Report on the 36th ESO Users Committee Meeting

ESO Garching 23-24 April 2012

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

http://www.eso.org/public/about-eso/committees/uc/uc-36th.html

Highlight topics from the presentations:

- Since March 1 quasi real-time data transfer to science archive with 30 Mbps, presently from La Silla and Paranal telescopes (250 GB /day), APEX will be added in May
- New operations tools (e.g. OT3, p2pp3, web-based night log tool @ VST, VISTA, UT2 – will be extended to remaining telescopes from P90 onwards)

La Silla:

- 2010+ operation
- HARPS upgrade polarimeter (Uppsala), Fabry-Perot calibration unit (Geneva)
- 3.6m secondary guiding (tip-tilt table)

VLT:

- AOF on UT4 upgrade on track (re-commissioning May 1)
- PARSEC replaced by AOF-laser (Oct-Dec 2012)
- 2nd generation instruments: KMOS, SPHERE, MUSE 2012/2013 commissioning
- UT4 M1/3 re-coating with problems because of exchange of Aluminium target in 2011:
    - contamination of coating unit presently under investigation
    - UT2 & UT4 M1 manually washed (R=88%, aluminisation usually achieves 90%)
- VIMOS upgrade: intervention in May, minimized operations
- NACO detector problem under investigation (defective cable)
- NACO move on UT4 in 3 steps:
    - step 1: NACO refurbnishment starts Oct. 1, (Oct-Dec 2012 unavailable)
    - step 2: removal and storage of HAWK-I, until arrival of GRAAL (2014)
    - step 3: NACO move from Nasmyth B to A
    - second move of NACO only when HAWK-I is required for AOF commissioning (location TBD)

VLTI:

- 1st light in K-band with PIONIER and 4 ATs, grood progress on GRAVITY & MATISSE
- PRIMA commissioning (2ATs) revealed number of technical issues, recovery plan in place, next steps in June

VISTA:

- 5th period of VISTA operations
- 80% of night time used for survey observations:
    - 5 programmes carried out: VVV, VIDEO, VMC, VHS, UltraVISTA
    - VIKING is pending due to non-delivery of Phase 3 data products
- 70% completeness (completed OB time / allocated time)
- Estimated survey completion: 5 years (VHS) to 7 years (VVV, VIDEO, VMC, UltraVISTA)
- VISTA science data products available since Dec 1, 2011 (700 GB download sofar)

VST:

- Science operations since Oct. 15, 2011
- VST public surveys: VST Atlas, KIDS, VPHAS+
- Completion rates ~50% below expectation, working on improvements

APEX:

- oberving efficiency almost 400 hours/month, science time ~3500 hours per year (~1000 hours for ESO)
- MPIfR PI instruments: FLASH+, CHAMP+ (currently not offered to ESO), 1.1Thz receiver (maybe offered to ESO in 2013)
- ESO PI instruments: ARTEMIS (winter 2013 available), ZEUS-2 (probably 2013 available)

ALMA:

- 58 antennas (46×12m, 12×7m) in various stages, 45 front end assemblies in Chile
- good progress on AEM antennas
- permanent power system almost complete
- band 5 development approved by ALMA board
- cycle 0:
    - proposals submitted: 917 (Europe: 399) oversubscription in Europe factor 11-12
    - proposals accepted: 112 (Europe: 35 – time-share balance applied)
    - currently data delivered to 23 PIs
    - observing efficieny still modest
- cycle 1:
    - proposal deadline: July 12, 2012
    - results or proposal review public: mid-Nov 2012
    - start of cycle 1 observations: Jan. 1, 2013

E-ELT:

- 39.3m segmented primary mirror, construction proposal available, adaptive optics built-in
- Pending decision by ESO Council in June, construction 2012-2022
- ELT Division created Jan 1, 2012, finalizing design and preparing for construction
- approval as Supplementary Programme requires at least 2/3 of member states to participate (i.e. 10, aim is all 15 member states)
- Industry days: Prague, Bern

Data products:

- MIDAS 12FEBpl1.1 will be last release, as of May 2012 no direct support
- Generation of external data products (quick-look products) suspended in favour of science quality data products (calibration plans, pipelines, Reflex workflows)
- Reflex v2.0 workflows: currently supported UVES, X-SHOOTER
- Phase 3 products: VISTA, VST public surveys, Large Programmes
- PI packs („pushing data") discontinued in favour of „self-service" (CalSelector)
- CalSelector available presently for archive data from 2009 onwards, effort to extend as far back as possible

Observing Programmes:

- Period 90: 937 proposals submitted (normal: 835, Large: 22, ToO: 35, GTO: 43)
- VISTA: 11 proposals submitted (352 hours)
- OPC: problem of recruiting panel members (large rejection rate, last minute drop-outs)
- Public spectroscopic surveys: 2 surveys approved with reduced time allocations
    - PESSTO (NTT-EF2/SOFI): 90 nights/year
    - GAIA (UT2-FLAMES): 60 nights/year
- Revision of Call for Proposals planned from P92

OPC Working Group report:

Recommendations by the Working Group:

1. ESO should use the current system to perform a (partially) blind test of Peer Review

2. ESO is to consider introducing a category of monitoring proposals (MPs) for projects that are long-term (several years)

3a. ESO should consider soliciting proposals only once per year.

3b. ESO is to consider inviting proposals for La Silla telescopes and for LPs/MPs on a yearly basis, in alternate semesters.

4. ESO might consider, either on all telescopes/instruments or a subset, to offer observing time exclusively in large allocations, akin to the process used for large surveys

5. ESO is encouraged to perform a larger scale experiment to explore distributed Peer Review as an alternative method

6. The OPC-WG suggests that those proposals where the Phase 2 time request exceeds by some set margin that requested originally in Phase 1, be removed from the scheduling process, irrespective of their post-OPC ranking

7. ESO should convene a similar working group in three years time, to assess the impact of changes made in response to this report

ESO position: recommendations 1-5 will not be implemented in the near future, smaller changes in the types of proposals will be considered in the near future, changes of proposal cycles will first be discussed internally

STC feedback: supports monitoring programmes

OPC feedback: supports monitoring programmes, mixed support for 1-year cycle for La Silla and Large Progammes, no support for a blind test of selection process, increase number of panels (?)

UC chair and vice-chair

The UC elected unanimously Scott Trager (NL) as new UC chair person and Gary Fuller (UK) as new UC vice-chair person. The UC acknowledged the work of the old chair and vice-chair persons.

ESO replies to UC35 recommendations

UC35.R.1: ESO should develop a mechanism through which restricted access of collaborators to specific runs can be delegated, following authorization by the PI.

The requested mechanism, understood by ESO to represent Phase 2 delegation, has been developed as part of the larger effort of developing the next generation of observation tools, including P2PP Version 3. These tools have been introduced as of Period 89 (including for Phase 2 preparation) on a single UT, UT2, since they encompass a large change in the operational paradigm at the observatory (e.g. the introduction of scheduling containers). However, in the interest of (a) decreasing the complexity involved in the rollout of these new tools and (b) being fair to users of other Paranal telescopes, it was decided to not offer Phase 2 delegation at the outset. The Phase 2 delegation mechanism will be introduced at the time that the use of these new tools is extended to the remaining UTs and VLTI. This is dependent on the experience gained at UT2, but is nominally scheduled for Period 91. It should be noted that the deployment of Phase 2 delegation to VLTI may be slightly delayed from this schedule, owing to increased complexities inherent in that facet of operations.

UC35.R.2: ESO should discuss plans how to change the current LaTeX based Phase 1 forms into a more user-friendly tool.

The Observing Programmes Office has prepared a plan for the re-haul of the Phase 1 system, which is being examined by ESO. During the UC meeting, Patat has updated the UC on ESO's plans.

UC35.R.3: ESO should start a knowledge database on issues related to data reduction.

No significant work was done on this topic because other activities in the back-end were given higher priority (CalSelector, Phase 3 Infrastructure and Catalogue Facility, Reflex 2.x, X-Shooter

sciencegrade pipeline) and because of the very limited use that the community is making of the Science Data Products forum.

UC35.R.4: ESO should consider approving the UC minutes formally in the autumn UC meeting and release it to the public.

ESO needs to consider the consequences of such recommendation in the light of its determination to align the Rules of Procedure (RoP) of all its committees. ESO would prefer not to tie the release of the approved minutes to the mid-term telecon, the organization of which is at the discretion of the Users' Committee.

UC35.R.5: ESO software should be platform independent.

ESO will, whenever possible and appropriate, use software technologies such as java which have been conceived to provide some level of platform independence. However ESO will only test the software on a limited number of predefined platforms.

UC35.R.6: ESO should develop suggestions how to improve the OPC evaluation and feedback process, preferably in preparation of the autumn UC telecon.

