Minutes of the Council Meeting held at
11.00 – 15.00 on Friday 14 March 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)
Dr Matt Middleton (MM); Vice President, (A)
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)
Prof James Hammond (JH) Secretary (G)
Prof Stephen Eales (SE) (A)
Mrs Patricia Tomkins (PT;) (A)
Dr Alan Cayless (ACA) (A)
Prof Steve Miller (SM) (G)
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)
Prof Silvia Zane (SZ) (A)

APOLOGIES:

None

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Philip Diamond (PD), Executive Director
Dr Robert Massey, (RM) Deputy Executive Director and Policy
Mr Audie Muller (AM), Head of Operations
Amy Austin (AA) , Charity Specialist, Birketts LLP
Nicola Morriss (NM), Charity Specialist, Birketts LLP
Lucy Devine (LD), Well Spring Consulting

2. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of 14 February 2025, were approved by Council

Action: AM to amend section 4.2 to accurately reflect the true make-up of the Remuneration Committee.

Action: AM to include the following text in section 5.2 – Council agreed to add 'Geophysics' to the Charter and to be included with the additional amendments.

Action: AM to amend MG's non-attendance in the AOB

Action: AM to amend 3.3 following MLO comment. To clarify the funds that we allocated towards the space weather exhibit and not the space debris exhibit

2.2 Action Status Report, was received by Council

2.3 NAM

Council discussed the need to start planning for future National Astronomy meetings earlier, PD explained that efforts are already underway. Discussions are ongoing with Hertfordshire and Keele for upcoming meetings, with a view to plan a year in advance. PD suggested the possibility of exploring the Llandudno model and i.e a non-university conference venue, as universities are finding it increasingly difficult to host large events.

PD encouraged Council Members to suggest their own institutions as potential venues and to engage their colleagues in the planning process. Positive feedback was received regarding Hertfordshire, with its new facilities being highlighted as a promising option. PD acknowledge DWT email with a list of potential venues was a helpful resource for future planning.

2.4 Future of Herstmonceux

MLO wrote to the Provost of Queen's requesting information and offering assistance but received a brief reply indicating that the matter was considered internal to Queens. Further details will be provided in RM's report.

2.5 Exhibition on Space Debris

MLO reported that Max Alexander's exhibition was a great success, attracting a large number of attendees. The round table discussion preceding the exhibition was particularly good and yielded useful insights.

2.6 OUP

Council discussed ongoing concerns with OUP, noting that Gemma Cannon is transitioning to a new job within OUP. Council expressed dissatisfaction with the situation, which has been escalated with OUP and will be further escalated to the CEO if necessary. The matter was also mentioned in a recent board meeting, ensuring all parties are aware.

2.7 Redacted

This item has been redacted as it relates to a personal matter.

2.8 Royal Society and Elon Musk

MLO informed Council that he attended a meeting at the Royal Society on Elon Musk and his Fellowship therein.

3. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

3.1 Out of town meetings

SU/JH discussed the planning of out-of-town meetings, confirming that the 2026 meeting will be held in Bristol. Applications for venues have opened, and two applications have already been received, one of which is for Bristol. The meeting is scheduled for April 2026, and details are available on the website.

Council Members were encouraged to share any local knowledge or university contacts that could assist with the planning.

3.2 Voting methods

PD raised voting methods with Council, specifically the single transferable vote (STV) and first-past-the-post systems. PD/AM is exploring the implications of each method with Mi-Voice, considering factors such as the size of the candidate list.

LD and NM reassured the Council that there is flexibility in how elections can be conducted, and these methods do not need to be baked into the bylaws.

Action: Council to receive advice from Mi-Voice and bring a paper back to the main meeting for further discussion.

PD highlighted that STV might make more sense for councillor elections, where there are multiple candidates for several positions, compared to presidential elections with fewer candidates. Council agreed to review the voting methods and bring concrete proposals to future meetings, ensuring the chosen method aligns with the organisation's needs and promotes fair representation.

