

Council Meeting

Wednesday 4 March 2015
12:30-15:30

Charles 2, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London WC1N 2JU

WEB Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

The President welcomed Council and observers, thanked the MO observer for attending and gave apologies.

Present: Professor Dame Jean Thomas (President)
Professor Chris Kirk (Hon Secretary)
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)
Professor John Coggins
Dr Kim Hardie
Professor Julia Buckingham
Dr Liz Lakin (by phone)
Dr Aileen Allsop
Professor Pete Downes
Mr Tim Brigstocke
Dr Paul Brooker
Professor David Blackburn

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Education & Training
Mr Jon Kudlick, Director of Membership, Marketing & Communications
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Science Policy
Ms Jen Crosk, PA to CEO (Minutes)
Dr Hazel Norman, Executive Director, BES
Ms Fiona Fox, Science Media Centre (first item only)

Apologies: Dr Jeremy Pritchard
Professor Chris Garland
Professor Richard Reece
Professor Rosie Hails
Dr Paul Hutchinson, Chief Executive, SEB

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Jo Revill, Chief Executive, BSI
Dr Lucy Harper, Chief Executive, SfAM

1.1 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made.

2. Science Media Centre presentation

Fiona Fox, CEO of the Science Media Centre gave a well-received presentation about the Science Media Centre's work. There was considerable interest from the Council who thanked Fiona for the excellent work the SMC does on behalf of the sector.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 December 2015

3.1 Review of action points

All action points had been completed or were covered elsewhere on the agenda.

3.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

There were no matters arising.

3.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

The minutes and Web minutes were **AGREED**

3.4 Conflicts of interest

No conflicts of interest were reported.

4. Chief Executive's Report

The chief executive highlighted the significant range of parliamentary events taking place during March. This continued to create an excellent profile for the Society and for the biosciences. Dedicated pages had been developed on the website which focused on the forthcoming General Election. Post-election, the first event to take place relating to science in Westminster will be Links Day on 23 June where, during the afternoon, MO's and others can have stands to present topics of importance (to the new Committee, as potential inquiry topics) and there will be surgery sessions with new MPs. The Society is helping to organise this.

The *Biology: changing the world* project, now sits with the MMC team. There had been significant publicity especially around the blue plaque for "Dolly the Sheep".

MD reported that two new grants looked possible. The first was a register of plant health specialists which will be funded in part by DEFRA over three years. The other was a potential

grant from the Gatsby foundation to support access into higher education courses and student access to the professional registers.

The handover of the new building was broadly on track for the end of March. The Landscape Institute, a current tenant, is expected to relocate there towards the end of April.

MD asked Council for nominations for the President's medal or long service award. He also raised the issue of the limited number of honours received by scientists in the national Honours system. Council agreed that it would be worth exploring ways of raising the relative proportion of both science nominations and successes, in conjunction with key sister societies. Council agreed that a process should be agreed which member organisations could feed into.

MD reported that the Royal Title application appeared to be progressing well. He also noted that the new chair of the Audit Committee would be Dr Rodney Eastwood, as agreed by Honorary Officers. As the last Audit Committee meeting had not been quorate Council were asked to agree the recommendations and actions in the enclosed draft minutes of the meeting. Council **APPROVED** these.

Council noted that tickets to attend the David Attenborough fundraising event were selling fast.

ACTION: MD to develop a process for Honours nominations, to be agreed by e-mail.

ACTION: all to send MD nominations for the President's medal and long service award by 30 March

Section A: Policy & Strategy

5. Feedback from Member Organisations' Enhanced Funders Meeting

Hazel Norman gave a report on the enhanced funders meeting the previous day. It had been a useful exchange on priorities and current activities for all the MOs present. She reported that the meetings so far had been very useful and that there had been a positive discussion around education and public engagement. One of the key objectives of this group was to influence the Society's overall policy agenda. It was clear that it provided a very useful two-way communication channel.

6. Three Year Plan

MD described the process for the development of the three-year plan. The current draft had taken into account views developed in the ETP committee and initial feedback from branches and member organisations. These responses were continuing to come in. He made clear the intention to summarise common themes and to circulate all the responses verbatim to members of Council to ensure transparency. The three key emerging themes of professionalism, unifying voice and regionalisation were welcomed and warmly endorsed by Council.

