

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

DEPARTMENTS OF BIOLOGY AND CHEMISTRY

Biology – Chemistry Planning Group Minutes of Meeting held on 17th October 2012

Present: Debbie Smith (DFS-Chair), Richard Taylor (RJKT), Jennifer Potts (JP), Gavin Thomas (GHT), Christoph Baumann (CB), John Pillmoor (JBP), Neil Bruce (NCB), Keith Wilson (KSW)
In attendance: Belinda Wade (BJW)
Apologies: Tony Wilkinson (AJW), Rod Hubbard (REHu), Ian Fairlamb (IJSF)

Action

12/11 **Minutes of the last meeting: 21st May 2012**
The minutes were agreed with a minor change.

12/12 **Matters arising:**

i) From minute 12/07(ii) Joint Symposium

JP said that it had been decided to postpone this symposium until next Easter and IJSF was going to provide a list of Chemistry participants. KSW said that an inorganic chemistry meeting had been held on October 5th. Such joint symposia are important to demonstrate interdisciplinarity.

JP/IJSF

ii) From minute 12/07(v) Biochemistry Chair

DFS reported that the University had signed off this position and the advertisement would be placed next week. Interviews are in February and NCB and AJW are on the panel. There would be wider consultation to help with shortlisting.

iii) From minute 12/08(iii) TF Review – cost recovery

JBP said that there had only been 3 applications so far for the low cost access scheme.

There is continuing discrepancy between Biology and YSBL PhD students about how to pay TF charges. The Biology Department subsidises TF access for their students but Chemistry does not. With the introduction of the DTP scheme all students receive the same subsidy, but it is more difficult for self-funded and EPSRC students. Biology pays for access to the 700 NMR spectrometer housed in Chemistry but other Chemistry equipment is considered essential for research, particularly spectroscopy, so there is no separate charging. It was thought that there is little unpaid cross usage of YSBL equipment by Biology. Charges for PhD students have been a longstanding problem due to the different financial models used but clarification is required and JBP and JP will keep working on this. RJKT gave a document entitled 'Chemistry–Project Allowances & Consumables from 1/10/12' to JP, and she will obtain similar information from the Biology Graduate Office in order to bring a report about support for graduate students and access to equipment to the next BCPG. JBP said it would be helpful to outline the demand from Chemistry for TF access.

JBP/JP

12/13 **Standing items**
(a) Strategic issues

(i) Biochemistry summer think tank

GHT reported that a good mixture of staff from both departments had met over the summer to discuss how to modify the Biochemistry (BCH) course and the impact of the future Biomedical and Natural Sciences courses. Enc 2 was the SWOT-type document

produced after these deliberations. At present BCH numbers are limited by the size of Chemistry's lecture theatre (A001) but the University is planning to build a new 350+ capacity teaching space, potentially on the Spring Lane site. Student numbers will increase anyway once Biomedical Sciences begins in 2014 and Natural Sciences in 2015. Both Chemistry and Biology are building new teaching labs which will be up and running in time for this increase in numbers. Core teaching for both BCH and Natural Sciences will be the same. All the above factors provide an opportunity to change the BCH course and make it distinct.

The amount of Chemistry at Stage 2 in the current BCH course could be increased with new modules in biomolecular spectroscopy or bio-organic/synthetic chemistry, leading to clearer connections with Chemistry staff and more chemistry-type projects offered. At Stage 3 there could be a new module in chemical biology. The present problem with projects should resolve itself by October 2014 once the large Chemistry intake has gone through. A weakness of the present BCH course is lack of identity and one idea is the introduction of a teaching fellow to act as a champion between the departments. Also this year there have been teething problems with the new centralised timetable with some Chemistry lectures not appearing on the BCH students' timetable.

DFS thanked GHT for producing a very good report. The next step is to take this to an extraordinary meeting of the Biochemistry Executive and flesh out the ideas, with a view to implementing agreed changes in the academic year 2013-14.

GHT

(ii) TF Research Committee

JP reported on an interesting first meeting of this committee at which all TF lab heads gave reports. Better communication/integration is key and the committee will meet 4 times a year with the minutes sent to BCPG. A working group is also being set up to discuss equipment needs and create a plan to respond to any funding initiatives that may arise. It was suggested that Dave Smith and Alison Parkin from Chemistry be invited to join this committee.

JP

(b) Reports from joint activities

(i) YSBL

KSW reported that the recent Wellcome Trust crystallisation/robotic replacement bid involved both YSBL and members of Biology but time had been very short to develop this proposal. Formation of the working group mentioned in 12/13(a)(ii) should improve our readiness to respond to external calls for equipment funding. Better collaboration is necessary for next year with input for RCUK/STFC infrastructure bids and the possibility of shared NMR and Cryo-EM facilities between Manchester, Leeds and York via N8 initiatives. RJKT said there had been a good level of grant success in YSBL recently.

Unfortunately the inorganic chemistry/YSBL meeting had fallen on the same day as the Biology Department Away Day but in future, this will be expanded to include Biology staff. KSW made two other suggestions for better interaction: firstly, interested Biology staff could join the YSBL coffee rota and meet daily in the Atrium to exchange ideas; secondly, joint lab talks could involve YSBL, TF lab heads and L1 and L0 staff. The latter could include mixed pairs of speakers. Current YSBL meetings are held fortnightly on Mondays at 11:15.

(ii) Green Chemistry

Based on information received from James Clark, RJKT gave a brief report on Green Chemistry activities, including the Biorenewables Development Centre, the FP7 project SUNLIBB, and the G8 EPSRC metal mining project which uses plants to extract metals.

(c) Research activities

(i) HEFCE giant bids

These grants are for £10M but require matching industrial or charitable funding; Simon Duckett and JP recently put such a bid together at short notice which was unsuccessful. NCB said that a message had been sent to all DRCs last week asking for a meeting to

discuss ideas for these large bids and suggestions need to be put forward by Friday October 19th.

(d) Teaching

(i) WT PhD programmes

DFS said that there was a call from the Wellcome Trust for new PhD programmes and the Academic Coordinator for Sciences, Brian Fulton, would be setting up a group to discuss this. RJKT said there was interest in Chemistry for a programme based round imaging which could also involve the new appointment in HYMS.

(ii) Full economic costing of research projects

Enc 4 was mainly for information. GHT said that the document had been sent to the PVC-Teaching & Learning, John Robinson, to build an argument for University help with funding for projects. RJKT said Chemistry had tried this in the past but this year had proposed the fees be used to fund PGWT students. It was suggested that combining these two messages might be more effective.

(e) Infrastructure

There was nothing to report on this topic.

12/14

Any Other Business

CB reported that both the MRes PGB and MSc BT courses had strong cohorts this year.

Next Meeting: Tuesday December 4th at 09:30 in Chemistry A107

Debbie Smith
Richard Taylor
29th October 2012