

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY FOURTH MEETING OF THE  
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 JUNE 2008 AT 10.30 A.M. IN  
THE OBSERVATORY BOARDROOM**

Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T.Harper, (Chair), Dr F. Byrne, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Professor M. Merrifield, Professor A. Hibbert, Mrs Sue Hogg, Professor P. Dufton and Professor J. Dyson

Apologies: Dr Á. Downey and Professor E Meurs

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

**1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 NOVEMBER 2007**

- 1.1. The minutes of the Management Committee meeting held on 29 November 2007 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 2.2** Professor Hibbert informed the Committee that the Memorandum of Agreement between the Queen's University Belfast and the Armagh Observatory in relation to the supervision of PhD students had been completed and signed.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

- 3.1. The Chairman said that no real progress had been made on resolving the issues arising from the DCAL audit of the organization other than that a letter had been received from Mr Sweeney, DCAL Permanent Secretary, following the meeting between the Chairman and Mr Sweeney held to discuss these issues. The organization needed a clear letter of understanding covering these issues and an appropriate arrangement to operate at arm's length.
- 3.2. The Chairman informed the Committee that a member of Planetarium staff had initiated formal grievance proceedings.
- 3.3. The Chairman asked Mr Young to seek clarification on the classification of the organization by the DCAL.

**4. REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Dr Byrne's detailed report on the Internal Audit Committee meeting held on 13 June 2008 and the draft minutes of the meeting were distributed to the Committee. Dr Byrne referred to the following matters:

- 4.1. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) has provided an unqualified opinion on the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2008 and Helm Corporation, the Internal Auditors, have given a substantial assurance on the audit of the system of internal control. This is a very satisfactory outcome.
- 4.2. There was a detailed discussion on the accounts at the meeting and the NIAO traffic light accounts analysis system was of assistance in focussing on the reasons for variances in the accounts compared with the previous year.

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- 4.3. Some issues were raised in the audit of the human resources system and appropriate responses have been given by management to the recommendations arising from the issues.
- 4.4. The Helm Corporation contract for the provision of the internal audit service ended on 31 March 2008. The contract allows the organization to extend on an annual basis for a further three years or to go out to tender. For the first year's extension, the Helm Corporation propose a substantial increase in the number of audit days, from 12 to 20, and an inflationary increase in their daily charge-out rate. In a recent assessment of the internal audit provision, the external quality assessor felt that the previous number of audit days was too low. Helm Corporation regard 20 days as a more realist requirement to ensure that Government Internal Audit standards are met and to continue to provide adequate audit coverage of the system of internal control. The cost will be £7,000 for the year, which is approximately double the current cost. The Committee, after noting the advice from the DCAL on the matter and after further discussion, agreed to accept the Helm Corporation proposal for the year to 31 March 2009.
- 4.5. In response to a question from the Committee on the testing of the Planetarium's emergency evacuation procedures, Dr Mason said that such testing was normally carried out when secondary school groups are present. Dr Mason agreed to also test the procedures when the public are present.
- 4.6. On the proposal of Professor Hibbert, seconded by Archdeacon Hoey, the Committee gave the Directors approval to sign the accounts.
- 4.7. In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the Directors and the Secretary for the work put in to achieve the audit opinion received.

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

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

- 5.1. A corrigendum performance indicator table was submitted to the meeting. Key performance indicators for 2007 or 2007/2008 were better than target. External income of £200k for 2007/2008 was on an ascending trajectory and actual refereed publications were 57 compared with a target of 45.
- 5.2. The key targets for the Observatory's component of the DCAL Skills and Science programmes had been achieved. The Observatory continues to carry out the work funded by this programme. The 2008 summer programme of student training has been curtailed because of funding problems but the Observatory will supervise 4 school-age children under the Sentinus programme.
- 5.3. Antoaneta Antonova, Timur Sahin and Anthony Moraghan have completed their PhD programmes subject to minor corrections.
- 5.4. Gerry Doyle and Jorick Vink report success in the last STFC grant round obtaining three STFC-funded PDRA positions between them. The Observatory has been awarded three PhD studentships funded by the STFC, one starting on 1 October 2008 and two to begin on 1 October 2009.
- 5.5. A workshop was held at the Observatory from 18 - 22 February 2008 to discuss advances and research in the field of spectroscopy and spectropolarimetry of A and B-type stars.
- 5.6. Stefano Bagnulo and Jorick Vink, co-Investigators with Colin Folsom of a large programme at the Canada-France-Hawaii 3.6 metre telescope, have obtained 650 hours of spectropolarimetry of massive stars over the next five years to study magnetic fields.

