

Notes of the discussion of the BLCS Committee with Dr Clive Hayter, Programme Manager (Materials), EPSRC.

BLCS Annual Conference, 22nd March 2005.

Background.

Dr Hayter was invited to discuss with the BLCS committee issues around recent EPSRC funding of liquid crystal-related research. A letter of invitation that raised some of the concerns of the Committee was sent to Dr Hayter prior to the meeting, to which he responded in a letter dated 7th March. The BLCS committee had concerns around panel membership and the expertise of referees for proposals, would wish to improve the perception of new research directions in liquid crystals and would want to query whether the 'Photonics' badge was the most appropriate for LC research.

Points raised.

- Dr Hayter presented data showing the success rate of liquid crystal related grants at EPSRC across all programmes for the past few years. There was a clear drop in success rate from 2003. Dr Hayter would want to delve deeper into the reasons behind the step-reduction in grant success.
- The BLCS committee would be receptive to being involved in a pilot study in moderating referees comments. Specifically, this would involve referees being party to comments on particular proposals made by other referees and offered the opportunity to modify their responses based on this.
- The BLCS would wish to be as closely involved as possible in any consultation pertaining to reorganisation of the 'Materials' panels. It was suggested that 'Photonics' is no longer a good fit to the research portfolio that is being suggested by the community.
- Concern was expressed regarding a fall in the number of studentships available. We would wish to explore with the EPSRC opportunities to target studentships at new interface areas.
- It was recognised that a roadmap of directions for LCs would be helpful, particularly in the context of outside perception that the research in LCs is almost exclusively bound up in displays. This could be underpinned by a 'spotlight' feature on LCs for the future¹.
- The BLCS Winter Workshop for new graduate students and doctoral researchers was noted as an area of best practice that we could apply to the EPSRC for some funding to support.

¹ Since the meeting a 'spotlight' article appeared which made quite negative reference to LCs. HFG wrote to Dr Hayter requesting advice on how to address this issue and is awaiting response.