



NEWS RELEASE

The Australian Synchrotron Project deploys Observatory Sciences for specialist control software training

(22nd March 2004) The Australian Synchrotron Project has successfully deployed UK-based scientific consultancy and systems company Observatory Sciences Limited to deliver its initial training in the use of the control software environment EPICS (Experimental Physics and Industrial Control System). The training course took place in Melbourne, Victoria, where the \$A206 million Synchrotron, Australia's first, is currently being constructed. Those taking part included selected contractors as well as project staff members.

The Australian Synchrotron Project selected Observatory Sciences primarily for the company's extensive experience of EPICS software, which has been used on many major high energy physics facilities as well as on large astronomical telescopes. Observatory Sciences has a strong track record in delivering EPICS training to scientific projects. These include the Isaac Newton Group of telescopes (Canary Islands), the UK Astronomy Technology Centre, the University of Durham, University College London, Daresbury Laboratory and Diamond Light Source Limited.

"EPICS is in use in many, if not most, Synchrotron facilities," said Richard Farnsworth, Lead Control Systems Engineer, Australian Synchrotron Project. "As such, it represents a safe low risk approach, yet a modern way to implement instrumentation and control systems. This is one of our key project criteria for the software we use." Using EPICS at the early stage of defining how the system is to operate is also helping the team to streamline many of their requirements. "Since many other facilities already use EPICS, if EPICS doesn't do the function we require of it, it probably doesn't need to be done.

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“We needed a deep knowledge of EPICS in order to deploy it in the facility we are building,” Richard Farnsworth continued. “One of the real benefits of the training course, which has made this possible, has been to give us sufficient confidence and experience in the EPICS product to be able to do this.

“To be part of, and contribute to, the scientific community with EPICS is a very powerful thing. We get a lot of functionality very cheaply and get our code exhaustively tested in multiple environments very quickly. Use of this system is also important and useful to us because EPICS is very cost effective and easy to deploy — there are few licensing restrictions. This is balanced by the costs associated with maintaining staff — there is little commercial support,” explained Richard Farnsworth. “That’s another reason why Observatory Sciences and its training are so valuable.”

“Synchrotron light technology is becoming increasingly important in many areas of scientific and industrial research — perhaps most notably in medical discovery and development,” commented Philip Taylor of Observatory Sciences Limited, who, with colleague Andy Foster, presented the training course in Melbourne. “The new Synchrotron has been described by the Premier of Victoria as the most exciting and significant science infrastructure investment in Australia for decades. Observatory Sciences is very pleased to have helped bring the project team there into the wider EPICS community.”

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Observatory Sciences Limited: Notes for editors

Observatory Sciences Limited is an independent UK-based company which provides consultancy and systems to scientific research organisations and technical clients. It specialises in developing integrated observing and observation analysis systems, including software for the control of telescopes and instruments used in space and astronomy. The company offers extensive experience of employing the latest technologies in the design, commissioning and operation of major astronomical facilities.

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Observatory Sciences provides complete project management and support for public and private sector clients — among them the UK Ministry of Defence; the Gemini Observatory; UK Astronomy Technology Centre (UK ATC); Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), now Defence Science & Technology Laboratory (DSTL); the Royal Observatory Greenwich; Natural Environment Research Council (NERC); British National Space Centre (BNSC) — in areas which include:

- Design and development of instrument and equipment control software
- Astrodynamics and satellite tracking consultancy
- Data assessment and analysis systems
- Embedded systems design, programming, management of outsourced production
- Systems procurement and integration
- Facility management and operation
- Robotic/remote data acquisition
- Feasibility surveys
- Training and skills transfer
- Systems maintenance and upgrade
- Performance audits
- Problem analysis and holistic solution recommendation.

Observatory Sciences has unusual depth and breadth of expertise in the development, management, delivery and operation of astronomical and space-related projects, and a track record of success. The company has grown steadily since its launch in 1998.

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