MINUTES

Council Meeting (February 2026)

A meeting of Council was held at 11:00 on Friday 13 February 2026 at the Council Room, Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W1J 0BQ.

Present:

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

In attendance:

Ms Liz Baker, Head of Publishing
Ms Elaine Ellis, Head of Membership
Dr Robert Massey, Deputy Executive Director
Mr Ian Russell, Executive Director

1 Welcome and apologies for absence

Professor Lockwood welcomed everyone to the meeting and the Society's new Head of Membership, Elaine Ellis, to her first meeting.

Apologies had been received from Audie Muller.

Professor Lockwood noted that the Society had recently been informed of the sad news of the passing of Mike Cruise (1946-2026) and Allan Chapman (1946-2026). He paid the following tribute:

"Mike was a great servant of UK astronomy, space science and geophysics and of the RAS in particular. He served on Council over many years and in many capacities, including as President and twice as Treasurer. Mike was once my boss at Rutherford lab - and a very fine boss he was being a great leader and a superb mentor. We will all miss his calm wisdom. I will also miss his delightful sense of humour - a kind, subtle humour based on deep insight and knowledge. He had a little 'tell' as poker players would call it - a little acceleration and a smile that would flush across his face and you knew he was about to say something funny, insightful and very clever".

"In the same week we learned of the passing of Allan Chapman, another great servant of this Society. He was without doubt the most erudite speaker I have seen. He would stand in the middle of a stage and speak without a microphone or lectern or PowerPoint and deliver fascinating talks about the lives of famous astronomers with perfect clarity and in perfect prose. He would speak without deviation, hesitation or repetition and although those talks were the best part of an hour long they would fly by in what seemed to be just a minute."

2 Declarations of interest

The Declarations of Interest register was noted. Council members were reminded to inform the Executive Director of any changes as soon as possible and to disclose any undeclared conflicts, or things that could be perceived as a conflict, should anything arise during the meeting.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2025 and matters arising

Mr Russell noted that he had been advised of a number of corrections and clarifications that had been incorporated into the draft Minutes. With these corrections the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2025 were approved.

Actions from the last meeting were in hand or on the agenda, though Mr Russell noted that two actions had been delayed: the review of travel grant assessment timings, which was being handed over to the Head of Membership, and the revision of the Code of Conduct, for which a working group meeting had been scheduled.

4 Report from the Treasurer

The Treasurer noted that the Society's managed investment portfolio continues to perform well and the Society's financial position both in terms of investments and 'cash at bank' remains healthy.

Since his report was circulated the Society had completed a significant repayment of the loan secured against the lease of Burlington House.

The Society's staff left the meeting while Council discussed the recommendations of the Remuneration Committee.

[Redacted]

Society staff rejoined the meeting.

Dr Parmar spoke to the options outlined in his paper on how applications for RAS Fellowships and Sir Norman Lockyer Fellowships should be managed (paper C-2026-02 refers). After discussion, Council agreed with the proposal that each year there should be a call for two 'RAS Fellowships' which would cover both RAS Research Fellowships and Sir Norman Lockyer Fellowships. The Awards Panel will assign successful applicants to the most suitable type of Fellowship taking into consideration financial constraints.

This will allow us to simplify the application process and information provided to candidates and provide flexibility for the panel and with the use of funds.

ACTION: Ms Ellis to ensure that the new process for managing Fellowships is adopted and relevant information on the website and elsewhere is updated.

Professor Wild agreed to produce a short discussion paper for the March meeting of Council that would invite views on the wider issue of how Fellowships operate including how applications are assessed and demand is managed. The intention would be that this could be finalised at the

May meeting in time for the next call. Professor Lester expressed his view that the Society should retain some limit on the number of active Fellowships at any particular institution.

ACTION: Professor Wild to bring forward an item on the management of Fellowships to the March meeting of Council.

5 Response by RAS Council to CDAG Statements and Suggestions Concerning RAS Awards

Professor Griffin spoke to the draft Council response to the Committee on Diversity in Astronomy and Geophysics (CDAG; paper C-2026-03) that he had produced on behalf of the Vice Presidents.

After discussion, Council agreed that the response should go forward to CDAG with two amendments relating to the structure of the response and to the geographic balance of award recipients, the latter to reflect the Society's remit to promote astronomy and geophysics in the UK.

