



JUST ALGORITHMS ACTION GROUP (JAAG)

Annual Report September 2023

Contents

1. Company Information
2. Chairman's Report
3. Directors' Report
4. Financial Statement
5. Stewardship Board Report

1. Company Information

Just Algorithms Action Group Limited

A company limited by guarantee

Company number 13174217

Registered office:

11 Ebrington Road,
Malvern, Worcs,
England, WR14 4NL

Web site: www.jaag.org.uk

Directors

Sabina Sadagattoulla Ali	(appointed 2/2/21)
Dr Penny Duquenoy	(appointed 13/12/22)
Andrew Philip Gray	(appointed 12/5/23)
Paul Stephen Holdsworth	(appointed 12/9/22)
Dr Martin Hugh Lloyd	(appointed 1/4/21)
Eoin Arthur McCarthy	(appointed 1/4/21)
Dr Siani Lynne Morris	(appointed 28/2/21)
John Stephen White	(appointed 28/2/21)

2. Chairman's Report

This Report covers the third year of JAAG's operations.

Due to his failing health, Martin Lloyd stepped down as Chairman in October 2022 and I am presenting this report as Acting Chairman.

The year has been one of continuing consolidation of JAAG's operational systems and projects. Our new governance structure of Stewardship Board and Company Board is working well, providing tangible benefits. We welcome our two new directors (Penny Duquenois and Andrew Gray) who have joined over the past year.

JAAG is fortunate in having members with a wide range of experience and expertise. To make the most of their contributions, JAAG's work is organised around projects, designed to move us towards our objectives.

We are part of a world-wide eco-system of civil society and non-governmental organisations (CSOs and NGOs) who are concerned about the ethical use of new technologies. The potential benefits to humankind from technology, and systems which incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, are awesome. But so too are the dangers. JAAG is exploring with others how we can best work together. Our work with the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence proceeds, and we are developing deeper collaborations with other CSOs, contributing to the Group's work.

Since the outset of JAAG, we have been led and inspired by Martin Lloyd. It was Martin, who originally suggested to me that an opportunity had opened up for practical work on the safe design and regulation of digital systems enabled by artificial intelligence. Using his very extensive and valued experience in the field of safe systems design, Martin brought a clear vision to those of us who joined him in the months and years that followed. His gift of clear discernment, gently expressed has, on many occasions, seen the Board through some otherwise quite difficult discussions. On behalf of all of those who have had the privilege of working with him at JAAG in the last four years, we extend our grateful thanks for his service.

Eoin McCarthy, September 2023

3. Directors' Report

It has been a busy, exciting year. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has burst into headlines, front pages and the media more generally, and JAAG members have been in the thick of it. As in previous years, we have made progress through the enthusiastic efforts of a score of active members, but much remains to be done and there is a long and challenging road ahead. If you are not already an active member, we hope you will consider joining us in one or more of our campaigns.

This report skates quickly over some of JAAG's work over the past year. More detail is presented and discussed in our JAAG Member Meetings (JMM) which we hold (virtually) about eight times a year.

Facing the UK Government

Together with other CSOs, we have been following the progress of two parliamentary bills which have been subject to much debate and comment in the UK: the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill (DPDI); and the Online Safety Bill.

A group of JAAG members closely followed the development of the proposed DPDI legislation, from the first public consultation phase in November 2021, to its revision and presentation to Parliament in March 2023. JAAG is concerned that the Bill would weaken individuals' rights over how their personal data is used; make it easier for organisations to use individuals' data; and make them less accountable for doing so correctly. Furthermore, the Bill would authorise automated decision-making (without any human involvement). Early in 2023, The project team sent out a succinct briefing paper for all JAAG members and continues to monitor developments.

The Online Safety Bill has been a marathon in the UK parliament since before JAAG began. Following many amendments, it is expected to receive Royal Assent shortly and become the "Online Safety Act." The test of its efficacy will then be the responsibility of the UK Communications Regulator (Ofcom). JAAG has taken part in many discussions with other CSOs on this. We will take an active interest in the practical problems of implementation which we expect will arise, and watch similar developments in the rest of the world (specifically the EU and the USA).

A small team from JAAG has also engaged with the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence (APPG AI). This was set up as a forum for parliamentarians to keep informed about technological innovations and the market place through contact with commercial corporate members, but it has been recognised that the non-profit (CSO) sector is likely to give the APPG more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the effects of technology on individuals and society as a whole.

Projects

Work has been carried out on the following projects:

- Tech@Work

Networking and research work has moved us closer to understanding the big challenges that AI poses for workers and workplaces. To move forward we are hoping that JAAG will be in a position to respond in the most effective way possible to help people at the receiving end of new technologies. We plan to continue strengthening the relationships we have started with established worker-led organisations.

- Audit Tool

Much effort was spent in the development of our proposed audit tool ("AuditLens"), for use in a variety of technical audits, with a view to expansion to meet the demands of ethical AI audits. A working prototype was developed, but the project then had a serious setback. Our software partner was taken over by a much larger company and the staff working on it were redeployed. We had no choice but to mothball this work until a suitable alternative software development team can be found.

- Digital and AI Ethics in Schools

We have identified the type of approach and material that would work best to raise secondary school children's awareness of the challenges brought by the latest developments in AI. This is an exciting project. However, we have an urgent need to recruit a project lead, with the necessary experience of teaching, who can take this forward. Once that is achieved, we hope to pilot some of the material in more schools in the months ahead.

