

52nd IAA SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) –
 The Next Steps (A4)
 SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

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THE SETI POST-DETECTION HUB: PREPARING HUMANITY FOR CONTACT

Abstract

Recent advances in technology have enabled us to realise that whenever we see a pinpoint of light in the night sky, regardless of which one we choose, there is a good chance that there is a planet nearby. Will we ever discover life on these other Worlds? Will we ever receive a message from E.T? We do not know. We also don't know when this could happen - ancient microbial life may be beneath the Mars rover, as you read this. But we do know that we cannot afford to be ill prepared – scientifically, socially, and politically rudderless – for an event that will have such a profound effect on us and one that we cannot afford to mismanage. The science of discovery – our known, unknowns and unknown, unknowns – is one that challenges us to the limit of our current knowledge, perceptions, and technology, whilst endeavouring to avoid any limiting Human conceit: a process that is ever evolving.

To facilitate such an endeavour, the SETI Post-Detection Hub at St Andrews was launched in November 2022, providing (for the first time) a long overdue permanent 'home' – one which the University of Durham's Law School has now become affiliated to - for coordinating the development of a fully comprehensive operational framework, drawing together interested members of the SETI and wider academic communities, as well as policy experts, to work on topics ranging from message decipherment and data analytics to the development of regulatory protocols, space law, and societal impact strategies. Science that also has much that can contribute to answering terrestrial questions, as well as reflecting on what makes us Human. The Hub's current research team has already expanded its international profile to include members from across much of the globe: both established SETI researchers and new expert voices.

This paper introduces the 'Hub's' operational rationales, goals, and objectives, as well as how the idea was developed from its original conception, the subsequent endeavours of a small UK team to develop its operational parameters, to where it is now and where we go from here.