

The University of Manchester

School of Chemistry

Minutes of Research Committee Meeting Number 38
held on Thursday 17 July 2008 at 3.00 pm in Room 7.28
Operations Subgroup

Present: Professor GA Morris(Chair), Professor P O'Brien, Professor RAW Dryfe, Professor IH Hillier, Dr AC Regan, Professor ML Turner, Professor MW Anderson, Dr A Fretwell, Mrs K Tarasova (Secretary)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Professor Clayden, Professor Kell, Professor Pimblott, Professor Popelier, Professor N Turner, Professor Winpenny.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes from the previous Operations Subgroup meeting (24 April 2008) were accepted.

3. Matters arising

- Professor Morris reported that a system was in place to address the ongoing problem of additional colloquia clashing with other events in the School calendar: all organisers of colloquia are asked to communicate at the planning stage with Dr N Burton who acts as an Academic Co-ordinator for the School.
- Professor Morris reported that an attempt to identify champions to promote the EPSRC current leading research themes (energy, digital economy, nanoscience, and next generation healthcare) was so far unsuccessful. At the Strategy Committee meeting on 5 June, Professor Pimblott volunteered himself as a champion for the energy theme, and Professor Winpenny for nanotechnology. Two remaining themes are still in need of champions.

4. Review of Centre for Nanoporous Materials

In response to a request from the Head of School that the Research Committee review all the Centres in the School, Professor MW Anderson gave a presentation on the Centre for Nanoporous Materials, this was followed by a general discussion. The following points were made:

- The Centre currently employs 7 academics, 3 PDRAs and 26 PhD students (15 students are Chemistry based, 11 are SCEAS)
- The Centre is based in the Chemistry building at the University of Manchester, and collaborates closely with the SCEAS
- There are currently 18 on-going projects, which cover a range of different activities. The major project is Crystal Growth of Nanoporous Materials, funded by EPSRC, with international collaboration and external partners
- The Centre has excellent facilities, with most of the required equipment already in place. Small concerns were raised about access to microscope facilities within Chemistry; currently staff in the Centre have to use facilities in Materials or elsewhere within the University

- The Centre has well-established collaborations with many industrial partners such as ExxonMobil, BASF, Chevron, UOP and others, and with other academic institutions such as UCL, Bath, St Andrews, Cambridge and Bristol
- The Centre works widely with groups and organisations in France, Sweden, Germany, Norway, USA, Japan, China, Thailand, Nigeria, India, Netherlands and many others
- The Centre has no rigorous management structure: each member of the team is in charge of developing their own scientific career
- The Centre is currently developing an outline Programme bid to the EPSRC

The factors behind the success of the Centre for Nanoporous Materials were thought to be:

- The Centre has a core of well-funded research
- The Centre's publication list is good – a considerable number of articles are published every year in prestigious international journals
- The members of the Centre have membership of various international panels, including the International Zeolite Association and the EPSRC National Crystallographic Service Management Advisory Panel
- The members of the Centre have good international reputations and are often invited to write review articles and book chapters

Professor O'Brien commented on the shortage of evidence that the Centre is generating diverse funding from various sources, and questioned the Centre's sustainability. Professor Morris raised a concern about the large number of students (26) supported by the Centre which, under the fEC regulations can be a substantial financial burden to the Schools. Professor Anderson pointed out that the Centre attracts a lot of overseas students, generating income for the School. The Committee noted with concern that the current financial model of the Centre is very dependent on one core grant. Professor Morris suggested that some income could be generated from external use of the Centre's facilities. Professor Anderson had not previously supported this idea because of the concern that staff in the Centre may then experience a shortage in equipment availability time.

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

Action: Professor Anderson's presentation to go on the School website.

5. Mechanisms for coordination of programme grant applications

Professor Morris noted that recently there has been a major shift towards supporting Programme grants within the EPSRC, and the School therefore needs a mechanism for promoting these bids and providing useful feedback. The Committee noted with concern that currently there is no co-ordination within the School on the number of applications to the same panel, which could lead to embarrassing overlapping of ideas and equipment requests.

Action: Professor Morris/Professor Micklefield to ensure that there are no overlaps in applications for the same resources to the same panel.

6. Update on DTC progress

The School is submitting two full DTC proposals: Actinides (Professor F Livens) and Nanoscience (Professor R Winpenny); the deadline is 14 August. The University held a workshop to help academics with DTC applications and the bids are being screened and submitted by the University central research services.

7. iProc Training for Academics

Professor Morris reported on the situation with iProc training for staff within the School. He pointed out that the three-hour training which is currently offered by the University is necessitated by the poor design of the system, and that for most users the iProc system is unlikely to provide any saving in time. Professor Morris advised that this training not be routinely recommended to academic members of staff, suggested that arrangements instead be made for purchase requisitions to be submissible electronically as Excel documents to Stores, a departmental secretary, or a nominated PDRA who will have been trained.

Action: Dr Fretwell to arrange with Ms Snook.

8. EPSRC KTA call

Dr Fretwell had previously circulated by email an EPSRC document with information on a KTA (Knowledge Transfer Accounts) call for proposals – deadline is 5 November 2008. This is a new EPSRC scheme that is replacing the current CTA scheme, and is focused on innovative ideas with commercial potential.

The new scheme is not based on supporting PG students, as previously, but on knowledge transfer and the translation of EPSRC-funded research into commerce, and though it potentially offers a large pool of resources, it is unlikely to be usable for supporting research. It was pointed out that since only one application per institution is allowed, the call must be closely co-ordinated by the central University which could potentially create organisational problems.

9. Any other business

It was noted that Imperial College London are inviting applications for their new Junior Research Fellowships scheme to support outstanding early-career scientists looking for an opportunity to focus on research and establish scientific independence on a competitive salary. It was agreed that a similar initiative from Manchester should be strongly supported.

It has been announced that Professor Winpenny will be the new Associate Dean for Research for the Faculty.

The Research Committee thanked Professor Morris for his long and outstanding service as a Director of Research for the School. Professor Micklefield will start as a new Director of Research on 1 September.

10. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed in September.

Katya Tarasova
1 August 2008