

Minutes of the 374 meeting Council

Friday 8 December 2017 09:00-12:30

Venue: Charles Darwin House 2

Present:

Neil Gow (President, in the Chair)

Christopher Thomas (Treasurer)

Maggie Smith (General Secretary)

Charles Dorman (Chair of Publishing Committee)

Pat Goodwin (Chair of Policy Committee)

David Whitworth (Chair of Professional Development Committee)

David Bhella (Chair of Communications Committee)

Steve Oliver (Elected Member)

Mike Skinner (Elected Member)

Nicola Stonehouse (Elected Member)

Paul Kellam (Elected Member)

David Pearce (Elected Member)

George Salmond (Elected Member)

Helen Brown (Chair of Early Career Microbiologists' Forum)

In attendance:

Ian Roberts (Treasurer-Elect)

John Morrissey (Incoming Elected Member)

Tracy Palmer (Incoming Elected Member)

Jodi Lindsay (Chair-Elect Publishing Committee)

Mick Tuite (Chair-Elect Scientific Conferences Committee)

Tadhg Ó Cróinín (Chair-Elect Professional Development Committee)

Chloe James (in attendance as part of the Council shadowing scheme)

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)

Sarah Buckman (Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes)

Tasha Mellins-Cohen (Director of Publishing)

Joanne Morley (Chief Operations Officer)

Gillian Perry-Bland (Governance and Operations Executive)

Maria Fernandes (Professional Development Manager) – for item 2.6.

1.1 Apologies for absence & welcome to new attendees

The President formally welcomed Council to the 374 meeting and welcomed all incoming Members of Council, and Chloe James as an observer. Apologies were received from Karen Robinson.

1.2 Declaration of any new conflicts of interest

None were declared. The President reminded all members that they had a responsibility for their own conflicts of interest and should notify the Society of any new conflicts that may arise.

1.3 Minutes of the 373 Meeting of Council

Council noted that on page 1, Tadhg Ó Cróinín's name was spelled incorrectly.

It was also noted that the Treasurer-Elect was appointed as Council shadowing representative and not all three of the individuals listed.

Subject to these amendments, the minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the 373 meeting of Council.

1.4 Matters arising from the minutes and action points

The Chief Executive raised three items:

The launch of Microbiome report has been very successful, and the President and Chief Executive thanked all the team involved for their hard work.

The Society had been asked to give evidence to the House of Lords Science Committee's inquiry into the Government's industrial strategy, and it was noted that this was a positive sign that the Society was being noticed in the policy area. Paul Kellam would be representing the Society.

The Society had launched the Microbiome colouring book as part of the Microbiome Project. There had been 200 orders on the first day and if sales continued, then the project should be able to recover its direct costs.

2. President / Chief Executive Business

2.1 General business /Report back from CEO

The President reported that Steve Oliver had been awarded the Genetics Society of America Lifetime Achievement Award and Council congratulated Professor Oliver.

The President reported that he had visited Lion Television production company (who had worked with the BBC) and confirmed that they were potentially interested in a series on the biology of microorganisms.

2.2 Composition of Council and Committees

Council noted the paper circulated in advance.

The Chair of Policy Committee noted that Maria McPhillips on Policy Committee would now come to the end of her term in 2018, as she was on maternity leave for the last year of her original term.

2.3 Minutes of 2017 Annual General Meeting

The President reported that the Annual General Meeting had been very successful.

The minutes were approved for circulation to the membership in advance of the 2018 AGM.

2.4 New members

The President noted that the list of incoming members had grown and how pleasing it was to see the list still growing. Council accepted the list of incoming members.

The Chief Executive confirmed that this was the last time the members report would be presented in this format. From 2018 the report would be produced from the new CRM. This had been launched in November with the web interface launched at the start of December. By the end of the first day, five people had used it to become members of the Society.

The Chief Executive reminded Council to sign up early for Conference through the web interface; The Governance and Operations Executive would be sending each member of the Council a discount code for Conference in due course. In response to a question, the Chief Operations Officer confirmed that it would be possible to carry out group bookings online.

2.5 Council Appointed Positions

The Chief Executive reported that during 2018, Council would need to identify successors for the President and the Chair of Communications Committee, with the next President to take office on 1 January 2019 for three years and the next Chair of Communications to serve as Chair elect for one year from 1 January 2019, and then three years as Chair.

