

# ROYAL SOCIETY FORMER STAFF ASSOCIATION

## Minutes of the Special General Meeting held at 1:00 pm on Tuesday 21 November 2023 at the Royal Society and on Zoom

*Present:*

Peter Cooper (*Chairman*)

*At the Royal Society*

Joyce Argent (accompanied by Neil Argent)

Peter Collins (*Editor, BTT, and Review Group member*)

Sharon Fishwick

Ann Hicks

Scott Keir (*Review Group member*)

Len Mole (*Committee and Review Group member*)

Laura Murphy

Mary Nixon (*Treasurer and Review Group member*)

Jane Silverleaf (*Events Secretary and Review Group member*)

Peter Warren

Nick von Behr (*PAG Lead and Review Group member*)

*On Zoom*

David Boak (*Review Group member*)

Diana Chapman

Pippa Cox

Brenda de Vere-Lewis

Mary Manning (*Review Group member*)

Nigel Parfitt

Carol Price

Chris Purdon (*Review Group member*)

Keith Root

Beata Seymour

Jenny Shanahan

Eileen Wilson (*Review Group member*)

### 1. Chairman's introduction

Peter Cooper welcomed everyone to the Special General Meeting (SGM), an important one in determining the future of the Association. He outlined the way in which the meeting would operate in hybrid mode.

Peter Cooper reminded members that voting would be by Ballot Paper, as stated in the Rules and Regulations. Ballot papers, to be returned no later than 5 December, had been circulated with the Report of the Review Group by email in late October and by post in early November. The SGM would be recorded and made available via the website so that members unable to attend could hear the discussion and debate and could make their decision accordingly.

### 2. Scrutineers for 2023/24

Noted that Jane Silverleaf and Imelda Topping had been appointed Scrutineers for 2023/24 at the 2023 AGM. They had both confirmed that they were able to undertake that role for the vote of the SGM. Peter Cooper thanked them on behalf of the Association.

### 3. The future of the Association

(i) Peter Cooper summarised why the Special General Meeting was taking place. The lack of nominations for vacancies on the 2023/24 Committee, and the concern that a similar response at the 2024 AGM could leave the Association without any Officers, had led the 2023 AGM to establish a Review Group to bring forward proposals that would enable the Association to continue operating with the resources available to it (finances and volunteers). The report of the Review Group was to be considered at an SGM held no later than November 2023 to allow time for the decision (whichever it was) to be implemented at the AGM in 2024. If the proposals of the Review Group were not accepted by the SGM, then the only course of action would be to close the Association at the 2024 AGM.

Peter Cooper drew members' attention to two points.

(a) The three-page Report put forward a model for the Association that the Review Group believed could effectively deliver the core benefits that members had shown they wished to derive from the Association in a more simplified and streamlined way, taking advantage of electronic networking while at the same time continuing to provide for those members unable to access the electronic system. In a Supplementary Paper the Review Group reported on work it had done to give reasonable assurance that the model was deliverable. But the content of the Supplementary Paper could not be assumed to be precisely how the model would be operated

in practice – that required more work, and in any case this SGM should not tie the hands of a future Association. Peter Cooper made clear that members were being asked to vote on the model in the Report, not the detail of the possible implementation in the Supplementary Paper.

- (b) The Report made clear that success was still dependent on there being sufficient volunteers to make it work. Paragraph 12 of the Report recommended that if the decision of the SGM was to accept the Report, there should be an immediate effort to identify volunteers. If this proved unsuccessful, then the Committee should be able to call a halt to the process – the Review Group recommended this decision point should be the end of 2023. The Committee supported this recommendation. Peter Cooper emphasised that, by voting to accept the Report, members were also voting to support this recommendation and the ability of the Committee to review progress at the end of 2023.

If the SGM voted to accept the Report and its recommendations, then the Committee would form an Implementation Team composed of members of the Committee, willing members of the Review Group and any members emerging from the call for volunteers to take on roles in the new arrangements.

Although as stated in (a) the vote was only on the content of the three-page Report, the Committee was well aware that members would have views on the way that the new model, if approved, might be implemented. Agendum 3(iii) of the SGM therefore enabled a wider discussion of these matters. While those implementing the decision of the SGM would take points made in this wider discussion into consideration, they would not be required to adopt them.