3.3 Organisation of the Council meetings

There was a general discussion on the organisation of Council Meetings.

SE suggested that, first, when the agenda is drawn up each month, everyone should be asked for any other business (AOB) items worthy of discussion, which could be scheduled for future meetings. Second, that there should be presentations from staff during the three-year cycle on the council, allowing the trustees to meet everyone and understand their roles better. Additionally, Council should delegate tasks to committees and ensure feedback is received by directly engaging with committee chairs. The paperwork Council receives does include minutes from all committees, but having someone present these issues would be beneficial.

MLO suggested that given the time pressures, we might consider having council meetings on different days, possibly during the away day. This would allow more time for discussions and ensure we are not penalizing anyone's ability to participate in Specialist Discussion Meetings (SDMs).

Moving away from the current format to a Thursday meeting could be beneficial, especially with the option of hybrid meetings. The discussion meetings and highlights could remain at the same time. This change would allow those coming from far away to attend both Council meetings and SDMs more easily. This adjustment is within the rules and would be very useful.

3.4 EDI Policy in the US

PD suggested to Council that we simply restate our values in our EDI policy on our website, so we could remind our Members and everyone else what we stand for. Additionally, we can express support for scientists.

3.5 Away Day

MLO suggested an away day to discuss publication and related aspects. Stating this should take place after May, possibly in September, to ensure that the new Executive Director, can participate. CS suggested the Natural History Museum as a venue.

MLO suggested that we should invite the editors-in-chief of our main journals to present their insights and future plans.

Action: Away day to be scheduled for September

4. TREASURER'S BUSINESS

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

AP proposed increasing the subscription rates by the CPI inflation and rounding down to the nearest pound. AP proposed the following subscription levels for 2026:

Type/Year	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**	**2026 Calc**	**Proposed 2026**
			+4% CPI		**+2.5% CPI**
Full Rate	£145.00	£155.00	£161.00	165.23	**£165.00**
Early Career (Years 2 to 5)	£92.50	£104.00	£108.00	110.86	**£110.00**
Early Career (First Year)	£62.00	£69.50	£72.00	74.09	**£74.00**
Students and Concessions	£30.00	£30.00	£31.00	31.98	**£31.00**
Students (First Year)	£5.00	£5.00	£5.00	5.33	**£5.00**

Council approved the proposal and agreed to the proposed subscription rates.

Action for the office: Monthly Direct Debits to be made available to Early Career (First Year) in 2026.

4.2 Budget was discussed by Council.

AP explained how at the last Council meeting it was noted that the initial payment on the Burlington House Lease of £875,000 could not be identified in the 2024 forecast or budget. AP confirmed that this payment was correctly assigned to the RAS balance sheet rather than to the budget. For clarity, the financial position of the RAS will be included in future budget reporting.

AP confirmed that the rent and interest payments for Burlington House in 2024 and interest payments in 2025 budgets are included in the provided accounts under "Support" costs.

AP explained that the initial payment on the lease was not included in the presented figures as it appears in the asset liability section of the accounts. The updated budget shows an additional 100K in our favour for 2024 due to additional funds from Oxford.

Council approved the budget.

4.3 OUP Article Processing Charge, for discussion and for approval

AP updated Council on the meeting with OUP, which included himself, PD, LB to discuss the APC (Article Processing Charges) for our journals. OUP proposed a 5% increase in APCs for Monthly Notices, JGI, and RAS Letters, a 4% increase in online subscription fees, and a 7% increase in print costs for JGI and ANG. After much discussion, it was felt that suggestion a significant decrease would raise alarm bells, so we proposed a 2% increase, which is below inflation. This proposal aims to balance the need for OUP to cover rising costs while not appearing desperate or overly profiteering.

AP explained that we need Council's agreement to propose this 2% increase to OUP.

Council expressed concerns about the impact of APC increases on funding availability, particularly for UK authors. The deadline for agreeing on the APC rates is March 24th, driven by OUP's financial year.

Some Council members felt that RAS should hold off on approving the increase until it is more comfortable with the level of service from OUP.

