Users' Committee

30th Meeting

Garching, April 3 and 4, 2006

Fact Sheets and Reports

By UC Members

ESO User's Committee 3 - 4 April 2006

Fact Sheet

Griet Van de Steene (Belgium)

Also this year, the Belgian community was very pleased with ESO and the quality of the data received from Paranal and La Silla Observatories. The high level of support and the good-will of the available staff on the mountains, the user support group, and the data management division are unanimously acknowledged.

In the end of run reports no specific issues of complaint were mentioned.

I received 6 answers (from colleagues at the Free University of Brussels, the University of Antwerp, the Royal Observatory of Belgium, and K.U.Leuven) to the poll with questions about the general operation and the second generation instruments. Four colleagues use the ESO telescopes and instruments often, the other two occasionally.

- The general information offered by ESO via the web, messenger and press releases is considered good. The resources in the Call for Proposals are mostly complete, and the documentation offered in the manuals or via the web is considered sufficient.
- The trips to La Silla and Paranal Observatories are considered well organized and the stay at the Observatories very good. The introduction at the telescope and the assistance during the observations also good. Service observers can monitor their observations sufficiently.
- *The delivered data sets were not always complete or in time. Observers insist to include raw data as well as pipeline reduced data and sufficient calibration data.*
- *For weather restricted observations in visitor mode the approval of the back-up program is not straightforward. It is suggested to transfer the responsibility for approval to the responsible who is present at the Observatory.*
- *There are also requests regarding the proposal submission and WEB letters:*
  1. *To mention a priori what the limitations are in each box of the proposal form (number of lines or words), in order not to be obliged to remove text too quickly, because of a vague error message at the time of proposal submission.*
  2. *To mention explicitly in the web letter that one has to click on the proposal ID to obtain further information about Phase 2 Proposal Preparation.*
  3. *To mention the deadline for P2PP up front in the web letter.*
- The work of the OPC and the comments received from the panels are considered acceptable.
- *The users obtain their information about the instrumentation mainly from the ESO web site and secondly from discussions with colleagues. The users rate their knowledge of the current instrumentation at La Silla and Paranal as*

quite good, their knowledge of the second generation instruments at La Silla as fairly good, but at Paranal as rather poor.

- *Prima, X-shooter, and MUSE are 2nd generation instruments directly related to the science of some observers.*
- *Most essential for the coming 5 years are the high spectral resolution and wavelength coverage. Also essential are science-quality and quick-look pipelines, high spatial resolution, and access to mm-wavelengths. Multi-objects capability and accurate simulation tools are also considered important, 3D spectroscopy irrelevant.*

Fact sheet by Dr. Uffe Gråe Jørgensen (Denmark)

Factsheet on replies from the Danish observers at ESO:

I have received written comments from 12 observers for the 2005 period, and "in-official comments" from some more.

In general everybody I have been in contact with, are very pleased with the support from ESO, and mention in particular satisfaction with the help in travel and accommodation arrangements, and help with the preparation of the proposals.
As usual there is a demand for access to more reduced data, and some people are unhappy with the shortness (lack of clearness) of the OPC comments (while others are happy with quality of the OPC).

One observer worries that one can only get raw un-reduced data from HARPS in the ESO Archive, while the observers get fully pipe-line reduced data. Can something be improved here ?

One group, which has had quite an amount of ToO time during the later years, are suggesting improvements to quicker activations of the the ToO observations with fewer errors (see their extensive comments on our web answers). In short they would like that ESO's form for receiving the activation requests are not changed unless it is very necessary, such that groups that are dependent on quick response to ToO requests (e.g. gamma ray bursts in this case) can construct semi-automatic activation requests. Could PIs of ToO be informed by email when changes are made to the ToO web-form ?

One observer requests that there should be a default place on the FORS2 CCDs where the objects are positioned if nothing else is mentioned in the OB.

One observer mentions that the Observation Time calculator is sometimes (very) wrong.

Comments or questions observers have asked to be raised during the discussion of development of future instrumentation:
What is the future of La Silla ?
What is specifically the future of FEROS at the 2.2m after 2006 ?
What is the plan for next-generation VLT & VLTI instruments ?
Status of the Alma Regional Center. Is there any poll about the short-term impact of the ELT project among ESO present users ?

March 2006,
Uffe Gråe Jørgensen,
Danish ESO-UC member.

Fact sheet by Dr. Merja Tornikoski (Finland)

Year 2005 was the first full ESO membership year for Finland. The number of submitted proposals with a Finnish PI has now increased, even though the acceptance rate is not very high yet (for P76 21 proposals with a Finnish PI were submitted and five were scheduled).

In February I circulated an e-mail among the most potential (to my knowledge) ESO users of the Finnish community, 45 names. The list has been updated since last year, and it now also includes all the Finnish PIs who have submitted a proposal for the last few observing periods (the list was provided by ESO).

I invited them to participate in the poll managed by Jochen Heidt on his web site, and I also invited them to contact me about any concerns, questions and wishes about ESO-related matters. There were *no* answers to the poll from Finnish users by March 20th (the time we had to submit the fact sheets; the initial deadline in the poll was set to March 26th, though).

I received some personal comments from Finnish users, indicating that at least some of them considered the poll questions too detailed or complicated (even though it was explicitly mentioned that they may reply only the questions they consider relevant). Additionally, I received some complaints about the ESO web pages, and I have also personally encountered broken links on the ESO pages as well as lack of information, or difficulty in finding some information that one would assume to be there. Also one user commented that for a novice user of ESO facilities it is very difficult to find relatively basic information to start planning an observing proposal. My understanding is that most Finnish proposals (especially the accepted ones!) either come from experienced ESO users (many of them having used the ESO facilities already before Finland's membership) or at least are supervised by such scientists, which supports this claim.

Two End of Mission reports were submitted by Finnish astronomers during the periods P75 and P76, one on La Silla and one on Paranal. These are not enough for any statistics, but at least these two observers were in general very happy, rating everything from good to excellent, except the Paranal observer rating the pipeline and the voice network as acceptable.

Users' Committee 2006
French Community

The French community has been polled – Two different channels have been used: the SF2A, French society of Professional astronomers and the list of French astronomers who got observing time between Periods 73 and 76, provided by ESO. The questionnaire is given in Annex.

70 persons have filled the questionnaire. This represents 50% of the French observers between P73 and P76.

Profiles of the astronomers who answered the questionnaire:

28 % of very frequent observers (each period)
60 % of frequent observers (every 2 to 4 periods)
21 % of occasional observers
1 % of astronomers who 1will use ESO in the future, thanks to new instrumentation

PART 1, ESO General Operations

1. General information offered by ESO

	Excellent	Good	Acceptable	Insufficient
The Web :	30 %	**52 %**	13 %	5 %
The Messenger :	7 %	**74 %**	10 %	7 %
Press Releases :	17 %	**56 %**	24 %	3 %

2. Proposal preparation, submission, evaluation

Ressources attached to the Call for proposal are

Complete	Partly complete	Incomplete	Useless
75%	25 %	0 %	0 %

	Excellent	Sufficient	Incomplete	Lousy
The Manuals	25 %	**70 %**	5 %	0%
The Web	24 %	**70 %**	2 %	3%

Any problem with the proposal submission ? Yes 20% No 80%

Evaluation of the work of the OPC	Excellent	Sufficient	Incomplete	Lousy
	12%	**52%**	36%	0%

3. Visitor mode observations

Introduction at the telescope and assistance during the observations

Excellent Sufficient Incomplete Lousy

53% 47% 0% 0%

Delivery of a timely and complete data set (incl. calibration data) ? Yes 94% No 6%

Trip to Paranal and La Silla ? General satisfaction. A few comments on that staff on Paranal could be friendlier with the visitors.

4. Service mode observations

Enough Time for the phase II preparation ? Yes 87% No 13%

Sufficient Monitoring of the observations ? Yes 84% No 16%

Delivery of a timely and complete set of data ? Yes 65% No 35%

Experience with waivers ? In general satisfaction although, the delays of answered is considered often too long

PART 2, Second Generation Instruments

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Knowledge of the current ESO instrumentation	12%	55%	30%	3%
Knowledge of the future instrumentation for La Silla	0%	8%	27%	65%
Knowledge of the future instrumentation for the VLT	3%	30%	35%	32%

Source of information ?

ESO-Web	Other-Web	At observing time	Discussion with Colleagues
34%	2%	2%	**64%**

Which instrument is linked to your science ?

KMOS	MUSE	PlanetFinder	X-shooter	HAWK-I	PRIMA
22%	15%	22%	16%	9%	16%

Importance of the following items for your future (5 years) science at ESO ?

	Essential	Important	Secondary	Irrelevant
Multi-objects capability	43%	17%	18%	22%
Quick-look pipeline	30%	46%	17%	7%
Science-quality pipeline	31%	56%	9%	4%
Wavelength coverage	46%	45%	6%	3%
High spatial resolution	53%	32%	15%	0%
High spectral resolution	41%	36%	16%	7%
3D spectroscopy	29%	20%	31%	20%
Access to mm-wavelengths	22%	18%	30%	30%
Accurate simulation tools	13%	37%	46%	4%

PART 3, Detailled comments and suggestions from the users

The comments are reproduced just as received.
Those concerning the second generation instruments will be reported during the meeting

- Proposal application form: Unfortunately, the "Month" keyword cannot be set to "any".

