

MINUTES OF THE 2010 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY FOR EXPERIMENTAL BIOLOGY

The Annual General Meeting of the members of the above-named organisation was held at Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London, WC1N 2JU, on Tuesday 20th April 2010 at 2pm.

Present: Pat Heslop-Harrison, Christine Raines, Mike Burrell, Martin Watson, Gudrun De Boeck, David Evans, Holly Shiels, Peter Lumsden, Alison Kingston-Smith, Lewis Halsey, Patrick Hussey, Lynne Sneddon, Mike Roberts, Paul Devlin, Keith Lindsey, John Love, Jenny Sneddon, Adam Benham, Jeune Pierre Verbelen.

In Attendance: Sabina Baba, Mary Traynor, Sarah Blackford, Chris Trimmer, Heather Budd, Eleanor Carr, Talja Dempster.

1. Reports from Honorary Officers

Reports were given to the members attending the AGM as given below.

a. Report from the President

2009/10 has seen many important developments in experimental biology. Based on the broad nature and lack of boundaries implicit in Experimental Biology, I feel we have clearly promoted and seen the increase the influence of Experimental Biology during the year of this report as well as taking on an increasing role in the development of life sciences internationally. The fast development of Experimental Biology has been highlighted better than ever before in our Annual Meeting in 2009 in Glasgow, and during our expanded programme of Symposia. Our Journals have reached new heights in their impact, and the first volume of a new book series, "Essential Reviews in Experimental Biology" was published. The place of experimental biology and science in general has been a leading item in the news of the day in a way that has never before been seen – whether in animal diseases and their spread, climate change, biofuels, agriculture and food supply, or biomedicine – and SEB has been giving input to many consultations about these, as well as to those on research assessment and education policies.

A major development for the Society was the movement of our main office from Southampton to a large building at 12 Roger Street in central London, named Charles Darwin House. We purchased, refurbished (to high environmental standards of BREEAM Excellent) and now share this with the Biochemical Society and the British Ecological Society. The ground floor is dedicated to flexible meeting rooms, including poster and break-out space, which now enable the Society to hold meetings for groups of between 5 to 150 at a location which is easily accessible from the whole world. The addition of our own conference suite will significantly benefit members attending Symposia and focused meetings held in Charles Darwin House by reducing

registration fees. The move is increasing our impact and work with other learned societies, and we have better links than ever with organizations which represent biology and science more widely – the Society of Biology (formed from the merger of the Institute of Biology and BioSciences Federation), CaSE (Campaign for Science and Engineering) and EPSO (European Plant Science Organization) are particular groups where we have worked with and supported their work on science policy and funding.

On the financial front, the SEB has been cautious given the extreme uncertainty of the impact on the society of the ongoing global financial changes. Our share portfolio has weathered the storm, thanks to the careful stewardship of the Investment Officer Len Evans. The costs of the building purchase, refurbishment and move have been substantial, but already it is clear that the new property has proved to be an excellent investment, and once the floors are let, we should be able to cover most of the extra costs of operating from London. After careful consideration we have retained the Southampton Property, and we will continue to monitor its value to the Society as part of our portfolio of investments. Whilst our investments are healthy, we do need greater reserves to underpin our current publishing and conference activities before we can initiate new plans, and our financial strategy aims to facilitate this.

Our conferences and symposia have been enthusiastically received by all those who attended. The exciting and now rather unusual format, with many early-career researchers presenting talks, and an emphasis on networking and discussions, is working well. The Society continues to subsidise our high-quality scientific meetings by over £100,000 each year, with a strategy to increase delegate participation and the impact of the science presented as well as to maintain an ideal environment for collaborative discussions. We continue to look for good-value venues that offer the best possible conference environment. The Education and Public Affairs Section of the society has continued to build its strength: public understanding events have been well-supported, and our Career development programmes and workshops have been particularly well-received during the year.

The Council was delighted to award Professor John Bryant Honorary Membership of the Society. This was in recognition of his contribution to the promotion of experimental biology over many years, with a particular impact on public understanding in the last decade where we are all grateful for his efforts on our behalf. John is also a past-President of the Society, and has been active over many years in the leadership of the Cell, Plant and the EPA sections. We also mark with regret the retirement of Professor Len Evans, lately our Company Secretary and Investments Officer. Under his careful management and prudent stewardship, our investments have grown markedly, enabling considerable expansion of our activities, and it is a great pleasure for me to thank him for these and his other substantial contributions to the Society.

Our accomplishments over the year have only been possible with the dedication and support of all the Council members, Section Committee members, those involved

with SEB publications and delivery of our activities, and the administrative team of the Society. The governance reforms put in place by our previous President, Ian Johnston, have allowed Council to make well-informed, timely and important strategic decisions, and I think are allowing the society to meet the challenges we face as experimental biologists. I am particularly grateful to the three Independent members of Council who have been so insightful and helpful in our development, and to the staff of the Society who have so ably enabled us to move the SEB forward in our mission to promote and increase the influence of Experimental Biology.

b. Report from the Honorary Treasurer including presentation of the annual audited accounts and reports for the financial year ended 31st August 2009 and approval of auditors

The accounts for the financial year ending 31st August 2009 were presented to the members. The auditors (Tudor John) were approved.

Report from Honorary Treasurer

The last financial year was an important one for the Society. With total funds of £1,846,598 (2008: £1,673,159) we continue with a strong financial position, well equipped to face the coming year.

We are now joint owners of Charles Darwin House and we moved into the new premises in December 2009 after a six-month refurbishment of the building. As hoped, the Society is now playing a pivotal role at the heart of an influential hub of non-medical biological learned Societies and are well placed to advance the cause of experimental biology.

This strategic development has not come without its financial commitments, which are spread across two financial years. In 2008 – 2009 we paid for the building and the project managers (with our tangible assets increasing from £327,622 to £662,885) and in 2009 – 2010 we will pay the fee for the refurbishment. Consequently our investments have decreased from £766,901 (2008) to £700,051 (2009) and our cash has decreased from £741,393 (2008) to £486,744 (2009).

Our major source of income in recent years has been from the Journal of Experimental Botany and The Plant Journal. Our journals continue to perform well and this is in no small part due to their excellent editorial teams. Both of these have had another good year and are generating revenue for the Society averaging in the region of £250,000.

Our membership is on the increase which is excellent news. This is directly influenced by the launch of the new strategic membership plan and a large amount of dedication from the Finance and Membership Manager, Heather Budd. Subscriptions increased to £42,800 (2008: £27,664).

The Annual main Meeting in Glasgow attracted 674 delegates with 396 (400 in 2008) oral contributions and 192 (161 in 2008) poster presentations. The Society supported this meeting by £61,957 (£130,000 in 2008) enabling scientists to attend

topical and cutting edge talks as well as network with the scientific community that attended the meeting. The Symposia continue to be successful meetings and are a valued addition to the Society's portfolio of meetings.

We continued to provide a full and varied education and public affairs programme which included the promotion of public engagement in science, outreach activities to schools and universities together with information on teaching and learning resources.

With the retirement of our Investments Officer, Prof Len Evans, we have taken on a firm of asset managers, Brooks Macdonald, after a rigorous tender process. The share portfolio of the Society is now in their capable hands and we hope to outperform the market over the coming years. Brooks MacDonald will report directly to Council (as the Investments Committee has been disbanded) every six months on the performance of our portfolio. Council has set a financial strategy which sets us the target of increasing our reserves in order to underpin the additional investment required in Charles Darwin House whilst continuing to fund our charitable activities to their established levels.

With our investment in our new Headquarters and our continuing commitment to the Main Meeting, two Symposia per year, the education and public affairs activities of the Society plus the new publishing project of the hybrid journal series, Essentials in Experimental Biology, and our excellent journals, as well as the continuing uncertainty with the economic climate and how that will affect science globally we are continuing to be prudent as an organisation and to focus on meeting our key objectives.

