



MiSAC Competition 2011: Helpful and Harmful Fungi

MiSAC is indebted to the British Mycological Society (BMS) for its generosity in sponsoring the 23rd Annual MiSAC Competition. The topic was *Helpful and Harmful Fungi* and the requirement was to design a web page for use by the competition sponsor to further the development of an appreciation among the general public of the many ways in which fungi affect everyday life.

There were the usual two entry groups: Key Stage 3 (Secondary 1/2 in Scotland) and Key Stage 4 (Secondary 3/4). The number of entries totalled 460 and involved more than 500 students from some 60 schools and colleges drawn from England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and, maintaining the international appeal of the competition, from the Republic of Ireland and Belgium (The British School of Brussels). Although entries from the KS3 (S1/2) group were in the

majority as usual, the continued good level of support from KS4 (S3/4) each year is very pleasing as is the substantial number of schools which support both entry groups.

There was good adherence to the rules of the competition, in particular the requirement to feature only one helpful or harmful fungus.

The judging was conducted by BMS representatives Professor Maurice Moss, University of Surrey, and Professor Anthony Whalley, Liverpool John Moores University, together with the Chairman and other members of MiSAC. Facilities for the judging were kindly provided at its headquarters in Reading by the Society for General Microbiology, a sponsor of MiSAC, whose staff also bore the onerous task of receiving and processing the entries.

The concept of this year's competition was particularly challenging because despite their

unquestionable importance, the study of fungi is poorly represented in assessment board specifications. Nevertheless, the judges were most impressed by the imaginative range and diversity of fungi that the entrants presented and by the care with which entries made both by hand and word processor were prepared. As well as the expected attention being given to, e.g. mushrooms, toadstools, penicillin production, cheese and yeast product manufacture, and diseases of the skin, many entrants were motivated to search well beyond the curriculum and found a great variety of less common and sometimes quite obscure macro- and microfungi. In this regard at least, the competition fulfilled an important purpose.

The high quality of many of the entries made the adjudication very difficult, particularly in the KS3 (S1/2) group. The judges looked closely for reasons for the help or harm of the chosen fungus, reference to its name and ecology, use of illustrations and provision of sources of further information, all of which were requirements of the competition. Clearly much still needs to be done to promote the correct use of 'fungus' (singular) and 'fungi' (plural) and to observe the rule of nomenclature whereby the genus and species in a Latin (scientific) name begin with an upper case and lower case letter, respectively, e.g. *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*.

Money prizes totalling more than £1,000 were awarded to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize winners and their schools, and each entrant was awarded a certificate. In addition, each school received a pack of resources to assist in the teaching of mycology, kindly provided by BMS.

The 2011 judging panel

