

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY SECOND MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 20 JUNE 2022 AT 11.00 AM IN THE PLANETARIUM BOARDROOM

Present: Mr J Briggs (Chair), Professor M Darnley, Professor L Harra*, Professor C Jackman,
* via Zoom Mr P Kennedy, Dr K Lemon, Professor M Mathioudakis*, Mr E Rooney and Mr R Wilson

In Attendance: Professor M Burton (Director), Mrs C Corvan (Head of Corporate Services), Dr M Sarzi (Head of Research), Mrs S Mackle (Education and Outreach Manager), Mr J Murray (Boardroom Apprentice), Mr Colin McCrossan, (SIB, Project Director) and Mrs L Brown (Corporate Manager)

Apologies: Revd Canon W M Adair, Mr S Brown, Mr G Cox, Mr P McGurgan and Mr L Knox (Head of Finance)

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were received as outlined above.

2. OPENING REMARKS

2.1 The Chair stated that it was a hybrid meeting and acknowledged that there were still certain difficulties for those joining online that they were unable to overcome. In addition, he welcomed Management Committee members who had not previously attended a meeting in Armagh. In an effort to manage the hybrid nature of the meeting and the sound the Chair asked for roundtable introductions and requested that throughout the meeting participants refrain from shuffling papers as far as possible. The Chair introduced himself and was followed by each person present in the room before those attending via Zoom. Professor Mathioudakis confirmed he could hear everyone. Professor Harra requested that everyone project their voice as she had had difficulties with the audio levels during the ARAC meeting earlier in the day.

2.2 At the outset the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. In particular, he welcomed Mr Colin McCrossan, SIB, Project Director and advised that Mr Murray, Boardroom Apprentice would join the meeting following consideration of Agenda Item 1.

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. Mr Roger Wilson declared his interest in Mullinure Lands and undertook to withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate stage.

Mr Wilson temporarily withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

4. CONFIDENTIAL ITEM REMOVED

Mr McCrossan retired from the meeting, Mr Wilson re-joined and Mr J Murray joined the meeting at 11.27 am.

5. CHAIR'S REMARKS

5.1 The Chair advised that it was the last meeting for Mr Jason Murray as Boardroom Apprentice, acknowledging that the previous two years had been difficult. He hoped that Mr Murray had enjoyed the year and that it had been of benefit to him and extended best wishes to him for the future.

5.2 Mr Murray thanked the Chair.

6. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2022

6.1 On the proposal of Mr Kennedy, seconded by Mr Rooney, the minutes of the meeting of 28 March 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

7.1 There were 8 matters arising from previous meetings. It was proposed to close 4 of these, with 4 remaining ongoing. Two of the ongoing actions would be addressed later – delegation to Sub-Committees and Management Committee Review of Effectiveness.

7.2 The Chair referred to the 2-day meeting, which it was planned to hold once a year, and invited feedback from Members on whether it was the right time of year and how it had worked out. He also thanked everyone for their attendance over the 2 days.

7.3 There were no further matters arising.

8. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

8.1 In response to a query from the Chair, Mrs Corvan advised that the draft Operating Framework was a document AOP was required to develop by the Department as part of the Partnership Agreement. It duplicated other documents, such as Terms of Reference, but was a document that AOP was required to have and was currently with the Department for review. The document set out AOP's operational approach on how it did business pulling together various documents on Governance. She considered it would be a useful document for induction of new Members.

8.2 The Boardroom Apprentice Impact Study had previously been circulated for information.

8.3 The Chair reported that Mr Peter McNeill had been appointed as the new Boardroom Apprentice. He had met Mrs Corvan via a virtual event and would be coming to AOP's event that evening.

8.4 DfC's Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025 had been published and the Deputy Permanent Secretary would be invited to either the October or December meeting to make a presentation on this. **Action MC 20/06/22-02 Presentation on DfC's strategy to be arranged for a future meeting.**

9. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR

9.1 At the outset, Professor Burton thanked those who were able to come to Armagh, it being the first time for over two years that the Management Committee had all been able to meet in this way and the first time some people had been to the Institution. He referred to the workload associated with meetings and believed there was a real opportunity cost to the organisation preparing the Papers ready for meetings, including the Board of Governors meeting and Accountability meetings. In light of the change in arrangements due to the move to a Partnership Agreement he explained that Accountability Meetings were reducing from 4 per annum to 3 per annum and said he would like the Management Committee to consider how often it would need to meet, particularly given there were more regular meetings due to the Project Board, a Sub-Committee of the Management Committee, all requiring more involvement of Members' time. **Action MC 20/06/22-03 Frequency of meetings to be considered.**

9.2 Professor Burton took the Committee through his report, elaborating briefly on key matters contained within it. The report included an update on AOP activities and operations and the 2022/23 Resource Budget.

