



**ASSOCIATION FOR THE  
STUDY OF OBESITY**

# **ASO Annual Report and Accounts**

**FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR  
ENDING JUNE 2023**

Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO)  
Charity Number: 1100648  
483 Green Lanes, London, N13 4BS

## About ASO

**The Association for the Study of Obesity was founded in 1967 and has since become the UK's foremost charitable organisation dedicated to the understanding, prevention and treatment of obesity.**

### ASO Mission

The ASO aims 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.

### ASO Objectives

- The promotion of professional awareness of obesity and its impact on health
- Educate and disseminate recent research on the causes, consequences, treatment, and prevention of obesity
- Prioritise obesity and provide opinion leadership in the UK
- Enhance understanding of the prevention and treatment of obesity throughout the UK
- Improve the quality of obesity education throughout the UK
- Forge links between individuals and organisations concerned with the study of obesity throughout the UK
- Support the role of patient and public involvement in obesity research
- Connect active researchers and practitioners from diverse disciplines who contribute to the development of a UK perspective on obesity.
- Provide appropriate input on the UK perspective at a European and international level through EASO and the World Obesity Federation.

The ASO is affiliated to the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) and the World Obesity Federation (WOF) and organised the inaugural International Congress on Obesity, held in London in 1974. ASO was the founding body of the highly respected International Journal of Obesity.

The ASO is also a member of the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA), a coalition of over 30 charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups who have joined together to fight obesity.

## 2022/2023 Business Priorities

The Trustees present their annual report together with the financial statements of the Company for the year 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023. The Annual Report serves the purposes of both a Trustees' report and a Directors' report under company law. The Trustees confirm that the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the charitable company comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the charitable company's governing document and the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102) (effective 1 January 2019).

The Trustees have complied with the duty in part 1 section 4 of the Charities Act 2011 to have due regard to public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission. A detailed report of the activities undertaken and achievements by the Charity to further its charitable purposes for the public benefit is given below[1].

The business priorities for the organisation in this year are unchanged:

## Professional

- To act as advocates for people with obesity
- To provide opportunities for members (including UK Congress on Obesity and grants)
- To promote and further the study of obesity and its management
- To raise awareness of and support our Centres of Obesity Management (COMs) to highlight clinical and service delivery examples of excellence delivering obesity management

## Developmental

- To ensure production and circulation of a monthly e-bulletin to share best practice and highlight relevant obesity news and information
- To maintain the ASO website creating, sharing and signposting to relevant news and events
- To support early career researchers (ECRs) through our ECR network

## Education and Clinical

- To produce and deliver educational programmes in support of high-quality excellence in obesity management and research including digital programmes such as webinars and meetings.

## Research

- To further research into the study of obesity
- To support funding of research into obesity prevention and management

## Impact report

In 2022, many of our operations returned to pre-pandemic activity and we were able to resume in-person events. Whilst our focus has been on the resumption of these services we have also been able to continue to support our members through the delivery of online educational programmes such as webinars which provide added value and opportunities for ongoing professional development.

During this period we have held hybrid in-person and virtual internal Trustee meetings. Much of our operational internal communications continues via digital means to ensure cost effective delivery of services.

## Professional

### Influencing and contributing to national policy

ASO works alongside many organisations across the UK and beyond to inform obesity policy, promote best practice and act as an advocate for people living with obesity.

We collaborate with many professional organisations including Obesity Voices, EASO, WOF, The Nutrition Society, BOMMS, BDA and others to share best practice, inform policy and disseminate learning. The ASO is a professional stakeholder organisation for NICE guidelines related to obesity.

[1] Since the Company qualifies as small under section 382 of the Companies Act 2006, the Strategic report required of medium and large companies under the Companies Act 2006 (Strategic Report and Directors' Report) Regulations 2013 has been omitted.

## Developmental

### Communicating with our members and the wider community

#### ASO Newsletter:

The widely respected monthly membership newsletter provides members with a vehicle to share information on national and international obesity and obesity related research, events, policy and position statements, educational resource, tools, jobs and studentships. The newsletter is also used to promote ASO activities and programmes to ensure members are fully informed. In this period our open rate for the newsletter ranged from 42%-51% (up from 33-48% in the previous year) with a click through rate ranging from 13% - 68% (up from 16-37% in the previous year).

