

Reflecting on Bioinspired Materials 2018

After I had some time to reflect, I am looking back on a hectic week that summarized as:

- 1 international conference to organize with a lecture in the lunch break
- hosting my PhD supervisor and making sure to impress him with our new labs
- 1 grant rejection
- 1 paper resubmitted
- launch meeting of our new KTP project in Cambridge

I will expand on the conference organization, which has been one of my favorite things to do over the last three years.

Bioinspired Materials 2018 conference and its history:

In 2016, I invited two young talented academics and dear friends, Eirini Velliou (University of Surrey) and Patricia Losada-Pérez (Université Libre de Bruxelles) for talks at ManchesterMet. It was then suggested to add an internal speaker (Vittorio Caprio) to this exciting line-up and pitch it as a seminar. With the help of colleagues in Engineering & Healthcare, we were able to bring a group of multidisciplinary researchers together and network during the poster sessions. The name “Bioinspired Materials conference” was born because it seemed to be the overarching theme of the three presentations. The event certainly was memorable because we were evacuated out of the building after the poster session due to the stormy weather.

The year after, I enlisted the help of a colleague to apply for funding of the Royal Society of Chemistry for new conferences. Just before the Christmas break I got the news the funding was awarded, which was a nice present but also a stressful moment since we pitched the conference as an ambitious two-day international event. It was full steam ahead after the holidays and we managed to attract sponsors and bombard people with emails to advertise the Bioinspired Materials 2017 conference. We were able to pull it off with a team of five people and had around 60 participants from all the corners of Europe coming to visit Manchester. While I was able to relax at the conference dinner with a massive piece of chocolate cake, I also sighed at the end of the conference “exciting, but never again”.

After various pleas of my enthusiastic co-organisers Araida and Trish, I was persuaded to host the event again this year. The compromise we reached was that it had to be a one day event in order to minimize stress and I was reassured “it would be a piece of cake now we have all the contacts”. Not entirely true, but I did notice that the conference organization really helped to expand my network. We had many



European participants in 2017– less so this year since it was only a one-day conference, but it was the first time we were able to host visitors from the far side of the world including Japan and Bangladesh. The international visitors arrived the day prior to the conference and I hope we gave them a warm welcome to ManchesterMet by showing them the new chemistry labs and the brand new Fuel Cell Centre, followed by dinner in a traditional pub. The following day started with another fire alarm (shear

With my PhD supervisor (Prof Patrick Wagner, KU Leuven)

panic for myself in the morning!) but the conference ran smoothly thanks to the help of my students and other volunteers. The day itself had many highlights but just to list a few:

- Being able to host your PhD supervisor and then show him your research students and lab: priceless
- Meeting people I admire on Twitter in real life and seeing their interesting contributions (@AlisonEdwards and fellow Dutchie @DrGvanK)
- High quality talks and lively discussions at the poster session, with three amazing winners from University of Hull, UoM and ManchesterMet.



Next year Araida and Trish will not have to persuade me, I am sure we will organize BIM2019 again at ManchesterMet! Perhaps with more help from my students, allowing me to actually have lunch this time ;)