

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN NUCLEAR SCIENCE

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 5 Old Palace Yard,
Westminster, on 9 January 1962

Present: Lord Bridges (Chairman)
Sir Robert Aitken
Mr. A. E. Drake
Dr. F. A. Vick
Dr. T. G. Pickavance
Mr. P. Bowles
Mr. G. W. Dixon
Dr. J. A. V. Willis (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor Peierls and Professor Wilkinson.

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 1961.

2. Matters arising from the previous minutes

Minute 2: policy on the use of contract labour

It was reported that the use of contract labour at the Rutherford Laboratory had been reviewed on the lines discussed at the last meeting, and that a statement of policy had been made to the Trade Unions. Implementation of the policy, which would be gradual, would result in rather more direct employment and rather less contract labour, so that some additional complement would be required, but there should be no increase in expenditure.

Minute 3: estimates 1962/3

The Secretary reported that the Treasury had called for an additional shadow cut in the NIRNS estimate. The new total shadow cut was £800,000. In addition, if the Institute bore the cost of University use of AEA computers, as was proposed (which might require about £200,000 in 1962/3), the Treasury would expect the Institute to find the money without an additional grant. In view of the consistent record of under-spending, the Committee agreed that they did not wish to dispute the further shadow cut.

3. Matters dealt with by correspondence

The Chairman said that, after reference to the Committee by correspondence, he had approved the proposals in the following papers:

(a) Paper 61/47 (Beam transport equipment for NIRNS experiments with the Birmingham Synchrotron);

(b) Paper 61/48 (Implementation of the escalator clause in Chivers' building contract;

(c) Paper 61/49 (Six more houses at Didcot).

Of these, (a) and (b) were proceeding, and (c) was being put to the Treasury. Since action was urgently required, Mr. Drake said that he would seek a quick reply from the Treasury.

4. Financial statement - Paper 62/1

The Chairman referred to the further large fall in the forecast expenditure in 1961/2, shown in Schedule I of paper 61/1, and said that while it might be very difficult to avoid over-estimation in the first two or three years of a big capital project, the estimating ought now to be closer. Dr. Pickavance said that progress on Nimrod had been delayed by technical difficulties, and many of the other major plant schemes had been delayed in starting because physicists and engineers had not been freed from the Nimrod work to the extent which had been forecast.

The Committee noted the new commitments reported in Schedule II and the position reported in Schedule III. The Secretary said that approval of the Peach Croft Scheme was now badly needed, as the negotiations for the land had reached a critical stage. Mr. Drake said that he would press the Treasury for a quick answer.

It was noted that the figures for the 1962/3 estimates given in Schedule IV do not include the additional cut mentioned in Minute 2 above.

5. Nimrod quarterly statements - Paper 62/2

The Committee considered the position of the Nimrod project as reported in quarterly statements Nos. 15 and 16, and in particular the position of the vacuum chamber work, on which Mr. Bowles reported verbally.

Mr. Bowles said that Marston Excelsior had made a claim that the total payment under their contract should be £1.6 million, compared with the agreed price of £1.2 million. The contract position was unfortunately not so strong as we would like; Marstons had made two reservations in their £1.2 million quotation, relating to the cost of major possible health precautions, and to any major unforeseen changes in production techniques. The Contracts Department had not been able to reach agreement with Marstons on the terms of these reservations, so the contract had not yet been signed. In these circumstances, Mr. Bowles and the Contracts Department were negotiating with Marstons and it appeared that a figure of about £1.45 million might be agreed, as including only those increased costs which Marstons could not reasonably be expected to have foreseen.

Mr. Drake said that we must be sure not to be too generous to Marstons, and he also suggested that the Treasury should be consulted before the negotiations proceeded much further. This was agreed, and the Committee invited Mr. Drake and Mr. Bowles to discuss the complicated situation in more detail, so as to help Mr. Drake in the approach to the Treasury.

The Committee also asked Dr. Pickavance and Mr. Bowles to consider urgently whether the whole £1.45 million (assuming this to be the figure) could be found within the present Nimrod estimate and contingency. This should be determined before the approach to the Treasury.

6. Increased cost of the building for the Atlas Computer - Paper 62/3

The Chairman pointed out that the sum at present approved for the Atlas Computer had been estimated by the Authority. The Institute was now responsible for seeking any necessary additional funds, but the Authority were naturally closely concerned at this stage. The Atlas Computer Committee had the matter in hand, but General Purposes Committee approval was needed for any request for more funds.

Dr. Vick said that he would like to assist in the investigation of the building plans, including the assessment of the number of people to be accommodated. The Chairman welcomed this offer and the matter was left with Dr. Vick, who would be able to take action in his capacity as a member of the Atlas Computer Committee, or separately.

Other points made in discussion were:

- (a) that the Atlas Computer Committee had asked for prefabricated buildings to be considered, on cost grounds, for the offices, and
- (b) that it would be helpful if one could express in financial terms the reduction in the efficiency of the computer which would result if, say, £100,000 were saved by lowering the machine specification.

Action 1. The Committee invited Dr. Vick to examine the Atlas building proposals. It authorized Mr. Drake, if requested by the Chairman of the Atlas Computer Committee, and having regard to Dr. Vick's advice, to ask the Treasury for up to approximately £200,000 additional funds for the Atlas Computer project.

7. Extension of Building R.12 - Paper 62/4

The Committee asked for certain details to be provided which were not apparent in Paper 62/4:

- (a) the amount of fees (the paper itself quotes figures plus fees, while the appendix does not include fees. There is no explicit reconciliation);
- (b) a statement of the present estimate for the full scheme, with economies but without the omission of anything which would be asked for later;
- (c) an explanation of the reasons for the increases in the estimate.