- ETC : In general, short exposures are not well treated

-AMBER : The VLTI AMBER software is far to be complete and "user friendly". The absolute visibility calibrated mode is not accurate at all and cannot be trusted yet. Some data are useless due to a very bad calibrator or no calibrator at all. Need to implement solid interferometric observing procedures.

-Manuals : They should be available both in pdf AND in html format

-OPC and Panels : If panel membership should not be public (?), the way the panel members are selected should be public. Evaluation guidelines should be public.

-Paranal: When you have half nights in Paranal and you have to stay up most of the night because you are not allowed to walk down and you have no car, it really is unpleasant. Why not have reflecting jackets that one could wear to walk down the road?

-WebPages: Some specific answers are difficult to find directly as oftentimes buried deep into PDF files. A google-like search engine would be welcome when most if not all the info gets into HTML pages. Logic is obviously not always driving the way the pages are built. For example, simply finding the postal address of ESO is nearly impossible…

Don't expect that each and every single ESO user will spend lots of time looking at the ESO web page to be sure not to miss some important information. The UC representative should relay via e-mail the important announcements made on the ESO web. I think in particular about the call for proposals for Public Surveys at VST.

-VLTI: It seems there too much turn-over between TIOs and they are lacking training. In my case, whenever we tried to use MACAO on VLTI, there is always one not working well and there are no specialists on the mountain. If we talk to them later, then you got the information, that you should have done this or that. There is a lack of persons (at least for VLTI) who know the VLTI from the telescope to the entrance of the instruments affected to operations. There are very good instrument scientist and engineers to do some maintenance or diagnosis work, but the support astronomers or TIOs seem to discover the problems on any piece of VLTI subsystems (telescope, MACAO, optical alignment, delay lines, dichroics, IRIS, ARAL).

Another problem (related to the previous ones) we have faced with AMBER is that anytime there was GTO time awarded, we lost between 50% to 80% of the first night because of problems on the individual parts of the VLT. It seems there is no global check-list before starting a run to ensure everything is working correctly... contrarily to the instruments. Therefore since we had only few nights of GTO, all these nights have been lost (no in term of GTO) but in term of observation. We would like that any beginning of VLTI run start with

Service Mode so that if there is a technical problem, no time is lost for visitors and if everything is OK then SM can continue.

It seems that the ATs are excellent telescopes (almost no vibration) compared to UTs and we can reach (unfortunately for UTs) almost similar magnitudes. It would be good to release the ATs to the community as soon as possible so that most of stellar physics program be done with ATs and also that UTs are being investigated deeply so that their limited capabilities are understood.

-Giraffe: There is an ESO version of the GIRAFFE pipeline. Reduced data are given for service observations, and no indication about the possible differences between ESO and Geneva pipelines are given. Will there be some specific documentation soon?

-Service Observing: It would be a tremendous bonus for people to monit or the data as soon as they is acquired, and not to wait till the end of the period**.**

The lack of structured timing constraints and linking of OBs, or grouping of OBs makes it hard to work properly with Solar system moving targets**.**

ESO Users' Committee : Poll 2006

Deadline for submission : March, 20th

Dear Colleague,

I would highly appreciate, if you could spend a few minutes for filling out the questionnaire below.
It will facilitate the preparation of the next meeting of the ESO Users' Committee (UC), in April 2006,
and help me acting as an interface between ESO and the French users.

The questionnaire is divided into two parts :

1. **ESO General Operation**
2. **This year Hot Topic : The second generation instruments**

Note that you do not need to fill out the questionnaire completely. Ignore any question which are not relevant to you.

The material submitted will be treated strictly confidentially.

Thank you,

Pascale Jablonka
French UC representative
Chair of the UC

A confirmation message will be sent to you after your submission

Your email address :

Your Profile

How often do you observe with ESO telescopes and instruments

Very often (each period)	often (every two-four periods)	occasionnally	I am a potential future user (due to new instruments and/or telescopes)

Poll 2006, Part 1 : General Operation

1 - How do you rank of the general information offered by ESO

	Excellent	Good	Acceptable	Insufficient
The Web				
The Messenger				
Press releases				

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2 - Proposal preparation, submission and evaluation

a - The resources in the Call for Proposals are

complete	partly complete	incomplete	useless

b - The documentation in the manuals is

excellent	sufficient	incomplete	lousy

<>

c - The documentation provided on the ESO WEB is

excellent	sufficient	incomplete	lousy

Any comments with respect to 2a-c ?

d - Did you experience any problem with the proposal submission and WEB letters (e.g. notification) ?

No

Yes

If yes, which one(s) ?

e - How do you evaluate the work of the OPC and the comments you receive from the panels ?

excellent	acceptable	incomplete	very bad

f - Any further comments as for the proposal submission, preparation and evaluation ?

3 - Visitor mode observations

a - The trip to Paranal and/or La Silla takes some time (up to 48h from door to door). Is the way this is arranged by ESO satisfactory ? If not, what can be improved and how ?

b - Any comments with respect to your stay at the observatory (food, dormitories etc.) ?

<>c - How was the introduction at the telescope and assistance during the observations ?

excellent	sufficient	incomplete	lousy

d - Did you receive a complete data set (incl. calibration data) and were the data delivered timely ?

Yes
No
Comments ?

e - Any comment as to the visitor mode observations ?

4 - Service mode observations

a - Phase II preparation: Did you have sufficient time to prepare your phase II (deadline) ?

Yes
No
Any comment ?

b - In case you submitted a waiver request, what was your experience ?

c - Could you sufficiently monitor your service mode observations ?

Yes
No
If not, can you suggest a way to improve the situation ?

<>

d - Did you receive a complete data set within your specifications (incl. calibration data) and were the data delivered timely ?

Yes
No
If not, why ?

e - Are you satisfied of the service observing mode in general ?

5 - Communication to ESO

Are there any specific questions you would like to be addressed at the UC meeting ?

Poll 2006, Part 2 : Second Generation Instruments

6 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the current ESO instrumentation (VLT, La Silla) ?

excellent good fairly good poor

7 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the future generation of La Silla instruments ?

excellent good fairly good poor

8 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the future generation of VLT instruments ?

excellent good fairly good poor

9 - How do you keep informed about the instrumental developments at ESO ?

- mostly via the ESO web page
- mostly via the web outside the ESO site
- at La Silla or Paranal when observing
- discussing with colleagues

10 - Which ones of the following 2nd generation instruments is directly related to *your* science ?

	YES	NO
- KMOS		
- MUSE		
- PlanetFinder		
- X-shooter		
- HAWK-I		

11 - What is the importance of the following items for *your future* (5 years) science at ESO ?

	essential	important	secondary	irrelevant
- Multi-objects capability				
- Quick-look pipeline				
- Science-quality pipeline				
- Wavelength coverage				
- High spatial resolution				
- High spectral resolution				
- 3D spectroscopy				
- Access to mm-wavelengths				
- Accurate simulation tools				

12 - Are there any specific questions you would like to be addressed at the UC meeting about the La Silla and Paranal *future generations of instruments, ALMA, the development of the ESO Extremely Large Telescope ?*

Thank you very much for filling out the Poll 2006 !

Send form Erase form

Fact sheet by Dr. Jochen Heidt (Germany)

I asked the German community for input for the UC-meeting throughout the WEB-based Poll setup mainly by myself with the modifications introduced by Frederic Courbin. About 250 potential users were informed via E-Mail about the POLL (all proposer for the last 4 periods mailed to me via VISAS plus an extended list which I maintain for other reasons). Hence a large majority of all German astronomers was contacted. Nevertheless, the reaction was not horribly impressive. Only 18 astronomers filled out the Poll (only 3 of them have used La Silla telescopes). The same amount of people submitted an EOM report (7 Paranal, 11 La Silla). Only 2 astronomers filled out the Poll *and* submitted an EOM, hence at least some conclusions can be drawn (some response from 34 astronomers).
In addition, I got one OPC-related complaint via E-Mail, but this was forwarded to the German representative in the ESO OPC Dr. Lutz Wisotzki, who took care of it.
In general, the observer were satisfied with the services offered by ESO. Not surprisingly, most (negative) comments were related to OPC matters.

Results from the WEB-based Poll

General information by ESO: Most found the information provided by ESO on the WEB/Messenger/PR excellent or good.
2 users still complained that the ESO-WEB is not well structured (old story), one found the ESO neutrality in PR insufficient and biased towards ESO employees in fields of high competition.

Proposals: The CfP and the documentation in the manuals and provided on the ESO-WEB were always found to be sufficient - excellent, proposal submission didn't cause any problems.
Still there is room for improvement. Some wish to have a summary section that views the instrument by tables and figures and functional keywords only in the instrument manuals, others found the documentation often redundant but on the other hand had to rely on different sources (especially for P2PP).

