



## **Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 10 May 2024, at Burlington House and via Zoom**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.2 Attendance**

##### **PRESENT:**

Prof Mike Edmunds (ME); President and Chair  
Prof Mike Lockwood (MLO); President Elect  
Prof Mike Cruise (MC); Interim Treasurer  
Prof Mark Lester (MLE); Senior Secretary - Online  
Prof James Hammond (JH) G Secretary  
Dr Matt Middleton (MM); Vice President, (A)  
Prof Stephen Eales (SE); Vice President (A) - Online  
Prof Andrew Curtis (ACU) Vice president G - Online  
Dr Sheona Urquhart (SU); A Secretary  
Mrs Patricia Tomkins (PT;) (A)  
Dr Olivia Keenan (OK); (A)  
Prof Belinda Wilkes (BW)  
Dr Joanna Barstow (JB)  
Prof Steve Miller (SM)  
Dr Alan Cayless (ACA) A  
Prof Caroline Smith (CLS)  
Dr Imogen Gingell (IG) G  
Prof Derek Ward Thompson (DWT) A - Online  
Prof Silvia Zane (SZ)  
Prof Clare Watt (CW); Vice President (G) - Online

##### **APOLOGIES:**

Dr Ashley Spindler (AS) A  
Dr Jasmine Kaur Sandhu (JKS) (G)

##### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr Philip Diamond (PD), Executive Director  
Dr Robert Massey, (RM) Deputy Executive Director and Policy  
Mr Audie Muller (AM), Head of Operations  
Mrs Lucy Devine, Wellspring Consulting (Agenda Item 3.2)  
Mr Eddie Finch, Buzzacott (Agenda Item 4.1)

### **2. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING**

2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 8 March 2024, were approved.

Action: ME asked for an amendment as a matter of fact regarding 4.1. AM to amend to read 'clear statement about read and publish deals.'

2.2 Action Status Report was received by Council.

### **3. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS**

3.1 Progress on monthly payments, update

AM updated Council on the progress of monthly direct debit instalments. There is still testing to be done, but it is hoped that the first pilot testing will commence in June.

3.2 Governance review

Mrs Lucy Devine, Wellspring Consulting, presented on the Governance review. Council were asked for questions and a discussion on the review took place. SM asked about the Trustee Code of Conduct and what would be different to the Member Code of Conduct. LD explained that the Trustee role is very different to the Member role (there are legal duties and liabilities, which Members do not have) and that a Trustee Code of Conduct would cover how Trustees deliver that part of their role which is additional to being Members.

SZ was impressed by the amount of induction, well organised. BW stated that the induction was excellent but limited as it did not talk about how the RAS is run and / or organised.

ML raised the quality and frequency of induction training is important.

ME/PD both reiterated that there was awareness of these issues and that they will be addressed for the next inductees.

A point of correction was raised for slide 16 regarding terms of office. To clarify, President serves two years, Vice-Presidents serve two years, the Treasurer serves five years, and Councillors serve three years. LD noted this and will send an updated version of the report.

SM clarified the current VP role, stating that the VP role is to look after the awards.

CW stated that a two year post is far too short if you have not served on Council before. ML suggested that we don't make enough use of the VP's.

AC stated that for a VP for a two year period it can be difficult to get to grips with the role, maybe make the role three years with the first year VP elect.

OK asked how the RAS would remain a charity if it ever lost its Royal Charter status. LD noted that this would depend on the circumstances - for example, if this was because of malfeasance, the Charity Commission would be likely to close the organisation down as a charity anyway. LD agreed to research this, to

provide a fuller answer.

ME thanked LD.

Action: ME asked PD to reconvene the Governance group to discuss the recommendations in the paper that LD presented.

### 3.3 Conference on extraterrestrial life

ME attended an event in Durham in April exploring life beyond Earth and its impact. Currently this is becoming a topical subject and ME wanted to ask Council how the RAS should respond should evidence come to light for extra-terrestrial life..

ME said that he would prepare a short paper to be included in the next Council meeting for discussion.

