

Appendix 2.

GARNet Town Hall Meeting (Summary notes)

5th April 2006, University of Kent, Canterbury (following SEB session 'Genomes to Systems')

Questions/Comments were invited on the GARNet Interim Report on Plant Systems Biology, on Biological Topics for a Networked Research Activity, and on Tools/Technology required (format as for 27 January 2006, with more focussed questions) – Presented and Chaired by Andrew Millar

30-35 participants including theoreticians and plant scientists with a range of interests.

Discussion covered many of the topics already raised in the January Town Hall Meeting and elsewhere, which are only summarised here:

1. Training is urgently required, especially of interdisciplinary PhD students (earlier training, e.g. undergraduate courses or summer schools, Masters courses, were also desirable).
2. Mechanisms to help plant scientists to access theoretical expertise were discussed, also provision of technical assistance service for modelling. The proposed Study Group in Mathematical Plant Science was supported.
3. Species used in plant systems biology: focus on Arabidopsis is necessary, but crop species will also benefit and should not be forgotten.
4. Biological topic for a large-scale activity in plant systems biology. Participants were keen that the topic should be as inclusive as possible. The 'Plant Growth' and 'Evolution/Adaptation' topics suggested from the JIC workshop were each supported by some participants, as was 'The Leaf'. The comparison to the proposed CPIB focus on the root was noted. AJM outlined the small number of staff that could actually be employed in a realistic Phase 3 proposal (~£5M). Focus would be necessary for visibility and to link models from sub-projects.
5. Organisation of large-scale research network. The proposed 'hub and spokes' structure was supported. Participants suggested a more federated structure than previously discussed, with a strong coordinating function in the 'hub', perhaps funded separately, and more independent 'spokes'. EU FP6 'coordinating actions' were mentioned as a possible funding model for the hub.
6. Development of standards for experimental plant research and for data exchange was seen as a potential benefit from a large network. Participants called for more data sharing methods, either a central data repository or a decentralised system with a single access point, e.g. via Moby-style web services. Coordination by NASC and/or CISBs and/or GARNet was suggested.
7. The model repository suggested at the Swindon workshop was supported.