

UK commits new funding to combat space debris

There are an estimated 900,000 pieces of space debris larger than 1 cm orbiting the Earth, with only a small proportion of them tracked.

The UK Space Agency is providing up to £1 million for organisations to come up with smart solutions to this problem by using cost effective ways to monitor objects in low Earth Orbit, or applying artificial intelligence to make better use of existing orbital data.

Tracking debris allows satellite operators to predict possible collisions so that they can manoeuvre them out of harm's way. One collision could create thousands of small, fast-moving fragments which can damage the satellites that provide everyday services such as communications, weather forecasting or satellite navigation.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

From artificial intelligence to advanced tracking systems, the UK space industry is leading the way in developing ground-breaking solutions to worldwide problems.

Today's funding will enable businesses to develop cutting-edge innovations to combat the growing amount of space debris orbiting the Earth – helping protect vital services like communications, weather forecasting and satellite navigation.

The UK is committed to the international effort to clean up space debris as the largest investor in space safety for the European Space Agency, including a substantial £10 million commitment to the ADRIOS (Active Debris Removal/In orbit servicing) programme. Later this year, Harwell, Oxfordshire, will host the operations centre for the ELSA-d satellite clean-up and decommissioning programme led by Astroscale.

Dr Alice Bunn, International Director, UK Space Agency, said:

We want the UK to be at the forefront of a new era of space where we continue to push boundaries while ensuring the growth is sustainable for all.

Space debris is a global problem and this funding will enable UK companies to develop new methods to help tackle the issue. Growing our space surveillance and tracking capabilities will be crucial for UK space businesses to innovate safely and sustainably in the future.

The new funding is part of the UK Space Agency's plans to grow its national space surveillance and tracking (SST) capability and, working with international partners, become a global leader in space sustainability.

Organisations will be able to bid for a maximum grant award of £250,000, out of a £1 million funding pot. Space surveillance and tracking is a growing international market, forecast to potentially reach over £100 million by 2035. With the demand for SST increasing, this provides an opportunity for the UK space industry to take a leading role in the sector.

The UK Space Agency is leading work across government to develop a comprehensive UK Space Strategy and to launch a new National Space Innovation Programme, which will fund transformative technologies and generate high-skilled jobs across the country.

[Prime Minister sets out timeline for retail to reopen in June](#)

Thousands of high street shops, department stores and shopping centres across England are set to reopen next month once they are COVID-19 secure and can show customers will be kept safe, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson has confirmed today.

The Prime Minister has set out:

- Outdoor markets and car showrooms will be able to reopen from 1 June, as soon as they are able to meet the COVID-19 secure guidelines to protect shoppers and workers. As with garden centres, the risk of transmission of the virus is lower in these outdoor and more open spaces. Car showrooms often have significant outdoor space and it is generally easier to apply social distancing.
- All other non-essential retail including shops selling clothes, shoes, toys, furniture, books, and electronics, plus tailors, auction houses, photography studios, and indoor markets, will be expected to be able to reopen from 15 June if the Government's five tests are met and they follow the COVID-19 secure guidelines, giving them three weeks to prepare.

Shops like supermarkets and pharmacies have been trading responsibly throughout the pandemic. Building on this and in line with the Government's roadmap, reopening non-essential retail is the next step towards restoring people's livelihoods, restarting the UK's economy, and ensuring vital public

services like the NHS continue to be funded.

Businesses will only be able to open from these dates once they have completed a risk assessment, in consultation with trade union representatives or workers, and are confident they are managing the risks. They must have taken the necessary steps to become COVID-19 secure in line with the current Health and Safety legislation.

The government is taking action to help businesses re-open and protect their staff and customers, including:

Publishing updated COVID-secure guidelines for people who work in or run shops, branches, and stores, after consultation with businesses, union leaders, Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive.

Working with local authorities to continue to carry out spot checks and follow up on concerns by members of the public.

The updated guidance takes into account the best practice demonstrated by the many retailers which have been allowed to remain open and have applied social distancing measures in store. Measures that shops should consider include placing a poster in their windows to demonstrate awareness of the guidance and commitment to safety measures, storing returned items for 72 hours before putting them back out on the shop floor, placing protective coverings on large items touched by the public such as beds or sofas, and frequent cleaning of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, including self-checkouts, trolleys, coffee machines and betting terminals, for example.

The vast majority of businesses will want to do everything possible to protect their staff and customers, but tough powers are in place to enforce action if they don't, including fines and jail sentences of up to two years.

As per the roadmap, hairdressers, nail bars and beauty salons, and the hospitality sector, remain closed, because the risk of transmission in these environments is higher where long periods of person to person contact is required.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

The high street sits at the heart of every community in the country. Enabling these businesses to open will be a critical step on the road to rebuilding our economy, and will support millions of jobs across the UK.

