

Minutes of the 389 meeting of Council

Friday 9 July 2021 9:00-14:30 GMT

Venue: Virtual meeting

Present:

Judith Armitage (President, in the Chair)
Robin May (Treasurer)
Mark Harris (General Secretary)
Paul Hoskisson (co-Chair of Building Communities Committee)
Stephen Smith (co-Chair of Building Communities Committee)
Paul Kellam (co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee)
Tadhg Ó Cróinín (co-Chair of Sustainability Committee)
Jose Bengoechea (co-Chair of Sustainability Committee)
Laura Bowater (Elected Member)
Sharon Brookes (Elected Member)
Andrew Edwards (Elected Member)
John Morrissey (Elected Member)

In attendance:

Kathryn Kerle (Chair of Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee) for item 2.2 only
Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)
Joanne Manning (Chief Operations Officer)
Sarah Buckman (Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy)
Charlotte Mitchell (Associate Director of Marketing, Brand and Communications)
Curtis Asante (Associate Director of Members Programmes)
Ruth Paget (Head of Communications and Content)
Maria Fernandes (Head of Membership and Professional Development) for item 1.7 only
Rosie Waterton (Executive Secretary)

1.1 Apologies for absence and welcome to new attendees

Apologies were received from Chloe James (co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee), Colman O’Cathail (Chair of Early Career Microbiologists’ Forum Executive Committee) and Deirdre Devine (Elected Member). The President welcomed Ruth Paget (Head of Communications and Content) in attendance and Maria Fernandes (Head of Membership and Professional Development) for item 1.7 only.

1.2 Declaration of any new conflicts of interest

The President reminded trustees to review and update the circulated Council Register of Interests, and to confirm to the office that their entry was accurate by 30 July.

The President congratulated John Morrissey for his recent appointment as a Director to the Irish Bioeconomy Foundation CLG.

1.3 Minutes of the 388 meeting of Council

Council received paper 389-01.

Council agreed the minutes should be updated under point 1.3 to reflect that Tracy Palmer had declined the invitation to extend her term on Council beyond 2020 “owing to the fact that she had been appointed as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Microbiology*”.

Subject to this amendment, the minutes of the 388 meeting of Council were accepted as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

Action 01 - The Executive Secretary to edit the minutes of the 388 meeting of Council.

1.4 Matters arising from the minutes and action points

All actions noted in the minutes and on the action grid had been completed or were in progress.

Arising from item 2.2.7, Peter Collins, an historian of science, had been appointed to the project and was working with the Editor-in-Chief of *Microbiology* Gavin Thomas to consider ways to celebrate the journal’s history. Council agreed to invite them both to the 390 meeting of Council in September 2021 to provide an update.

Action 03 - The Chief Executive to invite Peter Collins and Gavin Thomas to the 390 meeting of Council in September.

Arising from item 3.7, Kathryn Kerle, the external Chair of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee had agreed to serve a further year.

1.5 Council appointed positions

Council received paper 389-02.

At its 388 Meeting in March 2021, Council had delegated to the General Secretary authority to convene an Appointments Panel after the closing date for nominations for Council appointed positions.

The panel comprised the General Secretary in the Chair, Laura Bowater, Tadhg Ó Cróinín, Andrew Edwards and Chloe James.

Election of the incoming Society President

The Chief Executive reported that there had been seven initial nominations for the next President. Each nominee had been contacted directly by the General Secretary and four of them had submitted a manifesto; three had declined to be considered on this occasion. The panel had considered these manifestos and had agreed that it would not be appropriate for the panel to eliminate any of the candidates before they were presented to Council. The manifestos had been circulated to Council on 25 May.

He further observed that Council's preference was ordinarily to conduct the presidential election in person through the use of hard copy ballot papers. However, as the meeting was required to be held remotely, he reported the alternative process which had been previously approved by Council via email:

- At the relevant moment in the meeting, members of Council would be sent, by email, a survey monkey poll including all four candidates, and asked to vote for one candidate only.
- If no candidate received more than 50% of the votes, the lowest ranked candidate would be eliminated, and a second round vote would be held on the remaining candidates.
- Rounds would continue until one candidate received more than 50% of the votes.

If in a final round there was a dead heat between the two top-ranked candidates, it would be a matter for Council to discuss how it wished to proceed. If Council could not agree in this situation, the Articles of Association provided for the Chair of the Meeting to have a deciding vote.

