

Spaceport Cornwall focused on space cluster growth as Virgin Orbit pauses operations

Spaceport Cornwall has said it will continue to focus on growing the space cluster, after Virgin Orbit announced it was pausing its operations.

Richard Branson's US satellite launch firm is working to secure additional funding for future launches, and in the meantime has furloughed staff, [according to reports](#),

In a statement, the company said: "Virgin Orbit is initiating a company-wide operational pause, effective (from) March 16 2023, and anticipates providing an update on go-forward operations in the coming weeks."

The news comes after the company's attempt to make British space history by launching a rocket into orbit from UK soil [ended in failure](#), after suffering an "anomaly" during the flight at the start of the year

After taking off from Newquay, the Virgin Orbit plane flew to 35,000 ft over the Atlantic Ocean where it jettisoned the rocket containing nine small satellites towards space. Organisers of the Start Me Up mission said the rocket – with a variety of civil and defence applications – failed to orbit.

Virgin Orbit previously said it was anticipating [additional launches from Spaceport Cornwall](#), and had been in "active discussions" with key government and commercial stakeholders to start plans for new missions "as soon as later this year".

Cllr Louis Gardner, Cornwall Council's cabinet member for the

economy, said: “It is clearly a difficult time for the Virgin Orbit team as they navigate the next stage of their company, and we will await further information from them as events unfold.

“Our focus at Spaceport Cornwall is to continue to grow the space cluster in Cornwall, alongside progressing relationships with spaceflight operators. We remain the only licensed spaceport in the UK and our plan is to build on that position.”

Virgin Orbit is a key partner with Spaceport Cornwall and currently the only company which has launch capability. Cornwall Council has invested more than £10m into Spaceport Cornwall and claimed that the venture will result in hundreds of new jobs and attract businesses in the space industry to Cornwall.

A UK Space Agency spokesperson said: “This is a commercial matter for Virgin Orbit, and we are engaging regularly with the company to understand the next steps.

“We recognise that launching into space is an inherently challenging endeavour – that’s why we continue to support multiple projects to make the UK the leading provider of commercial small satellite launch in Europe by 2030, generating jobs and growth in communities across the UK.”

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