Action: PD to contact OUP to arrange a meeting with full Council to discuss further.

5. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

5.1 Report by Executive Director

Herschel Award Ceremony

PD reported that the event was well-attended at the German ambassador's residence, including the ambassador, Miguel Berger, and we plan to seek continuation funding

for future events. Professor Dr Isobel Hook, of Lancaster University, received the 2025 Caroline Herschel Medal and gave an excellent talk at the event. PD thanked all involved.

A&G Job Share

PD informed Council that we have been successful in the recruitment for the post of the A&G job share. Indra Bains, has experience with the British Astronomical Association Journal, and we are delighted with this appointment.

5.2 RAS and AG summer school

MM drew Council's attention to an astronomy meeting in Potsdam for early career researchers organised by the German Astronomical Society, MM proposed to subsidise 10-15 postgraduate researchers or postdocs to attend from the UK. This initiative would support stronger ties with our sister society. It was proposed that the level of financial assistance be capped at £500 per person.

Council approved this proposal.

Action: The Awards and Grants Officer to put out a general call for applications and assess its success.

MM stated that recipients of the travel awards will be asked to write a brief report on their experience. This initiative aligns with our broader travel bursary program and aims to support those who might struggle to attend otherwise.

5.3 RAS Council Elections 2025

Council approved the nominations for the RAS Council Elections 2025.

5.4 Governance review

LD noted that we are further ahead at this point than expected and congratulated Council on grappling with technical issues and engaging in a positive and constructive way.

LD summarised the agenda for the governance part of the meeting:

- Answer any outstanding questions Council may have on the proposed draft amended Charter and Byelaws, and to agree the documents or the changes Council wishes to make.
- Go through the tiny changes in legal drafting which have been made since our last discussions.
- Update on feedback from Fellows.
- Next steps.
- Refresher on governance points which have come up over the last year.

These points were taken in turn.

1. **SMALL CHANGES TO AMENDMENTS**

    a. **Term "Councillor".** LD explained that this had been used to refer to a particular member of Council and also as a generic term to refer any member of Council. When drafting it became clear that the best drafting required the term "Councillor" to refer to specific members of Council who have a non-named roles on Council, and the term "Council Members" (or "members of Council") to be the more generalised term to refer to any member of Council whether or not they are an Officer.

This was agreed.

    b. **VP term amended to 3 years.** LD explained that this had been discussed but we had been unable to find a reference in a minute of a particular meeting where this had actually been agreed. Many nodded at the table agreeing that the amendment in the VP term had been the intention.

This was agreed.

    c. **Elections process.** LD explained that the current wording in BL25 "viable, balanced and representative" was vague (and ultimately

meaningless since it can be interpreted in various ways) and that it would be helpful for Council to be able to create a shortlist of nominees where a number of individuals are going for the same role. We have therefore removed the wording "viable, balanced and representative" and inserted a power for Council to create a shortlist. Note that this is a power and not a mandatory requirement.

There was considerable discussion on this point. There seemed to be a conflation of the issue of having a power to create a shortlist and the need to have a specific number of representatives from A and G designations on Council. The feeling was that this requirement would make it difficult to create a shortlist. It was agreed that Council might need the flexibility to create a list based on their own interpretation of A and G since these are self-determined and often not the same as Council would define them.

LD and NM confirmed that there is no need for reasons to be given as to why the particular shortlist has been created, but Council would have a list of criteria they could apply, including numbers of A and G required, skills and experience gaps, policies of Society and whether need a particular person / exclude someone on that basis, particular projects the Society is working on, specific eligibility requirements for that particular period (e.g. early careers, particular groups, women etc). The removal of the "viable, balanced and representative" and the inclusion of a power to create a shortlist keeps the wording broad so that Council is able to ensure that it is fully representative (i.e. it is implicit that they can keep someone off the list if required). NM reiterated this should not go into the Byelaws but this would be a document sitting underneath the Byelaws which Council could amend as necessary and which was not mandatory but acted as a form of checklist.