As ever there are thanks due to numerous people: Pat Heslop-Harrison (President), Keith Lindsey (Vice-President), the dedicated Section Secretaries, Gudrun de Boeck (Elected member of Council) and the three Independent Members of Council, Geoff Randall, Geraldine Schofield and Alun Anderson, and lastly Len Evans (Secretary and Investment Officer) who are valued colleagues. Additional thanks go to the SEB Team that makes everything happen.

c. Report from the Honorary Publications Officer

In case you have not looked at the website recently, we have a new publication; ***'Essential Reviews in Experimental Biology Vol 1: Osmoregulation and ion transport: integrating physiological, molecular and environmental aspects'***. Hopefully, at £35.00, it is competitively priced and many of you will wish to buy it either in paper or electronic format. We have been fortunate to be able to employ Ellie Carr to get this series off the ground. The good news is that she does an excellent job. The bad news is that she will be chasing you for comments, ideas, refereeing etc. If you have any suggestions for new titles please get a pro-forma from Ellie and then we can try and see how to make your suggestions a viable proposition.

Our journals have continued to progress well. For those of you who like impact factors, then the journals are doing well. Personally, I wish I could find the time to read all the excellent papers that they contain. Christoph Benning has taken over from Harry Klee as editor in chief of The Plant Journal. Harry did an excellent job and it is sad to lose him. We have every confidence that Christoph will continue to move the journal forward and has an excellent editorial board to support him. Financially, The Plant Journal has performed extremely well, providing much needed funds to support meetings and the move to the new premises in London. The financial strength of the journal now means we can offer SEB members free colour in the journal. We have a lot of members who publish in the journal and hopefully you will find this a worthwhile membership benefit.

Plant Biotechnology Journal has continued to be well steered by Keith Edwards, with good paper flow, good papers and now in profit for its second year.

Journal of Experimental Botany has also continued to develop. It provides much needed funds to support the society. The majority of its papers are now open access but fortunately the subscription base has stayed fairly steady which provides us with some financial security.

Altogether then, we have had a good year but there is no room for complacency. The scientific world is still struggling and publishing and printing models are continually changing, so we must keep our eyes open and try to keep stepping in the right direction.

I would like to thank our editors in chief, Christoph Benning, Keith Edwards and Jerry Roberts, together with their editorial boards and ably supported by their editorial offices, for keeping our journals moving forward. I must also thank the SEB office who have provided their usual high quality service despite moving from Southampton to London. In particular I would thank Ellie Carr who has picked up the Essentials series with very little help from me and is managing the whole production and marketing process so efficiently.

d. Report from the Honorary Animal Section Chair

The Honorary Animal Section Chair, Craig Franklin was unable to attend the Annual General meeting due to travel difficulties and was therefore unable to give his report in person.

Report from Animal Section Chair

2009 saw considerable change within the Animal Section. After making a substantial contribution to the SEB as Chair of the Animal Section, Tobias Wang decided to stand down in July 2009. Tobias will however continue to play an active role within the

Society in between juggling the joys and competing demands of fatherhood. I have been fortunate to take over from Tobias at a time when the Animal Section is gathering more and more momentum – due in no small part to Tobias' infectious enthusiasm for experimental biology and his strong commitment to the SEB. Over the coming years I look forward to moving forward the new initiatives instigated by Tobias.

This past year saw two new groups being formed within the Animal Section as well as a number of new convenors being appointed to take up the challenge of promoting their disciplines and organising interesting and stimulating sessions for the SEB's Annual Main Meeting. The new "Ecophysiology" group, convened by David McKenzie (Montpellier) will build strengths in ecological and evolutionary physiology and importantly provide a vehicle to stimulate and enhance collaborations with the British Ecological Society who are now co-located with the SEB in Charles Darwin House. After a successful Satellite Symposium in Glasgow entitled "Conservation Physiology – Assessing and Forecasting the Responses of Organisms to Environmental Change" the Animal Section decided to support the formation of a new "Conservation Physiology" group with myself as the current convenor. This group will highlight the important role experimental biologists and physiologists play in addressing and highlighting conservation issues and the fast looming biodiversity crisis.

Joining the Animal Section as new convenors in 2010 are Holly Shiels (*Thermobiology*) and Lynne Sneddon (*Neurobiology*) who, together with David McKenzie (*Ecophysiology*), Michael Berenbrink (*Respiration*), Kath Sloman (*Osmoregulation*), Nic Bury (*Endocrinology*) and Alan Wilson (*Biomechanics*) are the chief proponents of these diverse scientific fields found within the animal Section of the SEB. Completing the Animal Section team are Rod Wilson, Lewis Halsey and Richard Handy and altogether this team is responsible for representing members of the SEB who are interested in the experimental biology of animals. These folks will be visible at the Main Meeting in Prague and want to hear from you about suggestions for new sessions to be run in future meetings. They are all passionate about promoting their discipline and running exciting sessions in future meetings.

