

Report to BSPP Annual General Meeting 2015

BSPP Board meetings

The Board will meet four times in 2015 to manage the affairs of the Society, to plan scientific meetings, to agree the policy for the Society's publications, to agree a budget and monitor income and expenditure, to identify opportunities to promote plant pathology and, generally, to further the interests of the Society and its members.

Board members

- President (Gary Foster), President Elect (Julie Flood). Richard Oliver was appointed Vice President for 2015.
- Treasurer (Paul Nicholson), Secretary (Sarah Holdgate), Programme Secretary (Elizabeth Orton), Membership Secretary (Sam Lee).
- Normally 6 representative members are elected by members at large and serve for 3 years. John Carr (Cambridge) and Jonathan Jones (JHI) were elected by the membership in 2014 and took over from Amanda Bennett and Elizabeth Orton at the start of 2015.
- The Senior Editors of *Plant Pathology*, *Molecular Plant Pathology* and *New Disease Reports* attend Board meetings along with the Newsletter Editor, the Webmanager and the Outreach Officer.

BSPP Finances

BSPP finances are in reasonably good shape. The flow of funds from our journals continues to be very healthy. Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, our investment portfolio has declined in value over the 12 month period to June 30th 2015. This is largely a result of the general downturn in share prices following uncertainty about the state of the Chinese economy. It is hoped that the uncertainty is behind us (for this aspect at least) and that the portfolio will return to positive growth in the near future.

The buoyant state of our finances has enabled us to maintain our support for student bursaries and travel for the current year. BSPP has supported undergraduate and MSc bursaries to a sum of £45,000 in 2015 and provided assistance for travel to conferences to the sum of £10,000 to date.

In addition to these activities, BSPP has been able to continue support for the publication of *New Disease Reports* as a valuable resource to plant pathologists across the globe. BSPP has also committed to the continuation of its outreach activities and see this as an important means with which to engage with a much broader audience.

BSPP Publications

- ***Plant Pathology***

The IF score for 2014 was published in late July at 2.121, and is down on the previous year (2.969). This ranks the journal at 63 out of 195 in the Plant Sciences, down from 37th. Most of this fall is due to the increased number of articles that we have been publishing to reduce the backlog, which increased the denominator used for the IF calculation. We don't expect this to be a long-term problem, and it takes the

IF back to where it was 3 years ago. For comparison, The IF for *EJPP* is 1.490, *Plant Disease* is now at 3.020 and *Phytopathology* has increased from 2.746 to 3.119.

The journal continues to make a healthy profit for the society - £199,540 in the last year, which is up on the previous year. However, BSPP is using approx. £5000 of this to buy an extra 240 pages each year at the moment to reduce the backlog of papers on early view.

Two Virtual Issues of previously published articles were published online: *Potato blight* (17 articles) and *Diseases of cassava and sweet potato* (10 articles).

A number of new editors have joined the Board to replace some retirements.

Molecular Plant Pathology

Online only: *Molecular Plant Pathology* moved to online only publication in January 2015.

Editorial Board: We appointed a new team of Senior Editors and editorial board members for 2015 – 2017. The new line-up includes 2 Senior Editors based in China. We have appointed an additional Senior Editor with nematode expertise.

Impact factor: The current IF is 4.7. This represents a 5% increase on last year's figure and ranks us 16/200 in the Plant Sciences category. Much of the recent increase in IF is due to Top 10 Review citations.

Page budget: A further increase in manuscript submissions coupled with a fairly constant rejection rate meant that a backlog of accepted articles was building up. At the annual journal management meeting, Wiley publishers recommended a 25% increase in page budget from 2016. This was approved by the BSPP Board.

New Disease Reports

The decline in submissions has been reversed with the level of submissions to date this year last seen in 2012. The output of published reports is also flourishing with the total for Volume 31 exceeding that of Volume 29 with the same expected for the second Volume of the year. The Senior Editor announced has his retirement, partly for personal reasons and partly with a desire to see a fresh approach to *New Disease Reports* after nearly 10 years in the post. Interviews for the new Senior Editor will be taking place this week, with the new Senior Editor planned to take over fully by the end of 2015.

Newsletter

Three issues of the BSPP Newsletter will be published in 2015, providing members with general information on current and planned BSPP activities, along with reports prepared from members who received funding through one of the many BSPP schemes including travel grants, fellowships and bursaries. The success of the newsletter is, as always, contingent on members continuing to provide interesting articles and content, and your continued help with this is requested.

Scientific conferences and meetings

The Presidential Meeting is the main scientific meeting of the Society and is typically held annually. Recently, the conference has been held in September, this has attracted new delegates to the conference. The BSPP may hold smaller meetings that cover topics suggested by the Society's membership and that strongly benefit the membership, none have been held in 2015 but proposals from members for future

meetings to be organised by BSPP are very welcome, for example a meeting on Tree Health was held in 2013.

