WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Andy Ford welcomed members to the meeting, noting that a successful meeting of RLC had been held that morning.

Chief Executive’s Report

Stephen Matthews introduced his report, referring to the successful Building Performance Awards held on the previous day.

With reference to Finance, he stressed the importance of operating in a business-like manner, and of ensuring that resources were appropriately balanced and applied to the Institution’s priorities. 2011 had been a very satisfactory year financially, with performance ahead of budget and with an improved cash position. In view of the challenging external environment, this was felt to be a very positive outcome.

Regarding staff capability, the technical capacity on the staff had greatly been enhanced, with an eight strong Technical Department in place. This was of great importance, particularly in responding to government consultations in view of the huge amount of legislation that was forthcoming. The pace of change was enormous, and it was hard to cover this need with volunteer input alone. There was also an enhanced focus on communication and the delivery of the Institution’s messages; the need to define and refine those messages was stressed as was the need to deliver them appropriately and to the right audiences.

Stephen Matthews went on to report on Membership, drawing attention to current membership levels. The large number of Affiliate members was noted, being the grade that could easily be joined without qualification or experience requirements. The balance between Affiliate numbers and those of other grades might be a matter for further consideration. Affiliate membership had grown very considerably since the year 2000, and whilst the Member grade had grown somewhat over that period, other qualifying grades had been static, or had declined in numbers. It was also noted that by median age, CIBSE had a younger membership than most other Institutions, and attention was drawn to further details presented, including recruitment and international figures. It was also noted that renewals to date had been somewhat ahead of previous years.

Information was then presented on usage figures for the Knowledge Portal, which were considered to be positive. The number of downloads of documents was noted, and it was pointed out that the previous frequency of updating would not be adequate in future.

Regarding the Building Performance awards, it was noted that the 2012 event had been successful, with more revenue from table sales and significantly more from sponsorship than in 2013.

Stephen Matthews also drew attention to the forthcoming Technical Symposium on 18th and 19th April, and the CIBSE conference which would be held in conjunction with UBM on 10/11th October. It was also noted that future Council meetings for the current year would be held on 14th June and 12th October.

It was also noted that Marie Dignan had decided to leave the Institution’s employment to take a career break, but was likely to continue to support the Institution’s work in some form.
Members discussed issues arising from the report, noting the interest generated by the Awards amongst people not normally closely involved with the Institution. It was suggested that CIBSE needed to concentrate on key priorities, and to promote such benefits as the Knowledge Portal and enhance their value. Members endorsed the value of the staff technical team, which was a great benefit to the Institution, but it was noted that many of the documents presented for comment were not well prepared, and might not be a high priority for CIBSE to provide input. There was always a need for additional specialist input to consultations, and the usefulness of web-based systems to gain a broad range of input was noted. It was important for CIBSE to embrace input from all members who wished to contribute, and to avoid the impression that everything had to come from HQ. A Regions Road-Show was planned to better engage with the Regions, and other means of facilitating input were being considered.

Membership Development Update

Pearl Mensah presented the report to Council, referring to the Institution’s strategic objective to develop membership. Routes to membership were being further developed, and discussions with other Institutions were underway on mutual recognition arrangements. Internally, a more outward facing membership development team had been created, and there was a focus on broadening the Institution’s reach beyond traditional catchment groups.

There was also an emphasis on developing internationally, with a focus on delivering membership benefits that were relevant to them.

Retention was also a key issue, and the need to engage the existing membership and to gauge the value they attached to membership benefits.

Referring again to membership numbers by grade, it was noted that there had been considerable emphasis on the Member and Affiliate grades, but there was a need to do more to engage and recruit younger members to the Student and Graduate grades. There would be increased activity in terms of company briefings, addressing both young engineers and those who would qualify for corporate membership. Based on numbers in the industry, CIBSE should have more members at the Associate and Licentiate levels, and there was an increased emphasis on technicians, and on BEng graduates who might not go on towards CEng.

It was noted that company visits were not only for larger companies, and that input from existing members was very helpful to this process. It was suggested that people could also be invited to sessions at HQ.

Regarding university co-ordinators and the issue of free student membership, it was noted that it was difficult to compete with other Institutions that did offer free membership and that this might need review.

It was suggested that at the top of the profession, there was a move for the most senior positions not to be held by CIBSE members, but by members of other Institutions and in particular those from IMechE or IET. It was noted that it was a great advantage to be established as an individual’s first Institution, and very often this would not be CIBSE for Building Services Engineers. The importance of membership being recognised and valued by employers was stressed, and it was suggested that existing members could help with this in their organisations. It was also suggested that new benefits to younger members, such as discussion forums and knowledge exchanges, could also make a significant difference.

