MINUTES

Royal Astronomical Society

Council (October 2025)

A meeting of the RAS Council was held on Friday 10th October 2025 at the Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, London, and via Teams

Present:
Professor Mike Lockwood – President (Chair)
Professor Jim Wild – President Elect (G)
Dr Arvind Parmar – Treasurer
Professor Matthew Griffin – Vice-President (A)
Prof. Paul Crowther (Vice President, A)
Professor Steve Miller – Vice-President (G)
Prof. Caroline Smith – Vice-President (G; online)
Prof. Mark Lester (Senior Secretary, G)
Dr Sheona Urquhart – Astronomy Secretary (A; online)
Mrs Karen Anne Devoil – Councillor (G)
Dr Imogen Gingell – Councillor (G)
Professor Derek Ward-Thompson – Councillor (A)
Dr Ashley Spindler – Councillor (A; online)
Dr Alan Cayless – Councillor (A; online)
Dr Chrysa Avdellidou (Councillor, G; online)
Dr Cyrielle Opitom - Councillor (A)
Dr Andrew Young – Councillor (A)
Dr Iain Hannah – Councillor (G)
Dr Mike Peel - Councillor (A)
Prof. Stephen Eales (Councillor, A)

In attendance:
Mr Ian Russell (Executive Director, RAS)
Dr Robert Massey (Deputy Executive Director; online)
Mr Audie Muller (Head of Operations)
Professor Mike Hapgood (Chair, Membership Committee)

1 Introductions

The President, Professor Mike Lockwood, welcomed members with a special mention to the new members that had been elected to the Council meeting and were being seen in person for the first time. New members that introduced themselves included Prof. Paul Crowther. Apologies had been received from Professor James Hammond, and Professor Andrew Curtis.

2 Declarations of interest

Members were invited to declare any interests relevant to the agenda. Professor Mike Lockwood reminded Council that we will be formally completing Declarations of interest forms at the December Council meeting.

ACTION: COI to be declared at December Council meeting (All)

3 Minutes and Matters Arising

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

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July were approved.

3.2 Fellowships

A note has been made regarding fellowships, though no specific action or discussion point was detailed.

3.3 Publishers & Finance Committee

A matter concerning publishers was intended for the Finance Committee.

It has not yet been submitted but is scheduled to go to the Committee as previously decided.

3.4 Extra Meeting – Letters in Monthly Notices

A key decision was made to incorporate *Letters* into *Monthly Notices* rather than launching a new journal with a separate impact factor.

This decision was influenced by recent changes implemented by *Parnassus*.

3.5 Sanctions Case

A recent sanctions check flagged two individuals affiliated with a sanctioned organisation. Although the institution was sanctioned, the paper and authors were not directly implicated. The case demonstrates that the sanctions process is functioning, though timing remains a challenge.

It sets a useful precedent for future cases.

3.6 Conduct Matter

A conduct case was discussed around a Fellow. [Redacted]

3.7 Fire Safety Compliance

Immediate fire safety concerns have been addressed, ensuring legal compliance and safety. Further work is required, particularly involving fire doors, which necessitates planning consent. An application is currently being prepared for submission to the City Council.

The Head of Operations has been commended for efforts in managing this process.

4. Minutes and Matters Arising

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2025 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September were approved.

4.2 Geoscience Campaign Collaboration

- Discussions have begun with the Geological Society (GeoSoc) regarding the “This is Geoscience” campaign.
- Proposal to create short-form videos targeting students at key decision points (e.g., choosing A-levels or university courses).
- The estimated cost would require Council funding and potentially hiring a dedicated resource.

4.3 Support for Upcoming Geoscience Conferences

- Mrs Karen Anne Devoil reminded Council about the two geoscience conferences and provided details on the two events.
- Two conferences are pending funding decisions via RAS Awards and Grants (results expected by 17th October).
- One is a free Early Career Network meeting in January; the other (GeoSoc-hosted) requires registration fees dependent on funding outcomes.
- Proposal includes discounted registration for RAS and GeoSoc Fellows.

