

Council Meeting

8 December 2021
12:30-14:30

Via videoconference

Web Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 Introductions and welcome

Present:	Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow (President)	JG
	Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary)	RR
	Dr Paul Brooker (Hon Treasurer)	PB
	Professor Hilary MacQueen	HMcQ
	Professor Claire Wathes	CW
	Dr Louise Leong	LL
	Mr Terry Gould	TG
	College of Organisational Members	
	Professor Patricia Kuwabara, Chair	PK
	Dr Suzy Moody	SM
	College of Individual Members	
	Professor Nigel Brown, Chair	NB
	Mrs Lucy Hudson	LH
	Dr Jacqui Piner	JP
	Professor Louise Cosby	SLC
Observers:	Professor Sir Ian Boyd, President Elect	IB
	Professor Jonathan Scott, ESP Committee Chair	JS
	Professor David Coates (Accreditation/Remcom)	DC
	Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive	MD
	Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Policy & Public Affairs	LB
	Mr Mark Leach, Associate Director (Membership, Regions & Facilities)	ML
	Mr Paul Trimmer, Associate Director (Accreditation & Professional Affairs)	PT
	Ms Jen Crosk, PA to Chief Executive (Minutes)	JC
Apologies:	Professor Yvonne Barnett, College of Organisational Members	
	Professor Stefan Przyborski, College of Organisational Members	

The President welcomed Professor David Coates to the meeting.

1 Naoroji Street, WC1X 0GB Tel: +44 (0)20 3925 3440 info@rsb.org.uk www.rsb.org.uk

CaSE and the Biochemical Society are now renting 17 desks. The Audit Committee has recommended appointed a new Chair, Clare Julien, to start when Rodney Eastwood steps down at the next AGM, following an open call for applicants. Council supported the recommendation.

Council congratulated Tom Ireland on his recent Giles St Aubyn award from Royal Society of Literature.

4. Health & Safety

ML provided an update. No issues reported. The new Operations and Technical Support Officer had undertaken H&S training and started drafting the H&S handbook which will be presented to RemCom and brought to Council for approval next year.

5. Risk register

The risk register had been reviewed by SMT and brought to Audit Committee. ML highlighted the top five risks at the current time, the main new risk being support for the Director of IT. The recruitment process is underway to appoint a part-time consultant following an unsuccessful initial contract.

Action: IT audit report to be shared with Council later in 2022.

Section B: Committee Reports

6.1 Accreditation Committee

DC provided an update on the development of international accreditation. Accreditation had continued to take place by moving assessments online for both new and recurring accreditation. A lot had been achieved, with accreditation continuing to function well despite the pandemic. DC wished to express his thanks to PT for his management and leadership of the accreditation work. Council **AGREED** DC's proposal to delegate authority to the CEO around returning to physical meetings. The CEO will liaise with the accreditation team and others as appropriate, including the Council sub-group.

6.2 Remuneration & HR Committee

DC provided an overview of the Committee's remit and recent work. The Committee now meet twice a year to discuss COLA/market adjustments (March) and to formally review HR policies and related items (October). A professional HR advisor now sits on the Committee and provides support to the CEO. This has helped further professionalise HR delivery. A new development framework had been introduced this year, along with a review of T&Cs using benchmarking from others in the sector. In reaching a decision on remuneration changes or adjustments the Committee take account of ability to pay and inflation, alongside benchmarks. DC highlighted that there is a separate RemCom Committee for the CEO's annual review and any award. The CEO has no involvement in this committee.

6.3 ESP Committee

Council received a summary of the most recent ESP meeting and JS highlighted the extensive conversation on climate and nature. The Committee expressed concern regarding

JG asked if this is the right direction of travel and sufficient activity relative to other priorities across the Society? Council agreed EDI must remain a central theme, embedded in what RSB does, but that measuring progress is challenging. Nonetheless, Council can keep asking the questions to aid the monitoring of progression. Council thanked JP and those involved. JG felt it was worth everyone looking again at the D&I progression framework, raised at a previous meeting, as it contains further detailed information.

Council discussed a number of options, including shadowing, mentoring, external benchmarking, targeted approaches and a more defined strategy. JG expressed her keenness for a shadow board as one route to more diverse input in to decision making, especially at a variety of career stages. SM suggested the possibility of an early career stage (ECS) person at each committee, along with an active ECS Committee. Council could include a student member, potentially someone in the first five years of a PhD.

Council **AGREED** to take the recommendations forward and asked JP to consider the other issues raised.

9. Horizon scanning

JG invited MD to introduce the item overall. He explained the senior management team would like to identify big items where it might be important for RSB to have a strong voice, and where the Society might make most impact over the next 6, 12 and 18 months. Due to the breadth of this area, JG suggested discussion should be divided into themes.

Training & Accreditation – already a central plank of the new three-year plan but where a number of opportunities might lie. For example, CW highlighted the lack of available quality-assessed training in areas such as biodiversity and landscape management. This could provide an opportunity and market research, such as a survey, might be worthwhile to consider next steps. IB suggested contacting organisations such as the Institute for Ecology & Environmental Management to discuss areas where we could collaborate, including discussions with RSC due to the chemistry content. PT and others agreed.

Action: SMT to consider options and report back in March, consulting with CW


Research Landscape – there is much happening in this area, including several broad-reach reviews and a technical review of UKRI and how it is working. The Society should ensure links to these, inputs where possible, and follow up in the context of the outcomes. HMcQ asked if there are ways of boosting the UK research environment, particularly for biologists, and all agreed this is an area where the Society can legitimately operate, making use of the new staff parliamentary role. We need to ensure the UK remains welcoming for international scientists.

