

Royal Society of Chemistry North West Regional Meeting

MINUTES of the North West Regional Meeting held at 18:30 on Thursday, 5th February 2009 at the Manchester Marriott Victoria & Albert Hotel, Water Street, Manchester, M3 4JQ.

1.0 Welcome

Elliot Finer welcomed the members to the meeting.

2.0 RSC Activities

Elliot Finer gave a brief presentation focussing on the new RSC Strategy on a Page, how current activities map to this Strategy and future activities. A brief overview of financial performance was also given.

3.0 Discussion

Elliot Finer invited members to comment on the content of the presentation and related issues including:

3.1 The RSC Roadmap

- It was noted that the RSC received 2,000 responses during the consultation period for the Roadmap exercise but that this number represented only a small portion of the membership.
- The consultation was well publicised and in experience, 2,000 responses is an outstanding number. In addition, whilst some of the responses were from individuals, others were submitted as group responses (via Local Sections).
- The Roadmap will help to promote chemistry to other organisations, many of which are already heavily involved in and aware of the activity.

3.2 Will the value of Local Section grants be affected in view of current economic conditions?

- The budget for Local Section grants in 2009 will remain similar to the 2008 budget. There are no plans to cut Local Section grants and they will be made available as in previous years.
- In addition to annual grants, Local Sections can bid for additional funding from a central pot of money. These applications are assessed by the Finance Working Party of the Committee for Local Sections.
- Sections are encouraged to 'think big' and spend reserves and grants.

3.3 How can we ensure that science teachers are appropriately qualified?

- Chemistry for Non Specialists is still a very expensive programme (costing ~ £200 for the course and £250 for teaching cover). Is there any way that the RSC can subsidise this cost further? In addition, can the RSC organise delivery of local sessions through NQT centres?
- The current standard of teaching labs is not good enough. Can the RSC put more pressure on the government to provide adequate lab facilities or more money to finance labs? One member suggested that the RSC could produce a flier on how to design a lab which teachers could present to their LEAs. Elliot Finer suggested that the RSC should consider organising a conference on the theme 'how do we build labs for schools'. Another member highlighted the possibility of industrial labs passing on old equipment to schools.

3.4 Membership Statistics

- Members were pleased to see growth in membership of the 16-18 age group. This is down to ChemNet membership which is not included in the total membership figure of over 46,000.
- The majority of RSC members are based in the UK.
- The number of International Partner Members has grown as has the number of International Sections. The RSC has also established very successful projects in India and Africa with its corporate partners.
- Student membership doubled in 2008 from 2007.
- How can we encourage more teachers to become members and engage with chemistry events? Proposals to offer teachers involved with ChemNet a membership 'deal' are currently being finalised and it may be possible to extend these plans to other teachers. One member suggested that the RSC could recruit and train through teacher training colleges.

3.5 Financial aspects of RSC meetings

- Interest Groups run lots of conferences and encourage as many students as possible to attend. Does the RSC have bursary schemes in place to support the attendance of students at these events? Yes – schemes exist for this purpose including the RSC Travel Grants Committee. Many Local Sections also run funding schemes.
- Can Local Sections and groups pay for speakers at RSC events? This is something that must be carefully considered on a case by case basis. Travel costs should usually be offered. Sections should discuss particular cases with Gemma Wood.

3.6 Media activities

- Members were concerned at how well judged some recent publicity stunts have been and asked what the strategy was behind initiating such activities. In addition, members questioned how the RSC has promoted science and advanced the chemical sciences through recent media activities. One member commented that the recent Downing Street Petition runs the risk of alienating teachers.
- Elliot Finer responded by stating that publicity stunts are generally a good thing but that some will be risky. He agreed that stunts need to be chemically focussed but pointed out that the media reaction to stunts and the angle which the media will focus on can not be predicted. Whilst some recent stunts have veered away from an obvious chemistry focus, it is excellent that the RSC has increased its media profile so significantly.
- One member asked how the RSC can link its other work with publicity stunts. It was pointed out that this is already being done with the 2009 theme of food and with topics such as climate change.
- One member suggested that the RSC needs to think big (for example, by encouraging the BBC to produce a chemical science series which focuses on key messages from the Roadmap or chemistry in everyday life). The RSC is 'thinking big' with its 2009 Food theme.

3.7 How can more chemistry teachers be encouraged to become RSC members

- For many chemistry teachers, membership to the ASE was seen as essential as it came with insurance. RSC membership does not include professional insurance and many teachers feel that the benefits of membership do nothing for them. Teacher members require more support from the RSC.

- In addition to the lifestyle benefits offered as part of RSC membership a wealth of educational materials and support for teachers is provided. A-level pupils are supported through ChemNet and several teacher forums have also been organised. The RSC is unable to recommend specific insurance policies and discounts with several suppliers are offered as an alternative.
- One member suggested that members are unaware of the benefits available to them. Member benefits are publicised through RSC News, Grapevine, the RSC website, leaflets and fliers and in member application and renewal packs.
- Better interactions with teachers can be encouraged via face-to-face meetings.

3.8 Funding for Local Sections

- There was a very positive message that Sections should spend up their grants and reserves and host a wide range of events.
- Local Section grants can be used to fund the same event on an annual basis as long as the event is successful and helps to meet the RSC strategic priorities.
- Local Sections have been trying to reduce their reserves. This must continue.

3.9 Other issues

- There are no plans for the RSC to fund research or studentships.
- The choice of degrees available to undergraduates is thought to be wide enough to train students for all jobs that chemists are required for.
- The work to develop parliamentary links has been very good.

4.0 Close and Thanks

Elliot Finer thanked all those attending for their contributions. The meeting was closed at 20:10.