

Cross-Party Group on Life Sciences

Tuesday 21st May, 2024 17:45 – 19:15

Minute

MSPs

Kenneth Gibson MSP

Michael Marra MSP

Graham Simpson MSP

Invited Guests

John Arthur, Director, Medicines Manufacturing Innovation Centre (MMIC)

Barrie Cassey, Technical Director, MMIC

Professor David Paterson, Executive Director, MASTS

Dr Debbie Russell, Deputy Director, Sea Mammal Research Unit, University of St Andrews

Non-MSP Group Members

Dr Barbara Blaney, Edinburgh University

Robert Crawford, Thornton Ross

Nairn Crawford, Thornton Ross

Brian Forbes, Director, Government Affairs Devolved Nations, AstraZeneca

Professor Frank Gunn-Moore, Head of School at School of Biology, University of St Andrews

Sonja Hart, Burness Paull

Sarah Hunt, Skills Development Scotland

Richard Lockhart, Burness Paull LLP

Frankie Macpherson, Reporter, Health and Care News Scotland

Richard Mole, Moredun Research

Kate Murray, AstraZeneca

Greg Stevenson, Director, Greg Stevenson Consulting Limited

Gary White, IQVIA

Alison Culpan, Director, ABPI Scotland (secretariat)

John Macgill, Director, Ettrickburn Limited

Esmé Pringle, Consultant, Ettrickburn Limited

Apologies

Brian Whittle MSP

Jackie Baillie MSP

Agenda item 1

Opening, Welcome and Introductions

Convener Kenneth Gibson (KG) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of the previous meeting (20th of February 2024)

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted. There were no matters arising.

KG said that 10 MSPs now support the CPG. Former member Ivan McKee has now stepped down after being appointed the Minister for Public Finance, and Jackie Baillie has joined.

Agenda item 2

AGM

KG was re-elected as convener.

Graham Simpson was re-elected as deputy convener.

ABPI was reappointed as secretariat.

Agenda item 3

The Journey from MMIC Oligos to OMICE Facility: Plans, Collaborations, and Building an Ecosystem

John Arthur (JA) gave an overview of the opportunity presented by oligonucleotides manufacturing to patients and the Scottish economy.

He explained how oligonucleotide-based medicines can bind to mRNA preventing a specific gene from triggering disease, and the potential for this approach to offer a precision therapy for certain conditions.

JA said the number of oligonucleotides in pre-clinical research stages has increased exponentially since the pandemic, but that the UK is not keeping up and risks missing out.

He said the MMIC has been set up to bridge the 'valley of death' in manufacturing innovation to create and test innovation and allow the next generation of medicines to eventually be manufactured at scale and reach patients effectively and affordably. He talked of the hopes of building an oligonucleotide R&D and manufacturing sector in Scotland.

He gave an overview of the manufacturing challenges and industry supply challenges, both in materials and the skills gap, that the UK faces.

Q&A

JA said a key mission for the next few years is to work with Skills Development Scotland and universities to ensure the future workforce is equipped with the analytical and manufacturing skills needed to work in oligonucleotides.

He said funding is key issue, and there is a need for bodies like Scottish Enterprise to continue to support innovation in this area.

Barrie Cassey said the approach of the NHS to prevention needs to include embracing early precision to ensure new tech can be used for the benefit of patients in Scotland.

Agenda item 4

15 Years of Coordinating and Promoting Marine Science: A Scottish Perspective

David Paterson (DP) gave an overview of the establishment of the Marine Alliance for Science & Technology for Scotland (MASTS).

He said the only way for Scotland to tackle emerging issues like climate change and pollution facing the marine environment is for universities and researchers to work together. The network now has 18 partnership institutions collaborating. This networking is fundamental to increasing Scotland's marine research and policy capabilities.

He said there are 95 post graduate researchers associated with the graduate school, and a further 91 alumni, who are providing the needed expertise, and this training must be maintained in Scotland.

MASTS forums include research focus on marine climate change, marine industries and maritime and coastal marine biodiversity, planning and governance.

DP said MASTS is also engaged with diversity work, creating policy papers, and representing Scotland and the UK in European and global organisations.

He said MASTS wants to develop better partnerships with industry, and focus for the future will be on getting more business and technology innovators involved in its work and working with representative organisations.

Sea Mammal Research: Informing Evidence-Based Decision Making

Debbie Russell (DR) gave an overview of the history, and current work, of Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), which was set up to advise the UK and Scottish Governments on matters relating to statutory seal management.

She said the key challenges now for SMRU include decreased resource and funding security from its main funders the Natural Environment Research Council and the Scottish Government.

DR said SMRU has taken opportunities in diversification and innovation, including carrying out research for other stakeholders across the globe, as well as welcoming visitors to its new centre.

Q&A

The meeting discussed how different groups involved across the life sciences ecosystem can understand what others are doing to support new opportunities for collaboration.

There was also discussion of how the approach to legislation on Highly Protected Martine Areas might change in the wake of the lessons learned by the Scottish Government.

There was also brief discussion of the potential of the seas in the discovery of new agents to treat disease – and the important role of innovation in manufacturing in reducing forever chemicals and solvents in sea water.

Close

Kenneth Gibson concluded the meeting.

The next meeting of the CPG on Life Sciences will take place on Tuesday the 17th of September 2024.

Actions

- Industry members to link Professor Paterson and Dr Debbie to the AAA subgroup of the Life Sciences Industry Leadership Group.
- Secretariat to contact with Michael Marra MSP with information on medicines affordability.