

A hard sell? Engaging UK and European politicians with space science

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Abstract

The UK, and the whole of Europe, face uncertain times. Science, particularly blue skies research, is equally affected by social change, and the relationship between collaborating nations. Securing political and public support for space science and astronomy, including exploration of the Solar system, is by no means easy, and science as a whole is some way down the list of priorities in international relations.

In this paper I will describe the efforts made by the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS)¹, the lead UK body representing professional astronomers, space and planetary scientists, with examples that may be of use to similar organisations at a European and national level.

Some challenges in the UK are likely similar to those across Europe: difficulty in recruiting women and members of minority groups to STEM occupations, variable political support, complicated migration rules and constrained financial resources. The 2016 vote to leave the European Union, set to be enacted in March next year, is an additional overarching pressure on scientists and society in general.

The Society's public policy works aims to engage in all these areas. It rests on analysis, for example regular surveys of the demographics and research interests of the scientific community, efforts to map the funding landscape, and dialogue with the astronomers and space scientists we represent. We assemble both qualitative and quantitative evidence to make our case to policymakers, organise meetings at an individual and community level, and set out position statements on key issues.

This paper will look at the success of our work, attempting to reflect on the achievements and sometimes disappointments from our approach, and plans for the future.

References

[1] Royal Astronomical Society: <http://www.ras.ac.uk/>