

Branches Guidelines

1. Objectives of the Royal Society of Biology

According to the Royal Charter for the Royal Society of Biology (RSB), the objectives of the RSB is to advance for the public benefit the science and practice of biology, to advance education therein and to regulate, coordinate and encourage the study of biology and its application.

The objective of branch committees is to work to help fulfil these objectives within agreed branch catchment areas, with the support of Head Office (HO) staff, primarily via the events officer.

Branch committees primarily achieve these objectives by organising and delivering a programme of events and activities throughout the year that:

- promote education and the increased public understanding of and engagement with the biological sciences
- engage members and the general public in branch areas with current developments in biology
- encourage the exchange of ideas and information between biologists from different fields of expertise and areas of employment and/or between biologists and those working in other science, technology, engineering and mathematics networks (STEM) and non-STEM fields
- enhance the professional status of bioscientists, thereby encouraging young people who aspire to become professional biologists
- assist the Society in the recruitment of members
- collaborate with other local groups, Member Organisations, Special Interest Groups, sister Societies and *ad hoc* entities created by the Outreach and Engagement Grants

2. Minimum requirements of branch committees

The RSB values the breadth of expertise and experience contained within its membership, especially within its volunteer branch committees. As a result of this diversity, it is appreciated that there will be variation in the content and format of events and activities that various committees are confident and qualified to deliver regionally. The autonomy, self-direction and distinct strengths of branch committees is to be celebrated and encouraged.

The following are expected of branch committees as a minimum requirement:

A branch committee will:

- promote biology and the aims and objectives of the RSB
- have the three principle officer roles filled: chair, secretary and treasurer
- ideally consist of between nine and 12 members in total (including the three principle officer positions)
- ensure that all branch committee members are RSB members
- meet at least four times a year or at least be able to show that event planning is clearly in progress
- be open to receiving new members on the branch committee
- run at least four events per year
- regularly review all committee roles and hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of branch members to elect the principal officers and other committee posts or members
- promptly update events officer of any contact changes or make up of the branch committee
- provide details of upcoming events to events officer so that they can be advertised on the RSB website and directly to members in the branch catchment area and those of adjoining branches as appropriate
- ensure that all health and safety guidelines are adhered to for each event, including the completion of a risk assessment and compliance with the RSB's safeguarding policy

3. Branch Annual General Meeting (AGM)

All branches are required to hold an AGM each financial year (1st October – 30th September). In practice the AGM can be a very short session held before or after a regular branch event.

All committee roles, including those of the principal officers are required to be reviewed, either formally or informally, on an annual basis. This is to ensure that branch committee members:

- remain happy with their roles
- have the opportunity to change roles
- are able to stand down from the committee
- can create new roles
- can propose changes to the committee

Nominations for new committee members must be made in advance of the AGM:

- any registered branch member can nominate themselves for election for a vacant position
- if more than one nomination is made for a specific committee role a formal vote must be taken at the meeting
- only members of the hosting branch, aged 18 and over, are eligible to vote
- hosting branch members of any grade are eligible to vote
- absent members may vote by email or in writing to the branch secretary or other nominated branch officer before the AGM takes place
- if only one candidate stands for a vacant position then that person will be duly elected and no vote needs to take place, unless any serious objections are raised by other branch members

All branch members must be invited to the AGM and informed of the meeting at least six weeks in advance. Members from other branches and members of the public may also attend, however only members from the hosting branch may vote.

It is recommended that the ideal length of term in office for branch members should be not less than three and not more than five consecutive years, although this will depend on specific local conditions and availability of branch members willing to serve on the committee.

All committee roles, including those of the principal officers, are required to be reviewed each year. This review should take place in advance of the AGM where any formal changes can be made. The branch secretary must be informed if committee members wish to remain in post, stand down, change roles or nominate themselves for another committee position.

A quorum of 10 members from the hosting branch is needed to regulate the annual meeting. If you do not have 10 branch members present, either in person or virtually, then the AGM is non-quorate and must be repeated within the financial year.

The proposed agenda for the AGM, including details of candidates standing for election, should be sent out to all branch members six weeks before the AGM takes place. Any branch member can request a specific agenda item to be added but must notify the branch secretary in writing at least two weeks prior to the AGM.

Any changes to the composition of the committee or of principal officer roles must be notified to the events officer immediately following the AGM.

The AGM is also an opportunity for a review of the year's events, the use of branch funds and to allow discussion on future plans and direction of the branch.

