
Minutes of the 110th Annual General Meeting of the Biochemical Society

Thursday 22 July 2021 at 16.30

This meeting was held virtually, using Zoom

Members present:

Pete Downes (Chair) (Trustee) [PD]	President
Sheila Graham (Trustee) [SG]	Chair, Biochemical Society
Dominika Gruszka (Trustee) [DG]	Early Career Researcher Representative Trustee, Council of Trustees
Martin Pool (Trustee) [MP]	Local Ambassador Representative Trustee, Council of Trustees
Derry Mercer (Trustee) [DM]	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
Sassan Hafizi	Member
William Andrews	Member
Solange Serrano	Member
Sasika Van Der Vies	Member
Ranjit Vijayan	Member
Sonia Gesmundo	Member
Hope Onohuean	Member
Ruth Brown-Shepherd	Member
Martin Lindley	Member
Fatima Adamunde Amin	Member

Rajasekaran Chandrasekaran	Member
Byron Carpenter	Member
Rohini Karunakaran	Member
Anne Stephenson	Member
Robbie Baldock	Member
Clare Stanford	Member
Robert Moore	Member
Cassandra Terry	Member
Richard Cryer	Chair Audit and Risk Committee
David Baulcombe	Member
Jan Witkowski	Member
John Coggins	Member
Nectarios Nicolaou	Member
Nick Furnham	Member
Oluwakemi Rotimi	Member
Pryank Patel	Member
Ivona Pocrnja	Member
Nigel Hooper	Member
Luminita Paraoan	Member
Adeleke Atunnise	Member
Christine Foyer	Member
Lawrence Edemhanria	Member
Consolato Sergi	Member
Sanj Kumar	Member
Steve Busby	Member

In attendance:

Kate Baillie [KB]	CEO, Biochemical Society and Managing Director, Portland Press Ltd
Malavika Legge [ML]	Director of Publishing
Clare Curtis [CC]	Publisher
Doug Armin [DA]	Head of Finance
Kofo Balogun [KBa]	Head of HR and EDI
Alice Pun [AP]	Governance Manager (Minutes)
Sarah Jenner [SJ]	Governance and Policy Officer

21/01 Welcome

PD welcomed all members and Council members to the Society's 110th Annual General Meeting. PD noted that the agenda and papers had been made available on the Society website in line with the Society's constitution.

SJ noted the following points:

- At several points throughout the meeting the Chair will ask for a proposer and a seconder for a motion. Members must indicate their willingness to be considered as either, by using the 'Raise Hand feature', found in the reactions menu at the bottom of the screen. The menu bar should appear on the screen when the cursor is moved across the screen.
- Attendees will be asked to vote on certain motions throughout the meeting by way of a Zoom poll. When applicable this will automatically appear on the screen to select either Yes or No, once the answers are submitted the poll will disappear from the screen.
- Any questions in relation to any of the presentations that will be given could be done by typing into the Chat box. Members were made aware that there may not be time to answer everyone's questions within the meeting and those questions will be responded to outside of the meeting.
- All attendees were requested to act responsibly and appropriately when posting comments or interacting with fellow attendees during the meeting.

21/02 Apologies for absence

PD noted that apologies had been received from the Chair of the Training Theme Panel (Luciane Vieira de Mello), the Industry Representative (Malcolm Weir) and the Chair of the Clinical and Translational Research Theme Panel (Joanne Edwards).

PD asked all members to hold a minute's silence in respect for those members who had sadly passed away since the last AGM.

21/03 Minutes of the Annual General meeting

PD opened the floor to comments on the Minutes of the 109th Annual General Meeting of the Biochemical Society. PD noted a motion to approve the minutes which was proposed and seconded by Richard Reece (Chair, PPL board) and Sheila Graham (Chair, Biochemical Society) respectively.

All attendees accepted the minutes of the last AGM by completing a poll on their screen. SJ confirmed that a majority had been reached and the minutes were accepted as a true and accurate account of the meeting.

21/04 Update on Society activities and achievements

The CEO presented an update on the Society's activities since the last AGM:

Remote working:

- Remote working was in place for all Group employees, with the option of serviced office space subscriptions from Q4 2021 for staff who preferred not to work remotely full time.
- The hybrid remote working/office space subscription model will be rolled out across the Group from October 2021 for a trial period of two years, with the first review to take place 6 months after the date of commencement.
- Face-to face meetings will re-start from October, with possible reconsideration dependent upon the progress of Covid-19 eradication activities.

