



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

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AGENDA ITEM 2

ATTACHMENT C(2011/03)2/1

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

11 FEBRUARY 2011

AT 1100 IN THE COUNCIL ROOM

1. PRESENT: Professor R.L. Davies, Professor J.E. Drew, Professor M. Kendall, Professor O. Lahav, Professor P.G. Murdin, Dr H.J. Walker, Professor M.A. Barstow, Dr I.A. Crawford, Professor K. Blundell, Dr E. Bunce, Dr I.F. Corbett, Professor D.W. Hughes, Dr A. Norton, Professor R.E. Spencer, and Mr M. Thompson
APOLOGIES: Professor J.C. Zarnecki; Dr R.J. Barber; Professor P.K. Browning; Professor A.W. Hood; Professor R. Ivison and Professor D.J. Southwood
IN ATTENDANCE: D. Elliott (Executive Secretary); R. Massey (Deputy Executive Secretary)

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2010 were corrected (paragraph 5.2) and approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 The President RAS Fellowships informed Council that the Fellowships schemes ('2010 RAS Fellowships' and 'Sir Norman Lockyer') had been very successful. Over 80 candidates of extremely high quality had applied from which a long list of 20 and an interview shortlist of 10 was generated. All of the interviewed candidates performed very well and the final ranking was difficult to make. The outcome was as follows:

2010 RAS Fellows:

James Hammond (Bristol > Imperial) 'Imaging the African super plume'

Baojui Li (Cambridge > Cambridge) 'Cosmology as a probe of Fundamental Physics'

Aline Vidotto (St Andrews > St Andrews) 'Protecting Planets from their stars'

Sir Norman Lockyer Fellow:

Adam Christopherson (QMUL > Nottingham) 'Constraining the Universe using non-linear perturbation theory'

The selection panel, comprising the President (chair) and Professors Elsworth, Frenk, Howarth, Kendall and Zarnecki (who was not available for the final interviews), assisted by a pool of 20 assessors, made a number of suggestions to improve the administration of the scheme viz setting an earlier application deadline; agreeing dates for selection panel teleconferences and candidate interviews in September; requiring candidates to state the start and completion dates of their PhD and to provide a mobile telephone number; and replacing 'Proposed Supervisor' with 'Host' or 'Sponsor' on the application form. That said the President paid tribute to the Events and Awards Officer, Lara Maisey, for her excellent handling of a complex exercise in a highly constrained timetable.

In discussion it was suggested that for the next round the selection panel might be refreshed; that the 'one institution one Fellow' rule should be reviewed and that Fellows, in addition to producing progress reports for Council, should be asked to speak at 'ordinary' meetings, write articles for 'A&G' and, subject to interest, encouraged to maintain contact with each other (and the Society) through a loose 'alumni association'.

Postscript: That RAS Fellowships were tenable at Cambridge both in the last, as well as this, round was the result of an administrative error. The selection process operated on the (erroneous) assumption that the rule

limiting host institutions to a single ‘2010 RAS Fellow’ had been advertised and was known both to applicants and to their putative universities. This misapprehension became obvious only after offers were made. Changes to the rubric and advertisements will rectify this in the next round.

3.2 The Executive Secretary circulated the first design for the *Patrick Moore Medal*. While welcoming the image of Sir Patrick on the obverse side, it was agreed that, given its purpose of recognising outstanding contributions to school level astronomy, the medal should include the word ‘Education’, and that the reverse side should include an image of the lunar surface, with which Sir Patrick Moore was so closely identified.

3.3 The President asked for feedback on any meetings between MPs and astronomy/geophysics university departments. To date, he had been informed they had taken place at Cambridge, Oxford and Edinburgh. The President encouraged colleagues to exploit this opportunity of ‘winning friends’ for RAS disciplines.

3.4 Dr H. Walker gave a progress report on the demographic survey. Some 7 or 8 astronomy institutions had still not participated, and hardly any geophysics departments had responded. It was agreed that Dr Walker would draft a letter in the President’s name to encourage recalcitrant departments; in addition there would be a link to the survey from the RAS web site.

4. PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS

The President reported on the meeting, on 26th January, of the Astronomy Forum at which STFC officials presented the outcome of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, the proposed new grants regime and the VISTA settlement. He added that officials from HEFCE and UKSA would be invited to future meetings to discuss, respectively, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Space Agency. Turning to the REF he informed Council that appointments to the review panels had been made but not yet published. Finally he noted with satisfaction that the German Astronomical Society would be a partner for the 2012 NAM in Manchester and that the European Astronomical Society (EAS) had suggested that the 2013 NAM might be expanded to accommodate the Nordic and Dutch astronomical societies. These latter developments were in line with the recent ‘Away Day’ recommendation that the Society should play a more active role in Europe.

