

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2020 AT 11.00 AM**

Present: Mr J Briggs (Chair), Mr S Brown, Mr B Hannam, Professor L Harra, Professor M Mathioudakis, Dr M McKay, Professor M Merrifield, Professor R Oudmaijer, Professor T Ray and Mr R Wilson

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), Ms K Moylan (Boardroom Apprentice) and Mrs L Brown (Corporate Manager)

Apology: Mr P McGurgan

**1. OPENING REMARKS**

1.1 At the outset the Chair welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and advised that Professor Mathioudakis and Mr Wilson had been delayed but would join in due course.

**2. APOLOGIES**

2.1 An apology was 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 21 SEPTEMBER 2020**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of 21 September 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 Dr McKay referred to the long-standing action to explore within ESA if exhibits could be provided to the Planetarium and reported that he had made new connections for Professor Burton with personnel with whom AOP could engage in respect of the new exhibition area.

5.2 The Chair reported that there were 9 matters arising from previous meetings. Three remained ongoing and it was proposed to close the remaining 6 matters.

5.3 With regards to the matter arising in respect of the timeline for Dean Dunstan's replacement, Mr Hannam advised the Committee that he had observed that Rev Shane Forster, Ballymore, Tandragee had been announced as the Dean's successor and would be installed in Feb 2021.

5.4 There were no further matters arising.

## 6. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 6.1 In terms of the Board Evaluation Questionnaire, the Chair reported that a few more responses had been received since the last meeting and the revised summary had been circulated. The average for all responses was >3 and deemed to be positive. Efforts would be made to provide a simpler questionnaire for 2021.

*Professor Mathioudakis joined the meeting at 11.08 am.*

- 6.2 In terms of Membership issues the Chair noted that there were quite a few members who would be leaving the Management Committee and Board of Governors at 31 December 2020. In terms of the Management Committee these were Mr Hannam, Dr McKay, Professor Ray, Professor Merrifield and Professor Oudmaijer. In addition, Dean Dunstan had retired at the end of October and Mrs Wilson had retired previously but had not been replaced.
- 6.3 With regards to the Board of Governors, the Chair referred to the announcement of Rev Shane Forster as successor for Dean Dunstan and advised that the Board of Governors would be required to consider its nominees to the Management Committee to replace Dean Dunstan and Professor Oudmaijer and that a recruitment campaign was under way to replace the DfC nominee Mr Greg Berry whose term was also ending at 31 December.
- 6.4 Whilst the principles of changing the membership were right and proper the Chair stated that it was sad to be losing very committed individuals who had contributed so significantly during the merger and the establishment of AOP as a trusted organisation. He said they were all passionate and motivated individuals and hoped that in the future he could still contact them for advice.
- 6.5 The Chair provided an update on the DfC recruitment campaign and the process adding that there had been 9 candidates shortlisted for interview. He reported that there were very strong candidates.
- 6.6 In conclusion, the Chair thanked those retiring members whom he said had contributed so significantly during the merger, creating a new organisation which maintained the reputation for research.
- 6.7 While acknowledging that it was time he was replaced on the Management Committee, Professor Merrifield expressed his disappointment and upset that no-one had had the courtesy to tell him so ahead of this final meeting. In response to a query regarding a replacement nominee from STFC and whether there was anything he could do to assist, the Chair confirmed that Dr Matt Darnley, Head of Teaching and a Reader in Time Domain Astrophysics at the Astrophysics Research Institute of Liverpool John Moores University had been appointed by the STFC. Professor Merrifield thanked his fellow Management Committee members and said it had been a pleasure working with them.
- 6.8 Professor Ray reported that Dr Caitriona Jackman had been nominated by DIAS as his successor. She had worked with data from missions to solar system planets and was very interested in outreach.

