

Minutes of OPTICON Telescope Directors Forum
Wednesday 3rd October 2007
Divani Acropolis Hotel, Athens, Greece

1	J Davies [Chair]	14	J Burgos
2	S Brierley [mins]	15	A Oscoz
3	B Gelly	16	P Boumis
4	M Dennefeld	17	C Goudis
5	F Bettonvil	18	C Veillet
6	J Andersen	19	D Kiselman
7	J Melnick	20	R Rutten
8	B. Nordstrom	21	G Tautvaisiene
9	G Davis	22	A Katsiyannis
10	R Cabanac	23	P Hantzios
11	S Ryder	24	J Alves
12	I Steele	25	R Schlichenmaier
13	E Oliva		

1) Apologies and Introductions

M. Boer (OHP) apologised that he could not attend, and would be represented by M. Dennefeld

Prof Goudis from the NOA welcomed everybody to Athens.

The meeting began at 9a.m.

2) Adoption of agenda

JKD asked if anything needed to be added to the agenda. The agenda as circulated was adopted.

3) Minutes and Actions from last meeting (JKD)

JKD asked if anyone had anything to add. There being nothing to add the minutes of the last meeting were formally accepted.

The Actions from the last TDF meeting September 2006 were reviewed:

Action 1 2006. No-one has asked for early payments. Closed

Action 2 2006. No new publicity ideas had been forwarded to IAC. Closed

Action 3 2006. New allocation Table was circulated. Closed

Action 4 2006. Some Northstar meetings took place around Christmas and Summer. Closed

Regards Action 4, M Dennefeld reported that the French Observatories, Haut Provence and the TBL at Pic Du Midi, have adopted NorthStar for the present call and CFHT may adopt it in

the future. JKD said feedback on the adoption of NorthStar by these observatories will be welcomed.

Action 1. NorthStar feedback to be provided – M Dennefeld

A NorthStar Workshop will be held in Italy 19th – 21st November. It will be a technical working meeting on the implementation and installation of NorthStar.

Action 2. JKD will forward message regards NorthStar workshop

Action 5 2006. Training is supported by the Board. Michel Dennefeld and Paul Garcia are investigating it how this can be done in FP7 under the new rules. Closed

Regards Action 5, the Board Meeting in Corfu in September were strongly supportive of the training aspects of OPTICON and J Davies stated that this aspect of the programme will have some priority in FP7.

4) Accession of Aristarcos. (JM)

J Melnick said the opinion of the working group was that it will be difficult to decide on the accession of the Aristarcos telescope to FP6 since the first observing period will run May - July 2008 with the call for proposals in November 2007. It will not be possible to open Aristarcos to the community through the Access programme until the first semester results are seen. It may, however, be possible to have an assessment by August 2008 although this is getting close to end of the year.

C Goudis gave a presentation on Aristarcos and said that he hoped it would be possible to provide access to Aristarcos before the end of 2008 to enable it's inclusion in an FP7 programme.

J Melnick highlighted the issue of eligibility for people who do not apply under the normal process but who get time automatically because they contribute instruments. JKD stated he thought this guaranteed time would fail on the basis of the at EU rules requiring open competition. J Burgos commented that from his point of view also such users are not eligible.

The TDF agreed to revisit the issue of the accession of Aristarcos in August 2008 and, if the May – July period of observing goes well, there will be a month's notice to advertise the telescope for the September call for proposals deadline.

5) Progress with the 2006 EC payments (JKD) + statistics for 2007.

JKD has been assured that the EC payments for the full 2006 refund will arrive soon but unfortunately there have been administrative delays in the payment process taking place between Brussels and Cambridge. This does not reflect any fundamental underlying problem with the report. If the Telescope Directors require bridging finances until such time as the payments arrive then please let the Project Office know.

Action 3. Telescope Directors to advise OPTICON Project Office if any monies are required in advance of the full 2006 payments.

6) Development of a proposed spending profile for the rest of FP6.