9.3 In terms of AOP activities and operations, the Committee noted:

- Summary Statistics:
 - there had been approximately 100 scientific publications produced and 100 presentations delivered during the 2021/22 financial year;
- Research Outreach Activities:
 - AOP had co-hosted the International Astronomical Union Symposium 361 held in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co Cavan;
 - the Data Visualisation Laboratory had been commissioned;
- Education and Outreach Activities:
 - the summer Brickosaurs programme was under way, with over 1,000 visitors on the first weekend;
 - public visitor numbers continued to rise and dwell time increase;
 - the Big Book of Experiments, which lead on from the Science at Home programme delivered whilst the Planetarium was closed during the pandemic, had been distributed to 840 primary schools in NI and 3,420 in the RoI;
 - the list of major events and activities;
- History and Heritage activities:
 - in terms of World Heritage Aspirations, work was under way to make a joint application for the UK's UNESCO Tentative List;
 - the Museum Accreditation application had been submitted and a site visit scheduled;
 - the application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund had been successful and had enabled the recruitment of a Collections Officer. Matthew McMahon had been appointed to this role. He had also been awarded a PhD position, funded by the Northern Bridge and would be fulfilling both appointments each on a part-time basis.
- staff movements:
 - staff appointments of 2 Education Officers, an ICT Officer, a Tours and Outreach Officer and a Collections Officer;
 - leavers were the temporary Librarian, part-time Research Assistant and the 3-month OPEN Fellow
- three new PhD students had been recruited, commencing in October 2022;
- Meteorological Activities:
 - discussions were ongoing with the Met Office regarding a change to its method of providing data from the Automated Weather Station which impacted on how this information was achieved and made available on AOP's web page;

- Dark Skies activities:
 - Dr Hannah Dalgleish, who had been working with AOP as a 3-month OPEN Fellow from Oxford University, would be holding a workshop on 30 June;
- other activities:
 - a guidebook had been developed and was available for sale in the Planetarium;
 - a schedule of visitors of note;
- update on capital projects;
- 2022/23 resource budget.

9.4 Dr Sarzi reported on the appointment of Alessandro Loni as a temporary PDRA for 8 months.

9.5 In response to a query from Mr Rooney regarding the deadline for the UNESCO application submission and its achievability, Professor Burton advised that this was already substantially complete. This application related to the UK side of the process and there would be a different timetable for the RoI side, however a very positive meeting had taken place with the Chief Archaeologist about engaging and taking this forward. Professor Burton confirmed that it would be a joint application, but it had to be led by one jurisdiction and the expectation was that it would be led through the RoI.

9.6 The Chair thanked Professor Burton for his reports and the Committee approved the Director's report.

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

10.1 Mr Kennedy, who had Chaired the meeting in the absence of Mr Brown, provided the update from ARAC.

10.2 Mr Kennedy advised that the Committee had received an update from Internal Audit regarding its programme of work and had reviewed the status of outstanding internal audit recommendations. Attention was drawn to the high priority recommendation relating to ICT and it was noted that the majority of the ARAC meeting had focused on cyber security, ICT, the way forward and the progress being made.

10.3 The outcomes from the ICT Workshop held on 25 May had been fed into the draft ICT Strategy and ARAC had considered the issue of sign-ins and how to satisfy the associated audit recommendation in the most efficient way and had decided to implement the policy as outlined and bring it back to the next meeting for review.

10.4 Mrs Corvan pointed out that the ICT Strategy was not presented for approval, but was for comment prior to being finalised. She added that the ICT Risk Assessment, which was for approval, would be kept under continual review.

10.5 Mr Kennedy advised that the Business Impact Assessment identified the risks affecting the organisation across the board, including internal and external factors and reported briefly on a recent incident whereby one of the risks had materialised by way of a power outage. He elaborated on its impact and the robustness of the procedures in place.

10.6 ARAC had noted the Working Outside the Office Protocol; was content to recommend approval of the IT Computer and Network Usage Policy, which had been revised in light of the recent Workshop and had considered and was content to recommend approval of the updated Risk Register, which had had a small number of changes.

10.7 Mr Kennedy advised that the draft Annual Report and Accounts had been tabled and NIAO had confirmed it would be commencing the Audit shortly. In terms of the Accounts he advised that they

were on budget, there was nothing exceptional and a few technical issues. In due course the final document would be presented to ARAC and then the Management Committee for approval.

