Joint Statement between the UK MOD and the Estonian MOD

The UK's Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace and Estonia's Minister of Defence Hanno Pevkur met in London on 8 November 2022 and committed to ever stronger ties between our two countries.

The excellent defence and security relationship that Estonia and the UK share is built on the solid foundations of shared interests and values and an exceptional history of close cooperation between our two armed forces. We cooperate frequently at all levels in all domains: through NATO maritime deployments at sea, Baltic Air Policing and air surveillance in the air, and through the UK's commitment as the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) framework nation on land. Our five-year eFP collaboration exemplifies what is possible when two similarly minded, close Allies come together in shared commitment and purpose.

In the face of a continuously challenging security situation in Europe, we have today signed a Defence Roadmap which sets out our joint plan to implement the commitments made at the NATO Madrid Summit for the forward defence of Estonia. Its implementation will lead to more capable UK presence, better able to deter aggression and to defend Estonia in crisis and conflict. It will contribute to our shared objective of protecting our populations and defending every inch of Allied territory at all times.

Estonia will start the development of an Estonian warfighting Division as agreed at the Madrid Summit. The Estonian Division will command in-place national and Allied forces as well as possible reinforcement units, to ensure seamless use of all national and Allied capabilities in the defence of Estonia. The establishment and staffing of the Divisional HQ will be completed in January 2023, with evaluation training in the Summer, leading to certification in 2024. The UK will also work closely with Estonia to support the development of its own national Divisional Headquarters, providing training and mentoring through a bespoke advisory team and the development of close links with the UK's 3rd Division.

The UK will enhance the effectiveness of its permanently based eFP Battlegroup by maintaining Divisional-level assets (namely short range air defence and multiple launch rocket systems) in country and augmenting these with periodic deployments of additional capabilities and enablers, including Apache and Chinook helicopters. Deployment of these capabilities will also present opportunities to exercise these assets under the command of the Estonian Division HQ. The first of these periodic surges will begin in January 2023, when Chinook Helicopters will deploy to Estonia. The UK will also enhance the capability of their eFP Headquarters, which from April 2023 will be led by a Brigadier. In light of this additional support, the UK's temporary second Battlegroup, which deployed to Estonia in February 2022, will return to the UK in December 2022.

The UK will also hold the balance of a Brigade at high readiness in the UK, ready to reinforce Estonia and the Baltics at a time of need. To ensure this Brigade is fully interoperable and integrated with Estonia's National Defence plan, the UK will regularly exercise the reinforcement of UK forces in Estonia up to Brigade-level. The first such exercise is planned for May 2023, when the UK will deploy additional forces to Exercise SPRING STORM, including a Brigade HQ alongside a Battlegroup. Estonia will provide Host Nation Support to these additional deployments through the provision of accommodation, technical facilities and training areas.

Estonia will improve its Host Nation Support for the UK surge forces and reinforcement training by building four additional accommodation halls and other necessary support facilities at Tapa Camp by May 2023. In the south of Estonia an additional Reception Staging Onward Movement (RSOM) assembly area will be constructed in 2023 and work will commence for a new permanent camp and enlarged training area.

In other domains, the UK will be providing Baltic Air Policing in Estonia from March to July 2023 using Typhoon aircraft and will contribute to NATO maritime patrols in the Baltics.

Further to the agreements reached today in the Roadmap, the UK and Estonia will continue to work closely with one another across all military domains and explore new areas for cooperation between our two armed forces. We will continue to work closely together through NATO, the Northern Group, and particularly through the JEF, which has become a significant contributor to regional security across its core area of the Baltic Sea, the High North and the North Atlantic. The agreement made today will lead to more UK high-end capabilities deployed to Estonia, more regular deployments of large numbers of high readiness forces, and greater military integration between our two countries. It is a big step forward in helping to guarantee Estonian and wider Baltic Security.

Government ministers visit spaceport ahead of first UK launch

Science Minister, George Freeman, and Transport Technology Minister, Jesse Norman, joined representatives from the UK Space Agency to meet those behind the mission and saw Virgin Orbit's LauncherOne rocket and its carrier aircraft, Cosmic Girl – which will launch from Spaceport Cornwall – up close.

Ministers also toured the spaceport's new Space Systems Integration Facility, the first of its kind at a spaceport in the UK, where the satellites have been integrated into the rocket ready for launch. Spaceport Cornwall will deliver 150 direct jobs and 240 indirect jobs by 2030.

