

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER
SCHOOL OF CHEMISTRY

Unconfirmed Minutes of the Teaching Committee Meeting

held Wednesday 18 January 2006 at 12.30pm in Chemistry Building, Rm 7.27

Present: Dr Henchman, Dr Brisdon, Dr Berrisford, Dr Gorry, Prof Whitehead,
Dr McDouall, Dr Flower, Mrs Helm.

1. Apologies for Absence.

Apologies were received from Dr Heath and Prof Thomas.

2. Minutes of Meeting held on 7 December 2005 (Paper 05/15).

The minutes were confirmed as correct.

3. Any Matters Arising not covered in the Agenda.

There were none.

4. Oral Report from Director of Teaching to include:

• **Entry grades for 2007**

At a previous meeting of this committee had agreed to a slow increase in entry requirements over a period of time, with the next increase to ABC for standard courses, BBC for Medicinal Chemistry and ABB for premium courses. This information had been passed to the Faculty some time ago. However, the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning had recently reported back to say that these requirements were out of line with the rest of EPS and as a result he was imposing the following entry requirements: AAB for the premium M.Chem. courses, ABB for standard M.Chem. courses and ABC for B.Sc. courses. The meeting was unhappy with this and felt that this sudden change would adversely affect the School's admissions and might necessitate admitting applicants with lower grades in order to meet targets, this would mean the school giving information to applicants as we have recently regarded our offer as a threshold. An inability to meet target figures would also mean having to resort to clearing, which the School wished to avoid.

• **Absence for religious observance**

Dr McDouall had already raised this issue at a previous meeting and the committee was aware that although guidelines for absence from examinations existed, these did not cover absence from either practical classes or coursework assessments. The VP for Teaching and Learning had produced an amendment to the existing guidelines to the effect that Schools should try to accommodate students whenever these events occurred. The meeting was not convinced that it was possible to implement this policy and declined to include the information in the Blue Book. Dr McDouall assured the meeting he had responded to the Associate Dean detailing the difficulties that would arise and outlining the School's intentions.

• **E-learning**

The University has designated 2006 the year of E-Learning. Dr Wallace and Dr Liem had been nominated by the Management Team as representatives for the E-Learning network with their first meeting in February 2006.

• **CM2712-Computational Chemistry**

This unit was one of two that fell at the bottom of the student satisfaction survey and staff concerned had now made a decision to include a coursework element (example classes) as part of the overall assessment for the unit. The weightings to be coursework 24%, examination 76%. Students will be informed of this change at the first lecture.

5. The Feasibility of School Timetabling of Tutorials – an oral Report (Barbara Helm)

Mrs Helm was able to report that timetabling of tutorials for 2006/7 was a possibility and the tutor allocation for new students would be by programme of study, thus enabling staff to arrange tutorials for a full group at any one time. CM1101 is to be reviewed but it was believed that the tutorial provision for first year students would remain the same as 2005/6 (ie Semester 2 only). Mrs Helm also asked whether or not the MSc Cheminformatics course would run in 2006/7, it will not. She informed the meeting that the new PeopleSoft system will need programme and course unit information inputting in order that students can self-register from the beginning of August onwards, and she asked that staff let her know as soon as possible if there were to be any curriculum changes.

6. First Semester Questionnaires – Oral Report (Dr Alan Brisdon)

Year 1

The questionnaires had been given out in labs and the response had been reasonable (c.40%). The new, first semester unit CM1101- Introductory Chemistry, had been judged useful and relevant by students, but CM1501- Communicating Chemistry was not so well received, with just the ChemDraw element highlighted as useful. The PASS Scheme was also seen to be helpful, but organizational difficulties were identified. These had, however, already been addressed at Staff/Student Liaison Committee and resolved. There had been some comment on the organization of labs, especially synthesis, but again the matter had been resolved at an early stage.

Year 2

The questionnaires had been given out at the end of a core lecture, but the response was not good (c.20%).

The biggest single complaint from this year's students concerned CM2711- Macromolecular and Polymer Chemistry. The last set of lectures had been well received, but the earlier classes were heavily criticized for content, level of study and discrepancies between the lecture and the handouts. The matter had also come up at the Staff/Student Liaison Committee and the relevant member of staff informed of these complaints. Core Chemistry seemed to have scored well and workshops were commended. The demonstrating staff in the measurement labs received some criticism for lack of proficiency and in some cases an unhelpful attitude. The synthesis lab equipment had caused some concern, but one of the experiments, the "devise your own experiment" experiment had been highly praised.

Year 3

The questionnaires had been given out in labs and the response had been good.

The fourth year returning students who are timetabled for some Year 3 classes had felt that when lectures were rescheduled their fourth year timetable was not consulted. Issues surrounding equipment and demonstrators had been identified and would be detailed fully in the final report.

Year 4

The questionnaires had been given out in lecture courses and the response had been good. The general comments concerned the lack of on-line material. Projects had had a good response and most students were happy with these. One unit, CM4521 – Organometallic Chemistry, had drawn some criticism on the pattern of teaching, but the staff concerned reassured the committee that this was an integral part of the course delivery, and that they were well aware that students found the subject difficult. One part of the core Inorganic Chemistry strand was universally criticised.

The final report will be distributed to staff, student representatives and posted on the student intranet as well as included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Staff/Student Liaison Committee on 22 February 2006.

7. Chemistry for our Future – and RSC / HEFCE Initiative

see <http://www.rsc.org/Education/ChemistryForOurFuture/index.asp>

As a result of government decision to reject further funding for the study of Chemistry, HEFCE are asking the RSC to bid for projects in the following areas so that institutions may improve and enhance their current provision. The areas are national roll-out of Aim Higher, HE Curriculum Development, Smarter use of labs., Careers, Sharing Best Practice and Supporting Key educational Interfaces. As the RSC will shortly be putting in a bid, the Associate Dean had suggested that there were two areas the school could concentrate on, one would be broadening access (including Aim Higher), with the proposal for regional centres as a resource for schools to do masterclasses etc. and “ChemistryLite”, which is an idea for offering chemistry programmes without the practical units/project element, which may be especially interesting to students who are for one reason or another less enthusiastic about practical work and who are not looking for a research career in academia or industry. The meeting agreed that market research would need to be undertaken to ascertain whether or not there was enough interest to sustain such a course. Staff were asked to visit the website for further information.

8. Any Other Business

A paper from the Study Abroad Unit was tabled and discussed. The meeting agreed that there would be a problem with matching semester dates if students took a year of study in Australia or New Zealand. The committee was interested in the proposal and would like further information, but recognized that Chemistry study had specific requirements, not least those imposed by RSC accreditation.

9. Next Meeting

The next meeting is 22 March 2006 at 3.30pm, venue to be announced.