Events:

Since the last AGM in July 2020, the Society had run:

- 2 On Demand conferences
- 3 scientific meetings
- 2 training events
- 2 half-day symposia
- 30 webinars – *over 10,000 views on YouTube*

Forthcoming 2021 events included:

- 4 scientific meetings
- 3 training events
- 12 webinars

Education:

Summer Vacation Studentships:

- Interim online provision had attracted 348 applications (lab-based provision usually attracts ~120 applications)
- Successful candidates received access to 'R for Biochemists 101' and 'Practical Python for Beginners' online courses
- Exclusive webinars for learners covering: (i) using computational skills, (ii) transferable skills and (iii) careers and next steps

Teacher Placement Scheme:

- Investigating a 'Teacher Webinar Series' covering education and careers in the molecular biosciences
- Speaking with ASE (Association for Science Education) to get advice on how best to serve the teacher community in a virtual setting

MOOC Working Group:

- First met on 18 May
- Initially considering fundamental questions of:
 - Why do we need a MOOC?
 - What is the end goal?
 - Who is the target audience?

Training:

Online courses:

- R for Biochemists 101 ran in September 2020 and May 2021
- Practical Python for beginners: a Biochemist's guide ran in November 2020 and March 2021
- R for Biochemists 201 piloted in January 2021 (to be launched in September 2021)
- Introduction to public engagement and science policy ran in October 2020
- An introduction for effective teaching practices in life sciences higher education (adapted from the 2020 using technology online course) launched in June 2021
- R101 and Python courses were being used for the online Summer Vacation Studentship scheme in 2021

Online training events:

- Evolving molecular biosciences education (27-28 May 2021) achieved 108 registrations
- Workshop on ribosome profiling (1-2 July 2021) achieved 63 registrations

Grants and awards:

A total of £4,554 of grants has been awarded so far in 2021

- 3 Sponsored Event Grants (total of £1,500)
- 4 General Travel Grants (total of £1,149)
- 1 Travel Award for International Skills & Knowledge Exchange (total of £700)
- 13 Early Career member bursaries (total of £630)
- 9 Student member bursaries (total of £505)
- 2 Full member bursaries (total of £70)

11 Awards will be presented in 2022

- 18% female winners
- 64% UK winners, with 36% from the EU, USA and Australia
- 12 Awards will be presented in 2023

Policy:

- Continuing input into consultations, including gene editing and science education.
- Participation in cross-society meetings, including LeSPAR and the RSB Engaging with Parliament series.
- Sponsor of the Bronze Award at STEM for Britain, which was presented to Sian Morgan from Cardiff University, for her work on 'Enhanced drug delivery methods to combat Corneal Blindness'.
- ECR representative participated in RSB's Voice of the Future, with a further 10 Early Career Members in attendance.

Early career researcher activities:

- ECR Taskforce: 30 selected ECRs met in early February to discuss the topic of peer review and preprints and in May to discuss metrics and authorship.
- ECR Editorial Board mentorship scheme: The scheme started on 1 March with 16 participants paired with Associate Editors from three of our journals (*Biochemical Journal*, *Clinical Science* and *Biochemical Society Transactions*).
- Chair of the Early Career Advisory Panel had guest edited a special issue of *Essays on Biochemistry*, focusing on contributions from ECRs, as well as co-authoring an article in the April issue of *The Biochemist*, in response to the Society's second Covid-19 survey.

ECR Webinar series:

- Two strands of these webinars:

- Careers webinars – covering topics such as non-academic careers for molecular bioscientists, careers in industry, careers in science communication, medical writing and engagement, and raising your professional profile.
- Research webinars – covering topics including inflammasomes and plant resistome, developments in neuroscience, novel advances in signalling, computational biology and bioinformatics and developments in drug discovery.

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Transitioning to open scholarship:

The Society continues on its path to open scholarship: In 2020 – success of *Read & Publish* pilot sales noted across 55 participating institutions.