The OPC Working Group has delivered a report to ESO, containing a number of recommendations for the improvement of the proposal review and time allocation at ESO. The report has been presented to the UC by the Director of Science, Leibundgut.

UC35.R.7: ESO should provide associations between calibration and science frames in the data archive.

The CalSelector tool is available through the Science Archive Facility as of November 2011. Oncescience files are selected via an archive query, the complete set of the most appropriate calibrations to process them is selected and attached to the request for the user to download. Ancillary files useful for the exploitation of the data (e.g. acquisition images) and relevant night log information are included, as well.

The tool currently offers uniform coverage for data taken as of January 1st, 2009. We are exploring options to extend the coverage as far back in the past as possible. It is likely that the look-back time will ultimately depend on the instrument and mode.

Extensive user documentation is available at http://www.eso.org/sci/archive/calselectorInfo.html and at http://archive.eso.org/cms/faq.

This topic will be discussed in the presentation on back-end highlights to be given at the meeting.

UC35.R.8: ESO should redefine the proprietary period, which should not depend on the time of the first download.

We are ready to move to a scheme where the proprietary period starts as soon as the data is made available to the respective PI or delegate, independently of actual download. For Service Mode runs, this means the moment the data is available for browsing and downloading through the ESO Science Archive Facility. For Visitor Mode runs, on the other hand, the clock would keep start ticking immediately after the actual data acquisition, because that's when data is potentially available to the visitor on the offline workstation on the mountain. It is worth it noticing here that in the vast majority

of cases Service Mode data is transferred via the net and becomes available through the Science Archive Facility within one hour of acquisition. However, the delay can potentially be of 7-10 days for particularly data intensive observation modes (burst mode, etc.), in which case the transfer to Garching is via disks in the Diplobag.

Recommendations by the UC

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

The UC recommends that:

- ESO should implement changes to the Phase 1 proposal preparation process rapidly and should keep the UC informed of these changes. The UC encourages ESO to present the implementation definition and timeline to the UC at their earliest convenience, at least by the UC Mid-Term Telecon.
- ESO should maintain a frequently-asked questions list on reducing data from ESO instruments, linked from both the User Portal and the individual instrument pages.
- The ESO data archive should contain calibrated data where at least instrumental signatures are removed to increase the value of the archive for the ESO users.
- ESO should consider approving the UC minutes formally and release them to the public in as timely a matter as possible, no longer than five to seven months after the annual UC meeting.
- ESO software should be platform independent. ESO should solicit help from the user community for testing on a wide range of platforms and publicly document the results.
- ESO should release the report of the OPC Working Group to the UC.
- ESO should not follow the recommendations of the OPC Working Group on yearly La Silla proposal submissions and consortium-driven proposals.
- ESO should continue its efforts towards rebalancing the load on individual OPC reviewers to continue the improvement of the OPC process.
- ESO should review all applicable rules for Phase 1 and Phase 2 proposal preparation in order to make sure that they are clear, well documented and public. Users should experience no disadvantages in cases when such rules are not properly documented.
- ESO should continue to make efforts to improve the VLTI observation system in order to further increase observing efficiency.
- ESO should implement the process of automatic ingestion of APEX data into the ESO Archive as soon as possible.

Action Items.

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.

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 Recommensations.

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 87 and 88. The most significant issues are highlighted in this report. The full results of the poll are given in the Appendix.

In total 425 responses were received. 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
Responses 2012	12	6	0	9	26	12	50	8	63	14	60	65	13	17	8	58	4

Most of the responses came from occasional and frequent 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 XSHOOTER (34%) and FORS (29%) followed by ISAAC, NACO, UVES and FLAMES. 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 huge oversubscription of UT2 having the most requested instruments XSHOOTER, FLAMES and UVES becomes a major concern. There is broad interest for NACO to continue.

Proposals – preparation & submission

The majority (79%) of the respondents submitted 2 or more proposals of regular type. The fraction of submitted Large Programs was 11%. The Call for Proposals was read by the majority at least quickly. The quality of the available technical information is judged to be sufficient/excellent.

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:

- Instrument modes are not always clear;
- ETCs do not cover all instrument modes (NACO, EFOSC2);
- Inclusion/placement of figures, long target lists in the proposal form are still considered to be a problem;
- Hidden upload size limit for figures;
- Problems during submission of the proposal are often related to field not checked by the latex compilation

Proposals – OPC feedback

The success rates were found to be evenly distributed suggesting a success rate close to 50%. The success rate was for 18% of the respondents below 25% and for 20% of the respondents about 75%. The majority (59%) of the respondents considers the scientific/technical feedback from the OPC

reasonable, about 31% is disappointed. These are almost the same percentages as last year. Some highlighted issues (detailed comments are given in the Appendix):

- OPC feedback is often considered to be too generic / too short / too stereotypical;
- In a number of cases OPC members seem not to understand the point of the proposal (lack of expertise?) and/or lack the understanding of instrumentation issues;
- Sometimes OPC feedback is found to be very uneven between semesters.

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

With the aim of channeling users complains in hopefully constructive ways, users were proposed several options on how to improve the OPC evaluation of proposals with the respective percentage of users supporting it:

- Provide more specific suggestions for proposal improvement:53%
- Provide just a cutoff mark and grading, and indicate technical issues with the proposal: 16%
- Make the OPC report public in the ESO web site after publishing approved proposals: 20.00%
- Make the names of the referees public 1-2 semesters after the evaluations: 21%
- Anonymize the proposals during refereeing and ranking: 35%

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. Some highlighted issues:

- Transportation to/from La Silla is found to be inflexible and very incovenient;
- Local support is not always optimal. For experienced users this may not be a problem, however inexperienced users may suffer from that;
- In several cases insufficient information was given regarding overrides (DDT, GROND);
- p2pp version on La Silla visitor machines are old and inadequate to prepare OBs.

Feedback from service mode observations

Phase II preparation and submission is a smooth process without major problems. About 50% of the respondents were in contact with an ESO Instrument Scientist in the course of this process. The majority of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of their data. There were several comments that priority A/B proposals were not completed or carried over to the next period.

The majority of the respondents were satisfied with the delivery of the data. Some issues were reported:

- The new structure of the distributed data is found to be inadequate; the old HTML structure is preferred including automatic night logs;
- Delivery of APEX data should be more efficient;
- Online PI packs with pre-calibrated data are crucial for quick data analysis (DDT, ToO), "cal selector" tool does not always automatically find all calibration files.

Data reduction

Astronomers use a mixture of software packages for data reduction, with an increasing fraction of ESO pipeline users. Progress in the improvement of the quality of ESO pipelines is acknowledged, but there are still many areas of improvement. Specific comments are given in the Appendix.

- The installation of ESO pipelines is for many users still a major problem;
- Pipeline manuals lack often detailed information and/or are out of date;
- Important instrument modes are often not supported;
- The quality of ESO pipelines is found to be very different;
- Mac OSX support is desired.

ESO data products

There is still a significant fraction of users who do not know about ESO data products or learned only through this poll: e.g. reduced data products (30%) and VISTA public survey projects (42%). In general, users find the data product services as useful. A majority (66%) would also consider contributing his/her reduced data to the service within certain constraints. The obvious problems are: (lack of) manpower and/or time, additional quality control, data reduction often not with ESO pipeline software.

The VISTA public survey data archive is found to be useful but still only rarely used. There are suggestions to improve the user interface in order to allow queries on VISTA catalogues.

A highlighted wish list for additional data products which should be made available to the user community:

- Meteo monitor data, weather reports, end of night reports to better assess the quality of observational data;
- Science-ready data (pipeline products) at least for the most basic data types, once the proprietary period is over.

Computer issues

For the majority of the respondents (53%) Linux is the primary operating system followed by Mac OS (44%). For the clear majority all relevant software packages for Phase I and II preparation and data reduction are available for their primary computing platform. 61% responded favorably that ESO should spend some resources on supporting Mac OS.

The majority of respondents are happy with the User Portal, although some users find it difficult to navigate and ask for a simplification of the menus. The Science Data Product Forum is still largely unknown (30%). Only a minority (26%) seems to check in the forum and is disappointed about the lack of activity.

ALMA

There were comparatively only few users responding to the ALMA poll. A reason for that might be that no specific e-mail addresses of ALMA users were available for the poll. Most of them seemed to have been involved in Cycle 0 proposals only as Co-Is and were therefore not fully involved in submitting proposals. Regarding feedback on proposals there were similar comments and critics as with the ESO OPC (feedback not useful for improving the proposal, some panel members lacking

necessary expertise). More specific suggestions for proposal improvement are desired. Most of the users are satisfied with the ALMA User Portal and its functionality.

For the next cycles, ALMA capabilities were rated in order of importance for their science: the most requested ones being higher resolution, higher sensitivity, surveying, ALMA compact array, additional bands, polarization.