- 6.9 Professor Oudmaijer stated that he was touched by the gratitude offered and was pleased how the two parts of the organisation had come together to become a single organisation that was respected by the Department and he hoped that the Department would continue its support of AOP. He expressed concern that good governance was not just about process but also about personnel and in particular that the HR aspect of the organisation was a little bit removed from the organisation if it was required to defer to the Department on issues. He suggested perhaps some sort of HR Ombudsman to the Management Committee. In conclusion, Professor Oudmaijer expressed his gratitude at being part of such a nice organisation for so long.
- 6.10 Addressing the concern expressed by Professor Oudmaijer the Chair referred to the move towards a Partnership Agreement with the Department for Communities. Professor Burton stated that increased delegation limits was another area being reviewed and added that the Department now had a clearer understanding of what AOP needed to do and vice versa.
- 6.11 Mrs Corvan pointed out that the Department was very supportive of AOP and working in partnership a significant amount of money had been invested in AOP over the last couple of years particularly in upgrading the Planetarium. She recognised that there were a few issues that still needed to be moved forward but that the organisation was nearing the end of the issues with the governance arrangements and as a result had the full confidence of the Department. Professor Burton added that approx. £200k had been secured for pure research projects.
- 6.12 The Chair advised that AOP was losing the Chairs of both of its Committees – Mr Hannam and Professor Ray. He said that both were very professional and would be sorely missed. He reported that Mr Brown had agreed to take on the role of Interim Chair of the ARAC in March 2021.

*Mr Wilson joined the meeting at 11.21 am.*

- 6.13 The Committee noted the Alumni Proposal paper and that a formal launch would be arranged in 2021 when restrictions permitted.
- 6.14 The Chair reported that the Management Committee Terms of Reference stated that they would be reviewed at least every three years. They had last been reviewed in November 2017. He proposed that these be reviewed for consideration in March following the appointment of new members. **Action MC 14/12/20-1 MC Terms of Reference to be reviewed for consideration at March 2021 meeting.**
- 6.15 Once the new appointments to the Management Committee had been confirmed, suggested proposed dates for the June, September and December 2021 Management Committee meetings would be circulated. The date that suited most would be selected. The date of the March meeting was Monday 15 March.
- 6.16 In response to a query from Professor Harra regarding the number of members retiring and the associated loss of knowledge and concern about time lapse between interview and appointment when she and Mr Brown had been appointed, the Chair reported that it was hoped that the appointments would be made in January and the Members would be in attendance at the March meeting.

## **7. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR**

- 7.1 Professor Burton guided the Committee through his report, elaborating briefly on the matters contained within it which included an update on operations during Covid-19; Research Report; Data Visualisation Laboratory; Staff Appointments, Achievements and Activities; Capital Budget 2020-21 and Financial Risk.
- 7.2 Declaration of Interest  
Mr Wilson declared an interest in the planning application for a replacement for the hockey pitch used by the Royal School site on AOP lands referred to in the Director's Report and added that he was aware that a meeting was to take place in the new year and that the Council would be involved in that. The Chair considered the declaration to be immaterial in that the update within the report was factual and Mr Wilson remained in the meeting.
- 7.3 In response to queries from Dr McKay, Professor Burton clarified that the hockey pitch, on AOP land, was in the early years of a 999-year lease to the Royal School and briefly explained the rationale for and tangible benefits the proposed Data Visualisation Laboratory would bring.
- 7.4 Professor Oudmaijer raised a query regarding the meeting with the Royal School in respect of the planning application relating to the hockey pitch. Given the Declaration of Interest previously declared by Mr Wilson, the Chair deferred the matter until the end of the meeting when Mr Wilson would be required to leave.
- 7.5 Professor Burton undertook to explore Professor Ray's suggestion that the Irish Centre for High-End Computing (ICHEC) may be useful to engage with regarding the Data Visualisation Laboratory given their work in this area.
- 7.6 The Committee accepted the Director's report.

## **8. REPORT FROM HEAD OF RESEARCH**

- 8.1 Dr Sarzi guided the Committee through his report and appendices, elaborating briefly on the matters contained within them which included the outcome of the 2020 STFC Consolidated Grant proposals; STFC PhD quota allocation Algorithm; AOP Ref-like research excellence review; early PhD recruitment exercise; facilitating Early-Career Fellowship (ECF) at AOP; 2020 UKRI Introductory Course in Astronomy and I-LOFAR.

