

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 15 JUNE 2020 AT 11.00 AM**

**Present:** Mr J Briggs (Chair), Mr S Brown, The Very Rev Dean G Dunstan, Mr P McGurgan, Dr M McKay, Professor M Merrifield, Professor R Oudmaijer, Professor T Ray and Mr R Wilson

**Apologies:** Mr B Hannam, Professor L Harra, Professor M Mathioudakis

**In Attendance:** Professor M Burton (Director), Mrs C Corvan (Head of Corporate Services), Dr M Sarzi (Head of Research), Mr L Knox (Head of Finance), Dr K Lemon (Boardroom Apprentice) and Mrs L Brown (Corporate Manager)

**1. OPENING REMARKS**

1.1 At the outset the Chair welcomed everyone to the second virtual Management Committee meeting.

**2. APOLOGIES**

2.1 Apologies were recorded as above.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 The Chair reminded members and officers of the need to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest associated with any item on the Agenda either now or at the relevant point during the meeting. No conflicts of interest were declared at this point.

**4. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2019**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of 30 March 2020 were reviewed and approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting to be signed by the Chair at a later date.

**5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

5.1 The Committee noted that there were 5 ongoing matters arising from previous meetings. Three remained ongoing and it was proposed to close the remaining 2. There were no further matters raised.

## 6. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 6.1 The Chair reported that the Annual Visitation by the Board of Governors was scheduled for Thursday 18 June and would be chaired by the new Archbishop. Both he and Professor Burton had had a virtual meeting with him.
- 6.2 In terms of Membership related matters the Chair reported:
- that DfC would be carrying out a recruitment process for 3 positions on the Management Committee to replace those due to expire at 31 December, namely Mr Brett Hannam, Dr Mike McKay and Mrs Primrose Wilson who had resigned two years prior. The campaign was due to commence in September and he had been invited to sit on the Interview Panel;
  - in line with the public appointments, it was necessary to approach STFC and DIAS regarding their nominees to the Management Committee. **Action MC 15/6/20–1 Write to STFC and DIAS regarding their nominees to the Management Committee.**
- 6.3 The Chair said he would like to recommend an Alumni-type body that would provide an opportunity for those with long-established connections with AOP, including past Committee and Board Members, to remain involved and continue their interest through a series of engagement activities. A draft Paper had been prepared and he asked that it be circulated to Members for their consideration. **Action MC 15/6/20–2 Alumni Paper to be circulated to Management Committee.**
- 6.4 Applications for the 2020 Boardroom Apprentice opened on 8 June. Dr Kirstin Lemon had agreed to remain on the Management Committee until a new appointment was made.
- 6.5 The Annual Board Evaluation Questionnaire would be issued within the next few days and Members were asked to return them promptly to the Corporate Manager.

*Due to technical difficulties Professor R Oudmaijer temporarily lost connection during the above Agenda Item.*

## 7. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR

- 7.1 Professor Burton guided the Committee through his report, elaborating briefly on the matters for discussion.
- 7.2 In terms of the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), Professor Merrifield referred to the engagement and outreach activities across many platforms and commented that there was still massive potential and opportunities to actively engage to increase market share, e.g. through the Institute of Physics' Teachers' Forum. Dr Sarzi advised that the Education and Outreach Manager planned to work remotely with teachers to support them. Professor Merrifield offered his assistance in this regard. Mrs Corvan advised that AOP was engaging with the Association of Science and Discovery Centres Forum. She undertook to request the Education and Outreach Manager to contact Professor Merrifield directly.