Science Minister George Freeman said:

> The first ever satellite launch from UK soil, here at Spaceport Cornwall, will be a giant leap for our fast-growing commercial satellite and space sector. This is one of our most innovative industries, generating new opportunities in Cornwall and beyond, with high-growth companies such as Space Forge, Surrey Satellites, Astroscale, Inmarsat, Open Cosmos, and the thriving Scottish space cluster.
>
> By establishing the UK as the leading European base to launch small satellites, we can build on our existing strengths in areas such as space manufacturing, in-flight manufacturing, satellite and debris retrieval, and launch licensing insurance and finance, to create jobs across the country, grow the economy and attract international investment.

Transport Technology Minister Jesse Norman said:

> We have one of the most advanced space sectors in the world, and the first commercial space launch from the UK will be a landmark moment both for the country and for our transport sector.

The mission, which has been named ‘Start Me Up’ in tribute to the iconic British band, the Rolling Stones, will be the first orbital launch from the UK, meeting a key ambition of the Government’s National Space Strategy, as well as being the first commercial launch from Europe and the first international launch from Virgin Orbit.

Both Cosmic Girl – an adapted Boeing 747 – and LauncherOne arrived separately in Cornwall last month, and the rocket is now in place under the wing of the aircraft.

Ian Annett, Deputy CEO at the UK Space Agency, said:

> We are at the dawn of a new era for space launch in the UK and about to achieve the goal of putting satellites into orbit in 2022. This is an immensely proud moment for the UK Space Agency and all those who have worked so hard to make this ambition a reality.
>
> Establishing orbital launch capabilities in the UK is already bringing new growth through investment and jobs into Cornwall and other communities across the UK, inspiring a new generation of space professionals whether in science, engineering, law and other disciplines.

Melissa Thorpe, Head of Spaceport Cornwall, said:

> It’s been phenomenal to welcome so many supporters of the UK space sector here to Spaceport Cornwall ahead of our first launch.
>
> My team and I loved showing the world how much work and how much international collaboration is going into making this world-first a reality. This marks just the beginning of a global movement with Space For Good at its core.

Dan Hart, CEO Virgin Orbit, said:

> We’re honoured to be part of this historic mission to open up the UK’s first international spaceport in Cornwall. With this mission we break new ground across the commercial space sector and important allied collaboration in space. Our company is here to serve our customers and their ambitions. Virgin Orbit is up and running and working to obtain final approvals to move forward.

The UK Government’s National Space Strategy sets out how the UK will become the first country in Europe to launch satellites into orbit in 2022. Spaceport Cornwall is one of seven spaceport sites being developed across the UK which will help unleash a wave of innovation and create hundreds of new jobs across the country. All UK launches are subject to receiving a licence from the Civil Aviation Authority.

Councillor Louis Gardner, Cornwall Council portfolio holder for economy, said:

> We’re delighted that ministers were able to visit Spaceport Cornwall as we gear up for the UK’s first ever satellite launch.
>
> This is an incredibly exciting time, not only for the Spaceport and those directly involved in “Start Me Up” but for Cornwall as a whole, and I’d like to pay tribute to all those involved for their hard work and dedication in getting us to this point.
>
> We have a long and storied history of engineering excellence in Cornwall, and the potential benefits that Spaceport Cornwall brings to our economy have never been clearer. From new jobs and new investment to inspiring the next generation of tech pioneers and space professionals, this promises to be yet another red letter day in our shared history.

Inspection Report Published: An inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office's Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa route

News story

This inspection focused on how the route has been working since its launch, including the ability to rapidly scale up operations and learnings taken from, and into, other immigration routes.

Publishing the report, David Neal said:

> I welcome the publication of this report, which looks at the efficiency and effectiveness of the Hong Kong BN(O) route.
>
> The inspection found that the Home Office is performing well overall and has built a flexible, resilient, and engaged workforce. My inspectors identified good working practices and a customer service-focused approach amongst Home Office teams, however greater transparency in terms of published customer service data was required.
>
> Most applicants undergo a fully digital experience and requirements for the route are relatively straightforward. The Home Office has learned lessons from the establishment of the European Union Settlement Scheme, although inspectors found that more could be done to capture best practice from the Hong Kong BN(O) operation for the benefit of future routes.
>
> The use of multiple case working systems presented problems which affected the accuracy and timeliness of data collation and

management information, and the Home Office should look to expedite the move to a single system to drive improvements.

I made three recommendations in this report. I am pleased that the Home Office has accepted all my recommendations and that work is already underway to tackle the issues raised

This inspection report was sent to the Home Secretary for publication on 11 July 2022.

Published 8 November 2022

Celebrating the next generation of Sellafield Ltd employees

News story

The latest cohort of Sellafield Ltd apprentices celebrate completing their apprenticeships at an annual event.

Over 180 workers celebrated the completion of their apprentice courses at Energus in West Cumbria last week.

Between them, the nuclear professionals have undertaken schemes including nuclear operator, nuclear welding inspector and project management and were delighted to collect their graduation certificates.

