

The Geological Society of London

COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual meeting held on 17 June 2020 – Burlington House closed during the coronavirus pandemic shutdown

PRESENT: Mike Daly (*Chair*), Jo Alexander, Tom Backhouse, Andrew Bloodworth, John Booth (*Vice President*), Jennie Gilbert, Joel Gill (*Secretary, External and Foreign Affairs*), Graham Goffey (*Treasurer*), Kathryn Goodenough, Jim Griffiths (*Secretary, Professional Matters*), Michael Kehinde, Chris King, Andrew Moore, Keith Myers (*co-opted Treasurer-designate*), 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: Bryne Ngwenya

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

Mike Daly welcomed the new members of Council: Jo Alexander, Jennie Gilbert, Michael Kehinde, John Perry and Lucy Williams + Keith Myers (co-optee)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies from Bryne Ngwenya were NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8 APRIL 2020

The minutes were APPROVED. A version of the minutes will be published on the website, with an explanation if items have been removed or reduced.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Richard Hughes (RH) said that all matters are discharged or covered elsewhere in today's papers.

5. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

5.1 *Standing List under Regulations R/FP/5 and R/FP/6 (CM/33/20)*

Under Regulation R/FP/5 (Appeals Procedures) and R/FP/6 (Disciplinary Procedures) Council is obliged to maintain "a *Standing List of at least 25 experienced and longstanding Fellows who are not members of Council and who are able to act on Panels established under these Procedures. At least two thirds of the List shall be Chartered Geologists or Chartered Scientists. Fellows may resign from the List at any time, and Council may appoint replacements at any time. The names on the List will not be available to Fellows.*" Matters dealt with under these Regulations include appeals relating to non-election as a Fellow, non-validation of a Fellow as a Chartered Geologist, investigation and resolution of complaints brought by five or more Fellows for removal of a Fellow on grounds of significant misinformation relating to application for Fellowship or validation as a Chartered Geologist, and complaints against the code of conduct.

Council AGREED the membership of the Standing List.

5.2 *Report of Officers Meeting held on 16 June*

Mike Daly (MD) said Officers discussed mainly staff related matters, including the impacts of Covid-19 and furloughing. With regard to the latter, the Society will continue to take full advantage of the support provided by the Government and will bring staff back on an as needed basis. This policy will be communicated to staff. Both offices have been closed since mid March which is reviewed monthly with the current period of closure ending this month. Officers agreed with RH's recommendation to look to re-open at the beginning of September and this will be reviewed at the beginning of August. Other matters discussed were the CRM project and Health & Safety, the latter of which has received a great deal of attention during the first half of 2020. The overhauled manual was approved subject to a few comments

6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

6.1 *Executive Secretary (CM/34/20)*

Richard Hughes (RH) said the impacts of Covid-19 exacerbated an already challenging overall financial position. This was discussed at the recent meeting of the Finance & Planning committee together with the approach to next year's budget planning process. The budget will need to identify at least £0.5m savings on this year's budget. It is inevitable that we will need to reduce headcount and bearing in mind that some teams are small Council may need to discuss stopping some activities in which the Society has been involved for some years.

Council is due to have early sight of the recommendations of the Library Review in September with a decision document coming to November Council. Neal Marriott, who is leading the review, was due to give a presentation today but other matters took priority. Neal is willing to give a separate presentation to any Council members who wish to see. RH said there are a number of urgent Council matters which have been removed from successive agendas. There are normally five Council meetings a year and RH proposed that there is an extra meeting in August to deal with the backlog. Council AGREED [subsequently confirmed for 19 August].

RH presented progress against the 2020 Business Plan. The document was a summary and a more detailed plan is available on request. Joel Gill (JG) asked about delays to projects regarding compliance with the Modern Slavery Act and DEI commitments. RH said there are some delays because of furloughing but that does not necessarily mean they will not be completed this year.

6.2 *Director of Finance & Operations (CM/35/20)*

Alex McPherson (AMc) presented the following items from his report:-

The sign off of the statutory accounts for the Society and Geological Trading Limited for 2019 was delayed pending clarification of the requirements of the Financial Reporting Council. Our auditors, RSM, have received that clarification and work has commenced on providing a 12 month operational and cash flow statement.

The Fellowship renewal status as at 8 June was 11,335 (11,952 2019). A chase-up campaign is ongoing with evidence emerging of many Fellows not renewing in the current uncertainty with Covid-19. Flexibility is offered where appropriate.

