

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY THIRD MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 3 OCTOBER 2022 AT 11.10 AM IN THE PLANETARIUM BOARDROOM**

Present: Mr J Briggs (Chair), Mr S Brown, Mr G Cox, Professor L Harra\*, Mr P Kennedy, Dr K  
\* via Zoom Lemon, Professor M Mathioudakis\*, Mr P McGurgan\* and Mr E Rooney

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), Mrs S Mackle (Education and  
Outreach Manager), Mr P McNeill (Boardroom Apprentice), David Eden (Opik Fellow)  
and Mrs L Brown (Corporate Manager)

Apologies: Professor M Darnley and Professor C Jackman

**1. OPENING REMARKS**

1.1 At the outset, the Chair apologised for the delay in starting the meeting which had been caused by over-run in preceding meetings. He reminded members that it was a hybrid meeting and hoped that the introduction of further new technology would overcome issues previously experienced by those joining remotely. Feedback would be welcomed on this. He also requested that participants refrain from shuffling papers as far as possible.

**2. APOLOGIES**

2.1 Apologies were received as outlined above.

**3. WELCOME**

3.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and in particular, AOP's new Boardroom Apprentice, Peter McNeill, to his first meeting. Each person attending the meeting both in person and via Zoom introduced themselves to Mr McNeill.

3.2 The Chair sought approval for Mr McNeill to attend future ARAC, SPRC, REAC and Redevelopment Sub-Committee meetings, if available. Management Committee approval was granted. **Action MC 3/10/22-01 Mr McNeill to be invited to attend all Sub-Committees.**

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

4.1 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. There were no declarations at this point.

**5. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2022**

5.1 The minutes of the meeting of 20 June 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

## 6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 6.1 There were 8 actions arising from previous meetings and it was proposed to close 6 of these, with 2 remaining ongoing. Mrs Corvan provided a verbal update on the status of the ongoing matters.
- 6.2 There were no further matters arising.

## 7. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 7.1 The minutes of the Sub-Group held on 2 August 2022 to consider Management Committee Effectiveness had previously been circulated. The Chair advised that since that meeting Mr Rooney had made some useful points which may require further discussion. It had also been highlighted that the REAC Chair had not been represented within the group. A further meeting, to which Professor Harra should also be invited, was proposed.
- 7.2 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 2 August 2022 and that a further meeting be convened. **Action MC 3/10/22-02 Further meeting of Management Committee Effectiveness Sub-Group to be arranged.**
- 7.3 Letter dated 6 July 2022 from Beverley Wall, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Policy and Professional Services regarding UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry was noted.
- 7.4 The Committee noted that the 2022-23 Business Plan had been approved by Minister Deirdre Hargey MLA on 23 September 2022.
- 7.5 With reference to ongoing discussions with Birr and Dunsink, the Chair briefly reported on a very successful meeting that had taken place on Thursday 22 September in Dunsink. There had been consensus about the 200-year collaboration between the three sites and the need to formalise that. A further meeting was scheduled for December, in Armagh, to take this forward and to consider a North-South research collaboration project that would be of relevance to both administrations. Professor Burton added that it had been a very positive interaction and there was no doubt of the many opportunities including those relating to UNESCO world heritage.
- 7.6 The Chair reported that other than suggesting Monday 20 March 2023, establishing dates for the remainder of 2023 was proving problematic. Mrs Corvan queried whether Monday was the best day of the week or if Members had any other suggestions, pointing out that it would be extremely difficult to find dates that suited everyone and that knowing times to avoid would be useful. Professor Burton advised of his unavailability for the proposed March 2023 meeting date. Recognising that some Members struggled to attend meetings during the working day, Mr Cox suggested holding one meeting a year outside of working hours. Further work to establish dates for the 2023 meetings would be undertaken. **Action MC 3/10/22-03 Identification of dates for 2023 to be progressed.**

## 8. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR

- 8.1 At the outset, Professor Burton reported that it was his 25<sup>th</sup> report. He took the Committee through his report, which included an update on Education and Outreach, Research and History and Heritage activities, Staff Matters and Achievements and Capital Funding Allocations, elaborating briefly on key matters.

