

£76m contract boosts F-35 Lightning fleet support

Signed by Lockheed Martin and the F-35 Joint Program Office, the Lightning Air system National Capability Enterprise (LANCE) contract will provide additional expertise on aircraft maintenance, bespoke UK training courses for pilots, groundcrew and engineers, and logistical and technical support for the fleet.

Providing additional experienced technical personnel at existing facilities, the contract will also allow three new capabilities to come into operation. These include an ejection seat maintenance workshop, a 'Pilot fit facility' to fit aircrew equipment, and component spray facility to transfer coatings onto aircraft components.

Giving the UK more freedom to operate its fleet of F-35s, it will also increase the number of flying hours available, alongside delivering important mission planning, training and maintenance capabilities.

Defence Minister Jeremy Quin said:

The Lightning Force forms a key part of the UK's Carrier Strike Group and plays a central role in protecting our interests at home and abroad.

This investment will help ensure that this world-class fleet, and their crew, are ready to deploy wherever and whenever required.

Based at RAF Marham, home of the UK Lightning Force, the investment reflects the increasing size of the UK's F-35 fleet and will create and secure 172 jobs mainly at the Norfolk base.

The contract will provide support for 25 months, with an option for a further three months. The majority of the work will be carried out by subcontractor BAE Systems.

Air Commodore David Arthurton, Combat Air Force Commander, said:

I welcome the opportunity LANCE provides to build upon the Lightning Force Element's already close relationship with our industry partners. The new contract will deliver an enhanced level of performance whilst also providing welcome stability to all involved with the programme.

Furthermore, it will underpin our participation in the United Kingdom's inaugural Carrier Strike deployment later this year, and provide an excellent foundation for future land and maritime

operations as Lightning matures towards Full Operating Capability.

The support provided by the contract will be crucial in ensuring the fleet is ready and prepared when they sail with HMS Queen Elizabeth on her maiden Global Carrier Strike Group '21 deployment.

Vice Admiral Rick Thompson, Director General Air for DE&S, said:

I am delighted that we have secured LANCE for the UK's Lightning Force. This is a critical support contract that shows a significant maturity in the platform's capability.

The UK currently has 21 fifth-generation F-35s, having received three new jets on 30 November 2020.