



Science Committee

Terms of Reference

Version 4: 25 October 2022

1. Background:

The African Astronomical Society (AfAS) is now in its 4th year since its relaunch in March 2019 in Cape Town, South Africa. AfAS is a professional astronomical society promoting research, human capital development and outreach through organising and facilitating activities aligned with its Mission, Vision and associated Strategic Objectives. The Executive Committee of AfAS is mandated by the African Astronomy Community to help realise the Mission and Vision of the Society as well as achieve its strategic objectives as set out in the AfAS Constitution. Thus, the Executive Committee appoints, at the beginning of its term of office every three years, committees to assist it with the implementation of its long-term strategy and Annual Operating Plan. The AfAS Science Committee (SC), through the appointment of its members by the AfAS Executive Committee, is tasked mainly to further and refine the research agenda of the community as well as the further development of young and emerging researchers.

2. Strategic Objectives of the Science Committee:

2.1. To support collaborative international astronomical research and related activities and projects in Africa.

2.2. To develop/review as a point of reference an “African Science Framework for Astronomy”, which addresses the strengths and weaknesses that currently exist across the African continent and a framework plan to enhance scientific and associated technological research in scientific areas of most interest to African astronomers.

2.3. To promote and organise conferences and workshops to enhance the exchange of knowledge.

2.4. To support mentorship, leadership, and guidance efforts for early-career astronomers.

2.5. To inspire and support underrepresented groups to study astronomy and engage in astronomy research.

2.6. To develop and implement activities that advance the science of astronomy on the African continent

3. Duties of the Science Committee

Given that the IAU General Assembly (GA2024) will be hosted for the first time in Africa in 2024, the major focus of this Committee for the 3 years commencing 2022 is to develop activities in support of the objectives of the GA2024 National Organising Committee (NOC) with the underlying motivation being to establish sustainable international research collaborations which will endure well beyond 2024, thereby leaving a science-oriented “legacy” emanating from GA2024. The Science Committee will therefore work closely with both the AfAS Executive

Committee and the GA2024 NOC in the development and implementation of activities which will include astronomers from across the African continent as well as the rest of the world to advance astronomy in Africa. In particular, the Committee will:

3.1. Organise meetings and events involving African astronomers.

3.2. Strive to increase the number of professional African astronomers as well as the number of astronomers working in Africa.

3.3. Support astronomical research in general, including facilitating access and use of existing facilities, and in particular, the publishing of articles to promote research in astronomy and astrophysics.

3.4. Increase awareness of GA2024 and encourage African astronomers to attend the GA2024.

3.5. Award grants/prizes to emerging astronomers to both advance their careers and to facilitate their attendance at GA2024.

3.6. Contribute to the realisation of “Vision 2024” (Vision 2024 maps out the continental ambitions for astronomy in Africa as related to the GA2024).

3.7. In collaboration with the AfAS Fund-Raising Committee and the GA2024 NOC, seek funding for its activities.

3.8. By invitation, the Chair of the Science Committee will be a member of the GA2024 NOC

4. Composition

4.1 Membership of the Science Committee is voluntary. Only members of AfAS can be nominated to be members of the Committee. Non-members of AfAS can be nominated, provided an application for membership is accompanied by the nomination. Self-nomination is permitted. All nominations must be accompanied by a brief motivation from the nominator as well as an abridged biography of the nominee, which does not exceed 1 (one) page. Nominees need to accept their nominations through an e-mail to the AfAS Secretariat. Nominations for membership to the Science Committee will be reviewed and appointed by the AfAS Executive Committee from its members and approved by the Executive Committee.

4.2 The Science Committee shall comprise at least 8 (eight) members, the majority of whom shall be independent non-Executive Committee members of AfAS.

4.3 Specialist advisors and/or working groups can be appointed by the Science Committee to provide advice to the Science Committee and/or perform specific tasks allocated to them by the Committee.

4.4 Other members may be co-opted into the committee when required, and the AfAS Executive Committee needs to be consulted on these appointments.

4.5 The members of the Committee should collectively have sufficient qualifications and experience to ensure that the objectives are achieved.

4.6 Only members of the Committee have the right to attend Committee meetings, although other individuals may be invited as observers and/or advisors to attend all or part of any Committee meeting as and when deemed appropriate.

