

## Minutes of the 395 meeting of Council

**Friday 01 July 9:00-14:30 GMT**

**Venue: Hybrid meeting held at 14-16 Meredith Street, London and via Zoom**

**Present:**

Gurdial Besra (President, in the Chair)

Robin May (Treasurer)

Mark Harris (General Secretary)

Chloe James (co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee)

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

Jose Bengoechea (co-Chair of Sustainability Committee)

Sarah Maddocks (co-Chair of Sustainability Committee)

Laura Bowater (Elected Member)

Sharon Brookes (Elected Member)

Nigel Brown (Elected Member)

Kim Hardie (Elected Member)

David Clarke (Elected Member)

Andrew Edwards (Elected Member)

**In attendance:**

David Grainger (Shadowing Member)

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)

Joanne Manning (Chief Operations Officer)

Sarah Buckman (Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy)

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

Curtis Asante (Associate Director of Members' Programmes)

Maria Fernandes (Head of Membership and Professional Development)

Helen Jones (Head of Strategy and Transformation)

Rosie Waterton (Executive Secretary)

Hebba Beech (Journal Development Editor) item 3.7 only

Alex Howat (Head of Open Science) item 3.12 only

Eva Scholtus (Head of Policy and Engagement) item 3.13 only

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

Apologies were received from Paul Hoskisson (co-Chair of Building Communities Committee), Gill Elliott (co-Chair of Building Communities Committee) and Colman O'Cathail (Chair of Early Career Microbiologists' Forum Executive Committee).

The President welcomed David Grainger as a Shadowing Scheme member and Maria Fernandes (Head of Membership and Professional Development) to the meeting in attendance.

The President offered congratulations to Laura Bowater for her new role as Head of the Peninsula Medical School at Plymouth University.

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

The Chief Executive reminded Council that the annual process for reviewing conflicts of interest was undertaken in July of each year and they would receive their current register of interests to confirm as correct, or amend, from the Executive Secretary in due course.

**Action 01:** Executive Secretary to send out the Council conflict of interest registers for review.

## **1.3 Minutes of the 393 and 394 meeting of Council**

Item 3.7 of the 393 minutes of Council required an edit to correct from present to past tense.

Subject to that amendment the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meetings.

**Action 02:** Executive Secretary to amend the 393 minutes of Council.

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

The Chief Executive reminded Council that a change to Unilever's policy on animal testing had resulted in the long-term commitment of Unilever to support the Colworth Prize Lecture being problematic and thus the Society had engaged in discussions on a different relationship with them for the future. As a first initiative, at a meeting with the General Secretary, the Society had agreed to host, and act as a "honest broker", for a one-day workshop style event on microbiome safety, at which Unilever would pose a question and scientists from the Microbiology Society membership and elsewhere would robustly discuss the issue with a view to producing some kind of published output. This would be taken forward by the Associate Director of Members Programmes and the Head of Strategy and Transformation. The Chief Executive noted that this was expected to be the first of several and various ways of collaborating with Unilever.

The President reported on progress for the collection of articles and reviews from authors from minority ethnic communities. He noted that five papers had already been received with a clear pipeline in place for more.

## **1.5 Statement on journals content funded by the Russian state or where an author comes from a Russian institution that has backed the war**

Council recalled that at its 394 Meeting in March 2022, it had decided to pause the processing of certain journal content originating in Russia, delaying review and publication during the war in Ukraine. Affected content included papers funded by the Russian state and those in which an author came from one of the Russian institutions that had publicly supported the war. A long standing and engaged member, who was a co-author of an affected paper, had written to communicate his thoughts on the policy. Council sympathised with the circumstances of individuals in this situation but it was felt that a change in policy would suggest a change in opinion towards the war itself. Council therefore agreed not to modify its decision until, as per its original statement, such a time as it was safe for Ukrainian microbiologists to return to their work. Council agreed to review the

circumstances of this condition at each meeting unless the situation in the Ukraine altered substantially between meetings, such as in the case of a ceasefire, in which case it would be reviewed via email or an extraordinary meeting in order to react in a timely manner.

**Action 03:** The Chief Executive to write to the Member to relay Council's decision.

**Action 04:** Executive Secretary to add the statement on content funded by the Russian state to each Council agenda.

## 2. Finance Committee

### 2.1 Finance Committee key points

The Treasurer reported to Council following the Finance Committee meeting the previous day. A written report had also been circulated.

#### 2.1.1 Investments update

The Treasurer reported key points from a presentation from ARC that world equities were down 4.7% over the last 6 months, US equities were down by 4.5% and that although UK equities were up 12.4%, the Society's portfolio had continued to underperform to the end of May as the portfolio had a global equity bias rather than towards the UK equity market. This meant that the portfolio had suffered from negative returns over the past six months of -8.3%, and that the value of the portfolio was now £11M. He urged, however, that it was important to look over the longer term and, although the target return of CPI+4% would be very difficult to achieve as a result of surging inflation, previous gains provided some buffer for this period of volatility. The Treasurer noted that this meant that if Council wished to draw down any funds from the portfolio, it would be better done in smaller staggered amounts in order to balance the risk of drawing down a large sum on a particularly low value day.

