

**MINUTES OF THE NINETIETH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF THE  
ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2013 AT 11.30 A.M.  
IN THE CASSINI ROOM ARMAGH PLANETARIUM**

Present: Archbishop Clarke (Chair), Mr E. Donnelly, Professor T. Ray, Dr M. McKay, Mrs P. Wilson, Mr B. Hannam, Professor M. Merrifield, Professor A. Hibbert (Deputy Chair) and Professor R. Oudmaijer

Apologies: Archdeacon R. Hoey

In attendance: Professor M. Bailey, Dr T. Mason, Mrs E.J. Kennedy and Mr A. Hughes (DCAL Observer)

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were recorded as above.

**2. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

**3. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2013**

The minutes of the meeting of 21 June 2013 were reviewed, approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

**4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- 4.1. It was agreed at Professor Merrifield's request that a statement of the actions and owners arising from each meeting should be clearly recorded and circulated in advance of the next meeting.
- 4.2. **A New Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments Building** – Professor Hibbert provided a brief update on work in progress. There was a brief discussion about the possibility of linkages between this project and the plans for Armagh Public Library. It was agreed that opportunity for informal co-operation should be explored in more detail by the Libraries Sub-Committee.

**Action Point MC18/10/13-01 Professor Hibbert and Mrs Wilson to explore informal co-operation with the Armagh Public Library at the next Library Sub-Committee meeting.**

- 4.3. Professor Bailey informed Members that he was waiting for comments from DCAL on the Observatory's draft Strategic Plan (paragraph 3.2). He expressed concern about not knowing the outcome of the DCAL review of Arm's Length Bodies and the impact this may have on the Strategic Plan.
- 4.4. Professor Hibbert provided an update on the work of the Employment Conditions and Remuneration Committee (paragraph 5.23). The Planetarium had a very flat employee profile, and changes in job titles were motivated by the Director to rectify this almost two years ago (Management Committee minutes: Nov 2011). The committee had met with the Theatre Manager and thoroughly reviewed her work and approved her contract. The committee agreed that the Planetarium Theatre Manager's job title be changed to Creative Director to better reflect her duties. The Science Communicator also has had his job title changed to Science Education Director for similar reasons. It also had been agreed that two of the Education Support Officers (ESOs) would become Senior Education Support Officers (ESO 1) to reflect changes in their duties, commensurate with their length of service. These changes will have no effect on pay and

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conditions. Dr McKay commented that the unusual and unsociable working hours of the Creative Director's contract had proved to be a productive change.

- 4.5. In relation to an absent member of staff (paragraph 7) Professor Hibbert provided an update on actions since the last meeting. He also noted that a whistleblowing disclosure had been made to DCAL.

## 5. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 5.1. The Chair thanked Professor Hibbert for his assistance and expertise in his role as deputy Chair. He reported on a recent meeting with DCAL Minister Carál Ní Chuilín, Peter May (Permanent Secretary) and Mick Cory (Director Sport, Museums and Recreation). The Chair was encouraged through the discussions and he stated his deep commitment to outreach and poverty issues but reaffirmed that this would attract additional costs for the organisation. He felt that DCAL would welcome specific proposals for additional funds, in line with the outreach commitment. The Chair assured Members that the Minister understood the importance of AOP and would like to visit later this year. Members felt that this was a very positive response from DCAL.
- 5.2. Discussion continued about Business Plans for the Observatory and Planetarium. The Planetarium fits more easily with DCAL objectives than the Observatory. The Observatory's core business is research and Professor Bailey expressed his view that it is crucial this is maintained. The Chair agreed and asked the newly appointed Operations Manager to work with Professor Bailey and Dr Mason to develop Business Plans for 2013/14 in the format required by DCAL.

**Action Point MC18/10/13-02 A revised Business Plan to be drafted for consideration by DCAL by end of November 2013.**

**Professor Bailey, Dr Mason & Mrs Kennedy**

- 5.3. There was a discussion about how the Members could meet the staff and students of AOP. Lectures by Senior Astronomers after previous Management Committee meetings and viewing of shows on offer in the Planetarium had proved useful in the past. Engagement with staff after Committee meetings at the Observatory had also provided another good opportunity. Professor Bailey felt that his staff and students would welcome this opportunity. Dr Mason suggested that in depth meetings with Planetarium staff would be welcome as this allowed a better appreciation of their duties.

## 6. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS AND REVIEW OF RISK REGISTERS AND QUARTERLY ASSURANCE STATEMENTS

- 6.1. Professor Merrifield requested that future Interim Reports include an Executive Summary which highlights the key issues to be discussed at the Management Committee meeting.

