

Anglo-Australian Telescope Board Anglo-Australian Time Allocation Committee (AATAC)

Policies and Procedures

Version 7
March 2009

Preface

This Handbook provides a summary of current policies of the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board (AATB), the Anglo-Australian Time Allocation Committee (AATAC) and the Anglo-Australian Observatory (AAO) in relation to the allocation of telescope time on the Anglo-Australian Telescope (AAT). It is designed to assist AATB members, AATAC committee members and AAO staff.

Helen Woods
Secretary, AATAC

Contacting the AATAC Secretariat

Postal Address:
PO Box 296
Epping NSW 1710
Phone: +61 (0)2 9372 4800

Street Address:
167 Vimiera Road
Eastwood NSW 2122
Fax: +61 (0)2 9372 4880

Ms Helen Woods (AATAC Secretary) hmw@ao.gov.au

Dr Heath Jones (AATAC Technical Secretary) aatac@ao.gov.au

WWW: <http://www.ao.gov.au/astro/apply/>

Contents

1. Background	3
2. Membership	4
3. Meetings	5
4. The allocation process	5
5. Responsibilities of committee members	7
6. The Technical Secretary	8
7. Accounting for observing time	8
8. Long term observing programs	10
9. Proprietary rights for AAT data	11
10. Service observing	11
11. Over-ride policy	11

1. Background

1.1 Under Article 5 (1) of the Supplementary Anglo-Australian Telescope Agreement, observing time on the AAT and use of associated facilities is shared between the Contracting Parties in proportion to the value of the contributions to the annual Joint Programme of the AAO. It shall be the responsibility of the AATB to make arrangements consistent with this principle in its determination of the use of the AAO. Article 5 (1) states:

1. Observing time on the telescopes and use of associated joint facilities and services shall be shared between the Contracting Parties in proportion to the value of the contributions to the annual Joint Programme of the AAO. It shall be the responsibility of the AATB to make arrangements consistent with this principle in its determination of the use of the AAO.

2. From Semester 2006A there shall be a single joint Time Allocation Committee ("TAC") which shall allocate time to both Australian and United Kingdom astronomers. Terms of reference shall be agreed in advance by the AATB.

3. The time allocated to the two Contracting Parties shall reflect each Party's contribution to the Joint Programme, as set out in Article 5 (1) of the Agreement, as amended.

4. Each designated Agency shall provide to the AATB no later than 1 March each year an indication of the level of financial contribution to the Joint Programme for the following three-year period.

1.2 The AAT Board has chosen to exercise its responsibility for the allocation of time on the Anglo-Australian Telescope through arrangements made with the two government departments responsible for implementing the AAT Agreement and its amendment, namely the Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC) in the UK, and the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) in Australia. Under guidelines set by the Board, these agencies will operate through a single joint Time Allocation Committee — the Anglo-Australian Time Allocation Committee (AATAC) — which ranks all proposals for observing time on the AAT on the basis of scientific merit, and assigns each one an appropriate number of nights.

1.3 DIISR and STFC contract out the secretariat responsibilities of the committee to the AATAC Secretary.

2. Membership

2.1 There are seven members on AATAC, with the balance between Australian and United Kingdom (hereafter “British”) members approximately reflecting the partners’ share of AAT time; this balance will be reviewed annually by the AATB. For Semesters 2009A and 2009B there will be 5 Australian members and 2 British members on AATAC.

2.2 Appointment to AATAC will usually be for a 3-year term although the appointments may be for staggered terms to ensure a steady turnover in membership.

2.3 The Chair of AATAC will be Australian and the Deputy Chair (who will substitute for the Chair if the Chair is unavailable, or in a potential conflict of interest) will be British. The Chair and Deputy Chair will be the primary points of contact regarding AATAC information for their respective partner communities. In particular, the Deputy Chair will make recommendations to STFC on the level of Travel & Subsistence support to be offered to eligible programs.

