

367 – Microbiology Society Meeting of Council

Friday 4 March 2016 09:00-12:30

Charles Darwin House

Present:

Neil Gow (President, in the Chair)
Christopher Thomas (Treasurer)
Evelyn Doyle (General Secretary)
Karen Robinson (Chair of Scientific Conferences Committee)
Charles Dorman (Chair of Publishing Committee)
Pat Goodwin (Chair of Policy Committee)
David Whitworth (Chair of Professional Development Committee)
Paul Hoskisson (Chair of Communications Committee)
Andrew Davison (Elected Member)
Steve Oliver (Elected Member)
Nicola Stonehouse (Elected Member)
Mike Skinner (Elected Member)
Steve Diggle (Elected Member)

In attendance:

Peter Cotgreave (Chief Executive)
Dariel Burdass (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Strategy and Communications)
Leighton Chipperfield (Director of Publishing and Income Diversification)
Sarah Buckman (Director of Scientific Programmes)
Joanne Morley (Head of Operations)
Rosie Waterton (Governance Manager)
Isabel Spence (Head of Public Affairs) items 13, 17 and 28

01. Apologies for absence & welcome to new attendees

The President opened the meeting and welcomed Council to his first Microbiology Society meeting of Council in the Chair. Apologies had been received and accepted from David Pearce and Council received confirmation from Dr Pearce that he had read and accepted all papers.

The President welcomed Steve Oliver, Nicola Stonehouse and Karen Robinson to their first official meeting of Council as incoming members.

02. Declaration of any new conflicts of interest

There were none. The President reminded Council members to check that the register was up to date and to inform the Governance Manager of any amendments.

03. Minutes of the 366 Meeting of Council

Council noted an unnecessary question mark on page 4 of the minutes. With this change, the minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the 366 meeting of Council.

04. Matters arising from the minutes and action points

The Chief Executive had circulated a paragraph for inclusion in the previously agreed Terms of Reference for all Committees. Council agreed the inclusion, which read:

“The Society is committed to ensuring that its activities reflect the make-up of the membership as a whole. In particular, as an organisation that operates in the UK and Ireland, it seeks wherever possible to ensure that its Committees include individuals from both territories.”

The concept of a biology hub at Charles Darwin House had been discussed on the previous day and would be covered under agenda item 8.

1.1 President / Chief Executive Business

05. General business /Report back from CEO

The Chief Executive reminded Council that the Annual General Meeting (AGM) papers would be brought to Council in July and any items for inclusion, outside the standard business to be transacted, would need to be noted before then.

He reminded Council of the Prize Lecture Dinner scheduled on the Tuesday evening at the Annual Conference and requested that anyone who had not already done so should confirm their attendance to the Governance Manager.

Council noted the new President had given an introductory presentation to Council the previous day, and had described his ambitions and understanding of the challenges for the Society during his term of office in the following terms:

Aspirations and ambitions:

1. Ensure that our mechanisms and structures engage with and harness the length and breadth of our membership, ensuring maximum value for them
2. Increase our membership (especially of the early career members)
3. Increase our political and societal influence and to contribute actively to current and future challenges
4. To maximise synergies with related microbiological societies
5. To achieve even greater impact via public engagement – for example by facilitating the production of a TV series about microbes that could be entitled *“The Invisible Planet”*

Challenges:

1. To ensure that our meetings remain attractive, nurturing, relevant and exciting
2. To increase collaborative activity without diluting our brand or identify
3. To achieve a cost- neutral operational budget
4. Ensuring that the diverse skills of a new MS workforce work optimally for us and for them
5. Ensuring the impact and value of our journal portfolio is sustained in an increasingly competitive market
6. Appropriate collaboration with other CDH tenants to maximise opportunities

06. Composition of Council and Committees

Council noted that Matthias Dittmar was missing from the Professional Development Committee list and the incorrect spelling of Delnari on the Eukaryotic Division list.

