

**MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 JUNE 2004 AT 10.30 A.M. AT THE OBSERVATORY**

Present: His Grace, The Lord Eames, Dr F. Byrne, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Mrs M. Cruickshank, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Professor P. Dufton, Mrs S. Hogg, Dr Á. Downey and Professor D. Williams

Apologies: Professor K. Bell, Professor L. Drury and Professor M. Merrifield

In attendance: Professor M. Bailey, Dr T. Mason, and Mr L. Young

**1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2003**

- 1.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2003 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

**2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- 2.1. **Minute 3.2** The names of the individuals suggested by the Committee as possible replacements for the current vacancy in the panel of DCAL representatives on the Committee were passed to the DCAL. The DCAL has not as yet announced the name of their new representative.
- 2.2. **Minute 7.2** Professor Dufton has agreed to fill one of the current vacancies on the Employment Conditions and Remuneration Committee.
- 2.3. **Minute 5.6** Professor Bailey informed the Committee that the reprint of John McFarland's article on Lindsay is available.

**3. OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

The Committee considered the recommendations made in the report "Options for the Future" prepared by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Dr Downey and Professor Merrifield and after discussion of the Report agreed the following:

- 3.1. Two new sub-committees of the Management Committee will be set up – a Research sub-committee for the Observatory and an Education sub-committee for the Planetarium. These sub-committees will act as sounding-boards, assisting and advising the respective Directors but not supervising or directing them. The sub-committees will also consider the potential for improved synergy between the Observatory and Planetarium. Membership of the sub-committees will be drawn from experts in the field of astronomical research and education within Ireland and the UK. The Directors will each submit up to six potential nominees for their respective sub-committees. The sub-committees will attend one of the Management Committee meetings at least every two years to report on their work, perhaps associated with the biennial Robinson Lecture.
- 3.2. A comprehensive and effective presentation of the benefits accruing to Northern Ireland from the reputation and activities of the Observatory and Planetarium will

**MINUTES**  
**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**23 June 2004**  
**Page 2**

- be prepared. Whilst the material for this presentation will be prepared by the Directors, consideration will be given to the involvement of a media/public relations specialist.
- 3.3. As much of the administrative management as possible will be devolved by the Directors to the Administrator. The post of Administrator will be evaluated as this progresses. In addition, consideration will be given to upgrading the post of Administrative Officer in the Observatory when the present post holder retires in January 2005 in order to provide a more senior administrative resource for the Administrator and the Observatory.
  - 3.4. Further consideration of the relationship between the Observatory and the Queen's University Belfast will be deferred until the new Vice Chancellor is in place.
  - 3.5. A sub-committee of the Committee will be set up to meet with the DCAL to discuss the above matters. The membership of the sub-committee will comprise Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Dr Byrne, and Mrs Cruickshank. The Directors will provide any necessary information but will not attend meetings between the sub-committee and the DCAL.
  - 3.6. Sir Kenneth Bloomfield and Dr Byrne will prepare a programme for the implementation of the decisions of the Committee on the Report.
  - 3.7. The Committee also agreed that the Secretary would send the papers submitted to this meeting and to future meetings of the Management Committee to the Board of Governors in order to ensure that the Governors were kept informed of these matters and other developments at the Observatory and Planetarium.

**4. AUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2004 AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had to leave the meeting early because of other pressing engagements and that Dr Byrne would chair the meeting in his absence. Before the Chairman left the meeting he dealt with two other matters which were to be considered under Any Other Business.

- 4.1. The Secretary informed the Committee that audited accounts would normally have been presented to the Committee at this meeting. However the timetable and arrangements have changed with the transfer of audit responsibilities from the Board of Governors to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and the new statutory requirement to lay the accounts before Parliament. It may be the end of June before the NIAO and KPMG, the auditors appointed by the NIAO to audit the accounts on their behalf, have completed their work. It is anticipated that the NIAO will then ask for the accounts to be signed by the Directors, probably within the next few weeks. The Committee agreed that the Directors be authorised to sign the accounts provided the accounts were not qualified.
- 4.2. The Chairman informed the Committee that Professor Williams' term of office as a member of the Committee would end this month. Professor Williams believed that a turnover of committee membership is important in any organisation and as he has had the privilege of serving on the Committee for quite a long time, it would be best for his membership to expire. The Chairman presented a small gift to Professor Williams in recognition of the valuable contribution he has made to the work of the Committee over the years.

Dr Byrne then chaired the meeting.

