



Society of
Spanish Researchers
in the United Kingdom

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Spanish Science needs more charities investing in R+D

Last Saturday, 8th February, the Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK) organised a roundtable about “Charities and Research” at the Hamilton House in Bristol. The event, supported by the Embassy of Spain in the United Kingdom, started with a welcome by SRUK South-west constituency director Veronica Celorrio.

Lorenzo Melchor, President of SRUK gave an introduction to the association about its origins and aims. Melchor described the SRUK wish to be a social and professional network that increases social awareness of R+D, while being scientific advisors and facilitating collaborations between UK and Spain. To introduce the day’s topic, he described the three traditional sources of funding for science and research: public (government, higher education and research councils), private and **third sectors (non-for-profit organisations and foundations)**. Lorenzo described differences between UK and Spain, such as the fact that this **third sector funds 10 times more R+D in UK than in Spain**. He also highlighted the fact that foundations and charities not only provide funding but are fundamental in public engagement.

Nicola Amoroso, founding trustee of CRIS Cancer Foundation in UK, was the first invited speaker. Nicola gave a moving introduction to the foundation and its work, which is based on raising funds for research and treatment of rare/underfunded forms of cancer. The foundation started in Spain in 2010, expanded and became present in the UK a year later. CRIS has several ongoing projects including new clinical trials, scholarships and development of guidelines for pain management. Amoroso described CRIS as a network-based foundation, with the motto of “together we are more”; she talked about the importance of promotion to potential donors and the need “to make people care by generating a personal connection”, linking the projects to real people by providing visual impact of the patients. Nicola briefly discussed the difference in “giving culture” between UK and Spain, highlighting that **in the UK there is a larger culture of regular donors and thus more of a potential market exists in Spain**.

Jose I. Fernandez Vera, CEO of the government-based public Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), talked about the aim of FECYT, which is to bring science and society together, mainly by improving and encouraging communication and information sharing. He discussed the traditional “triple-helix” scheme of R+D: academia, industry and government and wondered “where is the public?” Fernández Vera mentioned that civic participation is increasingly important, especially in topics that influence political decision-making, such as climate change and health issues. He discussed the fact that **although Spain has a large number of foundations, they tend not to fund science and technology**, which has led to a FECYT initiative called “Foundations for Science”; this project aims to involve foundations and organisations and encourage them to invest in and

promote science and research, while also stimulate science communication to the general community.

The last speaker of the day, Antonio Crespillo, came to talk about MasScience, a recent initiative that aims to find new ways to fund scientific research, based on social media and crowdfunding. Their motto being “**because research matters**”, MasScience started in June 2012, always adhering to their pillars of transparency, honesty and professionalism. Later this year, they are launching an online crowdfunding platform, which will benefit from both scientific and consultant boards, which will evaluate and encourage projects to be funded. Although currently based mainly in Spain, the UK and Australia, they hope to grow and expand their influence over the world. When discussing why he started the initiative, Antonio very adamantly said “**if you don’t do it, no one will do it for you!**”

A round table was then set up, with a very interesting discussion generated by an open Q&A. Topics spanned from the cultural differences in terms of donations and the view of science between the UK and Spain all the way to the use of social and more traditional media for science communication and fund-raising. Questions were raised about confidentiality issues in crowdfunding of science and ways of giving back to the public. An interesting debate was open about the relevance of tax relief programs for charities and R+D funding. As a closing remark, speakers and the audience concurred that **education, in addition to public engagement, is important to generate interest in science.**