



Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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AGENDA ITEM 2

ATTACHMENT C(2010/10)2/1

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

23 JULY 2010

AT 1100 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor R.L. Davies (President), Professor M. Kendall, Professor O. Lahav, Professor J.C. Zarnecki (Vice-Presidents), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Dr H.J. Walker, Professor M.A. Barstow, Dr I.A. Crawford (Secretaries), Dr R.J. Barber, Dr I.F. Corbett, Professor D.W. Hughes, Dr A. Norton, Professor D.J. Southwood, and Professor R.E. Spencer.

APOLOGIES: Professor K. Blundell, Professor P.K. Browning, Dr E. Bunce, Professor J.E. Drew, Professor A.W. Hood, Professor R. Ivison, and Mr M. Thompson.

IN ATTENDANCE: D. Elliott (Executive Secretary).

2. MINUTES

Following some introductory comments from new members of Council, the minutes of the meeting of 14 May 2010 were approved and signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 The President summarised the outcome of the first round of the '2010 RAS Fellowships' for which 50 valid applications were considered by a selection panel comprising Professors Roger Davies (chair), John Zarnecki, Ian Howarth, Carlos Frenk, Yvonne Elsworth and Mike Kendall viz Dr Ben Davies (November 2010 for 3 years at the Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge) - '*A Novel Method to Map the Star-Forming History of Galaxies*'; Dr Tom Kitching (January 2011 for 3 years at the Institute for Astronomy, University of Edinburgh)- '*High Precision Dark Universe Cosmology with 3D Gravitational Lensing*'; Dr Caitriona Jackman (1 year from October 2012 at the Department of Physics and Astronomy, University College London following 2 years funding already secured from Leverhulme and UCL) - '*Energy Release from Magnetospheres*.'

The President praised the efficiency with which the exercise had been conducted by Lara Maisey, RAS Events and Awards Officer, though noted that a number of procedural changes

had been suggested by the panel for the next round. He clarified that in line with the 'one fellow per institution' rule Cambridge and Edinburgh would be disqualified from hosting future '2010 RAS Fellows' but, in view of the limited call on RAS funds in the case of Caitriona Jackman, this would not apply to UCL. He went on to express his unease with the restriction of applications to candidates already in possession of a doctoral degree and wondered if the pool should be widened to include final year PhD students. Council shared his concern but concluded that the existing criteria should remain on the grounds that PhD students would rarely be able to compete against candidates with a portfolio of results and an established research programme gained up to 5 years post- PhD. To relax this rule would raise the expectations of PhD students unfairly – while adding unnecessarily to the administrative burden. Council asked for the rubric to be re-examined so that the eligibility rules were unambiguous and re-stated the desirability of obtaining part-sponsorship of its awards (providing this came with no attached strings).

3.2 The Treasurer summarised the progress made in respect of NAM 2011. He noted that a contract had been signed with *Venue Cymru* which would provide not only the meeting spaces but, most probably, the opening reception and conference dinner, registration and payment services and, though an outside agency, a crèche facility (should one be needed). The programme was being arranged by a Science Organising Committee (SOC) consisting (so far) of Professors Carlos Frenk, Andy Fabian, Mike Hapgood, Mike Bode and Mike Edmunds (Chair) and Drs Lyndsay Fletcher and Roberto Trotta. Provisionally, in addition to the MIST and UKSP programmes, it would cover 6 main and 3 additional themes viz formation and evolution of planetary systems; cosmology and large scale structure; physics of galaxies at high and low redshift; explosive transients, AGNs and black holes; astrophysical simulations (to include star & galaxy formation, N-body...); future windows on the Universe (to include gravitational waves, new radio/X-ray/...facilities) plus unsolved problems of post-main sequence stellar evolution; recent developments in statistical astronomy and astronomy, space and industry.

So far as sponsorship was concerned some £2,000 had been promised by Winton Capital and STFC had been approached for a more substantial amount. It was hoped to have the NAM web site functional before the end of 2010.

3.3 The Executive Secretary reported that he had communicated to the Royal Society Council's decision to offer financial support, on certain terms, to ensure the UK's continued adherence to the International Union of Radio Science (URSI). To date, the Royal Society had not concluded its consultation with other learned societies (nor on the comparable issue of subscriptions to the International Union of Geodesy & Geophysics).

