

2008 South East Regional Meeting

Held on 24 January at Burlington House

The meeting was Chaired by RSC Chief executive and the main presentation was provided by Dr Elliot Finer, RSC Honorary Treasurer

Summary of discussion

It was noted that the video used in the presentation would be made available to a wider audience and, if possible, placed on the web site for members to download.

- Council would be deciding at its next meeting whether to approve the plans for the library. If agreed, it was likely that the library will close at the end of May and re-open around 12 months later. Because of staff movements, room bookings would also be affected during this period. The RSC would be discussing with other bodies to try and secure space for member meetings, staff workspace etc
- When work was completed, members would be able to book facilities at preferential rates and it was planned to see how the new layout works before accepting bookings from external bodies. Some minimal work had been done to come up with a scale of charges but more would be done once the go ahead had been given by Council. It was likely that there would be an on-line booking system which would assist members to make the optimum booking. Reciprocal arrangements would be negotiated with other professional bodies who have facilities throughout the UK and overseas
- It was agreed that Chemistry for Our Future was an excellent initiative. The co-ordinator for the South East Region was at the meeting and would be pleased to discuss activities with any interested member
- During a meeting with the Minister for Science, he expressed his interest in inspiring young people in science and believed that the RSC's work was very productive
- The number of undergraduates studying chemistry had increased year on year for the last three years. It was believed that the RSC's efforts were, in part, responsible for this success
- There was a short discussion on "equipment exchange". Teachers and schools had limited funds with which to buy equipment and there are organisations with equipment they wished to dispose of. The RSC could provide a valuable service in this area. Some UK universities were donating equipment to South African Universities and ignoring the needs of UK schools. It was suggested that the RSC could liaise with other relevant organisations, such as the CIA and the SCI

- It was noted that some schools have little regard for practical work in chemistry and that a large number had very poor facilities and cramped rooms. Members were reminded that the RSC had commissioned research into school facilities and that the Government had promised funding to modernise laboratories. Unfortunately, that promise had not been fulfilled. It was agreed that 44,000 members could be useful in campaigning in this area by lobbying their MPs. The RSC was very effective at speaking to the top-levels of Government but needs assistance to address the grass roots
- Many teachers were anxious about key stage two of the curriculum and felt that it did not provide students with a good practical knowledge. However, it was noted that more schools are starting to offer single subject chemistry, which often resulted in more students opting to take chemistry. The RSC was urged to consider ways in which it could encourage more local authorities to adopt a similar approach
- “Project Faraday” was being launched which would provide advice and guidance to schools on the best ways to equip laboratories
- The RSC was urged to do even more in the area of training for non-chemists teaching chemistry, which was felt to be vital in ensuring the future of chemistry teaching. It was noted that the Government had announced recently that, beyond key stage four, students should have the option to request specialist teaching
- It was agreed that schools relied on good quality technicians to support teaching and that this was an area which seems to be neglected. It was noted that there was a National Technicians Centre, which provided valuable assistance and that the RSC was considering ways it could provide support
- The meeting was informed that the RSC worked with other relevant bodies to achieve its aims, such as the SCI. Collaboration was taking place in international activities, such as India, where they have an office. The RSC has an office in China and we are considering ways we can work together
- The RSC monitors articles in the news and topical issues and obtains appropriate responses from relevant boards and committees. It attempts to be much more proactive and address inaccuracies. The new “Roadmap” should be valuable in this area and help to identify other key areas. Already, the RSC was very successful in getting letters to newspapers published – around one a month, on average. Staff have been provided with statements on policy issues that they use if approached. These are prepared by boards and committees. Current areas addressed are energy, schools and specialist teachers. However, it is, sometimes, difficult to stimulate interest in some topics and the RSC has to be selective in the areas it chooses. What the RSC

believes to be important isn't always what the public or newspapers agrees to be relevant

- The demise of the part-time degree was raised. Such courses were useful in training of certain staff, such as technicians. It was noted that employers usually preferred to recruit graduates rather than non-qualified staff and out them through day-release. It was also extremely difficult to find work placements for graduates
- It was noted that the RSC was highly successful in lobbying Government and that, recently, a meeting had been held with science ministers and that a meeting had also taken place with three ministers during which concerns over schools and teachers had, again, been raised. It would continue to monitor concerns and, where necessary, take up matters with appropriate authorities
- RSC News is an important tool to assist with campaigning and raises issues hoping that members will become involved. Members could be a vital component in achieving success on campaigns
- It was noted that the Chilterns & Middx Section had recently re-established a postgraduate symposium which attracted an average of 40 graduates. The Section believed that the symposia would be more useful if arranged on a regional, rather than a Sectional basis. It was noted that the Dalton Division had expressed an interest in assisting. A suggest was made that the RSC should encourage Heads of Departments and local industry to participate. It was agreed that the RSC would consider how best to bring the various stakeholders together
- It was noted that the RSC provided educational materials to teacher training centres
- The meeting was informed that the ability to accept credit card payments would soon be available to groups and Sections. A trial would be conducted amongst a number of groups and sections and, if successful, this would be rolled out later in the year
- Members agreed that the Benevolent Fund was doing excellent work. Currently, around 50% of its work was support and advice, rather than financial assistance. It was noted that 63% of current beneficiaries were not retired. This emphasised that the Benevolent Fund was not only for those who are older and retired.
- A request for groups to be able to send mail via the RSC office and use franking machines was made. It was agreed to investigate the feasibility

The meeting concluded at 8:30