Welcome
Welcome to the September 2012 version of our newsletter. We hope that you find this edition interesting and informative. This month we include news about various aspects of postgraduate research student’s achievement and also information about events which may interest you.

Career development awards to outstanding Newcastle PhD students
Newcastle PhD student John Yarham, of the Institute for Ageing and Health, has been awarded a salary for a full year plus funding for consumables and travel as one of our successful applicants for funding from MRC, made available to mark 100 years of achievements by MRC scientists, under the MRC Centenary Early Career Award scheme.

John is very close to completing his MRC-funded PhD and will use the funding to develop a collaboration with Dr Richard Maraia at NIH, Bethesda USA, to learn and bring back to his laboratory at Newcastle a cutting-edge molecular technique that will enable him to develop even further his very successful research on mitochondrial disease caused by translation deficiency. John has published five papers during his PhD, including two as first author. John has just published work in the journal Mitochondrion, describing how mitochondrial DNA sequences within organisms of the same species are sufficiently conserved such that data from a single member allows specific mitochondrial diseases to be assigned to specific mutations on the basis of evolutionary conservation. This information will be very useful in the clinical diagnosis of mitochondrial disease. (Yarham JW, McFarland R, Taylor RW, Elson JL. A proposed consensus panel of organisms for determining evolutionary conservation of mt-trNA point mutations. Mitochondrion. 2012 12:533-538)

A second award was made to Catriona Barker of the Institute of Cellular Medicine. Catriona will use the funding to spend a period of time during her MRC-funded PhD studies in the laboratory of Professor Paul Proost, KU Leuven, Belgium, to learn techniques to produce and measure citrillinated chemokines. This will add to her current research looking at post-translational chemokine modifications. Like John, Catriona is a Newcastle University graduate. After her BSc here, in Biochemistry with Immunology, she obtained a Distinction in the MRes, which provided her training over the first year of her PhD.

North East Postgraduate Research Conference 2012 at Newcastle University
Now running for the seventh year, the North East Postgraduate Research Conference, organised by Newcastle University postgraduate research students, has grown to include participants from seven universities (Newcastle University, Northumbria University, Durham University, the University of Sunderland, the University of York, the University of Liverpool and Teesside University). Once again our students have organised what will undoubtedly be a fantastic event at a great venue – Newcastle’s Great North Museum (Hancock).

The students have put together a diverse and stimulating programme featuring keynote talks by David McAllister, Head of Skills & Careers at the BBSRC and Mark Henderson, Head of Communications at the Wellcome Trust. Both bodies are major funders of life sciences research in the UK. Ed Yong, journalist, blogger and science writer will also give a keynote presentation.

As a postgraduate research student at Newcastle University you will have the opportunity to participate in this event, both as a presenter and, should you wish, as a member of the organising committee, proving you with valuable experience to enhance your CV.

Full details of the event, which this year will run on Friday 26th October 2012, are on the conference web site, which is also set up an managed by the organising committee, at http://www.nepg.org.uk/index.php.
Experiences gained through travel grants awarded to Newcastle University postgraduate research students

Postgraduate research students may apply to the Faculty of Medical Sciences Graduate School Travel Fund for grants, awarded on a competitive basis, to travel to scientific conferences or other laboratories. It is extremely pleasing to note the benefits to our students of this travel funding scheme. Students report overwhelmingly positive experiences of their attendance at conferences or workshops or visits to other laboratories. Here are just a handful of quotes from students who recently benefited from the scheme. You can read the full reports, plus some selected recent reports by other students, at www.ncl.ac.uk/fms/postgrad/funding/TravelFundReports.htm.

“The positive feedback I received on my current work, as well as suggestions on what to investigate next, has improved my confidence in presenting and selling my research.” Martin Sim, on his experience at the 4th Annual ASM Conference on Prokaryotic Development, Montreal, Canada.

“I gave a two minute presentation summarising my poster and encouraging delegates to come to discuss it with me during the main poster session. Preparing the presentation was a good learning experience because it made me focus on the key message of my poster and figure out how to effectively communicate this in a very short time. I also learned a lot from seeing how other people tackled this challenge.” Emma Kirkpatrick, whose award allowed her to attend the Mastery of Manual Skills Meeting in Groningen, the Netherlands.

“I have gained both research ideas to bring back to the lab but also a great deal of background knowledge, which will be an asset while writing up my findings and defending my thesis.” Heather Murton, who attended the 3rd International Conference and Workshop on the Genomic Impact of Eukaryotic Transposable Elements, Asilomar, California, USA.

Newcastle University PhD student publication – journal cover feature

Newcastle University PhD student Helen Bosomworth of the School of Dental Sciences and Institute for Cell and molecular Biosciences has published some of her PhD research on cellular zinc transport in the journal Metallomics. The paper describes the expression, regulation and function of a zinc transporter that has a particular role in controlling zinc in the brain and that may be involved in the development of neurodegenerative disease. Helen’s work is featured as a special back-cover highlight - as shown – in the journal. (Bosomworth HJ, Thornton JK, Coneyworth LJ, Ford D, Valentine RA. Efflux function, tissue-specific expression and intracellular trafficking of the Zn transporter ZnT10 indicate roles in adult Zn homeostasis. Metallomics. 2012 (8):771-9). Helen is also author on a second published paper on zinc transport (Coneyworth LJ, Jackson KA, Tyson J, Bosomworth HJ, van der Hagen E, Hann GM, Ogo OA, Swann DC, Mathers JC, Valentine RA, Ford D. Identification of the human ZTRE (zinc transcriptional regulatory element) - a palindromic protein-binding DNA sequence responsible for zinc-induced transcriptional repression. Journal of Biological Chemistry. 2012 Aug 17. [Epub ahead of print]), and has contributed to other work submitted for publication. She took the MRes here at Newcastle University, as preparation for PhD study, and the research she undertook during her MRes research project also features in a recent publication (Gemmell E, Bosomworth H, Allan L, Hall R, Khundakar A, Oakley AE, Deramecourt V, Polvikoski TM, O’Brien JT, Kalaria RN. Hippocampal neuronal atrophy and cognitive function in delayed poststroke and aging-related dementias. Stroke. 2012 43:808-14). Helen’s publication is just one of numerous recent publications by Newcastle University postgraduate research students, many in top journals. If you join us here in the Faculty of Medical Sciences for studies at PhD or MD level you should aim – and expect – to have your work published. Many research students on one year Masters level courses, such as the MRes, also generate published output.