



DBD

Make A Difference.

Procurement Barriers to the SME Community

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Strategic Context

The key role of diverse supply chains in complex engineering delivery

Nuclear Sector Demand

The UK nuclear sector depends heavily on a highly robust and diverse supply chain to execute mission-critical programmes:

-  **New Nuclear & Fuelcycle:** Delivering clean, secure power generation.
-  **Defence Nuclear:** Supporting national security infrastructure.
-  **Fusion Programmes:** Commissioning next-generation energy systems.
-  **Decommissioning:** Waste management & site clean-ups.

Challenge

SMEs represent a vast proportion of UK engineering capability but sometimes struggle to secure access to public procurement pathways.

A few tips on leaping the hurdles

Why SMEs matter
Procurement barriers for SMEs
Developing our procurement capability
Failures & successes
Sample playbook

Why SME's Matter

Delivering significant value through agility, specialisation and localisation



Agility & Specialty

- Niche technical expertise
- Highly innovative
- Rapid team mobilisation
- Competitive overhead rates
- Direct access to experts



Socio-Economic Impact

- Localised regional employment
- Supporting levelling up goals
- Flexible community investment
- Direct social value returns
- Diverse regional growth



Nuclear Specialties

- Independent technical advisory
- Specialist safety case & regulatory expertise
- Simulation and modeling
- Specialist nuclear engineering
- Digital control architectures

DBD's Journey as an SME

Scaling successfully through hyper-focus and strategic sector alignment

2018 / 2019

£4.2M

28 Full-Time Employees (FTE)

Operating globally across UK, US, Middle East, China, Japan.
Standard nuclear business models, but with frequent diversity in adjacent sectors.

2026 / 2027

£40M

220 Full-Time Employees (FTE)

Hyper-scaled to 100% nuclear focus. Deeply entrenched in UK & US, across Defence, Decommissioning, Fuel Cycle, with recent diversity into Australia.

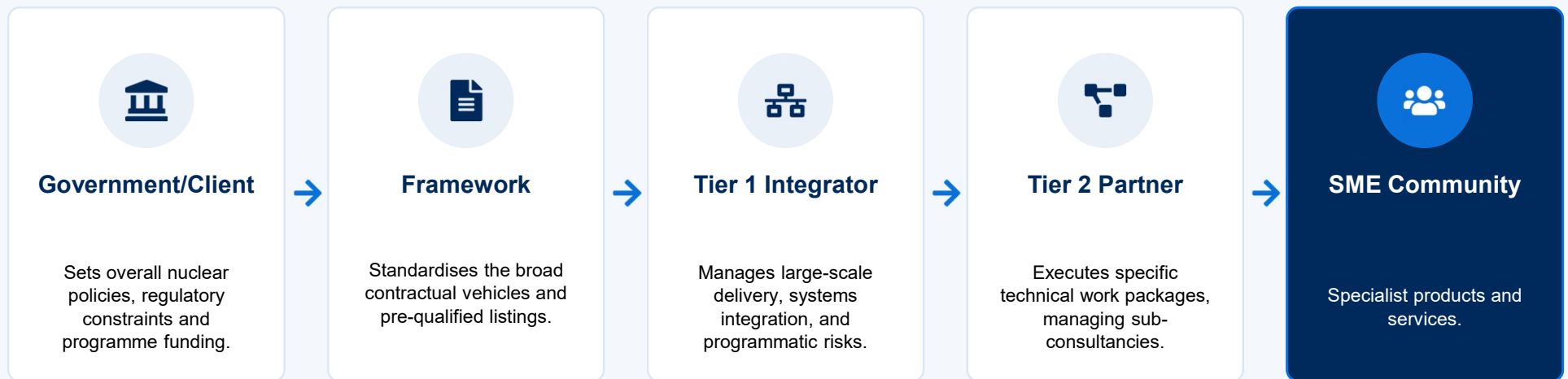
THE STRATEGIC KEY TO SCALING

SMEs cannot be everything to everyone. Find where your specific route-to-market is fully controllable and where you add distinct, high-impact value to the Client (Tier1) and Tier 2 partners. Focus is the key to success.



