



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 11 MAY 2012 AT 11:00 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor R.L. Davies, Professor F. Honary, Professor M. Kendall, Professor C. Tadhunter, Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor M.A. Barstow, Dr I.A. Crawford, Dr L. Fletcher, Ms A. Bailey, Professor K. Blundell, Dr E. Bunce, Professor Y. Elsworth, Professor R.T. Holme, Professor A.W. Hood, Professor S. Miller, Dr A. Norton, Professor D.J. Southwood and Professor R.E. Spencer

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D. Elliott (Executive Secretary), Ms P. Mortimer (Executive Secretary-designate) and Dr R. Massey (Deputy Executive Secretary)

APOLOGIES: Professor D.W. Kurtz, Professor O. Lahav and Professor D. Hughes

2. MINUTES

2.1 The minutes of the meeting of 29 March 2012 were approved with minor changes. (Paragraph 3.3: spelling correction to read 'Dr. Benjamin Joachimi' and paragraph 6.2: removal of the planetary designation for Dr. Emma Bunce.)

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Professor Southwood advised that a meeting to determine the remit and management of a Geophysics Forum has been scheduled for the 23rd May 2012; attendees will include the Challenger Society, Royal Meteorological Society, British Hydrological Society and the Geological Society. Professor David Southwood, Professor Mike Kendall and Pamela Mortimer will attend from the Royal Astronomical Society. The Council noted this progress and the need to recognise and address stakeholder sensitivities and complexities; and to ensure coherent engagement across the community.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President introduced the paper on the revised agreement between the RAS, National Maritime Museum and the British Horological Institute over the Harrison Regulator Clock (C(2012/05)4/1), the paper set out actions taken to date and future plans to record dimensions and assembly information, reassemble, copy and use of the clock(s). The Council agreed the approach and the President signed the agreement on behalf of the RAS.

4.2 The President summarised the discussion at a meeting with Professor Thierry Courvoisier, the President of the European Astronomical Society (EAS) held during the week of the National Astronomy Meeting. The RAS President, Treasurer and President-elect and the President and Vice President from Astronomische Gesellschaft, the German Astronomical Society attended. The RAS is keen to support the work of the European Astronomical

Society and to help it become a more effective unified voice for Astronomy in Europe. Structural and governance improvements could help in this, for example by changing the membership arrangements to become a federation of societies rather than the existing individual membership arrangements.

Council discussed options for active RAS engagement in Astronomy in Europe; this could be through direct RAS staff and member engagement or by sub contracting the management of our interests to the EAS.

The President noted that, in his personal capacity, he and a further two UK astronomers have been elected to the EAS Council and would take up positions later this year.

It was noted that there is an urgent requirement to engage with the European Parliament and Commission on Horizon 2020, the next EU framework for research programmes.

It was agreed that:

The Council should review Astronomy in Europe regularly and develop a long term plan for engagement. We should determine what the other European astronomical societies' approaches are to working with the EAS and in Europe (in the first instance we should approach the French, Italian, Spanish and Dutch) and develop our strategy accordingly.

ACTION: President and Exec Secretary

Council members to be provided with a list of their senior European counterparts so that advantage can be taken at international meetings to discuss the approach to the EAS and other shared interests

ACTION: Executive Secretary and all Council members

In the interim, RAS members should engage directly on urgent matters, such as Horizon 2020, as they arise. Professor Steve Miller to circulate relevant Horizon 2020 papers to Council members for their consideration.

4.3 The President had attended the Royal River Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum and learnt of plans to move the Harrison clocks currently based in Flamsteed House into the new Sammy Ofer wing. As RAS assets we should monitor this activity.

4.4 The President expressed his thanks to the RAS staff and Council members for their support during his enjoyable tenure as President, particular thanks were given to David Elliot who is retiring from the RAS after 9 years.

5. TREASURER'S BUSINESS

5.1 Journals Publication Contract (2012/05)5/1

The Treasurer introduced his paper on the RAS Publications Contract Tender that summarised the market testing process undertaken during over the months from December 2011 to May 2012 and made the recommendation that the RAS contract should be placed with Oxford University Press (OUP), (subject to agreed negotiation criteria.)

The Council thoroughly debated the matter. Professor R. Carswell, the Editor in Chief for Monthly Notices presented his opinions to Council by telephone. The Treasurer was not present during this telephone call. The President and Professor K. Blundell separately

declared conflicts of interest (as they both work for the University of Oxford) and whilst they partook in the preliminary discussion were not present for and abstained from the vote. The President-Elect, Professor D. Southwood chaired the final discussion and took the vote. The vote was 14 in favour of negotiating a contract with OUP and 2 against.

Council agreed:

To the placing of the RAS publications contract with OUP, subject to a negotiated contract. That subject to the contract meeting required financial, quality and ethical aims of the RAS it will be signed by the Treasurer on behalf of Council within one month, transition will occur over the period to December 31st 2012 when OUP will formally take over the contract.

ACTION: Treasurer

That as part of the contract negotiations RAS should work with OUP to agree a financial plan to support a sustainable pricing policy that is customer friendly and robust in responding to public or ethical concerns.

ACTION: Treasurer

That the following should be considered at the June Council meeting:

The allocation of additional resources generated by the letting of the publishing contract, this would include options to manage risks to the society such as those posed by Open Access publishing.

