



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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AGENDA ITEM 2

ATTACHMENT C(2007/10) 2 (1)

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 1 AUGUST 2007 AT 1400 IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY BURLINGTON HOUSE

1. PRESENT: Professor M. Rowan-Robinson (President), Professor M.E. Bailey, Professor R.L. Davies, Professor R.A. Harrison, (Vice-Presidents), Dr M.A. Hapgood, Dr H. J. Walker and Dr I.A. Crawford (Secretaries), Dr A.J. Ball, Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor B.K. Gibson, Dr J. Greaves, Professor J.H. Hough, Dr V. Nakariakov, Professor E.I. Robson, and Dr J.A. Wild.

APOLOGIES: Professor I.D. Howarth (Vice-President), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Professor M.A. Barstow, Professor M.G. Edmunds, Dr L. Fletcher, and Dr J. Mitton.

IN ATTENDANCE: D. Elliott and R. Massey

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 11 May 2007 were approved and signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 NAM

Council considered the 48 responses from members of the Standing Conference of Astronomy Professors who had been asked to explain why they were not regular attendees at the NAM. While a number of suggestions had been made, including 'themed' sessions and parallel specialist meetings, the consensus of Council was that while NAM organisers should take them into account they should also accept that, with many competing demands of their time, whatever changes were made, many senior astronomers would find it impossible to attend. Instead, the manifest success of the NAM in attracting large numbers of younger scientists, as well as specialist groups (with the proviso that renewed efforts should be made to involve the astroparticle physics community too) should be celebrated.

3.2 Review of PhD and PDRA training

The Policy Officer reported that the survey of academic staff and recently appointed PDRAs had just closed and that the preliminary analysis of results should be available at the October Council meeting.

3.3 Composition of Awards Committees

The lists were laid on the table

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 IoP/RAS meeting

The President outlined the fruitful discussion he, accompanied by the Executive Secretary and the Policy Officer, had held with the President, and his senior colleagues, of the IoP. Several areas of further cooperation, especially in the education and public outreach areas, were considered and it was agreed to meet on a regular basis.

4.2 RAE

Following the joint approach by the RAS and the IoP and the subsequent follow-up by the President, the Chief Executive of the STFC had replied on 20th July with the very satisfactory information that a method had been decided upon to allocate the ESA subscription between observational use of ESA facilities (21%) and non-observatory missions (79%), in order to provide a notional cost for the RAE 2008. The President said that this was a success for the RAS and that the outcome would be greatly welcomed by HEIs with significant involvement in missions (even if by restricting the attributions to UK based PIs an opportunity had been missed to promote inter-institutional co-operation).

4.3 CSR

The President reminded Council that, uniquely, the science budget, promising a 3% increase in real terms over the next 3 years, had been announced ahead of the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). He understood that the Science Minister, Ian Pearson, was in the process of deciding on the allocation of the science budget between the various research councils and wondered if the RAS could influence the outcome? It was agreed to send a short letter, avoiding the impression of special pleading, expressing the hope that HMG would wish to ensure the newly established STFC would be properly resourced so as to get off to a good start.

4.4 DIUS (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills)

The President noted that the recent reorganisation of government departments which united science and higher education, was substantially in line with the advice proffered to Gordon Brown in advance of his assuming the premiership. Less successful had been the attempts of the RAS, and many other bodies, to save the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons.

Postscript: The following letter to the President subsequently was received from the Chief Whip...

"Dear Michael

Science and Technology Committee

Thank you for your letter of 17 July.

The Prime Minister established a new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills with a mandate which includes delivering the Government's long-term vision to make Britain one of the best places in the world for science, research and innovation. It follows that science is a core part of the Department's focus.

The House of Commons yesterday unanimously approved a motion to establish - from the start of the next session - a Select Committee to scrutinise the work of this new Department, in accordance with the practice of having a select committee in place specifically to monitor the work of each department as a whole. It will of course be up to the new Select Committee to decide how it wishes to operate but it will be able to appoint a permanent Sub-committee dedicated to Science and Technology. If it does choose to appoint a permanent Sub-committee then this can serve very much in effect as a successor to the old committee and can be seen by the outside science community as a focus for such work. Given the representations made by a number of backbench MPs in support of establishing a Sub-committee, I am sure that the new committee will be giving this very careful consideration.

I do not anticipate any difficulties arising on cross-cutting inquiries. Select Committees are well used to conducting inquiries which cross departmental boundaries and frequently do so, usually following informal discussions between Committees or Committee chairs. And of course it is also open to Committees to conduct joint inquiries.

