Minutes of User Group Meeting 4
(22nd / 23rd of September 2003)

edited by Norbert Schartel

approved by voting members (25th of October 2003)

Meeting 22nd of September

Participants:
Jürgen Schmitt (Chairman), Xavier Barcons (External), Phil Charles (External), Andrea Comastri (External), Jacqueline Bergeron (Mission Scientist), Richard Griffiths (Mission Scientist), Richard Mushotzky (Mission Scientist), Roberto Pallavicini (Mission Scientist), Jelle Kaastra (RGS-PI), Keith Mason (OM-PI), Martin Turner (EPIC-PI), Mike Watson (SSC-PI), Fred Jansen (XMM-Newton Project Scientist), Norbert Schartel (Secretary),

Leo Metcalfe (Science Support Manager), Ramon Muñoz (Instrument Operations Manager), Calibration Scientists and interested staff from Vilspa

J. Schmitt (Chairman) opened the meeting at 11:00 and welcomed the participants.

The agenda was adjusted with respect to the inputs received from the community. It was agreed that the UG members report about comments from the community within the discussion section.
The following presentations were delivered:

1. Report of the Project Scientist (F. Jansen; 11:05-12:00)
2. Instrument Operations (R. Muñoz; 12:00-12:35)
3. Science Support
   - **3.1** General points and mission cross-calibration (L. Metcalfe, 12:35-13:15)
   - **3.2** EPIC (M. Kirsch; 14:00-15:00)
   - **3.3** RGS (A. Pollock; 15:00-15:30)
   - **3.4** OM (A. Talavera; 15:30-15:45)
   - **3.5** SAS status and plans (C. Gabriel; 15:45-16:45)
   - **3.6** Gallery Demo (M. Ehle; 16:45-17:05)
4. SSC status (M. Watson; 17:05-17:55)
5. Action items from last meeting (N. Schartel; 17:55-18:00)

The power-point viewgraphs of the provided talks are available on the UG Web pages. Every talk was accompanied by questions and short discussion, especially:

- Presentation 1: The Project Scientist clarified that according to the XMM-Newton policy data rights for TOO observations are granted to an individual if a TOO observation violates data rights for an accepted observation of that individual. The UG agreed on the following recommendations:

Recommendation 2003-09-22/21 The data rights holder of TOO observations should be identified on the TOO details web page in future, which will allow other scientists to contact her/him.

- Presentation 3.1: R. Mushotzky pointed out that the EPIC/RGS cross-calibration discrepancy is not new. This 20% difference between EPIC and RGS has been known since launch or before and urged that the matter be tackled. F. Jansen agreed, and L. Metcalfe stressed that the reported cross-calibration initiative of the Calibration Scientists was precisely intended to highlight systematically such problems. J. Kaastra, the RGS PI, was asked what the RGS team is doing about the problem and stated that they have a person working on it.

- Presentation 3.5: The UG appreciates the development of the "Picture Gallery" and feels that it will be an extremely valuable tool. The SOC is encouraged to continue with these efforts.

- Presentation 5: The UG decided to close all open actions and recommendations except one. The following action is pending:

  Action 2003-04-01/12 (Adding of EPIC spectra)

Based on the discussions and questions accompanying the provided talks and on the input received from the scientific community, the UG identified the topics for the discussion on the following day. The meeting finished at 18:45.

Meeting 23rd of September

Participants:
Jürgen Schmitt (Chairman), Xavier Barcons (External), Phil Charles (External), Andrea Comastri (External), Jacqueline Bergeron (Mission Scientist), Richard Griffiths (Mission Scientist), Richard Mushotzky (Mission Scientist), Roberto Pallavicini (Mission Scientist), Jelle Kaastra (RGS-PI), Keith Mason (OM-PI), Martin Turner (EPIC-PI), Mike Watson (SSC-PI), Fred Jansen (XMM-Newton Project Scientist), Norbert Schartel (Secretary),

The meeting started at 9:00. The whole meeting was used for discussions.

Project Scientist: The Project Scientist informed the UG on anticipated changes in the XMM-Newton organigram. In particular the UG was informed about the new role of the Project Scientist in the future. The UG took note of the planned changes and pointed out to the Project Scientist the fundamental importance of this ESA decision for the future of the XMM-Newton project and its perception within the astronomical community.

OTAC Chairperson: The UG would appreciate if Prof. M. Longair agrees to chair the XMM-Newton Time Allocation Committee once more. The UG members will also provide suggestions for a replacement of Prof. M. Longair, who in the UG's opinion did an excellent job in liaisoning the OTAC with the daily operations of the project.

Rotation of UG members: According to the mission statement of the UG the external members participate on a rotating basis. The UG discussed various aspects and scenarios for a rotation scheme. In order to ensure a smooth transition and transfer of the gained experience and knowledge, the UG decided that about half of the external members should rotate every year whereas the other half should stay for one more year.
The UG would appreciate if the chairperson, J. Schmitt, serves, at the minimum, for two more meetings to ensure that the specified aims can be reached.
F. Jansen will take care of the replacements, based on individual discussions with the external members. The replacements will be selected in a way such that the expertise of the UG members continues to cover different scientific topics.

