

Report on the 35th ESO Users Committee Meeting

ESO Garching 14-15 April 2011

The detailed agenda of the UC meeting and related documents can be found at

<http://www.eso.org/public/about-eso/committees/uc/uc-35th.html>

Highlight topics from the presentations:

E-ELT: continuous support of VLT/VLTI, ALMA, La Silla

1st light in 8 years (2012-2020), 9.4 years to 2nd instrument (Q2/2021)

Context: JWST: 2018, TMT, GMT: beyond 2010

42m baseline telescope & dome: construction 16+ years, increased risk

Present study of a 39m baseline with smaller instrument platforms, removal of gravity-invariant focus to reach the goal of 1st light in 2020, assessment ongoing (science cases)

Approval for 39m baseline concept planned for ESO Council 7/8 Dec. 2011

La Silla: LS2010+ minimum operation scenario operative, internal review with a number of recommendations

Upcoming **Paranal VLT** instrumentation: all 2nd generation instruments on track

- 2011: VIMOS upgrade (UT3), VISIR upgrade (UT3)
- 2012: KMOS (UT1 visitor focus), SPHERE (UT3 replacing ISAAC), MUSE (UT4 replacing NACO)
- 2013/14: 4LGSF, AOF (UT4)
- 2014/15: NACO without LGS transfer to another Nasmyth focus (CRIRES, FLAMES, VIMOS), NACO decommissioned when Double Cass. Instrument (high Strehl imager) will be available

VLTI activities: PRIMAS commissioning and delivery to operation, 1st visitor instrument (PIONIER, 4-beam combiner 4 UTs/4 ATs)

VISTA/VIRCAM: 1 year operation with stable performance, degradation of M1, M2 mirror coating, warranty issues on M1, 75% of time allocated to surveys, 10% Chilean time, 15% normal proposals, P88: 22 proposals submitted, 3 Chilean proposals

VST: 1st light achieved 0.85 arcsec FWHM without active optics, start of survey science operation planned for August 2011

ALMA: ALMA Science Portal online, ALMA archive mirrored at ESO containing raw data, calibration data and CASA scripts

ALMA Early Science: proposal deadline 30 June 2011, start of observations: 30 Sept. 2011

P88 proposals: 1010 proposals submitted (normal: 919, Large Programmes: 17, GTO: 26), last call of GTC proposals: 9, spectroscopic surveys: 2

ESO stated on the issue of the possibility of a Spectroscopic Survey for VIMOS, that such a survey will be announced when the large programmes running on this instrument will be over. The policy of the survey is still to be decided.

A number of issues were discussed which were brought up by ESO users in the course of the annual poll (more details are given in the Appendix):

- **NACO**

The planned decommissioning is a major concern in the user community, in particular how to bridge the time between the replacement of NACO at UT4 with MUSE and the mounting of the double Cassegrain instrument in 2014/15. Temporary mounting to other UT Nasmyth focus is complex operation with the risk of failure of vital parts of NACO. ESO envisages that such an operation may be carried out only once in the period 2012-2014/15.

- **GTO**

With the introduction of the 2nd generation VLT instruments a significant fraction of observing time will be blocked by GTO in the near future: MUSE (225 nights), KMOS (250 nights), SPHERE (260 nights), AOF (307 nights). GTO programs have additional impact on the user community by blocking target lists. This may be especially critical in the case of SPHERE. Reference to the GTO policy and GTO reserved target are given in every call for proposals. OPC reviews all proposals, GTO like Chilean proposals cannot be triaged. There were some cases where GTO proposals were ranked very low, however in almost all cases GTO proposals were scheduled in the past.

- **OPC**

The feedback of the OPC on proposals is a concern in the user community. In general, OPC feedback is considered to be to general, stereotypical, vague and too brief. This issue will be further followed up (see recommendation and action items).

- **Issues related to proposals and observations**

The UC acknowledges that the new esoforms introduced since P87 are an improvement. However, possibilities to change the present LaTeX forms into a more user friendly proposal tool (e.g. Web-based tools as used by other observatories) should be investigated by ESO. The timescale of introduction of such new tools should be significantly shorter than the time frame leading up to the E-ELT. A major concern is also the definition of the proprietary period of observational data. It is understood that the proprietary period begins with the first data download from the ESO archive independent of the current status of the program. The UC is of the

opinion that the proprietary period should start instead with the conclusion of the respective observing program. Possible implementations should be investigated.

- **ESO software products**

Mac OS support is a major issue. A majority in the community would like that resources be spent in supporting Mac OS. It turns out in the discussion, that the most requested software for Mac support are unfortunately those which are the most complex ones (FIMS, FPOSS, p2pp). This issue will be further followed up (see recommendations and action items). Generally, ESO software should be independent of the computer (operating system) platform.

The (non)-usage of the Science Data Product Forum is also a matter of concern in the UC. Possibilities to improve the service have been discussed. The usefulness of a knowledge base on issues related to data reduction will be investigated.

