Katrina Franckombe was awarded the AINSE Student Gold Medal in 1997 for her work on computational chemistry at the University of Tasmania. In June 1997, upon completion of her PhD she left to commence a post doctorate at Cambridge with Professor Peter Gill. Her research there focussed on the development of computer modelling of Coulomb potentials for very large molecular systems including proteins and other biological systems.

Katrina, not being one lacking social curiosity made many contacts outside research hours both on and off campus. One of these contacts led to some part time work that helped sustain her until the completion of her post doc in June 1998. At this time she felt the need to diversify her work experience and is currently managing a nightclub in Cambridge she said ‘I am gaining managerial and commercial skills while I look at other options.’ When pressed on her ambitions she became less buoyant and expressed concern at the decline in options for researchers and the poor remuneration when compared with other professions.

We eventually caught up with her in March 1999 and presented her with her gold medal in Cambridge. When will she return home? There are no immediate plans- this woman is taking a very broad view of where and what she will be doing in the next phase of her career.

Citation:

‘Katrina Franckombe has excelled in the field of computational chemistry during her PhD. With the use of the computer facilities at ANSTO and the financial support of AINSE, she has developed a fundamental understanding of carbonylation processes involving palladium complexes. She is the first person to have studied these processes in conjunction with bidentate ligands (which are necessary experimentally to obtain selectivity) and she had identified novel five-coordinate complexes and a novel isomerisation step in the mechanism.'
Her most significant findings concern the different chelating mechanisms of three different bidentate ligands. This information will be used to design more efficient catalysts.

Through her initiative, understanding an hard work, Katrina has continued to demonstrate that she is an outstanding student with many talents. I would place her in the top 2% of our PhD students and it is a pleasure to nominate her for an AINSE Gold Medal Award.

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