

Positions on Council for election in June 2022

- Skills & expertise gaps most helpful to fill
- Guidance for Fellows

Background

In 2013 the Council of the Society considered how, as far as possible, the Society can ensure that it has an appropriate mix of skills, experience and expertise necessary to fulfil the requirements of the Committees of Council and of Council itself. This is important since Council is the body of Trustees that holds responsibility for the affairs of the Society as a whole.

As part of those considerations, the Council recognised the guidance on governance in the Grant Thornton Charity Governance Review, 2013. The Charity Commission notes too:

“An effective charity is run by a clearly identifiable board or trustee body that has the right balance of skills and experience, acts in the best interests of the charity and its beneficiaries, understands its responsibilities and has systems in place to exercise them properly.”

The Hallmarks of an Effective Charity, Charity Commission.

The Society has a broad base and set of interests, and has in place safeguards to ensure that the Council has elected representation from three main constituencies – education; fieldwork and expeditions; and research and higher education. This is embodied in the Society’s Byelaws and Committee structure, and is further reflected in the composition of the Society’s membership, the nature of the Society’s work and its strategy. Furthermore, while this is not set down in writing, for well over 40 years the Society’s Council has, on average, had circa 50% academic members and 50% non-academic members, a balance that we consider healthy and seek to continue.

Consistent with the Charity Commission’s requirements on the duties and responsibilities of trustees of charities, Council members are also expected to act as positive advocates for the Society, to act in the best interests of the Society as a whole and to recognise that no single interest group, of whatever origin or cause, should have the capacity to dominate, or exert undue influence on, the Society’s governing body.

There are sound democratic grounds for electing the majority of Council members from the Fellowship, an approach that Council has no intention of moving away from. **However, with Council responsible for the Society’s overall strategic direction and decision-making, and with the Society growing and becoming more complex in recent years, it is increasingly the case that the Council needs to embody an appropriate balance and range of skills, expertise and experience in addition to knowledge within key Society constituencies.** So how best to achieve that broad succession planning, whilst balancing the need for continuity with the need to draw in “new blood” and maintaining the existing election framework and processes?

Consistent with the decisions taken in December 2013, and with the successful implementation of these since, Fellows will be provided with some additional guidance in relation to the elections, relevant both to those standing for election and to those voting, should they wish to use it. As previously, this will be a short paper on the Society's website and in the election packs that sets out, objectively, the Council's thinking as to the skills/expertise gaps that, at this time in 2022, are considered most in need of being filled and why.

This process does not, of course, preclude others from standing for election. Those standing for election will, as since 2013, be invited to draft 75 words of short biography and 75 words setting out how they meet the guidance on skills and expertise. This approach has been well received by the Fellowship of the Society.

Consistent with previous years, and as recommended by the Charity Commission (CC) for governance and accountability, those standing for election will be required to confirm that they are not disqualified from being a trustee. As per CC recommendations, we will ask them to complete and submit a declaration of eligibility form and a Conflicts of Interest form, and to send this with their nomination details.

This form will confirm that they:

- are willing and eligible to act as a trustee (and are cognisant of the requirements and responsibilities that brings)
- understand and support the charity's purposes
- have passed a Criminal Records Bureau check (to apply if their role as a trustee brings them into direct contact with the children or vulnerable people the Society is working with).

Breadth of Council membership

With regard to representation of the breadth of members, care has been taken in the interest/skills/expertise sought to include breadth from across the very wide range of communities in the Fellowship (including academic, expedition, field research, professional practitioner, regional interest, student, teacher, traveller) while also delivering the specific skills that the Council requires as a trustee and decision-making body for a geographical society. Most Council members also share a common interest in 'lay' sectors, such as travel. A commitment for the Council to retain its broadly 50/50 split between practising academic members and others provides an additional safeguard (see Appendix 2 for current breakdown).

● Appendix 1:

Skills and experience for RGS-IBG committees.

This paper sets out the key skills/expertise/experience that are considered to be most helpful for committees and Council as a whole in the strategy period.

