

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY THIRD MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 29 NOVEMBER 2007 AT 11.30 A.M. IN THE OBSERVATORY LIBRARY

- Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T.Harper, (Chair), Dr F. Byrne, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Professor M. Merrifield and Professor A. Hibbert
- Apologies: Dr Á. Downey, Professor E Meurs, Mrs Sue Hogg, Professor P. Dufton and Professor J. Dyson
- In attendance: Professor M. Bailey, Dr T. Mason and Mr L. Young

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JUNE 2007

- 1.1. The minutes of the Management Committee meeting held on 28 June 2007 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting after making corrections to the dates in the draft minutes 5.9, 5.11 and 5.43

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 2.1. **Minute 3.2** Professor Bailey noted that the draft DCAL person specification for its representatives on the Management Committee listed an astronomy background as desirable rather than essential. This should be changed as it is essential that we have persons with a specialist scientific background on the Committee.
- 2.2. **Minute 6.1** Professor Hibbert informed the Committee that the draft Memorandum of Agreement between the Queen's University Belfast and the Armagh Observatory in relation to the supervision of PhD students is still being finalized.

3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

There was no Chairman's business to report.

4. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS

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

- 4.1. The Observatory is performing well against each of its four key performance indicators for 2007/2008 with performance exceeding target to date. The level of external grant income of £300k set for 2007/2008 is an aspirational target and will not be achieved because of current difficulties over the availability of external research funds. The level of visitors to the Astropark is increasing and is currently 40,000.
- 4.2. Miruna Popescu arranged for the Royal Society solar physics exhibition "Living with a Star" to be out on display at various locations in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and also delivered a series of talks and a public lecture. Simon Jeffery delivered a Schools Lecture called "Inside the Stars" at W5, Belfast and to four grammar schools in Londonderry.
- 4.3. The proceedings of the Lindsay Centennial Symposium have been edited by Mark Bailey and will be published soon.

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- 4.4. 40 delegates attended the STFC Introductory Conference on Solar-Terrestrial Physics, organized by Gerry Doyle in St. Patrick's Trian, Armagh from 9 to 14 September 2007.
- 4.5. Gavin Ramsay has been successful in obtaining funding of £7,200 over two years from the Royal Society to support an international joint research project between the Armagh Observatory and Tuorla Observatory in Finland. Apostolos Christou and Prakash Atreya obtained support of £1,061 from the EuroPlaNet initiative towards their observing trip to California. John Butler has secured a minor part for the Observatory in a major Climate Change Research Programme funded by the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency.
- 4.6. The Observatory has agreed with DIAS to appoint a second Lindsay Scholar, with costs shared between the two institutions, with effect from 1 October 2008.
- 4.7. The Observatory's Research Assessment Exercise return has been submitted. Professor Bailey thanked Professor Dyson and other external members of the Observatory's Research Advisory Committee for their help and comments at various stages of the completion of the return and the members of the Observatory's administrative team who together have worked unstintingly during the past 2-3 months to ensure that all the financial and statistical parts of the return are as precise and accurate as possible.
- 4.8. Apostolos Christou, David Asher and summer student Victoria Hudson successfully observed occultation of the 9th magnitude star TYC 0464-02162-1. This is the fifth positive detection observed by the Armagh group. Apostolos also led the international team of astronomers that made the first ever observation of one of the satellites of the planet Uranus passing in front of another.
- 4.9. There have been a large number of tours of the Observatory and its grounds over the period, details of which are included in the Report.
- 4.10. The DCAL has recently informed the Observatory that the Department has made a provisional allocation of £1.5m in 2010/2011 for the New Library Building project. The final outcome will depend on the submission and approval of a full business case and the Observatory obtaining a further sum of circa £1m in matching funds from other sources.
- 4.11. Gifts and donations to the Observatory's Library and Archives are detailed in the Report.
- 4.12. Aidan Grant, who works at the Observatory under the auspices of the Appleby Trust training programme, was awarded the title "Appleby Trust Trainee of the Month" in October 2007.
- 4.13. All of the new staff and students have received Child Protection Training.
- 4.14. There were no Freedom of Information requests in the period.
- 4.15. Owing to a reassessment of the pension provision by the NILGOSC Actuary, the increase in the Observatory's pension contribution rate from 13% to 15% in 2008/2009 will add an estimated £10k to the Observatory's salary costs in that year and beyond.
- 4.16. There has been no written response from the DCAL to the Observatory's request for a delegation in respect of procurement.
- 4.17. The Observatory was given approval by the DCAL in October 2007 to pay all its staff, with one exception, their outstanding back pay.
- 4.18. A copy of the Observatory's Risk Management Policy is appended to this Report. The principal perceived business risks are: (i) lack of funding at a sufficient level to sustain a reasonable level of scientific operations; (ii) lack of research development funds; (iii) administrative inflation; (iv) staff pay and conditions; and (v) damage to the Observatory's reputation.
- 4.19. The Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007, which became law throughout the UK on 26 July 2007, makes it easier to prosecute organizations when gross failures in the management of health and safety lead to death. There