It became clear at this point that the draft amended Byelaws and Charter, the Table and the cover note had not been circulated to Council in advance of the meeting. It was agreed that the documents would be circulated after the meeting and Council Members could revert with any questions they had. The proposed resolution would still be tabled providing the Officers with the power to make "minor" amendments to the documents without the need to come back to full Council unless a substantive change or topic came up. This was agreed.

NM read the wording set out in the new amended BL 23.4.7. MLO asked to amend the wording from "shall" to "may".

Ongoing discussion was had regarding the new proposed elections process to include the ability for Council to create a shortlist. Some felt this was undemocratic and they were uncomfortable with the proposals.

LD confirmed the power is absolutely standard and reflects the power a Nominations Committee would have (such a committee being a very standard body in many charities and for-profit organisations). Further, it would be odd to rely entirely on the membership in relation to elections and for Council not to have the power to create a shortlist, but to withhold the power from the membership to remove a trustee (which is something the Council had previously decided not to include). If Council decided they did not want to include a power to create a shortlist, LD suggested they should revisit the decision not to allow the membership the power to remove a trustee.

Professor Griffin reiterated that the Society is a member organisation and, therefore, it is right for members to be able to be elected onto Council. However, Council are the charity trustees of the Society and responsible for determining the direction the Society is moving in. It makes sense for them, therefore, to have some power to determine who should be on the board of trustees (from practical point of view). There was a balance to be struck between in principle being totally transparent and open about who was nominated, and ensuring the board could function and was representative and balanced.

LD confirmed that the power to create a shortlist would sit alongside guidelines which the Council could determine.

There were some comments on the voting system but noted that this was different to the point about having the power to create a shortlist.

VOTE – 11 FOR, 6 AGAINST. Vote carried.

NM agreed minor change to wording at BL 23.4.7 to amend "shall" to "may.

d. **Associate Fellows.** Our understanding is that this is not something you actually use and so the term has been removed.

PD confirmed that the term had been used interchangeably with Honorary Fellow and as far as anyone could tell, it held the same status.

Agreed to remove it.

2. **PROCESS**

a. LD explained that we had thought the papers were in Council's board papers and so we had prepared a resolution for Council to approve the legal drafting of the documents.

However, given the documents are not in the papers, Council was asked to approve the documents (unseen) subject to any minor amendments which can be agreed by the Officers. This would mainly be typos, changes to particular words and other minor points. Anything not minor would require Council's consideration at a further Council meeting.

Council members were then asked to review the documents once they are circulated after the meeting and let us know, within the next 5 weeks, if they have any issues or questions or comments. This would be a period of reflection and if any significant issues arose we would call a further, virtual Council meeting. Any minor points and questions could be dealt with by LD and Birketts as set out above, with the Officers agreeing any minor changes required.

This was agreed.

b. LD explained that a further EGM in the autumn is unlikely to be required. Council had engaged so intensively with the governance review that all of the difficult matters had been dealt with and any remaining issues (e.g. Treasurer role, whether Council wishes to have closed sessions) are internal matters which do not require amendments to the Byelaws. Council may still wish to consult the membership and will want to inform them of Council's decisions, but these changes are not matters requiring member approval and, therefore, we hope to deal with all the member decisions in one go at the AGM.

This was welcomed.

3. **FEEDBACK FROM FELLOWS**

a. LD said there had been good engagement and all matters had been dealt with.

b. Most were "thank you" or agree. Some had questions. Some disagreed but ultimately were happy to "agree to disagree".

c. The main issue was how niche groups are represented on Council:

    i. Council could encourage small groups to apply for places on Council.

    ii. If Council knows that certain groups are not represented, they may consider a reserved place on Council for that particular niche group. That can be helpful.

    iii. There is no perfect solution and no Council is ever fully representative of its Fellowship.

There was some discussion on this point. Agreed that Council is there to represent its Fellows and it functions on behalf of the whole of the Society and not just their particular subset.

Council will consider this – no decision taken.

