

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VISITATION BY THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD
ON 23 MARCH 2007 AT 10.30 A.M. AT THE OBSERVATORY**

Present: His Grace, the Most Reverend A.E.T.Harper, Archdeacon R.G. Hoey, Canon J.M. Barton, Canon C.F. Moore, Canon H.J.W. Moore, Canon R. J.N. Porteus, Councillor B. Gardiner-Watson, Professor A. Hibbert and Professor J.E.Dyson

Apologies: Dean P.W. Rooke, Canon J.W. McKegney and Lord Ballyedmond

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

1. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

The Chairman referred to the following matters:

- 1.1. The DCAL has recently submitted draft 8 of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum for the Observatory and Planetarium. This document is in essence a statement of the terms and conditions under which the DCAL will provide grant assistance to the organization. The DCAL are now pressing the Directors to sign the document by 31 March 2007, otherwise future grant payment may be withheld. After discussion of the matter, the Board agreed that the Directors should sign the document with the proviso that any remaining issues will be addressed through the regular accountability meetings between the DCAL and the organization. The document will shortly be sent to the Board for information and comment together with guidance from the Directors on the remaining matters which need to be resolved.
- 1.2. Mr Paul Sweeney wrote to the Chairman on 15 February 2007 in connection with the future structure of the Board and the Management Committee. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has announced that the boards of all public bodies funded by Government should be appointed under the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment's guidelines. To implement this announcement in the Observatory and Planetarium would mean significant changes to the structure of the Board and the Management Committee. The Secretary of State has agreed to an alternative approach proposed by Mr Sweeney, namely (a) the Board of Governors will be left as currently constituted, (b) the number of DCAL appointees on the Management Committee would increase from four to six in June 2008 and (c) there would be no members co-opted by the Board on the Management Committee after June 2008, thus reducing the total membership of the Management Committee from 15 to 13 members, six of which will be appointed by the DCAL.
- 1.3. In his letter of reply dated 22 March 2007, the Chairman expressed his wish that the Board retain the right to co-opt persons to the Management Committee to ensure that there would be persons on the Management Committee with the specialist knowledge to advise on the present and future work of the two institutions. In respect of the draft Management Statement and Financial Memorandum, the frequency of reporting to the Department appeared to be excessive and the proposal to "claw back" the Planetarium's income above forecast appeared to be unfair. Councillor Gardiner-Watson agreed that he would help to facilitate a meeting with the new Minister for the Department when appointed to discuss these and other matters.

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2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VISITATION HELD ON 30 MARCH 2006

- 2.1. The minutes of the Annual Visitation of the Board of Governors held on 30 March 2006 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 3.1. Professor Bailey informed the Board that as the dip at the entrance to the Robinson Drive helps to reduce the speed of motorists it would be safer to leave it as it is. Mr Young will seek advice on signage from the Southern Education and Library Board, who are responsible for the maintenance of this section of the drive.
- 3.2. Councillor Gardiner-Watson was pleased to note that the meeting with DCAL officials attended by Councillor Gardiner-Watson and Dr Mason had helped to resolve the funding difficulties of the building refurbishment project and congratulated Dr Mason on the completion of the project and the Planetarium's achievements since re-opening.

4. REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- 4.1. The Board reviewed the approved minutes of the Management Committee held on 22 June 2006, draft minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2006 and the draft minutes of the meeting of the Internal Audit Committee on 7 June 2006.
- 4.2. The Board agreed that the papers submitted to each Management Committee should continue to be circulated to the Board.
- 4.3. Professor Hibbert informed the Board that as his department in Queen's University Belfast was re-locating to another building, there were some surplus journals which can be handed over to the Observatory for its collection. In addition, the Queen's University Belfast Validation Committee has approved the continuation of the collaboration between the University and the Observatory for the next five years. The Memorandum of Agreement on the collaboration will be submitted to the Management Committee for comment and then to the Board.
- 4.4. Professor Bailey thanked Professor Hibbert for his help in these matters and also emphasized the friendly atmosphere of constructive dialogue and support in which the review of the collaboration between the Observatory and QUB had been carried out. All the Observatory's senior research staff have now been approved as Recognised Teachers of the University.

5. DIRECTORS' REPORTS FOR 2006/2007 AND BUSINESS PLANS FOR 2007/2008

Professor Bailey referred to the following matters:

- 5.1. The Observatory performed well in 2006/2007 despite the lower number of research staff, with publications in refereed scientific journals, identified media citations and Distinct e-Visitors all above target. Income from research grants was lower than in previous years owing to stiff competition for grants and the presence of only three Research Astronomers in post during the year.
- 5.2. No progress has been made on plans for a new Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Building because DCAL were not in a position to confirm that they could provide funding for project expenditure not covered by any grant received from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 5.3. Three new Research Astronomers were recruited during the year bringing the total number of Research Astronomers to six. This will strengthen the Observatory's future research capacity and ability to obtain research grants.

