WELCOME, OBJECTIVES AND HOW TO USE
THE WORKSHOP

UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC
R&D FUNDING LANDSCAPE

ASSESSING FUNDING FIT

BREAK (10 MINUTES)

HOW FUNDERS ASSESS APPLICATIONS

PRINCIPLES OF STRONG DRAFTING

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND APPLYING THE
PRINCIPLES GOING FORWARD

IN-PERSON LIGHT LUNCH & NETWORKING

INTRODUCTION: Welcome to the Workshop

Kevin Brooks, Bid & Innovation Strategy Specialist

- **£51M (USD70M / Eu58.8) in competitive funding secured** over the past 7 years (including DASA funding).

- **30+ years of international experience** in bid writing, assessment, and innovation strategy.

- Former UK Government HEO - worked on multi-million-pound Treasury and innovation funding programmes.

- Qualified **Senior Project & Programme Manager**, experienced in multi-partner delivery and evaluation.

- **Clients have included:**

- SETsquared Partnership

- NHS: Health Innovation Wessex/Network

- Innovate UK

- Dorset LEP (Bid Writing Support Service)

- NHS Innovation Accelerator

- Industry commissions across UK, EU & USA.

- Regular **trainer, mentor, and bid assessor**, providing strategy and authoring support to public and private sector innovators.

Principles for Identifying Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Welcome and Introductions

This workshop is designed for defence SMEs and scale-ups working in research, development and innovation who want to engage more effectively with public R&D funding.

Participants will be coming from a range of organisational contexts, including companies working directly in defence markets, organisations operating in dual-use environments, and those developing civil technologies with potential defence or security relevance. The workshop recognises that innovation in defence rarely sits neatly within a single category, and that organisations often move between civil, dual-use and defence contexts over time.

The session is delivered in a lecture-led format, supported by structured question-and-answer pitstops. This approach allows complex funding concepts to be introduced clearly and consistently, while still creating space for clarification and reflection. Participants are encouraged to engage actively with the material, but also to recognise that the purpose of the session is to build understanding and judgement, rather than to solve individual bid challenges in real time.

<u>This presentation has been designed as a workbook to be useful post-course</u>.

Principles for Identifying
Funding Fit and Drafting
Strong R&D Applications

Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of this workshop is to build confidence and capability in engaging with competitive public R&D funding.

It focuses on helping participants **understand how public funding schemes are designed, why they exist, and how they operate in practice.** This includes understanding how competition documentation is written, how assessment criteria are framed, and how funding decisions are made.

A central objective of the workshop is to strengthen participants' ability to **assess funding fit before committing time** and resource to bid development. In defence and dual-use contexts, funding opportunities can appear strategically attractive while carrying constraints that make them unsuitable in practice.

The workshop also supports clearer, more credible drafting by helping participants **align proposals more closely to funder intent** and assessment expectations, rather than relying on precedent, assumption or informal advice.
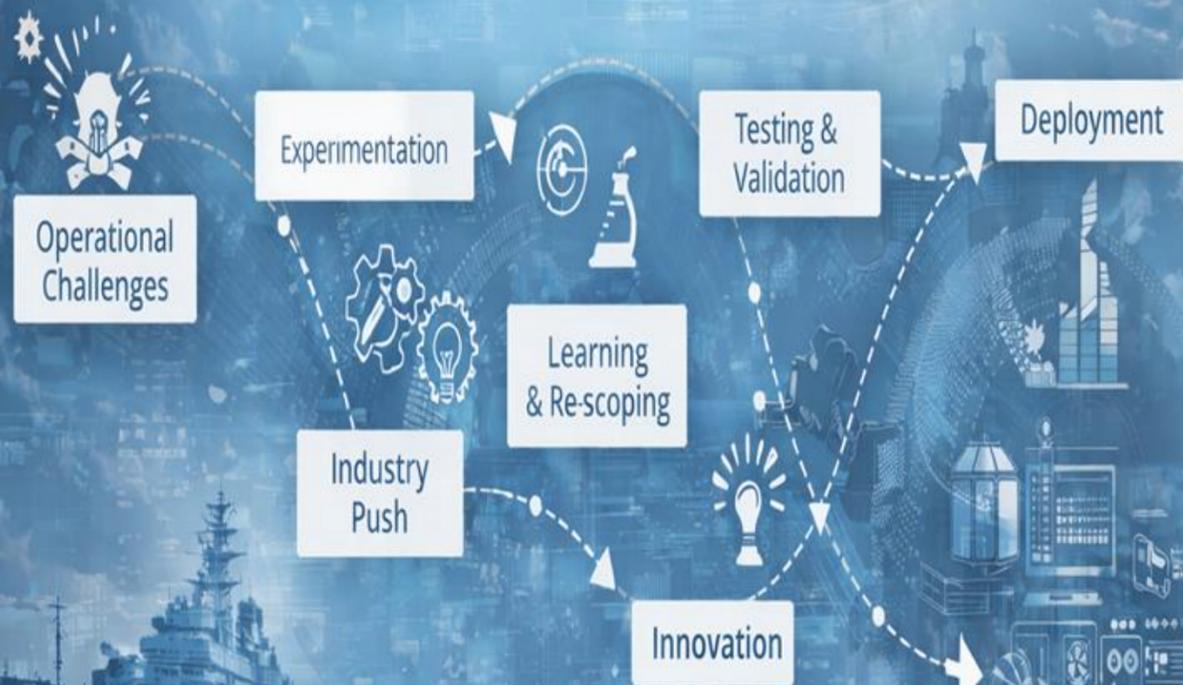
Defence Innovation Is Not a Straight Line

Defence innovation rarely follows a simple or linear progression from concept to deployment.

Innovations may originate in response to operational challenges, from technology push within industry, or through adaptation of civil technologies for defence use. They typically evolve through repeated cycles of experimentation, testing, learning and re-scoping, influenced by changing threat environments, user needs, policy priorities and resource constraints.

Public R&D funding plays a critical role in enabling this non-linear process. It supports early exploration, allows uncertainty to be managed, and provides structured opportunities to generate evidence and capability over time. In many cases, funding is used to support learning and risk reduction rather than immediate delivery. This workshop is designed to help participants understand how public funding fits within this reality, and **how to position innovation appropriately within different funding contexts.**

Why Funding Fit Matters in Defence Contexts

In defence innovation, poor funding fit can be particularly costly.

Projects may struggle not because the underlying technology is weak, but because the funding scheme is not designed to support the type of capability, maturity level or outcome being proposed. This can result in misaligned expectations, constrained delivery, or limited progression beyond the funded project.

For defence SMEs and scale-ups, these risks are amplified by limited resources, long development timelines and dependency on future funding or adoption pathways. Investing in poorly aligned opportunities can divert attention from more suitable routes and weaken organisational focus.

Assessing funding fit carefully helps organisations avoid committing to **opportunities that look attractive at a strategic or policy level but are structurally unsuitable**. It supports disciplined decision-making and protects credibility with funders and partners.
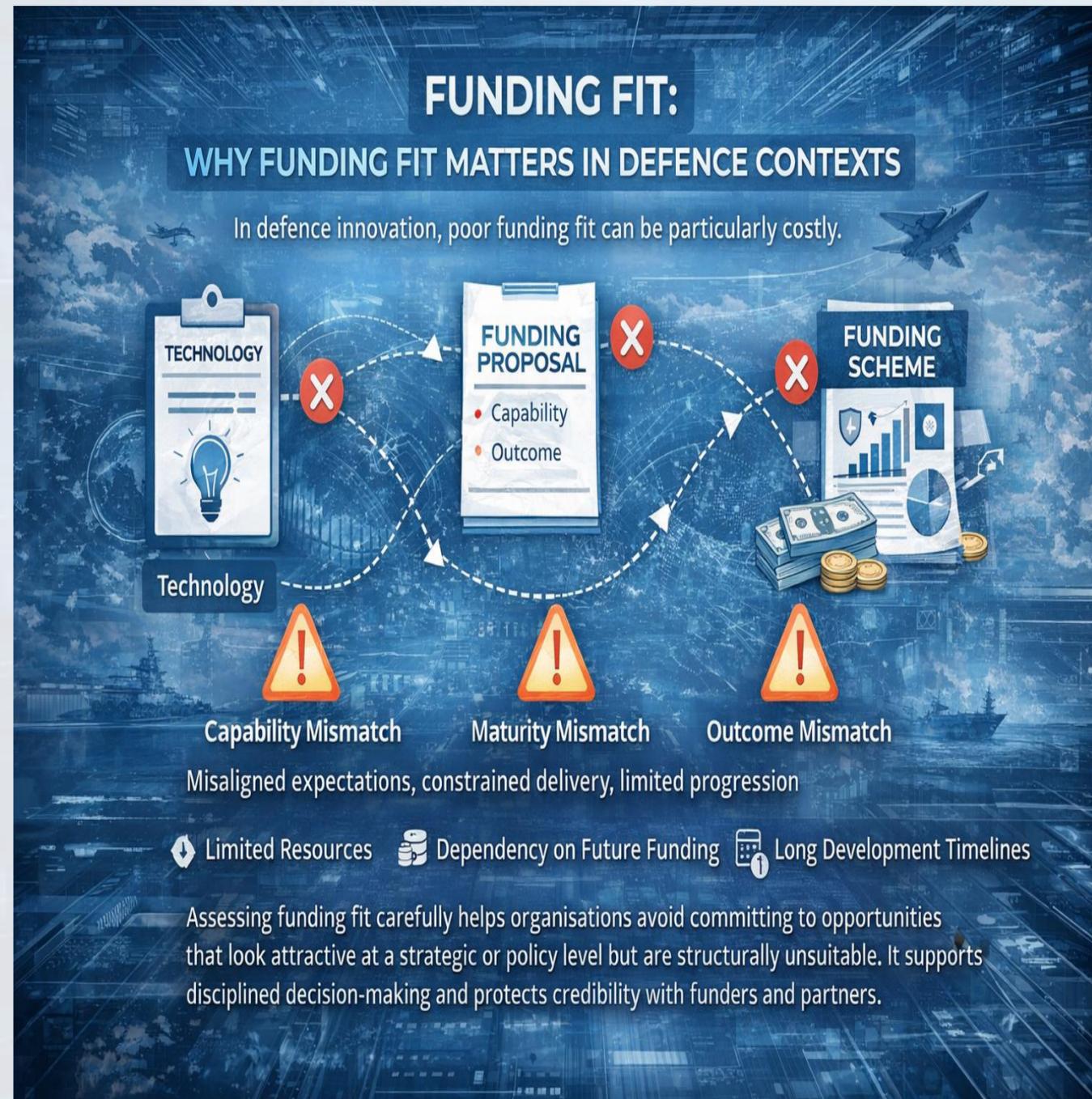
Principles for Identifying Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Scope and Boundaries of the Session

This session is deliberately principles-based rather than call-specific. It will not provide intelligence on live or upcoming funding competitions, nor will it offer insight into individual funders' internal decision-making or shortcuts to winning funding. It also does not act as a bid-writing clinic for specific projects.

