

DESIDER

AN INSIDE LOOK AT DEFENCE EQUIPMENT & SUPPORT



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



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RICHARD SMART, DIRECTOR, NAD PORTFOLIO OFFICE

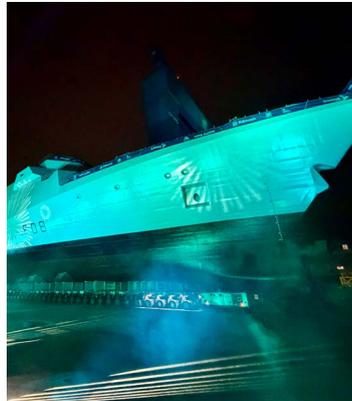
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START Talking

As he prepares for the next adventure, Andy Start returns for one last Start Talking to share some reflections on his time in the MOD.

In a recent roundtable engagement session with NAD Group colleagues I was asked whether I felt I had achieved as much as I expected during my three-and-a-half years as the CEO of DE&S, NAD and Deputy NAD. It was a good question, and one I had to think about.

My honest answer after reflection was, “Far more than I expected, and less than I would have wished.”

When I joined the MOD as CEO of DE&S in September 2022 the organisation was facing a lot of criticism, as was the defence industry. Pretty much everyone I spoke to implied that any mission to drive positive change was close to impossible and I should have low expectations. This only makes me prouder of what we’ve delivered together as a team. As a team I mean all of MOD, industry and our NATO allies because it’s been a truly collaborative endeavour.

One of my main efforts has been our support to Ukraine. I oversaw the delivery of millions of items of equipment by the UK and had the privilege to bring together the support of over 40 nations as co-chair the NAD Ukraine Defence Contract Group. Ukraine is vital to all of Europe’s security and we must continue to back them.

I’m pleased we’ve somewhat changed the public narrative about delivery. The vast scale at which we deliver to operations around the world is more visible. In my time with the MOD, we have supported humanitarian relief efforts, protected shipping and critical infrastructure, and projected the reach of our capabilities globally.

Our operational teams have been exemplary. We often speak about the few programmes that face challenges, but rarely about the over 2,000 projects and programmes that have continued to deliver. I’m delighted to see the progress being made on big programmes from space capability like Tyche, to new Type 26 and 31 ships and the Boxer armoured vehicle, and progress on cloud infrastructure and data security.

And arguably just as exciting has been our progress on big collaborative technology programmes, like the Global Combat Air Programme with Italy and Japan, and on novel innovations

like the Brakestop cruise missile programme and the modernisation of our logistics software.

When I look back, I’m staggered by the progress we’ve made on delivering a new defence strategy. This includes work I’ve been closely involved with – the Strategic Defence Review, the Defence Industrial Strategy and preparation for the Defence Investment Plan – and sub-strategies like our new commercial pathways and housing strategy.

Much of my career has been about leading complex change, but the results we’ve achieved in developing the MOD as an organisation have certainly exceeded my expectations. The collaboration with industry and our armed forces to redesign DE&S’ operating model represents one of the largest collaborative changes in government. Yet even that has been dwarfed by the scale of Defence Reform, the largest defence change programme in decades. It has been a real privilege to lead the work of forming the NAD Group as part of that, creating an organisation with unparalleled potential.

While the last three-and-a-half years have exceeded my expectations, I wish I’d been able to achieve more. The threats to our nation are unquestionably greater than at any time in my 37-year career, and the need to strengthen integrated capabilities with our NATO allies is pressing.

Nevertheless, I am optimistic. NATO has been strengthened by the addition of Norway and Sweden. It’s better funded, more interoperable and more integrated.

Here in the UK, we have a good plan, a powerful new organisation, and committed and capable people in place across Defence and within industry and our allies. The opportunities for the NAD Group and our defence enterprise are unparalleled, and I am delighted that Rupert Pearce has stepped up to lead it with passion and energy.

I’ll sign off with an enormous thank you to all of you for your support and comradeship. I’ll be cheering you on and continuing to contribute to Defence through my PhD and a portfolio of other activities.

SENIOR LEADER COMMENT

Setting up delivery for success

Richard Smart, Director of the NAD Portfolio Office, introduces Desider to the group's new portfolio system and explains the benefits it is going to deliver for UK Defence.



Portfolios enable delivery

That's my passionate belief.

But what is a portfolio? Simply put, it's a way of grouping, organising and optimising a collection of complementary programmes, projects, services and other related activities, and ensuring they align with strategic objectives.

Portfolios are an established part of how our defence system is structured. Until now, portfolios have been used primarily to group capabilities aligned with the UK Armed Forces.

But our new NAD Group portfolio system represents a transformative approach to how we plan to invest in and deliver new capabilities.

Rather than being centred around a single Service, our portfolios will support delivery of the future integrated

force. They will operate across the traditional boundaries of Defence, allowing teams to work in a way that's more agile, coherent and efficient, with a focus on delivering strategically valuable, integrated, multi-domain capabilities.

Portfolios bring real value by allowing teams to look across programmes and projects, and think more broadly and into the longer-term regarding prioritisation and budget allocation. They set the conditions for success and then pass the baton to programme, project and service leaders who can then get on and do the delivery job.

Each portfolio's director will be able to plan the long-term allocation of work and resources. This will give them flexibility to rebalance investment and optimise value in response to changes in the internal and external context. It may mean pausing or stopping work within their portfolio as priorities shift. In making decisions, portfolio directors will work closely with capability sponsors to understand the implications and impact of their decisions.

And, very importantly, all of that connects back to our end-users, the military operators, and what's going to be most valuable for them. The job of the armed forces is to protect, to deter and – if that's where we end up – to fight and win.

An important part of our role as the NAD Group is to support the military by helping solve the challenges they face, and by supplying them with the capabilities they need to protect, deter and win.

