1 Observatory Road Observatory Cape Town	AfAS African Astronomical Society

Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting (22 April 2026)

VENUE: Zoom

DATE: 22 April 2026

TIME: 14h00 – 16h30

CHAIRPERSON: Amare Abebe (AA)

SCRIBE: Meryem Guennoun (MG)

ATTENDANCE RECORDS

Amare Abebe (AA)	amare.abebe@afasociety.org	President
Benedicta Woode (BW)	benedicta.woode@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Charles Takalana (CT)	Charles.takalana@afasociety.org	Advisor (Ex-Officio)
Edward Jurua (EJ)	ejurua@must.ac.ug	Co-Opted Executive Member
Joyful Elma Mdhluli (JEM)	joyful.mdhluli@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Kenda Knowles (KK)	kenda.knowles@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Léon Snyman (LS)	SnymanLD@ufs.ac.za	APA Committee Chair
Meryem Guennoun (MG)	meryem.guennoun@afasociety.org	Executive Officer
Marc Yoa	yao.fortune@gmail.com	Co-Opted Executive Member
Marie Korsaga	marie.korsaga07@gmail.com	Co-Opted Executive Member

Patricia Ann Whitelock (PAW)	kenda.knowles@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member
Takalani Nemaungani (TN)	Takalani.Nemaungani@dst.gov.za	Ex-Officio Member
Yunus Manjoo (YEM)	yunus.manjoo@afasociety.org	Project Manager

Appologies

Kevin Govender (KG)	kg@astro4dev.org	Advisor (Ex-Officio) (joined later)
Thembela Mantungwa (TM)	thembela.mantungwa@afasociety.org	Communication committee chair

ABSENT

Yin-Zhe Ma (YZM)	yin-zhe.ma@afasociety.org	Vice President
Youssef Moulane	youssef.moulane@afasociety.org	Executive Committee Member (left the meeting)
Thebe Rodney Medupe (TRM)	rodney.medupe@nwu.ac.za	Immediate Past President (Ex-Officio)

DESCRIPTION	ACTION	DATE
1.Welcome & Opening **1.1 AA** opened the meeting and welcomed all participants, especially the two new co-opted members, MAF and MK **1.2** Acceptance of the minutes of the previous meeting was noted. **1.3 PAW** requested access to the presentation slides delivered by YZM at the conference. **MG** to determine whether the talk was uploaded to the shared platform **AA** emphasized that all presentation materials must be made available to EXCO and that where appropriate, these should also be available to the wider community	**ALL**	

2. Progress on action items not on Agenda

2.1 Website and Membership System

MG and YEM confirmed ongoing work continues on the AfAS website and membership module to address problems that arose when both went live on 1st April. Due to the Developer being involved in an accident where he was seriously injured, there will be a delay in addressing the changes that are required.

YEM added that the deadline for the payment of fees by full members will be 3 months from the date that the system is fully operational.

2.2 DARA/ROTSE Project (BW)

The Science Committee is scheduled to meet on Friday and progress on the ROTSE Project is on the agenda. It was noted that David Buckley is still the lead for the project, despite being based in China. BW commented that currently there is no alternative PI should he be unable to contribute to the project.

2.3 SALT Project (BW)

BW reported that Mirjana Povic acknowledged that there is a need to involve other African astronomers in the project and that this will need to be actively progressed.
PAW added that in discussions with SALT astronomers, it was indicated that they have the expertise and capacity to provide training through online platforms, including YouTube Training, for the submission of proposals to use SALT. This is included in the current year's plan.

2.4 AERAP

YEM reported that the foreign payment application has been submitted to FNB and is currently awaiting approval from the Reserve Bank, it is expected to take between 6 to 8 weeks.

2.5 Engagement with Khotso Mokhele

PAW confirmed that a meeting with Khotso Mokhele has been scheduled for May

2.6 MOU with SANSA (TM)

MG reported that the MoU is currently under review at SANSA, an in-person signing ceremony is planned to be held at SANSA's Johannesburg Office. YEM requested a copy of the draft MOU to review as the Secretariat had not been requested to provide inputs.

2.7 AstroAccel / Dark Skies Workshop Follow-up (MG)

MG had met with both Nombali Qodi and Joyful Mdhluli regarding the follow-up actions arising from AstroAccel Summit and Dark Skies Workshop.

She confirmed that the AstroAccel Summit report has been received from Nombali Qodi for review of the recommendations.

2.8 NewSpace Africa conference

MG could not attend the NewSpace Africa Conference in Gabon this week due to there being insufficient time to meet the minimum lead time required before a journey for the yellow fever vaccination.
A recorded virtual presentation on night sky impacts of satellites was submitted.