Job descriptions would be available and a request for expressions of interest would be sent out to members in the January newsletter to seek nominations. Individuals wishing to be considered for the roles or nominating others for the roles would need initially to submit a paragraph demonstrating their suitability. Following the item appearing in the January newsletter, there should be a long list ready for the March 2018 meeting, for the appointments panel and Council to evaluate.

The General Secretary along with an appointments panel of four members of Council, would consider all nominations¹. Nominations from Council members could be considered.

¹ Post meeting note: the following individuals accepted the General Secretary's invitation to serve on the panel: Tadhg Ó Cróinín, Steve Oliver and Nicola Stonehouse.

There was a lengthy discussion about ensuring a diverse field of candidates. After some deliberation, Council agreed that the membership should not be asked to identify individuals from particular groups, but should be enjoined to ensure that the full diversity of the Society was considered when making nominations.

2.6 Conference Grants

The Professional Development Manager discussed the paper (374-05) and highlighted that there had been 600 abstracts and 500 grant applications for 2017 Annual Conference; demand was outstripping supply. The Early Career Microbiologists' Forum had been consulted about whether to focus support on conference attendance, travel, or accommodation. Feedback had been split between attending the entire conference and travel and accommodation.

It was agreed that for the Annual Conference every member who is accepted to present work would be supported on a set rate basis, and the amount would be set by calculating the contribution to travel and accommodation and one day of registration.

This would be in two funding tiers:

1. Two day's conference registration fee for those resident in the area (within one hour's travelling distance via public transport)
2. A slightly higher contribution for those travelling from outside of the area where the meeting is being held.

Nicola Stonehouse raised a potential issue that is the new arrangements were introduced for 2018, there was little time to communicate them. It was therefore agreed to change the allowances for the 2018 conference, but tweaked to ensure that first-time attendees for this forthcoming Conference were not disadvantaged.

Individuals would also be reminded that what we are offering was purely a contribution, and they should wherever possible look for other sources of support.

It was also agreed that Council revisit this policy regularly as investing in early career attendees was critical to the future of the Society.

Paul Kellam queried how many first-time attendees go on to be life-long members, and if there was a chance that this could 'put off' individuals becoming lifelong supporters. The Professional Development Manager confirmed that our current data do not provide sufficient information but that ways were being investigated to gather this information to inform future decisions.

It was agreed to announce and communicate the change by the end of Monday 11 December; emphasising the point that it was important that attendees should also look to their institution for additional funding if required.

2.7 Nominations

2.7.2 Honorary Membership

Honorary Membership is awarded to members who have made a significant contribution to the Society or to microbiology as a discipline. There was one nomination received for John Schollar, who was nominated by the Chair of the Communications Committee, highlighting the many positive impacts Dr Schollar had had on the Society's education programmes. John Schollar had provided training courses for teachers and schools on behalf of the Society for well over a decade. The Chair of Policy Committee was also very supportive of the proposal. The General Secretary confirmed that she had also approached Laura Bowater for her opinion, as an expert in education and outreach. Prof Bowater had been supportive of the nomination but suggested that we need to think about how we determine who is eligible for Honorary membership, as the current wording on the website does not explain this well. The President requested that the General Secretary consider this in her review of prizes.

John Schollar's nomination was unanimously approved by Council, and the Chief Executive undertook to communicate with him.

2.7.2 Queen's honours

Council was asked to consider a request from the *Microbiology in Schools Advisory Committee (MISCAC)* who wished to put Dr John Grainger forward for a Queen's Honour. Council agreed to support the nomination.

It was also agreed that Council should be looking more systematically at nominations for similar honours in future and therefore future September meetings of Council will include a reminder to raise nominations for national honours.

2.8 Equality and Diversity report and Minutes

Nicola Stonehouse, in her capacity as Equality and Diversity representative for Council, reported back on the paper (374-07).

The Equality and Diversity Ambassadors Working Group recommended collecting data on other characteristics; ethnicity was suggested as the next characteristic to consider, and Council supported this.

The Chair of Publishing Committee questioned whether the socioeconomic status of schools involved in our outreach activities could be broadened.

