HENDERSON SCOTT

MARKET INSIGHT

Navigating the eDV Talent Landscape

Strategies for consultancies delivering into UK National Security

Introduction

The success of any national security programme depends not just on the technology used — but on the capability of the people behind it. For Consultancies operating in highly sensitive environments, particularly where eDV clearance is a prerequisite, the fight for talent has become a defining challenge.

This whitepaper was developed to support consultancies delivering into national security, by exploring the market forces shaping the secure tech talent space — from salary pressures and remote work expectations to bottlenecks in clearance and onboarding. Through candidate surveys, consultant interviews, and labour market analysis, we've gathered a snapshot of:

- The most in-demand eDV-cleared roles
- What's driving accepted offers — and what's causing dropouts
- How consultancies can differentiate based on process, flexibility, and candidate experience
- What primes, large sub-primes and SMEs can each do to attract, engage, and retain critical talent

This whitepaper is a practical, consultancy-focused look at what's really happening in the eDV tech talent market — and how firms like yours can gain a competitive edge.

> *"The technology talent market supporting the UK's national security programmes is becoming increasingly complex — and consultancies delivering into this space are feeling the pressure. Whether you're a prime contractor or a specialist SME, the challenge is the same: securing the right eDV-cleared technology talent, at the right time, under the right constraints. At Henderson Scott, we bring solutions to talent challenges. We work daily with firms who are tasked with building and deploying technical capability into the most sensitive environments in the country. This whitepaper aims to surface market reality and offer practical insight to help you compete smarter."*
>
> - Sean Brown, Practice Director at Henderson Scott

Methodology

This whitepaper draws upon a combination of primary and secondary research conducted in Q1 2025 to provide an accurate snapshot of the eDV-cleared technology talent market within the UK national security space. Two tailored surveys were distributed — one targeting eDV-cleared tech professionals and another focused on hiring managers and decision-makers across prime and sub-prime consultancies. These insights were supported by structured interviews with Henderson Scott consultants operating in the national security space, who shared real-time observations and trends from active hiring cycles. Additional market data was sourced from platforms such as Security Cleared Jobs to validate patterns in role demand, salary ranges, and clearance requirements. The findings are representative of the consultancy-led delivery model and are intended to support suppliers operating in highly sensitive environments.

Key trends in National Security Tech Talent

Whether you're a prime contractor or a specialist SME, the challenge is consistent: demand for eDV-cleared technology professionals has surged — while supply remains critically constrained, exacerbated by clearance delays for new entrants. Over the past 12 months, consultancies across the national security ecosystem have faced intensified competition, shifting candidate expectations, and growing delivery risk linked to talent shortages alongside a change in Frameworks and prime contractors.

Salaries are climbing fast — and offers must keep up
We've seen an average 18% salary increase across cleared tech roles, with some eDV-cleared candidates securing raises as high as 33%. Just 44% of accepted offers matched candidate expectations — while 52% exceeded them.

For consultancies, this means accuracy in offer design is mission-critical. If your numbers don't reflect current market sentiment, expect your offer to be declined — or outbid.

Process speed is a competitive advantage
Consultancies with a 1–2 stage process and quick turnaround are winning eDV talent. The average timeline from CV send to offer acceptance sits around 4 weeks, but top-performing consultancies are securing candidates in as little as 2 weeks.

SMEs in particular can leverage their agility to stand out. In contrast, larger primes may need to invest in internal sign-off reform to reduce delays that cost them talent.

DV bonuses are the norm
80% of employers now offer DV or eDV bonuses, often as standard rather than discretionary. For consultancies operating on tight margins, bonus structuring is becoming a key differentiator — especially when base salaries are constrained by client budgets.

Hybrid expectations are here to stay
Most eDV candidates now expect some level of hybrid or flexible working, even for secure roles. Firms that proactively address this (e.g., split-site models, secure pods, or flexible ROTA systems) are viewed as more progressive and attractive.

The shift from control to choice
This is no longer a buyer's market. eDV-cleared tech professionals are highly informed, often balancing multiple offers, and unwilling to compromise on compensation, process experience, or flexibility. The firms who win are those that adapt their hiring approach with speed, empathy, and market intelligence.

