

# DESIDER

AN INSIDE LOOK AT DEFENCE EQUIPMENT & SUPPORT



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

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# The Editor's Lens

**Welcome to the September edition of Desider. With a new parliamentary session, a new scholastic year, and changing of the seasons, September is a time for fresh starts and revived momentum.**

For many of us working in UK Defence that feeling is especially sharp this year. September 2025 feels like a turning point for our enterprise.

This month, we welcomed Luke Pollard MP into his new role as our Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry (note the important name change from 'Defence Procurement and Industry') and celebrated the publication of a far-reaching new Defence Industrial Strategy.

Then we joined thousands of colleagues and partners, and delegations from 160 governments, at DSEI UK 2025 for the largest event in the defence calendar.

This year, DSEI UK invited us to consider what a future Defence could look like, and how, as a collective endeavour, we can keep our people safe and drive economic growth.

We have an extract from Mr Pollard's excellent first DSEI speech in his new role over the page, followed by a column from Kevin Craven, Chief Executive at trade association ADS, who gives us an industry take on the event.

For those of us working in MOD's new National Armaments Director (NAD) Group, DSEI UK was a chance to present a united front at our first joint stand. The NAD Group's 27,000 staff members continue to coalesce around new structures and ways of working, and it was a big moment to see the physical manifestation of this in the ExCel hall.

Dominating conversations throughout ExCel was the Defence Industrial Strategy. Published on the Monday of DSEI week, it's a plan to make Defence an engine for growth and security, with practical measures that support British industry, drive up R&D spend, and make sure our industrial base is as resilient and productive as possible. The goal is to

make this an enterprise where creativity and innovation are hardwired in, where we can harness emerging technology, and make it easier for companies of all sizes to do business with the MOD.

The Defence Industrial Strategy builds on the most forward-looking Strategic Defence Review that a government has published since Desider began. Add to that a wide-ranging programme of structural reform, three-quarters of a billion pounds of new defence investment, and a commitment by the Government to dramatically increase defence spending, by as much as £40 billion by 2035.

They have created a tangible sense of purpose and a renewed spirit of collaboration. This is reflected in a number of the news stories in this month's edition, from a Type 26 frigate export deal with Norway to a technology sharing agreement with Ukraine, and the planned opening of a new drone plant in Swindon.

We have reasons to be optimistic, but it's equally important to temper that with a clear-eyed realism about the challenges and constraints we face. I'll leave you with the closing words from UK NAD Andy Start's DSEI UK keynote address:

"There will be hard choices to make between now and DSEI 2027. The scale and speed of threat evolution means we must adapt, must disrupt our own technology, and do so at an increasing pace. Again, the good news is we can see what we need to do. The scale of innovation at DSEI 2025 is mind-blowing.

"Despite the accelerating scale of the challenges we face, in the two years since the last DSEI we have achieved real momentum together. We have a long journey ahead of us. But while the threats we face are sizable, the opportunities are unprecedented."



## SENIOR LEADER COMMENT

# "Designed unapologetically to make Defence an engine for growth"

The following is an extract of Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry Luke Pollard's speech, given at DSEI UK 2025. The full text can be found on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.



**I was honoured to be asked by the Prime Minister a few days ago to step up from my role as the Minister for the Armed Forces to take on a new role looking not just at procurement and industry, but at readiness as well.**

Our armed forces are only as strong as the industry that stands behind them. We've seen that vividly in Ukraine, where our brave friends are fighting not just for their freedom and sovereignty, but for our security as well. The work of British industry, of European industry, of allied industry in helping keep Ukraine in the fight should be an illustration for everyone of the importance of having a fast, efficient, agile defence industry standing behind our armed forces. That is precisely what we have sought to deliver in the Defence Industrial Strategy, which I launched on Monday in the House of Commons.

...  
It is a strategy designed unapologetically to make Defence an engine for growth. And I will say that phrase quite a lot... because we have not been saying it clearly enough for far too long. We, as people who care about Defence, have been comfortable behind our walls, comfortable not telling the story of the economic contribution that we make to our communities, of how Defence not only keeps our country safe, it is the backbone of our economic growth.

...  
Whether you are a prime or a start-up, whether you're in academia or a trade union, all of us can tell that story better than we have done over the last decade. And if we do that, we can fuel export and innovation faster, delivering on the vision set out in the Strategic Defence Review and the Defence Industrial Strategy to provide greater resilience to our armed forces, to back industry and workers, and importantly, to increase our deterrence and war-fighting resilience.

...  
That is a mandate for a change in culture, a change in how we take risk. Because the Ministry of Defence is all about risk management; how we manage the risks to our nation, how we manage the risks to our allies.

Our risk ratios, how we contract, are in a different place than we need them to be today because peacetime procurement was fine when we were in peacetime, but, while we are not at war, nor are we at peace any longer. Our procurement system needs to adapt and that means we need a different approach to how we look at risk.

...  
We are a nation of makers and Defence can lead the way in asserting that to the wider public as well.

...  
Let's start trusting the people that know what they're doing. But part of that is about a trust that goes both ways, a trust that says, if we contract with you, we'll be able to do spiral development faster, we'll be able to get good value. Everyone will be able to deliver what they need to.

So, let's tell our story better. Let's spend money wiser. Let's procure faster and let's do so in a way that gives the amazing men and women of our armed forces and of our allies the kit and equipment they need to be ready for war-fighting. Because if we do that well, we will deter aggression, so we do not need to use it.

And if we do need to use it, I want to be absolutely certain that we can say to the Prime Minister, yes, the UK Armed Forces are ready, and so is industry, and so are the communities that we operate in; all ready to stand behind a whole of society approach.

