



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Burlington House, Piccadilly
London W1J 0BQ, UK

T: 020 7734 4582/ 3307

F: 020 7494 0166

Info@ras.org.uk

www.ras.org.uk

Registered Charity 226545

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

1. PRESENT: Professor A.C. Fabian (President), Professor J.E. Drew, 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, 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 and Professor O. Lahav.

APOLOGIES: Dr E Bunce; Professor M. Cruise; Dr J Wild

IN ATTENDANCE: Professor R. Davies (President-Designate); Dr R.Massey (Policy Officer); D. Elliott (Executive Secretary)

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 12 February 2010 were corrected, approved and signed

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Dr Walker informed Council that the Demographic Survey would be led by Dr Massey and Anita Heward and undertaken by an independent professional surveyor. It was hoped to commence the survey after Easter

3.2 The Treasurer reported that, in discussion with the Chair of the Library Committee, the 2010 Budget had been reduced by around £40,000 following the decision to discontinue subscription to (most) scientific journals. The proposed allocation of £14,500 would cover the cost of subscribing to remaining journals while an additional £5000 (which may be underestimated) was set aside for binding and conservation of some 140 volumes per year, the rate at which it was feasible for the librarian to process them. Other budget lines (salary, purchase of books, IT etc) would remain at present levels (after allowing for inflation). Finally, the Treasurer remarked that the organisation and conservation of the archives was a major undertaking for which Council approval would be sought once the Library Committee had completed a strategic review.

4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

4.1 The President welcomed the statement by Lord Drayson, Minister of Science and Innovation, setting out reforms to the structure of the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) which offered the real prospect of bringing funding stability to the astronomy community. In particular the reforms addressed the concerns about the way in which unforeseeable rises in international subscriptions, due to the falling value of the pound, put extreme pressure on the funding available from STFC both for research grants and the running of UK-based facilities (though details of how this would be effected were yet to be finalised). Equally welcome was the longer-term commitment to national facilities like the Diamond Light Source by the proposed creation of a separate, user based, budget. Finally, the President expressed relief that grants would remain with STFC, and not pass to EPSRC, since this would maximise the return on the UK's investment in the overseas telescopes by allowing grants and international facilities to be jointly managed. That said, Professor Fabian reminded Council that 'stability' was not the same as 'sufficiency' and that the critical issue of under-funding, which was likely to be even more extreme after 2011, remained the major challenge facing the community.

4.2 In that connection the President informed Council that preparations for the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) for the triennium 2011-2014 would begin in June this year and that it was imperative that a refreshed leadership of the STFC, with the support of the community, made the strongest case possible for sustained and significant funding of astronomy, without which it might take many years, if ever, to recover the UK's present global ranking. There was, he added, a danger that the imminent creation of a National Space Agency, at a time of severe funding constraint, could drive a wedge between space scientists and astrophysicists. This would harm both communities and, he urged, must be avoided at all costs.

4.3 Council thanked the President for the wise leadership he had exercised in recent months through his position in the RAS and his chairing of the Astronomy Forum. There was, though, some confusion as to the respective roles of the RAS and the Forum which, it was agreed, would be clarified by a statement on the Society web site.

5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

5.1 The item on the *Impact of spending cuts on SET and scientific research* was postponed pending the publication of the Report of the House of Commons S&T Committee

5.2 The Treasurer introduced his paper setting out the scope and costs of establishing 'bridging' fellowships intended to compensate (in some way and within the Society's means) for some of the expected loss of career opportunities from the STFC financial crisis. In costing his proposal he emphasised that while the awards were intended to rescue a number of professional careers, they would not be hardship awards, which the Society was not qualified to offer. Rather, they would be limited duration awards, of about 5 years in total, to meet what was hoped would be a temporary financial crisis in university grants. His proposal was based on the Society's existing Norman Lockyer Fellowship i.e. a fellowship awarded, regardless of nationality and tenable at any university in the UK, purely on the basis of the capability, achievement and promise of the researcher. Similarly, the proposed award would fund only directly incurred costs, and not overheads including bench fees. The Treasurer added that the advantage in making the new awards last 2, as opposed to the usual 3, years

was that more individuals could be assisted. However, in his view, this was outweighed by the drawback that awardees would need to divert their attention to securing follow-up funding after no more than 15 months or so. Assuming 1-2 fellowships per year were awarded between 2010 and 2015 the cost would be of the order of £560,000 with some £80,000 p.a. being taken out of recurrent income and the balance from reserves (unless other donors could be involved, which he thought unlikely). Including the Lockyer and RAS Daphne Jackson Fellowships, this represented an expenditure of more than £1M over an eight year period (though with the option of suspending the proposed scheme at any time, subject to honouring commitments, if budgetary requirements necessitated this). Finally, the Treasurer noted that handling the expected large number of applications would impose a considerable administration load and require active researchers to devote their time to assisting with the selection process.

Council welcomed this proposal warmly as a positive and timely intervention which would be widely appreciated by the community and added that every effort should be made to allow the scheme to be announced at the forthcoming NAM with the first fellow being appointed from the beginning of the 2010/11 academic year.

Turning to the scheme details, following a long discussion, Council suggested the following criteria:

- The Fellowships, which would be of 3 years duration, would be of a strictly temporary nature and funded from reserves rather than recurrent income
- UK institutions would be restricted to hosting one Fellow during the scheme's duration
- Applicants must be already based in the UK and, if feasible, applications would be made on-line and (at least for 2010) might be considered 'on paper', rather than by an interview board
- The subject areas covered by the scheme would be co-terminous with those of the Society, and not restricted to disciplines funded by the STFC, since other research councils were not immune from financial constraints

The Treasurer was asked to devise a scheme for Council's approval (by email). In addition, it was noted that Dr Greaves wished to present a proposal to Council in May for the creation of a hardship relief fund (which might be incorporated into the existing RAS grants scheme); that efforts should be made through the Finance Committee to secure joint sponsorship from foundations and/or commercial organisations; and that the new awards should be known as the '2010 RAS Fellowships' unless and until another name was agreed.

6. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

6.1 The Executive Secretary spoke to his paper setting out the proposed changes to the bye-laws for the approval of Council and subsequently that of the membership at the May 2010 AGM viz

- a) *Bye-law 23.* Council agreed to the deadline for nominations to Council being advanced to the end of November. This would afford sufficient time between their receipt (currently first Friday of February) and the finalising of the balloting list (second Friday of February) to allow Council to nominate additional candidates. In

addition the revised wording incorporated the agreed provision for fellows to make *suggestions* for the position of President for the consideration of Council.

- b) *Bye-law 25*. A proposal was rejected to make explicit that the *only* reasons for adding nominations after the deadline should be to ensure the balloting list was valid i.e. complied with the bye-laws stipulating the positions and the minimum number and designation of new councillors to be elected. While wishing to intervene as minimally as possible Council wished to retain the opportunity of adding names to the balloting list where otherwise minority interests might be under-represented. It was agreed to revisit this issue at a subsequent meeting.
- c) *Bye-laws 10; 35-40 & 52*. It was agreed to change the terminology from ‘Annual Contributions’ to ‘Membership Subscriptions’ (in line with the recommendations of the Charity Commission); to delete reference to an ‘Admission Fee’ (on the grounds of redundancy) and to facilitate future changes to concessions and fees, if agreed at an AGM, by removing certain, limiting, phrases.
- d) *Bye-laws 41 & 43*. It was agreed to revise the wording to clarify that the status of Associate (or Honorary Fellow) should be restricted to ‘foreign’ scientists, defined as non-UK nationals based overseas who are not Fellows of the RAS.

6.2 Discussion of the paper on the *International Union of Radio Science* (URSI) was postponed until the May meeting.

6.3 In view of limited time, Professor Edmunds, Chair of the Astronomical Heritage Committee, agreed to circulate a report of its meeting of March 5th by email (reproduced below).

‘This was held at the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford, allowing an inspection of the RAS items gifted and on loan to the Museum. The displays were excellent, with full acknowledgement to the Society. Members of the committee found it very useful to hear about issues of display, storage etc from the perspective of Museum staff.

The main items for business were:

1) A design has been roughed-out for a bi-lingual plaque to be displayed at the birthplace of the pioneer astro-photographer Isaac Roberts in Wales. It is intended that this will be erected this calendar year. Consideration was given to a long list of possible recipients of plaques, and a revised list with further data will be presented to the next meeting of the AHC, after some consultation with the IoP.

2) A draft policy/procedure on loan of the RAS instrument collection was discussed, including the setting up of a database. A revised version will be presented for signing off at the next meeting. A copy will be sent to the Library committee to see if they wish to extend this document to cover written archives, etc. It is intended that this year the AHC Chair should inspect the RAS instruments on loan to the Science Museum.

3) A start was made on developing a policy on identification and/or preservation of modern astronomical artefacts. In the first instance the Chairman will solicit views on current practice from the Science Museum, National Museum of Scotland and the MM/ROG.

4) Work continues on developing a map identifying interesting Astronomical and Geophysical sites in the UK, particularly those that may be visited by the public.

5) A subject raised, but not yet developed in detail, is the possible "listing" by the RAS of sites/buildings of particular astronomical or geophysical interest, to provide support in efforts for in their preservation.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 24th of June at the RAS. The Chairman would welcome any suggestions from Council Members for agenda items they would wish to see addressed'

7. FINANCE

7.1 The Treasurer spoke to the revised Operations Plan which outlined the improved budget out-turn for 2009. This, largely, was due to favourable currency fluctuations affecting journal income and the recovery of stock market investments. However, there had been also an encouraging rise in membership, including in 'Friends of the RAS', increased revenue from room lettings and the sale of images (through the arrangement with the Science Photo Library) and a fall in the cost of utilities. He also drew attention to the projected income and expenditure allocations for 2010, including provision for the RAS Daphne Jackson Fellowship and up-grades to office computing equipment and systems, for which Council approval was requested - and received.

8. OTHER

8.1 Council approved the following candidates for Election to Fellowship listed in the Officers' Reports for February and March 2010 and posted on the RAS web site.

Alexander	Richard
Bygrave	Vincent
Changela	Hitesh
Cousins	Claire
Dodd	Elizabeth
Donnelly	Christopher
Drave	Sebastian
Gupta	Jennifer
Hazarika	Rajib
Heighes	John
Hermanowicz	Maciej
Jonas	Justin
Jones	Alex
Lesur	Geoffroy
Lisse	Carey
Ma	Yin-Zhe
Morris	Rhys

Naegel	Stephen
Pilkington	Kate
Stanway	Elizabeth
Strange	David
Virdee	Jasmeer
White	Glenn

8.2 The Minutes of the A&G meeting of 12th February 2010 were approved and signed

9. AOB

9.1 Their respective chairs, Professors Drew and Zarnecki, presented Council with a list of names for consideration for membership of the ‘A’ and ‘G’ awards committees. These were agreed and, following confirmation of willingness to serve, will be published on the RAS web site

9.2 The Executive Secretary reminded Council that, following the withdrawal of Sheffield, no university had offered to host the 2011 NAM. If none was forthcoming within the very near future he suggested that consideration should be given to staging the event in a conference centre. In agreeing to this, Council noted that while the NAM in 2012 would be held at Manchester University, not many institutions felt able to organise what had become a very large and complex event.

Council rose at 1530

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A.C. Fabian
President

14th May 2010