

News story: DASA Download: Achieving exploitation from innovation

Innovation Buzz

To achieve the UK's vision to maintain its strategic advantage through the most innovative defence and security capabilities in the world, the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) works collaboratively with government, industry and academia to identify requirements and bring together the right people to develop workable solutions rapidly. We also support implementation of innovation into the hands of end users. This positive cultural shift within the defence and security sectors to embrace and catalyse innovation has created new funding streams, for instance the Defence Transformation Fund, and programmes such as the Spearhead Initiative. And, likewise in the Security sector, new innovation funding streams are being launched to stimulate innovation activity. For example, the Department for Transport (DfT) recently introduced a number of new Innovation Focus Areas with DASA to provide an uplift in capability available to transport operators.

Blurring lines

Current and future threats facing the UK and our allies are such that the lines of responsibility are blurring between Defence and Security requiring a cohesive working approach across the sectors. Indeed, the National Security and Capability Review recently highlighted the imperatives of working across government through the Fusion Doctrine to maximise the collective effect of the UK's national security capabilities.

Critical Capability

At DASA, our mission is to drive innovation in the Defence and Security ecosystem, and we, the exploitation team, have a core role to play to ensure that the innovative concepts funded through DASA are best placed for successful implementation.

As a service provider, we provide the Government with a critical capability to reach out to our networks and to find and fund some of the UK's brightest ideas. Aligned to this, DASA helps our innovators to transfer their innovation across the defence and security landscape, cross-fertilising capabilities and helping them to understand how to access the marketplace.

To support our innovators we provide advice, liaising and leveraging our networks to ensure that innovators are best placed to maximise the potential from government investment. However, achieving the adoption and uptake of the majority of novel ideas requires significant input and support from across the defence and security environment, hence the importance of our work to mobilise the ecosystem.

Fingers on the pulse

DASA is at the forefront of policy and operational response; we react quickly to requests to harness private sector capability to counter threats facing the UK. We are aware of the diverse challenges facing the defence and security sectors. We endeavour to understand priority areas for capability development, in addition to the barriers which may impact innovators from accessing the defence and security marketplace. And, we are keen to capitalise on our knowledge in these areas by encouraging relationships within the defence and security ecosystems. The planned appointment of embedded DASA staff in Front Line Commands will continue to improve our understanding and support of our cross defence colleagues.

Most recently, in the Security sector, we've been doing our bit to find and fund innovation that could potentially detect knives, collaborating with the Home Office in their campaign to tackle knife crime.

DASA's 'Improving Crowd Resilience' Programme was established in collaboration with the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) in the Home Office, as a direct response to the 2017 terror attacks, intending to accelerate crowd safety innovations and technologies. We were delighted when one of our suppliers, Krowdthink, achieved a customer contract in early 2019, just two months after concluding their DASA funded work. The Krowd App, which enables security teams and the public to instantly communicate, is now being used for the first time at the Broadgate Quarter in London.

In the Defence sector, we manage an international programme, known as 'Don't Blow It', that brings together experts around the world within the field of chemical and biological weapon disposal. DASA collaborates with overseas partners where there is a need to tackle common problems.

Increasing innovation agility in Defence

As reflected in the Modernising Defence Programme, the character of warfare is changing, requiring us to be more agile in the way we adopt innovation. In response, the Defence Innovation Unit, which manages the Defence Innovation Fund has determined that this funding should be used to accelerate the adoption of innovation, with the aim to achieve a user demonstration within 3 years. To make this happen, it is essential that the defence eco-system builds the connectivity that can underpin the innovation supply chain with all players being engaged and incentivised, as everyone has a role to play. Changing behaviours and new ways of working are always complex, but DASA is leaning into the challenge, working directly with partners across defence and security to start bringing exploitation to the fore.

EasiBridge, a DASA funded micro SME, is a pan-defence innovation success story. DASA embedded the exploitation process from the initial funding point in Summer 2018, engaging the Army in trials and keeping the end user in mind throughout the project. In Spring 2019, EasiBridge gained their first military order from the Army Rapid Innovation and Experimentation Laboratory (ARIEL) to deliver innovative bridging equipment to The Royal Engineers for further testing.

Stimulating the security market

The security sector is a complex and fragmented market which poses its own challenges to innovators trying to navigate their way to the right stakeholders. DASA has worked closely with private sector operators to ensure that funds from OSCT and DfT which aim to enhance the security of airports and crowded places deliver a step-change in capability.

Whilst defence funding seeks to implement novel capability directly within the defence supply chain, OSCT and DfT funds, to date, have aimed to stimulate the market place. Innovators have been prompted to bring forward novel capability for private sector operators, such as airports or those responsible for securing crowded places, to consider adopting these solutions.

Exploitation – our priority

We are realistic in acknowledging that despite exploitability being a key funding criteria, not everything we fund will make it through to the hands of the end user. However, even the unsuccessful ones can have great value to both Government and the supplier, helping develop understanding about what hasn't worked and why. Some competitions set out to simply inform the research programme; we know that their journey to a business ready solution may be a long one. DASA is here to help the innovation process be more successful, but we must also be prepared to fail; we must try new things, test things, and engage the end-user community at all stages of a programme to realise the value proposition. If it doesn't work, the time hasn't been wasted – we've learnt something and can use this to look for a better, more suitable solution. And, who knows, that innovation could be suited to another important task or find value in markets outside defence and security.

In recognition of the challenges that SME suppliers face in the development of their innovation post DASA funding, we are developing new services that will support our suppliers' knowledge. We want to help them to understand the options for funding from other sources of funding. This access to finance service will also include mentoring, to help the supplier ensure that their novel capability is underpinned by a business that is able to scale-up. This will enable defence and security to access innovation that is delivered by sustainable businesses. DASA can only go so far to ensure the successful uptake of innovation. We can help to accelerate the adoption of innovation, but we do not do it alone. We are part of a much larger innovation ecosystem, but we are doing our best to oil the cogs in that system.

There is a buzz of activity in innovation across government, but we must not let that buzz create a flurry of activity that has no substance. We all have a part to play to ensure that the best solutions are harnessed and we must also ensure that innovations and ideas are funded, tested, nurtured and integrated quickly for the better good of defence, security and UK prosperity.