

News story: Launch UK brings together UK commercial space sector

Universities and Science Minister Jo Johnson and Minister for Aviation Lord Ahmad spoke alongside the UK Space Agency CEO Katherine Courtney at the Launch UK conference at the Royal Aeronautical Society on 21 February.

A key strand of the government's Industrial Strategy is for the UK to hold a greater share of the commercial spaceflight market, worth an estimated £25 billion over the next 20 years, by developing competitive, commercial and safe spaceflight proposals for UK-based satellite launch services and sub-orbital flights.

The conference brought together potential UK spaceports and spaceflight vehicle operators – the component parts of the consortia that are working to provide commercial launch services from the UK.

The UK Space Agency has made grants worth £10 million available to help develop the capability for spaceflight. The consortia are being invited to provide their business cases for funding to develop key technologies or infrastructure in the UK.

The conference took place as new legislation – the Spaceflight Bill – was delivered to the House of Commons and the House of Lords today to facilitate and regulate commercial spaceflight.

Universities and Science Minister Jo Johnson said:

“We really do stand at the dawn of a very exciting era. This is a big and incredibly exhilarating moment for this country.

“The traditional space sector is changing and the way we access space is changing too, which is why this is a truly important moment for us. It's vital that we don't miss the exciting opportunities that are now ahead of us.”

Minister for Aviation Lord Ahmad said:

“We are boldly legislating where no British government has legislated before.

“It's clear we are galvanised and ready to grasp this huge opportunity for our country. We want to move quickly but we also want to get it right too.

“It's our ambition as a government, as a collective industry, as a country that the UK is the best place in Europe for space flight operations.”

Seven potential regional spaceports gave presentations and a panel of industry experts discussed innovations in commercial spaceflight, looking ahead to 2025, while there was also an opportunity for networking.

Katherine Courtney, CEO UK Space Agency, said:

“With our partners across government we continue to create a supportive environment for commercial innovation and cutting edge science.

“Together, we are working to embrace the emerging small satellite launch market to capture a share of the £25bn global opportunity. I’m confident that 2020 will see the first launches from British soil, and we’re working hard to make that a reality.”