

# DESIDER

AN INSIDE LOOK AT DEFENCE EQUIPMENT & SUPPORT



**PROTECTING OUR NATION, OUR TERRITORIES AND OUR ALLIES  
TODAY, TOMORROW, TOGETHER**

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# The Executive Lens

## *(with Lt General Simon Hamilton)*

**On Thursday 8 May the UK marked Victory in Europe (VE) Day. A day to remember the sacrifices made during World War II and to be reminded of the lessons our nation's history can teach us.**

In many ways the conflict in Europe was a struggle of industrial economies. Allied and Axis powers fought to out-innovate, out-produce, out-scale and out-supply.

The UK did not react or rearm fast enough when the drums of war began beating in the 1930s, and though we eventually triumphed, the cost was great. VE 80 should be a moment for us to reflect on that important lesson and be guided by it now.

Today, the UK must have a defence enterprise that functions as a coherent 'system of systems', stretching from digital design to test-range to our land, sea, air and space front-lines. One that can match our competitors and deter our adversaries, and is prepared for the moment that deterrent is not enough.

We must deliver and sustain a national arsenal that is attuned to the vast scale, rapid pace and evolving nature of modern warfare, so that when our front-line personnel need us, we are ready. This means leveraging every corner of our R&D ecosystem and digital know-how to quickly develop, test and exploit new capabilities. It means building partnerships and systems, and combining sustained investment in defence production capacity and skills with a greater understanding of front-line operational needs.

As Deputy CEO of DE&S, I am focused on equipping and supporting our armed forces with the edge that ensures successful operations. I feel immensely proud of the work that DE&S is already doing to achieve this. Our teams are the bridge between front-line and industry, working with and trusted by both to deliver new equipment and support solutions to time, performance and budget.

Today's operations, exercises and trials are the foundations on which our future forces will be built. The UK Carrier Strike Group, which recently began Operation Highmast, its 2025 deployment, is a powerful symbol of our deterrent strength and the importance we place on our role in a global community. It demonstrates what can be

achieved when we operate as an integrated One Defence network of military and civilian teams, government and private partnerships, British and allied navies.

Another lesson from VE Day and one that the ongoing war in Ukraine continues to teach us is that countries triumph when they stand together. As Churchill said: "There is only one thing worse than fighting with Allies, and that is fighting without them."

Ukraine's Victory Day, when it comes, will be thanks to their courage and determination, and to the support they receive from international allies and industry partners. The UK continues to stand with Ukraine, as do many others. At a recent meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, more than 40 nations recommitted their support, with £18 billion worth of new military aid. Here, our government has stated that it will support Ukraine with over £3 billion per year in military aid for as long as it takes.

In NATO, 32 national arsenals operate as one of history's most important military alliances. The UK is currently hosting NATO Exercise Formidable Shield, a naval-led multi-domain live-fire air and missile defence exercise. Nine NATO navies are taking part, with aerial assets from the UK, US and Norway also involved.

This followed NATO Exercise Steadfast Dart in January and February; the first deployment of the new Allied Reaction Force, designed to rapidly reinforce NATO's eastern flank. The exercises saw the UK Armed Forces operating across Romania and Bulgaria alongside 10 NATO allies.

NATO nations are creating new opportunities for co-development and co-production, amplifying our collective capabilities, bolstering our national defence industries, and ensuring NATO-wide readiness. Thanks to the hard work of colleagues across the National Armaments group, including in DE&S, the UK will continue to be at the forefront of these efforts.

As proud as I felt on VE Day, I feel an equal sense of pride each day I work with my colleagues in DE&S and across the defence enterprise. Together we will continue to boost UK growth and secure our nation, today and tomorrow.



## SENIOR LEADER COMMENT

# The DE&S area delivering lethality and protection

**Richard Murray, Director of the DE&S Lethality and Protect area, explains the purpose and impact of this exciting and broad new group.**

**The DE&S Lethality and Protect (L&P) area – stood-up in October 2024 – is a hugely diverse portfolio encompassing four sub-themes and 22 teams, from major MOD acquisition projects to procurements for specialist users, all within a £2.7 billion annual budget.**

'Lethality' supports our mission partners and allies with innovative, battle-winning capabilities, from managing our stockpiles of air-to-air missiles to procurement of personal protection weapons and associated ammunition. And 'Protect' demonstrates the portfolio's breadth, from the body armour keeping service personnel safe to goggles and boots for our military working dogs. We protect all our end-users by guiding and maintaining standards for ordnance, munitions and explosives.

Our technical specialists support the research and trialling of next-generation laser and explosive technologies. We manage 33,000 hectares of UK test sites with our Test and Evaluation partner QinetiQ, providing facilities and services to assess and assure the full spectrum of military equipment.

Bringing together teams from across DE&S into L&P as part of the new operating model was a big shift, but in the breadth and importance of our portfolio I can already see the synergies it has created. Our teams are starting to share skills and experience, and drive innovation across our key technology sub-themes.

L&P has a high and varied operational tempo, whether supporting the 2025 deployment of the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike Group, or providing the lethal edge to platforms and personnel patrolling the UK at sea or in the air. Of note has been our support over the last three years to our Ukrainian allies, with thousands of weapon systems and capabilities granted in kind. Throughout everything we do, our number one priority is always safe support to operations.

The diversity of the commercial landscape we operate in allows us to support UK industrial prosperity with both large companies and small specialist suppliers. And our portfolio has a significant and varied framework of international collaboration with NATO allies.

I have been in this job for six months. The role of any senior leader is to establish the context and environment in which your people can be successful; helping unblock issues, setting priorities and letting them thrive. I spend roughly half my time looking up and out, working with our mission and industry partners to understand the wider political, industrial, commercial and financial situation. The other half is spent looking inward to support the development of our new operating model, help identify solutions for any problems facing my teams and managing our complex web of stakeholder relationships.

It is important that we engage effectively with our mission partners, building those relationships and talking to them in a transparent and open way. DE&S' transformation and now Defence Reform may complicate this until the dust has settled, but UK Defence is still open for business and we must keep delivering value.

The Strategic Defence Review will provide further direction to shape L&P activity. It will mean developing industrial strategies for always-on production of key capabilities in the UK, and reinvesting in the UK's explosives and energetics industrial capacity, which has almost disappeared over the past 20 years. It will mean collaborating with our colleagues across Defence to develop novel, innovative capabilities and approaches.

While the breadth and challenge of our core work is a constant, we are ready to adapt to meet the changes that will shape what we do and how we do it, and how we go to market to acquire and support the capabilities our armed forces and allies need. Exciting times ahead.





