

## **Minutes of the 107th Annual General Meeting of the Biochemical Society**

**Thursday, 26 July 2018 at 16:15**  
**Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London, WC1N 2JU**

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**Present:**

**Pete Downes**  
**Rob Beynon**

**Colin Bingle**

**Steve Busby**  
**Anne Dell**  
**Joanne Edwards**

**Niki Gray**  
**Dominika Gruszka**

**Sanmuganathan Kasinathan**  
**Martin Pool**

**David Pye**  
**Richard Reece**

**Stefan Roberts**  
**Frank Sargent**  
**Malcolm Weir**

**Michelle West**

President  
Chair, Education, Training and Public  
Engagement Committee  
Chair, Awards Committee and  
Editor-in-Chief, Biochemical Society  
Transactions  
Member  
Chair, Biochemical Society  
Chair, Clinical and Translational Research  
Theme Panel  
Honorary Membership Secretary  
Early Career Researcher Representative  
Trustee, Council of Trustees  
Member  
Local Ambassador Representative Trustee,  
Council of Trustees  
Honorary Policy Officer  
Chair, Portland Press Ltd Board and  
Trustee, Biochemical Society  
Honorary Meetings Secretary  
Honorary Treasurer  
Industry Representative Trustee, Council of  
Trustees  
Chair, Basic Biosciences Theme Panel

**In attendance:**

**Richard Cryer**

**Kate Baillie**

**Adam Hughes**  
**Malavika Legge**  
**Hannah Russell**  
**Marcus Parker**  
**James Ronaldson**  
**Laura Woodland**  
**Robert Beer**  
**James Brown**

**Anastasia Stefanidou**

Independent Chair, Audit Committee  
  
CEO, Biochemical Society and Managing  
Director, Portland Press Ltd  
Director of Operations  
Acting Director of Publishing  
Director of Society Programmes  
Head of Marketing and Communications  
Head of Finance  
Head of Membership Engagement  
Training Manager  
Education and Public Engagement  
Manager  
Communications Officer

**The meeting started with one minute of silence to commemorate those members who had passed away since the last General Meeting (7 September 2017).**

#### **18/01 Minutes of the 106th Annual General Meeting (7 September 2017)**

The President opened the floor to comments on the *Minutes of the 106th Annual General Meeting of the Biochemical Society*.

No comments or errors were noted; therefore, the membership approved the proposal to accept the minutes as a true and accurate account of the meeting.

#### **18/02 Update of Society activities and achievements**

The CEO, Director of Society Programmes, Director of Operations, and Acting Director of Publishing provided an update on the Society's activities since the last Annual General Meeting (5 July 2017).

The CEO noted the following highlights from 2017:

- The Group had achieved a surplus of £279k for the year, and had realized a reduction of £650k in costs thanks to efficiencies and greater cost savings implemented by staff;
- Portland Press Ltd had achieved a profit of £1,845,000, thereby reaching its £1.8m profit target three years ahead of schedule
- The Society had sold its warehouse and secondary office building in Colchester for £500k
- The Society had also sold 6.2% of its equity share in CDH to the Society for Applied Microbiology, liquidating £1.4m
- The public engagement activity, Scientific Scissors, had been used as a best practice case study by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
- Additionally, the Society's social media had been highlighted as an example of best practice within the sector
- Portland Press had secured a 2 year deal with the CAPES consortium in Brazil; the CEO noted that synergies across the Group and, in particular, the educational resource Sciberbrain, had been influential in securing this business – highlighting the importance of being a Society-owned publisher

The Director of Operations presented an update on the Operations Directorate's activities since the last AGM:

- As at 17 July, the Society's membership was 6,994. The categories of membership were currently structured to follow the career progression of an academic, with an additional Associate membership for those interested in biochemistry, but who had pursued alternative career paths;
- The Society had a variety of membership initiatives, such as multi-year memberships (which offered a discounted fee) and Group memberships (most popular with undergraduates, of whom 24.1% were Group members)
- The Society's paid membership was tracking a trajectory of steady growth and a strategy was in place, and on track, to reach 7,000 paying members by 2021
- A new membership system was being implemented which would facilitate better membership engagement
- The 2017 membership survey had received 604 responses; the DoO noted this was a marked improvement compared to the 7 responses received in 2013. 83% of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied with their membership of the Society.
- A need for greater engagement with early career bioscientists had been identified; therefore, the Society had established an Early Career Advisory Panel (the DoO noted that if the initiative was successful, the Society would explore forming similar panels for other membership categories)
- The Society's industry strategy gained significant traction in 2017; activities included a training event, 'Key aspects of modern drug discovery', which had been supported by AstraZeneca, GSK, and Sygnature Discovery, in addition to the University of Leeds and the University of Aberdeen

