

MINUTES OF THE EIGHTY SECOND MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2011 AT 10.30 A.M. IN THE ARMAGH PLANETARIUM CASSINI ROOM

Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T. Harper, (Chairman), Dr F. Byrne, Mr E. Donnelly, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Professor R. Oudmajer, Professor T. Ray, Mr B. Hannam and Dr M. McKay

Apologies: Professor P. Dufton, Mr A. Peoples, Mr S. Shields, Mrs P. Wilson, Professor A. Hibbert and Professor M. Merrifield,

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

The Chairman welcomed Mr Brett Hannam and Dr Michael McKay, the newly appointed DCAL nominees on the Committee.

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 18 NOVEMBER 2010

- 1.1. After correction of a minor typographical error, the draft minutes of the meeting were approved as a correct record of the meeting by those members of Committee present at the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 2.1. Minute 4.6 – The letter of congratulations had been sent to Alison Neve.
- 2.2. Minute 4.13 – The heads of agreement between the Observatory and the DIAS on access to the ICHEC Stokes computer system remains to be completed.
- 2.3. Minute 4.29 – The Committee agreed that both of the Directors' Reports should be prefaced by a short summary of important matters of policy and strategy requiring the Committee's particular attention.
- 2.4. Minute 4.30 – The rota of presentations of the Observatory's research work has been arranged and Dr Jorick Vink will deliver the first presentation later in the meeting.

3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

- 3.1. Dr Mason drew the Committee's attention to a personnel matter which was noted by the Committee.

4. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS

Professor Bailey referred to the following matters in his Report:

- 4.1. Details of the Observatory's Key Performance Indicators for 2010/2011 and trends in various performance indicators for past years are detailed in the Report. All the trends are positive with Key Performance Indicators either meeting or approaching the targets for the year and there is nothing of concern to report for this year.
- 4.2. DCAL funding of approximately £1.2m for the year has increased over the previous year and this has allowed the Observatory to do a lot of extra work. The outlook is

- less positive for 2011/2012 because of the cut-back in funding arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 4.3. During discussion of the staffing levels and the future cuts Professor Bailey said that the current complement of six Research Astronomers was the minimum critical mass of core senior research staff necessary to sustain the Observatory's research work. The DCAL has recognised that small bodies such as the Observatory could not absorb large cuts and has made every effort to protect such organizations from the worst effects of funding cuts. The Observatory still has to make cuts but these must be in areas which are not irreversible to avoid a permanent shrinkage in core activities. It is also important to ensure that there continues to be a broad rather than a narrow range of research specialities at the Observatory. The Chairman said that in the DCAL's portfolio of ALBs the Observatory was the last vestige of research and the importance of maintaining the Observatory's critical mass of core research staff needs to be referenced in any meetings and conversations with the DCAL. Dr McKay said that there should be a plan outlining the core activities that need to be retained and the areas where cost savings could be achieved. Professor Bailey replied that a number of areas of savings had already been identified, including a temporary reduction in the number of core-funded studentships, and reducing the archive preservation work, which had been at a very high level in recent periods.
 - 4.4. In response to a question from Professor Oudmaijer Professor Bailey said that the current STFC PDRA grants yielded a contribution to indirect overheads of approximately £90k a year.
 - 4.5. In response to a request from Professor Ray Professor Bailey agreed to graph citation rates in the records of journals and refereed publications.
 - 4.6. The Armagh Robotic Telescope achieved "first light" on 1 February 2011. The Committee agreed that consideration should be given to running a competition for the naming of the telescope. Mr Hannam agreed to provide Professor Bailey with contact details for commercial organizations who may be interested.
 - 4.7. Professor Bailey referred the Committee to the table of funding trends which showed the total cut in DCAL income for 2011/2012. The biggest risks facing the Observatory over this period are the effects of inflation, the uncertain impact of pension costs on the non-cash budget and the likelihood that the Observatory's present record levels of external grant income will fall as a result of cuts in the budgets of various grant awarding bodies. Mr Young said that the DCAL is considering removing the pension costs from the recurrent budget line because of their volatility and treating such costs as annual managed expenditure, which would be funded from a different source.
 - 4.8. Interviews for the post of Joint Administrator have been held and the post is under offer.
 - 4.9. Staff have continued to be successful in obtaining observing time on international facilities and there has been a reasonable number of publications in the reporting period.
 - 4.10. Staff continued to deliver a significant number of both professional and public talks, for example the Director's lecture for the Darwin Lecture Series delivered at Cambridge University has been published on line and continues to attract interest with 5,400 views to date.
 - 4.11. The new Armagh City artwork "Celestial Sphere" has been installed at the top of English Street, Armagh. The Armagh City and District Council is progressing the restoration of "Turning Point", a piece by the same artist, and this is to be installed in the Mall later in 2011. This is part of the Council's goal to improve the cityscape of Armagh by creating a number of sculptures in the city and these particular sculptures acknowledge the importance of astronomy to the city's heritage.
 - 4.12. The STFC has awarded the Observatory a further STFC Doctoral Training Grant to start in the academic year 2011/2012.

