

BCS Council

JHD's notes: partial in both senses of the word

13 May 2010

Abstract

It is my habit, at the University of Bath, to take notes of groups to which I am elected (Senate, Council etc.) and circulate these among such of my constituents as are interested. This is the first in an attempt to do the same at the BCS. It should be noted that these are in no sense official, and may well even be wrong.

I also append my more general reflections, and personal views on the EGM.

Welcome The President welcomed us to the meeting, pointing out that this would be the first occasion when Council elected its own Chair, other than the President. She was merely chairing this meeting until the elections took place later in the meeting.

Minutes Agreed, subject to correction of post-nominals. There is a proposal that will be circulated for a 'business' award to complement the Needham and Lovelace awards. There were no significant other matters arising.

Regulations for Council Business These had been circulated. It was suggested, and agreed, that these regulations should be more public than just Council. The President had one correction: Appendix 5, section 3.2, change "calendar year" to "Council Year", but it was suggested, and accepted, to replace this by "the first meeting of Council after the AGM" (which has the same meaning, but avoids introducing new notation). Paragraph 3.5 (and 4.1), replace "May/June" by "September/October".

A member raised a question in respect of 3.16 and 3.18. In 3.16 the Chair is intended to do something if the Chair resigns, which needs debugging. More seriously, the runner up for Chair takes over if the Chair vacates office, and he felt that instead it should be the Vice-Chair. It was decided to delete 3.16 and 3.18. JHD's understanding is that this leaves no explicit provision for what happens if the Chair resigns, which means that the Vice-Chair *will* take over.

EGM Update A formal EGM Resolution has been received, 7 April, with 52 signatories. The EGM will be 1 July, at Southampton Street, as announced yesterday on e-BCS. Voting will be as at an AGM, i.e. person,

post or proxy (and administered by the Electoral Reform Services — commercial arm of the Electoral Reform Society). A list of Council Members who had supported the motion was read out (JHD didn't catch it). It was asked whether those calling for the EGM would have "equal air time" on the BCS web site. It was noted that this *had* happened when the IET had an EGM a few years ago. It was agreed to look at providing the "equal air time" via the BCS Members' Area.

The President reported that various substantive issues behind the EGM were on the agenda for the afternoon.

Elections These were for *elected* members of Council to vote only (i.e. not President, Vice-President etc.). After some confusion over the difference between "No" and "Abstain", the candidates for Chair of Council made presentations. Adrian Williamson was elected Chair of Council.

When it came to making presentations for elections¹ to Trustee Board, JHD commented that he had been a member of BCS for 23 years, and Council for 1.5 hours, and was only standing this time because of the lumpiness (four vacancies now, one over the next two years). JHD came bottom of the poll for Trustee Board, which was only to be expected.

After these results (and lunch) we elected two members of the Nominations Committee.

Half-way point

Membership Board Updates Adrian Walmsley (VP Members) spoke about the (Interim) Membership Board. This has to service not only the existing Member groups (Branches, Specialist Groups, etc.) but also the passive members, as well as recruitment. He would like the new Membership Board to have more teeth than its predecessors, and he has noted that many of the issues, notably finance, are common across several of the areas. Since it represents so many areas, there has been an open call for candidates for the Membership Board, and a selection committee will look at these to produce an *initial* set of (probably eleven) Board members. One of the Board's first tasks will be to decide how to renew itself. It was desired to have two members of Council on this (and other Boards), but it was noted that this shouldn't just be a matter of Council "sending observers".

An item that came up was the scope for confusion between the Membership Board (which basically deals with the activities of existing members²),

¹The President commented that this was the first time she could recall there being such elections, which in itself was a healthy sign.

²Subsequent correspondence with Adrian Walmsley has pointed out that Membership Board also deals with general recruitment of members, which is why Adrian was interested in JHD's manifesto suggestion about writing, in conjunction with universities, to graduates 5 years on, reminding them of the BCS.

and the Membership Committee of Professional Board (which deals with application for *professional* membership, particularly via the individual route). It was added that it might actually be easier to change the name of the Membership Board (which doesn't yet really exist).

One item for consideration is the request to consider whether SG members *have* to be BCS members. It was noted that there had been a proposal years ago for a category of BCS membership "SG Affiliate" to cope with this.

Communication Colin Beveridge spoke to issues relating to communication, and the use of the BCS Members' Forum.

Breakout Groups Four topics, essentially around communication and democracy issues, had been identified for round-table discussions. There was a lot of commonality between the groups, and it was generally agreed that a change in culture from 'closed' to 'open' was basically needed.

JHD's own group was discussing a paper³ by Bob Assirati (Deputy President), which was in fact a draft of a paper to TB. JHD was rapporteur, and (since breakout groups were limited to two bullet points) reported these.

1. [TB should] implement what has been promised (see Bob's paper, which noted, among others, that the last TB Digest to Council was November 2008, and that TB papers are not automatically copied to Council, despite this having been agreed), and more, e.g. posting discussions of TB etc. on the web rapidly after the meeting, and JHD noted that the same is (now) routinely done at his University.
2. We have 'streamlined' away many lower-level committees etc. (e.g. Branches Management), which means that routes for people to come up "through the ranks" are reduced, and this needs to be rethought.

He also (cheating slightly on the 'two points' rule) said that TB should ask **why** the promises had not been implemented.

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Business There were various other reports and updates.

JHD's reflections

As can be seen, about half the meeting was taken up with "mechanics of democracy" issues. On the other hand, this is cyclically the first meeting after the AGM, when a lot of such issues come up, and also some current procedures are new. JHD *would* be worried if this concentration on procedure were the norm.

The other main rôle of Council is to provide advice to the Trustee Board. I'm not sure that Trustee Board will be much enlightened by what happened

³CCL/2010/038 Appendix 1, unfortunately 'Confidential to Council'.

this day. It is quite clear that there *is* a lot of disquiet among ordinary Council members about the way things are going, and it is not possible to write off the call for an EGM as a crank movement.

I am worried by point A above and other indicators, such as the statement, at <http://academy.bcs.org/server.php?show=conBlogPost.1636>, that

The reason there has been a gap between that [BCS Academy Board] meeting and reporting it here is because the official report from the meeting needed to be approved by the BCS Trustee Board first before we could disseminate it more widely

I have also been advised that it would be better to wait for the BCS President's approval before posting these notes more widely, but after waiting four weeks have decided to post anyway.

EGM Business

I have not yet decided how I shall vote for the EGM in general. However, I will be **voting against 7**, not because I disagree with the principle (though I would rather see somewhere between the two), but because a moment of triumphalism after one has crushed a revolt (and note that 7 is conditional on the previous ones) is not appropriate. Lawyers tend to say "hard cases make bad law".

It would, in my view, have been better to wait until the dust of this EGM had settled, then ask Council (which after all represents the Members), what the number should be. Personally I would have gone for a formula depending linearly on \sqrt{n} .

I also note the comment, made in one of the LinkedIn discussions on the subject, that it would be possible, for instance, to vote **against 1,2 and against 6**, thus giving a 'not proven' verdict.

One way of seeing the malaise, which occurred to me, as a Territorial Army officer, is that the BCS seems in practice to have lost touch with the fact that it is, very largely, an organisation of *volunteers*. Such organisations require a greater degree of explanation of what's going on than other organisations. Cascade management, and "it was explained at the Members' Forum" do not work well here.