

# The Geological Society of London

## COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at Burlington House on 18 April 2018

**PRESENT:** Malcolm Brown (Chair), Rick Brassington, Lesley Dunlop, Marie Edmonds (Secretary, Science), Graham Goffey (Treasurer), Sarah Gordon (Secretary, External and Foreign Affairs), Rob Larter, Colin North (Secretary, Publications), Christine Peirce, Nik Reynolds, Keith Seymour (Vice President, Regional Groups), Jessica Smith, and Alex Whittaker

**APOLOGIES:** John Booth, Jason Canning, Liv Carroll, Tricia Henton, Naomi Jordan, Jennifer McKinley, Sheila Peacock, Nick Rogers (President designate), Katherine Royse (Secretary, Professional Matters) and John Talbot (Vice President, Chartership)

**In attendance:** Richard Hughes (Executive Secretary), Nic Bilham (Director of Policy & Communications), Neal Marriott (Director of Publishing), Jonathan Silk (Director of Finance & Operations) and Stephanie Jones (Administrative Secretary)

**Items 7 and 8:** Doug Fenwick, Chair of the Audit Committee, and Nick Sladden, Partner RSM, the Society's Auditors

### 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

### 2. APOLOGIES

The apologies above were NOTED.

### 3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 7 FEBRUARY 2018

The minutes were APPROVED and a redacted version will be published on the website.

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### 4. MATTERS ARISING

#### 4.1 *Space Review / Reception Refurbishment*

Malcolm Brown has been leading a group of staff comprising Florence Bullough (Policy Officer), Angela Edwards (Facilities Manager) and Caroline Lam (Archivist) to take forward improvements to the entrance hall such as decoration and the relocation of the ichthyosaur. These are ongoing and good progress has been made.

### 5. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

#### 5.1 *Result of ballot for Council*

Malcolm Brown reported the results of the advisory ballot conducted by Electoral Reform Services. 2062 valid votes were cast for the seven vacancies which compared with 2017 in 2017. Candidates have been informed of the outcome and the names of the successful will go forward for formal election at the Annual General Meeting on 6 June. Malcolm Brown expressed his thanks to all those willing to stand for Council. It was disappointing that only one woman stood this year.

#### 5.2 *Report of the Officers' Meeting*

The main items of business were staff related and in particular the directors' bonuses. Officers also discussed the appointment of an extra Vice President(s).

#### 5.3 *Re-naming the Fellows Room (CM/14/18)*

The Royal Academy's occupation of the Fellows' Room ended in September 2017 and in early October the room was used as part of the Plate Tectonics at 50 conference.

Council agreed that thereafter the room will be available to Fellows again but will also be used for other purposes such as conferences and meetings, which will mean that it will not be available from time to time. There is a seating area for Fellows in the Lower Library and a coffee machine for their use in the kitchenette.

Council discussed the renaming of the room some years ago and with the change of use it is timely to go ahead with this. Three names were suggested:-

*Gertrude Elles*  
*Maria Gordon*  
*Catherine Raisin*

Council were sent biographies for each candidate and voted on their preference. The room will be re-named **The Gertrude Elles Room**.

The bi-fold doors between the Gertrude Elles Room and the Library will be changed to improve soundproofing between the two spaces. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the beginning of June at which time the room will be available for meetings and external hire. The 'flexible furniture' will also have been delivered.

#### 5.5 *Dewey Medal (CM/15/18)*

The inaugural John Dewey medal will be presented at President's Day on 6 June. The rubric for the medal is:-

*This Medal will be awarded to a geologist who has made substantial and significant contributions to geology through sustained field mapping and/or field observation of rocks, and who has a strong record of training, leading and encouraging others to practise and pursue advances in geology by this means.*

Nominations were sought via the website, advertisement in *Geoscientist* and the newsletter with a closing date of 31 March. Fifteen nominations were submitted.

The Awards Committee ranked the nominations and, consistent with the usual practice for Awards, Council decided between the two nominations receiving the highest votes.

The nomination receiving the highest number of votes was Professor Robert Butler of the University of Aberdeen and Council AGREED he will receive the Dewey Medal for 2018.

## 6. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The directors reported on activity in their departments since the last meeting of Council.

