

**MINUTES OF THE EIGHTY FIRST MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2010 AT 3.00 P.M. IN THE ARMAGH OBSERVATORY BOARDROOM**

Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T. Harper, (Chairman), Dr F. Byrne, Mr E. Donnelly, Professor A. Hibbert, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Professor M. Merrifield, Professor R. Oudmaijer (by telephone link) and Professor T. Ray

Apologies: Professor P. Dufton, Mr A. Peoples, Mr S. Shields, Mrs P. Wilson, Dr T. Mason and Mr M. Cory (DCAL Observer)

In attendance: Professor M. Bailey and Mr L. Young

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 21 JUNE 2010**

- 1.1. The Committee noted the further clarification received from the DCAL on the project for the new Library, Instruments and Historic Archives building. The project will not proceed this financial year as it was too difficult to spend all the money in the year and therefore it was unlikely that the project would be conducted during the next 4-year Comprehensive Spending Review. However the Department will keep the project under consideration and will continue to bid for funding. The Department also agreed that the Observatory should progress the project by exploring other options for external funding.
- 1.2. The Committee agreed that the minutes should reflect what was actually said at the meeting and that the further clarification should be shown as a matter arising from the minutes. The minutes of the meeting were then approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

**2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no other matters arising.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

- 3.1. The Chairman referred to matters arising from his attendance at the DCAL Strategic Partnership Forum meeting on 2 November 2010. The Department's Risk Assessment of a number of its sponsored bodies has been completed and the results will be distributed shortly. It is hoped that this will result in some reduction in the detailed scrutiny of the Observatory and Planetarium. An exercise will be carried out across Government in Northern Ireland to determine amongst other matters what functions can be outsourced and what is non essential. The Department is also undertaking a review of assets owned and managed both by the Department and its sponsored bodies.

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**4. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS AND RISK REGISTERS**

Professor Bailey presented an extensive Report to the Committee including the following matters:

- 4.1. Details of the Observatory's Key Performance Indicators for 2009/2010 and trends in various performance indicators for past years are detailed in the Report. Refereed publications for the year are slightly lower than anticipated and it is likely that this number will be between 42 and 45 rather than the target of 50.
- 4.2. The Variable Star Telescope project is completed with first light anticipated later this year. The official opening is scheduled for January 2011 and the DCAL Minister will be invited to attend.
- 4.3. The DCAL provided additional in-year capital funding for the upgrade to the Observatory's computer systems to provide a professional astronomical data storage and backup capacity. The successful supplier was selected at a tender selection meeting on 12 November 2010.
- 4.4. At the Department's request an Equal Pay Business Case for payment of the revised pay scales only has been submitted.
- 4.5. A summary of the Business Plan budget and projected outcome for 2010/2011 is in the Report. It is expected that there will be a balanced budget for the year.
- 4.6. Alison Neve has successfully passed "with credit" all four of the first year's examinations of her two-year part-time Accounting Technician Ireland course. The Committee agreed that the Chairman should write to Alison to acknowledge her achievement. Other staff matters and staff movements are in the Report.
- 4.7. The post of Joint Administrator for the Observatory and Planetarium will be advertised in the week commencing 22 November 2010.
- 4.8. A full update on recent research work is in the Report.
- 4.9. This has been a very busy period for conferences and workshops at the Observatory. These include the 4<sup>th</sup> International MiMeS Workshop, 26 – 30 July 2010, the Fireball Data Workshop 15 – 16 September 2010, the International Meteor Conference, 16 – 19 September 2010 and the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Atomic Data and Analysis Structure Conference 3 – 6 October 2010. In addition, the biannual meeting of the Astronomical Science Group of Ireland (ASGI) hosted jointly with the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) was organized by Simon Jeffery (Chair, ASGI) with the support of a very capable Local Organizing Committee and held in Dublin in the Royal Irish Academy.
- 4.10. The Observatory hosted a visit by the Minister of the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL), Mr Danny Kennedy, on 10 November 2010, primarily to discuss the Observatory's contribution to the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programme.
- 4.11. The STFC has awarded the Observatory a further STFC training grant to support one Quota Studentship starting in the academic year 2010/2011.
- 4.12. Miruna Popescu and the Armagh Rhymers Educational and Cultural Organization have obtained grant funding of £30k from the European Union's PEACE III Small Grants Programme to support the OASES programme. Work is continuing to progress the UNawe project and funding of £3k has been obtained from the Royal Astronomical Society to produce and display "From Earth To The Universe" images in the Royal Albert Hall.
- 4.13. The Observatory has a 25 dual-processor computer node cluster "Beehive" which provides access to high-performance computing. Beehive is now in its sixth year of operation and needs to be upgraded and/or replaced. A replacement of the cluster will cost up to approximately £50k. As an alternative the Observatory has received an invitation to purchase a half share in Ireland's High-Performance Computing Centre (ICHEC) main computer system "Stokes" at a cost of €25k. The half share would provide the Observatory with a significant improvement in the high-end

computing resources and access to much greater memory. In a further development the DIAS has offered the Observatory access to Stokes under the DIAS umbrella, obtaining the equivalent of a quarter share in Stokes. In exchange the Observatory would fund the full cost (rather than as now half the cost) of the Lindsay Scholar, the equivalent of approximately an additional cost of £8k per year. The DIAS proposal, as well as being cost effective, provides Observatory staff with access to a high-performance computing facility, maintains the Observatory's active involvement with ICHEC, strengthens cross-border research collaboration and provides flexibility going forward. After full discussion of the matter the Committee, on the proposal of Professor Hibbert, seconded by Archdeacon Hoey, endorsed the Director's decision to proceed with the DIAS proposal. The Chairman asked that the heads of agreement between the Observatory and the DIAS on this matter be documented.

