

Press release: New projects see UK space firms tackle global challenges

Improved disaster response in Commonwealth states and tropical disease control are among the goals of 10 new projects involving British space organisations, Science Minister Sam Gyimah announced today.

The Industrial Strategy highlights the importance of bringing together the UK's world-class research with business investment to develop technologies and industries of the future that benefit society, as well as our economy. The UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme uses UK space expertise to deliver innovative solutions to real world problems across the globe. This helps some of the world's poorest countries, while building effective partnerships that can lead to growth opportunities for British companies.

The successful projects, worth £38 million in total, are led by a diverse range of organisations from the UK's growing space sector, from large companies such as Inmarsat and CGI, to start-ups such as Guildford-based Earth-i. The UK Space Agency and industry are working together to grow the UK's share of the global space market to 10% by 2030.

Science Minister Sam Gyimah said:

"The UK's space sector is going from strength to strength. It pioneers new technology and provides jobs for 40,000. Today I can announce that the space sector's capabilities are being put to use to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges.

"The UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme will help developing countries tackle big issues like disaster relief and disease control, while showcasing the services and technology on offer from our leading space businesses."

The International Partnership Programme is part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's (BEIS) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): a £1.5 billion fund from the UK Government, which supports cutting-edge research and innovation on global issues affecting developing countries.

There are 22 existing projects already delivering benefits, including a partnership between Inmarsat and the Philippine government to reduce the impact of natural disasters using satellite communications, which was called into action in December and January when tropical storms killed hundreds of people and displaced tens of thousands more to evacuation centres. The project used British technology and expertise to help relief workers get information in and out of the disaster zones which greatly increase the effectiveness of the response effort, helping them save lives and restore critical infrastructure.

Rupert Pearce, CEO of Inmarsat, said:

"Inmarsat was originally founded to save lives at sea and we are proud that, almost 40 years later, our robust, reliable satellite communication services are deployed throughout the world to assist following natural disasters and humanitarian crises, wherever they occur.

"With the invaluable support of the UK Space Agency, we have been able to

pre-equip disaster response teams in the Philippines with vital satellite communications solutions. This meant that when two deadly cyclones hit the country over a two week period, resulting in loss of life and serious damage to terrestrial communications infrastructure, Philippine authorities were able to utilise Inmarsat's mobile connectivity services to assess the damage and identify the needs of those regions most affected."

All IPP projects are match-funded by consortium members and international partners to ensure maximum value for money. The programme is fully compliant with Official Development Assistance (ODA) with the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recently reporting that the UK Space Agency had developed robust procedures for ensuring ODA eligibility and was thorough in its ODA compliance screening.

The UK Space Agency is also funding five Business Applications Ambassadors to work with industry across the UK. The Agency already supports a network of business incubators and the new ambassadors will advise on business applications and other opportunities in the UK.

Full list of new projects:

1) British Geological Survey, Nottingham: Modelling Exposure Through Earth Observation Routines (METEOR): EO-based Exposure, Nepal and Tanzania

Grant: £2.8 million

Target countries: Nepal and Tanzania (test countries), rolling out to all 48 Least Developed ODA countries

Theme: Disaster Management

At present, there is a poor understanding of population exposure in developing countries, which causes major challenges when making Disaster Risk Management decisions. METEOR takes a step-change in the application of Earth Observation exposure data by developing and delivering more accurate levels of population exposure to natural hazards. Providing new consistent data to governments, town planners and insurance providers will promote welfare and economic development in these countries and better enable them to respond to the hazards when they do occur.

2) Satellite Applications Catapult, Didcot: Space Enabled Monitoring of Illegal Gold Mining

Grant: £3.3 million

Target country: Colombia

Theme: Mining

This project is about improving detection and efficiency in monitoring illegal gold mining in remote forested areas in Colombia. The project will make use of freely available Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) data, and incorporate machine-learning techniques to show suspected areas of illegal mining, in a user-friendly web portal. The project will support the promotion of safe and secure working environments for all workers, and a reduction in the health-related effects from the high rates of mercury contamination associated with illegal mining.

3) EARTH-i Ltd, Guildford: ACCORD

Grant: £2.7 million

Target countries: Kenya and Rwanda

Theme: Agriculture

Coffee is the second most traded commodity globally, with revenues directly benefitting farmers in developing countries. Despite this, in Kenya and Rwanda 67% and 80% of people respectively live in poverty, including most smallholder coffee farmers. Unpredictable weather, pests, diseases, nutrient depletion and other factors limit earning potential by hitting coffee quality and quantity. ACCORD will deliver advice from satellite Earth Observation to help smallholder coffee farmers make significant improvements to crop quality and yield, providing them with access to timely, geo-targeted advice through a simple mobile application. This will allow smallholder farmers to achieve higher incomes for their work, improving quality of life for their families.

