



## **Council Meeting**

**6 December 2017**

**12:30-15:30**

**Charles Darwin House 2, 107 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8TZ**

## **Web Minutes**

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

**Present:** Professor Dame Jean Thomas (President)  
Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary)  
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)  
Professor John Coggins  
Professor Nigel Brown  
Professor Claire Wathes  
Professor Hilary MacQueen  
Professor Jackie Hunter  
Professor Patrick Hussey  
Professor Caroline Austin  
Professor Jeremy Pritchard  
Dr Louise Leong  
Dr Paul Brooker  
Dr Kim Hardie

**Observers:** Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive  
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Policy & Public Affairs  
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Membership & Professional Affairs  
Ms Ana Ilic  
Ms Jen Crook (Minutes)

**Apologies:** Professor David Blackburn  
Dr Paul Hoskisson  
Mark Hollingsworth, Nutrition Society  
Pamela Mortimer, Society for Experimental Biology  
Dr Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology  
Laura Woodland, Biochemical Society  
Jono Bruun, British Pharmacological Society  
Dariel Burdass, Physiological Society  
Hazel Norman, British Ecological Society

### 1.1 Declaration of interests

None reported.

## 2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 September 2017

### 2.1 Review of action points

All actions had been completed or appeared within the Agenda.

### 2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

The letter to the University of Sharjar regarding degree recognition had been approved and signed by Professor David Coates and the Society's logos had now been removed from the University's website.

### 2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **APPROVED** the Minutes and Web Minutes subject to minor typographical amendments.

### 2.4 Conflicts of interest

None reported.

## 3. Chief Executive's Report

Mark Downs (MD) gave an update of Society activity including a very successful Biology Week and the Policy Agenda.

MD discussed the handover of the Presidency at the next AGM and proposed holding a dinner after the event. It was suggested that the Society would hold a dinner for Members and Fellows, partly funded by sponsorship. Council further concluded that Council members themselves should purchase tickets if they wished to attend, with the exception of the Presidents.

Although yet to be formally announced, the Genetics Society wished to become a strategic partner. The new Policy Lead at the Genetics Society is Rebecca Oakey, this is a volunteer-led Society so there are no staff. MD noted that the RSB already provides membership services on their behalf.

MD reported that there had been a meeting of CEOs from a dozen of the Science Council member organisations where there was unanimous agreement that progress had not been satisfactory. Council discussed potential next steps.

## 4. ITN partnership

Council received a report from ITN for information. MD had been interviewed by Natasha Kaplinsky and this would be used as a taster for a longer programme, launching in Biology Week 2018. ITN would cover costs and it would be a news-style broadcast, with RSB helping to identify which organisations they should contact to develop case studies. There was a charge for organisations

wishing to film a case study. RSB will retain editorial control to ensure balance and to support scientific integrity of the information.

## **Section A: Finance & Governance**

### **5. Finance**

The Honorary Treasurer (PG) reported on the Finance Committee meeting that morning. Aside from the financial issues also before Council, they had discussed the key issue of the Society's closed defined benefit pension scheme. As the covenant with the RSB as the employer is assessed as weak, actuaries have recommended repaying the debt over a nine year period which would result in a large increase in the payment schedule.

The Finance Committee also discussed the CDH conference centre, which is now only used by co-owners.

Reports had been received on IBO and accreditation. Accreditation was currently on track and the IBO accounts were also satisfactory although with some outstanding debtors.

#### **5.1 Q4 report**

Finance Committee discussed the paper, noting that a draft set of accounts had been received showing the highest level of assets in the Society's history and an operational surplus. The operational surplus was a particular success whilst the overall asset growth was primarily an "accountancy-based gain" as a result of changes to the valuation of the CDH buildings and a reduced deficit (gain) on the pension fund. The cash position remained strong.

#### **5.2 Report from Finance Strategy Group**

Following Council's agreement to form a Finance Strategy Group, Chaired by Paul Brooker (PB), to consider proposals to improve the financial position going forward, the Group had held two meetings and one teleconference to discuss the proposals provided for Council's consideration.

Council discussed the proposed issues in depth.

Council had previously agreed a 3% increase in membership fees from January 2018 for the professional grades but the Group recommended that this should be amended to 5% from April 2018, as historic rates had not been increased with inflation. Even with this increase the total fee increase would only be around 13% since 2010 relative to inflation of 20%. Member organisation fees were also debated.

It was further proposed that there should be a £50 charge to become a Chartered Biologist and £25 per annum to continue to use the post nominal. Retired CBIols currently outside the CPD system would be exempt. This would also bring the Society in line with sister societies.

Council **AGREED** to introduce the CBIol fees proposed from 1 April 2018.

PB reported that subsidies for Special Interest Groups differed, as did their governance, impact and profile. However, it was clear they did not cover their full economic costs, whilst also recognising the wider value to the Society.

Council **AGREED** to proceed with all the recommendations made by the Finance Group.

### 5.3 Report from the Fundraising Group

Jackie Hunter (JH) provided a report. The Fundraising Group had been set up following the September Council meeting. One meeting had been held in which it was agreed that the Group would meet at least twice per annum. The Group would address the short, medium and long term focus of the Society's fundraising and would be providing a paper for the March meeting on legacy fundraising.

The Group had discussed using the Society's website more to drive its fundraising activity and welcomed any suggestions from Council by email to MD or JH.

## 6. Membership of the Science Council

This was discussed under the CEO's report.

