

2007 Eastern Regional Meeting

Thomas Graham House

20 February 2007

Members were welcomed to the meeting by Dr Neville Reed, Director of Member Services and Communication. He informed the meeting that, normally, Regional Meetings were Chaired by a member of Council. Unfortunately, on this occasion, Council members had not been able to attend.

He introduced the President, Professor Jim Feast, who gave a presentation covering the recent changes to the RSC in more depth and set out the direction and objectives for the immediate future. The major themes of the Presentation covered:

- Changes to the governance
- Major new initiatives
- Improving communication
- International Strategy

A copy of the presentation is on the SC web site and the following is a summary of the discussion which followed:

To the question of non specialist teachers teaching chemistry and being unable to put chemistry in its best light, it was noted that the RSC was providing 4-day courses for teachers, which would be 2 days residential followed by 2 one-day courses. The courses were being very well received and were helping to boost confidence. It was the RSC's long term objective to have more chemists teaching chemistry.

It was suggested that the RSC should target people on PGCE courses in a similar way to the Institute of Physics.

It was noted that the RSC is currently talking to teacher organisations and looking at ways of helping those working in industry who wished to take up teaching. However, many of the issues facing chemistry were at younger class ages, rather than in senior schools. A way of enthusing younger children before they are turned off by science or lose interest. At this level, the majority of those teaching chemistry are non-chemists who don't have the same enthusiasm or empathy.

It was agreed that the activities of the RSC over recent years, such as the "Campaign for Chemistry" could be given credit for the increase in numbers of those opting to take undergraduate courses in the chemical

sciences. The RSC also had a much higher profile in the media because of the activities of the Media relations department. A good example was the number of “hits” in The Metro. Recently, 20 articles had been published in that paper – reaching around 2 million readers. The RSC’s lobbying of Government departments and agencies was also a major factor in the rise in popularity of chemistry.

It was noted that, although there had been an 11% increase in 2006, the courses weren’t all straight chemistry but chemistry “with” rather than chemistry “and” This was a trend that had been happening over a number of years.

There was some discussion on “Chemistry for our Future”. The RSC was influencing the national curriculum and bringing in new ideas. There was some problem in that, whilst chemists were excellent at accepting new and innovative ideas, they weren’t so good at dispensing with old ones. This was creating some “clutter in the curriculum and this would need to be addressed. It was also recognised that, whilst an A level in maths was desirable for undergraduate chemists, it was not a complete necessity. Most university courses included mathematics for chemists.

It was noted that the RSC and SCI collaborated wherever it was possible or desirable. There had been attempts to merge the two organisations in the past, which had failed. However, the RSC would continue to work with the SCI on mutually beneficial projects. Some RSC Local Sections had joint meetings with the SCI and promoted each others’ meetings.

It was suggested that the RSC was still perceived to be too academic in its outlook and activities. It was noted that, though attempts had been made, and would continue to be made, to get more industry-based members to become involved, this was extremely difficult because of the pressures in the workplace.

The future of the Library at Burlington House was discussed. It was noted that it was planned to make the space currently used by the library much more adaptable and modern. It was hoped to provide members with better amenities, including small meeting rooms, a coffee lounge and workspaces. Members visiting London could use Burlington House as an amenity whereby, if they have some spare time, they can relax or study in an informal environment.

The RSC's governance structure has been slimmed down from around 55 members, to 16. This allows Council to be much more flexible and able to respond to a quickly changing world.

It was suggested that one of the biggest problems encountered over recent years has been the demise of part-time degree courses, day-release courses and night school teaching. This was causing a shortage of technicians. It was noted that, though a Govt working party had been introduced to look into technology needs, it was unlikely that part time degree courses would be introduced. The Open University offered a series of courses which attempted to address this problem. Sandwich courses died because of the lack of support from industry. It was felt that employment trends resulted in people changing their jobs many times throughout their career. The RSC would need to have a flexible approach to this and education in the UK will need to respond to the need to re-skill and retrain employees.

It was noted that payment for interest group meetings by credit card should soon be possible. Testing was currently taking place and, if successful, this payment method would be introduced later in the year.

There was a discussion on the RSC global activities. It was noted that the RSC was liaising with its overseas members to determine how best to meet their needs. It was hoped to introduce reciprocal arrangements with chemical scientists throughout the world, resulting in greater networking opportunities which would benefit RSC members. Additional overseas Sections will also be introduced, increasing the RSC's ability to provide services outside of the UK.

The meeting concluded at 8:30pm