



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 8 MAY 2009 HELD AT 1030 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor A.C. Fabian (President), Professor M.E. Bailey, Professor A.M. Cruise, and Professor M.A. Hapgood, (Vice-Presidents), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Dr H.J. Walker and Professor M.A. Barstow (Secretaries), Dr R.J. Barber, Dr I.F. Corbett, Professor M.G. Edmunds, Dr L. Fletcher and Dr J.A. Wild.

APOLOGIES : Professor I.D. Howarth (Vice-President); Dr I Crawford (Secretary); Dr A.J. Ball; Professor P.K. Browning; Professor B Gibson; Dr J Greaves; Professor J Hough; Professor R Ivison and Professor V Nakariakov.

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

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 12 March 2009 were approved and signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Dr Fletcher reported that she had finalised the format for '*What everyone should know about Astronomy*' and would be contacting colleagues to write the various sections. Once completed, the text and illustrations would be passed to the RAS office which would be responsible for designing and populating the web pages on which it would be displayed.

3.2 The Executive Secretary reported that the BGA Committee of the RAS had been established and that its first chair (aka BGA President) would be Professor Mike Kendall.

3.3 The Senior Secretary reported that the 'Big Bang' exhibition had been a great success (except the catering arrangements for exhibitors!). She and Dr Penston had demonstrated the 'Schoolscope' to enthusiastic school pupils and Dr Denton had done the same with the 'Schools Seismometer'. Council agreed the Society should support future 'Big Bang' events.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President reported that the NAM/JENAM ('European Week of Astronomy and Space Science') had been a huge success (excepting the poster displays which had attracted few visitors and the panel discussion in the 'community session' which had been somewhat

lacklustre), and wondered how best to repeat a formula which had attracted such a large number of participants, including many younger researchers, from across Europe. Perhaps, he speculated, every 3rd year the NAM could be broadened into a European conference which might match the American Astronomical Society's Congresses in scope and size (though he noted that Hatfield's facilities would be difficult to find on other UK academic campuses). Clearly there would need to be consultations with other national astronomical societies in Europe as well as with the European Astronomical Society, ESO and ESA. The President suggested that the Vice-Presidents could be asked to take ownership of this issue and present Council with their proposals. This was agreed.

4.2 The President next turned to the impact of the recent Budget on STFC's ability to implement its Delivery Plan. While science spending had been 'ring-fenced' (but not, as in the USA, augmented by a 'surge' of new money), a £106m efficiency levy had been imposed on RCUK. It appeared that STFC would be able to manage the immediate (2009) programme, albeit at the expense of staffing reductions which would reduce its level of administrative support to the community, but thereafter some 'restructuring' would be required. In particular the carry forward of existing commitment on the grants line would seriously limit the scope for making new awards. The combination of uncertainty about the health of public finances and the requirement for a General Election within the next 12 months was reported to be delaying preparations for the next Comprehensive Spending Review scheduled to appear in October 2010. Council agreed that the next year was likely to be 'turbulent' for the UK astro-community and that there was little prospect of the current Minister for Science and Innovation revising his priorities to its benefit. In these circumstances it was felt important that the RAS should co-operate with STFC to present the best possible case to HM Treasury for sustained support of astronomy while recognising, in the absence of additional funds, that any re-balancing of resources in favour of exploitation grants could entail closing down or ending UK support for some facilities. Finally, Council took note of suggestions that the RAS might provide funding for researchers from its own reserves; and also of the desirability of engaging both with its European counterparts, wrestling no doubt with similar dilemmas, and with Opposition political parties.

5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Professor Hapgood reported that the steering group supervising the 'Economic Impact Study' was concerned that 'Oxford Economics' had failed to devise a methodology for eliciting the robust quantitative data without which HM Treasury was unlikely to be persuaded to support increased investment in fundamental (or basic) physics research. A meeting with the senior management of 'Oxford Economics' had been arranged to discuss these concerns which, if not addressed, could cause the sponsors to end the study at the completion of the current, pilot, stage.

5.2 The Policy Officer spoke to the paper submitted to the IUSS Committee review 'Putting Science at the heart of Government'. There was some discussion about the statement in it that the UK 'ranks 2nd or 3rd in the world in terms of scientific output in astronomy and space science measured by papers, citations or citations relative to GDP'. The President wondered why it was not more categorical in claiming second place behind the USA. Dr Corbett responded that the data sets on which these conclusions rested were far from reliable and it was difficult, if not impossible, to be more precise.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 Professor Hapgood's proposals for the composition of the 2010 'G' Awards Committee were approved.

6.2 Dr Wild highlighted sections from the Membership Committee Report, especially the analysis of membership trends and the on-going review of subscriptions to which this was linked. He noted that it was planned to prepare papers for Council setting out options as well as summarising the results of the membership questionnaire (which had now been closed). In addition he explained the intention to migrate membership information to a new database. Finally, he asked Council to approve the Committee's recommendation for a continuation of the RAS Diary for a further 5 years. This was agreed with the proviso that consideration should be given to a re-design (possibly along the lines of the IoP Diary which comprised annual insets to fit into a more permanent cover) and to the production of an electronic version for fellows who prefer that medium. Council concluded by expressing its satisfaction with the thoroughness of the Committee's approach to its tasks.

6.3 Professor Cruise, Chair of the International Committee, outlined the paper which would be discussed at the forthcoming meeting, hosted by the RAS, of Learned Societies to discuss Capacity Building in developing countries. Council agreed that the 'Guiding Principles' described suggesting how Learned Societies might go about providing assistance were wise and appropriate. It was also agreed that responsibility for representing the Society on the Natural Sciences Committee of the UK National Commission for UNESCO should pass to the International Committee.

