

How The Physiological Society first admitted women

At the AGM of January 1913 a motion was passed that 'It is desirable that women should be regarded as eligible for membership of the society.'

The Committee of The Physiological Society met on 2 December 1913 ... and two of its members proposed and seconded 'That the committee take no action in respect of the admin of women to membership of the Society.' This was rejected by 7 votes to 2, and J. N. Langley (Professor of Physiology at Cambridge and owner and editor of *The Journal of Physiology*) proposed that at the next AGM a motion be brought that 'it is desirable to ascertain the opinion of the members on the subject.' As a result, at the AGM on 24 January 1914, 'It was proposed by Prof. Langley on behalf of the Committee:- As a preliminary to consideration of the question of the admission of women to the Society it is desirable to ascertain the opinion of Members on the question.' This was seconded by J. S. Haldane and carried with two 'dissentients'. The Committee met on 14 February and drew up three options to be sent to the members as a 'postcard'.

At the Committee meeting of 6 June 1914 the results of the postcard ballot were recorded. Ninety-four members had voted to admit women on the same terms as men, 36 to admit them as associate members and 31 'for no change in the present rules'. The results were presented to the members at the meeting of 27 June 1914 and the proposal adopted that the Committee draw up the new rule. The Committee next met on 12 December 1914 and Langley, chairing the meeting, proposed that a new rule be submitted to the AGM, 'That women be eligible for membership of the Society and have the same rights, duties and privileges as men.' Accordingly at the AGM of January 1915 this was introduced as 'Rule 36' and 'carried by a majority'.

The Committee met on 5 June 1915 and considered the nominations in the Candidates Book. Eight names were 'nominated for ballot', the first six of them women. The members met on Saturday 3 July at Oxford. The minutes record that dinner was at Magdalen College with Professor Sherrington in the Chair. 'The following were duly elected ordinary members of the Society:- Florence Buchanan, Ruth F. Skelton, Winifred C. Cullis, Enid M. Tribe, Constance Leetham Terry, S. C. M. Sowton, [and two men] George Winfield, W. R. Thacker.' The Society had at last elected its first women members.

It was proposed by Prof. Langley & seconded by J. N. Langley that the Committee take no action in respect of the admin of women to membership of the Society.
This was rejected by 7 to 2.
Prof. Langley proposed that the following motion should be brought before the Society at its next Gen. Meeting:-
'That as a preliminary to the consideration of the question of the admission of women to the Society it is desirable to ascertain the opinion of the members on the subject.'
This was seconded by Prof. Barstrop & carried by 7 to 2.
The Meeting then adjourned.

The Committee minutes of Dec 1913.

The form of the postcard to be sent to all members of the Society regarding the admission of women was drawn up & it was finally decided unanimously that it should take the following form:
"Are you in favour
1. Of the admission of women as Members of the Society on the same terms as men?
2. Of the admission of women as Associate Members?
Associate to have the right of voting on Annual Subscription of 10/-, which would entitle them to attend the Scientific Meetings, or of paying an Annual Subscription of £1-10-0, which would entitle them to receive the Journal of Physiology in addition.
3. Of making no change in the present rules?
The Meeting then adjourned.

The Committee minutes of 14 February 1914 setting out the three options to be sent to the members as a 'postcard'.

The result of the poll with regard to the admission of women as members was announced as follows:
On the same terms as men ... 94.
As Associate Members ... 36
For no change in the present rules ... 31
(See Minutes of Feb. 14th) Total 161

The Committee minutes of 6 June 1914 recording the results of the poll of the members.

A Committee was proposed for the Chair & carried by a majority
"36 Women shall be eligible for Membership of the Society & have the same rights, duties & privileges as men."

The Minute Book for the meeting of 23 January 1915, showing the adoption of the new rule to admit women.



Magdalen College: the JCR where The Society usually dined in Oxford is on the left.

Dinner was in Magdalen College, Prof. Sherrington in the Chair.
The minutes of the two previous meetings having been read & confirmed, the following were duly elected ordinary members of the Society:
Florence Buchanan
Ruth F. Skelton
Winifred C. Cullis
Enid M. Tribe
Constance Leetham Terry

(Men) S. C. M. Sowton
George Winfield
W. R. Thacker
The Meeting then adjourned.

The Minute Book for the meeting of 3 July 1915 recording the election of six women.