Background

At the Society's Council meeting in December 2013, following a paper from the Executive Committee and President, it was decided that the Society's Council should make clear, for reasons of good governance, the knowledge, skills and expertise that it felt it would be most helpful to have in the positions that were coming up for election the following June. It was agreed that a statement to this effect would be available on the election pages of the Society's website and distributed in the AGM mailing, as part of the pack of ballot papers, sent to all Fellows. Furthermore, it was agreed that those Fellows standing for election should be given the opportunity to set out briefly how they met the skills and expertise thought to be most helpful.

In that context, it was also agreed that for each of the main Committees of Council, and for the Council itself, a paper would be drafted that set out the range of knowledge, skills and expertise as a whole that were felt to be most helpful in order for the Society to be effectively governed and to be able to call upon appropriate expertise for advice and contacts (in the case of thematic committees) and for decision-making by trustees (Council). Clearly the range of skills and expertise that would be most helpful will vary over time as it will be affected in part by the Society's strategy.

This paper seeks to describe those sets of key skills/expertise/experience across the Council and its main committees that the Society is likely to need to draw upon repeatedly in its current strategy.

a. Committees of Council

The Society's four Committees of Council vary in the extent to which their membership is made up of individuals elected to hold positions on Council and other co-opted positions.

The Education (Edu), Expeditions and Fieldwork (E&F) and Research and Higher Education (R&HE) committees all have five positions held by those elected to Council for three year terms in the roles of VP, Honorary Secretary, and three ordinary Councillors. R&HE has one further annually elected Council role, that of Chair of Annual Conference. The remaining (up to seven) positions on each of those committees are for the most part made up of co-opted members, selected for their skills and expertise in relation to the role of the committee and the work being carried out. In some instances these are representatives of particular sectors of the Society, such as research groups, or of other key organisations, and in some cases they are elected from within those sectors. (The President and the Honorary Secretaries are welcome to attend all of these committee meetings, and the Director and relevant senior managers attend, and act as secretaries to, committees appropriate to their positions.)

The Finance Committee differs in having the Honorary Treasurer, a senior trustee position elected to the Council, as its chair and two other established positions on the committee. These are Chair of the Enterprises Board and Chair of the Investment Sub-committee. The three Vice Presidents and the President are entitled to attend, as are the Director and Head of Finance and Services.

Education Committee

Members of the [Education Committee](#) should collectively encompass knowledge, skills and expertise in the breadth of school-based education (particularly but not exclusively the 11 – 18 phase), in understanding the needs of both teachers and pupils in different educational settings, and in the wider contexts of education. This includes breadth in terms of career stage, different school settings, phases of education and styles of training. Members should embrace knowledge and expertise that ranges from subject knowledge, to quantitative, GIS and other relevant skills, and to assessment.

Members should also understand the challenges and opportunities faced by inner city schools and academies in particular, and bring collectively a wider perspective of the education agenda in terms of widening participation, social mobility and education policy. Knowledge and experience of the range of institutions and organisations that provide direct support for teachers is also sought through committee members. Ideally the membership should bring knowledge and understanding of the evolving different circumstances of geography at secondary level in England and Wales.

While members bring understanding, skills and expertise of particular sorts, as with all Society committee members and trustees, they are all required to act for the benefit of geography and the Society, rather than for their own particular interests or disciplines or as a champion of any one sector or organisation.

There are currently no standing representatives on this committee. In prior years there have at various times been representatives from the Geographical Association, OFSTED, and the Ordnance Survey. This reflects times when the Society was engaged in particularly active partnership projects with the GA and OS and, in the case of OFSTED when there was a lead Geography Inspector. Five members of the Committee are directly elected to the Council, leaving up to seven additional co-opted positions on the committee (some of which may be taken up, if appropriate, by standing representatives).

Details

The (up to) 12 members of the Education committee, should all bring sound contact networks within their areas of operation/expertise and should, collectively, encompass the following knowledge, understanding, skills and expertise. It is anticipated that individuals may offer more than one area:

- Experience and knowledge gained by being a senior/head teacher (geography specialist) at secondary level, including an understanding of the contextual frameworks of education policy in England. (C)
- Wider expertise in geography education beyond that of school teaching, such as in widening participation, social mobility and education policy. (C)
- An in-depth understanding of the challenges facing geography teaching and raising aspiration in low performing, inner-city schools (C)
- Practical expertise, skills and knowledge as an established geography teacher and head of department at secondary level in either the maintained or private sector (C)
- Expertise in teacher education, and understanding of the changing frameworks of initial teacher education and the opportunities and challenges they offer
- Practical expertise, skills and understanding of challenges facing early career geography teachers at secondary level in the maintained or academy sector
- Expertise in assessment at secondary level, including the particular challenges of assessment in geography

- Knowledge and understanding of the primary teaching sector, and in particular years five and six and the transition into secondary education
- Expertise in educational standards and their maintenance
- Expertise from sister bodies with whom the Society works closely in delivering its educational activities.