The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system project started in 2017 to replace an unsupported platform. The project has not gone well. Consequently, not all parts are operating satisfactorily and the relationship with the contractor has deteriorated. It is intended to migrate to a new support partner but this plan has been complicated by lockdown and also by the acquisition of the original contractor by the parent company of the preferred new partner. Work continues on moving away and getting the system operating more efficiently.

April management accounts - AMc said the Society enjoys strong income at the beginning of the year and increased expenditure later in the year so at this time of year he looks at the forecast. Specific to April, operationally is about £400k worse than budget. The budgeted surplus for the year was around £220k but the current forecast suggests a deficit of about £180k and taking depreciation into account this deteriorates to a deficit in excess of £600k at the end of the year. A large amount of the deficit is because of the lack of conference and event income caused by the Covid-19 closure.

6.3 *Director of Publishing (CM/36/20)*

Maggie Simmons (MS) said that there is a reduced service to Fellows during the closure. Fabienne Michaud, Head of Library & Information Services, visited Burlington House last week to despatch some postal loans.

The Publishing House is operating in difficult conditions but there have been plenty of editorial successes including the first transfer article for the GSW community open access journal, *Lithosphere*.

The Marketing Team is working very hard on subscriptions and she was delighted to report that the University of Cambridge has subscribed to the Lyell Collection for the first time. There are now nine archive deals across North America and France.

MS was also pleased to report that the Warehouse will re-open on 23 June to clear the backlog and get new titles moving.

Michael Kehinde (MK) asked about the move to online journals and whether consideration was given to print on demand. MS said the move away from print journals was approved at the last Council meeting and there are a number of benefits including those to authors. Print on demand was considered but it is not viable and environmental considerations were also factored into the decision.

6.4 *Director of Science & Communications (CM/37/20)*

Alicia Newton (AN) said the virtual summit on 10 June on *The Future of Geosciences* which Tom Backhouse (TB) planned was a great success with over 1k registrations. There is a summit on 24 June with a host of representatives from the wider Earth science community to identify and address the issues effecting the student pipeline in the UK. The SEG joint conference will now take place in 2023. AN said that material is being produced for virtual conferences such as guidance and delegate fees.

6.4(i) *Proposal to become a signatory to the COPDESS Fair Data Statement of Commitment (CM/38/20)*

In March 2015, the Publications & Information Committee agreed for the GSL Publishing House to be a signatory to Coalition for Publishing Data in the Earth and Space Sciences (COPDESS) Statement of Commitment. The initial statement has since grown into the Enabling FAIR Data Project, which has developed a framework to encourage publishers, authors, and data repositories to ensure that data is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable. This work led to the development of an Enabling FAIR Data Commitment Statement which affects publishing policies, but also has more general requirements for adhering societies. Specifically, the statement requires that: "Societies, communities, and institutions will strive to:

- Support and promulgate open and FAIR data principles and practices in their core Earth, space, and environmental science activities and policies.
- Participate in further development of open and FAIR data practices.
- Engage in the development of community standards, infrastructure, tools and services to enable open and FAIR data practices.
- Provide regular education and outreach to their communities regarding these principles and practices.
- Promote open and FAIR data activities as important criteria in promotion, awards, and honors.

- Provide other credit and recognition for researchers that are following open and FAIR data practices and encourage others to include such recognition as part of regular career advancement.”

It is envisaged that the Society will take a light touch to these commitments and AN gave examples.

In June 2019 Council agreed in principle to become signatories subject to approval by relevant committees. The Science, External Relations, Professional, Publications & Information and Awards committees have approved signing.

Council APPROVED becoming a signatory to the COPDESS FAIR Data Statement of Commitment.

6.4(ii) *GSL Commitment to Diversity, Equality & Inclusion (CM/39/20)*

AN reminded Council that the Society has a statement on Diversity in the Geosciences and is also a signatory to the Science Council's Declaration on Diversity, Equality & Inclusion. An audit was done of visible material, such as portraits, and high profile collections to identify known problematic individuals and to produce some messaging around those items.

Council members were asked to volunteer for the position of Diversity Champion to replace Lesley Dunlop who stood down in June and to contact AN or George Jameson.

7. CODE OF CONDUCT (CM/40/20)

RH said that in late January 2020 the Society received a complaint alleging breaches of the Code of Conduct. An investigation panel was convened which after due consideration concluded there was no case to answer. The panel's conclusion was based on the finding that the evidence identifying the author was largely circumstantial and could be open to challenge. The complainant was duly informed.

