



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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AGENDA ITEM 2 ATTACHMENT C(2011/10)2/1

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING 10 JUNE 2011 AT 1300 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. **PRESENT:** Professor R.L. Davies, Professor F. Honary, Professor M. Kendall, Professor O. Lahav, Professor C. Tadhunter, Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor M.A. Barstow, Dr L. Fletcher, Ms A. Bailey, Professor K. Blundell, Dr E. Bunce, Professor Y. Elsworth, Professor D.W. Kurtz, Professor S. Miller, Professor D.J. Southwood, and Professor R.E. Spencer.

APOLOGIES: Dr I.A. Crawford, Professor A.W. Hood, Professor D.W. Hughes, Dr A Norton, and Mr M. Thompson.

IN ATTENDANCE: D. Elliott (Executive Secretary) and R. Massey (Deputy Executive Secretary.)

2. MINUTES

Following a 'tour de table' the minutes of the meeting of 13 May were approved and signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 The Executive Secretary reported that the Council of the American Astronomical Society had decided, on grounds of its expected costs, not to enter into negotiations on co-publication of *A&G*.

3.2 The Executive Secretary reported that, in the event that the preferred option of St Andrews fell through, a provisional reservation for the 2013 NAM had been made at *Venue Cymru* for the week preceding Easter.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President up-dated Council on his exchanges with the STFC concerning the burden on peer reviewers during the transition to consolidated grants. He relayed a message from Professor Andy Lawrence, Chair of the Grants Panel, which claimed that, using 2008 as a base line, the amount of work involved would be no worse, and probably somewhat better. Furthermore, over time, the burden of peer review should see an overall reduction as the amount of documentation reduced.

4.2 Turning to e-Val, which had been introduced with minimal consultation, he noted that STFC had responded to the concerns of the community by suspending it pending a review and 'lessons learned exercise'.

4.3 The President added that the way in which the STFC Rutherford Fellowships were being introduced also was characterised by confusion over the date of the deadline.

4.4 Turning to the Society, Professor Davies urged members of Council to encourage their post-graduate students to become Fellows; just as important a recruitment opportunity were the STFC workshops for new PhD astronomy students. Professor Kendall volunteered to supply a list of

Geophysics contacts to act as advocates for the Society with their students. The President went on to report that he was pursuing a possible source of external sponsorship for the RAS Fellowships.

4.5 Finally, Professor Davies repeated his suggestion that university departments should cultivate relationships with their local MPs and MEPs (in connection with the latter the Deputy Executive Secretary undertook to circulate the relevant list.)

5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

5.1 The Executive Secretary summarised the paper proposing that, instead of the present 1430-1600, future AGMs should be between 1600-1700 (followed by a shorter 'ordinary meeting' given over almost entirely to a presentation by a globally renowned scientist). This, Officers felt, would allow the specialist meeting its normal time span while the revised timetable might attract more members to the AGM. Following the President's reassurance that with some streamlining, avoidance of duplication and advance publication, there would be adequate time for the business of the meeting, it was agreed to implement the new arrangement for the 2012 AGM.

5.2 Professor Kendall outlined the issues raised in the paper about Solid Earth Geophysicists (SEG) in the Society. While, numerically, SEG Fellows were a relatively small part of the Society's membership, their discipline, he felt, ought to be better represented on Council given the importance of *GJI*. The failure of SEG candidates, however distinguished, to secure a directly elected place on Council was the result of not being well known to the astronomical community - while the voting power of the SEG community was dissipated because its membership was split between the RAS and Geological Society. At the same time, there was a potential for the Society to recruit a significant number of new members from that part of the SEG community which used the techniques of quantitative analysis, mathematical modelling and simulation, which are closely related to the practice of astrophysicists. In considering how to make the Society more welcoming to SEG scientists, Council rejected changing the definitions of 'A' and 'G' to make the latter more exclusive to SEG or of introducing quotas for membership of Council. On the other hand, it was agreed to consider creating a SEG 'named lecture' (or of limiting the existing Harold Jeffreys lecture to SEG topics) and to explore options, including joint membership, to promote closer relations between the Society and the Geological Society. Professor Southwood, along with Professor Miller, Dr Fletcher and Dr Bunce (all previous Harold Jeffreys lecturers) agreed to bring recommendations to Council about the former while the latter was remitted for further consideration by the Membership Committee.

