

Biochemical Society - Annual General Meeting Minutes

Meeting held 1630 Thursday 13 July 2023 in person at the offices of the Royal Society of Biology, 1 Naoroji Street, London WC1X 0GB, and online via Zoom.

Members Present: Julia Goodfellow (Chair)	President, Chair of Council of Trustees
Augustin Amour (AA)	Industry Trustee Representative
Hannah Britt	Early Career Trustee Representative
Susan Campbell	Local Ambassador Trustee Representative
Lisa Chakrabarti (LC)	Chair, Basic Biosciences Theme Panel
Sheila Graham (SG)	Chair, Biochemical Society
Nigel Hooper	Chair, Portland Press Board
Luciane Vieira de Mello (LM)	Chair, Training Theme Panel
Frank Sargent (FS)	Honorary Treasurer
Helen Watson (HW)	Chair, Education Committee
Christopher Baumann	Member
Colin Bingle (CB)	Member
Paula Feldman	Member
Emily Flashman	Member
Kirsty Jones	Member
Deborah Kajewole	Member
Robert Moore	Member
Alice Robson	Member
Consolato Sergi	Member
Jean Thomas	Member
In attendance: Helen Aston	Incoming Independent Chair, Audit Committee
Richard Cryer	Independent Chair, Audit Committee
Sukhraj Dhadawar	Independent Member, Finance Committee
Paul Green	Independent Member, Audit Committee
Doug Armin	Associate Director, Finance and Governance
Kate Baillie (CEO)	CEO Biochemical Society, MD Portland Press Ltd
Kofo Balogun	Associate Director, HR, EDI and Technology
Catherine Heath	Education, Training and Public Engagement Manager
Sarah Jenner (CoS)	Company Secretary and EDI Manager
Orla Lappin (CCM)	Content and Communities Manager
Gaynor Redvers-Mutton	Associate Director, Business Development and Sales

23/01 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the Biochemical Society's 112th Annual General Meeting, both those attending in person and those attending online.

Apologies were noted from Professor Steve Busby, Dr Martin Lindley, Dr Derry Mercer and Professor Michelle West.

The CoS outlined the Ground Rules for the meeting:

- The meeting was being held as a hybrid meeting and minutes of the meeting would be available on the Society website in due course;

- No questions were submitted prior to the meeting and due to limited time there would not be the opportunity to ask questions today, instead these could be submitted either by email or in the Zoom chat and would be answered following the meeting;
- Throughout the meeting the Chair would be asking for proposers and seconders for certain actions. Those online could indicate their willingness to act as either of those by using the raise hand function on zoom. Those in the room could indicate their willingness to act as either by raising their hand;
- When asked to vote, online attendees would see a poll appear on the screen in front of them which could be completed by selecting one of the two available answers. Those in the room could indicate their agreement with the question posed by raising their hand;
- Attendees were asked to act with respect for each other throughout the entirety of the meeting.

23/02 Deceased members

The Chair noted the names of those members who had died since the previous General Meeting provided in Paper 1.

The Chair led a one minute's silence to remember these individuals.

23/03 Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting

The Chair noted the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 21 July 2022 provided as Paper 2. The Chair tabled a motion to approve the minutes as a true and accurate record of that meeting, which was proposed by LC and seconded by SG.

Attendees were asked to vote by using the poll on their screen or raising their hand in the room. It was confirmed a majority vote had been received and the minutes were accepted into the Society's record.

23/04 Update on Society activities and achievements

The CEO and CCM presented an update on the Society's activities and achievements since the 2022 Annual General Meeting.

Pillars of Group Strategy 2022 – 2025

- Bring together molecular bioscientists and encourage wider dialogue;
- Support career development and lifelong engagement;
- Promote and share knowledge;
- Develop and transform our working practices and business model;
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to run throughout.

Promoting and sharing knowledge

Several themed collections had been published across the journal portfolio:

- Bionanotechnology and synthetic biology;
- Reproductive physiology and disease;
- Tackling SARS-CoV2 biochemistry;
- Towards systems biochemistry;
- Emerging technologies for research models of human neuronal disorders;
- Cell death and survival;
- Plants and climate change.

Currently open for submissions:

- Cell signaling in the 21st century;
- Bile acids, gut microbiota and host interactions;
- Cytokines and inflammation;
- Human DNA repair;
- Sepsis;
- Biology of ageing.

Submissions and publications in the journal portfolio:

Submissions to and publications in the journals were lower in 2022 compared with 2021, however, to end May 2023 submission and publications were tracking well, with submissions higher than at the same time last year.

