

## Council Meeting

7 June 2017  
12:30-15:00

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

## Council Web Minutes

### 1. Welcome and apologies

Present: Professor Dame Jean Thomas (President)  
Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary)  
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)  
Professor John Coggins  
Professor David Blackburn  
Professor Nigel Brown  
Professor Claire Wathes  
Professor Hilary MacQueen  
Dr Louise Leong  
Dr Paul Brooker  
Dr Kim Hardie

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive  
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Policy & Public Affairs  
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Membership & Professional Affairs  
Ms Laura Woodland, Biochemical Society  
Ms Ana Ilic, Executive Officer  
Ms Jennifer Crosk, PA to CEO (Minutes)

Apologies: Professor Jackie Hunter  
Professor Patrick Hussey  
Professor Caroline Austin  
Dr Paul Hoskisson  
Professor Jeremy Pritchard  
Dr Hazel Norman, British Ecological Society  
Mr Paul Hutchinson, Society for Experimental Biology  
Dr Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology  
Mr Jonathan Bruun, British Pharmacological Society  
Mr Mark Hollingsworth, Nutrition Society

The President welcomed new members of Council and Observers.

1.1 Declaration of interests. There were none. JT

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 December 2016** JT

2.1 Review of action points

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda. There were none.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council APPROVED the Minutes and Web Minutes.

### 3. Chief Executive's Report

Mark Downs (MD) gave an update of activity since the last Council meeting. He had written to all sitting MPs prior to the dissolution of the House to highlight the importance of science. This had been followed up by letters to all party leaders, asking them to take full account of science, and bioscience in particular, in the next parliament, highlighting a number of priorities. So far there had only been a response from the SNP.

MD had also written to 1,900 parliamentary candidates. To date, 70 responses had been received, although none were from Conservative party candidates.

A dinner of the Education Policy Alliance (formerly SCORE), working on the 5-19 education agenda had provided a useful opportunity to review collective priorities for science education. Whilst most of the current strategy remained unchanged, there was agreement to provide an increased focus on teacher retention.

MD noted that the Annual General Meeting had attracted significant interest, with 170 people registered and 120 attending. This was more than double an average year.

Although a more detailed paper on Charles Darwin House followed, the Chief Executive specifically wished to record the completion of the sale of 1% of the equity in CDH Limited to the Society for Applied Microbiology.

Given the appointment of new Trustees and the strategy discussion planned for later in the afternoon, the President invited the Chief Executive to provide a short overview of other Society activity. A slide presentation followed in which MD sought to highlight the breadth and depth of activity undertaken by the Society, ranging from generic issues such as diversity to very specific bioscience topics.

Paul Brooker (PB) asked about the Member Organisations' Presidents' dinner. This was an event which had been offered to a range of Presidents, whilst seeking to ensure it was small enough to allow useful discussion. Representatives of eight member organisations had attended and further dinners were planned to accommodate other Presidents. Additionally, other dinner meetings were being developed to facilitate engagement with other Trustees within member organisations. These would be themed around issues such as finance and policy. Professor Jeremy Prichard had already hosted one successful dinner on training. The President reported that the dinner had been very

useful. In particular, it had allowed some of our member organisations to share experiences amongst themselves, as well as providing an opportunity to better explain the work of the Royal Society of Biology.

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

### **4. Finance**

The Honorary Treasurer provided a brief update on the discussion at Finance Committee earlier in the day. She noted that CDH would no longer be offering Conference Centre services to commercial clients from 1 July 2017. The International Biology Olympiad was performing in line with budget; whilst sponsorship was down, the income from sale of additional rooms had increased. Most issues were covered elsewhere on the agenda.

#### **4.1 MO Fees**

Rachel Lambert Forsyth (RLF) gave an overview of the paper before Council. The financial aspects had been considered by Finance Committee, who supported the recommendations. The new structure would provide more clarity and reduce administrative costs but would result in a likely reduction of income. Importantly, the reduced fee levels should provide an opportunity to recruit more member organisations. PB highlighted the opportunity to communicate these positive changes, since in most cases fees would reduce, as part of a renewed engagement with member organisations, explaining the opportunities and benefits of their association with the Society.

On balance, Council felt that it would be appropriate to introduce the new structure from next financial year.

Council **AGREED** to move to the new MO fee structure from FY 2017-18. Council members also offered to help engage the member organisations, particularly the smaller ones.

**Action: RLF to implement new MO fee structure from March 2018.**

#### **4.2 Q2 forecast**

The Honorary Treasurer reported that Finance Committee had reviewed the Quarter 2 forecast, which demonstrated that the Society was performing in line with budget. Council noted the report.

### **5. Governance**

#### **5.1 Elections and voting trends**

Ana Ilic (AI) provided an update on the recent elections to Council. Turnout had improved significantly and it was particularly pleasing to see that more member organisations had engaged in voting. A number of individual members had raised concerns about the current requirement for a nomination to be supported by six members (one nominating and five supporting). On balance, and given that Council had the ability to nominate an individual who lacked this level of support, there was agreement that the current system should remain

unchanged. The advice currently being given, to become more engaged with committees or branches as a way of meeting other members, or to use the MySociety portal, seemed appropriate.

