

*Newsletter message from the RSPSoc Vice-Chair*  
**Dr Sam Lavender**



A swap from the Chairman to Vice Chairman for this newsletter.... As I write this we are rapidly approaching Christmas and I'm currently in London attending the Geological Remote Sensing Group's (GRSG) 20th Annual Meeting. I found the first day fascinating and at the end of one talk we had an enthusiastic debate on whether geology is an art or science and could digital data entry replace field notebooks... GRSG has an increasing membership and enviable balance of commercial and academic members, which I'm sure the new chairman, Richard Eyers, will continue to build on. On a more personal note, I was very pleased when the European Space Agency (ESA) Soil Moisture and Ocean Salinity (SMOS) satellite (figure 1), together with Proba-2, was launched from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in Russia on the 2nd November. Since its launch, SMOS

has deployed its three arms, undergone a series of health checks and the MIRAS instrument has started to produce preliminary data – we're now waiting for the first calibrated data... This is especially exciting as measurements of ocean salinity have never previously been made by a satellite sensor, and so SMOS will rapidly exceed the data collected historically by ground based means (such as ships, floats and buoys) and provide systematic and comprehensive measurements over the whole globe. In 2009, ESA also initiated its Climate Change Initiative that aims to generate, preserve and give access to long-term data sets of Essential Climate Variables (ECVs). Ocean salinity is too new a measurement to be included, but eleven ECVs have been chosen for the first phase of funding – 3 year projects (one per ECV) where the European Earth Observation science

community will define and validate innovative approaches. Last week, ESA hosted a side event entitled 'Global Monitoring of our Climate: the Essential Climate Variables' at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. We wait to find out what the world's political leaders will agree to...

I would like to conclude by pointing to the recent news that Britain is to setup a dedicated agency to direct its space policy, which follows a year where the UK has gained its own ESA research centre at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus (in Oxfordshire) and the launch of the Space Innovation and Growth Team (IGT) that will define a 20-year vision and strategy for the future growth of the space industry. I feel this is an exciting time for our Society and the UK community at large.

Sam Lavender  
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**Figure 1: The newly-launched SMOS system (Image courtesy ESA - P. Carril)**