

The Geological Society of London

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at Burlington House on 5 February 2020

PRESENT: Nick Rogers (*Chair*), Tom Backhouse, Andrew Bloodworth, John Booth (*Vice President*), Mike Daly (*President-designate*), Lesley Dunlop, Joel Gill, Graham Goffey (*Treasurer*), Sarah Gordon (*Secretary, External and Foreign Affairs*), Jim Griffiths, Chris King, Andrew Moore, Bryne Ngwenya, Katherine Royse (*Secretary, Professional Matters*), Sarah Scott, Jessica Smith (*Vice President, Regional Groups*), Helen Smyth, John Talbot (*Vice President, Chartership*) and Alex Whittaker (*Secretary, Science*)

APOLOGIES: Kathryn Goodenough, Nik Reynolds (*Vice President*), Gemma Sherwood and Rob Strachan (*Secretary, Publications*)

In attendance: Richard Hughes (*Executive Secretary*), Alex McPherson (*Director of Finance & Operations*), Alicia Newton (*Director of Science & Communications*), Maggie Simmons (*Director of Publishing*), and Stephanie Jones (*Administrative Secretary*)

Richard Hughes gave a health and safety briefing.

Nick Rogers welcomed Maggie Simmons (MS), newly-appointed Director of Publishing, to her first Council meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies from Kathryn Goodenough, Nik Reynolds, Gemma Sherwood and Rob Strachan were NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2019

The minutes were APPROVED. A version of the minutes will be published on the website, with an explanation if items have been removed or reduced.

SJ

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 *Role description for Diversity Champion*

Lesley Dunlop said she is aware this needs to be done.

LD

4.2 *President's Awards 2020*

Nick Rogers (NR) said this year's President's Awards will be made to Dr Tim Gregory of the University of Bristol and the British Geological Survey and Dr Thomas Phillips of Durham University

4.3 *Fundraising priorities*

Richard Hughes' (RH) report said a paper would be coming to February Council to spark discussion about fundraising priorities. RH said the paper has been written but will be brought to the April meeting due to lack of space on today's agenda.

RH

4.4 *University Champions network*

Alicia Newton (AN) is taking this forward.

AN

4.5 *Proposal to merge the Chartership and Professional Committees (CM/01/20)*

At their November meeting, Council supported in principle the merger of the Chartership and Professional Committees, and requested that the proposal was finalised following additional consultation.

The additional work was concluded and the proposal, as outlined in this paper, was approved by the Chartership and Professional Committees on 22 January.

There are finer details to be agreed, but Council APPROVED the proposal including that the title of the Officer who will chair the merged Committee will be Secretary, Chartership and Professional. There was mention in the paper of creating more standing committees and Graham Goffey (GG) was not supportive of this suggestion. He also asked that this Committee takes ownership of attracting and retaining members and that this should be included in the new Terms of Reference.

JT

- 4.6 *External Relation Committee's Statement on Fossil Fuel Involvement (CM/02/20)*
Sarah Gordon (SG) and AN tabled this paper. There have been a number of recent instances where it would have been helpful to have an agreed statement on the Society's association with fossil fuel companies. The External Relations Committee was asked to create a short statement and used a workshop to identify the key themes. They will also draft a longer companion article that will align with the ethical investment strategy in the lead up to COP26.

Council discussed the matter at length. RH said that he will bring a paper to April Council on fundraising compliance and some of the issues raised may be covered there. NR said this is a document that Council has to own. Council was asked to send their comments to SG by Friday and she will circulate a re-draft on Monday.

Council
SG

GG is working on the Ethical Investment Policy.

GG

5. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

5.1 *Report of Officers Meeting*

NR said the meeting was very positive. A lot of Human Resources documents and practices have been formalised although there is still work to do. RH is chairing the newly-formed SHE (Safety, Health & Environment) Committee and is developing a stronger health and safety environment.

5.2 *Nominations for Council*

There are seven candidates for the five vacancies:-

*Mrs Joanna Alexander
Dr Jennie Gilbert
Dr Michael Kehinde
Dr David Latin
Dr James Lawrence
Dr John Perry
Mrs Lucy Williams*

Civica Election Services (formerly Electoral Reform Services) are running the election and will despatch ballot papers by email and post on or around 11 February.

6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

6.1 *Executive Secretary (CM/03/20)*

RH drew attention to the following items:-

Burlington House Lease (confidential to Council)

Library Review

The composition of the panel is now complete and will comprise:-

- Prof. Hazel Rymer FGS, Chair, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching Innovation at the Open University, former Society trustee and Secretary, External Affairs;
- Neal Marriott, Project Manager and former Director of Publishing;
- Graham Goffey FGS, FPC representative and industry user;
- Vicky Corcoran FGS, Library User Group Chair;
- Dave Quinn FGS, Publications and Information Committee representative and an industry user remote from London;
- Gemma Ward, Royal Society of Chemistry library services manager;
- Wayne Syme, CEO of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers;
- Mark Thorley, currently Science & Technology Facilities Council, formerly NERC's Head of Science Information.

