



The Science, Technology, Engineering & Medicine Public Relations Association

Minutes of the STEMPRA Annual General Meeting

16 May 2007

IOM3 – 1 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1

Attendance: Juliet Upton (Chair), Robbie Walker (Treasurer/Acting Secretary for this AGM) + 23 members

1. Apologies for absence:

S Bell, T Boyce, M-L Burnett, P Green, A McLaughlin, K Nevin-Ridley, C Nichols, J Reck, J Rees, T Reynolds, N Richardson, F Stokes, M van den Heuvel

2. Minutes of the 2006 AGM

The minutes of the 2006 AGM were approved as a true record.

3. Reports from the Officers

The reports from the Chairperson and Treasurer/Membership Secretary were circulated and are included with these minutes as Appendix (1). Thanks were expressed to Juliet Upton and Robbie Walker for their work.

4. Election of Committee

4.1 Five Committee members were standing down: Juliet Upton (Chair), Faye Stokes (Secretary), Peter Green, Andrew McLaughlin and Joe Meaney.

4.2 Five Committee members are continuing their term of office: Robbie Walker (Treasurer/Membership), Elspeth Bartlett (Newsletter Editor), Claire Bithell and Clare Kingston.

4.3 Simon Wilde has served his two years as a Committee member and is now nominated to stand as Secretary (proposer: Hazel Morris, seconder: Laura Miles). Craig Brierley is nominated for a further two years as a Committee member (proposer: Nick Hillier, seconder: Lyndal Gully).

4.4 Nominations have been received from Katrina Nevin-Ridley (Chair, proposer: Juliet Upton, seconder: Elspeth Bartlett), Simon Levey (proposer: Juliet Upton, seconder: Robbie Walker), Laura Miles (proposer: Juliet Upton, seconder: Robbie Walker), Judith Moore (proposer: Juliet Upton, seconder: Craig Brierley) and Hazel Morris (proposer: Juliet Upton, seconder: Craig Brierley).

These five nominations were duly elected by members. Juliet Upton welcomed the new members and expressed thanks to all the Committee members who were stepping down. Craig Brierley read out a short statement on behalf of Katrina Nevin-Ridley, the newly elected Chairperson. The statement is included as Appendix (2) with these minutes. Craig Brierley also offered a vote of thanks to Juliet Upton, the outgoing Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee.

5. Appointment of Auditor

Peter Cooper agreed to remain in post as STEMPRA Auditor.

6. A Forward Plan for STEMPRA

The AGM then concentrated on a discussion of the ways in which STEMPRA could develop over the next few years. A summary of the discussion is given in Appendix (3) with these minutes

7. Any Other Business

Juliet Upton closed the AGM by thanking the members, the committee and IOM3 for providing the venue.

8. Date and Time of next AGM

2008 – Date to be announced.

Appendix 1

Chair's Report for 2006

2006 was both challenging and successful with many pointers for future success.

Events

There were four main events in 2006, which were fully supported by members and indeed non-members.

The AGM and associated event:

Communications: A Tool for attracting investment: Nigel Clarke, Advanced Transport Systems Ltd

23 March 2006: NESTA, London

Science in the news - Climate change debate

Bob Ward, Senior Manager of Policy and Communication, The Royal Society

14 August 2006: Captain's Cabin Pub, London

Science in the news – Radiation & Health Scares

Dr Mike Clark, science spokesperson for the National Radiological Protection Board at the Health Protection Agency

27 November 2006: Science Media Centre, London

[Had to be cancelled at the last hour due to the Polonium crisis! Now rescheduled for 22 May 2007/]

"Networking for dummies" workshop and STEMPRA Christmas Party

5 December 2006: The Wellcome Trust, London

Science Communication Conference

13 – 14 July 2006: IET, London

In addition, the Chair helped on the Royal Society/BA conference consultation group in planning for the Science Communication conference and chaired half a day of the conference on "the future of broadcast and new media" and a media strategy seminar.

At the conference, she issued a press release to highlight a potential project with The Royal Society and to begin to raise the profile of STEMPRA as the "voice for the SET PR professional".

