

## Scientific Liaison & Information Services

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The Department of Scientific Liaison and Information Services (SLIS) continued to publicise and promote the science of SCRI whenever cost-effective opportunities arose. Events such as the British Potato Council's 'Potato Technology '98' provided an ideal vehicle for doing so. The Institute's national and international reputation rose ever higher and had a direct consequence in the increasing numbers who visited SCRI. International visitors formed an increasing percentage of the total, with parties from distant countries such as Argentina, Estonia, New Zealand and Palestine among the many who came to SCRI in the past year.



Visitors from the International Congress of Plant Protection on the post-congress tour of the Institute.

Universities continued to take a great interest in the Institute's work, with staff and students from the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot Watt, Newcastle, St Andrews and Strathclyde among those who visited regularly. It was a particular pleasure to welcome the new Secretary of The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department, Mr John Graham, soon after his appointment, to demonstrate to him a range of the Institute's research activities. An increased effort, in collaboration with MRS, has been put into bringing to SCRI the individuals and organisations who wish to know more about the Institute's work and, thereafter, may wish to invest in our R & D. Links with the less-advantaged countries have not been neglected, with visits by individuals and groups from countries such as Bangladesh, China and Greece.

Our involvement with local organisations such as Bio-Dundee helped to create a critical mass to promote the biotechnological R & D undertaken by groups in and around Dundee. SLIS was also a founder member of the new ECRR Public Relations Group. New developments such as the Dundee Science Centre and the Carse of Gowrie Initiative (to revitalise industry, tourism and transport links) provided opportunities to inform the public about SCRI's work and be informed about areas of mutual scientific interest. The need to convey easily understood information about the Institute's research to the general public is an increasing precondition of Government and Euro-



Lord Provost of Dundee, Mervyn J Rolfe, J.P., with Dr Asitava Basu and Mr Maloy Ghosh, visiting students from Bangladesh, at the City Chambers.

pean Union support. To this end, staff have given interviews to the press, radio and television, and made presentations to a wide range of clubs and societies, from Citizens Associations through Business Clubs to Rotary and Probus.

The Unit of Bioinformatics and Information Technology, in collaboration with the Engineering and Maintenance Department, has continued the programme of upgrading and extending the computing facilities at SCRI. The Institute is committed to phasing out all computers with a 386 (or less) processor by the year 2000



and over-seeing a wholesale switch to Windows NT and Office 97 software in the same period. A major effort, involving staff from the BTR, Library and Visual Aids Units, has been put into upgrading the Institute's web pages (<http://www.scri.sari.ac.uk>) and creating an Intranet as an easily accessible source of 'in house' information, with pages dedicated to Staff, Administration, Health and Safety, Engineering, Library, Appointments, etc.

The Library continues to be under pressure, with costs escalating well in excess of inflation. Again, the donations of books and other material made by members of staff are gratefully acknowledged, as these allowed the Library to make optimum use of its funding. Nevertheless, difficult decisions had to be taken again about the cancellation of some journals. The rapidly growing collection of links to electronic journals and the catalogue of useful and interesting web sites, reached from the Library Intranet page, have increased rapidly in popularity. The process of re-locating little-used stock has continued and plans have been drawn up for the Library's further upgrading, including additional shelving and computer terminals. Currently, discussions are taking place about the difficulties which the Library would face if existing links with the University of Edinburgh have to be severed. This would increase annual running costs by at least £10K.

The Visual Aids Unit continues to provide a wide range of services in photography and graphics. The unit's output increased yet again, as a result of the increasing number of staff, students and visitors who required routine services. In addition, the greater demands to publicise the Institute's science and commercialise the products of its research, have resulted in increasingly elaborate PR material and displays, the production of videos, etc. A measure of the high standards of the unit's work was shown by awards of a Silver Gilt Medal for the Ladybird Spot Checks exhibition at the Dundee Flower Show, Best Poster at the ICPP conference in Edinburgh, which was attended by 2000 delegates, and 1st and 2nd prizes at the Scottish Microscopy conference. On a commercial note, 300 copies of the in-house 'Ladybird Video' have been sold.

The Health and Safety group has again had a vital rôle to play in the successful undertaking of complex and potentially hazardous research procedures. All the research and research support activities upon which SCRI is engaged have been subjected to health and safety risk assessments. The procedures and substances used in these activities are extremely diverse and risk assessment places a significant management burden on scientists and support staff. Meetings of safety co-ordinators in the BBSRC and SABRI institutes and SAC took place throughout the year with SCRI represented at the joint BBSRC/SABRI meeting at BBSRC Headquarters, Swindon, the SABRI meeting at MLURI, Aberdeen and the ECRR meeting at SAC, Edinburgh. These meetings are able to draw upon the support of safety personnel in BBSRC's Human and Corporate Resources Group. This unit circulates Hazard Notices, referring to work activities and substances, Health and Safety Information Notes, which highlight new legislation and general points of interest, and Policy Notes, which provide guidance in Health and Safety issues for institute senior management teams. A comprehensive pack, giving guidance on the risk assessment of substances, has recently been received from BBSRC and the procedures are being integrated into SCRI's system of health and safety management. The implementation of such policies will improve progress toward standardisation in health and safety management across the biological PSREs, which will in turn simplify the processes involved.

Reception, as the first point of contact for either visitor or telephone caller, continues to have a vital rôle in public perception of the Institute. It was a pleasure to welcome Louise Fiddes to the staff and to see her maintain the high standards of efficiency and warmth of welcome for which the Institute is noted.

All staff in SLIS, in their different rôles, played a major part in preparations for and the presence of the Visiting Group, especially as the first series of dates identified for the visit were postponed. Due to staff changes, etc., this resulted in the preparation of virtually a complete new set of documents. It is a measure of SLIS skills and commitment that this was achieved so quickly and efficiently.