Good afternoon and welcome to you all, especially the project members who have travelled from overseas and to the STFC Senior Management present.

We are here to celebrate the success of VISTA, and make no mistake, VISTA has been, and is, a tremendous scientific success. Normally, for such a high profile facility we would be expecting a formal opening and celebration, possibly with a Royal, to be held on site in Paranal. However, in this era of austerity and the particular political nuances associated with the ESO accession and VISTA, it was agreed to have a local celebration commemorating just what the UK has achieved.

I should point out that I was not involved in VISTA at the outset, I only became involved through the departure of others until finally I was the last man standing so as to speak; responsible for the delivery and acceptance by ESO. Indeed, from my viewpoint of Director of our Hawaiian telescopes I had a real concern at the outset that VISTA could impact delivery of instruments to the JCMT and UKIRT. While this turned out not to be the case through good management at the UKATC by my predecessor, when I finally became responsible for VISTA, the PI made absolutely sure that I remembered on every occasion that VISTA was my highest priority project.

However, there is no doubt in my mind that VISTA has turned out to be excellent for the UKATC and the UK – in spite of the difficulties with ESO. It provided a huge degree of experience in working on such a massive project and learning valuable lessons of procurement etc that has set the UK, and in particular the UKATC, in good stance for the E-ELT process ahead. Taking on VISTA at the time was a challenging, farsighted and brave decision by Adrian and his management team, and they were absolutely right. We should also remember that the whole project involved the UKATC and RAL along with the Universities of Edinburgh, Cambridge, Durham and of course Queen Mary.

When I came to Edinburgh in 2002 my role was to hassle project managers and remind them of the mantra of schedule, cost and specification. While VISTA did not manage to achieve the first two requirements, nevertheless it was a tremendous engineering challenge and all-in-all I think it did very well given the circumstances. For those of you who have seen the facility, the telescope and the camera, the engineering just stands out – it is absolutely magnificent – and for those of you who haven't seen it, then I hope this afternoon will show you what's behind the building of this fabulous telescope.

Of course with hindsight things could always have been different, and one of these was dealing with ESO itself. In fact it took us a while to figure out that the view from Garching and the view from Paranal are not always identical,

which didn't help as we were dealing with our single-point-of-contact from Garching, who, I must point out, was extremely helpful, pragmatic and hugely supportive. With hindsight, more work could have been done prior to delivery to smooth things over in Paranal, but it would not have achieved anything on the penalties score that I need to touch on right now. I have spoken directly with the parties involved in the contract and both were adamant that there would be no situation where the penalty clause would be invoked – but time and people move on and situations change and we ended up where we did – lots of grief and grey hair for many of us. Nevertheless, this is all behind us now as history; ESO are our major partners and we work closely with them and we seek to be constructive and supportive for the current and future programmes.

In conclusion, we need to be very clear that VISTA is truly fantastic – it is the IR survey facility of choice; it is unique. Its efficiency in data taking is brilliant, the pipeline software is just fantastic, the reliability of the system is very high, the PR images are just fabulous and ESO are delighted.

So, let us enjoy the celebration of a great achievement, VISTA; today we hear about the engineering, tomorrow we hear about the fabulous science from the current surveys and some possibilities for the future.