4) Rothamsted Research, Harpenden: EcoProMIS

Grant: £3.9 million

Target Country: Colombia

Theme: Agriculture

The EcoProMIS project aims to help Colombian rice and oil palm farmers to improve productivity and stabilise incomes, allowing them to compete globally whilst responding to climate change and producing responsibly. The project uses satellite Earth Observation alongside environmental and crop data to research the impact of crop and ecosystem management on biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions and productivity. The outcome will be a partnership of farmers, research institutes and industry experts that creates comprehensive sets of crop and ecosystem data. This data will be made freely available for the Colombian partners to improve the environmental, technical and financial efficiency of their processes. It will also provide information to insurance firms, government food processors and further beneficiaries to create income for sustainable knowledge.

5) HR Wallingford, Wallingford: An integrated dengue early warning system driven by Earth Observations in Vietnam

Grant: £4.1 million

Target Country: Vietnam

Theme: Health

This work will provide a tool that enables advance warning of likely dengue outbreaks, allowing public health authorities to mobilise resources to those most in need. The project will also provide forecasts of dengue fever under a range of climate change scenarios. The system will link Earth Observation data with climate forecasting and a land-surface model to predict for the first time the impacts of various elements (such as water availability, land-use, climate), on the likelihood of future dengue epidemics. The dengue forecasting tool will also include a water assessment module, delivering the additional benefit of improving water management in Vietnam's transboundary river basins.

6) Janus TCD, Stourbridge: Improved Situational Awareness In Fisheries (ISAIIF)

Grant: £5.5 million

Target Country: The Philippines

Theme: Illegal Fishing

The ISAIIF project will use satellite technology to help the Philippine government tackle Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in its waters. This project aims to halt the decline of a fisheries sector that employs more than 4 million people. The project will use a wide variety of data sources, including satellite data to understand the location, time and behaviour of specific vessels at sea. This will be combined with a satellite navigation application with an authentication tool through which Philippine fisherfolk confirm their compliance, creating a new digital barrier to IUU fishers within the supply chain. Outcomes will include better monitoring and enforcement of IUU by the Philippine government, improved safety, security and economic productivity for Philippine fisherfolk, benefits to the Philippine economy, and an improvement in the international reputation of Philippine fisheries.

7) CGI, Leatherhead: Peatland Assessment in SE Asia by Satellite (PASSES)

Grant: £2 million

Target Countries: Indonesia, Malaysia

Theme: Forestry

Tropical forest fires affect over 20 million people in South East Asia, leading to significant deteriorations in public health and premature mortalities as well as contributing to global CO2 emissions and other negative environmental impacts. Many fires occur over drained peatland areas. This project will use satellite observations and measurements to map peat condition, even when under a forest canopy. By monitoring water levels and improving hydrology in the peatland areas, the risk of fire can be dramatically reduced. By using freely available observations from satellites through the EU Copernicus programme and use of emerging industrial hosted processing capabilities, PASSES will prove that peatland monitoring is a cost effective way to reduce forest fires.

8) eOsphere Limited, Didcot: SIBELIUs: Improved resilience for Mongolian herding communities using satellite derived services

Grant: £1.6 million

Target Country: Mongolia

Theme: Disaster Management / Insurance

Mongolia is a large country with around 30% of its population dependant on livestock herding who are exposed to extreme weather events (dzuds). Dzuds are increasingly exacerbated by climate change and are highly damaging to Mongolia's economy and devastating for the poorest herders. A typical dzud can impact tens of thousands of herders, many of who will lose all their livestock leaving them in extreme poverty, with associated impacts for the wider economy. The SIBELIUs project will provide greater dzud-resilience for herders by providing the Mongolian Research Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment with new sources of satellite data, plus a geo-spatial database for distributing new and upgraded environmental products to key stakeholders supporting herding communities.

9) United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR): CommonSensing
Grant: £9.6 million
Target Countries: Fiji, The Solomon Islands, Vanuatu

The overall aim of CommonSensing is to improve resilience towards climate change, including disaster risk reduction, and contribute to sustainable development in three selected Commonwealth Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The project will combine earth observation data to provide stakeholders with access to important information regarding disaster risks (including disaster risk planning, food security, climate risk and other environmental concerns). This information will be accessible to beneficiaries through a web portal and mobile applications. CommonSensing project will create long-term investment loops, define priorities for future climate funds proposals and ensure a sustainable service-platform, running three years after IPP project end.

10) HR Wallingford, Wallingford: Minimising the risk of tailings dams failures through the use of remote sensing data
Grant: £2.7 million
Target Country: Peru
Theme: Mining

Tailing dams are earth embankments used to store toxic mine waste and effluent which can be more than 100m high. Their rate of failure is high, due to poor design regulations and less rigorous construction methods than for normal water-retaining dams, especially in low-income countries. This project will use Earth Observation and Global Navigation Satellite System technologies to allow for more effective monitoring of the dams and therefore quicker action can be taken to avoid the tailings dams failures. The project will help to reduce damage to ecosystem services downstream of mines upon which many vulnerable communities rely for both their source of water and their livelihoods.