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## FEATURE

# SMEs: The backbone of Defence

**Samira Braund, Defence Director at trade association ADS, makes the case for greater immediate and long-term support for SMEs.**



**The below represents the views of the author and not of Desider, DE&S or the UK Ministry of Defence.**

**From the Scottish Highlands to the Belfast dockyards and down the Cornish coast, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of our defence sector, providing resilience and a strong industrial base for our supply chains.**

These companies provide critical technologies that keep our nation safe and our alliances strong. Their agility and flexibility enhances the UK's defence readiness and preparedness, and puts industry at the centre of deterrence.

Figures from the ADS Defence Sector Outlook found that the defence industry added £12 billion to the UK economy in 2023, while employing 164,000 people in highly skilled, well-paid jobs across the country. SMEs play a crucial role in this national picture.

We are acutely aware that further clarity over capability requirements, streamlined defence procurement processes, and supply chain support would offer the innovative, entrepreneurial smaller businesses that form our industrial bedrock some much-needed reassurance. This need is especially urgent when you consider that according to the ADS Industry Trends survey,

approximately a quarter of SMEs have struggled to secure government and non-government contracts due to difficulties in accessing finance.

## Struggling for success?

With 95 percent of our membership consisting of SMEs, we see the scale of challenges that small businesses face in the defence sector, particularly slow procurement mechanisms and limited market access. DE&S has been crucial in overcoming some of these those hurdles and we are encouraged by their response to industry concerns. More broadly across the MOD, we are excited to see the creation of the Defence Innovation Unit and the SME Support Hub. These two initiatives will fast-track access to MOD opportunities and aim to accelerate technology pull-through.

To meet the Government's growth agenda, exports remain a priority. The MOD and the UK Security Defence Export team (part of the Department for Business and Trade) should consider ways to provide greater support to SMEs in export discussions. Their endorsement, influence and access could be a significant boost for these companies.

Engaging with our SME industrial base is crucial, but we risk losing these companies to poorly supported mechanisms that could drive UK businesses out of the market. To fully unlock the potential of our dynamic SME base, and help it thrive, the MOD must set ambitious spending targets, hold commercial officers accountable for SME engagement, and incentivise larger Defence Primes to collaborate more with SMEs. While the Government's recent SME-focused support and spending initiatives offer much-needed relief, a comprehensive industrial strategy with clear, costed benefits is the only way to secure the long-term stability of the sector.

## Looking Ahead

We should not underestimate the scale of the challenge ahead of us – a quick fix will not build the military capability or industrial capacity we need for our security in the face of the current global threats.

Recent developments and funding pledges are welcome, exciting and interesting for anyone with a view of our sector. However, we cannot afford to assume that the job is done, or indeed, that enough has taken place.

As we eagerly await the Defence Industrial Strategy, we hope that the Government keeps one important thing in mind, which I'm sure our almost 1,500 members would echo: the cost of deterrence is always less than the price of instability.

## FEATURE

# DE&S supports Carrier Strike Group 2025

**As the Royal Navy begins Operation Highmast, the 2025 deployment of the UK's Carrier Strike Group, DE&S teams are supporting in multiple ways.**

**The Carrier Strike Group's 2025 deployment (CSG 25) is an international formation of Royal Navy and allied warships, submarines and aircraft.**

Known as Operation Highmast, CSG 25 is led by flagship aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales, commanded by Commodore James Blackmore. Its eight-month mission is to demonstrate the collective resolve and determination of the UK and our allies to maintain maritime security, prosperity and freedom, from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

As one of only a few nations capable of leading a deployment of this scale, the Royal Navy is once again demonstrating that UK Defence is ready to meet the threats of today and tomorrow.

"Working closely with partners from across the globe, Operation Highmast will demonstrate credible deterrence and our support to NATO and the rules-based international order," Commodore Blackmore said. "This will reaffirm that the UK is secure at home and strong abroad, and reinforce the UK's commitment to the Indo-Pacific."

Between April and December, CSG 25 will conduct a series of land, sea, cyber and air exercises that demonstrate its readiness to protect national interests and underpin global security. It begins with around 2,500 military personnel – roughly 2,100 Britons, 200 Norwegians and a similar number of Canadians and Spaniards – rising to over 4,500 for key exercises in the Indo-Pacific.

Such a dramatic and complex deployment is the culmination of months of painstaking planning, testing and evaluation. DE&S has been at the heart of this preparation, ensuring the Group's ships, aircraft, helicopters and other platforms are ready for deployment, and making sure every small, key detail, such as gauges, deck coverings and insulation, are ready and in place.

Here are some ways DE&S is supporting CSG 25.

## Equipment and spares support

DE&S is providing in-service support for a huge range of equipment, from medium aircraft towing tractors and ground power units to nitrogen charging units and de-icing trailers. DE&S has also provided over 170,000 individual pieces of spare equipment. This includes electrical equipment, heating, fans, power control and distribution equipment, indoor and outdoor lighting, domestic appliances, and pressure testing equipment.

## Salvage and Marine Operations

DE&S' Salvage and Marine Operations (SALMO) team are providing a range of support to CSG 25. They are supporting the biofouling management of the Group's ships to ensure environmental compliance and freedom of manoeuvre on the high seas. SALMO is also sending two marine salvage dive teams, ready for heavy underwater engineering, giving operational commanders the flexibility to rectify defects.

## Defence postal and courier services

DE&S is responsible for the complete provision of official and personal mail for the CSG 25, including a mail service to more than 30 locations across four continents. CSG 25 will require approximately 4,600 bags of mail, totalling over 33 tonnes in weight.

The Defence Courier Service is responsible for the timely movement of Protectively Marked Material (PMM). A team of defence couriers will deliver PMM to CSG 25 using routine air and road courier schedules and special tasking as needed.

## Defence Munitions

HMS Prince of Wales visited Glen Mallan Jetty to embark Weapons Ordnance Munitions and Explosives, in support of her operational programme. DE&S' Defence Munitions team worked alongside the Prince of Wales crew to replenish the aircraft carrier's ammunition before she set sail.



## NEWS

# The eyes and ears of Carrier Strike Group 25

**The DE&S Crowsnest programme has delivered three airborne surveillance Merlin Mk2 helicopters to protect the UK Carrier Strike Group during its 2025 deployment.**



**Three Royal Navy Merlin Mk2 helicopters have been designed for Airborne Surveillance and Control (ASaC), and will be the eyes and ears of the UK's Carrier Strike Group 25 (CSG 25).**

The Merlin ASaC helicopters have been delivered by Lockheed Martin, and incorporate an updated version of a Thales Searchwater radar and Cerberus Mission System, as part of the Crowsnest programme, which reached Full Operating Capability (FOC) in March.

