

ESA member states sign new Ariel collaboration agreement

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European Space Agency (ESA) member states have signed a new agreement on 8 June to confirm roles for the Ariel mission.

During its four year mission, Ariel will improve our understanding of what exoplanets are made of, how they were formed and how they evolve. Scientific data will be released to the scientific community and general public at regular intervals throughout its planned four-year operational phase.

Ariel, which was proposed by an international consortium led by UCL (University College London), was selected by ESA from 26 proposals put forward to be the next medium class mission in its science programme. A consortium of more than 50 institutes from 17 countries will work together to build the mission's payload module.

The agreement between ESA member states ensures that the work taking place across the consortium continues to be supported by their national agencies.

Professor Giovanna Tinetti, Principal Investigator and science development lead for Ariel at UCL, said:

“Ariel will be transformational in helping us understand the planets in our galaxy. By studying hundreds of diverse worlds in different environments, we will see our own planet in context, giving us a better sense of why Earth formed as it did.”

Paul Eccleston, Ariel Consortium Programme Manager and Chief Engineer at the Science and Technology Facilities Council's RAL Space said:

“Ariel is bringing together scientists, engineers and technicians from across Europe to deliver this fantastic mission which will allow us to study planets outside our solar system and understand our place in the universe. I'm proud of the progress the consortium has already made to design the payload. These ties are only set to strengthen as we progress towards launch.”

A payload design review will be completed later this year, with the design expected to be finalised by 2025. A flight acceptance review will be completed in early 2029 ahead of launch later that year.