## FEATURE

# The DSEI industry perspective

**Kevin Craven, ADS Chief Executive, shares his impressions following another successful UK DSEI conference.**

**In a week that saw the hotly anticipated publication of the Defence Industrial Strategy, the defence industry took to the ExCel conference centre to showcase the incredible strength of our collective global expertise.**

From an ADS perspective, we were privileged to host more than 180 businesses on our pavilion in a floorplate equivalent in size to a Type 23 frigate. The week was a hive of activity, including engagements with Secretaries of State, visits from a number of National Armaments Directors, political and official tours, delegations from across the globe, and the business-to-business engagements we know are crucial to support our smaller enterprises.

Publication of the long-awaited Defence Industrial Strategy was a remarkable moment for the over 180,000 people driving our sector forward. Defence businesses are at the heart of local communities; our sector fosters social mobility and prosperity through the high proportion of jobs we offer people from all walks of life. Significant investment in wider skills packages, alongside the £250 million investment in Defence Growth Deals will be critical to maintaining both our defence posture and the talent that delivers it.

UK-made capability is in high demand with exports from the UK's defence and security sectors having doubled in the last decade. Any way that government and industry can work together to speed up this process is welcomed.

Effective implementation of the Defence Industrial Strategy will deliver a whole-of-society benefit. Industry stands ready to play our part, but assertions earlier this year of significant increases to defence spending are both welcome and bittersweet. Naturally, every penny must be spent wisely. The defence industry will



always say it needs more investment, but – like any sector reliant on the public purse – we must justify what, why, when and how. Value to society must drive all that we do.

The primary purpose of defence and security are to protect and deter. Yet, in the process, the value we provide to the economy is increasingly critical to innovation and prosperity. The Government's acknowledgement of the need to immediately bolster UK Defence is hugely welcome. In real terms, spending three percent of GDP on Defence by 2035 will see a £12 billion investment in our sector, according to the latest ADS statistics. Critics will argue it is not enough, but no one can deny that, to your average person, it's an eye-watering sum.

An increase in spending of this magnitude delivers the long-term demand signal that helps the defence sector to do what we do best: deliver capabilities that are needed to uphold our security, in a way that delivers value for money to the citizens we are here to protect.

According to ADS data, more than 50,000 direct jobs will be created – in employment that is highly skilled, well rewarded and, ultimately, keeps our society safe. These gains will be observed throughout the nation – let's not forget that 80 percent of jobs in defence and security are found outside of London and the South East.

Notably, our model also highlights a more than 50 percent increase in the Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy from the sector. GVA could reach £23.5 billion by 2035 under the new outlines.

Catalysing industrial production is paramount to our collective security. Recent government proclamations recognise that a whole-of-society approach is needed for effective defence and deterrence. Through these frameworks, we're excited to be working with the MOD and our members to create meaningful opportunities for not just the next generation of talent entering our sector, but for the societies and communities we're proud to operate in.



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## FEATURE

# How Test and Evaluation transformation is unlocking innovation

The MOD Test and Evaluation (T&E) Transformation Team unpacks the Defence Industrial Strategy's announcements, and their wider mission to build the world's most relevant and responsive military T&E enterprise.



*The T&E Innovation Fund sponsored multi-spectral emulator trial at Portsmouth Technology Park.*

**The Defence Industrial Strategy, published earlier this month, made it clear that an effective T&E ecosystem is critical to enabling the rapid iteration and innovation needed for the UK's future economic and military success.**

While this may be self-evident to those of us working in the field, T&E is too-often thought of as more test than teacher.

This needs to change. The need for faster 'spiral' development and the rapidly changing threats, tactics and technology we face mean we have to shorten the distance between the factory floor and the front-line. This requires exploration, iteration and assurance to happen quickly and continuously. This is the underlying principle behind our concept for future

T&E, called Future Advantage Through Evaluation (FATE).

We have spent the last year working with partners across the MOD and industry to understand what might be required to make FATE a reality across the defence enterprise. At a summit in January, we brought together over 100 participants from equipment manufacturers, testing companies, regulators, the front-line commands, DE&S, Dstl and elsewhere. Together we explored how to co-design an architecture for the future and the interventions needed to make it happen.

The main takeaway from the summit was how well-placed the UK is to take on the T&E challenges of the future, with the expertise and capabilities to remain

a world leader. This helped frame our new mission: to build the world's most productive, relevant and responsive military T&E enterprise here in the UK.

A good example of one community created initiative is the T&E marketplace announced in the Defence Industrial Strategy, to be launched in 2026. This digital platform will help T&E users identify and connect with suitable facilities, capabilities, expertise and support from across the public and private sector. The aim is for the marketplace to evolve over time to include a knowledge hub for the T&E community and a means to streamline access to resources.