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- 5.7. Gerry Doyle and other collaborators have discovered a completely new category of radio emitting object which has immense implications for our understanding of stellar magnetic activity. In an effort to look into the short term variability of this emission the Observatory was awarded three 2.5 hour shifts at the Arecibo Observatory in May 2008 and it is hoped to receive additional observing time later this year.
- 5.8. Gavin Ramsay reports that his RApid Temporal Survey continues to get further allocations of telescope time at La Palma.
- 5.9. Tolis Christou, Prakash Atreya and Martin Muphy travelled to San-Francisco, California to observe a rare outburst of the Aurigid meteor shower, which occurred when predicted.
- 5.10. David Asher continues with his work in cometary dynamics in collaboration with Japanese colleagues.
- 5.11. The Observatory plans to increase its Northern Ireland Regional Area Network (NIRAN) connection to the Internet from 10 Mbps to 100 Mbps as soon as the new NIRAN pricing structure is available.
- 5.12. A new Voice Over Internet Protocol telephone system has been introduced by Martin Murphy and Geoff Coxhead. Whilst it is too early to make a proper appraisal of this new system, there are indications of savings of £1k - £3k per year in call charges.
- 5.13. Simon Jeffery reports that he gave a series of six invited lectures on “Stellar Evolution” at Kodaikanal Observatory, India from 29 April to 13 May 2008.
- 5.14. The book “Border Heritage” tracing the Heritage of the City of Armagh and Monaghan County” and edited by Mark Bailey, was launched on 9 June 2008 in St. Patrick’s Trian, Armagh. During research for the book Professor Bailey discovered that Archbishop Richard Robinson was born in 1708, not 1709 as previously thought.
- 5.15. Staff Trade Union representatives have agreed revised employment particulars for Research Astronomers.
- 5.16. Aileen McKee has completed the very demanding National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health course and a Level 4 NVQ in Business and Administration. These qualifications add a very significant level of additional expertise to the Observatory’s administration team.
- 5.17. John McFarland continues to supervise an adult with learning disabilities cataloguing the E. M. Lindsay correspondence and other documents. During the course of this work John discovered that Archbishop Robinson met Sir William Herschel in Bath in 1766.
- 5.18. Two further donations to the Library and Archives have been received. Dr David Stickland, editor of the Observatory, provided 21 early volumes of this journal and Professor John D. Landstreet provided a copy of his graduate text.
- 5.19. Damaged outdoor exhibits have been repaired and final work to install the repaired planets will take place shortly.
- 5.20. In April 2008 the Observatory and Planetarium received notification from Access Northern Ireland that their applications for Registered Body status had been accepted.
- 5.21. The DCAL now require that monthly Resource Consumption accounts are submitted to the Department.
- 5.22. The introduction of International Financial Reporting Standards will require a number of changes to the 2008/2009 annual accounts.
- 5.23. There have been no requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act since the last meeting of the Management Committee.

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- 5.24. There have been no changes to the Observatory's Risk Register since the last update in 3 March 2008. The format of the Register will be changed to comply with the traffic light system recommended by the auditors.
- 5.25. There have been two meetings of the Health and Safety Committee since the last meeting of the Management Committee. In the period there was one minor accident in which a member of staff bruised his knee after walking into a fire extinguisher. The fire extinguisher has been relocated. During the last fire drill all staff were evacuated safely and in a timely manner. Staff were reminded to remove any obstacles they might meet wherever possible.
- 5.26. The 2008 Robinson Lecture will be given by Professor Peter Brand, University of Edinburgh, on the evening of 20 November 2008. The subject of the lecture is "God and the Universe". Professor Brand also agreed to deliver a Robinson School's Lecture on the afternoon of 21 November at the Royal School Armagh.
- 5.27. During discussion of Professor Bailey's report, Professor Merrifield said that cutting edge science was being carried out at the Observatory and obtaining grant funding for three PDRA posts was an outstanding achievement in the current funding situation. Professor Merrifield's comments were endorsed by Professor Dufton, Professor Dyson and Professor Hibbert.
- 5.28. In discussion of the increasing level of bureaucracy imposed on the organization, the Chairman said that he was appalled at the excessive administration and other documentation required of the Observatory Director by the sponsoring department. This was seriously interfering with the Director's primary role to be the lead astronomer at the Observatory.