The guidance we have set out today provides a vital framework to get shops open in a way that is safe for everyone. It explains how retail workers who are not currently working can go back to work as safely as possible and feel confident in their workplace. And it reassures customers that shops are properly assessing the risks and putting in place measures to protect them.

Josh Hardie, CBI Deputy Director General, said:

As our high streets slowly reawaken, this new guidance is important for businesses on the ground. Our shops are doing all they can to keep the public and their staff safe, and we've seen many retailers leading from the front with innovative solutions to do just that. As more and more businesses turn their attention to reopening, this guidance will help them plan to do so safely and securely.

Andrew Goodacre, CEO, British Independent Retailers Association, said:

Bira is pleased with the guidance being given to retail outlets.

It provides a broad framework for the basic measures and still allows the retailer to be flexible according to the size, layout and location of the shop.

This guidance will ensure that independent retailers provide safe environments for employees and customers.

[PM press conference statement: 25 May 2020](#)

Good evening and welcome to the Number Ten Coronavirus Press Conference

Before I turn to this evening's announcements, I want to update you on the latest data

- 3,532,634 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 73,726 tests carried out yesterday;
- 261,184 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 1,625 cases since yesterday;
- 8,834 people are in hospital with COVID-19 in the UK, down (12%) from 10,092 this time last week;

And sadly, of those who tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings,

36,914 have now died. That's an increase of 121 fatalities since yesterday. This new figure includes deaths in all settings not just in hospitals.

And once again my deepest condolences go out to all those who have lost their loved ones before their time. We must not, and will not, forget them.

Two weeks ago, I set out our road map for the next phase of our fight against Covid 19

It is a cautious plan, informed by the evidence about what is safe, and conditional upon our continued progress against the virus.

And we are making progress. Thanks to this country's collective efforts, the key indicators are heading in the right direction. The daily number of deaths is down, the number of new cases is down, our survey evidence suggests the infection rate is falling, and the R has not risen above one.

So just over 2 weeks ago, we moved to step 1 of our plan, encouraging those who are unable to work from home to go back to work, with new guidelines setting out how workplaces can be made COVID-secure.

At the same time, we allowed people to spend more time outdoors and to meet one member of another household outside, provided they remain 2 metres apart.

I also said we would be able to move to step 2 of our plan no earlier than Monday 1 June – a week today.

We will set out our formal assessment of the 5 tests that we set for adjusting the lockdown later this week, as part of the 3 weekly-review we are legally required to undertake by Thursday.

But because of the progress we are making, I can, with confidence, put the British people on notice of the changes we intend to introduce as we move into step 2.

And I think it is important to give that notice, so that people have sufficient time to adjust and get ready before those changes come into effect.

Yesterday I set out our intention to begin reopening nurseries and particular years in primary schools, reception, year 1, year 6, from 1 June, followed by some contact for those secondary school pupils with exams next year from 15 June. Some contact for years 10 and 12 from 15 June with their teachers.

This announcement has given schools, teachers and parents clarity about our intentions, enabling them to prepare in earnest. The Department for Education is now engaging with teaching unions, councils and school leaders to help schools get ready.

Today, I want to give the retail sector notice of our intentions to reopen shops, so they too can get ready.

So I can announce that it is our intention to allow outdoor markets to reopen

from June 1, subject to all premises being made COVID-secure, as well as car showrooms, which often have significant outdoor space and where it is generally easier to apply social distancing.

We know that the transmission of the virus is lower outdoors and that it is easier to follow Covid Secure guidelines in open spaces. That means we can also allow outdoor markets to reopen in a safe way that does not risk causing a second wave of the virus.

Then, from 15 June, we intend to allow all other non-essential retail, ranging from department stores to small, independent shops, to reopen. Again, this change will be contingent upon progress against the 5 tests and will only be permitted for those retail premises which are COVID-secure.

Today we are publishing new guidance for the retail sector detailing the measures they should take to meet the necessary social distancing and hygiene standards. Shops now have the time to implement this guidance before they reopen. This will ensure there can be no doubt about what steps they should take.

While the vast majority of businesses will want to do everything possible to protect their staff and customers, I should add that we will, of course, have the powers we need to enforce compliance where that is required.

I want people to be confident they can shop safely, provided they follow the social distancing rules for all premises.

The food retail sector has already responded fantastically well, enabling supermarkets to be kept open in a safe way – and we will learn lessons from that experience as we allow other retail to open.

These are careful but deliberate steps on the road to rebuilding our country.

And we can only take these steps thanks to what we have so far achieved together.

We will only be successful if we all remember the basics – so wash your hands, keep social distance, and isolate if you have symptoms – and get a test.

I will now hand over to Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director of Public Health England, to take us through today's slides.