2.9 Egyptology Funding Request (AA) It was acknowledged that the funding request of Euros 10K could not be met , however AA proposed a small contribution. YEM mentioned that AfAS could contribute R50K and this will be confirmed once the 2026/27 budget is approved.

2.10 Survey on Astronomy Research Priorities (BW)

BW reported that 62 responses have been received but the survey was only sent to conference attendees.
BW will engage with Rhodri Evans To ensure a broader circulation.

2.11Recognition Awards (AA)

No meeting has been organised to date.
a meeting involving at least PAW, AA, and TN to be scheduled with a view of providing an update to EXCO at the July meeting.

2.12 Conference Proceedings (AfAS 2026) (MG/AA)

MG has compiled the AfAS 2026 . conference presenters in the format required by PoS. She noted that the material was previously disorganised but has now been structured.
MG further informed the Committee that The formation of the Editorial Board of formation is underway, with a target of 12–16 members is in progress Patrick Woudt declined the invitation to Chair the Board.
PAW/JEM recommended consulting SAIP who have good experience in publishing conference proceedings, to ensure robust editorial standards.
MG to contact SAIP
AA contacted Markus Bottcher of SA GAMMA who publishes through PoS.
PAW reported that she is drafting a document on ethics and plagiarism and that this should be read in parallel with any ethics code that PoS have.

3. Communications Chair & Strategy **JEM/YEM/MG met recently to discuss the** implementation of the EXCO Directive to reinstate TM as Chair of the Communications Committee and Shirley Aoko as co-chair. It was agreed that the EXCO Directive will be relayed to the Communications Committee at its meeting on the 21st and this was done with no objections. **JEM to issue the current draft of the** communication strategy to ExCo members for comment. The Comms Committee will also review its ToR and continue with the Re-branding of AfAS. **MG** informed ExCo that ASSAP has offered the services of their full-time graphic designer at no cost. **CT** advised the Committee that a competition had previously been organised for a new logo, but the then ExCo failed to reach agreement and the initiative was dropped. **MG** will request from the committee the previous design proposals as well as ExCo comments. **PAW** suggested exploring the use of AI tools for initial design options		
4.AOPs, Q4 Reports & TOR Review **PAW** stated that the AOPs and Q4 reports are not satisfactory, it is apparent that most of the Chairs do not fully understand what is required.**YEM** commented that each year reporting formats and notes on want is expected , are provided and that the content is dependent on the approach taken by individual Chairs. Reporting has to be in a format that is easily understood by stakeholders and funders. **YEM** sanitizes the information presented when drafting consolidated reports. It was agreed that **YEM** will have a training session with all the Chairs when presenting the reporting requirements for 2026/27 in June. **YEM** and **MG** are jointly working on a ToR template for the Committees. MG has requested all Committees to update their ToR. **YEM** further explained that the TOR review process is intended to address governance inconsistencies, including clarification of Chair/co-chair/deputy roles, approval processes (membership vs EXCO appointment), and consequence management (attendance, deliverables, accountability). It was agreed that Committees can decide whether to have Chair/Deputy Chair or Co-Chairs.		

5. AfSA Regional Astronomers Nomination for Euro collaborations. **AA** presented the list of nominations received for the AfSA collaborative project with Europe. The regional representation is given below: • North Africa (2) • West Africa (3) • East Africa (2) • South Africa (2) • Central Africa (1 due to limited nominations) These were submitted to AfSA contact, Hamdi Kasem. YEM raised concerns about having familiar senior individuals rather than inclusion of new participants.		
6.Science Strategy **BW** confirmed: • Committee composition: AA, PAW, KK, BW, and EK • First meeting held in Botswana; outcomes to be formalised • Working groups to be defined by end of June BW will convene a follow-up meeting after the next science committee Meeting		
7. AfAS Financials & 2026/27 Budget **7.1 Year-End Financial Position** **YEM** presented the :the year-end funding summary which reflects a carry forward of R1,4m to 2026/27 inclusive of some R0,5m unspent funds of APA/ROTSE. Thus AfAS core operations has R1,2m carry forward including conference cost recoveries of some R0,3m. This is mainly due to the low spend by committees as they struggled to re-organise themselves as well as savings in salaries due to MG joining AfAS in February 2026. **7.2 Audit & Grant Update** **YEM** confirmed that the audit process has been initiated with the Auditors in receipt of all relevant reports. They will commence their review at the beginning of May. • The DSTI has paid the 2026/27 grant on the 22nd April inclusive of AERAP. **7.3 2026/27 Budget** YEM tabled the 2026/27 budget allocations for approval, queries on the interpretation of some of the numbers were addressed together		

