

EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY

ASTRONOMY WORKING GROUP (AWG)

Recommendation on Science Communication

At its 120th meeting held on 27-28 September 2004 at ESTEC, Noordwijk (NL), the Astronomy Working Group (AWG) discussed again the important issue of ESA Science Communication.

The AWG is pleased about the recent communication successes, in particular regarding Mars Express, Cassini/Huygens, Hubble and, to a lesser extent XMM-Newton and Integral. The AWG has also noted an improvement regarding the access to information on the ESA Web site. All this has demonstrated the major and essential role played by the Science Programme Communication Service (SPCS) within the scientific activity of the Agency in selecting and providing to the corporate communication department the material relevant to the ESA science missions.

The AWG strongly believes that communication of scientific results is an essential part of the successful conduct of scientific missions. Scientific results have a very strong impact on the public, as also clearly demonstrated by other agencies and international organizations, and must be seen as the ultimate justification to the public at large, of the important financial investments in space missions. The AWG is, in particular, convinced of the importance of direct contacts between the SPCS and the scientists, as a guarantee of the proper and immediate scientific validation of the produced communication material (texts, images and videos). This is especially true for astronomy missions, which may be more difficult to bring within the public's reach than Solar System exploration missions.

The AWG, however, is extremely concerned for the future of the communication of ESA's science results, particularly in view of the anticipated increased budget transfers from the SPCS to the corporate communication department.

The AWG strongly fears that such budget transfers would seriously jeopardize the capability of SPCS to provide the appropriate scientific inputs essential for a high level of ESA corporate communication activities precisely at a time when space science communication has successfully changed the perception of the Agency among the general public. Therefore, the AWG unanimously recommends a strengthening of the SPCS means so that it can even better support the science communication activities undertaken at corporate level.