

Council Meeting

**Wednesday 9 March 2016
12:30-15:00**

CDH2, 107 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8TZ

Web Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

The President welcomed Council and staff, thanked the Member Organisation observers for attending and gave apologies. The President thanked the two outgoing Council members, Dr Liz Lakin and Dr Aileen Allsop, for their two terms on Council, noting the considerable contributions they have made.

Present: Professor Dame Jean Thomas (President)
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)
Professor Julia Buckingham
Dr Kim Hardie
Dr Liz Lakin
Professor John Coggins
Dr Paul Brooker
Dr Aileen Allsop
Mr Tim Brigstocke

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive
Mr Jon Kudlick, Director of Membership, Marketing & Communication
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Science Policy
Ms Ana Ilic, Executive Assistant
Mr John Misselbrook, Biochemical Society
Mr Peter Cotgreave, Microbiology Society

Apologies: Professor Chris Kirk (Hon Secretary)
Professor Richard Reece
Professor David Blackburn
Professor Pete Downes
Professor Chris Garland
Dr Jeremy Pritchard
Ms Jo Revill, British Society for Immunology

Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London WC1N 2JU Tel: +44 (0)20 7685 2550 info@rsb.org.uk
www.rsb.org.uk

Mr Ian Russell, Society for Endocrinology
Dr Hazel Norman, British Ecological Society
Mr Paul Hutchinson, Society for Experimental Biology
Ms Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology
Mr Mark Hollingsworth, Nutrition Society
Mr Jono Bruun, British Pharmacological Society

1.1 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 December 2015

2.1 Review of action points

All actions had been completed.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

No matters reported.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council APPROVED the 16 December 2015 Minutes and Web Minutes.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

No conflicts of interest reported.

3. Chief Executive's Report

Mark Downs (MD) provided an overview of activity since the last Council meeting. Four major Parliamentary events had been organised: the Christmas reception, the New Year Science and Technology Select Committee reception, Voice of the Future (VOF) and SET for Britain. Stephen Benn had led on these events with support from other members of the team. They had all been hugely successful. MD wished to record his thanks to Stephen Benn and other colleagues. The VOF event had been unique. The turnout of senior parliamentarians and ministers was high and, after much persuasion, Tim Peake participated in the event from the International Space Station. MD noted that the chair of the Select Committee had approached the Society directly to help develop her reception and identify guests. MD felt that this was one indication that the Society's influence was now significant.

The final legal details of the Royal title were still being finalised. The Privy Council had reviewed our request to amend the Charter and Bylaws. MD understood that there had been no objections but confirmed that a formal notification had not yet been received. This did not stop the use of the Royal title but was required to complete final legal closure on the issue.

MD recorded his thanks to Professor John Coggins for chairing the judging panel in SET for Britain. There had been a significant number of biological entries, but for the first time biology had

been overtaken by engineering. He noted that the cost of the event continued to rise as charges for use of Parliamentary rooms increased.

The end of year audit had been successful and, as noted elsewhere, the end of year deficit was significantly lower than anticipated.

The Director of Education and Training would be returning from maternity leave in early July. There are plans to appoint a full-time person on a one-year contract around that time to help with the run up to the International Biology Olympiad in 2017. This year's Biology Olympiad competition had been very successful with student numbers rising by 1000 to 7200 from 630 schools.

MD noted the continuing success of the Accreditation programme and the significant range of Science Policy, Education and Public Engagement work that was currently ongoing.

MD brought to the attention of Council guidance which had been issued the previous day by the Charity Commission in relation to Brexit. This set out the obligations of trustees not to enter into political discussion on this issue except where there was a clear need and justification that was in line with the charity's objectives. He offered to circulate the guidance to Council for review. He also noted that Links Day 2016 will be on the subject of the EU and Science and will be held three working days *after* the referendum.

This year the elections to Council had generated significant interest. There had already been a number of applications and an election process was therefore inevitable. It was very encouraging to see such high-level interest in the Society's work.

Action: MD to circulate the Charity Commission guidance.

Section A: Finance & Governance

4. Finance

4.1 Update on the work of the Audit Committee

Rodney Eastwood (RE) introduced himself to Council having taken up the role of Audit Committee Chair early in 2015. He described the discussion at the two most recent meetings and made clear that he was available to discuss any issues of concern with members of Council directly. He noted that, as part of good practice, the Audit Committee intended to re-tender for the provision of audit services. This would be carried out later in 2016 with a view to putting a recommendation to the AGM in May 2017. He reported that the committee had also considered the option of establishing a formal internal audit process. They had concluded that for an organisation the size of RSB it was not necessary. Nonetheless the committee felt there may be a requirement for an internal audit of specific projects or activities from time to time. The committee's work on risk management remained an important function and RE noted that Council had accepted the recommendation to review the top 10 risks themselves at least once annually.