4. Principal Officer Roles

Branch Chair:

- lead and motivate branch committee to create a programme of public and member events

- help develop and drive forward new event ideas
- consider ways in which the branch can reach new audiences and raise its profile in the area
- consider ways in which the branch could become more sustainable, for example through additional recruitment or fundraising
- involve new people/organisations/partners within branch initiatives
- delegate tasks/roles/responsibilities appropriately amongst the committee
- chair committee meetings and the AGM
- lead the informal annual review of branch committee roles
- represent the branch within the RSB and externally

Branch Secretary:

- act as primary contact for the branch, internally and externally
- inform RSB HO of any changes in branch committee membership
- deal with enquiries from regional members either directly or through the HO events officer
- arrange committee meetings and the AGM
- notify committee members and confirm attendance
- produce Minutes and Notice of Actions at committee meetings

Branch Treasurer:

- maintain records and copies of branch finances
- attend branch meetings to provide financial reports
- approve expenditure and ensure that the branch remains within budget and is cost-efficient

Vice Chair (where appointed):

- assist the chair directly with their role
- act as chair in cases where the chair is absent or unavailable at branch or RSB events

Education Liaison Officer (where appointed):

- build relationships with local schools or higher education providers within the branch catchment area
- develop opportunities to support schools or HE facilities with events, competitions or other activities

5. Bylaws and Regulations**a) Council Bylaw 36: Branches and Specialised Groups – extract from the RSB Bylaws:**

- The Council may at its direction upon receipt of a request to that effect from not less than ten individual voting members, create a Branch of the Society in a particular district or a Specialised Group with appropriate terms of reference and powers as published in the Regulations, and the Council shall have the power to dissolve any Branch or Group so created. The Council may contribute towards the costs of the formation and maintenance of a Branch or Specialised Group from the general funds of the Society.
- Each Branch or Group shall be constituted and its affairs shall be carried on subject to and in accordance with the Charter, Bylaws and Regulations of the Society.
- Membership of a Branch shall be open to all members of the Society without payment of any fee in addition to that payable to the Society in accordance with the Bylaws. No person shall belong to more than one Branch, although they may attend events/meetings/etc. of any Branch. Members of the Society may belong to more than one Specialised Group.

b) Regulations concerning branches:

- The HO events officer shall have responsibility for liaising with the branch committees and will represent the views of the branches to staff at HO and Council.
- The events officer will provide details of membership where possible in line with Data Protection Regulations.
- The events officer or any other member of the events and regions team will email members on behalf of branch committees and distribute content as requested but retains the right to edit material within RSB policy and guidelines in order to comply with RSB style guidelines.
- The events and regions team will upload branch events on to the RSB website and organise any booking or payment requirements. This is following receipt of event details from the branch committees provided on the branch event form which need to comply with the required notice period.
- The events and regional manager will be the budget holder for any funds allocated to the branch to enable it to carry out its activities during the Financial Year.
- Each branch approved by Council shall adopt the model Branch Constitution as approved by Council.
- Each branch shall adopt any Council-approved amendments to the Constitution at its next AGM.
- No branch or branch committee is empowered to bind the RSB to a particular policy or financial commitment without the prior approval of HO, any such approval being normally sought through the HO events officer.
- Each branch, acting through its treasurer, shall send HO a Return of Branch Income and Expenditure at the end of each Financial Year.
- The catchment area for each branch is set by the RSB according to geographic counties.
- Members of a branch may attend meetings organised by any other branch.
- The Rules for the appointment and responsibilities of branch officers and committee members are set out in the Branch Constitution.
- The appointment of all branch officers and committee members is “honorary”; no remuneration is paid but members may claim reasonable expenses in accordance with the scale of reimbursement set from time to time by Council.
- Branch officers are responsible to the RSB for the day-to-day running of their branch, in accordance with the Regulations and Constitution of the RSB and the branch.
- Elected officers and committee members have delegated powers in accordance with the RSB's Charter, Bylaws and Regulations.
- Provided that officers and committee members have acted in a lawful manner and have also fulfilled their obligations as described in this document, then the RSB's insurers will cover any potential liability arising from their actions.
- However, members should consult HO for more detailed information on matters that may affect individual and collective liability.

c) Planning branch events, budget guidelines and financial records:

- The RSB's Financial Year runs from 1st October to 30th September.
- Branches should organise their activities so that they provide information in a timely manner (a minimum of six weeks before the event takes place) and in accordance with the RSB's budgeting timetable.
- Branch committees should maintain an up to date list of activities and promote these through the RSB's website.
- Once a branch committee has approved a programme of events and associated costs, this forms the basis for a branch budget proposal, which is normally required by HO by July/August each year for the following Financial Year.
- Branch administration and travel costs are added to the event costs in the above submission.
- It is pertinent to highlight any major changes proposed in future branch activities including any specific future events that may incur high costs as soon as they are known. No assumption should be made that such events might be funded without the prior approval of HO.