- 7.3 Dean Dunstan congratulated all those involved in the outreach programme, which he considered to be impressive.
- 7.4 The Chair felt it was useful to have Principles for Development on AOP Lands documented, adding that the paper included as part of the Director's Report was a living document. In response to a query, it was noted that the comments received from ABC Council and RSA had related to a more specific link to the Armagh Area and engagement with the City and in respect of education, that AOP's future plans had a desire to expand its education role.
- 7.5 Professor Burton pointed out that the Principles Paper would also be considered at the Board of Governors meeting later in the week with the Board having ultimate authority in such matters.
- 7.6 Dean Dunstan and Mr Wilson declared an interest in the Planning Application on AOP lands leased to the Royal School Armagh which was contained within the Director's report. The interests declared were not material and both Management Committee Members remained in the meeting.
- 7.7 In response to a query from Mr Wilson, Professor Burton confirmed that it remained the case that no response had been received from the Council's Planning Department. Mr Wilson undertook to investigate why plans were not publicly available for comment.
- 7.8 Mindful of his declared conflict, Mr Wilson explained that there should be no reason why the plans and planning documents could not be viewed adding that this was in the spirit of the working partnership between the Council, the Education Authority, the Royal School, AOP and private landowners. He said there was no reason for any secrecy or perceived secrecy. Mrs Corvan acknowledged this and confirmed that provisional plans had been shared with AOP, but that AOP needed to be sure it was commenting on the final plans.
- 7.9 In response to queries the Committee noted that it was not known why the Observatory had not been included in the 1991 extension of the Armagh Conservation Area, although it may have been because the Observatory and lands had their own listed status. It was also noted that inclusion within the Conservation Area did not preclude development but would ensure that more careful consideration was given to any proposals. Such an approach had proved beneficial for Jodrell Bank. Professor Burton clarified that it was not intended to have all of the AOP site included within the Conservation Area. It was proposed to include the area and gardens around the Observatory, including the historic site lines, but not those around the Planetarium.
- 7.10 Dean Dunstan commented that conserving the historical Meridian sight lines was of crucial importance as this affected grounds over which the Observatory has no control. Having planning guidelines for consideration at that point could be very important as without them something of very important significance to AOP could be destroyed.
- 7.11 The Chair reported that AOP would investigate further inclusion of the Observatory, its immediate environs and gardens in the Conservation Area. The Committee would be required to give final consideration to the list in due course.

- 7.12 In terms of redefining AOP's Vision the Chair referred to the report, with a working title 'ICARUS @ Armagh', which had previously been circulated. He said it was a living document and stressed the importance of AOP's relevancy and making its future as relevant as possible in a post-COVID world. There was a need to demonstrate how AOP was relevant to science, education and heritage. With reference to the project group meeting with DfC he reported that they had suggested meeting with Department of Education and others to further develop the ideas.
- 7.13 Mr Brown pointed out that the relevancy of science was never more important and never as mis-understood, fuelled by the internet. He considered a centre for understanding science was needed.
- 7.14 With reference to mental health issues, Mr McGurgan suggested engaging with the Department of Health. The Chair undertook to follow up on the suggestion.
- 7.15 Professor Oudmaijer congratulated Professor Burton on the paper which he considered displayed huge confidence and sought clarity on what was meant by an incubation hub. In response, Professor Burton explained that there was no specific thinking at present but that it related to establishing an applied research element showcasing and explaining science in a visual way.
- 7.16 Dr Lemon suggested engaging with the Department of Economy around tourism and employability. She referred to the skills-gap for scientists for the future and the contribution that AOP could make to future scientists.
- 7.17 The Chair thanked Members for their comments and commended Professor Burton and the project team for their work. He believed the document was ambitious and confident and stressed that AOP needed to be confident in its relevance. The Committee noted that changes would be made to the document in light of any comments received from the Departments previously mentioned.
- 7.18 Professor Burton drew attention to a paper on Business Consultancy Services' review of the SIB recommendations for AOP which had been included as part of his report and advised that it provided a conclusion to this matter. The review had not identified any further issues. The Chair acknowledged the journey to this point, adding that the recommendations arising from the report that had brought about the merger of the two organisations had been achieved in the context of how the new organisation was governed and organised and AOP was now moving towards a Partnership Agreement approach.
- 7.19 Mr Brown commented that AOP was now a unified organisation, which he considered to be strong and this was to be commended. On behalf of the Management Committee, the Chair extended thanks to the leadership team in this regard.
- 7.20 It was noted that a Business Plan for 2020-21 had been prepared and submitted to DfC pre-COVID, however, this would need revisited as the KPIs were now unachievable.
- 7.21 The Committee noted that the Dome projector system was almost complete.

