NCRI INFORMATICS INITIATIVE

National Cancer Research Institute

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NCRI INFORMATICS INITIATIVE WINS TIMES HIGHER AWARD

THE National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Informatics Initiative has triumphed as the Times Higher Research Project of the Year 2005.

The distinguished panel of judges were unanimous in their support of the project that they felt "embodied the future of science."

The goal of the Initiative is to bring together data gained in every area of cancer science and medicine - from the molecule through to the largest population studies – into one fully integrated and accessible knowledge base. By pulling all of these diverse sources of data together, patients will benefit from research more quickly, and cancer researchers will be able to open up new avenues for study.

The initiative focuses on effective management of research data in the UK and also works closely with the US National Cancer Institute Center for Bioinformatics and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory's European Bioinformatics Institute, in order to share and make best use of research information on an international basis.

The initiative has been running for two and a half years and will need to continue for a decade to reach its full potential. Although it starts with cancer, the NCRI shares with others the vision that its work will quickly be extended to other areas of science. One of the judges, Nancy Rothwell, vice-president (research) at Manchester University, said: "This project has the potential to have a profound impact on research."

The judges also highlighted the project's usefulness to society, improving knowledge of the causes, treatment and prevention of cancer.

Professor Richard Begent, chairman of the NCRI Informatics Task Force and professor of oncology at UCL, said: "It's a great honour to have recognition at this early stage in the project. We think we can give a real boost to cancer research in the years to come. It's an ambitious project that has the potential to have a very real impact on peoples' lives. We want to improve the treatment that we can offer to cancer patients, and also contribute to research that will prevent cancer in future."

The award was presented to Prof Begent by Professor Colin Blakemore, chief executive of the Medical Research Council (MRC), one of the co-funders of the initiative. Prof Blakemore said: "I am delighted that the MRC is supporting this innovative and collaborative project. Multidisciplinary initiatives are part of the future of medical research and this is an excellent example of clinicians and researchers sharing knowledge and expertise to benefit people's health."

Professor Anthony Finkelstein, head of the UCL department of computer science, who nominated the project for the award, said: "The NCRI Informatics Initiative exemplifies higher education in the UK. The project is strategic, imaginative, of high scientific value and will capture the imagination of scientific and public communities alike."

Jane Cope, administrative director of the NCRI, added: "This is the first time that anything like this has been done in the UK. At the same time, research is an international effort and we need to share information across all boundaries. To this end, we are working with partners at the US National Cancer Institute and the European Bioinformatics Institute."

Professor Alex Markham, chairman of the NCRI, said: "The NCRI was created to develop projects such as this. It's rare in the field of cancer research that a project can be truly described as groundbreaking – but this is one of those occasions. It is wonderful that the importance of this vision has been publicly recognised by the Times Higher Awards."

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For media enquiries contact Steve Palmer in the press office on 020 7061 8312 or, out of hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264059.

Notes to Editors

- The NCRI Informatics Initiative was established in 2003 and aims to maximise the impact of cancer research, science and medicine in the UK. It is composed of a Coordination Unit, a Task Force of community representatives and a High Level Steering committee representing stakeholder parties. For more information see www.cancerinformatics.org.uk

- The NCRI Informatics Initiative is currently supported by the Medical Research Council, Department of Health, Cancer Research UK, AstraZeneca, Wellcome Trust, The Institute of Cancer Research, Scottish Executive Health Department and Welsh Assembly Government.

- The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a partnership between government, the voluntary sector and the private sector, with the primary mission of maximising patient benefit that accrues from cancer research in the UK through coordination of effort and joint planning towards an integrated national strategy for cancer research. www.ncri.org.uk

  The NCRI consists of: The Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); The Association for International Cancer Research; The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research Fund; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Relief; Marie Curie Cancer Care; The Medical Research Council; The National Assembly for Wales; Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services Research & Development Office; Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Executive Health Department; Tenovus; Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care; Wellcome Trust and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

- The US National Cancer Institute Centre for Bioinformatics (NCICB) provides biomedical informatics support and integration capabilities to the cancer research community. We work with both intramural and extramural groups to develop Initiative-Specific Modules. These modules are connected through intelligent interfaces, coordinated through an NCI Core Module and deployed through open source tools and systems. The NCICB also serves as a focal point for cancer research informatics planning worldwide. We work with research organizations, biomedical informatics groups and standards bodies to facilitate the identification and adoption of information exchange standards, thus connecting research information sources wherever they may reside. www.ncicb.nci.nih.gov

- The European Bioinformatics Institute (EBI) is a non-profit academic organisation that forms part of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL). The EBI is a centre for research and services in bioinformatics. The Institute manages databases of biological data including nucleic acid, protein sequences and macromolecular structures. www.ebi.ac.uk

- UCL (University College London). Founded in 1826, UCL was the first English university established after Oxford and Cambridge, the first to admit students regardless of race, class, religion or gender, and the first to provide systematic teaching of law, architecture and medicine. In the government's most recent Research Assessment Exercise, 59 UCL departments achieved top ratings of 5* and 5, indicating research quality of international excellence.

  UCL is the current Sunday Times University of the Year and the fourth-ranked UK university in the league table of the top 500 world universities produced by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University. UCL alumni include Mahatma Gandhi (Laws 1889, Indian political and spiritual leader); Jonathan Dimbleby (Philosophy 1969, writer and television presenter); Junichiro Koizumi(Economics 1969, Prime Minister of Japan); Lord Woolf (Laws 1954 – Lord Chief Justice of England & Wales), Alexander Graham Bell (Phonetics 1860s – inventor of the telephone), and members of the band Coldplay.

- The Medical Research Council (MRC) is a national organisation funded by the UK tax-payer. Its business is medical research aimed at improving human health; everyone stands to benefit from the outputs. The research it supports and the scientists it trains meet the needs of the health services, the pharmaceutical and other health-related industries and the academic world. MRC has funded work which has led to some of the most significant discoveries and achievements in medicine in the UK. About half of the MRC's expenditure of approximately £500 million is invested in its 40 Institutes, Units and Centres. The remaining half goes in the form of grant support and training awards to individuals and teams in universities and medical schools. Web site at: http://www.mrc.ac.uk.