

## UK 8m Users Group meeting, Oxford, 10 October 2007

Minutes prepared originally by Jacco van Loon, 2 November 2007.

Modified by Jacco van Loon, 29 November 2007, with input from Ilona Soechting & Simon Morris.

Modified by Jacco van Loon, 5 December 2007, with input from Isobel Hook.

Present: Ilona Soechting (Gemini Operations), Simon Morris (Gemini Science Committee, ESO OPC Chair), Marie Lemoine-Busserolle, Mark Wilkinson, Tim Gledhill, Andy Bunker and Chris Conselice (both via telecon) and Jacco van Loon (Chair, ESO Users Committee).

Apologies received from: Mike Barlow, Philip Best, Malcolm Bremer, Matt Burleigh, Roger Davies, Jim Dunlop, Isobel Hook, Matt Jarvis, Rachel Johnson, Pat Roche, Ray Sharples, Aprajita Verma.

A further 10 members did not attend; no one from STFC was present.

After a welcome and round of introductions, the agenda was discussed and approved.

The presentations and some additional material can be found on the UK 8m UG webpage: [http://gemini.physics.ox.ac.uk/Users/Users\\_Committee.html](http://gemini.physics.ox.ac.uk/Users/Users_Committee.html)

### The UK 8m Users Group

The new chair raised the issue of the role and visibility of the UK 8m Users Group, as he had not been aware of the existence of the group until being asked to chair it, and neither had other members or people who have been approached to become a member. This was seen as undesirable and indicates that the group is not serving the wider UK community.

The role of the interest group was confirmed by those present:

“The role of the UK 8m Users' Group is to collect feedback, comments and suggestions from UK users of the Gemini telescopes and ESO VLT, in order to represent UK interests and opinions at the various ESO and Gemini committees (STC, GSC, Gemini OpsWG etc).”

The “UK users” should be seen as a variety of interested parties, from regular users of 8m-class telescopes, instrument builders and the community at large, who wish to be kept informed about developments and opportunities and whose experiences and needs must be recognised when improving observatory operations and planning for the future, to the current UK members on committees affiliated with the operation of the Gemini and ESO observatories for benefit from communication between these committees and users.

Although several committees (ESO Users Committee, Gemini Operations Working Group, Gemini Science Committee) already solicit input from the user community themselves, the UK 8m Users Group is the only place where all the information is shared.

The group must be made better known among the user community.

#### **Actions items:**

- representation at NAM, and active advertisement of such session (Jacco/Ilona).
- reporting back to the community via the STFC astrocommunity mailing list (Jacco).

It may be noted that input from the community into this UK 8m UG meeting had already been sought via the STFC astrocommunity mailing list, resulting in almost no responses. Large Facilities Sessions at NAM also tend to be poorly attended. Still, the above were seen as essential.

Another concern is that the meetings of the group (once a year by telecon and once a year in person) are poorly attended. This meeting in particular was not well attended; this was in part due to the restricted availability of the chair, a contemporaneous ELT meeting most of whose attending UK 8m UG members notified the chair later than most other members did, and the fact that STFC does not reimburse travel expenses for this.

It was suggested to combat this apathy by more selective membership. One extreme would be to only invite committee representatives but this was deemed too restrictive. Opening it up to anyone who wants to was also not liked, for reasons of confidentiality.

**Action item:**

- membership of the group is to be reconsidered, with as core members representatives of the Gemini Operations working Group, Gemini Science Committee, Gemini Time Allocation Committee, ESO Council, ESO Users Committee, and ESO OPC, and UK community membership invited on the basis of an approximate one representative per institution (Jacco).

**Recommendation:**

- that meetings in person be held in a more central location, e.g. Nottingham.

**Gemini issues**

Ilona Soechting reported from Gemini operations (slides are on the web).

The time balance between the Gemini partners has been allowed to drift in the past, but it has been restored through better procedures and more awareness among the NTACs.

GNIRS broke in April 2007. An extra call for proposals was issued, which went through a semi-regular but accelerated peer-review process.

The opportunity to submit proposals specifically for poor weather conditions is currently underexploited by the UK community. It was unclear how such programmes are allocated time, and it was deemed inappropriate for Gemini Directors to invite Gemini staff to use poor weather conditions for their own programmes.

**Action items:**

- the UK Gemini Office should advertise the opportunity and procedures for poor weather proposals more aggressively (Ilona).
- the Gemini Science Committee should ask for clarity on the peer-review process adopted in allocating poor-weather programmes (Simon).

Multiple Object Spectroscopy has turn-around time of 7 days from submission of designs by PIs to acquisition of science data at the telescope. Pre-imaging is not always necessary though.

**Action item:**

- ask current applicants whether MOS would still be attractive for ToO projects (Ilona).

**Action items:**

- the Gemini Science Committee should discuss whether the Planet finding Working Group in fact approved NICI campaign (Simon).
- the Gemini Science Committee should discuss the possibility that CCDs are available for a “quick fix” of GMOS (Simon).

