ESO OBSERVING PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE

79th Meeting

Garching

20 - 24 November, 2006

DRAFT MINUTES
79th Meeting of the
ESO Observing Programmes Committee

held in Garching from 20 – 24 November, 2006

A. OPC meeting - Part 1 (20 November, 2006)
B. Panel Sessions (21/22 November, 2006)
C. OPC meeting - Part 2 (23/24 November, 2006)

The meeting took place with the following participants:

Chairperson: Dr. Lutz Wisotzki (Germany)

Members:
Dr. Xavier Barcons (Spain)
Dr. Eric F. Bell (Germany)
Dr. Svetlana Berdyugina (Switzerland)
Dr. Hermann Boehnhardt (Germany)
Dr. Sven De Rijcke (Belgium)
Dr. Hans de Ruiter (Italy)
Dr. Goesta Gahm (Sweden)
Dr. Michiel Hogerheijde (The Netherlands)
Dr. Jari Kotilainen (Finland)
Dr. Donald Wayne Kurtz (United Kingdom)
Dr. Andre Moitinho (Portugal)
Dr. Simon Morris (United Kingdom)
Dr. Tom Richtler (Chile)
Dr. Monica Tosi (Italy)
Dr. Sebastian Wolf (Germany)

On behalf of ESO:
Dr. Catherine Cesarsky
Dr. Gautier Mathys
Dr. Marco Lombardi
Dr. Andreas Kaufer
Dr. Magda Arnaboldi

Secretariat: Elisabeth Hoppe
A. OPC meeting – Part 1

The OPC chairman, Dr. Lutz Wisotzki, opened the 79th OPC meeting and addressed a special welcome to the four new OPC members: Drs. S. Berdyugina, G. Gahm, D. Kurtz and S. Wolf. All participants to the meeting introduced themselves in a tour-de-table. Dr. Lutz Wisotzki then took the occasion to announce the presentation by Dr. Macchetto on the recommendations by the VISTA Public Survey Panel (see agenda item 6).

1. Introduction by the Director General

The Director General welcomed all participants to the meeting and expressed her appreciation for the substantial efforts this committee is investing in the proposal evaluation activities, a joint effort which is indispensable to ensure the quality of the science results stemming from ESO telescopes.

She reported that in P79 the number of proposals reached a new record, which implies a still higher workload for the referees. In view of this it might be advisable to look into new procedures for very short programmes, which seem to be rather demanded by the astronomical community.

Some recent news of interest to be mentioned was:

Paranal

VST
The VST is still delayed due to problems with the mirror cell. The primary mirror is about to be accepted. OmegaCAM is suffering from some problems with the filters. Conclusions on how to proceed will be made in the following week.

VISTA
is in great part already on Paranal and advancing very well, however the primary mirror is still delayed.

CRIRES has shown excellent results during science verification and is available to the community as of P79.

La Silla

2.2m
Presently it is planned to extend the lifetime at least until P82 in order to possibly accommodate advanced OmegaCAM Guaranteed Time and to ensure the completion of ongoing Large Programmes.
GROND
The MPE instrument to investigate GRB afterglows and other transients, is on the way to the mountain.

TAROT
The second of the robotic telescopes works extremely well. The results obtained become public immediately.

APEX
Unfortunately the Bolometer Array LABOCA is still encountering problems and has been taken out of the telescope for repair.

2./3. Adoption of the Agenda and Approval of the Draft Minutes of the 78th Meeting

The agenda of the 79th OPC meeting was adopted.
The minutes of the 78th OPC meeting were approved without any changes.

In view of the increasing number of rather comprehensive OPC working documents which makes delivery via e-mail very cumbersome, Dr. Wisotzki recommended establishing an OPC dedicated Web page which provides these documents.

4. Dates of the next meeting

The next OPC meeting is scheduled in the week of May 21 – 25, 2007.

5. Reports on on-going Large Programmes

After a thorough discussion of the progress reports on the 10 ongoing Large Programmes, the OPC approved all of them for continuation or conclusion.

Considering that there are still quite some backlogs in the SM queues the OPC wondered how carry-overs of Large Programmes, which normally do not need an approval by the OPC should be treated.
Dr. Mathys suggested to involve the OPC for further recommendation, if a Large Programme has to be carried over more than two times.
6. **Presentation and discussion of the VISTA Public Survey Panel outcome (Dr. Duccio Macchetto)**

Dr. Macchetto gave a presentation on the review procedures and evaluation process of the VISTA Public Survey Panel and conveyed the PSP recommendations regarding the various proposals to the OPC (ANNEX 1). The OPC Chairman thanked Dr. Macchetto for his detailed presentation and on behalf of the OPC expressed his appreciation for the comprehensive work of the PSP.

