

## **Council Meeting**

**12 September 2018  
13:00-16:00**

**Charles 1&2, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London WC1N 2JU**

## **Web Minutes**

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

- Present:** Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow (President)  
Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary)  
Dr Paul Brooker (Hon Treasurer)  
Professor Nigel Brown  
Professor Claire Wathes  
Professor Hilary MacQueen  
Professor Yvonne Barnett  
Professor Caroline Austin  
Professor Jackie Hunter  
Professor Sarah-Jayne Blakemore  
Professor Patrick Hussey  
Dr Paul Hoskisson  
Dr Kim Hardie (via telephone)
- Observers:** Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive  
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Policy & Public Affairs  
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Membership & Professional Affairs  
Dr Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology  
Ms Ana Ilic  
Ms Jen Crosk (Minutes)
- Apologies:** Professor Patricia Kuwabara  
Dr Louise Leong  
Professor Rebecca Oakey, Genetics Society  
Dr Hazel Norman, British Ecological Society  
Ms Laura Woodland, Biochemical Society  
Mr Mark Hollingsworth, Nutrition Society  
Ms Pamela Mortimer, Society for Experimental Biology  
Mr Jono Bruun, British Pharmacological Society  
Mrs Dariel Burdass, Physiological Society

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The President thanked Council for the adjustment to the start time of the meeting due to diary commitments.

The President welcomed Professor Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, the new ESP Committee Chair.

**1.1 Declaration of interest**

None reported.

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 June 2018**

**2.1 Review of action points**

All actions had been completed or appeared on the Agenda.

**2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda**

None reported.

**2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes**

Council **APPROVED** the full Council Minutes and Web Minutes of 6 June 2018.

**2.4 Conflicts of interest**

Professor Hilary McQueen declared that she was a member of the HUBS Executive Committee in relation to item 8.5.

**3. Chief Executive's Report**

Council congratulated the President on her appointment as Chair of Public Health England's Advisory Board.

Council had received the CEO's update report and Mark Downs (MD) added that the Society would shortly be scheduling its 2019 Fellows lunch dates and asked any Council members willing to host to contact Jen Crook.

**ACTION: Council members to notify Jen Crook of interest in hosting a Fellows' lunch during 2019.**

The President reported that she had been very happy to see the positive outcome of the recent IBO visit and congratulated the UKBC committee and staff team on their work.

#### **4. Health & Safety**

MD reported that there had been no major incidents since the last meeting. One minor incident had been recorded in the accident book, whereby a member of staff hurt their foot in a meeting room.

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

#### **5. Finance**

##### **5.1 Update from Finance Committee**

Paul Brooker (PB) reported that the Finance Committee (FC) had met earlier and discussed most of the items further on in the Council Agenda. Given the anticipated increased liquidity of the Society in 2019 as a result of selling the CDH buildings, FC had considered the need for professional investment advice and would discuss this further at their December meeting. It was proposed that the investment should have a low to medium risk profile and that the Society should seek to use a financial vehicle suited to providing an income.

There had been no change in the financial Accreditation landscape but the Accreditation Committee would be providing further information in due course on potential early stage investment for quality control of apprenticeship end point assessment.

PB reported that the pension regulator had written to the Society agreeing the revised repayment schedule.

##### **5.2 Minutes of the last Finance Committee Meeting**

Council received two sets of Finance Committee Minutes, relating to the full meeting and teleconference.

##### **5.2 Q3 forecast**

PB reported that Q3 looked positive and suggested a position close to break even for the year end. The Committee had welcomed the positive report. MD noted that the 11 month position, subsequent to the issue of papers for this meeting, confirmed the reported trend. The agreed 2017-18 budget deficit had increased following the decision to make an additional contribution to the closed defined benefit pension scheme and additional investment in membership recruitment. Against this backdrop, a break-even outcome would be a significant improvement. Changes in some restricted funds had contributed to the anticipated outcome but, nonetheless, the unrestricted fund was still set to deliver an improvement.

MD highlighted that the new financial year was now likely to commence with more in unrestricted funds than anticipated, possible at an all time high.

##### **5.3 2018-19 Budget**

PB set out the principles he had applied to the 2018-19 process particularly highlighting his aim of achieving a break-even position on the operations budget, maximising the use of funds

to deliver the Society's charitable aims. Although generation of a large surplus for particular strategic aims, or running a temporary deficit for investment purposes, were clearly both appropriate, on occasion, closely matching income and expenditure over a business plan cycle should be the key aim.

MD outlined the draft break-even budget which FC were recommending and Council were asked to provide endorsement. He noted, in particular, that the sale of the CDH buildings sat outside this budget and would be handled separately, save for some specific items such as removal of building depreciation and the pension fund repayment which had been removed from the operational budget.

PB reported that additional expenditure to support one-off investment from the realisation of the capital gain on the buildings had been considered by the FC. A new website and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary (see later item) were two initial considerations. Council agreed on the importance of a new website, noting the risks as well as the benefits and supported the Committee's recommendation that a plan and budget be developed.

Council **AGREED** the recommended break-even operations budget for 2018-19; handling the budget for the sale of the buildings and relocation separately; and payment of the current outstanding pension fund deficit from the proceeds of sale during the financial year.

## **6. Governance**

### **6.1 Complaints Procedure**

The Honorary Secretary (RR) thanked Ana Ilic (AI) for developing the process which had initially been designed to be internally focussed. A public facing explanation of how to make a complaint would be added if Council were content with this draft. RR explained that the procedure would continue to be "work in progress" to ensure it remained fit for purpose. Complaints would receive an auto-generated holding response once the process was embedded in the MySociety portal.

Council discussed whether to accept anonymous complaints and the potential need to cross link this with the existing "Whistle Blowing" policy where issues could be raised anonymously. On balance, Council agreed that anonymous complaints should be reviewed as far as practical, noting a guarantee of anonymity for the complainant might be preferable to allow feedback. Council asked that the potential for anonymity be made clear on the relevant section of the website.

Council **AGREED** the new regulation and process for complaints.

### **6.2 Skills Audit**

Council received a paper giving an overview of the skills audit. Ana Ilic (AI) reported on the results obtained and summarised the outcome, noting the results of the diversity questionnaire. Areas of obvious skills gaps included legal, marketing, fundraising, school teaching and estate management. There was also an under-representation from the private sector.

There was a wide ranging debate that considered the options around school teacher representation, Ph.D student involvement and possible improvements in age, ethnic and socio-economic diversity.

MD reminded Council that some skills were better represented through the committee structure and that three members of the RSB staff were qualified teachers.

Council **AGREED** to recruit a new Trustee through an open competition, stressing particular interest in applicants with skills in the legal, fundraising or marketing areas, noting RSB's commitment to greater diversity.

**ACTION:** MD to develop a job description for agreement with Honorary Officers; to take forward advertising; and to establish a review panel to agree a process and make a recommendation in due course.

## **Section B: Policy & Strategy**

### **7. Report from ESP**

Sarah-Jayne Blakemore (SJB) reported that the ESP Committee had met the previous week. This had been her first meeting as Chair. The Committee had discussed the proposed new Welsh Science Curriculum. A collective letter had been sent to the Welsh Government setting out specific concerns. The Committee had also debated the Welsh "Grow the Future" report and how this could provide a platform for picking up the science of topical issues such as biodiversity or GM.

There was agreement that more direct involvement from Fellows and Members in Wales was important, as might be discussion with the Learned Society of Wales.

Laura Bellingan (LB) noted the challenge of gaining community input and reflecting that effectively, given short response timelines and the confidential way in which drafts had often been shared.

SJB talked through the forthcoming policy-lates and invited recommendations for future topics.

REF 20/21 was inevitably an area of importance to the Society and Council reflected the variety of views in our communities. Yvonne Barnett, as a sub-panel Chair, commented on the broad process and the importance of listening to concerns.

### **8. Policy & Public Affairs Update**

#### **8.1 Policy & Public Affairs update**

Council welcomed the update paper from the Policy & Public Affairs Director, noting the significant range of work undertaken across teams.

#### **8.2 Inclusion & Diversity**

Laura Marshall (LM) joined the meeting and described the background to the paper.



The Board Diversity Champion - Caroline Austin (CA) – suggested the draft should be developed further in order to ensure it was more fully defined, with input from Council Members on the Diversity and Inclusion “task and finish” Working Group.

Jackie Hunter (JH) proposed the addition of clear targets that are achievable and can be monitored. All agreed. CA noted that the Science Council has a good set of criteria that we could use.

Council asked for the draft to be developed further by the working group in light of comments, noting that it will be important to also develop suitable wording for the website and other external interfaces.

**Action: Oral update at the December Council Meeting, with completion in March (LM/CA).**

### 8.3 Athena Forum

Council received a paper providing an overview of the Athena Forum. Funding had been requested. CA supported continued involvement, particularly as a route to understanding, and spreading, best practice around inclusion and diversity.

Council **AGREED** the proposal and recommended an annual review

### 8.4 UKBC update

Council welcome the summary of events leading up to, and during, the IBO in Iran and reiterated their congratulations to the UK team and the UKBC committee on the most successful UK IBO performance to date. RR added Council's thanks to LB and the team for their work behind the scenes. As always, the UKBC Committee volunteers had put in an enormous effort, which was highly valued. Maggie Linford and John Bennett had been required to contribute even more hours than normal at the IBO as visa issues had limited attendance by other Committee members.

LB reported that the contribution of the IBO to “soft diplomacy” had been especially welcomed by the Foreign Office.

