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**Title:** *“Planetary science across light-years”*

**Abstract.** The search for exoplanets has often been driven by the goal to discover life in the Universe. We know today there are billions of worlds out there, and small planets are the most numerous... So there is hope! We have come a long way from the prejudice that only an Earths twin can host life: our galactic cousins appear more diverse, complex and interesting than we ever thought, and perhaps for this reason, many of the great exoplanetary discoveries have been obtained serendipitously and with modest facilities.

While the role of flagship missions to advance the study of habitable worlds is unquestioned, alone they risk creating a scientific ecosystem based on a monoculture. To foster a diverse, rich and sustainable approach, which will also enable the best use of the flagships, we are pursuing dedicated, moderate size missions that will provide a much needed scientific complement to the largest facilities. A keystone of this approach is the Ariel Space Telescope, to be launched in 2029 by ESA. Ariel is the first mission dedicated to the determination of the chemical composition of hundreds of exoplanets, enabling planetary science far beyond the boundaries of the Solar System.

We are at the same time pursuing an innovative, commercial approach to the delivery of high-performance, small-size scientific satellites through the company Blue Skies Space Ltd, that will further contribute to a thriving, diverse and sustainable scientific ecosystem.