



**Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 17 July 2024, Bronte Dining Room,
Hull University and via Teams**

1. INTRODUCTION

Attendance

PRESENT:

Prof Mike Lockwood (MLO); President and Chair (G)
Prof Arvind Parmar (AP); Treasurer (A/G)
Dr Matt Middleton (MM); Vice President, (A)
Prof Matthew Griffin (MG); Vice President, (A)
Prof Andrew Curtis (ACU) Vice president (G) - Online
Prof Caroline Smith (CLS) Vice president (G) - Online
Prof James Hammond (JH) Secretary (G)
Mrs Patricia Tomkins (PT;) (A)
Dr Olivia Keenan (OK); (A) - Online
Dr Imogen Gingell (IG) (G) - Online
Prof Derek Ward Thompson (DWT) (A) - Online
Dr Ashley Spindler (AS) (A) - Online
Dr Alan Cayless (ACA) (A)
Prof Steve Miller (SM) (G)
Dr Chrysa Avdellidou (CA) (G) - Online
Dr Andrew Young (AY) (A) - Online
Dr Iain Hannah (IH) (G)

APOLOGIES:

Dr Sheona Urquhart (SU); Secretary (A)
Prof Mark Lester (MLE); Senior Secretary (G)
Prof Silvia Zane (SZ) (A)
Prof Stephen Eales (SE) (A)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Philip Diamond (PD), Executive Director
Dr Robert Massey, (RM) Deputy Executive Director and Policy
Mr Audie Muller (AM), Head of Operations

The new Trustees were introduced to Council

2. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 10 May 2024, were approved.

2.2 The Minutes of the AGM of 10 May 2024, were approved.

2.3 Action Status Report was received by Council.

2.4 Matters arising

2.4a Governance group

PD confirmed that the Governance group has been reconvened.

2.4b Martyn's Law

MLO raised that the RAS should consider what actions are required for the RAS given the introduction of Martyn's Law. AM stated that a guidance and policy is currently being developed has this impacts operationally.

SM stated that the RA should have a major role in this, due to the nature of their business and footfall. One concern was around security costs; with this new law there would be increased costs in both security and insurance.

Action: PD will raise this issue with the Courtyard Societies in a meeting on 19 July 2024.

CS recommended that the Head of Security at the NHM could present to Council in October.

Action: CS to organise for the Head of Security to present at Council in October.

2.4c Astronomer Royal

PD thanked Council for their contributions. PD updated Council on a meeting he attended organised by the Dame Angela Mclean, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Government. The former President Mike Edmunds was also in attendance, and there was representation from the Royal Society, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The group agreed a shortlist of three from a total of 17 nominations.

PD explained that the shortlist will go to the Cabinet Office for approval, and then passed to the Crown. PD mentioned that one of the key drivers in the people shortlisted was the fact that there were of good scientific standing. It is hoped that a decision will be made in the next few weeks.

PD mentioned that the term has been agreed in principle to be no more than 10 years and renewable at five years subject to review.

2.4d AGM 2024

Council discussed the proposal from Horace Regnart, to change the name of NAM to INAM. After discussion, and concerns about brand image, Council voted and approved that the name should remain unchanged.

3. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

3.1 Progress on monthly payments

AM updated Council on the progress of monthly direct debit instalments. AM confirmed that the pilot testing had been completed and this will be ready to launch for full rate payers only for the 2025 renewals. In addition, a campaign will be run aimed at card payers.

3.2 Special Council Meeting

PD updated Council on the Special Council meeting where, Barbara Beasley, Partner, Farrer & Co, outlined the key points from the documents that had been circulated to Council regarding the lease. Council members were given the opportunity to ask any questions in relation to these documents.

Council voted and approved all documents at the meeting.

Declaration of Trust – between the Courtyard Societies, outlining how they will work together. Concerns were raised about the need for agreement on the decision making process and whether unanimity or a simple majority was required.

It was noted that Council had voted and approved for delegated authority to be given to Arvind Parmar and Mike Lockwood to sign off any minor changes to the lease documents

MM asked about the responsibilities of the RA, and where they fit in all this, since the responsibility is split collectively, even though footfall and use of the Courtyard is predominantly RA orientated. MM asked whether we would need to consult with them on installations for example.

Action: PD will raise this issue with the Courtyard Societies in a meeting on 19 July 2024.

3.3 Planning for Terrestrial Reaction to the Detection of Extraterrestrial Life

A discussion took place regarding former President Mike Edmund's paper, following an event he attended in Durham in April exploring life beyond Earth and its impact. Council discussed how the RAS should respond should evidence come to light for extra-terrestrial life.

Council welcomed the idea but accepted that this should be low-key. Council questioned who exactly these fringe groups were and what and who they represented.

- The President said that his one concern was that we give this issue too much emphasis we could attract unwanted attention. He recommended that any potential activity be low key.
- A question was raised about where the threats against scientists came from – were they from organised groups? There was no clear answer to this.
- It was suggested that there could be a better gender mix on the proposed panel. It would be good to have a broader mix of skills. Could the addition of an anthropologist or sociologist allow it to think more generally about Science and Society? Representation from the field of Astrobiology was also suggested. The issues are much broader than just scientific ones.
- It was commented that ‘bad behaviour’ can come from within the community and not just from twitter trolls. There will be a need for defensive statements to address criticism from within the community.
- It was agreed that a journalist should be on the panel, the name of whom to be confirmed in due course.
- It was suggested that a representative [REDACTED] from the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) International Planetary Protection panel should be asked to join the panel.
- The question was asked: What would the panel be doing between now and if there were evidence for life in one of the three categories outlined in the paper?
- The President said that the terms of reference should be broad – to understand the landscape. The panel would be a place that Council could turn to for advice on how to position itself, not just in the event of something happening, but in general.
- The President thought it was a good idea to have a standing committee, but that it didn’t have an urgent job to do. They just needed to keep Council informed.
- It was suggested that the chair of the group come in to brief Council
- Question was raised about confidentiality. It was agreed that it was best for the panel to be a public group so that external groups were not suspicious of its activities
- We should be able to point people to our policy positions on this issue
- It was commented that the public needs to be prepared for the possibility that there is no life outside our planet or not for many decades

