

2003-2007 Report to IUGG
on the
Federation of Astronomical and Geophysical Data analysis Services (FAGS)

This period has been interesting as the FAGS Council addressed a number of changes, external and internal, and continues thoughtful restructuring of the organization.

The Committee on Scientific Planning and Review (CSPR) is the ICSU Committee responsible for all Priority Area Assessment (PAA) and it appoints an *ad hoc* PAA Panel for each major priority scientific area identified for assessment. At the 27th General Assembly of ICSU (2002) the CSPR recommended carrying out two PAA, both of which passed comment on FAGS. The first, *PAA Report on the Environment and its Relation to Sustainable Development*, (ISBN 0-930357-59-0) released in December 2003 was critical of FAGS although their comments were supposedly narrow in scope and “...*limited to their [FAGS] contribution to environmental science.*” (Sec 5.5.5, pg. 36 of the report) The panel recommended that FAGS should no longer be an Interdisciplinary Body under ICSU (ICSU IB).

The second PAA, *Panel on Scientific Data and Information*, (ISBN 0-930357-60-4) released in December 2004 similarly reviewed FAGS activities in relation to science data and information and also recommended that FAGS should no longer be an ICSU IB. (Sec. 5.3.2, pg. 32) The report cites that FAGS was not active in regard to key data policy and management issues and that it did not interact with other ICSU bodies such as CODATA and WDCs. One of the reports key recommendations is to establish a Scientific Data and Information Forum (ScDIF) and noted that some of the FAGS services may be important contributors to ScDIF.

The reaction of the FAGS Council, the service directors, and the sponsoring Unions, IUGG, URSI and IAU were opposed to devolving FAGS back to the Unions, and generally discontent with the PAA process and results. However, the council recognizes that FAGS must also evolve as a federation in a rapidly changing world. The scientific service directors all agreed that not being associated with the ICSU umbrella could have a detrimental impact on their ability to obtain funding from their national sponsors.

Therefore, a FAGS Council meeting in Paris (2-3 May 2005) at UNESCO included Service Directors and the Union' Secretary Generals. They studied several alternatives for the future. One alternative that the FAGS Council has been investigating was its rebirth as a virtual Centre (CAGS) under the auspices of UNESCO. UNESCO would consider a joint grouping with the three Unions in principal. Advantages could have been more government recognition and funding for FAGS Services. Another alternative was to create an ad hoc committee across the three Unions, which would have had the weakness of being without a prestigious umbrella, such as ICSU, or UNESCO.

At 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.

A FAGS meeting was organized on 29-30 March 2006 at Paris Observatory again with the Service Directors, the Unions and the ICSU Representative in order to re-consider the future of FAGS with the new situation. During this meeting, it was acknowledged that, contrarily to what was discussed during the 2005 FAGS meeting, there was a future for FAGS within ICSU. A proposal should be prepared for building a new federation of services in order to adapt to the modern astronomical and geophysical services, the ICSU WDC system evolution and the current ICSU strategic plan. There has been interesting and positive discussion during that meeting from which have emerged preliminary views on the current FAGS strengths and weakness and on a recommended organisation for a future Federation of Services that could (i) be a benefit for the Services and the Unions and (ii) fit the current ICSU strategic plan and especially the Priority Area Assessment (PAA) on Scientific Data and Information.

In last 2006 the "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 have been adopted and are especially relevant to considerations on the future of FAGS -- SCID membership includes two FAGS representatives. Two FAGS representatives have been nominated and the first SCID meeting will probably be held in a few months time.

In parallel, the FAGS Council is preparing a strategic paper on FAGS future, which will be discussed at the FAGS meeting in April 2007 in Paris. The concepts in the paper will be discussed with the Services, the Unions, ICSU, etc. Further developments will be considered during the FAGS General Committee meeting at the 24th IUGG General Assembly in July 2007, Perugia, Italy.

IUGG funding for FAGS has been steady at \$12,000 US per year. This funding is gratefully received, and by nature is fully utilized with no overhead being extracted from the receiving services. It is most commonly used for outreach to scientists in developing countries. In general, funding from the Unions has decreased dramatically, with IUGG being the main sponsor of FAGS services activities. 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.

FAGS Website, with links to all of the FAGS services:
<http://www2.kms.dk/fags/index.html>

Meetings of FAGS Council 2003-2007:
April 28, 2003, ICSU, Montmorency, Paris, France

April 19, 2004, Southampton Oceanography Centre, Southampton, UK
May 3, 2005 UNESCO, Paris, France
March 30, 2006, Observatoire de Paris, Paris, France
April 3, 2007, ICSU (tbd), Paris, France

Council:

President: Nicole Capitaine, France, succeeded David Pugh, UK, as President of the FAGS Council in March 2006. David Pugh completed his last four-year term.

Secretariat: Niels Andersen, Denmark

Members:

IUGG: David Pugh, UK; Ruth Neilan, USA

URIS: Roy Booth, Sweden; Phil Wilkinson, Australia

IAU: Einar A. Tandberg-Hanssen

Respectfully submitted on behalf of FAGS Council,

Ruth E. Neilan and David Pugh
IUGG Representatives to FAGS