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

- Education and Outreach Activities:
  - there had been a record number of visitors over the 2022 summer;
  - the Observatory tours programme continued;
  - the 'CapCom Go!' dome show was now available in Irish and Ulster Scots and work towards providing British (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) was under way. BSL, ISL and relaxed Mission Santa sessions had been scheduled.
  - Mrs Mackle had been appointed the British Association of Planetaria's (BAP) Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer;
  - a new Puffersphere App had been developed and the Interstellar App was being revised;
  - a list of notable events and media activities;
  - a new version of the audio for the Armagh Weather Story dome show had been recorded with the assistance of the Southern Regional College (SRC);
- Research Activities:
  - an update on activities relating to the Data Visualisation Laboratory;
  - planning for conferences and workshops in September 2023;
- History and Heritage activities:
  - a submission had been made to the UK's UNESCO World Heritage tentative list and discussions had taken place with Fingal and Offaly Councils regarding a similar application to the Chief Archaeologist's office in the ROI;
  - AOP's Museum Accreditation application had been successful;
  - the Collections Officer engaged to deliver the National Lottery Heritage Scheme funded project 'Wisdom begins with Wonder: Inclusive Access to the Armagh Observatory Historic Collection' had commenced employment;
- Capital Funding Allocations:
  - the range of projects under way included repairs to a cupola window in the Observatory and the Astropark upgrade.

8.3 Professor Burton drew Members' attention to the Tiger Team Interim Report and explained that it highlighted the importance and complexity of the issues around ICT and why dealing with these was so critical to the future of the organisation. He added that it was easy to detrimentally affect the running of the organisation by bringing things in too quickly, however at the same time it was recognised that the IT environment was rapidly changing.

8.4 A number of AOP personnel had attended a meeting of the Association of Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) the previous week. Professor Burton commented on the need to engage strategically with ASDC, as AOP embarked on its redevelopment plans, and reported that it was pleasing to see that a lot of what AOP was doing aligned with industry norms, but that a Planetarium was only a small part of what was happening in the science centre industry.

8.5 The Chair considered the engagement to be critical as AOP looked towards its redevelopment, which needed to be leading-edge.

8.6 Mr Cox commented that there were some amazing activities highlighted within the Director's report, such as doubling the visitor numbers for June and July compared to pre-pandemic and exciting opportunities with Dunsink and Birr and commended and thanked those involved.

8.7 In response to a query from Mr Kennedy it was confirmed that in the event of more capital funding becoming available there were further projects that AOP could progress, subject to deliverability, however, contributions towards telescope projects was something that did not present the same time constraints.

