

tion with respect to discussing the real science issues in the OPC. Moreover, institutionalising such a procedure might contain an incentive to introduce fake proposals; experience shows, however, that our community is most reasonable in this respect, and that people understand that such an attitude would rapidly become self-destructive. Ideally, then, in order to recommend the highest-quality science, an OPC discussion should be held on the relative merits of the proposals in the sub-panels, and the cut-off lines should be modified accordingly. This final adjustment of the cut-off lines is not an easy issue, however. OPC members, who lively remember the thorough discussions they had in their panel, tend to refrain from reshaping the picture from much shorter discussions with less involvement from the experts in the field. Moreover, with eight sub-panels, any formal voting procedure which is systematically applied for each telescope, tends to be cumbersome, and for this very reason often hardly influences the result.

But it remains true that OPC members should strive, to the extent possible, towards gauging the quality of the science in their (sub-)panel to that in the others. If this did not happen, the system might degenerate into four or even eight independent OPCs, a situation which should definitely be avoided! It should be pointed out, however, that thorough multidisciplinary scientific discussions occur within the OPC for the large and ToO proposals, which concern all OPC members. Also, at the OPC meeting that follows the panel meeting, each panel presents its highlights to the whole OPC. In general, the very fact of living a full week together entails many opportunities for cross-fertilising. When more nights become available for regular programmes, because of the non-selection of large programmes, discussion naturally arises within OPC on which panel presents the best case for this additional time. Finally, if a panel definitely feels it

needs more time than the preliminary amount, it is able to fight for it and thus to trigger an agreement on some redistribution of time, involving a discussion within the OPC on the scientific quality of the cut-off proposals. The latter has often occurred, but was not felt as a stringent necessity during the last OPC meeting, which may reflect that the broad scope of the new panels also has a beneficial redistributing effect on quality. To conclude, my grateful experience is that the OPC consists of scientists who are open to abandon any corporative attitude with respect to the other panels, but that they are not reluctant to require specific discussions and formal voting in order to recommend the best science.

Concluding Remarks

After the last OPC meeting, several panel and OPC members expressed their positive opinion about the procedure, and no dissenting voice was heard. The dual panel system, which was adopted with some hesitation, passed its first test very well. It would be naive, however, to anticipate that no new evolution of the procedures should occur in the future. Quite soon two more VLT units with new instrumentation will become available, probably again leading to an increase of the number and a widening of the scope of the proposals.

In order to cope with the steady increase of projects and particularly of data, not only the OPC but also the community should respond positively to the challenge of accepting to evolve. The large programme concept was designed to increase the efficiency with which the VLT could achieve the fundamental science issues for which it was built. Its success will also rely, however, on the capacity of the fairly dispersed ESO community to co-ordinate the expertise which exists in the member states. Some efforts are clearly needed to foster collaborations between institutes in the different countries, and the commu-

nity is large enough to achieve this while maintaining a healthy competition. It would be an expression of the strength of astronomy in Europe if the question would become actual to increase the fraction of time to be devoted to large programmes to more than 30%.

A major way to involve the ESO community in the rich potential of the telescope park in Chile, is the OPC itself. Several experts, asked to join a panel, decline the offer because they fear the high workload. They are right that the workload is high, but by declining they miss an opportunity to be part of a most inspiring process. There is no reserved time for OPC or panel members, but participating in the discussions is a unique way of enlarging one's scientific culture and is very helpful to learn how best use is made of the ESO instruments. This way, the panel members can exert a positive feedback on the dynamism of research in their home institutes and contribute to inspire their colleagues in their home country. Since the panel system, involving much more than before the community in the evaluation process, was installed, the average quality of the proposals has been increasing significantly indeed.

This is my last *Messenger* report as chairman of the OPC. I take advantage of this opportunity to express my gratitude to the many colleagues with whom it was so stimulating to work: to both ESO directors general Riccardo Giacconi and Catherine Cesarsky, to the Section Visiting Astronomers and other ESO staff involved, and of course to my colleagues in the OPC and the panels. In particular, we owe much to Jacques Breysacher, who is the living memory of the OPC and the practical mind which guarantees that the job can be done within one week, to Christa Euler, who for three decades now continues to produce logistic miracles before, during, and after the OPC meetings, to the ever efficient Elizabeth Hoppe, and to my predecessor Joachim Krautter, who made the new OPC system work.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Scientific Preprints

(July – September 2000)

- 1381. S.A. Ehgamberdiev et al.: The Astroclimate of Maidanak Observatory in Uzbekistan. *A&A*.
- 1382. J. Breysacher and P. François: High-Resolution Spectroscopy of the SMC Eclipsing Binary HD 5989: the Hell 4686 Emission Line. *A&A*.
- 1383. I.M. van Bemmelen, P.D. Barthel and T. de Graauw: ISOPHOT Observations of 3CR Quasars and Radio Galaxies. *A&A*.
- 1384. A. Pasquali, M.S. Brigas and G. De Marchi: The Mass Function of NGC 288. *A&A*.
- 1385. T.H. Puzia, M. Kissler-Patig, J.P. Brodie and L.L. Schroeder: Globular Clusters in the dE,N Galaxy NGC 3115 DW1: New Insights from Spectroscopy and HST Photometry. *AJ*.
- 1386. R. Siebenmorgen, T. Prusti, A. Natta and T.G. Müller: Mid Infrared Emission of Nearby Herbig Ae/Be Stars. *A&A*.
- 1387. M. Chadid, D. Gillet and A.B. Fokin: Van Hoof Effect Between Metallic Lines in RR Lyrae. II. Comparison with Purely Radiative Models. *A&A*.
- 1388. F. Comerón, R. Neuhäuser and A.A. Kaas: Probing the Brown Dwarf Population of the Chamaeleon I Star Forming Region. *A&A*.
- 1389. S. Cristiani and V. D'Odorico: High-Resolution Spectroscopy from 3050 to 10000 Å of the HDF-S QSO J2233-606 with UVES at the ESO VLT. *AJ*.
- 1390. F.R. Ferraro, B. Paltrinieri, F. Paresce and G. De Marchi: Very Large Telescope Observations of the Peculiar Globular Cluster NGC 6712. Discovery of a UV, H Excess Star in the Core. *ApJ Letters*.
- 1391. G.A. Wade et al.: An Analysis of the Ap Binary HD 81009. *A&A*.
- 1392. F. Primas, P. Molaro, P. Bonifacio and V. Hill: First UVES Observations of Beryllium in Very Metal-Poor Stars. *A&A*.