

## **Fondation Neurodis**

### **Report of the International Scientific Council Second meeting 9 November 2010**

#### Members of the International Scientific Council

Professor Colin Blakemore (chair)	University of Oxford, UK
Professor John Duncan	UCL Institute of Neurology, London, UK
Professor Francesc Graus	Institut d'Investigació Biomèdica August Pi i Sunyer, Barcelona, Spain
Professor Pierre Magistretti	Université de Lausanne, Switzerland
Professor John Parnavelas	University College London, UK
Professor Giacomo Rizzolatti	Università degli Studi di Parma, Italy

## **Background**

The second meeting of the International Scientific Council (ISC) of the Fondation Neurodis was held at the offices of Merck Serono in Lyon on 9 November 2010. All the members of the Council were able to attend.

The members of the ISC express their thanks to Merck Serono for again providing excellent facilities for the plenary sessions, the meetings of the ISC with various groups, and for the pleasant lunch.

Fondation Neurodis was officially created in August 2007, but funding did not commence until 2008, so the ISC was essentially reviewing the second year of progress. The broad goal of the Neurodis Foundation is to stimulate neuroscience research in the Rhône-Alpes area, with the eventual objective of improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of neurological and neurosensory disorders.

Only 12% of the total budget of Fondation Neurodis had been consumed by December 2010, but expenditure will ramp up rapidly in 2011, because of new appointments.

The members of the ISC received a comprehensive written report on all the work of the Fondation Neurodis.

## **Presentations**

The meeting consisted of an informal presentation by Professor Mauguère over lunch about the work of the Fondation, a plenary session, a meeting between the members of the ISC and all the researchers supported by the Fondation, and a final meeting with members of the Steering Committee.

Professor Mauguère introduced the plenary session, which extended from 1400-1800. All the researchers who are funded by the Fondation gave short reports on their research. These were confidently presented, in generally excellent English.

**The ISC was favourably impressed with the quality of the young researchers appointed by Fondation Neurodis, by the range and quality of their research projects and by the general level of morale among the group.**

**They appreciated the way in which the Fondation responded to a recommendation made last year and modified the process for defining topic areas for recruitment, giving applicants more freedom to choose where to work and what project to work on.**

**The ISC believes that these changes have improved the appointment process, and it notes the high quality of appointments made during the past year.**

### **Chair of Excellence**

**Alexander Hammers**, who holds the Chair of Excellence for Functional Neuroimaging gave an impressive account of the range of research that he, Rolf Heckemann, and others who have now joined their team are performing at the CERMEP (Lyon).

They have established themselves and their work very well and are now involved in a wide range of research activity. Much of the effort remains essentially methodological, and this is not surprising, given the aims of the group in providing support for research across a wide range of neuroimaging methods.

They have done a great deal of work on brain atlases, which is now being extended to young children and neonates, and also to the elderly.

The group is starting to produce publications based on work done in Lyon, which is a good sign of progress.

**The ISC commends Alex and Rolf for their achievements over the past year. Like last year, the ISC urges the Fondation to ensure that these researchers are encouraged and enabled to pursue their own research interests, not only to provide technical support to the members of Neurodis.**

**The ISC notes that registration for clinical responsibility with the Ordre des Médecins has continued to be problematical. The ISC hopes that this will be resolved soon, so that Alex can play a full role in clinical work in his unit**

### **Alain Buisson: Team Leader, Grenoble**

Alain's laboratory has developed a new transgenic mouse model of features of Alzheimer's disease. It co-expresses mutated amyloid precursor protein (APP) and mutated presenilin 1, under neuron-specific promotion. Cerebral amyloidosis begins at 6-8 weeks of age. The group is studying particularly the role of the soluble oligomeric form of A $\beta$  and has shown that it disrupts actin in the spines of neurons and reduces Long-Term Potentiation. Alain is developing a new cellular imaging platform at GIN in Grenoble.

**The ISC commends Dr Buisson for his progress.**

## Reports on research

The ISC heard reports from two Young Researchers (Dr Sebastien Carnicella and Dr Celine Amiéz) and five Postdoctoral Researchers (Drs Charlie Wilson, Guy Gingras, Fadila Hadj-Bouziane, Lucia Carriero and Mélina Bégou)

**The ISC was pleased to learn of the progress being made by all the younger researchers in Fondation Neurodis and congratulates the more recently appointed researchers for the speed with which they are establishing their work.**

## General Comments and Recommendations

All the members of the ISC were impressed with the progress that has been made by Fondation Neurodis since the first meeting, a year earlier. It is beginning to have real impact on the neuroscience community in the Rhône-Alpes region.

