SSRO

Single Source
Regulations Office

Digital Strategy
2025-2030

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The Single Source Regulations Office (SSRO) is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Ministry of Defence, but independent in our operation and decision making. The single source regulatory framework places controls on the pricing of defence contracts that are awarded without competition. The SSRO is at the heart of this framework and plays a key role in the regulation of single source contracts (Qualifying Defence Contracts and Qualifying Sub-Contacts, or 'QDCs' and 'QSCs'), which equates to approximately half of all defence spending on equipment and support each year, providing some of the largest and most strategically important UK defence capabilities.

This Digital Strategy ('Strategy') relates to data, technology, people, and processes that allow the SSRO to operate and deliver continuously better performance across our organisational goals, leveraging the appropriate digital tools and platforms. The strategy sets out our approach to:

- Defence contractors' reported data,
- Inputs that support delivering our statutory duties,
- Inputs from stakeholder engagement,
- Internally reported and generated finance and HR data, as well as our technology and the digital tools and platforms that we use to collect and process this data.

This Strategy, alongside relevant policies and processes is aligned with the relevant government strategies, policies, and functional standards[1] and is subject to regular review and approval by the SSRO's Accounting Officer.

Previous SSRO strategies

This Digital Strategy replaces the strategies relating to DefCARS and the data it holds:

- Data Strategy 2019; and
- DefCARS Future Technology Strategy 2021.

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1 Including the *cross-government digital strategy, roadmap for digital transformation* (where relevant) and the Government's functional standards on Digital 005, Analysis 010 and Security 007.

A new Digital Strategy

The SSRO's Digital Strategy builds on the foundations of both the previous Data Strategy and DefCARS Future Technology Strategy, bringing them together and superseding them. However, its scope is wider, encompassing all digital, data and technology deployed within the SSRO.

Our digital ambition is not limited to the further development of DefCARS. To enable faster decision-making, insightful and consistent high-quality outputs and improved Defence outcomes, we will ensure that we have the necessary digital skills; that our processes are agile, supportive and streamlined, and that the data we collect in support of our organisational goals is in the right format to optimise its exploitation.

The Strategy reflects further developments in technology and policy in the digital area, and alongside the relevant policies and processes includes:

- The SSRO's ambitions for how digital, data and technology will be used to achieve the objectives of the regulatory framework, and of the organisation.

- A blueprint and outline plan for digital, data and technology related activity setting out our key aspirations within data, technology, people and processes.

We will continuously explore the best ways to deliver our digital services, both internally and externally. We will be responsive to the changing requirements from the organisation and our stakeholders, particularly alive to the need to respond to changes arising from the Strategic Defence Review, the Defence Industrial Strategy and the review of the Single Source Contract Regulations. We will monitor and assess any new developments in technology that could be adopted to support our work. Any changes to our digital systems and processes will be implemented effectively and efficiently to drive productivity and safely support our people.

Guiding IT Principles

The SSRO's guiding IT principles remain that the SSRO should have:

- **Independent IT systems and services.** Our IT services and information and data should remain in the organisation's scope of responsibility, subject to regular review and the potential to explore better integration of DefCARS with MOD systems.

- **Cloud-based and flexible systems.** A 'cloud first' strategy, complemented by a Zero Trust Architecture (ZTA) access solution. Flexibility is attained by using scalable solutions that increase or decrease resources without changing their design.

- **Technology as an enabler, not a barrier.** The SSRO uses high quality products, both in terms of hardware and software to support the workforce. As an 'information and data' organisation, storing and processing sensitive information, tested tools and secure configurations are essential to effectively support the business.

This single Digital Strategy should be read in conjunction with the SSRO's Security Strategy.

2. SUMMARY OF THE SSRO'S DIGITAL STRATEGY

Diagnosis: 'As is' – where the SSRO is now

The SSRO brings together data, technology, and capability (people and processes) to securely deliver its digital services including to assist industry to input compliant reports and MOD to utilise these reports through analysis and quality MI.

- Our **data** governance approach would benefit from being more comprehensive across all our data sources, assisting in solving data issues.