Overall, it was noted that over the last three years, the performance from Evelyn Partners (formerly Tilney) had still exceeded the target return of CPI+4%, with the annualised rate of return at 7.2% and had, over that time, outperformed the peer group and benchmark, but that due to the most recent performance the ARC traffic light rating moved to amber for performance vs target return but remained green for all other categories. ARC had awarded the portfolio a two-diamond rating (out of a maximum of four), which was 'broadly in line with expectation,' again due to the recent underperformance with more recent returns having a higher weighting on the calculation of the diamond rating.

Evelyn Partners had reassured the Finance Committee that although the US equity market had seen the worst dip since 1932 and the worst start to the year for US bonds since 1788, the Society's portfolio make-up had meant that some of the worst market performance had been avoided as they had sold off bonds earlier in the year. They had noted that although bonds were starting to recover, Evelyn Partners was not yet purchasing them as there may still be falls to come and when they did move to buy bonds, they would start with smaller US bonds first.

They acknowledged that short term performance was down but that over the longer term, the investment performance was still positive and that they continued to hold 80% in equities because of confidence in the individual businesses and their long-term growth.

### **2.1.2 Management accounts**

The Treasurer reported that the Finance Committee had received the draft management accounts to the end of May 2022 and been joined by Adam Gibbs from JS2 Ltd, the Society's finance providers. He had presented the income and expenditure which showed a surplus of £1.3M against a budgeted deficit of -£462k and reported that this was on target to achieve budget by the end of the year. They had also reviewed the balance sheet which was strong overall but reflected the fall in value of the investment portfolio with the Society's total assets worth £17.4M on 31 May 2022 versus £18.1M at 31 May 2021.

All members of staff, except the Chief Executive, left the meeting for the remainder of this item. The Chief Executive highlighted that the new strategy, currently being considered by Council (to be approved under agenda item 3.11), and the changing circumstances following the pandemic lockdowns meant that it would be necessary for the Society to look carefully at reshaping its workforce for the future. Work was already underway in this regard and he would be having discussions with staff over the coming weeks. All staff would be offered the opportunity to apply for a voluntary redundancy package to provide those individuals who did not wish to adopt the changes with a practical way of leaving the organisation. Consequently, Finance Committee and Council would consider the issue of the budget, and payroll in particular, in more detail at its next meeting.

Staff members returned to the meeting.

### **2.1.3 Recommendations of the Grants Review Working Group**

The Society had undertaken to review the grants programme to ensure that it remained aligned to the Society's future strategic direction and maximised the support available to as many members as possible. A Working Group including Finance Committee member Sharon Brookes, had been formed and discussed where the programme of grant initiatives could be improved so that the Society strategic aims could be met more effectively in future. The recommendations from the working group aimed to refine the grants schemes to (i) better support international and undergraduate student members, (ii) connect members working in different sectors of microbiology, and (iii) increase awareness of the grants programme. These objectives would likely increase costs on a year on year as these grants were opened up more widely but it would be difficult to forecast this until uptake was evident.

Council approved the Finance Committee's recommendation to underwrite a potential overspend in the grants budget for 2023 and for this to be included in the final 2023 budget proposal to be prepared for September's meeting.

### **2.1.4 Annual report and summary of audit 2021**

Following full consideration at the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee on 12 May, the Finance Committee recommended to Council to approve the Annual Report 2021 subject to the addition of the post balance sheet event note below, recommended by Sayer Vincent to be added under note 11 of the accounts, regarding the fall in the value of the investments since the year end.

'As at the date of these accounts being approved, the latest value of the investments was £11,027,000. The Council considers that the fall in value is temporary and will continue to monitor the investment performance in the coming year.'

Council approved the Annual Report 2021 and the post balance sheet note wording and requested a steer on the timing of the “temporary” nature of the investment value. The Chief Executive noted that the guidance from Evelyn Partners was that although this fall was unlikely to recover in the next two years, it was also unlikely to be a decade long drop but no more specific projections were available and circumstances were being monitored.

Council delegated authority to the Chief Executive to undertake minor, typographical and cosmetic amends to the Annual Report 2021.

**Action 06:** The Chief Operations Officer to ensure the Annual Report 2021 was finalised and circulated to the membership with the 2022 Annual General Meeting Papers.

#### **2.1.5 Budget reforecast 2022 and initial budget proposal 2023**

Council approved the Finance Committee’s recommendation that the initial budget proposal for 2023 be worked into a final budget proposal for September’s meetings and include a proposal for the investment in future budget. It would also include changes following the discussions regarding payroll costs and the grants budget earlier in the meeting.

**Action 07:** The Chief Operations Officer to ensure the approved proposals for investment in the future, payroll changes and grant review recommendations be reflected in the final 2023 budget for submission to September Council.

#### **2.1.6 Persons of significant control register**

The Treasurer reminded Council that the Society considered that no individuals held significant control of the organisation and therefore, having considered the matter, Finance Committee was once again recommending a blank register be submitted. Council approved the recommendation.

