

BMSS report – 17th International Mass Spectrometry Conference 2006-09-08
Rebecca Sage
University of Bristol

As a physical scientist doing research on the fundamentals of laser ablation using quadrupole mass spectrometry I was aware that the programme of the IMSC was very biological and analytical. This being the case I initially thought that a lot of the presentations would be too specific and unrelated to my work, such that I would not be able to understand or draw anything useful from these sessions. However this did not prove to be true, on the whole I thought that the oral presentations gave good concise introductions to the work allowing me to learn specifics of techniques such as electrospray ionisation, MALDI and LIAD. It impressed me that most people were not happy to just treat their mass spectrometer as a “black box” and many speakers described what they believed to be the elegance of mass spectrometry.

I very much enjoyed the plenary lectures; the variation in topics was fantastic. I was particularly interested in the prion biology lecture given by Adriano Aguzzi it was very interesting to see the way that developments had been made concerning the path of neuroinvasion, and the movement of the infection around the body.

At times I struggled to decide between talks during the parallel oral sessions, I was often torn between what would be most useful to my work and those which I found most interesting. I thought that there were some parallel sessions that should have been run at different times, for example I would have liked to attend the soft ionisation session and the fundamentals session, I guess it is always going to be impossible for the organisers to please everyone though. The time keeping in some sessions was not very good so it was difficult to move between sessions and still see the whole of all the talks.

The working with mass spectrometry workshop put on by the BMSS was very informative, the four speakers had all taken different paths and they gave a good perspective on their line of work. It is amazing to see the passion with which the two academic speakers talked about their work. Professor Cooks was very honest about the ups and downs that an academic career can bring and made it clear that if you go into an academic career without a massive amount of enthusiasm for your subject it would be very difficult to sustain. Professor Thomas-Oates put her career development down to luck but I suspect that the reason so many opportunities came her way were because in her own words she is “obsessed” by her work. Probably the best talk for me was given by Dr Rachel Martin, I had heard careers talks from academics before but was void of information from the more commercial side of science. She gave an insight into working for a vendor and opened my eyes to other options that are out there which may be better suited to me. Dr David Jones provided useful information on the applications procedure, including choosing the right job and writing a C.V.

The most valuable part of the week for me was presenting my poster. I was glad to have my session at the beginning of the week as it was a good opportunity to speak to people right from the start. I was kept busy talking about my poster for the entire session, which surprised me as I was presenting work which was on the periphery of the main focus of the conference. I met a number of people, some of which were just

interested in looking at the work I was doing, but others were working in a similar field to me and were able to give me suggestions which may prove to be very useful. I was given a lot of business cards and made some connections which will hopefully lead to collaborations.

I would like to thank the BMSS for giving me a travel grant, making it possible to attend the conference; it was incredibly beneficial to spend time with such a large group of accomplished researchers. I look forward to being able to attend similar events in the future.