

OPTICON Telescope Directors Meeting

28 October 2009

Niels Bohr Institute, Copenhagen

Attendees:		
Andersen, Johannes	Davis, Gary [by telecon]	Melnick, Jorge
Balcells, Marc	Dennefeld, Michel	Molinari, Emilio
Boumis, Panayotis	Goudis, Christos	Oscoz, Alejandro
Brierley, Saskia [Minutes]	Gredel, Roland	Steele, Iain
Cabanac, Remi	Kiselman, Dan	Veillet, Christian
Davies, John [Chair]	Krautter, Joachim [EAS Observer]	
Apologies: J Alves, F Bettonvil, M Colless, M Boer, C Benn		

1) Welcome, Logistics and Apologies

J Davies welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked J Andersen for arranging the logistics and hospitality and gave apologies on behalf of those who were unable to attend. J Davies also introduced M Balcells, the new director of ING, and J Krautter, the nominated Observer from the EAS.

3) Minutes and Actions

The minutes of the last meeting held at the University of Hertfordshire on 21 April 2009 were accepted.

Actions from last meeting:

1. J Davies to contact J Alves

Done. This was with regard to assuming the position of Chair of the TDF. See items 4) & 13) of the Agenda.

2. JKD and Access Office to advise users and potential users of the reason for the delay in supplying travel grants

Done

3. JKD to find and review Terms of Reference

Done. See item 5) of the Agenda.

4. JKD to gather missing powerpoints and make available to ETSRC

Done.

5. JKD to set up sub-committee to draft ToR and procedures

Done.

6. JKD – canvas for dates for next TDF

Done.

4) Provision of a Chairman for this Meeting.

J Alves was unable to accept the nomination to assume the Chair of the TDF and it was agreed that as J Davies prepared the current meeting that he should chair it.

5) Adoption of the TDF rules and procedures (PAPER)

The existing rules have been circulated. These were drawn up, based on the board and executive rules, in early FP6. The forum discussed them to decide if they were adequate for FP7.

- *With regard to membership, J Davies asked if it was felt there was still the right mix of people or should we change.*

It was felt that the membership was adequate for the time being. Once 2-4m telescopes were reviewed then the membership might change. In terms of an observer, it was suggested the observer could be anyone not representing an infrastructure, not necessarily the EAS. J Andersen suggested we write EAS into the ToR as there was no obvious suitable alternative.

In terms of reporting back to the communities that don't have infrastructures, J Krautter advised that he would report to the EAS Council and could write a small report in the EAS newsletter. M Dennefeld agreed with J Krautter but that advertising the forum in such a way did not relieve the TDF of doing more publicity as well. J Davies reported that he had attended an Infrastructures Meeting organised by the nuclear/particle community yesterday in Lund. At that meeting there was general agreement that a lack of information amongst potential users about available infrastructures was the largest single barrier to trans-national access.

- *The present rules have no provision for changing the chair but discussion at Hatfield decided a rotating chair might be worthwhile.*

The meeting discussed rotating the position of Chair, a process which should not be allowed to impact the programme. It was agreed the Chair should be on a 2-year rotating, renewable basis and nominations would be canvassed for a vote at the end of this meeting. The ToR should be changed accordingly.

Action 1. All, minus the Nominees – Vote for next Chair of TDF at the conclusion of this meeting

- *Decisions of the Forum*

Section 4: Decisions of the Forum, states that *'the Forum shall be competent to take decisions if at least half of its members are present or represented at the meeting'* and *'Should a vote be necessary, a majority of two thirds of the members present or represented shall be required for a decision'*. It was agreed that a section would be inserted re applying Board and Executive rules about what to do if there is not a quorum i.e. if half the TDF members were not present or represented.

Action 2. J Davies – update the ToR in accordance with discussion under Item 5 of the agenda

6) FP6 final payment status (PAPER)

J Davies circulated the payment details for information only. The financial aspects of the final report have been accepted by the Commission and all user fees will be paid in full. At present, this final tranche of FP6 funds have not yet arrived in Cambridge for distribution.

