

News story: Defence Secretary announces new Maritime Patrol Aircraft squadrons

Nine new P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft will be operated by number 120 Squadron and number 201 Squadron from RAF Lossiemouth in Moray.

120 Squadron was the RAF's highest scoring anti-submarine unit in the Second World War with 14 kills. 201 Squadron can trace its origins back to the formation of No 1 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service in 1914. Wing Commander James Hanson will oversee the formation of 120 Squadron from April 2018. 201 Squadron will form in 2021.

The aircraft's key role will be to help protect the UK's submarine-deployed nuclear deterrent and its two new aircraft carriers.

The UK Government is investing £3 billion over the next decade in its Maritime Patrol Aircraft capability.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Our nine new Poseidon aircraft are part of our plan to monitor and deal with increased threats to our country. They can operate at long range without refuelling and have the endurance to carry out high and low-level airborne maritime and overland surveillance for extended periods, helping keep us safe. The P-8A aircraft will allow us to work more closely with our allies, improve our surveillance coverage and will provide value for taxpayers' money.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

Today is an important milestone in the P-8A Poseidon programme which will bring to the Royal Air Force an unrivalled maritime patrol capability. The advanced state-of-the-art sensors aboard the P-8A will provide global protection to UK, NATO and our Allies' submarines and warships, and enhance and complement the UK's standing search and rescue responsibilities.

It is also a great pleasure to welcome back 120 and 201 Squadrons. Both have long and distinguished records serving in the maritime role and together they will help forge the next generation Royal Air Force.

Poseidon will add to the UK's surveillance capabilities and is designed to conduct anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, search and rescue and

intelligence gathering. They can carry torpedoes and anti-shiping missiles.

As a leading members of NATO, the UK Ministry of Defence has already signed agreements with the US and Norwegian militaries to cooperate closely on operating their P-8A aircraft across the North Atlantic.

With the first aircraft due to arrive in the UK in 2020, the RAF has maintained its Maritime Patrol Aircraft skills by embedding aircrew within MPA squadrons of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

Poseidon will bring wider economic benefits with an additional 400+ service personnel to be located at RAF Lossiemouth, where £400m is also being invested in new support infrastructure for the aircraft.

As the Poseidon P-8A is based on the Boeing 737, it will help support several hundred direct UK jobs, and create opportunities for UK firms to bid for training and support contracts.

[Most people worse off after Theresa May's year as Prime Minister – Jeremy Corbyn](#)

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, commenting on Theresa May's year as Prime Minister, said:

"A year ago today, Theresa May stood on the steps of Downing Street, saying she wanted a country that works for everyone.

"One year on, most people are worse off, with vital public services cut to the bone, falling wages and stagnating living standards, soaring classroom sizes and a million more on NHS waiting lists under the Tories.

"Under her government, the privileged few have benefited from tax give-aways, at the expense of the majority, who have borne the brunt of Conservative cuts.

"Theresa May now heads a zombie government, with no ideas, no answers and no leadership. This is a government in name only, having to ask other parties to "clarify and improve" its policies and delaying most Parliamentary business until the autumn.

"The Conservatives have no plan for Britain. Labour is ready to fight the next election, whenever it may be, to form a government that will build a country for the many, not the few."

[This Government's policies have slammed the door on the aspirations of people across Britain – Angela Rayner](#)

Angela Rayner MP, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary, commenting on UCAS figures for UK higher education applications, said:

"These figures show the worrying impact of a Conservative Government happy to burden young people with over £50,000 of debt just for getting an education.

"From tuition fees rising with no end in sight, to maintenance grants being scrapped, and extortionate interest rates on student debt, this Government's policies have slammed the door on the aspirations of people across Britain, and now we are beginning to see the impact that will have on university applications.

"The decline in nursing applications is utterly shocking, and shows the results of the Government's regressive and short-sighted decision to scrap nurses' bursaries at a time when our NHS will desperately need more staff.

"If the Tories want to see more young people go on to university they would bring back maintenance grants, tackle high interest rates on student debt, and end their plans to see tuition fees rise each and every year."