Irrespective of the panel's decision, the investigation highlighted a limitation of the Society's current Code of Conduct. The matter was raised at the Professional Committee meeting on 25 March. The committee acknowledged the potential for reputational damage, but recognised there is a sensitive balance to achieve which should not impinge upon the rights of Fellows to free speech. Nevertheless, an increasing number of organisations have in place policies setting out standards of acceptable behaviour for their employees and members in personal communications such as social media. The recently retired VP Chartership (John Talbot) was asked to investigate further.

In line with best practice in the Codes of Conduct of similar societies and following consultation with the Professional Committee, a revised Code of Conduct was developed which makes clear that the standards of conduct expected of Fellows apply to activities undertaken in both professional **and** personal capacities. The opportunity was taken to update with the newly named Professional & Chartership Committee. Council APPROVED the amended Regulation and Code of Conduct.

8. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH THE JEREMY INGHAM FUND (CM/41/20)

Jenny Boland, Head of Development, joined the meeting.

RH reported to Council in April that Jeremy Ingham, a long standing Fellow, approached the Society to set up a research grant fund as *The Jeremy Ingham Fund*. Following discussions with Mr Ingham the purpose of the fund has been agreed *'to provide grants for the encouragement of research into engineering geology with preference being given to the study of construction materials and/or research incorporating the use of petrological techniques'* The paper outlined the basis on

which Mr Ingham intends to make funds available annually with the first grants expected to be distributed in 2021. The grants will be decided by the Society's Research Grants Committee with Mr Ingham taking no part in the decision. John Perry asked for an engineering geologist to be involved in this process.

Council APPROVED the establishment, name and purpose of the fund; however, there was concern about the narrowness of the description for which there may not be many applications, a potential cause of disappointment to Mr Ingham. The word '*including*' instead of '*preference*' was suggested. Jenny Boland was asked to go back to Mr Ingham with feedback about the description.

8. **PROPOSAL FOR GSL FULLY OA JOURNAL PROPOSAL – *COMMERCIALY SENSITIVE (CM/42/20)***

9. REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES (CM/43/20)

Council NOTED the reports of the standing committees.

10 ELECTIONS

10.1 *Fellowship (CM/44/20)*

Council AGREED to recommend to the Fellowship that those candidates listed should be elected as Fellows at the Ordinary General Meeting on 17 June 2020.

10.2 *Chartered Geologists (CM/45/20)*

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

10.3 *Candidate and Junior Candidate Fellowship (CM/46/20)*

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

10.4 *European Geologist (CM/47/20)*

Council APPROVED those applicants listed as European Geologists.

10.5 *Chartered Scientist (CM/48/20)*

Council APPROVED those applicants listed as Chartered Scientist

11. REMOVAL OF FELLOWS FOR NON-PAYMENT OF THE 2020 SUBSCRIPTIONS (CM/49/20)

Annual subscriptions are payable on 1 November in respect of the following calendar year and bye-law 4.5 requires that Council removes from the Society those Fellows who have not paid their subscriptions by 30 June. Council was presented with 1282 names for removal if they have not paid by 30 June, 82 of whom have Chartered status.

MD said he did not wish to strike off these names yet, bearing in mind the prevailing circumstances of Covid-19. Whilst recognising that membership cannot be given for no payment, Council AGREED not to remove the names at the end of June but to allow a further three months for those in arrears to pay their subscriptions. A revised list will come back to September Council.

12. DEFINING STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY (CM/50/20)

Megan O'Donnell (MO'D), Policy Officer and GSL Project Leader, and Dan Cole, McKinsey & Company, joined the meeting.

RH said that in February 2020 Council approved a proposal from MD, then President-

designate, to proceed with a short-term study into strategic options for the Society. The project benefited with *pro bono* support from McKinsey & Company.

MO'D is leading the project with support from other staff, Fellows, Trustees, past Presidents and participants from academe, industry and government backgrounds. Joel Gill is joining the group.

MO'D presented a progress update against the following headings:-

- Overview of the project
- Challenges facing the Geological Society today
- Emerging themes and the resulting options and choices
- Operating model improvements
- Emerging options and recommendations
- Next steps

There will be further development of a number of more detailed strategic options for Council to discuss in September. GG said the Society is facing a challenging financial situation and this will mean that there will be some difficult decision needed.

MO'D will circulate the slide pack to Council who were asked to give feedback.

Megan O'Donnell and Dan Cole were thanked for their work.

