

MINUTES of the Annual General Meeting

Held at Queen Mary University of London, St Bartholomew's Hospital, London EC1A 7BE

at 14:00 on Wednesday 10 May 2017

1. Welcome and Apologies

The President, Professor Dame Jean Thomas FRSB, welcomed everyone to the Society's eighth AGM and reported that no proxy votes had been received.

Apologies were received from;

Professor Caroline Austin, Professor John Coggins, Professor Jackie Hunter, Professor Patrick Hussey and Professor Hilary MacQueen.

The President asked for any amendments to, or comments on, the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 12 May 2016. There were none.

The Minutes of the previous AGM were ACCEPTED as a true record.

2. CEO Report

Dr Mark Downs (MD) gave an update on the last financial year 2015-16 plus highlights of a few events since then.

The Society is operating to a three-year operational plan, with the financial year October 2015 – September 2016 having been the first year of the plan. The plan covers three key areas: a unified voice, professional membership and a broad reach, all underpinned by a programme of public outreach work.

The Society is a unifying voice for the life sciences, representing views of the sector, including Member Organisations and individual members. It leads a range of activity in Parliament on behalf of the science community through Dr Stephen Benn, the Society's Director of Parliamentary Affairs. The RSB is also active in the devolved nations and often partners sister societies.

Links Day, a chance for the science community to engage with parliamentarians in Westminster, was very timely in 2016. It was scheduled for 28 June, only five days after the referendum in which Britain voted to leave the EU. As such, it was the first scientific event in Parliament to discuss the issues of Brexit and the event was well attended and had national news coverage.

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At Voice of the Future we had the virtual presence of astronaut Major Tim Peake, speaking to attendees in a recorded message from the International Space Station. This was an exciting and unique experience for students and MPs alike.

SET for Britain in 2016 saw the biology section receive the highest level of entries, and the biology winner went on to win the prized Westminster medal.

Almost everything that the Society does is in collaboration, whether with individuals or organisations, and this includes, but is by no means limited to, the Science Media Centre, the British Science Association, Sense about Science, the Science Council, The Foundation for Science and Technology, Campaign for Science and Engineering, the Learned Societies' Group, the Parliamentary Steering Group and the Parliamentary Affairs Committee. These organisations not only work with the RSB, but are critical in supporting the Society in the work that it produces. Individual Membership remains the bedrock of the Society, and the expertise of members is often called upon. MD urged members to record their expertise on the mySociety online portal.

The Society also supports biologists through continual professional development (CPD) infrastructure and a wide range of training opportunities, as well as three chartered statuses and seven registers.

Accreditation and Advanced Accreditation remain a growing area of importance for the RSB, as well as for institutions, students and employers. In addition to Accreditation and Advanced Accreditation, last year the Society rolled out Masters and International Accreditation, and is currently developing the infrastructure for accrediting Foundation Degrees and doctoral training centres.

MD recorded his thanks to the Society's network of 19 branches, all of which are run by volunteers. Between them they organised over 100 branch events last year engaging thousands of visitors. There was also significant activity among the Society's special interest groups.

The Society has been running fundraising events for the past three years, and in 2016 the Science Museum auditorium was packed for an evening with Sir Alec Jeffreys Hon FRSB, in conversation with Dr Alison Woollard FRSB.

In 2016 the Society celebrated the 50th anniversary of the *Journal of Biological Education*, and a special addition of the journal was published: interviews are available on the Society website. April 2017 also saw the launch of a new journal, *Emerging Topics in Life Sciences*, in partnership with the Biochemical Society and Portland Press.

The Society has engaged with industry through the Employers Advisory Group and uses professional registers and training as key tools in this engagement.

Society Reports

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, (RLF), Director of Membership and Professional Affairs, updated attendees on the membership of the Society.

Overall there has been a positive upward trend in membership, and RLF thanked all members who are critically important to the work of the Society and especially the member engagement work that members do. The Society has recently reached the 17,000-member milestone, and is on course to reach 18,000 by September 2018. The most recent election in April was the strongest since 2014, with over 1,000 members joining.

