

Minutes of the 388 meeting of Council

Friday 5 March 2021 9:00-14:30 GMT

Venue: By Zoom

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)

Chloe James (co-Chair of Impact and Influence 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)

Colman O’Cathail (Chair of Early Career Microbiologists’ Forum Executive Committee)

Laura Bowater (Elected Member)

Sharon Brookes (Elected Member)

Andrew Edwards (Elected Member)

John Morrissey (Elected Member)

In attendance:

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)

Eva Scholtus (Head of Policy and Engagement)

1. Apologies for absence and welcome to new attendees

The President formally welcomed Council members to the 388 meeting. Apologies were received from Deirdre Devine (Elected Member).

1.1 Declaration of any new conflicts of interest

The President reminded Council members that they had a responsibility for declaring their own conflicts of interest and should any new conflicts arise they should notify the Society.

John Morrissey noted that he had been appointed to the Microbial Biotechnology Board of the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB).

Action 01: Council members to send any new conflicts of interest to the Chief Operations Officer.

1.2 Minutes of previous meeting

The Minutes of the 386 and 387 Meetings were agreed as a true and accurate record.

1.3 Matters arising from the minutes and action points

Arising from the 386 Meeting item 3.1.1, Honouring Tony Trinci. The President reported that discussions were ongoing, and she would report back to Council in due course.

Arising from the 387 Meeting item 3, John Morrissey had accepted the invitation to extend his term on Council by a further year to the end of 2021. 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*.

2. Finance Committee

2.1 Update from the Finance Committee

2.1.1 Key points

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

2.2 Collated finance papers

2.2.1 Investment portfolio

The Treasurer summarised to Council the key points from the meeting held on 4 March 2021. He noted that Andrew Kettley and Peter Gilliver from ARC joined the meeting to give their presentation, followed by Rebecca Davidson and Matthew Dickens from Tilney. Charlotte Swing, the Society's independent investment advisor was also in attendance.

He noted that the portfolio had performed well over the last quarter, as shown by the green traffic light rating in the report, with a total return of 16.8% since inception and that it was currently worth £10.5M, despite the drawdown of £500,000 for use by the Society at the end of 2020.

2.2.2 Management Accounts

The Treasurer summarised that the Committee had been provided with the draft management accounts for 2020. These showed an overall surplus of £102k against a budgeted surplus of £10k and a reforecast deficit of -£258k. It was reported that there may be some very minor adjustments still to make to the accounts but that the outturn presented was near final at this point.

2.2.3 Annual Salary Award

The Chief Executive introduced this item and asked all staff members to leave the call.

Council noted the considerable efforts that Microbiology Society staff had made over the last year to maintain and grow activities despite the pandemic and awarded Society staff a 2.5% cost of living increase, effective from April 2021. In addition, all staff were awarded a one-off £500 bonus payment in recognition of how well staff had performed during lockdown.

Action 03: Chief Executive to communicate with staff on the afternoon of the meeting, and implement the bonus and pay increase.

2.2.4 Journals Open Access business update

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

2.2.5 Fundraising update

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Treasurer summarised this item and highlighted the progress on plans to launch a fundraising campaign later in the year. It was noted that plans were now moving into the latter stages and the papers outlined the full plan which had been developed to support the launch. It was expected that the first phase of the launch would take place in early May, after Annual Conference.

2.2.6 Update on significant operational matters

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Treasurer highlighted one item relating to the planning permission appeal which was ongoing.

2.2.7 Contingency budget statement

The Treasurer summarised this item, noting that there was one request for approval this quarter - £5k to be allocated from the contingency budget to support some additional work requested by the Editor-in-Chief of *Microbiology*, Gavin Thomas, to support the activities being planned for the journal's 75th Anniversary.

Action 04: Council approved the recommendation from Finance Committee for £5k to be allocated from the contingency budget to be used to support the *Microbiology* 75th anniversary activities.

2.3 Charles Darwin House Ltd liquidation update

The Chief Executive reported that the liquidators were still awaiting tax clearance from the HMRC, and that as reported previously this would take a significant amount of time owing to the pressures on HMRC during the current economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

2.4 Critical Risk Register

The Chief Operations Officer presented the Critical Risk Register and observed that, following comments at a previous meeting, a change had been made to the main register to include the Society's potential environmental impact under "failure to keep pace with the external environment". In addition, she observed that other updates had been made to the progress column and included:

- Journal income for 2021 appeared to be less affected by the pandemic than expected.
- The delivery of large-scale digital events remained a significant risk.
- The activities taking place to try and increase submissions to Society journals.

