

2007 Midlands Regional Meeting

Marriott Hotel, Leicester

Tuesday 3 April 2007

Professor Jim Miller, a member of the RSC's Council, welcomed members. He reminded them that, under the new governance structure, Regional Meetings were now an important avenue of communication between Council and members. He hoped that members would take an active part in the meeting and introduced Dr Eliot Finer, RSC Honorary Treasurer, who made a presentation on:

- The recent changes to the governance
- Improving communication
- Major new RSC initiatives
- RSC International Strategy

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

It was noted that members could choose which Divisions, Forums and Interest Groups they wished to belong to and that they could register their decisions on-line.

The RSC is aware of the breakdown of its membership, which was approximately 60% industry based, 20% academic and 20% retired. It was noted that information on areas members work in is also collected, the pharmaceuticals industry being the largest. If it was felt appropriate, it is possible to publish this information on the RSC web site.

It was noted that the RSC is conducting research into how many of its members were "technicians" and attempting to identify where they fit into the membership structure. It was hoped that, by identifying those who considered themselves technicians, the RSC could ensure that it provided an appropriate service to them. There would be a survey later in the year to obtain this information.

Members were informed that previous surveys of members discovered that most were satisfied with the service they received from the RSC. The main reasons stated for remaining in membership were:

- Chemistry World
- RSC News
- Networking
- Divisions/Forums/Interest Groups

An in-depth discussion about the plans for refurbishing the library took place. Members noted that, currently, the library was a much underused facility which cost an significant amount to maintain. The intention was to create a “members area” whereby members could visit Burlington House when in London, have a coffee, check their emails and even have a sandwich. The plans also created small private work spaces which members could book to work whilst in London.

It was noted that, despite dramatic changes, it will remain a fully functioning library and the historical collection would be maintained fully. However, if the improvements went ahead, the space occupied by the library could also be used for many activities, including public lectures, exhibitions and schools activities. Two slides showing the architects impression of the refurbished library were displayed. It was noted that the appearance of the library would be greatly enhanced whilst retaining its historical heritage.

In addition to enhancing Burlington House facilities, it was hoped to negotiate reciprocal arrangements with other institutions which had similar facilities, allowing members use throughout the UK

The plans received warm support from members present.

Members noted that the closures of chemistry departments over the previous two years had resulted in the RSC creating a strategy to address future closures. Timing was extremely important and the earlier the RSC was made aware of any threat, the more success it was likely to achieve. The proposed closure at Sussex was a good example. The RSC was fortunate in being made aware of the proposal to close the department before any announcement had been made, This allowed us to take the initiative. The RSC has many valuable contacts within the UK Parliament and its select committees, as well as with the research councils. Research which the RSC had commissioned recently had highlighted the fact that all chemistry departments ran at a loss and that we had used this information to press the case for chemistry.

It was agreed that the demise of part time courses had also created a problem, resulting in some closures.

The meeting noted that HEFCE had recently awarded the RSC £3.6 million pounds over three years to promote chemistry to young people. Chemistry for our Future is a highly ambitious project and, if successful, will attract much larger funding.

At a recent ACS Open Board meeting, we had the pleasure to be able to report an increase in the numbers of chemical science undergraduates and the re-opening of chemistry departments.

It was agreed that ALL members had a responsibility to promote chemical sciences wherever possible – with the general public and, where possible, legislative bodies. The RSC's Media Relations Department is proving to be highly successful in ensuring that the RSC gets its message across and there is now a lot more copy in newspapers and reports on both television and radio.

One of the problems in schools was teachers and education authorities who believed, incorrectly, that certain substances and experiments were not possible due to H&S legislation. Where necessary, the misconceptions were challenged, usually successfully. A new publication "Surely that's Banned" has also made a great a great contribution in dispelling these myths.

It was noted that a highly successful "Chemistry, the Next Generation" event had taken place the day before the meeting. The Leicester University Chemistry Department lecture theatre had been jam packed with enthusiastic school students.

The importance of events such as Chemistry at Work was noted. These events, which brought school students together with industrialists were always highly successful and should be encouraged.

The meeting concluded at 20:25