



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 28 JULY 2009 AT 1400 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor A.C. Fabian (President), Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor M.A. Hapgood, Professor J.C. Zarnecki (Vice-Presidents), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Dr H.J. Walker (Secretary), Dr R.J. Barber, Professor K. Blundell, Dr P.K. Browning, Dr I.F. Corbett, Professor B.K. Gibson, Dr J. Greaves, Professor R. Ivison, and Dr J.A. Wild.

APOLOGIES: Professor J. Drew (Vice-President); Professor M Barstow and Dr I Crawford (Secretaries); Dr. E. Bunce; Professor M. Edmunds; Professor O. Lahav; Professor A Hood.

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr R Massey (Policy Officer); D. Elliott (Executive Secretary)

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 8 May were approved and signed

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Council approved the proposal from Liverpool John Moores University to host an 'Out of London' specialist meeting in 2010 on (provisionally) 'Explosive Transients - Detection and Follow-up'. LJMU would be responsible for providing a venue and making the arrangements with financial support from the Society at the level of the Burlington House meetings.

3.2 Council agreed to revert from Thursday to Friday (at 1100) for its meetings noting that, on occasion, members of Council may have to attend a session of a specialist meeting being held simultaneously. However, for those reluctant or unable to travel to London on 2 consecutive days, this would remove an obstacle to their attendance at the A&G meeting.

3.3 Professor Hapgood reported that the pilot phase of the *Economic Impact Study* produced by 'Oxford Economics' had yielded unspectacular results, mostly as a result of the continuing difficulty of agreeing and measuring 'economic impact' in relation to fundamental 'British' physics research. Were the steering group minded to move to a full study Council asked Professor Hapgood to refer back for further instruction before committing the Society.

3.4 The Policy Officer commended the publication of the House of Commons Innovation, Skills and Science Committee report on 'Putting Science at the Heart of Government', especially the sections relating to strategic priorities, the Haldane Principle and the (re-)establishment of the Science and Technology Committee.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President reported discussion at the June 23 meeting of the 'Astronomy Forum'. He summarised the remarks made at the meeting by Professor Ian Diamond, Chair of the RCUK, who believed the science community was unique in having a 'ring-fenced' budget, at least until 2011. Professor Diamond had gone on to say that RCUK was committed to supporting research, including 'blue skies' research, but that in return for their annual investment of £6bn the government expected to see its benefits. That said, if a research grant proposal had no economic impact case, but was based on excellent science, this would not disadvantage it. Professor Diamond was impressed when he was informed that only the USA had a better research productivity record in astronomy and space science than Britain (though this was masked by the way results were reported, which disaggregated them into the constituent countries of the UK). Other issues raised at the Forum were the financial outlook for grants, where budgetary constraints meant that PDRA awards made in 2006 to cover years 4 and 5 would have to be withdrawn to allow for new awards to be made this year, and the review of ground based facilities.

4.2 In connection with the latter, Council discussed the desirability of producing a brochure to make the case to the Government for continued support of ground based astronomy in the UK in the light of the up-coming decisions on ESO's plans for the E-ELT and SKA. There was some concern that this should not be at the expense of space based astronomy, though this had benefited from the 'Case for Space' study which had demonstrated the value of the industry to the UK economy, and had been welcomed by the Government. However it was accepted that, outside academe, little was known or appreciated about the importance of ground based astronomy. Council agreed that key members of the community should be involved in producing an attractive booklet by the end of 2009, whose production costs would be met by the STFC, containing persuasive evidence of the value to the UK of ground based astronomy.

5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Dr Corbett reported on the meeting he attended at the Institute of Physics with representatives of STFC to discuss the latter's financial situation and corporate strategy planning. In respect of the first STFC had explained that, with help from BIS (formerly DIUSS), it had balanced the budget for 2009-2010 by 'borrowing' £20M from the 2010-11 budget. However, unless extra funds were forthcoming, it would start the next year with a shortfall of some £20-50M depending on how the impact of exchange rate increases on international contributions (particularly to ESA) were treated. If that turned out to be the case, to avoid the risk of another damaging public dispute, the meeting urged STFC to take the community into its confidence in deciding priorities.

Concerning the corporate strategy, Dr Corbett explained that since the meeting, a so-called 'Vision' document had appeared aimed at persuading decision makers of the value of STFC funded activities. This distilled the emerging conclusions from the corporate strategy, which was expected to appear later in 2009. Council welcomed the importance given to curiosity

based research, but wondered if the document was sufficiently persuasive. It was agreed that the CEO of STFC, Professor Mason, should be invited to the October meeting of Council for in-depth discussions.

