

# The Geological Society of London

## COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting on 22 September 2021 held virtually due to continuing precautions re the coronavirus pandemic.

PRESENT: Mike Daly (*Chair*), Jo Alexander, Mark Allen, Ruth Allington (*President-Designate*), Neil Frewin, Jennie Gilbert, Joel Gill (*Secretary, External and Foreign Affairs*), Kathryn Goodenough, Martin Griffin, Jim Griffiths (*Secretary, Professional & Chartership Matters*), Michael Kehinde, Pete Loader, Andrew Moore, Keith Myers (*Treasurer*), Amanda Owen, John Perry, Sarah Scott, Jessica Smith (*Vice President, Regional Groups*), Gemma Sherwood, Rob Strachan (*Secretary, Publications*), Lucy Thomas, Alex Whittaker (*Secretary, Science*) and Lucy Williams

APOLOGIES: None noted.

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

### 1. APOLOGIES

Mike Daly (MD) NOTED apologies from Ruth Allington who would join slightly late.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None noted.

### 3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 30 JUNE 2021

Minutes were APPROVED with the following amendments to be made by Christina Marron (CM):

- April minutes to show Joel Gill (JGi) as attending
- action to write letter to complainant to be attributed to Richard Hughes (RH)
- Jo Alexander (JA) queried date for April Council 2022 - confirmed as 6 April 2022
- Actions table to differentiate between Alex Whittaker (AW) and Alex McPherson (AMc).

CM

### 4. MATTERS ARISING

Matters arising: All other actions NOTED as in progress, discharged or on today's agenda.

### 5. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS (*confidential to Council*)

Report of Officers Meeting (verbal)

MD asked Richard Hughes (RH) to present key staff matters discussed. RH noted:

- (Staff matters confidential to Council).
- CRM: Officers approved a move to a new CRM platform provider, Silverbear with Alex Pherson (AMc) to negotiate acceptable price .
- HSE Committee: The Committee reconvened late July. It needs representation by a Council member and any Council member interested is asked to contact RH.

Council

Report of Elections Committee

MD said seven Council members terms came to an end in June 2022 that including the loss of experience of three Officers\*:

Dr Kathryn Goodenough  
Mr Andrew Moore  
Mrs Sarah Scott  
Ms Gemma Sherwood

\*Miss Jessica Smith (Vice President)  
\*Prof Robin Strachan (Secretary, Publications)  
\*Dr Alexander Whittaker (Secretary, Science)

MD said the Committee had discussed list of possible candidates and would reach out to other potential council members through Geoscientist, the newsletter and social media.

## 6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

Executive Secretary's report (CM/50/21)

RH spoke to the key items of note:

- Burlington House (BH): to discuss at the Council strategy day.
- Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR) update: RH said SGR first contacted the Society in 2018. In June 2021, a follow up letter was received and a response sent. Although still critical of links to fossil fuels industries, SGR have updated their report noting significant progress but still requesting the divestment of all funds in fossil fuels and severing ties with one corporate patron. (Discussion confidential to Council).  
Noted that other similar organisations e.g. WASTE – had a more collaborative approach and greater transparency.
- Complaints:
  - Ongoing complaint: (Update confidential to Council). The matter is now closed.
  - Request to reopen earlier complaint from 2019: (Item confidential to Council). The complainant had sent a Data Subject Access Request which was responded to. A further letter has since been received and will be responded to.
  - New complaint re. alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct: (Update confidential to Council).
  - New complaint re. Geoscientist: (Update confidential to Council). The suggestion of creating an Ethics Committee will be addressed during the forthcoming review led by Ruth Allington (RA) of the current complaints regulations. RH noted Geoscientist had offered to publish an abridged version of the complainant's letter to the Society, but the complainant had elected not to do so.
- Legacy giving brochure: the brochure was included in the autumn magazine and a £50k legacy pledge received to-date.
- Spacescapes: RH said it the exhibition had attracted a broad range of sponsors and had been very successful.

Director of Finance & Operations (CM/51/21)

incl: Management accounts/outturn 2021 YTD

Alex McPherson (AMc) noted highlights:

- IT penetration testing: AMc said the recent results were an improvement on previous testing results as a consequence of recent work to update systems and resolve vulnerabilities.
- Fellowship: the difference in headcount is just eight Fellows fewer than last year. The membership team recognises the benefits of using third parties for renewals follow up and will use earlier on in the renewal cycle in future.
- Financial systems and tools: AMc said the SAGE upgrade and Power BI training were a great step forward and the combined tools would support improvements and efficiency.
- Standard Operating Procedures: AMc will present a progress update on the SOPs drafts to the Audit Committee in October 2021.
- Hybrid Working: AMc noted the imminent start to hybrid working model with planning in place to ensure attendance is spread evenly throughout the week.

- Facilities costs: Cost reductions efforts resulted in a reduced cost base by £25k.

Management Accounts: AMc noted changes in reporting with a move from a departmental approach to a more detailed profit and loss outlook that measures performance against previous year, so giving an improved financial overview. He said the year-end forecast is predicting a surplus of c, £240k. This strong position is due in part to investment portfolio gains currently c. £0.5m.