4.4 Planning and Coordination with GeoSoc

[Redacted]

4.5 Engagement with Broader Scientific Community

- Positive discussions with Geosoc and a representative from the Institute of Physics (IOP) about cross-society collaboration.
- Potential for RAS to join broader initiatives led by the Science Council to address shared challenges across learned societies.

ACTION: A formal proposal for the geoscience video campaign to be developed and costed.

ACTION: Further discussion to be scheduled at the next meeting, particularly with key stakeholders like Prof. James Hammond present. A Working group to be convened with Prof. James Hammond and Mrs Karen Anne Devoil.

5. Finance

5.1 Report from the Treasurer

5.1.1 Financial Position (Mid-Year Review)

Dr Arvind Parmar, Treasurer explained that the Society's finances are broadly on track with the budget approved in March. There is also a significant lease related payment due by the end of the month.

Dr Arvind Parmar explained that the Society is now expected to end the year in surplus.

5.1.2 Reserves and Investments

The Society holds funds in bank accounts and investments. The Finance Committee will review the balance between liquid savings and long-term investments at its meeting on 27 November. Topics for discussion include:

- Potential reallocation of funds into a managed asset portfolio.
- Consideration of additional lease payments.
- Funding for a new research fellowship.

5.1.3 Fellowships Discussion

There was strong support for expanding the Society's fellowship offerings, particularly for early-career researchers. Suggestions included:

- Increasing the number of fellowships awarded annually.
- Exploring the feasibility of longer-term or themed fellowships (e.g., a one-off fellowship to mark 200 years of Monthly Notices).
- Considering the financial sustainability and institutional implications of fellowship funding, including the lack of overheads which may deter some universities from hosting fellows.

5.1.4 Charity Commission Considerations

While the Charity Commission is currently less stringent about reserve levels (especially post-COVID), there was consensus that the Society should ensure its reserves are used effectively to support its mission, including addressing gaps in research funding and career development.

ACTION: The Finance Committee will assess the Society's financial strategy and bring recommendations to the December Council meeting. Council expressed a collective desire to enhance support for fellowships and early-career researchers, within sustainable financial parameters. Dr Arvind Parmar to report back.

6. Strategic

6.1 Consideration of voting mechanisms for elections to Council

Council discussed a paper introduced by Mr Audie Muller outlining three options for future Council election voting mechanisms:

- Retain the current First Past the Post (FPTP) system.
- Move to Single Transferable Vote (STV).
- Adopt Approval Voting.

Professor Mike Lockwood stated that the French-style second round was excluded due to concerns about voter fatigue and administrative burden.

Mr Ian Russell and Mr Audie Muller confirmed that mi-Voice, the Society's voting platform, confirmed it could support any of the three proposed systems.

Council confirmed it has the authority to determine the voting method, though changes to the bylaws would require AGM approval.

Professor Derek Ward-Thompson questioned the need for change, noting no clear evidence of issues with current outcomes and also argued that FPTP is inherently unfair, as it allows candidates to win with minority support, and that STV offers more representative outcomes.

Professor Matthew Griffin supported STV, citing its ability to empower voters by allowing them to rank preferences without fear of "wasting" votes.

Prof. Caroline Smith and others questioned whether changing the voting system would increase voter turnout, which currently stands at 20%.

Dr Ashley Spindler and others noted that low engagement and difficulty in recruiting candidates were more pressing issues than the voting method itself.

Professor Jim Wild and Prof. Mark Lester expressed concern that STV may not offer practical advantages for single-seat roles and could complicate the process.

Council proposed offering incentives such as a discount on membership fees, prize draws, or merchandise to encourage voting.

Prof. Caroline Smith proposed better communication strategies, including monthly newsletters and clearer election promotion via email.

Prof. Mark Lester suggested a future away day focused on both member benefits and engagement to explore these ideas further.

A vote was held between retaining FPTP and adopting STV.

Council voted in favour of moving to Single Transferable Vote (STV) for Council elections.

