



**OPTICON BOARD, GRENOBLE
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OVERVIEW OF ACCESS PROGRAMME

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Summary. A detailed report of the uptake of the trans-national access programme has been prepared by the IAC access office and is provided in the papers for this meeting. Despite early concerns of a slow ramp up, the access programme is off to a flying start with 22% of the contracted amount of access potentially eligible in the first year. Take-up is highest at those telescopes already familiar to users through the FP5 programme. High delivery at telescopes with large user fees means this could translate into 27% of the proposed access budget. This success raises concerns about the spend profile which were discussed by the executive and possible responses will be elaborated at the forthcoming telescope directors meeting in November.

Users. The main eligible users to date are from CH, D, NL and I. Uptake from the central European countries is low. Determining the reason for this is a priority if we are to rectify this situation. Put simply, we need to know if it is due to low numbers of applications or a low success rate of proposals since these will require different responses. This information is being sought from the telescope directors by the access office.

Finance. At the present rate, the notional budget will be fully spent as early as year 3.5 and some telescopes will complete their share of the contract by the end of year 2. This raises cash flow and philosophical programmatic issues. In particular we have the option of proceeding at full steam and expending the budget early, sending a clear message to the EU that we were cut too much or somehow rationing access to allow the programme to run its full course. The executive at its September meeting stated that it wished to restrict the spending to about 20% per year by the imposition of additional selection criteria to give priority to the most appropriate users. To have any real effect, these will require to be applied retrospectively to runs already scheduled. Such an action will have to be approached with some subtlety to avoid tarnishing the reputation of the programme with both users and infrastructure operators. It may also require a re-evaluation of the procedures operated by the access office.

The telescope director's forum are fully appraised of the situation and will discuss it in detail at their meeting next month. Our intention is to present several costed options to the executive in the new year.

Other Issues. A mechanism to peer review both the LT and Aristarchos must be defined before they can enter the programme. It is proposed that such a plan be developed at the director's forum since that is where the operational expertise lies.

The implication of changes to the operations of the UKST must be considered if the AAO withdraws its support from this telescope as presently planned.

Additional background relevant to this paper can be found in:

Access_Report_Sept04.doc

Access_Report.pdf

Access_annex_1_selection_panel_members.pdf.

Access_annex_2.xls