Based on the discussion the following recommendations and action items were formulated:

The UC recommends:

- ESO should develop a mechanism through which restricted access of collaborators to specific runs can be delegated, following authorization by the PI.
- ESO should discuss plans how to change the current LaTeX based Phase I forms into a more user-friendly tool.
- ESO should start a knowledge database on issues related to data reduction.
- ESO should consider approving the UC minutes formally in the autumn UC meeting and release it to the public.
- ESO software should be platform independent.
- ESO should develop suggestions how to improve the OPC evaluation and feedback process, preferably in preparation of the autumn UC telecon.
- ESO should provide associations between calibration and science frames in the data archive.
- ESO should redefine the proprietary period, which should not depend on the time of the first download.

The UC will undertake the following tasks:

- The UC Chair and STC Chair should have a Telecon to discuss how best to share information between their meetings.
- The UC will discuss with the STC Chair the future capabilities at ESO for 3-5 micron Adaptive Optics observations.
- UC is concerned about the feedback of the OPC to the users. The UC will produce recommendations to ESO concerning the feedback and evaluation process for the autumn UC telecon.

Appendix: Annual report regarding issues brought up by ESO users

The following issues were discussed during the General Discussion and *Tour de table*. They constituted also the ingredients for the Action items and Recommendations.

ESO Users Committee Chair's Summary

This is the summary by the ESO UC Chair of feedback collected from users by the UC and additional issues that were communicated to the UC. The questionnaire covers the observing periods 85 and 86. The most significant issues are highlighted in this report. The full results of the poll are given in the appendix.

In total 249 responses were received. This is a decrease with respect to the peak of last year (334 responses), however, the number is at the same level as 2009 (230 responses). The table lists the number of responses sorted by country.

Country	A	B	BR	CH	CL	CZ	D	DK	ES	FI	F	I	NL	P	SE	UK	Other
Responses 2010	17	11	--	1	7	3	33	1	29	12	40	57	12	10	5	61	35
Responses 2011	11	5	0	14	11	7	14	7	36	8	56	44	14	8	5	9	0

Most of the responses came from occasional and frequent users, only 7% of the response were from first time users. As already noted in the last years, the majority of observing programs (68%) is carried out in service mode.

The by far most used and requested instruments were FORS and XSHOOTER followed by CRIRES, ISAAC, NACO, UVES and APEX. The least used/requested instruments were FEROS, HARPS and WFI. The very low numbers for VIRCAM requests is explained by that fact that at least 75% of the observing time is presently allocated to public surveys. There is some variation among the individual countries. The oversubscription of UT2 because of XSHOOTER has also been raised as issue.

Proposals – preparation & submission

The majority (62%) of the respondents submitted 2 or more proposals of regular type. The fraction of submitted Large Programs was 4.3%. The Call for Proposals was read by the majority at least quickly. Only a minor fraction had problems understanding the policies (instrument mode offered, proposal types). Most of the technical information on instrumentation/telescopes is obtained from on-line manuals and previous experience. The quality of the available technical information is judged to be sufficient/excellent. However, it was also noted that information is sometimes (e.g. time overheads) spread over too many pages. This includes generally also the Exposure Time Calculators although a number of issues were listed (see appendix for details):

- XSHOOTER: complete wavelength coverage for galaxy/QSO spectra not available, ETC should report bright limits for the NIR arm;
- EFOSC: grating 19 not available;
- SINFONI: in the case of emission lines, the ETC gives the S/N at the central wavelength and not integrated over the whole line, which is often useful;
- ETCs should also accept user input spectra;
- ETCs do not contain not all stellar spectral types.

There seems to be only a modest impact of blocking targets by GTO programs on the preparation of regular proposals. Only 17 proposals resulted to be affected, 8 of them were not submitted at all because the proposed target(s) were an essential part of the proposal.

Filling in the proposal and submitting the proposal was generally considered to be a smooth process with only small problems and complaints. Here are some highlighted issues:

- Figures: not all jpg and pdf formats are accepted, difficulties in placing figures and figure captions in the proposal;
- Long target lists are still considered to be a challenge;
- The LaTeX form generation is less strict than the verification during submission. This costs extra time which is considered a problem for last-minute submissions.

Proposals – OPC feedback

The success rates were found to be evenly distributed suggesting a success rate close to 50%. The success rate was for 22% of the respondents below 25% and for 32% of the respondents about 75%. The majority (57%) of the respondents considers the scientific/technical feedback from the OPC reasonable, about 33% is disappointed. Some highlighted issues:

- OPC feedback is considered to be too general/stereotypical, too vague, too brief
- In a number of cases the OPC feedback is not reflecting the scientific background and main aims of the proposal

Feedback from visitor mode observations

No distinction is made between La Silla and Paranal. Generally, there was positive feedback on issues regarding visitor mode observations. This includes travel, lodging, support at the telescope and observations.

- Complains about 12 hours transfer time when travelling to Chile (travel support by ESO is based on cost not efficiency);
- Travel to/from La Silla has delays;
- 6% of the respondents found the introduction at the telescope incomplete/confusing. The fact that there is no scientific support on La Silla is specifically mentioned. For experienced users this may not be a problem, however inexperienced users may suffer from that;
- Support on Paranal is not always optimal and depends strongly on the person of the support astronomer

Feedback from service mode observations

Phase II preparation and submission is a smooth process without major problems. The majority of respondents (54%) were in contact with an ESO Instrument Scientist in the course of this process. The installation (requirement of specific Java version) and use of p2pp still poses for some users problems.

