MINUTES

Royal Astronomical Society

Council

A meeting of Council was held at 9:00am on Wednesday 10 September 2025 at Rose Meeting Room, Milton Hill House, Steventon, Oxfordshire, OX13 6AF

Present:
Dr Alan Cayless (Councillor, A)
Prof. Andrew Curtis (Councillor, G)
Prof. Stephen Eales (Councillor, A)
Dr Imogen Gingell (Councillor, G)
Prof. Matthew Griffin (Vice President, A)
Prof. James Hammond (Geophysics Secretary, G)
Dr Iain Hannah (Councillor, G, via MS Teams)
Prof. Mark Lester (Senior Secretary, G)
Prof. Mike Lockwood (President, G; Chair)
Prof. Steve Miller (Vice President, G)
Dr Arvind Parmar (Treasurer, A/G)
Dr Mike Peel (Councillor, A)
Dr Ashley Spindler (Councillor, A)
Prof. Derek Ward-Thompson (Councillor, A)
Prof. Jim Wild (President-Elect, G)
Dr Andrew Young (Councillor, A)

In attendance:
Ms Liz Baker (Head of Publishing)
Ms Alice Power (Managing Editor)
Mr Ian Russell (Executive Director)

1 Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to an additional meeting of Council that had been called to discuss two urgent publishing-related issues.

Apologies had been received from Dr Chrysa Avdellidou, Prof. Paul Crowther, Mrs Karen Anne Devoil, Dr Cyrielle Opitom, Prof. Caroline Smith, and Dr Sheona Urquhart.

2 Declarations of interest

Council members were asked to state any relevant interests not previously declared; there were none.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2025 and matters arising

It was agreed that approval of the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 8 July 2025 and any non-urgent matters arising would be carried forward to the next meeting of Council which will be held on 10 October 2025.

4 Letters in *Monthly Notices*

Ms Baker introduced her paper on the future treatment of Letters in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society (MNRAS)*; paper C-2025-15 refers.

Clarivate, the producers of Web of Science which publishes bibliometrics including the Impact Factor, have changed their processes which has meant that Letters in *MNRAS* are no longer being indexed in the service. This is because the status of *MNRAS: Letters* is rather ambiguous: In some ways it is considered part of the main journal as it was never sold separately or had a separate Impact Factor and shares a submission site and Editorial Board with the main journal. However, in other respects it could be considered a separate journal as it has its own website and, crucially, its own International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). It is the fact that *MNRAS: Letters* has a different ISSN from the main journal that has caused the problem as Clarivate are now refusing to assimilate content from different ISSNs into one Impact Factor and they have a new automatic ingest process which is not accepting content published in *MNRAS: Letters*.

Council were asked to consider whether going forward:

a) Letters should be an article type within the main journal, or
b) *MNRAS: Letters* should be formally launched as a separate journal.

It was noted that the citation profile of Letters and full research articles in *MNRAS* has, in recent times, been very similar and so including them or not in the main journal as they currently are should not materially affect the Impact Factor either positively or negatively. The difficulty of developing Letters given the competition from *Astrophysical Journal Letters* was noted. Were it possible to develop Letters such that they were cited considerably more than research articles then this would increase the Impact Factor of *MNRAS* so the key question is whether it would be more successful to develop Letters within *MNRAS* or as a separate title.

Should the decision be taken for Letters to be a separate title it would essentially constitute a new launch although, as noted, it already has its own website and ISSN and thus there is a level of brand awareness. However, we would need to apply for inclusion in Web of Science before the journal would be awarded an Impact Factor which would take at least two years. Council noted that this would place the new journal at a serious competitive disadvantage to established journals making it difficult to attract good content to the title.

A decision to formally have Letters as an article type in the main journal would also require acceptance by Web of Science and changes to the way the journal is treated but it is hoped that, particularly since this situation has arisen through no fault of the Society or its publisher, Clarivate would agree to expedite any decisions and process changes required, though it was noted that there is no guarantee of this.

It was also noted that the Society could launch a separate letters journal in the future should it choose to do so, and many on Council felt that would allow for a more considered decision without the time pressure arising from the situation with Clarivate.

Following a robust discussion, and noting the preference of the majority of *MNRAS* Editorial Board members that had commented, Council decided to make Letters an article type in the main journal and to ask the Editorial team to devise and implement plans to develop Letters within *MNRAS* as part of the journal's wider editorial development.

ACTION: Ms Baker to inform the Editorial Board of MNRAS and OUP of the decision to formally make Letters an article type of *MNRAS* rather than a separate journal.

ACTION: Ms Baker and her team to work with the new Editor-in-Chief of *MNRAS* when appointed to devise a plan for the development of Letters in the journal as part of a wider review of article types in the journal.

