

Spacewalk to fit ground-breaking British kit to International Space Station

Two astronauts will today undertake a spacewalk to install a revolutionary piece of government-funded technology on the International Space Station (ISS), marking the UK's first major industrial contribution to the spacecraft.

Called ColKa for 'Columbus Ka-band Terminal', the UK Space Agency-funded system will revolutionise scientists' ability in the UK and Europe to access the results of their space-based experiments, from investigations into the effects of radiation on seeds to biomining research. The results will help unlock benefits for all of us, from understanding how our bodies and muscles age to furthering our understanding of illnesses like cancer and Parkinson's Disease.

This giant leap forward for research carried out in the Columbus module will allow astronauts and researchers to benefit from a dedicated link back to Earth at home broadband speeds. Currently, results are returned to Earth on a hard drive, which could take months to receive, with data sometimes being lost in transit. The new terminal will enable results to be delivered to scientists just a day or two after the data is recorded – allowing scientists to process information much more quickly and adjust experiments if they see any problems with the data, such as an unclear image.

NASA's Victor Glover and Michael Hopkins will venture outside the space station for 6 hours to mount the UK-built large suitcase-sized device to the European Space Agency's Columbus module on the ISS.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

This mission to install pioneering UK-built technology in space exemplifies how government backing is helping our most innovative companies push the boundaries of what we can achieve in space as well as back home on Earth.

Strengthening the speed at which data can be transmitted from space will bring enormous benefits to scientists and researchers across Europe, helping them progress vital research faster, while opening up numerous commercial opportunities for UK firms as we build back better.

The ColKa antenna during testing. Credit: ESA – M. Cowan

Tethered to the ISS by a retractable steel cable, the astronauts face challenging conditions as they work to install the terminal, orbiting Earth at an altitude of 250 miles.

The astronauts will go without food for hours as they work in the harsh thermal vacuum of space, where the temperature can be as hot as 120 degrees Celsius in the sunlight, down to minus 160C when the Sun is out of sight.

The data will be transmitted to a ground station at Harwell Campus, Oxfordshire, near ESA's European Centre for Space Applications and Telecommunications, and from there it will be transferred to the Columbus Control Centre and user centres across Europe.

Columbus was conceived and designed over 20 years ago, when the internet was in its infancy. The laboratory was launched to the Station in 2008 and uses the Station's network and NASA's infrastructure for communications with the Columbus Control Centre.

David Kenyon, Managing Director at MDA UK based in Harwell, which designed and built ColKa using the RAL Space clean rooms on the Harwell Campus, said:

We are extremely excited that ColKa is being brought into service. This system is our first flight system developed through MDA UK, and we now have equipment for another seven flight missions, including four lunar systems, under development in Harwell. ColKa will bring tremendous benefit to all our ESA astronauts, scientists and projects.

The contract was awarded to MDA UK following the UK Space Agency's investment of £40m in ESA's space exploration programme in 2012. In November 2019 the UK committed £180 million to the European Space Agency's global exploration programme, which, along with the lunar gateway and lunar communications, will include bringing back the first samples from Mars and support the US ambition to have a sustainable presence on the Moon.

To date, UK scientists have been involved in 17 cutting-edge experiments that have taken place on the ISS and 33 others that are currently being developed and readied for future flight. In total, more than 2,700 investigations from researchers in 108 countries have been accomplished aboard the orbiting facility.

The UK's space sector is going from strength to strength, employing around 42,000 people and carrying out world-class science while growing the economy.

Funding boost to get young people get into work

Employers can now apply for a £1000 cash boost to help them take on new trainees, Apprenticeships and Skills Minister, Gillian Keegan has announced today (27 January).

The new scheme will support young people to gain the skills and experience they need from the very start, helping them to get a job, an apprenticeship, or pursue further study. The cash boost – which is available until 31 July 2021 – will help businesses with the cost of providing a high-quality work placement for a trainee. This includes providing facilities, uniforms or helping with travel costs. Businesses offering new traineeship opportunities will receive the £1,000 bonus for every trainee they take on with up to a maximum of 10 trainees. Employers can claim the cash incentive for all work placements that have been completed since 1 September.

The highly successful traineeship programme has already helped nearly 120,000 young people get on the path to a great career since 2013. Recent figures show that 66% of trainees get a job, take up an apprenticeship or go on to further study within 6 months of completing their programme, and today's announcement will expand the scheme even further, giving thousands more young people the opportunity to gain the skills they need to start a new career as we build back better from the pandemic. This will support this country and our businesses to fill and create more jobs, giving young people a better start while boosting productivity.

The programmes last between 6 weeks and 12 months, and focus on developing vital employability skills, alongside additional English, maths and digital skills, combined with a work placement lasting a minimum of 70 hours. Young people have completed work placements in a range of exciting industries including construction, education and health and social care.

