

Joint BSI/NVVI congress: 5 – 9 of December 2016

Unlike many other editions of the NVVI Winterschool, this edition was held in Liverpool together with our British colleagues. Due to the number of participants, the venue was considerably larger than I was used to with different rooms to accommodate the plenary sessions. The chairs were comfortable to sit in for longer periods of time, which contributed to increased focus during listening to the talks. In addition, the venue provided room to have coffee, discussions with participants, roam around the (incredible number of) exhibition stands and display of the more than 700! posters.

Even though science moves on rapidly, previous winterschools did have a degree of similarity between each of them, due to the fact that the same NVVI members join every year. This edition however provided the NVVI members with a more broad spectrum of talks and subjects, contributing to an increase in overall knowledge, one of the many benefits of the joint meeting. During the talks, there was a pleasant atmosphere that allowed every participant to be comfortable in asking questions. A disadvantage of the size of the venue was that if you had a question you were unable to ask during the session, it required a serious quest to find the person amongst all others, a quest quite similar to looking for a particle stray of hay in a hay stack.

The first day of the congress was dedicated to the bright sparks, a brilliant keynote lecture by Professor Akiko Iwasaki, and an opening ceremony by the president of BSI and vice-president of NVVI. The presentations given during the bright sparks session were shorter versions of the presentations given during the following days, giving the participants who arrived later the opportunity to attend. However, the majority of the attendants that already heard the bright sparks presentations before left when the presenter would present again, leaving the presenter with a small audience (especially during the third time presenting).

The oral presentations of the congress were subdivided into plenary sessions based on topic. On the one side, this created order in the chaos of all the different topics, however, if you wanted to attend two talks that were given at the same time, you had to make some pretty difficult decisions. On Wednesday and Thursday evening, the poster sessions were held with a pleasant environment of social networking (contributed to by glasses of wine). The posters were divided over two sections depending on the day, shifting the lot to either the one or the other side of the hall, giving more space to the participants who wanted to escape the crowd without excluding themselves from the scientific surrounding.

Overall, I enjoyed the joint BSI/NVVI congress as I was able to extend my immunological knowledge on a variety of topics. The mingling and interaction with the British participants contributed to the enjoyable atmosphere during the poster sessions and breaks, whereas the location (Liverpool) gave the perfect opportunity to socialize with direct colleagues. BSI and NVVI have done a wonderful job at organising the congress and I look forward to attending more joint congresses in the near future.

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