

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Calling Planet Earth - Space Outreach To The General Public (4)

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YURIGAGARIN50: A UK INITIATIVE TO CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FIRST HUMAN SPACE FLIGHT

Abstract

On 12 April 1961, Yuri Gagarin made the first human flight in space. 12 April 2011 is the 50th anniversary of this. General interest in astronauts is high and is a powerful tool for education, outreach and public engagement. Consequently, as well as being a notable anniversary in its own right, 2011 also offers an excellent opportunity for space outreach through use of the ‘Gagarin hook’ to capture the public’s attention, which can be subsequently be redirected to the benefit of the wider space community. In order to take advantage of this opportunity in the United Kingdom, YuriGagarin50 was launched in 2010 to provide a single overarching framework to stimulate and facilitate events/activities. With modest funding and a core of volunteers, YuriGagarin50 has had significant impact in raising the level of awareness, both of the anniversary itself and of space activities in general.

As a result, a wide range of events will take place during three 2011 ‘launch windows’: March (UK National Science and Engineering Week), April (anniversary of Gagarin’s flight) and July (anniversary of Gagarin’s post-flight visit to the UK). These include: two UK-Russia space experiments, a film made on the International Space Station, a one-day conference on Gagarin and human spaceflight, ‘Rockets for Yuri’ - a country-wide ‘community rocket launch’, the gathering of ‘Memories of Gagarin’ from people who met/saw him in 1961, numerous public talks and lectures, at least two pieces of drama and one piece of public art. In addition to this, supporting resources for teachers and the public have been produced: ‘Launch Manuals’ and videos for Rockets for Yuri, timelines for Gagarin’s life, spaceflight and his visit to the UK respectively. The success of YuriGagarin50 and its programme is evidenced by the fact that they have been formally incorporated in the UK-Russia Space Year Agreement signed by Roscosmos and the UK Space Agency in February 2011.

This paper will describe the background to YuriGagarin50 with special reference to the building of a consensus between the various groups and individuals involved, the means by which funding was obtained, the use of social media for promotion and communication, the means by which it operated, the events and resources that arose as a result of it and their impact. Particular attention will be paid to good practice that may be of use to other groups and lessons learned from the overall process, especially areas for improvement.