

ISIS User Committee and Facility Access Panel Chairs Meeting

14 July 2014

Electron Building, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory

1. Summary

The meeting was held primarily to discuss proposed changes to proposal mechanisms, the role of Facility Access Panels (FAPs) and various other user processes. A summary of conclusions and what ISIS is going to do is given in this section; this is then followed by more details of the meeting and the discussions.

1.1 Access mechanisms and role of FAPs

The idea of 'framework' proposals to allow FAPs to judge the context and support of proposals was not endorsed for a variety of reasons. Instead, there was wide support for having an explicit part within the proposal form for applicants to give the wider context/programme of their research including grants, students, etc. There was support for structuring the 2-page part of proposals more. A 'lay' or 'public' abstract was supported (to replace current abstract).

ISIS will introduce a 'context' section either within the proposal system or within the 2-page science case. The current 'abstract' will be replaced by a 'public' or 'lay' abstract. ISIS will look at providing more structure for the 2-page science case.

There was wide support for discontinuing the programme access mechanism.

ISIS will let existing approved programmes run their course and then end this access mechanism.

There was support overall for improved flexibility and reducing the proposal-to-beam time where required. It was suggested that rapid access be increased by promoting it to the community, carving out time for this on instruments, etc. It was felt that rapid access proposals should be reviewed by at least 2 FAP members and graded to tension them against Direct Access proposals. It was recognised that different communities / instruments may need to use rapid access to differing degrees.

ISIS will promote Rapid Access as a more general mechanism in order to provide increased flexibility and the opportunity for some users to get beamtime more quickly when this is required. Rapid Access proposals will be reviewed by two FAP members. Based on the experiences of running this system, and with advice from FAP members, ISIS will consider whether to increase the pool of FAP reviewers to help reduce workload. ISIS will provide clear flow-charts and other information on what access mechanisms are available.

Reserve time or 'pool' time (time carved out on instruments for instrument scientists to allocate to enable experiments to be completed, deal with down-time etc.) was generally thought to be a good idea.

ISIS will consider, on an instrument-by-instrument basis, the appropriate level of reserve time to provide flexibility for completion of experiments.

It was agreed in principle that FAPs could monitor experiment outputs and experiment reports. Further thought needs to be given as to what counts as outputs and how these are judged. There was wide support for re-launching experiment reports, enforcing completion of these particularly where continuation time was requested, and making these available to FAPs. It was requested that there should be automatic

reminders to users regarding experiment reports, and reports (or the lack of a report) should be clearly visible when a user logs into the ISIS systems. It was suggested that not making the reports public may encourage more useful information to be given within them. It was suggested that forms could be updatable, e.g. after a year.

ISIS will re-introduce experiment report forms and make these mandatory; they will be for ISIS internal use and for FAPs, and will not be made public. They will be expected before continuation proposals are considered. ISIS will provide reminder alerts for experimental reports. FAPs will be provided with additional information on beamtime that PIs have had previously and what the outputs from this has been.

Other matters: There was discussion of cross-facility proposals to enable easier access to both ISIS and Diamond.

ISIS will continue to monitor the need for this and discuss with Diamond how it might be enabled.

1.2 Travel and subsistence, consumables, etc.

There was wide agreement that changing the number of supported people for an experiment from 4 to 3 is fine, so long as a case can be made to have 4 where needed.

ISIS will implement this.

There was wide agreement that users getting the bus from Didcot to Oxford during working hours is fine.

ISIS will implement this.

Regarding increasing the number of nights supported to cover other relevant work at RAL: there were no strong feelings on this, but it should be done with instrument scientist approval if time at RAL is extended.

ISIS will allow additional nights when these are justified on the basis of the experiment needs and with instrument scientist approval.

Consumables: It was felt that clarity is needed over what is supported and what isn't (is it just base chemicals or is it sample cells, etc). There was a diversity of views regarding consumables support, with both recognition that some experiments (e.g. those needed isotopes or specialist cells) require financial support and that this is not a large amount compared with the overall cost of the beamtime, alongside the view that ISIS can't be responsible for all these costs. An 'honesty box', for users to tick to say that they have no other support for consumables, or equivalent question on the consumables form, was seen as a good idea. It was suggested that there is a minimum claim of, say, £100 to remove lots of small transactions.

