
Minutes of the 109th Annual General Meeting of the Biochemical Society

Thursday 23 July 2020 at 16.30pm

This meeting was held virtually, using Zoom¹

Members present:

Pete Downes (Chair) (Trustee) [PD]	President
Sheila Graham (Trustee) [SG]	Chair, Biochemical Society
Joanne Edwards (Trustee) [JE]	Chair, Clinical and Translational Research Theme Panel
Dominika Gruszka (Trustee) [DG]	Early Career Researcher Representative Trustee, Council of Trustees
Luciane Vieira de Mello (Trustee) [LVM]	Chair, Training Theme Panel
Martin Pool (Trustee) [MP]	Local Ambassador Representative Trustee, Council of Trustees
David Pye [DP]	Honorary Policy Officer
Richard Reece (Trustee) [RR]	Chair, Portland Press Ltd Board and Trustee, Biochemical Society
Stefan Roberts (Trustee) [SR]	Honorary Meetings Secretary
Frank Sargent (Trustee) [FS]	Honorary Treasurer
Helen Watson (Trustee) [HW]	Chair, Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee
Michelle West (Trustee) [MW]	Chair, Basic Biosciences Theme Panel
Malcolm Weir [MWe]	Industry Representative
Alfred Thumser	Member
Ana Cuenda	Member
Anne Dell	Member
Anthony Turner	Member
Byron Carpenter	Member
Camila Gaspar	Member

¹ Where reference is made to 'raising hands' this was facilitated by the 'raise hand' functionality in Zoom.

Chris Morris	Member
Clare Stanford	Member
Consalto Sergi	Member
Dr Ruth Brown-Shepherd	Member
Fiona McMurray	Member
Hannah Bridgewater	Member
Hannah Scott	Member
Helen Walden	Member
Jean Thomas	Member
Jessica Boakes	Member
Jon Mueller	Member
Kathryn Garner	Member
Lynne Cox	Member
Ms Paula A Feldman	Member
Patrick Lewis	Member
Rhian Touyz	Member
Pryank Patel	Member
Rajasekaran Chandrasekaran	Member
Ranjan Ramasamy	Member
Sanj Kumar	Member
Sarah Perrett	Member
Stephen Muench	Member
Yolande Redwood	Member

In attendance:

Kate Baillie [KB]

CEO, Biochemical Society and Managing
Director, Portland Press Ltd

Adam Hughes [AH]	Director of Operations
Malavika Legge [ML]	Director of Publishing
Ivana Knyght [IK]	Director of Society Programmes
Clare Curtis [CC]	Publisher
Doug Armin [DA]	Head of Finance
Katie Crabb [KC]	Head of Marketing and Communications
Lorraine Reese [LR]	Head of Conferences and Events
Kofo Balogun	Head of HR
Alice Pun [AP]	Governance and Membership Manager (Minutes)

20/01 Welcome

PD welcomed all members, staff and council members to the Society's 109th Annual General Meeting, in his 3rd year as Biochemical Society President.

PD noted that the agenda and papers were circulated to those registered to attend and have been made available on the Society website in line with the Society's constitution.

PD acknowledged the nature of this year's meeting being that it was held virtually and as such required a formal process. PD noted that all members had been asked to submit any questions in advance of the meeting and advised that answers to questions submitted would be addressed within the proceedings. He also asked that any questions that arise during the meeting should be raised via the chat function in Zoom. All relevant questions would be collated by the moderator and discussed at the end of the meeting. PD also advised that any questions raised not relevant to meeting proceedings were to be collated and answered in a separate document that would be distributed after the meeting, if necessary.

20/02 Apologies for absence

There were no formal apologies for absence for the meeting.

20/03 Minute silence in memory of members and staff who have passed away in the last year

PD asked all members to hold a minute silence for the members and staff who had sadly passed away since the last Annual General Meeting, as detailed in Annex 5. PD also acknowledged the sad passing of Rhodri Hughes (Marketing Officer – Publishing) who died earlier this year due to complications related to Covid-19; and that of member, colleague and friend Michael Wakelam, who also died from complications related to COVID-19.

20/04 Minutes of the Annual General meeting (25 July 2019)

PD opened the floor to comments on the Minutes of the 108th Annual General Meeting of the Biochemical Society.

There being no comments he asked the membership to receive the minutes into the records of the Society, and to indicate their acceptance by raising their hands. The Director of Operations confirmed a majority of hands had been raised and the minutes were thus accepted as a true and accurate account of the meeting.

20/05 President's Remarks

PD noted that as the AGM was virtual, the decision had been made to depart from the traditional update presentation on the previous year's activities. The Society's impressive achievements are incorporated into the [Trustees Annual Report](#) and the [Annual Review document](#), which was available, and would remain available, as PDF on the Biochemical Society website.