13. OVERVIEW OF THE SCIENCE PROGRAMME TO 2022 (CM/51/20)

AN said Council approved the Society's science strategy in 2014. Its stated objectives are very broad and cover most aspects of the Society's work:

- To promote geoscience as an observational, analytical, experimental, computational, interpretative and predictive science,
- To advance understanding of the geosphere, and its interaction with other parts of the Earth system (hydrosphere, cryosphere, atmosphere and biosphere),
- To facilitate communication of advances in geoscientific knowledge among professional geoscientists in academia, industry and government, through meetings, publications and library and information services,
- To communicate our science to non-geoscientists, including parliamentarians and government officials, the media, teachers and students at all levels of education, and interested members of the public, and
- To highlight the value of geoscience to society, in generating economic prosperity, delivering resources, safeguarding the environment and helping to address policy challenges; to make the case for public and private investment to sustain high-quality geoscience research, education and training in the UK; and to argue for the implementation of public policies to stimulate these activities.

One of the major outcomes from the 2014 strategy was the Themed science years with themes chosen to reflect key societal challenges:

2016 – Year of Water
2017 – Year of Risk
2018 – Year of Resources
2019 – Year of Carbon

2020 – Year of Life
2021 – Year of Space
2022 – Year of Sustainability

There are some very positive outcomes to the Themed years such as bringing together Specialist Groups (SGs) to organise conferences, focusing our outreach efforts and informing publications, but, as outcomes of the Strategic Options Project emerge, it is timely to review whether to continue with them after 2022.

AN said that conferences generally come through proposals to the Science committee and proposers do not have to be Fellows. The Science Committee also solicits proposals. Free venue hire is offered to SGs. There is a mixed amount of interaction with the SGs with the exception of the Petroleum Group which is fully integrated into Society operations.

AN outlined the focus of the Flagship meetings and other events run by the Society. The Society has held some very successful meetings such as the Plate Tectonics in 2017 and the Bryan Lovell meeting in 2019 which brought together industry and academics in a way in which few other organisations can do equally well.

AN presented the conference calendar for all meetings to 2023. Only one or two SGs are represented which is not because they are not active but because of poor ties with the Society and a lack of knowledge of how best to support them with their meetings. There is a decent number of meetings in 2021. 2022 is currently a bit thin with some meetings waiting for sign off and others in the development stage. In 2023 there is the joint SEG meeting.

There are three categories of SGs: Constituted, Affiliated and Joint Associations. All SGs report to the Science Committee through a representative. Some of our best conferences have been collaborative with the SGs and AN is looking to improve communications and how the Society can best support them.

There are new opportunities such as an all virtual conference in November which will reach a much wider audience. There are also a number of challenges such as accessibility to Burlington House, lack of 'landmark' events and a crowded workshop calendar.

AN presented two options towards a delivery plan and welcomed Council input:

- Option 1: leave conference strategy as it is, ramp up by soliciting more proposals and better engaging Science Committee members, offer better defined benefits to SGs; and
- Option 2: fewer, larger GSL meetings (2-3 a year), focused themes that bring industry and academe together and cut across SGs; better support SGs to deliver target meetings to their community; virtual meetings to delivery smaller cross-SG meetings.

Helen Smyth said that 2021 will be very crowded and suggested that meetings are held in 2020, particularly those that will not bring in high revenue.

AW said a key challenge is thinking that Covid-19 will be over in 2021 and that conferences will return to normal. There will be a lot more virtual conferences and the Society needs to be in a position to offer hybrid conferences with in person and virtual attendance offered.

GG said there has been tendency to err towards too short lead times whereas it takes a long time to put together and promote an event. Webinars can be turned round quickly and we need to understand what works best virtually and physically.

TB said there were lessons to learn from *The Future of Geosciences* event, such as

diversity of the panel, but it exposed opportunities that we can move relatively quickly by working in a collaborative way and can reach out to find out what events people want to hold. It is likely that a large number of attendees were not Fellows and the opportunity was missed to monetise by promoting membership and converting them to Fellows or by making a small charge. AN said there will be a follow up email to all those who registered with a special offer on Fellowship

MD thanked AN for her presentation. He said there are clearly some challenges and suggested that the Science Committee is pushed to make a decision about what will happen after 2022 and the Year of Sustainability. AW agreed and said this decision is needed sooner rather than later. There are interesting data coming out of the Strategic Options Project and he has a session organised with MO'D.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Stephanie Jones is retiring after 12 years with the Society and will be greatly missed. Mike Daly thanked her for her exemplary service and wished her well.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8 and 9 September 2020 - virtual