It's not exclusively about delivering military capability though. Our NAD Group priorities also help to strengthen our industrial ecosystem, drive UK prosperity and increase productivity more generally. Our portfolio directors will be able to make the right choices that maximise the benefit across those priorities.

Working at the front-line of defence delivery

The NAD Group's portfolio system will help those operating at the front-line of delivery; the teams working to get the new capabilities into the hands or under the feet of our forces.

The portfolios will set the scene for delivery, enable it and make it more effective. They will reduce the burden that falls on delivery teams and give them confidence that they are working on the highest priorities and delivering the right kit.

SENIOR LEADER COMMENT

What we can do through a portfolio approach is think about the opportunity to rationalise our demand signal. Rather than different bespoke types of radar for different environments, for example, we can explore more strategically whether there is one type of radar that's good enough for two or more environments.

What we can do through a portfolio approach is think about the opportunity to rationalise our demand signal. Rather than different bespoke types of radar for different environments, for example, we can explore more strategically whether there is one type of radar that's good enough for two or more environments.

And the portfolios will ensure there's a balance between workload demand and the supply of resources, the pound notes and the people. An important outcome of the new portfolio system is to bring the delivery plan into balance with the available budget.

Purposeful portfolios

For industry, the portfolio system creates an opportunity to engage more strategically and in a more joined-up way with our overall delivery plan, including, for example, how we would adjust our approach in response to future technology and market developments. And that should open up longer-term enduring opportunities for the supply chain.

Without the portfolios, you might have a delivery team doing working a piece of kit in one place and another delivery team doing something very similar in another, making piecemeal asks of industry, without connecting them.

With the portfolio construct, we can bring those things together and optimise it for our supply chain partners.

This links back to our NAD objective around building a resilient industrial ecosystem. The portfolio construct is an opportunity to think strategically, big picture across the supply chain, about how all the individual demands add up to something that can be more than just a simple sum of the parts.

And now a supplier is not responding to piecemeal demands, it's responding to a more aggregate joined up view of total demand.

One of our watchwords as we roll out the portfolio system is the need to ensure that things work in a way that is fully purposeful. The work of a portfolio is to optimise the total value that can be achieved from the available resources.

All of these changes are being taken forward as part of the MOD's Defence Reform modernisation programme. Through that programme, authority and accountabilities in the MOD, beneath the ministerial level, has been reorganised and simplified into a quad of the Permanent Secretary, the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Chief of Defence Nuclear and the National Armaments Director.

The new quad leadership team is a key driver behind the shift in the portfolio set-up. Right now, senior responsible

owners in our Military Strategic HQ (MSHQ) have to account for new programmes, new projects, new services, and so does the NAD Group.

The new portfolio construct will gather accountability within the NAD Group for future capabilities, major programmes, new platforms and significant upgrades, what we call 'invest work'. In parallel, 'readiness work', which is more typically associated with in-service support, will remain with the MSHQ and military commands to lead, but with the NAD Group still providing significant support and services.

The key point is, if you think about the complexity of the challenge that comes with large 'invest work' programmes, this is where a large part of our delivery skills can be put to best use. And with this shift, all of that will now sit with the NAD Group.

Success will mean our armed forces get optimal value, which they would see as maximum military capability. And more broadly, maximum protection, maximum deterrence, maximum war-fighting readiness.

The challenge of organisational change

There are challenges that come with any large-scale organisational change. Authorities and accountabilities are shifting, in a good way, but shifting nonetheless.

The portfolio system means some significant changes to how programmes are managed and delivered, where work gets done and where accountability sits. And with that, the challenge of supporting and helping people to take on those new responsibilities.

This can be quite hard in terms of what organisations across the MOD are taking on and letting go of. We have to manage this in a measured and adaptive way because this is complex, systemic change. Each move we make has knock-on impacts.

Conclusion

This change is fundamental to achieving the vision set out in the Strategic Defence Review, positioning the UK as a leading tech-enabled defence power with the capabilities it needs to counter rapidly evolving global threats.

Our success will depend on all of us embracing this new way of working and playing our part in delivering better outcomes for our armed forces and our nation.

All the challenges of change will be worth it, when we deliver a new purposeful portfolio system that enables us to respond dynamically to evolving threats and take advantage of opportunities of rapidly shifting defence and technology landscapes.

By focusing on integrated, outcome-driven delivery, we're becoming more agile and resilient, less burdened by duplication, and more confident and supported at the front-line of delivery.



INTRODUCING THE SME ZONE

NEW FOR DVD2026

Details of a new opportunity for SMEs will be announced soon, increasing opportunities for SMEs to put their ideas, innovations and products in front of MOD influencers and supporting industry collaboration.

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NEWS

Midlands business to build crucial UK-made naval anchors

Historic manufacturing and heritage skills strengthened as family business Solid Swivel is awarded the contract to forge anchors for the Royal Navy.

Skilled workers in the Midlands will forge and assemble some of the UK's largest naval anchors in over 70 years, reviving a key manufacturing capability and ending reliance on imported anchors.

Solid Swivel, a family-run business established in 1910 and the UK's last known anchor and chain manufacturer, has secured a multi-million-pound MOD contract to supply specialist anchors, chain cables and associated fittings.

The company will produce more than 30 anchors of various sizes and over 2,300 meters of anchor chains for Royal Navy vessels. This includes six of the biggest anchors the business has ever made for the Navy's largest warships, the Queen Elizabeth-class (QEC) aircraft carriers HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. The QEC anchors will each weigh over 12,500 kg, equivalent to a single-decker bus.

The MOD contracts placed at Solid Swivel support 14 jobs, including two new hires producing anchors and chain cable for other vessels, such as Type 45 destroyers and small boats.

Solid Swivel will work alongside two fellow Midlands businesses – family-run business Somers Forge and Goodwin Castings – to deliver the programme of work. By returning anchor production to the UK, the contract strengthens supply chain resilience, restores a sovereign capability and invests in the specialist skills needed for a modern, self-reliant Defence sector.