4.7 Individuals in attendance at Committee meetings by invitation may participate in discussions but do not vote on resolutions or form part of the quorum for Committee meetings.

4.8 The Science Committee will appoint an “Early Career” Working Group with at least 5 (five) members and at least 2 (two) members of the Science Committee and the Chair of the Working Group being an “Early Career” member of the AfAS Executive Committee.

4.9 Committee members who have their committee membership terminated for whatever reason or those who have resigned prior to the end of the Committee’s tenure will be replaced with new members who will serve until the end of the Committee’s term of office. The normal recruitment process will be followed. However, should a member leave the Committee within 6 (six) months of the expiry of the term of office of the Science Committee, no replacement will be appointed unless total membership falls below 50% plus 1 member.

4.10 At the end of the term of office of the current committee, for the purposes of continuity, no more than 3 (three) of the current members may be requested by the AfAS Executive Committee to remain for another term.

4.11 The Committee will elect a Chair and Deputy Chair from amongst its members; the tenure of members of the Committee will be aligned to that of the Executive Committee, which is normally 3 (three) years commencing at the beginning of the AfAS financial year (April to March).

5. Meetings of the Science Committee

a. Meetings will be held at least every second month, and the Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, will issue a meeting schedule for the year no later than the end of April of a financial year. The duration of each meeting will be set by the Chair based on the agenda for a particular meeting.

The Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, will draft the agenda for the meeting and issue the draft agenda for comment/additional agenda items no later than 2 (two) weeks prior to a meeting. The secretariat will issue the final agenda no later than 1 (one week) prior to the meeting. The Secretariat will ensure that any documents that are required for any agenda items will be issued together with the final agenda.

In the absence of the Committee Chair, the deputy will chair the meeting. Otherwise, the members present may nominate and elect one of their members to chair the meeting.

5.1. Minutes and meeting papers

The minutes of each meeting of the Science Committee will be prepared by the Secretariat, who will have one of its staff present at each meeting. The minutes of each meeting will be issued to all members no later than 10 (ten) working days after a meeting for review by the members. However, the Chair will be required to endorse the draft minutes prior to issue to all members.

Outside of meetings, all communication between members shall take place through email to ensure all committee members are kept up to date with all work and discussions.

5.2. Attendance of Meetings by Members

A quorum of the Committee shall be 50% plus one of the members. All decisions taken at a duly convened meeting of the Committee at which a quorum is present shall be binding on all members of the Committee.

Members of the Science Committee are expected to attend all its meetings; however, it is acknowledged that due to work and other schedules, this may not be possible at all times. Members who cannot attend a scheduled meeting must advise the Secretariat prior to the meeting of his/her absence and reasons for such absence. The Chair of the Committee will decide on the validity of such reasons, and this will be noted in the minutes of the meeting. Should a member not attend 2 (two) consecutive meetings without reasons that are acceptable to the Chair of the Committee, membership will be terminated, and they will be discharged of their duties. However, should a member not attend a total of 6 (six) meetings or more prior to the expiry of the Committee's term of office, such a member's membership will also be automatically terminated.

6. Annual Operating Plan/Funding

Each Committee appointed by the Executive Committee of AfAS will be required to submit an Annual Operating Plan (AOP), which outlines planned activities of the Committee for the coming 3 (three) years, with the emphasis being on the coming year. The Chair of the Committee will engage with all members of the Committee as well as the Secretariat when drafting the AOP. An annual budget that is required to execute the plan must be included as well. However, given that AfAS has a limited budget for the activities of committees, the Science Committee should include fund-raising initiatives in support of its planned activities in its AOP.

The AOP must be submitted in the required format to the Secretariat no later than the end of April of the coming financial year and thereafter submitted to the AfAS Executive Committee for review and approval at its May meeting.

7. Amendments to Terms of Reference

Any member of the Science Committee, the AfAS Executive Committee or the Secretariat may propose amendments to this Terms of Reference. Such proposed amendments must be sent to the Secretariat in writing and discussed by the Science Committee at its next or special meeting. Should the amendments, or any variations thereof, be acceptable to the Science Committee, the Chair will forward the proposed amendments to the Secretariat for subsequent approval by the AfAS Executive Committee.