Instead, the workshop equips participants with a repeatable framework for interpreting published competition documentation, assessing funding fit, and structuring applications in a way that responds clearly to stated requirements and assessment criteria.

This approach reflects the reality that defence and innovation funding mechanisms evolve regularly. Building judgement and interpretive skill is more robust than relying on templates or insider knowledge that may quickly become outdated.

Principles for Identifying
DEFENCE
Funding Fit and Drafting
INNOVATION
Strong R&D Applications

Defence Funding Changes, Principles Endure

The defence innovation funding landscape changes frequently. Priorities shift in response to geopolitical context, emerging threats, technological opportunity and policy direction. New programmes emerge, others close, and language evolves. For organisations engaging with public funding, this can create uncertainty and a sense that success depends on constantly tracking the next opportunity.

However, while programmes change, the underlying principles remain consistent. Funders publish objectives, define assessment criteria, and expect applicants to provide evidence that they can deliver what is proposed. Assessors score what is written and are constrained by formal processes.

By focusing on principles rather than programmes, organisations can adapt more effectively to change and maintain confidence as funding environments evolve.

Principles for Identifying Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Applicability Across Defence, Dual-Use and Civil Funding

Although defence, dual-use and civil public R&D funding schemes differ in emphasis, language and policy framing, they share common underlying assessment logic.

Across all contexts, funders publish what they are seeking, set out how applications will be assessed, and expect applicants to provide clear, explicit evidence in response. Assessors score against published criteria and cannot infer intent, ambition or capability that is not clearly articulated.

For defence innovators, this means that skills developed in one funding context are often transferable to others. The principles explored in this workshop are designed to support that transferability, enabling organisations to move more confidently between defence-specific and broader innovation funding opportunities over time.

UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC R&D FUNDING LANDSCAPE

Public R&D Funding in a Strategic Context

As of **1 July 2025**, the **Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA)** has been integrated into a new consolidated organisation, **UK Defence Innovation (UKDI)**. UKDI brings together DASA, the Defence Innovation Unit (DIU), the DE&S Future Capability Innovation (FCI) team and Command Innovation Hubs to accelerate the delivery of advanced technologies for the Armed Forces.

The transition is intended to **streamline defence innovation**, enabling faster technology development and stronger alignment with military capability needs. UKDI operates with a **ring-fenced annual budget of at least £400 million**.

During the transition period, existing **DASA competitions, services and partnerships continue to operate**, with full integration expected by **July 2026**. The core mission remains unchanged: to drive innovation across the UK defence and security sector through a **responsive, collaborative approach** with industry and academia.

This restructuring follows the Ministry of Defence's **Strategic Defence Review**, which highlighted the need for faster, more coherent innovation mechanisms to maintain competitive advantage.

Public R&D funding exists as a strategic instrument rather than a simple grant mechanism.

Across defence, dual-use and civil contexts, funding schemes are shaped by national and international objectives concerned with security, resilience, technological advantage, industrial competitiveness and long-term economic growth. These objectives influence what types of innovation are supported, how schemes are structured and what outcomes are prioritised.

In defence contexts in particular, public R&D funding is often used to address capability gaps, manage strategic risk and stimulate innovation where market incentives alone are insufficient.

Understanding this strategic framing is essential for interpreting why schemes are designed as they are and what funders are ultimately seeking to achieve.

Why Public R&D Funding Exists and How It Supports Innovation

Public R&D funding exists to do what markets cannot:
•Absorb technical and delivery risk
•Support long-term development beyond private return horizons
•Enable learning, experimentation and evidence generation
•Address strategic needs that extend beyond a single organisation.

In defence and security contexts, funding is used to:
•Build and sustain national capability
•Improve preparedness and resilience
•De-risk technologies critical to future operational needs

In collaborative defence programmes, funding also:
•Coordinates investment across multiple nations
•Reduces fragmentation and duplication
•Strengthens shared industrial and technological capability.

Key principle:
Public R&D funding is not just about innovation for its own sake —
it is about aligning innovation effort with collective strategic priorities.

Public R&D funding exists to support innovation that would struggle to progress through private investment alone.

Innovative technologies often involve high technical uncertainty, long development times or benefits that extend beyond a single organisation. Public funding helps absorb some of this risk, enabling exploration, experimentation and learning that would otherwise be difficult to justify commercially.

In defence and security contexts, public R&D funding also supports national capability, preparedness and resilience. In civil and mission-led contexts, it may focus on societal challenges, productivity or infrastructure transformation.

More recently, large-scale collaborative defence funding initiatives have also been established to coordinate investment across multiple nations, reduce fragmentation and strengthen shared industrial capability. These initiatives demonstrate that public R&D funding exists not only to fill market gaps, but to align innovation effort with collective strategic priorities.

Different Funder Types and Scheme Purposes

Consider....

Not all funding is meant to do the same job:

- **Early-stage schemes** exist to test ideas and generate evidence - use them to **learn**, not to promise early delivery.
- **R&D schemes** exist to build and refine solutions - use them to **reduce risk**, not to claim readiness.
- **Demonstration & deployment schemes** exist to prove performance — use them only when you can **credibly deliver**.

Key SME judgement: Ask *what the scheme is designed to support*, not *whether your idea is interesting*.

Rule of thumb: If you have to force your innovation to fit the scheme, it probably doesn't.

The public R&D funding landscape is made up of multiple funder types and scheme designs, each with a distinct purpose.

Some schemes focus on early-stage feasibility and concept validation, supporting organisations to test ideas and generate initial evidence. Others support industrial research and development, where the emphasis is on building, testing and refining solutions. More mature schemes focus on demonstration, integration or deployment, often with stronger expectations around performance, deliverability and impact.

These differences are intentional. They reflect the role each scheme plays within a wider innovation ecosystem. Understanding scheme purpose is essential to judging whether an opportunity is suitable for a particular innovation at a particular point in time.

Comparative overview table

Dimension	UK Defence Innovation(UK defence innovation funding)	NATO DIANA (accelerator-style funding)	European Defence Fund (collaborative R&D)	What is common across all three
Assessment style	One-off submission scored directly against published criteria such as desirability, feasibility and viability	Staged assessment with progression decisions at defined points (e.g. entry, bootcamp, scaling)	Multi-assessor evaluation combining technical scoring with strategic and portfolio-level considerations	Assessment is rule-bound, criteria-driven and based only on what is written
Collaboration expectations	Often optional or limited; focus on individual organisational capability	Initially single-organisation, expanding through cohorts, test centres and networks	Typically mandatory; structured consortia across organisations and EU member states	Collaboration must be justified, purposeful and aligned to scheme intent
Risk appetite	Calibrated to project scope; ambition expected but risk must be clearly managed	Higher tolerance of uncertainty early, reducing as projects progress through stages	Balanced portfolio approach combining core capabilities and higher-risk innovation	Risk must be explicit, proportionate and actively managed
Drafting emphasis	Precision, clarity and direct mapping to assessment criteria	Clear articulation of potential, learning and credible progression between stages	Strategic alignment, coordination and contribution to shared capability objectives	Clarity, alignment and credibility matter more than technical sophistication
Decision constraints	Assessors score under strict time, format and compliance rules	Assessors gate progression based on evidence generated at each stage	Assessors consider both project merit and fit within a wider programme portfolio	Assessors cannot infer intent, fill gaps or score what is not explicit

How Funding Supports Different Stages of Innovation

Funding expectations change as your innovation matures.

•**Early-stage funding** supports uncertainty, learning and exploration. Assessors expect fundamental questions discovered and feasibility established in principle, not all the answers.

•**Mid-stage funding** supports building, testing and refining. Assessors expect evidence of progress and risk reduction.

•**Late-stage funding** supports demonstration and deployment. Assessors expect performance data, delivery plans and adoption pathways.

Common SME pitfall: Trying to place an innovation into a scheme that does not match its maturity - either overstating readiness or underselling delivery expectations.

Key judgement: Be realistic about **where you are now** and **how far you can credibly progress** within the funded project.

Public R&D funding supports innovation across different stages of development, from early feasibility through to deployment.

At early stages, schemes tend to tolerate higher levels of uncertainty and focus on learning and exploration. As innovations mature, expectations shift towards evidence of performance, robustness and readiness for use. Later-stage schemes typically require clearer pathways to adoption, integration or impact.

Misalignment often occurs when organisations attempt to force an idea into a scheme that is not designed to support its current maturity or intended outcomes. Understanding where an innovation sits in the lifecycle, and how far it can realistically progress within a funded project, is critical to selecting appropriate funding opportunities.

Scale and Ambition in Public R&D Funding

Public R&D funding schemes vary significantly in the scale and ambition of the projects they are designed to support.

Some schemes are deliberately small in scale, supporting tightly scoped projects focused on answering specific technical questions or generating evidence. In these contexts, ambition is expressed through clarity of learning objectives rather than breadth of impact.

Other schemes are designed to support large, ambitious programmes aimed at delivering system-level capability, major technological advancement or demonstrable progress towards deployment. Here, ambition is framed around outcomes, integration and progression rather than exploration.

Successful applicants calibrate ambition carefully to match scheme intent. Over-scaling early ideas can undermine credibility, while under-selling ambition in later-stage schemes can weaken competitiveness.

Consider...

Ambition must match the scale of the scheme.

•**Small-scale schemes** reward focus. Ambition is shown through **clear learning objectives**, not big claims.

•**Large-scale schemes** reward outcomes. Ambition is shown through **integration, progression and delivery**, not exploration.

