



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 8 OCTOBER 2010 AT 1100 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Prof. M.A. Barstow, Prof. P.K. Browning, Dr. I.A. Crawford, Prof. R.L. Davies, Prof. J.E. Drew, Prof. A.W. Hood, Prof. D.W. Hughes, Prof. O. Lahav, Prof. P.G. Murdin, Prof. D.J. Southwood, Mr M. Thompson & Prof. J.C. Zarnecki.

APOLOGIES: Dr R. Barber, Prof. K. Blundell, Dr E. Bunce, Dr. I. Corbett, Prof. R. Ivison, Prof. M. Kendall, Dr A Norton, Prof. R.E. Spencer & Dr H. Walker.

IN ATTENDANCE: D. Elliott (Executive Secretary); R. Massey (Deputy Executive Secretary)

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 23 July 2010 were approved and signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 The Executive Secretary reported on the lecture given by Professor Miller of UCL which described the contributions made by London based astronomers, past and present. This formed part of the Burlington House Courtyard lecture series 'Breaking the Mould', itself part of the Mayor of London's Story of London event.

3.2 The Deputy Executive Secretary listed the recipients of the publication, *A New View of the Universe-Big Science for the Big Society*, which included selected MPs, civil servants and Learned Societies.

3.3 The Executive Secretary announced that the next tranche of RAS Fellowships, including the Lockyer Fellowship, had been advertised and that decisions would be made before mid-February 2011. The President confirmed that, by application of the 'one institution rule', neither Cambridge nor Edinburgh would be entitled to host a further '2010 RAS Fellow' but that UCL (where the Fellow selected in the first round would be funded by the RAS for only 1 of her 3 years) would be. In all cases, though, the principal selection criterion would be the scientific excellence of the candidate (who would be advised, if necessary, to relocate to an eligible institution).

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President summarised the business of the Astronomy Forum which met on 6 October. This was largely taken up with a presentation by Professor Womersley, Director of Scientific Programmes at STFC, on the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review due on 20 October (though the allocations to Research Councils may not be known before mid-December). The Forum was reminded that a 25% cut, on average, was being sought from most departments over 4 years. In addition STFC was being required to cut administration costs by 33% and capital costs by at least the same amount. That said there were some signs that science might escape with a lower % cut, not least since the case had been well made that, compared to countries like Germany and the USA where respectively 2.5% and 2.8% of GDP went on science, the comparable figure for the UK was 1.7%. Professor Womersley added that STFC continued to work on the assumption that the principles of Drayson Review concerning protection from currency shifts, cost sharing of the National facilities and funding of the UK Space Agency, were still in place. With reference to recent ministerial statements concerning concentration of research into some 20 universities, he noted that Astronomy research *already* was

concentrated, with 80% of funding going to 16 groups. Following this there was a discussion about ESO and, in particular, VISTA.

4.2 The President briefed Council on the 'Science is Vital' campaign being orchestrated by the CaSE (Campaign for Science and Technology) which the RAS had endorsed. He added, though, that it would be more effective if local MPs were exposed to the contributions physics departments made to economic activity in their constituencies – and even more effective if third parties, rather than its practitioners, argued the case for investment in science.

4.3 The President outlined the ways in which the Society had responded to calls to nominate candidates for the physics, earth sciences and maths panels being established to conduct the Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise in 2014. Working with the Institute of Physics he was hopeful that the Society's nominations would ensure a good representation of astronomers and geophysicists.

4.4 Finally, the President sent congratulations to the Manchester based physicists who had been awarded the Nobel Prize, for work arising from basic research, noted that 4 astronomers featured on the recent 'Times' list of the UK's 100 most influential scientists and thanked Professor Drew for representing him at the recent Dublin meeting on 'The Transient Universe' sponsored by the Royal Irish Academy and the Astronomical Science Group of Ireland, as well as the RAS

5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Deputy Executive Secretary drew attention to 4 recent submissions made by the Society viz to the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology's Inquiries into Scientific Advice and Evidence in Emergencies and the operation of the UK Space Agency; to EPSRC's proposed International Review of Maths and to STFC's review of Grant Funding Models.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 The Executive Secretary invited comments on the content of the Away Day on December 9 /10. Council felt that it should focus on the Society's values and vision at a time of public funding austerity. A steering group consisting of the President and Professors Southwood, Lahav, Browning and Kendall were appointed to distill this into a structured programme.