with comments on the large variances for a few expenditure items. Following a brief discussion, the budget was approved by EXCO. YEM will inform the Committee Chairs of their final allocations. **7.4 Budget Governance Concerns** **YEM** highlighted: • Need to ensure committees implement planned projects • Risk of passive budgeting without execution • Importance of linking funding approval to deliverables and outcomes **7.5 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) & Implementation** **YEM**, noted that some AOPs were delayed due to illness and post-conference workload. YEM concluded by stating the budget reflects EXCO's approval of the intent to spend the funds and that whenever a Committee seeks to spend AfAS funds , a proposal inclusive of activity details, outputs and outcomes as well as a detailed funding plan will be required.		
8. AfAS 2027 Conference Planning **8.1 Venue & Costing Update** **KK** reported two potential venue options for AfAS 2027: Rhodes University, which is more cost-effective but presents capacity constraints due to graduation week, and East London/Port Elizabeth as the preferred alternative. Estimated baseline costs are approximately 3 million ZAR, covering venue, catering, and logistics only, and excluding accommodation, travel, and workshops. **8.2 Budget Overview** **YEM** confirmed that projected costs are consistent with the Botswana conference, estimated in the range of 3–4 million ZAR. It was noted that adopting a hybrid format significantly increases overall costs. Registration fees will be symbolic and not generate much income **8.3 Parallel Sessions & Workshop Structure** **KK** raised the question of whether to proceed with 2 or 3 parallel sessions, expressing concern that the programme could become overloaded due to an excessive number of workshops. She recommended that pre-conference workshops be limited to approximately 3–4, with a competitive selection process introduced for approval. **YEM** noted that workshops should, where possible, be self-funded for accommodation, while AfAS support should be limited to venue and		

catering costs, with a clear separation maintained between workshop logistics and the main conference organisation. **8.4 Workshop Coordination & Communication** **KK** emphasised the need for improved advance communication regarding workshops, stating that any proposed workshop should be communicated to the organising committee well in advance. **PAW** noted that workshop organisation this year was not well structured and asked whether a formal call for pre-conference workshop proposals, including clear guidance on requirements and costs, would be issued. **KK** confirmed that such a structured call is planned. **8.5 Conference Dates & Side Events** **KK** proposed the conference dates of 4–10 April 2027, this will be confirmed after graduation dates from the University are received. **CT** highlighted that side events should be prioritised where they can contribute to attracting additional funding and participation. AA supported the idea of introducing a competitive element for side events. **8.6 Fundraising** **TN** suggested scheduling meeting next week with KK, YEM, and MG to discuss fund raising initiatives **KK** added that a few potential East London partners are willing to contribute funding, but only for activities directly linked to their involvement.		
9. Closing		
NEXT MEETING	**22 July 2026**	

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS	**DATE**	**PERSON RESPONSIBLE**
Continue development of AfAS website and membership system with progress updates	Ongoing	**MG / TM / YEM**

Develop strategy to involve African astronomers in SALT project and integrate training opportunities	2026 cycle	**BW / Eli**
Await FNB approval for AERAP application and report outcome	6–8 weeks	**YEM**
Hold meeting with Khotso Mokhele and report outcomes	Next month	**PAW, MG, AA and YEM**
Finalise SANSA MoU governance review and arrange signing at SANSA Operations, Johannesburg	Prior to signing	**AA / TM / YEM / MG**
Follow up on astronomy research priorities survey distribution gap	Immediate	**BW**
Schedule meeting on recognition awards criteria	Upcoming	**PAW / AA / TN**
Finalise decision on Egyptology funding after budget review	Pending	**AA**
Enforce submission and follow-up of TOR updates	Ongoing	**MG**
Await AfSA feedback on regional nomination process and report back	Pending	**AA**
Define Science Strategy working groups and formalise outcomes	End of June 2026	**BW**
Finalise AfAS 2026 editorial board (12–16 members)	April	**MG**
Consult SAIP/IOP on editorial standards for proceedings	Immediate	**MG**
Circulate ethics and plagiarism draft and align with PoS guidelines	Ongoing	**PAW**
Circulate communication strategy to EXCO members	Immediate	**JEM**
Retrieve previous AfAS logo designs and ExCo feedback	May	**MG / Communication Committee**
Develop training sessions for AOP and Q4 reporting cycle	Before next cycle	**AA / YEM / PAW**
AfAS 2027 organization	ongoing	**KK**
Organise fundraising meeting	Next week	**TN / KK / YEM / MG**