



**Minutes of the Council Meeting held at
10.30 – 15.00 on Friday 13 December 2024, Council Room, New Burlington House,
and via Teams**

1. INTRODUCTION

ATTENDANCE

PRESENT:

Prof Mike Lockwood (MLO); President and Chair (G)
Prof Arvind Parmar (AP); Treasurer (A/G)
Prof Caroline Smith (CLS) Vice president (G)
Dr Matt Middleton (MM); Vice President, (A) - Online
Prof Matthew Griffin (MG); Vice President, (A)
Prof Andrew Curtis (ACU) Vice president (G)
Prof Mark Lester (MLE); Senior Secretary (G)
Dr Sheona Urquhart (SU); Secretary (A)
Prof James Hammond (JH) Secretary (G)
Prof Stephen Eales (SE) (A)
Mrs Patricia Tomkins (PT;) (A)
Dr Olivia Keenan (OK); (A)
Dr Alan Cayless (ACA) (A)
Prof Steve Miller (SM) (G)
Dr Chrysa Avdellidou (CA) (G) - Online
Dr Andrew Young (AY) (A)
Prof Derek Ward Thompson (DWT) (A) - Online
Dr Iain Hannah (IH) (G) - Online

APOLOGIES:

Dr Imogen Gingell (IG) (G)
Dr Ashley Spindler (AS) (A)
Prof Silvia Zane (SZ) (A)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Philip Diamond (PD), Executive Director
Dr Robert Massey, (RM) Deputy Executive Director and Policy
Mr Audie Muller (AM), Head of Operations
Lucy Devine (LD), Wellspring Consulting
Neil McLaughlin (NM), Purcell
Elizabeth Smith (ES), Purcell
Sean McGee (SM), Associate Professor in Astrophysics, University of Birmingham

2. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 11 October 2024, were approved

It was mentioned that the abbreviations for Council members should be correct throughout the minutes.

Action: AM to amend ML to MLO or MLE where appropriate.

Action: AM to change 3.1 from "formally" to "formerly".

2.2 Action Status Report, was received by Council.

2.3 Future of Herstmonceux

MLO updated Council that no reply has been received from Joe Silk. MLE asked if there had been any response to the FOI request, to which MLO confirmed that there had been.

2.4 Martyn's Law

MLO commented that this will be the responsibility of the Operating Committee for the courtyard to take forward.

2.5 Astronomer Royal

SM asked about the current situation with the Astronomer Royal. PD informed Council that a potential conflict of interest may be delaying the process.

Action: PD will follow this up to find out how this is progressing.

3. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

3.1 Executive Director resignation and recruitment

Robert Massey and Audie Muller were asked to leave the room while Council discussed the recruitment process for The Executive Director, highlighting that there may be internal applicants.

A recruitment group has been formed, comprising the Officers, Caroline Smith and former President Emma Bunce. Two Executive Search Agencies, Berwick Partners and Hanover Fox, were considered, and Hanover Fox was preferred.

Hanover Fox, led by Phil de Granville, will handle the entire recruitment process, including longlisting, shortlisting, arranging interviews, and negotiating terms and conditions.

The Council was asked to delegate powers to Treasurer and the President to negotiate these terms. The goal is to have the new appointment in place before the next AGM, with interviews scheduled for February and a decision by March 10th.

The head-hunters will keep the group informed at every stage, and the members of the recruitment steering group constitute the interview panels. The recruitment process aims to cast a wide net, potentially including international candidates, and ensure the best fit for the role.

3.2 Out of town meetings (JH/SU)

JH and SU discussed the SDM in Dublin in April, emphasising the need to coordinate and ensure everything happens on the same day.

They also discussed the challenge of accommodating both in-person and online audiences for evening talks, suggesting that only half the audience might be able to attend in person.

Additionally, the discussion highlighted the importance of planning specialist discussions in advance, identifying suitable locations and times before requesting proposals. This preparation would help ensure that the chosen venues can host the events effectively.

The group also noted the need for flexibility, as some locations might not be able to host the meetings despite initial plans.

DWT suggested that this wasn't necessarily the answer as NAM meets this requirement. DWT stated that London is best placed to host these meetings due largely to its transport links.

PD suggested that we do one SDM once a year that can take place outside of London, and if we make preparations in advance this should mitigate the risk of low attendance etc.