- 4.13. The Armagh Public Library and the Observatory have obtained grant income of £19.9k from the Pilgrim Trust and the Northern Ireland Museums Council to support the Collection Management and Public Access project for a second year.
- 4.14. The Observatory will receive approximately €200k to progress the European Universe Awareness (EUNAWA) project over the next three years. This will support EUNAWA activities to encourage an interest in science and technology amongst young people.
- 4.15. The Observatory's Loans Committee has approved the loan of the 6-inch reflecting telescope by Thomas Short to the National Maritime Museum as part of the "Royal River" exhibition 27 April 2012 to 9 September 2012. During discussion of the historic clocks at the Observatory Dr Byrne said that he recollected that a George III clock had been loaned to the Queen's University Belfast some years previously when Dr Lindsay was Observatory Director. Professor Bailey will ascertain the status of this loan.
- 4.16. In response to a question from Professor Oudmaijer Professor Bailey said that the Observatory had two European grants, one EuroPlanet award and the EUNAWA collaboration. This possible source of research funding will continue to be pursued.
- 4.17. Professor Bailey referred to a number of donations received by the Observatory and in particular thanked PhD student Tobias Hinse for his kind donation of a Meade telescope for public outreach and student observing sessions.
- 4.18. The programme of Science in the Community activities in the period were detailed in the Report. Future events included: two public lectures on St. Patrick's Day followed by tours of the Human Orrery and Astropark; the third cross-border Schools Science Conference organized by the Observatory and the Centre for Cross Border Studies together with the Royal School Armagh and the Armagh Planetarium and taking place on 5 and 6 May 2011.
- 4.19. The next biannual meeting of the SALT Board will take place in Armagh on 24 to 27 May 2011, and the Tarantula "Flames" Meeting will be held in Armagh on 30 May to 1 June 2011. Full details of these events are in the Report.
- 4.20. Under Governance and Accountability matters Professor Bailey referred to the following matters:
 - The Director tested a web filtering tool for a period but a number of perfectly legitimate requests for access to sites for scientific and work-related reasons were blocked. In the Director's opinion this is not a suitable approach to the problem of preventing unacceptable use of the Internet. This matter will be discussed at the next Audit and Risk Management meeting on 25 February 2011. Mr Hannam commented that the solution is to either have a good process for freeing up websites which have been incorrectly blocked or to track and monitor website usage.
 - The Fraud Insurance has been cancelled following advice from the DCAL.
 - The Observatory's Risk Register is appended to the Report for the Committee's information.
 - The DCAL has authorised the payment of the new Equal Pay scales for those staff up to Administrative Officer, Executive Officer II and analogous grades backdated to 1 February 2009. The question of whether the Equal Pay compensatory sum backdated to 2003 and paid to NICS staff applies to Observatory and Planetarium staff remains to be resolved. In addition the DCAL has authorised the payment of the outstanding pay award for 2009/2010 to all other staff backdated to 1 August 2009.
 - Under Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) the Observatory has been classified as a single "Minor" body and the Planetarium classified as a "Small Body" because the Planetarium exceeded the financial threshold for Minor Body status. As a result the Planetarium is required to submit financial data to the WGA process. A recent exchange of correspondence with the DCAL suggests that this classification is being reconsidered.

- During 2010 the Observatory received one complaint, which was dealt with by the Director, and approximately 70 unsolicited positive comments.
- The timetable for the preparation of the 2010/2011 accounts has been agreed with the auditors.

Dr Mason referred to the following matters in his Report:

