UKSS Newsletter Issue 2

Spring 2020

In this issue, we report on the 2019 Annual General Meeting, look ahead to the 2020 International Conference at Lancaster University, and plans for the new-look Systemist journal.

2019 was a good year for the Society, with a successful conference at Bournemouth University. This year we move ahead from a sound financial footing.

As always, the Management Committee would like to hear feedback from you, our membership:

ukssnewsletter@gmail.com

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MEMBERSHIP NEWS & EVENTS

The University of Winchester Climate Action Centre and Faculty of Education are hosting the Harmony in Education conference on 1st May in Winchester and would be delighted if you would like to attend. The fee is £50, and £25 for students and newly Qualified Teachers.

https://store.winchester.ac.uk/conferences-and-events/external-conferences-events/conferences/harmony-in-education-conference?token=397e99525e628559fd8cffbdcbb0f04e

Launched in April 2018, the Centre for Climate Action (Climate Change Education and Communication, or CCEC) is an ambitious interdisciplinary and collaborative centre aiming to be a home and catalyst for action on CCE at the University of Winchester. We undertake research and teaching in the area of CCEC and organise public engagement events.   Dr Tammi Sinha

SCiO meetings

The next SCiO events in the UK will be on the 26th & 27th of April.
The development day is on Sunday the 26th and the open meeting is the 27th.
The open day will include talks on Governance in the Anthropocene by Ray Ison & Ed Straw, Critical Systems Heuristics by Tony Korycki, Visualising Transformation by Steve Whitla, and practice sessions on Systems Laws led by Patrick Hoverstadt and Positioning as a Systems Practitioner led by Benjamin Taylor.

Normally, the April meetings are held in Manchester, but this year we're teaming up with the school of systems in Hull and following our open meeting there will be the annual Michael Jackson lecture, which this year is being given by Peter Senge. You will be able to keep up to date with events and book for these events through the website: http://www.systemspractice.org/

Patrick Hoverstadt
[Further information about SCiO can be found on page 6]

STPIS '20

6th International Workshop on Socio-Technical Perspectives in IS Development (STPIS'20) in conjunction with CAIS'20

The Workshop will take place from 8 to 9 June 2020 in Grenoble, France.

The main purpose of STPIS is to arrange discussions on use of socio-technical perspectives in organizational system development. The long-term goal is to provide a meeting point for the community of researchers and practitioners interested in the socio-technical approach.

Paper submissions: 1 April 2020
Workshop Website: https://stpis2020.cs.ut.ee/

Report of the Annual General Meeting of the UK Systems Society 2019

The AGM took place on 24th June 2019 at the Executive Business Centre, University of Bournemouth, at 4.15. It was attended by 18 members.

As President, Prof. Frank Stowell welcomed members to the meeting on behalf of the Society.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising not otherwise occurring on the agenda.

Election of Officers: Prof. Stowell explained that it had been agreed last year to create a virtual Committee to meet digitally. This Committee is comprised of Gary Evans (Conference Chair), Peta Sice (Workshops Organizer), Ian Roderick (Treasurer), Pauline Roberts (Membership Secretary), and Prof. Frank Stowell, President and Editor in Chief of the journal.

Prof. Stowell went on to say that he would like to put on record that he has been part of the committees and boards of the UKSS since the early 1980s and in his opinion this Committee is amongst the most effective since that time. To this end, he asked members to agree to ratify this new team, and extend their term of office for the next 3-years. At that point the Society would be in a position to resume annual elections. The Committee would co-opt other members from time to time to help deliver the Society's objectives. For instance, Christine Welch would be co-opted to assist Pauline Roberts with the newsletter. Members voted unanimously in favour of the proposal.   FS to continue to review the effectiveness of the Committee.

Recruitment of board members: One Member challenged how well social media platforms were in-use during the conference to promote the opening and sessions of the 21st UKSS International Conference? He argued he could only find two tweets, tweets he had messaged. Members then discussed as to whether we co-opt a Member specialising in social media onto to the Board. FS asked the Member whether he was volunteering to which he agreed. Members present at the AGM wholeheartedly endorsed his appointment.

Members endorsed the co-opted appointment of Stephan Wennekes to advise and improve the Society's social media efforts.

Treasurer's Report: Ian Roderick reported on the Society's financial position. He summarised receipts and payments and the Society's bank balance. He confirmed the Society has a comfortable trading surplus and is in a position to consider investment into new activities.

Membership Secretary's Report: In the absence of the Membership Secretary, the President stated that the membership fee for the coming year will be £80 per annum including online access to the Systemist and newsletters. Student membership will cost £40. Pauline Roberts will continue to act as Membership Secretary for the coming year.

Members accepted the proposed membership fee structure for 2019-2020.

Publications: The Society has ceased its link with IGI, the publisher of the International Journal of Systems and Society. The Board will replace this with a newsletter distributed twice yearly, and reinstate The Systemist as the journal of the UKSS. The Membership Secretary will be assisted in this by Christine Welch, who is co-opted to the Committee for this purpose. The Board will move to reinstate the Systemist, which will be published once per year. Both will be digital, the newsletter distributed to Members only. Details of these initiatives will be sent to Members as soon as possible. The Systemist will be digital and at no extra cost, and will be open access. Hardcopy will be available to buy. There will be an editorial board set-up for the Systemist and Members will be invited to become referees (details of which we will provide in a future newsletter.

Members voted in favour of the newsletter and reinstatement of the Systemist.

UKSS Activities:

Forums and workshops : The relaunch of UKSS forums and seminars were briefly discussed. These are intended to work alongside the conference. A human systems forum seminar, had been proposed by PS, probably hosted by the University of Northumbria, with possible collaboration with the University of Newlands, Cape Town, South Africa. More information is to follow. PS will organise this.

Members accepted the proposed launch of forums and workshops.

Conference: Prof. Stowell gave a potted history of the UKSS national conferences to date and the challenges of delivering a national conference, e.g. cost. The question he then asked of the Members was, what format should the conference take in the future? The options were no conference, a 1-day conference such as those at Bournemouth and Portsmouth, or a 2-day conference similar to those of recent years at St. Anne's, Oxford. The option of no conference was ruled out by the Members; after further deliberation, the Members felt the 1-day conference format was the best option for the foreseeable future. FS proposed the 1-day conference format continues for the next 3-years, with Universities such as Edinburgh and Northumbria as potential hosts. FS also reiterated the importance of a conference chair to drive organization forward.

Member unanimously voted in favour of 1-day conference format for the next 3-years. The delivery of 1-day conferences for the next 3-years Prof. Frank Stowell and Gary Evans will co-lead.

Constitution and Memorandum & Articles of Association: In Roderick outlined for Members the governance arrangements for the Society that also addressed a question raised by a Members who felt all Committee Members should be Trustees. IR advised he and FS were both Directors and Trustees of the Society, as the Society is both a Charity and Private Limited Company and that the Management Committee advises the Directors and Trustees on the delivery of certain Society activities, such as a conference. IR did not feel there was a need to appoint new directors and trustees at this stage; however, the Constitution and Memorandum & Articles of Association are under review by the current Trustees. IR felt the governance was working and the reinvigorated Management Committee helping to achieve the objectives of the Society.

UKSS partners: Members noted a request to collaborate with the University of Newlands, Cape Town, South Africa had been received via Petia Sice. This would relate to Members' working on teaching, research and professional practice. UKSS Member at The University of Newlands is Laurie Rauch, who is keen to work around human systems teaching, research and professional practice, and possibly with Bournemouth University.

Members noted the potential collaboration between UKSS Members.

Date of next meeting: The date and time of the next AGM we will circulate once the date of the conference is agreed. This is now confirmed at 22 June 2020.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 5 p.m.

SCiO

SCiO is a community of systems practitioners who believe that traditional approaches to running organisations are responsible for many of the problems we see today, believing that systemic approaches to designing and running organisations offer radically new and better alternatives. SCiO and UKSS therefore share similar objectives.

SCiO runs eight meetings a year in the UK: four 'open days' – which are open to non-members and four 'development days' which are members only. The development days are learning workshops and an opportunity to bounce any systems issues or ideas you have off some other members and get their input. The next SCiO events in the UK will be on the 26th & 27th of April. The development day is on Sunday the 26th and the open meeting is the 27th. The open day will include talks on Governance in the Anthropocene by Ray Ison & Ed Straw, Critical Systems Heuristics by Tony Korycki, Visualising Transformation by Steve Whitla, and practice sessions on Systems Laws led by Patrick Hoverstadt and Positioning as a Systems Practitioner led by Benjamin Taylor. Normally, the April meetings are held in Manchester, but this year we're teaming up with the school of systems in Hull and following our open meeting there will be the annual Michael Jackson lecture, which this year is being given by Peter Senge. You will be able to keep up to date with events and book for these events through the website: http://www.systemspractice.org/

 2019 saw the launch of several overseas chapters of SCiO, with groups running in the Netherlands, Belgium and DACH and with a new group being planned in the Middle East. If you are interested in events in any of these countries, or in starting a chapter elsewhere, please get in touch.

The following initiatives are of particular interest:

Systems Practitioner Apprenticeship
SCiO has been actively engaged in the development of a Level 7 (Master's level) apprenticeship in systems thinking practitioner apprenticeship: https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/systems-thinking-practitioner/

At time of going to press, the standard has been agreed by the institute for apprentices and we're still finalising details of the End Point Assessment. For those not familiar with the apprenticeship system, it means that there is government funding available for professional training to the standard and in the future, that will include systems practice. As a by-product of the process, this means that the UK Government has recognised systems practice as a profession and SCiO as the professional body. As well as SCiO members contributing to the work of the Trailblazer Committee that drew up the standard, SCiO provided the competency framework on which the standard was based.

Professional qualifications
SCiO has developed and is now starting to roll out a professional grading system for its members, based on accrediting prior learning and practice. So, depending on their level of proficiency and experience across the skills in the competency framework, practitioners and theorists can apply for different grades of professional qualification. For more information contact us through the website: http://www.systemspractice.org/

[Since 2014, SCiO and UKSS have had an agreement to disseminate details of one another's activities]

A letter from Prof. Frank Stowell, Editor in Chief of The Systemist Journal

Dear Systemists, warm wishes for a happy and fruitful 2020.

As we decided at the last AGM, The Systemist is back with a brand new focus. For the past five years, Systemist has been embedded within a commercial publication we had chosen as the preferred vehicle to publish members' research. However, this relationship proved to be unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Although there were advantages to be gained – for instance, the higher profile that a commercial marketing system afforded – these were outweighed by the disadvantages fed back to us by members: the expense, problems when members tried to access the journal and, worst of all, a very unfriendly submission system that resulted in us losing some high quality papers when authors simply gave up!

By bringing back The Systemist, we have the opportunity to move forward without these frustrations. From an editor's point of view there is much to be gained by removing the layers of bureaucracy and complicated software interface of a commercial journal. This can be replaced by a much more personal relationship with authors, reviewers and associate editors, so that submissions are dealt with in a timely and convenient way.

As we know from our members' feedback, Systems thinking is very widely used among practitioners. However, the wealth of learning they are gleaning in their practice is not always translated into lessons for the development of our discipline. A gulf has been allowed to open up between Systems Practice and the on-going progression of Systems Theory. We need a vehicle through which practitioners can be welcomed to share their new insights. Systemist will encourage this by providing a format more conducive to their practice. Practitioners do not always have time to grapple with the requirements of academic journals. Here we have the opportunity to encourage 'real world' accounts of experience in applying Systems ideas to good effect.

At the same time, from the perspectives of academic members we can free authors from the cost/prohibition of open access to their papers. Because Systemist is owned and controlled by the UKSS, and is financed by members, we can maintain a policy which allows authors to retain the copyright of their published material [with a small caveat see below*]. This means that once a paper appears in an edition of The Systemist, the author can distribute it as they wish. The editions will be freely accessible on-line.

Research output of academics tends to be constrained by the requirements of the Research Assessment Exercise, used to determine research funding of higher education institutions. This exercise takes place at intervals of eight years and as soon as one exercise has finished, institutions begin to think about the next! The work the REF is conducted by panels that are based in traditional disciplines and this inevitably constrains the nature of the research that individuals can engage in and publish. Papers submitted to the panels are supposed to be rated on their scholarship, irrespective of the journal in which they are published but we nevertheless end up with the same old 'star' rating of papers.

Whilst this approach has many advantages because it, theoretically raises the quality of the publication bar, the reality is sometimes different. The Panels and UoA's are determined by various research bodies (see https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/what-is-the-ref/) and naturally academics will be expected to submit papers to the set of journals relating to the panels decided by their school/faculty or university. Research status is inextricably linked to money. This means that less mainstream areas of scholarship, particularly those like ours that are transdisciplinary, can be left out in the cold. For example, both Systems and Information Systems are without a dedicated Unit of Assessment, so that academics in these areas will be encouraged to submit to journals that 'recognized' by an REF panel.

