



*Advancing  
Astronomy and  
Geophysics*

## ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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### **COUNCIL MEETING 28 July 2006 AT 1300 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM AT BURLINGTON HOUSE**

#### **1. PRESENT**

##### **APOLOGIES**

M Barstow

M Cruise

R Davies

I Howarth

D Hughes

T Hartquist

L Fletcher

E Priest

I Ridpath

##### **IN ATTENDANCE**

D Elliott (Executive Secretary)

#### **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 12 May 2006 were approved and signed.

#### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

Vice-President Professor Gubbins reported on the launch of the BGA's report '**Geophysics in the UK**' held at the Institute of Physics on 24 July, which was attended by some 40 participants, mostly scientists, and some media representatives. Council repeated its strong support of the BGA's strategy for responding to the crisis in UK geophysics education. Without ruling out a financial contribution to the costs of creating a geophysics education officer, estimated at £100,000 for 3 years, Council noted Professor Gubbins' view that the hydro-carbon industry would be willing to find the necessary resources and that the Society's main role would be to provide endorsement and public support for the Report's recommendations.

#### **4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS**

The President spoke to the paper laid on the table outlining his proposed 'Action Plan' for the next 2 years on which he invited comments. Thereafter, he would produce a revised document for presentation to the September meeting of Council. He highlighted 3 priorities. First, the need for the Society to campaign for more resources for its sciences (specifically in the next Comprehensive Spending Review, CRS) as well as to make a significant contribution to the restructuring of the 'Large Facilities Council' (*sic*). Second, to make a step change in the Society's education and outreach activities especially by public lectures, school visits and authoritative web pages (mentioning that Dill Faulkes was interested in partnering some initiatives). Finally, to increase the Society's professional – and lay –membership.

In discussion, it was observed that the interests of geophysicists must not be overlooked; that the Society should work with other bodies where appropriate and that the up-coming International Heliophysical Year' in 2007 could be a useful peg on which to hang outreach activities. The Treasurer reminded Council that there were funds in the region of £0.4m to support major initiatives. Finally, it was noted that the Membership and Education/Higher Education Committees would wish to comment on the proposals.

#### **5. PUBLIC POLICY**

##### **5.1 'Next steps'**

The President reported on the community meeting jointly hosted by the Society and the Institute of Physics on 14 June 2006 where the RAS position on the 'Next Steps' proposals had been presented to the DG of the Research Councils, Sir Keith O'Nions

##### **5.2 RAE consultation**

The President spoke to a previously distributed paper which set out the Society's proposed 'line' on the government's proposals for assessing and rewarding 'quality research' after 2008 by using metrics. Given the swings and roundabouts effects on university departments and subject disciplines of the various replacement models, he noted that it would be extremely difficult to achieve a consensus. He also noted that he had misunderstood one of the issues on which the government had sought comments. The President volunteered to produce a revised draft which corrected this as well as to seek an input from a non-STEM fellow about the distribution of humanities research funds, given the Society's concern with the history of astronomy. In the light of e-mail comments from Council on it, if it were possible to achieve a consensus, the revised paper would be placed on the RAS web site and submitted to the government. Otherwise, no submission would be made.

##### **5.3 Campaign for the next CSR**

The President informed Council that he was planning to meet the Chief Executive of PPARC to obtain details about funding and about knowledge transfer. This would be

incorporated into a substantial paper, which would be presented to the Science Minister, Lord Sainsbury, making the case for astronomy funding. Council reminded the President of the need not to overlook NERC.