Michael John, DE&S Mechanical Systems Chief Engineer, said, "This partnership with Solid Swivel and their fellow Midlands manufacturers brings vital anchor-making capability back to Britain. Through this partnership, we're not just procuring anchors, we're investing in the specialist expertise and regional supply chains that underpin our long-term defence capability. These industrial commitments show what can be achieved when we collaborate closely and harness the strengths of British industry."

The contract demonstrates the Government's commitment to making Defence an engine for growth, using investment to strengthen British industry and create opportunities in communities across the country.

Forging of the QEC anchors will begin at Somers Forge in April, starting with the shank, before fluke components are produced at Goodwin Castings, and final assembly is completed at Solid Swivel. The entire manufacturing process will be overseen and certified by



maritime classification society Lloyd's Register.

David Kertai, Business Development Manager for Solid Swivel, said, "Solid Swivel are delighted to be the nominated supplier to the Royal Navy for anchors, chain cable and fittings. As the last manufacturer in the UK capable of making the entire anchoring package from the chain locker to the anchor, we are proud of the great manufacturing heritage within the business. With 115 years of experience in forging steel products, we are able to not only produce high-quality, safety critical components, but manufacture bespoke and specialised items to meet the fleet's requirements."

Plans for the retired anchors include responsibly rehoming, recycling or disposing of them as appropriate, and will be managed by the MOD's Defence Recycling and Disposals Team. Previous anchors have been displayed outside MOD sites, military establishments and military retirement homes, while others serve as permanent maritime monuments in cities across the country.

NEWS

New contract for medium-lift helicopters secures thousands of UK jobs

Leonardo UK will supply a fleet of helicopters, based on its AW149 platform. This secures skills and employment around Yeovil, and delivers an important capability for the UK's armed forces.



The MOD has signed a £1 billion contract with Leonardo UK to deliver 23 new medium-lift helicopters.

The New Medium Helicopter (NMH) programme secures thousands of jobs while bolstering the UK Armed Forces' battlefield capability and making the UK Leonardo's global centre for military helicopter production and exports.

This paves the way for future export orders to be built in the UK with an increased domestic workshare above 40 percent. International orders for NMH and Leonardo's other helicopters could generate over £15 billion in exports over the next decade.

Defence Secretary John Healey said, "This defence investment works for Britain on every level. It strengthens our armed forces, secures thousands of skilled British jobs and sets up big export opportunities. It is a major vote of confidence in British industry, British workers and British innovation. This Government's broad deal makes Yeovil the proud home of Leonardo's global military helicopter production, building world-class helicopters for our forces and allies around the world for many years to come."

The agreement secures the future of sovereign helicopter production and of Leonardo's facility in Yeovil, sustaining 3,300 jobs. This includes 650 people working directly on NMH, plus more involved with

autonomous systems and in providing ongoing support to the Merlin and Wildcat fleets. With a UK supply chain of nearly 70 companies, NMH will also support sovereign defence skills and expertise for decades to come.

Rupert Pearce, National Armaments Director, said, "In an increasingly volatile and unpredictable world, characterised by emerging threats and shifting geopolitical dynamics, the importance of a robust and agile defence industrial capability cannot be overstated to preserve operational advantage. I am therefore delighted by the news of the New Medium Helicopter approval and the deal brokered by the NAD Group with Leonardo.

"In addition to delivering a versatile and resilient military capability, this investment secures thousands of jobs while strengthening the UK's helicopter design, manufacturing and support base for decades to come, and enables a potential £15 billion of export opportunities over 10 years."

The NMH programme will meet multiple rotary wing requirements using a single aircraft-type and will be capable of supporting defence operations in all environments around the globe. It will be able to undertake defence tasks that were previously delivered by three different aircraft types, improving efficiency and operational flexibility, now and in the future.

Leonardo also plans to set up Yeovil as a future centre of excellence for autonomous helicopters. Proteus, which undertook its first flight at the end of January, has demonstrated it can conduct a range of missions including anti-submarine warfare.

The development of uncrewed and autonomous technology in the UK is at the heart of the Government's Defence Industrial Strategy and could offer the opportunity to make platforms such as NMH optionally crewed in future.

Nigel Colman, Managing Director of Helicopters UK, Leonardo said: "We welcome the decision to award the New Medium Helicopter contract to supply medium-lift helicopters to the Ministry of Defence, as well as the continued investment in Proteus – our autonomous rotary wing uncrewed air system in development with the Royal Navy.

"Leonardo is committed to providing the UK Armed Forces with a world-class medium-lift helicopter based on our leading AW149 platform, which will serve our military personnel for many years to come."

NEWS

£12 billion worth of DE&S contracts to adopt a strengthened cyber security model

Defending against evolving threats, and safeguarding national security and operational integrity requires a collaborative, whole-Defence effort. This is being delivered through the MOD's new Cyber Security Model.

In a boost to cyber security, DE&S is helping to deliver the MOD's new era of supply chain cyber resilience.

In 2012, a forward-thinking industry and government alliance was formed to respond to the upward trend in cyber threats from criminals, hackers, terrorists and foreign intelligence services. Coined the 'Defence Cyber Protection Partnership', by 2017 they had created a Cyber Security Model (CSM) and held regular forums to collaborate with the mutual goal of improving cyber resilience.

Over the years, this approach has continued to develop, keeping pace with the rapidly changing cyber landscape. In December 2025, the partnership launched version 4 of their CSM (CSM v4), which requires every DE&S supplier to conduct certain mandatory activities when working with the MOD.

Supply chain cyber-attacks now feature regularly in the news. In September, Jaguar Land Rover confirmed a prolonged production suspension following a ransomware attack, which led to significant financial losses. If such attacks can disrupt car manufacturers, the consequences of an attack on a defence supplier could be much more consequential than lost revenue.