Action: RAS Office to research potential venues for SDM's

3.3 Naming conventions and the IAU

MLO mentioned that there are several geophysical events with inconsistent naming in the literature, particularly related to magnetic activity. To address this, MLO has suggested that a proposal will be made to the General Secretary of the IAU to institute a naming committee adjudicate on standardising these names.

This initiative aims to reduce confusion caused by multiple names for the same events. If anyone has additional events or phenomena that need standardised naming, they are encouraged to contact the President.

MLO stressed the importance of clarifying such names as this will help ensure consistency and clarity in scientific communication.

Action: Council is invited to provide input on any other naming issues they encounter to MLO or PD.

3.4 Delegated authority to approve remuneration package for the Executive Director's Successor

The council was asked to delegate powers to Arvind and the President to negotiate these terms. This was approved by Council

4. TREASURER'S BUSINESS

4.1 Statement of Account and Treasurer's Report

AP reported that the interim accounts for the first nine months of 2024 indicate a 20% decrease in expected income compared to 2023, amounting to a shortfall of approximately £350K. This decline, coupled with rising expenses such as staff costs and new National Insurance contributions, necessitated careful financial management in the coming year.

[REDACTED]

Grants

In 2024, we completed two rounds of small grants, distributing more funds than previous rounds. Notably, 50% of the applications were deemed worthy of funding. For education and outreach, we allocated nearly twice as much as in previous years, totalling £38,000. However, only 20% of these proposals were successful, highlighting a significant demand within the astronomy and geophysics community for outreach initiatives. This shortfall requires further discussion with the Chair of the Education and Outreach Committee.

Successful grants are now highlighted on the RAS website.

4.2 Autumn Budget 2024, were received by Council, were received by Council.

4.3 Terms of Reference Remuneration Committee

RM mentioned that this should be referred to as “Remuneration” and not “Renumeration”.

Action: AM to make the appropriate changes where necessary regarding the Committee.

AP explained that upon becoming Treasurer, it was noted that there were two draft sets of committee terms of reference, each suggesting different reporting structures. One had the committee reporting to the Treasurer, while the other had it reporting to the Council.

After discussions, it was decided that the Committee should report to the Council, making it a subcommittee of the Council. This decision has been agreed on by all relevant parties.

The Committee's responsibilities include setting pay scales for staff and directors, as well as determining honoraria for Editors etc.. The committee will be chaired by the Treasurer and will report back to the Council.

MG raised a concern about the inclusion of up to one Fellow as a member of the committee, questioning under what circumstances this would be zero and whether that would be advisable. AP clarified that the intention is always to have at least one Fellow, ensuring good practice and representation.

The Council agreed to approve the terms of reference, subject to this clarification.

Action: AP will proceed with the necessary steps to formalise this structure.

5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

5.1 Report by Executive Director

PD reported to Council the following:

Herschel Medal

PD confirmed that we have a further grant from Government of £20,000 for the Herschel Medal, covering prize money and administrative costs, including a ceremony at the German ambassador's residence on March 13th.

Invitations will be sent out, and Council members will be welcome to attend. This grant needs to be applied for annually, and there are concerns about its continuation beyond next year as the initial agreement was for five years only

The call for nominations has gone out, with 11 candidates currently under consideration.

STFC

PD stated that the STFC has agreed to fund £25,000 for next year, although they commit only one year at a time.

Book Launch

PD mentioned there is a possibility to host the launch of the official biography of Stephen Hawking at the Society.

John Brown Lecture

PD commented on the success of the recent John Brown Memorial Lecture, featuring artist Ione Parkin and attended by members of the arts community. Suggestions for future speakers, particularly those at the intersection of astronomy and the creative arts, are welcome.

5.2 Governance review draft resolutions for Council

Lucy Devine (LD), Well Spring Consulting presented to Council draft resolutions to consider and approve.

LD reported that the review took place over the summer and a questionnaire was circulated to Council to review the recommendations. A Steering Group was set up which has met several times. LD expressed her thanks to members of the Steering Group which include the RAS former President Mike Edmunds, IG, PD and SM.