## **5.4 EU Radio Spectrum**

The President introduced this late agenda item by informing Council that the submission made by OFCOM to the European Union review of the radio spectrum was inadequate. The Society needed to take action to protect the radio spectrum for scientific purposes in the face of pressure to share it with commercial services. It was agreed that the Geophysical Secretary would consult the radio astronomy and ionospheric communities and produce a Society submission

## **6. BURLINGTON HOUSE**

### **6.1 Refurbishment**

The Treasurer spoke to 2 previously distributed papers, which outlined the scope and budget of the project. He reminded Council that the purpose of the refurbishment was to remove obsolete domestic functions from the building and to make it fit for the Society's purposes and of greater benefit for members as well as comply with the requirements of the lease and to improve access under disability legislation. The project was closely controlled by a steering group, on which there was strong representation from Council, and by the Council itself, this meeting being a key one that had been orchestrated to precede the issuance of invitations to tender for the building work. At its meeting on July 20, the Steering Committee considered the building and related budgets in the light of the nearly - completed specifications. The building budget of £ 2,253,326 (inclusive of VAT, inflation and professional fees) was some 12 % higher than the figure agreed by Council in October 2005, largely as a result of specifying more air ventilation and cooling to offices, upgrading the fit-out of the kitchen and 'lounge'/staff room and the requirement to fire rate existing doors.

In addition, he informed Council that there had been considerable investigation and iteration on the budget for the internal fittings that would be necessary in addition to the building budget. A budget of £100,000, including VAT, consultant's fees and technical installation, would provide for the AV equipment required in the Lecture Theatre; this compared favourably with budgets for similar theatres elsewhere. Similarly, a budget for the interior furnishings at £200,000, including VAT, consultant's fees and installation, would provide for furnishings (lighting, flooring, drapes/blinds, furniture) of a high standard in the public rooms by a combination of re-using existing (repaired and restored as necessary) and new items.

The Treasurer added that possible savings, which could restore the budget to its original level, had already been identified should they prove to be necessary. He made this caveat because of the possibility that the costs quoted by contractors might be lower than the budget estimates and because Council may wish to retain some of the additional features. They included restricting the areas to benefit from air conditioning and the installation of a new Council table.

In response to questions, the Treasurer confirmed that, after allowing for £0.4m for new outreach activities and the creation of a new head of policy post, the effect of the refurbishment project would be to leave the Society's reserves at some £2.8m in 2009, the same figure as in 2001 and subsequently agreed by Council as a policy for the reserves to be the minimum necessary for the Society's well - being. Council was assured that a refurbishment on this scale was unlikely to be repeated this century and that, as it would have to be approved by the landlord (the government), there was no risk of being obliged to reverse any modifications at the end of the 80 - year lease arrangement.

On the understanding that the possible savings mentioned above would be brought into play if necessary, Council agreed that the existing specifications should be used to prepare tender documents for potential contractors. However, it was emphasised that the total cost of the project must be contained within a ceiling of £2.55m.

As a postscript the Treasurer informed Council of the approach from one of its fellows, Peter Martin, who works with artists including a Lise Autogena who has proposed to design and install a series of 'fish-eye' real time images linked to all-sky cameras. The aim would be to connect Burlington House, astronomical research and the general public (not least by making the images accessible on the RAS web site). With the proviso that, if it went ahead, the art-work would be self-financing and that the membership should be given the opportunity of making other suggestions, Council agreed that a thousand or so pounds would be made available to Lise Autogena to develop the concept to the point where it could be better visualised.

## **6.2 Staff Review**

The Executive Secretary spoke to a previously distributed paper, which focused on 2 recommendations, which arose from the Strategy Away Day in July 2005 and the review of job descriptions undertaken by a Human Resources consultant, Sandy Rhodes, in April and May 2006.

The first, in the light of current and projected library usage statistics, was to move to a reduction from 2 to 1 in the number of full time library staff. After a full discussion Council agreed that the Librarian, routinely, would need general administrative assistance (e.g. for managing loans or recording acquisitions), but that there was no requirement for 2 full-time librarian posts. In addition, Council asked that the Librarian's job description should be revised to include 'servicing committees and supporting the work of the head of policy development'. It also asked for guidelines to be produced to minimise the time spent by the library on lower priority enquiries from the public.

However, in the immediate future, there was a need for the existing staff complement to complete the catalogue computerisation project (serials, circulation & cataloguing modules) and general modernisation (for example, entering journals into the 'Heritage' programme and converting records). Accordingly, while Burlington House was being refurbished, the library staff would focus on the tasks outlined above (with the corollary that services for visitors would have to be severely restricted).

