

News story: DASA Download – Celebrating DASA's 2nd Anniversary

Welcome to DASA's new official blog. We at DASA – the Defence and Security Accelerator – are passionate about innovating and doing things differently: disrupting, experimenting and challenging. Our mission is to find and fund exploitable innovations to support UK defence and security quickly and effectively, and support UK prosperity. And in our short existence, we have achieved an amazing amount and built a fantastic team. Our ability to work at pace is vital to keeping people safe.

DASA was launched two years ago in December 2016. A lot has changed since then. An entire ecosystem has been built across defence and security to innovate, ranging from identifying and exploring new and emerging technologies, investing in innovative ideas and concepts, through to testing, demonstrating, piloting, and adopting new ideas rapidly. Many more people than ever before – in Government, industry and academia – are spending their time on innovation activities for the benefit of defence and security, using their skills and experience at all levels to make things work better. What I find most exciting is how much energy there is now across the different parts of that ecosystem, how many engaged people, how much diversity of thought and backgrounds. I often say we should 'let a thousand flowers bloom', and I'm delighted to have watched a whole meadow grow. The UK is now well placed to exploit rapidly the very best ideas, products and services.

DASA is here to help. We have expanded the range of activities and areas we work in, taking on commissions from frontline services such as the Police, Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force, as well as aviation security, transport security, and counter-terrorism. We have run events, workshops, market exploration calls, themed calls, and our open call, taking in a mind-boggling range of proposals such as: a ladder invention, by Easibridge, that is easily adjustable and man-portable using short-section ladders as building-blocks to construct a quick and easy assault bridge or gap crossing... we funded this one; and a project that will investigate the feasibility of using whiskers to improve underwater navigation... we funded this one too!

We have helped UK businesses to grow and prosper. Pete Webb, Managing Director at Montvieux recently told us that,

We've expanded our workforce by 30 per cent since we've been engaging with DASA. Whilst that isn't entirely down to DASA sponsored projects, it is definitely down to our increasing (and broadening) expertise in AI, which DASA has helped generate. But moreover it's down to the confidence that DASA has given us to think about partnerships and technology in a different way – which our customer base have really appreciated and positively responded to.

We've invested over £42m to date, in 278 projects in both the defence and security sectors. To give a further idea of the diversity across these sectors, we've invested in one project that is focussing on 'human-machine teaming' and 'deep learning' to enable military commanders to quickly interpret big data sets for more informed decisions. And, another project, which is investigating electromagnetic imaging techniques for automated imagery analysis, ensuring that the UK has the latest capabilities to efficiently detect security threats.

We give businesses and academics access to the best technical expertise and experienced frontline officers to help develop their idea and iron out any flaws early on. We have built our networks, engaging widely across the UK and internationally via our team of Innovation Partners. We have talked to many hundreds of innovators, small businesses, academics, entrepreneurs and industry, encouraging them to better understand the challenges facing the UK in defence and security, and to see how they can help us to maintain strategic advantage.

As I said, I think we have made a very good start. But there is much more to do. In DASA, we will be seeking to expand our networks further, to develop new partnerships with others who can help us and amplify our impact. We need to engage with an even more diverse group of people – including those not yet working in defence and security – and benefit from their insights and challenges. And we need to help to break down the barriers to innovation that exists, to change the culture even more widely and to infect others with our enthusiasm for innovation. I'm excited to see what the future will hold.