The helicopters from 820 Naval Air Squadron will provide advanced anti-submarine and airborne surveillance. They will fly more than a mile above the Strike Group, and use high-powered radar, held underneath the fuselage in a domed bag, to look up to 100 miles in any direction.

Wherever the CSG operates, the helicopters can hunt threats beneath the waves and scan the horizon for air and surface threats, and can be used to coordinate defensive and strike operations.

Paul McDermott, Merlin – Head of Programmes at DE&S, said: “The announcement that the Crowsnest programme has achieved Full Operating Capability means the Royal Navy now has the capability required for its Merlin aircraft configured in the ASaC role. This reflects a superb cross-stakeholder endeavour comprising DE&S, Royal Navy and industry personnel, who have worked collaboratively to deliver a significant milestone for the UK. It marks a key achievement for the programme, bringing to fruition many years of intense work.”

Reaching FOC means Crowsnest is now able to ensure full protection for the Strike Group's warships from threats such as hostile aircraft, ships and incoming drones or missiles, enabling essential command and control over an extended area.

Captain Colin McGannity, Carrier Air Wing and Strike Warfare Commander said: “The principal reason for having the ASaC capability and the Crowsnest programme to do that is for protection of the Strike Group against air threats. Although it doesn't fire anything to engage missiles, it's there to provide early warning to ships and particularly for the threats that ships would struggle to see themselves. By getting a really capable radar up high and looking down, we're taking advantage of all the lessons that we've learned in the past, particularly back in the Falklands War, to make sure that we've got that capability to help protect the Strike Group.”

The programme has included more than just the integration of the radar and new mission system into the existing Merlin helicopters. It also involves a new data link to share live tactical information with the ships below and the creation of a training programme, including a new simulator at Royal Naval Air Service Culdrose.

Crowsnest Programme Director Commander James Stone added: “The Merlin Mk2 ASaC helicopters have now reached full operating capability. It now means the ‘eyes of the fleet’ are back, doing their core job with the full ability to deliver maritime force protection from air and surface threats.”



## NEWS



# First new Airbus H145 helicopter delivered

**The first of six Airbus H145 helicopters, which will serve in Brunei and Cyprus, has been handed over to the British Army.**

**The new fleet was ordered by DE&S a little over a year ago and, at Airbus Helicopters UK in Oxford, has undergone the modifications required to support UK troops overseas.**

The H145s will fulfil the operational requirements previously carried out by Puma HC2 helicopters, whose withdrawal from service started in March this year.

In Cyprus, the helicopters will be flown by the RAF's 84 Squadron and used for aerial firefighting. They have been modified to support a Bambi Bucket, a lightweight yet strong, firefighting tool for carrying water. In Brunei, they will be used for jungle warfare training and crewed by Army Air Corps 667 Squadron.

The £122 million procurement by DE&S created around 20 new engineering jobs. Around 250 staff, based at Oxford Airport, have worked on ensuring the helicopters are fit for military service.

Air Commodore Gareth Bryant, DE&S Head Helicopters 2, said: "With the decision to retire the Puma HC Mk2 after over 50 years of service, the imperative to deliver a replacement helicopter for Brunei and Cyprus increased in importance.

"Against extremely challenging timescales, the DE&S Multi Helicopter Platform Delivery Team has worked with Army Capability and Airbus Helicopters UK to rapidly deliver the first aircraft. We are delighted the first of these impressive new aircraft has now been delivered to commence testing and evaluation in what has been a truly successful joint team effort."

The H145 is already a trusted platform for UK Defence. It is flown at RAF Shawbury and RAF Valley as part of the UK Military Flying Training System (MFTS), where helicopter aircrews use them to learn maritime, mountain and search-and-rescue techniques.

Procuring the H145 helicopters rather than commissioning the purchase of a new aircraft demonstrates efficiency and value for money through greater commonality in training, support and the supply of spare parts.

The first aircraft was accepted from Airbus Helicopters UK by Group Captain Rob Hart, the Senior Responsible Owner for H145, at Airbus's Oxford site. Test and evaluation of the helicopter, including flight trials, is now underway at MOD Boscombe Down.

Group Captain Hart said: "The delivery of the first of these versatile aircraft is testament to the outstanding teamwork between UK Armed Forces, DE&S and Airbus Helicopters UK. Investment in this exciting capability also reaffirms our commitment to Cyprus and Brunei, where from 2026 the RAF's 84 Squadron and 667 Squadron of the Army Air Corps will conduct vital tasks in support of defence requirements."

The H145 helicopters are powered by two Safran Arriel 2E turboshaft engines and have a five-blade rotor. They can fly up to 265kph and have a maximum flying range of 651km. At 13.64m in length they have a maximum take-off weight of 3,700kg meaning they're ideal for the tasks they will be deployed on.

Richard Attack, Managing Director at Airbus Helicopters UK, said: "We are extremely proud to be handing over the first of this additional batch of H145 Jupiter helicopters, fully role-equipped at our Oxford factory barely a year after receiving the order for the aircraft."

The second H145 helicopter is due to be delivered in autumn 2025.

## NEWS

# £300 million contract to modernise flight training for RAF and Royal Navy

**RAF and Royal Navy mission aircrews will soon benefit from advanced synthetic and mission simulated environments, and new training facilities.**

**DE&S has awarded a £300 million contract to Ascent Flight Training to significantly improve flying training for RAF and Royal Navy trainees, while investing in local communities.**

The scaling up of this service will result in a four-fold increase in trained mission aircrew personnel, to 140 a year. They will be prepared for the demands of modern operating environments and equipped with the skills to operate a wide range of aircraft.

The Future ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) and Rear Crew Training System (FIRCTS) programme will train rear crew personnel at Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) Culdrose and RAF Cranwell. They will benefit from highly realistic synthetic and mission simulated environments, new training facilities and equipment. Using advanced technology, their training will be delivered in a safe, cost-effective manner that reduces both flying hours and Defence's carbon footprint.

The FIRCTS programme reflects a considerable investment in infrastructure as part of the UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS). Around 68 skilled workers will be hired or retained for the duration of the eight-year contract up to 2033 and £180 million will be spent in the UK supply chain with investments in Cornwall, Lincolnshire and Bristol.