5.3 The Executive Secretary outlined the Report on NAM 2011 held between 17-21 April 2011 at Venue Cymru (a conference centre) in Llandudno, North Wales, the first NAM not to be organised and located in a university. Reports had been universally favourable, the result of the professionalism of the conference centre staff, the venue's state of art technical facilities and the skill and dedication of Professor Mike Edmunds, Chair of the SOC, and Dr Quentin Stanley, who built a bespoke system for the submission of abstracts and the organisation of sessions, which is available for use by future NAM organisers. The Executive Secretary drew attention to the lower than average registration figures (437, of whom almost 50% were non-Fellows), the result, possibly, of the **date** (week before Easter); **duration** (3.5 days); **late availability of the scientific programme** (which was finalised only a matter of days before the meeting) and **location** (perceptions that Llandudno was remote and inaccessible).

5.4 The Executive Secretary explained that, in addition to the premises on the West side of the courtyard, the Society leased the top floor of part of the building, the 'Annexe', otherwise occupied by the Geological Society comprising the former library of the Chemical Society and a store room, an area totalling some 70 sq metres). When the main apartments were refurbished in 2007, it was decided to postpone consideration of the long term use of this architecturally important facility which currently houses the library's 'reserve book collection' and runs of little used journals. Given how seldom items stored in the Annexe were consulted it was perhaps time, the Executive Secretary said,

to instruct the Library Committee and the Librarian to devise a timetable for disposing of non-valuable items so that the space thereby created could be put to better purpose. For example, were some of the staff currently housed in the main apartments to work out of the Annexe, it would liberate space for a video-conference suite which would enhance the Society's scientific activities. Council agreed this item needed further consideration but, in the meantime, requested the Library Committee to produce a plan for the disposal of the non-valuable and alternative storage of the valuable, items currently in the Annexe.

6. FINANCE & FACILITIES

6.1 The Treasurer commented on the Operations Plan which predicted that, in real terms, 2011 would end with the Society in much the same financial position as in 2010. However he reminded Council that this estimate assumed inflation at 4% (which was almost certainly under-stated). He also observed that the Society's unrestricted reserves would allow it to operate for about 4 years should all sources of income dry up. This was, he felt, a reasonable benchmark for setting, and maintaining, reserves.

6.2 Professor Blundell explained that, with the agreement of the Executive Secretary, in return for a modest honorarium and travelling expenses, 2 IT technicians from the Physics Department at Oxford had visited the Society in the company of Colin Foster, its Facilities Manager, to diagnose and remedy the persistent unreliability of its Wi-Fi service and its A-V equipment. They had discovered a chapter of errors in the installation and configuration of the cabling and connectors carried out during the refurbishment of the apartments and had been able to rectify some of them. However, Professor Blundell went on, a second visit was necessary to complete the cable testing and to investigate the A-V system. This was agreed with alacrity and gratitude.

7. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

7.1 The Deputy Executive Secretary spoke to the Report of the Science and Technology Committee inquiry into Astronomy and Particle Physics Funding, the first time a parliamentary committee had looked into this subject in such detail. The inquiry, he explained, was a sub-set of the review of the science budget following the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review and, probably, had been precipitated by the Committee's dissatisfaction with some of the answers given by the Chief Executive of the STFC during that broader investigation. The Report concluded that STFC was risking the UK's ability to stay at the forefront of future developments by focusing its astronomy and particle physics programmes into fewer areas, particularly its planned withdrawal, to achieve a very modest saving, from all Northern Hemisphere optical and ground based astronomical facilities. The Committee was also highly critical of past STFC strategies, saying its failure to incorporate into policy documents details of the planned withdrawals was 'inexplicable', 'chronic', 'typical', and the reason why client communities have had such a low opinion of it. The Committee observed that, although science had done relatively well in the Spending Review, funding for astronomy would reduce by 21% over the next four years compared with 2010-11. More starkly, comparing 2014/15 with 2005, spending in astronomy and particle physics would be some 50% lower than its level six years ago. This was a worrying situation, the Committee warned, particularly when set against the planned increased investment in science and innovation by the UK's international peers. The Chairman of the Committee, Andrew Miller MP, had concluded, "The idea that subjects like astronomy and particle physics do not provide immediate economic returns and therefore can be sacrificed at the altar of cutbacks is nonsense. Other countries are getting it right: invest in science and innovation now and reap the longer term rewards of economic growth. If the UK is seen to send out a message that these scientific fields deserve to be relegated to lower divisions, what hope is there for inspiring the next generation of scientists?"