PD acknowledged that in this time of considerable challenge, he will be focusing his comments on the Society's reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the innovative work that has been undertaken to ensure that it remains on as firm ground as possible:

- **Innovation and opportunity in a time of change:**

PD recognised the innovation and opportunistic approach to the new ways of work that have been implemented across the Group in response to the ongoing pandemic, highlighting one such example with the new webinars offered as a digital and distanced alternative to traditional meetings during lockdown. The series showcases the offering from across the Group. Forthcoming webinars were:

- ACE2: friend or foe
- Building gene drives to beat malaria
- Human Cell Atlas: Mapping the human body one cell at a time
- Alpha-synuclein, a central player in neurodegenerative diseases
- Disassembly of the replicative helicase in eukaryotic cells
- From diagnosis to therapy in Duchenne muscular dystrophy

- **The impact of COVID-19 on researchers:** a survey of researchers in the molecular biosciences had been carried out which highlighted the anticipated short, medium- and long-term impacts as well as how the Group could support the community at this time. In recognition of the dynamic nature of the crisis a follow-up survey is anticipated for the end of October (this was an output from the Policy Advisory Panel that took place on Friday, 17 July).

- **Increased engagement with Early Career Researchers (ECR):** PD noted that the ECR community had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and as such the Society was continuing to work closely with the Early Career Advisory Panel on how best to support the community.

PD informed those in attendance of the upcoming events to support the community, including: ECR webinars and networking events; an updated Careers Hub; Junior Editorial Board, and Early Career Researcher Taskforce.

- PD noted that Society journals signed up to the [Welcome Declaration on Covid-19 content](#) on 31 January 2020, and in line with this **all coronavirus content had been made free to read** in Biochemical Society journals, with a pledge to publish any new content on this topic as Open Access.
- PD recognised the efforts to enhance open access capability across the journal. He highlighted that the **paywalls** to all content **were removed in the third week of April** as the breadth of co-morbidities became known and as lockdowns taking place across the world hampered subscribers' access from remote locations. Paywalls would remain down until they are **reinstated in August** in line with most researchers returning to labs and institutions.

- PD highlighted the record success in the uptake of the group's transformative subscription offerings. Over 50 institutions had taken up new Read & Publish options to support **unlimited OA publishing from affiliated corresponding authors**. This translated to **>7% of subscriptions income from the Society's journals now under a transformative offering**. He pointed out that the Biochemical Society was one of only two societies in the world making this sort of innovative offering for all institutional subscribers in 2019, and is proud to be President of a Society at the forefront of this movement towards an open access footing.
- PD recognised that the Group had been working hard on **Financial modelling** which was carried out from April to July. The Society has been able to map out the various scenarios of surplus from PPL, and Group finances on the whole, in order to weather the current changeable times and prepare for a potentially challenging 2021.
- PD acknowledged the smooth transition of the Society to **remote working** from 16 March 2020. He emphasised that all changes were considered with the safety of the staff and member community being of paramount importance. He noted that as a result of a number of business technology infrastructural projects throughout 2019, the Society was able to be up and running immediately with little to no downtime. Since then the Society has continued to deliver, albeit to varying extents, all of its activities within the safety parameters set by lockdown.
- In 2019 the Society sold its interest in both Charles Darwin House buildings and moved into serviced offices. In June of this year the Society took advantage of the serviced office lease coming to a close and elected to **not have premises until at least March 2021**. This would both protect the Society's assets by not paying for costly offices that cannot be used, but also enabled the Society to be innovative in whatever final premises it puts in place taking advantage of the benefits of in-person collaboration and remote working.
- As a reaction to the pressures of Covid-19 across the sector, the Society's Executive Management Committee and Senior Management Team had **frozen a number of staff vacancies and redeployed** the time of some colleagues to more effectively support key activity. This ensured that the society is making best use of its assets and also enabled it to more effectively support the in-house team during this challenging time.
- PD confirmed that the Society would be creating **an Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Advisory Panel** to ensure that all the activities and processes across the Group are inclusive, diverse and accessible to the molecular biosciences community. PD stated that the aim of this panel is to ensure that every member's needs are met. The creation and the composition of the EDI Advisory Panel was discussed at the recent Policy Advisory Panel which took place on the 17th of July and it was anticipated that this new Panel will be in place by Autumn 2020. A wider reference group will also be formed to ensure that every voice is heard. More information and regular updates will be provided via Members' News.
- Following a note submitted by a member, PD highlighted the awareness of the Society with regard to the shifting sands in relation to Sino-UK relations. PD noted that this is something that would be considered within the Society's strategy as the situation becomes more clear.

PD congratulated the Trustees, CEO, Senior Management and all of the in-house team for facilitating a notably positive outcome in a time of considerable challenge.

PD noted that draft accounts circulated to the members were signed by the Trustees in the meeting immediately before the AGM.