Factsheet Austria prepared by Werner Zeilinger

This year 10 replies were received most of them from frequent ESO users. Most of the users are willing to serve in OPC and ALMA panels. In general, the Austrian community is satisfied with ESO and its services.

VIMOS, SINFONI, FORS and MIDI were the most used/requested instruments. No major problems were noted in connection with proposal preparation and submission. The only comments were*:*

- *It wasn't quite clear if ISAAC would be available in P89.*
- *Inserting figures is still a problem, long target lists are a problem, sometimes the figures are not accepted during proposal submission without obvious reasons*

50% of the users were not satisfied with the OPC feedback. The majority would like to have more specific suggestions by the OPC for the improvement of the proposal. One specific complain about OPC comments:

- *Unfortunately, I experienced several times that negative OPC comments occured which were totally off the science of the proposal (e.g., complaining about insufficient S/N to measure stellar velocity dispersions from abs. lines while the science driver was to measure *rotation velocties* from emission lines which requires a much lower S/N).*

The responses in the section observations (both visitor and service mode) were in general very positive. There was one specific comment on service mode observerations:

- *Some of the observations were not carried on because of lower priority (B), some other just moved to the next period (priority A). We asked in the README that before moving to the next star, the observations of one object should be finished, but this was not respected. Moreover some of the data delivered were not really good (for MIDI).*

For data reduction only a minority (40%) uses the ESO pipelines. By installing the ESO pipeline software the majority of the users encountered small and major problems. There were specific complains about the VLTI pipelines:

- *... This is my wish list: MIDI: 1) a pipelilne that works correctly for the SCI-PHOT mode, without crashing, and giving reliable results. 2) a clear way to understand if the data are good or not. This is a very big issue at the moment. 3) a document that explains clearly how to reduce and judge the data quality. It is unacceptable that I have to reduce the data with two (sometimes three) different pipelines and then to compare results, and then to change the masks, and the to compare results, and then the referee is not happy... AMBER: 1) a way to calibrate AMBER data (I know people are working on this) 2) a solution for the wavelength*

calibration of low-resolution mode of AMBER, and MR-H. 3) a way to extract the spectrum of
AMBER which does not involve home-made recipes.

A large fraction of users became aware of the various data services only through the poll. The ESO data products service if found in general to be useful.

There is now an about equal number of Linux and Mac OSX users. In general, ther is the wish for more support of Mac OSX.

No specific comments about ALMA were submitted.

Factsheet Belgium prepared by Martin Groenewegen

From the users poll: In total 5 replies [2011: 5; 2010: 11; 2009: 16].

To small numbers for any statistics!

- – All 5 willing to serve on ESO/ALMA panels.
- – ALMA: 1 PI + Co-I (successful as Co-I), 1 Co-I (not succesfull).
- – 3 Linux, 1 MAC, 1 Windows user.

Factsheet Chile prepared by Manuela Zoccali

This year 23 users answered the Poll, out of which only 7 are ALMA users. In general, they had positive experience, except for a few, isolated complaints.

The most relevant problems are probably the delay in the SM data delivery, and the fact that sometime they did not get all the data they expected.

Phase 1 and Phase 2

Chileans are frequent users (83% had more than 3 runs) of ESO facilites, either in service mode (>50%) or in visitor (50%). On average, chilean users get ~50% of the observing time they asked for, and they are mostly (78%) satisfied with the OPC evaluation.

The most requested instruments are FORS, XSHOOTER and FLAMES, in this order.

In general they had no problem with the CfP, nor the proposal submission.

Phase2 was also smooth, occasionally they needed (and obtained) more information from the Instrument Scientist. A couple of users complained about the ETCs being too complicate to understand.

Observations

Observations went mostly OK both in visitor and in service. However, there were some delays in the delivery of SM data, and some of them (28%) did not get all the data they expected. In one case a SM run was canceled without a proper explanation.

Data Reduction

Chileans make a significant use of ESO pipelines. All of them recognize that a major fraction of their work goes in data reduction. Many users tried to install ESO pipelines in their machines (14) but only a minor fraction (5) succeeded. One suggests that ESO should invest more FTEs into data reduction software. They believe that ESO should also invest in supporting MAC OS: a few of them do not have access to linux machines, and some software exists only for that platform.

Archive

Archive operations went smooth, including downloads. Chileans seem to learn a lot from the ESO archive pages. About 50% of them knew about Data Delegation and CalSelector, and they found them useful. Phase III is also judged very useful, even if very few of them actually used VISTA data.

ALMA

Only a few chileans used ALMA so far. They did not get much support from the ARC. They didn't receive data yet.

They seem to agree that the most urgent need is additional bands.

Factsheet Czech Republic prepared by Adela Kawka

Eleven users in the Czech Republic responded to the poll, with 9 completing the survey and 2 started but did not finish the survey. Responses came mostly from people who have submitted a proposal as either a principal investigator or co-investigator to either ESO or ALMA, and who consider themselves a frequent or occasional user.

The requested instruments were XShooter, FORS, EFOSC, FEROS, NACO, UVES, FLAMES, APEX, VIMOS.

Proposals - preparation, submission and OPC feedback

Overall satisfaction with the preparation and submission of proposals with some minor problems reported. One complaint was that the macro for including figures in the proposal is not very flexible and that the limits on some box-sizes are not very practical.

The success-rate of proposals of most users is less than 25%, with some reporting success rates better than 50%. Half of the users were dissatisfied with the proposal evaluation provided by the OPC and when prompted for suggestions on how to improve the OPC evaluation procedure the two preferred answers are: (1) to provide more specific suggestions for proposal improvement and (2) make the names of the referees public 1-2 semesters after evaluations.

One user responded at length concerning the proposed suggestions. Some were deemed unrealistic or too punishing on the panels with the overall conclusions that the size of the panels needs to be increased. Another user made the suggestion that each ESO membership country could be guaranteed a minimum quota.

Feedback from visitor and service mode observations

No ESO instruments were reported to be used in visitor mode. Two users responded to using APEX in service and were generally satisfied with their service mode observations.

Data reduction and archive

A mix of ESO pipelines, other packages and home brewed software are used by astronomers in the Czech Republic. Two users tried to install the ESO pipeline, with one reporting that the installation went smoothly and the other reporting major problems.

Most users reported that the PI packages were not needed, with a small number finding the PI packages useful or very useful. Many users did not know about some of the services (Data delegation, CalSelector, reduced data products) provided by ESO until they filled out the poll. Some users learned about these services from the ESO Archive pages. The users that used these services found them useful.

No user has submitted their own reduced data to Phase 3 yet but approximately half are considering it. One user expressed concern about the lack of quality control on user submitted data.

Computing

Most users rely on Linux as their primary operating system. There were no problems reported with the availability of any relevant software packages. The majority of users do not think that ESO should spend some of its resources to fully support Mac OS.

ALMA

Three people responded to the ALMA section. Their responses were overall positive.

Other

There is a general satisfaction with User portal. One user commented that the hierarchy (some important links are hidden) and the language could be improved.

Most respondents (56%) did not know that the Science Data Products Forum existed. Only one user has responded to using it and finding it satisfactory.

Factsheet Denmark prepared by Frank Grundahl

A total of 8 danish replies to the questionaire. Generally positive, with some minor comments and specific suggestions. Brief overview:

- a few Latex problems (a disagreement between the allowable coordinat format as stated in the template and the actually accepted format).
- Some comments about rejected GTO programs, suggesting that they should only be evaluated on technical feasibility, and not the science. It may possibly not be entirely clear what ESO understands by 'GTO'.
- one user expressed an interest in quicker processed data for the archive
- the one user which applied for ALMA found the portal easy to use.
- Overall fairly satisfied users.
- A few mentioned (in separate emails) that the poll is too long/exhaustive.

Factsheet Finland prepared by Seppo Katajainen

This year we got 14 answers from Finnish ESO users, which is the best results for years. Maybe increasing activity tells us that people have been also more active in using ESO facilities than before.

Most of those who replied have been also send applications during last ESO periods, which shows that those who answer to the poll, are also active ESO users. Only very few have send ALMA applications, however. Among these, almost half described them as frequently users and half as occasional users.

Some would be willing to be ESO panel members, again almost half would and another half wouldn't.

People mostly send normal proposals, not large programs. Also many of those who replied send many applications per each ESO period.

Most popular instruments have been FORS, XSHOOTER, NACO, UVES, SINFONI and HAWK-I.

People are quite happy for information available and do not have much problems in proposal submissions either. Constant complaining reason is in proposal submission is the location of pictures in proposal LaTex form.

Most people were even happy to OPC evaluation for their proposals!

About pipelines, most people do not use them, and most people admit that they have had a lot of work work with data reduction process, however.'(as they dont use pipelines!)

