

News story: £30m boost to fast-track battlefield apps

The funding, drawn from the multi-million Transformation Fund, will spark a step change in the development of application software for the Armed Forces and allow the rapid adaption of the state-of-the-art technology to be used in extreme environments, from natural disasters to the frontline.

The crucial technology will also give the military the warfighting edge they need to outpace adversaries and combat emerging threats, allowing those on the ground to demand responsive software that can visualise and automate secure, critical information, tailored to their mission, anywhere in the world.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

From major natural disasters to the frontline on the battlefield, our Armed Forces are quick to react and even quicker to adapt. This technology matches that agility by enabling the creation of specialist digital applications that are tailored, secure and responsive.

By deploying this technology into the hands of our military, from sailors serving in the Caribbean, to pilots working in the Middle East, we will ensure we have a fighting force fit for the future, equipped with state-of-the-art technology at their fingertips.

The new approach, championed by Joint Forces Command, will allow defence specialists to create and tailor applications rapidly to meet an operational commander's requirements, assure its robustness and security, and deploy it on military networks in a matter of days.

As a mission evolves and changes, the application will be able to be adapted and changed to keep step with the demands of the operation.

The capability, dubbed PREDA – Platform for Rapid Exploitation of Digital Applications – is similar to the technology being introduced by the United States Air Force (USAF) and US Marine Corps, which has already seen direct benefits from putting modern applications and decision support software directly in the hands of the war-fighter, when and where it is needed.

The USAF has already delivered 18 tailored applications to support planning, command and control functions at its Air Operations Centers. Further applications are being explored in budgeting and acquisition, cyber defence and logistics.

Whilst the approach is initially expected to provide tools to support decision making and command and control, the initiative could be rolled out to other disciplines, such as cyber defence, logistics and medical support.

The technology is expected to be in use on operations across the globe by the end of the year.

The funding for the innovative Application and Software Design comes after the Defence Secretary announced a £66m funding injection for military robotic projects last week.

As part of the Modernising Defence Programme, the Defence Secretary has dedicated millions of pounds to transforming defence, arming the British military with innovative technology through fast-tracking new projects.

The MOD is embracing transformation at an ever-faster rate and the Transformation Fund is focused on investments in truly high-tech innovation that will develop the Armed Forces of the future.

Press release: Commonwealth Day 2019: PM message

Today, on Commonwealth Day, I am proud to celebrate the United Kingdom's part in this diverse family of nations. It is fitting that in the group's 70th year our theme is 'A Connected Commonwealth'. In an increasingly interlinked world, the bonds between Commonwealth citizens, organisations and governments provide a uniquely valuable network for international co-operation.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London last year, my fellow leaders and I agreed concrete steps to achieve a fairer, more secure, more prosperous and more sustainable future for the group's 2.4 billion people. As Chair-in-Office, the UK is now working with the whole Commonwealth to deliver those commitments.

Over the past year, our leadership of the new Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance with Vanuatu has encouraged 24 member countries to commit to specific actions to tackle marine plastic pollution. And over 2,300 women-owned businesses have signed up to the UK-funded Commonwealth 'She Trades' programme, boosting female entrepreneurship.

The collective determination to deliver the Commonwealth's vision for a common future has never been stronger. I continue to firmly and wholeheartedly believe in the good that this family of nations can do.

Press release: Commonwealth Day 2019: PM message

Prime Minister Theresa May's Commonwealth Day message.

Press release: Thousands of places created in new special free schools

Thousands of new school places are being created for children with special educational needs or those facing additional challenges in mainstream education, providing tailored support to help children thrive.

Every region in the country will benefit from a new school, which include 37 special free schools and two alternative provision free schools. This will create around 3,500 additional school places, boosting choice for parents and providing specialist support and education for pupils with complex needs such as autism, severe learning difficulties or mental health conditions, and those who may have been or are at risk of being excluded from mainstream schools.

