

Dstl Scientist wins Woman of the Year at Women in Defence awards

The annual awards, this year held at Guildhall in London, recognise exceptional women across UK defence. With more than 470 nominations received, the competition was high with seven staff from Dstl in the final shortlisting.

This year, Phillippa Spencer, who has worked at Dstl for 17 years, collected the awards for Woman of the Year and for Outstanding Contribution to defence.

Phillippa was cited for her work as a polymath, applying mathematical and statistical thinking across a number of areas such as cyber, artificial intelligence, data fusion, chemistry and biology.

Her analysis was used amongst healthcare workers in Sierra Leone during the Ebola outbreak and she was a key subject matter expert in bringing the F-35 fighter into service. More recently, Phillippa was involved in the clean-up of Salisbury following the Novichok incident, where she applied statistical modelling to determine whether locations or vehicles were safe to use.

This year Phillippa was awarded a patent for her method of interrogating mixtures of nuclear acids by short tandem repeat analysis. This complements her existing patents at Dstl including for the pre-symptomatic diagnosis of sepsis.

On receiving her award Phillippa said:

“This was a huge shock to me and a tremendous honour. I want to thank all the people who have supported me throughout the years, especially the F-35 team. Becoming Woman of the Year is a humbling, yet exciting experience.

” I am lucky enough to have had a diverse and extremely fun career and I hope that I have many years to come. I would ask all of my colleagues to nominate more women next year as I know there are many others like me who have made significant contribution to defence.”

Gary Aitkenhead Chief Executive of Dstl said:

“I am so proud that Phillippa has won Woman of the Year. Her contribution to defence is exceptional and is worth honouring. She has been involved with some of the key aspects of defence during her 17 years at Dstl and her work has really made a difference in keeping the public safe and saving the lives people across the world.

“I want to see more women like Phillippa leading the way to inspire other women and to show them that careers in Science and Technology are worth considering. This is a fantastic event and well done to Phillippa.”

Other finalists from Dstl included Cerys Rees of Chemical, Biological and

Radiological Division who was shortlisted for the Outstanding Contribution Award. Nikki Williams, of CIS Division, and a member of staff from the Counter Terrorism division were shortlisted in the Most Collaborative Award category.

Christine McCullough, of CIS Division, and Rebecca Mangham, of Platform Systems Division were named in the Emerging Talent Award category.

Dstl Petersfield School STEM Club team (Jess Barnes, Hannah Fitzpatrick, Kate Hotton, Verity Jackson, Samantha Rawle, Bethany Roberts, Catherine Smith, and Vicky Webb) made the shortlist in the STEM in Defence Award category.