*Professor Harra left the meeting at 11.55 am.*

- 8.2 With regard to the Consolidated Grant proposals, Professor Mathioudakis stated that he had been on the panel, had declared an interest when the AOP proposals were discussed and left the room. Dr Sarzi and Mrs Corvan responded to a query from Professor Mathioudakis as to whether the outcome resulted in the loss of any PDRAs. The Committee noted that PDRAs were employed on a Fixed Term Contract which was subject to funding. A recruitment process would be necessary for two new PDRAs. Dr Sarzi added that funding had been secured to retain 1 PDRA until the end of September 2021.

- 8.3 Professor Mathioudakis expressed his support for the proposal for facilitating ECFs. He considered it essential that AOP offered some form of reassurance that there was a long-term future otherwise it wouldn't be successful in attracting high quality candidates.
- 8.4 Dr Sarzi said that Dr Erin Higgins had also expressed an interest in applying for a Leverhulme, 3-years ECF, which required significant involvement from AOP and the commitment to match-fund the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years and AOP wanted to be able to support the request.
- 8.5 Professor Burton emphasised the importance of ECFs as a strategy for AOP as it wanted to be in a position to encourage applications. He sought the Management Committee's support to do so. Mrs Corvan added that these were the challenges that were currently being considered in the context of the budgets.
- 8.6 Professor Mathioudakis stated that it was his understanding that AOP had never managed to attract any of the most prestigious ECFs such as Ernst Rutherford Fellowship (ERF), a Royal Society University Research Fellowship (URF) or the most recent UKRI Future Leadership Fellowship (FLF). Dr Sarzi said that since he'd been at AOP there had always been an applicant for one or more ECFs, demonstrating that AOP had a sufficiently good reputation to attract candidates. Dr. Sarzi also pointed out that AOP was generally allowed to put in only one candidate for ECF scheme, which reduces the chances of securing funding. In some instances, AOP could support more than one application, but this may potentially be problematic should two or more candidates be successful as it would be unlikely that AOP could offer multiple positions. Professor Mathioudakis added that it was generally unlikely that multiple ECFs were awarded to any one institute.
- 8.7 In response to a query from Professor Oudmaijer, Professor Burton and Dr Sarzi clarified that Management Committee support was sought to the strategy of ECF previously outlined but pointed out that AOP was not permitted to offer permanent positions to candidates and that there were risks.
- 8.8 Professor Mathioudakis pointed out that ERF, URF and FLF would seek assurance that the candidate would have the same status as other Armagh staff astronomers, during and after the fellowship. Professor Merrifield cautioned that due to the length of the contract they would be in that position in any event and a redundancy situation may arise affecting not just the Fellow but other astronomers also.
- 8.9 With reference to the REF-like research excellence review, Professor Merrifield cautioned about how the exercise was portrayed as being parallel to a REF Exercise. He pointed out that the REF process was very critical and it was important to make sure that AOP's review was too. In particular he expressed concern about how the review of impact case studies, which was where almost all the distinction in a REF review derived, differed. In response to a query from Dr Sarzi, Professor Merrifield said it was important to make clear that AOP would not be rating its scores against anyone else.
- 8.10 Professor Mathioudakis concurred with Professor Merrifield adding that this was a 'pass or fail' area and if you didn't make the cut in respect of impact case studies then the review wouldn't rank. He considered that it was really important that the Review was as close to the real thing as possible.
- 8.11 Professor Ray reported that a further 5 years' funding had been secured from the Irish Government of £80-100k per annum for I-LOFAR.

- 8.12 Professor Ray also reported on a pilot programme STFC had started associated with collaboration on instrument building between Ireland and the UK including Galway, Liverpool, Maynooth, Manchester, DIAS and Durham, with £400k available in 2021. It was hoped to build on this for the future and he hoped that Armagh would get involved in conjunction with somewhere like Queen's.
- 8.13 The Committee accepted the Head of Research's report and supported the pursuance of ECFs as a strategy for AOP, subject to concerns raised by Professors Ray, Oudmaijer, Merrifield and Mathioudakis. **Action MC 14/12/20-2 ECFs to be pursued as a strategy for AOP.**
- 8.14 Professor Oudmaijer stated that successful candidates were strong candidates and the strategy was one that had to be supported.