Provisional recommendations will come to September Council.

SHE (Safety, Health & Environment) Committee

RH chaired the first meeting of the Burlington House SHE Committee. He asked for a volunteer from Council to join the Committee.

6.1.(i) *2019 Business Plan year end progress report (CM/04/20)*

RH reported a reasonably successful outturn. Council noted the highlights and lowlights which included the following:-

- 2019 was another successful year for the Publishing House with revenue targets met or exceeded and nearly all objectives delivered;
- In the Science programme, it was pleasing to report closer ties with the Specialist Groups particularly the Tectonic Studies Group and the Mineral Deposits Studies Group. There was good attendance at the Bryan Lovell meeting on decarbonisation and an increase in the number of schools participating in the heats for the School's Geology Challenge;
- 2019 was the first full year for the new Head of Development and saw strong foundations laid for future fundraising. Progress is being made in implementing the Development Strategy;
- There was significant progress in Human Resources with the appointment of a new HR Manager, Farhana Begum. The overhaul of the Society's Pay, Reward, Staff Benefits and Performance Management System is now complete.
- Lowlights included a decrease in the number of conferences although the impact of the new Head of Events are encouraging. Fellowship numbers fell for the second consecutive year and a review is underway of Fellowship categories and benefits.

6.2 *Director of Finance & Operations (CM/05/20)*

Alex McPherson (AMc) presented Council with the November management accounts which show a forecast surplus of £328k but at operational level and net outturn (after depreciation) level a deficit of -£364k remains. December is showing a surplus of £300k stemming from unrealised gains in the investment portfolio. AMc said there may be some small write-offs needed and he will also look at an impairment in value of CRM once the 2019 audit is complete.

The 2019 audit starts on 24 February and when that is concluded a funds review will be undertaken. A short-term temporary member of the Finance team has been engaged to assist with day-to-day operations and audit preparations.

RH

Council

AMc reported a possible breach of IT at Burlington House in September. A report has been sent to the Information Commissioner's Office.

CRM is fulfilling its core purpose but its overall performance continues to disappoint. There is currently a consultancy project managing a technical review of the system to facilitate an alternative support entity. This will be subject to approval by the Finance & Planning Committee.

2020 membership renewals are progressing well with just over 70% renewed. Reminder letters were sent at the end of January to 3,400 members. Telephone chase up is planned to commence from 1 March.

Council APPROVED the updated terms of reference of the Audit Committee. AMc is seeking a suitably-qualified Trustee to join the Audit Committee which meets twice a year.

Council

6.3 *Director of Science & Communications (CM/06/20)*
Council NOTED the status of key business plan items.

AN said the Society is seeking input on three government consultations:- an Environment Agency inquiry on river basin management, the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland's consultation on their science strategy, and the Office for Students' survey on responses to sexual harassment (focusing on these issues in relationship to fieldwork and other off-campus experiences).

The Society's Geoscience for the Future poster, designed in conjunction with Geology for Global Development and University Geoscience UK, prompted a request from a number of geoscientists for the Society to take the lead on the issue of declining student numbers. The Society will be hosting a summit for representatives from various groups later in the year.

A new media strategy is in place shifting press activities to a more strategic cultivation of a network of science journalists and targeted press releases. The future of the Society's website is being looked into by a working group.

This year is Year of Life with a number of activities planned. 2021 will be the Year of Space.

A final or nearly final draft of the revised *Climate change in the geological record statement* will go to the February meeting of the Science Committee. Council AGREED that there should be a position statement, which must come to Council, alongside the statement containing the findings of the working group.

AN

AN will bring to April Council the new constitution of the Petroleum Group which wishes to change its name to the Energy Group.

AN

6.3(i) *Proposal to restructure the Science Committee (CM/07/20)*
In recent years, GSL-led conferences have declined in both number and quality and are 'amber' in the Business Plan. This has also had adverse financial impacts, with overall conference income falling £10,000s short of projections in both 2018 and 2019. There are a number of factors that have contributed to the declining output, including lack of engagement with the specialist groups, lack of engagement with UK academics, and a lack of proactivity from the conference office team.

Improvements in conference team processes and performance allow the rebuilding of the conference programme. The Conference Working Group identified a number of practices that would contribute to a more successful conference programme, the implementation of which requires some restructuring of the Science Committee to ensure the right mix of expertise and clear terms of reference for members as to their

responsibilities. The main change will be requiring each member to agree to convene one conference during their three year tenure and solicit at least one successful proposal from the geoscience community. The following composition was proposed:-

Science Secretary

5 seats for representatives for each Specialist Interest Group family

3 seats for industry-based representatives

3 seats for academics

4 seats for Council members

1 early career academic rep

Additional seats as required for delivering themed years, addressing fast moving areas, or meeting other needs, with membership not to fall below 14.

