Alexis Barr
Report of Systems Approaches to Cancer Biology conference, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, USA, 3th-6th April 2016

I flew to Cape Cod to present my work at the inaugural Systems Approaches to Cancer Biology conference in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. This promised to be an extremely exciting conference, being coorganised by the Association of Early Career Cancer Systems Biologists and the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health in the US. Systems Biology is still a controversial area to some in cancer research who are sceptical that such approaches can yield useful outcomes for cancer patients. However, this is the meeting where we united to prove that this was clearly wrong.

Doug Lauffenburger from MIT kick-started the meeting declaring that the way to win over the critics was to "generate the results, and confront them with data". Over the course of the next three days, it was clear that not only do we have the results but also that we are starting to see the clinical benefits emerging from these experiments.

We had unseasonal snowstorms for two days of the conference but that didn't chill the discussions in the lecture theatre. The conference consisted of a series of talks from young postdoctoral and junior faculty members, together with a handful of talks from more seasoned professors. There were also two very interactive poster sessions giving time for more in-depth discussions. In addition, the organisers had included "Principal Investigator Lunches" to give junior researchers the chance to network with senior people in the field. This acted as a great "way-in" with some of the top researchers in the field and generated stimulating discussions about careers and the future of the field.

The travel grant from the Royal Society of Biology gave me the opportunity to attend and present my work at this unique conference. I presented in the final session entitled "Signaling networks in cancer" and received great feedback which will be very useful as I move forward with this work. Currently, this conference is the only one combining systems biology with cancer research so was the perfect forum for me to present my results.

I achieved all I hoped to from attending this conference. I presented my work to both established and up-and-coming researchers in the field, received feedback on my work to help me develop my future research directions, had face-to-face discussions with eminent scientists in the field, extended my network of systems biologists covering a broad range of expertise, established two new potential collaborations and learned about new and exciting technologies that will change the way we conduct our future work. This would not have been possible without the generous support of the Royal Society of Biology.