



ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 08 JUNE 2012

AT 13:00 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor D.J. Southwood, Professor F. Honary, Professor B.E. Parsons, Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor M.A. Barstow, Dr. I.A. Crawford, Dr. L. Fletcher, Ms Mandy Bailey, Mr C.E. Barclay, Professor R.J. Davis, Professor D.W. Hughes, Dr. G.H. Jones, Professor D.W. Kurtz, Dr. A. Norton, Dr. S. Peacock, Professor R.E. Spencer

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms P. Mortimer (Executive Secretary) and Dr. R. Massey (Deputy Executive Secretary)

APOLOGIES: Dr. S.A. Mitton, Professor C. Tadhunter, Professor Y. Elsworth, Dr. H.J. Fraser, and Professor S. Miller.

The President welcomed the new members of Council present and invited them to introduce themselves. Welcome statements were received from Professor B.E. Parsons, Mr C. Barclay, Professor R.J. Davis, Dr. G.H. Jones, and Dr. S. Peacock.

2. MINUTES

2.1 The Minutes of the Meeting of 11 May 2012 were approved with a minor change.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Astronomy in Europe, International Partners C(2012/06)3/1

The President reminded Council that details of senior interlocutors in the astronomical societies of Spain, France, Holland and Italy had been provided so that if the occasion presents itself (for example, at international meetings) then Council members could informally discuss what the other European astronomical societies' approaches are to working with the European Astronomical Society (EAS). He asked Council members to keep himself and the Executive Secretary informed of any such interaction. Formal engagement between the RAS and EAS will continue; a letter to the EAS has been drafted by the Treasurer for the President to consider as a means of expressing the sort of conditions that the RAS would require in order to engage more fully with EAS on funding issues.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

The agenda items 4.1 Geophysics Forum: Minutes of Exploratory Meeting C(2012/06)4/1 and Geophysics Forum: British Hydrological Society C(2012/06)4/2 were taken together.

The President summarised the outcome of the exploratory meeting held on 23rd May 2012 and the subsequent telephone conversation with the Hydrological Society on the 30th May 2012. Recognising that geophysics interests span several learned societies and the differences in self perception between solid earth geophysicists and fluid geophysicists the intention is to establish two groups, one under the auspices of the British Geophysical Association and the other comprising space science, meteorology, oceanography and hydrology. The President has discussed this approach with Duncan Wingham, CEO of NERC, who was supportive.

There was much discussion on the problems of terminology, nomenclature and overlap between disciplines in this area. It was noted that Earth Science has previously not been represented by one voice so it was important to try to address this. Professor Mike Kendall and Professor Barry Parsons are taking informal soundings from their community on who should be included in such a forum and believe that the focus would be on engagement with the research councils, talking to them about strategies and how best they should be implemented in the geophysics field.

The President will write to the organisations representing space science, meteorology, oceanography and hydrology to agree a way forward. **ACTION: President**

Professor Parsons will continue to engage with his colleagues and draft a letter once clarity on attendance and purpose is achieved through the ongoing informal soundings.

ACTION: Professor Parsons

An update will be provided to Council in October.

4.3 **UK Space Action Network (SPAN)**

The President explained that the UK Space Action Network, (SPAN), has approached him, in his capacity as President, seeking the support of the RAS. SPAN covers Space and Planetary Physics and Earth Observation issues in addition to Astronomy and is a community action group which represents the interests of these research disciplines to the UK Space Agency (UKSA), government and other relevant bodies. SPAN is a relatively well organised and established group that the RAS could turn to for comment and/or advice on space matters much as it may call upon the Astronomy Forum.

Professor Barry Parsons, Professor Mike Cruise and Professor Richard Davis declared that they are members of SPAN. It is likely that the majority of members of SPAN are RAS Fellows.

The UKSA are keen to see SPAN supported (they currently provide funding to support SPAN's advisory activities) and very much recognise that it would be useful to have an independent body to lobby on space matters. However, Professor Cruise explained that following the changed status of UKSA (to be an agency of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills) the lobby could not be directly under UKSA aegis.

It was agreed:

- that the RAS should consider supporting SPAN and that the Council should consider a firm proposal at the October Council meeting.
- the Executive Secretary will consider the mechanics of the support that should be agreed formally, for example in a memorandum of understanding, similar to the arrangements with the British Geophysical Association.

- The Executive Secretary will attend the next SPAN meeting on 11th July and agree a way ahead.

ACTION: Executive Secretary

4.4 STFC: the closure of JCMT and UKIRT

The President explained that he and the Deputy Executive Secretary had agreed and released a press release on 31st May in response to the Science and Technology Facilities Council's (STFC) decision to end support to the Hawaii based UK infrared telescope and the James Clerk Maxwell Telescope. The press release expressed deep regret at the decision and also welcomed the decision that allows UK scientists to continue to use the Isaac Newton group of telescopes. The President and Deputy Executive Secretary had received a number of very negative emails from Fellows who felt that the RAS had not refuted the STFC position strongly enough nor consulted the Astronomy Forum prior to issuing the press release.