- Our data platform **technology** is reaching legacy status, so the SSRO must build on its strong technology core, and our infrastructure in the cloud, as well as develop our thinking about how to transform our other services through technology.

- Our **people** have digital skills and capabilities, supported by brought-in expertise when required, but we need to continue to develop our team to close critical digital skills gaps and increase engagement with others doing similar work in government.

- Our **processes and policies** need to be appropriately sized and aligned with the government functional standard for digital and analysis, with our digital services recognising the non-digital elements of these services.

Our Vision: Where the SSRO needs to be by 2030

DefCARS will remain the primary tool for **securely** and efficiently capturing, storing, and facilitating the use of statutory report submissions and its data will be recognised as a **strategic asset**.

These DefCARS quality, timely and standardised statutory reports alongside other digital assets arising from our statutory functions will be **accessible and trusted** by their users and where relevant fully utilised by the MOD, providing insights for procurement decisions, contract management and supporting the development of the regulatory framework.

Our digital and corporate services will be delivered within a comprehensive data governance framework with supportive policies and processes as well as strong **digital capabilities** through skilled professionals and external experts. These will be supported by **fit for purpose, easy to use, delivered at scale and pace** digital, technology and data that promotes effectiveness and efficiency.

Ways: Initiatives to achieving our digital objectives

- **Data:** We will drive exploitation of our data to the fullest, using data technologies and analytics, data science and Artificial Intelligence capabilities within a strong data governance framework to deliver quality data at optimal cost and efficiency.

- **Technology:** We will update all our digital assets, including DefCARS, to address legacy issues and security risks, refresh our technology roadmap that includes facilitating industry submission of quality data and better utilisation of this data by MOD as well as improving and updating our internal technology to facilitate delivery of our statutory functions.

- **People:** We will invest in our people to ensure they have the right skills, capabilities, and roles, partnering with the wider government digital community and external expertise to ensure effective delivery of our digital services.

- **Process:** We will embed the right processes to enable us to design, deliver and securely operate our digital services within a strong data governance framework that upholds appropriately scaled functional standards for the organisation.

3. OUR ASPIRATIONS: STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Our **DATA** is used as a 'strategic asset' supporting speed and simplicity in procurement and providing trusted insights:

- We will drive exploitation of our data to the fullest, using data technologies and analytics, data science and Artificial Intelligence (AI) capabilities within a strong data governance framework to deliver at quality data at optimal cost and efficiency.

- Provide a focus on improved data quality through new reporting guidance, support and training complemented by third party data whether driven out of the review of single source regulatory framework, technology changes or best practise.

- Provide analysis and insight to improve the effective use of the data.

Our **TECHNOLOGY** Platforms will be modernised and maintained:

- We will update all our digital assets, including DefCARS, to address legacy issues and security risks, refresh our technology roadmap (which includes facilitating industry submission of quality data and better utilisation of this data by MOD) as well as improving and updating our internal technology to facilitate delivery of our statutory functions.

- Develop a fit for purpose WebApp that will address the legacy issues and ensure data security within DefCARS.

- Collaborate with third-party suppliers, industry, and MOD to ensure a more accessible system improving the collection of statutory reports and other inputs to support our statutory functions.

- Explore the utilisation of AI.

Our **PEOPLE** will be empowered and highly skilled:

- We will invest in our people to ensure they have the right skills, capabilities, and roles, partnering with the wider government digital community and external expertise to ensure effective delivery of our digital services.

- Enable a digital mindset across the SSRO in delivering its organisational goals.

Our **PROCESSES and POLICIES** will support efficient and effective delivery of our external and internal services:

- We will embed the right processes to enable us to design, deliver and securely operate our digital services within a strong data governance framework that upholds appropriately scaled functional standards for the organisation.

- Ensure our digital services operate within a strong governance framework, policies, and procedures.

- Explore the options to further integrate DefCARS within MOD.

4. DATA ASPIRATIONS

Our DATA is used as a 'strategic asset' supporting speed and simplicity in procurement and providing trusted insights: We will drive exploitation of our data to the fullest, using data technologies & analytics, data science and AI capabilities within a strong data governance framework to deliver at quality data at optimal cost and efficiency.