7) Update on ETSRC process

The European Telescope Strategy Review Committee met with Agencies at the end of 2008 (Heathrow 2nd December) and undertook a consultancy period. The panel, which met most recently in Madrid on September 25th 2009, is trying to map the Astronet science vision onto Europe's 2-4m telescopes in order to produce a list of capabilities required to deliver that vision. J Davies was in attendance at the meeting and summarised his notes. Each member of the ETSRC panel has been asked to expand on one of the five key important capabilities. Additionally, J Davies has been tasked to provide input on operational models and to compile a single list of facilities suitable for inclusion in the ETSRC document. Although based on a spreadsheet prepared some time ago this list is to be expanded and updated and for this he would value input from all TDF members. Further to the compilation of the input from the sub-groups tasked with 'fleshing out' the capabilities, ETSRC will draft a report for distribution to the Agencies in the next 6 weeks or so, prior to the official report to Astronet.

The meeting members agreed that it would be useful to hold an interim TDF meeting as soon as the agencies have been passed the ETSRC report as it will be available for public comment after the agencies see it.

Action 3. All - TDF members to check the facilities information in infrastructures matrix provided is correct – by end of Nov.

J Davies will ask Janet Drew if the ETSRC document will be circulated to the TDF before its submission to the agencies and when the consultation process will include the TDF.

Action 4. J Davies – double-check the ETSRC consultation period and reporting process with J Drew

Action 5. J Andersen - further to the ETSRC report being available for review by TDF members a TDF Meeting should be arranged

8) FP7 Status:

In particular:

8.1 Status of Access Office:

ING accepted responsibility for the FP7 Access Office however due to the resignation of J-P Garcia, Juan-Martinez, Head of Administration, has assumed the role until such a time as the final form of the FP7 programme, and therefore the requirements of the Access Office, are decided.

8.2 Status of Aristarchos:

C Goudis gave a brief update on the status of Aristarchos. A problem with light contamination was discovered inside the instrument for which Zeiss accepted responsibility - however while a fix was put in place there is still some residual contamination. There have also been delays in repairing a number of minor glitches, e.g. with encoders, so the facility is still in 'engineering mode'.

The TDF reaffirmed its decision that the review of the Aristarchos telescope called for by the FP6 referees should still be carried out under FP7 and are waiting for

Aristarchos to inform them they are fully ready in order to complete the review process. A potential problem is the lack of a commitment by higher authority to the provision of local technical staff. C Goudis would like the availability of in situ permanent technical staff to be made a condition of inclusion in the programme and J Davies agreed that it could be put in writing that a reasonable level of support for the telescope would be expected.

The original Aristarchos review committee comprised R Gredel, J Melnick and R Rutten however it was agreed I Steele would now join the committee in place of R Rutten, when the telescope announces it is fully ready.

Action 6. J Davies to think about what to put in writing re technical support requirements for Aristarchos' eventual accession to Programme.

Action 7. The telescope director to inform Review Committee (I Steele; R Gredel; J Melnick) when fully ready for review.

8.3 Requirements to convert estimated audit fees to actual costs.

Unlike in FP6 where a user fee was agreed in advance and used throughout the programme, such estimated costs will not be accepted by the EC in FP7. J Davies has spent a lot of time trying to clarify how the EC's requirements for real costs to be paid in FP7 will be implemented. In the underlying EC thinking, user fees will be re-evaluated and adjustments made at the end of the programme once audits (or other cost validation mechanisms) have been done. This poses a budgetary problem for OPTICON as a whole if the eventual real costs are significantly more than anticipated. J Davies has circulated the TNA Access rules (Annex III to the EC contract) and a note based on a long telecon with an EC expert.. There are several different interpretations of the EC contract text, therefore if anyone has serious concerns now is a good time to discuss them with the EC and have the chance to withdraw from the access programme before it's too late. J Davies believes the sensible course of action is to re-evaluate one's user costs by filling out the TA1 form and see how it comes out against the one supplied in the proposal. The executive has asked that all the telescopes do this at the end of 2009 in order that the project as a whole can get a better overview of the financial commitments being run up by the access programme. We believe that the EC will take the revised TA1 on trust as a validation of the 'real costs' but on the understanding they might carry out external audits in the future. If such an audit is called, evidence that the user fee methodology has already been validated by an external person might be extremely helpful. Therefore J Davies recommends that this early re-evaluation of the TA1 form be done in consultation with an auditor or other financial official in order to demonstrate that the methodology being used is valid.

