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## ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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### AGENDA ITEM 2 (1) ATTACHMENT C(2007/12) 2(1)

#### MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 11 OCTOBER 2007 HELD AT 1300 IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY BURLINGTON HOUSE

**1. PRESENT:** Professor M. Rowan-Robinson (President), Professor M.E. Bailey, Professor R.A. Harrison, Professor I.D. Howarth (Vice-Presidents), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Dr H. J. Walker and Dr I.A. Crawford (secretaries), Dr A.J. Ball, Professor M.A. Barstow, Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor M.G. Edmunds, Professor B.K. Gibson, Professor J.H. Hough, Dr J. Mitton and Dr V. Nakariakov.

#### **APOLOGIES**

Professor R. Davies; Dr J. Greaves Dr L. Fletcher, Dr M. Hapgood, Professor I. Robson and Dr J. Wild

#### **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 1 August were approved and signed

#### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

##### **3.1 IYA 2009**

Council noted Professor Robson's report. The President reported the discussion held with the Institute of Physics concerning branding the Year as 'Galileo 400' or similar. This had been considered, and rejected, by Professor Robson on the grounds that 2009 was a global project of the IAU, which had thought long and hard about its name and associated logo. While acknowledging that the UK had styled the 2005 International Year of Physics as 'Einstein Year' to avoid the negative associations, apparently, set up in the public mind by the word 'physics' this was not felt to be an issue with 'astronomy'. The Executive Secretary confirmed that the matter had been resolved and that the IoP, together with the STFC and the Society, would finance the recently advertised post of 'IYA 2009 Coordinator' following interviews on November 26.

##### **3.2 Space Policy: Report of the Science and Technology Committee**

Professor Cruise noted that the report had appeared in July and the government response was expected in October. He added that the informal discussions he had been party to indicated that the report was taken seriously by government and the RAS input might be mentioned in the response. Issues such as an independent oversight body, increased funding for space technology and a revision of the previous

are all possibilities, but they might be constrained by  
view outcome.

distributed by the Universities and Colleges Union  
calling off the consultation on a possible boycott.

#### **4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS**

The President reminded Council of his letters to the Chief Whip concerning the demise of the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons, to which he had received a neutral reply, and to the Minister of Science concerning the need to invest in blue skies research and to deliver a good CSR outcome for STFC, to which no reply had been received.

He went on to report that STFC's CEO, Professor Mason, had informed him verbally that STFC had been awarded a 4% pa budgetary increase over the next 3 years. After allowing for expected inflation of 2.5% and 2.5% to cover FEC (Full Economic Costs- from which university based researchers should ensure they benefit), it was clear that the community faced a difficult year since some cuts were inescapable. Even so the President believed that compared to many other sectors, the outcome could have been worse. Council agreed that before making any response the Society needed to see the detailed settlement and that Professor Mason should be consulted before making any public utterances about it.

Finally, the President noted that the incoming President of the BAA had informally floated the notion of the Association's members enjoying some kind of affiliation with the Society. This would be taken further in formal talks to be arranged later in the year.

#### **Postscript:**

Figures subsequently released by the Department of Innovation, Universities and Science showed that STFC's 2007/8 budget allocation of c.£573.5m would increase by 13.6% to c.£651.5m in 2010/11 (compared to increases of 17.1%,18.6% and 30.1% respectively for NERC, EPSRC and MRC)

#### **5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

##### **5.1 BNSC Working Group on Space Exploration Report**

Dr Crawford introduced a paper jointly produced by himself and Dr Hapgood, which included a summary of the Report, and invited Council to consider if it wished to respond. He noted that, while media coverage had focused on the recommendation that the UK government reverses its policy on involvement in human space exploration (HSE), that was just one of twelve, interlocking proposals spanning science (including, but not limited to astronomy), technology, business and education. Dr Crawford drew attention to a chart that showed the % of GDP spent on civil space activity by the UK and analogue countries. He concluded that if the government were serious about participating in the 'Global Exploration Strategy' to which it had signed up earlier in the year, there would need to be a significant uplift in the space budget. Council was united in its concern that any budget increase necessitated by HSE should not be at the expense of other areas of science ; some remained unpersuaded that the case for singling out HSE for extra funding had been demonstrated. However, it recognised that the Working Group Report had made a serious contribution to thinking about space policy, to which the Society should make a serious response. To this end, a group consisting of Professor Cruise, Professor Barstow, Professor Harrison and Dr Ball, coordinated by the Policy Officer, would bring a one-page draft

detailed consideration of the Report (and possibly  
)).

