

The Geological Society of London

COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual meeting held on 8 September 2020 – Burlington House closed during the coronavirus pandemic shutdown.

PRESENT: Mike Daly (*Chair*), Jo Alexander, Andrew Bloodworth, John Booth (*Vice President*), Jennie Gilbert, Joel Gill (*Secretary, External and Foreign Affairs*), Graham Goffey (*Treasurer*), Kathryn Goodenough, Jim Griffiths (*Secretary, Professional & Chartership Matters*), Michael Kehinde, Chris King, Andrew Moore, Keith Myers (*Co-opted – Treasurer designate*), Bryne Ngwenya, John Perry, Nik Reynolds (*Vice President*), Sarah Scott, Gemma Sherwood, Jessica Smith (*Vice President, Regional Groups*), Helen Smyth, Rob Strachan (*Secretary, Publications*), Alex Whittaker (*Secretary, Science*) and Lucy Williams

APOLOGIES: Tom Backhouse

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

Amy Whitchurch, Geoscientist Editor – item 7

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies from Tom Backhouse NOTED post-meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19 AUGUST 2020

Minutes to be updated to include point raised by Bryne Ngwenya (BN) (see matters arising) and recirculated. Following this a version of the minutes will be published on the website, with an explanation if items have been removed or reduced.

SJ

4. MATTERS ARISING

Diversity Audit: Alicia Newton (AN) said Caroline Lam will be working on a follow-up review with the History of Geology Group when she returns from furlough leave in late September. A separate group led by AN and Maggie Simmons (MS) will be looking at developing a policy-based approach for dealing with sensitive historical issues. BN commented that the minutes had not been fully representative of the discussion which had agreed a dissociation with Henry de la Beche.

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

Report of Officers Meeting (verbal)

Mike Daly (MD) said key matters discussed were around staffing, including:

- The reopening of Burlington House this week (w/c 7 Sep 2020) and the Publishing House in June to enable the re-start of book sales.
- A few staff had expressed a wish to return to the office due to difficulties in working from home: provision had been made for them. MD commented that RH had proposed a future hybrid working model: this had been agreed in principle with further steps recommended around associated Health and Safety measures.

- Staff Survey: MD said the survey had shown many positives, but issues were highlighted around communications, in particular with the SLT, which Richard Hughes (RH) was addressing. Communications with Council had also been raised and MD proposed virtual meetings with staff 2-3 times a year with 4-5 council members attending, perhaps timed in the mornings before Council. Council AGREED to the proposed virtual meetings with staff.

RH/CM

Report of Elections Committee (verbal)

President designate: MD said he had been in contact with two female academics in regards to standing for President designate.

Elections: MD noted that eight Council members were due to leave in 2021. Alex Whittaker (AW) had agreed to stay on for another year to allow time to identify the next Secretary of Science Committee and to continue to support current work around the new Science Strategy. Keith Myers (KM) is a starred candidate for Treasurer.

MD said it would be ideal to have a strong pool of candidates to stand and asked Council to encourage candidates through use of their networks. MD also recommended a greater use of social media to reach a wider pool of candidates representative of its 11,000+ Fellows, including more academic representation.

Joel Gill (JGi), Jessica Smith (JS) and AW agreed to contribute video clips for GSL social media talking about their own experiences of being on Council and the benefits CM and SJ to follow up.

CM/SJ

Honorary Fellows (CM/56/20)

Council AGREED the nomination of Kathryn O’Sullivan. RH to contact with nominee and if she accepts, an item will be published in Geoscientist. Council said it would be wonderful if she was able to contribute in some way like a Virtual Talk of her Life Experience to the 2021 “Year of Space”.

RH

6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

Executive Secretary’s report (CM/57/20)

Richard Hughes (RH) said that critical business items underway were the library review and the lease.

Burlington House lease matters (confidential to Council)

Director of Finance & Operations (CM/58/20)

Fellowship: Subscription matters

He (Alex McPherson – AMc) said the final drop in membership had been just over 300 members. MD said that it had provided a positive connection with Fellows and would provide a platform for subsequent growth. He said that moving forward, the option for deferments but with reduced benefits could be a beneficial route to explore if it could be in keeping with the Society’s bye-laws. RH was asked to consider this as a part of the Membership Review.

IT: AMc noted:

- Migration of records to a cloud shared point solution early October.
- The change to a VOIP telephony system in October with an expected 50% reduction in current costs.
- CRM: a consultant’s review had recommended the least risky route was to re-engage with Felinesoft in order to rectify outstanding issues. AMc said

discussions with Felinesoft were underway to this end. He said there could be an agreement to share costs to fix issues with system if GSL is shown to have been at fault. Keith Myers (KM) said that the Society is spending more on its CRM than a commercial organisation would pay and questioned whether there could be an off-the-shelf rather than a bespoke solution available.

