

The sky is not the limit: could you be the UK's next astronaut?

For the first time since 2008, The European Space Agency (ESA) is on the lookout for new astronauts, and UK citizens of any walk of life are invited to apply.

Following an intensive period of training, which will include a 3-week course in caving and a course in practical geology, the new astronauts will take their first flights into space when they are deployed to the International Space Station. They are likely to be part of the crew on the next missions to the Moon in the late 2020s and through the 2030s.

ESA is also issuing a special call for candidates with physical disabilities to apply to its astronaut reserve. The pilot project aims to open the astronaut career path to people who, until now, have been excluded from space flight. Those with a lower limb deficiency or who are considered to be of short stature and meet other recruitment criteria are invited to apply. ESA will invest in the necessary adaptations of space hardware to enable these otherwise excellently qualified professionals to serve as crew members on a safe space mission.

The UK Space Agency expects the next professional UK astronaut to be selected through this recruitment drive and encourages all eligible applicants to apply.

Experience of the space sector is not essential, but candidates will need a master's degree (or higher) in Natural Sciences, Medicine, Engineering, Mathematics or Computer Sciences or be qualified as an experimental test pilot. Fluency in English is essential along with other requirements. The right person for the job will also be calm under pressure and be willing to be the participate in life science experiments – past experiments have included studying the effects of microgravity on human bone and tissue.

Science Minister, Amanda Solloway, said:

Becoming an astronaut is a dream for many, and Tim Peake's historic mission to space in 2015 showed millions of Brits that it can become a reality, while putting the UK firmly on the map as a leading space-faring nation.

With the UK space sector receiving more government backing than ever before, it's time for a new generation of British astronauts to answer this call as we continue working with our European partners to push the boundaries of science and exploration even further.

In 1989 Helen Sharman became the first British astronaut when she was

selected for the joint UK/Soviet Union mission, Juno. In May 1991, Sharman spent eight days in space and became the first female astronaut to visit the Mir Space Station.

Tim Peake was the first British recruit though the ESA astronaut programme in 2009 where he and 5 other applicants from the United Kingdom made it to the final stage of the application process. In 2015 Tim spent 6 months living and working on the International Space Station and was the first British astronaut to take part in a spacewalk.

British ESA astronaut, Tim Peake, said:

Over the next few years and decades, space exploration will become even more exciting as we travel back to the Moon and even further to Mars. For space missions to succeed, they require highly motivated people from diverse backgrounds to combine their skills and work as a team. The next generation of UK citizens have so much to offer the world, and so I would encourage anyone who has dreamt of pushing the boundaries of what is possible to take this opportunity to be part of ESA's future cohort of space pioneers.

The position of astronaut is just one possible career path in the UK space industry, which employs close to 42,000 people in various roles from aerospace engineers, satellite technicians, research scientists to entrepreneurs and lawyers. Anyone who meets the criteria to be an astronaut is invited to submit a complete application online through the ESA careers website.

Applications will open on 31 March and stay open for two months until 28 May. There will then be a 17-month process of screening, psychological, practical, and psychometric testing, medical selections and two interview selections until the final applicants will be appointed and announced in October 2022.

The UK Space Agency has been a member of the ESA human exploration programme since 2012, and its participation is not affected by Brexit.

The UK Space Industry has a total income of £14.8 billion, and its contribution to GDP is expected to grow as the government boosts investment in space-related activity. The UK Space Agency is leading major programmes to support the first UK space launches, pioneer satellite innovation, and foster space hubs across the Union.

Government delivers more than one

million devices to disadvantaged pupils

More than one million laptops and tablets have now been delivered to the most disadvantaged children across the country, as part of a £400 million government investment that will support schools and young people for years to come.

Official statistics published today show the government has delivered 1,055,745 laptops and tablets to the children who need them most to help make sure their education can continue during the pandemic.

Thousands of families have also received additional data from mobile operators, following the Department's work to help children without internet access get online. This has supported access to educational resources to help children while most are being educated from home.