It will deliver the latest advances to trainee aircrew to meet growing ISTAR and Unmanned Aircraft System demands, and has been enabled by a collaboration between DE&S and mission and industry partners.

FIRCTS will recapitalise the Culdrose and Cranwell sites, with Babcock International

Group building and managing new training facilities at each, and repurposing existing equipment where possible. The synthetic and mission simulated environments will be provided by Lockheed Martin, and Draken will provide support for a fleet of upgraded Textron King Air 350E Avenger training aircraft. Course material development will take place at Ascent Flight Training in Bristol.

Captain Polly Hatchard RN, DE&S UKMFTS Team Leader, said: "This new flight training contract is a significant step forward for the UK's defence capabilities, ensuring that armed forces personnel have access to world-class training resources. The contract reinforces our commitment to providing the highest level of readiness and operational effectiveness, whilst creating new jobs across the UK and investing in regional economies."

FIRCTS will ensure the UK is at the forefront of providing world-class air power operational capability. The RAF Directorate of Flying Training has worked closely with the other stakeholders from the UKMFTS Enterprise to help set the requirements for the FIRCTS programme.

Air Commodore Rob Caine, RAF Head of Flying Training, said: "The introduction of the Future ISTAR and Rear Crew Training System will ensure that we can safely deliver world-class personnel to the front-line to operate in

vital roles on our latest aircraft platforms including Poseidon, Rivet Joint and Wedgetail. The investment in the latest training technology and infrastructure at RNAS Culdrose and RAF Cranwell will help us to prepare aircrew to be ready to Fly, Fight and Win in an uncertain world."

Once their training is complete, mission aircrews will be qualified to operate the latest applicable innovations on platforms including Merlin Mk2 and Wildcat helicopters, RAF Poseidon MRA1 aircraft and Rivet Joint, and remotely piloted air systems, such as the Protector RG Mk1.

The first personnel will be able to use the new training system from 2027.





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## NEWS

# New contract to maintain Typhoon engines and support UK jobs

**A support solution, worth £563 million, has been awarded to Rolls-Royce for Typhoon engines, which will support 200 UK jobs.**

**DE&S has awarded a new support contract to Rolls-Royce for the continued maintenance and repair of RAF Typhoon EJ200 aircraft engines.**

The five-year Typhoon Engine Support Solution (TESS), worth £563 million, will directly support around 200 jobs, with the majority based at Rolls Royce's headquarters in Bristol.

The TESS contract will include services such as the maintenance, repair and overhaul of the engine and modules, the provision of spares and aircraft ground equipment management.

It builds resilience into the UK-based supply chain by supporting up to 2,400 jobs that are essential to harnessing the UK's combat air expertise. It will sustain vital skills that enable the RAF to deliver air capabilities today and be a bridge to future capabilities, like the Global Combat Air Programme.

The DE&S Typhoon Delivery Team includes civilians, military personnel and contractors. The team supports Typhoon in-service and is delivering a series of upgrade programmes over the next 10 years to ensure the UK's 130 Typhoons continue defending the UK at home and abroad.

Lyndon Hoyle, Head of the DE&S Typhoon Delivery Team, said: "We are pleased to award this long-term contract to Rolls-Royce for the continued maintenance and repair of Typhoon EJ200 engines. This contract not only ensures the continued availability of the Typhoon fleet, it helps drives growth and prosperity within UK Defence, reinforcing our dedication to procuring capability that equips our armed forces with the competitive edge, now and in the future."

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "Not only will this contract help to maintain our world-class jets, it also delivers on our Plan for Change by securing around 200 jobs in the UK and boosting the skills base our world-leading defence industry relies upon."

Together with our upgrade programme, this contract will ensure our Typhoon fleet remains the backbone of UK air defence for the next decade."

Since entering service in 2003 the RAF Typhoon has been the backbone of the UK's combat air defence. The Typhoons cover a full spectrum of air operations including air policing, peace support and high-intensity conflict. They play a key role in the UK's Quick Reaction Alert Fleet, which defends British and Falkland Islands airspace.

Alex Zino, Head of Global Network and Director of Business Development and Future Programmes at Rolls-Royce, said: "The Typhoon Engine Support Solution represents a continuation of our support of the EJ200 engine – something we have been committed to for over two decades. The Royal Air Force's Typhoon fleet is crucial in maintaining the UK's combat air capability and defending our interests at home and abroad and we are proud to serve our UK armed forces customer and help keep this aircraft flying for years to come."



## FEATURE

# How DE&S is accelerating our commercial pathways

**Helen Bates, DE&S Director Commercial Authority, tells Desider about the benefits of the Accelerating Commercial Pathways programme and the motivation behind it.**



**Our world is becoming a more contested, challenging space. We must be on the front-foot to deliver defence innovation and ensure we are protecting the nation and helping it prosper.**

I've only recently moved into DE&S, having spent the last five years in the MOD working as the Defence Commercial Function Director.

When I reflect on the 20 years I spent working in the defence industry, effectively as a supplier to the MOD, it was clear that there was a better way for us to work together. I was frustrated at the pace of procurement, at the rigidity of approach, at the fact that my colleagues in industry and my customers in the MOD were looking for opportunities to work in different ways, but weren't able to harness innovation across the defence enterprise.

I'm really pleased to say that this is the motivation behind the Accelerating Commercial Pathways programme.

The programme aims to increase the pace of our work and make Defence more adaptable to future challenges. It is focused on driving a shift in behaviour and ways of working through better guidance, and unlocking the opportunities of new procurement legislation. The programme's stakeholders are encouraged to share knowledge, best practice and real-world insights, including lessons from the battlefield, the supply chain and our allies in Ukraine.

Underpinning the programme are a range of commercial pathways. These handrails guide staff through different types of procurement, highlighting opportunities to exploit flexibilities within commercial policy and legislation, recognising that there is no 'one size fits all' approach.

## **The main benefits of the Accelerating Commercial Pathways programme are:**

- Enabling rapid delivery of capability to the end-user
- Opening-up opportunities for greater flexibility, collaboration and iteration
- Allowing for quicker development and testing of new technologies
- Accelerating the speed of commercial decision-making and assurance, with a focus on earlier planning, strategy development and closer collaboration with customers and suppliers.

We are at an exciting point in the Pathways programme. In March 2025, we officially launched the programme across Government, UK Defence and with defence industry, publishing guidance for the first tranche of pathways. This included the Spiral Pathway, which provides the commercial ways of working necessary to release capability quickly and then iteratively develop a solution with suppliers, without 'gold-plating' the output.