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

- 9.1 Mr Hannam informed the Committee that the ARAC had considered two Internal Audit reports both of which provided satisfactory assurance. There were no recommendations arising from the Internal Audit in respect of Covid-19 Contingency Procedures. The report on the GDPR Internal Audit had identified 8 recommendations which were largely of a technical nature and there were plans in place to address them.

*Professor Mathioudakis retired from the meeting at 12.15 pm.*

- 9.2 A report on the status of Outstanding Internal Audit Recommendations, as assessed by Management, identified 12 outstanding recommendations. It was expected that all of these would be completed by the end of the financial year.
- 9.3 The Committee was content that all key risks had been identified and assessed and that there were plans in place and therefore recommended to the Management Committee that the Risk Register be approved.
- 9.4 The Committee had considered the following policies and was content to recommend for Management Committee approval:
- Data Protection (revision)
  - Information Security
  - Logical Access Control
  - Physical Access Control
  - Financial Policies and Procedures (revision)
  - Loans Policy
- 9.5 Mr Hannam reported that there were two Matters Arising. That the ARAC Terms of Reference and Membership be reviewed for consideration at the March 2021 meeting and a reminder to Management Committee Members remaining beyond 31 December 2020 of the need to complete the Safeguarding Training and to forward their certificate to the Corporate Manager. **Action MC 14/12/20-3 Members' Certificates for Safeguarding Training to be provided to the Corporate Manager by 31 December 2020.**

9.6 As it was his last meeting as Chair of the ARAC Mr Hannam expressed his thanks to Professor Burton, Mrs Corvan, Mr Knox and Mrs Brown for their support in making his role easier and also to his fellow members on the Committee.

9.7 The Chair thanked Mr Hannam for his report and the Management Committee accepted the Chair of ARAC's update report and approved the Risk Register and the Policies as previously outlined.

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

10.1 Professor Ray reported that SPRC had considered the following matters:

- the SPRC Terms of Reference and Membership would be reviewed and agreed at the March Management Committee;
- there would be no SPRC in March;
- a number of employment policies had been reviewed with no changes recommended. These were Dignity at Work; Equal Opportunities Policy; Grievance Policy & Procedure and Disciplinary Policy & Procedure;
- the NILGOSC Pensions Discretions Policy needed to be updated following recent NILGOSC training. This would be brought to the Management Committee in March for approval;
- an update on annual leave carry over arrangements had been provided and it had been noted that two requests for additional carry over leave had been approved by management;
- an update on staffing – temporary and agency staff had been provided;
- update on working arrangements during the Covid-19 pandemic;
- details of sickness absence (Non-Covid);
- a verbal update on the 2020 Staff Survey recently completed which showed positive progress;
- proposals for a staff engagement event in January and a well-being day;
- update on HR Strategy Action Plan 2020/21.

10.2 Professor Ray said that it had also been his last meeting as Chair. He thanked his fellow members, Mrs Corvan, Mrs Brown and the other members of the team for their excellent support over the years.

10.3 The Chair commented that the tremendous work of the ARAC and SPRC had been vital in gaining the confidence of the Department for Communities.

10.4 The Management Committee accepted the report.

## **11. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN – Corporate Plan Objectives and KPIs and Finance**

11.1 In response to queries from Professor Oudmaijer in respect of KPIs 2 and 11, Professor Burton explained that a number of the original KPIs had had to be removed as a result of the impact of Covid 19 on operations and that the KPIs were not necessarily the same every year. Mrs Corvan explained that when reporting to the Department Paper 17 was known as the non-quantifiable objectives and that the KPIs were derived from this. The Business Plan approved by the Minister had had some very ambitious targets especially in relation to visitor numbers which was why KPIs had been changed, postponed and added. Some of the new KPIs were included to illustrate where the organisation had pivoted its operations. In terms of visitor numbers, she reported that these had been reduced very significantly. It had been anticipated that half of the visitor numbers target would be achieved during the Space Lights event but that when the KPI had been revised it had

been thought that the Planetarium would be able to open on 28 October. The KPIs had been developed in consultation with the Department and both the non-measurable objectives and KPIs were reported on at Accountability Meetings.

