

Microbiology in the Regions report

the HIV-1 virus mutates and the implications for vaccines. Students from 24 universities across 11 different countries worked in teams to develop their own research questions and appropriate methodology for investigation. The project resulted in the creation of a global online research community through multidisciplinary collaboration.

E-learning approaches do not necessarily save staff time. All of the speakers had invested much energy into developing their online resources and running them required substantial ongoing effort. Indeed, the salaries of staff teaching the Maryland course were supplemented to reflect the extra workload, a somewhat unfamiliar concept for UK academics! Nevertheless, it was clear that the speakers were witnessing tangible rewards in terms of student engagement, performance and enjoyment, and hopefully some of the audience were inspired to take their involvement in e-learning to the next level.

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2nd All-Wales Microbiology Meeting, Gregynog Hall, 15–17 March 2004

■ **Gareth W. Griffith**

With devolution in Wales has come the possibility of funding for research from the Assembly Government and also encouragement for collaboration between the constituent colleges of the University of Wales and other research institutions in Wales. Microbiologists from Aberystwyth and Cardiff have met annually at Gregynog Hall (www.wales.ac.uk/newpages/external/e3650.asp), the university's residential centre near Newtown Powys since 1972. These meetings were originally instigated by Professors Gareth Morris from Aberystwyth and David Hughes from Cardiff, and many alumni of the two departments, including a number of eminent SGM members, will remember the 25th anniversary meeting in 1996.

In 2003 it was decided to broaden the scope of the meeting to include microbiologists from Bangor and Swansea in the first All-Wales Microbiology Meeting. This year's meeting was further expanded to include scientists from IGER and benefited greatly from a grant from the SGM/SfAM regional meeting fund. The grant covered the costs of guest speakers and also allowed us to focus the meeting on lectures given by younger microbiologists. The majority of the 27 presentations were given by postgraduates, with some talks from undergraduates and postdoctoral researchers (the full programme can be found at <http://users.aber.ac.uk/gwg/gregynog/>). All the talks were of a very high standard, but the £150 Microbiology Communication Prize for the best talk by a younger scientist was won by George Tordoff, Cardiff, on Interactions between collembola (springtails) and saprotrophic basidiomycete fungi, with Amy Bishop (Swansea), Prysor Williams (Bangor) and Kathryn Wakeman (IGER) as close runners-up.

As a mycologist I see it as my duty to constantly remind my colleagues that microbiology is more than just bacteria, so it was pleasing that there were several fungal presentations, including that of our guest speaker Dr Jonathan Leake from the University of Sheffield who enthralled the audience with a lecture entitled *Mycorrhizal mycelial networks – key pathways of nutrient and energy flow in ecosystems*. We were also fortunate to have a presentation by Dr Alan Thomas, newly appointed Director of the Wales Centre of Excellence for Waste Research, about future

funding possibilities in this important area of applied microbiology.

The meeting included an 'ice-breaker' quiz hosted by Hywel Griffiths (Aberystwyth) – there seemed to be an inverse correlation between success in the quiz and academic seniority (even in the microbiology rounds!). There was also time to tour the magnificent grounds as part of a nature walk led by Al Venables (Cardiff) or to help 'aerate' one of the lawns in the traditional Gregynog football match.

I am grateful to all 50 delegates who attended the meeting for their support and hope to see them again next Spring (14–16 March 2005). I do have an extensive mailing list of microbiologists working in Wales, but if I failed to reach any SGM members who would like to know more about the forthcoming meeting, please email me on gwg@aber.ac.uk

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Joint Regional
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aim to promote
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Gregynog Hall, Newtown Powys,
Wales.
COURTESY G.W. GRIFFITH

