

Outline of changes to Article IV, Paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Radiation Research Society suggested by Peter Wardman (presented to Members at the 54th Annual Meeting, 22 September 2008)

1. Introduction

Dr Wardman suggested that the multidisciplinary nature of the Society was a strength which was important and should be protected. However, the single-word descriptions of the four main scientific fields were now dated and inadequate. On the other hand, electing Councilors with specific responsibilities to represent each of the four broad areas of interest was valuable, worked well enough, and should be retained without the transfer of four Councilors from specific areas to 'At Large', which was a proposal 'on the table'.

Members were reminded of key paragraphs of the Constitution. Article II presents the objectives: 'The objectives of the Society shall be: 1. To promote original research in the natural sciences relating to radiation. 2. To facilitate integration of different fields/disciplines in the study of radiation effects ...'. Equally relevant was Article IV.2: 'It shall be the guiding principle of the Society, its Officers, Council, and Board of Editors to provide equal opportunities to the participating branches of science (physics, chemistry, biology, and medicine) in the conduct of the affairs of the Society.'

Dr Wardman suggested that it was not evident how the proposed changes which had been previously discussed by the Membership (those which were 'on the table') conformed to these Articles, either in principle, or in the inevitable consequences which would follow changed representation. In his view, minor modifications to the Constitution would achieve the aims of the suggested changes and would be preferable.

2. Proposed alternative changes

It was suggested that the Constitution should define groupings of interests with wider definitions than the present single-word description of 'disciplines'. This could be most simply achieved by inserting a preamble in Article IV, paragraph 2, something like:

'For the purposes of these Articles hereunder:

'Physics' shall mean 'physics and related physical and mathematical sciences, including: electronic, mechanical and optical engineering including imaging technology; mathematics and statistics and their applications in biology and medicine; ...'

'Chemistry' shall mean 'chemistry and related molecular sciences, including: biochemistry; chemical biology; structural biology; nanotechnology; ...'

... and so on.

(The above descriptions were truncated for presentational purposes, merely to give an indication of the general form of words which might be adopted.)

3. Practical consequences of the proposed changes

Membership application forms would emphasise the multi-disciplinary nature of the Society, and explain that in order to preserve broad representation on Council and in the conduct of its affairs, the interests of members was formally divided into four groupings, and Members would be asked to check which group most closely describes their interests. Thus the Society would aim to be an association of

groupings, and we could ditch the archaic ‘discipline’. In Dr Wardman’s view, retention of the four grouping structure would preserve a balance and help retain the broad scope of the Society. He suggested these proposals were neither contentious nor divisive, and he recommended the Society adopts them, and moves on.

4. The way forward if this suggestion is favored in principle by Members

Council would be mandated to draft a preamble to Article IV, paragraph 2 following the form suggested above. This would be circulated to Members with the request to suggest areas of interest which might have been overlooked, or to indicate whether a subject area was in the ‘wrong’ grouping, and a final motion then drafted for approval in the usual way.

It would seem desirable for the preamble to include some form of authorisation for Council to modify the descriptions of interests from time to time in the promotional and membership documentation of the Society, requiring only endorsement by the Membership as formal changes to the Constitution if the changes were significant, or confirmation every (say) three years in any event. Thus the listing of interests would be dynamic and responsive to change without too much administrative burden. It should be possible for Members to revise their interests as frequently as needed, using the online service. The enhanced ability to search for Members with interests closely matching those of an individual Member should be useful in promoting collaborations, and complement or facilitate the ‘BR-RIDGE’ structure.