

## The University of Birmingham opens its new telescope to the public

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A new era of astronomy starts at the University of Birmingham this month, when students and researchers start to observe the night sky with a new state-of-the-art telescope located at the University's observatory on the outskirts of the city.

The new telescope, which is the most powerful within 50 miles of Birmingham, will revolutionize the learning opportunities for students, and will also be available for the community and local astronomy groups to use.

The Observatory has been part of the Birmingham student experience since the 1980s and has been used by generations of undergraduate students on the University's renowned Physics and Astrophysics degree programme.

Dr Graham Smith, Director of the University of Birmingham's Observatory, said: *'Our students can now peer much further back in time towards the beginning of the Universe, and also study much fainter objects in the local universe, than was previously possible. I'm really looking forward to them pushing our new telescope to the limit, as they explore the cosmos and develop cutting edge research, analysis, and project skills. That journey begins today as a new season of student observing begins.'*

Callum Bellhouse, an undergraduate student at Birmingham, who will be using the telescope in his studies, said: *'My friends and I are extremely excited to see this upgrade carried out at the observatory. It's great to be the first students to have the opportunity to observe with the Alluna telescope, and to actually carry out observations for ourselves. The practical skills and experience that we gain from using the new telescope are invaluable for our futures.'*

Callum continued: *'Members of our undergraduate astronomy society, AstroSoc, really enjoy running astronomy events for the general public. As Chair of AstroSoc, I'm looking forward to teaming up with the Observatory to launch the new Public Astronomy Nights in 2014.'*

Since the last student observing season ended, Dr Smith and his team have transformed the Observatory into a facility fit for the 21st Century. He commented: *'This project is a fantastic team effort across the School of Physics and Astronomy, including engineering experts in our workshop, current and retired academic colleagues, numerous students, support staff and Alumni. I take my hat off to the team, and pass on huge thanks from our students.'*

With a diameter of half a meter, and high quality optical design matching that of professional research telescopes such as the Hubble Space Telescope, the new telescope is the most powerful telescope within easy reach of the West Midlands community. *'This is a major landmark for astronomy and science in the West Midlands,'* enthused Dr Smith, *'I encourage our community -- students, and members of the public alike -- to make the most of this wonderful investment. I'm looking forward to developing links with the West Midlands community in the years ahead.'*

The University of Birmingham Observatory (UBO) will launch a brand new programme of Public Astronomy Nights starting in January 2014. These events will include the opportunity to visit the Observatory and to use the new telescope. Details will be announced in December 2013 via the [Observatory website \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/observatory\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/observatory). The public may also [follow the Observatory on Twitter \(https://twitter.com/UoBobservatory\)](https://twitter.com/UoBobservatory), and sign up for future email updates by emailing their name to [ubo-signup@star.sr.bham.ac.uk \(mailto:ubo-signup@star.sr.bham.ac.uk\)](mailto:ubo-signup@star.sr.bham.ac.uk).

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### Notes to Editors

1. Dr Graham P. Smith is a Reader of Cosmology, and the Director of the University of Birmingham Observatory at the University of Birmingham's School of Physics and Astronomy.
2. In Birmingham there is a long and proud tradition of astronomy research, education, and public engagement. The University's Observatory was opened in 1984 where to the present day Birmingham undergraduates acquire real world technical skills as they design, execute, and analyse their observations of the universe.
3. The new telescope at the University of Birmingham Observatory has been supplied by Alluna Optics GmbH ([www.alluna-optics.com](http://www.alluna-optics.com)), and is controlled using software and motors supplied by Software Bisque Inc. ([www.bisque.com](http://www.bisque.com)).
4. Ongoing developments at the University of Birmingham Observatory, including enhancements to opportunities for the public, are supported by donations from the Alumni and friends of the University. Supporters may contribute by selecting 'Physics Telescope Fund' from the drop down list on [our donation form \(https://bhamalumni.org/NetCommunity/SSLPage.aspx?pid=210&frcrid=1\)](https://bhamalumni.org/NetCommunity/SSLPage.aspx?pid=210&frcrid=1).
5. General enquiries about the University of Birmingham Observatory should be directed to [ubo@star.sr.bham.ac.uk \(mailto:ubo@star.sr.bham.ac.uk\)](mailto:ubo@star.sr.bham.ac.uk).
6. Watch a [video of the first observations made by the new telescope of Comet Ison \(Video/news/uobobservatory-comet-ison-20131030.mov\)](http://www.uobobservatory.com).
7. Cameras and other instruments that are used to record the observations carried out with the Alluna telescope are supplied by Elliott Instruments ([www.elliott-instruments.co.uk \(http://www.elliott-instruments.co.uk\)](http://www.elliott-instruments.co.uk)) and SBIG Astronomical Instruments ([www.sbig.com \(http://www.sbig.com/\)](http://www.sbig.com))

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