

## Report to BSPP Annual General Meeting 2016

### BSPP Board meetings

The Board will meet four times in 2016 to manage the affairs of the Society, to plan scientific meetings, to agree the policy for the Society's publications, to agree a budget and monitor income and expenditure, to identify opportunities to promote plant pathology and, generally, to further the interests of the Society and its members.

### Board members

- President (Julie Flood), President Elect (Richard Oliver). Murray Grant was appointed Vice President for 2016.
- Treasurer (Paul Nicholson), Secretary (Sarah Holdgate), Programme Secretary (Elizabeth Orton), Membership Secretary (Sam Lee).
- Normally 6 representative members are elected by members at large and serve for 3 years. Dawn Arnold (UWE) and Michael Csukai (Syngenta) were elected by the membership in 2015 and took over from Sian Deller and James Fountaine at the start of 2016.
- The Senior Editors of Plant Pathology, Molecular Plant Pathology and New Disease Reports attend Board meetings along with the Newsletter Editor, the Webmanager and the Outreach Officer.

### BSPP Finances

BSPP finances are in relatively good shape. The flow of funds from our journals continues to be very healthy. Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, our investment portfolio has declined in value over the 12-month period to 30 June 2016. This is a result of a general downturn in share prices over the period and compounded by uncertainty about the economy post-'Brexit'. It is hoped that much of the uncertainty is behind us (for this aspect at least) and that the portfolio will return to positive growth in the near future.

The buoyant state of our finances has enabled us to maintain our support for student bursaries and travel for the current year. BSPP has supported undergraduate and MSc bursaries to a sum of £45,000 in 2016 and provided assistance for travel to conferences to the sum of almost £20,000 to date.

In addition to these activities, BSPP has been able to continue support for the publication of New Disease Reports as a valuable resource to plant pathologists across the globe. BSPP is continuing with its outreach activities and sees this as an important means with which to engage with a much broader audience, particularly through aiding teaching of pathology components in GCSE and A-level courses.

### BSPP Publications

- Plant Pathology

The IF score for 2015 was published in late July at 2.383, and is up on the previous year (2.121). This ranks the journal at 53 out of 209 in the Plant Sciences, up from 63rd. For comparison, The IF for EJPP is 1.494, Plant Disease is now at 3.192 and Phytopathology is 3.011.

The journal continues to make a healthy profit for the Society (£194,363) in line with previous years and has now moved to 9 issues per year and an increased page number, to alleviate the backlog of papers that has built up.

Two Virtual Issues of previously published articles were published online, one on nematodes and one on disease diagnostics.

A number of new editors have joined the Board to replace some retirements.

- Molecular Plant Pathology

Copy flow remains healthy. As of 1 September we had received 250 submissions, which is slightly up on this time last year.

The current Impact Factor is 4.3. This ranks us 16 out of 209 in the Plant Sciences category. We continue to be the second plant pathology journal in the Plant Sciences category after Annual Review of Phytopathology.

The October 2016 issue of Molecular Plant Pathology will contain the first in a new series of 'Challenge Review' articles - Challenges in Bacterial Molecular Plant Pathology. Senior Editor Rob Jackson wanted to take a fresh look at the review format, asking authors to set out the current challenges in their research areas and to provide new perspectives. Rob explains his thinking in an accompanying editorial.

- New Disease Reports

The rate of submissions continues to be healthy with 121 reports submitted in 2015 (a number not seen since 2012) and 65 in the year to date. The output of published reports is also proceeding well with the total for Volumes 32 and 33 exceeding that of the preceding year. Following the announcement of the retirement of the former Senior Editor, Dr Gerard Clover took over this responsibility in October 2015. Discussions are ongoing with the BSPP board as to how New Disease Reports can best deliver its objectives in the future.

- Newsletter

Three issues of the BSPP Newsletter will be published in 2016. These provide members with general information on the current and planned activities of the BSPP, along with reports prepared from members who received funding through one of the many BSPP schemes including travel grants, fellowships, bursaries and the plant pathology promotion fund. The success of the newsletter is, as always, contingent on members continuing to provide interesting articles and content, and your continued help with this is requested and welcome.

## Scientific conferences and meetings

The Presidential Meeting is the main scientific meeting of the Society and is typically held annually. Recently, the conference has been held in September, this has attracted new delegates to the conference. The BSPP may hold smaller meetings that cover topics suggested by the Society's membership and that strongly benefit the membership, we encourage members to contact the Programme Secretary with suggestions, for example a meeting on tree health was held in 2013.

This year the Society are pleased to be supporting the inaugural Grand Challenges in Plant Pathology Interdisciplinary Workshop, which takes place immediately after the Presidential Meeting at the Oxford Doctoral Training Centre, organised by Prof. Gail Preston. PhD students and post-docs will address the current big issues in Plant Pathology facilitated by those work in both academia and industry.

We hope that this workshop will run every year to encourage PhD early career researchers from all disciplines to consider plant pathology as a career, as well as addressing the current plant health problems faced on a global scale.

