
Commonwealth Chemistry Special General Meeting 30 November, 2021

SGM/1121:99

MINUTES of a Special General Meeting of the Commonwealth Chemistry held on 30 November from 1030 – 1230 GMT.

PRESENT

Executive Board	
Dr Vicki Gardiner	(President) Australia
Professor Choon Hong Tan	Singapore
Dr Deborah Nicoll-Griffith	Canada
Professor Ishmael Masesane	Botswana
Professor James Darkwa	Ghana
Dr Michael Forde	Trinidad and Tobago
Professor Peter Mallon	South Africa
Professor Priyani Paranagama	Sri Lanka
Dr Robert Parker	UK
Mr Roger Stapleford	Australia
Professor Sarah Masters	New Zealand
Professor Sourav Pal	India
Secretariat:	
Dr Ale Palermo	Secretary
Ms Gill McGrath	Secretariat
Dr Sarah Thomas	Secretariat
Mrs Rachel Thompson	Secretariat
Attendees:	
Dr Erick Awas	Kenya
Professor Bikele Mama Dèsiré	Cameroon
Ms Claudine Joelle Ngatsing Foka	Cameroon
Mr NMS Hettigedara	India
Professor Andrew Holmes	Australia
Dr Justin Kabera	Rwanda
Professor Abdul Karim	Bangladesh

Dr Tebello Mahamo	Lesotho
Professor Iqbal Rouf Mamun	Bangladesh
Professor Basil Shelton Marasinghe	Papua New Guinea
Professor Bice Martincigh	South Africa
Dr Clarence Mgina	Tanzania
Professor Michael Mucalo	New Zealand
Dr Noah Naumih	Kenya
Professor Catherine Ngila	South Africa
Professor Jean Pierre Nkurunziza	Rwanda
Mr Jean Claude Ndom	Cameroon
Professor Vincent Nyamori	South Africa
Professor Gloria Ukalina Obuzor	Nigeria
Professor Ponnadurai Ramasami	Mauritius
Professor Vinod Singh	India
Professor Emmanuel Sinagra	Malta
Dr Soon Ting Kueh Datuk	Malaysia
Dr Pierre Gerard Tchieta	Cameroon
Professor Flavien Astride Alfred Toze	Cameroon
Professor Amália Uamusse	Mozambique
Professor Avril Williams	Barbados

1.	<p>WELCOME FROM THE PRESIDENT – DR VICKI GARDINER</p> <p>Dr Gardiner welcomed all to the first Commonwealth Chemistry Special General Meeting and thanked them for their attendance.</p> <p>She introduced three new members of Commonwealth Chemistry – the Cameroon Society of Chemistry, the Chemical Society of Lesotho and the Rwanda Chemical Society and welcomed all three. Cameroon and Rwanda had produced a short video for the event and this was shown to participants.</p> <p>With the new additions, the total number Commonwealth Chemistry Members was 25.</p>
2.	<p>COMMONWEALTH CHEMISTRY FINANCE COMMITTEE (SGM/1121:02)</p> <p>Dr Gardiner took participants through the set up of the Commonwealth Chemistry Finance Committee. Its purpose was to ensure the future financial sustainability of the organisation.</p> <p>The members of the Committee were confirmed as:</p> <p>Professor Sourav Pal, Chair (India) Professor James Darkwa (Ghana) Dr Deborah Nicoll-Griffith (Canada) Dr Ale Palermo (UK) Dr Robert Parker (UK) Mr Roger Stapleford (Australia) Professor Choon Hong Tan (Singapore)</p> <p>The Committee would act in an advisory capacity with the Executive Board responsible for all financial decisions and member societies would be kept up to date.</p>
3.	<p>A SUSTAINABLE CHEMISTRY WORKFORCE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE REPORT- PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN FINDINGS, COMMITMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (SGM/1121:03)</p> <p>Dr Gardiner introduced the main findings of the report.</p> <p>38 out of 54 countries had participated in the survey and she gave thanks to all of those who had promoted it. The survey consisted of 20 questions, broken down into four main sections which covered – career progression, training, working environment, collaboration and networks and it also included a question as to what kind of wider support Commonwealth Chemistry could provide. Four focus groups had taken place during September 2021 to better understand some of the key findings. The participants of both the survey and the focus groups were based in low, middle or high income Commonwealth countries or were Commonwealth nationals currently living outside of the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Early Career Researchers (ECCs) were defined as anyone within the first 10 years of their research, after completion of their most recent chemistry qualification(s) and excluded career breaks. Two thirds of the respondents were from high income countries and one third from middle and low income countries. Low and middle income countries were grouped together to avoid overly reducing the sample size.</p> <p>Overall, it reflected the greatest number of practicing chemists in high income countries proportional to the population, as well as the high barriers in low and middle income countries in accessing the survey, such as Internet infrastructure. In addition, many low or middle income countries did not have a chemical society, which meant that there were less well established networks through which to contact local chemists.</p>

It was found that 9 in 10 ECCs were working in areas relevant to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ECCs in low to middle income countries were researching topics related to health, food, agriculture, water and the environment.