CSM v4 reflects the MOD's commitment to working in partnership with industry to address evolving cyber threats and safeguard national security. By adopting and complying with CSM v4, suppliers are meeting defence requirements, actively safeguarding themselves and taking decisive steps to secure their supply chains.

The upgraded model introduces a new approach to cyber controls, setting specific requirements based on new risk profile levels:

- **Level 0 contracts** are assessed as having a low cyber risk. Suppliers must demonstrate basic cyber security practices, such as having Cyber Essentials certification.

- **Level 1 contracts** have a low-to-moderate cyber risk. Suppliers must demonstrate a comprehensive cyber security programme with examples of good practice.
- **Level 2 and 3 contracts** have a high level of assessed cyber risk. Suppliers must demonstrate advanced and expert cyber security oversight, planning and practices.

DE&S delivery teams will set the cyber risk profile level required for each contract by conducting a risk assessment. Suppliers will then have to demonstrate their compliance with the controls through a new online service.

Andy Brannigan, Chief Information Security Officer for DE&S, highlighted the critical role these new measures will play in safeguarding defence supply chains and mitigating cyber risks.

"The new Cyber Security controls introduce a stronger cyber security baseline to protect our defence supply chains against cyber-attacks. Ensuring our suppliers comply with CSM v4 is crucial to ensuring risks to defence information are identified and mitigated throughout the project lifecycle."

The MOD's CSM v4 represents a bold, and essential, step towards protecting operations, reputations and the future of the defence industry. It demonstrates UK Defence's commitment to leading the charge in prioritising cyber resilience, with a clear message that cyber security is not optional.

Its effectiveness hinges on the active participation of all involved. A supply chain's cyber security is only as strong as its weakest link. Thanks to the uplifted CSM v4, there is a system in place to assure that every link is now strong enough to meet current and future cyber threats.

NEWS



Dual Type 31 successes demonstrate strength of UK shipbuilding

The second and fourth Inspiration-class frigates celebrate important points in their manufacturing process, bringing both powerful warships a step closer to deployment.

In a milestone moment for the Royal Navy's Type 31 frigate programme, steel was cut on HMS Bulldog, while HMS Active emerged from its build hall on the same day.

The ceremonial cutting of steel for HMS Bulldog marked the start of construction on the fourth of five Inspiration-class frigates. Later in the evening, HMS Active – the second vessel in the class – rolled out of the purpose-built Venturer Building Assembly Hall on to a hardstand, marking its transition from construction to the fitting-out phase.

The powerful Type 31 warships are designed to deter aggression and maintain the security of the UK's interests around the world.

The Type 31 programme sustains 2,500 highly skilled jobs, with 1,250 people directly employed by Babcock at the Rosyth shipyard in Scotland and a further 1,250 across the UK supply chain.

Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry Luke Pollard said, "These milestones show Scottish shipbuilding at its best. From starting construction for HMS Bulldog to rolling out the impressive HMS Active, this programme is delivering world-class warships for the Royal Navy and real economic benefits

for communities across Scotland and the wider UK.

"The frigates will serve our nation for decades to come, and the skills and infrastructure we're building here will secure the future of Scottish shipbuilding for generations."

The programme continues to progress along a number of parallel tracks, with the first ship, HMS Venturer, having celebrated her float out from the assembly hall in mid-2025. More recently, the keel of HMS Formidable was laid in a ceremony at the end of last year. All five ships are scheduled to be in service by the early 2030s.

Steve Ranyard, DE&S Type 31 Team Leader, said, "We're pleased to reach this point in the programme as we deliver this next generation of frigates for the Royal Navy. These are two major milestones that the entire programme team can take pride in celebrating. This reflects the excellent collaboration between Babcock, DE&S and the Royal Navy."

The five frigates will operate out of Portsmouth Naval Base and will form a key element of the Royal Navy's surface fleet. The Inspiration-class is one of two replacing the Royal Navy's existing frigate force. It will perform general

duties around the globe – from maritime security operations, intelligence gathering and disaster relief to full-scale warfighting if required.

Commodore Stephen Roberts, Type 31 Programme Senior Responsible Owner, Royal Navy, said, "These advanced warships will provide the Royal Navy with a maritime security capability to deter aggression and protect our nation's interests, in home waters and across the globe, well into the future."

The Arrowhead 140 design, which Type 31 is based on, has secured international export success with sales to Poland and Indonesia, demonstrating how British design can create exportable intellectual property while strengthening partnerships with allies.

Babcock CEO David Lockwood added, "Delivering the steel cut for HMS Bulldog and the roll-out of HMS Active on the same day is a powerful demonstration of the drive and delivery focus of our Type 31 programme as we build the next modern, future-ready fleet for the Royal Navy. These milestones show the maturity of our facility, the success of the design and build process, and the skill and dedication of our Babcock team."

NEWS

New Suffolk drone factory opens to boost Ukraine's Armed Forces

Ukraine's armed forces will be able to better defend itself against brutal Russian attacks after one of the country's largest drone manufacturers opens a new factory in Suffolk.

Four years on from Russia's invasion, the UK's unwavering support for Ukraine continues with the opening of Ukrspesystems' new drone production facility in East Anglia.

In a vote of confidence for the UK, Ukrspesystems has chosen Mildenhall in Suffolk for its new drone factory, and nearby Elmsett for its testing and training facility. The company's £200 million investment will create up to 500 British jobs at the sites and through a UK supply chain.

Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry Luke Pollard said: "Our resolve to support Ukraine is stronger than ever, and we are backing Ukraine's defiant armed forces as they fight for peace.

"Ukrspesystems' new factory is a vote of confidence in UK support and underlines the deepening cooperation between our nations' defence industries. This investment will create up to 500 new jobs in the east of England, drive Defence as an engine for growth, and help Ukraine defend itself against Putin's aggression."

