

Director's response to ATUC Report – June 2014

ATUC Recommendation	Director's Response	Traffic Light
Commendations and successes		
<p>ATUC wishes to commend ATNF on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● impressive progress on BETA commissioning, and in particular the recent HI spectral line and continuum images; ● ASKAP/ACES team/Secondment programme, which has worked together enabling the BETA images to be produced; ● securing funding for 36 PAFs; ● progress on SKA work-packages, in particular leading the Dish Consortium, which is under-going design review. ● continued efficient operation of the current ATNF telescopes ● research excellence of the astrophysics and engineering groups 	Noted and thanks	
Major Recommendations		
CSIRO Budget Cuts		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The committee strongly recommends that the ATNF continue its full support for the world-class existing observatories as a National Facility. The committee further recommends that the observing capabilities of the telescopes should be maintained even at the cost of other factors, that may include receiver availability and scheduling flexibility. 2. The community should be consulted and given ample notice (ideally at least a year) of any major changes to the telescopes, especially with regards to capabilities or time available. 	<p>CSIRO appreciates the helpful advice regarding the priority of maintaining observing capability. As noted at the ATUC meeting, CSIRO has decided to cease expenditure on the Mopra facility. Although this is a difficult time for CASS, CSIRO remains committed to the delivery of ASKAP, to its broader SKA activities, and to its continued delivery of the Australia Telescope National Facility as a world class capability for astronomy research.</p> <p>ATNF will endeavour to give the community as much notice as possible of any major changes. However, the budget cuts announced in May took effect in July, and it has not been possible to consult or provide notice.</p>	<p>Yellow</p> <p>Red</p>

Minor Recommendations		
Parkes Training		
1. Training should be provided “on-request” where possible. It would allow observers to obtain expertise well in advance of their observing sessions, perhaps at times that may be more convenient for them and when expert ATNF advice may be more readily available.	Efforts are made to schedule new programs (especially with new teams) to start on weekdays so that training can be provided in advance, and new users are encouraged to arrive a day or two before their observations start so they can familiarise themselves with the observing set-ups and be fully trained. Scheduling regular blocks of time specifically for training purposes will be trialled for next semester.	Green
2. The visitors’ service group should liaise with the Parkes SOC astronomer to identify visitors who are getting training. The SOC astronomer could then introduce the visitor to ATNF staff members with shared research interests.	There is, at present, no single source of information on who will be observing, where they are observing from, and whether they need first-time or refresher training. We will make this information available to the SOC astronomer and the visitors’ services group.	Green
3. Observing training should be provided by ATNF staff with expertise in the visitor’s observing programme (e.g., a spectral-line expert should train a visitor observing spectral lines). For example, the ATCA observing “friend” policy could be extended to Parkes.	Some aspects of training (VNC sessions, the PORTAL, FROG, responding to alarms) is common to all observers and can be delivered by any of the support staff, however, as noted, some aspects of observing are specific to the type of observation and indeed requires a level of expertise in that field. The ATNF “friends” scheme is not limited to the ATCA and is already available for Parkes proposers (www.atnf.csiro.au/observers/Friends.html). We will endeavour to make this more widely known!	Green
Parkes Remote Observing Requalification		
The ATNF should take account of recent observing and number of hours since the last re-qualification in determining remote observing eligibility. Experienced and regular observers should be permitted to remotely re-qualify. Usage statistics are already being collected by the portal.	Some of the feedback from the Parkes remote observing questionnaire was along similar lines, that the current requirement for on-site requalification every 12 months might be extended for experienced and regular users. We acknowledge that regular remote observers are better qualified than once-per-year observers, however we need to balance this against our strong preference to encourage interactions between observers and staff, which is best achieved through visiting the SOC.	Yellow

Parkes Face-to-Face Induction		
Parkes face-to-face induction could be moved to a different location or be movable to any desk in the observers area that is available at the time, including the ATCA and Mopra areas.	Agreed – all four observer’s desks have identical computer set-ups, so there is no reason why Parkes inductions can’t be done at a separate desk.	Green
ATCA Duty Astronomer Training		
Early in their DA training, students should be asked directly about their level of confidence in performing these procedures, and that if setup is required out of hours during this early period, staff should walk them through the process step-by-step prior to leaving for the day.	No first-time DA is expected to know the solutions for all problems, and ATCA staff spend a lot of time with DAs on the first day to introduce them to the observing system. We have trialled introductory sessions prior to the start of the duty week for first-time DAs, and we can extend this practise if it would help first-time DAs feel less daunted.	Green
Notification of NAPA/ToO Observations		
Information on eligible NAPA/ToO projects is made available to observers, either through an e-mail message or by displaying that information prominently on the Parkes PORTAL, for example requiring the observer in charge to explicitly acknowledge having received that information. This will allow observers to react appropriately to any requests to hand over the telescope.	This has only become an issue this semester, with a highly-ranked Parkes proposal that seeks to respond with ~1 hour to GRB alerts, which clearly requires an automated mechanism. The PORTAL now clearly denotes which proposals can be displaced by this NAPA, and the PIs of all potentially impacted proposals were notified.	Green
CABB 16 and 4 MHz Zoom Modes		
Given the progress already made with the 16 MHz mode, ATUC recommends that the 16 MHz mode be rolled out as planned. Implementation of the 4 MHz mode would be desirable but not urgent.	Due to recent budget cuts and consequent staff losses, work on new functionality for CABB (including both 4 and 16 MHz modes) has ceased. There is no currently funded path to reactivate this work. We expect limited ongoing effort by Honorary Fellow Dick Ferris.	Yellow
Student Training at ATNF		
ATUC recommends continued support for students at the ATNF and a continued commitment to the co-supervised students.	Within the constraints imposed by the budget cuts and the resulting reduction in the size of the Astro group, we will continue to support students and continue the co-supervision scheme.	Green

ATCA Off-Axis Polarisation Calibration		
<p>CSIRO staff should investigate the feasibility of either updating these MIRIAD tasks for the CABB era or otherwise developing methods for estimating or correcting off-axis instrumental polarisation.</p>	<p>The wide bandwidths provided by CABB result in off-axis corrections having a significant frequency dependence. Efforts to characterise this have commenced, however our resources, for both further measurements and changes to MIRIAD, are limited. We note this is an issue also under active investigation for implementation within CASA.</p>	<p>Yellow</p>