



UK Engagement with Space Committee

Corrected oral evidence

Monday 30 June 2025

3.30 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Ashton of Upholland (The Chair); Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury; Lord Booth-Smith; Lord Clement-Jones; Baroness Donaghy; Lord Lansley; Baroness Mobarik; Lord Shamash; Viscount Stansgate; Baroness Stowell of Beeston; Lord Tarassenko.

Evidence Session No. 21

Heard in Public

Questions 179 – 189

Witnesses

[I](#): Sir Chris Bryant MP, Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology; Annelies Look, Director for Space, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Examination of witnesses

Sir Chris Bryant MP and Annelies Look.

Q179 The Chair: Welcome to the next public session of the UK's engagement with space inquiry. I am delighted that we have with us Minister Chris Bryant, who has agreed to come and answer the questions. It is a really important moment for us because as we have begun to pull together all the different threads of the issues that have come to light, we have a chance to perhaps test a few of these out on him and to get his views. Annelies, you are joining him as well, as a senior person from the department. I am sure that there will be an exchange between you.

If I may, I will begin with the first question. Do you think that there is a need to have a more streamlined space strategy that focuses explicitly on the comparative advantages that the UK has?

Sir Chris Bryant: Yes—and hello; it is very nice of you to have me along today. When I arrived in post and took on this responsibility—I think of myself as space commander for the Government—one of the first things I said was, “I don’t know why we’re doing all these little bits and pieces of this, that and the next thing”. It was as though every time there was a new Space Minister, they came along with a new preferred project. Instead of having one big statue, we ended up with small little busts in every niche available. That is not the right way for us to go.

We have tried to be very focused. A chunk of that work is still to be done because we have only just had our spending review settlement. But we have set ourselves three priorities. First, national security: you will have seen from the strategic defence review that space is mentioned 40 times or so, which is a complete difference from any previous review. That is for a very obvious reason, namely that, in a modern war, you cannot dominate the terrain without dominating space as well. Probably before anybody started a war on land, they would start a war in space to take satellites out and so on. That is number one.

Secondly, economic growth: anything that brings economic growth to the UK is good. There is a series of things that we are good at that bring very significant economic value to us. Thirdly are things where we have a unique capability that we should exploit to its utmost. A classic instance of this is that we are the only country in Europe that is able—well, you could argue Norway could—to develop launch in the way that we can. We should exploit that as much as we possibly can. Yes, I completely agree that we need to be more streamlined. That is an argument that has met with support from everybody in the industry as well.

Q180 Baroness Mobarik: We have had written evidence that one of the key problems with the UK's space strategy is that it does not prioritise the development of a UK sovereign space programme. I would like to ask you: can the UK achieve its space capability goals and international leadership in space without a sizeable sovereign programme?

Sir Chris Bryant: First, I would say there is a balancing act for us to achieve. Obviously, something like 80%—I will be corrected if I have this wrong—of our civil space budget is spent through ESA, the European Space Agency. Where we can, it is best for us to co-operate with our closest allies. A lot of the things that they are developing are projects that we want to be engaged in, and it brings, obviously, financial benefits to us because we are able to launch projects that otherwise we would not be able to do on our own.

I suspect my predecessors wanted to show more of a Brexit dividend in some strange way and consequently were rather keen on other UK-based projects. But because of the geo-return process, which you will understand, the last quarter—again, I will be corrected if I have this wrong—is the best quarter we have had in all our time as a member of the ESA, in terms of ESA projects and the money that we spend through ESA being spent in the UK. If we can maintain that into the future, that is a really significant benefit for us.

There are things that we are really good at: earth observation, small satellite manufacturing and launch, as I have said. In those areas, yes, there are things that we need to do with a sovereign capacity.

Annelies Look: Just to add on, we had a choice as to how we entered into this spending review. We could have looked at what we have traditionally done and said we want to continue with that, and we want to do more things. But what the Government chose to do—this is the right thing to do—was to start with the outcomes. What outcomes do you want to achieve? What activities best deliver on those outcomes? And only then, who are you best doing that with? Is it best done with the European Space Agency, best done nationally, or best done bilaterally? That is the logic flow that we have gone through: outcomes, activities and then who best to partner with.

