

## **Council Meeting**

**6 June 2018  
12:30-14:00**

**Charles 1 & 2, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street,  
London, WC1N 2JU**

## **Web Minutes**

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

**Present:** Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow (President)  
Professor Richard Reece (Hon Secretary)  
Dr Paul Brooker (Hon Treasurer)  
Professor Nigel Brown  
Professor Claire Wathes  
Professor Hilary MacQueen  
Professor Yvonne Barnett  
Professor Patricia Kuwabara  
Professor Caroline Austin  
Dr Louise Leong  
Dr Kim Hardie  
Dr Paul Hoskisson

**Observers:** Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive  
Dr Laura Bellingan, Director of Policy & Public Affairs  
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Director of Membership & Professional Affairs  
Professor Rebeca Oakey, Genetics Society  
Ms Laura Woodland, Biochemical Society  
Ms Ana Ilic  
Ms Jen Crook (Minutes)  
Mr Paul Trimmer (item 8.2)

**Apologies:** Professor Jackie Hunter  
Professor Patrick Hussey  
Professor Sarah-Jayne Blakemore  
Dr Hazel Norman, British Ecological Society  
Dr Lucy Harper, Society for Applied Microbiology  
Mr Mark Hollingsworth, Nutrition Society  
Ms Pamela Mortimer, Society for Experimental Biology

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Mr Jono Bruun, British Pharmacological Society  
Mrs Dariel Burdass, Physiological Society

The President welcomed Professors Barnett and Kuwabara as newly elected members of Council and two member organisation observers, Laura Woodland (Biochemical Society) and Professor Rebecca Oakey (Genetics Society). The President then explained her preferred style for meetings, ensuring everyone feels able to contribute, whilst noting the need to keep to a sensible timeframe. She highlighted the need for a regular (at least annual) review of Board effectiveness, the administration of meetings and the performance of the Honorary Officers including herself as Chair.

The President welcomed the healthy state of the Society and thanked the outgoing President, other Trustees and staff for all their work.

1.1 Declaration of interests

None reported.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 March 2017**

2.1 Review of action points

All actions had been completed or appeared within 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 of 14 March 2018 subject to a minor amendment to the web Minutes.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

A number of Council members declared an interest in relation to the reserved item on CDH. These were Richard Reece (Biochemical Society), Nigel Brown (Microbiology Society), Kim Hardie (Microbiology Society) and Paul Hoskisson (Microbiology Society).

3. **Chief Executive's Report**

Mark Downs (MD) highlighted his involvement with the Boards of some of the RSB's MOs over recent months, specifically Heads of University Biomedical Science (HUCBMS) who had invited him to speak at their House of Lords 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and the British Ecological Society (BES) where he had presented to their Council. Much of his time had been taken up within internal issues such as the operation of CDH and the regulatory environment, including GDPR.

MD, supported by the President, noted the highly successful Presidents' dinner at the Hilton Waldorf, with over 100 attendees. Lord Willetts had spoken extremely positively about the Society. Overall

the dinner was self-financing. Ahead their centenary, MD noted that the PPA team will be working with the Nutrition Society on a "State of the Nation" report.

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

### **4. Finance**

#### **4.1 Update from Finance Committee**

The President invited the Honorary Treasurer, Paul Brooker (PB) to report back on the Finance Committee meeting held that morning. This was his first meeting in the Chair and he thanked the Committee for their support, noting that there were now three new members – Nigel Brown, Louise Leong and Jackie Hunter (who had sent apologies).

Outside of the reserved item on CDH, the Committee had discussed the Q2 forecast, management accounting & budget setting processes, membership and accreditation financial performance and the defined benefit pension scheme.

MD had commissioned haysmacintyre to develop a more robust and fit for purpose management accounting system, to both ease reporting and to help ensure the Finance Committee and the Senior Management Team had the appropriate tools for reporting, forecasting and budgeting. This will include clearer and more flexible KPI reporting.

Both membership and accreditation were performing well. The individual recruitment had seen a reduction in net surplus, relative to budget, but this was not thought to be a major source of concern. Recruitment numbers were up so the difference relates to the mix of levels and discounts provided. Accreditation was ahead of budget.

PB noted the work that had been done to reduce the pension deficit through positive work with the Pension Chair and Trustees, leading to a revised repayment schedule over the next five years.

Caroline Austin (CA) asked about fee levels for accreditation assessors. Richard Reece (RR) confirmed these were not intended to cover the full cost of the time required for the process, currently around 2-3 days, but were more a "thank you", noting that assessors saw wider benefits.

