

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY SIXTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 FEBRUARY 2009 AT 10.30 A.M. IN THE OBSERVATORY LIBRARY

Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T.Harper, (Chair), Dr F. Byrne, Dr Á. Downey, Professor A. Hibbert, Mr E. Donnelly, Mr S. Shields, Mrs P. Wilson and Dr R. Oudmaijer

Apologies: Professor M. Merrifield, Mr A. Peoples, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Mrs Sue Hogg and Professor P. Dufton

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

The Chairman informed the Committee that due to other pressing commitments Professor Meurs had resigned on 26 February 2009 as the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies Nominee on the Management Committee.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Jardine, the DCAL Observer, 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 20 NOVEMBER 2008

- 1.1. Minute 5.1 of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2008 was changed to include Dr Oudmaijer in the list of Committee members due to attend CIPFA training. The minutes were then approved by the Committee as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 2.1. **Minute 3.3 and 3.4** Professor Bailey informed the Committee that the proposed visit of Professor Ohlmeyer and Professor Loeber had been postponed.
- 2.2. **Minute 4.2** Professor Bailey informed the Committee that Mr Colin Hatrick, who was the former Heritage Lottery Fund Monitor of the project for the restoration of the Observatory's telescope domes, had agreed to help with the project for the new Library, Archives and Historic Instruments Building.

3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

The Chairman referred to the following matters:

- 3.1. Dr Byrne attended a meeting along with the Directors between the DCAL and the Chairs and Chief Executives of the DCAL's Arms Length Bodies (ALBs). Dr Byrne reported that a number of the ALBs expressed concerns about the burden of rapidly increasing levels of Government bureaucracy and the difficulties arising from insufficient recurrent funding. In addition, the recommendations of the report on the Review of Internal Audit Provision in ALBs were discussed. The recommendations that concern the Observatory and Planetarium will be addressed by the Observatory and Planetarium Internal Audit Committee. Dr Mason added

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that the difficulties experienced by the Observatory and Planetarium with the procurement of works through the Central Procurement Department were also experienced by other ALBs.

- 3.2. During discussion of Dr Byrne's report Mr Jardine thanked Dr Byrne and the Directors for attending the meeting and said that due to the increased scrutiny of the Department by the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, the more frequent meetings of the local Public Accounts Committee and a number of examples of corporate governance failure within the Department, it was essential that the Department increase the pace of governance within the Department and its ALBs. In the future the Department will carry out a risk-based assessment of each of its ALBs to ascertain where the Department needs to be involved.
- 3.3. The Chairman noted that there was a further accountability meeting between himself as Chair of the organization and the Minister on Thursday 23 April 2009.
- 3.4. The Chairman informed the Committee that Dr Downey and Mrs Hogg had been re-appointed for a further term.
- 3.5. The Chairman said that the Department requires all its representatives on boards of management to undergo corporate governance training and this is scheduled for Observatory and Planetarium representatives on 3 June 2009. The Department also strongly recommends that all members of the Observatory and Planetarium Board of Governors and Management Committee undertake this training although this is not mandatory.

4. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS AND BUSINESS PLANS

Professor Bailey referred to the following matters:

- 4.1. The Observatory's 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) grade profile is a very significant improvement on the corresponding results in the last RAE in 2001. Now, in 2008, 85% of the Observatory's research has been assessed as of international quality compared with 10% in 2001. In addition, in remarks made by the RAE Assessment Panel, the Observatory's outreach activity was considered to be world-leading.
- 4.2. Professor Hibbert said that this was a very satisfactory outcome and is not widely out of line with the results obtained by much larger university departments. The Chairman added that the Observatory staff should be congratulated on their achievement and the Department should take some comfort from the results of this independent assessment of the quality of the Observatory's research work.
- 4.3. Professor Bailey referred to the projected financial outcome for 2008/2009. Overall, it is anticipated that there will be a small deficit of £5k which, if it materializes, will have to be financed out of reserves. During the year the Observatory received additional unrestricted recurrent funding of £60k from DCAL and an amount, £35k, from the Planetarium, which by the end of the year reduced to just £5k. The contribution to indirect overheads from research grants was higher than expected due to the success of the Observatory staff in obtaining research grants and other grants to support the Observatory's outreach function. In addition, costs were reduced or deferred in a number of areas.
- 4.4. During discussion of the financial report Dr Downey said that the estate costs were higher than expected for the year because of exceptional remedial work to address a number of health and safety issues in the buildings and asked if, as an alternative to using reserves, which should be preserved, DCAL would be able to provide additional funding to deal with these exceptional costs or if it would be possible to set the loss off against next year's funds. In response, Mr Jardine said that no additional funding is available this year and there is no provision to carry over deficits from one year to the next, adding that ALBs should aim to work within available funding and avoid incurring deficits.

