

Council Meeting

**7 December 2016
12:30-15:30**

**Rooms 2 & 3, Charles Darwin House 2, 107 Gray's Inn Road,
London, WC1X 8TZ**

Web Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

The President welcomed Council, staff, thanked Member Organisation observers for attending and noted apologies.

Present: Professor Dame Jean Thomas (President)
Professor Chris Kirk (Hon Secretary)
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)
Professor John Coggins
Professor Richard Reece
Professor David Blackbourn
Professor Pete Downes
Professor Nigel Brown
Professor Patrick Hussey
Professor Jackie Hunter
Dr Paul Brooker
Dr Jeremy Pritchard
Dr Kim Hardie (by phone)

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive
Ms Laura Woodland, Biochemical Society
Mr Casey Early, Physiological Society
Mr Jon Kudlick, Director of Membership, Marketing & Communications
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Science Policy
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Education & Training
Ms Ana Ilic, Executive Officer
Ms Jennifer Crosk, PA to CEO (Minutes)

Apologies: Professor Julia Buckingham
Dr Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology
Mr Paul Hutchinson, Society for Experimental Biology

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Mr Mark Hollingsworth, Nutrition Society
Dr Hazel Norman, British Ecological Society

1.1 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 September 2016

2.1 Review of action points

All items had been completed or appeared on the Agenda. Honorary Fellowship events were currently on hold due to financial constraints.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

None reported.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **APPROVED** the Minutes and Web Minutes.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

In relation to Section C, Professor Nigel Brown reported being a previous President of the Microbiology Society and Professor Patrick Hussey is the current President of the Society for Experimental Biology. Professor Richard Reece is a trustee of the Biochemical and Chair of Portland Press and Dr Pat Goodwin is a Trustee of the Microbiology Society.

3. Chief Executive's Report & President's update

Mark Downs (MD) gave an update of recent activity, particularly engagement with politicians which included three Ministerial meetings. Stephen Benn (SB) had continued to do good work and had spoken to David Davis on the science agenda, as well as receiving a specific mention on the live BBC broadcast of the Youth Parliament. Stephen Metcalf MP had distributed his election flyer for the Chair of the Science & Technology Committee, in which the Society's logo appeared in the background of his picture.

There had been a wide range of public engagement activity across the UK for Biology Week which was covered in the Membership paper, with four major events held in central London. More recently, an event sponsored by P&G had been held on air pollution (Blue Sky Research for Grey Sky Days) as well as 'Come dine with the future' in Cardiff in partnership with Sêr Cymru National Research Network for Low Carbon, Energy and Environment (NRN-LCEE - expert panel on the future of sustainable food)

The Audit Committee had been looking at improving ways in which the Society could reflect on internal process. They had decided to seek a review of at least one major item per year. The first will be IT infrastructure, especially the membership database Marvin, and the new auditors (haysmacintyre) had been commissioned to carry out an independent security review. The

Committee had also reviewed the staff handbook and operations manual, both of which had been distributed to Council for information.

The new online application system, which integrates with the Society's HR database with an on-line "vacancies portal" in MySociety, had been developed for both staff and committee appointments. This system would be used for the upcoming Council appointments, due to be promoted in the December edition of *The Biologist*.

MD noted that, following previous agreement by Council that the Society should become increasingly firm about the importance of CPD in retaining CBiol status, members had been contacted to highlight the risk of losing this status in the absence of CPD. Council wished to record their thanks to the team for successfully taking this forward.

The President gave a brief report on her meeting with Minister Jo Johnson in partnership with the RSC, IoP and Council for Mathematics the previous day. It had been a very positive discussion and the Minister was keen to engage and welcomed the offer of help from Learned Societies.

Section A: Finance & Governance

4. Finance

4.1 Update from Finance Committee

The Honorary Treasurer noted that most of the update would be coming up in Section C. The Finance Committee reported that the cash position remained strong; that the membership team would be taking up membership services for CDH; and that they had looked at the budget for the IBO and Accreditation, both of which looked positive. The Committee considered a one-off payment to the pension fund from the Society's 1% equity sale of CDH to SfAM. The valuation would be discussed further under CDH business in section C.

4.2 Q4 forecast

The Q4 figures had been circulated for information. The management accounts showed a cash surplus, however, the actual operational bottom line was closer to half that figure. This partly reflected increased MO income and late MO payments from the previous year. The variance column showed that the figures were not far out from those forecast at Q3. Against a budgeted deficit this represented a positive swing and was an excellent outcome. Council thanked the CEO and RSB team for achieving this.

5. Staffing update

MD had circulated a paper listing changes over the past six months for information. Turnover during 2016 was just over 17% representing 6 jobs. This was in-line with other similar organisations in the sector. MD added that the Society could make more use of its alumni network moving forward.

6. Online overview of the Society

MD highlighted areas of the Society's website, outlining its work, as well as our partnerships, member information and downloadable free activity resources. "MyLearning" had yet to be formally launched. There were Apps available for citizen science work such as Spider in da House, Breathing

Britain and Biology Changing the World. The Society also had a Pinterest account and YouTube channel. Council suggested that it would be useful for the website and newsletters to have a 'spotlight on' section.

Section B: Policy & Strategy

7. Education & Training

7.1 Report from ETP

Jeremy Pritchard (JP) reported that there had been good committee engagement at the ETP strategy day in November. The Committee had evaluated their current membership in light of the upcoming vacancies and agreed to seek representation from students, technicians and teachers.

