

Positions on Council for election in June 2023

- Skills and expertise
- Guidance for Fellows

Background

In 2013 the Society's Council 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 main constituencies – education; fieldwork and expeditions; research and higher education; and professional practice. 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?

.....

In considering this question the Council agreed that it would start by identifying (and regularly reviewing) the range of skills, expertise and experience it felt was needed from the Council and Committee members as a whole. This information will be placed on the Society's website. Council would then use this as a basis for providing transparent guidance on the skills and expertise gaps it considers to be most helpful to fill. Such guidance would be available to those considering standing for election in any particular year, and would take note of the skills of existing Council members, the Society's strategic plan and current activities.

In any year, the nominees and their proposers will be kindly asked to address how they help fill any identified skills and/or expertise gaps as part of the short biographical statement required of nominees, and in proposer supporting statements. It is not a requirement that nominees fill identified gaps but it is highly desirable. The review of skills gaps will in addition be used by the Council to help identify candidates for the co-opted positions on the Council, which are set out in the Bye-Laws. Council nominees are also asked to consider carefully their ability to meet the time and other commitments required, including attendance at Council and Committee meetings in London, and any conflicts of interest, before standing for election. Furthermore, in line with the Charity Commission guidance on governance and accountability, those standing for election will be required to submit a Declaration of eligibility form which confirms they are willing and eligible to act as a trustee and understand the responsibilities involved, and a Conflict of interests form.

This approach, adopted from the June 2014 elections, has been well received and has been used in elections since that date, with the Council considering the skills gaps most needed in December each year before the elections.

Elections June 2023

The following Council positions are to be elected in June 2023:

- Honorary Treasurer
- Vice President: Expeditions and Fieldwork
- Vice President: Membership
- Vice President: Professional
- Councillor: Research and Higher Education

Taking note of the current knowledge, experience and skills on Council, and of the key skills/expertise that will be lost when Council members completing their terms stand down in June 2022, the following key skills/expertise areas are those that have been identified as being most helpful to fill on the Council in the 2023 elections.

Expeditions and Fieldwork related positions

- Senior field researcher or practitioner of international standing, or extensive experience of senior leadership roles in the provision of fieldwork and expeditions (Vice President).

Research and Higher Education related positions

- Expertise in research leadership and impact in geography. In-depth knowledge of the Society's research groups and their ethos. (Councillor).

Finance related positions

- Senior level financial management and accounting expertise together with an understanding of not-for-profit organisations and risk management; and empathy with geography (Honorary Treasurer).

Membership related positions



- Skills and experience that include a combination of membership fulfilment; marketing; recruitment and retention; programming and volunteer support (Vice President).

Professional practice related positions

- Senior level expertise and leadership in professional geographical practice and professional development (Vice President).

Consistent with the Society's protocol, 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, 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 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 for governance and accountability, those standing for election will be required to confirm that they are not disqualified from being a trustee. As per Charity Commission 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.

These forms 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.