2.4 Nominations to the committee will be sought following the procedures currently used to appoint members of the Australian Time Assignment Committee (ATAC) by DIISR, and the Panel for the Allocation of Telescope Time (PATT) by STFC. In addition to 5 committee members, Australia will also nominate 1 substitute to take the place of an AATAC member who is unavailable for a meeting of the committee. The UK will likewise nominate 2 committee members and 1 substitute. In the exceptional circumstance that more than one substitute is required, the Chair or Deputy Chair (in the case of Australia, or the UK respectively) will, in consultation with the AAO Director, identify appropriate additional substitutes.

2.5 There will normally be no more than one representative on AATAC from any given institution. The AATB will review the nominations to the committee to ensure the make-up is appropriate (e.g. that a suitable spread of sub-fields are represented), and will appoint a Chair and Deputy Chair from among the committee members.

2.6 Either partner may appoint an AAO staff member to AATAC, although (as for other institutions) normally no more than one AAO person could be on the committee at a time. The AAO will provide a Technical Secretary to AATAC; the Technical Secretary is not a member of the committee.

3. Meetings

3.1 Observing time is allocated by semester, namely:

February – July (the 'A' semester) with proposal deadline 15 September; &

August – January (the 'B' semester) with proposal deadline 15 March.

The committee meets twice each year, usually in May and November, to assess and rank proposals for the following semester.

3.2 AATAC will normally meet physically in Australia, but should aim to hold at least one of its meetings each year via video-conference.

3.3 Four members constitute a quorum. At the meeting the Chair (or in their absence, the Deputy Chair) presides. Allocations are made by a grading system (described below) carried out by the members present. AATAC members may also be required to vote on procedural or allocation matters. In the event of an equality of votes the Chair (or Deputy Chair, if presiding) has a casting as well as a deliberative vote.

4. The allocation process

4.1 Proposals for AAT time will only be accepted on the AATAC form, and must be submitted via the Web upload system before the announced deadline (nominally midnight AEST on March 15 for the B semester, and September 15 for the A semester). Late applications received after the deadline will only be considered at the AATAC meeting if the Chair and Deputy Chair judge that there are sufficient extenuating circumstances for why the proposal could not be submitted before the deadline.

4.2 Approximately ten percent of the total time is normally set aside for use at the Director's discretion, principally for essential maintenance, commissioning of new instruments, or payback of programs that lose significant amounts of time to instrument failure.

4.3 There is no special allocation of time made to AAO staff. No applicant, or institution, should receive special consideration by AATAC. However, all other things being equal, some priority would be given amongst proposals near the cut-off for scheduling to those deemed essential for completion of a student's PhD thesis, where such a case has been made in the proposal itself.

4.4 The AAO Director will make recommendations to AATAC on the number of nights to be set aside for Service observations with each AAT instrument, based upon the number of active proposals in each Service queue, while seeking to maintain approximately the same level of over-subscription as for regular AAT proposals.

4.5 The AATAC meeting is usually held 6–8 weeks after the proposal deadline, and papers are circulated to committee members as soon as possible after that deadline. The papers include the bound booklet of applications for assessment, as well as a copy on CD-ROM. At that time each of the proposals are allocated to a specific committee member by the Chair for more careful consideration and for presentation at the meeting.

4.6 Proposals are distributed to AAO staff members to assess the technical feasibility of the observations. The technical assessor may remain anonymous, but should not make any comments regarding the scientific merit of the proposal. The assessor should not make guesses if the necessary information is not clear from the application. These reports are circulated to committee members about two weeks prior to the meeting, along with a response from the Principal Investigator (PI) if necessary. It is the responsibility of the AATAC Technical Secretary to contact the PI if there is a serious technical problem. The Technical Secretary will have the final say on whether a proposal is feasible, and an appropriate number of AAT nights to be allocated.

