

Council Meeting

**Wednesday 8 June 2016
12:30-14:30**

**Ramsden Room, St Catharine's College,
Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RL**

WEB Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

The President welcomed Council, new Council member Professor Nigel Brown and 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 Julia Buckingham
Dr Kim Hardie
Professor John Coggins
Professor Richard Reece
Professor David Blackbourn
Professor Pete Downes
Professor Nigel Brown
Dr Jeremy Pritchard

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive
Mr Adam Hughes, 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 Sarah Cox, Schools & Education Policy Manager
Ms Ana Ilic, Executive Assistant
Ms Jennifer Crosk, PA to CEO (Minutes)

Apologies: Mr Tim Brigstocke
Dr Paul Brooker
Professor Patrick Hussey

1.1 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 9th March 2016

2.1 Review of action points

All actions had been completed. JK would send Council a draft transcript of the interview with Tim Hunt.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

None reported.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council APPROVED the 9th March 2016 Minutes, Web Minutes and Reserved Business Minutes.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

No conflicts of interest were reported.

3. **Chief Executive's Report**

Mark Downs (MD) noted with sadness the death of Dr Barbara Knowles and confirmed that a commemorative event to celebrate her life would be held on 16th June at the Romanian Cultural Institute. Barbara had been awarded the European Citizen prize posthumously.

MD reported that the Society was in the process of tendering for a new auditor.

The Society now had an online training module, and an online grant module had been developed, which the Genetics Society was the first to use.

MD updated Council on Society events, reporting that the AGM had taken place on 12th May, and the Trustee election by individual members had a return rate of around 20%. This was an increase of 6% over the previous year. MO voting was disappointingly low at 13%. The Honorary Secretary recorded his thanks to Ana Ilic for the greatly improved voting system. The Alec Jeffreys fundraising event at the Science Museum had raised £6,500 net. Future events included Links Day on 28th June with the title "Science after the referendum: What next?". The JBE was celebrating its 50th anniversary.

MD recorded his thanks to the Biochemical Society for two new grants for new teacher training/guidance and to provide public engagement training for early career researchers.

MD welcomed Casey Early, interim CEO at the Physiological Society, to his first meeting as an observer since the Physiological Society joined the “enhanced funders’ MO group”. MD reported that the Society for Immunology had now left the Enhanced Funders Group as they had appointed their own policy officer.

MD noted that the three main risks to the Society continued to be the IBO2017 in the short term, Accreditation and MO funding; these were items on the agenda for the strategy meeting.

On member organisation services, MD reported that a new client had originally planned to join us in February but had been forced to postpone. It is hoped that they will be contracting with us around October.

Section A: Finance & Governance

4. Finance

4.1 Update from Finance Committee

Pat Goodwin (PG) reported that the Finance Committee had discussed the challenges in getting advertisers for the printed copy of *The Biologist* and whether some members might find it acceptable to only receive on-line access. It had been agreed that a working group of students and younger members should be explored to consider options. Jon Kudlick added that in the wider membership sector, other organisations had created an app version of their magazine with little take-up from their membership, and that it was generally accepted in the sector that printed magazines were highly valued as a membership benefit.

Action: JK to bring a paper to Finance Committee reviewing costings for *The Biologist* and options for students or others to have only online access.

From 1st October it would become compulsory for all employees to be automatically enrolled into a pension fund at a minimum requirement of 1% for employee/employer. As our current fund did not qualify for auto-enrolment, new options would need to be explored. There could be varying contributions for employee and employer, but Finance Committee agreed the preferred route should be two contribution options and to review this at a later date. PG added that half of the RSB’s staff members were not in a pension scheme at present and the Society needed to look at new ways of bringing more young staff members into the scheme.

MD felt that the Pension Trustees would be willing to discuss positively new options regarding the Society’s Defined Benefit Pension Scheme deficit, and Finance Committee had agreed a draft letter outlining proposals based on the professional advice from Punter Southall. MD would write to the Pension Trustees on this basis next week.

