

DRAFT Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 13 March 2020

1. Attendance and Apologies

PRESENT:

Prof Emma Bunce (EB) President-Elect and Chair
Dr Nigel Berman (NB), Treasurer;
Dr Mandy Bailey (MB), A Secretary;
Prof Lyndsay Fletcher (LF). Senior Secretary;
Prof Mark Lester (ML), G Secretary; (via skype from 13.45)
Prof Anton Ziolkowski (AZ), Vice President, G;
Dr Paul Daniels (PAD) Vice President, A;
Dr Clare Watt (CW);
Mr Kevin Kilburn (KK);
Dr Jane MacArthur (JM);
Prof Steve Miller (SM);
Dr Matt Middleton (MM);
Dr Sheona Urquhart (SU);

APOLOGIES:

Prof Mike Cruise (MC), President;
Professor William Chaplin;
Dr Claire Foullon (CF);
Mr Kevin Kilburn (KK);
Ms Indhu Varatharajan (IV);
Dr Stacey Habergham-Mawson (SHM), Vice President (A);

via skype

Professor Lyndsay Fletcher;
Dr Matt Middleton;
Dr Jane McArthur;
Dr Megan Argo;
Prof Lorraine Hanlon (LH);
Professor Mahesh Anand,(MHA) Vice President (G)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Philip Diamond (PD), Executive Director;

2. Minutes & Matters Arising

2.1 Minutes of 14th February 2020

The Minutes of 14 February 2020 were APPROVED by Council subject to the following amendments:

Clare Watt was present at the meeting

3. insert 'at the Astronomy Forum'

AZ pointed out a number of typos:

- 5.2 amend capital letters for west end.
- 5.4 replace 'and' with 'any'
- 5.5b insert 'or making use of data from'
- 7.4 small 'will'

Action Status Report

Property WG – PD has met with a property lawyer from StoneKing to discuss next steps with him, in association with EJB and NB. They are experienced property lawyers and charity specialists too.

Siobhan Adeusi is working on the date of the AwayDay.

PD – contacted legal advisors regarding the code of conduct and this will go back to WG when that is received. Note that it is not necessary to go to an AGM for implementation .

SM – suggested that we should flag up to the membership that the CoC is being changed. The redrafting of the disciplinary procedures will be held over until we have the legal advice on CoC.

PD – Reasons for resignation will be included in future membership reports.

Confidential discussion - redacted

3. President's Business

The President Elect took this item in the President's absence.

EB had received a letter from a Fellow, asking whether RAS would make a statement in support of Fellows on strike as a consequence of the UCU industrial action, and whether it had been discussed at a Council meeting. EB suggested in general, that for a Learned Society, disputes between employees and their employers were beyond its remit.

This was **agreed** by Council.

4. Treasurer's Business

4.1a Treasurer's Report

Subscription rates:

NB commented that they were relatively low compared with other societies. He proposed to increase main rate by £5. The ECR rate and first year full rate were not increased last year and NB proposed that they increase by £4. Rates tied to these increases e.g. joint rates with IOP and GSL would move pro-rata.

Council **approved** the subscription increase proposed by the Treasurer

Gerald Merton Fund was given to the society to help Fellows who have hardship. There are a very small number who join the society and then make repeated claims against the fund, which is not fair to others. NB will take a stronger line and flag that this may not happen in the future.

LF suggested that it would be good to put a statement to that effect on the website.

Action: NB to draft statement for website

NB reported that there are now only 30 subscriptions for print copies of MNRAS of which 7 are freely distributed. The revenue from these subscriptions is falling and OUP advise us

that it would be financially favourable within two to three years to cease print subscriptions. NB has therefore proposed to OUP that they should now stop such subscriptions for MNRAS.

Action: Executive Director will inform the Heritage Committee as a courtesy and ask OUP about special editions and print on demand, also provision for people with vision impairment, and arrangements with the British Library for keeping electronic journals.

PD commented that VAT on digital publications will be zeroed as a result of budget.

Action: PD to contact OUP to see if this is positive in terms of income or not.

4.1b Newton Investment Report

NB reported that the pandemic had had a strong negative impact on markets. The Society's fund was down by a £1m from a level of £8.4m. There was a potential for loss of income in about a year from now.

4.2 Bank Account Statements

NB proposed the opening of a new bank account with Nat West as a back-up account. A formal resolution was necessary with authorised signatories to be approved by Council

Council **agreed** the resolution.

5. Organisation and Structure

5.1. Executive Director's update

- Burlington House Lease

RAS and the other Courtyard Societies have sent a letter to MHCLG to challenge the interest and accelerator components of the rent rises. The letter also makes a formal proposal to purchase a very long lease. The Royal Society of Chemistry sent a separate letter as they have very different financial position to the others.

- IAU

PD has sent an application for the Royal Society proportion of RAS' subscription to IAU. The Royal Society will meet us to let us know whether we have been successful in due course. NB questioned why we were responsible for a significant part of the UK's subscription.

Action PD to check situation with AAS and to circulate a link to IAU's website

- NAM

PD reported that the 2020 NAM had been postponed until next year

Action PD to inform David Southwood, President of the Dining Club

- Corona Virus Continuity Plan

PD reported that each department had been asked to draw up a continuity plan in anticipation of a closure of the building. The staff would be able to adapt to home-working if that became a necessity. Zoom, skype and other software can be used for governance and management meetings.

PD reported that the SDMs and Ordinary meetings and public lectures will also need to be postponed in the event of a building closure.

PD raised the issue of the AGM and whether it could be held. Council **agreed** that it should be delayed, and that the officers will set a new date.

Action Officers to meet to agree a date

Council **agreed** that elections should proceed as last year with the option of physical ballot papers still available on request but that elections should be fully online in 2021

5.2 RAS Fellowship Award

EB had noted the request from CF that the panel should discuss the potential for Universities to contribute to the cost of the Fellowship. The panel did discuss this – notwithstanding that it was a small group – the panel members said that 50% of the institutions represented would rule the Fellowship out on those grounds. This may well disadvantage students – the recommendation was therefore to rule this out on those grounds.

EB reported that there was an exceptionally high quality field. The candidate who had been offered the Fellowship had informally agreed to take it up, but any of the top four candidates would make could have been awarded the Fellowship.

The meeting restarted at 1.50 pm. MM and SU left the meeting. JM left at 2 p.m.

5.3 Presentation by Dr David Brown and Emma Willis, Warwick University to host NAM 2022

Key points:

- Dates Tuesday 12th to Friday 15th July
- University of Warwick Central Campus
- Main Venue - Warwick Arts Centre
- Accommodation on site
- conference dinner in on site banqueting suite
- Astronomy group at Warwick has had significant investment in recent years
- multiple staff hires
- new physics with astrophysics degree
- planned on campus observatory
- There are two groups, 28 academic staff and 23 research staff
- Research interest include, exoplanets, compact objects and accretion, gravitational waves, stellar populations, wide field surveys.
- There is also a centre for fusion, space and astrophysics which covers helio/asteroseismology, solar chromosphere and space weather.
- There are good links with the community and research funders, nationally and internationally group members have experience of running meetings at all scales and have run two major conferences in the last five years: the PLATO mission conference and the European White Dwarf workshop
- Warwick Conference Centre is wholly owned by the university, has 40 years' experience, 70% repeat clients. It has in house catering, an in house production team and long service team members. The venue would be the Warwick arts centre. This has all the required spaces, including a plenary theatre with a capacity of 570
- Warwick conferences offer a dedicated contracts manager, dedicated events manager, a duty manager during the conference, lead conference assistant and support, catering support and additional support when required with an additional fee
- There is excellent connectivity, via air, rail and road, ample car parking, a transport terminal on campus. Excellent campus amenities, including bicycle hire, sport and fitness hub shops and cinema. Attractions off campus include Warwick castle, Coventry cathedral, and stratford-on-avon
- Initial budget estimates suggest registration costs broadly comparable to NAM 2019

Comments:

ML: Costs are at 2021 prices

SM Transport experience not so good at the Council Awayday in Warwick

Presenter would like timescale for decision

MB Request that budget not too tightly tied to accommodation, David Brown said that registration cost would be offset against room booking

LF suggested that the LOC would benefit from involvement of staff members with substantial prior LOC experience.