It was observed that since all of Council and all of the candidates were active in the same microbiology community it was likely that several Council members would at some stage have had significant interactions of some form with candidates. In the interest of full transparency, trustees were asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest with any candidate to be considered and recorded. The following were all noted:

- Robin May declared that he and one of the candidates worked at the same institution and in close proximity which he considered a conflict of interest. He therefore declined to participate in any discussion or any round of voting in which that candidate was included.
- Steve Smith declared that he had encouraged one of the candidates to consider submitting a nomination to the presidency but acknowledged he had no part in assisting or formally supporting the application and thus Council agreed this was not a conflict.
- John Morrissey declared that one of the candidates had previously acted as an external examiner at his institution during which they had close interactions. Council agreed that on the basis this was some time ago this was not a conflict.
- Paul Hoskisson declared that he had undertaken his PhD within the same building where one of the candidates had worked. On the basis that this was over 10 years ago, Council did not consider this a conflict.
- Paul Hoskisson declared he had seconded one of the candidates' nomination to the Society's Unliever Colworth Prize Lecture in 2015. Council agreed that adequate time had passed, and that the nomination was unrelated and thus was not a conflict.
- Jose Bengoechea declared that one of the candidates was an Emeritus Professor at his institution, but this was agreed not to be a conflict.
- Several trustees had served on committees with various candidates, and this was agreed not to be a conflict and it was unnecessary to list all of these interactions in the minutes,

Council voted, and the result was corroborated by three members of staff. Gurdyal Besra was declared to be the incoming President of the Society. The Chief Executive undertook to contact all

candidates to communicate the result to. He reminded Council that the Society's announcement of the presidency election result would depend somewhat on the candidate's institution as it was often co-ordinated and therefore the information should remain confidential until released to the membership before the Annual General Meeting.

Action 05 – The Chief Executive to contact all presidential candidates to communicate the outcome of the election.

1. Other Council appointed positions

Council approved the recommendation that Kalai Mathee be appointed co-Chair Elect of the Building Communities Committee and Scientific Conferences Panel (SCP) for two years from 2022, followed by a two-year term as Chair of SCP and co-Chair of Building Communities Committee.

Council approved the recommendation that Tina Joshi be appointed co-Chair of the Impact and Influence Committee from 2022 for three years.

Council approved the recommendation that Sarah Maddocks be appointed co-Chair of the Sustainability Committee for a three-year term as from 2022.

Council noted that at its 388 Meeting in March 2021, it had approved the recommendation that the Chair of Publishing Panel convene a panel to consider three nominations for the post of Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Medical Microbiology*. A panel comprising Paul Hoskisson (Chair, Publishing Panel), Laura Bowater (Council representative), Professor Kalai Mathee and Professor Norman Fry (current joint Editors-in-Chief of *JMM*), and Professor Sam Shepherd (Acting Editor-in-Chief of *Microbial Genomics*) had subsequently been approved by the General Secretary.

Council noted that since the last meeting, it had approved by email the panel's recommendation that Professor Tim Inglis be appointed as Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Medical Microbiology*.

1.6 Results of the 2021 election

Council received paper 389-03.

It noted that there had been three vacancies for Elected Member roles to Council and the Society had received eight nominations. Council ratified the results that the incoming trustees from 2022 would be: Nigel Brown, David Clarke, and Kim Hardie.

The Chief Executive reminded Council that elected trustees each sit on one of the Society committees and, in the context of their experience and skills, the President had proposed that Nigel Brown sit on the Finance Committee, David Clarke sit on Impact and Influence Committee and Kim Hardie sit on the Building Communities Committee.

The Chief Executive noted that a light touch review of some aspects of the nominations process, including revisions to the requirement for consecutive membership within the last two years, would be presented to the 390 meeting of Council in September. Council discussed the composition of Council and noted that the Articles of Association placed no restrictions on allocated positions of the Council and considered if there might be circumstances in which it was desirable to co-opt any further members to fill any specific gaps in representation. The General Secretary highlighted the disproportionate lack of virology representation as an example, noting that almost 50% of the membership worked in the area and that percentage was not currently reflected in the make-up of

Council. Similar arguments might be made about other specialisms, protected characteristics, geographical representation, institutional representation, industry representation, career stage and discipline and specific skills related to strategic aims and/or business need. Council noted that recommendations relating to inclusion and diversity would be considered as part of the General Secretary's Group report.

It was also noted that being too specific in the requirements for candidates would tend to impose barriers to applying to be on Council which may reduce inclusivity, though it was also acknowledged that consideration might be given to managing the expectations of the role to members. For example, members considering applying might be required or encouraged to discuss their application with a current member of Council to help them assess if they were suitable. In deciding any processes of this kind, a balance of performing their duties as trustees by ensuring a composition of a strong board with relevant skills and experience, and ensuring inclusivity, representation, transparency and democracy needed to be struck.

