

Council Meeting

Thursday 12 December 2013
12:30-14:30

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

WEB Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

The chair welcomed Council and Prof Jackie Hunter (JH), CEO at BBSRC and gave apologies.

Present: Prof Dame Nancy Rothwell (President)
Dr Pat Goodwin (Hon Treasurer)
Dr Liz Lakin
Dr Kim Hardie
Prof Richard Reece
Prof John Coggins
Prof David Blackburn
Dr Aileen Allsop
Dr Paul Brooker
Mr Tim Brigstocke
Dr Jeremy Pritchard

Observers: Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive
Prof Jackie Hunter, Chair of BBSRC (guest)
Mr Jon Kudlick, Director of Membership, Marketing & Communication
Dr Laura Bellingan, Head of Science Policy
Ms Natasha Neill, Executive Officer
Ms Gemma Garrett, Head of Education
Ms Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Head of Education (on maternity leave)
Ms Jen Crosk (Minutes)

Apologies: Prof Chris Kirk (Hon Secretary)
Prof Julia Buckingham
Prof Rosie Hails
Prof Chris Garland
Ms Judith Willetts, British Society for Immunology
Ms Elaine Snell, British Neuroscience Association

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1.1 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 September 2013

2.1 Review of action points

All actions had been completed.

2.2 Matters arising not on the Agenda

No matters were raised.

2.3 Approval of Minutes and Web Minutes

Council **AGREED** the Minutes and Web Meetings of the meeting held on 12 September 2013.

2.4 Conflicts of interest

None reported.

Section A: Policy & Strategy

3. Joint discussion with BBSRC

Mark Downs (MD) gave a presentation to Jackie Hunter (JH), CEO at BBSRC on the work of the Society and where previous BBSRC funding had been used. JH gave an overview of BBSRC priorities and where these matched the Society. She felt that BBSRC could undertake further partnership work with the Society on common key areas, particularly reporting more widely what we do. The BBSRC will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2014 with a launch in November, followed by a range of activities.

In terms of developing private sector links, the President (NR) felt that a forum to discuss 'what the Society can do for you' would be useful in taking forward the right information when approaching industries. The President thanked Jackie Hunter and invited her to observe the remainder of the meeting.

4. Report from ETP

Jeremy Pritchard (JP) gave an oral update on ETP. An ETP Meeting and away-day had been held on 9 December which looked at priority areas such as higher education, teacher support in schools, agriculture and fisheries.

JP requested that Council forward any examples of people promoted within teaching by the end of February, ideally including the criteria and process used.

Gemma Garrett (GG) reported that the Society had again been involved in discussions around A Level reforms. The Society had worked closely with the RSC and IoP. The main aim would be to push back first teaching of science A levels to 2016. Council felt a body of people was required who could decide what the ideal biology curriculum would look like, including the content, assessment and skills required to progress at each stage. There was also concern that the current plan meant that the A Level Biology grading would not include practical skills.

NR asked GG to write a one pager stating that, whereas the Society welcomed the reforms, there was much opportunity for it to be improved and that first teaching needed to be from 2016.

5. Accreditation

5.1 Update

Liz Lakin (LL) reported that the UKCES funding would end in September 2014. There was a current underspend but targets were being met or exceeded.

LL reported that there had been interest from seven HEIs for research Degree Accreditation in the January round.

5.2 Ratification of Accredited programmes

LL reported that Stage 1 and 2 of the process had been completed and we were in a position to offer either full accreditation or interim accreditation for new degree programmes, aspiring for full accreditation, but without students graduating at the present time. Another site visit would be scheduled once the first round of students graduate.

As interim accreditation required two site visits, Council felt that extra payment should be made by the Universities to cover extra cost.

5.3 Sustainability of current programme

LL tabled a paper which set out a number of new funding models. Council debated the options and concluded that the Society should proceed to develop a new three year programme (four in Scotland) recognising the significant financial challenge in the absence of external funding in the short term. A fee structure based on annual payments was agreed as a good model.

6. MMC Report

JK gave an update on MMC and reported a target of 14,000 members by January 2014.

Discussions were currently taking place around Biology Week 2014. As it would be the year of the brain, investigations were being done around a crowd sourced neuroscience project with a quiz or game. The Society was also planning a potential new citizen science project monitoring hay fever symptoms.

There had been much public engagement activity, with a Seasonal Parliamentary Reception and MO meeting in December. Biology Week 2013 had been very successful, with good press coverage.