The Society also provides financial sponsorship for plant pathology-related meetings organised by members. The upper limit for sponsorship is now £4000. Two conferences have received support with one award to Prof Sarah Gurr (University of Exeter) on the 'Ecology and evolution of crop pests and pathogens' (13-14 July 2015) and the other to Prof Lesley Torrance for an EMBO Workshop on 'Plant viruses: friends and foes' (11-15 July 2016).

Education

The society continues to actively support both undergraduate and postgraduate interests in plant pathology through the funding of bursaries projects supervised by BSPP members. During 2015 there were 19 students supported by the scheme, furthermore the board of the society sees this as an extremely good use of funds in the support of plant pathology research at the student level and we look forward to supporting more students in 2016.

In total 200 students have benefited over the past 17 years and have been funded to spend 8 weeks or more of their summer holiday gaining practical experience in research labs across the UK and of this over 75 have been funded in the last 4 years.

Fellowships

Two Junior Fellowships have been awarded; one to Emily Seward (University of Oxford) and one to Daniel De Vega Perez (James Hutton Institute). One Senior Fellowship has been awarded to Prof Xiangming Xu (East Malling Research Station).

Travel Fund

We continue to support cases judged as appropriate up to a maximum of half the costs of a trip up to a limit of £750. We have so far received 22 applications and 13 that met all the criteria have been awarded a grant. Members come from all parts of the world and a travel to a wide range of conferences has been supported. Most of the rejected applications were due to missing the deadlines.

Outreach

After extensive discussions at board level, about the future of outreach within the Society a new outreach officer was appointed in March 2015. Dr Phil Smith was appointed to this part-time role. Phil has over 10 years experience of running a science education charity, the Teacher Scientist Network in Norfolk and before that was a plant pathology researcher.

Paul Beales (board member with responsibility for outreach) and Phil have discussed the future direction that the Society's activities will take. Phil is looking to develop deeper relationships with a smaller cohort of teachers, refining the existing resources and developing new ones that are more practically based. Through his existing Networks he aims to increase the visibility of BSPP resources for schools and develop a 'toolkit' for scientists to use in school.

BSPP will still have presence at key events, although there will be a reduced number of events attended compared with the last couple of years. Phil and Paul will

decide which are the most appropriate to ensure engagement with key stakeholders. Phil is also looking to develop partnership working with other societies and groups, most notably SAPS (Science and Plant for Schools) and attended the SAPS Summer School in Eslington this year.

Phil's first big event is currently underway! Running in parallel to our conference is a teacher/sixth-form mini-conference entitled 'Damaging and Deadly'. The timing of the Presidential meeting in relation to the start of the school year makes this a tough call but with the meeting going ahead anyway it is considered well worth the effort. This event feature 3 mini-talks and a chance for VIth form students to join in the poster session at the conference. This is a format that could be moved around the country with future meetings and more lead-in time to recruit schools.

The outreach web-pages have been edited and updated to reflect these changes. Feedback from members about the resources and the future direction of outreach is always welcomed. The outreach officer is keen to support members in organising their own events and members are invited to share these thoughts via email.

Industrial liaison

The BSPP continues to be involved with the Diseases Working Group of the British Crop Production Council. It is planning a one-day review in December 2015 to discuss "Emerging threats; emerging solutions". There is also discussion over collaborating to renew the BSPP's Teaching Audit. BSPP responded to the EU public consultation on endocrine disruptors, in which the society stated the need for more emphasis on scientific evidence in the decision-making process.

This year we have secured three major and five minor sponsors for the Presidential conference.

Publicity

Publicity work for the BSPP aims to raise the profile of the Society in the UK and at international meetings. To date during 2015, the BSPP has had exhibition stands at the Molecular Biology of Plant Pathogens meeting on 8-9 April 2015 and at the American Phytopathological Society Annual Meeting in Pasadena California (1-5 August 2015) to promote wider knowledge about the Society and benefits of membership. The BSPP and the science of Plant Pathology were also highlighted at university access events at the University of Nottingham, where on 27 July 2015 Kwasi Adusei-Fosu and Matt Dickinson exposed 29 school students aged 15-19 and their teacher to a wide range of topics in plant pathology and at the University of Cambridge where John Carr introduced virus-plant and virus-aphid-plant interactions to 23 sixth form students from Northern Ireland. At both events the visitors were showered with BSPP materials (pens, 'fluffies', and highlighters etc.) as prizes. A competition was launched to choose a new design for the BSPP T-shirt. The winning design will be chosen at the BSPP Presidential Conference at the University of Bristol, 13-15 September 2015 and announced by the BSPP president, Professor Gary Foster.

Membership

At the end of August 2015, the membership of the Society stood at 657, down from 721 in June 2014 (when members who had not renewed for 2014 had not yet been removed from the database), up from 647 in 2012 and up from 631 in 2011. Just over 33% of current BSPP members are based outside the UK. Membership is drawn from 55 countries from Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australasia.

Gary Foster

September 2015