ISIS will provide greater clarity as to what is supported regarding consumables¹. We will increase the normal maximum limit to £1200 per experiment. We will allow cases for more than this amount, up to £3000 per experiment, to be made where it is clear that the direct cost of sample preparation materials, e.g. isotopes, required for a neutron experiment, is greater than £1200. We will limit the amount that any individual PI can claim to £4800 per round. We will also set a

¹ *Proposal for consumables claims to clarify what is eligible:* Consumables claims can be made for chemicals, including isotopes, which are base materials for the preparation of samples for an ISIS neutron experiment. ISIS will also consider claims for limited equipment which may be necessary for sample preparation beyond the immediate base materials required. However, such equipment must be specific for the preparation of the required samples (i.e. not for more general use – and so is likely to be one-off use), and cannot be equipment which would normally be part of a well-found lab. Chemicals which would also be part of a well-found lab, including cryogenics, are also ineligible for claims. Claims should relate directly to sample preparation, so that sample cells for experiments and other equipment required for the experiment itself cannot be claimed and must be found from other sources.

budget for the total of consumables claims to ISIS for any one year, and claims will need to be conditional on us not having exceeded this consumables budget. We will enforce the rule that claims must be received within three months of an experiment. We will add an ‘honesty box’ to the consumables claim form.

Publishing proposal summary information: There were no objections to this in principle, but there was concern over what information would be made public and when in relation to the date of the experiment.

ISIS will implement the publishing of proposal summary information. We will make it clear on the proposal form which information is to be made public. We will look at the possibility of publishing the information a period of time, e.g. 6 months or a year, after the relevant FAP meeting, so that experiments have been run before information is published.

2. Details of the IUC and FAP Chairs Meeting – 14 July 2014

Present:

Member	Institution	IUC / FAP	Discussion Group
Anthony Powell	Reading	IUC, UG1	Red
Peter Slater	Birmingham	IUC, UG1	Green
John Holbrey	Queen’s Belfast	IUC, FAP 2, UG2	Red
Jeremy Lakey	Newcastle	IUC, UG3	Purple
Ali Zarbakhsh	Queen Mary London	IUC, UG3	Red
Phil Salmon	Bath	IUC, UG4	Green
Jon Goff	Royal Holloway	IUC Chair, UG4	Purple
Sylvia McLain	Oxford	IUC, UG5	Red
Christoph Salzmann	UCL	IUC, UG5	Green
Don Paul	Warwick	IUC, FAP 6, UG6	Purple
Hongbiao Dong	Leicester	IUC, UG7	Purple
David Barlow	King’s London	FAP 3	Green
Andrew Boothroyd	Oxford	FAP 4	Red
Neal Skipper	UCL	FAP 5	Purple
John Bouchard	OU	FAP 7	Green

User Group (UG) and FAP numbers:
 1 – Crystallography
 2 – Disordered Materials
 3 – Large Scale Structures
 4 – Excitations
 5 – Molecular Spectroscopy
 6 – Muons
 7 - Engineering

Present from ISIS:

Robert McGreevy ISIS Director
 Philip King ISIS Spectroscopy and Support Division Head
 Sean Langridge ISIS Diffraction Division Head
 Steve Hull ISIS Crystallography Group Leader
 Andrew Kaye ISIS User Programme Manager
 Christy Kinane ISIS Instrument Scientist, minutes

Apologies:

David Dye (Imperial), John Claridge (Liverpool), Beau Webber (Kent), Alan Drew (Queen Mary London), Michael Preuss (Manchester)

2.1. News and updates from ISIS

Robert McGreevy presented a wide variety of updates and news from ISIS, including instrument and machine developments, international collaborations and future running.

2.2. Discussion on user arrangements at ISIS: proposal access mechanisms and role of FAPs

Philip King gave a summary presentation on possible changes to proposal access mechanisms and the role of Facility Access Panels (a document describing possible changes had been distributed to attendees prior to the meeting). Attendees then split into three groups to discuss the proposals and report back.

Summary of comments from Red group

- The group were not convinced by the framework proposal idea; instead, the amount of direct access time could be increased.
- There could be a box added to the proposal to present the research context rather than the framework idea.
- The current proposal abstract could be removed and replaced with some sort of public abstract, possibly to give the context.
- The group decided that users from different science areas would need different types of access mechanisms, and that FAPs would need different amounts of rapid access time.
- Rapid access proposals should be reviewed by at least two FAP members (and the pool of FAP members could be increased to spread the workload).
- The group had no issue with discontinuing the Programme Access mode.

Summary of comments from Purple group

- The group agreed with the overall aims of reducing the amount of time between proposal and beamtime, of recognising the context of a proposal and of reviewing outputs.
- They noted that different communities might have different requirements regarding proposal mechanisms.
- The group had no issue with removing the current Programme Access mode.
- The group were not in favour of the proposal for a science frameworks; there was concern about ranking experiments in this case, and they were worried that it might discourage new users and spontaneity.
- The group suggested that the context of an experiment be presented via a box on the proposal form as also suggested by the red group. They suggested increasing the structure of proposals more generally to provide more guidance to users.
- The group liked the idea of increasing direct access but like the red group they expressed a need to grade rapid access proposals better. They noted that rapid access is not that useful for some science areas.
- Having a pool of instrument time available for allocation by instrument scientists might encourage new users.
- The group considered experimental reports to be very important.