Transition to open: Future roadmap ratified by Council of Trustees March 2023:

- March 2023: Pledge open science agenda and produce staged roadmap;
- June 2023: Introduce change to green open access (OA) by lifting embargo;
- June 2023: Increase Read & Publish (R&P) services and started conversion campaigns;
- October 2023: Announce adoption of Subscribe to Open as a 4th pathway to OA.

Citation and usage metrics showed increases for OA articles published in our journals. We anticipate new R&P agreements in North America will boost this further, helping to maintain the trajectory of the past three years.

Transition to open: Widening access to our content:

- Across the portfolio usage increased by approximately 35% compared to 2021, surpassing 2m article views for the first time;
- The most notable increases in 2022 were seen in Clinical Science up by 60% and Biochemical Society Transactions up by 42% compared to 2021;
- Article views for the Biochemical Journal contributed almost a third towards our total institutional usage in 2022.

2024 Awards

The work and contribution of fourteen eminent bioscientists, outstanding teams and exceptional early career researchers has been acknowledged:

- Improved diversity with 50% of winners this year identifying as female;
- First Vietnamese winner of The Colworth Medal – Kelly Nguyen;
- First team winners – DDU-GSK Kinetoplastid Drug Discovery Team and WEHI Bioservices Team;
- New Award categories presented for the first time:
 - Biochemical Society Awards (Significant Breakthrough or Achievement and Sustained Excellence);
 - Research Support Award;
 - Teaching Excellence Awards (Early Career and Established Educator).

2025 Awards were opening for nominations in August 2023.

Events since last AGM in 2022:

- 10 scientific meetings;
- 1 Harden Conference;
- 4 training events;
- 6 online training courses;
- 20 Biochemistry Focus webinars.

Social media activity:

Continuous improvement had been seen across all accounts since the last AGM and proactive engagement continued to increase across all platforms.

The Society launched a new Instagram account on 4 May to engage a wider audience:

- 164 followers in first week, including BBC Science Focus;
- 293 followers (as of end June);
- Images and videos;
- 3 posts a week: Educating, Entertaining, Engaging.

Supporting career development and lifelong engagement

Training:

- Six online training courses were run in 2022 attracting 456 learners: Two runs each of R for Biochemists 101, R for Biochemists 201 and Practical Python for Beginners;
- Further three training events attracted 100 learners, including protein purification and biophysical characterization;
- Evolving molecular bioscience education event held in May in association with FEBS and IUBMB;
- Training events continued throughout 2023 and proposals were welcomed from any member of the scientific community for consideration by the Training Theme Panel and relevant Research Area.

Science Communication Prize:

- Received 35 eligible entries for the 2022 competition: 28 in the written category and 7 in the mixed media category;
- Following judging, winning entries were published on the website and via The Biochemist magazine;
- 2023 competition is currently open for applications.

Science Vacation Studentship:

2022 scheme - awarded:

- 38 lab-based placements;
- 46 programming placements (access to R and Python courses).

Four schemes taking place in 2023:

- Research studentships (lab-based) – 136 applications (40 places available);
- Programming studentship (access to R & Python courses) – 118 applications (80 places available);
- Scientific publishing studentship (internal at the Society) – 66 applications (1 place available);
- Public Engagement and Science Communication studentship (internal at the Society) - 29 applications (1 place available).

Dissemination of careers resources:

- Careers section on the website covers range of careers available with a biosciences degree – what do biochemists do? A pull-up banner for use at careers fairs was created;
- Took part in the Royal Society of Biology Biosciences Careers Days in November 2022 (online) and in March (at Sheffield Hallam University);
- Working with university careers departments to ensure that we are disseminating our careers resources as widely and effectively as possible;
- Working with the Industry Advisory Panel to update the 'biochemists in industry' booklet.

Webinar on careers in clinical trials:

Run on 29th June, invited speakers discussed the different routes and job opportunities available within the clinical research industry across various career stages, as well as highlighting which skills were valued through their own personal experiences.

Invited Speakers:

- Alice Guazzelli, Clinical Trial Manager, University of Oxford;
- Andre Lopes, Senior Medical Statistician, CRUK Cancer Trials Centre;
- Giulia Pellizzari, Lecturer and Education Lead, CRUK Cancer Trials Centre.

Careers beyond Academia 5th July 2023:

Free event for late-stage PhD students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to discover more about careers opportunities outside of bench research. Six varied science-related career pathways were represented, with a strong emphasis on how scientific skills and experience could be transferred to roles in these sectors.

