

Training centre expansion will launch space and robotics apprenticeships

Construction work to expand Oxfordshire Advanced Skills (OAS) and launch new apprenticeship programmes in space, robotics, data science, energy storage, power engineering and cyber security started at a celebratory ceremony yesterday.

The training centre's £13 million extension at the UK Atomic Energy Authority's (UKAEA) Culham Science Centre is funded by the Fusion Foundations Programme. This is a government initiative to enable the delivery of fusion, which has great potential to provide sustainable energy for generations to come, through the development of infrastructure, facilities, and skills in the UK.

The ground-breaking ceremony included OAS apprentices, who represent a total population of around 175 current learners employed by manufacturing companies across industries from motorsport to pharmaceuticals, maritime and fusion.

They were joined by representatives from UKAEA, training provider MTC Training and construction partner McLaughlin & Harvey. OxLEP also attended the ceremony and has awarded OAS a grant to fund specialist equipment.

David Martin, UKAEA's Director of OAS, said: "It is an exciting time for OAS as we look to build on our success of equipping the local community and employers with the skills needed to drive fusion energy and adjacent sectors forward.

"OAS aims to create the next generation of engineering talent and upskill the existing workforce. The new courses will empower UK manufacturers to adopt transformative technology in space and robotics, helping businesses to better compete in the global marketplace."

A group of apprentices joined the ceremony including: Harvey Black (UKAEA), Tommy Illingworth (Presto Engineering), Phoebe Wales (Williams F1), Sam Spencer (STFC), Jodi Bain (Owen Mumford) and Rhys Dawes (Williams Jet Tenders).

UKAEA apprentice Harvey Black, a Level 3 Engineering Technician, is helping to deliver fusion energy – based on the same processes that power the sun – as a safe, low carbon and sustainable energy source. He said he was excited by the potential of the extension.

Harvey added: "I am enjoying studying here and it is helping my career ambitions. This expansion shows that what is happening is working and will be growing. The additional space, tools and equipment will benefit even more people."

The three-year-old facility will be extended by 2,355 sqm and ready to receive its first cohort from September 2023, creating career-making

opportunities for an additional 90 apprentices.

Emma Johnstone, MTC Training's Operations Manager at OAS, said: "Since opening in 2019, our apprentice intakes have already doubled in size. The extension will help OAS to increase our impact even further by supporting more people and businesses with future skills.

"We're committed to working collaboratively with our employer partners to identify the skills gaps that are challenging their current and future business operations. As a result of this work, I'm pleased to announce our new Level 4 Space apprenticeship programme has already been approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and we are busy working on the curriculum delivery of our other new courses, to be launched later this year."

OAS is a partnership between UKAEA and the Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC). The two organisations have a history of apprentice training in science and engineering stretching back more than 70 years.

The extension forms part of OAS Phase 3, with the design being informed by an Access & Awareness report to ensure the training centre accommodates mental health, neurodiverse and physical disability needs.

This includes training of staff for increased awareness along with better access for people with physical barriers such as braille signposting, hearing aids and interior design.

To find out more about OAS and apprenticeships, visit: oas.ukaea.uk or for the latest fusion energy news and opportunities, visit: ccfe.ukaea.uk.

[Local Covid Commemoration Survey](#)

News story

The UK Commission on Covid Commemoration launches a survey to collate information on commemoration activities across the UK.



UK Commission on Covid Commemoration

The UK Commission on Covid Commemoration was established on 21 July to secure a broad consensus from across the whole of the United Kingdom on how we commemorate the COVID-19 pandemic and mark this distinctive period in our history at a national and community level.

As part of its work, the Commission is keen to hear about existing and planned Covid commemoration activities across the United Kingdom. Please complete [this short survey](#) to inform the Commission of Covid commemoration activities near you. This could include activities such as the opening of a memorial garden or an event to say thank you to those involved in the response.

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[Planning Inspectorate Chief Executive announces departure](#)

Ms Richards took up post as the Planning Inspectorate Chief Executive in March 2016. During her time in office, she has overseen the transformation of the organisation, modernising the structure and digital services of the organisation to improve outcomes for customers. She led the organisation through the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring continued delivery of service as well as bringing in virtual ways to deliver planning appeal, national infrastructure and local plans casework.

