

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VISITATION BY THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON 18 MARCH 2005 AT 10.30 A.M. AT THE OBSERVATORY

Present: His Grace, the Lord Eames, Archdeacon R.G. Hoey, Dean H. Cassidy, Canon J.M. Barton, Canon H.J.W. Moore, Canon R. J. N. Porteus, Professor A. Hibbert, Canon J. McKegney and Councillor W. B. Gardiner-Watson

Apologies: The Right Honourable, the Lord Ballyedmond

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

1. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

- 1.1. The Chairman welcomed Professor Hibbert, the new Queen's University Belfast representative on the Board, to his first meeting and also thanked Councillor Gardiner-Watson for agreeing to serve as the DCAL representative on the Board for a further term.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VISITATION HELD ON 25 MARCH 2004

- 2.1. The minutes of the Annual Visitation held on 25 March 2004 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

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

4. REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- 4.1. The Board reviewed the minutes of the Management Committee and its sub-committees since the date of the last Board meeting, and the audited and signed accounts for the year ended 31 March 2004, together with the auditors' recommendations on the accounts and the organisation's system of internal control.
- 4.2. During the discussion of the future relationship with Queen's University Belfast, Professor Hibbert said that he would like to see more collaboration between the research groups at Queens and the Observatory, perhaps in the form of joint research contracts. However, amalgamating the research groups and the Observatory for the purposes of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) would be impracticable given the different approaches of the two institutions to RAE submissions. Professor Bailey welcomed the opportunity for increased collaboration, which should be on an individual basis, and agreed that the Observatory should make its submission to the RAE as a separate body.
- 4.3. The Board, after considering draft 7.2 of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium Management Statement and Financial Memorandum, sent to the Board of Governors and the Management Committee on 22 December 2004 for information and comment prior to the meeting, adopted the draft as an acceptable working document on the understanding that it should be regarded as open to change from time to time.

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5. DIRECTORS' REPORTS FOR 2004/2005 AND OPERATIONAL PLANS FOR 2005/2006

Professor Bailey referred to the following matters:

- 5.1. Staff had achieved considerable success during 2004/2005: the 41 papers published in refereed scientific journals was the highest since 1998; external grant and other income, projected at £250k for the year, maintained the high levels of recent years; and the record of talks and other scientific contributions, media mentions and Distinct e-Visitors to the Observatory's web-site remained at high levels. A notable achievement during 2004 was the Observatory's involvement in arrangements for the first joint meeting of the Astronomical Science Group of Ireland and the Institute of Physics in Ireland, "Astronomy and Astrophysics in Ireland". With more than 140 participants this was the largest astronomy meeting ever held in Armagh.
- 5.2. The programme of restoration of several historic telescopes and telescope domes and the improvement of the fabric of the main Grade A listed building has continued with grant assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the DCAL and the Environment and Heritage Service. Staff have also undertaken innovative projects in the Observatory grounds and Astropark, including the construction of the Human Orrery and the inauguration of the new Phenology Garden.
- 5.3. Of the 6 principal objectives for 2004/2005, 5 were achieved, namely to: maintain existing high-quality research programmes; obtain grants and additional external funding to support new research projects; strengthen the Observatory's access to research infrastructure; widen access to the heritage material; and advance plans for a new Library, Archive and Historic Scientific Instruments Building. The remaining principal objective, to strengthen the Observatory's research capability by obtaining additional funding above core funding for the recruitment of additional research staff and to maintain and improve the Observatory's access to high-quality research infrastructure, remains to be achieved. The first six-month's core funding from the DCAL for 2004/2005 was the worst for many years and although additional core funding was awarded by the DCAL for the second six months of the year it is very difficult to plan more than six months ahead because of continuing financial uncertainty.
- 5.4. The principal objectives for 2005/2006 are to: maintain existing high-quality research programmes; obtain grants and additional external funding to support new research projects; strengthen the Observatory's research capability in solar system and stellar astrophysics in readiness for the next RAE (RAE 2008; census date 31 October 2007); enhance the Observatory's access to and use of necessary research infrastructure; widen access to the heritage material; and progress plans for a new Library, Archive and Historic Scientific Instruments Building. The key task for the year is to obtain a stable level of core funding and to gain access to additional funds for the recruitment of additional research staff.
- 5.5. The DCAL recurrent grant for 2005/2006 is projected to be only £660k, the same in cash terms as it was 2 years ago. For a small organisation with significant fixed overheads it is very difficult to maintain normal activities with this level of funding. We need an uplift in core funding if we are to avoid a spiral of decline as well as additional funding for new research staff in preparation for the next RAE. We need as much help

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as possible from the most influential members of the Board to secure additional funding in what is an extremely competitive environment.

