



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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AGENDA ITEM 2

ATTACHMENT C(2010/03) 2/1

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 12 FEBRUARY 2010 AT 1100 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor A.C. Fabian (President), Professor M.A. Hapgood, Professor J.C. Zarnecki (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, Professor K. Blundell, Dr E. Bunce, Professor P.K. Browning, Dr I.F. Corbett, Professor M.G. Edmunds, Professor B.K. Gibson, Dr J. Greaves, Professor A.W. Hood, Professor R. Ivison, Professor O. Lahav, and Dr J.A. Wild.

APOLOGIES: Professor M Cruise; Professor J Drew

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

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 11 December 2009 were approved and signed

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 The Policy Officer reported that the *UK Ground Based Astronomy* booklet was in an advanced stage of preparation. He planned to seek input from STFC but appealed for examples of significant recent research by UK astronomers to go alongside case studies demonstrating the contribution to the wider economy of astronomy- trained people.

3.2 Professor Hapgood informed Council that a meeting with NERC had been arranged in June at which it was hoped to agree a framework for regular liaison between the Research Council and the part of the community represented by the Society which it funded.

3.3 The Executive Secretary reported that the Society had decided against trying to mount a co-ordinated UK bid to host the IAU's Office for Astronomy Development. He understood that while some UK institutions had shown an interest only 2 to his certain knowledge had

made formal expressions of interest. Dr Corbett indicated that there had been a total of 39 from around the world and that it was hoped to announce the outcome in May.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President reported on the meeting of the Astronomy Forum on 15 January explaining that the first half had comprised short presentations on the issues arising from the STFC prioritisation exercise while the second (currently under review by the Minister of Science) focused on the tensions arising from (fluctuating) international subscriptions and the operating costs of large domestic facilities being set against grants for university researchers.

The Forum expressed particular concern at the projections of Professor Cruise, Chair of the Astronomy Grants Panel (AGP). He said the AGP understood that the available funding might support 75 new PDRAs but could be as low as 56 per annum in later years. If that happened

Were this to happen, some 70% of rolling grants would not be viable since the number of PDRAs awarded per group would be too small to warrant them. This offered the bleak prospect that the community would be reduced to a small number of independent academics who might typically receive two rolling grants over their whole career, with no hope of providing international project leadership.

The President believed that the next few years would inevitably see the UK displaced from its position as the world's leading astronomy country after the USA. It was unrealistic to expect that there would be additional funds, particularly given the demands of high impact spending departments such as Health and Defence, and that the priority should be the protection of centres of excellence- and not 'salami slicing' across the board (an outcome , he believed, which the present peer review arrangements tended towards). To counter this risk he had written to the chair of STFC, Professor Sterling, urging that the community, though senior scientists on PPAN, should be *directly* involved in decision taking rather than, because of the Science Board, being at one remove.

That said he was hopeful, following his meeting on February 4 with Lord Drayson, that some alleviation would be afforded. First, by transferring the management of international currency fluctuations to BIS or the Treasury. This would prevent further uncontrollable increases in STFC subscriptions to major international organizations impacting directly on other STFC activities. Second, by requiring other Research Councils to pay for their respective communities' use of the national facilities currently funded from STFC's budget, the direct tensioning between facilities and the PPAN-scientific community (alone), would be avoided. The President added that, while it was not a universally shared position, he had informed the Minister that the interests of the community would be better served if astronomy grants remained with STFC rather than being merged with the other physical sciences funded by EPSRC.

In the subsequent discussion it was suggested that the Society might wish to use some of its funds to supplement the pool of PDRA bursaries by funding a number, preferably on a shared cost basis with universities or commercial concerns. It was also noted that the next round of the RAS Norman Lockyer Fellowship was due to commence later in 2010. It was agreed that the Finance Committee should look into this but in the meantime the Executive Secretary should be apprised of any cost-sharing possibilities. It was also noted that following the

General Election there could be a further rationalisation of the research councils and that the Society needed to be prepared to respond to this.

Finally, the President reported that he had written to the South African Minister of Science expressing concern about the suspension of Professor Phil Charles from his position as Director of the South African Astronomical Observatory.

5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

5.1 The Policy Officer was thanked for his submission to the S&T Committee Review of Spending Cuts

5.2 Professor Zarnecki drew attention to the *Space Exploration Review* to which Lord Drayson's department had made a significant contribution. He also mentioned the more recent *Space Innovation Report*. Both reports, which originated from groups established before the full impact of the current economic downturn had been felt, called for significant increases in public funding for space activities.

5.3 The Executive Secretary spoke to the 2010 objectives of the Society as described in the draft 2009 Annual Report. In addition to adding a note about the Library, there were a number of drafting suggestions to clarify the community leadership role espoused by the Society and the use of the term 'impact', which, it was observed, has a particular meaning in the context of research projects.

5.4 The Policy Officer asked for contributions from members of Council to enable him to complete the web-based guide entitled 'Ten things you ought to know about Astronomy'.