11.2 The Committee noted the progress against Corporate Plan Objectives, KPIs and Finance Report to Period 7.

## **12. POLICIES FOR APPROVAL**

12.1 The Committee noted and approved the report on the review of HR Policies.

## **13. AOB**

13.1 The Committee noted the:

- availability of online training as outlined in the report;
- ARAC and SPRC Minutes for September 2020;
- date of the next meeting was 15 March 2021.

13.2 The Chair reminded Members that Safeguarding Training was to be completed and certificates forwarded to the Corporate Manager by 31 December 2020. Mrs Corvan pointed out that this was one of the outstanding audit recommendations and it was important to have the action completed before the review of the recommendations in the New Year.

*There being no further business other than the deferred matter in which a Declaration of Interest had previously been declared Mr Wilson retired from the meeting at 12.30 pm.*

13.3 CONFIDENTIAL ITEM REMOVED

13.4 Mrs Corvan congratulated Professor Tom Ray on his recent appointment as Senior Professor in Astronomy & Astrophysics. She said that Senior Professors were the most senior academic appointments in DIAS and were appointed by the President of Ireland on the advice of the Government of Ireland and that Professor Ray's appointment papers had been signed by President Higgins in November 2020.

13.5 A sign of applause was displayed by a number of Management Committee members in respect of Professor Ray's recent appointment.

13.6 The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and participation, which represented a full year of meetings conducted via Zoom. He extended a Happy Christmas to everyone and hoped that 2021 would be very different.

13.7 Professor Burton extended thanks to Mr Hannam, Professor Ray, Professor Oudmaijer, Professor Merrifield, Dr McKay and Dean Dunstan for their time and commitment which had helped transform the organisation tremendously. He hoped that they would continue their support and engage with the Alumni.



13.8 Mr Brown indicated his support for Professor Burton’s comments.

The Chair thanked Members for attendance and participation.

The meeting concluded at 12.43 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

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(Chair)

Dated:

**Updated Actions as at 24 November 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>Proposed to close</b></p> <p><b>December 2020:</b> The European Space Agency’s Public Relations person for Planetaria has been appointed and is Mr. Daniel Scuka who is the Programme Communications Officer for the Directorate of Operations and Space Safety at the European Space Operations Centre in Darmstadt, Germany. AOP will make contact to build a long term cooperation. While AOP has already appointed a company to design and deliver an upgrade to the exhibition area, it will provide the company with Mr Scuka's contact details and introduce him to engage with him on content.</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>

MC30/3/20-02	Explore inclusion of Observatory in Armagh Conservation Area and report back to a future meeting.	SMT	<b>Ongoing</b> <b>June 2020:</b> Update included in Director's Report
MC15/6/20-01	Write to STFC and DIAS regarding their nominees to the Management Committee	Head of Corporate Services	<b>Proposed to close</b> <b>October 2020:</b> Letters issued to STFC and DIAS. Chair will provide an update at Dec meeting. <b>September 2020:</b> Not yet progressed, to be completed before December meeting.
MC21/9/20-01	Recirculate Board Evaluation Questionnaire and consider other evaluations options for future years	Corporate Manager	<b>Proposed to close</b> <b>Dec 2020:</b> Updated summary of responses agenda item for Dec meeting. <b>21 September 2020:</b> Questionnaire recirculated.
MC21/9/20-02	Boardroom Apprentice MOU to be signed	Corporate Manager	<b>Proposed to close</b> <b>27 October 2020:</b> Copy of signed MOU provided to Boardroom Apprentice.
MC21/9/20-03	Establish date for March 2021 meeting	Corporate Manager	<b>Proposed to close</b> <b>4 November 2020:</b> 15 March 2021 confirmed as date for ARAC and MC meetings. <b>27 October 2020:</b> Options circulated to relevant MC members for consideration.
MC21/9/20-04	SALT MOU to be signed	Professor Burton	<b>Proposed to close</b> <b>November 2020:</b> MOU signed.
MC21/9/20-05	Explore timeline for Dean Dunstan's replacement on the Management Committee	Head of Corporate Services	<b>Ongoing</b> <b>November 2020:</b> Chair will address BoG nominees to the MC with Chair of BoG. This position may remain vacant until 2021 BOG meeting or BoG Chair may communicate with members directly to fill Board Representative vacancies on MC.