It was agreed that the new system should be trialled for a minimum of five years to ensure consistency and avoid frequent changes.

ACTION: Mr Audie Muller to liaise with mi-Voice to implement STV.

ACTION: Mr Audie Muller to investigate accompanying communications to the Fellowship which will highlight the change and encourage participation in nominations and voting.

7. Plans for Burlington House Lecture Theatre and Reception

Mr. Audie Muller introduced the paper outlining proposed works at Burlington House, focusing on the Lecture Theatre, reception area, Director's Room, and Fellows Room. Council was asked to approve an indicative budget range to enable architects and consultants to develop feasible and cost-aligned design proposals.

Mr. Audie Muller emphasised the importance of approving an indicative budget to avoid wasted effort and to guide realistic design and procurement decisions. The budget would support the development of a project management plan with clear timelines and costs.

Professor Derek Ward-Thompson strongly supported the need for refurbishment, citing discomfort and impracticality of the current seating. He stressed the importance of including functional furniture (e.g. tables for laptops and note-taking).

Mr. Audie Muller confirmed that these concerns would be addressed in consultation with architects and noted that another Society is also refurbishing its lecture theatre, offering a potential opportunity for shared learning.

Professor Mike Lockwood highlighted the urgent need to improve fire evacuation procedures, particularly for individuals with mobility impairments, and also stressed the importance of a secure and functional reception area to support public access and safety. Mr. Audie Muller confirmed that these priorities are being considered in parallel with longer-term redevelopment plans.

Professor Matthew Griffin and others supported the development, noting the importance of increasing public engagement and better utilising the building's location and spaces. Mr Ian Russell explained the potential reconfiguration of the building: Ground floor: Public-facing activities and events, First floor: Fellows' spaces and library, and Upper floors: Council and staff offices.

Professor Matthew Griffin and Prof. Caroline Smith suggested that architects be briefed to provide both a proposal within the indicative budget and a more ambitious alternative.

Dr Alan Cayless raised the need to coordinate long-term plans with immediate fire safety works to avoid redundant efforts. Mr. Audie Muller acknowledge and confirmed that this would indeed be done. Prof. Caroline Smith and Mrs Karen Anne Devoil discussed the importance of preserving heritage assets, including rare books and furniture, and proposed fire-rated safes for valuable items. Prof. Caroline Smith also advocated for renewed focus on digitisation of archival materials to improve access and safeguard against physical damage.

Council approved proceeding with the indicative budget to engage architects and consultants. It was agreed that the team should explore both a budget-aligned and a more ambitious option for redevelopment. The importance of a holistic vision for the building was acknowledged, with a focus on accessibility, public engagement, and heritage preservation.

ACTION: Mr Audie Muller to make a start on this project.

8. Recruitment of MNRAS Editor-in-Chief

Professor Mike Lockwood and Mr Ian Russell Council provided an update on the formation of a Working Group to recruit the next Editor-in-Chief of *MNRAS*.

The Head of Publishing is coordinating the first meeting, which is expected to take place online in the coming week. The group will begin by reviewing and refining the draft role specification.

The current timeline anticipates a call for applications in early 2026, with the appointment to be ratified at the March Council meeting and the new Editor-in-Chief in post ahead of NAM.

Professor Derek Ward-Thompson raised the question of including a current member of the *MNRAS* Editorial Board on the panel in an ex officio capacity. However, it was agreed that, given the need for change in the editorial direction as discussed at the Away Day, the panel should remain independent of the current board. It was noted that some current board members may apply for the role.

Concerns were raised about gender balance on the panel. While the current composition includes four male Council members, two female staff members, and one external female editor, it was noted that the panel was formed based on expressions of interest from Council members.

9. Proposal to close the Sir Norman Lockyer Memorial Trust

Mr Ian Russell updated Council on the status of the Sir Norman Lockyer Memorial Trust.

It was recommended that the Trust be formally closed. However, as the RAS Council cannot make this decision on behalf of the Trust, a separate meeting of the Sir Norman Lockyer Memorial Trust trustees (who are also RAS Council members) must be convened.

