

[Press release: Dstl Investigates the earth's upper atmosphere](#)

Using specially designed shoebox-sized satellites known as CubeSats, scientists will be able to study the Earth's upper atmosphere and find out how it impacts on radio frequencies through space.

Dr Mike O'Callaghan, Space Programme Manager at Dstl, said:

We're trying to find out how the ionosphere might affect us when we communicate. For example, are signals weaker during specific space weather conditions? It's important to understand the effects and how it might impact our communications around the world, specifically with military operations.

The Wideband Ionospheric Sounder CubeSat Experiment (WISCER) project builds on work carried out by Dstl and the University of Birmingham, which was partly funded by the UK Space Agency. It forms part of a joint programme with the Naval Research Laboratory in the United States (US). Plans are now in place to launch two CubeSat satellites during 2020/21, each with a UK and a US payload.

The UK payload will contain a WISCER antenna and waveform generator that will transmit a signal to a bespoke ground signal receiver, assessing the impact of the ionosphere on the signal. The US payload will measure how electron density changes with altitude. The collaboration offers the opportunity to generate data cost effectively, with both countries potentially sharing results.

Dr O'Callaghan added:

Space is a global endeavour and collaboration is absolutely critical to delivering the WISCER project. We're excited to be launching the project and will be looking at initial results once in orbit.

[video](#)

Here in the UK, Thales Alenia Space has been awarded a contract for £1.5 million to build the WISCER payload and ground signal receiver. Ben Olivier, CEO of Thales Alenia Space, said:

We are delighted to have been selected by Dstl to contribute to this important project, which will ultimately improve the understanding of operating in the space environment. Working with

key partners Oxford Space Systems and Teledyne Defence & Space, we will deliver a complete experiment package including mission system engineering.

[News story: OPG updates legal guidance on giving gifts](#)

OPG's [gifting practice note](#) explains the legal framework around giving gifts and has been updated to reflect recent judgements by the [Court of Protection](#).

It also explains the approach OPG takes if deputies or attorneys go beyond their authority to give gifts on behalf of the person they act for.

OPG has separate general [guidance on giving gifts for non-professional deputies and attorneys](#).

Being an attorney or a deputy can be a demanding role – like a part-time job for some – and there are [practice notes covering a range of subjects](#) to help attorneys and deputies be as effective as they can.

[Press release: Secretary of State Karen Bradley announces new phase of talks](#)

Since my appointment as Secretary of State I have had a number of discussions on the way forward to restore the Northern Ireland Executive and other political institutions under the Belfast Agreement. What has quickly become clear to me is that time is short and one last opportunity to reach agreement remains.

Without agreement we will be facing a set of political consequences that will represent a significant setback to the progress made since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, almost twenty years ago. Over the past eight months the political parties, particularly the DUP and Sinn Fein, have made progress in closing the gaps existing between them on a range of difficult issues that have prevented the formation of an Executive. The gaps are narrow, but there are still significant differences to overcome. I also want to emphasise the role played by the SDLP, Alliance and the UUP who have

made an active and positive contribution to making political progress. Based on my conversations so far, I believe it is possible to reach agreement.

All of the parties have expressed their commitment to the restoration of the Executive. They have indicated to me directly their willingness to engage in a constructive manner to try to reach agreement. A short, intense set of political talks to restore the Executive will therefore commence next Wednesday [24 January 2018].

These will involve the five main parties, the UK Government and the Irish Government in accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach.

Initially, these talks will focus on gaining clarity of understanding on the progress that was made over the last seven months on a range of issues, including formation of the Executive and what are known as legacy issues. Progress must be swift. It is clear that Northern Ireland needs strong devolved government and political leadership. The people of Northern Ireland cannot continue to have their public services suffer by the lack of an Executive and without Ministers making the key policy and budget decisions.

Without an Executive, Northern Ireland's voice on critical issues will not be heard as strongly.

I will be updating Parliament in Westminster no later than 7 February on progress.

Without rapid progress, the UK Government will face significant decisions.

These include setting a budget for 2018/19, the future of MLA pay, the prospect of a further election (which I continue to keep under review) and ultimately other arrangements to ensure that Northern Ireland is able to benefit from the good government that its people both need and deserve.

My clear focus now, however, must be to see devolution restored, an Executive established and the progress that Northern Ireland has made over the past two decades continue. And that is what I intend to do in the coming weeks.

Press release: Calls for views on transforming court estate

HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) is working alongside the judiciary to modernise the justice system to make access to justice quicker, easier and fairer for all – and enable some work to be held away from a physical court building.

