

DEFENCE

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for changes in the number of scientists working on hydrodynamic testing at Aldermaston. [73816]

Des Browne: In the absence of the ability to undertake nuclear testing given that the UK has signed and ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban treaty, it is necessary to invest in hydrodynamic testing to provide assurance that the existing Trident warhead stockpile is reliable and safe. It is planned to increase the number of scientists working on hydrodynamics testing at AWE from 70 to 95 over the next three years.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Atomic Weapons Establishment has conducted studies into the use of *(a)* hydrodynamic test facilities at Aldermaston for developing new nuclear warheads, *(b)* hydrodynamic testing to build a nuclear weapon without having to use underground testing of such a weapon and *(c)* hydrodynamic test facilities at Aldermaston for developing a new warhead. [73818]

Des Browne: Hydrodynamics testing is essential in underwriting the safety and reliability of the existing stockpile without recourse to nuclear testing. There is no programme at Aldermaston to develop a new nuclear warhead.

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Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total capital cost of the new Hydrodynamics Research Facility being considered by the Atomic Weapons Establishment is expected to be. [73820]

Des Browne: A number of options are under consideration. Mature costings are not available.