4.7 In general, AATAC will review proposals without recourse to external referees. However, it would remain at the discretion of the AATAC Chair to call for referee reports if appropriate (e.g., for large or long term observing programs, or for highly specialised or contentious proposals). The Technical Secretary, Chair, and Deputy Chair will be responsible for soliciting up to 3 referees per proposal, with each referee typically asked to review 2 or 3 such proposals. PIs will have the right of reply to matters raised by the referees, but the referee's identity should only be made known to AATAC members.

4.8 In order to save time at the meeting, each panel member does a full science pre-grading of all the proposals beforehand, abstaining for those proposals in which a member is taking part, or is unsure of. These votes are submitted to the AATAC Secretary before the meeting. Panel members are still free to change their votes at the meeting as subsequent discussion may change one's opinion.

4.9 Committee members should grade each of the proposals on scientific merit along the following guidelines:

5 = outstanding proposal

4 = well above average proposal

3 = good proposal

2 = below average proposal

1 = technically/scientifically defective proposal

4.10 At the meeting, the committee member assigned to each proposal gives a brief (maximum five minute) summary of the proposal, concluding with his/her scientific opinion of the application. The application is then discussed by the whole committee, and the final score is given in terms of the above grades. Half-grades are permitted.

4.11 Scores by committee members should be given on the scientific merit of the proposal, irrespective of whether dark, grey, or bright time is requested. When a committee member is included in the list of applicants on a proposal, or otherwise feels they may have a conflict of interest, he/she must excuse themselves from the meeting during discussion and voting on that proposal.

4.12 Proposals are graded scientifically for the maximum number of nights requested unless panel members feel the goals can be met in less time. Short (1-2 night) allocations for projects requesting more time than this are strongly discouraged.

4.13 The scores for each application are indicative only and are one of several considerations in the allocation of time. They are strictly confidential and should not be circulated outside the meeting.

4.14 Allocations made at the meeting are provisional only, and strictly confidential. The AAO undertakes to release a draft schedule within one week of the AATAC meeting, after which the AAO Scheduler will e-mail the named Principal Investigator of all successful proposals with details of their scheduling and guidelines for observing.

4.15 Immediately before, or in conjunction with the release of the schedule, the AATAC Secretary e-mails all applicants giving the committee's reasons for the non-allocation of time, or for the number of allocated nights, and general feedback. The Chair can indicate the relative position of the application in relation to the others, but should not give out the actual score of the committee.

5. Responsibilities of committee members

5.1 Each member of AATAC is expected to:

- Assess and grade each application prior to the meeting.
- Prepare a summary of the proposals allocated for presentation at the meeting.
- Collate a brief feedback statement for each proposal, based on discussion during the meeting.
- Provide a point of contact for their constituents to communicate general issues with AATAC, but should direct any potential matter of dispute arising from the meeting through the Chair.
- Undertake other tasks as directed by the AATAC Chair.

5.2 In addition, the AATAC Chair (or in their absence, the Deputy Chair) will be expected to:

- Oversee policy matters.
- Conduct the business at each meeting.
- Coordinate the allocation process at the meeting.
- Liaise with the AATAC Secretary over any matters arising or in development of new policies.
- Supervise the dispatch of feedback to all applicants after the meeting.
- Liaise with the AAO Scheduler and Technical Secretary in the event of a scheduling conflict.

6. The Technical Secretary

6.1 The Technical Secretary is responsible for:

- Providing an updated list of available AAO instruments to the user community in advance of the application deadline.
- Supervising the receipt of AATAC applications via the web-based interface.
- Coordination of technical assessments by qualified AAO staff.
- Monitoring consistency of AATAC grades over consecutive semesters.
- Liaison with PIs prior to the meeting where there may be a serious technical problem with a proposal. An extract from the technical assessment should be forwarded to the PI, edited for clarification if necessary. This is intended to be a one pass process and lengthy email correspondence should not be entered into.
- Any other matters as directed by the AATAC Chair or AAO Director.