### 6.1 *Executive Secretary (CM/16/18)*

Council NOTED Richard Hughes' report. He highlighted points relating to the Burlington House lease, the Science Council and Chartered Engineer status which Council discussed.

A considerable amount of time has been spent on recruitment. A good calibre of applicants was received for the Director of Finance & Operations and the Director of Science & Communications vacancies. These have been shortlisted and interviews will be held in May. The Head of Development post is currently being advertised. Appointments have been made to the positions of Geoscientist Editor and Head of Editorial Development. Naomi Lindsay joined the Society on 5 April as HR Advisor on a six-month interim basis.

*Business Plan:* the Society is operating on a three year rolling business plan and a progress report will come to Council on a quarterly basis. Council noted that most items are 'green' and that those on 'amber' are related to people issues, i.e. staff departures. There are two 'red' items – the lease and brand alignment which is a contingency item dependent on bringing in consultants. Item 82 will be re-categorised 'amber'.

6.2 *Director of Finance & Operations (CM/17/18)*

Jonathan Silk highlighted the following topics from his report:-

*UK Operational Geoscience Competency Initiative:* positive discussions are moving forward. This is at an early stage but could see recognition of a technical level of competency below that of Chartership, as well as a level beyond CGeol. Further discussions are planned before a proposal is brought forward for consideration.

*CRM Project:* the final testing stage revealed no significant issues with the functionality of the system but there were concerns with the quality of the data. This means the schedule has slipped with the 'soft' go-live towards the end of April and wider promotion during May. There is a meeting with the contractors, which Richard Hughes will be attending, tomorrow.

*GDPR:* the Society has appointed a consultant, Tom Hughes, to plan and implement the changes required by GDPR. Training is being planned and will be rolled out very shortly.

*Financial Outturn Review 2017:* this was a full review of the Society's financial performance in 2017 which reconciles the budget and the monthly management accounts with the financial statements.

*Research Grants 2018:* a review panel met on 1 March to consider the research grant applications for 2018. The total amount requested by 44 applicants was £58,591 and the panel recommended that £35,526 be awarded to 30 applicants and the Robert Scott Memorial Fund of £2,000 to one applicant. Council APPROVED the research grants.

*Health & Safety:* there were no incidents.

It is a requirement that the trustees as a matter of routine should take reasonable steps to assess and mitigate any risks to the charity's activities or beneficiaries and to confirm that any serious incidents have been reported as part of the annual return. Serious incidents include loss of funds, significant sums of money or other property donated from an unknown or unverified source and unlawful activity by a member of staff or trustee. Jonathan Silk said that there were no serious incidents to report since the last meeting of Council.

Jonathan Silk's principal activity until he leaves the Society on 30 April will be the handover to the Interim Director of Finance & Operations.

6.3 *Director of Policy & Communications (CM/18/18)*

Nic Bilham said his main activity since the last Council meeting has been to work on the transition of information to his team prior to his departure in June. He highlighted the following topics from his report:-

There are some excellent entries for the Plate Tectonics competition

*EGU 2018:* it was a very busy week and over 15,000 attended. It is important for the Society to have a significant presence and Nic Bilham and Richard Hughes have talked about increasing this in future. Nic Bilham co-convened a session on geo-ethics.

The External Relations Committee agreed that the Society, together with Geology for Global Development, should be a founder member of a Coalition of Geoscience Organisations for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (CGO-SDGs). A number of other organisations have been invited to consider joining as founder members, and to launch the initiative at RFG2018 in June. Nic Bilham declared that he is a trustee for Geology for Global Development.

The Society is working with UK representatives of the International Association for Geoscience Diversity (IAGD) on plans for the launch event for the UK Chapter (Diversity in Geoscience UK – DiG UK) at the Society on 4 June which Council members are encouraged to attend.

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The American Geosciences Institute's Statement on Harassment was approved by its Council, and is being disseminated to member bodies and others. We are looking at how best to incorporate it in our own codes and policies.

The Society responded to the following inquiry:-

- Science and Technology Committee update inquiry on the possible impacts of Brexit on UK science.