#### ASO Networks:

In May 2023 our Midlands Network held an obesity symposium, 44 delegates attended the event. We also held two hybrid events by the Yorkshire network. The first (2 November 2022) on Psychological aspects of obesity had 103 delegate registrations. The second (14 June 2023) on inequalities in obesity practice and provision was attended by 76 persons (46 virtual and 30 in person). Our East of England Network delivered a webinar on The Genetics of Obesity: Practical Implications for clinical practice and research at which there were 173 attendees. The annual meeting of the South West network was held on 13th October 2022 in person in conjunction with Novo Nordisk – with approximately 40 attendees. Our Scotland Network held a webinar on whole systems approach to obesity management (15th May 2023) and 65 delegates joined the online session. An event hosted by SafeFood, ASO NI and ASO Island of Ireland was held on 15th November 2022 on the topic of stopping obesity stigma – a priority for all, approximately 40 delegates attended in person with 80 joining virtually.

Three further Networks have undergone a change in leadership; London & South East, North East and North West. As such, the member activities diminished temporarily, new activities are in the planning stage for this reporting period.

#### ASO COMs:

There were no national events for our COMs during this period. However, we are currently working with our COMs to develop our programme of work further and to review the process for COM membership. Planning was ongoing during this reporting period to schedule an ASO COMs meeting at UKCO 2023.

#### ASO Awards:

In this period, we issued four awards. The first three, presented at the ASO UK Conference on Obesity (UKCO) in September 2022 were:



##### **Prevention and Treatment Award**

The winning title for this award by Amy Ahern was SWiM COVID (SWiM-C) Study



##### **3-Minute Thesis Award**

The winning title for this award by Friedrich Jassil was the impact of combined nutritional-behavioural tele-counselling and supervised exercise intervention on weight loss and health outcomes following bariatric surgery (BARI-LIFESTYLE): a single-blind, parallel-group, randomised controlled trial



##### **Best Poster**

The best poster was awarded to Charlotte Lee for the project, Development and initial evaluation of a weight management programme tailored for people with serious mental illness: a non-randomised feasibility study with qualitative interviews



##### **Best Early Career Network Presentation**

Florence Sheen was awarded the best early career network presentation at our annual ECR meeting on her project: “How children interpret and internalise public health messages around weight and healthy eating”.

### ASO Website:

In the period we had 22,259 users with 36,708 sessions involving 82,447 page views. The top three countries where visitors originate are UK (56%), USA (16%) and Andorra (2%). India, China and several other European countries also feature in the Top 10. The Home page is the most visited page (7,723) followed by our annual conference (UKCO pages) - UKCO main landing page 4,354 hits and UKCO Programme page 4,300 hits. The website statistics represent growth though the data for previous years is incomplete for full comparison.

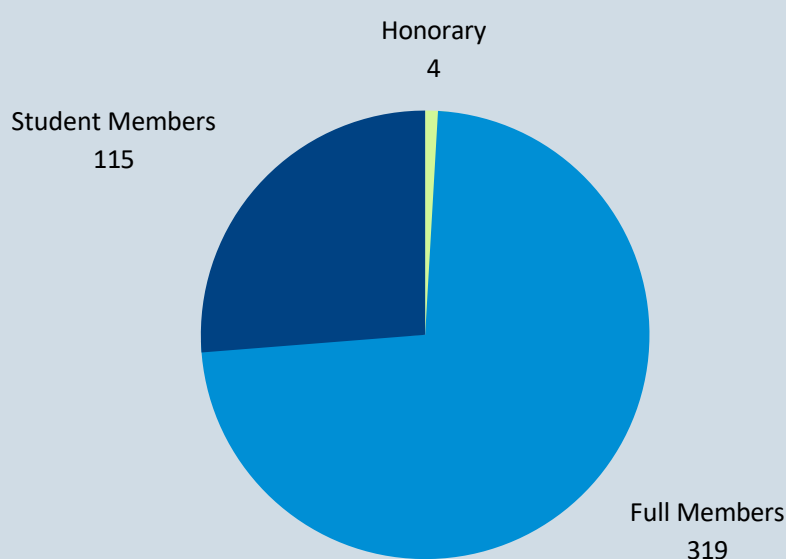
### ASO Social Media:

During this period, we have continued to maintain our reach and grow our engagement on ASO social media. We had 326,600 Twitter Impressions averaging 892 impressions per day. The average engagement rate over this period is 3% (vs 2.15% in previous year) and total number of links clicked is 2,486 (vs 2,101 in the previous year). At June 2023, the total number of Twitter followers was 6,042, with an average growth of 54 followers per month.