Further pathways will follow in the coming months. This includes a specific pathway for our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that enables greater transparency and simplicity, and so increases SME engagement in defence procurement.

We recognise that guidance on its own is not going to deliver the change we need. We are providing a raft of communications, direct support to teams, and are hardwiring these new ways of working through our policies, processes and systems across DE&S and broader Defence.

Industry engagement is going to be vital to refine and test the pathways. We are arranging sessions, working with trade association ADS, to incorporate industry feedback, building on what we have already received. We're keen to share case studies and examples, and see what Defence can learn from them.

Working together, we can deliver this important programme for Defence.

## NEWS

# Ukraine Defence Contact Group reaffirms commitment to crucial military support

**At the 16th meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, more than 40 nations and multiple international organisations recommitted to support Ukraine.**

**The UK and its allies have reaffirmed their commitment to Ukraine at the latest meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG).**

National Armaments Directors (NADs) from more than 40 nations met at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, together with multiple international organisations, under the leadership of the UK and Germany.

The NADs heard operational updates from Ukraine and from NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine, and discussed priority areas for Ukraine's support. They agreed to ensure that the commitments made in the UDCG Ministerial Format – including pledges of more than €21 billion worth of new military aid packages – are rapidly converted into contracts with industry and the tangible delivery of support to Ukraine.

The 16th meeting of the UDCG was jointly chaired for the first time by UK NAD Andy Start, Germany NAD Vice Admiral Carsten Stawitzki, and Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister for European Integration, Sergiy Boyev.

Reflecting on the importance of the UDCG, Andy said: “The unwavering intent of the Defence Contact Group remains clear – to provide Ukraine with the military support they need to continue the brave defence of their nation and their people, and to put them in the best position to achieve peace through strength. Only by working together as allies, as National Armaments Directors,

and as one collective defence enterprise will we deliver nations' pledges and achieve this critical goal.”

The UDCG was formed after Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, when the US Secretary of Defense requested that allied NADs regularly come together. It first met in September 2022, and since then the UDCG has consistently brought together more than 40 nations and government organisations in support of Ukraine. It is focused on accelerating capability deliveries to Ukraine by synchronising international procurement, production and sustainment efforts.

Earlier, during a series of bilateral, multilateral and NATO meetings in Rome and then Brussels, the UK and Germany renewed their commitment to work together to deliver enhanced military manoeuvre support capability.

Andy Start and VAdm Stawitzki signed a Letter of Intent declaring the two nations' commitment to ongoing bilateral co-operation for the military bridging projects, Wide Wet Gap Crossing (WWGC) and General Support Bridge (GSB). This builds on the shared conviction that mutual support and cooperation on armament projects is of utmost importance for the defence of NATO member states.

WWGC, also called Project Triton, is a modular, scalable and configurable bridging and ferrying system for military crossings of wet gaps over 40 metres. This fulfils a NATO commitment

to provide a WWG capability which is operated by a joint UK-Germany multinational bridging battalion based in Minden, Germany.

The General Support Bridge (GSB) project, also called Project Tyro, is a rapidly deployable military bridge system produced by KNDS in Stockport, UK. The GSB system enables a 46 metre bridge to be built in less than 90 minutes, which can be crossed by all current NATO main battle tanks along with the UK's future tank, Challenger 3.

Andy added: “This Letter of Intent reinforces our already strong co-operation agreements and ties with our German partners, particularly in the bridging support capability area, with a strong focus on increased interoperability.”





## FEATURE



# How Peregrine is changing maritime surveillance

**The Royal Navy has deployed a new edge in maritime surveillance, Peregrine; a remotely piloted helicopter system rewriting the rules of engagement at sea.**

FEATURE

**Delivered by Thales UK, the Peregrine system was procured by the DE&S Uncrewed Air Systems 1 (UAS1) team, as part of an Urgent Capability Requirement (UCR), to increase HMS Lancaster's ability to detect and track suspicious vessels.**

HMS Lancaster has been deployed to the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman for more than two years, as part of the Royal Navy's wider mission to prevent the movement of weapons, narcotics and other illicit goods through key waterways.

Peregrine has significantly extended HMS Lancaster's surveillance coverage, supporting 24-hour missions against illegal maritime activity. The full system – aircraft, sensors and integration into other ship systems – is operated from the ship's flight deck, while the uncrewed aircraft is controlled remotely from the operations room, enabling long-range reconnaissance without placing aircrew at risk.

UAS1 Team Leader Adam Seton Mead said, "This rapid delivery under urgent operational conditions is a great example of what DE&S and industry can achieve together. Peregrine is already proving its value on operations and is helping to reduce the burden on the crewed helicopter, allowing the Navy to maintain a continuous presence in a challenging environment."

The Peregrine system was integrated and deployed in early 2024. It now flies daily missions alongside crewed Wildcat helicopters, which can focus on response and strike tasks. The two-aircraft combination provides HMS Lancaster with a tailored air group able to maintain round-the-clock coverage.

In a recent mission in the northern Arabian Sea, Peregrine played a key role in detecting vessels acting suspiciously at night. Using its onboard radar, the helicopter identified a transfer between a fast boat and a traditional sailing boat, called a dhow. This led to the

launch of the Wildcat and an operation that resulted in the seizure of over £5 million worth of heroin and methamphetamine.

Commander Sam Stephens, Commanding Officer of HMS Lancaster, said: "The combination of Wildcat and Peregrine enables persistent surveillance and fast response. This success shows the value of integrating new technology to help us disrupt illegal activity and keep vital shipping routes secure."

Each Peregrine helicopter has a range of 180 kilometres and, when equipped with the Thales I-Master radar, can monitor up to 800 square kilometres per hour. The use of an uncrewed system supports longer missions by reducing round-the-clock surveillance challenges such as crew fatigue and the maintenance demands required on a manned system.

Thales is continuing to invest in the future of maritime Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), using AI technology to enhance the mission system (the 'brain' of the uncrewed system) and the I-Master radar to provide Peregrine with even greater detection performance. The system's success aboard HMS Lancaster may only be the beginning.

"We're proud to see Peregrine proving its value in live operations, helping the Royal Navy extend its reach, act faster, and stay persistent across vast maritime areas," said Julie Martin, Senior Account Director, Naval, Thales UK. "This is exactly the kind of uncrewed capability that modern naval forces need to meet the threats of today and tomorrow."

