

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY SECOND MEETING OF THE  
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 28 JUNE 2007 AT 10.30 A.M. IN  
THE OBSERVATORY**

- Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T.Harper, (Chair), Dr Á. Downey, Professor P. Dufton and Professor A. Hibbert
- Apologies: Dr F. Byrne, Professor E Meurs, Mrs Sue Hogg, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Professor M. Merrifield and Professor J. Dyson
- In attendance: Professor M. Bailey, Dr T. Mason and Mr L. Young

The Chairman congratulated Professor Bailey on the award of an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List – "for services to Astronomy".

**1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2006**

- 1.1. The minutes of the Management Committee meeting held on 24 November 2006 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

**2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- 2.1. **Minute 4.4.3** Dr Mason confirmed that all new staff are monitored for child protection purposes.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

The Chairman informed the Committee of the following:

- 3.1. Draft 8 of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) Management Statement and Financial Memorandum for the Observatory and Planetarium has been signed by the Directors to signify their agreement to its terms, with the proviso that any remaining issues will be addressed through the regular accountability meetings between the DCAL and the organization.
- 3.2. The DCAL has decided that the number of DCAL appointees on the Management Committee would increase from four to six in June 2008 and there would be no members co-opted by the Board on the Management Committee after June 2008, thus reducing the total membership of the Management Committee from 15 to 13 members, six of which will be appointed by the DCAL. The DCAL has agreed that the appointment process would take full account of the need to recruit individuals with the necessary specialist knowledge for the organization's needs and that the Board of Governors and the Management Committee would be involved in the recruitment process for the new DCAL representatives to ensure these appointments could be made to best suit organizational needs.
- 3.3. In relation to the concerns expressed by the Chairman about the draft Management Statement and Financial Memorandum, the DCAL confirmed that it is standard good governance practice to have quarterly accountability meetings and to return income which has not been forecast to the Department as Government funds are provided on the basis of need. The body generating the surplus may submit a bid to the Department to request that the surplus income be re-allocated to the body. However, there is no guarantee that such a bid would be successful.

#### **4. INTERNAL AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT**

Professor Dufton referred to the following matters in his presentation of the Internal Audit Committee Report:

- 4.1. The Northern Ireland Audit Office has completed the audit of the Observatory and Planetarium draft accounts for the year ended 31 March 2007 and will provide an unqualified audit opinion. The NIAO has confirmed that no report on the accounts was required and there are no comments and no critical matters which had to be drawn to the attention of the Management Committee.
- 4.2. The organization's share of the NILGOSC pension scheme deficit, as computed by the scheme actuary, has been incorporated into the accounts.
- 4.3. The Internal Auditors have given a substantial assurance on their audit of the system of internal control.
- 4.4. The Auditors reported on a number of matters which arose during the course of the audits. During the year a delivery note was signed by a member of Observatory staff confirming that three items were delivered. On further investigation, only two items were discovered and as a result the Observatory incurred a loss of £1,937 for the item not received, a portable computer. New instructions have been issued to staff on goods receiving procedures and a report on the matter was submitted to the DCAL. Although there is no evidence of internal fraud, on advice from the DCAL the police have been informed. Professor Bailey informed the Committee that the police have now concluded that it is unlikely that anyone will be made amenable and that the DCAL has subsequently given the Observatory permission to write off the portable as a loss.

During the Committee's discussion of the report Dr Downey noted that no audit assurance had been given on the risk registers. Professor Bailey said that the risk register process had been reviewed during the cycle of audit work in the last two years and the risk registers are considered at the Internal Audit Committee meetings.

The Committee gave the Directors permission to sign the draft accounts after the Board of Governors have had an opportunity to comment on them.

