

## Royal Society of Chemistry North East Regional Meeting

MINUTES of the North East Regional Meeting held at 18:30 on Thursday, 26 February 2009 at the Royal York Hotel, Station Road, York, YO24 1AA.

### 1.0 Welcome

Due to unforeseen circumstances Eliot Finer was unable to attend the meeting. Neville Reed gave the presentation to RSC members and Dr Ian Edwards chaired. Dr Edwards welcomed members to the meeting.

### 2.0 RSC Activities

Neville Reed gave a brief presentation focussing on the RSC's financial position and the new RSC Strategy on a Page, how current activities map to this Strategy and future activities.

### 3.0 Discussion

Dr Edwards invited members to comment on the content of the presentation and related issues including:

#### 3.1 Support provided by the RSC for the lower levels of education (e.g. primary schools)

- The RSC has done some work for this age range, as have Local Sections. One reason why significant central resources are not focussed in this area is because there are too many primary schools for the RSC to tackle on its own.
- Furthermore, studies have shown that children are generally pro-science at primary school level. The problem area has been identified as age 11-13. The RSC is currently talking to other organisations about this issue.

#### 3.2 Education

- The structure of the RSC Education Department has changed. Education is being viewed as a continuum with activities from primary level through to working life now being centred within the same department.
- With the merging of the Directorates for Education & Qualifications and Science & Technology into a new single Directorate for Science, Education & Skills, the managerial positions are now as follows: University Education and Research; Schools and Colleges; Industry and Business; Interest Groups; Events and Awards.
- It was queried whether the RSC would be creating any services or materials for students aged 14+ (similar to ChemNet). The RSC is in the very early stages of looking at this area.
- It was added that some teachers struggle to find external people who can come into the classroom to discuss topics relating to STEM. It was highlighted that members can contact the RSC Education department for resources and help in this area.
- One member commented that they could not locate the CFOF funded 'Science in a Suitcase' activity in their area. This should still be running and investigations will be carried out to find out where it has gone. It was noted that Andy Beeby from Durham University was the contact for this.

### 3.3 Knowledge retention and education

- The most suitable study and teaching methods depends on the individual person.
- The RSC continues to campaign in the educational standards area and has been invited to talk to the Qualifications and Curriculum body. It was emphasised that the RSC was very careful during the education campaign not to criticise teachers or students, rather, the system they have to work in.
- It was acknowledged that the RSC could have liaised more with regional educational bodies and local education divisions during the CFOF programmes.

Dr Edwards then invited members to discuss points that had been raised in advance of the meeting:

### 3.4 Regional working

- The RSC believes that member groups could work together more efficiently at a regional level. The same RSC structure exists as in 1980, with all Sections, Divisions and Groups operating relatively separately. It was suggested that Groups and Sections in the same area may consider a joint committee meeting once a year.
- The RSC is continuing to think about developments in this area.
- It was confirmed that Groups and Sections can obtain email lists of their members upon request from the Membership Department. The RSC is also able to email members on behalf of a Group or Section via an E-Alert.

### 3.5 Government funding for chemistry research

- The future of science funding was discussed. There is currently sufficient money in science but whether this will continue is unknown. The Science Minister, Lord Drayson, has stated there will not be any funding cuts.
- We may see a plateau in funding or perhaps a decrease due to some of the research money going into Full Economic Costings.
- The creation of Doctoral Training Centres is excellent for universities who have them but can pose a funding threat to those without.
- The RSC needs to continue to campaign to prevent chemistry departments closing.

### 3.6 Manufacturing and R&D in the UK

- The worrying decline of manufacturing and R&D activities in the UK was discussed.
- One such problem is the downsizing of pharmaceutical industries, (as they move abroad), which cannot be prevented.
- One member observed that we need to try to fight this downsizing and protect our industries. Innovation is necessary to compete with emerging markets such as China, as the UK is unable to compete in commodities.
- It is important to lobby the government for research funding.