[See attached release. Unfortunately the project did not move forward as Bob Ward, the project's champion internally at The Royal Society left his job and there was no one to continue to champion the project at the time.]

During National Science Week on 17 March 2006, she also chaired a joint BA/ESRC workshop which aimed to bring science communication and science PR practitioners and social scientists together.

Newsletter

An historic moment was reached in the life of STEMPRA's newsletter – it joined the 21st century and went "on-line"! The first issue went live in June although with great apologies to members who only received it later in the autumn – perhaps snail mail was better!

There were two issues of this new newsletter in 2006. Highlights included:

- Profiling the launch of a new journal; *Science in School*;
- More in the “How to ...” series, aimed at providing practical advice on topics ranging from “how to run your own media training course” to how to set up your own broadcast studio”.
- The impact of new media on PR
- News from “our man in Brussels” – Tim Reynolds

The Website

In line with our move to the 21st century, STEMPRA’s website was redesigned and now has a much fresher, contemporary ‘look and feel’. The site is still in need of significant content update which is planned in 2007.

e-mail Discussion list

The e-mail discussion list continues to be an extremely useful, although not always active means of contacting members informally.

It is however very cost effective for members and the Committee to communicate across the membership.

The future for STEMPRA

The Committee continued to review how STEMPRA could/should develop after its first successful ten or so years. We remain confident that the Association continues to play an important role for the PR community in the not-for-profit and academic SET sector.

Some informal market research was conducted at the end of 2005. A non-member survey was carried out by Becky Morelle, courtesy of the Science Media Centre to their list of press officers across the UK (600+). The results of this survey were interesting and were reported to the membership, in the June edition of the STEMPRA e-newsletter. Many thanks to Becky and the SMC for their work and data.

Strategy Review

The Chair began work on a strategy review document towards the end of the year with the intention of using it as a consultation document with the membership. As members know, this work has been completed and will be finalised at the 2007 AGM.

Committee Membership

We were delighted to welcome onto the Committee in 2006 a new Treasurer – Robbie Walker and a new Secretary, Faye Stokes.

Robbie has worked miracles to make some sense of the accounts which our previous Treasurer regrettably neglected. He has brought a friendly but efficient and vital order to our financial systems. He has also chosen to reunite the roles of Treasurer and Membership Secretary, which were previously held both by the Treasurer. This has helped enormously with membership records and with the subscription renewal process. I wish to record in this report both my own personal thanks to Robbie and the gratitude of the Committee for ensuring that we are back on track with our financial and membership management.

Faye began the year with us very enthusiastically and was extremely helpful as our Secretary. Happily for the Stokes family, she became pregnant with her first child during the course of the year and left on maternity leave before this AGM. Again, warm thanks to her for her contribution to the STEMPRA committee.

At this AGM, five members are standing down. Faye Stokes (Secretary), Peter Green, Andrew McLaughlin, Joe Meaney and myself as Chair. I would like to thank them for their contributions to STEMPRA and wish them well.

We are always grateful to our committee members' organisations for absorbing some of our costs. Specifically to the BA , The Wellcome Trust and SMC for hosting committee meetings and events.

This will obviously be my last report as Chair. My original intention was to continue as Chair in 2007 to see through the initial implementation stages of the Strategy Review which I have largely been responsible for developing. I also felt that it was important to nominate my successor early in 2007 and to work with him/her for a brief handover. Regrettably, I was forced into a position when only days before the proposed AGM in March, I had to resign to safeguard the positive reputation of STEMPRA. I apologise once again to the membership for the inconvenience that resulted in the postponement of the AGM to 16 May.

I have very much enjoyed my time on the STEMPRA Committee – it is often time-consuming and frustrating but also interesting and rewarding. May I take this opportunity to thank all the committee members I have worked with over the years and STEMPRA's auditors, Peter Cooper and formerly Linda Capper, for their hard work, their support and their friendship. I look forward to exciting events and prospects for STEMPRA in the coming years.

Juliet Upton
Chair

Membership report for 2006

At the beginning of 2006, STEMPRA inherited a situation where the previous year's membership had not been systematically renewed and so the membership database was reconstructed to improve future administration.

