

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 JUNE 2009 AT 10.30 A.M. IN THE CASSINI MEETING ROOM, ARMAGH PLANETARIUM**

Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T.Harper, (Chair), Mr E. Donnelly, Dr Á. Downey, Professor P. Dufton, Professor A. Hibbert, Mrs S Hogg, Professor M. Merrifield, Dr R. Oudmajer, Mr A. Peoples, Professor T. Ray and Mr S. Shields

Apologies: Dr F. Byrne, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Mrs P. Wilson and Mr L. Young

In attendance: Professor M. Bailey, Dr T. Mason and Mrs A. McKee

The Chairman welcomed Professor Tom Ray (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS) Nominee) to his first meeting.

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

Tom Mason reported that Mr Lawrence Young was currently on sick leave, the Chairman suggested that best wishes of the Committee be conveyed to Mr Young.

**1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 FEBRUARY 2009**

- 1.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2009 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

**2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- 2.1. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

The Chairman referred to the following matters:

- 3.1. The Chairman informed the committee that he had received correspondence from Mr Paul Sweeney, DCAL Permanent Secretary regarding the proposed Strategic Partnership Forum.
- 3.2. The Management Statement and Financial Memorandum have been revised at Section 6.2 Re-grading/Creating Posts, Paragraph 6.2.1 to include the amendment agreed between the Permanent Secretary and the Chairman. This amendment is also applicable to all other sections of the MSFM and the appendices which refer to re-grading/creating posts. The Committee agreed that this amendment was acceptable.
- 3.3. The Observatory's 2009/2010 Business Plan, dated 2009 April 19 was formally accepted by DCAL on 2009 May 26.
- 3.4. The Chairman reported that he had an accountability meeting between himself as Chair of the organization and the Minister on Thursday 23 April 2009.

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- 3.5. After a wide ranging discussion of various strategic issues and on the need for a short overarching strategic plan for the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, the Chairman recommended that a special meeting be arranged to address the issue. At the suggestion of Mr Peoples it was agreed that a sub-committee be formed consisting of 3 or 4 members of the Management Committee and the two Directors. Eamon Donnelly, Áine Downey, Alastair Peoples and Seamus Shields agreed to serve on the sub-committee. A meeting will be arranged for September/October 2009 and the sub-committee will report back to the next meeting of the Management Committee to be held in November 2009.

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

In the absence of Dr Fred Byrne, Professor Alan Hibbert had agreed to chair the meeting of the Internal Audit Committee held on 22 June 2009. Professor Hibbert referred to the following matters:

- 4.1. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) has completed the audit of the Observatory and Planetarium Draft Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2009 and has provided an unqualified audit opinion.
- 4.2. The draft Internal Audit Strategic Plan 2008/09-2010/11 was submitted to DCAL and a response received on 12 March 2009.
- 4.3. It was proposed and agreed that the name of the Internal Audit Committee be changed to the Audit and Risk Management Committee. The committee approved this recommendation.
- 4.4. It was recommended that the Internal Audit Committee should meet 3 times per annum, in line with the Management Committee meetings, approximately 2 weeks before the Management Committee meeting. The committee approved this recommendation.
- 4.5. It was recommended that the Internal Audit Committee co-opt an appropriate member to the committee with a financial background and training relevant to the organisation. As the DCAL are currently planning to recruit 2 new members to the Management Committee, it was agreed that the criteria for the positions should include relevant financial expertise and training.
- 4.6. The Internal Audit Committee reviewed the internal and external audit recommendations for 2007/08.
- 4.7. Tribal Helm, the Internal Auditors have completed their 2008/09 Internal Audit and have given a satisfactory level of assurance, with all financial systems given a substantial level of assurance. The draft Management responses to the Internal Audit recommendations were agreed by the Committee, the majority with an implementation date of June 2009.
- 4.8. The current Risk Registers for the Observatory and Planetarium had been discussed as part of the papers for the Internal Audit Committee and were also tabled for any further questions or comments by the Management Committee. Dr Mason drew the Management Committee's attention to actions taken to resolve the outstanding High Risk item in the Planetarium's Risk Register, noting that although this had been resolved, a further issue had now arisen concerning the electrical wiring in the Planetarium's Administration Building. Dr Mason reported that these issues were being dealt with and that the Planetarium's Risk Register would be updated to incorporate the new High Risk item.
- 4.9. After discussion the Management Committee accepted the Accounts and the Internal Audit Reports for 2008/09.

