ESO OBSERVING PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE

84th Meeting

Garching - Ismaning

May 25-29, 2009

MINUTES
84th Meeting of the
ESO Observing Programmes Committee
held in Garching and Ismaning from 25 to 29 May 2009

A. OPC meeting - Part 1 (25 May)
B. Panel Sessions (26/27/28 May)
C. OPC meeting - Part 2 (28/29 May)

The meeting took place with the following participants:

Chairperson: Dr. Elias Brinks (United Kingdom)
Vice-chairperson: Dr. Kim Venn (Canada)
Members:
- Dr. Jaqueline Bergeron (France)
- Dr. François Boulanger (France)
- Dr. Enrico Cappellaro (Italy)
- Dr. Cathie J. Clarke (United Kingdom)
- Dr. Adriano Fontana (Italy)
- Dr. Leon Koopmans (The Netherlands)
- Dr. Claes-Ingvar Lagerkvist (Sweden)
- Dr. John D. Landstreet (Canada)
- Dr. Diego Mardones (Chile)
- Dr. Michael Merrifield (United Kingdom)
- Dr. Huub Röttgering (The Netherlands)
- Dr. Esko Valtaoja (Finland)
- Dr. Paul van der Werf (The Netherlands)
- Dr. Werner Weiss (Austria)
- Dr. Simon White (Germany)

Members-at-Large:
- Dr. Hermann-Josef Röser (Germany)
- Dr. Natascha Förster-Schreiber (Germany)
- Dr. Ari Laor (Israel)
- Dr. Armando Gil de Paz (Spain)
- Dr. Sofía Feltzing (Sweden)
- Dr. Henny Lamers (The Netherlands)

ESO/GTC Observers:
- Dr. Maria Teresa Beltrán (Spain)
- Dr. Armando Gil de Paz (Spain)

On behalf of ESO:
- Dr. Tim de Zeeuw
- Dr. Gaitee Hussain
- Dr. Andreas Kaufer
- Dr. Bruno Leibundgut
- Dr. Gautier Mathys

Minutes:
Ms. Elisabeth Hoppe
A. OPC meeting – Part 1

1. Introduction by the Director General

The Director General, Prof. Tim de Zeeuw, welcomed the OPC members and expressed his appreciation for the substantial efforts invested by this committee in the proposal evaluation activities over a period of several weeks. He pointed out that the OPC advice is crucial to ensure the quality of the science results stemming from ESO telescopes.

He noted that in P84 the number of proposals had increased by about 15% compared to previous periods, which represented a new record. On the one hand, it is very rewarding to see that that the astronomical community is making full use of the facilities provided by ESO and that very exciting projects are coming out of this. On the other hand, the implications for the workload of the OPC are rather worrisome. Therefore high priority has to be given to the exploration of ways and means to adapt the ESO proposal evaluation process to the ever-increasing workload.

The Director General then gave a presentation on the current status of the ESO programme (ANNEX 1).

Dr. Merrifield asked how ESO would handle the additional workload required for evaluation of proposals for usage of new facilities.

The Director General answered that the survey telescopes would be mostly dedicated to Public Surveys, so that they should generate little extra work for the OPC, and that ALMA will have its own, separate TAC. He acknowledged that the increasing number of proposals for the VLT, the La Silla telescopes and APEX had to be faced without undue delay. He suggested that the OPC members could informally discuss about possible options during the coming week.

On behalf of the OPC, Dr. Brinks thanked the Director General for his introduction.

Dr. Brinks welcomed the new members of the OPC, Drs. Simon White, Jacqueline Bergeron, Michael Merrifield, Paul van der Werf, Diego Mardones and Werner Weiss. All the meeting participants introduced themselves in a tour-de-table.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda of the 84th OPC meeting was adopted without any changes.

3. Approval of the Draft Minutes of the 83rd Meeting

The minutes of the 83rd OPC meeting were approved without any changes.
4. **Dates of the next meeting**

The next OPC meeting is scheduled in the week of November 16-20, 2009.