As the Royal Navy modernises its fleet to meet emerging threats in contested waters, Peregrine stands as a proven, forward-looking solution – keeping eyes on the ocean so that the mission never misses a beat.

## NEWS

# Radio-frequency weapon takes down drone swarms

**A directed energy weapon demonstrator has been developed that could provide a cost-effective complement to missile-based air defence systems.**

**The British Army has, for the first time, successfully tracked, targeted and defeated swarms of drones in the latest trial of a radio-frequency directed energy weapon (RF DEW) demonstrator.**

Across the trials, more than 100 drones were immobilised using the weapon. This included soldiers from 106 Regiment Royal Artillery taking down two swarms of drones in a single engagement.

Sgt Mayers, a senior remotely piloted air systems operator, had the honour of being the first British soldier to bring down drones using radio-frequency technology. "RF DEW is an exciting concept," he said. "We found the demonstrator quick to learn and easy to use. With improvements on range and power, which could come with further development, this would be a great asset to layered air defence."

The project, known as Ealing, has been delivered by Team Hersa – a collaboration between DE&S and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl). Developed by a Thales

UK-led industry consortium, the demonstrator has been designed to explore the potential of radio-frequency weapons for the UK Armed Forces.

The trial was completed at Air Defence Range Manorbier in West Wales and proved the demonstrator could neutralise multiple targets simultaneously with near-instant effect.

The weapon uses high-frequency radio waves to disrupt or damage critical electronic components inside the drones, causing them to crash or malfunction. RF DEW systems can defeat airborne targets at ranges of up to 1km and are effective against threats which cannot be jammed using electronic warfare. At an estimated cost of only a couple of pence per shot fired, if developed into operational service it could provide a highly cost-effective complement to traditional missile-based air defence systems.

Adam, from the DE&S Directed Energy Weapons team, was involved in the trials. He said: "The purpose of this project is to develop an experimental directed energy weapon system

that enables us to explore the system integration challenges and the operational challenges of fielding an RF DEW. It's absolutely crucial that we not just maintain the ability to fight the threats we currently face, but also address the threats that are coming down the line, and the development of radio-frequency weapons is really a big part of that."

Thales employs around 100 highly skilled engineering and manufacturing staff in Northern Ireland on the project, and a further 30 to 35 supply chain jobs in Chelmsford, Essex, directly contributed to the development of the demonstrator.

Nigel MacVean, Managing Director of Thales Integrated Airspace-protection Systems, said: "Thales continues to be at the forefront of this pioneering technology, and we are proud to continue the research and development in this sector alongside our partners in government."





## NEWS

# Merlin helicopter contract extension supports 1,000 UK jobs

**DE&S has awarded a £165 million two-year contract extension for the upkeep of the Royal Navy's fleet of 54 AW101 Merlin helicopters.**

In a boost for UK growth, DE&S has extended the Integrated Merlin Operational Support (IMOS) contract with Leonardo Helicopters UK for up to two years to ensure the continued expert upkeep of the Royal Navy's fleet of 54 AW101 Merlin helicopters.

The contract extension, worth more than £165 million, will sustain around 1,000 highly skilled UK jobs, 200 of which are located at Leonardo's facility in Yeovil, and 800 across the wider UK supply chain and at Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) Yeovilton and RNAS Culdrose.

IMOS supports the Royal Navy's fleet of 30 Merlin HM Mk2 maritime patrol helicopters and 24 Merlin HC Mk4/4A amphibious and battlefield lift aircraft.

The IMOS contract was originally awarded in March 2006 and is currently in its fourth five-year Pricing Period (PP4), which began on 1 April 2020. IMOS PP4, worth £699 million, was negotiated by DE&S and developed in collaboration with the Royal Navy. The IMOS extension builds on this and includes depth maintenance, supply of spares, aircrew and maintainer training, technical support service, proactive obsolescence service and support to other platforms.

Mark Langrill, DE&S Director Rotary Wing and Uncrewed Air Systems, said: "We are pleased to continue our successful partnership with Leonardo Helicopters, ensuring that the Royal Navy's Merlin helicopters remain in optimal condition. This contract extension will strengthen our ongoing collaboration and contribute to the security and economic growth of our nation, while ensuring high levels of aircraft availability and sustaining highly skilled jobs across the UK."

Armed with Sting Ray torpedoes and M3M .50 calibre machine guns, the HM Mk2 helicopters provide the Royal Navy with anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare capabilities, and have powerful radars for airborne surveillance and control. The HC Mk4/4A fleet provides troop transport, casualty evacuation and can carry medium-lift under-slung loads of up to 3.8 tonnes. Both variants can carry out secondary roles, such as search and rescue.

Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry Maria Eagle said: "Our fleet of world-class Merlin helicopters provide the Royal Navy with a vital advantage over our adversaries, keeping our carrier strike groups safe and enhancing their battle-winning capability.



"This investment demonstrates our unwavering commitment to maintaining cutting-edge defence capabilities that keep us safe, while utilising defence as an engine for economic growth, supporting 1,000 well-paid jobs across the UK."

As well as jobs based at Leonardo in Yeovil, other roles supported by the contract – including apprenticeships – are based at RNAS Culdrose in Cornwall, in the Merlin Depth Maintenance Facility where the Merlin Mk2 aircraft and training system are located. The Merlin Mk4 aircraft and training system are located at RNAS Yeovilton in Somerset.

Leonardo is the prime contractor for IMOS, with Lockheed Martin and SERCO appointed as key sub-contractors. Nigel Colman, Managing Director, Leonardo Helicopters UK, said: "We're extremely proud to have provided the UK's AW101 Merlin fleet from the home of British helicopters in Yeovil. Working closely with the Ministry of Defence and Royal Navy, we're keeping the Merlin fleet supported and available, so it's ready to fly whenever and wherever it's called upon."



## NEWS

# New electronic warfare drones to provide extra war-fighting dimension

**RAF jets will be better protected and more lethal thanks to a new Storm Shroud drones, delivered by DE&S in under six months.**

**A fleet of new electronic warfare drones, known as Storm Shroud, has come into operation, providing an extra war-fighting dimension for the RAF.**

The Storm Shroud AR3 uncrewed air systems were procured from Tekever and delivered by DE&S' Autonomous Collaborative Platforms (ACP) Delivery Team in less than six months.

Once integrated with Leonardo UK's Britestorm electronic warfare system, the AR3 drones will provide advanced signal jammers to disrupt enemy radar at long range. This will protect fighter jets, such as the F-35B Lightning II and Typhoon, from enemy fire and make them more lethal by enabling them to attack targets undetected.

Mark Langrill, DE&S Director Rotary Wing and UAS, said: "We're immensely proud at DE&S to have worked with our innovative industry partners to deliver this game-changing capability to the RAF in such a short timeframe. We know our adversaries around the world are trying to outpace us in the uncrewed air space, but Storm Shroud shows the UK and its allies remain at the forefront of developing battle-winning technology for our armed forces."

The drones are manufactured in the UK, supporting 200 jobs in locations including Tekever's site in Aberporth, West Wales, and Leonardo's site in Luton, Bedfordshire. Storm Shroud is only the first of a family of next-generation drones – known as ACPs – being delivered to the RAF.

Darren Astall, Head of the ACP Delivery Team, said: "This is a great demonstration of the speed and agility DE&S professionals can deliver when working in our new, more efficient operating model. We're proud to have played a key role in ensuring the RAF can achieve initial operating capability with Storm Shroud now, and look forward to helping deliver the spiral upgrades and support needed to make this exciting capability even more effective in the future."

Following extensive use on the front-line as Ukraine continues to repel Russia's illegal invasion, the Tekever AR3 and AR5 drones have already proven their value, racking up more than 10,000 hours of flight time for Ukraine's armed forces.

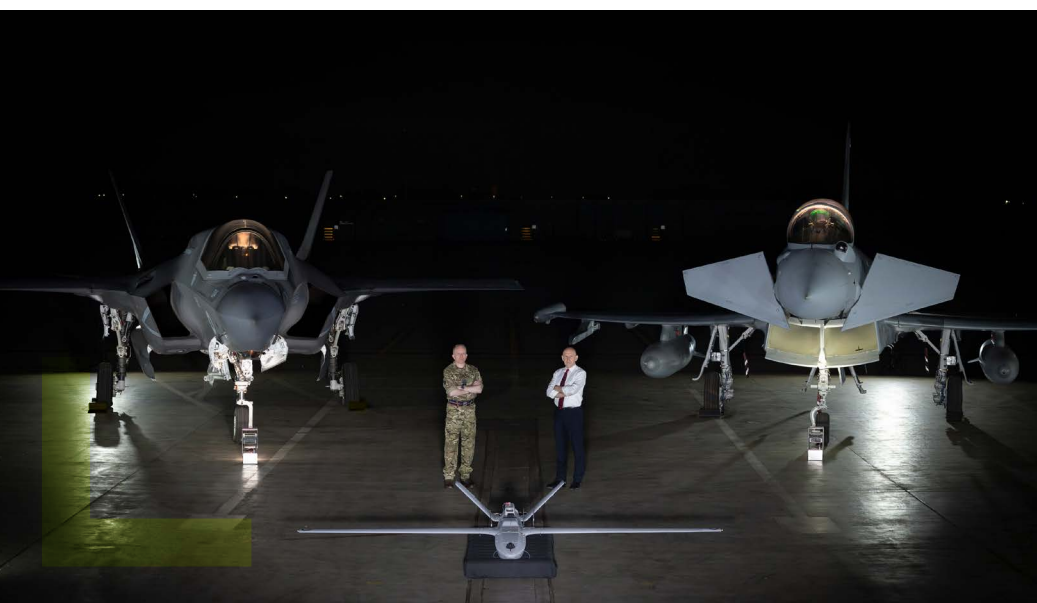
With Storm Shroud now part of the UK's war-fighting capability, the RAF will benefit from high-end electronic warfare without needing crew to fly the systems, freeing them up for other vital frontline missions. The drones will be continually upgraded as technology advances.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Rich Knighton, Chief of the Air Staff, said: "This is a seminal moment for the RAF to maintain our advantage in air combat and national security. The RAF is committed to exploring cutting-edge technologies that can enhance its lethality and survivability in a more contested and dangerous world."

In a further vote of confidence in the UK defence industry,

Portuguese-owned Tekever plans to invest a further £400 million over the next five years across the UK, creating up to 1,000 more highly skilled jobs.

Ricardo Mendes, CEO of Tekever, said: "This programme is a strong example of how the Ministry of Defence and industry can work collaboratively to deliver cutting edge defence capability at pace, while incorporating lessons learned from operational feedback in Ukraine and supporting the UK sovereign industrial base."



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Desider is the monthly corporate magazine for DE&S. It is aimed at readers across the wider MOD, armed forces and defence industry. It covers the work of people at DE&S and its partners, and other corporate news and information.

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## NEWS

# State-of-the-art Defence storage facility opens

**The UK Armed Forces will be better equipped to respond to evolving threats as the construction of a new storage facility in Cumbria is completed.**

**The build phase of the Longtown Defence Storage Facility (LDSF), a new £98.5 million warehouse managed by DE&S in partnership with Team Leidos, has been completed.**

At 76,000m<sup>2</sup>, the warehouse significantly increases MOD storage capacity. The LDSF, which was delivered on time, will enhance the UK's defence readiness and resilience, while streamlining and strengthening supply chain operations. It provides safe and secure storage for a broad range of mission-critical operational materiel and inventory, such as large spare parts used by the British Army, RAF and Royal Navy.

Les Millar, DE&S Logistics, Services and Commodities Head of Strategy and Special Projects, said: "The completion of the build phase of the Longtown Defence Storage Facility marks a leap forward in our storage of materiel to support all parts of the armed forces, giving us a state-of-the-art environmentally efficient facility to store significant amounts of parts and spares for defence platforms, enabling us to be better prepared for military threats, both today and for the foreseeable future."

The contract for the construction of the site, awarded by DE&S to construction and civil engineering firm McLaughlin & Harvey, supported approximately 150 highly skilled jobs in Scotland and a further 300 in the north of England. Now complete, the warehouse will provide up to 25 permanent jobs.

Paul Griffen, McLaughlin & Harvey Managing Director, said: "The successful completion of a 76,000m<sup>2</sup> warehouse within the MOD's national storage network wasn't just another build – it was the delivery of critical national infrastructure within a live, high-security environment. Our team worked in close partnership with all stakeholders, ensuring minimal disruption to the daily operations of the base. This project highlights our capability in the defence sector and ongoing commitment to supporting the UK's armed forces to remain ready, responsive and resilient."

Designed with sustainability and long-term resilience in mind, the facility incorporates modern construction methods, high-performance materials and energy-efficient systems – supporting operational effectiveness and contributing to the MOD's Net Zero ambitions.

