

ROYAL SOCIETY FORMER STAFF ASSOCIATION

Unconfirmed Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 20 May 2019

<i>Present:</i>	Peter Cooper (<i>Chairman</i>)	
Choong Kar Chan	Linda Mackenzie	Peter O'Rourke
Diana Chapman	Mary Manning	Wilma Pereira
Peter Collins (<i>Editor, BTT</i>)	Jackie Middleton-Smith	Keith Root
Brenda de Vere-Lewis	Len Mole	Beata Seymour
Ann Hicks	Susan Moss (<i>Welfare Secretary</i>)	Jane Silverleaf (<i>Events Secretary</i>)
Joan Hurrell	Mary Nixon (<i>Hon. Treasurer</i>)	Peter Warren

1. Apologies for absence

Peter Cooper reported that 52 members had sent apologies.

2. Minutes of the 2018 AGM

The Minutes of the AGM held on 21 May 2018 were amended by the correction of the spelling of Choong Kar Chan's name in Minute 6(a) and (b) and the amendment of 2014/15 to 2017/18 in the latter Minute. With these amendments the Minutes were confirmed: proposed by Peter Warren, seconded by Keith Root, approved by a show of hands. [Copies of the confirmed minutes are available from the Secretary or from the website.]

3. Matters arising from the Minutes.

None.

4. Report from the Chairman [AGM19-1]

Peter Cooper noted that this, his first year as Chairman, had been relatively smooth; the finances were stable and a diverse and interesting programme of events had been held, with thanks to Mary and Jane respectively. He was particularly pleased that Nick von Behr had volunteered to lead the Professional Activities Group and he and a supportive group were planning events in June and November.

Less positively, the position of Hon. Secretary remained unfilled and he had received no nominations in time for the AGM. The Committee had reviewed the duties of the Hon. Secretary and could see ways of breaking down the tasks into more manageable loads – a Membership Secretary, a Minutes Secretary, a distribution manager, a website manager etc. He encouraged all members to consider whether they could offer some time to support the work of the Association.

Peter Cooper noted the sad loss of Chris Argent and Norman Robinson during the year; both had played major roles in the Association. He was pleased to welcome four new members – Joyce Argent, Robert Rees, Alison Bell and Alison Evans – bringing the total number of members to 101.

Finally, Peter thanked all the members of the Committee for their hard work to keep the Association active, responsive to members' needs and financially sound.

5. Hon. Treasurer's report [AGM19-2]

(a) Accounts for 2018/19

Mary Nixon reported on the accounts for 2018/19; revised copies had been provided to members at the AGM with some amendments following examination of the accounts by the Accounts Examiner, David Sturt. Mary reported that the finances remained healthy with a net surplus on the General Fund of £187.42 compared with £214.53 last year. Subscription income was up, and she thanked the anonymous donors who had paid the costs of printing three issues of *Beyond The Terrace*. The Committee had agreed to contribute to the costs of tea, coffee and drinks at the New Year lunch, as well as allowing an amount for the Professional Activities Group to initiate its programme.

The Welfare Fund had made grants to several members and had received new donations, for which she was very grateful. The Fund had a balance at the year end of £1188.20.

Mary informed the AGM that David Sturt had examined the accounts but was unwilling to sign them until after the AGM had approved them. Regrettably, for personal health reasons, he was unable to attend today's meeting but had provided the following report:

I have examined the Receipts and Payments Accounts for the General, BTT and Welfare Funds for the Royal Society Former Staff Association, prepared by its Treasurer, for the year ended 31 March 2019 a copy of which is attached hereto, together with the supporting underlying records, including evidence of said receipts and payments, and the Lloyds Bank Statements.

Under the Rules of the Royal Society Former Staff Association the only competent body to approve these Accounts is a General Meeting of the Association. For professional reasons I am not prepared to sign my Report as Accounts Examiner before they have been so approved.

If these Accounts are so approved, I am content to sign a Report to the effect that I am satisfied that the Receipt and Payments Accounts are accurately supported by the underlying records.

Peter Cooper noted that, while this was not in accordance with the Association's Rules, David had confirmed that he was content with the accounts, and the only variation was in the order of signing them. He asked whether the AGM would agree to consider the approval of the accounts for 2018/19 on this basis. Proposed by Choong Kar Chan, seconded by Peter O'Rourke, approved by a show of hands with none against.

