

## MINUTES of the Annual General Meeting

Held at Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger St, London WC1N 2JU

at 14:00 on Wednesday 2 May 2018

### 1. Welcome and Apologies

The President, Professor Dame Jean Thomas FRSB, welcomed everyone to the Society's ninth AGM and reported that no proxy votes had been received.

Apologies were received from;

Professor Caroline Austin FRSB, Dr Kim Hardie FRSB, Dr Paul Hoskisson FRSB, Dr Louise Leong FRSB, Professor David Blackbourn FRSB, Dr William Marshall CBIOL FRSB, Professor Julia Buckingham FRSB, Mr Dafydd Lewis FRSB, Mr Rob Simpson CBIOL FRSB, Dr Wendy Bridle CBIOL MRSB, Dr Bob Park CBIOL MRSB, Professor Ahmad Ismail FRSB, Professor Jenny Morton FRSB, Mr Abdool Jackaria MRSB.

The President asked for any amendments to the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 10 May 2017. There were none.

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

**Proposer: Kate Bailie, seconder John Coggins.**

### 2. CEO Report

Dr Mark Downs (MD) gave an update on the last financial year 2016-17 plus highlights of a few events since then.

It has been a year of change. The Society's Council and key committees have seen a large turnover, coupled with a restructuring of the internal departments which led to a change in how the staff and committees work together. The two key supporting committees, the Education and Science Policy Committee and the Membership and Professional Affairs Committee, are now in line with the structure of the internal departments.

Since the Society's formation in 2009 there has been steady growth in membership numbers and a strong retention rate. In April 2018 the Society reached a new milestone of 18,000 members. Given the current rate of growth, 70% of current members have joined since 2009.

Through the Society's special interest group UKBC (UK Biology Competitions) the Society runs the Biology Challenge, Intermediate Biology Olympiad and the British Biology Olympiad (BBO). The Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London WC1N 2JU Tel: +44 (0)20 7685 2550 [info@rsb.org.uk](mailto:info@rsb.org.uk)  
[www.rsb.org.uk](http://www.rsb.org.uk)

BBO provides a means of selecting a team to represent the UK at the International Biology Olympiad (IBO) each year.

In 2017 the RSB, in partnership with the University of Warwick, hosted the IBO. This was a huge achievement for the RSB as it marked the first time that the UK was hosting the IBO. The academic quality of the competition was judged to be very high, with 250 students from 64 countries taking part in tests, practical work and social activities. MD also noted his thanks to the 100 volunteers who helped throughout the event, without whom the delivery of the IBO could not have been possible, especially the UKBC committee.

Parliamentary engagement activities, such as Links Day and Voice of the Future, continue to be important parts of the Society's work, ensuring that members of parliament are conscious of bioscience issues. Public messaging remains critical and will continue to remain so, and the Society continues to collaborate with its individual membership and Member Organisations (MOs) to deliver on its parliamentary agenda.

The Society is operating to a three-year plan, with the financial year October 2016 to September 2017 having been the second year of the plan. The three key pillars of activity are a unified voice, professional membership and a broad reach, all underpinned by a programme of public outreach work.

The RSB supports a professional workforce through a range of activities including accreditation of degrees, and 2017 saw the launch of international accreditation. The Society also looks to influence the biological education landscape, mapping requirements across awards and recognition systems and ensuring biology remains a key part of science education.

The Society has a broad reach and works together with members and MOs for a stronger impact. The RSB's teacher and industry networks have grown, and the Society has a voice on the ministerial committee for science and Brexit, working alongside other STEM learned societies on parliamentary activities.

In 2019 the Society will celebrate 10 years since its inception through a series of events. It will be important that members are able to fully engage both with this and the development of the new three year plan.

MD noted his thanks to all members and member organisations for their help and support.

### **3. Society Reports**

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, (RLF), Director of Membership and Professional Affairs, updated attendees on the membership of the Society.

Overall there has been a positive upward trend in membership and the Society recently reached the 18,000-member milestone, ahead of its target to do so by September 2018. The Society's members are critically important to the work of the Society and RLF thanked all the members for their support.