- An Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity strategy had been developed and would feed in to all activities and initiatives;
- The Society had funded two postgraduate members to attend the 43<sup>rd</sup> FEBS congress in Prague;
- The Local Ambassador day in York (16 November 2017) received the highest number of LAs attending to date;
- In 2017, £146k had been awarded in Grants. The DoO noted that the Visiting Fellowships grant had been renamed to 'Travel Award for International Skills and Knowledge Exchange', in order to more clearly identify its purpose to members
- 11 awards would be presented in 2019; nominations for the 11 awards in 2020 would open on 1 August. This included two new Early Career Research awards; the scope for these had been unrestricted so that nominations for any research area would be considered;
- The recent election for the next Chair of the Society had seen a turnout of 21.9%
- The Society was undertaking a governance "health check" to ensure that the new governance structure implemented following the Governance Review was functioning as intended

The Director of Society Programmes presented an update on the Society Programmes Directorate's activities since the last AGM:

- Since the last AGM, the Society's events programme had included 14 Scientific meetings; 2 Harden Conferences; 3 Training events; 2 Society events; together these had reached over 1,500 delegates.
- An online training portal had been launched in October 2017 and the 'R for Biochemists 101' course had already run three times;
- The Society was piloting hybrid meetings, allowing virtual participants the chance to attend online and interact as they would if they were in the room; so far, only a modest number of delegates had attended online, however feedback had been very positive to date;
- The majority of event delegates were from the UK (73%) although the events had attracted delegates from a total of 41 countries. A third of delegates were non-members;
- The winners of the ever-popular Science Communication Competition had recently been announced; 48 entries had been received;
- In 2017, 7,695 registrants had signed up for the Society's Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), "Biochemistry: the Molecules of Life", in partnership with Futurelearn. Since the course started, over 18,000 people had registered;
- The Society continued to support the STEM Insight scheme, with 14 placements since July 2017 for teachers in either academia or industry to learn more about these career paths. The Director of Society Programmes noted that the feedback from the placements was overwhelmingly positive;
- The Society had also supported teacher CDP through events with the Royal Society of Chemistry;
- The Society had produced a new guide to studying biochemistry at undergraduate level;
- Careers activities included five careers events for a variety of audiences; new careers posters; the jobs board; and a 'day in the life' features in *The Biochemist*;
- A new public engagement activity, 'Full Beam', was being developed to explore the use of light in research
- The Society was piloting an Art and Science project in collaboration with Central Saint Martins;
- Since July 2017, the Society had attended 16 public engagement events, including events outside the traditional Science Festival forum ((for instance, Sunderland Air Show);
- The Society had collaborated with the other co-owners of Charles Darwin House on an outreach event focusing on World Coffee Day
- The Society continued to feed into a variety of government consultations, mostly through the Royal Society of Biology and Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE), although also fed into some individually(for instance, the Society had recently submitted a consultation response on anti-microbial resistance)
- The Policy Network had attracted over 100 members and was a useful forum through which members' views could be gauged to feed in to consultations;
- Eight Diversity in Science grants had been awarded in 2017
- The Society had partnered with sister societies in order to deliver six Policy Lunchbox events since July 2017, and was also a member of LeSPAR (Learned Society Partnership on

Antimicrobial Resistance) which had delivered an interdisciplinary workshop on diagnostics for AMR for ECRs in November 2017

- The Society had collaborated with the British Pharmacological Society, The Physiological Society, and The Nutrition Society for a mixer at the Experimental Biology conference;
- Members news received consistent open rates of 40-45%
- The Society had responded to 18 news stories over the last year and had also provided Trustee comments for the Science Media Centre's rapid response to the Life Sciences Sector Deal, the Life Sciences Industrial Strategy, and the European Medicines Agency relocating to Amsterdam (which had been picked up by the Guardian)
- Twitter followers had increased by 24%, 13% and 58% to the Society, Portland Press, and *The Biochemist* feeds respectively
- An antibiotic future tweetchat in partnership with the Society for Applied Microbiology and Sense About Science had been hosted to mark European Antibiotic Awareness Day
- Three online quizzes had been designed to mark World Heart Day, World Cancer Day, and World Sleep Day,
- The Society had started to livestream its events, including Policy Lunchbox, the Novartis Medal and Prize Lecture, and the Biology Week Debate, helping the Society to reach over 6,000 additional people
- In 2017 the Society's website had received 674,816 views, and since January 2018 the open rate of marketing campaigns had been 41% (9% click v opened rate)