With the AGM's approval, therefore, the motion to accept the accounts for 2018/19 was proposed by Peter Warren and seconded by Mary Manning; the meeting agreed the motion by a show of hands.

The AGM then considered the issue raised by David in his report and whether changes needed to be made in the way the Association's accounts were examined and approved. In discussion the following points were made:

- While a registered charity or company would have its accounts approved by its Council, Board or Executive, the RSFSA was an Unincorporated Association which was able to operate under its own Rules; at present these gave responsibility to the Treasurer to produce accounts for examination.
- There was some element of the Treasurer 'marking their own homework' under the current Rules.
- All power to make decisions was currently with the AGM and membership – the Committee ran the Association's business only insofar as the AGM had agreed.
- Requiring the Committee as a body to approve the accounts for examination would have implications on the timing of its meetings and of the AGM, as well as adding a responsibility (outside their defined responsibilities) that some members might feel they were unable to accept.
- The AGM was not truly in a position to seek amendments to the accounts presented to it; the role of the Accounts Examiner was to provide that oversight on members' behalf. But the AGM could seek clarification and ask for amendments to be considered in future years.
- The current system had been operating successfully over the lifetime of the Association and a more complex system should only be introduced if there was a real problem needing to be addressed.

The proposal was put forward that the Treasurer and Chairman (or other Officer if the Chairman is unavailable) should approve the accounts for 2019/20 for presentation to the Accounts Examiner, and the AGM should be invited to adopt the accounts with any advice necessary from the Accounts Examiner. The Committee would also bring to the AGM any amendments necessary to the Rules and Regulations to facilitate this procedure. The proposal was proposed by Choong Kar Chan and seconded by Susan Moss; the meeting agreed the motion by a show of hands.

(b) Provisional budget for 2019/20

As required by the Financial Regulations, Mary presented an outline draft budget to the AGM. Inevitably, many of the figures could only be nominal at this stage, but were based on historical costs and projections from previous years. She noted that the timing of late and early payers plus other non-standard subscription rates meant that the estimated subscription income was not a simple multiple of the membership base. The budget also included an amount to underwrite the Professional Activities Group. Peter Cooper noted that those participating in the Group's activities would be charged although for 2018/19 at least some of that income showed as subscription income as the costs for anyone attending who was not yet a member covered both the event and their first year's subscription.

Mary confirmed that she did not see a need for an increase in the subscription rate in 2020. In response to a question, while a gradual increase at inflation rates would be preferable to a step increase at a later stage, the relatively healthy finances did not warrant an increase at any level.

The AGM noted the draft budget.

(c) Reserves policy

As requested at the last AGM, Mary reported that the Committee had considered a Reserves Policy. The AGM noted that the Welfare Fund should be treated separately and inherently required a healthy balance to meet the unpredictable demand for small grants. The General Funds, however, had several areas where there was a need for a reserve – in particular in-year cash flow relating to deposits for events and the worry that were the Association to lose the benefits of free rooms for the AGM and Committee then it would be

subject to a significant unknown new cost outside our current financial model. At present the level of the Reserves approximately balanced the annual expenditure, which the Committee considered to be appropriate.

After discussion the following wording for the Reserves Policy was proposed:

The Reserves exist to ensure the continuation of the Association's activities in the event of a drop in income or a rise in the charges that it incurs in pursuit of its activities; the level of the Reserves shall be reviewed annually at the AGM.

Proposed by Keith Root and seconded by Peter Warren; the meeting agreed the motion by a show of hands.

6. Report of the Welfare Secretary

Susan Moss reported on member welfare matters. Gift cards had been sent to members on their 80th and 90th birthdays and cards to those on their 70th birthdays. She had been in contact with several members during the year who had been unwell to see how the Association might be able to help them and, where appropriate, had sent gift cards.

She reminded members to let her know of any member who was ill, infirm or might otherwise be able to benefit from the Association's Welfare Fund.

7. Report of the Events Secretary [AGM19-3]

Jane Silverleaf apologised that members were receiving more emails about potential events but the complexity of some arrangements made this the only sensible way to determine dates and preferences. She would usually contact members not on email and they were always included in the circulation of the detailed event notice.

She reported on the visits to Kew Gardens and the SELCHP waste combustion facility, and on the New Year lunch. The latter had been very well attended, although this had led to some comments on the lack of space. However, the next available size of room would have significantly increased the costs. The AGM agreed that the event was successful and the restricted space an inevitable outcome of that success; it indicated that it was content to continue with this model.