There has been increased growth across all membership grades and MRSB continues to be the largest group of members. The Society was pleased to note that student membership numbers had grown, as they are our lifeblood of future members. The trend has been helped by the accreditation of degrees and the growing importance of professional registers and chartered status that adds an additional layer of support to the membership.

RLF noted that the Society has a good gender balance overall but that a big difference still remains at the FRSB grade. The Society has been working to address this and RLF encouraged all members to urge their female biologists to join their professional body across the grades.

The membership services department, offering secretariat, membership and bookkeeping support to a number of member organisations, has seen a large growth. The Society has been able to support a further 5,000 individuals through this activity, and this is expected to grow to 6,500 over the next year.

The Society offers a number of professional registers; Chartered Biologist (CBiol), Registered Science Technician (RSciTech), Registered Scientist (RSci), Chartered Scientist (CSci) and Chartered Science Teacher (CSciTeach). The Plant Health Professional Register is our newest, and has been growing in scope. The Society is proud to be able to support its members through registers and chartered status, as well as offering CPD and training opportunities for continual professional growth and advancement.

RLF announced that the Society's online training portal, myLearning, has gone live with new courses being added annually. Alongside face-to-face training in house, it is the aim of the Society to be able to broaden its reach by allowing more members to be able to access training from wherever they are based.

Regional activity is supported by 19 branches, each of which is run by a volunteer committee. RLF thanked all the volunteers that work on the committees, hosting and running events and outreach activities that broaden the Society's scope throughout the UK and internationally.

Alongside the accreditation of degrees and advanced (typically 4 year) degrees, last year the RSB also launched accreditation of international and masters degrees. Foundation degree accreditation will be launching in the coming year. In the annual Accreditation Awards the Society celebrated high achieving students and universities that reached accreditation. The Society will be looking for feedback from university colleagues to strengthen and improve the accreditation schemes.

RLF noted that the RSB has considered mentoring schemes, with varying levels of success. It is a subject that comes up every year in planning conversations, but unfortunately the Society has not been able to find a way to run a scheme successfully yet. She invited any suggestions from members.

Dr Laura Bellingan (LB), Director of Policy and Public Affairs, then gave an update on the policy work at the RSB.

Brexit continues to be a large area of activity and the RSB has been vocal regarding the legislation on the movement of people and skills and expertise at all levels, supporting a widespread membership base. Funding of science has also been an important issue for representation. Additionally, the Society worked on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) from initial consultations up to official nominations for the REF 2021 expert panel.

In 2017 the Society's chief executive gave evidence to the House of Lords on the breadth of the life science, which aimed to bring awareness that the scope of the life sciences in government needs to be broadened past the current focus on the medical sciences set out in the Life Science Sector Deal.

The Society does a lot of work through its six special interest groups (SIGs): UK Biology Competitions (UKBC), Natural Capital Initiative (NCI), Heads of University Biosciences (HUBS), Animal Science Group (ASG), Biology Education Research Group (BERG) and UK Plant Science

Federation (UKPSF). The RSB proactively gathers information from the community and continues to work in partnership with MOs, taking forward collective issues and actions to parliaments and representing the voice of the biosciences. The RSB is grateful to its membership community for giving the Society the capacity and drive to bring concerns of the community to the forefront.

Outreach education and engagement work continues to be a popular area of work. Biology Week in September every year is a fantastic week of bioscience activity, and compliments the Society's other outreach activity across the UK, with a presence at festivals and events.

Awards and competitions allow the Society to support members with studentships and travel grants. The significant activity of the RSB members is recognised through awards such as the Outreach and Engagement Awards and Teacher of the Year. The Society also acts to engage members at all grades through competitions, from the Nancy Rothwell Award celebrating specimen drawing at BioNet membership level, all the way through to the Photography Competition. Having an arts and science link is a real boost to activity and an interdisciplinary approach to engaging members and the public.

2017 was also the first full year of the new *Emerging Topics in Life Sciences* publication, produced in partnership with the Biochemical Society and Portland Press.

#### **4. Receive and consider the Annual Report and Accounts**

Dr Pat Goodwin (PG), Honorary Treasurer gave an overview of the Society's annual accounts, in her last year serving as Honorary Treasurer.