8.8 The Chair thanked Professor Burton and the Committee approved the Director's report.

*Dr David Eden, Öpik Fellow joined the meeting at 11.50 am.*

- 8.9 Professor Burton introduced Dr David Eden, Öpik Fellow, who joined AOP from Liverpool John Moores University in February 2022, working on molecules in our galaxy.
- 8.10 With the aid of PowerPoint and screen share, Dr Eden gave a brief introduction to his area of work, which centred around what caused stars to form and attempting to solve the problem of star formation across the Universe. Dr Eden displayed an image of a molecular cloud recently released from the JWST, explaining that stars formed in molecular clouds. These are made up of many of the molecules we find around, but the primary component is molecular hydrogen. However, the molecule most commonly observed by astronomers was carbon monoxide. By observing molecular clouds from telescopes on the ground and in space we can gain insight into how stars are formed.
- 8.11 Dr Eden said that the primary facility he used, which AOP invested into, was the James Clerk Maxwell Telescope (JCMT), located on Mauna Kea, Hawaii. The frequencies needed for this telescope were very close to the wavelengths that water would absorb in the atmosphere, hence the very dry site used on top of the 4,000m high mountain. His work looked at the entire Milky Way, with two main goals – How do the large-scale features of our Galaxy impact star formation? and What regulates star formation within astronomical systems? He used imagery to explain these two science goals and the finding that the physics forming stars in our galaxy was the same as that happening in very energetic and distant galaxies. This was related to the amount of dense gas present and by looking at the distribution and dynamics of dense gas in the Milky Way they hoped to be able to understand how this influences and controls the star formation process across the cosmos.
- 8.12 Dr Eden briefly explained the potential use of the DVL and virtual reality headsets to produce a three dimensional map of the Galaxy.
- 8.13 Dr Eden responded to specific questions from Members during which he confirmed that the chemistry of the molecules did have an impact on the dense gas levels and advised that he was currently writing a telescope proposal for the JCMT to look at different molecules to test the chemical models and determine whether they were indeed accurately measuring the properties of the clouds they want to study. He also explained that whilst the Andromeda Galaxy or any other spiral galaxy gives us an idea of what the 3 dimensional picture of the Milky Way looks like it only provides a starting point to determining its true 3D structure. Radio observations of the molecular gas in our Galaxy provides a tool which we are now using to better determine this structure.

*Having been thanked for his presentation, Dr Eden retired from the meeting at 12.02 pm.*

- 8.14 The Chair commented upon the usefulness of updates from Research.

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

- 9.1 Mr Brown advised that the ARAC Members had been asked to complete the Annual Effectiveness Checklist and a report would be brought back to the next meeting.
- 9.2 ARAC had considered 3 papers in respect of Internal Audit. The Education and Outreach Activities Audit Report provided Satisfactory Assurance and contained 6 recommendations, two Priority 2 and four Priority 3. The HR and Performance Management Report also provided Satisfactory Assurance. It contained 3 recommendations, two of which were Priority 2 and one Priority 3.

- 9.3 In terms of the status of outstanding internal audit recommendations, Mr Brown reported that there had been good progress. Of the 6 outstanding actions, one was complete; two would be completed that day; one was awaiting an external organisation and two target dates were not yet due. The recommendations from the two audits previously mentioned would be added for the next meeting.
- 9.4 The Chair reported that considerable time had been spent discussing ICT matters in light of the complexities for the organisation and the developing risk of cyber-threat. ARAC had noted the work of the Tiger Team and recommended Management Committee approval of the ICT Strategy and Action Plan; the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy and the ICT Risk Assessment. Further work would be undertaken on the patching and BYOD Policy as this was a complicated area and the risks were quite high. There had also been some discussion around archive back-ups.
- 9.5 ARAC had considered the updated Risk Register, which identified 9 risks across 5 risk categories, one of which was extreme, three high and five moderate. There had been no change to eight of the risks and one had been increased from moderate to extreme. The high risks related to ICT and the extreme risk was of a financial nature.
- 9.6 ARAC had considered the draft Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April – September 2022) and was content to recommend approval to the Management Committee.
- 9.7 In terms of external audit, the Committee had considered the draft Report To Those Charged With Governance, which was an unqualified audit with one Priority 2 and two Priority 3 findings, and was content to recommend it and the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22 for approval to the Management Committee.
- 9.8 The Committee noted that the Risk Management and Safeguarding policies had been reviewed, with no material amendments.
- 9.9 In conclusion, Mr Brown advised that the ARAC was content that the organisation was on fairly solid footing with the exception of the risks associated with ICT and finances. Mr Cox pointed out that the issues around ICT were features other businesses he was involved in were also grappling with.
- 9.10 The Management Committee approved the ICT Strategy; Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy; ICT Risk Register; Risk Register; draft Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April-September) and the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22.