30% of the respondents reported that their service mode programs were not concluded. Most of the comments in the questionnaire relate to this issue. This includes also programs ranked A. Most of the users are satisfied with the quality of the data.

Data reduction

Data reduction is performed using either ESO pipelines (34%), other software packages (34%) or home brewed software (32%). 59% of the respondents did try to install an ESO pipeline and 23% encountered problems. It is noted that the effort in data reduction varies strongly between instruments. Several users noted problems installing ESO pipeline software under Mac OS.

- Difficulties to set up the gasgano graphical user interface;
- Data reduction with the XSHOOTER pipeline is difficult (sky subtraction, flux calibration);
- FORS long-slit mode is inadequate (sky subtraction);
- No recipes for the reduction of tilted slits;
- Excellent pipelines for FLAMES and UVES;
- Sometimes pipeline manuals lack detailed information.

Computing issues

For the majority of the respondents (55%) Linux is the primary operating system followed by Mac OS (43%). For the clear majority all relevant software packages for Phase I and II preparation and data reduction are available for their primary computing platform. 55% responded favorably that ESO should spend some resources on supporting Mac OS.

Software packages where Mac OS support is mostly desired: FIMS, FPOSS, p2pp, vmmps and finding chart tools in general.

General issues

The majority of respondents are happy with the User Portal, although some users find links sometimes obscure and ask for a simplification of the menus. The Science Data Product Forum is still largely unknown and there was only little feedback on it. People seem to check the forum, but are disappointed that there are still only few topics present.

A clear majority (70%) of the respondents is willing to serve on OPC panels.

APEX

Only a subset of the 249 respondents (about 20%) participated in the poll related to APEX. The overall feedback is positive. Areas of improvement are manuals and documentation on observing strategies and data reductions. The available information is regarded to be too unstructured for non-expert users. Exposure Tim Calculators and observing modes were found to be sufficiently supported. More information on the progress of observations is desired. Faster availability of data is a concern.

About 19% of the 249 respondents plan to submit a proposal for ALMA Early Science Cycle 0 and are largely happy with the provided ARC user support.

Factsheet Austria prepared by Werner Zeilinger

This year 11 replies were received most of them from frequent or occasional ESO users. In general, the Austrian community is satisfied with ESO and its services.

FORS and UVES were the most used/requested instruments. No specific problems were noted in connection with proposal preparation and submission. OPC feedback is generally considered to be reasonable. The responses in the section observations (both visitor and service mode) were in general very positive.

A number of specific comments were submitted mostly in the area of data reduction:

- Rank B service mode programs which were started should have the chance to be completed also after the end of the semester;

- More support for Linux 64 bit systems;
- MIDI should have one data reduction pipeline instead of several different packages;
- AMBER should have a stable routine for data calibration;
- No recipes for the reduction of tilted slits;
- The purpose of the Science Data Products Forum is not clear.

Most of the users have access to Linux systems, but wish for more support of Mac OSX. A number of users have problems with the installation of ESO data reduction pipelines.

No specific comments about APEX/ALMA were submitted.

Factsheet Belgium prepared by Martin Groenewegen

Overall the Belgian Community rates highly the overall support and commitment of the ESO staff.

From the users poll: (In total 5 replies [2010: 11; 2009: 16]).
To small numbers for any statistics!

Overall positive about issues regarding Phase I and II, travel, VM runs, user portal.

Only one person responded to the APEX/ALMA questions.

Factsheet Czech Republic prepared by Jiri Grygar

Eight Czech astronomers answered the UC questionnaire;
one more has sent personal comments to the undersigned.

Excerpts from personal commentaries:

Three respondents found the OPC feedback disappointing. Successful users are mostly satisfied with the ESO support documents and help from ESO staff. Two APEX users complain that obsolete pdfv1.3 is used for proposal submission, the GILDAS software is difficult to use and the documentation is not very well organized. Two respondents are apparently frustrated by the total lack of success with their proposals [stellar astronomy]. No additional comments by Czech users apart from replies to the UC questionnaire were received.

Factsheet Denmark prepared by Frank Grundahl

A total of 7 danish replies to the questionnaire. Generally very positive, with some minor comments and specific suggestions. Brief overview:

- The OPC comments were not useful at all.
- The S/N calculation was unclear for FORS/X-Shooter (FG comment: I think reading the manual could solve this!).
- It is suggested to tie the UserPortal passwd to the programme, rather than an individual, such that it is not necessary to share personal password with collaborators. Such that there is a separation between the Users of a programme and the PI. (this has been mentioned in earlier years).

- Several of the users rely on X-Shooter.
- Only one on ALMA/APEX, which was dissatisfied with the level of documentation and 'friendliness' of the system. Possibly this will improve over time as ALMA is being deployed. More frequent communication between the PI and staff astronomers was wished for also.
- There is a general satisfaction with the UserPortal and several users check it frequently for new data-products.

Factsheet Finland prepared by Seppo Katajainen

This time ESO Users Poll got 8 answers from Finnish astronomers, which is quite a normal result (typically there has been between 8- 10 answers).

In generally most people were quite satisfied and happy with all ESO facilities, and topics discussed in the poll, and people were also quite short in their comments. There were few suggestions for improvements etc. It is obvious that there are more active ESO users in Finland, but they do not reply this poll, despite of reminding of the Poll dead line. Below are shortly some impressions and thoughts collected from those replies in the Poll.