It follows a commitment from the Education Secretary Damian Hinds to give the green light to all high-quality special free school bids last December when he announced an additional £250 million for local authorities for their high needs budget. This builds on an additional £100m of capital funding for local authorities to invest in additional places and better facilities for pupils with special educational needs and disability at mainstream schools, special schools and colleges, taking total investment from 2018 to 2021 to £365 million.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Parents rightly want choice of where their child goes to school and to know that the education and support they receive will ignite that spark of potential that exists in all of us, so they can go on and succeed.□

We want every school to be a school for children with special educational needs and disabilities. That's why we are investing significant funding into Special Education Needs units attached to mainstream schools and in additional support so children with

education, health and care plans can access mainstream education.

But we recognise some children require more specialist support. These new special free schools and alternative provision schools will make sure that more complex needs can be provided to help support every child to have a quality education.

Applications will now open in the 39 successful local authorities to find providers – including community groups, teachers, charities, existing education providers and other organisations – that will run them.

Of the 37 new special free schools:

- three will be in the North East, providing over 200 places in total mostly for children with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH);
- six will be in the North West, providing over 400 places including for children with SEMH, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD) and speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN);
- five will be in Yorkshire and the Humber, providing over 500 places including for children with SEMH, ASD, SLD, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and SLCN;
- one will be in the East Midlands, providing 50 places for children with SEMH;
- four will be in the West Midlands, providing over 400 places including for children with SEMH, ASD and Multiple Learning Difficulties (MLD);
- four will be in the East of England, providing over 300 places including for children with SEMH, ASD and SLCN;
- five will be in London, providing over 400 places including for children with SEMH, ASD and SLCN;
- three will be in the South East, providing over 300 places including for children with SEMH and ASD;
- six will be in the South West, providing 500 places including for children with SEMH, ASD, Complex Learning Difficulties (CLD) and SLCN; and
- two AP free schools will provide over 100 places in the West Midlands for children who have been, or are at risk of being, excluded from mainstream education.

Dame Christine Lenehan, Director of the Council for Disabled Children, said:

We are pleased to welcome the new wave of special free schools and the extra choice they will bring to the system for children with special educational needs. We look forward to seeing them working in partnership with parents, children and local agencies to deliver the best outcomes for children.

Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said:

These additional school places will enable children with special needs and those facing difficulties to have access to high quality education provision. Over the past week, there has been much debate in the media about children and young people whose social, emotional and behavioural needs make them vulnerable. Today's announcement of a range of specialist provision in every region of the country is hugely welcome.

The 39 new free schools will offer an extra 3459 extra places for pupils. The schools add to the 34 special and 42 AP free schools already open, and come on top of a further 54 special and 12 AP free schools approved in a previous application rounds, which will open in future. The total number of special free schools will come to 125 upon completion.

Notes to editors:

- Information about the 39 areas, as well as guidance about the application process for the competitions, has been published on GOV.UK.
- The 37 special and two alternative provision free schools will be established in the following local authority areas:
 - Special free schools – Bexley, Bromley, Bury, Cornwall, Dorset, Essex, Halton, Hartlepool, Hertfordshire, Kent, Kingston upon Hull, Kingston upon Thames, Leeds, Leicestershire, Newham, Norfolk, North Lincolnshire, North Somerset, North Yorkshire, Northumberland, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Reading, Richmond upon Thames, Rochdale, Salford, Sandwell, Sheffield, Shropshire, Solihull, Somerset, Stockport, Stoke on Trent, Suffolk, Tees Valley, Warrington and Wiltshire.
- Alternative provision free schools – Warwickshire and Worcestershire
- The 39 new free schools follow an applications round in July 2018, where councils set out their case for why a new special or AP free school would benefit pupils in their area.
- Once all the schools are open, they will offer an extra 3,469 extra places for pupils, extending the support given to SEND pupils as well as those not in mainstream education.
- The commitment to 39 new free schools comes after the Department for Education announced an additional £250 million for the high needs budget and an extra £100 million investment to create more specialist places in mainstream schools, colleges and special schools in December.

Press release: Thousands of places created in new special free schools

Around 3,500 extra school places to be created for pupils facing the biggest challenges in their education