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

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

- 5.1. Referring to the 2008/2009 outturn, the Observatory received a further £8k Capital grant towards the Variable Star Telescope project. Total Capital grant received during 2008/2009 was £68k, and total expenditure was £69.9k, including £1.9k arising from an element of grant outstanding from a prior year. In addition, the organization's bid for £234k non-cash funding to 31 March 2009, originally made in the December 2008 monitoring round, had been successful and this provided the Observatory with a further £167k non-cash funding. The small deficit that had been projected in 2009 February crystallized as a small surplus of around £0.4k.
- 5.2. Projected DCAL income for the year 2009/2010 is £817k Resource plus £105k that has been ear-marked for the Observatory from other DCAL funds, an amount expected to be confirmed in the 2009 June or the subsequent monitoring round. In addition, the Observatory has been allocated £25k core Capital funding, corresponding to 50% of the organization's joint Capital funding of £50k.
- 5.3. The approved Business-Plan budget for 2009/2010 together with actual income and expenditure to 31 May 2009 was provided in the Director's interim report for information.
- 5.4. Professor Bailey referred to the following in the Research Highlights section of his Report, summarizing progress since the 2009 February meeting of the Committee:
  - (i) Gerry Doyle has been successful in obtaining a research grant of £170.4k from the Leverhulme Trust to support the project "Ultracool Dwarfs". The funds will employ a postdoctoral research fellow and a PhD student;
  - (ii) PhD student Geert Barentsen has been successful in obtaining external funding of £1.5k from STFC to participate in the 2009 Alpach Summer School;
  - (iii) Gavin Ramsay has been awarded 10 nights of INT time and two nights of WHT time; the former has a notional cost of £5k per night, the latter £17k per night. This highlights the very significant resonant external funding obtained by astronomers at Armagh to support their research. The Committee noted that telescope time like this is actually won in open competition, and this is a very good result. The Chairman commented that it may be useful to refer directly to the monetary value of such awards as it highlights UK Central Government support for Northern Ireland projects;
  - (iv) Visiting astronomer Maria Madjarska is leading a successful team at the International Space Science Institute (ISSI), Bern, and is involved in several international research collaborations with research staff at Armagh. Since her official involvement with Armagh Observatory, she has submitted one paper to the Astrophysical Journal and one to Astronomy and Astrophysics;
  - (v) Simon Jeffery reports that, during 2009 May, he observed the pulsating DB white dwarf WD 1654 –160 with the 4 m William Herschel Telescope. This Whole Earth Telescope (WET) campaign included 25 observatories operating between 15 May and 10 June 2009;
  - (vi) PhD student Tobias Hinse reports that a second exoplanet transit paper has been accepted by the journal Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society;
  - (vii) John Landstreet has completed an advanced lecture course on the topic of 'Magnetic Fields in Stars'. The lectures were delivered Armagh Observatory and Queen's University Belfast;
  - (viii) The Observatory hosted the second Cross-Border Schools Science Conference (SSC 2009) 'Discover the Stars at Armagh' on 29 and 30 April