### **n and Road Map**

at the Road Map, which would be launched in 2008,  
could have a powerful impact on the decisions of Europe's funding agencies. Council  
agreed that it was important that the community should be involved in shaping its  
outcome and that the best way was by inviting Professor Bode, the author of the Road  
Map, to present an early draft to the RAS NAM in Belfast (during the community  
session on April 3 2008). Thereafter the Society should encourage attendance at the  
meeting in Liverpool in July 2008 at which the Road Map would be launched.

### **5.3 Conservative Party Science Policy Report**

Council welcomed the Conservative Party's recognition of the importance of Science,  
but, in view of the Report's emphasis on technology transfer, agreed that the President  
should remind the Report's chairman, Ian Taylor MP, of the need for pure research as  
a necessary pre-requisite.

### **5.4 Burlington House lunch-time lectures**

Dr Mitton rehearsed the reasons for establishing a public outreach lecture series as a  
way of consolidating the Society's public profile and, by means of a feed back form,  
of testing the interest in and viability of recruiting large numbers to a new category of  
membership (Friends of the RAS). In anticipation of securing Council's approval,  
which was given, Dr Crawford had approached 6 fellows who had agreed to give  
popular lectures during the first 6 months of 2008. The feed back obtained would  
guide the subsequent development of the series, including their possible extension to  
non-metropolitan venues, and possibly suggest other services, which could be offered  
to Friends.

### **5.5 Cunard –RAS co-operation**

Council agreed that the Policy Officer should investigate further and following a pilot  
run, would decide whether to progress to a formal agreement with Cunard under  
which the RAS would provide lecturers for its cruise ships. It was noted that any  
lecture associated with the Society would need to be of high standard and it would not  
be sufficient to simply advertise the opportunity to the membership. That said,  
Council recognised the opportunities for promoting the Society to potential supporters  
and benefactors (and with this in mind the Treasurer undertook to revise the relevant  
leaflet which could be distributed to audiences).

## **6. BURLINGTON HOUSE**

The Executive Secretary reported that staff would return to Burlington House on  
November 1<sup>st</sup>, though work to complete the commissioning of equipment and fittings  
would continue throughout November. Despite some slippage to the timetable, the  
project would be delivered within budget and, as from December, the Society would  
begin to enjoy the benefits of having its own lecture theatre and refurbished premises.

## **7. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE**

### **7.1 Membership Committee Report**

Dr Mitton highlighting the Committee's continuing concern that the Society should  
provide more services to members outside London, reported that Lord Rees, with  
RAS sponsorship, would deliver the prestigious Roscoe Lecture during the first of  
what may be 3 annual meetings the Society will hold in Liverpool, starting in  
September 2008.

committee's discussion about international activities, overseas members and the potential competition from society. She noted that in other societies this, as well as grants and capacity building in developing countries, would be the business of an international committee. Council was seized with this observation and instructed the Executive Secretary to devise the draft TORs, composition and budget of such a committee for further consideration at the December meeting.

Professor Gibson reminded Council that the priority of the Membership Committee remained to recruit bigger numbers of younger scientists, especially PDRAs, and undertook to bring proposals to the next Council. In the meantime the Executive Secretary was instructed to send all 'Points of Contact' as well as relevant Heads of Department, an electronic message for forwarding to postgraduate students, outlining the benefits of joining the Society.

## **7.2 Membership contributions for students**

Dr Mitton explained that following further discussion in the Membership Committee it was proposed that the concessionary rate being requested for part-time PhD students, identical to that already offered to full-timers, should be extended to include all part-time postgraduate students enrolled on a research degree. This was partly to accommodate those students required to register for a master's degree before being transferred to a doctoral programme, and to avoid unnecessary discrimination against the small numbers who would otherwise be excluded. This was approved.

## **7.3 Pension and Life Assurance Scheme Deed**

The Treasurer sought the approval of Council for a Deed of Variation to accommodate the legislative changes introduced by the 2004 Finance Act. The Treasurer explained that the Deed, which gives legal force to the Society's pension schemes, needed to be revised to include a new set of rules, compiled at its request, by the Society's advisers, Towry Law. With the reassurance from the Treasurer that these changes were not disadvantageous to the staff of the Society, Council authorised the President and Secretary to sign the Deed of Variation.

