



Move forwards, grow and innovate

In April, much of the UK reacted with shock when Prime Minister Theresa May called a snap General Election, to be held on 8 June 2017, so soon after the triggering of Article 50 to leave the European Union (EU) at the end of March. Many questions have been asked in the wake of the announcement, and we still don't really have any idea what will happen to the UK's space sector following Brexit.

Towards the end of April, I attended the *Westminster Business Forum Keynote Seminar: Growing the UK space economy - Strategy, Infrastructure and International Collaboration*, where these topics were addressed. The attendees heard from a variety of experts, ranging from satellite manufacturers and operators, financiers, MPs, European Space Agency (ESA) executives and key academics.

The UK space sector is a massive industry, and is recognised as being critical to infrastructure nationwide, despite being largely invisible. "A lot of 'non-space businesses' are now coming to be heavily reliant on the space industry for everyday tasks, even though they don't realise it yet," said Nick Appleyard, Head of Integrated Applications and Downstream Services at the ESA. From broadcast, credit and debit card payments, GPS and broadband, the space sector supports most of us every day, whether we know it or not.

In line with the incredible developments space technology can provide, the UK Space Innovation and Growth Strategy 2010-2030 (IGS) has set a target to increase the UK share of the global space economy from six percent to 10 percent by 2030, growing by £40 billion each year. One of the key challenges to this goal is the need to continue to exploit new technologies and innovate. "We're probably the most conservative industry since Sotheby's started to sell antiques – we need change," observed Mark Hempzell, President of the British Interplanetary Society.



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The industry has come a long way in the last decade. The space sector is increasingly being funded by private companies and enterprises, while government funding has fallen to around 14 percent. However, the government does recognise the need to innovate and enable new capabilities on our shores. "Today, the government is smoothing the way for the sector to build its own Spaceport, whereas ten years ago, it would have been a very different matter," said Julian McGougan, Head of Technology at techUK.

However, everything is changing as we edge closer to leaving the European Union (EU), with involvement in European Space Agency (ESA) projects uncertain. "The ESA is not the EU, but the EU supports significant space infrastructure. Post-Brexit, we must ensure access to the ESA programmes we've invested in to continue to grow our sector. If we fail, we're going to have a big problem with how we achieve our growth," explained Professor Martin Barstow, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Strategic Science Projects at the University of Leicester, and Director of the Leicester Institute of Space and Earth Observation.

Richard Peckham, Business Development Director (Space) at Airbus Defence and Space, stated: "We hope that we'll still be able to participate in EU space programmes, with easy if not free movements of goods and people. Whatever happens in terms of new procedures are going to be important, and one thing we will be calling for from the government is transitional processes."

It's clear that the industry is uncertain on what the UK's space sector is going to look like in the aftermath of Brexit, and it's difficult to plan in the wake of such much uncertainty. It's key that we continue to move forwards, grow and innovate, and further collaboration with the EU and other partners could be key to our success.