- 4.14. The LOw Frequency ARay (LOFAR) is an innovative multi-purpose radio telescope designed to provide a breakthrough in sensitivity for astronomical observations at low radio frequencies below 250 MHz. The core radio-telescope array is currently being assembled in the Netherlands and there are now LOFAR outstations in many parts of Europe. The Observatory has expressed an interest in participating in an Irish consortium proposal to place a LOFAR station at Birr, Co. Offaly.
- 4.15. The Director, as Chair of the UK SALT Consortium, attended the recent SALT management board meeting in South Africa. There is greater confidence that the technical difficulties with the telescope will be overcome and that the telescope will produce data by March/April 2011. The next SALT management board meeting is in Armagh over 24-27 May 2011.
- 4.16. The Observatory has scanned a variety of historic papers relating to the shared heritage of the Armagh Public Library and the Observatory. In a second digitization and microfilming project the Observatory's historic meteorological records from 1795 to 2004 and other important archival material have been scanned and microfilmed.
- 4.17. The Armagh Public Library archivist, in a largely externally funded joint Armagh Public Library and Observatory project, has continued the work to improve the documentation and storage conditions of the historic library, archive and astronomical museum collection. The current funding for the project will cease at the end of 2010. The Observatory will seek external funding of approximately £60k to continue this project for a further two years. The Committee, after noting the interest in this project declared by the Chairman and Archdeacon Hoey, agreed that every effort should be made to continue this very valuable project.
- 4.18. The Observatory continues to supervise a number of school-age and undergraduate work experience and summer project students and also makes use of data from the Faulkes Telescope for work experience projects.
- 4.19. The current lifetime opportunities programme may be extended to include another individual.
- 4.20. The sculpture by Brian Connolly "Celestial Sphere" commissioned by the Armagh City and District Council and with detailed advice and background astronomical information from Observatory staff, will be formally unveiled on 16 December 2010.
- 4.21. The "aroundNorth" Sound-Art project by composer Robert Jarvis to acquire a new, innovative astro-art sound exhibit for the Observatory Grounds and Astropark was short-listed for the 2010 New Music Awards but did not win. The Observatory is investigating other options for continuing this project.
- 4.22. Under the OASES project a number of group visits by schoolchildren and other educational activities for schoolchildren have taken place both at the Observatory and the Planetarium. The Robinson Schools Lecture was held on 17 November 2010 at the Royal School Armagh and was attended by 125 schoolchildren. These activities, including occasional group visits and tours of the Observatory and the Observatory Grounds and Astropark and Human Orrery, are important not only in promoting the Observatory but also in making a positive contribution to the

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- Government's STEM programme and to DCAL targets. Full details of all these activities are provided in the Report.
- 4.23. The Report contains a summary of the main points arising from the DCAL Strategic Partnership Forum, which the Chairman has previously referred to.
  - 4.24. There was an incident of sickness associated with the recent Atomic Data and Analysis Structure (ADAS) conference. The matter was reported to the health protection agencies.
  - 4.25. The audit report on the external VOIP fraud, the Observatory's Risk Register and the Quarterly Assurance Statement of Internal Control submitted to the DCAL are included in the Report for information.
  - 4.26. The DCAL has determined to promote good practice amongst its sponsored bodies as part of its Education and Learning Strategy. The Observatory's programmes of Science in the Community and related education and outreach activities are being evaluated against a number of quality assurance measures.
  - 4.27. The Director apologized for the continued delay in the submission of the Observatory's Strategic Plan. This is due to other work pressures on his time.
  - 4.28. During discussion of the Director's Report the Committee noted the tremendous work being done by the Observatory. Concern was expressed about the level of vandalism noted in the Report and the number of damaged light bollards in the Observatory driveway, which detracted from its appearance. It was noted that the Southern Education and Library Board were responsible for the entrance and part of the driveway up to the top edge of the Armstrong School boundary. Their assistance would be required to improve this area.
  - 4.29. Professor Merrifield left the meeting at 4.30 pm but before doing so requested that the Observatory Report be shortened to show matters which require the Committee's attention. Professor Bailey agreed that in future he would prepare a short summary of these matters and append the detailed description of the Observatory's principal activities for the Committee's information.
  - 4.30. The Committee also agreed that, in order to give due cognizance to the Observatory's important research work, at future Committee meetings the senior research staff should be asked by rota to provide the Committee members with a short presentation of their current work.