Ukrainian drone company Ukrspesystems was founded in 2014. It produces a wide variety of drones, including the PD-2 and SHARK-M surveillance models, which communicate autonomously with strike drones to identify, track and destroy Russian targets. The UK has previously ordered over 80 SHARK and Mini-SHARK drones from Ukrspesystems' factories in Ukraine.

Ukrspesystems' drones have contributed to almost \$3 billion of damage to Russian forces since the start of the full-scale invasion.

The factory was opened by Defence Minister Luke Pollard, reaffirming the UK's continued support for Ukraine. According to Ukrspesystems, when fully operational it will be capable of making up to 1,000 drones a month.

Separately the UK has started producing Octopus interceptor drones, aiming to ramp up to thousands per month, designed to take out Russian Shaheeds and other weapons at a fraction of the cost, part of the MOD's £4.5 billion military support package.

The news from Suffolk follows the announcement of a new business centre in Kyiv, which will enable the UK's defence industry and innovators to step up their work to equip Ukraine's armed forces.

Ukrainian Ambassador to the UK General Valerii Zaluzhnyi said: "This factory represents more than industrial cooperation – it is part of a new European security architecture built on shared responsibility



and shared production. Ukraine brings battlefield experience and innovation, and together with the United Kingdom we are strengthening the capabilities needed to deter aggression."

The UK's Defence Industrial Strategy is making it easier for defence business to operate in the UK, driving economic growth and bolstering the Government's support for Ukraine, in line with the Strategic Defence Review.

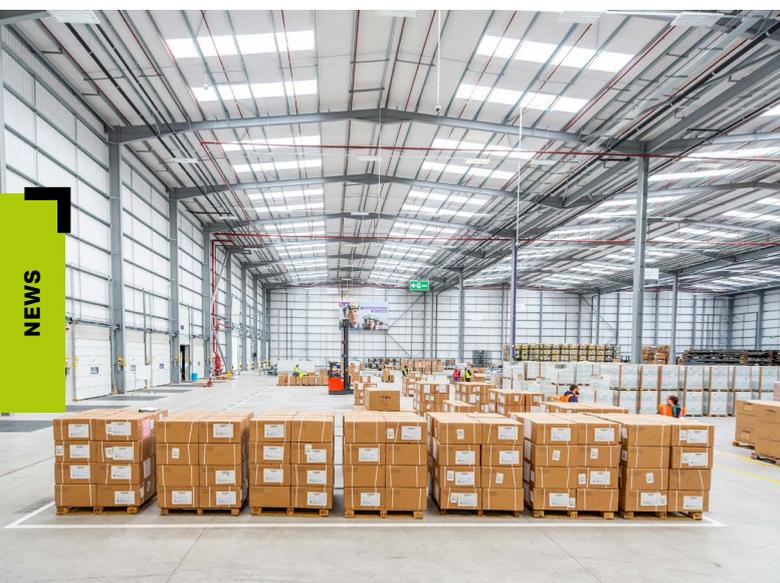
Director of Ukrspesystems UK Rory Chamberlain said: "Four years on from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, this factory delivers what matters: secure supply, secure resource and sustained support for Ukraine. By establishing production in the UK, Ukrspesystems are increasing the resilience of the UK's defence industrial base and providing a trusted supply chain, which ensures that the drones relied upon by the Ukrainian Armed Forces can be built and scaled without interruption.

"Delivered with UK and Ukrainian Government support and in partnership with British SMEs, this is 'Made with Ukraine' in action – embodying the UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership through real industrial capability, happening now in East Anglia."

NEWS

Final piece in place for defence support transformation

Thousands of defence logistics users to be provided with effective digital solution for warehousing, distribution and storage.



The MOD has awarded the third major contract within the Business Modernisation for Support (BMfS) programme.

The £113 million contract, to deliver Defence Logistics Information Services (DLIS), has been awarded to the Digital Allies consortium, made up of PA Consulting and Accenture. DLIS will provide UK Defence with modern, digitally enabled capabilities for warehousing, freight distribution and storage information services.

The award represents the final element of the BMfS programme's delivery structure. It follows a £320 million contract for a Defence Equipment Engineering and Asset Management System, and a £33 million contract for Foundational Services, the 'digital socket' that BMfS' new solutions will all plug into.

This means that BMfS now moves into its delivery phase, bringing the programme's intended outcomes – improved war-fighter readiness, better interoperability across UK Defence and with NATO, and enhanced national security – a step closer.

What will DLIS provide?

DLIS replaces 10 different heritage systems with a single, easy to use, digital solution. It will give defence logistics users an efficient and flexible capability, which adapts to operational needs. Users will benefit from streamlined processes for

managing inventory, munitions, warehousing and movements.

The Digital Allies consortium's software-based solution will provide defence-specific functionality designed to work effectively from implementation.

Rear Admiral Paul Murphy, Senior Responsible Owner for BMfS, said, "This is another major improvement in support to the front line. By replacing legacy standalone systems with a modern, evergreen, off-the-shelf system, DLIS will help thousands of users across multiple operational nodes, ensure the right materiel is in the right place at the right time."

Investment in UK industry

Together, the three BMfS contracts represent a significant investment in the UK defence industrial base. They will directly create around 170 skilled jobs in the UK, with the potential for hundreds more, while sustaining employment in the existing defence sector and strengthening supply chains.

Luke Pollard, Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry, said, "We are meeting this new era of threat by making our armed forces more lethal. This programme will boost our national security by transforming how we provide our sailors, soldiers and aviators with the kit they need when they need it, whether at home or overseas."

Delivering transformation

With all three contracts now in place, the National Armaments Director (NAD) Group can begin delivery in earnest. BMfS will transform defence logistics through more efficient systems and standardised business processes, delivering enhanced readiness and operational advantage alongside improved interoperability between UK Defence and NATO partners.

