

Draft MINUTES of the Annual General Meeting

Held at:

The Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE

11:00 on Wednesday 10 May 2023

1. Welcome and Apologies

The President had been delayed, therefore the Honorary Secretary, Professor Claire Wathes FRSB, welcomed everyone to the Society's fourteenth AGM.

Apologies were received from:

Dr Alan Lansdown FRSB, Godfrey Broad MRSB, Prof Mansi El-Masi FRSB, Prof David Brigden FRSB, Prof Sir Munir Pirmohamed FRSB, Dr Sohal Jheeta FRSB, Prof John Solbe FRSB, Dr Rosemary Solbe FRSB, Prof Alexandre Antonelli FRSB, Prof Paul Leonard FRSB, Dr Barbara Hall FRSB, Ann Fullick FRSB, Nick Tomlinson AMRSB.

The Honorary Secretary asked for any amendments to the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 18 May 2022 – none were reported.

The Minutes of the previous AGM were ACCEPTED as a true record.

Proposer: Professor Nigel Brown
Secunder: Mr Christopher Hughes

2. Chief Executive's Report

Dr Mark Downs FRSB (MD) gave an update on the last financial year October 2021 to September 2022.

The Three Year plan, focussed around the wonder of biology, was now in its second year, with some targets already achieved.

Two key Committees provide support to Council - Membership & Professional Affairs Committee (MPA) and the Education & Science Policy Committee (ESP).

MPA had conducted a review of international branches, the ambassador scheme and a membership benefits package.

ESP had looked at the broad policy agenda over the past five years and responded to nine consultations during the reporting period (including use of animals in research and genetic technologies). On the 5-10 biology curriculum, we are engaged with partners on an ongoing consultation in Wales around a double GCSE offering. CPD for teachers is an important area, ensuring that they are trained to teach other subjects.

Horizon/Pioneer and research funding remain big topics on the agenda. The Society's general election manifesto had been developed and sent to political parties.

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RSB had invested in a full-time role for EDI work and we continue to take two interns per year with UKRI.

Parliamentary engagement remained a key role for the Society and we continue to maintain a strong link with the House of Lords via Dr Stephen Benn. Following his departure from the Society, Susie Rabin had been appointed to take up the role as Associate Director of Communications & Public Affairs. The Society continues to work closely with chemistry and physics to ensure joined up messaging for policy makers.

The Society played a significant role in convening the community via the Member Organisation Policy Lates, covering various topics, including the impact of animal and human health.

Public engagement continues around the 'wonder of biology'. Biology Week 2023 will run between 16-20 October and the competitions are already live.

Plant health was an area of growth over the last year, with funding received from Defra for plant health studentships, to ensure an improved understanding of the role of plants in future challenges.

Regional branches remained very active, with more things available online to allow greater engagement. Internationally, Australasia and East Asia branches would be going forward but Hong Kong activity would cease.

Our degree accreditation programme has grown and we have worked with World Bank to support degree accreditation in Africa.

Professional registration has seen growth and a CBiol review was carried out to ensure alignment with Chartered status across the sciences. CPD will create a gold standard and has to be completed in order to retain CBiol but this can be achieved in different ways.

Home working had mostly continued since the pandemic therefore hotdesking space was currently being rented to CaSE and the Biochemical Society.

Council had invested in new staff roles in order to deliver on the three year plan, alongside looking at ways the Society could be an innovative employer. On the latter, a 4 day, 32 hour week had been successfully trialled between June and December, achieving positive media coverage.

3. Summary of the Annual Report and Accounts

The Honorary Treasurer, Dr Paul Brooker FRSB (PB) gave an overview of the Society's annual accounts from 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022. The year had seen a return to pre-pandemic activities and new areas of work, building on the strong performance of 2021-22. The operational budget had achieved a surplus of £31k against a planned deficit budget of £44k.

The Trustees had taken a medium to long-term view on managing its CCLA investment portfolio, which provides income alongside capital growth. We have also taken advantage of favourable interest rates for short notice accounts.

Income had been diversified by increasing activity for accreditation, professional registers and provision of membership administration services.

Given this strong liquidity, whilst remaining prudent, some of this cash would be used for investment in staffing and infrastructure in financial year 2022/23. Such areas include increased education and science policy engagement, improved communications and membership recruitment capability.

Membership subscriptions continue to be the largest portion of our income and PB thanked members and member organisations, with particular thanks to the Society's strategic partners: Biochemical Society, British Pharmacological Society, British Ecological Society, Applied Microbiology International,

Physiological Society, Nutrition Society, Anatomical Society, British Society for Immunology, Genetics Society, Society for Experimental Biology, AstraZeneca, UK Research & Innovation and the Wellcome Trust, for their continued support.

