

The 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the British Neuroscience Association

11:00-12:00, Wednesday 9th September 2020
Held online via Zoom

Introduction and welcome by the Chief Executive, Dr Anne Cooke (AC)

- AC welcomed and thanked all attendees and explained that this is the first time the BNA has held an AGM online.
- AC introduced Annette Dolphin (AD - current BNA President), Catherine Harmer (CH – BNA Treasurer) and Zoe Kourtzi (ZK - Secretary)
- For the purposes of this meeting, the reporting period is from 1st Oct 2018 to 30th September 2019 (year end 2019).
- Due to disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 AGM is taking place slightly later in the year than usual.
- In recognition of COVID-19 disruptions, both Companies House and the Charity Commission granted extensions on the deadlines for submission of the BNA's annual accounts.
- A vote will be held during today's meeting to adopt the accounts which will be presented by CH.

Report from the President, Professor Annette Dolphin

1. Governance: Confirmation of elected Council and Committee members since previous AGM

- Since the previous AGM (April 2019) the following people have been elected:
 - **Volko Straub** from the University of Leicester has been elected by the membership as Trustee and Council member, to the position of Groups Co-ordinator on Council.
 - **Emma Soopramanien** from Queen Mary University London has been elected by the membership as Students & Early Careers Representative on the National Advisory Committee.
- AD gave thanks to those who have completed their time on the Council and committee since the previous AGM, namely:
 - **Ros Langston** from Dundee University, who stood down as Groups Co-ordinator
 - **Natalie Doig** from Oxford University, who stood down as Students and Early Careers representative.
- AD also gave thanks to those who continue to give their time to the BNA council and committee.

2. Strategy: Update on the BNA's strategic plans

The BNA is a membership organisation whose vision and purpose is “to preserve and protect health and advance public engagement in neuroscience, through supporting, promoting and representing neuroscientists and neuroscience research”, a vision which is articulated in more detail in the charity's official ‘Objects’ - which can be found in the Annual Report and Articles of Association listed with the Charity Commission. More can be found online in [governing documents](#).

To help the Council and Committee members deliver these Objects in a strategic, joined-up manner, the BNA has three overarching and connected strategic aims: to **Inform, Connect, and Influence**.

These aims were arrived at through a series of strategic workshops and engagement with members and all of the BNA's activities fall within one or more of these aims.

During the period being reported on at this AGM (from 1st October 2018 through to 30th September 2019), the BNA is delighted to report achievements in all three aims. AD highlighted one activity for each aim and encouraged attendees to look at the full Trustees' Annual Report and to contact the BNA after the AGM if they wish to comment, ask about, or suggest activities they would like to undertake.

Aim one: To Inform. BNA's scientific journal, *Brain and Neuroscience Advances*, is the most important means by which we inform the profession about the latest neuroscience research. AD encouraged all to visit the journal, [Brain and Neuroscience Advances](#).

During this reporting period, the journal published a unique collection of articles, entitled "*Neuroscience, past, present and future*", created to celebrate 50 years of the BNA. What makes the collection unique is that all of the articles are written in a way that's accessible to non-specialists, whether that's an A-Level student or a neuroscientist who specialises in a different field, making for a wonderful resource of accessible, readable articles that inform about a wide range of neuroscience topics - all of which are free and easy to download online.

We are proud that the journal is wholly owned by the BNA, and that it is one of only a handful of journals to cover the full range of open science practices, such as Registered Reports and CRediT taxonomy.

Aim two: To Connect. It's common knowledge that neuroscience in academia and industry needs to be well connected in order to achieve the best outcomes for research and its real-life applications. The BNA set up a working group in 2018 to increase connections between neuroscience in academia and in the commercial sector e.g. pharmaceutical, biotech, or Medical technology (MedTech) companies, and this activity really started to gain momentum during the reporting period, with the BNA being invited to present at a Dementia Industry Group meeting, round table discussion at the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries and a Royal Society of Biology meeting about connecting with industry, as well as other activities. This initiative has now been titled '*Building Bridges Between: Industry & Academia*' and the BNA are looking forward to hosting a live Q&A with Astra Zeneca Executive Vice-President, Sir Mene Pangalos, on 15th September.

