



**Minutes of the Council Meeting held at
11.00 – 15.00 on Friday 14 February 2025, 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) - Online
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) - Online
Prof James Hammond (JH) Secretary (G)
Prof Stephen Eales (SE) (A) - Online
Mrs Patricia Tomkins (PT;) (A)
Dr Alan Cayless (ACA) (A) - Online
Prof Steve Miller (SM) (G) - Online
Dr Chrysa Avdellidou (CA) (G) - Online
Dr Andrew Young (AY) (A)
Prof Derek Ward Thompson (DWT) (A)
Dr Iain Hannah (IH) (G)
Dr Imogen Gingell (IG) (G) - Online
Dr Ashley Spindler (AS) (A)

APOLOGIES:

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
Liz Baker (EB), Head of Publishing
Rhodri Jackson(RJ), Publishing Director, OUP
Gemma Cannon (GC), Senior Publisher, Science, OUP
Nicola Morriss (NM), Charity Specialist, Birketts LLP

2. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 13 December 2024, were approved

2.2 Action Status Report, was received by Council

2.3 Voting Methods

This was received by Council and will be included for discussion at the Council meeting in March.

Action: To be included in the March Council meeting agenda

2.4 NAM, 2026

PD met again with Sean McGee and Benjamin Gompertz from the University of Birmingham to discuss alternatives to the dates that they had proposed in their December presentation to Council to host NAM in 2026. PD reported to Council that University wide lockdown due to graduation ceremonies mean that it is not possible to reschedule these dates.

They commented that they will do their best to put in any mitigation to support childcare. It was noted that DWT had serious reservations about the scheduling if NAM 2026 and advised that he would not be attending.

SU agreed with DWT's point and questioned whether they were aware of the implications when they proposed to host NAM.

Council emphasised the need for early planning and the importance of starting the planning process earlier due to current time constraints. MLO suggested bringing forward the schedule for planning to avoid future issues.

Council expressed concerns about the difficulties of the potential for low turnout if the event timing is not suitable. Noting that some members may not be able to attend if the timing is inconvenient.

Council acknowledged and noted that several members have reservations about the current planning process.

CS suggested that planning for events like NAM required two to three years in advance and emphasised the benefits of long-term planning for logistics and to accommodate delegates' schedules and funding.

Action: MLO proposes creating a new timetable for planning future events, recognising that the lead times that were reasonable a few years ago are no longer sufficient. PD/MLO to review and put a timetable in place.

2.5 {Redacted}

2.6 Astronomer Royal

PD updated Council that there were no updates on the role news, and it was noted that there has been a prolonged period without information. Efforts to obtain updates have been unsuccessful, and there is speculation about the potential candidate, but no official confirmation has been received.

2.7 Session for Award Winners at NAM

PD mentioned that Nigel Meredith, the Chapman Award winner, has inquired about the lack of a suitable session for him to speak at NAM when he receives his award. Council was asked to consider whether a dedicated session for prize winners to present their work should be included in the program. This situation highlights the need for such a session to accommodate award recipients who wish to share their achievements. MLE commented that many of the award winners were invited to give talks at A & G Highlights meetings.

Action: PD to speak to NAM organisers to see if a session could be supplemented into the programme

2.8 Future of Herstmonceux

RM provided an update on the recent developments. RM and Joe Silk met with the Vice Provost for Research at Queens University, and a leading physicist to discuss the future of the site, which they proposed to retain as a STEM facility. While the meeting was courteous, it lacked clarity on their intentions but admitted that they did not have concrete plans as yet. They also raised concerns about the financial burden of maintaining the site, particularly the castle, and their previous unsuccessful business model of bringing students from Canada.

The Observatory Science Centre, the current tenants, had made an offer to purchase the site, which was declined by Queens. The Futures Group plans to meet in a couple of weeks to decide on a response. RM noted that while there is now some dialogue, the situation remains uncertain.

Action: MLO/RM to write to the province to the Provost with an offer of positive engagement from the RAS.

3. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

3.1 {Redacted}

3.2 Out of town meetings

JH/SU are currently working on the out-of-town Specialist Discussion Meeting , which is contingent on the RAS staff identifying potential venues. An appropriate venue will then be secured.

Action: AM to circulate potential venues to JH/SU/MLE

3.3 Exhibition on Space debris in conjunction with Lloyds of London

MLO reported that Max Alexander, a photographer, had organised a successful exhibition on space debris in conjunction with Lloyds of London. Max had contacted the RAS with a request to sponsor the exhibition.