Barriers included a lack of promotion opportunities, mentoring and support and limited access to equipment and consumables. Difficulty in accessing funding for research and funding for networking and travel were also found to be a significant challenge across the Commonwealth. In addition, ECCs were found to need more support in the writing of funding and grant applications, getting scientific papers published and in seeking out coaching and mentoring.

Evidence showed that diverse teams do better, unfortunately inequality and a lack of diversity was shown to be a major problem particularly when related to gender. Women ECCs were more likely to be held back by prejudice, family commitments and a culture of long working hours. It was acknowledged that these barriers also impact men but more than one in five women said a family commitment negatively impacted their work compared to one in six men. Almost one in four women said that the expectation of long hours had a negative impact compared to one in six men. It was also found that women were less confident in writing applications and getting published.

Dr Gardiner handed to Dr Forde for the next part of the presentation to explain the commitments of Commonwealth Chemistry, following the findings. Dr Forde talked through the key commitments – firstly, to empower chemists to build their networks by setting up a Commonwealth Chemistry Early Career Network, by holding online and in person events such as webinars and workshops and by supporting the development of new and existing chemical societies, which play a crucial role. Secondly to support ECCs to develop non-technical skills by partnering with organisations to increase professional development opportunities and career guidance. Thirdly, to empower and support Commonwealth Chemistry members to champion equality in chemistry in all its forms in their local communities by sharing good practice and a range of different activities. Lastly, to facilitate knowledge sharing between ECCs across the Commonwealth for example by providing free access to Chemistry World and engaging policy makers and funders.

Dr Forde handed to Dr Nicoll-Griffith for the next part of the presentation, to explain the Recommendations for The Commonwealth. She put forward that the Commonwealth should use its power to encourage greater scientific collaboration, to enhance support for ECCs through its capacity to build programmes and engage with members to promote inclusion and diversity.

Dr Nicoll-Griffith handed to Professor Paranagama for the next part - Recommendations for Funders of Research. She said that there was a call for an increase in the number of grants targeted at ECCs, and that more funding be made available for equipment and travel and that diversity within the teams and institutions should be taken into account when considering funding.

Professor Paranagama handed to Professor Tan for the next part – Recommendations for Universities and Chemical Sciences Employers. He said this group should increase job security, provide training in non-technical skills, and provide coaching and mentoring for ECCs. Also, that they should promote family friendly work practices, consider equipment sharing arrangements and gather data on and improve inclusion and diversity.

Professor Tan handed over to Dr Forde who would act as Chair for Q&A.

Professor Mucalo asked if larger sized countries had dominated the survey in terms of participation. Dr Gardiner explained that this was taken into consideration ahead and the information had been gathered in such a way that it was able to be analysed and compared to accommodate this.

A second question was put forward as to how Commonwealth Chemistry would communicate the results of the report, to ensure that organisations such as funders were aware of the results and recommendations. Dr Gardiner explained that Commonwealth Chemistry was in the process of applying for Accredited Status which would open a lot of doors. She also asked for help from Commonwealth Chemistry members as each member would know who, within their country, to speak with in order to share the report. She added that the Secretariat was in the process of putting together a cover letter which could be sent with a copy of the report and this would be shared with members. She also encouraged members to be in touch with the Secretariat for support.

Professor Soon Ting-Kueh Datuk asked if there was a database of ECCs. He also said that it was important to not only focus on research ECCs but also those within industry and corporates who would face similar difficulties. Dr Gardiner said that this was a very good point and that while the current survey had focused on university and research ECCs, at some point in the future other groups would be looked at, possibly through another survey. She acknowledged the point that a database would be a good idea and that looking at how to obtain permissions etc for this could be looked into.

Dr Forde said a question had come through as to what success factors could look like and asked Dr Nicoll-Griffith if she would like to answer. She said that one would be to see Commonwealth Chemistry members proactively communicating the report in their own country, second was to establish an ECCs network and ensure it was inclusive and active and engaged and that the network was heard by members of Commonwealth Chemistry, third that it would be important to measure collaboration of researchers and finally to keep arranging events that brought ECCs together, for example the poster competitions.

A question came through about what would be done with the results. Dr Forde asked Dr Mallon if he would like to answer. He said that while there were many recommendations it was important to look at priorities and put together an action plan. It had been suggested that a task group be formed, and the initial members would be himself, Professor Paranagama, Professor Pal and Professor Masters. He then asked that member societies contact the Secretariat to put forward names of those who would like to join the task group.