6.2 The Technical Secretary may not comment on scientific issues, unless invited to do so by the Chair. The Technical Secretary, or a suitable substitute, should attend policy and scientific sessions of the AATAC meeting or at the very least be available for technical comment during the meeting.

7. Accounting for observing time

7.1 Under the Supplementary Agreement, the Designated Agencies (DIISR and STFC) are required to forecast their contributions to the Joint Programme for the next three years by March 1 each year. This should enable the AATB to estimate the partner share of each Contracting Party at the March/April Board meeting, taking into account these forecasts and any variations from that forecast in previous years. This will allow the AAO to declare the partner

share foreseen for the next 12 months in the Announcements of Opportunity for observing time issued in August and February. For example, in accounting for time it is proposed that the partner shares in financial year 2006-07 (i.e. July 2006 to June 2007) determine the AAT time shares in semesters 2006B and 2007A (August 2006 to July 2007), and so on.

7.2 The formula for allocating observing time has two parameters for achieving a suitable balance between share equity and optimum science:

- (1) A specified fraction, f_O , of open-access time. This time is top-sliced from the available total, which means that the Australian and British shares each provide the same fraction f_A of their time. The available nights are thus divided into fractions f_A , f_B and f_O such that $f_A+f_B+f_O=1$ and f_A and f_B are in proportion to the Australian and British shares of the Joint Program. The purpose of the open-access time is to encourage collaboration with other nations and to allow high-quality proposals dominated by others to get time. From Semester 2008B, f_O will be 0.2.
- (2) A super-majority threshold, M , beyond which Co-Investigators from the minority category (or categories) are counted against the time share of the super-majority categories (or category), *if the Principal Investigator is in the super-majority categories (or category)*. The purpose of the super-majority threshold is to ensure that time is awarded largely according to investment in the Joint Program while allowing (and even encouraging) some level of collaboration. From Semester 2008B, M will be 66%.

7.3 Initially the scheduler fills up the Australian, British and Other shares in proportion to the fraction of such proposers on each program (AAO staff count as f_A Australian and f_B British). A proposal that is awarded N nights and has A Australians, B British and O Other proposers counts as N_A Australian nights, N_B British nights and N_O Other nights, where $N_A=NxA/(A+B+O)$, $N_B=NxB/(A+B+O)$ and $N_O=NxO/(A+B+O)$. Note that 'nationality' is determined by the location of the proposer's home institution, not by the proposer's citizenship.

7.4 Once one of the three shares is exhausted, proposers in that category can only get time if they are a Co-Investigator on proposals with a super-majority of proposers (one of whom must be the PI) from the other two categories. In such cases minority Other proposers are counted against Australian and British shares in proportion to their JP shares, while minority Australian or British proposers are counted against the open-access share.

7.5 If the UK share is exhausted before the Other share, then the UK proposers will all be considered as Other, and counted against the Other share until the Other share is exhausted. Similarly, if the Australian share is exhausted before the Other share, then the Australian proposers will all be

considered as Other, and counted against the Other share until the Other share is exhausted.

7.6 Once two of the three shares are exhausted, proposers who are Co-Investigators from those two categories can only get time if proposers (one of whom is the PI) from the third category are in a super-majority. Such minority proposers then count against the remaining share category along with the majority proposers.

7.7 Once time has been allocated through a first pass of all eligible proposals, any remaining time will be filled through a second pass of the list. In this instance, proposals are taken solely on the basis of rank order, and the super-majority nationality criteria no longer apply. This means that time is not charged to partner shares nor repaid in future semesters. Rather, the nights are distributed from the remaining nights irrespective of which partner's share they come from.

7.8 The AAT Scheduler will, with guidance from the Chair of AATAC, make minor adjustments to the allocations to allow for practical matters such as dark time, scheduled instrument blocks, Director's time and so on. Any resulting small imbalances in partner shares could be corrected in subsequent semesters.