SALARIES INCREASING
Average 18% rise across eDV-cleared roles

OFFERS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS
52% of offers surpass candidate demands

FAST HIRING PROCESSES WIN
1-2-stage recruitment drives acceptance

HYBRID WORK DEMANDED
Flexibility expected even for eDV roles

Talent availability and in-demand skills

The most pressing delivery risk facing national security consultancies today isn't compliance, capability, or competition — it's the availability of eDV-cleared technology talent. The talent pool is finite, highly specialised, and in many areas, close to saturation.

The most in-demand eDV roles
Across client programmes, consultants report the highest demand for:

- Software Engineers (Java, Python, C++, AWS, React)
- Automation Testers
- DevOps Engineers
- Cloud Infrastructure Specialists

These roles are tied directly to long-term programme delivery requirements from key government departments, and most demand deep technical capability alongside full eDV clearance.

The eDV talent pool is static — supply cannot scale fast
Unlike commercial tech sectors, consultancies in national security cannot scale hiring by casting wider nets. eDV Clearance is currently taking 18 months+ and limits access to an already small, high-value community.

For Primes, this means leveraging your prime status, delivery portfolio and programme diversity as a selling point.
For large Sub-Primes, this means leveraging your delivery portfolio and scale as a selling point.
For SMEs, it means playing to agility, culture, and speed to engagement.

Shift the mindset: From "perfect fit" to "trainable talent"
The demand for candidates with 100% clearance and 100% skills alignment is increasingly unrealistic. Firms that succeed are:

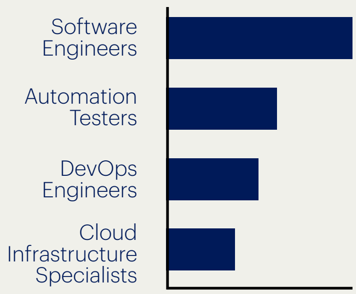
- Willing to train internally (especially for legacy tech stacks)
- Open to upskilling adjacent technical candidates with the right clearance
- Proactive about engaging non-cleared talent for pipeline development

Opportunity for differentiation
For delivery partners in national security, there's real opportunity to differentiate on how you build and manage cleared talent internally:

- Upskilling frameworks
- Community-building among eDV teams
- Retention strategies tied to career development

These aren't just retention tools — they're value propositions when bidding or partnering.

Most in-demand eDV-cleared Technology roles in National Security



> *"The smartest consultancies are starting to treat talent the same way they treat IP - as an asset to develop, not just acquire."*
> Sean Brown, Practice Director at Henderson Scott

Salary and compensation trends

For consultancies delivering into national security, particularly on eDV-cleared programmes, salary strategy is no longer just a commercial discussion — it's a tactical necessity. As cleared candidates become more informed and in-demand, even small misalignments in compensation can lead to declined offers or last-minute withdrawals.

Market uplift is outpacing budget structures

- 18% average salary increase across eDV-cleared tech roles in the past year
- Peak increases of up to 33% for in-demand skillsets (especially for in-demand technical roles)
- Just 44% of offers matched expectations — 52% exceeded them, often to secure the candidate
- 9 out of 10 accepted offers were salary-driven

This reality puts pressure on both prime and sub-prime consultancies, particularly when delivery budgets are fixed by pre-scoped commercial agreements.

DV bonus strategy is now a differentiator

80% of clients now offer DV or eDV bonuses, but how they're positioned makes all the difference:

- Primes & Larger Sub-Primes may offer structured, policy-led bonuses, but often lack agility in approval
- SMEs can be more flexible with their salary bandings, are more likely to extend equity but are typically less likely to offer a now expected DV Bonus. This can make direct offer comparisons challenging for candidates

Compensation is more than base pay

Top-performing consultancies are now layering multiple value levers into their offer strategy:

- Personalised DV bonus options
- Flexible working models including 4 day work week and 9 day fortnights
- Career progression visibility from day one
- Commitment to clear project scopes and delivery pathways

These layers matter — particularly to eDV candidates, who often trade higher pay elsewhere for predictability and impacting a secure consultancy environment.

