

Thoughts on the Cockcroft Institute
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As an academic in Manchester for 25 years, much of my effort was spent on promoting and building relationships with the two research intensive universities existing at that time in Manchester, The Victoria University of Manchester and UMIST, as well as with the various NHS Hospitals. My motive was purely selfish: the translational nature of the research in the Haematology/Oncology Department I was leading at the Paterson Institute demanded the active participation of the very best scientific and clinical researchers that the region had to offer. I believe that the time spent on building such partnerships was well worth it and certainly paid many handsome dividends over many years.

So, when I left my academic life to become Director of The Wellcome Trust, my previous experiences had taught me that by far the best way forward in a highly competitive world was to influence, cajole and join with like-minded organisations, be they Governments, national Research Councils, academic Institutions or other charitable funding bodies. Only by doing this could we create the critical mass, add value and increase the likelihood of success to international scientific and clinical research programmes.

But partnerships are never easy to build and can often end in tears and recriminations if the building blocks are not secure and maintained in good repair. They require people who are willing to compromise and organisations that are able to put vested and parochial interests on one side and seek solutions to difficult problems in the spirit of partnership.

It is with this background in mind, that I approached the possibility of taking on the role of Chairman of the Cockcroft Institute with a degree of reluctance! Following my initial meeting with Professor Drummond Bone, then the VC of Liverpool University, a far-ranging discussion on the life and poetry of Lord Byron (poetry is a likeable pastime of mine!) was followed by my thoughts on the problems likely to confront the various partners involved in the project. Although a very exciting concept, there remained much to be done in the nuts and bolts of Board membership, administration, facilities, staffing, and handling of any intellectual property and so on.

Nonetheless, I agreed to consider further the invitation to Chair the Board and then I was exposed to one of those accidents of fate that beset us all (I suspect that physicists believe in accidents of fate, although they undoubtedly use some other terminology !?) At a committee meeting being held at The Royal Society in London I wandered into the wrong meeting room, sat down, and began a most interesting conversation with the only other person present. We chatted about the potential of the Cockcroft Institute and the enthusiasm, commitment and intellectual vigour of the scientist in Liverpool who was leading the endeavour at that time. Yes, we were talking about John Dainton! Only when

other people joined us did I realise that I was in the wrong room for my meeting and that the person I had been talking with was Erwin Gabathuler....physicist at Liverpool University!

The rest, as they say, is history.

What I found as the first Chair of the Cockcroft Institute was a group of universities, Lancaster, Manchester and Liverpool working closely together with the Northwest Regional Development Agency and the STFC, at the very highest administrative levels, negotiating in good spirit, with me and the Founding Director, John Dainton. The Board structure and other administrative details were resolved with little pain and various other administrative documents drawn up and agreed over time. The assimilation of the Cockcroft onto the Daresbury Campus had taken place. It would be foolish of me to say that there were no problems in this process. Of course there were, but the people kept faith with the project and the partners have, together, established a paradigm for how internationally competitive sciences can be built through working together at a regional level.

But, none of this could have happened were it not for the vision and brilliance of the scientists in Liverpool, Lancaster, Manchester and Daresbury. To them do we owe this debt of gratitude for it is their persistence and scientific excellence that has made the Cockcroft possible and enabled us to look forward to a secure funding future on the Daresbury site. And of course it is because of them and their research that Swapan was attracted to the Cockcroft Institute as the Inaugural Director,

And to them and their vision that Swapan looks for taking the Institute forward under his leadership.

Mike Dexter