

Membership and Professional affairs activity under the Membership and Professional Affairs Committee

Chair: Professor Richard Reece CBIol FRSB
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Governance

The Membership and Professional Affairs (MPA) Committee was formed in March 2018 following a review of the governance structures of the RSB. It is one of two Principal Committees of the RSB and reports directly to Council. Chaired by the Honorary Secretary, the role of committee is to develop and review the RSB's strategies, policies and processes that support our individual members and Member Organisations (MO) throughout their lifetime with the RSB to achieve their own personal, professional and organisational goals. Further information on its remit and membership can be found on our website¹. In 2019 the committee completed its first full cycle of meetings. Under the direction of the committee and Chair, the agenda and focus of each meeting has developed to meet the evolving requirements of the RSB and its membership.

Membership

2018/19 was a challenging year for membership recruitment and retention. Having started the year with an overall membership total of 18,310 in October 2018, total individual membership fell over the January and April elections – partly due to the lapsing of some 300 affiliate members studying an access to HE course, who had had two years of membership prepaid, but also due to a significant lapsing in free BioNet (school and college) members. However, it should be noted that no significant fluctuations were noted at the FRSB and MRSB grades.

As a result of this, an increased emphasis was placed upon retention, and a successful trial using a third party call centre was carried out in late summer 2019 (this trial has since been extended for an additional year). By July 2019 (the final election of the financial year), total membership plateaued at 17,744 and the RSB membership team continues to work hard to grow recruitment and further improve retention.

Member Organisation (MO) numbers remain relatively steady, with a small net decrease over the year following a modest number of leavers and joiners. At the end of the period there were 89 MOs.

Ambassadors

The RSB Ambassador scheme is intended to mobilise a group of engaged members to promote the RSB internally within their own organisations, facilitating opportunities for the RSB, improving levels of engagement with current members and recruiting new members to join.

The Ambassador pilot scheme was launched in April 2018 with applications open to all professional grade members (AMRSB, MRSB and FRSB). Applications closed in May 2018, and 20 Ambassadors were appointed in June 2018. During the pilot year, the Ambassadors reached approximately 3,000 potential members through 23 events, received membership interest from 290 potential members and successfully recruiting 110 new members (96 from HE, 14 from industry).

¹ www.rsb.org.uk/mpa

In addition to the number of events and members recruited, Ambassadors:

- Invited each other to speak at events e.g. there were several collaborations between Ambassadors in HE and Industry, including a 'Hackathon' at Kingston University for HE students to consider industry-based scientific problems posed by our Ambassador based at GlaxoSmithKline.
- Invited RSB staff to engage with their institutions.
- Wrote for *The Biologist*, spoke at RSB events (such as the Bioscience Careers Day) and collaborated with branches, for example, the Northern Ireland branch and the Ambassador based at Queen's University Belfast.

The pilot scheme showed tremendous promise for increasing the profile and reach of RSB, supporting membership awareness and growth, and providing development opportunities for our members and in December 2019, Council approved its continuation and expansion.

Branches, regional and national activity

Our **branch committees** organised almost 100 events for members, schools and the public, including wildlife trips, inspiring talks, photography workshops and hands-on outreach activities. Through the branches working group and all branch meeting, members networked, shared expertise, and informed RSB support for these activities.

10-year anniversary

October 2019 marked the start of the **10 year anniversary** with a launch in Westminster, special issue of *The Biologist* and dedicated website (anniversary.rsb.org.uk). RSB had planned to celebrate throughout 2020 with the sell-out Anniversary Gala Dinner, regional talks honouring Pioneers of Biology and funding new Big Biology Day festivals, although the pandemic has inevitably led to the cancellation of some of these events. RSB work has been showcased online with monthly infographics.

Professional support and training

Support for our members at all professional stages across the breadth of biosciences remained a key focus for us. In 2018-19, we launched three new online training courses and delivered 15 face to face courses. A new Training and Registers Development Plan outlines our training offer and how this extends to target groups linked to registration levels, aligning the registration competency framework with our training courses. An Industry Skills Certificate is a new initiative, designed to support the employability of scientists into industry, either for the first time or from academia and this launched in the summer 2019. The certificate recognises a set of skills and knowledge gained through the participation in online and in-person training courses, which can support a career move into industry. There has been extensive research undertaken to establish the skills requirements in industry, through reports of potential skills gaps and advice from the Society's Employer Advisory Group (EAG) and it will ultimately support members seeking to apply for Registered Scientist. Duplication models are being scoped for a Technical Skills Certificate which supports the Registered Science Technician register and a version for Chartered status.

Discipline specific registers for Toxicology, Qualified Persons, Fetal Morphology, and Plant Health Professionals grew slightly over the year. 2020 is designated as the International Year of Plant Health and we hope to see increased engagement with the Plant Health Professional Register as the year progresses.

Client services

The membership services team completed its fourth full year, servicing seven societies (Genetics Society, British Society for Neuroendocrinology, British Lichen Society, British Society for Genetic Medicine, Quekett Microscopical Club, the Anatomical Society and the International Society for Affective Disorders) at year end totalling around 6,500 individual members collectively. The team is now also supporting an external client, the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy, for whom we host a version of the RSB membership system upon which they manage their own membership, and an additional external client, the Institute of Animal technology launched this year. In addition to membership services and database provision, the RSB also offers financial, secretariat, grant and event administration services.