3.4 Council noted the communication from Dr Greaves suggesting the creation of a postgraduate students' hardship fund but decided against pursuing it further.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

The President began by saying that he would endeavour to give Council advance warning of the topics on which he proposed to talk and that he would indicate which of them, on grounds of confidentiality, would be excluded from the minutes. He then proceeded to summarise his discussions with the Chair of the STFC, Professor Sterling, about the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and the status of the recommendations of the 'Drayson Review' concerning the management of currency fluctuations in the payments to international

facilities and the separating of budgeting lines for national facilities to facilitate contributions from other research councils. Turning to the CSR more generally he informed Council that the Chair of the STFC Planning Group, Professor Burnett and other officials, would attend a meeting of the Astronomy Forum on 28 July. He also noted that the proposal made to BIS by the Royal Academy of Engineering, that research funds should be focused on projects with short term economic impact, had been unhelpful. Finally, the President alluded to the continuing discussions between BIS and ESO over VISTA.

5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Dr Walker spoke to the paper outlining the scope of the proposed Demographic Survey and the methodology to be used by Dr McWhinnie of 'Oxford Research & Policy' with whom an agreement in principle had been reached. This would establish the size and composition of the UK astronomy and geophysics (as the term is used in the RAS) communities; the instruments used and the ambitions of early career scientists. Council welcomed, and approved, this initiative though was concerned that time pressure (a final report to be delivered by February 2011) did not permit the preferred option of seeking competitive tenders. It was agreed that a professional analyst was needed to devise a questionnaire to obtain meaningful results against which trends over the past decade or so could be plotted (a lesson learned from the experience of undertaking the, incomplete, 2003 survey in-house). For the same reason it was agreed not to expand the questionnaire to obtain data on economic impact or public engagement (though that information should be sought by other means including the returns made for the 2008 RAE). Finally, Professor Kendall and Professor Zarnecki agreed to advise the steering group (Dr Walker and Dr Massey) on optimal ways of obtaining appropriate data from respectively the geophysics and planetary science communities.

5.2 Dr Crawford & Professor Kendall summarised the recent meeting between representatives of the Society and officials of NERC to explore working relationships following the transfer of some funding responsibilities for solar-terrestrial physics from STFC. While it was not clear if this would require something analogous to the Astronomy Forum it was agreed that the RAS and the BGA were important community contacts (which was reinforced by a subsequent invitation to attend a meeting to discuss NERC's CSR strategy).

5.3 Dr Williams, Acting Director of the UK Space Agency (UKSA), outlined the background to the creation of the new organisation explaining that the previous arrangements via BNSC could have allowed civil space to atrophy as a result of the unintended consequences of separate decisions taken by its many stakeholders. The new 'executive agency' (which was not a NDPB or 'Quango') was directly responsible to the Minister for Science who was in charge of its overall strategy and development. Dr Williams explained that UKSA gradually would take over responsibility for policy and key Government budgets for space including the European Space Agency subscriptions currently funded by NERC, STFC and the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), and management of the major EU space based projects including GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security), Galileo and the EU Satellite Centre. In addition it would also take responsibility for Research Council and TSB funding of space technology and instrumentation. The International Space Innovation Centre (ISIC) at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus would be a key part of the UK's space strategy. The core budget of UKSA was currently some £250-300k pa though Dr Williams stressed that much depended on the outcome of the CSR. He confirmed

that funding the scientific exploitation of results from space missions, which could be spread over many years after the mission budget had been agreed, would remain the responsibility of the UK research councils, on the relevant committees of which UKSA would be represented and with which there would be written implementation agreements. He agreed that it was difficult, but essential, to strike a balance between funding new, and providing the wherewithal to exploit the results of old, missions. In due course a substantive Director would be appointed together with a Steering Board at which point there would be consideration of how the Agency should best interact with the scientific research community.

5.4 The Executive Secretary informed Council that Professor Steven Miller (UCL) would represent the RAS in the Mayor's *Story of London* festival in October by presenting a lecture entitled *Capital Cosmos: London's eye on the heavens*.

5.5 Council took note of the RAS booklet produced with assistance from STFC entitled *A New View of the Universe-Big Science for the Big Society*. It was agreed that, by dint of the examples cited of its economic and social impact, it made a persuasive case for continued public investment in astronomy and deserved wide circulation among opinion formers and decision takers. It was agreed to make a PDF version available for download from the RAS web site.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 The Executive Secretary drew attention to the newly redesigned RAS Web Site and encouraged Council to make use of it.

