

THE COMPANY OF BIOLOGISTS SURVEY

Survey Results

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Introduction

During the summer of 1997 the Company of Biologists (COB) contacted the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) to assist in efforts to assess the current and future activities of the COB. The general goal of the project was to aid the COB in collecting data that would be useful in planning for the future. Specific goals included asking the COB's managers, directors, editorial staffs, and production staff for their assessment of the organisation's current business and charitable activities and organisational structure, as well as their suggestions for future activities.

OSRL's tasks included: designing, pretesting and printing a questionnaire appropriate to all constituencies in the COB; advising the COB on survey administration; conducting data entry; analyzing the collected data, and preparing the final package. The final package includes a facsimile of the questionnaire, a "banner table" presentation of survey results in cross-tabular fashion, and a presentation of the responses to open-ended questions and respondent comments.

This report begins with a brief discussion of survey methodology and then proceeds to a discussion of survey results. The results are presented in sections organised in the order of the questionnaire. The first section summarizes the results of questions concerning *background information*: how respondents are associated with the COB and their general impressions of the COB, as well as respondent level of education, age, and sex. In the second section the results of the questions having to do with *the COB's journals and publications* are presented. The third section presents respondents' answers to questions regarding *the COB's charitable activities*. The fourth section deals with *the COB's work environment*. The report concludes with the results of survey questions concerning *the COB's future*.

Survey Methodology

The questionnaire was developed by OSRL staff in close collaboration with representatives of the COB. A facsimile of the questionnaire is provided in Section 2 of the documentation that accompanies this report.

Representatives of the COB administered the survey. The survey was sent to 100 people, including all directors, employees and members of the COB. All recipients received repeated reminders to fill out and return the questionnaire through the COB's internal communication mechanisms. However, there were indications that some surveys were not completed due to fears of retribution and/or lack of trust in the pledge of anonymity that was made on the cover of the survey.

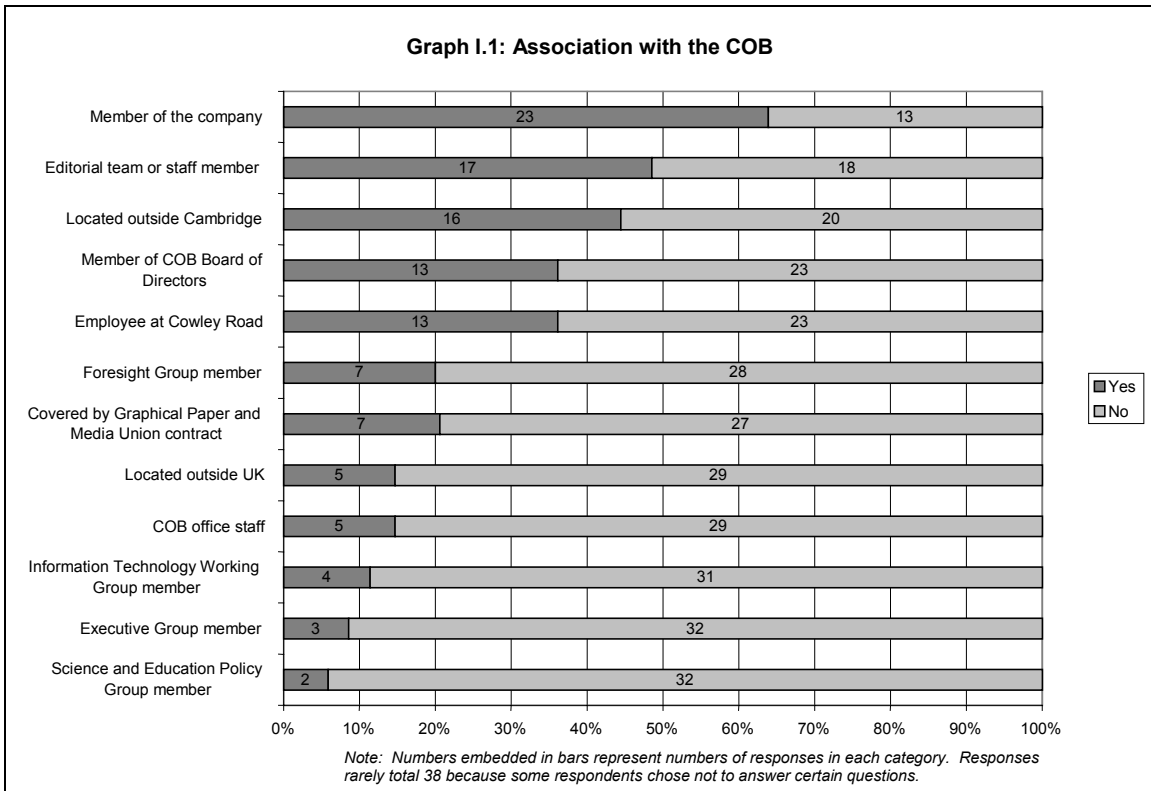
The thirty-eight questionnaires that were completed and returned are the source of all data presented in this report. A 38% response rate is somewhat low, but not uncommon for mail-out surveys, such as this, which rely on single mailings. Because completed surveys do not appear to have been returned by a random sub-sample of the target population, there is likely an unknown "self-selection" bias in the data. Thus, while the results are suggestive and illustrative of certain trends in the COB, they should not be considered as strictly representative of all opinions held by associates of the COB.

It should be noted that the total number of responses to any question is typically fewer than the total number of respondents (38) because some respondents chose not to answer certain questions. Responses of "don't know" also have been excluded from the graphs and discussion presented in this report. Please consult the "Banner Tables" in Section 3 of the documentation that accompanies this report for a more comprehensive presentation of survey results in cross-tabular fashion. Also see Section 4 of this documentation for a presentation of answers to open-ended questions and respondent comments, which are not summarized in this report.

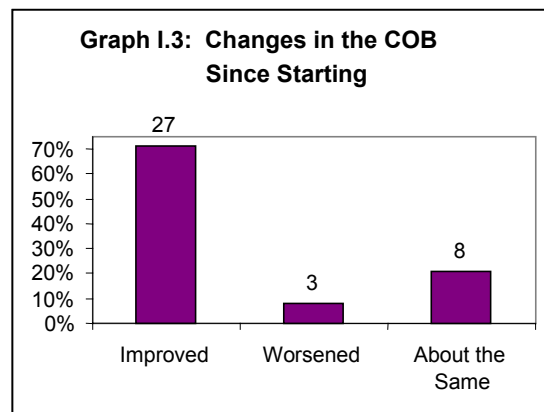
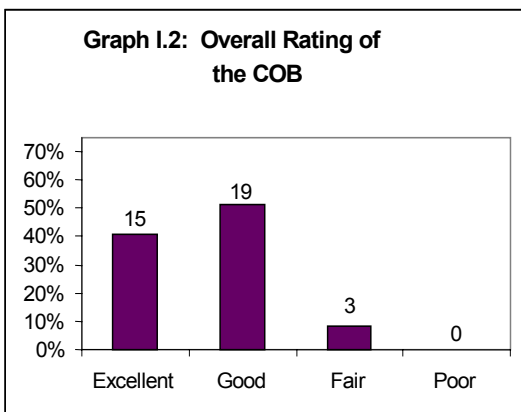
Survey Results

Background Information

The most common way that survey respondents were associated with the COB was by being a Member of the company (see Graph I.1). Sixty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they were company Members, followed by 49% who indicated that they were "editorial team or staff members." The least commonly indicated associations with the COB were "executive group member" and "science and education policy group member," with 3 and 2 "yes" responses, respectively. Thirty-six percent of the respondents were employees at Cowley Road, 21% indicated that they are covered by the Graphical Paper and Media Union contract, and 15% indicated that they were located outside of the UK.

