

## **2007 North East Regional Meeting**

**Marriott Hotel, York**

*8 March 2007*

Dr David Whan, member of RSC Council, welcomed members to the meeting and reminded them that, under the new governance structure, Regional Meetings were an important avenue of communication between Council and members. He introduced Professor Jim Feast, RSC President, who gave a presentation on:

- 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 following discussion.

The question was raised how the RSC can enhance the public's perception and understanding of science. It was noted that the RSC is already very active in this area. In addition to the Media Relations Department, which is doing an excellent job in promoting the RSC and its activities, there are also on-going programmes such as Chemistry at Work and Chemistry for our Future. The task is not made easier when the public hear that the DTI rake back money which was supposed to be ring fenced for science. Such actions on behalf of the Government give the public mixed messages about the importance of science. The RSC will fight for the funding, if necessary. Science is the key to future health and prosperity. The RSC will strive to ensure that it remains at the forefront of Government thinking. Over recent years, the RSC has enjoyed a close working relationship with the Government and David Sainsbury has been a great ambassador for science. So much so, that he has recently been awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the RSC.

Concern was raised over whether the costs associated with the dramatic increase in international activities would have a adverse affect upon the RSC UK. It was noted that many of the activities were self financing. A good example was "Chemistry World China", which would be funded by advertising. If any activity was found to be unsuccessful, it would be axed. Members were reminded that the RSC's Royal Charter required it to "advance the chemical sciences" Therefore, the international activities fit neatly under that banner.

To the question of how Sections and Interest groups can encourage greater attendance at meetings, the meeting noted that the recently introduced "Grape Vine" weekly email was proving to be a very useful tool in promoting meetings.

The value of the RSC and its membership to chemists working in industry, and the RSC's ability to influence companies transferring to India and China was questioned. Members recognised that over half of members were employed in industry and that had long been the case. The RSC could do little to stop large multinationals from transferring to other countries. These were commercial decisions. However, it was not all doom and gloom. Many smaller, more specialised companies are taking the place of the larger ones. A good example is the Tees valley area, which was, at one time, known as British Steel and ICI. Whilst those two companies have declined in the area, there are a lot of high value/smaller volume companies in their place. Chemistry still maintains its presence, but in a different format. It was also noted that it was a mistake to think that companies were moving simply because of cheap labour. Over recent years, both India and China have progressed and are producing high quality graduates and a flexible work force. Often, because of government investment, facilities are also better.

It was agreed that the RSC needs to make the promotion of CChem a high priority. It needs to make greater efforts to engage with industry and encourage more input from industrial members.

There was general agreement that solutions to many of the big challenges in the future will rely upon the chemical sciences – global warming being at the forefront. It needs to be recognised that a significant contribution to greenhouse gases is made by industry and, as such, the RSC should encourage more industrially based chemists to take part in the debate.

It was noted that, whilst the RSC has no plans to seek to merge with other societies, strenuous efforts are made to forge closer links, where relevant. The RSC is conscious that, because of its larger size, it could be seen to be a threat. However we seek to be the "partner of choice" where there are mutual benefits to be gained by working with others.

Members were reminded that, many years ago, many children received chemistry sets as presents but these were no longer available. It was suggested that the RSC could introduce a new chemistry set, which could help raise the profile of chemistry as a fun activity. It was agreed to consider this in more detail.

There was some discussion on the difficulty of obtaining representatives of universities to sit on committees and it was agreed that the needs of academic reps should also be considered when reviewing the needs of industrial reps.

The RSC's new structure of governance was discussed. It was noted that the Professional Affairs and Membership Board would cease to exist and, in its place, a new Membership Affairs Board would be introduced. Some of the responsibilities of the new RSC boards would be transferred to more appropriate areas and there would be no sub-committees. Instead, time limited working parties would be formed. These would be disbanded upon completion of the specific tasks. The first job of each new board will be to review its activities and define its new role. To ensure that the expertise of the sub-committees was not lost, each was asked to provide a review of their activities and priorities.

The importance of marketing membership was discussed and it was noted that the RSC had recruited appropriate staff with a marketing background to promote its membership. A new industry scheme was noted whereby companies who paid for their staff to be members would be provided with tailor made benefits. The scheme would be launched later in the year.

After the meeting, an award was made to John Notley, Central Yorkshire Local Section, who had completed over ten years service on the committee. The President stated that the RSC was indebted to its members upon whom much of its activities relied. He thanked Dr Notley for his valuable contribution.

The meeting concluded at 20:35