The co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee (PK) referenced an increase in spam and phishing attacks due to Brexit and the new bureaucracy involved dealing with the EU. He suggested this might be included as a risk.

The General Secretary referenced the lack of applications to Council-appointed positions and questioned whether fewer people wanting to be involved with the governance of the Society was a potential risk.

The co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee (CJ) suggested that the changes that had been made to the governance structure may have inadvertently led to a new risk for inclusion, in that the increased remits of the Committee may lead to a risk of missing some areas of work.

Council was reminded that it had previously agreed that all governance changes would be reviewed at the end of the year and amended where necessary.

John Morrissey suggested, and Council agreed, that should Council propose adding additional risks to the register then these should be considered by the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee in more detail before the register was formally revised.

3. President / Chief Executive Business

3.1 General business /Report back from CEO

The Chief Executive reported that the Royal Society of Biology was holding elections to its Council and the Society for Applied Microbiology had requested the support of the Microbiology Society as a counter-signing organisation in seconding their nomination. Council agreed, noting that the proposed candidate for nomination was a member of both Societies.

The Chief Executive summarised the events programme for 2021 and talked about returning to a physical Annual Conference in Belfast in 2022 noting that whilst the physical event would include an enhanced digital experience for delegates, the meeting would not be fully hybrid and that hybrid meetings meant different things to different people. With eight parallel sessions it would not be possible to have the full in-person experience online as it would be like running two events at the same time.

It was agreed that this would be made clear in all communications about the event.

3.2 Outcomes from the Thursday session of Council

Council members had, at their Thursday session, held a wide ranging debate about the future of how scientific information would be disseminated, and the Society's place in that landscape.

The President observed that Council had heard a good deal of information from the Society's staff during the session and that now there was a need to prioritise what was achievable in the short-term and what should be a longer-term, more aspirational plan.

John Morrissey spoke of the need for the Society to have a clear vision about what the Society was doing around Open Science and to distinguish this from the plan for publishing. He emphasised there were two issues at play and the vision for Open Science needed to be clearly communicated.

The co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee (PK) commented that the Society was in a unique position and that the importance of microbiology had never been clearer. He highlighted the potential to recruit more members around the world at a time when we were seeing changes to publications and to platforms for communications in the era of Open Science. He spoke of the

opportunity to create a plan and philosophy – bringing in more people from around the world and using our solid brand effectively across the digital space in terms of communicating microbiology.

The General Secretary observed that there was a need to better communicate and promote the benefits of publishing with the Society to reach new, international markets. The Chief Executive suggested there was a need for different efforts in different places and that it would be vital to identify a tractable number of significant markets to start with. He noted that during the Thursday session several members had mentioned Brazil and China as possibilities for more targeted activities regarding the journals and the Society, and that the Society had good contacts in Brazil should Council wish to proceed with this.

The Chair of the Early Career Microbiologists' Forum Executive Committee commented that the Society needed to facilitate a major culture change – he said there were several routes to achieving this and one way was to facilitate growth in Open Science by making it a policy within the journals. He noted the Open Research Platform was an important step towards this, but that it would need a lot of support for the community to engage.

The co-Chair of Building Communities Committee (PH) talked about the importance of not conflating Open Access with Open Science. He emphasised the need for relevant policies and protocols for the former, rather than doing things as an afterthought, and for the latter the need to add value to the journals by giving authors the opportunity to explain their work to a more public audience in their own words. The President agreed suggesting a piece written for the lay audience could be included at the start of all articles and mentioned the possibility of publishing these in native languages to increase reach.

The Treasurer said there were three different things to distinguish – (i) Open Science; (ii) the communication of science to members and the wider world (making science more accessible); and (iii) interacting with other, potentially larger organisations including the media, recognising the fact the Society speaks for a large community and was a recognised voice of microbiology.

John Morrissey suggested more could be done to integrate our content across numerous communication channels, whether it was a paper or a lay abstract, it could be linked to a podcast or other digital content. The Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing explained podcasts were regularly produced featuring interviews with members about article submissions to the journals as well as other activities, and that similar content was also produced for the blog, alongside short films. The co-Chair of Building Communities Committee (PH) mentioned more could be done to better signpost this content and tag it to the journal pages so that when someone found a paper, they also got the additional content (podcasts, blogs etc) and *vice versa*. Laura Bowater agreed this was a good idea.

The co-Chair of Sustainability Committee (JB) commented that reaching out to the general public would help us nurture the future generations, that it was risky to keep the Society solely for scientists and that we needed strategies to expand our influence. The President noted the Society offered grants and funding for outreach work and more could be done to promote this support.

