

Following Up on the Recommendations of the Visiting Committee

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Like most scientific organisations, ESO periodically invites advice from an external expert panel that assesses the performance of the Organisation, and formulates a number of recommendations. The most recent ESO Visiting Committee travelled to all of the ESO sites in the last months of 2018 and delivered its report to Council in June 2019. The committee, whose composition and mandate had been approved by ESO Council, was constituted by a set of internationally renowned scientists who possess complementary areas of expertise covering all aspects of ESO's function. I am extremely grateful to all committee members for their hard work and very careful preparation of their report. An extract of the main conclusions and recommendations is presented in the preceding article.

The ultimate goal of this exercise is to obtain external and expert guidance on areas where action needs to be taken, at the very least because there is always room for improvement. However, as a member of ESO, it is also rewarding to read in the report that in the committee's view ESO is fulfilling its mission very well, and that with the support of Council and the adoption of a number of recommendations the Organisation is bound to succeed in its current endeavour, that of building and bringing into operation the ELT, while maintaining the VLT/I and ALMA at the forefront of worldwide astronomy. It gave me great pleasure to convey the congratulations of the Visiting Committee to all ESO personnel.

A number of actions aligned with the Visiting Committee recommendations are now being taken after discussion with the ESO Council. Updates on these actions will be reported to and discussed with Council as they progress. The ongoing actions include: support to ESO Council in discussing an updated strategy; a careful and continuous updating of the

risks and costs of building the ELT and bringing it into operation; continuing to recruit the necessary staff to support the ELT — avoiding overloading and project fragmentation in the matrix; intensifying the understanding between ELT construction and Paranal operations as well as enhancing ESO's technical involvement in ELT instrument development; empowering and further supporting the ELT Programme Scientist in overseeing all scientific aspects of the ELT; clarifying the interfaces with CTA-South to ensure that the project develops without affecting the other projects in Paranal; discussing the future of the Atacama Pathfinder EXperiment (APEX) in a cost-neutral way for ESO and defining a communication strategy that capitalises on ESO's scientific achievements and the added value of ESO's programmes to society.

I have no doubt that the recommendations of the Visiting Committee will strengthen ESO and increase the likelihood that it succeeds in its mission.

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Paranal Observatory with the Milky Way appearing to stretch directly upwards from one of the Unit Telescopes.