

SOMERVILLE COLLEGE

OXFORD

The Annual General Meeting of the Somerville Association was held on Saturday 9th March 2019 at 2.15pm in the Flora Anderson Hall, Somerville College.

The President, Alison Wolf (AW), welcomed everyone to the AGM.

1. The minutes of the AGM held on 10th March 2018 were approved
2. There were no matters arising.
3. Election to the Committee:

AW thanked the outgoing longstanding Committee members Karen Twining Fooks (1978, 6 years) and Frances Walsh (1956, 6 years) for their commitment to the group and their support to the College.

Elected to the Committee:

Joe Smith (2013, Modern Languages) proposed and seconded by the Committee

4. President's business

AW said it was a great privilege to have been appointed as President of the SA and a pleasure to preside over this meeting. The number of events organised for SA members is outstanding by any College's measure and it would be wonderful if we could encourage our Somervillian friends to come to events, in College, in London and further afield. A highlight of the programme in the next academic year is the Family Day (14th September 2019) which offers a wonderful opportunity for alumni of all generations to bring their families back to College. Perhaps more significantly, in October we will be celebrating the College's 140th Birthday and there will be a series of events throughout the year, starting with a celebration on Sunday 20th October.

Four Somervillians were recognized in the 2018 Queen's Birthday Honours list:

Angela McLean (1979, Maths) was awarded a DBE for services to Mathematical Biology and scientific advice for government.

Dr Margaret Casely-Hayford (1980, Jurisprudence) was awarded a CBE for charitable services in the UK and abroad.

Carole Hillenbrand (DPhil 1968) was awarded a CBE for services to the Understanding of Islamic History.

Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, an honorary fellow, was made a Companion of Honour for services to music.

AW then introduced the new College Communications Manager, Jeevan Vasagar (JV)

5. College Communications and Publications

JV gave a brief overview of the key messages from the College that any communications strategy needs to embrace: academic excellence, and the ‘outsiders’ college – i.e. a radical tradition of educating outsiders and including the excluded.

JV is currently undertaking a review of how we communicate these messages and whether or not the numerous College publications support the strategy; it is possible that a process of iteration can lead to a process of constant failure to communicate a message. Should we consider changing the number of print communications? JV suggested that one main print publication might be a better platform for communicating with alumni. The annual magazine could be “repurposed” to be a clear alumni communication to cover what’s happening in College and what’s happening in each year group. The College Report could be repositioned to be an internal almanac, digitally? Alumni views were welcomed.

Alumni at the meeting indicated that print is still popular across the matric years and that digital publishing doesn’t gain the same traction as hard copy. Some alumni found the College Report more interesting to read than the magazine and vice versa – there is unlikely to be a ‘one size fits all’ solution.

JV commented that alumni news seemed odd and disconnected in the College Report although he recognised that there appeared to be an appetite to preserve the content as is. There needs to be a process of feedback and clarification for each publication, i.e. who is the audience, what are they interested in and how are they best served.

Many alumni enjoy receiving the College Reports, value and keep them. It is important that the communications team seek feedback from the Somerville Community before they embark on any major changes to publications. Perhaps the best way to do this is in more detailed consultation with the year reps.

JV thanked alumni for their views and agreed that further consultation was required.

6. Future events

A list was circulated.

7. Address by the Principal

Another successful year for the College. Students are stellar academically and in their extracurricular activities: Blues in Tennis, rugby and gymnastics. In the student political sphere, one of our Thatcher Scholars, Ben Etty, has served as President of OUCA. It’s encouraging that our students are stepping up to take on these roles – we need successful leaders in politics on all sides of the political spectrum.

Our Somerville Development Programme (previously Thatcher Development Programme) continues to thrive, offering students additional support through a broad range of events and workshops to help prepare for life after Somerville.

In September the Catherine Hughes building will officially open, marking a pivotal moment in the College's provision for students. All undergraduate students will have the option to live in College for the duration of their course; this will save them money, enhance our College community on site and will also contribute positively to our message to prospective students.

Our access initiatives have included another "Demystifying Oxford" day designed to help prepare our state school candidates for interviews and last weekend we invited our offer holders to spend a day here (with or without parents). We hope this will encourage them to accept their offer to study here, help reduce the fear factor and reassure them that Somerville and Oxford is a place for them to excel.

As we look to the year ahead, we are looking forward to celebrating our 140th birthday in October and hope you can join us for the celebration event and launch of *Somerville in 140 Objects*, a book which encapsulates the spirit of the College through a series of beautiful photographs, many of which will be very familiar to you. We will also be working on the College's strategy for the next 5 years, which will include building on our access initiatives and working hard on the recruitment and retention of academics, which is not without its challenges. We are currently seeking to recruit 6 new fellows (a combination of retirement and other factors) and most recently our advertising for a new Fellow in Statistics resulted in only 7 applications; Brexit is unlikely to help us meet these challenges. The independent panel review (Augur) set up by the PM to examine post-18 education and funding is due to publish its report soon. It is rumoured that tuition fees may be reduced to £7500 which will have a major negative impact on the University sector if the Treasury does not make up for any potential loss of funding through fees.

Despite the increasingly difficult financial environment we are facing we are confident that together our community of academics, students, staff and of course alumni can rise to the challenge.

The meeting closed and was followed by the Winter Meeting with Susie Dent (1983, Modern Languages) and Rebecca Jones (1985, History).