6.2 Council noted the timetable for the 2011 Council Elections when there will be elections for the positions of President, Treasurer, Secretary, Vice-President (both 'A' and 'G') as well as 4 'ordinary' members of Council. For the position of President, tenable from May 2012 (but present, as an observer, at Council after May 2011) account would be taken of the recommendations of the Presidential Election Committee (PEC), drawn from Councillors retiring at the next AGM who were not seeking election to any other position on Council and who did not intend to make a Presidential nomination. For 2011 this would comprise Professors Zarnecki (Chair), Drew and Ivison and Drs Walker and Corbett. For other positions Council would decide if additional nominations were required to ensure compliance with the bye-laws and/or to satisfy any other considerations (e.g. gender/regional/interest balance). It was emphasised that all valid nominations received by 26 November 2010 for *any* position on Council, unless subsequently withdrawn, *automatically* would be listed on the ballot paper.

6.3 Council considered the report of the Membership Committee. In particular it endorsed the recommendation to continue the 'Friends of the RAS' scheme and to encourage inventive ways of developing and indeed exploiting this additional resource including the introduction of a £40 rate for a couple sharing the same address. Council approved also the Committee's intention to generate explicit admission criteria for Fellowship of the Society so that decisions could be made on an objective and defensible basis, adding that the same criteria should be used for both election routes i.e. whether through recommendation by existing fellows or letter of application. It was agreed that the AGM would be asked to approve an amendment to bye-law 33 which contained the anachronistic requirement that all applications are 'exhibited at the Society's premises for a minimum period of four weeks to provide an opportunity for Fellows to draw the attention of Council to any relevant information about the candidate'. Applications, though, would continue to be posted on a secure section of the Society's web site. Finally, following confirmation by the Treasurer that, based on modest sales projections at a cost of around £12 per item, there would be little or no financial risk, Council approved the Committee's proposal to commission the design and production of Certificates of Membership suitable for wall display.

7. FINANCE

The Treasurer spoke to his paper summarising the Financial Outlook as incorporated in the up-dated Operations Plan which predicted a healthy surplus over the next two years based on recent trends in both membership numbers and the circulation figures for the journals. He added, though, that this did not take into account the impact the Comprehensive Spending Review might have on the size of the UK astronomical community (and therefore of the size of the RAS) nor of the impact of budget cuts to universities on journal subscriptions. The largest *foreseeable* uncertainty in the income of the Society, he noted, was the exchange rate at which sterling is traded since while publishing costs, largely, were denominated in sterling more than half of the income from publications was in dollars and Euros. The conclusion the Treasurer reached was that it was safe to proceed with the next tranche of 'RAS Fellowships' which still left scope to finance additional new activities from reserves costing up to £500,000.

Finally, he observed that UK Astronomy was unusual among scientific disciplines in being served by 3 organizations, all with around 3000 members; the RAS, for professional astronomers, the British Astronomical Association for active observers and 'serious amateurs' and the Society for Popular Astronomy for beginners and the general public. He speculated on the administration cost savings that could be made, and the greater public impact which might be achieved, were they able to act in concert more closely than they have done hitherto.

8. PROGRAMMES & PROJECTS

8.1 Professor Lahav, Chair of the International Committee, summarised the committee's recent activities before presenting a paper setting out the case for funding 'NAM Bursaries' aimed at the Society's overseas based membership which, he reminded Council, constitute almost 1/3 of its fellowship but which, physically, was unable to enjoy many of the benefits of membership. The grants scheme introduced a few years ago facilitated attendance at conferences by UK based scientists; Professor Lahav said that his proposal would encourage and facilitate attendance by overseas fellows at the Society's premier meeting, the National Astronomy Meeting (NAM) by providing assistance with travel costs. It was agreed that for the 2011 NAM £5K would be made available, in such amounts as were deemed appropriate, to applicants based overseas who made a convincing case for financial support to the Grants Committee. Candidates would be favoured who could demonstrate that, in addition to an active involvement in the NAM, they intended to make additional professional visits whilst in the UK. The bursaries, whose rubric would be finalised by Professor Lahav with the assistance of the Executive Secretary, would be advertised on the RAS and NAM web sites.

