



ESO/OPC/116
January 2011

ESO OBSERVING PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE

87th Meeting

Garching - Ismaning

November 22-26, 2010

MINUTES

87th Meeting of the
ESO Observing Programmes Committee
held in Garching and Ismaning from 22-26 November 2010

- A. OPC meeting - Part 1 (22 November)
B. Panel Sessions (23/24/25 November)
C. OPC meeting - Part 2 (25/26 November)

The meeting took place with the following participants:

Chairperson:	Dr. Ralf Bender	(Germany)
Vice-chairperson:	Dr. Eileen Friel	(USA)
Members:	Dr. Jaqueline Bergeron	(France)
	Dr. Annette Ferguson	(United Kingdom)
	Dr. Emmanuel Jehin	(Belgium)
	Dr. Hans Kjeldsen	(Denmark)
	Dr. Jean-Paul Kneib	(France)
	Dr. Leon Koopmans	(The Netherlands)
	Dr. Martin Kuerster	(Germany)
	Dr. Henny Lamers	(Netherlands)
	Dr. Simon Lilly	Switzerland)
	Dr. Diego Mardones	(Chile)
	Dr. Michael Merrifield	(United Kingdom)
	Dr. Jean-Louis Monin	(France)
	Dr. Bianca Poggianti	(Italy)
	Dr. Regina Schulte-Ladbeck	(USA)
	Dr. Antonella Vallenari	(Italy)
Members-at-Large:	Dr. Felipe Barrientos	(Chile)
On behalf of ESO:	Dr. Tim de Zeeuw	
	Dr. Michael Sterzik	
	Dr. Bruno Leibundgut	
	Dr. Gautier Mathys	
Minutes:	Ms. Elisabeth Hoppe	

A. OPC meeting – Part 1

Opening of the meeting

Dr. Ralf Bender opened the 87th OPC meeting addressing a special welcome to the new members Dr. Kneib, Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Jehin. He thanked Dr. Vallenari and Dr. Lamers for taking over the role of acting Panel chairs and OPC members in replacement of Dr. Lennon and Dr. Hillebrandt who could not attend the meeting.

All the meeting participants introduced themselves in a tour-de-table.

1. Introduction by the Director General

The Director General, Dr. Tim de Zeeuw, welcomed the OPC members and expressed his appreciation for the substantial efforts invested by this committee in the proposal evaluation activities. He pointed out that the OPC advice is crucial to ensure the quality of the science results stemming from ESO telescopes.

In his presentation ([ANNEX 1](#)) he outlined the outstanding scientific and operational highlights and gave an overview of the milestones of the ESO programme and the next steps to come.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda of the 87th OPC meeting was adopted without any changes.

3. Approval of the Draft Minutes of the 86th Meeting

The draft minutes of the 86th OPC meeting had been distributed to the P86 and P87 OPC members. They were approved with a minor change with regard to the affiliation of Dr. Bonifacio, which should be France instead of Italy.

4. Dates of the next meeting

In 2011 the OPC meetings are scheduled on 23–27 May and 21-25 November.

5. Overview of OPC Procedures

Dr. Mathys gave a brief overview of the OPC procedures. The main change for P87 was the merging of the Short and Normal Programme types. The Short Programme type was used between Periods 80 and 86 to distinguish proposals requesting a total amount of observing time not exceeding 10 hours. From Period 87 all such proposals had to be submitted as Normal Programmes. Concurrently, the Normal Programme proposal form has been significantly revised. The main change with respect to previous

periods is the introduction of a limit length of two pages for the combination of the scientific description of the programme and the attachments. Only positive feedback was received from the community with regard to these changes.

In Period 87 for the first time VISTA open time was offered to the community. After the OPC evaluation the open VISTA proposals will be considered in scientific competition with the ongoing public surveys, also making sure that there are no cases of science duplication.

6. Progress status report on the OPC Working Group

Dr. Leibundgut informed the OPC that the final report of the OPC Working Group is expected to be available early in 2011. He summarized the objectives of this Working Group and gave a summary of the progress achieved so far ([ANNEX 2](#)).

7. Public Spectroscopic Surveys: overview of Letters of Intent

Dr. Leibundgut gave an overview on the procedure and time line of the call for Public Spectroscopic Surveys (PSS) and provided the OPC with some statistical information based on the 24 letters of intent that were received. Formal proposal submission of projects pre-selected by the PSS Panel will be invited for the regular proposal deadline for P88, 31 March 2011 ([ANNEX 3](#)).

8. VISTA Public Surveys: Status Report

Dr. Arnaboldi, the ESO Survey Team leader, presented a detailed status report on the 6 ESO Public Surveys with VISTA including their completion rate and early science results ([ANNEX 4](#)).

