



Ministry  
of Defence

Ministry of Defence  
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Ref: FOI2018/13316

E-mail: [ISS-SecretariatGpMbx@mod.gov.uk](mailto:ISS-SecretariatGpMbx@mod.gov.uk)

20 November 2018

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email of 23 October 2018 requesting the following information:

*"I would like to know if your department and associated agencies make use of algorithms, machine learning or artificial intelligence for any of its functions, and how they use these tools.*

*Please could you also provide details of any risk assessments that have been carried out ahead of use."*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and I can confirm that some of the information in scope of your request is held.

Algorithmic decision-making and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have many potential applications within a Defence context, from delivering process efficiencies through back office process automation, to supporting improved decision-making to enhancing military capabilities. The MOD recognises that this is a developing field that has the potential to transform how we operate and ensure that the UK can maintain our competitive advantage.

The MOD is investing heavily in understanding and pulling through these innovative technologies into front line service. Some of the initiatives underway across Defence are listed below, and links to some websites and media articles about them can be found at Annex A:

- The Royal Navy has established Project NELSON as a centre of excellence in Data Science and AI.
- MOD, in conjunction with GCHQ, has signed a Defence and Security Partnership with the Alan Turing Institute (Turing), the National Centre for Data Science and AI. The partnership is conducting applied research in Data Science and AI, providing a means to train MOD and GCHQ staff through formal training courses and the placement of research fellows within the Turing environment, and also providing a platform to enable MOD to raise awareness of the capabilities of these technologies.
- The Defence and Security Accelerator publishes innovation competitions online, which include work on AI. A MOD AI Hackathon took place in November 2017.
- The MOD has adopted an innovative approach to engaging with a broader supplier base for data science solutions through both a public data science competition on 'Kaggle', and our own Data Science Challenge Platform. Dstl also fund research into how automation and

machine intelligence can analyse data to enhance decision making in the Defence and security sectors.

- The Defence Secretary announced the launch of AI Lab, a single flagship for Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and data science in Dstl, based at Dstl Porton Down.

MOD subscribes to the Government Data Ethics Framework, and we require our data scientists to carry out a review according to the [Data Ethics Workbook](#) and a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA). A PIA is a standard series of screening questions that guides users through the potential risks and benefits of sharing personal data. This will take place during the Discovery phase of any data science project, to check that the data required can be used, and that the analysis and products are ethical, minimally intrusive, and that unintended negative consequences are as low as reasonably practicable. This also ensures regulatory compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

ISS Secretariat

<https://www.techuk.org/events/briefing/item/9400-innovation-challenge-artificial-intelligence-in-royal-navy-warships>

<https://www.ktn-uk.co.uk/news/army-warfighting-experiment-awe-robotics-and-autonomous-systems-ras-expressions-of-interest>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accelerator-themed-competition-revolutionise-the-human-information-relationship-for-defence/competition-document-revolutionise-the-human-information-relationship-for-defence>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accelerator-themed-competition-revolutionise-the-human-information-relationship-for-defence/challenge-1-additional-information-innovation-challenge-elements>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accelerator-themed-competition-revolutionise-the-human-information-relationship-for-defence/challenge-2-additional-information>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accelerator-themed-competition-revolutionise-the-human-information-relationship-for-defence/challenge-3-additional-information>

<http://www.techuk.org/events/opportunity/item/11510-mod-artificial-intelligence-hackathon>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/crowdsourcing-innovative-new-defence-technologies>

<https://www.datasciencechallenge.org/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/100000-for-research-into-automation-and-machine-intelligence>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/flagship-ai-lab-announced-as-defence-secretary-hosts-first-meet-between-british-and-american-defence-innovators>