OPC: To my surprise, the OPC was not found to be too bad. The ratings for excellent/acceptable/could be better/could be much better/a disaster were 2/8/6/2/0. Of course these numbers are biased since only successful applicants filled out the Poll.
Lots of, but traditional comments were received: comments to brief, too much artificial reasoning for declining a proposal, proposal was not read carefully enough...so I do not include them here. I sent them to Lutz Wisotzki for his information.
One user suggested that Apex/Alma proposal should be handled in a separate panel.

Visitor Mode: By tradition excellent grades were given to this section. The user were happy with the transportation, logistics and the introduction to the telescope. Except for 2 cases (identical user), they received their complete data set before they left the observatory.

Some suggestions: One Paranal observer would appreciate an amateur telescope on site (no joke!). Argument: One typically needs to be 48hrs in advance at the observatory, hence switching to night shift can conveniently be done this way! On the other hand, one La Silla observer do not understand why he should be 48h in advance on La Silla. In addition, he would prefer to have directly a connecting flight to La Serena from an international one and also the possibility to leave La Silla around noon to catch an evening (international) flight home. Would save 3 days.
Some Paranal users would like to have breakfast around 14h.

Service Mode: In general, people were happy with SM observations. There was always sufficient time for Phase II preparation, they were extremely satisfied with the way waiver requests were handled. Problematic is the monitoring of SM observations. While this can be done easily for Paranal, it is (almost) impossible for La Silla but would be appreciated also there. One user would like to see even which of his OBs have been executed, while another even was not aware that it is possible to check the status of his SM observations on Paranal!
2 observer complained that observations repeatedly have been taken out of constraints, i.e. being useless. One found the progress of A priority runs slow. It is not clear to him if this is due to bad weather or simply bad scheduling. Sometimes the SM data set was incomplete, but the observer was not informed why this was so. One would prefer some real-time interaction with the SM-observers (i.e. a simplified form of remote observing) at least for the first OBs.
Sometimes, the person in charge of the P2PP-material is *not* the PI. It would be good to have a "contact E-Mail address" in the relevant README file.

Short-/Mid-term planning, Hot Topic: All facilities (La Silla, VLT(I)+2nd generation, ALMA) were rated equally important on short and intermediate timescales.
The biggest surprise (to me) came out of the questions related to the Hot Topic. While all observers stated that their knowledge of the current ESO instrumentation is good or excellent, 6/7 rated their knowledge of future La Silla Instrumentation as poor! The knowledge of the future VLT instrumentation is only slightly better (fairly good in most cases, but never good or excellent)!
KMOS seems to be the top instrument for most of the people, while the rest (MUSE, PF etc..) seems to be either not known to the ESO-user or less important.
MOS-capabilities, science-quality pipelines, λ-coverage and high spatial resolution are the most important items for the future science to be conducted at ESO. Less important were quick-look pipelines, high spectral resolution, 3D-spectroscopy, access to mm-wavelengths and accurate simulation tools.

Some general comments, e.g. role of the UC, wishes for the future:

- A review of the 'end of mission reports' should appear once a semester to monitor the quality of the observations and demonstrate, that these reports are taken seriously.
- ESO should make more transparent, which instrumentation and telescopes will be available in the future.
- ESO must not forget to provide "normal" imaging and spectroscopic instruments for big telescopes. Sometimes we just want a big light bucket without lots of extra things which can go wrong!
- More transparency in the modalities and output of the OPC. Fairness of the OPC and sufficient ESO support for service mode programs.
- La Silla can do still very good science, however, instruments would require an upgrade for doing front research.
- Try to keep TIMMI2 alive since VISIR is not the best choice for all kind of scientific programs.
- It would be helpful to gain some flexibility with the proposals. Why do I not get time in a subsequent semester if I haven't specified this when submitting the first proposal for a given topic? Given that 6 months are between two proposal deadlines, more flexibility would be very useful.

Results from the EOM reports

While *all* La Silla users gave excellent ratings in their EOM, Paranal users where a bit more critical (good-excellent). Its not clear, why this is so. They probably expect more from the site with the bigger telescopes (and more complex instrumentation) or students preferably were sent to La Silla (who tend to be rather enthusiastic), while the big ones inspected Paranal (who are more critical per se).

Some comments from La Silla EOM reports:

- The HARPS-pipeline should allow for more user interaction; a standard reference describing details of the reduction would be welcome (e.g. for publications).
The departure time from La Silla on Saturdays posted on the WEB is wrong (2.15Am instead 4.15AM)!
- Internet connection was sometimes slow.

Some comments from Paranal EOM reports:

- Project was only partly successful due to bad pupil alignment for UT2 (MIDI).
- Different numbers from Garching, support astronomer, user manual and ETC (linearity, saturation limit, persistence) for observations of 6.5mag star (Sinfoni).
- Reference frame for blind offset differs from the one for FORSes and ISAAC (UVES). Should be stated more clearly in manual and check should be added to the support astronomers checklist.
- Internet connection sometimes slow.
- More disk space and more Ethernet ports at the telescope would be appreciated.
- No English translation for menu.

FACT SHEET

Bianca Maria Poggianti (ITALY)

As in previous years, a questionnaire was circulated among the Italian community to assess the quality of ESO services perceived by the users. Prior to the questionnaire, I had been contacted by just one user with a request, but it should be kept in mind that I have been the Italian representative in the UC only since December 2005.

43 users filled in the questionnaire, compared to 54 in 2005 and 41 in 2004.
A presentation of the poll results is given in the next pages, and the main points can be summarized as follows:

1. Overall, users are satisfied to very satisfied by the services offered by ESO. Rankings are especially high regarding the proposal preparation and submission process, the general information provided by ESO, traveling to and staying at the two observing sites, and the assistance provided in visitor mode.
2. Users are less satisfied with the proposal evaluation process/OPC work and with service mode observations. It is perceived there is room for improvement in the evaluation and referee feedback phase. For several users, a critical aspect is the rationale behind the selection of programs executed in service mode, when compared to the scientific ranking of the proposal.
3. There is a widespread, recognized lack of knowledge of future generation instruments both for La Silla and Paranal. The ESO web page remains the privileged source of information for new instrumentation (as well as by word of mouth), and more documentation is wished for.
4. The most important features for the next 5 years instruments at ESO are considered to be the *wavelength coverage,* a *science-quality pipeline,* the *multiobject capability* and the *high spatial resolution.* Interestingly, access to mm-wavelengths received the lowest score among the users that replied to the poll.

After the presentation of the poll results, I have listed the individual comments of users. They indicate where improvement is most desired and provide several practical suggestions and requests.

QUESTIONNAIRE 2006 – ITALY

1 - How do you rank the general information offered by ESO through:

	excellent	good	acceptable	insufficient
The WEB	11	22	8	1
The Messenger	6	30	1	0
Press releases etc.	6	21	10	0

2 - Proposal preparation, submission and evaluation

a - The resources in the Call for proposals given for the preparation of the proposal are
complete 31 partly complete 8 incomplete 1 useless 0

b - The documentation for writing the proposals provided in the manuals is
excellent 14 sufficient 24 incomplete 0 lousy 0

c - The documentation for writing the proposals provided on the ESO WEB is
excellent 14 sufficient 26 incomplete 0 lousy 0

d - Did you experience any problem with the proposal submission and WEB letters (e.g. notification) ? NO 38 YES 0

e - OPC decisions are always a matter of debate. What is your general opinion about the work of the OPC and the comments you receive from the panels ?
excellent 3 acceptable 16 could be better 11 could be much better 8 a disaster 0

3 - Visitor mode observations

a - The trip to Paranal and/or La Silla takes some time (up to 48h from door to door). Is the way this is arranged by ESO satisfactory ? If not, what can be improved and how ?
Always satisfactory, except one case: ESO oblige visitor astronomer to choose the cheapest flight (possible overprice with other comapnies are not covered by ESO), which in some cases implies a significant enlargement of the duration of the flight from Europe to Santiago.

b - Any comments with respect to your stay at the observatory (food, dormitories etc.) ?
Excellent(13), good at La Silla (1), fair at Paranal (1)

c - How was the introduction at the telescope and assistance during the night ?
excellent 21 sufficient 9 incomplete 1 lousy 0

d - Did you receive a complete data set (incl. calibration data) and were the data delivered timely ?
YES 28 NO 2

e - Any further comments as for visitor mode observations ? see below

4 - Service mode observations

a - Phase II preparation: Did you have sufficient time to prepare your phase II material ?
YES 32 NO 2 **Further comments ?** see below

b - In case you submitted a waiver request, how was your experience ?
Satisfactory 7 Answer arrived too late 1

c - Could you sufficiently well monitor your service mode observations ?
YES 27 NO 6 If **not, can you suggest a way to improve ?** see below

d - Did you receive a complete data set within your specifications (incl. calibration data) and were the data delivered timely ? YES 23 NO 8 **If not, why ?** see below

e - Are you satisfied of the service mode observations in general ?
yes 15 partly 7 no 5

5 - Are there any specific questions you would like to be addressed at the UC ? see below

Questions relevant to this year general topic: "2nd generation of VLT instruments, ALMA, and ELTs"

6 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the current ESO instrumentation (VLT, La Silla) ? excellent 10 good 20 fairly good 10 poor 1

7 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the future generation of La Silla instruments ?
excellent 0 good 8 fairly good 6 poor 26

8 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the future generation of VLT instruments ?
excellent 1 good 12 fairly good 13 poor 14

9 - How do you keep informed about the instrumental developments at ESO ?
- mostly via the ESO web page 22
- mostly via the web outside the ESO site 0
- at La Silla or Paranal when observing 0
- discussing with colleagues 18

10 - Which ones of the following 2nd generation instruments do you know and/or are directly related to YOUR science ?

