

Council Meeting

**15 September 2021
12:30-14:30**

Via videoconference

Web Minutes

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|---------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| 1. Welcome and apologies | | JG |
| Present: | Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow (President) | JG |
| | Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary) | RR |
| | Dr Paul Brooker (Hon Treasurer) | PB |
| | Professor Hilary MacQueen | HM _c Q |
| | Professor Claire Wathes | CW |
| | Dr Louise Leong | LL |
| | Mr Terry Gould | TG |
| | College of Organisational Members | |
| | Professor Patricia Kuwabara, Chair | PK |
| | Professor Stefan Przyborski | SP |
| | Dr Suzy Moody | SM |
| | College of Individual Members | |
| | Professor Nigel Brown, Chair | NB |
| | Professor Louise Cosby | SLC |
| | Mrs Lucy Hudson | LH |
| Observers: | Professor Sir Ian Boyd, President Elect | IB |
| | Professor Jonathan Scott, ESP Committee Chair | JS |
| | Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive | MD |
| | Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Policy & Public Affairs | LB |
| | Mr Mark Leach, Associate Director (Membership, Regions & Facilities) | ML |
| | Mr Paul Trimmer, Associate Director (Accreditation & Professional Affairs) | PT |
| | Ms Jen Crosk, PA to Chief Executive (Minutes) | JC |
| | Ms Karen Patel, Head of Membership & Events (for item 10) | KP |
| | Ms Lauren McLeod, Head of Education Policy (for item 8) | LM _c L |
| | Ms Helen Mitchell, Education Policy Officer (for item 8) | HM |
| Apologies: | Professor Yvonne Barnett, College of Organisational Members | YB |
| | Dr Jacqui Piner | JP |

1.2 Declaration of interests

The President reported her appointment as President-elect of the Biochemical Society. This commences in July 2022 after departing RSB in May. There is no overlap. She also noted her role with AMS, co-Chair with Professor Peter Mathieson to review the long term sustainability of health research in the UK.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 June 2021

2.1 Review of action points

RSB provision of Lateral flow tests: to be revisited if staff are no longer able to access these free of charge.

LB reported that there did not appear to be an on-going challenge in identifying scientists to peer-review research papers although some segments were clearly facing challenges on occasion. Council agreed to monitor the situation.

All other items had been completed or appeared on the agenda.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

None reported.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **AGREED** the Minutes and Web Minutes of 9 June 2021.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

None reported.

Section A: Governance and Risk Management

3. Chief Executive's Report

MD gave an overview of some of the upcoming items on the agenda.

He had written to the Chancellor regarding the Comprehensive Spending Review and the Prime Minister in relation to COP26. An acknowledgement from the Chancellor had already been received and the PM letter was available on the website.

Following 12 months without any staff changes, he reported the Society is now recruiting in events, membership, registers and accreditation. Stephen Benn left on 1 September 2021 after ten years at the Society for a seat in the House of Lords but will continue to work with us in specific areas, where permitted. There has been significant support from MOs to continue this work, albeit with the option to refine the offering.

The website work is back on course following delays as a result of the pandemic and early 2020 staff changes. LB is leading on this and the project should come to fruition early in the New Year, combined with an upgrade in our CRM system later in 2022.

MD flagged the excellent outcome on the 5-19 curriculum finalisation, Biology Week events and the importance of CPD for the CBiol designation moving forward, to further raise its value and recognition, bringing it more into line with other similar designations.

4. Health & Safety

ML confirmed there were no major H&S concerns or incidents to report. A new Operations & Technology Officer has been appointed from October to cover H&S policies, local IT provision and to support the meeting room/hot-desking function.

The Remuneration Committee agreed a flexible approach to returning to the office from 1 October, with staff expected to attend all staff, and some team, meetings in person, along with key external engagements if required. Vulnerable staff or carers may be exempted. A survey has been sent to staff which should highlight any concerns. CaSE are due to start using the office in October and the Biochemical Society may continue to use three desks, or more, into the autumn.

5. Appointment of the next Honorary Secretary

CW left the meeting for this item. One nomination had been received from CW for the Honorary Secretary role on a term of five years, reviewed annually. The role also includes sitting on the Remuneration & HR Committee and Professional Matters Committee.

There was enthusiastic support for her nomination and Council **AGREED** the recommendation to appoint Professor Claire Wathes as Honorary Secretary at the AGM in May 2022.

Section B: Strategy and Finance

6. Strategy

Council received a more detailed paper for advice and guidance following feed in from Council, SMT, staff, MPA & ESP Committees and strategic partner CEOs. Council were asked if anything should be added or removed.

Additions suggested included Chartered Science Teacher within the registers section, enhanced liaison with industry, agriculture and the medical profession links, highlighting our biomedical work via the Plant Sciences Group and Advisory Group on Genetic Technologies.

Both MPA and ESP Committee welcomed the direction of the strategy, with ESP Committee suggesting that MO resources could be pulled together, with careers advice as an example, to help answer the common question of what biologists do.

