

Warfighting Experimentation Force unveiled

- Prototype warfighting and experimentation Battlegroup being established
- The force will hone skills to tackle the latest hybrid and conventional threats.

Soldiers will have their future warfighting skills sharpened and developed further by the establishment of the new dedicated force, based on an infantry battalion but with elements from across the army, designed to fight prototype warfare at the leading edge of defence.

In setting a bold ambition for the future, the experimentation Battlegroup will pit soldiers, equipment and tactics against the very latest hybrid and conventional threats posed by terrorist, proxy and state adversaries.

Minister for the Armed Forces, James Heappey said:

With every great advance in technology comes an advance in the way we fight. The British Army has a proud tradition of experimenting and innovating with new technologies during each of the previous industrial revolutions so as we enter this new age of big data, automation and artificial intelligence, it's important that the new Experimental Battlegroup will be able to build on that tradition and integrate these latest advances into our force structures, equipment requirements and tactics.

Supercharging experimentation, the force will lead in trialling cutting-edge technology and its integration into the way we fight; testing the force to its limits, driving innovation and ensuring that the army's structures, equipment and way of fighting evolve in line with the threats.

This will push forces to their limits to drive innovation to the core of British Army structures and future-proof the battlefield for British personnel.

The Battlegroup draws on the heritage of previous experimental units during earlier industrial revolutions such as the Experimental Corps of Riflemen in the Napoleonic Campaign who introduced rifles, sharpshooting and skirmishing tactics for the first time and the Experimental Mechanised Force formed in 1927 to investigate and develop the techniques and equipment required for armoured warfare.

This announcement follows the publication of the [Integrated Review](#) earlier this week. The Integrated Review is the most comprehensive articulation of a defence, foreign and national security approach published by a British Government in decades.

As part of the Integrated Review, the army will modernise to form a more agile and integrated force able to exploit Defence's network across the globe delivering vital capabilities in the most-contested environments.

The [Defence Command Paper](#) published on 22 March and outlines further details on how defence will adapt and modernise to meet future threats.

900 trees planted along Suffolk rivers

The goal was to help improve river habitat diversity and contribute to efforts to reach the 'Good Ecological Status' classification.

This classification is required under the Water Framework Directive, which aims to protect and improve the water environment.

Over the past 2 winters, teams have planted almost 900 trees along 10 kilometres of the river. The project team have planted 7 kilometres of trees along the River Gipping, 2 kilometres along the River Rat at the Museum of East Anglian Life, and a further 1 kilometre along the Somersham watercourse at Little Blakenham.

These sections of river were chosen because they had little existing tree cover and would benefit from the increased shading the trees will provide.

This shading will help mitigate the effects of our changing climate by helping to keep the river cool in summer. This will have big benefits for fish and invertebrate populations.

The trees will also provide valuable bankside habitat for breeding birds and for bats, otters and invertebrates.

It is also expected that shading will help control vigorous plant growth within the river channels at some locations. This will reduce the need to carry out costly in-channel vegetation clearance.

In time, the tree roots will help to stabilise the river banks leading to less sediment entering the water, which will help improve water quality. The roots will also provide vital habitats for fish as will low-hanging branches trailing into the watercourse.

The trees will also provide valuable bankside habitat for breeding birds and for bats, otters and invertebrates. As well as enhancing the landscape quality of the Gipping valley.

Two brushwood mattresses were also installed in the River Rat, which flows through the grounds of the Museum of East Anglian Life at Stowmarket. These

mattresses will create in-channel habitat diversity by improving flow and will provide an attractive habitat for both fish and invertebrates.

Naomi Boyle, environment programme officer at the [Environment Agency](#), said:

We are thrilled to have worked with [Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#) on this key project, which will help our rivers adapt to the changing climate.

We would like to thank the 13 landowners who made this work possible by letting us plant on their land.

We hope to continue this work elsewhere in Suffolk. If you own land with river frontage and have an interest in improving its biodiversity then please do get in touch.

Penny Hemphill, project manager at Suffolk Wildlife Trust, said:

It has been a pleasure working with Environment Agency for the last two years delivering this project.

Riparian tree planting is key to delivering natural flood management as well as enhancing sites for biodiversity and conservation. Many thanks to all the landowners for coming on board.

[Army announces Special Ops Army Ranger Regiment](#)

News story

The British Army is establishing a special operations Brigade, the core of which will be four battalions of the new Ranger Regiment.



