

Minutes of the fourth meeting of the OPTICON Medium Telescopes WG. Hotel Nivaria La Laguna, Tenerife 22-23 January 2004

Present: Dr J K Davies, OPTICON Project Scientist (Chair).

Dr A Adamson (UKIRT)
Dr A Oscoz (IAC/TCS)
Prof J Andersen (NOT/CUO)
Dr F Bettonvil (Utrecht/ DOT)
Dr J Burgos Martin (IAC)
Dr D Mouillet (OMP/TBL)
Prof M Dennefeld (IAP)
Dr B Gelly (THEMIS)
Prof C Goudis (IAA, NAO/Greece)
Dr R Gredel (Calar Alto)
Dr J Melnick (ESO)
Prof B Nordstrom (EAS)
Dr E Oliva (TNG)
Prof R Rebolo (IAC)
Dr R Rutten (ING)
Dr O v d Luehe (KIS/VTT)
Dr G Scharmer (SST)
Dr M Boer (OHP)
Dr C Veillet (CFHT)

Dr M Colless (AAO) participated for the first hour by telephone link.

1. Welcome, apologies, logistics and minutes of last meeting

Prof Rebolo welcomed the meeting to the historic town of La Laguna, stressed the commitment of the IAC to playing its full part in the activities of the OPTICON telescope network and informed those present that the facilities of the IAC were open to them at any time during the meeting.

Apologies had been received from Dr David Carter (Liverpool Telescope) who was busy commissioning their new telescope on La Palma.

Minutes of the last meeting. It was pointed out that the correct affiliation for Dr Dennefeld was IAP, Paris. Although largely superseded by events, the minutes of the last meeting were otherwise accepted as a correct record.

2. Brief Introductions and overview of facilities

Each of those present introduced themselves and their facilities. In particular the group welcomed the directors of the four solar telescopes and several newly appointed directors to observatories already in the network.

3. Overview of OPTICON.

Dr Davies described the history and current state of the OPTICON consortium. This meeting is the last to be held under the auspices of the EU FP5 programme.

The OPTICON FP6 contract is currently being negotiated with the EU but its start date will be applied retrospectively to 1 January 2004. The EU indicative budget is 19.2 million Euro of which the OPTICON board has provisionally assigned 5.5 million Euro for the trans-national access programme (including the cost of the access office) plus a further 250,000 Euro for the other activities of OPTICON telescope network. Further details are available as a powerpoint presentation circulated by Dr Davies after the meeting.

4. Function of the OPTICON Telescope Directors Forum.

Dr Davies summarised the role of the Directors Forum, noting that it included oversight of the trans-national access programme and longer term strategic issues relating to the role of all medium sized telescopes in Europe.

Dr Davies noted that while reaching decisions by consensus will always be the objective of the forum, there might be times when difficult decisions have to be made. For this reason he proposed a set of rules of procedure based on those for the OPTICON board. Feedback from the membership suggested that these could be simplified and Prof Andersen offered to draft a simpler version for discussion on the second day of the meeting.

Dr Davies reported the Chair of the OPTICON Board, Prof Omont, had raised the question of the representation of the Directors Forum at the OPTICON board meetings. There was some discussion about voting rights with respect to the number of JRA and network spokespersons who might be present. However, since voting rights at the OPTICON board reside solely with board members it was resolved that no other representation was needed and that the Project Scientist should both chair the forum and represent it at the board.

ACTION 1.A1 Dr Davies to communicate this consensus to Prof Omont.

5. Relationship of N6 'Telescope Network' and N2 'Structuring ENO'

Dr Burgos gave a presentation on the role of the N2 network. No specific duplications between the planned activities of N2 and N6 were noted.

6. Principles behind the access programme.

Dr Davies summarised the EU 'Annex III to the contract' which sets out various conditions which must be met in order that users and observing periods qualify for support under the Contract. On the assumption that 'international experts' referred to scientists with an international reputation, and not to 'foreign' scientists, none of those present expressed any concerns that their telescope time allocation process might not meet the EU criteria.

The Annex III rules laid down by the EU allow, in principle, support of users who already have assured access to non-national facilities by reason of pre-existing agreements or legal technicalities. The panel felt that use of resources in this way was not consistent with the spirit of the trans-national access programme which is to support new users. The meeting resolved to develop additional guidelines to be used in defining the qualifying user groups to ensure that the wider objectives of the trans-national programme would be met. Dr Melnick agreed to lead a splinter group to develop some guidelines for proposers and the access office to use when assessing the eligibility of user groups and observing runs. These guidelines were approved and are set out in Annex -1 to these minutes. They are slightly more stringent than the EU rules as a literal interpretation of the contract Annex III would allow access that was not in the spirit of the access programme.

While recognising that a time would very probably come when the number of eligible nights exceeded the money available to pay for them, the forum decided to postpone developing a policy on this issue until experience over at least two semesters could be used to guide the discussion. Telescope directors were advised that it would be prudent to allocate only 10-15% of the nights expected under the programme during the first two semesters as a value of 10% had been used when estimating the first EU advance payment. Observatories exceeding this guideline would most likely find that full payment of user fees would be delayed for a year until the 2nd tranche of EU money was available. It was noted that there was a need for continuity in the programme so it would be sensible to pace the spending over several years.

7. Experience with FP5 and a vision of the access office.

Dr Burgos presented a summary of how the FP5 ENO contract had been managed and how that experience could be used to best effect within the FP6 programme. He presented a proposed budget, its associated staffing level and demonstrated a database tool which could be used to help manage the programme and provide information to potential users.

Dr Dennefeld pointed out that since the number of nights available under the access programme had been reduced by a factor of 2 in order to fit within a reduced allocation from the board, it was not clear why the estimated cost of the access office had not also fallen, albeit perhaps not in a direct relationship. Dr Melnick sought clarification of the staff effort required and drew attention to an inconsistency in the Annex I to the contract. Dr Burgos pointed out that much of the workload was independent of the number of users and restated his view that this level of resource was necessary.

Noting that a provision exists to review the performance of the access office and its budget at approximately month 18 of the contract, the forum endorsed the proposed scope of work of the trans-national access office.

There was discussion of the proposed guidelines for payment of travel grants and the number of observers to be supported for each observing run. It was agreed that, as under FP5, travel grants would be refunded on an actual cost (receipted bills) basis provided that travel was arranged using the lowest reasonable fares, etc.. After further

discussion it was agreed that the baseline would be to support one observer per observing run, except in the case of UKIRT, Themis and SST where issues such as long runs, high altitude or complex instrumentation made it necessary to support two observers. It was agreed that where observing teams made convincing cases for additional observers the access office would arbitrate, taking into account the state of the trans-national access budget and the wishes of the respective telescope director.

It was agreed that since the primary criterion for acceptance of an observing proposal was scientific merit, it would not be a requirement that proposers announce in advance that they would seek OPTICON support. Rather, the access office would contact potential beneficiaries after the allocation process and advise them of the opportunity to apply for travel support.

Recognising that, for sound scientific and operational reasons, more and more use was being made of service observing, it was agreed that suitable service runs would qualify for user fees, and a working definition of 1 night = 10 hours of service observing would be adopted. However, observers awarded time under either service, remote or robotic observing would not qualify for travel grants. Dr Burgos pointed out that in the case of service, remote or robotic observing runs it would be essential to have adequate documentation to demonstrate to the EU that qualifying access was given, since there would be no 'paper trail' from the visiting observer.

With regard to the mechanism for payment of user fees to telescope operators, each director was asked to communicate with Dr Burgos their preferred method for user fees to be refunded

Day-2

Additional discussion of Rules for procedure

Prof Andersen presented his proposed simplification of the rules for procedure. In general these were simpler and adopted without discussion except regarding the issue of the chairman of the forum. It was suggested that the Directors Forum should nominate a rotating chairman in order to reduce the load on the project scientist and allow the group dynamics to evolve from meeting to meeting. While appreciating the suggestion, Dr Davies felt that rotating the position of chair of the meeting would create unnecessary confusion and extra work when planning the meetings and that he would prefer the present arrangements to continue. It was also noted that having a director chairing the meeting may create unnecessary conflicts of interest. After some discussion it was agreed that the Project Scientist should chair the forum and that additional support for the taking of minutes, etc. should be provided. The agreed rules form Annex-2 to these minutes.

8 Strategic Issues.

The following, non-exclusive, mechanisms were identified to promote the activities of the trans-national access programme.

Presentations at the 2004 JENAM meeting, perhaps as part of a joint OPTICON-Radionet half day dedicated session. Simple, single folded sheet, pamphlets or one

page handouts such as had been used to promote OPTICON activities at the FP6 launch conference. A continuation of the contributions by Dr Davies to the EAS newsletter. Dr Adamson suggested an electronic (e-mail) newsletter to which users were invited to subscribe. Dr Mouillet suggested targeted mailing to institute directors, although no such mailing list is known to exist. The electronic EAS mailing system can also be used at short notice and with high flexibility. Prof Dennefeld clarified that, in addition, this mailing was also directed to representatives of National Societies who were supposed to "explode" relevant messages to their full community.

Dr Burgos pointed out that feedback forms would be managed by the access office and that submission of such a form would be a condition for receiving a travel grant. He was asked to circulate a specimen EU feedback form in order that directors could make input to the final content of the FP6 feedback form.

ACTION 1.A2 Dr Burgos to circulate the existing FP5 feedback questionnaire for comment and draft a new one for the FP6 programme.

During a discussion of the wider role of the telescope Directors Forum, Dr Veillet asked if the group had a mission statement which would help focus our strategic thinking. Based on a draft by Prof Andersen the following formulation was adopted:

The mission of the OPTICON Telescope Network is to optimise the scientific returns of the European front-line optical-infrared telescopes by deploying the combined intellectual resources of all of Europe in their use and promoting synergy at the European level in their development.

The long-term vision is to create an optimised, distributed European research facility accessible in a transparent manner to all European scientists on the basis of scientific merit.

In a discussion of the evolution of the whole network, including gaps, duplications and future plans it was noted that the table produced by Dr Rutten some years ago was in need of revision. Dr Rutten agreed to update this table as soon as convenient. This would then be used as a resource to guide future planning of instrument programmes.

ACTION 1.A3 Dr Rutten to update table of facilities and provide to Dr Davies for incorporation on the OPTICON web site.

On the issue of time swaps between broadly similar telescopes it was noted that this can be a very successful way of rationalising the instrument suites at specific telescopes if comparable capabilities exist elsewhere. However, communities have considerable 'ownership' of, and pride in, national facilities so persuading users to give something up is in practice quite difficult.

Time swapping and cross agency telescope applications are often also hampered by cultural issues (each community knows what its TAC expects) which can be further exacerbated by the superficial differences in proposal submission systems which are in fact fundamentally similar. Some kind of unified submission system might help remove this additional barrier to co-operation. It was suggested that the access office

collect together a set of proposal forms with a view to assessing the possibility of developing a user interface to the various proposal systems which would be simple to use while preserving the specific needs of each telescope operator.

ACTION 1.A4 Dr Burgos to gather together specimen forms and circulate before the next meeting.

Mechanisms for evolving the network including adding new telescopes.

Given the effort which had been expended in developing the present network, and the fact that adding new telescopes would require modifications to the contract, it was decided that additional telescopes would not be admitted into the network for the duration of the FP6 contract.

Prof Goudis gave an update on the state of the Aristarchos telescope. The building and similar infrastructures are complete. The mechanical structure and primary mirror of the telescope and much of the software has been installed. The AGU unit is expected to be installed in February 2004. At the moment the secondary mirror is late but it is expected that the telescope will be complete by August 2004. Various instruments are being provided in exchange for observing time, e.g. ULTRACAM and a spectrograph built in collaboration with Manchester University. It is hoped that the telescope will be ready for operation by September. Prof Goudis asked if, in the light of the EU recommendation that the telescope be reviewed by an international committee before joining the access programme, it had been decided how this process would take place. Prof Andersen indicated that the OPTICON Board would have to make such a decision and would nominate some kind of committee or task force.

Dr Melnick expressed his concerns, supported by others, that smaller telescopes had been added to the network in direct contravention of recommendations made by this group at earlier meetings. While recognising the need for compromises during the final proposal preparation, the project scientist was asked to note that the value of this forum would be undermined if its recommendations were not taken seriously by the OPTICON board and OPTICON executive. In this context Dr Melnick felt that decisions on the timescale for Aristarchos and the Liverpool Telescope to enter the access programme should be the responsibility of this forum, and not of the board since the board did not include a majority of active observatory directors.

ACTION 1.A5 Dr Davies to discuss with the board procedures for the entry of Aristarchos and the Liverpool telescope into the access programme.

It was felt that an external review of the access programme would be useful and that an appropriate time might be in 2-3 years as part of a mid-term review.

9 Role of Enhancement Activities in the OPTICON programme.

Prof Dennefeld pointed out that the role of the 'research enhancement activity' was wider than just the schools applied for under the Marie Curie programme. Rather it concerned all aspects of enhancing the uses of these infrastructures. His first action will be to set up a working group to consider all aspects of this process.

Since the most recent Marie Curie proposal had not been supported despite its very high rating, it would not be possible to hold a classical NEON school in the summer of 2004. Instead a special 'virtual NEON' school would be held at ESO 14-24 July.

During discussions of funding telescope time for these schools it was confirmed that they could probably not be included in the access programme because the various time allocation systems would be unlikely to rank them with sufficiently high scientific priority to gain time by peer review. It was felt that telescope directors giving the time without receiving any user fees would send the wrong message. The meeting expressed its support for these enhancement activities and urged that Prof Dennefeld should continue to seek funding for the training schools and fees for telescope time via the Marie Curie programme.

10. Relations with other observatories outside the network.

Equipment Loan

The meeting considered a paper from Dr Panov of the Rohzen observatory asking about the possible loan or donation of equipment no longer required by network telescopes. It was agreed that several observatories might have unused filters and possibly CCD's and controllers that might be available. However there was concern that this was more than a question of just shipping some equipment. The receiving observatories might request training in the use of and technical support for such equipment, etc. It was agreed that OPTICON funds could be used in a very limited number of cases to support a single visit of a technical staff member from a non-network observatory to collect some hardware and receive instruction in its operation from a network facility. No further use of OPTICON resources will be allowed under the Access programme.

ACTION 1.A6 Dr Davies to write to Dr Panov.

ACTION 1.A7 Directors with potentially surplus equipment to contact Dr Panov directly.

World Net telescope proposals

The meeting considered a paper from Dr Aerts of the astero-seismology network. This group were seeking a simpler way of applying for time on multiple telescopes than making several applications to different TAGs and suffering the consequence of double, or multiple, jeopardy in the process.

Although the meeting was sympathetic to the problem, and was pleased that it had been raised at this level, it could not offer an immediate way forward. The smaller telescopes used by this scientific discipline are outside the membership of the network so only a small number of OPTICON telescopes are implicated. However, since most of the telescopes have time allocations which are determined by one or more national TAGs the directors themselves are unable to control this process.

ACTION 1.A8 Dr Davies to contact Dr Aerts.

11. Date of Next meeting

It was proposed to hold the next meeting at a mutually convenient date in early to mid-November at the Observatoire de Haut Provence.

There being no other business, Dr Davies thanked the local organisers and those attending for what had been a very productive meeting. The meeting closed at 13:30.

Eligibility of the user groups

Definitions:

- **User:** means a researcher within a user group, including the user group leader.
- **User group:** means a research team of one or more researchers given access to the infrastructure under the project. Each user group is led by a user group leader.

To be eligible to benefit from access to the *infrastructure* under the *contract*, a *user group* must satisfy the following conditions:

- ▶ both the *user group* leader and the majority of the *users* must come from Member States or Associated States;
- ▶ both the *user group* leader and the majority of the *users* must come from a country other than the country(ies) where the legal entity(ies) operating the *infrastructure* is(are) established;
- ▶ The institution of affiliation of the *user group leader* and the majority of the *users* shall not have access by right to the facility being applied to.
- ▶ In no case shall a *user* be eligible for travel and subsistence support to access his/her own facility through this programme.

When the *infrastructure* is composed of several research facilities operated by different legal entities, these conditions shall apply to each facility separately.

Prospective *user groups* requesting access shall be required by the *access provider* to submit in writing a description of the work that they wish to carry out and the names, nationalities and home institutions of the researchers expected to take part.

Annex-2 Revised Rules of Procedure.

Rules of Procedure for the OPTICON Telescope Directors Forum.

1. Membership

- 1.1 The OPTICON Telescope Directors' Forum shall consist of:
- a representative of each distinct infrastructure (i.e. telescope or group of telescopes at single location under the responsibility of a specific agency) included in the OPTICON Trans-national Access Programme,
 - the OPTICON Project Scientist, and
 - the leader of the enhancement activities of the Access Programme.
- The Head of the Trans-National Access Office administrating the Trans-national Access Programme, and an Observer representing the European user communities without infrastructures in the Telescope Network, shall be invited to attend the meetings of the Forum.
- 1.2 The meetings of the Forum shall be convened and chaired by the Project Scientist.
- 1.3 Each infrastructure shall notify the Project Scientist of the name of the person representing it on the Forum.
- 1.4 If an infrastructure is unable to send a representative to a meeting of the Forum, it may appoint another member to act as a proxy. The Project Scientist must be advised of such appointments not less than three days before the meeting.
- 1.5 At suggestion of any member, the Project Scientist may invite other persons to attend a meeting of the Forum.
- 1.6 The decisions and recommendations of the Forum will normally be presented to the OPTICON Board and Executive Committee by the Project Scientist.

2. Meeting Arrangements

- 2.1 The Forum shall meet not less than once a year, at a time consistent with the telescope proposal deadlines and the annual OPTICON reporting cycle.
- 2.2 Other meetings of the Forum may be convened by the Project Scientist as required for the proper execution of the Access Programme, or at the request of at least half of the members of the Forum.
- 2.3 Meetings of the Forum may be conducted by whatever means the members decide to be most effective in each case. The same procedural rules shall apply however meetings are held.
- 2.4 The Project Scientist shall inform all members by mail, fax, or electronic mail of the date and venue of the next meeting not less than 8 weeks in advance. Members shall confirm their attendance not less than 7 days before meeting.
- 2.5 Should a matter arise of such urgency that a meeting of the Forum, in person or by correspondence, cannot be convened by the schedule defined in 3.1 – 3.3, a 2/3 majority of the members of the Forum may, at the proposal of the Project Scientist, decide to consider the matter on a shorter timescale.

3. Agenda and Minutes of Meetings

- 3.1 The Project Scientist shall prepare a draft agenda for the next meeting, to be submitted with the announcement.
- 3.2 Any member may, no later than 3 weeks before the meeting, propose other items for inclusion in the draft agenda.
- 3.3 The Project Scientist shall send the updated draft agenda and any other relevant documents to the members at least two weeks before the meeting.
- 3.4 The Project Scientist shall send Draft Minutes and an Action and Decision List from each meeting to all participants within three weeks after the meeting. A revised draft, taking into account any corrections received within 14 days of distribution, shall be submitted to participants for final approval. No response within another two weeks shall be deemed to imply acceptance of the minutes. The final minutes shall be published on the OPTICON Web site.

4. Decisions of the Forum

- 4.1 The Forum shall be competent to take decisions if at least half of its members are present or represented at the meeting.
- 4.2 The Forum is normally expected to reach its recommendations and decisions by consensus. Should a vote be necessary, a majority of two thirds of the members present or represented shall be required for a decision.
- 4.3 In matters affecting the continued participation of an infrastructure in the Access Programme, the Forum may make a recommendation, but shall refer the matter to the OPTICON Executive Committee for decision.
- 4.4 Should the Forum be unable to reach a decision on an issue in time to avoid significant negative consequences for the Access Programme, the Project Scientist may refer the matter to the OPTICON Scientific coordinator for further action.

5. Conflicts of Interest

- 5.1 Members shall declare any potential conflict of interest in any item on the Agenda to the Forum Chair immediately they become aware of it. In such cases, the Chair may require that Member to withdraw from the discussion and decision on that item.

6. Revision of the Rules for Procedure

- 6.1 These Rules for Procedure may be amended at any time by a unanimous decision by the Forum.

Appendix III Action List.

ACTION 1.A1 The Project Scientist should both chair the Directors Forum and represent it at the board. Dr Davies to communicate this consensus to Prof Omont.

ACTION 1.A2 Dr Burgos to circulate the existing FP5 feedback questionnaire for comment and draft a new one for the FP6 programme.

ACTION 1.A3 Dr Rutten to update table of facilities and provide to Dr Davies for incorporation on the OPTICON web site.

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