

New UK-led satellite will identify natural resources from space

The Mission and Agile Nanosatellite for Terrestrial Imagery Services (MANTIS) satellite, which received funding today will help energy and mining businesses identify new resources.

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Searching for natural resources is often an expensive and hazardous exercise, carried out in remote areas of the world. However, high resolution images of terrain taken by the MANTIS satellite and refined through novel data analysis will mean that prospectors can view Earth geology remotely, so reducing cost, removing risk and helping them to make better decisions.

The demonstration project is co-funded by industry and the UK Space Agency through its investment in the European Space Agency's (ESA) InCubed Programme, which aims to support innovative projects related to Earth Observation into the commercial market.

Beth Greenaway, Head of Earth Observation for the UK Space Agency said:

Observations of the Earth from space are central to modern day life in helping us to monitor climate change, map our environment, forecast the weather and now – finding new resources.

The UK is a world leader in Earth observation technology, and we hope to maintain momentum at the forthcoming European Space Agency Council of Ministers in November, where we will be reaffirming our ESA membership.

The InCubed funding will help bring this service from concept to a Minimum Viable Product stage, providing and demonstrating the first element of a potential satellite constellation, helping overcome the initial barrier to market and supporting the growth of the UK space sector.

UK space business Open Cosmos will provide the satellite platform and lead construction of the mission, Terrabotics will provide the data analytics service and the high resolution camera will be procured from Satlantis in Spain.

Rafel Jordá Siquier, founder and CEO of Open Cosmos said

Open Cosmos is very excited to work on this next generation Earth Observation satellite. This project shows that bringing together the best specialists in their fields, in this case Open Cosmos, Satlantis and Terrabotics, leads to great technical performance improvements of Earth Observation platforms, while at the same time significantly reducing time to orbit, complexity and cost of these systems.

Investing in Industrial Innovation – InCubed – is a European Space Agency programme supporting innovative projects related to Earth Observation, with the focus of removing barriers to entry of the commercial marketplace. The UK, jointly with Spain, is a lead contributor to the programme, with the nations having contributed €10 million each to the total budget of €35 million. UK InCubed funding has been awarded through a process of competitive calls for proposals.

The MANTIS contract was signed this afternoon (11 September) at ESA's ESRIIN facility near Rome, Italy.

The UK's investments in ESA are strengthening the UK's national capability in space, which is fundamental to modern day life, from weather forecasting and satellite TV, to communications and monitoring climate change.

The UK will make ambitious new subscriptions to ESA programmes in November, which will strengthen capabilities further and ensure the UK plays a significant role in global efforts to return humans to the Moon, bring back the first samples from Mars and develop innovative new technologies for life on Earth.

Ministerial portfolios confirmed at Department for Education

Michelle Donelan confirmed as Children and Families Minister

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The government has today confirmed Michelle Donelan as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, as Chris Skidmore returns as joint Minister of State for the Department for Education and the Department

for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Minister Donelan began the role on Tuesday 10 September, following the start of her predecessor Kemi Badenoch's maternity leave.

She takes on responsibility for children's social care, special educational needs and disabilities – including high needs funding – disadvantage and social mobility and support for the home learning environment.

She will also continue to support the Secretary of State in his role as skills lead, including on the delivery of T-Levels, apprenticeships and adult education, in recognition of the important role technical education plays as the country prepares to leave the European Union.

Minister for Children and Families Michelle Donelan said:

I truly believe that a good education is the key to creating a fair society where everyone, no matter where they come from or their circumstances, has opportunities to succeed.

From the earliest years of children's lives to the point at which they make decisions about their further education or training, I am proud to be joining a department that is focusing its efforts on the most disadvantaged in society.

Minister Donelan remains as a Government Whip, taking on the role at the Department for Education on an unpaid basis for the duration of Kemi Badenoch's maternity leave. She was previously a member of the Education Select Committee between July 2015 and October 2018.

Minister Skidmore returns as Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, following the resignation of Jo Johnson on Thursday 5 September.

The government has also announced today that:

- Minister of State for School Standards Nick Gibb will take on policy for early education and childcare including funding, support for the early years workforce, curriculum, quality and the early education entitlements.
- He will also add responsibility for PE and school sport and the Pupil Premium to his existing portfolio.
- Minister for the School System, Lord Agnew, will take on responsibility for the further education provider market, including quality and improvement.
- He will also lead on EU exit preparation, delivery of the Careers Strategy, the Opportunity Areas programme, school food and safeguarding in schools and post-16 settings, in addition to his existing brief.

Major funding boost for River Aire regeneration project

A project to revitalise one of Yorkshire's longest river has been given a further boost after The National Lottery Heritage Fund announced today it had awarded a £714,000 grant to the Environment Agency to return salmon to the River Aire.