Aim three: To Influence. In 2018 BNA were thrilled to be awarded funding from the Gatsby Foundation, this has enabled the BNA to make significant progress in meeting its aim to 'Influence', in particular through our campaign, '*Credibility in neuroscience*', which seeks to influence the way neuroscience is done, so that it maximises transparency, reproducibility, replicability and reliability of research. A very important aim.

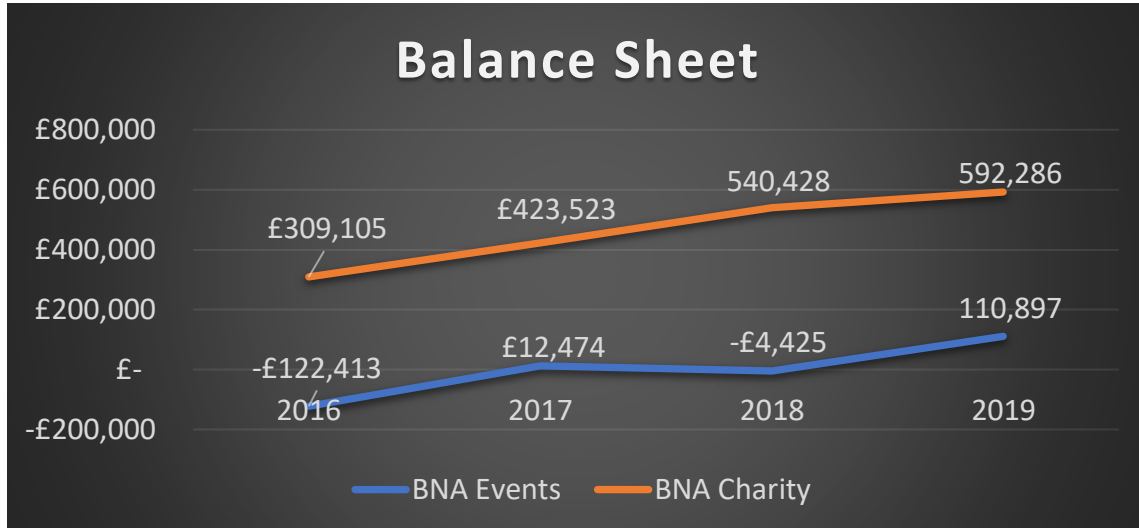
During this reporting period we appointed the Credibility Advisory Board (CAB) and recruited two new members of staff - Head of Marketing and Communications, and Head of Policy and Campaigns - to oversee and help deliver this work.

An example of work for the credibility campaign was the introduction of 'pre-registration posters' at the 2019 Festival of Neuroscience, which are posters that present *plans* for research before it's been carried out, rather than research that has already been completed. We believe this was the first large conference to have preregistration posters, and published a comment paper in *Nature Human Behaviour* about how they worked and advice on how to introduce them; a number of conferences have now also had preregistration posters, and so this is a prime example of how we are influencing the sector and meeting one of our key strategic aims.

Report from the Treasurer, Professor Catherine Harmer

1. Annual accounts for the British Neuroscience Association Ltd and for BNA Events Ltd

Reserves



- BNA Charity: Reserves include in-advance funding for the ‘credibility in neuroscience’ project and ongoing development work
- BNA Events: Reserves follow a 2-year cycle in line with income from biannual Festival of Neuroscience.

It should be noted that the BNA’s reserves may need to cover a period of uncertainty, given the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic instability likely to occur over the coming 1-2 years or more..

Year-end (YE) accounts of BNA Charity

- CH compared the total income, total costs, and the difference for YE2019 with YE2018 (shown right)
- Major income sources for YE209 include investments, membership, advertising & donations/grants
- Major expenses come from costs of travel/meetings, bursaries, subscriptions/membership, bulletin production, neuroscience in schools and journal costs
- Thanks were given to Gatsby, Roche and all other funders and supporters of the BNA, including members.



YE accounts of BNA Events Ltd

- CH compared the total income, total costs, and the difference for YE2019 with YE2018 (shown below)
- The difference between a Festival and non-Festival year can clearly be seen.
- These figures include income from registration, sponsorship, and donations
- The expenditure includes costs for speaker and meeting expenses & administration
- The fund from BNA Events reported in the graphs above have now been transferred to the charity accounts and will appear there in the next reporting period.
- The year end 2019 accounts show a stable pattern of income and planned expenditure.