5.5 The fact sheets on Planetary Exploration and Space Weather produced under the aegis of MIST were noted

5.6 The BGA submission to the S&T Committee inquiry into Geoengineering was noted

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 Professor Edmunds, chair of the Presidential Election Committee (PEC), outlined the problems encountered in operating the new system for reaching a decision on Council's nominee for the position of President. In particular he explained that there had been insufficient time between the closing date for the receipt of 'suggestions' from the membership and the February Council meeting at which the balloting list had to be completed. It was agreed that, to prevent this re-occurrence, the Executive Secretary would examine the bye-laws and seek Council's agreement to effect any required changes at the AGM in May 2010. In addition it was proposed that the names of candidates suggested to the PEC should be carried forward to the next round of Presidential elections (in 2011). Following a discussion, and subsequent clarification by the Executive Secretary, about the intention of bye-law 25, which allows Council to add its own nominations, Council went on to approve the following balloting list:

Position and Name	Proposer	Secunder
President Prof. R. Davies	‘Council’	
Vice-President A Prof. O. Lahav	‘Council’	
Vice-President G Prof. M. Kendall	‘Council’	
A		
Dr W.J. Chaplin	Prof. A.M. Cruise	Prof. I.W. Roxburgh
Prof. D.W. Hughes	Prof. J.C. Brown	Prof. M.G. Edmunds
Dr A. Murphy	Prof. J.A. Peacock	Prof. A.F. Heavens
Dr A. Norton	Prof. J.C. Zarnecki	Prof. M.A. Barstow
Prof. R.E. Spencer	Prof. I.W.A. Browne	Dr A. Wilkinson
Mr M. Thompson	Ms. A. Bailey	Mr R.A. Milhoux
Dr M. Ruffert	Prof. D.C. Heggie	Prof. A.F. Heavens
G		
Prof. M.J. Burchell	Prof. J.C. Zarnecki	Dr I.A. Crawford
Prof. S. Crampin	Dr S. Peacock	Dr J.R. Evans
Prof. R. Erdélyi	Prof. A.W. Hood	Prof. B. Roberts
Dr P.G.J. Irwin	Prof. P.L. Read	Prof. F.W. Taylor
Dr S.E. Milan	Prof. B.S. Lanchester	Prof. M.A. Hapgood
Prof. B.E. Parsons	Prof. K.A. Whaler	Prof. G. Houseman
Prof. D.J. Southwood	Prof. J.C. Zarnecki	Prof. M.K. Dougherty
Dr D.M. Wright	Prof. S.W.H. Cowley	Prof. M. Lester

6.2 The Executive Secretary reported that the House Committee, which is charged with supervising the repairs and upkeep of the Society's premises; monitoring Health & Safety provision and approving the purchase of furnishings, fittings, etc., had been in abeyance since before the start of the Burlington House refurbishment programme. In the intervening period its responsibilities had been discharged by the Finance Committee, aided by the annual inspection carried out by the Honorary Auditors. Council agreed that the revised arrangements appeared to be satisfactory and that the House Committee should accordingly be disbanded.

6.3 Council approved the appointment of Professor Zarnecki to the Finance Committee and the appointment of Dr John McCue and Mr Brian Sheen to the Education Committee

6.4 The Report of NAM 2009 was noted. Described as the *European Week of Astronomy and Space Science* and held under the joint auspices of the RAS and the European Astronomical Society, it was hosted by the University of Hertfordshire between April 20th - 23rd. It was the largest NAM to date with 1081 onsite delegates and was opened by the UK Science Minister. There were 8 plenary talks and 49 parallel sessions resulting in a total of 480 presentations in addition to 454 poster displays. On the final day 280 attended a Schools Day for ‘gifted and

talented' pupils. Some 950 media mentions were recorded and a number of commercial and academic agencies had exhibition displays.

7. FINANCE

7.1 A paper was presented outlining the revisions to the bye-laws required to implement the changes to membership subscriptions agreed at the December Council meeting. These were to allow monthly or quarterly payments, rolling start dates and the substitution of 'Membership Subscriptions' for 'Contributions'. In addition the Treasurer reported that he had incorporated other changes, which did not require bye-law revision into the schedule for 2011 subscriptions viz respectively, relating to payment by direct debit or continuous payment authority and to the discount for fellows aged under 30. The Treasurer then turned to the proposed 2011 subscriptions which he proposed should be adjusted to reflect the change in the RPI (2.4%) and which resulted in the following schedule:

Category 1 Fellows: Fellows who completed full time education more than 5 years before 2011 Jan 1. £93.50.

Category 2 Recently qualified Fellows: Fellows who completed full-time education less than 5 years before 2011 Jan 1. £62.

Category 3 Student Fellows: Fellows who, on 2011 Jan 1 (or at the time of election in 2011), are full-time students at any level (or part-time postgraduate students enrolled on a research degree), who are studying Astronomy, Geophysics or a related subject. A certificate available from the Society must be completed. £24.

