

# UK space chiefs vows to try again after failed rocket launch

January 10 2023

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Space sector bosses on Tuesday said they were disappointed by the failure of the country's historic first attempt to launch satellites from UK soil but pledged to investigate and try again.

The failure of the mission late on Monday is a blow to the UK's fledgling [space](#) sector.

Had it been successful, it would have made the UK one of only nine countries able to launch rockets into Earth's orbit.

A Virgin Orbit Boeing 747 carrying the 70-foot (21-metre) rocket took off from a spaceport in Cornwall, southwest England, at 2202 GMT on Monday.

The rocket then detached from the aircraft and ignited as planned at a height of 35,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean to the south of Ireland at around 2315 GMT.

But as the [rocket](#) was due to enter orbit and discharge its nine satellites, scientists reported an "anomaly" that prevented it from reaching orbit.

Virgin Orbit CEO Dan Hart praised the launch teams but said their task had been complicated by the "first time nature of this mission" which had "added layers of complexity".

"We will work tirelessly to understand the nature of the failure, make

corrective actions and return to orbit as soon as we have completed a full investigation and mission assurance process," he added.

The UK Space Agency said it would work closely with Virgin Orbit as they "investigate what caused the anomaly".

"While this result is disappointing... the project has succeeded in creating a horizontal launch capability at Spaceport Cornwall," said Matt Archer, the agency's commercial spaceflight director.

Monday's launch would have been the first from UK soil. UK-produced satellites have previously had to be sent into [orbit](#) via foreign spaceports.

## **'Within a year'**

The satellites were to have a variety of civil and defence functions, from sea monitoring to help countries detect people smugglers and space weather observation.

Lucy Edge, CEO of Satellite Applications Catapult, said planning would begin immediately for a replacement [mission](#) for a client who had a maritime surveillance [satellite](#) on board.

But she said the bigger picture was the issue of UK launch capabilities.

"We will keep doing this. We will get a launch capability out of the UK, probably more than one. I think within a year is entirely reasonable," she told BBC radio.

The number of space bases in Europe has grown in recent years due to the commercialisation of space.

For a long time, satellites were primarily used for institutional missions

by national space agencies but most of Europe's spaceport projects are now private-sector initiatives.

The market has exploded with the emergence of small start-ups, [modern technology](#) making both rockets and satellites smaller, and the rapidly growing number of applications for satellites.

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Citation: UK space chiefs vows to try again after failed rocket launch (2023, January 10)  
retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-01-uk-space-chiefs-vows-rocket.html>

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