8. Long term observing programs

8.1 Applicants requiring time in more than one semester, and particularly for those which will be spread over three or more semesters, or requiring substantial amounts of telescope time, may seek long term status for their proposal. If successful, the proposal will gain an award of time for the coming semester and a provisional award for future semesters (subject to reports on the progress of the project), relieving applicants of the need to continually apply for time for the same project.

8.2 If a proposal is unsuccessful in obtaining long term status, it may still be considered for a normal award for the forthcoming semester in the usual way. Applicants should justify the total time request carefully, and indicate the total number of nights (the sum of the time requested for next semester plus the additional time requested) on the application form.

8.3 Applicants seeking long term status may be allowed to submit extra material with prior permission from the committee (in the first instance via the AATAC Secretary). Such extended cases will normally have a strict five-page limit.

9. Proprietary rights for AAT data

9.1 Most AAT data are available upon request via the Cambridge Astronomical Survey Unit after an initial proprietary period. Data taken prior to 1 August 2006 will have a proprietary period of 24 months, while data taken on or after that date will have a proprietary period of 18 months.

9.2 AATAC and the AATB may choose to extend, or shorten this proprietary period for any particular program (or a subset of the data).

10. Service observing

10.1 Applications for AAT service observing can be made for programs requiring up to 6 hours of telescope time. Service proposal deadlines are set at three times a year. Service proposals will expire 18 months after submission, but may be re-submitted for re-assessment at any time.

10.2 These applications are assessed by a Service sub-committee according to their feasibility, timeliness and scientific merit. The Service sub-committee normally comprises one Australian member of AATAC, one British member of AATAC, and an AAO staff member.

10.3 Submitting the same proposal both to AATAC (for scheduled time), and to the service program is permitted if the PI makes a case for why they should get time through both.

11. Over-ride policy

11.1 Applications for over-rides should be submitted in the same way as other applications, and will be assessed on scientific merit in the normal way.

11.2 An over-ride can take several different forms. The most obvious is an observation of a target of opportunity (ToO). This is defined as any observation where the notice given to the AAO and the scheduled observers is likely to be short. Applications for such projects should be submitted in the usual way, explaining why the science can only be done in this fashion. However, any other short observation requiring less than half a night may

also be treated by the AAO as an over-ride (e.g., a scheduled observation requiring two hours after twilight for three consecutive nights is also treated as an over-ride). In this case though, the scheduled observers will know in advance, and compensation is normally given for the time lost.

11.3 The following special rules apply to all over-ride projects:

- As much notice as possible should be given to the scheduled observers that their program would be subject to an over-ride.
- There should normally only be one over-ride per program (i.e. one single time slot) without compensation from AATAC. Applicants seeking an exception to this rule (e.g., several short exposures on the same target spread over several nights), should make this clear in the technical case, and in the scheduling comments part of the application forms. Such cases will be considered by AATAC on an ad hoc basis, but they will be expected to set a total maximum length of time that these observations should not exceed during a single block of time. That block will then be considered as one over-ride.
- Observers would normally be compensated through Director's time or through the normal scheduling process where possible for programs where more than one over-ride was scheduled. However, no compensation would be made where the same observers would be participating in the scheduled program and the over-ride program.
- Over-rides may take place during Director's Time or on Service Nights. These still count towards the total allocated by AATAC however.
- The over-ride would be deemed to have been completed regardless of poor weather or any other obstacle that might affect observations. PIs are allowed to check what the weather is before calling for the over-ride.
- A given observation program can only be over-ridden once. There is therefore the potential for conflict between different over-ride programs. In all cases the over-ride program that is triggered first shall have priority. Resolution of disputes will be the sole responsibility of the Director, or his designate.
- Over-ride programs will only be executed after a complete observing checklist, full contact details, and template observing sequences (where appropriate) have been provided by the PI, to the satisfaction of the AAO Director. To assist in this process, an AAO contact astronomer will be assigned to each approved over-ride program.