Policy Challenges - the pandemic and climate change are critical areas to both support action and they can be used to highlight the value of biology. The National Risk Assessment process could be made use of to link the contribution of biology in many areas. It is under-utilised. Similarly, the spending review is heavily debated but largely left untouched between review rounds. These could be policy opportunity areas.

Action: Council to reflect on any other ideas and email to MD

12. Any other Business

COVID – A new announcement is anticipated following the rise in cases of the new variant (subsequently named Omicron). The physical staff meeting scheduled for 9 December will now be hybrid and the scheduled Christmas party has been cancelled. MD will recommend that all staff work from home and notify those renting desk space that, although the office will be open, there will not be the usual staff support.


28/03/22

1.2 Declaration of interests

None reported.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 September 2021

2.1 Review of action points

All done or appearing on the Agenda.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

The President requested updates on the previous actions not on the agenda. MD asked for the legacy item to be deferred to March 2022, noting that Finance Committee had agreed it should simply be retained as a restricted fund, unspent, for the present. On further COP messaging the President noted there had been some activity such as making a special edition of the ETLIS Journal on Climate Change freely accessible during COP.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **APPROVED** the Minutes and Web minutes of 15 September 2021.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

None reported.

Section A: Governance and Risk Management

3. Chief Executive's Report

MD summarised key areas of activity including the award of a DEFRA/FERA grant for Plant Health over three years. There was a strong relationship with DEFRA and it was pleasing to see the Society's work in the area highlighted in the consultation on Plant Biosecurity (Biorisk).

Action: MD provide feedback to Defra

Since its November launch, the 5-19 Curriculum framework is available online and has received positive feedback. This is a major piece of work covering seven years and MD encouraged Council to further familiarise themselves with the final version.

In another welcome development, the Nancy Rothwell drawing award entries are currently on display at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester until the New Year.

Following Stephen Benn's departure, and consultation, a new structure, headed by an Associate Director of Public & Parliamentary Affairs, along with a new part-time Press Officer had been proposed. There will also be investment, as agreed, into the education team of 0.7 FTE.

green washing around the term “net zero” and Council considered replacing this with “climate positive”.

Another area of debate had been online assessment and current proposals for demonstrating the application of knowledge and problem solving. Council unanimously supported this approach although both RR and HMcQ stressed the challenges in some areas such as mathematics.

6.4 MPA Committee

RR introduced the paper. The MPA had three items to raise:-

- (i) International branches - Hong Kong and Australasia members to be surveyed in order to determine what they wish to do and how we can support increased activity.
- (ii) RR updated Council on the professionalisation of CBiol, whereby an annual fee of £25 per annum had been introduced, alongside CPD requirements for all. The fee had not previously applied to all CBiol members and a slight drop off in CBiol registration was anticipated. MD had received letters from a small section of the community, expressing their disagreement. Council noted the concerns and hoped that further explanation might allay these.
- (iii) The MPA Committee requested an amendment to the Regulations to more appropriately acknowledge Honorary Fellowship. Council **AGREED**.

Section C: Strategy and Finance

7. Strategy

Council received an updated version of the strategy, based on previous feedback and MD provided three suggested Mission Statements, recommending adoption of the second option. Council **AGREED** the proposal and the options suggested for updating the Values. MD thanked NB and others for their help in expanding the latter.

JG asked if Council wished to consider the Vision Statement, which she felt needed greater clarity. IB agreed that “true value of biology” was unclear and perhaps could be amended to “our vision of a world that values biology’s contribution to life for all.” HMcQ added that if use of the word ‘value’ is retained it would require an explanation of what it is valuable for e.g. sustaining earth, healthier people.

Action: Council to email any final suggestions for the Vision Statement to MD within the week.

Council **AGREED** the document overall.

8. EDI update

JP discussed the paper prepared by Jade Hall and sought feedback on the proposed future direction.

10. Financial Planning

10.1 Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of 1 December 2021

PB updated Council on the recent Finance Committee meeting. Minutes had been circulated. FC received an annual review from a representative of CCLA for our ethical fund. The fund continues to perform well, earning just under £40k total income for the Society last financial year, with 14.7% return on investment.

The Reserves Policy was reviewed and retained, at the CEO's recommendation, at approximately three months' basic expenditure (£500k) in low risk accounts. The current cash position is strong with total liquid assets over £2m.

Alan Johnston is standing down as the closed defined benefit Pension Trustee Chair after ten years' service. As we are approaching self-sufficiency and possibly buy-out in an increasingly technical and specialist area, a professional Chair has been agreed for succession. Bhavna Kumar, has been appointed, following an open competition, to commence in January 2022. Council recorded their appreciation for all the work Mr Johnston had undertaken for the Society.

10.2 Q4 management accounts

The audit is now complete and the draft Statement of Financial Affairs (SOFA) plus Balance Sheet should be available prior to Christmas. The forecast is an outturn around budget for operational costs, possibly going into surplus. Overall, there is a substantial surplus anticipated at year end due to investment returns and the John Barker legacy. This will easily exceed £300k. During the year, the drop in income has been offset by the reduction in expenditure. Cash flow was good and is as expected.

Council welcomed the positive report.

Section C: Reports to Council

11. Progress Reports

11.1 Policy and Public Affairs Directorate

Council received the detailed paper for information and JG thanked staff for the enormous amount of work done.

11.2 Membership, Registers & Training

ML highlighted the need to monitor membership recruitment numbers but that our work with CHORD, on retention, is having a significant impact. Council found the overview of membership helpful and asked for a more detailed discussion at a future meeting, given its critical place within the RSB.