Common SME mistake: Over-scaling early ideas to appear "strategic", or under-selling ambition in schemes designed to deliver capability.

Key judgement: Let the **scheme's intent set the level of ambition** — not the size of the funding pot.

Collaboration Expectations Across Funding Schemes

Collaboration expectations vary widely across public R&D funding schemes and are a key differentiator between them.

Some schemes are designed to support single-organisation projects, particularly where the objective is to explore a specific technical challenge or develop proprietary capability. Other schemes require or strongly encourage collaboration between multiple organisations, sectors or countries.

In defence and mission-led contexts, collaboration may be central to the purpose of the scheme, enabling shared risk, complementary expertise and interoperability. However, collaboration is not inherently beneficial. Poorly justified or unnecessary partnerships can weaken proposals rather than strengthen them.

Strong applications demonstrate that collaboration is purposeful, proportionate and aligned to scheme objectives.

Collaboration Expectations

Collaboration must earn its place:
•Some schemes are designed for **single-organisation delivery**.
•Others require **genuine collaboration** to achieve their objectives.

Reality check: Collaboration can **share risk**, but it also **creates risk** - through coordination, dependency and delivery complexity.

Assessors expect:
•clear roles and ownership
•evidence that added risk is **understood and justified**

Rule of thumb: Only collaborate where the benefit clearly outweighs the additional risk.

Risk Appetite and Expected Outcomes

Public R&D funding schemes differ markedly in their tolerance of risk and expectations of outcomes.

Early-stage schemes often tolerate, and sometimes encourage, higher levels of technical uncertainty. In these contexts, outcomes are frequently framed around learning, feasibility or proof of concept rather than delivery.

As schemes move towards later stages of innovation, tolerance of uncertainty decreases. Funders expect applicants to demonstrate that key risks have been identified, mitigated and reduced, and that proposed outcomes are realistic and achievable.

In defence contexts, risk appetite is often balanced across portfolios, with some funding directed towards core capabilities and some towards higher-risk innovation. Applicants must align their treatment of risk and outcomes to what a scheme is designed to support.

Risk and outcomes must match the scheme.

•**Early-stage schemes** tolerate uncertainty. Assessors expect **learning, feasibility and proof**, not delivery.
•**Later-stage schemes** expect reduced risk. Assessors look for **evidence, robustness and realistic outcomes**.

Common SME mistake: Presenting high uncertainty in schemes that expect delivery - or overstating certainty in schemes designed for exploration.

Key judgement: Align your risk story and outcomes to what the scheme is designed to buy.

Different funding models combine scale, risk and collaboration by design — reflecting the strategy behind them.

Focused defence innovation schemes (e.g. **DASA**, under the UK Defence Innovation / Strategic Defence Review). Fund tightly scoped projects with clear defence relevance. Expect **feasibility, deliverability and value for money** aligned to national capability needs.

Accelerator-style programmes (e.g. **JANUS**, **NATO DIANA**, aligned to NATO's Defence Innovation and Emerging & Disruptive Technologies strategies)
Fund **staged progression**. Expect **higher uncertainty early**, with rising expectations as maturity and evidence increase.

Large collaborative defence programmes (e.g. **European Defence Fund**, aligned to EU defence industrial and capability strategies). Fund **shared capability** through multi-national consortia. Expect **high ambition, structured governance and coordinated delivery** across partners.

Key SME insight: These models repeat because they serve different **strategic objectives**, not because of funder preference.

Rule of thumb: Fit your innovation to the **funding model and strategy.**

Illustrative Examples: Defence, Dual-Use and Mission-Led Programmes

Different funding models illustrate how scale, collaboration and risk appetite are combined in practice.

National defence innovation schemes often support focused projects with clear relevance to defence needs, emphasising feasibility, deliverability and value for money. Accelerator-style programmes support staged development, allowing higher uncertainty early and increasing expectations as projects progress.

Large-scale collaborative defence R&D programmes support multi-national consortia addressing shared capability priorities, combining high ambition with structured governance.

The purpose of these examples is not to highlight specific programmes, but to show how patterns recur across funding contexts. Recognising these patterns helps organisations position their innovation appropriately and avoid forcing misaligned opportunities.

ASSESSING FUNDING FIT

Milestone Zero
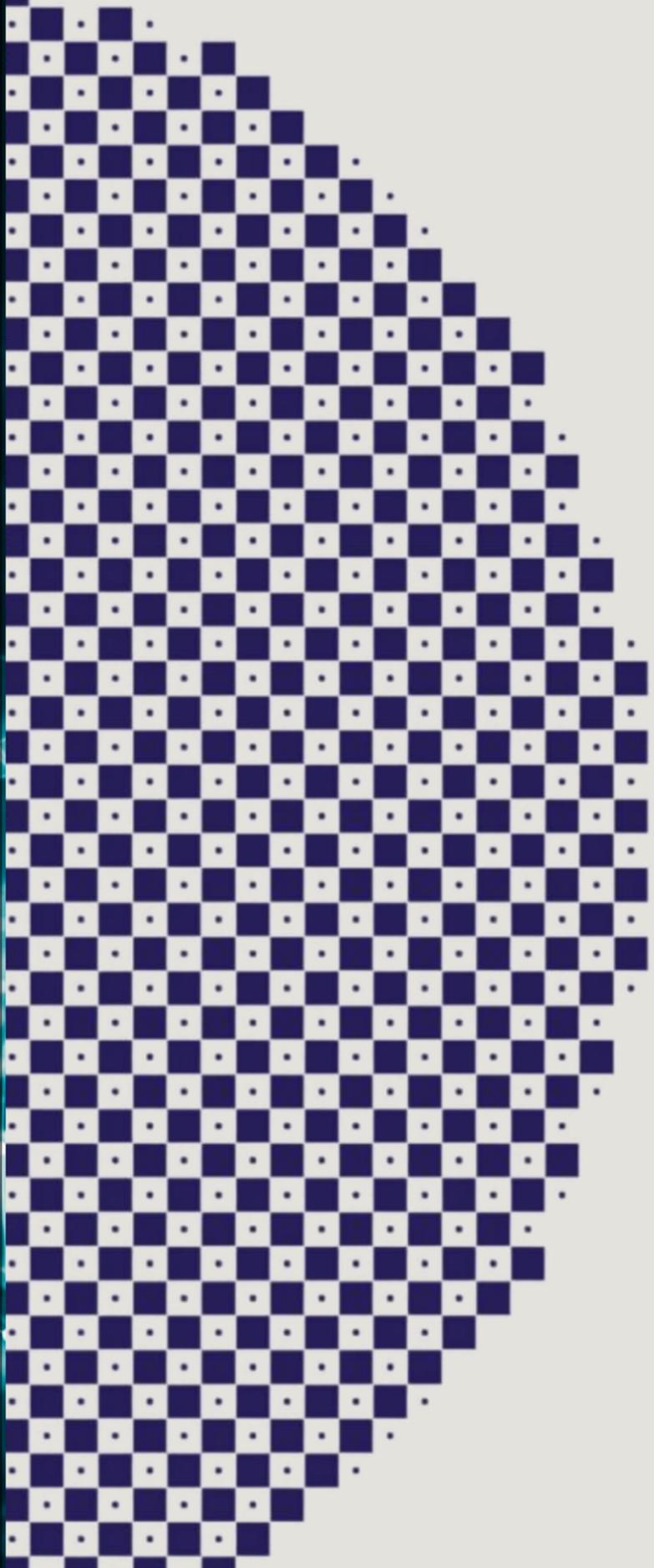
Why Assessing Funding Fit Matters

Assessing funding fit is one of the most important stages of engaging with public R&D funding, yet it is also one of the most frequently neglected.

Many (>33%) unsuccessful applications fail not because the underlying idea is weak, but because the funding opportunity is a poor match for the technology, the organisation, or the intent of the scheme. Proceeding with a weak fit consumes time and resource, distracts from strategic priorities and can damage organisational credibility with funders and partners.

In defence and dual-use contexts, the consequences of poor fit are often amplified. Projects may become constrained by inappropriate expectations, unrealistic progression assumptions or misaligned outcomes. Assessing fit carefully before bidding is therefore a strategic decision, not an administrative one.

Treat Bid Writing Like a Project

Key message:
Winning starts before the call opens. This phase is about assessing **strategic fit**, **business capability**, and **resourcing** before writing a single word.

- Align the funding opportunity with your **business plan** and strategic goals.
- Test if your project genuinely fits the **funder's objectives**.
- Identify whether you can assemble the **team, time, and evidence** to deliver and win.
- Treat this pre-bid stage as a **project in its own right** - with milestones, tasks, and risks.

Pre-bid readiness isn't preparation; it's phase one of delivery.
Plan it like you'd plan a funded project: define scope, build the team, allocate tasks, and set internal deadlines before the funder sets theirs.

Milestone Zero

The Pre-Bid Project Checklist

Focus Area	Question	Outcome
Strategic Fit	Does this opportunity align with your business plan and growth goals?	Clear go/no-go decision.
Funder Alignment	Can your project clearly meet the funder's stated objectives?	Confident alignment narrative.
Team & Capability	Do you have the skills, partners, and credibility required?	Identified leads and partners.
Resources & Timing	Can you deliver within the call's budget and timeframe?	Realistic resource plan.
Risk & Readiness	What could undermine your application readiness?	Early mitigation and scheduling.

Milestone Zero

Four-Month Roadmap to Bid Writing Readiness – From Concept to Preparing to Draft

Phase	Timeline	Goal	Key Actions	Outputs / Decision Points
1 **Define and Decide**	**Month 1**	Confirm opportunity and strategic fit	• Review call pipeline and strategic alignment (Industrial Strategy 2025 Life Sciences Sector Plan) • Check fit with business plan and growth goals • Identify potential delivery partners • Conduct early **Go/No-Go decision**	✅ *Opportunity Assessment:* summary of fit, risk, and scale
2 **Assemble and Analyse**	**Month 2**	Build foundations for a credible proposal	• Secure internal support and partner commitment • Define project concept, aims, and success measures • Gather early evidence (market, technical, need) • Develop draft resource map (budget, team, facilities)	✅ *Concept Summary* and preliminary *Risk Register*
3 **Plan and Prepare**	**Month 3**	Treat the pre-bid phase as a live project	• Create a **Pre-Bid Project Plan** — milestones, roles, deliverables • Assign drafting and review responsibilities • Develop **narrative framework** (align to funder language and criteria) • Refine costs and partner inputs	✅ *Bid Readiness Pack:* draft outline, timeline, and budget model
4 **Draft and Decide**	**Month 4**	Move into Pre-drafting mode with clarity and control	• **AI Decision Point:** decide whether to use AI for structuring, editing, or tone-checking • Begin planning **Drafting Plan** to funder questions using approved narrative • Conduct internal reviews and compliance checks • Finalise submission assets (budget, IP, support letters)	✅ *Complete Review-Ready Draft* and internal sign-off for submission

The scope tells you what the funder will - and will not - fund.
•The scope sets **explicit boundaries** on what is eligible.
•Supporting documents reveal **implicit expectations** about outcomes, behaviour and evidence.