6.2 Council reviewed the results of the Away Day of September 2008 and concluded that it was timely to organise another after the CSR was announced in late October when the scale of the expected reductions in the science budget would be known. Since the date of the December Council meeting was already in diaries it was decided that the event should be held in a London hotel on the evening of Thursday December 9 and during Friday December 10 until 1500, when it would be necessary to depart for the RAS 'ordinary meeting' in Burlington House. It was agreed that an appropriate theme would be 'How can Astronomy and Geophysics be projected as the important and indeed indispensable activities they are such as to ensure a continued significant level of research funding?' It was added that this may entail some consideration of the current governance and objectives of the Society.

6.3 Dr Walker presented a short report from the Education Committee. In respect of the IYA 2009 legacy project 'Moonwatch Week', she asked Council to advise the grants committee to 'look favourably' on small grant applications from organisations planning the associated public outreach activities, live science events, observing with telescopes, research observatory webcasts and sidewalk astronomy projects. Noting that this would be of the order of £2,000, this was agreed. It was also agreed that the Treasurer could top up the grants line with £15,000 from general reserves.

6.4 Dr Crawford outlined the proposed 'RAS Teaching Award' to recognise outstanding contributions to the teaching of astronomy, geophysics or planetary science in schools. While noting that it may wish in future to inaugurate a related scheme to recognise achievement in higher education institutions, Council agreed that this new award should be established under the auspices of the Education Committee which would be charged with proposing its name, agreeing the award (with a monetary value of £1,000) and organising the call for nominations

and selection panel in the expectation that the first awardee would receive their prize no later than April 2012 during the NAM.

7. FINANCE (Treasurer)

The revised Operations Plan was noted.

8. PUBLICATIONS

8.1 The Minutes of the Publications Management Committee of April 2010 were noted. The Treasurer informed Council that he would present a paper to the October meeting about the publishing contract with Wiley-Blackwell which expires in 2012.

8.2 Council approved the appointment of Eiichi Fukuyama of the National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention, Japan to the Editorial Board of *GJI*

9. OTHER

9.1 Council approved the election of the following candidates for election to fellowship of the Society:

Alabidi, Laila

Alexander, Louise

Aragon-Salamanca, Alfonso

Barstow, Joanna

Brown, Daniel

Browne, Paul

Bryant, Graham

Carter, Jennifer

Evans, Christopher

Gesztelyi, Lidia

Gonzalez-Morales, Pedro-Alejandro

Hamilton-Morris, Victoria

Hart, John

Hill, David

Hlavacek-Larrondo, Julie

Jayaraman, Apoorva

Johnstone, Colin

Kelvin, Lee

Kosch, Michael

Lang, Pauline

Li, Chuan

MacLachlan, John

Maraston, Claudia
Morgan, Ralph
Morton, Richard
Nixon, Adam
Nogueira de Araujo, Rosana
Karen Olsson-Francis, Karen
Pires dos Santos, Pryscilla
Pont, Frederic
Pring, Nicholas
Purll, David
Ramanjooloo, Yudish
Rees, John
Riddell, William
Saheed, Olusegun
Shafieloo, Arman
Shipley, Graham
Snape, Joshua
Stark, Florian
Tam, Kuan
Thomson, Alasdair
Trenchard, Ann
Vargas Dominguez, Santiago
Vasudevan, Suppiah
Wallace, Alison
Ward, Ann
Ward, Andrew
Watson, Fraser
Weidner, Carsten
Wheeler, Joanne
Wokes, David
Woods, Paul

9.2 The minutes of the A&G meeting of 14th May 2010 were approved and signed

10. AOB

10.1 Council considered how best to manage the procedure for nominating (or in the case of chairs, endorsing applications from) appropriately qualified candidates to the relevant subject sub-panels which will be appointed to evaluate submissions to inform QR research funding decisions as part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In respect of sub-panel 9

(Physics) it was agreed, where possible, to coordinate this with the Institute of Physics with the President and Professors Zarnecki and Lahav representing the Society; in respect of sub-panel 7 (Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences) the Society, through Dr Crawford, would liaise with the BGA (Professor Kendall) while for sub-panel 10 (Mathematical Sciences) advice would be sought in the first instance from former Vice-President Professor Priest. It was noted that planetary sciences straddled sub-panels 7 and 9 and needed to be represented on both.

10.2 Professor Hughes asked if consideration could be given to reinstating the portraits of former Presidents in the stairwell.

Council rose at 1530

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R.L. Davies
President

8 October 2010