

Release of Scientific Data from VLTI Commissioning

Technical commissioning activities of the VLTI with the VINCI test camera and the 40-cm diameter siderostats with 16 m baseline and the ANTU and MELIPAL 8-m telescopes with 103 m baseline have been ongoing since first fringes on March 17, 2001 with the siderostats and on October 30, 2001 with the 8-m. A number of astronomical targets from various object classes have been observed in these two modes.

The observations were made to assess the compliance of the instruments with the technical specifications as well as to characterise performance of the

facility in its first phase of development. In addition to these more technical tasks, a number of observations are certainly also useful for scientific purposes.

In order to fully involve the ESO community in analysing and understanding the data and its scientific and technical implications, ESO has decided to make these data available to this community through the archive.

The data were obtained in the period between March 17, 2001 and December 5, 2001 and have been deemed by the commissioning team and the VLTI Project Scientist to be of sufficient qual-

ity to warrant scientific work. The data are available directly on the ESO web (http://www.eso.org/projects/vlti/instru/vinci/vinci_data_sets.html).

Access to these data is restricted to astronomers in the ESO member countries. ESO welcomes community feedback on any aspect of the reduction, analysis and interpretation of these data. Please contact the VLTI project scientist (fparesce@eso.org), the VLTI group head (aglindem@eso.org) or the head of the Commissioning team (mschoell@eso.org) with your comments and for further information on this release. *F. PARESCE*

VLT Science Verification Policy and Procedures

Replicated from ESO web pages

1. Science Verification Observations

After the conclusion of Commissioning of a new VLT instrument, and prior to the start of regular operations, a series of **Science Verification** (SV) observations with such an instrument are conducted. SV observations may also be conducted in the case of a major instrument upgrade.

The equivalent of at least 11 VLT UT nights should be dedicated to SV observations.

SV Observations are conducted during the *dry runs* preceding the instrument regular operations. At the end of the scheduled dry runs, the VLT Programme Scientist submits to the Director General a report on the status of completion of the planned SV observations. If the corresponding set of data is judged insufficient to reach the goals of SV, the Director General may decide that further SV observations be executed during the first scheduled regular runs in Service Mode.

All SV Observations are conducted in Service Mode, but one or two members of the SV Team may be present at Paranal Observatory for a prompt reduction of the data, and the selection of the observations to be executed.

2. Goals of Science Verification

The goals of SV are manifold, and include:

- offering to ESO users first science-grade data from a new instrument
- demonstrating the scientific potential of the VLT+instrument
- fostering an early scientific return from the VLT+instrument
- experimenting any pipeline and reduction tools that may be available at the time of SV
- providing feedback to Operation (Paranal and Garching), Instrument Division, and Data Flow System, as appropriate
- the involvement of scientists from the ESO community in the prompt scientific exploitation of the data.

3. Science Verification Programmes and Data Policy

The SV Plan of an instrument is developed by a dedicated SV Team.

The PI(s) of the instrument subject to SV and the Instrument Science Team are involved in the definition of the SV plan.

The SV Programme is presented to the ESO Faculty for discussion.

The SV Programme is finally submitted by the VLT Programme Scientist to the Director General for approval.

SV observations of targets already included in GTO or approved GO programmes with the same instrument could be executed only with the agreement of the PI.

Raw and calibration SV data passing quality control are made immediately

public via the ESO archive, following the "Data Access Policy for ESO Data".

The SV Team will make efforts to release reduced SV data within two months from the conclusion of SV observations.

4. Selection Criteria for SV Programmes

SV Programmes are selected according to the following criteria: They should

- have outstanding scientific interest
- push the VLT+Instrument close to their limit
- address a scientific issue widely studied within the ESO Community
- result in a sufficiently complete dataset for its prompt exploitation to be scientifically rewarding
- use the core modes of the instrument
- help PIs and Co-Is of approved GO and GTO programmes to get promptly acquainted with the data from the instrument
- exploit complementarity with other public datasets (e.g. HDF-S/CDF-S/EIS, etc.), if appropriate.

5. The SV Team

5.1 Composition of the SV Team

A dedicated SV Team is assembled for each of the various SV phases, including Garching and Chile staff and fellows (typically up to 8–10 people).

In the selection of the SV Team mem-