Please be assured that the Government holds science in high regard and attaches the utmost importance to the scrutiny of Government policy.

*Yours sincerely
Geoff Hoon MP"*

4.5 Space Policy: Report of the Science and Technology Committee

At this point the President invited Professor Cruise to present agenda item 7.2. Professor Cruise, who had overseen the RAS submission to the Committee as well as having acted as its expert adviser, reported that he felt the Report was a good one, even if it did not recommend a specific, increased, budget for UK space activities. What it had done was draw attention to the under-performance of the BNSC as well as make well based recommendations on a number of policy issues. These included Human Space Flight, where the Committee suggested reversing HMG's long standing 'in principle' objection to UK involvement; space medicine, where it felt the case for ring-fenced funding had not been established, and space tourism. The Committee had sounded a warning that the recent and current success of UK space science was based on past investment and that its continued vitality depended on future spending. That said, unless HMG signalled a step change in funding, which was unlikely, there was little point in converting BNSC into a fully fledged Space Agency with its attendant, increased, administration costs. Instead, the report called for the creation of a Space

Forum, which would be able to lobby government for increased resources in a way that BNSC is currently unable to. Professor Cruise said that the input of the RAS had been important and influential but that current ‘behind the scenes’ discussions, on which he hoped to report at the October meeting, would be vital. Finally, he noted that the Report, very unusually, had chastised industry for over-zealous lobbying during the Committee’s deliberations.

4.6 BNSC Working Group on Space Exploration

The President reported that he had been asked to review the draft report of this *ad hoc* group of which both the RAS Senior and Geophysical Secretaries (in their other capacities) were members. He felt that it gave undue emphasis to human space exploration at the expense of robotics, a view with which the Geophysical Secretary disagreed. In order that Council could judge for themselves, the President said he would seek permission to circulate a draft from the Group’s chair, Professor Frank Close. In any event the position of the RAS on human space exploration had been established recently, following a consultation with its members.

5. BURLINGTON HOUSE

The Executive Secretary noted that the project was on time (allowing for the previously agreed 4 week extension) and on budget. However, there was a risk of further delay caused by the electricity power company supplying the new connection to Burlington House, as well as a risk of being presented with ‘acceleration costs’ by the contractor, to enable him to meet the completion date deadline. Finally, he noted that contracts had been placed for the engraving of the windows of the first floor landing but that the proposed art work in the new Fellows Room (a display of all-sky camera images) was in doubt following the artist’s failure to secure a grant from the STFC.

6. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 Committee Membership

Council noted and approved the tabled revisions to the membership of various of its committees.

6.2 Herschel House Museum

The Executive Secretary spoke to a previously distributed paper seeking advice on the future relationship between the RAS and the Museum of which it was a trustee. It was agreed that, in view of the importance of Sir William Herschel to its history, the Society had a special responsibility and that the Astronomical Heritage Committee should be asked to propose ways in which this could be effected. At the same time it was agreed that the Society’s exposure as a trustee of the Museum should be included in the RAS Risk Assessment.

6.3 The work of the Astronomical Heritage Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Professor Clive Ruggles, gave a presentation of its activities. He noted that its main objectives were to support the study, protection and maintenance of cultural properties significant in the development of astronomy; liaise with other bodies; actively support UNESCO’s Astronomy World Heritage (AWH)

initiative; enhance public interest in and understanding of heritage sites and advise on light pollution issues relevant to heritage sites. There had been a shift in emphasis from ancient sites and monuments to instruments of all ages, archives, and historical observatories though the committee continued to monitor, and where appropriate intervene, the development of Stonehenge (and other ancient sites) and was co-operating with the Education Committee to produce a leaflet on its astronomical significance. In connection with the AWH initiative Professor Ruggles noted that there was likely to be an approach from UNESCO to the RAS for further assistance.

7. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

7.1 Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

The Policy Officer spoke to his previously distributed paper. It was noted that the imminent disappearance of the Science & Technology Committee meant that follow-up to the Space Policy Report would have to be via Parliamentary Questions.

7.2 European Research Area (ERA)

The Chair of HedComm, Professor Hough, explained that the ERA had been mooted in 2000 but that its gestation, like the Bologna Process, was very long. Both developments had important implications for UK HEIs and he felt that the RAS should make a significant input to the on-line consultation currently being conducted by the EU. To this end he encouraged all members of Council to complete and return the (long!) questionnaire to the Policy Officer for synthesis and completion.

