

## RSB Council Meeting

14 September 2016  
12:30-15:30

Rooms 2 & 3, Charles Darwin House 2, 107 Gray's Inn Road,  
London, WC1X 8TZ

### Web Minutes

#### 1. Welcome and apologies

The President welcomed Council and new Council member Professor Patrick Hussey 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  
Professor John Coggins  
Professor Richard Reece  
Professor David Blackburn  
Professor Pete Downes  
Professor Nigel Brown  
Professor Patrick Hussey  
Dr Paul Brooker

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive  
Ms Laura Woodland, Biochemical Society  
Dr Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology  
Mr Paul Hutchinson, Society for Experimental Biology  
Mr Jon Kudlick, Director of Membership, Marketing & Communications  
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Science Policy  
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Education & Training  
Ms Jennifer Crosk, PA to CEO (Minutes)

Apologies: Dr Jeremy Pritchard  
Dr Kim Hardie

### 1.1 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made.

## 2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 June 2016

### 2.1 Review of action points

All actions 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 **APPROVED** the Minutes and Web Minutes. The Reserved Business Minutes were **APPROVED** but in light of developments since the last meeting of Council, some items remained “work in progress”.

### 2.4 Conflicts of interest

No conflicts of interest were reported.

## 3. Chief Executive’s Report

Mark Downs (MD) reported that Brexit had provided an opportunity for the Society to show leadership and support MOs and would continue to be an important area over the coming months.

Professor Colin Kleanthous had agreed to become Editor-in-Chief for the new joint journal with the Biochemical Society to be launched in spring 2017.

Despite valuing enhanced funder membership, one member organisation has stepped down as a result of internal financial challenges. Council agreed that more needed to be done to demonstrate the added value of enhanced membership and suggested that both Trustees and staff should engage with MOs regularly given the turnover of Trustees. The Finance Committee had agreed to set up a sub-group to look at different MO funding models, reporting back to Council at the December meeting.

Council felt that a more formal exit interview with President/CEO of departing enhanced funders and, possibly other MOs, would be helpful.

**Action: Finance Committee to provide a paper on MO models at the December Council Meeting.**

**Action: Mark Downs/President to take forward formal exit interviews with leaving MOs**

The Finance Committee had discussed the possibility of RSB trustees and committee chairs holding topic-based group dinners for MOs to facilitate greater dialogue and understanding. MD

noted that Jeremy Pritchard had agreed to host a training-focussed dinner before Christmas if possible.

MD confirmed that a response to his letter on Brexit had not yet been received from David Davis.

**Action: Mark Downs to follow up David Davis letter.**

## **Section A: Finance & Governance**

### **4. Finance**

#### **4.1 Update from Finance Committee**

Picking up on the points made in the CEO's report, Pat Goodwin (PG) explained that a sub-group would be looking at MO income and the financial challenges over the next 2-3 years. The Finance Committee had discussed a range of issues most of which were covered in separate agenda items focussing on future budgets and the Q3 forecast.

PG reported that RSB Trustees were invited to attend a meeting of CDH owner Trustees and CEOs in September to discuss both the strategic direction of the business and proposals for a new governance structure.

PG noted that *The Biologist* remained an important membership benefit. Nonetheless, the Finance Committee felt it important to discuss potential savings through a greater focus on online access, whilst recognising it was a complex area. They had asked Jon Kudlick (JK) to introduce the option to opt out of the printed copy for all. This would require some IT work.

Following initial success from the investment in the role, the Finance Committee had agreed to amend the Membership & Marketing Officer's contract from two years fixed to permanent.

The JBE contract had been renewed for a further seven years. There was the opportunity to make more of the journal, with emphasis on teaching in universities and schools. JK would take forward discussions regarding raising the journal's profile.

PG added that there were increased costs for the Society's defined contribution pension scheme due to auto-enrolment. She also noted that the closed defined benefit scheme's interim valuation had shown a significant increase in the deficit. This was likely to result in higher levels of contribution from the Society in future years.

#### **4.2 Q3 forecast**

MD reported a good year, with a small surplus forecast against an agreed deficit budget. Although there had previously been concerns on cashflow, the outcome had been better than expected with cash remaining strong throughout the year.

#### 4.3 Budget for 2016-17

The Finance Committee had reviewed the budget proposal for 2016-17 and reported their agreement of the proposed budget. However, they were keen to ensure a sufficient contingency fund given the range of uncertainties discussed and recommended doubling the provision.

Next financial year cash was expected from the Society's equity sale of CDH shares to SfAM. However, the improved outlook from 2015-16 suggested cash flow would remain strong even in the absence of this cash injection.

Work was being undertaken towards creating a dashboard including showing staff costs as a percentage of revenue.

#### 4.4 Budget for next three years

Council **AGREED** to the Finance Committee's recommendations on the three-year budget planning, particularly the use of a sub-group to develop a range of scenarios for Council to consider, aiming to move to a surplus budget, ideally in 2017-18 and certainly for the following year.

### **Section B: Policy & Strategy**

#### **5. Education & Training**

##### 5.1 Report from ETP

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RLF) gave an update from the August ETP meeting. The Biology Education Research Group (BERG) Co-Chair had been invited to attend and give an overview of operations but this had not been possible due to transport issues. However, a paper had been submitted which provided the group with an understanding of BERG's work.

