

Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)

Meeting papers

BBSRC Systematics Initiatives

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BBSRC Systematics Initiatives

BACKGROUND

BBSRC's position on systematics and taxonomy research is as explained to the House of Lords Select Committee in 2002:

- Systematics research is in the remit of the BBSRC inasmuch as it contributes to the delivery of BBSRC's overall mission;
- In order to compete effectively for funding systematics research proposals need to address a specific, strategic and timely need and/or show innovation in methodology;
- BBSRC is not responsible for the maintenance and development of collections, the scholarship associated with curation, or the production of monographs.

In December 2005, BBSRC established a Working Group to identify feasible means of addressing issues with the funding of systematics research. The Working Group made the following recommendations:

- **To promote with greater clarity BBSRC's idea of what constitutes a good systematics research proposal.** A showcase of BBSRC- and NERC-funded systematics/taxonomy projects was seen as a means of informing the community about the types of proposals of interest to the Research Councils. The Working Group proposed that a joint BBSRC and NERC event would be most beneficial since the boundary between the Councils' remits is not clear to the research community and there is a perception that applications can easily fall through the gap between Councils;
- **To promote development at the interface between systematics research and other biological research areas.** The Working Group recognised that systematists were currently making valuable contributions to many funded BBSRC grant applications, but that these contributions were frequently unrecognised and unrewarded, since the input was often made informally, prior to submission of the applications. The Group also recognised that there were significant areas of current research where an understanding of systematics and comparative thinking was fundamental to the interpretation of data, but this understanding was sometimes lacking among the relevant communities;
- **To encourage more and better training in systematics.** Conveying the current intellectual and practical challenges of taxonomy and systematics to students was seen by the Working Group as being an important aspect of increasing the number and quality of students going into systematics research. A showcase meeting would assist in this aim, since it could demonstrate the variety of projects, techniques and questions that are encompassed by 'systematics'.

The Working Group concluded that some relatively modest interventions, mainly aimed at advising the systematics community and assisting them to develop proposals, could considerably improve the contribution being made to the delivery of the BBSRC mission. The outcomes are described below.

BBSRC Small Grants Scheme for Collaborative Research in Systematics (CoSyst)

Launched in December 2006, the CoSyst scheme is designed to provide short-term funding for new collaborative projects with a substantial systematic/phylogenetic/taxonomic component. The scheme is intended to support preliminary collaborative research that will form the basis of novel responsive mode proposals to either BBSRC or NERC.

BBSRC has committed £75,000 per annum for the next three years for this new funding scheme, subject to review after the first two years. Funding of £2k to £20k (typically £2-5k) is available. The scheme is administered by the Linnean Society on behalf of BBSRC and the first closing date was 31 January 2007.

Eligibility

The scheme is open to UK-based novel collaborations. Researchers from the same Institution may apply but should be from different scientific disciplines and/or departments. All applicants must be of at least Senior Post-Doctoral status.

One researcher will be nominated as the Administrative Lead for the project. The Administrative Lead will be in full-time academic employment within the UK and be eligible to hold a Research Council grant. At least one researcher will be an established systematist or phylogeneticist. This can be either the academic lead or a collaborating partner.

Please note that although this scheme is designed to encourage collaborations between systematists and non-systematists, this scheme does not exclude collaborations where all parties are established researchers within the fields of systematics and taxonomy.

Research Councils Systematics Symposium 29 August 2007, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh

The Symposium is designed to showcase the broad remit of current BBSRC and NERC-funded research in the field of systematics. This event is allied with the Systematics Association's Sixth Biennial Conference, Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, which runs from 27-31 August.

The Symposium is open to all with an interest in systematics. For registration and further details please see: <http://www.systass.org/biennial2007/>.

**Amanda Read
Programme Manager
Genes & Developmental Biology
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