ACTION: Professor Griffin to make the agreed amendments to the response.

ACTION: Professor Lockwood to send the final version of the response to CDAG, via its Chair, and to join the next meeting of CDAG (on 10 March 2026) to discuss the issues raised further.

6 Publishing Update (including recruitment of new Editor-in-Chief for *Monthly Notices*)
Ms Baker introduced her publishing update paper (C-2026-04). Submission increases detailed in the report for 2025 were welcomed and for the first 5 weeks of 2026 Monthly Notices submissions increased by 20%, Geophysical Journal International by 30% and RAS Techniques and Instruments by 100%.

Ms Baker noted that, in common with other scholarly journals, Monthly Notices had seen a rise in submissions that may be linked to 'papermills', where manuscripts are submitted on behalf of researchers for a fee or authorship is offered for sale. Such papers are typically low quality and increasingly AI-generated. The Monthly Notices editorial office, under the direction of the Editor-in-Chief, is taking steps to identify and reject these submissions at an early stage.

ACTION: Ms Baker to update Council at the July meeting on the number of suspicious papers being received.

Ms Baker noted that the *Monthly Notices* Editor-in-Chief interviews are being held on 24 February and the panel is pleased with the candidates who are being interviewed for the role.

ACTION: Ms Baker to report the outcome of the interviews to Council before a public announcement is made.

Ms Baker updated Council on the Read & Publish (R&P) deals Oxford University Press (OUP) has negotiated, which are of particular importance for Monthly Notices. The UK JISC deal has been confirmed for 2026-28 and deals have recently been renewed with Sweden, the Netherlands, South Africa and the Czech Republic. A new deal with Lyrasis, a consortium of 80 US universities, now includes all open access journals in the OUP portfolio, and the RAS titles have been included in the Max Planck deal.

7 Executive Director's update
Mr Russell spoke to his update (paper C-2026-06). The following points were discussed:

a. Chairs of Committees will be asked to work with staff leads to review their committee's Terms of Reference and update as necessary. Exemplars have been produced by Dr Parmar and Mr Russell for the Finance Committee and the Publishing Management Committee for reference. Committees will be asked to agree proposed changes and revised versions will be submitted to Council for approval as and when they are available. Professor Lester requested that changes between versions be made clear if possible.

ACTION: Mr Russell and Ms Ellis to ensure that the Terms of Reference of all of the Society's Committees are reviewed and updated if required by the end of 2026.

b. The Society's Bye-laws state that the membership of each of the Society's Committees should include a member of Council. Staff will check adherence to this and clarify that such members should sit as representatives of Council in order to provide liaison between the Committee and Council rather than in a personal capacity. Consideration needs to be given as to whether such representation is *ex officio* or if a selection process needs to be agreed.

ACTION: Mr Russell and Ms Ellis to investigate Council representation on Committees and make recommendations to Council.

c. Council noted that the amended Charter and Bye-laws were submitted to the Charity Commission by e-mail on 5 December 2025 although at the time of the meeting the Society's entry had not been updated.

d. Professor Ward-Thompson asked what the mechanism would be for Council members to feed into the plans for Burlington House. Mr Russell replied that the architects were being invited to respond to a technical tender document and that how Council is involved in the development and approval of plans was to be determined. Professor Lockwood stated that the architects should be asked to provide a series of proposals for consideration.

ACTION: Mr Muller to propose the mechanism by which Council members feed into the development and approval of plans for the redevelopment of Burlington House.

Professor Ward-Thompson suggested that the plans should be shared with the Fellowship in due course and Professor Eales expressed his view that Council should be given the opportunity to feed into the creative process.

8 National Astronomy Week

The Society's Public Engagement Officer, Adam Boal, joined the meeting for this item.

Dr Massey spoke to his paper on the National Astronomy Week (paper C-2026-05) explaining that it is organised primarily by volunteer amateur astronomers, occurs irregularly, and is timed to be coordinated with an astronomical event.

Mr Boal noted that a key issue would be identifying the audience we wish to reach and this would determine whether the event should happen during term time and away from exams, or during school holidays.