J Davies has provided figures of how many nights the telescopes within the programme will be under-subscribed in 2008, based on average figures from the preceding years. The forum reviewed the figures. TBL has recently had an increase in OPTICON qualifying proposals in the last round and they expect to deliver the remaining nights in 2008. The ESO telescopes, however, have had a reduced number of eligible proposals as only non-ESO members qualify for time on ESO telescopes, a situation exacerbated by the accession of the UK and Spain to ESO. J Melnick commented that during the last call for proposals only two eligible OPTICON

proposals were received and that he considers this to be a failure of the programme to deliver to non-ESO member countries. The meeting discussed the allocation of the unspent ESO funds and J Melnick stated that it is up to the OPTICON Board to decide what to do. J Davies said that the FP6 Co-ordinator G. Gilmore has informed him that the TDF forum can re-allocate the funds within the Network should it decide to do so. If it is decided to re-allocate the unspent funds, the TDF is required to determine a plan of action which will be outlined in the January 2008 Annual Report for the EU. Ian Steele on behalf of the LT raised no objections to a re-allocation of unspent LT funds, but J Melnick did not accept the diversion of ESO funds to other telescopes as he still hopes sufficient qualifying proposals will be received.

JB reported that there remains a significant amount of unspent travel money, partly due to the reduced number on ESO nights meaning that fewer expensive trips are being made than at first thought. Regards spending this travel money a second observer could be supported in exceptional cases and this could be advertised in the last year (2008). JB agreed that this has been done in the case of solar telescopes.

Action 4. J Melnick to confirm ESO position regards unspent Access funds and provide estimate of reasonable access numbers for 2008

In order to address the ESO situation the TDF discussed relaxing certain rules such as where the team, rather than the PI, applying for access time were from non-ESO countries. It was pointed out that if rules were relaxed then this needs to be reviewed across all telescopes and additionally it will be difficult to change it back in FP7. On this basis the TDF agreed not to change the rules. J Andersen commented that including the travel budget there is approximately €750k unspent and, without prejudicing any decisions we make in the future, the money could be reallocated to nights already scheduled but which are not presently expected to get OPTICON money. J Davies agreed that the Telescope Directors should inform him of their schedules so that he can review the allocations. Half the uncommitted funds could be reallocated for the current semester and half in the 2008 semester.

Further to confirmation of the ESO situation, the summary of the plan of action is as follows:-

1. Start paying for qualifying runs already allocated
2. J Davies will review the schedule for allocating the unspent travel budget. The numbers for all the telescopes will be revised based on the minimum contracted value for each telescope (i.e. an across the board % increase)
3. J Davies to provide everyone with some revised figures in the next few weeks and then let them know by Spring 2008 what readjustments are required for the 2nd semester 2008

Action 5. J Davies to provide revised allocations estimates for each telescope

7) Update on EU progress towards FP7. (JKD)

J Davies gave an update on progress of I3-type activities towards FP7:

I3-type activities will continue in FP7 so OPTICON can continue as it is. The FP7 call is expected to open on 15th November 2007 and the deadline is 15th February 2008 for contracts lasting 4 years. There will be a second call 2 years later and a third call about 3 years later. The preliminary bids are for 4-year contracts and only those successful will be invited to bid for an extra 3 year award in the third call.

The EU are assuming current activities will apply to continue under FP7 and typical I3s will have less than 20 members and have budgets of less than 5million Euro. The budget envelope is quite tight and there will also be more competition from presently unfunded areas.

During the Mid Term Review Board meeting held in Corfu in September 2007 a separate FP7 meeting was held and it was broadly agreed to proceed on the same basis as under FP6. By mid-November 2007 a costed FP7 plan needs to be provided. The EU cost model system will

change (although this has limited effect on the access programme except where dedicated staff are involved) and the Access user fee system will change whereby an estimated user fee will be provided to the EU at contract start and then be adjusted later on the basis of post facto audited costs. The implication is that costs must be justified over the period of the contract. J Davies encouraged the TDF to read the EC paper circulated in preparation for this meeting, entitled 'Draft Guide to Financial Issues relating to FP7 Indirect Actions'.

