University of Sheffield Teachers’ Conference July 2015

When the new academic year begins you can guarantee the first few days within schools will involve SLT describing CPD opportunities along with a cry that teachers need to ensure their own learning continues. Some teachers see this as a potential opportunity whilst others, often justifiably, feel it is adding to an already overloaded teacher schedule. Therefore I personally feel it is important to provide CPD events that do not impose and add to a workload but rather allow for teachers to relax and continue to build upon their own skills by enjoying events from inspirational leaders in their field.

In light of this, I was delighted to hear that the RSC SaFE Group had planned a Teachers’ Chemistry Conference in July 2015 in order to provide a range of lectures and workshops to support teachers with their CPD whilst also providing an opportunity to network. The setting at the Department of Chemistry at the University of Sheffield provided a warm and welcoming atmosphere and allowed for teachers from all over the country to meet with their contemporaries and discover new developments within their field.

The event began with a keynote address about A-level reform by Dr Neil Wade (Head of Qualifications Reform), this talk allowed attendees to gain a greater perspective regarding future changes whilst also allowing them to seek answers to questions they have during this shift in the science A-levels. This followed with three short talks which provided an introduction to the afternoon breakout sessions giving everyone a flavour for the afternoon events. Bob Worley proved an inspiring introduction about using microscale chemistry which was followed up by a fantastic workshop session. The teachers in this session were inspired by the resources and it provided teachers with new ideas particularly those who have to work on even the smallest budgets – his workshop demonstrated that there is no excuse for not including hands-on practical chemistry in lessons. Jessica Ball and Nick Backstrom’s work based learning session really got teachers thinking about skills required in industry. Nick’s hands on activity of predicting the level of qualifications needed based on job specifications was highly enlightening and made me think twice when discussing job opportunities with students. Other workshops allowed for teachers to continue their discussions regarding the practical changes in the A-levels as well as meeting the Educational Coordinator from the RSC to explore the resources and enrichment opportunities.

As a teacher based in the South of England I particularly enjoyed meeting a wide range of staff based in areas such as Leeds and Birmingham. It allowed us to discuss topics such as the benefits of different resources available to us as chemistry teachers as well as the facilities on offer to us when collaborating with our local universities. Conferences such as these really do make CPD an enjoyable experience, one where both staff and ultimately our students can benefit from shared knowledge.

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