

FS 63 An introduction to Dstl

Dstl features prominently in the DTS. It asserts that Dstl is the MoD's principal source of scientific and technological expertise; that Dstl has a particular role in undertaking research, supporting development and giving broad science and technology advice, particularly in areas which must be retained within government, and that Dstl must retain and develop its S & T skills by working closely with MoD's research suppliers, including SME's, and particularly with universities.

Dstl was formed in 2001 when its previous incarnation, DERA, was split into two separate organisations. The parts which could be privatised became Qinetiq. Those which, for security or other considerations, it was determined would remain within government became Dstl. It is a Trading Fund Agency within the MoD, so operates on a commercial trading basis. It carries out work which must, for security or other reasons, be done within Government. Of the £350m turnover approximately 80% comes from the MoD with the remainder mainly from other Government departments and the balance from private industry or overseas governments. It has around 3,500 employees, of whom 2,800 are qualified to 1st degree or above. When formed, people were located on a dozen sites around the country but the organisation is now on track for its goal of only three sites by 2009 – Porton Down, Portsdown West and Fort Halstead.

Dstl's overriding mission is to create the winning edge for UK Forces and Government through the best use of science and technology. As an arm of government it is rightly charged with doing this in a manner which gives value for money to the UK taxpayer. Being a Trading Fund assists greatly in focussing both management and employees on the 'bottom line' and on efficiency. Since it was formed Dstl has made huge strides in cost-cutting and productivity increases while improving its abilities to solve its customers' most important present and future problems.

Wherever practicable, Dstl exploits its intellectual property externally, thereby delivering additional financial benefits for the taxpayer. This is handled through wholly-owned subsidiary, Ploughshare Innovations Ltd, which either licences technology or exploits it through joint ventures. It has recently achieved its first sale, to 3M Inc., a joint ventures, Acolyte Biomedica, which produces diagnostic equipment

for MRSA and other infections. The intellectual property used by this business was a spin off from work done on biological detection equipment for the UK armed forces.

Dstl covers a very broad range of scientific and technological disciplines and works on programmes and projects ranging from very long to very short term. Here are some examples:

Long-term work :

- Leading the joint research project with industry on Network Enabled Capability (NEC) (to achieve desired results through a smaller number of more capable assets).
- Deeply involved in many stages of the Future Force Structure Study (F2S2) which explored the force structures to better meet the UK's defence needs in 2025.
- Dstl's vaccine research, particularly for anthrax and plague is widely praised and has attracted substantial contracts from the US.

Support to acquisition:

- Future Rapid Effects System (FRES) - Dstl supported the various phases of assessment then definition of capability, then the optimisation of the acquisition strategy and remains a key member of the Integrated Project Team .
- Joint Combat Aircraft - Dstl has been deeply involved since the programme's inception including assessing policy implications of future capability, assessing technical risk in the programme and developing simulation software to explore operational concepts and tactics.

Support to operations:

- During Operation TELIC, Dstl deployed around 100 staff into theatre to carry out specific tasks and support the Urgent Operational Requirement process.

Dstl maintains a Scientific Advisor in both Iraq and Afghanistan where their support is now greatly appreciated by senior service personnel and where they have certainly contributed to saving lives.

- Dstl has made a significant contribution to the protection of deployed forces from improvised explosive devices. It has developed special armour for in-service vehicles and continue to develop a wide range of counter-measures against ever-changing threats.

Support for Counter-terrorism

- Dstl operates the Counter-terrorism Science and Technology Centre at Porton Down on behalf of MoD.
- Dstl operates the country's only Forensic Explosive Laboratory on behalf of the Home Office. This has had a huge workload following the 7th July 2005 London bombings.

Collaboration

- Dstl does not work in isolation. It has an extensive network of contacts worldwide in the military, academia and industry. These add considerable value to MoD research programmes. Links with the USA are of particular value.

Dstl's unique contribution to all of the above areas (a microcosm of the areas in which it is working) relies on two fundamental building blocks: Highly-qualified and dedicated professional staff, renowned for their discretion and impartiality, and intimate knowledge and understanding both of the armed forces and of other parts of MoD. These factors enable it to deliver its mission - to deliver the winning edge to the UK armed forces and Government through the best use of science and technology.

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March 2007