People have been quite happy for ESO Data Product service also. About the operating computer systems, people use mostly Linux, and some use Mac.

Factsheet France prepared by Claire Moutou

General

The Poll message was sent to the 149 French PIs listed by ESO, to the general community 10 days later, and a second time to the PIs for a reminder. The Poll was answered 59 times (40%); or 48 times (32%) if only completed records are counted. 30% were ALMA users. More users of XSHOOTER, FORS, NACO have replied.

The distribution of answers usually follows the general trends. There are several good comments about the quality of support by ESO staff, and the usefulness of CalSelector for VLTI observations. I summarize below the main remarks for further improvements.

CfP:

- – make clearier the list of instruments/modes that are offered
- – simplify figure management
- – not enough space to report on previous observations or explain complex observing strategies

OPC:

I think the community suffers from the fact that the OPC evaluation cannot be a linear process, due to the turn-over in the panels and the heavy load for panel members. From the OPC perspective,

improvements from one semester to the next on a given proposal are not really taken into account, which is the only thing the users can work on. This reflects in comments like:

- "wrong statements", "random justifications", "irrational process" in feedbacks...

Additional comments or question regarding OPC procedure:

- OPC too conservative, no high-risk proposals can go through, especially compared to US panels.
- bias of OPC against interferometry (too specialized): more experts needed in some panels
- competition at OPC level btw similar non-european and european proposals; how is it handled?

Also related to proposal ranking (but out of OPC):

- DDT procedure needs clarification (refereeing, prioritization, feedback on operations)

Observations:

- more information on SM programs in competition at a given time, to optimise the observing priorities
- Some feedback requested on non observed OBs
- request for remote observations from Garching or home institutes? (for easy visitor mode programs at Paranal)
- some users think there is too much time allocated in priority B? (or not enough completion of each B prg)
- other users are worried about lost time at VLT, the telescope being idle for lack of programs?
- La Silla observations w/o support astronomer: stressful
- several users request more flexibility in SM
- limitation of delay line range is an issue (no access to some targets); will this be solved by ESO soon?
- VISIR burst mode: many data, machines are heavily loaded, disks full, not possible to reduce online (hardw limitations)
- too many configurations of VLTI in a VM run: loss of efficiency
- specify pipeline parameters in Phase 2 to deliver science-ready reduced data
- are there documents with all fits keywords?

More data requested:

- VLTI data quality monitoring requested
- VLTI : obtain simultaneous photometry with IRIRS guiding camera
- more data about atmosphere features/models of telluric/flux std
- all-sky images at the time of observations in SM

Tools

It appears that only ~ 30% observers use the ESO pipelines.

- Making masks for FORS : problem of software platform
- java versions are different for several p2pp or pipelines
- p2pp link to simbad for basic information
- p2pp support for manual editing of OBs

- Progress to be made on data reduction
- a simpler version of pipeline documentation

Archive:

- PI access to La Silla data through the archive would be useful, a few days after the end of a run
- reduction process gets very long for modern data, 12months proprietary period is too short
- VISTA archive: user expecting possibility for massive queries
- Archive data should be anynomous, science abstracts not provided
- Add raw data from PIONIER in archive

Logistics

- Getting home from La Silla when the run is over: ESO should be more flexible
- Experienced users would like not to arrive 2 nights in advance
- Flights that save small money but looses >10h should not be imposed

Alma

- pb with mac platform for proposal
- line analysis tool (an example is provided CASSIS@CESR)
- request for quicker delivery of APEX data to the PI after observation (already existing, non official, needs ESO support)

Poll

- missing "not concerned" option in the poll
- poll is too long

Factsheet Germany prepared by Thomas Preibisch

39 German users answered the poll.

Most users seem to be generally content with the ESO services, several expressed their high degree of satisfaction ("Excellent work!", "Keep up the good work!").

There are no reports of major problems, but a number of smaller issues:

1) Fraction of accepted proposals that are actually observed:

Several users complained that a too large fraction of proposals accepted in Category A or B is finally not observed. One statement: "even proposals allocated time in category A are only observed around 50% (even after carry-over)."

These claims agree with my own experience from my proposals: during the last two years, I was granted 60.4 hours VLT time in Category A or B, but only 22.1 hours (37%) was actually observed.

Suggestions: It would be interesting to know to ratio of granted time in Category A or B versus actually observed time for a larger statistical sample. If this confirms the above mentioned numbers,

ESO could consider reducing number of proposal accepted in Category B slightly, to make sure that any Category A or B project has at least a 50% chance to be actually observed.

2) OPC results/comments:

74% of all users are satisfied with the evaluation of proposals by the OPC,but there are several complaints concerning the lack of information about the rank of proposals.

Suggestion: Could ESO provide the precise final grading and ranking for each proposal (plus the distribution of grades for the panel or the cutoff grade)? (as is the standard in other OPCs)

3) Visitor Mode:

Several users complained about the lack of flexibility in the travel schedules at La Silla. They say the transportation is not frequent enough, resulting in unnecessary time loss, and do not understand why it is not allowed to rent a car or pay for private transport to La Silla.

4) Operating system:

64% of the German users use Linux,
31% use MAC,
5% use Windows
95% of the German users have access to Linux

Only 5% report problems due to missing software packages for their primary computing platform for Phase 1, 2, or data reduction.

Regarding the question "Should ESO spend some of its resources on supporting Mac OSX fully:"
18 say no, 17 say yes

Factsheet Italy prepared by Stefano Benetti

A total of 67 Italian users (15% of whole sample!) answered the UC Poll this year. Most of them are frequent (63%) and occasional (21%) users. The majority of the users submitted regular proposals (67%), while GTO and large ones are down to ~19% and ~18%, respectively. The majority of the users (51%) submitted between 2 and 4 proposals in the two periods involved in the pool, while the more active users (> 4 proposal submitted) have been the 18% of the sample. Sixteen of them (24% of the users) applied for ALMA.

The users have been directly involved in Phase II and data reduction (64%).

The instrument most proposed by our community in 88 and 89 semesters has been again XShooter (requested by 24 users), followed by FORS (16 users), FLAMES (14), and EFOSC2 (12), and a group of instruments including UVES, VIMOS, HAWK-I, SOFI and APEX (7-9 users, each).

Users are generally quite satisfied with the whole process of proposal preparation and submission, only small problems have been reported for phases 1 and 2. The technical information needed for proposal preparation, including Exposure Time Calculators, are generally deemed sufficient/excellent. The success rate among the Italian users that answered to the pool is relatively good (15% had a success rate higher than 75%; 16% between 50-75% and 28% between 25-50%).

48% of the Italian users were satisfied with the OPC evaluation and 37% of them think that a way to improved the OPC evaluation could be that of providing more specific suggestions to the proposal, while 24% of them would like to have the OPC reports published in the ESO web site.

The instrument most used by our community in 88 and 89 semesters in visitor mode has been again

XShooter (used by 4 users), followed by EFOSC2, SOFI, and WIFI (2 each).

The quality of assistance at the telescopes is good. Several comments regarding the visitor mode are reported at the end of the document. In service mode, the process of monitoring the status of the observations, getting the expected data, including adequate calibrations, within a reasonable time was well accomplished. Some comments regarding the service mode are reported at the end of the document.

ESO pipelines are installed at home institutions by 49% of the users, and eighteen of them found small/major problems in installing the pipelines. 38 users judge that the effort involved in data reduction is not negligible. See few comments on this topic at the end of the document.

19 users think that the data delegation service is useful or very useful, and the majority of them learnt about this service either form ESO archive webpages or filling the UC poll.

25 users, instead, find the CalSelector service useful or very useful, while 16 of them didn't know about it. Most of the users learnt about this service from the ESO archive webpages (13) or from colleagues (6).

The raw data downloading for the ESO archive seems to be a smooth process with problems reported by only 5 users. ESO is also providing reduced (including VISTA) data and this service is generally rated by the Italian users (28) useful or very useful. The majority of them learnt about the service from the ESO archive webpages or via this poll and colleagues. 13 of them didn't know about the service. A good fraction (72%) of the users is willing to submit its reduced data products to Phase 3.

30 users think that the ESO Data Products Service is useful or very useful and 81% of them are willing to contribute to it with their experience. At the end of the document there are few interesting comments on this.

Users are divided among Linux operating system (60%) and Mac (40%). 60% of the users think that ESO should spend some of its resources on supporting Mac OSX, while 23% of them are against it (the remaining didn't answer to this question).

Users are very happy with User Portal and few comments on this topic are reported at the end of the document.

A big fraction of the Italian Users (22) has not yet looked at the Science Data Product Forum, while 11 of them rate their experience satisfactory.

ALMA section.

13 users submitted a proposal for cycle 0 and only one user was awarded with observing time.

6 ALMA users found the ALMA Science User portal easy to use.

The majority of the ALMA users are happy with the OPC evaluation even if they would like to have from the OPC more specific suggestions for proposal improvement.

Some interesting issues not covered by the UC poll are reported at the end of the document.

---------------------- Answer/comments from the Italian Users ------------------------

Did you have trouble understanding the policies with respect to different topics

--- I did not realize that the APEX 230 GHz system was going to be changed and that the instrument available for the observations was going to be different from the one used the previous run.

--- In case of partial release, it is unclear that the proprietary period starts for the (chunk of) data as soon as you touch them, even though the run is completed more than one year later.

If you encountered problems with filling in the proposal forms and/or submitting the proposal, please describe them briefly here

--- errors due to some missing codes or wrong latex characters

--- 1. figure limited to 1Mb, sometimes is hard. 2. not enough space for figures.

Further comments on proposal judging and feedback

--- I believe OPC members receive a significant number of proposals and they try to do their job at the best. Still the comments received are often disappointing and inadequate to the effort invested by the PI and the team to prepare the proposals. In several cases it might be preferable to have comments stating that the proposals were just not found as interesting as others. Perhaps different systems could be considered. It has been proposed in the past the idea of sending proposals to review to people who are submitting the proposals. I believe this is a worth exploring idea. Confidentiality can be still maintained by hiding, for instance, selected target and the applicants names and by asking to respect confidentiality to the reviewers

--- Give rotation to the TAC members, select them on a random basis; surely do not ask to the TAC members to nominate their successors. This is not fair, and surely not right. Everybody in the community should have a chance to serve as TAC members, and especially young researchers, which should be selected on the basis of their merit (citations & refereed papers score!) and NOT because recommended by old ... persons already "in the system". Avoid this, if you can.

Were there specific problems that arose during your observations that are not described above?

--- bad weather conditions

--- I had the strong feeling that the ETC exp. times for SOFI were by far too optimistic

Any other comments on visitor mode?

--- The transport schedule to/from Santiago can be very inconvenient for visitors!

--- The rules regarding getting to La Sila now that there is only sporadic bus access are too strict, people from my group have often had to leave Europe up to a week before observations just to sit on the mountain for two nights before the run as the time table was not very compliant and they were not allowed to take a taxi.

--- make easier, and more immediate the transfer of the collected data to the visiting astronomer. He should be able to plug his USB3, USB2, eSATA, hard drives into a safe area without all the troubles that this simple operation usually imply. This should be pretty straightforward to fix.

More detail on any aspects of Service Mode Observing

--- The answers above refer to Omegecam, which is missing from your list

--- The recent change by the Quality Control Group at ESO that the usual HTML directory structure is not any longer available, neither in the archive download nor on the Blue Rays is a major disappointment.

Moreover, the fact that no automatic night-logs are delivered are a big concern as well. As a frequent user you need to log into the data archive and retrieve for each single observation a short summary of the night log. These ascii files neither even contain any target name nor a reference to the ESO ambient monitor.

--- Never really clear when data are taken and where to download them from. Waiting for the CD to arrive via snail mail is not a real option, and has, in my opinion only an archival value.

--- Our Large Programme "VIPERS" using VIMOS is ongoing since P82. These are the main problems to signal: 1) The structure of the distributed data (both PI-Pack downloads and Blue Ray final distribution) has seen a relevant change a few months ago: the packs do not contain anymore the very useful HTML directory structure that used to organize in a nice way the observing logs and comments. This is really disappointing for our automatic data extraction and archiving system, which was using that structure and actually embedding it within our own web-management system. We were informed, after inquiring with the support astronomer, that this is the consequence of the ESO decision to cut down the Quality Control Group at ESO, which provided this service. This is very bad impacts ongoing large programmes that were organized as to use this. 2) The way observations in Paranal are considered as "Passed" and thus classified as A or B is sometimes inconsistent. This produces a strong variability in the data quality, which impacts the science. We have identified a few OBs, which are clearly out of spec and will need to be re-observed (after approval by ESO). This is forcing us to probably apply more stringent constraints to our submitted OBs, but this would not be necessary if the current constrains were followed carefully.

Any comments on reduction of ESO data

--- The effort for data reduction strongly depends on how much the observations are pushing the instrument to the limit. Therefore the previous question is not fully meaningful

--- FEROS DRS software manuals need update

--- Problems with the FLAMES-UVES pipeline. Making it running required a major effort at my home institute. Reduction of 520nm setup very unstable. Manual should be improved.

--- FLAMES FPOSS did not work on MAC, this was a major problem.

--- It would be good if the software was installed somewhere where we were allowed to login and reduce the data if we had problems installing the software locally.

--- see comments above

--- In my opinion ESO should provide just the best possible RAW data. Reduction is up to the good astronomers. There are no resources also for this, and besides whatever ESO (or any other institution) would do for the data reduction is always unsatisfying.

--- the person in charge of every pipeline should be identified and the process of making implementation should be formalized: formal request followed by a formal answer

--- Pipelines should be provided (and tested) for Mac OS X as well as for linux bases machines.

Do you consider to submit your own reduced data products to Phase 3? Please, explain why

--- I do not have time and manpower to do that, I might do it if possible in future.

--- believe more easily accessible to provide data directly from the journal website or Vizier database

--- No time

--- Reduced data for which I am the PI are already present as advanced data product or available thorough

dedicated portals

--- Electronic version of catalog are put elsewhere. In my opinion, ESO should not use the already limited resources also for this. Best RAW data (better than competitor facilities) are the only things that a user should dare to ask to ESO.

--- Too much work to be done FOR ESO and nothing in reward....

Do you have further comments or suggestions for us to improve the service? (Phase 3)

--- The archival reduced data should be available for as many observations and instruments as possible, because for nearly all data I retrieved (generally long-slit optical spectroscopy) they were not.

--- Provide best possible instruments and raw data, and let the astronomers to develop their own data reduction procedures tailored to their specific needs, all the rest is waste. And there are no resources towaste.

Please, specify which additional data products should be made available to the user community (service mode)

--- phase 2 material (e.g FIMS, ADP)

--- PI packs, detailed night logs, references to the ESO ambient monitor

Which ones? Make a priority list if more than one package is given (Phase 1 proposal preparation).

--- FPOSS

--- fposs

Which ones? Make a priority list if more than one package is given (Phase 2).

--- vmmps on mac os x

--- p2pp

--- FLAMES FPOSS not available on Mac

--- p2pp

--- fposs

Which ones? Make a priority list if more than one package is given (data reduction)

--- As far as I know Scisoft package has only an unofficial MAC distribution

--- esorex sofi hawk pipelines

--- The reduction package for XSHOOTER were available but it was impossible an easy installation. And the manual is very confuse

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.

--- Big problems with mismatching Java version support for different programs (gasgano, p2pp...) in mac osx

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

--- the access to the results of the proposals might be implemented

--- on the question below "What is your experience with the Science Data Products Forum? Choose one of the following answers This question is mandatory." the option "who cares!" is missed.

--- Difficult to understand where things are, especially if you are an occasional user. Not easy to find where you can access the data, the results of the proposal evaluation.

--- For a better handling of my Large Programme, I would like to be able to know in real time how much time has been already used by each run, without the need to "counting" the observed OB's and make a roiugh estimation.

Do you have any comments/suggestions based on your experience with the Science Data Products Forum?

--- It's pretty basic but robust. It should not have the exact pointings of the telescope for non public data just rough pointings.

What additional features would you like to see in future releases of the ALMA Observing Tool?

--- More example with technical computations on observing time based on science verification and cycle 0

Are there any specific issues that were not listed in the previous pages and that you would like brought up at the the ESO User's Committee meeting?

--- As part of a LP VIMOS spectroscopic programme I see it slowly progressing, with normal programs executed while conditions where OK for the LP. Moreover sometime priority indicated in phase II are not followed at all.

--- I would like to bring up the question of the rules valid for ESO-paid observers for GTO runs, in particular for XSHOOTER. There is a total lack of clarity about these rules, which has caused

problems to GTO observers who went observing also for others, trusting that ESO would pay their travel, and had finally to pay on their own. I have send more details about this issue to the Italian representative in the UC. Please make clear and complete rules available to GTO observers in advance.

--- It is sad that ESO decided to downgrade the La Silla Observatory in the way it did. Because of this, the limited availability for the european community at 2- and 4-metre class telescopes in the southern hemisphere is in my opinion causing serious access problems to the observing programmes which focus on targets which do not need very large telescopes to be investigated.

