

Dstl careers: Jessica, weapons systems effects analyst

Jessica works in the Weapons Systems Group (WSG) at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl). WSG helps the Ministry of Defence (MOD) by assessing, understanding and demonstrating new technologies and how systems can be integrated across the different parts of the armed forces.

I knew growing up I wanted to be involved in Defence. It swayed from RAF pilot to Royal Engineer to wanting to work in Aerospace with Rolls Royce and finally I landed on analyst. I finally realised that no matter how keen I was for a career in defence I couldn't leave behind my true love – a love for maths and the nitty gritty-ness of it all. I studied maths at the University of Liverpool, taking on a combined Masters course before taking a small side step in to teaching. I graduated in 2019 with an MMath and applied to Dstl. I've not once looked back.

Since joining Dstl in August 2019 I have not only thoroughly enjoyed my work in my primary role within the Weapons Systems Effects (WSE) team where I model future potential radiofrequency (RF) weapons and their effects, but I have also taken on multiple other responsibilities and roles, which contribute both to my own personal development and to the defence-critical work that Dstl undertakes. I have been acting as an Employee Engagement Champion for the past couple of years, collaborating with management to promote a better working life for my colleagues within the group. I also have a role engaging with industry partners and customers on developing novel and emerging technology, and encouraging others to be creative and innovative.

It might sound like I've bitten off more than I can chew but that's one of the great things about Dstl. I'm afforded the time to pursue several roles, each requiring a varied skill set allowing me to develop in all areas rather than just sticking to my very technical primary role! I have loved being able to sit in key stakeholder meetings, talking technical and sharing my knowledge and expertise, then jumping straight to helping a colleague with a problem or brokering better communications within the group, then leading an innovation workshop on collaborative weapons or how we can take existing gaming tech and incorporate it in to the weapons domain.

It's comforting knowing that my team and management support me in all of my pursuits, and I'm listened to in terms of my workload. Dstl fosters a great community of sharing work and knowledge, and I've never felt uncomfortable asking for help.

I tend to stick to the usual 9-5 working life, but I have definitely taken advantage of Dstl's flexible working pattern. I think it's ever more important that an organisation allows its employees the ability to take time when time is needed. For example, during the summer months I sometimes switch to working longer days Mon-Thurs to enjoy a 3 day weekend! Ultimately, I can

work in a way that suits me which does wonders for my work-life balance, mind-set and productivity.

Working at Dstl is a wonderful thing for a plethora of reasons, but what I appreciate most is how encouraging my colleagues are, and that also applies to Dstl as a whole. In the time I've been here I've been encouraged to pursue my Chartership in Maths (CMath) with the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications, and I've been asked to publish pieces of my work to scientific journals. It doesn't stop at professional recognition though. Dstl is a place where learning is a fantastic thing. I've been allowed to learn, to ask questions, to put forward my ideas and be a part of the conversation, and not once have I felt embarrassed or under pressure. A working environment like this is second to none.

No two days look the same at Dstl, so it's difficult to pin point the most exciting piece of work, but what I really enjoy most is knowing what I do makes a difference to the safety and security of our country.

I was initially apprehensive about joining the working world, but Dstl has been a great start to my career. I've already gotten to do loads of cool stuff (including a 2-month trip to California), with even more on the horizon. I'd highly recommend Dstl if you're looking for a place where you'll have the freedom for self-development, feel valued and contribute to the bigger picture.