- 4.20. Professor Bailey had dealt with the Corporate Governance matters which also related to the Planetarium.
- 4.21. The adverse weather conditions in December 2010 prevented the Planetarium opening for a period and as a result admission numbers and takings were significantly down on the same period last year. From research it is clear that visitor attractions in rural areas of Northern Ireland were particularly badly hit over this period.
- 4.22. The expansion of the Planetarium's website has continued with the addition of new Twitter and Facebook accounts. The number of hits on the website continues to increase.
- 4.23. Astronotes are now distributed electronically rather than by hard copy.
- 4.24. In conjunction with the Blackrock Castle Observatory in Cork a second set of questions was added to the existing app at the start of 2011. The programming for this project was financed by the Ireland European Space Agency Educational Research Organization.
- 4.25. In February 2011 the Planetarium will participate in a week-long pilot event organized by C2K to promote video conferencing. The Planetarium's contribution will be to introduce the Solar System to a KS2 class.
- 4.26. Planetarium staff participated in the January 2011 BBC2 broadcast of a series of astronomy programmes hosted by Dara O'Briain and Professor Brian Cox. Feedback has been very positive.
- 4.27. Colin Johnston has continued to deliver a series of lifelong learning courses in conjunction with Queen's University Belfast. The level of interest in the course has been very high.
- 4.28. The DCAL has provided funding of £9.5k for a collaborative project "Cosmic Cuilcagh" to be held in March 2011 in conjunction with staff at the Marble Arch Caves.
- 4.29. The project to compile a new interactive workshop "Seeing the Invisible" is complete and will be tested with schools as soon as possible.
- 4.30. The Stranmillis University College, Belfast student has successfully completed his placement at the Planetarium. The Planetarium will also offer this facility to St. Mary's University College, Belfast.
- 4.31. The outreach programme for schools and community groups remains very popular and has already exceeded targets set for the year.
- 4.32. Robert Hill from the Northern Ireland Space Office continues to seek areas for space sector development and events/workshops and to establish relationships with the corporate sector. The Committee encouraged the Director to actively seek links with influential business people and to promote the Planetarium as a corporate venue. One suggestion was to promote the Planetarium as a venue for weddings.
- 4.33. Dr Mason said that the delivery of the equipment for the upgrade of the Digistar projection equipment was on schedule and due to arrive early March 2011 with installation to commence on 14 March 2011.
- 4.34. The Planetarium's Risk Register was appended to the Report for information.
- 4.35. During the recruitment exercise for the Joint Administrator post it was noted that the title may need to be changed should the post be re-advertised.
- 4.36. As part of its outreach work the Planetarium continues to play a key role in the European Space Agency Educational Research Organization STEM programme to bring astronomical topics to young people throughout Ireland.

4.37. There were no Health and Safety issues to report in the period.

In response to questions on the Planetarium Report Dr Mason said that the Planetarium is actively seeking feedback on the quality and content of its work and the marketing plan for the educational activities is targeting KS3 pupils at present. It is important to demonstrate to the DCAL that the Planetarium's educational activities are of a high quality and in demand. It should be stressed that museums and such bodies as the Planetarium are not merely money making organizations but centres for inspiration. In response to a question from Professor Ray Dr Mason said that the drop in shop sales was due to lower visitor numbers.

Archdeacon Hoey noted that visitor satisfaction ratings for the Planetarium's reception bookings and the café were lower than they should be. Dr Mason referred the Archdeacon to the personnel issue reported earlier in the meeting in relation to the reception bookings and also said that there were difficulties with the current arrangements for catering in the café, which will be addressed shortly.

5. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH

Dr Jorick Vink delivered a short presentation of the work of his research group entitled "The Most Massive Stars in the Universe". After questions the Chairman thanked Dr Vink for his presentation, which he had found very valuable. Such occasions provide an opportunity to demonstrate to DCAL the excellence of the Observatory's research staff and their work.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1. Professor Bailey referred to the following matters:

- A member of the Committee had expressed concern with the material used to point the front steps of the main Observatory building. It was suggested that a material more sympathetic with the fabric of the building should have been used. In addition, another CPD contractor had broken two of the historic panes of glass in the Observatory's main building during routine cleaning of the windows. The Observatory has little control over the contractors used by CPD but there must be experts within CPD who can procure the right contractors to carry out work on a listed building.
- In 2010 there was a record 365 returns to be made to the DCAL and other Government Departments. This is a proxy for the rapid growth in bureaucracy over the past few years. It is creating a serious work overload for the Director and administrative support staff and is preventing the Director from carrying out any meaningful research work. Professor Bailey expressed his growing concern with this situation and remarked that in any future recruitment for this post it will be very difficult to recruit an astronomer of the right calibre who would be willing to undertake a post that did not provide an opportunity to develop their research interests.
- The DCAL is currently undertaking a review of asset management within its ALBs. The organization will be required to develop an asset management strategy and plan, justify the current use of existing assets and identify assets for disposal. This will add further bureaucracy to the work of the Observatory. The Chairman added that the assets of the Observatory and Planetarium were not the property of Government.

Mr Hannam declared an interest in the asset management exercise, which was being conducted throughout all Government Departments by his organization. There was no intention to asset strip currently used property. Reports so far demonstrate that there are substantial unused/underutilized assets in the public sector and that the standard of asset management is

poor. The exercise will result in the first comprehensive asset register of what is owned in the public sector and improvements in asset management and asset utilization should result in significant savings for the public sector.

In respect of the pointing of the steps and the damage to the window panes the Chairman asked the Director to seek advice from those bodies charged with the preservation of the built heritage in Northern Ireland.

The Committee acknowledged the deep concerns of the Director over the level of externally imposed bureaucracy and the resulting impediment to the Director pursuing his research interests, which is a risk to the organization. Mr Hannam added that the Observatory was not being singled out, this issue affected all organizations in the public sector.

7. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place in the Observatory Boardroom at 10.30 am on 23 June 2011.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm.

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: 23 June 2011