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- 2009 together with the Centre for Cross Border Studies, in collaboration with Armagh Planetarium and Royal School Armagh;
- (ix) Dr Luc Rock and his student Melanie Thrush (both QUB) report that their initial investigation into sources of precipitation in Northern Ireland has shown a number of interesting trends and it is expected that the project will be expanded into a PhD project;
  - (x) Following a full competitive tender to supply enhanced Internet access and bandwidth to members of the Northern Ireland Regional Area Network (NIRAN), the Observatory has been invited to retain its position as a founding member of NIRAN and the upgraded NIRAN, called NIRAN II. The arrangement will provide the Observatory (and Planetarium) with Internet access at a bandwidth of 100 Mbps. This is 10 times more than the present bandwidth of just 10 Mbps. The enhanced service will be provided for a recurrent cost of approximately £16.5k per year, less than two-thirds the present cost of provision, plus the one-off cost of a new router and peripherals in the first year (c.£5k). After discussion the Committee endorsed the Director's decision to maintain the Observatory's internet access through NIRAN, noting that the arrangement provided very high value for money;
  - (xi) The Observatory has agreed to host Dr Carla Gil, a European Southern Observatory (ESO) Chile Fellow, for the fourth year of her ESO Fellowship from 1 June 2009 to 31 May 2010. She will also work part-time at DIAS;
  - (xii) Ulster Unionist party MEP Jim Nicholson and MLA Danny Kennedy visited the Armagh Observatory on Friday 17th April 2009;
  - (xiii) The Observatory has hosted visits by 4 external research visitors during the period 2009 March 1 to 2009 May 31;
  - (xiv) The second Lindsay Scholar has been offered to Ms Gráinne M. Costigan, a graduate from Trinity College Dublin and the University of Cambridge. Ms Costigan will work at DIAS under the joint supervision of astronomers at DIAS, Armagh and QUB and will be registered at QUB.
- 5.5. The Observatory's final Key Performance Indicators results for Government Key PIs during 2008 and 2008/2009 were: Rate of Return: 20.2% (cf. target 21.5%); Administrative Efficiency: 8.2% (cf. target 8.2%); Staff Absence: 1.7 days per person per year (cf. DCAL target c.10.0 days per person per year); Refereed Journal Publications: 53 (cf. target 50).
- 5.6. The Annual Report for Calendar Year 2008 and Financial Year 2008/2009 was completed during 2009 and placed on the Observatory web-site and circulated widely.
- 5.7. Observatory staff and students have hosted a large number of tours of the Observatory, Astropark and Human Orrery, involving both formal and informal visiting groups, and covering people of all ages and backgrounds.
- 5.8. Four school children have been provided with school work-experience projects since 2009 March 1.
- 5.9. John McFarland has continued to supervise a young adult with complex needs for four hours per week.
- 5.10. 17 press releases have been issued during the calendar year up to 2009 June 17, of which the majority were published. There have been approximately 180 identified media citations in the period 1 January 2009 to 31 May 2009.
- 5.11. John McFarland reports that he has dealt with 87 enquiries from members of the public from 1 January 2009 to 31 May 2009.
- 5.12. Staff at the Observatory have organized or been involved in a very large number of activities concerning International Year of Astronomy 2009. A diary of IYA 2009 activities to date and further activities that are planned are included in the interim report.

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- 5.13. There have been a number of incidents of vandalism which are fully reported on in the interim report.
- 5.14. 12 new signs designed by Miruna Popescu were installed in the Astropark with additional Capital funding (c.£10k) provided by DCAL. The five original signs were also updated and refurbished.
- 5.15. As previously reported, additional Capital funding provided by the DCAL enabled the Observatory to purchase some of the principal elements of the new Variable Star Telescope project. An order for further components of this new telescope project was made from DCAL Capital funds during 2009 April. This leaves primarily the new telescope dome to be procured and installed in a location south of the main Observatory building, close to the Robinson Memorial Dome.
- 5.16. Refurbishment of the Observatory House begun during 2008/2009, is nearly complete. This greatly improves the Observatory's capacity to host senior visiting scientists in self-catering accommodation without having to face the very significant additional overheads of hotel accommodation, and will provide a very cost effective enhancement of the Observatory's research visitor programme.
- 5.17. Owing to pressure of other work in the period since the last meeting of the Committee, progress on the library project has been much slower than hoped. A meeting between the Director and the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) was held on 25 June 2009, where it was agreed that CPD would carry out a feasibility study. There is a window of opportunity to progress this strategically most important project, and it is hoped to advance it during the summer of 2009.
- 5.18. The collaboration established with the Armagh Public Library has continued to be an extremely effective way to identify the lacunae in the Observatory's 'museum' systems and what processes and procedures will need to be in place when the new library, research and learning resource centre is finally complete. It is a strategic objective for the Observatory to secure Museum accreditation.
- 5.19. A number of donations have been made to the Observatory since the last meeting of the Committee and are listed in the interim report;
- 5.20. Professor Bailey referred to a number of administrative matters:
  - (i) STFC-funded research student Bridget Kendrick resigned from her position as a first-year PhD student with effect from 1 May 2009;
  - (ii) Three new PhD students have been recruited to begin work at the Observatory with effect from September/October 2009. They are Xianfei Zhang, Zhenghua Huang and Kamalam Vanninathan;
  - (iii) David Pérez Suárez passed the oral examination for his PhD thesis, subject to corrections and some further work, on 8 May 2009 and has obtained a post-doctoral position with the solar physics research group at Trinity College Dublin;
  - (iv) Prakash Atreya passed the oral examination for his PhD thesis, subject to corrections, on 5 June 2009 and has obtained a post-doctoral position with the Institut de Mécanique Céleste et de Calcul des Éphémérides (IMCEE), Observatoire de Paris, France. Prakash is 24 years old, and we understand that this makes him the youngest student from Nepal to gain a PhD;
  - (v) Aileen McKee and Alison Neve, together with Eamon Rafferty (Armagh Planetarium), are to be congratulated in maintaining an efficient and effective finance and administrative function for the Observatory during the Administrator's absence owing to illness;
  - (vi) A new Vetting and Barring Scheme, the VBS, is being introduced in Northern Ireland with effect from October 2009. The Scheme introduces a number of new features and requirements on employers and employees;
  - (vii) As previously noted, Lawrence Young's bid to the 2008 December monitoring round for a total of £264k non-cash resource funding was

