



356 - SGM Council Meeting - Minutes

Minutes of the 356th meeting of Council held on Friday 5 July 2013 09:00-12:30

Venue: Marlborough House, Spencers Wood, Reading, RG7 1AG

Present

Nigel Brown
Andrew Davison
Colin Harwood
David Blackburn
Evelyn Doyle
Ian Henderson
John Sinclair
Karen Robinson
Maggie Smith
Paul Hoskisson
Sara Burton

In attendance

Mark Harris (Chair-elect SSC)
Chris Thomas (Treasurer-elect)
Simon Festing (Chief Executive)
Darial Burdass (Head of Communications – Items 23-26)
Leighton Chipperfield (Head of Publishing – Items 27-31)

01. Apologies for Absence & welcome to new attendees
Apologies were received from Charles Penn.

02. Minutes of the 355th Meeting of Council
The minutes of the meeting were accepted as a true record of the meeting (after attendance of Mark Harris included).

03. Matters arising from the minutes and action points
There were none.

04. Redactions - none proposed
Council agreed that there should be no redactions for the minutes of the 355th Council meeting.

President/Secretary/Chief Executive Business

05. General business / Marlborough House items

The Chief Executive explained that there were three main areas of concern, namely:

- (i) day-to-day business continuity, including maintaining the quality of outputs (such as journals and conferences),
- (ii) reviewing different areas of work in a planned, prioritised and orderly way, and
- (iii) establishing a smooth relocation to London.

As far as item (i) above was concerned, the situation appears to be stable with regard to business continuity. No concerns had arisen with respect to journals or conferences.

The President and General Secretary had no business in addition to that appearing elsewhere on the Agenda.

06. Appointments and elections to Council and Committees

Council noted the election of two new Council members, Pat Goodwin and David Pearce.

Council noted the appointment of Colin Harwood as Chair of Publishing Committee until September 2014, as agreed in advance by email.

Council approved elections for one or two members of the Publishing Committee, as well as election or ad hoc appointment to one remaining post on the Professional Development Committee.

Council agreed that the President would write by email to elected members of Council asking which was their preferred committee to sit on as Council representative. Council agreed that there would continue to be a representative on SCC.

The President will email the newly appointed Council members, as well as the unsuccessful candidates, informing them of their appointment. New committee members are to be informed by the Chairs of the respective committees.

07. CDH, 107 Gray's Inn Road, and relocation plans

The Chief Executive explained that the timetable for full relocation into Charles Darwin House (CDH) at 12 Roger Street was dependent on the refurbishment programme for 107 Gray's Inn Road (107 GIR). Important decisions still need to be made about that refurbishment, including the merits (and cost-effectiveness) of adding a fifth floor to 107 GIR.

One way or another, SGM will complete the move to London by the beginning of 2014. But there is a likelihood that it would be into a temporary location, most likely on the first floor of 12 RS, within CDH for a period of some months before we can access our final destination.

The current plan is for all existing tenants (rather than owners) to move out of CDH and into 107 GIR. This is to allow better use of floor space in CDH through reconfiguration.

It was noted formally that Council met in March at the spring conference to discuss plans to buy into CDH and contribute to the purchase of 107 GIR, and subsequently met in April to formally endorse both of those decisions, subject to satisfactory due diligence.

08. Timetable / planning of reviews

Council noted the plan of reviews, some of which are already on-going. The chart is an internal document, but provided to Council for information. The reviews are often logically split into stages, usually coinciding with internal milestones, such as Council meetings or the AGM.

Members of Council will to be involved in all of the reviews, and members would be allocated onto the Working Groups in due course.

09. Strategy Review Working Group –membership

The current SGM Strategic Plan was finalised in January 2011, and subsequently formally adopted by Council in April 2011. It was agreed at the time that there would be a light-touch review after two years. This would kick off with a meeting in October.

Members of the working group would be: Paul Hoskinson, Chris Thomas and Karen Robinson.

10. Minutes of internal Strategy Group meeting

The CEO explained that the purpose of the internal Strategy Group is to “join the dots” between different departments, so that there is sufficient collaboration on any area of work which is inter-departmental.

11. AGM papers for approval

Council approved the papers. The CEO explained that it would not be necessary to ask for proposers and seconders from the AGM audience for any business which has gone through Council already. Council agreed that the Composition of Council and Committees document should be included in the AGM papers.

12. FYI: New members of the Society

Noted.

Finance and administration

13. Approval of finalised annual accounts for 2012

The annual accounts were approved and five copies were signed by David Blackbourn and Paul Hosskinson on behalf of Council. The purchase of CDH had been noted in the 2012 accounts since it constituted a major financial transaction that had taken place after the financial year-end.