8.2 Professor Edmunds, Chair of the Scientific Organizing Committee (SOC) for the 2011 NAM reported on the state of preparation of the programme. To ensure that the meeting covered a wide spectrum on specialisms, and to exploit the proximity to the cluster of aerospace and optics industries in North Wales, the SOC had first set the principal themes – before inviting proposals from attendees. They were the 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; astroparticle physics and 'Future windows on the Universe' (to include gravitational waves, new radio/x-ray/..facilities, and discussion of other facility provision). Professor Edmunds agreed to circulate the programme to Council before it was signed off and to prepare a written report for the December meeting.

8.3 Speaking in his capacity as Chair of the Astronomical Heritage Committee, Professor Edmunds outlined a proposal to co-fund a programme of research on the RAS Harrison "Regulator" Clock at the National Maritime Museum (NMM). This would involve dismantling, measuring, photographing, reconstructing the clock and publishing a full account of the findings. He reminded Council that, though incomplete at the time of his death, Harrison's clock, designed to be 100 times more accurate than other contemporary time-pieces, was of great historical importance. The proposed project would enable replicas to be made, for example by the British Horological Institute (along with the NMM, the project's co-sponsor) to test this claim. The NMM, under the supervision of Jonathan Betts, possibly the world's leading authority, was currently carrying out a very similar investigative programme of its Harrison marine chronometers. Betts had agreed to lead the project for the RAS clock ensuring there was a written and photographic description, including detailed technical drawings, of the construction and functioning of the instrument. Not only would this project be of scholarly importance, there could be considerable public and educational interest. Council agreed that this was an important initiative but before reaching a final decision asked the Treasurer to investigate the share of the costs which the Society should bear and to confirm that the proposed management arrangements would ensure the safety of the clock during the project.

8.4 Professor Edmunds next turned to the paper which was addressed to Council from Professor Clive Ruggles to fund an 'Astronomical Heritage Portal' as part of the UNESCO-IAU initiative to identify and safeguard sites

of astronomical heritage significance. The portal would act as an information repository and forum aimed, primarily, at UNESCO National Commissions wishing to prepare the dossiers needed to promote astronomical sites onto the World Heritage List (on which sites of scientific interest are sparsely represented). The RAS was invited to become the principal sponsor of the portal at an estimated cost of some £43K. In response it was decided to ask Dr Corbett (in his capacity as General Secretary of the IAU) and Dr Hoskins (the leading historian of astronomy) to discuss the proposal further with Professor Ruggles and, in due course, to report to Council both on its feasibility and on the desirability of the RAS investing in it.

9. OTHER

9.1 The following were appointed to the GJI Editorial Board : Dr A Biggin, Liverpool ; Dr J Wassermann, Munich and Prof W Friederich, Bochum

9.2 Council approved the election of the following candidates to fellowship of the Society

Candidate:

Alshino	Abdulmonem
Atreya	Prakash
Axon	David
Calura	Francesco
Chapman	Sean
Clark	Tim
De Cassia Domingos	Rita
Deacon	Niall
Ellison	Andy
Gent	Frederick
Goulev	Petar
Henshall	John
Hill	Kathryn
Jones	Andrew
Lam	Wai-Shung
Lapington	Jon
Lolachi	Ramin
Lynch	Juliana
Madelaine	Peter
Molineux	Richard
Morris	Edward
Mulder	Alison
Roche	Patrick
Ross	Aidan
Sahman	Dave
Schonbachler	Maria
Simpson	Peter
Thurgur	Edward
von Arx	Cyrill
Weller	Louise
Weratschnig	Julia

10. AOB

Council noted that the painting ‘Celestion 2’, displayed in the Fellows Room, had been on loan from the artist Anthony Wishaw for several years, an act of singular generosity. Since it neither had a budget, nor the expertise, to make purchases of art the Executive Secretary was instructed to inform Mr Wishaw that it fully understood if he wished to have his valuable painting returned so that it could be put on the market.

Council rose at 1520