

Report on the

First ESO-EAAE Astronomy Summer School

held at ESO Headquarters, Garching, Germany, 19–23 July 2007

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The 1st ESO-EAAE Astronomy Summer School for teachers took place in the ESO Headquarters in Garching from 19th to 23rd July 2007. This summer school was based on ten years of successful schools organised around Europe by the EAAE (European Association for Astronomy Education), but 2007 marked increased involvement by ESO. In addition, the summer school was recognised as a Socrates course, allowing teachers to apply for funding through the Socrates programme, while some additional support for delegates was made available through ESO.

Fifty teachers and other educators from 16 countries around Europe, plus Chile, took part in the summer school, with the theme of “Strategies for effective teaching of astronomy”. The aim was to promote active participation and the exchange of ideas, and the school was open to all teachers with an interest in astronomy.

The summer school included workshops from EAAE instructors, poster sessions on astronomy teaching activities and a series of general talks presented by scientists at ESO. In addition, there were amateur observing sessions kindly arranged by AGAPE, and a live video link to the VLT on Paranal.

In the opening session, participants were welcomed by Claus Madsen (Head of the ESO Public Affairs Department), Fernand Wagner (President of the EAAE), and Rosa M. Ros (Chair of the Summer School).

During the five days of the course, the participants took part in ten different workshops, on topics as diverse as educational exercises involving gravitational lenses, a study of Eta Carinae, and ways to make astronomical observations with a pinhole camera. A guide to ESO’s educational programmes was also



Figure 1: Participants in the 1st ESO-EAAE Astronomy Summer School for teachers in the entrance hall of the ESO Headquarters.

presented by Douglas Pierce-Price, and Claus Madsen discussed science education in a European context. In addition, as a new feature of the joint ESO-EAAE Summer School, there was a series of extremely well-received talks by ESO astronomers about the latest work of the organisation. These included presentations on the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT) by Roberto Gilmozzi, the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) by Paola Andreani, and “Supernovae: the exploding stars” by Ferdinando Patat. In addition, delegates were able to share more information by presenting posters of their educational projects.

Also during the day, we were very fortunate to be able to make observations of the Sun, thanks to the help of the AGAPE team. Unfortunately, the weather in the evening was not good enough for night observations, but an excellent live video presentation from Paranal by Paul Lynam

proved a highlight of the summer school. At the weekend, a trip to the Deutsches Museum in Munich gave delegates a chance to visit its astronomy exhibits, and more.

At the end of the five-day-long Summer School, all delegates received a certificate of participation from ESO and the EAAE. However, of course, the most important things they took home were knowledge about the latest astronomical developments at ESO, an understanding of new and exciting ways to teach astronomy, memories of a great summer school, and new contacts with colleagues and friends.

Thanks are due to all the speakers, the AGAPE volunteers, and the organising committees, for making this first joint summer school such a resounding success. The next summer school, which is currently being planned, will take place in Granada in July 2008.