5. **Overview of OPC Procedures**

Dr. Mathys gave an overview of the OPC procedures to be applied for P84 with a special emphasis on the main procedural changes with respect to P83. These changes had been outlined in the “Step-by-Step Guide for OPC and Panel members”. He stated that the most important of these changes was the introduction of triage in the Panel meetings. Considering the ever-increasing number of proposals, this measure had to be taken so as to keep the workload of the Panels to a manageable level, and to allow them to spend more time on the discussion of the proposals of highest scientific merit. He explained that the ESO-specific implementation of triage fully took into account its application to a multi-telescope context, and gave a short summary of the main elements of triage as laid out in the “Description of the implementation of triage at ESO for Period 84”.

Dr. Mathys and the OPC Chairman answered the questions that arose about procedural aspects and practical details of triage to be considered in the Panels, such as the resurrection of triaged proposals and the feedback comments to be provided for the triaged proposals.

Further procedural changes with respect to P83 with implications for the Panel discussions or the proposal evaluation process in general were briefly discussed:

- The OPC chairperson does not belong to any Panel.
- The definition of the grade scale for proposal evaluation has been clarified.
- The voting procedure in Panel meetings is by secret ballots only.
- Before the OPC meeting, only Primary Referees are required to provide detailed comments on the proposals that are assigned to them, the other Panel members are encouraged, but not obliged to write comments. However it is noted that, in the future, referees giving extreme grades should also be required to write detailed comments.

In the following discussion, some suggestions were made towards improving the procedure.

Since the discussion of the proposals by the Panels is organised according to scientific topic, some OPC members suggested that the scientific sub-categories, as specified in the proposals, be reported in Electra.

The OPC appreciated the fact that the working documents for the Panels are now made available in PDF and Excel format. However the organisation of the information in the Excel version could be revised so as to make it easier to use.

Before closing this point of the agenda, the OPC Chairman reiterated the importance of proper handling of the conflicts of interest.
6. **Review of Action Items of Previous Periods**

The OPC reviewed the action items defined at its 83rd meeting and concluded on their status.

7. **Overview of P84 Visitor Instrument proposals**

Dr. Kaufer presented the outcome of the review by the La Silla Paranal Observatory of the Visitor Instrument Proposals submitted for P84 ([http://www.eso.org/secure/OPC/P84_Visitor_Inspdf](http://www.eso.org/secure/OPC/P84_Visitor_Inspdf)).

The OPC greatly appreciated the information provided by Dr. Kaufer.

8. **Review of Calibration Programme proposals**

Six Calibration Programme (CP) proposals were submitted for evaluation by the OPC. After a presentation by the Primary Referee and a summary of the assessment of the ESO internal Calibration Programme committee by Dr. Kaufer, each programme was discussed by the OPC.

In conclusion, the OPC recommended one Calibration Programme for implementation in P84. The outcome of the OPC votes is summarised at [http://www.eso.org/secure/OPC/P84_CP_votespdf](http://www.eso.org/secure/OPC/P84_CP_votespdf).

In view of the fact that several proposals submitted in this category were not fully within the definition of Calibration Programmes, the OPC found that a clarification of this definition might be useful.

9. **Review of on-going Large Programmes**

Seventeen status reports on Large Programmes that were concluded in P82 and on on-going Large Programmes were received. The OPC found it gratifying to see that the vast majority of reports mention excellent progress and results, and expressed its satisfaction with ESO staff and facilities.

The OPC approved the continuation of all on-going Large Programmes.
10. Overview of P84 Target of Opportunity proposals

For P84, 52 Target of Opportunity (ToO) proposals were received (10 in OPC category A, 1 in B, 9 in C, and 32 in D). In addition, the X-Shooter consortium submitted 5 proposals for Guaranteed Time Observations (GTO) of ToO nature.

Dr. Mathys reminded the OPC members of the procedures to be applied for the evaluation of ToO programmes, and indicated that they should also be used for the X-Shooter GTO programmes requesting ToO observations.

The joint ToO Panel chaired by Dr. Venn should generate a merged ranked list of the recommended ToO runs, indicating the maximum number of targets and of triggers per target to be approved, as input for the scheduling process.

11. Overview of P84 Large Programme proposals (including GTC proposals)

For Cycle 84A, 28 Large Programme (LP) proposals were submitted (10 in OPC category A, 5 in B, 9 in C, and 4 in D). For Cycle 84B, 18 ESO/GTC Programme proposals were submitted (9 in OPC category A, 5 in B, 3 in C, and 1 in D).