She said:

“In the Planning Inspectorate our people are our greatest asset. I have had the pleasure and privilege to work with many talented and hardworking people during my time at the Inspectorate and have seen an increase in our capabilities and skills, enabling us to deliver our valuable public services.

“The COVID years challenged us but brought out the resourcefulness and ingenuity to keep our casework moving. The organisation is now establishing

the foundations to deliver in an increasingly digitised future.

“I am leaving at a time of great change, but also of great opportunity, for those working in the planning sector. I go with confidence that my successor will lead an organisation that is changing and improving for the better, with a workforce that is as professional and dedicated as it has always been. I wish the very best for the future to all working at the Inspectorate and across the wider government planning sector.”

Director of Planning at Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Simon Gallagher said:

“I’d like to thank Sarah Richards for her dedication to the Planning Inspectorate over the past six years in post. Her successor will be joining at an exciting and challenging time with the focus on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill progressing through parliament. The services provided by the Planning Inspectorate, however, remain a core part of the English planning system, dealing with planning appeals, national infrastructure planning applications, examinations of local plans and other planning-related and specialist casework in England.”

The recruitment process to appoint a successor will be run by the Department. Interim arrangements will be put in place to lead the Inspectorate while the recruitment is underway.

ENDS

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate Press Office, on 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: Press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Government recommends cutting unnecessary bureaucracy in research sector

Today (Thursday 28 July), the government has published the [final report of the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy](#), launched in March 2021 to identify ways to substantially reduce unnecessary bureaucracy in all parts of the research system.

The review was launched in recognition of the impact unnecessary bureaucracy has on diverting and hampering the work of researchers and their teams, and on the overall productivity of research organisations.

This report therefore makes recommendations across the research system –

spanning government, funders, and research organisations and their teams – to address unnecessary bureaucracy for the benefit of the research system and those working in it, with the aim of ensuring it is kept at bay in the future.

The final report builds upon the Review's [interim report](#), which identified the principles that have underpinned the approach and development of the final recommendations. It draws together the overall scope and context for the Review's work, and sets out findings and recommendations across 6 different aspects of the research sector:

1. Reducing the complexity of assurance requirements: simpler asks for information, with less duplication and relying more on what organisations already do.
2. Proportionate funding applications: ask for less information at the start of the process and only ask for more as the chances of success get higher.
3. More responsive grant management: there should be flexible project start dates and standard arrangements for contracts.
4. Better sharing of data: improving data flows between different digital systems to minimise information asks, whilst maintaining data protection.
5. Action by institutions to reduce bureaucracy: universities should work with each other and with organisations like Universities UK to minimise bureaucracy.
6. Communicate better: express clearly why information is being asked for, and avoid 'just in case' gold plating.

The Review was led by Professor Adam Tickell, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Birmingham, and its findings support the goals of the government's [Research and Development Roadmap](#), which includes a commitment to removing unwarranted bureaucracy in the UK's research system.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

The work of our exceptional researchers will not reach its full potential while the research system is bound up by excessive red tape. The findings of Professor Tickell's thorough review shine a light on the huge opportunity for improvements in this field.

I am confident this report will act as the stimulus needed for institutions, funding bodies, regulators – and for government – to come together and make the progress required.

Author of the Bureaucracy Review, Professor Adam Tickell, said:

UK research is world-leading, however from the findings and

recommendations in the Review it is clear there are huge opportunities to improve how our research system works. The Review has unearthed excessive bureaucracy across the system.

It will now take a collective effort involving individuals, institutions, funders, regulators and government to realise the potential benefits of change while ensuring the vital checks and balances in the system are not lost. I hope this report signposts the way forward and provides the impetus needed.

Unnecessary bureaucracy ultimately diminishes the returns of research funding, and this report sets out a clear plan to increase efficiency and enable the UK's world-class research base deliver their innovative work to the best of its potential.

Chief Executive of UK Research & Innovation, Ottoline Leyser, said:

We warmly welcome this thoughtful and excellent review. I would like to thank Professor Tickell and his team for their thorough work and carefully considered recommendations setting out how the research and innovation community can work together to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy.

