

# SOUTH AFRICAN NEUROSCIENCE SOCIETY (SANS)

## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2024

|       |                         |
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| Date  | 19 July 2024            |
| Time  | 18:15 – 19:30           |
| Venue | Premier Hotel, Umhlanga |

### Attendance

|                        |                     |                    |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| • Rachael Dangarembizi | • Kimberly Williams | • Dorit Hockman    |
| • Sahba Besharati      | • Zama Msibi        | • Sagel Kundieko   |
| • Anja de Lange        | • Maahir Kauchali   | • Tosin Olasehinde |
| • Sylvester Omoruyi    | • Amalia Awala      | • Roxanne Hattingh |
| • Nombulelo Mthembu    | • Siphesihle Mkhize | • Kholeka Vezi     |
| • Slindile Masinga     | • Siyethaba Bhengu  | • Kiara Rampershad |
| • Prisca Gadisi        | • Imtatia Ngcakaza  | • Naledi Dziba     |
| • Lungelo Mthembu      | • Johanne Marais    | • Emily Higgitt    |
| • Ariel Kraitzick      | • Yanga Pato        | • Lilitha Cengani  |
| • Alison Clifford      | • Thandazile Juwele | • Chris Ajonijebu  |

## 1. Adoption of Minutes of AGM 2023

- The minutes of the 2023 AGM were adopted without amendment.

## 2. Membership to SANS

### 2.1 Current Membership

- Total membership (current and expired combined): 468
- Active members: 60
- Expired members: 366
- Suggestions raised to grow active membership:
  - Increase the frequency of renewal reminders sent to members.
  - Introduce an automated, business-style payment system for membership renewal, with members notified in advance of any automatic payment.

### 2.2 Strategies for Membership Stimulation

- Society symposia and events were noted as a key driver of new membership, as non-members often register in order to access reduced member rates.
- Further suggestions put forward by members included:
  - Running competitions offering non-monetary rewards, such as one-on-one sessions with established researchers.
  - Sustaining member engagement between symposia through smaller events (e.g. games nights, webinars), including in collaboration with other neuroscience clubs.

- Identifying principal investigators (PIs) and encouraging them to promote membership to their students (word of mouth).
- Introducing added benefits for SANS members, such as reduced symposium registration.
- Strengthening the Society's webinar programme and online presence.
- Involving young members with fresh ideas in planning activities.

### 3. SANS Social Media, Website and Communications

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#### 3.1 Social Media Report (Sagel Kundieko)

- SANS maintains active social media pages on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter/X, on which updates are posted; members were encouraged to like and follow these pages.
- The intention had been to post at least twice a month; however, this has been constrained by limited capacity.
- A call was made for interested young members to assist with generating content for the Society's social media platforms.
- Members were invited to contact Sagel Kundieko directly for further details on the relevant handles and pages.

#### 3.2 SANS Website

- The Society's website (<http://saneurosoc.co.za>) remains the primary online platform for SANS.

### 4. SANS Symposia

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Rachael Dangarembizi noted that the Society needs to generate income to remain financially sustainable, including to retain its Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) status, which requires annual auditing at a cost of approximately R25,000 per annum. While societies typically generate income through hosting conferences, SANS has historically held its symposia jointly with Biological Psychiatry, which reduced financial risk but also limited financial gain. This informed the decision to host an independent meeting in Durban.

#### 4.1 2024 SANS Symposium – UKZN/Durban (Rachael Dangarembizi)

- The Local Organising Committee (LOC) dedicated significant time and effort to ensure the success of the meeting.
- The Society incurred no outstanding debt and is projected to net approximately R100,000 once all outstanding bills have been settled.
- Further funding opportunities were identified, including sponsorship from IBRO to support future SANS meetings.
- Income was also generated through exhibitor fees.
- With roughly six months' lead time for this meeting, it was noted that a longer planning window could unlock further opportunities, including travel grants, exhibitor participation, sponsorships and partnerships.
- Members unanimously agreed to hold SANS meetings on a biennial basis (once every two years), as the Society is not yet ready to plan a further symposium in 2025.
- It was agreed that SANS meetings should be decoupled from SONA meetings to avoid competing with SONA for attendance.

#### 4.2 2025 Biological Psychiatry (BP) Collaboration and Future Direction

- Discussion was held on whether SANS should continue coupling its meetings with Biological Psychiatry (BP). Points raised included:
  - A preference to establish SANS as an independent, self-sustaining meeting.
  - BP's primary focus on psychiatry was felt to be narrower than SANS' broader neuroscience scope, limiting relatability for some members.
  - The next independent SANS meeting is confirmed for 2026.
- The current meeting was noted as the Society's most successful to date in terms of attendance, achieving international participation and raising the Society's profile; members agreed on the importance of sustaining this momentum.
- Summary of comments from Rachael Dangarembizi:
  - The Society is pleased to move toward independent, biennial meetings — while this requires considerable work, it is regarded as doable and rewarding.
  - SANS remains open to collaboration with BP where it is of clear benefit to the Society.
  - Decoupling from SONA, the mother body in Africa, will allow SANS members to attend SONA and SANS in alternating years.
  - The 2024 meeting was considered a strong success, and a brief written meeting report may be produced and shared.
  - Communication will be sent to invite member discussion and input on the 2026 meeting.
  - While UKZN's hosting of the 2024 meeting was appreciated, the Society noted a need for a formal, written framework setting out what the partnership with a hosting institution entails, as this was not clearly defined this time and the Society was found wanting in this regard.