Action 06 - Chief Operations Officer to work with the Head of Central Services and Executive Secretary to produce a light touch review of the nominations process for presentation at the 390 meeting of Council in September.

Action 07 - General Secretary to bring a proposal relating to the representation of subject expertise on Council.

1.7 General Secretary's Group Report

Council received paper 389-04 and noted the feedback from February's Committee meetings.

Council discussed if or how the Society should focus on shaping change and how to piece together the thoughts of its members and provide a summary statement. It considered when the Society needed to be more strategically vocal on its own as well as working with others on these issues and what was expected to be achieved by doing so. Council acknowledged the context of this discussion in relation to the Thursday afternoon session part 3, as minuted under item 3.2 below.

Council acknowledged that different issues would determine a proactive or reactive approach and the levels of controversy and thus differences of opinion within the membership would determine the process for dealing with them accordingly. For example, where an issue was identified in advance that had a clear impact on the membership, such as the ODA funding cuts, the Society was able to respond at speed using quotes and testimony from members as representatives of the community rather than needing to canvass the opinions of large groups. Council considered it preferable to identify issues such as these that were important to the membership to enable the Society to be proactive. Council acknowledged that for more complex issues with more overt political elements and where opinion may be divided across the membership, the Society should be comfortable expressing the nuances and therefore diversity of opinion within the membership and play a role to collate and summarise but not necessarily support one opinion.

Council also considered how best to demonstrate the Society's work of this kind to a wider audience. Issuing reports and statements in support of the membership to the membership was valuable but engaging wider stakeholders would have more impact. It noted that strategic use of resources to influence others to act when appropriate was important, for example – the Society had worked with

the Science Media Centre which had run a briefing on the ODA funding cuts which had been followed by a Government press release partially addressing the issues the next day. Council also noted the opportunity for utilising this as a cross cutting activity and agreed that the Society should publish more write-ups of its policy activities within our journals to strengthen the Society's identity within publications and raise awareness.

Council asked the Impact and Influence Committee to "horizon scan" and identify issues and topics of relevant to the membership and distinguish those with a potentially controversial or political edge that the Society could prepare for accordingly.

The President noted the example that following the Government's widely criticised responses to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, it was important that the Society had input to the inquiry that was inevitably to be launched. She urged that an archive of the Society's involvements at each stage of the evolving pandemic be created to include the involvement of our expert members at all levels and demonstrate the agility of the Society and its presence in commenting, advising and guiding throughout. Council noted that a temporary member of staff was to be recruited to work on this.

2. EDI recommendations

Council welcomed the Head of Membership and Professional Development, Maria Fernandes, to the meeting. Council noted the 2020 diversity data report and considered all recommendations:

1. Council agreed to extend the Society's data collection to all protected characteristics with a 'prefer not to say' option for each category.

It was noted that no recommendations to support disability or those with long term health conditions were included specifically and that the inclusion of these characteristic in the data collection was intended to help inform future recommendations to support individuals.

2. To co-opt a BAME member to Council, as a trustee of the Society with full voting rights to avoid tokenism.

In view of the outcomes of agenda item 1.6, Council considered this was not necessary for 2021 but was mindful to ensure this recommendation was revisited in future years as the composition of Council naturally altered with turnover.

3. To explore the barriers to members from underrepresented groups nominating themselves to Council and Committees with a view to reducing/removing these where possible.

Council agreed to utilise the Members' Panel as a forum through which to explore this.

4. To communicate the Society's EDI data to all members following the July Council meeting (including previous years), acknowledging areas of concern and intent to move in the right direction, in order to be more transparent

Council approved this recommendation.

5. Following the LGBTQ+ survey, to invite LGBTQ+ members to a follow-up meeting to explore what more the Society could do for this group

Council approved this recommendation.

6. To voice the group's support for plans for the Members' Panel and next steps.

Council approved this recommendation.

Action 08 – The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy to implement the approved recommendations as listed above.

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy reminded Council that the Society had begun collecting data on gender in 2013 and more recently collecting data on ethnicity and disability. Although the results informed all recommendations and many changes had already been made to reduce barriers to participation, she observed that data were still limited, and issues regarding how to hold this data in conjunction with data protection requirements had impacted progress.

Council considered ways to continue momentum and welcomed the idea of utilising sector data as a comparator to the Society's position. It also noted the Society's intention to join EDIS - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science and Health, a coalition of organisations working to improve equality, diversity and inclusion in the science and health sector. Signing up to schemes such as Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter was considered but it was acknowledged these were aimed at employers rather than membership organisations. Further work would be needed to assess whether any scheme might be suitable for the Society.

Action 09 - The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy to ensure an assessment of the suitability of schemes such as Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter for the Society was undertaken.

1.8 Update on Prizes Panel

The General Secretary updated Council that following a call to the wider membership, a panel had been selected which represented the full breadth of microbiology. He reported that the Society had received a strong number of nominations to the prizes and recommendations on most of them would be presented to the 390 meeting of Council in September. However, as in previous years the 2021 Microbiology Outreach Prize would need to be agreed by Council at the current meeting because the winner was expected to present at the Society Showcase and AGM event in September. The details of the recommendation had been circulated to Council via email in advance of the meeting.

Council approved the recommendation that Ed Hutchinson be awarded the 2021 Microbiology Outreach prize for his project "Virus Snowflakes".

Action 10 - The Head of Membership and Professional Development to ensure Ed Hutchinson be invited to receive the award and give a presentation at the 2021 Society Showcase and AGM.

2. Finance Committee

2.1 Finance Committee key points

1. Investments update

The Treasurer reported the key items from the Finance Committee meeting the previous day. Council noted the reports from ARC and Tilney which provided an update on investment performance to the end of May 2021 and a summary of the performance to the end of June 2021 which concluded that following a sustained period of good performance, with a 14.4% return over the last 12 months, the portfolio was now worth just over £11M. He reassured Council that on querying if the differing ways countries were recovering from the pandemic could impact the portfolio, Tilney had responded that the portfolio did not have any significant exposure to any one particular region which should protect it from these differences. He noted that Tilney planned on making few minor changes to the makeup of the portfolio and that the Committee was satisfied with Tilney's performance and discretion in this level of management.

2. Management Accounts – to the end May 2021

Council noted the draft management accounts to the end of May 2021 and the Treasurer reported a very strong balance sheet demonstrating the Society's total assets worth £18.1M versus £17.3M at the same point in the previous year. He highlighted that the accounts showed a surplus at the end of May of £2.12M which set the Society in good stead for a year end break-even position, rather than a budgeted deficit of £500k.

3. Annual report and summary of audit 2020

Following full consideration at the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee and the Finance Committee, Council approved the Annual Report 2020 and combined final audited accounts.

Action 11 - Chief Operations Officer and Executive Secretary to ensure the 2020 Annual Report and Accounts be signed and submitted to the membership with the AGM papers and filed with Companies House and the Charity Commission.

4. Reforecast 2021 and initial budget proposal 2022

Council considered the 2021 reforecast and initial 2022 budget proposal. The Treasurer highlighted that the continued uncertainty brought about by the pandemic for a longer period of time had led to the previously budgeted and approved deficit not being required for 2021, but in fact pushed to 2022. A detailed proposal would be presented to the 390 meeting of Council in September.

Action 12 - Chief Operations Officer to submit the detailed 2022 budget proposals to the 390 meeting of Council in September.

5. Persons of significant control register

Following the annual process to review, Council approved the Finance Committee's recommendation to submit a blank statutory Register of Persons of Significant Control (PSC) to Companies House as in previous years.

Action 13 - Chief Operations Officer and Executive Secretary to submit a blank statutory Register of People of Significant Control (PSC) to Companies House.

6. Journal business update

Council noted the 2021 update on journal business performance and transformation of the business model including transformation plans and the proposed journal pricing for 2022.

7. Fundraising update

The Chief Executive observed that since the last meeting the Unlocking Potential Fund had been launched and had received its first donations.

8. Update on significant operational matters

Council noted the update on significant operational matters as reflected in the paper.

2.2 Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee update

This item was presented out of sequence to the agenda to accommodate the attendance of the Chair of the Committee, Kathryn Kerle.

9. Audit

Kathryn Kerle reported the successful completion of the audit tender process. Eight potential firms had been approached and four tendered to the review panel comprised of the Chair of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee, the outgoing and incoming Treasurers, the Early Career Microbiologists Forum Executive Committee Representative, the Chief Executive and Chief Operations Officer. She reported that Sayer Vincent was unanimously approved as the incoming audit firm and although the transition for the 2020 audit process had gone well some parts of the audit had not been smooth. The committee was, however, satisfied that all issues had been resolved for the current year, but the Chair, the Chief Executive and the Chief Operations Officer would work with Sayer Vincent to prevent any future recurrence of issues encountered this year.

She further reported that, following a change to auditing standards (which now required the auditors to submit an opinion on whether the Society was a 'going concern') and following consideration of all financial and risk factors, and in particular the funds the Society had in reserve, it was recommended that Council include a statement related to this matter. Council noted that the statement had been agreed by email since its last meeting.

Kathryn Kerle reported that in accordance with best practice, the committee was retendering for the outsourced accounting function which had been provided by JS2 Ltd for approximately seven years to date.

10. Risk

Kathryn Kerle reminded Council of the thorough risk register review undertaken in early 2020 and the resulting rationalisation of risk utilising the strategy as a starting point to identify strategic risks. The committee had performed a further review in May 2020 in the light of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and she reported that many of the challenges that the pandemic posed had been successfully mitigated through management intervention, such as successfully moving many events online and the use of technology to meet the needs of members. The committee intended to undertake a "drains up" review in 2021. Council commended the process and noted that the Society had a willingness to be radical to adapt when required which was an endorsement of an effective risk management strategy.

11. Evaluation

The Committee had held a workshop in February 2020 to consider how to define impact, why to assess impact and what dimensions of impact were important on members, stakeholders and the wider world. Kathryn Kerle noted that building this type of assessment into the strategic planning process would be the most effective way forward and now the Society had revised its governance structure to better serve its strategy and had plans to hire a manager to focus on evaluation, an assessment of the impact of the current strategy would inform the development of the successor strategy.

The President thanked Kathryn Kerle for her contributions to the work of the Committee and extended Council's gratitude for her agreement to extend her term as Chair.

2.3 Collated finance papers

These were taken as read. All key items had been reported and actions taken under agenda item 2.1.

2.4 Charles Darwin House Ltd liquidation update

The Chief Executive reminded Council that the Directors of Charles Darwin House Ltd had been comprised of the Chief Executives of the six organisations who owned the building in various shares, of which the Microbiology Society owned 24.5%. Following the sale of the buildings the company was in the process of liquidation, but due to the pandemic and thus complexities in getting all Directors together to execute necessary business, this had been delayed. To circumvent these issues, the other five Directors had all resigned office to enable Peter Cotgreave to be the sole director and execute the required business.

Following a long delay by HMRC (which was understandably busy with pandemic-related schemes) the liquidators had put a call out for any unsecured creditors to the organisation, of which Microbiology Society was one as it had made a loan of £24.5k to CDH Ltd. The liquidators had accepted the Society's claim for credit and the money was expected to be received relatively soon.

Simultaneously, HMRC was required to calculate the final interest owed on corporation tax and once this was paid and HMRC granted formal tax clearance, the co-owners would each receive a share of the funds remaining, approximately a further £25k in the Microbiology Society's case. CDH Ltd would then remain on the Companies House register for six months before ceasing to exist.

3. President/Chief Executive business

3.1 General business/report back from CEO

12. President and Heads of Departments meeting

The President reported her meeting with the staff Heads of Departments in which they had discussed ways in which the Society might keep microbiology at the forefront of public interest. She cited how impressed she was at the amount of work that had been undertaken, both in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on Society operations and in responding rapidly to it and utilising it as an opportunity to increase the Society profile and fulfil our role in communicating microbiology to the wider public.

13. Food Standards Agency Project

Robin May reported confidentially on a cross-government project, funded by the Treasury to pilot a nationwide genomic surveillance system for antimicrobial resistance and food-borne pathogens, in which he was involved as Chief Scientist at the Food Standards Agency. The project would offer a number of recruitment and secondment opportunities over a period of three years. Significant engagement with the microbiology community would be needed, and the President and General Secretary had indicated enthusiasm for the Society to be involved, with which Council agreed. Discussions were ongoing about an initial workshop in September.

14. Elisabeth Bik

The Chief Executive reported that Elisabeth Bik, the previous recipient of the Society's 2021 Peter Wildy prize for her work detecting photo manipulation in scientific publications and identifying cases of improper research conduct, had had court proceedings brought against her by a group of microbiologists who had refuted some of her claims. An anonymous user had published a picture of the Society's code of conduct on Twitter claiming that Dr Bik was not abiding by its terms. In order to perform due process, the Society had attempted to contact this user to request further information and to understand if a specific and relevant allegation was being raised. He reported that three weeks had passed, and the anonymous user had not responded. Dr Bik had contacted the Society through an intermediary, concerned that the Society might revoke her award and had been informed that in the absence of any formal allegation via the proper process, no investigation to that end was being undertaken. She had also asked for support against her prosecutors but, despite reaffirming the Society's commitment to scientific standards, transparent scrutiny of data and the importance of free speech, since the Society was not directly involved in the court proceedings we currently had no grounds for providing direct support in this way.