The co-Chair of Sustainability Committee (TOC) said there were different strands of communication to consider, communicating with scientists, communicating with the public, and communicating with policy makers. He commended staff at the Thursday session for explaining what they were doing

very well and wondered if more needed to be done to communicate all these efforts to the membership in order to get them to feel part of this movement.

The co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee (PK) said the Society was at a decision point – did we stick in our comfort zone, or did we build our leadership in microbiology and infectious diseases? Our brand meant something – did we use it to push further, with the resources that we had? John Morrissey asked how ambitious we wanted to be – incremental or radical? He spoke of the Society’s strategy and that the biggest risk to the strategy was an unwillingness to change. There was a need to be ambitious and radical and for the Society to be seen as the organisation that put microbiology on the map – Open Science was a tool that could help achieve this.

The President summarised the conversation, noting that this was the time to be radical in communicating microbiology not only to the membership but more widely. She spoke of the need for the Committees and the staff to think about how they would like to see a more radical approach to communicating microbiology within their remits and to produce plans and get buy-in from the membership, potentially through consultation at Annual Conference. Andrew Edwards suggested that delegates at Conference had already bought into the Society and that it might be important to reach out to the whole membership, possibly through an all member survey.

The Chief Executive summarised there were three emerging categories for the Society’s staff to focus on delivering –

- Some specific detail, such as an international focus on Brazil / China, which should now be managed by the relevant parts of the governance structure.
- Better communication of the activities the Society already does, including a piece of work on the value of word of mouth by and among members.
- Process to capture this desire for leadership; making it reality that the Society had a global vision on Open Science and that the level of ambition needed to go up another level to deliver this.

The Chief Executive reminded everyone that the current strategy was time-limited and that this was nearly at an end. In addition to this, there was a global ‘moment of time’ in terms of the spotlight on microbiology during the pandemic and the Society’s new strategy needed to capitalise on this moment.

3.3 Composition of Council and Committees

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

3.4 Membership report

3.4.1 Membership Report

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy reported that the Society had 6,141 members as of 4 March 2021.

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy highlighted one item from the membership report regarding the recent survey to the membership of LGBTQ+. Following a good response rate, the responses were being analysed and findings would be reported back to Council in due course.

3.4.2 New members

Council approved the list of new members.

John Morrissey asked the Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy about the statistics showing 25% of the membership were Affiliate members and what was known about these members and their geography, questioning whether the growth here could be due to a wider interest in microbiology. The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy responded that the Affiliate membership rate was introduced to support potential members in developing countries to join the Society for free and that this was the majority of the makeup of the category. The Chief Executive added that it was often those at an earlier career stage that joined as Affiliate members.

Sharon Brookes mentioned previously asking about the composition of the membership and the potential to explore the different sectors represented in the membership (particularly members in government and industry) and commented that further member segmentation would be appreciated. The Chief Executive undertook to ensure that such information as could be gleaned would be included in the report for the next meeting.

The co-Chair of Impact and Influence Committee (PK) commented about the LGBTQ+ survey and referenced how this highlighted the lack of representation on Committees and at Council. He asked what more could be done and what might be missing. He also spoke of the Impact and Influence Committee meeting held in February 2021 where Committee members had expressed a need to do more, though there was a lack of understanding of what 'more' was or might be. The Chief Executive noted that this came up at all three Committees and would be discussed by the General Secretary's Group at its next meeting in April and brought back to Council for more detailed consideration at its next meeting.

3.5 Council appointed positions

The General Secretary presented this item. He noted that the usual process at this meeting would be for the General Secretary to report on the expressions of interest for positions following the closing date in February. However, the deadline for these had been extended to 9 March following receipt of fewer expressions of interest than hoped.

The President left the meeting for the discussion on the appointment of the next President.

Council delegated authority to the General Secretary to contact the names on the list at the closing date to confirm that those who had been nominated would be willing to stand before forming an appropriate appointments panel, avoiding Council members who may be conflicted.

It was agreed that the governance changes coupled with the impact the pandemic was having on potential nominees' time could be having an impact on the expressions of interest.

The co-Chair of Sustainability Committee (TOC) suggested that new videos about what was involved in each Committee could be made, following the success of the previous one with Nicola Stonehouse talking about being on Council. John Morrissey agreed and commented that the Divisions needed to

be encouraged to get more involved and to put themselves forward for Committee roles when their terms ended.

There was a question about whether the recent Shadowing Scheme event had been successful. The Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing reported that Melissa Lacey had applied to shadow Impact and Influence Committee and had joined her first Committee meeting in February 2021, supported by co-Chair Chloe James as her point of contact on the Committee and by the Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing on the staff.

