

Minutes of a telephone conference of BSVP Council, 22nd October 2009, 4.00 pm

Present: Mark Stidworthy, Brian Summers, Rod Else, Jane Miller, Sue Newband

1. Finance

General status of finances

JM reported that the Society made a loss of approximately £900 in year 2008/09, mainly due to the cost of the professional secretariat. This year the loss would probably be more, because there has been no increase in income and a small loss on Module 6 (high costs of a foreign speaker and only 15 paid attendees). The Secretariat costs approximately £3800 just for monthly running costs. However, subscriptions collected to the end of the financial year (30/06/09) had been only £1975, necessitating a transfer of £600 from the reserve. This was not sustainable. An agreement had been reached to reduce the Secretariat cost per attendee for Modules, since some of the tasks that had been anticipated were actually being done by volunteers.

The Society had savings of approximately £15,000.

Concern was expressed about the impact of the poor financial climate. Would this lead to a further reduction in meeting attendance, or was the reason for the poor attendance at the skin Module a large number of other meetings scheduled during that month. Perhaps June was a better month, and it might be necessary to reduce the overall number of meetings by incorporating the AGM into a Module?

ACTION: JM to present these concerns to the membership within her report to the AGM.

Bad debtor – what to do?

One trainee had attended a Module before cleared funds had been obtained, and had subsequently failed to pay. She had subsequently left her employment at the veterinary school concerned. Despite repeated approaches, she had refused to make a payment. Since she had been an employee of the University and attended during work time, Council questioned whether the University could be pursued for the payment (£375). It was decided to make a query to the trainee's supervisor.

To avoid such a scenario in the future, no attendance would be allowed, and no notes provided, without obligatory pre payment in the form of cleared cheque or bank transfer, or if absolutely necessary, cash at registration. Without this, entry would be refused.

ACTION: JM and/or RE to informally approach the trainee's supervisor.

Membership subscriptions

JM discussed whether there was a need for an increase of adjustment of membership subscriptions and to what level. As a minimum, subscriptions should cover the running cost of the Secretariat (i.e. approximately £4000). With approximately 100 members, this meant a general increase to £40 per member, or possibly a differential change (£25 retained for trainees, £50 for non-trainees, assuming that this would

generate similar levels of income). In order to calculate this accurately, the exact number of trainees versus professionals would be needed, but it was estimated that approximately one third of current members were trainees. In order to make membership beneficial, the discount for members attending meetings/Modules would need to increase to more than the new membership fee and £75 was suggested.

ACTION: JM to draft revised set of guideline subscriptions and meeting fees, and present them to the AGM during the Treasurer's report.

Registration with HMRC as not for profit

The exact tax status of BSVP remained uncertain, despite attempts to clarify by asking treasurers of similar-veterinary organisations, and the Inland Revenue website and guidance was opaque. MS and/or JM would try and find out exactly what is required, so that the Society avoided any legal or financial consequences now that the accountant had pointed out the anomaly, and charitable status was no longer an option.

ACTION: MS/JM to investigate.

Secretariat contract renewal

JM was engaged in renewing the BSVP secretariat contract. As part of this, she would try and clarify when SN was working on general BSVP business ("free time") and when she was specifically working on "Module" work, for which an additional per capita charge was being made. Subject to clarifications, gratitude and satisfaction was expressed for the extremely efficient work of the Secretariat.

ACTION: JM to complete negotiations and sign contract.

2. Secretarial business

BVA Specialist Division Status

It was agreed that it would be desirable for MS to further explore the possibility, already explored in a preliminary fashion, that BSVP seek Specialist Division Status within BVA. This would probably need the agreement of the BSVP AGM, since a Constitutional amendment would be needed to satisfy the BVA criteria that Officers serving on BVA Council should be members or associate members of BVA. This would need to be written into the BSVP Constitution. There was discussion as to the likely cost of this to BSVP, should the relevant BSVP Council members not be members of BVA in their own right on election. BSVP would have to pay their subscription. This was however likely to be cheaper than becoming affiliate members of BVA, which would be achieved by payment of a set yearly fee (currently £500). It was noted that BVA's own Council structure was currently under review.

ACTION: MS to present this issue for discussion at the AGM.

3. Education

BS reported that that had been generally excellent feedback on past modules. One issue that had been raised was the desirability of alternating speakers so that a single person did not lecture for long periods at one time.

Future modules - Module 7 and beyond

Planning for Module 7 (alimentary, to be held at Moredun in June, was under control with two experienced people (SS and MD) undertaking the work jointly.

Because of meeting crowding in September, and financial pressures, it was suggested that the 2010 AGM should be incorporated into Module 8 (liver and pancreas), to be held in mid/late October 2010. The meeting would therefore run Friday and Saturday, to try and appeal to regular Module attendees and as many of the single day "Kegworth" group as possible.

Module 9 was provisionally suggested for March 2011. An organiser and venue needed to be found.

ACTION: MS to liaise with the new Education Coordinator to try and bring them up to date. Much information and protocols for planning were already held by the Secretariat.

