

About The ESO Messenger

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The present *Messenger* is the hundredth issue to be published. This may be a good moment to look back to the beginning and to the development of this publication.

The idea of an internal ESO newsletter was born in the early seventies. Using the words of Professor Blaauw, Director General of ESO at that time and the person who launched *The Messenger* in its orbit, the purpose of The ESO Messenger should be "first of all, to promote the participation of ESO staff in what goes on in the Organization, especially at places of duty other than our own. Moreover, The Messenger may serve to give the world outside some impression of what happens inside ESO. The need for more internal communication is felt by many of the staff. The dispersion of our resources over several countries in widely separated continents demands a special effort to keep us aware of what is going on at the other establishments..."

The first issue of *The Messenger* appeared in May 1974. It was printed without colour, had six pages and a circulation of about 1100 copies. It was distributed to ESO staff, to the members of the ESO Council and the various ESO committees, and to astronomical institutes.

Blue as a second colour was introduced for the first time in *The Messenger* No. 4, but only on the upper part of the cover page and for the description of ESO on the last page. The upper part of the cover has essentially remained unchanged until today, except for small changes in connection with the location of the various ESO establishments.

The first five issues were done in letterpress printing. From No. 6 until today it has been printed in offset. The first colour pictures were reproduced in the December 1982 issue (No. 30). Colour was used occasionally, and then with increasing tendency. Now, the use of colour has become standard. The number of pages has varied greatly over the years – from 6 pages (No. 1) to a record number of 88 pages (No. 70).

Until No. 70, *The Messenger* was produced in the traditional way. That is, after preparation by the editors, all manuscripts were retyped at the publishers, then proofread and checked with the manuscript. The layout was done at ESO by pasting the corrected proofs and copies of the figures on paper sheets. The publisher then put the text into pages according to this layout. Since more and more authors of *Messenger* articles provided electronic files (in LaTeX format), from No. 71 (March 1993) to No. 78 (December 1994), the text columns of those articles were prepared in LaTeX. These texts were then exposed on film with the printer's high-resolution output device, and the film mounted on pages the same way as before. Trials to prepare the three-column layout entirely in LaTeX format were not successful.

At the end of 1994, following the example of some of his colleagues, the technical editor acquired a Power Macintosh with the necessary desk-top publishing tools. So, starting with No. 79 (March 1995), the layout of *The Messenger* has been produced in-house, using the electronic files provided by the authors or scanning the hard copies in those cases where the authors are not able to provide text in a format compatible with the layout programme (QuarkExpress). The

whole publication on CD ROM (~ 650 Mbytes) is taken to the publisher, which means that only printing and bookbinding are done outside ESO. This way, savings of printing costs of the order of 30,000 DM per year are realised for *The Messenger*.

As activities increased and more and more scientific results were produced at ESO, the interest of the press, of amateur astronomers, physics teachers, etc. in *The Messenger* also increased. In the course of the years, the distribution list gradually increased from about 800 addresses at the beginning to almost 4000 today. Including the copies distributed to ESO staff and at ESO exhibitions and other PR or astronomical events, the total circulation is now 5000 and sometimes even more.

However, the number of readers may be considerably higher. A great number of copies is sent to institutes and libraries where they are read by several people. In addition, from No. 81, September 1995, *The Messenger* can also be accessed via Internet

(<http://eso.org/gen-fac/pubs/messenger/>) Due to internal problems, No. 82 was produced by the publisher in the traditional way and is therefore available only on paper.

Two people at ESO regularly work on *The Messenger*: the Editor (about 0.3 FTE = Full Time Equivalent) and the technical editor (about 0.5 FTE). It would be interesting to know the total time spent for the preparation of *The Messenger*. However, it is not possible to evaluate the time needed by the authors and the people who assist them (secretaries, draughtsmen, etc.) in preparing their contributions.

Until today, four editors were alternately responsible for *The Messenger*: Editor of the first three issues was Francis Walsh; Editor of Nos. 4 to 19 and again of Nos. 43 to 72: Richard West; Editor of Nos. 21 to 39: Philippe Véron, and from No. 73: Marie-Hélène Ulrich (Demoulin). The Nos. 20 and 40 to 42 were prepared by the technical editor without official editorship (contributions approved by the Director General).

Some Mishaps in Connection with the Production of The Messenger

It is probably not surprising that during the production of 100 issues of The Messenger, also a number of mishaps have occurred. Perhaps the most serious one happened with Messenger No. 4, when an object fell on the printing form, damaging part of the first Messenger page. The damaged letters were exchanged by the printers without submitting a new proof to the editors. All the damaged letters were correctly exchanged, except that the Messenger No. 4 was printed and distributed again as No. 1.

But errors are not only due to negligence – too much thoughtfulness can also produce errors. For example: on two occasions the discovery trails of minor planets disappeared from the Schmidt plates that were reproduced in The Messenger because the printers thought that the printing plates had been scratched. Without telling the editors, the plates were retouched, and the discovery trails, well described in the captions, had gone. However, these errors were discovered in time.

A similar case that was not discovered in time happened in No. 19, in an article about neutron stars. The author of that article provided a number of figures accompanying his text. On one of them, a drawing of the optical companion of the neutron star and the neutron star itself (seen from two different directions) was presented. The author was probably well aware that the small neutron star – just a dot on the figure – might get lost in the printing process. He drew the attention of the editors to the importance of the dots in the figure. The technical editor, for his part, told the printers to see to it that the two dots on the figure would not disappear. The neutron star remained at its place until the last revision of that Messenger issue. However, when The Messenger was finally delivered, the neutron stars had disappeared! Investigating the matter more closely, it was found that the printer, at the last moment before running the printing machine, had discovered two "dust grains" on one of the figures and eliminated them... In order not to lose time, the technical editor, with the help of the three kind ladies of the ESO Secretariat that served as reception and typing pool at that time, took some drawing pencils, and put the neutron stars back in place. Fortunately, the circulation then was only about 1200 copies, and the work was done in less than one day. It is hoped that the author will forgive us if the neutron stars may not have had exactly the right size or not been at their exact position...

The last anecdote is only indirectly related to The Messenger and happened in early 1977 and with the same publisher. It shows that public-relations activities should not be neglected in an organisation like ESO. In order to better understand the situation, the reader should know that at that time the ESO scientific and technical divisions were still at the CERN premises near Geneva, and the Office of the Director General with the Administration had shortly before moved from Hamburg to Garching. The ESO Headquarters was in its construction phase and the Garching staff (22 or 23 people) was provisionally housed in an apartment building in Garching. Only a small, discreet sign identified the place as ESO offices. One day, the manager of the publishing firm came to ESO to bring the blue prints of The Messenger and to discuss some matters with the technical editor. To see someone of ESO, a visitor had first to ring the bell outside the building. Then a member of the ESO Secretariat, located in a flat on the ground floor of the building, opened the door and asked whom he wanted to see. Then the secretary by telephone informed the staff member concerned. The visitor went up to the apartment in which the staff member had his office. Here, he had to ring the bell again and wait a moment to be let in. This all must have appeared very strange and mysterious to the man. He said nothing while he was at ESO. But some weeks later, when the technical editor had matters to discuss with him at his place, he said: "Now I know what ESO is all about – you can't fool me – astronomy is just a pretext. ESO is a secret-service agency!..."