Tina Cardy referred to research by IET which suggested that paid-for student members was not successful, but that arrangements by which universities paid for bulk student membership could be considered. She went on to report on the forthcoming membership test marketing campaign which would target different groups, including Facility Managers, and different means of reaching people. There would be some benefit from the conference tie-up with UBM, as it would allow access to people on their database. Non-CIBSE members who were members of groups would also be targeted, as would those who had purchased training or publications but were not members.
Developing CIBSE Communications and Knowledge Sharing

John Brindle of the Institute of Physics introduced his presentation on the changes made by IOP to embrace the digital age. He explained the history of the IOP, noting that it had always been a publisher, producing a substantial number of journals. In the year 2000, IOP had 23,000 members and all membership application systems and committee activities were paper based, which imposed long timescales. There had been member demand for change, and for increased engagement and efficiency together with enhanced services and benefits. As a result, the IOP moved to having all online applications forms, and all peer review undertaken electronically, which had been accepted by Engineering Council, and had enabled a much wider range of people to be involved.

IOP Members largely now maintained their own records and paid online, with 90% of payments received within one month. Online systems were now routinely used for such things as conference planning and publishing, with all planning and development being undertaken electronically. Virtual communities were now of key importance with social network coming to the fore. IOP now had 44,000 members, with a median age of 27. Digital only membership had been introduced, at low cost, and student membership was free but without hard copy products. Student membership was available to all students, not only those on accredited courses.

This approach did require that proper digital magazines and rich media websites be produced, rather than simply PDF versions of magazines. Online CPD, training and knowledge services had now become the norm and less than 10% of renewals were done on paper.

For the future, IOP was looking to move into external social media and virtual communities. This had started in the case of LinkedIn with a group started by an individual member, but now was run by IOP. A Twitter channel had been introduced as well as YouTube and Facebook channels.

Andy Ford thanked John Brindley for his contribution, remarking on the low median age of IOP and the considerable increase in membership numbers. It was noted that this had only been possible through the transfer to digitally based activity. Retention rates of students had also increased greatly, even of those who were not directly employed in physics after graduation. In response to questions, it was noted that IOP had to some extent tailored its information to a younger membership, but that the quality of content had not changed. It was noted that the need for real contact had not decreased, so for instance conferences were still held physically, and indeed lunch and coffee breaks had increased to allow for more networking, and to reflect the fact that knowledge could be transferred in other ways. Regarding the technology, it was noted that it was largely modular, rather than a single system.

Regarding the potential tension between the rather trivial nature of much social networking and the need for bodies such as IOP and CIBSE to be authoritative, John Brindley stressed the need to separate the delivery of hard information from the more informal Twitter type contact. Regarding the target audiences, it was explained that the networking aspects had proved popular with physics teachers, and that the directing of people to proper information sources, rather than trying to deliver the hard content through social media, was a key issue. It was also noted, however, that any incorrect information was very quickly picked up and commented on by other users.

Regarding the benefit of retaining members who were no longer involved in physics, it was noted that increased critical mass gave greater weight to the IOP’s dealings with government. It was also noted that SLL had been using social networking, and that Twitter had been very useful, particularly during events such as exhibitions where it had been an effective means of communication.

Discussion

Marianne Trusson talked about the benefits of the use of social networking, having experienced different benefits from different sites. LinkedIn provided contact through groups and recruitment access, as well as keeping in touch with colleagues. It allowed debate and immediate feedback, although care was needed. The question of liability was a potential issue, but she felt that it was acknowledged that an individual opinion should not be entirely relied upon. It was suggested that there was a need for some ground rules as to how social networks were used.
It was pointed out that sites such as the CIBSE LinkedIn group did provide a sense of community, and that people felt a benefit from being part of it. Members commented that the usage of different networks varied depending on age group and cohort, and it was suggested that Facebook was primary a school-age phenomenon which people gave up at university and beyond.

It was suggested that a wider view might be taken than purely building services and CIBSE membership, and that young people more generally should be engaged with the importance of the construction process and of buildings. The potential for low cost digital based membership could open the door to joint membership with other bodies such as RIBA.

Members discussed a range of experiences in the use of social media and the potential for CIBSE to develop its use and to engage others in the process.

It was agreed that these new technologies could not be ignored, but that they were not the complete answer and were part of a wider picture. They provided a channel for communication, but the most important thing was the message. Membership growth would depend on demonstrating the value to potential members of joining CIBSE. The importance of recognising that the membership was first based on the participation of people who cared about buildings was pointed out.

Summary

Andy Ford took the message from the debate that CIBSE should not be passive in its approach. The IOP presentation had some interesting examples, such as the engagement with a much wider range of students. CIBSE needed to develop a proposal for its way forward which could be discussed further. The possibility of co-badging and engaging with people of other disciplines was noted, as was the potential for better engagement with the Regions, each of which was unique. The potential of technology to provide much wider engagement was stressed, as there was a limit to the number of connections that were otherwise possible. The importance of soft skills was also pointed out, and the potential for training in these areas might be considered. Andy Ford thanked members for their contribution.

Vote of Thanks

David Fisk expressed the thanks of Council to Andy Ford for his contribution during the year in which he had chaired Council as President of the Institution. He referred to the inclusive feeling Andy had brought to the operation of Council, and members expressed their appreciation of his Presidency.