15. The State of Microbiology project

The Chief Executive reported that progress on the State of Microbiology project, intending to draw on publicly available data to make a statement on state of microbiology in UK and Ireland, had stagnated. He cited several reasons for this, including the resignation of the Chair of the working group, staff leave and the pandemic demanding a refocus of resources.

Council agreed to pause work on this project with a mind to revisit it in a post pandemic world, reflecting on the impact this may have had on findings.

3.2 Outcomes from the Thursday session

Council had held a discursive session on the afternoon prior to the 389 meeting of Council at which it received presentations from staff and considered opportunities and challenges coming out of the pandemic. In particular, it considered the format of events and meetings in the future on the basis that the Society had demonstrated it provides high quality, successful in person meetings and high quality, successful virtual meetings, but that delivering a truly hybrid meeting was exceptionally difficult in order to cater adequately to both types of audience simultaneously. Council was mindful of its financial responsibilities of prudence but were content that the financial status of the Society was robust enough that careful experimentation in the short term, for a matter of such strategic significance to realising its charitable aims, was untroublesome.

Council agreed to continue with an in person Annual Conference in Belfast 2022 but accepted that delegate numbers might be lower than previous years due to a nervousness around travel. It supported plans to include elements of an enhanced digital experience but understood that this was not truly hybrid. It agreed to further develop this digital experience for Annual Conference 2023 onwards but to retain the in person focus and agreed that the remaining events programme be an overall hybrid portfolio, including some in person events and some digital events. Council wished to communicate a position statement to members on what the Society intended to offer and why, and longer term, continue to consult the membership and stratify views of early career microbiologists to understand the changing needs of the members in a post pandemic world. It was noted that following an extended period of enforced virtual meetings, the appetite for face to face might be high, however once the immediate reaction to this had passed, a balanced portfolio of both virtual and face-to-face offerings might meet varying needs and increase engagement.

Council also considered how to ensure microbiology remains in the consciousness of wider public following the spotlight that the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic had thrown upon it. It agreed to harness the interest in the Society's YouTube channel as a source of information during the pandemic and identify other microbiological topics of public interest to feature on this platform. It agreed to explore the use of Annual Conference as an outreach opportunity for local schools and to continue promotion of the Society to undergraduates and other sectors through their institutions and use of the champions scheme. There was strong support for press packs and for these to continue to be developed.

Council had been asked by an active member to consider signing a letter to be published in the *Lancet*, calling on the government to change its approach to releasing restrictions related to controlling the Covid-19 pandemic.

As discussed under agenda item 1.8, Council acknowledged that when approaching complex and often emotive issues with a political edge the Society should balance its responsibility to comment on relevant areas of fact as an expert voice with understanding that opinion may be divided across the membership and it cannot, and should not speak for them. As a result, Council was not minded to sign the letter. However, it agreed that the Society should make a statement on the website, briefly setting out its view of the easing of pandemic restrictions, pointing to practical facts (such as the value of wearing masks) and demonstrating to members its action on their behalf and thereby setting its position for future reference. It was noted that this would be a collective statement of Council on behalf of the Society, and not attributable to individuals and that it would be important to have the supporting scientific evidence ready to defend the statement if necessary.

Council delegated responsibility to the General Secretary to convene a group with relevant expertise from Council including Gill Elliott, the incoming co-Chair of Building Communities Committee, with a view for publication on Tuesday 13 July, following the formal government announcement of the lifting of restrictions. The General Secretary also undertook to communicate Council's decision back to the member from whom the invitation to sign the letter was received.

Action 14 – General Secretary to mobilise an expert group from Council and circulate a draft statement to Council on Monday 12 July. Comments to be received and incorporated ready for publication on Tuesday 13 July.

3.3 Composition of Council and Committees

Council received and noted paper 389-06.

3.4 AGM and Society Showcase 2021

Council received paper 389-07 and noted the plans for the 2021 AGM and Society Showcase. The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy noted that in response to feedback from our early career members during the ECR support project, the Society would host a training session on science communication online. Many early career members appreciated the fact that the public was more aware of microbiology than ever and wanted to reach out and talk about their subject area. Unfortunately, they often also encountered reluctance and negative feedback from those who deny facts, as referenced in this year's Hot Topic Lecture by Stephan Lewandowsky. Therefore, the Society proposed to provide a session equipping attendees with the skills to conduct successful science communication online.

3.5 Collated 2021 AGM papers

Council received paper 389-08.

It was noted that some members appeared on both the outgoing and incoming members lists. This was likely because they were undertaking a different role within the committee, for example standing down as a co-opted member but taking office as an elected member. Council agreed duplications should be removed to avoid confusion, even where the individual was incoming in a different capacity.

With this alteration, Council approved the AGM papers for circulation and delegated power to the Chief Executive to update the AGM papers with any other relevant outcomes of the 389 meeting of Council.

Action 15 - Executive Secretary to amend the AGM papers and publish to members 21 days prior to the AGM date.

Action 16 - Head of Central Services to update the Council AGM diary invitation to reflect the approved programme.

3.6 Membership report

Council received paper 389-09 and noted progress on initiatives to recruit, retain and engage members, including efforts to understand the needs of underrepresented groups within the community such as those working in industry and Clinical and Health-related microbiology to better support them.

Council noted the positive responses of the early career researchers to the Society's efforts to understand the impact of COVID-19 on them professionally. The subsequent focus groups had obtained useful information that was informing a position statement on the effect of the current climate on the career progression of early-career researchers. The feedback would also inform the Society's broader professional development and policy work.

Council noted recommendations of the Champions Review Working Group that were in progress that focused on (i) improving awareness of the Champions Scheme, (ii) improving the processes of

the scheme, and (iii) improving Champion support and networking and specifically the creation of an online repository for Champions resources which would provide a comprehensive suite of the Society's promotional materials and enable networking, knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Council considered the breakdown of membership numbers per category and acknowledged that the Affiliate Members category had the same proportion of total members as the Full Member category. This prompted discussion on whether Affiliate membership category, which had been free for a number of years, should have a small associated fee. Council was mindful of ensuring the Society remained accessible and welcoming to all those with an interest in microbiology and agreed that any fee should be on a scale relating to national income levels. Council agreed that this should be considered for future years' subscriptions.

Council approved the list of new members joining the Society.

Action 17 - The Head of Membership and Professional Development to discuss the potential Affiliate Members fee structure with Sustainability Committee and present a case to be included with the 2023 subscription rates proposal to Council in July 2022.

3.7 Strategy 2023-2027 consultation process

Council received paper 389-10 and noted the timetable. The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy committed to provide interim updates to every Council meeting.

3.8 Open Research Platform update

Council received paper 389-11. Following the Society's successful bid for a Learned Society Curation Award from the Wellcome Trust and Howard Hughes Medical Institute in 2020, significant progress had been made with the project to convert *Access Microbiology* into an open research platform. The platform would combine many of the elements of a preprint server with those of an academic journal in an effort to improve the rigour, reproducibility and transparency of the academic record, fast-tracking the communication of valuable research and thus maximising potential for impact and influence.

The Chief Executive commented on the unique construct of the platform and that the Society was leading the way for this type of model. He cautioned, however, that with being the first to launch this type of project, inevitably challenges would arise against which there was no benchmark to judge outcomes. He highlighted the challenge of how to present an article that existed as a preprint on a Society branded webpage, but which may no longer be under peer review because either it had been identified as fundamentally unsound (with no recourse for the authors to adjust enough to warrant acceptance), or the authors had declined to revise their article. This would present a reputational risk that work not endorsed by the Society could appear on the Society platform and in the public domain.

The Publishing Panel had discussed the issue and the Chair observed that there was a spectrum of severity within this issue and that the Society needed to consider different policies and mechanisms for the varying types and levels of potential risk and not to implement a "one size fits all" heavy duty filtering mechanism, or a process through which articles were completely removed as preprints, as this was contradictory to the spirit of an open platform.

It was discussed and agreed that:

In circumstances where an article was not considered appropriate for publication but was otherwise undamaging, a statement box would explain that the article was no longer under peer review but remain available as a preprint only. It was requested that for further transparency the statement box clearly cite the reason that it was not published for example, if the authors were unresponsive or declined to revise their article during the peer review process and where relevant, link to the Editor's final decision explaining why it was ultimately not considered for publication.

A policy statement would be introduced that expressed that in the rare case that a pre-print was damaging to the Society and/or the discipline then the content of the preprint article would be removed from the platform and the title and author list only would remain. Therefore in cases where reviewers had identified serious misconduct, or where the work was considered controversial to the point of damaging or offensive, the full-text of the preprint and the associated PDF would be suppressed. For transparency, in these instances, a statement box on the remaining preprint title would explain why its content was no longer accessible. This would balance the spirit of an open platform with mitigating reputational risk to the Society.

