

Royal Society of Chemistry Welsh Regional Meeting

MINUTES of the Welsh Regional Meeting held at 18:30 on Thursday 12 March 2009 at the Ramada Plaza Wrexham, Ellice Way, Wrexham. LL13 7YH.

1.0 Welcome

John McDonald welcomed the members to the meeting.

2.0 RSC Activities

Jim Feast gave a brief presentation focussing on the new RSC Strategy on a page, how current activities map to this strategy and future activities.

3.0 Discussion

John McDonald invited members to comment on the content of the presentation and related issues including:

3.1 Membership statistics

- Is the recent increase in membership due to recruitment in the UK or abroad?
- The recent increase is largely down to recruitment in the UK.
- Student membership doubled in 2008 from 2007.
- The international cooperation agreements have resulted in an increase in International Partner Members and this comprises a network of ~200,000 people. There has also been an increase in the number of International Sections recently.

3.2 Although we have seen an increase in students choosing to study Chemistry at University, the number of school students studying Chemistry is decreasing. What can the RSC do?

- It was noted that Chemistry, Biology and Physics are studied as combined science in many schools.
- The RSC Council is discussing this issue and recognises how vital it is to have trained scientists. The need for inspirational chemistry teachers can not be overestimated in encouraging students to study Chemistry in further education.
- The RSC is influencing education by showing its presence through the media and influencing government. It has been acknowledged that MPs now recognise the RSC as an effective voice in parliament.

3.3 Update on Welsh Assembly matters

- Leigh Jeffes, RSC Welsh Assembly Liaison Officer, described how the 'Science and the Assembly' event is now in its fifth year. The theme this year is 'Science and Health'. An outline of the speakers, format, organisations involved and sponsorship was given.

- A Welsh Assembly Cross-Party Working Group on Science and Technology has been formed and Leigh Jeffes has taken the role of Secretary. Meetings are held tri-annually.
- The role of Chief Scientific Advisor has still not yet been filled but further information is expected at Easter.
- An interim report from the Enterprise and Learning Committee can be found on the website and a full report will be provided in June.
- Chris Adams enquired about final details for the 'Science and the Assembly' event in May. Leigh Jeffes responded that anyone who has registered for the event will be sent all the details by email.

3.4 Update on Benevolent Fund activities in Wales

- Jim Ballantine, Secretary and Treasurer, South Wales West Section Committee, voiced how useful the Volunteer Visitors had found the recent training event at Burlington House.
- It was highlighted that there are currently no beneficiaries in Wales and Gemma Wood clarified that money is available but that there had been no applications from any members in Wales.
- Concern was raised that Volunteer Visitors would be 'appraised' and it was suggested that the term 'appraisal' be changed in view of the fact that they are volunteers. Gemma Wood assured members that this had already been agreed. The 'appraisal' is merely a review, undertaken every 3 years, not just for the benefit of the RSC but also, to ensure that Volunteer Visitors are happy and receiving the support they need.

John McDonald invited members to discuss points that had been raised in advance of the meeting:

3.5 Mentoring Scheme

- A member expressed his concern that he had received no review and was not aware of any reporting process for his role as a mentor. He questioned at what point the relationship with his mentee should be reviewed or terminated.
- The RSC is aware that the mentoring programme needs further development and this is something which is being looked into.

3.6 Improving communication between groups and staff and working together more effectively

- Sections in Wales have been working well together and should look to continue this by sharing their specialities, learning from each other and prioritising their aims to align with the RSC strategy.
- Communication is key and the current aim of the RSC Networks Team is to enhance communication between members, Sections and staff. Any ideas or suggestions from members are welcomed.
- Malcolm Jones commented how useful he found the New Officers Briefing Day and that he felt the benefit of building a relationship with RSC staff on the day. He expressed the need to foster similar working relations with members from other Sections in Wales.
- Sections should work with other Sections in close proximity and not just regionally. Although devolution in Wales will make this increasingly

difficult, Sections in Wales must work together to enhance their relationship with the Welsh Assembly and make it as effective as possible.

- Sections were reminded that they can come to the RSC if they require support to increase beneficial activity for Wales.

3.7 Funding for Local Sections

- Concerns were raised over changes to the Local Section grants. Gemma Wood explained the provision of grants and that there has been no change to the way in which grants are calculated. If a Section has received a reduced grant in recent years this is because reserves have been over a certain threshold and the RSC is working with the Local Sections to reduce their reserves.
- Sections should not be afraid to spend their full grant and host a wide range of events. If additional funding is required Sections should approach the RSC Networks Team.

3.8 RSC Council

- Peter Lloyd expressed thanks to John McDonald for his work on RSC Council.
- It was noted that the representation of members on the RSC Council is excellent and that they are aware of cross-country issues.
- John McDonald recommended that Sections in Wales liaise closely to address how best to work with RSC Council going forward.

3.9 Regional Activities and Public Engagement

- The 'Science and Energy' demonstration, designed by Mr A.J.S (Bill) Williams, was highlighted as a good example of Sections working together.
- The suggestion was made that the North Wales Young Scientists' Symposium become a regional activity for Wales.
- Chris Adams commented on two recent inspiring initiatives: The Science Writing Competition and the Martin Poliakoff YouTube videos. He suggested that a competition based on these ideas be held in Wales.
- Other similar suggestions such as the Bill Bryson Award and the possibility of exhibiting posters in the Senate were discussed.

3.10 Organisation of Local Section activities in Sections without a University Chemistry Department

- Sections should organise a range of activities to suit all members and not just those in academia. Sections were reminded of the need to be creative and to use RSC resources. The Networks Team would be keen to receive any new and innovative ideas which could be shared with other Sections.
- One member observed how many challenging issues had been recognised during the meeting (including the lack of universities and industry in Wales and failing lecture programmes) and hence posed the question of what could be done.
- John McDonald suggested that Sections consider forming a steering group to address these issues together.

- Sections were encouraged to work with RSC Interest Groups and other networks in their region and to think of new communication methods to deliver activities, network and enhance knowledge transfer.

3.11 The Chemistry Centre

- Will the Chemistry Centre be used for Committee meeting or will they be moved to TGH, Cambridge?
- Although a number of staff will move to Cambridge, all Committee meetings will continue to be held in London at the new Chemistry Centre.
- The opportunity for members to use the facilities at the new Chemistry Centre will also be available.

4.0 Close and thanks

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