

News story: Welsh company wins £82M contract on global stage

The deal with Qioptiq in St Asaph, North Wales, will see battle-winning handheld equipment – including night-vision goggles and day and night weapon sights – maintained over the next six years, to ensure they are available to our personnel around the globe.

This good news for Wales, as the UK prepares to celebrate St David's Day, follows the recent announcement that North Wales will be a global repair hub providing maintenance services for F-35 components, in a move worth millions for the region.

Speaking at the IDEX trade show, Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:

It's a pleasure to announce this £82 million contract here at IDEX. This deal will provide our troops with the equipment they need to stay safe, while also delivering £47 million of savings.

This contract is made possible by our £178 billion equipment plan, supported by a Defence budget that will rise every year until the end of the decade.

Work under the new Surveillance Target and Acquisition Support (STAS) contract will create eight new positions at the company, which employs around 560 at its St Asaph and Bodelwyddan sites. By merging 20 individual support contracts into one deal, the MOD will save £47 million for the tax payer over the next six years.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

This massive contract for Qioptiq underlines Wales' reputation as a world leader in the defence technology sector, coming hot on the heels of the choice of DECA Sealand as the global repair hub for the F35 aircraft.

This enormous vote on confidence in the Welsh economy demonstrates that we offer the highly skilled workforce and facilities that investors need. It is also clearly great news for employment in the region.

The contract covers equipment used right across the Armed Forces, from frontline infantry and Royal Marine soldiers, to military specialists such as bomb disposal experts, including infantry periscopes, laser aimers and target locating equipment.

Chief Executive Officer of the MOD's Defence Equipment and Support organisation, Tony Douglas said:

This new deal with Qioptiq has reduced costs by a third, demonstrating how we are constantly striving to build innovation and value into Defence procurement and support. Crucially, the STAS contract, will deliver improved support to Her Majesty's Armed Forces.

INDEX is a biannual international defence exhibition and conference dedicated to unmanned systems held in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. The United Kingdom has supported INDEX since its inception and this year a Royal Navy Mine Counter Measure Vessel, HMS Penzance, will be attending.

Mrs Baldwin and the UK team will be working to develop closer links with a range of Governments and industrial partners in the Gulf. British companies are promoting a range of innovative world leading technologies, many suitable for armed forces in the region.

They are keen to share technology, offer value for money solutions supported by training and logistical support, and build joint venture partnerships on land and maritime border security; maritime mine detection and countermeasures; and chemical, biological, radiation and nuclear and biological and chemical defence.

Press release: Search engines and creative industries sign anti-piracy agreement

The UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO) has helped broker a landmark agreement which will see search engines and the creative industries work together to stop consumers being led to copyright infringing websites.

Representatives from the creative industries, leading UK search engines, and the IPO developed a Voluntary Code of Practice dedicated to the removal of links to infringing content from the first page of search results.

The Code agreed on 9 February 2017 will come into force immediately, and sets targets for reducing the visibility of infringing content in search results by 1 June 2017.

Minister of State Jo Johnson MP will oversee the implementation of this Code

of Practice, and the IPO will work with all parties to evaluate progress.

Jo Johnson, Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, said:

Search engines play a vital role in helping consumers discover content online. Their relationship with our world leading creative industries needs to be collaborative. Consumers are increasingly heading online for music, films, e-books, and a wide variety of other content. It is essential that they are presented with links to legitimate websites and services, not provided with links to pirate sites.

I am very pleased that the search engines and representatives of the creative industries have agreed this Code. I look forward to this valuable collaboration benefiting both the UK's digital and creative sectors.

Minister of State for Digital and Culture, Matt Hancock, added:

We are one of the world's leading digital nations, and we have a responsibility to make sure that consumers have easy access to legal content online. Pirate sites deprive artists and rights holders of hard-earned income and I'm delighted to see industry led solutions like this landmark agreement which will be instrumental in driving change.

As we build a more global Britain we want the UK to be the most innovative country to do business, and initiatives like this will ensure our creative and digital economies continue to thrive.

