

**MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-NINTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2005 AT 10.30 A.M. AT THE OBSERVATORY**

Present: His Grace, The Lord Eames (Chair), Mrs M. Cruickshank, Mrs Sue Hogg, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Archdeacon R. Hoey, Professor J. Dyson and Professor L. Drury

Apologies: Dr F. Byrne, Dr Á. Downey, Professor P. Dufton, Professor M. Merrifield and Professor A. Hibbert

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

**1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JUNE 2005**

- 1.1. The following amendment was made to paragraph 5.17 of the draft minutes of the Committee meeting held on 28 June 2005, which were previously circulated: "The Observatory's Business Plan for 2005/2006 projects an expected expenditure some £106,900 more than the projected income. It is virtually impossible for the Observatory to make recurrent savings of the required order of magnitude without seriously damaging its long-term position and weakening its RAE return. The Business Plan for 2005/2006 has been agreed by the DCAL on the understanding that the shortfall would be met from the Observatory's reserves. The DCAL is also considering options for providing the necessary additional funds to secure the Observatory's long-term position."
- 1.2. The minutes of the meeting were then approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

**2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

Dr Byrne, who was unable to attend the meeting, will report on the work of the Options Committee at the next meeting of the Committee.

**4. DIRECTORS' INTERIM REPORTS**

Professor Bailey referred to the following matters from his Interim Report:

- 4.1. Over the past three years the Observatory has been on flat cash funding from the DCAL and this situation is forecast to continue for at least the next two years. As a result the Observatory is now at crisis point in terms of its core funding. The two vacant research astronomer posts should be filled as soon as possible to at least maintain the current level of research activity but the recruitment process cannot start until the future funding regime is clear. It is now a matter of urgency that the

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Observatory's funding is put on a secure and sustainable long-term foundation. After a full discussion of the matter, the Committee agreed that the Chairman should write outlining the very serious funding difficulty facing the Observatory and the likely consequences if this is not resolved, to Lady Hermon MP, in her capacity as a member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, and to Mr Peter Hain MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

- 4.2. A new automatic meteor camera system was inaugurated at the Observatory in June 2005, comprising three low light level video cameras with software to detect and record meteors whenever they occur.
- 4.3. Michael Smith reports that he has taken his first observations with SALT, and helped prepare the text for the first-light press release. Mark Bailey represented the Observatory at the official inauguration of SALT at Sutherland on 10 November 2005 in the presence of the South African President, Thabo Mbeki.
- 4.4. The newly formed Research Advisory Committee, comprising Professor John Dyson (University of Leeds; Chair), Professor Mark Birkinshaw (University of Bristol) and Professor Carl Murray (Queen Mary, University of London), plans to undertake a preliminary view of the Observatory's strengths and weaknesses in the forthcoming RAE as soon as the Physics Panel's assessment criteria have been announced in January 2006.
- 4.5. The HLF, DCAL and EHS funded project "Telescopes and Domes at Armagh Observatory" has now been completed with the exception of two pieces of optics. No progress can be made on the proposal for the new Library, Archives and Historic Scientific Instruments building as the DCAL has so far been unable to make any commitment to the required matching funding.
- 4.6. Details on staff who have left and joined the Observatory are contained in the Report.
- 4.7. The recently agreed Management Statement and Financial Memorandum is again under review with a substantially changed document due from the DCAL.
- 4.8. After receipt of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report on the taxation provision in the Observatory's accounts, both the Observatory and the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the external auditors, were satisfied that the provision was no longer required and accordingly the 2004/2005 audited accounts were altered to reflect the release of the provision.
- 4.9. The Observatory Risk Register, which had previously been considered by the Internal Audit Committee, has been included in the Report for information. Lack of core funding and lack of research development funds are the two major identified risks facing the Observatory.
- 4.10. The lease of a parcel of land to the Armstrong Primary School has been extended to 30 June 2007.
- 4.11. There was one reportable accident during the period, details of which were included in the Report.
- 4.12. The BDS review of the job description of the post of Director of the Armagh Observatory has been completed. The next stage is the grading evaluation.