Council discussed allocating £5000 to support the exhibition in London, which will start at Lloyds and providing an additional £5000 for the exhibition to tour the UK.

Council acknowledged the unique value of this exhibition and the importance of engaging with broader communities and agreed to allocate £10000 in total, the additional sum conditional on receiving reports of the tour and its impact.

The launch reception is scheduled for March 4th at the Lloyd's building, and Council members will be invited to attend.

Action: MLO/PD to inform Max Alexander about the allocation of the grant and that we allocate this towards the space weather exhibit and not the space debris exhibit, and the conditions in securing an additional £5K

4. TREASURER'S BUSINESS

4.1 Statement of Account and Treasurer's Report, was received by Council.

Discussion on Endowment Funds and Inflation Index

AP explained that the RAS has 18 endowment funds, where only the income generated can be used, not the capital. Legally, the value of these funds cannot fall below £1.65 million, as set in January 2015. To account for inflation, the Council decided to increase this amount annually using the Retail Price Index (RPI).

However, due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, the investments have not kept pace with inflation. As of the end of 2024, the funds were valued at £2.49 million, but adjusting for inflation using RPI, the required value is £2.54 million. This discrepancy means no funds can be withdrawn.

AP put forward to Council a proposal to switch from RPI to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is generally lower. This change would allow the withdrawal of £281K, leaving £2.21 million in the fund, well above the legal requirement. The Finance Committee has reviewed this proposal, and Council's permission is sought to adopt CPI.

Council approved this proposal.

Investment Performance and Budget Forecast

AP explained that the endowment funds are managed by BNY Mellon and Newton, with most funds performing well, though some are in savings accounts yielding about 4%. The 2024 forecast shows a surplus of approximately £319K, pending final figures.

4.2 Remuneration Committee and Staff pay award

Philip Diamond, Robert Massey, and Audie Muller were requested to leave the room. AP explained how the Remuneration Committee met last month to discuss staff pay and honoraria for the year.

They reviewed the current state of salaries and compared them with other similar organisations, deciding on a recommendation of 2.5% pay increase for staff, which aligns with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rise from last year.

Additionally, five staff members will receive further pay adjustments to address disparities and additional responsibilities.

Council were asked to approve the 2.5% pay increase and additional individual staff pay adjustments. Council approved these recommendations.

AP explained how the committee also discussed the honoraria for journal editors, particularly for Monthly Notices, which amounts to approximately £250,000 per year. Given the decrease in the number of submissions, it was decided to keep the honoraria at the same level as last year. The committee highlighted the need to be cautious about increasing staff numbers and suggested that if editors leave, they should ideally not be replaced to reflect the reduced workload.

Council was asked to approve these recommendations and consider the long-term strategy for managing editor appointments and workloads.

MLO/AP asked that PD and EB to be brought back into the conversation to address the issue of editor pay and appointments. The discussion highlighted the need for a system to ensure turnover among editors while maintaining coverage of workload and expertise. It was noted that some editors have been in their roles for decades, which limits opportunities for new editors and fresh perspectives.

Council considered the possibility of implementing term limits for editors and ensuring that they actively promote the journals. There was a consensus that the current situation, where some editors have been in their roles for a very long period, needs to be addressed. The Council agreed to develop a plan to ensure turnover and active promotion of the journals, with a more detailed strategy to be presented at a future meeting.

It was proposed that a small group, including PD and EB, discuss how to address these issues and bring a plan back to the Council.

Action: PD/EB to convene a working group to bring back a plan to Council

MLO suggested the idea of inviting the editor-in-chief to discuss these matters. Council agreed to handle the situation sensitively, given the long-standing contributions of some editors, and to explore options such as making stipends conditional on signing new agreements or reducing stipends in line with reduced workloads.

4.3 Budget 2025

AP welcomed view on the budget for the upcoming year, highlighting a surplus of £320,000 due to higher interest rates and lower maintenance costs for the building. The proposed budget for the next year shows similar income levels but increased costs, particularly in staff expenses, leading to a projected deficit of £200,000. This is considered manageable given the current surplus.

DWT and ACU raised about the inclusion of the cost of buying Burlington House in the budget, which will be clarified offline.

Action: AP/MP/PD to circulate detailed budget to Council

Council also discussed the decision to allow drawing down from the endowment, which would provide flexibility for funding needs. ACU and ACA raised some concerns about the risks and the need for proper checks and balances. It was agreed that any substantial drawdown should come back to the Council for approval. The overall financial health of the society was noted as positive, with investments and bank accounts showing growth.

Council provisional approved the budget for 2025, pending clarification about the inclusion of the cost of buying Burlington House

4.4 Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting 24 October 2024, were received by Council.