In particular, the ISC were pleased to see how many of the recommendations they made at their first meeting have already been implemented. They thank Professor Mauguère and his colleagues for responding so positively to their suggestions.

Professor Mauguère drew the attention of the ISC to the difficulty in acting on one of their recommendations – namely the suggestion that the Steering Committee might be reduced in number. The ISC had been concerned that such a large committee (21 members) is unwieldy and unlikely to work efficiently. Professor Mauguère said that this proposal had been discussed seriously, but it had been decided that, in the interests of democratic representation, the full membership of the Steering should be retained. Moreover, Professor Mauguère reported that, because of the demands of other commitments, usually only a fraction of the full membership (typically 6 members) attends meetings of the Steering Committee. So, it was felt that limiting full membership to a small number might result in inadequate attendance.

The ISC agreed that, in the circumstances, it would have been difficult to proceed on the basis of their recommendation.

The ISC would like to make a number of comments and further suggestions to the Steering Committee and the Administrative Board.

- Last year, the ISC expressed its concern about the short duration (two years) of the post-doctoral appointments and it recommended that positions should be offered for three years rather than two. This has been done for the new appointments, but this has created a serious

- disparity in the terms of employment between the earlier and the more recent appointments. **The ISC is concerned about these inequalities in employment and hopes that the Fondation will be able to enhance the terms of employment for those recruited before the change in the terms of these appointments, so that they are not 'second-class citizens'.**
- There is still disappointment among the post-docs employed by the Fondation because they cannot obtain places on Inserm training courses, which would be valuable for extending their expertise and hence enhancing their careers. **The ISC recognises that there are formal restrictions on access to these courses but hopes that the Steering Committee will continue to explore with the Directors of Inserm units whether there is some way that places can be made available for Fondation Neurodis employees.**
- Last year the ISC suggested that it might be valuable to have an annual meeting open to all the members of Fondation Neurodis. The Committee was pleased to learn that the first meeting will take place in the early spring of 2011.
- Some of the young researchers appointed by Fondation Neurodis expressed their concern about the fact that certain rights and privileges of other employees in their home laboratory were not available to them. In particular some were not given insurance cover for work out of normal hours. The ISC hopes that host laboratories can find a way to extend to Fondation Neurodis researchers the same rights and entitlements as for their own employees. **The ISC recommends that all researchers appointed by the Fondation Neurodis should have honorary contracts with their host Departments, and full access to all facilities.**
- In general, it was felt that greater transparency as to the status and rights of Fondation Neurodis employees would be valuable. **The Committee hopes that new recruits can be furnished with a clear statement of the nature of their contract, their entitlements and privileges, and the reasons for any differences between their terms of employment and those of researchers of similar age and responsibility in their host departments or institutes.**
- Despite the special nature of Fondation Neurodis appointments and the very competitive recruitment exercise, some of the young researchers feel that their status is not only unclear but perhaps inferior to that of standard employees of departments or institutes. **The ISC hopes that the Steering Committee will consider ways of recognising and signalling the excellence of Fondation Neurodis researchers. A title of some sort might help – perhaps 'Neurodis Fellows' (for post-docs) and 'Neurodis Senior Fellows' for Team Leaders.**

- Although the impressions of individual young Neurodis researchers is generally positive, even enthusiastic, **the ISC felt that slightly more formal arrangements for induction and orientation, help with settling in, introduction to their host department or unit, and guidance about future career options would be welcomed (especially by foreign recruits).**
- Although the Annual Meeting will help Neurodis employees to get to know each other better, **the ISC thought that it would be good to encourage more communication between them, and even collaboration between researchers working in related fields.**

## Conclusions

The ISC congratulates all the researchers of the Fondation for their progress and the Fondation itself for its growing confidence and impact. It applauds the work of the Steering Committee and the Administrative Board. In particular, it recognises the dedication and commitment of Professor Mauguère, and the two members of administrative staff, Claire Rigaud-Bully (General Secretary) and Isabelle Rondy (Direction Assistant).