

# Talent in the European Space Sector

## Webinar Key Takeaways

9<sup>th</sup> October 2025, 15:00-16:30 CEST

### Speakers

**Professor Chris Rapley** – Professor of Climate Science, University College London (UCL)

**Lucy Van der Tas** – Head of Talent Acquisition, European Space Agency (ESA)

**Joseph Dudley** – Director, Space Skills Alliance

**José Pedro Ferreira** – Project Groups Coordinator, SGAC

**Jérôme Barbier** – Coordinator, YEES - Young European Enterprises Syndicate for Space

**Sien De Neve** – Student, advanced master's degree in Space Science from KU Leuven, and a master's degree in Chemistry from Ghent University

### Hybrid Skills and Interdisciplinary Education

- The sector faces a growing demand for **“T-shaped professionals”** – individuals combining deep space expertise with cross-functional, and systems-thinking skills. As space merges with the broader economy, promoting **adaptable, hybrid, and creative mindsets** becomes essential.
- **Universities struggle to keep pace** with the rapidly evolving STEM and space sectors. Curricula updates are slow, whilst industry needs shift quickly. Solutions could include embedding cross-disciplinary modules into existing degrees, and adapting to lifelong, work-integrated learning, where hiring based on skills rather than qualifications is common practice.

This raises a broader question: **does STEM education need a structural rethink** to align with the needs of the future workforce?

- **Spin-in's from other sectors should be actively encouraged.** These professionals bring the T-shaped profile - experts interested in applying their skills to a new context - and add much-needed diversity to the sector.
- **Mentorship and apprenticeship programmes** are key to capturing the knowledge of retiring experts, ensuring continuity across generations.

### A Vanishing Mid-Level and Challenges for Juniors

The most acute space workforce gap in Europe seems to lie at the **mid-career level**, driven by:

- A **rapidly expanding sector** that outpaces the natural maturation of its workforce
- **Limited entry pathways** and competition for junior profiles
- **Poaching of experienced profiles** by other high-tech industries

ESA will always have a high need for mid-level professionals, particularly those with prior industrial experience or **spin-in backgrounds** from adjacent sectors. The agency places strong emphasis on feeding the European space talent pipeline as a whole through internships, and graduate and junior professional programmes.

In contrast, **start-ups** and **scale-ups** often attract mid-career professionals more easily – generally offering higher salaries, faster project cycles, and more dynamic work environments.

Juniors with **non-traditional space** or **international** backgrounds struggle to break into the sector due to strict qualification and nationality requirements, which can cause drift to other sectors. Organisations such as **Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC)** can help to aid this transition through project-based learning and global networking opportunities.

### Attraction, Retention, and Motivation in a Competitive Environment

- **Competing with Big Tech:** Space can't match salaries but can compete through **purpose, flexibility, and visible societal impact**.
- **Reframing the Narrative:** How we speak about space matters. The story of space should blend **inspiration with real-world impact**. Beyond the excitement and ambition, space delivers **concrete benefits for life on Earth**, supporting areas such as climate monitoring and global connectivity.
- **Visible Progress:** Given the long timelines of missions and programmes, **short-term recognition mechanisms** are essential to maintain motivation and a sense of contribution.