Q181 **Lord Booth-Smith:** One thing that has been raised, both by research organisations and commercial enterprises, is how the incentives differ between grant-based funding and use of things like government contracts. I wondered if there were any steps the Government were taking currently to think about maybe moving on from just doing a lot of existing grant-based funding work, to having greater use of government contracts. Then linked to that, just given economic circumstances and fiscal circumstances, do you see that as a way to get more bang for your buck, given current budgetary restrictions?

Sir Chris Bryant: Just on fiscal pressures, it is worth saying we will not be able to fund everything that we would like to. That is certainly true. We are going to have to make decisions over the next few months as to what we commit to, both nationally over the spending review period and at the European Space Agency. One issue there, of course, is that its commitment process is not just a three-year spending review timeline; it is longer. That makes things more complex for us because the Treasury does not really like long profiles like that. We maybe need to think about some reprofiling of our expenditure as well.

It is a very good question you ask because historically we have tended to depend on funding things via R&D. That is great. We have a very good R&D settlement from the Treasury for the spending review period. We are very happy with that in DSIT, but that takes you only so far in relation to space. A lot of stuff, of course, needs to be developed on an entirely commercial basis. That will grow, I am confident of that. But in some areas, we need to think of making sure that we are a very good procurer of services. We might come on to the question of how we structure responsibility within government for space. I am conscious that DSIT is not the only department that is engaged in this. DESNZ similarly has responsibility, Defra too, and they are commissioning stuff from space.

The one thing that really struck me is that you cannot spend a day in modern Britain without in some way or other being engaged with something that has come from space. Most people simply do not understand that. We need to do a better job of explaining that to society, so that people understand why this investment is not just some nice-to-have frivolous thing—sending somebody off to Mars or whatever. It is actually about how we structure our lives, how we are economically efficient and more productive.

Annelies Look: Yes, absolutely. As you say, we are very strong in grants, but actually to get that growth from start-up, to scale-up, to commercialise, to industrialise, you need the right blend of grants, anchor contracts and investments. In the *Industrial Strategy* published last week, one of the chapters now gives the space sector access to the British Business Bank and the National Wealth Fund, which will help on the investment side.

On the contracting side, the UK Space Agency has the Unlocking Space programme, which allows the space agency to work with different parts of Government to show the benefit of space, in terms of delivering benefit to the citizens. There is a lot of work going on there, but as the Minister says, there is still more to do. We have a number of anchor contracts in government at the moment, but I hope the work that we are doing to create a one-government approach to space will be able to accelerate that further.

Sir Chris Bryant: If I might add, throughout the *Industrial Strategy*—this applies not only to space, but equally to space—is this issue around access to capital, especially for scale-up. It is a really important part of what we need to be able to deliver. I am glad that the British Business Bank is completely signed up. Just one example of this: I was talking to Open Cosmos last week. It has quite a lot of big contracts coming, it needs some capital investment, and it needs to know where to go.

Q182 **Lord Lansley:** Can I take you further into our relationship with the European Space Agency? As you said, a substantial proportion of our funding goes there, but we are in fourth position in terms of the overall funding of ESA. When we look towards ESA Ministerial, what are you anticipating that we might look towards in terms of providing leadership or looking for ESA to do for us?

Sir Chris Bryant: There is a slightly rocky period ahead. Everybody who has been a Space Minister advises me about the process of going up to a Ministerial. Maybe Baroness Ashton might recall similar events in Europe when people negotiate, but I gather it is quite a complex process. First, spending money in and of itself is not an achievement; spending money and getting results and outcomes is. I am not in a competition with any of the other countries to say, "I'm spending more than you". I am in the business of trying to establish what projects ESA is engaged in that will really bring value and benefits to the UK.

Of course, I want to do that jointly with ESA because it is important that ESA is a strong body. It is also important that it is not just an EU body; it is a European space agency. Of course, it has other associate memberships like Canada and other places.

The other point I want to make is ESA needs to look very carefully at how it saves money and spends money in a way that really delivers. We will be fairly eagle-eyed between now and the Ministerial meeting in November. It was interesting meeting with my German and Swiss counterparts and others and seeing how keen they were to make the same point to ESA that nobody has limitless budgets. We really want to see things that deliver.