The Acting Director of Publishing introduced herself; she had joined the organization as Publisher in February 2015, and had assumed her current role in May 2018. She presented an update on the Publishing Directorate's activities since the last AGM:

- The portfolio consisted of 4 research and reviews journals, and 3 fully commissioned journals
- Year on year submissions and publications continued to grow, with 3,000 submissions in 2017 compared to 2,400 in 2016, and 1,000 articles published compared to 940. To the end of 2018, it was projected that 3,600 submissions would be received, of which 1,400 articles would be published;
- In 2017, over 5,700 authors from 55 named countries contributed to articles published in the portfolio. This was compared to 4,100 authors from 50 countries in 2016; countries newly represented included Malaysia, Cyprus, South Africa, Qatar and Ukraine;
- There were 90 scientific editors from 17 different countries advocating for the journals, overseeing peer-review and driving content strategies. In 2017, new agreements were put in place including a financial provision for editors carrying out journal advocacy work;
- The first *Bioscience Reports* editorial board meeting had taken place in March 2018
- The Society's Publications Committee had met for the first time in 2017; helping to oversee the journal editorial boards, journal coverage from a portfolio perspective, and developing publishing policies. Since its establishment, the Committee had focused on inclusivity, diversity and equality on the editorial boards, agreeing an aspirational 50:50 male: female gender balance. The Committee had approved the implementation of ORCID; integration of BioRxiv with the submission site to allow for preprints to be submitted via this route; and had agreed a new Data Policy championing FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable; Reusable) data
- The portfolio had received over 6m full-text views in 2017; the paywall had been relaxed mid-2017 but switched back on in November 2017, resulting in a decrease in total usage and corresponding increase in abstract views; this information was being used to generate sales leads;
- To June 2018 there were 20% more subscribers to the electronic table of contents (eTOC) alerts (10,200 in total)
- To 23 July payments totalling £3.1m for 2018 subscriptions had been received (excluding currency gains on trading). Open Access (OA) revenue was also experiencing steady growth year on year, with most growth coming from the full OA journal, *Bioscience Reports*
- As part of its business plan, PPL was preparing for an eventual transition to an OA environment, while maximising current opportunities for subscription revenue. In support of the latter, a new subscriptions sales agreement had been signed with the Royal Society of Chemistry;
- In 2017, two new journals had been launched: *Neuronal Signaling*, and *Emerging Topics in Life Sciences* (co-owned with the Royal Society of Biology). *Emerging Topics* had published

six issues in 2017, and an application had been submitted for indexing on the Web of Science;

- The journals *Biochemical Society Transactions* and *Clinical Science* would be online only from 2019
- *The Biochemist* had moved to sit with the content editorial team, with two issues having been produced under the new team structure. The magazine's Editorial Board was in the process of reviewing and reaffirming the strategy.

### **18/03 President's comments**

The President introduced himself and noted he was proud to have been appointed as the Society's new President. Until the end of the year, he was Vice Chancellor of the University of Dundee, having been at the university for about 30 years. He had first joined as a member of the Society in 1978 at the start of his PhD, and had previously sat on the Society's Executive Committee in the 2000's first as Vice Chair and then Chair.

The President noted that the Society was in good health both financially and in terms of its membership. In order to continue its success, it was important that the Society responded in a timely and appropriate fashion to changes in its external environment; particular contemporary challenges including Brexit, and the Society's pension schemes (USS, and the closed defined benefit scheme).

Since holding the position of President over a decade ago, he noted that the Society had transformed itself from the inside out in order to continue supporting its members and to meet its charitable purposes to support the advancement of the molecular biosciences, and ensure that the discipline thrives both in the UK and internationally. The President noted that there had been a palpable cultural shift and the staff and Trustees were working very closely to deliver the strategy and the needs of the community in creative ways.