Several significant submissions are in preparation:

- Two BEIS consultations on aspects of the siting process for a GDF (Geological Disposal Facility) for radioactive waste, due to be launched later this year;
- DfE consultation on subject-level TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework);
- DCLG consultation on the revised National Planning Policy Framework;
- Environmental Audit Committee inquiry on Changing the Arctic.

A working group met to discuss the establishment of an Early Career Geoscientists Network (working title). Plans are being developed and a proposal will come to the next meeting of Council. Rick Brassington said he understands the Hydrogeology Group has an early career group. Nic Bilham said there is no intention of replacing any such groups.

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*Future Science report:* Marie Edmonds and Nic Bilham are in contact with colleagues from University Geoscience UK (UGUK) to agree a new approach to completing this report following the research priorities meeting held in February 2017 with the British Geological Survey, Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) and UGUK. Nic Bilham said this is on his 'urgent' list and it is expected to complete a draft of the report in Q2 of 2018. Christine Peirce said that the RAS funding was contingent on the publication of that report.

*Great GeoBake:* Nic Bilham urged Council members to look at the blog post. The initiative is a very successful way to promote the work of the Society.

There are two briefing documents in preparation to promote A-level geology to school head teachers and to university departments. Jessica Smith raised the matter of the different approach taken in Scotland to the teaching of geology. Nic Bilham said the Education Committee is aware of this.

Principal activities prior to the next Council meeting:- continuation of handover to the team; making progress with the Future Science report; recruitment of an intern to work on Year of Risk outputs; initiating the review of the degree accreditation scheme; completing the priority setting and stakeholder mapping exercise; and preparing for the Society's presence and activities at RFG2018.

#### 6.4 *Director of Publishing (CM/19/18)*

Neal Marriott highlighted the following points from his report:-

The subscription renewals process is well underway with around 80% of anticipated 2018 revenues now received. This is a little ahead of the same time last year.

One of the key challenges is implementing bug fixes on the GeoScienceWorld new ebook site hosted by Silverchair. Neal Marriott said this was an issue around formatting.

The Publishing House will shortly start posting accepted manuscripts on the Lyell Collection, enabling a dramatic reduction in the time between acceptance and online availability. It was acknowledged that there were some mixed views on this approach, but that it was becoming the norm for publishers.

Principal activities prior to the next Council meeting are:- induction and training of new Head of Editorial Development; CRM testing prior to launch; Implement Aries Production Manager module for journals; Implementing required procedures required to ensure GDPR compliance by 25 May; Develop plan to respond to/plan for key industry disruptors; plan for surveys of reviewers and authors to measure levels of GSL service satisfaction; and undertake required work to launch new ecommerce site on the Lyell Collection.

## 7. REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE (CM/20/18)

Doug Fenwick, Chair of the Audit Committee, and Nick Sladden, Partner at RSM, the Society's auditors, joined the meeting.

Doug Fenwick said the Audit Committee met with the Society's auditors and staff on 16 March. There were too many outstanding items at the time of the meeting some of which took a while to resolve. While there were some mitigating circumstances, he suggested this could be around the timing of meetings, year-end and the production of the accounts and that the overall schedule for the audit requires review.

There was concern about the absence of a business continuity plan and this must be rolled out and adopted as a matter of urgency.

The documentation for operational controls and operating procedures requires updating.

The Committee formally recommends that Council approve the 2017 Audited Accounts.

## 8. 2017 AUDITED ACCOUNTS (CM/21/18)

Jonathan Silk said the Accounts were considered by the Finance & Planning Committee (FPC), and the Audit Committee who both recommend acceptance.

Nick Sladden said this was the first year for RSM as the Society's Auditors and he agreed with Doug Fenwick's comments about the timetable. They will work with the Society to improve this. He said the Audit Committee was a very useful meeting with a good degree of detail discussed. There was good dialogue between the staff and the audit team.

Nick Sladden said he was able to sign an unqualified audit report for both the Society and the trading subsidiary. He said there were two key issues identified both relating to prior year numbers:-

There should have been a provision in the balance sheet as at December 2016 for profit share paid for the jointly-owned journals, Petroleum Geoscience and Geochemistry: Exploration, Environment, Analysis. The balance sheet has been restated by £81,000 for this adjustment. There was also an adjustment of £158,000 relating to prior-year irrecoverable VAT.