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were no accidents in the period and details of the various health and safety checks carried out are noted in the Report.

- 4.20. The Observatory is involved with other parties in the organization of the Ninth European Symposium for the Protection of the Night Sky from 17 to 19 September 2009.

During discussion of Professor Bailey's Report the Committee agreed that: (i) Mr Young would check the regulations for the registration of the Observatory's Data Controller under the Data Protection Act; (ii) members of the Management Committee would be nominated to fill the various gaps in its sub-committees; and (iii) the terms of reference of the sub-committees would be amended to state that members can meet by e-mail or other electronic means if required.

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

- 4.21. Dr Mason expressed his concern about the DCAL's imposition of certain NICS terms and conditions and procedures and their intervention in the payment of nationally agreed salary increases to certain staff promoted by the organization, in effect removing tasks and responsibilities he was employed to discharge and calling into question his professional competence.
- 4.22. The Planetarium's performance against its key performance indicators are shown in the Report. Admissions numbers and income are lower than targeted because there were fewer than expected visitors during the summer.
- 4.23. The Skills and Science funding, which will end in March 2008, has been very valuable in sustaining the Planetarium's outreach programme. During November 2007 staff delivered the outreach programme in Galway, Limerick and Cork, reaching some 5,000 people. The Virtual Planetarium is nearing completion and a beta version is being loaded onto the Planetarium website.
- 4.24. The Planetarium is considering a proposal from Bytel, who currently have a computer server installation in the Planetarium Bungalow basement, whereby they will expand their equipment into other parts of the Bungalow in return for hosting two new servers for the Planetarium. The Committee agreed that there was merit in this proposal and asked Dr Mason to ensure that the proprietorship of the building was made clear in any formal arrangement.
- 4.25. There was one accident in the period which is detailed in the Report along with the action taken. A risk assessment has been carried out for a newly pregnant member of staff.
- 4.26. A new show has been completed to make up a full collection of seasonal shows and a show will be completed for the 2008 school year to take account of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. Another show is being planned for the Planetarium's 40th birthday celebrations in March 2008. A new LED scoreboard has been introduced in the theatre to enhance participation in shows delivered by the education staff.
- 4.27. The Planetarium is considering a maintenance agreement with Evans and Sutherland, the suppliers of the Digistar 3 projection equipment, under which the Planetarium would receive annual maintenance of the existing equipment, software upgrades and a hardware upgrade to the new Digistar 4 equipment for the payment of circa £20k over a 5-year period. Discussions are at an early stage and it is anticipated that a firm proposal will be available for the Committee's consideration at its next meeting.
- 4.28. Robert Hill's secondment to the Northern Ireland Space Office continues and he has made excellent progress on the new astronomy curriculum. Robert has also been appointed to the International Astronomy Committee to work on 2009 astronomical events.

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In response to a question from the Chairman on the disappointing visitor numbers, Dr Mason said that other attractions in Armagh had experienced lower visitor numbers over the summer period. More marketing will be needed in the year ahead to restore visitor numbers to the required level.

The Chairman asked that the minutes show that the Directors' Interim Reports had been received and their contents noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1. Professor Merrifield informed the Committee of the serious funding difficulties currently facing the STFC. As a result it is likely there will be less funds available for research grants over the coming years. Professor Bailey said that in the light of these difficulties it would be important to ensure that the DCAL recognizes its responsibility to provide sufficient funding for core staffing and other costs.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 19 June 2008 starting at 10.30 a.m. in the Planetarium Cassini Room.

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: 19 June 2008