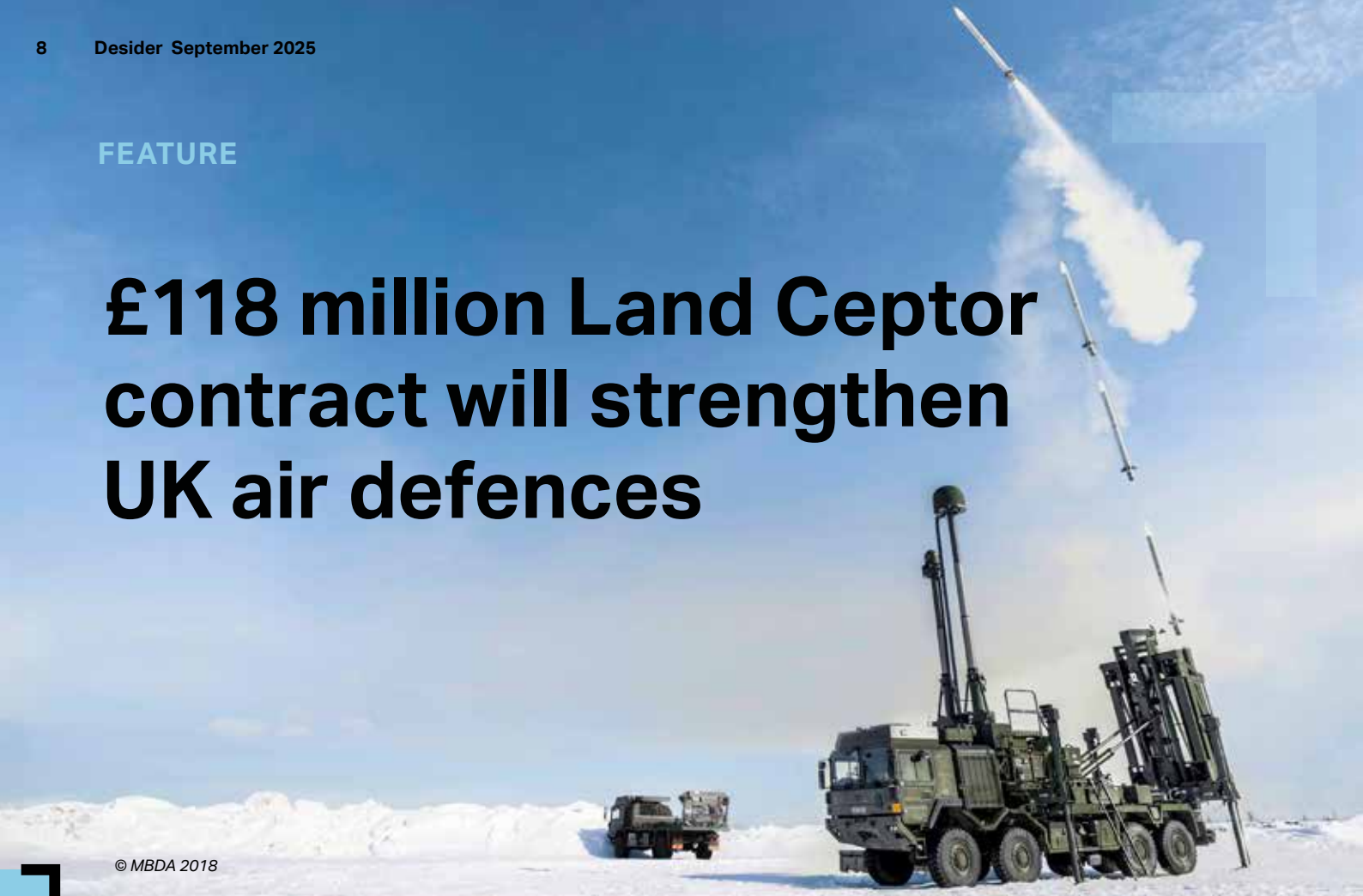
This project is joined by others looking to standardise T&E data management, and improve data connectivity at higher classification levels and access to shared secure supercomputer capabilities across the enterprise. Other projects are investing in deployable T&E technology and piloting the provision of a high-fidelity virtual test range and toolkit, allowing private sector and MOD teams to rapidly test, innovate and integrate systems using Defence's most demanding operational use-cases.

Finally, a 'range of the future' programme at Dstl will provide the T&E delivery community with a vehicle to improve the long-term productivity and capacity of UK test ranges, ensuring they can support the next generation of Defence capability.

We are also keeping the door open for other innovations by inviting MOD and industry colleagues to propose solutions to T&E challenges, with the next round of innovation funding opening in November.

## FEATURE

# £118 million Land Ceptor contract will strengthen UK air defences



© MBDA 2018

**DE&S has awarded a contract to MBDA for the manufacture and delivery of six missile launching systems, enhancing the UK's air defence capabilities and supporting national security.**

**A three-year £118 million contract will provide the British Army with Land Ceptor medium-range air defence missile launching systems.**

The launchers, which fire Common Anti-Air Modular Missiles, are a key component of the cutting-edge Sky Sabre system, alongside radar and command and control units.

Sky Sabre, which replaces the Rapier air defence system, is capable of intercepting cruise missiles, aircraft and drones. It is highly accurate and can hit a tennis ball-sized object travelling at twice the speed of sound. The sophisticated system can also control the flight of 24 missiles at the same time, guiding them to hit multiple targets at once.

Peter Mackay, DE&S Head of Lethality and Protect-1 Air and Missile Defence, said, "Sky Sabre is a key air defence capability for the British Army with its ability to intercept multiple targets simultaneously. The Land Ceptor launcher element of this system delivers proven high accuracy and speed. This is the result of a great deal of hard work between DE&S and MBDA to accelerate delivery timelines. Together, we are meeting the challenging requirement

of increasing army lethality and air defence capabilities, using the lessons we are seeing in Ukraine."

The system was tested during Exercise Formidable Shield, a NATO-led exercise held at a QinetiQ-run range in the Outer Hebrides. This marked the first live-firing of the system in the UK, showcasing its ability to operate seamlessly within NATO's integrated air and missile defence network. The UK has also deployed Sky Sabre in Poland as part of Operation Stifftail, strengthening the defence of NATO's eastern flank.

Lieutenant Colonel James Boutle, Commanding Officer of the 16th Regiment Royal Artillery, said, "Sky Sabre represents a step change in the UK's ground-based air defence capability. As the Army's most advanced air defence system, it provides a powerful shield against modern airborne threats, from fast jets to precision-guided weapons and drones.

"For 16th Regiment Royal Artillery, operating Sky Sabre is both a privilege and a responsibility – ensuring we are trained and ready to strengthen the UK's contribution to NATO when called on. As part of this, we work hand-in-hand with

industry partners, such as MBDA here in the UK, to continuously optimise the system to ensure it remains at the cutting edge – a collaboration that guarantees we stay ahead of adversary technology."

The purchase from MBDA will support up to 140 jobs across the UK, including at MBDA's manufacturing site in Bolton. UK Defence already supports 1,300 jobs at the facility and MBDA plan to expand this to around 2,000 jobs by the end of the decade. This latest contract contributes to economic prosperity and delivers on the Government's Plan for Change.