In 2021:

- Over 200 institutions had taken up a *Read & Publish* offering
- New '*Transformative Agreements*' with Max Planck Digital Library (Germany), CSIC (Spain) and MALMAD (Israel)
- Figshare integration (for data deposition) has been completed
- Became signatories to the Initiative for Open Abstracts
- To June 2021, ~13% of the total sales income was from *Read & Publish* pilots, and the proportion of OA content in five transitioning journals was at a record high, ranging between 27% and 53%

Publishing ethics and dealing with malpractice:

- June 2020 – alerted to an issue with papers submitted to and published in the *Bioscience Reports* journal.
- Clear that the journal had been a victim of 'papermills'
- Editorial published in *Bioscience Reports* addressing the issue of papermills, as well as a post on the Society's blog.
- Elisabeth Bik, one of the most well-respected image integrity consultants, tweeted about this and emailed directly to say it was an excellent editorial.
- To date *Bioscience Reports* has published 22 corrections, 45 retractions and 46 papers with Expressions of Concern to correct the scientific record – work was ongoing and we are remaining vigilant.

Publishing income and copyflow:

A surplus of ~£2.5 million was returned to the Society from the publishing function in 2020.

As at 30 June 2021:

- 2,214 submissions, about ~800 fewer than this time in 2020, mostly due to *Bioscience Reports* receiving fewer submissions since additional checks were put in place over 2020 to identify suspected fraudulent papers and prevent submissions from papermills.
- 683 articles published, about ~180 fewer than this time in 2020, mostly due to *Bioscience Reports*.
- £3,126K of subscription income (including *Read & Publish*)
- £373K APC (article publishing charge) open access income.

Collaborations:

- Worked with The Physiological Society and the British Pharmacological Society on a collection of content, including topics such as drug resistance, immunotherapy, multimorbidities and neurodegenerative disease

- Published content 'paired up' with event registration for the March 2021 (online) Dynamic Cell meeting. This was a joint meeting with the British Society for Cell Biology and was sponsored by EMBO.
- Collaborating with other societies in the 'COVID-19 vaccines and the role of public information' group

Key themes from the Strategy Retreat (November 2020):

- Embracing and developing digital resources and making better use of current platforms, exploring a more integrated approach across systems.
- Refreshing our thinking in the areas of grants, training, education, policy and public engagement, engaging with relevant communities.
- Greater focus being given to maximizing synergies across the Group, curating resources within the same fields, with this and community engagement being driven by content.
- Equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) needed to be at the heart of everything the Society does.

Operations:

Infrastructure review:

- Reviewing group infrastructure to address business as usual hurdles and support of the Group's strategic and 'digital transformation' aims.
- External expert consultant recruitment underway.
- Goal end date of review and proposals for action: September 2021

New website project:

- To implement a new Biochemical Society Website, based upon requirements derived from in-depth audience analysis and stakeholder engagement.
- Likely a two-phase approach: 'shop front', then 'integrations'.
- External agency appointed.
- Goal stakeholder engagement begins: September 2021

Investments review:

- To review the Society's current investment activities and cash reserves in order to deliver maximum return on assets whilst retaining due reference to business risk and security.
- Overseen by Finance Committee.
- External consultant(s) recruitment completed.
- Goal: Proposals presented to the Trustees at July 2021 meeting.

Synergies and Packages:

- Three subject areas chosen as areas for 'proof of concept' for packages at the March 2021 Council meeting:
 - Virology and Vaccines
 - Synthetic Biology
 - Mitochondria

Current activities and next steps for the packages:

- Evaluating resources/activities available in these areas
- Discussing concept with key stakeholders – including Committees and Panels and staff members (content and collaboration group has been formed)
- 'Proof of concept' document presented at the July 2021 Council meeting which included consideration of and recommendations for:
 - What resources/activities will be included
 - Who resources/activities are aimed at (taking into account EDI)
 - How package will be 'hosted' to ensure maximum discoverability

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

- EDI Advisory Panel convened in October 2020
- Recent appointment of Dr Amanda Marie James to the position of Panel Chair, and EDI representatives appointed from a number of key Society committees/panel.