5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

5.1 The 2011 Balloting List for election to Council was approved viz

President-elect	D Southwood
Vice-President (A)	C Tadhunter
Vice-President (G)	F Honary
Treasurer	M Cruise
Secretary	L Fletcher
Councillor	A Bailey
Councillor	C Barclay
Councillor	PA Daniels
Councillor	Y Elsworth
Councillor	E Kontar
Councillor	D Kurtz
Councillor	S Miller
Councillor	B Parsons
Councillor	T Ponman
Councillor	M Ruffert

The Executive Secretary noted that, in addition to the officer posts, there would be elections for 4 Councillor positions, of which at least one would have to be filled by an ‘A’ and one by a ‘G’ candidate.

5.2 The Executive Secretary outlined the main objectives for the Society in 2011 as set out in the draft Annual Report. These included:

- To champion curiosity driven or ‘blue-skies’ research.
- To establish closer relations with NERC (possibly through a ‘Geophysics Forum’), UKSA and HEFCE.
- To place more emphasis on encouraging early career scientists.
- To signal its commitment to supporting school level science by designating one of the members of Council as Vice-President (Education).
- To support overseas based scientists through the activities of the International Astronomical Union’s Office for Astronomy Development.

In connection with the last point it was agreed that it's recently appointed Director, Dr Govinder, should be invited to the NAM.

5.3 The Deputy Executive Secretary introduced a paper setting out a range of ways in which the Society could enhance its education and outreach activities, in what he explained was a changed landscape following the International Year of Astronomy (IYA 2009) and the proliferation of electronic social networks viz:

- Given the large number of organisations involved in public engagement and education an essential preliminary was to map current activity to see where the RAS could add most value.
- Some of these organisations (such as the newly created European Space Education Resource Office, ESERO) could be used to extend the reach and take-up of existing RAS resources for teachers while others (such as EdExcel which organises GCSE astronomy examinations) might welcome the use of Burlington House for in-service teacher training courses.
- 'Smartphone apps' could be developed to sustain interest in successful IYA 2009 projects, such as 'Meteorwatch.'
- The Education Committee could play a more active role in the Society's affairs, for example by contributing submissions to policy reviews.

Council welcomed these positive suggestions and speculated how the chairs of RAS committee, who were not councillors, might be more closely involved in the work of Council.

5.4 Professor M. Kendall & Dr E. Bunce reported on the outcomes of the 'Away Day' held on 9/10 December 2010 (further reports will be made at the March meeting of Council). Professor Kendall, leading on solid Earth geophysics (SEG), outlined his discussions with the Institute of Physics to include SEG content in 'A' level and undergraduate physics degree programmes. Other priorities were to up-date both the BGA 'Geophysics Education' report of 2005 and the RAS 'Geophysics in the UK' booklet, encourage the SEG community to engage with the Society and develop the profile of SEG in NERC (on whose 'Science and Innovation Strategy Board' Professor Kendall sits). Dr Bunce, leading on early career scientists, outlined her thinking on a 2 day meeting for final year undergraduates and/or post graduates to develop presentational and research skills. In discussion it was suggested that, to keep numbers manageable, this proposed, annual, meeting could vary its focus to appeal to different groups. Options included timetabling the meeting at the beginning or end of the NAM or (more feasibly) holding it at the end of the academic year (possibly, not least for reasons of cost, in an Oxford college). It was agreed to discuss these and other possibilities at the early careers lunch meeting during the Llandudno NAM.

5.5 The report of the Astronomy Heritage Committee was noted, including the intention to bring a proposal to the March meeting of Council for the proposed research project on the RAS Harrison Regulator (housed at the National Maritime Museum).

5.6 A written status report of the 2011 NAM prepared by Professor Edmunds was noted

5.7 Dr Crawford reminded Council of the April 1st deadline for receipt of proposals for RAS Specialist Meetings in the 2011/12 season. It was suggested that it could be appropriate to organise meetings on ALMA and PLANCK - but that it was for fellows to take the initiative.

5.8 Council agreed, exceptionally, to extend the period of office of the Membership Committee Chair, Dr Mitton, by a further 3 years.

6. FINANCE

6.1 The Treasurer introduced 3 papers relating to proposed increased staff remuneration and employer pension contributions by explaining that they set out changes in line with previous practice, based, respectively, on RPI and an actuarial revision. They took no account of the current, challenging, financial and economic environment where conditions were being worsened for many people fortunate enough to remain in employment. This, however, he added, was something that Council might feel it appropriate to consider. He noted that he and others at the meeting were personally affected and would withdraw as required.

Turning to the Defined Benefit Pension Scheme (which was closed to new staff in 2002) Council noted that the recent actuarial valuation (with an effective date of Jan 1 2010) prepared for the scheme trustees calculated that an additional £257K was needed to correct the deficit in the fund out of which pensions were paid (the result of

underperformance of investments during the ‘credit crunch’ years), as well as an increase of employer’s contribution rate to 35.6%. However, it was observed that this computation took no account of the stock market rally in 2010. In view of that, and of the ability, if needed, to replenish the pension fund from general reserves, it was agreed that the £257K payment should be phased over 5 years, noting the opportunity to review the situation in 3 years following the next valuation. Council was reminded that only 3 serving staff remained in this scheme and that its responsibilities would be fully discharged within some 15 years or so (based on projected retirement ages).