ETP had been keen to review and update the *Biological Nomenclature*, as this had not been done since 2008. There had been a split view on an online-only version being made available. Advice would be sought from the publisher.

ETP had noted a few comments on the HE & Research Bill & Stern Review but there had been nothing concrete to raise at this stage. PG felt the Society could usefully meet with MO senior executives/trustees to take forward the development of a common agenda. Council were invited to contact RLF or Sarah Dalmedo with any comments.

Council considered the wording of the Responsible Research Statement which had broadly been agreed by ETP. It was felt the word 'misuse' in the first paragraph was vague and should be amended to 'intent'. It was also felt that the second paragraph was more of a position statement.

ETP had discussed Grammar schools and had agreed to focus on quality of teaching issues rather than differentiate between grammar schools and others. RLF added that the Education Policy Advisory Group would be taking this forward.

MD reported an opportunity to influence the Government's skills agenda. Lord Sainsbury had led a review of post-16 qualifications with the DfE and BIS. There are proposals to profoundly change the current offering through a focus on two distinct routes: A-levels and a "technical" route. The technical route could involve an FE college-based education (plus employer placement) or an employer led apprenticeship. A separate advisory group would be set up for each of the 15 key skills areas identified. Gatsby had been keen for professional bodies to look at this and to see it as an opportunity to influence the agenda: it will appear on the November ETP agenda.

## 5.2 Update on IBO

RLF gave an update on IBO 2017 adding that a full financial report would be provided at the December Council meeting. Sponsorship had been obtained from Philip Harris (school resource educational seller) which would be linked to the opening ceremony and additional funding had been offered by the BPS. Jon Day continued to seek additional sponsorship, particularly in the employer engagement area.

On insurance, quotes were being obtained from Hiscocks to cover cancellation fees in the event of "Acts of God". The Society's Public Liability insurance would be increased at renewal in December to cover the event.

RLF added that over 70 questions had already been compiled from the 100 required (plus an additional 10% for contingency) and Council were invited to submit further questions.

**Action: RLF to submit a report on IBO 2017 finances to the December Council meeting**

## 5.3 Accreditation update

Richard Reece (RR) reported that Accreditation remained on track and had been performing well, with the expected deficit for the next year significantly reduced. As anticipated, advanced accreditation had plateaued and the team were looking at accrediting stand-alone master's programmes. The first round of International accreditation was now established. Doctoral Training Programme accreditation (training aspects, not research) and Foundation Degree accreditations were still at the development stage.

## 5.4 Future of the Employer Advisory Group (EAG)

Following up on June's awayday discussions, Aileen Allsop had been very supportive of Council's recommendations including Council **AGREEMENT** on the recruitment of a new Chair for the EAG, with a two-year period of office.

**Action: RLF to make the EAG aware that recruitment was underway for a new Chair.**

RLF asked Council how the Society should recruit EAG members, as it was felt the full membership of RSB was not currently being utilised. Lucy Harper (LH) and Laura Woodland expressed interest from SfAM and the Biochemical Society, respectively, in linking up on employer-related issues and respective groups. RLF also recommended an annual EAG dinner as a charged event, hosted at CDH, which Council endorsed.

Council **AGREED** to the restructure of the EAG and supported an open application process for the chair.

## **6. Policy**

### **6.1 Equality & Diversity**

Although it was felt the returners group ran very well, a lack of funding restricted activity. A returner's week had been arranged and appeared to go well. An evaluation of the activities was planned.

The RSB website currently had a statement relating to gender diversity which might usefully be expanded. LH suggested that the current statement would be useful for other MOs, mentioning SfAM's grants process. Age diversity was one area that Council felt we should be making more progress on. More generally, MD added that an unconscious bias training session had been held the previous day which had highlighted the requirement for clearer equality and diversity statements.

### **6.2 Brexit**

Council received an update following recent meetings on Brexit and discussed how to make science visible in the debate. Council felt that key concerns included free movement, international programme collaboration and finance, but other elements would also need to be captured. LB asked Council to keep the Society aware of any issues or events that were appearing to be problematic. LB proposed circulating a draft questionnaire on Brexit to Council and ETP for comment.

## **7. Membership Marketing & Communication**

### **7.1 MMC update**

Jon Kudlick (JK) reported that membership numbers were on track and showed an improvement in gender balance. Gender balance in Higher Education and Further Education remained a key area of focus for the sector which could help when targeting new members and activities.

On Membership Services, four organisations are currently showing interest in this service.

On events, the Society had a stand at the New Scientist Live Event and Council were reminded of the Biology Week events. The Flying Ant survey had received good media attention on many occasions and Adam Hart's paper would shortly be published in a journal.

### **7.2 Scotland Branch Development**

John Coggins (JC) reported that the Scottish Branch had been delighted with the RSB letter confirming the new arrangements (and the designation Royal Society of Biology in Scotland) and JC would be talking about membership at the AGM on 8 October.

### 7.3 Honorary Fellowship event ideas

JK proposed a lecture series outside London that might include formal presentations of Honorary Fellowships. Sponsorship could be sought to cover the cost of each event. Council support the concept.

**Action: JK to explore in further detail and update Council at the next meeting.**

### 8. Three-Year Plan – overview of progress 2015-16

Council received an update from MD on the three-year plan and noted the good progress.

### 9. AoB

Council asked that future Minutes contained full names of organisations and committees prior to abbreviations.

*Jan Thomas*  
7 December 2016

