

UK joins international research centre to tackle climate change and explore space

- UK to become a member of the Atlantic International Research (AIR) Centre to strengthen collaboration in oceans, space, energy and climate change science across the Atlantic regions
- UK Science Minister Chris Skidmore signs agreement in parliament with Portuguese Science Minister Manuel Heitor
- the signing reflects the UK's commitment to ongoing international science and research collaboration as part of our Industrial Strategy

Researchers will benefit from new international partnerships with 15 countries as part of the AIR Centre, thanks to a new agreement signed today.

Science Minister Chris Skidmore has signed an agreement in Parliament with Portuguese Science Minister Manuel Heitor that will make the UK a full member of the AIR Centre.

The Centre was set up in 2017 and aims to strengthen scientific collaboration with researchers from around the world working on shared challenges and opportunities, from cutting carbon emissions to understanding space. It is designed to foster economic development through Atlantic region collaborations on space, climate and oceans issues.

UK Science and Innovation Minister Chris Skidmore said:

To meet the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow it is essential that our best and brightest scientists and researchers are able to collaborate internationally.

Our joint-working through the Atlantic International Research Centre will incorporate a wide range of scientific work, from developing new space industries to tackling climate change. This will help meet a key aim of our modern Industrial Strategy, to retain and build on our world-leading position in research and development.

But as the first major economy to introduce a legally binding net zero target, work between our scientists and those from Portugal and 15 other countries could play a vital role in helping us eliminate the UK's contribution to global warming entirely by 2050.

Portuguese Science Minister Manuel Heitor said:

The AIR Centre is for future generations and to benefit our

societies through a better compromise between economic development and environmental preservation, with an emphasis on Atlantic regions.

It has been built upon a deep scientific diplomacy process launched in 2016 on Atlantic Interactions, involving governments, scientific/academic institutions and industry.

With headquarters in the Azores and several local hubs in several countries, the AIR Centre has been implementing a scientific agenda on Atlantic Interactions, which will benefit from the UK engagement, but also bring additional advantages to the UK on its 6 lines of action: Marine Resources and Biodiversity, Healthy and Clean Ocean, System integration from near space to deep ocean, Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change and Natural Hazards, Sustainable Energy Systems; and Data Science for the Atlantic Ocean, including its coasts, biodiversity and societies.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Portuguese Space Agencies to collaborate on future space science and developing space industry opportunities was also signed.

UK/Portugal collaboration in space is growing. Thanks to Britain's business environment, academic excellence, modern regulation and support from the UK Space Agency, pioneering space businesses are locating to the UK.

The UK Space Agency is working with Portuguese space business Omnidea to bring the development and testing of their innovative Plasma Focus Thruster to the UK. With an expected improved overall performance of up to 30% over existing thruster technology, the equipment could revolutionise spacecraft propulsion, whilst bringing new expertise, jobs and growth to the UK space sector.

This follows a [speech](#) made by the Science Minister Chris Skidmore earlier this week on the UK's space industry at the Policy Exchange, where he also announced a new agreement between the UK Space Agency and NASA.

International science collaboration is a priority for the UK government, as it aims to raise investment in research and development to 2.4% of GDP by 2027. In May, the government published the [International Research and Innovation Strategy](#) and has committed to [guarantee EU research](#) funding through the Horizon 2020 programme in the event of a no deal Brexit.

[Competition rules must continue to](#)

evolve with emergence of digital platforms

Competition rules need to change to prevent potential new forms of consumer harm, Business Secretary Greg Clark said today.

Competition rules must continue to evolve with emergence of digital platforms

- Businesses and regulators must also find ways to end the “worst effects” of business models that exploit loyalty
- government to consult on Competition and Markets Authority’s audit recommendations as Business Secretary urges sector to voluntarily reform as quick as possible before legislation
- Sir Jonathan Thompson appointed as new CEO of Financial Reporting Council to take forward establishment of new Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority

Competition rules must change as platforms and big data are disrupting the basic plumbing of markets – and despite the huge benefits they have brought, sometimes create new forms of harm, especially for ordinary consumers, Business Secretary Greg Clark said today, Thursday 18 July.

Speaking at the Social Market Foundation in London, Mr Clark said that ensuring retail markets in utilities “consistently work in the interest of all households” also presents “unfinished business” for government, competition authorities and regulators.

The Business Secretary said strengthening the role and remit of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will be crucial to ensuring that consumers are protected and that new digital markets and big data work in the interest of all households.

He said:

The CMA, our regulators, government, our Parliament and our people collectively have the knowledge, pragmatism and experience to be winners at the economically crucial global competition to design the rules of competition.

His comments came as the government set out its Strategic Steer for the

Authority, published today, on the independent role it must play in championing consumers.

Greg Clark praised the CMA in highlighting the “loyalty penalty” faced by many consumers, saying:

This government has responded extremely supportively to the CMA’s recommendations on the ‘loyalty penalty’. Business and their regulators must find ways to end the worst effects of these business models, and the companies involved should look to the energy industry as proof of our seriousness in the lengths we and regulators will go to if needed.

He warned of the consequences of markets with limited competition. He highlighted the particular issues of the audit market, dominated by the “big four” companies. Recent reports have shown the concerns that have been raised about the quality of audits, including for some of the largest audit firms. Mr Clark announced a consultation of the CMA’s “powerful and compelling package of recommendations” to reform the audit market.