Action 8. Directors to re-evaluate their TA-1 form using real costs for 2009

Note that every time the total costs declared by a contractor over the whole OPTICON programme (ie including JRA and networks) exceed 375K a formal audit-like process will be triggered. At this point the financial counter is reset at '0' and another audit is not required until the costs reach 375K again. However, for small partners, e.g. some of our telescopes, this requirement for a formal audit may never be triggered and the revised TA1 form may be all that is ever required.

8.4 FP7 Advance

In FP6, each agency received 80% of planned spending over 18 months then each subsequent 12 months this figure was re-evaluated. With a few exceptions the TA directors were not advanced funds and got paid for access actually delivered after the event.

In FP7, the algorithm used by the EC for the advance is 140% of a typical years spending minus some holdbacks. The reporting periods for FP7 end in months 12, 30 and 48. (Note that the OPTICON contract is a 4-year programme but the TDF decided to run the Access programme over 3 years to make it a sensible period across which to deliver the Access programme.) The executive decided to advance 37-38% of JRA/Networks budgets but because of various uncertainties the TNA advances will only be 20%. A spreadsheet was circulated illustrating this entitled 'FP7 first advances'.

J Davies informed the meeting that Cambridge confirmed the FP7 funds arrived from the EC and have now been sent out. They should be arriving in each partners' banks shortly.

8.5 FP7 next call information and schedule

There will be several FP7 calls and the one applying to us will most likely be in winter of 2010. If so, following the usual timescales, the results would come out in 2011 and the contract would start beginning 2012. Our existing programme runs until 2012 so there may be an overlap, or the first contract could be terminated early. It is thus possible that if we get a new contract we can start a new programme in 2012.

At the Infrastructures meeting J Davies attended yesterday there was strong pressure from communities to continue TNA programmes. At that meeting an impressive graph was shown showing that while the access resources from FP2 onwards has risen gradually, the number of infrastructures supported has risen far more dramatically. What will happen in the second half of FP7 and FP8 is thus unclear. However, J Davies' plan is to assume success and he envisages that in the future the Access component will contain a slightly different array of telescopes in accordance with the ETSRC panel and that it will run a common TAC.

M Dennefeld commented that OPTICON will have to show significant changes in respect of the current one in the next proposal, to justify them giving us more money. J Davies agreed the FP7 part II plan is that he hopes to show it is not just business as usual but that some real structuring has taken place.

9) FP7 spend so far, what we do next and proposed allocations for 2010A given remaining budget and plans (PAPER)

J Davies circulated a spreadsheet entitled 'FP7 Access calculator' and explained that he derived the values on the assumption the common TAC would not be implemented in 2010A. J Davies asked the meeting if they agreed to carry out with business as usual in 2010A and, if so, whether the numbers were agreeable or should they be adjusted. J Andersen commented that in the interests of continuity he believes the 4/7 nights profile should remain. There was general agreement to carry on with business as usual subject to the table being correct which the meeting members will check.

Action 9. All – check figures in 'FP7 Access calculator' for accuracy

10) Update from Bulgaria conference

M Dennefeld presented the conclusions from the Bulgaria Enhancement Conference which followed an Observing school. It was a chance to present hot scientific topics to the Eastern European community. The community would like examples of successful observing proposals to aid them with their proposal submission. The meeting briefly discussed the proposals received from the Eastern European community which are often rejected because of scientific quality, although poor use of English does not help; M Dennefeld commented that his conclusion was that the common TAC would be useful to ensure fairer treatment of the Eastern European community within scientific community.

11) Switch to Common TAC operation (PAPER)

11.1 ToR. Final acceptance

J Davies commented that he was not planning on covering whether we should or shouldn't have a common TAC in this meeting as we are proceeding on the basis this has been agreed.

Q1: UK Schmidt telescope: to all intents and purposes this telescope is not at present open to regular proposals due to its commitment to RAVE. It does have a contracted number of nights under the programme that are being used to support qualifying nights within the RAVE programme. JA suggests proceeding for another semester at the current level as he doesn't see a reason for cutting membership now, The ETSRC report is the logical point for discussing membership. If the common TAC works, we will end up with different (possibly smaller) suite of telescopes. While the TDF is optimistic that the ETSRC report will propose a new operating model, the TDF will still have to make the decision whether or not to support telescopes that don't participate in the OPTICON common TAC.

Q2: If by the end of today's meeting telescopes are not going to join the common TAC process, do we still pay for nights committed by those telescopes in the contract. J Andersen commented that we should wait to see who is going to join the common TAC.

