

North West Regional Meeting

Renaissance Hotel, Manchester

Thursday 9 February 2006

Introduction

Professor Dave Garner welcomed members to the meeting. He reminded members that Regional Meetings were an important way the RSC's Council communicates with members and hoped that those present would enjoy the meeting and find it useful. He introduced the RSC's new Chief Executive, Dr Richard Pike.

Dr Pike gave members a brief overview of his background and looked forward to working with members to enhance the RSC's current activities, develop new initiatives and safeguard its future.

Professor Garner introduced the President-Elect, Professor Jim Feast, who gave the main presentation of the evening.

RSC 2006-2010 Strategy

Professor Feast reminded members of the RSC's vision which was ***to be the most effective international organisation for advancing the chemical sciences***. Members noted that 10 key areas had been agreed by Council and these were:

- **Increase our influence in key decision making bodies**
The RSC will participate in, and influence, science and education policy discussions across the UK and with the EU, and ensure it is recognised as a key source of expertise and advice on the chemical sciences
- **Broaden our science base**
The RSC aims to nurture the core chemical sciences, expand its scientific footprint and enhance the support for the applied sciences
- **Foster the study and teaching of chemical sciences**
The RSC will encourage the study, and enhance the teaching, of the chemical sciences at all levels
- **Enhance the benefits of membership**
The RSC will become increasingly relevant, receptive and responsive to a broader range of chemical scientists across the UK, EU and more internationally
- **Promote professional qualifications and ethical conduct**
The RSC will promote its professional qualifications, best practice in the chemical sciences and uphold the highest ethical standards

- **Enhance our publishing activities**
The RSC will build upon its international reputation for excellence in publishing through strengthening its core products and by encompassing a broader footprint
- **Improve our channels of communication**
The RSC will enhance the perception and image of the chemical sciences and its practitioners amongst our members, the international scientific community and the general public
- **Pursue activities in partnerships with other organisations**
The RSC will build national and international alliances to further the impact of the chemical sciences and its practitioners
- **Improve our governance, structure and financial planning**
The RSC will complete the review of its governance and structure and ensure the provision of resources for the effective delivery of the strategic plan
- **Investing in our staff and supporting our volunteers**
The RSC will develop its staff and support our volunteer network to deliver our strategy

During the discussion which followed, the following points were made:

- The RSC must strive to increase its influence in the way chemistry is taught in schools and use its best endeavours to ensure that more teachers of chemistry are qualified by having a degree in the subject
- The RSC should encourage more teachers to get involved in its activities and to assist schools by arranging good quality presentations within the classroom
- By expanding and broadening its base, the RSC should ensure it does not spread itself too thinly and become a “Jack of all trades and master of none” It was noted that the RSC is an integral part of the EU and it could not afford to ignore that fact. We should also remember that the majority of the RSC’s income is generated outside of the UK. There were many problems common to ourselves and other learned societies. Where possible, we would work with others to achieve our aims.
- Though the RSC has become much more visible in the media in recent times, we need to be clever in trying to get chemistry into popular culture – TV soaps etc

Following Professor Feast's presentation, Dr David Karsa gave a short presentation on the Industry & Technology Forum (ITF) and its activities.

The Industry & Technology Forum

Dr Karsa informed members that around 60% of members have an "industrial" background. It was noted that:

- Following a review of the Industrial Division, it was agreed that, to address the needs of members in industry, a more streamlined approach was needed. This resulted in the Industry & Technology Forum being created to replace the Industrial Division
- The new ITF was concentrating on enhancing the benefits it provides to members and was now focussing on:
 - Professional qualifications
 - Industry focused training & conferences
 - Networking Opportunities
 - Opportunity to influence Science Policy
 - Access to Scientific Information
 - Special discounts
 - Industrial Lectureships
 - Innovation Awards
- Changes in the staff structure had resulted in big improvements in communication and support
- The ITF now had around 13000 members. It supported 8 Subject Groups and 8 Sectors. Subjects ranged Applied Catalysis to Process Technology and Agriculture to Speciality Chemicals
- Great strides had been made in developing a programme of training courses. These were proving to be very popular and successful and were a great credit to the RSC
- The ITF devotes a lot of its resources to providing support for spin-out companies and SMEs, particularly in the early stages of their life. A new web site for SMEs will be launched in June 2006
- Three awards for Innovation were offered each year. These were:
 - **Chemistry World Entrepreneur of the Year**
Contributed to the growth of an SME
 - **Creativity in Industry**
Lifetime achievement award
 - **Teamwork in Innovation**
Acknowledging collaborative projects

- The North West Chemistry Trust was started with around £80K and it was envisaged that this would last for around 10 years. However, ten years on, there was still around £50 left. The Trust provides a great deal of support for schools (chemistry kits etc)
- As in other areas of the RSC, it is important to involve and encourage younger members to take an active role within the Forum

Open Forum

Immediately after the 2 presentations, Professor Garner invited to raise any items they wished. The following issues were discussed:

- Before amalgamation, the RSC was 4 separate societies. Merging them had provided many advantages. Because of the many overlapping activities, would there be any merit in the RSC merging with the SCI? It was noted that there were no immediate plans for this. Before any amalgamation takes place, the parties involved need to consider what the key success factors were. It was necessary that the reasons for merging are clear and beneficial to both parties and that lack of clarity often led to failure. The meeting was informed that the local branch of the SCI works very closely with the Manchester Local Section and that joint meetings with other Sections in the North West already took place. It was also noted that the SCI had a new Chief executive who was keen to work closely with the RSC.
- Though the RSC had many academics on board, we need to make a concerted effort to get many more professional industrial members to participate and take an active role
- In respect of the UK's future energy needs, there are big issues looming such as the role of future nuclear energy, radioactive waste disposal, the nuclear clean up & decommissioning programme. There may be a future skills gap in radiochemistry and one of our top priorities at the moment should be in ensuring the skill bases we currently have in radiochemistry are maintained. In academia, the group at Manchester is key although there are also some other relevant groups, this is an area where industry based capabilities are particularly important (these include those at NEXIA - formerly the R&D part of BNFL). Members may be aware of the new R&D building being commissioned at Sellafield - which will be the focal point for the UK's civil nuclear chemistry & materials R&D - and also some of the discussions about what should happen to the R&D skill base as the industry is restructured. It was noted that the RSC had already identified this problem and had produced a report which is now in the public domain. Radiochemistry is a very

specialized subject and, therefore, such chemists are expensive to train and employ

- The RSC should provide funding to set up a forum whereby young industrialists and young academics could assist in developing schools chemistry courses of the future
- The lack of recognition of CChem was discussed and the possibility of licensing to practice as a chemist was considered. The poor pay scales in comparison with other jobs was also discussed. It was noted that salary structures were market led. However, it is likely that, because of the huge issues facing the world – environment, sustainable energy, global warming – a need for well qualified and well paid chemists will be created
- The meeting agreed that training as a chemist also provides a large number of transferable skills. It was also agreed that many chemists stay in the profession because they have a passion for the subject
- It was noted that, following the demise of the District Member of Council, the South East Region had set up formal meetings between the Local Sections within the Region. This was to ensure that best practice was shared and ideas for joint meetings discussed. This was felt to be a good idea and staff were requested to set up a similar scheme in the North West

Professor Garner thanked members for attending. He had enjoyed the lively discussion and hoped that they too had enjoyed the meeting.

David Lindores
13 February 2006