

Defence Innovation and SMEs Take Centre Stage at DSEI UK 2025

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This year's Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) exhibition, set to take place from 9 to 12 September at London's ExCeL, is placing a strong focus on innovation and the growing role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK's defence landscape. With the theme "Preparing the Future Force," DSEI UK 2025 is expected to attract tens of thousands of visitors and will provide a platform for new

ideas, cutting-edge technologies, and practical collaboration between industry and government.

More than just a trade show, DSEI has become a key event for defence professionals across the globe. It brings together policymakers, military leaders, engineers, and entrepreneurs to explore how innovation can strengthen national security and operational readiness. From cyber and space to land, sea, and air, the exhibition covers every domain of defence, offering a broad view of current priorities and future needs.

One of the most anticipated areas this year is the newly expanded Tech Zone, where over 100 companies, including many from outside the traditional defence sector, will showcase technologies ranging from artificial intelligence and autonomous systems to low-Earth orbit communications and advanced data analysis. Rather than being confined to one area, these innovators will be embedded throughout the venue, reflecting the increasing overlap between civilian and military tech.

For SMEs, the event offers a rare opportunity to break into a sector often dominated by large contractors. Thanks to new initiatives backed by the Ministry of Defence, smaller firms now have more direct access to procurement pathways, funding opportunities, and face-to-face time with decision-makers. Many of these businesses, start-ups, university spin-outs, and companies from industries like automotive or energy, bring fresh perspectives that defence leaders are eager to explore.

Senior military figures, including Commander of Strategic Command General Jim Hockenhull, have stressed the importance of tapping into ideas that come from beyond traditional defence circles. His message is

clear: future capability will come not just from scale, but from speed, creativity, and adaptability.

This shift coincides with recent reforms aimed at streamlining defence procurement. Announced earlier this year, changes include a push to shorten acquisition timelines and invest in faster, off-the-shelf solutions. A £400 million innovation fund and a new defence marketplace have been introduced to support these goals, with SMEs expected to play a central role.

Ultimately, DSEI UK 2025 offers more than just an exhibition floor; it's a space where partnerships are forged and the future of defence begins to take shape. For Britain's growing community of innovators, it's a chance to step forward and be part of that conversation.