

# THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

## DEPARTMENTS OF BIOLOGY AND CHEMISTRY

### Biology – Chemistry Planning Group Minutes of Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013

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

#### Action

**13/17**      **Minutes of the last meeting: 16<sup>th</sup> August 2013**  
The minutes were agreed.

**13/18**      **Matters arising:**  
All outstanding matters are dealt with below.

**13/19**      **Standing items**  
**(a) Strategic issues**  
*Update on YSBL space*

DFS reported on an email from KSW to Brian Fulton, Academic Co-ordinator for Sciences, copied to RJKT, in which it was suggested that the structural biology labs should remain in Biology, but synthetic/chemical biology could move into the refurbished Green Chemistry space. AJW was concerned that this was a piecemeal solution which may have to last for the next 5-10 years. DFS said that she had met with KSW and Gideon Davies last week, and needed to know if the offices offered on L1 and K2 were required or not. RJKT will talk to KSW and Gideon Davies and provide an update at the next BCPG meeting.

RJKT

DFS and the incoming Biology HoD, Ian Graham, will be setting out the case for a new research building on the Biology footprint before Christmas. YSBL staff will need to decide if they wish to be an integral part of this vision.

**(b) Reports from joint activities**  
*TF update*

JBP reported that the SPR instrument was now repaired at a cost of around £7k. The fault had been as expected, a failure of the fluidics cartridge which seems to need replacing every 6-9 months, irrespective of the level of use. Unfortunately the upgrade to the T200 that REHu contributed to has not improved the longevity to any great extent. Given the low level of usage, the current pay-as-you-go charging system is no longer sustainable. JBP is proposing to undertake a strategic review of how best to proceed with this instrument but also to widen the discussions into the other instruments in the Molecular Interactions lab. He would like someone from YSBL to be involved. AJW suggested that Fred Antson would be the best person to involve as a major user of the SPR.

JBP noted his concerns about the upgrade from Windows XP to Windows 7 which needs to be completed by April 2014. This may cause problems as many instrument PCs may

not be upgradable due to costs or the unavailability of software upgrades that work with Windows 7. Any PC still running XP is unlikely to be allowed internet access and this may cause problems with data transfer and remote engineer access. NCB said that he had discussed this with Ian Jennings, who did not foresee too much of a problem as a local lab intranet solution with a gateway computer should be possible for any instrument PC that cannot be upgraded. RJKT said he would double check if there was a similar issue with Chemistry equipment.

*After the meeting: DFS raised this issue with Brian Fulton and the HoDs of Physics and Electronics.*

### **(c) Research activities**

#### *(i) BBSRC funding in Synthetic Biology*

NCB tabled a document summarising discussions held over the summer about a potential multidisciplinary bid for a Synthetic Biology Research Centre, known as SYNBIONT. This is a large initiative involving Electronics, Physics, Chemistry, Social Science and Biology. A second workshop to discuss this initiative has been organised for January 2014. In the meantime York had been awarded 3 LoLas and now has PIs on 5 NIBBs (BBSRC Networks in Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy). NCB will keep BCPG informed of progress.

#### *(ii) WT equipment bid*

JP informed BCPG that she would be submitting a preliminary bid to the Wellcome Trust for a biomolecular 800 NMR spectrometer by the December 2nd deadline. This has been discussed with Jason Lynam and the NMR Committee. Co-applicants would be Michael Plevin, Gideon Davies and Fred Antson with support from Newcastle, Durham and HYMS. Any new spectrometer would go into the TF Molecular Interactions Lab (headed by Andrew Leech) and have the same charging structure as the current 700 machine and mass spectrometer. A high-field instrument with cryoprobe in the Biology Building is essential for the growing needs of biomolecular NMR. RJKT requested that an upgrade to the 700 MHz instrument be considered when the new 800 instrument was being ordered.

**JP/RJKT**

### **(d) Teaching**

#### *(i) Biochemistry funding model*

There are two main issues regarding the BCH funding model - admission targets, as agreed in the MTP, and accurate costings. The BCH target in both departmental MTPs is 55 home and 3 overseas students. Due to accommodation in labs and lecture theatres, it has been suggested that the numbers given to Central Admissions be dropped to 50±3, although the final number recruited should remain at 58 total. Both departmental management accountants have agreed that the numbers in the MTP should not be changed. RJKT stressed that 58 was the absolute maximum. The BCH programme obtains excellent students and feedback, and a decision must be put in writing soon. RJKT will contact Simon Willis, Director of Admissions, and copy to DFS.

**RJKT**

*After the meeting: RJKT spoke with Simon Willis to outline the problem. Simon will consider and consult before the MTP meetings.*

Enc 2 was a draft document, prepared by Michelle Squires the management accountant for Biology, showing BCH modules for all 3 stages and the breakdown of Biology and Chemistry involvement. The bottom line shows that this is close to 70:30 respectively. This will be monitored over the next 2-3 years.

#### *(ii) Developing the integrated Masters courses*

Biology's proposal for integrated MBiol and MBiochem courses goes to UPC tomorrow and UTC next week. This has been discussed at Biology and Chemistry teaching committees but GHT said that he could elucidate for the benefit of YSBL staff. AJW expressed concern about the impact of more project students but it was stated that there would be no overall increase in student numbers. For students at Stage 3, the projects

will be smaller and more group-based, whereas in Stage 4 the project will be full time over the year and include £2k for consumables. The sector is moving towards 4-year degrees and potential students do ask about these at Open Days. RJKT said it was worth noting that some accreditation schemes have a 60 credit limit for projects. Also when Chemistry introduced the MChem programme the uptake had been surprisingly high at about 70%.

*(iii) Streamlining of MSc BT and PGB courses*

Due to decreasing student numbers and the future integrated Masters degrees, current Masters programmes are being streamlined. CB tabled a document outlining the changes to the BT and PGB courses for 2014-15. Courses will be 'themed' and several modules will be delivered to both cohorts together. Stage 4 MBiochem students will be able to pick up some of these modules. JP asked if all elements will be assessed - CB said that this will be done using open essays or similar. The Biology Masters Board is meeting to discuss this later this week - KSW and REHu are members of this committee.

**(e) Infrastructure**

Nothing to report.

**13/20**

**Any Other Business**

*iGEM celebration* – DFS mentioned the event taking place this evening in Biology to celebrate the achievement of the iGEM team consisting of Biology and Biochemistry students. The students will be giving their award winning presentation and encouraging other students to get involved in next year's competition.

*Deborah Smith* – This was the last BCPG for DFS and RJKT thanked her for her contributions. DFS stressed the importance of this group, which oversees collaboration between the two largest departments on campus. She expressed the hope that it would continue under her successor, Ian Graham, with increased focus on strategic issues in future.

**Next Meeting: To be scheduled**

Richard Taylor  
Debbie Smith  
9<sup>th</sup> December 2013