
Minutes of the 190th RSS Annual General Meeting

Held Thursday 5th September 2024 13:15 – 13:50 at the RSS International Conference:

DoubleTree by Hilton Brighton Metropole, Kings Road, Brighton, BN1 2FU

Present: Dr Andrew Garrett (RSS President and chair)
Kevin Barnes (Honorary Treasurer)
Fellows of the Society, including Honorary Officers and trustees
Guests of the RSS International Conference

In attendance: Sarah Cumbers (CEO), Holly O'Brien (Governance Manager, scribe)

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

The 2024 Annual General Meeting began with a welcome from RSS President and meeting chair Andrew Garrett, who noted that the required quorum had been met and that this was the 190th AGM of the Society.

Andy informed attendants that the session would be recorded and deleted in accordance with GDPR, and that relevant papers could be found both on the RSS website and on the 2024 Conference application.

Attendees were reminded that, while non-fellows were encouraged to participate in the AGM, only Society fellows were able to vote on resolutions (which would be approved by a simple majority indicated by a show of hands).

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM

Prior to passing the minutes of the 2023 AGM (held Wednesday 6th September), Andy noted previous topics discussed and the way in which these had been addressed in the past year:

- Increased involvement with 'More or Less' - host Tim Harford attended the 2024 RSS Conference, delivering the Campion Lecture
- Honorary Fellowship – this year, three fellows were selected strategically

Andy asked the members in attendance to approve the minutes from the 2023 AGM with a show of hands.

RESOLUTION:

- a) The membership in attendance approved the minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting.

3. SUMMARY OF RSS ACTIVITIES

Andy invited RSS CEO Sarah Cumbers to update the attendees on Society activity over the past year. Sarah noted that she had just begun her post as Chief Executive at the previous conference held in Harrogate, and that the AGM was a key opportunity to review the Society's achievements since then:

- RSS Strategy: following meetings of the long-term strategy group, a draft strategy was presented to Council in March 2024 – Sarah noted a number of meetings with external stakeholders regarding alignment and priorities, as well as the response from members (via the RSS newsletter), non-members and staff:
 - Sarah highlighted that inclusion had been identified as important within this new strategy, signalling the Society's intention to be an inclusive body for all data professionals
 - Member-led culture and increased engagement was accentuated, as well as the Society's international role

Sarah reminded attendees that the final version of the Strategy was published in April 2024. She noted that the goals within this strategy reflected those outlined in the Royal Charter, but that language and context had been updated in the hope that members will identify with them.

- Sarah noted the principles needed to implement this strategy, sharing that some of these (such as resources and finance) were in conflict with one another – it was highlighted that the future financial sustainability of the Society was key.
- Plans for a governance review and member engagement activities were shared.

Sarah noted the key priorities agreed by Council for 2024:

- 1) Building a sustainable office: Sarah referred to the pending sale of 12 Errol Street and noted the recent recruitment of David Hamilton, Head of Partnerships, as a key step forward – notably with regard to plans for income generation in response

to the fall in publishing revenue. The planned expansion of the Accreditation team and (gradually) of conference was also noted.

- 2) Energising the membership: segmentation analysis to support development of a member value proposition, focus groups, AI task force and Statisticians for Society. It was shared that the National Lottery funding for Statisticians for Society has been extended using COVID-related underspend, allowing the scheme to continue in 2025.

- 3) Building on what we do well

Funding from the Academy for Social Sciences has been awarded for two EDI projects: the Future Leaders Programme and upcoming work on member data. Sarah also noted the work of the new Celebrating Diversity SIG, who had their first meeting at the 2024 conference.

Sarah reminded attendees of the release of the new *Data Science and AI* journal – the first new release from the RSS since 1953 – and that submissions were open.

Sarah also highlighted the work of the Comms and Policy team, in particular their work on the Society's 2024 General Election Campaign. She also shared that the RSS is working directly with the ONS on the Statistics Assembly (as recommended in Denise Lievesley's review of the UK Stats Authority). She also noted campaigns around:

- Statistics Under Pressure
- Household Cost Indices
- Public statistics

Sarah acknowledged the work of the RSS Climate Change Task Force, particularly noting their 'explainers' as an effective tool for public understanding and engagement and the aim of Net Zero.

Andy congratulated Sarah on the Society's achievements during her first year in post and invited questions from attendees.

4. TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT & FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Andy next invited Kevin Barnes, Honorary Officer for the Society, to present the Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year. Kevin noted that, though it was his fifth year presenting these accounts, it was his first time doing so in person.