**Action 08:** The Chief Operations Officer to submit a blank persons of significant control register to Companies House.

#### **2.1.7 Fundraising update**

The Treasurer reported that the Unlocking Potential Fund had continued to grow with donations for this quarter largely coming from members giving up their option to claim back expenses for Annual Conference, taking donations to ~£10k.

The Head of Membership and Professional Development noted that the Unlocking Potential Grant was launched at the end of March this year, to support early and mid-career members who required an extra level of support to help them deal with circumstances that prevented professional development. 26 eligible applications had been received from members resident around the world and interviews had been scheduled with a view to appointing the first cohort in late July. It was hoped that the stories from members who benefited from the grant would then be used to promote future donations to the fund.

#### **2.1.8 Update on significant operational matters**

Council was reminded that the outsourced arrangement for the Society’s HR support had been in place in its current form since 2014, (although a slight change in arrangements occurred when the Society moved offices in 2019). The Treasurer had therefore proposed that the Chief Officers lead a review of the HR provision, having carried out reviews for the Society’s audit and financial services in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The Senior Management Team joined the HR staff responsible for the

providing the service at an awayday in May to spend time reviewing the activities and support provided, which covered a summary of the current arrangements, communication, and consistency, developing a plan for recruitment and attracting talent, organisational development, and the management of an unbalanced workload.

It was agreed that a continuous improvement plan would be developed and led by the Head of HR and the Chief Operations Officer which would include several agreed actions under these headers as a minimum:

- Embed all learning and development activity within the HR team
- Review all HR communications to ensure that they reflect the Society's voice
- Create a centralised internship scheme
- Develop the experience of all line managers to better manage poor performance.

#### **2.1.9 Contingency budget**

Council noted the contingency budget statement of commitments at July 2022. There were no items for approval.

#### **2.2 Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee update**

The Chair of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee joined the meeting and updated Council on the 2021 audit which, she reported, had been a smooth process. The rules on provision of a Going Concern Statement in the Annual Report, which had changed in 2021, had again required Council to consider the statement by email and it had been approved.

At its September meeting the Committee would focus on the ongoing risks and opportunities associated with flipping the journals to open access, as well as any risks associated with the new 2023-2027 strategy. It would also develop a risk appetite framework to consider how much and what kind of risk to take when making decisions. A report would be submitted to the December meeting of Council.

The President noted that as this was the Chair's last year, this would be her final report to Council, and he thanked her on behalf of Council.

#### **2.3 Collated finance papers and 2021 Annual Report**

These were taken as read.

#### **2.4 Charles Darwin House Ltd liquidation update**

The Chief Executive reported that Companies House had registered the final report of the liquidators of Charles Darwin House Ltd on 30 June 2022, and that unless something wholly unexpected were to happen to prevent it, on 30 September 2022, CDH Ltd would automatically be dissolved and removed from the register of incorporated companies.

### 3. President/Chief Executive business

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

The Chief Executive reported that the Early Career Microbiologists (ECM) Forum working group had reviewed the Sir Howard Dalton Young Microbiologist of the Year competition but as both of the working group members who were on Council, Colman O’Cathail and Gill Elliott, had sent apologies, the paper had been deferred. He summarised that, in keeping with language used across Society activities, the group recommended to change the name to the Sir Howard Dalton Early Career Microbiologist of the Year award and that there was a desire to develop a mechanism to ensure applications could be submitted via another means other than at Annual Conference or Irish Division meeting to make it easier for international applicants who may not necessarily attend those events.

He reminded Council that the Microbiology Society would organise the 2023 Federation of Infection Sciences conference but following some issues with the professional conference organisers that had been contracted for the 2022 conference hosted by the Healthcare Infection Society, the Society would use its in house events team to deliver the 2023 meeting which may require additional staff resourcing.

Clarivate analytics had released the 2022 impact factors for scientific journals and, despite scepticism on the use of impact factors (IF), Council acknowledged that members of the community still regarded them as a measurement of success. The Chief Executive reported that the *Journal of General Virology* (JGV) had increased its IF to 5.14, the *Journal of Medical Microbiology* (JMM) had seen a 20% increase up to 3.2 and *Microbiology* had also increased. He noted that the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology’s* (IJSEM) IF remained unchanged and that *Microbial Genomics* had seen a small fall to 4.9, putting it below the psychologically important level of 5. He commented that unsurprisingly, following the pandemic, research about viruses had been of more interest to people in the last few years.

The General Secretary updated Council on the Prize Award Panel, noting that the number of applications from members to sit on the panel had resulted in great diversity. He confirmed that the number and quality of Prize Lecture nominations was high but confirmed that a majority of Prize Lecture Awards would be recommended to the September Council meeting. However, as the Outreach Prize Lecture was to be featured at the Society Showcase in October, Council was asked to approve the recommendation for the 2022 winner at its July meeting. He reported that two nominations had been received and that both nominations were of an exceptional standard and the panel had struggled to distinguish one winner given the differences in outreach remits. They therefore recommended that a joint award should be made for the 2022 Microbiology Outreach Prize. Council approved the 2022 Microbiology Outreach Prize be awarded to both Kalai Mathee for the Art meets Science and engaging with new audiences project and Jon Tyrrell for his project entitled ‘Superbugs’ (A Pop-up Science Shop.....and Beyond!).

