



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Burlington House, Piccadilly
London W1J 0BQ, UK

T: 020 7734 4582/ 3307

F: 020 7494 0166

Info@ras.org.uk

www.ras.org.uk

Registered Charity 226545

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 12 FEBRUARY 2009 HELD AT 1300 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor A.C. Fabian (President), Professor M.A. Hapgood, Professor I.D. Howarth (Vice-Presidents), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Dr H.J. Walker, Professor M.A. Barstow and Dr I.A. Crawford (secretaries), Dr R.J. Barber, Dr P.K. Browning, Dr I.F. Corbett, Professor M.G. Edmunds, Dr L. Fletcher, Professor B.K. Gibson, Professor J.H. Hough, and Dr J.A. Wild.

IN ATTENDANCE: D Elliott; R. Massey

APOLOGIES: Professor M.E. Bailey, Professor A.M. Cruise (Vice-Presidents) and Dr A.J. Ball, Dr J. Greaves, Professor R. Ivison, and Professor V. Nakariakov.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 11 December 2008 were approved and signed

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Professor Hapgood summarised the conclusions of his consultations with senior members of the solar-terrestrial physics (STP) community concerning the proposal in the Wakeham review of the 'Health of Physics' that responsibility for parts of solar-terrestrial physics (STP) should transfer from STFC to NERC. In general this was supported, provided it was accompanied by sufficient funds to enable NERC to administer and support the current level of research which, in turn, required a level of funding at least equal to that prevailing prior to the impact of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. The parts of STP that fall outside NERC's focus on Planet Earth, such as space-based plasma physics, space weather and space-based measurements, needed to be supported within the STFC Astronomy Programme.

Council approved this position and requested the Executive Secretary to communicate it to the Chair of the RCUK Executive Group, Professor Ian Diamond

3.2 The Policy Officer explained that, in view of the wide remit the IUSS Committee Review on 'Putting Science and Engineering at the heart of Government Policy', it had been

decided to contribute to the discussion on which the submission sent by the Science Council was based, a copy of which had been placed on the Society's web site

3.3 The Senior Secretary reported that Professor George Ellis had agreed to deliver the 2009 Whitrow Lecture during the 'European Week of Astronomy and Space Science'.

4 PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President explained that the 'Astronomy Forum', whose inaugural meeting took place on 21 January 2009, aimed to plug a gap in community based discussion of what research in astronomy is carried out in the UK, and how it is funded (or not). It would provide an independent, authoritative voice with which to speak to STFC and other bodies, complementing the activities of the RAS, which embraces a wider range of interests, and the Standing Conference of Astronomy Professors, which has become too numerous to function effectively. Given the current economic and financial situation the outlook for astronomy in the next Comprehensive Spending Review is problematic. STFC needs to be helped to make the best case to the Treasury. Similarly, while working for a good outcome, the community needs to advise STFC on the *process* which scientists will find least unacceptable in the event of a further funding shortfall and consequent cuts to facilities or programmes. There is consensus that the existing imbalance between the spend on facilities and on the exploitation of results from them must not be allowed to worsen.

To be able to speak for the research astronomy community, the 'Forum' needs to be inclusive without being too large to be unmanageable - a maximum of 30. Membership, usually, should be restricted to one representative per university with smaller research groups being represented by neighbouring institutions. Representatives must be willing to understand and relay the views of all astronomers in their University, including those attached to other departments or related institutions.

4.2 Turning to the STFC Corporate Strategy consultation, the President noted that this would be discussed at the 'Forum' deliberately scheduled the day before the next Council meeting. Council agreed that, in that case, it made sense to delay finalising its own submission until the next meeting

4.3 After a number of rescheduling problems the President announced that a meeting with Science Minister Lord Drayson had been fixed for 5 March 2009

4.4 Finally, the President reported that he and the Executive Secretary had represented the Society at the **Official** Opening of IYA 2009 held in the Paris HQ of UNESCO attended by some 900 people, including students (the one representing the UK being sponsored by the RAS)

