

# One small step towards spaceflight in the UK as government publishes environmental guidance

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## Government consultation on environmental objectives for the spaceflight regulator

I am today publishing the [consultation on the government's environmental objectives](#), which the spaceflight regulator will take into account when exercising its spaceflight functions under the [Space Industry Act 2018](#). We're also consulting on the [associated guidance](#) to the regulator on how the government expects it to interpret these environmental objectives.

Responses to the consultation are sought by Wednesday 24 March 2021.

This government is committed to growing the space sector in the UK and cementing our leading role in this sector by unlocking a new era in commercial spaceflight across the UK. Government and industry have set a target to grow the UK's share of the global market to 10% by 2030. The UK space sector directly employs 41,900 people and contributes £5.7 billion to UK gross domestic product (GDP).

The space sector will need another 30,000 people if it's to achieve its ambition to secure 10% of the world market by 2030. To support this, our spaceflight programme will enable commercial spaceports to be established in the UK that will facilitate a variety of spaceflight activities, including vertical and horizontal satellite launch and sub-orbital spaceflight.

Growing the UK's launch capability will help bring new jobs and economic benefits to communities and organisations right across the UK, as well as inspiring the next generation of space scientists and engineers. Harnessing the opportunities provided by commercial spaceflight will feed into our emerging [national space strategy](#), the government's agenda to level-up the UK, and global Britain.

Access to space and the use of space-based technology also brings many benefits to the environment, allowing us to, for example, observe weather patterns, monitor climate change, manage natural resources, and monitor for harmful activities such as illegal deforestation, fishing and animal poaching.

The UK space sector has an established world-class satellite manufacturing capability and technical expertise, which already makes a significant contribution to global efforts to monitor and understand the Earth's environment. For example, the 2018 British-built satellite Aeolus is used to revolutionise the accuracy of weather forecasting, providing benefits to all citizens on Earth.

The introduction of commercial spaceflight to the UK will have environmental implications at the global, national, regional and local level. The objectives and guidance recognise that to deliver the government's economic, social and environmental objectives, we need to balance mitigating the potentially negative environmental impacts of spaceflight activities with enhancing the strong contributions commercial spaceflight can make to both the economy and our local and global efforts to monitor the environment.

The [Space Industry Act 2018](#) requires applicants for a spaceport or launch operator licence to submit an assessment of environmental effects (the assessment) as part of their licence application. The objectives and guidance that government propose setting explain how the spaceflight regulator will take into account the assessment when deciding licence applications and setting licence conditions.

We've worked with environmental agencies, public bodies and government departments to ensure coherence with our national and international policies and obligations. Our intention is to have these objectives in place by the time the secondary legislation and guidance (on which we [consulted on 29 July 2020](#)) comes into force this summer and the regulator begins receiving and assessing applications.

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## **PHE statement on Variant of Concern and new Variant Under Investigation**

The New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) has

named one additional SARS-CoV-2 Variant Under Investigation and one additional Variant of Concern.

Over 4,000 SARS-CoV-2 variants have been identified across the globe. Most of these are not of concern. The UK's world-leading genomic sequencing programme continues to closely monitor these variants as they arise and develop.

VUI202102/01 is characterised by the presence of the E484K spike protein mutation and a small number of other mutations. It is derived from lineage A.23, which is seen internationally, but the E484K additional mutation on this lineage has only been seen within the UK. It was first identified by Public Health England (PHE) on 10 January, while investigating a cluster of 5 cases linked to members of staff from a hospital in Liverpool. So far, 55 cases of this variant have been found.

VOC202102/02 is a specific cluster characterised by the presence of the E484K spike protein mutation on the VOC202012/01 SARS-CoV-2 B1.1.7 variant that was first detected in the UK at the end of 2020. Through genomic sequencing and enhanced contact tracing, PHE have so far identified 21 cases of VOC202102/02 across the UK, predominantly centred upon an outbreak in the South West of England.

The E484K mutation is present on Variant of Concern first detected in South Africa (VOC-202012/02), as well as a number of other variants sequenced globally. Although there is currently no evidence this mutation alone causes more severe illness or greater transmissibility, it is reported to result in weaker neutralisation by antibodies in laboratory experiments.

Dr Susan Hopkins, COVID-19 Strategic Response Director at PHE, said:

While we expect that the vaccines will still prevent severe illness and deaths, we are taking public health action on clusters of variants with E484K to reduce the risk of spread in our population.

We will be implementing the necessary public health action to mitigate the spread of these variants and will continue to monitor them closely.

It remains absolutely vital that people continue to stay at home where possible, and follow the guidance on face coverings, social distancing and hand hygiene.

