

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Biennial Report of the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes for the years 2002 and 2003. The period covered by this report contains many scientific highlights and technical achievements, combined with significant developments in the organisation and the international collaborations. This report provides an overview of the main events and summarises the financial status and scientific output of the telescopes.

A key milestone over the reporting period has been the signing of a new agreement between PPARC, NWO and the IAC on collaboration in the operation and development of the ING telescopes. The new agreement implies that ING now forms a tri-partite international organisation. The new collaboration fits into the ongoing process of restructuring the observatory, which has a primary goal of achieving a model for operation that is significantly less costly to the funding agencies. As a result of this collaboration, the Spanish community gains more access to the ING telescopes, while the IAC will offer their newly developed IR spectrograph, LIRIS, as a common-user instrument on the William Herschel Telescope. Several important scientific discoveries are reported in the following pages, underlining the continued scientific relevance of the ING facilities, next to the new generation of very large telescopes. In particular worth mentioning is the impact of the Wide Field Survey activities on the Isaac Newton Telescope, which has resulted in expansion of our knowledge of the galactic structure and of our Local Group of galaxies. Also visiting instruments such as SAURON and the Planetary Nebula Spectrograph continued to offer high-impact science results, emphasising the importance of our strategy to welcome such novel developments.

Looking back on the very successful period covered by this report, it is important to realise that the achievements have only been possible thanks to the continued efforts and motivation of the staff. This has been particularly noteworthy considering the difficult situation as a result of budget reductions. I hope you will enjoy reading about ING's activities, the scientific results and technical achievements at the telescopes.



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Director of ING