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- awarded in part, namely the element (£234k) for Pension Provision (£167k Observatory and £67k Planetarium);
- (viii) As a result of the DCAL's recent review of Internal Audit provision, the Observatory's internal audit procedures will need to be strengthened to bring them into line with new DCAL requirements;
  - (ix) A new version of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM), dated May 2009, was issued by the Department on 21 May 2009;
  - (x) There are currently no 'Very High' (Red) perceived risks facing the Observatory, but among the more intractable issues currently faced by Management, and one which is recognized as being very difficult to address, is the question of Administrative Inflation. This is illustrated by the exponentially growing volume of work, much of it apparently nugatory, that is now being created by externally imposed reporting, governance and accountability requirements emanating mostly from central UK and Northern Ireland government departments;
  - (xi) The Health and Safety Officer, Geoff Coxhead, reports that there have been no reportable accidents or near misses since the last meeting of the Management Committee, nor have there been any relevant major changes in Health and Safety law. In addition a number of routine inspections have been carried out;
  - (xii) There have been no requests to the Observatory for information under the Freedom of Information Act since the last meeting of the Management Committee;
  - (xiii) As reported to the 2009 February meeting of the Management Committee, the Observatory replied to the recommendations of a DCAL review of its banking arrangements and is awaiting a formal response from the DCAL;
  - (xiv) Professor Bailey referred to three forthcoming events, a public lecture and image workshop by Jayanne English, University of Manitoba, Canada, to be held on 4 and 5 August 2009; The Ninth European Symposium for the Protection of the Night Sky, from Thursday 17 September to Saturday 19 September inclusive; and the "Portraits of Astronomers" exhibition from 19 November 2009 to 9 January 2010, a collaboration between Armagh Observatory, the Armagh County Museum and the photographer, Ms Lucinda Douglas-Menzies;
  - (xv) The Observatory's 2009/2010 Business Plan, dated 2009 April 19, was formally accepted by the Department on 2009 May 26 and placed on the Observatory web-site;
  - (xvi) The Annual Report for Calendar Year 2008 and Financial Year 2008/2009 was completed during 2009 April and placed on the Observatory web-site and circulated widely;
  - (xvii) There is a need for the Observatory to produce a five-year rolling Strategic Plan, but unfortunately there has not yet been any time to produce this document owing to other pressures.

Dr Mason referred to the following matters in his Report:

- 5.21. The Planetarium's Key Performance indicators for 2008/2009 have been revised and are in the draft Planetarium Business Plan for 2009/2010 that is included in the Planetarium's interim report for information. The Business Plan has been resubmitted but not yet been approved by DCAL.
- 5.22. Dr Mason expressed his concern over the escalating volume of governance and accountability requirements being imposed. In particular, he mentioned the number of audits that have been carried out over recent months. While he recognises their necessity and usefulness, they do place an extra burden on his limited staff resources.

