

Open Letter from undersigned RadioNet Partners organisations on the Future of e-MERLIN, the Lovell Telescope and UK Leadership in Radio Astronomy

To:

Professor Michele Dougherty, Chief Executive, STFC
Sir Ian Chapman, Chief Executive, UKRI
Chris McDonald MP, Minister for Science
Rt Hon Jonathan Reynolds MP, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade

Dear Professor Dougherty, Sir Ian, Minister McDonald and Secretary of State Reynolds,

We write as representatives of a group of organisations participating in **RadioNet**, Europe's long-standing collaboration of leading radio astronomy institutes, observatories and research infrastructures.

We are deeply concerned by the proposed cessation of funding for **e-MERLIN, the Lovell Telescope, UK membership of JIV-ERIC, and UK participation in the European VLBI Network (EVN)**.

For more than seventy years, Jodrell Bank and The University of Manchester have been central to international radio astronomy. Today, the Lovell Telescope remains one of the most sensitive elements of the EVN, while e-MERLIN provides unique imaging capabilities and baselines that cannot be readily replaced by existing facilities. Their loss would significantly weaken the international radio astronomy scientific community.

These facilities are not superseded by the SKAO or any other existing research infrastructure. On the contrary, they provide complementary capabilities that will become increasingly important in the SKA era, particularly through the development of SKA-VLBI, where the Lovell Telescope and e-MERLIN would play pivotal roles.

The STFC decision is particularly troubling because the collaborations centred on Jodrell Bank, e-MERLIN, the EVN, JIVE and RadioNet were instrumental in creating the scientific vision, international partnerships and technological foundations that ultimately made the SKA possible. It is especially incongruous that, as the SKAO is under construction, support is being withdrawn from some of the very facilities and collaborations that helped bring it into existence.

We are also troubled that this decision comes at a time when other leading radio astronomy nations are increasing investment in national facilities alongside major international projects. Strong international leadership depends upon strong national capability. The UK's proposed withdrawal stands in stark contrast to this international trend and is difficult to reconcile with its role as host nation of the SKAO Headquarters.

Beyond astronomy, e-MERLIN and Jodrell Bank sustain internationally recognised expertise in advanced instrumentation, signal processing, high-speed data transport, distributed computing, and emerging capabilities in Space Domain Awareness and Space Security. These are strategic assets that cannot be rapidly rebuilt once lost.

The financial savings associated with these cuts are modest. The costs, however, would be immense: diminished scientific capability, erosion of technical expertise, weakened strategic and sovereign resilience, reduced international influence, and lost opportunities that may never be recovered.

We therefore urge STFC, UKRI and the UK Government to work with the University of Manchester and the international community to find a sustainable solution that preserves e-MERLIN, the Lovell Telescope and the UK's role within international radio astronomy. As a long-standing European forum for coordination and collaboration in radio astronomy, RadioNet stands ready to assist in identifying and supporting sustainable solutions.

The future requires both the SKAO and strong national facilities. Preserving them is essential for maintaining UK leadership, strengthening European science, and maximising the return on decades of international investment.

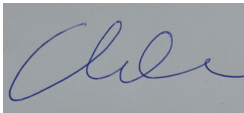
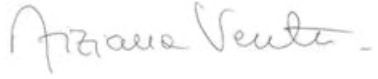
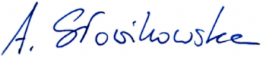
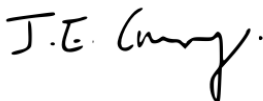
The views expressed in this letter are those of the undersigned.

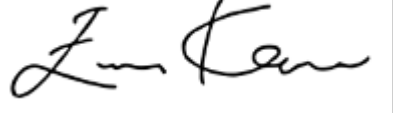
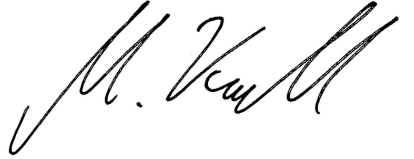
Yours sincerely,

The undersigned organisations participating in RadioNet

Representing a broad cross-section of Europe's radio astronomy institutes, observatories and research infrastructures.

Signatories

Institute (Country)	Name/Function	Signature
ASTRON - Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy (The Netherlands)	Violette Impellizzeri, interim Director ASTRON	
IGN - The Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Spain)	Pablo de Vicente, director Yebes Observatory (IGN)	
INAF - Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica (Italy)	Dr. Tiziana Venturi, INAF representative in RadioNet	
JBCA - Jodrell Bank Centre for Astrophysics, The University of Manchester (UK)	Prof. R. J. Beswick, Jodrell Bank Centre for Astrophysics, The University of Manchester (UK) and RadioNet Spokesperson	
JIV ERIC - Joint Institute for VLBI ERIC (EU)	Dr. Agnieszka Słowikowska, prof. NCU, Director of JIV-ERIC	
LAB - Laboratoire d'astrophysique de Bordeaux (France)	Dr. Patrick Charlot, Directeur de Recherche CNRS, Univ. Bordeaux representative in RadioNet	
MPIfR - Max Planck Institute für Radioastronomie (Germany)	Prof. Dr. Michael Kramer (Executive Director)	
MRO - Aalto University Metsähovi Radio Observatory (Finland)	Dr. Tuomas Savolainen, Director of Metsähovi Radio Observatory	
OBSPM - Observatoire de Paris-PSL (France)	Jean-Mathias Griessmeier, Director of the Nançay Radioastronomical Observatory (ORN), RadioNet representative for Paris Observatory	
Laboratoire J.-L. Lagrange (France)	Dr. Nicole Nesvadba, Directrice de Recherche CNRS, Directrice du Laboratoire Lagrange	 Nicole NESVADBA Directrice du Laboratoire LAGRANGE UMR 7293
OSO - Onsala Space Observatory, Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden)	Prof John Conway Director Onsala Space Observatory, Swedish national infrastructure for Radio Astronomy	

OXFORD - The University of Oxford Department of Physics (UK)	Dr. Boon Kok Tan, Principal Investigator, group leader	
Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)	Prof. Evan Keane, Director Rosse Observatory, Head of I-LOFAR Telescope.	
University of Würzburg (Germany)	Prof. Dr. Matthias Kadler, Professur für Astrophysik, Lehrstuhl für Astronomie, Institut für Theoretische Physik und Astrophysik, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg	
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