[More charter flights to get Britons](#)

home from West Africa

Up to 380 more British travellers stuck in Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Liberia will be able to return to the UK at the start of June on two flights chartered by the UK government.

This is in addition to over 6,000 British nationals who have already flown home from across sub-Saharan Africa.

Details of the new flights are as follows:

- 2 June: Guinea – Côte d'Ivoire – UK
- 3 June: Cape Verde – Liberia – UK

The additional charter flights have been arranged for British travellers, and their dependants, whose primary residence is the UK. Priority is given to the most vulnerable travellers, for example people with health conditions.

Minister of State for Africa, James Duddridge, said:

These two flights from West Africa will mean up to 380 British travellers from Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia are able to return home. We have now chartered 29 flights from sub-Saharan Africa and will have helped over 6,000 British nationals get back to the UK.

This has been a logistical challenge and I am grateful for the continued co-operation and support from the local authorities in all these countries.

The UK government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to help bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on 30 March – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

So far, charter flights have returned British travellers from countries across the world including India, Pakistan, Nigeria, The Gambia, South Africa, Nepal, Ghana, Tunisia, Algeria and Peru.

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email newsdesk@fco.gov.uk

Bus, plane... and horseback: How the Foreign Office helped a British traveller return home

- Nineteen year old traveller from Eastbourne headed for home on horseback after being stranded on a Patagonian ranch the size of the Isle of Wight after a lockdown was introduced.
- Foreign Office meticulously planned her epic journey using all means of transport available.

A British tourist found herself at the centre of an epic journey home by bus, plane, taxi and horseback after being stranded in an isolated ranch in Patagonia, a half day's horseback ride from the nearest road.

Annabel Symes, 19, from Eastbourne, was fulfilling the dream of a lifetime, working as a volunteer hosting tourists at the 100,000 acre Estancia Ranquilco.

The isolated horse and cattle ranch in Argentine Patagonia is located in the foothills of the Andes more than 1,000 miles from Buenos Aires.

Annabel was due to return home at the end of the summer season in early April but her flight home was cancelled when Argentina introduced swingeing travel restrictions to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Having received a call for help from Annabel, the Foreign Office organised a rescue plan involving a half-day's horseback ride to the nearest road, a nine-hour taxi journey to the nearest town and finally a 17-hour bus ride to Buenos Aires airport.

It was here that Annabel joined 200 other British travellers from every corner of Argentina on a flight home. British Embassy staff also had to negotiate travel permits with local authorities from the different regions so they could organise bus travel, book taxis and facilitate cross-country travelling.

Before undertaking her unusual journey, Annabel was growing increasingly anxious about her situation as winter began setting in.

In a region where temperatures plunge below zero, heavy snowfall would have made leaving the ranch impossible. To make matters worse, Annabel had only packed clothing for summer.

“Once I realised I was stranded, I registered with the British Embassy. Communication was made challenging as the estancia only had patchy internet access via satellite which meant lots of cold WhatsApp conversations sitting on a tree stump in the middle of a field,” said Annabel.

Annabel and her partner, an American citizen, had to ride off the estancia to reach an outpost by the road in the dark, with mules carrying their bags – finding their way thanks to a full moon. From there, she took a taxi which was sprayed with disinfectant at each checkpoint along the way, where temperature checks were also in place.

Annabel finally arrived at Gatwick Airport on 8th May – five weeks and a national lockdown later than she had planned – where she was reunited with her parents, two sisters and border terrier dog Sidney.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

“We are delighted to have been able to help Annabel get back home.

“Since the start of the Coronavirus outbreak, the Foreign Office has been working with airlines and governments to keep vital routes open, helping more than 1.3 million travellers return to the UK on commercial flights.

“We also made £75 million available for special return flights, so far bringing home more than 33,000 people from countries without commercial options.”

One of more than 33,000 stranded British tourists brought home on 159 Foreign Office special return flights, Annabel has secured a place to study Natural Horsemanship at the University of Montana Western from September.

“Carolina and Beatriz at the Embassy really looked after me. They were so organised – coordinating hundreds of British nationals from all over Argentina’s provinces in really extreme circumstances,” Annabel added.

British Ambassador to Argentina, Mark Kent, said:

“The Foreign Office organised two special flights that allowed over 400 British travellers and their direct dependents to return home from Argentina. All domestic flights, buses and trains are suspended, so the Embassy had to arrange 8 special buses to pick up people from 31 cities and towns throughout the country, which is the 8th biggest in the world. The buses covered a total of over 7,000 miles.

“There were some epic journeys for people to get to Buenos Aires to make their flights. Annabel’s was a particularly long and arduous trip from an extremely remote part of Patagonia, and I pay tribute to her resilience and patience. I’m glad we were able to help her get back home safely.”

Further information