The Governance Manager undertook to make these revisions.

Council appointed positions

The President reminded Council of the process for Council appointed positions and that the call had gone out to the membership for nominations for the incoming General Secretary, Treasurer-elect, Chair-Elect of the Publishing Committee and Chair-Elect of the Professional Development Committee.

The General Secretary reported that the Society had received three nominations for the position of Chair-Elect of the Professional Development Committee but no nominations from the membership at large for the other appointed positions advertised. The nominations panel had met the previous day and had collated a list of names for the General Secretary and Treasurer positions. In recognition of the Society’s Equality and Diversity statement the General Secretary requested additional names from Council before the end of the meeting, with a view to bringing final

recommendations to the July meeting of Council. The President reminded Council to also consider the balance of not recycling the same faces but simultaneously ensuring individuals were known and trusted.

Once all nominations were received, the panel members were to rank the candidates and approach the approved top four individuals for each in order.

The panel recommended Tadhg O’Croinin for the position of Chair-elect of the Professional Development Committee. Council approved this recommendation. The General Secretary reported that candidates for Chair - elect of the Publishing Committee were still under consideration and a recommendation would be brought to the July meeting of Council.

07. Outcomes from Executive Officers awayday

The Chief Executive took Council through the key points covered in the awayday in February, which had focused on the Society’s partnerships and collaborations. He confirmed the outcomes of the previous day’s session with Council and undertook to implement the outcomes presented, which related to: (i) reviewing and regularising unclear and poorly documented relationships, (ii) focusing international efforts on strategic benefits of the Society’s membership of the Federation of European Microbiology Societies (FEMS) and the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB), (iii) reviewing the benefits of enhanced funder membership of the Royal Society of Biology and (iv) pursuing opportunities to work with other microbiology societies in the UK for the benefit of our members and charitable objects.

The Chief Executive summarised the outcomes of the discussion the previous afternoon regarding the objectives of the Biology Hub. Council agreed that the hub should create a sense that all biologists have a home that feels welcoming. They felt that networking would be key to the purpose of the hub with the following key objectives:

1. To strengthen biology and the interdisciplinary relationships within the community
2. To provide a two way dialogue; facilitating the ability for the community to listen to outside world and to be the outward facing voice of biology.

There would be a shared recognition that not all activities would be in the direct interests of all Societies and that for specific project, other microbiology societies may be brought in.

08. Publishing plans

The Chair of the Publishing Committee, Charles Dorman, gave Council an update on the successes, issues and future plans within the Publishing department in the following terms:

- The following extract is taken directly from the Chair of Publishing Committee’s notes.

Publishing is among the five strategic priorities of the Microbiology Society. It contributes to the Society's mission of "Advancing the understanding and impact of microbiology by connecting and empowering communities worldwide" and helps to underpin the Society's vision of "A world in which the science of microbiology provides maximum benefit to society."

Publishing accounts for 81% of the Society's income and for 31% of its costs. The health of the Publishing business and of the Society are inextricably linked.

Under Leighton Chipperfield's direction, the Publishing operation is conducted on a very business-like and professional basis with a strong emphasis on sales, marketing and new product development. These are areas that the Society had neglected in the past. (The 2011 Simon Inger Report.)

Staffing of the Publishing department has evolved in line with this new emphasis: most staff members are publishing professionals.

Focus is now shifting to a more explicit consideration of the quality of the science that we publish: where applicable, the impact factors of our journals are now in a band between 2.2 and 3.2 and

uniformly mid-range in their subject rankings; our authors and readers know this. This requires attention. (JGV, ~3.2; Micro ~ 2.5; JMM ~2.25; IJSEM 2.5).

Related to the previous point, we must recognise that the editorial boards of our journals are the gatekeepers of the science that we publish and their decisions have an enormous influence on the quality and reputation of our 'product'.