Instead of taking time out to attend a physical court building, working people can now make a number of claims online – including filing for divorce, challenging rogue traders for money owed, or making a tax appeal. In criminal courts the increasing use of video links means more vulnerable victims can give evidence away from the court room and without having to meet their attacker face to face. Across the country, people are also now able to indicate their plea online for low level motoring offences – 80,000 online pleas were made last year. This enables the court to better prepare for the hearing – saving time in the courtroom. Fully virtual options – where a case is hearing by an online video hearing – are also being tested for some court cases. This will save people the time and money spent travelling to court and waiting for their hearing – which can mean taking an entire day off work.

Ministers are seeking views on how the estate can change to support this transformation. The consultation asks for opinions on how to best make decisions about courts across the country – focusing on ensuring access to justice, delivering value for money and enabling efficiency in the longer term.

Five separate, regional consultations have also been published today seeking views on the closure of 8 courts across the country – where workload can be better allocated at other courts close by.

Following an earlier consultation in July 2015, HMCTS has been closing some underused and dilapidated courts which are not necessary to deliver effective justice. When this is complete, HMCTS will occupy around 340 court and tribunal buildings providing face to face services. Over 90% of these will be less than 15 miles from another court or tribunal, and the majority will be less than 5 miles away. £114.7 million has already been raised from building sales, which has been ploughed back into modernising our courts and tribunals services and making it easier for people to access justice.

The changes introduced through digital reforms will mean there are many more ways to access justice without the need to travel or physically attend court. For those that do need to go to court, there will be more modern and well-connected courtrooms.

Justice Minister Lucy Frazer said:

This government is investing over £1 billion to reform and modernise the justice system – making it more convenient, easier to use, and providing better value for the taxpayer.

As we increase the use of digital services, it makes sense to consider the wider role and need for Court buildings and assess whether some are still necessary to provide effective access to justice. Where physical courts are to close, every penny raised will be put back into funding changes which will make justice easier to access for all at the same time as offering protections for the most vulnerable.

The government's reform programme is already delivering benefits to court users, including the ability to plead guilty online for traffic offences and a new digital programme which will allow defendants, victims, witnesses and professional users to share legal documents and cases online. It is also reducing stress for victims and the most vulnerable and reducing the emotional turmoil experienced through crime by the use of video links in criminal courts so victims don't have to face their attackers. And online applications for divorce and probate, as well as making a claim in the civil courts, are already being piloted.

Consultations

[Banbury Magistrates' and County Court and Maidenhead Magistrates' Court](#) (in a single consultation for the court estate in the Thames Valley)

[Cambridge Magistrates' Court](#)

[Chorley Magistrates' Court and Fleetwood Magistrates' Court](#) (in a single consultation for the court estate in Lancashire)

[Northallerton Magistrates' Court](#)

[Wandsworth County Court, and Blackfriars Crown Court](#) (in a single consultation for the court estate in London)

[Fit for the future: transforming the court and tribunal estate](#)

[News story: World-first register to crack down on criminals laundering dirty money through UK property market to go live by early 2021](#)

- world-first public register will require overseas companies that own or buy property in the UK to provide details of their ultimate owners
- £180 million worth of property in the UK has been brought under criminal investigation as the suspected proceeds of corruption since 2004
- government will publish draft laws this summer and the register will go live by early 2021

A world-first register revealing owners of overseas companies buying property in the UK will go live by early 2021 to crack down on criminal gangs laundering dirty money in the UK, the government has announced.

More than £180 million worth of property in the UK has been brought under

criminal investigation as the suspected proceeds of corruption since 2004. Over 75% of properties currently under investigation use off-shore corporate secrecy – a tactic regularly seen by investigators pursuing high-level money laundering.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's register will require overseas companies that own or buy property in the UK to provide details of their ultimate owners. This will help to reduce opportunities for criminals to use shell companies to buy properties in London and elsewhere to launder their illicit proceeds by making it easier for law enforcement agencies to track criminal funds and take action.

Yesterday in the House of Lords the government committed to publishing a draft bill this summer and introducing it in Parliament by next summer. Following legislation, the register would go live by early 2021.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

We are committed to protecting the integrity and reputation of our property market to ensure the UK is seen as an attractive business environment – a key part of our Industrial Strategy.

This world-first register will build on our reputation for corporate transparency as well as helping to create a hostile environment for economic crimes like money laundering.

The register will also provide the government with greater transparency on overseas companies seeking public contracts.

The response to an earlier [call for evidence](#) will be published shortly.