3.5.1 Election timetable

The Chief Executive reported that as well as the Council-appointed positions, there would be three Elected Member positions on Council available from the end of the year. He requested that Council members encourage others to come forward for election. Nominations would open on 22 March, closing on 4 May 2021. The ballot would open on 1 June, closing on 22 June 2021. Council will be invited to ratify the results at its meeting on 9 July 2021.

3.6 Statement on the effect of the pandemic on early careers

The Chief Executive introduced this item and invited the Chair of the Early Career Microbiologists' Forum (ECM) Executive Committee to comment.

The Chair of the ECM Forum Executive Committee explained that the ECM Forum Executive Committee members had raised this issue via the three Committees. He said that while ECMs had not necessarily had a more difficult time than any other groups of researchers during the pandemic, they were typically in more transitional roles and this was where the impact had been most pronounced. He explained that some had struggled with PhDs or to complete them, that they were less likely to have publications resulting from their PhDs, and that some had been stuck in postdoc positions for longer and were unable to transition into faculty positions.

The Chair of the ECM Forum Executive Committee proposed that the Society produce a position statement to make it clear that there could not be the same expectations on early career researchers (ECRs) for the next couple of years, as their CVs would look very different from usual. It was noted that this had not impacted all ECRs, those working on SARS-CoV-2 had been fortunate and less likely to suffer, but the vast majority had not been able to do this.

The President noted that this was not exclusive to microbiology, that institutions were responding in different ways and asked if it would help to join forces with other organisations. The Chief Executive spoke of the Society's experience with the 'Science For Ireland' project where it had harnessed the collective voices of the community and amplified them – and that this approach had given other organisations and institutions the confidence to speak up.

The co-Chair of Building Communities Committee (SS) said there could be a misconception that it was the best time ever to be a microbiologist, when clearly there were a lot of issues.

Council approved a two-part approach; to develop one message from the Society and to join forces with others and produce a joint statement alongside it, if possible and appropriate.

Action 05: The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy to follow up with relevant staff and put in motion the development of a position statement.

3.7 Chair of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee

The Chief Executive presented the paper which invited Council to consider whether it wished to extend the term of the current Chair of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee, Kathryn Kerle, by a further year until 31 December 2022, following this suggestion at the 386 meeting of Council.

Council approved the recommendation and also suggested that Kathryn Kerle was consulted about the future recruitment process for this appointment when her term ended to ensure that it was advertised in the right place and would stand the best chance of recruiting a suitable successor.

3.8 Deputy Editor-in-Chief appointments

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy presented the paper which provided an overview of the revised process for appointing Deputy Editors-in-Chief and invited Council members to consider the recommendation from the appointments panel for the role of Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Microbiology*. The Chair of Building Communities Committee (PH) was invited to comment on the panel discussion.

Council endorsed the recommendation from the panel to appoint Tracy Palmer as Deputy Editor-in-Chief for *Microbiology* and for the Chair of the Publishing Panel to convene a panel to consider three nominations for the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal for Medical Microbiology*.

3.9 Committee business not to be covered by the General Secretary's Group

No additional business was raised.

3.10 *Microbiology's* 75th Anniversary 2022

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy summarised the paper and invited Council to consider the list of ideas from the *Microbiology* journal Editorial Board and indicate if it had a preference on the priority of the journal celebrations.

The co-Chair of Building Communities Committee (PH) spoke of the need to ensure Council had the same priorities as Publishing Panel and of the importance of ensuring the journals were seen as part of the Society's wider brand.

The General Secretary commented it was good to celebrate 75 years, but we needed to ensure we were looking forward and not just take a historical look back.

The Chief Executive and co-Chair of Building Communities Committee (PH) mentioned declining submissions to this journal and pushed for our own senior members to consider publishing in our own journals, emphasising the need for content from Divisions, from Committees and from Council.

John Morrissey spoke of the opportunity provided by Open Science as well as the anniversary, mentioning it might be possible to see 2022 as the launch of a new vision for outward engagement at Annual Conference – tying into the 75th Anniversary of *Microbiology*.

Sharon Brookes talked about connectivity of themes across all journals and tying in wider Society activities.

The President summarised that it was important to link across the whole range of the Society's work, commending tying journals into Annual Conference sessions, and to link to wider themes (like

climate change and the COP26) but also to look to the future and the next wave of potential papers to ensure the ongoing success of the journals.

3.11 Next steps for the Society following Brexit

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy presented the paper and draft framework for next steps following Brexit and invited Council for comments, suggestions and areas of priority. She explained the paper had been discussed at all three Committee meetings in February 2021 and that at Impact and Influence Committee James Tooze (Policy Officer at the Campaign for Science and Engineering) had presented members with an update on science post Brexit.