The Society also provides financial sponsorship for plant pathology-related meetings organised by members. The upper limit for sponsorship is now £4000. The BSPP supported two conferences. The EMBO Workshop on 'Plant viruses: friends and foes' on 11–15 July 2016 at The James Hutton Institute, and an AAB workshop on 'Exploiting novel sensors for detecting abiotic and biotic stress in crops' on 27–28 June 2016 at Sutton Bonington.

### Education

The society continues to actively support both undergraduate and postgraduate interests in plant pathology through the funding of bursaries projects supervised by BSPP members. During 2016 there were 22 students supported by the scheme; furthermore, the board of the society sees this as an extremely good use of funds in the support of plant pathology research at the student level and we look forward to supporting more students in 2017.

In total 222 students have benefited over the past 18 years and have been funded to spend 8 weeks or more of their summer holiday gaining practical experience in research labs across the UK and of this over 87 have been funded in the last 4 years.

### Fellowships

The BSPP awarded one Senior Fellowship to Dr Ioly Kotta-Loizou (Imperial College) to be held at the John Innes Institute starting in November 2016

### Travel Fund

As a Society we are particularly generous in supporting conference and institutional visits. The travel fund remains an important instrument to facilitate knowledge dissemination, training and collaboration in the field of plant–microbe interactions globally. We continue to support cases judged as appropriate up to a maximum of half the costs of a trip up to a limit of £750. To date we have funded 30 applications to a tune £19,163 with 3 pending for consideration. Only 3 were rejected, and these were based upon failure to meet the deadlines. Importantly, these applications captured BSPP membership from across the world and attendance at a wide range of conferences, with MPMI in Portland being particularly popular.

### Outreach

BSPP's outreach programme has had wide reach in the last 12 months, working to benefit teacher and students and to engage with the general public. The first teacher and sixth-form mini-conference took place at last year's Presidential meeting in Bristol. It was successful in attracting 30 students (Y10–Y12) from three different schools, with one school travelling over an hour to attend the event. Following the success of its pilot year, this year's group have just vacated this room and gone to join the poster session of the conference!

New resources for schools have also been developed. An extensive introduction to the study of plant disease has been developed as a GCSE and sixth-

form teaching resource (in PowerPoint format) and several Pathogen Information Sheets generated in response to curriculum drivers have been created and reviewed by experts in the field. These will appear on the Outreach pages of the Society's website very soon.

The Society had a very visible presence at the Lancashire Science Festival in Preston at the end of June (with the Festival recording record numbers of attendees) and the stand having a constant stream of visitors. We have also just returned from the British Science Festival's Family Weekend in Swansea, in which the stand gave several students vital public engagement experience as volunteer helpers. Anyone wishing to gain some confidence in schools/public engagement should look out for details of training events at next year's conference and the Molecular Biology of Plant Pathogens meeting in Durham.

The Society will be looking to attend different Festivals in the coming years to maintain a geographically diverse reach. The outreach officer is also happy to support members in organising/delivering their own events and members are invited to get in touch with any ideas they may have, even if they are not based in the UK.

#### Web pages

2016 has been a good year for the overall web presence of BSPP. As well as continuing to build on our current modernised web site design, through increasing the quality and vibrancy of the imagery, we have added some new sections including a new blog run by Dr Eric Boa and downloadable bursary reports from all our undergraduate summer students. Away from our own web presence, we have created two new sites. The first advertises the return of our student conference 'Molecular Biology of Plant Pathogens (MBPP)', a site that includes an updated logo and a colour scheme to tie into the main BSPP brand ([www.bspp.org.uk/mbpp](http://www.bspp.org.uk/mbpp)). The second is for a new Interdisciplinary Study Group run by Dr Gail Preston, titled 'Grand Challenges in Plant Pathology', which also includes a new logo and the BSPP colouring (<http://www.bspp.org.uk/grandchallenges/>).

#### Publicity

Publicity – especially on BSPP membership benefits – has been displayed not only at the Presidential Meeting and (in a few days' time) at the Grand Challenges in Plant Pathology Workshop, but also at BSPP-sponsored meetings. These include the AAB 'Exploiting novel sensors for detecting abiotic and biotic stress in crops'. Sutton Bonington, 27–28 June 2016 and the forthcoming European Association for Potato Research Pathology & Pests Section Meeting 7–11 August 2016, Dundee. The BSPP has also been represented at the 2016 American Phytopathological Society Meeting in Tampa, Florida and the 2016 IS-MPMI 17–21 July 2016, Portland, Oregon. Attendees at the annual Biology Taster Day for sixth-form Pupils in June at Cambridge University – which features mostly plant pathology activities – were provided with BSPP souvenirs and heard a lecture on the importance of plant pathology and its career potential. This Presidential Meeting sees the launch of the new BSPP t-shirt, the design of which was chosen at last year's meeting by balloting the attendees.

#### Membership

At the end of August 2016, the membership of the Society stood at 632, down slightly from 652 in August 2015. For comparison, membership of the Society stood at 721 in June 2014 (when members who had not renewed for 2014 had not yet been removed from the database), and at 647 in 2012. Membership numbers have, overall, remained steady over the last 5 years. Just over 35% of current BSPP members are based outside the UK. Membership is drawn from 51 countries from Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australasia.

Julie Flood

September 2016