Action 2. The Committee agreed that, when the details listed above have been provided, the Treasury should be informed of the items which have been omitted from the original scheme.

8. Restaurant: increased estimate - Paper 62/5

The Chairman said that the restaurant had been approved on an estimate of £85,500. It was now reported, after building had been well started, that the cost would be nearly 50% greater. He was not prepared to accept this standard of performance. Further, the paper gave inadequate or unsatisfactory explanations of the increases in almost every case.

The Chairman's criticism was endorsed by members of the Committee. It was also stated that the cost of £293 per place (excluding fees, furniture, and external services) compares with £177 in the new AERE canteen nearby. A further point raised was the adequacy of the proposed MRC contribution, in the light of the increased cost.

Action 3. The Committee declined to approve the increased estimate for the restaurant. They asked, as a matter of urgency, for an investigation to be made into the increased estimate, and into the scheme as it now stood, to see what economies could be made. It was agreed that the following should be invited to form the investigating Board:

A Chairman, to be chosen by Dr. Pickavance and Dr. Vick
Mr. P. Bowles
Mr. H. J. Millen (AEA Finance Branch)
Mr. R. M. Fishenden (AERE)

The Committee authorized the Chairman to decide on the action to be taken after considering the report of the Board.

9. Increased fees on Phase II Building - Paper 62/6

In reply to the Chairman, Mr. Dixon confirmed that the fees charged by the Southern Works Organisation are actual costs. The provision for fees in estimates is inserted by the NIRNS Finance Section on the advice of SWO. In the case of the Phase II Building, the provision (made before the days of SWO) was only 10%, whereas the actual costs on this scheme were now estimated to be unusually high (about 20%).

The Chairman said that the method of treating these fees was not yet satisfactorily clear to him. He would like to have a memorandum setting out the present practice. Mr. Drake said that the AEA Finance Branch was separately enquiring into the same question and the Committee therefore left the action with Mr. Drake, but asked to have a memorandum on the subject as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Committee deferred their decision on the request for approval of an additional £42,000 for fees.

10. Approval powers, foreign currency - Paper 62/7

Action 4. The Committee took note of Paper NI/GP/62/7 and granted the following delegated powers of approval for foreign currency expenditure:

Up to £1,000	As delegated by the Director, Rutherford High Energy Laboratory
Up to £50,000	Director, Rutherford High Energy Laboratory
Items over £50,000 are to be referred to the AEA Finance Branch.	

11. Contract for the use of the Merlin Reactor - Paper 62/8

The Committee took note of Paper NI/GP/62/8. One point which was questioned was the extent of the commitment which the Institute would be asked to undertake for three years ahead. The Secretary said that the contract negotiations had not yet dealt with this point, but that in the preliminary technical discussions with the firm, their request for commitment for three years had referred only to the engagement of additional staff to operate the reactor full time.

The Committee approved the action being taken under the control of the Research Reactor Committee, as reported in Paper 62/8.

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

9 January 1962

For GPC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN NUCLEAR SCIENCE

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

9 January 1962

Notes for the Chairman

Expected Lord Bridges, Sir Robert Aitken, Mr. A. E. Drake,
Professor R. E. Peierls, Dr. F. A. Vick, Dr. T. G. Pickavance,
Mr. P. Bowles, Dr. J. A. V. Willis and Mr. G. W. Dixon of
Southern Works Organisation

Apologies Professor D. H. Wilkinson will be in Lahore

1. Previous meeting - 2 October 1961

Minute 2 (Contract labour). The use of contract labour has been reviewed on the lines discussed, and a statement of policy has been made to the Trade Unions. Some additional complement, but not additional expenditure, may be required.

Minute 3 (Estimates 1962/3). Treasury has proposed increasing the shadow cut from £600,000 to £800,000 in addition to our finding any funds required for University use of AEA computers. I think we can stand this.

2. Matters dealt with by correspondence (All approved)

Paper 61/47. (Beam transport equipment for use on NIRS experiments with the Birmingham synchrotron)

Paper 61/48. (Implementation of escalator clause in Chivers building contract)

Paper 61/49. (Six more houses at Didcot)

3. Financial statement (Paper 62/1)

Forecast 1962/62. Increased under-spend on capital

Schedule III. Increased estimate on three schemes

Schedule IV. Does not include the Treasury's latest proposed cut

4. Nimrod statements (Paper 62/2)

Statement 15, is very old but reports the increase in estimates to £11.2 million (page 1) and reports of commitments (page 6)

Statement 16, is fairly old and contains little of interest except Page 6

Vacuum Chamber. Mr. Bowles can report on the vacuum chamber as usual

Mr Bowles - you will want to see where I have indicated that you would probably start off

/A.D.

11/2

5. Increased cost of Atlas building (Paper 62/3) (Willis, Bowles)
Asks approval for Penney and Drake to act
6. Extension to R.12 (Paper 62/4) (Willis)
Scheme pruned to keep within approved sum
7. Restaurant (Paper 62/5) (Bowles)
An unhappy story, but we are doing all we can to keep the cost down
8. Fees (Paper 62/6) (Willis)
Another rather difficult one for SWO
9. Foreign currency (Paper 62/7) (Willis)
A small tidying-up
10. Merlin Reactor (Paper 62/8) (Willis)
I hope that the Committee will concur in our going ahead with this scheme which the Research Reactor Committee is guiding

J. A. V. Willis

4 January 1962