It is unclear how much scope exists for some of our journals to become more 'exclusive' simply by raising the rejection rate. (2015 values: JMM 78%, Microbiol 62%, JGV 58%, JMMCR 35%, MGen 32% but with most papers currently being solicited by the Ed Board, IJSEM 16% - but this is a journal of record).

Ideally, we should attract better papers and maintain a high rate of rejection; attracting papers of poor quality from 'emerging markets', or anywhere else is not going to work in our favour. Every submission involves work - the further the paper gets in the process the more work is involved.

Any change in policy will take two years to reveal itself at the level of an improvement in impact factor.

Next steps:

We are introducing as much uniformity as possible in the application of best editorial practice across the entire stable of our journals.

Some examples: IJSEM has been an outlier among our journals for many years; it has now agreed to adopt practices that are standard at other boards (e.g. Council approval of new Editors in Chief, board members serve for defined periods rather than for life, engagement with the other journals etc).

The value of a training procedure for new board members has been recognised by the boards and we would like to see this adopted uniformly.

We will bring the boards together for collective consideration of strategic issues, especially to consider ways to improve the quality of the science in our journals and the impact of our papers. The first editorial board plenary meeting will take place on March 21st at the Liverpool conference.

We have assigned to each journal a member of staff in the office to act as its point of contact. This streamlines communication and addresses a criticism made by some boards that they don't always know who to contact at HQ.

Recently, we have hired people with a science background to fill vacancies among the office staff.

This is helping to overcome the 'two cultures' problem that previously existed in Publishing where the majority of the office personnel interacting with the editorial boards were arts-humanities graduates. Some office staff members were of the opinion that communication with the scientists was not always friction-free.

We have hired a Publisher, with a scientific background, to drive the Publishing agenda, including the improvement in citation rates of the papers we publish, the performance of our editorial boards and the commercial aspects of our publishing business. (Nicola Wise – a Chemistry MPhil - starts in April 2016).

- Extract end.

It was suggested that further streamlining the process and therefore timescales from submission to publication would improve the author experience and increase the return rate and ensure our journals are considered relevant. Leighton Chipperfield reported that time scales were reducing and efficiency was dramatically improving and whilst this was important, it was not considered to be the main concern of submitting authors.

Steve Diggle noted the increasing trend in preprint services and suggested that the Society could utilise this by finding high quality papers online and solicit the authors to submit to the Society's Journals.

Nicola Stonehouse suggested pulling together themed papers into online only special issues. Publishing exciting reviews was also recognised as a way of bolstering impact factor which is widely considered important to the community.

Council discussed harnessing the talent which the Society attracts to its meetings as speakers and Prize Lecture winners to solicit top distinguished research or review papers into the Journals by, for example, enclosing a letter in their welcome pack. A financial incentive (or other) could be considered to secure top authors.

Council discussed what makes some papers high impact and some not and considered picking out papers that will be highly cited. Council agreed that any further comments or suggestions should be sent to Charles Dorman subsequent to the meeting.

The President encouraged Council members to attend the plenary Editorial Board session at the Annual Conference to demonstrate to the Editorial boards that Council is fully supportive of the Publishing strategy and of Professor Dorman's leadership and the changes he was implementing.

09. Web notices to members

Council noted the requirements detailed in the paper and approved the recommended course of action.

10. New Members List

Council received the list of new members and acknowledged that a test member record had accidentally been included.

Sarah Buckman, Director of Scientific Programmes, noted that the list was longer than usual due to a peak in members joining for reductions in delegate rates at the Annual Conference, and to be eligible to apply for grants. She confirmed that in due course the move to a new database would allow for institution requirement in member records.

11. Education and Outreach Award

Neil Gow declared an interest for this item due to his involvement in the Royal Society's Summer Science Exhibition, for which his team would be applying for the Award.

Daniel Burdass introduced the paper and explained to Council that the proposal would formalise a process that had been historically undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis and align it with other transparent, decision making processes of the Society. She noted examples of fantastic work the Society has been able to support using this fund for collaborative purposes such as previous stands at the Royal Society and a joint funded venture (with SfAM) entitled Microbes on the Menu.

Council requested the wording of the award be amended to read "up to £5000" to enable those with smaller projects, or shared funding already approved, to apply for a lesser amount. It was noted that the award would have associations of prestige and recognition over a grant and thus outcomes would be reported and presented at meetings as with the Prize Lectures.

With the amendment to the wording, Council agreed the award and process timescales.

Council heard the summary of the Royal Society exhibition proposal likely submitted by Neil Gow's team. The objectives of the activity aligned with many of the Society's strategic priorities and was endorsed by the Communications Committee. Council also endorsed the proposal and agreed that it would be considered for funding once the award process was in place.

Equality and Diversity

Isabel Spence, the Head of Public Affairs, introduced the paper and informed Council of the recommendation by the Equality and Diversity Ambassadors to widen the data categories the Society collects. She noted the valuable contribution of Charles Dorman, whose comments were included as an appendix to the paper.

There was a concern that collating data on non-overt protected categories risked inadvertently creating or enabling unintentional discrimination. Although the data would be anonymous, Council was conscious to consider the perception by members of being asked for information that was not considered appropriate to their science and the danger that this could be seen as intrusion. The question of what data the Society could legitimately compare these data to in order to appropriately benchmark within the industry was raised. The Society currently used Athena Swan data to measure itself against the academic biological sciences institutes regarding gender. Council considered that the Society could and should behave in a consciously inclusive manner without the need to collect data to prove its relevance, for example, the Society can ensure the meeting programme is mindful of all religious holidays without needing to understand the religious demographic of all its members. Council requested that in the light of its discussions, a more detailed project proposal be submitted, outlining what data would be collected and what specific purposes they would be used for.

14. Honorary membership

(i) Nomination of Nigel Brown

Council had received the nomination of former President Nigel Brown and unanimously agreed he be elected as an Honorary Member.

(ii) Process for the future

The General Secretary reminded Council of some of the previously agreed criteria for the nominations of Honorary members and proposed that, to align it with other Society nomination processes and to ensure the prestige of the honour was maintained, checks and balances be incorporated.

Council agreed the process documented in the accompanying paper.

15. Critical Risk Register

The Chief Executive introduced the paper and reminded Council of the changing Charity Commission Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) requirements that required the Annual Report to include more specific examples of the major risks faced by the Charity and how Council mitigates them.

The Chief Executive undertook to review the Critical Risk register and to asterix those that the Senior Management Team considered to be of overall importance to the reporting of the charity. This would be circulated to Council.

Council also requested that the register highlight any additions or changes made to content or level of risk from the previous versions.

16. Council meeting dates 2017 and 2018

One of the dates of the Finance and Operations committee was recorded as 2018 instead of 2017. With that amendment, Council acknowledged the dates of the Council Meeting dates for the next two years.

17. Policy Activities Review

Isabel Spence presented the recent activities and impacts of the Policy Committee and Department of the Society to Council.

Council formally acknowledged its gratitude to both the Committee and the staff for such high levels of achievement in this strategic area in relation to the finite levels of resource.

The Chair of Scientific Programmes Committee requested that Division Chairs be consulted on future briefing topics to be reflective of topic covered at the Annual conference. It was confirmed that as part of the strategy implementation plan, the Society now had measures to ensure better consolidation of themes cross all activities including Policy, *Microbiology Today*, the Scientific Meetings programme and Journals.

The Chief Executive reminded Council that Divisions were to be invited to the Thursday session of the July Council meeting. The Chair of the Policy Committee also commented on the impressive representation of Early Career Microbiologists in its activities and noted further opportunities to engage this group.

1.2 Finance and Operations

18. Finance and Operations Committee Key points

These were noted.