- British Army unveils new special operations Ranger Regiment
- The Rangers will operate in high-threat environments

Over the next four years a share of £120-million will be invested into the unit, enabling it to undertake roles traditionally carried out by Special Forces. They can be expected to be involved in collective deterrence such as training, advising, enabling and accompanying partner forces.

Alongside special operations, a further Brigade will be established. The Security Force Assistance Brigade to provide guidance and training to allied partner nations and draw expertise from across the army.

Elements of each Brigade will be routinely deployed across the globe to assist partner nations in delivering defence and security.

The Ranger Regiment seeded from four Infantry Battalions and will be at the core of our frontline expeditionary posture.

In addition to the Rangers, the Security Force Assistance Brigade will provide guidance and training to allied and partner nations. It will contain specialised infantry units with the ability to draw personnel and expertise from across the Army.

Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace said:

The best way to prevent conflict and deter our adversaries is to work alongside partners to strengthen their security and resilience. These Ranger battalions will be at the vanguard at a more active and engaged armed forces.

Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith said:

The Army Special Operations Brigade is designed to operate alongside both regular and irregular partners and proxies in high-threat and hostile environments.

Consisting of four specialist battalions, the Army Ranger Regiment

will be the vanguard of the Army's global footprint.

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[Appointment of Chief Electoral Officer – March 2021](#)

Press release

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Right Honourable Brandon Lewis MP has today announced the renewal of Virginia McVea's appointment as Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.



The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Right Honourable Brandon Lewis MP has today announced the renewal of Virginia McVea's appointment as Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.

Ms McVea's appointment was due to expire on 31 January 2022 but to ensure continuity in advance of the next electoral cycle it has been renewed for a further period of four years until 31 January 2026.

Virginia McVea has been the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland since 1 February 2017. She is a qualified solicitor who previously served as the Director (Chief Executive Officer) of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Head of Legal Services in the Human Rights Commission and as a legal adviser to the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.

Notes to Editors

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible for appointing the Chief Electoral Office under section 14 of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962, as amended by Article 6 of the Electoral Law (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, the Northern Ireland (Modification of Enactments – No 1) Order 1973 and the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006.

Although the current period of appointment is not due to expire until 2022 it was appropriate to announce the renewal of Virginia McVea's appointment at this time to ensure continuity in advance of the next electoral cycle.

Information on the work of the Chief Electoral Officer and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland can be found at <http://www.eoni.org.uk>

Terms of appointment

- The position is full time and pensionable.
- Remuneration is currently £92,413, and reviewed annually.

Political Activity

- All appointments are made on merit and with regards to the statutory requirements. Political activity plays no part in the selection process. However, in accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity in defined categories to be made public.
- Virginia McVea has declared no political activity in the past ten years.

Regulation

- The Commissioner for Public Appointments regulates this appointment.

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Scottish Secretary speech on defence in Scotland

It's a privilege to be here, at this crucial RAF base from where aircraft and crews are poised 24/7, 365 days a year, to scramble and intercept potential threats to UK airspace.

And from where the United Kingdom contributes to NATO Air Policing missions, having deployed to Iceland, Estonia, Romania and Lithuania in recent times. A strength and a tradition that all of us in Scotland should be rightly proud of. I thank you all for all you do.

The last eight days have been the biggest in generations for the defence sector with the publication of the Integrated Review.

And that was followed swiftly by yesterday's launch of the Defence Command Paper.

This paper outlined clear and credible plans as to how we will modernise and adapt our Armed Forces, supported by additional UK Government investment of £24 billion over the next four years.

And then today will see the release of the new Defence and Security Industrial Strategy, which details the framework through which we will deliver on these plans working with industry, academia and our global partners.

This will see Scotland benefit from increased investment, bringing skilled jobs in traditional areas such as shipbuilding, and also in rapidly developing areas such as cyber and space.

UK defence, and Scotland, enjoy a special two-way relationship. The UK brings key security and economic benefits to Scotland while Scottish military and civilian personnel at establishments across the nation provide capabilities that are vital to the UK and our NATO allies.

Defence makes a significant economic contribution to Scotland with 15,000 regular and reserve armed forces personnel, supported by 4,000 MOD civilians.

And defence procurement contracts support over 12,000 private sector jobs in Scotland.

Bases such as this – home to brave service personnel and civilians, and state of the art kit such as Typhoon jets and submarine hunting aircraft – show that Scotland has a crucial role to play in the security of the UK and the world.

The significance of RAF Lossiemouth is clear, as it continues to expand and modernise as home to four front line Typhoon squadrons, Poseidon P-8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, and the RAF's new Wedgetail E-7 early warning aircraft.

