

The University of Manchester

School of Chemistry

Minutes of Research Committee Meeting Number 14
held on Thursday 15 September 2005 at 2.00 pm in Room 7.27

Present: Professor GA Morris (Chair), Dr MP Attfield (*vice* Turner), Professor JNL Connor (*vice* Hillier), Dr M Morris, Dr PLA Popelier, Professor JD Sutherland (*vice* Thomas), Dr A Fretwell (Secretary)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Professor Hillier, Dr Regan, Professor Thomas, Professor Turner and Professor Winpenny

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Full economic costing

Dr Fretwell gave a presentation on full economic costing (fEC) and the impact on the School of Chemistry. The main points covered were:

- the fEC model implemented by the University
- models for estimating academic time spent on projects
- costing of named technicians (& EOs) on grants and time sheets
- estates and indirect charges calculations
- capturing additional information to calculate the fEC

Action: Dr Fretwell will draft a form to collect the additional data required to complete a full economic costing for a proposal.

Action: It was agreed that Dr Fretwell will monitor fEC submissions and report back in three months time regarding investigator time and technician charging in the School

The Faculty draft guidance document on pricing and costing had been previously circulated and was discussed. Professor Kell noted the need for such documents to have a name attached in order to direct feedback, and the existence of detailed advice from UMIP on contract costing. The document gives guidance on how much to charge for industrial and commercial contracts; however, where there is flexibility and discretion in pricing, the responsibility for price lies primarily with the Head of School. There was concern from the Committee that the document as it stood could give the wrong messages to younger members of staff, and that it should not be shown to potential industrial collaborators.

Action: Dr Fretwell to circulate the University's new draft RGC10 form, and the pricing guidance issued by other Faculties. Professor Morris to provide feedback to the Associate Dean for Research.

It was agreed that a sensible and transparent approach for the School is needed, that the Faculty document does not provide this, and that in particular the policy for industrial studentships should be considered. There was concern that industrial collaborators could go elsewhere for 'cheaper' research of comparable quality.

Action: Dr Fretwell to brief the Management Team on the implications of fEC.

Concern was expressed at the lack of adequate information systems support for the School's research.

Action: Professor Morris to raise this issue at the next Management Team meeting .

5. BBSRC studentships update

The BBSRC call for applications for DTA studentship awards was announced in May, however the University and Faculty ruling on how to proceed was not fully decided until two weeks before the September deadline. Professor Morris expressed his opinion that the resulting bid was of poor quality, and may be less effective in securing funding than should be the case given that the School of Chemistry holds more BBSRC funding than any other UK Chemistry department. One area of particular concern was that there were significant problems in collecting statistical data for the Faculty. Professor Morris felt that there were clear lessons that need to be learnt, particularly regarding the collection of statistical data for the forthcoming RAE exercise. He also noted that that in other Faculties the Associate Dean for Research was more closely involved.

6. RAE 2008

Professor Morris reported on the recent meeting of Faculty RAE group. Presentations from this meeting on weightings given to outputs/environment/esteem for different panels and from Professor Williamson of the Engineering sub-panel have been previously circulated.

The Engineering panel has published detailed guidance on how its assessments will be made:

- Outputs will be judged on individual quality; citation or impact factors will not be considered, a commentary of up to 100 words for every single paper returned is expected
- Esteem factors will be graded relative to the stage of career and level of appointment of an individual. [Professor Morris reminded the Committee that we will need to have constructive esteem factors for everyone in the School and that we should be encouraging everyone to address this now]
- The percentage for environment (20%) will be divided equally between textual information from the RA5 return and PhD numbers. The latter will be implemented by giving the unit with the best ratio of PhDs to FTEs the full 10%, and scoring the others pro rata

It is not known whether the Chemistry sub-panel is adopting an equally prescriptive approach, but the statement in the Chemistry sub-panel draft statement, that research expenditure in the form of expenditure per FTE and research assistants per FTE will be

regarded as evidence of the research environment, may be a key factor. Professor Morris highlighted the implication that subjective judgements will play a large part in the assessment, and the Chemistry sub-panel 's emphasis on looking to the future.

Professor Morris reported on the external review exercise. Mr Parker from the Faculty is to deliver a complete set of pro formas by the end of the week, for checking by the School. The three elements required for the exercise are the individual pro formas, the statistical return covering postgraduate student numbers, PDRA numbers and research spend, and the written commentary from the School setting out its research agenda. The external reviewers selected by the School have both agreed to review the School; dates for the end of November or beginning of December have not yet been agreed.

7*. Research database

There was no request for discussion.

8. External presentation

In a written report tabled in his absence, Dr Regan informed the Committee that Dr Liem has now taken over all of the website development, and has written new style sheets from scratch to match the University's corporate style. Most of the content has now been migrated to Dreamweaver (but is not yet live), and Dr Liem is working on incorporating images and finishing the home page. The new web-site will be launched on 1 October. The individual academic staff pages are already live on the Dreamweaver-based site.

The University is negotiating to purchase another Content Management System, to replace CMS. Dr Morris wished to see that any new system implemented was robust and fit for purpose, before changing from this current system of using Dreamweaver.

9. Any other business

The School policy on overseas research studentships (ORS) was discussed. Chemistry has this year lost out to other Schools in winning these studentships. Professor Sutherland questioned the use of School funds to subsidise ORS student maintenance when the School is not in a position to make an accurate assessment of the quality of students. Committee members reported variable quality of ORS students. The previous rationale for subsidising these has been the contribution to overseas student numbers (and fees), the improvement to global visibility, and the potentially good standard of students. It was noted that the true cost of research students is considerably greater than either the home or the overseas fee, that the subsidy needed by an ORS student is not greatly dissimilar to that for a home student under the current financial model, and that the School should take an overview of all relevant research student categories when allocating resources.

Action: Professor Morris to report to the Management Team that the Committee questions the automatic subsidy of ORS students.

10. Date of next meeting

Thursday 6 October, at 2 pm in room 7.27.

Ann Fretwell
20 September 2005