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EUROPEAN ORGANISATION FOR ASTRONOMICAL
RESEARCH IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

**FOR
INFORMATION**

COUNCIL

117th Meeting

Garching, 8 and 9 and June 2010

Allocation of GTO Proposals

Council is invited to take note of this document.

Allocation of Guaranteed Time Observations proposals

The current use of Guaranteed Time Observations (GTO) is defined in Appendix 2 of the VLT/VLTI Science Operations Policy document (Cou-996 rev. approved in December 2004).

Following this policy the Principal Investigator (PI) is asked to submit the observation list (including target, instrument setup and exposure times) before the release of the Call for Proposals, i.e. at least one month before the proposal deadline. These observations are protected and must not be duplicated in regular proposals. The GTO proposals themselves are submitted at the regular proposal deadline and specially marked as GTO.

The ESO Observing Programmes Committee (OPC) reviews all received proposals. In almost all cases, the GTO proposals have been ranked highly and have been scheduled. However, on very rare occasions a GTO proposal receives a bad grade. For all proposals the OPC panel provides detailed comments and feedback.

The OPC grades proposals from 1 (best) to 5 (worst). Due to the demand of telescope time a typical grade for a successful proposal is around 2, with some variation due to oversubscription of RA ranges or specific observing conditions (dark time, good seeing, photometric, etc.). Proposals with a grade larger (worse) than 3 are not considered for scheduling, as they are regarded to be scientifically not sufficiently rewarding. Since P84 proposals which received bad grades in the pre-evaluation by the OPC panel members are triaged i. e. they are not discussed at the OPC meeting itself. Currently the bottom 30% of proposals is triaged.

The Interpretative, Supplementary and Amending Agreement concluded with Chile in 1995 states that Chilean proposals receiving a grade larger (worse) than 3.0 should not be scheduled, even if this means that the 10% observing time for Chilean astronomers is not filled.

The allocation of GTO is based on proposals submitted to ESO following the contract with the (instrument) consortium that acquired the guaranteed time. They are provided to the OPC for information (to protect against competing proposals. Contrary to regular proposals, GTO proposals are not triaged, i.e. they are discussed by the OPC panel. The vast majority of GTO proposals obtain grades fully in line with other regular proposals and would be scheduled on scientific merit alone. In a handful of extremely rare cases GTO proposals have been ranked very low (with grades larger (worse) than 3).

If a GTO proposal with a bad grade and low rank were nevertheless scheduled, it would take precedence over more highly ranked general observer proposals. This leads to a situation where the telescope and instrument would be used for a research project which has been judged in the peer review significantly inferior to other programmes and impacts the overall scientific return from the VLT/I.

For these reasons, the VLT/VLTI Science Operations Policy will be applied in the following way:

- GTO proposals with grades larger (worse) than 3.0 will in general not be scheduled. The Director General can overrule the OPC grade, if deemed necessary or appropriate.
- GTO time will be honoured in all cases. The time of rejected proposals will remain in the ownership of the GTO team and will be allocated at a later time based on a new (improved) proposal.

Appendix 2 from Cou-996 rev.

VLT/VLTI Science Policy
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APPENDIX 2

POLICY FOR GUARANTEED TIME OBSERVATIONS (GTO)

A) GT Observations during regular instrument operations

Rewarding Consortia for providing hardware or software that enhance the ESO scientific capabilities and competitiveness is central to the VLT/VLTI strategy. It allows to involve resources and expertises that are spread across the community and to focus them on projects which are beneficial for the whole community.

In any given Observing Period GTO observations will not exceed 10% of the global VLT/VLTI time.

At least two months prior to the issue of a Call for Proposals the GTO PI will submit to ESO the complete GTO plan and will indicate specifically which part is proposed for the semester which is the subject of the Call. After review by the ESO Directorate and approval by the Director General, at the time of the Call for Proposals the GTO plan for the semester will be made publicly accessible via the ESO Web site to avoid the submission of other proposals that would duplicate GT observations. Protection against duplications will be enforced only on a semester-by-semester basis. In the case of GTO surveys or focused projects taking a large fraction of the GTO time, i.e. Large GTO Programmes, the whole observing plan may be made public at once, while the GTO teams will be invited to make public the resulting science products as early as possible.

In their proposal, the GTO Teams will provide the specific list of targets, or the field coordinates and size to be explored. In both cases instrument set ups and integration times will be specified. The total observing time for all targets shall strictly match the GTO time allocated in the given Period.

Like for any other observation, GT Observations are protected against duplications. OPC will reject proposals that will clearly duplicate GT Observations. However, GT observers do not have exclusive rights over the targets they intend to observe or over the science they intend to investigate. OPC can recommend observations of the same targets with different instrument set-ups or of different targets of the same nature proposed by non-GTO scientists.

GT observations are restricted to the use of instrument modes which have been or will be offered to the community.

The GTO Teams are subject to the same regulations of non-GTO Teams concerning the changes of observations with respect to the DG approved plan.

B) GT Observations prior to an instrument being offered for general use

ESO policy is to allow and facilitate the scientific exploitation of a new VLT/VLTI instrument as early as possible, provided this is compatible with the activities necessary to bring the instrument to full efficiency and stable operability.

Within this framework, GTO Teams may request to advance part of their GT observations to prior to the instrument being offered to the general users. The Team will not be entitled to bad weather or instrument failure compensations. Only possible losses due to failures of VLT/VLTI telescopes or instrument components provided by ESO can be compensated. The plan for such observations will be timely posted on the ESO Web site.