

Council Meeting

**15 March 2017
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, 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 John Coggins
Professor Richard Reece
Professor David Blackburn
Professor Julia Buckingham
Professor Nigel Brown
Professor Patrick Hussey
Dr Paul Brooker
Dr Kim Hardie

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

Apologies: Professor Sir Pete Downes
Professor Jackie Hunter
Professor Claire Wathes
Dr Jeremy Pritchard
Dr Louise Leong
Dr Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology
Mr Paul Hutchinson, Society for Experimental Biology

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Dr Hazel Norman, British Ecological Society
Mr Jonathan Bruun, British Pharmacological Society
Mr Mark Hollingsworth, Nutrition Society

1.1 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made.

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

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.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **APPROVED** the Minutes and Web Minutes.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

None reported.

3. **Chief Executive's Report**

Mark Downs (MD) provided a summary of activity since the last Council meeting. In particular, he highlighted the welcome level of interest from the membership in becoming engaged in the governance of the Society. He noted that the AGM had already exceeded the initial numbers expected and, as a result, a new venue may need to be found. A final decision on this would be taken at the end of March. He also noted that there was significant interest in the forthcoming elections to Council. He welcomed the appointment of two new trustees Dr Louise Leong and Prof Claire Wathes. He also highlighted the welcome news that there had been a successful outcome in the search for a new President and that Prof Dame Julia Goodfellow had agreed to take up the role from May 2018.

There continued to be a very high level of policy activity and parliamentary engagement. STEM for Britain had taken place on Monday and 'Voice of the Future' was underway in parallel with the Council meeting. Subsequent papers detailed a wide range of policy work covering both proactive and reactive engagement. MD noted that the Gopher Wales launch had been highly successful on 14 March 2017 with the new online training module due to launch by the end of the month.

At the end of the Chief Executive's report, the President recorded her personal thanks, and those of Council, to three long-standing outgoing members, namely Prof Julia Buckingham (JB), Prof Christopher Kirk (CK) and Prof Sir Pete Downes. All three trustees, she noted, had been involved in the Society in various forms from its initiation in 2009. They have all made significant contributions to the Society's success, noting that they would be sorely missed. Unfortunately, Pete Downes was

unable to attend the meeting. Both CK and JB wished to record their ongoing enthusiasm and support for the Society, wishing everyone well for the future.

Section A: Finance & Governance

4. Finance

4.1 Update from the Finance Committee

The Honorary Treasurer gave an oral update on the discussions at Finance Committee, which had met in the morning. Aside from the issues covered specifically on Council's agenda, the committee had also considered issues relating to the Pension Fund deficit and Charles Darwin House Ltd. They also touched on the accreditation programme and the International Biology Olympiad, both of which they considered to be performing in line with financial expectations.

She noted that there were ongoing discussions with the Pension Fund trustees who had recently agreed to accept the majority of the Society's recommendations for a new approach to their investment strategy.

External bookings had now ceased for Charles Darwin House Ltd. This was in accordance with the agreements reached between Councils of the co-owners at the end of 2016. It was anticipated that the final position for last financial year for CDH Ltd would be in line with expectations and new budgets will be prepared based on the changes that had recently been agreed.

The Hon Treasurer recommended acceptance of the sale of equity in Charles Darwin House to SfAM at a price of £223,200. This represented 1% of the total equity in the two buildings. **Council AGREED this price.**

4.2 Q1 management accounts

Council noted the positive progress during the first quarter of the current financial year. The Finance Committee had considered a report in detail and noted the likely improvement on the budget deficit at this early stage in the financial year, and particularly welcomed the better-than-expected positive cash flow.

4.3 Auditors report and letter of engagement

The Chief Executive gave a brief overview of the auditor's report noting that it was unqualified and had not identified any major concerns. Both Audit Committee and Finance Committee had welcomed the helpful approach and report provided by the new auditors, hayesmacintyre. Paul Brooker (PB) noted the thanks that had been extended by Finance Committee to Surinder Sohal, the finance manager at the Society for all her work over previous years. He welcomed the new appointment on the staff team to support her work.

4.4 Trustee's Report and Accounts

The Honorary Treasurer provided a brief overview of the final Accounts and Trustees Report. She noted that this had been reviewed in detail by both Finance Committee and Audit Committee. The

President recorded her thanks on behalf of Council to the Chief Executive and the staff team for delivering a better-than-budget outcome for the last financial year. The operational surplus was £133,000 against a budgeted deficit of £64,000. The most significant change from last year related to the defined benefit pension scheme deficit and the revaluation of the Charles Darwin House buildings. When both these issues are fully reflected the accounting deficit is £83,000.

Council AGREED the Trustees Report and draft final Accounts and authorised the Honorary Officers to sign the Accounts as a true and fair record for the previous financial year.

4.5 Going concern and cash-flow

Council reviewed the cash flow for the period March 2017 to March 2018 and noted that the Finance Committee had already reviewed the detail. Council noted that cash remained reasonable on the current forecast and that the injection of additional funds from the sale of equity in Charles Darwin House, coupled with the currently better-than-expected cash performance within the current financial year, made it clear that the **Society remained a going concern**.

