

# News story: Dstl Seeks SMEs for Additional £40M Research and Partnership Opportunities

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the science and technology sectors could benefit from an additional £40 million to £45 million of external investment opportunities from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl). The organisation is seeking supply chain partners for a series of research projects across the defence spectrum due to start this year.

Representatives from Dstl will be available to meet potential SME partners at Venturefest South at the Ageas Bowl on 29 March. Venturefest South brings together top talent from the region to demonstrate technologies and innovations, allow start-ups to pitch for investment, and match entrepreneurs with the right organisations to take their businesses to the next level.

Dstl works with a range of start-up and SMEs, providing funding and guidance to develop new and innovative ideas to help protect the UK's armed forces; helping companies grow and boosting the regional economy. Defence is a hugely important sector in the South East, employing more than 39,000 people, with a further 18,000 in aerospace and space.

By working with investors Dstl also helps companies to commercialise the impact and bring new technologies to market. Licensing agreements have been signed for 125 technologies across defence and security, biometrics, life sciences, and diagnostics which have created 580 jobs.

Gary Aitkenhead, Dstl Chief Executive said:

Venturefest is a terrific opportunity to meet potential suppliers and explore ways we can work together. We're especially interested in companies who have not traditionally worked in defence but have specialist expertise and fresh ideas. SMEs need rapid decisions and it can take as little as a week for a new supplier to be approved.

Venturefest South is a not for-profit initiative that has been created and developed by a group of partners within the regional innovation economy including: Carswell Gould, Solent LEP, Innovate UK, the Knowledge Transfer Network, University of Portsmouth, Southampton City Council, Solent University, The University of Southampton, Portsmouth City Council, and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

The fast-growing innovation network in the south is supported by a number of corporate sponsors including BDO, Natwest and Dstl. All the money raised from sponsorship and ticket sales will go towards creating opportunities for early-stage business start-ups to exhibit for free at the conference.

Venturefest South is part of the wider Venturefest network, which works nationally to draw local innovation eco-systems together through a number of local events around the country, working closely with the Knowledge Transfer Network, Innovate UK and other national partners.

[Find out more and to apply to take part in any of the pitching sessions, showcase an innovation in the exhibition or sponsor Venturefest South 2019](#)

A host of opportunities exist for SMEs to work across Dstl's portfolio over the next 12 months, and through the SME Searchlight programme there will be a series of events, workshops and consultations to develop a broader supplier ecosystem, particularly in the fields of radio frequency engineering, artificial intelligence, synthetic biology and wargaming. The team can be contacted by emailing [searchlight@dstl.gov.uk](mailto:searchlight@dstl.gov.uk)