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

Professor Bailey referred to the following matters in the presentation of the Observatory Interim Report:

- 5.1. The key tasks in the Observatory's 2007/2008 Business Plan are to (i) complete the Observatory's RAE submissions, (ii) complete the planned Skills and Science activities for the period, and (iii) develop a Business case for the new Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments Building.
- 5.2. It is important to maintain the Observatory's Education and Public Outreach programme, which has been greatly assisted by funds from the Skills and Science Package. Targets set by the DCAL for this programme are to (i) deliver a work-experience programme between May 2006 and June 2008, (ii) provide an education and outreach programme catering for a minimum of 1,000 children per annum between May 2006 and June 2008, and (iii) deliver three highly trained PhD graduates into the workforce in each of the next two years.
- 5.3. The Key Performance Indicators for 2007/2008, including new KPIs introduced by the DCAL in 2006, are shown in the report. After discussion of the usefulness of the KPIs as a measure of the Observatory's progress and achievements, the

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- Committee agreed that it would be best to continue with the current set rather than introduce new and possibly flawed measures.
- 5.4. The Observatory hosted three conferences in the period: a seminar on the Universe Awareness project; the international EuroPlaNet Strategic workshop on “Coordinated Meteor Observations in 2007 and Beyond”; and the Cosmogrid Summer Meeting.
  - 5.5. There were 11 senior research visitors from various parts of the world during the period.
  - 5.6. The Research Advisory Committee has not yet met, owing to a combination of illness and pressure of work.
  - 5.7. Research highlights included: observations of the Leonid meteor outburst, predicted by David Asher and colleagues some eight years ago, were made from Armagh on 19 November 2006; Apostolos Christou reports that he has been awarded time on both the Faulkes Telescopes to observe the forthcoming Uranian moon mutual events; Stefano Bagnulo reports that he will shortly present the first polarimetric observations of Eris; Mark Bailey and John McFarland have been involved in the completion of a major review article on the trans-Neptunian region; the launch of two new spacecraft will provide opportunities for Gerry Doyle’s Solar Physics team to scrutinize the Sun as never before; and Gavin Ramsay’s observation programme will provide massive data sets with the aim to discover the subset of rapidly varying objects that correspond to ultra-compact binary white-dwarf systems.
  - 5.8. Nearly all the Observatory’s computers using the “Windows” operating system have now been removed, and replaced with UNIX-based systems. The Northern Ireland Regional Area Network has continued to provide an extremely reliable connection to the wider UK academic computer network and the Internet. One of the UK’s leading evaluation services for online educational services has reviewed the Observatory’s web-site and awarded the site a “Highly Recommended” rating.
  - 5.9. The new Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr Edwin Poots, visited the Observatory and Planetarium on 6 June 2007.
  - 5.10. Simon Jeffery delivered a course of 8 two-hour lectures on Fortran95 at Queen’s University Belfast, as an agreed part of the University’s post-graduate training course.
  - 5.11. Professor Eric Priest FRS delivered the Robinson Schools Lecture (“Our Wonderful Sun”) on 23 November 2006 and a more in-depth treatment of the same topic in the 2006 Robinson Lecture on 24 November 2006. The Observatory held a one-day conference and public lecture on 26 January 2007 (“E.M.Lindsay and Astronomy in Ireland”) to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Observatory’s seventh director, Dr E. M. Lindsay. As part of its contribution to the UK National Science Week, the Observatory held the first Cross-Border Schools Science Conference ever to be held in Ireland on 8 to 9 March 2007 in collaboration with the Centre for Cross-Border Studies.
  - 5.12. Mark Bailey retired as Chair of the Armagh Visitor Education Committee, continuing in accordance with the Committee’s rules as Deputy Chair for 2007/2008. Mark Bailey and other members of the Observatory played a leading role in arrangements for the second Armagh Heritage Day on 23 May 2007.
  - 5.13. In the seven months to 31 May 2007 the Observatory attracted approximately 170 media citations.
  - 5.14. The DCAL has bid for funds to progress the New Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments Building. There is, so far, no information on whether the bid has been successful.
  - 5.15. The Observatory is pleased to report a number of gifts to the Library and Archives: Ms Michelle Thomas, Armagh, donated an historic Yeates & Son 2.75-inch brass refracting telescope; Dr Máire Brück donated seven early photographic plates from the Armagh-Dunsink-Harvard telescope; and the Queen’s University Belfast

