

Dear colleagues,

The final outcome of STFC's Programmatic Review was announced in July, and its implications for UKIRT can be seen [here](#). The announcement described three scenarios for the future operation of UKIRT, and specified that a decision would be made in December.

Following a lengthy discussion with the UKIRT Board, which met at the JAC on 8/9 December, option (c) was selected: UKIRT will move to wide-field survey mode from February 2009 and the UKIDSS survey programme will be completed as expeditiously as possible under STFC funding.

This is a profound change of paradigm and the decision was taken only with great reluctance, given that UKIRT has served the UK astronomical community exceptionally well as a general-purpose observatory for almost 30 years. Adoption of this mode will nevertheless enable us to focus our resources on UKIRT's highest-priority science programme. Accordingly, the three Cassegrain instruments (CGS4, UFTI and UIST) will be removed from service at the end of the current block (currently scheduled for the last week of January). They will not, however, be retired: it is my intention to keep them in storage for a period for potential reinstatement should circumstances change.

Our science mission is now to complete the UKIDSS programme as quickly as possible, and to optimise the science programme of the telescope within that constraint. Modelling indicates that completing UKIDSS will take us until the middle of 2012, and that there will be a considerable amount of 'empty-queue' time, increasing in the later years, as UKIDSS fields are increasingly completed. The Board has therefore decided to convene a review of UKIDSS and the four approved campaign programmes in the autumn of 2009.

Given the continued existence of some non-UKIDSS time, it is possible that we will continue to support PATT and service programmes under this operational mode; a further announcement on this point will be made in early February, following an operational re-planning exercise.

Finally, I can report to the community that the UKIRT Board strongly endorsed the concept of a new instrument for UKIRT. Dr Hugh Jones (Herts) will be submitting a Statement of Interest to STFC for an ultra-stable, high-resolution echelle spectrometer called UKIRT Planet Finder (UPF). Although the primary science goal is to search for Earth-mass planets around nearby M dwarfs by extending the radial velocity technique to the infrared, the proposed instrument (based heavily on the cancelled PRVS instrument for Gemini) has a wide range of other astronomical applications. Hugh will be canvassing the UK community for support during January and I encourage all potential users of such an instrument to get in touch with him.

Professor Gary Davis
Director JAC
22nd December 2008.