ACTION: Executive Director to communicate LF's suggestion to David Brown

Council members were broadly supportive of the presentation

5.4 RAS Year 4 Evaluation Report Sarah Jenkins (Jenesys)

The evaluators were asked to monitor the demographic profile and impact on audiences reached to see how and to what extent each project's aims were met and to assess if and how the individual projects' outcomes have contributed the RAS outreach and public engagement programme.

The cumulative total of individuals reached was 60560 by end 2019.

A wide range of public audience groups were reached, of all ages and with a very wide geographic distribution.

The outcomes were reported as an increase in STEM-related knowledge or interest in topics and a broader increased confidence in life-skills.

Funding organisations were allowed to deploy their own audience experts to lead the delivery of activities and events. They had the freedom to coin a variety of ways including through art and cultural activities. Combine their own particular expertise with input from STEM experts.

A lengthy funding period meant that projects had time to test and pilot outputs and learn from the experiences and outcomes they provided. Astronomy and geophysics topics lend themselves to being accessed.

The different types of project cover breadth and depth opportunities for engagement. Fellows were motivated to participate because of their love of their subject, desire to engage communities, and develop their communication skills.

The benefits from their engagement included learning about less traditional forms of engagement, working with audience experts, and making contacts and accessing networks for future engagement work.

Suggestions for RAS for the future: RAS could:

- provide more outreach opportunities for Fellows;
- work in partnership with other organisations that run events and activities reaching local public audiences or engage with organisations that may benefit from Fellow involvement;
- Formalise the support for Fellows doing outreach, to provide consistency in what is offered
- Systematically broker relationships for Fellows to provide effective matching through a volunteer scheme.

Comments

Action Office to circulate summary report

Numbers reached should reach 100,000 in 2020

Increased engagement opportunities for Fellows would be a wonderful legacy of the project

EB commented that the outcomes were very positive

SM stated that the cost of each interaction was roughly £10 which represented excellent value for money

PAD noted that the National Astronomy week took place from 14-22 November and could provide opportunities for the project

6. Policy and Public engagement

The following papers were received by Council:

6.1 RAS Early Careers Network

6.2 Ministers for Science and Universities

6.3a Sustainability working Group and letter

Council **approved** the creation of a sustainability Working Group to review and make recommendations on the environmental impact of astronomy, space science and geophysics.

Comment: Carbon footprint should be part of the discussion

AZ and CW volunteered to join the working Group

6.3b Letter for IAU

Council received the letter for the IAU.

7. Publications

7.1 GJI Editorial Board minutes Postponed

7.2 Update from the PSWG

The update from the PSWG was received by Council.

8. Other

8.1a Awards Committees

MB suggested that it would be better to have an A member serving on the Michael Penston Thesis Prize Panel and RAS 'A' Awards Committee 2021, rather than a G (currently Prof William Chaplin).

Council was asked to vote on the proposal that an A member will be found and that as a consequence, WC will stand down. This was **agreed** by a majority decision.

Comment: The Thesis Prize panels incorrectly have 2019 as the year of the panel.

Action: PAD to look for a replacement member

Council approved the replacement of Professor Don Kurtz by Dr Megan Argo on the E&O Grants panel

8.1b E&O Committee awards sub-committee Report

MB commented that this paper should be for approval. Council was asked to approve, a proposal to remove the option for self-nomination and anonymity from the Annie Maunder Medal and the Patrick Moore medal.

Council **approved** this proposal

8.2 Officer's report - Council **approved** the new Fellows list

8.3 Minutes of the Ordinary meetings February 2020 were **approved**

9. AOB

PD reported on the success of the pop up planetarium in the Courtyard. There were 3200 visitors in two weeks. Feedback was very positive.

SM left the meeting.

Council agreed that there should be an offline discussion about the voting dates.

Action All to send comments to PD

Council rose at 15.35

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Professor Emma Bunce

13 March 2020