

## Evaluation of second annual conference: *New frontiers in teaching genetics* 15 June 2010 Edinburgh

### What we did

In June 2010 Gengage held its second annual conference: *New frontiers in teaching genetics*. The focus of the conference was on teaching genetics in secondary schools. Both teachers and sixth year students were invited to attend. The programme included dynamic keynote presentations on current and future trends in genetics and a series of interactive workshops, aimed at providing teaching tools for discussing genetics in the classroom.

### Participants

Over 100 biology teachers, students and Gengage members attended the conference, which provided a timely opportunity to explore innovative ideas about how to approach genetics in the context of the new SQA Highers in biology and human biology. These courses are currently being revised to ensure that they are up to date and reflect recent developments in bioscience and medicine, including genetics.

### Venue

The conference was held at the John McIntyre Conference Centre and St Leonard's Hall, University of Edinburgh, which provided a suite for plenary sessions, and 5 breakout rooms with tables arranged "cabaret style" for workshops.

### Structure and content

- The day began with a welcome from Prof Kenneth Boyd, Gengage.Chair and an Introduction to the Day from Prof Jack Jackson, Chair of the Gengage Education Sub-group.
- This was followed by the keynote address delivered by Prof David Porteous on *Our genetic inheritance - for better or for worse, in sickness and in health*
- Participants then attended one of five parallel workshops:

**Workshop 1** – Genes - diseases and dilemmas

**Workshop 2** – Wizard Genes

**Workshop 3** – Gene Jury

**Workshop 4** – Meet the Gene Machine

**Workshop 5** – The Nowgen Schools Genomics Programme

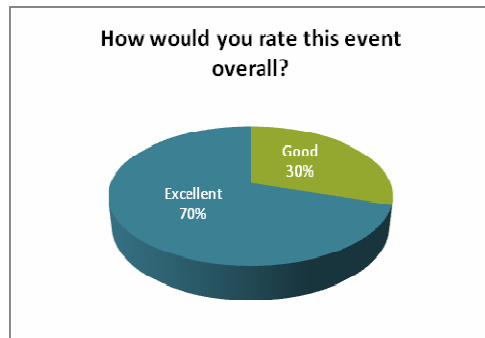
- Following lunch, Dr Kevin O'Donnell gave a plenary presentation on *Pompe disease: a case study of the development of a successful treatment for a rare disease*
- Delegates then attended another parallel workshop
- The conference was closed after a plenary presentation by Prof Mary Porteous on *How developments in the laboratory affect patients in the genetic clinic*

## What participants said about the event

“Very informative and a great way of developing interest in genetics for the future”

A participant

Those who attended the event provided very positive feedback which we collected by way of evaluation forms. 100% of delegates said that they thought the conference was good or excellent, and would recommend this type of event to others.



“Overall, an excellent day. Extremely informative and all my students found it very worthwhile. They were still talking about the issues raised after each workshop”

A participant

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of participants rated the plenary sessions and workshops as good or excellent overall, and the venue and catering received very enthusiastic responses.

However, a number of helpful suggestions were made for ways the conference might have been improved.

## Suggestions

- Allow more time for workshops. There was a general sense that the workshops would have benefited from additional time to allow participants to complete activities. This was a very positive indication of the high level of interest in the workshops. In addition, several participants said they would have liked to attend more than 2 workshops.
- Make the workshops more relevant for upper year students and include activities that focus on the science, eg. scientific experiments and interactive displays.
- Advertise sooner. Despite having sent letters and emails to schools starting in April, it would appear that information was not being received by teachers in a timely manner. We will look into and try to resolve this for future events.

## Future Events

- The following suggestions were made for future events:
  - A genetics debate for senior pupils
  - Student conferences to tie in with the new Higher and Advanced Higher curriculum; CPD for teachers
  - Demonstrations of possible degrees/careers in genetics

We will take these suggestions into consideration when planning our events for 2011.

## Find out more

If you would like more information about Gengage, please contact us on 0131 651 4750 or at [genadmin@gengage.org.uk](mailto:genadmin@gengage.org.uk)