Users:

Most of those who answered, are frequently users, some are occasional users.

During last two observing semester (P85 and P86) people were not very successful to get observing time, and that might be also one reason why activity to reply is low (i.e. people feel that if they have not got data from those periods, they might not be able to answer)

Instruments used:

accepted runs: FORS, APEX, NACO.

People also applied time for EFOSC2, XSHOOTER, HAWK-I (but did not get any time)

Frequent users send typically 2 – 4 applications per run (whereas there's many who do not send any....) People read CfPs very well and are aware of all necessary info (and where to find it etc.). Most of people do not have any problems with the submitting the proposal, one was complaining about the figure layout problems with the Latex form.

The available technical information on the instruments was sufficient and the ESO Exposure Time Calculators were found to be enough accurate and in generally filling in the proposal forms was smoothly for most of the people.

Average proposal success rate in Time Allocated/Time Requested was approximately quite low, in most cases less than 25 %, and many were disappointing to that. Only few cases some people got better success rate (even more than 75 %) and were happy for that. The scientific/technical feedback from the OPC was felt also mostly sufficient, but naturally few complains occurred.

When people get their data, they seem to use still quite often their own home brewed pipelines, and only few reported to use ESO pipelines (perhaps they all didn't know about the latest development, like availability of REFLEX pipelines for many instruments...). People mostly use Linux systems, MAC users are rare, still.

Most were also satisfied to ESO User Portal and didn't have any comments to improve it. Few people were even willing to serve on ESO OPC panels (but not many).

Information on the APEX web pages was felt to be sufficient to prepare ESO proposals generally. SHFI, LABOCA and SABOCA observing time calculators were sufficiently detailed for most.

Some who answered were planning also to submit proposals for ALMA Early Science Cycle 0.

Factsheet France prepared by Mathieu Puech

General results

A total of 56 French ESO users answered the poll this year, out of 183 French PIs identified by ESO. The poll was advertised directly to these PIs, plus a general advertisement to the French community through the weekly email alert of the French society of Astronomy and Astrophysics (SF2A). The return rate is ~ 30%, which is significantly more than the two previous years (with ~ 20%). The poll is dominated by frequent (52%) and occasional (38%) users. The French community uses virtually all ESO instruments, including VLT, La Silla, VLTI, and APEX.

Main subjects of satisfaction

The preparation of phases I and II went smoothly for almost all French users. ESO support is generally well-rated among users (Manuals, USD, ETCs, User Portal, Science Data Products Forum, Data Delivery and Retrieval). ESO data reduction pipelines are judged very useful by most users, even if small problems were encountered quite frequently in installing or using the different softwares. Visiting astronomers are generally very happy with the logistic support offered by ESO in terms of travel and lodging, as well as with the high-level technical and scientific support at the telescope (“Paranal is beyond doubt a five-star observatory”).

Main subjects of dissatisfaction

Number one dissatisfaction is clearly related to feedback from the OPC, which is judged disappointing for 50% of the French users. It is often felt that OPC decisions are as efficient as a random process (“Overall, I never know why I DO get time or why I DO NOT get time”). This probably leads users to split/multiply the number of proposals they submit (74% of the French users submitted more than one proposal as PI over the past two periods), which probably leads in turn to an increased work load on the OPC. It is also felt that there is a problematic lack of memory of the OPC between periods, with several cases of proposals sometimes ranked in the first quartile (but not scheduled because “no time could be allocated”) and ending up one semester later in the fourth quartile (and sometimes even back in the first quartile later on). Cases of “wast” of telescope time were also reported with programmes partly executed in service mode and rejected one semester later by the OPC. It is quite well understood that over-subscription is the main issue here, but is not well understood why the OPC does not simply states this clearly, when there is no special scientific objection (“Most of the time, one gets the impression of a trial-and-error approach to proposal selection, with the OPC trying to find some way to reject proposals given the over-subscription rate”; “the OPC complains about the lack of explanations, when in fact such explanations are in the proposal”). It is felt that the OPC/ESO should better communicate about where is the threshold for getting scheduled at the telescopes. This could be facilitated if the panel members and the community have a better feel for where the cutoff line stands.

Several complaints were expressed regarding the too limited bandwidth/quality of the network connection at Paranal, which caused several issues during OB preparation at the telescope.

Special Topic: APEX

Only two specific comments were expressed:

- "It was unclear which receivers were offered for APEX because there was some discrepancy between the call for proposals and the APEX webpage."
- "Observations with LABOCA for extended sources seems tricky and impossible to program if not helped by a Laboca-guru".

Miscellaneous

- Specific issue with FIMS: "infortunate features" in FIMS have caused serious issues in the execution of several OBs on FORS2 in service mode. Only programmes ranked "A" have been executed over this period, while programmes ranked "B" remained unexecuted. It was asked whether ESO could carry over such programmes since the issue was not on PIs and co-Is responsibilities.
- Specific issue with HARPS blazes: it was pointed out that blaze_A.fits files are not accessible from the archive, which severely limits the use of HARPS data in the archival mode.

Factsheet Germany prepared by Thomas Preibisch

There are no reports of major problems, but a number of small issues.

Several complaints about the proposal forms:

- Not all jpg or pdf formats are accepted
- Large white space around pdf files (causes space problems)
- Strange constraints on filenames (e.g. excluding "-")

Visitor Mode: Transport from Santiago to the telescope:

- starts very early in the morning
- Travel to/from La Silla has unacceptable delays (many hours spent waiting in La Serena)

ESO Network:

- The User Portal and especially WEB Letters were not accessible from Paranal,

APEX Documentation:

- For less experienced investigators, the information on APEX is not sufficient

Finally, here the results of the poll about the Mac OS issue:

71.4% of the german PIs use LINUX as their primary OS
21.4% are Mac users

Regarding the question

"Should ESO spend some of its resources on supporting Mac OSX:"

71.4% of the german PIs say "No"

Factsheet Italy prepared by Stefano Benetti

A total of 44 Italian users (18% of whole sample!) answered the UC Poll this year. Most of them are frequent (48%) and occasional (45%) users. The majority of the users submitted regular proposals (56%), while GTO and shorts ones are down to ~16%. The users have been directly involved in Phase II and data reduction.

The instrument most used by our community in 86 and 87 semesters was XShooter (requested by 17 users), followed by FORS (10 users) and a group of instruments including Apex, EFOSC2, NACO, VIMOS, FLAMES and ISACC (5-6 users, each).

Users are generally quite satisfied with the whole process of proposal preparation and submission, only less than 5% report some problems with phases 1 and 2 (problems are reported below). The technical information needed for proposal preparation, including Exposure Time Calculators, are generally deemed sufficient/excellent. The users mainly got the technical information from on-line manuals and colleagues. The success rate among the Italian users that answered to the pool is quite high (46% had a success rate higher than 75%).

Unexpectedly the feedback from the OPC has been judged reasonable or great by 73% of users. This is totally in countertrend with most recent pool results.

The quality of assistance at the telescopes is still very high, as is always been. Only few users complained because the scientific support has been suppressed in La Silla (comments reported at the end of the document). In service mode, the process of getting the expected data, including adequate calibrations within a reasonable time was well accomplished. Some users would like to have from ESO more detailed comments on the reasons why service observations have not been executed.

ESO pipelines are installed at home institutions, and used both for judging data quality in visitor mode (56%) and for final scientific reduction in 43% of the cases, which is more or less in agreement with that found in past pools. However the vast majority of users (83%) judges that data reduction is not a smooth process.

In general Italian users are happy with the service given by the User Portal (none seems to have problems). Beside the raw data, most of the users finds that the most useful contents of data packages is the pipeline processed science data (31%) followed by the master calibration (27%). About 75% of the Italian users claimed to check the User Portal at least twice during a given Observing Period in order to check for new data products. The users are also very happy with ESO archive, both as service and for data downloading.

Users are almost equally divided among Linux operating system (55%) and Mac (45%). 48% of the users think that ESO should spend some of its resources on supporting Mac OSX, while 36% of them are against it (the remaining didn't answer to this question).

Finally, regarding this year Special Topic, ONLY 7 Italian users answered to at least one question of this part of the pool dedicated to APEX/ALMA and only 5 answered to the complete pool.

Here below, the individual comments of Italian users are listed.

Understanding policies on different topics:

- I found that the description of the MOS observing mode with EFOSC2 is quite confusing

Please describe problems encountered in proposal preparation.

- The X-shooter ETC is still missing the complete wavelength coverage for QSO spectra at high redshift.

- The new form for normal proposals is not adequate to explain clearly the science case and the objective. I don't think that such a drastic cut in space is helping the judgment by the OPC members.
- While trying to estimate the expected performances of various instruments, observing the same object, it was difficult to provide an appropriate description of the target, since some ETC rely on different or not completely fitting templates and / or target parameters.
- Grating 19 at EFOSC not available in ETC
- Calculation of exposure time: The galaxies template, if present, were not sufficient to cover the whole range of XSHOOTER wavelengths.
- For SINFONI, in the case of emission lines, the ETC gives the S/N at the central wavelength and not integrated over the whole line, which is often useful.

Describe problems encountered in proposal submission

- The latex form generation is less strict than the quality check during submission. It could be better if they are the same.
- I personally find absurd that the proposal can be submitted only once. If, for whatever reason, an incorrect proposal or a proposal with error is submitted, then it is NOT possible to correct it. This limitation is not understandable. It is technically very easy to set up a submission system where the proposal can be submitted an arbitrary number of time, just automatically rewriting the submitted files, until the deadline expired. I repeat, the current limitation is not understandable.

Further comments on proposal judging and feedback

- I am submitting a proposal for simultaneous observations with XMM-Newton and APEX. I do not understand how and why the XMM TAC of AO08 and 09 judged the proposal very interesting and granted a large amount of time while the ESO TACs always reject them without constructive remarks. I am thinking that accessing to ESO facilities is restricted to ESO/instrument teams only
- The issue of the limited amount of time for ToO proposals could be easier to follow commenting the rank of your proposal wrt the other ToO proposals and ToO threshold.
- OPC comments were really not convincing.
- Feedback comments should be longer and more specific. But I understand that this might be difficult.

Any other comments on visitor mode?

