



Association for the Study of Obesity

Annual report from the Chair 2020 -2021

For the second consecutive year, I write this report to share with the members from the comfort of my own home. Like many other organisations, COVID continues to have a profound effect on what we have been able to offer and how we can operate. And, like many others, we have learnt different (and sometimes better) ways to do things. A good example of this comes from our webinar series; an online event that continues to attract delegates from all over the world. And, the pandemic has allowed us to reconsider ways in which we can best support our members as a key priority area. Some of these are described in this report, and its worth saying that I am proud to say that we, as an association, have continued to grow and expand so that there remains good hope for ASO to continue to deliver its aim of to develop an understanding of obesity through the pursuit of excellence in research and education, the facilitation of contact between individuals and organisations, and the promotion of action to prevent and treat obesity.

Events

COVID-19 had a significant impact on ASO events, including the cancellation of UKCO20 and UKCO21. However, the timing of the pandemic meant that we were able to avoid many of the associated costs. The first was due to be held in Oxford and I'm happy to say that we are now planning on going back to Oxford for our UKCO24 congress. We have also established our plans for next year, where we hope to see you all in person in Lancaster and for UKCO23 in Belfast (where it was originally due for UKCO21).

This year, we made a decision to offer something a bit different to our members and hosted a members only 2 day online event called Hot Topics. Sessions were focused discussions on: (1) The implications of defining obesity as a disease; and (2) Post pandemic priorities for prevention and treatment of obesity.

On behalf of the trustees and the wider organising committee, I want to thank everyone involved in developing both sessions, which I thought were extremely thought provoking and the feedback was excellent. I also want to extend a big thank you to our session Chairs, Professor Giles Yeo and Professor Linda Bauld for doing such a brilliant job of navigating us and stimulating rich discussions. We are going to release papers for each of the topics and have recently put out a call to members to get involved in this work.

Similar to our previous UKCO, we also hosted an early career researcher event 'SciComm 101' the day before our Hot Topics event. This proved to be very popular and we have had some great feedback. I want to say a big thank you to Dr Rebecca Richards for leading this event alongside a group of dedicated ECRs, including Dr Julia Mueller.

Having secured funds from Novo Nordisk we have also continued to host our series of monthly webinars including a range of topics with a varied group of presenters. These have proven to be extremely popular, with registration figures up to as much as 700 with delegates (and speakers) from all over the world. We have used these webinars as an opportunity to extend our reach and to build partnerships and relationships, including those with our regional networks, and other organisations including EASO and the British Dietetic Association. Our anecdotal evidence suggests that the webinars have raised the profile of ASO.

ASO governance and working arrangements

Since our last AGM, we have also transferred our secretariat from BioScientifica to a joint appointment with Red Hot Irons and Simon and Gail Williams. This is working extremely well; balancing the organisational, technical and governance tasks led by Red Hot Irons with the communication, partnership and scientific oversight tasks led by Simon and Gail. During this time, Red Hot Irons have supported us to develop a new membership system and a new website. Simon and Gail have worked hard to build relationships with sponsors and partners and have recently launched a new ASO educational portfolio to be supported by Trustee Dr Nicola Heslehurst. I want to extend a thank you to both Red Hot Irons and Simon and Gail for helping making this a seamless transition.

Dr David Hughes has continued to work hard to ensure that our governing documents are fit for purpose and has focused his attention on a strategy to update all of the association policy documents with support from Red Hot Irons. I'm extremely grateful to David for delivering on such a huge (and perhaps unrewarding) task.

Grants

We were pleased to receive 14 applications for this year's award, which was focused on digital weight management. Applications were reviewed by our Trustees, plus additional external reviewers when conflicts of interest prohibited trustee review. I'm happy to report that we were able to award funds to two grants. Congratulations to Dr Georgios Dimitriadis and Dr Wendy Nicholls, both of whom will be invited to present their work at UKCO. More details of their planned work can be seen on our [website](#). I would like to extend a special thank you to Professor James Stubbs and the rest of the Research and Advisory sub-committee for all of their efforts in setting up and awarding these grants. We welcome any feedback more generally about the grant process, including the value that members feel they provide and any suggestions for future topics.

Trustees

It is always with sadness that we have to say goodbye to trustees, and we had to do this for two people this year. Dr Abd Tahrani was an extremely valued member of the board. He played a key role across many of our activities and was instrumental in moving forward the Clinical sub-committee and developing our partnership. Professor James Stubbs was also a valued member of the board and helped us to develop our small grants programme over the past two years. He played a key and important role as Chair of the Research and Advisory sub-committee. On behalf of the rest of the board and all of our partners and members, I want to say a very big thank you to both Abd and James and wish them all the very best for the future. We hope that they continue to be part of the ASO family for many more years. I'm grateful to Dr Rebecca Richards and Dr Alex Miras, who have both agreed to take on the leadership roles for the Research and Clinical subcommittees respectively.

We sought applications for new trustees again this year and received 13 applications. Firstly, I would like to offer my thanks to all members who stood for election in 2021 and encourage members to consider standing for election in the future. Of the 13 applicants, 5 have been selected following a democratic decision from our members. This increases the total number of trustees to 15 from 12 from the previous year. The Board decided to do this given the reduced costs of additional trustees with a new blended approach to operations, balanced against the needs to fill designated roles within the Association. So, I want to express a warm welcome to Sarah LeBrocq, Dr Julia Mueller, Professor Emilie Combet, Mary O’Kane and Dr Georgios K. Dimitriadis. We look forward to working with them and we are currently considering their specific roles within the Board.

I am extremely pleased to say that we have now two trustees who provide expertise to the Board via their lived experience of obesity and through their tireless commitment within patient led organisations. Ken Clare continues to support ASO and has plans to develop a patient and public involvement hub in collaboration with Leeds Beckett University. Sarah LeBrocq has recently joined us and we are looking forward to working with her to extend our communication and partnership working.

Moving forward

I now look forward to another year of activity, including continuing our webinar series and building and extending partnerships, including with the European Association for the Study of obesity, the British Dietetic Association, The Nutrition Society and patient led organisations. We also hope to reignite some of our core activities (paused due to COVID), including the centres for obesity management led by trustee professor Batterham, who is considering the option of setting up a paediatric centres for obesity management and greater investment in our early career researcher network. And of course, our flagship event, the UK congress of obesity planned in person (all being well) next September in Lancaster, with a local organising committee led by Dr Jennifer Logue. On behalf of the rest of the Board of trustees, I will say that we are all very much looking forward to what looks to be an exciting year ahead and I truly hope that we all have greater opportunity to see each other in person – and networking is something that I feel the ASO excels in.

For a full account of 2020 – 2021 activities, please see the [ASO annual report and accounts document](#)