

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF VERBATIM REPORTERS

Company Registration No. 23811

129th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held on:

Saturday, 14 May, 2011

At

Kents Hill Park,
Milton Keynes

Council Members:

Ann Lloyd (President), Jean Lukins, Sheryll Holley, Helen Edwards, Susan Humphries, Elisabeth Willett, Karen Young

Present: Chris Armstrong, Paul Brincou, Rachel Butterly, Pam Crooknorth, Karen McDonald, Ian Dawson, Mirella Fox, Louise Frith, Jean Gough, Andrew Howell, Nadea Joseph, Ann Lloyd, Jean Lukins, Jill Mason, Jane Norman, Mary Sorene, Karen Stevens, Michele Sowerby, Carole Tasker, Elisabeth Willett, Leah Willersdorf, Karen Young,.

PRESIDENT: Firstly, let me welcome everyone to the AGM today in Milton Keynes. First, I will call on Mary to read the notice. (The notice was duly read) Thank you, Mary. Are there any apologies for absence?

SECRETARY: Laura Harrison, Jenny Chandler, Stephanie Stamp, Nicky Misso, Hilary Maclean, Pauline Miller, Angela Chew, Anne Mills, Aine Aughney-Macdonald, Nicky Leahy, Christine Lawton, Pauline Humphreys, Heather Morris, Michael Laidlaw, Franny Barrett, Joanne Naughton, Sarah Edwards, Roger Bell, Jackie Roper, Barbara Bennett, Helen Davies, Margaret Beaumont, Susan Wiltshire, Sandra Khan, Diana Burden, Margaret Stevenson, Sandra Evans, Sharon Scott, Shelley Dutton, Audrey Shirley, Carina Raglione, Rita Fox, Frances Dobson, Miriam Weisinger and Robyn Nott.

ELISABETH WILLETT: Lindsay Bickers.

CHRIS ARMSTRONG: Carolyn Stewart.

LEAH WILLERSDORF: And Julie Smith.

PRESIDENT: The minutes of the last meeting. I think these have already been circulated to members. If any member would like another copy I think that Mary has some available. (Same distributed) Is everybody happy to agree the minutes? (Show of hands) I think we can take them as agreed.

SECRETARY: I will get you to sign them later.

PRESIDENT: All right.

It is my pleasure on behalf of the Council of BIVR to welcome you officially all to this year's AGM, being held for the first time in Milton Keynes. I am so pleased that you have been able to attend today and hope that the facilities on offer here have met with your expectations. I was rather expecting to be running into some famous concrete cows but that pleasure has so far eluded me.

This year we are once again continuing in the vein of holding our meetings outside of London, being ever hopeful - as we inevitably always are - of attracting as many people as possible to this annual event.

As you will no doubt be aware, the Council continues to meet throughout the year on a regular basis. During our meetings we have contemplated the possibility of many different venues and themes for our AGM, amongst which - let me tell you - was my favourite of holding it at a luxury spa, but then we realised that perhaps not much in the way of business would be actually achieved. We would all have felt very refreshed at the end of the day but that would have been about it. Ultimately the Council were of the view that Milton Keynes, with its extremely good road and rail links, would be an attractive proposition, and so here we are at Kents Hill Park today.

I am afraid that I have to start my address on a rather sad note. As I am sure you are all aware by now, it has been decided by Her Majesty's Court Service (in their rather questionable wisdom) that stenographers will no longer be used to record cases with effect from March 2012, our role being superseded by court clerks, whose unenviable task it will be to supervise the digital recording of cases.

We have all been aware for a long time that this would eventually happen. When it was finally announced earlier this year that the long-standing tradition of stenographers working within the court system as “keeper of the record” would be something that would be consigned to the annals of history, it caused some disquiet amongst those within the legal profession, some of whom have questioned whether justice will be properly served by the digital recording system, and whether or not expensive retrials will result if, for instance, no record of a witness’s testimony is available, be that through the result of human error, overworked court clerks simply forgetting to switch the recording on, or through some sort of technical malfunction. I suppose we shall just have to wait and see on that score.

Anyway, that is the bad news out of the way.

I now move on to more positive things and, as we all know, when one door closes, another most definitely opens, and that has always been the case within our profession. We hope that “other door” will be found in the all new BIVR website, which was launched with a modest fanfare in April, through which our Members will very soon start to reap the rewards from it being a more user-friendly site, both in terms of putting reporters and employers in contact with one another, both in this country and anywhere else in the world, as well as being a portal through which to contact colleagues, buy and sell equipment and also to source whatever employment opportunities may present themselves.

There has been quite a significant sea-change over the last three years in respect of how various types of work are sourced with more and more businesses relying upon the internet to locate and directly contact qualified verbatim reporters on our list instead of using the hitherto traditional route of established reporting firms. We feel that we have made it much easier for this to happen by providing prospective employers in advance with the basic details of each of our members through the reporter search facility, which, as you know, includes information on the specialist areas in which we work, the various systems for reporting that we use, our geographical location, et cetera.