## 5. SANS Transformation Report (Sahba Besharati / Dorit Hockman)

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- An invitation letter incorporating a transformation statement (prepared by Joe) is to be circulated to the full membership for review.
- The Transformation Committee was congratulated for its work.

## 6. SANS Outreach Activities

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### 6.1 Brain Awareness Week 2024 (Zama Msibi)

- UKZN, in collaboration with SANS, hosted Brain Awareness Week, comprising two main activities:
  - A primary school visit — while the content was originally aimed at older learners, the school requested that future content be adapted for a younger audience, and has since invited the UKZN team to return.
  - A brain awareness walk along the beach promenade, which was well attended, including by staff members outside the neuroscience group and by parents. Both activities were led by students.
- These activities were funded by IBRO and the Dana Foundation.

### 6.2 SANS / WWN / ALBA Activities (Rachael Dangarembizi)

- The Society continues to build its global presence through activities such as the ALBA network.
- A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) event was held at the current symposium with sponsorship from ALBA.

## 7. SANS and the International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO) (Rachael Dangarembizi)

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### 7.1 IBRO Registration Fees and Partnerships

- IBRO presents ongoing opportunities for funding and partnership; SANS has submitted a bid to host the next IBRO meeting and has been shortlisted.
- The current SANS symposium was also funded, in part, by IBRO.

## 8. Treasury Report (Kimberly Williams / Tanya) — reported by Kimberly Williams

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### 8.1 Current Meeting Finances

- Income of approximately R460,000 has been generated to date, with further income still expected.
- Significant expenses have been incurred (specific figure not recorded).
- A positive balance remains after covering all expenses (specific figure not recorded).

### 8.2 Audit

- The annual audit remains outstanding; however, the Society will pay a reduced fee of R14,000, down from the usual R26,000.

### 8.3 Membership Fees

- Membership fees are set at R100 for students and R250 for non-students.

### 8.4 Funds

- The Society holds a positive financial balance.

## 9. Fundraising (Kimberly Williams / Tanya)

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*No separate report was tabled on this agenda item during the meeting.*

## 10. SANS Executive Committee (Rachael Dangarembizi)

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### 10.1 Next ExCo Election

- The next ExCo election has been postponed to 2025 in order to un-sync the election cycle from the biennial collaboration with Biological Psychiatry.
- The next AGM will be held online in 2025 for the nomination of ExCo members; members are encouraged to self-nominate or nominate others.

### 10.2 Nomination of New ExCo Member

- A nomination process was held to replace Bianca (Wits), who has been unreachable since being co-opted onto the committee in 2022.
- Chris Ajonijebu and Anja de Lange put themselves forward for self-nomination.
- Siphesihle Mkhize was nominated by Zama Msibi.
- Rachael Dangarembizi clarified the position being replaced: as Sagel Kundieko has since taken on and continues to lead the social media portfolio, she will remain in that role, and the vacant student representative position will be filled separately.
- As Siphesihle Mkhize was the only student among the nominees, she was confirmed as the incoming student representative by default.

## 11. SANS Education (Rachael Dangarembizi)

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*No separate report was tabled on this agenda item during the meeting.*

## 12. Any Other Business (AOB)

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- A suggestion was made to publish participating poster presentations on the SANS website to encourage greater participation (Maahir Kauchali); it was noted in response that this could raise concerns among supervising Pls (Rachael Dangarembizi).
- SANS approached Nature regarding coverage of the 2024 Symposium; as a commercial publication, Nature requested a fee of £20,000, which the Society could not afford.

***The meeting was closed.***

## Summary of Action Items

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| Action                                                                                                                | Responsible                              | Timeline                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Send an invitation letter with the transformation statement to the full membership for review.                        | Transformation Committee (Sahba / Dorit) | TBC                            |
| Increase the frequency of membership renewal reminders and investigate an automated payment / renewal system.         | ExCo                                     | TBC                            |
| Formalise, in writing, the terms of partnership between SANS and future host institutions for its biennial symposium. | ExCo                                     | Before 2026 symposium planning |
| Draft and circulate a brief report on the outcomes of the 2024 UKZN/Durban Symposium.                                 | Rachael Dangarembizi                     | TBC                            |
| Issue communication inviting member input on planning for the 2026 SANS meeting.                                      | ExCo                                     | TBC                            |
| Hold the next AGM online in 2025 for the nomination of new ExCo members.                                              | ExCo                                     | 2025                           |