LD discussed the timeline for implementation which included a phased introduction of the resolutions. These could be done in an EGM online early 2025 or late 2025. LD suggested the easier ones go to the AGM in May 2025 and the harder ones at an EGM later in 2025. MLO stated that the EGM should be after there has been a consultation with members. MLO also stated that there should be a change-control document so that we can easily track where changes have been made.

Regarding the documents AC suggested that a reference system is put in place so that these can be easily tracked, especially if we are taking this for consultation with our Fellows.

Action: LD to reference each document and have a numbering system for future iterations of the website, these can alert Fellows to any compliance issues.

Action: LD recommended that all Council members remind themselves of their duties as Trustees particularly because of the personal liability for being in breach of those duties.

LD commented that she had received four sets of feedback from the group.

LD opened up for discussion the proposals for updating the Bye-laws.

There was strong support for getting agreement to straightforward changes at the 2025 AGM and then a second tranche, focused on the most complex changes, at an online EGM later in 2025 or early 2026

All agreed about allowing the possibility of members being able to vote to remove a Trustee, noting OK's point that the Member Code should also refer to that possibility.

- Agreed to remove *all* role descriptions from the bye-laws and put them into a separate document, not just Treasurer
- Elections - agreed to let people know the day before the AGM, agreed that the personal statement / mini bio should go to Council along with CVs, agreed to break a tie through a Council vote, accepting that this may end up with a Presidential casting vote. Also agreed to build in flexibility for Council to choose the election method in the future (a move from FPTP to preference voting),
- Elections continued - Action - Lucy to prepare a note for Council on possible different voting systems.
- Removal of Trustees - ask Birketts about how the registered medical practitioner provision works in real life - and if it is to stay in, line it up better with the Council meeting timetable
- Presidential/Chair vote in Trustee meetings. Agreed that the President will have a vote. Also, a casting vote, but put in all role descriptions of people who might end up chairing Council that ideally, they would find a way not to use the casting vote
- Proxy voting agreements
 - Permit "Advance voting" (don't call it proxy voting) online, not paper, with a cut-off point to enable Council reflection
 - Options are: Yes, No, Abstain, "the President can vote for me". Also ask for a voluntary note about why a person has voted however they have voted.
 - Build in discretion to NOT offer advance voting

To discuss over the next few months:

- Fellows' power to remove a Trustee - agreed the main options are to leave this power as implicit or to make it explicit. Specifically carving it out (i.e. making it a

named exception to Fellows' power to call a meeting and vote on a motion of their choosing) would be inflammatory.

- Emergency powers - noted the agreement that a change was needed, but no agreement yet on what the change should be
- Hon Auditors - no time to discuss, but this isn't urgent

Code of Conduct for Trustees (and just as importantly... how to deal with a breach)

- Mark Lester agreed to help progress this

Terms of office

- No time to discuss (n.b. there was no objection to the proposals on the Council's governance website - the changes are minor, really only to the VP term

VP role

- no time to discuss and I do think this needs discussion

Minor changes to the Charter

- No time to discuss – to pick up when we are back in early 2025

Council agreed in principle to accept the above proposals that will be taken to the Membership for consultation.

Action: Nicola Morris from Birkett's to attend the Council meeting in February 2025.

5.3 Receptionist/Administrator role at the RAS

PD updated Council on several staffing updates which included the retirement of Kim Clube, Head of Publishing. Liz Baker will increase her hours to cover the role, supported by the new Managing Editor. These working arrangements will be reviewed in the coming months.

PD mentioned that interviews for a new Public Engagement Officer have been successful, with an appointment expected to start in February. The role was adjusted from Education Outreach Officer to Public Engagement Officer to attract a broader range of applicants. This new role will not be responsible for EDI. This will be covered by another member of staff.

PD asked Council to approve the proposal, to make the receptionist/administrator role permanent, which is crucial for maintaining operations, especially since the building is currently closed on Mondays.

PD mentioned that the increased staffing will help cover weekday operations more effectively. The importance of Monday openings was emphasised for accommodating library visitors, committee meetings, and other events. Council the discussed the need to balance costs and benefits for potential future weekend openings.

Council approved to make the Receptionist/Administrator role permanent.

5.4 IT Update, were received by Council.

5.5 Delivery Plan, were received by Council.

CS commented that the risk register was out of date in the document.

Action: AM to replace with an updated risk register in the Delivery Plan.