It has been a challenging financial year, with a high expenditure due to the IBO event. The Society's Council initially approved a deficit budget ahead of the financial year in anticipation of the event. However, due to prudent spending and increased membership income the Society performed better than expected and finished the year with an operational surplus of £28k. PG thanked the Society's members and member organisations for their support. Membership income is the biggest income stream for the RSB and without this support the Society would not have been able to deliver on such a wide ranging programme of activity.

PG also noted her thanks to the Finance Committee and support from the finance staff at the RSB, who all helped to deliver a better than expected outturn, ensuring the Society continued to remain a going concern.

The Society has increased the funds carried forward compared to the previous financial year. Reasons for this are twofold: the increased value of the investment of Charles Darwin House where the Society resides, coupled with the reduced deficit of the defined pension scheme following a revaluation.

PG thanked Surinder Sohal and the RSB finance team, the Audit Committee chairs Daniel Ross and Rodney Eastwood, the auditors BDO and haysmacintyre who helped the Society through new SORP regulations, and all the strategic partners.

In continuation of last year's AGM, PG was happy to present the new legacy pamphlet and announced the launch of the Society's legacy programme.

The President recorded her thanks and that of the whole Council for all the hard work PG has carried out in her role as Honorary Treasurer.

## 5. Voting on Resolutions

The meeting voted to accept the annual report and accounts; no proxy votes were received and all those present voted in favour by a show of hands.

Proposer: Jonathan Bruun; seconder: Professor Hilary McQueen.

**It was RESOLVED that the annual report and accounts for 2016-2017 were accepted by the meeting as a true record.**

The meeting voted to allow Council to appoint haysmacintyre as the Society's auditors and to set their remuneration. No proxy votes had been received, and all attendees voted in favour of the resolution by a show of hands.

Proposer: Professor Jackie Hunter; seconder: Professor John Coggins.

**It was RESOLVED that Council will appoint haysmacintyre for the audit of the financial year 2017-18 and to set their remuneration.**

## 6. Confirmation of Honorary Officers

This AGM marks the end of Professor Dame Jean Thomas' term as the Society's President. MD thanked JT for all her support over the last four years which had seen the Society go through a lot of change. He recorded his thanks to JT for her personal support and for volunteering so much of her time to the Society.

JT noted that over the last four years the Society has gone from strength to strength. The RSB has carried out considerable work to support members, looking after the discipline of biology, and broadening outreach activity.

The presidency was officially passed over from JT to Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow (JG), with a ceremonial handover of the President's chain of office.

JG expressed her personal thanks to JT. She noted that this is her third time taking on a role of president and that she is very grateful to the RSB Council for her appointment. In her role as president, she will work with Council to support its staff and volunteers to deliver individual membership support. JG also highlighted the importance of supporting the MOs and industry partners, as well as students, early career researchers, academics and teachers. JG is looking forward to listening to member input for the development and continual growth of the Society.

JG reminded members that the Society's Honorary Officers are Council elected and must be reappointed on an annual basis. She gave thanks to PG in her job as Hon Treasurer, noting that this has been her fifth and final term in the role. JG announced that Dr Paul Brooker has been appointed by Council to the role of Honorary Treasurer and confirmed that Professor Richard Reece has been re-elected as Honorary Secretary for a second term.

## 7. Election of Council Members

Professor Richard Reece (RR) reminded members of the constitution of Council. Three of the members are Honorary Officers (President, Secretary and Treasurer), four members are appointed

from the College of Individual Members, and four from the College of Organisation Members. A further four members are appointed by Council to fill any skill gaps.

This year there were no vacancies in the College of Individual Members. In the College of Organisational Members, the terms for Professor John Coggins and Professor David Blackburn came to an end. Three nominations were received following a call to Member Organisations and following an election Professor Yvonne Barnett and Professor Patricia Kuwabara were elected to the Society's Council. The voting turnout was 38%.

Before being appointed to the role of Honorary Treasurer, Dr Paul Brooker held a Council-appointed place. To fill this new vacancy, Council will be carrying out a skills audit of the current members and will advertise for the vacancy in due course to broaden the skills and diversity of the Board.

## **8. AOB**

There being no other business, the President brought the meeting to a close at 15:15.