Scientific Evaluation of VLT-UT1 Proposals

OBSERVING PERIOD 63 (APRIL 1 – OCTOBER 1, 1999)

The procedure for time allocation on the VLT and on the La Silla telescopes will basically follow the same principles, i.e.
• Observing proposals will have to be submitted every six months.
• The scientific evaluation of the VLT proposals and the proposals for the La Silla telescopes will be performed at the same time and by the same OPC and Panels.
For Observing Period 63, the submission of proposals and the related OPC activities will follow the time table given below:

August 1, 1998	Web release of the Call for Proposals for the Paranal and La Silla observatories. This release will include a new application form.
October 1, 1998	Deadline for the submission of VLT-UT1 and La Silla proposals
October 15, 1998	Distribution of the VLT-UT1 and La Silla proposals to members of the OPC Panels, and to the directors of the Paranal and La Silla observatories for technical feasibility assessment
November 2, 1998	Distribution of the technical feasibility reports to the members of the OPC Panels
November 25, 1998	Deadline for submission of reports by the members of the OPC Panels
Nov. 30 – Dec. 4, 1998	Meetings of the Panels and of the OPC

First VLT Call for Proposals

P. QUINN, J. BREYSACHER, D. SILVA

1. Introduction

On 1 August 1998, ESO will release the Period 63 call for proposals for all ESO telescopes. For the first time this will include the 8.2-m Unit Telescope 1 of the VLT. The deadline for proposals will be 1 October 1998 for all telescopes which represents an increase of one month in the preparation period from previous rounds. The OPC will meet in the first week of December 1998 for both UT1 and La Silla telescopes (see the box "Scientific Evaluation of VLT-UT1 Proposals" in this issue). Period 63 operations will commence on 1 April 1999. Proposals for Period 64 will be called for on 1 February 1999 and close 1 April 1999.

During Period 63, UT1 will offer instruments in both Service Mode and Visitor Mode. It is ESO's intent to ultimately offer Service Mode observations for all most frequently used modes of instruments on the VLT in order to permit the best utilisation of the unique properties of the Paranal site and to guarantee a minimum level of consistency to the archived data. As we accumulate experience on the most effective use of the instruments and develop adequate software tools, we plan to support service as well as visitor observing with automated calibration pipelines to initially remove instrument signatures and ultimately to provide physical quantities. Initially, such pipelines will exist only for the simplest modes of use of the instruments offered. Service observing can "of course" be carried out without the benefit of such standardisation in the same manner that visitor observing is carried out. This mode of operation is much more manpower intensive and will be offered on a best-effort basis. ESO will work closely with the user community to develop service and visitor mode operations and resources that will maximise the scientific return of the VLT.

In Service Mode, successful principal investigators will specify observation programmes as a series of Observation Blocks (OBs) using Phase 2 Proposal Preparation (P2PP) software tools (see Silva and Quinn, December 1997, *The Messenger*). These OBs will be executed by ESO staff astronomers on UT1 to a schedule dictated by OPC ranking and prevailing conditions. In Visitor Mode, astronomers will again construct OBs but will journey to Paranal and be present when they are executed.

2. Instruments for UT1 in Period 63

ESO plans to offer FORS1 and ISAAC on UT1 beginning in April 1999. Detailed descriptions of these instruments can be accessed from the ESO Web page http://www.eso.org/instruments.

All VLT instruments are commissioned in two phases. In the first phase, the instrument is mounted on the telescope for the first time and functional tests are made of all operational modes. This phase is followed by an assessment period where instrument performance is evaluated and observing templates are optimised. The second and final commissioning phase sees operational tests of all observing modes to be offered to the community. Each instrument then enters a Science Verification period in which test science programmes are executed under actual operations conditions to assess science performance and readiness for operations. At this time ESO is planning to carry out the commissioning schedule for FORS1 and ISAAC outlined in Table 1.

The final set of instrument modes and the measured instrument performance on UT1 offered to the ESO community on 1 April 1999 will depend on the results of the commissioning and science verification processes. Principal investigators may have to make modifications to observing programmes in early March

TABLE 1: FORS1 and ISAAC Commissioning Periods.

Instrument	Phase 1 Commissioning	Phase 2 Commissioning	Science Verification
FORS1	10/9/98 – 4/10/98	10/12/98 – 26/12/98	14/1/99 – 20/1/99
ISAAC	14/11/98 – 4/12/98	4/2/99 – 17/2/99	18/2/99 – 24/2/99

TABLE 2 : Modes for FORS1 in Period 63.

FORS1 Instrument Mode	Pipeline in Period 63
Direct Imaging	Yes
Multiobject Spectroscopy	No
Longslit Spectroscopy	Yes
Imaging Polarimetry	No
Spectropolarimetry	No

TABLE 3 : Modes for ISAAC in Period 63.

ISAAC Instrument Mode	Pipeline in Period 63
Short Wavelength Imaging	Yes
Long Wavelength Imaging (without chopping)	No
Short Wavelength Spectroscopy	Yes
Long Wavelength Spectroscopy (without chopping)	No

1999 based on the outcome of commissioning.

Tables 2 and 3 present the FORS1 and ISAAC instrument modes ESO plans to commission by 1 March 1999 and offer during Period 63.

3. Application Process for Period 63

Observing proposals for all ESO facilities on La Silla and Paranal will use a revised application form. Although revisions were necessary to provide VLT support, ESO took this opportunity to streamline the form in many areas and to provide the capability to include Postscript figures.

As usual, the La Silla Call for Proposals will only be available from the ESO Web site.

A separate VLT Call for Proposals will be published both on paper and on the Web. The VLT Call for Proposals will contain all the information necessary to complete and submit a VLT observing proposal, including a description of the detailed supplementary documentation available to proposers. Such detailed documentation includes the VLT White Book (a technical overview of the entire VLT facility) and the individual instrument handbooks. The VLT Call for Proposals will also provide the information necessary for proposers to decide whether Visitor Mode or Service Mode is more appropriate for their project. Information about the FORS1 and ISAAC Exposure Time Calculators (ETCs) and how they can be used to support the proposal process will also be provided. Preliminary versions of the FORS1 and ISAAC ETCs are available via the ESO Web site at http://www.eso.org/observing/etc.

Astronomers preparing VLT observing proposals should be aware that if they are awarded VLT time, they will be asked to complete a Phase 2 proposal process. During the Phase 2 process, proposers will create detailed descriptions of their observing programme in the form of Observation Blocks (OBs). Visitor Mode PIs will be strongly encouraged to construct their OBs before traveling to Paranal but will not be required to finalise their OBs until after they have arrived there. Service Mode PIs, however, will be required to submit their OBs to ESO before their programme will be executed. More information about this process will be provided in the VLT Call for Proposals. Astronomers planning to propose for VLT time may also wish to read Silva & Quinn (*The Messenger*, December 1997) and Silva (this issue). A detailed guide to preparing OBs using Phase 2 tools will be published in the December 1998 *Messenger*.

Astronomers with further questions regarding the call for proposals for Period 63 are asked to contact the User Support Group at ESO (usg@eso.org).

P. Quinn
pquinn@eso.org

In this evening view, obtained about half an hour after sunset, the UT1 telescope structure is seen through the dome slit. The assembly of UT2 is well on its way in the next dome, and the first parts of UT3 are in place in the third.