Announcement of

The Launch of the New ESO User Portal

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A unified interface connecting ESO with its community, the User Portal, has been introduced. The motivation for the new interface, and its implications for users, are briefly outlined.

On November 14, a new interface connecting ESO and its user community was launched: the User Portal. Within this system, account information (username, password, contact information) for all science and observation-related web-based applications (e.g. WASP, the Web Application for Submitting Proposals) and stand-alone software (P2PP, the Phase 2 Proposal Preparation tool) is unified, and user-controllable.

This new interface is the result of a large inter-division collaborative effort, that has involved all those ESO groups and departments responsible for providing operational support to the users via different web-based applications (e.g. proposal submission, preparation of Phase 2 packages, access to the ESO Archive).

The need for such a change was required by the substantial increase of the number of users of the science facilities and services offered by ESO. If we count those people who have registered at the ESO Science Archive Facility and/or have been a Principle Investigator on an observing proposal, the number we arrive at is more than 7 000 people.

To aid these users in all aspects of their scientific interaction with ESO, from preparing and submitting observing proposals, to configuring Observation Blocks (at Phase 2 or in preparation of a Visitor Mode run), to requesting data from the Science Archive Facility, ESO provides a number of web-based routines and standalone software applications. Examples of the former include routines for data requests from the Archive, while perhaps the best-known example of the latter is P2PP.

To make full use of some of these tools, users have always had to identify themselves by providing a recognised username and password. For example, in order to check the Webletter containing the outcome of the Observing Programmes Committee (OPC) evaluation and the scheduling review of their proposals, users were required to enter identifying credentials.

Prior to last month, those usernames and/or passwords were imposed by different groups within ESO, and were basically unchangeable thereafter. Moreover, since these different groups were themselves operating with different user databases, there were no straightforward means available to ensure that the information for any given user agreed across the board.

The User Portal project was developed with these issues and drawbacks in mind. The final goal was to provide our user community with one single entry point for all operational services we offer.

As a starting point, ESO made a strong effort to establish a central list of users, by combining information in both the archive and proposal databases. Anyone who had registered for the Archive or submitted an observing proposal, or both, was notified in an e-mail that an ESO User Portal account had been created for them. Despite the major effort that was invested to try and merge users with multiple usernames (mostly due to different initials and/or last names on submitted proposals, different e-mail addresses, different registrations for Archive access), some users ended up receiving more than just one e-mail. Users were then encouraged to activate their account and update their contact information, e.g. their ESO User Portal profile. Users with unwanted multiple activated accounts should contact ESO (*usd-help@eso.org*) to request that the extra accounts are merged. It is highly recommended to have only one User Portal account per user. Otherwise, the history of any user's interactions with ESO (e.g. submitted observing proposals, approved/rejected runs, Phase 2 and progress report pages) will be split among the different accounts, depending on the account that was activated before a certain interaction.

Clearly, this new interface affects all users of ESO facilities, not only those that were already registered. For instance, new users wishing to submit an observing proposal will now need to have a User Portal account in advance of the proposal submission deadline. Similarly, new users wishing to retrieve non-proprietary data from the ESO Archive will also need to have an active User Portal account beforehand. To make it easy to create accounts we provide a simple, three-step process. This begins by browsing *http://www.eso.org/UserPortal* and clicking on the "I would like to create a new account." link. As a second step, the users are then asked to fill in the details of their User Portal profile. The final step is to click on the link provided in the e-mail that the user will receive from us. Account activation is crucial if any data package is expected to be received from the Archive: this step will not happen automatically.

After activating their ESO-supplied or self-created accounts, users have full control over their usernames and passwords, and they are responsible for keeping their contact information up to date. Affiliation and postal address are, once again, rather important at the time of data shipment by the ESO Archive.

The ESO User Portal is intended to make the use of ESO web applications, and other software, simpler and more manageable. For instance, users will now employ the same username and password for all applications that require them. More features will be added in the near future. In fact, as far as ESO is concerned, the launch of the User Portal does not mark the completion of the project, but we consider it to be only the achievement of its first milestone.

For more information see *http://www.eso. org/ESOUserPortal/docs/faq.html.*