

Council Meeting

Friday 20 June 2014
12:30-14:30

Charles 2, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London WC1N 2JU

WEB Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

The President welcomed Council and observers and gave apologies. The President and Council congratulated Andy Treharne on his MBE.

Present: Professor Dame Jean Thomas (President)
Professor Chris Kirk (Hon Secretary)
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)
Professor John Coggins
Dr Kim Hardie
Dr Jeremy Pritchard
Professor David Blackbourn
Dr Paul Brooker
Professor Chris Garland

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive
Mr Jono Bruun, Chief Executive, BPS
Ms Lucy Harper, Deputy CEO, SfAM
Dr Andrew Treharne MBE, Chair, UKBC
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Education & Training
Ms Gemma Garrett, Deputy Director of Education
Mr Jon Kudlick, Director of Membership, Marketing & Communication
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Science Policy
Dr Stephen Benn, Director of Parliamentary Affairs
Ms Natasha Neill, Executive Officer
Ms Jen Crosk (Minutes)

Apologies: Professor Julia Buckingham
Professor Rosie Hails
Dr Liz Lakin
Professor Richard Reece
Dr Aileen Allsop

Mr Tim Brigstocke
Professor Pete Downes
Mr Phil Wheat, Chief Executive, SfAM

1.1 Declaration of interests

Paul Brooker had been elected to the British Society of Toxicologists. John Coggins had retired from the BBSRC Council. Jeremy Pritchard had stepped down as Chair of the EPA Committee and Mark Downs had completed his term on the Science Council Board.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 March 2014

2.1 Review of action points

All actions completed.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

No matters reported.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **APPROVED** the Minutes and Web Minutes of the 12 March 2014 meeting.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

No conflicts of interest were reported.

3. Chief Executive's Report

Mark Downs (MD) reported that the Society had been heavily representing science in Parliament, with a live web broadcast of the successful Voice of the Future. MD thanked all the judges, especially John Coggins (JC) for their help on Set for Britain, which had received a far higher number of applicants in biology than any other discipline. The Houses of Parliament had now introduced a very high charge for room hire and MD was in dialogue with Andrew Miller MP about charitable organisations being unable to meet these high costs.

On staffing, four members of staff were moving on to new jobs. Paperless direct debits were set to go live on 2 August and the Society had recently introduced a 'donate to' button for web visitors. The examiners database would soon be live.

Council considered an appeal request for the President's medal but **AGREED** that there could not be an appeal for internal honours applications for the President's medal or other awards. However, re-application in future years was perfectly acceptable.

Regarding the Royal title application, MD confirmed that after Links Day, Stephen Benn would be working on drafting a generic letter for submission to the Cabinet office in the autumn. The President highlighted the need to ensure senior scientists as well as politicians were supportive.

Section A: Policy & Strategy

4. Report from ETP

Jeremy Pritchard (JP) reported that there was now Society activity from primary through to secondary education. The Curriculum Committee had been established, with the first meeting to be held on 1 July.

There were currently two key open consultations: Capital Investment in Research (BIS) and further subject level discussions for Key stage 4. JP asked Council for engagement on the Key Stage 4 Consultation and proposal that students at A-Level should only take biology as a whole subject, rather than having separate A level options such as human or environmental biology. Comments had been received on both sides of the argument and JP asked Council to forward their comments by email to Rachel Lambert-Forsyth.

Laura Bellingan (LB) had circulated the draft Capital Investments paper. The concept of including a “shopping list” of possible priority capital items had received mixed feedback. A recent BBSRC intern had sought volunteers to run a workshop, which had been attended by the Chair of HUBS and provided input towards a high level letter which would be submitted. There was a five year review period and the Chair urged Council to comment by email to LB by 4 July.

5. Education & Training

5.1 IBO 2017 business plan

Council discussed the options provided by RLF and Andrew Treharne (AT) on how the Society could take this forward. All of Council strongly supported the work of the UKBC and the desire to host the international Olympiad at an appropriate time.

RLF and AT argued that there was a strong case for continuing to seek funding for 2017. AT made clear that the Society could still withdraw in 12 months' time and that there was no financial risk in doing this. Some members of Council felt that it was a very difficult challenge financially.

All agreed that if we were to continue, firm commitments, or underwriting, for at least £200k were needed within 12 months. Everyone agreed that the Society could neither contribute any core funding from unrestricted funds nor underwrite any funding shortfall.

Jonathan Bruun and Lucy Harper commented from a member organisation (MO) perspective. Both felt, that as an MO already providing significant funding it was unlikely that their Councils would agree to underwrite any loss.

On balance, Council **AGREED** to continue to seek funding for up to a year, with interim reports at each Council meeting. Council suggested immediately approaching large corporates and organisations alongside Research Councils.

5.2 Teacher support strategy

Council considered proposals to support secondary teachers. This was considered to be a good way of engaging with MOs and members. Gemma Garrett (GG) outlined four options for new work. She indicated that the Society's current membership costs were considered by many to be high, without enough specific benefit to teacher members.

Council welcomed the papers and there was wide support for all the proposals, recognising that some were easy to implement with zero, or close to zero, cost. The Honorary Treasurer made clear that any new expenditure would need to be carefully considered against all other priorities identified. She also proposed shifting to a twice-a-year review of new funding requests tied to the existing Finance Committee meeting cycle. There was **AGREEMENT** to put in place this type of process.