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

- 10.1 Mr Rooney advised that the skills gap paper was a standing item on SPRC and there had been no changes to it since the previous meeting. The Committee had also noted the progress on the HR Strategy and Action Plan.
- 10.2 SPRC was content to recommend Management Committee approval of Special Bonus Scheme Payments, which had been considered in accordance with the Policy.
- 10.3 Mr Rooney reported that, arising from the Management Committee Effectiveness Review, SPRC had considered its position in terms of whether some HR policy reviews could be delegated to SMT rather than coming to SPRC; could be approved at SPRC without coming to the Management Committee; or needed to continue to come to the Management Committee. He advised that SPRC was very much supportive of Management Committee effectiveness working by focusing the Management Committee agenda on the main issues and that other areas of decision-making could be delegated to the appropriate level and that this would require a change to the SPRC Terms of Reference. SPRC was minded to recommend to the Management Committee that there should be an appropriate delegation

process for existing policies, with significant changes being brought to SPRC and minor insignificant changes being approved by SMT, with guidance on what significant meant. New policies would continue to be considered by SPRC and recommended to the Management Committee. He noted that this would be further discussed at the forthcoming Management Effectiveness Review Sub-Committee meeting agreed earlier.

- 10.4 SPRC had had a brief discussion on the Hybrid Working Policy. This issue having been discussed at the June meeting with the direction of travel approved by the Management Committee, subject to some amendments. Mr Rooney advised that further work had taken place within the staff and proposals and discussions around what would be the appropriate Hybrid Working Policy. Those discussions had still to be resolved. The next stage was to have a revised draft Hybrid Working Policy for SPRC consideration and further consultation with staff in order to be in a position to bring a final Hybrid Working Policy to the December meeting. The application of the policy since June had raised issues and SPRC had put in place a process to bring the Hybrid Working Policy through to final decision by the Management Committee and SPRC would be reconvening to consider this single issue.
- 10.5 AOP had been awarded Diversity Mark Bronze Award and work to progress the targets identified within the application would be taken forward. The Project Juno Committee continued to meet with a target date in 2023.

*Mr McGurgan joined the meeting at 12.15 pm.*

- 10.6 The Chair thanked Mr Rooney for his comprehensive update, adding that it was important to come back to the December meeting with a draft Hybrid Working Policy that had been properly discussed and agreed. **Action MC 3/10/22-04 Draft Hybrid Working Policy to be agreed at December meeting.**
- 10.7 The Committee approved the Special Bonus Scheme Payments as previously outlined by the SPRC Chair.

## **11. UPDATE FROM THE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (REAC)**

- 11.1 Professor Harra referred to the notes of the June and September meetings, which were available to all Members. At these meetings they had discussed updates on what was happening within outreach, previously provided through Professor Burton, and also opportunities for research funding and different aspects of research activities.
- 11.2 In terms of the effectiveness of REAC, the Committee's view was that it was an informal Committee and was not providing governance but rather provided advice and undertook discussion related to its Members' experience of particular aspects e.g. computing and IT, and what they experienced in their own organisations. It was felt that it was purely an advice and discussion forum and all the Committee members and AOP attendees agreed with this.
- 11.3 The Committee had discussed the frequency of meetings and agreed that twice yearly was sufficient, with the ability to hold additional meetings as necessary to consider a particular topic.
- 11.4 REAC was aware that a lot of its expertise was within the Research/University system and that there may be times when it needed to bring in expertise to help with outreach activities.
- 11.5 There being no questions the report from REAC was noted.

