

Press release: Women in Defence awards showcase Dstl scientists

270 guests including 30 finalists from across the Defence world attended the third annual Women in Defence UK awards. Hosting the event was BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour presenter Dame Jenni Murray with the Secretary of State for Defence, The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP announcing the winners.

Dstl's Professor Petra Oyston scooped the top award in the Innovation category for her work in developing synthetic biology techniques for the next generation of materials for protection, such as use in body armour for military personnel. Petra's work included using genetically modified E. coli to provide a toughening mechanism in ceramic material and producing high strength adhesives from barnacle genes.

On receiving her award, Petra said:

I feel very surprised, there was some very stiff competition, and some absolutely brilliant women here tonight. It just speaks volumes about the high quality work we do at Dstl, and I thank the fabulous team that I've had surrounding me delivering brilliant innovative solutions for Defence.

During his opening speech, Gavin Williamson, said:

This year's nominees hail from right across Defence. Some command teams and others lead cyber. Some specialise in intelligence and others from industry. These are women who have been deployed across the world from Belize to Bosnia, from Kosovo to Kenya, who have fought terror and made Salisbury safe. Not all will take home awards, but each and every one are winners – strengthening our nation and representing the very best of British.

Other Dstl finalists included Penny Brookes, nominated in the Most Collaborative category for her work building an international research team that is delivering cutting-edge forensic techniques to benefit defence and security. Carolyn Stothard was nominated in the Unsung Heroine category – a dedicated line-manager, mentor and mediator who supports many with mental health difficulties and neurodevelopmental conditions.

Dstl's Chief Executive, Gary Aitkenhead said:

It's been an absolutely tremendous evening. I am a father of three daughters, I was thinking about them growing and achieving what some of the women here tonight have achieved and to see three Dstl

finalists doing fantastic things and for one of them to get a top award is absolutely thrilling – it's been a brilliant evening, well done to all of them.