Council **AGREED** to package and promote the existing resources and develop the Society's school and teacher benefits. Council also **AGREED** that establishing teacher networks and developing a diagnostic subject knowledge tool should be raised at the next Council Meeting and considered, in the round, at Finance Committee, given that they involved substantial new expenditure.

5.3 Proposal to form a new SIG: Biology Education Research Group

Council **AGREED** on the formation of the Biology Education Research Group as a Special Interest Group. No funding was proposed at this stage.

5.3 Update on support for primary schools

Council received a paper for information.

6. Report from Accreditation

6.1 Accreditation sustainability

Paul Trimmer (PT) reported that the UKCES Growth and Innovation funding was due to end in September. Going forward, a revised sliding fee scale was proposed for universities submitting more than one programme but based on a lower annual fee rather than a single large fee every five years. Discussions regarding further grants were still underway.

The proposed new Accreditation staff team would be much smaller, consisting of three full-time members of staff instead of the current five. A professional assessor would be recruited to act as lead assessor, assisted by at least one volunteer assessor.

7. MMC Report

JK reported that the membership figures were looking healthy and that the April election had been the most successful ever. A branch had now been formed in Hong Kong and

avenues for self-funding were being explored. The Society was currently seeking corporate funding for the fundraising event with Professor Brian Cox on 2 September.

A new MSB Advisory Group had been formed to replace the former MMC Committee; their first meeting was held in June.

The team was very pleased with the response to the regional grant scheme launched earlier in the year, with over 50 applications from members keen to organise local activities and events. Out of these, 15 have been selected.

For the first time, the Society will be doing hands-on biology at a music festival (Green Festival in August), as part of its Strategy to reach new audiences via public engagement activities.

Council welcomed the excellent work and promising membership recruitment numbers.

7.1 Member breach of code of conduct

Council considered a specific case and agreed a formal investigation.

7.2 Honorary Fellowship

Council discussed Honorary Fellowships and agreed a further invitation.

8. Science Policy

8.1 Signing up to AllTrials

Sense About Science had approached the Society, seeking support for its campaign for all clinical trials to be registered and results reported transparently. A significant number of organisations had signed up, including a number of MOs.

Council felt that the Society should be willing to sign but were aware of issues noted by other organisations, such as pre-2004 results not being available in the required format.

Council **AGREED** in principle to the Society signing the AllTrials petition but recommended that the wording associated with the Society's endorsement should reflect the key points of the discussion. In addition, any necessary alternations of the Guidance on Professional Practice should be considered in due course. .

8.2 General Election 2015

Council **AGREED** to a virtual discussion of the strategy and to make recommendations for policy areas and specific items for pre-election activity. JC added that this could potentially be a topic at the next MO Meeting (Nov/Dec tba) although something was still needed ahead of the Party conferences.

8.3 Equality & Diversity at the Society

Council discussed the Equality and Diversity paper and **AGREED** to email MD with any amendments.

9. Sponsorship

Natasha Neill reported that the Society did not currently have a formal sponsorship policy and asked for Council's opinions on the draft submitted.

Council **AGREED** that the Sponsorship Policy paper was useful but that it should remain fairly generic, with day-to-day decisions delegated to the Chief Executive.

10. President's Medal

Council **AGREED** to the nomination procedure for the President's Medal. It was also agreed to change the governance process such that the Honorary Officers and a further four members of Council would review future applications, reverting to the whole of Council in the event of any significant division.

11. Biology Changing The World

Council received the paper for information. They welcomed the excellent progress.

Section B: Finance

12. Membership Organisations

MD reported that the Physiological Society Council had decided not to increase their fee this year following wide discussions around new benefits. However, eight other MOs had agreed to either significantly increase their fees or continue at their current significantly elevated level. These are the Biochemical Society, Society for General Microbiology, Society for Applied Microbiology, Society for Endocrinology, British Pharmacological Society, British Ecological Society, Society for Experimental Biology and (post meeting) British Society for Immunology. Council agreed that this core group of enhanced funders would enjoy additional membership benefits.

13. Q2 and Budget

MD reported a deficit was forecast for the year end. A prudent deficit budget for 2014-15 was proposed backed by a return to growth across three future years. Reserves and liquidity remained strong during the whole period but MD recommended a regular review of activity. Accreditation funding skewed figures for the next 12-18 months. No new grant income has been assumed. There was however an assumption that the pension deficit payment would reduce and then cease. Figures had included an assumed 3% increase in membership income and core costs. MD suggested that the Society should ensure that liquid assets remained at least twice the reserve fund for the next five years. The Honorary Treasurer felt that the Finance Committee should look at the balance between restricted and unrestricted funds.

Council **AGREED** the broad direction proposed including the deficit budget, subject to more detailed review at Finance Committee.

14. Update on CDH II

MD reported that building work was due to commence 23 June, with completion at the end of October. MD had been in discussion with two new potential tenants. Council requested a tour of the new building at the December Council meeting.

15. AoB

No other business was reported.

The next Council Meeting, including a Strategy Session and Dinner will be on 17 September 2014.

Paul Thomas
17 September 2014