Risk management

In the autumn of 2022 our member Peter Hanley introduced JAAG directors to the Product and Process Assurance System for managing risk. Unlike more usual risk registers, this approach uses objective-centric risk assessment. We decided to pilot this approach with Stage 2 of our AuditLens Project. This was done and was found to be useful, so we expect to revive it when this project is brought out of its mothballs and apply it to similar projects as appropriate.

Membership

Net membership has grown from around 70 to around 80. This is disappointing but not surprising, given that we have not initiated a drive for new members in the past year. While some of our members have not renewed, there has been a steady flow of new members, mainly through personal introduction. Now, with our increasingly international membership we are better able to keep abreast of developments in the rest of Europe and in the USA. We still aim to grow sufficiently to attain a critical mass of grass-roots members capable of making our concerns known at local and national level.

What's in a name?

When JAAG was founded in 2019, the buzz was all about Algorithms and the threats they pose to individuals and society. In the intervening years, media attention has switched to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the threats which that poses to individuals and society. There appear to be no commonly agreed definitions of either Algorithms or AI, but this does not prevent politicians, academics, entrepreneurs and lawyers becoming experts on these subjects. One thing that everyone is agreed on is that there is great potential for harm from unregulated exploitation of new technologies, but there is also potential for new and stunning benefits in the form of life enhancement and big economic gains for some. We are already seeing many of the benefits and harms. They are both likely to increase rapidly in the coming years.

JAAG has no current plans to change its name to keep up with new terminology as it is introduced and hyped. Our focus is to keep a watching brief on all related developments; to call out injustice and harms as we see them, to initiate and contribute to efforts to inform and educate; and to work with perseverance towards a commonly agreed set of safe, ethical standards and accountability for the commissioning, development, implementation and operation of all systems which make use of hardware and software technology.

Future plans

JAAG's third year of operation has been challenging in several respects. We spent our first two years exploring possibilities that could fit within JAAG's four main aims.¹ This work included the exploration of many different project ideas. Over the past year, this investment of time and energy into researching opportunities and gathering information has enabled the Board to 'reality check' these ideas.

We have consulted our members on priorities, making use of the Polis tool². This has helped us to build consensus and obtain a clearer view of what we can usefully focus on, with the skill-sets, money and resources we have available. We are in a strong position to move forward.

In the short term, we plan to continue with our portfolio of projects, to grow our membership, and deepen our relationships with other CSOs. Since the end of the year, we have received a small grant from Worcestershire County Council which has helped us to develop a plan for membership growth.

1 See www.jaag.org.uk

2 See <https://pol.is/home>

As we focus more on working in areas where JAAG can have the greatest impact, we will also remain open to suggestions and new opportunities. Below are some examples of possible work, in addition to what has already been mentioned above:

- development and implementation of a Register of Concerns, with the aim of deriving general concerns from specific ones, and identifying practical general solutions
- finding a new software development partner to enable AuditLens to be brought out of mothballs
- in collaboration with partner organisations, applying to the world of AI, and information systems more generally, a Whole System Approach (WSA), similar to WSA initiatives in the Health and Energy sectors³
- making better use of our web site and social media to explain and comment on the issues behind the headlines.

³ This would involve looking beyond the technology to the ways in which organisations procure, commission, maintain, operate and support systems throughout their lifecycle. Who is accountable for them? Whose interests do they serve? What are their day-to-day and long term effects? In what way do they impact on the lives of the digitally excluded? How can systems run safely and have their defects detected and fixed? And many more questions.

4. Financial Statement

Statement of Financial Activity

(SoFA)

GBP (£)	Notes	9 months to Mar 22	12 months to Mar 23
Income			
Member Subscriptions		950	1,075
Grants		0	0
Individual donations		9,900	18,206
Bank interest received		0	28
Total Income		10,850	19,309
Expenditure			
Subcontractors		5,838	10,377
Travel Expenses		169	262
IT, website etc		850	443
Subscriptions, Fees and Donations		1,124	305
Bank Charges		2	4
Total Expenditure		<u>7,983</u>	<u>11,391</u>
Surplus for period		2,867	7,918
Opening Balance at 1 April 2022			6,204
Closing Balance at 31 March 2023			14,122

Balance Sheet as at 1 Apr 2023

GBP (£)

Fixed Assets

Tangible assets		0
-----------------	--	---

Current assets

Cash		14,322
------	--	--------

Creditors

Amounts falling due within one year	1	-200
Amounts falling due after one year		0

Total Liabilities

-200

Net Current Assets

14,122

Total Net Assets		<u>14,122</u>
------------------	--	----------------------

Reserves

Restricted Funds	2	2,442
Unrestricted Funds		11,680

Total Funds

14,122

Notes to Financial Statement

1. Accruals for member expense claims not yet submitted.
2. Restricted funds are the total of unspent grants and donations received for our Schools project.
3. Just Algorithms Action Group Limited is a company limited by guarantee and has no share capital. The liability of each member in the event of a winding-up is limited to £1.

5. Stewardship Board Report

Since last year's Annual Report, the JAAG Stewardship Board (SB) has been established with its terms of reference and three members have been appointed: Paul Hodgkin, Siani Morris (Pearson) and Roger Ramsden.

The SB has established a good working relationship with the JAAG Board; it has led the search for new directors and been involved in various personnel and strategic issues.

Looking ahead to the coming year the SB's work is likely to focus on further director recruitment; discussions around various succession plans; and the ongoing review of JAAG's purpose, business model and operational functions together with ad hoc issues as they arise.