7.3 IYA 2009

The UK 'Single Point of Contact' (SPOC) for IYA 2009, Professor Robson, reported that he intended to request STFC to set aside funds, additional to the regular 'Science in Society' budget, against which bids for IYA 2009 activities could be bid. He also hoped that the RAS would provide dedicated grants, noting that the outreach and educational events which would characterise IYA 2009 (unlike the on-going Heliophysical Year, where the emphasis was on scientific research) provided a close fit with the priorities identified in the 'President's Action Plan'. In response to a question, Professor Robson confirmed that IYA 2009 events in the UK would not ignore the commemoration of Galileo's turning his telescope to the skies 400 years earlier, but this would not be their 'leitmotiv'. It was noted that the NAM in 2009 would be a joint event with the European Astronomical Society and that Armagh would be hosting an international Dark Skies meeting – both of them presenting opportunities to promote the key message of IYA 2009 viz 'the universe-yours to explore'. However it was expected that most activities in the UK would be arranged by a mixture of professional and amateur organisations loosely co-ordinated by the SPOC. He, though, needed to be supported by someone who would work with these organisations to ensure they brought their projects to fruition. Professor Robson went on to report that he was confident that funding for a post would be forthcoming from STFC, IoP and, he hoped, the RAS. Assuming an appointment for perhaps 2 plus years (whether part-time or full-time being determined by the field of candidates) and a 3-way split, he asked Council to approve, in principle, setting aside up to £40,000 as the RAS contribution. This was agreed.

8. PUBLICATIONS

8.1 RAS Book Series

The Managing Editor, Dr Bowler, spoke to her previously distributed paper. Council expressed the hope that the first books might be available for display (and sale) at the ordinary meeting in December, the first to be held in the refurbished premises.

9. OTHER

9.1 Candidates for Election

Council approved the following Candidates for Election to Fellowship listed in OR/05/07; OR/06/07; OR/07/07 and posted on the RAS web site.

Alareedh	Abduaziz A.M.
Amos	Deanna
Asher	David
Ashrafi	Mina
Ashton	Stephen
Beldon	Charlotte
Bogdanova	Yulia
Caruana	Joseph
Chan	Kit Hung
Down	Emily
Ferreira	Barbara Travao
Forsyth	Colin
Garner	Adrian S.
Golovin	Alex
Griffin	Eoghan
Haley	Paul
Hayat	Imran Asim
Herod	Adrian James Vincent
Laird	Ryan
Miniutti	Giovanni
Noack	Philip
Panahi	Mina
Pearson	Ruth
Pinter	Balazs
Ribeiro	Valerio A.R.M.
Rosenberg	Philip David
Sathyaprakash	Bangalore
Schettino	Antonio
Senior	Andrew
Shannon	Sarah
Trifourki	Sotira
Tsiklauri	David
Uttley	Philip
Weston	Simon
Wheelwright	Hugh
Whiter	Daniel
Winterburn	Emily

9.2 RAS guests at August 1st Reception

Noted

10. AOB

10.1 2010 Space Studies Programme of the International Space University

Dr Ball drew attention to the previously circulated letter inviting the RAS to support the Open University's bid to host the 2010 Space Studies Programme of the International Space University. Council agreed that this programme had proved itself over many years to be an excellent event not least for creating lasting international networks. However any financial support would have to be considered in the light of competing claims and within the time scale (end August) the RAS could do no more than provide moral backing in the form of a letter from the President.

10.2 Academic Boycott of Israel

Council noted that in the light of the possible call by the UCU for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions, the IoP had issued a statement re-affirming its commitment to internationalism regardless of race, religion or nationality. It agreed that, if it was possible, a 'statement of values' should be distilled from the Charter and Bye-laws and be posted on the RAS web site. Also, that the President should provide comfort in the event of an approach from any FRAS based in Israel seeking reassurance of their continued membership of the Society. However, Council felt that no purpose would be usefully served by taking up a public position on the actions of a separate organisation with which it had no formal or informal relations.

10.3 Young Astronomers Meeting

Council noted and welcomed the intention to hold a RAS supported meeting in Edinburgh in December.

10.4 Lockyer Fellowship

Council noted that the next Lockyer Fellow would be Dr Mark Swinbank, of the University of Durham

10.5 Dutch Astronomy Meeting

Council noted, and approved, the request to fund a lecturer at the 40th anniversary meeting of the Dutch Young Astronomer's Association (JWG). It was suggested that the current Lockyer Fellow, Dr Trotta, might be suitable

Council rose at 1730

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M. Rowan-Robinson
President

11th October 2007