Alex Whittaker said the current terms of reference of the Science Committee are very vague. He said the proposed terms of reference are still a work in progress and will be tightened up. The additional tasks will require a new strategy to recruit members, particularly from academic departments, and the Society may need to consider rewards such as waiving fees or providing free fellowship to academic members of the Science Committee. Jim Griffiths cautioned about offering 'free' seats because of discrepancies with other committees.

Council APPROVED the proposal in principle but asked to see final Terms of Reference for approval.

AN

6.4 *Director of Publishing (CM/08/20)*

MS said the Library, in collaboration with the History of Geology Group, have been working on celebrations to mark the centenary of the publication of Greenough's map of England and Wales.

Subscription reporting continues to be sub optimal and no systematic improvement is anticipated until the current CRM contractual issues are resolved. 2019 ended with 172 Lyell Collection Complete subscriptions, which is five ahead of 2018.

Sixteen book titles were published by the close of 2019, two new titles were published in January 2020 and 23 books are in various stages of production.

Twenty-one book proposals were accepted in 2019, including the first title in a new series 'Geoscience in Practice' led by Angela Coe. The series will explain in plain English how geological techniques are used in practice.

Lithosphere, the GeoScienceWorld Open Access Community Journal launched on 13 January. There is some work to be done before setting in place the transfer mechanisms from participating Society journals/books.

Final development of, and stakeholder feedback on, a proposal for the Society's own fully open access journal will go to the March meeting of the Publications & Information Committee.

A review of pricing policy and options for moving away from printing journals will commence soon.

7. STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON: ITS PURPOSE IN A CHANGING WORLD (CM/09/20)

MD said the Society is facing a number of challenges. These include pressure on revenues as petroleum industry sponsors reduce, the declining number of students studying Earth sciences and the shift of scholarly publishing to Open Access, as well as energy transition, a decarbonising world and the changing role of geology in science and academia, all of which may demand a different response from the Society. In late 2019 Council suggested it needed a discussion of these challenges

and opportunities to understand what strategic options the Society has to ensure its long-term sustainability and relevance. To do this, the Society will need to address several interrelated topics:-

- How the context (internal and external) has changed since the 10-year strategy purpose and themes were set out in 2017.
- What are the implications of these changes on the Society's current ambition and direction, and how well is it currently positioned?
- Given this, what are the available strategy options for the Society and how should it select and implement the best approach to the preferred direction?

The background has been discussed with consultants, McKinsey, who, if approved by their Pro-Bono Committee, will support and contribute significantly to this work.

Joel Gill (JG) said it would be important to look internationally and beyond the normal groups such as industry. He also asked what has changed since the 2017 strategy. RH replied that in his view the big change is public engagement with climate change.

Council were very supportive of the proposal which they APPROVED on the basis that McKinsey PBIC agree to contribute on a pro-bono basis. Council members were asked to email RH if they wished to contribute.

Council

8. MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES AND BENEFITS REVIEW (CM/10/20)

Mohammed Jahangir (MJ), Head of Fellowship Services, joined the meeting. He apologised that work on this project has been slow but it has required the review of a lot of data and the results of the Fellowship Survey. There has also been discussion with various groups within the Society, academics and early career Earth scientists.

He said that questions have periodically arisen regarding the suitability and sustainability of the Society's current age-based membership categories. Matters to address include:-

- moving away from an age-based structure;
- accommodating those moving away from the profession who wish to remain members of a learned society. He said he had two phone calls today from members in this category but he has no scope to offer a reduction. RH said he can use his discretion and asked MJ to discuss with him.

There are different views about what people want from their membership and this needs to be factored in to any future fee structure. RH said the review is not just about membership categories but also the benefits that go along with them. The financial implications of any changes must be included.

Council AGREED with the proposal to form a working group comprising members of Council and outside representatives to bring a proposal back to Council. The composition of the working group will be decided upon by RH, MJ and AMc. GG suggested someone with a marketing background would be useful.

MJ was thanked for his work on this project.

9. REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES (CM/11/20)

Council NOTED the reports of the standing committees.

The External Relations Committee met yesterday and SG asked to be informed about any Trustees or Fellows attending the 36th IGC in Delhi in March who can form the UK delegation.

A proposal will be coming to Council about Honorary Fellows but in the meantime SG asked for nominations.

10 ELECTIONS

10.1 *Fellowship (CM/12/20)*

Council AGREED to recommend to the Fellowship that those candidates listed should be elected as Fellows at the Ordinary General Meeting on 20 November 2019.

10.2 *Chartered Geologists (CM/13/20)*

The applications from Fellows listed to become Chartered Geologists had been approved by the Chartership Panel and were AGREED by Council.

10.3 *Candidate and Junior Candidate Fellowship (CM/14/20)*

Council AGREED to elect as Candidate Fellows and Junior Candidate Fellows those applicants listed.

10.4 *European Geologist (CM/15/20)*

Council APPROVED those applicants listed as European Geologists.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8 April 2020