19. Report from Finance and Operations Committee

The Treasurer reported to Council that the Finance and Operations Committee had received a presentation from Katrina Norris of Waverton the previous morning and as previously discussed, the Committee would bring a draft statement on investment in fossil fuels to the next meeting of Council.

He reported on the ongoing issues with ending the contract with the Society IT service provider Advanced and that the lawyers were currently drafting relevant documentation.

Council received the management accounts for the year end 2015 and the Treasurer reported that the Society audit was to be undertaken within the next few weeks. Once completed, the Society would be in a position to tender for a new auditing firm.

The Treasurer presented the accounts and noted that the figures reflected a far more positive landscape than the budgeted proposals. He commented that the deficit figure presented did not include depreciation of the fabric of the building or the investment manager costs, which were not known in full when the report was prepared; the actual figure for the deficit that would be reported in the Annual Report and Accounts was estimated to be £328,000 about half what had been budgeted.

The Treasurer reminded Council that the Society annually reviews a staff pay award to take into account inflation in the cost of living. The Finance and Operations Committee had considered the average pay rise percentage across the industry against the financial position of the Charity and recommended a 2% increase to staff annual salary.

Council approved the recommendation and requested that in informing the staff of the decision, the Chief Executive should draw attention to Council's appreciation for the quality of work consistently produced.

In view of the changes to the Charity SORP, the Society's renewed focus on evaluation, and the need for adequate independent scrutiny, Council considered implementing a separate audit committee with an independent Chair, as was common in other, similar organisations. This would ensure thorough scrutiny and transparency in the financial management of the Society. Council additionally suggested the exploration of appointing external experts to feedback to the membership at the AGM. The Chief Executive undertook to bring forward firm proposals to the next meeting.

Income Diversification:

The Director of Publishing and Income Diversification confirmed the main updates were available in the paper submitted to the Committee and to Council.

Donations and legacies:

The Director of Publishing and Income Diversification summarised the points in the paper and the recommendation that the Society proceed with a feasibility study for a donations and legacies programme. The Finance and Operations Committee recommended (i) implementing simple, low cost measures such as including information about donations and legacies on the website and (ii) further investigation of a fuller fundraising campaign. Council approved these recommendations.

1.3 Policy

20. Policy Committee Minutes

Council noted the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy Committee.

1.4 Publishing

21. Publishing Committee key points and update

The Director of Publishing and Income Diversification reported that since the paper had been distributed there had been a change in circumstances regarding the Society's discussions with

International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) to publish open access summaries of the next ICTV Report within the pages of the Journal of General Virology. Another journal was now interested in a similar agreement and so negotiations were still underway.

1.5 Scientific Conferences

22. Scientific Conferences Minutes

Council noted the Minutes of the Meeting of the Scientific Conferences Committee.

23. Scientific Conferences key points and update

The Chair of the Scientific Conferences Committee updated Council on the progress on the Annual Conference, which was just three weeks away. The Society was continuing its high standard of relevant sessions with the Hot Topic lecture on the recent Zika virus outbreak. The Director of Scientific Programmes also confirmed that the programme booklet was now finalised and would go to print in the coming few days. The abstract book would be in digital form but was all mobile and tablet optimised to remain consistent and user friendly across all media. She confirmed that there were currently 873 online registrations and 45 offline registrations which was already over the total numbers for the previous year.

She noted that the Society's move to a different meeting structure as a result of the Conferences Review now allowed for more variety of meetings and demonstrated representation of the diversity of the membership but not necessarily all at the Annual Conference.

She encouraged Council to engage with the exhibitors at Conference to nurture these relationships, particularly in the light of significant increases in income from the exhibition, which would only be sustainable if the exhibitors felt their attendance was worth it.