--- see comments above

--- Yes, I do ! Why ESO could not spent very little money to fix some great instruments they already posses ? ! ? For example, why the La Silla Schmidt telescope was not FIXED ? Why it was rather sold for almost nothing to NOT-European institutions ? Who took that decision ? Note that I do not buy it that "it was too expensive to fix it!". The La Silla ESO Schmidt is an instrument capable of scanning 1/4 of the sky in one night. http://www.eso.org/public/teles-instr/lasilla/1mschmidt.html I wonder who in the ESO User's Committee is so blind to do not even recognize the potential of the infrastructures for which Europeans have already paid (a lot!) ? May be, younger scientists (more into "actual science" and not just in politicians) should be in the ESO User's Committee. People that actually use instrumentations, who "gets the hands dirty", and get a grip on what is important, should be included. For these reasons, I am sorry but I am totally unsatisfied with the work of the ESO User's Committee. It would be nice to know how members of the ESO User's Committee get elected. I never vote for.

--- Proprietary periods should start when run(s) is (are) completed, not when a partial data release is touched for the first time.

Factsheet The Netherlands prepared by Scott Trager

There were 13 responses this year to the UC poll from unique NL respondents. Most respondents were PIs for typically more than four LSP proposals in the period covered by the poll, with a small number of ALMA PI/coIs also responding; they were typically 50% successful. NL respondents were typically experienced users, with typically 2-5 service mode projects and a handful of visitor mode projects, typically in regular GO mode, though large, DDT, and (several) GTO users were also represented. XSHOOTER, UVES and NACO (for the first time, due to the recent surge of interest of the NL community in exoplanet research) were the top requested and used instruments during this period; there is broad support for usage of the other instruments (with a few exceptions: ISAAC, MIDI, and SINFONI users -- if any -- did not respond). Interestingly, there were again no responses from VISTA or VST users, even though one VISTA public survey and one VST public survey are PI'ed in the Netherlands.

Proposal process: Users appear generally to skim the Call for Proposals, so important issues buried in the text may be missed. The ETCs were generally considered to work at least sufficiently well, with only one complaint. There were complaints about the maximum figure size of 1MB, which is seen as very restrictive. More seriously, one respondent suggested that "the current format for the scientific rationale (2 pages, including figures) can be improved. Figures should not be allowed to compete with the text in terms of space. I would suggest 1 page for box 8A, 1/2 to 3/4 page for box 8B and a full page for box C." Another user complained about the unwritten limit on the number of targets allowed (250), which can be restrictive for large programmes. This year, in contrast to previous years, most

respondents were unhappy with the OPC feedback; suggestions for improvement were dominated by requests for more detailed feedback and the release of the names of OPC members some time after the period in question. Two respondents questioned the technical knowledge of OPC members: "On two occasions, the OPC comments were technically wrong. On one other occasion, the OPC suggestion was incompatible with the observing modes offered by ESO"; and "it is hard to understand that the feasibility is questioned of a project to has to be carried out with the instrument that you helped building (in GTO time)." There was a suggestion to make more clear the separation between technical evaluation (by the ESO staff) and scientific evaluation (by the OPC). Nearly all NL respondents would be happy (as usual!) to sit on the OPC.

Visitor mode: Reports from NL users this year were much more positive about visitor mode than in previous years, but NACO problems have compromised some runs.

Service mode: No significant issues with Phase 2; in fact, USG was complimented by more than one user for Phase 2 support. However, XSHOOTER telluric correction standard observations were again criticized: "Telluric Standards in the NIR are useless the way they are now for X-Shooter. Frames should be taken in nodding mode with A and B offsets. Without this it is almost impossible to correct for the many bad pixel in the NIR detector of X-Shooter." AMBER run completion was also commented on: "My experience in the last 5 periods of AMBER SM is a limited completion rates (class A and B). I have just been informed that time constraint class A program are not (anymore?)carried over. ESO should carry them over if in agreement with the timing constraints." Finally, one respondent suggested that "it would be useful to (have the option to) receive an email notification each time a SM OBs is executed and/or data are available for download."

Data reduction: Some contrary responses here. Some users are completely happy with the ESOREX/Gasgano pipelines and their output ("X-shooter and UVES pipeline deliver almost science-ready results"), while some have serious complaints ("ESO Help for X-Shooter reduction with the pipeline is insufficient. I literally got the reply from the eso-help that the X-Shooter pipeline does not support observations on faint targets"!). MacOS X support (see below) was found lacking inpipeline installation/usage. One user suggested "the [pipeline] manuals are quite technical and newbies would benefit from workshops". I note that the NL community organizes its own X-Shooter reduction workshop once a year, but perhaps other countries/instrument consortia/ESO can do so as well.

Data access/computing: Data delegation is slowly being adopted by the community. CalSelector, on the other hand, is generally used but occasionally found wanting ("the CalSelector tool did not alwaysautomatically find all of my calibration files, so I had to manually search for those files in the archive for some service mode OBs").

Only about half the NL respondents use the reduced data from ESO, but most would like to contribute reduced data, although none of the respondents have actually contributed Phase 3 data (although UltraVISTA, an NL-led public survey, has just done so). Very few the respondents have used the VISTA public archive, but most of the respondents are happy that the data is there (even if they haven't used it!).

Computing: For the first time, MacOS X has overtaken Linux as the primary OS among NL respondents, and a strong majority (7/9) would like to see ESO spend resources on fully supporting MacOS X. One respondent pointed out that "FORS2 mask preparation software was only available as an executable for 32-bit computers. It was extremely difficult to find a machine where to install it and use it -- 32-bit machines do not exist almost anymore". Several users complained about the lack of support for the X-Shooter pipelines on MacOS X (in fact, one claimed that ESOREX and Gasgano do

not work on MacOS X 10.6/10.7, which is incorrect); while this is clearly incorrect (the NL member of the UC uses these pipelines regularly on MacOS X 10.7), there appears to be a lack of help for the installation of these pipelines under MacOS X. Moreover, one respondent said that "the same pipeline version with the same data and sof file sometimes crashes on Mac but runs on Linux."

User Portal/Science Data Products Forum: No significant comments or complaints.

ALMA: The few ALMA PI/coIs who responded seemed please with the Cycle 0 procedure, although they were not awarded time. In coming cycles, a preference for higher sensitivity and the Compact Array were stated. As for LSP proposals, respondents would like to see more concrete suggestions for improvement in the proposals from the (ALMA) OPC, as it was not clear to these respondents how the decisions were arrived at.

Final comments: From a long-time ESO user and instrument PI: "I think it is unacceptable that three of the most requested instruments (FLAMES, X-shooter, UVES) are mounted on the same telescope. This results in a pressure factor about three times higher than on the other three UTs. A relatively straightforward solution would be to exchange X-shooter and VISIR."

Factsheet Portugal prepared by Nanda Kumar

Statistics: Eleven complete and two partial responses to the users poll were received from the Portuguese community. Proposal statistics included participation as PI's and Co-I's for seven proposals each. Two ALMA proposals were submitted as Co-Is of which one is approved. Among the users who took the poll, frequent and occasional users were 36% each. In this year, the number of visitor and service mode observers were 30% each. 10 regular and one GTO proposals were submitted aiming at XSHOOTER, CRIRES, UVES, HARPS, SINFONI and NACO instruments.

Proposal Package and OPC: Most users read the CfP quickly, had no problems with proposal packages, found that the technical info and exposure time calculators were sufficient. The users are divided in half in expressing their satisfaction with the evaluation of their proposals by the OPC. 55% of the users seek more specific suggestions for proposal improvement and also agree with anonymizing the proposals during refereeing and ranking process. Specific suggestion included that similar proposals be judged within the same sub-panel of the OPC. 64% of the users agreed to serve on the OPC and ALMA panels if necessary.

Observatory, Pipeline and Computing: Observers who visited the observatories consider the logistics and observing support went smoothly and rate the ESO services excellent at the observatory level. one of the three users who obtained service mode observations complained that the data was not as expected including calibrations. ESO pipelines are used only half of the time in reducing the data. PI packages are considered not needed. The newly introduced calsel service was found useful by 40% users, and the remaining users did not know about it. About 1/3rd of the users primarily work with Mac OSX and the remaining use Linux. 45% of the users consider ESO should spend some resources on supporting Mac OSX fully. A tool to make finding charts was consider a priority and was not available for the primary computing platform of one users. X-shooter data reduction kit was not possible to install on mac.

FEROS and 2.2-m telescope: Conflicts with the GROND experiment are noted. One user thinks it would be better if, in case of lost time due to bad weather conditions, the GROND time is also cut in the same percentage. This would guarantee that, e.g if the observer has 3 nights and only during the

last 2 hours the weather is good, then he/she has at least some observations (even if GROND has an alert to observe something). The observer cannot control if GROND is observing a real ToO gamma ray burst or something else (e.g. an afterglow).

Factsheet Spain prepared by Lourdes Verdes-Montenegro

Number and profile of users filling the questionnaire

List received from Chair of UC: 109 Spanish PIs of proposals for La Silla/Paranal in periods 86-88, no PIs of ALMA proposals included.

