

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

DEPARTMENTS OF BIOLOGY AND CHEMISTRY

Biology – Chemistry Planning Group Minutes of Meeting held on 24th February 2014

Present: Ian Graham (IAG-Chair), Christoph Baumann (CB), Alison Parkin (AP), Jennifer Potts (JP), John Pillmoor (JBP), Gavin Thomas (GHT), Keith Wilson (KSW)
In attendance: Belinda Wade (BJW), Andy Parsons (for Chemistry HoD)
Apologies: Richard Taylor (RJKT), Rod Hubbard (REHu), Tony Wilkinson (AJW), Neil Bruce (NCB)

Action

14/01 **Minutes of the last meeting: 26th November 2013**
The minutes were agreed with minor changes.

14/02 **Matters arising:**
All outstanding matters are dealt with below.

14/03 **Standing items**
(a) Strategic issues
Update on YSBL space

IAG summarised discussions held last December while Deborah Smith was still Biology HoD. KSW had sent various letters and concept notes to the Academic Co-ordinator and he had 'escalated the issue to institutional level'. There is dire need for space, especially wet lab. The interim solution is to use the space vacated by Rob Edwards on M2 for Gideon Grogan's group and some on L0/1 for Fred Antson's. The latter means moving two Biology PIs and this should be finalised in the next few weeks. KSW said that YSBL is committed to remaining within the Biology building complex, and this solution could benefit both departments through increased collaboration. IAG said that Simon McQueen-Mason, Director of CNAP, had proposed several conditions for sharing the M2 space which are: (i) YSBL staff would need to become part of the central consumables pot on M1 and M2, (ii) clear expectations and targets for joint grant applications would be set and reviewed annually, and (iii) it was understood that the Biology HoD would have ultimate say about the space in the event that CNAP were to be awarded another large grant in future. It was agreed to involve the Academic Co-ordinator and draft a one page memo of understanding for YSBL staff to sign up to. KSW will brief YSBL staff this afternoon.

IAG/KSW

There will be financial implications due to staff moving round and also the duplication of small pieces of equipment, but all agreed that this was a good idea. It was suggested that the budget Chemistry had allowed for the refurbishment of YSBL could help with these extra costs. AP said that she and Martin Fascione would be vacating the office on L1 in June/July to move into the new Chemical Biology space within the Chemistry Department. IAG will take another look at Biology office space and it was agreed that the offices vacated by YSBL on K1 could be re-populated by Biology.

The ultimate solution is for YSBL to be part of the Phase III interdisciplinary research building, plans for which IAG, Biology HoD, is taking forward with an ambitious 5 year timeline being set. IAG is putting together a strong case for both Phase II and III for Senior Management Group. IAG stated that many departments on Heslington West are competing for University capital funding and therefore it is very important that this is seen

as a joint venture and that Chemistry supports the plan for the Phase III research building development as it will greatly benefit YSBL.

(b) Reports from joint activities

TF update

JBP informed BCPG that the problem of the computers which control instruments but still use the Windows XP system had been effectively solved by Ian Jennings setting up a sub-network on the Biology server.

The University IT service cannot currently handle large datasets for high performance computing but is seeking to resolve this in future, and Biology IT is gradually trying to move data over to central servers. KSW pointed out that establishing decent WiFi across the Biology Department would be useful as it does not make a very good impression to students and visiting speakers when this is not available. IAG said he would raise this at the next Academic Staff meeting.

IAG

(c) Research activities

(i) Networks in Industrial Biotechnology & Bioenergy (NIBBs)

IAG said that he and the Director of CNAP are leads on 2 of the 13 NIBBs recently announced, with GHT co-PI on another. Industrial biotechnology funding through the BBSRC is a 5-year rolling programme and there are great opportunities for the University to be involved. Chemistry staff should be made aware of this call and it was suggested that AP, JP and Gideon Grogan could arrange a joint symposium around Easter. GHT will send AP a list of relevant staff to contact. There is overlap with Green Chemistry, and one of the companies involved, Green Biologics, employs a large number of York graduates so there are potential connections.

AP/JP

The PVC for Research is taking forward the proposal that the University gains special partnership status with the BBSRC.

(ii) WT equipment bid

JP informed BCPG that the 800 NMR equipment bid was through to the next round and April 1st is the deadline for the full bid. The result will be known in June/July. JP is in discussion about where in Biology this equipment would be housed and either a pod next to the pre-clinical scanner or at the end of L0 are possibilities.

(d) Teaching

(i) Biochemistry student numbers

The number of Biochemistry offers made this year was reduced late in the day and consequently 3 students had to be removed from Biology's MTP. Both departments need to agree numbers up front so that other MTP targets can be adjusted accordingly. It was suggested that discussions should be held each September and that the Academic Co-ordinator should be involved. At present there are many good applicants who cannot be taken because of the lack of a 300+ seater lecture theatre. Both the new Natural Sciences programme and the introduction of integrated Masters degrees in Biology are unknown factors for numbers in future. Integrated Masters will be offered to the 2014 BIO and BCH intake and Biology is expecting a 30-40% conversion rate. The uptake of integrated Masters in Chemistry is 70%. All York's immediate competitors now offer these 4-year programmes and about half the visitors on Open Days ask about them.

(ii) Central teaching provision

The cost of providing more central teaching space has escalated from £8M to £12M. Chemistry and Biology regard a new 300+ seater lecture theatre as essential but central timetabling is of the opinion that more small seminar rooms are necessary. GHT said that he had been present at previous meetings where the necessity for a large lecture theatre had been discussed and he will send IAG some notes. Andy Parsons said that a 350-seater lecture theatre was in the new Chemistry building plan.

GHT

(iii) Structure of MSc CBB

The CBB programme has changed because Computer Science is no longer involved and the percentage split between Biology and Chemistry needs to be formalised, however there appeared to be some confusion about the cost model. CBB is a joint course where the two departments split the funds, whereas PGB and BT just buy-in teaching from Chemistry. It was thought that the course organiser, Peter Young, had discussed this with Dave Smith, Chair of Chemistry BoS. IAG will discuss with Richard Waites, Chair of Biology BoS, who has been in discussion with Chemistry regarding financial arrangements.

IAG

GHT said that he had given an extra session to the students about the new 10 credit Chemistry module to encourage uptake.

14/04

Any Other Business

A contractual issue was discussed.

Next Meeting: Tuesday May 27th at 14:00 in Chemistry A122

Ian Graham
Andy Parsons
28th March 2014