5.6 RAS Burlington House Purcell Presentation

Neil McLaughlin and Elizabeth Smith from Purcell presented to Council on potential redevelopments and use of the building.

Action: AM to circulate presentation to Council.

The discussion focused on the potential for making the Courtyard Societies more accessible to the public. The possibility was suggested of creating pathways through the societies, possibly using the basements, similar to how the National Portrait Gallery utilised its vaults to connect different parts of the building without disturbing the historic interiors.

The conversation also touched on the necessity of opening up to the public as part of the conditions of a new lease, and the need for improved security and storage solutions on the ground floor.

Further, the Council discussed the importance of a coherent comprehensive plan for the building's use, including considerations for public access, security, and fundraising. They highlighted the need for a well-designed cloakroom and consistent door mechanisms for ease of access.

The conversation also covered the potential for Heritage National Lottery funding and the importance of having a clear vision for the building's future use to attract funders.

The discussion concluded with a focus on sustainability and the need for a phased approach to renovations, ensuring that any changes align with the building's historical significance and the needs of its users.

DWT reemphasised that before we start this work there needs to be a clear articulation of what exactly do we do and why.

There was a consensus on the importance of coordinating with other societies sharing the building to ensure any changes are cohesive and beneficial for all. The idea of mapping out the journeys of different stakeholder groups, such as school students and the general public, was proposed to better visualise how they would interact with the building and its spaces.

SM commented that if we open the building so that it is more accessible to the public and Fellows, there will also be staffing issues to consider.

OK suggested that we could liaise with the Property Manager at the Institute of Physics who was involved with the redevelopment of their new building.

The conversation also highlighted the need for a smaller working group to make detailed suggestions, given the current underutilisation of space. SM and CS raised concerns about the implications of opening up more to the public, including staffing and security issues. The potential for generating revenue through increased public engagement was discussed, with suggestions for charging a modest fee for access to the building's historic features. The importance of aligning any developments with heritage considerations and the terms of the lease was emphasised, along with the need for a phased approach to renovations.

MLO suggested that a special session of Council could look and discuss these issues and that it would be recommended to include some aspirational plans to the agenda for the AGM in May 2025. PD recommended reconvening the Property Working Group.

Action: PD to reconvene the Property Working Group.

5.7 RAS Council Elections 2025 review of nominations

[REDACTED]

MLE explained that Nominations for the council are underway, with four positions to be filled: one astronomy based, one geophysics based, and two open positions. There is competition for the Vice President (Geophysics) role. Issues were raised, included the tradition of alternating roles between astronomy and geophysics, and the length of service of individuals on the council. It was noted that while there is no formal rule against consecutive terms in different roles, it is important to ensure the council continues to evolve. This issue will be considered as part of the ongoing governance review.

Council then discussed about the nomination process, particularly the need for nominees to provide a CV and a statement of willingness to serve. One nominee, had not yet provided these documents. The council agreed that nominees must submit their statements and CVs by the specified deadline to be included on the

ballot. There was also a query about the paperwork required for nominations, specifically, whether nominees need to sign their nomination forms.

This will be checked, and the statements will be brought to the next council meeting for approval. The possibility of nominating a president-elect was discussed, but it was decided to maintain the current list without adding a president-elect at this time. The council approved the current list of nominees, subject to the submission of the required documents.

Council approved the Nominations.

5.8 Awards Committee Reports

MM thanked the panel and gave a special thanks to Nush Cole. MM explained that despite fewer nominations this year, the panel was very happy with the quality of the successful nominees.

A new rubric was introduced to support discussions, which proved useful in providing greater resolution in scoring. This rubric was only applied to the A awards and not the G awards.

The panel plans to propose amendments next year to better align the nomination process between A and G panels with this rubric at a review meeting to be held early in 2025

A specific issue arose with the early career award, where two nominees were inseparable in quality and both were about to age out. The panel decided to award joint medallists despite them working independently, due to the time-sensitive nature of their eligibility. Additionally, there was a query about the Fowler Award, where no reserve was listed despite six nominations. This was likely due to eligibility issues related to the requirement for work to be conducted predominantly in the UK.

The council approved the list of awardees.

