

352nd SGM Council Meeting - Minutes

Minutes of the 352nd meeting of Council, held on 6 July, 2012 at 9.00 am at Marlborough House, Spencers Wood, Reading RG7 1AG.

Present

Hilary Lappin-Scott, (in the Chair)
Colin Harwood
David Blackburn
Evelyn Doyle
John Sinclair
Nigel Brown
Paul Hoskisson
Jo Verran

In attendance

Charles Dorman (Treasurer Elect)
Simon Festing (Chief Executive)
Suzanne Beaumont (for Finance & Administration)
Jane Westwell (for Professional Development & Scientific Conferences)
Dariel Burdass (for Policy & Communications)

1. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received from Gary Rowley, Ian Henderson, Karen Robinson and Mark Harris

2. Minutes of the 351st Meeting of Council

The minutes of the meetings were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes not on the Agenda

There were none.

President/Secretary/Chief Executive Business

4. Report back from Governance Working Party

- Council approved the recommendations of the Governance Working Group as discussed at the meeting the previous day. Specifically, the following was agreed:
- The Education and Public Affairs Committee and the Education Division are to be dissolved with immediate effect. Two new committees are constituted reflecting two of the strategic priorities in the SGM strategic plan – namely Professional Development and Communications/Raising awareness (precise committee names subject to further clarification).
- Chairs of all formal Council committees will sit on Council. In the case of Professional Development, Communications/Raising awareness, Publications and Policy, the Chairs will serve for three years, except in the case of the chair of the Finance Committee as the Treasurer's term of office is four years.

- Interim arrangements should include adjusting the terms of Chairs such that there is a rotation of the years that they step down. Further work and discussion is likely to be necessary to achieve this.
- Each of these new committees, as well as the Policy Committee will have 4 elected members. In addition, the committees can co-opt up to two ad hoc members.
- David Blackburn will contact Sara Burton to let her know about her appointment as the Chair of the Professional Development Committee, but that a deputy has not yet been appointed.
- Council agreed to seek fresh input and leadership for the new deputy positions (Policy and Professional Development) in due course. Council would establish that a specific skills set is required for these positions.
- Jo Verran will work with Sara Burton to make suggestions and then invite members of the Education Division to populate the two new committees.
- Marlborough House staff will bring proposals to the September Council meeting to flesh out further the membership of any of the committees as necessary. This could include holding extraordinary elections. Council agreed to announce the new Committee structure at the AGM, and mechanisms to fill any places on them. The full Society membership can be informed electronically in due course.
- The number of Council members will be increased by two, to take into account the Chairs of the new committees.
- The Scientific Meetings Committee and the Publications Committee already have their own agreed membership and arrangements, and so are not covered by the above.
- There will be one departmental standing member of SGM staff in attendance for each committee meeting - usually the respective Head of Department. Other staff members may rotate in for relevant parts of the agendas as necessary.
- Council is responsible for appointing a deputy Chair of all of the committees, taking into account suggestions from the Committee and the existing Chair. During interim arrangements, Council will be seeking to identify new individuals to take on those roles, rather than those necessarily on the existing committees.
- Apart from SMC (where existing arrangements still apply), the deputy Chair will shadow the existing Chair for one year, attending Council for the last two meetings of that year. The deputy may additionally stand in at a Council meeting which the Chair cannot attend.
- The remits of the two new committees are broadly as outlined in the paper from the Governance Working Party. These may need to be fleshed out and confirmed by Council, including further clarification as necessary, and will be reviewed from time to time. Some areas will cut across Committees and Council eg prizes and awards.
- The term "Officer" will no longer be used for the Chairs of Council committees. But the Executive Officers will retain that title.

- The five chairs of the committees should meet regularly after Treasurer's Committee meetings to discuss matters of coordination.
- The proposed amendments to the Articles of Association were approved. It was additionally agreed to remove the stipulation of the term of office for elected members of Council in the Articles. However, the requirement that a Council member should be a member of the Society should be retained.
- Council agreed that the MT Editorial Board is not a formal sub committee of Council, and falls under the jurisdiction of the Communications committee. The Editor will not normally sit on Council after Paul Hoskisson steps down. The recruitment and appointment of the Editor is matter for the Communications committee.
- Council agreed that Jo Verran would be Chair of the Communications Committee with immediate effect for one year (i.e. until the September 2013 AGM). Council agreed that Sara Burton would be invited to become Chair of the Professional Development Committee for two years (i.e. until the September 2014 AGM), and that Nigel Brown would remain Chair of the Policy Committee.

5. General business / Marlborough House items

General

Council noted that the President has written to Sir Mark Walport to congratulate him on his appointment as the next Government Chief Scientific Adviser, and to offer any assistance. He will begin in April next year when the incumbent, Sir John Beddington, finishes his term.

Council noted the silver gilt award for the Chelsea flower show, and thanked the staff and Society volunteers for their time and hard work. Council also noted that the Communications Committee will look at how this work can be taken forward, including what can be done with such displays in the future.