	YES	NO
KMOS	21	7
MUSE	9	13
PlanetFinder	8	15
X-shooter	26	8
HAWK-I	11	12

11 - What is the importance of the following items for YOUR FUTURE (5 years) science at ESO ?

	essential	important	secondary	irrelevant
Multi-objects capability	14	18	6	0
Quick-look pipeline	7	14	15	0
Science-quality pipeline	19	14	2	0
Wavelength coverage	14	21	2	0
High spatial resolution	13	17	8	1
High spectral resolution	12	14	10	3
3D spectroscopy	8	13	12	3
Access to mm-wavelengths	5	9	15	5
Accurate simulation tools	3	17	12	3

12 - Are there any specific questions you would like to be addressed at the UC about the La Silla and Paranal future generations of instruments, about ALMA and about the development of the ESO Extremely Large Telescope ? see below

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Individual comments are listed below:

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1. General information offered by ESO

1. The scientific quality of the press releases is not always uniform: sometimes rather "normal" results make it to the PR, while important results are not advertised. The latter effect is probably due to the fact that researchers tend to underestimate the importance of PO and is not easy to cure, but the former issue can be cured with a stricter control of what is released to the public.
2. I had the feeling that the ESO PR office is not able to quickly manage new discoveries. My colleagues and I had an unpleasant experience concerning this.
3. Some key info is hidden in pages that are very hard to find out
4. In many occasion it is difficult to find something you are looking for. I'm talking for example about MIDAS software and its changes through new versions.
5. Sometimes the useful informations (e.g. the features of a instrument) are hidden in a sea of other interesting but not so essential informations.

2c. Proposal preparation and submission

1. Some more "examples" may help the readability of the documentation
2. Not always the exposure time estimators are the latest versions or give reasonable estimate
3. Sometimes if you get a web page from a path of links, it is different from the page (that should be the same) achievable from another path of links. I found that problem particularly in looking for information about telescopes and detectors (i.e. SOFI@NTT)
4. Sometimes the critical points for a succesful submission of a proposal are not enough underlined in the documentation.

2f. Proposal evaluation, OPC

1. OPC decisions are subjective and influenced by fashion. For example if you work on nearby external galaxies, but without direct cosmological implications your proposals will be rejected. full stop.
2. About evaluation: Large Programs should not prevent the approval of smaller programs on the same topic, especially when submitted for the same Period. The current approach assumes that the LP are 100% successful, which is often not the case.
3. This is a biased answer, I have been a member of the OPC and I was astonished by the general level of the review
4. In the last couple of years I got extraordinarily good evaluations and no observation time. Last time the OPC was so enthusiastic of my proposal that assigned to the project much more observational time than required, but assigned priority B: as a result the observations are not being performed!
5. It hasn't always been clear how the inputs from panels was dealt with by the OPC
6. The OPC work is good; comments are not always useful but panelists have an heavy work load and comments are based on preliminary selections.
7. We often received illogical or/and very perfunctory remarks.
8. Referees should read more carefully the proposals. It is common to receive comments from the OPC from which it is evident that the referee was too superficial. In this sense, a reduction of the ratio proposals/referees could help. Also, a more constructive interaction with the OPC to correct possible referee's errors should be considered.
9. I would like that motivations used to reject a proposal are (1) clearly stated (2) solidly based on the literature in the field rather than to rest on referee's opinions and (3) that could help proposers to ameliorate their future proposals. Typical two lines motivations do not fit the above "fair" requests.

3d. In visitor mode, complete dataset received timely?

1. Most of the time the data are more than fine, but sometimes problems arise (i.e. you find only part of the data on cd, or you are given corrupted cds). in those cases, not much is done to fix the problems. i.e. in the case of the corrupted dvds, only the raw data were re-distributed, the reduced data were simply lost.
2. 2 weeks of delay after visiting observing

3e. Other problems in visitor mode

1. A major problem was the lack of any useful quick look possibility for the VIMOS+IFU mode

4.a Service mode - Phase II preparation

1. A problem has been the fact that FIMS is only provided for Linux: this limitation should be avoided for such an essential piece of software.
2. A better and more concise explanation of how the user should interact with the different systems (e.g. StarCat, FIMS, P2PP) would be useful.
3. The restriction to 1 hour exec time per OB should be relaxed given the significant dead time and give to the observer the responsability to use longer OBs.

4.c Service mode: monitoring SM observations

1. Follow the instruction that the user provides, please!
2. Automatic info to the PI when OB are done and possibility to preview data.
3. More transparency in the selection criteria on what program to execute, what not would be good. But this would charge with extra load the resident astronomers. Democracy is not free.
4. In my view it could be helpful if - some time before the end of the useful period for the observation - there were some communications between the user and the astronomers charged of service observing for programmes that haven't been performed. In my experience, many programmes are not performed because of an exceedingly rigid approach to the observational requirements. If I have required that my observations have to be performed when the seeing is <1.4", in many cases I would be much happier if they are performed even if seeing is 1.5" than of they are not performed at all because of a FORMAL mismatch of the requirements.
5. A message could be sent to the PI when an observation is performed

4.d Service mode: data delivery

1. Huge delay in observations
2. The fraction of data observed is largely variable, depending on several scheduling factors.
3. I'm still in contact with the astronomer who performed the observations, to understand what went wrong during the observations.
4. As an example, the standard calibration files for the FORS images do not permit to evaluate the extinction coefficient in the right way. I know we should use the extinction tables via WEB, but the numbers do not cover all the periods needed.
5. Sometimes I received the data very late. The reason is not known.

4.e Service mode: general

1. A B-queue time-critical program at Paranal was not executed properly. Time critical programs, once they are started, should be executed as A-queue, otherwise it is a waste for both the proposers and the Observatory
2. I am not satisfied with service observations in general, because well ranked proposals were often not executed, with no justification
3. My only service mode proposal accepted by the VLT never got done. I never knew why. I was told "bad weather". But does that mean than no other proposal was executed that semester? Sure not. On what criterion then mine was canceled?
4. We experimented problems in retrieving data due to the ESO firewalls. Neither sftp nor ftp were working, so we had to use the wget command, which implies the knowledge of the EXACT directory path in which the data were stored. This delayed the data retrieval.
5. It depends on the astronomer. Sometimes the service mode is good, some others really bad.
6. Sometimes one wonders whether SM observations could be better planned. E.g. does it make any sense to acquire the pre-imaging set, if there is no time to get the corresponding spectroscopy afterwards ?
7. Apparently there is no relation between the scientific merit of a proposal and the probablility to be observed
8. A nice improvement could the following. Normally the science spectroscopic data go trough the pipeline and the result is very satisfactory. However the spectra of the standard do not go trough the pipeline. This means that you have to go through all the reduction steps just to have the spectra flux calibrated.

5. Questions users would like to see addressed at the UC

1. A technical issue: if possible, calibration lamps for FORS1 and FORS2 should be taken soon after the scientific exposure, especially in cases in which the telescope is far from zenith. The latter fact introduces strong shifts along the wavelength axis which make the daytime calibration lamp useless.
2. It's obvious that service mode observing is subject to seeing and sky conditions, but the rationale of the actual program selection is sometimes unclear. Could we ask for reports of the reasons why a program has been performed rather than another ?
3. To make a public list of ranked observations in service mode and to see after the period the proposals observed

12. Questions to be addressed at UC regarding the hot topic of this year (next generation instruments, ALMA and ELT)

1. The most important and major step for ESO astro community is to realize an ELT.
2. The development status of new-generation instruments is poorly documented in the ESO Web. The ELT is even less known to the astronomical community.
3. I think we should ask ESO to enter the ELT venture only if 1) the project planning allows for reasonably rapid execution, 2) the resulting facility is really competitive with what will be available elsewhere
4. Please, be fast with ELT!!!!!!!!

Fact sheet 2006 ESO UC meeting, Dr. Walter Jaffe (The Netherlands)

Summary of textual input from the users questionnaire and e-mails and my own opinions:

1. General level of satisfaction is high, especially for travel support

2. Criticism comes generally from experienced users. This included: Information in User manuals is sometimes outdated or wrong.

   Night support is variable; problems reported to night astronomer seem to disappear without action; probably insufficient manpower.

   More flexibility in slightly non-standard modes should be allowed in Service Mode.