Summary:

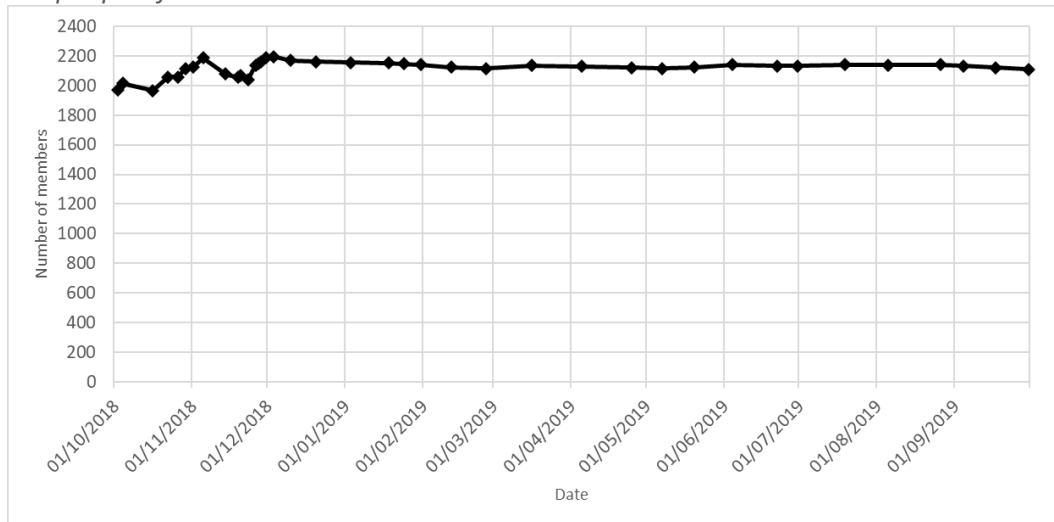
- The YE2019 accounts show a stable pattern of income and planned expenditure.
- BNA Events is in surplus after a surplus from the Festival – this needs to last for longer given potential lower returns for the 2021 Festival
- BNA charity remains in a good position, with planned expenditure in line with core mission and activities.
- The BNA continues to be vigilant, considering uncertainty on income from investments and festival in 2020-2021

AC asked attending members to adopt and accept the presented accounts, agreeing that they are a true record of our accounts by way of a poll presenting the following question: *Do you accept (adopt) the account for the BNA Ltd for YE 2019.*

AC confirmed that the accounts were adopted by the majority in attendance and will now be submitted to Companies House and the Charity Commission.

Report from the Secretary, Professor Zoe Kourtzi

1. Membership report for YE2019



- The total membership number has increased from 1971 (1st October 2018) to 2109 (September 2019).
- This is an increase of 138 members or 7% of the total.
- To reach our target of 10% increase, we would have needed to increase by 197 members over the year, giving total of 2168 members. We were therefore short of our target by 59 members.
- The highest point over the course of YE2019 was 2194, on 3rd December 2018. This is likely to be associated with the poster submission deadline and early bird deadline of 30th November for BNA2019.

2. Meetings

- **Neurosciences and brain tumour research: joining forces for greater impact:** 23rd October 2018, London
- **Festive Symposium December 2018, Neuromyths, and the science behind them:** 17th December 2018, KCL – this launched the ‘neuromyths’ theme for 2019, it was a very successful symposium and featured covered by BBC Radio 4.
- **BNA2019 Festival of Neuroscience:** Dublin, April 2019: 1300 participants over 4 days from 37 countries. The meeting featured 52 exhibitors and 10 non-exhibiting supporters with 21 partnering organisations. The outcome saw a healthy profit for the BNA.

3. 2018 BNA prize winners

- Professor Irene Tracey, University of Oxford – Outstanding Contribution to Neuroscience
- Dr Emma Yhnell, Cardiff University – Public Engagement of Neuroscience
- Dr Delia Fuhrman, University College London – Postgraduate prize
- Rachel Coney, University of Leeds – Undergraduate prize

Q&A with attendees

Following the COVID19 pandemic many universities are in financial crisis and are making redundancies – what is the BNA doing to lobby the government to provide necessary funds to universities?

AC acknowledged that COVID19 was outside of the reporting period addressed in this meeting but reassured that BNA is aware of the challenging situation of COVID19. Due to Gatsby funding, the BNA are fortunate to have appointed a policy lead within the executive team and are now much more able to act in these policy and advocacy areas. BNA held a consultation (a survey) of neuroscientists and took the results to the Government by writing to the science minister. BNA has also written to MPs in devolved nations, requesting that they put the question to their respective parliaments about support for neuroscience research. Recovering from and coping with the impact of COVID19 on research is clearly a huge challenge, but AC reassured attendees that the BNA continues to champion the needs of neuroscientists.