It was the Committee's policy to engage various Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and other committees which reported into ETP on a rolling cycle. Professor Nick Wells, Chair of the Animal Science Group (ASG), had provided the Committee with an overview of the work of the ASG at the last meeting.

Discussions had taken place on equality and diversity and how to move this forward. The Committee had also noted the effectiveness of the policy newsletters.

Break-out groups had discussed technical education, and they had been joined by Ali Orr, Registrar at the Science Council/member of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Panel.

A practical survey of over 2,000 students had been held, asking A level students how well prepared they had felt for their studies. Interim results showed a clear pattern that whereas students felt well prepared for practical work, this was not the case for presenting the data. The results would be summarised and released to students and teachers, followed by the offer to work with teachers on this negative perception.

Brexit had been discussed, including the industrial strategy.

7.2 Update on IBO and financial position

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RLF) reported that the IBO income looked healthy and that the expenditure would be lower as Warwick University had confirmed it would not need to charge VAT on some activities and academic time will be provided free of charge. The income from UK Biology Competitions (UKBC) had been healthier than expected during 2015-16. She pointed out that the total expenditure for staffing time, for those not directly involved in IBO, had not been included. However, new sponsors were still being sought and any surplus funds would be retained by UKBC for future educational activity.

The theoretical papers were being developed by the IBO Chair, Dr Andrew Treharne, along with past IBO participants Josh Hodgson and Matt Johnston. These would be uploaded to the online system in January, thus allowing time to check questions.

The practical papers were being developed by Professor Kevin Moffat and Dr Leanne Williams from the Warwick School of Life Sciences, with testing expected to start between February and Easter.

RLF noted her thanks to the British Pharmacological Society (BPS) for becoming a sponsor.

RLF added that 50 volunteers would be required for the event.

The information pack was available on the IBO website and official invitations would be sent to countries in the next few weeks, with registration commencing in February.

7.3 Accreditation update

The Finance Committee had looked at the financial forecast for accreditation, which looked set to return a better bottom line than originally planned. Richard Reece (RR) gave a brief overview. Following increased interest in International accreditation, one international visit has already been made, and further visits to a number of universities are planned for 2017. The team had been looking at new accreditation programmes such as doctoral training programmes and foundation degrees. There were indications of strong demand in all these areas.

7.4 HUBS Constitution

Following the recent HUBS meeting, minor changes had been made to the Constitution to reflect their current ways of working and to bring the terms in line with other SIGs.

John Coggins (JC) added that it would be helpful for the wording to state that members could be re-elected for a second term. Council also felt that any gender-specific terms should be removed and that the wording for item *i* should be amended to “no personal interest”. Casey Early suggested similar future changes should be indicated via a “track-changed” version.

Council **AGREED** the HUBS Constitution subject to the above changes.

Action: RLF to amend and send a track change version to the CEO to sign-off.

8. Science Policy Update

Laura Bellingan (LB) updated Council on staffing changes.

The Society had undertaken Consultation responses to the Migration Advisory Committee, and Science & Technology Select Committee, and on Accelerated Courses & Switching University Degrees and TEF.

The Society in its capacity as UK Bioscience Coalition (UKBSC) secretariat also assisted the Home Office, facilitating training from the neuroscience community for HO inspectors, this was successful and hopefully will result in further requests on specific topics.

The UK Plant Sciences Federation (UKPSF) met recently; their ongoing work this year has been bringing together a roadmap of plant sciences. The Committee were keen to run a different type of annual meeting next year, to include high profile speakers, focussed around the Roadmap.

LB updated Council on the work of the Genome Editing Advisory Group which had recently been established from the Fellowship. She invited Council to suggest additional names. The President asked for the current membership list to be circulated to Council.

Action: LB to circulate a list by email to Council.

Council discussed the HE and Research Bill, and noted the loss of Research Councils' Royal Charters under the proposed new UKRI arrangement and the desirability of UKRI being granted a Royal Charter to ensure political independence, Some felt there was a strong case for prioritising the need for a UKRI Royal Charter because of the risk that future Governments might be less supportive of independence than the current administration (post meeting note: Government proposals to enshrine the Haldane principle in law are helpful in this regard).

Pete Downes (PD) expressed concern that devolved administrations are not adequately represented within the proposed UKRI structure, especially given the inclusion of Research England.

Council **AGREED** that the Society should be vocal on the issue of UKRI independence and assured visibility and access for all of the UK in future research governance arrangements.

9. Membership, Marketing & Communication

Jon Kudlick (JK) reported that membership recruitment remained strong with the total membership now at 17,000. Biology Week events had been well attended and received healthy press coverage. The figure for students involved via school activities had now increased from 3,155 to 6,000. JK reported that Tom Ireland, Editor of *The Biologist* won an award for Business & Professional Magazine Editor at the Scottish Magazine Awards. Council congratulated Tom.

JK confirmed that *The Biologist* "opt-out" for the printed copy would go live on-line in the New Year and that care would need to be taken around how this is communicated as the paper version is frequently seen as a member benefit.

10. Science Council

Council discussed the Science Council draft "Strengthening Science for the 21st Century" which had been circulated at various Science Council meetings. Serious concerns were expressed about the Science Council's direction of travel and Council did not support the proposed strategic approach.

Action: MD to take forward discussions on the draft Science Council document and write to them outlining RSB concerns.

11. AoB

None reported.

The next meeting of Council will be held on Wednesday 15 March 2017 in CDH2.