The new facility uses green technology and practices, including energy-efficient lighting, automated climate control and recyclable packaging solutions. There will also be a dedicated nature reserve area and rainwater will be recycled for washroom facilities.

The on-site rail network has also been enhanced as a result of the project. This is to enable materiel to be moved in and out of LDSF easily and distributed via the national network to other MOD sites, helping to reduce costs, lorry journeys and emissions.

Day-to-day operations will now be managed by Team Leidos, made up of Leidos and supply chain specialists Kuehne + Nagel, and overseen by DE&S. Simon Hutchings, Vice President Logistics and Mission Support, Leidos UK & Europe, said: "As the delivery partner for the MOD's Logistics Commodities and Services Transformation programme, Team Leidos is proud to be bringing much-needed resiliency to the Defence storage network at the point in time when the MOD is working to place the UK strategic base at the heart of its war-fighting posture."

"Working collaboratively with Kuehne+Nagel, DE&S and the MOD's contractors McLaughlin & Harvey, the new facility at Longtown is a key milestone in this transformation – enhancing resilience, operational readiness, and efficiency across the Defence supply chain."





## NEWS

# DE&S highlights

A digest of DE&S news from the past month.

## HMS Monmouth sold to Turkey for recycling

Experts from the DE&S Exports and Sales team have sold Type 23 frigate HMS Monmouth to a Turkish ship recycling company. The sale of the ship was advertised by the DE&S team for recycling only. Expressions of interest were requested from a list of European ship recycling facilities and, after a robust tender process, Leyal Gemi Sokum Sanayi Ve Ticaret Ltd Sti was awarded the contract.

HMS Monmouth was taken out of service in June 2021, after being stripped of her weapons and sensors. She left Portsmouth harbour in April 2025 to be towed to her final destination. Having sailed around the world for 28 years, she was beyond her intended lifespan, making her uneconomical to repair and keep in service.

Eight new Type 26 frigates, currently being built by BAE Systems at its Govan and Scotstoun shipyards in Glasgow, will replace the Type 23 fleet. The Type 26s, procured and delivered by DE&S, will be flexible and advanced warships with the primary purpose of Anti-Submarine Warfare, protecting the UK's continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent and Carrier Strike Group.

Additionally, five Type 31 ships are being built and integrated at Babcock's Rosyth facility in Scotland. These will replace five general purpose Type 23 frigates as they come out of service.

## New interactive technology for Chinook maintenance training

RAF Chinook helicopter technicians now have access to the latest interactive training technology to speed up their learning and development.

DE&S has accepted into service a new Virtual Maintenance Trainer (VMT) for the Chinook Maintenance School at RAF Odiham in Hampshire. The digital training system uses up-to-date software technology with large, interactive touchscreens for

classroom instruction and laptops for individual study and use "in the field". The system displays a highly realistic, dynamic 3D model of the aircraft and can replicate a wide range of faults, which the student can diagnose and rectify.

Boeing Defence UK (BDUK) was awarded the £7 million contract to deliver the Chinook VMT in 2023 with a two-year lead-time to acceptance into service. This was achieved on time and to budget, with BDUK working with US sub-contractor DiSTI Corporation.

The VMT's realism is designed to give students greater knowledge and confidence, enabling them to become fully qualified more quickly.

## DE&S delivers innovative technology for Type 23 frigates

New technology, which will allow the Royal Navy to share combat data at speed during operations at sea, has been installed on the Type 23 frigate, HMS Richmond.

Delivered through the DE&S Maritime Multi-Link programme, the integrated Link 16 Crypto Modernised System will significantly improve the ship's ability to share tactical situational awareness with other vessels.

The installation on HMS Richmond is part of a wider modernisation drive to deliver essential upgrades across the Royal Navy's surface ship tactical data link capabilities, increasing the UK's ability to work seamlessly with NATO and coalition partners. It comes alongside a related upgrade – an interim 'beyond the line of sight' capability commonly referred to as the Joint Range Extension Application Protocol – which allows tactical data link information to be passed via satellite.

The Type 23 frigate also had over 20 updates and upgrades, improving combat effectiveness, sustainability and the lived experience of the ship's company.



HMS Richmond

## PEOPLE

# Rebecca Thompson

**Job title**

Defence General Munitions Army Heavy Operations Manager

**What does your role involve?**

I am responsible for managing and delivering rifled tank ammunition for the Challenger II Main Battle Tank, 81mm mortar bombs for the infantry and ceremonial rounds for important occasions like Remembrance Sunday. This involves understanding our mission partner's requirements and engaging with industry to meet them. I work with a talented multidisciplinary team in Defence General Munitions. This requires an understanding of the commercial, financial, engineering and supply chain functions to deliver ammunition that is safe and suitable for service to our end-users.

**What do you most enjoy about your job?**

I enjoy learning about the technical aspects of the ammunition, which I need to know about to ensure I can make effective decisions. I also enjoy visits to our industry partners' facilities to see how the components are made and assembled into the final product. It helps bring to life the equipment I am delivering.

**What is your greatest accomplishment to date?**

Successfully changing my career path. I have a degree in marine biology and zoology from Bangor University, but subsequently joined the Civil Service. I have worked in a variety of roles in the ammunition supply chain using my transferable skill-set and taking every opportunity to learn and increase my knowledge base.

**What keeps you energised about working at DE&S?**

The range of opportunities and roles available to me. I've recently completed the Becoming programme, which helps women develop as leaders in the workplace. The programme has enabled me to develop my personal skills and critical thinking to assist with my future career aspirations – an excellent offering by DE&S and one I would highly recommend!

**Who or what has shaped who you are?**

Coming from a working-class background, I've developed a strong work ethic, which I use to prove I am capable of anything I put my mind to.

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?**

Raising my five-year-old daughter and running through my beautiful local countryside. I am currently training for my next half-marathon after recovering from an injury.

**What might surprise people about you?**

Before I started at DE&S, I worked off-shore as an environmental consultant in the oil and gas industry. I had to complete Helicopter Underwater Evacuation Training to pursue that career choice!

**What's the best advice you've ever been given?**

There's no such thing as a stupid question. I have numerous examples from my career where someone has asked the 'stupid' question, and it has challenged some unearned assumptions, which has unlocked projects and allowed them to move forward.







99-year-old RAF veteran Dennis Bishop, who served across Europe during the Second World War, tours a 30 Squadron Atlas A400m aircraft at RAF Brize Norton.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

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F-35B jets from 617 Squadron and 809 Naval Air Squadron land on the flight deck of HMS Prince of Wales as the ship departs on Operation Highmast.

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