The FP7 plan needs to be agreed in late January 2008 however there needs to be a reasonable draft plan in place in 8 weeks and the process for achieving this is what needs to be done today.

7.1 Summary of Discussion Papers

- Development of an FP7 Access Programme

J Davies asked each of those who distributed a paper in advance of this meeting to summarise it, beginning with his own discussion paper entitled 'Development of an FP7 Access Programme'. Rationalisation of Europe's telescopes is, in J Davies opinion, not something that has been achieved under FP6 and therefore he has some suggestions for changes to be made under FP7. Additional items worthy of note are:-

- training of existing telescope users will be encouraged in FP7 and will be listed for separate funding in our proposal.
- due to the lack of take up amongst Central European countries, J Davies invited Grazina Tautvaisiene, Director of Vilnius University Research Institute of Theoretical Physics and Astronomy in Lithuania, to today's meeting to help define a plan to tackle this situation.

J Davies subsequently ran through his financial estimates for FP7 and his suggestions for the proposed number of telescopes that could be considered for funding. J Davies stressed that a decision on how to proceed given the funding scenarios outlined needs to be made by the end of this meeting.

M. Dennefeld noted that setting an a-priori number of telescopes to be included in the FP7 proposal was in contradiction with a selection based on the competitiveness of the telescopes and/or the quality of their instrumentation.

It was asked whether the Telescope Network activity could learn anything from RadioNet – for example the inclusion of Central and Eastern European countries. G Davis pointed out that there was no discussion on Eastern Europe at the RadioNet Board meeting which he attends. In FP6 when the proposal was developed, a small subcommittee was set up and proposals for inclusion in the TNA network evaluated - the same will be done for FP7.

- An OPTICON-TAC for the FP7 Access Program

Regarding whether an overarching TAC was required, E Oliva explained that the Common TAC he proposed would look at how the recommendations, e.g. from a 'Scientific Council' can be met. J Davies commented that essentially it was intended to operate as a normal TAC process - with the proviso that the panel may switch an application to another telescope. The members discussed this issue of reassignment and noted that it does not always work.

- Common Optical Observatory

J Andersen discussed his paper 'The Scope of the OPTICON Access Programme and Tasks for the Telescope Directors Forum' and explained that in FP7 his angle is different as his involvement in ASTRONET affects his approach. The key question, looking at equipment for European astronomy in the future, is how do you guarantee that facilities will be available? What telescopes will be available in the next 10-15 years? He envisaged a scheme where several 2-4m telescopes would be run as a consortium within a common observatory that would have a common TAC. The driver for this approach is to secure scientific needs and the future of the telescopes. He proposed dealing with the big issues in two steps – proposing

access in FP7 for the first two years, then reviewing and planning the reorganisation of the network for the last two years

- An appraisal of the instrumental set-up in northern telescopes

M Dennefeld presented his analysis of the present instrumental situation and outlined his vision of trying to achieve coordination of instrumentation, rather than systematically closing telescopes. This means reducing the number of instruments offered at a given telescope, but does not mean avoiding all duplication, as the scientific pressure factor may require more than one instrument of a given type. Rationalisation will be a difficult task.

Following the above presentations, J Davies presented his 'to do' list for this Network activity to take forward.

It was stated that OPTICON's FP7 objectives might not overlap with the long term vision of some funding agencies, which links to the ASTRONET process. OPTICON could be a trigger for European integration but it is the funding agencies themselves who will have to achieve it. J Davies said he believes that a properly structured 'integrated system proposal' might get them motivated to do this. M. Dennefeld said that the TDF should elaborate his own views about the future organisation of the medium-sized telescopes and make it known to the agencies and to ASTRONET: this is the only way to have an influence in the process.

