



ASSA COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

DATE	7 April 2025	TME	17:00 – 18:15	VENUE	Via Jitsi Meet
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ATTENDANCE

Council

	Role
Derek Duckitt	President, Chair – Hermanus Centre, Cosmology Director
Dr Daniel Cunnama	Vice President (outgoing President)
Dr Matie Hoffman	Vice President (incoming President), Chair – Bloemfontein
Adv AJ Nel	Treasurer
Lerika Cross	Secretary
Andre Bruton	Membership Secretary
John Lindsay-Smith	Chair - Johannesburg Centre
Johan Smit	Chair - Pretoria Centre
Francois Zinserling	Proxy for Mike Hadlow, Durban Centre Chair

Appointees

Chris Stewart	Instrumentation Director
Dr Christian Hettlage	Web Master
Chris de Coning	ASSA Archiving, Historical Director
Clyde Foster	Planetary Director
Dr Claire Flanagan	Convenor of Scholarships
Tim Cooper	Comet, Asteroid, Meteor (CAM) Director
Dave Blane	Double & Variable Star Director & Photometry & Spectroscopy Director (Acting)
Jacques van Delft	Solar Director
Colin Steyn	Observing Director
Willie Koorts	MNASSA Editor

Apologies (a) and Absentees

Auke Slotegraaf	SGAS Editor
Dr Ian Glass ((a)	Council Member
Martin Heigan (a)	Imaging Director
Dr Pierre de Villiers (a)	Outreach Director
Case Rijdsdijk (a)	Council Member
John Gill (a)	Web Manager
Mike Hadlow (a)	Chair – Durban Centre
Peter Hers (a)	Chair – Garden Route Centre
Willem Brazelle	Chair – Cape Centre

Documents supporting this meeting are available in the [ASSA Cloud Folder](#):
[Meeting Agenda](#), [Meeting recording](#)

	Discussions / Decisions / Actions (in bold)
1	<p>Welcome, Present, Apologies, Proxies received Derek Duckitt opened the 4th ASSA Council meeting for 2024/25 year, welcoming all members. Apologies received before & after meeting are noted under Attendance.</p>
2	<p>Previous Minutes of Meetings and Agenda The minutes of the Council meeting held <u>27 January 2025</u>: Chris Stewart proposed accepting the minutes – seconded by Jacques van Delft.</p> <p>Note: Outcomes and actions arising from previous minutes/Council discussions are <i>in italics</i>. Actions are underlined. Progress since previous meetings included.</p>

	Discussions / Decisions / Actions (in bold)
3	<p>3. Communication</p> <p>3.1 Communications document (<i>Permanent item</i>) Latest draft is available on the ASSA Cloud, 23 September 2024.</p> <p>3.2 Website Update Christian informed that he secured a commitment from IT to migrate the website to a new WordPress version within the next week; his will resolve the issues listed under 3.2.1 to 3.2.4. <u>Christian</u> will inform when the changes have been made.</p> <p>3.2.1 Join Us top menu item on website <i>(11 Mar) Auke created top menu item, <u>Join Us</u> on website but was unable to edit /create a new Form and called on <u>Christian</u> /SAAO IT to make changes requested.</i> <i>(22 April) To resolve Join Us and Captcha issues: a plug-in Updraft for migrating the website to a WordPress single-site set-up at the SAAO. <u>Christian</u> can arrange Google Analytics.</i> <i>(28 Oct) SAAO IT is busy extracting from the current multisite into a site of its own.</i></p> <p>3.2.2 Search function <i>(22 April) Since the website review: reactivating the "Search" function</i> <i>(24 Jun) Christian informed Search button was added back to site. It was suggested to move it to the menu. As this requires changes to the site template, this shall be addressed once the site has been moved from the current WordPress multisite to a standalone site.</i></p> <p>3.2.3 Captcha error <i>(28 Oct) When completing/submitting either “Ask an Astronomer” or “Report a Sighting” forms on <u>Contact Us</u> the submission fails with error: “The reCAPTCHA was invalid. Go back and try again.”</i></p> <p>3.2.4 Spam emails <i>(27 Jan) Tim reported that he is receiving spam to his personal email from shallowsky@ that seems to originate from “Report a Sighting”. Christian undertook to take up the issue with SAAO IT.</i></p> <p>3.3 Sending email to all Members <i>(22 April) Proposal for implementing an ASSA Member List</i> <i>(24 Jun) Some Centres are in support, some not. Daniel proposed to work with Christian on an alternate option to allow members to opt in to mail list using Join Us tab on website and MailChimp.</i> Recap of the objective to achieve – further to the 24 June meeting: Finalise an option to implementing an ASSA Member List which will allow all members to opt in to the mail list by using the Join Us tab on the website and MailChimp. Daniel provided information before the meeting, see the file “Setting up a Mailchimp Mailing List for ASSA Costs and Benefits” The meeting proceeded to consider the option.</p> <p>Key points The free plan can support up to 500 contacts. AJ confirmed current ASSA membership is below that.</p> <p><u>Daniel</u> agreed to prepare an introductory email to be sent to all ASSA members outlining the purpose and process including the simplicity of the opt-out process. This will be done once Christian finalizes the technical side (refer item 3.2). He will describe i.a. how and why member contact information would be managed and updated, who will have the rights to send communications via MailChimp, access levels per defined per group or centre, how to maintain an up-to-date MailChimp list.</p> <p>Andre, the Membership Secretary, already maintains a database of Country member details. and he expressed interest in actively participating in the process. <u>Daniel</u> confirmed he will contact <u>Andre</u>.</p> <p>AJ proposed that there should be a mandatory administrative mailing list for key votes and decisions —emails from which members cannot unsubscribe, to ensure organizational accountability and participation. This proposal was not voted on and is thus in abeyance for now (<u>Council</u>).</p> <p>3.4 ASSA Cloud repository https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1FQ7NHg4cK7XAM-Z_xElSXPc6R3PmVlaY</p>