Lord Lansley: Given that we have had the NATO Ministerial, there are 19 countries that are members of both ESA and NATO. Although ESA itself is focused on civil space activity, there are lots of dual-use technologies. Is there any sense in which the focus on space in the NATO and the defence review can inform some decisions we make about where ESA's priorities should lie?

Sir Chris Bryant: Well, strictly according to ESA's rules, no. But obviously, this is nonsense. As you say, so many aspects of what we talk about now in relation to space must have dual use built into them from the very beginning, rather than suddenly added on at the end. This is one of the issues that we need to think about. We may be coming on to the issue of how we structure government decisions for us in this area. That point has already been hammered home to us by several of the key decisions and key vulnerabilities, for that matter, that we have.

Q183 **Lord Tarassenko:** I want to ask about Galileo and IRIS². I would like to do it as a two-part question. We have had some wonderful witnesses, the first of whom was Major Tim Peake, right at the start. He was absolutely adamant that we should rejoin Galileo because we contributed so much of its funding and scientific expertise before Brexit. Then we had Lord Willetts, as chair of the UK Space Agency, who said that the UK had to exit Galileo because it has a security function that cannot be offered to non-EU members. However, now that the UK has a much closer defence and security partnership with the EU, some issues that pushed us out of Galileo could possibly be dealt with. Is this something that the UK Government are considering as a secure and accurate alternative to American GPS?

Sir Chris Bryant: Annelies has been through this process a bit more than I have, but I fear that the answer is no.

Annelies Look: As you say, Galileo is an EU space programme that we are not currently a participant in. The current multi-annual finance framework runs up to 2027, so within this framework we are not part of it. As you rightly point out, what it does not allow us is to have access to the secure aspect of it, which we do through the American GPS programme. Certainly, our UK public businesses still have access to the open side of Galileo without us being a participant. As always, when the renewal comes up, the Government will look at it and see whether it matches the outcomes that the Ministers want to achieve.

Sir Chris Bryant: I should reiterate the point I made earlier: we will not be able to do everything that we would like to. We will not be able to fund everything that we would like to.

Lord Tarassenko: This was less about funding and more about strategy. You might have noticed my name is Ukrainian. What has been happening in terms of defence partnerships and the UK drawing closer? That was the basis of the question. Now we are closer in terms of defence and security, it might be worth revisiting the issue of Galileo and its secure aspects.

Sir Chris Bryant: We certainly need to make sure that we and our allies have the ability to work out where they are and where their opponents are.

Lord Tarassenko: Moving on to a similar topic but a different form of technology, IRIS², which is a major infrastructure project—as I am sure you know—of €10 billion to €11 billion. It is currently in the early stages of development. Its aim, quite openly, is to rival Elon Musk's Starlink in providing high-speed connectivity to European Governments and citizens. We have heard several witnesses tell us that participation in IRIS² would be of strategic economic value for the UK. Under EU rules, third-party countries are able to participate in IRIS², but we have been told the UK has not shown any real interest. Is that really the case?

Annelies Look: It is the same situation. Under the current multi-annual finance framework, we are not part of it. We absolutely encourage the UK industry to be a part of the supply chain but again, when it comes up for renewal in 2027, we can take another look.

Sir Chris Bryant: I am sorry, I am going to reiterate that it is going to be quite a stretch for us to get to our existing commitments, let alone to add new commitments financially. I fully understand the point you are making about strategy and strategic advantage, but sometimes that comes up against the hard reality of money.

Lord Tarassenko: But in the *Industrial Strategy*, the space part of it talks about focusing on the five key capability areas, and satellite comms technology is very much that. The new satellite comms, the new generation of technology, is IRIS². Are we reviewing whether we should

be because it is one of our key areas of priority?

Sir Chris Bryant: We set aside up to £80 million in the *Industrial Strategy* for the five key capabilities, but that is only one of them.

Q184 **Baroness Stowell of Beeston:** I suppose just expanding to the rest of the world, we have had quite a bit of written evidence from various different organisations and individuals supportive of the UK's endeavours to develop international partnerships and programmes beyond ESA, the EU and the US. I wonder if you could tell us what the Government's assessment is of the relative importance of investment in national programmes, ESA, and these others. You have just talked about the limits of your spending capacity, but give us a sense of it, because it was not really captured in the *Industrial Strategy* space plan in terms of how you see these different programmes.