National Armaments Director Rupert Pearce said, "This contract marks a significant milestone in our mission to modernise UK Defence's logistics capabilities. By partnering with UK industry, we're not only delivering cutting-edge digital solutions for our armed forces, we're investing in British skills and innovation.

"The NAD Group is committed to building the industrial partnerships that will sustain our national security for decades to come, and this award demonstrates that commitment in action."

NEWS



A new era for maintenance insight, powered by AI

DE&S and the Royal Navy continue to develop Motherlode, a pioneering data tool enabling better informed decisions that boost the availability, reliability and safety of aircraft.

Re-launched in early March 2026, Motherlode version 3 is an AI-enabled version of the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm's maintenance analytics tool.

The new version, developed jointly by 1710 Naval Air Squadron and DE&S' Automation & AI team, provides squadron engineers, the Continuous Airworthiness Management Organisation team and delivery teams with near real-time access to assured maintenance data and predictive analytics.

Leveraging advanced data models, Motherlode identifies components at risk of failure, highlights environmental factors that are accelerating wear and pinpoints opportunities to safely extend maintenance intervals. By presenting this critical information in a clear format, Motherlode empowers users to make informed, data-driven decisions that enhance efficiency, optimise resource allocation and improve operational readiness across the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force.

At the heart of this innovation is the tool's embedded AI chatbot, which offers a user-friendly, concierge-like experience. By guiding users to answers in just a few questions, the chatbot breaks down data literacy barriers and significantly reduces the time required to gain actionable insights.

"The third version of Motherlode is a first-of-its-kind product for Defence, delivering truly transformational capabilities," said Steve Hodson, Head of DE&S Automation & AI. "By combining advanced analytics, Generative AI, and an extensive repository of platform and engineering data, it revolutionises platform management and maintenance by making critical insights readily accessible to the front line."

Since its first release in 2021, Motherlode has saved the Royal Navy over 7,500 annual workforce hours through changes to maintenance tasks and their frequency across selected rotary wing platforms. When rotary aviation forces complete more than a million maintenance hours each year, even small optimisation gains can produce significant savings. For example, a five percent reduction in scheduled effort gained through optimised maintenance schedules equates to tens of thousands of hours – equivalent to the workload of dozens of engineers being freed up for other duties.

The new version of the tool is anticipated to save even more time and resource as it rolls out across a further three aircraft types. Ultimately, this expansion of Motherlode facilitates greater engineering capacity, more efficient operations and improved asset availability.

"Motherlode is exactly what innovation at the core looks like," said Lt Cdr Samuel Budd, 1710 Naval Air Squadron. "We are giving maintainers the data, context and confidence they need to make rapid, informed decisions. It has the potential to improve aircraft availability, ease workforce pressure and strengthen our operational output across the Fleet Air Arm and wider Defence."

The re-launch of Motherlode exemplifies DE&S' commitment to fostering collaboration across Defence to deliver advanced analytics and AI capabilities at an enterprise level.

As DE&S continues to deliver transformative digital capabilities, it reaffirms its position as a leader of AI exploitation in Defence, ensuring that the UK Armed Forces remain at the forefront of operational capability.

NEWS

UK supporting military maintenance facilities in Ukraine

At sites around Ukraine, joint British and Ukrainian-run facilities are getting battle-damaged vehicles back to the front-line faster and providing high-skilled, well-paid jobs.

The UK supports four maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facilities in Ukraine, with a fifth planned.

Operated under MOD contracts by UK companies with British and Ukrainian workforces, these facilities repair armoured vehicles and equipment – including UK-gifted CVR-T, Husky and L119 light guns, all AS-90 heavy artillery vehicles donated by the UK, and former Soviet-era kit – returning them to Ukrainian forces faster.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the UK has been working to establish engineering sites in Ukraine, operated under MOD contracts by UK companies with skilled joint UK and Ukrainian workforces.

Locating these facilities in Ukraine ensures that armoured vehicles and equipment are repaired and returned quickly, bolstering their armed forces and providing high-skilled, well-paid jobs.

British engineers are on the ground in Ukraine, working side-by-side with Ukrainian counterparts to service and repair the vehicles. While visiting one of the sites recently, Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry Luke Pollard said:

“From the factory floor to the frontline, the UK is standing firm with Ukraine. Our pioneering facilities are helping keep Ukraine's defiant armed forces in the fight against Putin's brutal attacks, and British firms are boosting long-term industrial production in Ukraine and partnering with Ukrainian companies to benefit both our nations.

“While the world's attention is focused on conflict across the Middle East, the UK has not and will not forget Ukraine. Visits to Ukraine have always been deeply poignant for me. The UK

will never waver in our support for Ukraine and we are clear that Ukraine's security is Britain's security.”

As part of his visit, Defence Minister Pollard led the UK's seventh trade mission to Ukraine, the largest in the series, with over 80 delegates including representatives from Estonia, Finland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, and 55 companies. This number included a record 35 UK companies from primes to SMEs, offering a range of innovative solutions.

The Minister met with Ukrainian counterparts, as well as with UK and international partners' defence industry leaders. Discussions at the trade mission around inward investment and mobilising private capital will further strengthen the UK's ability to support Ukraine.

The UK and Ukraine signed an agreement for the latest project under Programme Lyra, the unique UK/Ukraine technology exchange agreed by the Prime Minister and President Zelenskyy in June 2025. This will see sophisticated UK electronic warfare technology combined with Ukrainian platforms to improve Ukraine's military capability.

Following the trade mission, the UK will move to a permanent presence to support UK industry in Ukraine. The trade missions have successfully deepened ties between British companies and their Ukrainian counterparts, securing contracts and helping build lasting sovereign production in Ukraine. That success has been underpinned by significant growth which will be supported in future by a new British Business Centre opening in Kyiv.

