

Report on the JCMT Board meetings, May & July 2005

The JCMT Board met on 19–20 May 2005 at Cardiff University, and again by teleconference on 12 July 2005. The key items before the Board were the JCMT Strategic Review, the plan for the infrastructure work required for SCUBA-2, the status of SCUBA, the proposed legacy survey programme and the proposal to create a JCMT Science Archive.

The JCMT Strategic Review Panel (chaired by Martin Harwit) is scheduled to visit the JAC from 19 to 21 September 2005. The focus of the review will be to consider the scientific future of the JCMT, beyond the end of the current UK/Canada/NL agreement in 2009. Prior to this, a visit from the Chair or another member of the Review Panel has been planned in each of the three partner countries. This will provide an opportunity for the Panel to gather further information from the funding agencies and user communities.

The Board welcomed the delivery and commissioning of ACSIS and looked forward to the completion of HARP-B later this year. It also noted the support provided by the Netherlands for operating the JCMT in conjunction with the SMA and the CSO.

On 22 February 2005, PPARC Council re-approved funding for SCUBA-2, as has already been announced. Large-scale changes will be required to the telescope and enclosure in order to accommodate this instrument at the JCMT, and the scale of the engineering work requires that the telescope be shut down for a period of approximately six months. The Board approved a project plan which calls for the telescope shutdown to begin on 09 January 2006. The facility should then be ready to receive SCUBA-2 in July 2006, the same month in which the instrument is currently scheduled for delivery. The Board agreed that SCUBA-2 was the highest priority for the observatory and asked the Director to proceed accordingly. The Board also decided at its May meeting that, in view of the demanding programme of work at the JCMT, there should be no visiting instruments during semester 05B so that support effort can be deployed on higher-priority activities.

The Board was informed in July that SCUBA continues to suffer from two faults: a leak in the cryogenic system and a leak in the gas handling system. SCUBA had been removed from service in early June and the community had been informed. Although a potential means of repair had been identified, the Board decided against proceeding. The main arguments were (a) the short time for which SCUBA would be made available to the community if successfully repaired (10 weeks); (b) the low probability of a delay in the telescope shutdown for SCUBA-2; and (c) the impact a repair campaign would have on other critical projects in progress at the JCMT (preparation for HARP and SCUBA-2). The Board therefore endorsed the Director's recommendation to retire SCUBA permanently and with immediate effect. In so doing, it recognises that this will come as a disappointment to many in the community, particularly those with incomplete projects. SCUBA has been one of the most successful and productive ground-based astronomical instruments of modern times, and has provided excellent service to the JCMT community over the last decade; its retirement marks the end of an era in the history of the telescope.

In recognition of this loss of capability, the Board approved the Director's proposal to invite AzTEC back to the telescope as a visiting instrument in 05B in order to maintain a limited continuum capability during the hiatus between SCUBA and SCUBA-2. Further information concerning the period when AzTEC might be made available will be communicated to the TAGs as soon as negotiations with the team are completed. The ITAC/TAGs will then be responsible for arranging projects to be carried out with AzTEC.

The Board received a proposal from the JCMT Survey Steering Group (JSSG) describing a legacy survey programme to be undertaken with HARP-B and SCUBA-2. The Board was delighted by the very strong response to the call for proposals, and noted that the independent reviewers had been unanimously positive in their assessments. The Board approved a 2-year survey programme, and endorsed in principle a 5-year survey programme (the latter being 'in principle' because the Board has no jurisdiction over the JCMT beyond the expiry of the current UK/Canada/NL agreement in 2009). The Chair of the JSSG, Dr Ivison, will communicate the specific decisions back to the proposing groups by 22 July.

Finally, the Board endorsed a proposal from the Director for the creation of a JCMT Science Archive as the optimal means of handling the large data volumes which will be generated by the new suite of instruments. The work will be split between two sites, with the survey pipeline being developed at the JAC and the archive and VO integration functions being provided by a professional data archiving centre. PPARC agreed to provide software development effort to assist with the JAC component of the work. A proposal within Canada to find resources for the archive service was successful.

The next ordinary meeting of the JCMT Board will be held at the JAC on 15–16 November 2005.