

# Press Release

From MIST Council

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## **British “Space Weather” scientists welcome parliamentary report on science funding**

The parliamentary Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Select Committee publish their report today looking into the science budget allocations and the £80 million black hole in the STFC budget. The report, which is critical of the government and damning about STFC management, identifies Solar Terrestrial Physics (STP) as a science area where action is needed.

Solar Terrestrial Physics in the UK is being hit particularly hard by the proposed STFC cuts, with all support for ground-based research due to end and several university groups already suffering major cuts. STFC’s treatment of STP is one of several examples of poor STFC management highlighted in the committee’s report. For example they note that “the withdrawal of funding for ground-based STP facilities while the UK is engaged in a long term commitment to EISCAT has made the UK look like an incompetent international partner”. In their recommendations, the select committee “urge STFC to suspend its decision on ground-based STP so that the issue can be revisited with proper peer review and in full consultation with the community”.

Professor Betty Lanchester of the Space Environment Physics group at the University of Southampton said: “This report provides hope that common sense can prevail, and the UK will not simply throw away its world lead in this area; however, it cannot prevent the loss of talented young scientists that has already begun.”

The Select Committee notes that ground-based solar-terrestrial physics also fits within the remit of NERC and encourages STFC, NERC and the STP community to find a favourable solution for all parties. The STP community is already developing a response to this suggestion.

The report finds the management of STFC to be “ineffective and secretive” which reflects the sentiment expressed by the STP community at a meeting in January where resolutions were passed announcing deep concern “about the lack of transparency in recent decision-making within the STFC, ... and the lack of consultation and discussion with the community” and calling for “a change of the structures, and individuals” at the heart of the research council.

Notes to editors:

### **Acronyms:**

STFC – Science and Technology Facilities Council ([www.scitech.ac.uk](http://www.scitech.ac.uk))

NERC – Natural Environment Research Council ([www.nerc.ac.uk](http://www.nerc.ac.uk))

STP – Solar Terrestrial Physics

EISCAT – European Incoherent SCATter Radars ([www.eiscat.com](http://www.eiscat.com))

## **MIST**

The UK's Magnetosphere, Ionosphere and Solar-Terrestrial (MIST) scientific community is engaged in fundamental and applied research into the interactions between the Sun and the Earth and investigates the effects of the Sun on the Earth's protective magnetic shield (its magnetosphere) and Earth's atmosphere. Scientists in the UK play a key role in understanding and predicting space weather events. These can:

- Cause damage to Earth-orbiting satellites providing (amongst others) global communications and Earth observations for weather prediction.
- Interrupt radio communications.
- Effect electricity and oil supply networks.
- Pose critical health risks to astronauts in Earth orbit and increased risks to air crews and aeroplane avionics.

The community also helps to understand the effect of solar variability on climate change, studies how GPS navigation signals pass through the atmosphere, track potentially dangerous space debris, and develops novel techniques for geological exploration. This research portfolio has a high international profile and makes significant contributions to major scientific issues (e.g. climate change) with a high priority for central government. The practical applications of this research have substantial economic and societal impacts for the UK.

The MIST community gathered at the Royal Astronomical Society's London Headquarters on 21<sup>st</sup> January and passed three resolutions, the full texts of which are available at

<http://www.mist.ac.uk/mistres.html>

and a previous press release regarding the resolutions is available at

<http://www.mist.ac.uk/Press-release-MIST.pdf>

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The MIST council is a group of five UK researchers, elected by the space science community to plan conferences and organise the community. The current council comprises of Prof. Mike Hapgood (Rutherford Appleton Laboratory) (chair), Prof. Betty Lanchester (University of Southampton), Dr Gary Abel (British Antarctic Survey), Dr Andrew Kavanagh (University of Lancaster) and Dr Chris Arridge (University College London). Further details regarding the MIST community (including MIST Council members) can be found at: **[www.mist.ac.uk](http://www.mist.ac.uk)**