The review's recommendations, and the principles that underpin them, strongly align with ongoing work at UKRI, such as our Simple and Better Funding Programme. By working in partnership across the UK research and innovation system we can catalyse transformational change, maximising the value from record-breaking levels of public investment in R&D.

The recommended changes will allow essential research – from healthcare development to studies in environmental science – to be delivered unhindered by excessive red tape, supporting the UK's ambition to maintain its competitiveness, and secure its position as a science superpower.

Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Lucy Chappell, said:

For many years, clinical research has been vital in helping us improve the health of patients and the public. In the COVID pandemic, we found new ways of doing leading-edge research from rapidly creating vaccines to identifying life-saving treatments such as dexamethasone. This research has saved thousands of lives.

It's crucial that we continue to build on the successes of our research ecosystem within the NHS and more widely. The Tickell Review will help us do that, with its proposals to improve the efficiency of research.

We will continue to work collaboratively across government and with

key stakeholders to address any unnecessary bureaucracy relating to our research so that we can continue to deliver world-class care.

Interim Chief Executive of Universities UK, Chris Hale said:

UK universities produce world-leading research. This research is best supported by a dynamic and flexible system without unnecessary bureaucracy. The outcomes of this review show that there are ways the research system, and universities operating within it, can develop more efficient and effective processes.

We look forward to supporting the implementation of the findings to create a more sustainable and harmonised system that maximises universities' research capacity.

Government takes further action to protect Slough taxpayers after council falls short

Levelling Up Secretary Greg Clark has confirmed he is “minded to” exercise his intervention powers in Slough Borough Council after the commissioners’ progress report into the borough unveiled continued failure to deliver best value for residents and large-scale challenges facing the council.

Commissioners were sent into Slough Borough Council on 1 December 2021 to address serious financial and management failures at the request of the former Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and their first report was submitted on 9 June 2022.

Whilst Slough Borough Council’s staff have been working hard to enact change under difficult circumstances, the report describes the “unprecedented” scale of challenge facing the council, including financial issues due to piling debt and poor accounting practices, and governance issues that have decimated the council’s capability and capacity.

The report has also made it clear that it will take “substantial time” to achieve far-reaching and positive improvements in Slough.

To ensure that staff have the right support to tackle these challenges, the Secretary of State may provide commissioners with additional powers to oversee the recruitment of the council’s most senior members of staff.

Levelling Up Secretary Greg Clark said:

"The commissioners' report has assured me that the current intervention measures remain necessary in Slough. Councils must deliver for the people they serve – which is why I am minded to expand these measures to deliver swift and long-lasting improvements.

"Whilst this decision is not taken lightly, difficult decisions must be taken to protect hardworking taxpayers.

"I am confident that Slough Borough Council will continue to work closely with commissioners to address their challenges and I hope to see more progress imminently."

Lead Commissioner Max Caller CBE said:

"The challenges in Slough are huge and unprecedented. We are working closely with DLUHC and are grateful for the Ministers support in driving change at the Council.

"We welcome the Secretary of State's decision to expand the directions at this time."

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is working closely with stakeholders and MPs in Slough, and Minister of State Paul Scully has spoken directly to Slough's Members of Parliament about the proposed new intervention measures.

Slough Borough Council and other interested parties will have until 11 August to provide representations on these proposed intervention measures.

The commissioners play a crucial role in getting to the bottom of the issues facing Slough Borough Council, by utilising their years of experience of working in senior positions at other councils in the UK.

Slough's Commissioners continue to bring a wealth of experience to the council and many of the improvements to date would not have been possible without their guidance.

On 1 December 2021, Commissioners were sent into Slough Borough Council to address serious financial and management failures at the request of the former Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Lead Commissioner, Max Caller CBE, previously led the Best Value Inspections at Northamptonshire and Liverpool and was a Commissioner at Tower Hamlets. Max is a former Chief Executive of the London Boroughs of Hackney and Barnet and former Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Max Caller CBE is being supported by finance commissioner Margaret Lee, former statutory finance officer at Essex County Council and member of the London Borough of Croydon Improvement and Assurance Panel and Commissioner Gavin Jones, current chief executive of Essex County Council.