How was the BNA affected by virtual change in Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS) Forum Glasgow?

The BNA was very disappointed as a lot of planning had taken place in preparation for the event. The BNA team were looking forward to welcoming delegates to Glasgow and meeting European collaborators. AC acknowledged FENS in providing a successful virtual event experience in such a short space of time. It affected the BNA in that some of the planning for events and schemes did not go ahead, e.g. the lab hosting scheme involving approximately 100 early career researchers (ECRs) from around the world, but the BNA has not lost anything financially. The overall message is that it was disappointing the BNA was unable to welcome people to the UK, but the online meeting was very positive and strengthened connections between neuroscientists and with the BNA at a crucial time.

Is the BNA receiving income from the journal and is that expected to happen over time?

At the moment, no. The journal is a long-term project which was not expected to generate income for some time. The main purpose is to support the BNA's aims and objectives (especially around credibility in neuroscience). However, the journal has now been indexed with PubMed central, and the anticipation is that the BNA journal will generate income in about 5-10 years.

Influence inform connect. Within the context of 'connect' as BNA's strategic aim, what does the BNA do to promote overseas academic connections?

BNA membership is open to all countries and we have members from all around the world. BNA also has affiliations to FENS and the International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO) and members enjoy free membership to these societies through their benefits package. Currently, the BNA local group representatives (LGRs) are placed in the UK and Ireland because the remit of the charity is within the devolved nations of the UK. However, overseas members are a valued part of the membership.

Follow up question about partnering organisation for the BNA2021 Festival of Neuroscience.

The Festival is unique in that it is not just a BNA meeting; it is a whole group of societies coming together and BNA connects with overseas societies via these partnering organisations, some of which overseas, including: Société des Neurosciences, Neuroscience Ireland and the Canadian Association for Neuroscience.

BNA has shown impressive membership numbers and growth. Can you comment on the various membership categories?

The BNA aims to provide a category for everyone including undergraduates (including A Level and 16+ students), postgraduates, ECRs, full members, full industry members and retired member. Within these categories there is clear indication that clinicians and trainee psychologists are also able to join. BNA has some honorary memberships. Associate membership is relatively new and is for those who are interested in neuroscience but not in a professional capacity.

What are you doing to increase membership members?

A recent project carried out by the BNA revealed that the organisation is very successful at recruiting members, but weaker on retaining members. In large part, this is because there is a large, transient student population, where members join and then leave at the end of their course or training. One way to improve this is the introduction, over the last year, of a new membership category called 'Career Starter, which is designed for people who have been a BNA member as an undergraduate or postgraduate but have decided not to stay in research. Career Starters are entitled to one year of reduced fees (same as Postgraduate membership) and the hope is that this will lead them towards the Associate Member category and help them to stay in touch with the neuroscience community. Furthermore, a research group membership scheme has been launched, enabling groups of people to join. BNA has also embarked upon a retention campaign which returned some extremely valuable data and feedback.

How can members become more involved?

Through council and committee positions, local groups, and via the local group funding scheme which enables members to run activities in their local institution with the purpose of meeting and recruiting BNA members. The BNA is always interested in people who can help with communication work, including writing and social media. AC encouraged members to get in touch via the BNA office (office@bna.org.uk).

With regards to self-funded PhD students, is there any financial help with membership for these students?

In this situation lower rates can be awarded on a case-by-case basis. AC encouraged members to get in touch via the BNA office (office@bna.org.uk).

Does the BNA have student ambassadors?

Yes, local group student representatives (LGSRs) were introduced around two years ago. Some institutions have several LGSRs to represent the wide spectrum of students (undergraduate, medical etc). AC encouraged members to get in touch via the BNA office (office@bna.org.uk) if this of interest.

Are there LGRs in other countries such as Africa?

BNA does not currently have LGRs outside of the UK and Ireland as the remit of the charity, as registered with the Charity Commission, is limited to the UK. However an overseas BNA group is something that could be considered going-forward.

AC encouraged all to get in touch, gave thanks to Council and Committee and to the Gatsby Foundation who are really helping us to expand our ambition, as well as other funders and supporters.