

Royal Society of Chemistry Midlands Regional Meeting

MINUTES of the Midlands Regional Meeting held at 18:30 on Thursday, 19 February 2009 at the Park Plaza Nottingham, 41 Maid Marian Way, Nottingham, NG1 6GD.

1.0 Welcome

Dave Garner welcomed the members to the meeting.

2.0 RSC Activities

Jim Feast gave a brief presentation focussing on the new RSC Strategy on a Page, how current activities map to this Strategy and future activities.

3.0 Discussion

Dave Garner invited members to comment on the content of the presentation and related issues including:

3.1 General comments about the RSC

- Positive feedback was received from members and one member referred to the RSC as a “dynamic organisation”. The East Midlands Local Section is particularly active and organises lots of events. It was also observed that member recruitment visits to universities are very effective and well organised.

3.2 What does the RSC do for me?

- Feedback on some members' views that the cost of membership may not be reasonable value was received. One member responded that schemes such as Chemistry for our Future (CFOF) often engage members with RSC activities and help them make the most of their membership.
- Desire for the CFOF project to be continued was noted and that it is very important for a Learned Society to speak with one voice to successfully lobby the necessary people. This gives arguments more weight and impact on education/science policy.
- Chemistry is the only science to have all societies in Europe linked (via EuCheMS). This gives chemical societies more influence in Brussels.

3.3 Effect of the present economic climate on the Publishing business

- The RSC continues to expand publishing and will not be receding. There are new products in the pipeline. The RSC is also in an advantageous position as it is currently cheaper to sell its products overseas.
- Consumers try to support L&P publishing and are expected to stop purchasing commercial journals in preference of RSC and scientific ones.
- It is hoped that investment in STEM will continue as this becomes increasingly important for the future.

3.4 Chemistry student numbers

- Even though chemistry student numbers are increasing the opposite impression is often held by individuals.

- One member noted that the top universities are still successful in recruiting chemistry students but other universities may be suffering and that chemistry is becoming concentrated into a smaller number of stronger departments.
- Between 2010 and 2019 the number of 18 year olds will drop by 16%, leading to a natural decline in student numbers. It follows that there will be a decline in the number of chemistry students.

3.5 Employment opportunities for new chemistry graduates

- There will be a very large number of chemistry graduates in 2009, however, many chemical science companies are not currently recruiting. Could this lead to a large unemployment issue for new chemists?
- There are many opportunities for people with a chemistry background. Chemistry provides an education, not a training, therefore chemistry graduates can go in to several different areas. Also, chemical based industries and their employee roles are now much more diverse.
- Gemma Wood added that students in this difficult situation could obtain help from the RSC Advice and Guidance service.

3.6 Full economic costings

- It was commented that funding money should be better monitored so it is known how universities make use of it. It was also remarked that there are many administrators employed in universities to carry out FECs, which is considered unnecessary.

Dave Garner invited members to discuss points that had been raised in advance of the meeting:

3.7 Chemistry Centre

- From January 2010 there will be a charge for the rooms in the Chemistry Centre.
- These rates were set against fees of similar organisations. RSC rates will be cheaper for members than an equivalent room in London. Catering costs are also being revised.
- Costs of room hire can be factored into the budgets for Divisions and Forums.
- Subject groups with a low income will work with staff to ensure that using the Chemistry Centre is not to their financial detriment.
- It was emphasised that the Chemistry Centre comprises several rooms in Burlington House all of which can be hired.
- Queries about the Chemistry Centre should be directed to Helen Pain or Lucy Sandbach.

3.8 RSC Library

- A previous recruitment campaign for a new Librarian had been unsuccessful. The RSC is re-assessing the role of the librarian before any further recruitment is attempted.

3.9 Current activities at Burlington House

- There was some concern over the number of staff covering the work of Interest Groups and Committees. One member felt there are insufficient staff employed in this area and that while staff do the best job they can, had experienced poor

- organisation ahead of meetings
- This issue will be followed up by members of staff.
 - There is a need to develop communications to help Interest Groups and Divisions, (for example, in constructing webpages and newsletters). This does happen and needs to be communicated effectively.

3.10 RSC accreditation of university courses

- Accreditation is largely desk based but as accreditation criteria change, there will be some visits made to universities. The RSC needs to address the balance in accreditation at both ends, i.e. universities compiling very large files of information which then needs to be examined thoroughly by the RSC.
- The RSC does not agree with free student membership and has no plans to offer this. Students pay 60% of the subscription rate the first year after graduation and then phased increases of 10% each year thereafter until reaching the full membership rate.
- There is a membership package for people who no longer work in the chemical sciences but are still interested in the subject and this is the affiliate category of membership.
- The RSC does not have a figure for the number of people no longer working in chemistry but who are still members as this is difficult to judge.
- RSC membership fees are cheaper than other related organisations and the direct debit option for payment has been helpful for members.

3.11 How the RSC works with industry

- An increasing number of chemists work for SMEs and are therefore more difficult to find. It was acknowledged that trying to compile a list of SMEs is impossible as it changes constantly. The RSC will look at ways to address this issue.
- Gemma Wood drew attention to the RSC Reps network, which can facilitate this communication between local industries and academic establishments.
- Many big companies have sold off parts, losing RSC Reps as the company fragments but the list of Reps is kept as up-to-date as possible.

3.12 International Cooperation Agreements

- The RSC now has 19 International Sections. In China 3 ChemSocs have also registered in the last 18 months. The aim is to create an international networking hub.

3.13 Benevolent Fund activities in the Midlands region

- Graham Parry wanted to raise awareness of the Benevolent Fund activities in the area. He is currently trying to organise a retired chemists lunch in Derby.

3.14 Charges for RSC group membership

- This is currently being considered by Council and staff in consultation with the Interest Groups.

4.0 **Presentation of the Adrien Albert Award**

Dave Garner, RSC President, presented the Adrien Albert Award to Professor

Malcolm Stevens who made a brief acceptance speech.

5.0 Close and thanks

Dave Garner thanked all those attending for their contributions. The meeting was closed at 20:30.