5.2 Professor Hapgood reported that the transfer of responsibility for ground-based STP from STFC to NERC appeared to be progressing and so it was now timely to explore what should be the Society's future relationship with NERC. Professor Hapgood, together with the Chair of the BGA and other leading members of the STP and SEG communities within RAS, volunteered to seek a meeting with the Directory of Strategy at NERC to discuss how this might be done

5.3 Council noted the situation report on *IYA 2009* prepared by Professor Ian Robson

5.4 The Policy Officer reported that, following the RAS submission earlier this year to the Royal Society's 'Fruits of Curiosity' project, the Society had been asked to supply additional evidence in the form of data and/or case studies. He appealed for this to be sent to him by the end of August. He also reported that he would liaise with CaSE (Campaign for Science and Engineering) in their attempts to raise the profile of Science in the forthcoming General Election, not least in order to influence the subsequent Budget.

5.5 The Policy Officer informed Council that the Science Minister had launched a consultation about the future of BNSC. The Society, he reminded Council, already had expressed the view that 'space science and exploration would be facilitated by reforming BNSC into a new, independently funded, technically aware organisation for coordinating space exploration activities in the UK, which could take the form of an independent UK Space Agency'. He went on to say that he would liaise with the Vice-Presidents to review this statement in the light of the questions raised in the consultation and, following further guidance from Council, the membership might be invited to register its opinion by means of a web-poll.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 Professor Cruise reported on a BNSC consultation designed to test the viability of an annual National Space Conference designed to achieve greater impact by drawing together a number of existing events, including the NAM. Following discussions with the other Vice-Presidents, he suggested that the Society should volunteer to suggest speakers for the Space Science component of a National Space Conference. However, as its purpose and scope would be very different from that of the NAM, he believed there was no basis for any kind of rationalisation of the two conferences. This was agreed and Professor Cruise was asked to reply accordingly.

6.2 The Treasurer spoke to a paper outlining the business components of the forthcoming IAU General Assembly in Brazil, at which the Society would be represented by the President and himself. In particular, he drew attention to the resolutions on which the President, as the UK's National Representative, would be required to vote. The most important, in so far as it entailed a significant financial commitment, was to adopt the strategic plan *Astronomy for the Developing World* and to authorise the IAU Executive to finance it from the Union's wealthier members as well as to seek outside sponsors. Council agreed that the IAU offered

the best way of supporting combined efforts to assist astronomy in the developing world and authorised the President to approve the resolution (as well as the others listed in the paper). The Treasurer also highlighted the fraud which had been perpetrated by the (deceased) former Administrative Assistant of the IAU.

6.3 Professor Cruise introduced the International Committee's report. It had agreed to approach a number of foreign astronomical societies (including those in the United States, France, Germany, Spain, India – as well as the EAS) to discuss cooperation involving, say, the exchange of journals, visiting rights to each other's meetings, joint meetings, exchange of speakers and the establishment of "chapters" for RAS Fellows working abroad. In particular France and Germany, it was felt, along with the UK, might be interested in linking their national meetings on a rotating basis to the EAS's JENAM (with an occasional 'slot' for one of the smaller countries). Professor Cruise reported also on the meeting hosted by the RAS of learned societies, attended by some 45 people, to discuss the potential for Capacity Building programmes in science. Finally, he reported the Committee's suggestion that foreign post-doctoral students studying in the UK might be encouraged to join the Society, and remain in it on their return to their home countries, if they were invited to Burlington House for a meeting with the President, followed by a tour of the building and attendance at an 'ordinary' meeting and the subsequent drinks reception. Council welcomed all of these initiatives.

6.4 The Executive Secretary asked Council to approve the establishment of the 'Winton' Awards'. Winton Capital Management, he explained, through one of their FRAS employees, had offered to sponsor 2 new annual prizes of GBP 1K each, for an initial period of 3 years. Their purpose would be to complement the Thesis and Fowler Awards by rewarding PDRAs, respectively in astronomy and geophysics, whose career had shown the most promising development since the completion of their PhD (which should have been no more than 5 years previously). Council welcomed this generous offer and authorised the Executive Secretary to make the necessary arrangements.

6.5. In recent years, the Executive Secretary reported, nominations for Society awards and medals had not always been as numerous as was desirable. To stimulate more, Council had already agreed to end the requirement that the right to make nominations be restricted to Fellows of the Society. With the same objective, to counter allegations that the secrecy of the awards process, exemplified by the anonymity of the awards committees, deters nominations, the Executive Secretary sought Council's agreement that, with their permission, the names of members of the Awards Committees should be published on the Society web site. This was agreed.