1.6 Professional Development

24. Professional Development Committee key points and update

The Director of Scientific Programmes updated Council on the progress of the recently launched Early Career Microbiologists' (ECM) Forum, which already had 56 members already signed up. She explained that there would be a sign-up sheet at the Annual Conference registration stand to engage with relevant individuals upon arrival and urged Council to encourage all eligible peers and colleagues during interactions at conference. The Chair of the Professional Development Committee reminded Committee Chairs that from September the newly elected ECM Executive Committee representatives would join their Committees and urged Council to encourage any strong potential candidates they knew to nominate themselves to the ECM Executive Committee.

25. Champion Scheme update

Council noted the paper. The Director of Scientific Programmes updated Council around some planned changes to the scheme which were designed to identify the more influential members within the community to seek their support and to give the Champions more ownership around the events they organise. She also updated Council on plans to enhance Champions Day to make it more interactive and offer development opportunities such as involving Council and potentially honorary members for networking purposes.

Council requested to receive names and contact details of Champions in their areas so they could approach and support as necessary.

1.7 Communications

26. Communications Committee key points and update

The Director of Strategy and Communications reported to Council on the operational changes of the staff department, following decisions taken by Council in 2015. The Marketing team was now centralised to work across Society activities rather than concentrating solely on the Publishing arm. Initially they were working closely with conferences and the membership team.

She highlighted the February statistics which demonstrated over 20,000 hits on the corporate website; the highest in any one month to date. The Society had also reached 10,000 twitter followers and 100,000 visitors to Microbiology Online (the education website) in one month.

27. Communications Committee Minutes

Council noted the Minutes of the Meeting of the Communications Committee.

28. Small World Initiative update

The Director of Strategy and Communications updated Council on the trademark agreement submitted by the [Institute for Life Sciences Collaboration](#) (ILSC) for the Small World Initiative Inc. and outlined the positives and negatives to signing the agreement, which were detailed in the paper. The Chair of the Communications Committee added that the (ILSC) could not own citizen science as a type of activity or as a term which meant that if Council decided not to sign the agreement, all planned events and activities could continue, but the Society would need to rename the project. Council agreed not to sign the agreement.

The Director of Strategy and Communications outlined the options for a new name for the project and explained that research had indicated that the term “antimicrobial” was not recognised by the public as readily as “antibiotic”. She reported to Council that brief research with non-science communities had preferred the option of “Antibiotics Unearthed” which was received as the most popular choice of Council.

AOB

Steve Oliver drew Council’s attention to news reports that agar supplies were diminishing, with consequent cost implications and the prospect of shortages of a key component of laboratory supplies. Council agreed that this was an important matter, and that the Society should (a) highlight the issue through a video feature on the website and (b) seek to establish whether members had identified any suitable alternatives to agar, for example by including a call for information in *Microbiology Today*.

The Chief Executive invited Council members to inform the Governance Manager of their preferred format for papers now the functionality of the intranet, Marjory, had been realised.

The meeting was declared closed at 12:40.

Actions:

Agenda item	Action	Owner	Deadline
2	Check that the conflicts of interest register and notify Governance Manager of any necessary updates	All RW	July Council
5	Redactions of the minutes of the 366 minutes	RW	ASAP
7	Revisions to Composition of Council document	RW	July Council
7	Nominations panel to approach candidates for GS and TE roles Recommendation for Publishing C-E	ED	July Council
12	Education and Outreach Award process implementation	DB	ASAP
13	Equality and Diversity paper	IS	July Council
14	NB Honorary membership	NG, RW	ASAP
15	Asterix risks considered to be of overall importance to the reporting of the charity and circulated the CRR to Council.	PC. RW	ASAP
19	Draft statement on investment in fossil fuels	Treasurer	July Council
19	Inform staff of annual pay award and pass on Council’s appreciation for the quality of work consistently produced.	PC	ASAP
19	Audit Committee proposal	PC	July Council

19	Proceed with a feasibility study for a donations and legacies programme.	LC
25	Circulate relevant Champions contact details to Council members	SB
AOB	Comms plan re: agar supplies	DB