AMc said the Q4 focus would be the year-end and preparing audit files including a review of the asset register and possible asset impairments. He outlined significant changes from 2020 to 2021:

- Increased revenue from online CPD training
- Lyell income down £250k less than 2020.
- Donations/sponsorship income is £103k, less than forecast.
- Capital expenditure was less than budgeted due to the delays on projects (CRM etc). AMc to include capital expenditure reports in November papers.

AMc

(Discussion confidential to Council).

MD praised the updated management accounts format and noted that the situation overall was much improved compared to the year prior in terms of Fellowship numbers.

Director of Publishing (CM/52/21)

MS spoke to the key highlights:

- Lyell Collection subscriptions have increased by 12 totalling 159 renewals. (Details confidential to Council).
- MS said it was possible that academic Lyell Collection subscriptions had reached their peak. The new sales role agreed by Officers would focus on growing corporate subscriptions.
- GeoScienceWorld royalties have performed strongly.
- Talks are underway with several possible customers re transformative Read and Publish agreements.
- Commissioning: there are 5 new books proposals and 9 more in hand which is a positive step forward compared to start of year
- ES3 has 10 submissions to date with high proportion of review articles.
- (Commercially confidential item).
- The Publishing House is currently recruiting to replace two new chief editors who are standing down.

KM asked if the Publishing House is tracking usage and targeting marketing efforts at a customer level. MS explained they do monitor more with larger organisations but do not have human resource to do that with all customers. KM to discuss with MS offline.

KM/MS

John Perry (JP) observed the Publishing House is very good at marketing its products via conferences and asked if this was a done with CPD courses. MS confirmed that books act as a springboard for CPD. JP noted the next CPD on Earthworks so MS's staff team to contact.

MS

*RA joined the meeting.*

Director of Science and Communications CM/53/21

Alicia Newton (AN) spoke to highlights:

- The Society has been granted observer status at COP26, providing an important opportunity to communicate the importance of geoscience in the energy transition.
- Spacescapes Courtyard Exhibition: AN said it has received a lot of media coverage as well as ~200 persons visiting weekdays and 1000 at weekends. It is hoped it will

possible to move exhibition to "name omitted" to host for the rest of 2021 and then take it to locations outside London but noted space requirements and cost of re-reconstructing are considerations. AN asked Council to make suggestions re relocating or sponsorship avenues.

Council

- AN said the digital geoscience champion role had only received two applications. AN asked Council members to promote further afield to have a wider candidate pool to select from and asked Council to share with contacts. KG said the 1-2 day per month requirement was a big ask and suggested reducing it to 1 day per month. AN to reword to update specification re time requirement.

AN

Forward look conferences and events (CM/54/21).

- AN noted the shift in conference structure moving to two big signature events annually at Burlington House alongside a series of digital webinars, and workshops rather than in person events on other themes.
- KM queried if there were any initiatives in the pipeline to support Fellows in mid to late career who are experiencing career transitions. AN said the team would like to look at this area in the next phase of CPD course planning.

Gemma Sherwood (GS) queried if free taster sessions for CPD courses could be offered as a benefit for Fellows. AN said this was being trialled with its course on climate extremes but would look to extend this further with other free courses to be added.

Lucy Thomas commented that the timing of CPD courses (currently 5-7pm) could be difficult for some, e.g. for those with families. AN confirmed sessions are recorded and made available to those unable to attend live session. AN to make this very clear in marketing of courses.

AN

Martin Griffin (MG) noted opportunities to link up with other CPD training initiatives for those transitioning from the petroleum industry. He added said ground model training at chartership level was a good area to explore. AN agreed and said that this was being looked at.

AN

AN noted virtual format has been very successful especially with niche topic areas. MD said it was great to have a list of upcoming events: training and conferences in the pipeline.

#### 7. RISK REGISTER CM/55/21)

AMc said he had provided an overview of current risk management. He noted the implementation of the 4Risk software earlier in the year, updates to risk register and ongoing training for managers and risk owners. AMc said a sample of report of high/med high risks had been provided in the papers and that the new software will allow reports to be easily produced with heat mapping tools etc.

AMc spoke to the high-rated risks:

Burlington House: rising rent, potential relocation and dilapidations costs. AMc noted work was underway to address all these issues and mitigate risks. The Burlington House situation would be part of the strategic planning meeting tomorrow.

Declining income: AMc said this was a live topic with initiatives underway including CPD courses and conferences, Publishing House's work to mitigate decline in income as well as efforts to retain and grow the Fellowship.

MD noted risk 8 "declining relevance" was a risk that came out in the past and was important to monitor as a risk mitigator. KM said that it would be good for Council to focus on insights that come from the executive team's risk analysis. RH said a discussion regarding risk following tomorrow's strategy meeting could be useful.

AMc to produce reports for the secretaries regarding the risks that fall under their committee.