The Chair of the ECM Executive Committee further noted that there was a need to promote microbiology to all people from all backgrounds and suggested putting life stories on our website to highlight members' backgrounds. The Chief Operations Officer confirmed this was being discussed by the Communications Committee and was being taken forward. It was agreed that while the Society could not realistically collect data on socio-economic background, it could encourage members who were applying for support to ensure that their activities aimed to widen participation among under represented communities. The Society had already discontinued its schools membership programme, because the overwhelming majority of schools that benefited had already been well resourced, often private, institutions.

Paul Kellam asked whether the Society should be more aggressive in targeting 50% female representation instead of 33%. It was agreed that this question would be considered by the Equality & Diversity Ambassadors Working Group, and that it was not necessary for the same target to be applied to all activities.

It was also agreed that we would publish the data on our website to increase transparency in line with the new strategy.

2.9 Officers' Away Day

Council noted the paper circulated in advance, which detailed a series of actions aimed at implementing the Society's new strategy. These had been discussed, agreed and recommended by various Committees, as specified in the paper, and did not require immediate changes to the budget approved by Council.

In particular, Council noted that:

Under Objective 1

- The Conference Programme was forging links with groups not previously closely aligned with the Society, including Protistology-UK and the British Yeast Group
- The Conference team was being expanded within the current budget, owing to improved financial administration of the programme
- All suitable opportunities available to the Society were being offered to members, rather than any being taken by staff
- The new CRM would allow a new members' only area of the website and Member Directory
- There would be a new post of Member Engagement Officer
- There would be a renewed focus on communications activities being member-led
- Each journal would have its own clear vision, informed by competitor analysis
- The Society would investigate ways to publish novel outputs and to publish traditional outputs in new ways, including through the proposal for *Access Microbiology* previously considered by Council

Under Objective 2

- The new Conference Rules were changing the nature of the Annual Conference to be more focused on opportunities for early and mid-career scientists
- The Society was trialling different formats of Focused Meetings
- The Policy team would develop Society positions in advance of external requests, and would focus more efforts on workshops, round table meetings and discussions involving members rather than necessarily seeking to produce labour-intensive reports
- The 'State of Microbiology' project, previously agreed by Council, would be an ambitious interactive tool rather than a static report

- A new mid-career working group, chaired by the incoming Chair of Professional Development Committee, would define new ways of supporting an important group of members
- More professional development content would be incorporated into the Annual Conference programme
- As previously discussed by Council, each journal would have its own Twitter feed
- The Society would review its publishing platforms and investigate options for working with legitimate scholarly collaboration networks, with an initial project between *Microbial Genomics* and *ScienceOpen*

Under Objective 3

- The staff structure had been reviewed and minor modifications made with significant benefits
- There would be continued investment in the physical working environment of the staff
- Individual members of staff would all be set objectives that mapped onto the Society's strategy
- As previously requested by Council, there would be a full and detailed assessment of the pros and cons of being situated in Charles Darwin House, conducted by an external independent consultant, and overseen by a steering group chaired by the incoming Treasurer
- Work was progressing on defining a meaningful fundraising programme, and there had been a success in the form of sponsorship from a member for a prize for the best Harry Smith Studentship report each year
- The Society would investigate the extent to which members-only resources could boost members or potentially be marketed at a cost to non-members
- The Society would case routinely printing its journals within two years, with provision for print-on-demand copies for the small number that might be required
- There would be a review of Author Processing Charges
- There would be detailed examination of the profitability of each established title, and the timescales to profitability of the newer ones

Across all objectives

- A renewed effort would be made under the newly-appointed Head of Communications to enhance the planning and effectiveness of the Society's overall communications strategy
- New levels of ambition would need to be underpinned by appropriate infrastructure

- Cost-effective ways would need to be investigated for delivering higher levels of ambition, and in the immediate term, additional support would need to be found to support the important work of the Early Career Microbiologists' Forum
- Given the range of activities undertaken by the Society, new and relatively straightforward ways of reporting and evaluating their success would need to be defined.

2.10 Staff Survey Report

The Chief Executive reported that this report was created and run by the Society's Staff Forum, which was initiated in 2014 when staff turnover was at 90%. He discussed the report comparing this year's report with previous years, and observing that overall staff were happier and more content in their roles.

The survey was carried out in July and results were marginally affected by a period of change associated with redundancies before that time.