Speakers included:

- Professor Dame Melanie Welham, outgoing Chair, BBSRC – grants and funding;
- Dr Ross Coron, House of Lords – policy;
- Dr Madalina Mihai, Potter Clarkson PLC – patent law;
- Dr Gary Male, Oxford Pharmagenesis – communications;
- Dr Ania Wilczynska, bit.bio – bioinformatics;
- Dr Julie Warner, Boyd's Consultants – regulatory affairs.

Grants and bursaries 2022:

- Over £300k awarded as grants or bursaries with applicants from 32 different countries;
- Reopened the Krebs Memorial Scholarship Fund for the first time since 2019, including updated criteria to cover those impacted by the coronavirus pandemic;
- Eric Reid Fund for Methodology saw its highest number of grant applicants awarded (12 awards totaling £46k);
- Two new grant schemes were introduced: Online Attendance Grants and the Student Opportunities Grant.

Bringing together molecular bioscientists and encouraging wider dialogue

Activities around COP27 (6-18 November 2022):

Promotion of:

- Emerging Topics in Life Sciences issues on coral reef ecosystems and adapting to climate change;
- Biochemist issue on sustainability;
- Two webinars on the topics of the role of plants in achieving net zero and environmental sustainability in biomedical laboratories;
- Opportunity to submit to the Biochemical Journal themed collection on plants and climate change.

Royal Society of Biology's Biology Week (1-9 October):

- Promoted Society activities and resources related to the world of protein structure and function;
- Encouraged members and staff to take part in the #IAmABiologist twitter campaign.

Pharmacology 2022 (13-14 September 2022):

- Biochemical Society-sponsored symposium held on the topic of cell death (chaired by James Murphy, Editor-in-Chief of Biochemical Society Transactions);
- Coincided with an open call for papers for the cell death content collection (in the Biochemical Journal and Biochemical Society Transactions);
- Exhibition booth – promoting membership, grants, publications and the Society's new strategy;
- Meet the Editor session held at the booth (with James Murphy);
- Clare Stanford (Editor-in-Chief of Neuronal Signaling) also in attendance at the meeting.

Scientific Outreach Grants:

23 applications were received in 2022 (compared with 16 in 2021). The Society awarded 10 grants (a total of £9,422) to two projects in Nigeria, one project in Portugal and seven projects across the UK.

Themes included:

- A school outreach project in Kaduna State Nigeria, with 136 students, focusing on genetics and careers in molecular bioscience;

- A public outreach activity on 'can you find a cure for Leishmaniasis' at the Glasgow Science Festival;
- 'SciFair 2023' where students in the North-East of England carried out a research project and presented their findings;
- A citizen science project allowing young water sports participants to regularly test the quality of the water they play in.

Encouraging the community to represent the Society at science fairs:

Local Ambassadors (LA's) were given training and access to the Society's public engagement activities at the LA Day in November 2022.

Attendance at science fairs via LAs included:

- Somerscience Festival
- Explore (Sheffield Hallam University)
- SciFest 2022 (University of Wolverhampton)

STEM for Britain 2023 (March):

Sponsored the bronze award (in the biochemistry and biological sciences) section of the STEM for Britain awards:

- Won by Sarah Dickson (Newcastle University) for her work on a system to monitor dolphins and porpoises at offshore wind farms;
- Society member Olivia Conway was also a finalist and received the silver award.

Voice of the Future (March):

Rebecca Budden (University of Birmingham) represented the Society, asking the Science and Technology Select Committee what more the government could be doing to encourage more scientists into policy roles. Rebecca will be joining the Government Office for Science after completing her degree.

Parliamentary Links Day (June):

Attended by members of the Policy Advisory Panel, the Policy Network and early career representatives. Theme was 'Science and Economic Development'.

Policy position statements:

The Society's antimicrobial resistance statement was updated in November with a webinar on 27 July to accompany the updated position statement.

Other position statements currently being updated:

- Open scholarship;
- Diversity in the science sector;
- Genetically modified crops, feed and food.

Early Career Advisory Panel (ECAP):

We welcomed our new Early Career Representative Trustee and panel chair, Dr Hannah Britt, in spring 2023. In addition, ECAP have contributed to a range of discussions and activities across our work, including:

- Events - ECAP informed the programme for the early career-focused event and facilitated roundtable discussions on the day;
- Publications - Two ECAP members guest edited review journal themed issues;
- Early career membership & engagement - ECAP advised on improving membership benefits for early career members and on the strategy for developing the Early Career Network.

