

UK 8m user group

May 2006

Poll of UK ESO users

- List of UK proposer emails from ESO, about 200
- Mailed them to ask for responses to an on-line questionnaire: Got about 40 responses
- “Coordinated” across ESO member states in as much as we all asked the same questions.
- Results were not combined, but it became clear there were common themes
- Additionally, detailed comments on all ESO aspects were received

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

	Excellent	Good	Acceptable	poor
Web	8	22	3	5
Messenger	4	15	7	1
Press	6	10	11	2

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2 - Proposal preparation, submission and evaluation

	Excellent	sufficient	incomplete	poor
Call resources	27	10	0	0
Info in manuals	8	25	5	0
Web resources	5	25	4	1

5 had problems with submission, 32 did not

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3- The OPC

3 found OPC decisions excellent
11 found them acceptable
11 found they "could do better"
9 found the "could do much better"
3 found them "a disaster"

A major source of comment, not just by the UK but by most other countries

Poll of UK ESO users

4-Visitor & service mode

- People were happy with all travel arrangements etc and generally with the telescope introductions in VM
- Most people came away with complete data sets (weather permitting)
- Most people reported they had enough time to prepare SM Phase 2
- Some people (6 of 22) felt they could not monitor SM programmes sufficiently. Not clear if they were aware that they could use the web to do this
- About half of SM programs (12 of 24) arrived in a timely manner & in a complete enough state

Poll of UK ESO users

5-Instrumentation knowledge

- Most respondents thought that had fairly good or better knowledge of the current instrumentation suite
- Most had poor knowledge of future La Silla instruments, not surprising
- Similarly, not a great deal of knowledge of future VLT instruments
- Most people keep themselves informed of developments via the ESO web, but surprisingly quite a number from discussions with colleagues:-> ESO need to communicate better.

Poll of UK ESO users

6- Importance of future instruments to user's science

	Important	unimportant
KMOS	21	4
MUSE	13	8
SPHERE	6	15
X-SHOOTER	15	9
HAWK-EYE	6	12

Poll of UK ESO users

6- Importance of future instruments to user's science

	Vital	Important	Secondary	Irrelevant
Multi-obj	15	13	4	4
Quick look Pipe	7	17	11	1
Science pipe	11	20	6	0
Wave cover	17	13	5	0
High spatial	10	16	8	1
High spectral	12	10	10	3
3D Spec	5	15	8	5
Mm-wave	10	8	12	5
Sim tools	7	8	13	4

Points from UC presentations

- Apex now working
- La Silla now a test bed for other people's novel instruments
- 1302 user science nights last year, about 89% availability total losses (tech, weather, incompetence) ~11-12%
- LGS on VLT works, but needs improving
- Hawk-Eye will arrive late this year/early next year
- 30" long slit on UVES
- New VPH red grisms on VIMOs 2x sensitivity
- New Sinfoni detector -> 4x sensitivity in J
- All user computers at observatory upgraded
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Points from UC presentations

- Proposal submission problems in April. Big problems, all sorted out now. Big headache for everyone, users and ESO.
- OPC changes: 3 subpanels in C and D (2 in A and B)
- New nominating cttee for the OPC -> recommend to the DG, cttee made up of 2 ESO staff and 3 outsiders
- Members selected for science expertise and complementarity, no national reps
- Terms shortened: OPC 2 years, panel 1 year
- Still hard to fill panels 65 requests led to 36 refusals even with the shorter term.
- New rules on conflicts of interest.

Points from UC presentations

- New User portal. Reorganisation of the ESO web site. Login with one user name/password, works for all relevant personal info, eg web letters, P2PP, archive, committee membership etc.
- Theoretically could allow resources necessary for you to be gathered together. Could allow you to immediately download VM data from archive, assuming that the observatory can get it into the archive quickly (link from Chile is slow).
- Finnish SAMPO project: should set up recipes for data reduction of many/all ESO instruments. Will be compatible with CPL and pre-existing tools. SAMPO assesses all the requirements
- Ongoing projects to secure legacy software, sadly first part is to make a python interface for MIDAS!!!
- Other projects: ERDA:- interactive front end for pipeline recipes
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UC Discussion Points

- It was clear that ESO believes that The Messenger is a prime way of communicating important information to the user and we should all be avidly reading it.
- Many points the users bring up are claimed to be answered in one or more articles in previous Messengers
- Users do not pay attention to this, if ESO wants us to, the info needs to be flagged, indexed and presented differently (eg as web pages rather than a monolithic pdf file). We made the point that ESO might want us to read this, but people don't treat it as seriously as the stuff on the main website

UC Discussion Points

- There was widespread unhappiness about the feedback from the OPC. Often useless and/or rude. Often useless in determining whether reapplying is worthwhile.
- ESO needs to get a grip of this, they say the OPC is independent, but that's an excuse.
- The OPC was seen as a black box, not just by the UK but other nations too
- ESO said it has been (or will be) explained in the Messenger, as with everything else
- Suspect this issue will go away with more people cycling through the panel process

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Action items (as I remember them)

- Put OPC rules & selection procedures on the web
- Make the OPC aware that people are unhappy with the quality of feedback, it must be improved
- Ensure that scheduling remarks are in feedback, to explain the non-scheduling of high-ranked proposals
- Understand that the web is the medium for obtaining information about ESO, ensure that it is up-to-date and fully cross-referenced
- Recommend quick-start guides/cookbooks for instruments so that users don't have to wade through manuals to find small bits of critical information.
- Recommend that ESO looks at ways of getting SV data to users earlier (eg night after observation)

Other Issues

- Getting individual queries/problems through to ESO in this forum is difficult
- Still a case of them kicking into touch anything that is too far from what they were already thinking
- Case in point: How do we follow up VISTA? There will inevitably be a need to get thousands of redshifts for some projects. How do we do that?
- I asked about a red-CCD upgrade to VIMOS, Moorwood gave many reasons (all weak & non-scientific) why not. Basically, they have just got VIMOS fixed, they don't want to change it again. The DG said it would be wrong to think that you could follow up thousands of VISTA redshifts with ESO telescopes..... In this case she didn't want to antagonise the smaller nations who are against giving out large swathes of telescope time. They need to think about this, having VISTA without spectro-followup makes no scientific sense.