- In general, once the total funding available for branches is agreed, funds for specific branches will be allocated according to individual branch activities. If no submission has been sent in to HO the allocation of funds will be at the discretion of HO.
- Notification of allocated funding is sent to branch committees prior to 30th September each year.
- Branches are encouraged to have their funds managed directly by HO rather than through separate branch bank accounts.
- Specific rules apply to branches that continue to maintain their own bank accounts, namely a requirement that new funds will only be transferred across once the Annual Return for the previous Financial Year has been submitted and approved.
- It is important for branch treasurers to keep HO informed of events that are likely to cost significantly more than the original budget; similarly, events that are well under budget should also be reported as funds can be redirected elsewhere as appropriate.
- The branch treasurer is responsible for maintaining an up to date record of branch income and expenditure and a spreadsheet is available for this purpose as required.
- Where branches continue to maintain their own Bank Accounts, these must not be allowed to go overdrawn and the HO finance department must be kept aware of the Bank Account details and current balance. The HO finance manager must also be one of the signatories to the Account.
- The branch treasurer must also prepare an account of income and expenditure for the previous Financial Year for approval at the next AGM. Back up paperwork supporting items of income and expenditure must be retained either by HO or by the branch treasurer for six years in case they are required by the RSB's auditors.

d) VAT and the branches

- All branch activities form part of the RSB's activities and, as such, are subject to inclusion within the RSB's VAT Returns.
- The RSB is a partially exempt body and is, therefore, unable to recover all of the VAT it pays out.
- It is imperative that HO is provided with all VAT invoices and receipts in order to be able to account for them correctly with HMRC; similarly, it is essential that branches consult with HO before setting any event charges or issuing invoices.

e) The status of branch officers – charity trustees

- The Royal Society of Biology is a registered Charity (Registered Number: 277981). It is, therefore, subject to the control of the Charity Commissioners acting under their authority conferred by the Charities Acts.
- Whilst the Constitution of each branch comes from the authority of Council that defines the powers of the branch and its officers, no definitive statement can be made that the officers are, in fact, charity trustees.
- However, it is certain that the Charity Commission could hold branch officers and committee members to account for problems that might arise in the management of a particular branch's affairs if they are contrary to the Charity Acts.
- Branch officers and committee members must, therefore, ensure that they do not act outside of the overall remit of the RSB as set out in the Royal Charter and of the powers granted to a branch by Council.

f) Insurance and the branches

- The RSB is insured against a number of risks including professional indemnity insurance but it may not cover every risk. It is the responsibility of branch officers to check with HO in the event of any uncertainty.
- Branch officers are responsible for advising all potential motor users of the need to have business use extension insurance in place on their personal motor insurance policies before starting journey on RSB business.

- Claiming travel expenses is not relevant to the validity of those using their motor vehicle for RSB business.

g) Risk Assessments for branch events

- Any event organised by a branch that takes place away from RSB premises should have a Risk Assessment carried out beforehand, using templates provided by HO. This is particularly important for outdoor events where additional hazards can be anticipated.
- Copies of Risk Assessments should be submitted to HO and be kept for 3 years after the event has taken place.
- Specific Risk Assessments should be undertaken when any person under the age of 18 is likely to be present.
- In all cases, branch events must comply with the RSB's Safeguarding Children Policy.
- If, even after exhaustive efforts, there is still a risk to a minor then it is likely that the event should not be held.
- Under no circumstances should an event be held where there is any likelihood of death or danger to the public.

h) Use of electronic communication and the holding of personal data

- Branches must adhere to the RSB's Privacy Policies with respect to the use of electronic communication and the holding of personal data.
- Bulk emails to members will be sent out by HO only.
- Individual email addresses are not to be disclosed to anyone who is not a branch officer or member of RSB staff.
- Any email address list held by the RSB is only to be used for RSB business.
- Branch committees must not hold a general database of members' information.
- Members' contact details obtained and held by the committee should only be used for the specific purpose they were originally provided for.
- Any limited data that is held is done so under the terms of the Data Protection Act.

6. Branch Constitution

CONSTITUTION OF THE BRANCH OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF BIOLOGY

1 Name

The name of the branch is the Royal Society of Biology xxx branch.