Provide analysis and insight to improve the effective use of the data

The SSRO will proactively utilise the data from DefCARS, alongside information from our other support functions, such as the helpdesk queries, NRAS, referrals and other third-party data sources, as well as from our regular stakeholder engagement, to provide insights that will help our stakeholders respond to the major defence procurement challenges.

- We will establish a central repository for critical data ownership and stewardship information, which includes a quality dimension that sets out the currency, accuracy, completeness, conformity, consistency, timeliness, and uniqueness of this critical data.

- We will continue to develop and publish statistics and insights using data from DefCARS and our other data sources providing increased transparency to all stakeholders.

- We will continue to prioritise the timely fulfilment of the Secretary of States request for analysis under Section 36 and Section 37 of the Defence Reform Act.

- We will be proportionate in our compliance activities and focus our analytical activity increasingly to a smaller number of significant contracts by both value and impact, to provide more detailed and consistent analysis and to improve data quality and utilisation.

- We will continue to develop and maintain analytical reports that support MOD procurement and by extrapolating forward to provide insights that will allow MOD to understand the regime, how it works and actively manage their contracts through to successful conclusion. And using feedback loops to identify data priorities and areas of highest demand and impact.

- We will enable our secure suite of accessible Management Information to be used by a wide range of MOD users and investigate the potential sharing of relevant Management Information to industry stakeholders.

- We will utilise the information on our SharePoint gathered from Stakeholder engagement, Helpdesk, Non-Referral Advice Service, Referrals, and other data sources to provide insights into the needs of our stakeholders using this to inform our onboarding, training, guidance and input into improving the regulatory framework.
- We will seek to ensure that data we utilise in our statutory functions is of sound quality, sourced from reputable sources and supportive of providing quality products and services to our stakeholders.

We will explore how the utilisation of our data by MOD can be facilitated through input of our metadata into government data marketplaces[1].

Provide new reporting guidance, support and training complemented by third party data with a focus on improving data quality

The Government is undertaking a Strategic Defence Review and developing a Defence Industrial Strategy, which may lead to changes to the legislation (the Defence Reform Act and Single Source Contract Regulations) that specifies how pricing and reporting should be conducted under the single source regulatory framework and what data is most valuable.

Data quality is about more than compliance. To be high quality, the data submitted into DefCARS and utilised by the SSRO in its statutory functions should be current and relevant, comparable, and reliable. The SSRO should ensure that data is fit for purpose through good data governance and management. This will be achieved through clear ownership of data quality, protection, security, and ethics based on the cross-government frameworks, guidance, and standards.

- We will develop our Reporting Guidance to reflect changes to both "what" should be reported and "how" data should be reported following changes to the single source regulatory framework and following improvements to DefCARS. By building in improved feedback loops and dialogue with industry, we will ensure supportive reporting guidance and DefCARS user guide.
- We will ensure that our guidance is accessible (clear, applicable, and useful) to users and remains so.
- We will investigate "guidance as code," to support common data standards while limiting validation errors and modernising reporting instructions.
- We will review the format of our guidance to further integrate reporting guidance into DefCARS, improving how contractors consume and interpret it, for example through searches, the potential use of AI including chat-bots and investigating whether there is a digital solution to providing intuitive and differentiated guidance for the different types of contract and supplier reports.
- We will facilitate the use of DefCARS by users in both industry and the MOD by the inclusion of webinars and video demonstrations on our website and in our training and support services.
- We will work collaboratively with MOD to improve alignment between its Commercial toolkit and the SSRO's reporting guidance and improve its accessibility.
- We will build a shared understanding of data quality issues in contractors' statutory reports, by working cooperatively with both contractors and the MOD, utilising DefCARS and the analysis from the system through our compliance work and data utilised in support of our wider statutory functions.
- We will move towards a data-driven approach to compliance with appropriate MI and use findings and feedback from our compliance monitoring to inform updates to our compliance methodology, the reporting guidance, DefCARS and our review of the regulatory framework.
- We will identify data quality improvements for all the data used in our statutory functions, including that obtained from third party sources such as Bloomberg and Moody's data, improving its relevance through our work and supporting our ambition to increase the MOD's utilisation of the data within statutory reports.

