



Council Meeting

9 December 2020

12:30-14:30

Via videoconference

Web Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

Present:	Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow (President)	JG
	Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary)	RR
	Dr Paul Brooker (Hon Treasurer)	PB
	Professor Hilary MacQueen	HMqQ
	Professor Nigel Brown	NB
	Professor Claire Wathes	CW
	Professor Caroline Austin	CA
	Professor Sarah-Jayne Blakemore	SJB
	Professor Yvonne Barnett	YB
	Professor Paul Hoskisson	PH
	Dr Jacqui Piner	JP
	Dr Louise Leong	LL
Observers:	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, Events & Regional Manager (for Paper 6)	KP
	Dr Jade Hall, Science Policy Officer (for Paper 7)	JH
Apologies:	Professor Patricia Kuwabara	PK
	Professor Stefan Przyborski	SP
	Mr Terry Gould	TG

1.1 Overall declaration of interests

Nothing reported.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 September 2020

2.1 Review of action points

All items had been completed or appeared on the Agenda.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

None reported.

2.4 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **APPROVED** the Minutes & Web Minutes.

2.5 Conflicts of interest for items on this agenda

None reported.

Section A: Governance and Risk Management

3. Chief Executive's Report

Council received an update from MD. Several events have been successfully held virtually. The West Midlands racist incident was believed to be a random act, rather than targeted and has been reported to Zoom and the Police.

MD reported the Society is currently planning a series of events with the Science and Technology Select Committee, commencing 6 January and these will be held as thirty-minute question sessions exclusively for RSB members.

The Policy agenda, particularly education, had been very busy. MD stressed that the Society is trying to deliver to a similar level as IoP and RSC, with a much smaller team. But, by and large, was doing so with success.

The Society is required to have a Health & Safety Officer as this function was previously covered by CDH. Council **AGREED** MD's proposal for Mark Leach to be appointed to this role. The President thanked him for volunteering and noted he had now completed the required training.

A second home working staff survey had been completed which broadly matched the June review, with a desire for home-working in some form to continue post pandemic.

The President highlighted the general increase in cyber-attacks and GDPR data breaches during the pandemic and felt it would be helpful to distribute the National Cyber Security Centre guidance to RSB Committees. The Audit Committee has the remit to cover this area and, as Data Protection Officer, ML reassured Council that the Society has good GDPR compliance and there are thorough processes in place around what staff are able to download. The President requested Audit Committee review the situation and to feed back their conclusions to Council.

**Action: JC to distribute cyber security guidance to staff with Committee responsibilities
Audit Committee to report on cyber security to Council**

4. Health & Safety

No accidents had been reported.

5. Regulations – updates for agreement

Council discussed three proposed Regulation updates:-

Regulation 1.4	addition of 4 years as the President's term of office, not eligible for re-election.
Regulation 3.2	reduction in the time to make an appeal against election refusal from 56 days to 28 days.
Regulation 3.9	update to the appeals process.

Council **APPROVED** all three Regulation changes and asked for Mary Wratten to view the changes as a final step.

Section B: Strategy and Finance

6. Financial Planning

6.1 Finance Committee Meeting of 4 December

Council received a bullet point summary due to the short turnaround time between meetings.

PB provided an oral update. The membership services plan had been presented by ML, and Council members can request a copy of the full business plan by emailing him. There is room for the department to take on at least 1-1.5 new contracts before reaching capacity following cessation of the previous CDH contract.

CA asked if there were many bioscience learned societies who aren't already members? In response, MD reported that an intern had previously completed a project on this which we could use and build on. It showed there were a range of organisations to consider. MD will discuss with SMT in February and bring a paper to Council in March.

Action: SMT to discuss MO recruitment and bring a paper to Council in March

CW suggested exploring agriculture and forestry organisations. Many people involved in land management see the need to have sound biology input. HMcQ suggested looking at potential international MOs.

MD had provided FC with a thorough paper on options for 1NS. There is a break-point in the lease at 2025 without any penalty but before that some form a lump payment would be required. FC felt that any building decision should be HR strategy driven not just by finance requirements. There was a strong recommendation not to take any action at the present but to keep this on the table for review.

The final salary pension scheme revaluation is underway and it was anticipated that the deficit would increase. There will be a more detailed discussion between now and the next Council meeting in March between FC and the Pension trustees.