4. **GOVERNANCE REFRESHER**

a. Role of committees. LD said Council should be confident in delegating matters to committees. Their remit should be clear and anything within that remit should be left for them to work on and report back to Council on. Anything outside that remit should be brought back to Council for a decision. So, apart from receiving reports and questioning appropriately, Council should not be reconsidering matters which have been appropriately dealt with within the remit of the committee's delegated authority. If the Council receive and read any reports from committees and appropriately question, Council can consider that they have appropriately satisfied their duties under charity law.

b. Reading materials in advance. LD reiterated the need for Council to read all Council papers in advance of attending the meeting. Any questions should be raised before the meeting so that they can be dealt with in advance if possible. This reserves the meeting for discussion of the main issues rather than side issues which do not merit a full Council discussion.

Finally, LD explained that it is sensible to take a year to see how the updates work in practice and then in 2026 or 2027, any further tweaks which are required to be made can be brought before the membership again. These can be considered further "twiddles". It is highly unusual for a significant governance review such as this not to require such twiddles in a year or two, after the amendments have bedded in.

AOB – It was confirmed that "Geophysics" had been included in the new amended objects of the Charter and Byelaws. (This had not been recorded in the previous meeting's minutes.)

RESOLUTION

- Council agreed **unanimously** that the Officers should have delegated authority to agree any final amendments to the documents for placing before the membership in time for the May AGM.

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

MG mentioned about the ALLEA Declaration, signed by many reputable institutions and societies, including in the UK.

Action: Circulate the ALLEA Declaration to council AM

MG also suggested that the RAS should sign up to it, expressing concern in a civilized manner. MLO reminded Council that we should be mindful of the timing regarding the election and other wider issues, such as the situation in the US. It's not just about EDI; it's about broader concerns. We need to support our American colleagues and address the systematic issues at play.

6. POLICY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

6.1 The RAS on 'X'

RM had discussed with his Communications Officer the current state of our activity on X (formerly Twitter). They believe X is becoming a less desirable platform, and other organisations are also reducing their activity. RM proposed pausing our activity on X while focusing on platforms that engage better with our audience, such as Instagram and Facebook. We recommend not deleting our accounts to prevent misuse of our usernames and suggest considering making the accounts private in the future. This approach allows us to maintain a presence without actively engaging on the platform.

There was a discussion about the ethical concerns of social media platforms like Meta (Facebook and Instagram) and their impact on engagement. Despite these concerns, our engagement on these platforms remains better than on X. It was agreed that we should continue to monitor and review our social media strategy. It was suggested that we avoid making a public statement about pausing activity on X to prevent drawing unnecessary attention. Instead, we can simply direct followers to our other active platforms.

Council voted and agreed on this recommendation.

6.2 Update on ESO and light pollution was received by Council

RM thanked Marietta Valdivia Lefort for her helpful work, including translating materials into Spanish. RM explained that the situation in Chile is ongoing, but there are reasonable grounds for optimism. We will continue to monitor how the ministry proceeds with its decisions.

6.3 Herstmonceux Futures Group: draft minutes of meeting of Thursday 27th February, was received by Council.

RM updated Council regarding the Herstmonceux Futures Group and explained that MLO has already referred to the current status. RM explained that the main issue is the lack of clarity on their detailed plans, despite their statement of principles about prosperity and public engagement. We are involved through the Futures Group, which was initiated by Joe Silk, and we have connections with Queens, Canada. Other observatories have also reached out to us, but they haven't provided the necessary information. We aim to ensure a positive future for the site rather than letting it fall

into disrepair. We have a meeting with Queens, and we hope they can develop a workable plan.

RM explained that there are concerns about whether their ideas will maintain the business model or address historical issues with the sponsor.

6.4 Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee: Under the Microscope, was approved by Council.

RM informed Council that the Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, reestablished last autumn, has an open call for inquiries, including one into astronomy that was dropped in the last session. RM believes it is reasonable to ask them to finish this inquiry.

Council gave approval to proceed. RM stated that suggestions for content are welcome.