Chris Allam, Managing Director of MBDA UK, said, "We welcome this contract as it builds on our strategic partnership with the UK Ministry of Defence. Land Ceptor is an excellent example of the innovative capability that this partnership has produced and delivered to the British Army.

"Manufacturing more launchers will provide more jobs and sustain many vital partners in our supply chain. Just as importantly, it will give the Army the decisive military capability and increased scale needed in air defence."



The background of the advertisement is a high-angle photograph of an F-35 fighter jet in flight, viewed from the side and slightly from behind. The jet is dark grey and is flying over a vast expanse of white clouds. In the upper right corner, there is a large, stylized graphic element consisting of overlapping green and blue shapes that form a partial 'X' or a large arrow pointing towards the right. The Siemens logo is positioned in the top left corner.

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## NEWS

# MOD awards FN UK contract to upgrade Heavy Machine Gun

**A new £20 million contract will see the L111A1 machine guns upgraded over the next two years and supported for a further eight years.**



**The DE&S Dismounted Close Combat Portfolio team has awarded FN UK a new £20 million 10-year contract to upgrade and provide through-life support for the UK Armed Forces' L111A1 Heavy Machine Gun.**

The contract will see FN UK, the only manufacturer and assembler of machine guns in the UK, undertake a comprehensive mid-life improvement programme for the weapon system over two years, followed by eight years of in-service support.

All upgrade work will be carried out at FN UK's manufacturing facility in Kent, creating 10 new jobs and sustaining 80 existing positions. In addition to the jobs, this will also contribute to upskilling many existing employees, enhancing the skill level of the workforce.

The L111A1 12.7mm (.50) Heavy Machine Gun is an updated version of the Browning M2. It is recognised as one of the finest heavy machine guns ever developed. It serves as UK Defence's most capable direct fire small calibre weapon, with an effective range of approximately 1,800 metres. The weapon provides integral close-range support from ground-mounted tripods or when fitted to vehicles. It is employed across a range of platforms including Royal Navy ships which use the L111A1 to counter assaults from fast inshore attack craft.

Richard Murray, Director – Lethality & Protect at DE&S, said, "This contract ensures our forces will continue to benefit from one of the world's most capable heavy machine guns, with enhanced performance and reliability that will

serve UK Defence for years to come. The partnership with FN UK demonstrates our commitment to maintaining cutting-edge capabilities whilst supporting British manufacturing and jobs."

The mid-life improvements are designed to overcome obsolescence, and improve performance and reliability. As a result, the weapons system is expected to save the MOD approximately £9 million through-life thanks to a reduced need for spares, while ensuring it continues to contribute significant firepower across army and navy operations.

Brigadier Nick Serle, Head of Military Capability Delivery for the British Army, said, "This mid-life update will further enhance the lethality of our close combatants. It will also help secure skilled jobs in the UK and is another clear demonstration of our commitment to the Land Industrial Strategy."

The contract comes as FN UK marks a significant milestone, celebrating 50 years of manufacturing in the UK. The company traces its origins to Manroy Engineering in 1975, which initially produced machine gun parts for the MOD. FN Browning acquired Manroy in 2014 and renamed the company FN UK.

Michelle Cantoni, CEO of FN UK, said, "At FN UK, we're proud of this announcement as the only machine gun manufacturer in the UK, which continues to ensure our long-term dedication to Britain. Additionally, this achievement occurred during commemorations to mark 50 years of manufacturing in the UK and over 135 years of expertise as part of the FN Group."



## NEWS

# Norway selects UK's Type 26 warships in record £10 billion partnership

**The UK will supply Norway with anti-submarine frigates in its largest ever warship export deal.**

**The Norwegian Government has selected the UK as its strategic partner for the acquisition of its new class of frigates.**

The UK, in its biggest ever warship export deal by value, will supply Norway with at least five frigates to be built by BAE Systems on the Clyde in Scotland.

Norway's selection of the UK's world-leading Type 26 frigate is the culmination of many years of government campaigning, which began when UK Defence Exports (UKDE, now part of the MOD International Collaboration and Exports team) identified the market opportunity in 2018. UKDE brought together a campaign team made up of personnel from across the MOD, Naval Command HQ, wider government, and British and Norwegian industry.

This latest agreement will create a combined British/Norwegian naval fleet of 13 anti-submarine frigates – eight British and five Norwegian – to operate jointly in Northern Europe, strengthening maritime security in the face of increasing Russian threats.

The Royal Navy and Norwegian Navy's Type 26 frigates will be built simultaneously by BAE Systems, benefitting from investments already made, such as the Janet Harvey Shipbuilding Hall in Govan.

The Type 26 team, a part of the DE&S Combat Ships Delivery Group, played a significant role in securing this deal. Pat Browning, Type 26 Team Leader, said, "The Norway announcement to form a government-to-government strategic partnership with the UK to tackle the threat in the North Atlantic was a result of very close working across government and industry partners.



"It's exciting to move into the delivery phase jointly with Norway on the arrangements to build at least an additional five Type 26 Global Combat ships. It is also exciting to work with other DE&S delivery teams, Naval Command and across the National Armaments Director Group. This work will include joint support, training and operating arrangements, and strategic offset programmes as part of this unprecedented partnership."

Commodore Steve Roberts, Senior Responsible Owner for Type 26 frigates, also shared his praise, "The DE&S team should be rightly proud of their significant contribution to achieving the Norway deal. They have demonstrated exemplary behaviours and highly professional leadership across the technical, commercial and financial aspects of what was a very demanding competition. I look forward to continuing the work with DE&S colleagues to deliver on this historic strategic partnership."

The major export deal offers a significant boost to the UK economy. It is expected to support more than 400 British companies and sustain 4,000 UK jobs across the UK supply chain well into the 2030s. This includes more than 2,000 jobs at BAE System's Glasgow-based shipyards where the ships will be built. The Norwegian and British vessels will be as identical as possible and will have the same technical specifications.

