

# [News story: 'Brain' for driverless cars: Oxford spin-out wins FT award](#)

[Oxbotica: imagine the future](#)

A company spun out from the [University of Oxford](#) in 2014 to develop a 'brain' for driverless cars has won a Financial Times ArcelorMittal [Boldness in Business](#) award.

[Oxbotica](#) carried off the 'Smaller Company' award for its achievements in creating artificial intelligence software for the next generation of autonomous road vehicles.

## **Creating an autonomous control system**

With support from Innovate UK, Oxbotica has developed an autonomous control system called Selenium. It can work on any vehicle, including forklifts and cargo pods.

The software uses data from laser and camera sensors mounted on the vehicle to find out where it is, what's around it, and to calculate a safe and efficient route.

The technology is already running on Oxbotica's fleet of vehicles, including a last-mile delivery van, the ESA Mars Rover, and the £8 million [GATEway](#) (Greenwich Automated Transport Environment) project in London.

## **Creating value through intellectual property**

Originating from the university's [Oxford Robotics Institute](#) (ORI) research group, the company has spurned conventional financing through external investment.

Dr Graeme Smith, CEO of Oxbotica, said:

We didn't take the easy money. We've got very specific methodology to creating value through intellectual property and opportunities to license that. We stuck steadfastly to that approach. It's nice to have a big investor but we didn't want that to change our focus or direction.

Oxbotica began with 4 employees and has now grown to 30, with the intention of doubling that number this year.

Dr Smith added:

We've opened up a third office in Oxford, a full fleet of

autonomous vehicles, and a dedicated test track and workshop. Our customer base is expanding rapidly and we're growing fast to meet this demand. This award is a major deal to a small company like us.

Oxbotica's success was recognised alongside other winners, including Google's [Deepmind](#), [Dollar Shave Club](#), [Dong Energy](#) and [Preferred Networks](#).

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## **[News story: UK and France strengthen defence cooperation with new weapon system agreement](#)**

Signed during a visit by M. Collet-Billon to the Ministry of Defence, the agreement begins a three year concept phase to develop future long range weapons for the British and French Navies and Air Forces. Each country will contribute €50 million to this phase.

The Future Cruise/Anti-Ship Weapon programme will look at options to replace and improve existing Naval and Air Force weapons systems in the next decade. Lasting up to three years, this will help to define the missile designs and reduce risks to inform decisions about the next stage of the programme

Alongside sharing costs, both sides will benefit from access to each other's national technology expertise, trials and test facilities.



Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin and her French counterpart with the French and British project teams from MBDA, including Antoine Bouvier, CEO of MBDA. Crown Copyright.

**Minister of Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:**

Our relationship with France is strong and enduring. We have a long history of cooperation in defence and security with our European Ally.

As demonstrated by having Europe's largest defence budget, the UK is committed to European security and we will continue to collaborate on joint defence programmes across the continent. Today's agreement will sustain 80 jobs in the UK.

**Délégué Général pour l'Armement Laurent Collet-Billon said:**

We are launching today a major new phase in our bilateral cooperation, by planning together a generation of missiles, successor to the Harpoon, SCALP and Storm Shadow. The FC/ASW (future cruise/anti-ship weapon) programme's aim is to have by around 2030 a new generation of missiles.

This future capability is strategic, industrially as well as operationally. This new programme will be the backbone of our "one complex weapon" initiative.

The agreement is a further example of joint work under the Lancaster House Treaty of 2010 and builds on UK and French similarities in missile capabilities and delivery dates, providing significant efficiencies and securing value for money for the taxpayer.



Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin and her French counterpart Laurent Collet-Billon meeting with members of the French and British project teams from MBDA. Crown Copyright.

During the 2016 Amiens Summit, the UK and France formally confirmed their intent to launch this project within 12 months. This agreement, which allows the Direction Générale de l'Armement to place the contract with MBDA, illustrates the dynamic nature of UK-France strategic cooperation.

UK-French cooperation already covers a wide range of fields beyond the FC/ASW programme, including research emerging from the partnership on innovation and missile technologies (MCM-ITP), work to align our capability plans, development and production centred on the Future Air-to-Surface Guided Weapon (FASGW) and the mid-life update programme of the SCALP/Storm Shadow missile systems. This new project further strengthens MBDA's industrial optimisation building on their new Centres of Excellence.

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# [Press release: New agency to provide joined-up education and skills funding](#)

The Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency are to merge to become one body, the Secretary State for Education [announced today](#) (Tuesday 28 March).

The new, single funding agency – to be called the Education and Skills Funding Agency – will sit within the Department for Education and begin to operate from April 2017.

The new body will continue to carry out the roles of the Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency and will therefore be responsible for effectively and efficiently overseeing:

- the funding of education for pupils aged 5 to 16
- education and training for those aged 16 to 19
- apprenticeships and adult education
- managing school building programmes

Its responsibilities cover these functions in England.

Secretary of State for Education Justine Greening said:

Creating the Education and Skills Funding Agency will mean we are able to provide a more joined-up approach to funding and regulation of schools, colleges and other providers, with improved accountability and better service.

We will be working closely with our staff, unions, stakeholders and the education sector to finalise and deliver our plans for the new agency.

Current chief executive of both agencies, Peter Lauener, has announced that he intends to retire following the merger and plans to recruit a successor are under way. Mr Lauener will carry on as chief executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency until a permanent replacement has been recruited and is in place.

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## [There is a continuous need to](#)

## modernise the police but caution is required with these plans – Diane Abbott

**Diane Abbott MP, Labour's Shadow Home Secretary**, commenting on new Government plans that would allow civilians to compete for chief constable jobs, said:

“Caution is required with these plans. There is a continuous need to modernise the police, making it more diverse and representative of society as a whole, but many able officers will now wonder whether their own career paths could be blocked.

“This Tory Government have already reduced officer numbers by over 20,000 and broken their pledge to protect police funding in real terms.

“Neither the police nor the public will want to see people recruited from outside the service simply because of their willingness to implement further swingeing cuts.”

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## The Government must act to close the funding gap in local services so that people are able to travel freely and safely throughout their communities – Teresa Pearce

**Teresa Pearce MP, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**, commenting on an Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) report showing that one in six roads in England and Wales are in poor condition, said:

“Up and down the country, motorists, cyclists and passengers regularly have their safety compromised by dangerous and recurring potholes. Whilst

councils are doing their utmost to repair these swiftly, huge cuts to local government budgets are making this ever more difficult.

“The Government must act to close the funding gap in local services so that people are able to travel freely and safely throughout their communities. And the utility companies who regularly dig up the roads must also be an active part of the solution to this problem.

“The Tories’ chaotic and cack-handed approach to local government funding is creating a system whereby councils can only afford to provide the bare minimum in statutory social care, safeguarding and homelessness services. Consequently, we are seeing everything else, from libraries to roads, suffer as a result.”