Council welcomed this strong message and asked the Deputy Executive Secretary to ensure that the Report was disseminated not only to the astronomical community via the Astronomy Forum and Heads of Department but also more widely to the higher education community at the level of Dean and Vice-Chancellor.

7.2 The Deputy Executive Secretary summarised the principal findings emerging from the Demographic Survey of the Astronomy and Geophysics communities in the UK commissioned from Sean McWhinnie of *Oxford Research and Policy*. A previous survey, he explained, had been undertaken in 1998 but the subsequent one in 2003 was incomplete and unpublished. The new work was designed to collect data in a format that could be compared with the earlier findings. The data in the results was derived from questionnaires sent to departments and another one posted on-line for completion by the research community. Among its findings the Survey highlighted the higher proportion of professors, the growing numbers of fixed-term researchers, the decline in the number of technical staff, the increase in the representation of women at all levels (but with significant "leakage" towards the senior grades), the large number of postgraduates not funded by UK research councils, the under-representation of ethnic minorities and, in astronomy, the shift in observational effort from X-ray to infrared wavelengths. Council welcomed the Survey, which would facilitate modelling the effects of future policy and spending decisions, though registered some concerns (particularly over ethnic balance) and looked forward to seeing the completed report which would also contain information about facilities. A subsequent analysis would be made about the ambitions of early career researchers.

7.3 The Society's input to the questions raised in the UK Space Agency Strategy Consultation were approved with the addition of a further point, viz that the Agency needed to create an advisory committee structure to properly hear the 'voice' of the science community. This was particularly important since, much more than the science research councils, the Space Agency faced towards industry and would evaluate missions on their commercial as well as scientific value. Since, unusually, the consultation time-table allowed it, it was agreed that, before being submitted, the Society's responses would be circulated to Points of Contact and the Astronomy Forum for further comment.

8. PUBLICATIONS

The Report of the Publications Management Committee held in March was tabled for information. Council noted with interest that, following the appointment of a Chinese editor to the Board of *GJI*, submissions to the journal from Chinese authors had overtaken those from UK based scientists.

9. OTHER

9.1 The Minutes of the 'Ordinary' meeting of 13 May 2011 were approved and signed.

9.2 The following candidates, listed in the Officers Report for May 2011, were elected to Fellowship of the Society:

Surname	First Name
Couchman	David
Favata	Fabio
Johansson	Peter
Larner	David
Mahany	Nicholas
McEwan	Jason
Meyer	Karen
Murphy	Simon
Pascut	Aurelia
Pavlovski	Krešimir
Roberts	John
Roberts	Owen
Thomas	Holly

In addition, late applications for election from Mr Bernard McCluskey, Sheffield, sponsored by Clive Tadhunter; Mr Nigel Rivett, Surrey, sponsored by A.J. Norton and Dr Edmund J.W. West, Hampshire, sponsored by Prof. M.D. Smith plus one reinstatement (Mr Martin Lunn) were approved.

10. AOB

10.1 Council authorised the Executive Secretary to agree a contract with the former Treasurer, Professor Murdin, who had been requested to review and make recommendations about revision to staff remuneration, the final and stake-holder pension schemes and the current maternity/paternity leave arrangements.

10.2 It was noted that Mr Thompson, for a mixture of professional and personal reasons, had been unable to attend most Council meetings since his election in 2011 and, therefore as per bye-law 70, was deemed to have resigned. Under Bye-law 21 Council was empowered to fill the vacancy until the next AGM. Council requested Officers to circulate recommendations for their consideration.

10.3 The Executive Secretary announced that, following the meeting, there would be an opportunity to visit the Annexe.

The meeting ended at 1600.

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R.L. Davies
President

14 October 2011