11.2 Common TAC operational model and how it will be supported.

The meeting discussed the Common TAC and perceived pros and cons. The OPTICON calls should be launched before most of the national calls go out, and certainly before schedules are made. If the Common TAC is going to happen it should have well defined rules and criteria. Currently v13 of the 'OPTICON TAC options' document is in circulation. J Davies asked the meeting to agree the set of operational rules or agree the timeline in which to decide them.

J Davies subsequently ran through the TAC Mission and ToR which the meeting then debated and clarified.

11.2. 1 The point about '*do not have access...*' should move the top paragraph.

11.2. 2 The meeting prefers a cleaner statement than '*so as to maximise the scientific value*' to say something like based on scientific merit

11.2. 3 M Balcells: phrasing of '*standard*' – the standards are very different between telescopes. Changed to '*reasonable standard*'. J Andersen – replace '*national TAC's*' with '*telescope in question*'.

11.2. 4 J Melnick: As part of the Spanish contribution to ESO the ESO community have access to 120 clear nights of Grantecan time but there are various restrictions

on what can be done. ESO have developed a new procedure whereby scientifically ranked proposals are passed to an Ad Hoc committee which selects them based on other operational, rather than scientific criteria. This could be done here i.e. by a sub-committee of this group.

It was agreed that some form of discussion (J Melnick commented that a videoconference would be preferable) should be organised to refine the TAC list, a so-called 'Final Filtering Process' (FFP) for which a report would be generated for the benefit of the OPTICON Board, I Steele was anxious that the process by which these late changes were made should be transparent in case any particular facility had a large number of highly ranked proposals which did not pass this final step. J Davies will build this extra 'FFP' step into the process and will also seek volunteers for the sub-committee.

The meeting discussed the process - M Balcells would like proposals to compete with national proposals and not be top-sliced. J Davies commented that if a proposal does not get scheduled because of a conflict that is unfortunate but that there should not be a second pass of scientific judgement by national TACs. Ultimately, however, who gets telescope time is down to the Telescope Director who must balance all the competing interests..

11.2. 5 '*No single telescope..*' – should money follow science/do popular telescopes soak up all the money? J Melnick commented the TACs are not there to distribute the money, the TACs should produce a ranked list and a cut-off to pass to the sub-set of the TDF, ref last paragraph of section 3.

Action 10. J Davies will build this extra 'FFP' step into the TAC process and will also seek volunteers from within the TDF to serve on it.

11.2. 6 Ref '*Projects must be scientifically competitive and will be ranked based on scientific Merit*' : if the meeting thinks it is a good idea to clarify what we think is 'scientific merit' – might make sense to link to a definition of how this is defined.

11.2. 7 Section 2: The members may be appointed for '*two to three*' years, not '*three to four*' as currently stated. Should the TDF appoint the Chair, or should it be 'chosen by the TAC members themselves' as currently stated? IT was agreed that the first chair would be nominated by the TDF, with the TAC then able to decide itself how it wished to proceed in the future.

The meeting discussed ways of evaluating the process to determine if the common TAC has been a success. J Andersen said criteria have to be set up to define how we know it's a success and J Davies commented that if agencies still want to participate in it, that's how we'll know.

Action 11. J Davies, All – update 'OPTICON TAC options' document wrt decisions made under item 11 of the Agenda. Once this is done circulate the document to TDF for review.

M Dennefeld commented that an independent observer should look into the 'FFP' rather than the TAC itself.

11.2. 8 It was agreed that the paragraph '*No single telescope shall be allocated more than 50% of the total user fee budget...*' was no longer an issue for the TAC and it will become an issue for the 'FFP'.

11.2. 9 Remove line *'the precise number of nights will depend...'* below the table re max number of nights (Section 1).

Most proposals can't be shunted from telescope to telescope: if it is clear that one telescope does and one doesn't have time, then the FFP can suggest the move.

11.2. 10 Section 3. Post TAC meetings process – not the *'Post TAC'* now but the *'FFP'*.

From point 4 (*'After the Runs'*) onwards, the process is as current. There are still a couple of practical things to be decided – are we going to have 1 or 2 calls per year. The meeting agreed *two*. Having the proposal system ready a month before the deadline is enough but before that shouldn't be too difficult.