Dr. Mathys gave a short summary of the procedures to be applied for the evaluation of Large Programmes and ESO/GTC programmes. In particular, he stated that ESO/GTC Large Programme proposals are not eligible for conversion to Normal Programmes. Following the OPC meeting, the technical and operational aspects of those ESO/GTC programmes identified as suitable for implementation, will be reviewed by the ESO-Spain Liaison Committee, who will issue a final recommendation to the Director General. Dr. Leibundgut stressed that the OPC should identify and rank all suitable ESO/GTC programmes even though the time required for their execution may exceed the available time for such programmes in the present round, since the Liaison Committee may conclude that some cannot be allocated time on technical or operational grounds.

Furthermore Dr. Mathys informed the OPC that those OPC members who areCols of one or more Large Programmes or ESO/GTC programmes would be replaced by designated Panel members, acting as OPC members-at-large, in the joint Panel session and OPC session for discussion of all the programmes of the considered type. Furthermore, two OPC members-at-large appointed by Spain participate in the evaluation of the ESO/GTC Large Programme proposals. Their role in this process is identical to that of other OPC members. The members-at-large are also invited to attend as observers the joint Panel session and the OPC session devoted to discussion of the regular ESO Large Programme proposals.
B. Panel Sessions

1. Welcome and Information to Panel Members

Dr. Mathys welcomed all participants to the OPC Panel meetings. He presented an overview of the work to be performed by the Panels during their meetings, with special emphasis on the newly implemented triage system and its implications for the procedures in the Panels (ANNEX 2). He stressed the importance of the comments to be written by the Primary Referees for communication to the proposal PIs via the web-letters. Furthermore Dr. Mathys presented the proposal submission statistics, including their distribution across the various scientific categories and the demand on individual telescopes. He outlined the procedure of proposal evaluation and time allocation, and explained the principles underlying the generation of merged rankings per telescope across all Panels. He reminded the Panel members that feasibility questions should be submitted as soon as possible, in order to ensure that the La Silla Paranal Observatory experts could answer them before the end of the Panel meetings.

Dr. Kaufer presented a report on the La Silla Paranal Observatory, with emphasis on the current status of the available instrumentation (ANNEX 3).

2. Review of Applications by the Panels

The 12 Panels met at the Telekom Center in Ismaning on May 26, 27 and 28 (morning) to review the applications for P84. Special sessions for the joint discussion of Large Programmes were scheduled to prepare the recommendations to the OPC for the final evaluation of these programmes.
C. OPC meeting – Part 2

1. Joint meetings of the Panel chairs

At the beginning of the afternoon of May 28, joint meetings of the Panel chairs and co-chairs defined merged rankings for the ToO proposals across scientific disciplines, and coordinated the Normal and Short Programmes recommendations within each of the four scientific categories of the OPC.

2. Final Review of ToO Programmes

On behalf of Dr. Venn, the chairperson of the OPC Panel for ToO proposals, Dr. Mathys presented the recommendations for implementation of ToO programmes in P84. These recommendations of the ToO Panel were unanimously endorsed by the OPC. They are summarised at http://www.eso.org/secure/OPC/P84_ToO_rec.pdf.

Several ToO proposals were ranked amongst the top proposals in their panels. The demand for time-critical observations keeps increasing, although the demand for rapid response observations has slightly decreased. The breakdown by category shows the pre-dominance of investigations of the cataclysmic ends of stellar evolution. Recurrent science topics for ToOs are GRBs, Supernovae, micro-lenses and black-holes.

3. Final Review of Large Programmes

a) ESO Large Programmes

The OPC Chairman welcomed the members-at-large to the Large Programme discussion.

Each LP proposal was discussed by the OPC after a short presentation by its Primary Referee. The OPC then voted on the recommendation of the proposal for implementation. For those proposals that were not recommended for implementation as LP and that the proposers identified as suitable for conversion to NP, a second vote took place to decide if such conversion should indeed be considered.

As a result, six new Large Programmes were recommended for implementation in P84. Three Large Programmes were recommended for consideration as Normal Programmes in reduced form. The outcome of these votes is reflected at http://www.eso.org/secure/OPC/P84_LP_votes.pdf.
b) **ESO/GTC Programmes**

Dr. Leibundgut reminded the OPC that the accession agreement of Spain into ESO includes the allocation of 122 clear nights with the new 10.4m GTC to proposals by PIs from ESO member countries in the years from 2009 to 2011. According to the approved ESO/GTC scheme, in P84, 40 ESO/GTC nights are available for time allocation.

