

Council Meeting

**6 September 2017
12:30-15:30**

Charles Darwin House 2, 107 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8TZ

Web Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

Present: Professor Dame Jean Thomas (President)
Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary)
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)
Professor John Coggins
Professor David Blackburn
Professor Nigel Brown
Professor Claire Wathes
Professor Hilary MacQueen
Professor Jackie Hunter
Professor Patrick Hussey
Professor Caroline Austin
Dr Louise Leong
Dr Paul Brooker
Professor Jeremy Pritchard
Dr Paul Hoskisson

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
Mr Adam Hughes, Biochemical Society

Apologies: Dr Kim Hardie

1.1 Declaration of interests

None reported.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 June 2017

2.1 Review of action points

All actions were ongoing.

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 subject to an amendment to record that the Society for Applied Microbiology purchase completion date for CDH equity was 12 May 2017, not 31 May 2017.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

None reported.

3. Chief Executive's Report

Mark Downs (MD) gave an update on Society activity, building on his paper. In particular, MD highlighted the wide range of parliamentary activity, which has taken place during the early part of the summer. Parliamentary Links Day had taken place just after the Queen opened the new Parliament and was the first major external event held within the House, helping to raise the profile of science and the Society. He also noted that the policy team had been very active, pointing to the significant range of work which was currently being undertaken.

Notably, the other area of major activity had been "UK Biology Competitions" culminating in the International Biology Olympiad (IBO) held at the University of Warwick. The IBO had been a significant undertaking and was a major success. Both MD and Council recorded their thanks to all the UKBC committee, volunteers and Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RLF) and her team for all the work done to ensure a very successful IBO 2017.

MD noted that the Society's internal systems continued to be developed successfully. The latest addition was the launch of a new membership portal, which he briefly demonstrated.

Section A: Finance & Governance

4. Finance – update from Finance Committee

The Honorary Treasurer, Pat Goodwin (PG) gave a report from the Finance Committee meeting, which had been held earlier in the day. The key themes of Q3 and future budgets were the main items. Information relating to both had been included for the consideration of Council in the current set of papers.

In addition to these items, PG noted that the IBO financial performance had been in line with budget over a three-year period, generating an overall surplus on a marginal cost basis.

The Committee had also reviewed the current performance of accreditation, which continued to perform in line with the budget. Additionally, the Society's Head of Membership proposed an increase in membership fees for the grades FRSB, MRSB and AMRSB.

On the issue of the pension fund deficit, MD noted that the Pension Trustees were still awaiting the latest actuarial valuation, which was due imminently.

PG reported that the Society's book-keepers, Accountability Europe, have provided the service for greater than five years. Finance Committee had recommended considering re-tendering for services in accord with best practice. **Council AGREED and asked the Chief Executive to consider this further.**

4.1 Q3 forecast

MD provided a brief update and reported on the discussion at Finance Committee. He noted that Council had agreed a deficit budget for financial year 2016-17 and that the Q3 forecast suggested a significant improvement on the deficit, which did not include any profit that will have been realised from the sale of equity in Charles Darwin House. The data included in his paper highlighted the strong cash flow throughout the year, which had often outperformed forecast. Council welcomed the report.

4.2 2017-2018 budget

By way of introduction, the Honorary Treasurer summarised the discussion at Finance Committee regarding not just the 2017-18 budget, but also elements of the Q3 forecast and the next three years. In short, there had been significant concern that deficit budgets appeared to be required in each of the next three years. This was viewed as unsustainable and requiring immediate action. Paul Brooker (PB) noted that almost all the increased deficit resulted from income reduction, which was outside the Society's direct control. In his view, expenditure had been, and continues to be, well managed.

A wide-ranging discussion was held regarding which actions to take to improve the Society's financial position.

Council **AGREED** the recommendation by Finance Committee that two working groups should be established. The first will be a Finance Strategy Group chaired by Paul Brooker to urgently consider the budget for next financial year and beyond. It was proposed that this group should have a membership of six, half drawn from Finance Committee and the remainder from Council.

The second group will be a Fundraising Strategy Group. The remit of this group will be to develop a medium-term fundraising strategy building on the discussion at the Council away day in June 2017. It will consider the opportunity for both short-term and long-term fundraising, including preparations for the proposed 10 year anniversary celebrations in 2019–20.

