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*** NOT FOR RELEASE BEFORE 0800 3 APR 2019 ***

Research on a New Chatbot to Help Support Military Personnel

Birmingham UK, 3 April 2019

Military personnel may one day be able to get personalised day to day support for their busy lives thanks to a new project being delivered in response to a MOD Funding Competition. The project is being led by Birmingham-based Daden Limited, in collaboration with Altruist Enterprises and the Institute for Employment Studies. Daden and Altruist are both based at the Innovation Birmingham Campus. The competition was run under the auspices of the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA), sponsored by the Defence People (which sets the strategy for developing a capable and motivated military and civilian workforce within the MOD). The initial contract is worth £247,720.

The project aims to develop a mobile chatbot application with the intention of trialling it at RAF Fylingdales in North Yorkshire. In creating the application and content the team are working with the military users and managers to identify what support is needed, and also what other information and functionality would encourage personnel to use the application on a regular basis. Military life can require high levels of resilience from Forces' personal with lengthy separations, frequent moves, deployments, shift-patterns and operational duties all adding to the load. It is hoped that the app will help to reduce the friction of day-to-day military life, improve mental and physical health, wellbeing and resilience, support personal planning and development, and ensure that military personnel are more informed, motivated and fulfilled.

The app, which builds on previous work by Daden and the University of Worcester for the MOD, is designed to work on personal mobile phones and provide personnel with quick, direct, 24/7 access to information and support resources to help both them and their families. The app can also take a more pro-active role, offering up suggestions for short training sessions to help build resilience and well-being, to improve sleep, to manage stress, and to plan future personal development and career progression. It is not intended that the app does everything itself, rather it helps signpost users to trusted and appropriate web and mobile apps and resources, and of course to human support when that is the best way to deal with an issue.

RAF Fylingdales Station Commander Wg Cdr Alun Walton said *"The virtual life coaching application will allow RAF Fylingdales serving military and families to engage with different aspects of modern life by embracing ever-present technology. This is a real step in the right direction for welfare and resilience and we look forward to contributing to the development of the application for all of Defence in the future."*

David Burden, Managing Director of Daden Limited said, *"Having something you can turn to quickly, at any time of the day or night, to get some advice about something that you might not right now want to speak to another human about can be of real benefit. But from our work in this area so far we've been impressed at how mature users can be – recognising when a chatbot system like this is of real help, and when they really are better off speaking to a human."*

Katie Buckingham, Managing Director of Altruist Enterprises, said *"We are very pleased to be involved in such an exciting and worthwhile project. There has been a rising trend in the rate of UK Armed Forces personnel assessed with a mental disorder over the past 10 years. Our team of mental health and training specialists, in partnership with Daden and the IES, aim to provide individuals with the tools to build resilience and maintain positive well-being through the many challenges of military life."*

Dr Alison Carter, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Employment Studies, said *"IES cross-sector research found that today's job entrants - younger people in particular – are comfortable consuming information through technology, automation and chatbots, being handed over to a person when required. This already happens during recruitment and learning, and can be easily applied to cultivating better working lives. IES is delighted to support this project which we expect will make a positive contribution to the wellbeing and engagement of military personnel."*

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The current development phase of the project runs until May 2019, when hopefully approval will be given to continue to the live trial at RAF Fylingdales in the second half of 2019. As with much current MOD funded work there is also a real interest how such developments can also be used in the non-military domain to help grow UKplc. As such the team are also developing a “civilian” demonstrator of the concept and talking to business and other organisations about how this could help support their own employees, staff and even students.

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Note for Editors

The original DASA Defence People call can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accelerator-competition-defence-people-innovation-challenge>

About Daden: Daden Limited specialise in delivering innovative solutions in immersive learning and education and in conversational artificial intelligence (chatbots). Daden's national and international clients have ranged from the private sector to central and local government, education, public safety, and health, including the Ministry of Defence, the City of New York, Birmingham City Council and almost two dozen universities in the UK and abroad. Founded in 2004 by David Burden, Daden are based at Innovation Birmingham Campus, in Birmingham, UK.

About DASA: DASA find and fund exploitable innovation to support UK defence and security quickly and effectively, and support UK prosperity. Their vision is for the UK to maintain its strategic advantage over its adversaries through the most innovative defence and security capabilities in the world. DASA is a cross-Government organisation, launched in December 2016 by the Secretary of State for Defence.

About RAF Fylingdales: RAF Fylingdales' primary mission is missile warning; a strategically important 24/7 365 task for which information is passed to UK and US Governments through the UK Space Operations Coordination Centre and Head Quarters Northern Region Air Defence respectively. Fylingdales also provides input to the US Missile Defence system. RAF Fylingdales' secondary mission is space surveillance, routinely tracking about 60% of the detectable debris out to low earth orbit and contributing to the US Space Surveillance Network. This information is also passed to the UK Space Operations Coordination Centre as well as data which contributes to the satellite warning service, over flight and re-entry roles delivered to the Ministry of Defence and UK forces deployed world wide. BMEWS Site III RAF Fylingdales therefore has the unique function of providing missile warning, missile defence and mission data simultaneously to UK and US.

About Altruist Enterprises: Altruist Enterprises are an experienced provider of Resilience, Stress Management and Mental Health at Work training to organisations nationally. Their goals are to increase knowledge, encourage conversations and build confidence around the issue; thus ensuring healthy, motivated and more productive workforces.

About the Institute of Employment Studies: IES is a not-for-profit, independent centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and HR management. It works closely with government departments, agencies, professional bodies and associations and employers in all sectors. IES is a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and HR planning and development.

About University of Worcester: The University of Worcester is one of Britain's most inclusive institutions, with more than 10,000 students studying across a range of courses each year. The University is in the top 10 for sustained employment, according to the most recent Longitudinal Educational Outcomes data (2017) with 97% of Worcester graduates in work of further study within 6 months of graduating. Worcester is one of

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the Country's leading providers of teacher training, with more than seven decades of experience in educating outstanding professionals to work in our schools.

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Supporting images (and/or higher resolution versions) may be available on request if not included with the release.



The Virtual Life Coach application

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The team at RAF Fylingdales. From left to right: Katie Buckingham (Altruist), Fg Off Lucy Playle (RAF Fylingdales), Darrell Smith (Daden), Flt Sgt Keith Burt (RAF Fylingdales), Liz Hey (IES)