   Phase-In information for Service mode is sometime inadequate and necessary information can only be obtained from instrument scientist (several examples from VISIR).

   Data Reduction Pipelines are not described in enough detail. It is difficult to assess reliability of results. Pipelines vary immensely in usefulness.

   Pre-Imaging for both SM/VM modes was done a last moment, making analysis of results an emergency process.

3. On proposal announcements, submission and judging:

   The functioning of the OPC was often found to be poor.

   ESO proposal forms are user-unfriendly. They change very often, so that proven texts and procedures, (e.g. including graphics) cannot be reused.

   OPC comments range from unhelpful to useless. They do not help in improving future proposals and often seem to have nothing to do with final time allocation.

   The announcement on very short notice of science verification time on APEX was very obscure.

   ESO should send e-mails when important new capabilities exist.
   E.g. the call for proposals for surveys.

4. Instrumentation:

   What are ESO's plans concerning spectropolarimetry. FORS1 has some capabilities but will be replaced as some point.

   Performance of SINFONI in J-band is a factor 2-3 below design. What is going on?

Below please find a summary of the numerical input from the WEB based questionnaire.

SUMMARY OF 11 FILES OF QUESTIONNAIRE INPUT from DUTCH users

	no answer	1(or Y)	2(or N)	3	4
WEBInfo=	0	0	9	1	1
MessInfo=	0	1	8	2	0
PRInfo=	2	1	4	4	0
CfPInfo=	0	8	3	0	0
ManInfo=	0	1	10	0	0
WEBPropInfo=	1	2	8	0	0
PropSub=	0	1	10		
OPC=	1	0	3	2	5
TelIntro=	4	5	1	1	0
VMCompl=	3	8	0		
PhaseII=	1	10	0		
SMMonitor=	3	8	0		
SMCompl=	3	8	0		
KnowESOInst=	0	1	5	4	1
KnowLaSillaInst=	0	0	0	3	8
KnowVLTInst=	0	1	3	2	5
KeepInformESOInst=	0	4	1	0	6
KMOS=	2	3	6		
MUSE=	2	4	5		
PlanetFinder=	2	3	6		
X-shooter=	0	5	6		
HAWK-I=	2	1	8		
MultiObj=	0	4	3	2	2
QuickLookPipe=	0	2	7	2	0
SciencePipe=	0	4	6	1	0
WaveCover=	0	6	4	1	0
HighSpatialRes=	0	4	4	2	1
HighSpectralRes=	0	1	6	3	1
3DSpec=	0	3	4	4	0
mmWave=	0	4	1	4	2
SimulTools=	0	1	4	6	0

Fact Sheet by Nuno C. Santos (Portugal)

UC meeting – April 3-4, 2006

The Portuguese astronomical community has about 60 members in different institutions. In order to have an input from them, I have sent the link for an online poll (available at `http://astro.oal.ul.pt/~nuno/ESO_UC/Poll2006_PT.htm`) to the Portuguese Astronomical Society mailing list, as well as to a list of Portuguese PIs of ESO proposals that was kindly provided by ESO.

A total of 9 answers were received by the 20th of March 2006, most of them from frequent users of ESO telescopes and instruments. The answers were related to the following main topics:

Information. In general, users are happy (or reasonably happy) with the information that is offered by ESO through the web pages, Messenger and press-release. A few comments/suggestions on this matter were:

- *Some of the manuals of the La Silla observatory (I have no experience with Paranal) available online are somewhat outdated and should be revised.*
- *An e-mail newsletter about changes in the web page/information would be useful.*
- *The information is usually there but the website is very confusing. Some info is hard to get and there are too many empty links. I never read The Messenger and rarely pay attention to the press releases.*

Proposal preparation, submission and evaluation. Regarding this topic, no major complaints exist. No problems were reported regarding the preparation and submission of the proposals. A few comments have been issued:

- *There are always some issues that are not covered for complex applications, but a very flexible finding chart facility, ideally integrated also with the ESO archive, would be very nice. I.e. a place where you can specify a location in the sky and the program decides whether the archive contain appropriate images and can provide them to you on the fly – you can of course do this offline but an online application would be nice and useful.*
- *I have experienced some problems (with the application form) when applying for AMBER/VLTI on P76, but that was the first time that instrument was being offered.*
- *Some instrument manuals seem to miss a bit of information about some details.*

As usual, some people complain that the OPC evaluation could be better, in particular:

- *Specially for DDT proposals, I had the impression that sometimes the committee completely misses the point of the proposal.*

Visitor mode observations. Again no major concerns. Some of the persons said that the trip from Europe to La Silla/Paranal is *slow but satisfactory*, that the *one-day stop at the guest-house is very helpful to recover from the trip*, and one user suggested that *maybe the optional use of the small airplane connection could be a solution for those in a*

hurry, if financially viable. The stay at La Silla and Paranal only deserved one comment stating that *food in Paranal should follow the example from La Silla*.

The introduction at the telescope and assistance during the night was always considered to be *excellent*. No problems were reported regarding the data delivery.

Service mode observations. People are happy with the deadlines for Phase II preparation, and with the waiver requests (regarding this latter issue, one comments even states that *in general, very good: I had an answer within the next 48h.*).

The monitoring of the observations in service mode deserved one comment:

- *May have been improved, but I had observations spaced widely in RA and wanted to look at the progress to see if I should request data before time, but whether associated calibration data were obtained was not indicated and that made it difficult to decide.*

The same situation is seen regarding the question of whether people have received a complete data set within your specifications. All positive answers expect for one comment mentioning that:

- *Service was excellent except for calibration data. The pipeline doesn't provide very good calibration parameters, which is a pity given the quality of all the rest.*

In general, people are happy with the service mode observations, but some other general comments were sent:

- *Often the data on the DVDs is very hard to sort out (which are generic calibrations, specific calibrations, master calibrations, pointing data, spectroscopic - science - data, pipeline processed data, etc). Software is made to address this (Gasgano) but it doesn't smooth the process completely.*

- *I had problems using the software suggested by ESO to produce the finding charts. I had very efficient and instructive replies from the ARSystem regarding all my inquiries during the P2PP.*

- *La Silla service mode seems to be a mess. People there seem to do their best, but ESO does not seem to want to organize things a bit more like in Paranal. I could not even understand to when (month of observations) I should do my OBs, because nothing was specified in the observing schedule given by ESO!!!*

- *Regarding photometric calibration it would be very useful to have a bit more precise parameters from the pipeline.*

Special topic: "2nd generation of VLT instruments, ALMA, and ELTs"

When asked about their knowledge about current and future instrumentation at ESO (La Silla and Paranal), the answers showed that although most users have a *good* or *fairly good* knowledge about current ESO instrumentation, the vast majority of the answers mentioned a *poor* (!!!) knowledge regarding future instrumentation. Most persons also mentioned that they keep informed about these issues mostly through the *ESO web page* and *discussing with colleagues*.

Regarding second generation instruments, all the instruments on the list (KMOS, MUSE, PlanetFinder, X-shooter, HAWK-I, and PRIMA) received positive answers when

asking whether they were directly related to people's science. This is specially true regarding *KMOS* and *Planet Finder*.

As for the different items in the poll that could be useful for the near future (5 year) science at ESO (namely, Multi-objects capability, Quick-look pipeline, Science-quality pipeline, Wavelength coverage, High spatial resolution, High spectral resolution, 3D spectroscopy, Access to mm-wavelengths, and Accurate simulation tools), the answers were very dispersed, and in all, it seems that all these issues have some importance to the Portuguese users. This is particularly true regarding the *simulation tools*, the *high spatial resolution* and the *multi-object capability*.

Finally, I had two other comments about ESO future instrumentation, the first of which sent by two different users:

- *A small, 1-m class, automatic telescope, with a good CCD camera (maybe remotely controlled?) would be very useful (and cheap!). Some simple but important science programs could really benefit with such an instrument, and without many costs for ESO. These include e.g. the follow-up of discovered exoplanets to search for transits, simple UBV photometry of stars with no precise photometric measurements, etc...*

- *Any plan to implement mid-IR polarimetry at the VLT?*

Fact Sheet for ESO UC 2006 – Sweden (by Sofia Feltzing)

Specific emails where sent to all Swedish PIs in the Periods 73 - 76 asking for feedback on their specific concerns. I also emailed all Swedish astronomers and ask them to participate in the web-based poll. We used the web-page provided by the German representative (Jochen Heidt).

In total I have had 9 answers to the web-based poll and two separate emails concerning issues somewhat outside the scope of the web-based poll.

