

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN NUCLEAR SCIENCE

11/2

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held at No.5, Old Palace Yard,
Westminster on October 2nd, 1961.

Present:- Lord Bridges (Chairman)
Sir Robert Aitken
Mr. A. E. Drake
Professor D. H. Wilkinson
Dr. F. A. Vick
Dr. T. G. Pickavance
Mr. P. Bowles
Dr. J. A. V. Willis (Secretary)

1. Minutes of the last Meeting

The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on July, 20th, 1961.

2. Matters dealt with by Correspondence

The Chairman said that after reference to the Committee by correspondence he had approved on their behalf the proposed contract for the houses at Didcot (Paper 61/40) and the extension to Brown Boveri's contract for Nimrod converter plant (Paper 61/41).

3. Financial Statement Paper 61/42

In connection with two new contracts for provision of labour, listed in Schedule II of the statement, policy on the use of contract labour was briefly discussed. It was agreed that a balance was needed. One clear occasion for it was to deal with peak requirements. It was also pointed out that the true cost of our own labour, including overheads, may be much more than appears at first sight. However, there was a real need to guard against doing so much by contract as to leave our own labour not fully employed.

It was also reported that the Trade Unions had enquired about the the Institute's policy on the use of contract labour at the first meeting of the Joint Negotiation Committee. This enquiry was in line with similar discussions between the Trade Unions and the Authority, and the replies were being co-ordinated. There was no indication of any serious difficulty.

The Committee accepted the financial statement.

4. Estimates 1962/3 Paper 61/43

The Chairman said that the estimates set out in Paper 61/43 incorporated the Board's decisions on a programme involving a reduced expenditure which it was hoped that the Treasury would accept.

Although forecasts for 1963/4 and 1964/5 are included, and the 5-year forecasts requested by the Treasury have been taken still further ahead to 1966/7, the Committee emphasised most strongly that they regarded the figures beyond 1962/3 as no more than forecasts. They were the present forecasts (at present prices) of the cost of carrying out the present programme. It was considered that additional items would certainly arise, and that the Institute must be free to put them forward for approval. Mr. Drake said that the point had been made by the Minister for Science's Office in putting the Institute's 5-year forecasts to the Treasury.

The Committee considered the estimates for 1962/3 and concluded that on certain items, including the Electron Laboratory, an under-expenditure seemed quite likely and that it would not be too risky to accept an additional shadow cut of up to £200,000.

A small correction to note 2 on page 5 of the paper was agreed. The note stated that any credits arising under the Atlas computer contract on account of further Atlas sales would be treated as Extra Exchequer Receipts. Mr. Drake said that this would only be correct for actual payments from the firm to the Institute, which could only arise in later years. While the Institute was paying for the Atlas any credits would be "netted" against these payments.

ACTION 1. The Committee approved the estimates as set out in Paper NI/GP/61/43 and authorised the Secretary to make any minor corrections and amendments found necessary in discussion of the estimates with the Authority, the Minister for Science's Office and the Treasury.

5. Staff Complement Paper 61/44

The Committee briefly considered Paper 63/44. They accepted the paper for estimate purposes, but left the consideration of approval of the new complement to the Personnel Committee, to whom the paper is also to be submitted.

Comments were made on two of the possible additional commitments shown in Appendix II. It was considered that the approval of the Personnel Committee should be sought before any decision to operate the restaurant with Institute staff. It was also considered that it would not be necessary or desirable to undertake our own contract work.

6. Treatment of the Large Spoil Heap at the Rutherford Laboratory. Paper 61/45

The Chairman said that the consultant, Mr. Jellicoe had produced something approaching a minimum scheme in his Scheme "C". Besides the spreading of topsoil and seeding, a good deal of shaping of the mound was necessary for technical reasons, to make the slopes stable and manageable.

It was noted that additional expenditure will be necessary later on a fence to isolate the potentially dangerous area.

The Committee approved the proposed Scheme "C" in principle, and noted that a formal submission will be made when a firm estimate is available.

7. D.C. Power Supplies for Nimrod Beam Transport. Paper 61/46

ACTION 2. The Committee approved the negotiation of a contract with Brentford Transformers at a total price of £67,992 as debated in Paper NI/GP/61/46.

8. Contract Approvals

Taking as an example the case dealt with in the previous minute, the Chairman suggested that proposed contracts over £25,000 should no longer be referred to the Committee as at present, unless there was some special point which it was thought the Committee would wish to consider. The Committee agreed with this proposal. They asked the Rutherford Laboratory staff to examine the proposals, including building contracts, and refer any to the Committee when they thought this desirable.

ACTION 3. The Committee authorised the placing of contracts over £25,000 without reference to them in future, provided that in each case the cost was within the financial approval given by the Committee, the contract was placed by competitive tender and was approved by the U.K.A.E.A. Contract Department. However, the Committee asked the staff to refer cases to them whenever this seemed desirable.

9. Nimrod Vacuum Chamber

Mr. Bowles reported that technically the vacuum chamber position had continued to improve, but the cost still gave cause for concern. Although we had a fixed-price contract, the firm had already suggested a review in expectation of making a loss. The Committee considered that a meeting with the firm and the Authority's Director of Contracts could well be held at a time when the first satisfactory production vessel had been produced. The size of a possible claim could then be estimated, but it was thought that such a claim should not be dealt with until the end of the contract. The normal procedure would be to take such a claim into account, but to accept it only in part, if at all. It must be remembered that a good deal of the extra cost incurred was due to the firm's shortcomings and that these shortcomings had also put the Institute to a good deal of expenses besides resulting in considerable delays.

J. A. V. Willis
Secretary
Rutherford High Energy Laboratory
Harwell.

10th October 1961.