	Discussions / Decisions / Actions (in bold)
	<p>Chris de C confirmed a few Section Directors still needed to be added. The goal was for everyone to upload relevant materials before the AGM. Each Centre and Section was responsible for managing their own digital “space” within the cloud, including uploading meeting minutes, newsletters, logos, and any material with historical value.</p> <p>Chris de C said he planned to do a full download of the Archive after the AGM to an external hard drive dedicated to the archive. The meeting supported this action. <u>Chris de C</u> will obtain a quote and submit to Financial Sub-Committee for approval.</p> <p>3.5 Dark Sky 3.5.1 Astro Tourism Daniel reported the Astro Tourism Strategy was presented to Parlement 18 February and approved. There was no funding available from this project. Daniel a Tourism Department working group meeting and the initiative was progressing well, with upcoming events planned. Daniel encouraged <u>interested parties</u> to email him directly, and he would connect them with the appropriate contacts in the Department of Tourism.</p>
4	<p>4. Outreach 4.1 Astrophotography (“AP”) Competition (assa.sao.ac.za/sections/astrophotography/astrophotography-challenges/) <u>All members</u> were asked to circulate the Competition Flyer as wide as possible (All)</p> <p>Concerns were raised about the recent photography competition regarding the high barrier to entry for amateur participants. For a potential next competition the sponsors could be asked for prizes for beginners, intermediate, and advanced to promote inclusivity, encourage broader participation.</p> <p>4.2 ASSA GMN Outreach Project (https://globalmeteornetwork.org/outreach/) The project is listed on the <u>ASSA Outreach page</u> and the latest status available at: https://globalmeteornetwork.org/outreach/2024/04/10/south-african-cameras-installations/ (27 Jan) <i>Tim will procure components and assemble these locally thus potentially saving money to procure more than 4 units. Chris S volunteered his services to help assemble the cameras.</i> Tim reported that presentations were held to the two schools on 19 February to bring new educators and learners up to date with the objectives of the project and explain how to access the data from the cameras. A second presentation - explaining how to use Stellarium to familiarise learners with what the cameras are seeing - will be held once the schools return from vacation in April.</p> <p>The GMN Report 2024 gave results for South Africa, with the number of cameras increasing from 4 to 8, and the number of captures from 200 to 2294. With full-year participation from the schools now expected, that number should increase further in the coming months.</p> <p>The GMN cameras in South Africa played a role in the discovery of a new meteor shower, detected between 18–22 March in constellation of Puppis as announced by the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams on 1 April and is awaiting a formal name. The discovery will be featured in MNASSA, and schools involved will receive recognition for their contribution. <u>Daniel</u> offered to help draft and share a press release with the traditional media, newsletters, and possibly broadcast segments to highlight the meteor shower discovery, and the role schools played.</p>
5	<p>5. ASSA Publications 5.1. SGAS 2025 (27 Jan) <i>Auke encouraged everyone to give him feedback for the SGAS 2026.</i> AJ noted that the SkyGuide had already required a second print run due to unexpectedly high demand. This was unusual, maybe as the initial print run was unusually small.</p> <p>5.2 MNASSA (https://assa.sao.ac.za/publications/mnassa/) (27 Jan) <u>Christian</u> to confirm that mnassa@ email is reverting to "Willie Koorts" koorts.willie@gmail.com. Willie encouraged everyone to send him articles for MNASSA – for now send to both MNASSA@ and his gmail address. Willie confirmed he would continue as MNASSA Editor for the time being but would welcomed</p>