The launch of the incentive scheme follows the announcement in July 2020 by the Chancellor, as part of his Plan for Jobs, of an additional £111 million investment to support the largest-ever expansion of traineeships so more young people have the skills and confidence they need to get on in life.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said:

My number one priority is to support, protect and create jobs, which is why for the first time ever we're giving businesses £1,000 to cover the cost of trainee work experience, because we know that traineeships are a proven way to give young people the skills and opportunity, they need to be ready for work.

We also know that our young people will be vital in the national

effort to recover from the pandemic, so I urge businesses to seize this opportunity and help us harness the talent of our young people and offer hope for the future.

Gillian Keegan, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills said:

We're pulling out all the stops to help young people get the skills and confidence they need to progress. This cash boost will help employers of all sizes provide more traineeship opportunities, to invest in their workforce so they can rebuild and grow, giving young people a vital route to start their apprenticeship journey, get their first job or go on to further study.

I strongly encourage as many employers as possible to apply now and take advantage of this fantastic offer so more young people can gain the skills they need to progress in their careers as we build back better from the pandemic.

Louise Powell, Head of Apprenticeships, Specsavers said:

We began offering Traineeships in September to provide an opportunity for young people to experience a real working environment and for our store partners to recognise the young talent available. So far we have had 16 Trainees and 10 of those have now been offered a job with 9 about to start their Apprenticeship. We have a further 24 vacancies and we have been amazed at the continuing quality of candidates presented by our partner Qube throughout".

This new cash boost is in addition to the apprentice scheme announced last year, which offers employers £2,000 for each new apprentice they hire aged under 25, and £1,500 for apprentice aged 25 and over. This includes taking on an apprentice who has been made redundant. More than ten thousand employers have already taken up the offer, which is available until March 2021, so businesses can create even more opportunities and give more people the life changing chance to start a great career.

The government's £2 billion Kickstart Scheme is also creating hundreds of thousands of new, fully subsidised jobs for young people across the country.

Together, these schemes will ensure that more of our young people are given the opportunities they deserve, helping them to secure the experience and skills that they need to get a job or start further education or training, while boosting productivity and filling more jobs.

Kiwi women given the chance to be British High Commissioner for a day

World news story

British High Commissioner to New Zealand Laura Clarke is calling on young women aged 17 to 25 to apply for the annual 'Be British High Commissioner for the Day' competition.



The winner will have the opportunity to become an 'honorary High Commissioner' and get an insight into what it is like to be an Ambassador or High Commissioner, and lead a diplomatic mission.

She will accompany Laura Clarke on an exciting programme to mark International Women's Day on 8 March, including meeting with influential leaders and taking over the mission's social media pages.

To apply, applicants need to submit a one-minute video to the [UKinNZ application portal](#) setting out how they think we can learn from the COVID-19 pandemic to build a more gender-equal society.

Applications open from Friday 22 January to Monday 22 February, with the winner announced shortly afterwards.

HE Laura Clarke, British High Commissioner to New Zealand, said:

This competition is a great opportunity for young New Zealanders to meet inspiring women and learn about some of the exciting issues we work on – from negotiating trade agreements to tackling climate change.

It gives our future female leaders the chance to not only see what life is like inside a diplomatic mission, but to be given a platform to talk about how we can improve the lives of women and girls globally.

I encourage any young Kiwi women with an interest in international affairs and tackling gender inequality to apply.

Last year's competition winner was University of Otago student Kate Hellings, who sat in on various meetings with leading women and attended the High Commission's annual International Women's Day Wonder Women function at Laura Clarke's official residence, Homewood.

Kate Hellings said:

I encourage all young women who would think about applying to be High Commissioner for the Day to really take the time to think about how they can improve gender inequality in New Zealand. Not only did I get to meet some of the most amazing females in the industry, but the British High Commission team made the most amazing programme for me.

I was honoured to be selected as it is an extremely valuable and educational experience, and one that I will not forget.

The winner will need to be available for the duration of the day on Monday 8 March 2021. If the winner is not based in Wellington, flights and accommodation will be covered by the British High Commission.

Notes to editors

- British High Commissioner Laura Clarke is the UK Government's representative in New Zealand. She was appointed in January 2018 and was the youngest person to be appointed the role.
- She was recently awarded an OBE for services to foreign policy in the 2021 New Year's Honours.
- A panel at the British High Commission will select the winner of the 'Be a High Commissioner for a Day' competition, who will be announced on

UKinNZ social media channels.

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Normalisation should help deliver Israeli-Palestinian peace

Thank you Mr President. As others have done, I'd like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing, and welcome him to this new role. Thank you also to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for joining us today, and for his briefing.

Mr President, let me start by welcoming President Abbas's announcement of dates for legislative and Presidential elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the first time since 2006. We encourage the Palestinian leadership to work toward strong, inclusive, accountable and democratic institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights. Free and fair elections are an important and necessary step.

Turning to the conflict, Mr President, I should first reiterate the United Kingdom's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process: we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 lines with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. The UK supports existing UN Security Council Resolutions as a basis for this settlement, including UN Security Council Resolution 2334.