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- 4.5. Professor Bailey referred to the financial projection for 2009/2010. In the DCAL's grant announcement letter dated 12 January 2009 there is no immediate uplift in recurrent funding for the Observatory, but the letter went on to acknowledge that there is a shortfall of approximately £170k for Observatory funding, and a further need for £50k for the new Library building project. The DCAL has potentially identified £105k towards the resource shortfall, subject to DFP approval, and will bid for any remaining shortfall in 2009/2010. This additional funding together with the additional income arising from the Observatory's external grants, will enable the Observatory to submit a balanced budget for 2009/2010.
- 4.6. The Observatory's Key Performance Indicators for 2008/2009 are currently projected to be as follows: Rate of Return 19.9% (target 21.5%); Administrative efficiency 8.2% (target 8.2%); Staff Absence 1.7 days per person per year (DCAL target circa 10 days per person); and Refereed Journal Publications 54 (target 50). The Rate of Return does not include the use of external research facilities which are provided free to Northern Ireland research institutions by the UK Research Councils. If this in-kind benefit was taken into account it would effectively double external income and rate of return would be substantially increased.
- 4.7. Professor Bailey referred to the following in the Research Highlights section of his Report, summarizing progress since the last meeting of the Committee:
 - (i) Mark Bailey, Miruna Popescu and Robert Hill have been successful in obtaining external funding totalling in excess of Euro 50k (largely from the Republic of Ireland's "Discover Science and Engineering Programme") to support a variety of IYA 2009 activities during 2009 and beyond;
 - (ii) Stefano Bagnulo has been successful in obtaining funding of £13,400 from the Leverhulme Trust to bring Professor John Landstreet of the University of Western Ontario, Canada, to the Observatory for a period of eight months, starting in January 2009;
 - (iii) Stefano Bagnulo reports that, using the ESO VLT, he and co-authors have performed the first-ever polarimetric survey of Trans-Neptunian objects;
 - (iv) David Asher and Bill Napier, a former research fellow at the Observatory, have completed a major invited review article on the Tunguska impact event which was published in the 2009 February issue of *Astronomy and Geophysics*;
 - (v) Gavin Ramsay reports that he and co-workers have discovered a new polar (a highly magnetic compact binary) and that he has co-authored a paper presenting VLT observations of an accretion-powered millisecond pulsar;
 - (vi) Apostolos Christou has been instrumental in re-introducing observational astronomy to the Observatory using Observatory telescopes. Observations of the mutual events of the satellites of Jupiter that he and other Observatory staff and students had made during 2003 from Armagh have been published in a refereed journal. Recent capital funding from the DCAL to purchase a 17 inch robotic telescope will allow the Observatory to build its capacity to carryout research quality observational astronomy from Armagh;
 - (vii) Gerry Doyle reports that staff and students from institutions throughout Ireland attended three advanced courses on High-Performance Computing held at the Observatory over the period 16th to 19th February 2009;
 - (viii) Dr Luc Rock, Queen's University Belfast, collected the first samples of rainwater from the Observatory on 27 January 2009 for the project to measure the isotopic composition of rainwater at the Observatory;
 - (ix) Martin Murphy and Geoff Coxhead report that the high-performance computer cluster installed in 2004 has completed more than 42 processor-years of CPU activity and the new VOIP telephone system installed in 2008 has proved to be extremely reliable giving rise to substantial annual savings in telephone costs;