J Andersen stated that it was important to get the right wording within the ASTRONET Road Map. The proposed Common Optical Observatory approach could help in so far as funding might come out of the general research funds and/or private, university funds, etc, with the effect of reducing the hard-wired connection in the agencies between the funding for construction and operation of the largest new facilities and operating costs for existing smaller ones.

R Rutten stated that there was a need to demonstrate that this activity is prepared to make decisions in view of the rationalisation vision, align the Access Programme and provide input into the ASTRONET Road Map.

M Dennefeld leads a separate EU contract for practical training called NEON within the Marie Curie programme and there is a separate Interferometry MC programme. At present the main part of the funding comes from MC programmes, but in FP7 the MC programme will not support large schools or workshops. It is therefore possible that all the funding will have to come from the OPTICON network. G Tautvaisiene commented that few people are accepted from Lithuania into the NEON schools but M. Dennefeld replied that the acceptance rate depended on the number of applicants and there were extremely few applicants from Lithuania. He stated that the NEON programs are giving a large preference to candidates from Eastern Europe in general, and try to achieve the largest possible diversity in nationalities of the participants. As the NEON programme will be inbuilt into the OPTICON programme in the future, ways of broadening publicity can be looked at.

Following a question of J. Melnick, M Dennefeld commented that the impact of the NEON programme is evaluated through questionnaires and by previous students taking up scientific posts. However, how the community evaluates the success of these schools remains an important question.

Action 6. All: Suggest ways that the success of NEON schools can be evaluated.

--**-- LUNCH BREAK --**--

- J Davies continued going through his 'To Do' list.

J Davies proposed that subscribing to a common TAC would be a condition of belonging to the FP7 Access Programme. J Andersen commented that the commitment to provide time is inherent in the contract but J Davies would like a single common TAC rather than multiple national TACs in order to influence policy in the best interests of European astronomy. As

telescope allocation periods differ, there is a potential scheduling difficulty but the people in overall control are the respective Telescope Directors. It may also be possible to have the time allocation process operate earlier than the national TACs. In response to this, B Nordstrom pointed out that users may try to apply twice, especially if one particular telescope was wanted. J Davies said he could see all these potential difficulties but they could be ironed out. For adequate feedback to the national funding agencies, a representative from each would sit on the common OPTICON TAC. M. Dennefeld stressed that the main reason for a common TAC was to ensure a homogeneous treatment of all eligible applicants, irrespective of nationality or language differences, which foreign users are usually not able to appreciate well or address properly. It would also make it more appealing for first users to apply, especially if linked to a common proposal form.

G Davis commented that the logic for adopting a common TAC rests on whether the TDF might want to apply different time allocation criteria than the national TACs. The TDF might, for example, decide to favour Central and Eastern European proposals, which a national TAC could not do. If the TDF wants to have the ability to adopt different time allocation criteria during FP7, then a common TAC would be the logical means for doing so.

J Andersen professed he was sceptical; while he could live with a common TAC, he was not sure it was a step forward. He sends the formal list of those approved and those not approved for access time, to the Access Programme every year and he does not believe it would involve an extra administrative step for the Access Programme to overturn a decision. In this case, however, the committee would have to go against the scientific ranking already awarded.

In support of the common TAC, M Dennefeld said that as the ultimate goal is the long term integration of the telescopes, it seems to him a first step towards this. J Alves agreed it was a step in the right direction although in the short term he believes it will create an extra administrative overhead.

J Davies asked that the TDF at least identify all the potential problems. If the plan ultimately does not win approval, the Telescope Network will have to go back to drawing board.

Action 7. All – identify all perceived problems regards common TAC
Action 8. All – ask their Agencies if they want to be involved in the Common TAC and, if so, what their criteria are

B. J Davies asked the Solar Telescope representatives how they felt about being split from the night-time astronomy programme and becoming more self contained. The situation has changed since FP6 as there is an FP7 proposal for a Design Study for a large European solar telescope and O vd Luhe has put forward a proposal for an OPTICON solar network in FP7. B Gelly said he was in favour of what J Davies was proposing regards a common TAC and felt it was possible for them. He also believes a Common Proposal Tool would easily be put into practice. J Davies stated he was happy to keep solar telescopes within the group, especially if they welcomed the move towards a common proposal tool, but was unsure if this was their vision. R Schlichenmaier stated he was not aware of moves to encourage separation of solar from night-time telescopes and does not see the point of not being included within the wider Access Programme. J Davies stated that he was happy with their decision.