Answers received: 63

- Among them 55 from ESO provided list (50%).
- 21 people were involved in ALMA proposals.
- Hence 13 users applied both to La Silla/Paranal and ALMA.
- >40 people were willing to serve in ESO panels (to provide this list to ESO?).
- >1/2 frequent users (last year most users filling the poll were occasional users)
- Most applied to regular programs with Xshooter, followed by ISAAC, FORS+UVES and NACO.
- 2 people answered for Apex telescope
- 1 was observing with a visitor instrument (Ultracam).

I also got separate personal feedback from several users. The summary below intends to reflect both the comments in the Poll as well as direct to me.

To the summary of the results it is added in italic specific comments and suggestions of users, which might be found feasible and useful by ESO, and would imply an improvement in ESO services to the community.

Proposal preparation and submission

There were few problems understanding policies, and no problem in general with the proposal package. Users are in general happy with the information about instruments.

Some suggestions to improve this Phase I are:

- Centralizing basic information for proposals would be acknowledged, like overheads, different configurations of instruments, etc. E.g. one specific comment from a user: *"Information about overheads on ISAAC were all over the place. Had to consult two or three different manuals to get it. I suggest to incorporate that information to the ETC".* This issue was equally raised last year.
- To optimize the system for the web server accepting the proposal, and make it more error proof.

Issue with the proposal of a Spanish User, leading to the suggestion of establishing a figure to evaluate cases of conflicts between ESO-users and ESO-organization, who can propose an objective solution.

A detail next the case raised to me by a Spanish user, known by ESO, that occured during P89 period. The user, following ESO instructions, uploaded the latex file of his proposal into ESO page on time.

When he tried to upload the attachment with the figures, also on time, the file was rejected by the ESO system, the reason given being that the file was larger that the established limit. There is no such limit in the ESOFORM manual. The proposal would have entered without a single problem should the (hidden) size limit would have been 1.5MB, which seems also acceptable for a file size in the current times.

This problem is completely independent on the time remaining to the deadline at the moment that the files were being uploaded. Rules that were not public were applied.

Furthermore, the user tried to upload the latex file of his proposal, which went smoothly into the system twice. In Section 5 of the users manual, in boldface, the skeleton proposal is merely described as a "… version of your proposal that only contains the technical details of your programme". It does not seem that the final version of the figure file is included into the "technical details".

The user got the 1st answer from ESO about two weeks after his contact with ESO, the same day of the deadline. However one first argument against adressing this issue was that the proposals had been already distributed to the OPC Panel members.

The solution of the problem was proposed by the DG who exceptionally accepted the proposal without figures.The OPC complained about the bad way the proposal was ellaborated, since figure was missing.

OPC feedback

About 60% of users were satisfied with OPC comments, while 40% were not.

With the aim of channeling users complains in hopefully constructive ways, willing to provide ideas for improving a process which is of the interst of all that goes smoothly (all) users were proposed several options on how to improve the OPC evaluation of proposals: next it is indicated the suggestion as well as the % of users supporting it.

- Provide more specific suggestions for proposal improvement = 50%
- Provide just a cutoff mark and grading, and indicate technical issues with the proposal 20%
- Make the OPC report public in the ESO web site after publishing approved proposals 20.00%
- Make the names of the referees public 1-2 semesters after the evaluations 20%
- Anonymize the proposals during refereeing and ranking 35%

Some users also added as a comment that reducing the load of work for the OPC would be an effective mechanisms to improve evaluations. Complains from other users could be mostly explained by this overload of the OPC (too generic answer, giving te impression of not having read the proposals, etc)

A different kind of complain was raied by a user, and is quoted here:
"I submitted a high-risk proposal that was not approved. The science was very well evaluated but technically, the progran was difficult I would have liked that the OPC had taken the risk of approving new ideas even if they are risky. I think they were very conservative."

Finally a user asked for a more flexible consideration of the requested time for e.g. the 2.2m, since observations requiring less than 3 nights are not allowed at this telescope (since no service mode exists).

Service mode

More than half of users were involved in service mode observations in detail, the principal instruments used being XSHOOTER, FORS, ISAAC and APEX, in this order.

Two thirds of the user were satisfied with the information provided for preparing phase 2, understood the calibration material provided with the data (according to the instrument calibration plan), with the standard calibration data, and with the delivery of the data.

1/3 required additional calibration observations, accounted against their time allocation, so that e.g one user comments:
"I would like that ESO would consider calibrations during the bright part of the twilights as part of the calibrations and not part of your science. In our specific case to take a spectrum in the bright twilight, which is translated in a sun spectrum, with the same instrumental configuration as in the science would have been incredibly useful but, to get that you have to remove some time from your objects, so, we could´t do it. "

Half needed to contact an ESO Instrument Scientist to complete Phase 2 submission (suggestion to have an analog to support astronomer to ask specific questions and help to do the phase2).

Visitor mode

Most users did not use visitor mode for their observations. The ones who did, had reported smooth logistics, no problems assembling required pre-arrival data and preimaging, were happy with the introduction at the telescope and technical assistance, and got a complete data set.

Except for:
- *"Technical problems with VIMOS. Moreover, the telescope had a technical problem related with VLTI."*
- Status and support of EFOSC2 on the NTT, qualified as poor: "Many things that are listed in the manual as readily available did not work at all (flat lamps, mask generation, etc). "

Data reduction

For final-science-quality data reduction 29 people use ESO software, but a similar amount use other software. Half tried to install ESO pipeline with small problems.

The PI packages have been useful for about half of the users.

Most of the users have consider that data reduction constitutes a major effort.

Specific comments about this:

- *"The instruments I usually use, VIMOS and X-SHOOTER are complicated per se. It would help if ESO made the pipelines a bit more flexible. We had to reduce a VIMOS-MOS by hand because the pipeline did not allow to select the number of objects to be extracted per slit."*
- *A user reported that the VISIR pipeline did not produce reliable reduced spectra. This user was able to make Home Brewed Software for VISIR reduction, so it can be anticipated that this comment does not come from an unexperienced user.*
- *"Please provide reduced data for ALL instruments!"*

- *"ESO pipelines are not smooth at all and require lots of effort to be used and understood. Including some preliminary reduced data in the PI-package (for VLT instruments) would make things much easier."*
- *"Better pipeline to high quality fully reduced data are needed, and all these data available in the ESO archive."*

Rapid response to a report of a bug is acknowledged by the user:

A bug was detected in UVES pipeline wavelengh calibration (relevant, since was making radial velocity measures). ESO people checked it fast. The issue suggests to increase checking any new pipeline before release.

Other problems:

- Gasgano problem to be used for several instruments in the same installation.
- It seems that more than one instrument pipelines can not be managed in Gasgano. The user would like to know *"how to install and run different recipes from different instruments. In the web page there's only one line dedicated to this case, but is not enough".*
- *"ESO should warn when using FORS that there is a gap between two chips that is exactly in the center of the FOV, so, if nobody warns the observer you end up with your object in the gap. Observers always try to put the objects in the center of the available FOV."*
- *"Pipelines are not flexible enough to handle the particularities of some cases. For example, in our ISAAC proposal multiple targets were aligned over the slit, and the pipeline does not allow for an easy multiaperture extraction."*
- *"Policy on standard calibration data for long slit spectroscopy is insufficient, it should include standard and arc spectra through the same slit width as that used during the night"*

The CalSelector Service was rated by less than half of users useful, (since most were not aware of it). Download of the data was satisfactory. Most find reduced data products useful, but a fraction didn't know about it and learned it from the Poll. Nobody submitted data to Phase 3, but most would agree to submit their own reduced data products to Phase 3.

VISTA public survey projects: half users found it useful. Half didnt know about it.

Suggestion for VISTA:
"The query form just looks for the coordinates of the image center. As a consequence, it is often difficult to find out which image contains a particular object. I think that the search engine should be able to find the image where the required coordinates are included, it would be very useful."

ESO Data Products Service is found in general useful.

The additional data product suggested to be made available to the community support above mentioned requests: astrometrically and photometrically calibrated images flux-calibrated spectra, better science ready data, fully reduced data for all the epochs and instruments, in particular for high resolution spectroscopy.

Most users learned about the Data Delegation service from the Poll, and find it useful.

Computer

Half users work with linux and half with Mac. Nearly 40 users consider that Mac should be fully supported.

Specific suggestion:
"About the VISIR guideCam software. Provide one guide star is mandatory in the phase 2, so, one need to use this GuideCam Lite software for VISIR, but is only available for LINUX and the version is really old and may cause some installation problems. Would be good if they develop this tool for Mac as well."

User Portal

The process of submitting proposal is asked to be error-free, more robust, with suggestions like: easier web navigation, menus not very intuitive, webpage should be a bit simpler, a bar with username and the possibility to log out should always be visible, etc.