After a brief discussion on the available time for Public Surveys and the length of the surveys recommended for implementation, it was reminded that final approval of the time allocation is subject to the submission of a detailed Survey Management Plan. Furthermore, the progress of the surveys will be monitored on a regular basis by the ESO Survey Team (EST), and evaluated by the PSP. The EST leader, after consultation with the PSP Chair, will report to the OPC on the status of advancement of the ESO Public Surveys. In particular, future time allocation will be contingent to the timely delivery of the Data Products. Dr. Wisotzki suggested that on the OPC level the procedures of monitoring the ongoing Public Surveys could go along the lines of the procedures for Large Programmes, which would imply that an additional item would have to be foreseen for this in the OPC agenda.

The OPC fully endorsed the recommendations of the PSP and approved the 6 core proposals identified by the Public Survey Panel. It was also agreed that the first year of VISTA operations should be fully dedicated to Public Surveys, and that VISTA would be made available to general users as of the start of its second year of operations.

7. **Report on P78 GRB PI meeting and on execution of ToO runs in previous Periods.**

Dr. Mathys reported that the biannual GRB PI meetings in Garching have now become a “good old” tradition. By initiating these meetings, ESO certainly contributed to the fact that the coordination of the observing strategies of the various ToO groups goes very smoothly now. As a further successful step in this direction it had been agreed that if one of the groups exhausted its time before the end of the Period, they would forfeit to the other group(s) the right to trigger in the remaining month(s) originally assigned to them. The ToO science results presented at this meeting proved that thanks to the implementation of the RRM the VLT has become a major contributor to GRB redshifts.
Dr. Mathys stated that it is still unclear what will happen with this field of science beyond the lifetime of Swift which provides most of the ToO targets. The Director General commented that there is a common agreement in the astronomical community that the extension of the lifetime of SWIFT should be strived for.

Dr. Mathys finally presented a statistical overview of the time assigned to ToOs and the actual time used for ToOs in Periods 75/76/77, which showed that only a fraction of the allocated time is effectively used, and that a significant number of ToO programmes have not triggered at all during a given Period.

8. Overview of P79 Large Programmes and Targets of Opportunity

ToOs

Dr. Wisotzki presented the list of ToOs submitted for P79 including the requested targets. He reminded the participants that in the Thursday morning session of the OPC ToO sub-group, the concerned Panel chairs will have to devise a recommendation for implementation to be submitted to the OPC for endorsement in Part 2 of the meeting.

Upon inquiry by Dr. Morris, Dr. Mathys informed the OPC that from the operational point of view, up to 100 triggers can be handled, but it should be kept in mind that there is a large discrepancy between allocated and actually executed triggers. Furthermore follow-ups should be separated and not considered as triggers.

Dr. Wisotzki reminded the OPC that contrary to Normal Programmes, the OPC is entitled to reduce the number of triggers/targets and/or the time allocation of ToO programmes.

Large Programmes

For P79 15 Large Programmes (LPs) were submitted (6 to Panel A, 4 to Panel B, 3 to Panel C and 2 to Panel D). In order to streamline and homogenize the discussion of Large Programmes, Dr. Wisotzki had prepared some guidelines for procedure that he presented to the OPC for consideration. Furthermore he pointed out that for the final conclusion by the OPC he considers it important that a consensus on a qualified voting majority has to be reached.
Panel Sessions

1. Welcome and Information to Panel Members

On behalf of the Director General Dr. Mathys welcomed all participants and in particular the new Panel members to the 79th meeting. He was aware that the proposal evaluation is a very labor intensive process which is not only true for the meeting itself but also for the weeks before and after the meeting. Therefore a debt of gratitude is owed all those who participate in this process.

The OPC Chairman, Dr. Wisotzki, introduced the Panel chairs to all participants and gave a summary of the agenda of the week and of the guidelines and special aspects to be considered with reference to the evaluation of Normal Programmes, GTOs, Large Programmes and ToOs. He reminded the OPC that category changes of proposals, if any, should be identified at the beginning of the Panel discussions in order to avoid late notice problems with those Panels the proposals will be re-assigned to.

He stressed the importance of the Prime Referee comments which will be included in the web-letters to the PIs. Considering the low number of user complaints, in general the quality of the comments can be considered as very good, but further improvement could be reached by following some common guidelines.

He informed the OPC that in future ESO will systematically include the quartile information in the web-letters. Such kind of information should therefore not be mentioned in the Prime Referee comments.

2. Report by Dr. Mathys

Dr. Mathys gave an overview on the number of submitted proposals for P79, their distribution over the scientific categories and the pressure on the individual telescopes (ANNEX 2). As had been agreed upon at the last OPC meeting, his report also included a list of highly ranked P78 proposals that could not be scheduled including the non-scheduling reasons.

Furthermore Dr. Mathys explained the new method for building a single ranked list across the OPC categories for each telescope, based on the renormalized grades.

3. Report on Instruments

Dr. Kaufer presented the La Silla Paranal status report including recent developments and news (ANNEX 3).
Review of Applications by the Panels

The Panels reviewed the applications for P79 on November 21 and 22. After the Panel meetings the OPC documents with the Panel recommendations were released for the final discussion on November 23 and 24, 2006.