Common SME mistake: Reading the scope in isolation and missing constraints or expectations embedded elsewhere.

Key judgement: Strong fit exists only when your project aligns with both **what is stated** and **what is implied** across all documentation.

Rule of thumb: If you have to argue that you fit the scope, you probably don't.

Competition Documentation as the Primary Source of Truth

Competition documentation should be treated as the primary and authoritative source of information for decision-making.

Funding opportunities are accompanied by multiple documents, including scope statements, eligibility rules, assessment criteria, definitions and procedural guidance. Each of these serves a specific purpose, and all must be read and interpreted together.

A common mistake is to rely on summaries, headlines or informal advice while overlooking detailed requirements embedded in the documentation. Strong applicants read all published material end to end and use it as the basis for judging fit, rather than relying on precedent or assumption.

Reading Documentation Systematically, Not Selectively

Assessing funding fit requires a systematic approach to reading competition documentation.

Applicants should distinguish between contextual background and explicit requirements, paying close attention to language that signals obligation or discretion. Words such as "must", "should" and "may" are used deliberately and indicate different levels of expectation.

A disciplined reading process involves identifying mandatory eligibility criteria, understanding scope boundaries, and mapping assessment criteria before forming a view on suitability. Skimming or selective reading increases the risk of misinterpretation and poor bid/no-bid decisions.

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Winning bids start with understanding the funder, not the topic:

•Funders ask for **outcomes and behaviours**, not just technical solutions.
•The real ask sits across **objectives, criteria, language and emphasis** - not just the headline challenge.

How SMEs build insight (legitimately):

•Read **all guidance**, not just the scope.
•Analyse **assessment criteria** to see what success looks like.
•Look at **previous funded projects** to understand patterns.
•Engage in **briefings, webinars and published Q&A** to hear what is emphasised and what is avoided.

Defence-specific reality: Implicit expectations often relate to **capability relevance, progression and adoption**, even when not stated explicitly.

Rule of thumb: If you can clearly explain *why the funder cares*, you are closer to answering the real question.

What Is the Funder Really Asking For?

Beyond the headline topic or challenge, funders are asking for specific outcomes, behaviours and evidence.

Understanding what the funder is really asking for requires interpretation rather than literal reading. Applicants should consider why the scheme exists, what gap it is designed to address, and what success would look like from the funder's perspective.

In defence contexts, this may include implicit expectations around capability development, relevance to operational need, or progression towards future adoption. These expectations are often visible through assessment criteria and scheme objectives rather than topic descriptions alone.

Assessment Criterion	What the Funder Is Really Testing	What Assessors Look For
Relevance to the Challenge	Whether the project addresses the specific problem the scheme exists to solve.	Clear alignment to scope, objectives and intended outcomes — not generic defence relevance.
Innovation and Technical Merit	Whether the proposed approach represents meaningful progression.	Clear explanation of what is new or different, supported by evidence or rationale.
Credibility and Feasibility	Whether claims are realistic and deliverable within the project.	Consistent assumptions, honest treatment of uncertainty, achievable timelines.
Approach and Methodology	Whether the workplan is appropriate to achieve the stated objectives.	Logical sequencing, justified methods, clear milestones and decision points.
Capability of the Team	Whether the team can realistically deliver what is proposed.	Relevant skills, experience, access to facilities, and clear roles.
Risk Management	Whether risks are understood and actively managed.	Identification of key risks, proportionate mitigation strategies.
Value for Money	Whether public funding is being used appropriately.	Clear link between costs, activities and outcomes.
Expected Outcomes and Impact	Whether the project delivers what the funder is seeking.	Outcomes framed in line with scheme intent (learning, capability, progression or deployment).

Assessment Criteria as Signals of Funder Priorities

Assessment criteria provide the clearest insight into what funders value.

They define how applications will be scored and therefore what evidence applicants must provide. Assessors score against criteria and cannot award marks for information that is missing, unclear or placed elsewhere in the application.

Strong funding fit exists when a proposed project can respond clearly and credibly to each assessment criterion without distortion or over-claiming. If significant criteria cannot be addressed convincingly, this is a strong signal that the opportunity may not be a good fit.

The UK Research & Innovation - TRL levels and definitions are as follows:

•**TRL 1:** basic principles observed and reported

•**TRL 2:** technology concept or application formulated

•**TRL 3:** analytical and experimental critical function or characteristic proof-of-concept

•**TRL 4:** technology basic validation in a laboratory environment

•**TRL 5:** technology basic validation in a relevant environment

•**TRL 6:** technology model or prototype demonstration in a relevant environment

•**TRL 7:** technology prototype demonstration in an operational environment

•**TRL 8:** actual technology completed and qualified through test and demonstration

•**TRL 9:** actual technology qualified through successful mission operations.

Judging Fit: Technology Readiness

Technology readiness is a central dimension of funding fit.

Public R&D funding schemes are designed to support innovation at specific stages of maturity. Some focus on early feasibility and concept validation, while others expect technologies to be sufficiently mature to demonstrate performance, integration or readiness for deployment.

Assessing fit requires honest appraisal of current maturity and realistic judgement about how far the technology can progress within the scope and duration of the project. Overstating readiness undermines credibility, while under-selling progression can weaken competitiveness.

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Defence Illustration: Technology Readiness Expectations

In defence innovation, technology readiness is often interpreted inconsistently.

Some defence funding schemes are designed to explore novel concepts with high uncertainty, while others are intended to support near-operational capability. Misalignment occurs when organisations assume that all defence funding favours near-deployable solutions.

Strong applicants align their claims about readiness and progression to the intent of the scheme, making clear what will be explored, validated or demonstrated during the funded work.

Judging Fit: Strategic Alignment and Constraints

An opportunity may be technically attractive but strategically misaligned.

Assessing funding fit requires consideration of how a project aligns with wider organisational objectives and constraints, including commercial strategy, intellectual property considerations, resourcing, cash flow and long-term positioning.

Some funding schemes impose expectations around collaboration, dissemination or future development that may not align with organisational goals. Recognising these constraints early supports more disciplined bid/no-bid decisions.

A strong idea needs a credible team behind it.

Assessors look for a team where **every role has a clear purpose** and is backed by **relevant experience**.

At a minimum, strong applications include:
•**Named technical leads** with experience directly relevant to the work proposed
•A **named, experienced project manager** responsible for delivery, governance and reporting
•A **commercial or exploitation lead** to address future adoption, scaling or route to market.

Strengthening the team: Where capability is missing internally, use **advisors or subcontractors** to fill gaps - but only where their role is clear, necessary and proportionate.

Defence-specific reality: Capability may also include experience of **security, assurance, regulation or working with defence users**.

Rule of thumb: If delivery depends on people who aren't named or roles that aren't defined, assessors will assume the capability doesn't exist.

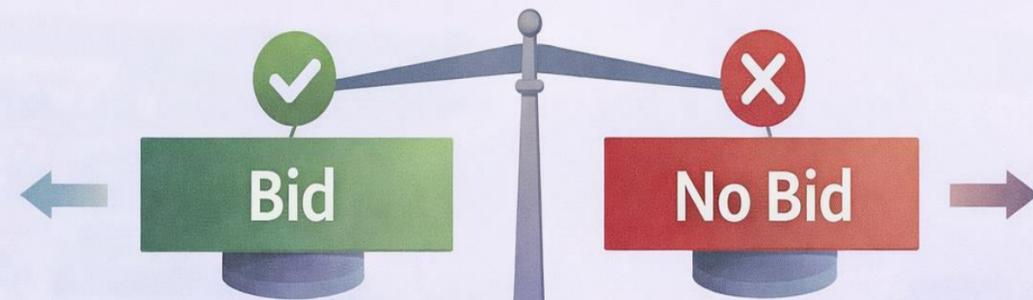## Judging Fit: Organisational Capability

Funding fit is not only about the technology; it is also about the organisation.

Funders assess whether the applicant and any partners have the skills, experience and capacity to deliver the proposed work. This includes technical expertise, project management capability, access to facilities and the ability to manage risk and governance requirements.

In defence contexts, organisational capability may also include the ability to operate within security, assurance or regulatory constraints. If delivery capability is weak or overstretched, the opportunity may not be a good fit regardless of technical merit.

Evidence-Based Bid / No-Bid Decisions

The outcome of funding fit assessment should be a clear, evidence-based bid or no-bid decision.

This decision should be grounded in published documentation rather than optimism, pressure or anecdote. Walking away from a poorly aligned opportunity is a positive outcome that preserves organisational focus and credibility.