Be realistic, be fast, be transparent

Candidates are adjusting salary expectations mid-process based on perceived demand. Consultancies who delay decision-making — or try to negotiate down — often lose out to firms who go in strong and close quickly.

Salary and Compensation Trends in National Security Consulting

"Clients delivering into secure programmes need to realise the offer is the closing tool, not the negotiation opener."

Sean Brown, Practice Director at Henderson Scott

Recruitment timelines and process efficiency

When hiring eDV-cleared talent, speed is strategy. In an ecosystem where every candidate is highly contested and clearance limits scale, the consultancies that win are not just those offering the best salary — but those with the most streamlined and candidate-conscious hiring processes.

Time-to-offer is the dealbreaker
Across the market:

- Average timeline from CV submission to offer acceptance is 4 weeks
- Leading consultancies are securing hires in 2 weeks and those winning in the talent market are ensuring swift interview feedback/decisions
- The most successful hiring processes include no more than 2 stages and rarely involve technical tasks

The message from candidates is clear: if you take too long, they'll take another offer.

SMEs vs. large Sub-Primes and Primes: Process agility
SMEs have a natural edge in agility — often able to:

- Avoid internal bureaucracy
- Provide immediate feedback
- Tailor offers on the fly

Primes & Larger Sub-Primes, while carrying greater brand weight, often lose candidates to slower decision-making, multi-layered approvals, or rigid frameworks. To stay competitive, primes must address internal sign-off delays and build dedicated candidate engagement teams to manage parallel pipelines.

Contract delays are a critical dropout risk
Even after verbal acceptance, we see candidates withdraw due to:

- Long delays in issuing contracts
- Silence during notice or clearance wait periods
- Uncertainty about onboarding timelines

Consultancies that build structured post-offer communication plans — including named points of contact and onboarding timelines — significantly reduce post-acceptance attrition.

Build process as a differentiator
Top consultancies are now positioning process itself as a competitive advantage, highlighting:

- Transparent timelines
- Structured feedback loops
- Consultant-led handholding throughout
- Swift contract issuance

Highest dropout risk

- Final interview
- Offer acceptance
- Start date

SMEs vs. Large Enterprise

	SME	Large Enterprise
Agility	High	Low
Bureaucracy	Low	High

Candidate sentiment and mobility

Understanding what motivates eDV-cleared tech professionals to stay — or leave — is critical if you want to build long-term delivery capability. These candidates know their value, are rarely on the market for long, and are increasingly selective about where they invest their time and trust.

What attracts them
From our survey and consultant interviews, the top reasons eDV candidates choose a consultancy include:

- Access to mission-critical programmes
- The chance to work with cutting-edge technology
- Strong team culture and leadership
- Salary and package
- Flexible working models, even in restricted environments

While primes may benefit from name recognition and programme scale, SMEs are often chosen for their culture, visibility, and personalised career paths.

Why they leave
Candidates told us they would consider leaving if:

- Salaries were significantly better elsewhere
- There was a lack of career progression
- Bureaucracy made day-to-day work frustrating
- They felt undervalued or disconnected from impact

Where they go next
When eDV professionals leave, the most common destinations are:

- Private sector technology consultancies (often outside secure environments)
- Larger primes with more structured progression
- Start-ups or scale-ups offering innovation and equity
- Some leave the sector entirely, frustrated by pace and rigidity

What you can do
Primes can offer:

- Structured progression frameworks
- Programme switching options to support growth
- Internal secondments across accounts

SMEs can differentiate with:

- Flat hierarchy and faster promotions
- Regular 1:1 career reviews
- Direct access to leadership and recognition

Both benefit from regularly engaging candidates post-placement — a step many overlook once onboarding is complete.

Candidate motivations

"Whilst only 22% of candidates admit to prioritising pay and benefits as part of their expectations, our experience is that this becomes much more important during the process and is the primary reason for candidates accepting and declining opportunities, followed by flexible working and career growth/opportunities."

Sean Brown, Practice Director at Henderson Scott

Remote work and flexibility

Before 2020, the idea of hybrid or remote working in secure environments was nearly unthinkable. Today, it's become one of the most sensitive friction points in the national security talent market — particularly among eDV-cleared professionals who expect the same flexibility they see offered elsewhere.

