

Minutes of User Group Meeting 1 (6/7 March 2002)

edited by Norbert Schartel

approved by voting members (20 April 2002)

Meeting 6th of March

Participants:

Juergen Schmitt (Chairman), Roberto Pallavicini (Mission Scientist), Richard Griffiths (Mission Scientist), Phil Charles (External), Xavier Barcons (External), Andrea Comastri (External), Michiel Van der Klis (External), Jelle Kaastra (RGS-PI), Martin Turner (EPIC-PI), Keith Mason (OM-PI), Mike Watson (SSC-PI), Bernd Aschenbach (Telescope scientist), Fred Jansen (XMM-Newton Project Scientist), Norbert Schartel (Secretary), several Experts from SSC, MOC and SOC providing talks, interested staff

First Part:

The User Group meeting followed the agenda, which is attached, up to 17:05. The presentation of Dietmar Heger (MOC Manager) was given by his deputy, Oscar Ojanguren (MOC, Darmstadt).

Juergen Schmitt (Chairman) of users group explained that he insisted on the talks (as given in the agenda), because useful advice and recommendations can only be given on the basis of a prior understanding of the technical and operational constraints. In further meetings the number of presentations will be significantly reduced.

Second Part:

Discussion (extended in comparison to agenda, end 19:00)

- discussion about observations suffering of high radiation background ("bad space weather").
- extended and detailed discussion about the problem, scientific impact and the advantages/disadvantages of different solution scenarios
- discussion about performance of RPS during AO2 submission: The User Group was unanimously upset about the AO2 proposal submission debacle. The Project Scientist openly said that the project were very embarrassed about it and would make sure that something like this would not happen again, ever. Project Scientist described ESA plans to ensure a smooth submission for AO-3 (improved RPS for AO3 and new system for AO4 onwards with two phase submission system)
 - Users Group acknowledged that the problem is realized and that appropriate actions are taken.

- Users Group suggested that the adjustment of exposure times be simplified (NS: already in the package of requested changes)
- Users Group suggested to shorten the country list (NS: already in the package of requested changes, i.e. list will be shorten to countries from which proposals were received)
- Users Group pointed out that for many proposal OM is not required for the scientific case, but a significant amount of time was spent to fill the form. (NS: explained that not requested OM time is used for calibration observations or filled with default observations)

Action 2002-03-06/01: Project should provide statistics on observations suffering of high radiation background for a representative sample of XMM-Newton pointings. (One month before next meeting of User Group)

Recommendation 2002-03-06/01: Observations suffering of high radiation background should not be re-scheduled or granted compensation time without a (re)evaluation of the scientific case by OTAC, i.e. observers are recommended to (re)submit their proposal in a following AO.

Recommendation 2002-03-06/02: The RPS should provide the possibility to flag proposals which result from previous observation suffering of high radiation background in order to specifically allow proposers a resubmission and alert OTAC for a proposal resubmission.

Recommendation 2002-03-06/03: Project should inform the scientific community about the steps taken to ensure smooth submission of proposals for AO3.

Recommendation 2002-03-06/04: Project should improve the description on how non-requested OM time is used, particularly to clarify that OM exposures are not mandatory if OM is not required to fulfill the scientific case.

Recommendation 2002-03-06/05: Project should create and maintain a WWW-page within the SOC home WWW-pages in which the User Group and its tasks are described and in which the minutes of User Group meetings and the viewgraphs of the presentations should be made public.

Meeting 7th of March

Participants:

Juergen Schmitt (Chairman), Roberto Pallavicini (Mission Scientist), Richard Griffiths (Mission Scientist), Phil Charles (External), Xavier Barcons (External), Andrea Comastri (External), Michiel Van der Klis (External), Jelle Kaastra (RGS-PI), Martin Turner (EPIC-PI), Mike Watson (SSC-PI), Bernd Aschenbach (Telescope scientist), Fred Jansen (Project Scientist), Norbert Schartel (Secretary), several Experts from SSC, MOC and SOC providing talks, interested staff

First Part:

The User Group meeting did not strictly followed the agenda, but all talks were given. Every talk was followed by a discussion. Intensive and detailed discussions followed the presentation of the SAS (J. Osborn) and the "XMM-Newton and the scientific community" (R. Pallavicini). The discussions built the basis for the conclusions, actions and recommendation of the subsequent discussion session.