Strong organisations treat bid/no-bid decisions as part of their innovation strategy, not as an ad hoc response to opportunity availability.
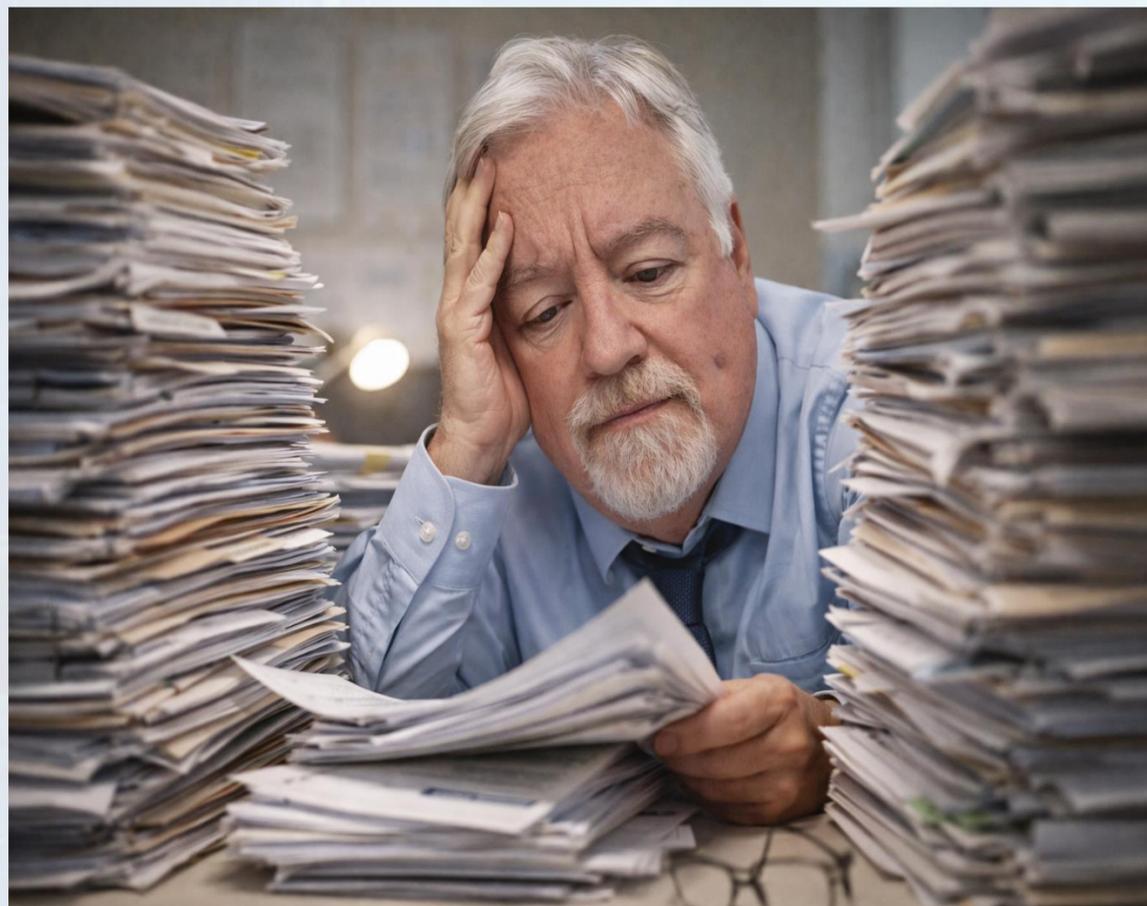
HOW FUNDERS ASSESS APPLICATIONS

What Happens After an Application Is Submitted

Once an application is submitted, it enters a formal assessment process governed by published rules and procedures.

Applications are first checked for eligibility and compliance. This stage confirms whether the applicant and project meet the basic requirements of the competition, such as organisational eligibility, scope alignment, format and submission completeness. Applications that fail at this stage do not progress further, regardless of the quality of the idea or team.

Eligible applications then move into assessment against the published criteria. Depending on the scheme, this may involve independent assessors, panel-based review, or a combination of individual scoring and moderation. Scores are often discussed and adjusted to ensure consistency across applications.

Although applicants may expect a holistic judgement of their idea or organisation, assessment is in practice a structured, criterion-based process focused on the evidence presented.

Assessment is procedural, not personal.
•Applications are checked for **eligibility and compliance first**. Failure here ends the process, regardless of idea quality.
•Only compliant bids are **scored against published criteria**. Assessors cannot rescue missing or unclear information.

Assessor reality: Applications are not judged holistically. They are scored **criterion by criterion**, based only on the evidence provided.

Key SME action: Before submission, review your bid **as if you were an assessor**:
•Can every criterion be scored clearly?
•Is required information in the correct place?

Rule of thumb: If assessors have to search for evidence, they probably won't score it.

How Assessors Read Applications in Practice

Assessors read applications under significant constraints.

They are typically reviewing multiple proposals within limited timeframes and are required to score against specific criteria. As a result, assessors may not read applications as a continuous narrative. Instead, they move between sections, looking for clear, explicit evidence that each criterion has been met.

Assessors cannot infer intent, ambition or capability that is not clearly articulated. They are also bound by compliance rules: information that is missing, unclear or placed outside prescribed formats may not be considered.

This means that clarity, structure and explicit alignment to assessment criteria are functional requirements, not stylistic preferences. Applications that are difficult to navigate or rely on implicit understanding increase the risk of under-scoring.
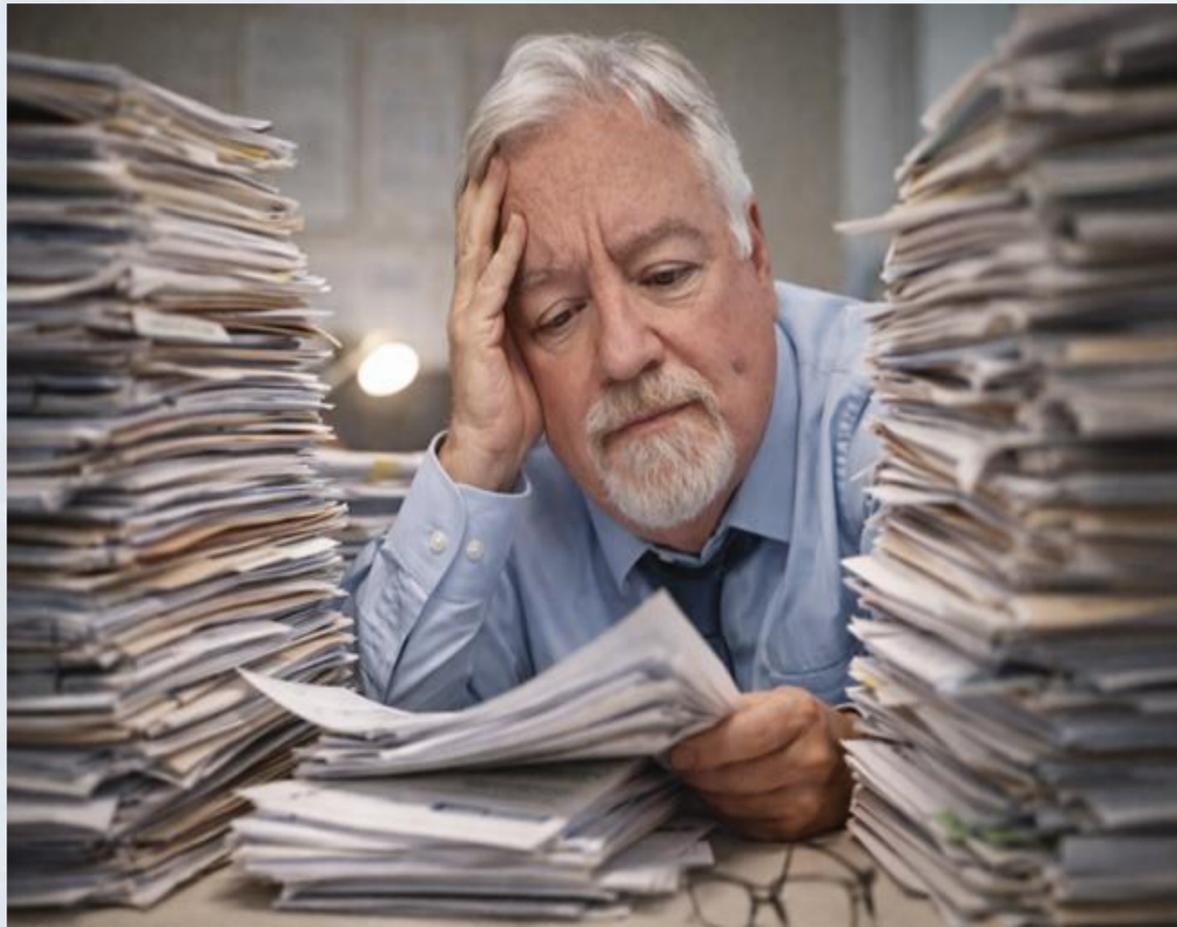
Defence Illustration: Assessment Constraints Across Funding Models

Assessment constraints apply across different defence funding models, even where structures vary.

In single-stage national defence innovation schemes, assessors score one-off submissions directly against published criteria and must rely entirely on what is written. In staged accelerator-style programmes, assessors make progression decisions at defined points based on the evidence presented at each stage. In large, collaborative defence R&D programmes, assessors may also consider how proposals contribute to a wider portfolio of strategic priorities.