The major task for their January meeting had been a detailed review of the audit process and outcome. RE noted that the draft audit report was unqualified and that no major concerns had been raised. The auditors had made a recommendation regarding the recording of income from animal licence certificates which had slipped following a staff change. This had now been rectified.

The Audit Committee was pleased to be able to recommend the Trustees' Report and Accounts to Council as a positive and accurate representation of the Society's work over the previous financial year.

Council welcomed the positive report and thanked the Chair and the committee for their work. RE left the meeting at 13.00.

4.2 Report from the Finance Committee

The Honorary Treasurer, Pat Goodwin, reported back on the discussions held at Finance Committee in the morning. She noted that the Society was in a better financial position than anticipated from previous budgets and forecasting and thanked Mark Downs and his team for their work. The end of year deficit was £137,500 based on operational cost and was reduced further to £84,200 when unrealised investment gains and the pension position were taken into account. The budget had allowed for a deficit of £308,000. Council welcomed this positive report.

The Committee had benefited from a presentation on the Society's pension deficit issue from the newly appointed advisers, Punter Southall. PG reported that the deficit associated with the closed defined benefit pension scheme has grown and a number of options to address the deficit are being explored. Council encouraged the Finance Committee to proceed with negotiations.

PG noted that the committee had considered a number of other specific issues including an increase to the current staff salary budget, whilst also recognising the need for stronger communication to our member organisations, as discussed above.

4.3 Auditor's Letter

Both Audit and Finance Committee had reviewed the Auditor's letter. They did not wish to raise any matters of concern and Council noted the contents.

4.4 Approval of Trustee Report and Accounts

With the inclusion of one specific change, and a couple of minor typographical adjustments, Council were happy to accept the recommendation of Finance Committee to approve the Trustees' Report and Accounts for 2014 – 15.

Decision: Approval of the Trustee's Report and Accounts for 2015 and authorisation to write to the auditors to this effect.

4.5 Going concern & cash flow

Finance Committee had reviewed the cash flow in detail and reported to Council that the Society remained a going concern for the next 12 months. MD noted that cash flow remains strong and that total liquid assets each month were broadly in line with previous financial years. PG noted that the following financial year, particularly around the time of the International Biology Olympiad in the summer, would be the most challenging time during the course of the current three-year plan. Council reviewed future cash flow and agreed that the Society remained a going concern.

Decision: Council unanimously agreed that the Society remained a going concern for the next 12 months.

4.6 Q1 Report

MD introduced the quarter one report. He noted that Finance Committee had also reviewed this in detail. He highlighted that it had been a positive start to the new financial year and that the cash position remains strong. As of 31 December 2015, the Society was benefiting from an approximate positive variance from budget of around £187,000. Some of this was due to timing but at least £50-£60,000 represented a permanent improvement, bringing the Society closer to a break-even position for the current financial year. It was still too early to be confident of this but it was certainly a positive start. He noted that, with the changes to staffing and the related budget agreed by Finance Committee at their meeting in the morning, there would be additional new costs which would bring the likely year-end closer to the current budgets position of a small deficit. Council noted the positive start.

5. Governance

5.1 President's Medal

Ana Ilic (AI) introduced her paper which proposed amendments to the criteria for the award of the President's Medal. The key change was opening up the medal to members at any grade. Council welcomed this more inclusive approach.

Decision: The President's medal may be awarded to a member at any grade.

6. Legacy Fundraising

AI outlined initial thinking on a proposition to develop a Legacy Fundraising strategy. This would include dedicated information on the website, and in due course printed material.

Decision: Council supported the development of a Legacy Fundraising programme.

Section B: Policy & Strategy

7. Report from ETP

Laura Bellingan (LB) gave an overview of the recent ETP committee meeting. She passed on apologies from the chair who had been unable to attend due to significant train delays on the day.

The committee had reviewed their approach to starred items. This was a process whereby reports were received in a variety of areas where no significant discussion was anticipated. There was concern that this was leading to minimum engagement on many important areas. To redress this it was proposed that there should be a dedicated item on the agenda covering all the starred items to ensure discussion around some of the key principles and the opportunity to ask questions if required, without reverting to full agenda items for each paper.

A major area of discussion has been the research excellence framework (REF) and the current Stern review. Senior Science Policy Officer, Alessandro Allegra joined the meeting for this item.

A wide variety of views were being received and LB sought views from Council on whether we should seek to submit a response covering as many issues as possible, be selective, or take a wider strategic approach focusing on issues of particular relevance to the Society. The President,

supported by other trustees, felt that we should not simply repeat what others will be saying and who are probably a lot better placed to comment.

