

News story: Defence Secretary announces world class innovation panel

Defence Innovation Advisory Panel

Addressing engineering students, academics, and apprentices, Sir Michael Fallon announced three members of the new Defence Innovation Advisory Panel. The Panel will be charged with driving forward the MOD's Innovation Initiative, which aims to encourage imagination, ingenuity and entrepreneurship, in pursuit of maintaining a military advantage in the future.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Backed by an £800M innovation fund, we want to transform defence and work with small firms, academics and others to find solutions to the threats to our security.

This panel of world class innovators will bring their drive and expert insights to the vital task of keeping the UK ahead of our adversaries and boosting our prosperity.

Major Tim Peake, the first British astronaut at the European Space Agency, is one of the panel members to be announced. Businessman and former Chairman of McLaren Technology Group Ron Dennis, Innovate UK's Chief Executive Ruth McKernan, and Robert Hannigan, retiring GCHQ Director, all join him.

Major Tim Peake said:

I'm delighted to be part of the Ministry of Defence's drive to place innovation at the heart of everything they do, and to bring my experience to the effort to improve the technology, organisation, and culture that keep the UK safe.

Ron Dennis said:

There can be nothing more important than our national security, and I'm enthusiastic to be among the first of those named to this world-class Panel, who have joined MOD to spearhead their efforts to innovate across the organisation, from technology to culture – challenging the status quo, staying ahead of the curve through change and innovation.

Innovative Unmanned Technology

During his speech, the Defence Secretary also announced the launch of a two year £8 million second phase of innovative research and development, exploring the future of unmanned air systems. Developed in partnership with Leonardo Helicopters, the Rotary Wing Unmanned Air Systems (RWUAS) Capability Concept Demonstrator will be a vital tool in discovering how unmanned air systems can support our personnel on the battlefield of the future by developing new concepts and technologies.

The jointly funded programme will utilise the specialist engineering skill base at Leonardo Helicopters by exploring emerging technologies and methods. The announcement comes after the Royal Navy led 'Unmanned Warrior' in 2016: a major international demonstration of autonomous systems which could transform the way in which the Armed Forces of the future help keep Britain safe.

SMEs at the heart of innovation

SMEs are at the heart of the Innovation Initiative, and earlier on Monday, the Defence Secretary visited two world-leading Oxfordshire-based small and medium enterprises. The Defence Secretary took part in an Innovation Roundtable with industry representatives, academics, think tanks, and senior policy-makers. The goal is to work more effectively with businesses and academics across the UK – and particularly with SMEs which might not normally think of themselves as Defence suppliers.

Sir Michael Fallon discussed the innovative collaboration between Reaction Engines, the MOD, and suppliers while touring the cutting-edge facility. The company is a global leader in aerospace propulsion and is currently designing and developing technologies for the next generation of air and space vehicles, with the potential to enable hypersonic flight and transform space access.

He also toured the Animal Dynamics facility, viewing their Skeeter intelligence-gathering micro-drone, which has tiny wings inspired by the dragonfly. Animal Dynamics' innovative research is focused on so-called "biomimetic technology": producing drones based on natural forms. The MOD has placed contracts with Animal Dynamics worth up to £1.5M since June 2015 as part of its Disruptive Capabilities initiative. The drone is part of a wider, innovative MOD Disruptive Capability project, which aims to significantly improve intelligence gathering in complex urban environments.

The Skeeter intelligence-gathering micro-drone manufactured by Animal Dynamics.

The Defence Secretary also visited the new Centre for Applied Superconductivity: a joint project between University of Oxford and local industrial partners and research centres that share an interest in the discovery and future applications of novel superconducting materials. These include improved MRI healthcare scanners and in new quantum technologies for sensors and meteorology. This direct engagement between the research community and commercial application is precisely the kind of dialogue the

Innovation Initiative seeks to foster.

Chief Scientific Advisor

As part of Defence's drive to transform its culture, the role of the MOD's Chief Scientific Advisor has been expanded and is responsible for the MOD's commitment to spend 1.2% of its budget on science and technology. While in Oxford, the Defence Secretary announced that world-renowned scientist Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte has been appointed to lead the MOD's research and technology programme. As the MOD's Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Durrant-Whyte will work across the UK and internationally to drive defence innovation, commission research, and use technology to keep our people safe in challenging environments.

Press release: Foreign Office Minister marks second anniversary of Boris Nemtsov's murder

Minister for Europe, Sir Alan Duncan, urges Russia to bring all those responsible for the murder of Boris Nemtsov to justice

Boris Nemtsov, a former Deputy Prime Minister and leader of Russia's opposition, was shot dead two years ago on 27 February 2015. The suspected murderers are currently on trial, with verdicts expected in March, but there are concerns that the investigation has not pursued leads into who ordered the assassination.

Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, said:

Boris Nemtsov was a man of great stature, who was admired in the UK for his essential and courageous work in promoting democracy. I urge the Russian government to ensure that all those responsible for this appalling crime are brought to justice. Like many in Russia and the international community, the UK government is continuing to follow developments closely.

Further information

News story: GLD signs landmark Pro Bono Charter

The Government Legal Department is one of the 21 founding signatories of the Law Society's landmark [Pro Bono Charter](#).

Stephen Braviner Roman, Director General at GLD, said:

I'm really pleased that GLD was one of the first to sign up to the Pro Bono Charter. By being a founding signatory, we are showing that we take our pro bono commitments seriously. We have made real strides over the past year in our pro bono activity, and I am sure that with the support of our new Pro Bono and Volunteering Network, this will continue to go from strength to strength.