Peter Cooper then took the meeting through the Report of the Review Group, seeking queries and points of clarification.

- (ii) Members were invited to vote:
  - either (A) to accept the proposed model of the Review Group, in which case the practicalities and details would be developed over the next six months, and the new arrangements implemented, including a new Constitution, at the 2024 AGM,
  - or (B) to agree that the Association be dissolved at the 2024 AGM, with appropriate arrangements for that closure being made over the next six months.

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

- |   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| <b>(A) To accept the proposed model of the Review Group</b>           | <b>in favour 35</b> |
| <b>(B) To agree that the Association is dissolved at the 2024 AGM</b> | <b>in favour 2</b>  |

**The decision of the Special General Meeting is, therefore, that the proposed model of the Review Group be accepted and the details developed for approval at the AGM in May 2024.**

- (iii) Peter Cooper then invited members to give their thoughts and suggestions on the proposals in the Report and the ideas in the Supplementary Paper. The discussion would guide the next stage, whether drawing up detailed plans for implementation of the new arrangements, or planning for the closure of the Association.

A summary of points raised in the discussion is at Annex A.

#### **4. Any other business**

By Rule 5, the only business that may be carried out at a General Meeting must have been notified in advance to members. No additional business had been notified.

Peter Cooper announced that he would let members know the date of the 2024 AGM when he had negotiated with the RS. [*Post-meeting note*: Confirmed as Monday 20 May 2024 at 2:00 pm.]

The meeting thanked Peter Cooper for his leadership and the meticulous level of detail and consultation throughout the Review.

Peter Cooper declared the meeting closed at 2:30 pm.

Peter Cooper, Chairman  
7 December 2023

## Annex A

### Points arising in discussion

- BTT as a members' newsletter should be more than a set of articles, but should focus on members' news and act as a means of communication between them on what they are doing.
- Feedback shows BTT with news about members has high support. That depends on receiving information from members, and there is far less response now to the annual call for news than in past, possibly an issue of timeliness and perceived interest?
- On the other hand, less overlap of members' times at the RS (a result of the shorter length of time people spend in any one job) means that news about other members is less relevant and meaningful to members who never knew them.
- A BTT that is designed for online use (but also with a printed format) could take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new format. The focus of BTT and the concept of what formed an 'article' may need to be more flexible to meet diverse expectations.
- 'Professional' editing and composition of BTT would still be important in an online version; but it was less critical to edit for length, as the online version would not be so dependent on fitting into a defined number of printed pages.
- It becomes important for the platform holding BTT to be able to provide appropriate places to hold current and past material, and to notify members when new material is posted.
- It was suggested that BTT might act as the nucleus of a new Association, from which all the other activities and services emerge – membership list, noticeboard for members' news, etc.
- An email-based platform might be seen as rather old-fashioned and onerous, and some find it irritating if emails arrive too frequently. Against that, email is still one of the simplest and most widely available electronic messaging systems.
- Social media platforms such as Facebook are widely used and liked, but they are generational and keep changing, which necessitates administration when moving to the next platform.
- Any solution must cater for members who have no internet or email, or do not use smartphones.
- Look for the maximum flexibility to meet different members' wishes – the platform should be an enabling mechanism, even possibly supporting additional social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc) alongside the core mechanism if groups of members want to set up and run them.
- Is growing the membership realistic – would that need a more forward-looking organisation?
- A danger of fragmentation into small self-run activities and tasks is that it could lead to no one holding things together.
- Is a 'Convenor' or 'Moderator' required? ('Moderator' has another meaning of acting as guardian and censor in relation to social media.) Possibly have two members working together ('job share') to avoid no one taking full responsibility.
- Need to keep new arrangements under review. A review after a period (3 months, 6 months, 12 months?) to check that things are going in the right direction and delivering what we expect, and whether tweaking was needed.
- Against that, to do all the work and find later that it does not work seems unfortunate.
- Members opting to take printed materials adds to the administration and complexity. A simpler body may need to restrict options to members whose choices are limited by their circumstances.
- A simplified and streamlined body must concentrate on the essential features, not the 'nice to have' features.