10.8 The Management Committee approved the ICT Risk Assessment; IT Computer and Network Usage Policy and the Risk Register as at 8 June 2022.

10.9 The Chair thanked Mr Kennedy for his report and for deputising for Mr Brown.

11. UPDATE FROM THE STAFFING POLICY AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (SPRC)

11.1 Mr Rooney advised that SPRC had considered the skills gap and resourcing issue, a standing item for SPRC, and noted the positive progress in relation to posts filled since the last meeting which included the Project Director, Education Officers and ICT Support. It was also positive to note that the pressure bids which included provision for some essential posts had been met by the Department, however there remained significant resourcing pressures.

11.2 SPRC had noted progress being made on Project Juno and complementary to that, considered the draft Diversity Mark Bronze Award application. Comments were sought by end of June to enable application to be made by 29th July.

11.3 Mr Rooney reported that the Hybrid Working Policy had been discussed. He explained that this was a new policy in regard to how the organisation worked and worked effectively in the interests of both the organisation and the individual and how to get that blend. He confirmed that the direction of travel had been approved by SPRC, however there were a few items of detail relating to the impact on travel and subsistence policy (no change), insurance and the appeals process yet to be worked out.

11.4 The Volunteer Policy was recommended for approval, subject to clarity on the time commitment for volunteering.

11.5 SPRC was content with both the Working Outside the Office Protocol and the amendments to the Recruitment Policy.

11.6 Mr Rooney advised that SPRC had also reviewed the HR Strategy and Action Plan with emphasis on changes and outputs delivered since they last met and the Committee was content with the progress that had been made.

11.7 The Management Committee approved the draft Hybrid Working Policy, Draft Volunteer Policy and Recruitment Policy.

11.8 The Chair thanked Mr Rooney for the update.

11.9 Mr Wilson queried whether AOP was experiencing difficulties in attracting and employing staff, as was being experienced by other organisations and also whether cost of living rises and industrial action were likely to be issues facing AOP. In response, Mrs Corvan confirmed that whilst candidate pools were reduced AOP had been fortunate to have attracted some quality candidates. Meanwhile recruitment of casuals was being kept as an open list. In terms of pay, she advised that AOP was not a very unionised organisation and had not been impacted upon previously in relation to union ballots or strike action. However, she was aware that NIPSA's pay claim had been submitted and AOP sat under the NICS pay and conditions. Whilst at present there was no evidence of discontent from employees, they were very mindful that cost of living issues were impacting on everyone and the cost of travelling to and from work was in particular having an impact on the education team.

- 11.10 Professor Jackman queried whether the Hybrid Working Policy had any impact on applications, particularly for research posts and suggested AOP might want to consider exploring more flexibility on how often people could work from home. In response, Mrs Corvan explained that there had been much debate about this issue and the benefits of being in a community of research versus working remotely and the conclusion drawn was that when you brought people together then the engagement needed to be worthwhile. Within Research this meant maximising days when everyone would be on site. Discussion had also taken place on whether if AOP recruited someone of high calibre would they be permitted to work remotely and what the impact on that might be, however, no decision had been taken. Professor Burton added that this would be something considered on a case-by-case basis and Dr Sarzi highlighted potential issues with visa conditions. Mr Rooney referred to similar discussion at SPRC and considered that the Policy would probably need to evolve over time.
- 11.11 Mrs Corvan referred to ‘the big resignation’ and explained that quality of life issues and work life balance were now of more importance to people. Additionally, people who may not previously have thought of leaving jobs were doing so and people were more driven to change career for better work life balance or job satisfaction.
- 11.12 The Chair recognised that moving forward the finance and working environment would become more difficult and they were indebted to ARAC and SPRC for their involvement in the detail of these matters.

12. UPDATE FROM THE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (REAC)

- 12.1 Professor Harra reported that REAC was meeting a few weeks before the Management Committee and that the Minutes of the March meeting had been included with the Papers. At the recent meeting there had been two points on which the Committee had taken a vote. The first had been Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. She advised that Prof Mathioudakis had provided input and support to Dr Sarzi on this, which had been helpful. REAC agreed unanimously to support the career development of staff. She reported that there had been a little cynicism from some of the staff on the kind of courses made available but she felt that that was something they should work with and to choose the best courses available for staff.
- 12.2 In terms of the REF, Professor Harra advised that it was not yet known whether the Panel wished to carry out a site visit. The second matter on which the REAC had agreed to related to setting up a repository for publications in preparation for the REF if AOP decided to go ahead. Whilst this was expensive and would have an impact on budget the Committee was supportive of this as open access was not just important for the REF but also for other funding applications.
- 12.3 The Chair thanked Professor Harra for her report and enquired how the engagement between Research and Education within the sub-committee was developing. She advised that there were good updates from the Education and Outreach side. They hadn’t discussed explicitly in detail whether the interaction was improving or not but the interaction was there. She suggested this could be something they add to the next agenda to consider how they could improve this.
- 12.4 The report from REAC was noted without comment.

13. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22– Corporate Plan Objectives and KPIs

- 13.1 Mrs Corvan explained that the Corporate Plan Objectives paper provided the end of year performance against the non-KPI objectives for 2021-22.
- 13.2 The KPIs paper showed the end of year position in respect of the quantitative objectives. Mrs Corvan guided Members through the report elaborating briefly on the non-achieved targets.

13.3 The Committee noted the performance against the 2021/22 Business Plan as outlined in the Corporate Plan Objectives and KPIs papers.

13.4 Mrs Corvan responded to a query from Professor Mathioudakis regarding KPI 4 which related to funding from scientific sources and KPI 16 which listed successful funding from non-scientific sources. She explained that KPI 4 had been included at the request of DfC to demonstrate that AOP was bringing in external funding adding that the £420,000 related to AOP's consolidated grant income.

14. POLICIES

14.1 The Committee noted the Report on Policies and approved the Access to Information and Acceptance and Provision of Gifts and Hospitality Policies, to which no material amendments had been made.

15. AOB

15.1 The Committee noted the:

- dates of remaining meetings in 2022 - Monday 3 October and Monday 19 December;
- availability of training as outlined in the report;
- REAC, SPRC and ARAC Minutes for March 2022;
- PR Coverage Report;
- Minutes of Mullinure Collaborative Forum May 2022.

15.2 Mrs Corvan briefly outlined the arrangements and timings for the remainder of the 2-day's activities.

16. Management Committee Effectiveness

16.1 The Chair suggested setting up a task and finish Committee to consider in detail issues arising from the Management Committee Effectiveness review and to report back to the next meeting. The Chair and Messrs Kennedy and Rooney volunteered to sit on group. **Action MC 20/06/22-04 Sub-committee to review Management Committee Effectiveness to meet and report back to the October meeting.**

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and participation.

The meeting concluded at 12.25 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

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(Chair)

Dated:

Updated Actions as at 13 June 2022

Reference	Action	Owner	Progress
28 March 2022			
28/03/22-01	Confirm Project Board Membership	HoCS / Chair	Propose to close 1 April 2022: membership confirmed via email.
28/03/22-02	Paper to be brought to Board of Governors regarding Management Committee delegation to Sub-Committees and amendments to Terms of Reference.	HoCS	Ongoing 20 June 2022: MC to consider and agree detail. 26 April 2022: delegation from Management Committee to Sub-Committees approved at Board of Governors meeting.
28/03/22-03	Further discussion of the Action Plan and implementation of the action points relating to Management Committee Review of Effectiveness.	HoCS	Ongoing 20 June 2022 further discussion required to agree and record actions
28/03/22-04	Approval of the Partnership Agreement to be recommended to the Board of Governors, subject to final changes, to be approved by Professor Burton	HoCS / Corporate Manager	Propose to close 26 April 2022: Partnership Agreement approved at Board of Governors meeting and now with DfC for approval.
28/03/22-05	Availability for proposed June meeting arrangements to be determined via email	Corporate Manager	Propose to close 29 April 2022: confirmation of arrangements issued.
20 September 2021			
20/09/21-01	Officers to put in place the necessary arrangements for the role of Charity Trustee to be transferred from the Board of Governors to the Management Committee	HoCS	Ongoing 13 June 2022: application submitted to Charity Commission 26 April 2022: proposal to transfer role of Charity Trustee from Board of Governors to Management Committee approved at Board of Governors meeting. December 2021: being progressed to align with 2022 Board of Governors Annual Visitation.
Sp 5 May 2021			
SpMC5/05/21-01	Records of all meetings and discussions associated with the ALV	Corporate Manager	Ongoing June 2022: propose to close as now established first item on agenda for as long as required.

	to be marked as confidential and redacted from publishes minutes		March 2022: move to first item on Management Committee Agenda September 2021: moving forward this matter will be last item on Management Committee meeting Agenda
30 March 2020			
MC30/3/20-02	Explore inclusion of Observatory in Armagh Conservation Area and report back to a future meeting	SMT	Ongoing June 2022: ongoing but no further update at present March 2022: ongoing but no further update at present September 2021: ongoing but no further update at present June 2021: ongoing but no further update at present 15 March 2021: ongoing but no further update at present June 2020: update included in Director's Report