5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Professor Hapgood up-dated Council on the Economic Impact Study commissioned from Oxford Economics. He noted that, on the steering group, there continued to be considerable debate about what constitutes fundamental research. There is, for example, a class of basic scientific research that is inspired by potential uses rather than being curiosity driven so that distinguishing pure and applied research is not always easy. Another important issue was to identify the types of economic benefits that follow from fundamental research. These should include the value of increased skills and spill over into other R&D areas as well as traditional

economic benefits such as patents, licenses and company profits derived from products based on a particular area of research. However a critical area is the economic value that end users derive from the introduction of a new technology though they may be one or two orders of magnitude greater than the direct economic benefit. For example medical research which results in a labour force with a longer productive working life. Finally, UK research is often exploited abroad where, for example, US and Japanese venture capital firms appear to have better technical knowledge base on which to judge risks and make investment decisions.

5.2 The Policy Officer spoke to the RAS submission which had been made to the BNSC consultation on the review of space exploration policy, which, while up-dating and expanding it, re-cycled existing agreed policy.

5.3 The Senior Secretary reported that 2 RAS supported projects would form part of the Science Council display under the theme '*The Ecosystem, Earth and Energy*' at the '*Big Bang*' exhibition at the Queen Elizabeth Centre on 4-6 March 2009 viz the 'Schoolscope' and the 'Schools Seismometer'

5.4 The Policy Officer informed Council that he had attended the launch by the Science Minister of the outreach programme '*So What? So Everything*'

5.5 Professor Barstow expressed concern that the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE 2008), probably as a result of the normalisation of results across different disciplines, had failed to properly rank physics in comparison with chemistry departments, which appeared inconsistent with the findings of the Wakeham Review of the 'Health of Physics'. Since the RAE scores affected the amount of QR (Quality Related) funding provided by the Higher Education Funding Councils, and possibly influenced internal funding decisions by individual universities, it was agreed that the Society should liaise with the Institute of Physics to consider what coordinated action might be taken.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 The Executive Secretary summarised the responses he had received from past Presidents about the terms and conditions under which future presidents should operate. They had agreed that the Society was more heavily involved in public policy issues with a consequently higher demand of a President's time, but there was no support for there being an honorarium. There was, though, a consensus in favour of reviewing the way Presidents were (s)ected and their length of office - and of the roles of the Vice-Presidents.

In discussion, it was agreed that the membership needed to be involved in selecting the candidate who would appear on the ballot list as the Council nominee, perhaps through being invited to make suggestions for consideration by a small sub-set of Council which would take into account considerations of gender, subject specialism and geographical balance. There was, though, little support for Council nominating more than one candidate on the grounds that this could deter senior scientists from agreeing to stand. Depending on when such a selection procedure occurred there might be a case for formalising the status of the 'President in Waiting'. There was also support for expanding the roles of the Vice-Presidents to encompass providing support for the President and Policy Officer in formulating and promoting the Society's position on public issues.

The Executive Secretary was requested to establish a small working group to undertake further investigations and, in due course, bring proposals to Council

6.2 Council approved the following balloting list for the 2009 elections

Vice-President A

Prof. J.Drew 'Council'

Vice-President G

Prof. J.C. Zarnecki Prof. M.G. Edmunds Prof. I.P. Wright

A

Prof. K. Blundell	'Council'	
Dr W.J. Chaplin	Prof. T.D. Marsh	Prof. I.W. Roxburgh
Dr D.L. Clements	Prof. B. Gibson	Prof. M. Rowan-Robinson
Dr R. Cordey	Prof. J.C. Zarnecki	Prof. A.N. Lasenby
Dr M. Hendry	Prof. J.C. Brown	Prof. J. Hough
Prof. O. Lahav	Prof. D. Lynden-Bell	Prof. D.A. Williams
Dr J. McCue	Dr J.R. Dormand	Mr J. Youdale
Mr M.A. Thompson	Mr P.L. Money	Mr R.E. Mizon