AMc

*Neil and Gemma left meeting temporarily for work commitments.*

8. REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES (CM/56/21)  
Council NOTED the reports.

9. ELECTIONS (CM/57/21-CM/61/21)  
*Fellowship (CM/57/21)*  
Council AGREED to recommend to the Fellowship that those candidates listed should be elected as Fellows at the Ordinary General Meeting on 30 June 2021.

*Chartered Geologists (CM/58/21)*  
The applications from Fellows listed to become Chartered Geologists had been approved by the Chartership Panel and were AGREED by Council.

*Candidate and Junior Candidate Fellowship (CM/59/21)*  
Council AGREED to elect as Candidate Fellows and Junior Candidate Fellows those applicants listed.

*European Geologist (CM/60/21)*  
Council AGREED those applicants listed as European Geologists.

*Chartered Scientist (CM/61/21)*  
Council AGREED the applicant listed as Chartered Scientist.

10. DRAFT BUDGET 2022 (CM/62/21)  
AMc said the draft budget was presented to FPC and Council in September and he would present in November in its final form for Council to sign off.

AMc said the current draft showed a deficit so next steps were to look do an analysis of the resources allocated and to review changes from last year and 2021 as well as looking at investment into value generating activity. AMc said further work would be done by SLT to refine for the FPC and Council in November to bring a finalised version that would also show planned capital expenditure.

11. RESERVES POLICY (CM/63/21)

KM explained he had proposed a review of the reserves policy and the level of reserves held.

AMc noted that the current reserves policy is somewhat basic as it requires reserves to cover nine months' expenditure without any consideration of the confidence levels of predicted income. He said the model provided by Wise Owl includes a risk-based evaluation of income. This modelling has shown, provisionally, that reserves held are greater than required by up to c. £2.3m. AMc said further analysis would identify an appropriate final reserves level.

KM said it was important to agree an appropriate level of free reserves. He noted that the previous policy has led to the build-up of large reserves while investment on charitable activities has declined. The exercise has shown the potential to free up considerable funds for investment in charitable activities and revenue growth.

(Discussion confidential to Council).

MD noted there were lots of investment possibilities and the best approach could be for RH to convene a group that would report to Council. KM agreed and said Council should provide the governance and investment criteria.

Recognising the recent growth of the investment portfolio growth and declining investment in charitable activities, Council AGREED in principle to amend the reserves policy to allow increased investment in charitable activities. A further paper will be brought to the November Council meeting with outline proposals for a disbursement mechanism,

## 12. PURPOSE STATEMENT (CM/64/21)

RH noted the significant amount of time invested by a working group including Council members, staff, regional and specialist groups. He thanked Council for their suggestions at the last meeting which had been taken on board with the final revised versions as presented:

**Purpose:** Advancing and sharing knowledge of planet Earth and beyond for the benefit of humanity. RH noted the inclusion of “sharing” to show the active role.

**Mission:** To support Earth scientists, grow interest in the natural world, and connect science, the profession and society.

**Vision:** To be an inclusive and thriving Earth science community, advancing knowledge, addressing global challenges, and inspiring future generations.

**Values:**

- Collaborative
- Equitable, diverse and inclusive (RH noted the addition of “equitable”.)
- Highest standards of service
- Pursuing excellence in all we do
- Leading and embracing change.

RH explained the final versions would be communicated externally in a Geoscientist article to be published in Q1 2022.

Council APPROVED the changes.

## 13. REGULATIONS UPDATES (CM/65/21 - CM/71/21)

MD said three attached regulations had been revised and updated to accommodate the new membership fee categories.

FP-01 Nomination and election of new Fellow (CM/65/21)  
Council APPROVED the revised regulation.

FP-03 Rules for Candidate Fellows (CM/66/21)  
Council APPROVED the revised regulation.

FP-09 Subscriptions and Fees (CM/67/21)  
Council APPROVED the revised regulation.

MD said three regulations were revised to accommodate the new CSci standards and proposed changes to the requirement for sponsors for chartership applications.

• FP-02 Criteria and procedure for validation as a chartered geologist (CM/68/21)  
Council APPROVED the revised regulation.

• FP-11 Criteria and procedure for validation as a chartered scientist (CM/69/21)

Council APPROVED the revised regulation.

- FP-13 Continuing professional development (CM/70/21)  
Council APPROVED the revised regulation.

MD explained that the Research Grants regulation, R-G-15 Award of Society Grants had been updated to reflect changes in the Fellowship benefits and in regards other requirements.

AW noted a key change to the regulation was to require applicants to be Fellows. Amanda Owen (AO) said a £45 membership fee could be prohibitive for many PhD students.

(Discussion confidential to Council).

RH said he, AW and AN would revise the Research Grants regulation R-G-15 and bring back to the November Council for approval.

RH/AW/  
AN

KG said grants are allocated to early and mid-career and it was reasonable to expect applicants to be Fellows especially those in employment. KG suggested there could be some leniency for students with reduced income.

GS noted the regulation did not refer to accreditation of degrees being required for Chartership applications. After some discussion AN agreed to bring the final version of the accreditation review to November Council.

AN

12. AOB  
None noted.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

24 November 2021

Council dates 2022: 2 February, 6 April and 22 June