**Action 09:** Head of Membership and Professional Development to ensure the dual Outreach Prize Winners be invited to the 2022 Society Showcase.

#### 3.2 Outcomes from the Thursday session

The Chief Executive summarised the previous afternoon’s discursive meeting of Council. Council had agreed that the Society would not review any of its financial policies at this time as they were all

deemed fit for purpose and reflective of the Society's current financial governance. Following a series of presentations from staff members across departments of the Society, Council renewed its mandate in relation to use of excess reserves, namely they should be invested in making the Society a stronger organisation, with greater day to day flexibility than the main budget, subject always to proper reporting and approval by Finance Committee.

### **3.3 Outcomes from the Officers' Awayday**

The Chief Executive reported that the Senior Management Team and President had considered what changes were needed as the Society looked ahead to launching a new, ambitious strategy. They summarised that the degree and pace of change to achieve ambition was high and the range of opportunities vast so it was necessary to focus where differences and impacts could be made; more specifically in taking equality, inclusion and diversity and Internationalisation seriously. A culture shift was required to break away from doing things because we always have, to stop trying to "be all things to all people" and to ensure the Society ways of working were agile and not bureaucratic. This would require; much greater knowledge of and engagement with our members, especially overseas, drawing on a wider base for the governance structure, with clearer roles and purposes and a reshaped staff workforce of people suited to the challenges and changes to come.

### **3.4 Composition of Council and Committees**

This document was taken as read.

### **3.5 Council appointed positions and Results of the 2022 election**

#### **3.5.1 Council Appointed Positions**

At its 393 Meeting in March 2022, 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 had comprised the General Secretary Mark Harris in the Chair, Sharon Brookes, Tina Joshi and David Clarke.

David Grainger left the meeting for this agenda item.

#### Treasurer -elect

Council approved the Appointments Panel recommendation to appoint John Sinclair as Treasurer-elect from January 2023 - December 2023 and Treasurer from January 2024 - December 2026.

#### General Secretary

Council approved the Appointments Panel recommendation to appoint Karen Robinson as General Secretary from January 2023 – December 2025.

#### Co-Chair-elect of Impact and Influence Committee

Council approved the Appointments Panel recommendation to appoint Catrin Moore as the co-Chair-elect of the Impact and Influence Committee from July – December 2023 and co-Chair from January 2023-December 2025.

#### Co-Chair elect of the Sustainability Committee

Council approved the Appointments Panel recommendation to appoint Geertje Van Keulen as the co-Chair-elect of the Sustainability Committee from January – December 2023.



#### FEMS Delegate

Council approved the Appointments Panel recommendation to appoint David Kelly as the Microbiology Society FEMS Delegate from January 2023 – December 2025.

#### Chair of Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee

The Chief Executive reported that interviews had taken place but the panel had decided not to appoint and would go back out to recruitment utilising Nurole – a hiring platform for voluntary non-executive roles, and through the networks available to Council and the audit committee's current membership.

**Action 10:** The Chief Operations Officer to circulate the Chair of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee role description to Council.

#### Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Medical Microbiology*

Tina Joshi left the room for this agenda item.

The Chief Executive reported that the panel had reviewed five candidates and unanimously recommend Tina Joshi as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Medical Microbiology*.

#### Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of General Virology*

Following recent discussions with the Editor-in-Chief, Paul Duprex, and Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Alain Kohl, of *Journal of General Virology*, it was discovered that both believed that their tenure was five years - with their terms expiring at the end of 2024. This was not intended to be the case, as following the alignment of Editor contracts to the same turnaround as governance posts, Editors-in-Chief are contracted to serve a three-year term. Therefore, both agreements are set to expire at the end of the current year, 2022.

The Editor-in-Chief had had far higher than expected commitments professionally over this term, due to the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 and felt they had much more to contribute and complete on the journal. Additionally, the Deputy Editor-in-Chief had expressed a preference for the extra time to prepare for their stepping up to the position of Editor-in-Chief.

Council approved the extraordinary extension of both agreements to the end of 2024, when (pending approval from Council) the Deputy Editor-in-Chief would commence as Editor-in-Chief for a three-year term, ending in 2027.

#### *Microbiology Today* Deputy Editor

Council approved the introduction of the post of Deputy Editor of *Microbiology Today* to bring it more in line with that of the Society Journal's. Council would receive a recommendation for appointment from the panel to its December 2022 meeting.

**Action 11:** Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing to commence advertisement of the Deputy Editor of MT position in September 2022.

### **3.5.2 Results of the 2022 elections**

Council received the voting data and summary results of the 2022 elections and ratified the following results:

- Karen Campos-Leon as incoming elected Member of Impact and Influence Committee.
- Jo Kite as incoming ECM Forum Chair-elect
- Éva Bernadett Bényei as incoming ECM Forum Executive Committee Impact and Influence Committee
- Kelly Capper-Parkin as incoming ECM Forum Executive Committee Building Communities Committee
- Jack Sunter as incoming ECM Forum Executive Committee Sustainability Committee

Council ratified the appointment of the following positions that had been uncontested and thus not gone to election:

Council

Alan McNally

Sustainability Committee

Arindam Mitra

Jennifer Ritchie

Eukaryotic Division

Albert Bolhuis

Giuseppe Buda De Cesare

Jordan Price

Calvin Tiengwe

Irish Division

Jason Chin

Guerrino Macori

Nicky O'Boyle

Prokaryotic Division

Rodrigo Bacigalupe

Rebecca Corrigan

Petra Oyston

Simon Rout

Virus Division

Alex Borodavka

Hannah Burgess

Helena Maier

Clive McKimmie

ECM Division Representative for Irish Division

Gillian Carney

It was noted that several positions had been unfilled through this process and thus would be co-opted.

**Action 12:** Chief Executive to write to all elected, appointed, allocated and unsuccessful candidates.

### 3.6 General Secretary's Group Report

The General Secretary presented the report and highlighted key recommendations for Council approval.

1. A full review of the Society's website and Society communications should take place as soon as was practicable.

Council was in favour of this, particularly in relation to the new strategic direction and an emphasis on inclusion and accessibility. It was also supportive of moving away from being "all things to all people" and making better use of data to be more targeted in the Society's offering to Members.

2. To move to an online Spring (April/May) meeting and an in-person Autumn (October) plenary meeting of the Committees.

Council approved this recommendation.

3. A fee for Affiliate Members should not be introduced.

Council acknowledged the Sustainability Committee's and General Secretary's Group's discussions on this and that it was felt that introduction of a fee to this category of membership would counter the Society's aims to be more international and approved the recommendation. This recommendation was also reflected in the AGM Papers for 2023 Membership Subscriptions.

4. EDI recommendations to Council following the presentation of the Members Panel manifesto:
  - To support the Members Panel with implementation of its manifesto, with particular focus on developing peer support networks, being more inclusive at Annual Conference with an LGBTQ+ mixer on the programme and improving pronunciation of names, and encouraging representatives from the Irish Division and Retired Members to join the panel.

Council approved this recommendation.

- To trial moving poster sessions at Annual Conference 2023 to a time in the programme where alcohol would not be expected (e.g. early afternoon/after lunch), with consideration given to additional social/networking events where alcohol was an option.

Council approved this recommendation and also discussed encouraging more committee and Council members to be involved in the poster judging process as it encourages more engagement.

- A full review of the Society's website and communications to include ensuring wide communication of Society EDI activities and commitment to action on EDI.

Council approved this recommendation.

- To consider the possibility of hybrid meetings as part of the review of the Society's Annual Conference and Focused Meetings due to take place over the summer with findings to be reported to Building Communities Committee, the General Secretary's Group and Council at the end of 2022, in time for implementation for 2024 events.

Council approved this recommendation.

5. One or two additional staff members to implement elements of the new strategy, particularly in relation to EDI and realising the Members Panel initiatives in due course, and aims for the Society to be more international.

Council approved this recommendation.

**Action 13:** The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy to oversee the implementation of the approved General Secretary's Group recommendations.

### **3.7 Parachute research and global inclusion**

At its 391 meeting, Council had acknowledged the editorial piece published in *Microbial Genomics* about parachute research; a term used to describe situations in which researchers based in the global north visited developing countries for fieldwork, gathered data, and then returned home to publish research without adequately acknowledging the contributions of the local researchers in that community. They observed that it was a topic that was becoming of wider interest and would be particularly prevalent for the Society in regards to its strategic aims for further internationalisation and global inclusion in our activities, and the topics and research it publishes. The Society had since launched a survey to gain insights from the community with regards to this practice and how the Society could prevent the publication and dissemination of research of this type. Hebba Beech, Journal Development Editor, joined the meeting to present a paper which provided insights gained from that survey and a draft policy to prevent extractive and exploitative research practices, such as parachute research, in Society programmes and activities. She noted that alongside the Open Access inclusivity policy approved at the 391-09 meeting of Council, the policy aimed to increase global inclusion at the Society and break down some of the barriers faced by those in lower-income, less privileged, research settings.

Council was strongly supportive of the principle of having a policy in place to highlight the issues at hand and encourage greater consideration of the concept but was concerned to ensure the process was made as easy for authors as possible and did not create further barriers to submitting work to the journals. Council was positive about the suggestion of instigating this process at the point of publication rather than submission so the relationship with authors was already established. Council encouraged that the Society look to streamline the format of the reflexivity statement, for example by asking authors to respond to a set of questions rather than develop a full statement and to reduce the number of questions. It was also suggested that the Society should review resources from the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and similar policies from research funders such as Wellcome as benchmarks, though it was noted that many policies in place simply stated an expectation with little or no conditions to comply which the Society felt did little to further the cause.

**Action 14:** The Journal Development Editor to review UKRIO resources and to streamline the questions as prompts for the reflexivity statement.