Sir Chris Bryant: No, and we will probably need to do a full space strategy for the UK because that will need to be updated. That will embrace the work of several different departments, not just DSIT.

You are right that there is ESA, there is what we do in the UK on our own, and then there are things that we do bilaterally, for instance with Japan or with New Zealand—there have recently been new developments there—and of course with the United States of America. It is a mix of the three, and what we have to decide over the next few months is precisely how we structure those three. We have set aside I think £75 million for bilateral arrangements over the next five years, but you will note that £75 million is not a vast amount of money.

Baroness Stowell of Beeston: If you are going to be looking at this over the next few months, when might we see an outcome from this? Just bearing in mind that our inquiry is quite fixed in terms of the length, do you think we will have any sense from you before we finish our inquiry?

Sir Chris Bryant: We will have to have made very big decisions by the time we get to the ESA Ministerial in November. In fact, discussions with some other member states of ESA are inclining towards making broader decisions earlier than that, rather than having this late-night barroom brawl, as it has been described to me. But it is not going to be much before October.

Baroness Stowell of Beeston: But you might welcome some direction from us in this area.

Sir Chris Bryant: All advice, even unsolicited advice, is always welcome.

Q185 **Lord Clement-Jones:** We have had quite a lot of witnesses say that space policy is too fragmented across Government. I am sure you are aware of that criticism. Do you recognise that as a challenge when it comes to cross-government co-ordination on space policy? For instance, in terms of delivering the Space Workforce Action Plan, which requires that kind of co-ordination, what steps are you taking to try to ensure that

kind of co-ordination and overcome the issues?

Sir Chris Bryant: Well, we need to behave as one Government in this area. When I was first elected in 2001, this was largely a scientific innovation area of discussion, maybe a little Met Office and some Defence, but not much, whereas now there are very few departments that do not have some kind of involvement.

Recently, Maria Eagle and I—she from the Ministry of Defence and I from DSIT—gathered together Ministers including from FCDO, the Department for Transport, and DBT, to discuss how we can have much more of a one-government approach to space. It is partly because we all spend to some degree in that area. We also need skills—the point you just made—and we need to be much more co-ordinated.

We are in the process of discussing how to formalise our meeting of junior Ministers. There is an advantage to being more formal, which is that we could have powers devolved down from Cabinet, we could become a Cabinet sub-committee, but then that might require Cabinet members all to attend, and sometimes being formal is a bane rather than a blessing. We are just working out what the best structure is that we can have, but we are determined to work as a single Government.

Annelies Look: A huge amount of work has gone on in creating that one-government space endeavour. Back at the beginning of the second phase of the spending review, rather than each government department looking at space in isolation, what we did was collectively come together. As the Minister said, those outcomes for space are not just DSIT outcomes for space, they are cross-government outcomes for space, national security and economic growth.

What we did then was look at the space sector and we came up with a common lexicon that we could all actually agree on across Government. You have the five capabilities in the space industry plan, you have earth observation, and you have space science and exploration. These are the things that we spend money on. We came up with what we termed as a strategy on the page for each one of them. A cross-government one that had true ends, ways and means: these are the outcomes we want to achieve, this is what we are collectively doing across Government to try to achieve that; more importantly, this is where the money sits in different government departments. For the first time, the Treasury could see holistically where money was being spent in space.

Since doing that, we are now moving into a place of going through the allocations process, seeing where people have landed in the spending review and what that does for those strategies. We are then transferring those strategies into cross-government plans, funded plans that we can then share with the sector to say, "This is what we are going to do over the remainder of the spending review, and it's funded".

As the Minister said, we are then looking at the actual governance of how we drive that delivery, with a ministerial forum underpinned by what

used to be the National Space Board, which was a policy board that has now pivoted to a strategy and delivery board. It is constantly looking at how the ecosystem is changing and how we respond to that, but also how we can drive delivery to make sure we holistically, across Government, are making sure the money goes as far as possible.

Lord Clement-Jones: Our witnesses will be very encouraged to hear that. You have two tiers, where you have the policy and then you have the delivery, so to speak. Of course, the last Government set up a Cabinet committee that never met. This will be at a slightly different level. It will be a working ministerial level; is that right?