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- Coordinator, Professor A. Hibbert, donated several volumes of the Astrophysical Journal which were surplus to the University's requirements.
- 5.16. Aileen McKee successfully completed the very demanding National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health course on Health and Safety.
  - 5.17. Miruna Popescu has assisted the Armagh Public Library with images for their headed paper, flyers, and various promotional material.
  - 5.18. PhD students Bebe Ishak and Natalie Behara passed the oral examination of their theses. Eamon Scullion, the third PhD student recruited in 2006, arrived on 1 January 2007. Colin Folsom and Abedin Abedin, Observatory-funded PhD students, were recruited during summer 2007 and the Observatory's STFC (formerly PPARC) Quota Studentship was filled by Thomas Barclay.
  - 5.19. Two new PDRA staff started in the period; Dr A. Srivastava for a ten-month term with effect from 1 March 2007 and Dr I. Savanov for a one-year term with effect from 1 April 2007.
  - 5.20. The new Research Astronomers started work at the Observatory, Dr Jorick Vink with effect from 1 March 2007, and Drs Stefano Bagnulo and Gavin Ramsay with effect from 1 April 2007.
  - 5.21. New staff members and those who have not yet completed Child Protection Training are scheduled to attend the Observatory child protection course on 24 July 2007.
  - 5.22. There have been no requests to the Observatory for information under the Freedom of Information Act since the last meeting of the Management Committee.
  - 5.23. The Observatory will face the burden of higher employer pension contributions in future years due to the pension deficit. Owing to a further change in Government regulations affecting pensions, the level of the Observatory's component of the total NILGOSC pension deficit has been increased to circa £400k.
  - 5.24. As the current arrangements for the procurement of buildings maintenance are proving to be unwieldy and expensive, a request has been submitted on 25 May 2007 for a delegation to cover this issue.
  - 5.25. The DCAL has asked the Department's Internal Auditors to carry out a review of the Observatory and Planetarium staff promotion process. The Government has not yet given approval for the organization to pay the agreed pay award for 2006/2007, which is now in arrears by eleven months.
  - 5.26. The annual return has been submitted to Research Councils UK confirming, among other matters, that there has been no scientific misconduct and that the Observatory has suitable policies in place to ensure good research conduct.
  - 5.27. Following the introduction of the law against smoking in public places, on 30 April 2007, signs prohibiting smoking have been installed at the main public entrances to the various Observatory buildings.
  - 5.28. The Observatory is organizing a programme of open days and evening tours of the Observatory Grounds and Astropark during summer 2007.
  - 5.29. A STFC Introductory Conference on Solar-Terrestrial Physics, organized by Professor Gerry Doyle and other members of his research group, will take place in St. Patrick's Triam, Armagh, from 9 – 14 September 2007.
  - 5.30. The 9<sup>th</sup> European Dark-Skies Symposium will be held in Armagh from 17 to 20 September 2009 as part of the Observatory's contribution to the 2009 International Year of Astronomy.
  - 5.31. The Observatory's Business Plan 2007/2008 and the Annual Report for Calendar Year 2006 are available on the Observatory's web-site.

During the discussion of the Director's report, it was noted that the current NICS salary structure does not provide sufficient opportunities for promotion or reward for exceptional performance for Observatory staff and accordingly there is a risk that the best calibre staff may not be recruited or retained. The Committee asked the Director and the Secretary to

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research how other organizations dealt with these issues and asked the Director to include the risk in the Observatory Risk Register.

The Committee expressed its concern over the long delay in payment of the 2006 pay award. In discussion of the employment status of Observatory and Planetarium staff, it was the view of the Committee that members of staff are employees of the Governors of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium and have never been defined as civil servants subject to civil service terms and conditions and procedures. Dr Mason was asked to write to the Department in relation to this matter.