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- Dr Mason also referred to the increasing number of requests for information that are received from the DCAL, usually with a very short return timescale, emphasizing that these further stretch his staff resources.
- 5.23. Issues relating to the Planetarium's Risk Register were discussed under the Report of the Acting Chair of the Internal Audit Committee. Dr Mason is still planning to meet with Mr Peoples to review the register.
  - 5.24. Since the last meeting of the Management Committee there have been no reported accidents or incidents in the Planetarium and no major legislation changes in Health and Safety law. All routine checks and inspections have been carried out. All necessary health and safety risk assessments and training for a new part-time member of staff will be provided. Currently there are two qualified first aid staff with a third staff member starting a five week first aid at work course in the near future.
  - 5.25. Details on various staffing issues since the last meeting of the committee and information on succession planning are contained in the interim report. The Committee suggested that this should be discussed further at the Strategic Planning Sub-Committee Meeting.
  - 5.26. Dr Mason referred to the changes in the procedure on how his performance appraisal is to be carried out. As the Chairman does not have detailed knowledge of the nature and scope of the Director's post, Dr Mason said that it may be more appropriate for the Vice-Chairman of the Management Committee to assume the role of appraiser due to his experience, as he has held the position of Acting Director of the Planetarium in the past. The Chairman agreed to the change.
  - 5.27. Dr Mason provided the Committee with an exclusive preview of the new Armagh Planetarium web-site, which is due to be launched next week. The new web-site has been designed and built entirely in-house and is much more interactive with videos, science demonstrations and free downloads. Unlike the old web-site, the new web-site will run on the Planetarium's own server and this will provide greater flexibility and control over the site. Dr Mason informed the Committee that if the web-site had been built by an outside provider it would have cost in the region of £50k. The Committee thanked Dr Mason for his presentation.
  - 5.28. The Planetarium new summer schedule will begin on 4 July 2009 with 'Blast Off!' a fun family-friendly event to be held over the first weekend in July.
  - 5.29. On 8 July 2009 the Planetarium will have an evening event, Dr Carolyn Porco, Head of the Saturn Cassini Imaging Team to present her "She is an Astronomer" lecture. This is part of the Planetarium's IYA activities and is run in partnership with DIAS, Dunsink and Blackrock Castle Observatory.
  - 5.30. The Planetarium will be running three new shows this summer, two of which the Planetarium were involved in the planning and making, We are Astronomers, Invaders of Mars, and Legends of the Night Sky: Orion, as well as the popular Secret of the Cardboard Rocket. The last two are suitable for younger audiences. It is anticipated that the credit crunch may increase visitor numbers, following the conventional wisdom in the Irish tourist industry that many people will choose to holiday at home this year to make savings. The Planetarium's aim is to attract them to Armagh.
  - 5.31. A number of promotional advertising campaigns are planned, including TV and print media advertising to coincide with the summer season. The spectacular astronomical images on display in Belfast City Hall grounds titled 'From The Earth to the Universe' (FETTU) will also allow the Planetarium to hand out discount vouchers to boost attendance. The visitor number KPI is the most important of all of the Planetarium's targets and all finances and cash flow are linked to this figure, so it is important that visitor numbers are maximised.
  - 5.32. Appendix 3 of the Planetarium's Interim Report provides copies of the Belfast Telegraph posters which were prepared earlier this year, and which have been

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distributed in NE England, Tyneside, and are also available on the new website as free download. The latest educational Stargazer promotion has been taken up by 12700 children through the medium of the Belfast Telegraph which should be assessed as a part of our outreach figures. All of the material was planned and scripted in-house.

- 5.33. Other advertising activities are documented in the revised business plan.
- 5.34. Detailed technical matters are contained in the Planetarium's Interim Report.
- 5.35. The Planetarium's partner institution in the Republic of Ireland is Blackrock Castle Observatory in Cork. Using the Planetarium's badged portable planetarium on loan to them they have reached over 1600 people at a recent international science event "Science Picnic" in Warsaw on 30 May 30 2009 and from the beginning of last year they have reached 11118 in total. Since the beginning of this financial year they have reached 5384 school children in Co Cork. This is in addition to the numbers that we service through our own efforts.

During discussion of the Director's report it was noted that a potential untapped source of visitors to the Planetarium may be older people or senior citizens, who perhaps have more time and resources to make visits to the Planetarium. Dr Mason said he would look into ways to target this sector. It was also noted that the Planetarium could benefit from the scientific expertise available at the Observatory to advise on science content of various publications.

The Chairman thanked the Directors for their helpful and informative reports.

**6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 6 November 2009.

The meeting ended at 1.20 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: 6 November 2009