

Minutes of the 379 meeting of Council

Friday 8 March 2019 09:00-12:30 GMT

Venue: Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London, WC1N 2JU, UK

Present:

Judy Armitage (President, in the Chair)
Ian Roberts (Treasurer)
Maggie Smith (General Secretary)
Nicola Stonehouse (Chair of Communications Committee)
Amy Richards (Chair of Early Career Microbiologists' Forum)
Paul Kellam (Chair of Policy Committee)
Tadhg Ó Cróinín (Chair of Professional Development Committee)
Jodi Lindsay (Chair of Publishing Committee)
Mick Tuite (Chair of Scientific Conferences Committee)
David Blackburn (Elected Member)
Deirdre Devine (Elected Member)
Charles Dorman (Elected Member)
John Morrissey (Elected Member)
Tracy Palmer (Elected Member)

In attendance:

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)
Joanne Morley (Chief Operations Officer)
Tasha Mellins-Cohen (Director of Publishing)
Tony McBride (Interim Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes)
Sarah Buckman (Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes, on maternity leave)
Gillian Perry-Bland (Governance and Operations Executive)

1. Apologies for absence and welcome to new attendees

The President formally welcomed Council to the 379 meeting. Apologies were received from George Salmond.

2. 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 notify the Society of any new conflicts that may arise. None was declared.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the 378 Meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record, subject to the following corrections:

In Section 3.8, “he” should be “the”.

In Section 3.6.1, Carol Munro’s name was spelled incorrectly.

4. Matters arising from the minutes and action points

The Chief Executive reported that Carol Munro had agreed to be the Society’s FEMS delegate for a term of three years.

5. Finance and Operations

5.1 Update from Finance and Operations Committee

5.1.1 Key points

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

Charles Dorman asked how the new Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee would be involved in helping Council to manage the risks associated with the investment portfolio. The Chief Executive reminded Council that the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee would examine risk exposure in detail and report to Council. The investment portfolio carried very a significant component risk on the Critical Risk Register. He further reminded Council of the composition and Terms of Reference of the Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee.

5.1.2 Membership Rates and Legislative Changes

Council noted the paper circulated in advance, including the relevant legal advice. Council approved the recommendation of the Finance & Operations Committee that any member of the Society who, since 1 January 2019, had paid more than the lowest appropriate rate for their grade, by virtue of

having paid by a method other than Direct Debit, should be contacted and offered a refund or the opportunity to convert the difference into a philanthropic gift to the Society.

5.1.3 Journal Subscription pricing recommendation (2020)

Council approved the recommendation of the Finance & Operations Committee to adopt the proposed journal subscription pricing for 2020.

5.1.4 Update on significant operational matters

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

6. President / Chief Executive Business

6.1 General business /Report back from CEO

The Chief Executive reported that the Society had received a letter from Public Health England expressing sincere gratitude for the work done by Jodi Lindsay, as the nominated representative of the Society, on the UK Standards for Microbiology Investigations. Council congratulated Jodi Lindsay.

6.2 Composition of Council and Committees

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Chair of ECM Forum noted that the International Representatives for each Committee should be listed as reporting to the International Ambassadors group.

6.3 Outcomes from Thursday session of Council

6.3.1 Finances

Council noted that the previous day the Chief Executive and staff had summarised the overall financial implications of several large projects, including the sale of two buildings, purchase of new premises, and the expenditure of excess reserves on investment in the future and activities associated with the 75th anniversary.

6.3.2 Investment in the future and 75th Anniversary

Council had previously agreed that it should spend up to £1,783,573 of its excess reserves on projects to invest in the future of the Society over a period of up to five years and on its 75th anniversary programme for 2020.

The investment included new staff posts, which had increased the headcount, but in a time limited way.

