

Meeting of UKFN Advisory Board

16:00 GMT, Monday 27 November 2017
via Webex

MINUTES

Present:

Matthew Juniper (Chair)
Nick Daish
Simon Bittleston
Ann Karagozian
David Standingford
GertJan van Heijst
Ton van den Bremer

1. Minutes of last AB meeting (29/3/17)

The AB unanimously accepted the minutes from the last AB meeting.

2. Outstanding actions from previous AB meetings

(a) There was one outstanding action from the AB meeting, 21/9/16, namely to include a Jobs page on the website. MJ noted fluids-related jobs are currently advertised via Twitter and the Newsletter, and are limited to those put forward by UKFN members. The AB agreed a more general listing would be useful, but it would be most efficient to give a list of links to existing sites rather than recompile lists of jobs. SB offered to report on Schlumberger's use of job sites; AK noted some professional societies may have job lists, e.g. the Combustion Institute.

Action: SB to provide list of sites that Schlumberger typically uses for job adverts.

Action: ND to compile list of sites likely to feature jobs of interest to UKFN members, and investigate putting this on the website.

(b) There was one outstanding action from the last AB meeting, 29/3/17, namely to add more interactivity to the SIG page. MJ noted this was technically relatively challenging, and was therefore currently a low priority.

3. Website

MJ ran through the list of sections on the website, highlighting the main new features since the last AB meeting and seeking input from the AB on two sections in particular, the Directory page and Competitions page.

Directory page

MJ outlined the current Directory page, noting the search facilities were relatively simple, and therefore input from the AB would be welcome both on how the Directory might be used and on ways to improve its user-friendliness and functionality.

The AB suggested it would be helpful to know how much the Directory page is currently being used. MJ pointed out this information should be available in the form of Google analytics data, which has already been set up, and agreed to investigate further for this and other pages on the website.

Action: ND to review usage analytics for website, in particular which pages attract most visits, including the Directory page.

GJvH noted that locating an individual was not straightforward due to the non-alphabetical listing order (currently users are displayed in order of registration). It was agreed to look at changing this so the list is arranged alphabetically.

Action: ND to investigate sorting Directory into alphabetical order.

MJ encouraged the AB members to share any thoughts on improvements to the Directory page, as an ongoing action.

Action: All AB, ongoing – further comments on ways to improve user experience for Directory.

Competitions page

MJ outlined the recently-added Competitions page and the response to the first competition (31/5/17) and noted a second competition was about to close (30/11/17). The entries would be used as publicity material, and some were to be followed up by Tom Crawford (see Item 7).

This led on to a discussion of publicity of UKFN, for example at the recent APS-DFD meeting in Denver. MJ noted that the UKFN presence had been relatively low-key, and AK suggested that a small sponsorship might be considered for next time, such as a booth. GJvH put forward EUROMECH conferences and events as another publicity route, e.g. a stand at the 2018 European Fluid Mechanics Conference¹.

Action: ND to investigate cost of stand or other sponsorship at APS-DFD, EUROMECH, etc.

Future plans

MJ noted new functionality (SIG mailing lists), new content (consolidate in particular researcher resources and individual SIG pages, encouraging SIG leaders to add their own material) and a need to maintain the website after the grant end. Regarding the last of these, GJvH enquired on the amount of time currently spent on website maintenance, as this would inform future requirements. ND responded it was difficult to estimate because of its patchy nature, but agreed to make an estimate.

Action: ND to estimate time per week required for keeping website up to date.

MJ remarked that plans for the discussion forum were on hold, since it would be more efficient to link to other existing resources, such as the ERCOFTAC QNET-CFD Knowledge Base Wiki (http://www.ercoftac.org/products_and_services/wiki/). DS noted there was still a need for sub-editors for QNET, and that UKFN might advertise this at some stage.

Action: MJ to contact QNET editor to discuss possible interactions with UKFN.

¹ 12th European Fluid Mechanics Conference, 9-13 September 2018, Vienna.