Mary Nixon had proposed a visit to Brighton as an additional 'out-of-London' event and members had received material on this. Jane was looking at various possible events, including a river trip to Greenwich or a visit to the Crick Institute. There was also the possibility of more informal occasions, where members might be informed of an exhibition or event and a date suggested when those who wished might like to meet up there. Finally, Jane noted that Marjorie Harris was opening her garden again under the National garden Scheme on 7 July and Marjorie would be pleased to see members there.

8. Report on the Professional Activities Programme [AGM19-4]

Nick von Behr was unable to attend the AGM but had sent a report on the plans of the Group. Peter Cooper thanked Nick, Rachel Tobbell, Pippa Cox, Juliet Upton and Caroline Chipperfield for the work they were putting into the Programme.

9. Report of the Editor of *Beyond The Terrace*

Peter Collins paid tribute to Chris Argent, who had founded *BTT* in 1993 and been its long-term Editor. The Association owed an enormous debt to Chris for his work and dedication.

Peter reported that *BTT73* would be going to the printers shortly. Looking to future issues, he invited members to contribute to a lively 'Letters to the Editor' section. In response to a question from Peter, the AGM indicated that the self-standing compilation of tributes to members, extracted from *BTTs*, was appreciated and should be continued. Diana Chapman asked that members should be encouraged to send in their news at any time, not just at the annual update, as sometimes the news was rather out of date when it appeared.

10. Elections to the Committee [AGM19-5]

Peter Cooper announced that no nominations had been received for the vacancies on the Committee; a request to the AGM elicited no further nominations. He announced that the Committee had agreed to propose Len Mole to the position of Ordinary Member. Accordingly, the following elections were agreed by shows of hands:

Professional Activities Secretary: Nick von Behr to be formalised in this position to serve for three years.

Ordinary Member: Len Mole to serve for three years.

Peter Cooper referred back to his earlier statement about the difficulties of operating without an Hon. Secretary and the discussions of the Committee about seeking ways to utilise any amount of time or skills that members were willing to offer, by finding smaller scale tasks, not all of which necessitated attendance at Committee meetings. He urged members to consider what they could offer in the way of time and skills, and to contact him or any member of the Committee.

11. Appointment of the Accounts Examiner for 2019/20

Noting David Sturt's concerns about the procedures for the accounts examination, and as he was not at the meeting to indicate his preference, the AGM was asked to approve the appointment of Keith Root as Accounts Examiner for the 2019/20 accounts. Proposed by Mary Nixon, seconded by Peter Cooper; the meeting approved the motion by a show of hands.

12. Report on pension matters

Peter Cooper, in his role as Member-Nominated Trustee of the RS (Defined Benefit) Pension Plan, reported on actions during the year. He sought queries from Plan Members present – there was some concern at the late arrival of payslips and other communications; he would take the matters to the next Trustees' meeting.

13. Any other business

(a) Financial planning Choong Kar Chan brought to members' attention free seminars run monthly by Buckingham Gate Chartered Financial Planners (<https://www.buckinghamgate.co.uk>) at the RAF Club in Piccadilly, London. These covered such issues as IHT Planning Pension and Investment Planning.

(b) Electronic communications Peter Cooper raised the issue of circulating members electronically. Restrictions imposed by email providers on large-scale email circulations were making this more onerous; he asked whether members would be agreeable to the Committee looking into the use of alternative ways of circulating emails and information – such as Google Groups, Mailchimp or Groups.io – which would involve members' email addresses being held by the providers of those services. The AGM indicated that it would be content.

(c) Social media Peter Cooper consulted the AGM on whether there would be interest in a WhatsApp group, as the question had been raised by a member. Such a group would not replace the current mechanisms for distributing information (i.e. post and email) but would allow more informal multi-way interaction between members. The Professional Activities Group might also wish to look at using LinkedIn for this purpose. The AGM was supportive of the idea and Diana Chapman agreed to establish a WhatsApp group in the first instance. She would contact members whose mobile phone numbers she already had and would welcome other members who wished to join to send her their numbers. A note about the group would be included in the next *BTT*.

14. Date for the 2020 AGM

The date for the 2020 AGM would be notified to members after the availability of rooms at the Royal Society had been ascertained.

PRC, 31 October 2019