Introduction

The term multi-disciplinary is much used today. It carries with it the air of promise and efficiency. It is interesting to reflect, therefore, that the progress of science over the last century has been, more or less, in the other direction. What started as Natural Science evolved into Physics, Chemistry and Biology. Chemistry itself then split into Organic, Inorganic and Physical. Organic Chemistry has then undergone further fission to produce areas like Natural Product Chemistry, Organometallic Chemistry and Polymer Chemistry. Somewhere along the line Materials Science and Analytical Chemistry graduated into separate existences as well. All these developments, whilst satisfying the needs of the individual's concern for a 'tribe' to belong to, has done nothing for the effectiveness, or image of science. Problems in the real world do not come neatly packaged into tightly defined disciplines, and since the world is 'multi-disciplinary' so too must science be.

The importance of learning from other areas of science has been demonstrated many times. However, most journals and conferences seem to have gone down a route of increasing specialization. The structure of this conference, born, like all good ideas, in a bar, was to mix polymer scientists up in a slightly different way from usual. The mixture adopted was supposed to represent the process of work — a sort of 'cradle to grave' analysis. Thus people who provide theoretical understanding of high modulus fibres could compare techniques with those who model conducting polymers. Synthesists of every persuasion could debate whose yield was bigger. Analysts could vie for accuracy and resolution. And, finally, materials scientists could argue over who had the better properties. This was the intention of the Organizing Committee, and of *Polymer*. Certainly to judge from the papers and posters, there was lots to share. This issue reflects that breadth of interests. There are some omissions. Recasting work to be accessible requires effort that many people cannot afford the time to spare. However, if Polymer Chemistry is to become multi-disciplinary, that effort must be made. The increased need for efficient, controlled output polymerizations will not be solved by chemists alone. Engineers, thermodynamicists, rheologists, etc., all play a part. The construction of nanoscale (or even microscale) structures requires strong interaction between chemists and materials scientists. If polymers are to make the next set of impacts on everyday life, then we must be prepared to learn new areas of expertise and work with other experts. On the other hand we could split again — maybe into Useful and Useless Polymer Chemistry?

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