7.22 Dr Sarzi reported that the STFC-funded PhD position had been offered to a female student.

7.23 Professor Ray referred to the STFC School to be held in January which would be virtual. He requested that consideration be given to making the School available to PhD students in Ireland as well. Dr Sarzi replied that this should be possible.

7.24 The Committee accepted the Director's report.

## **8. UPDATE FROM THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC)**

8.1 Mr Brown provided the update from the ARAC on behalf of Mr Hannam. He informed the Committee that the ARAC had considered 3 papers from the new Internal Audit providers, CavanaghKelly – Internal Audit Charter, Internal Audit Strategy 2020-2023 and Annual Internal Audit Plan 2020-2021 all of which were being presented to the Management Committee for approval.

8.2 The following papers had also been considered and were recommended for approval:

- Risk Register, which had been updated to include changes due to COVID-19
- Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (September-March)
- Annual Board Assurance Statement
- Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20, which included the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20
- Revisions to the Financial Policies and Procedures

8.3 The Management Committee accepted the Acting Chair of ARAC's update report and approved the Internal Audit Charter, Internal Audit Strategy 2020-2023, Annual Internal Audit Plan 2020-2021, Risk Register, Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (September-March), Annual Board Assurance Statement; Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20 (including Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20) and the revisions to the Financial Policies and Procedures.

## **9. UPDATE FROM THE STAFFING POLICY AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (SPRC)**

9.1 Professor Ray reported that SPRC had considered the draft appraisal policy. Whilst the SPRC had been content with the policy itself, the consultation process had not concluded and so it was felt that the final policy should be brought back in September.

9.2 Following the appointment of a PDRA to the Öpik Fellowship, STFC funding for a short period of up to 10 months for a post-doctoral position had been created. Management felt that it would be very difficult to attract anyone to such a position due to its short duration and the current circumstances and considered that the only viable option was to appoint a PhD Student who had just qualified and had been working in this field. SPRC had approved the 10 month appointment subject to STFC agreeing to extend the funding beyond 31 March 2020.

9.3 The SPRC had noted the following matters:

- a new Education Structure had been implemented following an internal recruitment process;
- appointment had been made to a 2-year PDRA post, subject to a successful visa application;
- it was planned to commence recruitment to the two remaining posts in the structure still filled by temporary agency staff before the end of June;
- three short term temporary posts continued, subject to available budget;
- the 2019 Pay Award had been implemented by NICS at 2% across all grades. A Pay Remit business case had been completed and would be submitted to DfC for approval;
- staffing arrangements during lockdown had been discussed and the focus was now on Recovery Plans. The majority of staff would continue to work from home for the foreseeable future as this was working well. The Committee had been particularly complimentary about the positive way in which AOP continued to operate throughout the pandemic;
- Project Juno plans would continue to focus on recruitment practices. The most recent appointments had been female;
- proposals for a staff engagement event to take place following the September Management Committee, or if this was not possible, the December meeting.

9.4 The Committee had considered a confidential matter and agreed that a set of principles be prepared for consideration in September, with a view to bringing the matter to the Management Committee for discussion and approval.

9.5 In response to a query from Professor Merrifield regarding the completeness of the Appraisal Policy, Professor Ray explained that the SPRC had been content with the document but since it was subject to ongoing consultation the Committee felt it would be more appropriate to bring a final document back for formal approval in September and so it was being withdrawn from the Management Committee Agenda.

9.6 Professor Merrifield commented that the draft policy didn't provide much information in terms of how it linked with the wider HR function if performance was unsatisfactory. Mrs Corvan explained that the appraisal policy had been through a few iterations, the original having been very Civil Service orientated. The HR Audit had identified a few issues with the appraisal process and so she had developed a simpler form with accompanying guidance notes for each section.