International relations

Council identified a need for greater clarity on purpose with respect to how the Society should work in the international arena. This includes issues such as how we can have a presence and participate effectively in large meetings such as ASM, and how we can strengthen our relationships and engage with regional/international societies.

This issue has partly arisen from the meeting of Hilary, Charles and Jo with the International office of the ASM. Jo also noted that she represents SGM on the education board of ASM, but it remains very US-centric on that front. Council noted that whilst ASM is increasing its international activity, it remains very much US led.

For SGM to develop more international partnerships there will need to be identification of potential benefits and common agendas, and assessment of which international societies wish to reciprocate in strengthening relationships. SGM will need greater clarity for itself on whether it remains predominantly a UK/Irish organization, or to what extent it wishes to be more active internationally. Council agreed that SGM should consider carefully all international relationships, including FEMS, IUMS, ISME and ASM.

It was noted that Huw Taylor was stepping down shortly as UK ambassador for ASM. The SGM should seek to embed the new ambassador within the Society. The ideal person would be an experienced international player who would be on Council for some time. Council agreed that Maggie Smith would be a good choice for this role – David Blackburn to approach.

Council agreed the need to take forward the Heatley-Payne Travel Award with ASM. Council noted that joint sessions with ASM at conferences are attractive in principle but need work to organise the full benefit, and especially the need to clarify expectations and financial commitments at the outset.

Council noted that on a similar note, Charles has appointed Colin Hill as Irish ambassador, allowing SGM a second avenue of contact.

Council agreed that the General Secretary can play a coordination role, but cannot realistically be responsible for all international activity.

Council agreed to set up a Working Group to consider and review our international relations, and the General Secretary should bring a short paper identifying where we are in international relations to a future Council meeting.

FEMS conference

Council agreed that SGM should take forward a possible bid to host a FEMS conference (a huge success) in 2017. SGM should take the lead in working with other UK/Irish societies for the bid. Discussions had already taken place (informally) with SfAM about a joint bid - Hilary to progress more formally. This should be an opportunity to draw in other smaller societies as well.

Council noted that the FEMS conference organisers take on the financial liability, as well as most of the profit. This allows the Society(ies) hosting the bid to concentrate on organising the science.

Office location review

Council agreed to set up a Working Group to consider whether it is in the long-term best interest of the Society to remain at the Marlborough House location, or to relocate, most likely to London, and what the benefits would be. This is in the light of an informal approach from members of the management committee of Charles Darwin House to the Chief Executive wishing to discuss the possibility of SGM taking space in that building.

Council noted that such an offer had been made a few years earlier. But Charles Darwin House was now up and running and clearly successful in terms of fostering collaboration between societies.

The Working Group would be chaired by Charles Dorman and include Nigel Brown, Colin Harwood, Karen Robinson and Simon Festing (the latter as a full member). The Working Group would give a progress report at the September Council meeting, and report back in full in November.

It was agreed that any decisions about location would depend on a robust business case to be made, and should take into account any identified benefits, as well as the full range of implications on all staff departments.

General Secretary

Council agreed that Nigel Brown would chair a Working Group to identify the next General Secretary. The membership would include Paul Hoskinson, John Sinclair and Maggie Smith. Council noted the job specification circulated by David.

Finance and administration

6. Report back from Treasurer's Committee (TC)

The Chief Executive explained that he had decided not to submit full budgets to the July Council meeting. These were not ready because: (i) six-monthly figures had not been available for the current year, (ii) the new committees had not met to discuss their budget allocations, (iii) the implications of the restructuring of the journals department remained completely unknown, and (iv) further work is required on the budgets to try to separate out restructuring from running costs.

However, member journal subscription prices and membership rates had been submitted to Treasurer's Committee, and agreed. These need to be approved at the AGM. Commercial Journal subscription prices were likewise agreed, and are the main determinants of our income.

Council approved an increase in the membership rate for ordinary members of £1 to £60.

Council approved an increase in commercial journal prices by a different percentage for each tier. This was recommended by Treasurer's Committee to make more of a differentiation between the tiers (on advice from Simon Inger and his team) as follows:

Tier 1 increase by 1%

Tier 2 increase by 2%

Tier 3 increase by 3%

Tier 4 increase by 4%

Tier 5 increase by 5%

This gives a total budgeted journal income for 2013 of £3,250,490, which is very similar to 2011 as a more favourable dollar rate of 1.56 has been assumed. Council approved the setup of deals to forward sell \$1.6m to fix the rate for the income.

Initial budget analyses suggest a worst case scenario of a deficit of approximately £600k. But, as above, there are lots of unknowns. The intention will be to return to a balanced budget, but it is not yet possible to predict whether this will be achieved by 2014 or 2015.

Council agreed to phase out corporate membership and use different ways to interact with companies. These new ways could be developed around the corporate displays at our conferences.

Council thanked Colin Harwood for a long and successful period as Treasurer of the Society.