Council discussed NetZero and felt it an important area for the Society whilst recognising our direct impact was small (mainly travel). Starting to articulate the challenges and value of action of NetZero to members and the wider community has the potential to facilitate growth.

For monitoring implementation of the strategy, Council **AGREED** on a light-touch balanced scorecard approach, linking strategy to implementation, with cross team ownership.

Action: MD to develop a light-touch option

7. Financial Planning

7.1 Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of 7 September 2021

PB introduced this item. Finance Committee (FC) were pleased to report a stable twelve months. Cash flow remained extremely strong, with around £2m of liquid assets, partly driven by the 12% capital growth in the CCLA investment and some reduced expenditure, especially for travel.

FC had agreed not to reimburse any travel expenses incurred for any cancelled training/events but clearly flagging this when booking.

MD and SMT were asked to consider establishing a staff group to discuss any issues related to the current stakeholder pension scheme. FC agreed to support staff by arranging independent advice but did not recommend the Society giving direct advice on the investment choices available to staff.

JG suggested Council should discuss recognition of the two recent legacies at the next meeting.

Action: Recognition of legacies to be added to the December Council agenda

7.2 Q3 management accounts and year-end forecast

MD spoke to his paper reporting an anticipated £50k-£60k operational surplus against a small (£23k) deficit budget. The overall year-end surplus including legacies and investment capital growth is expected to exceed £300k. Council congratulated FC on the positive Q3 accounts and year end forecast.

7.3 Budget for 2021-22 & 3 year outlook

FC had agreed the aim of a break-even operational budget, which excludes any legacies and investment growth, for FY2021-22. On the day of their meeting, the Government had announced a planned increase in employer National Insurance contributions of 1.25% and FC had therefore asked for this to be reflected in the payroll figure, reducing the original small surplus to a slight (£3k) loss. They also noted likely inflationary pressure in years 2 and 3 of the budget cycle and proposed including this too. The three budget before Council thus included these additional costs, whilst still proposing a small surplus in each year.

Council received the Finance Committee's recommendation and **APPROVED** the break-even budget for 2021-22 alongside the small surplus budgets for FY 22/23 and 23/24.

8. Curriculum framework sign-off

LMcL and HM joined the meeting and presented the 5-19 curriculum framework to Council following sign off from the Curriculum & ESP Committees. Toast Biology had been appointed to print the report. Policy makers and awarding bodies will be invited to an online launch event. The report was the culmination of many years of work and Council recorded their appreciation to staff and volunteers for this excellent document.

Council considered the framework and **AGREED** sign off for publication.

Section C: Reports to Council

9. Outputs relevant to COP26 climate and environment

Council received this paper for information following previous discussions on the importance of the area and the need to take into account both member and public expectations.

Council felt the paper strongly outlined our achievements and suggested a summarised version, potentially working bottom up. LB was asked if some of the outputs could also be linked to branch activities along, possibly, with a presentation at the next all branches meeting. JG suggested further short and focussed messaging on the activity and impact of the research community might be valuable. Council **AGREED**.

Action: Further develop and roll out messaging, especially to members, further drawing together examples of research impact.

10. Biology Week

KP joined the meeting for this item and thanked PS for her contributions to the paper. All events this year will be virtual. To date, over 100 people had registered for the policy late on food consumption. The competition and award winners will be celebrated at specific points during the week and we expect to achieve a similar number of events as the previous year. Next year will mark ten years of Biology Week and it is hoped a return to some physical events will see numbers rise up to and beyond pre-pandemic levels.

11. Progress Reports

11.1 ESP meeting held on 2 September 2021

JS reported that much of their discussions have been covered elsewhere in the minutes but wanted to highlight that the committee were very positive about how much is being done by the Society. They suggested that the strategy could be re-modelled to allow a separate version for public dissemination alongside the work LM is undertaking on policy work impact. The committee felt the Society could also usefully be looking at more ways of helping the transition from A Level to university study.

11.2 Policy and Public Affairs Directorate

Council welcomed the wide range of work underway and thanked the staff and volunteers involved. A new DEFRA/FERA grant over three years will allow growth of plant health science work.

11.3 MPA Committee update

RR reported that the MPA Committee had approved the membership strategy as an internal document to guide the membership group work.

Council **AGREED** the MPA Committee's proposal to move all CBiol registered individuals over to the £25 annual retention category with the requirement to complete CPD.

RSB is currently trialling a mechanism for approval of training programmes to assure quality levels for the bioscience community.

11.4 Membership, Registers & Training

ML reported work is ongoing to address the balance of male/female Fellows.

JG thanked ML/PT for keeping membership numbers close to 18k and for providing continued accreditation services during the pandemic.

12. Any other Business

Council discussed holding a physical meeting in December. On balance it was felt crowded transport was still a disincentive for many and a virtual meeting should be held. MD added that the IT set up in the meeting rooms would allow a hybrid approach if required moving forward.

Decision: December Council meeting to be held virtually.



Signed electronically
8 December 2021