Management Accounts: AMc said the year-end forecast had improved since the start of the pandemic. He noted the investment portfolio dip in March had recovered and was showing a £176k gain.

Director of Science and Communications CM/59/20 and CM/60/20

AN noted that due to unexpected workloads on the authors the climate statement would now be completed by end of September. After this a role out of the statement would be planned including a virtual event of some form.

Mark Anderson had stepped in as Chair, of the Accreditation Review after Nick Rogers stepped down. Terms of reference for the review were included in Council's papers.

Request for GSL to take on education projects (CM/60/20)

AN said GSL had been approached to see if it was able to take over the earth sciences teaching programme offered previously by the Building Earth Science Education Resilience Project. AN explained that the Society's Head of Development, Jenny Boland, has assessed the proposal and had identified ways to make it a more attractive proposition to potential sponsors. Chris King (CK) outlined the evidence which showed the training of Geology teachers was critical to ensure future geology students, noting that this was also part of tomorrow's strategic discussion.

Kathryn Goodenough (KG) agreed that the teaching of geoscience in schools was important but that supporting this project was unaffordable at this time. Support from Regional and/or Specialist groups was also discussed but it was felt they might not have the capacity.

Joel Gill (JGi) said GSL had a responsibility to invest in education as part of its social licence. He said that further work was required to fully understand the costs implications and feasibility at a time of reducing staff capacity. Keith Myers (KM) said he supported resources being put into education initiatives. Graham Goffey (GG) said if GSL was to fund further education initiatives then it would have to look at what other activities could be cut.

Michael Kehinde (MK) and BM proposed a business case approach was needed should be put forward with the benefits (the long term impact), costs and risks to make a decision to look at the preferred option. MD agreed a more considered, big picture approach was needed.

Gemma Sherwood (GS) asked if it would be possible to fund through the awards/grants. RH said the awards were funded mostly through 'designated funds' so options were limited.

RH said the number of staff in the Education Team had fallen and that posts were not being re-filled. Staff capacity was therefore also a factor as well as affordability. AN proposed she and Jenny meet with CK and BESER to discuss options and bring a proposal back to Council. Council AGREED AN's proposal.

AN

Director of Publishing (CM/61/20)

Maggie Simmons (MS) said the Burlington House library was now open to Fellows every Thursday by pre-appointment and a maximum of four Fellows. She said all slots were fully booked up until October.

She explained that the GSL had taken an important step in the transition to open access through a transformative agreement with JISC. A contract has been agreed with Frontiers to provide the publishing platform for launching Earth Science, Systems and Society (ES3) on 13 August. The process for recruiting a Chief Editor was active.

MS noted that as most major conferences would be virtual this year, it could be harder to attract new authors. Any Council members attending the GSA or AGU annual meetings were invited to look at GSL's virtual exhibitions.

7. REMOVAL OF FELLOWS FOR NON-PAYMENT OF THE 2020 SUBSCRIPTIONS (CM/62/20)

Subscriptions matters

Council AGREED those wishing to continue with their membership should be allowed to continue as "dormant" and defer payment due to the current extenuating circumstances.

Jessica Smith (JS) said that in the context of 'dormant' fellows it was important to establish if Chartered Geologists would continue practising. If so, they would need to continue to meet their CPD requirements. JGr agreed but clarified there was a reduced CPD requirement for retired or unemployed Chartered Geologists.

AMc

8. GEOSCIENTIST (CM/63/20)

Amy Whitchurch (AW), Geoscientist editor, joined the meeting. She said her draft paper proposed to overhaul 'Geoscientist' for three key reasons:

- To modernise and achieve more interaction with its audience.
- To substantially reduce production and postal costs.
- To be more sustainable and reduce the magazine's carbon footprint.

AW said that the revamp could include supplementary video/podcasts content made available via a digital, online version. She added that further cost reductions would be made through volunteer contributors. In addition, AW proposed fewer editions would be published each year, proposing either three, four or six.

Maggie Simmons (MS) expressed her support of the proposal adding that it tied in perfectly with the general direction of the Society. Gemma Sherwood (GS) said the app proposal was an exciting option allowing regular items to be drip fed whilst also potential being a source of income with advertising and/or job adverts. RH said costing for an app would need to be reviewed.

LW said that there could be a drop in readership if was not available in hardcopy and added that less publications but with more content may be less palatable. Joel Gill (JGi) said volunteer recruitment and relationship management would need staff input and could be an issue with staff capacity. GG said a choice should be given to Fellows and said many would choose digital for sustainability reasons.

Council APPROVED changing the publication frequency of Geoscientist with the final number being no fewer than quarterly. Council also APPROVED developing Geoscientist Online into a digital resource and offering Fellows an opt out of receiving a hard copy.