Action RM/All

JH suggested updating the inquiry on astronomy and space science to include geophysics, highlighting that geophysics in the UK is under threat.

RM has requested policy ideas from JH on the geophysics side, which will be discussed at the upcoming BGA committee meeting. The deadline for submissions is March 24th .

PD/MLO proposed to form alliances with other organisations like the IOP and GeolSoc to jointly sign a letter, emphasising the industry's need for geophysicists and the skill shortage.

Action: PD to convene a working group with the Geological Society and IOP.

6.5 CDAG - Committee would like to appoint Dr Hayley Brown to replace Jane Smith

Council approved the appointment of Dr Hayley Brown to replace Jane Smith

6.6 European Light Pollution Manifesto - request for signatories was approved by Council

7. OTHER

7.1 Membership Officer's Reports were received by Council. Council approved the candidates for Fellowship

7.2 Minutes of the A&G Highlights Meeting 14 February 2025, were approved by Council

7.3 Ian Robson Award ToR was discussed and approved by Council

PD explained how Ian Robson generously proposed funding a lifetime achievement award, which overlaps with the service awards but is distinct from the gold medal. This award aims to recognise individuals who have been stalwarts in the community. Ian Robson himself received a service award last year, which delayed the introduction of this new award.

Council reviewed and accepted the terms of reference for the award.

The award will replace the service award (A) and will have a prize of £1000.The service award (G) will be funded at £1,000, up from
the current £500, which will be cost-neutral for the RAS due to Ian's funding.

Council discussed the importance of acknowledging contributions from individuals who have significantly impacted the community.

The terms of reference for the award were agreed upon, and it was noted that similar philanthropic contributions could be considered in the future.

7.4 OUP Update on Journal Submissions was received by Council

8. AOB

House of Lords UK Engagement with Space Committee - Call for evidence

MM mentioned that The House of Lords UK Engagement with Space Committee has launched a call for written evidence for its inquiry into UK space policy and the opportunities and challenges facing the sector.

Action: RM will coordinate the submission process, seeking information within two weeks. Contributions should be sent to RM.

Small Grants Scheme

AP informed Council that the February round of small grants has finished, and compared to 2024, we have 15% more small grants and nearly double the number of education grants. This year, we received 39 grants, up from 23 last year.

Future Agenda Items

AS suggested adding an agenda item for the next meeting to discuss the wider university funding model. AS proposed exploring how the Council can support campaigns by organisations like the UCU to challenge the government's approach to university funding. This issue is of interest to the Council, and it was agreed that it is a timely topic to address.

STFC and Funding

MLO/RM discussed the 20% cuts to STFC and explained that there is still uncertainty. The STFC council has not received their settlement, and discussions are ongoing. There is concern about the tension between facilities and discovery science funding. We need to keep an eye on the situation and be prepared to respond if necessary. Writing to MPs with specific points may be more effective than using a form letter.

Additionally, some grant proposals have been funded, but the level of funding is still unclear. Grants that should have started on April 1st have been delayed until July 1st. This indicates ongoing challenges, but there may be some resolution. We need to monitor the situation closely and consider the implications for future funding rounds.

AS suggested providing a template wording for letters to MPs to help articulate concerns effectively.

Action: RM to work with AS on putting together a template to send to MP's

JH/AC raised concerns that UK universities are facing financial difficulties, leading to the closure of degree programs that do not meet certain student thresholds. Geophysics degrees, often independent and not part of larger cohorts, are particularly at risk. These programs typically have fluctuating numbers between 5 and 25 students, rarely hitting the required 30. As a result, many geophysics degrees are being closed, which could drastically change the landscape in a year or two.

AC mentioned that it is important to check on the status of geophysics programs at your universities and support them, as this situation is stressful for staff and conveners.

AC stated that they have published evidence in astronomy and geophysics, which can be used to support our case, and AC asked if we should consider writing to the Scottish Parliament and other relevant bodies. While this may not solve the immediate problem, it is a long-term issue that needs attention.

Council Rose at 15:24