In response to the possible rationalisation of telescopes within the programme, J Andersen agreed that a small panel is formed and suggested Roland Gredel to head it up. M Dennefeld commented that strong, standard, criteria were necessary to be able to make any decisions. I Steele also stated that transparency of the process was imperative which J Davies agreed was critical. J Davies proposed that the TDF would converge on the panel and the criteria in a couple of weeks and therefore everyone should mail their suggestions for proposed panel members.

The steps to instigate the process to define the Telescope Network are as follows:

1. Action, see above, for Telescope Directors to ask the Agencies if they want to be involved in the Common TAC and, if so, what their criteria are
2. Telescope Directors to provide suggestions to John Davies regards who should be approached to form a small panel to conduct a peer approval process on the medium telescopes (panel to be approved by the Executive Committee).
3. Telescope Directors to provide suggestions for criteria panel should apply; i.e. what the terms of reference should be
4. The Telescope Network already uses a compliance matrix and this should be checked against existing members.

Action 9. All – send suggestions regards Review Panel members and criteria for the proposed rationalisation of member telescopes

Action 10. G Davis – supply the RadioNet questions for inclusion in terms of reference

C Goudis commented he did not see why we should decrease the number of telescopes. J Davies stated that in his opinion the number of telescopes needs to fall in order to get leverage by contributing more funds to fewer telescopes, but this may not be everyone's opinion.

The members discussed the possibility of other European telescopes wanting to be included in the programme and J Andersen stated he did not believe this was a good idea for time being. G Davis reported that RadioNet took the decision to invite people some time ago and for OPTICON to now do the same would appear to be too short-notice. It was agreed that other telescopes will not be invited to join in just now but we will establish another Network of small telescopes to let them meet and justify their inclusion in a co-ordinated programme some time in the future.

M Dennefeld commented that some telescopes were not as competitive as they could be as they did not currently have adequate instrumentation. J Melnick remarked that if a telescope could not be competitive, it should not be in the programme. M. Dennefeld reminded that the compliance matrix was established by/for large institutions/telescopes and was not easily directly applicable to some observatories with only one, smaller telescope to offer. On the other hand, the matrix was not including the instrumentation, although what was primordial was the quality of the offered instrumentation and also its filling a niche not covered somewhere else. One should therefore not just consider the number of telescopes to be included, but have a broader, long term view of the scientific needs.

J Andersen suggested a two stage adoption procedure of the rationalisation proposal: A/ accept the principle that halfway through the first grant we might remove some telescopes if a plan for rationalisation is prepared e.g. based on the ASTRONET roadmap, for example, have defined rules regarding small telescopes. B/continually re-evaluate the network as some telescopes may change their status and availability for internal reasons.

J Melnick asked if the Common Proposal Tool i.e. NorthStar was compatible with service observing? J Davies said that he would confirm that the CPT supported service observing.

Action 11. J Davies – confirm that NorthStar supports service observing

J Davies stated that his hope was that the take-up of NorthStar was successful and that other telescopes will want to adopt it for their own use. This would mean that the maintenance can then be shared between a larger group of telescopes. If, in the future, there is a dedicated OPTICON TAC, then a Common Proposal Tool would be mandatory.

Funding for FP7: J Davies warned that there may be a period of a year when there will be no assurance of funded access. Assuming the proposal is submitted to the EU in February 2008 then the contract should be in place by January 2009, but experience shows that delays are likely. In this case the proposal would probably be back dated to 1 January 2009 but there is

the risk in embarking on work without an approved contract. There was general agreement amongst the meeting members that the risk be carried.