On a separate accreditation issue, PB confirmed that the Accreditation Committee had decided not to increase the fees paid by organisations being assessed during 2018.

#### **4.2 Minutes of the last Finance Committee Meeting**

The draft minutes from the last Finance Committee meeting had been included for information. They had been approved in the morning. PB informed Council that he anticipated the draft Finance Committee papers being circulated to Council well ahead of each Council meeting and then included again for completeness in the full set of Council papers.

#### **4.3 Q2 Forecast**

Council reviewed the Q2 forecast included in Paper 3. This mid-year report had been considered in detail at Finance Committee. Overall the picture was encouraging with a forecast deficit very close to budget despite an agreed additional payment to the pension fund and another unbudgeted amount on staff – both approved by Council in March.

Council welcomed the positive report.

## 5. Health & Safety

This is a standing item and MD introduced the annual update. The CDH building User Guide had been circulated by email as further background. There had been no major incidents over the last year and two minor injuries – both recorded in the accident book. None were reportable to the H&S Executive and there had been no near misses.

Council asked for clarification over the split of responsibilities between CDH and RSB. MD reported that anything to do with the inherent physical infrastructure for guests or staff was the responsibility of CDHL and ultimately the Directors therein. This covered fire evacuation, maintenance, Legionella testing etc. RSB had responsibility for event management and any equipment operated and owned specifically by RSB both on and off site. Risk assessments were a requirement for all events at branches or those organised by HQ.

CA asked about the use of step ladders by RSB. MD confirmed none were owned or used.

Claire Wathes (CW) asked whether manual handling and fire safety training were provided for all RSB staff. As they were not, MD was asked to investigate options for online training and CW offered to send further information from her own employer.

The President recommended a similar annual report and discussion on diversity and inclusion. All **AGREED**.

**ACTION: MD to investigate manual handling training and fire safety training for all staff**

**ACTION: Claire Wathes to provide MD with further background on potential providers.**

**ACTION: MD to ensure an annual review by Council of the RSB's Diversity and Inclusion work and policy.**

## 6. Governance

### 6.1 Summary of Governance proposals

Council reviewed and **AGREED** the nominations in paper 5, noting that appointment to the Membership and Professional Affairs (MPA) Committee followed an open call for applications. Some had already been agreed by email. The appointments were:

Finance Committee: Nigel Brown., Louise Leong, Jackie Hunter

Audit Committee: Patrick Hussey, Claire Wathes

ESP Chair: Sarah-Jayne Blakemore

College of Organisational Members Chair, Paul Hoskisson

Curriculum Committee Chair, Jeremy Pritchard

MPA Committee: Richard Reece (Chair), Nelson Chong, Joy Hinson, Charlotte Lawson, David McAllister, Patrick Murphy, Neville Punchard, Jonathan Shields, David Whitworth.

RR noted that diversity had been considered as part of the appointment process but the Committee was still in need of a better gender balance in the future.

Council **AGREED** the revised Regulations ahead of the AGM by email. These were now online.

Two new Trustees had been elected at the AGM – Professor Yvonne Barnett and Professor Patricia Kuwabara.

Hilary MacQueen enquired about the process for appointing a new Chair of the Audit Committee. The incumbent's term will come to an end in May 2019 she noted. MD confirmed that a new external Chair would be sought in 2019.

MD pointed Council to the new Charity Commission Guidance on issues which prevent individuals becoming a Trustee (such as bankruptcy). A new declaration must be signed by every Trustee ahead of August 2018. MD distributed the forms and asked for them to be returned quickly.

**ACTION: All trustees and senior staff to send Jen Crosk a completed declaration by 30 June 2018.**

Council **AGREED** that the remaining Trustee vacancy should be filled following a skills audit, and in line with gaps, in relation to the new three year strategy, once agreed.

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RLF) raised a concern in relation to an Affiliated Organisation.

The President, supported by Council, asked for the issue to be set out in writing . This could be done electronically. She emphasised the need for a transparent process and a clear audit trail in the decision making process.

**ACTION: RLF to develop a paper and draft letter for consideration and decision by the Honorary Secretary.**

## 6.2 GDPR

Council noted the paper by MD and **AGREED** the approach taken noting that compliance will be an on-going issue. PB recorded his thanks to RLF and her team for the GDPR advice provided to other smaller MOs who had found it invaluable.

## Section B: Policy & Strategy

### 7. Report from ETP

In the absence of the ETP (now ESP) Chair, who had sent apologies, Laura Bellingan (LB) provided an update on the recent meeting. This had been Jeremy Pritchard's (JP) last as Chair with the Chair-elect, Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, attending as an observer.