[Jeremy Corbyn to meet Michel Barnier, European Union chief negotiator on Brexit](#)

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, will have an extended meeting with the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, in Brussels on Thursday, in a move which signals Labour's growing importance to the Brexit process in the wake of the UK General Election.

The Labour leader will be joined by Shadow Brexit Secretary, Kier Starmer and Shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott, for the meeting in which they are expected to discuss Labour's priorities for a jobs-first Brexit deal and cover Labour's approach to Phase 1 negotiations.

Phase 1 includes citizen's rights, exit obligations, and Ireland's border

arrangements. Labour will raise the issue of EU nationals and repeat the party's support for a unilateral guarantee of the rights of EU nationals currently living in Britain. Labour will extend the hand of partnership and friendship to European Union leaders and outline how a Labour-negotiated Brexit would seek to build on our integrated trading positions and commitment to protect and maximise trade opportunities between the UK and the rest of Europe.

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour party, said:

"Labour is a government in waiting and we are ready to take up the responsibility for Brexit negotiations.

"Labour respects the referendum result and the decision to leave the European Union. But a Labour Brexit would look very different to the race-to-the-bottom tax haven backed by this Conservative Government.

"In contrast to the Conservatives' megaphone diplomacy, we will conduct relations with our European neighbours respectfully and in the spirit of friendship. Our strong links with our European sister parties gives Labour an advantage in reaching an outcome that works for both sides.

"Labour would negotiate a jobs-first Brexit deal which puts the economy, jobs and living standards front and centre. Labour would unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU citizens living in the UK because it's the right thing to do.

"Labour wants to work with other countries to build a different Europe, one which promotes human rights and environmental protections, celebrates the positive and complementary contributions of European nations, and where trade is fair and sustainable."

[News story: RAF opens close combat role to women ahead of schedule](#)

Updated: picture

Speaking at the annual RAF Air Power Conference in London, Sir Michael praised the opening up of close combat roles to women, ahead of schedule, as a defining moment in the RAF's history.

The opening of the RAF Regiment to women means that from September 2017, every trade and branch in the RAF will be open to all genders.

The RAF Regiment is the Air Force's ground fighting force, protecting RAF bases, aircraft and equipment at home and abroad.

Announcing the opening of the RAF Regiment to women, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

A diverse force is a more operationally effective force. So I'm delighted that the RAF Regiment will be open to recruitment to women from September. Individuals who are capable of meeting the standards for the regiment will be given the opportunity to serve, regardless of their gender. This is a defining moment for the RAF, as it becomes the first service to have every trade and branch open to both genders.

In July of last year the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary announced that all three services would open up recruitment to ground close combat roles to women.

The RAF Regiment was due to open its recruitment to women by the end of 2018, at the same time as the Infantry and Royal Marines. However the opportunity to invite women to recruit into the Regiment earlier than expected has become available due to a review of work practices which concluded that the Regiment was closer to the Royal Armoured Corps, which is already admitting women into their training ranks, in terms of risks.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

The RAF is committed to providing equal opportunity to all, so it's fantastic to be able to open recruitment to the RAF Regiment to women ahead of schedule. We want the best and most talented individuals to join the Air Force, regardless of their gender, race, or background. A diverse force is a more effective force, and we need the best people to deliver the important work we do, be it defeating Daesh in Iraq and Syria, or protecting Britain's skies.

Stepping up to support Allies

Sir Michael Fallon also announced that the UK will continue to provide Air Transport support to French counter-terrorist operations in the Sahel for at least the next six months. Working together with the UK's firm ally of France in tackling extremism, the RAF has been providing C-17 air transport flights supporting the 3,500 French personnel deployed as part of the French pan-Sahel counter-terrorism initiative, Operation BARKHANE.

France is one the UK's most important European Ally on defence and security matters and both nations aim to uphold the security of Europe through sharing capabilities in the most efficient way.

Investing in equipment

Today's announcements follow yesterday's investment, announced by the Defence

Secretary, of around £40 million in cutting-edge technology to improve the defence of the RAF's Typhoon fighter jets that will sustain over 100 highly skilled British jobs.