6.6 Despite evidence (such as electronic voting for Council elections) that the RAS web site was playing an increasingly useful function in the Society, the Executive Secretary reported feedback from fellows about their difficulty finding items on it -and their variable quality. He said that proposals had been solicited to redesign the site using the combined skills of Paul Johnson, the designer of A&G, and Quentin Stanley, who was responsible for re-engineering the site in 2005. In addition to making the site more attractive and easier to use, the opportunity would be taken to migrate to a new content management system. Council approved the project subject to its cost not exceeding £8K (exclusive of VAT and travelling expenses).

6.7 Council approved the following committee appointments :

GJI Editorial Board: David Halliday; Ingo Grevemeyer; Stephane Labrosse; Christine Thomas ; John Brodholt

Library Committee: Guy Hurst, Philippa Browning; Ian Howarth (Simon Mitton - Chair)

Finance Committee: Kieron Leech

Committee for Women in Astronomy and Geophysics (CWiAG): Nicola Pressling

Astronomy Heritage Committee: David Hughes; Liba Taub (Mike Emunds - Chair)

6.8 The Executive Secretary drew Council's attention to recent and proposed changes to office staffing

6.9 Council noted the report of the recent meeting of the CWiAG

7. FINANCE

The Treasurer spoke to a paper setting out the Society's current financial situation as reflected in the up-dated Operations Plan. This was particularly timely given the agenda item on the Daphne Jackson Trust, in which the Society would be invited to participate in its fellowship scheme. Regarding the reserves, while, as a result of the fall in investment values during the financial crisis, the position had weakened considerably since December 31 2007, they were still well above the minimum £2.5M agreed as prudent by the Council in December 2003. Pension funds also had suffered, but the unexpected death in service of a member of the Defined Benefit Scheme, whose consequences were covered by insurance, had left the Scheme in surplus (for the moment). Revenue from publications, the principal source of income to the Society, remained buoyant, though the long term impact of 'open access' publishing and the squeeze on university library budgets, remained uncertain. This, generally benign, situation, the Treasurer concluded, indicated that the Society would run an approximately balanced budget in 2009, with a surplus in 2010 and that it could afford to fund a new initiative providing the outlay entailed was modest and not open - ended.

8. PUBLICATIONS

The MN Editorial Board Report was noted

9. OTHER

9.1 The report by Dr Mark Swinbank, outlining his considerable achievements during the first year of his Lockyer Fellowship, was noted with great satisfaction.

9.2 Dr Woolley, Chief Executive of the Daphne Jackson Trust, gave a presentation on the Daphne Jackson Fellowships. She explained that they were designed to enable men and women (preponderantly the latter), with a career break from a SET job or completed PhD of at least 2 years, to return to careers in science or engineering. This was achieved through updated knowledge and renewed professional skills gained on (usually) 2 year part-time research projects in a university research laboratory or industrial establishment in the UK. The research project, Dr Woolley added, had to be timely and challenging but achievable within the available timescale, offering a reasonable prospect of thereby becoming more

employable. Applicants for University-based Fellowships were expected to find a suitable host institution, department and supervisor willing to cover bench fees and day to day consumables. Fellows would become employees of their host institution, their salary deriving from a sponsoring organisation (which could choose to exercise control over their selection and be involved in their subsequent monitoring). To date, 191 fellowships had been awarded resulting in a 96% success rate in returning people to careers in science. Typically they cost rather more than £50K over the 2 year period they lasted.

Following the withdrawal of Dr Woolley, Council agreed that the Society should express interest in creating a *Royal Astronomical Society Daphne Jackson Fellowship* providing the cost was restricted to the order of £50K and that it was understood it did not imply a continuing commitment beyond the first fellowship. In addition, the Daphne Jackson Trust would have to agree to the Society being closely involved in the selection of the Fellow, not only to ensure their proposed research was relevant to its disciplines but to be satisfied that the successful candidate met the high standards required to re-enter the research community. It was hoped that, following discussions with the Trust, a proposal might be brought to Council in October.

9.3 Council approved the following candidates for Election to Fellowship listed in OR/05/08; OR/06/08 and posted on the RAS web site.

Akram	Waheed
Apperley	John
Bigger	Marcel
Bleiweiss	Max
Brunt	Chris
Buitrago	Fernando
Chun	Yoon-Young
Cole	David
Cui	Jun
Durant	Robin
Edge	William
Ferraro	Simone
Fisher	John
Fleuren	Simone
Garthwaite	Matthew
Heesen	Volker
Katsiyannis	Athanassios
Keil	Ralf
Keskeys	Michael
Ogunmodimu	Olugbenga
Oldella	Felipe
Poyner	Gary
Rice	Ken
Routledge	Graham
Shears	Jeremy
Smulczeski	Marie
Threlfall	James
Zhao	HongSheng

10. AOB

Council noted a paper laid on the table by Dr Walker reporting plans to mount an exhibition to mark the centenary of infrared imaging.

Council rose at 1815

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A.C. Fabian
President

9th October 2009