**Action 15:** The Journal Development Editor to review ways to instigate the policy in a way that minimised barriers to submissions.

### 3.8 Society Showcase 2022

The Head of Membership and Professional Development, Maria Fernandes reminded Council that the Society Showcase was an opportunity for Early Career Microbiologists, the Young Microbiologist of the Year finalists and Champions to come together with senior members of the Society in a celebration of work and networking opportunity. Council noted the suggested schedule for the day and the planned focus on supporting members who wished to make a career transition in microbiology. It undertook to consider appropriate individuals, who had transitioned between sectors to partake in the panel discussions.

**Action 16:** Council to submit ideas of individuals who had transitioned between sectors to partake in the panel discussions to the Head of Membership and Professional Development.

### 3.9 Collated 2022 AGM papers

The Executive Secretary noted that, as agreed at the 393 meeting of Council, the Society's 2022 Annual General Meeting would be held as a stand-alone online event on 1 September. She noted that the AGM would formally launch the 2023-2027 strategy but there was no out of the ordinary business requiring a membership vote and thus the draft papers reflected a "business as usual" agenda and standard papers including the recommendations approved by Council earlier in the meeting such as the incoming members of Council and Committees, and the Affiliate membership fees. In accordance with the Society Articles of Association and Company Law, the notice and papers needed to be distributed to eligible members 21 clear days before the event. Council approved the draft papers and delegated authority to the Chief Executive, as the Company Secretary, to make minor amendments to the papers prior to their distribution.

**Action 17:** The Chief Operations Officer to ensure the AGM Papers be distributed to the eligible membership 21 clear days before the AGM date.

### 3.10 Membership report

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy presented the paper and highlighted the current membership total of 6,811. She noted that an updated membership implementation plan would be developed which would take into account learnings from the last two years of serving the community. She updated on work to streamline the collection and storage of data in order to better report on the sectors represented within the membership and that understanding of this would better inform how to target engagement initiatives.

Council acknowledged highlights from the ways the Society was engaging and celebrating different membership communities, how it was showcasing members' work, supporting the community and reaching underrepresented groups and building communities via external partnerships.

As an example, the Executive Secretary reported on one of the Society's "Get Involved online event series" which had featured a panel of members discussing their experiences of the Shadowing Scheme, how it had encouraged them to get involved with the Society governance structure by demystifying how it worked and being a positive means through which to network. She noted that all members had spoken very positively and enthusiastically about all interactions they had with the Society and how welcoming a community it had felt. The panel had featured a member who was currently on a career break, who was a Society Champion, sat on the Members Panel and who,

following her time on the Shadowing Scheme, had been elected to the Impact and Influence Committee. This was an example of how the Society continued to support the professional development of microbiologists at different times in their careers and how the Society supported inclusion by breaking down barriers to participation (due to childcare issues, the member's young daughter had joined the event). The Executive Secretary went on to note how the Shadowing Scheme was intended to assist the Society's sustainability aims for succession planning of future leaders and the scope for utilising the scheme further to support Council's future strategic aims of more internationalisation and diversity within the governance structure by ensuring opportunities for underrepresented groups to gain the necessary experience to support their nominations to positions within the Society's governance. There were plans to run an in-person event at Annual Conference 2023 on the scheme.

Council approved the incoming members list.

### 3.11 Draft 2023-2027 Strategy

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy presented the 2023-2027 strategy paper noting the work undertaken in the months prior to understand the priorities of Council members, Committee and Division Members, Editorial Boards, staff and the wider Membership. The key mission, vision and core values of the Society remained unchanged as they were the very essence of the organisation and therefore much of the language would remain unchanged. Council agreed, however, that greater focus would be needed on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, on broadening and deepening the Society's international reach, and on cementing a member-driven culture. Monitoring and evaluation had also been written directly into the strategy to embed it across all activities and move from anecdotes of success to evidence.

Council considered the balance of wanting to pull back from being "all things to all people" with ensuring adequate energies were put into amplifying the voices of the membership and recognised the importance of gaining a better understanding of our members so we could better provide meaningful opportunities and communicate the things that mattered to them as individuals.

Council approved the 2023-2027 Strategy.

**Action 18:** The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy to ensure implementation plans for the delivery of the strategic objectives and a monitoring and evaluation framework are finalised, ready for launch at the AGM.

### 3.12 Open Research Platform update

Alex Howat, Head of Open Science, joined the meeting to update Council on the launch of the Open Research Platform (ORP). She reminded Council that following the Society's successful bid for a Learned Society Curation Award from the Wellcome Trust and Howard Hughes Medical Institute in 2020, *Access Microbiology* had been converted into an open research platform, launched at the end of May 2022. The platform combined 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. She reported that the Society had operated a soft launch initially to allow a week opportunity to embed the platform workflow and fix any bugs that occurred. She reminded Council that the Society was being very honest and open in all its communications that this was a new

enterprise with no benchmark for success and invited open discourse to learn and improve it as it grew. She reported that so far the reaction had been very positive and since launch 10 preprints, from a range of content sources, were now in the system.

