

Careers and people

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Careers and people

Spotlight on: Xavier Barcons



The Spanish astronomer Xavier Barcons, who has been appointed as the next director-general of the European Southern Observatory (ESO), is an ESO veteran with a background in X-ray astronomy. Barcons served as ESO council president in 2012–2014 and he also chairs the organization's Observing Programmes Committee. He will assume the directorship in September, when the term of the current director, Tim de Zeeuw, ends.

ESO is in the process of adding a major new facility, the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT), to its existing suite of three observing stations in Chile. Construction on the E-ELT began during Barcons' term as council president and the telescope is expected to see first light in 2024.

Barcons has also been active in promoting a next-generation space-based X-ray observatory – an idea that is now being taken forward as the European Space Agency's Athena mission, which is due to begin construction in around 2019.

Movers and shakers

Eric Becklin of the University of California, Los Angeles, US, has received the Henry Norris Russell Lectureship from the American Astronomical Society (AAS). He was honoured for his distinguished record of discoveries made using telescopes on the ground, in the stratosphere and in space, including studies of infrared sources at the centre of the Milky Way.

A separate award, the Dannie Heineman Prize for Astrophysics, went to **Lars Bildsten** of the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics and the University of California, Santa Barbara, and was presented jointly by the AAS and the American Institute of Physics. Also honoured was **Rebekah Dawson** of the University of Pennsylvania, who won the AAS' Annie Jump Cannon Award for her work on the dynamics of exoplanets in multi-planet systems.

Robert Feidenhans'l, a physicist at the Niels Bohr Institute at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, has been appointed as the new chair of the management board of the European X-ray Free Electron Laser in

Hamburg, Germany.

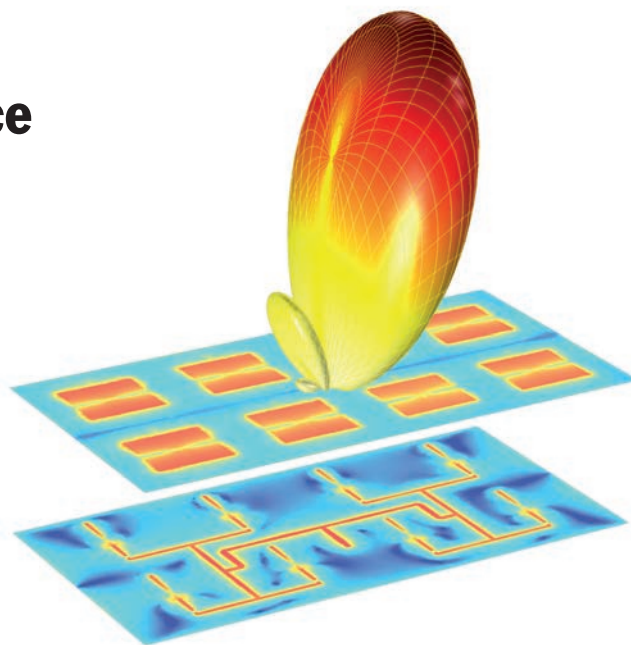
Mahouton Norbert Hounkonnou, a professor of mathematics and physics at the University of Abomey-Calavi in the Republic of Benin, has won the 2016 CN R Rao Prize for Scientific Research. The prize, which is awarded by the World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) in Italy, recognizes Hounkonnou's "outstanding level" of research in mathematics and his sustained commitment to mathematics education.

Four leaders in the field of quantum computing are set to help Microsoft develop a topological quantum computer. **Leo Kouwenhoven** of Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands and **Charles Marcus** of the University of Copenhagen have already been hired by the US-based company and they will both build dedicated Microsoft quantum labs at their respective universities while also maintaining their academic research labs. Joining them are **David Reilly** of the University of Sydney, who develops quantum devices based on nanostructures, and **Matthias Troyer** of ETH Zurich, a theorist working on quantum algorithms.

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