

The Case For Space- Britain's best kept secret



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If I told you that we are living in an age of unprecedented change, you would probably agree. But if I then told you that space is changing all our lives, I suspect I will have lost you.

I hope that in the time it takes you to get to the bottom of this page, you might agree with me that Britain's world leading space industry is a jewel we cannot afford to lose.

Recently, the Treasury helpfully spelt out what change looked like for us all. It named five new challenges for Britain: we are ageing; technology is happening faster; China and India are becoming economic superpowers; terrorism is reshaping our security landscape; and we are damaging our environment. These challenges we all know in one form or other, from jobs moving to the Far East to the pensions timebomb, or the latest effects of our changing climate.

If I was pushed to name a common theme behind these challenges I would say it was innovation. We must innovate more, and we must innovate better – we must develop and use innovative solutions to address the challenges of our times.

Space can help us do all of this. For a start, space is one of our most innovative industries. Fed by a space science community described by the Science Minister as "one of the crowning achievements in Britain's science base", space adds about £7 billion to our economy and supports around 70,000 jobs in what is one of the country's most highly productive industries. Space is one of the highest value adding hi-tech sectors in Britain. And it employs the most highly skilled workforce in British manufacturing. Behind this little known success story is a rollcall of world bests. Britain leads the global market for low-cost satellites. Britain leads the global mobile satellite communications market. Britain leads the world in the application of earth observation data – putting maps into the hands of aid agencies from Darfur to the Asian Tsunami.

Space is a good industry for Britain to be good at. Because space is going somewhere fast. In fact the global space sector is growing faster than China – no surprise then that China, like India, is investing huge sums in space. By 2025 the world space market could be worth \$1.5 trillion. Its not difficult to see why. Take satellite navigation. Once the preserve of luxury cars, satellite navigation will soon literally be in the palm of your hands – by

2020 most of the world's three billion mobiles will have satellite navigation. From finding the nearest Chinese restaurant to dialling 999, space is set to change our lives as much as did the mobile phone itself.

But the benefits of our space leadership are felt far further afield. Britain's space activities are today inspiring our schoolchildren into science and engineering. Last year, the Scottish Space School reached 25,000 schoolchildren – 83% of these went on to take science courses. Northern Ireland has set up a Space Curriculum Office. Yorkshire's regional development agency is investing £1 million in a new Space Education Office for the UK.

UK Space is also shaping our understanding of climate change. Satellites first identified the hole in the ozone layer. Now a UK led satellite will use a radar to bounce off the arctic ice,

giving us the most accurate and comprehensive picture of the melting ice caps. Another British satellite instrument is mapping the changes in our sea surface temperatures, changes that have been linked to last year's worst ever hurricane season in the Caribbean, and to the worst ever drought in the heart of the Amazon basin. No wonder Britain's chief scientist, Sir David King, recently remarked "there is no doubt that satellites, often UK designed and built, play a critical role in evaluating man's impact on the environment."

Space, you may be surprised to hear, also holds the key to the sustainable development of the third

world. Space is laying down a communications infrastructure for the whole of Africa that will stand the test of time, one which can reach every village, opening up new opportunities from teaching to healthcare, from the economy to humanitarian aid.

In fact, UK space is reshaping our whole policy landscape, from road congestion to satellite criminal tagging, from secure global communications for our Armed Forces to broadband for our rural communities.

All of this for less than a penny per person per day. Space is not only Britain's best kept secret. It is our best bargain too. I hope you agree with me now, and let's hope, in this Spending Review, the Chancellor does too.

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