Action: The Chair of the Awards panel to notify awardees

AC said that G panel faced several conflicts of interest, leading to a rule change where any conflict with one nominee resulted in exclusion from discussions for that entire prize. This approach aligns with best practices in other societies. The panel also emphasised adherence to nomination rules, particularly word limits, and suggested setting up an online form with fixed word limits for future nominations and referee letters to streamline the process.

A significant discussion point was the categorisation of exoplanet studies, questioning whether they fall under A (astronomy) or G (geophysics) awards. The panel sought Council's advice on this matter. Additionally, clarity was requested on the criteria for single study awards like the Price and Chapman medals, and the distinct nature of prize lectures compared to other awards. The panel decided against using tabulated criteria formally, though some members found them useful for guidance. The panel also noted that 36% of nominations were female, slightly higher than the percentage of female UK geophysics staff.

The Council approved the list of awardees.

Action: Council will look to address the categorisation of exoplanet studies and the use of rubrics in future meetings.

MLO suggested that the Awards Panel review group in January consider adopting brief narrative guidance for nominations, emphasising key points such as service, teamwork, and scientific excellence, while allowing flexibility in how nominations are presented.

MLO explained that this approach aims to avoid channelling nominees into a rigid format and to ensure that excellence is clearly conveyed. Comments on exoplanets will be collected and forwarded to inform the discussion.

Action: The Awards Panel final guidance to be produced and to be reviewed by Council in February.

SM highlighted the Education and Outreach Awards.

The Council approved the list of awardees.

5.9 On-line database for Fellows

AM recommended that a working group is formed to oversee its development, with an estimated cost of £20,000 and a six-month implementation timeline. This initiative aims to enhance the society's digital resources and accessibility.

AM proposed that one member of Council, the Membership Committee, the Membership Officer, and the Head of Operations sit on the working group. SE nominated himself to serve on the working group.

Action: AM to convene a working group.

5.10 University of Birmingham, NAM 2026

Sean McGee (SMc), Associate Professor in Astrophysics, University of Birmingham, made a presentation bid for NAM 2026 for the University of Birmingham to Council.

The presentation was well received by Council. SMC explained that the earliest date that they could host NAM is 20th July 2026.

The Council then discussed the bid and covered several key points regarding the timing and organisation. One major concern flagged by DWT, AC, CA was the proposed timing at the end of July, which conflicts with the only period many academics can take summer holidays. This timing could significantly reduce attendance, as many academics are tied up with university duties until mid-August.

It was suggested to consider scheduling the event in early July or even in 2027 to secure a better timeframe and venue.

The conversation also highlighted the importance of booking prestigious venues well in advance, as these are often reserved years ahead. The need for a balanced organising committee was noted, with a call to redistribute responsibilities more equitably. Plans for hybrid attendance were confirmed, and the importance of addressing any issues early was emphasised.

Additionally, the group discussed the feasibility of providing on-site childcare to accommodate attendees with families. While supportive of the idea, RM highlighted and Council acknowledged the logistical challenges, such as finding providers willing to offer services for a small number of children for a week.

The possibility of negotiating the event date with the venue was considered, with a preference for moving the event to early July if possible. If rescheduling is not feasible, the group agreed to proceed with the current plan, accepting some compromises. The overall goal is to ensure the event is well-organised and accessible.

Action: PD/MLO to discuss with SMC the possibility of moving the event to an earlier date in July in 2026.

6. POLICY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Social media policy, were received by Council.

6.2 Oral question in the House of Lords and Debate on Science and Technology, were received by Council.

6.3 QAA Subject Benchmarks Consultation, were received by Council.

6.4 Rendezvous and Proximity Operations Stakeholder response, were received by Council.

6.5 Curriculum and Assessment Review, were received by Council.

6.6 Education and Outreach Committee Minutes 4 June 2024, were received by Council.

7. OTHER

7.1 The Membership Officer's Reports was received by Council. All proposed fellows were approved.

7.2 Minutes of the Membership Committee 20 September 2024, were received by Council.

7.3 Grants awarded in 2024, were received by Council.

7.4 Journal Submissions for November, were received by Council.

PD informed Council that OUP will be attending the February Council meeting in 2025. SM proposed one of the items for OUP to comment on is how OUP promote RAS journals.

7.5 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 11 October 2024, were received by Council.

7.6 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 8 November 2024, were received by Council.

8. AOB

None

Council Rose at 15:30 13 December 2024