There are challenges ahead for animal physiologists and experimental biologists, including ensuring that our discipline remains relevant and visible to: our colleagues working in other biological fields; funding bodies & policy makers; society in general; and, critically to students and young research scientists who are the future of this discipline. We are fortunate to have a strong and dynamic team in the Animal Section, committed to making sure that experimental biology is relevant and

continues to strengthen and I look forward to working with them over the coming years to achieve this goal.

Finally, support I have received from the SEB executive team (Chris, Heather, Sabina, Talja & Ellie) has been outstanding and in particular the effort that went into bringing me rapidly up to speed with the challenges of this position and the strategic vision of the SEB. I look forward to working with this highly motivated and dedicated team over the next four years and representing the members of the Society to ensure that animal-based experimental biology goes from strength to strength. See you in Prague.

e. Report from the Honorary Cell Section Chair

Professor Patrick Hussey was recently elected as Cell Section Chair. The group currently is composed of Kris Vissenberg, Jon Love, Steve Aves, Adam Benham, Susan Brookes and Martin McAinsh. There have been a number of other changes since the last report. Dennis Francis has stepped down from the section and we thank him for his considerable efforts over the years in convening the Cell Cycle Group. Many excellent sessions and symposia have been organised by Dennis and often coorganised by John Bryant. Furthermore, after discussions with Hans-Otto Pörtner and Craig Franklin, it was decided that the Thermobiology group be moved from the Cell to the Animal section. This was felt to integrate more effectively with the remit of the animal section.

The Cell Section is currently the smallest section in the SEB with a dwindling committee membership. The intention now is to reinvigorate the Cell section to include modern approaches to cell biological problems. This will mean that new Groups will have to be established and convenors for these groups appointed. I hope to achieve these goals over the next year, but this will be an ongoing program of change in my term as Section head.

We have some exciting sessions booked in for the Prague meeting in 2010 including sessions organised by the Cell Cycle, Cytoskeleton, Signalling and Thermobiology groups. Moreover, we elected Marcel Janson (Wageningen University) for the President's Medal for his excellent work on microtubule associated proteins.

The Cell Section is and will be going through a period of change over the next year; new groups and scientists will be added that will change and expand the remit of the Cell Section.

f. Report from the Honorary Education Section Chair

SEB Impact and the EPA

For those SEB members who receive and read the SEB Bulletin, you may have noticed my article on Impact in the March 2010 issue. Since its first inception EPA has supported various outreach and KT activities in addition to our core activities that focus more closely on the needs of SEB members. The impact agenda provides an opportunity for EPA to coordinate and support members in their impact activities in the widest context, a strategy stated at the end of my article: "Define impact however you want, do it yourself or do it by proxy, but do it!" With Impact activities having an increasingly higher profile we aim to continue to develop support to our members and the wider science community.

Developing links with other societies

One of the main objectives of the EPA Section is to stretch our resources and influence as far as we can through collaboration with other organisations. In particular, we work closely with our co-habitants with whom we share our new premises in London – the Biochemical Society (BS) and the British Ecological Society (BES) – as well as other major societies of the newly launched Society of Biology. We do this through regular meetings and discussions to agree cooperative activities such as contributing speakers for Teacher and Outreach events, co-organising our own careers conference for undergraduates and contributing to policy work; we continue to address policy issues as they arise, in particular keeping abreast of the multitudinous school curriculum developments and responding to important specialist consultations. In addition, we recently initiated the first Education Policy lunchbox with our BS, BES partners, which is run on a monthly basis with an invited speaker and education policy professionals attending to listen to the talk, discuss issues and network. In fact, today will be our third event featuring a school curriculum adviser:

<http://www.biochemistry.org/PublicAffairs/Events/EducationPolicyLunchbox.aspx>.

In addition, to further strengthen our activities in the animal biology area we have recently recruited Iain Barber, a member of the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB), onto the EPA Section Committee.