Law Society president Robert Bourns said:

Solicitors do a huge amount of unsung pro bono work, providing voluntary, free legal services to those who cannot afford them or access legal aid. This ranges from supporting law centres or providing pro bono legal advice to charities, through to smaller firms giving free advice to clients who are unable to pay.

Press release: 'Regulator ready' stem cell lines now available for clinical development

The stem cell lines are produced and quality-controlled under European regulation and are therefore suitable for use as starting materials in manufacturing therapies for clinical trials, saving researchers precious time and effort.

The UKSCB is a world leading not-for-profit pluripotent stem cell bank distributing stem cell lines qualified for use in clinical trials. Each cell line will be supplied with a certificate of analysis and we are in the process of compiling a starting materials dossier for each of our cell lines which will be available in the near future.

The UKSCB is a trusted supplier of stem cell lines with the highest quality

and standards of due diligence and is a favoured partner in stem cell research.

Dr Christian Schneider, Director of NIBSC said:

Regenerative medicines are a game-changer – they have the potential to fully repair damaged tissues and organs, offering new solutions and hope for people with conditions that could not previously be cured.

At the heart of regenerative medicines are stem cells, as they can generate cells to repair many different tissues and open the door to novel therapies for currently untreatable disease.

Professor Glyn Stacey, Director of UKSCB said:

In partnership with our depositors we are at the forefront of innovation, making a panel of EUTCD-grade stem cell lines available for the development of clinical therapies.

Our stem cell lines will be a significant step forward in getting regenerative medicines onto the market.

Dr Rob Buckle, Chief Science Officer at the Medical Research Council, which co-funds the UKSCB, said:

The availability of EUTCD-grade human embryonic stem cell lines via the UKSCB provides an invaluable 'gold standard' starting material; ensuring high quality and ethically-sourced stem cells are widely available to the research community to use in human clinical studies.

We are delighted to see this investment now bearing fruit, bringing us ever closer to realising the potential of regenerative medicine in treating the many diseases that currently have no cure.

Background

1. Funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the UK Stem Cell Bank (UKSCB) was established in 2003, at the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC).
2. The UKSCB is licensed by the UK Human Tissue Authority under the requirements of the EU Tissue and Cells Directive (EUTCD) to supply stem cells for development of human therapies.

3. The [UK Stem Cell Bank](#) is a centre of the [National Institute for Biological Standards and Control \(NIBSC\)](#). NIBSC is a centre of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency which also includes the [Clinical Practice Research Datalink \(CPRD\)](#). The Agency is an executive agency of the Department of Health. www.mhra.gov.uk.
4. Stem cell lines from the [Centre for Stem Cell Biology](#) (University of Sheffield), [North West Embryonic Stem Cell Centre](#)/University of Manchester Clean Rooms and [King's College London will undergo a phased release across spring and summer 2017](#). Further stem cell lines from [Newcastle University](#) and [Roslin Cells Ltd](#) are undergoing due diligence review as a preliminary to the production and release of cell lines later in 2017.

Press release: Cabinet office: new senior appointments and changes

Sir Mark Lyall Grant will retire from the Civil Service and his role as National Security Adviser on 13 April 2017.

He will be succeeded by Mark Sedwill who is currently the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office. Philip Rutnam will in turn move from the Department for Transport to become the new Permanent Secretary at the Home Office.

Commenting on Sir Mark's retirement the Prime Minister said:

I would like to thank Mark Lyall Grant for his long years of public service, in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, at the United Nations and also in particular for his work since 2015 as National Security Adviser. Mark has made a huge contribution and I wish him every success for the future.

The Prime Minister added:

Mark Sedwill's experience means that he is ideally qualified to take up the critically important role of National Security Adviser. As well as his recent time in the Home Office, he has served in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and has wide-ranging experience of foreign and security policy issues.

The Home Secretary said:

I would like to thank Mark Sedwill for his distinguished tenure as Permanent Secretary of the Home Office. He has worked hard to achieve our mission to cut crime, prevent terrorism, control immigration and protect the vulnerable. His dedicated public service has helped keep our citizens safe and our country secure. I know he will continue that mission in his new role.

And I am delighted to announce Philip Rutnam's appointment as Permanent Secretary at the Home Office. Philip brings a wealth of leadership and delivery experience, including working on major projects and addressing the long term needs of the UK. I look forward to working with him when he takes up his new role.

Sir Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary, echoed the comments from the Prime Minister and Home Secretary, paying tribute to Sir Mark's time as National Security Adviser, and welcoming Mark Sedwill and Philip Rutnam to their roles:

Mark Lyall Grant's work over recent years, in the Cabinet Office and before that the UN, has been immensely important in promoting the UK's national interests and keeping this country secure. He has served with great distinction two Prime Ministers and the National Security Council, providing strong leadership to the whole national security team. I thank him for his service and wish him all the very best for the future.

I congratulate Mark Sedwill and Philip Rutnam on their new roles, and look forward to working closely with them. They are both experienced Permanent Secretaries with a strong track record of leadership and achievement.

A Civil Service Commission-led competition has been launched today to find a successor to Philip Rutnam.

Jonathan Moor, Director General for Resources and Strategy at the Department for Transport, will be acting Permanent Secretary at the Department of Transport from 3 April, until a successor is in post.