ASTRONET road map: Regards the ASTRONET aim to build a Road map for the infrastructure needed to implement the European Science Vision for Astronomy for the next 20 years, M Deneffeld asked about the plan to influence the ASTRONET road map and the meeting members discussed this issue. It was agreed that the TDF should coordinate a response to the draft ASTRONET roadmap before the Liverpool symposium in June 2008.

Action 12. J. Davies- Co-ordinate input for the ASTRONET Roadmap

G Tautvaisiene said that Eastern European telescopes would like to make a submission. J Andersen stated that the planned review should be of the existing programme, in order to make sure they still all make the requirements. Once this review is completed, a network could be set up to review the future role of other European telescopes during the first FP7 contract and prepare a proposal for the next OPTICON submission in 4 years time.

The meeting members agreed that an arbitrary cut-off based on telescope size will not be applied to existing telescopes in the programme however those who feel strongly can let their views be known.

TDF and the Access Programme:

J Davies discussed the roles of the TDF Chairperson and the Access Office. The IAC do not wish to continue running the Access Programme so all Telescope Directors are being asked if they would like to take on this role from 2009 onwards.

Action 13. All – inform J Davies if interested in running the Access Office from 2009 onwards and how much it would cost to administer.

Action 14. J Burgos will circulate document with Access Office tasks

J Davies offered a new model in which the Access programme could be run by an individual on a day to day basis. This person might have to provide, either directly or via another partner, the functions currently carried out by the Access Office. This division of tasks would give a restructured TDF more time to concentrate on plan for ASTRONET, instrument rationalisation, role of European telescopes, etc. It was up to the TDF to choose the administration of the network. In the first place the model needs to be decided and the running costs roughly budgeted but who will carry out these duties does not have to be named in the Proposal.

It was agreed that the issue of maintaining the link between travel grants and user fees, or the risk in breaking it, is a decision that should not be made now but considered in the Proposal for the future.

Action 15. J Davies – write draft FP7 proposal with support from J Andersen

9) E-star, a potential FP7 activity (Paper 9)

The meeting members discussed the eSTAR project, a client scheduling system which is implemented as a service on LT, Faulkes telescopes etc, and whether there was support in the TDF for its implementation on OPTICON telescopes. I Steele is an investigator on this project so he declared a conflict of interest. He was however asked to briefly explain the purpose of this software and explained that the software is an advantage to the user in that they can schedule the run remotely. G Davis also said he highly recommends this programme. eSTAR are proposing a further 3 years to deliver eSTAR and VOEvent facilities to OPTICON.

E Oliva said he did not believe it should be implemented now and J Andersen agreed that in his opinion the Telescope Network has a severely constrained budget so he does not believe eSTAR should have priority.

The consensus was that this software is specifically addressing an operation mode, the rapid response to the trigger of a target of opportunity, which is not the main problem at most of the telescopes in the Network, and would fit easily into fully remotely operated telescopes only. It should thus not be a priority.

J Davies concluded that e-star does not fit with the network model at this point in time, but those who operate telescopes in Queue mode have now been appraised of it and may wish to buy into it somehow.

10) AOB + DONM

J Davies asked the meeting members if they required another meeting before the TAC meetings in mid-2008. J Andersen suggested a meeting was held before the ASTRONET Infrastructure Roadmap symposium in Liverpool in June 2008. The draft Roadmap is scheduled to become available in March 2008 and the meeting members agreed to a meeting in early May 2008. This will give the TDF time to influence the ASTRONET Roadmap, but it will be too late to influence the OPTICON proposal for FP7.

G Tautvaisiene said that a letter of intent would be submitted for the Vilnius Observatory to join OPTICON FP7. She also offered to host the next meeting in Vilnius.

J Davies thanked the local organisers. He advised those going to visit the Aristarchos telescope the next morning that the minibuses would be leaving from the hotel at 9a.m.

The meeting ended at 6.45p.m.