

The University of Manchester
School of Chemistry

Minutes of Research Committee Meeting
held on Thursday 7 April 2011 at 12.00pm in 7.027/7.028

Research Committee Meeting

Present: Professor J Micklefield (Chair), Professor M Anderson, Dr D Berrisford, Professor P Budd, Professor R Goodacre, Dr S Koehler, Dr R Layfield, Dr L Natrajan, Professor S Pimblott, Dr R Pritchard, Professor D Procter, Mrs K Tarasova (Secretary)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr S Coote, Dr A Fretwell, Professor E McInnes, Professor J Thomas, Professor S Yeates.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes of the previous Research Committee meeting held on 10 February 2011 were accepted as a correct record.

Professor J Micklefield gave a brief update on REF 2014 (the email was sent out to all academic staff in the School):

- We are informed that 1*/2* activities will not attract any funding. It is therefore essential that the School maximizes the number of 3*/4* outputs.
- The School needs to start work on preparing impact case studies (possibly six in total) and we ask for suggestions of research undertaken in the School during the period from 1993 until present. Drafts of impact case studies will be submitted to the University REF team by 1 June.

Professor J Micklefield reported that in response to George Whiteside's paper in Nature the School organised the Think Tank working group. The group's task is discussion and revision of present (traditional) teaching methods in Chemistry. The group includes Professor N Turner (the Chair), Professor S Flitsch, Professor S Yeates, Professor M Turner, Professor R Winpenny, Professor J Micklefield, Professor G Procter, Dr L Natrajan and Dr M Ingleson. The group met a few times and their suggestions will be reported to the School academic staff at the Away Day on 17 May.

3. Strategy and plans for 2011/12 seminar series

Professor J Micklefield thanked the seminar organisers (Dr D Berrisford, Dr L Natrajan, Dr R Henchman and Dr S Koehler) for doing an excellent job.

Professor J Micklefield summarized critical comments from the members of staff as follows:

- There is currently an issue with coordination of School seminar/colloquium programme. There is no clear structure of who is responsible for what - too

many people are involved in organising too many seminars and there is often a lack of communication between them.

- The quality of speakers is not always high enough: volume over quality problem.
- There are clashes with PSI and MIB programmes.
- Record of attendance for both staff and students is very poor.
- Research theme leaders are not engaged enough in providing suggestions for the programme.
- Seminars are not properly advertised.
- Conclusion: this is damaging to the external reputation of the School and needs to be sorted out for the next academic year.

A discussion followed and the following suggestions were made:

- There should be one person in the School with an overall decision-making responsibility for the seminar/colloquium programme. However, a better organised consultation, particularly with research theme leaders, is required.
- Every speaker should have a host (an associated member of staff) who takes full responsibility for attendance of the right audience.
- There should be a better system of advertising: a short abstract of each talk to be circulated in advance.
- There should be a tighter programme with more prestigious speakers: one seminar/colloquium per week across twelve weeks in each semester (3 from each section).
- There should be a better integration with the MIB and PSI programmes.

Action: seminar organisers to report the exact plan of action to the next Research Committee meeting.

4. Review of studentship funding

Dr R Pritchard reported that there are 9 studentships available for 12/13 EPSRC DTA allocation which is one more than in the previous year. One studentship is matched against Nano DTC, eight will be allocated by strategy competition which as previously will be announced later in the year.

Dr R Pritchard reported that the UK Border Agency recently published new immigration rules and policy statements regarding the student visa system. The system is currently being reviewed, however the government has already announced tighter requirements which will be phased in by April 2012. The Post Study Work route will be closed from April 2012 which means that graduates may have to leave the UK at the end of their PhD studies (as against two years visa extension which is currently available), however a few concessions have already been made including no cap on switching to Tier 2 for UK University graduates who have secured a graduate level job.

Dr R Pritchard announced that one extra EPSRC DTA studentship award is available to anyone who can obtain industrial CASE funding and asked the RC to decide if the studentship should be filled this year or deferred until the next year. The RC decided that if possible the studentship should be filled this year. The email should be sent to all

members of academic staff inviting them to take part in a small competition with a short deadline.

Action: Jason Micklefield/Ann Fretwell to send out an email regarding the competition for the extra studentship award.

5. Report of efficiency savings changes for RC research grants

Professor J Micklefield reported that there will be imminent changes forthcoming as a result of the Wakeham review into the Financial Sustainability and Efficiency in Full Economic Costing of Research in UK Higher Education Institutions (report issued June 2010). This was followed by the RCUK report 'Efficiency 2011-15: Ensuring excellence with impact'. Professor J Micklefield summarised the RCUK report as follows:

- The first of the changes comes into effect from 1 April 2011 and it is a topslice to the University Research Council funding on all current portfolio of projects. The University has been placed in a higher efficiency band so the topslice has been set at only 1% (as against possible 3.5%).
- From 1 July 2011 there will also be a cut in the University Indirect Rate applied to all RC funded projects.
- From 1 April 2011 the Research Councils will no longer inflate the award through the application of a set indexation rate at award stage.
- The threshold for equipment on a Research Council project will raise from £3K to £10K. For any bid including equipment the University will need to provide evidence that we do not already own an asset which could be used. This requirement comes into force from 1 May 2011.
- In addition, the Research Councils have been particularly hard hit in their allocation of Capital funding – the University will be required to fund a significant part of equipment in the range of £10K to OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) threshold. This is anticipated to be around 50%.
- A new Research Equipment form will be introduced by the University in order to comply with the new RCUK requirements. The form will be completed for all research grant applications requesting individual pieces of equipment over £10K with effect from 1 May 2011.
- For equipment above the OJEU threshold (current equivalent of €125,000) a business case will be required.

It was commented that these and all further details regarding the changes should be circulated to the academic staff in the School as early as possible so that the staff can do some ahead planning.

6. HESA figures on research income

Table of HESA research income for 2009/10 for all chemistry departments was circulated to the Research Committee prior to the meeting. The figures demonstrate that we are 4th amongst UK Chemistry Departments with £9.7M behind Cambridge (£15.7M), Oxford (£14.8M) and Imperial College (£9.9M). Professor J Micklefield pointed out that the figures may appear less complimentary if we consider income per FTE as some of chemistry departments are significantly smaller than us in number of academic staff. Detailed

examination of the figures also shows that we fall below the sector for income from charities and EC, so this is one area of opportunity.

7. Update on value of School's research grant and contracts

The data and corresponding chart (compiled by Dr A Fretwell) for all School awards from August 05 until March 11 were circulated to the RC prior to the meeting. The figures cover a total value of grants per each finance year and provide a breakdown per type of sponsor (i.e. UKRCs, EC, UK Government, Industry, Charities, etc.). The figures revealed an overall significant rise of awards in 09/10 and this positive trend continues in 10/11, particularly in EC section. It was commented that the figures are encouraging and demonstrate that academics in the School are learning to look for more diverse funding opportunities.

8. Date of Next Meeting

16th of June 2011 at 12.00pm in Room 7.27/7.28.