

Innovation call for urban drone technology

News story

The Ministry of Defence is seeking new ways to assist military drone operators in urban environments in a new funding competition.



The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) and Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) are seeking innovative and novel solutions to assist military drone operators to improve usability in challenging and complex urban operations.

This cross-departmental requirement between DASA and DE&S is designed for the rapid exploitation of technology and is the first of its kind.

Up to £900,000 is available for successful proposals that can help the Ministry of Defence overcome three challenges.

The first challenge is the development of an optimised Unmanned Air System suitable for use in urban environments.

The second challenge is to develop a human-controlled lethal payload that could integrate with a platform outlined in the first challenge.

The third challenge is to demonstrate a full Unmanned Air System with an integrated payload, bringing together the separate elements of challenges 1 and 2.

We are looking for ideas that reduce the mental strain on operators and to improve performance – but solutions must ensure that they remain under full human control at all times.

It is envisaged that these innovations could in future contribute to a new capability that can remove service personnel and military dogs from complex and dangerous urban warfare situations where their lives are put at significant risk.

This competition will be run using a framework agreement. To be considered

for inclusion on the framework, suppliers must first complete the compulsory Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) and Cyber Risk Assessment, by Thursday 15 October at midday BST.

Full details can be found in the [competition document](#).

Published 15 September 2020

British Airways doubles up in Pakistan – announcing direct flights from Lahore to London Heathrow

The ‘City of Gardens’, Lahore is known for its rich culture and will be the second city in Pakistan that British Airways will connect to London, US and Canada. The airline already flies every single day from Islamabad, connecting friends and family as well as business contacts.

Flights will be operated by a Boeing 787-8 departing from Heathrow Terminal 5, landing into Lahore’s International Airport.

British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Dr Christian Turner said:

The first ever British Airways flights to Lahore is a sign of confidence in Pakistan, and the deepening ties between our two countries. I hope it will open up even more opportunities for business links, people-to-people ties and tourism.

Moran Birger, Head of Sales for The Middle East and Asia Pacific, said:

We are delighted to start direct flights four times a week from Lahore to London offering convenient travel options for customers flying for leisure or business.

Our new services from Lahore will connect two of Pakistan’s biggest cities with London, and offer seamless transfer options to Manchester, the United States and Canada.

Following the relaunch of services from Islamabad to Heathrow earlier this year, this new flight from Lahore represents our continued investment in Pakistan, and we look forward to welcoming our customers on board.

Return fares from Pakistan if booked on ba.com start from \$657 in World Traveller, \$998 for World Traveller Plus, and \$1806 for Club World.

In response to Covid-19, British Airways has introduced a range of measures to keep its customers safe. Prior to travel, they will receive information on changes at their airport and onboard experience and tips on how to prepare for their journey. Customers will also be asked to help manage the wellness of everyone travelling by:

- Checking-in online, downloading their boarding pass and where possible self-scanning their boarding passes at the departure gate.
- Observing social distancing and using hand sanitisers that are placed throughout airports.
- Using new contactless, automated features at our lounges, including a new online food and drink service.
- Wearing a facemask at all times and bringing enough to replace them every four hours for longer flights.
- Ensuring they have everything they need from their hand luggage before departure, and where possible, storing their carry-on bag under the seat in front of them.
- Not travelling if they think they have any symptoms of Covid-19.

On board, all cabin crew will wear PPE and a new food service has been introduced which reduces the number of interactions required with customers. Surfaces including seats, screens, seat buckles and tray tables will be cleaned after every flight and each aircraft is completely cleaned from nose to tail every day.

The air on all British Airways flights is fully recycled once every two to three minutes through HEPA filters, which remove microscopic bacteria and virus clusters with over 99.9% efficiency, equivalent to hospital operating theatre standards.

Notes to editors

The flight schedule is as below:

Flight number	Frequency	Departure airport	Departure time	Arrival airport	Arrival time
BA 259	1.3.5.7	LHE	17:55 LT	LHR	05:40 LT
BA 258	12.4.6	LHE	08:00 LT	LHR	12:55 LT

[UN Human Rights Council 45: statement on behalf of the Sri Lanka Core Group](#)

Thank you Madam President.

This statement is on behalf of Canada, Germany, North Macedonia, Montenegro and the UK, the Core Group on Sri Lanka.

We note the High Commissioner's concerns on Sri Lanka in her update.