In summary the result from the web-based poll and those emails are (when I quote directly from someones email or web-answer that text is set inside citation marks):

- ESO web-pages are thought to be hard to penetrate, with bad structuring and pages changing position/name too often for individuals to be able to keep a good set of bookmarks
- The Messenger is well regarded and much appreciated
- Press-releases are thought excellent for astronomers but of less use to the journalists and general public
- In general the information available through the web and manuals is deemed adequate for proposal preparation. However, it is felt that it would be much better if the latex-checks were the same in the pre-submission checks as they are once they are being processed at ESO (i.e. full compatibility is asked for). The WEB letter system has no complaints.
- The work by the OPC is deemed acceptable by most who answered the poll. However, when it comes to the feedback there are issues raised by those who answered. In particular the following issues were raised by two of the users

    1. "ESO OPC reports are too brief and unclear, occasionally rude and are often gravely inconsistent between consecutive observing periods. In my experience TACs at other observatories often do a much better job in explaining their decisions and giving a useful feedback to observers. I think that instead of 2-3 sentences, both OPC and technical evaluation should be given in 2-3 sufficiently detailed paragraphs."
    2. "The work of the OPC I regard as certainly acceptable, if not better. The feedback on the other hand could be much better. It does not always address the issues in the proposal. Also, it would be good if there was a line or two with "feedback" from visas in certain cases. For example we had a project that was transformed from a visitor mode to a service mode as it was too lowly ranked to get visitor mode but would make an excellent filler. We were happy with that decision, but since the change of mode was not spelled out and why it was changed in the web-letter we spent extra days asking if there was a mistake or not. This, clearly means that the user support group gets more work that could easily be avoided with a line or two in the web-letter."

- Travel to the observatories are deemed good. Some find that the food was better in the past, other wish for better night snack on Paranal and that the heating sometimes fail due to power shortage.
- All are happy with introduction to the telescopes and all got their data back in a shape they liked.
- ETCs suffer from time to time from simple bugs that could be easily traced if the upgrades would be installed well before the proposal deadline. Latest problem with UVES ETC in slicer mode is a good example.
- From one user I have had a longer email concerning several issues related to his experience as a visiting astronomer using UVES on VLT. I believe that the issues he raise are important and have therefore included his comments (almost) in their entirety.

  1. The first note concerns the absence of sufficient information about unusual (when compared to other observatories) limitations of the visitor mode observing at Paranal. I found that there exists a number of restrictions which are poorly reflected in the user manuals. In particular,
     (a) Slit vs. slicer observing mode of UVES has to be selected beforehand and any change between these two options has to be approved by Paranal Science operations;
     (b) The choice of backup/filler targets is constrained by the SciOps requirement that all targets which are planned to be observed by the approved programs or has been observed within one year are "protected". This means that their observation as additional backup/filler targets is forbidden. This creates problems for the scientific fields with a few suitable bright targets: all of them usually fall in the restricted category and could not be observed.

     Comment: ESO needs to make Paranal visitor astronomer rules more transparent and, possibly, think about lifting some of the restrictions which hinder efficient visitor mode observing.
  2. (This comment is specific for the UVES visitor mode; I do not know to what extent it concerns other Paranal instruments.) I would suggest that some time in the evening before observing night should be set aside for visitor astronomer to take evening calibration datasets if necessary. This would allow
     (a) Populate pipeline with suitable calibration frames, enabling scientific night time data to be reduced properly;
     (b) Identify potential problems with the instrument modes that are going to be used during the night.

Currently Paranal SciOps has the policy to obtain calibration data only in the morning after VM observing run. In other words, no checks or calibrations specific to the instrument mode that visitor wants to use are made. This is a dangerous approach because potential problems are identified only when first night exposures are obtained.

3. In the case of my observations, when making the first night exposures I found that the readout overhead time of UVES is 3 times longer than specified in the manuals and p2pp. As a result, I was able to obtain only 50% of the scientific data. ESO has refused to compensate for this loss of observing time, even though it was acknowledged afterwards that a faulty hardware caused the problem. (Comment: would it be possible to better monitor the performance also of modes that are used less frequently?)
4. On the positive side, I am impressed by the work of the ESO staff at Garching (in particular Jakob Vinther) who responded quickly to my complaint about incorrect operation of the UVES ETC in the slicer mode. They have sent me detailed description of the improved slicer mode ETC formula and have commissioned a new version of ETC within a week of my complaint.

- All had enough time to prepare their PhaseII material after having been notified that they got time and all felt that the waiver request had worked well (**Comment:** Why do La Silla and Paranal observatories have different email addresses for the waiver requests?)

- Most are happy with the monitoring of their Service Mode observations. However, there are two suggestions

  1. "The problem is that it is difficult to estimate the quality, other than getting a rough idea from the DIMM seing monitor and sky transparency monitor. Still, I believe that the observers make a quality assessments for each OB and that could be posted on the run progress pages."
  2. "The way it is done does feel a bit offline. I do not however, have any good suggestions on how to improve. Perhaps a few automatic emails when say 25, 50 and 75% of the project is completed?"

- Many are happy with the results of the Service Mode observations. However, there are a few comments that could be of use to ESO

  1. Are you satisfied of the service mode observations in general ? "No. The three times where I as a PI ave used service mode have resulted in very bad data. We got a series of observations with FORS2 where the galaxies were placed on the joint between the 2 chips. That was not so smart. I do not know what caused the other problems but the data we got (IFU spectra and multi-obj spectroscopy with the 3.6m) were much inferior to what is expected from the prevailing conditions at the moment of observations according to the

ESO monitor pages and the instrument manuals and exposure time calculators.(seasoned observer)"

2. The organization of the data on the delivered DVDs is a bit complicated and confusing.

- A number of issues related to data in various ways have been raised.

1. UVES: Pipeline-reduced echelle-order spectra (quick-look pipeline) should be provided in addition to the merged ones. The merging of the UVES pipeline is anything but sophisticated!
2. For Phase II preparation: Oftenly (e.g. in the IR) one has to use many telescope offsets and ideally they should be different. It would be very useful if there was a graphical tool to examine that the offsets one enters is indeed the desired one - it is very easy to make a small mistake especially when copying/cutting/pasting many OBs. Something like the VisualTargetTuner (VTT) for HST would be ideal.
3. Why do ESO use a file naming convention that conflicts with MIDAS (e.g. including '-' signs). My suggestion is to upgrade MIDAS in these respect. In general I would like ESO to put more resources on MIDAS, rather than relying on commercial software like IDL.
4. UC should ask ESO to announce changes to existing software/hardware EVEN if ESO is 100% certain that it will work and the transition will be undetectable to the observer

Below follows the answers to the remaining questions addressed in the poll.

5 - Are there any specific questions you would like to be addressed at the UC ?

"I think it a good idea to intensify the interaction with young students to increase the awareness of what is going on at ESO. Thus to invite students to Garching and European observatories (more than now), to take initiative for national and regional summer schools and to send ESO representatives to these courses or just for visits to the institutes to inform about ESO plans and new instrumentation."

Questions relevant to this year general topic: "2nd generation of VLT instruments, ALMA, and ELTs" (Questions 6-9 on the web-pages)

6 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the current ESO instrumentation (VLT, La Silla) ? excellent – 0; good – 8; fairly good – 1; poor – 0

7 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the future generation of La Silla instruments ? excellent – 0; good – 2; fairly good – 3; poor – 4

8 - How would you qualify your own knowledge of the future generation of VLT instruments ? excellent – 0; good – 4 ;fairly good – 3; poor – 2

9 - How do you keep informed about the instrumental developments at ESO ?

mostly via the ESO web page	2
mostly via the web outside the ESO site	1
at La Silla or Paranal when observing	0
discussing with colleagues	6

10 - Which ones of the following 2nd generation instruments do you know and/or are directly related to YOUR science ?

	YES	NO
KMOS	2	3
MUSE	4	2
PlanetFinder	4	3
X-shooter	7	0
HAWK-I	3	2
PRIMA	2	5

11 - What is the importance of the following items for YOUR FUTURE (5 years) science at ESO ?

	essential	important	secondary	irrelevant
Multi-objects capability	2	3	4	
Quick-look pipeline		5	4	
Science-quality pipeline	6	2	1	
Wavelength coverage	5	4		
High spatial resolution	1	2	4	1
High spectral resolution	6	2	1	
3D spectroscopy	1	2	3	2
Access to mm-wavelengths		1	4	3
Accurate simulation tools	1	2	5	1

12 - Are there any specific questions you would like to be addressed at the UC about the La Silla and Paranal future generations of the instruments, about ALMA and about the development of the ESO Extremely Large Telescope ?

“Important parameter for future science: High temporal resolution.”

“Usually the timelines are too optimistic and not regularly updated on the web. problems and delays should be admitted and advertised in which case they will meet respect rather than anger.”

ESO Users Committee 2006 (Switzerland)
Fact Sheet by Dr. Frédéric Courbin

The Swiss community has been polled in February 2006. Almost all PIs of ESO programs in Periods 74-76 have answered the poll (14 answers) or have sent me directly their comments about specific points they wanted to make. The opinion of the Swiss community can be summarized as follows.

1 General information provided by ESO

Two users out of 14 have found that the *general information* provided on the ESO web page was satisfactory. However, while the content of the pages is considered as good, the access to the information and the clarity of the web structure can be improved.

Six users find useful the information in the ESO messenger, 3 have no opinion and 5 find the information of low quality. There is a split in opinion on the quality of the ESO press-releases, with 50% of users judging it as excellent, and 50% judging it as bad or very bad.

