

July 2016



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Australasian Neuroscience Society Newsletter

Hobart Meeting
4-7th December 2016



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Message from the President

As ANS Members will be aware, the funding success rates for health and medical research through the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) have been in decline in recent years.



James Vickers

*President, Australasian
Neuroscience Society*

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) has been developed as an alternate source of research support, and ANS has provided a submission to the 'Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy'.

Some of the key recommendations by the ANS for this MRFF strategy were:

- That the MRFF seeks to develop strategic funding initiatives that reflect the burden of disease in Australia.
- That the MRFF consider the particular emerging health burden of diseases and conditions that are expanding dramatically, such as the neurodegenerative diseases of aging, as well as the greater recognition of the impact of mental health conditions in the young.
- That the MRFF consider how future economic prosperity in technological innovation and new industries may be supported by excellence in research. In this regard, the ANS recommends focussed support of the emergent 'neurotechnology' industry and further development of links between excellent neuroscience research and application to health issues such as sensory loss, health surveillance and mobility.

We also advised that the strategy should investigate a functional Fellowship system to support researchers at all stages. The NHMRC have recently also released details of a 'Structural Review of NHMRC's' Grant Program, with three suggested potential models for granting into the future. We will be seeking the views of Members for a submission by the ANS on this review, due towards the end of August.

In the meantime, ANS has joined with a number of other universities and organisations to support a new initiative arising from the Australian Academy of Sciences – the Australian Brain Alliance – that seeks to provide a unified approach to boosting neuroscience research in Australia. Through the Alliance, we hope to make a strong case for a major national brain research initiative, and we will be developing a program of engagement with politicians, policy makers and industry sectors to help move this along. The Working Group for this Alliance is chaired by ANS Member, Professor Pat Mitchie.

Members of the Alliance have agreed to work together to develop the case for a significant national brain initiative and to advocate to the Australian government and other relevant stakeholders for its establishment. Over time it is envisaged that the membership of the alliance would be expanded to include industry and other potential end-users of brain research. The Alliance is focusing on the rubric of 'Cracking the Brain's Code' and has three main subthemes around supporting neurotechnology-based industries,

tackling debilitating degenerative and mental health conditions, and supporting enhanced learning. The aim is drive high quality basic neuroscience research and to develop interdisciplinary approaches toward outcomes of significant benefit for Australians. With the establishment of other national brain initiatives around the globe, we need to mobilise Australian neuroscience around this initiative, to present a unified position to those close to funding decisions.

We will provide further information regarding the Alliance as the campaign develops. It may be that local meetings with politicians and policy makers in regions across Australia will form a useful grass-roots approach. The results of the last election may make all politicians sensitive to issues of relevance to their constituencies, as well as hopefully a refocus on excellent scientific research as an area of national interest, as well as future productivity. There will be a short session on the Alliance at the ANS Scientific Meeting in Hobart in December, as well as a larger 'launch' event in Canberra through 2017. We also look forward to discussing this initiative with ANS members in New Zealand so that we can encourage interest in a substantial national program of support for the neurosciences in New Zealand.

*(Message from the
President...continued)*

These are busy and anxious times, with declining nationally competitive funding rates, unknown strategic directions of the MRFF, and now the review of NHMRC granting approaches. We would encourage you to be involved, where you can, in helping to shape the future direction of health and medical research, as well as how we may develop neuroscience research throughout Australasia.

In closing, one of the major advocacy events associated with the Society is the Australian Brain Bee Challenge (ABBC). Our National Coordinator, long-time ANS Member, Professor Vaughan Macefield, will shortly be heading overseas for a new academic appointment. We would like to pass on the Society's deep gratitude to Vaughan, and also to the Western Sydney University, for supporting the ABBC so well, and we wish Vaughan well in his new position. In this issue of the newsletter, we have a call for an Expression of Interest for a new National Coordinator and headquarters for the ABBC.

Australian Academy of Science recognises neuroscience excellence

The Australian Academy of Science (AAS) recently announced the winners of its 2016 awards in recognition of scientific excellence. Members of the ANS executive were delighted to see the awards recognised a variety of neuroscience achievements.