International contacts

As an international society our work and collaborations extend outside of our UK base – in 2009 we secured stronger relationships with other plant societies such as the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB) and the European Plant Science Organisation (EPSO) and, in addition, we are forging new links with animal science organisations: our president, Pat Heslop-Harrison, has secured a meeting with the president of the International Union of Biological Science (IUBS) in Prague

Activities in Prague

Our focus for the EPA Programme in Prague this year is a one-day session entitled 'Academia – mastering a complex career'. Aimed at postgraduates and early-career researchers, we will cover the wider arena of tasks which will enhance career prospects for those seeking an academic position as well as those already in post and seeking to stay there. This session, which will include speakers from the international community, will be complemented by posters and the SEB Education exhibition will feature teaching tools and career information with the opportunity for delegates to take some of these away to use in their own activities. As mentioned above our developing collaborations with ASPB will continue in Prague with ASPB contributing to our session, reciprocating the SEB contribution at the ASPB annual meeting in 2009. In addition, to the regular Women in Science dinner, we will be running the previously successful networking event as a precursor to the main meeting on Tuesday 29th evening. Last year's pilot was very well received and promoted interdisciplinary engagement with feedback such as:

'I met many people that I would not have in the normal run of the conference, they were from vastly different areas and in all likelihood we would not have crossed paths. However I had many interesting discussions with these people and will be keeping in touch with many of them'.

Careers

We have been further facilitating the career planning and development of our early-career members and postgraduates by extending our services Europe-wide. We recently ran a career workshop at the Veterinary University of Vienna and will be doing the same at Charles University in Prague just before the start of our Main Meeting. There are plans to do the same for our members who are based in Belgium and Germany as well as continuing with the bulk of our work in the UK. SEB is gaining a reputation for its expertise in this important area and Sarah Blackford is taking the lead in the wider activities of the affiliated societies of the Society of Biology in this respect, as well as being involved in other national organisations such as Vitae (www.vitae.ac.uk) and acting as an associate editor for the *International Journal of Researcher Development*.

EPA Symposia

The organisation and planning for the first SEB Education & Public Affairs Symposium meeting is well advanced with sponsorship from the *Journal of Experimental Botany* and a joint partnership with Lancaster University (where it is being hosted). An impressive line-up of interdisciplinary speakers will ensure that the meeting covers all pertinent aspects of the broad-ranging issues associated with food security, with the ultimate aim of producing tangible outcomes and a set of recommendations to take forward. Our Satellite fund paid for Ingo Potrykus to deliver a schools session

during the AAB Africa Symposium in October 2009 - http://www.africacollege.leeds.ac.uk/lectures/Potrykus_Ingo/player.html - and the remainder will fund two of our speakers for the EPA Programme during the SEB Meeting (Teaching and Outreach).

Into the future

Looking forward to 2011, we will have just had our mid-year Section meeting at the time of the AGM so detailed plans are not yet in place. However, as a fully integrated Section of the SEB we are seeking to work more extensively with the other Sections. A number of projects have been instigated – we are talking at the end of this month with the PEPG group of the Plant Section aiming to develop more support for outreach in the plant area. To this end resources are being developed aiming to address the negative perception of plant science amongst teachers and pupils. Some EPA has already supported development of some preliminary resources during Science week 2010 and these will also be used at the BA festival September 2010. We are also following up suggestions from the animal section in relation to animal outreach resources for the Olympic year in 2012.

Despite the negative connotations of some aspects of the Impact agenda, EPA exploits the positive aspects and continues to provide a forum and resources to support activities of SEB members and so increase the overall impact of the Society.

g. Report from the Honorary Plant Section Chair

This is my first report as Honorary Plant Section Secretary, having been elected by the membership last summer. I would like to thank Keith Lindsey, as the outgoing Secretary of the Plant Section, for his work over the last few years and also for providing support when I took over. I am now settling in to my new role on the committee and have attended two Council meetings and Chaired one Plant Section meeting. I am looking forward to the next three years and hope that during this time we can continue to promote the profile of Plant Biology in the research community. The main business of the biennial Plant Section Committee meetings is to organise sessions for the Annual Main Meeting. The membership of the Plant Section committee includes Conveners representing the interest groups: Metabolism (Lee Sweetlove and Julian Hibberd), Plant Transport (Phil White), Plant Environmental Physiology (Gail Taylor and Howard Griffiths), Plant Gene Structure and Function (Andrew Fleming and Mike Roberts) and Plant Development (Mathew Terry and Paul Devlin). We have been discussing the role of conveners and in the coming year will aim to raise the profile of these interest groups with a view to involving more of the plant community in the SEB.

