



SPPIRIT

Scottish Parasitology Partnership in
Research, Innovation and Training

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SPPIRIT Network Newsletter

November 2022

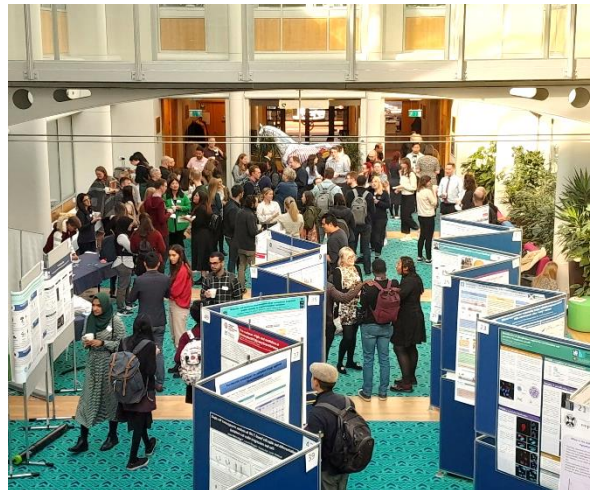
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First SPPIRIT Research Symposium Takes Place

A major aim of the SPPIRIT network is to provide a platform for parasitology ECRs across Scotland to be more visible in their research, thereby facilitating networking and cooperation between the next generations of leading parasitologists. As well as promoting collaboration among researchers, this will also provide awareness of the different facilities and expertise held within Scottish universities and research institutes, which ECRs could seek to benefit from.

Following the successful launch event in March 2022, we were keen to keep momentum going with another event, something that would represent an opportunity for all of our Early Career Researcher (ECR) members to come together and network with one another. With this in mind, we settled on a research symposium.



The one-day symposium was held on the 26th September 2022 and was hosted at The Moredun Research Institute on the outskirts of Edinburgh. The day featured two keynote lectures, six talks from submitted abstracts, two poster sessions and a mixer event to end the day. More than 100 attendees came along for the event.

To open the day's proceedings, Dr David Smith (Moredun Research Institute) welcomed a packed lecture theatre of attendees before handing over to Chief Scientific Advisor for Scotland Professor Julie Fitzpatrick

(Scientific Director at The Moredun Research Institute and Chief Executive of The Moredun Foundation) to provide opening remarks and support for the SPPIRIT network. Professor Sarah Reece (University of Edinburgh) then gave an overview on the scope and aims of the network.

The diversity and high quality of parasitology research taking place across Scotland was clear to see. Dr Clare Harding (University of Glasgow) provided our opening keynote lecture on the role of iron in the protozoan parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. This was followed up by a presentation from Dr Aidan O'Donnell (University of Edinburgh) who presented on the circadian rhythms of malarial parasites which could have implications on the timeliness of drug treatment. Dr Marta Campillo Poveda (University of Glasgow) switched our focus to worm parasites, giving a talk on their research into manipulation of the host gut by the nematode *Heligmosomoides polygyrus*. The last talk of session 1 was delivered by Jack Hanna who provided a rundown of their research into the development of a novel toolkit for identifying drug targets in *Cryptosporidium*. Four major parasites, variable research themes and three different institutes represented in session 1 alone!



We then moved to the first poster session. We had setup the programme to have a one-hour lunch break bookended by two one-hour poster sessions. The committee were delighted to see how organically researchers came together to discuss each other's research, to the extent that what actually unfolded was effectively a three-hour poster networking session featuring almost 70 research posters. After all, this was the focus of the event – to provide a platform for attendees (particularly ECRs) to interact with one another and establish strategic research links for ongoing and future research.

The second session began with a talk from Dr Priscilla Ngotho (University of Glasgow) on the reversible remodelling of host cells by *Plasmodium falciparum* gametocytes. Dr Pieter Steketee (The Roslin Institute) followed up with a talk on fatty acid metabolism in the livestock parasite *Trypanosoma congolense*. Sticking with the theme of livestock parasitology, Cassandra McGregor (Moredun Research Institute) gave a talk on the prevalence of roundworm and benzimidazole resistance in traded UK sheep. This was followed by a keynote lecture from Dr Henry McSorley (University of Dundee) on the modulation of the host immune response by the intestinal nematode *H. polygyrus*. Again, session 2 showcased the diversity of medically and veterinary important parasites and research themes that are under investigation across a variety of research institutes.

Dr Mattie Pawlowic (University of Dundee) rounded off session 2 with an interactive survey to gain important feedback from attendees. This feedback is valuable for ensuring the network is meeting the needs of our members and is working effectively to meet our aims. After announcing the three poster prize winners, Dr David Smith then provided closing remarks, thanking our organisers, sponsors and attendees for making the event such a successful one.



This was the very first SPPIRIT network research symposium and we anticipate this being an annual event rotated throughout host institutes.

We would like to reiterate our gratitude to our sponsors for the event, as well as the organising committee (see below).

Event sponsors:



What's Next?

Fellowship writing workshop (10:00– 16:30 on 29 Nov; Edinburgh)

We are hosting a workshop focused on writing applications for an ECR fellowship. The workshop is taking place at the University of Edinburgh. It is aimed towards individuals that are in the process of putting together a fellowship application and has been well subscribed. We look forward to welcoming those that have registered for the event and we anticipate holding more funding-focused workshops over time with each one having a particular focus, so keep an eye out for future events like this.

SULSA Development Fund workshop (12:00-14:00 on 9 December; Online)

SULSA are supporting postdocs and fellows through their ECR Development Fund (<https://sulsa.ac.uk/ecr-development-fund/>). Successful applicants may receive up to £4000 in seed funding to develop novel research ideas which can be used for travel, training, or consumables. In this **online SPPIRIT workshop**, PIs with extensive grant-writing experience will provide feedback to you following a pitch session, and evaluate your pre-application.

This funding aims to support researchers in their endeavours to develop their own novel research track and can be used for a variety of activities within these categories:

- Travel
- Training in new techniques/skills
- Consumable costs
- Facility access

They are also looking for projects to fulfil at least one of the following:

- Building a new collaboration (international, cross-discipline, cross-sector)
- Upskilling of the applicant
- Generation of pilot data and/or developing a pathway to commercialisation

Sign up for the SULSA Development Fund workshop here: <https://bit.ly/3DtjVQL>

Note that the deadline for applications to the SULSA Development Funding Call is Wednesday 11th January 2023.

Current SPPIRIT committee members:

SPPIRIT NETWORK COMMITTEE

 Lilach Sheiner University of Glasgow	 Mattie Pawlowic University of Dundee	 Sarah Reece University of Edinburgh	 SPPIRIT Scottish Parasitology Partnership in Research, Innovation and Training		
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 Melanie Ridgeway University of Dundee	 Simona Seizova University of Dundee	 Emma Briggs University of Edinburgh	 Stephen Larcombe University of Edinburgh	 Kirsty McWilliam University of Edinburgh	 Frank Venter University of Edinburgh
 Roz Laing University of Glasgow	 Andrew Maclean University of Glasgow	 Shikha Shikha University of Glasgow	 Matthew Sinton University of Glasgow	 Megan Sloan University of Glasgow	 David Smith Moredun Research Institute