Council approved the letter of representation, signed by the Treasurer on behalf of Council, which is provided to the auditors.

14. Quarterly accounts for 2013, monthly figures and budget re-forecast

Cash flow was healthy for the time of the year. The bank balances, at £1.4m and \$286k, were slightly more than at the same time in 2012, in part due to a balance of £300k from cash realised from the sale of investments for the purchase of SGM’s share of 107 Grays Inn Road. This balance will eventually be used as our share of the refurbishment costs of 107 Gray’s Inn Road and other operating costs.

Income from the journals on average was up to around 99% of the previous year, with the attrition rate of subscriptions outweighed to a large extent by the increase in prices. The income from Microbiology was lower compared to the other journals. However, this reflected the strategic decision, made after the 2013 budget was finalised, to abolish excess page charges. The overall number of subscriptions was down 5% on the same time last year, with a quicker than predicted move to online only from print plus online. The sales and marketing department is seeking to address these issues in what is an increasingly competitive market.

The membership numbers are currently down 2.4% and the schools membership by 21%. These issues are being addressed by the Membership Review Committee.

With respect to the budget re-forecast, Council was reminded that the budget had originally been drawn up and then agreed around the middle of 2012, and that there had been many changes since then. These are reflected in the re-forecast, showing a potential deficit of £800,000. Council was reminded that these figures are normally conservative, and the deficit is likely to come in somewhat lower.

The Chief Executive explained that some of the savings associated with organisational change (restructuring and relocation) would start to appear during 2014, although some of the costs would also fall into that year. There is a good prospect of moving towards a balanced budget for 2014.

15. Report from Finance Committee

Investment Proposal from BlackRock: Chris Thomas, as the incoming Treasurer, and Suzanne Beaumont plan meet up with the new investment manager, Doug Shaw, at BlackRock's London offices before the September Finance Committee. They would bring recommendations for any further changes to investment policy back to Finance Committee and Council.

2013 management accounts full year reforecast: The reforecast for 2013 shows a deficit of £804k compared to the original budgeted £662k. The budget was set before the publishing department reorganisation, and as a consequence there is a significant saving on publishing department costs against a budget of £287k, but this is balanced out in part by a £133k reduction in expected income. Previously, the only organisational change costs budgeted were for the publishing team. The reforecast now includes costs for all staff including additional relocation costs which were agreed separately by the CEO with Council as part of the office move discussions.

Proposed sale of Marlborough House: Council supported the decision from Finance Committee to sell the current headquarters without seeking planning permission for a change of use. The estimated additional £50k value that could potentially be gained from planning permission would be negated by the possible delays, costs and additional resource it may involve. The funds from the sale would be re-invested into the portfolio to replace some of the funds used to purchase our share of CDH and 107 GIR. Three agents had been contacted and had suggested a selling price of between £750k and £1m. Staff would determine which agent and marketing methods to use, and would subsequently consult Finance Committee again over the proposed sale price itself.

Membership rates 2014: the proposed rates were agreed by Council.

SGM support for geomicrobiology: Council approved providing £2k per annum support for 3 years to a new network being established with the assistance of the Mineralogical Society for scientists interested in the roles of microorganisms on the geosphere and applying microbiological techniques to problems of contaminated land and water. The Membership Working Group had identified environmental microbiologists and industrial microbiologists as two of the disciplinary groups where we have lost members in recent years.

Proposal of SGM support for UK/Ireland iGEM teams Council approved providing £6k per annum support over 3 years for UK and Ireland teams to enter the International Genetic Engineered Machines (iGEM) competition in 2014 and two subsequent years. It had been suggested that this could come from the Harry Smith vacation studentship grants as previously but it was agreed there would be an additional budget for this. Sara Burton would work with BBSRC and other involved societies to agree a mechanism for awarding the funding and appropriate SGM branding.

Council noted that Finance Committee had agreed that Susan Wong should be on the bank signatory list as a member of the Senior Management Team.

Scientific Conferences

16. Support for European Society of Virology meeting

Council agreed to fund the attendees at the European Congress of Virology (Lyon, 11-14 September 2013), as per the proposal, for travel and accommodation in line with guidelines for SGM conferences, (which would include £600 for USA + 3 nights reasonable accommodation - the figure of £600 came from the guidelines for speaker allocations in the conference review document). In addition SGM will provide up to £2000 to ensure the appropriate badging of speaker's lectures and publicity for the SGM at the meeting.