Dr Geoffrey Faulkner received the Ruth Stephens Gani Medal for 2016, an award which recognises research in human genetics research, honouring the late Ruth Stephens Gani's contribution to science in human cytogenetics.

Dr Faulkner is a Mater Research Institute/University of Queensland researcher whose focus is on why patients develop neurological disease. He searches for answers to questions such as how many genetic mutations in individual brain cells influence how memories are formed, and if diseases such as schizophrenia and Alzheimer's disease are caused by these genetic mutations. Dr Faulkner's research could form the basis for future treatments used for these disorders.

In 2011 Dr Faulkner's published breakthrough work in Nature describing somatic retrotransposition in the human brain was selected by the US National Institute of Mental Health as the "joint number 1 research advance of 2011"¹ and he has followed this up more recently with two additional revolutionary articles in Cell.



**Dr Geoffrey
Faulkner**

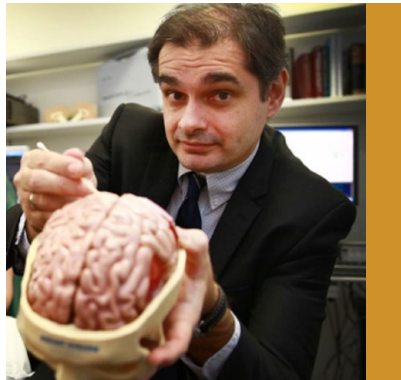
*Received the Ruth Stephens
Gani Medal for 2016 in recog-
nition of his human genetics
work [Photo courtesy AAS]*

The Gottschalk Medal, in honour of the late Professor A. Gottschalk and his contribution to science, recognises outstanding medical science research by researchers up to 10 years post-PhD. This year it was awarded to Professor Ostoja Steve Vucic Director of Neurophysiology and Consultant Neurologist at Sydney's Westmead Hospital. Professor Vucic's innovative research uncovered novel mechanisms that underlie the development of neurodegeneration in amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

¹ 2016. Profile Associate Professor Geoff Faulkner | Mater Research. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://research.mater.org.au/Researchers/Improving-Treatment-of-Disease/Cancer-Biology-and-Management/Associate-Professor-Geoff-Faulkner.aspx> [Accessed 9 June 2016].

(Australian Academy of Science recognises neuroscience excellence ... continued)

Professor Vucic's research has focussed on developing new techniques for diagnosing ALS which has led to earlier and more successful interventions, as well as identifying new therapeutic targets and neuroprotective therapies for the disease. His research has also contributed significantly to understanding the molecular and genetic processes underlying relapsing and progressive forms of multiple sclerosis, driving development of novel treatments for this chronic disease.



Professor Steve Vucic

Winner of the 2016 Gottschalk Award [Photo courtesy AAS]

Groundbreaking research carried out by Professor Naomi Wray from the Queensland Brain Institute (QBI), and mental health advocate Professor Patrick McGorry AO from The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, University of Melbourne has led to them being among 21 scientists to be elected as Fellows of the Australian Academy of Science this year.

Professor Wray was rewarded for her work as a leading complex trait statistical geneticist. Her contributions to quantitative genetic and evolutionary selection theory have been significant, leading to applications in agriculture and medicine. Internationally, changes to agricultural selection programs have resulted from Professor Wray's theoretical work on the prediction of rates of inbreeding in populations undergoing selection.

Recently Professor Wray, along with her QBI colleagues Professor Peter Visscher and Associate Professor Jian Yang, were awarded a five-year National Health and Medical Research Council \$7 million program grant to conduct research into the genetic causes of common diseases such as dementia, schizophrenia and Parkinson's disease.



Professor Naomi Wray

Director of QBI's Centre for Neurogenetics and Statistical Genomics, and one of 21 new Australian Academy of Science Fellows [Photo courtesy AAS]



Professor Patrick McGorry AO

Recognised for his development of early intervention services for youth [Photo courtesy of AAS]

Professor Patrick McGorry AO is a world-leading researcher in the area of early psychosis and youth mental health and his election as an AAS Fellow recognises his work creating new concepts for psychotic disorders and a new clinical and research focus on youth mental health. The result of this work has been earlier diagnosis and better outcomes for young people with mental illness. Professor McGorry's development of the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre which focusses on the early phase of illness, has been repeated around the world, as has the youth mental health reform model, headspace, the model he played a key role in designing.