For example, a study that Steve Probert and I undertook for the Higher Education Authority and Council of IS Professors showed, at the time, that almost all submissions from the Information Systems field were made through management journals. The same story will apply to Systems researchers. Our new vision for The Systemist will provide an opportunity for Systems colleagues to publish Systems papers, in a peer-reviewed journal, and on an open access basis without regard these constraints.

But The Systemist cannot survive without your support.

The Model

I suppose it will be of no surprise to members that as an ex-Lancaster researcher who worked with Peter Checkland, my vision for The Systemist will be based upon that of the Journal of Applied Systems Analysis (JASA) that was published at Lancaster in the early years of Soft Systems practice. JASA published papers dealing with the development of Systems ideas and their application in real world settings, and was edited by Checkland. He published many papers authored by well-known Systems researchers at the time, such as Sir Geoffrey Vickers. Many JASA authors have become well known subsequently, although ironically in a journal that would not be considered relevant for the REF today. However, to many 'Systemists' JASA is a gold mine of historical material on the development of Systems thinking at that time. The demise of JASA, and subsequently The Systemist, has effectively closed the door on the kind of discussion that these journals once supported. We hope this new era of The Systemist will reverse that trend.

Our journal will be run by you, the membership. Presently we plan one edition each year which will be published on-line. A hard copy will be available for anyone who wants it - but this will be at an extra charge. We have retained our ISSN for hard copies and will continue the numbering of the journal, which was continued during the period when it was nested in the commercial journal. A new reference number has been issued by the British Library for the on-line editions. Copies of each edition will be lodged with the British Library as before.

For the launch of the new era of The Systemist, I will continue as Editor-in-Chief (EiC) and Christine Welch will act as the Managing Editor (ME). The EiC will be responsible for maintaining the educational standards and charitable status of the UKSS through the journal, recruiting and encouraging support from the Systems community, and act as the arbiter in any disagreements. The Managing Editor is a key role as it is this person who will be in the front-line encouraging papers and making sure they are reviewed in an efficient and timely manner.

We will enlist the aid of respected specialists, who will encourage colleagues in their area of specialism to submit papers. We will call these roles 'Commissioning Editors' (CE). We will also ask for volunteers to review submissions within each area. The reviewing process will include one reviewer nominated by the author(s) and one allocated by the editors. We are currently debating the reviewer process should be double-blind or whether the names of reviewers should be made known to each author in the spirit of academic freedom. We would welcome members' views on this. The accent on the reviewers' role will be one of support and encouragement, rather than judgement.

In the event of a recommendation of resubmission, this will be 'managed' by the CE in question, keeping the Managing Editor in the picture. In the case of a rejection, the reviewers will be expected to produce a short account of their decision which is passed on to the Managing Editor who will inform the author(s). In the unlikely situation of a dispute between the decision and the author it will be referred to the EiC.

NEW SYSTEMIST

*There will be one edition each year and this will be available in electronic and hard copy format. Papers will be open access under a Creative Commons (CC-BY) licence. Submitted papers must be original and not published elsewhere. *As part of the agreement between the author(s) and the UKSS the circulation of any published papers should include a copy of the cover page of the respective edition of The Systemist. We will create a simple form of agreement for authors to ensure that copyright matters are clear.*

Please consider becoming a Reviewer for Systemist

Prof. Frank Stowell

Call for Papers

The Systemist is a peer-reviewed, open access journal published annually on-line under a Creative Commons licence (CC-BY). There are no publication fees. Hard copies of the journal are available by payment on request. Accepted articles are eligible for advance publication.

Submissions are invited of original articles, which may be full research papers, case studies from practice, substantial reviews of relevant literature, opinion and discussion pieces or other types of submission by agreement of the Editor.

Topics could include, but are not limited to:

➢ problem structuring methods
➢ modelling approaches
➢ soft systems analysis
➢ second order cybernetics
➢ critical systemic thinking
➢ work systems
➢ systemic approaches to management of projects
➢ environmental and social sustainability
➢ systemic governance of technologies
➢ socio-technical principles and practices.

Please submit to the Editor by email to the address above, including a covering letter that explains the type of material submitted and its relevance to the Systems agenda.