Action: ME asked members if they wanted to input into the paper they should contact him.

MC asked what would happen if a serious message was sent from extra-terrestrial life, would it be a whole Earth response or an individual response?

CS commented that there is more concern with asteroids and asked if there was a similar committee that would respond to that.

SM mentioned that people working on sample returns, where there is a risk of contamination.. ML commented that there is a great risk of contamination with the commercial companies not following proper procedures.

### 3.4 Parting Thoughts of a President at the end of his term of office

ME reviewed how the Governance review has taken place. With the lease, this provides us with a great opportunity to collaborate with the other courtyard societies. The strategy document has now been completed and it is up to us to deliver it.

ME said that we should look at a recruitment drive to include senior astronomers, and that we should keep our SDM's fresh.

ME wanted to see dates in the calendar for the communications and website review.

ME wants the RAS to be seen as a trusted professional service, and thanks Staff, Council, PD, Fellows, and Officers.

#### **4. TREASURER'S BUSINESS**

4.1 MC introduced Eddie Finch from Buzzacott to update Council on the audit for 2023. We received a clean audit.

4.2 Council were asked to approve the paperwork:  
a. Annual Report and accounts for 2023

These were received by Council and approved.

b. Post Audit Report from Buzzacott

These were received by Council and approved.

c. Letter of representation

These were received by Council and approved.

MC stated that the audit went well and that Buzzacott acted as a critical friend. MC formally thanked the Accountant, Mark Piper.

4.3 Statement of Accounts was received by Council.

MC also commented that the incoming Treasurer, Arvind Parmar, has been involved in many of the financial meetings, online discussions and publication meetings over the past three months.

4.4a Treasurer's Report was received by Council.

A draft document on an anti-fraud policy was highlighted and will be updated before presentation to Council in October. The Risk Register had also been reviewed and updated.

4.4b Risk Register

SM commented on 1.12 Eco Activists take random action including BH, and said that this should have a broader remit. In addition, 2.20 Statements about geopolitical situations damages reputation, how do we navigate this? RM added depending on the severity of the situation where is this signed off, at Council?

ME said that if there was a political issue this would in theory go to the Officers, RM, PD and the President. If this wasn't enough then would need to go to Council for approval.

#### **5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE**

5.1 Arrangements for AGM 2024 (Executive Director)

PD reminded Council members about the AGM 2024.

## 5.2 Report by Executive Director, **for information**

PD confirmed that the Royal Society have given us a grant to assist with the payment of our IAU subscription. PD confirmed that we will be sending delegates to the IAU General Assembly in South Africa .

Astronomer Royal – ME/PD attended a meeting regarding the Astronomer Royal, with the following recommendations in regard to selection: 1) No more than 10 years 2) Include review after 5 years 3) distinguished in our field, with the ability to discuss wider issues 4) Nationality – has to be both a British citizen and resident in the UK.

PD confirmed that suggestions for Astronomer Royal were coming in. The recommendations for Astronomer Royal will be discussed at a meeting on 31 May 2024.

PD was pleased to announce the Royal Patronage of the Society, with King Charles III, to continue as our Patron.

Action: ME proposed that PD sends a thank you letter to His Majesty.

Council discussed how we could celebrate this event. PT suggested we could connect with Greenwich Observatory, SM suggested a moon tree be planted, OK suggested that we discuss with the other courtyard societies, and ML suggested a ceremony at a visitor centre, should one be created together with the other Societies.

PD commented that there is a presentation of the Bullying and Harassment report on Friday 17 May, which ML will introduce as the new President.

PD updated Council on the lease stating that we are currently waiting for the sub leases to come back and be signed-off. If needed we might need to call for an Extraordinary meeting to look at this, if they come back before Council sits again in July. This can be done virtually.

### Membership Committee

Council was asked to approve the following Committee members for the Membership Committee: Aswin Sekhar, Gail Campbell, and Alex Richings.

Council voted and approved Aswin Sekhar, Gail Campbell, and Alex Richings as new members of the Membership Committee.

