

Royal Statistical Society

Minutes of the 186th Annual General Meeting
held online
Wednesday 16 September 2020

Present: Professor Deborah Ashby (RSS President, in the Chair) and Fellows of the Society.

In attendance: Stian Westlake, Chief Executive; Iain Wilton, Director of Policy and Public Affairs; Charlotte Stovell, Acting Head of Finance; Ricky McGowan, Head of Professional Standards & Accreditation; Anna Heath, Membership Manager; Teresa Espejo, Web & Multimedia Officer; Maryjoy Kellman, Training and Commercial Administrator; Sarah Campbell, Governance Manager; Luz Martinez, Conferences and Events Officer.

Apologies: Jen Rogers, Vice President for External Affairs, was only able to attend the first half of the meeting due to a work commitment.

1. WELCOME AND MINUTES OF LAST YEAR'S MEETING

The President welcomed everyone to the meeting. She advised that a video of this event would be posted online, and that if members did not wish to be included in the recording, they should announce this when they introduced themselves.

The President went on to explain that resolutions would only be passed by this meeting, and recorded in the minutes, where the majority of attendees voted in favour of them. She briefly set out the process for voting electronically. The President advised that a breakdown of polling analytics would be shared with a small number of RSS staff for due diligence purposes.

RESOLUTION: The minutes of the 185th Annual General Meeting (circulated to members prior to the start of the meeting) were taken as read.

2. RSS CHARTER AND BYLAWS

The President explained that the RSS Council was recommending some revisions to the Society's Charter and Bylaws.

Stian Westlake, Chief Executive, reminded members that the Charter and Bylaws define the Society's governance structure, disciplinary procedures, and the processes for amending governance policies. He advised that Council was recommending several revisions to the Charter and Bylaws to modernise and clarify these documents, without changing their fundamental purpose. Stian went on to explain that the proposed amendments would ensure that the role of the Professional Affairs Committee was more clearly identified as having formal delegated authority from the trustees. He said that the changes would also introduce

a 'Data Analyst' category of membership, and that John MacInnes would speak to this in more detail. Finally, Stian explained that if the AGM agreed these changes, the next step would be for the RSS to apply to the Privy Council for final approval.

John MacInnes, Vice President for Professional Affairs, spoke to this item. He noted that in recent years, large numbers of people had moved into work centred on advanced analysis of data in the private and public sectors. John said that many of these people do not have a first degree in statistics, and that managers tasked with recruiting to these roles often do not have good knowledge of the required skills. John advised that the Professional Affairs Committee and Council now felt that the Society should extend its range of professional membership and add to the existing categories of GradStat and CStat. John said that the proposed revisions to the Charter and Bylaws would create a new entry level category of professional membership, titled Data Analyst.

John set out the criteria which would need to be met to become an RSS Data Analyst. He advised that applicants would be required to have a degree, to have completed some statistical training which was approved by the RSS, and to be keeping a sufficient CPD log. John reminded members that the Professional Affairs Committee (PAC) was already involved in accreditation of university degree courses and was also developing a 'quality mark' which anyone providing statistical training could apply for. John said he felt that, taken together, these revisions marked an important step in ensuring the Society could provide effective regulation of statistical qualifications in the changing circumstances associated with the emerging data economy.

The President opened the floor for discussion. Some members asked why the 'Data Analyst' category could not be titled 'Data Scientist'. John MacInnes advised that PAC had given serious consideration to this question, the issue being that many data scientists are working at a very high level and introducing an entry level category titled Data Scientist might cause confusion and alienate some people in the data science community.

Trevor Lewis raised several points. He advised that he was fully supportive of the introduction of an entry level category of professional membership. Trevor went on to say that his preference would be that a post-nominal acronym be specified for this category. He suggested that the title be changed to 'Registered Data Analyst' or RDA. John MacInnes thanked Trevor for this suggestion and said that RDA was a title which PAC had considered. John said that the concern was that having an entry level title of 'Registered Data Analyst', and the next step up being 'Graduate Statistician' might cause confusion, as the entry level title might appear to be more senior. However, John said that if there were other suggestions of post nominal titles that did not raise this problem, PAC would be happy to look at this.

Trevor Lewis went on to raise a concern about changes to the wording relating to the PAC in the revised Charter and Bylaws. He noted that in the existing documentation, PAC has responsibilities assigned in the Charter, and that in the revised versions, these responsibilities would be delegated to PAC by Council. He went on to say that it was proposed that several paragraphs relating to PAC in the Bylaws would move to the Regulations and could therefore be amended by Council without agreement at the AGM. Finally, he said that it was being proposed that PAC members be elected by Council rather than by a ballot of professional members. Trevor said that, according to the current Bylaws,

professional members should vote on changes to the parts of these documents which relate to PAC.

John MacInnes responded to the points raised by Trevor Lewis. John said that he was confident that the revised Charter and Bylaws would not reduce the independence and power of PAC. John advised that, in his view, the revised documents clarified the respective remits of Council and PAC, and the relationship between these two bodies. John noted that, for example, Council had for many years played an important role in finding members for PAC, and the new documents would reflect this reality rather than substantively changing the processes which were currently being followed.

Stian Westlake said that the changes which were being proposed were very much based on consultation and discussion with PAC and were not intended to in any way compromise PAC's independence. Stian advised that members of the Executive Committee had recently been in contact with Trevor Lewis on this matter. He confirmed that, if the AGM could agree the revised Charter and Bylaws in principle, the RSS would be organising a ballot of professional members following this meeting to seek specific approval for the proposed wording on PAC.

Finally, Trevor Lewis said that there were several changes which he would like to request to the wording of the revised Charter and Bylaws. He advised that these were not substantive changes, and would not change the meaning of the text, but would ensure clarity and completeness.