For more than 30 years Professor McGorry has contributed to improving the youth mental health sector including for those who are vulnerable such as the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, transforming the lives of tens of thousands of young people around the world. Professor

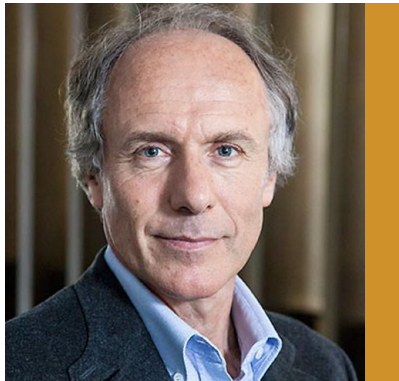
(Australian Academy of Science recognises neuroscience excellence ... continued)

McGorry's expertise in youth mental health policy in Australia and overseas means that the 2010 Australian of Year is frequently asked to provide advice on youth mental health.

Australia's Chief Scientist and neuroscientist Dr Alan Finkel AO was also elected as a Fellow to the AAS. Dr Finkel is a passionate advocate for science and engineering education, and he was recognised not only for being a convincing and successful advocate for science and engineering research and innovation, but also for his ability to create awareness with young researchers about how to succeed in the industrial world. Dr Finkel carries this into his role as Chief Scientist which he describes as one of encouragement and advice.

Dr Finkel believes that science is the driver for innovation and at the AAS awards dinner he called for investment in the future². Among his tasks, Dr Finkel is leading the development of the National Research Infrastructure Roadmap – a strategic plan for whole-of-government investment in science, research and innovation – to establish the major items which will feed astounding science over the next couple of decades.

Each of these AAS award recipients has made a significant contribution to neuroscience and ANS congratulates them on their innovation and investment in Australia's future.



Dr Alan
Finkel AO

New Fellow of the AAS

[Photo courtesy of AAS]

² 2016. Ambassadors of the Future | Chief Scientist of Australia. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/2016/05/address-to-the-australian-academy-of-science-annual-dinner/>. [Accessed 9 June 2016].

Spiders put the bite on IBS pain

Spiders have helped researchers from Australia and the US to discover a new target for Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) pain.

Spiders have helped researchers from Australia and the US to discover a new target for Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) pain.

The international research team – involving researchers from the University of Queensland and the University of Adelaide – used spider venom to identify a specific protein involved in transmitting mechanical pain, which is the type of pain experienced by patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).



Published in Nature “Selective spider toxins reveal a role for the Nav1.1 channel in mechanical pain” the discovery is a vital step forward in developing treatments for IBS patients.

The team was led by Professor Glenn King from UQ’s Institute for Molecular Bioscience (IMB), University of Adelaide’s Associate Professor Stuart Brierley, based at the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI), Professor David Julius from the University of California San Francisco, and Dr Frank Bosmans from Johns Hopkins University.

Professor King, part of the IMB Centre for Pain Research, said spider venom was an effective tool for investigating pain signalling in the human body.

“Spiders make toxins to kill prey and defend themselves against predators, and the most effective way to defend against a predator is to make them feel excruciating pain,” he said.

“Spider venom should therefore be full of molecules that stimulate the pain-sensing nerves in our body, allowing us to discover new pain pathways by examining which nerves are activated when exposed to spider toxins.”

A total of 109 spider, scorpion and centipede venoms were investigated as part of the study. Venom from a species of tarantula native to West Africa, *Heteroscodra maculate*, produced the strongest result.

The team found that an ion channel (a protein in nerves and muscles) called Nav1.1, previously implicated in epilepsy, was activated by the spider venom, suggesting it also plays a role in sensing and transmitting pain.

Further investigation revealed that Nav1.1 is present in pain-sensing nerves in the gut and underlies pathological levels of abdominal pain, such as that felt by IBS patients.