Section B: Policy & Strategy

5 Report from ETP

In the absence of the chair, Jeremy Pritchard, Laura Bellingan (LB) provided an overview of the most recent committee meeting. She highlighted that the membership was about to change, with many members of the committee having served eight years or more. Nigel Brown (NB) pointed out that the committee had an exceptionally large remit and wondered whether the change in membership should coincide with a review of its operation, possibly splitting policy from the other work. There was some support for this approach from within Council, especially given the additional workload around Brexit. Indeed, there was a sense that the significant demand of reactive consultations meant that proactive work might not be getting the priority required.

There was a wide discussion, which also touched on the structure of the ETP committee. MD noted that the committee itself had considered this issue within the last year and had concluded that the significant overlap amongst policy and other issues suggested that the current format was the best option. He also noted that, although personally he had no particular objections to a different structure, it was the output which mattered. The final policy position arrived at resulted from inputs of individual members, member organisations, special-interest groups and other committees, for example HUBS. This meant that it was not the committee itself which decided the overall policy approach, instead it acted much more as a gatekeeper and monitor of quality.

PG wondered whether there might be a case for a virtual group to work specifically on Brexit issues. LB undertook to consider this further.

PB also reminded Council of the need to ensure that the policy requirements of industry were considered alongside those of academia.

The President concluded that there was not an overwhelming appetite for changing the current structures but that it should be kept under review. LB emphasised the need for the Society to receive evidence and information relating to many of the key policy issues which would be discussed. This would allow the Society to make informed decisions and to influence the agenda through our contacts, networks and submissions.

6 Policy & Public Affairs

6.5 Policy & Public Affairs update

Council noted the information paper and the considerable range of activity that was currently underway. The President thanked the Policy and Public Affairs team for all their work.

6.6 Publishing update

LB provided an update on the Oxford University Press monograph series and the new journal, *Emerging Topics in Life Sciences* published by Portland Press in partnership with the Biochemical Society. The first edition on new antibiotics was due to be launched in the very near future. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the take-up for an online only version of *The Biologist* was very low so far. MD clarified that all members had been notified of the opportunity to opt out of a physical copy through his recent letter which went to each individual member.

6.7 Accelerated degrees

LB introduced this topic and asked whether Council felt the Society should take a particular stance on accelerated degrees. There was universal concern that biological subjects would not be well served by accelerated degrees. In particular Council highlighted the potential for significantly reduced hands-on practical work and the need to ensure that degrees are research-led. Nonetheless, there was acceptance that there could be a role for these degrees in some circumstances but their purpose and value would have to be clearly differentiated from those of 'standard' degrees. It was not felt appropriate that the accelerated degrees could be accredited using the current criteria set out by the Society. PB highlighted the value of technical skills to the private sector and the lack of appropriate skills in current undergraduates, but recognised that the new degrees might not necessarily fill the role, especially if practical opportunities were reduced.

6.8 Higher Education & Research Bill

Council noted the current stage of this Bill and the ongoing importance of the Society remaining closely engaged with its development and implementation.

6.9 Industrial Strategy Green Paper

LB introduced a draft response to the Industrial Strategy Green Paper. Everyone agreed that the number of questions represented a significant challenge in providing a coherent and succinct response, which did not involve significant overlap between answers. The President, supported by Council, encouraged the Society staff team to keep answers short and focused on the specific question wherever possible, noting that not every question should be answered, especially where we did not have a unique angle or information to provide. A concise response had more chance of being read by, and of being useful to, Government. NB particularly highlighted the importance of high-level skills.

7 Membership & Professional Affairs

7.1 Membership update

Rachel Lambert Forsyth (RLF) introduced the new-style membership paper and asked for comments on its appropriateness. Council welcomed the information provided and asked for future

iterations to include the retention rates on a per grade basis. PG also noted the importance of trends over time which would become easier to track moving forward.

RLF highlighted the significant drop in BioNet numbers at this particular moment but felt that overall membership was progressing well and that the total number might still see a small increase.

7.2 Fellowship Committee

RLF introduced her proposals to formalise the Fellowship Committee with agreed terms of reference. Council agreed that it should be formalised with five-year terms that were phased. They also agreed to the proposal to ensure gender balance. To ensure some continuity it was agreed that not all members of the current committee should leave at the same time; the President suggested that membership should be for a further one, two or three years, with one of the three old members retiring each year.

7.3 Training report

Council received the training report for information.

7.4 IBO update

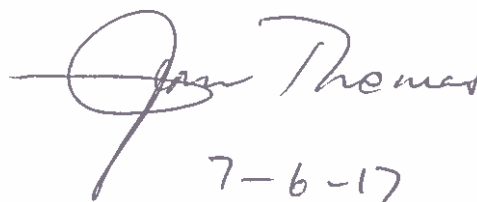
Finance Committee had considered progress towards the expected financial goals at their meeting. Whilst sponsorship had been disappointing during the first half of the year, other income remained on target and the IBO looks set to meet its broad financial goals. RLF reported that registration continued to go well and that the programme of events was now finalised. At this stage everything looked to be on course. MD noted that to date 54 of the potential 70 participating countries had already paid their fees on the early-bird rate. RLF reported that there had been over 100 applications for the 50 volunteer places available during the course of the IBO week.

7.5 Accreditation

Richard Reece (RR) provided a brief summary of progress. In short, targets continued to be met and progress remained good. International accreditation had now commenced. He anticipated that Council would be asked to review a paper on accreditation for foundation degrees and doctoral training centres at their next meeting. Council welcomed the positive progress.

8 AoB

None reported.



7-6-17