6.4 The Honorary Audit Report was noted.

6.5 The Treasurer spoke to his paper on the recent RAS Specialist Meeting in Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). He reminded Council that this was a pilot for RAS meetings held outside the usual cycle ('second Friday' and NAM) and away from the usual location (Burlington House). The budget for the meeting was set at the average for a RAS discussion meeting. LJMU contributed the venue, shared speakers' expenses and organised the meeting while the RAS provided two speakers' airfares and some meeting expenses. He concluded that it had been a successful meeting and that the formula should be repeated at different venues, possibly running to both 'A' and 'G' meetings depending on demand (which the Secretaries should ascertain as soon as possible). This was agreed by Council.

6.6 Dr Corbett spoke to a paper setting out a revised procedure for the election of the President. Following discussion the following was agreed:

- In *October* members will be invited to make **suggestions** of suitable persons for consideration by Council as possible candidates for President (in addition to their entitlement to make **nominations**, which require 2 proposers and the candidates' written consent).
- A *Presidential Election Committee* (PEC) comprising Councillors who will not be eligible for re-election or do not wish to be considered for re-election will scrutinize the names which have been **nominated** or **suggested** to confirm their eligibility and may add its own **suggestions**

- At its *February* meeting the PEC will present Council with a list of all valid names, however submitted, together with its non-binding recommendations (aiming for a minimum of 4). Following Council's ranking of them, the President will approach the candidate(s) explaining that there will be just **one** *Council nominee* (though any other properly nominated fellows will appear on the ballot list too).
- Except for the 2010 election, when the above process will be implemented from October 2009, this will happen *every alternate October* during a new President's first year of office (when, following their election, the *President Elect* will be invited to attend meetings and take part in all discussions of Council as a non-voting observer from a mutually agreed start date).

It was noted that no changes were required to be made to the Bye-laws and that the new procedure would be outlined in a Standing Order.

7. FINANCE

7.1 The Treasurer drew attention to the revised Operations Plan which showed an essentially balanced budget in 2009 and a modest surplus the following year.

7.2 The Treasurer spoke to the Finance Committee's Report which, in turn, largely had been preoccupied with consideration of the auditor's report. The latter, which had been wholly satisfactory, had highlighted the importance in the present economic climate of strictly controlling non-essential expenditure. Council was assured that the audit had been made on the basis of full disclosure and of compliance with the requirements of the Charity Commission and authorised a letter confirming the same to be sent to the auditors.

Turning to RAS grants the Treasurer noted that this was one of the Society's most visible 'success stories' not least through providing assistance to undergraduates, thereby seeding the researchers of the future. Council agreed to the proposal that the amount available from the General Fund to support grants in 2009 should be raised from £20,000 to £40,000.

7.3 The Trustees Report was formally approved and signed by the President. Council added that it was content with the format of the Report and cautioned against incurring expenditure on a 'glossy' brochure since their intended audiences (policy makers, opinion formers and the like) rarely, if ever, read such publications.

8. PUBLICATIONS

8.1 The Treasurer reported that the publishers had revised their assumptions about projected growth and income of *MNRAS* and *GJI* and concluded that 2010 Journal Prices, including *A&G*, should be increased by 6% (the industry norm). He added that this represented good value for money as the size of the research journals was expected to increase by 10%. Following his reassurance that this would not put renewal subscriptions at risk (there was no reason to suppose the usual 98% figure would not be sustained and, besides, an increasing number of users purchased the journals in 3 year contracts as part of a multi-journal arrangement), this was approved by Council.

8.2 The appointment of Dr D Halliday as an editor of *GJI* was approved. Council took the opportunity to congratulate Professor Trampert on the excellent start he had made as Editor in Chief.

9. OTHER

9.1 Council approved the following candidates for Election to Fellowship listed in OR/04/09 and posted on the RAS web site.

Alexander	Caroline
Berkoff	Nikolai
Bourne	Nathan
Brook	Chris
Budzynski	Jon
Calverley	Alexander
Canning	Rebecca
Christopherson	Adam
Chrysostomou	Antonio
Daniels	Paul
Davies	Christina
Davies	Guy
Ferreira	Pedro
Galindo	Reyes
Garrod	Robin
Graham	Alexander
Infeld	Eryk
Kavanagh	Patrick
Mead	James
Miljkovic	Katarina
Pedretti	Ettore
Prosser	Laura
Salter	Graeme
Sedgwick	Chris
Senevirathne	Bethmini
Steed	Kimberley
Swinyard	Bruce
Thomson	Drew
Walton	Dominic
Wicks	Robert

9.2 The Minutes of the A&G meeting of 13 March 2009 were approved and signed.

9.3 The President thanked the retiring members of Council viz Professor M.E. Bailey; Professor I.D. Howarth; Dr. A.J. Ball; Dr. L. Fletcher; Professor J.H. Hough and Professor V. Nakariakov.

10. AOB

10.1 It was announced that the annual Courtyard Societies Summer Reception would take place at the Royal Academy on 28 July (**Note:** Subsequent to the meeting it was agreed to move the next meeting of Council from 24 to 28 July to accommodate this).

10.2 The President asked Council to consider the desirability of reverting to Friday for its regular meetings. It was agreed to take a decision at the July meeting following which dates of Council meeting in 2009/2010 would be fixed.

Council rose at 1200.

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A.C. Fabian
President

28th July 2009