

2007 Irish Regional Meeting

Holiday Inn Hotel, Belfast

6 March 2007

Dr David Whan, member of RSC Council, welcomed members to the meeting. He reminded those present that, under the new governance structure, Regional Meetings were an important avenue of communication between Council and members. He encouraged them to have their say during the meeting. He introduced Dr Simon Campbell, Immediate Past President, who gave a presentation on:

- 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 following discussion.

To the question as to whether the lower numbers of Council members will affect Council's ability to function, it was noted that a smaller Council, supported by professional staff was better able to be more flexible and respond quicker in an ever changing world. The new structure of governance was not set in stone and could be adapted or amended if it was felt that any aspects weren't successful. The RSC needed to learn how to weed out unsuccessful activities and introduce new ones in a much more disciplined way. Currently, the RSC employed around 300 staff, around half of whom are chemists working in the publishing area and managing professional projects. Their success was reflected in the very profitable publishing activities of the RSC. However, it should be noted that "Open Access" for journals could pose a threat so the RSC is building up its reserves so that, if need be, it can continue its activities paid for from its reserves.

There was general agreement that the designation Chartered Chemist did not receive recognition. It was noted that it was very difficult to persuade industry to give CChem greater credence and that some of the difficulty is caused by the high number of PhD chemists being trained in the UK. The RSC is planning a campaign to promote CChem and it encourages members to participate in CPD, though this is not a legal requirement.

It was suggested that the newly introduced REACH legislation should be seen by the RSC as an opportunity. Approached correctly, the RSC

could seize the opportunity to move the legal/litigation aspects of the science. REACH will require more professionally qualified chemists to be successful. However, there is almost no relevant courses being taught to meet the REACH requirements. This is an area that the RSC could easily move in to. Other similar areas are untapped, such as Intellectual Property. It was noted that, at the last meeting of Council, a new group had been agreed. The "Law Group" was now established.

It was noted that REACH was now having an effect on businesses, both in terms of manpower and finances. Dr Campbell invited members to let the RSC know of any specific difficulties and, if necessary, an approach would be made to the EU.

The RSC could also help those in academia. Most academics had little or no knowledge of REACH. The RSC could produce some resource to assist academics (and industrialists).

It was suggested that Chemistry World could have a regular article on legislation, whenever necessary.

The meeting noted that the Industry & Technology Forum was extremely active in helping small businesses and start up companies. It arranged a series of meetings tailored towards the needs of smaller enterprises and set up focus groups to investigate specific challenges.

It was noted that the RSC was not a union. As such, it could not act as a closed shop. Its Royal Charter requires it to act in the public interest and uphold the standards of those who practice chemistry. This is achieved by informing government, influencing chemistry teaching and arranging public outreach programmes.

The needs of teachers was discussed. It was agreed that the RSC produces very good resources, all of which is free. For that reason, teachers do not have to be members to benefit from the RSC. To the question as to whether teachers should be treated as a special case, it was agreed that, if this was introduced, other members may request that they too are treated as a special case. Members were informed about the recently introduced "ChemNet" which was aimed at 16 – 18 year old A level students and this initiative was welcomed.

Some concern was raised over teachers' apparent lack of knowledge of health and safety aspects and their unwillingness to conduct experiments. The meeting noted the excellent publication "Surely That's Banned" produced by the RSC and sent to all secondary schools.

Concern was raised over the arrangements for the IUPAC meeting, which is to be held in Glasgow and organised by the RSC. The meeting heard that the arrangements seemed to be very slow and, at times, erratic. It was noted that there had been staffing difficulties within the Conferences department which were being overcome.

It was agreed, generally, that the rsc.org web site had been improved significantly. However, there was still more to be done. Members were encouraged to inform the RSC of any difficulties they encountered.

Members were informed that the RSC was watching the elections in Northern Ireland closely. It was hoped that, once a government was in place, a similar arrangement to that in Scotland and Wales would be introduced, whereby the RSC would establish close links with members of the Assembly.

The needs of industrial members was discussed in depth. It was agreed that, whilst the RSC provided a range of discounts for all members, it was difficult to find out what members employed in industry wanted. Whenever they're asked, they rarely provide an answer. Members were encouraged to check the web site for a whole range of new lifestyle discounts available to members.

A local difficulty in funding the Schools Analyst competition was discussed and a solution identified.

The meeting discussed the trial which took place in the South East Region following the disappearance of the District Members of Council. It was noted that, over a two-year period, 3 meetings had taken place involving representatives from each of the four Local Sections within the Region, along with representatives of the Analytical Division and the Education Division. Those who attended had believed that there was some benefit derived from the meetings, particularly in sharing ideas and best practice. It was noted that the professional Affairs and Membership Board had agreed at its last meeting that any other Region wishing to introduce a similar arrangement should be free to do so and that staff should assist in the initial setting up stage.

Dr Whan thanked members for attending and for expressing their views.

The meeting concluded at 8:30pm
David Lindores