- I could complete the program essentially thanks to the help of an experienced user, by chance there. The absence of a support astronomer has the consequence that only observer with a long experience can really exploit the instrumentation. Even if the visitor is contacted in advance, not every problem is known in advance. I shall add that I was probably at La Silla at the worst time of the year for assistance: between Christmas and New Year
- In La Silla there are not any more resident astronomers. So no introduction. But, based on previous experiences and contact with RA in Paranal (I. Saviane), the runs went smoothly.
- La Silla: now without supporting astronomer I found twice Gasgano not working properly and of consequence the on-line data reduction pipelines were stopped. This, especially in case of SOFI observations, could affect very seriously the observing run. Gasgano should check regularly.

More detail on any aspects of Service Mode Observing

- Since some of the standard calibrations for X-shooter are taken on a weekly basis it always happens that some of them are missing in the DVD (I'm referring to GTO observations).
- Proposal scheduled in P85, 30 hrs FORS allocated (priority A), 4 hours carried out in P85, 4 hours in P86, still expecting 22 hours.
- Proposal scheduled in P86, 10 hrs NACO allocated (priority B), observations not executed.
- There is still an unsolved issue in absolute cross-calibration of the three X-shooter arms. Something likely to be addressed by ESO itself.
- I never knew that data were taken... No e-mail notification!
- 085.A-0135 - 30 hours allocated (Priority A)
- 8 hours carried out at the end of P87....

More generally, none of the proposals in which I have been involved in the last 3 years (all accepted in Service Mode) has been executed. It think that it could be useful to obtain more detailed comments on the reasons for which observations have not been executed.

- Not all of the data were obtained, but they are carryover is granted through through the next, forthcoming period... very much appreciated.

Any Comments on reduction of ESO data

- After a preliminary run of the pipeline, it seems it's not adequate for my data (dithered MOS with VIMOS)
- Gasgano did not properly compile, but the problem was ignored, because data are generally dealt with in Esorex sessions.
- I believe that the XSHOOTER pipeline still needs major work in order to work properly. The manual lacks in clarity, especially about the meaning of the recipes parameters and the suggested/best values.
- Problems with the XSHooter pipeline and, more in general, the installation under MAC OSX.
- The ESO Sinfoni pipeline works nicely, although difficult to tweak for fine reduction steps, such as the detailed sky subtraction. Another potential issue is that the pipeline is a closed box, it is difficult to understand whether something went wrong in the various intermediate steps.

Were there software packages required during your Phase 1 proposal preparation that were not available your primary computing platform?

- NACO JNPS
- p2pp; fposs
- guidecam; vmmps
- Java version
- java 1.5 (needed by the p2pp); FLAMES FPOSS; NACO JNPS
- FIMS not supported for MacOSX (for FORS2 runs in previous periods)

If you have any suggestions or comments about software and computing related to proposal preparation, submission, observations, data reduction, or other issues, please describe them here. Are there specific issues you would like brought up at the UC meeting?

- All ESO packages and pipelines should be available also for MAC.
- Release the source packages not only the precompiled ones.
- It is pity that ESO does not fully support MIDAS (not anymore). I usually use the pipeline to get the data reduced, but I use MIDAS for data analysis, that I still consider a very good package.

Do you have any comments/suggestions based on your experience with the User Portal?

- Some problems with the passwords: if you use an old password on the user portal or p2pp, the system lets you through initially, but then gives you various error messages later. It is therefore very difficult to understand that you simply used the old/wrong password and you loose a lot of time. Why not blocking users from the start?
- Still as PI of a Large Program I have to give up my login coordinates to coPIs...!
- The "Logout" button should be available from everywhere (any sub-section) within the UserPortal.
- When one changes the period in the WebLetters section, it should be automatically updated without need of clicking on "Change period"

Are there specific issues you would like brought up at the UC meeting?

- I did already (ESO panel)
- The ESO web page is not easy to use. Science users seem to have the lowest priority. The new call for proposals (or even knowing when it is going to be issued) is very hard.
- Already done! (Pool deadline too close to Phase 1 deadline)

Are there specific problems that arose during your observations that are not described above? Indicate run ID and a short description of problem.

- 082.A-0278 - 30 hrs allocated (priority B). Observations not executed.

- 085.A-0135 - 30 hrs allocated (Priority A). 4 hrs carried out in P85, 4 hrs in P86. 22 hours still remaining.
- 386.A-0574 - 10 hrs allocated (priority B). Observations not executed.
- In brief all my problems had to do with the decrease of La Silla services: unreasonable transport schedule and denial even to use a private transport, lack of support astronomer and onsite documentation not well organized.
- Often the approved service-mode runs ranked in Priority B are not (completely) executed.

Factsheet The Netherlands prepared by Scott Trager

I received 13 responses this year from NL PIs out of a mailing list of 55 (a response rate of 24%). Respondents were typically "frequent users", with typically 2-5 service mode projects and a handful of visitor mode projects, typically in regular GO mode, though large, DDT, and GTO users were also represented. APEX and XSHOOTER were the top requested and used instruments during this period, with UVES following closely behind; there is broad requests for usage of the other instruments. Interestingly, I received no responses from VISTA users, even though a VISTA survey is PI'ed in the Netherlands.