Professor Steve Miller proposed that this meeting be held online, 30 minutes before the next Council meeting on 12 December 2025, with a single agenda item: the formal closure of the Trust.

It was agreed that formal notice, a supporting paper outlining the implications, and minutes would be required for this meeting.

Some concerns were raised by Mrs Karen Anne Devoil about safeguarding the Sir Norman Lockyer Fellowships and other associated activities. It was clarified that these responsibilities already rest with the RAS and would continue under its governance.

There was discussion about the status of transferred funds.

Professor Mike Lockwood noted that the Trust had effectively been "half closed" already, with all assets transferred to the Society, and that the remaining steps were largely administrative.

Mrs Karen Anne Devoil inquired what effect the closure of the Trust would have on the day to day running of the Norman Lockyer Observatory. It was confirmed that the observatory is a legal entity in its own right (both a company limited by guarantee and a UK charity) and is fully independent of the RAS. It is therefore unaffected by the Trust's closure.

It was clarified that the only decision to be made at the trustees' meeting is whether to formally close the Trust. Decisions regarding the future use or reclassification of the funds (e.g., whether to maintain them as restricted or make them unrestricted) would be made separately by the RAS Council, wearing its own governance hat.

Council agreed to convene a meeting of the Sir Norman Lockyer Memorial Trust trustees at 11:00am on 12 December 2025, immediately prior to the RAS Council meeting. The sole agenda item will be the formal closure of the Trust, subject to unanimous agreement by the trustees.

ACTION: A supporting paper outlining the implications and options will be circulated in advance. Mr Ian Russell and Mr Audie Muller to circulate this.

10. Proposal to create a new position: Head of Membership

Mr Ian Russell presented a proposal for the creation of a new, permanent, full-time Head of Membership role.

The role is intended to address membership activities and membership communications within the Society. Mr Ian Russell noted that many Fellows are unaware of existing Society activities, highlighting a need for improved outreach and engagement.

Council approved the proposal to create a new position, Head of Membership.

ACTION: Mr Ian Russell and Mr Audie Muller to begin the recruitment process

11. Membership development discussion

Professor Mike Hapgood (Chair, Membership Committee), was invited to present membership initiatives and challenges, following discussions at the May Council meeting. His presentation focused on improving member engagement, streamlining processes, and expanding the Society's reach.

Membership Application Process

Professor Mike Hapgood proposed delegating approval of straightforward Route 1 applications to a Council sub-group to reduce delays. It was noted that Route 2 applications (more complex cases) would still be reviewed thoroughly.

Professor Steve Miller and Dr Alan Cayless raised concerns about maintaining oversight.

A consensus emerged around maintaining Council visibility of all applicant names while enabling a subgroup to expedite approvals.

Finding Nominators and Points of Contact

Difficulty in identifying Fellows to nominate applicants was discussed.

Professor Mike Hapgood stated that the Points of Contact (POC) network is being updated, with efforts to ensure coverage across institutions.

Prof. Stephen Eales suggested creating a searchable online directory of Fellows (with GDPR-compliant opt-in) to help applicants find nominators. Mr Audie Muller explained that we would be considering this in our future development of the CRM.

Subscription Management and Retention

Issues with payment methods and timing of renewals were discussed.

Professor Derek Ward-Thompson felt that although the monthly direct debit is now available it is not well-publicised. Mr Audie Muller explained that this is targeted at certain groups, and that as your suggestion we have now moved the collection of the direct debit to the last day of the month (i.e. 31 January).

Reinstatement policy was praised for its success in bringing lapsed members back, though the current three-year limit was questioned. Council agreed to review this restriction.

Targeted Membership Growth

There needs to be an emphasis on early career researchers (ECRs) and career transition support. A discussion on Route 2 applicants from interdisciplinary or adjacent fields (e.g. data science, engineering, behavioural science) took place.

Prof. Caroline Smith proposed exploring corporate membership models to engage the space industry and other non-academic sectors.