21/05 President's Remarks

PD noted that in this time of considerable challenge, he would like to focus the comments on the Society's reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the innovative work that had been undertaken to ensure that it was on as firm ground as possible:

- **Premises:** Early in the pandemic the Society took advantage of its short-term office license coming to the end of its term and terminated the agreement moving to an entirely remote working organization. Throughout this time the Society made excellent use of IT systems to ensure that our work continued as efficiently as possible. This move had proven extremely successful and in November of last year the decision was made to remain a remote working organization for at least the next two years, but to offer staff the option of 'serviced office subscriptions' from October 2021. This was aligned to the Society's general policy stating that in-person meetings will only be held from October 2021, and only if it will be safe to do so. The Trustees will be reviewing the success of the remote working arrangements in March 2022.
- **Financial position:** During these unprecedented times, the Group could look back at a year of financial stability achieved through good planning and cost control.
 - 2020 saw a drop of 16% in total recorded Group income compared to 2019, but expenditure on charitable activities also reduced by 27% and the net income for the year before gains & losses was £613K. In total, after unrealised gains on investments and actuarial gains on the defined benefit pension scheme, the net movement in funds for the year was £1.651 million.
 - Portland Press achieved a profit on ordinary activities before taxation of £2.16 million and the full amount is to be distributed to the Biochemical Society under Gift Aid.
 - Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer) would be presenting the 2020 finances in further detail.
 - Financial modelling continued throughout the year with work carried out to assess Portland Press profitability in various scenarios and budget setting for 2021 based on decisions made at the Trustees Strategy Retreat in November 2020. This modelling was being incorporated into work currently being undertaken with respect to three-year forecasting and budget setting for 2022.
- **Open access:** The Biochemical Society and Portland Press were strongly committed to making a sustainable transition to open access. The Biochemical Society's publishing arm, Portland Press, initiated transformative sales in 2020, piloting an innovative 'unlimited' *Read & Publish* approach. The debut transformative offerings had been a great success, in helping to accelerate Portland Press' transition towards open scholarship, and for researchers and institutions who have benefited from uncapped, streamlined, transaction-free open access (OA) publishing. From 50 institutions in 2020, in 2021 over 200 international institutions were now signed up to the offering; and the *Read & Publish* pilot has enabled us to 'flip' 10% of all 2020 journal content to open access.
- **Papermills:** In June 2020, Portland Press was made aware of problems with papers published in the *Bioscience Reports* journal. It became apparent that the journal had become a target for submission and publication of content from suspected papermills – papers that

have been produced by a company and 'sold' to authors, with the data often assumed to be fake and/or used across multiple manuscripts. Portland Press and the Society responded to the problem immediately and were open and transparent about the problem and how this was addressed (with changes to processes immediately put into place). An Editorial and blog post had also been published that provided more information about the problem and the Society's response. Portland Press continue to be vigilant, and since being alerted to the problem in June 2020, to date over 750 papers had been rejected at submission as being from a suspected papermill.

- **EDI:** The Society has reached a key point in our EDI journey with the EDI Panel having been convened in October 2020.
 - The Group had a functioning EDI Advisory Panel with a newly nominated Chair (Dr Amanda Marie James) who is an expert in this field.
 - Dr James had introduced the Society's EDI Manifesto (The Three A's):
 - Awareness: Making sure our community understand what EDI means to us and what we are and will be doing about it.
 - Action: Creating tools to support our community to implement our EDI values in their everyday lives.
 - Accountability: Being accountable and transparent as an organisation for the work we do, and ensuring we put our plans into action.
- New approaches included, continuing to hold virtual committee/panel meetings and the Group Strategy Retreat. Some panels may wish to continue with a hybrid mix of in-person and online meetings (as a new way of working).

20/06 Trustees Annual Report and Statutory Accounts for the period ended 31 December 2020

FS provided a summary of the Society's Finances:

Statutory Accounts 2020: key figures

- Group surplus (surplus)/deficit – 2020 (£1,651m) and 2019 (£852K)
- PPL Revenue – 2020 (£4,509m) and 2019 (£4,812m)
- PPL Profit – 2020 (£2,160m) and 2019 (£2,119m)
- Group total net assets – 2020 (£12,377m) and 2019 (£10,726m)

Income:

- Majority from PPL (£4.5m)
- Membership income (£230K, 5% of the income)
- Scientific conferences income reduced in 2020 owing to Covid-19.