As this cohort start their careers with Sellafield Ltd, we recently announced 200 young people also kicked off their training with us as new apprentices.

Sellafield Ltd interim site director, Euan Hutton said:

This annual apprentice event celebrates our apprentices. They completed their training with the traditional NVQs but with the added addition of End Point Assessments (EPAs).

These EPAs are carried out by a variety of external organisations e.g. National Skills Academy Nuclear, University of Cumbria, energy and utilities services etc. They are challenging to achieve involving a mixture of tests, theory, technical interviews and, on some schemes, a practical assessment as well.

Well done to all of our apprentices. You are a credit to yourselves, your families, Sellafield Ltd, the local community and our training providers.

Congratulations and well done!

Published 8 November 2022

£2.5 million available for research and innovation to help Defence better understand whole body vibration

- DASA has launched a new Themed Competition: Understanding Whole Body Vibration
- Funded by Defence Medical Services and Defence Science and Technology
- Up to £2.5 million in funding available for innovative technologies and ideas that may be used as the basis for further research into whole body vibrations

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is pleased to launch a new Themed Competition, Understanding Whole Body Vibration. Run on behalf of the Defence Medical Services and Defence Science and Technology, this competition seeks to enhance our understanding of whole body vibration (WBV), including its links to injury and effects on performance.

Key dates and funding

£2.5 million (Exc. VAT) funding is available for this Themed Competition. DASA expects to fund between 1-3 proposals.

The deadline to submit a proposal is midday on Wednesday 18 January 2023 (GMT).

Do you have a disruptive idea or concept? Read the full competition document and submit a proposal.

What is whole body vibration?

WBV is defined as vibration transmitted to the whole body, typically from a supporting surface or platform, including vehicles and machinery.

Service personnel across Front Line Commands may experience WBV during training and operations, for example, when occupying wheeled or tracked vehicles that traverse rough terrain, or aboard small boats. Testing new platforms and vehicles also often involves exposure to WBV.
Injuries that can be caused by WBV are not clearly defined and are often non-specific, for example, neck pain, back pain or dizziness.

These symptoms are difficult to attribute directly to specific levels of WBV exposure. Similarly, evidence that details the short-term impact of WBV is often anecdotal. To help Defence better understand WBV, we require detailed, robust epidemiology and experimentation and modelling of WBV effects.

The proposals submitted to this Themed Competition will help address the following outstanding WBV questions, such as:

- what is the scale of injury related to WBV and how does this affect deployability?
- how does vibration cause musculoskeletal injury?
- what happens when vibration and shock are combined with other environmental factors such as heat, cold, noise, altitude, etc.?
- how do we measure WBV exposure at the individual level?
- what are the short-term effects of exposure to WBV and how do they differ for males and females?

Whole Body Vibrations: Challenge areas

This competition has 3 challenge areas.

Challenge 1: Define the size and nature of the problem

This challenge area seeks definitive data on the prevalence and severity of WBV in service personnel working with armoured vehicles or boats.

Ideas that may help solve this challenge area may include:

- machine learning algorithms to mine clinical databases that establish patterns of injury in at risk groups
- mechanistic models that increase our understanding of how WBV causes musculoskeletal injury in males and females and how to predict and prevent future injury

Challenge 2: Quantify exposure to WBV

This challenge area seeks to determine a dose-response relationship between

WBV and injury.

Ideas that might help solve this challenge area may include:

- platform agnostic wearable sensors to evaluate personal exposure to WBV and shock
- platform instrumentation that can capture and transmit vibration and shock signatures for use in research and development

Challenge 3: Establish the short-term effects of WBV on performance of duties

This challenge area seeks evidence for the effects of WBV exposure on human performance, such as visual tracking ability, cognitive skills, and physical performance.

Ideas that might help solve this challenge area may include:

- development of military-specific, validated outcome measures that are sensitive to the influence of WBV exposure
- technology that can reproduce experimental conditions of vibration and shock signatures experienced by individuals across different platforms

For a more detailed breakdown of this themed competition's challenge areas, read the full competition document.

Webinars

17 November 2022

This webinar will provide more information on the challenge areas and how to submit a proposal. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions in the Q&A. If you would like to get involved, please register on the Eventbrite page.

Register now

One-to-one sessions

A series of 15 minute one-to-one teleconference sessions, giving you the opportunity to ask questions.

If you would like to participate, please register for one of the sessions below:

Submit a proposal

Do you have a potentially disruptive idea or concept that will help the Defence Medical Services and Defence Science and Technology understand WBV? Submit your idea and help Defence better protect service personnel from the effects of whole body vibration.

Learn more and submit a proposal.