

OPTICON Telescope Directors Meeting
Schiphol Airport Amsterdam - 3 September 2008
Attendees: C Goudis ; P Boumis ; J Davies [Chair] ;J Andersen; C Benn; F Bettonvil; M Dennefeld; M van der Hoeven; I Steele; S Berry; C Veillet; S Brierley [Minutes]; M Boer; D Kiselman
Apologies: J Alves, R Cabernac, G Davis, E Oliva, J Melnick; G Gilmore

Agenda

1. Minutes of the last full meeting and notes of the splinter meeting at Liverpool (available at <http://www.astro-opticon.org/meetings.html>)
2. Actions from last meeting.
3. Summary of FP6 programme, nights delivered and budget.
4. Situation regarding FP7 and timescales for the contract
5. Options for FP7 + decision on the contract details (ALL).
- 5b. Teaching part of FP7
6. Future of the TDF in FP7 (JKD)
7. AOB
8. Next Meeting

- 1) Minutes of the last full meeting and notes of the splinter meeting at Liverpool (available at <http://www.astro-opticon.org/meetings.html>)

JKD gave apologies on behalf of those unable to attend and introduced those who were new to the meeting. Simon Berry represented UKIRT on behalf of Gary Davis; Chris Benn, Head of Astronomy, and Michel van der Hoeven from ING were in attendance as R Rutten, former ING Director has now moved to Grantecan.

MD asked to discuss the teaching part of FP7 at some point today and JKD agreed to include it under Agenda item 5, options for FP7.

The meeting formally accepted the Agenda as well as the minutes from the last full TDF meeting in Greece, October 2007.

- 2) Actions from last meeting.

The Aristarchos telescope never acceded to the Access Programme and can not now as it is the end of the FP6 programme. The meeting agreed that the telescope would be accepted into the new FP7 programme subject to the recommendation of the FP6 TDF review process.

Action 5 from TDF Meeting October 2007: JKD provided the target number of nights.

Action 12 from TDF Meeting October 2007: The Medium Telescope Review panel was

set up to coordinate input to the ASTRONET Roadmap. JA commented that the final publication of the ASTRONET Roadmap will be in October this year.

Action 13 from TDF Meeting October 2007: As regards running the Access Office under FP7, only one offer was received i.e. ING, and this has been accepted in principle.

In the side meeting at the ASTRONET symposium: JB advised against making retrospective payments for nights in previous semesters.

There is a JENAM meeting taking place next week (8th to 12th September) in Vienna but there are no plans for OPTICON to be represented at it. A formal presentation of the ASTRONET Infrastructure Roadmap will be given by Michael Bode. One reason for not attending this meeting is that another JENAM meeting is scheduled for 19th – 24th April 2009 in Hertfordshire (see <http://www.jenam2009.eu/default.asp?ContentID=1341>). JKD has been asked to represent OPTICON on the organising committee. A splinter meeting, or a 2 or 3-segment parallel session, may be set up to allow more time for the TDF to present and discuss their long term plans.

3) Summary of FP6 programme, nights delivered and budget.

JKD gave a presentation entitled “FP6 Summary” and highlighted the contracted and delivered telescope time: there is a predicted underspend of circa 100k of unused user fees and about the same for travel. These monies will be used as an OPTICON contingency fund unless their use is sanctioned for something else.

The meeting discussed the actual number of nights that were delivered compared to the number of proposals which in principle qualified for support. MD noted that the number of requested nights, rather than the number of proposals, would be a better guide to the demand for the programme. JKD will attempt to get those numbers together and into the final report.

Action 1 JKD – collate actual number of user nights requested rather than those actually supported for entry into final report

4) Situation regarding FP7 and timescales for the contract

A €15M sum was requested for OPTICON. This was cut by the EU who appear to have decided to introduce a larger number of smaller programmes rather than fewer larger ones. This means that the total number of nights that can be supported is very low and equates to only a few nights per telescope per year.

