

MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 28 JUNE 2005 AT 10.30 A.M. AT THE OBSERVATORY

- Present: His Grace, The Lord Eames, Dr F. Byrne, Mrs M. Cruickshank, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Dr Á. Downey, and Professor J. Dyson
- Apologies: Archdeacon R. Hoey, Mrs S. Hogg, Professor P. Dufton, Professor M. Merrifield, Professor A. Hibbert, and Professor L. Drury
- In attendance: Professor M. Bailey, Dr T. Mason, and Mr L. Young

The Chairman welcomed Professor Dyson to his first meeting of the Management Committee as the newly co-opted member of the Board of Governors and nominee of the Board on the Management Committee.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2004

- 1.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2004 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 2.1. Minute 5.13. The dedication and naming ceremony of the Southern African Large Telescope will take place on Thursday 10 November 2005. Professor Bailey will attend the ceremony as the Armagh Observatory representative.
- 2.2. Minute 5.15. The Observatory Grounds and Meteorological Officer has taken over responsibility for opening up and closing the buildings following the retirement of the Planetarium caretaker in March 2005. A professional security firm now acts as the primary key-holder for building security.

3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

Dr Byrne reported on the work of the Options Committee:

- 3.1. The two principal areas under consideration are: the formation of two sub-committees, one primarily for the Observatory and one primarily for the Planetarium, to provide advice to the respective Directors; and the further development of collaboration with the Queen's University Belfast. The Options Committee also considered commissioning a local journalist to prepare promotional material for the two organisations. This work will have to be commissioned in accordance with Government procurement rules and will depend on the availability of funding.
- 3.2. The Options Committee intends to submit its final report and recommendations to the next meeting of the Management Committee in November 2005.

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- 3.3. During the Committee's discussion of Dr Byrne's report it was noted that the outreach roles of the Observatory and Planetarium were different in nature. The Observatory's outreach was more technical, concentrating on the physical sciences, whilst the Planetarium's role was to interest people in the general sciences. As the RAE 2008 rules were not yet defined it would be difficult to see how Queen's University could provide advice to the Observatory on the approach to the RAE submission and also the university might well be looking at different issues in its approach to the RAE. On the question of the size and membership of the Observatory sub-committee, it was agreed that it should be small with perhaps two to three members, with one member possibly drawn from one of the astronomers on the Management Committee.

4. INTERNAL AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

Dr Byrne, Chair of the Internal Audit Committee, presented the Internal Audit Committee Report:

- 4.1. The Internal Audit Committee met on 23 June 2005 to consider the draft audited accounts for 2004/2005, the management letter from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on the draft accounts, and the report of the Internal Auditors for 2004/2005, copies of which were included in the Committee's papers for information and comment
- 4.2. The NIAO confirmed that they intend to issue an unqualified opinion on the accounts. The Internal Auditors reported that the weaknesses from the previous year had been dealt with and the weaknesses identified in the audit for 2004/2005 were of a minor nature. In addition, the Internal Auditors confirmed that the system of internal control was substantially sound, which is an extremely good result for a small organisation.
- 4.3. After a detailed examination of the accounts and the audit recommendations, the Internal Audit Committee agreed that the draft audited accounts and the report of the Internal Auditors be recommended for adoption by the Management Committee at its next meeting. The Internal Audit Committee also agreed that as the Governors of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium have corporate responsibility for the accounts, they should be consulted before final approval of the accounts. In addition, in order to ensure a greater involvement of the Governors in the consideration of the accounts, the Internal Audit Committee recommended that the Management Committee should consider extending the membership of the Internal Audit Committee to include a member of the Board of Governors.
- 4.4. After discussion of Dr Byrne's report and on the proposal of Dr Downey, seconded by Professor Dyson, the Committee adopted the audited accounts for 2004/2005 and the report of the Internal Auditors for 2004/2005. It was also agreed that Mr Young will write to the Governors to give them the opportunity to raise any matters on the accounts, after which the accounts will be signed by the Directors. It was further agreed that Mr Young will ask Archdeacon Hoey, who is a member of both the Board of Governors and the Management Committee, to serve on the Internal Audit Committee.

5. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS

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

- 5.1. Three new minor planet names were announced, for: Patrick Corvan, former Planetarium caretaker; Apostolos Christou, research astronomer at the Observatory; and David Sinden, who was responsible for the recent restoration of the Observatory's historic telescopes.
- 5.2. The Observatory's unique meteorological data were used extensively in a new booklet on climate change produced by Dr Barry McAuley, Environment and Heritage Service, and in Ana Maria García Suárez's thesis, which was highly commended by the examiners.
- 5.3. Observations were made from the Planetarium and Observatory telescopes using a CCD camera for the first time. Modern detector technology has brought back the usefulness of relatively small telescopes such as those at Armagh.
- 5.4. Papers have been produced on the origin of Jupiter-family comets by David Asher, Mark Bailey and Vacheslav Emel'yanenko and on comets and the terrestrial impact hazard by the same authors together with Bill Napier. Gerry Doyle reported on evidence discovered for explosive event activity in the Sun originating in the solar chromosphere.
- 5.5. A new automatic meteor observing system has been constructed and installed on the Observatory roof by Geoff Coxhead and Apostolos Christou.
- 5.6. Simon Jeffery organised a two-day course on interactive display language at the National University of Ireland, Galway. There were 10 research visitors in the period 1 November 2004 to 30 June 2005 and Gerry Doyle has been successful in obtaining a £30k visitor grant over three years from the Royal Society and the British Council.
- 5.7. The assessment criteria for RAE 2008 will be announced later in 2005.
- 5.8. The project to construct a 32 m diameter radio telescope at Birr, Co. Offaly, which has been under consideration for the last four years by representatives from various university groups, institutions and observatories in Ireland, including the Armagh Observatory, is gaining momentum and it is hoped that EU funding will be obtained for the project.
- 5.9. Professor Bailey asked the Committee to agree the membership of the panel to appoint a Research Astronomer to replace John Butler on his retirement on 31 October 2005. After discussion, the Committee agreed that Professor Dyson would represent the Committee on the panel and that Professor Bailey should proceed with the appointment of the other members.
- 5.10. The restoration of the historic Calver telescope has been completed by David Sinden and the telescope was delivered to the Observatory on 31 May 2005. The asteroid (10369) was named in recognition of David Sinden's contributions over many years in providing high-quality astronomical optics.
- 5.11. Substantial efforts were made to ensure that the Observatory is compliant with the requirements of new disability discrimination legislation. The main actions taken

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were: installation of a new disabled toilet in the library; installations of ramps at the rear of the Observatory; modifications to common-room areas and stairs of the main building; and improved pathways and seating in the grounds.

- 5.12. A grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the proposed new Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments building has been completed and will be submitted to the Observatory architect for detailed drawings and costings later in the summer.
- 5.13. The construction of the Human Orrery is virtually completed and two keynote articles on the Human Orrery, prepared by Mark Bailey, David Asher and Apostolos Christou, have been published in leading astronomical publications.
- 5.14. Professor Bailey referred the Committee to his detailed notes on work experience students, the collaboration with local schools and universities and the student summer programme. The first part of 2005 has seen a growing interest in the Observatory by members of the public and an exceptionally large number of visits by small groups have been accommodated by Observatory staff.
- 5.15. Lectures and other public events included the Robinson Schools Lecture and the Robinson Lecture delivered by Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell in November 2004, the launch of the Armstrong School House system in which the four Houses were named after four of the five outer planets, the Ards Arts Centre event attended by Miruna Popescu at the invitation of Dr Mason, and the Friends of the Armagh County Museum garden party which was held in the Observatory grounds and attended by the author and garden expert Patrick Bowe.
- 5.16. Margaret Cherry retired from the Observatory on 31 January 2005 after a period of service lasting more than 47 years and was recently honoured by the receipt of an MBE in the June 2005 Honours list. Alison Neve was appointed to Margaret's post as Accounts and General Administrative Officer and began work at the Observatory with effect from 1 June 2005. Four students, Ignacio Urra Ugarte, Barry O'Connell, Nick Sleep and Ana Maria García Suárez passed their PhD oral examinations. Mark Bailey has been nominated to serve on the Council of the Royal Astronomical Society for a 3-year term to mid-May 2008.
- 5.17. The Observatory's Business Plan for 2005/2006 projects an expected expenditure some £106,900 more than the projected income. It is virtually impossible for the Observatory to make recurrent savings of the required order of magnitude without seriously damaging its long-term position and weakening its RAE 2008 return. The Business Plan for 2005/2006 has been agreed by the DCAL on the understanding that the shortfall would be met from the Observatory's reserves. The DCAL is also considering options for providing the necessary additional funds to secure the Observatory's long-term position.
- 5.18. Members of the Committee expressed their concern over the funding difficulties facing the Observatory and concluded that it may be necessary to seek support for the Observatory from politicians and the public. Professor Bailey will prepare a corporate plan highlighting the strength of the organisation, the value of the Observatory's work and its value for money, while also continuing to work with the DCAL to secure the additional funding.