The President had responded personally to the Fellows who had complained explaining that whilst the decision was regrettable, due process had been followed by the STFC; the decisions had been taken after a long consultation process and peer review, in sharp contrast to with the behaviour of STFC previously. Moreover, there had been no time to consult with Council or the Astronomy Forum. In such circumstances, the President, with the assistance of the Executive Secretary, had taken action.

The President thanked the Deputy Executive Secretary for his sound work on this which allowed him to feel well prepared and able to respond to critics with a rational position. He noted that it was a watershed moment as the UK will no longer have national assets and all future work will, of necessity, be collaborative. 'Nature' had recently approached the President to write an article on the transition to international and collaborative working from a space science perspective. He would explore if this invitation could be expanded to cover the impact in other scientific disciplines including the use of telescopes.

Professor Kurtz asked if there was any financial implication to removing the telescopes. It is understood that the original agreements include a liability for their removal if they are closed and that STFC are currently seeking a solution that will minimise the impact on funding.

5. TREASURER'S BUSINESS

5.1 Journals Publication Contract

For the benefit of new Council members the Treasurer summarised the process and outcome of market testing the journals publication contract. The Council noted progress in the transfer from Wiley Blackwell (WB) to Oxford University Press (OUP). The following key points were made:

- The Treasurer and Executive Secretary have met with OUP 4 times since the May Council meeting, OUP have nominated 21 named individuals to support our journals.
- WB and OUP are working well together and following the standard journal transfer protocol.
- The draft contract is in a semi final form and includes the quality and performance requirements set by the RAS, contract signature is expected before the end of June 2012. [Update : The contract was signed on the 27th June 2012]
- The Treasurer paid tribute to the RAS publications panel who worked very hard to achieve this success.
- Journal prices for 2013 have been agreed: UK, Europe and US prices will increase by 4 to 4.5 % depending on location; the Rest of the World prices will reduce by 2%. These figures are to be compared with the increase of 6% proposed by Wiley-Blackwell.

5.2 Allocation of Resources Gained from Publishing C(2012/06)5/1(a) and Open Access Publishing C(2012/06)5/1(b)

The Treasurer introduced proposals and preliminary costs for activities that could be undertaken using the surplus income generated from the publishing contract and presented the possible impact of Open Access publishing. The potential to spend an extra £350K to £450K a year on activities supporting RAS objectives is a significant opportunity that should be used to generate long term impact. He invited Council members to consider and add to the proposals in preparation for a more in depth discussion in the autumn. The Treasurer highlighted the potential impact that Open Access may have on the financial position of the Society, were OA mandated without a sustainable business model then the RAS could lose publishing income and run at a substantial loss impacting upon the Society's reserves.

Council members were very appreciative of the work that had gone into the two papers and agreed that the surplus should be spent on improving the RAS for its membership.

Other proposals included:

- revamping the Grant Scheme that delivers benefit to astronomers and geophysicists all over the world
- revising NAM attendance fees for pensioners
- supporting more students to attend NAM
- supporting early career training
- providing public outreach and media training for members to try and develop STEM ambassadors
- supporting initiatives targeted at schools

It was agreed that the Treasurer, through the managing editor of GJI, would informally approach the Deutsche Astronomische Gesellschaft to discuss the possibility of developing options benefiting them as our key publishing partner.

It was agreed that Council members were to provide proposals to the Treasurer and that Council would consider an options paper, including more financial data, at the October Council meeting.

ACTION: Treasurer and all Council members

It was agreed that Council should give full consideration to an investment plan covering the next few years and that this topic could be considered at a Council Away day. The Executive Secretary would scope venues for an Away Day and report at the Council meeting in October.

ACTION: Executive Secretary

5.3 Financial Implications of RAS Sponsoring One or More Fellowships C(2012/06)5/2

The Treasurer explained the background to the establishment of RAS fellowships; in the first year the RAS supported one fellowship and this had risen to three per year funded from the financial reserve. This approach was taken as it was hoped that RAS fellowships were filling a temporary void in government funding. It now appears unlikely that government funding will be returned to previous levels. The Treasurer advised that the RAS should plan to fund one fellowship annually until the Society can access a significant extra funding source with long term prospects. He agreed to re-circulate a note he had prepared following a training course on obtaining philanthropic donations.

It was agreed that Council would consider a discussion paper on how best to approach philanthropic donors at the Council meeting in October. **ACTION: Treasurer**

It was noted that there is a significant administrative and management burden to those involved in the Fellowship selection process and from past experience it would be difficult to prioritise one preferred candidate when applications are from very diverse work areas.

The President advised that one of the fellowships planned for this financial year would not be taken up (as the individual awarded the Fellowship had been offered a Royal Society Fellowship) and proposed that this funding be slipped into next year. Council would then have more time to agree a long term funding approach as apart of the investment plan agreed under agenda item 5.2. Council agreed this proposal.

5.4 Publishing Policy C(2012/06)5/3

Council approved the publishing policy that will be put on the RAS website.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 IT and Communications Working Group C(2012/06)6/1

Council agreed the establishment of a working group to oversee improvements to the audio visual system, broadband, Wi-Fi provision and video conferencing capability in Burlington House. Professor Ralph Spencer will chair the working group that will report to Council.

