

## IYA2009 — UK activities

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### Abstract

This presentation describes the organisational structure of IYA2009 activities within the UK and the progress in funding ideas and the planning of the ideas and events themselves.

### 1. Organisation

The top-level organisation is carried out under the auspices of the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS). The web page<sup>1</sup> has been in existence for some six months. There is a Steering Committee overseeing activities comprising members from the following organisations: the RAS, the Federation of Astronomical Societies (FAS), the British Astronomical Association (BAA), the Society for Popular Astronomy (SPA), National Astronomy Week (NAW), the Royal Observatory Greenwich (ROG), the Association for Astronomy Education (AAE), the Institute of Physics (IoP), Astronomy Now, Ecsite, the Society for the History of Astronomy (SHA), the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), the Faulkes Telescope (now Las Cumbres) and representatives from the Scouts and Guides. I chair the Steering Committee. There is also an Executive Committee that represents the major funding bodies and this is represented by the RAS, STFC and the IoP. I also chair the Executive Committee.

### 2. Work to date and funding

Three Steering Committee meetings have been held, which have mainly concentrated on the non-professional astronomy pool and fleshing out “ideas” that can be taken forward for more detailed planning and potential execution. Currently the Steering Committee is being grouped into theme areas and a single contact appointed to coordinate the activity within the theme and feedback to myself and the UK Coordinator.

IYA2009UK itself was effectively launched at the National Astronomy Meeting in April 2007 at the University of Central Lancashire as part of the one day outreach parallel session. I gave a presentation and also announced the new web page, which came online that day. Since then we have had articles on IYA published in a range of journals. This will be expanded greatly in 2008, hopefully following the United Nations endorsement of IYA2009.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.astronomy2009.co.uk](http://www.astronomy2009.co.uk)

Everyone realises that funding is a critical issue and in the UK we have been extremely fortunate in finding support from established astronomy organisations, principally the RAS and STFC. The latter provided funding to help support the International Coordinator (Pedro) and recently, the RAS, STFC and the IoP have pledged 150k EUR for a full-time UK coordinator. This was extremely important and I hope will set an example for other countries to emulate. We are expecting to interview in late November and are seeking to appoint from January 2008. The post will continue until April 2010, to include the important post-event evaluation.

Funding will also be sought from the RAS and STFC to support specific IYA2009UK initiatives. These are expected to be awarded through standard peer review processes, but we are hoping for significant sums for this, of order hundreds of thousands of euros. So far we have made little attempt at seeking funding from other sources, but this will ramp up in early 2008.

### 3. Specific UK events in the planning phase

A number of events have now been earmarked as IYA2009 specific. Other events that occur on an annual basis will be approached to gain an IYA special flavour.

**Moonweek 2009.** This will be the annual National Astronomy Week, renamed. It will take place during the week of 21–26 July and will commemorate a number of events; namely the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apollo landing (21<sup>st</sup>), the longest total solar eclipse of the century (22<sup>nd</sup>) and the weekend will feature Thomas Harriot celebrations at Syon House, Kew (26<sup>th</sup>). To my chagrin, this latter gentleman was unknown to me until some six months ago, and I suspect the same is true for many in the audience. However, his claim to fame is that he observed the Moon through a telescope and made a very crude map some time before Galileo, but unlike the great scientist, he failed to publish! In fact he seems to have been quite a character, and for a time was jailed on suspicion of being involved in the plot to blow up Parliament — just Google<sup>2</sup> him to get the rest of his story.

We have also agreed to hold two Astronomy Weeks during the year. These will focus on having as many members of the public as possible look through a telescope, mainly using the network of amateur astronomers. We have selected the weeks of 29 March and 29 October, ensuring that we have the first quarter Moon and Saturn and Jupiter respectively — although neither is a prime viewing object in 2009. We have gone for “weeks” rather than a day to maximise opportunity in case of poor weather and to include both weekends and weekdays. This will also allow solar viewing during the day for schools. We anticipate that these weeks will be used as a springboard for many other events.

In terms of annual UK meetings, the following will be targeted for an IYA theme in 2009: ASTRO-FEST in January; the Association of Science Education meeting also in January, National Science Week (British Association for the Advancement of Science in March), Science Festival Week (BAA

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<sup>2</sup> see for example, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9039337/Thomas-Harriot>

in September) and the National Astronomy Meeting in March, which in 2009 will be held at the University of Hertfordshire and is a joint JENAM meeting.

#### 4. UK ideas

There are a host of ideas that have not yet matured to the detailed planning phase, but will undoubtedly take place. Organisation of these will be tasked for 2008. These ideas include star parties organised by astronomical societies etc, special events held by Visitor Centres and Planetariums, the possibility for extremely cheap “do-it-yourself” cardboard “give-away” telescopes for the public and issued from Visitor Centres and Planetariums (but with very limited astronomical capability), donation of “reasonable” telescopes to selected schools (requiring significant external funding), taking telescopes into schools for night-time and solar observing along with the use of real-time solar web-feeds, an attempt to obtain really cheap solar projection kits (out of cardboard) to distribute to schools (and hope that the Sun responds with some sunspots!). There are also ideas about making a radio or TV documentary about Thomas Harriot, special visits to “Stately Homes”, along with concerts of Holst’s *The Planets*. At the Royal Observatory Edinburgh we are looking to take selected items from the world famous (and arguably best) collection of astronomical texts on a “world tour” (anyone interested please contact me). Competitions and prizes for many of these activities will undoubtedly take place.

We are very keen to use the IYA to provide specific resources for local astronomical society members to use for communicating astronomy with the public, as these provide the greatest numerical resource within the country. This might include such things as “how to give a talk” (we’ll point to David Malin’s contribution for this conference of course), the suggested use of PowerPoints, “what works and what doesn’t”, web material, posters, coffee mugs with the IYA logo, etc.

Given the UK’s extremely strong record in astronomy research and the use of robotic telescopes for education, we are also keen to see this coordinated through the IYA, maybe with competitions and prizes as part of the theme. Astronomy lectures on tour given by gifted speakers is another possibility and there is already good progress on a special newsletter for 9–16 year olds (called Starlight) to be issued once a term. We are also very eager to be involved with the touring astronomical image show, at all of the three levels as just described yesterday at this conference.

Other ideas include attempting to place astronomy pull-outs in one of the UK’s major newspapers, and producing information sheets available to the public and schools. This would also be on the web and, as well as very specific astronomical topics, might include such things as “what astronomers did for us”, “astronomy and navigation”, “a guide to UK astronomical archaeological sites”, “observatories”. There is also encouragement for planning night visits by the public to Stonehenge to see the stars, moonrise and other events.

A key theme that is emerging in discussions is the focus on light pollution issues in general. Therefore, it is certain that the UK will want to contribute to the DarkSkies initiatives and Globe at Night. There is a thought that we could designate a “Dark Sky Park”, but this may not be so easy in the UK.

Regarding education, this is a very strong point within the UK and we will undoubtedly participate in the Cornerstone Projects through such aspects as UNawe, Hands on Universe, etc. In Scotland we have already gone through the *Continuing Professional Development* and *Teach the Teachers* for astronomy in the curriculum, but undertaking this for England and Wales will be much harder due to the scale and bureaucracy of the educational machine. Nevertheless, this is something that I hope the UK Coordinator will be able to drive to a successful conclusion.

In all of the things we are planning we need to remember the heritage factor; what will the IYA have left for the next generation, what platform has it provided on which future expansion can be built?