The OPC Chairman thanked Dr. Arnaboldi for her interesting presentation.

9. Review of concluded and on-going Large Programmes

21 status reports of on-going or concluded Large Programmes were received. The OPC approved the continuation of all on-going Large Programmes. Requests for time compensation, which were submitted by some Principal Investigators, were all related to weather and technical downtime losses during Visitor Mode runs. Since as a rule, such losses are not eligible for compensation, only one of these requests was supported by the OPC. The exception corresponds to a programme requiring usage of the Laser Guide Star that was unduly affected by an unsuccessful maintenance activity.

10. Review of Calibration Programme proposals

Three Calibration Programme (CP) proposals were submitted for P87. They were introduced by their respective Primary Referee. The OPC discussion was supported by a pre-assessment of these programmes by the ESO internal panel, which was represented by Dr. Sterzik. In conclusion, the OPC did not recommend implementation of any of the Calibration Programmes. However, it suggested to integrate one of them in the planned technical activities of the Observatory. The goal of the programme was

to demonstrate a new observing technique with the VLTI and AMBER with a view to enabling observations of considerably fainter targets. The outcome of the OPC votes is summarised in [ANNEX 5](#).

11. Overview of P87 Visitor Instrument proposals

Dr. Sterzik gave a presentation on the assessment of the Visitor Instrument Proposals submitted for P87 ([ANNEX 6](#)), which was found very useful.

12. Overview of P87 Target of Opportunity proposals

For P87, 48 Target of Opportunity (ToO) proposals plus 5 X-shooter GTO proposals of ToO nature were submitted. 10 ToO programme proposals were in OPC category A, 1 proposal in category B, 6 proposals in category C, and 31 proposals in category D.

Dr. Mathys reminded the OPC that a ToO proposal can contain genuine ToO runs and normal runs; the latter are evaluated in the same way as Normal Programme runs. He summarised the procedures to be applied for the evaluation of ToO programmes and thanked Dr. Friel for accepting to chair the joint ToO Panel, which has the task to consolidate the outcome of the Panel discussion and to provide the OPC with a merged ranked list of all recommended ToO runs.

13. Overview of P87 Large Programme proposals

Dr. Mathys presented the list of Large Programme proposals submitted for P87 (4 in OPC category A, 3 in B, 2 in C, and 3 in D) and thanked the OPC members who agreed to take the role of chairs of the joint LP discussions scheduled for Wednesday afternoon. Furthermore he informed OPC that Dr. Barrientos kindly agreed to take the role of member at large to replace a conflicted OPC member in the discussion of new Large Programme proposals.

B. Panel Sessions

1. Welcome and Information to Panel Members

Dr. Mathys welcomed all participants to the OPC Panel meetings. In his presentation ([ANNEX 7](#)) he elaborated on the roles of the Panels and on the procedures to be applied. Furthermore he gave some recommendations for the Panel meeting organization. He reminded the Panel members that feasibility questions should be submitted early on, in order to ensure that the Observatory experts could answer them before the end of the Panel meetings. He explained the principles underlying the generation of merged rankings per telescope across all Panels and stressed the importance of the comments to be written by the Primary Referees for communication to the proposal PIs via the web-letters. Furthermore he presented the proposal submission statistics, including their distribution across the various scientific categories and the demand on individual telescopes. Finally Dr. Mathys thanked all the participants for the work devoted to the proposal evaluation before and during the OPC week.

Dr. Sterzik presented a report on the La Silla Paranal Observatory, with emphasis on the current status of the available instrumentation ([ANNEX 8](#)).

2. Review of Applications by the Panels

The 13 Panels of the OPC met at the Commundo Center in Ismaning on November 23/24/25 (morning) to review the applications for P87. Special sessions for the joint discussion of Large Programmes were scheduled in the afternoon of November 24, to prepare recommendations to the OPC for the final evaluation of these programmes.

C. OPC meeting – Part 2

1. Joint meetings of the Panel chairs

At the beginning of the afternoon of November 25, joint meetings of the Panel chairs and co-chairs defined merged rankings for the ToO proposals across scientific disciplines, and coordinated the recommendations on the Normal Programmes within each of the four scientific categories of the OPC.

2. Final Review of ToO Programmes

Dr. Friel, the chairperson of the OPC Panel for ToO proposals, presented the recommendations for implementation of ToO programmes in P87. These recommendations were unanimously endorsed by the OPC. They are summarised in [ANNEX 9](#).