Despite these differences, a common constraint applies: assessors can only score what is explicitly evidenced in the application. Strategic relevance, innovation potential or organisational reputation cannot compensate for missing or unclear evidence.
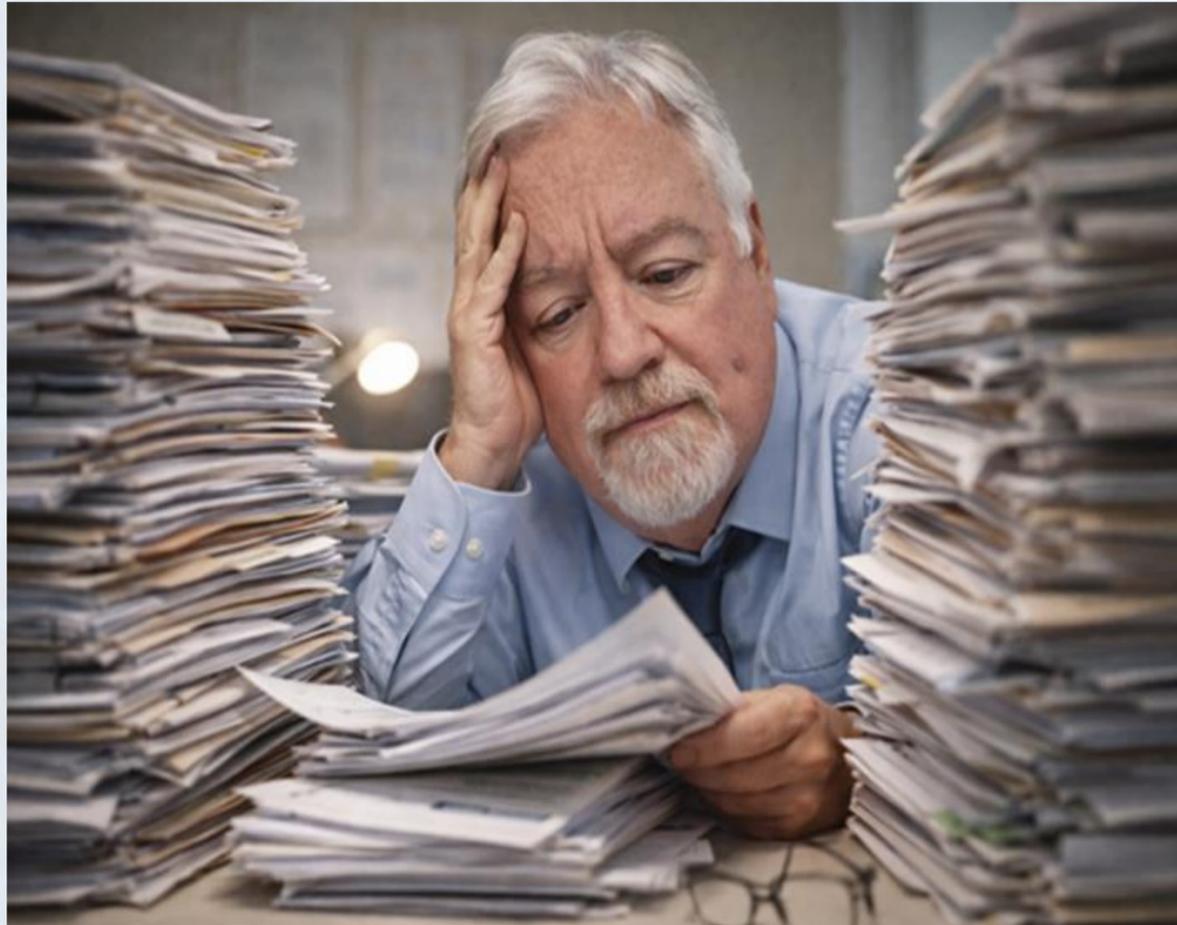
Why Clarity and Alignment Matter More Than Sophistication

Across public R&D funding schemes, clarity and alignment are decisive factors in assessment.

Clear applications make it easy for assessors to understand what is being proposed, why it matters and how it will be delivered. Alignment ensures that this information maps directly to the published assessment criteria and scheme objectives.

Technically sophisticated proposals that are poorly aligned or difficult to score often perform worse than simpler proposals that respond directly to requirements. Successful applicants design applications around how they will be assessed, not around how impressive they appear.

Credibility is built on evidence, not confidence.

Assessors look for **claims that are proportionate to the evidence provided** and consistent across the application.

Strong credibility comes from:
•Evidence at the **right level of granularity** (data, prior work, trials, user insight)
•Clear linkage between **problem, approach and outcomes**
•Assumptions that are **stated, not hidden.**

Narrative matters — but only when grounded in evidence: A compelling story helps assessors understand *why* the work matters, but it must be supported by:
•realistic timelines
•honest treatment of uncertainty
•outcomes that match current maturity.

Common SME mistake: Over-claiming readiness, compressing development stages, or implying deployment where only feasibility exists.

Rule of thumb: If you can't show it yet, explain **how you will learn it**, not why it will definitely work.

What Funders Mean by "Credibility"

Credibility is a core assessment concept across public R&D funding schemes.

From a funder's perspective, credibility is not about confidence or ambition. It is about whether the claims made in the application are supported by evidence and realistic assumptions. Assessors look for internal consistency between the problem described, the approach proposed and the outcomes claimed.

Credible applications acknowledge uncertainty where it exists and explain how learning will be generated within the project. Over-claiming maturity, compressing development timelines or implying outcomes that cannot yet be demonstrated undermines credibility, even when the underlying idea is strong.

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Defence Illustration: Credibility in Defence Innovation

In defence innovation contexts, credibility is particularly sensitive.

Claims about performance, readiness or operational relevance may be scrutinised closely, especially where evidence is limited or context-dependent. Defence assessors are alert to overstatement and to assumptions that do not reflect operational or regulatory realities.

Strong defence applications are explicit about what is known, what remains uncertain and what will be tested during the funded work. By framing uncertainty as something to be managed rather than hidden, applicants demonstrate maturity and realism, which strengthens assessment confidence.

Deliverability is about realism, not optimism.

Assessors want confidence that the project can be **delivered as described**, within the time, cost and capability available.

Strong deliverability is shown through:

- A **logical workplan** with clear sequencing of activities
- **Milestones that mark real progress**, not just dates
- **Named responsibility** for delivery, decisions and reporting
- Dependencies that are **acknowledged and managed**, not ignored.

Common SME mistake: Providing excessive technical detail while leaving the delivery plan vague.

Assessor reality: If assessors cannot see *how* the work will be delivered, they will assume it won't be.

Rule of thumb: Clear planning beats detailed ambition every time.

What Funders Mean by "Deliverability"

Deliverability refers to whether the proposed project can realistically be delivered as described.

Assessors consider whether the workplan is logical, whether activities are sequenced appropriately, and whether milestones are achievable within the proposed timeframe. They also assess whether the team has the skills, experience and capacity to carry out the work.

Deliverability is demonstrated through clear planning rather than excessive detail. Well-defined tasks, clear responsibilities and realistic dependencies give assessors confidence that the project can be executed effectively.

A lack of clarity in delivery planning is one of the most common reasons for reduced scores, even in technically strong proposals.

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Defence Illustration: Deliverability Under Defence Constraints

Defence innovation projects often operate under additional constraints that directly affect deliverability.

These may include security requirements, access to end users or test environments, assurance processes, export controls or dependencies on external organisations. Assessors consider whether applicants recognise these constraints and have planned accordingly.

Generic workplans that ignore defence-specific realities can raise concerns about delivery confidence. In contrast, applications that explicitly acknowledge constraints and explain how they will be managed are more likely to be assessed as deliverable.

Value for money is about proportionality, not cheapness.

Assessors want to see that the **level of funding requested matches the work proposed** and the outcomes expected.

Strong value for money is demonstrated by:
•A **clear line of sight** from objectives → activities → resources
•Costs that are **directly tied to delivery**, not convenience
•Justification for major cost items, not just totals.

Common SME mistake: Cutting costs to look competitive while undermining deliverability.

Assessor reality: Under-costed projects raise as many concerns as over-costed ones.

Rule of thumb: If you can explain *why each cost is needed* to deliver the outcome, value for money will usually follow.

What Funders Mean by "Value for Money"

Value for money is a required consideration in most public R&D funding schemes.

It does not mean minimising cost at all times. Instead, it means demonstrating that the requested funding is reasonable, proportionate and directly related to the activities required to achieve the stated outcomes.

Assessors look for a clear relationship between objectives, activities and resources. Costs that are poorly justified, disconnected from the workplan or disproportionate to the proposed outcomes raise concerns about both value for money and deliverability.

Defence Illustration: Value for Money Across Funding Models

In defence and security contexts, value for money is often linked to risk reduction, learning and capability development rather than immediate commercial return.

In some schemes, value is demonstrated by how efficiently early investment generates evidence or reduces uncertainty. In others, it is assessed in terms of contribution to shared capability, interoperability or industrial resilience.

Across funding models, strong applications show that public funding is being used appropriately to achieve outcomes that would not otherwise be realised, without inflating scope or complexity.

Risk No.	Risk Description	HLM Rating (Pre)	Risk Score (Pre)	Mitigation Actions	HLM Rating (Post)	Risk Score (Post)
R1	Core technology does not perform as expected in a relevant environment	High	20	Early laboratory validation (TRL 4-5); defined performance thresholds; stage-gated testing in relevant environment	Medium	9
R2		Medium				
R3		Medium	10	contingency; subcontractor support	Low	
R4	...ed access to test facilities or environments	High				
R5	Project timeline is overly optimistic given technical	Medium				
R6	Regulatory, assurance or security approvals take longer than anticipated	Medium	9	Early engagement with assurance bodies; time and cost allocated for compliance activities	Low	4
R7	Collaboration dependencies slow delivery or decision-making	Medium	10	Clear governance; defined escalation routes; formal reporting cadence	Low	5
R8	Costs increase due to unforeseen technical challenges	Medium	12	Budget contingency; prioritisation of high-risk tasks early; spend reviews at milestones	Low	6

Innovation is not rewarded for being radical - it is rewarded for being relevant.
•Funders rarely score novelty in isolation. They score **progression, learning and applicability**.

Common misconceptions to avoid:
- *"Higher risk scores better"* → Risk must be **appropriate and managed**.
- *"More complex means more innovative"* → Complexity without clarity loses marks.
- *"Bold claims compensate for uncertainty"* → They usually undermine credibility.

Assessor reality: Funders expect you to **understand your risks**, explain why they exist, and show how they will be mitigated through the project.

Rule of thumb: Well-managed risk scores higher than uncontrolled ambition.

Common Misconceptions About Innovation and Risk

Applicants often hold misconceptions about how innovation and risk are viewed by funders.

A common belief is that innovation must be radical to be fundable. Although some funders will want 'frontier science', in practice, they are often more interested in relevance, progression and learning than novelty alone. Another misconception is that higher risk always scores better; in reality, funders expect risk to be appropriate to the scheme and actively managed.

Applicants may also assume that technical sophistication will compensate for lack of clarity. In assessment, clarity and alignment consistently matter more than complexity.

PRINCIPLES OF STRONG DRAFTING

Practical Tips for Applicants

- **Anchor claims in evidence**: reference published research, prior projects, trials, datasets or user insight where available.
- **Quantify wherever possible**: include numbers, ranges, benchmarks or thresholds rather than qualitative statements alone.
- **Evidence maturity honestly**: if the project is at proof-of-concept, show what is already known (e.g. performance indicators, experimental results) and what remains to be tested.
- **Specify learning outcomes**: define what knowledge will be generated, how it will be measured, and what success looks like.
- **Match detail to stage**: early-stage projects should quantify understanding and uncertainty, not imply deployment readiness.
- **Make assumptions explicit**: state them clearly and explain how the project will validate or challenge them.

Sense-check: If claims cannot be supported with evidence or numbers, assessors are unlikely to treat them as credible.

Granularity and Evidence in Drafting

Appropriate granularity is a defining feature of strong public R&D applications.

