

# North West Regional Meeting

## Marriott Hotel, Liverpool

Thursday 1 February 2007

### 1.0 Welcome

Professor Paul O'Brien welcomed members to the meeting. He reminded members that the RSC was a large and complex organisation which was required to be "all things to all people - from a learned society to a professional organisation. In addition to its many activities, it was also a registered charity.

Recent changes to the governance structure of the RSC had resulted in a smaller leaner Council and to ensure that Council members remained in touch with grass roots opinions, a General Assembly had been introduced, which, along with Regional Meetings, ensured that members had opportunities to influence Council and raise issues of concern.

### 2.0 Improving the Way We Work

Dr Simon Campbell, Immediate Past President, reminded members that, for the RSC to remain the successful organisation that it was, and to ensure it continues to progress, it needs the support and contribution of its members. Indeed, members were the lifeblood of the RSC. It was for that reason that Regional Meetings were introduced so that "active members" and Honorary Officers could come together to discuss strategy and any other issues of concern.

He then gave a presentation which covered the recent changes to the RSC in more depth and set out the direction and objectives for the immediate future. The major themes of his Presentation covered:

- Changes to the governance
- Major new initiatives
- Improving communication
- 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 the RSC is in the forefront of international activities. In countries where it is establishing relationships, it often receives strong support from British Embassies, most of whom say that it is the first time they have had contact from professional organisations
- Some concern was raised over the Bologna process, whereby the nature and length of EU qualifications were being

harmonised. Despite the RSC's submissions and advice, the UK Government still believed that there would be no problems. Indeed, Government believed that the EU system would resemble UK qualifications. This was a issue that, if not addressed, could put UK graduates at a disadvantage and the RSC would continue to lobby Parliament.

- Wherever possible, the RSC would work with other learned and professional societies to achieve its international objectives, some of which were already established in some of the countries being targeted by the RSC. It was noted that the IChemE had a new Chief Executive and that this would be an ideal time to establish closer working co-operation
- There was general agreement that the Chartered Chemist designation still did not receive recognition. Despite positive feedback from senior management of companies, this did not filter down throughout the organisation. One problem was that there were PhD chemists who competed for jobs which were at the CChem level. This was not such a problem with the engineering profession, where CEng received much wider recognition. It was, however, noted that the CEng qualification was not a requirement to practice
- It was noted that the North West Education Division was finding it increasing difficult to arrange activities in, what was, a very large geographical area. It was agreed that the Division should liaise more with the Local Sections within the Region. It was noted that, if members in the Region would like staff to arrange for representatives from each Local Section, along with representatives of the Analytical and Education Divisions to meet and discuss the way forward, they should contact David Lindores
- A member raised the lack of RSC profile at PGCE meetings. The Institute of Physics has a very high profile at these meetings and provides very high quality study packs and teaching noted for trainee teachers. This is an area that the RSC could have an impact in raising the profile of chemistry and assist non-chemists in teaching the subject
- It was agreed that the RSC, which allocates around £1.5 million each year to educational activities, does produce some high quality resources. However, whilst it aims to provide its resources to all secondary schools within the country, a high percentage does not reach the intended target – ie teachers. Often, material does not get past the school secretary. The majority of members questioned whether this broad brush approach, sending unsolicited mail to schools is the right approach. The RSC needs to decide what is an acceptable take-

up rate. The value of giving something free to all was questioned and there was general agreement that, if something is free, it's not valuable. There was some support for the idea that schools should be required to opt in to receiving RSC resources

- It was proposed that the RSC should provide more resources for teacher training and careers advice, some of which, could be provided electronically – on-line, email etc
- Members were pleased to see the introduction of ChemNet, the new network for “A” level students which, already, had over 1200 members. It was agreed that the RSC should examine ways that the network could be managed to encourage more teacher participation in RSC activities. It was noted that the cost of membership was £10 for one year or £15 for two years. To the suggestion that membership was provided free of charge, it was noted that the RSC was looking for a commitment from students and, again, if something is free, the value would be questioned. The target is to achieve 10000 members in two years. This is a reasonable target as we would be targeting only those who were enthusiastic about chemistry. We will be marketing to teachers to promote the network
- Those members who had seen it, agreed that the RSC web site aimed at teachers was excellent
- The following excellent publications were mentioned:
  - Education in Chemistry
  - Surely that's Banned
  - Kitchen Chemistry
  - A Short History of Nearly EverythingAnd that these were sent to all secondary schools within the UK

- The comment was made that, whilst the Education Division arranged some very good meetings and initiatives, it did not communicate these effectively, especially to Local Sections. This results in Local Sections being unable to help with promotion
- It was agreed the RSC should take active steps to recruit teachers. This is a vital area in which the RSC should enhance its presence

In summary, it was agreed that, whilst the Education Department undertakes some very good work and introduces new initiatives, it should review its activities to ensure that resources are targeted appropriately.

- The theme of the 2007 Chemistry Week, “Travel” was noted and felt to be an ideal subject, bearing in mind the concerns over

global warming. Local Sections would receive a grant to assist them to arrange local activities and a national road show would be arranged centrally. Suggestions for high profile names to get involved included Richard Hammond of Top Gear, Nigel Mansell and Adam Hart-Davies, who had already indicated that he may be willing to assist. It was agreed that Local Sections could influence where the road show would appear and this should be arranged through Pauline Meakins

- It was agreed that the success in getting “names” to raise the profile of chemistry should be encouraged. The well-known author, Bill Bryson and Heston Blumenthal had been highly successful in getting the RSC’s message across. The Bill Bryson prize for schools’ science communication had received around 700 entries and the book, “Kitchen Chemistry”, published in conjunction with Heston Blumenthal, had received acclaim
- Members noted that, though the RSC provided funds each year to The Catalyst Museum, it has no presence there. It was agreed to consider sending RSC pens to the museum so that one could be provided to each visiting child. Around 4000 would be needed each year. It was also agreed that the RSC should sponsor some of the debates for children that are arranged in the museum and that this is something that we could encourage Bill Bryson to attend.

The meeting concluded at 20:00

David Lindores