3. Final Review of Large Programmes

The OPC Chairman welcomed Dr. Barrientos, the member-at-large replacing Dr. Kneib in the Large Programme discussion. Each of the ESO Large Programmes was discussed by the OPC after a short presentation by its Primary Referee, before a vote was taken. As a result, the OPC recommended the implementation of 5 of the 12 Large Programmes submitted in P87. The outcome of the OPC votes on Large Programmes is reflected in [ANNEX 10](#).

The OPC also discussed the case of several Normal Programme proposals, which requested more than 100 hours in P87. These projects do not formally fall into the category of Large Proposals, but do request a significant amount of time. It was concluded that the distinction between Large and Normal Programmes must be clarified in the future.

4. Comments on the OPC Procedures

The OPC members found that current procedures are adequate to cope with the large workload. As a consequence the panel meetings are more relaxed now than in the past, and more time can be devoted to the science discussion. The OPC commented positively on the changes introduced in P87 in the proposal form for Normal Programmes, which indeed reduced the overall workload.

Some suggestions and ideas for further procedural changes with regard to the frequency of the OPC meetings, the revision of the scientific categories and the re-organisation of the Panel structure were discussed. Dr. Leibundgut thanked the OPC for its input, which will be brought to attention of the OPC Working Group.

5. Scientific highlights

The OPC members briefly presented the scientific highlights identified in their Panels, which included:

- the exploration of gas around Lyman-break galaxies through absorption spectroscopy of background QSOs (FORS2)
- deep infrared imaging with HAWK-I of very distant ($z > 1.3$) X-ray detected clusters of galaxies to probe cluster evolution
- a check whether the reionisation of He II at $z \approx 3$ is due to faint quasars or other sources to be detected by VIMOS observations
- FORS2 narrow-band imaging in the C IV and He II lines of Lyman- α halos in $z = 3.1$ proto-clusters should establish their metallicities and test for photoionization from an AGN feedback
- the stellar population around the central black hole of the Milky Way will be explored in detail (SINFONI) as well as a characterisation of the flare from the black hole itself (NACO and MIDI).
- mapping of AGN outflows to large distances (> 100 kpc) by looking for faint C II* lines to observe the influence of the outflows on the environment (X-SHOOTER)
- measurement of magnetic surface structure through HARPS polarimetry to determine the dependence of absorption lines, which are used to measure the radial velocity, and correct for the possible detection of planets
- a systematic survey of the inner regions of proto-planetary disks around T Tauri stars (VLTI - PIONIER)
- characterisation of exo-planets and the physics of their atmosphere were the topic of several proposals. The detection of molecules in transmission spectroscopy towards several known planets will be attempted (X-SHOOTER, FORS2).
- target of opportunity observations to characterise the chemical and isotopic composition of bright Herschel comets with CRIRES, FORS2 and UVES
- measurement of the radial and vertical structure of inner disks with about 2 milli-arcseconds resolution (PIONIER) in systems which transition from proto-planetary disks to debris disks. The outer disks will be observed with MIDI and AMBER.
- imaging of disks in Herbig Be/Ae stars with PIONIER
- spectroscopy of two planets orbiting the same star to find evolutionary differences to compare the chemical composition and physical conditions of planets at the same age (NACO)
- detection of water ice on the surfaces of asteroids to check how pristine these objects are (NACO)
- confirmation of circular polarisation in the Earthshine as induced by chiral molecules of living material on Earth's surface (FORS2)
- monitoring of the aspherical wind evolution in η Car and the wind-wind interaction (AMBER)
- observations of the periastron transition of a companion through the disk around a Be star (AMBER)
- exploring whether multiple stellar populations exist in more globular clusters (X-SHOOTER, FLAMES)

The OPC chairman thanked the OPC members for their presentations, which he found very interesting.

6. Conclusions by the Director General and the OPC Chairman

The Director General was pleased to see again the overall high demand for all telescopes and the quality of the proposals, which reflects the continued interest of the community in ESO facilities. He pointed out that the work of the OPC is crucial to ensure the quality of the future science results from ESO telescopes and thanked all participants for the time and efforts devoted to the proposal evaluation process. Finally he thanked the leaving members and the leaving OPC Chairman for the fruitful and collaboration.

Dr. Bender replied that the OPC chairmanship was a very interesting experience for him and thanked the Observing Programmes Office for the pleasant collaboration and for the efficient organization of the meetings.

7. Other business

This was the last meeting of Dr. Mathys as Head of the Observing Programmes Office. The Director General, seconded by the OPC members, took the occasion to express his gratitude for the experience and dedication Dr. Mathys devoted to his functions throughout the past years, and wished him all the best in his new position of Lead Astronomer of the ALMA Proposal Handling Team.

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