Finally, Council instructed the Executive Secretary to devise a means of achieving this reduction in staffing, mindful of the need to consider the welfare of staff, and to bring his proposals to a future meeting.

The second was the creation of a new post of 'Head of Policy' combined with clarification of the role of the post of Communication Officer. The purpose of the new post would be to raise the Society's engagement in policy formation and lobbying by enabling the RAS to respond to initiatives from government, Research Councils and other relevant bodies in the UK and overseas as well as undertake horizon scanning to develop proactive initiatives. This would entail attending significant meetings of the RAS Council and relevant committees as well as outside meetings and arranging consultation procedures with the membership. In addition the Head of Policy would be involved in the promotion of Society reports, reviews, policy statements and the like in co-operation with the press officer.

Council agreed to establish this post for three years at a cost of up to £48,000 on a part-time home-worker basis (nominally 2 days per week) in the expectation that, on average, one day per week would be spent in the Society's London offices where s/he would have access to administrative and library support and instructed the Executive Secretary to initiate the recruitment process noting that the successful candidate must be able to command the respect of the astronomy and geophysics communities, have excellent networking and communication skills plus at least a basic knowledge of the workings of UK science policy.

Turning the Communication Officer post, it was evident that the existing job description was too wide to be accommodated within the equivalent of 55 days per annum (the position left by the resignation of the second Communication Officer). It was agreed to limit the scope of the post and to re-name it Press Officer. Its remit would be to handle media relations where there was a RAS interest (acknowledging that judgement would need to be exercised in interpreting 'RAS interest'; a rule of thumb was that the words 'Royal Astronomical Society' could legitimately appear in any associated press release or media story). Some members of Council were concerned that the job description should not be drawn so tightly, nor the number of contracted days be so limited, as to exclude the Press Officer's involvement in, for example, education and other outreach initiatives. Others were surprised by the minimal supervision exercised over the post-holder. Accordingly, it was agreed that the Executive Secretary should negotiate a new contract with the existing post-holder. This would incorporate a revised job description and reporting regime, and acknowledge that additional assistance would be required during the NAM. Furthermore, the Executive Secretary was authorised to increase the number of days contracted by the Society with the Press Officer to allow support to be provided to the Head of Policy and others involved in new activities.

Note: It was agreed to consider any further staffing implications arising from the President's 'Action Points' when they were more advanced.

## **7. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE**

### **7.1 Awards Committees**

Council approved the list of nominees to constitute the awards committees proposed by their chairs. In the case of the G committee it was agreed that there needed to be an additional representative of the geophysics community

## **7.2 Committee & Editorial Board Appointments**

The following appointments were approved:

### **MNRAS editorial board**

Andrew Liddle (Sussex)  
Ofer Lahav (UCL)  
Ralph Wijers (Amsterdam)

### **GJI editorial board**

Mike Kendall (Bristol,  
Jeannot Trampert, (Utrecht)  
Jun Korenaga, (Yale)  
Yehuda Ben Zion (Southern California)  
Isabella Velicogna, (Colorado)  
Jean Virieux (Nice-Sophia Antipolice)  
Gerhard Pratt (Queen's)

### **Membership Committee**

Mike Bode (LJMU)  
Tom Boles (BAA)

### **Education Committee**

Martin Barstow (Council)

### **CwiAG**

Helen Walker (RAL) (chair)  
Jane Greaves (St Andrews)  
Mimi Hill (Liverpool)  
Barrie Jones (OU)  
Anita Richards (JBO Manchester)  
Sara Russell (NHM)

### **Library Committee**

Emma Bounce (extension)  
Ian Ridpath (Chair - extension)

## **Astronomical Heritage Committee**

Allan Chapman (Oxford)  
John Steele (Durham)  
Clive Ruggles (Chair - extension to 2009)  
Alec Boksenberg (extension to 2009)  
Derek McNally (extension to 2008)  
David Hughes (extension to 2008)  
Bill Burton (extension to 2007)

## **Higher Education Committee**

Jim Hough (Council)

### **7.3 Revision of Astronomical Heritage Committee TORs**

These were approved 'nem con'.