FS presented a summary of the Society's finances as at 31 December 2019. The Group made a surplus of £852k at the end of 2019 and £2.1M was gifted back to the Society from PPL. The Group total net assets were recorded as £10.7M in 2019.

Income from charitable activities increased from 2018 to 2019; 87% related to Journals & Books, with a steady amount from Membership Fees and Scientific Conferences. FS acknowledged that a small amount of income is generated through online training courses.

The total expenditure for 2019 on charitable activities had increased; 44% related to Journals & Books, 17% on Scientific Conferences, 8% related to Policy, Education & Professional, 15% on member recruitment and 4% towards Grants and Awards.

FS provided an update on going concern and the reserves policy.

- In the opinion of the Trustees, the Society had adequate reserves to continue its activities for the foreseeable future.
- The Society considers free reserves to be the unrestricted funds not designated for other purposes and readily available in the short to medium term.
- The Trustees consider it ideal to maintain a level of reserves representing 12 months of committed Society expenditure, including pension scheme deficit funding, with lower and upper bounds of 6 to 18 months.
- As at 31 December 2019, the Society had free reserves sufficient to cover 22 months of charitable expenditure. This was slightly above the ideal level of free reserves as outlined by the policy.

PD stated that a motion to acknowledge the report had been proposed and seconded by Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) and Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer) respectively, in advance of the meeting. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by raising their hands. AH confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via majority and the accounts were accepted into the society records.

20/07 Current Trustees

PD noted the list of current Trustees as provided in Annex 3.

- Pete Downes (President)
- Sheila Graham (Chair, Biochemical Society)
- Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer)
- Stefan Roberts (Honorary Meetings Secretary)
- David Pye (Honorary Policy Officer)
- Richard Reece (Chair, Portland Press Board)
- Helen Watson (Chair, Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee)
- Michelle West (Chair, Basic Bioscience Theme Panel)
- Joanne Edwards (Chair, Clinical and Translational Research Theme Panel)
- Luciane Vieira de Mello (Chair, Training Theme Panel)
- Dominika Gruszka (Early Career Member Representative)
- Martin Pool (Local Ambassador Representative)
- Malcolm Weir (Industry Representative)

PD noted that a motion to acknowledge this list had been proposed and seconded by Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) and Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer) respectively, in advance of the meeting. PD invited all present to indicate their acknowledgement of the list of current Trustees as per the annex by raising their hands. AH confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed by majority and the list was accepted into the society records.

20/08 Election and Vacancies

PD noted the vacancies within the Society's Committees and the timeline for the nominations and elections process for 2020 as detailed in Annex 4.

New appointments:

- Conferences Committee
 - Luminta Paraoan (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion representative)
 - Dietmar Lang (Industry Representative)

- Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee
 - Pam Scott (Education Technology) – extend term by 12 months to finish December 2021
 - Peter Anderson (Secondary Education) - extend term by 12 months to finish December 2021

- Policy Advisory Panel
 - Derry Mercer (industry representative) – extend term by 6 months to finish June 2021
 - Sandra Kirk (liaison with HUBS) - extend term by 6 months to finish June 2021

- Clinical Science
 - Rhian Touyz – Editor in Chief position term extended for 2 years to 31 December 2022

- Bioscience Reports
 - Weiping Han – appointed as Editor in Chief
 - Christopher Cooper – appointed as Deputy Editor in Chief

- Biochemical Society Transactions
 - Colin Bingle – Editor in Chief term extended for 2 years to 31 December 2022

- Essays in Biochemistry
 - Sarah Perrett – Editor in Chief

Forthcoming Vacancies:

- Council of Trustees
 - Honorary Policy Officer (Trustee and Chair of Policy Advisory Panel)

- Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee
 - Industry representative

- School / FE teacher representative
- Education Technology

- Policy Advisory Panel
 - Education policy representative

- Grants Committee
 - Member

- *Neuronal Signalling*
 - Editor in Chief

- *The Biochemist*
 - Science Editor

PD noted that a motion to acknowledge the above had been proposed and seconded by Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) and Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer) respectively, in advance of the meeting. PD asked all present to indicate their acknowledgement of vacancies as per the annex by raising their hands. AH confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed by majority and the lists of appointments and vacancies was accepted into the society records.

PD reminded the members that nominations will open in September.

20/09 Deceased members

PD acknowledged the formal notification of members who have passed away since the previous General Meeting.

PD noted that a motion to acknowledge this list had been proposed and seconded by Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) and Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer) respectively, in advance of the meeting. Members were asked to indicate their acknowledgement by raising their hands. AH confirmed that the acknowledgement had been made by a majority.

20/10 Any other business

There were no other items of business raised either in advance of the meeting or by the members present.

The Annual General Meeting was declared as closed.

April Walters
Operations and Grants Administrator

Alice Pun
Governance and Membership Manager