2 Objectives

The objectives of the branch are to further the aims and objectives of the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) at all times by:

- a) promoting and fostering the public understanding of biology in the branch area
- b) encouraging the exchange of ideas and information between biologists from different fields of expertise and areas of employment
- c) representing the views of the members of the branch to the officers, council or other RSB branches
- d) enhancing the professional status of bioscientists, thereby encouraging young people who aspire to become professional biologists
- e) organising activities of biological, social and general value to members of the branch, thereby keeping them in touch with current developments in biology
- f) assisting the RSB in the recruitment of members
- g) collaborating with other branches, RSB Member Organisations, Special Interest Group and sister Societies in the furtherance of the above objectives

3 Membership

Membership of the branch is for all members of the RSB, at any grade, living or working within the area of the branch and any other member who has chosen to be affiliated with the branch.

4 Organisation

The branch is organised and administered by a committee elected by the branch members.

5 Composition

The branch committee must consist of the following:

- a) the honorary officers: chair, vice-chair (optional), secretary and treasurer, nominated from the individual voting members of the branch
- b) up to 12 ordinary members, nominated from all grades of membership of the branch
- c) up to three additional members of the branch, co-opted by the committee

6 Election of Officers and Committee Members

The election of officers and committee members will be conducted and ratified at an Annual General Meeting of the branch or, exceptionally, at a Special General Meeting (SGM) convened for that purpose and annually thereafter.

Elections of officers and committee members will be by ballot of those Individual Voting Members, registered in the branch one month prior to the election. The ballot will be carried out at the AGM or SGM or by postal vote held at the discretion of the Committee and ratified at the AGM or SGM.

7 Tenure of Office

Normally no person should serve as an honorary officer in the same capacity for a period of more than five consecutive years. Normally, no person should serve as an ordinary member of committee for more than 10 consecutive years.

8 Unexpired Term

In the event of the resignation of an honorary officer, the committee will appoint another member of the committee to take over the relevant responsibility until the following AGM. In the event of a resignation of a committee member, the committee has the power to co-opt to fill the unexpired term of membership.

9 Records

The branch secretary will notify committee members of forthcoming meetings and will keep a permanent record of all proceedings, which should include:

- a) The names of all officers and members of the branch committee attending meetings
- b) All decisions taken by the branch committee
- c) All decisions taken at the AGM or at a Special General Meeting of the branch

10 Quorum

A quorum of the committee consists of one third of the total elected committee members and honorary officers. In the absence of the chair, the vice chair or other honorary officer should take the chair.

11 Special General Meetings of the Committee

Any three elected members and/or honorary officers may request the honorary secretary to convene a special meeting of the committee within a period of 21 days, stating the business to be discussed. The honorary secretary should also advise the HO events officer of the requirement to hold a special meeting of the committee.

12 Duties and Responsibilities of Officers

- a) The honorary treasurer will keep accounts of all monies received and expended by the branch and will report to the committee at each meeting on the state of the finances.
- b) The honorary treasurer will ensure that the accounts are examined annually and will forward a copy of the branch accounts, together with such other information as may be required, to the finance manager at the RSB, by such date as may be set.
- c) The honorary treasurer will produce a budget for the forthcoming year that will be agreed with HO and submitted for approval by such date as may be set.

13 Annual General Meeting

A General Meeting of the members of the branch must be held in each calendar year. A quorum of 10 members will regulate the annual meeting which is chaired by the chair, or in their absence the vice-chair, or in the absence of both officers by a member of the branch committee. Notification of the Annual General Meeting must be given at least six weeks prior to the date of the meeting stating the date, place and time of that meeting, together with the agenda and any call for nominations for election to the committee.

14 Special General Meeting

Any 10 corporate members of the branch may request the honorary secretary to convene a Special General Meeting of the branch, stating the business to be discussed. At least 21 days' notice of such a Special General Meeting is required.

15 Powers of Branch Committee

The branch committee has the powers to decide on matters not provided for in the foregoing Constitution so long as such decisions do not contravene the Charter, Bylaws or Regulations of the RSB.

16 Changes to the Constitution

The Constitution and Bylaws can be changed only after notice of the proposed changes have been made to the Annual General Meeting and thereafter agreed by a vote of at least two-thirds of those attending a subsequent Annual or Special General Meeting. Any proposal for changes to this Constitution must be agreed with the events officer on behalf of the RSB prior to adoption at an Annual or Special General Meeting of the branch. Any proposal for changes arising at an Annual or Special General Meeting not previously agreed with HO must be approved before implementation.

17 Dissolution of the Branch

In the event that the branch is unable to operate for any reason, a motion to dissolve the branch will be made by the branch committee at a Special General Meeting convened for that purpose. If the motion is carried, then any monies or property currently held by the branch must be returned immediately to the RSB.

18 Date of Effect

This Constitution was agreed at an Annual General Meeting of the xxxxx branch on xxx (date) and will be effective from that date.