Category 4 Honorary Fellows (or Associates): Honorary Fellows (or Associates) who at the time of their election to this category were not already Fellows: £nil.

Category 5 Older Fellows: 1. Fellows who exercised their rights under Byelaw 38 before 2003 Jan 1. £nil.
2. Fellows who, without having the above historic rights, validly exercise their rights under Bye-law 38. £24.

Newly elected fellows: There is no admission fee. The following rates are applicable in the first year of election, **only** for those who agree to pay by Direct Debit or Standing Order from a UK bank account or by Continuous Payment Authority on an acceptable Credit or Debit Card:

Category 1 Fellows. £62.

Category 2 Recently qualified Fellows. £41. This rate is also available in their first year for Fellows transferring from category 3 to category 2.

Category 3 Student Fellows. £1.

Discount for those joining with the year part over: Subscription rates for newly elected Fellows joining in Categories 1 or 2 after the end of June are reduced by 50% in the first year.

Further concessions and fees:

Discount for IoP members: Rates for Fellows in Categories 1 and 2 are reduced by 25% if they are also members of the Institute of Physics.

Payment by instalments: Subject to the Council being satisfied that effective administrative arrangements to cope are in place at a particular date, thereafter Fellows in Categories 1 and 2 may opt to pay the Membership Subscription in quarterly instalments (**only** by Direct Debit, Standing Order or Continuous Payment Authority) at the rate applicable at the time payment is due.

Payments by cheque etc. There is no additional fee set for Fellows who wish to pay other than by Direct Debit, Standing Order or Continuous Payment Authority. However, Fellows who pay by cheque or by other means (such as, from outside the UK, by an international bank transfer) are asked to consider the additional costs borne by the membership as a whole of processing such payments and to make a voluntary addition. The suggested amount is £5.

Council agreed that all of these proposals should be put to the AGM for approval by the membership.

7.2 The Treasurer presented the up-dated Operations Plan which predicted an operating surplus in 2010. He added that an under-spend on the RAS Daphne Jackson Fellowship was likely.

7.3 The Treasurer left the room at this point. In his absence Council approved increases to the remuneration of staff and editors as well as the Treasurer to reflect the change in RPI in the previous calendar year.

8. OTHER

8.1 Dr Walker spoke to a paper setting out the case for undertaking a demographic survey of the astronomical community in the UK. She explained that the Society had organised surveys in 1993, 1998, and 2003 to chart the numbers, age distribution, gender, and origins of people, including PhD students, who were professionally engaged in astronomy. It was important that base-line data was acquired over the next few months before the impact of the funding cuts was felt. She suggested that a professional survey firm was engaged at a cost of up to £10,000 and mentioned that she had been recommended the names of some by the Institute of Physics. Council authorised Dr Walker, with the assistance of the Executive Secretary, to negotiate a contract along these lines.

8.2 Dr Crawford sought the opinion of Council on the desirability of establishing a new award to recognise excellence in the teaching of astronomy in schools. Council encouraged him to work up a proposal for consideration at a future meeting.

8.3 Council approved the following candidates for election to Fellowship listed in the Officers' Report for December 2009 and January 2010 and posted on the RAS web site.

Axtell	John
Baker	Deborah
Bartlett	Elizabeth
Bending	Victoria
Burgess	David
Burke	Claire
Burton	Christopher
Cano	Zach
Caselli	Paola
Davey	E. A.
Faimali	Alessandro
Feeney	Stephen
Findlay	Joseph
Green	Lucie

Gulsen	Erhan
Habergham	Stacey
Harris	Jennifer
Hasan	Usama
Hosseinpour	Mahboub
Hounsell	Rebekah
Irven	Brian
Irving	Benjamin
Izzard	Robert
King	Matt
Lauffer	George
Loaring	Nicola
Long	Richard
Lykou	Foteini
Norris	Mark
O'Neil	Robert
O'Regan	Jonathan
Owensworth	Jamie
Petters	Arlie
Polichtchouk	Inna
Shelton	David
Tresman	Ian
Trow	Allan
Yates	Japheth

8.4 The Minutes of the Ordinary meetings of 11th December 2009 and 8th January 2010 were approved and signed

9. AOB

9.1 Council members were invited to express interest in attending the annual Buckingham Palace Garden Party to which the Society had been allocated 4 tickets

9.2 Council noted a request from the librarian to re-allocate funds previously ear-marked for the purchase of journals to be used for the binding of existing journals. The sum involved, some £43,000, was thought excessive. Instead, the Library Committee was asked to discuss its detailed spending plan, in the first instance with the Treasurer, before re-submitting its proposals to Council.

9.3 Professor Barstow asked for suggestions about the organisation of the ‘community meeting’ at the forthcoming NAM. It was agreed that rather than, as in previous years, a Q&A session with a panel of STFC officers, there should be a series of short presentations to stimulate community discussion, possibly using IT to involve people unable to attend the meeting.

The meeting rose at 1530

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A.C. Fabian
President

12th March 2010