## **7.4 Presidential portrait**

The President left the meeting at this point and Vice-President, Professor Bailey, took the chair. The Treasurer explained that the decision to commission painted portraits of the last 2 (women) Presidents was influenced by the wish to enliven the Society's portrait collection of, mostly, elderly men. Nevertheless, Council felt that, in addition to a photographic record (which should continue), it was fitting to mark a Presidency of either gender with a painted portrait providing costs (of the order of £5,000) remained affordable. At this point the President returned and resumed the chair.

## **7.5 Bequests**

The Treasurer first proposed to Council that the greater part of Dr Tannahill's generous bequest of almost £55,000, on the use of which no conditions had been laid, should be ear-marked for activities associated with the International Year of Astronomy 2009. Noting that this accorded with the wishes of Dr Tannahill's family, Council approved and agreed that an obituary should be commissioned for publication in 'A&G'

Secondly, the Treasurer noted Mr Eric Northrop's bequest of an observatory, housing a 10-inch telescope, in a private dwelling in Cheam. He proposed to facilitate the transfer of the, amateur grade, telescope to the Isle of Wight Astronomical Society,



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associated costs, leaving the observatory to the estate's approval, Council asked the Treasurer to discuss this of Instruments, as well as with the Chair of the RAS of this was the most effective way of using the

## **7.6 RAS Jobs Register**

Council was encouraged to note that a high % of the UK based community appeared to use this free service, which cost the Society some £500 pa or so to provide. However, perhaps only 25% of UK positions appeared to be advertised. It was felt that the service would be used more if job vacancies could be viewed on a web site, as well as by email (as at present). This will be considered by the RAS web management committee. In any event, Council requested the Executive Secretary to ask Points of Contact to encourage university employers of this service.

## **7.7 RAS Bank Mandate**

The Treasurer asked Council to approve a revised list of bank signatories with immediate effect viz

Dr. I. A. Crawford  
Mr. D. Elliott  
Professor I.D. Howarth  
Professor P.G. Murdin, O.B.E.  
Professor M. Rowan-Robinson  
Mr. J.R. Struthers

This was approved

## **7.8 Library Committee Report**

The Report was noted. Following discussion it was agreed that the Treasurer would inform the chairman of the Library Committee that the requested budget for 2008 of £55,500 would be reduced to £53,500 by retaining the conservation sub-head at £2,000. This would more closely match inflation and took account of the expected under-spend in 2007. However, the Committee would be encouraged to approach the Treasurer in the event that additional funds were needed.

## **8. OTHER**

### **8.1 Council Elections 2008**

At this point Professors Cruise and Barstow left the room.

Council approved the proposed nominations of Professors Cruise and Barstow for the posts, respectively, of Vice-President (A) and Secretary (A). In addition it agreed to propose Dr Hapgood for the post of Vice-President (G).

**8.2** Council approved the following Candidates for Election to Fellowship listed in OR/08/07 & OR/09/07 and posted on the RAS web site.

|          |              |
|----------|--------------|
| Andic    | Aleksandra   |
| Davies   | Mike         |
| Dawson   | Steven Aston |
| Diver    | Declan A.    |
| Evans    | John W.A.    |
| Graham   | Matthew      |
| Halliman | Gregg        |



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|------------|---------------|
| Marsden    | Leslie Holmes |
| McEachran  | Iain          |
| O'Dell     | Shaun         |
| Phillimore | Amanda        |
| Ryan       | Raymond       |
| Wood       | Lloyd         |

8.3 The Minutes of the A&G Meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> May 2007 were approved and signed

9. AOB

9.1 Professor Edmunds reminded Council of the unique importance of the Antikythera Mechanism and the need to preserve the data produced by the research team. He wished to discuss ways in which the Society could cooperate with the limited liability company, established by the team, to ensure information could be placed in a long-term archive and sought permission of Council to approach the Treasurer and Executive Secretary to consider options. This was freely given.

9.2 Dr Walker invited members of Council to participate in a diversity workshop being organised by the Committee on Women in Astronomy and Geophysics at the Royal Society of Chemistry on 31 October.

9.3 Professor Bailey drew attention to the Royal Irish Academy McCrea Lecture on 23 November

The meeting closed at 1650

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M. Rowan-Robinson  
President

14<sup>th</sup> December 2007