

House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology: Inquiry into the UK Space Agency

Submission from the Royal Astronomical Society

1. With more than 3500 Fellows, the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) is the leading UK body representing the interests of astronomers, space scientists and geophysicists. As such, the Society has taken a close interest in the UK Space Agency and strongly supported its establishment. We are therefore pleased to offer evidence to the Committee for this inquiry.
2. In summary, we argue that the Agency's effectiveness will be clearer once it is fully established, that its priorities should be framed by the existing strategies for space and looking forward, at least in part by the ambitions of the space science community. We further also note that investment in space-related activities in the UK remains some way behind that of our major European competitors.
3. **What progress has been made in setting up the UK Space Agency?**
4. Following the launch event in April, some transition work has taken place but little of this has been in the public domain so the Society is not able to comment on progress towards full operation as an executive agency from April 2011. For the Agency to have a greater impact, once it becomes fully established it needs to take a more visible lead on space policy.
5. **How does the UK Space Agency work with other bodies (national and international) on space issues?**
6. Given the short time since the Agency was set up it is too early to answer this question. The Society expresses the hope that the Agency will collaborate effectively with all the relevant national and international agencies and scientific bodies. In the UK, this would include the research councils, learned societies and networks of scientists and engineers in universities, research establishments and the space industry. Internationally, the Agency should strive to remain a strong partner in ESA and continue the existing work being done with other agencies like NASA, JAXA and the Chinese and Indian space organisations.
7. **Is the UK Space Agency more effective at coordinating space policy than its predecessor, the British National Space Centre?**
8. Again, it seems premature to make a judgement on the effectiveness of such a new organisation. The RAS lobbied Government for the creation of the new Agency, at least partly in the belief that a single body would be better placed to make decisions than an amorphous partnership of many government departments, non-departmental public bodies and industry.

9. If the UK Space Agency is to live up to its potential, then officials and advisory bodies (like the Space Leadership Council) should certainly continue to work with key stakeholders in the scientific community including the relevant learned societies like the RAS.

10. What should the UK Space Agency's priorities be for the next five years?

11. The RAS argues that the starting point for setting Agency priorities should be the recent Space Exploration Review, and Space Innovation and Growth Strategy, published in 2009 and 2010 respectively. The Review set out the options for UK involvement at different levels of investment and the benefits for science, innovation, commerce and society that would follow.
12. Looking forward, there is a vibrant space science community in the UK with no shortage of ambition. Recently, this community organised two meetings on the ESA Cosmic Visions call for proposals and put forward a series of innovative ideas for missions. The RAS strongly urges the Agency to use the talent of this community to help its future priorities for space science and exploration.
13. The Space Innovation and Growth Strategy set out a 20-year vision for space sponsored by industry, government and academia. This report argued that with Government support the UK space industry could grow to a value of £40 billion by 2030 and in the process create up to 100000 jobs.
14. The Society believes that the Government should capitalise on this opportunity with a corresponding expansion in civil space science and exploration activity alongside that in the private sector.
15. Setting of future priorities will depend not only on the budget for the UK Space Agency, but also the resources available for astronomy and space science research from the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC). Without adequate support for this science, it will be far more difficult to realise the potential benefits of the new Agency.

16. Is the UK Space Agency adequately funded?

17. In the light of the June Emergency Budget, the Comprehensive Spending Review now underway and the transition from BNSC to a full executive agency, the size of the final budget for the UK Space Agency remains unclear.
18. According to BIS, in the fiscal year 2008 – 2009, investment in civil space activities amounted to £268.7 million, with £106.07 million of this directed to space science and exploration. In comparison, in the year 2001 – 2002 expenditure on space science

and exploration amounted to £41.75 million. Much of this space activity is funded through mandatory and optional contributions to the European Space Agency (ESA).

19. The Society welcomes the increase in investment in the last decade, but notes that none the less the UK still remains parsimonious in comparison with other advanced nations. On the most recent figures, the contribution by the UK to ESA is only around half that of France and Germany and significantly lower than Italy. In GDP terms overall UK space funding is 21st in the world.
20. Given the strength of the commercial UK space industry and the opportunities it presents for high-value economic growth, the Society argues that investment in space science and exploration should increase to match that of our European competitors.