Sir Chris Bryant: Frankly, it is the Ministers who are closest to the weekly decisions on space. Obviously, the Department for Transport has the Civil Aviation Authority. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has all the strategic and geostrategic issues that are so important.

Annelies Look: DBT.

Sir Chris Bryant: Yes, I forgot about DBT. Yes, we have already had one meeting. We have another one next week.

Lord Clement-Jones: There will not be too much ad hockery, so to speak. Wherever co-ordination is needed, that will be the instrument.

Sir Chris Bryant: Yes. Sometimes we may want to bring in industry as well. That is the advantage of having an informal meeting of junior Ministers, so we could on occasion bring them in to inform some discussions. Some work that we already do is combined. A month ago I went to the National Space Operations Centre in High Wycombe. That is a joint operation launched a year ago between the MoD and DSIT, and it is absolutely essential to the work that we do in this area. It is a very impressive and seemingly easy co-operation between two departments you might think would not necessarily operate so easily together.

I am also conscious that—again, I will be corrected if I have this figure wrong—we spend a low proportion of our defence budget on space. Is it 5% or is it 0.5%? One or the other—only a factor of 10 difference. It is for MoD to decide whether that is the appropriate way forward. Our combined work together as we move forward is going to be important.

Q186 **Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** I am going to move on to skills, Minister. One of the departments you did not mention, of course, which you did in your previous evidence, was the Department for Education, and involving it in the fact that we have a skills problem. I hope that is also part of your agenda.

Sir Chris Bryant: It is essential. I went to the 50th anniversary of ESA in Paris a couple of weeks ago, which was the longest ceremony in the history of humanity—I am still scarred by it—I met John McFall, who is a member of your House, but a different John McFall is one of our UK astronauts. He was saying how important it is to make sure that we have

a throughput of youngsters who are thinking about space as a possible career, whether it is in engineering, or it is because of their ability in AI, or it is their interest in mathematics or whatever it may be.

Implementing the results of the *Space Sector Skills Survey* from 2023 is a really important part of what we do. That is why DSIT has set aside £187 million in this area. We also need to do more on AI training, and we made some announcements a couple of weeks ago about that. I know you have an interest in the creative industries as well, and interestingly, some of this is across all of Government. The BFI has just produced a report on the film industry and the need for AI education in the film industry. At the moment it is so ad hoc and haphazard that some people have worked it all out and are brilliant and are seeing enormous productivity gains, and others are not. That applies in space as well.

Annelies Look: As the Minister said, within the *Industrial Strategy* there are a number of cross-cutting skills issues, which are addressed through a number of announcements. Within the space chapter, there is a commitment there for the education and future workforce programme that the UK Space Agency runs as well.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: As the Minister will know, this is a joy to my ears. We have heard from the scientists and astronauts we have seen that they really believe in STEAM as being the way forward. I know the Chair is very strict with sticking to our questions—

Sir Chris Bryant: It is my fault, I am afraid. It is because I have to give evidence to another committee.

The Chair: We are doing very well on time. It is not that bad.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: My question is about the UK's current immigration system. We have heard, and you have heard, from witnesses that this is a real problem. We are blocking potential talent coming in from Europe who can help us move our space domain forward.

Sir Chris Bryant: Yes. Look, we need to have an immigration system that is robust where it needs to be robust and unimpeachable where it needs to be unimpeachable. It also needs to be clever, intelligent and flexible enough to be able to make sure that we have the people we need, the talented people in a whole series of different spheres. You could say exactly the same about AI actually, or you could say it about British artists being able to tour in Europe, or a whole series of different areas where we just need to be clever and on point.

I worry sometimes that the system just is not quick enough to be able to accommodate the needs of business. If you want somebody who is extremely talented and they are one of only 10 people in the world who can possibly deliver economic growth in your company, then you want the system to be able to respond really fast.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: Are you working on this and on visas and so on? Is this something that you are actively working on?

Sir Chris Bryant: I have had a series of conversations with the Home Office, not specifically in relation to space because that has not come across my desk, but in relation to other sectors that I have a responsibility for. The point is well made, but it is something we need to get right.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: I understand because you and I come from the same background, but space should be added to that imperative that it is easier for people with these skills to come.