2 Preparation of phase I proposals, and feedback from ESO

The manual and web information made available by ESO to prepare phase I proposals are usually found fairly satisfactory. However, the web structure is often blamed to cause significant waste of time in finding specific informations or specific manuals.

The Phase I forms are found unclear about how to apply for monitoring programs, especially when numerous observing epochs are asked for. More space would be needed in the "scheduling requirements" box.

The users note a growing discrepancy between the scientific comments given by the OPC on their proposals, and the time actually allocated. Extreme cases have been noticed with outstanding scientific comments and in the end a low priority in the execution of the program in practice. The community feels that it is not well informed on how the comments by the panels and by the OPC are actually used by ESO to schedule programs, or not.

3 Observing in visitor mode

The organisation of the trips to La Silla and Paranal, the food and the lodging are found very satisfactory in both observatories. However, the trips could be made shorter, with less preparation time at Paranal for observers who know already the intrument they will observe with.

The help of all ESO staff to solve problems at the telescope is very much appreciated and the staff is usually seen as very efficient, but one user noticed that new staff members are sometimes sent at Paranal as support astronomers while they are still not very well trained for the instrument they support.

4 Observing in service mode

No major problem with service mode observations. All users are happy with the tools provided by ESO (ETC, p2pp, fims etc...) and with the contact with the ESO staff. The time given to the users to do their phase II is judged as sufficient by all service mode users.

Several users note that, in some cases, it would be helpful to interact directly with paranal in order to fine tune OBs. For example to fine tune exposure times or in ToO in order to decide whether it is worth it continuing a series of OB or not.

The time necessary to accept a waiver is sometimes long, up to one week, and it is often difficult in phase I to see if the modes requested will require a waiver or not.

One user noticed that not all calibrations are always sent along with the data.

Master flat fields (FORS) are still sent trimmed with respect to the data, making them difficult to use.

One P74-program had more than 50% of its targets duplicated with another program of the same panel, with identical science goal and close to identical title.

5 2006 general topic: 2nd generation of VLT instruments, ALMA, ELTs

The Swiss communitty does not feel it is well informed on the new generations of ESO instruments, including ALMA. Most of the users say that the information they get on this matter is collected when chatting with colleagues rather than from ESO directly. The ESO web information about the status (accepted, in construction, under study) of a next generation instrument is unclear.

Given the growing complexity of the instrumentation, a full science pipeline is quoted by 70% of the users as an essential element for any future instrument at ESO, independent of the instrument performances.

Fact sheet by Dr. Malcolm Bremer (United Kingdom)

The views of the UK community towards its use of ESO facilities was gauged through a web survey. The questions in this survey were identical to those used in surveys by other member nations. Emails were sent to all recent UK applicants (the list supplied by ESO) and 38 of these responded, approximately 20 per cent of those targeted.

Overall, it appears that the community is fairly satisfied with the service ESO provides, naturally a survey of this kind brings forward more criticism than praise. In any event, the responses to the survey have allowed particular themes of concern to UK astronomers to be identified and these are discussed below.

(1) Information

Information on the web was generally thought good, the messenger as good-acceptable and the press releases acceptable. Quite a few respondents said that they did not read press releases, and only a half read Messenger and thought it was good or excellent. It seems that the average UK astronomer does not treat the messenger as a key resource for learning about ESO.

The most common criticism is that much of the information on the web is spread over too many pages, documents etc. In particular several users said that many of the manuals, although normally complete, did not allow for a fast way to get up to speed on an instrument. They were not optimised for use by an astronomer. This is not uncommon, manuals written by engineers etc are often like this. Cookbooks, tutorials or FAQs are more useful, though the detailed manuals need to be there too. There were occasions (eg for UVES/FLAMES) that important information was spread over several pages and inconsistent.

(2) Proposal preparation and submission

People were happy with the information in the call for proposals. The general proposal information on the web was deemed sufficient. Manuals were thought to be sufficient rather than excellent, reflecting the above comments that it took a long time to hunt for the required information. There were particular exceptions: The EMMI manual was noted to be poor, as are polarisation details in most manuals. More information on Apex needed to be available (at least for the last call). Some users were not convinced that exposure time calculators gave results that agreed with their experience of the instruments.

Proposal submission and web letters presented few problems though a couple of users found it annoying that sometimes the proposals were rejected during the submission process by ESOFORM due to Latex errors. I'm not sure whether this was with or without successful dry-run checking on the web site. One clear negative is that people don't like the way the form changes each time, forcing them to re-import all of their text etc from previous proposals manually. Could a converter be written, or some way found of

indicating what has changed in the form from round to round? Some would like the call to be made earlier than 1 month in advance.

(3) The OPC

This got by far the most comments. Only a minority (1/3) thought that the work of the OPC and their feedback was acceptable or better. Many people thought that the feedback was useless and sometimes rude. Although people often object to this at other observatories, it is clear there is a real issue with this for ESO in comparison to our other facilities. People clearly realized that assessing this many proposals is difficult, but this was factored into their comments. Some examples:

"The feedback received sometime makes sense. The feedback often includes incomplete sentences. I can provide an example if required."

"On my latest proposal, the comments read as though (grudgingly) the proposal was excellent and would produce excellent science, but that no time would be awarded as the panel/referee (whoever) did not like this type of research."

In particular, people were not convinced that in every round, each panel had sufficient expertise to judge their proposals:

"Well, I've had very positive and very frustrating experience with the OPC, so on average it is OK. A problem is that the panel, depending on its constitution, sometimes lacks the necessary specialist knowledge to assess the relevance of a proposal, and then the decision is somewhat random"

People are concerned about the openness of the process, many people found it a black-box:

"Some of the OPC comments belay a total incomprehension of the proposal, or even of the field of research. I suggest a system similar to other TACs where the main referee on a proposal may put questions to the PI before any final decision is made. This works well in the case of (UK) PATT and Gemini proposals. Finally, many of the OPC comments are simply not helpful. _ Many_ times I've had "Very interesting science, well written and clear proposal, full time allocation should be awarded." and then I get no time award! I assume that scheduling or heavy over-subscription is the key but the OPC comments are not augmented with comments from the scheduler and so one is left wondering how to change the proposal for the next proposal round."

In particular one UK panel member is concerned that the secret voting on panels is open to abuse. I have heard this from other members. The debate can happen, but if someone is determined to vote against a proposal they can, regardless of the facts. This is not what happens in other TACs which the UK uses, it would be clear if anyone was doing this.

Whether this is justified or paranoia, it clearly indicates problems with the perception of the OPC. It must be seen to be more

accountable. Suggestions for improvement from UK users include making all panel members names available AFTER the results are announced, improving the comments by making an indication of the ranking (top 10%, bottom quartile etc), adding scheduling comments to indicate why a highly ranked proposal did not get scheduled. You then know whether to reapply next semester or not.

Clearly serious work needs to be done to make the workings of the OPC more transparent to UK users, and to improve the average UK astronomer's view of it. Quite a few of the comments were couched in terms of a comparison between different TACS, it is in ESO's interest to ensure that it is seen favourably in the light of these.

(4) Visitor mode observations

In general people were happy about the way they were looked after when visiting ESO (transport, accommodation). One or two did not find the travel form particularly transparent and felt they had little control of their schedule. One user suggested that more than just the departure date should be specified, better that the arrival date and city of origin is used to sort out the flights (so that international and internal flights can be matched up well). This may simply be a case of the user having to get to know the system (and the schedule of internal flights), but this could be helped by ensuring that there is some feedback between the observatory & user before the tickets are confirmed. The need to be at the mountain 48 hours before observing, especially when ESO support was available only within 10 hours of the run, was questioned by at least one user.

One vegetarian complained that the food at the observatory was not particularly suitable.

In terms of support, the responses varied from "top class" to "very poor", one observer lost time because the TO "could not be found". Most respondents found the introductions and assistance good or excellent. Almost all visitor mode respondents received complete data sets.

One point made which has come up several times before from multiple UK observers is best summarised by direct quotation::

".... for some visitor programmes, the point of being present for the observations is to be interactive (e.g. when on a programme of obtaining redshifts for a sample, to stop observing a galaxy when a redshift is obtained). This is only possible if the data can be reduced & analysed in real-time - which requires the relevant calibration data to be taken BEFORE the first night. There still seems to be no opportunity to do this. Some opportunity should be provided."

Other users found the EMMI control system overly complicated, with information spread over too many screens, another user found it almost impossible to calibrate high resolution EMMI data (blamed on a lack of information before arriving at La Silla).

(5) Service Mode observations

Most observers found that they had sufficient time to prepare their Phase 2, but at least one questioned why, if it takes ESO 3-4 months to communicate an award, should only 6 weeks be given for the user to fill in the Phase 2? Specifically, this can cause a problem during the northern hemisphere summer, with people away on holiday or at conferences and on working visits away from their home site. For many observers this is not a problem, but there are quite a few where they can be away for many weeks during this period. Getting the web letters out more quickly would make this problem go away. Surely the recent automation of this system helps? Other users who said that they did have enough time did note in their comments that it was "a close run thing", so any improvement would be very welcome.

