

Minutes of the OPTICON Executive Meeting held on 21 September 2004
in the Oort Building, Leiden

Present.

G Gilmore (IoA) Chair

W Boland (NOVA)

G Vettolani, INAF

G Monnet (ESO)

R Sirey (PPARC)

A Omont (INSU.)

J Andersen (NOTSA)

R Rebolo (IAC)

H-W Rix (MPG) by Telephone link

In attendance.

Observers: B Nordstrom (EAS), S Lilly (SANW)

Project Scientist: J Davies

Due to weather induced air traffic delays the order of items was changed to allow all members of the executive to arrive before the substantive items were discussed.

1) The minutes of the last meeting had been approved after circulation. It was noted that all actions from those minutes were complete or were agenda items at this meeting

9) FP6 Budget Distribution. The expected additional Swiss contribution to the project was eventually not available, so funds to support these activities, at a lower level in some cases, have been reallocated internally. At present, no cuts have been made to existing budgets. Small allocations have been made to RDS, RA3, GNCA and SANW for management travel since they have no other OPTICON budgets on which they can call. The result is that the 5-year budget is notionally overspent by of order 273,000 Euro.

The first EU payment has been received but it is only 80% of the amount defined in the first 18 month plan. Due to the late arrival the payment schedule has been changed from three instalments at 6 monthly intervals to an immediate payment of 100% of the amount for subcontracts plus 66% of other costs. This payment is now in progress with respect to the budgets for JRAs and networks. A second payment will be made in 2005 once the appropriate reports have been received.

[Action on JKD to circulate details of these payments to the executive members who had not already received a copy]

2) ELT science case. G Gilmore indicated that he had helped to get things done on a more expedient timescale. A document presenting the case for national UK involvement will be submitted to PPARC this week. A 'Glossy' brochure exists in draft form and this is being further edited this week. This draft will go to ESO Council, and if its contents are agreed it will be mass produced and widely distributed.

The planned Florence meeting in November will have the ELT science case as an output. This will be the 'published version' of this document and will be used as input to the separately funded design study. Isobel Hook is in now place as ELT Project Scientist from 1 July, funded partly by OPTICON and partly by PPARC.

4) FP5 Budget. The OPTICON annual report and final reports were submitted on time. The final report claimed an amount which produced an overspend at a level of 40,000euro. EU apparently accepted the claim, but no final details have yet been received. There are some issues on how to deal with the overspend and the resulting final distribution between partners as compared with the prediction in the proposal. The final payment has not yet been made to the FP5 co-ordinator for onward distribution to the FP5 partners.

5) Progress Report on Networks. The paper from the Project Scientist was accepted as presented. No issues were apparent. It was noted that the AVO activity has been awarded a separate contract and will cease to be a supported OPTICON activity soon. A detailed list of the final membership of the Key Technology working group was requested and it was agreed that Colin Cunningham would be asked to present progress at the Board meeting.

[Action JKD to ask CRC for such a list]

7) Report from JRA's. Four reports have been received and circulated. Concerns at the lack of reports from JRA2 and 3 were raised. The chairman remarked that he had some verbal reports from JRA-2 and G Monnet confirmed that he was aware of progress due to close interactions between JRA-1 and JRA-2. It was decided that JRA-3 should be asked to present a detailed report the upcoming board as part of a rolling review of the JRAs. [Note: A short report from JRA-3 was in fact received on the day of the meeting, but too late for circulation]

On the wider issue of JRA monitoring, the proposal to assign two individuals to monitor each JRA had not been implemented due to conflicts of expertise and involvement in existing activities. It was decided to review the JRA's first annual reports and then send representatives to make spot checks on progress at various meetings.

6) Progress Report Access programme and Budget projection. The project scientist summarised the results of the access programme so far as detailed in the paper by Jesus Burgos which had previously been circulated. There is a considerable take-up of the programme and the number of eligible runs is at such a level that the entire budget could be expended by year 3.5. Some facilities will reach their contracted amounts of access even sooner than this. The use of the programme by the central and eastern European countries is comparatively low at this stage. It was noted that the telescope directors' forum has not yet met to review the situation but the executive stressed the need to be seen to widen the community and to maintain a more or less level spend profile throughout the contract and not to exceed 80% before the end of year 4 without specific approval. The executive issued various guidelines to focus the discussions of the telescope directors' forum and asked that a detailed implementation plan consistent with those guidelines be presented to its next meeting. Further input will be requested from the wider OPTICON board ahead of the telescope directors' forum. In order to avoid compromising the integrity of the access programme, it was agreed that all users who been promised travel support to date would receive this support, even if, after taking into account the oversubscription issues, the telescope operators did not eventually claim the relevant user fees for some of these runs.

The executive agreed to send the money for travel support of these users directly to the IAC for onward distribution.

[Action GG to inform Cambridge Finance office to make this payment]

The possibility that the UKST may leave the programme at some point was noted, as was the need to eventually incorporate the Aristarcos and Liverpool telescopes once they were in full operation.

3. I3 Co-ordinators Forum Since the various FP6 I3s now represent a major link between the EC and the wider user base across Europe the possibility that all the I3s might meet to improve inter-I3 collaboration

has been raised. Prof Gilmore has been invited to a meeting of I3 and other network Co-ordinators in Brussels on Nov12th. Dr Davies will probably accompany him.

Input to FP7. A draft input to the commission's FP7 proposals previously received by the chairman was circulated. It was agreed that as far as possible an agreed input from all the I3s was desirable and this document had been sent to OPTICON for our comments. There was considerable discussion of this paper and the Chairman agreed to draft a synopsis of this discussion and send it for comment by the OPTICON executive before forwarding the consensus for incorporation in the wider submission.

[Action GG to circulate OPTICON input for further comments- Done]

Plans for the production of the Annual report. GG has recently had more information on the requirements for FP6 annual reports and audit certificates. It is hoped that these may make the process less burdensome and all I3's can apply for a contract amendment to clarify the situation on audit certificates. It seems likely that smaller partners may have to submit only one such audit certificate covering the whole programme, but larger contractors such as ESO and INSU may still be required to provide annual certificates.

The project scientist has circulated to all JRA and Network leaders a template based on the material which will be needed for the 1st annual report. He has requested that they return the completed templates in time to be circulated as progress reports at the next board meeting a few weeks hence. None has yet been received. An agenda for the next board meeting was outlined.

Next Meetings.

A proposal from Simon Lilly that the next meeting be held in Zurich on 24 January was accepted.