	Discussions / Decisions / Actions (in bold)
	<p>support or a handover if someone else wished to take on a more active editorial role. He thanked those who contributed articles, noting the upcoming issue is already well-stocked with content.</p> <p>New Content Streams for MNASSA A suggestion was made to build a more sustainable content pipeline for MNASSA from academic circles. Such as to engage university students in submitting content for MNASSA, especially since many students are eager to get published and produce solid work. AJ proposed reaching out directly to lecturers at universities that offer astronomy, such as Bloemfontein, Wits, and UCT, to help disseminate calls for submissions to students. Daniel added that contacting supervisors through mailing lists might be effective, though he noted students are typically reached via supervisors rather than direct mailing lists.</p> <p><u>Willie and Daniel</u> to draft a student-facing call for articles, and <u>AJ</u> volunteered to help compile a contact list of university lecturers.</p> <p>5.3 ASSA publications (<i>Permanent item for noting</i>) <u>MNASSA</u>: Recent edition was published February 2025 <u>CAM Notes</u>: Recent edition published 2 April '25: 2025 No.2 covering April to June '25 <u>Solar Bulletin</u>: Recent edition was published 12 January 2025 <u>Deep Sky Bulletin</u>: Recent edition was published December '24</p> <p>Increase distribution of ASSA Publications The meeting proposed to promote the publications more broadly. AJ informed that using platforms like Substack or Blogger could increase readership through keyword optimization and automated multi-platform publishing.</p> <p>Jacques, for the Solar Bulletin, proposed to copy other organisations. Jacques also mentioned participation from local members is disappointingly low and asked if Council can assist in encouraging more involvement. Compliments were extended to Jacques for the quality and frequency of the solar imagery and reports, and it was suggested that standout images should be placed on the website and ASSA Flickr. Jacques requested that the solar section on the website be equipped with a visitor counter, allowing better insight into audience engagement. The feasibility of this feature is deferred until after the new website is launched, at which point Christian will be consulted.</p>
6	<p>6. Scholarships 6.1 2025/26 Bursaries <i>(28 Oct) AJ confirmed that both ASSA and Cooke Scholarships will remain at R25k</i></p> <p>Applications The Scholarships Committee received nine applications, with one disqualified. Most submissions were deemed poor quality. There was concern that the current application process was failing to reach stronger candidates, suggesting a communication gap rather than a lack of talent.</p> <p>Only one candidate – doing an honours degree - was considered worthy of support and the committee recommended awarding him the Cooke Scholarship. He needed the funds to register but missed the deadline due to delays in transferring scholarship funds from ASSA's investment account. <u>Claire</u> will check with him if he might be able to register for any mid-year half-courses. The Cooke Scholarship funds for 2025 will be made available to this candidate for 2026 studies, depending on his situation at that time.</p> <p>The ASSA Scholarship will be held over until next year. The key takeaway was that awarding a scholarship is a discretionary act, not an obligation.</p> <p>Scholarship Eligibility and Criteria A discussion ensued around scholarship eligibility, focusing on whether students with average or below-average academic performance should qualify for funding. There was consensus that strong mathematics performance is crucial for astronomy scholarships. <u>Matie</u> agreed to develop a general set of criteria for identifying promising scholarship candidates and</p>