Experience with the Science Data Products Forum

Half find it ok, but half didn't know about it.

ALMA

7 users submitted proposals as PI and 19 as collaborators. 5 got time, but didnt get the data (hence couldn't comment on it).

Resources used for technical information on the ALMA setup:

On line 12, ARC 7, OT help 8, colleagues 11.

Users are happy with the technical information, proposal submission, and found their issues solved,

Users missed in CASA:

A GUI with help for non-experts, Fringe fitting for VLBI data.

Several future ALMA capabilities were rated in order of importance for their science, the most requested ones being higher resolution and higher sensitivity (the others being: surveying, alma compact array, additional bands, polarization).

A similar set of possibilities were proposed to improve the evaluation of ALMA OPC:

Provide more specific suggestions for proposal improvement: 12 users
Provide just a cutoff mark and grading, and indicate technical issues with the proposal: 3 users
Make the OPC report public in the ESO web site after publishing approved proposals: 7 users
Anonymize the proposals during refereeing and ranking: 6 users

The way the evaluation was made and the results were clear for half of the proposers.

Factsheet Sweden prepared by Kirsten K.Knudsen

This year the ESO UC poll was answered by six users, a number comparable to the past few years (5-6). These are mostly frequent users and include both PIs and co-Is to the La Silla Paranal Observatory and ALMA. Generally, most users are satisfied and happy with ESO and the ESO facilities. Here is a brief summary of comments and suggestions:

- **Reduction of ESO data:**

- "I appreciate the excellent archiving. Considering the sophistication of the instruments and the difficulties of data reduction, I think that ESO has generally done a very good job with reduction procedures and pipelines."

- **Software:**
  - For 5 out of 6 users Mac OSX is the primary OS. 100% agreement that ESO should spend resources to support Mac OSX fully.
  - Software packages that were not available for primary computing platform:
  - Phase 1:
    - Midas on MAC OS LION
    - ALMA cycle 0: The ALMA proposal tools are not backward compatible with older versions of Mac OSX, nor with older Mac hardware.
  - Phase 2: FPOSS
  - Data reduction: Gasgano ESOREX CRIRES PIPELINE ; Midas on MAC OS LION
  - Suggestion: Would be good to make all packages independent of computer
  - rat is used and have them in e.g. JAVA in web pages.
  - CASA (ALMA): Some plotting routines could be improved (e.g. overplotting)

- **ALMA future capabilities:**
  - Including polarization, additional bands, and compact array
  - Solar filters to enable ALMA observations of the Sun [This option was not on the list of the UC poll]

- **OPC:** There were some suggestions for improving the OPC evaluation procedure as given in the UC poll. However, a former panel and OPC member comments that these suggestions would not improve the OPC evaluationprocedure.

- **Additional comments:**
  - Concerning "Blue" sensitive observations: Since the retirement of FORS1, this is only offered in visitor mode on FORS2 - consider _service_ mode access.
  - HAWKI is a crucial instrument to keep and maintain.
  - The science output from VLTI are not in proportion to the resources spent on it.

Factsheet Switzerland prepared by Hans Martin Schmid

We obtained feedback from 8 ESO users, mostly (75%) experienced users, submitting 2 or more proposals per year. 5 users obtained service mode observation, 3 had visitor runs, and 1 obtained ALMA data. Two are Linux, six are Mac OS X users.

The feedback on questions related to the proposal application process, technical information, user support during phase 2 preparation, technical support at the telescope are overall positive, with at most some minor problems. There was one complaint about the proposal form in the LaTeX format.

50% of the Swiss users made a note about the feedback and proposal judging form the OPC

- Mixed quality of panelist – bewildering lack of understanding of the point of the proposal
- Very short feedback with essentially no information
- Impression that the OPC members didn't read carefully the proposal (to many to read)
- Improvements asked by OPC in one period where attacked in the next period (proposal history box in the form?)
- The OPC process has a major stochastic element

In visitor mode observations there was one person pointing to a difficulty for observers at La Silla:

- Runs which starts on Mondays and finish on Fridays should be avoided, because the lack of transports to LaSilla requires 4 additional nights on the mountain

Comment on service mode observations:

- Slow execution of Cat A OBs and even cancellation continues to be a serious problem and leads to much frustration

On data reduction the users state that this requires a lot of efforts. Most use own software and only a few the ESO pipeline (25%)

The data delegation system was considered to be useful or very useful by all who answered.

The Cal selector Service was not know to 62% of the people, the other find it useful

All who know the reduced data products (75%) find it useful or very useful.

The ESO data products are considered to be very useful.

Two final comments on the proposal selection process:

- there is a major stochastic element in the OPC proposal selection process. This makes multi-semester programs very difficult because it must pass twice the OPC selection
- HARPS is highly demanded (overscription factor almost 9), any way out in the near future

Factsheet United Kingdom prepared by Gary Fuller

- The request for input from UK astronomers was distributed via a community-wide email list used for announcements from the UK funding agency, STFC plus personal emails to all 197 astronomers listed as investigators on ESO proposals for periods 86, 87 and 88.
- In total there were 59 responses from UK astronomers.
- The most heavily requested instruments were FORS and XSHOOTER (20 requests) followed by HAWK-I,NACO, ISAAC, SINFONI (each with more that 10 requests).
- The majority of users were happy with the experience with ESO or had only minor problems.
- 20% of respondents commented on problems with the proposal forms or submitting proposals.
    - Various, but rather minor, issues with LaTeX form for submission. Why is the latex format and processing so complex? There was the claim that most other observatories have more straightforward (LaTeX)) formats. Has the idea of an online generator for the forms been considered?
- Nearly 30% of respondents did not know ESO is providing reduced data.
- 40% of respondents don't know that the VISTA public surveys are available through the science archive.
- Users are almost equality divided between users of Linux and Mac OS computers.
    - A 64 bit Linux version of scisoft is requested.
- There are five specifics issues users have raised:
    - XSHOOTER calibration observations on telluric standards which are made using STARE mode. Details are attached below. In general this raises the question how are calibration processes decided and them reviewed in light of more user experience?
    - There was a question about completion rates for queue scheduled programs and how decisions are made about which programs to observe. One user had only 6% of 42 hours of VLT programs in the last 3 periods completed. This seems very low.

- ToOs: There was a request for a review of how these are handled. Details below.
- There was a comment about completeness of ETC with respect to advertised instrument modes. For example NACO prism, some EFOSC2 gratings were recently not included. What should a user, particularly a novice user, do in these circumstances?
- What is the status of network transfer of APEX data back to the archive? When will it be fully implemented and the standard mode of operation?
  - Two other specific requests:
    - A request for the VISTA archive to provide custom sized cutouts and links to other surveys
    - Archive to contain pipeline reductions (as it used to apparently) to allow tracking of service mode runs. (I strongly support this suggestion as I believe that close to real time tracking of service mode projects is extremely important.)

XSHOOTER Calibration

The problem is the following:

Currently the XSHOOTER telluric standards are observed in the 'STARE' mode, which means each tell std is observed only once, and always on the same part of the detector. Also, the SNR is typically 50-100. These observations are inadequate for the following reasons:

* With only one observation it is very difficult to reject cosmic rays and bad pixels.

* When the star is always on the same spot on the detector it is impossible to use other tell standard observations to reject bad pixels.

* For many stellar spectroscopy programmes, a typical SNR requirement is ~100. This means that the SNR ends up being limited by the telluric standard.

A simple solution to this problem would be to change the OB to 'NOD' rather than stare. This would enable cosmics and bad pixels to be rejected easily, increase the SNR by sqrt(2), all for an investment of an extra 5-10sec of integration time (thus the OB is still acquisition dominated). This is exactly the OB strategy for the XSHOOTER flux standards, why the tellurics treated differently?

Targets of Opportunities

Comment for user:

(1) For rare ToO's (e.g. ones which are likely to trigger perhaps once or less per cycle) it would make much more sense to allow long term status (over at least 2 or 3 cycles, say) to give a reasonable chance of a trigger (or perhaps building up of a small sample). (2) for some ToOs (particularly GRBs) it can be hard to know until observations have been made, just what category and set of science goals pertain to a particular burst. This is a headache for proposers and TACs. On some other major telescopes, time for making the most urgent, rapid observations is awarded under an "umbrella" programme, representing all interested parties (and allowing flexibility to respond to different circumstances). Later

time follow-up can then be under the remit of more specific, focussed, pre-planned proposals. I realise this goes against the normal ESO way of doing things, but it could be thought about. Scientifically it would have distinct benefits. (3) all this does also raise the issue of the limits imposed by ESO on the numbers of ToO's awarded each cycle. The ToO process would benefit from revisiting, since unless ToO's are really highly disruptive to operations (which I don't think they are, at the level they currently happen), then better to decide on a scientific basis rather than imposing a limit.