PB reported that, looking forward, there would be a challenging environment over a planned period.

PB formally thanked Dr Mark Downs, CEO, Surinder Sohal, Finance Manager and the Executive team, who had greatly aided his work. PB was also grateful to all members of the Finance Committee, Audit Committee and the auditors Haysmacintyre for their work in ensuring the Society financial position continued to be sound and transparent.

Following a review by the pension trustees, the administration advisors for the closed defined pension scheme was changed and a revaluation is due in June 2023.

The full Trustees report and annual accounts is available via the Society's website.

4. Questions and answers session

A question and answer session was held with the President, Honorary Officers and the Chief Executive.

Are there any plans to start more journals?

Not at the current time. The journal market is extensive, requiring substantial investment. This would be a challenge the current marketplace as it is not our specialist area.

Is the Society planning to increase outreach activity in other countries to support biology education?

We are aware of opportunities and keen to increase international engagement in the future.

How much of the income invested is in international companies?

The Churches, Charities & Local Authorities Fund (CCLA) is an ethical fund, avoiding investment in activities such as arms, oil and tobacco. Investments are spread across a variety of different markets. We received an annual report from the investment manager and Council is happy with the investment and portfolio.

Congratulations for increasing international collaboration – do we have an existing or designed pathway for new graduate collaboration?

This is currently still modest and through our accreditation process but we can look at the pathway as we move forward.

How much do you spend on London and local events? What about helping members get engaged? Nobody talks about stem cells, changes in DNA, monoX antibodies, proteins, reversing ageing. You don't seem to be engaged in the literature I read.

There has been investment in running free events, with around 130 branch events held across the country during the year. These do not run into tens of thousands of Pounds. All our branches run sessions and many have switched to online events to reach a wider audience. Branches would be happy to receive suggestions for events and speakers. The Society does a lot of work on genetic technologies, which is an area covered by our policy team. However, we do not wish to duplicate the work of our MOs in those specialist areas but can work with them in promoting their events.

In addition, the membership survey, sent out every three years, provides an excellent vehicle for hearing what our members want.

Will you be doing more online Fellows lunches?

During the pandemic we held some Fellows lunches online which were well attended. We have now returned to face-to-face lunches but would be happy to organise further online lunches if there is interest.

How do you ensure that accredited courses still meet employer's needs?

Regular engagement with employers through the employer's advisory group and we envisage this network increasing engagement.

How much money changes hands for a single accreditation event?

Accreditation is overseen by an accreditation committee, and we employ (on a consultancy basis) a small team of assessors who receive a modest honorarium. Three people would typically attend an accreditation visit. The total cost depends on the number of programmes and the type of accreditation applied for, but typically ranges between £3k and £15k; some institutions will apply for multiple programme accreditation.

5. Voting on Resolutions

The meeting voted to accept the annual report and accounts by a show of hands. All were in favour. There were no objections or abstentions.

The Honorary Secretary put forward two resolutions to the meeting:

It was RESOLVED that the annual report and accounts for 2021-2022 were APPROVED by the meeting as a true record.

Proposer: Professor Claire Wathes

Seconder: Professor Nigel Brown

It was further RESOLVED that Council will appoint Haysmacintyre for the audit of the financial year 2023-24 and to set their remuneration.

Of the 103 proxy votes received, 99 were in favour.

Proposer: Professor Claire Wathes

Seconder: Professor Hilary MacQueen

6. Confirmation of Honorary Officers and announcement of new Honorary Treasurer

The Honorary Secretary reminded members that the Society's Honorary Officers are Council-elected and re-appointed on an annual basis, for a maximum of five years. The Honorary Secretary was re-appointed for a second year.

The Honorary Treasurer, Dr Paul Brooker, had fulfilled his fifth and final year and the Honorary Secretary expressed Council's gratitude for his enormous support to the Chief Executive and Committees. The Honorary Secretary welcomed Dr Louise Leong as the new Honorary Treasurer.

7. Election of Council Members

The Honorary Secretary reminded members of the constitution of Council:

Three Honorary Officers - President, Secretary and Treasurer

Four appointed from the College of Individual Members

Four appointed from the College of Organisation Members

Four appointed by Council

A call for nominations had been made for one vacancy from the College of Individual Members. No nominations had been received therefore Dr Jacqui Piner was appointed for her second term.

Mr Terry Gould had completed his term as Council elected Trustee and Mr Neil Burton was appointed in his place.

Professor Melanie Welham had been appointed to Council, commencing September 2023.

8. AoB

The Honorary Secretary gave thanks to everyone attending the Society's Annual General Meeting. There being no other business, the Honorary Secretary brought the meeting to a close at 12:00.

The next AGM will be held on Wednesday 8 May 2024.