6.2 Q4 management accounts

Council received a summary of the year end forecast which showed an anticipated deficit of around £200k. This was around £140k better than budget and on a cash only basis there looked to be an £80k surplus. Liquidity had remained strong and Council agreed the Society remained a going concern based on the cash flow reviewed by FC. HaysMacintyre are currently carrying out an audit and had not raised any concerns to date. The draft accounts are due before Christmas. Q3 had been positive due to a lower spend on events and T&S. The President congratulated the staff team for helping to deliver a successful audit during a difficult period.

6.3 2020/21 budget & 2021/22

MD included the 2020/21 budget for information. For 2021/22, FC had agreed a broad set of assumptions, including no new income, individual membership continuing at a steady, modest growth, along with continued retention, and modest staff salary increases. This should deliver a break-even position. The Pension deficit could affect this but broadly we are where we want to be.

PB proposes to provide a three-year outlook at the AGM to place the last two years of deficit in the context of a return to surplus.

7. Events & Biology Week 2021/22

KP presented a paper on the future of RSB events and Biology Week, highlighting that there had been an increase in registration for events during the pandemic. The current climate had also provided opportunities to get to know our branches better and partner with other organisations. Although the Parliamentary Links day had not gone well due to technical issues, over 1,000 registered, with 700+ logging on. As it's currently hard to quantify demand for face to face events when things return to normal, a continual and slow return to face to face meetings was recommended and **AGREED**.

NB had attended all the branch virtual AGMs and felt some would like to hold visits to outdoor venues as soon as Government permitted it. Everything is currently on hold until April, with a review in January. Council had some sympathy with that view and felt small outdoor branch events might be possible post April – but the situation needed continual review.

PB suggested that the AGM in May be planned as an online event.

Council **AGREED** to hold the AGM on 19 May online.

Action: JC to circulate the AGM and Council meeting dates for 2021.

Council **AGREED** to postpone most in-person events until September 2021 but that branches could have some flexibility for smaller, outdoor events. Branches will be given guidance to ensure events are COVID safe.

MD reminded Council that some events are pan-science, therefore we will need to consider the views of sister organisations. Links Day is usually held in June and Council may need to make a decision in March on whether this should go ahead.

PT asked that Council consider the Accreditation Awards Ceremony due in June as this would not work well virtually and suggested this could be planned with a blended approach using an outdoor venue, with an online offering for those not wishing to attend in person. Council **AGREED** the event might be held in June or September outside but under canopy, in a larger venue to allow social distancing subject to a review of costs and Government advice nearer to the time.

Action: KP/PT to provide an update to Council in March.

8. Biosciences for all update

LB presented the paper in Laura Marshall's absence, highlighting progress in many areas.

The President welcomed the paper and thanked everyone involved. Council agreed this is an effective piece of work which allows the Society to work closely with MOs in an area of mutual interest. All felt that the current expenditure of just under £50k is appropriate and that the reach is larger than many things we do: it also feeds into the strategy for better engagement with MOs.

Section C: Reports to Council

9. Progress Reports

9.1 ESP meeting held on 19 November 2020

Council received notes of the ESP Committee meeting.

9.2 Policy and Public Affairs Directorate

Council welcomed the paper and noted the extensive work that had been undertaken. MD noted that the process for reducing *The Biologist* from 6 to 4 issues had started, with initial communications received well, as far as currently known.

CA reported her concern that students may not receive the extension of grant funding by UKRI previously anticipated Universities were not themselves providing training grants to cover shortfalls. The President recognised the concern and LB noted that the policy team had picked up this issue from the community some months back. LB invited Council to email any comments to her.

Action: Council to email LB further information on student grant funding extensions as appropriate.

9.3 Membership, Regions and Events (including accreditation & training)

ML reported feeling cautiously optimistic about membership figures, including renewals. Membership recruitment numbers are slightly down but there had been requests to upgrade, which is a positive development.

PT reported that work was underway by the review group for 'professionalisation of Chartered Biologist.' PB is chairing a group to review the Society's training provision and there will be a paper for the March meeting.

The President congratulated ML/PT on the membership and accreditation numbers.


PB highlighted the importance of focussing on recruitment beyond academia, particularly within the private sector. Making better use of Heads of Departments to advocate, possible via HUBS was also proposed. Addressing gender imbalance at higher grades was also recognised as a key action area.

Action: HMcQ to email HUBS and SMT/Council to continue to monitor and review with advice from MPA committee

10. Any other business

SMT have been discussing where we go as we approach the end of the current three-year plan, along with looking at the next 5-10 years.

One of the four NCI partners, BES (founding member), have given notice that they will be leaving this special interest group in January. The NCI Conference is being held mid-January, with a good line-up, bringing together the health and environment agenda.



Signed electronically 9 December 2020