Charitable activities expenditure in 2020 included:

- Governance costs
- Administration: Portland Press
- Journals and books
- Policy, education and public engagement
- Scientific conferences
- Grants and awards
- Membership

Going Concern and 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 reserve 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 2020, the Society had free reserves sufficient to cover 34 months of charitable expenditure. This exceeded the ideal level of free reserves as outlined by the policy. A review of the Society's investment opportunities was in progress.

PD noted that draft accounts circulated to the members had been approved by the Trustees in the Council meeting held immediately before the AGM. PD thanked the Trustees, CEO, Senior Management and all of the in-house team for facilitating positive outcome and a year of successful activities in a time of considerable challenge.

PD noted a motion to acknowledge the Trustees Annual Report which was proposed and seconded by Derry Mercer (Honorary Policy Officer) and Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) respectively. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by completing a poll on the screen. SJ confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via a majority and the accounts were accepted into the Society records.

21/07 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)
- Derry Mercer (Honorary Policy Officer)
- Richard Reece (Chair, Portland Press Board)
- Michelle West (Chair, Basic Bioscience Theme Panel)
- Helen Watson (Chair, Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee)
- Joanne Edwards (Chair, Clinical and Translational Research Theme Panel)
- Dominika Gruszka (Early Career Member Representative)
- Luciane Vieira de Mello (Chair, Training Theme Panel)
- Martin Pool (Local Ambassador Representative)
- Malcolm Weir (Industry Representative)

21/08 Election and Vacancies

President:

PD noted a motion to ratify the appointment of Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow as incoming President from July 2022 which was proposed and seconded by Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) and Sheila Graham (Chair, Biochemical Society) respectively. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by completing a poll on the screen. SJ confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via a majority and the appointment was ratified by the membership.

Chair, Clinical and Translational Research Theme Panel:

PD noted a motion to ratify the appointment of Martin Lindley as Chair, Clinical and Translational Research Theme Panel which was proposed and seconded by Derry Mercer (Honorary Policy Officer) and Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) respectively. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by completing a poll on the screen. SJ confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via a majority and the appointment was ratified by the membership.

Chair, Portland Press Limited Board:

PD noted a motion to ratify the appointment of Nigel Hooper as Chair, Portland Press Limited Board which was proposed and seconded by Sheila Graham (Chair, Biochemical Society) and Stefan Roberts (Honorary Meetings Secretary) respectively. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by completing a poll on the screen. SJ confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via a majority and the appointment was ratified by the membership.

Honorary Treasurer:

PD noted a motion to ratify the extension of Frank Sargent as Honorary Treasurer for a further 3 years bringing the end date to December 2025, which was proposed and seconded by Richard Reece (Chair, PPL Board) and Helen Watson (Chair, Education, Training and Public Engagement Committee) respectively. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by completing a poll on the screen. SJ confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via a majority and the extension was ratified by the membership.

Early Career Representative:

PD noted a motion to ratify the extension of Dominika Gruszka as Early Career Representative for a further period of 1 year which was proposed and seconded by Stefan Roberts (Honorary Meetings Secretary) and Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer) respectively. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by completing a poll on the screen. SJ confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via a majority and the extension was ratified by the membership.

EDI Chair:

PD asked all attendees to note the appointment of Amanda-Marie James as EDI Advisory Panel Chair, in line with the Society's Nominations process.

PD noted the vacancies within the Society's Committees and the timeline for the nominations and elections process for 2021 as detailed in Annex 4. PD reminded the members that nominations will open in September.

21/09 Editorial Board appointments and retirements

PD asked all attendees to note the Editorial Board member appointments and retirements since the last AGM.

21/10 Committee appointments and retirements

PD asked all attendees to note the Committee member appointments and retirements since the last AGM.

21/11 Deceased members

PD acknowledged the formal notification of members who have passed away since the previous AGM and thanked attendees for the minute of silence earlier in the meeting.

21/12 Appointment of Auditors

PD noted a motion to appoint BDO as the Biochemical Society's Auditors for the financial period ending 31 December 2021 which was proposed and seconded by Derry Mercer (Honorary Policy Officer) and Sheila Graham (Chair, Biochemical Society) respectively. PD asked all present to indicate their acceptance by completing a poll on the screen. SJ confirmed that the relevant vote had been passed via a majority and BDO was appointed as the Society's auditors.

21/13 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.

Alice Pun
Governance and Membership Manager