

Press release: More than £3m invested in space exploration

A further £230,000 of funding has been awarded to studies into experiments that could be built and flown to the International Space Station (ISS), which could potentially support future human exploration of space.

The £3 million from the UK Space Agency Aurora Science programme, which is exploiting the data from robotic exploration, including our major investment in ESA's ExoMars mission, will target questions of past and present life on Mars, investigating the presence of water and the geochemical environment as well as atmospheric trace gases and their sources.

Science Minister, Jo Johnson, said:

"Science enables and shapes the UK's future in space exploration. This government funding will play a vital role in ensuring UK academics can continue to study the secrets of our solar system, from the polar regions of the Moon to the potential of life on Mars.

"Research and innovation are at the core of our Industrial Strategy, and by investing in these types of projects, we are reinforcing our position as a world leader in these important and exciting areas."

The £3 million has gone to 17 academics and individual scientists working at UK research organisations. The scientific objectives of the first mission in the Aurora programme, ExoMars, are to understand Mars's environment and its atmosphere.

In addition, £230,000 of funding has been awarded to the UK microgravity and space environments community in academia and industry. Four proposals have been funded, which will study concepts and designs for experiments which will deliver high quality science on the ISS as part of a national science programme.

British ESA astronaut Tim Peake was involved in many experiments during his sixth-month mission on the ISS from December 2015 to June 2016, including several with contributions from UK scientists.

Libby Jackson, Human Spaceflight and Microgravity Programme Manager at the UK Space Agency, said:

"Microgravity science in the UK has grown rapidly since we joined the ISS programme back in 2012. Any future mission to the ISS represents a really exciting opportunity to build on this and to ensure that the UK science community is properly placed to capitalise on the research opportunities that such a flight would offer."

The studies undertaken will address how high quality science can be implemented within the constraints of the ISS and provide an accurate cost

for the full flight experiment.

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