Press release: Government announces Mr Justice Langstaff will lead inquiry into the Infected Blood scandal

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington, today (8 February) announced that Mr Justice Langstaff will chair the public Inquiry into the infected blood scandal.

Mr Justice Langstaff will be the full time Chair of the Inquiry from 1 May following his retirement from the High Court. In advance of this, he will be consulting further with people affected, their families and other stakeholders on the Inquiry's terms of reference.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington said:

The infected blood scandal of the 1970s and 80s is a tragedy that should never have happened. We must now ensure it can never happen again.

I am determined that this independent Inquiry will give victims and their families the answers they have spent decades waiting for.

I want to ensure the Inquiry is now established as quickly as possible. I thank Justice Langstaff for agreeing to lead this important work and Government will provide him with all the support he needs.

Mr Justice Langstaff said:

Providing infected blood and plasma products to patients truly deserves to be called a major scandal. I intend through this Inquiry to be able to provide both some well-needed answers to the victims and their families, and recommend steps to ensure that its like will never happen again.

Nothing less than a thorough examination of the evidence will suffice: and the process needs to lead to a full report within the shortest timescales that such thoroughness can accommodate.

Once the further consultation on the terms of reference has taken place, the Minister for the Cabinet Office will confirm the final terms to the House of Commons.

Press release: Parliament approves real terms increase in funding for local authorities

Parliament has today (7 February 2018) approved the funding settlement for English local authorities that will see a real terms increase in available resources over the next 2 years and give them access to over £200 billion from 2015 to 2020 to deliver the high-quality services their local communities need.

Ahead of today's Parliamentary debate Communities Secretary announced extra

funding to help local authorities meet the needs of vulnerable people and support services in rural areas.

A further £150 million will be available to those councils providing adult social care. In addition, £16 million will be made available to councils providing services in rural areas, taking the total rural services grant to £81 million – the highest it has ever been.

This follows consultation with local government on the funding plans announced in December that included giving councils additional financial freedoms to deliver services for their most vulnerable residents while protecting Council Tax payers from excessive increases in their bills. The threshold at which councils must hold a referendum before raising Council Tax has been set in line with inflation at 3%.

Ten additional business retention rates pilots – for areas of varying sizes and location – were also confirmed. These areas will keep 100% of growth in business rates, which will stay in communities and be spent on local priorities.

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid said:

Parliament has today approved a settlement that strikes a balance between relieving growing pressure on local government whilst ensuring that hard-pressed taxpayers do not face excessive bills.

We have listened to representations made and delivered on these requests: a real terms increase in resources over the next 2 years, more freedom and fairness, and greater certainty to plan and secure value for money.

Government has also launched a review of local authorities' needs and resources to enable a new funding system to be devised. Ministers are encouraging local authorities to respond to the [consultation](#) ahead of the deadline on 12 March 2018.

View [details of the settlement](#), including funding breakdowns for individual authorities.

Further information

The settlement for local government sees a real terms increase in resources to local government over the next 2 years (£44.3 billion in 2017 to 2018 to £45.6 billion in 2019 to 2020)

In December the threshold at which local authorities must hold a referendum in order to raise Council Tax was confirmed in line with inflation (3%). This change, combined with the additional flexibility on the Adult Social Care

precept confirmed last year, gives local authorities support in relieving pressure on local services – including adults and children’s social care.

Following feedback from the sector as part of the consultation, the government has today also announced some additional measures:

- £150 million Adult Social Care Support Grant in 2018 to 2019
- a further £16 million for Rural Services Delivery Grant in 2018 to 2019 to allow for funding commensurate with 2016 to 2017 levels

In December, 10 additional business retention rates pilots – for areas of varying sizes and location – were confirmed. It is expected that combined these will raise over £150 million in 2018 to 2019, which will stay in communities and be spent on local priorities.

The Communities Secretary also published a [consultation on need and resources](#) in December that aims to implement a new system based on its findings in 2020 to 2021.

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[News story: Essential maintenance to our online service](#)

Updated: CHS issues.

We're doing essential maintenance to CHS. Between 6pm and 9pm on Monday 12 January, you might experience issues with CHS.

Sorry for any inconvenience.

[Press release: Planned Israeli settlement: statement by Minister for Middle East](#)

Minister Burt said:

The UK strongly condemns the Israeli government's decision to establish a second new settlement deep in the West Bank in less than a year. These plans could involve the retroactive 'legalisation' of the outpost of Havat Gilad.

Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the physical viability of the two-state solution. We call on both parties to refrain from actions which make peace more difficult.

Further information

- Follow Minister Burt on Twitter [@AlistairBurtUK](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
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