

Scottish Sub-committee of the HCUK
Minutes of the meeting held on 9.11.2005 at 2pm at University of St Andrews

Present:	Professor N Richardson	University of St.Andrews (Convenor)
	Professor R Howe	University of Aberdeen
	Professor I Gilbert	University of Dundee
	Professor J Murphy	University of Strathclyde
	Dr D Mincher	Napier University
	Dr H Rendall	University of Paisley
	Dr R Ansell	Glasgow Caledonian University
	Professor K McCullough	Heriot Watt University
	Professor L Yellowlees	University of Edinburgh
	Mr W Rennie	RSC (Parliamentary Affairs)
Apologies:	Ms L Steele	RSC
	Dr P Kong	Robert Gordon University
	Professor C Gilmore	University of Glasgow
	Professor J Palfreyman	University of Abertay

1. *Apologies and Welcome*

Welcome and introductions by Convenor (NVR)

2. *Minutes of Last Meeting*

The minutes of the last meeting were approved. Russell Howe pointed out that he was allocated to St.Andrews rather than Aberdeen in the last minutes.

3. *Matters arising*

4. *Convenor's remarks*

Annual Parliamentary Day – LJ, RH and WR briefed the meeting on the 5th 'Science and the Parliament 2005' organised by RSC, which was held on 2nd November, 2005. It was an opportunity for different parts of the science education and research community to meet with MSP's, exchange views, debate key issues and participate in one of four working parties (Education, Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Environment and Health) chaired by MSP's. There will be a similar event next year and it was recommended that a breakout session on Chemistry teaching in Universities should be included.

The Bologna Agreement – What does it mean to us? A brief discussion took place on the state of awareness and preparation, within Scottish Universities, for implementation of the Bologna agreement: A declaration signed by 29 countries in June, 1999 making a commitment to European-wide higher education reform and degree convergence. In general, it was agreed that there is little evidence of Scottish Executive or University guidance in adapting degree structures to the Bologna pattern. It was agreed to invite an authority on the details of the Bologna agreement to the next meeting of the Scottish sub-committee.

RSC - The Convenor (NVR) drew the committee's attention to a number of current RSC initiatives in Higher Education. A newsletter "Aim Higher – Chemistry the Next Generation", is part of a two year pilot project to promote the excitement of chemistry as a subject and publicise career opportunities to schools and higher education institutes. Other useful publications in career guidance are "Got a degree, what next?" and the "Parents Guide to Chemistry degrees" The RSC also run a series of UK and European Industry Study Tours for 2nd and 3rd year postgraduate students, which have been a great

success with very positive feedback. These events involve site tours, presentations and students have the opportunity to interact with company representatives. For these initiatives, Dr Josephine Tunney is the higher education specialist. Contact details are Tel: 0207 440 3348, e-mail Dr Josephine Tunney.

HEFCE funding opportunity - NVR informed the committee of an event, "Chemistry for the Future", taking place on 30th November, 2005 in Birmingham and hosted by the RSC. The event aims to inform Heads of Chemistry in England of an opportunity to bid for HEFCE funds (£20-30M is likely to be available over a five year period), to cover training and development of Chemistry courses etc. Scottish and Welsh Heads of Chemistry will be invited as observers!

5. **Implications of new Higher Syllabus** - There seems to have been little follow up to the consultation, which was initiated last year, on the document describing possible changes to the Chemistry syllabus in Scottish schools. It was suggested that the process may have been overtaken by the wider exercise on education in the 3-18 age range. Anxieties were expressed over some of the directions being suggested. The SQA contact (WR) will try to find out what current situation is regarding the consultation document.

A further discussion took place on several aspects related to the number of Chemistry teachers in Scottish schools. Concerns were expressed over the age profile, the number of "non-chemists" teaching chemistry and the retirement of principal teachers. In the near future, there are expected to be significant problems with teacher numbers falling significantly, mostly through retirement and particularly in principal teachers. Scottish Executive are aware of this: a recent education department survey/audit shows that 47% of science teachers are over the age of 50, with Chemistry by far the worst. Scottish Executive has released extra funding for more trainee teachers. At present students can go to England to study and receive a "golden handshake" of £5k, with the danger that they will not return, although salaries in Scotland are initially higher.

6. **Scotchem** - The role of ScotCHEM, as part of the new collaborative ventures for chemistry research and graduate teaching in Scotland, was outlined. ScotCHEM will deal with co-ordination of research facilities and postgraduate teaching activities in Scotland by, in the first instance, providing information on facilities available, graduate courses, industrial liaison etc. Meetings, with presentations, will be held approximately quarterly. Currently the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, St Andrews and Strathclyde are represented. Other Universities, which have research and/or graduate teaching activities in chemistry, who might wish to be represented, should contact Professor Ken Mckendrick (Heriot-Watt University), who acts as chairman of the ScotCHEM group.
7. **RAE 2008** – The consultations of panels and sub-panels are now complete with final guidelines to be made available in January/February 2006. These will contain clearer definitions of the 0-4* grades. The balance of 60,20,20 between output, environment and esteem may yet undergo minor amendment. Some concerns were raised about joint submissions and the implications for the partner institutions, more particularly in the way this may be announced and perceived by the media. At this stage, Edinburgh and St Andrews intend to make a joint submission in Chemistry.
8. **AOB – Chemistry in Scottish Universities**
A discussion took place on the current status of Chemistry across the Scottish Universities focusing on student recruitment, staff numbers, the nature of the taught Chemistry courses available and the Faculty/College/School structure under which Chemistry academic staff find themselves. It was felt that Chemistry in Scotland was significantly stronger than five years ago and that student recruitment had risen or at least stabilised during this time over most universities.