7. Redundancy policy - enhanced benefits (from TC)

Council noted that full organisational change and redundancy policies had been submitted to Treasurer's Committee for approval. There will be a further check on these policies to ensure that they are legally sound. Council noted that those policies were generic, and would cover organisational change or redundancy arising in any situation.

Council approved the recommendation from Treasurer's Committee for enhancement to redundancy pay in relation to the restructuring of the journals department set at a level of 1.5 times statutory pay, plus a lump sum of £1500. Council noted that this was in line with typical policies in similar organisations (as identified in a benchmarking activity) and that it struck a reasonable balance between employee compensation and costs to the Society.

Professional Development & Scientific Conferences

8. Prize medal lecture

Four nominations were received. Council elected Rita Colwell to be the recipient of the 2014 SGM Prize Medal. Jane Westwell to draft invitation letter and sent to Hilary Lappin-Scott.

9. Proposed mechanism for nomination for Honours

Council supported the proposed mechanism (noting that it was self-explanatory). The role of the General Secretary is to collate any multiple nominations. It is the role of the person proposing to actually fill out the form (there is some workload involved here).

10. Confirmation of mechanism to honour Harry Smith

David Blackburn has received a letter sent on behalf of Mrs Janet Smith who is pleased that SGM will be renaming the vacation studentship scheme in her late husband's honour. She requested clarification that the grants are available to international students. David Blackburn to confirm that the grants are available to support undergraduates registered for first degree in a UK or Irish university irrespective of their nationality.

Council also requested that a copy of the commemorative issue of *Microbiology Today* be sent to Mrs Smith. It was suggested that Sudesh Cole may be able to do this on one of her regular visits.

11. Division & Council results & recommendations

Maggie Smith and Andrew Davison were elected to Council. The President will let the new Council members know. The new members will be invited to the September 2012 Council meeting.

Council noted also that Divisions have the power to co-opt members, and also to ask any member to step down.

12. Proposed changes to grant schemes

Council approved the proposed changes.

13. Approval of Agenda for AGM and timing of future AGMs

Council approved the proposed agenda. It was agreed that the timing of the AGM (currently held at the September conference) would inevitably have to be reviewed if a proposal came in future to suspend holding that second conference.

14. FYI: Minutes of the meeting of the SMC meeting of 26/06/2012.

Noted

15. FYI: To confirm those listed as new members of the Society

Noted

Policy & Communications

16. Recommendation on remit and scope of the STI statement

Council approved the recommendation that a statement on sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) is developed in line with the remit produced by the Policy Committee. Council approved the themes and proposed plan and also authorized the Policy Committee to recruit a chair and expert panel.

17. Recommendation on circulation of GM statement

Council approved the recommendation that the draft GM statement should be circulated to members and key stakeholders, via the SGM web site, for wider consultation, and that following following consultation, Council would adopt the revised document, (approved by the Policy Committee) as the Society's position on GM.

18. GM research initiative from Sense about Science

Council approved the recommendation, of the Policy Committee, to support the GM initiative from Sense about Science by offering financial support of £2000 – it was noted that this was in line with other Learned Societies of our size.

19. FYI: Minutes of (b) Microbiology Today Committee of 27/04/2012

Noted

Publications

20. Progress and recruitment of Head of Publishing – report from JBSC

Council noted the successful appointment of a new Head of Publishing, Mr Leighton Chipperfield.

21. FYI: Draft minutes of the Publications Committee TC of 26/06/2012

Noted

22. Dates of Council meetings for 2013

Agreed as follows:

7/8 March (draft accounts)

Dates to be determined in June (finalisation of accounts and Journal prices) -

12/13 September (budgets) (the week after Autumn conference)

5/6 December (Xmas drinks!)

23. Next Meeting of Council

Date: Monday 3 September 2012 12:30-14:00

Venue: Social Sciences Room 0.21, Warwick Conference Centre

SGM AGM: Tuesday 4 September 2012 12:35-13:00 in the Warwick Arts Centre Theatre

AOBs

1. International Society for Plasmid Biology

This small Society (ISPB) is concerned that it will struggle to maintain membership and activities into the future, and is keen to discuss whether SGM would provide a home to the Society (host website, maintain membership records, etc – on a cost neutral basis). Council agreed to return to this issue at

a future meeting following further analysis by staff of our future capacity and necessary due diligence. Simon agreed to contact Prof Chris Thomas to explain SGM's course of action.

2. Termination of Strategy Sub-Committee, Journals Business Sub-Committee and Governance Working Party

Council agreed for these groups to be closed.

3. Review of process used for the election of President

Council agreed that the Chief Executive would progress this as a paper exercise to analyse the recent process, and make recommendations as to what worked well or not.

4. Impact factors for SGM journals

Council noted that this would fall within the brief for the new Head of Publishing.

5. New Editor-in-Chief of IJSEM

Council noted the appointment of Ahren Oren

Council extended thanks to the President, Hilary Lappin-Scott for the long and dedicated service to SGM. Council noted that the Society had been left in a much stronger position by the end of her term.

Dr Simon Festing, 8 August, 2012