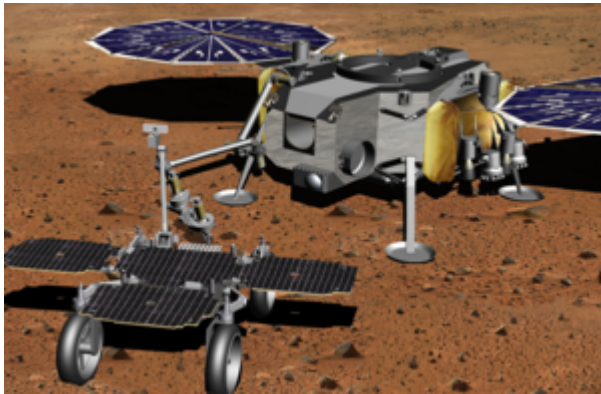


UK designing new rover to bring first samples back from Mars

News story

Airbus UK has won the next phase of the study contract to design the Sample Fetch Rover for the European Space Agency (ESA)



Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

The UK space sector has world-leading expertise in robotic space exploration, with Airbus completing the build of the 'Rosalind Franklin' rover last year.

This new contract will see UK scientists and engineers working on the next Mars 'Sample Fetch Rover' as part of a joint NASA and ESA campaign to collect samples from Mars and return them to Earth.

Airbus in Stevenage is leading the Sample Fetch Rover project and has already completed two preliminary studies, to develop sophisticated algorithms to help the rover spot the samples and a robotic arm to pick them up.

The plan is for the rover to launch in 2026 and land on Mars in 2028. Once there, it will collect up to 36 soil, rock and atmospheric samples left behind by NASA's 2020 Perseverance rover, before transferring them to a Mars Ascent Vehicle to begin their journey back to Earth for study.

Graham Turnock, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

This is an exciting opportunity for the UK space sector to play a leading role in humanity's efforts to return the first samples from Mars. Airbus has a rich heritage of designing challenging space missions in the UK, from the Solar Orbiter probe to the 'Rosalind Franklin' Mars rover.

The government has made clear its ambitions for space and we are working hard to develop a new National Space Strategy to bring

long-term strategic and commercial benefits to the UK, while strengthening our international partnerships through ESA and beyond.

In November 2019, the UK committed £180 million to ESA's global exploration programme to ensure UK industry plays a leading role in this mission to bring back the first samples from Mars and supports NASA's ambitions to return humans to the Moon.

[Further details](#)

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Prime Minister announces merger of Department for International Development and Foreign Office



The Prime Minister has announced that DFID and the FCO will merge, uniting development and diplomacy in one new department that brings together Britain's international effort.

Work will begin immediately on the merger. The new department – the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – will be established in early September and will be led by the Foreign Secretary.

The merger is an opportunity for the UK to have even greater impact and influence on the world stage as we recover from the coronavirus pandemic and prepare to hold the G7 presidency and host COP26 next year.

UK aid will be given new prominence within our ambitious international policy. The Foreign Secretary will be empowered to make decisions on aid spending in line with the UK's priorities overseas, harnessing the skills, expertise and evidence that have earned our reputation as a leader in the

international development community.

The UK is the only G7 country to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas development and the Government remains committed to this target, which is enshrined in law.

Announcing the new department, the Prime Minister said:

This is exactly the moment when we must mobilise every one of our national assets, including our aid budget and expertise, to safeguard British interests and values overseas.

And the best possible instrument for doing that will be a new department charged with using all the tools of British influence to seize the opportunities ahead.

The Prime Minister has also announced that the UK's Trade Commissioners will come under the authority of UK Ambassadors overseas, bringing more coherence to our international presence.

The objectives of the new overseas department will be shaped by the outcome of the Integrated Review, which is expected to conclude in the autumn, and is the biggest review of foreign, defence and development policy since the Cold War.

A checked against delivery version of the PM's statement to Parliament can be found [here](#).

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1. 17 June 2020

Added translation

2. 16 June 2020

First published.

[Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons: 16 June 2020](#)

Mr Speaker,

Before I begin, I am sure the whole House will join me in paying tribute to

the memory of Jo Cox, who was cruelly murdered four years ago today.

Her sister, Kim Leadbeater, spoke for us all when she urged everyone to remember Jo by pulling together with “compassion and kindness”.

I was concerned to learn that the Hon Member for East Dunbartonshire is now in hospital: we send her our best wishes.

Mr Speaker, with permission, I will make a statement about the ambitions of a Global Britain and the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are living through a daily demonstration of how events on the far side of the world influence not only British security and prosperity, but something as elemental as the state of our health, and whether we can go to work or buy our daily bread.

This crisis offers vivid proof of the seminal importance of international engagement and exactly why our country must perform its global role.

I have begun the biggest review of our foreign, defence and development policy since the end of the Cold War, designed to maximise our influence and integrate all the strands of our international effort.

The overriding aim is to bring this country’s strengths and expertise to bear on the world’s biggest problems, seizing the opportunities of Britain’s presidency of the G7 next year and the UN climate change conference, COP26, which we will host in Glasgow.

The UK possesses the third biggest aid budget and diplomatic network in the world: we owe it to our people to make best use of these assets, which scarcely any of our peers can match.

The British taxpayer has the right to expect that we achieve the maximum value with every pound we spend.

One cardinal lesson of the pandemic is that distinctions between diplomacy and overseas development are artificial and outdated.

For instance, to protect ourselves against another calamity, the UK will need to work alongside our friends to strengthen international bodies like the World Health Organization, and help vulnerable countries to improve their health systems and achieve greater resilience.

It makes no sense to ask whether this amounts to aid or foreign policy: they are one and the same endeavour, and they’re designed to achieve the same goals, which are right in themselves and serve our national interest.

On 4th June I chaired a virtual summit of the global vaccine alliance, which raised enough money to immunise 300 million children.

I doubt whether any other occasion will save more lives, and avoid more suffering, or produce a better example of the good this country can do by its international engagement – in the true and broad sense – alongside our

friends.

And yet today – as anyone with experience of it will know – a dividing line between aid and foreign policy runs through our whole system, with our Department for International Development working independently from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and our aid budget parcelled out between different arms of Whitehall.

DFID outspends the Foreign Office more than four times over and yet no single decision-maker in either department is able to unite our efforts or take a comprehensive overview.

We give as much aid to Zambia as we do to Ukraine, though the latter is vital for European security.

We give ten times as much aid to Tanzania as we do to the six countries of the Western Balkans, who are acutely vulnerable to Russian meddling.

And, regardless of the merits of these decisions, no single department is currently empowered to judge whether they make sense or not: we tolerate an inherent risk of our left and right hands working independently.

Faced with this crisis today – and the opportunities that lie ahead – we have a responsibility to ask whether our current arrangements, dating back to 1997, still maximise British influence.

Those well-intentioned decisions of 23 years ago were right for their time.

They paved the way for Britain to meet the UN target of spending 0.7 percent of national income on aid, a goal that was achieved by the Coalition Government in 2013 and has been maintained ever since – including this year – and which remains our commitment.

Yet those judgments date from a relatively benign era when China's economy was still smaller than Italy's and the West was buoyed by victory in the Cold War.

We must now strengthen our position in an intensely competitive world by making sensible changes, and so I have decided to merge DFID with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to create a new department, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

This will unite our aid with our diplomacy and bring them together in our international effort.

DFID has amassed world class expertise and all of its people can take pride in how they have helped transform the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world.

To select but a few examples, they have striven to protect millions of children across the world from polio – which is now on the verge of global eradication – and they have paved the way for millions of girls to attend school for the first time in countries like Pakistan, as I have seen for

myself.

They have done their utmost to ease the suffering in Syria and in Sierra Leone they were central to the defeat of an outbreak of the Ebola virus.

All this amounts to the finest demonstration of British values, following in the great tradition of the country that ended the slave trade and resisted totalitarianism.

And it is precisely that ambition, vision and expertise that will now be at the heart of a new department, taking forward the work of UK Aid to reduce poverty, and that will remain central to our mission.