There is a joint OPTICON/ASTRONET review, co-chaired by J. Drew and J. Bergeron, underway for which the Terms of Reference have already been circulated. The list of potential panel members is being circulated for agreement. JKD has no idea of the likely outcome and can imagine several possible scenarios, e.g. a) a club to entitle users to a share of nights; b) bilateral time swapping activity; c) a sort of sale and leaseback arrangement. However, JKD feels it is important for work to continue on the OPTICON programme rather than waiting for the outcome of the review.

A detailed proposal is required to be sent to the EU by the end of September 2008. JKD

reported that he has received input from JRA/NAs on how they are going to cut their programme to fit the budget and hopefully we can achieve the same at today's meeting for the Access Programme. OPTICON had hoped for a 4 year contract but at the I3 NET meeting on 1st September a few things materialised:

- i) the original expectation was for I3's to apply for a 4 year grant
- ii) a mid FP7 "top up" funding of existing I3s was expected but there has been a change of emphasis within the EU and the final call may be restricted to existing I3s OR a mixture of old/new.
- iii) there may be the possibility of reducing the duration of the contract from 4 years to 3 as budgets have been cut.
- iv) some of the I3's are offering 'cut price' access by subsidising the process. A number of I3 coordinators are upset by this although the EU appears to think it is a good idea. The I3 NET tried to send clear message that this is not a sustainable policy.
- v) The plans for next I3 call will be reviewed by the EU on September 26th.

The meeting discussed a cut to a 3 year programme and JKD pointed out there was some risk the funds would not be spent in time. JKD also has the impression the above considerations for FP7, such as cutting the programme short, are uncertain and we may know more by end of the year.

- Status of Northstar and options.

UKIRT, TBL and OHP are using Northstar for proposal submission and a version that is compatible with ING and NOT is being worked on. UKIRT and RadioNet are also using the TAC support module and it can be brought online for the French telescopes soon. The next TAC process starts in a month's time so Northstar probably can't be up and running at ING in that timeframe but testing can start and then it can be rolled out in April. Travel money can probably be used to fund this activity until the end of year. JKD warned against doing too much at the same time; he would like to get the ING module sorted first. IS said it hasn't been discussed for the Liverpool Telescope but they already manage 3 separate sets of applications so he felt positive.

- FP7 Access Office options

Regards running the Access Office under FP7: ING noted their interest in running it on a cost-neutral basis i.e. charge the programme what it cost. CB commented there has been a reduction in the resources available from OPTICON. However it has been decided that 1FTE @ €60k will be supported by OPTICON and ING continue to be very interested in doing it.

5) Options for FP7 + decision on the contract details

JKD's mail of 25-July-08 included some proposals and he invited the meeting attendees to provide better ones. There was considerable discussion of these proposals.

The following points were agreed:

We will not break the link between user fees and travel grants. Instead we will consider the suggestion of JA that we should transfer money into enhancement if we want to support users with only travel grants.

We will predefine a split of resources between night and solar telescopes based on the

split in FP6. The solar telescopes could allocate as they want.

There was an agreement to fund runs allocated in 2009A even though this ran across the FP6/FP7 boundary.

It was decided to adopt a flat spending profile over 3 years. The meeting agreed to initially adopt the 6 annual nights x 4m class and 14 x 2m class telescope model (it was noted from past experience in practice the larger telescopes probably will not deliver).

The meeting discussed applying a common TAC, possibly in conjunction with a Northstar version which may or may not be used by the telescopes for their national TAC processes. It was agreed to use the present "own TAC" model for 2009A and 2009B before introducing a new system based around a common TAC from 2010A. The 2010 semester starts in February 2010 so if the allocation process is changed the details have to be decided by September 2009.

For the longer term, using a common TAC and allowing user fees to follow the allocations, the meeting discussed capping nights and safeguards to prevent one telescope soaking up the entire programme. The process will have to be defined in a way that prevents this and nevertheless keeps the scientific market process operating as much as possible. CG and MD noted there were two kinds of proposals (regular ones, or survey type) and a lot of resources could be swallowed up by the bigger telescopes. JKD stated that it depends on how the Terms of Reference of the TAC are written, and this will have to include things like balance between telescopes.

