

News story: Joint Forces Command Operational Concept Demonstrator flies for over 25 days

The Zephyr-S operates in the stratosphere at an average altitude of 70,000 feet and could support a wide range of applications, including land and maritime surveillance, and a variety of communication tasks. It runs exclusively on solar power, flying above the weather and conventional air traffic; filling a capability gap complimentary to satellites, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) and manned aircraft to provide persistent local satellite-like services.

The ultra-lightweight UAV, made by Airbus, began its maiden flight in Arizona, USA, on 11 July 2018 and touched down on 6 August 2018.

It was airborne for 25 days, 23 hours, 57 minutes, easily surpassing the old record of 14 days, 22 minutes and eight seconds, which was set by a previous version of the Zephyr UAV. As a result, an application has been made to establish this as a new world record.

Working to Joint Forces Command, the Defence Equipment and Support Technology Office is delivering the OCD to improve MOD's understanding of how the innovative and cutting-edge technologies employed in a HAPS capability might be utilised to deliver operational effect to inform future acquisition projects.

The OCD contract with Airbus was signed in 2016 and includes the purchase of three Zephyr-S platforms, with further flight trials planned for the coming months.

General Sir Chris Deverell, Comd JFC, said:

This is a great example of how JFC is at the heart of innovation for UK Defence. We are demonstrating new technology that puts our Armed forces at the cutting edge of communication and surveillance.