Funders and assessors need sufficient detail to understand exactly what will be done, by whom, and on what basis key claims are being made. This goes beyond high-level ambition or intent and requires clear specification of activities, assumptions, evidence, roles and decision points.

Effective granularity strikes a balance: enough detail to support scoring and confidence, without unnecessary technical overload.

Applications that remain vague or generic are difficult to assess and often score poorly, regardless of the underlying quality of the idea.

Question 8. Need or challenge
What is the business need, technological challenge, or market opportunity behind your innovation?

Explain:
- the main motivation for the project
- the business need, technological challenge or market opportunity
- whether you have identified any similar innovation and its current limitations, including those close to market or in development
- any work you have already done to respond to this need, for example, if the project focuses on developing an existing capability or building a new one
- the wider economic, social, environmental, cultural or political challenges which are influential in creating the opportunity, such as incoming regulations.

Structuring a Clear and Coherent Application

Structure is a primary enabler of effective assessment.

Applications that mirror the structure and intent of published assessment criteria are easier to read, easier to score and less likely to be misunderstood. Clear headings, consistent terminology and deliberate signposting allow assessors to locate relevant evidence quickly.

In defence innovation funding, poor structure often signals weak interpretation of funder intent. Strong structure reflects good judgement and understanding of how the application will be assessed. Drafting should therefore begin with structural planning before detailed content is written.

What is the business need, technological challenge, or market opportunity behind your innovation?

Explain:
• the main motivation for the project
• the business need, technological challenge or market opportunity
• whether you have identified any similar innovation and its current limitations, including those close to market or in development
• any work you have already done to respond to this need, for example, if the project focuses on developing an existing capability or building a new one
• the wider economic, social, environmental, cultural or political challenges which are influential in creating the opportunity, such as incoming regulations.

Defining the Problem and Framing the Need

Clear problem definition is fundamental to a strong public R&D application.

Funders need to understand what problem is being addressed, who is affected and why public funding is justified. This requires more than describing the technology. It involves articulating the unmet need and explaining why existing solutions are insufficient.

In defence contexts, this may relate to capability gaps, resilience challenges or emerging operational requirements. However, these must still be explained explicitly rather than assumed. Applications that treat the problem as self-evident often underperform in assessment.

Question 9. Approach and innovation
What approach will you take and where will the focus of the innovation be?

Explain:
•how you will respond to the need, challenge or opportunity identified
•how you will improve on any similar innovation that you have identified
•whether the innovation will focus on existing technologies in new areas, the development of new technologies for existing areas, or a totally disruptive approach
•the freedom you have to operate
•how this project fits with your current product, service lines or offerings
•how it will make you more competitive
•the nature of the outputs you expect from the project, for example reports, demonstrator, know-how, new process, product or service design, and how these will help you to target the need, challenge or opportunity identified.

Articulating Innovation in a Scorable Way

Innovation must be articulated in terms that assessors can recognise and score.

This involves explaining what is new or different compared to the current state of the art, how this represents meaningful progression and why it matters.

Innovation should be described relative to existing solutions, not in isolation. Innovation does not need to be radical to be fundable. Incremental or applied innovation can score strongly when it is relevant, well justified and aligned with scheme objectives. Assessors cannot infer innovation that is not explicitly articulated.

Question 9. Approach and innovation
What approach will you take and where will the focus of the innovation be?
Explain:
•how you will respond to the need, challenge or opportunity identified

•how you will improve on any similar innovation that you have identified

•whether the innovation will focus on existing technologies in new areas, the development of new technologies for existing areas, or a totally disruptive approach

•the freedom you have to operate

•how this project fits with your current product, service lines or offerings

•how it will make you more competitive

•the nature of the outputs you expect from the project, for example reports, demonstrator, know-how, new process, product or service design, and how these will help you to target the need, challenge or opportunity identified

Justifying the Approach and Methodology

Justification is central to credible drafting.

Applicants are expected to explain why their chosen approach is appropriate to the problem being addressed and the objectives of the scheme. This includes articulating key assumptions, dependencies and design choices rather than presenting the approach as self-evident.

In defence and dual-use contexts, justification may need to address constraints such as assurance requirements, access to environments or regulatory considerations. Explaining why alternatives were not selected demonstrates critical thinking and strengthens credibility.

Question 14. Project management

How will you manage the project effectively?
Explain:

•the main work packages of the project, indicating who is the lead partner assigned to each and the total cost of each one

•your approach to project management, identifying any major tools and mechanisms you will use to get a successful and innovative project outcome

•the management reporting lines

•your project plan in enough detail to identify any links or dependencies between work packages or milestones

You must submit a project plan or Gantt chart as an appendix to support your answer. It must be a PDF no larger than 10MB. It can be up to two A4 pages and must be legible at 100% zoom.

Workplans, Milestones and Resources as Evidence of Deliverability

Workplans, milestones and resources are core assessment evidence, not administrative detail.

Assessors use these elements to judge whether the project can realistically be delivered within the proposed timeframe and budget. Activities should be clearly defined, logically sequenced and linked directly to objectives and expected outcomes.

Milestones should represent meaningful progress or decision points rather than arbitrary dates. Resources should be proportionate and clearly justified. Together, these elements demonstrate delivery confidence.

WP1 – Requirements and Use-Case Definition (Months 1–3, £150k, Systems Requirements Manager): defines operational requirements, performance targets and environmental constraints for the quantum sensor. It includes end-user engagement, confirmation of success criteria and alignment with regulatory and assurance expectations. The milestone is an agreed and validated requirements specification to guide system design.

WP2 – System Architecture and Design (Months 2–6, £300k, Chief Systems Engineer): develops the end-to-end system architecture, covering sensing principles, control electronics, interfaces and packaging. The key milestone is completion of a system design review confirming component selection and integration approach.

WP3 – Core Quantum Sensing Element Development (Months 4–12, £550k, Quantum Technology Lead): focuses on developing and stabilising the quantum sensing element. Activities include experimental optimisation, noise reduction and performance characterisation. The milestone is laboratory demonstration of sensing performance against defined metrics.

WP4 – Prototype Integration and Build (Months 10–16, £400k, Integration Manager): integrates all subsystems into a functional prototype. Milestones include successful assembly, subsystem integration and initial end-to-end operation.

WP5 – Testing and Validation (Months 14–20, £350k, Test and Validation Manager): validates prototype performance in relevant environments. The milestone is completion of benchmark testing and comparison against requirements, identifying residual gaps.

WP6 – Data Processing and Signal Interpretation (Months 8–20, £250k, Data and Algorithms Lead): develops and validates algorithms for signal extraction and interpretation. Milestones include verified data outputs, error analysis and robustness assessment.

WP7 – Risk Reduction and Future Pathway (Months 18–24, £200k, Exploitation and Commercialisation Lead): addresses remaining risks and defines next-stage development and exploitation pathways. Milestones include a scale-up roadmap and readiness assessment for follow-on funding or deployment.

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Milestones should represent meaningful progress or decision points rather than arbitrary dates. Resources should be proportionate and clearly justified. Together, these elements demonstrate delivery confidence.

Most drafting weaknesses stem from judgement and interpretation failures, not writing skill.

To avoid common pitfalls:

- **Identify the full question requirement**: break each question down and ensure every part is explicitly answered.
- **Decide fit before drafting**: only proceed if the project can credibly meet the scheme's objectives and criteria.
- **Use assessment criteria as a checklist**: structure responses so assessors can clearly score each element.
- **Plan before you write**: define scope, outcomes, risks and evidence first, then draft.
- **Match claims to evidence**: confident language must be supported by data, experience or a clear learning plan.

Rule of thumb: If you haven't clearly answered every part of the question, assessors cannot award full marks.

Common Drafting Weaknesses Are Usually Judgement Failures

Across public R&D funding schemes, similar drafting weaknesses appear repeatedly.

These include lack of clarity, poor structure, unsupported claims and misalignment with assessment criteria. While these are often described as writing problems, they usually originate earlier in the process as failures of judgement, interpretation or planning.

In defence contexts, confident language or technical depth can sometimes mask these weaknesses, but assessors still score against evidence. Drafting polish cannot compensate for fundamental misalignment between the project and the scheme.

**Strengthening Applications
Through Refinement**

- Treat the application as a **drafting and refinement process**, not a one-off task.
- Start by **structuring responses around assessment criteria** before writing in detail.
- Review each draft to check that **every part of every question is fully answered**.
- Test whether claims are **supported by evidence, quantified where possible, and proportionate to maturity**.
- Edit deliberately for **clarity, precision and ease of scoring**, not stylistic flourish.
- **Generate One Voice:** Ensure your application is in a consistent style.

Supporting the process: AI tools can be used to support refinement by checking structure, clarity and alignment, but judgement, accuracy and final accountability must remain with the applicant.

Avoiding Weak Drafting Through Deliberate Practice

Avoiding common drafting weaknesses requires deliberate practice rather than stylistic improvement.

Strong applications are rarely written once. They are developed through structured planning, review and alignment to assessment criteria. This includes planning the structure around scoring decisions, mapping evidence explicitly and editing for clarity and precision.

Organisations that perform well treat drafting as a repeatable, disciplined process embedded within wider innovation and funding strategy. Over time, this reduces recurring weaknesses and improves consistency of performance.
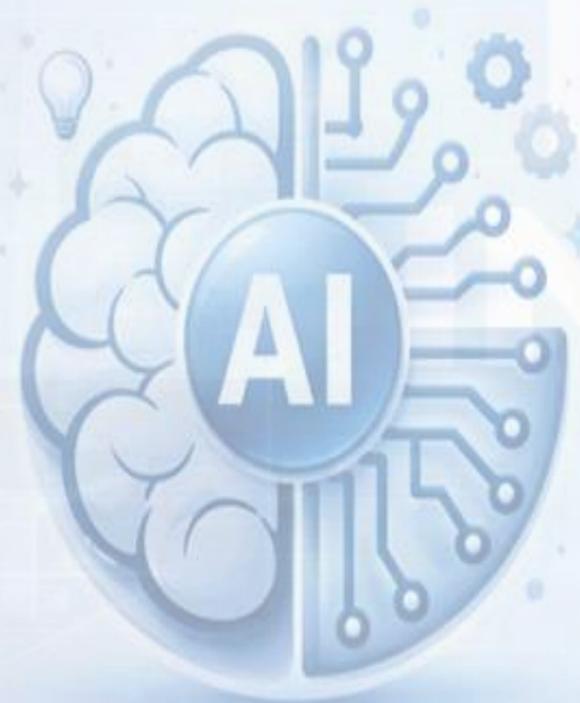
Using AI to Strengthen Drafting Judgement

AI can support stronger drafting when used as a **tool for structure, clarity and challenge**, not as a substitute for judgement.