While this scheme placed a statutory obligation on the employer to meet its commitments, the stakeholder pension scheme, offered to staff joining the Society after 2002, entailed no such legal requirement. However, Council was reminded, the Society had agreed to set employer contributions in the stakeholder scheme at levels targeted to achieve similar benefits for staff– as long as this was considered affordable and appropriate. Until 2009 these varied between 4% and 10% of salaries, compared to a (minimum) employee contribution of 5%. However there had been a sharp increase in 2009 and, to maintain parity, a further increase would be needed which would bring the employer’s contribution to between 29% and 35%. Council accepted that it was undesirable to sever the link between the 2 schemes precipitously, and therefore approved the new rates for a period of 12 months, but agreed that such a wide gap in both schemes between employer and employee rates of contribution was unsustainable.

Finally, in line with the RPI between January 2010 and 2011, Council approved an uplift of 4.8% to staff salaries (except that of the Executive Secretary, whose pay is linked to university scales) and to the honoraria paid to journal editors and to the Treasurer. In reaching this decision Council was mindful that most staff were paid fixed, not incremental, salaries.

At the request of Council, Professor Murdin agreed to investigate how the ratio between the employer and employee contributions to the stakeholder pension scheme could be reduced and to review the Defined Benefit Scheme with the same thought in mind; and, together with the Executive Secretary, to review the staff pay structure (though this was unlikely to be accomplished before he retired as Treasurer in May 2011).

6.2 The, up-dated, Operations Plan was noted

7. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

7.1 The Deputy Executive Secretary introduced the Society’s draft submission to the House of Commons Science & Technology Committee inquiry into Astronomy and Particle Physics in the UK. He explained that the inquiry would explore the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review, partly in the light of some statements made to it by the Chief Executive of the STFC (to which the Society had drawn the Committee’s attention). In particular, that there had been a deliberate over-investment in UK astronomy, which was now being corrected, and that the withdrawal from northern hemisphere telescopes was a long term strategy previously agreed with the community. Following discussion Council deputed the President, Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary to finalise the submission taking into account further contributions from the Fellowship.

Postscript: the submission will be posted on the RAS web site following the embargo period

7.2 Given the new ‘Free Schools’ policy and the ongoing relaxation of the strictures of the National Curriculum, Council agreed the Society should be prepared for any future public discussion on the place of Creationism in the school science curriculum by adopting the following statement:

The Royal Astronomical Society supports the teaching of evolution, geophysics, astronomy and other scientific theories in school science lessons. These disciplines share the characteristic of being subject to modification and sometimes outright falsification as new facts and theories come to light through the results of observation, interpretation and experiment. Based on over a century of scientific work, incorporating a wide range of evidence from many intertwining branches of science, such as astronomy, geophysics and physics, the universe is many billions of years old (the current best estimate is about 13.7 billion years old) and the age of the Earth is about a third of that (about 4.5 billion years old). These figures are both consistent with each other and consistent with biological sciences, like evolution. It is not for the Society to comment on the teaching of religious ideas in schools. However, we believe that Intelligent Design and Creationism are not scientific theories and are presented with too little regard to carefully developed and tested scientific evidence, in order to support a preconceived view. This view encompasses the central ideas of these belief systems that the Earth and universe are no more than a few thousand years old and that creatures on Earth were created as they are now

at a particular time in the past, not long ago. These ideas directly contradict scientific evidence and are so far from accepted scientific knowledge that they are regarded by scientists as false. Intelligent Design and creationism are not science and should not become a mandatory or optional part of the science curriculum in schools in the UK.

8. OTHER

8.1 Council approved the election of the following candidates to fellowship of the Society:

Surname	First Name
Abraham	Iain
Ali	Anum
Calderbank	Valerie
Carroll	Nicole
Eaton	Mark
Grieff	Thomas
Ineson	Judith
Marks	Andrew
Mead	Bradford
Mingarelli	Chiara
Neelamkodan	Naslim
Olsen	Tracey
Wilkins	Daniel
Yates	Jeremy
Baker	Tessa
Bell	Christopher
Brown	David
Carpinetti	Alfredo

Castelli	Christian
Cole	Gary
Collins	Duncan
De Villiers	Helena
England	Philip
Frost	Mark
Frost	Michael
Hall	Martin
Hurley	Peter
Laitinen	Timo
MacDonald	Erin
Marshall	John
Nelson	Richard
Ponsford	Barry
Rigby	Emma
Rowlands	Kate
Rowlandson	David
Scott	Caroline
Sekhar	Aswin
Skinner	David
Stever	Samantha
Thu Ra	Soe

van Rooijen- Lynn
McCullough

8.2 The Minutes of A&G meetings of 10th December 2010 & 14th January 2011 were approved

9. AOB

The Executive Secretary advised Council that, as in previous years, the Society had been invited to nominate up to 4 individuals to attend the Buckingham Palace Garden party and asked for interested members to contact him.

Council rose at 1520

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R.L. Davies
President

11 March 2011