Approved Minutes

OBSERVING PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE

96th Meeting

19-21 May 2015
96th Meeting of the
ESO Observing Programmes Committee
Ismaning, 19-21 May 2015

A. Panel Sessions (19-20 May)
B. OPC meeting (21 May)

The meeting took place with the following participants:

Chairperson: Alvio Renzini (Italy)
Vice-Chairperson: Henk Hoekstra (The Netherlands)

Members:
- Micol Bolzonella (Italy)
- Xavier Bonfils (France)
- Alessandro Bressan (Italy)
- Marcio Catelan (Chile)
- Jesus Falcon-Barroso (Spain)
- Fabrizio Fiore (Italy)
- Malcolm Fridlund (The Netherlands)
- Peter Jonker (The Netherlands)
- Suzanne Madden (France)
- Simona Mei (France)
- Reynier Peletier (The Netherlands)
- Nicola Schneider (France)
- Ignas Snellen (The Netherlands)
- Ben Stappers (United Kingdom)
- Roland Walter (Switzerland)

Members-at-Large:
- Nina Hatch (United Kingdom)
- Samuel Boissier (France)

On behalf of ESO:
- Jean-Philippe Berger
- Carlos de Breuck
- Gaitee Hussain
- Rob Ivison
- Eric Lagadec
- Bruno Leibundgut
- Ferdinando Patat

Minutes:
- Elisabeth Hoppe
A. OPC Panel Sessions

1. Welcome and Information to Panel Members

F. Patat welcomed all participants to the OPC Panel meetings and introduced the Director for Science, Rob Ivison, the VLT Programme Scientist, Bruno Leibundgut, the VLTI Programme Scientist, Jean Philippe Berger, and the new OPC Chair, Alvio Renzini to the audience.

In his presentation (ANNEX 1) F. Patat recapped the OPC terms of reference, the roles of the panels and the triage process and gave a comprehensive overview on the proposal statistics for P96. He emphasized the importance of the OPC in its function to review, evaluate and rank all proposals and thereby to advise the Director General on the best possible use of the ESO telescopes and thanked the OPC members for the enormous workload they are managing every period.

G. Hussain outlined the pre-OPC activities including the procedures of the proposal grading as well as the procedures to be applied in the Panels and at the OPC level for Normal Programmes, ToOs and Large Programmes. Furthermore she gave some recommendations for the Panel meeting organization, in particular concerning the handling of conflicts and technical feasibility questions.

Finally she emphasized the importance of the OPC comments to be written by the Primary Referees. These comments are an important piece of information included in the PI web-letters and serve the community as a reference for the quality of the proposal evaluation work.

On behalf of Ch. Dumas, J.-P. Berger, the VLTI instrument scientist, gave a presentation on the La Silla Paranal Observatory, with emphasis on the status of the VLTI (ANNEX 2).

2. Review of Applications by the Panels

The 13 OPC Panels reviewed the applications for P96 on May 19 and 20.

Joint discussions of Large Programmes were scheduled on the afternoon of May 20 with the aim of preparing recommendations to the OPC for the final evaluation of Large Programmes on May 21.

B. OPC meeting

The OPC chair, A. Renzini, opened the 96th OPC meeting with a special welcome to the new OPC members, Fabrizio Fiore, Xavier Bonfils, Nicola Schneider and Peter Jonker.

All participants to the meeting presented themselves in a tour-de-table.

1. Approval of the Draft Minutes of the 95th Meeting

The draft minutes of the 95th OPC meeting were approved without any corrections or comments.
2. Dates of the next meeting

The next OPC meetings will be held in the weeks of 17-19 November, 2015 and 18-20 May 2016. (2 days for Panel meetings and one full day for the OPC meeting).

3. Review of new ESO Large Programmes

The OPC Chair, A. Renzini thanked N. Hatch and S. Boissier for taking on the role of members-at-large in the OPC discussion of the new ESO Large Programmes.

The session started with a general discussion about the scientific impact and legacy value of Large Programmes. In general the OPC felt that ESO should steer community to larger LPs, in particular for HARPS. B. Leibundgut, the VLT Programme Scientist, replied that there are indeed internal discussions on the best use of telescope time that may result in a push to very large peer programmes.

The discussion and voting on the Large Programmes was introduced by a summary of the procedures to be followed, presented by F. Patat. Then the OPC members chairing the joint Panel discussions in their category explained the results of the voting in the joint meetings on the Large Programmes, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the individual programmes.

Led by the Chair, the OPC then concluded on the Large Programmes to be voted on and on the voting procedure to be applied. As a result, the OPC recommended five out of the 27 Large Programme proposals for implementation. Two programmes were recommended in category A (cosmology) – one with KMOS and one with SINFONI. One programme was recommended in category B (galaxies and galactic nuclei), with MUSE and one programme in category C (interstellar medium, star formation and planetary systems) with HARPS. One programme was recommended as a filler in category D (stellar evolution) with FORS2.

The outcome of the OPC votes on Large Programmes is reflected in ANNEX 3.