Joint sub-panel discussions on LPs, ToOs and Normal Programmes were scheduled in order to sort out possible duplications and to co-ordinate the ranking.

C. OPC meeting – Part 2

1. Ranking of Large and ToO Programmes

a) Large Programmes

The discussion on the definition of a “qualified” majority for the votes on the Large Programmes which had been raised by the OPC Chairman resulted in the general consent that to meet this criteria a significant majority should be aimed at. Before devoting to the newly submitted Large Programmes, the OPC took note of a report on a recent DAZLE run for LP 178.A-0832 approved in P78, which was very much appreciated.

Then the Panel chairs gave a detailed summary of the joint discussions of the Large Programmes submitted in their category indicating which proposals had been recommended by their Panel. After a thorough discussion and concluding votes, the OPC recommended 4 Large Programmes for implementation in P79.

None of the submitted Large Programmes were recommended for a conversion to “Normal”.

b) ToOs

For P79 38 Target of Opportunity proposals were submitted of which 16 for GRBs, 7 for SNs and 15 for other topics.

On behalf of the OPC sub-group for ToOs, Dr. Moitinho presented a recommendation for implementation based on a ranked list of the proposals indicating the approximate commitments as concerns the numbers of targets and triggers. He explained that the final time allocation should be proportional to the recommended number of triggers.

Dr. Wisotzki thanked the OPC sub-group for ToOs for the valuable input provided.

The OPC unanimously approved this proposal as official recommendation for implementation.
2. Scientific Highlights (reports from the Panels)

The Panel chairs gave a summary of the scientific highlights in their panels. The OPC was pleased to see a very broad range of topics from the Solar System to the Early Universe such as:

- Observing the crossing of Uranus' ring plane (once every 42 years)
- Direct spectroscopy of an exoplanet in transit
- AGN-powered feedback in high-redshift galaxies
- Presence (or absence) of Dark Matter haloes around elliptical galaxies
- Spatially resolved pulsation of Cepheids with VLTI

3. Status of action items of the 79th OPC meeting

Based on the summary provided by the OPC Chairman, the OPC reviewed the action items identified at the last meeting and found all of them closed or in progress. The OPC Chairman thanked ESO for the efforts to close these action items so quickly.

Issues that require further discussion within the OPC and with ESO were:

- Review the topical OPC sub-categories, in particular to clarify overlap between B and D panels, and for placing GRBs and SNe. (Suggestions by OPC should be sent to OPC chairman)
- Change the request stated in Box 10 of the ESOFORM proposal form.

4. OPC Procedures / action items for future periods

- additional ToO page should specify soft and hard triggers
- revision of the functionality of the Panel Tool and its products (e.g. ranked lists)
- further up-dates of Electra (e.g. including the PR comments)
- Web-based distribution of OPC documents and reports

After a thorough discussion on how to cope with the increasing workload in the panels the following measures to be taken for P80 were identified:

- create a 4th sub-panel for category C and D
- extend Panel discussions by half a day (Thursday morning)
- introduce “short” proposals for requests of small amounts of time

Further possibilities of streamlining the Panel discussions, such as triage should be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.
4. Conclusions by the Director General

The Director General was deeply impressed by the seriousness of thinking invested in the evaluation of the proposals and the attention paid to ensuring the best use of ESO observing facilities. She expressed her highest appreciation to the OPC.
She had the impression that the implementation of the new OPC rules of procedure has worked out very well and that the shorter terms of OPC and Panel members did not hamper the efficiency of the OPC work. In her view a positive side effect of the shorter terms is the larger involvement of the community in the OPC, which contributes to the transparency of the system.

5. Other business

Upon recommendation by the UC expressed at its 74th meeting, Dr. Mathys conveyed the following UC statement to the OPC.
“The UC recognizes the strong and very valuable effort of the OPC to recommend observing proposals to ESO. Some reservations have been however expressed concerning the quality of the feedback provided to the proposers by the referees (the UC Fact Sheets are available to the OPC). The UC suggests that this feedback should explicitly mention the -strengths- and the -weakness- of the proposals.”

The OPC confirmed that this request by the UC is appreciated and that continuous efforts are made to emphasize the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals.
The OPC chairman commented that he had screened all OPC comments of P78 and was pleased to find only a very small number of comments not adequate. This impression was confirmed of the extremely small number of user complaints that was reported to him by “visas”.

According to the present procedures visas forwards the PR comments to the Panel chairs who then provide their comments/corrections to the PR for final editing, if necessary. In addition some Panels circulate the comments in the sub-panel and have them checked internally before submission.
Dr. Wisotzki was of the opinion that a further streamlining of these processes might be useful. Furthermore he recommended that the comments by the Panel chairs should be checked by the Co-chairs of the panels. Dr. Mathys confirmed that visas will consider this for the P79 comments.

The OPC expressed their appreciation and gratitude for Dr. Wisotzki’s accomplishments and highly valuable contributions in his role as OPC chairman.
They recommended Dr. Wisotzki summarizing a set of guidelines for the Panel procedures as a basis for discussion at the next OPC meeting.

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