

Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting

Thursday 7 September 2023 13:30 – 14:15 GMT

Present:

Gurdial Besra (President, in the Chair)

Karen Robinson (General Secretary)

36 members of whom 20 were voting members.

In attendance:

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)

Joanne Manning (Chief Operations Officer)

1. Introduction by the Chair

The President, from the Chair, welcomed attendees to the Society's 2023 Virtual Annual General Meeting (AGM). He declared the meeting quorate and open after a show of hands of Full, Full Concessionary, Post Graduate Student and Honorary Members of the Society.

He observed that the papers had been made available on the Society's website. He further confirmed to the meeting that all motions presented at the AGM had been endorsed by Council and any motion submitted by any other person would need to have a proposer and a seconder.

He reminded members who were in attendance that anyone addressing the AGM could do so by digitally raising their hand and should clearly state their name and affiliation and that those eligible to vote at the AGM were Full, Full Concessionary, Post Graduate or Honorary Members of the Society.

The Chief Executive gave a brief summary of the achievements of the Society over the reporting period. He highlighted the main areas below and reported under the Society's three objectives:

1.1 Building Communities

In 2022 the Society returned to a very busy in-person events programme starting with Annual Conference in Belfast which was joined by over 1,300 people over four days, with 36 sessions, 284 offered talks and over 500 posters. He commented on the atmosphere of excitement and enthusiasm as the community reunited for its flagship event, though went on to note that the rest of the year was packed with events in support of the microbiology community, with nine Focused meetings all over the UK and Ireland and a series of President roadshows with popular events held in Glasgow and Northumbria. The Society also supported the international meeting 'Beneficial Microbes' in Wisconsin, USA.

To improve accessibility and enable more of the community to access research in the journals and professional development opportunities relating to publishing, nine successful online seminar meetings were held which welcomed nearly 1,000 participants based in 56 countries all over the world.

Following a review of our work with industry at the end of 2022, recommendations from the Industry Working Group had laid foundations for new ways to create new opportunities for meaningful engagement with the microbiological industry community where they are. He explained that this approach was also to be utilised to work closer with other identified communities such as the infection science community, who may not have previously thought they had a home with the Society and reiterated that the Society message could not be more clear – we are welcoming to anyone interested in microbes.

1.2 Impact and Influence

The Society celebrated the 75th year of the founding journal, *Microbiology*. It launched in 1947 to bring together papers across fundamental microbiology and promote the original objective of the Society; to bring microbiologists together into a broad scientific community. He continued that this objective continued to be central across all Society work and the journals suite.

In terms of the Society policy work, work had continued to influence decision makers and in February 2022, with expert advice from members, the Society released the briefing *Climate Change: Microbes as our Allies*, in time for the publication of the latest climate change report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. He emphasised the necessity to do more to advance the role of microbiology in global challenges by harnessing the expertise and amplifying the voices of the members, using the new, ambitious project for 2023, 'Knocking Out AMR' as a key example of this.

He also reported on the collaboration with the Institute of Physics in April 2022 on an open letter to the Irish Government – *Science For Ireland: Time for an Ambitious Research and Innovation Strategy* as a follow-up to the 2020 position statement *Science for Ireland: Propelling Research and Innovation Success*, we. It urged the Government to increase investment in research and development, allocate funds along the innovation pipeline, offer competitive career opportunities, promote collaboration across borders and maintain an open dialogue with experts.

1.3 Sustainability

Access Microbiology was launched as an open research platform in May – the sound science scope of the platform ensures that all rigorous research can be published and importantly it provides early career microbiologists with an opportunity to publish much of the research that they generate that may otherwise remain unseen because it has not historically been seen as 'worthy of publication'.

The Society Unlocking Potential grant opened in March, supported by the first fundraising initiative and the grant, awarded to ten people in 2022, supported the career development of promising early and mid-career microbiologists. He noted that the Society would not have been able to open the grant without the support of campaign donors whose generosity allowed support to members whose circumstances threatened to hold them back from achieving what they otherwise could.

He also reminded the meeting that in 2022 the first Members Panel was formed which brought together a group of microbiologists from historically marginalised communities to help the Society ensure it is welcoming across all its activities. The Panel's co-Chairs worked with the General Secretary's Group to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion matters continue to be appropriately considered at the highest level of the Society's governance.