Professor Mamun put forward a question as to what influence the report might have on research grants from Commonwealth Chemistry for those in developing countries. Professor Pal answered stating that grants for large projects may be limited but those that focus on SDGs may be more likely to receive funds and it could be something that the Executive Board could look into. Dr Gardiner said that Commonwealth Chemistry had not been set up as a funding agency but reiterated that the report and the template letter should help in applying for grants locally and that Commonwealth Chemistry would try to facilitate and support.

Professor Sinagra said that while funds were available in Malta through the European Union and locally, it fell short of what other countries (large economies) received. He felt that projects relating to the environment were not well received and there was not a lot of funding available. Dr Gardiner said she hoped the report findings would give members the evidence-based data to approach bodies for funding.

	<p>Dr Forde closed the item but said that there would be time available at the end of the agenda for further comments and questions.</p>
4.	<p>UPDATE ON COMMONWEALTH CHEMISTRY PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES 2021-2023 (SGM/1121:04)</p> <p>Dr Forde asked Professor Sarah Masters to present the next item. Professor Masters explained that she was Chair of the Scientific Organising Committee for the inaugural Commonwealth Chemistry Congress. She took Commonwealth Chemistry members through the activities carried out through 2021, since the AGM in May. The 1st Commonwealth Congress had 750 attendees from 38 countries. She added that one of the highlights for her had been the career conversations with three speakers from diverse backgrounds. As a result of all of the networking, she now had a PhD student working with her. Following the Congress the second poster competition had taken place with 161 people taking part and 25 prizes and she thanked those in attendance who had acted as judges. Taking Chemistry to Market Webinar had 300 participants and 150 views of the recording and this would be available on the Commonwealth Chemistry website.</p> <p>She handed to Professor Nyamori to talk through the upcoming activities 2022 - 23. Professor Nyamori explained that he was the Chair for the Scientific Organising Committee for the 2023 Congress which would take place in Trinidad and Tobago. For 2022 events so far would be – celebration of Commonwealth Day, AGM in May when a President-Elect would be nominated and the 3rd Commonwealth Chemistry Poster Competition.</p>
5.	<p>COP26 AND POSITION STATEMENT ON POLLUTION (SGM/1121:05 AND SGM/1121:06)</p> <p>Professor Nyamori introduced Dr Robert Parker to present this item. Dr Parker explained that COP26 Statement on Sustainability and Critical Raw Materials was enclosed at paper SGM/1121:05 and had been agreed by the Executive Board. He asked that Commonwealth Chemistry Members share the statement widely with their stakeholders and communities.</p> <p>The second paper - a declaration to the United Nations for a Global Science Panel for Chemical Pollution SGM/1121:06 was a request from the Royal Society of Chemistry to member Societies to consider, with their Boards, and if there was agreement to then endorse. The President of the Royal Society of Chemistry would write to Commonwealth Chemistry member societies with a formal request. He added that the Executive Board of Commonwealth Chemistry had endorsed the declaration at a meeting on 17 November 2021.</p>
6.	<p>ELECTIONS 2022 (SGM/1121:07)</p> <p>Dr Gardiner took participants through the election process which would be happening soon. There would be positions available for President-Elect 2022 (who would then become President in 2023) and two positions on the Executive Board. She presented the timetable for nominations which would open on 1 December 2021 and would close on 31 January 2022, the Executive Board would then review nominations in February 2022. Candidate information would be sent to voting representatives of Society members in March 2022, voting would open in May 2022 and close one week after opening, the results would be announced at the AGM in 2022.</p>

