

[Press release: Helping residents be prepared for flooding](#)

The Environment Agency is working with residents in Chester-le-Street to help them be better prepared for flooding.

[News story: Wedgetail is on the radar, Defence Secretary announces ahead of NATO conference](#)

The E-7 Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) System is able to fly for long periods of time and manage the battlespace from the sky, providing situational awareness and tracking multiple airborne and maritime targets at the same time. It then uses the information it gathers to direct other assets like fighter jets and warships. It has already been proven on operations in the battle against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

Further discussions are set to take place before any investment decision is made, as the MOD follows a stringent approvals process to ensure the aircraft meets the military requirement and represents value-for-money. If selected, UK industry could be involved significantly with the programme, from modification work to through life support.

Speaking ahead of the meeting of Defence Ministers in NATO, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The Wedgetail is the stand-out performer in our pursuit of a new battlespace surveillance aircraft, and has already proved itself in Iraq and Syria. Running air operations from the sky, it could be an excellent asset for the RAF and give us a real edge in this increasingly complex world.

Our future with Australia will already see us operate the same maritime patrol aircraft, world-class Type 26 warships and supersonic F-35 jets. Wedgetail may join that formidable armoury and help us work together to take on the global threats that we both face.

Following market analysis and discussions with other potential providers, the MOD has concluded that the potential procurement of the E-7 represents the

best value for money option for the UK against need, whilst representing a significant opportunity for increased defence cooperation and collaboration with our key ally Australia.

The MOD will work closely with Boeing to ensure Britain's leading defence industry could also benefit from any deal.

Named after Australia's largest bird of prey, the wedge-tailed eagle, the high-performing aircraft has been proven on operations with the Royal Australian Air Force, having seen action against Daesh over Syria and Iraq and impressing US Forces in the 'Red Flag' series of large-scale exercises.

The Wedgetail uses a standard Boeing 737 airliner modified to carry a sophisticated Northrop Grumman active electronically-scanned radar and can cover four million square kilometres over a single 10-hour period. If selected, it would replace the E-3D Sentry, which entered service in 1992.

It is a proven and reliable aircraft that has been in-Service with the Royal Australian Air Force for some time, with potential to considerably reduce the risk normally associated with acquiring a complex new platform of this nature. The aircraft is based on the Boeing 737 airliner family as is the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft due to enter service in 2019.

The news represents a further development of the UK's increasingly close military capability and industrial relationship with Australia, who recently selected the British Type 26 design for its future frigate. That decision confirmed the UK's world-leading ship design capabilities, whilst strengthening collaboration in anti-submarine warfare and demonstrating the value of the global five-eyes partnership.

With its proven interoperability, the Wedgetail could also link up with the RAF's latest arrival, the F-35 Lightning, providing pilots with the latest intelligence and situational awareness demonstrating how a modernised next generation Air Force can fight and win in an increasingly complex and dangerous environment, characterised by high speed and low observability.

With Australia also a partner in the F-35 programme, the RAF and the Royal Australian Air Force will have further opportunities to work together across platforms and with other allies such as the United States to share and collect data and conduct joint training missions, all leading to faster, more effective and more integrated combat forces.

[Press release: UK festival of creativity and innovation to be held](#)

[in 2022](#)

A major nationwide festival showcasing the UK's unique strengths in creativity and innovation will be held in 2022.

Backed by £120 million government investment, the Festival of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be a moment of national celebration and help attract new inward business and investment.

It will deliver an exciting programme of events on arts, culture, design and tech across the country.

Taking place in the year of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the festival will amplify key anniversary celebrations of some of our most beloved institutions. In 2022, The BBC will mark its 100th birthday, the Edinburgh International and Fringe Festivals will celebrate their 75th anniversary and Birmingham will welcome 54 Heads of State to the Commonwealth Games.

[Press release: Man sentenced for assaulting Environment Agency officer](#)

A North East man has been fined after he assaulted and threatened an Environment Agency officer investigating a pollution incident.

[News story: Graduation time for Dstl third year apprentices](#)

Twelve apprentices celebrated their achievements with each one gaining employment at Dstl, taking up roles across the business.

Belinda Shute, Apprentice Team Leader, said:

It's fantastic to have this kind of event – it highlights the successes and achievements of the apprentices, plus the invited family members got to see 'inside the wire', which they wouldn't normally get to see. I'm so proud of our apprentices, they have all

worked incredibly hard and it's really nice for them to be recognised in this way.

22-year-old Tom Money is among the apprentices who successfully completed the course. He said:

I feel so happy to finally graduate and I'm excited with what the future holds. It's been very a broad experience and a real eye opener – I've seen lots of different things and have been given exposure to some really cool stuff! I'm also pleased that I've secured a job within the Land Platforms division of Dstl.

During their time as apprentices, the group supported outreach programmes; visiting schools and colleges to talk about the benefits of doing an apprenticeship. They also took part in national events including the The Big Bang Fair and RAF100.

23-year-old William Robinson completed a mechanical and manufacturing apprenticeship. He said:

My course was vastly varied, spending time at QinetiQ's apprentice training school in classrooms, and then working on vehicle assessments. I am really pleased that I have finished my course and I will continue to build my career using skills learned during the apprenticeship. I also have a full-time job at Dstl, which feels a bit strange as I will no longer be 'the apprentice'! It felt really good receiving my certificate of graduation, and it also allowed us to show off our achievements and show the rest of Dstl how valuable the apprenticeship scheme is.

Dstl's apprenticeship scheme is now in its tenth year, and is open to people of all ages and backgrounds, from school leavers to those looking for a second career or a change of direction.

Dstl's Chief Executive, Gary Aitkenhead, said:

It's great to celebrate the achievements of people like this. We're absolutely committed to our apprentice scheme and it's fantastic that all 12 apprentices graduated and have now been successful in securing a variety of roles at Dstl.