

# FOREWORD



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*Chair of the ING Board*

It is a pleasure to write this foreword to the 2006-2007 Biennial Report of the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes, on behalf of the ING Board.

The period 2006-2007 was one of consolidating the efforts started several years ago to prepare for operating a world-class facility with a budget which at best is stable. In parallel, the discussion intensified with the partners (STCF, NWO and the IAC) on how to continue to operate the ING at the appropriate level after 2009 when the current agreement comes to an end. Despite these difficult circumstances the ING has been able not only to maintain a world-class observatory with facilities that are high in demand and produce excellent science, but also has developed and completed new facilities such as the Laser Guide Star system, GLAS, opening a new area of science and expertise. The Board is very impressed with these accomplishments and wants to compliment the entire ING staff for carrying the observatory through continued harsh times in such an effective way. It clearly shows the motivation and dedication of all involved.

The past two years have been very productive from a scientific point of view. LIRIS, the near infrared imager/spectrograph designed and built by the IAC for the WHT, is in high demand and producing excellent science. The same statement can be made for the other new instrument OASIS now routinely available at the WHT in combination with NAOMI, the adaptive optics system. Its capabilities will be greatly enhanced with the laser guide star system, GLAS, successfully developed and installed and almost ready for routine observing. GLAS opens up the entire northern sky for Adaptive Optics (AO) assisted spectroscopy and imaging. It is the final step in a strategic development to bring the WHT to the forefront of AO and to bring to fruition a science area that will prove to be very interesting and strategically important for both the ING and its communities. Outside interest in these capabilities is already quite strong.

Another asset of the WHT, accessibility for visiting instruments, continues to prove itself. The demand for visiting instruments, all producing high quality science, remains higher than can be accommodated, and over the last two years we saw INTEGRAL, SAURON, PN.S, PLANETPOL, FASTCAM, GHaFaS (IAC's new Fabry-Perot imager), and ULTRACAM use the WHT, many several times. A new, very valuable and exciting addition in this respect will be the very-high-resolution fibre-fed spectrograph HARPS-NEF, a Harvard planet-finder (complementing the NASA Kepler mission) which will probably come to the WHT and also be available to the general ING community. Negotiations were conducted in 2007 and will be completed early in 2008.

The INT, initially operational in a single instrument mode with the WFC, but now a dual instrument facility again with the IDS back on-line, continues to entertain excellent projects. Use of the INT for large scale surveys has led to the recent first data release of the (H-alpha, r, i) survey of the galactic plane, IPHAS, providing a fascinating view of the northern galactic plane.

The Board continued to focus its attention on the future of the ING past 2009 when the present contracts between the funding agencies, NWO, PPARC and the IAC terminate. The high potential of the ING, in particular the WHT, is widely recognised. The partner countries are close to an agreement with the IAC and NWO continuing to support the ING at the current level past 2009, and the STFC indicating that it will continue supporting the ING, though at a reduced level. With the imminent contract with Harvard for the use of the WHT for HARPS-NEF, it will be possible to find sufficient funding to continue the ING past 2009. The Board and Director have put continued efforts into finding a constructive way forward and it is gratifying to see that a very positive solution is within reach.