The (non-APEX) ETCs were generally considered to work at least sufficiently well, although a few users complained about "bright limits in the NIR arm" of X-Shooter and "I am not always sure it treats ... slit width" correctly.

The new proposal format has started to raise loud complaints. In particular, one respondent complained at length about the current form "forc[ing] the submitter to choose between text and figures... there is just not enough space anymore" for figures; "I would recommend to allow one full page" of figures and "a clear limitation ... to [the] size[s] of box[es] 8a and 8b". There is also the continual complaint that the ESOFORM package is too restrictive in its format.

The oversubscription of UT2 was noted as negatively impacting proposal acceptance. One respondent suggested that the CfP should "announce a) how much time is expected to be available on each instrument and b) past (over)subscription rates". In general, users were reasonably happy with OPC feedback and only a small fraction (<1/3) disappointed.

Visitor mode: There was a very strong response from one user (followed by an email directly to me that "support on the NTT (EFOOSC and SOFI) was at such low level that it was inadequate. For a mid-size telescope to compete with other mid-size telescopes in the world the instruments must be kept in excellent shape, allowing the observers to try new and innovative observing strategies. If this is not the case, as it is now, then in my opinion it is better to close the telescope. Now, the telescope and its instrumentation is only geared for 'run of the mill' stuff." Another reported that "support in La Silla was confusing (and confused) to the point that I would have preferred to handle everything myself." But Paranal support was rated as excellent or sufficient.

Service mode: Problems with X-Shooter calibration, HAWK-I technical issues were reported, and APEX Phase II submission issues.

Data reduction: Telluric correction in X-Shooter spectra and distortion correction of HAWK-I mosaics were identified as problematic.

Computing: Mac OS X and Linux are evenly split as primary OSes among users; only one responded as using only Mac OS X. This user strongly requested the availability of "fposs" for Mac OS X;

another requested VMMPs. The vote to support Mac OS X at the cost of other support was 4:7. In general, the User Portal was seen positively, although one user suggested that ESO should perhaps beta-test it against "novice users". Very few people seem to know about or use the Data Products Forum.

Overwhelming positive response for serving on OPC panels!

APEX:

Five users responded to this section. While in the general experience is positive, there was significant frustration with the PI instruments, especially ETCs and interaction with the teams. Some frustration with the APEX web site was also reported; suggestion is to make it part of the ESO pages. Faster availability of data is greatly desired, and closer interaction would be appreciated by most.

Many will apply for ALMA science (7 out of 13 respondents).

Factsheet Portugal prepared by Nanda Kumar

The Portuguese community is very happy with the ESO services and rates the quality as very good or excellent for most aspects, notably, the proposal information, operations at the observatories, data delivery and the archive. Improvement of the data pipelines may be recommended as the users rely upon other software packages to achieve final scientific quality data reduction. Archive users seek ancillary information and pipeline processed data (where available) along with the raw data. The only criticism was on the proposal evaluation where it was felt that either the proposals were not well read or understood (the feedback declaring lack of information which actually existed in the proposal). When I approached by email/phone many previous proposers who did not take the poll, I gathered that many users were highly disappointed and even demotivated by the feedback on the proposals which they felt did not transmit competent review nor criticism. The general feeling is that, unless measures are taken to improve the proposal evaluation and feedback procedure, the excellent facilities and performance of the ESO can be severely undermined along with its money value.

Factsheet Spain prepared by Lourdes Verdes-Montenegro

I have received by the chair a list of 108 Spanish PIs of proposals for periods 85-87, together with 19 of Apex proposals for the same period. Ten people were in common, so a total of 117 people were contacted, and 36 answers received (31%). Most users filling the poll were occasional users, submitting regular (GO)proposals, mostly using FORS.

Several users in the provided list reported that they were not PI of any ESO proposal in these periods. Another user in apex list told me he never asked for time to Apex.

I also got feedback in person from several users, including a meeting in 2011 ESO Spanish Community Days. The summary below intends to reflect both the comments in the form and direct to me

I notice that in the previous UC (where I was not yet a member) it was mentioned to add a question on the UC in the questionnaire which I was not able to find.

Phase I related issues.

There is a general complaint that the information is not easy to find in the call, instructions are not very clear in different aspects and there is much information spread over too many pages (most

users indicating that they read the call quickly). Details can be found in the poll, in particular, a comment on how to apply for a service programme in which observations longer than one hour are required, when the maximum allowed length for OBs is 1 hr, and be sure that the observations will not be spread in different days.

Supporting this would be the following. Before setting up a page for Spanish users (<http://amiga.iaa.es/ESOUUsers>) I asked several users on what would be more useful for them.

The answer was to split the call for proposals in an html format. I hence did an html version of the call and added some extra links and emphasized some items. Several users found it easier to access the information this way.

Most users found the ETC sufficient but different concerns were raised about it, as:

- underestimation of exposure times, particularly due to not inclusion of overheads, which is not straightforward to find in the manuals.
- not inclusion of templates for all stars as previously requested by a user in this poll.
- unclear whether calibrators should be accounted for in the time estimation (service versus visitor mode seem to work differently)

Proposals:

- template has shown submission problems due to accents present in the main text. Important for spanish users at least.
- errors in the proposal are often not shown all at the same time, so only when once is corrected the next one appears, and makes errors fixing iterative.

