
21st Cambridge MedChem Meeting
A hybrid Meeting

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The Cambridge MedChem Meeting

- Run by RSC BMCS and SCI
- Most important MedChem Meeting for BMCS/SCI
- Run every 2 years and this was the 21st
- Size of meeting is limited by capacity of Churchill College lecture theatre at 350
- Always oversubscribed
- Traditional event for many first disclosures
- Huge support from Big/small Pharma, Biotechs, Startups, Academia

Why hybrid?

- When the event organisation started (2 years before), the Organising Committee had no idea how COVID would affect or change the event
- Significant demand from potential attendees for physical presence
- In part to test the water
- The meeting had been held at Churchill many times
 - We knew what facilities were available
- The venue staff were also very willing to help and interact directly with Maggi Churchouse who provided secretariat.

Virtual platforms

- Vimeo was used for the live stream of the main technical programme on the recommendation of TC Digital (the AV company used and associated with Churchill College).
- Zoom Meetings was used for networking, using one of the RSC's licences.
- Zoom Meetings was also used for Posters (one licence) and for the Speaker set-up and Q&A (another licence).

Before the event

- TC Digital worked with each speaker and each flash presenter to create a recording for use on the day.
- Posters were available for viewing on conference server and on Twitter.

Registration

- At the time of registration, participants were asked whether they would be interested in attending in person if rules permitted.
- Once both Government and College rules allowed us to accommodate delegates on site, we asked whether (a) they still wanted to attend and, more importantly, (b) their company would allow them to attend.
- Those two numbers were very different. At this point, we notified potential physical participants of the rules agreed with Churchill College.

On the day

- On the day, TC Digital set the cameras in the conference room, provided the sound mixing, communicated with the virtual speakers and chairs. They also managed the live Q&A in a dedicated Zoom Room.
- Two of the speakers delivered live presentations, and four of the speakers were live in the conference room for Q&A.
- The 2021 Malcolm Campbell Memorial Prize was presented in person and received via video link by Sir Patrick Vallance.
 - This award is presented by the Biological and Medicinal Chemistry Sector to All UK Scientists involved in the fight against COVID-19. For excellence in biological and medicinal chemistry.
<https://youtu.be/x5dTRYqDMz0>

How did it work

- As ever, the science presented was outstanding
- Overall, everything was fine, and the uptake of physical participants (55), the max capacity allowed, reflected how much a face-to-face event was welcomed.
- There were 281 virtual attendees
- The physical networking was very well received, and the virtual networking sessions, although sparsely attended (10-12 people), were enjoyed by those who joined.

What could be improved

- Using Zoom webinar with a rebroadcast onto a YouTube channel as well as Vimeo would have been preferable, because Vimeo was unreliable.
- Trying to have virtual delegates asking question orally did not work, but this improved substantially when we reverted to written questions for virtual participants, relayed by the session chairs.
- The computer hosting the Zoom Room for posters failed on one day, which was a disappointment for virtual delegates.

More observations

- Within the Zoom Room, the 'top of the list' posters were very busy but hardly anyone visited the later numbers and the attendance at exhibitor rooms was low.
- Exhibitors probably experienced no particular advantage in attending in person, because there were no physical stands
- There are now many virtual networking platforms but adding another platform into the mix might not be wise.
 - Added to which after a full day sitting watching presentations, I'm not sure how many would want virtual networking?

Feedback

- Feedback was collected by paper and electronic questionnaires
- 53 people responded
- Overall score 4.33 (out of 5)
- Virtual conference 3.81
- Posters and Exhibitors 3.2
- Would you attend a similar event model again 4.25

Committee

- Nadia Ahmad, Charles River
- Mark Healy, Novartis (Technical Adviser)
- Simon Peace, GlaxoSmithKline (Chair)
- Jo Pinder, Vertex
- Gordon Saxty, Fidelta (Treasurer)
- Jamie Scott, AstraZeneca
- Chris Swain, Cambridge MedChem Consulting
- Nigel Swain, Sosei Heptares
- Andrew Williams, Hon Chairman, RSC BMCS
- Maggi Churchouse (Secretariat)