4. Special Interest Groups

MJ ran through the current status of spending on SIGs (Figure 1 in Agenda), from which it seemed likely there would be an underspend, in particular if SIG meetings did not run to the schedule set out in spending plans. MJ suggested two possibilities to handle this:

- Third call for SIG proposals: it is planned to discuss with SIG leaders, say around March 2018, whether they would spend their budget and if not whether they would like to release some portion of their allocation. Equally, some SIGs may wish to increase their spending. For sufficient net surplus, a third round of SIG proposals, aimed at creating 3-5 new SIGs, could be made.
- New activity: towards the end of the grant, a new SIG-related activity could be initiated, such as sponsoring members of a SIG, in particular PhD students, to attend conferences in the SIG's area.
TvdB suggested a postdoc conference in 2019, possibly a UK-based (UKFN-branded) version of the EUROMECH-sponsored European Postgraduate Fluid Dynamics Conference, but without duplicating the UK Fluids Conference.

Action: All AB, ongoing – further comments on ways to manage potential SIG underspend.

5. Short Research Visits

MJ ran through the current status of spending on SRVs (Figure 2 in Agenda), from which it seemed likely, as for the SIGs, that there would be an underspend. This could be addressed by increasing the number of visits, if there were the demand, and possibly also the maximum spend per visit. Return visits, to follow up the outcomes of an earlier visit, would be acceptable.

Action: If quality permits, increase the number of SRVs awarded in the next few batches.

6. Supplementary funds

MJ summarised the status of the supplementary funds received as contributions from institutions. The spending had so far been exclusively on competition prizes. The original intention to use some funds on outreach activities has been obviated partially by UKFN's ongoing association with the Journal of Fluid Mechanics (see Item 7), who are sharing some of their outreach resources with UKFN.

The AB liked the use of competitions, including the proposed dissertation prize². GJvH noted the JM Burgerscentrum in the Netherlands holds a symposium with similar prizes (oral presentation and PhD thesis), which are well-received and help maintain investment in the conference.

MJ noted that it would be possible to keep unused supplementary funds beyond the end of the grant, and could therefore be available to cover things like basic maintenance of the website.

Action: All AB, ongoing – further comments on ways to use of supplementary funds.

² The organizing committee of the 2018 UK Fluids Conference in Manchester and the UKFN Executive Committee have recently agreed in principle to hold a session at the conference featuring the three finalists for the dissertation prize, who will each give a 30-minute presentation to decide the overall winner and runners-up.

7. Engagement with other fluids-related bodies

ERCOFTAC

MJ noted UKFN is now responsible for UK Pilot Centre, and in addition to its duties in this capacity, UKFN would be encouraging its SIGs to participate more closely with ERCOFTAC, through

- joining forces with/becoming leader of/creating new ERCOFTAC SIGs
- being active in the QNET-CFD Wiki

DS/MJ, who had been at the recent ERCOFTAC Autumn Festival, noted that UKFN had been well-received.

Journal of Fluid Mechanics

MJ summarised the current collaboration with JFM, who are developing plans to become a hub for fluid mechanics research, including wider outreach. One important step has been to take on Tom Crawford, a maths/fluids outreach specialist, as their social media editor. In collaboration with Nicole Sharp of FYFD (<http://fyfluidynamics.com/>), he recorded a rich set of almost 50 interviews at the recent APS-DFD meeting, around half of which featured UK fluids researchers. These will be compiled into short videos, each containing 3-4 topics, released at the rate of one per month. They will be published on the JFM YouTube channel and the FYFD website, including where appropriate connections with UKFN (who will highlight the videos on the website).

EPSRC

MJ noted current plans for interacting with EPSRC relied on outputs from the SIGs, so a more concerted effort would be made once these are further developed.

Action: MJ to contact EPSRC to update them on SIGs.

