



Association for the Study of Obesity

Annual Remarks from the Chair, Dr Nicola Heslehurst: AGM December 2023

There has been much to celebrate at ASO over the last year. Our achievements have been made possible because of the tireless voluntary support from our team of elected and co-opted Trustees. The Trustees continue to demonstrate dedication to ensuring that the ASO meets its strategic aims to advance the science on obesity prevention and management. There is enthusiasm to support clinical and public health policy and practice, and particularly to support our ECR members with career development opportunities. We have also received outstanding support from the team at Red Hot Irons who manage the ASO Office for all our activities.

For a full account of July 2022 - June 2023 activities, please see the [ASO annual report and accounts](#) document

My remarks in this document reflect on the past year since our AGM in 2022. In addition to the specific categories that I have chosen to highlight this year in my report, I would like to thank Mary O’Kane for managing the ASO response to multiple NICE consultations, Dr Sandra Isibor for working on reviewing the ASO endorsement policy, Patrick McGinley for his work as ASO Treasurer, Sarah Le Brocq who rejoined the Board of Trustees in September, Dr Zoe Bell for her work across various ASO events, and our sub-committee chairs Prof Emilie Combet, Prof Alex Miras, and Dr Kath Roberts for their leadership of ASO operations.

Events

UKCO 2023 in Belfast was a huge success, tickets sold out and we had to close registrations early. Delegate feedback from UKCO 2023 was overwhelmingly positive, although there are some areas for learning and improvement which we are taking on board. I would like to particularly thank Dr Laura McGowan and the local organising committee, Dr Nerys Astbury ASO UKCO Lead, Red Hot Irons, and the events team at Riddel Hall for their work in pulling together the programme and ensuring the smooth running of UKCO 2023. I would like to thank all the speakers and chairs, especially our lived experience colleagues who were integral to the conference organisation and programme. We have also developed partnerships with other organisations whose presence was seen at UKCO 2023, thanks to Dr James Nobles ASO Partnerships Lead for driving this forward.

Alongside UKCO, we held engaging and interactive ECR and COMs meetings, well attended, and again with excellent feedback from delegates. I would like to thank Dr Julia Mueller ASO ECR Lead, and Prof Emilie Combet and Dr Zoe Bell for developing and chairing the ECR event; and Dr Dimitris Papamargaritis ASO COMs Lead, Prof Alex Miras and Dr Georgios Dimitriadis for the COMs event.

Dr Georgios Dimitriadis has been increasing and diversifying our sponsorship, and we saw the benefits of this for our 2023 events. Increased sponsorship means we can provide more to our members. For example, at our 2023 events we were able to offer accommodation and travel grants for ECRs to make attending the ECR event more accessible; discounted registrations for delegates attending the COMs event to also attend UKCO to provide greater education and networking opportunities; and we extended our lived experience representation at UKCO.

In 2023, we have also seen an increase in our ASO Network events in person, hybrid and online. These are important to ensure that, throughout the year, our members have access to obesity education, networking, and opportunities to share their research. I would like to thank Dr Dawn Swancutt ASO Networks Officer and all the regional Network Leads for their efforts in getting these events back up and running to full capacity. If any members would like to get more involved with ASO Networks, please reach out to your regional Networks Lead (see <https://aso.org.uk/aso-networks>).

Member consultation

In 2023, we have been conducting a member consultation to inform our strategic plan moving forward and look forward to sharing the results of this with our members in 2024. I would like to thank Dr Laura Gray ASO Strategic Review Lead for her work on developing the survey, and all ASO members who have completed this survey to date. It is important that we get your input to develop the ASO strategic direction and ensure we are meeting the needs of our membership. The deadline for is 15th December 2023 and I urge anyone who hasn't yet completed the 15-minute survey to do so and help us shape the strategic direction of the ASO over the next 3 years (see <https://aso.org.uk/form/aso-members-consultation-2023>).

ASO Restructure

In 2023, the Board of Trustees have had extensive discussions on our existing structure and how we operate. Currently we have a large Board of Trustees, the majority of whom oversee the ASO operations and have the essential obesity expertise and skills to deliver our strategic plans. There is a smaller group of Trustees who have the required governance skills and interest, which is the key legal responsibility for all Trustees. Following a vote among the Board of Trustees, we will be restructuring to separate the governance and operational roles. Moving forward, the ASO will have i) a Board of Trustees whose remit is governance and will be led by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and ii) ASO Committees whose role is to operationalise our strategic plan and will be led by the ASO President.

Existing Trustees have decided whether they will be:

1. Continuing their Trustee role and exclusively focusing on ASO governance
2. Continuing their Trustee role for a period of 1 year to oversee the restructure and then moving into an operational role
3. Retiring from their Trustee role to focus exclusively on operations

This is an exciting change for ASO and should make our processes more efficient, enabling us to deliver more for our membership, and provide more opportunities for members to be involved in the ASO. We plan to have fully transitioned to this new model of working by the end of 2024 and will

keep you informed of progress and positions that become available within the new structure. I would like to thank Dr David Hughes ASO Deputy Chair and Secretary, and Red Hot Irons for their work towards making progress with this restructure.

ASO Honorary Fellowship Award

The ASO established prestigious Fellowship Awards in 2017. These are awarded every two years and recognise the contribution individuals have made to the ASO and/or the field of obesity. Since inception, ASO Fellowships have been awarded to Prof Susan Jebb (2017), Prof John Blundell (2019), and Prof Jason Halford (2021). It was my pleasure to award the 2023 ASO Fellowship award to Ken Clare for both outstanding contribution to the ASO and to the field of obesity.

On behalf of the ASO Trustees, I would like to thank Ken for his past and on-going work to improve the lives and care for people living with obesity. In recognition of this work, we also created the Ken Clare Award which will be awarded to an ASO member each year in recognition of their PPIE work in the field of obesity.

Moving forward

The Board of Trustees and Operations Committees will be working alongside one another in 2024 to ensure we review and update our strategic plan for maximum member benefit (informed by the member consultation); that our governance procedures and scrutiny of the charity is maintained; and to develop transparent and equitable processes for implementing the new structure, including election to the Board of Trustees, Operations Committees, and Chair and President roles. During this time of change, we have proposed to extend the tenure of those Trustees whose term was due to end. This is a risk management strategy to ensure that we have committed and experienced people who can continue to deliver ASO activity, and who have the expertise to contribute to the restructure. In 2024, we will also be recruiting new members of the Board of Trustees and Operations Committees and look forward to working with more of our ASO members in these roles next year.