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- 5.4. During the year John Butler, who retired on 30 November 2006, was honoured by receipt of an MBE in the 2006 June Birthday Honours list, Gerry Doyle was honoured by Membership of the Royal Irish Academy and Aileen McKee completed, in one year, her 2-year part-time Level 4 NVQ in Business and Administration, the equivalent of a university degree and a very significant achievement.
- 5.5. The Observatory's share of Skills and Science funding is a very valuable source of additional funding and significant progress has been made towards meeting the Observatory's Skills and Science targets, which are mainly educational and outreach.
- 5.6. The Armagh Observatory Annual Report 2006 has been completed and distributed to the Board.
- 5.7. The principal objectives for 2007/2008 are to:
 - maintain and expand existing high-quality research programmes;
 - obtain grants and additional external funding to support new research projects;
 - prepare for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE 2008), which has a census date 31 October 2007, and make a high-quality RAE submission;
 - promote and develop the Armagh Observatory Grounds and Astropark, and widen access to astronomy at Armagh by expanding the Observatory's Education and Public Outreach programme; and
 - progress plans for a new Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments Building.

Key performances indicators, including new indicators required by the DCAL, for these objectives are contained in the Business Plan.

- 5.8. The statement of Income and Expenditure for 2007/2008 in the draft Business Plan projects a shortfall of £55,000, which can if necessary be funded by using the Observatory's reserves. The announced parliamentary grant-in-aid for 2007/2008 is again £1050k (Resource) plus £13k (Capital) of which the Observatory's share is £660k (Resource) and £6.5 (Capital), the same in cash terms as in 2003/2004. Although the Observatory is expecting to obtain higher levels of external grant income in future years it is likely to require an uplift in core financial support to maintain its present high level of research activity in the long term.

Dr Mason referred to the following matters:

- 5.9. During 2006/2007 the Planetarium confirmed its position at the leading edge of centre-based and outreach learning, being the only institution in Ireland with a Digistar-equipped theatre.
- 5.10. The Northern Ireland Space Office has been set up by Robert Hill with funding from Yorkshire Forward and Space Connections. Mr Hill has completed his work on the Key Stage 3 curriculum programme for the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment which will bring astronomy into the curriculum with the Planetarium as the venue of choice for teacher resources.
- 5.11. The Planetarium continues to participate and take a leading role in science events hosted by institutes of technology and universities in Galway, Waterford and Limerick and is also, through the Forfás Discovery of Science and Engineering Programme, receiving visits from primary schoolchildren from the Republic of Ireland.
- 5.12. Funding from the Skills and Science programme has helped to maintain and develop the Planetarium's outreach programme.
- 5.13. A new programme of night and day sky observing and astrophotography is being developed and David Malin, an expert in astrophotography, will visit the Planetarium in May 2007 as part of this programme.

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- 5.14. The Planetarium is open to all in society and in particular makes a special effort to ensure that its educational services are accessible by those from disadvantaged backgrounds and with disabilities.
- 5.15. The Planetarium has cemented its relationship with the European Space Agency (ESA) and continues to receive support from ESA in the form of displays for the exhibition area.
- 5.16. Over 37,000 people have visited the Planetarium since re-opening at the end of July 2006. Outreach figures, currently just under 10,000 to date, will be substantially increased as a result of Robert Hill's presentations at the BT Young Scientist event in the RDS, Dublin.
- 5.17. The Business Plan for 2007/2008 has been accepted by DCAL subject to a few minor amendments. The primary target for 2007/2008 is to achieve visitor numbers of 67,000. Income from admissions and shop sales is expected to be about £250,000 and the target for numbers reached through outreach is 22,000.
- 5.18. As a result of a joint venture with Mars UK Limited who are launching a new confectionery, Mars Planets, the Planetarium logo will be displayed in 364 supermarkets across Northern Ireland.
- 5.19. The Statement of Income and Expenditure for 2007/2008 shows a balanced position.

The Chairman thanked the two Directors for their presentations which clearly demonstrated the academic excellence of the research work and the very innovative approach to education and outreach.

On the proposal of Archdeacon Hoey, seconded by Councillor Gardiner-Watson, the Board approved the Observatory's draft Business Plan and the Planetarium's Business Plan for 2007/2008.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 6.1. Professor Bailey said that the second Armagh Heritage Day, organized by the Armagh Visitor Education Group, will take place on 23 May 2007.
- 6.2. Dr Mason said that he intended to write to the DCAL to express his concerns about the high cost of preventative maintenance proposed by the Properties Services Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel and the DCAL's view that Planetarium staff are employed under Northern Ireland Civil Service terms and conditions, which was not the Director's view. It was agreed that Dr Mason should circulate a copy of his letter to the Board and keep the Board informed of developments in these matters.

7. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

- 7.1. The next meeting of the Board will take place in the Observatory Boardroom on Friday 14 March 2008 starting at 10.30 a.m.

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 Board of Governors

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Date: 14 March 2008