

2021 Annual General Meeting minutes

Thursday 16 September 2021 13:30 – 14:15 GMT

Hybrid meeting

Present:

Judith Armitage (President, in the Chair)

Mark Harris (General Secretary)

Robin May (Treasurer)

24 Members of the Society

In attendance:

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)

Sarah Buckman (Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy)

Joanne Manning (Chief Operations Officer)

1. Introduction by the Chair

The President, from the Chair, welcomed attendees to the Society's 2021 Virtual Annual General Meeting (AGM). She declared the meeting quorate and open after a digital show of hands of Full, Full Concessionary, Post Graduate Student and Honorary Members of the Society.

She observed that the papers had been made available on the Society's website. She 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.

She 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 2020 the Society had celebrated its 75th anniversary, reflecting on the aims of founding members Sir Alexander Fleming, Marjory Stephenson and other visionary microbiologists, to advance and promote microbiology by providing a common meeting ground for scientists working in specialised fields. This ethos of collaboration was still at the heart of the Society and was prevalent across its 75 year history. It was particularly poignant to acknowledge the founding objective of the promotion of microbiology through community in a year when the novel virus – SARS-CoV-2, causing COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic had thrown a spotlight on the discipline. The Society had again furthered this objective and played an integral role in supporting the fight against COVID -19 through building an online research community to coordinate efforts.

In facing the challenges of not being able to come together in person, the Society undertook its first large-scale online meeting, bringing hundreds of people from the community in a weeklong series of events to celebrate Why Microbiologists Matter. This paved the way for the first ever virtual Annual Conference which followed and was celebrated as a huge success.

1.2 Impact and Influence

The Society was able to use its position to mobilise its members to use their knowledge, skills and networks to help important initiatives including populating the first Lighthouse Lab in Milton Keynes. The impact and influence of the microbiology community was also well evidenced through its responses to questions from the media on the transmission of viruses, on the benefits (or not) of social restrictions and on the efficacy of vaccines. Members willingness to work directly with the Society enabled an effective media partnership with the Science Media Centre which allowed journalists to access expert data and commentary throughout the pandemic.

The Society recognised the public appetite for information relating to what was going on in the world around them and as well as continuing to publish reliable up to date information on the website which surpassed 2.8 million views, the digital hubs created to go live in the anniversary year, celebrating Why Microbiology Matters, were able to deliver accurate scientific information in an accessible format on relevant topics. This increase in appetite for content was further demonstrated through the biggest ever growth across digital media channels including over a quarter of a million views of the herd immunity video on YouTube.

Despite the focus of COVID-19, the Society also launched 'A Sustainable Future' project, which demonstrated the value and raised the profile of microbiology in addressing the world's biggest challenges and published three reports from the project on soil health, the circular economy and Anti-Microbial Resistance.

1.3 Sustainability

In support of the next generation of microbiologists and future leaders in the field, the Society had held the first online ECM Conference and featured the Sir Howard Dalton Young Microbiologist of the Year competition at the Why Microbiology Matters showcase. Despite being unable to hold the in-person events the Society increased its membership with 6,145 members at the end of 2020 (an increase from 5,345 at the end of 2019).

As part of the Society's plans for long terms sustainability it successfully applied for a Wellcome Grant which will allow the development of a new innovative open research platform, initially to establish Access Microbiology journal. The Society was also working towards a new era of open access in scientific publishing with the further success of the Publish and Read model which allowed authors to publish OA in all of the Society's journals free of charge.

In 2021 the Society would launch its first ever fundraising activity, the Unlocking Potential fund, designed to establish a new grant to help members who may require support for a variety of reasons, in order to help them to progress and to reach their full career potential.

1.4 Forward look to 2021

For 2021 the Society intended to build on the momentum of 2020 and the focus that Covid-19 had placed upon the discipline of microbiology. The Society would celebrate the 75th anniversary of *Microbiology* in 2023 which presented further opportunity to not only recognise the historical significance of the anniversary but also the future of publishing for the community.

1. Minutes of the 2020 Annual General Meeting

The minutes were approved *nem con*.

2. Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. Financial report

The Chair invited the Treasurer to comment on the financial report for 2020 and he noted that as the pandemic impacted various activities of the Society, including the cancellation of Annual Conference, it had been an unusual year financially. He highlighted the following points.

The Society had balanced the operating budget in 2020 and ended the year with a slightly larger surplus (102k) than originally budgeted (10k) due to the changes in activities because of the pandemic.

2020 saw Council continue to use its reserves as per its policy, to invest in the following activities spanning the five years of the strategy (2018-2022); 75th Anniversary activities; investments in technology to support the publishing process; investment in physical infrastructure such as IT; and investment in people, both its members, through engagement activities, and staff.

The investment portfolio had continued to perform well though following the pandemic volatility in the financial markets was anticipated. However, Finance Committee and Council were reassured by the Society investment managers that this would be well managed.

Sheila Patrick, Queens University Belfast, asked about the financial loss of not having an in person conference and the Treasurer explained that typically the Society did not make a profit on its flagship event, even when held in person. Although there had been some losses incurred from un-utilised venue costs, this had been balanced by a reduction in expenditure in other areas of business. He invited any member who wished to receive specific figures to request them and to be sent further information directly.

3.1 Receiving of the annual accounts

On the recommendation of the Treasurer, the annual accounts for 2020 were received by the membership by a digital show of hands.

3.2 Appointment of auditor

This was approved *nem con* by a digital show of hands.

3.3 Approval of membership subscription rates

The Chair presented a paper detailing the membership subscription rates proposed for January 2022. The subscription rates were approved *nem con* by a digital show of hands.

4. New Members of Council, Committees and Divisions

The Chair announced the incoming members of Council for 2022:

Gurdial Besra – President
Gill Elliott – Co-Chair, Building Communities Committee
Tina Joshi – Co-Chair, Impact and Influence Committee
Sarah Maddocks – Co-Chair, Sustainability Committee
Nigel Brown – Elected Member
David Clarke – Elected Member
Kim Hardie – Elected Member

The Chair further confirmed that the names of incoming Committee and Division members were available on the Society's website in the papers for the meeting and further confirmed that subsequent to the publication of the papers Ollie Severn had been co-opted to Impact and Influence Committee and Ben Johns co-opted to Sustainability Committee.

The Chair thanked the outgoing members of Council who would step down at the end of 2021, noting that it had been a year requiring particularly big decisions in an uncertain environment. She noted the commitment required by Council members in this time and she was grateful for the devotion shown.

The outgoing trustees were:

Stephen Smith – Co-Chair, Building Communities Committee
Paul Kellam – Co-Chair, Impact and Influence Committee
Tadhg Ó Cróinín – Co-Chair, Sustainability Committee
Deidre Devine – Elected Member
John Morrissey – Elected Member

5. AOB

The General Secretary noted that the President's term of office would also come to an end in December and applauded her successful leadership through a governance restructure, her legacy of membership roadshows and the Society 75th anniversary celebrations. He thanked her for her commitment to guiding the Society through a microbiological global crisis and acknowledged her contribution to the Society.

The President reflected on her time in office and thanked all the members and staff for promoting the advancement of microbiology and creating exceptional outputs whilst under unprecedented circumstances. She recognised that the pandemic had highlighted particular challenges for Early Career Researchers and pledged that the Society would continue to support and advocate them as the future of microbiology.

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 14:13.