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## 'TOP GUN' ACOUSTIC COURSE OPENS DOORS FOR THE FIRST TIME.



The home of the United Kingdom's elite Advanced Course for sonar operators has opened its doors for the first time to visitors. The "A" Course has been described as the 'Top Gun' of the sonar world. It is the most demanding course for submarine hunters in the world and aims to take experienced sonar operators and perfect their skills to enable them to make quick decisions when detecting and classifying threats in a complex environment.

While the focus of the World is understandably on operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, supported by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, continue to train their personnel to counter the potential threat posed by submarines in modern naval warfare.

More States than ever now possess submarines. With over two thirds of the World's population living within 100km of the shore and over 90% of the UK's trade by weight travelling by sea, at times of international tension submarines pose a deadly threat to our forces and economy.

Key to countering this threat is ensuring that our sonar operators are able to detect an opposing submarine first. This is essential for our forces as it allows them either to avoid detection by the enemy or, if required, destroy them.

The UK centre of excellence for acoustic analysis is part of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl). A team of scientists, engineers, analysts and experienced military personnel analyse acoustic information in meticulous detail using state of the art analysis systems to extract information on the characteristics of ships and submarines. This analysis supports the UK's anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability by providing material to train the sonar operators of submarines, ships, helicopters and Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft. The pinnacle of the professional training for a sonar operator is the successful completion of the demanding "A" course.

Typically 20-24 students are enrolled on the 3 courses held every year. Each course is 4 weeks in length. Most students are from the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force but some come from other nations including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. The failure rate on the course is low, typically less than 10%, due to the high pre-joining requirements, experience and quality of the candidates.

Peter Starkey, Future Business Director at Dstl said, "It is essential that the UK maintains a bank of qualified and experienced sonar operators. They are highly skilled individuals and to lose this capability would be a threat to our security. Dstl's position at the heart of MOD means that we can continue to provide a unique, independent facility using cutting edge techniques and the very best data, providing sonar operators from the Royal Navy and RAF with the very best training which ensures the future of this capability."

Captain Mike Davis-Marks RN OBE of the Royal Navy said, "ASW is a vital task and the Royal Navy prides itself on having some of the most capable ASW platforms in the world. Regardless of the sophistication of the equipment available, the key to an effective capability is training, and the A course is recognised as the pinnacle for Royal Navy ASW operators".

Group Captain Jerry Kessell, Station Commander of Royal Air Force Kinloss, home of the Nimrod MR2, said, "Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft such as the Nimrod MR2 are powerful anti-submarine weapons. The Nimrod possesses a deadly combination of speed along with a formidable weapons system which includes an outstanding sensor package. A key component of the weapons system is the skilled acoustics operators who provide essential information for fighting the aircraft. The "A" Course represents the pinnacle of achievement for these operators and ensures that the Nimrod fleet remains the most potent anti-submarine warfare force in the World".

Chief Petty Officer Joe McCranor, a former student of the course, said, "My next job is Chief Ops on a submarine. The "A" Course enhanced my effectiveness as an advisor to the Command and ensured I have the skills to be the senior acoustic analyst on the boat. The course improved my analysis skills, updated my knowledge of sonars, signatures and other factors impacting my work. Initially the course was very demanding. There are lots of facts and figures to learn in a short time and the days are long. But soon, after the first week or so, I noticed my skills and knowledge rapidly getting up to speed and I was able to more confidently handle the course material. This confidence building with regards to skills is the real purpose of the course".

**ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

- Dstl (the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory) is the centre of scientific excellence for the Ministry of Defence, housing one of the largest groups of scientists and engineers in public service in the country. Its 3,500 strong workforce includes some of the nation's most talented and creative scientists with the brief to ensure that the UK Armed Forces and Government are supported in-house by world class scientific advice. Dstl delivers defence research, specialist technical services and the ability to track global technological developments. Its capabilities compare with the best in the world, supporting defence policy making and operations and procurement decisions. For more information visit [www.dstl.gov.uk](http://www.dstl.gov.uk).