Expeditions and Fieldwork Committee

Members of the [Expeditions and Fieldwork Committee](#) should collectively encompass expertise in the breadth of fieldwork and scientific expeditions, including at university, in schools, and in independent travel that advances geographical knowledge. It would be helpful for members to include those who have experience of team-based scientific expeditions, those who have experience in undertaking field research or scientific expeditions alone, as individuals, and those with a good knowledge of participatory/in-country collaborations.

Members should embrace knowledge and expertise that ranges from field research and field teaching to expedition logistics, fieldwork techniques and expedition health and safety. Members should also understand the different types of institutions and organisations that provide support for fieldwork and scientific expeditions, and bring expertise of fieldwork/expeditions both in the UK and overseas.

While members bring understanding, skills and expertise of particular sorts, as with all Society committee members and trustees, they are all required to act for the benefit of geography and the Society, rather than for their own particular interests or disciplines or as a champion of any one sector or organisation.

It has been general practice for some ten years that the two senior-most positions on this committee, namely those of Vice President and Honorary Secretary, both of which are members elected to Council, should aim to comprise one senior academic and one non-academic. This is to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of interests at the top of this wide ranging committee. (Prior to ten years ago, it was typically the case that both positions were held by academics.) With five members being elected to the Council, including the V-P and Hon. Sec. and three ordinary councillors, there are up to seven co-opted positions on the committee.

The activities of the GIS, medical cell, and inclusive expedition informal groups are reported, via the Geography Outdoors report, to this committee.

Details

The (up to) 12 members of the E&F committee, should all bring sound contact networks within their areas of specialism and should, collectively, encompass the following knowledge, understanding, skills and expertise. It is anticipated that individuals may offer more than one area:

- Leading field research geographer of international repute, research council funding track record and large scale field science project expertise (C)
- Academic **field** research expertise in human geography; and expertise in field teaching/methodologies at university level
- Academic field research expertise in physical geography or environmental science; and expertise in field teaching / techniques at university level (C)
- Well-developed field logistics expertise in complex field research / scientific expeditions / challenging environments (C)

- Independent traveller expertise (with particular reference as to how this area relates to the Society's work in provision of advice and training) (C)
- Expertise and skills in the area of independently led overseas scientific fieldwork and expeditions, including independent gap year and undergraduate expeditions
- Understanding of the challenges and opportunities of school fieldwork in the UK and overseas; and experience of leading fieldwork with school pupils
- Strategic level, independent field / expedition health and off-site safety expertise
- Knowledge and expertise from organisations within the UK that 'host' fieldwork and outdoor learning, e.g. national parks, AONBs
- Expertise and perspective from the organised charitable or commercial provider sector of outdoor learning or scientific expeditions for groups

Research and Higher Education Committee

The Society's Byelaws state that those standing for election to the five positions on Council within the R&HE area should '*hold a position in research or in higher or further educational institutions or be persons of similar standing*'.

Members of the [R&HE committee](#) should collectively encompass the breadth of the discipline of geography, including representation of physical and human geography, and hold expertise in a breadth of research methodologies (recognising the remit of other committees) and in university teaching as well as research. Members should embrace a range of career stages, and types of institution, and contribute expertise in areas of wider relevance to higher education and research. Ideally the membership should also bring knowledge and understanding of the evolving different circumstances of geography in higher education across the four UK nations.

While members bring understanding, skills and expertise of particular sorts, as with all Society committee members and trustees, they are all required to act for the benefit of geography and the Society, rather than for their own particular interests or disciplines or as a champion of any one sector or organisation.

Among the non-directly elected members, are standing representatives elected from the research groups chairs (three members); and from the postgraduate forum (one member). In addition, two elected Chairs of Conference (for the current year and the previous year) serve on the Committee; the latter having the standing of Vice-President on Council. Together with the five members elected to the Council, this leaves one co-opted position.