### **7.4 Report of the Finance Committee**

This was noted without comment.

### **7.5 Revision of Bye-laws**

Council approved the following proposals for consideration by the 2007 Annual General Meeting (revised text in *italics*):

**Bye-law 5** - To allow for electronic communications, replace 'by a letter' with '*by a written communication*' -

**Bye-laws 6, 13, 24** - To allow for electronic communications, replace 'dispatched' by '*sent*' - ditto

**Bye-law 10** - To improve clarity, replace 'A General Meeting of Fellows shall be held annually on the second Friday in May: to receive and consider the Annual Report of the Council on the state of the Society, and the reports of the Auditors; to discuss and determine questions relating to the affairs of the Society; to make elections to the Council; to enact, alter and repeal Bye-laws; to decide upon the Admission Fee and Annual Contributions for the ensuing year; and to appoint auditors, both Honorary and professional'

by

*'A General Meeting of Fellows will be held annually, normally on the second Friday in May, to discuss and determine matters relating to the affairs of the Society, including the Trustees Report; reports of the professional auditors; appointment of*

*professional auditors; election of Council; Admission Fee and Annual Contributions for the ensuing year; and, as deemed necessary, the enactment, revision, and repeal of Bye-laws. In addition, two or more Fellows, not being members of Council, chosen by the Society at each General Meeting as Honorary Auditors, will deliver a personal report on the resources, goals, structures and activities of the Society' .*

**Bye-law 65** - To reflect reality, replace 'The accounts of the Treasurer shall be inspected annually by two or more Fellows, chosen by the Society at each Annual General Meeting to act as Honorary Auditors. They shall report, at the following Annual General Meeting, on the general state of the funds, membership, property and premises of the Society'

by

*'The accounts of the Society shall be inspected annually by professional auditors'*

**Bye-law 1** - More accurately to describe the community represented in the Society, replace 'The object of THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY shall be the encouragement and promotion of Astronomy and Geophysics'

by

*'The object of THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY shall be the encouragement and promotion of Astronomy, Solar-System Science, Geophysics and closely related branches of science'*

In addition, to implement the wish of Council to replace the term 'Associates' by 'Honorary Fellows' for future holders, while allowing current Associates the option of retaining their present title, Council agreed to propose the following changes:

**SECTION V111** - Replace 'The Election and Privileges of Associates'

by

*The Election and Privileges of Honorary Fellows*

**Bye-law 2** - Replace 'The Society shall consist of Fellows and Associates, collectively referred to as Members, who shall have the privileges and obligations set out in the following Bye-laws'.

by

*'The Society shall consist of Fellows and Honorary Fellows (also known as Associates) collectively referred to as Members, who shall have the privileges and obligations set out in the following Bye-laws'*

**Bye-law 33(i)** - Replace 'A candidate for Fellowship will be considered by Council for election if either of the following is satisfied:

(i). The candidate has been proposed and recommended, according to Form No. 1 of the Appendix, by at least two Fellows or Associates, one of whom must certify personal knowledge of the candidate's suitability'

by



*'A candidate for Fellowship will be considered by Council for election if either of the following is satisfied:*

*(i) The candidate has been proposed and recommended, according to Form No.1 of the Appendix, by at least two Members'*

**Bye-law 41 - Replace** 'The Society may honour any person, eminent in the field of astronomy or geophysics, by election as an Associate of the Society. The election shall rest with Council'

by

*'The Society may honour any person, eminent in the field of astronomy or geophysics, by election as an Honorary Fellow of the Society .The election shall rest with Council'*

**Bye-law 42 - Replace** 'The Secretaries shall inform an Associate, as soon as practicable after election, of the honour conferred by the Society and shall send a Diploma drawn up in the form prescribed by the Council'

by

*'The Secretaries shall inform an Honorary Fellow, as soon as practicable after election, of the honour conferred by the Society and shall send a Diploma drawn up in the form prescribed by the Council*

**Bye-law 43 - Replace** 'Unless also a Fellow, an Associate need pay no Annual Contribution, but shall have all the privileges of Fellowship except those of being eligible to hold office in the Society and to vote at General Meetings'.

by

*'Unless also a Fellow, an Honorary Fellow need pay no Annual Contribution, but shall have all the privileges of Fellowship except those of being eligible to hold office in the Society and to vote at General Meetings'.*

## **7.6 Expulsion of Members**

While acknowledging that its use would be extremely rare, Council approved the previously distributed new Standing Order to create a procedure for expelling a member who brought the Society into disrepute as provided for by bye-law 53.