The 3-night minimum on classical visitor mode has been relaxed: 1-night runs are allowed. If the programme is complicated (i.e. if for Phase II the OT examples which represent established observing procedures are unsuitable) but the nature of the target or the requested conditions make classical scheduling inefficient, queue should be allocated but the PI should request funds to travel. The observer is requested to stay several days as

there will be no pre-allocated night but a few-days period instead. The PATT Chair has agreed in principle to cover the costs of travel and subsistence for this; NTAC contacts the PI who then applies to the PATT Chair. Note that STFC already provides for students to travel even for queue mode observations, for training purposes. It is decided on a case by case basis.

Simon Morris reported from Gemini Science Committee (slides are on the web).

The next Gemini Science Committee meeting is going to define the criteria for a long-range plan of implementation of new instrumentation, and phasing out (by around 2010) of instruments to keep the number of instruments at any Gemini site at about 5 or fewer.

Gemini South currently only has two instruments: GMOS and T-ReCS, with GNIRS to be repaired and bHROS decommissioned.

The UK undersubscribe mid-IR instruments. In particular, Michelle has been offered on Gemini **North** but the interest has been very poor. It was more popular when it was still offered on UKIRT (in fact, it was never meant to stay on Gemini indefinitely). One reason that was mentioned is that certain modes (e.g., spectropolarimetry) that were available on UKIRT are not offered on Gemini.

**Action item:**

- Follow up any existing agreements and reviews regarding the future of Michelle and UK use of/need for mid-IR instrumentation (Ilona).

**Action item:**

- Gemini Science Committee minutes will be made available about a week after (Simon).

**ESO issues**

Simon Morris reported from the ESO OPC (slides are on the web).

Jacco van Loon reported from the ESO Users Committee (slides are on the web).

ESO uses an electronic newsletter to announce new opportunities as they arise, but this is not generally known. Neither is the ESO helpdesk, an ESO User Support Department facility to help ESO users with a variety of queries.

**Action items:**

- raise awareness of the ESO electronic newsletter and how to subscribe to it, via the STFC astrocommunity mailing list (Jacco).
- raise awareness of the ESO helpdesk via the STFC astrocommunity mailing list (Jacco).

ESO is concerned that a large fraction of those invited to serve on a panel decline, in particular as the large (increasing) volume of proposals requires many panel members. ESO asked the Users Committee to urge their constituency to agree to serve a term (two semesters) when asked. It was noted that the ESO panel meetings do clash with the UK teaching term (but this is true also for most other panel meetings).

There was some discussion on the wish to increase the flexibility in defining Observation Blocks. OBs longer than 1 hour are already allowed upon request, however the weather conditions are not checked beyond the first hour and so data might be taken that does not conform with the required conditions. Reacquisition may take less time in practice, in which case in principle exposure times could be extended or more OBs could be executed. Overfilling the allocation in Phase II is not currently allowed (it is allowed for Gemini). Generic target lists are already allowed though.

Scepticism was expressed over one possible programme considered by the ESO Strategic Working Group, namely a European large computing facility, as not even within the UK a consensus on such facility could be reached.

It was unclear how the delays with VISTA affect the UK membership contribution to ESO.

### **Future instrumentation**

The Aspen process resulted in 4 instruments being shortlisted by the community: WFMOS, GPI, PRVS, GLAO. GPI passed its PDR and is on schedule to be delivered by 2010. PRVS conceptual design studies have been successfully completed and at their May 2007 meeting the Board has approved funding through PDR. The contract is being prepared for final approval at the November 2007 Board meeting. WFMOS contracts for two competitive conceptual design studies are due to be signed at the November 2007 Board meeting. A campaign to monitor the ground layer on MK is progressing very well and preliminary results suggest that MK is very well suited for GLAO.

ESO will announce its Call for Proposals for third generation VLT instrumentation in 2008. The UK 8m Users Group considered it important that the community is informed and polled about the opportunities for future instrumentation, and that clarity is sought from STFC with regard to funding of UK interests in instrumentation.

#### **Action items:**

- find out the time when the Call for Proposals for VLT third generation instrumentation will be released and the proposal deadline will be due (Jacco).
- prepare to poll the UK community on their views on future instrumentation (Jacco).
- liaise with STFC and Gemini/ESO(/ELT) Science(/Steering) Committees (Jacco).

Regarding the last item, Jacco van Loon and Simon Berry (STFC) had an initial telephone discussion on 19 October 2007. STFC admits that they have no long-term strategy for instrument development. Hence each request for funding will go through the usual case-by-case PPRP peer-review process. STFC do recognise the desire for an open discussion involving the community, and possibly for planning ahead. Briefings will take place via telecon before the Gemini Science Committee and ESO Council meetings later in 2007.

No time was left to discuss scientific highlights. The meeting was adjourned at 16:20.

Iлона Soechting is thanked for making the local arrangements and updating the web.