SCHOOL OF CHEMISTRY & MOLECULAR BIOSCIENCES
RESEARCH STUDENTS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Meeting 2/12 8 June 2012  For general publication

Present: Miss Kylie Agnew-Francis, Mr Mohammed Alaidarous, Mr Nabil Alikhan (in the chair), Prof Melissa Brown, Mr Jed Burns, Ms Lena Daumann, Mr Jacob Dulley, Mrs Chandhi Goonasekera, Ms Rhiannon Mondav, Ms Katie Nichols (from partway through Business Arising item RHD Forums), Miss Talia Pettigrew, Ms Sohinee Sarkar (from partway through Business Arising item RHD Forums), Mr Mark Starkey (minutes).

Apology: Dr Lisbeth Grondahl.

Minutes: Minutes of the meeting held 10 May 2012, having been circulated, were taken as read and were confirmed.

Business arising out of the minutes (not elsewhere listed):

Membership

Mark Starkey reported that Liam Tille had advised that he was withdrawing his enrolment in the BSc (Honours) for personal reasons and so had resigned from the Committee. A call for nominations from Chemistry Honours students to replace Liam had been issued 6 June. Talia Pettigrew had been the only nominee and so had been duly elected. Nabil welcomed Talia to the Committee and Talia introduced herself to fellow members.

Melissa Brown, who had been unable to attend Meeting 1-12, introduced herself to fellow members.

Jacob Dulley, the MBS Honours representative, said that as he expected to graduate at the end of first semester, he would be able to attend only one more meeting. Mark Starkey advised that Hamish Kelly would replace Jacob (based on a call for nominations earlier in the year) and it was agreed to invite Hamish to the next meeting.

RHD Forums

Lisbeth Grondahl had advised prior to the meeting that she was continuing to consider ideas for RHD forums, including those suggested at Meeting 1-12, and would report to the next meeting.

Subsequent to Meeting 1-12, information on two free workshops organised by AIBN for RHD students on careers in publishing and how to get published had been circulated to SCMB RHD students. The workshops, held 6 and 8 June, had been over-subscribed, but a couple of members had attended. They reported that the careers session had been interesting. The ‘how to get published’ session had given a good overview of how publishers choose papers. The speaker gave examples from her own background, drug design, but the examples were none-the-less concrete.

Melissa Brown said that she knew the speaker and that similar workshops could be tailored for SCMB if members thought it worthwhile.

Rhiannon Mondav said that she was interested in better understanding the career path in academia.

Making Turnitin available to RHD and Honours students – creation of RHD student community in Blackboard

Lisbeth Grondahl had reported prior to the meeting that an RHD student community in Blackboard, which would facilitate use of Turnitin by students for checking draft submissions, was nearing finalisation. It should be available by the start of July. Lisbeth was planning to invite all unconfirmed RHD students of the School to an information session later in June to explain the system, given that it would be compulsory for students to submit their confirmation report to Turnitin.
1. Marking time allocations for tutors:

Lena Daumann reported that she has received a number of complaints from RHD students who are employed as tutors, particularly on third year chemistry laboratory courses, that the 20 minutes of paid time allowed to mark each laboratory report is inadequate, in that tutors were claiming that an average of 30 minutes is being spent to mark reports properly and give feedback to students on how they could do better.

Members noted a report in the agenda papers from the coordinator of one third year course indicating that where there had been three reports of 12% each in 2011, there were now four reports of 9% in 2012. The reduced value indicated that students were required to put in less effort and that there ought to be correspondingly less to mark. The coordinator had indicated that the School seeks to contain tutor costs provided learning objectives are not compromised and that there are always economic considerations when delivering a service.

A number of members echoed the concerns of tutors, citing first year chemistry where there is apparently only an hour allowed to mark a whole class.

Rhiannon Monday suggested that tutors or course coordinators consider having a sheet listing the responses to common mistakes. The sheet could be returned with student submissions, with the relevant responses highlighted. This would save tutors time in having to repeat feedback. Members agreed that this would work with ‘black and white’ errors and probably more-so in first and second year courses, but not for more-specific or stylistic errors, typically encountered in third year courses.

Jed Burns suggested that if a remedial tutorial or workshop providing feedback was offered, marking time could be reduced. Such sessions could be optional, like PASS, or structured into courses at strategic stages of the semester.

Members observed that feedback could generally be more-easily given in molecular biosciences practical classes where breaks often occurred than in chemistry practicals where breaks were uncommon.

Melissa Brown summarised that marking times should be increased if they were currently not working, but that the solution could vary from course to course. She indicated that she would ask course coordinators to review marking time allocations.

2. SCMB Strengths and Weaknesses Survey:

Melissa Brown thanked those RHD students who had participated in a survey of staff and RHD students earlier in the year regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the School and suggestions for how weaknesses might be addressed.

The most common weakness identified with respect to RHD students had been the lack of funds for travel. Melissa explained that the School was finalising a scheme whereby each RHD student would be able to access a set amount of funds over their candidature for support for things such as computers, lab consumables and travel. Expenditure of the funds would be by agreement between the student and their Principal Advisor. Details and an application form were being finalised and the scheme should be announced in the coming weeks.

