

# Reflections from Longtime Lay Councillor David Hughes

**N**OW BEING IN my seventh and last year as a lay member on the College Council, I was asked to reflect a bit on the experience. I believe that the boards of all self-governing professional bodies have lay members, sometimes called public representatives, appointed by the government to ensure that the public interest is well-served. It seems that a prerequisite for a lay member is to know nothing about the field in which the profession operates. This is not as silly as it seems, because it enables people like me to ask the “dumb questions” that nobody else has raised, which occasionally turn out to be quite useful. This sometimes requires patience on the part of the real professionals which, I must say, I have always experienced.

Many professional bodies combine looking after both the interests of the public and their members, and some do this well. However this kind of approach requires fairly complex internal controls and “firewalls” and it never completely overcomes public suspicion that the organization will look after its own when in a crunch. This is why the separation of the Association of Professional Biology from the College was an important step in enhancing the College’s credibility.

When I joined Council, there were 1,721 college members and now there are 2,233 –a pretty healthy twenty-nine percent growth. Today, there is more member interest in serving on Council, finances have improved as has insurance against shocks such as unexpected legal bills, a new *Code of Ethics* is in place along with guidance on stewardship, and member audits and CPD opportunities are being continually enhanced, as are the capabilities of the small but dedicated office staff. Not bad for a volunteer-driven outfit! All of these advances, in my view, add up to increasing the value and public recognition of being an applied biology professional, irrespective of the outcome of current debates on right-to-practice legislation, professional reliance, and so on.

All in all, I have had great pleasure in participating in a growing and maturing organization of which you can all be proud. 

David Hughes, Lay Councillor