5. Membership of the Science Council

The Council discussed the future of the Society's membership of the Science Council.

MD stressed there remained support for the mission of the Science Council and noted that they had done some excellent work in areas such as equality and diversity. The Society currently holds a licence, offered by the Science Council, to provide their registers to RSB members. Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RLF) reported that around 35 new members had come to the RSB from the Science Council “new” common application process.

Council **AGREED** that it would review the Society’s membership of the Science Council no later than the March 2018 meeting.

Louise Leong (LL) enquired about opportunities for supporting apprenticeships given the new drive towards better technical education. RLF agreed that this was an opportunity and noted that the Science Council register for technicians was probably the area in which the RSB could find most value given that none of the RSB-owned registers provided recognition at level III.

Action: Council to review the Society’s Science Council membership at the March 2018 meeting.

Section B: Policy & Strategy

6. Report on IBO 2017

RLF presented video highlights of the IBO 2017 event, expressing her thanks to the Co-ordinating Committee, Warwick University and the staff team, as well as Council’s support to host the event. Overall, the event had enhanced the RSB’s reputation.

The examination and practical processes had been extremely well run and the social media reach figures were outstanding. The budget was on track to meet expectation.

The Society had offered free membership to the fifty volunteer students on site.

Council reiterated congratulations to the UKBC Committee on an extremely successful event.

7. Biology Week

Laura Bellingan (LB) provided an update. A range of activities has already been organised for Biology Week, with a two-page spread to appear in *The Biologist*. A “Policy-Lates” event on mental health and wellbeing, a social media campaign on different biologists and their roles (#iamabiologist), a RI debate on genome editing, a tree “poll” and other events are planned.

Council discussed the format for the genome editing event and the way it might be presented externally, ensuring that we have implemented lessons learned from policy engagement on the issue of GM and, more recently, stem cells. The latter is widely perceived as a very positive case study.

Council members are all invited to attend Biology Week events and to become involved. It was agreed that a list of centrally organised events would be distributed.

ACTION: LB to arrange distribution to Council members of forthcoming Biology Week events.

8. Update papers

8.1 Membership & Professional Affairs update

Council welcomed this report from RLF and, having already covered a range of issues relevant to the directorate, noted the considerable progress across many areas.

8.2 Policy & Public Affairs update

LB provided an overview of the wide range of work currently being undertaken within her directorate. Science and education policy continued to be very active areas and there was presently a particular focus on the RSB response to the new industrial strategy consultation. She invited Council members to continue to offer comment. LB reported that the Jo Johnson consultation group continued to be active, highlighting that we enjoyed representation on the group.

Jeremy Prichard (JP) reported on the two policy dinners he had hosted during August. He judged both to be very successful and noted that the free-flowing agenda for both ended up focusing on Brexit, perhaps more so than might be expected. There appeared to be considerable support for the policy agenda the Society was pursuing and a keen interest in remaining closely involved.

LB reported that the Society would again be represented at the New Scientist Live event at the end of September in London where over 20 members of the Society, who were currently practising biologists, were provided an opportunity to engage with members of the public. This format was very successful last year and is a very cost-effective route to public engagement for the Society.

9. AoB

MD raised the issue of a Board level equality, diversity and inclusion champion. This role is currently fulfilled by the Honorary Treasurer who completes her term of office in May 2018. Caroline Austin had expressed an interest in taking over the role from this point and MD had invited comment from Council. There were no other candidates and **Council unanimously AGREED** the appointment of CA from the date of the AGM in 2018.

On a separate issue, MD noted that the International Biology Olympiad in 2018 would be held in Iran. Current Foreign Office guidance still supports travel to Tehran but does provide notes of caution. The guidance also makes clear that other areas in Iran are currently not recommended for travel. There were a range of views, including unanimous agreement that the safety of students, staff and volunteers representing the Society was paramount. RLF noted that other countries were likely to attend and that the Iranian Government would seek to ensure high levels of safety.

Council **AGREED** that the competition should proceed as normal, making clear there should be regular review. Whether or not the team attends should take account of advice closer to the time.

The next meeting of Council will be held on Wednesday 6 December

John Thomas
14-3-18