Council noted past discussions on corporate membership and the need to manage potential conflicts (e.g. satellite launches vs. dark skies advocacy).

Mrs Karen Anne Devoil suggested improving promotional activity and engaging with subsets of the community (such as outreach professionals) to help increase membership.

Under-18 Engagement and Safeguarding

Professor Mike Hapgood raised the issue of interest from under-18s and the need for appropriate affiliation schemes.

There is work being done on safeguarding-compliant models for engaging schools and younger audiences.

Amateur and Non-Academic Professionals

There was a discussion on better integrating amateur astronomers, science communicators, and non-academic professionals into the Society, with an emphasis on recognising their contributions and creating a sense of community.

Conference Engagement and Recruitment

Some suggestions included:

- Offering membership discounts with conference registration.
- Targeted recruitment at events like NAM and geophysics conferences.
- Tracking non-member attendees to follow up with membership offers.

Council agreed to consider the following:

- Delegating Route 1 application approvals to a Council sub-group.

- Removing or extending the three-year limit on reinstatements.
- Enhancing visibility of Fellows to support nominations.
- Reviewing and promoting monthly direct debit options.
- Exploring corporate membership models.
- Improving engagement with under-18s and non-academic professionals.

ACTION: Mike Hapgood to feedback to the Membership Committee meeting scheduled for the following week.

ACTION: Council members encouraged to reflect on the proposals and submit specific ideas for further action.

Professor Mike Lockwood and Council thanked Professor Mike Hapgood for his presentation and contributions

12. Policy and Diversity Officer: Request for approval

Dr Robert Massey introduced his paper proposing the extension and formalisation of the Policy and Diversity Officer role.

Dr Robert Massey acknowledged that the circulated paper included some unintended bullet points but noted they reflected his thoughts.

The proposal recommends making the current 0.5 FTE (part-time) role into a full-time, permanent position, citing the current postholder's contributions to diversity work, the early careers network, and policy initiatives such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dark Skies.

Dr Robert Massey highlighted the evolving policy landscape, including issues like low Earth orbit development and geophysics course sustainability, as justification for expanding the role.

Council confirmed support for the proposal but sought clarification on the current and proposed time allocation for the role.

Professor Steve Miller suggested that a future Council meeting include a presentation from the CDAG Public Engagement and Outreach team, to improve Council's familiarity with staff and their work.

Professor Matthew Griffin raised a question about the recruitment process for the role.

Mrs Karen Anne Devoil shared that she has had some positive experiences working with the current postholder on the Diversity Committee and endorsed their work.

Mr Ian Russell initiated a broader discussion on Council members' involvement in committees, suggesting a clearer structure for committee governance and councillor engagement.

Council observed that it is unusual for Council to approve individual staff roles, suggesting this responsibility might be better delegated to the Chief Executive in the future, once budgeting and governance processes are more robust.

General support was expressed for making the Policy and Diversity Officer role full-time and permanent.

A vote was proposed to approve the additional 0.5 FTE and formalise the position. This was approved.

ACTION: A future Council meeting will include a presentation from the Public Engagement and Outreach team. Dr Robert Massey to oversee this.

ACTION: The need for clearer committee governance and councillor involvement pathways was acknowledged, with further discussion to follow. Mr Ian Russell to take the lead on this.

13. *MNRAS* Bicentenary activities

Mr Ian Russell, on behalf of the Head of Publishing, put forward a proposal for additional expenditure to support bicentenary activities for *MNRAS*, primarily funding a photographic competition.

Mr Ian Russell explained that the majority of the funding will support a photographic competition to celebrate the 200th anniversary of *MNRAS*. The competition aims to generate high-quality images for promotional use and to engage the Society's Fellowship and wider public.

Professor Steve Miller raised several key concerns:

- Licensing of submitted images was not addressed in the proposal.
- Prize value benchmarking was unclear.
- AI-generated images pose a challenge for authenticity in competitions.
- Suggested a plenary session at NAM 2027 to mark the bicentenary.