RESOLUTION: The AGM agreed the changes set out in the proposed new Charter and Bylaws, subject to a vote by the professional membership, and any minor, non-substantive changes to the wording.

ACTION: Nicola Emmerson and Ricky McGowan to be in contact with Trevor Lewis regarding the minor changes which he is proposing to the wording of the Charter and Bylaws, and to arrange a ballot of professional members to seek specific approval for the text of the revised Charter and Bylaws relating to the Professional Affairs Committee.

3. PRESENTATION ON THE SOCIETY'S WORK

The President explained that the meeting would now hear presentations from Stian Westlake, Jon Forster (Vice President for Academic Affairs), and Sharon Witherspoon (Vice President for Education and Statistical Literacy).

Stian reminded members that he had recently come into post as Chief Executive. He began by saying that he was grateful for all the excellent work carried out over the last year by RSS members, volunteers, and staff. In particular, he noted his thanks to Nicola Emmerson, who served for six months as Acting Chief Executive, and his predecessor Hetan Shah, who had moved on to become Chief Executive of the British Academy.

Stian said that 2020 had been a challenging year for the Society, in large part because of the Covid-19 pandemic. He congratulated members and staff on their very effective work to move the RSS Conference and training courses online. Stian highlighted the outstanding

contribution of the Covid-19 Taskforce, which was working closely with the media and policymakers to inform the debate on the pandemic. He also noted that the RSS had played a central role in successfully lobbying for changes to school exam grade adjustments.

Stian said that another important event of 2020 had been the Black Lives Matter movement. He noted that organisations such as the RSS had rightly been encouraged to think more about diversity and inclusion in their work, and in the history of statistics. Stian advised that in the coming year, more work would be done to look at how the RSS could support the use of statistics to fight racism in society, and to ensure that the RSS adequately promotes diversity within its membership.

Jon Forster spoke about the work of the Academic Affairs Advisory Group, which he Chairs. He advised that the group was continuing to work closely with the UK Research Councils, and to lobby for improvements to the Teaching Excellence Framework and the Research Excellence Framework.

Sharon Witherspoon gave a brief presentation on the Society's work on education and statistical literacy. She said that in the coming year, the RSS was keen to advocate for improvements to the teaching of statistical skills across the secondary school curriculum. Sharon advised the RSS would be working in strategic partnerships with learned societies in the sciences and social sciences to increase their engagement with statistical skills. Finally, she noted that for much of 2020, the Society's work on education had been dominated by advocacy on school exam grade adjustments. Sharon said she was delighted that the Office for Statistics Regulation had now agreed to look at the issue of government guidance for statistics-based decision making on individuals.

4. 2019 ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The President began by thanking Charlotte Stovell, RSS Acting Head of Finance, for her excellent work to keep the Society's financial processes in good order. She then invited Kevin Barnes, the Society's Treasurer, to speak to the Annual Report.

Kevin advised that the period covered by the accounts was entirely before he was appointed as Treasurer, and that he was therefore dependent on others for the detail of the content. However, he drew members' attention to the Society's positive financial performance last year:

- On a £2.9m turnover, there was net income of £383k, which was sufficient to cover the actuarial loss on the pension scheme.
- Most of the net income surplus was from restricted activities and would therefore be spent in the future, specifically a Big Lottery Fund Statisticians for Society grant, which will support the provision of pro bono statisticians to small charities.
- Reserves are healthy and include £3.1m of unrestricted funds. These funds are a valuable contingency for situations where the RSS faces uncertainties and bumps in the road, such as the current pandemic.

In relation to the current year, Kevin noted that Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the Society's finances, with income down around 20%. However, he advised that careful

management and cost savings due to reduced face to face activities meant that the RSS remained on course for a break-even position, despite the lower turnover.

In relation to the 2019 accounts, Kevin said that members could take assurance from the rigour of the external audit and review of our going concern status, the diligent oversight of the RSS Audit and Risk Committee, and the work of Kevin's predecessor as Treasurer, Trevor Llanwarne.

RESOLUTION: The AGM approved the Annual report and audited accounts for 2019 as a true and fair report on the normal financial activities of the Society in the year ending 31st December 2019.

5. MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Stian Westlake explained that Council normally proposes a small inflationary annual increase to the member subscription rates. However, he advised that this year, Council was recommending a freeze on rate increases, in view of the financial pressure which Covid-19 had put on many people.

Some members noted that Gradstats were currently asked to pay £10 on top of the ordinary subscription rates, and that the new Data Analyst members would also be asked to pay a supplementary fee. They asked whether, in future, it might be possible to waive these fees to encourage more recent graduates to join the RSS, perhaps by increasing the CStat fee. It was also suggested that it might be helpful to separate out the Significance subscription from the other journal subscriptions. Stian said that careful consideration would be given to these suggestions in the coming months.

RESOLUTION: Members agreed that, as from 1st January 2021:

- the basic member subscription shall be held at £142 per annum.
- the additional CStat subscription shall be held at £46 per annum.
- the additional GradStat subscription shall be held at £10 per annum.
- the additional journal subscription rate will remain at £42 per journal.

6. ELECTION OF THE AUDITOR

The President asked Kevin Barnes, RSS Treasurer, to speak to this item.

Kevin noted that Sayer Vincent have been the Society's auditors for many years. He advised that, in 2019, there was a tendering process inviting bids from other firms, and that following this competitive process Sayer Vincent were reappointed. Kevin went on to explain that, to ensure independence, a new audit partner – Joanna Pitman – had been appointed.

RESOLUTION: Members agreed to appoint Sayer Vincent of Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane, London, EC1Y 0TL as the Society's auditors, to hold the office until conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting.