**CIPR 2023 AGM**

**13 July 2023, 5pm, by Zoom**

**Panelists:**

Steve Shepperson-Smith (President)

Rachel Roberts (Past President)

Rachael Clamp (President Elect)

Alastair McCapra (CEO)

**Guest speaker:**

Jon Ronson, journalist and author

**MINUTES**

1. **Welcome by President, Steve Shepperson-Smith**

Steve welcomed attendees and introduced himself as the 75th CIPR President. He explained the agenda for the day with keynotes from all current honorary officers and accounts with our CEO. He also emphasized the importance of the AGM for members’ engagement and as an opportunity to scrutinise the decisions that the Board and management team are making about spending member money. He then introduced our guest speaker Jon Ronson, author, journalist and documentary filmmaker, who will talk about current affairs and his 2015 book, *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed*.

1. **Guest speaker:** Jon Ronson, journalist and author

Jon spoke to CIPR members on what's happened to internet culture since he wrote, *So You’ve been Publicly Shamed* with some stories of how individuals can react to public shaming differently, picturing social media and human behaviour effects. The full talk and AGM session will be later available on YouTube for the public. Steve thanked Jon for a fascinating talk and welcomed questions from attendees. Jon answered the following questions from members (abridged):

1. Question from Rachael Clamp: How long do you think Threads might become a cesspool?

Jon observed that these things can be very often top down. If the people who were running Threads are genuinely trying to be kindhearted and create a positive atmosphere, who knows, maybe it will trickle down in that way, but not sure how this would happen.

1. Question from Allison Gallagher Hughes: When you talk about people retreating into the suburbs, how that reverse tactic could affect social platforms?

Jon noted libertarian origins of the Internet and how free speech absolutists were demanding that the Internet was made in their image at the time. He believes that a more positive and kindhearted leadership of various social media platforms can create a better atmosphere. This can be found more often in niche community discussions and closed interest groups where people can congregate around their shared experiences.

1. Question from Samuel Wallace: What are your thoughts on the ability to be anonymous on social media and how that impacts on the experience of public shaming?

Jon noted that many keen shamers are doing it from for what they consider to be moral reasons and a lot of those people aren't anonymous because they're very proud of what they're doing.
Anonymous shamers tend to be ‘trolls’ or ‘edge lords’ and just want to create chaos. I think whether you're anonymous is less important than what's driving you as a person.

1. Question from Jon Clemens: The novelist Milan Kundera quoted in 1980 “people all over the world nowadays prefer to judge rather than to understand and to answer rather than to ask” so perhaps we are talking about human nature which cannot be changed?

Jon Ronson agreed, explaining that not only human nature won't change, but it can be amplified by whatever technological tool we're given to do our worst. It is unfortunately true that cold instant judgment seems to drive us and give us dopamine hits, more than we would like to think that it does. In the end, those of us who are still trying to end wars rather than start wars, to be the positive change that we want to see in the world. Just act the way that we would like the world to be.

1. Question from Claire Slipper: Faster news cycle can give a lot of pressure from clients and organizations to deliver a fast headline and the more sensational the better. What is your advice for getting thoughtful and measured stories out there right?

Jon answered that patience, curiosity instead of judgment and awareness of our own biases were key. A lot of people behave in the bad ways that they do because they succumb to cognitive biases.

The more aware we are of our own biases, the more empathetic we can be to the complexities of human behavior. Most of us are basically just a complicated mess of good and bad, and I think that's very important to remember. Jon quoted Max Mosley in PR terms: “our shame worthiness lies in the space between who we are and how we present ourselves to the world”. If we can narrow that gap to nothing, that means we are much less likely to be shamed or canceled. If you tell the truth about yourself to people, it will be harder for people to get you.

Steve thanked Jon for the Q&A and noted virtual applause from all attendees. Jon mentioned he was currently making this second season of his BBC podcast *Things Fell Apart* and he is also writing another book. He thanked all panelists, host and attendees for the session and left the webinar.

**3. Introduction to AGM, Steve Shepperson-Smith**

Steve started the AGM and noted that there would be two matters to votes at this meeting; one would be to approve of the 2022 AGM minutes and the other would be the reappointment of Sayer Vincent, our auditors for our 2023 audits. Both votes will take place electronically and live via Zoom.

1. **Approval of 2022 AGM minutes, Steve Shepperson-Smith**

A poll was launched via Zoom and members voted in favour to approve the 2022 AGM minutes as an accurate record of the meeting. David Hamilton proposed and Adam Honeysett-Watts seconded.

1. **2022 in review, Rachel Roberts**

Rachel noted that looking back and reflecting on achievements and learnings from last year, in our Annual Report there was a wealth of activities undertaken together with data that illustrates we added an extra 1,000 members and grew the number of Chartered CIPR Practitioners. The CIPR has responded to our desire to keep growing our reach, delivering podcasts, virtual and in-person events, we now have our own app, promoting, training and representing the industry, in the UK and internationally.

Two key initiatives were highlighted within our 2022 Workplan which were centered on growing and strengthening the CIPR community. One is that last year we made an important step change to move the dial on broadening representation. Volunteers who have been pursing this goal for years, principally through our Diversity & Inclusion Network have been doing an incredible job. We are pursuing a EDI strategy to drive change in this area by setting the goal to achieve the National Equality Standard. The second highlight was holding our first Volunteer Conference in Leeds in May. The Conference was about harnessing the power of the people who are great ambassadors for our profession, as well as some practical sessions exploring our strategy and values.

To close, Rachel noted how in our age of AI it was important to remember that great public relations comes from great human relations. She then thanked all those who contributed to the work of the CIPR in 2022.

1. **CIPR’s CEO, Alastair McCapra to review the 2022 audited accounts**

Alastair noted Rachel's remarks as she brought during her presidency to our work and that suffused everything we did last year as we pushed in every direction to make progress and to achieve some tangible results, but with one unfortunate financial result. In 2021 we were very cautious, as we didn’t know how the world was going to look and if people were going to want to attend events post pandemic, so we were very cautious on spending and as a result we made the largest surplus in our history of £376k, which of course isn't what we're here for, as a nonprofit organization. So in 2022, getting out of the pandemic, we set out to renew the energy and vigor across all our programs and drive very hard for growth in membership numbers, push hard to get up the number of charter practitioners, go back to face to face events for Excellence and so on. Some of that worked very effectively; we grew by more than 1000 members, and chartered our 500th member along the way. However, some things didn't quite go the way we thought they would go, and we probably ran too many training sessions with too few people. The PRide Awards also did not do very well last year, and once we started having in person sessions again, individuals slowed down to complete their qualifications, comparing to when we had lockdowns.

So the result was that although we were very ambitious, we were not realistic enough and we made a loss of £70K which was a disappointment to Alastair personally.

Although this was the first loss since 2016 and it was unplanned, what we've done this year is to tighten up our internal controls and procedures, having a better sense of where we are going. We will look more attentively at the forward business pipeline and will have a better sense of how our operating environment is shaping up, to not repeat that loss in the current or future years.

We have just signed up our 200th Corporate Affiliate and looking forward, we have about 600 people who have said that they want to get chartered, so it is possible that in Rachel Clamp's presidency next year, we will charter our 1000th person, which certainly is what we are aiming for.

1. **Re-appointment of Sayer Vincent as the Institute’s auditors for 2023**

A poll was launched via Zoom and members voted in favour to re-appoint Sayer Vincent as the CIPR auditors for the 2023 audit. Rachel Roberts agreed and John Wilkinson seconded.

1. **Looking forward to 2024 with Rachael Clamp, President Elect**

Rachael thanked the warm welcome and echoes Rachel Robert’s comments on the important of people in PR. She praised the calibre of volunteers across Board, and noted the projects that CIPR will give continuity during her year. We spent lots of time and money over the last few years investing and going 100% virtually for the team. We've aligned websites and back-office activities, launched the app and the online work learning platform to name just a handful of things that we have been doing. Our work in lobbying and AI and PR continues to be the best in the industry and is making a difference.

For 2024, we will refine, implement, and make the difference that we wanted to, looking holistically at virtual and digital strategy, working better for the membership and strategy delivery. We will continue and further build on the brilliant advocacy work that we have been doing around lobbying, AI and realigning our ESG work. We will ensure that we are a sustainable, successful, and supportive CIPR that is home to all practitioners. And before the end of the year, Rachael will share with as many as she can some of the 2024 workplan projects in greater detail, but most importantly what it will mean for members, not just what these projects are, as she wants members to get involved. She welcomed members to get in touch through the usual channels and she looked forward to seeing everyone as we run out towards the end of the year and then into next year.

1. **Questions to the President, Immediate Past President and CEO**

Steve thanked Rachael and opened the Q&A for honorary officers and the CEO.

1. Question from Jenni Beattie: Can you expand the forward pipeline about the accounts? Alastair explained that traditionally in finance particularly we look backwards at the last quarter's accounts and how performance can match expectations and budget. Therefore, based on past performance we can have a better understanding of what business is likely to come our way, and some examples of that are in in the Corporate Affiliate field. We have a queue of about 30 employers who are waiting for us to speak to them and start an onboarding process. If this number starts to drop, then something is changing in the market and that for some reason organizations are not as willing as they were last year to sign up to making their staff members, telling us about what our expectations should be in the future, and a similar effect can also happen with in-house training, or on chartered practitioners, where we have about 600 people in that pipeline at the moment.

b) Question from Robert Park: About the annual report and aligning ESG, what can CIPR learn from last year's Big Oil documentary? And how is the ESI monitor within the professional development opportunities getting more practitioners knowledgeable about net 0 carbon neutrality and other details that gets missed when the message goes out there within strategic communications?
Alastair replied that this year we published our first ESG report, and we used the ESI monitor to determine what our carbon footprint was. Almost immediately he realized how difficult and unclear this area is, and the number of organizations that can straightforwardly answer if they can offset tons of CO2 equivalent, is alarmingly low. He also shared that he asked someone recently regarding a similar organization, where our footprint was literally 10 times theirs. They replied that they didn’t measure everything, only things that they could change. And that’s not what CIPR is doing. Reflecting on The Big Oil documentary, Alastair noted that on the point made in the series, the same tactics were copied from the tobacco campaign, and then transposed onto the oil campaign, and then transposed onto climate. These are techniques which were exposed in that series and are very much in play in the world around us. As a charter body, we have a responsibility to act in the public interest and that public interest is not properly served if those sorts of tactics are still going on.

Rachael noted that there is a lot packed in the ESG acronym, and our activities around EDI and lobbying all fall under different areas of ESG. It is easy to get lost as into what we can do to support practitioners, our industry and for the institute itself. She does not know 100% yet what CIPR will do, and there is a lot that needs to be done. As she with Board shape the 2024 work plan over the next few months, she will be welcoming comments from members. She also encouraged members to look at the work of the CIPR ESG panel and some of the papers they are putting out, as they are helping to educate our members on how to operate in this area.

CIPR also has two new training courses this year; a sustainability diploma and sustainability on-demand training, which is free for members.

1. Question from Nooralhuda Aljlas: How can overseas members help, participate or be part of a committee or group active in the CIPR?

Steve explained that Rachel Roberts launched the EDIC committee last year, bringing volunteering opportunities as part of our commitment to inclusion. When volunteer opportunities come up, they will be on the website. Steve noted he has worked hard to make Council and all committees more inclusive, for instance we have a Council member joining us from Canada, Crispin Thorold, who is also a member of the CIPR International Committee. Nevertheless Steve explained that he is still trying to find more ways to engage members based outside the UK and this is an ongoing effort. He offered to connect Nooralhuda with the CRPI International Group, and apologized if she had felt there were barriers to engage from outside the UK.

d) Question from Allison Gallagher-Hughes: Does this year's finances have a similar amount to last year which will be ring fenced as a contingency plan? And is there any opportunity to review how we deliver training to make it more affordable and provide greater flexibility on how it is delivered?

Alastair explained that we do not have a contingency this year, but we are watching developments closely month by month and will be ready if things change suddenly and amend our financial plans accordingly. The cost of living crisis hasn't directly impact us for now, but it had clear impact on some members whose circumstances are being helped by Iprovision and other resources that we have. The training market at the moment is actually very buoyant, and we have reserves matching our pre-2019 practice of not running face-to-face courses unless there is a minimum of eight people present, and that helps us control our costs in terms of delivering it in a way that makes it more affordable. In person training offered in London is not going to get cheaper; online learning is a bit cheaper, but we still have to pay a trainer, staff to take the bookings and take care of all the other logistics. We still have to produce all the teaching materials which has a cost base that we have to meet. On-demand training is also a great opportunity for those who do not travel to London and want more than the current online training on offer. They are able to learn at their own time, in their own way. More on-demand training courses will be added every year in the platform.

Steve added that although training must have the right geographical spread, some regions can become extremely expensive for the CIPR to deliver it because they just do not get the same number of attendees as in London. If there is a local demand for face-to-face training, then a national regional group might pick that up if they can. On sustainable financial terms, most offers we have are for London, but we have now online and on-demand to supplement this. He also praised the recently launched CIPR Iprovision 75 funds, that can proactively help members from poor financial backgrounds or minority backgrounds to advance their careers, including students, with training costs in in London or elsewhere.

1. Question from Gemma Pettman: For Rachael, how are you looking at prioritizing and supporting volunteer activity across the organization?

Rachael observed that she has been chairing the group chairs community this year and trying to build strong relationships, closing some of the gaps that have been there between central and local activities, doing more crossover between different groups, and creating that strong community.

She wants to build better, stronger communication channels, for example the Coordinating Committee support that bring things together for greater and impact and higher success rate factors, taking into consideration people's time and commitment, finding the right balance on this. Steve also shared that the iProvision 75 Funds has been recently launched and is also available for all CIPR members that might need it.

1. **Close of Business – President, Steve Shepperson-Smith**

Steve thanked everyone who joined and shared that he was happy to engage with members and learners by either e-mail or LinkedIn, Twitter and Threads. He reminded members to check CIPR summer events and a Fellows and Chartered Practitioners lunch at the House of Lords on 29th of September, with speaker details still to be announced. He also reminded that the Maggie Nally lecture will take place online on the 4th of October, again with a great speaker to be announced, and the Future Leadership Conference which he is leading on the 14th of November.

He also encouraged members to stand for election for Presidency as the information was just made available in our website, noting that being a CIPR President for a year is a great experience within the profession. He wished all attendees a great summer and hoped to meet again at any of those events.