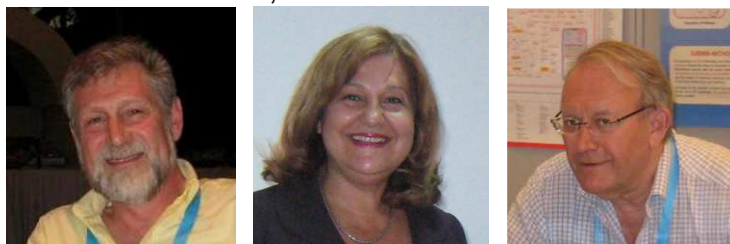


FEBS Education Workshop, Sofia 16-17th October 2008

Keith Elliott, Gül Güner and Ed Wood



At the June meeting of the FEBS Exec, in response to positive feedback from a WOGCEE questionnaire, the Committee agreed to a proposal from the Education Committee to run a workshop on education in a central or eastern European country. At short notice Ed Wood, with help from Keith Elliott and Gül Güner, put together a programme and Ganka Kossekova (supported by Diana Petkova and the Bulgarian Biochemical Society) agreed to host the workshop in the Medical University of Sofia.

Unfortunately during the organisation Ed found he was unable to take part and asked Keith (building on his “hero award” in Athens) to take over. Keith and Gül, supported by Ed, reorganised the programme and duly delivered it on 16th and 17th October.

There were 41 registered participants from 12 separate departments representing 8 universities and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, although all were not able to attend everything. The workshop was opened by Prof Vanyo Mitev, the Rector of the Medical University.

If the participants expected an easy time of sitting and listening to lectures they were soon disabused of this idea! After an introduction to Problem-Based Learning and how it is applied in Manchester (Keith) and Izmir (Gül), participants split into groups to find out what it is like to be a student in a PBL session. Perhaps aided by a supply of Turkish dried figs, all entered into the spirit and lively discussions ensued.



Participants in the workshop

In Ed's absence Ganka Kossekova agreed to share the e-learning session with Keith. This was actually a very positive change allowing show-casing of a local initiative to set up an on-line, interactive biochemistry course, including lectures, tests and case simulations, to support the medical students, also requiring development of the virtual learning environment – a project supported by the World Bank. It complemented Keith's general overview and example of an interactive course within a commercial VLE.



Gül presenting her research lecture

The first day was rounded off by Gül presenting a research lecture about her work on *in vitro* effects of hypoxia-reperfusion injury on human endothelial cells.

The second day began by Keith talking about academic quality – not just how it is monitored and assessed at local, national and international levels but also by asking the question “What is quality?”. The timing was particularly appropriate as the Bulgarian National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency has recently become a full member

of ENQA (the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education).

Again Ed’s absence allowed a second local example of e-learning to be presented by Regina Komsa-Penkova (Medical University of Pleven) in this case an international collaboration (on behalf of the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism) to provide continuing professional development in clinical nutrition and metabolism for clinicians. This was followed by a short session on teaching critical analysis.



Keith talking about academic quality

A second interactive session on PhD supervision was led by Gül built around Ed’s pre-prepared lecture on the responsibilities of students and supervisors. The lively small group discussions were perhaps helped by the presence in the groups of real PhD students who were able to say what it was like for them!



Discussion on PhD supervision – including a PhD student (extreme right) having his say!

In the final session of the workshop Keith gave an overview lecture on energy metabolism aimed at 2nd year

medical students on a PBL course. This was also attended by a group of 1st year medical students from Sofia who were let off their normal lecture to attend. Those participants who made it to the end were then presented with certificates by Keith and Gül for their fortitude.



Dr Tatyana Vlaykova receiving her certificate from Gül and Keith watched by Ganka

Despite missing Ed this inaugural Education Committee workshop was well received. To quote:

"The workshop was very interesting for participants for the new methods of education which can be successfully applied in the Bulgarian universities."

Diana Petkova, Bulgarian Biochemical Society

" ... this workshop was very successful, interesting and useful from educational and social point of view. The Bulgarian participants appreciated highly the professionalism, creative positive energy and excellent lecturers' skills. We liked their open friendly manners, enthusiasm, elegant style of expression, ability to talk clearly and communicate with different participants."

Ganka and Associate Professor A. Alexeev, Vice-Rector and Secretary General, Medical University of Sofia

We all hope it will be the first of many such workshops in the future.

After the workshop fact-finding visits were made to the Department of Plant Physiology and Molecular Biology at the University of Plovdiv and the Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Medicine and Nutrigenomics in the Medical University of Varna. These were on behalf of WOGCEE and supplemented the visit to Sofia made in 2007.

Keith and Gül were also treated to exceptional Bulgarian hospitality by Ganka Kossekova, Diana Petkova and Genoveva Nacheva (president and secretary of the Bulgarian Biochemical Society) showing the beauty of the countryside, the towns and the cuisine. The last provided testimony to the truth of Keith's final take-home message in his lecture:



Bulgarian hospitality!

Energy in (increased food intake) – Energy out (lack of habitual cycling)
= Fat (1.5kg increase in weight!)

Finally warmest thanks must go to Diana Petkova, Genoveva Nacheva and the Bulgarian Biochemical Society for supporting the workshop and especially to Ganka Kossekova for her hard work and excellent organisation leading to a very successful conclusion.