## 12. CONFIDENTIAL ITEM REMOVED

## 13. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

- 13.1 The Committee noted that the Corporate Plan non-KPI Objectives and KPIs were now being reported on a 4-monthly basis to align with the change to 3 Accountability Periods. In terms of the non-KPI objectives, Mrs Corvan reported that good progress was being made against all the objectives, as outlined in the report and that progress on the KPIs were on track.
- 13.2 Mr Cox commented that most of the targets were approaching mid-target well ahead of the mid-year point. Professor Burton reported that achievement of Urban Dark Skies accreditation was currently limited by the available resources.
- 13.3 In terms of the Finance Report, Mr Knox highlighted the exceptional income generated through Brickosaurs and reported that some of this was being used to off-set inflationary costs. Mr Knox explained that the greatest financial concerns related to escalating energy costs, of which the Department was aware, and salary increases, for which Department guidance had been provided on what to budget, but that he considered to be negligible and unrealistic.
- 13.4 Mr Kennedy commented that AOP's position may not be as grim as others, having secured significant funding. In terms of the energy consumption and salary concerns, he considered the Civil Service would have to take a position on these matters. Professor Burton added that AOP was not alone in these issues and other centres were discussing a reduction in opening hours. Mrs Corvan advised that the Department had been anxious to convey that it did not want AOP to reduce its programme. Mr Knox pointed out that closure would result in loss of income.
- 13.5 The Committee noted the concerns around energy and salary costs and approved the Corporate Plan Objectives; KPIs Aug-July 2022/23 and Finance Period 4 (July) reports.

## 14. POLICIES

- 14.1 At the suggestion of Mrs Corvan, the Committee agreed to refer the Policy Approval Review Report to the next meeting of the Effectiveness Review Sub-Group for discussion and noted that a Visitor Approval Form had been added to the Bailey House Policy. **Action MC 3/10/22-05 Policy Approval Review Report to be discussed at the Effectiveness Review Sub-Group meeting.**

## 15. AOB

- 15.1 The Committee noted the:

- date of next meeting - Monday 19 December;
- availability of training as outlined in the report;
- REAC, SPRC and ARAC Minutes for June 2022;
- REAC Minutes for September 2022;
- PR Coverage Report (June-August);
- Re-development Sub-Committee Action Points 22 August 2022.

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and participation.

The meeting concluded at 12.51 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

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(Chair)

Dated:



**Updated Actions as at 16 September 2022**

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<b>20 June 2022</b>			
20/06/22-01	Issue letters seeking updates to Royal School and ABC Council and request the opportunity to present to the School's Board of Governors.	HoCS	<b>Propose to close</b> Complete – no responses received.
20/06/22-02	Presentation on DfC's Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025 to be made to October or December MC meeting.	HoCS	<b>Propose to close</b> Deputy Permanent Secretary has accepted an invitation to attend the December meeting.
20/06/22-03	Frequency of meetings to be considered.	HoCS	<b>Propose to close</b> <b>3 October 2022:</b> Agenda item for Management Committee meeting and decision. <b>2 August 2022:</b> discussed at Management Committee Effectiveness Sub-Committee at which Members present considered quarterly meetings to be the right approach.
20/06/22-04	Sub-Committee to review Management Committee Effectiveness to meet and report back to the October meeting	HoCS	<b>Propose to close</b> <b>3 October 2022:</b> Agenda item for Management Committee meeting <b>2 August 2022:</b> discussed at Management Committee Effectiveness Sub-Committee at which Members present considered quarterly meetings to be the right approach.
<b>28 March 2022</b>			
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	<b>Propose to close</b> <b>3 October 2022:</b> paper and recommendations from sub-group to be considered by MC. <b>20 June 2022:</b> MC to consider and agree detail. <b>26 April 2022:</b> 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	<b>Propose to close</b> <b>3 October 2022:</b> Agenda item for Management Committee meeting <b>2 August 2022:</b> Sub-Group held. <b>20 June 2022:</b> further discussion required to agree and record actions.

<b>20 September 2021</b>				
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		<b>Ongoing</b> July 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.
<b>30 March 2020</b>				
MC30/3/20-02	Explore inclusion of Observatory in Armagh Conservation Area and report back to a future meeting	SMT		<b>Ongoing</b> Sept 2022: ongoing but no further update at present 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