Since Russia's invasion in February 2022, the UK has committed over £21.8 billion for Ukraine, making the UK one of Ukraine's largest bilateral donors.



NEWS



£53 million contract awarded for cutting-edge artillery weapon systems

The new deal will ensure the British Army has a reliable, powerful Mobile Fires Platform, while creating UK jobs and supporting growth.

Increased lethality for the British Army has moved a step closer after a £53 million contract was awarded by OCCAR, on behalf of the British Army, to ARTEC GmbH for the long-lead production of 37 weapon systems for the Remote Controlled Howitzer (RCH) 155.

The announcement also marks a significant boost for the UK defence industry, with new investment into Rheinmetall's large calibre gun barrel manufacturing facility – also known as the Gun Hall – in Telford.

The RCH 155 is the Army's long-term Mobile Fires Platform (MFP), intended to replace the AS90 weapons systems gifted to Ukraine three years ago. The RCH 155 comprises two major components: the Boxer Drive Module and the Artillery Gun Module (AGM). The AGM, in turn, is made up of the turret and the 'weapon system'.

The contract specifically covers procurement of the weapon system (also known as the 'height adjustable mass'), comprising the barrel, muzzle brake, the breech, the recoil system and the trunnions (mounting points for attachment to the turret).

£30 million of the contract value will go towards supporting the development of Rheinmetall's Telford Gun Hall, which is expected to create around 100 highly skilled jobs within the facility, with further employment supported in the wider UK supply chain.

This investment will ensure operational independence for gun barrel production in the UK and establish long-term capability and surge capacity for large gun barrels at scale.

The announcement follows a £52 million contract signed in December for three RCH 155 Early Capability Demonstrator

vehicles for joint UK and German testing, and builds on the landmark Trinity House Agreement signed by the two countries in October 2024.

The Boxer-based RCH 155 can fire eight rounds per minute at targets up to 70 km away, depending on the type of ammunition. It can come into action within seconds, operate with just two crew members, and travel at speeds of up to 100 km/h – making it harder for adversaries to target.

Brigadier Toby Lambert, Army HQ Head of International, Industry and Prosperity, said, "This contract is really great news – not only for our soldiers, but for the UK's ever-increasing industrial base. It demonstrates a strengthening of our supply chains and delivers on our commitments made in the Trinity House Agreement with our close ally Germany.

"The second order impacts of this award are far-reaching; the creation of high-skilled jobs combined with the drive for continued innovation will undoubtedly stimulate further investment in Defence. This demonstrates another key step towards the Army's continual modernisation programme, preparing our soldiers for the future fight."

The Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation – commonly known by its French acronym OCCAR – is an international organisation, which delivers and sustains complex, cooperative defence equipment programmes. It manages 23 defence programmes across the land, sea, air and space domains on behalf of its members states. The UK is involved in four programmes: the A400m Atlas aircraft, the Boxer modular armoured vehicle, the Principal Anti-Air Missile System, and Maritime Mine Counter Measures.

FEATURE

Procurement Segmentation: A new approach to faster, smarter defence acquisition

Helen Bates, DE&S Senior Responsible Owner for the Procurement Segmentation and Accelerating Commercial Pathways, explains how a new model will help Defence move faster and deliver more effectively.



UK Defence is introducing a new 'segmented' approach, which streamlines how equipment is acquired for our armed forces.

This much-needed change follows the publication of the Strategic Defence Review and Defence Industrial Strategy last year. These highlighted that traditional procurement processes could be complex and slow, particularly for small, innovative suppliers looking to work with Defence.

Procurement segmentation introduces a clearer, more responsive and tailored approach that matches acquisition routes to the nature of the requirement. The aim is simple: improve pace, reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and enable delivery teams to make better, more confident decisions from the start of a project.

Developed collaboratively by the NAD Group's Commercial and Industry, Options and Commissioning and UK Defence Innovation teams, together with other stakeholders from across Defence, the

new model introduces three segments, each designed around capability complexity, market readiness and delivery risk:

- Major modular platforms: For large, complex assets, including ships, aircraft and armoured vehicles, being delivered across Defence, the ambition is to reduce the average time to contract (from the point of commissioning) from six years to two.
- Modular upgrades: Covering upgrades to existing platforms, such as sensors, weapons, communications and mission systems. This targets a reduction in average time to contract from three years to one.
- Rapid commercial exploitation: For emerging technologies, like uncrewed systems, software and digital tools, the aim is to operate with rapid, three-month acquisition cycles.

Several programmes run by the NAD Group have already adopted the principles that we will promote through the new segmented acquisition model to accelerate capability delivery.

A £316 million contract with MBDA to develop the DragonFire laser directed energy weapon was procured through an agile commercial approach, for example. The first system will be fitted to a Type 45 destroyer from next year, five years faster than originally forecast.

An urgent hypersonic missile requirement was met through a dynamic framework and delivered in just five months, which included Cabinet Office approvals. The approach built a diverse supplier ecosystem of 124 companies, over half of which are small and medium-sized enterprises.

As part of Project ASGARD, a working product for soldier training was delivered in only three months, enabled by flexible contracting and digital-first commercial methods.

These examples demonstrate how determined the MOD is to reduce the time it takes to get to contract award, which is one of the key outcomes that procurement segmentation aims to deliver.

Such progress marks a significant shift in how we think about acquisition. It brings clarity, improves pace and ensures Defence is better positioned to access the innovative solutions we need for the future.

For external and industry partners, DPRTE on 25 and 26 March will be an opportunity to find out more from the NAD Group about procurement segmentation.

NEWS

News highlights

6 Medical Regiment medics receive and treat simulated casualties on the ground during Exercise Orion.

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

UKDI seeks innovations for blood testing in the field

Personnel injured in conflict rely on the timely provision of suitable blood. Early transfusion with compatible blood, screened for blood borne viruses to ensure safety, is a matter of life or death.