During the planning and technical specification phase of the project, there were many features of the platform that were considered desirable but not absolutely required for the platform to function and that these had therefore not been included in the development work. Staff would now prioritise the inclusion of some of these features based on the evaluation of the daily operations and from user feedback.

Council noted various means through which to monitor and evaluate progress, namely through the use of established methods of measuring the impact of published articles such as monitoring their citations, downloads and [Altmetric](#) score as well as adopting the manuscript review tool, [SciScore](#), to check for sufficient information in the methodology that would allow others to replicate the work and provided an overall 'score' and then, after 12 months of publications, use this 'score' as a proxy for the scientific rigour of an article and compare the 'scores' of articles published before and after the platform launch. The Society would also survey authors and reviewers about their experience across the stages of the publishing process. The overall satisfaction ratings of *Access Microbiology* would be monitored over time and mapped against the launch date to assess whether the platform had caused a shift.

She reminded Council that both the platform's Focus Groups and Steering Group expressed the strong view that it was important for the Society's reputation and to the wider community that preprints were clearly differentiated from published articles, to avoid readers confusing a preprint that was still undergoing peer review with a published Version of Record. Steps had therefore been taken to clearly signpost preprints across the platform and to increase the understanding and to encourage best practice when promoting them. The Society did not promote authors' preprints via social media channels but did not discourage authors from doing so themselves within their community. However the Society had a responsibility as a publisher and to the microbiology community to encourage authors to be responsible when promoting work that had not completed peer review. Council approved the following statement to be added as a 'Platform policy'.

*'The platform has been developed to support authors in disseminating their preprint rapidly and to receive community feedback. However, if authors choose to promote or disseminate their preprint, we ask that they always state clearly that it has not completed peer review.'*

Council wished to acknowledge the vast work that had gone into the transition of *Access Microbiology* to an OAP and commended Alex and her team for their ongoing efforts.

**Action 18:** The Head of Open Science to ensure the approved preprint policy statement be added to the platform.

### **3.13 AMR project**

Eva Scholtus, Head of Policy and Engagement, joined the meeting. She reported that there had been an increased interest from the microbiology community in further pursuing the engagement work in the fight against AMR. Members had brought the topic to Committee and Council meetings, published opinion pieces in Society journals and participated in public outreach activities and thus, co-Chairs of Impact and Influence Committee and Society's staff had developed a new project that

built on the success of the 2020 *A Sustainable Future* project. The *Knocking out AMR* project would engage a number of teams of experts to consider solutions in six main areas of AMR and culminate in series of events all over the world to showcase the work of the ‘solutions teams’ and raise the profile of the Society and its members in shaping the AMR response.

The *Knocking out AMR* project proposed to:

- a. set for cross-disciplinary action in a One Health context to develop feasible and effective solutions to AMR, and
- b. incorporate an awareness and public engagement effort, especially with (and for) under-represented communities, to step up the public mandate for policy action.

She reported that delivery would be overseen by a steering group composed of the Chairs of six solutions teams and report to Impact and Influence Committee and Council. The solutions teams would each be responsible for developing and implementing solutions in:

1. Therapeutics and vaccines
2. Surveillance, diagnostic and infection prevention and control (IPC)
3. Stewardship, human consumption and social science
4. One Health and climate change
5. Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)
6. UK policy

Council was supportive of this initiative and approved the solution team areas subject to the inclusion of Irish Policy to solution team 6 and the assurance of the inclusion of Veterinary health and environmental health as part of the “One Health” topic area as AMR had very different implications in these fields. Council encouraged the composition of each team to reflect experts in the field, early career members, industry representatives and members of journals’ Editorial Boards as well as ensuring international representation and equality, diversity and inclusion. The Head of Policy and Engagement also noted that collaboration with external stakeholders and organisations would be encouraged, and any external funding opportunities highlighted by the solution teams would be supported by the Society.

Council noted the key role of the communication and engagement working group and the opportunity to undertake some real public engagement work through this project.

**Action 19:** The Head of Policy and Engagement to proceed with the launch of the project to coincide with the new 2023-2027 strategy.

### **3.14 Environmental Impact**

The Head of Strategy and Transformation reminded Council that at its 393 Meeting in March 2022, Council had discussed the environmental impact of the Society and agreed that it would like to



explore ways of taking the issue seriously, with the intention of making valuable change but avoiding meaningless virtue signaling. As part of its work in this area Council was keen to include the amplification of the voices of our members working in this area and supporting the membership in improving environmental issues in, for example, lab practices. Council acknowledged that understanding and reducing environmental impact was a complex issue, and that it would take time to implement change, but the first step was the development of an action plan.

Council approved the proposal to set up an 18-month term working group to:

- Define the areas of focus for the action plan, and the action to be taken within each area.
- Identify relevant groups to implement the action plan.
- Agree the baseline and evaluation framework to measure impact.
- Develop an action plan for internal use to direct action.
- Draft a statement to be shared with members and external stakeholders.