The Editors Sub-committee and the Research Groups Sub-committee reports to the R&HE Committee.

Details

The (up to) 12 members of the R&HE committee, should all bring sound contact networks within their areas of specialism and should, collectively, encompass the following knowledge, understanding, skills and expertise. It is anticipated that individuals may offer more than one area:

- Research leadership in geography at senior national and international levels (C)
- Institutional /strategic level teaching and learning expertise in HE (C)
- Knowledge and understanding of the issues and opportunities facing geography departments in Universities, as best understood by heads of department

- Experience, knowledge and the wider perspectives of senior level university administration and associated policy frameworks (eg VC/ PVC level or equivalent) (C)
- In-depth knowledge of the Society's research groups and their ethos (C) (The Honorary Secretary chairs the research group subcommittee and is expected to provide this expertise.)
- Strong understanding of, and good contact networks with, key national and international funding bodies
- Knowledge and understanding of the circumstances facing postgraduates and early career stage academics. (This is primarily provided through the postgraduate representative, who is the annually- elected Postgraduate Forum chair.)
- Physical geography research expertise and sector knowledge across the UK
- Human geography research expertise and sector knowledge across the UK
- A breadth of analytical methods expertise, including quantitative and qualitative skills

Finance Committee

Members of the [Finance Committee](#) should collectively encompass the necessary business planning, accountancy and financial management skills in order to provide effective oversight of the Society's management in this critical area.

The Honorary Treasurer is normally expected to bring senior level financial management and accounting expertise from the business sector, together with an understanding of not-for-profit organisations, sensitivity to the importance of geography, risk management awareness, and good chairing and strategic skills. S/he will also bring such skills onto the Council.

Finance Committee members should embrace commercial expertise (in the form of the chair of the Enterprise Board), investment expertise (in the form of the chair of the Investment Subcommittee), legal expertise (especially that relating to intellectual property), and financial/senior accounting expertise, ideally from a different sector to that of the Honorary Treasurer.

While members bring understanding, skills and expertise of particular sorts, as with all Society committee members and trustees, they are all required to act for the benefit of geography and the Society, rather than for their own particular interests or disciplines or as a champion of any one sector or organisation.

Although not formally present as an identified representative, it has been helpful in recent years, and may be so in future years, for the chair of the pension trustees of the Society's final salary scheme to be invited onto the committee. Likewise, given the remit of the committee includes having regard to staff appointments, it may be helpful to have HR expertise on the committee, although not essential as the Society is well advised independently and externally in this regard.

Allowing for the three Vice-Presidents positions on the Committee, and the chairs of Enterprise Board and Investment Sub-Committee, it has up to 6 additional co-opted positions.

b. Council

The ratio of elected to non-elected positions on the Council is roughly 5 to 1; which is a much higher ratio than on the Committees of Council taken together. This is potentially both a strength (enabling involvement) and weakness (can lead to a poorly balanced/insufficiently expert body). This is widely recognised in general in committees elected from memberships.



● Appendix 2:

Current Council membership breakdown

President

Nigel Clifford

Immediate Past President

The Right Honorable Baroness Chalker of Wallasey

Chair of Annual Conference

Professor Rachel Pain

Vice Presidents

Dr Melanie Norman (Education)
Professor Alison Blunt (Research & Higher Education)
Robert Lucas (Expeditions & Fieldwork)

Honorary Treasurer

Carol Lawson

Honorary Secretaries

Grace Healy (Education)
Professor Peter Kraftl (Research & Higher Education)
Stephen Jones (Expeditions & Fieldwork)

Ordinary Councillors

Dr Niall McCann (Expeditions & Fieldwork)
Hugh Thomson (Expeditions & Fieldwork)
Professor Helen Walkington (Expeditions & Fieldwork)
Philip Avery (Education)
Joanna Coles (Education)
Narinder Mann (Education)
Professor Steve Darby (Research & Higher Education)
Dr Vandana Desai (Research & Higher Education)
Professor Klaus Dodds (Research & Higher Education)
David Lovell (Regions Representative)
Jordi Buckley (Postgraduate Representative)
Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB (co-opted)
Ashley Parry Jones (co-opted)