The Procurement Landscape

Tracing the multi-tiered flow from end-client down to specialised SMEs



SME Procurement Barriers

Key hurdles to overcome for specialised SME participation



Heavy Qualification Hurdles

Compliance certifications (ISO 9001, 14001, 45001, 27001, 44001, Cyber Essentials Plus).
Significant strain on limited SME back-office resources.



Bid vs. Return

Detailed framework response parameters require heavy bid team investments with no guarantee of downstream work package award or actual task volume.



Leadership Resource Contraction

SME bid teams often include the active executive managers. Pulling them off billable consulting work to draft bids compromises baseline revenue.



Limited Flow-Down Commitments

Major contract or framework wins with Tier-2 contractors don't guarantee project allocations. Client or T2 self-delivery reduces SME opportunities.

Solutions: Process Optimisation

Overcoming barriers through structured procedural and operational alignment



1. Ruthless Focus

Define your strategic sweet spot
Avoid bid sprawl
Pursue high-probability captures,
aligned to strategy
Consider lower margin to open doors
to future opportunities



2. Map Routes

De-risk single-channel dependency
Diversify pursuits across multiple
sector frameworks, direct client
engagements and Tier 2 pairings



3. Build Compliance

Bite the bullet and get compliant
Prepare reusable templates
Always, always, weave your case
study performance and Social Value
metrics into bid responses.

Solutions: Human Capital & Trust

Unlocking relationships and building mutual credibility



1. Map the Hierarchy

Map organisational structures across clients and Tier 2 partners. Identify key decision makers and technical champions.



2. Earn Early Trust

Attend industry events and organise workshops with partners. Deliver honest capability overviews and prove your reliability early and consistently.



3. Secure Tier 2 Alliances

Share the bidding burden with trusted Tier 2 partners. Protect your interests by insisting on clear Teaming agreements with defined scope or share split.

Solutions: Technological Leverage

Using modern digital systems to maximise small-team bid output



1. Active Pipeline Management

Use collaborative sales platform to map opportunity pipelines, maintain strict capture accountability, manage your client relationships.



2. AI-Driven Drafting

Utilise AI models to draft capture plans, format case studies, analyse tenders and quickly tailor core proposals to client needs.



3. Document Control

Establish centralised document hubs
Build structured libraries containing pre-cleared, tailored, nuclear-ready CVs, Case Studies.

Lessons From Failure

Critiquing real project misses to build stronger pursuit frameworks

CASE STUDY

UK Decommissioning Bid

The Context & Approach:

Engaged early, working closely with client to define scope alignment.

Delivered high-quality technical responses and competitive price points.

Outcome: Lost to a competitor utilising uncapped page count offer wide-ranging, comprehensive solutions and highly skilled resources.



Failure Post-Mortem

Not Answering the Specific Query: Over-emphasising perceived solution rather than addressing precise evaluation requirements.

Insufficient Resource Challenge: Failure to clearly demonstrate an experienced and well defined team structure to integrate with client to develop a capability rather than provide one solution.

Not over-selling: Failed to demonstrate other solutions and communicate we would bring the “A” team

Success Blueprints

Deconstructing programmatic wins across Fusion & Defence sectors

FUSION SECTOR

FOAK System Integrator

Teaming Strategy: Built and led a powerful, diverse delivery team directly as the primary Tier 2 contractor.

Early Trust: Constant on-site engagement with the end client technical and commercial teams at all stages of drafting and market engagement.

Bidding Discipline: Implemented rigid capture plans with clear risk profiling and detailed bidding assumptions. Strong technical and commercial offering aligned to our knowledge of client requirements.

Agile governance: Clearly understood risks, mitigated with workable assumptions and trust driven relationship with client.

DEFENCE SECTOR

UK Defence Delivery Partner

Synergetic Partnering: Early teaming with key Tier 2 contractors. Leveraged DBD's niche safety expertise to win.

Rapid Mobilisation: Deployed top engineering resources directly to client locations.

Framework Nurturing: Maintained daily touchpoints with critical framework stakeholders to flow down project opportunities.

The Path Forward

Actions for scaling SME capability in highly regulated environments

DBD'S SME PLAYBOOK

-  Engage early and clearly define your plans
-  Define clear value and fill capability gaps
-  Build genuine trust-based relationships
-  Think big, position with confidence
-  Prioritise and secure ISO/Cyber compliances
-  Don't be patient. Be intensely realistic

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