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- 5.19. The latest version of the book of Policies and Procedures was distributed to staff and senior management on 9 June 2005 and is being regarded as an interim working document until the few outstanding areas of disagreement can be addressed.
- 5.20. The Governors of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium have been designated as a public authority for the purposes of Fair Employment legislation with effect from 1 January 2005.
- 5.21. Professor Bailey has been nominated by the DCAL as the Qualified Person to judge matters referring to possible exemptions of material under the Freedom of Information Act, so far as the Observatory is concerned.
- 5.22. In the report on the Review of Public Administration, published on 22 March 2005, the proposed new structure for Northern Ireland government will comprise two principal layers: a Regional tier, largely comprising central government departments; and a Sub-Regional tier, largely comprising local councils, health boards and the sub-regional delivery units of the regional bodies. Because the Observatory operates not just locally, but regionally and throughout the island of Ireland, and internationally, and because the Observatory is a national facility with a unique heritage, the primary responsibility for its support should rest with the central Regional tier of the Northern Ireland administration. The Committee after discussing this matter agreed with Professor Bailey's approach and asked that the submission be a joint Observatory/Planetarium submission.
- 5.23. Under new Government procurement rules the Observatory and Planetarium have to undertake all procurement either through a central government purchasing agency or another recognised centre of procurement expertise. An agreement has been reached with the Southern Education and Library Board that this body will act as the appropriate centre of expertise for both the Observatory and Planetarium with effect from 1 April 2005.
- 5.24. The final report on the taxation provision in the Observatory's accounts is awaited.
- 5.25. Professor Bailey referred the Committee to his comments on health and safety and confirmed that there were no accidents to report.
- 5.26. The DCAL has informed the Observatory that it will be subject to review during 2005/2006, this being approximately five years since the last review. In addition, for the second time in five years, the BDS is undertaking a detailed review of the job description, pay, grading, performance and pay progression of the post of Director.
- 5.27. The Observatory Annual Report was completed in April 2005 and has been circulated to the Management Committee, the Board of Governors and to others on the circulation list and is also available on the Observatory web-site.

Dr Mason presented the Planetarium Interim Report

- 5.28. The Planetarium's primary objectives for 2005/2006 are to: re-open the theatre once the building refurbishment work is completed; maintain the current level of outreach numbers; maintain and develop links with the European Space Agency (ESA); work with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment to better promote space science in schools and to return astronomical topics to the

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curriculum; formulate a marketing plan for the Planetarium's re-opening; and organise and participate in events to popularise and promote science.

- 5.29. The target date for the completion of the main building refurbishment work is 19 December 2005. A considerable amount of time will be required after this work is completed to make the Planetarium ready for visitors. It is currently anticipated that the Planetarium will be fully open by May 2006.
- 5.30. The outreach work will concentrate on larger projects whilst still working with a number of small rural schools and community groups.
- 5.31. The links with the ESA are maturing as an important part of the Planetarium's future strategy. The ESA has recognised that the Planetarium can provide an established base as an ESA educational node.
- 5.32. The Planetarium is working with the authors of the new key stage 3 science textbooks to ensure that the Planetarium is named as the resource for schools to contact and visit.
- 5.33. The Planetarium has participated in a very successful visit to Nigeria sponsored by UNESCO which will be reported on in detail in due course.
- 5.34. The Planetarium collaborated with the Queen's University Belfast on 17 June 2005 on an educational outreach project attended by 120 children from 5 selected schools. Over July and August 2005 the Planetarium will make presentations at the Ulster Museum Belfast on space flight and missions to other worlds.
- 5.35. The Planetarium through its educational work with children and the wider public of all abilities and backgrounds, clearly aligns closely with DCAL objectives. The DCAL has stressed the importance of meeting these targets when it comes to funding matters.
- 5.36. It is intended to recruit two new staff to restore our presenting team to normal levels in readiness for re-opening. Dr Downey agreed to serve on the selection panel.
- 5.37. Tom Mason has been appointed as President of the British Association of Planetaria.
- 5.38. Congratulations are due to both Anna McNally and Kate Leer who passed the first year of a two-year HND in Finance and Business Studies with merit.
- 5.39. The annual Inter-Board Geography Conference, co-sponsored by the Planetarium and Action Renewables, took place at the Antrim Board Centre on 16 June 2005. The theme for this year's conference was earth observation and remote sensing. Planetarium staff delivered workshops to raise awareness of the many ways that satellite images can be used to enhance learning and the use of information technology skills in Geography lessons and coursework.
- 5.40. Dr Mason summarised the refurbishment work currently being carried out on the main building.

The Chairman thanked the Directors for their very comprehensive reports and also conveyed his congratulations to Dr Mason on the receipt of an MBE in the January 2005 Honours List.

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6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 6.1. Dr Mason reported that Bytel Networks Ltd., a networking and Internet hosting company based in Belfast, will provide the Planetarium with access to the Network as a back up and possible alternative to the connection currently provided by the Observatory. In order to install the necessary equipment Bytel will have to dig a channel running from the main Armagh to Portadown road across part of our land to the Planetarium Annex, where the equipment will be located. Bytel have asked us to sign a wayleave agreement. After discussion of this matter the Committee authorised Dr Mason to sign the agreement.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 7.1. The next meeting of the Management Committee will take place on Friday 25 November 2005 at 10.30 a.m.

Signed as a true record of the Meeting

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His Grace, the Lord Eames
Chairman of the Management Committee

Dated: 25 November 2005