	<p>She explained that each Society should nominate one candidate only for President Elect and one candidate only for the positions on the Executive Board – two nominations in total. The nominee for a Board position was required to be a member of the Society and the nominee for President Elect must be endorsed by the Society President and should have demonstrated leadership skills and be prepared to commit the required time.</p> <p>Voting would be virtual to ensure inclusivity and to give everyone the opportunity to vote. Each country would have one vote for each position available and only the nominated representative for the country could cast the vote. She confirmed, for clarity, for the upcoming voting there would be one vote per country for the President-Elect and two votes per country for the two available positions (one vote per position available) on the Executive Board. The deadlines for nominations and voting were fixed and could not be moved.</p> <p>She confirmed that the Executive Board would focus on Equality and Diversity when considering nominations to put forward for the voting process.</p>
7.	<p>MEMBERS' LED DISCUSSION</p> <p>Dr Gardiner asked Professor Mallon to Chair the discussion.</p> <p><i>What are the plans for developing the Commonwealth Chemistry ECC network?</i></p> <p>Professor Pal responded, saying that this was a very important and that the Executive Board would look into different models – i.e. IUPAC EuChemS and to develop a suitable model for Commonwealth Chemistry. A group of ECCs from across Commonwealth countries would come together to look at this. Professor Pal asked if Dr Parker had some background information on EuChemS ECC network. Dr Parker said that there was one representative per chemical society and that they were very productive - arranging events etc. They were also represented on the EuChemS Executive Board. Professor Pal asked Dr Parker to give some examples of the challenges that he thought Commonwealth Chemistry may face vs EuChemS. Dr Parker said time zones could be problematic and that regional ECC groups could be a good idea. He added that when people do come together they build relationships quickly and anything that Commonwealth Chemistry could do to support this would be a good thing. Professor Pal said coming together at physical events would be helpful.</p> <p><i>What is Commonwealth Chemistry doing to raise awareness of the United National Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?</i></p> <p>Professor Masesane said that Commonwealth Chemistry had made sure that all activities carried out by Commonwealth Chemistry had the SDGs embedded within i.e. the poster sessions, the Congress. He stated that this must be continued and said that in 5 – 10 years people would be much more knowledgeable about the SDGs and in turn able to implement more easily. Professor Mallon agreed and said that they should be central to funding applications.</p> <p><i>What can be done to support ECCs with applications for grants and other funding?</i></p> <p>Dr Gardiner said that the working group would look at this and outcomes could take the form of training for writing grants, research papers etc. She said that Commonwealth Chemistry would like to work with societies and organisations, with programmes already in place, in order to learn and also to work with member societies who might be able to influence local funding agencies.</p>

How will Commonwealth Chemistry address the lack of access to resources in low and middle income countries?

Professor Tan said that it might be possible to approach organisations with resources with a request to them to pledge a certain number of hours of time to help.

What can Commonwealth Chemistry do to aid travel support?

Dr Gardiner said that while Commonwealth Chemistry was not a funding agency in itself, she did see a role for it in highlighting and supporting and enabling and she reminded members to use the website to post any information that might be helpful to ECCs. Professor Mallon said that Commonwealth Chemistry could also help ECCs to make connections. Professor Nyamori said that a mentorship programme could be helpful.

What will the Executive Board do to ensure equality, inclusion and diversity within Commonwealth Chemistry?

Professor Masters said that Commonwealth Chemistry could help in terms of activities – International Women’s Day – 8 March and the IUPAC Global Women’s Breakfast – 16 February. Member societies could be encouraged to take part. She also reiterated that the nomination process for Board members would specifically take into account equality of representation. She also saw Commonwealth Chemistry as being able to help to support societies to develop EDI policies. Professor Mallon said an EDI Forum could be developed through Commonwealth Chemistry and reminded members to use Commonwealth Chemistry as a vehicle through which to develop ideas, activities.

What will Commonwealth Chemistry do to counteract the negative perception of chemistry (as seen on social media platforms)?

Professor Mucalo asked this question and also put forward the suggestion of a marketing campaign and said information posted on the website would be helpful. Dr Gardiner asked members for ideas and reiterated that as a Federation, all of the members were able to shape the activities of Commonwealth Chemistry and sharing information formed part of this.

What will happen if there are multiple rounds required for voting in the upcoming elections and who casts the votes?

Dr Gardiner reminded attendees that the voting was electronic and should therefore be more inclusive (as opposed to casting votes at the AGM). She confirmed that there would be one vote for each country and only one society member would cast the vote, therefore 24 votes would be put forward (India had two chemical societies but would still put forward only one country vote and the two societies would need to agree how to do this). If there was no clear winner then further rounds would follow. She said that no member of the Executive Board or the Secretariat would be able to nominate or vote.

Would it be possible to have a ‘resource centre’ which members could use to obtain information on funding agencies?

Dr Gardiner responded to Professor Soon Ting-Kueh Datuk’s question and said this was a good idea and asked all members to contact the Secretariat with useful information that could be uploaded onto the website.

With the questions now completed, Professor Mallon asked all attendees to turn on their cameras for a group photograph.

8. **AOB**

	<p>Dr Gardiner extended congratulations to the Kenya Chemical Society Chemical Safety and Security Team on receiving recognition by the US Department of State Bureau of International Security and Non-proliferation for their participation in Chemical Security programs. The Kenya Chemical Society was happy to make their expertise in this area available to other Chemical Societies members in Commonwealth Chemistry as required. The information would be added to the website.</p>
9.	<p>CLOSING REMARKS</p> <p>Dr Gardiner thanked everyone for attending. She added that the Secretariat would be in touch regarding the ECC report and with information about the upcoming elections.</p> <p>She added her thanks for the commitment given by members and that she looked forward to working together through 2022 and beyond.</p>

***Dr Ale Palermo
Secretary***