Dr Mason referred to the following matters in his Interim Report:

- 5.32. The Planetarium's actual outturn against key performance indicators for 2006/2007 and targets for 2007/2008 are shown in the report. All targets for 2006/2007 have been exceeded apart from the target for the virtual planetarium visitors. The work to create the virtual planetarium, which is funded by the Skills and Science Funding Package, will take place in 2007/2008. Skills and Science funds will also be used to increase outreach and to support the development of the public telescope viewing programme.
- 5.33. Ireland's first all-dome portable system has been purchased and will be launched in autumn 2007.
- 5.34. Three new shows will be presented in summer 2007: The Secret of the Cardboard Rocket; Pole Position; and Astronaut.
- 5.35. As part of the Planetarium's planned move towards greater self-sufficiency in show production, a seven-render computer system has been set up to process images for the Digital Theatre.
- 5.36. The Planetarium's in-house publication, Astronotes, edited by Colin Johnston, is published monthly and contains articles written by Planetarium staff addressing issues of the day as well as information about astronomical phenomena. This is a very useful means of promoting the work of the Planetarium as well as keeping the readership informed about news from space.
- 5.37. Neil Cullen has passed the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health course on Health and Safety.
- 5.38. The Director has been elected as President-elect by the membership of the International Planetarium Society, the premier world organization for Planetarium professionals.
- 5.39. New displays have been installed in the exhibit area: an interactive floor which reacts to movements and produces a number of effects and a scale model of the European Space Agency Ariane rocket and the COS-B Gamma Ray Telescope satellite.
- 5.40. Promotional advertisements have been placed in magazines and visitor journals and a new brochure has been printed. The Mars Planets promotion has produced extra income.
- 5.41. Four members of the European Space Agency visited the Planetarium on 25 June 2007 to discuss further collaboration and support for the Planetarium's education programme.
- 5.42. Astrophotographer David Malin visited the Planetarium in May 2007 and delivered a number of excellent illustrated lectures to specialist and general public audiences.
- 5.43. The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr Edwin Poots, visited the Planetarium on 6 June 2007. This was a very busy day with visitors of all ages attending at the same time as the Minister providing him with a flavour of the range and extent of the work carried out by the Planetarium. As a follow up to this visit, Robert Hill visited the Minister in Belfast to further promote and explain the

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Planetarium's work with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

- 5.44. In the period 1 April to 18 June 2007 there were 9,943 visitors to the Planetarium and 2,905 persons reached by the outreach programme.

The Chairman thanked the Directors for their reports and their achievements in the period.

**6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 6.1. Professor Hibbert presented the draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Queen's University Belfast and the Armagh Observatory in relation to the supervision of PhD students. The draft MOA is largely a statement of current practice and sets out the responsibilities of Queens and the Observatory for the registration, admission, training and supervision of PhD students together with the arrangements for student discipline, the payment of tuition fees, the distribution of publicity and other information, indemnity and liability undertakings, arbitration in the event of a dispute, and the legal jurisdiction applicable to the agreement. The agreement will last initially for a period of five years, commencing on 1 December 2007. Tuition fees charged by the University, which the Observatory pays on behalf of the student, will continue to be on the lower part-time basis.
- 6.2. After discussion, the Committee agreed, on the proposal of Dr Downey, seconded by Professor Hibbert, to recommend the draft document to the Board of Governors and asked that the draft be sent to the Board for comment and for confirmation that the document can be signed or sealed if required.
- 6.3. The Committee agreed that members of the Management Committee should be appointed to the various sub-committee and panels on a rota basis over a period of years.

**7. DATE OF NEXT MEEETING**

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 29 November 2007 starting at 10.30 a.m. in the Observatory Boardroom. The June 2008 meeting was set for Thursday 26 June 2008, starting at 10.30 a.m. in the Planetarium Cassini Room.

Signed as a true record of the Meeting

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His Grace, The Most Reverend A E T Harper OBE BA  
Chairman of the Management Committee

Dated: 29 November 2007