



15 Aug 2026

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the UKRI/STFC decision to cease funding for the e-MERLIN array. I believe this decision risks significant and lasting damage to the United Kingdom's scientific capability, its future leadership in the field of radio astronomy, the development of the skills base needed to maximise returns from the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), and the international partnerships that depend upon the expertise concentrated at the Jodrell Bank Observatory (JBO).

e-MERLIN continues to occupy a unique and essential niche in observational astronomy. At centimetre wavelengths, its angular resolution bridges the gap between traditional arrays like the Very Large Array (VLA) in New Mexico and the inter-continental very-long baseline interferometry (VLBI) networks. Many of the most important questions in modern astrophysics require observations at precisely this scale of a few tens of milli-arcseconds.

This capability is increasingly important in the wider context of major international facilities such as the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), the Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA) and the forthcoming Extremely Large Telescope (ELT). To fully exploit their discoveries requires complementary radio studies at comparable spatial scales. e-MERLIN provides that capability and remains a vital component of the international astronomical landscape

Of course, there is a huge amount of investment going into radio astronomy from the UK in the form of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). And the baseline design for SKA-mid included baselines out to 150 km for the very reasons mentioned above – the huge amount of cutting-edge science that can be accessed by having such spatial resolution. However, those baselines are not currently being built. The SKA-mid array as presently configured will deliver angular resolutions comparable with those of the VLA rather than those of the e-MERLIN. Strategic decisions should therefore be based on the capabilities that will actually exist in the coming decade, rather than on aspirations whose implementation remains uncertain. As a result, the scientific need for e-MERLIN will remain strong well into the 2030s.

The decision to withdraw funding also risks undermining the UK's long-term investment in radio astronomy at precisely the moment when the country is preparing to benefit from the SKA. e-Merlin provides far more than scientific observations; it is central to developing the expertise required to exploit next-generation infrastructure.

Much of the current UK radio astronomy community either received training directly at Jodrell Bank Observatory (JBO) itself or developed essential skills through collaboration with its staff. The observatory has been a focal point for training in instrumentation, data analysis, computing, and scientific leadership. Reducing this capability now would weaken the pipeline of researchers, engineers and technical specialists that will be needed to deliver the scientific returns from the UK's substantial investment in the SKA. Rather than scaling back expertise, this is exactly the period in which that expertise should be being strengthened.

Importantly, the JBO team has not been relying solely on traditional funding methods. For some time, the observatory has been developing plans to diversify their income streams via dual use of the e-MERLIN infrastructure for space situational awareness and defence-related applications. These initiatives offer a realistic pathway towards reducing long-term dependence on UKRI/STFC funding, while preserving scientific capability.

Such a transition can only succeed if e-MERLIN remains operational and credible in the eyes of potential partners. The prospect of closure risks the rapid loss of highly specialised technical staff and could lead to the degradation of valuable equipment. External organisations are far less likely to invest in a facility whose future appears uncertain. Continued support during this transitional period would protect previous public investment and maximise the likelihood that e-MERLIN can develop a more sustainable funding model in the future.

The consequences of defunding e-MERLIN would extend well beyond the UK radio astronomy community. It would also have a significant impact on the Development in Africa with Radio Astronomy (DARA) project, which I lead. DARA is a flagship partnership involving the STFC and the UK Government, together with our South African partners, and is funded via the Official Development Assistance (ODA) streams in UKRI, independent of the core science budgets.

Many of the excellent African researchers that have been funded by DARA and have gone on to success in the field of radio astronomy have done so by being trained on e-MERLIN projects by JBO staff. The skills they developed in scientific research, data handling, data-intensive computing, AI, and advanced technical analysis at JBO have been instrumental in their subsequent success and contribute directly to broader economic development objectives within their home countries.

Furthermore, following a visit to the Ghana Radio Astronomy Observatory, the current STFC Chief Executive encouraged the development of staff exchange activities between DARA partners and JBO as an example of how STFC facilities can support international development goals. e-MERLIN and JBO therefore represent not only a scientific asset but also a powerful instrument of international capacity building, playing an important role in supporting the UK's international development objectives and reputation as a global leader in scientific collaboration. Defunding it would send a profoundly negative signal to long-standing partners who have invested in these shared ambitions.

Therefore, I urge UKRI and STFC to reconsider the decision to cease funding for e-MERLIN. The facility remains scientifically unique, strategically important to the UK's future in radio astronomy, central to the training of the next generation of researchers, and increasingly well positioned to diversify its sources of support.

Closing e-MERLIN at this stage would sacrifice a world-leading capability, weaken the UK's preparedness for the SKA era, undermine successful international partnerships and jeopardise opportunities for future sustainability.

Yours sincerely,



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