The Society would, at the end of 2018, release a new iteration of its strategy to cover 2019-2021. At the time of the meeting, the Council of Trustees were developing the strategy, receiving proposals for how to achieve the objectives outlined at the Trustees' strategy retreat in November 2017. The President noted that it was a crucial time to provide a voice for the community, and the Society would seek to improve its alignment with the broader community as a central goal for the next three years. The Society was therefore exploring new ways to support and engage key groups in order to move away from being principally an academic society in order to serve the whole community.

The President thanked the CEO, staff, and the Society's volunteers for their dedication and hard work in realizing the Society's goals.

### **18/04 Elections and vacancies**

- *Incoming Officers and committee members*

The President announced that Professor Sheila Graham had commanded a majority of the votes cast in the election called on 12 June 2018. Therefore, the membership was asked to ratify her appointment to the position of Chair (Executive Management Committee) Elect, and the motion was carried without opposition.

The President noted that Dr Helen Watson had been the sole candidate nominated for the role of Chair of the Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee. The membership ratified her appointment to this position without opposition.

The appointment of the following committee members was noted:

- *Audit Committee:*
  - Professor Steve Busby
  - Dr Nick Watmough
- *Awards Committee:*

- Dr Robert Insall
  - Professor Maria O'Connell
  - Professor Michael Sternberg
- *Conferences Committee*
  - Dr Patrick Murphy
- *Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee*
  - Dr Alex Conner
  - Dr Julia Lodge
  - Dr Isabel Pires
  - Dr David Smith
- *Executive Management Committee*
  - Professor Anne Stephenson
- *Grants Committee*
  - Dr Joanna Kargul
  - Dr Ian Christopher Wood
- *Training Theme Panel*
  - Dr Liz Jenkinson

The President reported that nominations would open later in the year for the following positions:

- *Awards Committee*
  - Members
- *Clinical and Translational Research Theme Panel*
  - Member
- *Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee*
  - Training representative
  - Industry representative
  - Early Career representative
- *Grants Committee*
  - Chair
- *Policy Advisory Panel*
  - Member (regional representative)
  - Member (Early Career Researcher representative)
- *Training Theme Panel*
  - Chair
  - Members (incl. representatives with backgrounds working as a technician, in industry, or in academia)

## **18/05 Update on Society finances**

Frank Sargent introduced himself as the Society's Honorary Treasurer, having stepped into the role as Nick Watmough's successor in January 2018.

Following a period of several years in which the Society had run a planned deficit, the Society had achieved a net surplus of £279k. Portland Press Ltd had generated £3.9m revenue, returning a profit of £1.8m to the Society (compared to £1.2m in 2016) for expenditure on charitable activities.

The Society's auditors had given the Society a clean bill of health, and had confirmed they considered the company a going concern. The Society's reserves policy was to maintain liquid reserves sufficient to cover at least 6 months' charitable expenditure (with an upper limit of 18 months); at the end of 2017, the Society closed with liquid reserves sufficient to cover 16 months' expenditure.

#### **18/06 Annual Report and Statutory Accounts for the period ended 31 December 2017**

The members voted on the motion to receive the *Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 December 2017* into the records of the Society. The motion was passed without opposition.

#### **18/07 Report of the Auditors**

The members voted on the motion to receive the report of the auditors (Grant Thornton UK LLP) into the records of the Society. The motion was passed without opposition.

#### **18/08 Appointment of Auditors**

The firm Grant Thornton UK LLP offered themselves for reappointment as Auditors of the Society for the financial period ending 31 December 2018. The motion was seconded by Malcolm Weir. The motion was passed without opposition.

#### **18/09 Retiring Officers**

The President proposed a vote of thanks to the retiring Honorary Membership Secretary, Niki Gray, and Chair of Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee, Rob Beynon, who would step down at the end of 2018. The motion was seconded by Richard Reece and passed without opposition.

#### **18/10 Retiring Members of Committees**

The President proposed a vote of thanks to those members of the Society's committees who would step down at the end of 2018 (detailed in Appendix VI). The motion was seconded by Niki Gray and passed without opposition.

#### **18/11 Retiring Members of Editorial Boards**

The President proposed a vote of thanks to those members of the Society's editorial boards who would step down at the end of 2018 (detailed in Appendix VII). The motion was seconded by Stefan Roberts and passed without opposition.

#### **18/12 Current Officers**

The members noted the Society's subscription fees for the year 2019.

There being no additional business submitted prior to, or in person at, the meeting, it was declared closed.

- End -

Zoe Halbert  
Executive Officer  
August 2018