	Discussions / Decisions / Actions (in bold)
	<p>undertook to consult with colleagues.</p> <p>6.2 Communication with Students and Bursars <u>Council</u> to still discuss if firm guidelines/pre-requisites regarding communication from current and previous bursars should be formalised, e.g., to provide feedback on their progress and contribute by submitting papers to MNASSA and/or other ASSA publications.</p> <p>6.3 Bequest from Prof Brian Warner's estate <i>(27 Jan) AJ is processing a bequest of R10 000 from Prof Warner's estate and proposes for it to be part of ASSA's investment account to ensure a legacy and a Brian Warner Scholarship was agreed. AJ will convey the same to the institution handling the Estate.</i> A "beneficiary questionnaire and supporting documents" were prepared and returned to Personal Trust, the company handling the bequest, by AJ. AJ to still advise if: 1) The funds will be retained in the name of Brian Warner (and maybe be applied to textbooks); 2) Or folded into the other bursaries to boost their capital.</p>
7	<p>7. Membership 7.1 Country Membership <i>(13 Honorary Membership (max 15))</i> <i>(27 Jan) Clyde mentioned he did not receive a SGAS but bought one in Windhoek. Andre offered to look into and clarify the SGAS delivery to Clyde.</i> <u>Clyde, Andre</u> to confirm distribution of SGAS to Clyde.</p>
8	<p>8. Governance 8.1 Register ASSA for tax under a VDP (Voluntary Disclosure Program) Application <i>(7 Jul) CTFS to be asked on process PBO registration and to provide a quotation</i> <i>(8 May) The 3 willing unconnected persons (Daniel, Chris S, Pierre with Pierre the SARS rep.) have completed forms required by CTFS. CTFS will now start the application process.</i> <i>(24 Jun) CTFS informed of the allocated ASSA tax number 9229741260 and provided updated forms to be signed by Daniel, Pierre and Chris. The forms were signed/returned to CTFS 12 June.</i> <i>(28 Oct) AJ confirmed correspondence from CTFS that tax last year is zero, Tax Exemption is in place.</i> Council was informed that CTFS does not have available resources at present to process registration of ASSA as a PBO and discuss options to progress. <u>AJ</u> kindly offered to expedite the PBO registration and Council expressed appreciation to AJ.</p> <p>8.2 Council member resignation Council noted that Case Rijsdijk informed his resignation as ASSA Council member with immediate effect and noted that he "would like to thank ASSA, most sincerely, for all the support and friendship given me over the years; it did have a significant impact on my life". It was agreed that <u>Derek</u> will reach out to Case via a formal letter thanking him for his contributions to ASSA over a long period.</p> <p>8.3 Garden Route Centre closing down Council also noted that Peter Hers, Garden Route Chair, informed it is sadly in the process of closing down the Centre. Their resources have been depleted such as the resignation of Case Rijsdijk (who has been a pillar of support for many years) and I due to ill-health. <u>Derek</u> will provide a formal reply to Peter on behalf of Council.</p> <p>8.4 Checklist - upcoming alerts 31 Mar The Scholarship allocation was finalised</p>
9	<p>9. Financial Matters 9.1 2023/24 Financials <i>(28 Oct) AJ confirmed the financials for the year-end 30 June 2024 was received from CTFS and signed. AJ to send Lerika copy of signed financials to place on record in the cloud. (AJ)</i> <u>AJ</u> to send Lerika signed financials to load on repository.</p> <p>9.2 Investment Account</p>

	Discussions / Decisions / Actions (in bold)
	<p>Further to issues experienced withdrawing funds for scholarships from the ASSA Glacier/Sanlam account, AJ proposed that the funds are moved to Allan Gray who can provide for annual automatic payments. Refer to the motivation in the mail from AJ.</p> <p>As there was concern about the cost the shift would incur, <u>AJ</u> kindly offered to send an explanatory email to the Financial Sub Committee, detailing the proposal and implications.</p> <p>An alternative option was suggested to rely on reminders, e.g., a permanent note in ASSA agenda.</p>
10	<p>10. General</p> <p>10.1 Suggestions, requests, ideas</p> <p>No general item raised</p>
11	<p>Closure</p> <p>Next meeting is proposed for 21 July and the AGM for 11 August, both on a Monday.</p> <p>Centre monthly meetings:</p> <p>Hermanus Centre: 3rd Tuesday. Jhb Centre: 2nd Wednesday. Durban Centre: 2nd Wednesday, committee meetings 4th Wednesday. Cape Centre: 4th Wednesday</p>

Minutes Approved: _____ Date: _____

Attachments in support of minutes

In support of item 2: [27 January 2025](#)

In support of item 3.1: [ASSA Communication 240923](#)

In support of item 3.3: [Setting up a Mailchimp Mailing List for ASSA Costs and Benefits](#)

In support of item 4.1: [AP Competition Flyer](#)

In support of item 9.2: [Motivation to move investment account to Allan Gray](#)

All documents in support of the meeting including the agenda are accessible in ASSA Cloud :

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11BEKRb6zegtQRSZzvVyB26BpFrOKFgud?usp=drive_link

Checklist (covered under Governance item 8.2)

21 Feb Scholarship application dead line

31 Mar` Scholarship allocation finalised

31 Mar Closing date for nominations for: Honorary Members and Awards

15 April Deadline for Secretary to send to President and Vice President list of nominations

1 June Call for nominations for Council; Annual review of website

1 June New Country Membership fees to be agreed by Council

30 Jun Closing date for nominations for Council, receipt of Section reports, receipt of report from Scholarships Convenor, submission of items for placing on the Agenda of the AGM, Financial year end; Council to review appointment and roles of all Council Appointees including the Section Directors;

1 Jul Submission of annual updated ASSA membership form, Country Members: Subs renewal

31 Jul Closing date for ballot for Council nominations: Centre AGMs to be concluded before AGM

AGM 1st Wed Aug. 21 business days before 1st Wed in Aug: Deadline for members to receive notice

1 Oct Appointment/Negotiations with SGAS Editor for next edition. Open negotiations with Struik

Annual refresh of the Communications document after the AGM

END