1.4 Forward look to 2023

The Society's five-year strategy had expired at the end of 2022 and he explained that in order to have a new strategy in place, a full consultation process with staff, Council and Committee members had started in 2021 and continued into 2022 culminating in the launch of the Society new strategy and accompanying ambitious work programmes for the period of 2023–2027 designed to realise the Society's vision of a "world in which the science of microbiology provides maximum benefit to society".

There were no questions.

2. Minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting

The minutes were approved *nem con* via a show of hands by the voting members present.
21 show of hands.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Financial report

The Chief Operations Officer presented the financial report for 2023 on behalf of the Treasurer noting that 2022 had presented some financial challenges for the Society as the transition of the Society publishing business model; to open access continued. She noted that a returned to in-person events (including holding several events that had been postponed due to the pandemic) also impacted the bottom line and that, coupled with external economic factors which resulted in high levels of inflation, slow economic growth and market uncertainty the investment portfolio's performance had dipped. However, she emphasised that reassuringly, the excellent financial performance of our investments over the previous few years had allowed sufficient buffer to whether these challenges by making a number of planned withdrawals in order to maintain the Society's activities despite rising costs. This approach had also allowed the Society to seize opportunities as they have arisen to realise future growth and the new strategy.

She emphasised however that the Society's long-term strength was dependant on long-term financial planning and with that in mind, given the ongoing turbulence of global financial markets and substantial cost increases across many sectors, the Society had taken several measures to reduce expenditure to help ensure its long-term financial viability. These included things such as changing catering provision at Annual Conference, and moving alternate Council and Finance committee meetings fully online. She noted that many of these changes also had the advantage of making progress against the Society's 'sustainability' targets. Finally, she expressed that Council was keen to hear member's views on how to ensure the Microbiology Society continued to serve the community in the most open, supportive and financially-stable way it can for many years to come and invited any questions or comments.

There were no questions or comments.

4.1 Receiving of the annual accounts

The annual accounts had been made available to the membership with the papers for the meeting and the Chief Operations Officer invited any questions. There were none and therefore, on the recommendation of the Treasurer, the annual accounts for 2022 were received by the membership by a digital show of hands of the voting members present.

4.2 Appointment of auditor

This was approved *nem con* by a digital show of hands by the voting members present.

4.3 Approval of membership subscription rates

The Chair presented a paper detailing the membership subscription rates proposed for January 2024 and opened the floor to any questions. No questions were submitted and the subscription rates were approved *nem con* by a digital show of hands of the voting members present.

5. New Members of Council, Committees and Divisions

The Chair announced the incoming members of Council for 2023 as:
John Sinclair as the incoming Treasurer.

Geertje Van Keulen as the incoming co-Chair of the Sustainability Committee.

Kalai Mathee as the incoming co-Chair of Building Communities Committee and Chair of the Scientific Conferences Panel.

Jack Ferguson as the incoming co-Chair of the EC Forum Executive Committee.

Lorena Fernández-Martínez as an incoming elected member of Council.

George Salmond as an incoming elected member of Council.

Sheila Patrick as an incoming elected member of Council.

The Chair confirmed that the names of incoming Committee and Division members were available on the Society's website in the papers for the meeting and welcomed them to their roles and thanked them for engaging with the work of the Society.

The Chair thanked the outgoing members of Council who would step down at the end of 2023, expressing his gratitude for the time, expertise, energy and input contributed to the activities of the Society during their term of office.

He commended Jose Bengoechea as a fantastic co-Chair of Sustainability Committee – which had such an important role in major issues affecting the Society including the transition of *Microbiology* to Open Access.

He noted Gill Elliott role as co-Chair of the Building Communities Committee as it navigated important work around the Society's engagement with the industrial and infection science communities, as well as the guiding the Committee and Scientific Conferences Panel as they look to the future of Annual Conference.

He reported that Laura Bowater had long supported the Society through many roles including editing *Microbiology Today*, helping with media enquiries and contributing to our Appointments Panel and

Sharon Brookes had been an incredible champion for the Society at the Animal and Plant Health Agency and worked hard to promote *JGV* and all of our journals. He noted Andy Edward's contributions as an editor for *Microbiology* and promotion of the full journals portfolio in addition to his role on Council and finally applauded the enthusiasm, commitment and dedication to the Society of outgoing Treasurer, Robin May who had seen the Society through a period of significant change.

He opened the floor to questions but there were none.

6. AOB

There was no other business and the Chair declared the meeting closed at 13:55.