Council added that the Society should explore paying for Google AdWords in order for the Society to appear at the top of searches. Ana Ilic (AI) added that Google Ad Grants offered charities up to £8k per month in grants for advertising.

**Action: Fundraising Group to explore Google Ad Grants**

## Section B: Policy & Strategy

### 7. Update papers

#### 7.1 Membership & Professional Affairs update

Council received a paper for information, highlighting that membership numbers continued to increase and currently stood at 17,700. The next elections would take place in January and were looking promising. Positive responses were received from a recent membership campaign. Retention rates remained high in Fellowship and Membership with BioNet low and student membership stable. MOs were now being removed for non-payment. QP vivas had taken place and all had passed the most recent round.

The Branches Working Group had shown interest in a charter lecture that moves around the country and discussions were being held, with the possibility of this being launched as part of the Society's ten year anniversary celebrations.

##### 7.1.1 Pilot ambassador scheme for membership recruitment

Council received a paper outlining a proposal for the Society to run a Pilot Ambassador Scheme to replace the current ad-hoc On-Campus Rep scheme. Ambassadors would be self-nominated and based in every university across the UK and brought together for an RSB event. Research was carried out with MOs,

members and Fellows who actively promote RSB to their organisations, concluding that it would be a positive step and could commence immediately on a one year trial basis.

Ambassadors would look at the type of events where they could actively promote membership. PB added that the British Toxicology Society had successfully relaunched its ambassador scheme 12 months ago, aiming at junior members of HEI staff and academics. They currently send out a monthly email and held breakfast meetings.

Small grants would be available for regional events but this would depend on the enthusiasm of the ambassador. Industrial forums could be used to amplify outreach.

**Council AGREED to the formation of an Ambassador Scheme.**

## 7.2 Policy & Public Affairs update

LB reported that there were quite a few consultations for response in January. MD would be a Witness to the Lords Committee in January. MD felt that life sciences was still being framed too narrowly as just pharma and biotech. LB suggested the need to include key focuses such as Big Data and AI.

There had been much activity by SIGs. The UKPSF roadmap had gone out to 80 reviewers for general consultation. The Animal Sciences Group were holding a meeting with the Home Office later in December.

Good responses to calls for article ideas were still being received for *The Biologist* and discussions continued around offering this in a new digital format. LB invited Council to get in touch if they wished to submit an opinion piece for *The Biologist*. MD noted that the Oxford Primer Series was an on-going piece of work and that it was hoped to have a similar impact to the previous ones created by the IoB. The first titles are planned as a collective launch in 2019.

### 7.2.1 Biology Week overview

LB provided Council with a report and evaluation of the Society's sixth Biology Week. There had been diverse activities, with different digital platforms used, including a Facebook streaming of the RI lecture. A larger audience had been anticipated for the 'Biology of Mental Health' event, however, there had been around 1,200 online views and Council felt that the mental health and wellbeing theme should continue to be a hot topic.

The Society was a HEFC recognised nominating body for the next REF. As such an internal process had been set up to deal with requests for support.

### 7.2.2 Industrial strategy and the life sciences

MD will be giving evidence to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on 16 January and asked Council to send any points they wish to raise to either himself or LB.

## 8. ETP strategy day report

Jeremy Pritchard gave an update on their strategy day although much was covered in other papers. He felt that group discussions were now much wider and more inclusive following recent appointments making the Committee useful in a broader area. TEF was now clearly on the agenda and was central to the Society's remit, especially given the move towards subject-specific review. The Committee would follow this closely.

ETP were currently looking to recruit three new members.

### 8.1 Future activity and direction for the Policy and wider Agenda and views from ETP

It had been difficult to measure the impact of work done by volunteers on behalf of ETP and indeed RSB as a whole. This paper simply highlighted some potential new areas of focus. LB noted that we chair a science policy advisor network, which meets quarterly and would hold a specific workshop on impact and how different organisations are measuring and communicating with each other. MD suggested that we also need to understand what is important for different MOs so that we can show delivery on their behalf.

JH recommended more engagement with Artificial Intelligence and was happy to recommend speakers / contacts.

**ACTION: LB to consider how the RSB should engage more on AI**

## 9. Governance – approval of new committee structures

RLF outlined her paper: following the restructure in staff early in 2017, there was the need for the formation of a committee for Membership & Professional Affairs to advise on the development of a strategic framework, analysis of membership, oversight of professional registers, directing training and development, advising on event programmes, oversight of regional branch activity and advising on stakeholder engagement activities.

Membership would be broad, with representation from membership and potentially outside life sciences to bring in expertise. Terms of Reference needed to be put together before deciding on membership.

**Council were in full support of setting up a new MPA Committee.**

**Action: The Honorary Secretary and Membership staff to agree Terms of Reference.**

#### **10. Update on the AMR Strategy Working Group**

Council noted the helpful report from PH and were keen to remain closely engaged with this key topic.

#### **11. AoB**

JC noted that the STEM poster judging in 2018 will be the same week as Voice of the Future. At some stage, Council will need to find a successor for John Coggins who helps organise/ judge these events.

MD noted that the financial figures reported at the meeting are subject to audit, and will be reporting back to Council in due course once figures have been confirmed.

Patrick Hussey noted that an email strapline for Council members would be very useful.

**ACTION: LB to arrange for a proposed strapline to be circulated for use on a voluntary basis.**

*Jan Thomas*  
14 - 3 - 18