Decision: Council agreed that the RSB response on the REF should focus on issues of specific value and interest to the Society or where we have unique perspective. It was not necessary to answer all the questions.

8. Accreditation update

8.1 Revised Terms of Reference

Liz Lakin (LL) asked Council to consider some specific changes to the terms of reference for the degree accreditation committee. These were set out in the paper before Council and had been proposed to reflect the accreditation programme's growth and evolution over the last three years alongside the need to appoint new members over time. There was a specific requirement to appoint a new chair as LL was approaching the end of her term on Council. Under current arrangements the chair of the Degree Accreditation Committee must be a member of Council. It was proposed that this should change to allow any Fellow to fill this role on the recommendation of the committee, subject to the approval of Council. The committee was likely to recommend Professor David Coates as its preferred chair at its next meeting on Thursday 10 March. MD circulated a *curriculum vitae* for Professor Coates and asked if Council would be prepared to support the nomination. All agreed.

Council also supported the new terms of reference but expressed concern that the links with Council may not be strong enough as currently set out. There was a proposal, agreed by all, to amend the terms of reference to include the opportunity for up to two members of Council to attend in an *ex-officio* capacity.

Decision: Council agreed the nomination of Prof David Coates as the new Chair and, subject to the amendment above, the new terms of reference.

As part of a more general update, LL noted that the accreditation programme was performing extremely well, and was expected to meet all the KPIs. Finance Committee had reviewed the performance and were very satisfied with progress. They had also reviewed the cost implications of introducing accreditation for Doctoral Training Centres and stand-alone Masters degrees. Both had been welcomed. Council recorded its thanks to LL and the Committee for the excellent work and welcomed the developments. LL reported that there were 210 degree courses at 23 universities now in receipt of Advanced Accreditation. In addition 101 courses at 16 universities had been awarded (ordinary) Accreditation. The Accreditation Team was taking forward the February round of accreditation applications with 5 universities (42 courses) applying for Accreditation and one university with 2 courses for Advanced Accreditation.

Decision: Council agreed to the introduction of accreditation for stand-alone Masters degrees and Doctoral Training Centres.

9. Science Policy

LB summarised the work of the Science Policy team since the last Council meeting. The annual joint meeting with the Home Office on animal science had been very successful with a maximum capacity audience of 80. Similarly, work on plant science was progressing well. The new UKPSF

committee elections had been completed and a first meeting was now planned. Thanks to support from the Biochemical Society and the work of Hannah Atkins, the annual UKPSF conference this April was enjoying a good level of sponsorship and the number of registrants was broadly on course. In early January a popular meeting of the Natural Capital Initiative at Charles Darwin House had focused on measurement.

Paul Brooker (PB), supported by Council, noted the very impressive range of work that continued to be undertaken.

10. Membership Marketing & Communication

Jon Kudlick (JK) drew out some of the highlights from his paper. This included the development of the fundraising event with Professor Sir Alec Jeffreys, the Breathing Britain APP (#BreathingBritain) and a wide range of public engagement activities. JK encouraged Council to promote the fundraising event amongst their networks. He went on to inform Council that a future edition of *The Biologist* would contain an interview with Professor Sir Tim Hunt.

Action: JK to provide information to Council on how to promote the fundraising event

10.1 Membership Survey results

JK outlined the results from the recent Membership Survey. He felt that the response rate of nearly 20% was an excellent outcome given the rise from 14% last time. PB felt that the response was reasonable but not exceptional. He pointed out that in a recent survey completed by the BPS the response rate was over 30%. PB argued that as Membership was a central activity for the Society, with numbers now exceeding 16,000, it might be appropriate to consider employing a professional survey company to help design future surveys and to help establish a longitudinal study. He offered to provide information on the work at BPS.

Council noted that the benefit most valued by the membership was *The Biologist* magazine and that the Science Policy Newsletter was very popular.

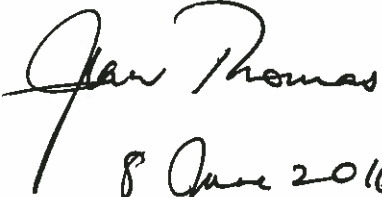
Action: PB to provide information on the BPS survey

Action: JK to analyse the data in more depth to help inform the strategic direction for membership.

11. AoB

LL reminded Council that JC would present a paper on potential future changes to the Scotland Branch at the June meeting.

The next meeting of Council will be held at Cambridge University on **Wednesday 8 June 2016** and will be followed by a Council strategy session and dinner.


8 June 2016