

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-FENS The Brain Conferences
Conference Title:	The Neurobiology of Synapses and their Dysfunction
Dates:	13-17 October 2013
Chair:	Nils Brose & Mike Greenberg
Rapporteur:	Isabel Varela-Nieto

General Comments

Any general comments you might have concerning the conference, your role, the scientific area covered by this conference, etc.

The conference was excellent, everybody praised the efficient work by the Office and the organisers commented how good is to have the opportunity to organize just the science of a conference without taking administrative duties. The rapporteur role has lost importance as the ESF has stopped supporting research and there are not concrete programs to offer to researchers. Still the attendants appreciated the explanation of what the ESF is and I got many questions during lunches and coffees. Many by young postdocs that are planning to start a career in research administration and/or evaluation, events organization, etc. their feeling was that the ESF maybe could offer them training. Also questions from researchers willing to organize conferences or interested in networking programs. I did not get many questions on evaluation and peer-review but normally it is not at conferences where the decisions to evaluate projects or institutions are taken.

Quality of the Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Comments on the balance and scope of the scientific programme, the scientific quality of the presentations and discussions.

The Scientific programme was very good, excellent speakers, good presentations and intense discussion that specially the first two days was very vivid. One of the conferees, Dr Thomas Südhof, could not attend because he has just got the Nobel Price. This underlies the scientific level of the speakers and the importance of the area. Gender balance of speakers was right, but not geographical balance as speakers for a few countries have participated; most of them were from just 2 European countries and from the USA.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Was the schedule and the atmosphere conducive to an easy exchange of information?
Was there time and space for an informal discussion? Were younger researchers integrated?

Discussion was vivid although it was coming down by the third day; possibly because the programme was excellent but very dense. The atmosphere was nice but there was little time for informal discussion and complains were heard about. Maybe a shorter dinner, buffet-like will allow some time for discussion after dinner around the posters and thus save some time after lunch for a longer stop. Young researchers were integrated although few were asking questions and there was a limited interaction with the seniors during the day, this improved at the posters.

Balance of Participants

Was there an appropriate balance between young and senior participants?
Was a balance of national groups and researchers from different (sub)fields achieved?

There was a good balance of young and senior participants, and also different subfields were presented as far as I can comment since I am not an expert on the area. There was not a balance of nationalities as indicated above.

Outlook and Future Developments

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference?
(How) could the conference outcomes be utilised further?

A few postdocs came looking for positions and talks over lunch and dinner fostered new bilateral collaborations and strengthen former links. Many conferees were coming from the USA, what it is a great opportunity for the European fellows but the chances to generate interactions aiming to joint project applications to H2020 were reduced.

Excellent experts got together to discuss the state of the art. This is a hot topic with many advances taking place based on bioinformatics and a new generation of mutated mice that allow the visualization of the neurons at work. The clearest outcome could be the publication of a monographic issue on a Neuroscience Journal, EJM possibly.

Follow-up

What immediate and long term follow-up would benefit collaborations and dialogues that may have begun at the conference?

This will be the ideal setting for a network (RNP) and/or a summer school. Since the ESF has no longer programmes to offer for a follow-up and I do not fully understand what I am expected to propose here. A series of conferences on the topic maybe every two years, would be appreciated by the area.

Organisation and Infrastructure

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference?
Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

The venue is excellent; everything was perfectly organised but maybe traveling to and from the airport could be improved. Participants were very satisfied.

The people from the conferences Unit did a great job.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

Yes, I think so.

About ESF Research Conferences

The Scheme

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

Conference Format

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

Division of Tasks

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: www.esf.org/conferences