Associate Professor Brierley, who is Head of the University of Adelaide’s Visceral Pain Group, said one in five Australians suffer from IBS, symptoms of which include abdominal pain, diarrhoea and constipation.

“IBS places a large burden on individuals and on the health system, but despite this, there are currently no effective treatments,” he said. “Instead, sufferers are advised to avoid triggers that will cause their symptoms to flare up.”

“Identifying the crucial role Nav1.1 makes in signalling of chronic pain is the first step in developing novel treatments for patients with IBS”

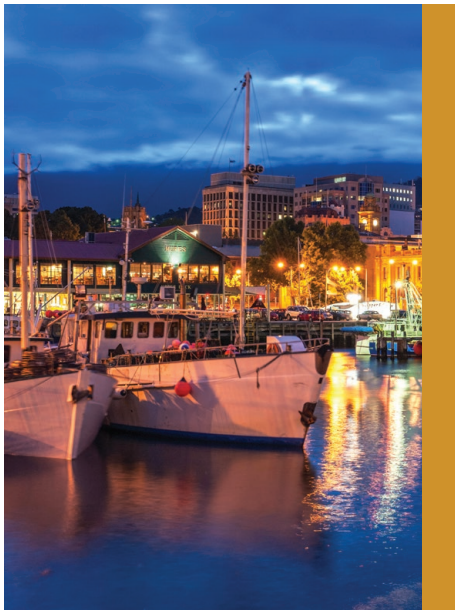
The team is now developing molecules that will block Nav1.1 and alleviate IBS pain. The research was supported by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council.

36th Annual Meeting of the Australasian Neuroscience Society

We look forward to welcoming you to Hobart in less than 6 months. The count-down is on for the 36th Annual Meeting of the Australasian Neuroscience Society. The meeting will open at 3pm on Sunday 4th December and close at 5pm on Wednesday 7th December.

Early registration has opened and closes on July 31st. The process only takes a few minutes to complete (<https://aomevents.eventsair.com/australasian-neuroscience-society-36th-annual-scientific-meeting/ans16-registration/Site/Register>), as abstracts are not part of the initial registration. If you became an ANS member **before** May 1st please search your email in box for "Lisa Beckham" to access your discounted registration link.

After you register, you will receive an email link to the abstract portal, so you can then upload your abstract at any time before July 31st. The local organizing committee would like to suggest that delegates consider booking accommodation for Wednesday 7th and flying out on Thursday the 8th – to avoid leaving the meeting early due to limited flight availability in and out of Hobart!



At the conclusion of the registration process you can request an invoice to be received by email, or pay by credit card.

Tickets for the welcome reception, early career researcher event and the conference dinner can be selected as part of the registration process. We encourage everyone to attend the opening drinks, and the students and postdocs to attend the early career researcher event. As part of the registration process it says that ECR event tickets are included in the student registrations. But please note that tickets are not included in the normal registration, so postdocs should select the '1 additional ticket' option to purchase their ticket for the ECR event. We would also like to point out that there are a limited number of tickets for the conference dinner, so please get in early and purchase your ticket to avoid disappointment. The events management staff at MONA (Museum of Old and New Art – an amazing gallery, vineyard and microbrewery) have gone out of their way to make this an experience not just a dinner!

To move from the social to the scientific, the conference program is really shaping up! We have four outstanding plenary speakers and 22 symposia that span topics relevant to nervous system function, cognition, interactions between the immune system and the nervous system, neurons, glia, bionics, genetics, nervous system disease and regeneration (<http://www.aomevents.com/ANS2016/Speakers>).

Additionally, this year's Presidential symposium will shine a spot-light on the achievements of mid-career female neuroscientists. Once early registration and abstract submission closes on July 31st, we will rapidly move to compile the 20 oral 2 poster sessions to add to the program.

We have had a good response so far in terms of early registrations, and expect to see an excellent cross-section of neuroscientists attending the meeting and a mixture of abstracts that will surely enrich the oral and poster sessions!

We look forward to posting the final program online – October this year!