Over the course of 2006, STEMPRA achieved a membership of 105 based on 56 renewals and 49 new members, 10 of which joined after September and so were also offered 2007 membership.

We are currently in the process of gathering further renewals and by May 2007 the membership stands at 101 based on 56 renewals (= to the whole of 2006) and 45 new members. New membership was given a considerable boost by the extremely successful training workshop in January 2007.

Robbie Walker
Membership Secretary

Treasurer's report for 2006

The accounts for 2004 and 2005 had to be reconstructed and were eventually circulated to the membership in June 2006.

We started the year with £6,326.90 and at 31 December 2006, STEMPRA had £6,691.25. This closing balance included some renewal and new membership subscriptions for 2007.

Quite a proportion of the expenditure in 2006 was related to invoices from 2005 (£1,082.39). The balance sheet provides further details of some individual items of expenditure.

By the end of 2006 our finances had stabilised following a reorganisation of the membership process and by May 2007, our reserves stand at £8,047.53.

Robbie Walker
Treasurer

Appendix 2

Katrina Nevin-Ridley – STEMPRA statement

I believe that STEMPRA provides an excellent opportunity for PR professionals involved in the science sector to share ideas and good practice in their field, offering potentially invaluable support to press officers both newly appointed and more experienced. There are currently very few professional development opportunities for PR professionals in this field and limited opportunities for sharing experience and discussing the challenge of presenting science accurately in mainstream news and communicating our organisations' objectives and outcomes.

I see the role of Chair of STEMPRA as an opportunity to raise the profile of the organisation and to offer a consistent range of activities for members across the UK to get involved with.

I will bring to the position my experiences of working in both a university press office, with the conflicting demands that it presents, and in one of the UK's major research funders, which reaches out to many different organisations.

I see a number of key issues I would like to address in the short to medium term, which include:

- Raising awareness of STEMPRA to relevant PRs throughout the UK.
- Finding out and addressing what science PRs would find most useful in terms of professional development and networking events.
- Offering a relevant and engaging annual events programme to address these needs.
- Rolling out STEMPRA activities throughout the UK.
- Increasing the membership of STEMPRA against a set objective, in particular outside London.
- Supporting press officers in winning the internal PR battle, convincing their Directors or Vice Chancellors that PR is an essential tool for promoting their organisation,

About Katrina

Katrina has been working in media relations for 10 years. She joined the Wellcome Trust a year ago as Head of Media Relations and is responsible for developing and implementing a media strategy aimed at raising the profile of the Trust and the work of the scientists it funds. She was formerly Head of Press & PR at the University of Edinburgh, where she was responsible for looking after the profile of the Vice Chancellor and briefing the press across a broad spectrum of university business, as well as implementing a proactive approach to publicising new research. Prior to that, she worked for the international development agency VSO.

Katrina has a good track record of encouraging and developing links between relevant organisations. She was instrumental in setting up a joint press officers' conference with the MRC in March, attended by over 60 press officers from around the UK. In April, she organised a joint breakfast networking event with the Royal Society and Editorial Intelligence exploring "Science and the Soundbite", with journalists and press officers.

She is also a member of CIPR.

Appendix 3 - A Forward Plan for STEMPRA

Juliet Upton outlined how much things had changed over the years that STEMPRA had been in existence. She circulated a list of key points to guide the AGM discussion.

What is STEMPRA's role?

Scope/Vision/Broad Aims/Key "differentiator"/Objectives

What should STEMPRA deliver?

To its members (relevant benefits)/The STEM community?

How should STEMPRA retain existing members and grow its base significantly?

Retention strategy/Recruitment strategy

How can STEMPRA gain and retain the appropriate resources to succeed?

Governance of the Association/Management structure/Finance/Human Resource

With so many players in the world of scientific communication, she felt it was important to reassess STEMPRA's role. It was important to distil everyone's views down into a small number of attainable targets for the next two years.

These would be recommendations from the AGM to Katrina Nevin-Ridley, the new Chair and the new Committee.