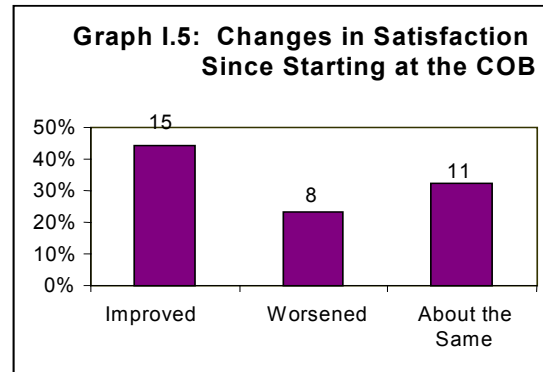
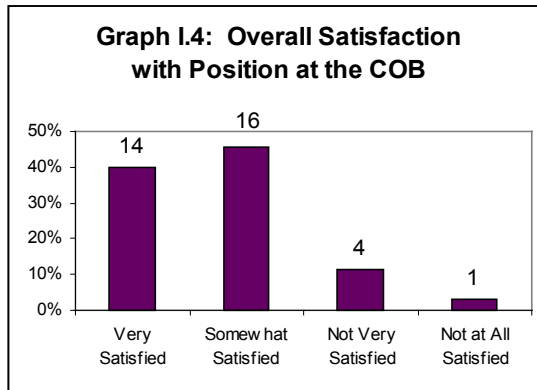


On average, respondents had been affiliated with the COB for 10.3 years. Of the 29 respondents who indicated their highest level of education, 27 held terminal degrees (Ph.D., D.Phil., M.D., etc.) and two held Master's degrees. The average age of respondents was 52.3. Twenty-three respondents indicated that they were male and ten indicated that they were female; five chose not to answer this question.



General impressions of the COB were favorable. When asked to think “about the COB overall, including all the products, services and activities it provides to the scientific community,” nearly 40% indicated “excellent” and 50% indicated “good” (see Graph I.2). When asked whether the products and activities of the COB had improved, worsened, or stayed the same “since you have

been part of COB,” just over 70% indicated “improved,” compared to 21% who indicated “worsened” (see Graph I.3)



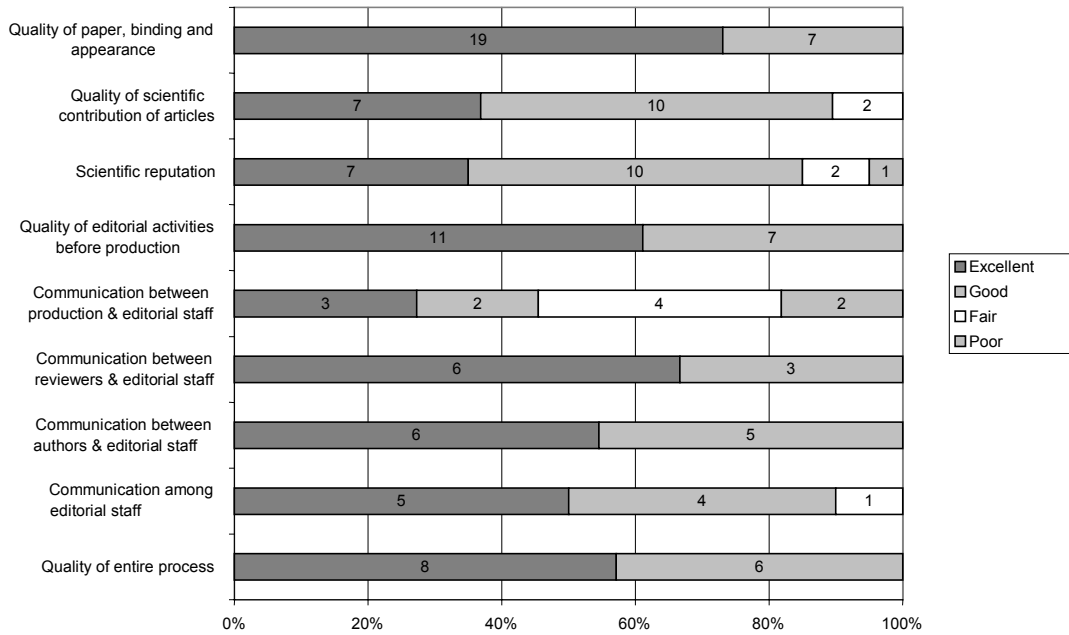
Respondents also tended to look favorably on their association with the COB. Forty percent indicated that they were “very satisfied” with their “overall” level of satisfaction with their job or position in the COB; another 46% indicated that they were “somewhat satisfied,” 11% indicated “not very satisfied,” and only 3% indicated “not at all satisfied” (see Graph I.4). Additionally, 44% of the respondents indicated that “things in general” had improved for them since they had become a part of the COB. Twenty-four percent indicated that “things in general” had “worsened” for them, and 32% indicated that things had “stayed the same” (see Graph I.5).

The COB’s Journals and Publications

Respondents were asked to provide assessments of the three journals published by the COB, as well as the *Naturalist Handbooks*, which are financially supported by the COB. In each case respondents were presented with a various aspects of the publications and asked to rate each as either “excellent,” “good,” “fair,” or “poor.”

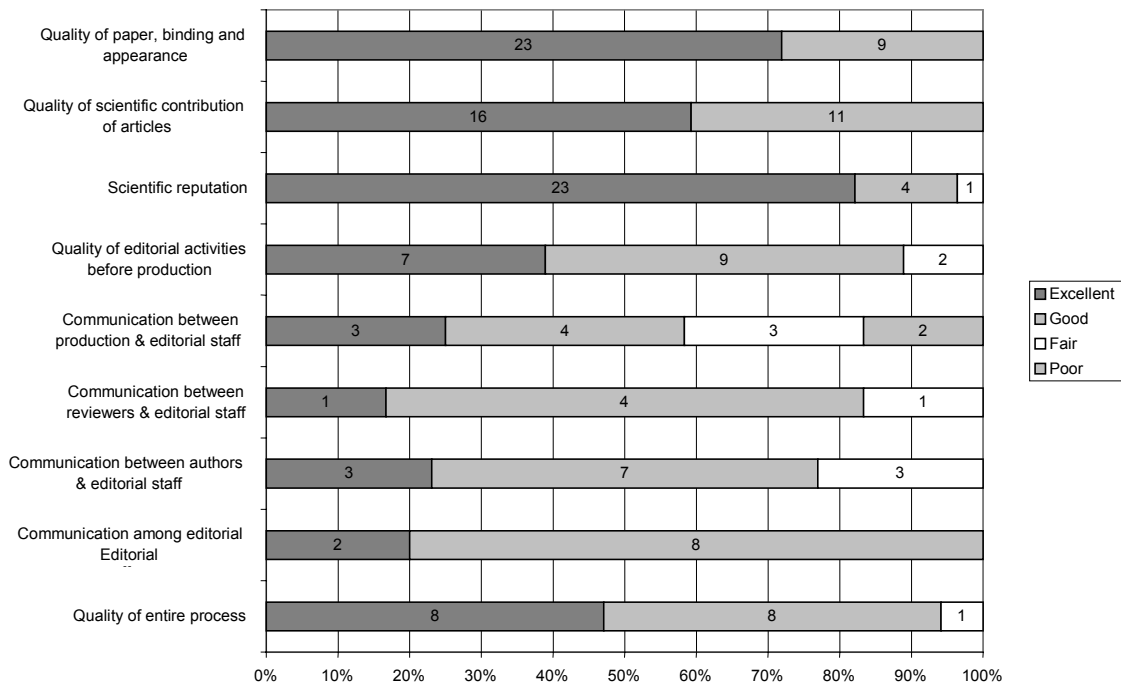
Journal of Experimental Biology. Respondents tended to give high marks to *JEB*’s overall quality and appearance, the communication between *JEB* reviewers and staff, the quality of *JEB* editorial activities before production, the “overall quality of the entire review, production and distribution process,” and the communication between *JEB* authors and staff. Only “Quality of communication between production staff and editorial staff” received ratings of “excellent” or “good” from less than 50% of respondents (see Graph II.1).

Graph II.1: Journal of Experimental Biology

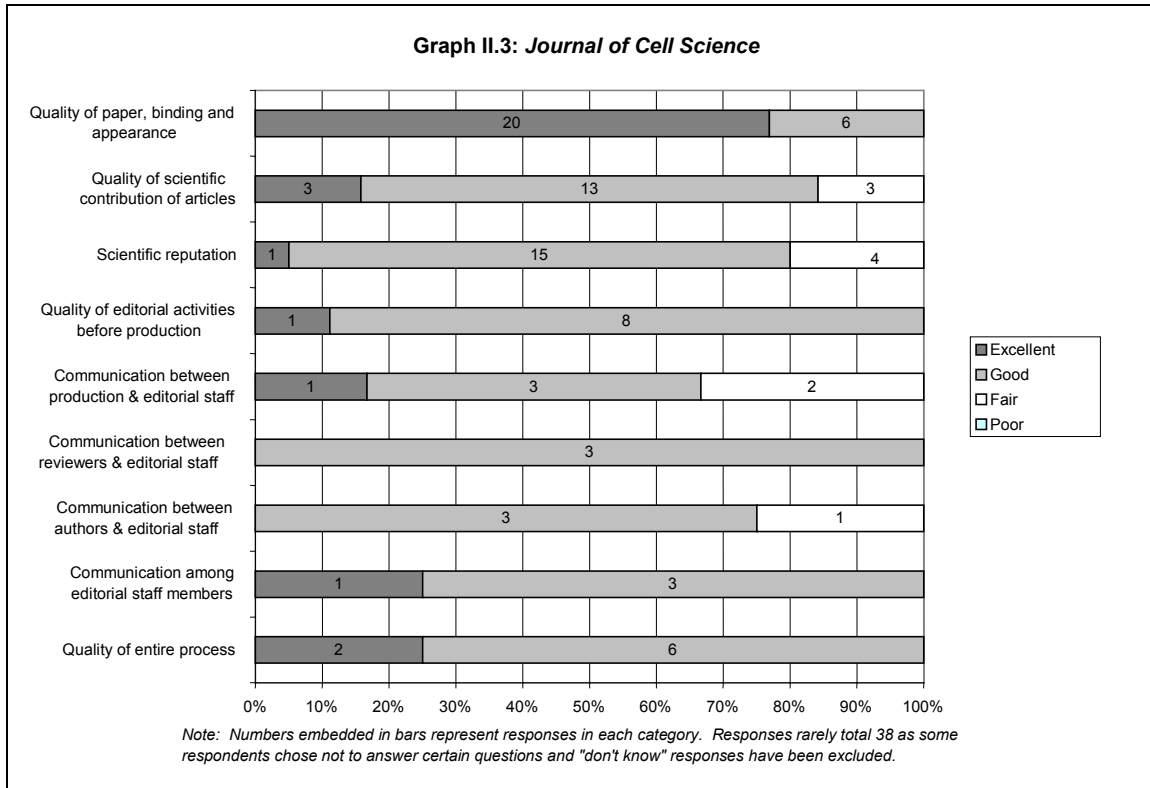


Note: Numbers embedded in bars represent responses in each category. Responses rarely total 38 as some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and "don't know" responses have been excluded.

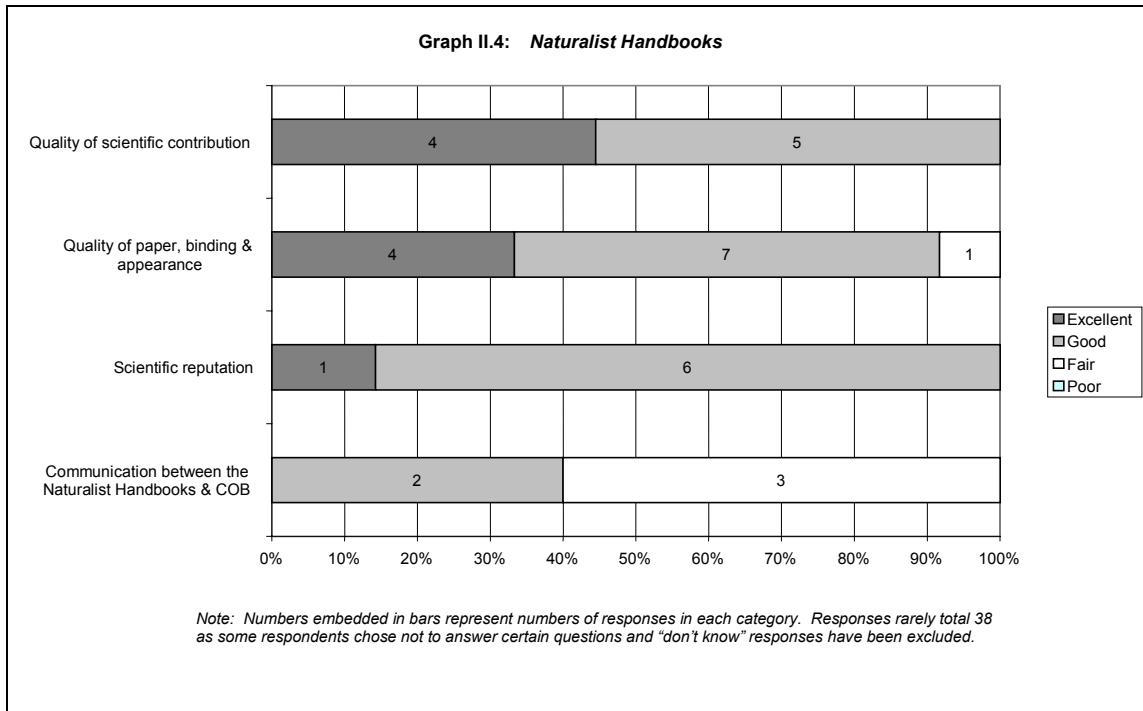
Graph II.2: Development



Development. Respondents also tended to rate *Development* favorably, with most respondents assessing the listed aspects of the journal as either “excellent” or “good.” Over 50% of the respondents rated as “excellent” *Development’s* scientific reputation, the quality and appearance of the final product, and the quality of the scientific contributions of articles published in *Development*. The only aspect of *Development* which received a rating of “poor” (by only 2 respondents), was the communication between the journal’s production and editorial staff (see Graph II.2).



Journal of Cell Science. Although the *JCS* received fewer ratings of “excellent” than was the case for the two other journals, ratings were still favorable, with most respondents assessing the various listed aspects of the journal as “good.” The overall quality of paper, binding and appearance again received the highest marks, with over 75% of the respondents indicating “excellent.” Two areas of *JCS* failed to receive any “excellent” ratings, but even these aspects (communication between reviewers and editorial staff, and communications between authors and editorial staff) predominantly received ratings of “good.” None of the listed aspect of *JCS* received an assessment of “poor” (see Graph II.3).

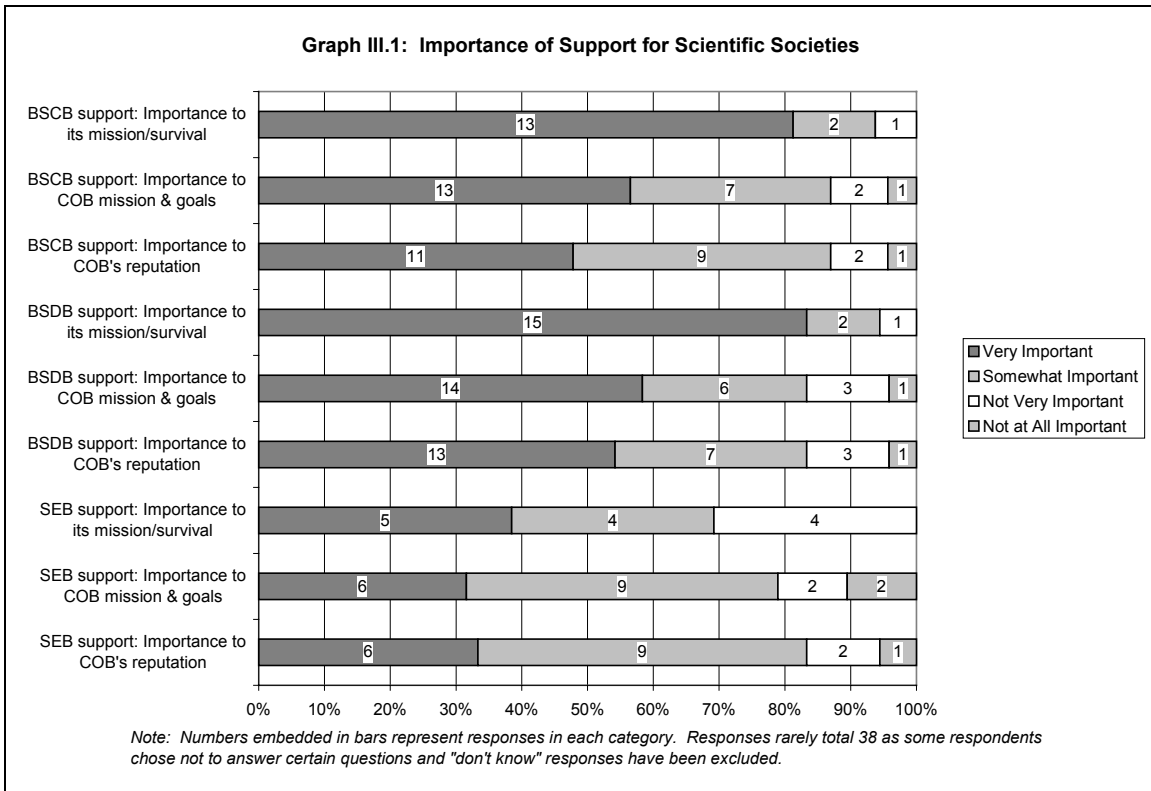


Naturalist Handbooks. The COB provides financial support for production and printing of the *Naturalist Handbooks*. Survey respondents generally assessed various aspects of the *Naturalist Handbooks* as “good,” although nearly 45% indicated that the quality of scientific contributions is “excellent;” one-third of the respondents indicated that the *Handbooks*’ overall quality of paper, binding and appearance is “excellent;” and 60% indicated that the communication between the *Naturalist Handbooks* and the COB is “fair.”

Respondents were asked to give their overall impressions of the COB’s journals and publications at the end of this section of the survey. These ratings were generally positive. Sixty-one percent of the respondents to these questions assessed the overall quality of the publications’ production process as “excellent,” with the remaining 39% indicating “good.” In response to a question that asked respondents to evaluate the “quality of communication among the production team,” 36% indicated “excellent,” 21% indicated “good,” 29% indicated “fair,” and 14% indicated “poor.”

The COB’s Charitable Activities

In the third section of the survey respondents were asked to assess the COB’s charitable activities, which include: financial support to three scientific societies (the British Society for Cell Biology, the British Society for Developmental Biology, and the Society for Experimental Biology), provision of travel funds for young scientists, and support for various scientific meetings and conferences. This section of the report summarizes respondent evaluations of the COB’s charitable activities.

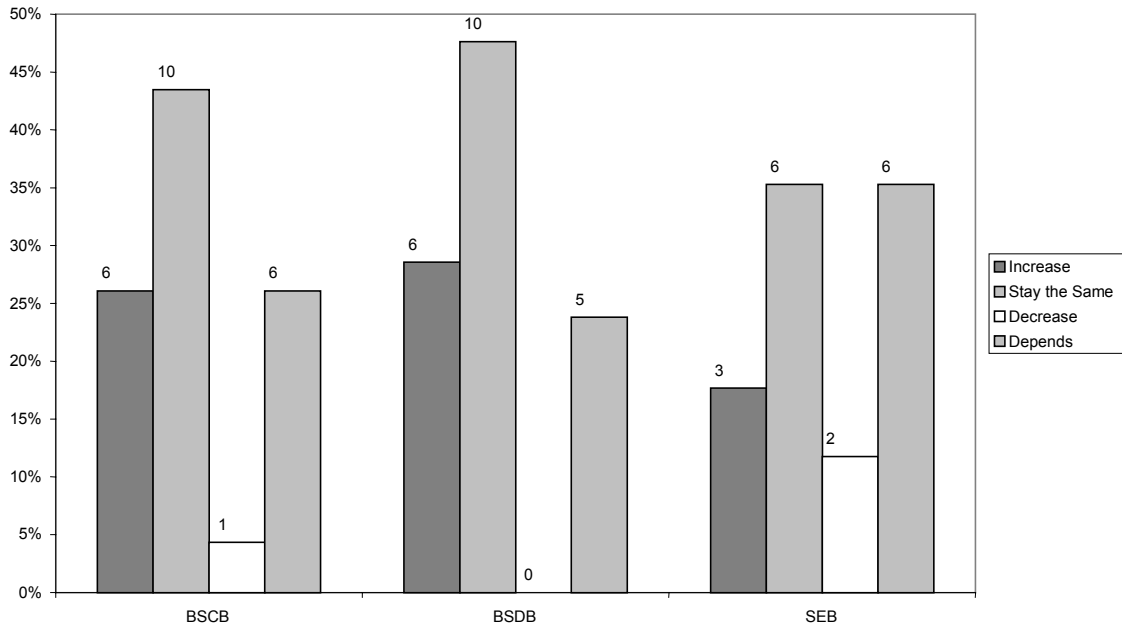


British Society for Cell Biology. Overall, survey respondents tended to indicate that the COB’s support of the BSCB is important (see Graph III.1). Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated that the support is “very important” to the mission and survival of the BSCB, 57% indicated that the support is “very important” to the COB’s mission and goals, and 48% indicated that the support of BSCB is “very important” to the COB’s reputation. Additionally, when asked how the COB’s level of support for BSCB should change, 26% indicated “increase,” 44% indicated “stay about the same,” and 26% indicated “it depends”; only 4% indicated that the COB’s support for the BSCB should be decreased (see Graph III.2).

British Society for Developmental Biology. Survey respondents tended to also indicate that the COB’s support of the BSDB is important (see Graph III.1). Eighty-three percent indicated that the support is “very important” to BSDB mission and survival. Well over 50% indicated that support of the BSDB is “very important” to the COB’s mission, goals, and reputation. When asked how the COB’s level of support for BSDB should change, 29% indicated “increase,” 48% indicated “stay about the same,” and 24% indicated “it depends”; none of the respondents indicated that the COB’s support of the BSDB should be decreased (see Graph III.2).

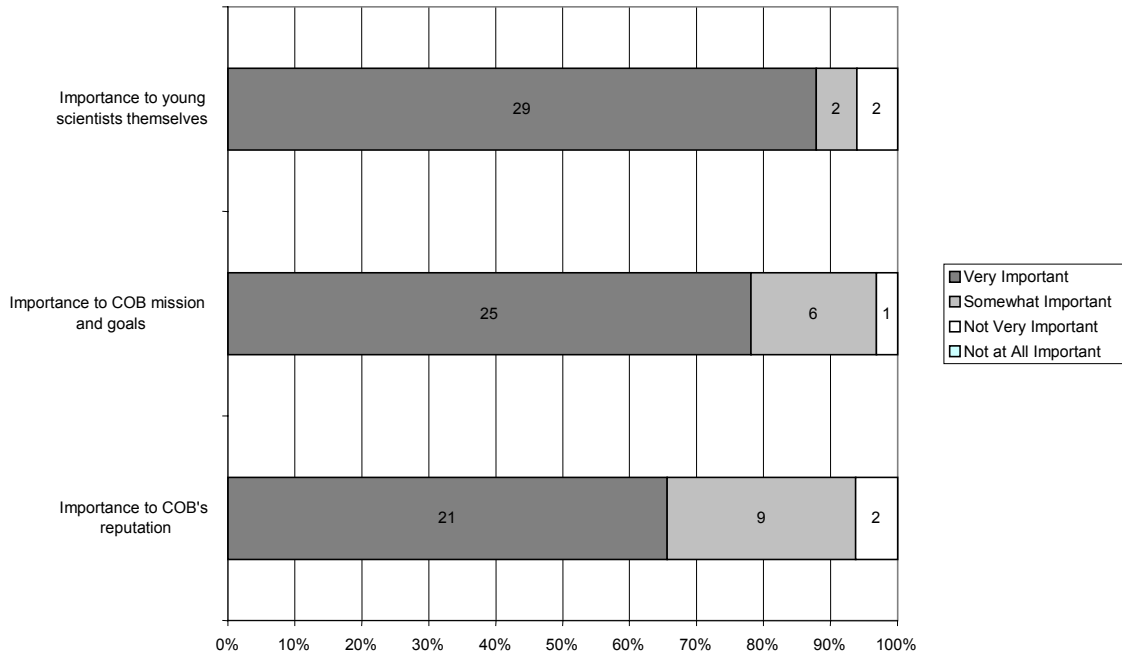
Society for Experimental Biology. Compared to the level of importance attributed to the support of the BSCB and the BSDB, respondents tended to indicate that the COB’s support of the Society for Experimental Biology is somewhat less important (see Graph III.1). Additionally, when asked how the COB’s level of support for SEB should change, 18% indicated “increase,” 35% indicated “stay about the same,” and 35% indicated “it depends”; 12% of the respondents indicated that the COB’s support of the SEB should be decreased (see Graph III.2).

Graph III.2: Recommended Changes in Support for Scientific Societies



Note: Numbers on top of bars represent responses in each category. Responses rarely total 38 as some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and "don't know" responses have been excluded.

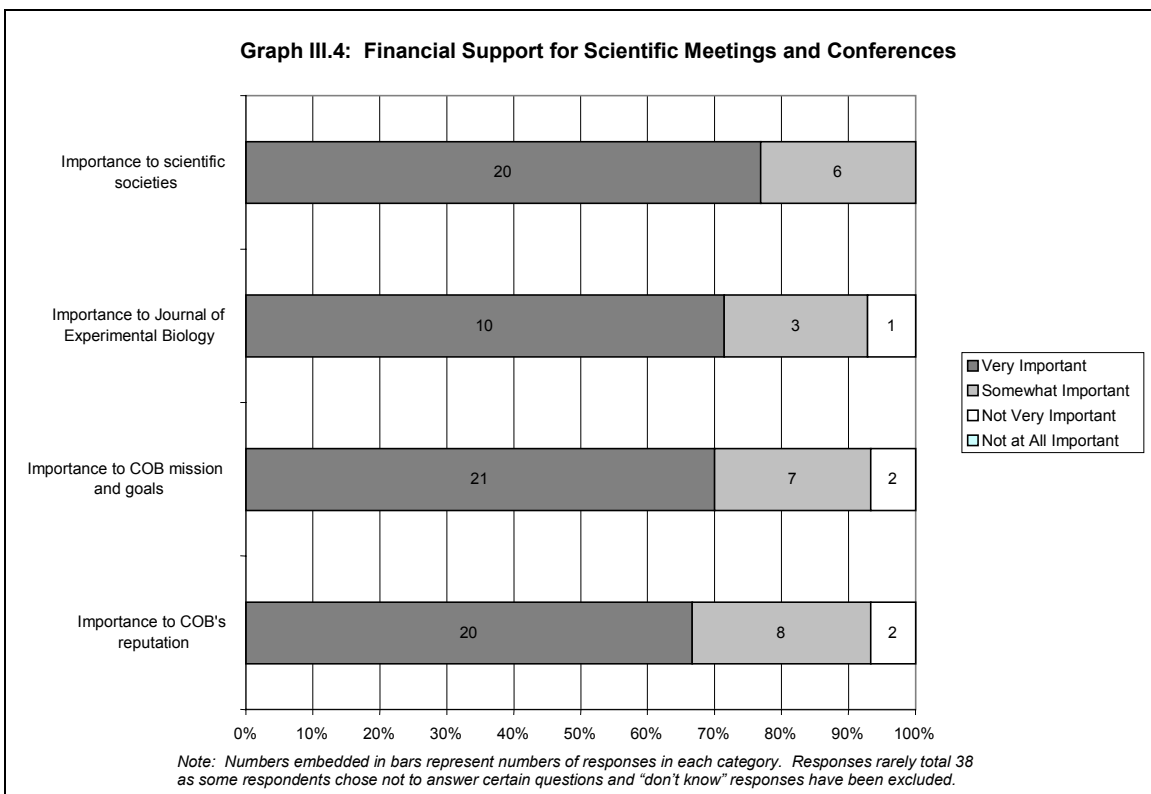
Graph III.3: Travel Grants for Young Scientists



Note: Numbers embedded in bars represent numbers of responses in each category. Responses rarely total 38 as some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and "don't know" responses have been excluded.

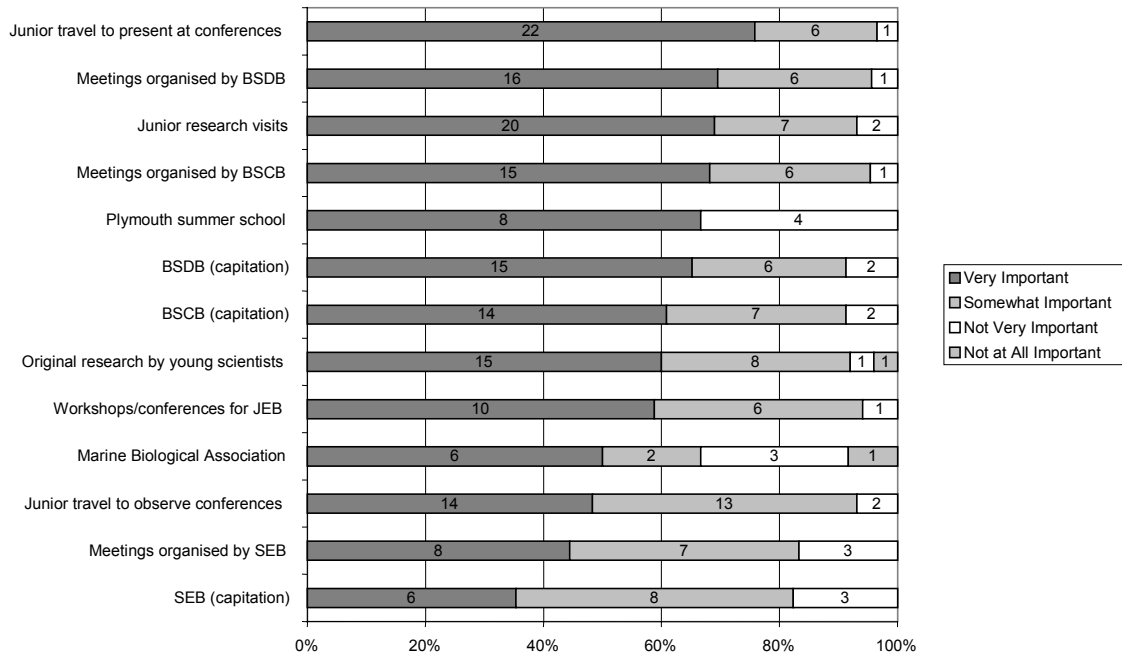
Travel Grants for Young Scientists. Respondents tended to indicate that travel grants are “very important,” especially to the young scientists who are the recipients of these awards (see Graph III.3). Only one respondent indicated that the COB’s support for young scientists’ travel should “decrease,” while 24 (77% of responses to this question) indicated that these awards should “increase.” Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that they are “very satisfied” with the decision-making process used to determine merit for support of young scientists’ travel; an additional 27% indicated that they are “somewhat satisfied.”

Financial Support for Scientific Meetings and Conferences. Respondents generally indicated that the COB’s support of meetings of the BSCB, BSDB, SEB and for conferences run by JEB is “very important” (see Graph III.4). Only 2 respondents (7.4%) indicated that the COB’s support of these activities should “decrease,” compared to 40.7% who indicated “increase,” 37% who indicated “stay about the same,” and 15% who indicated “it depends.”



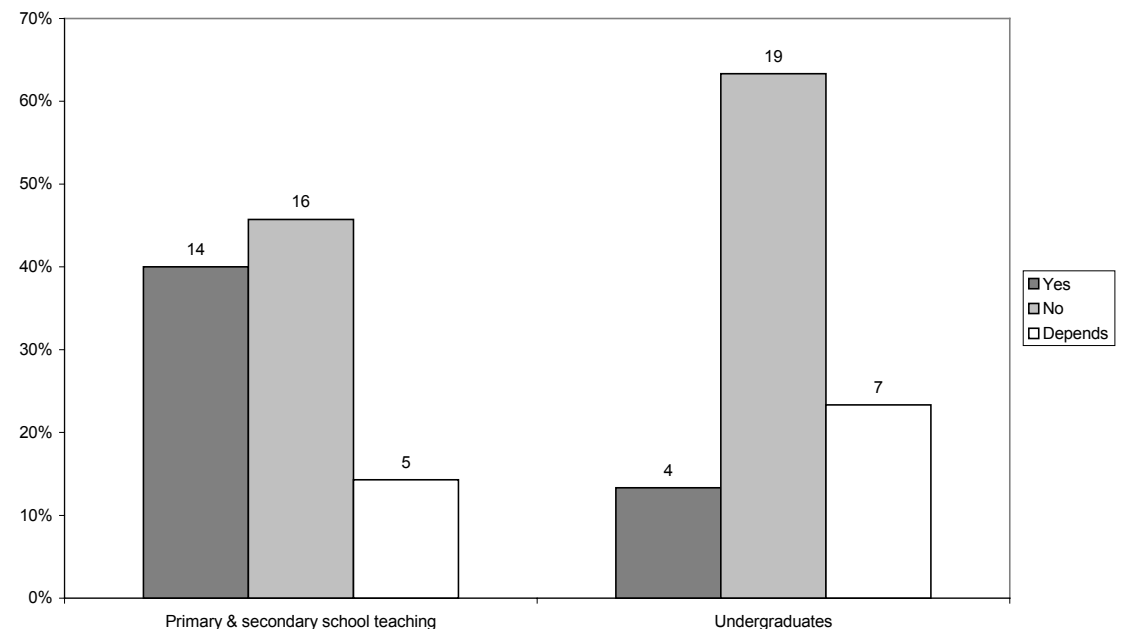
Scientific and Educational Awards. Respondents were asked to assess how important several scientific and educational awards granted by the COB are to the scientific community of biology in general. Respondents generally indicated that each of the awards is important: the entire list received only 2 responses of “not at all important” (see Graph III.5). More respondents considered “Junior travel to present at conferences” to be “very important” than any other award in the list (76%). SEB awards received the fewest indications of “very important” (35%); these awards also received the most indications of the most and least important awards to the scientific community, respectively.

Graph III.5: Importance of Scientific and Educational Awards



Note: Numbers embedded in bars represent numbers of responses in each category. Responses rarely total 38 as some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and "don't know" responses have been excluded.

Graph III.6: Potential Areas for the Expansion of COB Funding

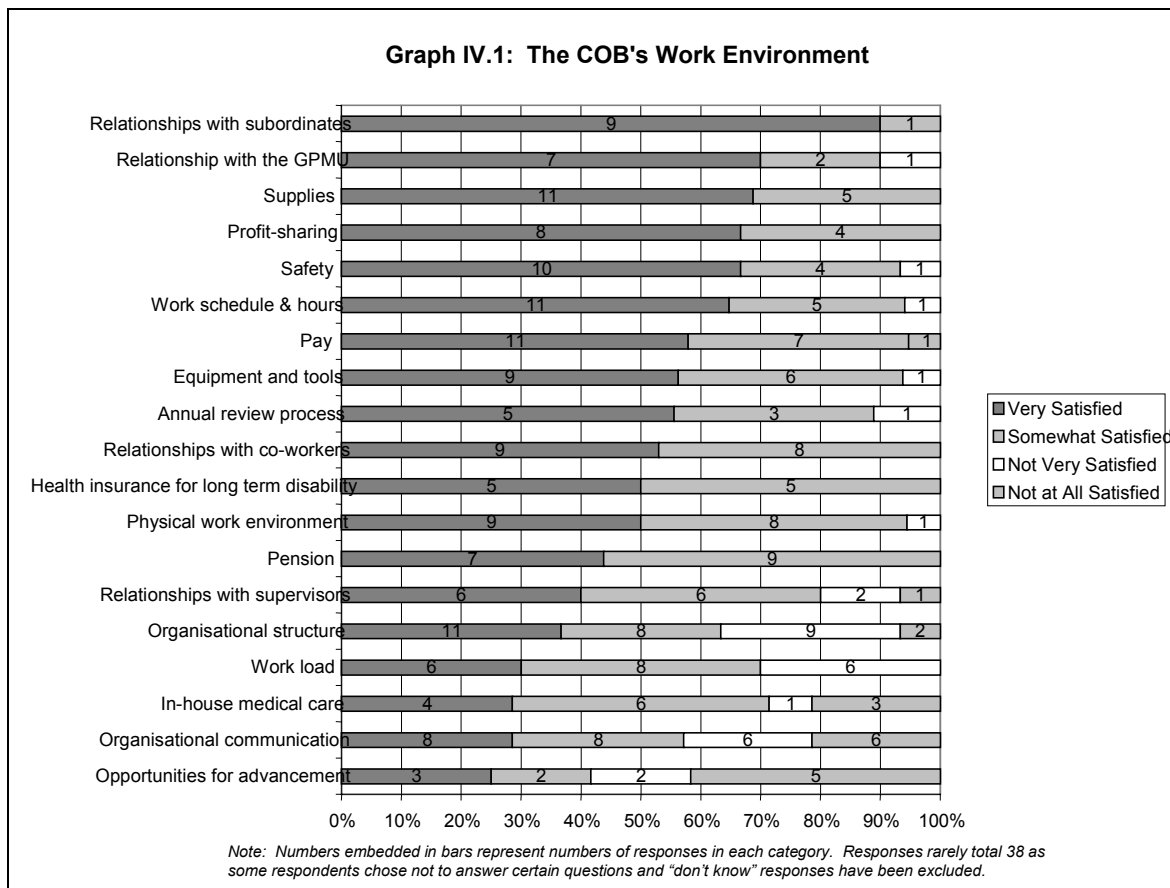


Note: Numbers on top of bars represent responses in each category. Responses rarely total 38 as some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and "don't know" responses have been excluded.

When asked whether COB scientific and educational awards should be extended to undergraduates, 63% of the respondents indicated “no,” 23% indicated “it depends,” and 13% indicated “yes” (see Graph III.6). Forty percent of the respondents indicated that the COB should consider extending its funding to primary and secondary school teaching to promote biological learning and understanding; 46% indicated that it should not, and 14% indicated “it depends.”

The COB’s Work Environment

Respondents were asked to consider their level of satisfaction with several aspects of their work with the COB. At least 50% of the respondents indicated that they were “very satisfied” with 12 of the 17 listed aspects of the COB’s work environment (see Graph IV.1). Areas that tended to receive more negative assessments include: organisational structure (30% “not very satisfied” and 7% “not at all satisfied”), work load (30% “not very satisfied”), in-house medical care (7% “not very satisfied” and 21% “not at all satisfied”), organisational communication (21% “not very satisfied” and 21% “not at all satisfied”), and opportunities for advancement (17% “not very satisfied” and 42% “not at all satisfied”).

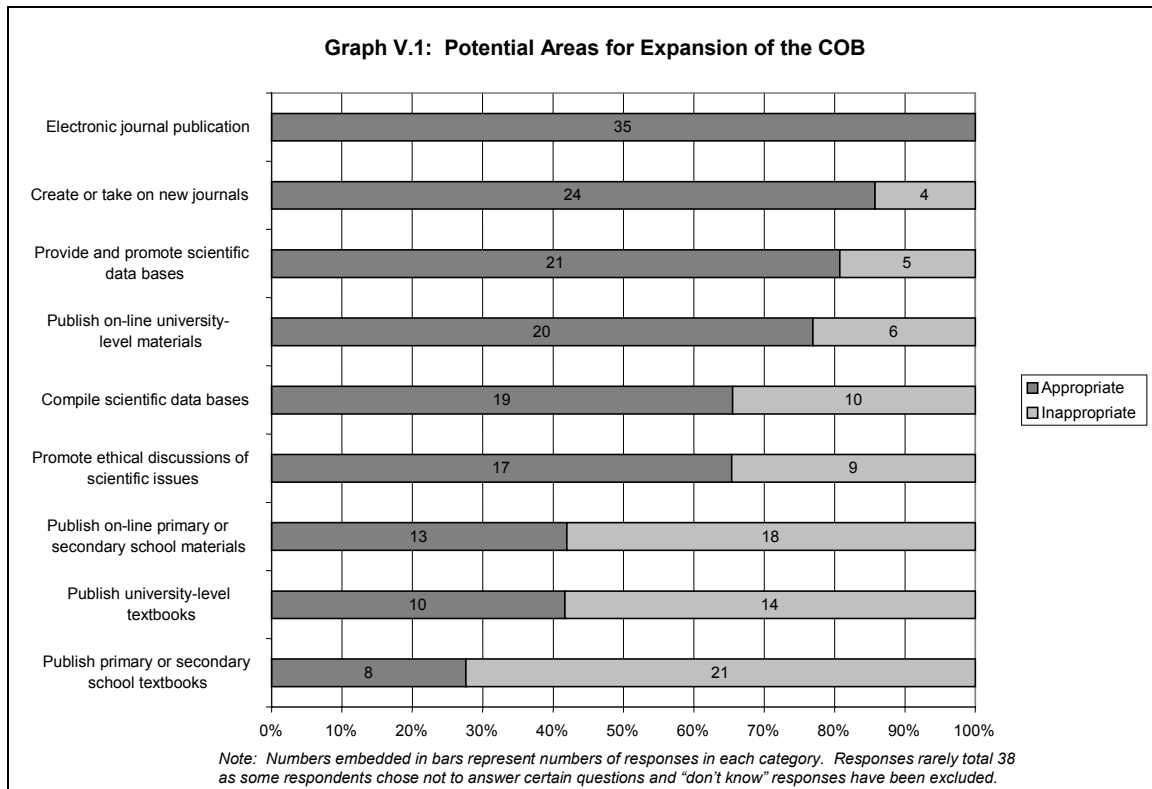


The COB's Future

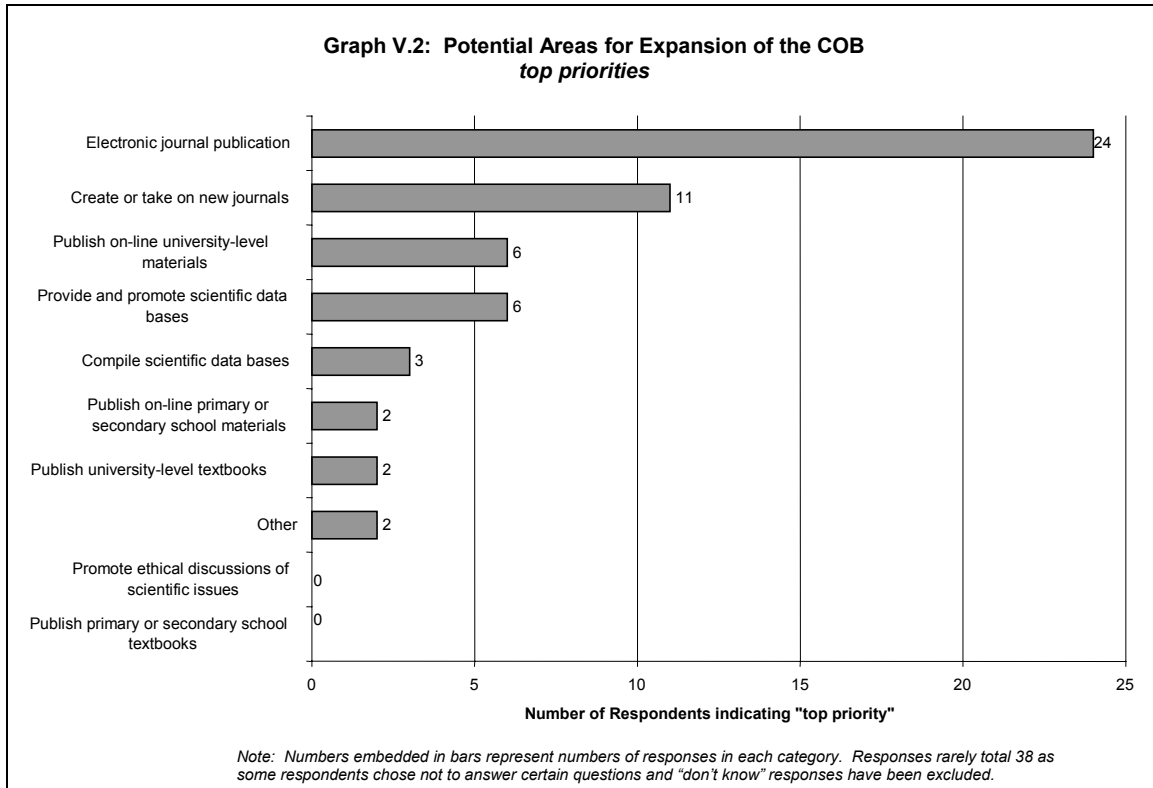
The survey concluded with a series of questions regarding the future of the COB, including future sources of revenue, potential avenues for expansion, on-line publication, and the COB's investments.

Future sources of revenue. Respondents were asked "how important is it for the COB to generate new sources of revenue?" Thirty-two percent indicated that it is "very important," 48% indicated "somewhat important," 16% indicated "not very important," and 3% indicated "not at all important." The following question asked respondents if they thought the COB should cut back its activities, stay the same or expand. No one indicated "cut back," 25% indicated "stay the same," 59% indicated "expand," and 16% indicated "it depends."

Potential avenues for expansion of the COB. When asked whether each of nine potential areas of expansion were either "appropriate" or "inappropriate" to the COB's mission of advancing and promoting the study of biology, respondents were unanimous in their approval of "electronic publication" (see Graph V.1). Over 50% of the respondents indicated that they thought six of the listed areas are appropriate areas for expansion of the COB. Three of the listings received approval from less than 50% of the respondents: publishing on-line primary or secondary school educational materials (58% indicated "inappropriate"), publishing university-level textbooks (58% indicated "inappropriate"), and publishing primary or secondary school textbooks (72% indicated "inappropriate").

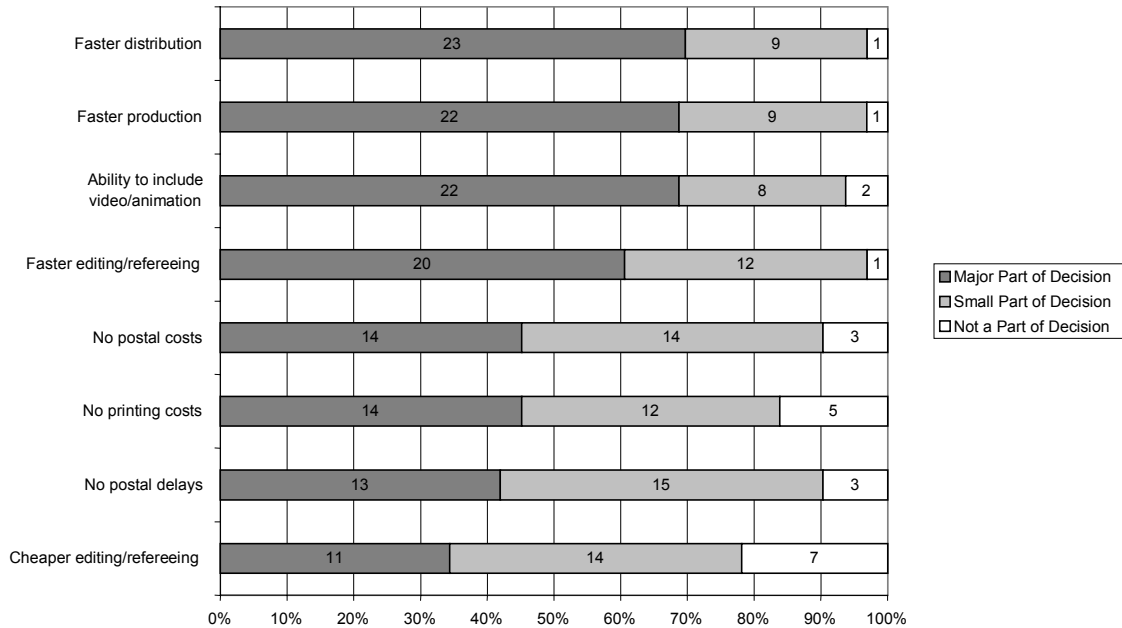


Respondents were also asked which of the listed potential areas for expansion they thought should be the COB’s top priority. Results again suggest high levels of support for electronic journal publication, followed by creating or taking on new journals, publishing on-line university –level educational materials, and providing and promoting scientific data bases (see Graph V.2).



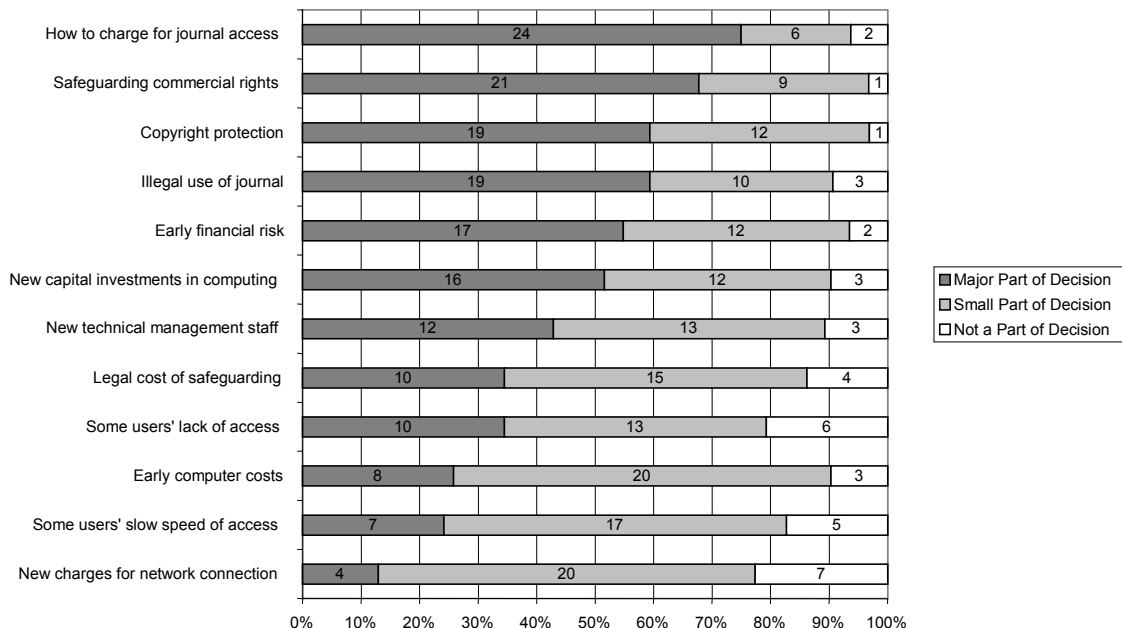
On-line or electronic publication. Respondents were asked to consider whether each of several “promises” and “problems” associated with on-line publication should be a part of the COB’s decision to move to electronic publication. Among the “promises” associated with on-line publication, respondents tended to emphasize the speed of the technology over and above cost-saving advantages (see Graph V.3). Among the “problems” associated with on-line publication, respondents tended to emphasize potential problems associated with charging for access to the publication, as well as legal issues such as the safeguarding commercial rights, copyright protection, and illegal use of electronic publications (see Graph V.4).

Graph V.3: Factors in Decision to Move to On-line Publication Promises



Note: Numbers embedded in bars represent numbers of responses in each category. Responses rarely total 38 as some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and "don't know" responses have been excluded.

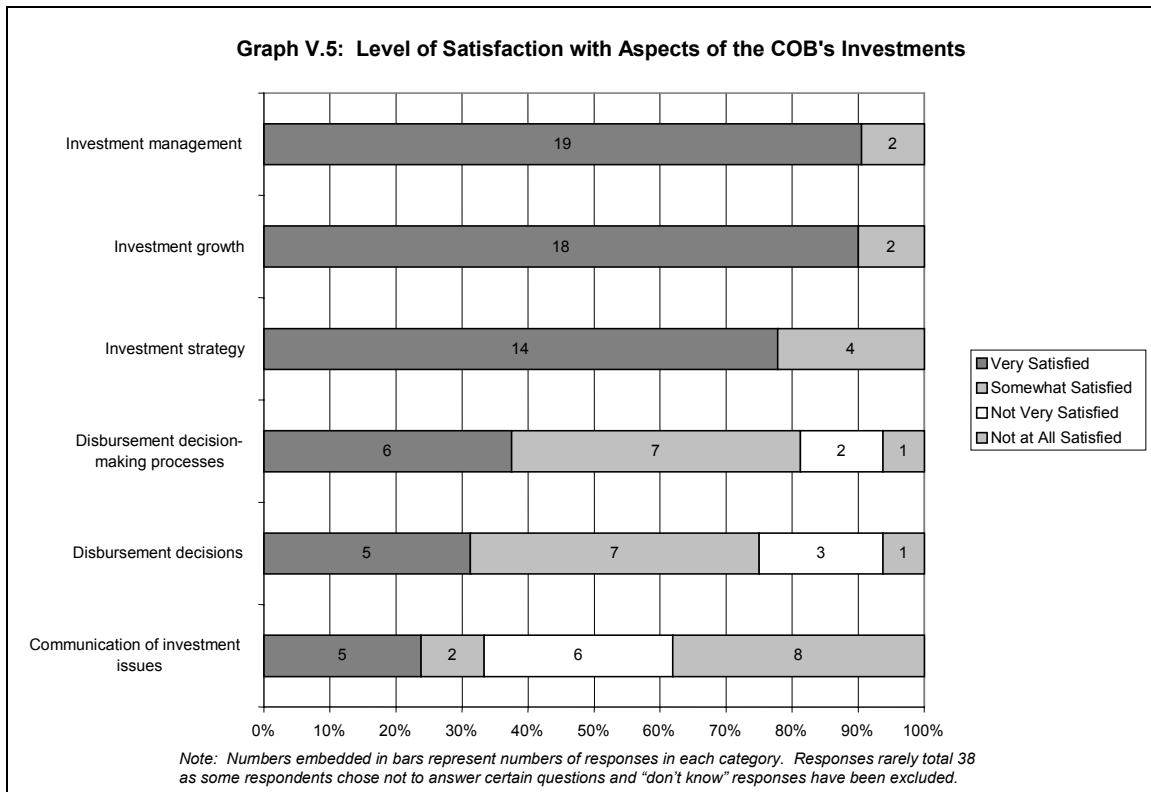
Graph V.4: Factors in Decision to Move to On-line Publication Problems



Note: Numbers embedded in bars represent numbers of responses in each category. Responses rarely total 38 as some respondents chose not to answer certain questions and "don't know" responses have been excluded.

Investments. The COB is currently enjoying a considerable net surplus of revenues due to its strategic investments. Ten percent of the respondents indicated that they know “a great deal” about the COB’s investments and investment strategies, 34% indicated that they know “some,” 21% indicated that they know “a little” and 34% indicated that they know “nothing at all” about the COB’s investments.

Respondents were then asked a series of questions regarding their level of satisfaction with various aspects of the COB’s investments. Most respondents were very satisfied with the management and growth of the COB’s investments as well as the COB’s investment strategy (see Graph V.5). However, most respondents were not satisfied with the communication of investment issues to COB employees, with 29% indicating “not very satisfied” and 38% indicating “not at all satisfied.”



Respondents were asked two final questions about the COB’s finances. First, respondents were asked, “Do you think that it would be best in the long term for the COB to remain a non-profit, charitable organisation or should it become a profit-making organisation?” Thirty of the 31 respondents who answered this question substantively indicated that the COB should remain non-profit. Second, respondents were told that the COB returns 3% of its net revenues back to the scientific community and then were asked “Do you think this amount should be increased, decreased, or stay about the same?” Sixty-one percent indicated that it should be increased, 27% indicated that it should stay about the same, and 12% indicated “it depends;” none of the respondents indicated that the amount given back to the scientific community should be decreased.

Conclusion

This survey of persons associated with the Company of Biologists provides a valuable source of information for the assessment of the company's current state of affairs, as well as potential directions for the future of the COB. As a policy OSRL refrains from drawing implications which are often better left to those in closer contact with the group or subject under investigation. However, some clear findings do emerge from the aggregated opinions of those who took part in the survey, including:

- Generally positive opinions of the COB and its development, both as an institution and as a place of work (see Graphs II.2-5);
- Fairly strong opinions of the COB's journals and publications, notably the journal *Development* (see Graphs III.1-4);
- Largely supportive attitudes toward certain of the COB's charitable activities (see Graph III.5);
- Reasonably positive attitudes toward many aspects of the COB's work environment, with lower levels of satisfaction around organisational issues (see Graph IV.1);
- A strong interest in on-line publication as a potential area of expansion for the COB (see Graphs V.1-2); and,
- High levels of satisfaction with the management of the COB's investments and the growth thereof (see Graph V.5).

These and other findings should be of great assistance to the future planning and organisational management of the Company of Biologists.