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1 Discovering data across government – Government Digital and Data

5. TECHNOLOGY ASPIRATIONS

Our TECHNOLOGY Platforms will be modernised and maintained: We will update all our digital assets including DefCARS to address legacy issues and security risks, refresh our technology road map to include how to facilitate improving industry's submission of quality data, and better utilisation of this data by MOD as well as improving and updating our internal technology to facilitate delivery of our statutory functions.

Develop a fit for purpose WebApp that will address the legacy issues and ensure data security within DefCARS

DefCARS was originally developed in 2017, and the bespoke nature of the system limits our ability to make changes while the access management model is built on code, that does not utilise current best practice. With funding from MOD, we will address these legacy issues and improve the security of the system.

DefCARS information held by the SSRO has been obtained under the statutory provisions of the Defence Reform Act 2014. These provisions require that sensitive commercial information obtained in the course of the SSRO's work shall not be disclosed without authority.

- We remain committed to ensuring that our IT infrastructure, all technology platforms and the information within them that we hold is secure and only available to those with a legitimate right to access it.

- We will replace the existing WebApp with a solution that improves the user experience, increases accessibility and utility, and takes advantages of advances in technology and addresses any "technical debt" and security vulnerabilities.

- We will ensure any changes to legislation are reflected into DefCARS and the supportive reporting guidance.

- We will ensure that relevant guidance and standards on design, architecture and operation of our information systems, technology, risk, and security is published.

- We will maintain the DefCARS security accreditation, at present from the MOD's Defence Assurance and Information Security service, until 2026.

- We will set out a path to improve our Secure by Design maturity score within the Secure by Design framework and maintain the SSRO's own Cyber Essentials Plus certification.

Collaborate with third-party suppliers, industry, and MOD to ensure more accessible systems, improving the collection of statutory reports and other inputs to support our statutory functions
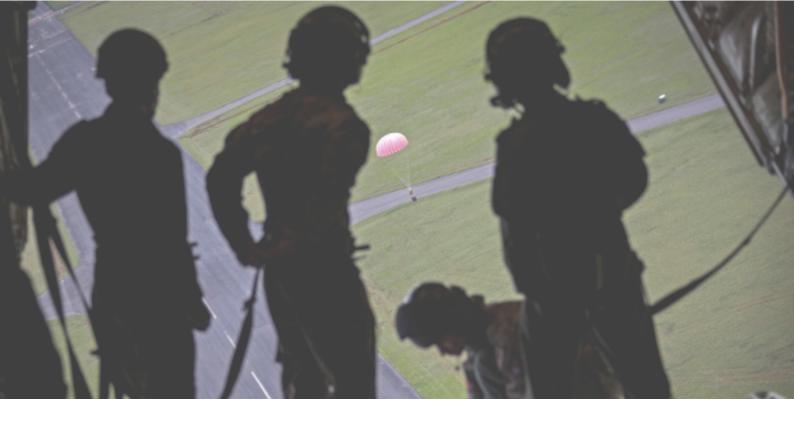
Our IT domains should support our services and be modern, stable, and secure.

Data should be collected once, where possible, to provide a single version of the truth. Defence contractors are required to submit reports in DefCARS as set out within the Single Source Contract Regulations, and the SSRO needs to use technology to make the collection of the data as efficient as possible.

- We will provide a modern, stable, and secure IT domain for all our services to both internal and external stakeholders.

- We will make appropriate use of external service providers with relevant expertise to meet the necessary quality and service standards, which currently includes ISO27001 and Cyber Essentials Plus certification.

- We will ensure that data collection is simplified, assessing whether the technology and the data fields can be further improved to support data entry and compliance as well as allowing efficient preparation and submission by industry of the statutory reports

- Explore the utilisation of AI

- The MOD has recognised that "AI has enormous potential to enhance capabilities, improve productivity and maximise our strategic advantage"[1], and has set the vision that: "in terms of AI, we will be the world's most effective, efficient, trusted and influential Defence organisation for our size"[2]. The SSRO will aim to keep pace with both MOD and Industry stakeholders use of AI.

- We will explore the use of AI to improve accessibility and support our customers such as using chat-bots to enhance customer service.

- We will evaluate the benefits of AI use in supporting our analysis and production of MI.

- We will seek out expertise to facilitate the SSRO journey in the adoption of the use of appropriate AI.

- We will investigate how AI can be utilised within the SSRO to draw together our extensive digital records, such as historical helpdesk query responses, compliance queries, non-referral advice and referral outcomes to support our statutory functions and support the operation of the regulatory functions.

- We will investigate how AI can be utilised to optimise operations within the SSRO and support internal data-driven corporate decision making and achievement of our corporate objectives through better utilisation of our digital corporate records.

- We will develop a new website to stand alongside the SSRO's current gov.uk website, which will support multi-media (video and webinars) with the aim of increasing the accessibility of our products and services to our stakeholder community and improving our stakeholder interactions.

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1 Ministry of Defence, The Defence AI Playbook
2 Ministry of Defence, Defence Artificial Intelligence Strategy

6. PEOPLE ASPIRATIONS

Our PEOPLE will be empowered and highly skilled: We will invest in our people to ensure they have the right critical skills, capabilities, and roles, partnering with the wider government digital community and seeking external expertise where appropriate, to ensure effective delivery of our digital services.

Enable a digital mindset across the SSRO in delivering its organisational goals

The SSRO provides security, digital and management information training from induction and appropriate specialist training throughout an individual's career with the SSRO including mandated annual refresher training for all employees, members, and third-party contractors.

The SSRO supports taking a digital perspective across its suite of activities and services.

- We will grow both our innate IT and DefCARS data and technology skillsets to ensure the SSRO becomes a more intelligent customer when dealing with our digital partners and suppliers as well as developing and drawing on a cadre of external expertise that can support our digital aspirations.

- We will arrange short placements at the MOD and industry for our digital staff, to enhance and maintain understanding of the digital environment and practices of our key stakeholders and their application of our guidance and other supportive tools.

- We will, when necessary, recruit staff with the right digital experience, skills, and knowledge, drawn from a range of relevant professional domains.

- We will build trust in the SSRO through the digital skills, knowledge and experience we bring to bear, supporting our staff in their professional development in all digital aspects to ensure delivery of our digital vision and objectives while supporting career progression.

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7.   PROCESS & POLICY ASPIRATIONS

Our PROCESSES will support efficient and effective delivery of our external and internal services: We will embed the right processes to enable us to design, deliver and operate our digital services within a strong data governance framework that upholds appropriately scaled functional standards for the organisation.

Explore the options to further integrate DefCARS with MOD

Interoperability of DefCARS with MOD systems and contract/supplier information, such as earned value management data and the MOD's Contracting, Purchasing and Finance (CP&F) tool, will enrich the information from the DefCARS data and make it more relevant.

The MOD has developed a data domain model for governance processes and DefCARS data sits within the "commercial" domain.

- We will seek to integrate DefCARS data into MOD's wider data and information strategy, so that DefCARS data can be more effectively blended with (and used alongside) other MOD data.
- We will align DefCARS and our digital services further within the MOD's existing governance processes for the data in the "commercial" domain where appropriate.
- We will carry out a data maturity assessment of the SSRO's capability, effectiveness, and readiness to use data fully in the delivery of a better stakeholder service.

Ensure our digital services operate within a strong governance framework, policies, and procedures

- We will ensure our digital services operate within the scope of the SSRO Security Strategy and that a robust governance framework, policies, and procedures are in place.
- We will ensure that where appropriate our policies and processes related to digital management are aligned with the principles set out in the Government Functional Standard on Digital (GovS 05) and in line with our Security Strategy.
- We will ensure that where appropriate our policies and processes related to our analysis work are aligned with the principles set out in the Government Functional Standard on analysis (GovS 010).
- We will continue to use outsourced digital systems to support finance, payroll, Human Resources, the SSRO Board and Committees, which enable appropriate and secure web-based system access that aligns with the SSRO's ICT systems and controls, while ensuring that the SSRO's data is kept safe, secure and available.