Archdeacon Hoey congratulated Professor Bailey on his Report and on what he and his staff had achieved during the previous year.

Dr Mason referred to the following matters:

- 5.6. The Planetarium's main building has been closed to the public, apart from limited summer opening, since November 2000. A sum of £2.5m was awarded by the DCAL in 2004/2005 for the refurbishment of the buildings and for the purchase of projection and other equipment. The equipment has been delivered and is currently in storage. DCAL appointed the Central Procurement Directorate to manage the building refurbishment project and the first stage of this work, the refurbishment of the Administration building, was completed in January 2005. However the contract for the refurbishment of the main building has not yet been awarded. It now appears that a further sum of circa £250k is needed to allow the work to proceed. This work is now some 2.5 months behind schedule and the delay may jeopardise our plans for opening by April 2006.
- 5.7. The Planetarium's outreach activities have been very successful during 2004/2005. Numbers reached by this activity are projected to be 15000 for the year, up approximately 30% on the previous year. Work has already commenced on the production of new shows for the re-opening in 2006 and the Digistar Users Group has awarded the Planetarium a prize for the first publicly shown results of this work. Staff have continued to develop our educational collaboration with scientific institutions both in Ireland and further afield.
- 5.8. Our goals for 2005/2006 are to: complete the building work on the site within the set time scale; install and commission the new Digistar 3 star projector system; install and commission new lighting and sound systems as well as an interactive seating system if resources allow; install and commission new shows for the public and schools' visitors; recruit two new presenters and train them for the scheduled re-opening to the public; install new displays in the public area; refit the staff spaces with basic office furniture and equipment; obtain new computer equipment for the public spaces that can be controlled and maintained using the computer network; refit the old caretaker's bungalow as a deep storage and staff facility, including secure car parking; prepare a comprehensive marketing plan for the 2006/2007 year; further cement our excellent working relationship with the European Space Agency, and continue planning for events that promote scientific careers for young people.
- 5.9. It is likely that the Planetarium will face flat core funding from the DCAL in 2005/2006, which in real terms will represent a cut in funding. When the Planetarium is fully open additional income from admissions will ease the financial difficulties. It is therefore essential that the refurbishment of the main building commences as soon as possible.
- 5.10. During discussion of Dr Mason's report it was agreed that Councillor Gardiner-Watson and Dr Mason should approach Dr McGinley, DCAL Permanent Secretary, in an effort to resolve the difficulties over the refurbishment project.

The Chairman thanked the Directors for their submissions and the Board adopted their reports.

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6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 6.1. The Board considered the current vacancies on the nominees to the Board of Governors and the Board's nominees on the Management Committee and agreed the following:
- Professor Hibbert was nominated to serve as one of the Board nominees on the Management Committee.
 - The replacement for the Astronomer Royal would be asked to serve on the Board and as a nominee of the Governors on the Management Committee when appointed.
 - One further person from the list prepared and ranked by Professor Bailey of suitably eminent and experienced persons would be asked to serve on the Board and as one of the Governors' nominees on the Management Committee.
- 6.2. Dr Mason informed the Board that Mr Pat Corvan, the Planetarium Caretaker, retired on 18 March 2005 after 30 years in the Planetarium's employment. The Board agreed that the Secretary should write to Mr Corvan expressing the Board's thanks and appreciation for his commitment to the work of the Planetarium.

7. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

- 7.1. The Secretary will arrange the date of the next meeting of the Board.

Signed as a true record of the Meeting

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His Grace, the Lord Eames
Chairman of the Board of Governors

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Date