Summary of comments from Green group

- The group considered that a year to get beamtime from proposal submission can be a problem particularly as it produces overlap with the next proposal round. A natural rhythm for time for experiments was thought to be 2 to 3 months from proposal, and there was a need for flexibility taking into account when university terms occur.

- The group discussed whether a move to 3 rounds a year would be sensible, and also discussed whether the ability to put proposals in without fixed deadlines would lead to a reduction in proposals. They felt that flexibility is important but too much might lead to beamtime being wasted.
- How do we judge/monitor outputs? This needs to be more than just papers, as publications can take several years to appear.
- A lay summary on proposals would be good.
- Are users generally aware of the different proposal mechanisms that are possible? Can ISIS advertise these better with flow charts of access mechanisms.
- Experimental reports are important; auto reminders would encourage their submission.
- More buffer days are needed to allow more flexibility to complete experiments, give time back when the beam goes off, etc.
- The group felt there was a need for better cross-facility proposals with Diamond for instance. Also for proposals to multiple beamlines at ISIS for when you need, e.g. SANS and reflectometry on the same samples.
- There is a lot of praise for the internal staff scientists, and a concern that we have not got enough of them.

2.3. Discussion on user arrangements at ISIS: T&S, consumables, etc

A variety of changes to travel and subsistence, and consumables arrangements for UK users had been proposed. It was also proposed that certain information from successful proposals be made available on the research councils' Gateway to Research site.

Summary of comments from Red group

- This group were fine with the bus and taxi changes proposed, and okay with 3 people supported per experiment.
- The group agreed with the consumables suggestions and proposed that ISIS institute a £100 minimum claim to avoid lots of small claims. They were fine with the idea of an 'honesty box' on the consumables form which has to be ticked to say that no other funding source was available; but they wanted to see the ability to make a case for additional funds e.g. for isotopes needed for neutron experiments.
- Experimental reports need to be enforced somehow via a reminder system and there also needs to be a different mechanism for a continuation reports. The system could allow you to just upload a paper etc.
- With respect to making public certain proposal information, the group thought it was okay to publish a lay abstract.
- The group thought the research fish would be good for experimental reports.

Summary of comments from Purple group

- The group supported the T&S change from 4 to 3 people, as long as there remains the option for more people by making a case.
- Extending the number of nights requested for a stay to enable sample preparation or characterisation, or for data analysis, was also thought reasonable, but with an ISIS scientist to approve this it.
- The proposed taxi and bus changes were supported; it was noted that taxis from Heathrow for UK users would be kept under review.

- The uplift from £1000 to £1200 seems reasonable for the consumables maximum. There was debate about what counts as a consumable. Can some of these things be given back to ISIS as ISIS property, e.g. sample cells?
- The group thought the 'honest box' for consumables would be a fair approach to this.
- On capturing experimental reports and outcomes there was a lot of debate about what should be in them, based on what a FAP panel would like to see.
- On making certain proposal information public, concern was expressed about what information is published and when. The group felt that making experimental reports public discourages people from writing them.

Summary of comments from Green group

- The group felt the funding change from 4 to 3 people on each experiment is reasonable as long as a PI can make the case for more if needed. Controversially it was proposed by a member of the group that this should be zero and money applied for from grants . . .
- With respect to consumables: there is some ambiguity about what is or is not considered on the consumables list, and this needs some clarification. There was concern that an absolute cap of £1200 might have consequences for experiments requiring deuteration or other isotopes.
- The group had doubts over the honesty box for declaring grant funding; why not have a box to say why the experiment couldn't be done without consumables funding?
- Experiment reports - one suggestion would be to go for a preliminary report, then make it more complete after a time limit. What the reports are for needs further consideration.
- The group had worries about the publication of certain bits of proposal information. There were concerns regarding patent infringement and also having competitors muscle in. It might require two levels of title, a public title and a private one. There is an issue of when information is best made publically available.
- The taxi proposal was considered reasonable. A wider campus shuttle bus might be considered.
- Research fish – people feel they have no choice on this, if the research councils are moving to this system, but there was a request to try to make sure things didn't have to be entered more than once.

Other topics

- An ESS instruments workshop was discussed; one is likely to be held in due course once ESS processes for in-kind contributions are better defined.
- December this year is the 30th anniversary of neutrons at ISIS, and 2015 will be 30 years of ISIS operations. ISIS will look at extending the NMUM meeting next year as a result; there is a plan for a full science day, a student day then a normal politics user meeting – details are still be sorted out.

Future dates

- **The next facility access panels will be held on Wednesday 10th and Thursday 11th December 2014**
- **The next ISIS User Committee meeting will be on Friday 12th December 2014.**