

The Future of the JAC Telescopes

Dear colleagues,

I write to bring you up to date regarding the future prospects of the two telescopes operated by the JAC.

Background

The JCMT is funded by three agencies: PPARC (UK), NRC (Canada) and NWO (Netherlands). The agreement between these agencies was signed in 1989, and it expires in May 2009.

UKIRT is funded entirely by PPARC, and is therefore not subject to an international agreement with a fixed deadline. Its continued support is contingent upon the strategic priority of its science programme within PPARC's planning.

Review Process

Both telescopes underwent independent strategic reviews in 2005. UKIRT was reviewed by a panel chaired by Professor Richard Ellis (CalTech), and JCMT was similarly reviewed by a panel chaired by Professor Martin Harwit (Cornell). Both reviews were highly positive; the reports are available from the JAC website. These reports fed into PPARC's Programmatic Review in late 2005/early 2006, in which the entire PPARC programme was reviewed.

Current Status

PPARC Council met in May 2006 to consider the outcomes of the Programmatic Review and to provide guidance to PPARC on the way forward.

The Council noted that the JCMT with SCUBA-2 will be a world-leading facility for the foreseeable future and recommended that it be supported until at least 2012, assuming successful operation of SCUBA-2 and participation of at least one of the existing funding partners. Discussions are currently underway between the three funding agencies and a decision is anticipated by the end of 2006.

The Council endorsed the UKIDSS survey programme for UKIRT until 2012, but felt that programme priorities within a limited budget precluded supporting the telescope at the current level of PPARC funding beyond 2010. Efforts are underway at the JAC to identify potential programme changes, cost savings and new income streams, including the possibility of new partners. It is expected that ideas will be brought back to PPARC in 2007.

In both cases the relevant telescope boards are fully informed of the work underway and will be consulted on any proposed changes.

I will endeavour to keep the JCMT and UKIRT staff and communities apprised of developments.

Professor Gary Davis
Director JAC
31st August 2006.