Sir Chris Bryant: We have a Space Skills Advisory Panel. When we next meet with it, that is one of the questions we might ask it.

The Chair: We come to Lord Shamash, who joins us from an operation on his knee.

Sir Chris Bryant: I thought it was a space operation.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: I am glad it is only his knee.

Q187 **Lord Shamash:** One of the things I find is almost a bed blocker, in a way, is where we are dealing with the whole issue of launching our rockets and satellites into space. It was mentioned earlier about being space-locked. This country is not, and we have a great advantage because we are not. We are looking at growth, and this is an amazing area for us to begin to grow into.

You mentioned earlier about how we got almost a one for 10 or 10 for 10 when we did an investment. I am convinced that if we were to develop further the various sites we have in the UK, we would actually benefit in the longer term. Basically, could you update us on the Government's plans when it comes to the European Launcher Challenge, so that we could do this with other countries? I do not know whether you have a handle on that.

Sir Chris Bryant: The first bit of this is we need to get some launch in the UK, and I am very hopeful that we will be successful in Shetland. We have made significant investments both in the site itself and in various different parts of what leads to having something take off. I had a very interesting meeting two weeks ago with people from Goonhilly, who were saying that even though they do not have launch in prospect at the moment, none the less the conglomeration of different industries that works around the site is a real economic strength for that part of the country as well. Yes, we want to build on those two elements. On the specific question that you have asked, Lord Shamash, Annelies, do you want to answer about Europe?

Annelies Look: Yes. As you rightly pointed out, it has an impact on growth. It also has an impact on national security. There are lots of conversations going on across Government about the importance of that. To have a proper launch ecosystem you have to have the spaceports and launchers, but also the customers who want to launch. Making sure all parts of that ecosystem are working is going to be particularly critical.

We are talking to companies that are interested and are part of the ELC considerations. We are also talking to ESA to better understand its plans for the European Launcher Challenge. At the moment, we are still going through the allocation process within the department. As the Minister says, we just have to understand those priorities, the activities that we want to do, against the budget that we have available.

Sir Chris Bryant: It is worth bearing in mind how significant an advantage Shetland is to us. It is easy to forget, but it is not easy to find places to launch from, as Turks and Caicos knows because we have had things blowing up over our territory. That is both dangerous and worrisome for the future, which is why Shetland is so important, and we want to maximise the benefit that we can get from it.

Lord Shamash: I am sure we would get very considerable investment once it was opened up. It would be for the benefit of the country as a whole in terms of economic growth.

Sir Chris Bryant: Well, I am sure a lot of European companies would much prefer to be able to launch from Shetland than go off to French Guiana. People have raised questions about the wind in Shetland with me. In actual fact, I cannot remember the precise number of days of the year when the wind is perfectly normal in Shetland, but it is no worse than Norway.

The Chair: We have a supplementary from Baroness Mobarik.

Sir Chris Bryant: It is not about the wind in Shetland, is it?

Baroness Mobarik: No, it is about the wind in Sutherland, actually. I just wanted to ask: is it not important to have a cluster and not just the one? All our efforts seem to be on the one spaceport, rather than a number of spaceports and perhaps a number of launch pads within those spaceports. Logistically, actually Sutherland being on the mainland is easier in some ways than SaxaVord on the Shetland Islands, although it is equally important. I just wanted to get your view on that.

Sir Chris Bryant: We have two licensed at the moment in the UK, of course, though SaxaVord is the most likely to have a successful launch in the near future. Yes, I would love us to have three. I am quite focused on getting the one to actually launch successfully, and once we have had two or three launches from Shetland, you are right, that then builds on the cluster. Launch in itself is not just launch, it is not just the site, it is everything that goes to enable launch to happen. That has to happen across a large part of the UK.

Annelies Look: Just to be really clear, that was very much a commercial decision made by the company to put its effort into SaxaVord, to make sure that it had a successful first launch.

Sir Chris Bryant: It was not my fault.

The Chair: I am going to ask Viscount Stansgate to ask his question,

then everybody will have asked a question, and we will still have 10 minutes for supplementaries.