9.7 Mrs Corvan undertook to review the Policy in light of Professor Merrifield's comments.

9.8 With reference to the temporary post-doctoral offer, Professor Oudmaijer considered the individual to be an excellent choice and queried the absence of a recruitment campaign. Professor Ray explained that the SPRC had discussed similar concerns but considered the proposed approach the only viable option in the circumstances. STFC was in agreement with the approach, however approval to extend funding had not yet been granted. He agreed with Professor Oudmaijer's comment regarding the calibre of the individual concerned. Mrs Corvan acknowledged that it was a deviation from AOP's normal recruitment policies but that a case had been approved by Professor Burton which detailed why this was deemed the only viable option.

9.9 The Management Committee accepted the report and approved the recommendation from the SPRC to offer a 10 month Fixed Term contract, subject to STFC agreeing to a funding extension.

## 10. POLICY FOR APPROVAL

10.1 The draft Gifts and Hospitality Policy was approved and the Chair pointed out that the Policy was relevant to Members.

## 11. AOB

11.1 The Committee noted the availability of training which was now being delivered on-line.

## 12. DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS

12.1 The remaining meetings for 2020 were noted as:

21 September

14 December

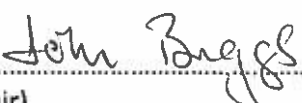
12.2 Professor Merrifield pointed out that the dates for the remaining meetings were particularly inconvenient for those from a University environment – one clashing with the first week of term and the other the last week of term. He asked that this be borne in mind when next setting dates.

12.3 It was hoped that the next series of meetings, in September, could be a hybrid meeting with a combination of those who may wish to travel and those who would join from home. Mrs Corvan reminded Members that it was planned to have an engagement event following the September meeting if conditions permitted.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their participation.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

  
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(Chair)

Dated:





MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION POINT LOG  
AND MATTERS ARISING

Updated Actions as at 29 May 2020

Reference	Action	Owner	Progress
MC29/01/15 – 01	Dr McKay to explore within ESA if exhibits could be provided to the Planetarium	Dr McKay	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p><b>16 December 2019:</b> Dr McKay and Professor Burton to progress.</p> <p><b>10 December 2018:</b> Dr McKay advised that he and Professor Burton would endeavour to progress the matter relating to the exhibits.</p> <p><b>21 June 2018:</b> Dr McKay advised that he has been unable to progress this due to his contact being on exceptional leave. He will endeavour to resolve this before his retirement.</p> <p><b>17 November 2017:</b> Continuing to explore opportunities with Dr McKay</p> <p><b>1 September 2017:</b> Dr McKay advised that he will introduce Mr News to the ESA PR.</p> <p><b>23 August 2017:</b> John News has been appointed as temporary HECO and will pursue this matter with Dr McKay</p> <p><b>29 March 2017:</b> It is hoped that a temporary Head of Education &amp; Outreach will be appointed shortly and this matter will be pursued at this time.</p> <p><b>20 September 2016:</b> Dr McKay has spoken to ESA PR in HQ (Paris). ESA would like to understand the direction AOP intends to follow and what support they could provide. It has been decided to wait until the new Head of Education &amp; Outreach is appointed before pursuing further.</p> <p><b>28 January 2016:</b> Dr McKay to introduce Planetarium representative to the ESA teams to pursue potential exhibits.</p>
MC24/6/19-02 & MC16/12/19	Invite Sean Barden to September Management Committee meeting	Corporate Manager	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p><b>May 2020:</b> Deferred until a physical meeting can take place.</p> <p><b>16 December 2019:</b> Deferred to Board of Governors Meeting 2020</p> <p><b>10 September 2019:</b> Deferred to December meeting due to facilitated session with Management Committee Members following September meeting</p>
MC23/9/19-04	KPI 3 to be reviewed for 2020/21 financial year in consultation with Professor Mathioudakis	Dr Sarzi	<p><b>Proposed to Close</b></p> <p>No longer relevant</p>
MC30/3/20-01	Analytics on online activity to be brought to the June meeting.	Prof Burton	<p><b>Proposed to Close</b></p> <p>Statistical information included in Director's Report</p>

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ACTION POINT LOG  
AND MATTERS ARISING

Reference	Action	Owner	Progress
MC30/3/20-02	Explore inclusion of Observatory in Armagh Conservation Area and report back to a future meeting.	SMT	Ongoing June 2020: Update included in Director's Report