

2008 Midlands Regional Meeting

Held on 4 March in Nottingham

The meeting was Chaired by Professor Ray Jones, Member of Council, and the main presentation was provided by Professor Dave Garner, RSC President-elect

Summary of discussion

- It was agreed that chemistry was vital in ensuring that future energy needs were met – biofuels, new batteries for storage, more efficient insulation materials were all significant areas where chemistry has an impact. The new generation of nuclear reactors also relied upon a high level of chemistry expertise. The RSC's new roadmap is being developed to address this theme, as well as other important issues such as water. Last year, the RSC had been invited to a meeting with the EU Commissioner, who had made it clear that he believed that chemistry was important in helping society address future concerns
- It was noted that, though Government listened to the RSC, it was, sometimes, difficult to get it to come up with funding to address the issues raised. A good example is the commitment to train more science teachers which, though laudable, had not been followed through. The RSC would continue to remind Government that it needs to take steps to ensure the science base of UK plc is strengthened and safeguard the UK's future. Otherwise the UK could fall behind in terms of expertise and technology. Over the last 5 years, the RSC had become much more proactive and much more professional in promoting the chemical sciences
- The proposals for the Library were discussed in depth. It was noted that the RSC had received a million pound donation from the Wolfson Foundation and two other smaller donations may be forthcoming. It was likely that the Library will close at the end of May/early June and that it would probably reopen in September 2009. Burlington House itself will need to close for around 5 weeks because of the possibility of asbestos. The new "Chemistry Centre" would be available for members to book at highly discounted rates and a range of catering would be offered, from simple sandwich lunches to high quality menus. These would be provided by outside caterers. All booking arrangements would be available on-line. It was noted that, currently, around 15 members a month actually visited the library and that this was a waste of a valuable resource. Conflict of bookings should be avoided. The RSC is aware of the dates of meetings of its main boards and committees around 2 years in advance
- Methods of communication were discussed in some depth. The RSC is considering new arrangements for joining subject groups and proposals for initiatives to encourage more group membership would be put to Council in the near future. It is likely that new arrangements would commence with the 2010 subscription renewal. The RSC could

also provide groups with a database of members of their group to aid communication. Facebook is another option which is being investigated. RSC newsfeeds are already available. The meeting was advised that, though technology was an important tool, recent surveys revealed that around 50% of members still preferred hard copy to electronic mailing. The RSC's email communication, "Grape Vine" is now sent to 28000 members, which is over two thirds of the UK membership. It is proving very successful. Chemistry World has a number of blogs and, though perception of blogs is that they are popular, the reality is that they are read by very few people

- The RSC is currently investigating the possibility of introducing "Sharepoint" for members. This file sharing and communication software is being trialled on the RSC's Intranet to determine its value. It is, however, very expensive and it may be that the RSC could come up with better ways of assisting members to communicate with each other. The RSC's web site will soon undergo further enhancements, which should help.
- It was noted that RSC News has proved to be successful and will be further enhanced. The on-line version will include articles that won't fit into the paper version
- It was noted that Chemistry for Our Future targeted not only potential chemistry students but those who may take elements of chemistry as part of their course – eg pharmacy. Interested members should contact the regional co-ordinator for further details. "Aim Higher" is proving to be highly successful and, with other RSC initiatives, is encouraging more students to take subjects in the chemical sciences. Over the last four years, there had been a 28% increase in the number of chemical sciences undergraduates. However, the RSC must not be complacent. It still needs to attract more students from "less privileged" areas. These are, normally, areas where chemistry is not taught by specialist teachers
- To the question of the drop out rate of chemical science graduates, it was noted that, whereas the average drop out rate is around 25%, those dropping out of chemical science subjects is around 10%
- Concern was raised at the non recognition of Chartered Chemist status and the RSC was urged to take steps to address this problem, It was noted that, over the last few months, the RSC had been talking to employers. Feedback received is that, whilst they are, in the main, aware of CChem, when faced with a choice between CChem and a PhD, they prefer to appoint the applicant with a PhD. The RSC must do more to explain that CChem denotes an applicant with a proven record of application of chemistry across a broad base, rather than proficiency in a narrowly defined area. However, it was noted that members themselves could do more to promote RSC qualification by using their designatory letters more. The meeting was informed that,

whilst members feel that CEng is supported to a greater extent by employers, even the engineers are concerned over the diminishing numbers of those opting for CEng when recruiting. It was suggested that employers who appoint PhD's should be encouraged to insist that progression to CChem should be a requirement. The RSC is also promoting company training and accredited schemes leading to Chartered status more widely and large companies are currently being targeted

- It was noted that, within the next 12 months, every non member academic will be contacted and offered a fast track into membership. This would alleviate the problem of lack of referees for applications. The meeting also noted that Rolls Royce took active steps to encourage all staff to join the relevant professional body. It was suggested that the RSC should publish a report of all university chemistry departments, along with details of staff and their membership of the RSC

The meeting concluded at 8:30