Dr Mason was unable to attend the meeting due to travel commitments but had recorded a DVD on his Report, which was presented to the Committee. Dr Mason referred to the following matters:

- 4.31. The development of new Planetarium Blog, Twitter and Facebook accounts for the Planetarium website has resulted in an increase in the number of website hits.
- 4.32. The Astronotes publication will be produced electronically from January 2011. It is expected that this publication will then reach a much wider audience.
- 4.33. Two new iPhone and iPad apps "Pocket Sky" and "Space Brains" have been launched. These are provided free for smart phone users. Questions for the Space Brains app were compiled by Planetarium education staff with assistance from the Blackrock Castle Observatory and Miruna Popescu of the Armagh Observatory.
- 4.34. Colin Johnston continues to deliver day and night-time adult education courses at Queen's University Belfast. The Planetarium hopes to extend this work by collaboration with Stranmillis College.
- 4.35. The Planetarium hosted an event in November 2010 under the auspices of the OASES project.
- 4.36. The BBC2 astronomy programme in January 2011 hosted by Dara O'Briain and Professor Brian Cox will publicise astronomy resources available in the UK, which will include the Armagh Planetarium.

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- 4.37. The project to compile a new interactive workshop, tentatively titled “Seeing the Invisible” will be tested with schools in February 2011. This project will also contribute to the DCAL Education and Learning strategy.
- 4.38. The Planetarium has been successful in obtaining £235k additional in-year capital funding from the DCAL to upgrade the existing Theatre projection equipment. Without this assistance from DCAL the Planetarium would be left with potentially obsolete equipment and increased incidence of theatre down-time.
- 4.39. From the statistics gathered most visitors to the Planetarium hear about the Planetarium by word of mouth and a large number of visitors are repeat visitors. This means that we need to continually produce new shows and workshop activities. Regrettably the Planetarium has been hit badly by the current economic recession and it is projected that visitor numbers will fall short of the Business Plan targets by between 20% and 25%.
- 4.40. It is anticipated that the Planetarium outreach numbers will increase by between 5k and 6k during October and November 2010 due to attendance at Science Week events in Ireland and outreach visits to Cork, Limerick and Waterford, all of which will assist the promotion of the ESERO-Ireland STEM initiatives.
- 4.41. Lower projected visitor numbers will reduce income from admissions and shop sales. The budget for the remainder of the year 2010/2011 has been changed to ensure that the Planetarium will achieve a balanced budget for the year.
- 4.42. Visitor satisfaction ratings to date are in the Report. Although the bulk of the comments are encouraging there are issues with the reception and bookings arrangements, which will be addressed. The satisfaction rating for the café is lower than required. The Planetarium plans to go out to tender for the café franchise.
- 4.43. There are no new risks in the Risk Register to report.
- 4.44. It is hoped following the completion of the DCAL Risk Assessment that there will be a reduction in the DCAL scrutiny of the organization.
- 4.45. The Director and the Planetarium are named as the Northern Ireland resource base for the ESERO-UK STEM programme.
- 4.46. There are no Health and Safety issues to report.
- 4.47. The Director’s period as IPS President will end on 31 December 2010. The final duty of the Director as President will be to attend the Association of Brazilian Planetarium’s conference in Rio de Janeiro and deliver a talk “Aliens on Earth”.
- 4.48. The draft Strategic Plan for the Planetarium is included in the Committee papers for comment.

During discussion of the Planetarium Report Mr Donnelly said that the Strategic Plan should make it very clear what the Planetarium would like to do as a Planetarium. There are clear tensions between what the Planetarium can do in a more constrained environment and what it should be doing. It is important that a broad view is taken in such a document. In addition, there needs to be action plans with names against responsibilities to achieve the actions and time bands for completion of actions. There will be other objectives for a Planetarium beyond DCAL targets and whilst it is very important that DCAL’s targets and its expectations of value for money are met the broader objectives should be clearly shown in the plan. This may require a wider range of KPIs. It is important as an organization that the Planetarium avoids strategic drift because of the vagaries of funding. The Planetarium must be a body with its own intrinsic value with a goal or “lighthouse” to aim for.

The Committee also expressed its concern about the decline in visitor numbers. The Chairman asked for an evaluation of whether the target numbers are realistic and if so what strategies are being used to achieve the targets. In addition, comparative figures should be obtained from other similar organizations with the numbers calibrated to take account of the catchment area and other factors.

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**5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

5.1. Professor Bailey referred to the Observatory's Risk Register. The "red" risks previously reported have reduced because these risks are being managed, although with opportunity costs for other areas.

**6. MEETING DATES FOR 2011**

The meetings for 2011 will take place on 17 February 2011, 23 June 2011 and 17 November 2011. All meetings will start at 10.30 am and the venue for the meetings will alternate between the Observatory and the Planetarium. The first meeting in 2011, the February meeting, will take place in the Planetarium.

The meeting ended at 5.35 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: 17 February 2011