Charles Woodburn, Chief Executive of BAE Systems, said, "The Norwegian Government's decision reflects its confidence in British industry's ability to deliver a superior anti-submarine warfare platform together with systems and equipment that will support its future maritime security. We look forward to playing our part in further strengthening the strategic partnership between the UK and Norway."

Delivery of the Type 26 frigates to Norway is expected to begin in 2030.





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## NEWS

# Groundbreaking Ukraine tech sharing agreement to deliver drones and support jobs

**‘First of its kind’ industrial partnership allows the UK and Ukraine to share detailed designs for cutting-edge air defence drones and other equipment.**

**The UK will manufacture and jointly develop cutting-edge military equipment with Ukrainian industry through a groundbreaking new technology sharing agreement which will support British jobs and strengthen both UK and Ukrainian national security.**

The first joint project is an advanced air defence interceptor drone, named Project Octopus, which will be mass-produced in the UK, with a target to manufacture thousands per month for Ukraine.

Interceptor drones are considerably cheaper than regular air defence missiles and are proving to be highly effective in countering the waves of one-way attack drones Russia continues to launch at Ukraine's cities. They fly quickly to intercept incoming drones and missiles, destroying them before they reach their targets.

The new tech sharing agreement has been made possible as a result of the growing industrial partnership between the UK and Ukraine. In September, Defence Secretary John Healey visited Kyiv to sign an expansion to the partnership, allowing sharing and joint development of intellectual property.

The technology sharing arrangement is among the first of its kind signed with Ukraine, allowing for unprecedented collaboration between British and Ukrainian companies. It provides options to expand industrial capacity and harness defence as an engine for growth – supporting investment and delivering on the Government's Plan for Change.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said, “As Russia continues its egregious and unrelenting attacks on Ukraine, the UK's support will not falter, and we alongside our allies will continue to step up. This new partnership is a landmark moment, bringing together British and Ukrainian ingenuity to deliver cutting-edge defence

drone technology to fight back against Russian aggression.”

Defence Secretary John Healey said, “The Strategic Defence Review set us the challenge to learn the lessons from the war in Ukraine. Through this groundbreaking industrial partnership with Ukraine, and our new Defence Industrial Strategy, we are revving up our world-leading defence industry. We will innovate at a wartime pace, support UK and Ukrainian security, and boost jobs here in Britain.

“The Ukrainians continue to fight with huge courage, military and civilian alike. The UK will continue stepping up to support them in the fight tonight, while we work together through the Coalition of the Willing to secure a just and lasting peace for Ukraine in the future.”


The drone developed under Project Octopus was designed by Ukraine with support from UK scientists and technicians. It has already proven highly effective against the Shahed one-way attack drone variants used by Russia, while costing far less to produce than its target.

The growing industrial collaboration delivers on the 100-Year Partnership signed between the UK and Ukraine in January, while supporting the priorities set out by the Defence Secretary to ensure Ukraine is supported to defend itself now, and deter threats in the future. The UK remains fully committed to securing a just and lasting peace in Ukraine and is engaging with key allies in support of this effort.

In March, the Prime Minister announced a historic £1.6 billion deal to provide more than 5,000 air defence missiles for Ukraine – creating 200 new jobs and supporting a further 700. The UK will also invest a record £350 million this year to increase the supply of drones to Ukraine from a target of 10,000 in 2024 to 100,000 in 2025.



## NEWS



# UK training of Ukrainian troops extended

**Ukrainian soldiers will receive a further boost from the British military's expert training, with Operation Interflex to continue to at least the end of 2026.**

**The UK is stepping up and evolving its training to ensure Ukraine's Armed Forces are in the strongest possible position.**

Training support and military equipment from the UK has helped give Ukraine a crucial boost on the front-line. The extension of Operation Interflex to at least the end of 2026 was announced by Defence Secretary John Healey as Ukraine celebrated 34 years since declaring independence from the Soviet Union.

More than 50,000 Ukrainian recruits have been trained on British soil so far as part of the Interflex programme. Together with 13 other nations, this is one of the largest schemes of its kind in the world.

Since it first launched, the UK has adapted Interflex training to best suit Ukraine's evolving military requirements. Two additional courses are now being delivered alongside basic infantry combat skills. One teaches soldiers how to command at a platoon and section leader level, and the other is an instructor training course.

Defence Secretary John Healey said, "We will continue to step up our support alongside allies, so that Ukraine can defend today and deter tomorrow. In the face of ongoing Russian attacks, we must put Ukraine's Armed Forces in the strongest possible position. And as the push for peace continues, we must make the Ukrainians into the strongest possible deterrent to secure that future peace."

"On this special day for the freedom and democracy of the Ukrainian people, we are ramping up and evolving our world-leading training support that has given more than 50,000 Ukrainians vital combat skills. This matters to Ukraine and it matters to Britain. A secure Ukraine is a secure Europe. From learning lessons from the battlefield to strengthen our own Armed Forces, to deepening

our military industrial collaboration and supporting jobs across the nation, Britain and Ukraine are growing closer than ever before."

Training a new generation of Ukrainian instructors is one of the most effective methods to strengthen Ukraine's security both now and in the long-term. It will help increase skills and the capacity to expand its own training programmes, allowing Ukraine to regenerate its military capabilities.

Survey results of Ukrainian recruits who completed Interflex training between January and August 2025 showed that 83 percent of those on the new leadership courses felt better able to protect the troops under their command. Ninety-three percent felt more confident they could make their troops more lethal.

Artem, a Ukrainian soldier currently on Operation Interflex's Platoon and Company Sergeants Course, said, "I am very grateful to the UK for supporting the people of Ukraine in their struggle for independence and identity as a nation. I am grateful for the opportunity to take such courses, for the high level of professionalism of the instructors, their dedication to their work, and for their ability to organise both group training and find an individual approach for each of us."