## **7.7 Library Committee Report**

This was noted without discussion.

## **8. PUBLICATIONS**

### **8.1 Digitization of GJI Backfiles**

The Treasurer informed Council that the editors of *GJI* and Blackwell wished to produce an electronic archive of back issues at a cost of £50,000 of which half would come from *GJI* surpluses and half from Blackwell. Blackwell was confident that costs would be more than covered by sales over 5 years, and this was incorporated in the proposed contract. The contract would be in the form of a supplement to the main publishing contract, which, unless terminated by 12 months notice in December 2006, would automatically extend until 2012. When Council approved this contract in

October 2003, initially for a 3-year period, it explicitly asked to be consulted before any further renewal. The Treasurer explained that the performance of the publisher under the new contract had immensely improved and the number of complaints about them had been negligible. Additionally, Blackwell had increased its reputation in scientific journal publishing by its reasonableness on the issue of open access publishing. The managing editors had expressed no wish to change publisher. Additionally, The Treasurer reminded Council that in view of the refurbishment project and the other changes that were being implemented in the Society, it would be particularly difficult to handle a market test of the Society's most important activity in 2007 leading to a possible change of publisher, although we would have had to face this difficulty if it had been necessary. In short, he felt that the Society should enter into the contract with Blackwell to publish the archive of *GJI* back issues and that the Society should not issue notice in 2006 of an intention to withdraw from the publishing contract.

Council agreed.

The Treasurer went on to report that a number of *GJI* editors had asked for the position of Managing Editor to be re-designated as Editor in Chief since it was felt that this better expressed the authority attaching to the position. Council agreed and, for consistency, approved an identical change for *MNRAS*

## **8.2 Book Publishing**

The Treasurer presented the recommendation of the Finance Committee to appoint Springer Verlag as the Society's book publisher following discussions with a number of publishers who had expressed interest.

The books would include monographs, lecture notes, books on historical themes, educational themes and advanced amateur astronomy and, while they would be scientifically sound, they would not necessarily be aimed at the academic market. A commissioning editor would be appointed with access to appropriate Society support and while books would be sold commercially, the Society would support direct sales to its members (and possibly to members of sister societies) at discounts. The books would be in areas where the Society could add value and fill empty niches by using its infrastructure to keep costs down and viewing its membership as a pool of authors and a readership base. The publisher would have the final decision on the viability of any proposed book, which would be budgeted as belonging to the RAS series on Astronomy and Geophysics. All books would be published at the publisher's expense and at no risk to the Society, which would receive a royalty, typically 15%.

On this basis Council gave approval to the Treasurer and Executive Secretary to negotiate a contract with Springer.

### **8.3 Access to research outputs**

This paper was noted without discussion.

## **9. REVIEWS**

### **Science teaching in schools**

Council noted the submission made by the Education Committee to the House of Lords review of Science teaching in schools.

## **10. OTHER**

### **10.1 NAM 2006 report**

This paper was noted without discussion.

### **10.2 Candidates for Election**

The following candidates were elected to the Society.

## **11. AOB**

11.1 The President reminded Council that following the next meeting on 18 September there was to be a joint reception with the other learned societies to celebrate the completion of the external refurbishment of Burlington House.

11.2 The President informed Council that during the refurbishment project, when the Society's apartments would be unavailable, the cost of arranging the wine receptions, which followed Ordinary Meetings, would become prohibitively expensive. Accordingly, unless the Council strongly felt otherwise, the Officers had decided to suspend them for the duration of the project. This was noted.

Council rose at 1700.