There was a concern that the HTML version of the preprint could be screen captured and made to look like a peer reviewed, published manuscript. Although it was acknowledged that the PDF version would have a 'preprint' watermark a question was raised if this would be available on the HTML. Council noted that with modern technology mock ups would be possible regardless of mitigation techniques and the Associate Director of Members' Programmes undertook to investigate this with the ORP project group.

Post meeting note: Upon further investigation it was confirmed that the only way to view a preprint was via the PDF document which would include the watermark. An HTML version beyond the title and author list was not available.

It was noted that the specifics of the statements may be dependent on the vendor and the project team undertook to take this forward. It would also undertake a risk assessment to investigate a full list of circumstances within this issue that could be considered damaging to the Society and create a list of examples, identifying their degrees of severity and likelihood. Council also considered the possibility of misconduct being identified retrospective to publication and acknowledged that a process similar to the standard retraction process of traditional publication methods would be utilised.

Council extended its gratitude to the Publishing Operations Manager for her work coordinating this project.

Action 18 - Associate Director of Members' Programmes to report back to the project team to discuss the capacity of the platform with the provider, Ingenta, to implement the various statements above.

Action 19 - Associate Director of Members' Programmes to investigate the HTML preprint display and establish mitigations for this to be doctored to look like a peer reviewed, published manuscript.

Action 20 - Associate Director of Members' Programmes to mobilise the ORP project group to identify a full list of circumstances that could be considered damaging to the Society and create list of examples, identifying their degrees of severity and likelihood.

3.9 Bequest from Bernard Dixon

The Society had received an unhindered bequest of “antiquarian medical books and historical papers” from Dr Bernard Dixon who had been a member of the Society for several decades. Having accepted the material and provided a receipt, the books and papers were the property of the Society and thus Council was obliged to use its judgement to make the best use of the material in pursuit of the Society’s charitable objects.

To understand the value of the collection the Society had consulted four expert companies and the owner of *Skoob*, who had known Bernard Dixon well and sold him some of the books in the collections, had made an offer of £4k for the entire collection with an undertaking to revert to the Society if something of unexpected value was identified.

Council considered that in deciding what to do with the bequest it needed to balance any direct benefits with the reputational risks of a chosen course and agreed that it wished to utilise the bequest in a way that the deceased and his family would support. Council noted that the message of a long-term member who had given the Society something that was important to him, and a significant part of his identity, could have some power in convincing others to do likewise and thus could assist the Society in its campaign for bequests and donations to the Unlocking Potential Fund. Council acknowledged that the content of some of the collection of books may be of some interest to Society members as they included a great deal of historic insight into microbiology and agreed to retain some of the books and to send to members in return for a small donation to the Unlocking Potential Fund and a short blog article about the book.

Taking into account the circumstances, Council agreed the course of action that would maximise the benefits of the bequest in terms of furthering the Society’s objects was:

- To destroy the photocopies and preprints, which have no value either financial or otherwise
- To investigate further whether there was any value in the small collection of papers associated with Dr Dixon’s life (collectors of Arthur C Clarke memorabilia for example) and if not, to offer the papers to Wellcome Library and/or the British Library
- To retain the set of SGM Symposia on the shelves in Meeting Room 6
- To retain a limited number of small volumes of historic interest about microbiology to give to members who support the Unlocking Potential campaign
- To sell the bulk of the collection to *Skoob* for £4,000, as outlined and attribute any financial proceeds to the Unlocking Potential campaign in Bernard Dixon’s name.
- To feature several of the books in *Microbiology Today* and/or on the website as historical book reviews of interest, and
- To flag the collection to *New Scientist*, of which Bernard Dixon had been Editor in the 1970s.

Action 21 - The Chief Executive to undertake the recommended courses of action regarding Bernard Dixon’s bequest.

4. Summary of Progress

4.1 Summary of Progress – Strategy 2018–2022

Council received paper 389-13 and noted the progress on implementing the strategy.

5. AOB

Council revisited the previous discussion to consider a name for the Society offices and/or the rooms within it and remained wary of honouring an individual.

Action 22 - The Chief Executive to review the previous paper submitted to Council in March 2020 and revise for re-proposal at the 390 meeting of Council in September.

The meeting concluded at 12:55.

The 390 meeting of Council would be held 17 September 2021.