Mr Ian Russell responded as follows:

- Agreed that licensing would be clarified to ensure the Society could use submitted images.
- Acknowledged the need for verification of prize-winning images, potentially involving expert Fellows.
- Supported the idea of a NAM 2027 plenary session.
- Council Members discussed the volume of entries and potential administrative burden:
- Concerns were raised about the estimate of 1,000 entries and the risk of being overwhelmed.
- Nominal entry fees were proposed to manage volume and ensure quality submissions.

Professor Steve Miller and others suggested limiting the number of entries per person and possibly charging a small fee, as is common in other competitions.

Mrs Karen Anne Devoil expressed concern that competition entries should not be free to enter to avoid being inundated with entries and setting a precedent for any subsequent related activities.

Dr Alan Cayless and Prof. Caroline Smith warned of the significant workload involved in vetting entries, especially with the rise of AI-enhanced or generated images.

Prof. Caroline Smith cautioned against underestimating the administrative complexity, citing her experience with the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. Prof. Caroline Smith offered to connect the Society with her colleagues at the Natural History Museum for advice on managing large-scale competitions.

Mr Ian Russell welcomed Prof. Caroline Smith offer and proposed that the Head of Publishing follow up. Mr Ian Russell suggested that concerns and recommendations be passed to the publishing team for further planning.

Additional Suggestions from Council included:

- Include a commended category in the competition to broaden recognition.
- Offer free RAS membership as part of the prize package.
- Use the competition to build a GDPR-compliant contact database for future engagement.
- Consider the strategic implications of engaging large numbers of amateur astronomers and photographers.

Council approved the expenditure in principle, with the understanding that:

ACTION: The publishing team will address concerns raised, particularly around licensing, AI verification, entry limits, and administrative capacity. Dr Liz Baker to take forward.

ACTION: Further planning and implementation details will be developed by the publishing team, incorporating Council's feedback. Dr Liz Baker to take forward.

14. Request for Council to consider suggestions raised by CDAG

Mr Ian Russell presented some suggestion for Council to consider which were raised by CDAG.

Undergraduate Bursaries

CDAG requested a review of the undergraduate bursary level, which had been increased at the July meeting. Mr Ian Russell confirmed that the Treasurer (Dr Arvind Parmar) and the Finance Committee are already reviewing the bursary level.

Council noted this is in hand and no further action was required at this stage.

Awards and Prizes – Equity and Reform

CDAG raised concerns about the equity and inclusivity of the Society's awards and prizes. One suggestion included eliminating awards altogether, citing concerns about elitism.

A key contribution came from Dr Andrew Young, who proposed that award criteria should focus on "added value" - recognising individuals for their progress relative to their starting point, rather than solely on absolute achievements. This approach would better account for relative disadvantage and promote cultural change within the Society.

However, it was emphasised that awards panels can only assess nominations received. It might be useful to share past statistics showing gender disparities in nominations and awards, particularly at senior levels, reflecting historical imbalances in the field. It was noted that career-long awards tend to skew male due to legacy demographics.

Professor Matthew Griffin supported engaging with CDAG but expressed concern over some of their specific suggestions. Professor Matthew Griffin proposed that he and his geophysics counterpart (or incoming VP) meet with CDAG to discuss the issues and provide a constructive response.

Prof. Caroline Smith supported Professor Matthew Griffin's proposal and volunteered to participate in discussions with CDAG and emphasised the importance of explaining the awards process and the legacy issues affecting diversity in senior awards.

Professor Mike Lockwood suggested the Society use this opportunity to review long-standing awards practices, including the secrecy of nominations and the difficulty of nominating. Professor Mike Lockwood highlighted the MIST community's awards task force as a model for proactive and inclusive nomination practices.

Mrs Karen Anne Devoil supported the need for greater outreach and awareness around nominations, especially to underrepresented groups and emphasised the importance of proactive engagement to broaden the nominee pool.

Professor Steve Miller noted the lack of nominations for some awards and the need to raise awareness of the awards' value and suggested Council may need to take a more active role in encouraging nominations.