Effective use of AI focuses on helping applicants interpret questions, test alignment with assessment criteria, and identify gaps in logic or evidence. AI can be particularly useful in stress-testing whether claims are clear, proportionate and internally consistent, and in highlighting where assumptions or evidence are missing. It can also help eliminate typos, spelling mistakes, and poor sentence construction.

However, AI cannot determine funding fit, assess strategic alignment or replace domain expertise. Outputs must always be reviewed and shaped by people who understand the technology, the funder and the operational context. Used well, AI supports better thinking; used poorly, it amplifies weak judgement.
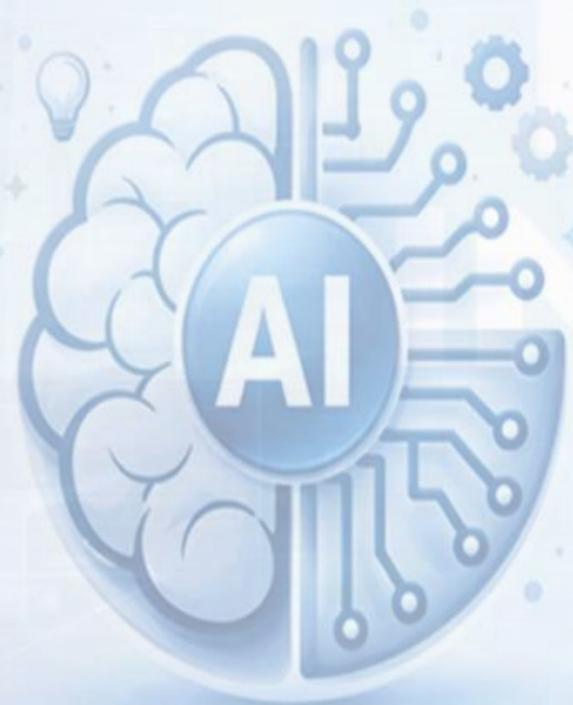
Avoiding AI-Driven Drafting Pitfalls

The greatest risk in using AI for bid drafting is treating it as a shortcut rather than a support mechanism.

Common failures include over-polished but shallow responses, generic language that lacks evidence, and answers that appear confident but do not fully address the question requirements (or are completely fabricated). These weaknesses are often easy for assessors to detect, particularly in defence and mission-led contexts.

Strong organisations use AI iteratively: to ensure 'One Voice', refine structure, improve clarity, and challenge whether responses genuinely answer the question and criteria. Final accountability for accuracy, evidence and credibility must always sit with the applicant. AI should reinforce disciplined drafting practice, not replace it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES GOING FORWARD

Principles for Identifying Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Bringing the Workshop Together

This workshop has been designed as a coherent journey rather than a collection of isolated techniques.

It began by situating public R&D funding within a wider strategic and policy context, particularly in defence and dual-use environments where funding is used deliberately to shape innovation behaviour, manage risk and build long-term capability. It then explored how different funding schemes vary in purpose, scale, collaboration expectations and risk appetite, and why understanding those differences is critical to selecting appropriate opportunities.

The workshop moved on to focus on funding fit, emphasising disciplined interpretation of competition documentation and evidence-based bid or no-bid decisions. It then demystified how funders assess applications in practice, highlighting why clarity, alignment and explicit evidence consistently outperform complexity or ambition alone.

Finally, the session translated these insights into practical drafting principles that support stronger, more credible applications across funding contexts.

Principles for Identifying Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Core Principles to Take Away

A small number of core principles underpin effective engagement with public R&D funding.

Public funding schemes are designed to deliver specific strategic outcomes and operate through published rules, guidance and assessment criteria. Understanding and respecting these is essential.

Not every funding opportunity is worth pursuing. Strong organisations assess funding fit honestly and early, using published documentation as the primary source of evidence rather than optimism, pressure or anecdote.

Applications are assessed against criteria by assessors working under constraints. They score what is written, not what is intended or implied. As a result, clarity, alignment and credibility consistently matter more than technical sophistication or rhetorical strength.

These principles apply across defence, dual-use and civil funding schemes and remain relevant even as programmes, priorities and terminology change.

Principles for Identifying Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Applying the Principles Beyond This Session

The value of this workshop lies in how the principles are applied after the session ends.

You are encouraged to adopt a more disciplined approach to opportunity assessment, beginning with careful reading and interpretation of published documentation. Bid or no-bid decisions (Milestone Zero) should be grounded in evidence about scheme intent, technology readiness, organisational capability and strategic alignment.

When drafting, applications should be planned around assessment criteria from the outset. Structure, justification and evidence should be designed to support scoring rather than persuasion. Drafting should be treated as a process of refinement and alignment, not as a single writing exercise completed under pressure.

Consistent application of these principles over time reduces wasted effort, improves funding success rates and strengthens organisational confidence in engaging with public R&D funding.

Principles for Identifying Defence Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Building Organisational Capability Over Time

Successful engagement with public R&D funding is an organisational capability, not an individual skill.

Organisations that perform well develop shared understanding of funder expectations, capture learning from feedback, and continuously refine their internal processes for opportunity assessment and bid preparation. They rely less on informal knowledge or individual experience and more on repeatable, evidence-based approaches.

Building reusable structures for interpreting calls, assessing fit and drafting applications improves consistency and resilience, particularly in defence innovation environments where funding landscapes evolve rapidly.

Over time, this capability becomes a strategic asset, supporting sustained engagement with innovation funding rather than episodic participation.
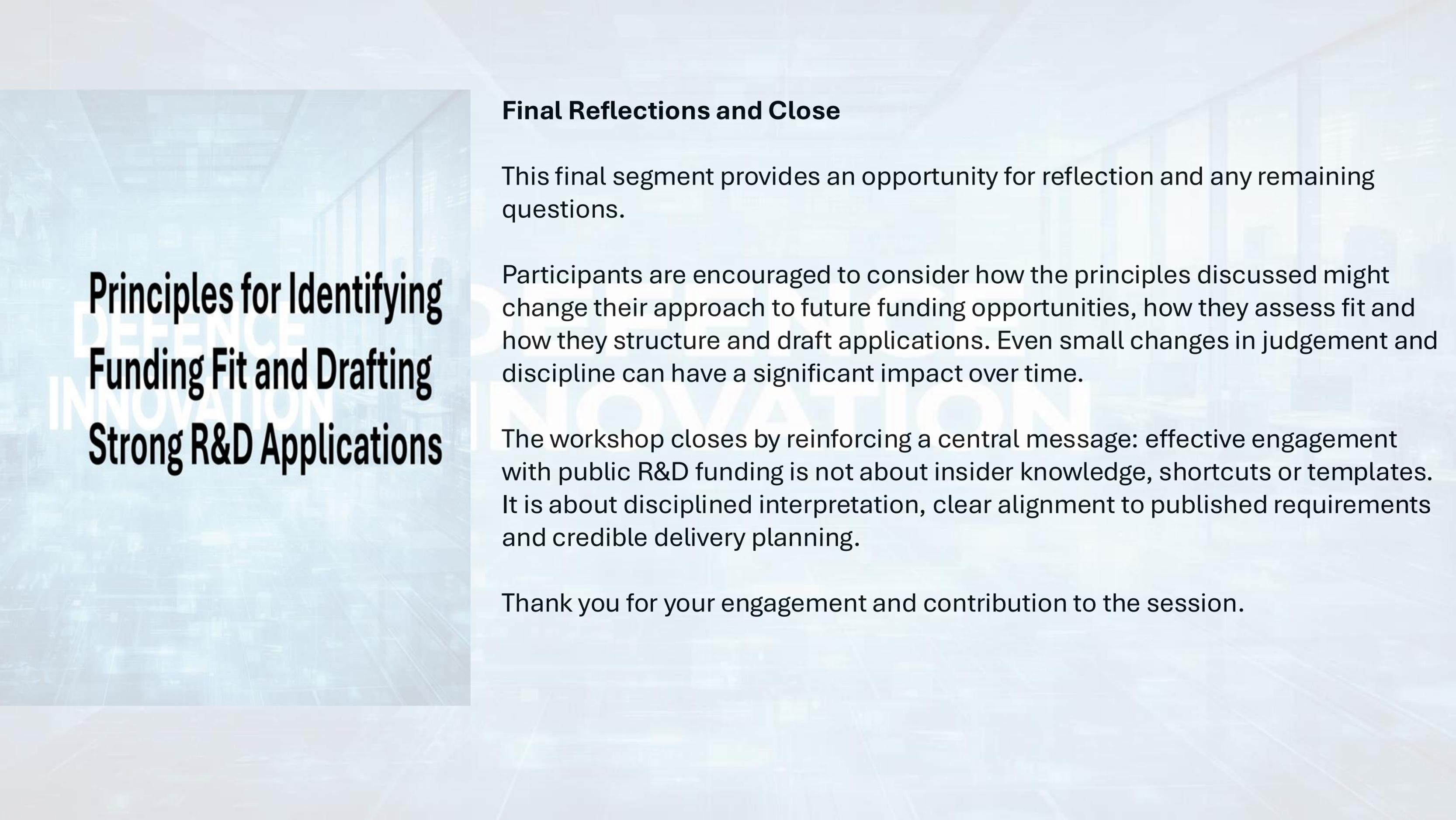
Principles for Identifying Funding Fit and Drafting Strong R&D Applications

Final Reflections and Close

This final segment provides an opportunity for reflection and any remaining questions.

Participants are encouraged to consider how the principles discussed might change their approach to future funding opportunities, how they assess fit and how they structure and draft applications. Even small changes in judgement and discipline can have a significant impact over time.

The workshop closes by reinforcing a central message: effective engagement with public R&D funding is not about insider knowledge, shortcuts or templates. It is about disciplined interpretation, clear alignment to published requirements and credible delivery planning.

Thank you for your engagement and contribution to the session.