"Instructors ensure that classes are conducted in conditions as close to real-life as possible, whether it be in trenches, in a forested area, or in an urban area. I learned how important it is to be prepared for coordinated actions in conditions of increased danger, how to properly coordinate personnel during defence, and planning offensive actions. I learnt how to survive in conditions of minimal support and improve first aid skills."



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# First batch of high-tech bomb disposal robots delivered

**UK Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams will now start to benefit from the T4 Uncrewed Ground Vehicle's advanced controls and precision, as part of a £32 million contract.**

At DSEI 2025, UK Defence announced that Project Dartrose had reached Initial Operating Capability (IOC). Central to this milestone is delivery of the L3Harris T4 Uncrewed Ground Vehicle (UGV) to the UK Armed Forces.

This medium-sized bomb disposal robot will be used by UK Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams to safely neutralise bomb threats alongside the emergency services.

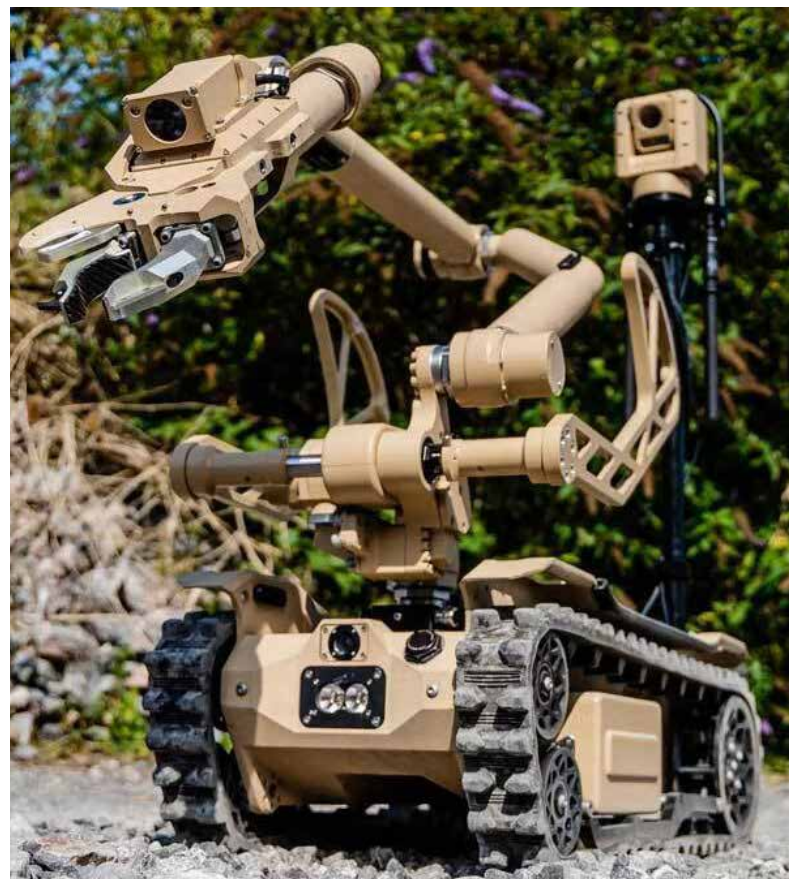
The T4 operates using advanced intuitive controls and high-definition cameras. A high-performance manipulator maximises control and reach in high-risk situations and a haptic feedback system allows operators to actually feel what the robotic arm touches or holds, helping them complete complex disposal tasks. Its hardened design supports all-terrain, all-weather performance even in austere environments, while its flexible design supports the use of high-power tools.

In total, 50 T4 UGVs will be delivered by industry partner L3Harris to the MOD under a £32 million contract, managed by the DE&S Specialist Vehicles and Uncrewed Land Systems (SVULS) Team. The T4 will see service with both British Army and Royal Navy EOD teams in the UK, Cyprus and Gibraltar.

Steve Hayward, SVULS Team Leader, said, "The team has delivered equipment into the hands of the end-users at pace, conducting trials and testing to achieve delivery milestones ahead of schedule. Providing this capability in support of the UK Defence's Military Aid to the Civilian Authorities (MACA) obligations demonstrates the commitment within DE&S to deliver the right equipment where it matters, keeping our operators and people in the UK protected from threats today and tomorrow."

The new Dartrose T4 fleet will operate alongside L3Harris' in-service T7 EOD UGV fleet, enabling operations in confined environments that are inaccessible to the larger T7. The T4 and T7 share key mechanical and interface components, such as the Portable Command Console, creating synergies in training and logistics, and ensuring more efficient through-life support.

Colonel Tim Gould, Army Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal Head of Programmes, said, "The L3 HARRIS T4 will now join its T7 stablemate in supporting our EOD operators on their vital work to safeguard the UK public from explosive hazards. The T4 will close a capability gap in the UK MACA EOD response by enabling greater UGV access in confined spaces."



L3Harris has 12 UK sites and employs more than 1,400 people in the UK. Ian Menzies, General Manager of the Intelligence & Cyber International Division at L3Harris, said, "At L3Harris, we are committed to delivering mission-ready technology that keeps people safe and operationally effective. These deliveries demonstrate our ability to rapidly deliver capabilities on time and to specification. The T4 gives operators the ability to neutralise explosive threats from a safe distance, reducing risk to life and strengthening the UK's operational resilience."



## NEWS

# UK's largest drone production facility to open in 2026

**New drone factory to open in Swindon, creating skilled jobs and strengthening UK manufacturing.**

**Defence Secretary John Healey has announced that the UK's largest uncrewed aerial system (UAS) production facility is to open in Swindon next year, creating 1,000 highly skilled jobs and boosting sovereign manufacturing.**

Swindon has strong historical ties to Defence, having helped to produce the Supermarine Spitfire in World War Two.

The new factory, operated by Tekever, is expected to open in 2026 and will position Swindon as a centre for UK UAS manufacturing. The 254,000 square foot site will support the full drone lifecycle – from rapid prototyping to production and research and development.