3. Advertising of events of relevance to RHD students:

Nabil Alikhan noted that ad hoc emails and the School’s weekly email bulletin, The Week Ahead, were the main means of communicating events such as seminars and workshops to students. He said that it would be useful to be able to plan farther ahead and easily record in one’s diary the events one wished to attend.

Melissa Brown mentioned that the weekly IMB seminars email included links to the seminar lists of all associated Schools and Institutes.
3. Advertising of events of relevance to RHD students: (cont’d)

Mark Starkey reported that SCMB’s seminars are listed on the UQ Events page, the database of which feeds the seminars page on the School website. The seminar page includes a pdf of seminars for the whole semester.

Mention was made of the possibility that students not enrolled in SCMB but located in the School’s buildings were not on the School’s RHD mailing list. Mark Starkey undertook to investigate.

4. Annual SCMB Research Students Symposium:

Members noted a list of preparation actions prepared by Nabil Alikhan, along with a Gant chart showing timelines. The items marked in red on the documents were deliverables. Nabil would update the documents progressively as preparations for the event advanced. He invited feedback from members on anything missing or requiring changing.

Finances and Sponsorship

Subsequent to Meeting 1-12, a working group consisting of Chandhi Goonasekera, Nabil Alikhan, Jed Burns, Sohinee Sarkar and Lena Daumann had met to develop sponsor invitation letters. Nabil reported that:
- a general template for the letters had been developed by the group;
- implementing a tiered sponsorship scheme had been seen to be too complicated to manage properly and a general request for sponsorship would be used instead, as was done in 2011;
- the sponsor list from last year had been expanded on and the different sponsors had been allocated to be handled by different attending members;
- there had been discussion on use of a more official UQ letterhead;
- the UniQuest and UQ related grants required a great deal of paperwork and more information was required to decide whether it was worth pursuing these sources.

Subsequent to the working group’s meeting a number of templates for various types of sponsors had been developed and circulated to RSCC members for comment to Nabil. Sohinee tabled the four templates. She had contacted a number of sponsors to check mailing details and most had suggested that an email would be sufficient. Sohinee added that initial sponsor reactions had been positive. Mark Starkey reported that the 2011 committee had used letters because the 2010 committee had experienced problems with emails not being forwarded to the correct person in a given organisation.

Members agreed that pursuing the UniQuest and UQ grants was a matter of whether the benefit outweighed the cost of effort in preparing detailed submissions.

Members discussed the pros and cons of a tiered sponsor approach.

Following discussion it was resolved –

(a) that a sponsor options of $250 (for half a display table or posters); $500 (full table plus slide at session commencement plus more prominent position in booklet); and the additional option to sponsor a prize be offered; and

(b) that the safest approach to sponsor invitations was to do a signed letter on letterhead, attach a scanned copy to an email, but send the original in the post as well;

(c) that Sohinee and Lena talk to UniQuest about the likelihood of success in securing a grant and, if so, base the proposal on the 2011 version on file; and

(d) that another informal meeting of the working group be held in the coming week to finalise the sponsor options and letters.
4. Annual SCMB Research Students Symposium: (cont’d)

**Venue**

Members agreed that the Hawken theatres would be suitable, provided the atrium space could be used for posters and for lunch. Seminar room S201, which contained moveable furniture, would be a good space for lunch, but the consumption of food and drink in centrally controlled teaching spaces was normally not allowed. Mark Starkey suggested that, in relation to the use of common spaces, such as the atrium, Property & Facilities normally referred users to the occupants of neighbouring space for agreement. In this case, the Faculty of EAIT office would be the relevant occupant.

Katie Nichols and Kylie Agnew-Francis undertook to contact Teaching Space Management Section regarding booking of the teaching spaces (for a half a day either side of the day of the symposium as well) and to ask if an exemption could be given for having lunch in 50-S201. They would also contact the Faculty of EAIT office regarding use of the atrium space for poster displays and for tables and chairs for lunch/teas.

**Catering**

Lena Daumann indicated that she would obtain quotes once it was certain marquees were not required and tables and chairs were required.

**Plenary Speaker**

Nabil Alikhan undertook to circulate the 2011 shortlist of plenary speakers to members to consider and add to. Members were also encouraged to ask research group leaders for the names of any visitors who might be in Brisbane or Australia at the time of the symposium. It was possible that the symposium budget would extend to flying a speaker from interstate.

Rhiannon Mondav offered to draft a letter of invitation to the speaker.

**Advertising/Promotion for Abstracts and Registration**

Nabil suggested that a working group be formed to progress this item. Kylie Agnew-Francis and Mohammed Alaidarous volunteered.

5. **Next Meeting:**

It was proposed that the next meeting be in four weeks’ time, but as some members would be away in early July, it was agreed to meet on 29 June.

Mark Starkey indicated that he would be on leave at that time, but Jill Sheridan would take his place.

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