As an aside, I would just add that it came to my attention recently that there is an apparent shortage of reporters in Scotland, so if anybody is contemplating relocating following enforced redundancy from the courts, then you may find that lacing up your boots and trekking north of the border may subsequently prove to be a good idea!

This brings me quite nicely on to the topic of membership of BIVR. I would assume that everybody here understands how critically important it is for all of us at this time to be members of a professional body and to engage in continuing professional development (CPD). Unfortunately, some are not so likeminded. There are still lots of very good reporters working in the private field who do not hold a current BIVR membership or who, astonishingly in fact, have never been members at all.

The Council have discussed this apparent reticence to apply for BIVR membership and what steps we could take to persuade reporters that it would be in their interests to join our ranks. Upon looking at the criteria for the membership examination as it currently stands, we took the view that an overhaul is long overdue and decided that probably a fresh approach is needed in order to make it more up to date, relevant and to be somewhat more reflective of the society in which we live and work. We feel that in order to attract more members it may be a good idea if we were to adopt a system that is now used in secondary school GCSE examinations whereby 50 per cent or more of coursework counts towards the final qualification.

It has been suggested that in order to qualify for full BIVR membership one should be able to meet or produce the following:

- An up-to-date curriculum vitae;
- a letter of confirmation from an employer/agent that one has worked for at least a two-year period in a particular field of reporting and has produced work of a consistently high standard;
- two specimen transcripts with appropriate redactions where necessary; and
- two independent referees confirming one's integrity and that one would therefore be a suitable candidate for admission into BIVR.

The one condition that would always remain would be a shorthand speed certificate for at least 180 wpm.

The examination criteria itself is ostensibly a matter for the Council to set as it feels appropriate. However, I would welcome any feedback or strong opinions that you may have in this regard as I feel that we do need an open and transparent policy debate on a matter as important as changing the way in which reporters are admitted into Membership.

It is to the advantage of us all that we are, and continue to be, members of a professional body, particularly for those working in the regulatory sector. As you will know, like it or not, this work is all subject to the competitive tendering process. During these tendering rounds if contractors were able to show on their tender documents that they only employ reporters who hold current membership of BIVR, whose members are bound by a code of ethics which appreciates and understands the need for confidentiality in sensitive matters, then that will only serve as a makeweight in favour of retaining reporters as opposed to just having the hearings digitally recorded.

It may also result in contractors actually taking positive steps to ensure that the reporters they use on a regular basis are fully qualified and properly certified members of BIVR where they can see the distinct advantages to them in so doing. It may be a good idea to remind these regulatory bodies that when they are considering digital recording, as opposed to verbatim reporters, with the result being that sound files would be transmitted across the internet to goodness knows where, confidentiality could so easily be compromised.

I know that I am preaching to the converted, but it should be noted that a very good reason for holding BIVR membership is that if we expect to receive professional fees - and quite honestly I do not see anybody sitting here today who would not hold that opinion - then we should all belong to a professional body. There are some contractors, who shall of course remain nameless, who deem it acceptable to pay reporters pitiful amounts in attendance money for regulatory work, even in some cases paying exactly the same rates as those we were achieving 25 years ago. I know for a fact that some of the people these contractors are using are not qualified verbatim reporters, but of course there are no checks undertaken to ascertain the credentials of the people who present themselves in these hearings and "appear" to take a verbatim note.

To try to address this issue, we have discussed the idea within Council of maybe having a photograph on our BIVR accreditation certificate and always wearing it in any hearing as a sort of badge of honour. It would soon become apparent then to employers that those who wear a BIVR badge are fully qualified and

that those without one - well - are something else entirely. We really need to get the message across to all parties in the areas in which we work, be that to regulatory bodies, the legal profession or to the contractors themselves, that we are professionals who do a difficult job and who should be taken seriously.

On the subject of fees, we are all aware that at this time it would be impossible for us to seek an increase in the fees that we receive, and, unfortunately, that may remain the position for some time to come. It has been drawn to my attention that there is a wide disparity in the fees that are currently being paid by various contractors. Personally I think it is really unacceptable to expect an experienced, fully qualified verbatim reporter to spend a whole day on a job for exactly the same pay that we received a quarter of a century ago. What on earth are these contractors thinking?

Equally, one wonders why experienced reporters continue working for these companies that offer such poor remuneration.

I really cannot understand it when, conversely, there are contractors in the marketplace who are extremely fair, who value a quality product and who recompense their reporters accordingly.

The fact is, despite the current austerity measures, there is quite a lot of work out there for reporters and, remember, it is a free market economy. With the prospect of achieving greater employment opportunities through the new website, we hope to encourage more experienced reporters into the fold and hopefully they too will then see the benefits that membership can offer.

Having said all that, it is up to all of us to maintain high standards of both work and appearance. We can only be judged by what we produce and if we produce poor transcripts then we will lose all credibility and accordingly will find ourselves without any work at all, being replaced by digital recording in all sectors.

