

ROYAL SOCIETY FORMER STAFF ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Royal Society and on Zoom at 2:00 pm on Monday 16 May 2022

Present:

Peter Cooper (*Chairman*)

At the Royal Society

Choong Kar Chan

Peter Collins (*Editor, BTT*)

Len Mole

Susan Moss (*Welfare Secretary*)

Keith Root

Jane Silverleaf (*Events Secretary*)

Ling Thompson

Peter Warren

On Zoom

Diana Chapman

Ann Hicks

Mary Manning

Chris Purdon

Beata Seymour

Jenny Shanahan

Imelda Topping

Nick von Behr (*Professional Activities Lead*)

Eileen Wilson

Apologies for absence

Peter Cooper reported that 78 members had sent apologies or were otherwise unable to take part.

1. Chairman's introduction

Peter Cooper welcomed members to the first physical meeting of the Association since the Annual Lunch in January 2020, and to the Association's first ever hybrid AGM with members both present in person and participating via Zoom.

He reminded members that there would not be voting at the AGM – Ballot papers had been issued and the Scrutineers would collect and count the votes received by the deadline of 29 May. The reason for using a Ballot system was to allow all members to express preferences, whether or not they could participate in the AGM (in person or by Zoom).

2. Minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting held on 17 May 2021 using Zoom (AGM22-2)

No amendments had been notified.

The proposal to confirm the Minutes was proposed by Len Mole, seconded by Ling Thompson. After the Scrutineers' count of votes cast by ballot, the voting was: in favour 30, against 0.

The Minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting were thereby accepted.

3. To consider matters arising not listed below

Minute 5 (membership campaign) – The Committee had discussed the matter and while it agreed that a membership campaign was needed, it was not possible while the Committee lacked people to undertake Committee roles, especially as its view was that identifying and persuading potential members would be best done by those who had themselves recently left the RS.

All other matters were covered by reports later in the meeting, including the responses of members to questions asked on last year's Ballot paper about timing and nature of events.

4. To receive a report from the Chairman/Secretary (AGM22-4)

Peter Cooper presented his report. It had been a mixed year, with some successes and some disappointments both in terms of how Covid developed and in how the Association's programme and activities had run. Like many other organisations, events where members could meet in person had not restarted but all parts of the Association's programme had nonetheless continued in some form:

- Members' Zoom events had continued successfully in place of face-to-face events
- the Professional Activities Group had continued to run its series of workshops online
- Susan Moss had kept in touch with many members and kept our welfare work at the forefront
- BTT had continued with regular issues of information and entertainment.

Sadly, we had lost four members during the year – Peter O'Rourke, Corinne Wakefield, Ann Machin and Annette Hilliker. We had welcomed David Foster, Robin Cantrill-Fenwick and Nigel Smith, bringing our total membership to 96.

Peter finished by expressing his thanks to all the Committee members for the work they have done to keep things going over the year, despite all the challenges and hurdles put in their way.

5. Report of the Treasurer on the Association's finances (AGM22-5)

Peter Cooper presented the apologies of Mary Nixon, who was unable to attend the meeting. He thanked Keith Root, the Accounts Examiner, who was present. The accounts for 2021/22 showed a surplus of £480.50 (General Fund and *BTT* Fund) and £151 (Welfare Fund) on the year; the balances stood at £4,848.89 (General Fund and *BTT* Fund) and £1,536.76 (Welfare Fund). Peter summarised some points from Mary's report.

(i) The revised accounts format aimed to make clearer where the Association's income came from and how it was spent across the aims and programmes of the Association, while keeping track of which Fund it was paid from (General Fund, *BTT* or Welfare Fund). The new format followed that recommended by the Charity Commission for small charities.

(ii) The accounts showed a good surplus on the year and a considerable accumulation of funds, partly because of the reduced programme of activities during Covid. The Committee felt the levels were higher than the Association needed, even taking account of the unexpected, and after discussion had concluded that we should invest funds into the various programmes – revitalisation of the programme should be our aim as we come out of Covid. Accordingly:

- the Committee had expanded the range of ways the Welfare Fund could be used and had simplified the application process
- it wished to allow Jane greater choice of place and type of event, including allowing a subsidy to ensure more members were able to take part
- PAG would be allowed to spend on rooms so the Group is able to have a mix of online and physical workshops, reflecting the diversity of its members
- *BTT* would not be limited in the length of issues (within reason) to allow it to reflect the full range of members' interests and contributions.

(iii) *BTT* was clearly the most appreciated core member benefit. For some years – since the RS stopped its subsidy of the Association – *BTT* had been generously supported by an anonymous donor. That donation was greatly appreciated but the Committee felt that, for transparency, the costs of *BTT* should be met from the subscriptions that members paid. Through the hard work of Keith Root and successive Treasurers, the Association had been made financially sound despite the loss of the RS funds. The Committee had been talking to the donor about how we might redirect their donation to support the Committee's strategy of enhancing all our programmes, as described above. Peter wished to put on record how much the Association appreciated and had relied on that donation – it had been provided at a time when we were unsure whether the Association could continue at all, and particularly whether *BTT* could continue in the form members wanted, and the donation had enabled us to get through that period and for *BTT* to thrive. It had been a lifeline and we remained most grateful to the donor.

The proposal to accept the 2021/22 accounts was proposed by Choong Kar Chan, seconded by Peter Warren. After the Scrutineers' count of votes cast by ballot, the voting was: in favour 29, against 0. The accounts for 2021/22 were thereby accepted.

6. Report of the Welfare Secretary and news of members (AGM22-6)

Susan Moss presented her report. She had been in touch with members who she had heard were unwell and had sent cards and gift cards to members who had reached 80th, 90th and 100th birthdays. Donations had been made to selected charities to mark the deaths of members. She asked members to contact her where they were aware of any member in need or where the Welfare Fund might be used to offer support.

Peter Cooper thanked Susan for her report and for all she had done over the year.

7. Report of the Events Secretary (AGM22-7)

Jane Silverleaf presented her report. Physical events had not restarted but it was intended to do so soon, with a possible visit to Hampton Court in June. She also offered to assist any member who would be interested in setting up a visit to a venue near to them.

She invited all members to consider offering to give a short talk as a focus for a Zoom Members' Meeting – it need not be a long talk (10 minutes) and could be on any topic.

The responses to questions asked last year on the Ballot Paper suggested that the Annual Lunch should be moved to a better time of the year. The venue was difficult but it was planned to use a larger room with a subsidy from the Association to meet the higher costs. The Committee was also discussing holding an evening social event which would be more convenient for professionally-active members.

Mary Manning confirmed that she had found presenting her Zoom talk enjoyable, and encouraged others to offer to talk on any interesting or entertaining theme.

Peter Cooper thanked Jane for her report and for all her work over the year.

8. Report of the Professional Activities Programme (AGM22-8)

Nick von Behr presented his report. He thanked Rachel Tobbell for organising the Programme over the last year – recordings were available on the website. The Professional Activities Group (PAG) had achieved most of the conclusions from the survey undertaken a few years ago. Least successful was the recruitment of more professionally-active members. PAG was now moving forward with plans to resume in-person events later this year.

Peter Cooper thanked Nick and his colleagues for the report and for all they had done.

9. Report of the Editor of *Beyond The Terrace* (AGM22-9)

Peter Collins presented his report. Three copies of *BTT* had been produced over the year. He added his thanks to the anonymous donor for funding *BTT*. Peter encouraged members to send him contributions for future issues; it was noticeable that fewer members had sent in details of what they had been doing over the past year, and he would be glad to hear from members at any time. He called for reminiscences relating to The Queen to mark the Platinum Jubilee.

Peter noted that he would be coming up to the end of his term as Editor and invited members who might be interested in taking over to contact him.

Peter Cooper thanked Peter for his report and for his work over the year – members agreed that *BTT* was 'a great read'.

10. Elections to the Committee

Peter Cooper announced that Nick von Behr and Len Mole (PAG Lead and Ordinary Member respectively) had reached the end of their first three-year terms. They were eligible for reappointment and no other nominations had been received, so they would be confirmed in those posts without the need for a vote.

The position of Hon. Secretary remained vacant and no nominations had been received by the deadline. Peter Cooper asked, as the Rules allowed, if there was any members participating in the AGM who would be willing to put themselves forward; no nominations were forthcoming and the post remained unfilled.

Peter expressed concerns that the Association was entering another year without an Hon. Secretary and with more of the Committee nearing the end of their terms of service. It was essential to find members able to take on tasks, and in the discussion paper for Agendum 13 he had suggested how we might break down tasks falling on the Committee into smaller packages. He asked members to consider whether they might be able to offer to take on one of those if the circumstances were right – i.e. within time constraints, not attending physical meetings, etc. The Committee would find a way to involve any member in a way that suited their wishes and circumstances.