G

Dr M. Anand	Dr I.A. Crawford	Dr S.S. Russell
Dr E. Bunce	Dr J.A. Wild	Prof. M.Lester
Dr C. Davis	Prof. M. Lockwood	Prof. R.A. Harrison
Prof. R.Erdélyi (a.k.a. R. von Fáy-Siebenbürgen)	Prof. G.J. Doyle	Prof. P.K. Browning
Prof. A.W. Hood	Prof. N.O. Weiss	Dr L. Fletcher
Prof. J. Woodhouse	Prof. M.A. Khan	Prof. M. Kendall

6.3 The Senior Secretary summarised the recent meeting of the Committee for Women in Astronomy and Geophysics viz that Council should be asked to invite the Director of the Daphne Jackson Trust to address a future meeting of Council on its activities (which was agreed); that there would be a 'Women's Lunch' and workshop at the European Week of Astronomy and Space Science; that the cornerstone IYA 2009 project 'She is an Astronomer' would be launched in Germany (and its UK component shortly thereafter) and that there was disappointment that no women had been selected by their institution to attend the 'Astronomy Forum'

7. FINANCE

7.1 The Treasurer informed Council that the organisers of the 'European Week of Astronomy and Space Science', which in 2009 incorporates the National Astronomy Meeting (NAM), had requested a RAS grant of £16,000. He explained that the NAM was of great importance to the RAS in recognition of which the size of grant support had doubled in recent years (to £12,000). Notwithstanding that the 2009 meeting was expected to be unusually big, he was reluctant to send a signal to the organisers of future NAMs that they could expect a similar level of funding. Accordingly he recommended to Council that the grant should be set at £12,500 (to allow for price changes since 2008) but that an additional £3,500 would be provided for a special item

viz a contribution to the costs either of making a conference registration system 'template' that, with minimal adjustment, would be available for future NAM organisers or of organising the open day for 500 gifted school students scheduled for the last day of the conference. After some discussion this was agreed.

7.2 Council approved a 1% uplift to levels of remuneration paid to journal editors, A&G production, the Treasurer and (some) staff to reflect the change in RPI between December 2007 and December 2008, back-dated to January 2009

7.3 Council approved a grant of £3000 towards the costs of erecting a memorial at the site of the Eddington 1919 Principe expedition and the associated lectures and outreach activities organised by the Ministry of Education

8. PUBLICATIONS

8.1 The report of the GJI Editorial Board meeting in December 2008 was noted

9. OTHER

9.1 The following candidates were elected to Fellowship of the Society

Awad	Zainab
Bayet	Estelle
Coward	David
Davis	Timothy
Dhanoa	Harpreet
Graff	Philip
Grams	Guilherme
Hunt	Garry
Jackson-Booth	Natasha
McEllin	Michael
Momtahan	Kian
Nicolosi	Giuseppe
Penny	Matthew
Scanlan	David
Sparks	Mark

9.2 The minutes of the A&G meetings of 12th December 2008 and 9th January were approved and signed by the President

9.3 Diana Garnham, Chief Executive of the Science Council gave an oral presentation about its activities. She informed Council that it was an umbrella organisation for some 30 member bodies, including the RAS, with a combined membership of some 500,000 scientists, potentially able to provide government a point of contact with, and representative view from, the entire sector, especially relating to science education (though care was taken not to trespass on discipline specific areas where member bodies had greater competence). A recent

initiative was a web site to promote careers through science. A major activity was organising the award of Chartered Scientist and Chartered Scientist Teacher status to qualifying individuals belonging to one of its member bodies.

10. AOB

10.1 The suggestion of the ‘A’ Awards Committee to consider establishing a new award for early career scientists had been considered by officers. They proposed that, instead, the Managing Editor of MNRAS might wish to emulate GJI which presented cash prizes to young researchers of outstanding papers.

10.2 Council was reminded of the deadline of April 1 for the receipt of proposals for specialist discussion meetings for the 2009-2010 academic year.

The meeting rose at 16.45

.....
A.C. Fabian
President

13th March 2009