4.5 Risk register, were received by Council.

MLO/PD thanked AM for making changes in helping reducing the risk on some of the items on the risk register.

5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

5.1 Report by Executive Director

Property Group

PD explained that the property group will convene just after the March Council meeting. This meeting is necessary to discuss various matters related to the building, which have not been addressed for some time.

Herschel Award Ceremony

PD reminded Council about the Herschel Award Ceremony at the German ambassador's residence on March 13th., where Professor Isobel Hook of Lancaster University will receive her award and give a talk. Members who haven't signed up yet are encouraged to do so. Representatives from the German Astronomical Society, including its President, will also attend.

Additionally, Dr. Stefanie Walch-Gassner, AG President will give a talk at the highlights meeting after the next Council meeting.

Courtyard Property Management Company

PD updated Council on developments in the Courtyard and explained that AM has been collaborating with a counterpart from the Geological Society to shortlist replacement managing agents for the courtyard. After diligent work, two credible managing agents were identified and interviewed by a group of about a dozen representatives from the Courtyard Societies. Carter Jonas has been selected, pending final negotiations. The new managing agents are expected to perform better than their predecessors, although there will be some risk during the handover process.

The new managing agents are anticipated to provide faster, better, and cheaper services, with a lower service charge cost compared to the current agents. Thanks were extended to AM for his significant efforts in this important task.

A&G role

PD explained that interviews for a job share position for the editor of A&G are scheduled for March. A report on the outcome will be provided afterward. Sir Philip Campbell, former editor-in-chief of Nature and Physics World, will serve as the external interviewer. The interviews are set for March 10th.

5.2 Governance review

Nicola Morriss from Birkett's LLP presented to Council. NM was welcomed by Council to clarify the changes. It was emphasised that the Charter changes are not as significant as they appear, as many amendments are simply formalising existing supplementary parts into the Charter. This needs to be communicated clearly to the membership.

Council reviewed the amendments, with NM addressing individual concerns. It was agreed that any specific worries should be discussed now, with expert advice available to resolve them.

MLE raised a concern about the removal of Council members for missing three consecutive meetings without permission. It was clarified that attendance includes online participation, and this will be made explicit in the bylaws. The provision is not mandatory but available if needed.

ACU suggested adding "geophysics" to the Charter's focus on astronomy. NM explained that this would require Charity Commission consent and could delay the process. However, if Council agrees, this change can be included with the rest of the amendments.

Council agreed to add 'Geophysics' to the Charter and to be included with the additional amendments.

There was a discussion on the dissolution clause, with a suggestion to require 2/3 of the membership to vote for dissolution. NM advised that this might be impractical due to low voter turnout. It was recommended to ensure any threshold set is achievable.

Council agreed that a dissolution provision should be included in the Charter with a requirement for 2/3 majority of members present and voting.

The inclusion of the president-elect in the Charter was agreed on by Council, as this role is part of the trustee body.

Concerns were raised about removing trustees on the grounds of ill health. NM explained that this provision allows for dignified removal based on medical opinion, ensuring trustees can present their case if they are unable to continue. It was noted that this is a standard provision and helps trustees make informed decisions.

Council discussed the necessity and implications of a clause for removing trustees. Concerns were raised about the potential for misuse and the need to differentiate between non-performance and disruptive behaviour. It was clarified that the Council includes various roles such as secretaries, treasurer, and vice presidents, all of whom are trustees.

NM explained that the clause aims to ensure that the Council can function effectively without being hindered by a trustee who is unable to participate. It provides a mechanism for removing a trustee based on medical opinion, allowing for dignified removal if necessary. This provision is not mandatory and would only be used in specific circumstances.

DWT expressed concern that the clause being too open-ended and suggested it might be better if it appeared to come from the trustee themselves. NM advised against redrafting the standard wording to avoid future complications. The clause is intended to cover situations where other provisions do not apply, ensuring the Council can maintain a fully functioning trustee body.

Council agreed to include the clause removing a trustee on the grounds of ill-health.

It was agreed that the clause does not have to be used but provides an option if needed, relying on the good judgment of the Council.

Council also discussed the power of the fellowship to remove a Council member. It was suggested to keep this power implicit rather than explicitly stating it in the bylaws to avoid potential misuse. The Council agreed to leave this as an implicit power, with the understanding that legal advice would be sought if such a situation arose.

Council discussed the implications of allowing the membership to remove trustees. It was clarified that currently, members can call a meeting to remove a trustee, but this

requires a majority vote. The idea of requiring a supermajority for such decisions was considered to ensure stability and prevent frivolous removals.