A key discussion had been around Brexit and access to EU grants. The Committee felt the outlook continued to be gloomy and there was support for RSB continuing to highlight this issue wherever possible in interactions with Ministers and Officials.

The meeting covered the recent Education Policy Alliance dinner attend by JP, MD and Lauren McLeod, where teacher retention, and the objective of every child having the opportunity to be taught by subject specialists, remained key. There was considerable concern regarding recent developments in the Welsh curriculum, where experts in curriculum development in biology had not been sufficiently included. A letter had been sent to officials to highlight specific issues.

There had been a helpful diversity and inclusion discussion to inform a draft policy. The President proposed it should be send to all of Council.

**ACTION: LB to send the draft diversity and inclusion policy to Council**

## **8. Policy & Public Affairs Update**

### **8.1 Policy & Public Affairs update**

Council thanked LB and her team, noting the significant amount of ongoing activity.

### **8.2 UKBC Team for Iran**

The President introduced the discussion, making clear that this was an important issue that needed careful consideration. She emphasised that the final decision on sending the UK Biology Olympiad team to Iran in July 2018 must be focussed on the safety and wellbeing of the four young people in the team, taking a view on the balance of risk. Council **AGREED**.

Laura Bellingan (LB) drew out the key points in her paper, especially noting that the decision to host the (International Biology Olympiad (IBO) in Iran was taken around nine years ago but that the political turmoil in the region, and risk to foreign nationals in Iran, had risen over the last year. She was in touch with Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) to help obtain advice and guidance in addition to the FCO formal position as stated on their website. At this point in time, the FCO advice concluded that travel to Tehran by British citizens remained appropriate, provided normal precautions were taken and local customs and culture respected. This advice was specific to Tehran. Travel to some parts of Iran were not recommended at all. LB went on to state that if Iranian visas were agreed, that this might impact travel to other nations such as the USA in the future.

The President asked Council to note that the team of four consisted of three men and one women (plus jury members). Under IBO rules for the competition the team had to be housed in a separate hotel to the jury. Thus, although they would have local Iranian chaperones, and should not at any point, either in the competition, or as part of the social programme, be allowed to travel independently, they would not have the UK Jury members/UKBC Committee members with them.

The President outlined her experience of how a UK university would approach this type of issue for an undergraduate team, pointing to the considerable risk assessment work that was needed, training for the students and clear lines of consent.

For context, MD highlighted that, although the number of countries registered was around half that of the UK, that a number of European countries were still attending, whilst others pointed out that equally, a number had decided not to participate (post meeting note: many other EU countries subsequently confirmed attendance). LB made clear that the UKBC Committee had not expressed major concerns and continued to believe that participation was appropriate, given normal safeguards. Five of the UKBC Committee (special interest group) will be attending in varying capacities.

Following in-depth discussion of these issues, the President proposed a sub-group of Council should be formed on a 'task and finish' basis to support the staff team in handling next steps. All were clear, including the UKBC Committee, that the team cannot attend if the FCO formally advised against travel to Tehran. The Council sub-group will consist of Patricia Kuwabara, Yvonne Barnett, Hilary MacQueen and Richard Reece (Chair).

MD reminded Council that the UKBC Committee members were all volunteers, including several experienced secondary teachers whose views were important in the process.

### 8.3 Brexit & Science

The President asked for this item to be picked up in the strategy session in the interests of time.

## 9. Membership & Professional Affairs

### 9.1 Membership & Professional Affairs update

RLF provided an update. Individual membership recruitment remained strong, exceeding the 18,000 target six months early.

Council noted the excellent progress and congratulated the team.

### 9.2 Apprenticeships

Paul Trimmer (PT), Head of Accreditation on the staff team, joined the meeting for this item and outlined a proposed pilot, in partnership with sister societies, to deliver external quality assurance for the end-point assessments in Degree apprenticeships, at the invitation of Ofqual. CA asked about the primary purpose which PT explained was to help ensure common standards across the country both between universities and individual programmes. Ofqual were prepared to cover direct costs including staff time.

Council noted that this was a pilot and as such there would an opportunity to step away in the future if it did not pan-out as hoped. There was **AGREEMENT** to proceed on the basis set out in the paper.

10. AoB

CA reported that the Athena Forum (a collection of learned societies working on gender equality) was currently restricted in its work as there was no dedicated budget. She asked if Council could consider this. Council felt it important to ensure activity was not duplicated. The President therefore proposed that a paper should be developed setting out the rationale for funding.

**ACTION: LB to lead and facilitate the development of a paper on the Athena Forum for the next Council meeting.**

John M. Goodfellow

12.9.18