

RUSSIA AND THE UK BRING STATUE OF YURI GAGARIN TO LONDON

A statue of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, was unveiled outside the British Council's London headquarters in the Mall on 14th July 2011 to mark the 50th anniversary of the first manned space flight. The statue, a gift from the Russian Space Agency (Roscosmos) to the British Council, will stand in the Mall for a period of 12 months. It was unveiled by HRH Prince Michael of Kent and Elena Gagarina, the cosmonaut's daughter and Director of the Kremlin Museums, exactly fifty years to the day that Yuri Gagarin met with the Queen as part of his visit to the UK in 1961.

Elena Gagarina said that she was very proud to be unveiling a statue to her father in a city that had welcomed him so warmly 50 years ago; and David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science, said that the statue is a fitting memorial to a true pioneer of our time, and also serves as an emblem to the greater collaboration with the Russian space agency agreed during his visit to Moscow earlier this year.

Yuri Gagarin was 27 when he journeyed into space on board Vostok 1. His space capsule travelled at a speed of 27,400 kilometres per hour, and orbited the earth in 108 minutes. On landing, he became the most famous man on earth. This statue, showing Gagarin standing on a globe in his space suit, focuses on the human aspect of the extraordinary scientific achievements of the Russian space programme. The statue was commissioned in 1984 by the small town of Lyubertsy, just outside Moscow, where Gagarin trained as a foundry worker from the ages of 15-16. Made by Anatoly Novikov, one of the chief sculptors of the Stalingrad Memorial (now the Volgograd Memorial), it was commissioned

to commemorate what would have been Gagarin's 50th birthday (he died in a plane crash aged 34) and is today a site of pilgrimage for cosmonauts before they travel into space. The version in London is an exhibition copy of the original.



Gagarin and the Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, 13 July 1961
Courtesy of RIA Novosti



On the bus to the launch pad, Gagarin with his back up pilot, Gherman Titov, 12 April 1961
Courtesy of RIA Novosti



Elena Gagarina daughter of Yuri Gagarin, and Helen Sharman, Britain's first astronaut, in front of the statue of Yuri Gagarin

The statue is the culmination of a year of planning by Roscosmos and the British Council and is just one example of the British Council's work to strengthen the relationship with Russia through education, English and the arts. Others who attended the unveiling ceremony included Helen Sharman, Britain's first astronaut. In addition to the statue, the British Council is showing an exhibition, entitled "Gagarin in

Britain", in its London headquarters on the life of Gagarin and the early Soviet space programme. It is also publishing a catalogue to mark the occasion.