MLE expressed concerns about leaving the power implicit, fearing it might lead to misuse. Others believed that the membership would act responsibly and that making the power explicit with a supermajority requirement would provide clarity and security.

Council voted on two options:

Option 1: Make the power explicit and require a supermajority for removal.

Option 2: Leave the power implicit as it currently stands within bye Law 6.

Council agreed Option 2, preferring to keep the power implicit.

Council also discussed the emergency powers provision and the need, advised by Nicola Morris to move away from a unilateral decision-making power. Two options were considered:

Option 1: Removing emergency powers and including other provisions such as holding meetings on short notice with a reduced quorum.

Option 2: Include safeguards within the current emergency powers bylaw to prevent unilateral decisions.

The Council agreed Option 1

There was a brief discussion on updating archaic language in the Charter should stay as it is, apart from the changes indicated above. It is the bye-laws that are being updated as these deal with the charity's functions.

MLO gave a note of thanks to NM for her guidance.

The President requested a timeline for the remainder of the Governance project.

Action: Lucy Devine to provide an updated timeline

5.3 IT Update, was received by Council.

5.4 OUP presentation

Rhodri Jackson(RJ), Publishing Director, OUP and Gemma Cannon (GC), Senior Publisher, Science, OUP presented to Council. They were joined by Liz Baker (EB), Head of Publishing, RAS.

The purpose of their presentation was to review the first year of the flip journals for 2024, covering both editorial releases and financial performance.

The presentation included a financial update, showing that while the journals did not meet the 2024 budget, they performed better than the 2023 actuals. The budget shortfall was attributed to automatic waivers granted for articles submitted before October 1st. The 2025 budget is based on actual data from 2024 and is therefore more accurate. The presentation also highlighted the distribution of funding sources for published papers, noting a significant number of automatic waivers and the impact of read and publish deals, particularly from European authors.

The discussion highlighted the distribution of waivers granted to authors from countries like Brazil and India, which require financial support. These waivers are part of the support to authors who may not have access to significant research funding.

The presentation provided a breakdown of how articles were funded through read and publish deals in 2024. The UK read and publish deal (JISC) was a significant driver of funding for UK authors, with similar but smaller impacts seen for GJI. The submission rates for both journals decreased in 2024, with a notable spike in submissions for Monthly Notices in September before APC charges were implemented. While GJI's submission numbers are recovering, Monthly Notices has stabilized but not yet recovered to previous levels.

The geographical distribution of submissions remained stable, with the UK, China, and the US being the top submitting countries. There was an increase in submissions from South Africa, Mexico, and the UK, likely influenced by existing deals. The usage of the journals has increased significantly due to the new business model, which made the entire back catalogue freely accessible, enhancing the reach and impact of the journals.

RJ provided updates on new agreements for 2025, including significant deals in California and Australia, and ongoing negotiations in other regions. These agreements are expected to support authors and maintain the journals' financial viability.

The discussion highlighted the impact of the journal flips on submission trends. The Astrophysical Journal (AAS) experienced a decline in submissions during its flip year in 2023, similar to Monthly Notices, which also saw a decline in 2024. In contrast, Astronomy and Astrophysics (A&A), operating under a subscribe-to-open model, saw an increase in submissions. This model allows libraries to pay for access, eliminating the need for authors to pay directly, which has attracted more submissions.

There were concerns about the competitiveness of Monthly Notices compared to Astrophysical Journal, especially given the similar APC charges. It was noted that the first year of the flip might not be indicative of long-term trends, and a clearer picture is expected by the end of 2025. The overall trend in the field shows an increase in astronomical papers, but Monthly Notices has not fully capitalised on this growth.

Council noted the need for better promotion and clearer information on funding eligibility was emphasised to attract more submissions.

MM expressed significant concern about the decline in submissions from North America, emphasizing that this not only affects income but also the journal's impact factor and reputation. He warned of a potential "doom spiral" where the journal could be perceived as second-rate if high-impact research from North America is absent. He urged for aggressive and fast actions to regain the confidence of North American researchers.

SE suggested that publicising the availability of waivers for North American authors could help regain submissions. EB confirmed that waivers are available and highlighted ongoing marketing campaigns to ensure authors are aware of funding options. The discussion also touched on the need for better communication and outreach to inform authors about their eligibility for funding and waivers.

RM raised concerns about the impact of author-pays Open Access agreements on scholars in the global South and the potential for AI-generated papers. It was noted that there are programs in place to waive APCs for authors from 105 countries, and efforts are being made to detect and manage AI-generated content. The importance of transparency and maintaining high editorial standards was emphasised.