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

- 5.29. The revised Planetarium Business Plan for 2008/2009, which includes the savings to provide an additional £35k to the Observatory, has been submitted to the DCAL but no response or approval has been received from the Department. Work on the Planetarium's strategic plan will commence during the summer but it is very difficult to plan so far into the future if the current position is uncertain.
- 5.30. Performance measures for 2008/2009 are shown in the Plan and include target visitor numbers to the Planetarium of 50,000 and outreach numbers of 10,000.
- 5.31. NASA Astronaut Dr Michael Foale visited Ireland for two days in June 2008 and spoke to over 1500 children from 70 different schools in Armagh and also in Navan in the Republic of Ireland.
- 5.32. The latest version of the Virtual Planetarium has been released and the new DCAL Minister will be invited to formally launch this site over the summer period.
- 5.33. TV advertisements will be run during the summer to boost attendance numbers. The Planetarium participates in promotional campaigns run by Armagh City and District Council as well as other tourist promotions. The Planetarium is also promoting the International Year of Astronomy and the Planetarium logo appears along with other associated organizations in the promotional material.
- 5.34. Obsolete equipment has been sent to the SELB for auction.
- 5.35. The most recent Planetarium Risk Register was reviewed at the Internal Audit Committee meeting. The register will be changed to show the top 10 risks and to implement the traffic light system recommended by the auditors.
- 5.36. The Planetarium will in future only accept credit card orders through its secure website system following the credit card fraud and resulting loss of just over £1,000, which was discussed at the Internal Audit Committee meeting.
- 5.37. The report of the Health and Safety Officer is attached to the Director's Interim Report. There were no accidents since the last Management Committee meeting.

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- The testing of emergency evacuation procedures discussed earlier in this meeting will be carried out over July/August 2008.
- 5.38. The projection equipment has been very stable mainly because the ambient temperature has been kept constant by dedicated air conditioners.
  - 5.39. The Director will attend the International Planetarium Society meeting and conference in Chicago and the Digistar Users Group meeting in Salt Lake City in June/July 2008.
  - 5.40. By the end of 2008 the Planetarium will have presented 19 different shows in the theatre. 10 of these shows have been produced in-house, which is a remarkable achievement.
  - 5.41. As part of a collaboration with Blackrock Castle Observatory to promote the Planetarium's educational services in the Republic of Ireland, the Cosmodome has been sent to Cork to be used by staff from Blackrock Castle Observatory. It is hoped that this collaborative arrangement will open up opportunities for additional funding from the Republic of Ireland Government.
  - 5.42. Robert Hill's secondment to the Northern Ireland Space Office continues. His work on the new astronomy curriculum for Key Stage 3 has been completed. Activities are being planned for the International Year of Astronomy in 2009.
  - 5.43. Senior members of the educational inspectorate are collaborating with the Planetarium to better exploit the potential of the International Space School Education Trust (ISSET). As a pilot project teachers will be sent to ISSET courses in the USA and it is hoped that a competition can be set up to send schoolchildren to space schools.
  - 5.44. The Planetarium continues to receive positive feedback about the quality of the articles in the Astronotes.
  - 5.45. The Planetarium now has 4 Education Support Officers (ESO) in post. More formal training including an end of training examination has been provided for the new ESOs.
  - 5.46. The Skills and Science programme ended on 31 March 2008 and the person employed under a fixed-term post to work on Skills and Science projects has left the Planetarium's employment.
  - 5.47. The Director is pleased to report that Julie Thompson, the Digital Theatre Manager, has given birth to a baby girl and both are well.
  - 5.48. During the Planetarium's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations a new exhibit was opened honouring Dr McKay, Dr Byrne and Mr Murtagh for their steadfast support of the Planetarium over many years.
  - 5.49. New materials supplied by the European Space Agency, including new models of satellites currently flying missions, will be installed in the exhibit halls at the end of June 2008. Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland has supplied two touch screen computer kiosks for the exhibit area.
  - 5.50. A meeting has been held with representatives of Gael Linn to consider the preparation of an Irish language show and shows in other languages will also be considered. Consideration is being given to how best to improve the facility for those with visual or hearing impairment.
  - 5.51. During discussion of the Director's report, Dr Mason agreed to add to the Planetarium Risk Register the potential adverse effect that the re-grading and back pay issues could have on staff morale. Dr Byrne congratulated Dr Mason on the great effort which has been put into re-establishing international links and restoring the Planetarium's reputation throughout Ireland. In response to a further question, Dr Mason said that consideration will be given to selling the in-house produced shows to other organizations.
  - 5.52. The Chairman thanked the Directors for their reports.

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**6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

6.1. There was no other business.

**7. DATE OF NEXT MEEETING**

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 20 November 2008 starting at 3.00 p.m. in the Observatory Boardroom.

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: 20 November 2008