Industry Advisory Panel:

The Industry Advisory Panel met in November 2022 for the first time. The panel will meet up to 4 times a year going forwards, and it has been expanded with three new members who are diversifying expertise within this group.

In 2023, the panel has established three priority areas in which to support industry representation: Society events, publications and careers support, with work on updating the 'Biochemists in industry' careers booklet underway, to support entry into industry careers.

Local Ambassadors:

The 2022 LA Day saw Ambassadors come together to discuss strategy, public engagement and support for students. Ambassadors have since attended various public engagement events across the UK and we have consolidated our Undergraduate Recognition Awards to ensure career development opportunities are offered to awardees based on Ambassador feedback.

In spring 2023, our new LA Representative Trustee, Dr Susan Campbell, was welcomed and now oversees LA activities.

Developing and transforming our working practices and business model

Transition to Open: R&P achievements in key regions UK and Australasia:

R&P was the driver of dramatic change. Regions where we secured national R&P consortia agreements for 2020 resulted in:

- Over 80% OA compliance within 3 years;
- UK-wide opt-in via Jisc;
- Australia and New Zealand opt-in via CAUL in 2020;
- OA became predominant model of publishing widening access to content from corresponding authors in participating institutions;
- OA articles funded by APCs declined by around half.

Reserves Policy – challenges ahead:

- A review of the Society's reserves policy is being undertaken;
- The Charity Commission requires charities to maintain adequate reserves to protect against drops in income and/or to allow them to take advantage of new opportunities;
- The current policy specifies levels of reserves related to months of expenditure, rather than considering strategic priorities and related risks;
- The new policy will reflect the Society's new strategic position and associated risks, particularly given the planned transition to open access publishing.

Four-day work week pilot:

- Having assessed similar organisations' successful adoption of a four-day working week, the Society commenced a trial of the scheme in January;
- Regular reviews continue to take place to ensure the working model is suitable for the community and the staff;
- The feedback received so far has been positive and 100% of staff saying that they would like to continue with this working model.

Digital Development:

The new Society website was launched in November 2022:

- Delivers advanced search functionalities, including 'fuzzy search' and automation;
- Fully responsive for mobiles and tablets;
- Design has been refreshed to better display the wealth of content available.

Since the launch the top three most viewed pages on the website have been:

- Society homepage;
- Summer Vacation Studentships;
- Events calendar.

IT infrastructure:

A new membership system 'SheepCRM' was launched in November 2022:

- Accurate reporting and improved running of the membership operation.

Solidified the Group's approach to cyber security:

- Introduction of advanced threat protection for emails;
- Upscaling of identity protection efforts.

Work is ongoing to update the finance accounting system:

- Migration to the cloud;
- Streamlining processes.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

- Recorded discussion on creating a diverse team completed October 2022;
- Extensive reworking of the Society's nominations process (language, marketing, questions, EDI data capture) for both Autumn 2022 and Spring 2023;
- Signed up to City, University of London Micro-Placement programme for two students seconded in June-July 2023;
- Second EDI Data Survey ran in 2022 with 384 respondents;
- Development of EDI pages on website: survey results and awareness days linked to relevant content, with increased EDI content being shared on socials.

Accessible and open activities and resources:

- Development of accessible resources, communications, and infrastructure;
- Creation of video guides for grant applicants (two pilot videos have been produced and plan is in place to produce a video guide for each grant within the portfolio by December 2023);
- A review of all web-published PDFs to ensure maximum compatibility with screen readers and general accessibility guidance/best practice.

23/05 Trustees Annual Report and Statutory Accounts for the period ended 31 December 2022

The Chair handed over to FS for an overview of the Society's financial position and the Annual Report and Accounts.

FS provided an update to attendees:

- The total group deficit in 2022 was £1,174k, compared to £42k for 2021¹;
- The significant increase in the Group deficit was due to three items outside of the organisation's direct control. These were an actuarial loss on the Society's closed pension scheme of ~£346k, a net loss on investments of ~£900k, and a USS pension scheme charge of £67k;
- Society revenue increased when compared to 2021;
- PPL revenue was £3,760k, with profit of £1,768k;
- 85% of income from charitable activities within the period was from journals and books, with an increase in income from scientific conferences of £355k as events returned post-covid;
- There had been a slight fall in membership income but the new system now in place would allow closer monitoring and reporting on those figures;
- 44% of expenditure on charitable activities had been for the running costs of PPL, with 24% spent on scientific conferences and 10% on membership recruitment;
- In the opinion of the Trustees, the Society had adequate reserves to continue its activities for the foreseeable future;
- The Society considered free reserves to be the unrestricted funds not designated for other purposes and readily available in the short to medium term;

¹ The full financial review for 2022 can be read in the annual report (pages 32-33). The Group's net income before gains and losses in 2022 was £61k compared to a net expenditure before gains and losses in 2021 totalling £414k. After accounting for gains and losses, the Group reported a downward net movement in funds for the year of £1,174k (2021: £42,000).