11. Appointment of the Scrutineers for 2022/23

The Committee had proposed Jane Silverleaf as its Scrutineer under the new Rules and regulations; Imelda Topping had agreed to stand as the AGM's nominee, Peter Warren, who had earlier offered his services again, regrettably having found himself unable to take on the role.

The proposal to accept the Scrutineers was proposed by Mary Manning, seconded by Diana Chapman.

After the Scrutineers' count of votes cast by ballot, the voting was:

Scrutineer appointed by the AGM – Imelda Topping	In favour 30, against 0.	<u>Approved</u>
Scrutineer appointed by the Committee – Jane Silverleaf	In favour 29, against 0.	<u>Approved</u>

12. Appointment of the Accounts Examiner for the 2022/23 accounts

Keith Root, the current Accounts Examiner, had offered his services as the Accounts Examiner for the 2022/23 accounts.

The proposal to appoint the Accounts Examiner was proposed by Peter Warren, seconded by Choong Kar Chan.

After the Scrutineers' count of votes cast by ballot, the voting was:

Accounts Examiner for 2022/23 accounts – Keith Root	In favour 29, against 0.	<u>Approved</u>
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13. Discussion on increasing member engagement in the running of the Association (AGM22-13)

Peter Cooper introduced a discussion on how the Association might encourage greater member engagement in the Association, especially in its administration. He stressed that this was not a criticism of members – other commitments, uncertainty about what is involved, etc. all played a part – nor was it peculiar to the Association, it was a common issue in most voluntary bodies.

He noted that it was ten years since *The Way Forward* report which had led to a significant change in the nature and aims of the Association – that had been very successful, with member numbers increased and activities tailored to a broader range of members. Plenty had changed since then, however – working methods, work and career patterns, people's time commitments, virtual meetings, etc. – and it may be time for a new look at what the Association does and how it does it.

He invited a wide-ranging discussion of the Association looking at three aspects – how we operate and manage the Association and Committee; how to break down the tasks falling on the Committee into smaller, more manageable and flexible packages; and how we can improve our member recruitment.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Could the Association pay for someone to work on the 'techie' side – the website, for instance?
- The Annual Lunch attracted the greatest support – did this suggest putting an accent on networking functions, holding perhaps two or more such events.
- The talk/lunch model organised by some other bodies could be an attractive proposition.
- Collaboration with other organisations on social visits, to get sufficient numbers, was worth considering but opening Association membership to other organisations was less popular.
- There was less interest nowadays from those leaving the RS in joining a body for the retention of social links, rather than professional contacts.
- Such was the spread of members' ages and times at the RS, that newly-joining members might know or have worked with few, if any, of the existing members. Member events, physical and virtual, helped to create linkages, as also would encouraging members to bring guests as an introduction to the Association.
- Should the Association add to its mission to support or encourage the younger generation, looking externally to the future and not perceived simply to be based on the past and the needs of members?
- Could we aim at the children, grandchildren and friends of members – for instance, by using the Summer Exhibition as a focus for getting families and friends together?
- Would a Vice-Chairman be a more appealing position than an Hon. Secretary? The concept of a 'Secretary' may not be understood nowadays.
- The Committee as a coordination group of members who wished and were willing to make things happen did not need too formal a structure, but it also provided cohesion, drive and leadership to

the Association, which required more formal governance structures and was not easily replaceable by a more informal structure.

- The Association's mechanisms seemed overly burdensome and slow for a small body, but were in part driven by the need to reflect the circumstances of a diverse membership.

Peter closed the discussion and said he would take the points back to the Committee for further thought.

Action: Peter Cooper

14. Any other business

(a) It was noted that no budget for 2022/23 had been presented. Peter Cooper pointed out that the Committee had been seeking the AGM's response to the proposals for increasing spending outlined in Minute 5 above, but it was fair that an outline of the next year's expenditure should now be drafted.

Action: Mary Nixon

(b) Peter Cooper welcomed Peter Collins as a new Member-Nominated Trustee (MNT) of the Royal Society (Defined Benefit) Pension Plan, and thanked him for standing for that role. Peter Collins said he was looking forward, with some trepidation, to working on the Board. There was still one MNT vacancy and the appointment process might be run again next year.

15. Date for the 2023 AGM

The date for the 2023 AGM would be notified to members after the availability of rooms at the Royal Society had been ascertained.

Action: Peter Cooper

Peter Cooper thanked everyone for attending and participating; he would welcome comments on the mechanics and practicalities of the arrangements. The meeting was closed at 3:27 pm.

PRC

23 June 2022