The Biologist had been shortlisted for the PPA Scotland's Best Business and Professional magazine category.

The annual branch meeting had been held on 12 November, with representation from all 16 current branches. Proposals to increase regional activity had been positively received.

The Society was currently seeking sponsorship for a number of activities including the book awards, photo competition and a Biology Day conference on 12 July.

6.1 Appointment of new JBE Editor

JK reported that David Slingsby would be stepping down as Editor of the JBE in May 2014. Council asked that the Editorial Board recommend candidates from the four given, the candidate would then meet with a Council member and JK for informal discussions. A decision would be based around the skills requirement outlined in the paper. JP agreed to meet with the recommended candidate.

6.2 Proposed new MMC structure

JK reported that a change was required in the Committee structure and suggested a new group to look at Membership and benefits. The Branches sub-group would continue.

Council AGREED to disbanding the current MMC Committee and the formation of a new Membership Committee focussed on MSBs, with Chairmanship term of three years.

7. Report from Science Policy

Laura Bellingan (LB) gave an update on Science Policy. There were ongoing issues with open access and animal science. LB had met with the Home Office the previous week and the Minister recorded a DVD message. An Independent panel had been brought in to look at Imperial following

public concerns over their animal handling procedures to see what was in place and to ensure high standards would be used.

7.1 Reporting negative results

LB spoke about the lack of negative result reporting. Council felt it important to speak to MOs and get their input on what they were doing in their journals and whether they accepted/encouraged negative results. LB suggested that there may be a role for the Society in developing guidance.

8. Professional Registers & Training

An information only paper was provided relating to the end of the Gatsby grant period for Registered Scientist and Registered Science Technician. Council noted the content.

9. Industrial Advisory Committee

Aileen Allsop put forward a case for an Employer Advisory Committee to be incorporated within the structure of the Society. There was currently no formal mechanism for maintaining a relationship with employers outside the academic community or beyond specific interest groups.

Council agreed the Society should identify and invite members to participate in an Employer Advisory Committee. The initial working framework / terms of reference should be defined ahead of the launch in May 2014.

Section B: Operational Issues

10. Membership organisation relationships and fees

There was currently an issue around MO income in comparison to activity, with MOs receiving much more from their membership than individual members. Following a dinner with major MOs, hosted by the President in October, there had been positive responses on a proposal of MO contributions at 1% of turnover. Council felt that a two tier proposal would be required so that those contributing significantly more enjoyed far greater benefits.

11. Governance: confirming Terms of Reference

Council APPROVED the revised Terms of Reference for the Finance Committee, Audit Committee, Remuneration Committee and Accreditation Working Group

12. Report on External Fraud

A virus attack in October had led to the theft of £20,000 of Society funds which had been claimed through the Direct Debit Guarantee Scheme. Council were asked to refer the Report on the external fraud to the Audit Committee for in-depth review, reporting back at the next Council meeting. Council noted that the appropriate procedures had been followed.

13. Chief Executive's Report

MD gave an update of Society activities. There had been extensive public engagement including three life science careers fairs and our second Biology Week, the latter achieving significant press coverage and record website stats. A major report was set to be launched at the UK Plant Sciences Federation meeting on 28 January. The Society would be hosting an event in March with ZSL, following up on the Ulaanbaatar conference on biodiversity during the autumn.

The Society had been successful in an £88k bid to the Welsh Government to roll out the Gopher Science Project developed by the Biochemical Society.

107 Gray's Inn Road was now completely vacant and the refurbishment plan was almost complete. The physical work on the new building was due to start at the end of January and a decision was awaited in relation to the planning for the additional floor. As design and build costs were being forced up, MD asked Council if there was any flexibility for a small amount of additional expenditure.

Alan Johnstone's term as Chair of the Remuneration Committee would be complete in early 2014. Council approved the appointment of Prof David Coates as the new Chair.

14. Organisational structure

Due to the Society's expansion, MD outlined to Council a new staffing structure more suited to a larger organisation with three core directorates. Council welcomed and agreed the proposals.

The Biochemical Society had generously agreed to fund two full-time permanent members of staff, Catherine Ball and Gemma Garratt.

Caroline Wallace had sadly left the Society but this presented an opportunity to review regional support in Scotland. Council agreed to proposals to expand the commitment in Scotland from 2 to 3 days per week alongside two days in the North of England, creating a new full time regional position.

15. AOB

The date of the next Council Meeting is 12 March 2014