

2008 Eastern Regional Meeting

Held on 7 February in Thomas Graham House

The meeting was Chaired by Dr Neville Reed and the Honorary Officer, Dr Elliott Finer, gave the main presentation

Summary of discussion

- The proposals for enhancements to the Library were discussed in some depth. It was noted that the new “Chemical Centre” would be able to accommodate between 90 and 110 people for conferences. There would be state of the art audio/visual facilities available and a range of catering choices. It will be possible to broadcast lectures live over the internet. To the question of access whilst a meeting is taking place, it was noted that, whilst everything would be done to help, there would, obviously, be some restrictions. The meeting was informed that the library was due to be upgraded and a decision on how best to use the space needed to be made. Currently, it is a much under utilised facility, used by a minute number of members.
- Space will be made available to external organisations. However, RSC events will always take precedence. RSC groups, Divisions/Forums and Sections will be encouraged to make greater use of the enhanced facilities and an on-line booking system will be introduced. Various price ranges for catering will be offered and highly discounted rates would be offered for member-based meetings. During refurbishment, three other rooms will still be available, albeit on a restricted basis – the Council Room, the Hinshelwood Room and the Fish Room
- Currently, Chemistry for Our Future was restricted to secondary schools but not to key stage 1 and 2. One problem with targeting primary schools was the sheer number of them – around 25000. That said, primary school teachers are eligible to apply for RSC prizes and funding. The RSC was urged to consider ways it can assist in stimulating interest in chemistry amongst primary schools pupils and encourage them to maintain an interest in science. It was agreed that even toddlers are fascinated by science and a lot can be done by the RSC, such as providing simple equipment and background materials. At the General Assembly, several members requested information about educational activities in their region. ***It was agreed to request the Education Department to provide a summary of its activities by region and any activities aimed at primary schools***
- It was noted that whilst Chemistry for Non Specialist, a project funded by GSK would help to address the problems of non-chemists teaching the subject, it was not the full answer. The Open University had courses which would assist newly qualified teachers and the RSC was looking at ways it can introduce a system of mentoring. The RSC’s training course, “Chemical Techniques” is available to teachers and would be of great help to them.

- Communication was discussed in some depth. The meeting noted that many larger companies were disappearing and being replaced by small to medium sized enterprises. This resulted in greater difficulty in communicating and making contact with members. Grape Vine and RSC News was proving valuable in this area. It was noted that recent surveys indicated that there was no clear method of communication which was favoured over others. Many members still preferred hard copy to electronic communication. In addition to RSC News and Grape Vine, the RSC also used eAlerts and RSS feeds from its web site. Even the remuneration survey was not organised in two ways – electronic and by post. It should be noted that, whilst the RSC used a variety of ways to communicate, it is competing with other, larger, organisations
- It was noted that the RSC is about to bid for additional funding to continue the “Chemistry for Our Future” project when the original pilot scheme is completed. However, there is a possibility that any money made available will be directed towards science in general, rather than just chemistry. However, the bidding rules have been changed and this could affect the viability of future planned projects. It may be that that the scheme has been too successful and that Government would prefer to target a wider area of science. The significant increase in the numbers opting to take chemistry at undergraduate level was applauded. It was agreed that this success was, probably, due to the effects of the Campaign for Chemistry, introduced by Simon Campbell, and the introduction of tuition fees, which has resulted in students being more selective in the courses they choose to study
- The question of the “decline in chemical industry” in the UK was raised. It was noted that, whilst it is true that larger companies are transferring manufacturing facilities to the far east, the UK was establishing itself as an area of innovation and quality. It should be noted that whilst 80% of RSC members are in the UK, only 15% of sales of chemicals are within the UK. Companies have always established their facilities where the greater sales are. The developing countries are also producing their own good quality graduates to service the needs of industry. The RSC is, in many ways, benefiting from these developments. Strong links have been established and it needs these new scientists to publish in RSC journals. China, in particular, was making huge advances, both in terms of quantity and quality of chemistry teaching and research. The Chinese government had made huge investments which were now bearing fruit and China needed to be seen as a high quality competitor
- The RSC’s strong financial position was noted and the question was raised about whether revenue from journals can be maintained. The innovative “Project Prospect”, which was a first in publishing and had been highly acclaimed, was seen to be the future of publishing. The RSC had a head start and will be promoting this unique product widely.

Costs may be kept down by outsourcing and suggestions for new products and/or services would be extremely welcome

After the Open Forum, Dr Alan Osborne, Essex Local Section, gave a brief presentation of an event which had established itself as a very successful and popular annual event within Essex. So much so, that "Fun with Chemistry" had been fully subscribed within 3 days of it being publicised, with 537 registered to attend. The event, which demonstrated chemistry and its relevance in fun way, regularly attracted audiences of up to 600 people. Members were provided with informative background details and Dr Osborne's presentation generated a great deal of interest. It was noted that staff were currently looking at creating packages of successful events and providing them to all Sections to aid them in arranging events. Dr Osborne's excellent event would be one of those which would be included

The meeting concluded at 8:30