Flying into the eye of the storm

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While most of us watched this summer's violent and destructive storms on TV from the comfort of our sofas, a team of researchers from across the UK, including University of Leeds scientists Alan Blyth, Barbara Brooks and Lindsay Bennett, took to the skies in specially equipped planes to study their origins.

The convective storm which caused flooding in Boscastle with 75mm of rain in two hours, is recognisable as bubbly cumulous cloud often seen in the UK. The research team from the school of earth and environment hope their observations will improve computer models used to predict these storms.

This summer's monitoring was a pilot project in preparation for a full study next year, when the team will use radars, a network of automatic weather stations and aircraft to measure winds, temperature and humidity. The team will wait, with equipment ready, to catch the storms forming from June to August.

Project leader Dr Blyth said: "A research model under development at the Met Office has had some success in predicting the location and intensity of thunderstorms a few hours ahead, but improving the accuracy and reliability remains a difficult challenge." The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) funded Convective Storm Initiation Project (CSIP) includes the universities of Leeds, Reading, Salford, Essex, Bath, Manchester and the Met Office.

Source: University of Leeds