

NABBS – National Association of Biochemistry & Biology Sciences (Managers) – A Potted History (with acknowledgements to Syd Williams)

In April 1972 a group of Laboratory Managers from several universities (Leicester, Aston, Sussex, Nottingham, Warwick, Bristol, and Birmingham) met at the University of Birmingham. The object of the meeting, (chaired by Syd Williams), was to discuss the formation of an association of University Laboratory Managers who were working in departments where Biochemistry teaching and research was carried out. The association would be a forum where managers could meet on a regular basis to discuss common problems and to exchange information and ideas.

The unanimous view was that such an association would be of great benefit to laboratory managers. Thus, the National Association of Biochemistry & Biological Superintendents* (NABBS) was founded. The inaugural meeting also set some guidelines for future meetings, these were later expanded to become what is now the constitution of the Association. Syd Williams became the Secretary.

Two-day meetings in Warwick (1972) and Sussex (1973) followed. This pattern, of holding two-day meetings twice per year (Spring and Autumn), carried on until 1981 when it changed to holding only one meeting per year (in the Autumn) of three days duration. In recent years some one-day Spring meetings have also been held, at which topics of special interest have usually been discussed. Limited Guest Membership, was introduced in 1975, with the aim of broadening the base of the association and to introduce views from a different aspect to Laboratory Management (eg. industrial managers, or University non-biological departments).

Members & Meetings

The membership of the Association grew steadily during the 70's, rising from eleven in 1972 to twenty four by 1980, settling at twenty eight in the late 80's and early 90's. Current total membership is twenty seven, including five guest members.

In 2000 the Secretary, Syd Williams, retired (as did Dennis Jones, both founder members). Roger Dainty (the only founder member still in post) took over as Secretary.



Retirement presentation to Syd Williams and Dennis Jones, September 2000

NABBS members have been honoured by the Queen. Mr Ken Bromfield M.B.E. (awarded in 1995) and Mr Theo Dalgleish M.B.E. (awarded in 2001, Theo retired in 1987).

Over the last thirty years over fifty meetings have been held at more than thirty venues (twenty eight universities), each member taking a turn to host. Most Superintendents/Managers have responsibility for purchasing within their departments, many NABBS members are therefore regular visitors to the main UK exhibitions of laboratory supplies and equipment. With the introduction of Regional Purchasing Consortia and National Working Parties in the 1980's, many NABBS members had an even wider role in purchasing, as representatives of their universities and regions. As members of the National Working Party for Laboratory Supplies, Syd Williams and Jim Murison represented the Higher Education sector on the committee that drafted the British Standard for recirculatory fume cupboards

There have also been a number of overseas visits to various conferences, exhibitions, study tours etc. These visits have usually been attended by a subset of Members, and started with a trip to Achema, Frankfurt, June 1976, for an exhibition of laboratory supplies and equipment, followed by a return visit in 1979. There have also been memorable trips to the US, initially for Pittconn exhibitions/conference and to undertake a study tour of a number of US University Bioscience Faculties (1993).



Visit to Emory University in Atlanta, 1993

One rather special invitation occurred in April 1994, when five NABBS members were invited to join a group on a visit to Treff AG in Degersheim, Switzerland. In 1998 three members, Paul Brown, Roger Dainty and Syd Williams, submitted a paper for inclusion in the 1999 Pittcon Conference. The paper, entitled "Current Trends and Changes to Research Strategy in U.K. Universities and Medical Schools". The paper was accepted, and in March 1999 they made a joint presentation at the 50th Anniversary Pittcon Conference in Orlando.



Visit to Treff AG, Switzerland, April 1994

NABBS continued to be active as group until the summer of 2012, when the decision was taken to merge with the larger group UBMA (University Bioscience Managers' Association), whose aims and objectives were similar to NABBS and who operated within the same discipline areas. UBMA can be contacted via their website www.ubma.org.uk.