Professor Miller asked about European Astronomy Week and Dr Massey replied that it appears to be inactive now. Dr Peel asked if the event could be aligned with a regular astronomical event like an equinox and asked about previous Society funding and Dr Massey confirmed that the Society had provided grants in the past.

Council was keen to explore if the Society could play a bigger role and agreed that it should be a regular event occurring at the same time every year. Council recognised the considerable time and effort that those associated with the event in the past had put into it, and the importance of working with them. Mrs Devoil expressed her enthusiasm but noted that, to maximise impact, it may require significant resources and Council accepted her point that a key objective should be to expand reach beyond those already interested in astronomy to the wider public.

ACTION: Dr Massey to bring a fuller proposal to the May Council meeting.

9 STFC cuts briefing for Council

Dr Massey spoke to his paper (C-2026-11) regarding the proposed 30% cut to the PPAN budget across the board which comes in addition to 15% cuts to grants already awarded. He noted recent letters from Michele Dougherty (Executive Chair, STFC) and Ian Chapman (Chief Executive, UKRI) and explained the background to the proposed cuts.

Dr Massey outlined various actions taken so far, including engagement with the media and requests for information from STFC, and noted that a virtual meeting of the Astronomy Forum, scheduled for 21 February with STFC representatives expected to attend, had been arranged.

Council had a robust discussion and ideas suggested included:

- A UK Government and Parliament Petition (https://petition.parliament.uk/)
- Ensure RAS engagement with the STFC Astronomy and Solar System Advisory panel town hall meetings on 16 and 20 February, respectively
- That the problem is that fixed (and increasing) costs of facilities are tensioned against research grants; the protections introduced by Paul Drayson in 2008 were removed around 2014 and a good outcome would be restructuring the Research Councils to avoid this in the future.
- That the narrative should be linked to the wider pressure that the university sector is under and the risk to physics departments.

ACTION: Dr Massey to consider Council's suggestions regarding potential responses to the STFC funding crisis.

Professor Eales noted that it was good to see the Society being so active in responding to this crisis and Council thanked Dr Massey and his team for the work that has been put in thus far.

Professor Miller noted that we have a small policy team and suggested that it be expanded given that this crisis and other policy issues are going to be with us for a long time.

ACTION: Mr Russell and Dr Massey to discuss if policy resource can be increased.

10 Support for geophysics (including potential for collaboration of the *This is Geoscience* campaign)

Professor Hammond reported on a meeting that had been held of a working group that had been convened to assess the options for support of geophysics that included Professor Curtis,

Mrs Devoil, the Society's Policy and Diversity Officer and representatives of the British Geophysical Association (Professor Miller and Dr Massey were unable to attend).

The group is tasked with determining how best to support geophysics in the UK and come up with a business case to be brought before Council; they are halfway through that process.

Professor Hammond noted that currently there are only enough undergraduate students to support two or three degree courses across the whole of the UK and that if the number of courses and the amount of solid earth geophysics are to be maintained a two or three-fold increase in student numbers is required. He noted that current volunteer activity lacks coordination in order to maintain momentum and that geophysics expertise could be leveraged with the policy and outreach activity of organisations like IOP, the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Geological Society of London.

ACTION: Professor Hammond to bring a business case back to the March meeting of Council on behalf of the working group.

11 Update on NAM 2026

Mr Russell informed Council that preparations for NAM 2026 appear to be progressing well (paper C-2026-07 refers). RAS staff had visited the venues on the University of Birmingham campus on 21 January 2026 and they are assessed to be very suitable. The Chair of the Local Organising Committee has been in regular contact with the Chair of the NAM 2025 Local Organising Committee so that we can build on the success of last year's event in Durham and ensure we act on lessons learned.

A Memorandum of Understanding had been shared with the Local Organising Committee and we are awaiting signature.

Mr Russell was pleased to confirm that STFC had agreed to support the event with a grant of £25,000.

There was general agreement that NAM should be more strongly identified with the Society.

11.1 Registration fees

Mr Russell noted that the registration fees proposed by Birmingham were the same as those for NAM 2025 in Durham and indeed fees appear not to have been increased for the last six years, during which time prices in the UK have risen significantly. As a result, the proposed fees for most registration categories would not cover the costs of the event.