The Chief Executive noted that one theme that came from the report was the knowledge staff have regarding their career progression, as the Society is a small organisation and cannot hope to provide internal promotion opportunities for many staff. However, it had been confirmed to staff that the Society would invest in training and development, and coach staff to the point where they were well suited to new roles either with the Society or with other organisations.

Paul Kellam raised a question regarding mentoring and the Chief Executive reported that through appraisals we were considering whether we can identify people outside of the Society who could mentor staff. It was also confirmed that one recommendation had been implemented from the staff survey, was to introduce a buddy system to provide support to new starters at the Society.

2.11 Governance Handbook

Council was asked to review the first draft of the governance handbook.

Council approved the wording about *Interests, loyalties and conflicts* in Section 5 of the paper for publication on the Society's website.

The Treasurer suggested that Council members' job descriptions should also be included.

Nicola Stonehouse commented that the final paragraph on page 12 was confusing and should be amended to read. *Ambassadors meet annually under the Chairship of a Council member, review data on participation across the range of activities. Following this meeting, they report to Council, typically in December.*

3 Finance and Operations

3.1 Finance and Operations key points

The Treasurer confirmed that despite a budgeted deficit, the Society was on course to break even during 2017. The main reasons for this were the advantageous exchange rate, increased membership income, and some roles being vacant for substantial periods of time. The Treasurer congratulated those involved.

All Society staff except the Chief Operations Officer left the room for the benchmarking salaries discussion and Council agreed the recommendation set out by the Treasurer in the paper from Finance and Operations Committee 157-03. It was also agreed that the Treasurer-Elect would review the salaries of other staff in the New Year and a paper would be taken to Finance and Operations Committee in March 2018.

The reserves policy had been discussed at length at the pre-council meeting on 7 December. Actions would be taken by Finance and Operation Committee to draft the update to the wording, for approval by Council in March.

The Chief Executive fully briefed Council regarding the current financial situation with Charles Darwin House Ltd, as detailed in the Finance and Operations Committee operational update paper, and confirmed that by the time Council next met in March, he hoped to have more information and be in a position to confirm that the situation was improved. The Treasurer and Treasurer-Elect both raised their concerns and agreed that the Chief Executive should investigate and escalate this issue as necessary. Council unanimously agreed that no further investment in anything new related to Charles Darwin House should be made until finances were all sorted out and transparent.

3.2 Review of Investment portfolio

The Treasurer confirmed that at Finance and Operations Committee the day before, it had been agreed that the Treasurer-Elect would take forward the review of the investment portfolio with ARC, further to the previous concerns with performance. The Treasurer-Elect had plans to meet with ARC in early 2018.

The President requested that Steve Oliver and George Salmond, form a group with the incoming Treasurer to progress this review.

The President gave his sincere thanks to the outgoing Treasurer for his service and support during his term as Treasurer over four years.

4. Early Career Microbiologists' Forum

4.1 ECM Forum Executive Committee key points and update

Helen Brown gave an update to inform Council that the Forum was continuing to grow, but that there would be some significant changes to the Executive Committee at the end of 2018 due to members coming to the end of their terms.

It was also reported that the Chair-Elect was organising a summer conference for undergraduates and key note speakers were in place already. The ECM Forum Executive Committee would next meet in January and would be able to update Council further at its next meeting in March 2018.

Steve Oliver suggested that as so many people were due to leave the Committee in one go we should consider extending some terms, as this would help with continuity. The Chair agreed to take this forward for discussion at its meeting in January.

4.2 ECM Forum Executive Committee minutes

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance

5. Publishing

5.1 Publishing Committee Key Points and update

The Director of Publishing discussed the papers and gave a brief summary of four areas of work in line with paper.

The Chief Executive highlighted the proposal to cease print from 2019. Council raised no concerns in ceasing print and it was confirmed that the Society would offer print on demand for those customers who still wanted a print copy.

The Director of Publishing also made note of new staff and role changes within the Society. Gaynor Redvers- Mutton had been appointed as the new Head of Sales and Business Development and Colin Green's role had been changed to Customer Services Representative, to reflect changes to his role.

The President gave his thanks to Charles Dorman for his work as Chair of Publishing Committee. Charles also thanked everyone on Council and his colleagues for their support.