## **5. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS**

Professor Bailey referred to the following matters from his Interim Report:

- 5.1. Observing continues at the Observatory with the observation of an occultation. David Asher and Mark Bailey have shown that a significant fraction of so-called scattered disc objects cannot be scattered at all. Bill Napier reports that about one per cent of long-period comets, which enter the planetary system, should be perturbed by the giant planets into orbits like those of Comet Halley.
- 5.2. The following additional funding has been obtained: Euro 6,000 from INTAS; £12,610 from the PPARC to support the Observatory's Visitor's Programme over three years, beginning on 1 April 2004; £3,000 from the PPARC towards the Human Orrery project; £17,000 from the Environment and Heritage Service towards the telescopes and telescope domes projects; and £115,000 from the DCAL for astronomy infrastructure and the Human Orrery project.
- 5.3. A record 24 applications were received for the joint Armagh Observatory and DIAS Lindsay Scholarship. Mr Anthony Moraghan was selected as the first Lindsay Scholar.
- 5.4. Details of the press releases, media mentions and visitors were included in the Interim Report. A small exhibition was organised to coincide with the Transit of Venus on 8 June 2004 and some positive observing was possible on the day despite the cloudy weather. The Observatory website for the transit attracted so much attention that the internet connection was saturated for a 24-hour period.
- 5.5. Following the efforts of the Observatory during 2003, the Armagh City and District Council has issued a new policy on reducing light pollution.
- 5.6. The project to re-install the planet Neptune in the Astropark together with a new plaque has been completed. Work on the restoration of the Calver telescope is going more slowly than expected. Completion of the first phase of the Human Orrery exhibit, laying the foundation and the fabrication and installation of the solar, planetary, comet and asteroid tiles, is expected to be completed in July 2004. Professor Bailey expressed his appreciation of the work of Mr Bertie McClure on these projects.
- 5.7. The disability audit report prepared by Disability Action was received in mid-March 2004. Some modifications may be required to the grounds and possibly the buildings. The report will be assessed by the Director and the Administrator later in the year.
- 5.8. It is likely that the contract with the Northern Ireland Regional Area Network (formerly the Northern Ireland Metropolitan Area Network) will be signed in June 2004. The cost for the provision of 10 Mbps bandwidth will be approximately £25k per annum. This represents very good value being roughly twice our present internet access costs for at least 10 times the bandwidth.
- 5.9. The 2007/2008 RAE census date will be 31 October 2007. It will be important to ensure that the additional research staff needed to compete effectively in the RAE are appointed before that date.
- 5.10. Correspondence with the Royal Society and the Leverhulme Trust has confirmed the Observatory's continued eligibility to apply for research grants from these organisations.
- 5.11. Professor Bailey asked the Committee members to submit their views on the New TSN Review consultation document, issued by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, to him before 15 July 2004 for incorporation in the Observatory's official response.

**MINUTES**  
**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**23 June 2004**  
**Page 4**

- 5.12. In relation to staffing matters, Giorgi Pavlovski passed his PhD oral examination on 26 November 2003, Professor Bill Napier formally left the Observatory on 30 April 2004 and 2 new PhD students and the Lindsay Scholar have been appointed.
- 5.13. An updated copy of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium draft book of Policies and Procedures was circulated to the Board of Governors, the Management Committee, staff and the unions on 4 June 2004. The two principal points at issue raised by the Observatory staff union representatives are the Disciplinary Policy and the Pension Policy Statements and further discussions will be held on these matters. Any points the Committee members have on the document should be sent to Professor Bailey for consideration and possible inclusion as part of a final set of policies. Any significant outstanding issues can then be brought to the Employment Conditions and Remuneration Committee for final discussion before the current book of policies is completed.
- 5.14. The DCAL has issued draft 3 of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum for the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium and this has been circulated to the Board of Governors and the Management Committee for their comments. Professor Bailey's detailed comments were included in his Interim Report. The main difficulty with the document is that it adopts a highly prescriptive approach to the responsibilities of the Board of Governors, the Management Committee and the Directors and makes no allowance for the small size and uniqueness of the organisation and the current management structure, in which many of the responsibilities and duties imposed on the Board and the Management Committee are delegated to the Directors. The DCAL are now pressing for agreement on the draft.
- 5.15. Mr John Hare, the Observatory solicitor, retired at the end of December 2003 and his practice was taken over by Walker McDonald, 2-6 Edward Street, Portadown. The Committee may wish to put the legal business out to tender.
- 5.16. The Freedom of Information Publication Scheme has been approved for the period 29 February 2004 to 29 February 2008. The full Freedom of Information Act comes into force on 1 January 2005.
- 5.17. The Department of Finance and Personnel has classified the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium as a minor body for Central Government Accounts purposes and as such the organisation will not be required to submit consolidated accounts.
- 5.18. No losses or special payments were incurred by the Armagh Observatory during 2003/2004.
- 5.19. The DCAL has informed the Observatory that the organisation would receive flat funding for 2004/2005. Consequently, a number of very severe cuts have had to be made in running costs. The cuts will affect the Observatory's ability to place itself in a strong position for the forthcoming RAE exercise and its ability to meet key performance targets for 2004/2005, and will have an adverse affect on staff morale. Further financial pressures will arise because of significant increases in pension costs to be implemented over the next three years. The Observatory is once again operating on a knife-edge and unless an uplift in funding can be provided by the DCAL it will be difficult to sustain normal operations next year. In addition, increased funding will be needed for new Research Astronomers and the related research infrastructure costs and for the new Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments building.