Notes to editors

1. The UK Intellectual Property Office is responsible for Intellectual Property (IP) rights in the United Kingdom, including patents, designs, trade marks and copyright
2. Signatories of the Voluntary Code of Practice are:
 - Google
 - Bing
 - BPI
 - Motion Picture Association

Under the Alliance for IP umbrella, the following members have indicated agreement:

- ACG
- Association of Authors Agents
- BASE
- British Brands Group,
- BSA
- FDA
- PPA
- Premier League
- Publishers Association
- PLS
- UKIE
- Entertainment Retailers Association
- Educational Recording Agency

News story: New legal powers could send UK scientists into space to research vaccines and medicines

British scientists will be able to fly to the edge of space to conduct vital medical experiments under new powers unveiled this week.

Laws paving the way for spaceports in the UK will allow experiments to be conducted in zero gravity which could help develop medicines.

The powers will allow the launch of satellites from the UK for the first time, horizontal flights to the edge of space for scientific experiments and the establishment and operation of spaceports in regions across the UK.

Next steps involve government encouraging business and industry to come forward with specific proposals for space launches and the introduction of a Bill later this year, after which specific rules and regulations will be developed for operators – such as safety and insurance measures. In addition, the government is inviting commercial space businesses to bid for funding to help create a space launch market in the UK.

The sector is vital to the future of the UK economy, it creates high-value jobs and generates wealth across the country. Our regions will benefit from direct access to space as the building of local spaceports will lead to more demand in hospitality and tourism services, creating jobs and opportunities. The UK construction, engineering and service sector will benefit too from supply-chains and supporting services.

Together the new powers and funding will potentially allow a commercial spaceflight from a UK spaceport by 2020.

Space satellites are vital for our daily lives – once launched they can help provide broadband to rural communities, monitor weather systems as they move around the earth, and even help rural health workers who use satellite communications to diagnose and assist patients situated far from specialist health services.

The move has the potential to take UK scientists up to space so they can research and develop vaccines and antibiotics, which grow differently where there is no gravity. The flights could also carry out hundreds of vital scientific experiments on medical issues such as aging and the human body.

Aviation Minister Lord Ahmad said:

The UK's space sector is the future of the British economy. It already employs thousands of people and supports industries worth more than £250 million to the economy, and we want to grow it further. Forty years ago, meteorologists couldn't have imagined the importance of satellites for predicting the weather. Today over 90% of data used in every forecast comes from a satellite, with hundreds of other applications used in GPS, telecommunications and broadband.

We have never launched a spaceflight before from this country. Our ambition is to allow for safe and competitive access to space from the UK, so we remain at the forefront of a new commercial space age, for the next 40 years.

Although the UK is a world-leader when it comes to satellite technology and services, businesses currently have to rely on launch services located in other countries such as the US, Japan, or India, and often have to share launch vehicles, which can lead to delays and restrictions on where satellites can go.

The Bill builds on [£10 million of grant funding](#) announced by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy earlier this month which will deliver an early boost to the UK's commercial spaceflight market, helping us harness our research and innovation while creating high skilled jobs. It will work alongside the government's modern [Industrial strategy](#), which will support sectors like the space industry by creating an environment where companies big and small can thrive.

Universities and Science Minister Jo Johnson said:

From the launch of Rosetta, the first spacecraft to orbit a comet, to Tim Peake's 6 months on the International Space Station, the UK's space sector has achieved phenomenal things in orbit and beyond.

With this week's Spaceflight Bill launch, we will cement the UK's position as a world-leader in this emerging market, giving us an

opportunity to build on existing strengths in research and innovation. Through our 'Industrial strategy' we will harness this potential, creating an environment where companies across this sector will thrive.

New launch technology for small satellites will provide low cost, reliable access to space.

Forecasts suggest the global market for this will be worth £25 billion over the next 20 years. Our new laws will put British businesses at the forefront of these services.

Press release: £12m pay boost to strengthen prison frontline and attract new recruits

- Prison officers at 31 prisons to receive immediate pay increase
- Thousands of staff to benefit from specialist training opportunities in skills such as self-harm and suicide prevention – further professionalising and building pride in the service

Thousands of frontline staff in London and the South East will benefit from an immediate boost to their pay, thanks to a new £12 million package announced today by Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss.

The new package will mean prison officers at the 31 establishments will see a pay boost of up to £5,000, with new recruits receiving higher starting salaries. New starters will receive up to £29,500 – an increase of £5,000 – while a prison officer in London could see earnings increase to £31,000.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

Prison officers do a challenging and demanding job day in and day out. I want frontline staff to know that their work, experience and loyal service is valued. We also want to attract the best new talent into the service, ensuring we recruit and retain the leaders of the future.

