

Defence scientists ramp up their support to the Covid-19 pandemic

Press release

Scientists from Dstl have been working tirelessly since the start of the pandemic to support a whole host of government agencies and civilian authorities.



British Army Royal Engineers deliver Covid-19 tests to European lorry drivers on the M20 in Kent, to enable the drivers to make the border crossing back into mainland Europe.

Recently, Dstl experts were called on by the MOD's Standing Joint Command (SJC) to provide short notice analytical support to the Dover crisis between Christmas and New Year, by helping the military and the police clear the backlog of heavy goods vehicles and their drivers. Dstl – the science inside UK defence and security – provided information to aid effective queuing and Covid-19 testing strategies which enabled a rapid return to normality.

As the current vaccine is rolled out, a number of scientists and technicians have been building data science and computing models for the NHS England IT system to tackle a range of vaccine related challenges, from vaccine population estimation to vaccine phasing and regional planning tools.

Dstl's Dr Kit Waterman, said:

It has been a privilege to contribute to one of the nation's largest logistical feats at this critical time. Modelling the phasing and delivery of the vaccine has proved an intellectually challenging and rewarding experience, and the opportunity to work with colleagues from across Dstl has really brought home the versatility and quality of skills developed through the delivery of science and technology support to UK defence.

Dstl's work has been crucial in both the response and building up of national and international scientific understanding of Covid-19. 180 defence scientists are currently working on multiple assignments, with more than 300 scientists in total who have worked on hundreds of Covid support areas. These include supporting the safety guidance for military personnel, ensuring supply chains for military equipment can operate, through to providing scientific support to a number of agencies, including the NHS, Public Health England, the Department for Health and Social Care, as well as the Government Office for Science (GO-Science) and the Joint Biosecurity Centre.

Dstl's Chief Executive Gary Aitkenhead said:

Our people are carrying out some outstanding work, including helping to make sure that defence maintains its operational output during the pandemic. Dstl has helped to widen the Government's scientific understanding on the spread of the pandemic, we've supported the national health response and are helping to increase the understanding of the virus. It is a truly national and global effort and Dstl is a critical part of that.

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