Action: MD to write to Pension Trustees

MD noted that the IBO was set to return a deficit below (i.e. better than) the original budget agreed by Council. One month remained before the Society lost the option to cancel the venue without incurring a charge. Finance Committee recommended going ahead. Council agreed. Although the IBO could be run on currently available funds, additional sponsorship

would mean an increase in activity and PG asked Council to forward any contacts that could be approached for sponsorship.

Action: Council to help identify potential IBO2017 sponsors and liaise with MD or RLF if ideas arise.

Council discussed ways of making the IBO accessible to remote schools and of linking teachers with universities. Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RLF) added that the Society would be offering a training session (20 places) in the autumn to support second-year students wishing to compete. Depending on its success, this could be done on a regional scale, potentially with full cohorts at all abilities. Council discussed the disadvantages to state school pupils due to the lack of up-to-date equipment and felt engagement was required, potentially with grants and directed coaching. It was felt the Society could fundraise on the basis of a legacy programme.

PG added that the Finance Committee had agreed that meeting four times per year, instead of two, had been beneficial and it would continue on this basis.

4.2 Q2 forecast

MD gave a brief update on financial performance this year which had been considered in detail at Finance Committee. He reported that the Society looked set to achieve an end of year outcome better than the expected deficit, possibly breaking-even. Pete Downes (PD) asked about the main reasons for this and MD reported that it had been achieved through a combination of new grants, reduction in staff budget costs, additional MO fees from last year, that were assumed to be written-off, and the increased success of accreditation. He said cash-flow remains strong, aided by a shift in the timeline for income and payments.

Section B: Policy & Strategy

5. Report from ETP

Jeremy Pritchard (JP) gave an overview of the recent ETP meeting. It had been a wide ranging discussion including picking up issues from the recent HUBS meeting (which had been well received). The reporting line of SIGs via ETP appears to be working well and there was a sense that more could be done to bring them together and share best practice. TEF had been a major item; this was covered later in the agenda. Council noted the extensive range of activity that the Society was now covering.

6. Education & Training

6.1 Update on IBO

RLF gave an update on the IBO. A dedicated microsite would be launched at the IBO in Vietnam. After the event, RLF would be talking to sponsors to see if the proposed plans for IBO2017 met their criteria and what exhibition space they would require. It was suggested that the exhibiting could be done on the Thursday night when students have their cultural night.

Practical activities were being created by the School of Life Sciences at Warwick and, although this should link to the IBO curriculum, it could add a flavour of their research helping to keep the competition current and relevant. Press releases and news stories were scheduled to coincide with the Society's award ceremony this month. RLF added that we were in process of inviting guests to open and close the event and the President confirmed that Sir Paul Nurse had agreed to be the keynote speaker at the opening ceremony.

6.2 Accreditation update

Richard Reece (RR) gave an oral update. Accreditation was progressing well and remained on target for both Advanced Accreditation and Accreditation. Although it was a collaborative process that did not set up universities to fail, some programmes did still fall short, demonstrating that it remained a robust process. Lack of chemistry in some biochemistry programmes remained a concern and the Society was working with Biochemical Society colleagues to develop clearer guidance.

Pete Downes (PD) asked about the progress of accreditation more widely and how broadly we should define our work in the area as we start to consider the implications of the HE White paper and move in to FE and international accreditation (plus distance learning options). How might we handle new providers or shorter Degree programmes? There was recognition of the importance of this and agreement that using an outcomes-based approach overcame some of the concern.

6.3 Curriculum Committee Update

Sarah Cox (SC) reported that considerable work had been undertaken with the Curriculum Committee including three one-day sessions to help take forward the development of a preferred curriculum. A meeting in Birmingham was scheduled for 8 July where school and university teachers could exchange ideas and forge greater understanding. It is hoped they could also have input into the draft papers emerging from the Curriculum Committee discussions. JP wished to note his thanks to SC for her extensive work on the curriculum agenda.