Presentation for AWG: J. Schmitt thanked all members of the UG for the inputs he received for his AWG presentation. F. Jansen reported that he had the impression that the presentation of J. Schmitt went well and thanked him.

Public Relations: The UG is still very much dissatisfied with the lack of support by ESA for XMM-Newton PR efforts. R. Mushotzky reported that he has a professional science writer available. He offered his help on an informal basis.

AO3: The UG feels that the AO3 was very successful. The scientific community appreciates the enormous improvements in comparison to AO2. The following improvements should be considered for future AOs:

Recommendation 2003-09-23/22 The PIs of large programs should be allowed to submit five pages scientific justification.

Recommendation 2003-09-23/23 Large programs should be defined by the PI considering the requested exposure time and scientific importance of the program.

Recommendation 2003-09-23/24 The scientific category for which targets were proposed should be provided in the list of accepted targets. (J. Bergeron explained that this information is important for some institutes in order to apply for national funding).

The UG may discuss the large programs, and especially the fraction of observing time which is available for them, after the scientific return of the accepted large programs can be overseen. There was an extensive discussion of the pros and cons of various presented schemes of providing feedback to the proposer. All UG members (voting and non voting) participated in the discussions and expressed different opinions about that. All members of the UG recognize that a sizable fraction of the community is in favor of receiving feedback. Given the various differing opinions, the chairman decided to hold a vote of the UG members. The following voting members of the UG participated on the voting: X. Barcons, J. Bergeron, P. Charles, A. Comastri, R. Pallavicini, and J. Schmitt. There were three votes for verbose feedback and three votes against it, i.e. the UG ended as a split committee. Therefore, the UG does not see itself as being in the position to recommend anything to the project.
F. Jansen reported on the ongoing development of a software tool to support the proposal evaluation by OTAC. Within this tool there would be the possibility to provide some form of feedback. The UG unanimously encourages the project to consider this possibility. It would be important that OTAC can suggest improvements for proposals, i.e. to inform about faults in the flow of the argumentation logic, missing visibility and feasibility studies, etc .
N. Schartel provided the numbers of proposals which were re-submitted due to high background radiation, and the exposure time requested by them. The UG feels that a revision of such proposals by OTAC is absolutely necessary. However, the UG recognizes that depending on the time at which a target was scheduled, the time lag between the first (AO2) observation and the (re-submitted) second (AO3) observation can be very long for an ongoing scientific project. Nevertheless, UG feels that in subsequent AOs the problem will be reduced due to the fixed one year cycle.

SAS: Based on talk 4, the status of the SAS was discussed. The UG stressed the need to maintain the SAS for an extended period of time. The difficulty with varying platforms and operating systems (Linux) systems was recognized.
The UG feels that the support (via the XMM-Newton HelpDesk and the SAS Support Team) is extremely good.
A. Comastri pointed out that the documentation of the SAS workshop contains several recipes which are not accompanied by the corresponding threads. N. Schartel explained that the problem was already recognized and that a revision of the threads is ongoing with the due date of the next SAS workshop (early October). A. Comastri will have a look at the results. The UG encourages the project to improve the data analysis threads documentation.

Joint XMM-Newton/ESO proposals: F. Jansen reported that the AWG recommended to reanimate joint XMM-Newton/ESO proposals. The UG recognizes the importance of joint XMM-Newton/ESO projects especially for European astronomers and is looking forward to receiving a detailed proposal and intends to formulate a recommendation once such a proposal is available.

XMM-Newton catalog Given the richness of the XMM-Newton data, the UG was not surprised that the first source catalogue was not as much used as expected by some members of the community. It has to be considered that still the large majority of publications use only data from the primary target and that the scientific community is just starting to

explore the serendipitous potential of XMM-Newton observations. On a longer time scale the XMM-Newton source catalogue will be one of the main tools to explore the wealth of XMM-Newton scientific results.

Endorsement 2003-09-23/05 The UG strongly encourages the ongoing efforts of the SSC to produce the official XMM-Newton source catalogue.

Invisible targets from GT/AO-1: The UG supports the project in settling the issue of accepted targets which can not be observed due to visibility constraints. (These targets are left overs of the pre-launch uncertainties of XMM-Newton's final orbit).

Conference Proceedings: The UG expressed its concern on the pending publication of the proceedings of the "New Visions of the Universe in the XMM-Newton and Chandra Era" symposium. F. Jansen explained that the proceedings will be printed as ESA SP. He expects this to happen in the next 4-5 months.

Swift: UG feels that the actual TOO procedure is fully adequate for follow-up observations of Swift detections. This topic may be revisited based on experience with such observations.

The discussions ended at 13:30.

Date of next meeting: 2nd and 3rd of June 2004, at VILSPA (start at 13:30 2004/06/02; end at 12:30 2004/06/03)