

The University of Manchester
School of Chemistry

Minutes of Research Committee Meeting Number
held on Wednesday 16 December 2009 at 2.00 pm in 7.27/7.28

Research Committee Meeting

Present: Professor J Micklefield (Chair), Professor M Anderson, Dr P Budd, Dr A Fretwell, Professor R Goodacre, Dr R Layfield, Professor E McInnes, Professor S Pimblott, Dr R Pritchard, Professor D Procter, Professor J Thomas, Mrs K Tarasova (Secretary)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Professor S Yeates.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

Minutes from the previous Research Committee meeting held on 3 November 2009 were accepted with one minor correction: it should read 'Drug Discovery theme was renamed to Health and Chemical Intervention' (Chemical Biology theme was included in the list of originally proposed themes).

3. Theme and theme leader assignment (Prof J Micklefield)

Professor J Micklefield reported that the new research structure matrix was circulated to the academic staff; all replies were collated in one document which was distributed to the Committee members. The document demonstrates that the vast majority of staff responded in a positive way. It was noted that three themes (Analytical Science, Health and Chemical Intervention and Nanoscience) had less than three people assigning them as their first choice. However, Prof J Micklefield suggested that the School should go ahead with the proposed research structure and changes can be made as and if required.

Prof J Micklefield requested that the Committee discuss the proposed theme leaders, taking into consideration that some members of staff have already too many responsibilities or currently are on a sabbatical leave. Following the ongoing discussion during which members of the Committee expressed their views and suggested possible candidates, the following was proposed: Prof R Goodacre for Analytical Science, Prof N Turner for Chemical Biology, Prof F Livens for Energy and Environment, Prof S Flitsch for Health and Chemical Intervention, Prof M Turner for Materials Chemistry, Prof P O'Brien for Nanoscience, Prof P Popelier for Simulation and Modelling, Prof G Morris for Spectroscopy, Structure and Dynamics and Prof J Clayden for Synthesis.

Action: Prof J Micklefield to make informal requests with the proposed candidates, and finalize the theme leaders at the Management Team meeting.

It was agreed that theme leaders stay in post for 2 years initially, then each appointment is revised by the Research Committee; early revision is possible if required. It was suggested that each theme has also a deputy theme leader.

Prof J Micklefield reported that the constructive discussions on redesigning of the School research web-site had started. The work will be committed under the supervision of Dr J McDouall, with major inputs from Dr A Fretwell and Dr S O'Hagan. Prof J Micklefield asked the Committee to send in their ideas to help define the new School research web-site.

4. REF Consultation (Prof J Micklefield)

The REF consultation document was circulated to all members of staff. The document was summarised by Prof J Micklefield who pointed out that REF will focus on: Outputs (60%), Impact (25%), and Environment (15%).

Outputs: there will be maximum three or four outputs submitted for each researcher; some outputs will be allowed 'double-weight'; outputs will be assessed against criteria of 'rigour, originality and significance' and will produce a graded four star sub-profile. RAE2008 demonstrated that staff who submitted outputs in the higher impact journals received higher levels of citation on average.

Impact: there are following types of impact – economic, social, public policy, health, environment, cultural and quality of life; each submitted unit will provide a number of case studies describing specific examples of research-driven impacts and an overarching impact statement for the school. This would fit well with the School's existing research centres which is the School's strength. On the negative side, the School is not particularly strong in establishing commercial activities.

Environment: covers the following areas – resourcing includes staffing, research income, infrastructure and facilities, management includes forward strategy, staff development and training of postgraduate researchers, engagement includes arrangements for the exchange of people and ideas with research user organisations, public engagement, support for interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and wider contributions to the research base and relevant esteem indicators. The School will need to demonstrate the added value that can be gained from the interdisciplinary institutes and centres, to look seriously into public engagement, and to work hard to maintain the existing infrastructure and facilities.

It was suggested to devote one of the future Research Committee meetings entirely to REF issues including how to encourage the staff to optimise their REF outputs. It could be useful if an REF dedicated meeting has a list of topics, including questions regarding the REF document, which is circulated to Committee prior to the meeting.

5. KTA Update (Prof J Micklefield)

Prof J Micklefield reported that a University panel had met to discuss the first round of KTA applications. Only one proposal from Chemistry was considered by the panel. Three School proposals were not considered because they had not addressed all the specific requirements for the individual scheme. The staff involved with these proposals are encouraged to discuss them directly with Miranda McCormick, Head of Knowledge Transfer for the University, to prepare them for resubmission.

It was pointed out that the School should not be asked to subsidise the overheads and all overheads costs should be included in the costing of each proposal.

6. Postgraduate recruitment (Dr R Pritchard)

Submission and Completion Rates: Dr R Pritchard reported that the School's current PhD submission rate of 80% within 4 years is very high; however the completion rate of 44% is below the acceptable threshold and needs to be improved. Dr R Pritchard pointed out that research councils require institutions to record both submission and completion rates and institutions whose results fall below the acceptable threshold may face sanctions. It is therefore very important that high submission and completion rate is encouraged and maintained within the School.

DTA allocation model for the School: the former method for allocation of DTA studentships was to top slice six for each Research Grouping and to award the remainder according to the numerical model based on individual EPSRC income. In future the DTA grants will be issued to the University by EPSRC without the supporting information of individual School values, and a strategic School allocation method will become increasingly more important. Prof C Whitehead suggested the Research Committee formulates a strategy for assigning studentships which will include not just DTA but also the School endowments funds. Priorities could be, but are not limited to: early career staff; priority or investment research areas (e.g. nano, energy, modelling); staff changing research areas; graduates from other universities; top graduating students.

It was decided to allocate six studentships by the individual EPSRC income model (Prof D Procter, Prof J Clayden, Prof E McInnes, Prof R Dryfe, Prof D Collison and Dr B Coe) and to allocate the remaining six for this year via a School strategic competition.

Action: Dr A Fretwell to formulate and administer a DTA competition within the School.

7. Any other business

At the previous meetings concern was raised over the small number of EPSRC Programme grants submitted by the School. In response to this, Prof M Anderson prepared and distributed data on a success rate of EPSRC programme grant applications submitted by all UK universities from May 2008 to December 2009. The figures revealed a general low success rate, with higher level of success in Materials (4 awarded out of 6) and lower level of success in Chemistry and Physical Sciences (5 awarded out of 19).

Prof J Micklefield reported that the SCEAS/Chemistry workshop which took place on 20 November was a success.

Prof J Micklefield reminded that the deadline for submission of RSC award nominations is 31 January 2010 and asked the Committee to make their nominations.

8. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed.