

## 401 Meeting of Council

**Friday 8 December 2023 09:00–14:30 GMT**

**Venue: Hybrid via Zoom and Meeting Rooms 3 and 4, 14–16 Meredith Street, London, EC1R 0AB, UK**

**Chair: Professor Gurdyal Besra, President**

**Present:**

Gurdyal Besra (President, in the Chair)

Robin May (Treasurer)

Karen Robinson (General Secretary)

Paul Hoskisson (co-Chair of Building Communities Committee)

Jo Kite (Chair of Early Career Forum Executive Committee), for items 1 – 2.1 (in part).

Sarah Hooper (co-Chair of Sustainability Committee)

Jose Bengoechea (co-Chair of Sustainability Committee)

Catrin Moore (co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee)

Tina Joshi (co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee)

Andy Edwards (Elected Member)

Laura Bowater (Elected Member)

David Clarke (Elected Member)

Nigel Brown (Elected Member)

Kim Hardie (Elected Member)

Alan McNally (Elected Member)

**In attendance:**

John Sinclair (incoming Treasurer)

Geertje Van Keulen (incoming co-Chair of Sustainability Committee)

Kalai Mathee (incoming co-Chair of Building Communities Committee)

Jack Ferguson (incoming co-Chair of Early Career Forum Executive Committee)

Sheila Patrick (incoming Elected Member)

Lorena Fernández-Martínez (incoming Elected Member)

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)

Joanne Manning (Chief Operations Officer)

Sarah Buckman (Chief Programmes and Partnerships Officer)

Charlotte Mitchell (Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Audiences)

Helen Jones (Associate Director Strategy and Impact)

Pippa Evans (Projects Delivery Lead)

Glyn Owen (Governance Executive)

Kofo Balogun (Associate Director of HR), for item 3.1.2.

Alex Chan (Commercial Engagement and Opportunities Lead), for item 3.4.

Kevin Maringer (co-Chair, Members Panel) for item 3.1.1.

### **1.1 Apologies for absence and welcome to new attendees**

The President welcomed everyone to the 401 meeting of Council, particularly the incoming members, who were attending as observers before taking office from January 2024.

Apologies were received from Robin May, Gill Elliott, and George Salmond (incoming Elected member), and Charlotte Mitchell (Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Audiences).

### **1.2 Declaration of any new conflicts of interest**

There were no new declarations of interest.

### **1.3 Minutes of the 400 meeting of Council**

The Minutes of the 400 Meeting of Council were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

### **1.4 Matters arising from the minutes and action points**

The Chief Executive reported that all actions were either completed, in train or included as substantive items on the agenda of the current meeting. Brief updates were included on the actions table.

He drew attention particular to the following actions from the 400 meeting of Council:

Action 04 – It had taken some time for the pension broker to provide the precise information relating to the small number of members of staff who were in the older investment scheme. This had recently been received and the Chief Executive expected to be in a position to write to all staff about the pensions review shortly.

Action 07 – Council members had expressed their views following the last meeting, with Mark Holmes of Cambridge University as the favoured candidate; the General Secretary had ratified his name as the representative to be put forward to sit on the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Plowright Prize Panel.

Action 08 – All of the Prize winners for 2024 had accepted, including the 2024 Prize Lecture winners and 2025 Prize Medal winner. A public announcement had since been issued naming the winners of the 2024 Prize Lectures and Prize Medal, and their lectures had been scheduled for Annual Conference 2024.

Action 11 – Council's revised discussions regarding content funded by the Russian state or coming from institutions supporting the war had been considered by the Publishing Panel which had supported the amendment. The amended statement would be published on the Society's website. The Chief Executive informed Council that at the time of the meeting, seven papers from affected institutions were paused under the policy.

## 2. Finance Committee

In the absence of the Treasurer, the Chief Executive reported on this item.

### 2.1 Finance Committee key points

#### 2.1.1 Accounting treatment of a legacy from Royall Tyler Moore

The Chief Executive reminded Council of the three conditions regarding the legacy bequeathed to the Society as set out in the will of the late Royall Tyler Moore. These had been approved in principle by Council at its previous meeting.

After having taken advice from the external expert on the Finance Committee, Ahmet Feridun, who clearly met the legal definition of someone that Council reasonably believed to be qualified to give it, the Finance Committee recommended that Council pass a resolution to use a total return approach to the endowment bequeathed by Royall Tyler Moore.

Council approved the Finance Committee's recommendation to resolve to adopt a total return approach to the endowment.

#### 2.1.2 Management Accounts – 31 October 2023

On behalf of the Finance Committee, the Chief Executive drew attention to the Management Accounts to the end of October 2023. In particular, he highlighted the expected deficit of approximately £1.4 million for 2023, and the significant but reduced budgeted deficit for 2024, which had previously been approved by Council.

Members of Council queried the Chief Executive on some of the details in the accounts, particularly the significant dip in finances between August and October 2023. The Chief Operations Officer clarified that this dip had appeared owing to the combination of a weak period in the performance of the Society's investments portfolio and some Annual Conference 2024 related expenses which would appear in the 2024 accounts but in cashflow terms were brought forward to 2023. Council noted that drawing on the Society's reserves to remain operational in the short term was consistent with the decision it had previously taken in response to the Society's predicted financial deficit, but stressed as it had previously done that this was not sustainable in the long-term.

Council considered the financial risks and opportunities faced by the Society more generally. Discussion focused on the Society's events and in particular the financial burden of running Annual Conference at a loss. Council accepted a recommendation from the Finance Committee that it should instruct the Chief Executive that every effort should be made to ensure that Annual Conference should break even on direct costs by 2026. The Chief Executive observed that this was a challenging but realistic target, provided that the inevitable consequences were understood. Further cost-cutting would not on its own achieve the objective. Higher levels of income would be necessary, and this would affect the way in which the Divisions organised the event. In her absence, he highlighted the work that Gill Elliott had undertaken as Chair of the Scientific Conferences Panel to embed some of the necessary changes.

Given that demand for Annual Conference continued to rise, additional income could include higher delegate fees. In the light of experience at FIS, it should also include more corporate sponsorship of particular conference sessions. The Chief Executive noted that there had previously been resistance

to such proposals but that now that Council had adopted an unambiguous decision, such resistance would be easier to manage. As a first step and demonstration of the concept, the incoming Chair of Scientific Conferences Panel had agreed with the Chief Executive to hold a short scientific session to accompany the Hot Topic lecture on dirty water at Annual Conference 2024, seeking commercial sponsorship.

Council members emphasised the need for a clear mandate at Divisions Day in 2024, which would begin the planning for the 2025 Annual Conference, because breaking even by 2026 would require appreciable progress by 2025. The ambition should be for Annual Conference not merely to break even on direct costs but from 2027 onwards, there should be an expectation that direct income should exceed direct costs.

Council revisited its previous discussion (399 Meeting, Item 3.3.1) about the possibility of not holding Annual Conference every year, but having a Biennial Conference with a richer and more varied programme of alternative meetings during the intervening years. The Chief Executive observed that the General Secretary's Group was recommending (Item 3.8 of the current meeting) that a final decision be taken about this matter at Council's 402 Meeting in March 2024. A number of members of Council felt that a decision would need to be taken sooner than March 2024.

In the interest of ensuring that it had enough information to make an informed decision, Council resolved to hold an extraordinary meeting in January 2024 for the sole purpose of considering this matter. The Chief Executive undertook to provide more detailed and specific information about various scenarios in advance of the meeting.

**Action 02:** Governance Executive to arrange a Doodle poll to find a date in late January 2024 for the extraordinary meeting of Council.

**Action 03:** Council members to refer any further points for discussion regarding the future of Annual Conference to the Chief Operations Officer.

**Action 04:** Chief Operations Officer and Chief Programmes and Partnerships Officer to prepare the relevant information to inform discussion at the extraordinary meeting of Council in January 2024.

### **2.1.3 Fundraising update**

The Chief Executive referred Council to paper 401-02 and the detailed report from the Finance Committee for details of the fundraising update.

### **2.1.4 Change to bank mandate**

Council approved a resolution to remove outgoing Treasurer Robin May from the Society's bank mandate and add the incoming Treasurer John Sinclair in his place.

### **2.1.5 Investment update**

Council members had attended the 182 meeting of the Finance Committee to receive the annual review of the Society's investments from ARC and Evelyn Partners. The Chief Executive asked Council to contact either him or the Chief Operations Officer directly with any queries arising from this item.

## **2.2 Collated finance papers**

These were taken as read.

## **2.3 Critical Risk Register**

Council reviewed the draft Critical Risk Register, which had undergone some format changes under the direction of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee. The Chief Operations Officer reported that these changes were intended to make the Register more useful for Council and to make the accountability of staff clearer. She also informed Council that the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee would from now on be inviting relevant members of staff to their meetings to discuss mitigations for the highest ranking risks.

Council was satisfied with the contents and mitigations for the draft Critical Risk Register, subject to the amendment that the income risk regarding income from event attendance should be categorised with impact 4, likelihood 4, overall 16, residual amber; the mitigations would be discussed at the extraordinary meeting of Council in January.

## **2.4 Strategy evaluation framework**

The Associate Director of Strategy and Impact reported on the evaluation framework, which was intended as a tool for determining whether and to what extent the actions deriving from the implementation plan were delivering Council's strategic objectives. Evaluation in this sense did not include all data collection and monitoring but was rather aimed at focusing on overall outcomes. Annual impact reports could then be produced for review by the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee.

# **3. President/Chief Executive business**

## **3.1 General business / report back from CEO**

### **3.1.1 Response to conflict the Middle East.**

Kevin Maringer, co-Chair of the Members Panel, joined for this item.

Noting that Council had made a statement regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Laura Bowater asked whether Council should consider taking a position with regard to the conflict happening in the Middle East.

Council acknowledged the complexity of the situation. Kevin Maringer briefed Council on discussions that had been taking place among the Members Panel regarding the conflict, noting that some members of the Panel had strong feelings regarding a statement relating to particular aspects of the conflict, while others were more nuanced and some had not involved themselves in the discussion at all. Kevin Maringer observed that some members of the Members Panel wanted to issue a statement on behalf of the panel regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza, independent of any statement by Council.

The Chief Executive gave details of the legal position, which constrained what Council as charity trustees could do and say. Regardless of how compelling the humanitarian situation was, Council would need to consider its legal status as the board of trustees of a charity, which was unable in law to "make moral statements at the expense of the charity" [Judgement in Harris vs Church Commissioners for England 1991]. The situations in Russia and the Middle East differed in a variety of ways. Council observed that the number of papers it received with Russian funding or support

was vastly smaller than the number it received from Israel and Palestine and that as trustees, they were legally obliged to take into account the effect this had on the financial business of the Society.

Noting its legal responsibilities and the controversy regarding the situation, Council decided against issuing a statement on the conflict. It further observed that the trustees would be responsible for a statement from any part of the governance structure, so that a statement from the Members Panel would also not be possible. Council discussed whether a policy should be agreed for issuing statements in response to global events, and agreed to return to the issue at a future meeting.

The Chief Executive undertook to brief the Members Panel on Council's decision, in collaboration with the co-Chair of the Panel, and to deliver an explanation of the legal constraints and Council's discussion in full.

Geertje van Keulen, incoming co-Chair of the Sustainability Committee, suggested that the Sustainability Committee should consider ways of highlighting humanitarian organisations and resources to aid microbiologists affected by the crisis – such as the Council for At-Risk Academics, which the Society supported financially when it was funding microbiologists – as a means of fulfilling the desire of some of the Members Panel to offer solidarity and support.

**Action 05:** Chief Executive to brief the Members Panel regarding Council's decision.

**Action 06:** Co-Chair of the Sustainability Committee to discuss the proposed matter with Sustainability Committee.

**Action 07:** Associate Director of Communications Brand and Audiences to prepare a draft policy for the conditions and criteria by which Council may be guided in making position statements on significant world events.

### **3.1.2 Staff engagement survey report**

The Chief Executive presented Council with outcomes of the annual staff engagement survey run by the Staff Forum. He reminded Council that the Staff Forum conducted the survey independently of senior staff and that the basis of consent on which staff provided information precluded Council from seeing the raw data (which was only available to members of the Forum) or any part of the detailed report (which was intended solely for members of staff).

The core question of whether each individual feels "like a valued member of staff" had achieved the highest results ever, and other questions which had produced very strong results included whether people "feel a strong connection to the Society as a whole," and whether there was a strong spirit across and among Themes. The main words listed about the current working culture were inclusive, friendly, dynamic, balanced and flexible; and for impressions of the Society as a whole, the most frequently listed words were welcoming, friendly and great.

A summary of the matters raised by staff with HR during regular one-to-one catch ups reinforced the positive outcomes, emphasising that all staff appreciated working practices, that the restructured Themes were proving popular and effective, and that very few people felt the need to access the employee assistance programme provided by WeCare.

The Chief Executive expressed his pride in the senior staff, the Staff Forum and the HR team, and further observed that these positive results did not mean that everything was perfect; the Staff Forum always produced recommendations, to which the senior team responded in full.

Council queried senior staff on the other benefits provided to staff by the Society, including whether a rewards scheme existed and any other opportunities staff had to give feedback to their senior colleagues. Senior staff reminded Council of the bonus scheme, which twice a year allowed anyone to nominate any colleague with final decisions taken by the leadership team, chaired by the Associate Director of HR, with the active and valuable assistance of the Chair of the Staff Forum.

### **3.1.3 Covid-19 public inquiry**

The Chief Executive updated Council on matters relating to the UK's Covid-19 Public Inquiry, reminding members of the Society's potential involvement, which had been discussed at previous Council meetings. He reminded Council that it had agreed that the Society would apply for Core Participant status for the forthcoming Module on Test and Trace, which was expected to be announced in the first part of 2024 and to last for over a year.

The Chief Executive advised Council that the Society's lawyers had reported the previous week that the Society had a higher than 50% chance of being appointed a Core Participant. The consequence of this would be that the Society would have access to the content of the Module, and the Society's lawyers would have the opportunity to input on the questions being posed during the inquiry. Regardless of whether the Society was appointed as a Core Participant, it was highly likely (higher than 90% according to the lawyers) that it would be asked to contribute to the Module of the Inquiry.

The Chief Executive reminded Council that participation in the inquiry would be a significant undertaking which would need to be treated with the appropriate legal sensitivity. Participation would require sharing all relevant information which the Society possessed with the inquiry, which might prove intrusive in some instances.

### **3.1.4 Code of conduct**

During the latter half of 2023, a member of Council had drawn attention to the effect of power imbalances in relation to the Code of Conduct. Noting that differences in power might impact how individuals perceived each other's behaviour, Council agreed to look at amending the Code of Conduct to make specific reference to power imbalances.

**Action 08:** Chief Operations Officer to consider the most effective manner of amending the Code of Conduct.

### **3.1.5 Visit to Nottingham**

The Chief Executive thanked Karen Robinson and Kim Hardie for their hospitality in hosting senior staff on a highly successful visit to their home institution in Nottingham in November 2023, at which microbiologists in a variety of disciplines from several departments of two institutions had enjoyed an engaging set of discussions about the Society, its activities and its future challenges.

### **3.1.6 Environmental Impact Working Group**

The Chief Executive reported that the Environmental Impact Working Group would be holding its first full meeting in January 2024, under the chairship of outgoing Council member Jose Bengoechea.

## 3.2 Outcomes from the Thursday session

Council had held an engaging and useful session the previous day, examining how best to ensure that the membership of Council was sufficiently inclusive to reflect the diversity of the membership.

Council noted that time had inevitably been limited, and that there had not been as much opportunity as everyone would have liked for wider discussion and interrogation of the various preparatory work that Council members had undertaken following the previous meeting. Council would need to return to the issues in the future.

Council members Alan McNally and Kalai Mathee, Members Panel representative Rowan Casey, and the Member Engagement and Communities Manager, Ffion Lane, had volunteered to form a core group which would meet in January 2024 and bring forward proposals for changes to the selection process for Council members in 2024. Given the timescales, any approval that was required from Council would need to be obtained by email. The Associate Director of Strategy and Impact had agreed to be secretariat for this group.

The Associate Director of Strategy and Impact would compile any further inputs from Council in advance of the meeting of the core group in January 2024.

**Action 09:** Associate Director of Strategy and Impact to collate relevant contributions and convene the core group in January 2024.

## 3.3 Council appointed positions and related matters

### 3.3.1 Positions to be appointed by Council in 2024

Council noted that the next President would need to be identified during 2024 to take office in January 2025, and a successor for a co-Chair of the Impact and Influence Committee would need to be identified in 2024 to shadow the incumbent in 2025 before taking office in 2026. The description of the current process described in paper 401-05 was taken as read, with the caveat that it would be subject to revision by any decisions arising from the work of the core group established following the Thursday Session of Council, as minuted under item 3.2.

Council approved the appointment of both Seána Duggan and James Redfern to be co-Deputy Editors in Chief of *Access Microbiology*.

### 3.3.2 Changes to recruitment of the Members Panel

This was taken as read.

## 3.4 Open Access business models – Subscribe to Open

The Commercial Engagement and Opportunities Lead, Alex Chan, gave a detailed presentation expanding on the paper circulated in advance. He showed how Subscribe to Open was proving to be a successful commercial model for a range of publishers, and how it could potentially extend the time available to the Society to move all of its titles to full Open Access in a sustainable way. Council approved the implementation of the Subscribe to Open publishing model for the *Journal of General Virology* and the *Journal of Medical Microbiology* from January 2025 as a transitional model.



The Chair of the Publishing Panel observed that Subscribe to Open offered a potentially practicable route for allowing the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology* to become Open Access, something that would be commercially challenging under other models.

### **3.5 Review and potential expansion of the journal portfolio**

The Chief Executive reminded Council that it had requested a review of the journals portfolio at its 399 Meeting in July 2023. Some initial work had been undertaken but it had not been possible to begin the main bulk of analysis until the new Publishing Manager had been appointed, which had now happened. Council noted that there was a range of microbiological content that the Society's titles was not attracting, and that in an Open Access world, volume was important, so it was crucial for the Society to attract a greater proportion of microbiology research. It would be crucial to appoint leading figures as Editors-in-Chief of any new titles, and also to ensure that new titles did not merely parasitise the Society's existing journals.

The model would need to be in line with *Microbial Genomics*, which had been successful by attracting papers that could in theory have been published in *Microbiology*, but where the perceptions of the scope of the latter journal meant that it did not attract such content.

Council observed that the Society would need to be able to identify the requisite reviewer-base to peer review content related to new areas, such as artificial intelligence in microbiology, one of the areas suggested as a possibility for a new title.

Council also observed that it was unlikely that any new title would generate a surplus in the short term and would need to be seen as an investment, and that each decision would need to be taken on the basis of adequate information and projections.

Council approved the mechanism for taking decisions in relation to expanding the journal portfolio.

### **3.6 Association of Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine**

The Chief Executive reported that, subsequent to previously reported discussions, the Society had signed a mutually beneficial Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine (ACB) the details of which were included in paper 401-08.

### **3.7 Council governance matters**

Two related items that had been requested by Council at its previous meeting were brought forward for further consideration.

#### *Council meeting schedule, as provisionally agreed at the 400 meeting*

At the closed session of the 400 meeting, Council had agreed to change its annual meeting schedule to remove the remote meeting of Council which took place in September and replace it with a commitment to arrange visits of senior staff to Council members in their first year of office. Online meetings had proven less engaging for the interactive and discursive nature of much of Council business. Furthermore, the timing of the September meeting reduced its value because of where it stood relative to working patterns at universities and being so soon after the July meeting.

Council had requested a paper for the current meeting to address the consequential details.

The paper set out proposals for dealing with the two items of business that were routinely considered in September.

At the suggestion of the General Secretary, Council decided not to make the changes, and to keep the pattern of online and in person meetings the same as it was at present, namely online meetings in March and September, and in person meetings in July and December.

### *Composition of Council*

At its 400 Meeting, during consideration of the need for changes to the make-up of Council, Council had noted the need to avoid “tinkering and tokenism” and had requested a complete review of its structure. The current paper set out some details of the objectives to be met by such a review, and gave an example of the ways in which the legal responsibilities of a Board of Directors (which had grown substantially) could be decoupled from the community leadership role which Council had always fulfilled. It was stressed that the example was merely by way of an illustration and that it was not at this stage necessary to place any store by the details.

Council noted that bringing a financial expert into the full membership of Finance Committee had been valuable and successful. However, although Council members saw the need for further professional advice, members disagreed about the extent to which commercial, publishing or other expertise should be brought onto Council itself.

Council agreed that its membership had become too large.

Council requested that the Chief Executive return to it with a varied set of proposed models at its next meeting, after having taken expert advice about possible alternatives. Council noted that the process would involve a complete review of the Articles of Association with a view to presenting an amended version to the Annual General Meeting.

**Action 10:** Chief Executive to consult with appropriate experts to draft a varied set of proposals for a new Board structure to be presented to Council at the next meeting.

### **3.8 General Secretary’s Group Annual Report of Committee Business December 2023**

This was taken largely as read, with some discussion regarding two items.

On point 2.2.2 in paper 401-10 regarding proposed changes to the Sir Howard Dalton Young Microbiologist of the Year award, Council queried the suggestion to remove Sir Howard Dalton’s name from the award. The General Secretary explained that there had been a feeling that naming things after figures from the past was beginning to be seen as outdated. In the interests of time, further discussion of this point was postponed for a later meeting.

On point 2.2.7 in paper 401-10 regarding the Members Panel’s consideration of a new mentorship scheme, Council expressed its gratitude to the Members Panel for developing the idea but at present, it was difficult to see how the staff time could be allocated. Council also felt that it would need to be able to closely monitor the implementation of such a scheme owing to the reputational risks involved with running it. Council was concerned with how the scheme would be set up to ensure a high quality of mentorship, and to offer value to participants by setting itself apart from existing institutional mentorship schemes.

### **3.9 Nominations for Honorary Membership**

Council had received two nominations for Honorary Membership.

Both the nominators, Karen Robinson and Kalai Mathee, left the room to recuse themselves from discussion.

Having noted the agreed convention that normally only one Honorary Membership should be awarded in a year, Council first voted to comply with this convention on this occasion.

Council voted to award Honorary Membership of the Society to Mark Harris.

### **3.10 Composition of Council and Committees**

This was taken as read.

### **3.11 FEMS update from the 2023 Annual Meeting**

In the absence of the formal minutes from the FEMS 2023 Annual General Meeting which had not yet been distributed, David Kelly (FEMS Delegate) had prepared an oral summary of the meeting and his observations on the Society's relationship with FEMS via pre-recorded video. In view of the time, Council agreed that a link to the video should be circulated after the meeting.

A transcript of David Kelly's presentation was included in paper 401-13 which was taken as read.

### **3.12 Membership report**

This was taken as read.

Council approved the list of incoming members.

### **3.13 Draft 2023 Annual General Meeting minutes**

Council approved the 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) minutes for circulation to the membership with the 2024 AGM papers.

### **3.14 Charity Commission monitoring visit**

For the formal record, the Chief Executive reminded Council of information it had been provided with in November, relating to a visit from the Charity Commission scheduled for January. The visit had arisen as a consequence of the success the Society had achieved in attracting new income from institutions in China via new publishing agreements. The Chief Executive drew Council's attention to the parts of the correspondence that highlighted that the visit was a routine matter and that there was no suggestion of anything improper.

A number of Trustees would need to be present during the visit, and all three Officers along with the Chair and Chair-elect of Publishing Panel had all agreed to attend. A briefing would be circulated in advance of the meeting on 12 January.

Laura Bowater queried whether the establishment of the Society's new WeChat profile could pose risks to the Society's relationship with the Charities Commission. The Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Audiences explained the robust process put in place to approve the

translation of all the content being uploaded to the Society's account via external translators and two internal checks before being published.

## 4. Summary of Progress

### 4.1 Strategy 2023-2027 Implementation Plan progress update

The Projects Delivery Lead updated Council on the progress which had been made on the Society's strategy in 2023 as outlined in paper 401-17.

The Projects Delivery Lead presented Council with the newly created project overview tracker, established as a means of assisting senior staff with monitoring delivery progress at a high level. The tracker covered 34 ongoing projects at the Society. These included established projects such as the Knocking Out AMR Project and website review. It also included a number of spin-outs from recent Council discussions covered in the following documents:

- The Strategy Implementation Plan (approved by Council in December 2022)
- The Comprehensive Review of Everything (recommendations approved by Council in July 2023)
- The General Secretary's Review of Divisions and Editorial Board (recommendations approved by Council in July 2023)

The Projects Delivery Lead drew Council's attention to six projects from the tracker which were expected to be of particular interest to Council in their current stages.

#### *Author acquisition*

Staff had combined author acquisition efforts under one umbrella in order to work more collaboratively and cohesively across the Society's themes. Regular workshops were held to generate ideas, campaigns and monitor the progress of author acquisition projects. The successful 'Publishing for the Community' messaging had been one output from these workshops, as was the Publishing Fundamentals initiative. Ongoing campaigns included an author, editor and reviewer testimony campaign and a highly personalised, three-stream US campaign targeted at the 'Big Ten' Alliance Publish and Read institutions. International priority markets had also been identified for 2024; these were Canada, USA and Germany.

#### *Publishing process review*

Publishing operations staff had recently completed an extensive review of the publishing process at submission, peer review and production stages. Recommendations from this review had been approved by the Leadership Team and were in the process of being implemented. The aim was to make publishing process more efficient and resilient, and by doing so to bring down turnaround times - which were already demonstrably on the decline - and to improve the author and reviewer experience. The implementation period would run until the middle of 2024.

#### *Website review*

Following a request from Council, over the course of 2023 six workshops had been held to 'review and refine' the Society's existing website. These had resulted in an in-depth project brief that

included the following pieces of work: redesign of the homepage and main landing pages; a restructure of the navigation and how content was organised on the site; and a full content audit and refresh. This brief would be scoped and costed by the Society's web developers Pixl8 in January 2024 resulting in an agreed Scope of Work, with the aim that the project would start from February onwards. Council was reminded that the Society's website was hugely transactional and that it was essential to avoid disruption to day-to-day business, such as membership renewals or event bookings during the development work.

#### *Inclusion – international and EDI*

Inclusion was a significant focus in the 2023-2027 strategy and there were a number of goals that fell under this heading, including becoming more inclusive of the international microbiology community, as well as EDI considerations. In 2023 there had been a number of international events and collaborations, including attendance at the Brazilian Congress of Microbiology; the West Africa Roadshow, which had largely been driven by local Champions; and the *Candida* and Candidiasis event held in Canada. Additionally, the Society had launched its presence on WeChat, the Chinese social media platform, in early December 2023 and would be actively managing that account on a trial basis for a year. A significant effort had also been dedicated to exploring different engagement approaches and business models with the wider Asian market where the Society's Publish and Read offering had been less successful for various institutional reasons. The Knocking Out AMR project had significant international goals and would become a useful vehicle for international engagement from 2024 onwards. In terms of EDI, the Members Panel had been leading the Society's efforts to improve in the areas of equality, diversity and inclusion, which was already bearing fruit on a number of fronts, not least informing the discussions that Council had taken part in during its discursive session the day before.

#### *Industry engagement*

The Development Opportunities theme had made substantial headway in 2023 in engaging with the industrial and applied microbiology communities. Industry engagement was a long-term aim of the strategy and the focus this year had been on market research and defining the industry offering, which in large part had led to the development of the ExhibitionPLUS initiative. In 2024 the priorities would be to standardise the offering and start generating income from industry collaborations, as well as to encourage more journal content from industry in a strategic way. The theme had started building relationships with over 160 companies in 2023, which was hoped would provide a solid foundation for ramping up engagement efforts with industry over the coming years.

#### *Knocking Out AMR*

The project had been launched in October 2023 and the first notable output would be a series of expert workshops (to be held in January 2024) which were aimed at understanding the gaps in the AMR landscape and where the Society could, very practically, have the most impact in line with the project's three objectives. The outcomes of these workshops would influence the project's programme of work for 2024 and beyond. The project would not include public engagement and outreach activities, and would instead focus on impacting policy. It had secondary, yet important aims, to use the project as a vehicle for driving better and deeper collaborations with priority audiences and also generating AMR-focused journal content. The project was guided by an Oversight

Group that was accountable for ensuring it fulfilled its objectives. There was a reporting line to Council from the Oversight Group via the Impact and Influence Committee.

In conclusion, it had been a productive year for the Society and substantial progress had been made against the strategy implementation plan already. Plans for 2024 were developing well and a lot of valuable groundwork for activities in the New Year had already been laid.

## 5. Any Other Business

The President thanked the outgoing members for their dedication and contributions over recent years: Jose Bengoechea, Andrew Edwards, Laura Bowater and in their absence, Robin May and Gill Elliott.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 2.20pm.

## 6. Action table

<b>Actions from the 399 meeting of Council</b>				
<b>08</b>	<b>3.4.1</b>	To conduct a comprehensive review of the suite of Society journals, to include product development of potential new titles if appropriate.	Head of Scientific Programmes	Ongoing Update provided at 401 Meeting.
<b>11</b>	<b>3.7.1</b>	To develop a new statement in line with option 2 (allowing publications from Russian institutions out with the EUA suspensions) for consultation with the journal Editors-in-Chief, before publication in response to the feedback received.	Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Audiences	Completed.
<b>Actions from the 400 meeting of Council</b>				
<b>10</b>	<b>3.7</b>	The Member Engagement and Communities Manager to implement the recommendations of the Champions Scheme Review.	Member Engagement and Communities Manager	Ongoing.
<b>Actions from the 401 meeting of Council</b>				
<b>01</b>	<b>1.5</b>	The Governance Executive to undertake the agreed redactions of the 400 minutes of Council and publish them on the website.	Governance Executive	Completed.
<b>02</b>	<b>2.1.2</b>	The Governance Executive to arrange a Doodle poll to find a date in late January 2024 for the extraordinary meeting of Council.	Governance Executive	Completed.

<b>03</b>	<b>2.1.2</b>	Council members to refer any further points for discussion regarding the future of Annual Conference to the Chief Operations Officer.	All	Completed.
<b>04</b>	<b>2.1.2</b>	Chief Operations Officer and Chief Programmes and Partnerships Officer to prepare the relevant information to inform discussion at the extraordinary meeting of Council in January 2024.	Chief Operations Officer and Chief Programmes and Partnerships Officer	Completed.
<b>05</b>	<b>3.1.1</b>	Chief Executive to brief the Members Panel regarding Council's decision on the response to the conflict in the Middle East.	Chief Executive	Completed.
<b>06</b>	<b>3.1.1</b>	Co-Chair of the Sustainability Committee (GVK) to discuss the ways of highlighting humanitarian organisations and resources to aid microbiologists affected by world events, such as the Council for At-Risk Academics.	Co-Chair of the Sustainability Committee	Ongoing.
<b>07</b>	<b>3.1.1</b>	Associate Director of Communications Brand and Audiences to prepare a draft policy for the conditions and criteria by which Council may be guided in making position statements on significant world events.	Associate Director of Communications Brand and Audiences	Ongoing.
<b>08</b>	<b>3.1.4</b>	Chief Operations Officer to consider the most effective manner of amending the Code of Conduct.	Chief Operations Officer	Ongoing.
<b>09</b>	<b>3.2</b>	Associate Director of Strategy and Impact to collate relevant contributions and convene the core group in January 2024.	Associate Director of Strategy and Impact	Ongoing.
<b>10</b>	<b>3.7</b>	Chief Executive to consult with appropriate experts to draft a varied set of proposals for a new Board structure to be presented to Council at the next meeting.	Chief Executive	Ongoing.