Q188 Viscount Stansgate: This means that you have 10 minutes to answer my question. The UK has sought to position itself as a leader in sustainable space through various initiatives. For example, at an earlier meeting we had a satellite brought in right over there, which illustrated how it was going to grab satellites and then de-orbit them and bring them back down to earth—that type of initiative.

Now, my question to you is: do you have any evidence—or have you seen any evidence—that this type of interest on behalf of Britain is having any effect on international countries and partners in what they do because they are interested in what we are doing?

Sir Chris Bryant: Now, “debris” is one of those difficult words because I am not sure whether it is “duh-bree” or “debb-ree”. I am going for “debb-ree”. *Hansard* will not be able to record that.

Viscount Stansgate: Well, *Hansard* can record that I agree with you.

Sir Chris Bryant: Excellent. If I could just take one step back to say that in High Wycombe—I have to be careful about how far I can go—to put it in layman’s language, there is a lot of stuff up there now. One of the dangers for a lot of satellites is stuff flying around that bumps into other stuff, or that is deliberately targeted to bump into other stuff. Safe debris removal is a really important part of what needs to be done, as well as monitoring where everything else is up there.

Not only is this an important part of our economic work because it is an area that we have some expertise in, but it is part of our national security. It may be that there are more accidental damages to satellites that knock things out for several days than deliberate ones, but if we can at least deal with the accidental ones then that gives us a better chance of dealing with the potential deliberate targets from hostile state actors. Do you want to answer the specifics around the money?

Annelies Look: Yes. The UK is home to several valuable initiatives aiming to address the challenges of orbital debris and is party to the international efforts. The UK is currently a member and chair of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee, IADC, where we are a signatory of the European Space Agency’s Zero Debris Charter. We also take a leading role in the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which met only last week. At the UN, the UK has continued to support important awareness-raising and capability-building of space law and guidelines, by funding two projects with the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs: one on the long-term sustainability guidelines and one on the registration of space objects.

The UK retains a significant influence in the field of space sustainability. We make the argument that without effective stewardship and innovative approaches to debris mitigation and remediation, we will lose that vital access to space that we all critically depend upon, as the Minister said

earlier. What we have managed to do through leadership in various UN offices with a mandate for space is within COPUOS—the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space—we have shown that leadership through working groups and through the sustainability and outer space activities, where we have negotiated and championed implementation of the guidelines and funded projects within UNOOSA.

We are also the chair of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Co-ordination Committee, which is a group of 13 space agencies that support and perform space debris research. The guidelines are part of the national regulations globally, and the UK membership and research delivered as part of the committee is essential to our success. We are doing a lot of things through a number of different committees.

Viscount Stansgate: Would you say there is a role for Britain's financial services industry, or a role that our legal system can play in international agreements looking forward?

Sir Chris Bryant: Space is a very contested domain at the moment. Again, going back 50 or 60 years, it was not contested in the way it is today and there was a general acceptance that it was not a space in which to mount a contest. That is very certainly not true now. Whether we need for future treaties to be able to, in essence, maintain the peace or maintain the tidiness of space—

Viscount Stansgate: Have you ever had any discussions with a view to future treaties, which might be very difficult to achieve?

Sir Chris Bryant: I have had very embryonic conversations, which were more chatting at the end of the day and asking, "What do we think?" I would say that for the UK, space is strategically important for military and for economic reasons. It is also a place where we do not want to see monopoly thrive, and where some actors have such enormous financial advantages and are able to throw up so much stuff that it is very easy for the rest of us to be dwarfed. That will mean increasingly that we in Europe—normally with our American allies, but we notice what has happened to NASA's prospective budgets, and there is some degree of uncertainty there—will want to work to make sure that space is a safe domain.

Lord Clement-Jones: I really wanted to follow up on that. Is it you who has the overview of discussions on international space regulation—the legal and liability aspects, for instance? Is this all under your purview? Just added to that, the question of insurance has come up. There is a Private Member's Bill on that subject coming through, if I am not wrong, which gives companies a backstop in terms of liability for what they do. Is that under you as well?

Sir Chris Bryant: I do not know about that. Do you know about that, Annelies, about indemnity?

Annelies Look: It is, but I will probably have to come back with a specific answer on that one for you.

