

4th July 2024



Dear member or interested party,

Welcome to the British Society for Gene and Cell Therapy (BSGCT) website. Our Society was founded in 2003 with the goal of advancing the science and practice of gene therapy for the public benefit, an aim which is quickly becoming a clinical reality. Gene and cell therapies are formally known as Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products (ATMPs) in the UK and European Union. Technically, the definition of ATMP includes products based on genes, cells or tissues. Our field of expertise also covers short, chemically synthesized nucleic acids (oligonucleotides) that can alter gene function, and all the modifications that can be introduced by genome editing. Collectively, these therapeutics offer avenues of treatment for previously intractable genetic diseases as well as novel approaches for common diseases. Some of these technologies have also been instrumental for the development of mRNA and viral vector vaccines for COVID-19, which had a significant impact on population health and protection and in ending the pandemic.

Not surprisingly, advanced therapeutics are a priority area in the UK Industrial Strategy and present significant opportunities for health benefit and economic growth. We have therefore entered a very exciting phase, where licensed gene and cell therapy drugs are becoming mainstream treatments as well as crucial industrial products. However, the production and delivery of advanced therapeutics is complex and expensive, and significant challenges lie ahead. Every stage in the therapeutic development and delivery process will require innovation, including pre-clinical and clinical studies, manufacturing, approval, pharmaceutical logistics, clinical delivery and reimbursement (the negotiation of a price between manufacturer and NHS or insurer that allows the manufacturer access to the market). Realistic and transparent pricing by manufacturers, and novel evaluation methods by healthcare agencies, will be required to ensure that gene and cell therapies become universally available, but also that fair profits from these innovative technologies support future R&D. In addition, due to the explosive growth of our industry, skill shortages are threatening to become a major limitation to further advancing gene and cell therapies, which needs to be urgently addressed through Higher Education and Training Programmes, including Apprenticeships and Placements.



I took over as President in late 2021, with a mandate of four years. My predecessor Prof Uta Griesenbach did a magnificent job piloting the society through the most complicated period since its inception, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For three years it was not possible to hold an annual meeting. Fortunately, the conference in Sheffield in 2019 was a resounding success both scientifically and financially, which allowed BSGCT to cope with the reduction in income experienced throughout the pandemic. Our highly anticipated joint meeting with the European Society of Gene and Cell Therapy in Edinburgh 11-14th October 2022 put an end to this hiatus and saw our largest ever attendance, more than 2,000 people. 2023 marked the 20th anniversary of BSGCT, celebrated at the annual conference in Stevenage on 22-23 June, our first meeting hosted in a corporate facility. The latest meeting, held in Oxford 17-19 June 2024, was our 20th conference. These three conferences were extremely successful scientifically and economically, and returned the society to a solid financial position – in fact, the strongest ever.



Oxford 2024 - 20th BSGCT conference

The society's 20th anniversary in 2023 was also marked with a publication in [Human Gene Therapy](#), describing BSGCT's genesis and history, current activities, strategic priorities and awards. A [videocast](#) summarizing this history is also available. We are keen on cake, so both the 20th anniversary (Stevenage 2023) and the 20th conference (Oxford 2024) were celebrated with iconic bakes.



In addition to the annual conference, BSGCT runs an impressive number of activities, including annual Public Engagement Day and Early Career Researcher (ECR) Events, an ECR Travel Awards scheme, Undergraduate Research Bursaries (URB), a Writing Competition for ECRs, a Mentoring Scheme, multiple communications (website, newsletter, blog, social media), and participates in multiple outreach events, for example [Royal Holloway University London annual Rare Disease Day](#), and Cheltenham Science Festival. During the pandemic BSGCT developed very successful online activities, which are now well-established, including three Online Webinar Series in which scientific, ECR development and public & patient outreach talks alternate.

For the 2021-2025 mandate we decided to focus on three priority areas: (1) to increase the membership of the society, for it to be truly representative of the gene and cell therapy community in the UK; (2) to establish an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Sub-Committee which will inform all activities of the society and reach out to enhance Global Majority membership; and (3) to ensure that training and promotion opportunities within the BSGCT Board allow for an equal, diverse and inclusive distribution of officer posts. Progress in all these areas has been steady. We have overcome the reduction in membership experienced during the pandemic, and reached record member levels in 2024. The EDI Sub-Committee drafted Vision & Mission, ToRs and an Action Plan, which have been approved by the BSGCT Board, as has a new, inclusive ECR definition which was requested by members at the 2023 AGM (*BSGCT defines an ECR as any individual actively*

engaged in research within the field of gene and cell therapy who is at an early stage of their career. This includes individuals working within industry from apprentices up to but excluding those in a senior research leadership role; and individuals in academia from graduate students up to but excluding those who have a permanent position).