9. ENERGY GEOSCIENCE CONFERENCE 2023 (CM/64/20)

GG spoke to the proposal for a new Energy Geoscience Conference (EGC) series to launch 2023 and be jointly run with PESGB. Helen Smyth (HS) and KM queried other partners, but GG said in this area PESGB were the strongest option in this area.

KG queried if given the current situation was a good time to launch a new conference series that was not established. MD also question the economic climate and the long-term impact on petroleum companies.

JGi asked if an EGC event would directly compete with GSL event programme currently under development. AN said not and that the conference could be one of GSL's two annual flagship events. GG said the Energy Group was enthusiastic about the proposal.

There was a discussion around the content of the conference. The importance of having a keynote speaker as a co-convenor was noted. LW said this kind of meeting was exactly what the GSL should be doing but expressed concerns that 2023 was too far away and that it could lose out to other bigger organisations re leading in energy transition. GG explained that the minimum lead time for this type of conference was 18 months, and also that hosting conferences in Aberdeen would reduce venue costs. LW agreed it was a key location with its City Council working to become carbon neutral and the venue was already carbon neutral.

Council EXPRESSED its reservations of a conventional conference of this nature with the PESGB, being planned far ahead in the current climate of uncertainty. They AGREED to move forward with minimum financial exposure and requested to be kept updated regarding any emerging risks and PESGB's sustainability.

10. 2021 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET(CM/65/20)

10.1 BUSINESS PLAN

RH explained that a full 2021 business plan would be brought to Council in November following Council's discussion of the Strategic Options project.

10.2 DRAFT BUDGET 2021

AMc said that the draft 2021 budget showed a £200k deficit and that the aim was to create a final budget with a £40-50k surplus for review at the FPC. AMc noted that anticipated fellowship income would decrease in the next reiteration as numbers were expected to drop by 15%.

GG said the organisation would need to run a non-deficit budget next year. He said work was already been done to reduce staffing costs but said additional cost cutting would be needed which would stretch the organisation and its resources. He proposed a carefully messaged campaign going into the renewals period to help garner support for the Society and encourage everyone to renew.

11. RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT POLICY (CM/66/20)

GG said the policy had being developed by a Council working group and reviewed by the FPC and other Committees on various occasions. He said there had been further amendments to align with the Paris Accord and also address the Society's relationship with the petroleum and other extractive industries. The current version had been approved by the working group for referral to Council.

BN said this was good platform to address our relationship with industries. However, he was unsure if "working towards" was the appropriate term in section A. He added

that the focus in the policy seemed to be on decarbonisation but did not look at other environmental stewardship. MD asked BN and GG to discuss any minor final amendments following the Council meeting.

GG/BN

Council PRE-APPROVED policy on the basis that any outstanding concerns of BN were addressed.

12. RISK REGISTER (CM/67/20)

AMc noted four areas of increased risk shown in a heat map: ICT disruption, subscription renewals, the Society's Strategy and perceived longer-term relevance and the lease situation. He also said the Brexit risk had previously been reduced but would need to be re-evaluated.

AMc

13. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES (CM/68/20)

Reports were noted. Jim Griffiths (JGr) noted that the virtual interviews with Chartered Geologist applicants had proved popular with the candidates and scrutineers and also created cost savings. JGr noted a move to electronic certificates although a hardcopy would remain available if requested.

14. ELECTIONS

14.1 *Fellowship (CM/70/20)*

Council AGREED to recommend to the Fellowship that those candidates listed should be elected as Fellows at the Ordinary General Meeting on 8 September 2020.

14.2 *Chartered Geologists (CM/71/20)*

The applications from Fellows listed to become Chartered Geologists had been approved by the Chartership Panel and were AGREED by Council including one PRE-APPROVAL should the candidate be approved by the Chartership Panel.

14.3 *Candidate and Junior Candidate Fellowship (CM/72/20)*

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

14.4 *European Geologist (CM/73/20)*

Council APPROVED those applicants listed as European Geologists.

14.5 *Chartered Scientist (CM/74/20)*

Council APPROVED the applicant listed as Chartered Scientist

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

MD proposed Council offering a mentoring session to early career Fellows as part of its outreach. John Booth (JB) said that many already do this as part of their Chartership CPD requirements but it would be good to formalise Council's offer. Helen Smythe (HS) said to be careful not to define it as mentorship but rather an offer of an informal conversation. Council members expressed their willingness to offer informational interviews for those early in their career. JA said it was a great way to connect with younger career Fellows.

Council AGREED and MD said he would move forward.

MD/AN

Council thanked Stephanie Jones for her contribution to the Society for over 12 years and wished her well in her retirement.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

25 November 2020 – virtual

There will be a business meeting during the afternoon of 25 November, with an Ordinary General Meeting following.