5.b) Training part of FP7

Lots of I3's include training programmes. OPTICON is allowed to carry out 'training' but should not attempt to duplicate work done under Marie Curie programme. There is a separate OPTICON training budget for this activity although it has to work in tandem with the TNA programme. The activity cannot take undergraduates but can accept e.g. PhD students and PDRA's.

MD described the situation under FP6 where the "enhancement" activity received a small amount of support which it was hoped would be ramped up under FP7 to include, for example, more Eastern European inclusion; lectures in hot topics in astronomy in Eastern Universities; training in new techniques like integral field spectroscopy or adaptive optics; and advisers paid to help with telescope runs. In collaboration with the telescopes such a proposal was submitted under FP7. It costs about €50k for a school to be run at a telescope (some are more some are less).

At the Board Meeting early July, this activity was cut by two thirds and now amounts to €200k over the 4 years of the FP7 programme. This amounts to just 4 schools i.e. less than what was funded under FP6. MD asked what the meeting thought was the best way to proceed i.e. where should he put the emphasis in FP7 as he has to write a new work programme by the end of the month.

JA suggested an extra €50K of Access money be used to fund people's travel for observing time where people are not funded by the normal Access Programme arrangements.

MD asked whether telescopes would offer time for free to help with teaching process as he would like a formal response. JA stated that this would be difficult in the current framework.

If MD wants to have any new type of activities under FP7, he can only schedule a school every two years with the presently available budget. JKD commented that MD should plan on spending the money in the first two and half years and assess the situation at that point as the project will know a lot more by then. JKD warned against being a pessimist and said specifics could be talked about later on. MD noted that he thought a school should also be held at the solar telescopes but this was not budgeted at the moment. In summary:

- At the moment telescope time cannot be given for free
- €50k will be transferred to 'enhancement' to assist in observer training
- This activity will continue to be done in close contact with the TDF

6) Future of the TDF in FP7 (JKD)

i) Assuming there will be a TDF under FP7, JKD offered to hand the Chair over to someone else. This will be made an agenda item at the first meeting in FP7. JA warned against leaving a gap in the management so JKD will stay in charge until next meeting and everyone should prepare their thoughts. For example:

- ii) Do we want to expand the programme (e.g. invite "non-Access Programme" directors)? JA said the TDF should stay as it is and if Drew/Bergeron recommendations change the structure, we can respond accordingly.
- iii) Should the TDF have an EAS representative? JKD suggested asking EAS to suggest someone and MD agreed to ask EAS at JENAM (he will ask unofficially at the moment). There is a precedent for such a representative, as long as it is someone who will contribute.
- iv) CV stated it would be good to use the TDF to talk about the individual facilities and use it as an opportunity to share information and ideas, plans and problems and as a way of finding partners, communities and collaborators. CV thought that sharing information was part of the initial plan and JKD stated that it always was an objective. IS agreed that just sharing information about telescopes would be helpful. JA commented that it would necessitate a two-day meeting. At the next TDF, it would be useful to have a review of all telescopes to help in being organised for FP7. The meeting agreed that holding a TDF in proximity to the NAM meeting in Hertfordshire in April 09 would be useful and JKD will canvas dates close to this time and allow non-telescope directors the opportunity to attend presentations on Europe's medium sized telescopes. These kinds of presentations could also be scheduled as one of the half-day sessions at NAM and therefore JKD will talk to J. Drew.

Action 2 All – prepare comments on the future management of the TDF by the next forum

7) AOB

JKD read email from GG to the meeting which asked the meeting members not to contact J. Drew directly regarding the telescope review but to direct any correspondence through GG.

8) Next meeting

In principle we will plan to hold the next TDF close to NAM; JKD will speak to J. Drew – it may be that presentations can be fitted into the formal programme or a day either side.

Action 3 JKD – canvas for dates for next TDF in proximity to NAM meeting in Herts in April 09 and speak to J. Drew

-- Meeting ended 2.30 p.m --