Candidate expectations have shifted
While candidates understand the restrictions tied to classified work, most still expect some form of flexibility, including:

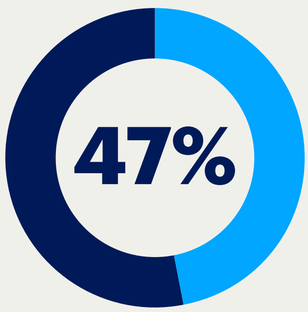
- Compressed working hours
- Split-site arrangements
- Hybrid models on non-secure days
- Flexible ROTA scheduling

Our research shows that even eDV candidates are now making work-life balance a priority, and many are willing to turn down roles that feel too rigid — regardless of salary.

Primes vs. SMEs: Who has the advantage?
Prime contractors benefit from greater flexibility due to their direct relationships with end customers and access to a broader range of opportunities. SMEs, by contrast, often play a supporting role — stepping in to plug resource gaps.

While SMEs can offer a more personalised experience where individuals feel valued rather than just a number, it's typically the primes that hold the lion's share of demand. As a result, greater flexibility in project variety and long-term pipeline is often found at the prime level.

Flexibility as a selling point
Flexible working isn't just a perk — it's a differentiator in a static, high-stakes market. Consultancies that embrace secure-by-design working models, ROTA flexibility, or even 9-day fortnights are already standing out in candidate decision-making.



of candidates cited flexibility as a top 3 retention factor

Clearance bottleneck

For consultancies operating in eDV environments, the clearance process isn't just a compliance necessity — it's a structural bottleneck that shapes everything from hiring timelines to revenue forecasting.

In a talent market already stretched thin, the clearance system adds an extra layer of delay and uncertainty that consultancies must strategically navigate.

eDV is the line in the sand

According to Security Cleared Jobs, 28% of national security vacancies in 2024 required eDV — and that figure is likely underreported for technical roles. This clearance level:

- Significantly narrows the available talent pool
- Extends onboarding timelines by months
- Limits candidate mobility between contracts

Time to productivity = delivery risk

Even once an offer is accepted, eDV onboarding can stall for:

- Waiting on contracts to be sent
- Inter-authority clearance transfer delays
- Lengthy notice periods while awaiting confirmation
- Poor communication
- Clearance reactivation or renewal timelines

SMEs may suffer more acutely here due to leaner bench strength and fewer resources to manage downtime, keeping candidates engaged through direct contact is paramount to reducing dropout risk and minimising time delays.

Primes and larger Sub-Primes, meanwhile, are often slowed by rigid internal onboarding processes with handovers between departments and systems.

What consultancies can do

Here's how some are staying ahead:

- Build pre-cleared pipelines: Invest in nurturing eDV-cleared candidates through content, community, and light-touch engagement — even when no live roles exist.
- Close communication gaps: Provide consistent updates and human touchpoints post-offer to keep candidates warm and committed during long lead-ins.

Candidate dropout points

Application	Slow feedback
Interview	Lack of urgency and feedback
Offer	Contract, clearance validation and counter offers
Start date	Clearance transfers and lack of post offer engagement

Candidate experience

In a market where every eDV-cleared candidate is fielding multiple offers — and every hire takes weeks or months to onboard — candidate experience isn't a nice-to-have. It's a strategic asset that can win or lose talent well beyond salary.

Where most consultancies lose candidates

Based on consultant interviews, the top experience breakdowns include:

- Feedback delays after interviews
- Misaligned salary offers at final stage
- Silence after verbal acceptance
- Slow or missing contracts
- Poor onboarding visibility during clearance wait

These gaps result in silent dropouts, rescinded offers, or cold feet. For firms delivering into eDV environments, these drop-offs are incredibly costly — especially if they delay project milestones or force rushed backfills.

What best-in-class looks like

Consultancies that win on experience tend to:

- Set expectations clearly at each stage
- Communicate proactively (even when there's no update)
- Involve hiring managers early and often
- Provide reassurance and transparency post-offer
- Issue contracts within 48 hours of verbal acceptance
- Have regular post-offer follow-up including high-side conversations

Both primes, larger sub-primes and SMEs can improve here. SMEs may do better naturally with more personalised service, while primes must scale structured experience to minimize risks between handover points.