Regarding equality and diversity on the Board, the current committee is made up of 7 female and 7 male members. Officer positions, of which there are 3 or 4 depending on whether a President-Elect has been chosen, are currently held by 1 female and 3 male members. To promote equality, BSGCT offers targeted encouragement and support to female and Global Majority members, a rotating chair for the monthly Board T-conference, internal leadership opportunities (Sub-Committee Chairs are currently 5 female and 2 male), external representation and shared PR opportunities. We consider that overall there is good progress towards equal representation.

Starting in 2024, BSGCT has established a set of strategic biannual awards, to highlight scientific achievement in the gene and cell therapy field in the UK, to acknowledge exceptional support for the activities of the society, and to promote good practice in public and patient involvement and engagement (PPIE). The BSGCT *Outstanding Achievement Award 2024* has been conferred upon Adrian Thrasher, who will receive it at the 2025 annual conference, where he will give a keynote lecture. The BSGCT *Services to the Society Award 2024*, for sustained support of the society's goals, was received by Simon Waddington at the Oxford conference. The BSGCT *PPIE Award 2024* was jointly won by the Sowden lab (UCL) and the Norrie Disease Foundation, and also presented at the Oxford conference. These new awards join the well-established *Fairbairn Award*, given to a UK-based PhD student or researcher who has completed their PhD within the last 3 years, for the best presentation during the annual conference. To promote membership and our strategic goals, all the society awards, grants, bursaries and prizes are restricted to BSGCT members.

BSGCT is an organization run by volunteers, with a Secretariat provided by an association management company (AMC). The volunteers include elected Board members, selected ECR Board representatives, Sub-Committee members, and people supporting specific events or activities. They deliver an impressive array of programmes in their own time, in addition to their day-jobs, and everyone in the gene and cell therapy community is indebted to them for their efforts. For the last 6 years, BSGCT has been supported by a Secretariat made up of the same people (Christina Slater, Liz Wilson, Gaëlle Jamar and Emma Watson) working for two different companies, Wats.On (to summer 2023) and Lumina Partners Europe (from summer 2023). Following a tender process, Lumina will hand over the Secretariat to CJ Association Management (CJAM) on August 1, 2024. The society is highly indebted to Christina, Liz, Gaëlle and Emma for their commitment, competence and friendly support, and for their significant contribution to making the society a more professional organisation.

The UK gene and cell therapy community has celebrated many achievements in 2023-24, including the opening of the CGT Catapult Edinburgh Centre and the NHSBT Bristol Innovation Hub, funding for a £17.9M 4-year Advanced Therapy Treatment Centre (ATTC) strategic initiative, leading Europe on relevant drugs in clinical development, the world-first approval of Casgevy, the first-in-man application of base-edited CAR T-cells, the beginning of recruitment in several clinical trials, and the showcasing of gene and cell therapy in the Cheltenham Science Festival, through a collaborative effort of BSGCT, the MRC/LifeArc Innovation Hubs and the CGT Catapult.

UK GCT community achievements 2023-24



Alyssa, world-first person treated with BE CAR T-cells (NEJM paper)



£17.9M 4-year ATTC strategic initiative



Opening of CGT Catapult Edinburgh



UK leads Europe on drugs in clinical development



Casgevy's authorisation by MHRA is world-first



Recruitment opens for HORACE (OTCD) and OTOF-101 (SNHL)



BSGCT is in strongest ever financial position



BSGCT, MRC/LifeArc Innovation Hubs, CGT Catapult and ATAC participate together in Cheltenham Science Festival



Opening of Bristol Innovation Hub (NHSBT)

BSGCT was established to foster communication and collaboration in the UK, with the aim of accelerating scientific progress and promoting fast translation from bench to bedside. Please help us with these efforts by becoming a member of our society.

With very best wishes,

Rafael J. Yáñez-Muñoz (BSGCT President 2021-2025)