The Treasurer commented on the need to reinforce to the EU that the UK remained part of Horizon Europe as there seemed to be confusion about this – the Society should do all it could to get that message across to the membership. He also suggested that because of the huge change in appetite for science in the US there may be an opportunity to join forces and build new collaborations, which might include joint working groups etc.

John Morrissey spoke of his new role at the EFB, and that he had been asked to explore opportunities for interaction with the Microbiology Society and would take this forward with the Chief Executive.

Council approved the framework and next steps.

3.12 Draft minutes of the 2020 AGM

The draft minutes of the 2020 AGM were approved for circulation to the membership for its approval at the 2021 AGM.

4. Summary of progress

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Chief Executive highlighted several items under each of the three strategic objectives.

Under Building Communities, this included the development of the online events programme for this year which would start with the *Candida* and Candidiasis meeting in two weeks' time, followed by Annual Conference Online 2021 and then a full Focused Meeting programme. Council thanked the Divisions for the hard work that was going into the events programme and all of the changes associated with delivering these events online.

The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy was invited to comment on the new seminar series noting that this was being developed to reach a single priority microbiology community to support and to share expertise at the request of the membership. She explained the first meeting under this banner, which would be for the SARS-CoV-2 research group, would take place in March 2021.

Under Impact and Influence, the Chief Executive highlighted recent efforts to increase the Society's visibility in the media. The Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing was invited to comment on the Society's media work and noted the improvement of relationships with science and health journalists at certain media outlets, and that this had led to the publication in

newspapers (most recently the *Telegraph*) of pitched stories, particularly from articles in the journals. She reported the development of new press packs, designed to aid journalists to find accessible but scientifically sound information on issues in the public eye, like vaccines, and a draft pack was being trialled with volunteers from the Media Trust and journalist contacts.

The Chief Executive noted the Royal Irish Academy had recently issued a call for input to help identify how the all-island higher education system should evolve to meet changing societal needs and challenges and we had received a great response from our members in Ireland.

The Chief Executive invited the Head of Policy and Engagement to speak about the outcomes and the future of the *A Sustainable Future* project. She spoke of the value of member case studies and interviews associated with the project and that she had received positive feedback from members who had contributed, including follow up from journalists. The success of this approach meant it would be used as a future model, helping us design new streams emanating from the project, like AMR.

Under Sustainability, the Chief Executive highlighted Annual Conference Online 2021 sales, stressing this was a new venture for the Society (having not undertaken marketing for digital events in the past). The Associate Director of Communications, Brand and Marketing added that to date £11,250 worth of sales had been secured – a combination of a mixture of packages including the industry symposium slots.

The President thanked everyone for their hard work and commented on how much was being achieved.

5. Committee Business (for information only)

5.1 Sustainability Committee minutes, October 2020

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

5.2 Building Communities Committee minutes, October 2020

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

5.3 Impact and Influence Committee minutes, October 2020

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

5.4 Early Career Microbiologists' Forum Executive Committee minutes, October 2020

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

6. AOB

The co-Chair of Sustainability Committee (TOC) asked on the progress of the Fleming Museum item that had been discussed at previous meetings and the Chief Executive reported that the pandemic had delayed the progression of this item, not least because the location of the museum was at St Mary's Hospital.

The co-Chair of Building Communities Committee (SS) asked about the future of in-person meetings such as Council and Committee meetings. The Chief Executive confirmed that hybrid meetings would become more common place and in future members who were unable to join in person would be invited to join by Zoom.

The meeting closed at 12:57.

Action log

Actions from the 388 meeting of Council			
No.	Action	Owner	Status
01	Council members to send any new conflicts of interest to the Chief Operations Officer.	Chief Operations Officer.	Completed. Register of interests circulated to Trustees 1/07/21 for review and update.
02	The Chief Operations Officer to make the appropriate redactions to the 386 and 387 minutes of Council.	The Chief Operations Officer.	Completed. Redacted minutes published on the Society website.
03	Chief Executive to communicate with staff on the afternoon of the meeting, and implement the bonus and pay increase.	Chief Executive.	Completed.
04	Council approved the recommendation from Finance Committee for £5k to be allocated from the contingency budget to be used to support the <i>Microbiology</i> 75 th anniversary activities.	The Chief Operations Officer.	Completed. See agenda item 2.3 Collated Finance Committee Papers.
05	The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy to follow up with relevant staff and put in motion the development of a position statement.	The Chief Programmes Officer and Director of Strategy.	Ongoing. See General Secretary's Group report to Council (389-04).