

Grammar School; Commendations – The Mount School York and St Olaves Grammar School, Orpington.

● Key Stage 4 Group: 1st Prize – Pocklington School, York; 2nd Prize – Rugby High School; 3rd Prize – The Mount School, York; Commendations – St Anselm's School, Canterbury.

Reports of the competition were published in *Mycological News*, *Microbiologist* and *Microbiology Today*, the house magazines of, respectively, British Mycological Society (BMS), SfAM and SGM.

2010 Association for Science Education Annual Conference

MiSAC keeps participation in the Association for Science Education (ASE) Annual Conference under constant review because of the increasing costs of taking part and the apparent decrease in attendance by numbers of practising teachers and technicians. Therefore, we decided not to have an exhibition stand at the conference in Nottingham in January 2010 but to continue to co-sponsor with SGM a talk in the *Biology in the Real World* series organised by NUCLEUS of which MiSAC is a member. The talk was given by Professor Kim Hardie (University of Nottingham) on 'Beating superbugs by understanding gene transfer'. We are grateful to CLEAPSS, a MiSAC sponsor, for arranging for MiSAC materials to be displayed at the conference.

Advisory work

Among the range of enquiries from school teachers and technicians, the previously reported increase in interest in the use of micro-organisms in practical work was sustained, perhaps as a reflection of the microbiological content of the new GCSEs. Included were questions about sources and suitability of cultures and culture media, staining and microscopy. There is still evidence of the need for clarification of protocols for practical work that arises from shortcomings in awarding body specifications and associated textbooks.

Enquiries come either directly to MiSAC or more usually via CLEAPSS, the National Centre for Biotechnology Education (NCBE) and the Society for General Microbiology (SGM), three of our sponsors. Much mutual benefit is derived from the exchanges of expertise readily available with these and our other sponsors. Direct interaction with teachers, technicians and PGCE students on



The late Peter Fry, Vice-Chairman (far left) and Janet Hurst, retiring Secretary (third from right) with other committee members and Alexandra Blair, The Times Education Correspondent (extreme right). Reproduced with permission from *Microbiology Today*, August 2006.

practical microbiology training courses and at exhibitions in England and Scotland continues to provide valuable opportunities for informal discussions on current issues. Involvement with other organisations included *Practical Biology*, a web-based resource, for which extensive advice on protocols for practical work on nitrogen fixation was provided, the British Mycological Society (BMS, a MiSAC sponsor) for a proposed practical using the oyster mushroom, and serving as publications referee for *Science in School*, a European education journal.

Other activities

The main business of MiSAC was conducted at three meetings of the Committee and there was an additional meeting for judging the annual competition. The business meetings were held at the headquarters of the Society of Biology, a MiSAC sponsor. Members continued to promote the work of MiSAC through their various roles on a wide range of other organisations, thereby also remaining informed about and contributing to discussions on current trends and future developments in school education. MiSAC materials were distributed in information packs for participants on the SGM and CLEAPSS practical microbiology courses. Liaison was maintained with suppliers of biological materials to schools and with publishers.

Many contributions were made in support of other organisations throughout the UK. Dr Margaret Whalley again presented and offered advice on the use of MiSAC materials at the annual SB Scottish Teachers' Conference in Stirling and, for the first time, at the ASE Scotland Conference in Dunblane. Participation in the latter event, which was done on a trial basis, included a joint

workshop with the Scottish Schools Equipment Research Centre (SSERC).

Dr John Grainger represented MiSAC at meetings of NUCLEUS to discuss arrangements for the *Biology in the Real World* lecture programme for the 2010 ASE Annual Conferences and demonstrated MiSAC practical materials at *Bioscience Evening* events organised by RBG Kew at Wakehurst Place and Kew. With Dr John Schollar (NCBE), he delivered SGM training courses in practical microbiology for teachers, technicians and PGCE students at the universities of Belfast, Cardiff, Kingston, Leeds and Loughborough, the National Science Learning Centre, York and the East Midlands Regional Science Learning Centre, Leicester. This ended MiSAC's involvement in SGM courses during which the 'Two Johns' delivered 100 courses over a period of 10 years.

Future activities

Development of a new MiSAC web site will be a major activity. A working party has been set up to oversee the project and has chosen Indent Design Ltd, Reading to do the work. Development of new titles in the printed series *MiSACactivities*, *MiSACbriefings*, *MiSACmatters* series will continue and *MiSACHelps* will be created for the web site only.

The topic for the 23rd Annual MiSAC competition for 2011 will be *Helpful and harmful fungi* wholly funded by special sponsorship from BMS. MiSAC will take a full part in the ASE Annual Conference in Reading in January 2011 by having an exhibition stand and workshop and jointly sponsoring a talk in the *Biology in the Real World* programme.

Committee membership 2009-10 (with affiliations)

Chairman: Dr John Grainger (University of Reading)

Vice-Chairman: Mr Peter Fry (SB)

Secretary: Mrs Janet Hurst (SGM)

Treasurer: Dr Margaret Whalley (British Mycological Society)

Assistant Secretary: Mrs Dariel Burdass (SGM)

Lay members: Professor Martin Adams (SfAM); Mr Phil Bunyan (CLEAPSS); Mrs Kath Crawford (SSERC); Mrs Mary Philpott (CLEAPSS); Dr John Schollar (NCBE), Mr John Tranter (ASE)

Finance

The sound financial position that MiSAC has developed over recent years is thanks largely to the generosity of our sponsors through their annual contributions and their further support in ways that cannot be seen from the accounts. These include additional special

sponsorship in turn to cover the full costs of the annual competition, travel costs of sponsor representatives to attend committee meetings, provision of meeting rooms and laboratory facilities, and distribution of MiSAC materials. In addition, the cautious approach adopted towards attending conferences and exhibitions in terms of their cost effectiveness has also contributed towards the satisfactory end of year balance. However, this will be depleted significantly in the forthcoming year as a result of printing costs and, particularly, development of a new MiSAC web site.

The annual return was made to the Charity Commissioners.

Acknowledgements

MiSAC is most grateful to all sponsors for their continued support. The generous amount of voluntary time willingly given by MiSAC Officers and the other Committee members is also gratefully acknowledged. In addition, we are greatly appreciative of the work of the Honorary Auditor.

The Committee was pleased to welcome Mrs Mary Philpott (CLEAPSS) to its ranks but greatly regrets the loss of two members, both of long standing. Mrs Janet Hurst (Secretary) stood down on taking retirement from her position at SGM after serving on MiSAC for 13 years during which time she made an invaluable contribution, in particular by using her influence to enable MiSAC to reach its current position of strength in terms of both activities and influence. But it gives MiSAC much sadness to record the sudden death of our Vice-Chairman, Mr Peter Fry, who was a member for 36 years and gave the benefit of his vast experience by serving also as Chairman and on many MiSAC working groups, notably the management group for the project which led to the publication *Practical Microbiology and Biotechnology for Schools* and the writing group for *Practical Microbiology for Secondary Schools*. Both colleagues are greatly missed.

Dr John Grainger, Chairman

MiSAC provides resource material, procedures and investigations for practical microbiology for teachers, technicians and students. © MiSAC 2010.

Microbiology in Schools Advisory Committee, c/o NCBE, University of Reading, 2 Earley Gate, Reading RG6 6AU.

E: microbe@misac.org.uk. W: www.misac.org.uk.