5 Compliance with international sanctions in the RAS journal portfolio

Mr Russell explained that OUP have changed their assessment of the risk of inadvertently failing to comply with the international sanctions regimes imposed by the UK, European Union and United States (paper C-2025-16 refers). OUP is concerned that peer review could be considered to be providing a service and as such have introduced changes to enable sanctions checking on submission, requiring the corresponding author to confirm that none of the authors, their affiliations, or anything in the paper contravenes sanctions in these territories.

Mr Russell expressed his opinion that the new process had been implemented and communicated poorly by OUP and was introduced with minimal consultation. Following a query from an author objecting to the new processes, the *MNRAS* Editorial Board had vociferously raised concerns that the new process was unnecessarily onerous for corresponding authors and, noting that no such requirement is made of authors submitting to the *Astrophysical Journal* or *Astronomy & Astrophysics*, placed *MNRAS* at a competitive disadvantage.

Following discussions with members of the Editorial Board, OUP has agreed to revert to the previous process on *MNRAS*.

Given that OUP had notified the Society that their assessment of the risk had changed, Mr Russell had assessed the risk to the Society. He presented his findings to Council with a request that Council accept that risk and continue with the mechanism of checking sanctions compliance on acceptance. This proposal was based on the following:

- OUP had given no satisfactory explanation as to why they had chosen to highlight sanctions regimes imposed by the UK, EU and USA but it is clear that the Society, as a UK registered company, must comply with UK and International law and therefore should concern ourselves only with UK sanctions.
- The UK government's Office of Trade Sanctions Implementation has confirmed to the Society that peer review of a scholarly article is not considered a service under UK sanctions, while noting that the Society does need to ensure that sanctions do not apply for other reasons.
- Any 'designated person' will almost certainly be subject to financial sanctions and therefore post acceptance financial sanctions checks should be sufficient.

Council had a thorough discussion regarding the risks associated with sanctions compliance, including the potential for the inclusion of "dual use" technology that could be used in weapons or weapons systems. Professor Hammond noted, for instance, that we need to guard against referees suggesting improvements to "dual use" technologies as this could be seen as providing technical assistance to a sanctioned entity. It was noted that RASTI could be particularly susceptible to this risk due to its scope. Professor Hammond suggested that guidance should be given to Editorial Boards and referees when dealing with authors from sanctioned countries to, for example, highlight errors or deficiencies but not how those errors / deficiencies could be corrected.

It was noted that papers containing information that could improve the effectiveness of "dual use" technology could be difficult to identify given the nature and designation of that technology but that the Society's Editorial office should work with the Editorial Boards to see if additional guidance, for instance to referees, is required.

ACTION: Ms Baker to work with the *MNRAS* Editorial Board to determine if additional guidance on the identification of "dual use" technology is required for reviewers of *MNRAS* articles and implement as necessary.

Professor Wild stated that he is comfortable that corresponding authors should be asked to declare that the authors of the paper and the content of the submission complies with relevant international sanctions in the same way that they are asked to confirm compliance with ethical standards. There was some support for this view from other members of Council.

Dr Young noted that there was also a risk that sanctioned technical information could be disclosed to a reviewer who was subject to sanctions and it was agreed that guidance should be developed with the Editorial Boards to guard against this.

ACTION: Ms Baker to work with the Editors and Editorial Boards to ensure that interactions with referees comply with relevant international sanctions.

Council agreed that the processes currently in place represent an appropriate mitigation of any risks of inadvertently contravening UK sanctions legislation.

ACTION: Mr Russell to inform OUP of the decision to retain current sanctions checking practices.

ACTION: Ms Baker to inform the *MNRAS* Editorial Board of the decision to retain current sanctions checking practices.

6 Code of Conduct violation: Report from investigating panel

Professor Wild reported on the investigation of an alleged breach of the Society's Code of Conduct (papers C-2025-14 and C-2025-17 refer). The investigation, arising from a complaint made by Sonia Turkington FRAS against Kevin Kilburn FRAS, was carried out by a panel of the Society's Officers which he had Chaired.

Having considered the evidence before them, the panel found that Mr Kilburn had breached the Society's Code of Conduct and recommended that he be asked to apologise in writing to Ms Turkington and make an undertaking to her and to the Society to refrain from using unnecessarily disrespectful language against Ms Turkington or any other person in connection with his status as a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in the future.

Council agreed with the recommendations of the panel.

ACTION: Mr Russell to write to Mr Kilburn and Ms Turkington with the outcome of the Code of Conduct investigation and to ensure that Mr Kilburn complies with Council's requests.

The investigating panel also highlighted some suggestions regarding the Code of Conduct and the process followed to investigate allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct.

6.1 Naming panel members

It was noted that our processes are silent on whether the identity of the members of the investigating panel should be disclosed to the complainant and the subject of the complaint. The subject of the complaint has the right to appear before the panel in which case the identity of the panel members would be disclosed.

Council agreed that the process should be explicit that the identity of the panel members will be disclosed to the complainant and the subject of the complaint.

