

## **Report on the recent work of FAGS**

(<http://www.icsu-fags.org/>)

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The Federation of Astronomical and Geophysical Analysis Services (FAGS) is one of the ICSU (International Council for Science) interdisciplinary bodies. It was established fifty years ago in the framework of the 1957-1958 International Geophysical Year (IGY). Its principal purpose has been to encourage the analysis of observational data likely to be of long-term value in astronomy, geophysics and related sciences. In 2008, FAGS includes 12 Permanent Services, each operating under the authority of one or more of the interested Scientific Unions: the International Astronomical Union (IAU), International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG) and Union Radio-Scientifique Internationale (URSI). The current FAGS services whose parent Union is IAU are CDS (Centre de données astronomiques de Strasbourg), IERS (International Earth Rotation and Reference systems Service), ISES (International Space Environment Service), IVS (International VLBI Service for geodesy and astrometry), SIDC (Solar Influences Data Analysis Service) and QBSA (Quarterly Bulletin on Solar Activity). During the recent years, FAGS Services have played major roles in international programmes associated with various topics (i.e. the astronomical Virtual Observatory, space weather, sea and land level changes, International Polar Year, International Electronic Year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, etc.) and several FAGS Services (i.e. IGS, IERS, IVS and PSMSL) have been closely involved in the development of the Global Geodetic Observing System (GGOS) of the International Association of Geodesy. These activities provide excellent examples of the value of astronomical and geophysical time series information.

The Federation of services is administered by the FAGS Council, which is composed of two representatives of each of the supporting Unions, the Secretary and the past Secretary of FAGS. Funding of FAGS, which has decreased dramatically during the last years, comes currently only from the Unions and is most commonly used by the services for publication of reports, outreach to scientists and training courses for scientists, technologists and students, with specific actions in developing countries.

During the period 2006-2008, the FAGS Council had to address the restructuring of the organization prompted by ICSU requirements. First, in response to the ICSU proposals, it was recommended that FAGS would not continue to be an ICSU body from 2005. Therefore, the FAGS Council with Service Directors and Unions General Secretaries studied several alternatives for the future including its rebirth as a virtual Centre under the auspices of UNESCO, or to create an ad hoc committee across the three Unions. However, during the ICSU 28th General Assembly, China, 18-22 October, 2005, the recommendations to eliminate FAGS as an ICSU IB were put to the Assembly, but it was not accepted and it was decided *“To extend ICSU’s sponsorship of FAGS for a period of 3 years, during which the FAGS panel will continue to fulfill its role of coordination among the Services, while ICSU examines integration of this function within its activities in data and information.”* This decision resulted from strong actions of the IAU, IUGG and URSI who submitted this alternative to the ICSU General Assembly and thus received a strong majority of votes among both the National Member and Union delegates of ICSU. Consequently, FAGS retained its Interdisciplinary Body status for a further three years.

Several meetings were organized in order to re-consider the future of FAGS with the new situation. FAGS Council meetings were held in March 2006 at Paris Observatory and April 2007 at ICSU with the Service Directors, the Unions and the ICSU Representative and a

FAGS General Committee meeting (with in addition the Chairs of the Service Directing Boards) was held in July 2007 during the time of the 24th IUGG GA in Perugia (Italy). A FAGS “White Paper” was prepared to provide the FAGS views on the prospects for a future grouping of astronomical and geophysical data analysis services in the framework of the new arrangements within ICSU for data coordination. This “White Paper” was formally provided to ICSU in July 2007. It reviewed the current FAGS strengths and weakness and the links with the other ICSU interdisciplinary bodies on scientific data and information, namely the World Data System (WDC) and the Committee on Data for Science and Technology (CODATA). The paper made a proposal for a future ICSU grouping of services adapted to the modern astronomical and geophysical services and that could (i) be a benefit for the Services and the Unions, (ii) fit the WDC and CODATA evolution and the current ICSU strategic plan. That proposal was discussed with the WDC and CODAT representatives.

In last 2006 the ICSU ad-hoc Strategic Committee on Information and Data (SCID) was established by ICSU, according to the ICSU Strategic Plan 2006-2011, in order to achieve the recommendations of the Priority Area Assessments PAA on Scientific Data and Information. The SDIC terms of reference specified that SCID should guide and oversee the reform of the WDC system and FAGS. SCID membership includes two FAGS representatives (Ruth Neilan and N. Capitaine), one CODATA representative (R. Norris) and one WDC representative (B. Minster) .Three SCID meetings were held in Paris during the period July 2007 to February 2008. Critical inputs to these meetings included the FAGS white paper and a report from a 2007 meeting of WDC directors and also the CODATA strategic plan. The draft report of the SCID was circulated to all ICSU Members and Interdisciplinary Bodies for comment and the final report submitted to the CSPR in April 2008. The main SCID proposals are to be presented to the ICSU General Assembly in October 2008. One of the major recommendations of the SCID report is *“that a new World Data Services system be created (as an ICSU Interdisciplinary Body), incorporating the WDCs and FAGS as well as other ‘state of the art’ data centres and services. This new structure or system must be designed clearly to support ICSU’s mission and objectives, ensuring the long-term stewardship and provision of quality-assessed data and data services to the international science community and other stakeholders”*.

The SCID report is therefore an important document which will affect the future of FAGS.

It should be noted that part of the future strategies for FAGS will be how to secure the necessary resources to support the coordination roles and those inter-service activities that are outside the scope of the individual services budgets.

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