Last minute overload at ESO site has been also mentioned.

OPC feedback

This, together with the not easy handling of the Call documentation has been the more emphasized problem, both in the poll and in person.

The panel criteria are found: short, unrelated with the contents of the proposal or just repeating the contents, variable from one call to the next, too general, stereotypical and/or with poor scientific feedback. Exact ranking is also considered that would be a useful tool to know how close was the proposal to get time.

It is well known that the number of proposals to be evaluated by the OPC is very large, but even under this circumstance, I consider that the (overall quality of the) feedback should be improved, and this should be a big concern for ESO itself.

It would be of great benefit for the scientific outcome of the observatory to view these complains as a willingness of the astronomers to improve the proposals and missing the information to do so. This is the way ESO can contribute to improve the quality of the proposals, which I understand is in the interest of all, and ESO the first.

Visitor mode

A support astronomer in la Silla would make observations more efficient.

Improvement of software used for target acquisition in long-slit observations would save time in identifying the targets in the acquisition images (rotation of acquisition images and reading coordinates ra,dec at different positions in them).

Experience with the support astronomers is uneven depending on the support person.

Service mode

Additional constraints to the standards one for NaCo observations would improve the quality of the data (see details in the poll).

Simple observations like repeated imaging of an object would be more efficient (more simple) to have direct communication with the observer.

p2pp extremely difficult to use.

Checking of the Phase II was found unsatisfactory for FORS and XSHOOTER by a user (see details in the poll).

Software related issues

Problems specific to MacOS X users:

- the applet for the making of finder charts does not work on a mac.
- modules of skycat for polarimetry
- Fims for MacOS X

Gasgano and p2pp use two different versions of Java, causing a User to have to hop between java versions.

Skycat-gaia is appreciated by the GRB community by its easy and accurate photometric determination and suggested to have ESO involvement.

An error is reported from a previous period: "OBs (in La Silla) need click outside the box after entering RA DEC of the target, otherwise the system does not take the last entered data".

Data reduction by instrument:

EFOSC spectra (long slit) and WFI data not reduced by the pipeline.

Effort involved in VIMOS data reduction and analysis considered too large for the scientific outcome.

XSHOOTER pipeline needs to be improved: large sky line residuals are present.

Information concerning proper removal of sky emission by small nodding in FORS in I band should be provided to the observer very clearly before phase-II.

Apex

It is noted that frequency switching is still not implemented.

For exploratory observations more flexible observations would benefit the scientific outcome of the observations.

A web interface with access to the data, logs, progresses would be very helpful.

NACO

Naco decommissioning is hardly understood by the users, as a useful instrument but not replaced by an instrument with equivalent/improved performances.

Factsheet Sweden prepared by Nils Ryde

I sent emails to in principle all Swedish users of ESO facilities informing about the web-based poll. Also, an email to the specific users in P85-P87 were targeted with an email offering them to give additional comments and feedback to me. The Swedish community comprised of 17 ESO instrument PIs and 25 APEX PIs for these periods. 5 users answered the poll (compared to six in 2008 and five in 2009) but this year I did not receive any other comments nor feedback from observers, which I normally do. Hopefully, this indicates a satisfied community.

Generally, indeed the Swedish community is very happy with ESO, its instruments and the communications with the Observatory.

General points taken up by Swedish ESO users:

1. **ESO COMMUNICATION OF PROGRESS OF INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT COULD BE IMPROVED:** ESO could be better in communicating the progress of the long range of instrument developments. Typically, a new instrument X is supposed to be available in period YY, but very often there are delays, and unless you are in the instrument team, you only find out by the time the CfP is issued. The information on the instrument www pages are in this respect often old or obsolete. This makes it difficult to plan ahead. *ESO should see as its role to ensure that the community is accurately updated on the progress of new instrumentation.*
2. **PROBLEMS WITH java VERSIONS:** p2pp requires certain java versions and updates on macs appear to, at least for some of us, make it impossible to run an old version of java. It would be great if p2pp could be made less version-dependent (for the java version that is).
3. **FORS** The E2V ccd on FORS is only offered in visitors mode. There is no good reason for this, and with this chip FORS is a very competitive instrument. It is a pity that FORS1 was decommissioned instead of less scientifically outstanding ones like e.g. ISAAC or VISIR.
4. **USERS' PORTAL ISSUES:** It is annoying to have to log in even for public issues, it would be sufficient if the webletters were protected.

Factsheet Switzerland prepared by Hans Martin Schmid

Here are some information about the UC-poll results from a ``Swiss" perspective:

Poll of the UC

- about a dozen people from Switzerland answered in the poll
- the answers to the multiple choice questions from Swiss users are statistically essentially identical to the distribution of answers from all countries (no special feedback from the Swiss users)
- the answers for the text questions from Swiss users address many different items, usually small problems, nice to have things, etc.;
- there is not an individual point which was mentioned by a larger fraction of Swiss users, except perhaps for MAC-user issues, etc.

Other feedback from the Swiss community:

I obtained quite some feedback directly from Swiss users. Two points were mentioned repeatedly:

- the feedback from the OPC on the proposals should be improved (mainly: it should be more careful and useful for the applicant)
- there are major concerns about the possible NACO decommissioning (mainly in my home institute)