Retention starts before day one

The post-offer period — especially when waiting on eDV transfer or onboarding approval — is where candidates are most vulnerable to counter-offers or anxiety. Without engagement during this phase, candidates often ghost or exit before start date.

- Smart consultancies use:
- "Keeping warm" communications
- Light-touch check-ins
- High side chats
- Branded onboarding packs
- Visibility into timeline steps

Experience = differentiator

Most consultancies in this space offer similar salaries and project work. What sets the best apart is how they make candidates feel throughout the process. In a static market with mobile candidates, that emotional edge matters more than ever.

Candidate journey in eDV hiring

"The job isn't done when the offer is accepted."

Government and industry collaboration

Every consultancy working in national security relies on the strength of collaboration across the ecosystem: between government departments, academia, and industry delivery partners. Yet too often, that collaboration is fragmented, reactive, and limited to one-off initiatives.

The talent crisis — especially for eDV-cleared technology roles — demands more joined-up thinking.

Where collaboration breaks down

Consultancies consistently report the following gaps:

- Disconnect between government workforce planning and actual market availability of talent
- Lack of fast-track mechanisms for pre-cleared or reactivating candidates
- Delays in guidance and funding around secure remote/hybrid models
- No unified approach to attracting and developing the next generation of eDV tech talent

Primes: Trusted partners, slower levers

As the front-line interface with government clients, prime contractors play a key role in shaping hiring frameworks and influencing clearance policy. But many are slowed by size and governance — making them less agile in adapting to market shifts.

To lead, primes must:

- Push for modernised clearance pipelines
- Champion workforce flexibility in contracts
- Set the tone for fair hiring practices in supply chains

SMEs: Closer to candidates, further from policy

Sub-primes and SMEs are often closest to the talent, with the agility to innovate — but furthest from the decision-makers shaping hiring conditions.

To stay competitive, SMEs should:

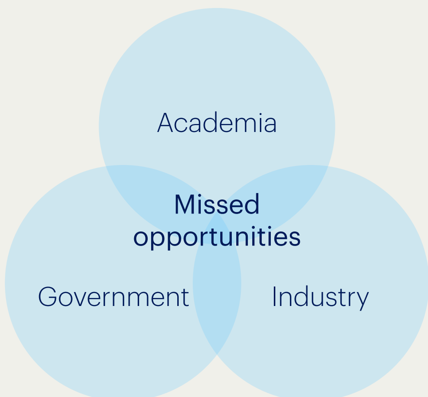
- Collaborate with primes to gain visibility and influence
- Share data on hiring blockers and those leaving the space
- Invest in training pathways and future talent initiatives

A call for structured dialogue

There is a growing need for formal, recurring collaboration forums between:

- Government programme leaders
- Clearance authorities
- Prime & sub-prime suppliers
- Academic and training bodies

Without this, the gap between workforce policy and delivery reality will continue to grow — and the talent crisis will deepen.



Recommendations

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to win in the current eDV talent market. But there are practical, high-impact actions that both primes and SMEs can take — some shared, some distinct — to strengthen hiring, retention, and delivery resilience.

Shared actions for all consultancies
Regardless of size or status, all delivery partners can gain competitive advantage by:

- Speeding up hiring processes
  Keep to 1–2 stages. Remove unnecessary technical tasks. Deliver feedback in under 48 hours.
- Strengthening post-offer engagement
  Don't go silent during clearance or onboarding. Set up structured touchpoints and welcome packs.
- Designing compensation beyond base salary
  Offer clear DV bonuses, flexible work models, and visible progression plans.
- Training hiring managers to close talent
  Internal stakeholders need coaching on how to pitch, reassure, and win candidate trust.
- Building internal talent development frameworks
  With a static market, growing your own is no longer optional — it's essential.

Prime contractors: Strategic levers
As market leaders, primes must set the standard across the delivery ecosystem.