The Core Group pays tribute to the people of Sri Lanka and to all those involved in delivering safe and peaceful Parliamentary elections, despite the challenges of Covid-19.

Next March, the Council will consider an important report by the High Commissioner, on human rights, reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. Specifically, it will consider the steps taken to implement resolution 30/1, through which, in 2015, the Council created a consensual framework to help Sri Lanka heal the wounds of its past and to address unresolved serious violations and abuses documented by the High Commissioner. This framework was renewed twice by this Council by consensus and with the explicit support of Sri Lanka.

The Government of Sri Lanka has been clear to this Council that it no longer supports resolution 30/1. The Core Group, once again, reiterates its profound disappointment at this development.

The Sri Lankan Government has also stated its continuing commitment to fostering reconciliation, justice and peaceful coexistence among Sri Lanka's diverse communities. It has suggested that a new domestic process will take this agenda forward. While we appreciate this continued commitment, previous such processes have, regrettably, proved insufficient to tackle impunity and deliver real reconciliation. This Council will want to pay particular attention to how the new approach, will differ from these previous attempts and put the victims of conflict at its heart. The future of the Independent Commissions including the Office for Missing Persons and Office for Reparations will be particularly important.

In the meantime we continue to hear concerns about an increasingly difficult operating environment for civil society and human rights groups in Sri Lanka. Instances of intimidation, harassment and surveillance continue, including threats to families of disappeared persons. Individuals are detained indefinitely without appearance before court, such as lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah.

Sri Lanka's dynamic and diverse civil society lies at the heart of its vibrant democracy. The Core Group expresses its strong solidarity with Sri Lanka's civil society, and human rights defenders, and calls on the government to take all steps necessary to allow them to operate freely.

Thank you.

Delivering payments and keeping students safe online

News story

The second in a series of blogs as the Student Loans Company continues to make Maintenance Loan payments to students. A blog by Derek Ross Executive Director, Operations



Since the start of the pandemic we at SLC have been working hard to support new and returning students with their student finance applications. This week, large numbers of students have registered on their courses and learning is underway. This will be a great relief to many, and I am delighted that we have supported a further 143,000 students with maintenance loan payments of approximately £323 million this week.

We continue to do everything we can to ensure that as many students as possible receive their maintenance loan at the start of term. To help us to process any outstanding applications as quickly as possible we ask that:

- Any evidence we may have requested from you to support an application is submitted immediately via the [online account](#).
- We are immediately notified of any changes to the course being studied, or the university or college being attended via the [online account](#).
- Students access their [online account](#) to check their payment status or visit our [Frequently Asked Questions](#). Our contact centres are extremely busy at present, especially on a Monday, so try a quieter time if you can't find the information you are looking for online.

Some students, who applied after the finance deadline, may not immediately receive their full entitlement. In these cases, a basic funding package is made available to those that are eligible with a top-up payment made as soon as their full application is processed.

As students return to study, we are also urging them to watch out for phishing e-mails and text messages. Just as students and their learning institutions know that payments are arriving into students' bank accounts, so

too do the online scammers who want to intercept and steal those payments. The easiest way for a student to become a victim is by falling for a phishing email or text that allows scammers to access their personal, financial and account information in order to steal or reroute a payment.

There are a few important tips that students can follow to help them identify a phishing scam:

- Phishing emails are often sent in bulk and are unlikely to contain both your first and last name; they commonly start, 'Dear Student' so be on guard if you see one like this.
- Check the quality of the communication – misspelling, poor punctuation and bad grammar are often tell-tale signs of phishing.
- Look out for messages that are designed to convey a sense of urgency to prompt a quick response, such as 'Failure to respond in 24 hours will result in your account being closed'
- Think before you click. If you receive an email or SMS that contains a link that you're not sure of then try hovering over to check that it goes where it's supposed to. If you're still in any doubt don't risk it, always go direct to the source rather than clicking on a potentially dangerous link.

We also urge students to be suspicious of any requests for personal information. SLC, Student Finance England (SFE) or Student Finance Wales (SFW) will never ask students to confirm login information or personal information by email or text message.

For more information on how to spot a phishing scam, students can visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/phishing-scams-how-you-can-avoid-them>.

[phishing video](#)

And please, if you receive a suspicious Student Finance e-mail or SMS, don't click on the link and send it to phishing@slc.co.uk.

Published 15 September 2020

[Circular 008/2018: Criminal Finances Act: extending the moratorium period for suspicious activity reports](#)

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