Going forward Council asked for clear documentation to continue, stressing the importance of sign-off by Council for future IBO attendance. Next year's event will be held in Hungary.

### 8.5 HUBS Constitution

Lauren McLeod (LMc) joined the meeting and explained the proposed amendments to the HUBs constitution. RR pointed out that part of the process had been aimed at seeking greater alignment between Committee and SIG terms of reference.

Nigel Brown (NB) questioned whether it was appropriate to have such long terms of office. Council agreed it was not ideal but accepted that a combination of practice on other Committees, the need to retain experience and the challenge of rotation on occasions, made it acceptable.

The international strategy, affiliate membership, constitutional amendments and length of service were all **AGREED**.

## **9. Membership & Professional Affairs**

### **9.1 Membership & Professional Affairs update**

Council received the update paper.

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RLF) gave a brief summary of the CBiol position following the introduction of charging and reported that there did not appear to be any significant impact on membership retention at present.

### **9.2 Membership survey**

Mark Leach and Emma Horrigan joined the meeting. RLF gave a presentation based on a response level of over 2,200 members, an increase on previous years.

One of the key messages was that 67% of respondents said their satisfaction level was 75% or higher whilst 93% said 50% or higher. The Biologist was the number one benefit, noting the quality had continued to increase.

CA asked about the response rate and whether it might be possible to improve on this. RLF agreed that we should continue to seek further engagement, whilst noting that a response rate of 12% was good and above typical industry comparators of 6-8%.

Council welcomed the very positive outcome and agreed that the information was highly valuable, meriting a specific action plan linking into the three year plan. It was important to demonstrate to members that their views had not only been noted but acted upon where possible.

RR suggested considering the detail further at the MPA Committee and bringing forward an action plan.

**Action: Action plan to be brought to Council at December Meeting by MPA Committee (RR)**

## **10. Future Planning**

### **10.1 Biology Week**

Philippa Skett joined the meeting and provided an update. Preparations were going well and, as in previous years, a surge in social media activity, website visits and media coverage was anticipated. Council welcomed the continued growth in the event and thanked PS and the team for their work to date.

### **10.2 Council Strategy Meeting note**

Council received notes of the Strategy Meeting held in June.

### 10.3 Three Year Plan update

Tom Ireland (TI) provided an update setting out the proposed structure of the paper. A key aim was to ensure the content was more accessible and shareable, so that it can be updated as goals are achieved. Four core themes were outlined - inspire, support, influence and grow. The President suggested that "evolve" might be a better descriptor than "grow". Council **AGREED**. In addition Council wished to ensure that global challenges in bioscience were reflected (and the potential role of RSB) alongside clear impact measurements and diversity considerations.

TI proposed a PDF format that would sit within the RSB website in a distinct area with links and updatable areas. A shorter print version would also be available.

CW felt that outreach should be clearer alongside a shift in focus to the science of biology. At present she felt the membership aspects possibly came out too strongly.

Patrick Hussey (PH) reflected on the importance of inter-disciplinarity, especially in the new era of UKRI.

Clearly top level KPIs need to be added for public consumption and more detailed milestones within the overall business plan. An integrated approach bringing together activity as collective impact for the sector rather than a Society focus was required.

**Action: Council to see another version electronically, with a final version for sign off at the December Council Meeting**

### 10.4 Bioscience Grand Challenges

Karen Patel (KP) joined the meeting and introduced her paper. Council welcomed the idea and had a wide ranging debate. Council supported an alternative title to flag the nature of the activity, perhaps "Biology, Changing the World" (*post meeting note: used in other contexts by the RSB a few years back*).

Greater involvement with teachers, schools, live broadcasting and potential charging were considered as well as moving to an "in-conversation" format. KP welcomed the feedback and stressed the value of engaging on a one to one basis with branches, noting the need to ensure clear cross-correlation with the new business plan. Council agreed there was little point in developing this simply because it was in the current plan. There needed to be a strong rationale.

On balance, Council supported the proposal with appropriate revisions and thanked KP for her work on this.

### 10.5 Tenth Anniversary Plans

KP asked Council for guidance on the scope and scale of the potential anniversary celebrations. Both NB and PB felt that it was only worth doing at scale, with a reasonably large programme of activity, if the intention was to have a lasting impact on the profile of bioscience and RSB's role.



MD commented that it would be a vehicle to deliver elements of the three year plan, particularly impact through outreach, explaining the role of biology in grand challenges and helping membership recruitment. There was an opportunity to link in with expertise in member organisations in all areas of bioscience.


Council supported the need for dedicated effort to help deliver the ambitions of the programme and PB noted that Finance Committee had considered this as a potential one-off activity funded through the building sales.

Council **AGREED** a new staff post for two years to take forward the proposals.

11. **AoB**

None reported.

***The next Council Meeting will be held on Wednesday 5 December 2018.***

  
6/12/18