The new MPA Strategic Facility is part of a £470million UK Government investment in infrastructure at this base.

So, let me talk a little more about the Integrated Review and why it is so important.

It differs from previous reviews in that it addresses our national security and international policy together.

It more strongly addresses the link between our domestic and international policy.

And it takes a thematic approach that brings together all the instruments of government behind overarching objectives.

The first responsibility of any government must be to protect its citizens.

And, in a changing world, together the United Kingdom must stay ahead of the evolving threats to our people, interests, and allies.

Alone, no one part of our Union can adequately protect its citizens from the new threats we face.

Nor can we prosper economically and socially in the way we can as a United Kingdom.

Together, all parts of the UK will take full advantage of the opportunities that lie before us.

The Integrated Review sets this out in four strategic areas.

Firstly, Sustaining strategic advantage through science and technology.

In short, this means that we will fortify and extend the position of the UK – and Scotland in particular – as a global science and technology superpower.

We will build our cyber strengths and capabilities in the frontiers of cyberspace, emerging technology, data, and space.

Crucially, the Integrated Review sets the ambition for the UK to be a meaningful player in space – using a mixture of sovereign capabilities and partnerships with our allies.

To achieve this we are developing the first national space strategy.

The UK space industry already generates an income of £14.8billion annually, with more satellites produced in Scotland than any country in Western Europe.

Scotland will remain at the heart of this national effort.

We will launch British satellites from Scotland by 2022 as part of the UK Space Agency's programme to enable a UK-wide market for spaceflight services.

Secondly, Shaping the open international order of the future.

International competition and the effects of the global pandemic will make it ever more important for the UK to work to restore a spirit of greater international cooperation.

Our influence on the world stage is extensive through our role in the UN and the global trading system.

There are real benefits that our extensive diplomatic network brings us in nearly 270 places around the world.

Our ambition to play an increasingly active part on the world stage will be of huge benefit to Scotland.

For example, just recently it was announced that the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's site in East Kilbride will increase in size by a further 500 jobs taking the total number to 1,500 by 2025.

Thirdly, Strengthening security and defence at home and overseas.

The threats we face are changing rapidly and we need to adapt and excel in new areas of defence to ensure the nations of the UK are safe and can prosper.

Our selfless servicemen and women are, of course, hugely important and will remain so.

As well as a quick reaction airbase, Scotland's proximity to the North Atlantic means we are also home to a strong naval presence.

Her Majesty's Naval Base on the Clyde plays a vital role in defending us and our NATO allies.

It is home to the Royal Navy nuclear submarines and continues to receive £1.5 billion worth of infrastructure investment.

As the second largest single-site employer in Scotland it currently provides 6,800 jobs and will grow to 8,200 jobs in future.

The importance of this site cannot be over-estimated and the Integrated Review highlights the new risks posed by the nuclear ambitions of some states.

In a context in which nuclear-armed states are prepared to flout international norms of behaviour, we must protect ourselves, and our allies, by the continued operation of a minimum, credible, independent nuclear deterrent based on continuous at sea presence.

But a country's security can no longer be measured by the number of troops or weapons they have.

The threats of the 21st Century are different.

We need to be prepared for high-tech warfighting and to defend ourselves from

cyber-attacks and disinformation.

We will play our part in this within a strong NATO.

Fourthly, Building resilience at home and overseas.

We will improve our own ability, and those of our allies, to anticipate, prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from risks.

The pandemic has shown us how vital this endeavour is and just how connected global threats can be.

Our fantastic scientists have made a global impact. We will accelerate vaccine distribution globally as the fastest route to recovery from the Covid crisis, and strengthen UK and global preparedness for future pandemics.

The British military's work to support Covid testing and vaccinations in Scotland is testament to this and the power of the Union to keep people safe.

The Integrated Review also makes tackling climate change and biodiversity loss the UK's foremost international priority.

Through the COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow this November, and beyond, our leadership will be vital.

To conclude Ladies and Gentlemen, In the Integrated Review the Prime Minister states:

Our Union will be more secure and prosperous, with wealth and opportunity shared more equitably across its regions bound by shared values and interests, we will stand stronger together on the international stage.

And I could not agree more.

Together, the Integrated Review, the defence Command Paper and the Defence and Security Industrial Strategy demonstrate powerfully how important defence is to Scotland – and how important Scotland is to the defence of the UK and, indeed, our NATO allies.

We cannot take our security for granted, but by working together in a strong Union, we can ensure a safe, prosperous future for the UK.