### 5.3a Strategy

PD thanks Jim Hannah and Sue Bowler for producing the Strategy booklet. SM stated that we will now need to deliver against the strategic objectives..

### 5.3b Discussion on holding meetings outside London

Council discussed the possibility of holding meetings outside of London. Some of the key points raised were:

- SE suggested that we look at having 2 of 8 meetings outside of London
- MLE commented that hard work goes into these meetings and it is not as straightforward as people think
- DWT suggested that NAM actually serves this purpose of having out of town meetings
- SU/JH suggested that that they would be happy to hold one in Dublin

This was put to Council and was approved. PD suggested that Council could also take place in Dublin on this day.

- AC suggested that we have an alternative fixed location for the Society

Action: ME suggested that all the Secretaries look at this and bring back to Council in October.

5.4 Property Working Group, Terms of Reference, was received and approved by Council

5.5 Finance committee, new members

A call out had been made for the Finance Committee, with seven interested parties of which two were recommended. MC stated that there are currently two key issues that the committee were dealing with; the lease and publishing.

Council was asked to approve the following Committee members: Ian Russell and Manikandan (Mani) Vijayaraghavan.

Council voted and approved Ian Russell and Manikandan (Mani) Vijayaraghavan as new members of the Finance Committee.

It was also noted that Arvind Parmar will chair future Finance Committee meetings, Lindsey Fletcher remains a committee member, Mark Lester is Senior Secretary. PD read out the terms of appointment.

5.6 Technology Steering Group, was received by Council.

5.7 Technology Update, was received by Council.

5.8 Delivery Plan Summary, was received by Council.

5.9a Honorary Auditors' report, was received by Council.

5.9b Honorary Auditors, appointment

Council was asked to approve the additional appointment of Chris Lee, in replacement of Yvonne Elsworth.

Council voted and approved the appointment of Chris Lee.

5.10 Staff organogram, was received by Council.

5.11 NAM, Hull 2024

RM updated Council on current developments and activities at NAM. RM stated that we are monitoring the situation and that AM and Nush Cole will be attending on 17 May 2024.

## **6. POLICY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

6.1 Cross sector call for the UK to be a leading country in the G7 on R&D investment, was received and approved by Council

6.2 RAS Policy on Space Advertising, was received and approved by Council

6.3 REF 2029 Open Access Consultation, was received and approved by Council

## **7. OTHER**

7.1 The Membership Officer's Reports was received by Council. All proposed fellows were approved.

Action: PD noted the resignation of Peter Cole and suggested we should write to acknowledge his resignation as a long serving member of the community.

7.2 Minutes of the Membership Committee Meeting 30 October 2023, were received by Council.

7.3 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 8 March, were received by Council and approved.

7.4 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 12 April, were received by Council and approved.

7.5 Thesis Prize, were received by Council.

- 7.6 RAS200 report, were received by Council.
- 7.7 Journal Submissions Update, were received by Council.
- 7.8 MNRAS Editor-in-Chief report, were received by Council.
- 7.9 RASTI Editor-in-Chief report, were received by Council.
- 7.10 GJI Editor-in-Chief report, were received by Council.
- 7.11 MNRAS minutes, were received by Council.

Action: AM to recirculate minutes

- 7.12 RASTI minutes, were received by Council.

Action: AM to recirculate minutes

## **8. AOB**

- 8.1 Specialist Discussion Meeting, Edinburgh, Sheona Urquhart feedback

SU updated Council on the recent SDM in Edinburgh in April. A couple of comments regarding difficulties with access to the registration list and the Zoom licensing. Other than that the SDM was a success.

SU suggested that an SDM could be held in Dublin.

- 8.2 Goodbye and thanks to outgoing Council members.

The President thanked all members especially those retiring members of Council: Prof Mike Cruise (Interim Treasurer), Prof Clare Watt (VP-G), Dr Joanna Barstow (A), Dr Jasmine Kaur Sandhu (G), and Prof Belinda Wilkes (A)

The President reminded members to attend the AGM.

Council Rose at 14:59 10 May 2024