Tracey & Kaylene

On behalf of the organising committee

Announcement of ANS2017



While only a few months away from the ANS2016 meeting in Hobart, the plans for the ANS2017 meeting in Sydney are taking on shape. The meeting will take place from 3rd to 6th December 2017 at the new International Convention Centre in Sydney. We are now calling for the submission of symposia proposals (see this edition of the newsletter) as an opportunity to contribute to the scientific program. Plenaries for the ANS2017 meeting will be announced shortly.

Thomas Fath

*On behalf of the
organising committee*

The application submission portal will open in late August.

The Australasian Neuroscience Society Council is now receiving proposals for the 2017 Annual Meeting in Sydney

Symposia will normally have 4 speakers and be arranged in themes of interest to the broad membership of the society. Funding will be available to contribute to the costs of ONE invited overseas speaker per symposium. Overseas speakers (not from Australia or New Zealand) can receive free registration, social tickets and up to \$2500 to cover costs of travel and accommodation. All financial support will be paid directly to the overseas speaker at the Annual Meeting. No Society funding will be available to support costs of Australian or New Zealand speakers, chairs or organisers.

The Society wishes to emphasize it is not necessary for a symposium to have an overseas speaker, as high quality proposals with all speakers coming from Australia and New Zealand are most welcome. Although proposals will be considered primarily on scientific merit, Council will take into consideration the geographic and gender diversity of the proposed speakers. In general, speakers in each symposium should come from different institutions. Symposium proposals that include early career researchers as the proposer, chair or speaker are encouraged.

Symposium proposers need to ensure that all **Australasian** speakers are current members of ANS, although exceptions can be made with appropriate scientific justification. Please note that for all selected symposia it is the organiser's responsibility to ensure that all speakers register and submit their abstracts by the specified deadline.

Note: *this year proposal submission will be via an online form posted on the ANS website (www.ans.org.au). Please visit the ANS website for full application details. The application submission portal will open in late August.*

All symposium proposals should be submitted online no later than Friday September 30th 2016.



The International Brain Bee

Well, it was great to attend the International Brain Bee in Copenhagen, hosted by the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS). A record-breaking 26 nations participated in this year's program, representing all six continents: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt (first year), England (first year), Germany, Grenada, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Qatar (first year), Romania, Taiwan (first year), Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, and the USA.

Vaughan
Macefield

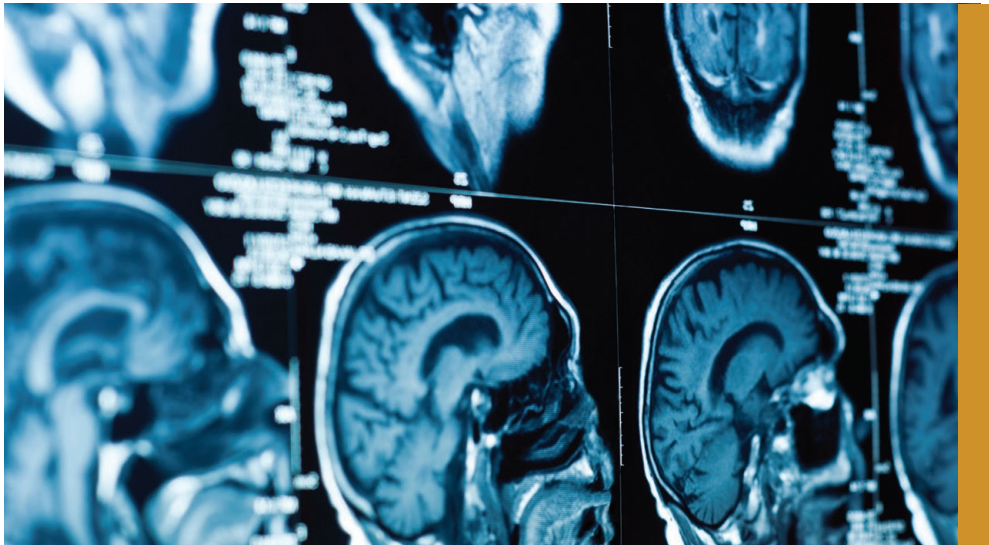
*National Coordinator,
Australian Brain Bee Challenge*