The Foreign Secretary will be empowered to decide which countries receive – or cease to receive – British aid, while delivering a single UK strategy for each country, overseen by the National Security Council, which I chair.

Those strategies will be implemented on the ground by the relevant UK Ambassador, who will lead all of the Government's work in the host country.

And in this we are following the examples of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, all of whom run their development programmes from their foreign ministries.

And we will align other British assets overseas, including our trade commissioners, who will come under the authority of the UK ambassador, bringing more coherence to our international presence.

Now, amid the pandemic, this House will ask whether this is the right moment to reorganise Whitehall.

In reality, this crisis has already imposed fundamental changes on the way that we operate and if there is one further lesson, it is that a whole-of-government approach and getting maximum value for the British taxpayer is just as important abroad as it is at home.

This is exactly the moment when we must mobilise every one of our national assets, including our aid budget and expertise, to safeguard British interests and values overseas – and the best possible instrument for doing that will be a new department charged with using all the tools of British influence to seize the opportunities ahead.

Mr Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.

[**New satellite data made available to**](#)

help tackle public challenges

News story

The public sector can access new satellite images of the UK to help issues such as town planning and flood mapping.



The first of its kind data archive, launched by the UK Space Agency's Space for Smarter Government Programme (SSGP), has updated its free optical and radar data sets of Britain and Northern Ireland.

The Agency is working to help government departments understand how they can use Earth observation (EO) data and create opportunities for new collaborations with industry and academia, as well as overcoming the cost barriers to test the capabilities of high resolution imagery.

The data, originally made available in March 2019, is intended to benefit the public sector in areas such as planning and development and environmental monitoring, while boosting further growth in the UK's world-leading space industry, which already employs nearly 42,000 people.

Ryan King, UK Space Agency's SSGP Manager said:

Since we first made this kind of data available to the public sector just over a year ago, we have seen 188 expressions of interest across 98 public sector bodies, and nearly 40 collaborations between government, industry and academia. We have already seen this data used for flood mapping, infrastructure monitoring, machine learning and habitat classification to name a few.

Now we have added more available data to provide higher temporal resolution across key urban areas and infrastructure locations such as London, Liverpool and the North East of England, as well as several stacks of synthetic aperture radar imagery, to enable much more detailed change detection. From this we hope to see the public sector and wider supply chain working together to explore how high resolution satellite imagery can address key current challenges

like remote asset management and environmental impacts such as the use of natural resources and changes in land use.

The archive data will be available for up to two years to explore what role high resolution satellite data could have in public sector delivery, and SSGP is developing hands-on training for civil servants on how to process and use the data.

The data has been made freely available to government through the Sentinel Data Access Service (SEDAS portal) hosted by the Satellite Applications Catapult for the purpose of research and development (R&D). Industry and academia can also access the data providing they have a demonstrable public sector sponsor and use case.

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[Return to work plan remains on track](#)

News story

Strict control measures in place as additional work activities launch at Low Level Waste Site.



Vending machines are taped off and not to be used.

The return of LLW Repository Ltd (LLWR) personnel to their workplace is continuing this week after the organisation's Restart Plan got underway without any major hurdles.

Office based workers began to return in small numbers last week to the Repository Site, in Cumbria, and this week additional activities are being introduced. Commissioning work on the Security Enhancement Programme and maintenance of Type B fissile packaging resume.

Returnees face a string of new arrangements and control measures, including limitations on movements during the working day and reduced Site open hours to minimise the potential for cross contamination, strict building occupancy limits and seating plans to accommodate 2m social distancing, single occupancy in toilet facilities and closed canteens and kitchens.

Paul Pointon, Managing Director, said: "As expected, we experienced a few teething problems last week and saw uncertainty from some colleagues about the new arrangements, but these were dealt with as the week progressed.

"Control measures are in place to protect the workforce, to demonstrate we are a 'COVID secure' facility and following Government guidelines.

"The new rules are temporary and remain under constant review, to ensure we align with emerging guidance. For now, around 75% of our people will continue to work from home."

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