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- 4.13. A copy of the Observatory's input to the DCAL's August 2005 Budget Review was included for the Committee's information as an Appendix to the Report.

The Chairman thanked Professor Bailey for the effort he had put into what was a very comprehensive report and remarked that the Committee would be content with less material if this would be of assistance.

Dr Mason presented the Planetarium Interim Report:

- 4.14. Control of the main building is due to be handed back to the Planetarium on 19 December 2005 after which work will commence on the commissioning of the projection equipment and the installation of the theatre seating.
- 4.15. Outreach has been very busy from September 2005 to date with numbers reaching 6,500 in the period with a further 5,000 anticipated at the Galway Science Festival.
- 4.16. At a presentation in Belfast to inform senior civil servants from DETI, Invest Northern Ireland, DCAL and DEL about the Planetarium's work, it was noted that the Director and the Presenters have very complementary skills that allow tightly knit team working.
- 4.17. It is very important at this point in the Planetarium's history to acknowledge the very considerable achievements gained since the 5-year plan for the Planetarium was presented to the Committee in 2003. All the key aims in that plan have been largely achieved with further advances expected soon.
- 4.18. Substantial progress has been made on the production of new shows with a total of six shows due to be available for the re-opening.
- 4.19. The current estimated cost for the Planetarium refurbishment project is £2,985,000.
- 4.20. All public rooms and spaces in the newly refurbished main building will be renamed after famous astronomers of the past. Work is underway with a glass artist to provide a central piece for the new shop area.
- 4.21. Details of the various staff changes since the last meeting of the Committee are contained in the Report.
- 4.22. Recruitment training will take place on 30 November 2005, after which the recruitment process for new education staff will commence.
- 4.23. New visitor booking documentation will be prepared for the re-opening of the Planetarium
- 4.24. The report of the Theatre Manager on the Digistar 3 training is appended to the Report. The time taken to render computer images for use in shows is very large with typically 6 hours needed to produce less than a minute of rendered imagery.
- 4.25. Work on the development of telescope night facilities is continuing.
- 4.26. Bytel have installed new computer server equipment in the basement of the former caretaker's house and have agreed to sponsor a new car for the Planetarium's use.

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4.27. Armagh Planetarium has become the tenth recognized Discover Centre in Ireland. All of these centres offer specific programmes designed for the Discover Primary Science Initiative.

4.28. The new Planetarium logos are attached to the Report for information.

During the course of the Committee's discussion of the Planetarium Interim Report, Dr Mason confirmed that he was confident visitor numbers could be sustained without loss of the outreach operation. In the case of the recruitment of new staff, he anticipated that there was a pool of good applicants for the new education posts. Those recruited will be thoroughly tested in the outreach field. The re-opening date of the new building is likely to be 6 June 2006 but this will be confirmed in due course.

The Committee agreed that the Chairman should invite Mr Bill Gates, founder of the Microsoft Corporation, to the re-opening ceremony and that the Chairman should send a letter of appreciation to Planetarium staff in recognition of their hard work and commitment to the Planetarium.

**5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

5.1. The Employment Conditions and Remuneration Committee was to have met just before the Management Committee meeting to consider a paper prepared by Dr Mason, but the meeting could not be held because insufficient committee members were present to form a quorum. The Committee agreed to consider Dr Mason's paper and after full discussion of the matter the Committee gave Dr Mason permission to proceed with the recommendations contained in the paper.

5.2. After considering a letter from the DCAL, dated 14 September 2005, requesting the completion of Performance Appraisal and Self-Assessment Forms for each member of the Management Committee and the Board of Governors, the Committee concluded that it would be difficult to see how such a process would work in the organisation, given the unique structure of both management boards. The Chairman asked the Secretary discuss this matter further with the DCAL.

**6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Secretary will inform members of the dates of the 2006 Management Committee meetings.

Signed as a true record of the Meeting

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His Grace, the Lord Eames  
Chairman of the Management Committee

Dated: 22 June 2006