

Wales becomes UK launchpad for next generation autonomous technology

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- Welsh SMEs will gain greater direct access to secure defence contracts by removing barriers to working with the MOD.
- Work to establish a new Defence Technical Excellence College to train the next generation of defence engineers.

Thousands of skilled workers in Wales will be involved in the design, testing and manufacture of innovative technologies, as a landmark deal positions the nation at the forefront of Britain's defence future.

Defence Secretary John Healey MP, Wales First Minister Eluned Morgan and Secretary of State for Wales Jo Stevens signed the £50 million Wales Defence Growth Deal, which will maximise Wales as a UK launchpad for autonomous technology and uncrewed systems, such as for use in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and one-way drones.

The deal – signed at Cardiff Castle – will widen access to MOD test ranges across Wales, including at MOD Aberporth, and working with the Civil Aviation Authority and its military counterpart, air corridors across central Wales will also be expanded to enable testing of uncrewed aerial systems by industry and the military.

Additionally, it will be made easier for Welsh small and medium-sized businesses to gain greater direct access to secure defence contracts by ensuring they have the proper clearances and access, creating a level playing field with major defence companies and unlocking homegrown talent. This will break from SMEs needing to go through Prime contractors to gain access to certain classified work.

Furthermore, our intention is to work collaboratively to establish a new Defence Technical Excellence College by September 2027. The college will train the next generation of defence engineers to support Britain's growing autonomous capabilities.

It is the latest example of the Welsh and UK Governments putting Wales on the front foot, supporting Welsh jobs and getting Britain building again. Earlier this week, both governments announced that seven new railway stations are set to be built across Wales, creating thousands of jobs across the country, boosting the construction industry and driving real change that communities will see.

Defence Secretary John Healey MP said:

We pledged a Defence Growth Deal for Wales and this is the UK Government delivering on that commitment.

Wales is central to the defence of the UK and I am proud to launch this new partnership that will transform the nation into a centre for innovation. It will create good jobs and drive growth in Wales.

We're investing £50 million in this deal to make Wales the UK's launchpad for uncrewed systems. Expanding test ranges and opening up Welsh skies will help put Britain at the forefront of the autonomous defence technology that our Armed Forces need to fight and win.

The First Minister of Wales Eluned Morgan said:

Wales will play its part to secure our national defence in an increasingly unstable world.

The aerospace and defence sector in Wales is vitally important to the economy and directly employs over 16,000 highly skilled workers. The backbone of the sector is the huge number of small and medium size companies across the whole of Wales who are the life blood of development and innovation.

The dual use nature of the deal means that its benefits will be felt across the wider Welsh economy. It is vital now that we see this commitment from the MOD filter down to the SMEs quickly and improves the defence capability of the UK.

Secretary of State for Wales Jo Stevens said:

Today's deal will shape the future of the defence industry for years to come and will deliver economic growth and thousands of skilled well-paid jobs.

We are building on Welsh expertise and our strong base by investing £50 million so Wales can lead the way in 21st century autonomous defence technology.

Kevin Craven, CEO of ADS, the trade association representing more than 1800 businesses throughout the UK in aerospace, defence, security and space:

The Defence Growth Deals were a standout feature of the Defence Industrial Strategy - aiming to leverage both well-established and developing strengths of the defence industrial base across the UK. Here in Wales, where the industrial footprint includes particular strengths in unmanned capabilities, world-renowned componentry and cutting-edge dual use technologies, this support is particularly pertinent.

Today's Wales Defence Growth Deal dovetails the two core motivations of industry and government alike: building UK and effective deterrence capabilities, while providing high-quality, high-value employment that strengthens local communities.

ADS are delighted to have worked in concert with our regional partners, the Ministry of Defence team and of course our brilliant members on how this support can truly unlock Wales' potential. We look forward to building on this further.

Almost 4,000 people in Wales are currently employed through MOD industry spending, as part of the more than £1 billion spent with the Welsh defence industry.

Today's investment will see innovative defence platforms designed, built and tested in Wales, helping to power autonomous systems across land, sea and air. And as part of the Defence Growth Deal, work will take place on developing the sovereign capabilities for critical materials resilience and assurance.

Defence Growth Deals are being created under the Defence Industrial Strategy as part of a bold initiative to support the growth potential of the defence industry, underpinned by the largest sustained increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War - hitting 2.6% of GDP from 2027.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/wales-becomes-uk-launchpad-for-next-generation-autonomous-technology>