

Council Meeting

15 June 2022

12:30-14:30

Via videoconference

Web Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 Introductions and welcome

Present:	Professor Sir Ian Boyd (President)	IB
	Dr Paul Brooker (Hon Treasurer)	PB
	Professor Claire Wathes (Hon Secretary)	CW
	Professor Hilary MacQueen	HMcQ
	Dr Louise Leong	LL
	Mr Terry Gould	TG
	College of Organisational Members	
	Professor Patricia Kuwabara, Chair	PK
	Professor Stefan Przyborski	SP
	Dr Suzy Moody	SM
	College of Individual Members	
	Professor Nigel Brown, Chair	NB
	Professor Louise Cosby	SLC
	Dr Jacqui Piner	JP
Observers:	Professor Jonathan Scott, ESP Committee Chair	JS
	Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive	MD
	Mr Mark Leach, Associate Director (Membership, Regions & Facilities)	ML
	Mr Paul Trimmer, Associate Director (Accreditation & Professional Affairs)	PT
	Ms Susie Rabin, Associate Director (Parliamentary & Public Affairs)	SR
	Ms Jen Crosk, PA to Chief Executive (Minutes)	JC
Apologies:	Professor Yvonne Barnett, College of Organisational Members	
	Mrs Lucy Hudson, College of Individual Members	

The President wished to record his thanks to Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow for her excellent work during her term, allowing his term to commence from a strong starting point. He also welcomed SR to her first Council meeting.

1.2 Declaration of interests

None reported.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 March 2022

2.1 Review of action points

All items were taken during the meeting.

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 of 28 March 2022.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

None reported.

3. Introduction from the President & forward look planning

The President invited views on future meeting formats, including the preferred mix of in-person, virtual or hybrid. Council agreed that in-person discussion was important, whilst recognising flexibility was more inclusive. On balance the President suggested alternate online/in-person committee meetings. Physical attendance at the in-person meetings would be actively encouraged, and expected in most instances, but with hybrid capability in place. MD reported that additional microphones had now been purchased for the Hindle room to ease hybrid meetings.

Council agreed to the President's suggestion of a standing agenda topic specifically to discuss implementation of the strategy, along with an additional forward look item. The area covered each time could rotate prioritising appropriately. Council were invited to propose items to allow ranking of strategic topics at the September meeting.

Action: IB/MD to discuss future agendas
MD to email Council requesting 2-3 specific topics for discussion
MD to compile a list of topics for Council to prioritise at their September meeting

Section A: Governance and Risk Management

4. Chief Executive's Report

MD highlighted the increase in face-to-face meetings over recent months, including the AGM, and the accreditation conference/awards day. Although a live stream had been planned for the AGM, an internet failure at the Law Society (AGM venue) had not allowed this and was entirely outside the control of the Society: a video of the meeting is available on the website. It had been a successful AGM, with much member engagement and one member specifically flying in from Nigeria. MD thanked SM for her excellent charter lecture.

The DEFRA (via FERA) early career plant science conference in Birmingham planned for next week has now been moved to an entirely online format due to the scheduled rail strikes.

1NS is being used more and there is an all staff meeting scheduled for 20 July. CaSE and Biochemical Society are using desk-space and meeting rooms. Discussions are taking place with another bioscience organisation, who wish to rent 8-9 desks and meeting rooms from January 2023.

Participation in the four-day week pilot commenced last week and although it's early days, things are progressing well. Only one staff member had chosen not to participate due to personal circumstances. MD is due to speak to our mentor shortly to provide an update and hear of other progress.

PT and his team continue to work on developing the RSB training offering. In an exciting new development, lab-based training will be offered for the first time.

We are six months into the new strategy, which is progressing well. Investment in the agreed new roles had been built-in for additional activity with the first appointments secured. This includes a 0.8 FTE education policy officer (20 July) and the two new associate directors. A press officer role has been re-advertised however and MD noted the extremely competitive employment market. This may lead to delays in some appointments, which could ultimately push back deliverable timelines in the current strategy.