Position on partial attendance/partial fee at modules

Potential attendees often asked whether they could attend for one day only. This had previously been refused due to the increased complexity of administration and experience of BSTP that this could be abused. The administrative cost for one day versus two was not halved; therefore if a one-day registration was to be allowed, 2/3 of the full registration fee was suggested as the benchmark figure. It was agreed that in the current climate, a change of policy to allow partial attendance was probably desirable to try and maximise attendance.

ACTION: JM and new education coordinator to consider this is drafting new fee guidelines. Registration forms to be altered to allow the possibility.

Cost of modules

It appeared that on the one hand Module fees were currently too cheap to be viable, whilst on the other, the major complaint was that they were too expensive for potential attendees. Comparison was made with CLDavis meetings for example. However, JM pointed at that a realistic analysis of the figures indicated that there was a need to increase the current registration fee of £250 to the region of £300/325/350. Therefore, could costs be reduced? Suggestions made included reducing costs by providing electronic copies on CD, as the paper files were expensive to print and collate, or by uploading notes to the web. However, arguments were made against this including copyright issues, Module uptake/attendance if notes were simply available online, lack of time for attendees to print off their own notes, and the popularity and desirability of receiving a professional set of notes that could be annotated during the course and then taken away in a useful ready to use form. It was decided to continue with the current system of providing printed notes for the moment. Another suggestion was a reduced fee for advance booking of multiple Modules. However, it was felt that most trainees were unlikely to have funds available in advance, and that problems could arise if Modules failed and refunds were required. It was however agreed that JM's suggestion of differential registration fees for trainees and non-trainees was desirable.

ACTION: As above, JM to revise fee structure and present at AGM.

Replacement education coordinator

No volunteers had come forward. A possible candidate (AS) had been suggested by MS and others, and would be informally approached. In the meantime, a general email would be sent to members highlighting that the role remained open. If no additional nominations came forward, it was hoped that the candidate would agree, enabling their election at the AGM.

ACTION: MS to make further contact with AS, and send text of suitable email to SN for distribution to members.

Role of the education committee

It was noted that over the last year the Education sub-committee had fallen dormant. With an incoming Education Coordinator, it would be helpful and desirable to try and rejuvenate this, as a source of ideas, meeting organisers and potential speakers.

ACTION: MS to prompt incoming Education Coordinator to stimulate this committee back into life by asking it for support and input.

4. General issues

Links with AVTRW

The 2009 joint Pathology Day with AVTRW had not been completely successful either from an organisational perspective, or as judged by attendance figures. This had been discouraging, and raised questions about the value of future collaboration. On the other hand, there had recently been a change of personnel in the Officer team of AVTRW, and the 2010 conference was due to move to a new venue in York. BSVP had been approached by the new secretary of AVTRW, Adrian Philbey, and asked to cooperate once again on a Pathology Day. Council agreed that in the light of the changes, this could be an opportunity of mutual benefit and for the promotion of veterinary pathology. It was therefore agreed that the views of members would be canvassed at the AGM, and that as a member of BSVP, AP would be invited to give a short presentation about AVTRW at the AGM, and encourage members to participate in the AVTRW Pathology Day. Assuming this received the support of the meeting, BSVP would renew its cooperation with AVTRW for the 2010 meeting.

ACTION: MS to email AP to invite him to present a 5 minute talk at the AGM.

Links with BSTP

Preliminary thoughts had been aired about the possibility of joint modules with BSTP. For example, could our current 2-day format be incorporated into a more extended BSTP meeting with 2 days of general pathology/small animal/farm animal, leading into a specialist day/days? However, integrating the cycles of the 2 organisations would not be simple, target audiences and outcomes were significantly different, the BSTP meetings were currently oversubscribed (yet not appealing to the same group of attendees as current BSVP meetings – very little overlap), and it was unclear what the benefits to BSTP would be, or what appetite they might have for this suggestion. It was perhaps something to bear in mind for the future.

ACTION: New Education Coordinator to perhaps liase with CS on the merits and possibilities of this proposal.

Future development - web presence, member participation

It was agreed by all that there was a general need to increase member participation in the development of the Society. This could perhaps be achieved by revisiting the idea of a member's area in the website, or a listserv. It was agreed that the necessary expertise to facilitate this was lacking from Council, and that a volunteer should be sought.

ACTION: Discuss with KI (current webmaster) and seek volunteers at AGM.

5. Planning for the AGM on November 14th 2009

Agenda items would include:

Officer reports (to be received by Weds 11th November and incorporated into a single presentation template by MS)

Particular issues – AVTRW cooperation (AP to be invited to speak), BSTP cooperation (CS to be invited to speak?), BVA Specialist Division status (MS to prepare), subscription increases (JM to prepare justification), discussion of future Modules (BS was not attending and so MS would prepare to discuss this).

It was suggested that perhaps a date and planned schedule for coordinating the 2010 meeting might facilitate volunteers, and prevent a last minute panic. Volunteers would therefore be sought at the 2009 AGM.

Minutes prepared by Mark Stidworthy