7. Policy

7.1 HE Policy: HE White Paper & TEF

SC introduced the paper and invited comments on the overall direction and where RSB might best focus efforts, noting that the draft response had already received considerable interest from our membership, especially MOs. The President recommended sticking to areas where we had a unique perspective, rather than simply duplicating what Universities might say. Council agreed and suggested highlighting our own work in valuing teaching – for example, HE teacher of the year and the HUBS agenda.

SC asked for feedback on questions 1-6 of a separate consultation on accelerated courses and switching Degrees. Adam Hughes (Biochemical Society) noted the potential interest of this to his Executive and asked if he might pass the paper to the Biochemical Society Trustees for comment and report back before the 19 July deadline. Council welcomed this and **AGREED**. They also noted the importance of these proposals for accreditation.

7.2 Science Policy: HE White Paper & Nurse review

Laura Bellingan (LB) introduced her paper and invited Council to feedback views, including electronically. There was still time to influence the outcome, and the second reading of the Bill in the House of Commons would be a particularly significant point, as amendments could be proposed after this, as could recruitment of the UKRI CEO. The date for this has not yet been announced. LB noted that BIS officials had offered a meeting for the core STEM disciplines.

ACTION: Council to provide LB with any key high level messages as soon as possible

8. Membership Marketing & Communication

Jon Kudlick (JK) reported that membership was on track, with 700 new members elected in April. Fewer applicants than hoped (as a result of changes to Science Council criteria) would be elected through the HE access programme and this would possibly reduce figures for the next two elections. At the last election, only 16% of new FRSBs were women. This is disappointingly low and a new call for female nominations had just gone out to members. Council were encouraged to recommend suitable females candidates.

On media, the Britain Breathing app, available on android, was launched in March and funding was being sought to relaunch a multi-platform version.

There had been a regional branches annual meeting in April with positive feedback.

JK noted that event dates had already been distributed to Council for two upcoming Parliamentary receptions.

The Honorary Secretary (CK) asked about the process for lapsed members and JK confirmed that they continued to receive a quarterly email which would stop after 3-4 years unless requested. After a non-payment period of six months, members no longer receive The Biologist, and after 12 months, members are recorded as lapsed and no longer show up within the membership figures.

AH asked if the Society asked gender questions in its membership application, adding that the Biochemical Society was considering this. JK reported that this was a compulsory field

8.1 Scotland Branch Development

John Coggins (JC) spoke about his paper, noting that the Scotland Government had not been particularly engaged in the science agenda and lacked a strong science network. The RSB could play a much greater role in advising on science education and policy. Under the proposal outlined, the branch would continue as normal but would establish a new special interest group (SIG), who would dedicate time to education and policy and have a degree of autonomy for activity and fundraising. He also noted that both RSC and IoP have separately funded staff working in Scotland and thought there were opportunities to raise funds locally to support a new Scotland-based policy officer.

Council discussed the proposals in depth during the course of the day. There was strong support for a structure better suited to Scotland's needs that also fulfilled RSB's remit. However, there was less enthusiasm for the establishment of a special interest group. Most felt the desired outcomes could be achieved using existing processes and structures with the branch being positioned as the "Royal Society of Biology in Scotland" with two sub groups and deputy chairs – one covering policy and the other outreach (traditional branch activity). Council asked MD to write to the branch suggesting this way forward.

Action: MD to write to the Scotland Branch

8.2 Membership survey response

As time was limited JK agreed to circulate by email a summary of his proposed next steps in analysing the data.

Action: JK to circulate a paper and timeline on analysing the survey outcome.

9. Demonstration of the new on-line training portal

This was postponed to a future meeting

10. AoB

No other business was raised.

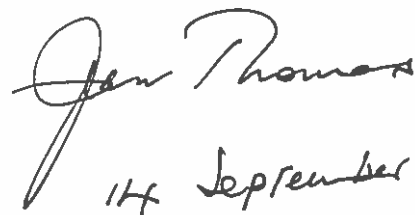
Section C: Reserved Business

11. RSB's role in supporting Parliamentary engagement

These minutes are recorded separately.

The meeting was followed by a Council only Strategy Meeting & dinner.

The next meeting of Council is on 14 September 2016 in Charles Darwin House 2.


14 September 2016