### ASO Membership Composition

Membership numbers have remained similar with a slight drop in full members 319 vs 328 in the previous period and 115 student members vs 121 in the previous period.



### Education and Clinical

During this period we were delighted to be able to resume our in-person annual flagship conference. The UK Congress on Obesity (UKCO) took place at Lancaster University on 7-9 September 2022.

**122** people attended UKCO from the 132 who registered.

Eighty-seven abstracts were submitted to the conference, of which 83 were accepted for oral and/or poster presentation. The keynote presentation by Professor Jason Gill was delivered on the topic of: "The importance of place: How where you live and where your grandparents came from affects your metabolic health".



*Enjoyable and useful conference, found networking opportunities invaluable.*

*Excellent conference and a must-attend for anyone with interest in obesity management and research.*



When asked 'how valuable did you find UKCO? on a scale of 0-5' the average score given by respondents was 4.3 out of 5. The event evaluation found that 88.9% of respondents would recommend UKCO to others.

### In the accounting period we were also able to deliver two webinars:

Title	Date	Attendees
Obesity and respiratory disease	17 November 2022	52
Obesity and minoritised ethnic groups	8 December 2022	47



## Research

During this accounting period we delivered a research workshop for ECRs with 25 attendees. The workshop, which was delivered on 6 September at Lancaster University ahead of our annual conference, provided early career researchers with practical advice and support in developing research programmes and publication. The workshop was highly interactive and included an opportunity to submit work, the best of which was given an award and an opportunity to present.

A post event evaluation found that 100% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the event met my expectations'.



*The best aspect of this event was the sheer variety of presentations. From PPI to grant writing and academic career to industry, each one served as a springboard to strike up further conversation with others.*

*I would strongly recommend this event and commend the organisers for their great work.*



In this period we also followed up on previous research grant awards and tightened up our processes for feedback and reporting on research grants.

## Plans for Future Periods

In the remainder of 2023 and into 2024 ASO aims to build on its successes through the successful delivery of its flagship conference, more educational programmes of work including webinars and network meetings, to continue to support our ECR network, and to build on embedding PPIE into ASO activities.

A key aspect of work in 2023 will be the restructuring of our Committees and Board of Trustees to facilitate improved governance processes, focus on fund raising, risk management and the business strategy of the organisation to ensure the charity is able to grow and thrive.



## Structure, Governance and Management

### Constitution

The company is registered charity (Charity Number 1100648) and a UK company limited by guarantee (Company number 4796449). Membership is open to obesity researchers, healthcare professionals, clinicians, academics, scientists, and students who are working and/or studying in the field of obesity and to others who have a particular interest in this area.

### Method of Appointment and Election of Trustees

The management of the charity is the responsibility of the Trustees who are elected and co-opted under the terms of the constitution. During this period the ASO was managed by 15 elected Trustees, led by Dr Nicola Heslehurst who was appointed chair on 7 September 2022 following the resignation of Professor Maria Bryant on the same day. The Trustees, or any member of ASO can recommend a Trustee for appointment. The term of office for Trustees is three years and Trustees may be re-appointed for a maximum of two terms of office unless appointed to Chair, Secretary or Treasurer position in which case they may stand for one additional term as per the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

### Policies Adopted for the induction and training of Trustees

A Trustee training manual is available for all Trustees which provides relevant information about the charity as well as useful links and advice on the role of the trustee. This is updated regularly and was last formally reviewed in 2021.