6.2 Extend and reach of our Code of Conduct

The panel had highlighted that the breadth of clause 3 of the general section of our Code of Conduct means that the Society could have to deal with allegations that were nothing to do with the Society or its business and suggested wording to narrow the scope of the Code of Conduct. Professor Griffin made further suggestions noting that it may be appropriate for a Fellow to properly intervene in a situation in a way that could be considered disrespectful.

Professor Griffin therefore suggested that clause 3 should read:

"With regard to any activity involving, or directly related to, the Royal Astronomical Society, Fellows must at all times behave with due respect and consideration for other Fellows, RAS staff, potential Fellows and visitors to the RAS."

6.3 Misconduct involving alleged criminality

It was noted that the Society would not wish to become embroiled in a criminal investigation should there be allegations of law breaking and that therefore any Code of Conduct investigation by the Society should be paused for the duration of a criminal investigation.

Council voted unanimously to accept these proposals.

ACTION: Mr Russell to draft changes to the Code of Conduct to address the changes agreed for approval by Council.

7 Fire safety at Burlington House

Mr Russell introduced paper C-2025-18 noting that the Society was served with a Fire Safety Notice in March 2024 and was visited again by the Fire Safety Inspectorate on 6 August 2025. The Fire Safety Inspector was disappointed by the lack of progress on some of the issues identified and had served the Society with a notice to make improvements within 28 days.

Mr Russell reported that all of the urgent issues identified by the Fire Safety Inspector had now been dealt with and Council recorded their thanks to Audie Muller for driving the necessary actions forward.

ACTION: Mr Russell to pass on Council's thanks to Audie Muller for his work on ensuring that the Society has complied with the Fire Safety Notices.

Mr Russell noted that there are a number of longer-term improvements that are necessary some of which will require listed building consent. He was, though, pleased with the recent progress made and the plans that have been drawn up to bring the building and our processes up to standard.

8 Process to appoint a successor to Professor David Flower as Editor-in-Chief of *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*

Mr Russell confirmed that Professor David Flower has announced his intention to step down as Editor-in-Chief at the end of 2026.

The appointment of Professor Flower's successor is the responsibility of Council and Mr Russell suggested that Council delegates that responsibility to a small sub-group.

Following discussion it was agreed in principle that:

- Council would delegate the appointment of the next Editor-in-Chief of *MNRAS* to a sub-group of six or seven.
- The sub-group can be drawn from Council and those not on Council.
- The role of the sub-group will be to: agree the role description; draw up the person specification and ideal candidate profile; determine the application process and deadlines; advertise the role; assess applications (shortlist from written application), and decide (from on-line interviews).
- The recommendation of the sub-group will ratified by Council.
- The sub-group will follow an open, competitive recruitment process. The post will be advertised but it is felt appropriate to encourage suitable candidates to apply.

9 Any other business

Noting that the next Council meeting will be held on 10 October 2025, the Chair asked for any urgent items of other business that could not wait until the next meeting.

There being none the meeting was closed.

Action Status Report

This Action Status Report tracks progress on all assigned actions and will be appended to the minutes for ongoing reference.

Number	Action	Lead Person/s	Status	When by?
4 Letters in Monthly Notices	Ms Baker to inform the Editorial Board of MNRAS and OUP of the decision to formally make Letters an article type of MNRAS rather than a separate journal.	LB		Sep-25
4 Letters in Monthly Notices	Ms Baker and her team to work with the new Editor-in-Chief of MNRAS when appointed to devise a plan for the development of Letters in the journal as part of a wider review of article types in the journal.	LB		Spring 2026
5 Compliance with international sanctions in the RAS journal portfolio	Ms Baker to work with the MNRAS Editorial Board to determine if additional guidance on the identification of "dual use" technology is required for reviewers of MNRAS articles and implement as necessary.	LB		Dec-25
5 Compliance with international sanctions in the RAS journal portfolio	Ms Baker to work with the Editors and Editorial Boards to ensure that interactions with referees comply with relevant international sanctions.	LB		Nov-25
5 Compliance with international sanctions in the RAS journal portfolio	Mr Russell to inform OUP of the decision to retain current sanctions checking practices.	IR		Sep-25
5 Compliance with international sanctions in the RAS journal portfolio	Ms Baker to inform the MNRAS Editorial Board of the decision to retain current sanctions checking practices.	LB		Sep-25
6 Code of Conduct violation: Report from investigating panel	Mr Russell to write to Mr Kilburn and Ms Turkington with the outcome of the Code of Conduct investigation and to ensure that Mr Kilburn complies with Council's requests.	IR		Sep-25
6.3 Misconduct involving alleged criminality	Mr Russell to draft changes to the Code of Conduct to address the changes agreed for approval by Council.	IR		Dec-25
7 Fire safety at Burlington House	Mr Russell to pass on Council's thanks to Audie Muller for his work on ensuring that the Society has complied with the Fire Safety Notices.	IR		Sep-25

Note: This Action Status Report will be reviewed and updated at each meeting. Owners are responsible for providing progress updates ahead of the next scheduled meeting.