## Background

The new Variant of Concern VOC202102/02 has been designated a variant of concern as it has arisen as a result of a mutation on the Variant of Concern VOC202012/01, and retains the characteristics that led to its parent variant being designated a VOC originally with an additional mutation E484K.

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# Wireless Communications, Networking and Information Theory Competition

## News story

£500,000 available for innovation to boost UK wireless communications capability in Information Advantage challenge



The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is looking for innovations to deliver information exchange capabilities that are resilient in a highly-dynamic operating environment where there are significant challenges from congestion and contention, such as jamming.

The [Wireless Communications, Networking and Information Theory Competition](#) is interested in ideas in the following areas:

- novel communication techniques
- novel coding and modulation
- novel networking techniques

On behalf of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) there is £500k available for this DASA competition, with the expectation that between 5 to 10 proposals will be funded.

[Click here for the full scope in the competition document.](#)

This competition links into the key component of the UK's future defence capability; the concept of Information Advantage, meaning the ability to out-think and out-decide adversaries to achieve dominance of the narrative and of operations.

Fundamental to Information Advantage is the ability to exchange information in a timely manner, resilient to adversary action, which may come in the form of electronic, cyber or physical attack.

Whilst we are interested in innovations at [Technology Readiness Levels \(TRL\)](#)

up to prototype demonstrators, the end of the project is hoping to deliver an array of technologies in the TRL 3 to 6 range.

The competition closes for submissions at midday BST on Wednesday 7 April 2021.

A series of 1-2-1 sessions will be available for those interested in discussing the challenge and their ideas with the project team.

[To register for a 1-2-1 slot on 18 February click here.](#)

[To register for a 1-2-1 slot on 23 February click here.](#)

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## **Liz Truss deepens trade ties, announces investment wins in India**

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss has concluded a 5-day visit (February 5-9), mapping the path to a potential future free trade deal and deeper trading ties with the world's largest democracy.

The Secretary of State is today announcing that the Government has helped to secure a number of investment wins that will create jobs across the UK.

This includes a major investment by leading technology and digital firm Tata Consultancy Services that will bring 1,500 high-skilled jobs to sites all over the UK.

Indian pharmaceutical and biotechnology giant Wockhardt has also confirmed further investment in Wrexham, Wales, leading to more than 40 new jobs and the extension of their Covid-19 vaccination contract to ensure the UK has uninterrupted fill and finish capacity for vaccines in 2022.

India is the fastest growing major economy in the world, with longstanding ties to the UK and a potential market of 1.4 billion people. On Saturday Truss agreed an outline of a new [Enhanced Trade Partnership \(ETP\)](#) with India's Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal, as part of the development of a roadmap that would lead to a potential comprehensive FTA, including considerations on an Interim Agreement on preferential basis.

It is an important part of the government's plan to deepen links with major economies of the present and future beyond Europe, creating more trade and investment in strategic industries like science, tech and services that will help the UK build back better, greener and stronger from coronavirus.

Throughout the global pandemic India and the UK have supported each other by keeping vital supply chains open, tackling protectionism and collaborating on vaccine research – whether that be the production of over a billion doses of our life-saving Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine at India's Serum institute or unlocking the export of nearly 3 million packets of paracetamol.

UK International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

India is the world's biggest democracy and a nation that shares our belief in free enterprise. Deeper trading ties will create opportunities for UK businesses that were simply not there as part of the EU, and set the stage for a much closer partnership with one of the economic powerhouses of the present and future, ensuring more investors like Tata Consultancy Services bring jobs and growth to the UK.

We will be collaborating much more closely in the industries of tomorrow like science, tech and green growth, so we can build back better and deliver an export-led, investment-led, jobs-led recovery from coronavirus.

The UK-India trade relationship, worth £23 billion in 2019, supports key industries such as technology and life sciences and around half a million jobs in each other's economies.

Life Sciences has been a priority sector for both nations, with UK pharmaceuticals exports to India growing by 21.4% to £96.75m in 2019. During her visit, the Secretary of State met with UK respiratory digital health company, Smart Respiratory Products, which is helping doctors in India manage their patients remotely via a smartphone app and telemedicine platform.

The firm recently secured a £5m partnership with Indian company, Care Ability Healthcare, to supply their Smart Asthma respiratory solutions.

Demonstrating the strength of the UK tech and life sciences sector, AI healthcare start-up Behold.AI announced during the visit that it has partnered with India's Apollo Group to provide a diagnostic tool which can quickly analyse chest x-rays to aid in screening COVID-19 positive patients.

And UK firm Micropore, which specialises in equipment and support services to enable pharma companies to improve the performance and economies of their formulated products is setting up in Hyderabad, India to supply its award-winning membrane emulsification technology to its customers in the region and neighbouring markets.