If the meeting agrees to move forward with these plans, authority will have to be obtained from the Agencies in the next couple of months (see note, below. This authority can only be obtained after the *'OPTICON TAC options'* document has been formally agreed). Additionally, all the telescope directors will have to make sure people know the rules have changed for the OPTICON TAC, so the normal TACS do not get troubled with questions regards considering proposals for OPTICON funding.

Action 12. All – ask Agencies for authority re Common TAC and FFP plans (dependent on Action 11)

M Balcells commented the tool must contain a very straightforward way for telescopes to provide the necessary information on instruments available and the configuration information for the drop down menus. Otherwise maintaining Northstar will be very difficult.

11.3 Status of Northstar Tool and review tool

J Davies is happy that the tool will be available in time and sometime in January the Northstar tool will have to be signed off. John may schedule a trip to ASTRON to conduct a user acceptance.

J Davies asked if there was anything unfeasible about the schedule and whether it can be met. J Andersen reported that we need the final version of the *'OPTICON TAC options'* document to sign off on, prior to approaching the national TACs.

M Balcells asked about the maintenance of the system. J Davies reported that the baseline is that ASTRON will maintain/host the software for the initial part and following that ING/ATC will need to discuss where it is sensible to host the server. It will be paid for out of the network budget. J Davies has asked for costs/time estimates for maintenance as it is important we act quickly. This will depend on staff resource balancing. UKIRT uses Northstar; they host it in Hawaii and manage it themselves. G Davis reported it has worked very well.

11.4 Schedule for committing to scheme for 2010B

M Balcells expressed concern at the option of acceding to the common TAC being voluntary. If some telescope does not wish to commit to the programme, it may still receive proposals that qualify for funding. J Davies commented that since we have outlined a process, we should address the issue as and when it arises with those that do not want to enter the CTAC. J Andersen iterated that the money in the programme is not much and therefore it is unlikely this process is going to run away with us and it can be reconsidered after a semester. J Davies asked whether if a telescope

declines to enter the Common TAC in 2010B but receives EU qualifying proposals through another process, was it right that they should be allowed to claim money from OPTICON for these nights. The general feeling of the meeting was that they should not. This will be written into the ToR procedures document

12) Update on EAST/solar access

D Kiselman provided an update on the solar network EAST. The process of putting up a common TAC for the OPTICON and Canarian solar ITP time this year has started and it will be carried out next year as well. While the formal structure is in place the ToR and Procedures have not yet been written in the level of detail being done for the night telescopes. EAST has not finished the discussion about in what sense the common TAC will redistribute the OPTICON budget. It is, however, easier to manage this process with four telescopes sharing the same site. The point of the exercise for EAST is they want a common approach to a large solar telescope in the future.

13) Chairman of the future TDF

R Gredel chaired this section of the meeting. M Dennefeld, J Andersen and J Davies were proposed as Chairs of subsequent Telescope Directors Forums on a renewable basis and therefore left the room while the ballot took place. J Andersen was selected as Chair and was pleased to accept the nomination.

14) AOB/Next meeting

It remained for J Davies to thank the meeting attendees and J Andersen for hosting the meeting. The next meeting will be arranged when it the forum has a clearer idea of the reporting period of the ETSRC (see Action 5)

15) ACTIONS

- Action 1.** All, minus the Nominees – Vote for next Chair of TDF at the conclusion of this meeting
- Action 2.** J Davies – update the ToR in accordance with discussion under Item 5 of the agenda
- Action 3.** All - TDF members to check the facilities information in infrastructures matrix provided is correct – by end of Nov.
- Action 4.** J Davies – double-check the ETSRC consultation period and reporting process with J Drew
- Action 5.** J Andersen - further to the ETSRC report being available for review by TDF members a TDF Meeting should be arranged
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- Action 7.** The telescope director to inform Review Committee (I Steele; R Gredel; J Melnick) when fully ready for review.
- Action 8.** Directors to re-evaluate their TA-1 form using real costs for 2009
- Action 9.** All – check figures in 'FP7 Access calculator' for accuracy
- Action 10.** J Davies will build this extra 'FFP' step into the TAC process and will also seek volunteers from within the TDF to serve on it.
- Action 11.** J Davies, All – update 'OPTICON TAC options' document wrt decisions made under item 11 of the Agenda. Once this is done circulate the document to TDF for review.
- Action 12.** All – ask Agencies for authority re Common TAC and FFP plans (dependent on Action 11)