These hard-working, dedicated staff are key to delivering our ambitious reform agenda, and it is right that we offer them greater

support as we move ever closer to transforming prisons into places of safety and reform.

Thousands of new learning and development opportunities which will help staff progress in their career will also be made available nationwide.

As part of a comprehensive strategy to further professionalise and upskill the service, staff who take part in the new training scheme will be required to support and mentor colleagues – handing down knowledge and supporting future leaders.

They will also be given specialist training in mental health and self-harm prevention, boosting their pay and progression in the Prison Service.

This investment supports the government's nationwide recruitment drive to recruit the best talent from around the country.

Governors at 30 prisons across the country have also been given greater freedom and flexibility to attract and recruit locally, reducing the time it takes to get new recruits through the door. Applicants will also be able to visit the prison before they take up post, and be in touch with a mentor while the recruitment process is underway

This wholesale, organisational reform will be supported by measures within the Prisons and Court Bill, which will set out a new framework and clear system of accountability for prisons, building on the wide-ranging reforms set out in the Prison Safety and Reform White Paper.

Today's news comes just days after ministers announced a new frontline service focused on reforming offenders and cutting crime, to launch from April 2017. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service will have full responsibility for the operational management of offenders in custody and the community, including strengthening security in prisons, tackling extremism and building intelligence about criminal gangs.

Notes to editors:

The pay increase will be granted to Band 3 Officers on Fair and Sustainable (F&S) terms at eligible prisons.

The prisons include: Aylesbury, Bedford, Bullingdon, Coldingley, Cookham Wood, Downview, Elmley, Feltham, Grendon, High Down, Highpoint, Huntercombe, Medway, Send, Stanford Hill, Swaleside, The Mount, Woodhill, Brixton, Belmarsh, Isis, Pentonville, Rochester, Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs, Erlestoke, Lewes, Whitemoor, Chelmsford, Guys Marsh and Littlehey.

The new award replaces existing pay increments for staff at the most difficult-to-recruit prisons.

Since publication of the White Paper

- 389 job offers have been made to new recruits wanting to join the Prison

Service which puts the government on track to recruit the first 400 of the additional frontline officers committed to be in place by March 2017

- we are appointing 75 mentors for new starter Prison Officers to help them in their first few months in the job which we know can be a difficult time
- we have started targeted local recruitment initiatives at 30 sites so that governors can more easily recruit the people they need
- we are launching a new Prison Officer apprenticeship scheme that will help increase diversity and make it easier to join the Prison Service
- we have launched a new graduate scheme to attract people from top universities to join the Service
- we have launched a Troops to Officers scheme that will support people to join the Prison Service after leaving the military.

News story: Defence Secretary: Britain committed to leading European security

Sir Michael told the annual Munich Security Conference that while Britain is leaving the European Union, the UK would not be stepping back from its role in European security.

Britain's leadership this year is demonstrated by two new major commitments to the NATO Alliance:

- Leading NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, otherwise known as the 'spearhead force'. This UK-led NATO Brigade is ready and willing to respond to any threat the Alliance faces and shows how NATO is strengthening its collective defence and deterrence.
- Deploying a battle group of around 800 personnel to lead in Estonia NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, another way in which NATO is stepping up to deter threats. Britain will deploy as part of the battle group the United States is leading in Poland, with over 100 troops.

The Defence Secretary also met with his German counterpart, Ursula von der Leyen, where he discussed the unprecedented level of cooperation between the two countries. Sir Michael also welcomed Germany's commitment to increase its defence spending.

Sir Michael, along with the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, yesterday launched Britain's new strategy for engaging more internationally in defence activity.

The International Defence Engagement Strategy is the way in which all defence

activity, short of combat operations, work abroad to prevent conflict, build stability and gain influence internationally.

Speaking at the Munich Secretary Conference, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Britain is committed to Europe's security, and we're stepping up our engagement internationally. Whether defeating Daesh in Iraq and Syria, deploying with our NATO Allies to deter threats, or engaging globally to help countries develop their security, Britain is playing a major role – and will continue to do so.

The Defence Secretary also confirmed that Britain would keep the momentum up in the fight against Daesh. In Iraq and Syria, the RAF are flying day and night to defeat Daesh.

The RAF hit over 300 targets as part of recent operations to liberate eastern Mosul, and is now focussing efforts on the approaches to the west of the city, where it is expected the liberation operation will begin within days.