The news comes after the Department for Education last month announced a further 300,000 laptops and tablets to help even more disadvantaged children and young people learn at home. Schools are now receiving these top-ups to their original device deliveries – with those schools with the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils being prioritised to receive devices first.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

I know what a challenging period this has been for pupils, teachers and parents – but it has been nothing short of inspiring to see schools and staff going above and beyond, as they always have done, to give our pupils the very best education possible.

Online access has been an important part of this work and will continue to be as we help young people catch-up after the disruption caused by the pandemic, which is why the delivery of these one million laptops is so vital. They represent one million children who will not let their education be overcome by this virus.

I want parents to know that we'll continue to do everything we can to protect our children's education at this unprecedented time and ensure they have the tools they need to get on with and make the most of their lives.

Work to deliver remote learning will lay the foundations for a long-term strategy to take advantage of the opportunities technology presents. The substantial number of devices provided, along with other initiatives such as the EdTech Demonstrator Programme, mean children will be able to access support for years to come.

The 1.3 million devices the government is providing sits alongside a package of extensive support for the most disadvantaged children. This includes partnering with the UK's leading mobile network operators to provide free data to disadvantaged families, alongside a further £300 million being invested in tutoring programmes building on the existing £1bn Covid Catch Up Fund.

In addition, the Oak National Academy has been 'zero rated' by eleven major telecoms providers, including Vodafone, 02, Three, and BT. This means no data charges will apply if lessons from the country's online classroom are accessed through a mobile phone from participating providers.

The news comes as the government continues to support the most disadvantaged, including those on Free School Meals. Every child eligible for free school meals will be supported while they are learning remotely during the school term, and with the support of the government's £170 million Covid Winter Grant Scheme, every council in England will be keeping vulnerable children warm and well-fed during the February half term.

Julian David, Chief Executive Officer of techUK, said:

Securing 1.3 million devices for disadvantaged children and young people in these challenging times, and delivering over one million, is a testament to how the UK tech industry and government have pulled together to support families that need help the most.

The devices programme is a great example of industry and government collaboration, which will help children's futures for generations to come. I'm keen to deepen this collaboration and see it go even further, and the tech industry stands ready and eager to provide further support for this critical mission.

Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive Officer of the Confederation of School Trusts, said:

The milestone of 1 million laptops is really important. Teachers and leaders have worked extraordinarily hard to provide pupils with high quality remote education during the lockdown. Schools are doing their utmost to support these pupils, including through the teacher-led Oak National Academy. We support the Government's ambition to make sure all pupils can access high quality teaching, at home and in school, and will work closely with Government to continue to improve access and connectivity.

In addition, the Department has also made £4.84 million available for Oak National Academy to provide video lessons in a broad range of subjects for Reception up to Year 11. This will all help to make sure there is as little impact as possible on children's education while they are learning from home.

The Prime Minister has confirmed that the current attendance restrictions in schools and colleges will remain in place until 8 March at the earliest.

Children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people will still be able to attend schools and colleges, including special schools and alternative provision. Early years settings also remain open.

Bristol landowner Maysouth Ltd fined for neglecting riverside wall

The Environment Agency was concerned that masonry and other debris from the disintegrating wall could be washed downstream and disrupt a tidal flap, increasing flood risk to a large number of properties.

The Agency had earlier inspected the southern boundary wall at the Windmill Farm Business Park, Bartley Street, and found it to be in a poor condition. Some sections had collapsed into the Malago Brook, a tributary of the Lower River Avon. What remained of the wall, was also at risk of failure. The watercourse is a main river.

In 2009 the landowner, Maysouth Ltd applied to the Environment Agency for permission to carry out repairs. Its application was refused on the grounds the company had failed to provide sufficient information.

However, permission was granted for certain temporary works including the installation of scaffolding wall props in the river channel.

In 2011 the Agency decided it was necessary to install a trash screen where the Malago Brook enters a culvert. This would prevent debris being carried downstream to the confluence of the Malago and Lower River Avon where it could block or force open a tidal flap.

However, it was not possible for the screen to be installed because of the poor condition of the retaining wall. The Agency decided to delay any in-river works until the repairs had been completed.

Following a site meeting in December 2011, Maysouth Ltd said it no longer believed the wall was its responsibility and would not be carrying out any repairs.

The company claimed maintenance of the wall and any repairs lay with Bristol City Council. This view was challenged by the council that said it did not own the wall or the land it stood on. Therefore, responsibility fell to Maysouth Ltd as riparian owner.

In September 2014, the Agency served the company with a legal notice

requiring it to repair the wall. Following further site visits and unsuccessful discussions, the Agency served a second notice in May 2016 with a 6 month deadline. When officers returned in December 2016 the wall still hadn't been repaired and 3 sections had fallen away. Temporary scaffolding supports were still in place and there was debris in the river channel.

Maysouth Ltd were subsequently prosecuted to ensure future compliance. Two years later in May 2018, the company finally accepted it was responsible for the wall and half the riverbed and that it had not complied with the notice.

Trudy Dove of the The Environment Agency said:

We have a responsibility to manage flood risks on main rivers. We were concerned that masonry from this damaged wall could block or jam open a tidal flap and increase the flood risk to a large number of commercial and residential properties.

Maysouth Ltd had ample opportunity to repair the wall, but chose not to meet their legal responsibilities, leaving us with no choice other than to prosecute.

Despite the earlier conviction, Maysouth Ltd, failed to carry out the repairs so were brought back to court in 2020. Appearing before Bristol magistrates, the company contested that a further daily penalty should be imposed for non-compliance. The court disagreed and at a hearing on 28 January, 2021, Maysouth Ltd, of Rainbow Phoenix Way, Swansea Enterprise Park, Swansea, Wales, were fined £26,760 and ordered to pay £10,585 costs for continuing to fail to comply with a notice served in May 2016.

District Judge Patricia Evans said the defendant had a responsibility to complete the repairs in a 'timely fashion'. It simply had not done that and while it was accepted negotiations over the required permit would take time, she found the company had been 'dragging its feet' despite extensive efforts by the Environment Agency to resolve the issue over a number of years.

Crime news: extension to the 2017 Standard Crime Contract

The 2017 Standard Crime Contract will be extended for a year (until 31 March 2022) in accordance with clause 2.3 of the Contract for Signature, and further to the [Headline Intentions](#) published in August 2020.

After carefully considering our approach for the 2022 crime contract against the backdrop of uncertainty and the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, we recognise

that launching a tender in April – as we had originally planned – would add further pressure during an already challenging period.

We are therefore offering existing providers a further six month extension to the contract (until 30 September 2022).

Contract background

The 2017 Standard Crime Contract is the current contract between the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) and providers for the provision of face-to-face criminal legal aid in England and Wales.

Contract timeline

The 2017 Standard Crime Contract commenced on 1 April 2017 with an initial term of three years (the Contract Period) with an option to extend it by up to two years.

In accordance with the contract terms, and further to the Headline Intentions we published in August 2020, the LAA will now extend the contract for a further year, until 31 March 2022.

This contract extension is automatic – existing providers do not need to do anything and will receive a formal notification letter.

Offer of further six month extension

In addition, existing providers will be offered a further six month extension to the Contract Period (until 30 September 2022).

All providers must respond by email as specified in the Contract Extension letter by 12pm on Monday 8 March 2021.

Contract extension letter

All providers will be sent a notice letter via email detailing the above extensions.

These letters will be sent on the 17 February 2021 to the email address of the person you have advised us is the Contract Liaison Manager for your organisation.

If you have not received your letter by Friday 19 February 2021, please email crime.contracts@justice.gov.uk and someone will respond to you as soon as possible (Please check your junk folder first before emailing).

Further information

[Versions of the Standard Crime Contract 2017 documents are available on GOV.UK](#)

[Headline Intentions](#)

Ministry of Justice statement in fee-paid judicial litigation: February 2021

[unable to retrieve full-text content]A further update on work MOJ is doing to respond to the CJEU judgment of November 2018 in O'Brien No.2 and the Supreme Court's judgment in Miller of December 2019.