Kevin highlighted to attendees the four main sources of income for the RSS:

- 1) Publishing – *Significance* and RSS journals: open access publishing affected income from 2023, when the Society also began working with OUP. Though a like for like comparison cannot be made as the previous contract with Wiley was a profit share and the OUP contract is a share of revenue, reductions were significant, it was noted that changing publisher protected the Society's financial position in this area as much as possible
- 2) Membership: record levels were met in 2023 (~£800k), with membership numbers continuing to grow (6,826 members end 2023, plus 5,200 e-members)
- 3) Commercial training: generated £270k in 2023 (slight decrease since 2022)
- 4) Conferences and events: generated £255k in last financial year (an increase on the previous)

These sources represent approximately 87% of total unrestricted income; Kevin noted that there was approximately £136k of further restricted income used to fund specific projects. Total income in 2023 was £2.175m (down £933k on previous year – most of which is reduced publishing income).

Expenditure increased in 2023 - notably on membership activities. As a result of this, along with reduced income, there was a net increase of £408k unrestricted expenditure. Kevin noted that investments did increase in by £157k throughout the year, leaving a net reduction in the value of unrestricted funds of £251k – taking the balance of total unrestricted funds to £3.660m at the end of the year. Restricted funds remained at £416k, making the total balance sheet value £4.074m.

Kevin raised two further financial matters:

- FTX Grant: following the bankruptcy of the funder FTX, the RSS is looking into the management of remaining, unspent funds
- Pension scheme: the scheme is in surplus in the accounting valuation, but *not* the funding valuation (which determines the Society's contributions); no asset liability is reflected in the accounts, but yearly contributions of £200k continue

Kevin referred to the previous approval of the accounts by Council, during which the assurance of auditors Sayer Vincent as well as the work of the Audit and Risk Committee and Finance team were greatly considered. This included the auditors' review of the Society's Going Concern Assessment.

Andy, as chair, invited attendee comments and questions before voting members approved the following resolution:

RESOLUTION:

- a) The membership in attendance approved of the financial statements presented for the year-ending 31st December 2023 (Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Report) as a true and fair report of normal financial activities.

5. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS UPDATE

Andy highlighted that the subscription update was for information; Council approved this in the meeting of June 2024:

1. Increase membership subscription rates by 4.6% (rounded to the nearest pound)
 - a. Fellow moves from £153 to £160
 - b. Data Analyst moves from £153 to £160
 - c. CStat moves from £201 to £210
2. Increase GradStat subscription rate by 7.4%. GradStat moves from £163 to £175
3. Data Analyst application joining fee increases from £50 to £75
4. Data Science Professional moves from £10 to £15
5. Advanced Data Science Professional moves from £48 to £50
6. Abolish the £5 joiners Direct Debit discount
7. Additional journal fee increases from £42 to £45
8. EDA and career break discount to remain frozen at 60%, concessionary discount to remain at 50%

It was discussed whether the Society recorded the number of members who allow their subscription to lapse and *why* – it was confirmed that there is an active 'follow-up' process, which is a likely contributor to the increase in membership numbers overall (paid and non-paid).

6. AUDITOR ELECTIONS

Kevin shared his satisfaction with the work of the Society's auditors over the past four years and therefore recommended that the members in attendance approved the resolution presented. Kevin also noted that this meant the auditors would be responsible for the 2024 reports of 2024 accounts, and that he was particularly impressed with the charity and expertise of Sayer Vincent.

The members in attendance indicated their approval of the following resolution with a show of hands:

RESOLUTION

- a) Members approved the reappointment of Sayer Vincent of Invicta House 108-114 Golden Lane London, EC1Y 0TL as the Society's auditors, to hold office until the conclusion of the next AGM.

7. CLOSE OF MEETING

Andy drew the 190th AGM of the Royal Statistical Society to a close by acknowledging the passing of key members of the Society in the past year:

- Tony Hawes (Institute of Statisticians)
- Frank Duckworth (editor of RSS News)
- Peter Armitage (RSS President, 1982-84)

Andy opened the floor for final questions; it was noted that many organisations write to members asking for donations and legacy contributions. Andy shared that this is a concept that the Society plans to move on with. Sarah added that this was a matter that the team was keen to address sensitively, and that the Society was aware that members would like to contribute in this way.

Attendees were interested to have an idea of what the team was looking for in terms of the new RSS headquarters. Sarah reiterated that the current building, despite providing ample space governance and external meetings, did not lend itself well to hybrid events of collaboration amongst staff. Maintenance costs are significant. The aim for the new office is for a flexible space to enable us to continue to run RSS events and training, and for staff to work more effectively with each other.

Andy thanked all for their attendance at the 2024 AGM, noting that this was an opportunity for those decisions made by trustees to be shared with the wider membership.

Attendees were reminded of the upcoming 2024 Council Election, with the voting window opening for six weeks from 11th October.

Minutes prepared by: Holly O'Brien, Governance Manager

Signature of RSS President: