

# 350th SGM Council Meeting - Minutes

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Minutes of the 350th meeting of Council, held on Friday 10 February 2012 at 9.00 am at Marlborough House, Spencers Wood, Reading RG7 1AG.

## Present

Hilary Lappin-Scott, (in the Chair)  
Colin Harwood  
David Blackburn  
Evelyn Doyle  
Gary Rowley  
Ian Henderson  
Jo Verran  
John Sinclair  
Karen Robinson  
Mark Harris  
Nigel Brown  
Paul Hoskisson

In attendance

Charles Dorman (Treasurer Elect)  
Simon Festing (Chief Executive)  
Suzanne Beaumont (for Finance & Administration)  
Jane Westwell (for Meetings and Membership Services)  
Dariel Burdass (for Education & Public Affairs)  
Robin Dunford (for Journals Production)

### 1. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received from Howard Jenkinson

### 2. Minutes of the 349th Meeting of Council

The minutes of the meetings were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

### 3. Matters Arising From the Minutes

There were none

## President/Secretary/Chief Executive Business

### 4. Society of Biology - follow up re Director of Parliamentary Affairs

Council approved the paper from the Chief Executive which explained why SGM would not be involved with direct funding of the Director of Parliamentary Affairs post at this time. It was clarified that SGM would keep under consideration its approach to parliamentary work and would find a way to become involved if need be.

### 5. Statement of Responsibilities of Council and Executive

Council adopted the paper as a "work in progress" document, not to be considered as set in stone. It was agreed to remove the "Additional specific duties" of Council Officers, which is considered to be

still under development pending implementation of the strategy and any further governance changes.

**6. To give consideration to how to recognize the contribution of Professor Harry Smith CBE, FRS to the SGM and microbiology**

Council agreed in principle that a long-lasting approach is appropriate. The first step would be a special issue of *Microbiology Today*. Council noted the need to speak to his widow for permission, and would enquire about the correct approach. The General Secretary would progress discussions with relevant members of staff and Council to consider further options.

**7. Recruitment of President for SGM - Proposed procedure and update**

Council agreed that the General Secretary would lead a group to consider the 12 names put forward so far, compare against the skill set required, and then make recommendations on up to four candidates to bring back to the next Council meeting. The other members of the working group would be Evelyn, Karen, Ian and John.

Council agreed that the criteria were partly reflected in the Statement of Responsibilities (agenda item 5). Additional criteria could include: (i) having time to do the job, perhaps 20 working days per year, (ii) relevant experience, (iii) gravitas and respect, (iv) recognized and strong track record of substantial contribution to microbiology, (v) prestige, such as memberships of academies etc., (vi) other qualities and experience of leadership, (vii) a good understanding of the Society, (viii) experienced in governance roles and equipped to make tough decisions, (ix) possessing the requisite skills to deliver our strategy, e.g. networking and policy skills, and (x) knowledge of related organizations.

Council agreed that voting at the next Council meeting would be used to produce an ordered list of candidates, ranking them by priority, and these would be approached in turn to see if they would accept the role. The working group would consider any contingency plans (if all the candidates turn down the offer), but it was noted that this approach had been successful in the past.

Council agreed that the Chief Executive should find out how other societies recruit their president. The intention should be to capture a good process so it can be used in future.

**8. Proposal for a Council 'review' meeting in September 2012**

Council agreed to hold such a meeting at the September conference. Council agreed that this meeting would be before the AGM, with Hilary as the Chair, and with incoming Council members invited to attend. The purpose would be partly handover (if the new President/elected members are available), and partly to check if there are any matters which need the attention of Council (in the somewhat lengthy gap between the July and November Council meetings).

**9. Considering nominations for Honours**

Council was supportive in principle. This would fall to the General Secretary to progress. The criteria would include SGM membership as well as substantial contribution to microbiology/society. Nominations can be fed in through a government department. SGM would encourage more than one organization to make nominations. There is a need to be mindful of procedures for any non-UK nominees (in particular the need to notify the Irish government of any nominees from Ireland), but that should not stop us proceeding.

**10. SGM Draft Strategy 2012-17**

Council endorsed the document in principle. The Chief Executive will send out to Council members the latest version (which was amended by members of the strategy workshop that took place on the afternoon of Thursday 9 February 2012) for any further comments. Council will need to give thought to how to measure the impact of activities undertaken by the Society in the light of the strategy, and what relevant measures of success would be.

The Chief Executive will ask Council members to individually prioritize the five Strategic Priorities in terms of how they would allocate budgets, and the collective results would be brought to the next Council meeting for consideration.

## **Finance and Administration**

### **11. Management accounts for 2011, including update on audit**

Council noted the overall surplus for 2011 of (currently up to) £298k. This figure is largely due to cautious budgeting for the income. The figure includes the costs of the office refurbishment (which were a late addition to the expenditure).

Council noted that some areas of significant expenditure had not been reviewed in recent years, and that that this should be reviewed in the light of the outcome of the Strategy Review

### **12. Report back from Treasurer's Committee**

The Treasurer raised concerns about the performance of the Society's investments. Although 2011 was a difficult year for investments, our own have not performed well against the all-share index benchmark. Council supported the need for Treasurer's Committee (TC) to review the investment policies for the Society.

Council endorsed changes to the portfolio suggested by the investment managers (endorsing the 'option A' provided as a benchmark). This would involve moving out of a poorly performing hedge fund investment as well as moving out of cash.

It was noted that the role of investment manager is to give advice, and that SGM has benefited from such advice in the recent past (enabling us to avoid some of the downward swing in the stock market after the 2008 financial crash for example). However, there was enduring concern about the lack of a basis to assess the advice from the investment manager. It was also difficult to assess the value for money from the investment manager, and to know what would be the basis for a decision to switch to a different investment manager. Council agreed that this is a role for the Treasurer's Committee. The new Treasurer would give attention to appropriate timings and develop a costed plan for a review. The review could involve getting independent advice.

The Treasurer reported back on other decisions, namely (i) support for \$18,000 (~£11,300) to develop a mobile optimized sites for SGM journals, (ii) an up-front fee of £11,000 for SGM to switch to a new pension provider, (iii) additional funds of approximately £9,000 for an extension to the fixed-term contract for the Conference Organizer (who is currently covering maternity leave) to help facilitate the adoption of the CRM.

The Treasurers Committee agreed some guidelines for authorization of expenditure across SGM.

Council agreed to contribute £1,850 towards live streaming from the Dublin conference of 'This week in Virology' by Vincent Racaniello, recipient of this year's Peter Wildy Prize. It will provide cost-effective publicity for SGM.

**13. Council decision on annual salary award**

Council agreed a flat-rate £500 increase for all staff (pro-rata for part-time staff) under the SGM salary policy agreed at the last Council meeting.

Council noted its appreciation and thanks for the hard work of Marlborough House staff.

## **Membership and Meetings**

**14. Report back on decision on Spring 2014 conference venue**

SGM is about to sign contracts at ACC Liverpool (BT Convention Centre - commercial conference venue) for spring 2015. Some changes to room bookings were agreed in the light of discussions at the Scientific Conferences Committee meeting about the strategic direction of SGM conferences.

**15. Strategic direction of scientific conferences**

Council supported the suggestions made in the paper. The Scientific Meetings Committee and the Divisions had recognized the need to cut costs. At the same time, it is vital not to undermine the excellent science which is so important for the conferences.

There is a need going forward for a better understanding of the budgetary framework in which the conferences operate. There has previously been little information provided to SMC or the Divisions on the costs of different options. There is also a need for clarity of decision making, between SMC and Council in particular.

Council agreed that it was worth trying to come up with a framework for allocating budgets (of some type) to the divisions. Any system will need to retain flexibility. While deciding allocations is invariably difficult, there is a need to start somewhere, based on information we have so far (such as attendance at conference sessions in the recent past). Council will need a top down approach to budgets, better defining the budget constraints under which conferences need to operate.

SGM is starting to explore venues for 2015, with the intention to seek a less-expensive non-commercial venue.

**16. Nominations for Honorary Membership - Anne Glover**

The nomination was endorsed by Council.

**17. FYI: Minutes of the Scientific Meetings Committee meeting of 24/01/2012.**

Approved by Council.

**18. FYI: To confirm those listed as new members of the Society**

Approved by Council.

## **Education and Public Affairs**

**19. Report back from Policy Workshop**

Council endorsed the continued policy work as described in the report back. This included continuation of the 2-page briefing documents, and the development of position statements – as far as possible on an annual basis. It was agreed that SGM needs 2-page ‘statements’ on issues featured in current, or future, public debates so our members know where we stand (e.g. genetic modification, use of research animals). To maximize the impact of policy position statements it was agreed that the policy issue being covered, for example STIs in 2013, would form part a thematic

programme, which might also include outreach activities, educational resources, media events as well as conference sessions and policy events.

The Policy Working Party will need to give further consideration to priorities. It is important that SGM keeps abreast of the external environment to ensure our work is timely and applicable. We need to ensure early engagement with other organizations when we seek collaboration. There may be a need for a coordinated approach to drive forward on one issue for a time.

## **20. Report back from Communications Workshop**

Council supported the development of an electronic newsletter (e-newsletter) for SGM.

Council agreed to give further consideration to whether the organization should change its name in due course. This would subsequently require a new logo and branding. Council agreed that a proposal should be brought initially to the November Council meeting for a decision in February 2013.

Council approved of progress to develop a new website for SGM. The redesign will be linked to the new contact relationship management database (CRM). Council agreed that it should be kept informed of progress with a view to approving a good website design with high levels of functionality and features. A significant feature will be a member's area. Council will need to deliberate on and clarify what will be inside that and the SGM will need to consult with a wider group of stakeholders to ensure that all the membership is served appropriately. Council agreed that SGM should develop the website with its current branding (black and gold) for now, whilst retaining the option to change the logo, branding and name of the organization if necessary in the future. Council were invited to the first website workshop to take place at SGM HQ on Friday 2 March 2012.

## **21. FYI: Minutes of (a) Education and Public Affairs Sub-Committee of 23/01/2012, (b) Microbiology Today Committee of 04/11/2011, (c) Policy Working Party of 03/11/2011, plus (d) Education and Public Affairs Press coverage 23 January 2012**

Approved by Council.

## **Journals Publishing**

### **22. Report back from Journals Business Sub-Committee and Thursday afternoon workshop**

Council approved the plan for Simon Inger to report initial findings and analysis from the Journals Business Review at the April 2012 Council meeting. Subsequently a full range of options, with pros and cons, would be presented to the July Council meeting for decision on the way forward. This would be preceded by a face-to-face meeting of the Journals Business Sub-Committee.

Council noted that the Journals Business Review was still in the data gathering and early analysis phase. This had involved a wide-ranging discussion at the Thursday afternoon workshop covering the role of Council, editorial and Journal development issues.

### **23. FYI: Minutes of the Publications Committee TC of 16/01/2012**

## **AOB**

- Mark Harris was confirmed as sitting on Council "in attendance" from September 2012 for one year (until taking up the post of Scientific Meetings Officer).

- Council agreed that the Chief Executive would send a sample of information from Marlborough House, (the SMT Minutes and Rolling Reports) which are regularly sent to the Executive Officers to see if other Council members wish to receive them.
- Council agreed to consider further the timings of Committee meetings, and when it is best to hold them (i.e. before/after Council meetings or at conferences).
- Council noted the departure of Robin Dunford at the end of February 2012. Council thanked him for his many contributions to the journals of the Society, and wished him well for the future. Council approved interim arrangements which would involve the four Managing Editors acting up, rather than any immediate recruitment into the post of Head of Journal Publishing.
- Council noted that Howard Jenkinson has stepped down from Council. Council thanked him for his work as Publications Officer. Council agreed that this role would be temporarily suspended pending the journals business review and any further governance realignments. In the meantime, Colin Harwood will act as Chair of the Publications Committee.

**24. Next Meeting of Council:**

Date: Friday 27 April 2012, 9.00 a.m.

Venue: Marlborough House, Spencers Wood, Reading, RG7 1AG