6.2 Electronic Infrastructure in Burlington House C(2012/06)6/2

Council noted the progress towards addressing the electronic infrastructure problems in Burlington House and that a number of contractors have visited and provided initial estimates.

The IT and Communication Working Group will determine the requirement, scrutinise bids and make proposals for implementation to Council. Council agreed to delegate £10K to the working group to address the immediate problem of broadband connectivity, subject to the approval of the Treasurer, and further expenditure up to £25K to be approved by the majority of the committee by email over the summer, if required. It was agreed that the solutions implemented should be flexible enough to include any requirement arising for the library annex once Council has agreed a policy on use of that accommodation. The President urged Council members to respond rapidly, if at all possible, in the event of any email request made during the summer break.

It was agreed that the working group should develop an electronic infrastructure strategy for Burlington House and that Council should annually review the position and consider any necessary improvements.

6.3 Olympics and Burlington House

Council noted that the Executive Secretary would email the membership to request that they provide advance warning if they are planning to use Burlington House during the Olympics period and that member access will be restricted to between the hours of 10:30 and 15:30. Staff will be encouraged to work from home where possible and/or adopt flexible working hours to avoid the peak travel periods.

7. POLICY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

7.1 Fun Kids Radio C(2012/06)7/1

The Council noted the success of Fun Kids Radio, a digital radio station specialising in content for children between four and nine years and the intention to broadcast an astronomy mini series that had received a small RAS grant. It was noted that the expenditure of £2.5K was a very cost effective way of reaching out to a new audience.

7.2 The DfE Consultation on Careers Guidance for Schools, Sixth Form Colleges and Further Education Institutions C(2012/06)7/2

There was discussion on the need to:

- provide advice on how to become an astronomer or geophysicist including what to study and how long it takes
- ensure awareness of the requirement to have a solid grounding in the physical sciences to progress into a career in astronomy or geophysics
- provide advice on how to get into careers in subjects that are not taught in schools.

There were mixed feelings on the benefits or otherwise of using career consultants.

It was agreed that the Deputy Executive Secretary would draft a response in consultation with the Geological Society and that this joint input should be submitted via an umbrella body such as the Science Council or the Institute of Physics.

ACTION: Deputy Executive Secretary

7.3 Impact of Astronomy and Geophysics Publications

The Deputy Executive Secretary advised that the booklet ‘A New View of the Universe: Big Science for the Big Society’ that set out the impact of astronomy is being updated and a similar version produced for geophysics. He requested input from Council members on examples of the impact of astronomy or geophysics on the economy or wider society such as career profiles, industrial applications, and spin-off businesses.

Sue Bowler the editor of A & G is leading on the geophysics booklet. It is hoped that NERC will assist in funding. STFC have agreed to provide £5K to assist in the publication of the Astronomy booklet.

It was agreed that Council should have look at the ‘A New View of the Universe: Big Science for the Big Society’ booklet and provide examples to the Deputy Executive Secretary.

ACTION: Deputy Executive Secretary and all Council members

8. PUBLICATIONS

8.1 MNRAS Board Meeting C(2012/06)8/1

It was noted that Bob Carswell the Editor in Chief for Monthly Notices (MNRAS) will stand down in the next few months. The Treasurer had identified a possible successor, Professor David Flower and circulated a short pen picture. Professor Flower is an existing editor for MNRAS and has indicated that he would accept were he asked. The increased workload to carry out the editor in chief role whilst continuing to act as an editor is estimated as a tri-fold increase. As such the Treasurer proposed that the honorarium be increased by 50%. Council agreed to the increased honorarium and thanked the Treasurer for his work and this achievement.

9. OTHER

9.1 Officers Report for May 2012 C(2012/06)9/1

Council agreed the following as Fellows:

Surname	First Name
Araujo	Rosana
Attree	Kevin
Ault	David
Crowe	Christopher
Dale	Robert
de Almeida	Ulisses
Häussler	Boris
Henshaw	Anthony
Le Brun	Amandine
Panagoulia	Electra
Sundara Raman	K.
Sutton	Phil
Watson	Stephen
Westmaas	Ronald

The Council noted that they would be asked to approve Fellows out of committee over the summer period. The membership secretary would circulate a list for approval towards the end of July. The presentation of the list would be altered to show which Fellows had been proposed through Route 1 or Route 2. **ACTION: Membership Secretary**

9.2 Minutes of the A&G meeting of 11 May 2012 C(2012/06)9/2

Council noted the minutes.

9.3 Daphne Jackson Fellowship C(2012/06)9/3

Council noted Dr. Hilary Kay's CV and synopsis of her research proposal.

9.4 Travel Expenses for Speakers at Ordinary meetings C(2012/06)9/4

Dr. Ian Crawford introduced his paper. It was agreed that expenses for speakers could be considered as part of the deliberations agreed under agenda item 5.2. In the interim, it was agreed that the Senior Secretary could support speakers at Ordinary meetings with travel expenses up to a total of £2000 per annum.

10. AOB

10.1 Membership election by email.

This item was covered under agenda item 9.1.

Council rose at 16:10