Government Office for Science

MJ reported on a meeting attended by government officials and senior academics on bridging the gap between science and policy. The AB was asked to comment on the science/policy interaction and how UKFN might contribute, for example through some form of brokerage service to government.

AK commented it was useful for government/policy makers to be aware of the importance of fluid mechanics, in particular its many applications (which tend to be of more interest than research areas), and a network such as UKFN helps to promote that. SB suggested that the provision of scientific advice was more valuable than policy advice. TvdB noted the route to interactions with policy makers could be through the Royal Society, Royal Academy of Engineering, etc., and it could be worth exploring the setting-up of 'policy internships' for interested PhD students.

Action: MJ to contact RS, RAEng to discuss how they might use UKFN as a resource for scientific advice to policy makers.

UK Acoustics Network

Finally, MJ reported on a new EPSRC-funded network, having just attended the Kick-off meeting. It is similar to UKFN, but with a closer involvement by industry. It already has its (ten) SIGs set up each of which has direct industrial involvement. There was intense interest in UKFN at the meeting, which was attended by around 100 people, and UKFN would monitor its activities for useful feedback to share with the UKFN SIGs that have greater industrial participation.

Action: MJ/ND to continue to monitor the UK Acoustic Network's activities.

8. Ways to continue UKFN

MJ noted there were two key parts of UKFN to maintain after the end of the EPSRC grant: the website and the SIGs. Maintaining the website had already been discussed, and is likely to be relatively cheap, with a small overhead to maintain a service provider, etc., and someone's time to add material. The SIGs would be more expensive to continue, and their maintenance requires further thought. Note it is likely that only a subset of the SIGs –those driven most effectively during this grant phase – will continue, and not all 41 of them.

UKFN SIGs and EPSRC CDTs

MJ noted that in addition to a standard subscription model there could be more imaginative ways to support SIGs into the future. For example, it may be possible to exploit the upcoming EPSRC call for proposals for Centres for Doctoral Training: a proposal would name relevant SIGs into a proposal, who would contribute to the CDT's activities, in return for which the SIGs would receive funding over the life of the CDT (typically 8 years). The timing could work well, with the first cohorts of students starting in October 2019, just as UKFN's funding ends.

When the CDT priority areas are announced, UKFN would canvass SIG leaders to identify those interested in joining such an effort.

The AB was supportive of investigating this idea further. TvdB suggested organising some form of brokerage event, either online or as a physical meeting. SB suggested approaching the RCs directly with this idea of linking UKFN SIGs and CDTs, possibly even suggesting the CDTs could fund SIG activities. More industrial engagement would help in this regard.

Action: MJ to canvass SIG leaders on their participation in CDT proposals.

Action: MJ to approach Research Councils to discuss (a) bringing CDTs and relevant SIGs together and (b) brokerage on CDT bids.

Evolution of UKFN and its SIGs

DS asked whether a follow-on grant was possible, given EPSRC appears to regard UKFN as a success. MJ responded that this was unlikely as-is, giving the example of RCNDE, the UK Research Centre in Non-destructive Evaluation (<https://www.rcnde.ac.uk/>), which started life in 2003 and evolved into a large research network with ca. £9M RC/industry continuation funding – this might be what a SIG does, but not UKFN itself. Nevertheless, options for a follow-on grant would be investigated.

TvdB suggested approaching the RCs directly to discuss possible ways EPSRC might support the continuation of UKFN, rather than second-guessing their reactions to proposals.

DS advised it would be preferable to avoid a subscription model if possible, as there can be a significant overhead once locked into this method of support.

Action: MJ to approach Research Councils to discuss general options for supporting UKFN beyond the end of the current grant, including possibilities for a follow-on grant.

Action: MJ/ND to review other networks and how they have evolved, as potentially useful experience for evolving UKFN.

9. Any other business.

There was no further business to discuss.

10. Next meeting

It was agreed the next AB meeting would be scheduled for approximately 6 months' time (May 2018).

Action: ND to poll AB members in March 2018 for possible dates.