It will bring large-scale production of Tekever platforms to the UK. This includes scaling up existing work on the RAF's Storm Shroud AR3 UAS, which are integrated with Leonardo's BriteStorm electronic warfare technology. These provide advanced, long-range signal jamming to disrupt enemy radar and protect UK aircraft.

Core production of the AR5 UAS will also be brought to the UK for the first time. The AR5 is a medium-altitude, medium-endurance fixed wing UAS, ideally suited for Search & Rescue, maritime surveillance and maritime patrol operations.

In May, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced an additional £19 million of investment into Tekever's AR3 Storm Shroud drones, underlining government support for home grown defence technology. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the UK has purchased approximately £270 million of Tekever drones to provide to Ukraine, including contributions from international partners through the UK-administered International Fund for Ukraine. These have been used extensively in destroying highly



advanced Russian air defence systems.

The Defence Secretary said, "This new factory is a clear demonstration that this government is making defence an engine for growth across the UK. Tekever's expansion will bring high-skilled jobs and world-leading drone manufacturing to Swindon, while strengthening defence supply chains.

"By backing Britain's defence industry, we strengthen both our economy and national security. Tekever's new facility will be its fourth location in the UK and largest to date."

This builds on the acquisition of West Wales Airport and marks a critical next step in the delivery of Tekever's Strategic Investment Programme Overmatch, which is designed to transform UK defence capabilities by accelerating innovation in AI

and autonomy.

Tekever's arrival in Swindon aligns with the Government's broader economic strategy to foster high-tech hubs, drive inclusive growth and unlock new opportunities for local talent and supply chains.

Karl Brew, Director of Tekever Defence, said, "Our decision to establish a new facility in Swindon reflects Tekever's commitment to the UK and to the ambitions of the £400 million Overmatch programme. The site will play a central role in the production of our new AR3 EVO system and in creating up to 1,000 highly skilled jobs over the next five years. This investment will ensure we deliver advanced, sovereign capability at pace and in close partnership with the UK defence ecosystem."



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# DESIDER

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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

# DE&S highlights

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



## Tom Nevard Memorial Competition 2025

The Tom Nevard Memorial Competition returned for its 71st year at the Defence Academy in Shrivenham. The event brought together 70 talented apprentices from across the MOD for five days of exercises designed to test everything from creativity to problem-solving skills.

This year's competition featured a new Digital Challenge hosted by Clarified Security. The modern cyber security task saw four-person teams tackle real-world hacking scenarios, marking an exciting evolution for the contest.

The competition began in 1952 as a skills test for MOD engineering apprentices honouring Tom Nevard, assistant secretary of the Labour Branch at the Ministry of Supply. Originally held in Glasgow, the competition moved to the Defence Academy in 2014, where it now runs annually. It has evolved over recent years to include challenges for apprentices from all specialisms, while continuing to honour a legacy of innovation and excellence across MOD apprenticeship programmes.

The 2025 judging panel included DE&S Deputy CEO, Lieutenant General Simon Hamilton. He said, "Spending time with our extraordinary apprentices from across Defence was truly inspiring and a reminder of how bright our future is. This competition offers invaluable opportunities to collaborate, grow and develop new skills. You are all at the start of a remarkable journey – be ambitious, push your limits, seize every training opportunity, and most importantly, enjoy the path you're on."

## Women in Defence nominees announced

Two DE&S colleagues have been nominated for prestigious Women in Defence Awards.

Lisa Thorne, Head of Support Capabilities and Commodities, and Catherine Smith, Defence Munitions Senior Logistic Operations Manager, have been selected from hundreds of nominees, in recognition for their exceptional contributions to UK Defence. Lisa and Catherine now join 60 other nominees from organisations including Dstl, GCHQ and MI5, as well as industry partners such as Rolls-Royce, Leonardo and Babcock.

Lisa has been shortlisted in the Inspirational Award category for positively influencing colleagues' career choices. After being nominated she said, "I'm truly thankful to be able to do a job I love, work with amazing people, in an incredible organisation. We absolutely make a difference every day for Defence, supporting our mission partners in protecting our nation, I'm so proud to say that."

Catherine has been nominated in the Resolute Spirit Award category, which honours personnel who have demonstrated steadfast perseverance while overcoming adversity. She said, "I am truly honoured and immensely proud to be shortlisted for the Women in Defence Awards in the Resolute Spirit Award category. This nomination came as a complete surprise to me and feels incredibly humbling."



### Upgraded RFA Lyme Bay returns to sea

Royal Navy amphibious landing ship RFA Lyme Bay has returned to the water with improved facilities and enhanced threat detection equipment after successfully completing her Contractual Support Period.

The vessel returned to her north-east roots in June to begin work at APCL A&P's Tyne facility in Middlesborough, as part of her in-service support contract with the MOD. The six-week Contractual Support Period was facilitated by the Cluster Support Team which consists of APCL A&P staff, uniformed RFA personnel and marine engineers, and DE&S subject matter experts.

As part of her annual maintenance, Lyme Bay received machinery and equipment testing and certification, and an overhaul of her diesel generators. The ship has also received technical upgrades and has been fitted with a counter-unmanned aircraft system designed to detect and mitigate threats posed by unmanned aircraft systems.

Besides improved threat detection capability, the ship now has upgraded amenities, designed to enhance the welfare of its personnel. This includes a refurbished galley deck and improved Wi-Fi connectivity.

Now that the upgraded RFA Lyme Bay has returned to the water, she brings further enhanced amphibious capability, bolstering UK Defence at sea.

### UK and Finland sign renewed Defence Materiel Memorandum of Understanding

While at DSEI UK 2025, UK National Armaments Director Andy Start and his Finnish counterpart Oli Ruutu signed a renewed bilateral Defence Materiel Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The renewed MoU's primary purpose is to establish a framework for future cooperation between the UK and Finland, with a focus on collaboration and positioning the UK as a strong and reliable partner to our allies in Eastern Europe.

