

Report on CHAPS status and activities for CHIPP

(Martin Kunz, CHIPP observer to CHAPS, based on the minutes of the 2025 CHAPS meeting, 14/11/2025, Bern)

Structure, role and composition of CHAPS

The CHAPS Chair, Philippe Jetzer (UZH), reminded participants of the role of the Swiss Commission for Astronomy (SCFA), a committee of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT). CHAPS is not an independent legal entity but acts as an advisory body to SCFA and serves as the astronomy counterpart of the CHIPP Board. Its main roles include advising on the Astronomy Roadmap and on priorities for FLARE funding. The Chair also reported on the renewal of SCFA membership for the 2026-2028 period, with several new members proposed from UNIGE, Uni Bern, UZH, ETHZ and ISSI.

Short reports from bodies of interest

CHAPS members presented updates from several national and international organisations:

- **ESO (F. Pepe):** Progress of the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT) remains good, although first light is now expected in 2029. Swiss groups are involved in several ELT instruments including METIS, ANDES and MOSAIC. Concerns were raised about the ability of current FLARE funding levels to sustain leading Swiss participation in future ELT instrumentation projects. Additional issues discussed included the future of the VLT beyond 2030, developments at CTAO and ALMA, and efforts to protect the Paranal site from nearby industrial development.
- **CSR / ESA (S. Paltani):** Switzerland continues to participate broadly in ESA science missions. Updates were presented on ongoing missions including JUICE, Solar Orbiter, JWST, CHEOPS and Euclid, as well as future missions such as PLATO, ARIEL, EnVision and LISA. Concerns were expressed about international funding uncertainties, especially potential impacts of reduced US support for some ESA-led programmes.
- **SSAA (D. Kitzmann):** The 2025 SSAA General Assembly was held in Locarno. The 2027 Saas-Fee course will focus on “Beyond Cold Dark Matter”. The Edith Alice Müller Prize 2025 was awarded jointly to Mara Attia and Andrea Francesco Battaglia.
- **IAU (W. Benz):** Switzerland remains underrepresented in the IAU relative to comparable countries. Additional nominations were encouraged. Activities discussed included support for astronomy in developing countries, preservation

of dark skies, lunar time standards and preparations for future IAU General Assemblies.

- **ASTRONET (J.-P. Kneib, presented by M. Sargent):** ASTRONET continues its role as a strategic planning network for European astronomy. Switzerland participates as an observer through SCFA.
- **SCFA and the Gornergrat radio telescope project:** Progress was reported on the proposal to install a new millimetre-wave antenna in the Zermatt/Gornergrat region as part of the next-generation Event Horizon Telescope (ngEHT). The project could provide an important European baseline for future horizon-scale imaging and time-domain studies of black holes.

Astronomy roadmap

A substantial discussion was devoted to lessons learned from the preparation of the Astronomy Community Roadmap 2024. Participants generally agreed that future roadmap exercises should place greater emphasis on prioritisation, strategic recommendations and coordination across scientific themes. Several speakers argued for a process that better combines community input with stronger editorial guidance and increased involvement of younger researchers. SCFA was tasked with establishing a small working group to define the process and timetable for the next roadmap update, currently expected around 2028.

FLARE projects

The future of FLARE funding was a major topic of discussion. CHAPS reviewed the outcome of the first call in the 2025-2028 funding cycle and discussed how increasing demand for FLARE resources requires clearer strategic prioritisation. A broad consensus emerged that ESO-related projects, particularly ELT instrumentation, should remain the highest priority for astronomy. At the same time, CHAPS stressed the need to communicate to SERI and SNSF that the completion of the ELT and its scientific instrumentation represents a particularly important period for Swiss astronomy and may require enhanced support.

Research funding

Particular concern was expressed regarding SNSF project funding in astronomy. Statistics presented at the meeting showed a strong decline in success rates over the past decade, from roughly 60% in 2015 to about 19% in 2024. Astronomy proposals are currently evaluated together with physics proposals, despite having reached a scale comparable to disciplines that maintain dedicated panels. SCFA and the Committee on Space Research (CSR) have formally raised these concerns with SNSF and are advocating for improved conditions for astronomy research funding.