### 3.7 Unemployment help for members

- It was observed that the RSC needs to work hard to reach members who are unemployed and need help, as they might not approach the RSC themselves.
- The RSC *Advice and Guidance* service offers one-to-one advice, career

consultations and CV help to members.

- The RSC has recently held redundancy surgeries at GSK and Pfizer. Contact in these situations is initiated in a mixture of ways. The RSC approaches companies where they hear redundancies are being made; companies or RSC Reps may contact the RSC; individual members may come to the RSC directly. Word of mouth through members is always useful.

### 3.8 The RSC liaising with its sister societies and benefits benchmarking

- The RSC does quite a lot of work with the IOP. A comparison was made recently between RSC benefits and those of the IOP. The RSC matched or bettered the benefits of the IOP and similar organisations.
- It was acknowledged that the IOP offer free membership to students but the RSC will not be considering this. Membership has more value when you pay for it and for students the fee is only £16 a year.

### 3.9 Membership subscriptions and schemes

- To attract new members, there is currently a scheme offering free first year membership to academics working in the UK. A similar plan for senior industrialists is also being considered. There is also a Leaders In The Field scheme, whereby top chemists from around the world are offered free membership for the first year.
- It was remarked that these offers are only to attract new members and not available to current members. However, once you are a member, the benefits available are excellent value for money.
- It was emphasised that subscriptions are tax deductible.
- A member queried whether RSC subscription rates are different overseas. This is not the case, although any person earning less than £12,000 pa pays only 60% of the fee. The RSC does not want to destabilise chemical societies overseas and therefore encourages membership of these societies. For example, in China, the RSC prefers chemists to join the Chinese Chemical Society and then gain access to RSC benefits through the International Cooperation Agreement.
- It was clarified that international partner society members can pay subscriptions for RSC subject groups without joining the RSC.
- Life membership and retirement fees were also discussed.

### 3.10 Increasing public awareness of chemistry

- Studies by the Wellcome Trust have shown that the public have a fairly positive perception of science and technology. General issues highlighted were the secrecy of research and the speed at which technology progresses.
- It was identified that scientists and engineers need to have more confidence and move away from the idea that people have a negative impression of them.
- In terms of public outreach work the RSC has a number of centrally organised programmes including Chemistry Week, themes that run for a year and member groups who work very hard in this area.
- There is nothing as formal as 'Speak Out and Listen', however, the RSC does have a list of speakers available who deliver public lectures.

### 3.11 RSC Council Membership

- A handout of current Council membership was distributed at the meeting.

### 3.12 The RSC 'Food' theme

- An update was provided on the RSC Food theme. The Food report was launched in January this year and various events are currently being discussed and planned to take place throughout the year.
- There will be posters available for display later in the year.

### 3.13 Feedback from the Downing Street petition

- The campaign for educational standards proved very controversial with both very positive and very negative feedback from members.
- It did lead to interesting discussions with government and the Qualifications Board.
- Many people agreed with the underlying concept of the petition but did not agree with the methodology. It was emphasised that at no time during the campaign did the RSC criticise students or teachers.
- The RSC acknowledged that, with hindsight, it would probably agree that the process could have been carried out better.

### 3.14 RSC Subject Groups

- It was queried whether members volunteering for roles in Groups could be paid for their time, where large amounts of work was required, for example, in planning conferences.
- The RSC responded by saying this could not happen. One option would be to use the RSC Conferences Department for help in organising large events, or use an external conferences support assistant (such as Elaine Wellingham).

### 3.15 CSci designation

- It was debated how valuable and widely recognised the CChem and CSci designations are. It is felt that the Chartered Engineer award is valued more highly in industry.
- The RSC is currently trying to tackle this issue. There is a proposal to make CPD mandatory for people with CChem and awarding Chartered Engineer and Chartered Environmental Scientist designations is being considered.

## **4.0 Close and thanks**

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