Second Part:

Most of the discussion was based on the discussions, which followed the talks during the morning session. Therefore, it was possible to focus on the recommendations and actions. In addition detailed discussions on TOOs and AO2. The discussions finished at 15:40.

Discussion in detail:

- SAS: There was a long discussion about analysis software that clearly showed a relatively high level of confusion on the part of the user community about
 - how to perform certain types of analysis
 - how to find information about whether certain types of analysis are possible or certain calibrations exist, and if so how to apply them,
 - which information is authoritative and which isn't and also that there were a number of elements missing from the software and calibration suite. It became clear from presentations made by the project that the next version of SAS would apparently go a long way towards filling in the missing elements. There was a recommendation on documentation as given below. Another concern was the availability of the current calibration files required for data analysis. The issue was left open. Users Group assumes that SAS release 5.3 will solve hopefully many of the users issues raised by various members. Users Group plans to revisit the status of SAS in the next meeting(s).
- TOOs: Several examples were given by User Group members of scientists getting upset about issues to do with TOOs. The project explained that due to the limited amount of science time available for TOO and discretionary-time observations only a small fraction of the good TOO proposals can actually be done, and that there are certain rules governing TOOs and their interaction with approved observations. There appears to be insufficient information about this among the scientific community, and a recommendation was formulated to improve this.
- AO-2: The User Group indicated unanimously that users are generally disappointed about the slow progress with Cycle 2 and wonders what is going on. The project scientist explained the reasons behind this (moving the GT observations forward, interference with Chandra AO); no Cycle 2 observations would be done before January 2003. The User Group accepted these explanations, but pointed out that a fair amount of the A02 proposals were written without any possibility of feedback from AO1 with the consequence that a significant fraction of the AO2 program carried out in 2003 would rely on

pre-launch science issues. The User Group recommended that further AO's should be issued as late as possible in order to ensure maximum possible feedback from previous successful observations into the new program. The issue of relative phasing between XMM-Newton and Chandra AOs was discussed but no conclusion and/or recommendation reached.

- The recommendation about transparency was motivated i.a. by the fact that the user community did not know of these reasons for the delay of Cycle 2 and thus bad feelings about the project were created.
- data delivery: The problems with the data distribution were presented and discussed at length. According to the status as presented by the SAS representatives the data distribution problems are solved to a large extent and only a rather small fraction of the data taken (at the level of less than five percent) is still awaiting processing and distribution. The Users group therefore assumes that the problem is indeed solved and formulated no specific recommendation. The Users group will regularly monitor the status of data processing and data delivery to guest observers.
- publicity of XMM-Newton: The User Group was unanimously appalled at the (lack of) publicity for XMM-Newton science. The project scientist explained that because of ESA policies this was out of his hands. A recommendation was formulated. The Users group will revisit this issue.

Action 2002-03-07/02: Project should provide a list of approved TOOs including a description of their data-rights. This pages should in addition contain a clear description on how to propose TOOs and describe the policies and constraints that pertain to TOOs.

Action 2002-03-07/03: Project Scientist should report on ToO and discretionary time observations in each Users Group Meeting.

Recommendation 2002-03-07/06: Future AOs should be issued as late as possible.

Recommendation 2002-03-07/07: The remote proposal system, which was used successfully for ROSAT, ASCA, SAX and Chandra and with which the X-ray community is very familiar, should be used for a phase A submission for AO-3. For the OTAC the basic information on exposure times etc. is fully sufficient. The successful proposers may then use the XRPS (which was in AO2) or another system to provide the project with observation details.

Recommendation 2002-03-07/08: Project should look into the possibility of making the review process more efficient and should try to decrease the number of panel members in view of the likely necessity to convene such panels regularly over the next years.

Recommendation 2002-03-07/09: Project should critically examine the SAS documentation and should provide a concise description of it (about two pages) with all the appropriate links.

Recommendation 2002-03-07/10: The science archive should be opened as soon as possible and should include all PV and calibration observations

Recommendation 2002-03-07/11: Users Group encourage the project to provide information on the project in a clear and transparent fashion to the astronomical community.

Recommendation 2002-03-07/12: The Public Relation efforts on XMM-Newton should be significantly improved.

Recommendation 2002-03-07/13: Users Group strongly endorse to have user workshops at VILSPA and encourage ESA to provide funding for participating students and post-docs from member states.

Date of next meeting: 16th and 17th of September 2002, (start at 14:00 2002/09/16)