

News story: Defence Science and Technology Laboratory launches 'SME Searchlight' to harness innovation

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) has launched a new initiative to encourage small and medium sized enterprises to work with them.

The project, called SME Searchlight, aims to attract non-traditional Defence suppliers and SMEs to help deliver a projected £40 to £45million increase in Dstl research spending with external companies, in line with the Government's intent to increase external spending with SMEs to 33% by 2022. As well as having access to this increased funding, companies could also benefit through working at the cutting edge of research and technology, with potential exploitation into new Defence and Security systems and applications.

Dstl's Chief Executive Gary Aitkenhead said:

This initiative is important at every level; from strategic partnerships and UK prosperity and growth to making a breakthrough which could save lives.

The increase in demand for new research opportunities extends across Dstl's portfolio, but they have identified four quite different areas to try out new approaches to develop a broader supplier ecosystem: radio frequency engineering, artificial intelligence, synthetic biology and wargaming.

Over the next 12 months, Dstl will be running a series of events, workshops and consultations focused on these four areas in partnership with ADS, the Federation of Small Businesses, Team Defence Information and TechUK. An ambitious target has been set of 60% of attendees at these events having never worked with Defence before, with the aim of bringing these new companies into Dstl's supply chain as direct suppliers; as members of Dstl's framework contracts; or through the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA).

Rob Solly, Dstl Division Head for Defence and Security Analysis and senior responsible owner for SME Searchlight said:

The benefits of this programme include increasing the innovation available to Dstl, collaboration across different sectors and the creation of UK intellectual property. From start-ups to established businesses, we want to hear from people with great ideas. We're simplifying the process of working with Government and we're hoping to show that it can be a fantastic and worthwhile partnership for both parties.

Dstl is partnering with [Venturefest](#) – taking place on 29 March – to engage with some of the best technology SMEs in the South. The first Dstl SME Searchlight event, focused on radio frequency engineering, is due to be held in April.

On 7 March, hosted through the Analysis Support Construct, Dstl is holding an event to invite proposals to identify and develop ways to use science and technology to generate savings for Defence. This will be focused around, but not limited to, Logistics, Personnel and Infrastructure/Estates.

For more information contact searchlight@dstl.gov.uk