Prof. Mark Lester stressed that awards panels should not nominate candidates to avoid conflicts of interest and supported the idea of a separate Council entity or task force to encourage nominations.

Council agreed to thank CDAG for raising the issues and to refer the undergraduate bursary request to the Finance Committee (already in progress).

ACTION: To form a small working group, led by Prof. Matthew Griffin, Prof. Caroline Smith, and Prof. James Hammond to engage with CDAG and develop a constructive response to their awards-related suggestions.

ACTION: The Working Group to consider revisiting the awards discussion at a future Council meeting (potentially in December), given the full agenda.

ACTION: The Working Group to explore models for proactive nomination support, such as the MIST Awards Task Force.

15. Executive Director's update

Mr Ian Russell confirmed that his written report had been circulated and could be taken as read.

Mr Ian Russell highlighted one key item requiring Council's attention: the proposal to remove Privilege Days (a legacy from the civil service, granting additional leave days after bank holidays) and instead incorporate them into standard annual leave entitlements, prorated for part-time staff.

No objections were raised by Council members, and the change was approved by consensus.

Additional Comments were raised on the post-event drinks reception.

[Redacted]

Mrs Karen Anne Devoil expressed disappointment that the post-event drinks no longer take place and suggested exploring alternative arrangements, including hosting receptions at the Geological Society.

Mr Ian Russell acknowledged the suggestion and noted that the Society had been caught off guard by recent licensing changes, but the idea would be considered.

ACTION: A regular review to take place on whether or in what form some sort of reception should take place. This will be taken forward by Mr Ian Russell and Mr Audie Muller.

16. Membership

16.1 Membership report

The Membership report from the Membership Officer was noted.

[Redacted]

16.2 New Fellows for approval

The list of candidates proposed for Fellowship was approved.

17. Election of Vice Presidents to Council in 2026

Prof. Mark Lester sought a decision from Council on terms of office for current Vice-Presidents following the transition to three-year terms.

Prof. Mark Lester explained that following a recent bylaw change, the term of office for Vice-Presidents (VPs) has been extended from two years to three years. This change requires a transitional arrangement to ensure a smooth rotation between the two Astronomy (A) and two Geophysics (G) Vice-Presidents, as per the Society's governance structure.

Prof. Mark Lester presented a paper outlining five possible options for managing the transition. After consultation with Prof. Paul Crowther (Vice President, A) and Professor Steve Miller – Vice-President (G), a practical solution was identified:

- Prof. Paul Crowther has agreed to serve a two-year term.
- Professor Steve Miller has agreed to serve a three-year term.

Council approved Option 3, which accommodates this arrangement and ensures staggered VP rotations moving forward.

A question was raised about how this change would affect committee roles, particularly the Astronomy Awards Panel, where the senior VP typically chairs the panel in their second year. It was noted that under the new system, one VP may need to chair for two years, and the VPs themselves could determine the most appropriate arrangement.

Council agreed that this aspect requires further consideration, but no immediate decision was necessary.

18. Nominations to Council

Prof. Mark Lester sought from Council approval of paperwork for the 2026 Council elections and discussion on A/G balance

Prof. Mark Lester introduced the annual nominations paper for Council elections. Positions to be filled in 2026 include:

- Vice-Presidents (A and G) – 3-year terms

- A Secretary – 5-year term
- Three A-designated Councillors
- One G-designated Councillor – all for 3-year terms

The paperwork follows standard format from previous years, with minor updates due to changes in the bye-laws (duties of roles no longer explicitly stated).

Council approved the paperwork, with a correction noted: the election will include two A-designated, one G-designated, and two AG-designated Councillors.

Mr Ian Russell introduced a proposal raised by Professor Derek Ward-Thompson on A/G Balance and Representation. It was suggested that the balance of A (Astronomy) and G (Geophysics) designated members on Council should better reflect the actual Fellowship composition, which is believed to be approximately 70% A and 30% G.

It was noted that the current structure (8 A and 4 G Councillors) may not align with this distribution and questioned whether the A/G designation should be retained at all for Councillors.