The discussion included questions about future projections, the impact of generative AI, and the competitive landscape, particularly in the US market. Council stressed the need for a strategic approach to maintain the journal's reputation and ensure authors are well-informed about funding options.

During the closed session, significant concerns were raised about the future of Monthly Notices. It was noted that the journal is receiving significantly fewer papers compared to previous years and has fallen behind both *Astrophysical Journal* and *A&A*. There was a strong sentiment amongst Council that OUP lacks a clear recovery plan, leading to fears about the journal's viability. The need for immediate and effective action was emphasised, particularly in improving online presence and ensuring authors can easily find funding information.

MM echoed these concerns, highlighting the potential impact on the journal's reputation and impact factor. He stressed the importance of aggressive and fast actions to regain the confidence of North American researchers. There was a consensus that the current approach is insufficient, and that proactive crisis management is necessary to prevent further decline.

MM emphasised that relying solely on a website to provide information is insufficient. MM argued that the approach needs to be more aggressive, with direct outreach to potential authors to explain the benefits of publishing in Monthly Notices and the support available to them. The goal is to actively engage with authors rather than expecting them to seek out information.

MLO agreed, highlighting the importance of targeted communication to ensure authors are aware of their publishing options. MLO suggested that conversations with stakeholders are necessary to refine the outreach strategy. Additionally, the possibility of considering a new publisher was mentioned as a potential "nuclear" option if current efforts do not yield the desired results.

Action: AM to circulate OUP presentation to Council

5.5 {Redacted}

5.6 Scrutineers, for approval

Council was asked to approve the Scrutineers who agreed to serve, they are Dr Peter Grimley and Professor Bernard Carr.

Council approved the Scrutineers.

6. POLICY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Supermassive podcast

RM expressed how the podcast has been hugely successful. There were suggestions to include topics on geophysics in future episodes.

Action: JH to discuss future topics on Geophysics with RM

6.2 Letter to Lord Vallance on European Southern Observatory

The Society had written to the science minister about the impact of the proposed industrial complex adjacent to the Paranal site of the European Southern Observatory. Marietta Valdivia Lefort, RAS Policy and Diversity Officer, is a Chilean national and is leveraging her knowledge of the local political landscape and government decisions in northern Chile to assist the RAS in addressing light pollution concerns. This sensitivity is crucial for effective lobbying efforts.

All available channels are being utilised to address this matter.

RM welcomed suggestions for additional ideas from Council.

6.3 STFC budget

RM and MLO led discussions on STFC budget. Concerns were raised about the potential impact of STFC cuts.

They explained that an inside source has indicated that there may be a 15-20% cash cut. This could significantly impact the grants line, with the possibility of no grants being awarded this year. The situation is still based on rumours, with no official statement from STFC. Their council is expected to sign off on the decision in March, just

before the next RAS Council meeting. The cuts could be worse than those experienced during the financial crash, and the community needs to be prepared to respond.

CS added that the UKSA's space exploration side has already decided not to issue any exploration calls this year due to funding uncertainties. This indicates a broader trend of financial challenges across research councils. Council discussed the need to contact CaSE and other organisations to prepare a coordinated response. They also emphasised the importance of being ready to act once the cuts are officially announced, including preparing template letters for fellows to send to MPs.

Given the financial challenges faced by STFC, there is a need to plan for potential impacts and consider the long-term future.

Action: RM to draft a paper for Council.

7. OTHER

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

7.2 Minutes of the CDAG meeting 28 November 2024, were received by Council.

7.3 Draft Minutes of RASTI meeting 29 January 2025, were received by Council.

7.4 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 13 December 2024, were received by Council.

7.5 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 10 January 2025, were received by Council.

8. AOB

Implications of and reaction to the shutdown of all federal government ED&I activity in the United States.

MG (not in attendance) wanted Council to discuss the implications of the shutdown of all federal government education and research activities in the United States. He was particularly worried about the impact on UK scientists. MG was also concerned about the effects on diversity and inclusion within the scientific community. The Council is asked to consider these concerns and discuss any potential actions or responses.

Action: To be included as an agenda item for March Council.

Annual Subscriptions

Fellows have raised concerns about the timing of the annual subscription deduction on January 29th, a date when many are likely to be overdrawn, having been paid on Christmas Eve and just before the January paycheck. This timing has led some to consider giving up their fellowship.

There is no specific historical reason for this date, and the possibility of changing it will be explored. Although it seems minor, it is important to many colleagues.

Action: AM to explore options

Council Rose at 15:47