

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY EIGHTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2009 AT 10.30 A.M. IN THE BOARD ROOM, ARMAGH OBSERVATORY

Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T.Harper, (Chair), Dr F. Byrne, Mr E. Donnelly, Professor M. Merrifield, Dr R. Oudmaijer and Professor T. Ray

Apologies: Professor A. Hibbert, Mrs S Hogg, Professor P. Dufton, Mr A. Peoples, Archdeacon R. Hoey, and Mrs P. Wilson

In attendance: Professor M. Bailey, Dr T. Mason, Mr M. Cory (DCAL Observer) and Mr L. Young

The Chairman welcomed Mr Cory to the meeting.

Members of the Committee confirmed that there were no conflicts of interest arising from the matters to be discussed at the meeting.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 JUNE 2009

- 1.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2009 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 2.1. Minute 5.21 The Chairman informed the Committee that the DCAL had approved the Planetarium Business Plan for 2009/2010.
- 2.2. Minute 4.4 (x) Professor Bailey said that the Internet access provided by the Northern Ireland Regional Area Network will be upgraded to 100Mbps in November 2009.

3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

The Chairman referred to the following matters:

- 3.1. Dr Downey has resigned from the Committee and Professor Hibbert, formerly Queen's University Belfast representative on the Board of Governors, has been co-opted on to the Committee by the Board.
- 3.2. A draft reply to the DCAL in respect of the number of Committee meetings per year, the proposed reduction in the number of Committee members and the recruitment documentation for Ministerial appointments to the Board of Governors and the Management Committee was presented to the meeting for discussion. The Committee noted that it was best practice within the public sector for management boards to have at least four meetings per year. The Committee agreed that the annual meeting of the Board of Governors together with the three Management Committee meetings should be sufficient for these purposes and consideration should be given to members of the Committee attending the meeting of the Board of Governors. The Committee agreed that the number of Committee members should be reduced to thirteen but that the remaining members co-opted by the Board of Governors should be allowed to complete their current terms of office. The Committee noted a number of minor typographical errors in the DCAL recruitment documentation and also that the

MINUTES
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
6 November 2009
Page 2

appointment of the Directors was a matter for the Board of Governors and not the Management Committee.

- 3.3. During further discussion of the recruitment documentation Professor Bailey said that in practice it was not always possible to follow NICS recruitment procedures to the letter, particularly in relation to the NICS requirement to appoint staff at the bottom of the salary scale. The Committee agreed that a degree of flexibility was needed to appoint at a higher spine point on the scale if necessary to secure the best candidate and that the selection process should be concluded in a timely manner. Mr Cory advised that if difficulties were likely to arise the organization should consult with the Department as early as possible in the recruitment process. The Chairman asked that the organization's recruitment procedures be amended to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Governors, the Management Committee and the Directors for senior and other posts.
- 3.4. At the last meeting of the Committee a sub-committee was formed to assist the Directors in the preparation of the Observatory and Planetarium strategic plans and a first meeting of the sub-committee was held in September 2009 at which the strategic planning process was discussed. In taking this forward the sub-committee should include in its brief a wide view of the future taking account of such matters as succession planning, the organizational structure including the future administrative structure and where the two institutions fit best within Government departments.

4. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS

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

- 4.1. Full details of the research work over the period are included in the Report for information and comment. Research staff have been very successful in obtaining further grants and observing time, details of which are in the Report.
- 4.2. Mr Tim Ryan, the organizer of the 2009 National Ploughing Championship, visited the Observatory on 20 July 2009. This led to the National Ploughing Association providing space for the Northern Ireland component of the IYA 2009-Ireland astronomy poster exhibition.
- 4.3. Mr Jim Nicholson MEP also visited the Observatory on 26 October 2009 to discuss areas in which he could be of assistance to the Observatory in Europe.
- 4.4. Full details of the Observatory's key performance indicators are shown in the report. The Observatory is broadly in line with targets although publications are slightly down at this stage of the year.
- 4.5. The DCAL has provided an additional £105k recurrent funding which is very helpful for this year's plans and noted that a similar amount will be required in 2010/2011. In addition the Observatory has been allocated a further £50k for the Variable Star Telescope Project and £10k to upgrade the air conditioning in the Observatory Bungalow computer room.
- 4.6. There has been a considerable increase in activities under the Observatory's Science in the Community and IYA 2009 programmes:
 - (i) the Observatory Librarian has continued to supervise an adult with disabilities providing valuable work experience and life-time opportunities for the individual concerned.
 - (ii) the Observatory co-organized an international conference on light pollution in Dublin and Armagh during the period 16-19 September 2009. Professor Bailey thanked Mr Cory for his contribution to the conference;

MINUTES
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
6 November 2009
Page 3