Professor Derek Ward-Thompson argued that Council should reflect the Fellowship more proportionally and suggested removing A/G quotas for Councillors and allowing open nominations. Professor Derek Ward-Thompson also highlighted inconsistencies in how disciplines like solar system science and astrobiology are classified under A or G.

Professor Steve Miller clarified that the current 7A/5G split is unusual and likely to revert to 8A/4G in future cycles and emphasised the importance of maintaining critical mass from both communities for balanced decision-making.

Mrs Karen Anne Devoil supported reviewing the disciplinary classifications, noting the blurring of boundaries between A and G, especially in fields like planetary science and astrobiology.

Professor Mike Lockwood noted that the bylaws require a minimum of one A and one G member to be elected each year and suggested that the current election cycle (1A, 1G, 2AG) could result in a G-majority, raising questions about representativeness.

It was highlighted that the historical evolution of the A/G distinction and the need to understand its origins are need to be understood before making structural changes.

It was also noted that geophysics was only formally introduced into the bylaws and Charter in the most recent governance review.

Professor Jim Wild and others emphasised the importance of maintaining representation for the solid Earth geophysics community, which may otherwise feel marginalised.

Council acknowledged the complexity and sensitivity of the issue and agreed that the A/G designation and Council composition should be reviewed in the longer term.

Council recognised the need for greater engagement with underrepresented communities (e.g. cosmologists) to encourage nominations.

Council approved the nomination paperwork for the 2026 election round, with the noted correction to the A/G/AG distribution.

Council agreed to defer a formal decision on Derek Ward-Thompson’s proposal.

ACTION: It was proposed that the issue be revisited at a future Council meeting or away day, with the potential for a working group to explore the implications of changing or removing the A/G designation. Mr Ian Russell to take forward.

Professor Mike Lockwood confirmed that any changes to the A/G structure would require amendments to the bye-laws, and these would need to be proposed at a future AGM.

19. NAM 2025 Press Coverage Analysis

Mr Ian Russell raised concerns about the cost and governance structure of NAM, noting that, the Society is contracting venues at significant cost.

The financial arrangements with host universities are currently unclear and not legally binding, with no formal budget or risk-sharing agreements in place. There is a risk that the Society could be liable for deficits, which may deter future host institutions given the financial pressures in higher education.

Professor Steve Miller and other Council members expressed concern about the lack of clarity in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with host institutions and the branding of NAM, which is not clearly associated with the RAS despite the Society's significant financial and organisational involvement.

Mr Ian Russell acknowledged the concerns and committed to:

- Reviewing and strengthening the MoU to clarify financial responsibilities and risk.
- Ensuring Council is fully informed of financial commitments in future NAM planning.
- Exploring long-term improvements to NAM's financial model and governance.

Council members agreed that NAM should be clearly recognised as the RAS's flagship annual meeting and that its financial and governance structures require urgent review.

20 Policy

20.1 Commons Education Committee: inquiry into Threat of Insolvency and International Students in universities

The Commons Education Committee: inquiry into Threat of Insolvency and International Students in universities paper was noted.

20.2 UK Space Agency move into DSIT

The UK Space Agency move into DSIT paper was noted

20.3 Reshuffle of government ministers

The Reshuffle of government ministers paper was approved.

20.4 Submission to Federal Communications Commission

The Submission to Federal Communications Commission paper was noted

20.5 UK Science Centres

Council approved to sign letter supporting the Association of Science and Discovery Centres campaign.

ACTION: Dr Robert Massey to follow up

21. Reports and Minutes from Committee and Working Groups (for information)

21.1 Minutes of the RAS CDAG, 27 March 2025
The minutes of the CDAG meeting held on 27 March 2025 were noted.

21.2 Minutes of the RAS CDAG, 10 July 2025
The minutes of the CDAG meeting held on 10 July 2025 were noted.

22. Any other business
None

Date of next meeting
Friday 12th December at the Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House

There being no other business the meeting closed at 15:45.