

Scottish-based space companies secure £8.5 million to bring pioneering launch technologies to market

Orbex and Skyrora, both based in Scotland, received the funding under the European Space Agency's (ESA) Boost! initiative and will use the money to develop their world-leading launch technologies further and bring them to market. This will support government's vision for the UK to be at the global forefront of the commercial small satellite launch market.

New small satellite constellations will improve our access to data and communications and revolutionise services such as satellite navigation and Earth observation, enhancing the way we see ourselves and interact with our planet.

Orbex, an orbital launch services company based in Forres near Inverness, has been awarded over £6 million, the largest Boost! award so far, to support development of their innovative Prime launch vehicle which will launch small satellites into orbit from Space Hub Sutherland in 2023.

Prime is fueled by bio-propane, a clean-burning, renewable fuel which reduces CO2 emissions by 90% compared to kerosene-based fuels and has been designed to leave zero debris in orbit around the Earth. The Prime rocket is being built in Orbex's Forres design and manufacturing site which currently employs 40 people and is looking to expand further to cater for the growing market for UK launch.

Scottish rocket company, Skyrora has received £2.5 million to complete the development of their Skyrora XL launch vehicle which will carry small satellites into orbit. This will contribute to the creation of an additional 170 jobs directly within the company and will trigger onward job creation across the UK's space, manufacturing and engineering sectors. The vehicle is on course to be test-launched in 2022 from a UK spaceport.

The UK invested £12 million into the Boost! programme in 2019, one of the largest investments from ESA member states. The funding will also enable Skyrora and Orbex to benefit from ESA's pioneering facilities, technical teams and business networks.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway:

The UK's space industry is thriving and we have bold ambitions to be Europe's leading destination for small satellite launches, developing world class commercial spaceflight capability up and down the country.

Today's funding for two of our most innovative space businesses is not only a step forward for UK spaceflight, but it will also help

to create highly skilled jobs and local opportunities as we build back better from the pandemic.

Ian Annett, Deputy CEO, UK Space Agency said:

This funding is great news for the UK space sector and will ensure companies such as Orbex and Skyrora really are at the forefront of the European space industry.

This support to our thriving space sector, alongside our flexible regulations and strong international agreements, means the UK is well placed to benefit from the new commercial opportunities UK launch will bring.

Rachel Maclean, Transport Minister, Department for Transport said:

Today's announcement is another key step in paving the way for space launches from British soil.

By supporting these innovative businesses, we can help enable a thriving commercial spaceflight market within the UK. Along with the most modern piece of space legislation in the world, we are cementing our leading role in this sector, unlocking a new era in commercial spaceflight for all four corners of our nation.

Chris Larmour, CEO of Orbex said:

We very much appreciate the investment in new, commercially-focused space launch services from ESA's new Boost! Programme.

We're especially grateful for the strong support we received from the UK Space Agency in a wide range of areas. Orbex's environmentally sustainable rockets will soon be launching commercially for the first time from the UK, and ESA's recognition of the economic opportunities this brings to the whole of Europe is significant to our progress.

Volodymyr Levykin, Skyrora said:

Receiving funding from the UK Space Agency and the European Space Agency is excellent news. It will help Skyrora accelerate progress towards our orbital launcher's flight readiness, Skyrora XL, from UK soil in 2022.

Skyrora has already delivered four launches, established manufacturing and engine test facilities throughout Scotland and

performed the static fire test of our orbital third stage. Furthermore, our pioneering work to achieve environmentally friendly spaceflight, such as our eco-fuel, will help establish the UK not only as a world leader in space technology but also the greenest space industry in the world.

The UK aims to be the first country in Europe to offer small satellite manufacturers a direct end to end route to launch. Earlier this month, Government published its response to the Spaceflight consultation, paving the way for the UK to install a regulatory and guidance framework to enable commercial small satellite launch from 2022.

The government's Integrated Review into security, defence, development and foreign policy, published on 16 March, reaffirms the government's commitment to making the UK a leading player in space, including through the UK's first national space strategy by June.

This will bring new jobs and economic benefits to communities and organisations right across the UK, as well as inspire the next generation of space scientists and engineers.

The European Space Agency is not an EU organisation, and the UK remains a member of ESA.