Projects funded through the investment included:

- Support for the implementation of the new database
- An internship scheme
- Better evaluation of the Society's strategic delivery
- The State of Microbiology project
- An upgrade to the Publishing platform
- An upgrade to the Editorial Manager system
- Redigitising the Society's journal content
- The development of a philanthropic fundraising campaign
- Technological improvements to the website and other IT systems
- Aspects of a major policy project *A Sustainable Future*, on the contribution of microbiology to realising the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- A campaign on Why Microbiology Matters for the 75th anniversary
- A major event at Annual Conference 2020 showcasing the Fleming Award and aiming to inspire early career microbiologists
- Other 75th anniversary activities

Most of these projects were reported to be in train and going well. Council's attention was drawn to those areas where projects were being adapted in the light of changed circumstances or new information.

Council was comfortable with the overall financial picture presented, and the Chief Executive undertook to circulate a revised one-page budget. Council agreed that members should be given a week to reply; should no comments be received the revised budget would be taken as accepted.

6.3.3 President's inaugural presentation

Council thanked the President for her inaugural presentation, which described her science and her hopes for the Society, as well as the challenges she foresaw in delivering these hopes.

6.4 Membership report

Council noted the papers circulated in advance. It further noted that two Council members, the Chair of Communications Committee and Tracy Palmer, would be hosting the first two events of the President's Roadshow in Leeds and Newcastle the following week.

6.4.1 Society Roadshows

John Morrissey asked how the UK and Ireland Roadshow was being publicised to non-members. The Chair of Communications Committee explained that the local member contact was responsible for promoting the Roadshow within their institutions; she gave the example of her work in Leeds, where the various institutional mailing lists had been contacted about the Roadshow. Tracy Palmer added that Twitter was proving helpful in promotional activities. The Chief Executive confirmed that there were more Roadshows scheduled for November, and these would be held in Plymouth and Reading. It was hoped a further event could be organised in Dublin in October.

The President explained that one of her goals for the Roadshow was to encourage members to network locally to support each other, and specifically, encouraging mid-career members to make connections with each other, for example exchanging learned experiences between lecturers and fellows. Another suggestion she had was that communication across generations to be improved, for example encouraging older members of the Society to be more engaged with social media.

The Chair of Communications Committee asked how to define mid-career: this was agreed to be members who are no longer eligible for the ECM Forum, but who would not consider themselves to be established in their career. The Chair of the Professional Development Committee reported that the mid-career working group had met and identified many opportunities and activities that the Society was already offering to these members.

6.4.2 Clinical and health-related microbiology

Following the meeting of clinical and health related members that had occurred in February, Deirdre Devine highlighted the value that clinical microbiologists placed on FIS. The Chair of the Policy Committee asked whether the CRM included a chance for people to indicate their interest in clinical and health-related microbiology so that the Society could track our impact on this section of the membership; the Chief Operations Officer responded that this is possible, but it would be worth revisiting the language used. David Blackburn asked about the size of the FIS conference; the Chief Executive replied that the estimate for 2019 was between 800 and 900 attendees. The Chair of Publishing Committee added that the SMI group consisted of approximately 20 microbiological communities with a clinical or health-related focus, some of which were also part of FIS.

6.4.3 Industry

The Chair of Communications Committee asked about the level of engagement of the named industrial members; the Chief Executive replied that they had been invited to participate and at least one very senior industrial member had agreed to take part in the Reading Roadshow event.

6.4.4 Membership figures

The Chief Executive reminded Council that in February 2019, the Society had 5,000 members and repeated the ambition that by the end of the 75th anniversary year in 2020, the membership figures would be the highest in the Society's history.

6.4.5 Database issues

The Chief Executive acknowledged that the issues associated with the CRM had been problematic and reported that the suppliers had been informed that should the situation remain unresolved by the next meeting of Council, the society would tender for new providers.

6.4.6 New members

Council approved the list of new members.

The Chair of the ECM Forum asked for an update on the earnings threshold for accessing lower membership rates for post-doctoral students. The Chief Executive reported that the threshold had been £35,000 and had been lowered to £30,000 on the recommendation of the Membership Working Group. He acknowledged that it was not clear from the paperwork why the Group had made the recommendation or the extent to which it had been drawn to Council's attention before it was approved.

