

The University of Manchester

School of Chemistry

Minutes of Research Committee Meeting Number 17
held on Thursday 2 February 2006 at 4.00 pm in Room 7.28
Operations Subgroup

Present: Professor GA Morris (Chair), Dr S Faulkner, Professor H Gleeson (invited), Professor IH Hillier, Professor DB Kell, Professor P O'Brien, Dr PLA Popelier, Professor ML Turner, Professor REP Winpenny, Dr A Fretwell (Secretary)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr Morris, Dr Regan, and Dr Schroeder

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising

Professor John Kelly of Trinity College Dublin will be assisting Professors Holmes and Chisholm with the external review of research on 23 and 24 February 2006.

Dr Morris is looking at the matter of obtaining software applications, in consultation with the Faculty Head of IS. The School has purchased site licenses for the University for ChemDraw / ChemOffice and also for NMR software. It was noted that central IT services do not publish a list of site licenses purchased for the University. It was felt that this should be co-ordinated centrally, since it is often more economical to buy a University wide site license, rather than buy many separate licenses for small numbers of individuals in Schools.

Professor Morris noted that information on facilities and equipment in the School has not yet been made available on the School intranet.

4. Open discussion with Professor H Gleeson, Associate Dean for Research

In a wide-ranging discussion, the Committee expressed concern that the research activity of the School was being let down by a lack of response from Faculty Finance and Human Resources teams. In particular post-award invoicing was a problem. Professor Gleeson reported that she was aware of the state of affairs and was actively working to improve the situation. Professor Gleeson requested that specific problems be brought to her attention with full details, so that she can act on them, and that Professor O'Brien be encouraged to make representations.

Action: All members to email Dr Fretwell with details of specific operational problems experienced with Faculty and central University administration, and Dr Fretwell to coordinate a response to Professor Gleeson.

Professor Gleeson reported briefly on the Faculty Administration Review Process which has recommended that significant additional post-award administration is further devolved to the Schools. Discussion is taking place on how to resource such devolution. Professor Gleeson advised that full details were in the report that has just been published and that Dr Morris has a copy. Concerns were expressed by the Committee over the length of time taken to instigate this review and the delay anticipated in acting on the recommendations.

It was noted by the Committee that this recommendation has serious implications for training and resources. The Committee felt that the Faculty has put staff resources into the wrong areas of administration.

The full economic costing (fEC) rates implemented by the University were criticised by members of the Committee for being too low compared to similar institutions. It was noted that these rates are being reviewed, and that the funding associated with fEC will go straight to the Schools.

Professor Gleeson discussed the difficulty in directing external and internal enquiries to appropriate contacts within the University, in areas of science that cross traditional discipline boundaries, e.g. climate change. The University web-site might facilitate this, if it can be searched by scientific topic. Professor Gleeson suggested that informal networks, facilitated by the Faculty but driven from the bottom up, might assist.

Professor Morris requested that Professor Gleeson clarify the Faculty policy on internal peer review. Professor Gleeson stated that it is Faculty policy that early career staff have their grant proposals internally peer reviewed until they have an appropriate record of successful grant applications. It is expected that Schools can dictate what is an appropriate record (normally two successful applications to a research council). It is also recommended that all staff have their proposals internally peer reviewed generally as this is good practice, but that there is no blanket requirement for experienced staff to do this.

5. Research groupings for RAE

Professor Morris circulated a list of research structures used by competitor institutions and an excerpt from the RAE 2008 'Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) criteria and working methods by subject panels' document. The documentation for UoA 18 (Chemistry) states:

'There will be no advantage in artificially grouping staff in delineated research areas if there is little or no evidence of a common intellectual basis in that group.'

Professor O'Brien posed the question: 'are the current research groupings the best way to present the School?'. Professor Kell suggested a renaming of the Biological grouping to 'Biological and Bioanalytical' to reflect better the nature of the work undertaken within the grouping. Another suggestion was to rename the Inorganic grouping 'Inorganic and Radiochemistry'. It was noted that any changes will need to be made in the next three to six months.

Action: Professor Morris to email all members for their considered comments and suggestions on changing research grouping names.

6. Any other business

Professor O'Brien reported that the £750k contract for CoEBio3, from the Northern Way Initiative, has been signed. A contract between CoEBio3 and BASF has also been given the go-ahead.

7. Date of next meeting

Operations subgroup: Thursday 2 March, 4.00 to 5.00pm in room 7.27.

Ann Fretwell
20 February 2006