

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

DEPARTMENTS OF BIOLOGY AND CHEMISTRY

Biology – Chemistry Planning Group Minutes of Meeting held on 16th May 2011

Present: Debbie Smith (DFS - Chair), Richard Taylor (RJKT), John Pillmoor (JBP), James Moir (JM), Tony Wilkinson (AJW), Christoph Baumann (CB), Ian Fairlamb (IJSF), Jennifer Potts (JP), Keith Wilson (KSW), Rod Hubbard (REHu), Colin Kleanthous (CK)

In attendance: Belinda Wade (BJW)

Action

11/06 Minutes of the last meeting: 18th February 2011
The minutes were agreed.

11/07 Matters arising:

i) From minute 11/02(ii) Biology Strategic developments

DFS informed BCPG that, following the withdrawal of the Molecular Biophysics candidate, all three Chair positions had now been advertised with the closing date for Plant Biology on May 16th, for Mammalian Cell on June 3rd and Molecular Biophysics still to be decided based on the VC's availability for interviews. The lectureship in Molecular Biophysics is on hold until this Chair is appointed.

ii) From minute 11/02(iii) Wellcome Trust 4-year PhD programme

DFS said the first PEC meeting had been held, comprising representatives from all the departments involved, and a skeleton plan for Year 1 had been drawn up. Out of over 60 applicants, 5 excellent students had been selected with varying backgrounds in biology, physics, computer science, electronics and maths/pharmacology, with 3 from the UK and 2 from overseas; however the Wellcome Trust pays home fees only. The PVC-Research has agreed that the University will waive the top-up fees for one overseas student (although this will be managed via Biology MTP), with the second supported by HYMS.

11/08 Biochemistry admissions update

(i) Current estimate of numbers – JM tabled a document showing the latest admissions figures and, based on last year's applications, a reasonable estimate for this year is 67 biochemistry students, although this could go as high as 72 since insurance accepts have increased 50%. More accurate predictions are very difficult. It was noted that next year the grade offer will increase to 'AAB' and that this year may be exceptional due to the fees increase for 2012 entry. Chemistry already interviews prospective students and specifies an 'A' in A-level Chemistry as a way to modify numbers. If the increase in biochemistry applications versus biology continues there will need to be a cap on numbers or a change in the funding formula because this affects departmental budgets. JM said that after this year's experience, Biology needed to be more cautious when sending out offers. Both departments are fully supportive of the biochemistry programme and alternative strategies must be found to manage any increase in numbers now and in future. DFS said that wider discussion on this issue was necessary in the Autumn term once numbers are known.

(ii) Progress on timetabling – JM thought that timetabling using different parts of the week was fine but will check with Stephanie Hazel-Gant (Biology), Adrian Whitwood (Chemistry) and Sue Johnston (Central timetabling).

(iii) Additional practical costs – Due to the increase in students, extra equipment will be necessary for lab practicals. Last year the University met the extra costs but both departments need to work out the additional cost implications for the future. JM agreed

JM

to liaise with Nick Wood (Chemistry) and Nicola Charlton (Biology) and draw up a list and deadline.

JM

(iv) *Streaming possibilities for lectures* – RJKT asked if streaming lectures should even be considered and, if so, whether to arrange this in an adjacent room in Chemistry or beam across campus to Biology. It was thought that if streaming was necessary the latter made an undesirable differentiation between chemists and biochemists. Biology had streamed some lectures to an adjacent room in the Autumn term and would have to do so again this year. It was decided that the first-come first-served principle should apply and not to go down the streaming route unless this seemed essential. It was noted that lecture attendance did not seem to decrease as term progressed as it had in the past.

11/09

Biochemistry projects

JM reported that only 7 final year biochemistry projects had been offered by Chemistry staff and none from outside YSBL. This was disappointing and should be closer to 13 with Chemistry's stake in the course being a third. AJW said that rather than sending out mass emails, Chemistry lists last year's projects if staff do not respond. Time is of the essence so RJKT said he would email those members of Chemistry who had offered projects in the past and also ask them to identify other potential colleagues – late projects could possibly go online. In future this could be handled by YSBL admin at the same time as MChem/BSc projects in liaison with Jenny White (Biology). RJKT said that the Chair of Chemistry's BoS was just about to transfer to Dave Smith and therefore it may be a good time to introduce changes. RJKT will put Dave in touch with JM.

RJKT

This problem will only get worse in the short term - next year 16-18 projects will be required - and Chemistry is currently reviewing project provision. Ideas include broadening range, downsizing scope, group projects/pairing students and introducing more computational projects. JP asked about the cost of projects which will potentially get worse with the increase in undergraduate numbers and decrease in the number of postdocs. It was suggested that staff who allocate projects should attend the BCPG meeting early in the Autumn term.

11/10

Biochemistry Executive Committee jobs

The Terms of Reference for this committee state that the Chair and Secretary should come from different departments; therefore JM proposed that when Michael Schultze's tenure as Secretary finishes in June, a Chemist should be appointed. Gideon Grogan was suggested and RJKT will ask him formally. JM also pointed out that his term as Chair was due to finish next year.

RJKT

11/11

Any Other Business

BBSRC DTPs – CK briefed BCPG on the new BBSRC DTP scheme. Consortia bids have to be submitted by mid-September and it has been decided that the Biology and Chemistry departments will join a joint White Rose bid to include FERA and Harwell. Therefore approaches by any other external institutions should now be declined. The bid is entitled "Mechanistic biology and its strategic applications" and White Rose will commit to 3 studentships per annum for 3 years, each institution (York, Leeds, Sheffield) must commit to 1 each per year and FERA may provide a further 2-4 per annum. Based on BBSRC income, of which 95% in the University comes from Biology and Chemistry, other departments on campus do not generate enough income or fit the remit to be included. DFS said she would bring this up at the HoDs Forum this week and stress that there are other current funding opportunities, such as the MRC, that may be more suitable for some other departments. Funders are becoming more focussed and institutions must follow their lead, which will also help with the REF exercise. This bid will be a useful model for subsequent calls. CK said there was a meeting to discuss DTPs in York on May 31st and also one in London in June.

Next Meeting: **Rescheduled to 20th July at 14:00 in A140 Chemistry**

Debbie Smith/Belinda Wade
20th May 2011