- The current Reserves policy considered 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;
- At 31 December 2022 the Society had free reserves sufficient to cover 26 months of charitable expenditure. This exceeded the ideal level of free reserves as outlined by the policy which was under review with a new policy to reflect the Society's new strategic position and associated risks, particularly given the planned transition to open access publishing.

The Chair noted that the report and accounts circulated to the members had been approved by the Trustees in the Council meeting held immediately before the AGM. The Chair tabled a motion to accept the Trustees Annual Report and Statutory Accounts as presented which was proposed by CB and seconded by NH.

Attendees were asked to vote by using the poll on their screen or raising their hand in the room. It was confirmed a majority vote had been received and the Trustees Annual Report and Statutory Accounts for the period ending 31 December 2021 were accepted into the Society's record

23/06 Appointment of Auditors

The Chair tabled a motion to reappoint Sayer Vincent as the Society's auditors. This was proposed by LM and seconded by AA.

Attendees were asked to vote by using the poll on their screen or raising their hand in the room. It was confirmed a majority vote had been received and Sayer Vincent were therefore re-appointed as the Society's auditors for the next financial period ending 31 December 2023.

23/07 Current Trustees

The Chair noted the list of current Trustees as provided in Paper 4:

- Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow (President)
- Professor Sheila Graham (Chair)
- Professor Frank Sargent (Honorary Treasurer)
- Professor Michelle West (Honorary Meetings Secretary)
- Dr Derry Mercer (Honorary Policy Officer)
- Dr Helen Watson (Chair, Education Committee)
- Professor Lisa Chakrabarti (Chair, Basic Biosciences Theme Panel)
- Dr Martin Lindley (Chair, Clinical & Translational Research Theme Panel – outgoing)
- Professor Luciane Vieira de Mello (Chair, Training Theme Panel)
- Professor Nigel Hooper (Chair, Portland Press Ltd. Board)
- Dr Hannah Britt (Early Career Representative Trustee)
- Dr Augustin Amour (Industry Representative Trustee)
- Dr Susan Campbell (Local Ambassador Representative Trustee)

23/08 Election and Vacancies

The Chair asked members to note Paper 5, which provided information for members to receive on candidates nominated to Trustee and committee positions as below:

- Professor Richard Reece – incoming Chair of the Society from July 2024;
- Helen Aston – incoming Independent Chair of the Audit Committee from July 2024.

As these positions were uncontested no member vote was required for their ratification. Members were also asked to note the forthcoming vacancies within the Society's committees.

23/09 Editorial Board appointments and retirements

The Chair asked all members to note the information provided in Paper 6 concerning members of Editorial Boards who had retired or started in the last year.

23/10 Committee appointments and retirements

The Chair asked all members to note the information provided in Paper 7 concerning members of Society committees who had retired or started in the last year.

23/11 President's Remarks

The Chair noted that this was her first AGM, following her first year in office. Thanks were given to the CEO for her comprehensive presentation which highlighted the four pillars of the organisational strategy and the central commitment to EDI.

The organisation had continued to develop with remote working now fully embedded, which had increased the diversity of people recruited and had also positively impacted the quality of life for all staff.

The trial of a 4-Day Week had been very positively received by staff and an extension to this would be considered by the Council of Trustees in November 2023.

The new website had been a great success and the Society continued to grow its presence on social media with the recent addition of an Instagram account.

Improvements had also been seen with the grants and awards portfolios, both in the number and quality of applications which had increased, as well as a much greater diversity amongst recipients.

The Chair thanked staff for their ongoing commitment and the Trustees for their support in her first year in office. Thanks were also extended to all those who served on committees, panels and research areas, and all those who contributed to the Society.

23/12 Any other business

The Chair noted there were no items of business raised by Members in advance of the meeting and so declared the meeting closed.

Sarah Jenner
Company Secretary and EDI Manager