Action: Council agreed to set up a sub-committee, and that it shouldn’t be a secret group. It will be necessary to check that the people joining the group are happy to be named. It should have broad representation, not just from within the astronomical community. The group should have an uncontroversial name. We look forward to what they want to report back

4. TREASURER'S BUSINESS

4.1 Statement of Account and Treasurer's Report was received by Council.

Arvind Parmar, was welcomed as new Treasurer. AP was delighted to inform Council that the grant rounds were up, with a total of £88,757 awarded from an annual budget allocation of £120,000 so far. In addition, the collection of Membership fees is comparable with last year. AP mentioned there is nothing exceptional to report.

CA asked AP for clarification on the grants that had been distributed.

4.2a Resolution HSBC Mandate

Prof Adrian Michael Cruise removed from the mandate and replaced by Dr Arvind Parmar in the role of Treasurer, 10th May 2024.

Prof Michael Lockwood (President) and mandate authoriser, replacing Prof Michael G Edmunds who retired as President, 10th May 2024.

HSBC Mandate authorisers: Michael Lockwood and Mark Lester (two signatures required)

Signatories: Mark Piper, Robert Massey, Philip Diamond, Arvind Parmar and Mark Lester. Any two.

Effective date of new mandate, 17 July 2024

The resolution was voted and approved by Council.

4.2b Resolution NatWest Bank Mandate

Prof Adrian Michael Cruise removed from the mandate and replaced by Dr Arvind Parmar in the role of Treasurer, 10th May 2024

Signatories: Mark Piper, Robert Massey, Philip Diamond, Arvind Parmar and Mark Lester. Any two.

Effective date of new mandate, 17 July 2024

The resolution was voted and approved by Council.

4.2c Resolution BNY Mellon

Prof Adrian Michael Cruise removed from the mandate and replaced by Dr Arvind Parmar in the role of Treasurer, 10th May 2024

Signatories: Philip Diamond, Arvind Parmar and Mark Lester. Any two.

Effective date of new mandate, 17 July 2024

The resolution was voted and approved by Council.

5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

5.1 Report by Executive Director

PD provided Council with updates on the lease.

5.2 Strategy

PD explained that the Delivery Plan Group met recently and they will be putting together a plan to execute the strategy.

5.3a Sustainability Working Group Minutes 22 May, were received by Council

5.3b Sustainability Working Group – Recommendations

Council discussed the papers presented by AM. It was agreed that in principle we could undertake some of the straightforward actions identified in the paper. It was noted that the Society should collaboratively work with the other societies, with JH, commenting that our approach to sustainability should be done holistically taking into account the other works needed to be done in the building.

Action: This will be brought back for the Sustainability Working Group to discuss.

5.4 Delivery Plan

The Delivery Plan group met and identified a framework to begin work on executing the plan. It was proposed that this is shared with Council in October.

Action: Delivery plan to be presented to Council in October.

5.5 Change of ECN representation on Membership Committee

Council reviewed the proposal put forward from Mike Hapgood. The Council voted and approved Dr Matthew Temple, as a change of ECN representation on the Membership Committee.

5.6 Update on the 2024 Governance Review

The paper from Lucy Devine, Wellspring Consulting, was discussed. PD confirmed that the Governance group has been reconvened.

6. POLICY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

6.1 General Election 2024, was received by Council.

6.2 SIT Committee inquiry into astronomy was received by Council

RM mentioned the Space Roadmap that has been circulated. MLO expressed his happiness for RM to continue to lobby Government on issues.

6.3 Re-establish the APPG for Dark Skies

MLO confirmed that we should continue to work in this area, and Council agreed.

AY mentioned student visa costs and the fact if these were removed from immigration this would help universities and the wider astronomical community. JH asked what the courtyard societies are doing about this issue.

SM asked about the possibility of a parliamentary day, something which the RAS had done previously. MM suggested to use the new Astronomer Royal as an attraction for MP's to attend. JH mentioned that BH could hold such an event.

Action: RM to look at the possibilities of organising a parliamentary day.

7. OTHER

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

7.2 Minutes of the Membership Committee Meeting 30 April 2024, were received by Council.

7.3 Minutes of the Membership Committee Meeting 13 June, were received by Council.

7.4 An update on Journal Submissions, were received by Council.

Council wanted updates and narrative on quarterly figures.

Action: PD to discuss with the Publishing team

7.5 Awards Panels memberships were received by Council and all Awards Panels were approved.

Action: It was noted that Dr Amy Gillain (Aberdeen) name is spelt incorrectly. Nush Cole to be advised of this and amend.

Council noted that the 2025 Education and Outreach Panel comprised only 7 members compared to 8 members on both the 2025 Geophysics Panel and 2025 Astronomy Panel. Council also recognised that an increase in grants will lead to an increase in workload on both staff and the panels.

It was suggested that we revisit the numbers on the panels.

Action: This item to be raised and discussed in a pre-meet for the Awards Panel and at the Award Panels review meeting in November.

7.6 Minutes of the Publications Management Committee,, were received by Council.

8. AOB

8.1 RAS200

SM was delighted to announce the publication of RAS200, and it is available for Council members to read.

8.2 NAM

IH mentioned that UKSP will be providing feedback about this year's NAM.

Council Rose at 14:46 17 July 2024