The detail of each area will be developed based on responses and the views of Council. So, for example, education activity could fit into all three themes dependent upon the specific detail.

PD highlighted the importance of reflecting the professionalism theme more explicitly in our mission statement. MD undertook to do this. PB stressed that the Plan should provide a framework for all our work going forward and that difficult decisions on resources should be taken in the context of the agreed plan.

The President stressed the need for a good executive summary, of perhaps 2 to 3 pages without too much detail. The detail could be included in appendices. MD suggested that the document would be developed in different ways for specific audiences. For example, there will be an overarching document professionally designed for wide use. This would be image-heavy with clear and simple English. Far more detailed documents would be available for internal purposes and for the individual directorates to feed in to.

PD also stressed that the document should not lose sight of the value of knowledge-generation for its own sake and the motivation and inspiration this provides for young people to become scientists and the legacy it provides for future generations.

LL felt that all the KPI's should be carefully considered to ensure that they were achievable. After discussion there was broad agreement that this was important, whilst recognising that some should be challenging, and that missing some was not critical provided the aspirational direction was appropriate. It was overall delivery that was critical and milestones (KPIs) were one way in which progress can be measured.

HN, supported by the Honorary Treasurer, pointed to the need to ensure that we had funds to support the work in the plan.

Council felt that some themes would be cross-cutting and fit horizontally across the three identified above. These might include diversity and public engagement.

Council agreed with the direction of the draft plan and were encouraged to forward specific comments to the Chief Executive over the next month.

ACTION: all to forward comments to MD by 31 March 2015.

ACTION: MD to collate all responses and summarise them, and circulate to Council.

7. Report from ETP

The chair of ETP, Jeremy Prichard, had sent apologies. In his stead Rachel Lambert-Forsyth and Laura Bellingan provided an update. The last ETP meeting had been held in January with a focus on developing the three-year plan. They had further discussed the Royal Society's vision report and the need to help develop this into action for the biosciences. The Nuffield Bioethics report had been well received and had included a forward by the President. Both peer review and scientific careers had been discussed.

8. Education & Training

8.1 Updated IBO 2017 finances

RLF gave an update on the IBO 2017. There was a wide ranging debate. CK and Council more widely, congratulated the team on the excellent progress. Nonetheless, CK and some others remained concerned that the Society may still be risking unnecessary financial exposure. There was also concern about the potential risk of non-attendance and the liability involved. RLF reassured Council, pointing to the successful operation of this event over more than 20 years with fixed numbers of countries and attendees. The UK was considered a good location and was likely to attract high numbers. Moreover, we would know in advance specific numbers and could adjust the bookings appropriately, thus reducing exposure. This was not like a normal academic conference where registrant numbers can vary widely year on year. Registration would start in September 2016 and payments would be due in January 2017.

HN asked how the IBO would fit into the Society's wider business plan. RLF responded by highlighting the "excellence in the life sciences" objective through the professionalism and regionalisation themes.

MD suggested that this was primarily about the level of risk that Council might be prepared to take. It was not specifically linked to one type of funder as alternative sources could be found. It was concerned mainly with whether or not a £50,000 differential between the current income and expenditure budgets was considered an appropriate buffer given the range of risks associated with the project. Council agreed that this was appropriate and the President called a vote.

Council voted unanimously to agree to host the IBO in 2017

8.2 E&T update

Council welcomed this paper and thanked the team for their work.

9. Accreditation update

LL provided a brief update on the accreditation programme. It was currently on track in terms of both finance and applications. The final Handbook for the new accreditation programme was about to be launched. The awards ceremony for the pilot projects will be held at the Royal College of Surgeons on 24 March. Council noted the excellent progress.

9.1 Degree recognition

LL described the recommendations in her paper to cease offering degree recognition from March 2015.

Council fully endorsed all the recommendations.

10. Report from Science Policy

LB highlighted the significant science policy activity over the last three months. Animal science had been particularly busy. In December 2014 there had been a very successful NCI conference in collaboration with the partner organisations, BES, CEH and James Hutton Institute. It had resulted in a surplus, which will contribute towards future work of this special interest group.

Many other activities were noted in the paper.