In 2022 the following new policies were reviewed and adopted:-

- Code of conduct
- Conflicts of Interest
- Equality and diversity
- Safeguarding and wellbeing

### Organisation structure and decision making

In early 2023 the Trustees undertook a review of its structure and processes and agreed to a planned change to facilitate a smaller Board of Trustees focusing exclusively on governance and probity with delegated operating Committees to manage the day-to-day operations of the organisation supported by the organisations contracted service provider, Red Hot Irons. This will evolve over 2023 and into 2024,

### Pay policy for key management

There are no paid staff, all work undertaken by the Committees and Trustees is done so voluntarily. The support agency, Red Hot Irons, is contracted to run the operational day-to-day activities and business administration.

## Application and adherence to the Charity Governance Code

ASO recognises good governance is essential to its effectiveness, reputation, and credibility. The Board of Trustees regularly review activities, policies, and processes to ensure the charity is delivering against its mission and charitable objectives. We have robust measures to ensure an effective and clear overview of financial controls. In early 2023, the board undertook a skills audit which highlighted some deficiencies in governance experience and resulted in plans to improve the organisational structure and decision-making by delegating operational activity to elected Committees allowing the Board of Trustees to focus on governance.

We operate a robust conflicts of interest policy, and all Trustees and Committee members complete declarations of interest each year. Conflict of interests form a standing item on all committee/board agendas. The Board aims to continuously improve its governance processes and is working through the Charity Governance Code to ensure its governance structures adhere to the principles of the code and recommended practice.

## Risk Management

The Trustees analyse and undertake a review of the risks the Charity is exposed to as part of an annual business planning process and in accordance with Charity Commission guidance (CC26), scoring the risks according to likelihood and impact. The systems and actions established to mitigate those risks are also reviewed by Trustees at each Board meeting and updated and adjusted accordingly, with the net risk in each area agreed. High risks closely monitored by the Trustees are:

- High level of dependency on too few income streams puts ASO at risk of sudden and/or long-term loss of funding – efforts continue to diversify income streams to include more Trusts and Foundation as well as funding from non-pharmaceutical companies.
- Potential for a sudden drop in income and the need to dip into accumulated reserves
- The risk that ASO could be perceived as being unduly influenced by sponsors/pharmaceutical industry. ASO has adopted stringent sponsorship, partnerships and endorsement policies and ensures where possible that there is a balance of sponsors from across the industry spectrum with no one sponsor having significant influence or control. Sponsors are not permitted to have any form of editorial control or influence over the content and development of new ASO activities and materials.

In early 2023, the policies put in place by ASO regarding undue influence were tested when the product Semaglutide manufactured by NovoNordisk hit the news headlines. Whilst ASO could clearly demonstrate that funds provided by the sponsor to support research grants were not influenced in any way by the sponsor there, nevertheless, was some backlash from the press and public regarding the perception of influence. ASO sought the professional advice of Aqua Communications to work with the organisation to develop a press statement to respond to media enquiries and look to longer term solutions for media management and risk mitigation.

## Volunteers

The Charity is heavily reliant on the time, expertise and energy of its Trustees and other members. Much of the work of the charity is conducted virtually via email and teleconference and is undertaken on a voluntary basis.



## Trustees and Senior Management



### Trustees

Prof Maria Bryant (chair) (resigned 7 September 2022)  
Dr Nicola Heslehurst (chair from 7th September 2022)  
Dr Nerys Astbury  
Professor Rachel Batterham (resigned September 2022)  
Kenneth Clare  
Prof Emilie Combet  
Dr Georgios Dimitriadis  
Prof Graham Finlayson (resigned September 2022)  
Dr David Hughes (Company Secretary)  
Dr Sandra Isibor (elected December 2022)  
Sarah LeBrocq  
Patrick McGinley (Treasurer) Prof  
Alex Miras  
Dr Julia Mueller  
Mary O’Kane  
Dr Dimitrios Papmargaritis (elected December 2022)  
Dr Becky Richards (resigned November 2022)  
Dr Kath Roberts  
Dr Dawn Swancott (elected December 2022)



