

THE USERS' COMMITTEE

HANS VAN WINCKEL, CHAIRPERSON OF THE UC

Unlike other committees of ESO, the Users' Committee (UC) acts as a direct link between the 'general users at large' and the ESO officials and focuses on the broad range of interactions of the current users with the ESO observatories. The aim of the committee is to streamline the requests from the users and advise the Director General and the ESO staff, with the goal of making the whole process from Phase I proposal writing up to reduction of the data as efficient and transparent as possible. Clearly, input from as many users as possible (read: all users) is needed to get a census on the legitimate needs of the community and in this article several ways to do so are restressed.

THE UC AND THE GENERAL USER.

In recent years, the ESO observatories and user interaction with ESO has changed considerably. The most dramatic change for the general user is no doubt the success of the service observing possibilities. The original goal to reach an even share between visitor and service mode observations turned out to be untenable and today more than 70 percent of the requested time is in service mode. With the global standardisation and the full paranalisation and lasillalisation of the instruments, the streamlined rigid data gathering procedures work and offer the user, even in service, very efficient tools for their observing strategies. The Users' Support Group (USG) and the Data Management Division (DMD) are now the main interaction channels for many of the users, more than the staff of the observatories. Overall, both observatories, Paranal and La Silla, receive good to excellent satisfaction rates by the users, while individual instruments may score less well. The role of the UC as an interplay between the users and the ESO staff to further improve the ESO services was outlined by Lutz Wisotzki in the Messenger nr. 106, 2001, p46 and will not be repeated here.

The evaluation of ESO's telescope and instrument performances by the user is monitored on a daily basis by night reports (for visitors); on a run-basis by end-of-mission reports (visitors) and finally yearly by the UC meeting. It is in this UC meeting that a series of action items (AI) and recommenda-

tions are formulated which are filtered from the general users' requests. Most of these AI and recommendations materialise in concrete results by the next UC meeting, illustrating that the users' requests have significant weight to trigger reaction.

UC SPRING MEETING

During this yearly spring meeting, the UC handles a full agenda : short briefings on the instrument-telescope performances and the proposal handling process; presenting problem reports from the users ; discussing new reports on the future of ESO that became available (like the report of the LaSilla 2006+ working group) and a half-a-day focus on a special topic, related to the use of ESO's facilities, and which is covered in much more detail. To increase communication with the user we post the minutes, with the list of AI's and recommendations, on the web a few weeks after the meeting on the page <http://www.hq.eso.org/gen-fac/commit/>. Also the national delegates will personally contact the user to give feedback on any specific item she/he raised. One can see that quite a few of last years' meetings have resulted in concrete actions already. To name but a few: simpler proposal phase I submission; test account to check the Phase I proposals through the ESO system; release of part of the EIS pipeline; and certainly: no late communication of the proposal OPC results. Other AI or recommendations take longer and are repeated (for example, the decision on the implementation of the recommendations of the LaSilla2006+ report or the updates of all web-pages and cleaning of redundant old links). Although the yearly

spring meeting is the most prominent UC business, this does not need to be exclusively so. You can contact your national delegate the whole year round and a good moment may even be just after your run (if in visitor mode), or during the reduction process, when the real quality of your data becomes clear. The latter is certainly the case for service mode observers. At the request of the UC, ESO organised also a poll of visitor mode observers which was presented by Fernando Commeron et al., 2003, *The Messenger* 113, p. 32. The questionnaire is still available to service mode observers and should be submitted by them (http://www.hq.eso.org/dmd/usg/survey/sm_questionnaire.html).

FEEDBACK REQUEST

The way to express needs and/or remarks are certainly not fully exploited by the users and only about 50% of the visitors fill in their end-of-mission reports, while the service questionnaire triggered a 1/6 reply rate. Clearly this should increase. By the time this *Messenger* is published, the preparation of the yearly UC spring meeting will be in full swing. The national representative of the UC (see Table 1) will come to you soon with a plea to answer, not only a list of specific questions on your experience with ESO's observatories, but also with a request to express yourself in whatever you feel is necessary to streamline the process from proposal to publication. It is obvious that the delegates can only call themselves 'representative' on any subject if a fair response is generated. Only then can the UC play its full role.

Table 1: The national members of the Users' committee

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Chile	Monica Rubio	<i>mrubio@das.uchile.cl</i>
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The national mandate is 4 years, updates can be found on <http://www.hq.eso.org/gen-fac/commit/uc/>