



Making the most of home-grown opportunities



Editor - Amy Saunders ●●●

For space industry observers, it's easy to believe that anything is possible, that there are no limits to what we can do. All this talk of self-driving cars, hotels on Mars, and super-fast global Internet for everyone makes people think we're so much further along than we actually are. While all these ideas are under research and development, we're still some way off seeing them actualised just yet.

If we look backwards, it hasn't even been 50 years yet since man first set foot on the moon for the first time. In total, there have been six manned moon landings, the latest in 1972. A lot of people have theories, some crazy, some entirely reasonable, about why we haven't ventured back to the moon since then. But the argument that just keeps coming up is money, or lack thereof. It costs a lot of money to visit the moon, money that could (arguably) be better spent developing more affordable launch systems.

In order to keep forging ahead, it's absolutely vital that investment in new technologies continues; reusable launch vehicles, for example, which in theory will one day provide considerably more affordable access to space, are just one aspect of this. It's also important that we take advantage of every resource that is available to us.

Here in the UK, we're doing just that. Shetland Space Centre (SSC) bosses are adamant that their site in Unst offers unrivalled (in the UK) natural advantages for delivering small satellites into space. As the farthest north potential site in the UK, it is ideal for launching small satellites into Polar and Sun-Synchronous orbits, and there are no obstacles to direct launch to these orbits such as populated centres or oil and gas installations. In addition, the airspace in the region is clear, with no major trans-Atlantic routes or military restrictions. Indeed, voices from the UK Space Agency, government and industry have all agreed Unst would be an ideal location for a dedicated small satellite launch facility in the UK.

The UK might still be considered by some as small fry in the global space sector, but don't expect that reputation to last long. With ambassadors, government, academia and organisations all working together to advance our home-grown capabilities, making the most of the resources here at our fingertips, the UK expects to account for 10 percent of the global space industry by 2020. I, for one, am looking forward to seeing us make a bigger mark on the international stage. 🌟

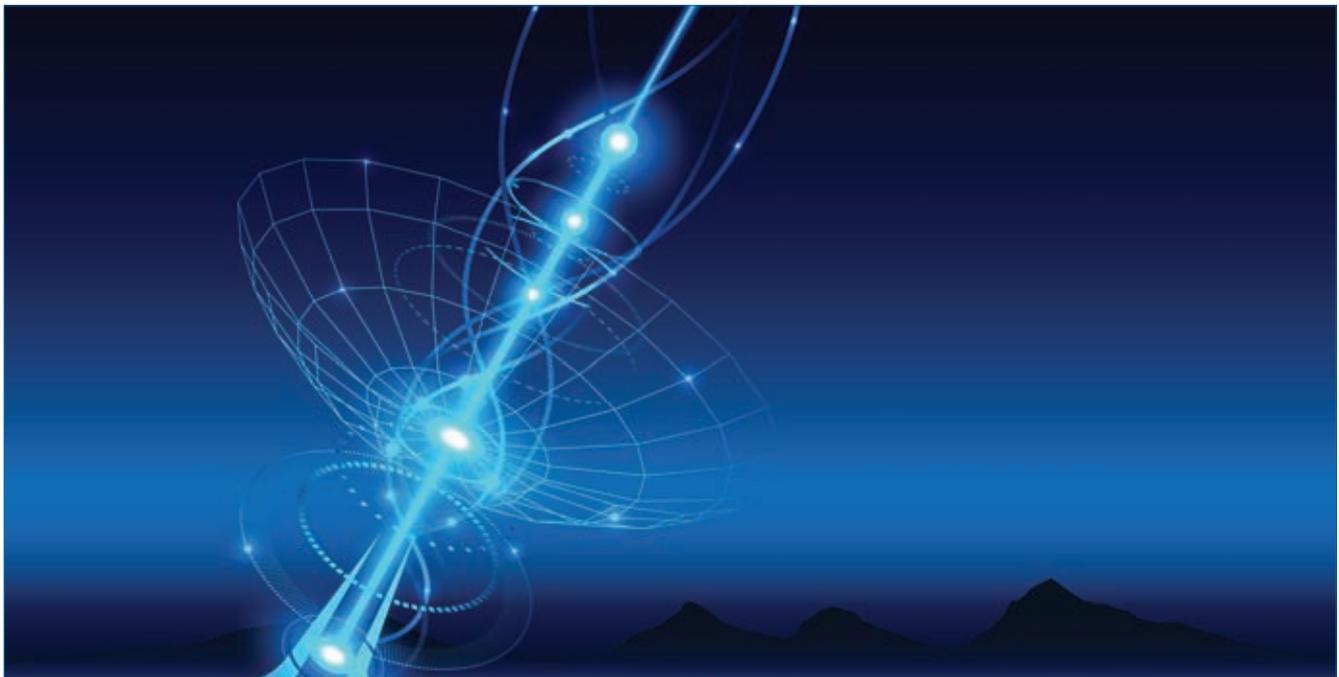


Photo courtesy of Shutterstock ●●●