The Business Secretary said:

The audit sector should be in no doubt about the need and the resolve to make these reforms. Audit quality must improve and we will do everything that’s needed. But the audit sector itself could do a great deal now voluntarily before any legislative change comes and I strongly urge them to do so. It is right, it is good for the economy, and it will give the sector much more credibility in helping shape the regime of the future.

He also announced the appointment of Sir Jonathan Thompson as the new CEO of the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), who, along with the other new members of the leadership team will take the organisation through its transformation to the new Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority, in line with the recommendations of the FRC Review. Sir Jonathan will be stepping down as Chief Executive of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to take up this new role in the Autumn.

Strategic Steer

The government has today published its [Strategic Steer to the CMA](#), which recognises the independent role it must play in championing the interests of consumers by ensuring competitive markets drive through more choice, fairer prices and innovative products.

The government also encourages the CMA to take a bold approach to enforcement to tackle anti-competitive behaviour and unfair trading, now and after the UK leaves the European Union.

While the CMA has a robust range of powers, the emergence of digital markets presents new challenges. Reforms to the CMA may be needed to ensure public confidence as we move to a digital economy and these will be consulted on in due course.

Competition Law Review

The government has also published a review which looks at the effectiveness of competition enforcement and changes made to the competition regime by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, which created the CMA.

The Competition Law Review finds that the direction of travel is broadly positive. More competition cases are being opened, merger reviews and market studies are being brought to conclusion more quickly, and stakeholder views suggest a good degree of confidence in the regime.

The report notes that we need to consider how well-equipped the UK's competition framework is to respond to current and future competition challenges.

In its upcoming Competition Green Paper, the Government will take a wide-ranging look at the institutions, powers and tools that promote and enforce competition in the UK.

Audit Reform

The Government has set out plans to bring forward significant reforms that deliver a competitive and resilient audit market following recommendations from the CMA.

Among other things, the CMA suggested that the government should:

- enhance regulatory scrutiny of audit committees
- give the new regulator flexible powers to implement a joint audit regime
- implement an operational split between audit and non-audit practices
- give the regulator powers to monitor the resilience of audit firms and intervene where necessary

[A consultation](#), launching today which will run for 8 weeks, will seek views on recommendations made by the CMA to improve competition and resilience in the audit market. It will close on 13 September.

Sir Jonathan Thompson has been appointed as new CEO of the Financial Reporting Council – this important appointment will lead the organisation in its transformation to the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority.

Sir Jonathan is currently Chief Executive and First Permanent Secretary of HMRC. He has been with the organisation since April 2016.

Behaviour & Insights Research – Terms and Conditions guidance for

businesses

The government has today published [new research](#) which shows companies how the use of simple Q&As, graphics and icons in their contractual terms can improve consumer understanding.

Making policies clear and easy to understand will help build customer trust and protect brand reputation. The research includes a number of key findings which the government is urging businesses to implement as good practice:

- display key terms as frequently asked questions, for example, “How can I return items?” or “Do I have to pay the return postage?”
- use icons to illustrate key terms: Choose the most important points that you want customers to understand and illustrate these with simple icons. For example, use a stopwatch icon together with an explanation like, “Must return purchase within 14 days for a refund”
- show customers your terms within a scrollable text box instead of requiring a click to view them
- provide information in short chunks at the right time – Use pop-up notifications or comments to the side of forms e.g. provide information about terms and conditions as customers fill in their personal details
- use illustrations and comics, for example comics’ speech bubbles give customers information about facts, dates, and figures
- tell customers how long it will take to read a policy to increase the chance that they will open T’s and C’s and/or privacy policies
- when a customer is about to buy something or set up an account, let them know when it’s their last chance to read any relevant policies before they do so.

Focus on skills to help maritime flourish

Maritime Skills Commission to be set up to look at careers at sea and training gaps.

Focus on skills to help maritime flourish

- Commission will be set up to help highlight the skills needed to ensure the maritime industry thrives
- Maritime 2050 and Clean Maritime Plan were key successes over the past

12 months

- government shows its commitment to supporting growth and innovation in the maritime sector

A Maritime Skills Commission will be set up in the coming year to look at careers at sea and how to plug training gaps for those working in the industry.

Maritime Minister Nusrat Ghani launched the [Maritime annual report](#) today (18 July 2019). The document reflects on the work the Department for Transport and its agencies has carried out in the past year and looks forward to ambitious plans that will be delivered in the upcoming 12 months.

This includes a review into the maritime sector's skills needs to ensure there is a good supply of well-trained professionals for the industry.

The report also focuses on the upcoming London International Shipping Week, a focal point for the sector which will be themed around International Trade in a Changing World.

Maritime Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

Our maritime sector is crucial to the vitality of the UK's economy.

The annual report highlights the great work the government has done this year to support and boost this industry.

There is also lots more planned for the next year as we deliver on Maritime 2050 and ensure this sector reaches its potential.

In the past year, the government has published its flagship [Maritime 2050 strategy](#), a long-term plan to shape the sector for the next 30 years, including through being a world leader in maritime technology and as well as seafarer training.

Last week, the [Clean maritime plan](#) was also unveiled. This aims to have all new ships ordered for UK waters to have zero-emission capabilities by 2025.