

Strategic Influence: My Vision for the RSC

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The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) is one of the UK's leading science organisations with a global reach. This year, 2007, brings new challenges and opportunities in a world where the chemical sciences can contribute constructive solutions to so many of the problems that we face.

For example, take the current Session of Parliament. MPs and Peers will be dealing with some of the major issues facing the UK – such as climate change, energy policy and the future shape of public expenditure to promote innovation – and the role of science is absolutely vital and central to each of these issues.

The scientific community, of which the RSC is a key part, wants to be fully engaged in the public and parliamentary debates on these and other issues.

My vision for the RSC is to develop our strategic influence.

As an organisation, the RSC does a remarkable job in many different areas, and as its Chief Executive I want to weld all these strands together into an effective and efficient whole.

Our key priorities, as we look ahead, can be stated very simply:

Influence the Decision Makers

We want to ensure that the RSC is influential in a world where there is enormous competition for attention in every area of public life. We seek to participate in, and influence, science and education policy discussions across the UK and within the EU, and be recognised as a key source of expertise and advice on the chemical sciences.

The spirit in which we do this is equally important. Our Royal Charter specifically requires us “to serve the public interest”, and the RSC does this in its work with Government, Parliament, the devolved bodies in Scotland and Wales, the European Parliament and Commission, and with a wide range of other public and private bodies.

We also see the RSC continuing to play an active part with the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, which does such a tremendous job in bringing science to Parliament.

The last year brought significant engagement between the RSC and Government, in developing the Chemistry Innovation Knowledge Transfer Network (CIKTN), and launching the Chemistry For Our Future (CFOF) initiative to improve curriculum development and teaching. We also highlighted the adverse funding gap between income and expenditure in teaching laboratory-based subjects at university, and this resulted in further governmental commitment over the next three years. We have also broadened our contact with industrial leaders, and see the engagement of key decision-makers right across society as vital for the future prosperity of the country.

Broaden Our Science Base

Chemistry is an enabling and expanding science that underpins so many different fields. We want to promote the importance of chemistry to energy, materials, the environment, sustainability, food and health, identifying it as the key science in addressing future global issues and offering business opportunities in these sectors. We



seek to nurture the core chemical sciences, including supporting the chemical sciences in chemistry-using industries, promote and facilitate innovation, expand our scientific footprint, enhance the support for applied science, and provide services to companies of all sizes.

During the last few months we have engaged with Government over energy and global warming, in particular, and contributed to changes in legislation in other fields within both the UK and EU.

The RSC is in a unique position to bring together its academic and industrial component parts, and we want to invest, in a prioritised way, in our many subject and interest groups to broaden RSC involvement in the chemical sciences and related topics, including the life sciences.

Encourage the Study and Teaching of the Chemical Sciences

The educational work of the RSC is probably its most enduring contribution to the cause of science. We encourage the study, and enhance the teaching, of the chemical sciences at all levels, from the primary to tertiary sectors. This means securing the role of chemistry in a modernised school curriculum and augmenting the supply and capability of teachers. We will continue to lobby for improved teacher training while for our part we will continue to provide RSC-managed inset training and

opportunities for scientists to consider a career change to teaching.

It will be essential that this is linked to university education, and to the overall needs of industry and society at large. The RSC already plays a key role in accrediting degree and training courses to support this.

Enhance Our Membership

The RSC has over 44,000 members in all its various categories (including over 1,000 school children), and we aim – like any modern organisation – to make membership worthwhile and beneficial. Old-fashioned notions of what “chemistry” comprises need to be discarded. We strive to become increasingly relevant, receptive and responsive to a broader range of chemical scientists across the UK, the EU and internationally. Our objective is to develop and enhance current networking opportunities and activities to support members, bringing together the local, the academic and the industrial networks that exist all over the UK. This will also improve synergies in addressing key issues.

Promote Professionalism and Ethics

The RSC is responsible for important professional qualifications which are the bedrock of the RSC’s scientific and other expertise. We seek to promote our professional qualifications, as well as best practice, in the chemical sciences and encourage members to participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). We also want to secure our members’ rights to practise their profession by influencing European and national legislation and standards and professional mobility. At the same time, it is important that we continue to uphold the highest ethical standards.

Expand Our Publishing Activity

Publishing is a vital part of the life of the RSC, and our journals (23 in all) have well-deserved and well-

established reputations for excellence. We seek to build upon our international reputation by improving our service to authors and subscribers, adding value to our existing products and developing innovative ones to serve new areas of science. As science continues to expand, we are targeting to produce new or enhanced journal and book titles to cover emerging areas of the chemical and related sciences. This activity will increasingly link with our other roles in education and the wider promotion of science and technology. The last year saw our monthly magazine *Chemistry World* acclaimed as the best in its class of professional journalism.

Improve Our Channels of Communication

Every modern forward-looking organisation needs to pay special attention to the way it communicates, both internally and externally. We seek to enhance the perception and image of the chemical sciences and its practitioners amongst our own members, the international scientific community and the general public. A good relationship between the world of science and that of society at large is vital to both. This calls for more effective listening, insightful comment that captures the imagination, and conveying information that is relevant to the needs of society.

Develop Our Partnerships

Science is international, and no scientific society can be effective without developing partnerships with its scientific “neighbours” – both at home and abroad. We must build national and international alliances to further the impact of the chemical sciences and its practitioners. We aim to build on partnerships with other professional and learned societies, and trade associations, within the UK. This multi-disciplinary approach will help deliver the solutions needed in an increasingly complex society like ours.

We already have good relationships with chemical societies from the developed world. We are now

building new partnerships with emerging economies – especially in Asia. We aim to refine our international strategy, taking account both of country characteristics, and the competition that we face, and place our priority on our commercial and high-level networking activities (including, where appropriate, formal co-membership arrangements) in Europe, China, India, Singapore, South Africa, Japan and Brazil. There are also great opportunities for developing our educationally-based activities elsewhere, in support of teaching and promoting science.

Improve Our Governance

As a registered charity, with an annual turnover of around £30 million, and extensive member-based activities supported by over 300 staff at two sites (London and Cambridge), it is always important to have the best governance possible, especially now that “science” has at last been included formally as a definition in the Charities Act 2006. We are already implementing a new governance structure fit for the challenges of the 21st Century, and the provision of the necessary resources and frameworks to deliver effectively our new strategic plan.

Invest in Our Staff and Volunteers

Finally, the RSC depends for its effectiveness upon its own staff and volunteers. We know that if we are to deliver our strategy, we need to develop our staff capacity and support our volunteer network. This will involve training programmes and development initiatives to enhance the competencies of our staff.

The RSC is a tremendously dynamic organisation which covers a surprisingly wide range of activities: scientific, publishing, educational, professional, learned, public and parliamentary. The more effective and efficient we are, the greater the strategic leadership we can offer. We are a scientific society on the move.