### Registered office

4 Bank Court  
Weldon Road  
Loughborough  
Leicestershire  
LE11 5RF



### ASO Sub-Committees

Finance, Governance and Membership  
Chair: Dr Nicola Heslehurst  
  
Clinical Practice and Obesity Management  
Chair: Prof Alex Miras  
  
Research and Scientific  
Chair: Prof Emilie Combet  
  
Communications, partnerships and networks  
Chair: Dr Kath Roberts



### Bankers

Unity Trust bank plc  
Nine Brindley Place  
Birmingham  
B1 2HB



### Accountants

Essex Abel  
4 Bank Court  
Weldon Road  
Loughborough  
Leics  
LE11 5RF



### Charity Registered Number

1100648

# Financial Review

## Principle funding

The principal funding sources for the Charity in 2022/23 as in previous years were:

- Voluntary income from the pharmaceutical industry (fees for event sponsorship)
- Voluntary income from the pharmaceutical industry (to support educational webinar programmes)
- Membership and conference registration fees

The total funding secured in 2022/2023 £116,640 slightly down on 2021/2022 as we did not secure any joint collaborative programme income in this year and significantly less in webinar sponsorship.

Conference sponsorship and exhibition, however, was markedly increased on the previous year, up by 268% as a result of the return to in-person conference.

## Principle Expenditure

Total expenditure in 2022/2023 was £100,730 which is substantially higher than in 2021/2022. The reason for this is explained by the return to in-person events, most notably our flagship annual conference.

Key expenditure areas were on the association management services provided by Red Hot Irons, the annual UKCO conference and the provision of webinar services. In 2022, we also saw a rise in administrative costs associated with the rapid rise in inflation. A key element of increased expenditure was a result of the development and implementation of a new website on the Drupal Nine platform providing significant security features and improvements in functionality. A return to in-person Trustee meetings also increased administrative costs. Accountancy and bookkeeping costs also rose significantly though this is offset by savings made since VAT registration.

## Reserves Policy

ASO has no regular guaranteed sources of income, and the long-term funding of the charity is uncertain. The charity, however, does have fixed operating costs in terms of the activities required to maintain its presence and further its charitable objectives. The charity's work is planned one year in advance with financial commitments made up to three years in advance on some programmes such as the annual conference.

The Trustees have therefore decided that in order to secure the viability of the organisation beyond the immediate future, to provide reliable service and required funding over the longer term, ASO must be able to absorb financial setbacks. It is therefore necessary to set aside some of the current income as a reserve against future uncertainties.

In view of the financial needs of the organisation, the Trustees have agreed to maintain a reserve policy to retain sufficient funds to cover the operating expenses of the organisation for one year. The reserve would cover: secretariat expenditure, supporting funds for agreed projects, and other liabilities such as legal expenses, contractual agreements and other miscellaneous expenses that are necessary for the operation of the charity.

The Trustees review the reserves policy at a Trustee meeting each year held prior to the AGM to ensure that:

1. the policy is adequate for its need in the coming year
2. reserves level are sufficient to cover one year operating expenditure
3. take necessary steps if reserves falls short of the funding requirement.

## Going concern

After making appropriate enquiries, the Trustees have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements. Further details regarding the adoption of the going concern basis can be found in the accounting policies.

## Financial Review Conclusion

The Society ended the year with net income of £30,987.

The charity continues to hold healthy reserves of £222,399. However, sponsorship and funding remain a significant challenge and cutting further costs will be difficult. With the post-pandemic return to in-person meetings and events alongside the rise in inflation costs have, unsurprisingly risen sharply resulting in lower margins at the year end.

ASO continue to explore other opportunities for funding programmes of activity and will be further exploring grant-making and sponsorship opportunities during 2023/2024.

## Statement of Trustee responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under company law the Trustees must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Company and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles of the Charities SORP (FRS 102);
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards (FRS 102) have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.



## Disclosure of information to independent scrutineer

Each of the persons who are Trustees at the time when this Trustees' report is approved has confirmed that:

- so far as that Trustee is aware, there is no relevant information of which the charity's accountant and independent examiner are unaware, and
- that Trustee has taken all the steps that ought to have been taken as a Trustee in order to be aware of any relevant information and to establish that the charity's accountants are aware of that information.

Approved by order of the members of the board of Trustees and signed on their behalf by:



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Dr Nicola Heslehurst  
Chair of the Board of Trustees

04/12/2023

Date: 

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