Future AAT Operations

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June 2018
The Transition

Commonwealth

Australian Astronomical Observatory

North Ryde

AAT

01 July, 2018

Mike Steel's talk

Australian Astronomical Optics

Universities

Anglo-Australian Telescope

My talk

ASA meeting, June 2018
AAT Governance Structure

ANU (operators)
AAL (managers)
AAT Council (governing body)

Use agreement

Australian Government (owns the AAT)
600,000+ students

Service agreement

Consortium agreement

13 Australian Universities
ANU
UNSW
UWS
U. Sydney
Macquarie
U. Melbourne
Monash
Swinburne
U. Tasmania
UQ
USQ
UWA
Curtin

Australian Government (owns the AAT)
What does not change

- Merit based access to all astronomers based at an Australian institute
- Regular, large and long-term programs
- Time for visitor instruments
- Target of Opportunity **
- A platform for testing novel instrument concepts **
- Remote observing **
- Night assistants and afternoon duty technicians
- Student training **
What does change

- Reduced astronomical support
- Paid time and open time
- Reduced travel support
- No service mode
The ANU intends to operate the telescope for at least the next 7 years

Annual baseline funding expected to be $3.175M for first the 4 years
- Compared to the current AAT operating budget of $4.4M, this is a 28% reduction
- Reduction from 27 to 16 FTE (14 on 01July), which is a 40% reduction
- Baseline funding will be supplemented by paid time

These changes will impact the level of support we can provide
Proposed changes to AAT support

- Reduced support astronomy services
  - No support astronomical support will be provided to most programs

- AAT will continue to supply night assistants

- Reduced technical support at night
  - The afternoon shift technical support will operate until 8pm (Currently 10pm)
  - Additional technical support is expected to only be by phone (no physical call-outs at night, unless it is an emergency)
  - This will likely result in slightly higher down-time

- Reduced travel and accommodation support
  - A small amount has been set aside for students to travel to site
Plans to mitigate the impact

- Increase the number of remote observing stations from 4 to 7.
- Astronomers will start no later than 3pm (4pm in summer) to ensure that there is sufficient overlap with technical staff.
- Observers who have not used the instrument in the last two years will have travel to site.
- Training of afternoon techs (to set up instruments) and training of night assistants (to operate instruments).
- Proposers will be strongly encouraged to include experienced observers in their teams (astronomers can also “arrive” early to become familiar with the instruments).
- Engineering services agreement between AAO-MQ and ANU.
- Greater community support.
No instrument scientists on AAT staff.

It is proposed that, as a condition of getting large program status, large program teams will agree (to be approved by AAT Council)

- Keep the user manuals up to date
- Develop data reduction pipelines
- Monitor instrument performance
- Programs requiring astronomical support
  - NOAO, OPTICON, Japanese time
  
- About 20 nights in 2018B

- It is proposed that the support is provided by community volunteers (to be approved by AAT council)
  - 1 night of Director’s time for three nights of support
  - a small honorarium
  - Travel and accommodations covered if observing to site

- Will it work?

- Yes!
The AAT is one of many telescopes at SSO
SSO Vision

- Excellence in everything we do, with a special focus on the large surveys and the time domain
  - Large surveys:
    - Support large and long-term spectroscopic surveys on the AAT with AAOmega, HERMES, VELOCE, and Hector
  - Time domain:
    - Enable rapid follow-up (within minutes) of transient phenomena
    - Process and distribute data automatically
- Facilitate others to establish facilities as SSO
- Astro-tourism
- Once the transition has settled down a bit, we’ll develop a long term plan for the AAT (including new instrumentation), and we will involve the community in this