

Press release: PM call with President Ghani: 7 November 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

This afternoon the Prime Minister spoke with President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan. The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's firm commitment to Afghanistan and congratulated President Ghani on the achievement of the first Afghan-led and secured election since 2001, praising the courage of the Afghan people who voted. The Prime Minister and President Ghani agreed that the elections mark an important step forward.

The Prime Minister commended President Ghani for his offer to the Taliban of talks without preconditions and the leaders agreed that the prospects for peace are more promising than they have been for a number of years. The Prime Minister pledged the UK's continuing support for a political settlement.

Both the Prime Minister and President Ghani paid tribute to the sacrifices made by UK and Afghan military personnel in Afghanistan and their continuing efforts in pursuit of peace.

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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.

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Press release: FCO Minister to visit Singapore, Hong Kong and Vietnam

FCO Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field has arrived in Singapore today (7 November), to take part in a SIIA-Chatham House Dialogue on the UK's future relations with ASEAN. He will also attend a roundtable with business leaders and meet Foreign Minister Balakrishnan.

The Minister will then travel to Hong Kong where he will meet ministers to discuss a range of issues including trade and security, and meet with members of the British business community. In Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, Mr Field will attend the 'Inspire Me' festival, celebrating 45 years of diplomatic

relations between the UK and Vietnam, and showcasing British business, education, science and culture. The Minister will also attend a Remembrance service in Vietnam.

On Sunday 11 November, Minister Field will join staff from the British Consulate-General Hong Kong to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph in Hong Kong for Armistice Day, which this year also marks the centenary of the end of the First World War.

Speaking on arrival in Singapore Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field said:

The UK has a strong and enduring relationship with South East Asia, with many shared interests, such as advancing our prosperity, security and mutual values. I am looking forward to my meetings with ministers, business leaders and young people to strengthen our partnership even further.

As my visit coincides with Armistice Day, it will be an honour to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph in Hong Kong as we remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice on the anniversary of the end of the First World War.

Further information