The key recommendation for Jonathan Silk's successor to tackle is how VAT exemption is being applied. In terms of internal controls and audit issues, one was around the bad debt provision included at December 2017. The figure was the same as the previous year and the auditors would like to see a line-by-line provision. It is also suggested that more resource is applied to credit control. For room hire bookings, it is recommended that a separate catalogue be put in place to monitor the income that is being received. Nick Sladden said he recommends that the accounts are signed off and the two letters of representation.

Jonathan Silk said there is a list of actions to hand over coming out of the audit. Nick Sladden said that RSM will report back progress in subsequent audits. Graham Goffey said the items will be dealt with by the FPC rather than being brought back to Council for managing.

Council formally APPROVED:-

- i. the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017 which were signed by the President and Treasurer; and
- ii. the letters of representation which were signed by the President.

#### 9. FELLOWSHIP FEES FOR 2019 (CM/22/18)

Council agreed in April 2015 that Fellowship fee increases would be linked to the rate of Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) as measured in January of each year – i.e. fees for 2019 should consider CPI as at January 2018. The rate of CPI for January 2018, as published by the Office for National Statistics in February 2018, was 3.0%. Inflation has been rising slowly but steadily since mid 2017 and current economic predictions are for this to continue.

As in previous years, the 3.0% uplift is taken as an average across all fee rates, so some categories will rise more than others. The maximum increase is £6.00 over rates charged for 2017. This occurs in the 34 to 59 membership class which rises from £204 in 2018 to £210 in 2019.

In addition, with the advent of the new CRM system, it was proposed to amend the Joint Fellowship Supplement, which has previously been a flat-rate for the second payer irrespective of membership class so that a discount is applied to both payers instead. This will be easier to administer under the new system and fairer for Fellows. The discount across all classes will be 35%

FPC considered these proposals at its meeting in March and recommend approval.

Council APPROVED:

- a. the proposed rise in Fellowship fees of 3.0%; and
- b. adoption of the new proposed Joint Fellowship Discount of 35%.

The proposal will be published in May Geoscientist and go forward for adoption at the AGM on 6 June.

Christine Peirce commented on the small number of Fellows who have joint membership of the Royal Astronomical Society and that work is needed to attract more members from there.

#### 10. REPORT BY THE SECRETARY OF FOREIGN & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Sarah Gordon and Nic Bilham gave a joint presentation on the work of the External Relations Committee and its reporting committees.

They spoke in more detail about Honorary Fellows for whom the External Relations Committee will be reviewing the criteria, for example what would these be for someone from industry?

Council was supportive of the proposal to organise a major conference in 2022 around the future of cities and urbanisation. The External Relations and Science committees will discuss at their next meetings and outline ideas will be brought to November Council including what it will take in terms of resources. Council was asked to email Sarah Gordon with ideas.

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11. REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES (CM/23/18)

The reports of the standing committees were NOTED.

12. ELECTIONS

12.1 *Fellowship (CM/24/18)*

Council AGREED to recommend to the Fellowship that those candidates listed should be elected as Fellows at today's Ordinary General Meeting.

12.2 *Chartered Geologists (CM/25/18)*

The applications from Fellows listed to become Chartered Geologists had been approved by the Chartership Panel and were AGREED by Council.

12.3 *Candidate and Junior Candidate Fellowship (CM/26/18)*

Council AGREED to elect as Candidate Fellows and Junior Candidate Fellows those applicants listed.

12.4 *European Geologists (CM/27/18)*

Council NOTED the names elected as European Geologists at the 22 March meeting of the European Federation of Geologists.

12.5 *Chartered Scientist (CM/28/18)*

Council AGREED to elect as Chartered Scientists the applicants listed.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none except to thank those members of Council who will be standing down at the AGM for their service:-

Rick Brassington  
Liv Carroll  
Marie Edmonds  
Tricia Henton  
Jennifer McKinley  
Christine Peirce

Keith Seymour, on behalf of Nick Rogers, thanked Malcolm Brown for his service as President.

Malcolm Brown thanked Jonathan Silk for the progress that had been made during his time with the Society. He also thanked Nic Bilham for his 20 years service and the great contribution he had made to the evolution of the Society.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

4 July 2018