The Society has been trying to address the gender balance amongst its membership and RLF encouraged everyone to urge female biologists to join their professional body.

The Society has a 95% retention rate at the Fellow (FRSB) grade, over 90% at Member (MRSB) grade and 98% at Associate Member (AMRSB) grade. Perhaps unsurprisingly, retention rates at Student and BioNet grades are a lot lower, and in the coming years the Society will be increasingly focusing on how to engage with these audiences.

Expanding on the training programmes available to members, the Society has recently launched a bespoke online training portal which has been in development over the past year. The first training programme is now live, for Gopher Science Labs, which schools in Wales can access free, as a result of a generous grant from the Welsh Assembly Government to create this programme. Further training is in development. RLF encouraged suggestions from members.

A dedicated team of staff works on providing membership services to some of our member organisations. The RSB is currently working with five organisations, providing a bespoke mix of membership, secretariat, treasury and events services based on the individual needs of each organisation.

Equally important are the member organisations, and the Society works with over 100. RLF recorded her thanks for their work and support, and to the seven Enhanced Funding societies that provide key support: the Biochemical Society, the British Ecological Society, the British Pharmacological Society, the Society for Applied Microbiology, the Society for Experimental Biology, The Nutrition Society and The Physiological Society. In 2015/16 this additionally included the Society for Endocrinology and the Microbiology Society.

Dr Laura Bellingan (LB), Director of Policy and Public Affairs, then gave an update on the policy work at the RSB.

Policy is not a discrete issue, and it threads through most of what the Society does, and so internally the departments for science policy, education policy and communication have been brought together. Policy also extends to membership and the Society's outreach work.

The RSB Council's principal committee, the Education, Training and Policy Committee (ETP) leads the policy agenda. Policy work is both proactive and reactive, generating initiatives and events as well as responding to consultations and actions. The Society focuses on how evidence-based science can inform policy development and on policies relating to science itself.

A lot of the work of the Animal Science Group (ASG), a special interest group of the Society, focuses on policy relating to the use of animals in research. It provides key information from across the sector to assist Government in this important area, often working with both the Home Office and BEIS.

The UK Plant Sciences Federation (UKPSF) has been proactive, creating a status report and identifying future challenges in plant science. The work of the UKPSF has been critical in identifying the status of the plant sector, with skills and funding being addressed in a new roadmap due to be launched in September 2017. The Plant Science Undergraduate Summer Studentships is just one of many outcomes of the Society's policy led activity in partnership with DEFRA.

The Society has engaged with the public through constructive discussions and events across a range of issues and, for example, through the collaborative partnership of Britain Breathing, a citizen science project recording hay-fever symptoms (in partnership with Manchester University and the British Society for Immunology) It also interacts with the community on a weekly basis through the Science Policy newsletter with its readership of over 17,000, as well as articles in *The Biologist*. LB urged members to provide opinion pieces and letters for *The Biologist*.

Education policy has been very active this past year and a pan-science approach was again important. The work of the education policy team has covered a broad landscape of primary, secondary, further and higher education.

There will also hardly be an area that will not be touched by Brexit, and the Society is working with its members, member organisations, and sister organisations to ensure the bioscience voice is heard.

3. Receive and consider the Annual Report and Accounts

Dr Pat Goodwin (PG), Honorary Treasurer gave an overview of the Society's annual accounts.

The income in the financial year October 2015-September 2016 was £2.5m, with 70% of income coming from membership subscriptions. Approximately 97% of the Society's expenditure goes towards charitable activities.

The Society makes very prudent assumptions on income when setting budgets for the year, and we had an operational surplus of £134,000 against a planned deficit of £64,000. This year was also the first year of the new financial SORP, meaning that the finances had to be displayed differently on the balance sheet. As a result, the Society's main office, Charles Darwin House, is now shown as a depreciating asset, whereas the second building, Charles Darwin House 2, leased to bioscience organisations, can be shown as an investment property.