Australia was represented by Onur Tanglay, the 2015 Australian Brain Bee Champion from Sydney, while New Zealand was represented by Matthew Fulton, the 2015 New Zealand Champion from Auckland. Prof George Paxinos attended the competition, which drew gasps of awe from the students (the book George wrote with Charles Watson and Matthew Kirckaldie was one of the study texts): wonderful to see that neuroscientists can be awarded the same level of attention as a pop star!

it was fantastic to see a young girl from Romania – Ana Ghenciulescu – take out first place, followed by Noonan Abu Mazen from Canada. And it was wonderful to see New Zealand's Matthew Fulton take out third place! Let's face it, Australia had done very well over the last few years, and now it was New Zealand's time to shine. Still, Australia's Onur Tanglay came in at 8th place, with there being little difference in scores across the top 10 students.

All in all, a great competition!

In a tough competition that included identifying structures in real human brains and diagnosing neurological disorders from videos of real patients,



ABBC National Headquarters ABBC National Coordinator

July 2016

Expressions of Interest sought

The Australian Brain Bee Challenge (ABBC) is a competition for high school students to learn about the brain and nervous system. It provides an exciting way to engage students in neuroscience and to inspire them to think about a career in science.

The ABBC was founded in 2006 and the first national Australian and New Zealand final was held at the ANS/IBRO meeting in 2007. From 2006-2014, the ABBC was jointly supported by the ANS and the University of Queensland/Queensland Brain Institute and the Centre for Brain Research Auckland. The competition grew from 240 students in 2006 to over 5500 students annually taking part across Australia and New Zealand. During this time the National Headquarters of the competition was QBI with the National Coordinator being Prof. Linda Richards. In 2013, the competition engaged with an educational industry partner, Education Perfect, to run round one of the competition and this has proven to be a very successful collaboration. In 2015, Prof. Vaughan Macefield was appointed National Coordinator and the National Headquarters moved to Western Sydney University. After 10 years as ABBC NSW Coordinator and 2 years as National Coordinator, Prof. Macefield is stepping down as he is moving his research program internationally.

ANS is therefore seeking expressions of interest from interested organisations and individuals who would like to be considered for the ABBC National Coordinator and ABBC National Headquarters.

Interested persons should contact ANS President-elect, Prof. Linda Richards or ANS Secretary Assoc. Prof. Kay Double, for further details of the commitment required as well as the benefits and opportunities associated with these roles.

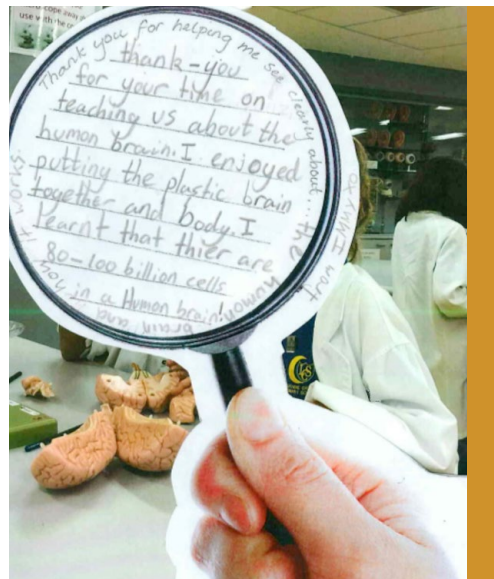
EOI
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ALIAN
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Lansdowne Crescent Primary School visits the Medical Science Precinct

July 2016

In June, two classes of Grade 3/4 students from Lansdowne Crescent Primary School were invited to the Medical Science Precinct at UTAS for an immersive neuroscience experience. During the first stage of their two-hour visit, ANS member Matt Kirkcaldie presented the students, teachers and parents with an illuminating lecture covering the use of magnification as a tool to investigate the brain, what neuroscientists do, and comparisons of brain structure and function between different mammals - ranging in size from mice to whales. This topic in particular generated a flood of questions, which was eventually interrupted by an ANS-sponsored morning tea. The students then gowned-up in the teaching dry-labs and were free to explore anatomical models of brains, ears, eyes and torsos, and were able to listen to the nerves firing in their muscles while hooked up to an EMG. Meanwhile, ANS member Tracey Dickson and her team toured small groups of students through the research labs, showing them neuroscientists in action at the bench and on the microscopes. The students were attentive and engaged throughout their visit, and judging from their feedback, they fully enjoyed the experience.