**Action Point MC18/10/13-03 Key issues for discussion to be highlighted in the Directors' Interim Reports at future meetings.**

**Professor Bailey, Dr Mason & Mrs Kennedy**

- 6.2. Professor Bailey highlighted several areas within his Interim Report including:
- £95k additional Grant-in-Aid funding from DCAL (Table 1);
  - Increasing average staff absence rate from 4.6 days per person per calendar year to 13 days per person during 2013 (Table 3);
  - The current position of the Key Performance Indicators (Table 5);
  - The recruitment of four new PhD students (paragraph 6.3)
  - The exceptional efforts of particular staff in covering many of the administrative and operations management duties (paragraph 6.3)
  - The list of academic visitors to the Observatory during 2013 (Table 8)

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- New grant awards from the Leverhulme Trust and the Performing Right Society for Music Foundation for the 'around North' feature (paragraph 6.4.4)
- Provision of a new Internet provider owing to the winding up of the Northern Ireland Regional Area Network. (paragraph 6.4.5)
- Compliments to Thirza Mulder on her work to update the Armagh Observatory Online Collections Database (paragraph 6.5.2)
- A programme of work has begun to scan maps and to produce high-quality plot copies to allow access by the general public. This is a pilot exercise in conjunction with the Armagh Public Library (paragraph 6.5.5)
- During 2013 alone, the EU-UNAWE teacher training and related outreach programmes have reached 190 teachers, science co-ordinators and other staff, who in turn estimate that they will reach more than 16,000 pupils per year (paragraph 6.6.5)
- The Observatory supported the Greenwood Players in presenting an intensive series of workshops in schools to illustrate various scenes from Brecht's 'The Life of Galileo' play and encourage crossover of knowledge of astronomy (paragraph 6.6.9)
- The Church of Ireland Board of Education has agreed to be the Umbrella Body for Access NI clearance for the Governors of Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (paragraph 6.9)
- DCAL has advised that the Equal Pay Claim issue should be closed following the outcome of recent court proceedings associated with NIO and PSNI (paragraph 6.9)
- A possible issue regarding the connection of the lightning conductor system to cameras on the roof of the Observatory is being investigated (paragraph 6.9.2)
- The collaborative agreement between Queen's University and the Observatory has been extended for one year to August 2014. A periodic review will be carried out in November 2013 (paragraph 6.14)

6.3. A query was raised by Professor Hibbert about his membership of the Management Committee. He is currently co-opted on to the Management Committee, by the Board of Governors. Professor Bailey is to liaise with DCAL to clarify the position.

## **Action Point MC18/10/13-04 Clarification to be sought from DCAL on co-option of members to the Management Committee by end November 2013**

**Professor Bailey**

- 6.4. Mr Hughes provided an update on the recent advertisement for members of the Management Committee.
- 6.5. There was a discussion about the benefits of measuring 'distinct e-visitors' as it does not reflect the volume of individual people but rather the number of servers. It does, however provide a measure of the attractiveness of the Observatory website to others.
- 6.6. Professor Ray queried whether an enhanced bandwidth should have been pursued when seeking a new internet provider. Dr Mason confirmed that there is sufficient fibre capacity to expand the bandwidth if necessary. Professor Bailey said the new contract is for a relatively short term (2 years) so the bandwidth capacity can be considered again prior to retendering.
- 6.7. The Chair thanked Professor Bailey for his dedication and achievements this year.
- 6.8. Professor Bailey presented the Observatory's updated risk register.
- Funding risk – there are insufficient funds to fill current vacancies in addition to funding for absent staff members. Current rating of Treated Risk is yellow.

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- Staff health and wellbeing, Recruitment and retention of staff and Administrative efficiency risks – These are complex and inter-related - as increased workloads due to vacancies can impact staff health and wellbeing. It is crucial that there is an improvement soon. Current rating of Treated Risk is yellow in all three areas.

6.9. This led to a discussion about filling vacancies within the Observatory. The Chair confirmed that he was not aware of any plans to change the current structure of AOP. He reassured both Directors that they would be heavily involved in the development of strategic plans to support the work of the organization. Following the recent meeting with DCAL he felt that the department would welcome a view from the Management Committee on the strategic direction of AOP. The following steps are to be pursued resulting in the development of a Strategic Plan for AOP:

1. The Directors of the Observatory and Planetarium are to define the future direction of their respective organization and develop a plan to achieve this
2. A Strategy Sub-Committee is to be set up to refine the plans and consider the practicalities. The Sub-Committee will include the Directors, Professor Hibbert, Brett Hannam (chair) and Professor Ray. This will take the form of a one day workshop in early December 2013 (date to be confirmed).
3. The Strategic Plan will be considered by the Management Committee on 23 January 2014 before being presented to the Board of Governors.
4. An independent review of the Strategic Plan will be carried out by key individuals who can advise on outreach activities, astronomy and research.
5. The Strategic Plan will then be discussed in detail with DCAL.