Council asked that an SGM slide be shown before each badged lecture and queried whether the Prize Lecture was double-funded (SGM needs to find out if any of the prize lecture speakers would otherwise be funded if SGM did not contribute). Council noted that SGM would have a “presence” at the meeting, including from the Publishing and Communications departments. Council also noted that some of the proposed speakers were involved in ESV in terms of sitting on their advisory board, and that SGM pays an annual subscription to ESV which is dependent on the number of foreign virologists in our membership.

Council noted that there was not a policy in place to deal with these ad hoc requests for significant sums of money. Until such a policy in place, they would have to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. There would need to be clarity about where the funding was going (to the organisation or to the individuals). In this case we are being asked to fund speakers, rather than simply travel or accommodation for members, as well as publicity costs.

17. FYI: Minutes of SCC of 24/03/2013
Noted.

Professional Development

18. Review of grants

Council approved the proposals to rationalise the grants regime, subject to some modifications. Greater clarity would be sought for each grant as to whether it was available for UK/Ireland, EU or international. The new grants are to come into place for 2014.

19. Review of membership categories

Council approved the proposed revision of the membership categories. Council took the view that postgraduate representation (i.e. the number of posts available on each committee for postgraduate members) should in some way be capped or restricted. This would be considered as part of our work on early career researchers, including postgraduates.

20. Prize Medal recipient for 2015

Sir David Baulcombe was awarded the 2015 SGM Prize Medal by vote. [Post-Council note – David has accepted.]

Council agreed that as part of the review of prizes, the mechanism for attracting good nominations for the prize medal lecture would be considered. The question arose of whether a more proactive and collaborative mechanism could be determined. Council agreed that there should be fresh nominations each year, rather than rolling forward candidates in a “pool”.

21. Working Group on prizes review - set up

Membership was agreed as: Evelyn Doyle (Chair), Andrew Davison, Maggie Smith, David Blackburn, Sara Burton and Mark Harris.

22. FYI: Minutes of PDC of 26/03/2013
Noted.

Communications

23. Rebranding – design selection

Council agreed that SGM should pursue further one of the designs – a curved “M” shape, which was preferred in the blue colour/format, as the future SGM logo.

24. *FYI: Minutes of CC of 24/03/2013*
Noted.

Policy

25. Update

Council noted that submissions had been made to BIS on key priorities for the research base, and to the House of Lords on the scientific infrastructure required for microbiology, and to the House of Commons on research requirements in antimicrobial discovery.

Colin Harwood is to attend a meeting on immigration, relating to visa requirements etc. He would welcome input from universities apart from Newcastle. William Burns will write a paper for Council.

26. *FYI: Minutes of Policy Committee of 26/03/2013*
Noted.

Publishing

27. Publishing Department update

Council noted that the new Publishing Department has now been largely established at the CDH location, with new staff becoming familiar with their roles. Now the focus is on taking forward aspects of the publishing strategy, in particular increasing marketing efforts, new products, and improving open access practices.

28. Form and function of Publications Committee

Council approved the proposals, subject to there being a mechanism for representation of the Editors in Chief on the business sub-committee.

29. Proposal for new Journal – JMM Case Reports

Council approved the proposal.

30. Approval for Open Access discounts - for SGM members, Institutional subscribers, editorial board members and Editors in Chief.

Council approved the proposals.

31. *FYI: Minutes of Publications Committee of 26/03/2013*
Noted.

Other

32. *FYI: Next Meeting of Council*

13 September at 09:00 hours. All Council meetings for 2013 will be at Marlborough House.

AOB

Harry Smith summer vacation studentships: Council noted the low funding rate of these grants to the virology community. It turns out that this was an unusual outcome for this year, since the processes which had been followed were the same as in previous years. Council agreed that better guidelines could be developed on the application and scoring for these grants. A benchmarking process could also help. This will be pursued in the Professional Development Committee.

Council thanked David Blackburn for his excellent contribution to SGM as General Secretary for the previous 4 years.

Action Points (not appearing elsewhere)

1. Hold elections for one or two members of the Publishing Committee. ✘ This can proceed now that summer is over. The Professional Development Committee have decided to co-opt a member.
2. Communicate with the European Society of Virology about funding for the European Congress of Virology. ✓ Done.
3. Professional Development Committee to finalise grants regime. ✓ Done.
4. William Burns to write a paper for Council. ✘ This will be after the meeting, which is scheduled for November.
5. Professional Development Committee to investigate ways to improve the scoring of the Harry Smith summer vacation studentships, with particular reference to virology submissions. ✓ Done.