

**Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) consultation on Science and Society strategy
(draft vision and objectives): RAS response**

The Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) has around 3700 members (Fellows) working in areas related to the fields of astronomy, space science and geophysics. Our membership includes a large number of teachers and informal educators and others engaging in Science and Society activity alongside their formal research roles. The Society convenes an Education Committee that represents these interests.

For these reasons we take a keen interest in the role undertaken by BIS in this area. The Society broadly agrees with the points set out in the draft vision and objectives, but nonetheless wishes to make two specific comments.

The strategy does not make clear how the work of BIS will sit alongside that of the Research Councils, who particularly in the case of the Science and Technology Facilities Councils (STFC – the body responsible for funding much of UK astronomy) are already very active in supporting Science and Society programmes. It would be helpful to see a clearer statement that seeks to avoid duplication between these two branches of the public sector.

We also draw the attention of BIS to the report of the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee on ‘Astronomy and Particle Physics’ published in 2011. This highlighted the lack of engagement between BIS and the Department for Education (DfE) and urged the Government to ensure that those responsible for education policy took full advantage of the opportunities for inspiration presented by new research projects and the many major space exploration missions where British scientists lead. In astronomy these might include the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT) and the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). The Government agreed with this recommendation in its response to the Select Committee and we therefore ask BIS to reflect this in its new strategy.