Adopting a Publishing Policy. Council members should provide comments to the Treasurer on the draft provided by as an Annex to the RAS Publications Contract tender paper, (Annex D to C(2012/05)5/1)

5.2 Conflict of Interest declaration C(2012/05)5/2

A small change was made to the Conflict of Interest declaration form (the broader term Institution replaced University, as not all Council members are University based).

It was agreed that:

Council members should pass their completed forms to the Executive Secretary by end of June 2012.

The Executive Secretary will hold the completed forms and ask Council members to review their declaration annually.

ACTION: All Council Members and Executive Secretary

5.3 Finance Committee Report, Operations Plan and Risk Analysis C(2012/05)5/3

The Council noted the report.

5.4 Trustees Report for 2011 including Financial Statements C(2011/05)5/4

The Council approved the report and it was signed by the President and Treasurer.

5.5 Audit Report 2011 Letter of Representation C(2011/05)5/5

The Council approved the letter and it was signed by the Treasurer.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 Video Conferencing

Dr. Robert Massey, Dep Exec Sec, provided an update on the feasibility of upgrading the broadband connection in Burlington House. A key limitation is that Westminster Council's planning policy restricts the installation of optical fibres in the area therefore standard internet providers can only routinely provide connections over copper wires, this reduces download speeds and quality. Dedicated business leased lines are available but at a significant cost.

Oxford University Physics IT section was meeting with an Audio Visual Company on 14th May to discuss options for video-conferencing in the Council Room and lecture theatre in Burlington House and the recording of presentations to go on the internet.

Council agreed that there is an urgent need to improve this situation and possible options should be scoped further and implemented as soon as possible. Dep Exec Sec should keep the treasurer informed of the cost of various options as they are investigated.

Professor Blundell proposed that an IT committee should be established to oversee matters such as the need for improved bandwidth, video conferencing, and improved communication systems in the lecture theatre and overspill rooms. It was agreed that the Exec Sec would consider and revert to the Council at the meeting in June.

ACTION: Executive Secretary

6.2 Committee Membership (Executive Secretary) C(2012/05)6/2

The Council approved the following changes to committee membership:

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Professor Richard Holme (Chair) to replace Dr. Jacqueline Mitton.

Dr. David Boyd, former President of the BAA and Dr. Tim O'Brien of the University of Manchester to replace respectively Tom Boles and Professor Mike Bode.

HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Professor Mike Edmunds and Professor David Hughes to renew for a second term as respectively Chair and Member of the Astronomical Heritage Committee.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

Professor Phil Charles, former Director of the SAAO [South African Astronomical Observatory], to replace Professor Ofer Lahav as Chair.

6.3 Report of the Honorary Auditors (Executive Secretary) C(2012/05)6/3

The Executive Secretary explained that the annual honorary audit arises from the time before there was a legal requirement to have professional auditors. It is helpful in providing an opportunity for RAS staff to discuss their work with someone external to the management chain and for the RAS membership to gain insight into the management of RAS activities.

Whilst the recommendations made are non-binding it is a useful tool to raise issues of concern to Council. In response to the issues raised in the report it was agreed that:

The Treasurer would present a paper to the June Council meeting on the financial implications of RAS sponsoring one or more Fellowships.

ACTION: Treasurer

The future and management of the Annex to the Library should be considered by Council. [Note: the new Librarian starts in August, therefore a paper could be considered at the October meeting] podcasts of public meetings should be made available on the RAS website.

The Council also discussed other matters highlighted in the report such as maternity leave, lack of back up for some staff functions and staffing resources required to support the courting of philanthropic donors.

7. POLICY OFFICER'S BUSINESS

7.1 Higher Education Commission C(2012/05)7/1

The Council noted the paper that will be posted on the RAS website.

7.2 RCUK Capital Projects C(2012/05)7/2

The Council noted the paper.

7.3 HEFCE Student Numbers C(2012/05)7/3

Council discussed the paper. The President asked for clarification on the definition of Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects (SIVS).

Action: Deputy Executive Secretary.

[Update: according to the HEFCE consultation paper, high-cost subjects like physics are included within the existing SIVS list.]

8. PUBLICATIONS

8.1 MNRAS Board Meeting C(2012/05)8/1

This paper had not been distributed to all Council members. It will be distributed and presented for information at the Council meeting in June.

8.2 PMC Board Meeting C(2012/05)8/2

The Council noted the paper and a concern that the impact factor for Monthly Notices had declined however a range of initiatives are in place to try to improve this.

9. OTHER

9.1 Officers Report for March and April 2012 C(2012/05)9/1

The Council noted this paper, in particular the fact that Miss Jennifer Harris is resigning. The Council also discussed the procedure under which emergency grants are awarded.

9.2 Daphne Jackson Fellowship (Executive Secretary)

Professor Sara Russell, Chair of the Women in Astronomy and Geophysics group had met with the candidate, Dr. Hilary Kay, on 10th May. If successful, after a career break of 5 years Dr Kay will return to work in October. Her CV will be circulated at the Council meeting in June.

ACTION: Executive Secretary

10. AOB

10.1 The President signed the Resolution for NatWest.

10.2 The NERC Strategy review has been brought forward in anticipation of the Comprehensive Spending Review being brought forward by one year.

10.3 The number of Friends of RAS is now 200.

10.4 Professor Ian Crawford will issue a calling notice for proposals for public lectures for 2012/13.

Council rose at 15:30

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D.J. Southwood
President

8 June 2012