Notes from the discussion

Role:

- Failure to deliver improvements would impact on membership retention
- Europe was an important goal for the longer term, but too ambitious while STEMPRA still has to address the way forward for its UK membership.
- Limited resources means Europe could initially be addressed with newsletter/e-list sharing.
- Digital technology was essential to retain contact with geographically remote members.
- An on-line archive of STEMPRA material would be very valuable.
- The UK has a different view of the division between science and arts/humanities compared with Europe. Social sciences communications is poorly represented in the UK. Again, like Europe, any broader communications remit into non-scientific areas was considered too ambitious for the present.
- Are the communicators we wish to recruit derived from the scientific community, or from the communications community (eg press officers)?
- Although 30%+ turnover in annual membership was considerable, this was believed to be due to the number of members who were recruited each year from "single issue" events with little follow-up appeal.
- STEMPRA should note that scientific communication is more than simply press relations.
- The commercial sector is significantly under-represented in the membership. Is this important? Many members are from academic institutions, few from government departments and this could represent a whole new area of opportunity.
- A rise in the charge for membership subscriptions and possibly a reduced student fee should be addressed.
- STEMPRA should aim to be an influential player in the STEM sector.

Delivery:

- Newsletter/e-list/informal events/formal training sessions were all considered important and well supported by members.
- Networking was also important
- We are currently unaware of similar provision for things like training available elsewhere, *at the price that STEMPRA offers.*

- Different views on pricing policy – some regard low prices as essential, others as underselling ourselves.
- More senior members would provide a different profile of resources for events. Also, more senior speakers at events attract more senior people to attend.
- A directory of members on the website could be a valuable resource.
- The website should also be more dynamic, reflecting the rapidly changing face of electronic communications.
- The importance of new media was covered.
- The e-list was underused. When it works, it works well.
- A more regular newsletter was favoured
- Mentoring was mentioned as a potentially good membership benefit.

Membership:

- Events are a good source of new members but they are less likely to renew (see earlier).
- STEMPRA needs a more formal recruitment strategy.
- Students are an underappreciated source of extra members and a differential membership fee might help (see earlier).
- Joint membership with other organisations (eg ABSW) and occasional joint meetings might be useful.
- Corporate membership for whole organisations/departments is worth consideration.
- Discounts for members at other events might be attractive but we probably need a much larger membership base to make this work.
- Electronic payment of subscriptions still has issues with security, administrative difficulties and STEMPRA's unincorporated status.

Resources:

- Being run by volunteers, STEMPRA only has limited resource.
- Part time help (eg a student) could make members more willing to organise events knowing the routine activity would be covered .
- A "home" for STEMPRA was considered important and KN-R may have some views here. One member who was not present (Gail Cardew) offered exploratory discussions for a home for STEMPRA with The Royal Institution.
- Some organisations already benefit from the synergy of a close relationship with STEMPRA (eg SMC).
- Limited financial resources mean that at present STEMPRA cannot consider employing someone, even part-time. This should not however be ruled out in the longer term.

Recommendations from the STEMPRA Membership to Katrina Nevin-Ridley, the new Chair and the new Committee.

There has been substantial consultation with all STEMPRA members both prior to and at the AGM. It is fair therefore to summarise members' wishes in the following ways and to request the new STEMPRA Committee for 2007/8 to put in place a deliverable plan with milestones over the next 1-3-5 years.

The new Committee for 2007/8 should seek to:

1. Set attainable but ambitious objectives for the organisation with a short term (1 Year), medium term (3 years) and long term (5 years) planning horizon;
2. Review and ensure that the appropriate human and financial resources are in place for the organisation to achieve these objectives;
3. Continue to provide a number of excellent, low-cost networking and professional events tailored to meet a diverse range of members' needs (i.e. different professional areas targeted at members who are at different stages of their professional careers);
4. Set and achieve ambitious membership growth for the Association;
5. Explore and where possible make greater use of digital technology to ensure that all members can enjoy benefits and dialogue regardless of their geographical location;
6. Strengthen and increase the frequency of the Association's newsletter as the main tool of communication;
7. Establish STEMPRA as the home of the STEM PR professionals and actively support them with their employers and within the STEM community.