## 5.2 Overview of new Regulations

The Honorary Secretary provided an update, noting that the proposed changes to the Society's Bylaws still remained before Privy Council, to be formally endorsed at their next meeting. No major changes had been proposed aside from some simplification, removal of the 'distinguished fellow' grade and introduction of the Royal title. The AGM had already supported these changes and Council had reviewed them previously.

The Honorary Secretary went on to note that the tenure of Dr Pat Goodwin as Honorary Treasurer would come to an end after the maximum five years' service in May 2018. He formally proposed that Dr Paul Brooker should become the new Honorary Treasurer from that date. Council unanimously **AGREED**.

As part of the governance discussion, MD raised the possibility of reducing the breadth of responsibility of the current Education Training and Policy Committee. This issue had been raised at the last meeting and on a number of previous occasions. In the past both Council and the Committee itself had concluded that, given the significant overlap between core areas, the current structure should be retained. However, with a new staff structure in place, and two core directorates, there was an opportunity to revisit this issue. MD proposed that the central activity and overlap between science and education policy could be retained if the training and registers element was removed. This work could then be picked up by an enhanced membership committee. He reported on behalf of Professor Jeremy Prichard, the current Chair, that this was something he supported. Council **AGREED** the recommendation.

**Action: LB/RLF to arrange the movement of training activity from ETP to Membership Committee**

## Section B: Policy & Strategy

### 6. Update papers

#### 6.1 Membership & Professional Affairs update

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth provided an overview. Although there had been a slight dip in overall membership, there continued to be growth in most areas, especially at the FRSB and MRSB level.

The President asked why over 2,000 members were exempt from CPD. RLF reported that these were retired members. Professor Hilary MacQueen enquired whether there were links with BBC programmes such as Springwatch. RLF provided a brief summary of the Society's historic engagement with the BBC and noted the request to revisit this opportunity.

#### 6.2 Policy & Public Affairs update

Dr Laura Bellingan (LB) provided an update on the Society's policy and public affairs work. Most of the details were contained in her paper. She noted in particular, the activity of some

sister societies who are pushing for a relaxation of the purdah rules. A range of briefing materials, which are regularly updated, are available on the website.

LB reported that our new joint journal, Emerging Topics in Life Science, was progressing well, with the first edition now available.

### 6.3 ETP report

Council noted the report.

### 6.4 CDH operations

The Chief Executive highlighted the planned public engagement event for CDH on the theme of International Coffee Day this autumn. This has been developed via a partnership of the British Ecological Society (BES) and the Biochemical Society. The BES will lead on project management.

## 7. Accreditation – Foundation & Doctoral Training

The President welcomed Professor David Coates (DC), the Chair of the Accreditation Committee to the meeting. DC introduced his paper and noted the important policy decision required from Council. Finance Committee had previously discussed and agreed the financial model but were keen to see regular reporting of each phase before further progression.

The main area of discussion was International Accreditation. A number of members of Council raised concerns over potential reputational risk and the importance of close monitoring. DC confirmed that accreditation was reviewed every five years and also noted that the process of international accreditation was two-way. In other words, the UK was often able to learn from the experiences of other countries, to the benefit of the UK. Council **AGREED** with the Accreditation Committee that this work was fully within the remit and objectives of the Society.

Council also **AGREED** that the Accreditation Committee may continue to develop the programmes in all the areas outlined in the paper before them.

The International Accreditation programme was the focus of debate, with concerns raised over the safety of staff and volunteers travelling to some areas of the world. DC noted that the Accreditation Committee had similar concerns. One potential solution, for areas where it was not currently advised to travel, would be to use academics who currently worked and resided in the country in question. These academics will, of course, need to be trained by the Society. Council were uncomfortable agreeing to such a proposal at this stage. Whilst they would not wish to see the option ruled out, there was full agreement that this should be reviewed in the future, as and when required, as the programme develops further.

As a next step, Council agreed that the Accreditation Committee should continue to develop options for the accreditation of International degree programmes which were not taught in English, using bilingual assessors based at UK universities. Accreditation of International programmes taught in English could continue. However, the accreditation of both English language and non-English language degree programmes would need to be subject to the

constraints that under no circumstances should the Society send staff or volunteers to countries where the Foreign & Commonwealth Office do not recommend travel.

Council also **AGREED** with the proposal that, at this stage, International accreditation should primarily be focused on universities which actively approach the Society, rather than through a major marketing campaign.

#### 8. **RSB Training Programme**

Given time constraints, the President invited comments on this paper by email and proposed that it should be re-tabled at a future meeting if required.

#### 9. **Honorary nominations process & committee**

Council **AGREED** that it would be helpful to formalise this process. A new Honours Committee should be formed.

There was agreement that the Long Service Award should be suspended for the present.

The President had provided comment on the proposed President's Medal system including the detail of the nomination form. Council **AGREED** there should be up to 3 Presidents' medals awarded per annum.

#### 10. **AoB**

No other business was raised.

The next Council Meeting will be held on 6 September 2017 at Charles Darwin House, London.

*John Thomas*  
*6 September 2017*