Following Council's email consideration of the issue in February, this decision had been reversed and the figure reverted to £35,000. He observed that Council would be invited to discuss the matter in more detail at the 380 meeting of Council when it approved the paperwork for the 2019 AGM. It would be important to identify Council's underlying purpose in the having the concessionary rate. The Chief Operations Officer added that identifying individuals caught by the change would be very challenging, but that should a member self-identify as having over-paid this year the staff would handle the situation appropriately.

6.6 Council-appointed positions

The Chief Executive reminded Council that there were five positions to be filled at the next Council meeting and that the current meeting needed to consider whether there was a sufficiently strong and diverse list of candidates for the Appointments Panel to proceed.

On the basis of an oral report, Council agreed that the overall list of nominations was not sufficiently strong and diverse to allow the Panel to proceed.

It was agreed that nominations for all roles would be re-opened until after Annual Conference 2019. Members would be encouraged to self-nominate, and the resources available for encouraging engagement would be re-promoted (videos and shadowing scheme). Council agreed to encourage suitable colleagues to self-nominate.

The Chair of the Communications Committee asked whether the roles could be shared. The Chief Executive responded that under the Articles of Association, Chairs of Council Committees must be a member of Council, and that by law, the members of Council are automatically Directors of the Company and Trustees of the Charity. However, the Chair and Chair-Elect of Scientific Conferences Committee generally worked as a pair and a similar relationship could be encouraged for other Committees. John Morrissey expressed concerns about the level of commitment from potential Chairs-Elect who might wish to split a role. Council membership was a serious commitment.

The General Secretary reminded Council members that while they could not nominate colleagues, they could self-nominate for such roles and encourage colleagues to nominate themselves.

6.6.1 Elections timetable

The Chief Executive informed Council of the elections timetable for non-Council positions, which would allow Council to ratify the results at its next meeting.

6.7 Committee Terms of Reference

The Chief Executive drew Council's attention to the revised Terms of Reference provided in paper 379-05 and reminded Council that it set the terms, which should then be discussed with relevant Committees.

Several changes were requested by Council members, and it was agreed that all Terms or Reference would be reviewed and standardised, then recirculated to Council for approval.

6.8 Policy on supporting bids

Council approved the statement in the paper circulated in advance.

6.9 Critical Risk Register and Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee update

It was noted that the new Audit, Risk and Evaluation Committee would bring a revised risk register to a future meeting of Council.

7. Summary of progress

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Chief Executive summarised the Society's progress against the strategy document.

Tracy Palmer questioned two aspects of the publication of posters in *Access Microbiology* and asked how the Society established the authors had permission from their supervisors to publish the posters. The Director of Publishing confirmed that the publishing team had requested this information and committed to re-contacted authors if this was in doubt. Tracy Palmer also asked whether publication of a poster would count as prior publication. The Director of Publishing stated that the poster being available online should be no different from exhibiting a poster at a conference, and that any journal which accepted preprint publication should also accept articles expanding on work initially presented as posters. The staff would double check on all relevant matters to ensure that the potential problem that was being highlighted did not materialise.

8. Committee Business (for information only)

8.1 Policy Committee Minutes

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

8.2 Publishing Committee

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

8.3 Plan S Update

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

8.4 Scientific Conferences Committee Minutes

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

9. AOB

The Chair of Communications Committee drew Council's attention to the situation at St Andrews where a fire in February had led to significant water damage in the microbiology laboratories, resulting in many microbiologists being left without a laboratory for up to a year. The Chief Executive agreed to contact the head of department (a former Chair of the Society's Virology Division) community to offer the Society's support and to determine whether there was anything practical the Society could usefully do to support the community.

The General Secretary asked about the naming of the Society's new building. The mechanisms for naming the building would be considered and brought back to Council. David Blackbourn noted that this could be a revenue generating opportunity, pending Council approval of any proposed name.

The meeting was closed at 12.35pm.