4. Presentation of ToO Programmes and Normal Programmes

ToO Programmes
46 ToO proposals were submitted, distributed in the scientific categories as follows: 5 for category A (cosmology), none in category B (galaxies and galactic nuclei), 8 category C proposals (interstellar medium, star formation and planetary systems) and 33 requests in category D (stellar evolution). The OPC unanimously endorsed the merged ranking list of all ToOs resulting from the Panel discussions, which was presented by G. Hussain. She reminded the OPC that typically not all the recommended ToO proposals can be scheduled due to the requirement that they have to be highly ranked, which is only known during the building of the schedule. The result is summarized in ANNEX 4.
Normal Programmes
F. Patat presented the merged ranking lists and histograms resulting from the Panel discussions and explained the underlying principles of the normalization across all categories and the elements for the application for triage. He reported that following the recommendation by the OPC, from P95 only grades 1-3 are considered for normalization, which worked very well. Also, upon request by the OPC, in P96 GTO programmes were not included in the post-OPC normalization process, which helped to provide a more consistent overview.

The OPC was happy to endorse the presented results for recommendation to the Director General.

5. Review of concluded and on-going Large Programmes

R. Ivison reminded the OPC members that the “quality assurance” of the on-going Large Programmes also entails (if necessary) the termination of a programme that does not meet the specified requirements.

He informed the OPC members that following the recommendations from the Observing Programmes Committee and Public Survey Panels, ESO organized the workshop “Rainbows on the Southern sky: science and legacy value of the ESO Public Surveys and Large Programmes” to be held in Garching on 5 - 9 October 2015. This workshop will discuss and put into perspective the scientific results achieved through these programmes together with their teams, the community and representatives of the reviewing panels.

The workshop will feature scientific presentations from all Public Surveys and a representative set of Large Programmes that were completed since the 2008 Large Programme workshop. The astronomers in charge of these Programmes have been invited to present their scientific results and the impact on their field of research. The workshop will include a session on the impact of these ESO programmes and on the developments required to increase the community access to the reduced data. The goal is to enhance their legacy value for the whole astronomical community.

The OPC then reviewed 18 progress reports from ongoing and recently completed Large Programmes. Each programme was assigned a primary referee, who presented the report to the OPC and flagged the compensatory time requests or any further potential problems.

Only one report was considered to be rather thin and therefore the PI was asked to provide a more substantial report. The revised version was duly submitted and reviewed by the OPC with a positive outcome.

Requests for compensation time were granted only where a clear scientific justification and technical reason, e.g. equipment failure, were presented. All ongoing projects were recommended for continuation.
6. Public Surveys using ESO Time on the Arizona Radio Observatory

A call for public surveys to allocate up to 2000 hrs was issued by ESO on March 6, 2015, in the context of the Agreement for transferring ownership of the AEM ALMA prototype antenna to the University of Arizona, where it was installed on Kitt Peak as a telescope of the Arizona Radio Observatory (ARO). Four proposals were received and were reviewed by a Panel of experts in the field. The panel recommended implementation of two of them, with a third proposal queued as a filler programme.

The OPC took note of the presentation by E. Lagadec, the Chair of the expert Panel, and endorsed the recommendations by the Panel.

7. Presentation of the new OPC recruitment procedure

Every semester the Observing Programmes Office needs to replace 25 to 35 OPC and Panel members. According to the current procedure, the nominations are provided to the OPC Nominating Committee (NomCom) by a number of different sources, which include the OPC itself, the Users Committee (UC), ESO staff, and volunteers in the community. The number of nominations is insufficient to cover all the needs in terms of scientific areas coverage, countries, conflicts, and gender balance, so that OPO has often to resort to alternative sources and/or personal links to the community.

To address this problem, OPO proposed a change in the procedures, by placing a standing action item on the UC to provide the necessary nominations to the NomCom. The proposal was presented during the last meeting (April 2015) to the UC, which signaled its approval.

Each UC representative will collect nominations in her/his country and enter them in the ESO database via a dedicated web-based interface. The system will be in place for P98, and it will be experimentally deployed for P97.

The OPC was informed about the new recruiting process during the meeting. The OPC acknowledged the importance and difficulties of recruiting so many expert and dedicated referees for the panels and for the OPC and endorsed the proposed new procedures.

8. OPC feedback

As in previous periods, the OPC reported that the tools of the aging proposal handling system are rather slow and inflexible which makes the work of the referees rather cumbersome.

The OPC Chair noticed with quite some concern that this period a considerable number of referees did not comply with the deadline for the submission of the pre-OPC grades and comments. He pointed out that this has a lot of negative repercussions for the evaluation process and advised the Panel chairs to pass a strong message to the referees to comply with the rules. Furthermore he asked OPO
to reinforce the rules and to flag any non-compliance to him.

With regard to the information provided to the OPC he mentioned that it would be very useful to include the distribution of approved programmes as a function of their length in the documents on the available time for a given period.

F. Patat replied that this information will be implemented in the new Phase I system and is part of the action items of the telescope time working group.

9. Conclusions

R. Ivison thanked the OPC members and in particular A. Renzini, the new OPC Chair for the fruitful and constructive collaboration.

A. Renzini was very pleased to see that the OPC and Panel meetings were all held in a sincere atmosphere and in a cheerful spirit and thanked the OPO office team for a very well organized process and meeting.

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