

# Committee Member Spotlight

Firstly, thank you to those who voted me onto the committee in 2016. I've either had an interest in, or worked in, mass spectrometry for just over two decades. The first time I used MS I was captivated, and to this day I still find it hard to find the right words to explain why. Suffice to say, that when I look at chromatograms and mass spectra, I see molecules, and that's just plain cool. I was an undergraduate industrial placement student at the Syntex Pharmaceuticals Ltd in Edinburgh.

I worked in drug metabolism, extracting and detecting metabolites in urine and faeces using LCMS (a Finnigan MAT II if memory serves me right). The undergrad placement students tended to get the icky jobs, a tradition I think, that gets passed down the science generations and every lab – it's a rite of passage. During my first job as a graduate at PPL Therapeutics, I did a lot of HPLC and amino acid analysis, and this whetted my appetite for analytical based research. Since then, my journey through mass spectrometry has persistently run parallel to my love of middle eastern dance (perhaps more widely referred to as belly dancing), a dance style which seems to attract a lot of scientists. I should also give a big shout out to my husband (and dogs) as well, before I go any further, as they have supplied me with unwavering support and sanity checks throughout my professional career.

I moved into academic research labs after PPL. Whilst the nature of these jobs is always uncertain; short term contracts and a reliance on someone else to secure funding for you, I found this worked well for me as it triggered a serendipitous cascade of opportunities which

has led to my current position. After a couple of years as a research technician and being a bit of a Jack-of-all-trades, I managed to find my way back to MS and the world of proteomics, namely peptide mass fingerprinting using an ABI DeStr. As a facility worker I loved (and still love) working on different projects, generating data for people. This put me in direct contact with Perdita Barran, probably the most influential and generous person in my career, who gave me the opportunity of doing a PhD, looking at non-covalent protein interactions using hydrogen-deuterium exchange. Being lucky enough to do research in an instrument development lab like Perdi's is a real privilege, as you get to play with the equipment, and to take it apart. I still have a real affection for that LCQ. After a brief diversion, pretending to do some biology, I ended up at the University of Exeter, where I set up and managed another core facility. It was here I cut my teeth on Metabolomics, naively thinking small molecules were easier than macromolecules. I couldn't have been more wrong. It was a steep learning curve, particularly in the data handling side of things, but I learnt so much during my time there and have been fortunate to be able to bring that experience back to the University of Edinburgh, where I currently run the Metabolomics side of the biological MS facility, under Thierry LeBihan. Here, I'm developing methods using GC and LCMS, and I'm enjoying getting to grips with ion mobility for small molecule work.

Public engagement, and an involvement with schools, has always been an important part of my professional career. My current position at Edinburgh has allowed me to get involved in



several science festivals and schools projects. One of the most enjoyable was the SAW (science, art and writing) project where I worked with an artist and a poet. We spent the day with a class of P5s (9 and 10 year olds), teaching the kids to do an experiment and then encouraging them to use that experience to develop their creative skills for haiku and artworks. I'm now hoping to develop a collaboration with Ascus, a community science initiative in Edinburgh aimed at adults, a demographic that often gets forgotten in science outreach. I hope some of this experience will help me in my role as the young persons representative, and a member of the education sub-Committee for the BMSS. If you have any ideas, I'd love to hear from you.

## SUPPORTING OUR YOUNG SCIENTISTS

As part of BMSS's dedication to educating our young scientists, we have funded over £200,000 worth of travel grants in the last 20 years, and over £80,000 of studentships in the last 10