With our commitment to the two-state solution in mind, Mr President, we condemn the Government of Israel's decision on 20 January to award tenders, and thus proceed towards construction of settlement units in the prospective East Jerusalem settlement of Givat Hamatos, an extremely sensitive area of the West Bank. Settlements are illegal under international law, and remain an obstacle to peace, and a threat to the two-state solution. The decision undermines the potential for future peace talks. The UK has also expressed concern at the additional 3,900 settlement units that have been advanced across the West Bank throughout January. We again urge Israel to immediately cease settlement expansion in the West Bank. And we remain concerned by demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes.

Mr President, we condemn the murder of Esther Horgan, in a suspected terror attack by a Palestinian suspect on 20 December in Tal Menashe. The UK is clear about our condemnation of all acts of terrorism, which gravely

undermine the prospects for peace. Equally, we condemn all violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians.

Mr President, this month also saw the firing of rockets on 17 January from militant groups in Gaza. The UK condemns the firing of rockets towards civilian populations. Any attacks targeted against civilians are unlawful and unjustifiable. The UK continues to encourage actors to put forward long-term sustainable proposals, to resolve the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militants in Gaza. We call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel. We continue to urge the parties to prioritise progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza. And we encourage Israel to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery.

Mr President, as we have consistently done, we join the US and other Council members today in rejecting unilateral action on both sides.

The UK has been a strong supporter of recent Arab-Israeli normalisation agreements. Normalisation changes the regional context, and presents opportunities for moving ahead with material benefits and new partnerships, to help deliver long overdue Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Mr President, a two-state solution is the only viable long-term solution. It is the only way to permanently end the Arab-Israeli conflict, deliver Palestinian self-determination, and preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity.

We echo the incoming US administration's hope that the process will unlock options for advancing a two-state solution. We look forward to working with them, alongside regional partners and the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to seize this positive momentum – helping deliver greater regional prosperity and security, and progressing a solution to the conflict. We continue to support that goal.

Reiterating the UK's full support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire

Thank you, Mr. President. May I start by thanking you for calling this debate. The United Kingdom reiterates its full support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and the implementation of the commitments under resolution 2532.

Sadly, as we've heard, despite a global pandemic of historic proportions,

peacebuilding has not always been afforded the priority it deserves. There has indeed been some progress, but implementation of the resolution continues to be mixed, as the following three examples illustrate.

In Yemen, as we've heard, the Houthis failed to reciprocate the Saudi-led coalition's unilateral ceasefire offers in 2020, and the recent Houthi attack on Aden has gravely undercut peace efforts. Now is the time to rally round the UN Special Envoys efforts to secure a lasting political solution to the conflict. The stakes have never been higher and the humanitarian crisis, already the world's worst, is significantly worsening with the effects of Covid-19. In September the Foreign Secretary warned that Yemen had never looked more likely to slide into famine. According to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification data, published in 2020, 16,500 Yemenis were living in famine conditions, now set to almost triple to forty seven thousand by June 2021.

Second, in South-Sudan, sustained increases in violence throughout 2020, combined with record flooding, mean areas of the country now likely face famine or famine-like conditions. This is a catastrophe that the government of South-Sudan must urgently address with international support. The 2018 peace deal remains the best chance of an end to violence and longer-term stability. However, implementation has stagnated. As such, greater coordinated international and regional pressure is needed on the government of South-Sudan to ensure they deliver their commitments.

More encouragingly, we welcome the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement on the 3rd of October 2020 by the government of Sudan, the Sudan Revolutionary Front and Sudan Liberation Movement, Minni Minawi. This is a crucial step towards comprehensive peace. But despite this progress, significant challenges remain here too, including intercommunal violence. The violence that occurred recently in West and South Darfur highlights the continued need for protection of civilians, which full implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement could help provide for. We encourage the signatories of the agreement to begin swiftly the process of implementation, particularly those provisions of the agreement pertaining to security arrangements and addressing the root causes of conflict. We also urge all those who remain outside the peace negotiations to engage immediately and constructively without preconditions.

As we've heard throughout 2020, we sadly saw the voices of women sidelined in peace processes. This is a grave problem, not just morally, but also because peace is more sustainable when it meets and reflects the needs of all people, men and women. The UK strongly urges the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and of youth, religious groups and NGOs in peacebuilding. And we must ensure women are able to carry out their work free from threats and violence. No woman should have to risk her safety to heal her community.

Finally, as we know, the Covid-19 pandemic threatens international peace and security. Ending the pandemic requires equitable global access to vaccines. Yet there are particular barriers to vaccine delivery in contexts affected by conflict and insecurity. We welcome the initiative of the Tunisian presidency

to do more at this critical time. And building on resolution 2532 the United Kingdom will convene a meeting in our presidency next month to address potential barriers to vaccine access such as ceasefires, logistics and funding for delivery. Thank you, Mr President.