

MEICOM

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Innovative Training Networks (ITN) H2020-MSCA-ITN-2017 - GA number 765212

Year 1 Progress Report 1st January - 31st December 2018

General progress of the action

All twelve MEICOM ESRs were recruited between 1st July and 30th September 2018, so for the first few months they have mainly been settling into their Host Organisations and familiarising themselves with their individual Research Training Packages (RTPs). A number of our ESRs have already made excellent progress on their RTP's and their first progress reports, containing details of their scientific research, meetings and outreach activities can be found by visiting our project website www.meicom-itn.com

MEICOM Inaugural Meeting (**AT3.1 & AT5.1**) 9th July 2018, Birmingham

The MEICOM Inaugural Meeting was held on 9th July 2018 at the IET Birmingham, Austin Court. This was a highly successful first meeting, attended by all partners, their recruited ESRs and the MEICOM associated partners. An introduction to the individual RTPs was given by each RTP leader and each ESR gave a presentation on their background, their research aims and outputs for the project. The day concluded with an introduction to management, and the election of the ESR Representatives Committee (ERC) and a discussion with the External Advisory Board (EAB).

This was followed on the 10th July by an ESR workshop on Plant Meiotic Recombination (**Technical theory and application (AT3.1)**) The Workshop focused on the current state of the art chromosome organization in crop species and the challenges confronting plant breeding and consisted of talks provided by the RTP leaders and external invited speakers.

On the 11th July, MEICOM project Coordinator Dr Eugenio Sanchez Moran hosted an Outreach & Event Planning day (**AT5.1 Discussion and Planning Outreach Events**) for the ESRs which included a representative from the ThinkTank and recently graduated PhDs with outstanding outreach experience (Marina Martinez [COMREC-ITN] & Chris Morgan [UoB graduate]). The day concluded with a tour of the ThinkTank in Birmingham where our first outreach event, Meet the Scientist, will be held on Thursday 21st February 2019.

The agenda for our Inaugural Meeting and Workshops and the PowerPoint presentation for our Outreach & Event Planning day can be viewed on www.meicom-itn.com and have also been uploaded in support of this report.

Planned meetings for 2019

Bioinformatics Workshop (AT3.2) 11th, 12th 13th February 2019, Wageningen

The ESRs will attend a three-day intensive workshop on Bioinformatics (**AT3.2**) hosted by Sander Peters and Dick De Ridder of partner WUR in Wageningen on the 11th, 12th and 13th February 2019.

Topics to be covered are data resources such as NCBI dbs, Ensembl, etc. and basic tools (e.g. BLAST, InterPro, Go annotation, Staden, Emboss, Primer3). Haplotyping and ChIP-seq analysis. The outcome of which will be that all ESRs will have “hands-on” experience of bioinformatics analysis.

Meet the Scientist Outreach Event (AT5.3) ThinkTank Museum 21st February 2019, Birmingham

Our first ESR led outreach event takes place at the ThinkTank Museum (**AT5.3**) and will focus on “*Crops for our future*”. The day will feature hands-on interactive plant science-based activities for school children, parents and the general public. The outcome of which will raise awareness of Food Security by the general public.

1st Annual MEICOM Project Meeting (incorporating AT3.3/AT5.2) 17th – 19th June 2019, Madrid

The 1st Annual MEICOM Project Meeting, hosted by Dr Monica Pradillo of partner UCM will be held in Escorial, Madrid. This will involve discussion sessions in which the ESRs will present progress updates to their cohort and the group. Feedback will be provided in both verbal and written form from the workpackage leaders and scientific committee. The day will conclude with a management meeting, feedback from ERC and EAC and a Plenary Lecture by an invited scientist.

Workshop on Advances in Meiotic Recombination (AT3.3) 18th June, Madrid

Following on from the 1st Annual Project Meeting, a workshop on Advances in Meiotic Recombination (**AT3.3**) will be held for the ESRs focusing on current state-of-the-art advances in meiotic recombination in crops, plants and other organisms. The outcome will be all ESRs will acquire a clear understanding of the new advances in the field of meiotic recombination to be able to adapt them into their work plan for their research.

Presentation Skills Workshop (AT5.2), 19th June, Madrid

The final ESR workshop held in Madrid will be on Presentation Skills (**AT5.2**), led by Dr Eugenio Sanchez Moran of MEICOM coordinators UoB. ESRs will have instruction on the preparation and delivery of verbal presentations followed by a feedback session. ESRs will receive general and personalized feedback on how to improve their presentation skills.

Recruitment strategy

The MEICOM recruitment period was 3 months from the start of the project (January 1st 2018 – March 31st 2018) by which time all suitable candidates were identified and in place ready to attend our Inaugural meeting in July 2018.

Applicants were instructed to complete their applications, sending one copy to the first choice RTP leader and a second copy to the MEICOM Project Manager in Birmingham. The positions were advertised via various channels, including Euraxess, the EU website, Arabuk, FindaPhD, MEICOM partner institution websites, social networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn) and newsletters of graduate schools.

The Coordinators (UoB) interviewed each shortlisted applicant via SKYPE interviews by the RC (Recruitment Committee) Any excellent but unsuccessful candidates from one Beneficiary were recommended to the other Beneficiaries. All appointed ESRs successfully met the eligibility criteria and high standards required by MEICOM and were non-discriminatory in all respects.

Of the final twelve successful ESRs, 50% were female. Our ESRs come from a wide range of countries including Spain, China, South Africa, Brazil, Poland, Germany, Philippines, Italy and the Netherlands.

ITNA – Initial Training Needs Analysis (TA9. Career Development Plan (CDP) (meets TO4)

All ESRs have completed a self-assessed ITNA. The ITNA is being used to develop a CDP, in discussion with the trainee's supervisor(s) and external mentor, that will address identified training needs and how they will be acquired from the portfolio of generic and transferable skills training courses provided by the Network or external organisations.

The CDP will be approved by the Training Committee (TC) of the Supervisory Board (SB). The CDP will also encompass career planning and trainees will be encouraged to use career planning resources such as the UK Research Councils' 'Career Mapping Tool'.

The CDP will be reviewed annually by the TC to ensure that the training programmes and individualized learning outcomes are sufficiently ambitious and relevant to meet the high standards of excellence that will be the aim of MEICOM.

Details of the skills training received by each ESR during their first year can be viewed within their individual progress reports by visiting www.meicom-itn.com

Secondments

All participants within MEICOM provide a range of secondment positions with complementary expertise for defined training of the ESRs. The ESRs are already planning their first secondments with our partners to facilitate their own research project, exchange knowledge and/or increase their expertise in the field of meiosis and plant breeding research. They will also be trained in specialised subdisciplines and discover various career possibilities.

Following each secondment, ESRs will prepare a short report on their activities and these will be continually updated, reviewed and, in time available to view on our project website.

Communication Activities

Although the MEICOM network is in the early stages, the ESRs have already taken part in a number of outreach activities and meetings. These can be found within their individual progress reports by visiting www.meicom-itn.com

In conclusion, the MEICOM Network is functioning excellently and very promising research progress is already being made. Our ESRs are happy, settling in well and communicating with each other as a group regularly.