- (iii) the Observatory hosted a joint public lecture by Martin Hendry (University of Glasgow) with the Armagh Natural History and Philosophical Society entitled “Why are we Here?” ;
 - (iv) a clone of the Armagh Observatory Human Orrery has been constructed at the King’s School, Peterborough with advice from Professor Bailey and the assistance of Mr Ryan McClure; and
 - (v) a new “Guide to Armagh Observatory Grounds and Astropark” information panel has been designed and procured by Aileen McKee. Aileen is to be congratulated on the quality of this interpretation panel.
- 4.7. An opportunity has arisen to refurbish and install in the Observatory grounds a sculpture “Turning Point 1992” by the artist Brian Connolly previously installed in St. Anne’s Square, Belfast. After discussion the Committee agreed that Professor Bailey should pursue this proposal and seek the necessary funding.
 - 4.8. The refurbishment of the Observatory House has been completed and books and journals stored in the Library Stack Room have been relocated to the Planetarium Administration Building to provide office space for new students.
 - 4.9. A grounds survey for the New Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments Building has been completed. The DCAL has recently announced further in-year recurrent funding of £15k which will allow the Observatory to progress this project.
 - 4.10. The Public Record Office for Northern Ireland has provided a report with a number of actions to be considered by the Observatory to improve the conditions under which the Observatory’s most important papers and historic archives are housed. A bid for funding to progress these actions has been submitted to DCAL. These requirements highlight the need to progress the New Library building.
 - 4.11. A small financial donation was received from the family of Dr Mary Lindsay and two historic “Robinson medals” have been purchased.
 - 4.12. Details of students who have completed their PhDs and newly appointed students are in the Report. The Armagh Observatory and the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS) have together appointed the second Lindsay Scholar who will work at the DIAS under the supervision of astronomers at DIAS, Armagh Observatory and Queen’s University Belfast. This arrangement is an example of the continued work of the Observatory in cross-border collaboration.
 - 4.13. The Director has approved a request from Gerry Doyle for another Visiting Astronomer, Dr Honjuan Wang, to collaborate with the solar physics group at the Observatory for two years.
 - 4.14. The Observatory Accounts Officer, Alison Neve, has begun a part-time accountancy training course at Armagh College leading to a higher level accountancy qualification recognized by Accounting Technicians Ireland.
 - 4.15. The Director has undertaken refresher training in a number of areas concerning Governance and Accountability. In addition the majority of Members of the Management Committee have now attended a recent CIPFA “On Board” workshop and the majority of members of the Board of Governors are due to attend this training in Armagh on 19 November 2009. Refresher training for Observatory staff and students on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults will take place on 26 November 2009.
 - 4.16. There have been no requests to the Observatory for information under the Freedom of Information Act.
 - 4.17. The Health and Safety Officer reports that there have been no reportable accidents or near misses since the last meeting of the Committee.
 - 4.18. The new accounting system was successfully introduced and particular thanks should go to Alison Neve and Eamon Rafferty (Armagh Planetarium) for their efforts to make this project a success.

MINUTES
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
6 November 2009
Page 4

- 4.19. The Observatory and Planetarium have agreed to join the Northern Bank pool to process DCAL-funded transactions on the understanding that existing banking arrangements will be retained for non-DCAL transactions but these arrangements have been put on hold until a Northern Bank/DFP review of the process of adding organizations to the pool has been completed.
- 4.20. The Northern Ireland Government appears to have agreed to revise the pay scales of certain lower paid NICS staff but no final agreement has been reached as yet. The Observatory has three members of staff in the affected grades.
- 4.21. Details of a number of future events are in the Report. The tenth Robinson Lecture, in 2010, "Astrobiology: Implications of Life Beyond Earth" will be given on the evening of Thursday 18 November 2009 by Professor Chris Impey, University of Arizona, USA.
- 4.22. A preliminary strategic planning meeting was held on 25 September 2009. Work on the development of the strategic plan is continuing.
- 4.23. During discussion of Professor Bailey's report Mr Cory said that significant cuts will be required in Departmental budgets over the next three to four years but the Department wishes to protect its smaller arm's-length-bodies like the Observatory and Planetarium from the effects of these cuts. The Chairman said that the report demonstrated very clearly the international reach of the institution.
- 4.24. Professor Ray agreed to join the strategic planning sub-committee to replace Dr Downey.

The Chairman left the meeting at 12.15 pm to attend another appointment and Dr Byrne chaired the meeting in his place.

