

[DASA Download: Supporting Innovation in small businesses](#)

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) not only finds and funds UK innovators, but also helps businesses to grow and develop, giving them access to networks of expertise and providing them with technical support. To date, over 50 per cent of our funding has gone to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Alan Scrase, our newly appointed 'Access to Mentoring and Finance' (A2MF) specialist is leading a new DASA service in which we offer potential and existing suppliers access and signposting to a range of business support, guidance and finance. Here, in the latest 'DASA Download', Alan discusses the value he is adding at DASA.

Innovation Journey

I support businesses on their innovation journey, advising them how to achieve a greater commercial impact from their ideas. I often find that some of the most innovative of concepts are lost along the way due to a lack of finance, management skills, impetus, or even effective communication. As a former contender on Dragon's Den, yes really, I know that the lack of any of these areas could simply be down to not having enough hours in the day. However, it could also be that it isn't clear to the innovator where to turn to next to mature their idea and organisation.

Breaking into and sustaining a presence in the Government's defence and security sectors adds its own complexities, but the opportunity for innovating can be endless. Significant steps have been taken to improve accessibility for business into these sectors, the creation of DASA for example. In the financial year 2018/19, DASA funded 226 proposals, with approximately 40 per cent of proposals being 'new to DASA' organisations demonstrating how DASA is reaching out to non-traditional suppliers to find the best ideas. Innovation is vital in defence and security to provide solutions to counter the increasingly technical threats from our adversaries. The government realises that solutions cannot always be found 'in-house' and that by supporting small and medium-sized businesses to bring new ideas to market more quickly could help the UK to stay one step ahead of emerging threats.

DASA connects these businesses to frontline services such as the armed forces and police, as well as aviation security, transport security, and counter-terrorism. Such access has allowed innovations to be tested in real life situations, rapidly accelerating the innovation process.

Supporting Business

Innovation hubs have sprung up across government and I believe this is an opportunity for small and medium sized businesses. The increased availability

of funding is also a positive. However, there is still a lack of knowledge across businesses as to how to harness the wide range of funding and support and how to create a sustainable business to become a long term, valued government supplier. And, that is where I come in.

I want to influence our networks and stimulate a more business savvy atmosphere within the innovation ecosystem. I am going to do this by getting out and about, I'm going to be at DASA's launch events, demonstration days and I'm meeting our stakeholders. I am also chatting to decision makers and policy players to ensure we have wider buy-in.

I am currently touring the UK discovering first-hand the challenges that face our current and potential suppliers. I am also spending time with our Innovation Partners, our talent scouts, working with them to share my more general A2MF knowledge across their networks. We have 12 regionally based Innovation Partners who are embedded in their local networks and who are liaising daily with their contacts to gauge and scope the market for suitable solutions. I will be providing our Innovation Partners with extra business nous and experience to advise their contacts.

Benefit to Government

When meeting businesses, what I am interested in is how they present themselves in terms of their value proposition and how this can be translated into a benefit for government and wider customers. I want to help organisations to grow in terms of confidence and maturity; many of them may just need a little advice on raising investment, recruiting key staff, trading laws or export guidance. This knowledge can be particular to the defence and security sectors, such as the International Arms Trade or the Five Eyes agreement. Some small businesses that are funded by DASA are unaware, for example, that they qualify for 'Research and Development Tax Credits' which can easily be claimed against the funding they receive. This is effectively 'cash back' to the company, worth up to 232% of the initial investment.

Nurturing people with ideas

DASA delivers a daily 'wow' experience, where I learn of the most amazing innovations, teams and businesses. To enable impact from such innovation – all the way along the supply chain – we need to nurture these businesses to ensure that innovation creates a wave effect on defence and security capability development.

My priority for the coming months will be to take the time to understand our suppliers and invest in them in terms of finance, management, and support.

For all queries about DASA, contact us via our email:
accelerator@dstl.gov.uk.

About Alan

Prior to joining DASA, Alan was the Business Incubation Centre Manager at

SETsquared at the University of Southampton where he supported and guided members to secure over £7m of grant and equity funding over six years. Alan has worked with senior Innovate UK and HEFCE staff and was responsible for conceiving and managing the award winning Innovation to Commercialisation of University Research (ICURe) programme. Alan has also run his own stereoscopic imaging business knowing first-hand the complexities of running your own business. Alan has been closely associated with a wide range of regional and economic development projects and programmes and will use this experience and knowledge to help DASA support its suppliers.