Sir Chris Bryant: I generally assume that I am in charge of everything until somebody tells me that I am not in charge of it. In relation to the space portfolio, we have taken leadership, alongside the MoD, because we are the two biggest players within Government. Maria Eagle and I are very much trying to work as a unit so that we can get the best value for money out of everything that we are doing. We are looking as much as possible, for instance, at dual use.

Of course, in the end, it is the FCDO that takes the lead on international treaties, and it was at our last meeting in the shape of Stephen Doughty. Of course, it looks at the threats from state actors like Russia and China.

Lord Clement-Jones: Is it part of your co-ordinating committee?

Sir Chris Bryant: Yes, very much so.

Lord Tarassenko: I have a question about the *Industrial Strategy*, but can I come back? I actually have the answer about Norway and Scotland. I consulted GPT 4.0, which is the premium version. You are both right and wrong in that Shetland generally experiences stronger and more consistent winds than most of Norway on average, but some parts of coastal and northern Norway can experience winds as strong or stronger than Scotland. Of course, we know that the Norwegian launch site is up in the north, so you probably can claim a score draw on that one.

Sir Chris Bryant: Somebody told me that they had asked ChatGPT-4, "What do we think of Chris Bryant as a Minister?" And it said, "Too soon to say".

Q189 **Lord Tarassenko:** Anyway, I will go on to the *Industrial Strategy*. Coming from academia, I know it is welcome in academia; from the industrial witnesses that we saw, they welcome having an industrial strategy. They would, would they not? What I am interested in is whether you think space has done well in the *Industrial Strategy*. You mentioned the five capability areas. You mentioned decisions made about Shetland, SaxaVord and so on. First, has space done well under the *Industrial Strategy*? Secondly, is it nimble enough? Once you have a strategy it is great, but do you lock yourself in, or are you nimble enough to respond to changing circumstances?

Sir Chris Bryant: Well, it is not just the *Industrial Strategy*, it is also the spending review. That is a matter for the whole of the DSIT budget, which we have yet to unroll. Now, I suspect that a significant chunk of R&D money from DSIT will end up going into space because it is self-evidently a place of innovation, research and development and so on.

Yes, we are pretty happy. I would love us to spend on the level that France does, or Germany, or Italy, but as I said at the beginning, I am much more interested in outcomes than I am just in how much money we have to spend. If I have not said this clearly enough, ESA has to look

at how it can be as financially efficient and good value as it possibly can be as well.

Lord Lansley: I am a little confused because when you were responding to Lord Tarassenko about IRIS², I got the impression that there was no decision for us to make, but quite clearly the European Space Agency regards this year as being a time for making decisions about IRIS². I did not quite understand. Perhaps you could explain a bit more about why the multi-annual financial framework precludes our participation.

Annelies Look: Yes, I will explain that a little. There is a difference between how we fund things into the EU versus how we fund things into ESA. To bring that to life, being a part of Copernicus means that we put a certain amount of money to the EU, but we also invest in ESA to have those technologies that then allow us to get even better return on our money through the EU programme.

We know that ESA is obviously responding to the security situation and considering some new programmes that member states might want to invest in. At the moment, we do not have a lot of detail of what it is thinking of doing. But we are staying close to the conversation, and we will consider it, along with all the other things that we could spend money on within this spending review.

Sir Chris Bryant: It is worth saying that there are some countries in Europe that, first, would prefer ESA to function without any consideration for geo-return at all. That would not be very popular with most countries, so that is not going to happen. Secondly, they would like ESA in effect to be an EU body, or at least within ESA to have a tighter body of EU members that make most of the decisions. I am very firmly opposed to it going down that route.

Baroness Mobarik: Just very briefly, you said earlier that space had been mentioned about 40 times in the defence strategy. I do not know if I just did not see it, but I flipped through the *Industrial Strategy*, and I did not really see space being mentioned—perhaps once, I think. Which pages should I be looking at? I know it is all interconnected.

Sir Chris Bryant: The *Industrial Strategy* has its main text, which does not mention the creative industries all that much either, but there is a creative industries sector plan, and likewise, there is a sector plan that includes space. We can make sure you have the stuff.

Annelies Look: I believe it is about page 80 of the advanced manufacturing chapter. There are four pages on space.

The Chair: Thank you. Can I bring this public evidence session to a conclusion? Thank you very much for being with us, both of you. It has been incredibly useful.