Dr Mason referred to the following matters in his Report:

- 4.24. General administrative matters affecting the Planetarium are referred to in the Observatory Report.
- 4.25. The Planetarium has launched its new website which contains much more educational material and more interactive facilities for users.
- 4.26. The translation of Planetarium shows into Irish, funded by the Ultach Trust and the National Lottery Fund and with assistance from the BBC, is progressing well. The launch of the new shows will take place on 26 November 2009.
- 4.27. Colin Johnston is delivering an adult education course at Queen's University Belfast.
- 4.28. The Planetarium held an experimental day's events for persons with varying degrees of hearing loss. Feedback has been excellent and the Planetarium plans to develop this further.
- 4.29. New shows have been produced for Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils and another show has been produced for pre-primary children.
- 4.30. Three Education Support Officers resigned over recent months – one is joining W5, one is taking a year out to travel the world and one is pursuing further study at the University of Ulster. The recruitment exercise to fill these posts will take place in November/December 2009.
- 4.31. Mr Irvine Richardson, a former inspector with the Education and Training Inspectorate, is working with the Planetarium as a volunteer to produce new staff training, induction and performance appraisal arrangements.
- 4.32. Following audit recommendations two sets of back-up hard drives are retained in separate sites and two new servers have been installed, one for the new accounts system and the other to replace a number of obsolete network machines.
- 4.33. A small fragment of the meteorite which fell in Sprucefield in 1969 has been located and will be put on public display with a copy of the Bovedy meteorite.
- 4.34. The Planetarium's Key Performance Indicators which are supplied to DCAL Accountability meetings are shown in the Report. The general trend in visitor

MINUTES
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
6 November 2009
Page 5

numbers is up but the temporary shortage of staff resources caused by staff resignations may reverse this trend in this financial year.

- 4.35. The Planetarium Christmas show will be promoted in Church magazines this year.
- 4.36. The Risk Register will be produced in a new format required by DCAL after training on the new format takes place.
- 4.37. A considerable amount of the Director's time is being spent on corporate governance compliance matters leaving less time for the creative aspects of the Director's role.
- 4.38. Further discussions with DCAL on the proposed changes to the Director's performance appraisal arrangements will take place after the next DCAL Accountability meeting.
- 4.39. The organization needs to consider succession planning and organizational structural arrangements in the light of the impending retirement of the joint Observatory and Planetarium Administrator.
- 4.40. Details of the marketing activities carried out over the period are noted in the Report. The Planetarium will continue to assess and improve these activities wherever possible.
- 4.41. Trials with Apple computers have reduced the number of virus attacks and consequently the number of technical problems the Director has had to deal with.
- 4.42. The Planetarium's collaborative arrangement with Blackrock Castle Observatory continues to be successful with increasing numbers reached through the inflatable dome outreach service. Outreach activities in collaboration with the Galway Institute of Technology will not take place this year due to cuts in their funding.
- 4.43. In October 2009 the Director participated in a two-day public project in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park entitled "Dark Skies" and organised by Bradford-based Space Connections. A report on the event will be published in the International Planetarium Society magazine.
- 4.44. Health and Safety matters are noted in the Report. There were no serious issues to report.
- 4.45. The Education and Inspectorate Report (October 2009) on the evaluation of the Planetarium's education provision and a preliminary 5-year plan for the Planetarium are appended to the Report for information and comment.
- 4.46. In response to questions on the Report Dr Mason agreed to develop collaborative links in Ireland to promote Irish language shows and to continue his efforts to obtain funding to replace the projection equipment which is five years old. At present there are spare parts for the equipment but there is a shortage of mother boards.

5. REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Dr Byrne referred to the following matters:

- 5.1. New members are required for the Audit and Risk Management Committee due to recent resignations. After discussion the Committee agreed that the Audit and Risk Management Committee should continue to function with its current membership of two until new DCAL representatives are appointed to the Management Committee after which this matter will be reconsidered.
- 5.2. The Audit and Risk Management Committee last met on 20 October 2009. Of particular concern to members was the increasing administrative burden placed on the Directors due to corporate governance requirements. During discussion of this matter Mr Cory said that all DCAL arm's-length-bodies faced the same level of scrutiny, which has arisen as a result of the Department having to tighten its corporate governance arrangements and by the requirements of the devolved Northern Ireland Government. When all the necessary corporate governance arrangements are in place

**MINUTES
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
6 November 2009
Page 6**

the Department will consider ways in which it can step back and reduce the levels of scrutiny.

- 5.3. The Selection Panel for the Internal Audit Service also met on 20 October 2009. Three firms submitted tenders and after evaluation of the tenders ASM Horwath was appointed as Internal Auditor for a period of three years.
- 5.4. The revised draft Terms of Reference for the Audit and Risk Management Committee were presented to the Committee for consideration. After further discussion the Committee approved the draft Terms of Reference.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 6.1. Professor Bailey referred to the wording of paragraph 4.4 of the Observatory's Corporate Governance Internal Audit Report for 2008/2009 concerning procurement. After discussion, the Committee accepted that the wording did not accurately reflect the full circumstances of the situation and that this should be raised with the 2008/2009 Internal Auditors.

7. DATE OF MEETINGS IN 2010

The November meeting will be on 18 November 2010 starting at 2.30 pm followed in the evening by the Robinson Lecture. Other meeting dates will be arranged by Mr Young.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm.

Signed as a true record of the Meeting

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Dr F N Byrne
Deputy Chairman of the Management Committee

Dated: 12 February 2010