Those who submitted waivers were generally happy, though there was a feeling that some of these were for obvious things that shouldn't really need waivers. Complaints about 1hr OB limits are becoming less but are still there!

One user has consistently complained to ESO (with no satisfactory response) that UVES data from service and the archive does not come with the correct set of calibration files. Although these can then be obtained manually, this is time consuming. In general, the user is happy with the service he obtains from the archive staff, but he is unimpressed with their response to what looks like a bug in the way the data is archived. If this is a bug, it needs to be fixed.

A minority of people appear not to know how to monitor their service observations. It is not clear whether they know about the status pages, but what is clear is that other observatories do a good job in this respect. eg Gemini has a page with the list of all accepted SM proposals, with a status bar against each one and note of when data was last taken. This single page is easier to use than the way we have to access individual status pages at ESO.

At least one use appears never to have received notification of his pre-imaging. By the time he realised it existed & requested the pipeline reduced data, it was too late in the semester for spectroscopy.

There is clearly still some disquiet about service mode among some users. One user writes " ... in my personal experience, I have consistently obtained my most exciting and important results with the Keck telescopes, rather than with the VLT. In my judgment, this is directly traceable to the different ways in which the two observatories operate." He argues that not being able to quickly respond to data coming in limits the science impact of service mode. Others complain that once an OB is submitted it is frozen, again not allowing quick reaction to data coming in, stifling innovative science. Most people work their way through SM, but clearly find the bureaucracy hard to deal with.

Users are still asking questions about making the data available before the end of the semester. Despite this being policy, its clear it is not getting through to all of the users.

One user noted that Z-band imaging standards were not taken as part of the FORS2 standard calibration package. When they are taken, the staff often do not realise that they need to be careful in not overexposing the primary calibrator as there are no published secondary calibrators in the Z-band standard fields.

About half the respondents reported that they received complete service-mode data sets in a timely manner, the other half said that they did not. Is this expected given the overall statistics?

(6) Specific instruments and other issues

Just over half the respondents rated their knowledge of ESO instrumentation as good or excellent, though most had very poor knowledge of future La Silla instrumentation. Similarly only a small minority had good or excellent knowledge of future VLT instrumentation. Most kept themselves informed through the ESO web, with about a third through conversations with colleagues.

KMOS was clearly well-known and directly related to individual science in the UK, Muse and X-shooter while less well-known seem to have a reasonable profile. Few people think planet-finder and PRIMA will relate to their science. Hawk-I got little recognition, puzzling given the profile of KMOS, perhaps this reflects the need to publicise it more.

In terms of the importance for future science, UK users ranked multi-object capability as essential or important along with good wavelength coverage. Quick-look pipelines were less important than actual science pipelines. Of all the topics asked in the user poll, simulation tools had the lowest priority.

Now onto individual points:

VIMOS-IFU: This took one set of experienced users 3 months to figure out, with them experimenting with Gasgano, EsoRex, and ultimately settling on a combination of VIPG I and IRAF. The data were taken in October, but are now shelved until they can figure out why the IFU table is not quite right. They combined 4 fields with the IFU and the data look great, except that there up-down problems in the column alignment. They have emailed the VIMOS help line and they are looking into it. The pipeline clearly needs a user friendly cookbook, this does not sound like a mode that is not as easy to use as it ought to be.

HARPS: GTO policies indicate that HARPS logs should be available but they are not, they must be cove red by some other agreement which is not on the web. Where is the Iodine cell for HARPS, it was part of the original specifications for HARPS? This is an issue that has dragged on for over a year. Clearly the iodine cell is vital for general users, regardless of what the PI says. Without it, it is not a common user instrument, this must be fixed.

Snapshot proposals: One user wonders if a specific category of "snapshot" proposals could be introduced. Some satellite mission has those, e.g. HST and SWIFT, and they can make extremely good use of

small gaps in the schedule. He has been PI on a large HST snapshot proposal, and got a fantastic data set worth ~70 orbits, which would not have been possible as a normal GO proposal. For ESO's telescopes, one could think of something similar, where a proposal is specifically designed for bad conditions. As an example: this user would like to observe a sample of ~20 objects that are bright enough to be done in quite poor conditions, and are easy to be carried out in 1h OBs. Now, for the proposal, he would like to submit a list of ~100 targets, stating clearly that it needs only bad conditions, and there is no need to get all targets done, but only a relatively small fraction. In the current system, he can not see how such a proposal could be written.

Spectroscopic follow-up for VST & VISTA: More than one respondent noted that the surveys carried out by these telescopes will generate vast numbers of targets for follow-up with the VLT. Although they will provide targets for typical 2-3 night MOS runs, the huge areas surveyed means that much of the science that they will enable will require very large spectroscopic campaigns. ESO needs to ensure that both the instrumentation and the mechanisms to grant time for large spectroscopic surveys are in place in order for this to happen. One user also noted that facilities to obtain photometry longward of K-band on VISTA sources need to be maintained (ie there needs to be L and M band imaging available into the KMOS/HAWK-I era).

Access to GranTaCan: Can ESO inform the community about the agreement with Spain for access to GranTeCan?

Fact sheet 2006 ESO UC meeting, Dr. Wolfgang Gieren (Chile)

The same poll as distributed in the other ESO member countries was offered to the Chilean community. 16 astronomers responded, which is roughly 1/3 of the current population of researchers in Chile, most of which are observationally oriented astronomers using the different existing facilities in the country.

I will in the following refer to the different questions made in the poll, and briefly summarize the essence of the answers received.

1. **General information**: People are extremely satisfied with all channels of ESO communication. In particular the information being offered on the ESO Website is judged very useful. People are very happy with the Messenger, and Press Releases as well.
2. **Proposal-related questions**: proposal preparation and submission tools were highly rated. Some astronomers think that some of the instrument manuals are not very up-to-date and should be improved. Nobody had any problems with the proposal submission.
   While my impression is that Chilean astronomers appreciate the work of the OPC, there is clearly a criticism with respect to the comments received from the panels. About half of the community members feel that the panel comments are not carefully elaborated and must be improved (especially for those proposals which have been rejected). Comments were, among others: "Panel comments are insufficient and not useful to improve the next version of the proposal", "OPC comments are random, sometimes contradictory". Clearly, there is a need for improvement.
3. **Visitor mode observations**: Chilean users were in general very satisfied with all aspects of visitor runs on La Silla and Paranal. A very few criticisms referred to the limitation of daytime access to the instruments, and to the performance of quick reduction pipelines which were not always found to work well. But in general, people appreciate the very high standards of ESO services and operations. Chilean astronomers also seem to think that ESO standards, in all aspects, are higher than in other international observatories operating in Chile.
4. **Service mode operations**: People are happy with the phase II process, and deadline. Only one astronomer thinks there is too little time for phase II preparation and suggests to extend the deadline by 2 weeks. Another one suggests to have a fixed and easy-to-remember date for phase II submission, which might be a good idea indeed. Most people seem happy with the OBs, but several think that the maximum length should be somewhat extended (1.5 hours), which would make many waiver requests unnecessary. While most astronomers are satisfied with the data for their service mode programs they get, there are a few complaints saying that data were not complete (calibration data lacking; 2 cases), and others who received their data very late. There was evidently a problem with 2.2m/WFI data; several users have not obtained all the data they were supposed to get.
   In general, however, Chilean astronomers are quite happy with the performance of the service observing mode.

5. **General comments**: One comment which was made by several astronomers refers to ESO´s policy to not allow more than 2 observers during a run in visitor mode. Chilean astronomers argue that it would be extremely valuable to have the opportunity to take 1-2 students to the telescope-however, many times, in the case of complex observations, the second person *must* be an experienced colleague, making it impossible then to take along a student. In the Chilean case, there are no important economic considerations either. So there is a clear request to ESO to change their policies and admit, for Chilean observers, at least one student, in addition to the two senior observers. This would also be in agreement with ESO´s policy to help the development of Chilean astronomy.
6. **Future ESO instrumentation**: Regarding the questions referring to the knowledge of current and future ESO instrumentation at both Paranal and La Silla, a few trends were very clear. Nearly all astronomers who responded the poll have a good knowledge of the current instrumentaion offered. Regarding future instrumentation, most astronomers say to have only a poor knowledge, at the present time. The ESO website seems the favourite place to learn about the instrumental developments at ESO; the other important channel is discussion with colleagues. Among the second-generation instruments, the most attractive ones are KMOS and (perhaps surprisingly) PRIMA-about 70% of astronomers think these instruments to be essential for their future research. The lowest ranking had HAWK-I, but still 40% of Chilean astronomers find this instrument useful for their future research.

   Among the different capabilities mentioned in point 11 of the poll, the ones which were considered most essential or important are multi-object capability, science-quality pipelines, and high spectral resolution. Those least important to Chilean users are 3D spectroscopy, access to mm wavelengths, and simulation tools. However, this information is clearly biased because none of the radioastronomers working in Chile contested the poll; there is clearly a growing group extremely interested in ALMA, and related facilities!