I should like to take this opportunity now to ask everybody, no matter how experienced you are, to please make sure your work is of a consistently high quality. Proofreading your work is of paramount importance. It is recommended that a mental break is taken between finishing the production of a transcript and the final proofread and, if you have the luxury of being able to read over your work a day or so after having produced it, then certainly take it. On dailies this is of course not possible, but in those circumstances it can be a very good idea to read colleagues' turns as this does reduce the possibility of errors creeping in.

On the theme of continuing professional development, it is with this in mind, and following numerous requests, that we are today offering workshops on the two main software packages, CaseCatalyst and Eclipse, which are used by the majority of reporters. Pen writers too may benefit from understanding how these systems work if they should ever choose to seek work as scopists. Speaking from experience, I can say that I have used Eclipse in the edit mode for the past seven or eight years and I am acutely aware that there continues to be a shortage of good editors whose skill is invaluable in the preparation of quality transcripts.

We have been very fortunate today in having had the pleasure of the company of Linda Bruce, who shared her expertise with us on what is expected of reporters who are thinking about becoming or are intending to become qualified STTRs. Linda's antecedent history shows that she is at the top of her game in this field

and is perfectly placed to advise us on all matters connected to this very interesting and rewarding field of work.

I have to thank Andrew Howell and Susan Humphries for giving up their time and offering us the benefit of their knowledge in their respective CAT system software. I happen to know that Andrew crosses the divide between the different software systems, having worked with both, and therefore is knowledgeable in respect of both systems; so we are extremely grateful to both him and Susan for sharing their expertise with us today.

The object and purpose of today, apart from obviously holding our AGM, is to present Members with an opportunity to understand further technologies with which they may not be familiar but which they may ultimately discover makes their job much easier. Let's face it, our job is hard enough as it is these days and anything that assists in making life just a little easier is always very welcome. I hope that Members will find today extremely useful, whatever system of writing they currently use.

I must also say a big thank you to Mary for all her hard work both today and over the last year. She has been an invaluable support to me during my past year as President and continues to work tirelessly on behalf of BIVR. I would also thank Raymond for his videography services today, which will assist in making today's meeting accessible to all our Members.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone who has attended. I hope you manage to take away at least something from the workshops that you did not know before. Today is a great opportunity for the exchange of ideas and tips amongst colleagues, and I suggest that we all take full advantage of what other people know.

Those who know me will know that I have an insatiable thirst for short-forms and more efficient ways of writing particularly long multi-syllabic words and am always pestering colleagues for tips along those lines. It seems that everybody knows something useful about a piece of software, or a great short-form for something, but no matter how simple or small that is, if we can all pool what we each know then we will only serve to enrich our knowledge and that will ultimately make us better reporters.

I thank you all for your attention and I now open the floor to any questions or comments you may have at this point.

JEAN GOUGH: The proposal that you put forward for a possible new method of Membership seem very sensible. What sort of timescale do you have in mind for introducing it, or is this in its very early stages?

PRESIDENT: It is in its very early stages. I wanted to mention it today just to get some feedback on what Members thought of the idea of changing the exam, making it more up to date and more fluid. We have not set a timescale at all yet. At the moment the examination is still as it has always been.

ANDREW HOWELL: I notice you said for the employer to show a two-year period. Would not one year be fairer? Working for anybody for two years consistently, especially now as more and more people are freelance, is going to be very difficult to prove. When we were trained in the old days we tended to

not spend more than say a year to 18 months' training, depending on how good you were, so maybe two years is too long. That is just my opinion.

PRESIDENT: You think it is too long. We welcome your comments and any feedback you may have. Okay.

ANDREW HOWELL: Another one. We have got a minimum speed of 180. Will you be offering higher speeds as well?

PRESIDENT: Yes. That is just a minimum requirement, which is what it is now. That will not change, but of course any higher speed is fine.

JEAN GOUGH: You mentioned the possibility of having a photograph on the BIVR membership card. I think that that is a good idea. As a registered NRCPD speech-to-text reporter, we are required to have a card with a photograph, which some agents insist you take along and produce at every assignment.

PRESIDENT: I think that is right. I think we should do that.

JEAN GOUGH: I am very proud to be able to do that. I have never actually been asked for the card, but I tend to take it out of the case and literally just put it on the desk so people can see it. I think that that would be a very good step forward.

PRESIDENT: It would make it more visible to people who really do not know what we do from the next person. When they come to realise that some of us have badges and that some do not then they will start to question why, hopefully. That is the idea behind it anyway, so yes.

JEAN GOUGH: That is the point.

PRESIDENT: That is a good point you have made about already having one. Does anyone else have any comments?

ELISABETH WILLETT: Could we ask the Members present how they feel about rotating the venues around the country? You know, have you been happy to come to Milton Keynes today, even if it is Cup Final day and the roads are full? Are you against the idea of ever going back to London? Do you want to go to Manchester next time?

CAROLE TASKER: Yes.

ELISABETH WILLETT: Or Edinburgh.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: Edinburgh would be nice.