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- (x) The second Lindsay Scholarship, a joint PhD studentship funded by DIAS and the Observatory in memory of Dr Eric Mervyn Lindsay, the seventh director of the Observatory and a man who had close connections both with DIAS and Queen's University Belfast, will go ahead in 2009.
- 4.8. Using additional capital funding from the DCAL, the Observatory has been able to purchase 12 new interpretation panels for the Observatory Grounds and Astropark.
- 4.9. Details of the 2008 Robinson Lecture and the very active programme of Science in the Community events and activities are included in the Report.
- 4.10. The Observatory has entered into an agreement with the Armagh Public Library to allow the Observatory to make temporary use of the Library's archivist expertise. This arrangement will allow the Observatory to prepare its Library and Archives for eventual transfer to a new building and facilitates other possibilities, for example the preparation of joint grant applications to support further collaborative activities.
- 4.11. Since the last meeting of the Committee there have been a number of donations to the Observatory's Archives, notably a very important addition to the Hardcastle Archive from Mrs D. Perceval, the grand-daughter of Joseph Alfred Hardcastle, fifth Director of the Observatory. Hardcastle, in turn, was the great grandson of Sir William Herschel.
- 4.12. Professor Bailey referred to a number of administrative matters:
- (i) Gavin Ramsay has been appointed Chair of the Isaac Newton Group UK Time Allocation Panel for a three-year period;
 - (ii) One new PhD student has been recruited starting in September/October 2009 with another on offer and a further student yet to be appointed. One to two STFC-funded students will be appointed this year;
 - (iii) The Observatory has identified a number of positions that might be regarded as regulated under the new Child Protection rules, and enhanced disclosure checks for these members of staff have either been completed or are in the course of completion;
 - (iv) DCAL have provided £234k of non-cash funding to cover the projected increase in the Observatory and Planetarium pension provision;
 - (v) The audit plan has been agreed in outline by the Internal Audit Committee and the Internal Audit will commence on 9 March 2009. The Internal Audit Committee has a lot of work to do following the recent DCAL Review of Internal Audit Provision and Alastair Peoples has volunteered to serve as an additional member of the committee. The Committee agreed to Mr Peoples's appointment to the Internal Audit Committee;
 - (vi) The outstanding Pay Remit has been settled;
 - (vii) There have been no reportable accidents or near misses since the date of the last Committee meeting. Details of routine Health and Safety checks are contained in the Report;
 - (viii) There have been no requests to the Observatory for information under the Freedom of Information Act since the last Committee meeting;
 - (ix) Owing to the Observatory's charitable status for taxation purposes, it has not so far been affected by any requirement to comply with changes in accounting practices arising from the IFRS;
 - (x) Following advice from the DCAL fraud insurance has been taken out at an additional cost of the order of £1k per year. The revaluation of the Historic Books and Scientific Equipment requested by the insurers has been completed, apart from expert opinion on a number of outstanding items. This is a further exceptional cost for 2008/2009;
 - (xi) The Observatory has replied to the recommendations of a DCAL review of banking arrangements, and is awaiting a formal response. There appears to be no advantage to the organization in making any change its present banking arrangements.

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- 4.13. Professor Bailey referred to three forthcoming events: on 14 March 2009 Professor David Southwood, Director of Science and Robotic Exploration at the European Space Agency, will deliver a Public Lecture “Space and Society”; and on 29 and 30 April 2009 the second Cross-Border Schools Science Conference “Discover the Stars at Armagh” will be held. The fourth AVEC-organized Armagh Heritage Day (AHD2009) “Armagh: A Centre of Learning Through the Ages” will take place in St. Patrick’s Trian, Armagh, on 20 May 2009.
- 4.14. The DCAL propose to amend paragraph 6.2 of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) by including the following clauses:
- Proposals to re-grade or create new posts should be subject to the NICS Job Evaluation and Grading Support (JEGS) assessment to confirm grading.
 - All vacancies (including re-graded posts) should be filled through open competition on the basis of merit unless agreed otherwise in writing by the Department.
 - Starting pay on recruitment and pay on promotion shall follow NICS remuneration policy unless agreed otherwise in writing by the Department.
- 4.15. Professor Bailey invited the Committee to consider the proposed amendment to the MSFM. After full discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the adoption of the proposed amendments subject to the satisfactory outcome of an exchange of letters between the DCAL and the organization recognizing the need for flexibility in such matters in the case of a small organization compared with the NICS and particularly in respect of re-grading/promotion procedures and the policy on starting salaries for new staff.
- 4.16. In conclusion Professor Bailey said that he would provide the Observatory’s Business Plan for 2009/2010 as soon as possible.

Dr Oudmajer left the meeting at 12.30 pm.

Dr Mason referred to the following matters in his Report:

- 4.17. Planetarium Key Performance indicators for 2008/2009 were projected to be as follows:
- (i) visitor numbers, projected to be 35,700 for the year against a target of 50,000, were disappointing. Admissions income and shop sales are lower because of the reduced number of visitors. One reason for the lower level of visitor numbers was that schools were reluctant to come to the Planetarium due to escalating fuel costs. The Northern Ireland Assembly could follow the lead of the Scottish Assembly by offering schools subsidies for travel to visitor centres;
 - (ii) outreach numbers, projected to be 13,500 for the year against a target of 10,000, were very encouraging. If account is taken of the numbers reached by the Planetarium portable dome which is being used by Blackrock Castle Observatory in Cork City, outreach numbers would reach nearly 20,000 for the year;
 - (iii) the virtual Planetarium website, which was launched by the DCAL Minister, received 175,000 hits since it was opened, which is well above target;
 - (iv) the number of children reached through the outreach service in the Planetarium’s New Targeting Social Need programme is lower than planned but steps are being taken to increase these numbers and costs will be subsidised where possible;
 - (v) the cost per visitor is higher than planned because of the reduced number of visitors;
 - (vi) total absence days for the year are projected to be just over 10 days (0.4%), well below the NICS threshold;

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- (vii) visitor satisfaction ratings are 80% overall, which demonstrates that visitors are in the main impressed with their visit.
- 4.18. The draft Planetarium Business Plan for 2009/2010 is included in the Committee papers. The main aim will be to increase visitor numbers with a target for the year of 42,000. The level of advertising will be increased but the Planetarium will be making use of collaborative advertising arrangements with the Belfast Telegraph and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which will be provided free of cost. The Planetarium is also working closely with the Armagh City and District Council in the preparation of promotional material for Armagh and its visitor centres.
- 4.19. The outreach target for the 2009/2010 is 10,000. This is likely to be conservative given the results in 2008/2009 and our plans to devote more resources to outreach. The new Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics programme, which provides funds to schools to enhance the provision of science educational activities, will provide the Planetarium with an opportunity to expand its outreach services.
- 4.20. The Planetarium will continue to develop a range of new shows for the public. Four are planned for the year of which two will be provided to the Planetarium free of charge. Shows for schools have been changed to increase interaction between the schoolchildren and Planetarium staff, with content reflecting Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 of the school curriculum.
- 4.21. The exhibit area is under continual upgrade. In particular new displays are needed for nursery-age children. The Planetarium is working with the European Space Agency on new exhibits and, with financial assistance from the DPS in Ireland, will purchase a meteorite for the display area. The Planetarium will also seek to obtain a sample of the moon.
- 4.22. The Planetarium has extended its European collaborative links. As well as the European links established by the Northern Ireland Space Office, the Planetarium now has a presence on the International Astronomical Union planning committee for IYA events in 2009 through Robert Hill's membership of that committee. The Planetarium's international presence has been expanded through the Director's appointment as International Planetarium Society President.
- 4.23. The Planetarium plan to bid to DCAL for a new projection system for the theatre. The decision recently announced by Minister Campbell not to proceed with the proposed stadium at the Maze may provide some flexibility in DCAL's capital programme to support this bid which will be subject to a proportionate business case.
- 4.24. As part of the Planetarium's IYA 2009 activities, the Planetarium plans to invite Carolyn Porco, an astronomer with the NASA Cassini Imaging Team, to visit the Planetarium.
- 4.25. The report of the Chief Inspector of Education, which will assess the quality and effectiveness of the Planetarium's educational activities, will be issued shortly.
- 4.26. The Planetarium's Theatre operations risk assessment has been updated and will be sent to Committee Members for information.
- 4.27. In response to questions from the Committee, Dr Mason confirmed that astronomy is back on the Key Stage 3 schools curriculum and that the Planetarium has training programmes for teachers. Dr Mason undertook to contact the teacher training institutions to see if further collaborative work could be undertaken.

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

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

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6. DATE OF NEXT MEEETING

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 26 June 2009.

The meeting ended at 1.15 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: 26 June 2009