

The University of Manchester

School of Chemistry

Minutes of Research Committee Meeting Number 36
held on Thursday 24 April 2008 at 3.00 pm in Room 7.28
Operations Subgroup

Present: Professor GA Morris(Chair), Dr PM Budd (*vice* Turner), Dr RAW Dryfe, Prof JR Helliwell (*vice* Kell), Prof IH Hillier, Prof SM Pimblott, Dr DJ Procter (also *vice* Clayden), Dr AC Regan, Prof NJ Turner, Professor REP Winpenny, Dr A Fretwell (Secretary)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Professor Clayden, Professor Kell, Dr Popelier, Ms Snook, and Professor M Turner.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes were accepted, subject to a revision.

3. Matters arising

The graphene Science and Innovation Award proposal led by the School of Physics has been submitted, with Chemistry as a co-investigator.

4. Review of CoEBio3

In response to a request from the Head of School that the Research Committee review all the Centres in the School, Professor NJ Turner gave a presentation on the Centre of Excellence for Biocatalysis, Biotransformations and Biocatalytic Manufacture, this was followed by a general discussion. The following points were raised:

- The Centre was initiated with significant funding from the Northern Way Initiative
- The Centre is based in the MIB building at the University of Manchester, and encompasses expertise from Heriot Watt University, the University of Strathclyde and the University of York
- Companies appreciate working with a single University from a contractual point of view, the University then subcontracts to other collaborators
- The Centre has attracted two large industrial contracts
- The Commercial Director (Paul Goddard) has been vital in negotiating large industrial contracts, he is more commercially aware than University Business Development Managers
- The Industrial Affiliates Scheme has generated £1million over the past three years, a second phase of the Industrial Affiliates Scheme is planned
- The Centre runs specialised training courses, the emphasis of these courses is on providing training and not purely on financial considerations
- There is a shortage of trained industrial biotechnologists at graduate and postgraduate level
- Should the School propose Chemistry with Biotechnology as a degree programme, with industrial sponsorship? The Northwest is industrially strong in this field

Action: Professor Winpenny to recommend a Chemistry with Biotechnology degree programme to the teaching committee, with input from the School of CEAS

The factors behind the success of CoEBio3 were thought to be:

- A unique selling point – in this case the scale-up facility
- The MIB building is attractive to industry
- Significant start-up funds were won by Professor Stan Roberts to start the Centre
- Professor Roberts was able to invest much time and effort in getting the Centre started
- Large industrial contracts have been won
- The Centre has a core of excellent, well funded research
- The Centre is not just Manchester-focused but draws in expertise from other Universities

Can we adopt this model, or elements of it, for other Centres? Radiation Chemistry aims to be the number one Centre for radiation chemistry in the world.

Professor Morris thanked Professor Turner for his informative presentation and contribution to discussion.

5. EPSRC DTCs

The School is leading on three DTC proposals, Actinides, Nanoscience and Materials Chemistry and is involved in an Energy bid. The bids are currently being screened by a University panel; the deadline for submission to EPSRC is 6 May. There was concern that all the bids are too widely dispersed and that they may not significantly benefit the School.

The committee noted with concern, the lack of direction and late response from the central University, in organising a mechanism for reviewing these bids and providing useful feedback. There are still unanswered questions over common costing information for these proposals, and the level of funding for management and administrative support that can be requested.

6. EPSRC Grand Challenges

Professor Morris discussed the document, previously circulated, on ideas for grand challenges which have been suggested by members of staff in the School. The response will be made at Institutional level, for the EPSRC deadline of 11 June, and requires an A4 sheet for each area identified. We will therefore need to select about six themes from the dozens submitted; from the School's point of view the real value of the exercise has been in the wealth of good ideas coming forward that could be the basis for responsive mode and other applications. We are waiting for the Vice-President for Research to rule on how the University should respond to the EPSRC call; when a decision is made Professor Morris will contact members of the committee by email to decide priorities for the School's contribution.

Action: awaits University decision.

7. Advertising summer placement opportunities

Dr Sarah Hart and Dr Claire Eyers have requested that opportunities for summer placements be put on the School web-site. This was endorsed by the Committee.

Action: Dr Fretwell to liaise with the Faculty's web support team.

8. Indicative EPSRC DTA allocation

The School has been notified of its indicative EPSRC DTA allocation of £908k for 2008. Staff are to be congratulated; this is a healthy amount and only slightly down on last year's record award of £980k.

9. Any other business

It was decided that the DTA studentships should be reviewed in June to look at unfilled allocations. Do we need to set a deadline, so that unfilled studentships can be reallocated, or would this encourage offers to weaker candidates? Last year, unfilled studentships were put back into the pool and reallocated the following year according to the model.

It was noted that at the last ORS studentship meeting, there was no representative from the Faculty. Only one studentship was allocated to Chemistry.

It was agreed that we should invite the Associate Dean for Research (Professor Clegg) to the next Research Committee meeting.

Professor Morris had previously circulated by email a press release from the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries (ABPI). Manchester is the top funded University. Nationally the overall funding allocated to PDRAs is approximately equivalent to the funding for studentships; however the School receives funding almost solely for studentships.

Professor Winpenny raised the issue of the number of colloquia on the previous Wednesday; an RSC lecture, an RSC postgraduate symposium and poster session, a PSI lecture, an Inorganic colloquium and a Materials colloquium had all taken place on the same afternoon. The level of activity in the School is impressive, but the degree of coordination is not: we should not have this sort of clash. The problem appears to reside in part with externally-organised lectures that are overlaid on existing commitments.

Action: Professor Morris to propose to the Management Team that colloquia organised for Wednesday afternoons in addition to the programme set at the beginning of the academic year should be approved by an Academic Co-ordinator, to ensure that there are no clashes.

10. Date of next meeting

Strategy: Thursday 5 June, 2.00pm in room 7.27/7.28.

Ann Fretwell
1 May 2008