**Action Point MC18/10/13-05 Directors to define the future direction of their respective organization and develop a plan to achieve this by end of December 2013**

**Professor Bailey & Dr Mason**

**Action Point MC18/10/13-06 Arrange the Strategy Sub-Committee workshop by mid-November**

**Mrs Kennedy**

**Action Point MC18/10/13-07 Identify independent reviewers of the Strategic Plan by end December**

**Strategy Sub-Committee**

6.10. Discussions continued on the Observatory's submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Professor Bailey explained that it was important for the Observatory to perform well in this assessment as the result will be used to inform funding allocations and establish benchmarking information. He felt that due to conflicting priorities, he had not been able to spend sufficient time with colleagues preparing the submission. Professors Merrifield and Oudmaijer expressed concern that a lightly prepared submission would have a more negative outcome than not submitting at all. Following a further discussion it was agreed by the Committee that the Observatory should not make a submission to REF if a positive outcome could not be guaranteed and Professor Bailey was instructed to withdraw from the exercise. It was emphasized that this decision should not be taken as an adverse comment on the perceived quality of any of the research staff in the organization. The senior research staff are regarded in high standing by their peers. The proposed independent review of the Strategic Plan will provide DCAL with an assurance of the work of AOP.

6.11. The Observatory's Quarterly Assurance Statement for the period ending 30 June 2013 was considered and accepted.

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- 6.12. Dr Mason presented the Planetarium's Interim report. He drew particular attention to staff matters including the change in staff job titles to reflect the reality of what staff actually do and to incentivize them by recognizing their critical contributions. Arrangements for flexible working and contracts were explored in great detail. The Committee noted that much greater value for money is achieved through the revised arrangements for the Creative Director.
- 6.13. Plans for future outreach were considered and Dr Mason confirmed that further updates will be provided to DCAL in due course.
- 6.14. The CBeebies astronomy programme which was filmed in the Planetarium was discussed. With audience viewing figures of up to 120,000 the increased awareness of the Planetarium gained from this could never be achieved within the current budget. Professor Ray suggested Dr Mason approach the RTE Junior channel about making a similar programme.

**Action Point MC18/10/13-08 RTE Junior channel to be approached by end of December 2013 about making a children's television programme on astronomy in the Planetarium**

**Dr Mason**

- 6.15. Dr Mason presented his Quarterly Assurance Statement (QAS) covering the period up to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2013. He stated his concerns about the revised template issued by DCAL and the requirement for the Chair of the Board to sign the QAS, given that he is not sighted on the details. Mr Hannam, in his role as Chair of the Audit and Risk Management Committee was of the view that the onus is on the accounting officer to make the checks and be confident that the content of the QAS is correct as set out in the DCAL guidance *'The Chair's signature reflects that the statement has been reviewed and considered at Board and that the Board is content that the representations contained within the statement reflect its knowledge of the organization.'* This limits the scope of the Chair's responsibilities. The new guidance is to be shared with the Members. The Chair indicated he was content with this new approach.

**Action Point MC18/10/13-09 DCAL Guidance for completion of Arm's Length Body Assurance Statements to be shared with members of the Management Committee by mid-November.**

**Mrs Kennedy**

- 6.16. The Planetarium's Key Performance Indicators were considered. The use of Groupon coupons had increased visitor numbers by 20% but income remains the same due to the discounted admission charge. Dr Mason explained the potential for visitor numbers to double if free access was granted.
- 6.17. The Planetarium's QAS was considered and accepted.
- 6.18. The Planetarium's Risk Register was considered. There were minimal changes from the last meeting.
- 6.19. The Chair was encouraged by very positive feedback from visitors about the professionalism and enthusiasm of staff in Planetarium.

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 7.1. Mr Hannam presented a report from the Audit and Risk Management committee. He highlighted areas of partial compliance by AOP as recorded in the Quarterly Assurance Statements including the development of the business plan. Minor changes were required to the draft QAS for the period ending 30 September, following consideration by the Committee. He was content that the representations contained within the Statements represented the ARMC knowledge of the organization.

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- 7.2. An updated Fraud Prevention Policy was approved at the ARMC meeting.
- 7.3. Audit recommendations for the Planetarium had been cleared and there were some outstanding for the Observatory. An Internal Audit Plan had been submitted and approved. The auditors will start on 28 October 2013 and will focus on financial processes. Their report is to be considered at the next ARMC.
- 7.4. Professor Hibbert provided an update with regards to an absent member of staff.
- 7.5. In line with DCAL procedures the Committee will be renamed 'Audit and Risk Assurance Committee' (ARAC).
- 7.6. Membership of the Committee was discussed. Mr Hannam reported that membership criteria for the ARAC had been approved by DCAL and would be shared with the Chair shortly, along with a request for the nomination of another member.

**Action Point MC18/10/13-10 Criteria for membership of ARAC to be shared with the Chair**

**Mr Hannam**

**Action Point MC18/10/13-11 Chair to consider the request for new nominations to ARAC**

**Chair**

- 7.7. The Chair thanked Mrs Wilson and Mr Donnelly for their contribution over the period of their membership of the Committee which is due to cease on 31 October 2013. This was endorsed by the Deputy-Chair.

**8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be on 23 January 2014 at 11.30 am.

The meeting ended at 2.53pm.

Signed as a true record of the Meeting

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(Chair)

Dated: