

OPTICON I3 Board Meeting 2

Meeting held at Mercure Hôtel Alpha, Grenoble, France

11 & 12 October 2004

Day One – 11 October 2004

Present:			
R Albrecht	ESA, ST-ECF	N Hubin	ESO/ JRA1
J Andersen	NOTSA	P Kern	Grenoble
E Battaner	Granada	S Lilly	SANW
E J Bakker	Leiden	O van der Luhe	KIS
W Boland	NOVA	G Monnet	ESO
A Chelli	Grenoble/ JRA4	P Moschopoulos	EC
C Cunningham	UK ATC/ JRA5	B Nordstrom	EAS
J Davies	UK ATC/ Proj. Scientist	A Omont (Chair)	IAP
M Dennefeld	IAP	R Rebolo	IAC
R-J Dettmar	RDS	J Seiradakis	GNCA
P Feautrier	Grenoble/ JRA2	R Sirey	PPARC
G Gilmore	UCAM/ Co-ordinator	A Sosa	IAC
A Gunn	RadioNet	S Wagner	LSW/ JRA3
S Howard (minutes)	UCAM	F Zerbi	Brera/ JRA6/ INAF

[NB: all presentations are available on the OPTICON WWW site]

1. Welcome

A Omont welcomed the attendees to the second Board meeting and thanked the organisers, Thierry Montmerle, Pierre Kern and Françoise Bouillet and their colleagues. He also welcomed Alistair Gunn from RadioNet, Anselmo Sosa from the IAC Access Office, F Zerbi, the co-ordinator of JRA6 and Eduardo Battaner, the new lead of RA3.

He reiterated how important OPTICON and such technical developments are for European Astronomy and the future implication for FP7.

The participants were provided with useful data in Flush Memory Sticks, so as to avoid the usual bulky paper hand-outs.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from the following:

T de Zeeuw (UL), P Benvenuti (INAF, represented by F Zerbi), Simon White (MPA), H-W Rix (MPIA), B Fort and J Bergeron (IAP, represented by M Dennefeld). It was noted that P Moschopoulos would join the meeting in the afternoon.

3. Approval of Agenda

The Agenda was approved with the addition of the matter of selecting a new Chairperson by the end of the meeting.

4. Approval of and action points from minutes of Meeting One

The minutes were approved.

A Omont went through each action point from the last meeting (noting that Action 8 does not exist). Pending outstanding issues are as follows:

Action 7 for G Gilmore – arrange a future workshop associated with a Board meeting in Central Europe, to discuss ambitions and requirements for FP7. This is an ongoing issue linked to the Access programme and should be kept for the next Board meeting.

Action 9 for O van der Luhe – prepare a discussion document and lead a discussion on the possible relationship between OPTICON and the Solar Physics community for a future Board meeting. This was deferred to the next meeting.

5. Co-ordinator's Report

G Gilmore presented the Co-ordinator's Report, making reference to various ongoing action points from the last meeting (5, 7, 10 and 16)

G Gilmore also reported on items covered in the Executive meeting in Leiden on 21 September. The minutes from these meetings will be put on the website, once approved.

It was noted that there are concerns relating to the budget and unsatisfactory communication with the EC, e.g. problems with Swiss funding.¹

5.1 Year One Funding

G Gilmore stated that rebalancing of finances could not take place until all information was obtained but that overhead costs amount to 20% of the whole budget. He explained how the instalments worked and that the remaining 20% should officially be paid no later than 45 days after the acceptance of the report and its associated financial paperwork, although there is no guarantee from the EC that they would adhere to this schedule.

A Omont and G Gilmore explained that the 18-month periods roll forward and restart at the end of each 12-month reporting period. G Gilmore explained to the Board members that there is a very important I3 Managers' Meeting in November to discuss the fact that there is no definition of an "annual report" or "audit certificate", and that this is the first big contract that the EC has had to process, so this project is something of a "guinea pig". C Cunningham expressed concerns regarding the audit certificates, from the point of view that with fixed cost models it is impossible to know how much time is spent on what areas, so how could an audit certificate be produced? G Gilmore also pointed out that there were other problems relating to the hiring of staff on multi-year contracts when only single year funding is assured.

P Feautrier asked for a definition of an audit. G Gilmore explained that it is a statement resulting from an internal check of accounts, confirming that money is being spent correctly. However, he stressed certain problems in that audits are usually conducted per department and not per project, and although the audit certificates are a generic requirement by EC law, there is in fact no official definition of an audit certificate. S Lilly asked if the EC would accept a statement, such as "*Institute's name) conducts their accounts according to appropriate law*". G Gilmore said this would be something for the EC to answer, and the I3 Managers' November meeting should provide more information here.

G Gilmore pointed out that on a positive note, once the audit certificates have been submitted and approved, no more checks will be carried out on that audit certificate period; the exception is ESO, who are audited on a rolling basis and submit certificates as they become available. N Hubin wished the Board to be aware, however, that it is generic in EC law that any contract can be audited up to 3 years afterwards.

G Gilmore stated that the main problems with the required audit certificates were as follows:

- the definition is unclear and different national systems apply;
- they are required soon after the year end and it would not be possible to supply them by this time;
- they can be very costly, although he had requested a contract amendment to provide a full set after year 3 then another after year 5, with the final report.

He stated that he hoped the meeting in November would help to improve informal relations with the EC.

¹ These issues were clarified by P Moschopoulos during the second day of the meeting.

6. Project Scientist Report

J Davies presented this report, which is available on the web, stating that the Networking is going well.

N3.4 AVO – P Quinn, the Co-ordinator has asked that OPTICON allow a further 10,000 Euros in period 2 for Data Centre Alliance networking, until they can obtain suitable funds from the next EU call.

After some discussion, supported by A Omont, J Andersen, O van der Luhe, G Monnet and M Dennefeld, it was decided that there was a moral obligation to continue to support this.

Action 1 ***J Davies: to transmit the following resolution from P Quinn – the OPTICON Board unanimously agrees that an additional amount of up to € 10,000 may be allocated to N3.4 for networking activities (Data Center Alliance) beyond mid 2005, should no other sources of funding these activities arise in time.***

All other Networks are progressing satisfactorily. Taking note of the failure of STIS and the delay or cancellation of the installation of COS on the HST, the NUVA network, N3.2, plans to advance its major conference by one year. This will require a rephrasing of its spend profile, but not additional funds. A summary table of Network status was presented and considered satisfactory at this stage.

There was a brief report from all JRAs (with the exception of JRA3, which followed later). These are all available on the website. A complete list of JRA webs (including passwords) was provided at the time and will be circulated again in a separate document. From these brief reports, it has appeared that all JRAs are doing well and have been very active although their planning has often been seriously delayed by the late arrival of EC funding.

J Davies outlined some details of the likely procedure for preparing the annual report. Whatever the outcome of the Brussels I3 workshop, it is clear that this must be done to a very tight schedule and that any failure to achieve this may have severe cash flow implications. All people responsible for providing information to the project office must do so on the requested timescales and requested formats.

7. RadioNet Overview

A Gunn presented the RadioNet Overview, which is available on the website. He emphasised the common interests between OPTICON and RadioNet and the boundaries between the two networks, where co-operation and collaboration are desirable. He stated that RadioNet have considered the possibility of a single astronomy FP7 approach, but this was not considered desirable. There was concern that no astronomy would be funded should the programme fail for any reason and the total amount of money available for astronomy may be reduced by funding limits on single proposals.

Action 2 ***G Gilmore/ J Davies/ RadioNet: to establish a working group to consider issues of overlap and common interest, including training issues, far-infrared and ALMA involvement, reporting and management issues, possibility of a joint astronomy policy towards FP7 and outreach.***

8. ILIAS

J Seiradakis provided a presentation on the astroparticle network ILIAS. He noted that ILIAS was being established, that it came later than OPTICON and is only now coming into full operation. The Board agreed that this was very informative and appreciated that this presentation was done at short notice.

9. ELT Activities

This presentation was given by G Monnet and is available on the web. He stated that this programme is actively being rebalanced to meet financial limits at present.

G Monnet's presentation triggered further discussion of science case development, mentioned in the Co-ordinator's report. M Dennefeld mentioned the IAU symposium.

Action 3 *G Gilmore: to ensure a full presentation of ELT Science Case development at the next Executive Committee meeting.*

Action 4 *All: to note IAU Symposium on ELT Science on 14-18 November 2005 in South Africa.*

(N.B. The local organiser, Patricia Whitelock, is organising an associated African student workshop from 7-10 November. She would like potential speakers at this symposium to volunteer to lecture at this school. Contact: paw@saao.ac.za).

10. Access Program

J Davies reported on the current status of the Access Program and A Sossa gave a brief overview of current distribution of users and illustrations of the type of report which they are able to produce. These reports are available on the website.

It was noted that the Access Program is very significantly oversubscribed with peer-reviewed allocated telescope nights. Approximately 28% of the contracted 5-year maximum Access Program has in principle already been allocated in the calendar year of 2004. This is very substantially above the required contract amount (10%), and is so large it seriously risks future management of the Access Program to achieve OPTICON's broader community goals. It also seriously exceeds to 80% of notional annual financial allocation, which is the guideline spend for each project manager to allow sensible financial contingency across the OPTICON program. It was explained that the Access Program pays for each allocation night, including nights lost due to bad weather.

S Lilly stated it would be useful to hear what the EC thought of the socio-economic point. P Moschopoulos responded that the Access Program should be easy to monitor and the deliverables are clear. He noted that it was stated in the contract that, after a selection on scientific merit, preference should be given to user groups who have not previously used the infrastructure and are working in countries where no such research infrastructures exist. S Lilly stated that in the case of significant oversubscription, preference should be given to the accession countries. Excepting desirability (always subject to peer-review approval) there was some discussion on whether some publicity on the program had been delivered effectively. Several members emphasised the considerable efforts made by the European Astronomical Society and by the Access office.

O van der Luhe, J Andersen and several other members emphasised that it would be undesirable for OPTICON and the community of users if the Access Program consumed all its resources early and did not continue throughout the whole of the OPTICON program, even though this would be contractually and legally possible.

Statistics are not yet available on success rates from different user communities. This issue is to be developed further by the Telescope Directors' Forum at the November meeting.

A Omont emphasised that the Board should provide general guidelines to the Directors' Forum when it develops eligibility criteria.

Issues arising from this discussion included the need to let market forces identify what FNE facilities merit less allocation. There is an essential need for peer-review, the desirability of uniform spending profile, the importance of integrating new users into the Astronomical Community and the desirability of ensuring preferential support for the highest quality facilities.

S Lilly emphasised that the question for Directors is not to consider who gets access, but who gets OPTICON funding.

R Sirey stressed the desirability of ensuring fees are available to those who would benefit the most.

G Gilmore stated that the spirit of the OPTICON proposal is to emphasise the role of the Access Program in integrating new member countries into the best astronomical practice. He went on to emphasise the essential need for the OPTICON budget to retain contingency and flexibility at the time of mid-term review. Given this, it is important that the Access Program should try to spend no more than 80% of its national current allocation by contract mid-term.

Following discussion here and later, the following action was raised.

Action 5 ***J Davies: to provide to the EC January meeting, details of the plan of the telescope Directors' Forum on the future implementation of the Access Programme.***

11. JRA3

S Wagner gave his presentation on JRA (available on the website).

The points emphasised partly concerned administrative changes in Heidelberg astronomy, which had not been resolved. Therefore, detailed management information is not yet available.

In discussion, S Wagner confirmed that current plans should resolve all institutional uncertainties by the end of 2004. S Wagner is confident that all matters will be resolved satisfactorily and in such a way that JRA will proceed as planned.

Some technical discussion of the intended approach followed.

From this, it is clear that start-up delays mean that no useful technical assessment of the program is yet feasible.

Administrative uncertainties are such that the Executive Committee is asked to consider this issue at their next meeting.

12. JRA Monitoring Plan

This presentation was given by G Gilmore and is available on the website.

All JRA leaders confirmed that they support the original proposed Executive Committee progress monitoring system. This involves one Executive Committee member attending each JRA annual review meeting and checking its website to assess management and progress. In some cases, full documentation is available on the JRA website.

Action 6 ***G Gilmore: JRA monitoring to continue to try to implement agreed monitoring process.***

End of Day One

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G Gilmore	UCAM	A Sosa	IAC
S Howard (minutes)	UCAM	S Wagner	LSW/ JRA3
		F Zerbi	Brera/ JRA6/ INAF

13. FP7 Overview

P Moschopoulos presented the FP7 overview, which included:

- Results of call for DS, CNI, AM;
- Information on next call for TA, I3, CA, AM;
- Towards Research Infrastructures in FP7.

This presentation is available on the website.

P Moschopoulos noted that ELT Design Study was the third most highly rated of all proposals, with AVO as fourth.

In the EC plans for FP7, the current intention is for the EC to develop a list of desirable European scale infrastructures across all subjects. They propose that significant construction costs could be provided by the collaboration with EU structural funds. The roadmap process is likely to involve consultation with ESFRI.

G Gilmore noted that the strength of a large roadmap is that many items are available for discussion and compromise between potential partners. In the discussion, it was agreed that in the context of roadmap schemes discussed by ESFRI and other EC instances, it is urgent that OPTICON discuss with other partners (RadioNet, ILIAS, ESO, ESA, national agencies, EAS) about the eventual establishment of a roadmap for astronomy.

P Moschopoulos also commented on earlier audit certificate discussion and hoped that continuing outstanding issues would be resolved soon, in part at the Co-ordinators' meeting in November.

14. I3 Co-ordinators' Forum

G Gilmore introduced the proposal from the Co-ordinator of the NMI3 that all 17 approved I3s collaborate on common issues. These include, in particular, annual reporting issues (as discussed elsewhere in the meeting), input into FP7 discussion and possible contribution as user representatives into the ESFRI working group deliberations.

15. Input to FP7

G Gilmore introduced the current draft submission which is being developed by all I3s.

The document was discussed on a paragraph by paragraph basis and many specific suggestions were provided.

G Gilmore confirmed that all of these would be forwarded for consideration for the joint I3 FP7 submission.

Action 7 *G Gilmore: to prepare letter template appropriate to send to MEPs. (This was done later and the text is attached).*

16. Key Technologies

This presentation was given by C Cunningham and is available on the website.

Some discussion as to the limits of activities of this working group. There was a consensus that it was more desirable to be focussed and effective than too broad and consequently ineffective.

Action 8 *C Cunningham: to ask Tony Peacock to join the Key Technologies WG.*

Actions involving ESA staff should be agreed with A Gimenez.

17. Outreach/ Publicity

J Davies summarised his considerable activities on producing OPTICON activity for circulation and general use. J Davies also asked for Board members' views on these and other possible actions.

It was agreed that public presentation on OPTICON activities at each JENAM is extremely desirable.

Action 9 *M Dennefeld: to arrange a plenary session at the JENAM 2005 to be held in Liege, Belgium.*

Several people commented that they had already given OPTICON talks at national meetings and others noted the desirability of continuing with these. J Davies noted that a suitable PowerPoint presentation was available on the OPTICON website.

In further discussion, it was agreed that it would be helpful for a brief overview of OPTICON to be available as a glossy brochure.

Action 10 *G Gilmore/ J Davies: to produce an overview of OPTICON.*

General discussion of the desirability of OPTICON involvement on other activities, especially to include the general public. No clear agreement on a practical way forward.

Discussion of possible joint outreach activities is included in Action 3.

18 A.O.B

18.1 Next Meeting

There is no definite date set at this time, but G Gilmore informed the Board that the next meeting would most sensibly, given OPTICON and EC-FP7 development timescales, be held in the middle of October 2005 and the INAF had offered to host this meeting in Rome. This

8

was agreed, with a date in mid-October 2005 to be agreed with INAF and circulated. He also mentioned that the next Executive meeting will be held on 24 January 2005 in Zuerich.

18.2 New Chairperson

J Andersen was nominated for this post for 2005 and this was agreed unanimously by the Board.

A Omont gave his thanks to the Board members for attending. The Board thanked Alain Omont for his considerable efforts as first Chairman of the OPTICON FP6 Board.

End of Day Two