As part of our Section meetings we now include a discussion of wider issues affecting plant biology with a view to raising the profile of plants to policy makers and in wider society. At the meeting in October 2009 Ginny Page, Director of Science and Plants

for Schools (SAPS), joined us to discuss teaching of plants in schools and how this impacts on the view of plant sciences held by school leavers when entering university. As part of this review a number of members of the committee provided Ginny with a list of the 'ten most exciting facts about plants' that A level students should be taught. Ginny will be feeding this information back to those involved in developing the A' level science curriculum.

Meetings Past and Future

Glasgow 2009

The Annual Main Meeting held in Glasgow was a great success. The Plant Section put on a number of excellent sessions that were very well attended. Disappointingly, 'The Young Scientists in Plant Biology' session was not as well attended as in previous years, mainly due to clashes with other parallel sessions. Providing the opportunity for early career scientists to present their work is an extremely important part of the SEB and Plant section remit. To ensure that these young speakers have a wider audience in the future and are planning to have reserved slots in each of the Plant Sessions and will pilot this at the 2011 meeting.

Prague 2010 and beyond

In the summer, the Prague 2010 AMM has a busy and exciting programme of plant sessions based around the theme of stress: '*Redox regulation and associated signalling in photosynthesis and respiration*' (Christine Foyer and John Allen), '*Plant Temperature Response Networks*' (Kerry Franklin and Heather Knight), '*Carbon Assimilation under Drought*' (Christine Raines and Martin Parry), '*Plant Responses to Belowground Stresses*' (Phil White and Glyn Bengough), '*DNA Repair and Recombination*' (Andy Maule and Karel Angelis), '*Alternative Splicing and its Impact on Gene Regulation in Plants*' (John Brown, Andrea Barta and Artur Jarmolowski), '*Ubiquitin and plant cell signaling*' (Ari Sadanandom), '*Young Scientists in Plant Biology*' (Richard Napier and Christine Raines). I am pleased to let you know that at the Prague meeting the two main Plenary Lectures, The Bidder and The Woolhouse will be given by Ben Scheres and Don Grierson respectively. The SEB Plant Section's Presidents medalist this year is Keara (Kerry) Franklin (Bristol), she will receive her award in Prague and will be presenting her work. Kerry will also be travelling to Valencia to receive her FESPB Young Scientist Award, as the SEB Plant Section nominee.

The Plant Section has provided support for other meetings from the satellite funds including: The '*International Congress of Sexual Plant Reproduction*' to be held in Bristol in August (local organiser Simon Hiscock) and support for students to attend the International Workshop in Plant Membrane Biology, Adelaide September, 2010. Members of the Society can apply for these funds to support a meeting that they wish to organise or to provide additional support for larger meetings.

In 2011 the AMM will return to Glasgow and the Plant Section is currently

considering the sessions that will be put on under the theme of 'Reaping the benefits' - Model to Crops. We would like to encourage the membership to come forward with ideas for sessions that would fit with this theme and we will be advertising this through the SEB website. 2011 is also the year for the Plant Section to host the SEB Symposium. This is a smaller meeting (1-200 participants) than the AMM and will focus on an area that is topical and where significant new discoveries are emerging. An announcement about the Symposium including speakers and venue will be on the SEB Website this summer.

To finish

To meet the increasing societal demands for food and fuel a continued research effort in plant science will be needed to provide the necessary high yielding, low input and sustainable crops. This is against a backdrop of likely decreases in government funding for science. It is essential that you as Plant Scientists continue to publicise your work to the widest possible audience. I encourage you all to come along to support your society and join us at the summer meeting in Prague to take advantage of networking opportunities, to share your new data and to hear some excellent science. Attendance at the meeting for PhD students and early career postdoctoral researchers is heavily subsidised and support for travel is also available.

2. Election of New Officers to the Society

No elections of new officers were necessary as all the positions are currently filled.

3. AOB

There was no other business to be discussed.

The meeting was adjourned 14.40pm.