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Summary of Activity

Membership is increasing year on year, despite the disruption of the pandemic. The association is in a financially healthy position, though it is possible that there will be a small loss for the 2020-1 period, partly due to lost income linked with the pandemic, but partly due to increased fixed costs. Thus, a moderate increase in membership fees will be considered at the AGM. The IJS has continued its progress in its new home of QUB/UU, with a strong stock of submissions and several initiatives to increase its profile. The new role of Second Level Sociology Officer has led to a number of actions to support sociology teaching in schools. Considerable efforts have gone into establishing strong communication with the membership and public at large to increase the profile and impact of the discipline. The SAI calendar continues to expand, with the SAI salon and SAI Study Groups now well established, and adding to the major events of the SAI Annual Conference and SAI Postgraduate Conference.

This overview must conclude with a note of gratitude to all who have given their time and energy to the association, and who have brought their interest to it. The committee is staffed entirely by volunteers who take no expenses and give their time freely. SAI Study Group convenors and members have vitalised specialist areas, and created a home base for researchers. Heads of Department, distinguished sociologists, past committee members, and long-standing friends of the association continue to offer invaluable support. Finally, the strength of the association is its members and their willingness to participate and support the discipline. Our goal is to sustain the fora that can facilitate their work, and hope that we succeed in this endeavour.

Openings in the Executive Committee

- We are seeking nominations for Vice President.
- We are seeking nominations for Postgraduate Representative. The candidate should be a current PhD student.
- Gerard Boucher and Amin Sharifi Isaloo were coopted onto the Executive Committee in 2020. Their status as ordinary members will have to be confirmed by nomination and election.
 - Amin Sharifi Isaloo (proposers: Lisa Moran, Egle Gusciute)
 - Gerard Boucher (Susan McDonnell, Lisa Smyth)

Officers' Reports

Membership Officer's Report

Hazel O' Brien has been the Membership Secretary since 2019

The year has followed its usual ebbs and flows of membership, with the official renewal date at the end of Nov providing a flurry of renewals and new memberships, alongside the months around the two conferences of Feb, Mar, Apr, May.

- By March 2021 our membership had increased to its peak of 176 members.
- By Apr 2021 our membership was 164 members, which compares to approx. 120 members at Apr 2020.
- Looking back in hindsight, there was almost certainly a larger than usual lack of renewals in 2020 due to Covid-19, and the associated late cancellation of the May 2020 annual conference. This would explain the low membership figure at this time last year.
- As the figures for this year show, we seem to have recovered from this very well, accumulating a good deal of new memberships associated primarily with conference participation despite those not being F2F.
- In addition, there are also more memberships coming in throughout the year than in previous years, which may be an indication that SAI Membership is starting to become more desirable asides from the key tie-in with conference participation.
- Of the 164 members, 44% of them are reduced price memberships often held by postgraduates or those in precarious employment.
- We are hopeful for the next year that we can continue to build on the relationships we have been developing with members to improve membership figures further in the future.
- A practical measure in this regard that has been very effective has been making contact with members during our 'busiest' membership months of Nov, Feb, March, April and May to remind them that their membership is expiring and to encourage them to renew. This has been very successful in gaining us renewals which perhaps people may have overlooked otherwise.
- Feedback from members has been that reminder emails are appreciated as members won't always be keeping up with their renewal date.

Treasurer's Report (Summary) – The Annual Accounts are attached separately

- There was €23,814 in the company bank account at 31.12.20

- The company is solvent and has net assets of €22,685.
- Overall there is a profit for the year of €515.
- The Turnover for the year 2020 was €9,278, this is a decrease of €5,587 on 2019. This was mainly due to the loss of conference fees.
- Expenses for the year amounted to €8,763. This is a decrease of €2,462 on 2019, which might be expected given the context of the C-19 pandemic and the cancellation of events and activities. However, two costs increased significantly, which merit further consideration.
 - The costs for the IJS increased to €4,822 from €2,135 which is an increase of €2,687.
 - The Accountancy fees increased from €1,353 to € 1816 which is an increase of €463.

IJS Representative's Report

Lisa Smyth has been the IJS Representative since 2020

Editorial Team Changes

- The UCD Editorial Team stepped down in November 2020 and were replaced by a team appointed from QUB/UU:
 - Co-Editors in Chief: John Nagle and Lisa Smyth
 - Contributing Editors: Cathal McManus (Debates & Book Reviews); Philip McDermott.
- The first issue for 2021, 29.1 (April), the first one of the new editorial team - is now out: <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/IRJ/current>
- Beyond this, there is quite a backlog of papers waiting to be assigned to future issues, and a steady stream of submissions.
- A new [Editorial Board](#) has been appointed and we hope to work strategically with the Board to develop the profile of the Journal over the next three years.
- Submission instructions for authors have been revised and types of submission have been simplified.

Marking 30th Anniversary of IJS

- A Special Issue which includes short reflections on the discipline from leading scholars working in, or on, Ireland and/or Irishness. We have had a very positive response to invitations to contribute and are delighted to have received a reflective piece from President Higgins, as well as a Preface for the Anniversary Issue.
- A virtual Special Issue, gathering together some notable pieces from the Journal over the course of its history. Editors have selected these to reflect the thematic strengths of work published in the journal over time.
- We are also hoping to hold a launch event for the Anniversary Issue, ideally under the auspices of the SAI Salon at Oscar Wilde House in Merrion Square, when COVID restrictions are lifted.

Other Special Issues

- Vol 30, 2022: *Walking Methodologies: Sociological Research on the Move* (Guest Editors: Maggie O'Neill, Claire Edwards, Caitríona Ní Laoire, Mastoureh Fathi and Ger Mullally - UCC and UCD)

- Vol 30, 2022: *Ideas Lying Around: An SAI Salon* (Transcript of Talks from Lynn Layton (Harvard) and Nidesh Lawtoo (KU Leuven); Foreword by Kieran Keohane; Afterword by John O'Brien).

IJS Prizes

- The call for submissions for the Postgraduate Prize has been extended to 30th April.
- Selection process for awarding IJS Article of the Year to be clarified. Prize to be awarded at May Annual Conference.

Second Level Sociology Officer's Report

Lisa Moran has been the Second Level Sociology Officer since 2020.

During 2020/2021, we focused on the following activities:

- A. Interviewing Young Scientist winners Cormac Harris and Alan O'Sullivan.
- B. The Young Sociologist of the Year Essay Competition,
- C. developing a collaboration with Dr Aimee Brennan
- D. Developing relationships with Cholaiste Choilm, Cork
- E. Developing a Learning Circles and Sociologist in Residence project.

A. Interviewing Young Scientist winners Cormac Harris and Alan O'Sullivan.

Lisa interviewed the winners of the Young Scientist competition Cormac Harris and Alan O'Sullivan and their teacher Karina Lyne (Cholaiste Choilm). The final transcript, along with some photos of the event chosen by Alan and Cormac are due to be uploaded to the SAI website soon.

B. Young Sociologist of the Year Essay Competition:

Lisa publicised this to schools doing PolSoc throughout the country in Dec 2020. UCD led the collaboration and it resulted in 21 entries. Marianne and Lisa joined a team from UCD (Taha Yasserli and Elisabeth Becker) to judge the entries. Daniel O'Sullivan (UCD) provided excellent administrative support.

There was a very high standard of entries from a range of schools throughout Ireland and we were very hopeful for the future of Irish sociology based on the calibre of entries. It was also great to see some entries from Northern Ireland as well. Thanks to John and to Jonathan Heaney (QUB) for publicising this in NI.

First place: Temple Carrig, Greystones

Second place: Temple Carrig, Greystones

Third place (3 awards): Meanscoil Gharman, Wexford, Pobalscoil na Trionoide, and Sacred Heart Grammar, Co Down

Honourable mentions to Drogheda Grammar School and CBC Clonmel.

C. Collaboration with Aimee Brennan:

We have also been working closely with Aimee Brennan since Autumn 2020, who runs one of the study groups on professional practice. Aimee is doing wonderful work on CPD with teachers and Marianne, and I have attended meetings with Aimee, John and Michael, a secondary school teacher who is in contact with Aimee.

D. Collaboration with Cholaiste Choilm:

We are further developing our relationship with Cholaiste Choilm, Co Cork and Karina Lyne, Science Teacher who was interviewed as part of the Young Scientist team. This is part of our broader remit of promoting sociology in schools and the Sociologist in Residence idea, outlined below.

E. Learning Circles and 'Sociologist in Residence' Idea:

Marianne has initiated a project involving Learning Circles for Reflective Practice as part of a broader piece of work on 'Sociologist in Residence' in secondary schools. There are similar projects in architecture which Marianne saw in practice. We think this could be an important area for development in 2021/2022.

Areas for Development (2021/2022)

A. Schools' website:

John, Marianne, and Lisa to come together to discuss the schools' section on the SAI website.

B. Learning Circles/Sociologist in Residence: A priority area for 2021/2022

C. Relationship with PASTAI (Politics and Society Teachers Association of Ireland): We made contact in March 2021 and this is a priority area for development. Thanks to Lucy for sending on contact details.

D. D. Conference/Workshop: We think there may be scope for developing a joint initiative with Aimee and others to discuss the promotion how sociology could be better promoted in schools (e.g. identifying barriers and enablers). This could take a workshop format or small conference, depending on interest from teachers.

Communication Activity

- There is no PR Officer at present, following Mark Doyle leaving the committee

Newsletter, Twitter, Email

- Nonetheless, a monthly newsletter continues to go to members, and there are several communications per month. We receive general statistics from Mailchimp about engagement. 50-60% open newsletter through email.
- Information is regularly sent to members via Twitter. The association currently has 2,047 followers. Hazel O'Brien and John O'Brien manage the account.
- The SAI's relevance to members in part comes from its status as a useful information hub. We rely on our members and Sociology Departments to forward information to us for this to be an effective news source for the SAI community. More effort needs to be dedicated to this activity.
- Email. Our members contact us with queries through our email, and this is regularly checked to ensure timely responses.

Website

The SAI website continues to be an important face for the association and resource for members. Over the past 12 months there have been 3,623 unique visits to the website. The greatest reason

for visiting the site is for conference and association membership information/registration. The Sociological Observer has been notable for now being the second most important reason the website is visited. The website costs €350 per year. This was required by Sage as to host the IJS on the website we required additional features to our website. However, the volume of people visiting the website to access the IJS is low, with only five visits in the past month. The advantages of hosting the IJS on the SAI website can hence be reconsidered, or more effort needs to be made to encourage traffic to this section.

Podcast

The SAI Podcast: 'Irish Society' has four episodes. These have been downloaded 621 times by unique individuals. Though these numbers are respectable for a niche podcast, for this endeavour to be a greater success more regular episodes will need to be produced. From a strategic point of view it has considerable potential for facilitating the discipline in impacting on debate on public issues, raising its status and profile, and establishing links with members.

Postgraduate activity.

- There is currently no Postgraduate Representative, following Ann Burke leaving the committee. The Executive Committee would like to note the tremendous energy and commitment she brought to the role.
- In the absence of a PG Rep the SAI Sessions have stalled, though may be revived in the next academic year.
- The SAI Postgraduate Conference took place on 26th and 27th February, online. There were 21 papers delivered by postgraduates. We were very grateful to the established sociologists who delivered keynotes: Aaron Winter (University of East London), Amanda Haynes (UL), Taha Yasseri (UCD) and Laurence Cox (MU), as well as Lisa Smyth (QUB) and Mat Creighton (UCD), who delivered a workshop on publishing. Lorcan Byrne the SAI Secretary did much of the organising in the absence of a PR officer.
- The goal has been to develop a supportive and interactive postgraduate community for both PhD and MA students throughout the country. As noted above 44% of membership is Reduced Cost, most of whom are postgrads.

Conferences, Events & Initiatives

- As noted above, the **SAI Postgraduate Conference** was held in February. There were 21 postgraduate papers, 4 keynotes, and an average of 38 attendees over the two days. The conference was free for SAI members and €10 for non-members. The aim was to offer a friendly and supportive atmosphere and collect high quality research, as well as to allow networking between the next generation of professional sociologists, and we deemed the event a success.
- The **SAI Annual Conference** will take place on the 7th and 8th May, online. The keynotes will be Prof.s Sally Shortall, Katy Hayward, Frances McGinnity and Kieran Keohane. The conference was oversubscribed. There will be 75 ordinary papers, and with regret several high quality papers could not be accommodated. Conference fees were set at a price point that was considered reasonable for an online event, and which could help the SAI meet its costs for the year.
- **Sociological Observer.** The Sociological Observer is an online magazine for long-form thought pieces on pressing topics. An ISSN has been acquired for it. Issue 1 of the

Sociological Observer was released in June 2020, on 'The Covid-19 Pandemic: Sociological Reflections'. Issue 2 was released in April 2021, on 'Black Lives Matter'. The intention is for this to be a quarterly magazine. SAI Study Group leaders will be invited to guest-edit issues. Lucy Michael and Ebon Joseph edited Issue 2. Lisa Moran of the BNL Study Group is currently editing Issue 3 (summer). Tom Boland of the WMW Study Group is editing Issue 4 (winter). Aimie Brennan of PSPP will edit Issue 5 (spring 2022). The strategic goal of the publication is to increase the responsiveness, relevance and impact of the association on ongoing debates and movements.

- The second **SAI Salon** was held in February, in association with the WMW Study Group, hosting Nidesh Lawtoo and Lynne Layton. The third SAI Salon will be held in collaboration with the IJS editors in late 2021.
- There are now seven **SAI Study Groups**, building on the original four, that were formed in November 2019. These are The Biographical Narrative and Lifecourse Research, Pedagogy of Sociology in Professional Practice, Sociologists who Count! Quantitative Methods Study Group, and the Sociology of Harm, Violence and Social Control, Race and Ethnicity, Work, Markets and Welfare: Economic Sociology for the 21st Century, Sexualities and Sexual Practices. All the groups are in operation and are arranging activities virtually, with several notable for the energising effect they have had on their respective communities of researchers. The basic requirement is that they organise a panel in the Annual Conference, at least one event per year, and submit an article to the IJS. We provide €500 to fund events linked with the Study Group. The strategic goal is to support specialisms and increase the relevance of the SAI. The financial cost/benefit of the Study Groups is not yet apparent, due to the currently virtual nature of events, with few expense claims made yet. A call for new Study Groups will be made in the next number of weeks.

Best wishes,
John O'Brien,
SAI President.