Council devolved responsibility to the Officers to approve the membership of the working group and, in keeping with the Society's core value of transparency and its belief that 'decisions should be informed by evidence and expertise', Council approved the requisition of an expert sustainability consultant, or consultancy.

Council acknowledged that, although an integral part of the Society environmental impact, responsible investment of the Microbiology Society portfolio would not form part of the scope for the action plan discussions. It would feature in the action plan as a commitment of the Society but discussions regarding how best to reduce the environmental impact from an investment management perspective were already underway with ARC.

**Action 20:** The Head of Strategy and Transformation to progress recruitment of the working group and tender process for an expert sustainability consultant, or consultancy.

## 4. Summary of Progress

### 4.1 Summary of Progress – Strategy 2018–2022

Council noted the updates of activity against the 2018-2022 strategy and acknowledged the following highlights.

The Cell-to-Cell Communication in Bacteria; Fundamental and applied aspects meeting had been considered a success and the Chief Executive reported specific positive feedback from the Chair of the Prokaryotic Division Martin Welch.

The recent launch of "Impact 2030", the Irish Government's new research and innovation strategy demonstrated a real seat change in the approach of Irish Policy and the Society planned to maintain strong engagement in the country and collaborate with other organisations to empower the Irish scientific community to provide policy advice on the decisions that matter to them.

The Society had created a new monkeypox information hub, featuring interviews with members Mike Skinner and Neil Mabbott.

## 5. AOB

There were no other items of business and the President declared the meeting closed at 12:50.

### Actions log

Actions from the 395 meeting of Council				
No.	Agenda item	Action	Owner	Status
1	1.2	Executive Secretary to send out the Council conflict of interest registers for review.	Executive Secretary	Completed
2	1.3	Executive Secretary to amend the 393 minutes of Council.	Executive Secretary	Completed
3	1.5	The Chief Executive to write to the Member to relay Council's decision.	Chief Executive	Completed
4	1.5	Executive Secretary to add the statement on content funded by the Russian state to each Council agenda.	Executive Secretary	Agenda item 3.10.
5	1.6	Executive Secretary to undertake the redactions and publish the minutes on the Society website.	Executive Secretary	Completed.
6	2.1.4	The Chief Operations Officer to ensure the Annual Report 2021 was finalised and circulated to the membership with the 2022 Annual General Meeting Papers.	Chief Operations Office	Completed.
7	2.1.5	The Chief Operations Officer to ensure the approved proposals for investment in the future, payroll changes and grant review recommendations be reflected in the final 2023 budget for submission to September Council.	Chief Operations Officer	Agenda item 2.3.
8	2.1.6	The Chief Operations Officer to submit a blank persons of significant control register to Companies House.	The Chief Operations Officer	Completed
9	3.1	Head of Membership and Professional Development to ensure the dual Outreach Prize Winners be invited to the 2022 Society Showcase.	Head of Membership and Professional Development	Completed

<b>10</b>	<b>3.5.1</b>	The Chief Operations Officer to circulate the Chair of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee role description to Council.	The Chief Operations Officer	Completed
<b>11</b>	<b>3.5.1</b>	Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing to commence advertisement of the Deputy Editor of MT position in September 2022.	Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing	Ongoing
<b>12</b>	<b>3.5.2</b>	Chief Executive to write to all elected, appointed, allocated and unsuccessful candidates.	Chief Executive.	Completed
<b>13</b>	<b>3.6</b>	The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy to oversee the implementation of the approved General Secretary's Group recommendations.	The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy	Ongoing
<b>14</b>	<b>3.7</b>	The Journal Development Editor to review UKRIO resources and to streamline the questions as prompts for the reflexivity statement.	The Journal Development Editor	Ongoing
<b>15</b>	<b>3.7</b>	The Journal Development Editor to review ways to instigate the policy in a way that minimised barriers to submissions.	The Journal Development Editor	Following a meeting with the Chair of the Publishing Panel, the plan is to require an author statement (similar to a COI or ethical statement) at submission stage, then this will be reviewed by the handling editor and reviewers. As part of author verification, all authors will have to confirm that they have approved the statement; and the editor and reviewer will have to confirm that they have

				considered the statement.
<b>16</b>	<b>3.8</b>	Council to submit ideas of individuals who had transitioned between sectors to partake in the panel discussions to the Head of Membership and Professional Development.	Council	Completed
<b>17</b>	<b>3.9</b>	The Chief Operations Officer to ensure the AGM Papers be distributed to the eligible membership 21 clear days before the AGM date.	The Chief Operations Officer	Completed
<b>18</b>	<b>3.12</b>	The Head of Open Science to ensure the approved preprint policy statement be added to the platform.	The Head of Open Science	Completed
<b>19</b>	<b>3.13</b>	The Head of Policy and Engagement to proceed with the launch of the project to coincide with the new 2023-2027 strategy.	The Head of Policy and Engagement	Ongoing
<b>20</b>	<b>3.14</b>	The Head of Strategy and Transformation to progress recruitment of the working group and tender process for an expert sustainability consultant, or consultancy.	The Head of Strategy and Transformation	Ongoing. A call has gone to the membership for participation in the working group and several consultant have been approached.