The Society is carrying forward £1.57m, and going confidently into next year as a going concern.

PG thanked MD, the finance staff, members of the Finance Committee, the Audit Committee and its chair Rodney Eastwood and auditors haysmacintyre for their collective work over the past year in guiding the Society to a more positive outcome than planned.

PG also recorded her thanks to all members and member organisations for their support, and especially the Enhanced Funding societies and AstraZeneca, BBSRC and the Wellcome Trust for their additional support.

The meeting voted to accept the annual report and accounts; no proxy votes were received and all those present voted in favour by a show of hands.

It was RESOLVED that the annual report and accounts for 2015-2016 were accepted by the meeting as a true record.

4. Appointment of Auditors

The meeting voted to allow Council to appoint haysmacintyre as the Society's auditors and to set their remuneration. No proxy votes had been received, and all attendees voted in favour of the resolution by a show of hands.

It was RESOLVED that Council will appoint haysmacintyre for the audit of the financial year 2016-17 and to set their remuneration.

5. Confirmation of Honorary Officers

JT reminded attendees that Honorary Officers are appointed by the Council – the Secretary and Treasurer for a maximum of five years, with a confirmation of their appointment carried out at each AGM. The President is appointed for four years.

Dr Pat Goodwin FRSB was re-appointed as the Honorary Treasurer, for her fifth and final term in her role. The Society will be appointing a new Honorary Treasurer at the next AGM.

The term for Professor Christopher Kirk FRSB as Honorary Secretary came to an end this AGM. Professor Kirk has been a Trustee since 2012 in his role as Honorary Secretary. The President thanked Professor Kirk on behalf of Council for his service to the Society in this role, and also noted that he had promoted the old Biosciences Federation as an umbrella organisation for the life sciences, and was then instrumental in its merger with the Institute of Biology in 2009.

Professor Kirk commented that it had been a very interesting journey for him, and that it has been a pleasure to see how well the Society has done in this time.

Professor Richard Reece FRSB was elected to the role of Honorary Secretary, after serving one term as Trustee in the College of Individual Members. Professor Reece is also highly active at the Society and works closely in the development of Accreditation.

Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow FRSB, currently the Vice Chancellor of the University of Kent and President of Universities UK, was also confirmed to succeed Professor Dame Jean Thomas as President of the Society from May 2018.

6. Election of Council Members

Professor Richard Reece (RR), the new Honorary Secretary, reminded members of the constitution of Council. Three of the members are Honorary Officers (President, Secretary and Treasurer), four members are appointed from the College of Individual Members, and four from the College of Organisation Members. A further four members are appointed by Council to fill any skill gaps.

There has been a great deal of turnover on Council in the past 12 months, with a third of the Trustees changing. In the College of Individual Members this year there were two vacancies, following Tim Brigstocke FRSB stepping down earlier in the year, and the appointment of Professor Richard Reece as Honorary Secretary (hence *ex officio* member of Council). Following a call for nominations, five were received and the two individuals elected were Professor Caroline Austin FRSB and Professor Hilary MacQueen FRSB. Voting turnout was 23%, a small increase from last year.

In the College of Organisational Members, Professor Julia Buckingham FRSB's second term came to an end. Two nominations were received following a call to member organisations and Dr Paul Hoskisson FRSB (Microbiology Society) was elected. Voting turnout was 49%, a vast improvement to previous years.

Council-appointed member Professor Sir Peter Downes FRSB reached the end of his second term. To fill this and another previous vacancy, Professor Claire Wathes FRSB and Dr Louise Leong FRSB have been appointed to Council. Council would also like to note the appointment of Professor Jackie Hunter FRSB in November last year in a Council-appointed role.

7. AOB

MD recorded his thanks to Karen Patel and Ana Ilic for the organisation of the AGM. He also thanked the 500+ volunteers who help out regionally, at events, as well as on committees and Council members, all of whom give their time freely.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 15:00.