The proposals that were submitted for ESO time on the GTC were discussed and voted on by the OPC. Based on these votes a ranked list was drawn up for discussion by the ESO-GTC liaison committee. Three proposals were evaluated as very interesting and received near unanimous support of the OPC. Two more proposals received overall positive votes. These five proposals, with three top-ranked proposals and two reserve proposals, will be considered further by the ESO-GTC liaison committee.

4. **Evaluation of OPC Procedures**

On behalf of the OPC, Dr. Brinks stated that despite the extremely high workload that the OPC had to cope with, the scientific selection process was found to be smooth and efficient. This was only possible due to further improvement of the OPC procedures. In particular, the introduction of triage, which worked very well, has allowed the panels to concentrate on the most relevant proposals.

Nevertheless it was fully appreciated that the present proposal evaluation system is extremely stretched. Considering the constant increase in the number of proposals it was acknowledged that further streamlining of the overall process is necessary. Therefore a working group will be set up to explore further measures to cope with the increasing workload in the future.

Suggestions with regard to the existing procedures were:
- To provide a list of proposals per referee which identifies their conflicts;
- To ask for a more detailed specification of the LP/NP conversion in the proposal form, or alternatively drop the conversion option completely;
- To do away with the distinction between Normal and Short proposals, and to restrict the scientific justification to 1 page (and 1 additional page for tables, figures, references, etc.).

Some OPC members were concerned about the large number of conflicts in Large Programmes and wondered whether the rules for handling of conflicts of interest should be relaxed for this type of programmes.

Dr. Brinks thanked the OPC members for their contributions and invited them to send their suggestions to him for further consideration in the Working Group.
5. Scientific highlights

The OPC members briefly presented the scientific highlights identified in their Panels:

- Measure the cross-correlation of Lyman-\(\alpha\) emitters and Lyman-break galaxies at 2.2<\(z\)<3.5
- Characterisation and mapping of the evolution of star forming submm-faint radio galaxies
- GRB at highest redshifts
- Optical recovery of clusters found by the Sunyaev-Zeldovich effect
- Spectroscopic confirmation of \(z>7.7\) galaxy candidates (follow-up of HAWK-I survey)
- Radial structure of dust tori in QSO and the presence of silicates in the tori
- Globular cluster kinematics around the isolated early-type galaxy NGC 821
- Is there enhanced [CII] emission of galaxies in the early universe?
- Molecular gas content of HI galaxies
- Gas flows within the sphere of influence of the black hole in Cen A
- Spatially resolved spectroscopy of planets
- Origin and heating mechanism of disks around low-mass young stellar objects
- Occultation photometry of highly irradiated transiting planets
- Volume-limited survey of exo-planets around young A stars
- Mid-infrared high-resolution spectroscopy of water vapour in the planet-forming region
- Confirmation and orbital parameters of the giant planet candidate around \(\beta\) Pic
- Origin, morphology and evolution of debris disks around main-sequence stars
- Cloud coverage and rotation period in an exo-planet system
- Seasonal changes and planetary waves on Saturn during equinox
- Collisional origin of the Kuiper-belt object Haumea
- Statistical constraints on supernova progenitor masses through investigation of their host galaxies
- Cepheid star in eclipsing binaries as accurate test for distance indicators
- Determining the mass of the compact object in an ultra-luminous X-ray source
- CNO abundances in single population globular clusters
- Solar abundances in an eclipsing binary in M67
- Speckle interferometry to see convection cells on Canopus
- Determination of the IMF in young clusters down to the brown dwarf limit

The Director General thanked the OPC members for their presentations, which showed that the quality of the proposals remains high and that a broad range of exciting research projects were submitted. In particular, he was very pleased to understand that X-shooter opened new possibilities beyond what its builders had in mind.
6. **Conclusions by the Director General**

The Director General was pleased to hear that the newly implemented triage procedure has indeed helped to make the work of the Panels more efficient.

The Director General expressed his highest appreciation to the OPC for the immense effort invested in the evaluation of the proposals and for the attention paid to ensuring the best use of ESO’s observing facilities.

7. **Other business**

None.

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