

SKILLS THE NATION NEEDS

Modern technology has transformed the way our armed forces are equipped and operate. Without state-of-the-art support from scientists like Darren Coe, the UK would lose its leading edge in the field

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I'm not a number...

I'm a
defence scientist

a job worth doing, not a cash saving

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Skills that cannot be turned on and off

DARREN COE works for QinetiQ as a leading expert on airborne radar. He joined the former Defence Research Agency in 1992, specialising in synthetic aperture radar for ground imaging, and has an MSc in microwave physics.

QinetiQ is the brains behind the Ministry of Defence across a broad front of technologies, from Chinook engineering projects at Boscombe Down to classified work in direct support of the front line.

Darren currently leads a team developing radar imaging techniques. Other projects he has worked on include an airborne reconnaissance programme which developed a world-leading battlefield surveillance platform, Sentinel, providing all weather, wide-area coverage to UK forces.

But R&D funding has fallen dramatically in real terms over the last few years, and in many of QinetiQ's areas world-class capabilities have already been lost.

Darren says this downturn in funding means that no new research is being done by his group for the MOD apart from

pulling through previously developed techniques.

"The cuts have already affected our work. Loss of the Nimrod programme and cancellation of the defence training contract mean that highly experienced staff have lost their jobs.

A thriving group of 60 radar research scientists is now down to a dozen.

"Today, there is almost no market for UK technology in MOD. UK industry must look abroad for opportunities, and this clearly has implications for the long-term support of our armed services. MOD's insistence on global competitions will increasingly see UK industry losing out to foreign companies and losing in-house expertise.

"Working as a scientist in the defence sector used to be a chance to do world-class research, working with the best equipment in the best facilities.

"These are skills that cannot be turned on and off at will. If the UK wants to stay a leading military power then it has to invest in technology. Our armed forces cannot afford to do without leading edge support from scientists and engineers."



“If the UK wants to maintain its position as a leading military power then it will have to invest in technology”



When MOD sneezes, QinetiQ catches cold

The squeeze on defence funding

has led directly to over 800 redundancies at the privatised defence company, QinetiQ.

In 2010, the company began consultation with Prospect on detailed plans for 'reshaping' its UK business, and proposed around 400 job losses, mainly at its scientific research base at Malvern,

Worcestershire.

This was followed in August with a further announcement of 325 job losses in its 'Managed Services' business, at Boscombe Down, Farnborough and the test ranges it runs on behalf of MOD.

During the summer over a fifth of QinetiQ's workforce were placed 'at risk' of redundancy





- ▶ during the consultation process, leaving over 1,500 scientists and engineers facing uncertainty over their futures.

QinetiQ argued that it needed to reduce operating costs by 10 per cent as a consequence of a sharp reduction in spending by MOD, which had slashed its science and technology budget by 20%. The company continues to depend heavily on MOD contracts for scientific innovation, testing and evaluation services across all

military capabilities.

Although QinetiQ had gone through 'reductions exercises' in each of the past four years, this time the redundancies had a much harder impact with the introduction of reduced redundancy terms.

To make a bad year worse, in October 2010 the Strategic Defence and Security Review announced that MOD was to scrap its contract with QinetiQ for the £14bn defence training initiative, which QinetiQ had secured in 2007.

In February 2011, the company announced another 126 redundancies at Malvern, including signal-processing mathematical posts undertaken by highly skilled individuals whose capabilities will now be lost to QinetiQ.

The scale of job losses at the UK's leading defence research company brings into sharp focus the impact of public expenditure cuts on private sector jobs. MOD cuts have impacted heavily on contractors like QinetiQ and BAE Systems. The

loss of so many innovative and skilled employees will inevitably have a long-term impact on future capabilities, including the lucrative market for civilian spin-offs from QinetiQ's defence work.



New Prospect House
8 Leake Street
London SE1 7NN

T 020 7902 6600 F 020 7902 6667
E enquiries@prospect.org.uk

www.prospect.org.uk

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