Council received a summary of the independent IT security audit and Audit Committee will provide a report on findings to Council in December. However, Guido Gybels (GG) is already progressing recommendations. MD also reported that we have now appointed an additional contractor to provide cover one day per week, along with on-call cover in response to a question from NB in relation to addressing the current risk of one person IT support highlighted in the risk register.

Council received correspondence relating to a complaint regarding Chartered Biologist and CPD. Around 20-25 responses have been received on this subject. Council recognised the concern but **AGREED** that it would be difficult to make exceptions on CPD completion irrespective of the achievements of the individual. They also concluded more could be done to ensure Chartered Biologists were fully appraised of the wide range of activities that can contribute to CPD reporting: there was evidence that some of the concern related to a perceived inability to complete sufficient CPD.

Action: MD to write to the complainant confirming Council's views

MD thanked Suzy Moody for volunteering to sit on the new staff pension group, meeting 1-2 times per year.

5. Health & Safety

ML provided a brief update and reported no issues from staff or organisations using RSB hot-desks. Following increased flexibility and working from home, staff are currently being surveyed to ensure they can safely and appropriately continue home working now the office is full open.

IB suggested that H&S continues to be a verbal update but that there should be a written annual report to Council, commencing September 2022. IB noted HMcQ's point that the risk register and H&S is regularly reviewed by the Audit Committee.

Action: ML to provide a written H&S report at the September meeting

Section B: Strategy and Finance

6. Financial Planning

6.1 Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of 8 June 2022

PB noted that the meeting date for Finance Committee was incorrect on the agenda. The two substantial items discussed were Q2 and membership fees – both covered later on the Council agenda. He welcome JP as a new member of the committee, who will attend her first meeting in September.

PB reported that the newly appointed chair to the defined pension scheme trustees has driven a review of advisors as part of best practice.

PB reminded Council that his second term as Honorary Treasurer is due to end at the AGM in 2023. He was happy to discuss the role with any interested parties and IB thanked him for his service and safe guiding hands.

6.2 Q2 management accounts and year-end forecast

Council received a short report on the mid-year position to end March 2022, which showed a slightly better than expected outturn. Although there is an underspend on staff, this had been built into projections and at year-end this will show an on-track overspend. There are some variances but income is up and expenditure down leading to a positive variance of over £100k at the mid-year point.

Cash flow remains strong with high liquidity and is closely tracking the forward-look forecast.

Following the original break-even budget, a deficit budget of £44k had been agreed by Council and FC. MD currently predicted a year-end surplus of approximately £70k. More expenditure will occur towards the end of the FY and some income may need to be accrued to next FY if activity is not completed. This will lead to a reduction in the surplus but with an expectation of a better-than-budget outturn still. PB reminded that at the last meeting, Council agreed to run deficits for the next three years due to our positive liquid reserves as part of the approach to supporting the new strategy.

IB added that, whilst the surplus at year-end is positive, we are still required to deliver on strategy/objectives and Council should understand where the trade-off sits with any surplus. It would be useful to consider this in future updates.

6. Membership fees

ML had been asked at the last Council to present a paper setting out the rationale for fee increases, taking account of both FC and MPA views.

MPA committee had discussed fees and, whilst understanding the need, they wished to recommend deferral of the 3.3% increase to January 2023 at the earliest, and only applicable to Members and Fellows. FC had discussed this, recognising the valid points made, and had proposed a compromise proposal of a 3.3% increase for all professional membership grades from October but deferred to January. FC also recommended providing an explanation of the tax advantages on membership fees. FC felt that, moving forward, there should be smaller, annual increases, not linked to CPI or wage costs but more the overall increased cost of running the Society. Alongside this, ML was asked to look at adding a monthly payment option.

Council **AGREED** the proposal within the paper. They also agreed an annual increase should be put in place each October.

8. HUBS membership

HUBS had approached ML about instituting a new brand of organisational membership solely associated with this special Interest Group. MD felt this could create internal competition and noted that long term sponsorship could work equally well. Council agreed that doing this would not be possible without amendment to the Society's Regulations and/or Bylaws

TG agreed this could create a situation of non-compliance with Bylaws, highlighting that for SIGS, liability resides with RSB and that it could lead to membership that was incompatible with RSB's objectives overall. He agreed with the initial response suggested in ML's paper, suggesting that corporates could be offered sponsorship for a limited period rather than membership.