The Committee, after discussion of Professor Bailey's Report, agreed the following:

- 5.20. The Committee members would submit their views on the New TSN Review consultation document to Professor Bailey.

**MINUTES**  
**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**23 June 2004**  
**Page 5**

- 5.21. The Director and the Administrator should continue their discussions with the DCAL with the aim of reaching an acceptable draft of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum, after which the draft should be submitted to the Board of Governors for approval.
- 5.22. The Observatory's legal business would stay with Walker McDonald unless a need for change arises.
- 5.23. Dr Á. Downey would be appointed to the Employment Conditions and Remuneration Committee.

Dr Mason presented the Planetarium Interim Report:

- 5.24. The DCAL decided to commission the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to survey the Planetarium buildings in order to ascertain what work was needed for the refurbishment project, for which £1million grant assistance was announced in January 2004. The CPD reported that the age and presumed poor state of the electrical system meant that the fire alarm system could be compromised. The CPD report was discussed at a meeting on 27 April 2004 between the DCAL, the CPD and the Director. At the meeting, the Director informed the DCAL of the controls and checks in place to minimise any risk arising from fire. However, the DCAL informed the Director that the risk was unacceptable to the Department and that the main building must be closed to the public with immediate effect. This took place on the following day, 28 April 2004.
- 5.25. A project management team has been set up for the refurbishment project and has started work on costing the various building refurbishment proposals contained in the CPD report. The bulk of the building work is needed to provide suitable disabled access. The funding of £1million already announced will not be sufficient and the Director is reasonably hopeful that a further £1million will be made available. The initial plan is to have the refurbishment work completed by July 2005.
- 5.26. The new Digistar projection system has arrived. New seating from Spain is due to be delivered in July 2004 and will be put into storage until the refurbishment has been completed. These purchases will have to be paid for out of the balance of funding of £218k announced in December 2003 and the existing £1million refurbishment fund.
- 5.27. Details of the various events and developments in the period from the last Management Committee meeting in November 2003 and planned future events were included in the Interim Report for information.

The Chairman, during discussion of the matters reported by Dr Mason, acknowledged the difficulties caused by the closure of the Planetarium main building and congratulated Dr Mason on maintaining staff morale over this period and the very good work being carried out despite these difficulties.

## **6. OPERATIONAL PLANS FOR 2004/2005**

- 6.1. The Observatory and Planetarium Operational Plans for 2004/2005 were submitted to the Committee for information and comment.
- 6.2. Professor Bailey said that the Observatory has been successful in recent years but there is a danger that under-funding could undermine this record of success. We must find a means to improve our level of recurrent funding and put it on a secure basis and to secure additional funding for additional Research Astronomers and for the proposed new Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments building.
- 6.3. The Committee agreed that the sub-committee appointed to discuss the matters arising from the Options for the Future Report with the DCAL would also raise the

**MINUTES**  
**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**23 June 2004**  
**Page 6**

funding difficulties. It will be necessary for the sub-committee to meet with the Directors on this matter before approaching the DCAL.

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no further matters under Any Other Business.

**8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Management Committee will take place on Friday 26 November 2004, commencing at 2.30 p.m. The Robinson Lecture will take place later that evening at 7.30 p.m.

Signed as a true record of the Meeting

His Grace, the Lord Eames  
Chairman of the Management Committee

Dated: 26 November 2004