It aims to strengthen cooperation in conventional defence technology and improve defence capabilities through better use of shared resources. It will identify and promote joint activities that support standardisation and interoperability, and establish a practical framework for implementing bilateral cooperation activities in the defence materiel domain. The two nations will also support their domestic defence industries by fostering cooperative research, development, production, procurement, and through-life support.







### Challenger 3 turret programme reaches manufacturing milestone

The Challenger 3 turret programme has officially completed its design phase and commenced the manufacturing phase, marking a major milestone in one of the UK's most complex and strategically important defence engineering projects.

The turret structure, fabricated at Pearson Engineering's Armstrong Works in Newcastle, has now been shipped to Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land (RBSL) in Telford for integration of the gun system and advanced electronics.

Ian Bell, CEO at Pearson Engineering, said, "Completing the design phase of the Challenger 3 turret programme is a proud moment for everyone at Pearson Engineering. This achievement reflects the depth of our engineering expertise, our commitment to sovereign capability, and the unique skills housed at Armstrong Works."

The Challenger 3 main battle tank is being developed and manufactured under a contract with RBSL which directly supports 300 jobs and a further 450 throughout the UK supply chain. It will provide the British Army with a modern, lethal main battle tank, protected by next-generation modular armour, developed by RBSL and the MOD's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. The tank will be fitted with digital gun control equipment, a new fire control system and stabilised sights for commander and gunner, which include daylight and thermal channels.

Mark Colley, Senior Responsible Owner for Challenger 3, said, "The completion of the Challenger 3 turret structure by Pearson Engineering marks a remarkable feat of engineering and a critical milestone for the British Army's next-generation Main Battle Tank... It's a proud moment for British engineering and a powerful example of how collaboration between industry and defence can deliver a cutting-edge capability for our soldiers."

### Fleet Solid Support reaches important production milestone

Delivery of the UK's Fleet Solid Support (FSS) programme has taken a major step forward, with the first Factory Acceptance Test of advanced panel line equipment taking place.

A delegation – led by Alan Haley, Harland & Wolff Recapitalisation Manager for Navantia UK, and Alex du Pré, DE&S FSS Project Leader – travelled to Finnish company Pemamek's facility to witness the successful testing of their PEMA Vision Robotic Welding Portals.

The fully mechanised, digitally integrated panel line system incorporates advanced robotics, automated material handling and precision welding technology to create consistent panels at high rates. It will be housed within an extended fabrication hall, with a 5,000 square metre expansion to existing facilities scheduled for completion in early 2026.

The panel line system will enable faster, more accurate and efficient shipbuilding, and supporting delivery of the three FSS ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Alex du Pré said, "We are pleased to have reached this pivotal milestone in the Fleet Solid Support programme. Our team's collaboration with Navantia UK has helped to ensure these advanced robotic welding systems meet the exacting standards required for building Royal Navy support ships that are fit for the future. This investment will benefit communities for generations to come and that is something the whole team can be proud of."

Navantia UK is investing £115 million across its four UK yards, including £90 million for Belfast. Navantia UK acquired the yards when it bought out Harland & Wolff in January 2025, securing over 1,000 skilled jobs across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

## PEOPLE

# Shona Bates

**Job title:** Ajax Programme Manager

**What does your role involve?**

I manage a complex Government Major Portfolio Project delivering 589 tracked and fully digitised Ajax vehicles to the Field Army through a firm price contract with General Dynamics Land Systems UK. There are six variants: Ajax (armoured fighting vehicle), Ares (protected troops transport), Athena (command and control), Atlas (recovery), Apollo (repair) and Argus (armoured engineer). I can often be found at Merthyr Tydfil in Wales where our Ajax vehicles are being produced.

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

Working on Ajax is a challenge and I continue to learn something new every day even after working on the programme for two years. Juggling Demonstration, Manufacture and In-Service phases means that there's never a dull moment, and I'm privileged to be part of a joint DE&S, Army and industry team. It's been a great honour to be trusted to lead one of Defence's most complex projects and see it successfully transform into delivering over 140 deployable vehicles so far.

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

Becoming one of the first 100 women to gain Chartered Project Professional status with the Association of Project Management. I was then one of the first five individuals in DE&S to reach Senior Project Professional status with the Infrastructure Projects Authority. These have been great achievements and a way of recognising all my project delivery experience so far.

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

Making a difference and connecting with people, not just through the projects we deliver together but by encouraging each other to keep developing and improving. Being part of a network, whether it's the Project Delivery profession, the DE&S mutual mentoring scheme or supporting others as a Fair Treatment Ambassador, keeps me motivated even when the going gets tough.

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

Growing up in the most deprived area of Scotland has had a big influence on me. Being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis over 10 years ago has made an impact too. Both of these have given me resilience and the determination to succeed against the odds, and they have taught me to be comfortable with uncertainty and change. But the people who have invested time and energy in me and supported me throughout my career have shaped me the most.

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

I've played drums with Bristol Samba for almost 20 years, performing at all sorts of events, carnivals and concerts. I've even performed at a prison, at Bristol's World Naked Bike Ride (fully clothed!) and at Banksy's Dismaland. I'm married to Colin and we've got two children, two dogs and two cats. I also love the challenge of an 'impossible' jigsaw puzzle – undefeated to date!

**What might surprise people about you?**

I started working for the MOD as a mapping and charting specialist in West London in 1998.

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

My dad always taught me that 'what's for you won't go by you' and that everything will work itself out eventually. He's been right so far!







A Chinook helicopter approaches the runway at Leuchars Station (formerly RAF Leuchars) in Fife, Scotland, as part of Exercise Kukri Dawn.

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A seaman specialist firing the L111A1 Heavy Machine Gun on board HMS Dauntless during Exercise Sharpshooter.

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