ANDREW HOWELL: We could go further north every year and then when we get to Inverness go back down to London.

PRESIDENT: Hopefully everyone has been very happy with the venue that we have chosen for today. If anybody does have any complaints about it please let me know. We feel that they have done quite a good job here today and that the facilities are excellent. And, as I said in my address, it has very good road and rail links. It can be difficult in London, especially at the weekends with lots of engineering works and things.

ANDREW HOWELL: Do you think that we should do like the NMC do and have some BIVR thing in each separate UK nation, like one in England, one in Wales, one in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland? There are a number of Northern Ireland reporters who do not seem to have a massive presence in BIVR. I do not know of any in Scotland. I know that they are pretty much their own union up there - the ones that are there.

PRESIDENT: I have heard there is a shortage in Scotland.

ANDREW HOWELL: “Hen’s teeth” is what I was told by a solicitor. You have to book them months and months in advance, so there are opportunities there I am told. It just seems if it was in each country of the UK...

PRESIDENT: You mean if we went on tour?

ANDREW HOWELL: Yes.

PAUL BRINCAU: Can I propose Las Vegas?

PRESIDENT: I don’t think that we can stretch to that; but you mean holding the meeting in each different country in the union?

ANDREW HOWELL: I just think it would be fairer. I mean the whole country is skewed towards the southeast, although less so now.

PRESIDENT: It has traditionally always been in London. That is why we have tried to move it around. Last year was the first year of our experiment when we went to Birmingham. We had a very good attendance there and we have had a good turnout today. So it obviously is working. If the message is getting out there that it is easier, people have a great day and learn a lot then, you know, it can only serve to encourage more people to attend.

ELISABETH WILLETT: As I seem to be the historian of BIVR, when I first started in this profession the AGMs were at 12.30 on a Monday - the first Monday in April I think - and no one was ever there except principals of firms.

PRESIDENT: They were all men, were they not?

ELISABETH WILLETT: All men. The first time I went there was with Helen Tennyson. We created mayhem because we said “Why do we have to have this meeting at 12.30? We are having to give up a day’s fees, you know, to come here.” The principals of course did not have to because they had workers working for them, you know, like drones. Well, no, the drones don’t do anything. I went to a lecture on

bee keeping the other day and the drones in the beehive apparently only eat and have sex, so we obviously were not the drones. We were the workers, the female bees working away. It took us an awfully long while to move from that 12.30 on a Monday to six o'clock on a Monday night and then to a Saturday. We had an awful lot of opposition even to a Saturday, didn't we? So well done for having got us this far. I think today has been great. We are becoming professional by having training as well as an AGM.

PRESIDENT: We absolutely have to have "continuous professional development", which is the buzz word now.

ELISABETH WILLETT: Just before we came in I was talking about the standards of English. I know the language is evolving, but there are still basic things. One of the things that is really bugging me at the moment is the way people always talk about the "amount of people". You do not have an amount of people, you have a number of people. Even the BBC - dear old Beeb - talks about amounts of people now. If only we could find some way of having an English workshop, but I do not know how you would do it. I really do not know how you would do it, but it would be so useful for all of us so we that we would correct everybody.

PRESIDENT: You would have to take it from people's CVs. If they have a degree in English then hopefully they do have some understanding of grammar, but maybe the two do not go hand in hand.

PAUL BRINCAU: You find lawyers in court are even worse. What's the point? Language evolves and if "amount" is the word, that is it now, that is what is used. People might not like it...

PRESIDENT: It has slipped into common usage. Also "Innit" has slipped into common usage, hasn't it Betty?

ELISABETH WILLETT: Yes.

PRESIDENT: Unbelievably so.

ELISABETH WILLETT: I was reading an article and the reason given for it is because we have so many ways of saying "innit" in English, whereas in French they have only got one way and in German they have only got one way. Therefore they have no problem: it is grammatical. But we have to have "innit" because that encompasses three or four terms. It just makes me cringe, but that's just me - old-fashioned, fuddy-duddy.

ANDREW HOWELL: But "innit" is better in a transcript if it is an East-End witness giving evidence, rather than saying "Is it not?" at the end of every sentence. (Murmurs of approval) It just doesn't look right.

PRESIDENT: Yes, it gives a better reflection.

PAUL BRINCAU: This goes on what from what Andrew said. You were talking about the initial period that we worked for a principal before. I was thinking, should we make it difficult for people to join the Institute?

PRESIDENT: No, the converse: we want to make it easier for people to join.

PAUL BRINCAU: In other words we should not set a criterion that is too high.

PRESIDENT: We have to set some criteria.

PAUL BRINCAU: But not too high. The important thing is actually what you said first, to encourage people by the use of this new website we have got. Then when we have enough ---

PRESIDENT: And the badge.

PAUL BRINCAU: And the badge. I mean a proper badge, not a silly little thing.

PRESIDENT: No, with your photograph on.

PAUL BRINCAU: I am not wearing a badge with a photograph on.

PRESIDENT: Why not?

PAUL BRINCAU: That looks silly. I would never wear anything like that.

PRESIDENT: As Jean says, she has to have a badge.

PAUL BRINCAU: But Jean is workings for...

JEAN GOUGH: I am NRCPD registered

PAUL BRINCAU: That is maybe why.

PRESIDENT: You work for the GMC, so...

PAUL BRINCAU: I don't work for the GMC; I work for myself.

PRESIDENT: Well, you attend hearings.

PAUL BRINCAU: Absolutely. But I think putting badges on is bit naff to be honest - with photographs on, you know.

JEAN GOUGH: I think ---

PAUL BRINCAU: I didn't say anything. I only mentioned it because you raised it.

PRESIDENT: You are entitled to your opinion, yes, of course.

PAUL BRINCAU: I mean, how many people? Why not have a straw vote to see how many people would agree to wear a badge here and see who says yea or nay. That apart, it is the whole thing I am

talking about, whether we should not put a criterion that is a level too high where people would say “I can’t be bothered. I’m getting work now. I’m not exactly being encouraged by my principal to join.” Why say “I want to go with the Institute and risk failing an exam?” You see, when a lot of us took exams - I was one of them; Mary failed me the first time - we had to go in and take our exams and they were hard. Then we had to reach a level and that was great. When I passed I felt elated. Unfortunately we cannot do that now.

ANDREW HOWELL: Why not?

PAUL BRINCAU: Because people do not care if they are in the Institute or not. How many people have been got onto the books?

PRESIDENT: We have to make them care; we have to make them care that they are not in it.

PAUL BRINCAU: We are not going to make them care by saying to them “Look, you have to reach this level before you can become a member”, because they will say “Yeah, okay”.

ANDREW HOWELL: Personally I think that 180 is too low. It is not that fast. It is only three words a seconds.

PAUL BRINCAU: It is a start.

ANDREW HOWELL: If you are a lawyer or a solicitor looking for a court reporter, you are more likely to take one off the BIVR website who has some degree of qualification than some ---

PAUL BRINCAU: You say that because you have ---

ELISABETH WILLETT: Can you remember that there is a shorthand writer taking a note. Do not talk over each other.

ANDREW HOWELL: I am terribly sorry, Helen.

PAUL BRINCAU: I think it is all right a lot of us saying higher than 180 as most of us here can go higher than 180, but we could not at the time we joined the Institute. We have to think of young people who are 18 --

ANDREW HOWELL: There aren’t any.

PAUL BRINCAU: -- to 20.

PRESIDENT: There are none.

PAUL BRINCAU: I don’t know.

PRESIDENT: We are trying to encourage people to become Members who have been reporters for years and who have never joined the Institute

PAUL BRINCAU: What about the younger ones? Are we going to end up - shall I quote Will Carling from the RFU - like a bunch of old farts? (To the shorthand writer) Can you spell that? Is it in your dictionary?

We need young people. We do not want to encourage old people to join; we want to encourage young people to join.

PRESIDENT: We want to encourage all people to join who are doing the job.

PAUL BRINCAU: Exactly, but what you have just mentioned is that we are trying to encourage the older people.

PRESIDENT: Just the people who are already working in the profession who are not Members and who should be.

PAUL BRINCAU: It might be easier to encourage those who are just getting to the qualifying stage.

ELISABETH WILLETT: Could I ask Paul a question? Are you suggesting that we have a method whereby you can merely sign up and join the Institute without any form of examination at all? Do you think that that is the way to go forward?

PAUL BRINCAU: No, let us have an examination. Let us have the examination we had when I joined and when a lot of us joined. I think it was 160 for an associate but then you had six months to reach your 180, otherwise you had to start again. The system worked then; why change it?

PRESIDENT: We want to make it more relevant to today. It does not seem to have a lot of relevance answering questions about things when people do not work in that field or have no knowledge of. If they are judged on what they do on a day-to-day basis and if their work is of a consistently high standard, then there is no reason why they should not be admitted into BIVR Membership if they meet the criteria - if they have the points I pointed out in my speech. They have to have some sort of confirmatory letter from an employer or contractor to say, "Yes, this person has worked for so long and has produced consistently high standards of work".

PAUL BRINCAU: To join the Institute?

PRESIDENT: To join the Institute, but they must have at least a 180 words a minute speed certificate.

PAUL BRINCAU: Do we know of principals of firms who would not let their people go anywhere near the Institute?

PRESIDENT: Exactly. There are some companies like that.

PAUL BRINCAU: Are they going to sign their certificates? No, they are not, are they? So if I work for somebody like that I will never become a Member.

ANDREW HOWELL: You have to make a start somewhere though don't you? You have to say "We are a professional body. This is our lowest benchmark by which we will let people work."

PAUL BRINCAU: Let the lowest benchmark not be too high.

ANDREW HOWELL: It is not high. In America 225 words per minute is the minimum. I think that that is not even fast enough.

PAUL BRINCAU: Unless you start people joining the Institute at the earliest opportunity that they can they are never going to join. Once they have set up they can go out and do a job where they don't need to be members and wear a badge and whatever they have to do. They are not going to join.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: Could I interrupt you a moment? What I am getting from you now is all negative and I do think we need to focus on the positive.

PAUL BRINCAU: Yes because it has all been positive, so we have to have some negative otherwise everything is tickety-boo.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: Why do we need negatives?

PAUL BRINCAU: It is not.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: Why do we need it?

PAUL BRINCAU: Because you have to test the waters. You have to be a devil's advocate otherwise everything is great on the Institute. It isn't, is it?

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: If you are negative you drag people down. You don't give people confidence and say "Come on, okay. Come in. One-eighty great. How about trying 200? You'll be good at that."

PAUL BRINCAU: Yeah, come in and then try 200 and work up your speed.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: But you are saying they are never going to do this; they are not going to do that.

PAUL BRINCAU: Because it is true, honestly.

PRESIDENT: You said you were not going to wear a badge, but I have seen you wearing a badge with your name and your photograph on. You wear one all the time.

PAUL BRINCAU: No, that is me.

PRESIDENT: You have a badge at the GMC.

PAUL BRINCAU: No, that is not a badge that is a thing that gets me through the doors.

PRESIDENT: I know it is; it is a pass, but you still wear it.

PAUL BRINCAU: Yeah, I have to click it. That is why I wear it.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: It is an ID card.

PAUL BRINCAU: Yeah, but...

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: It has got your name on and your photo.

PAUL BRINCAU: That is a security pass not a badge.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES: Sure.

PRESIDENT: It will be the same sort of thing.

PAUL BRINCAU: We are now talking about silly little things. Really what I started by saying was that we are putting the threshold too high. That is all. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT: You think the bar is too high on the criteria?

PAUL BRINCAU: I think it is if we are trying to encourage people to join the Institute. I mean I have never seen so many people as I see today at an AGM even though I think half of them left after lunch, because there were more people at lunch that came in.

SHERYLL HOLLEY: I just want to flag up that STTRs coming in, not all of them start doing transcript work. You can train at home; you can do different sorts of training. To set the bar at one or two years' proven work has to be slightly different for STTRs in that maybe a deaf client can give them a reference because they will not necessarily be in a court situation or in a situation where they will be consistently producing transcripts.

PRESIDENT: As I understand it, you do not produce transcripts at all, do you?

SHERYLL HOLLEY: No, not unless it will be a first-draft transcript after maybe the end of a meeting, but it is never a fully verified verbatim transcript. That may need to be altered.

MICHELE SOWERBY: Are you saying that you are scrapping the test? You are not saying that you are scrapping the test altogether --

PRESIDENT: No.

MICHELE SOWERBY: -- because new people will have to take the test anyway.

PRESIDENT: No, we are not scrapping it. We just wanted to give it a fresher look, a bit of an overhaul basically.

MICHELE SOWERBY: If you are in a job where you do not produce a transcript regularly, could there just be a requirement that you sit the test still?

PRESIDENT: It is an interesting idea.

IAN DAWSON: It seems to me that there is a gap. This follows on a bit from what Paul said and what Michele has just said. I am a student at the moment so I can join as a student member. Once I hit my 180 then presumably I have to lose my membership for a year or a couple of years until I can have the approval from the employer.

PRESIDENT: I see what you mean.

IAN DAWSON: There is a gap.

PRESIDENT: We have not discussed all the details of cases like yours. That is a good point. Thank you for raising that.

ANDREW HOWELL: The big competitor beginning with “M”, who has an awful lot of work, I know has a very good training course. What are their minimum speed requirements? I think that BIVR should at least equal those. If other firms are training lots of other stenographers then BIVR’s minimum requirement should at least be equal to those, if not better.

PRESIDENT: I do not know. I would not know what they were.

KAREN McDONALD: I don’t know that Merrills are going through stenograph training any more. There are no more trainees as far as I am aware.

PRESIDENT: Does anyone know?

LOUISE FRITH: I have tried to look recently on the internet. I am a student by the way; I am not a full member of the Institute and do not know whether I am allowed to speak. I have looked at them recently on the internet and have not been able to find any trace of them.

KAREN McDONALD: No, I don’t think there is a training programme.

RACHEL BUTTERLY: I am not a Member. At Merrills 160 is their minimum for Crown Court work and 180 is their threshold for realtime. But it ranges from 180 to 220 in the test. And they are not having anyone trained this year. They did last year but not this year, so there are no new trainees this year.

JEAN GOUGH: I am just thinking about the idea of having a photograph on your membership card. It is more of an awareness-raising exercise if the identification photograph was introduced and people wore those badges or even just put them on the table so that people could see them. Clients will then become more aware of BIVR.

PRESIDENT: That is the idea.

JEAN GOUGH: I am just wondering whether it ---

PRESIDENT: It is to raise the profile.

JEAN GOUGH: Yes. I wonder, if that is the case the existing associateship and membership categories and the exams that have been held up to now will hopefully become more relevant again. They have lost their relevance simply because associateship and membership is no longer required to work in court. That is where they were important. You had to be accredited to work in the court situation. Personally, I feel that asking for the two years' evidence of consistently good work is quite a tall order to ask of people to come into BIVR.

PRESIDENT: Thank you.

CAROLE TASKER: You could have something like this (indicating name plate) that you put on the desk in front of you that says "Carole Tasker, BIVR" with a nice logo or something.

PRESIDENT: Good idea. You carry it around with you wherever you go. That is another option. Then it will become apparent to lawyers and goodness knows who else that there is a difference. They will start questioning what that difference is and then we can make them more aware.

CAROLE TASKER: They may notice that more than a badge around your neck.

PRESIDENT: Exactly. That is a good idea. It is all pause for thought.

JILL MASON: If people did not want to wear a photograph, have you thought about having, say, an enamel badge with "BIVR member" on it - a lapel badge that you could wear anyway?

PAUL BRINCAU: I second that.

JILL MASON: Having something else like a card is a good idea. Photographs are a good idea, but just something that people might feel more comfortable wearing. Somebody could wear it or somebody could put a card up. You cannot cover every eventuality, can you?

PRESIDENT: We need something visible whatever we have.

SHERYLL HOLLEY: I don't know whether anybody has thought of it. You see my laptop is on the table. I wonder whether there is some kind of marketing folder, clip that you can put on the back of your laptop that says who you are, and, you know, if you want to book services, BIVR, AVSTTR,** whatever. I am just wondering whether anybody has designed anything like that.

MARY SORENE: I can tell you they have. They have got them in America. As your laptop is open, so any advertising - some people have just got photographs of their children on it, but you could obviously put an advert on it.

CAROLE TASKER: Do you know what I'm going to say?

PRESIDENT: No, go on Carole.

CAROLE TASKER: I'm a pen writer: I don't have a lop top! (Laughter)

PAUL BRINCAU: A tie with BIVR written on it would look very nice, like clubs do. I don't want to compare BIVR to a rugby or football club, but there are... Did you mention these nice badges that you wear like Members of rugby football clubs and so on on the lapel? A tie would be nice. I mean all right the girls might not want to wear a tie. I will wear a tie.

ANDREW HOWELL: They will only sell three ties; it is really not worth making them.

PAUL BRINCAU: I will pay for it as well!

CHRIS ARMSTRONG: This (indicating BIVR membership card) is a copy of what I am assuming we all have. Would it not be possible to have a safety pin type fixture on the back?

PRESIDENT: And wear it.

PAUL BRINCAU: A safety pin? The same as the security badge. We already wear this.

CHRIS ARMSTRONG: We already have this.

PRESIDENT: We have, but it needs to be more visible. It is in my purse and I never get it out. We need to start wearing some sort of visible sign that we are Members of a professional body. That is my message really.

CHRIS ARMSTRONG: And mine. I constantly carry mine and very often I am asked, and it goes straight down on the table.

PRESIDENT: People have asked you for your accreditation?

CHRIS ARMSTRONG: Yes.

KAREN YOUNG: I have been asked for mine as well – recently at Linklaters.

CHRIS ARMSTRONG: American lawyers very often do on depositions. And it is always with me if the need is there.

PAUL BRINCAU: I do depositions. I have never been asked to show accreditation, so, you know, you get the odd people, probably lawyers who have never done a deposition and they are told to check their stenographers. I am beginning to wondering, because we are putting a lot of emphasis on these badges, do you think that people will notice?

PRESIDENT: Yes, because they will notice the people without them and question who they are.

KAREN YOUNG: Because, can I just say, that - without mentioning the firm in question - a particular firm is using so-called shorthand writers who quite clearly are not shorthand writers.

PAUL BRINCAU: We all know that.

KAREN YOUNG: That is where it comes into play

PAUL BRINCAU: I know that. All I do when I go to do a job somewhere where they have never seen me before, they say "Who are you?" I say "I am the shorthand writer". They say, "You sit there". They never say to me "Can I see your accreditation?"

KAREN YOUNG: But actually if the NMC - and I cannot think of the other one - knew that they were not using properly trained writers they would be in breach of their contract, so it might bring that to light.

PAUL BRINCAU: But they never ask. That is the problem.

JEAN LUKINS: Maybe we should challenge them.

PRESIDENT: They want the BIVR signature at the end of the transcripts.

PAUL BRINCAU: Actually that is what I do. I always sign the transcripts with "BIVR" underneath. That is good so whoever sees the transcript will know and maybe if they see one without they will question it. That will probably have more force than all we have been saying now about badges, ties, hats or whatever we are going to wear.

PRESIDENT: I think if we can enforce it it is just a makeweight really.

PAUL BRINCAU: If everybody signed their transcripts and put BIVR underneath, when people see transcripts that are not signed BIVR, they might say "Who did this transcript?" Or "Why is this not signed? This is not right".

ANDREW HOWELL: Could I add something to that, Paul? Often a certain company, which I shall not mention again, takes that off the page. They take it off the end of the transcript.