He noted that more delegates at NAM 2025 registered at the non-member rate than the member rate which means that the Society is missing out on members and on a significant member benefit. Mr Russell suggested increases across the board and very significant increases for non-member fees and that delegates should be able to access the member rate if they paid the appropriate membership fee and committed to apply for membership of the Society.

Professor Eales supported increasing prices but suggested that the Award Dinner should be heavily subsidised to keep the cost to £40 to £50 and this view garnered general support from Council although Professor Ward-Thompson disagreed.

Dr Hannah stated his view that many people assume NAM makes a significant profit and are unaware of the financial support provided by the Society and STFC and that this support should therefore be communicated more widely.

ACTION: Mr Russell to ensure that the financial contribution made to NAM by the Society and STFC is communicated to the membership and to delegates.

It was noted that there is no early bird discount on registration fees for NAM this year and Council agreed that this would be preferable in future.

ACTION: Ms Ellis to ensure that future NAMs have an early bird registration rate.

ACTION: Mr Russell and Ms Ellis to ensure that Council's view on registration fees is shared with the NAM 2026 Local Organising Committee and endeavour to persuade them to align the fees with the view of Council.

11.2 Future hosts of the National Astronomy Meeting

Mr Russell informed Council that the institution the Society had approached to hold NAM 2027 was keen to do so in future but was unable to in 2027. The Society will therefore invite expressions of interest from Heads of Groups in hosting the event in 2027, 2028 or 2029, and will consider holding it at a commercial conference venue as a contingency.

Professor Ward-Thompson referred Council to a list of potential hosts he had prepared previously, and Professor Eales noted that another university had previously expressed an interest.

It was generally agreed that NAM should be held outside of London so that the Society's events were not so London-centric and because of the cost of venues and accommodation.

ACTION: Mr Russell and Ms Ellis to urgently investigate possible hosts for NAM 2027 and future events.

12 Ballot List for 2026 Council Positions

Professor Lester reported the proposed list of candidates for positions on Council arising from May 2026.

The vacancies for Astronomy Secretary, Vice President (Astronomy) and Vice President (Geophysics) will be uncontested, there being one candidate for each of those offices.

There are four vacancies for Councillors: one each for 'A' and 'G' and two that can be either 'A' or 'G'. There are seven candidates for these positions (five 'A' and two 'G').

The ballot list for the vacancies arising on Council in May 2026 was approved.

ACTION: Ms Ellis and Mr Russell to make arrangements for the online ballot with the intention that voting will be open from 16 March to 7 May 2026.

Mrs Devoil noted that more should be done to promote membership of Committees including Council by, for example, making it clear what is expected and sharing details of what they have found rewarding about the experience. This could include profiles of those currently in post on the Society's website. These points were accepted.

ACTION: Ms Ellis to ensure that information on the expectations and experience of committee membership is included on the website as soon as is practicable (noting that this may need to form part of the wider redevelopment on the website).

13 Membership

Mr Russell spoke to paper C-2026-09 on membership noting that since the last report seven Fellows had resigned their membership and there had been 17 reinstatements.

Council was asked to consider 44 new applications for membership and these were approved.

Professor Eales urged the Society to implement a directory of members - a request supported by several other members of Council. Mr Russell replied that the Society's IT systems and website required significant upgrading, which would take time and was currently limiting the introduction of new features such as this. Nonetheless the staff will make best endeavours to respond to this request as soon as possible and at the least will ensure it is included in the specification for upgraded systems.

ACTION: Mr Russell and Ms Ellis to investigate the introduction of a directory of members.

14 ECN representation on the Membership Committee

On behalf of the Chair of the Membership Committee, Dr Mike Hapgood, Mr Russell asked Council to approve the appointment of Dr Vishnu Varma as the Early Career Network representative on the Membership Committee to replace Dr Matthew Temple (paper C-2026-10 refers).

Dr Varma's appointment to the Membership Committee as the Early Career Network representative was approved.

15 Minutes of the Satellite Constellations Working Group held on 19 May 2025

The Minutes of the Satellite Constellations Working Group held on 19 May 2025 were noted.

16 Minutes of the Remuneration Committee meeting held on 21 January 2026

The Minutes of the Remuneration Committee meeting held on 21 January 2026 were noted.

17 Any other business

There being no further business the meeting closed at 15:34.