- Push for contract structures that allow for flexibility, role clarity, and remote-friendly options
- Use your scale to drive diversity and upskilling initiatives in the cleared tech space
- Lead by example in improving clearance transfer onboarding times
- Share delivery forecasts with SME supply chain partners to help them pipeline more effectively

SMEs and Sub-Primes: Agility advantage
With fewer constraints and closer access to talent, Sub-Primes and SMEs can win by focusing on experience and adaptability.

- Offer tailored onboarding journeys and fast offer decisions
- Be transparent about role scope and progression paths
- Champion a culture-first message — candidates care more about values and support than logos
- Collaborate with primes to gain earlier access to demand forecasts
- Use person centered packages as decisive tiebreakers against slower competitors

Shared actions

- Build and nurture pre-cleared talent communities
- Enhance post-offer engagement
- Advocate for clearance process reform
- Align compensation with market expectations
- Adopt flexible and hybrid working models wherever security allows
- Improve candidate experience at every stage
- Strengthen employer branding around mission impact
- Develop career pathways and upskilling plans
- Advocate for clearance process reform
- Accelerate hiring processes

Future forecasting

The eDV-cleared technology talent market is not static — it's evolving in response to candidate behaviours, delivery demands, and national security priorities. For consultancies, understanding what's coming next is essential to building resilient, future-ready hiring strategies.

What happens if we don't adapt?
If consultancies — and the wider ecosystem — continue with outdated hiring models and underpowered engagement strategies, we can expect:

- Increased delivery risk due to unfilled roles and start-date delays
- Higher cost of hire, driven by salary inflation and counteroffers
- Loss of experienced talent to commercial and international opportunities
- Inequitable access to opportunity, favouring primes with scale over SMEs with innovation

What's coming next
Based on current market trajectories and conversations across the ecosystem, we forecast:

1. Continued salary growth — especially in Software, Test, Cloud and DevOps
The most in-demand eDV skillsets will command year-on-year uplift. Expect bonus inflation too.

2. Hybrid models will become a competitive requirement
Consultancies that design secure, flexible working options will attract and retain better candidates.

3. Clearance acceleration will be policy priority
We anticipate increased pressure on Consultancies to continue to only select candidates from within the same authority for Contractors but that there will be greater flexibility to transfer clearance between authorities for permanent talent.

4. SMEs will lead in candidate experience innovation
Expect sub-primes to gain ground by offering white-glove service, tailored onboarding, and community-led retention — something primes may struggle to replicate at scale.

5. Strategic talent partnerships will emerge
Forward-thinking consultancies will begin investing in academia, training providers, and internal bootcamps to build talent, not just chase it.

The firms that succeed in the next phase won't just react to change — they'll lead it. That means shifting from transactional hiring to long-term talent strategy, and from passive delivery to active market shaping.

Projected developments

NEXT 12 MONTHS	BY 2026	BY 2027	BY 2027	LONGER TERM
Annual bonuses paid. New framework live and new primes accelerate candidate movement	Continued rapid growth in salaries and bonuses	Significant investment in candidate pipelines	Accelerated eDV clearance processes	SMEs lead in talent experience innovation

The race for eDV-cleared technology talent is no longer just a hiring challenge — it's a delivery risk. For consultancies working at the heart of UK national security, the ability to attract, engage, and retain this rare talent pool will increasingly define who wins the work and who delivers it well. Whether you're a prime with influence or a specialist SME with agility, the path forward is clear: rethink the offer, streamline the process, and invest in long-term talent strategies that reflect today's candidate expectations. The consultancies that embrace this shift will not only stand out in the market — they'll raise the bar for the entire ecosystem.

HENDERSON SCOTT
NATIONAL SECURITY TALENT SOLUTIONS

Henderson Scott delivers Executive Search, Permanent Staffing, Contractor and Associate Hiring, and our Employed Consultant Model to Primes, large contractors, and SMEs across the National Security sector. Our award-winning Talent Solutions team supports organisations in securing high-quality, security-cleared professionals, including eDV-cleared talent.

To discuss your your hiring needs or challenges, please contact Sean Brown at 07590 375 985 or sean.brown@hendersonscott.co.uk

HENDERSON SCOTT