Council **AGREED** that, as liability lies with RSB, control must be retained. Any corporates wanting to associate with us should do so via corporate membership of RSB. Association with HUBS could then follow from this if appropriate.

Section C: Reports to Council

9. Progress Reports

9.1 ESP meeting held on 26 May 2022

JS has been in discussion with the Chair of the Curriculum Committee about the evolution of the curriculum framework, how it is being used and ways it can be further publicised.

For example, it is useful as a guide for discussion for the new Welsh GCSE and consideration is being given to producing a Welsh version of the framework. IB added that he would like to learn more about the Society's education work in due course.

The education team are engaging with DfE on the contents of the natural history GCSE as it appears to be more focussed on climate change than natural history.

9.2 MPA Committee Report/Minutes of 25 May 2022

CW reported that any skills gaps on the committee are being identified via a skills matrix. Take-up among biology teachers remains low, potentially due to lack of awareness of resources available to them and schools. The committee wished to have someone with experience in this area and requested Council approval. It has historically been a challenge to recruit teachers and most have been from the private sector but the option to join meetings virtually may help to address this. PK suggested promoting teacher engagement through the science awards. CW added that some attendees at the AGM mentioned they are working with universities on the skills agenda and therefore may have availability from this associated area. Council **APPROVED** the committee's request to recruit new committee member(s) with school links/teachers.

There had been much discussion around the fee increase and the Committee wished to grow RSB membership in a cost effective and resourceful way. This had already been discussed under the fees item but it was important to note the strength of view from many members.

Following a survey, feedback suggested there was a positive view of RSB from overseas membership. Nonetheless, some overseas branches had been inactive and were currently under review, with the committee prepared to dissolve them if this continues to be the case.

The committee had agreed a review into engagement with MOs and Matt Webb is now working closely with MOs in his new role.

9.3 Science & Education Policy

Dr Arianne Matlin will be joining the Society on 4 July as the new Associate Director of Science & Education Policy. MD is covering the portfolio in the interim.

PB raised recent comments in the press around Horizon and NI discussions and whether UK association was now likely. MD noted we were actively following this and SR reported she been invited to join a meeting alongside RSC and IoP to develop thinking. IB added that Plan B is currently in development but will take time to develop similar impact to Horizon and noted that partners will need to come in with equivalent funds. All learned societies are putting Government under pressure on this.

9.4 Publications

The Biologist is continuing well since its reduction to four print issues, along with additional online content.

9.5 Parliamentary & Public Affairs

SR reported that planning is underway for Links Day, which will be run in-person, after two years online. Shortlisting is underway for a new Press Officer, with interviews to be held late June.

9.6 Membership, Regions & Facilities

ML continues to work on membership recruitment and is cautiously positive that we are starting to turn a corner, potentially due to the return to a fully staffed membership team. Recruitment for the regional membership officer had been a challenge due to the current market and has been re-advertised following amendment to the job description. We continue to work with Chord on membership renewals and we will be trialling working with them on membership applications. We are also working with LH on technician recruitment.

MD reported that MO invoices had gone out in May, the majority of which have already been paid.

9.7 Accreditation, Professional Registers & Training

Accreditation is currently doing well, with numbers of applications and renewals high. A review group is looking at risks for international visits in terms of safety in the region and COVID. At their recent strategy day, the Accreditation Committee discussed university grade inflation and are collaborating with RSC and IoP to address this. David Coates wished to discuss the potential for MPA committee lobbying Government with JS.

There are ongoing discussions around the Biorisk register, with some institutions willing to put forward funds to set this up whilst we are awaiting others. Training is going well, with the first practical skills training arranged at the University of York and other training programmes in development.

10. Any other Business

MD reported that CW's move to Hon Secretary had created a Council-appointed vacancy and he would shortly be sending a skills matrix to get a sense of desired skills.

The next Council meeting will be held on 28 September at 1 Naoroji Street.



Signed electronically 28 September 2022