10.1 UK Plant Science Federation future funding

LB reported that funding for the UKPSF will come to an end this summer. There were sufficient funds remaining to continue operating it at current levels until the end of the calendar year. Funding sustainability would be a critical objective over the next few months. It was encouraging that the British Society for Plant Pathology had agreed to provide £5000 of funding per annum for the next three years. She hoped this would encourage more organisations to directly support UKPSF. A number of funding bids were planned.

MD highlighted the importance of obtaining funding by September this year to allow planning.

11. Membership Marketing & Communication

JK provided an update on the work of the MMC team. There had been a slight dip in membership, for the first time for nearly five years. This reflected a particularly large cohort of students who were recruited and paid for by the universities two years ago. Many of these had been automatically updated to AMSB level, and not renewed on departing university. PB congratulated the team on maintaining a constant membership increase up to now.

Media coverage since the last meeting had been high. This was particularly due to the *Biology: Changing the World* project, but also a range of policy work in areas such as GM and mitochondrial DNA.

A new publication entitled *Spotlight on Careers* had been launched. This would be handed out at relevant events, and will be available on the website." It brings together real-life stories on the careers of a range of individuals, previously published in *The Biologist*.

The team had recently held an event in Dublin to explore the possibility of establishing a branch in the Republic of Ireland. This has been well received and further progress was expected.

JK reported that the David Attenborough fundraising event was almost full and is looking to be a very successful evening.

The fixed term Membership & Marketing Officer had been recruited – a brand new post, focusing on income generation and membership.

Council welcomed the positive progress.

Section B:

12. Report from Finance Committee

PG provided a report from Finance Committee that morning. They recommended minor changes to their terms of reference and asked Council to support an additional member joining the committee. **Council AGREED.** Kim Hardie agreed to undertake this. PG also recommended an additional member for the Audit Committee to help ensure it was quorate. The President proposed two new members might be beneficial.

Council AGREED the revised terms of reference and membership for both committees.

The finances of the Society remained sound and on track to meet budget. Nonetheless there were significant pressures and a number of areas need close monitoring. Membership income was slightly down although recruitment remained solid. The staff team felt this was primarily a result of timing, but were monitoring the position carefully.

MD explained the current position with the pension deficits which had been discussed in detail at Finance Committee.

Council would be looking for the appointment of new trustees for the pension fund following the death of one trustee, and a request from the chair to step down after many years of service. A former Honorary Treasurer and past Chair of the Remuneration Committee of the Society been approached. He had expressed an interest in the Chair role.

12.1 Auditors Letter

The Finance Committee recommended signing the auditor's letter after close review. Council noted their responsibilities as trustees in terms of the declarations it contained and **gave approval for the President to sign the letter.**

12.2 Approval of Trustee Report and Accounts

Subject to minor text alterations agreed by the Finance Committee there was a recommendation to Council to approve the annual trustee report and accounts. The year-end deficit was in line with forecasts (and expected) given the prepayment of a large grant for accreditation in the previous financial year. This has led to an unexpectedly high surplus the year before. Over the course of the two years the Society's finances had remained broadly at breakeven. **Council approved the Trustee Report and Accounts for 2013-14.**

12.3 Going concern

The Finance Committee had reviewed cash flow for the next 12 months. They noted that cash flow became much weaker later in 2015 and had therefore agreed to liquidate funds in a Santander account and transfer them to working capital in July, on maturation of the investment. They had asked for close monitoring and agreed to reconsider whether funds from the CCLA investment fund should be drawn down at their meeting in September.

Nonetheless they were confident that the Society remained a going concern and were happy to recommend this to Council.

Council AGREED that the Society remained a going concern for the next 12 months.

13. Governance Review

The Honorary Secretary gave a report on the governance review. All relevant documents had now been reviewed. The detail would be agreed by correspondence. The bylaws were attached. The main change related to a removal of the Distinguished Fellow grade. This had never been used. He proposed awaiting the outcome of the Royal Title bid before formally submitting anything to the Privy Council.

Council thanked him for this work and **Agreed with the proposal.**

14. AoB

There was no other business.

The next meeting date is **10 June 2015 in Cambridge**, followed by a Strategy Meeting and dinner.

Jan Thomas
10 June 2015