Kaylene Young



Notification of proposed changes to ANS Constitution

The ANS Council propose several changes to the ANS Constitution and herewith give notice of these changes prior to a member vote at the 2016 AGM.

The constitutional changes formally allow the following:

1. Allow the Society to appoint a member in an advocacy role.
2. Recognise the current positions of Past-President and President-Elect as a part of the Executive.
3. Allow the introduction of two new positions on Council to represent the following members: A Postgraduate Student Representative and a Neuroscience Research Representative. The later position will represent members who are professional neuroscience researchers but not senior group leaders. This Council member may hold a postdoctoral position, a research officer position, a facility management position or similar.
4. Allow for a position of Editor-elect for 6 months to one year to allow the transfer of information to the incoming Editor.

The aim of these changes is to increase the representation of all members on Council, to increase neuroscience advocacy and to smooth the transition between Council roles, as new members take up these positions.

The wording of the changes proposed are as follows:

2. Object

Addition of clause 2.3

- 2.3 The Society shall engage in the advocacy and promotion of neuroscience for the benefit of its members. This may be by appointing a member of the Society to represent the interests of the Society on Councils or Boards of other societies or to engage in advocacy strategies as required by the Society.

4. Executive

Modification of clause 4.1

- 4.1 The Executive of the Society shall be the President, the Secretary, the Treasurer and the Editor and, as required by the Executive, the elected positions as described in 4.2, 4.3.
- 4.2 The office of President shall, upon the retirement of the previous President, be assumed by the person who occupies the office of President-elect. The President shall hold office for two years, and will then be Past-President for one year.
- 4.3 The position of President-elect shall be filled by election to take effect one year before the due date for the retirement of the President.

5. Council

Modifications in 5.1 and 5.3

- 5.1 The Society shall have a Council consisting of: 1. The Executive; 2. Elected positions described in 4.2, 4.3 and 4.5; 3. Additional members elected by the Society to fill positions required to conduct the business of the Society including Council Members, known as "Regional Representatives", who will be the respective representatives of the States of Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and New Zealand. 4. A Postgraduate Student Representative and a Neuroscience Research Representative who will represent postgraduate student members and members who are professional neuroscience researchers but not senior group leaders, respectively.
- 5.2 Subject to this Constitution and to decisions of the Annual General Meeting, the Council shall be responsible for the conduct of the business of the Society and shall have power: 1. to make and amend rules for the conduct of the business of the Council; 2. to co-opt as members for the time being of the Council such Members of the Society, not exceeding three, as the Council deems fit.
- 5.3 Regional Representatives and the Neuroscience Research Representative shall hold office for two years and shall be eligible for re-election for two, but not more than two, succeeding years. The Postgraduate Student Representative shall hold office for one year and shall be eligible for re-election for a further year. The Editor shall hold office

for one year but shall be eligible for re-election for any number of succeeding years. The Editor shall have the right to appoint an Associate Editor who will act in place of the Editor as necessary but who will not normally be a member of Council. As deemed appropriate by the Executive, the election of incoming Editor may take effect six months to one year before the due date of the retirement of the incumbent of this position, allowing the position of Editor-elect to be occupied for up to one year.

Please direct any queries regarding these changes prior to the AGM to the Secretary Kay Double or President James Vickers.

Kay Double

Secretary



We are always interested in receiving articles or information from ANS members for the newsletter. Such material could include topics for discussion, meeting announcements, meeting reports, news about prizes and awards received by ANS members, obituaries, and any other items of potential interest to members of our Society. The copy deadline for the next newsletter is 1 October 2016.

ANS Policy on Requests for Publicity via Email Circulation

The policy of ANS is to minimise email traffic to members. Advertisements for meetings and other significant announcements such as job vacancies can be added to the website and included in the newsletter if appropriate. Such requests should be directed to the ANS Secretary.

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