5.2 Publishing Committee Minutes April 2017

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance

6. Communications

6.1 Communications Committee Key Points and update

The Chief Operations Officer reported that the new Head of Communications – Charlotte Mitchell - had been appointed and had met the Executive Officers at their away day. She would start formally with the Society on 15 January 2018. The Chair of Communications Committee confirmed he was looking forward to working with the new Head of Communications.

The Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes confirmed that Antibiotics Unearthed was now coming to an end. The PhD student would be funded for the remaining part of the academic year

2017/2018. The findings from this project were in the process of being written and the Society was looking at ways of making this legacy information accessible.

7. Professional Development

7.1 Professional Development key points and update

Council members were asked to encourage others to attend the pre-conference teaching in higher education day/symposium in April. The flyer had been distributed to Council as part of the papers.

The President gave his thanks to Dave Whitworth for his work over the last three years, as this was his last meeting as Chair of Professional Development Committee.

7.2 Professional Development Committee minutes

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

8. Scientific Conferences

8.1 Scientific Conferences Committee key points and update

The Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes confirmed that the deadline to submit abstracts was the 11 December and we had received over 200 submissions so far.

The President and all of Council gave thanks to Karen Robinson for her excellent and hard work during her term as Chair.

8.3 Scientific Conferences Committee minutes

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

9. Policy

9.1 Policy Committee key points and update

Council noted the paper circulated in advance

9.2 Policy Committee minutes

Council noted the minutes circulated in advance.

10. AOB

The Chief Executive informed Council that the Society had been approached to support the *Trends in Medical Mycology* conference to be held in Aberdeen in 2021; the President declared an interest. He confirmed that the Society would consider this, with Council's support but would need to make sure it did not clash with our Annual Conference in April. The Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes would take this forward.

The President noted that there were six colleagues who had come to the end of their terms on Council and gave thanks to all for their invaluable contributions with particular thanks given to the outgoing Treasurer.

The Chair of Policy Committee asked about the progress of the International Ambassadors Working Group. The Chief Executive confirmed that there would be a meeting of the group in 2018. This meeting would operate the same way as the Equality and Diversity Ambassadors Working Group and meets once per year.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.30pm

2. Summary of actions

No.	Action	Owner
374/01	All of Council to send through their conflicts of interests.	Council
374/02	Governance and Operations Executive/ to amend Council minutes 373.	GOE
374/03	Governance and Operations Executive to redact the Council minutes 373	GOE
374/04	Finance and Operations Committee to investigate portfolio investment options and report back to Council.	Incoming Treasurer
374/05	Governance and Operations Executive to amend Composition of Committees and Divisions in advance of March 2018 meeting.	GOE
374/06	Governance and Operations Executive to circulate discount codes for registration for Annual Conference to Council.	GOE
374/07	Job descriptions for incoming members of Council to be reviewed and circulated from January.	CEO and COO
374/08	Item to appear in the January newsletter regarding Council appointed Positions, with a list of nominees completed for the March 2018 meeting.	GOE and Communication team
374/09	General Secretary to evaluate nomination with the appointments panel	General Secretary

374/10	Update the terms and conditions of Conference grants by 11 December	Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes
374/11	Inform John Schollar of Honorary membership	CEO and Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes
374/12	Include reminder at future September Council meetings to raise nominations for national honours.	CEO and COO
374/13	Publish Equality and Diversity report information on website.	Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes
374/14	Equality and Diversity Ambassadors Group to consider increasing the target for gender representation.	Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes
374/15	Take forward all agreed actions from the Officers Away Day paper (see item 2.9)	CEO, COO, Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes and Director of Publishing
374/16	Make changes to Governance handbook and circulate	CEO and COO
374/17	CEO to communicate Research Excellence Framework nominees.	CEO
374/18	Issues related to Charles Darwin House to be further investigated and reported back to Council in March. No additional expenditure for CDH authorised by Council.	CEO and COO
374/19	Finance and Operations Committee to review the investment portfolio with ARC.	Incoming Treasurer
374/20	Chair of ECM Forum to discuss with the forum the possibility of extending tenure to 3 years, to report back to Council in March.	Chair ECM
374/21	Investigate proposal to support <i>Trends in Medical Mycology</i> meeting in 2021	Director of Strategy and Members' Programmes