KAREN YOUNG: Yes.

ANDREW HOWELL: So once you have sent it to them it has gone.

PAUL BRINCAU: Actually our firm does not. Whenever I see a transcript, just to remind me if I have done the job before, I always turn to the last page and if I have done it I see my name, so they do not.

PRESIDENT: We did go through a spell when people were putting on that they were members of BIVR when they were not just so they were complying with contractual regulations.

JEAN GOUGH: One thing I have noticed with a group of professionals I work with, the Association of Lip Speakers, is they have really been trying to raise people's awareness of lip speaking. Whenever I see

a lip speaker in any sort of event they always will have a badge saying “Member of the ALS”, Association of Lip Speakers. I think it is a very effective tool. Even if we did not have a photograph, I think to have a badge with BIVR on it and the person’s name would be good.

PRESIDENT: Yes, okay.

PAUL BRINCAU: Is it going to work in a firm where there are people, for example the firm some of us work for, some of whom are Members and some who are not? If I start walking around with a badge and my name on it, are the others going to say to me “Hang on, what are you up to?”

PRESIDENT: Hopefully they will say “I am going to join too”.

PAUL BRINCAU: No the next thing is you get is a phone call from up the top saying “Will you stop wearing the badge?”

PRESIDENT: They cannot stop you from wearing a badge.

PAUL BRINCAU: Yes. They can not give you any work, can’t they?

JILL MASON: Conversely some firms only want to give work to people who are BIVR Members and do not want to give it to anybody else, so it probably would balance out.

PAUL BRINCAU: The same way, you know, you get phone calls saying “Could you slow down with your transcripts please because there are some others who are doing the same as you who cannot produce it as quick as you?”

PRESIDENT: I cannot imagine a firm ever saying that

PAUL BRINCAU: Yes, they do.

ELISABETH WILLETT: I must say I do agree with Susan. Paul, you are being very negative about everything.

PAUL BRINCAU: Please, that ---

ELISABETH WILLETT: Just let me have a go; you have had a long say. I do think you have said a lot this afternoon and I think that when you get home tonight you should take the time and write in - and it will be the first time probably we have heard from you - with all the suggestions because the Council goes on year after year talking. We come here and we do not really know what you want. You have obviously been thinking about this for a long while.

PAUL BRINCAU: I have not.

ELISABETH WILLETT: I suggest you write in to whoever is next year’s president and say, “Why don’t you do this? Why don’t you do that? And I will come on the Council for meetings so I can help you think about these things” because you never put yourself forward for the Council, do you?

PAUL BRINCAU: Actually I was going to suggest that we should have younger people on the Council.

ELISABETH WILLETT: They are coming into the profession, dear. And - to use your words - until they do you are stick with us oldies.

PAUL BRINCAU: We should have minutes of the Council meeting to see what is going on. Then we can contribute.

ELISABETH WILLETT: We do minutes but they are private and confidential.

PAUL BRINCAU: They should not be.

ELISABETH WILLETT: We sometimes have to discuss individual cases.

PAUL BRINCAU: Yeah, but certainly things which are to the benefit of the Members should come down to us. I don't try to stifle debate.

ELISABETH WILLETT: They do in the newsletters.

PAUL BRINCAU: That is no good. We want to see what is going on in the meetings.

PRESIDENT: If there is no other issue to raise, can I call on Mary to give us the Treasurer's report please?

TREASURER: The report and accounts, which have already been distributed by email and on the website, but if anybody would like a copy? (Same distributed) It is a question of whether you have any questions that I can answer you on the accounts. Other than that for you to approve them so we may move on to if the next bit. Does anybody have any questions on the accounts? No questions on the accounts.

PRESIDENT: Are the reports and accounts adopted?

TREASURER: Could we have a proposer please? Jean Gough proposes. Could we have a seconder? Carole Tasker seconds. Thank you. Are they approved? (Show of hands) That is agreed.

PRESIDENT: We know move on to election to the council. We have had no nominations for the vacancies, but if anybody feels the need to become a council member...

KAREN YOUNG: Could I nominate someone? Could I just look to see if she is quite happy? I would like to nominate Leah Willersdorf to the Council, but I just want to check if I still have a life home!
(Laughter)

SECRETARY: They are co-opted this year. They have to be nominated and elected next year, but we welcome them to be co-opted. (New president elected)

PRESIDENT: Before we finish, I will just say that there are some membership forms over on Mary's table over there, so if anybody would like to apply to join BIVR today, who is not already a Member, then please take a form when you leave the room this afternoon.

The next item will be Susan delivering the Eclipse workshop today.

CAROLE TASKER: Can I propose a vote of thanks for Ann? I propose a vote of thanks to Ann for being president for the past year. (Applause)

ANN LLOYD: The date of our AGM next year will be 19th May at a venue to be announced.

SECRETARY: It would be appreciated if a member reading these minutes will volunteer to take the minutes next year.

(The meeting closed at 3.20 pm)