

# Royal Society of Chemistry

## Welsh Regional Meeting

### Marriot Hotel, Swansea

*Thursday 17 May 2007*

The meeting was Chaired by Dr John Macdonald, Council member. He welcomed members to the meeting and encouraged them to take an active part. He introduced Dr Simon Campbell, Immediate Past President, who gave a presentation on "Improving the way we work" The Powerpoint presentation is available to view on the web site. After the presentation, Dr Macdonald reminded the meeting that the RSC had seen tremendous change over recent years and that a lot of the success of the changes was due to the efforts by DR Campbell. He invited comment and suggestions and the following discussion took place:

- The RSC should consider introducing a benefit such as "webscience", a search engine used by many scientists. This could be accessed via the Library
- The Canadian Chemical Society was very active in some of the Gulf States. Requests for assistance from these states had been turned down by both the ACS and RSC and, it could be, that the RSC was losing out. It was agreed to take a look at this issue
- Health and Safety legislation has resulted in chemistry lessons in schools becoming very sterile with few practical exercises and experiments taking place. This makes chemistry into a very boring subject. It was noted that the Government promised to update all schools laboratories but, unfortunately, very little progress has been made. One of the problems was that many teachers were unaware of just what sort of experiments they could conduct. To address this, the RSC has produced a booklet "Surely That's Banned" which explains which chemicals are not and, as important, what are allowed. The booklet has been welcomed warmly
- Two regions in Wales now have no chemistry departments in their universities and this has created a problem for the Local Sections. It was noted that other Local Sections might be able to assist. The meeting noted that the RSC continues to stress the importance of local courses to HEFCE and other Regional agencies. However, these agencies believe that regional co-ordination is OK, rather than local. It was also noted that some universities which had closed their chemistry department were no re-opening them and introducing a variety of courses, such as HND. Whilst the RSC could have responded better to the closure the department at Swansea, many lessons had been learnt and the RSC's strategy in respect of closures was now greatly improved and resulting in successes
- The RSC had been able to encourage the chemical community to work together. Recent closures of chemistry departments had highlighted the need for chemists to take a united approach to problems. We now see a complete change in attitude amongst academics who now rejoice when chemistry departments are saved or reopen

- It was noted that the RSC has many joint meetings with other institutions, such as the SCI, IChemE. A lot of collaboration takes place and, where appropriate, we work closely with others on projects of mutual benefit
- The recent increase in the numbers going on to take chemistry at university was, in no small part, due to the efforts of the RSC in recent years. High profile campaigning and introducing initiatives such as the Bill Bryson prize had raised the profile of chemistry and it was becoming more recognised that many of the problems facing the world in the future would be addressed by chemists
- The RSC's support for teachers was praised, including the "Chemistry the Next Generation", which was Government funded initiative and was already enjoying success. A recent survey amongst pupils who had attended revealed that 70% had said that they would consider a career in chemistry
- The difficulty in getting industrial members to participate was discussed. It was noted that there was tremendous pressure on industry these days and industrialists simply didn't have the time to be able to join in. Whilst some companies sponsor local activities, their staff don't, in general, attend meetings. It was noted that, in a survey conducted by the RSC 3 years ago, most industrialists didn't specify anything in particular that they'd like the RSC to provide. A survey to be conducted this year will specifically ask them what the RSC can do to help them. However, it was expected that there would not be much response. It was also noted that, whilst senior managers supported the RSC and its aims, this did not filter down to middle managers
- Local industry used to maintain good relations with local technical colleges. However, many local companies have now gone, leaving only the larger multinationals
- The meeting noted that Local Sections could obtain tailored lists of their membership at any time through the Local Events Executive. These would enable to locate where their industrial members were and allow them to tailor their activities
- The RSC's media and lobbying activities had been vastly improved, making a huge difference in the RSC's influence and profile
- It was noted that the RSC had received a lot of additional support from HEFCE for strategically important subjects, including chemistry. It was now trying to introduce a similar arrangement with the Scottish Parliament and initial signs were very encouraging. After Scotland, Wales would be targeted. In the meantime, the RSC had allocated £10,000 of its own funds to Wales to support educational initiatives
- The document "Science Policy for Wales" was discussed. It was noted that the Assembly had recognised certain areas, such as Environment and Energy as priorities. However, there were no proposals on how issues should be tackled. The document was very poor as far as substance was concerned. It also fails to recognise the global nature of science and takes too parochial a view. The First Minister's response to questions had been very vague and he had turned down the recommendation that Wales should have an office for science and technology. The proposal from Sir John Cadogan that Wales should

introduce a Minister for Science had not been heeded and the First Minister had said that, if needed, he was able to approach David King, the Scientific Advisor for the Westminster Parliament, for advice. It was suggested that a question be raised in the Assembly asking how many times David King had been consulted. It was agreed that it was important for the Welsh Assembly to have a Scientific Advisor

- It was noted that all Assembly Members had been invited to the Science and the Assembly event, taking place on Tuesday 22 May, though not many will be expected to attend the afternoon talks because the Assembly will be sitting. It is likely that most will attend the evening reception
- Dr Stephen Benn, RSC Parliamentary Affairs Officer, informed the meeting that the RSC has proved to be the most effective scientific society for raising the profile of science to UK Parliaments/Assemblies. The Science and the Assembly meeting will be the first large event for the new Assembly and will be an excellent opportunity for the scientific community to enhance its influence with WA Members. He provided members with a list of new Assembly Members, along with guidelines on how they make contact and interact with them
- The meeting was reminded that the RSC employed a consultant to the Welsh Assembly, Leigh Jeffes. Local Sections should ensure that they maintain contact with Leigh and, where possible, invite him to attend their meetings
- Concern was raised over the imminent abolition of the Committee for Recruitment and Retention of Members, particularly in the area of retention of members. It was noted that the new Membership Affairs Board would assume responsibility for recruitment and retention and was keen to ensure that all initiatives of the CRRM were maintained. The new board would set up strategic working parties to ensure momentum
- The meeting was informed that there had been a recent meeting of Local Section Benevolent Fund Representatives and Regional Benevolent Fund Co-ordinators in London. Members were reminded that, if they were aware of any member with problems, they should inform their local contact or Rosemary Davenport in TGH

After the general discussion, Dr Macdonald was pleased to announce that a member of the South Wales West had completed 10 years service on the committee and, during that time, had held one of the Honorary Officer positions. Dr Campbell said that the RSC relied upon the dedication of its members to be able to achieve its goals and objectives and that members were “the life blood of the Society” He presented **Neville Jones** with a certificate signed by the President and a Commemorative Plate Dr Simon then informed that another member was eligible for the award. **Dr John Macdonald**, North Wales had been a member of his Local Section Committee and had held office during that time. He was pleased to present him too with a certificate and a Commemorative Plate. The meeting applauded the two members.

The meeting concluded at 20:45