Where a lack of specialist personnel and formalised testing means a recipient's blood group cannot be reliably established, universal blood types are used, but these are often in short supply.

The availability of logistically light, rapid, accurate blood tests, which can be used in a deployed environment, would maximise available stock and help save lives on operations.

Addressing this, UK Defence Innovation – part of the National Armaments Director Group – has launched a new competition, seeking innovative solutions for blood collection and testing devices that are suitable for point-of-care use by non-specialists in operational environments.

The Themed Competition, which has up to £3 million funding available, is called Rapid transfusion diagnostics: Optimising safety on deployed operations, and is being run on behalf of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and the Defence Medical Services.

Innovative solutions to boost munitions outload capability

Trials hosted at Defence Munitions Kineton, the largest munitions depot in Western Europe, have shown how low-cost, innovative solutions can strengthen the UK's warfighting readiness and resilience.

Programme Outload includes three pioneering projects focused on modernising processes to ensure the rapid and efficient movement of munitions:

- SAGE tested the use of satellite communications, 4G and Wi-Fi in places where digital signals are normally restricted, such as explosives warehouses. By enabling real time stock visibility, it could change how Defence records, manages and moves munitions.
- PAXO looked at ways to pack munitions more efficiently. It tested new tools and methods to speed up loading munitions into shipping containers, making the process faster, safer and less labour-intensive.

- ONION reviewed how munitions are currently handled and stored, and the policies governing this. It identified barriers to innovation within Defence Munitions sites, both during routine operations and when Defence needs to scale up during conflict.

The trial findings show that Defence can make significant improvements to munitions outload processes without major investment. Recommendations have been shared with senior leaders and work is underway to consider expanding the projects across Defence Munitions sites.

Wales becomes UK launchpad for next-gen autonomous technology

Thousands of skilled workers in Wales will be involved in the design, testing and manufacture of innovative technologies, as a landmark deal positions the nation at the forefront of the UK's defence future.

Defence Secretary John Healey, Wales First Minister Eluned Morgan and Secretary of State for Wales Jo Stevens signed the £50 million Wales Defence Growth Deal, which will maximise Wales as a UK launchpad for autonomous technology and uncrewed systems, such as for use in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and one-way drones.

The deal will widen access to MOD test ranges across Wales, including at MOD Aberporth. Working with the Civil Aviation Authority and its military counterpart, air corridors across central Wales will also be expanded to enable testing of uncrewed aerial systems.

Additionally, it will be made easier for Welsh small and medium-sized businesses to gain greater direct access to secure defence contracts by ensuring they have the proper clearances and access, creating a level playing field with major defence companies and unlocking homegrown talent.

PEOPLE

Catherine Smith

Job title: Senior Logistics Operations Manager

What does your role involve?

I oversee logistics across all Defence Munitions sites, ensuring the UK's Armed Forces receive the critical ammunition they need, wherever and whenever required. My role involves balancing immediate operational demands with strategic planning, managing compliance, transport coordination, material accounting and fostering collaboration across Defence to maintain agile supply chains. At its core, it's about leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, anticipating challenges and making decisions under pressure.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

I value the dynamic nature and purpose of my role, where no two days are the same, and every task directly supports the operational effectiveness of our armed forces. Knowing our work impacts real-world operations is incredibly rewarding. I also appreciate working alongside talented, dedicated colleagues whose expertise, commitment and humour create a strong sense of teamwork and shared purpose, even in high-pressure situations.

What is your greatest accomplishment to date?

I am proud to have led major ammunition movements, including efforts supporting Ukraine, which earned me the Resolute Spirit Award at the Women in Defence Awards 2025 and an invitation to 10 Downing Street. Balancing a demanding career and motherhood, and overcoming health challenges after a medical discharge from the RAF, has been a journey of resilience and growth that has shaped who I am today.

What keeps you energised about working at DE&S?

The profound sense of purpose at DE&S is what keeps me energised. Knowing that our work directly contributes to the safety, capability and effectiveness of those who serve our country fosters a deep sense of pride and motivation. It's incredibly inspiring to be part of an organisation where collaboration, innovation and resilience are essential to success. Working alongside talented and dedicated colleagues to tackle complex challenges and deliver meaningful results is what drives me every day.

Who or what has shaped who you are?

My time in the RAF had a huge influence on who I am today. The challenges I experienced during my service career, including operational deployments and leadership under pressure, taught me resilience, adaptability and the importance of teamwork. Those lessons continue to shape how I lead and approach challenges today.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I enjoy spending time with my family, being around horses and getting creative. I love tending to my roses and crafting, whether it's sewing, knitting or modelling with polymer clay. My daughters often join in too; my eldest learned to sew at seven so our home is usually filled with half-finished projects and plenty of good intentions.

What might surprise people about you?

During my military career, I volunteered as a community first responder. I trained as an emergency care technician and also spent time volunteering at a riding school, helping children who might not otherwise have the chance to experience equestrian activities and the therapeutic benefits of working with animals.

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

"Focus on what you can control." In high-pressure operational environments, uncertainty is inevitable. By focusing on what you can influence, you can remain grounded, resilient and forward thinking. "Femininity is a strength, not a weakness." Embracing femininity as a strength is a powerful reminder that authenticity and individuality are assets, not limitations, in any professional setting.





A member of the UK Commando Force on board an inflatable landing craft takes the brunt of a wave in Norway.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Cover photo:

A member of the Solid Swivel team making 38mm chain cable for a Type 23 frigate. The operator is stood in front of a flash butt welder, which welds the two ends of the link together.

Editorial team:

Jonathan Mazliah
Sophie Clist

Design and Photography:

Mark Hawke, Andy Wilkins, Claire McClelland, Jack Eckersley, Geraint Vaughan and Charlie Perham

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