# PROGRAM EXCELLENCE AWARDS

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Thank you for participating,

Gregory Hamilton
President
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Acknowledged, agreed, and submitted by

_____          _____

Nominee's Signature                                                                      Date

Nominee's Name (please print): <u>Rachel Takahashi and Katherine Kucharski</u>

Title (please print): <u>Certification Program Manager and Certification Lead</u>

Company (please print): <u>General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. (GA-ASI)</u>

## NOMINATION FORM

Name of Program:  UK Protector Military Type Certification (MTC)

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☑ Customer Approved

- o Date:  16 Jun 2025

- o Customer Contact (name/title/organization/phone): Gp Capt Neil Venables, UK MOD.

☐ Supplier Approved (if named in this nomination form)

- o Date:  _____

- o Supplier Contact (name/title/organization/phone): _____

**PLEASE REFER TO PROGRAM EXCELLENCE DIRECTIONS
AS YOU COMPLETE THIS FORM.**

## SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
**Make the Case for Excellence**
*Value: 10 points*
Use 12 pt. Times Roman typeface.

**What is the vision for this program/project? What unique characteristics and properties qualify this program for consideration?**
[LIMIT YOUR NARRATIVE TO THIS PAGE.]



In partnership with the United Kingdom (UK) Ministry of Defence (MOD), General Atomics Aeronautical System Inc. (GA-ASI) has designed, tested, and generated compliance evidence to earn the MQ-9B SkyGuardian®, designated as the Protector RG Mk1 in Royal Air Force (RAF) service, the United States' first Military Type Certification (MTC) of an Medium Altitude, Long Endurance (MALE) Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS).  The MTC was granted by the UK Military Aviation Authority (MAA). The MAA operates as a technically independent regulator to ensure rigorous, objective evaluation consistent with international aviation standards. The result is a certification process that reflects the same regulatory integrity expected for manned military aircraft, with no compromise on airworthiness or public safety. The Protector MTC was granted by the UK MAA on 29 April 2025.

This milestone stems from a decade-long effort that began in 2014, when GA-ASI was approved under the Design Approved Organization Scheme (DAOS), a UK MOD regulatory framework that certifies and oversees organizations responsible for the design of military air systems and equipment. In 2015, the UK became the launch customer for GA-ASI's MQ-9B SkyGuardian, later named "Protector" by the RAF, initiating a joint drive to produce a UAS capable of combat and operation in non-segregated airspace.

Achieving MTC required a significant design overhaul of the baseline MQ-9A Reaper UAS, followed by the creation of compliance evidence in the form of design analysis, flight testing, software and hardware testing, and environmental qualification. GA-ASI produced 67,478 pages of compliance evidence to support the Type Certification Basis (TCB), which included 1,766 certification requirements from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Standardization Agreement (STANAG) 4671 Edition 2 and UK Defence Standardization (DEFSTAN) 00-970. The GA-ASI UK Protector program comprises seven contracts with the UK MOD, totaling approximately 3,400,000 hours.

Not only were the technical aspects challenging, but the unique programmatic aspects presented new and unforeseen trials. GA-ASI, the UK MOD, nor the UK MAA had ever worked a UAS certification program before. This meant that all three main organizations involved needed to embrace collaboration, incorporate lessons learned, and manage and contract unforeseen scope quickly throughout the program.

The global impact of the UK Protector MTC deserves recognition because it's a first-ever achievement that enables routine UAS operations in civil airspace from domestic RAF bases, drastically expanding its operational flexibility and reducing reliance on segregated ranges or overseas deployments. But more importantly, it serves as proof of concept for future unmanned systems seeking full integration into regulated airspace and sets a precedent for allied and NATO forces worldwide. Earning MTC will positively impact MQ-9B customers currently operating or coming online soon, including programs with Belgium, Canada, Poland, Japan, Taiwan, India and U.S. Air Force in support of the Special Operations Command.

## DIRECTIONS

- **Do not exceed 10 pages in responding to the following four descriptions**.
    - Allocate these 10 pages as you deem appropriate, but it is important that you respond to all four sections.

- DO NOT REMOVE THE GUIDANCE PROVIDED FOR EACH SECTION.

- Use 12 pt. Times Roman typeface throughout.

- Include graphics and photos if appropriate; do not change margins.

## SECTION 2: VALUE CREATION
Value: 15 points

Please respond to the following prompt:

➤ **Clearly define the value of this program/project for the corporation; quantify appropriately**

)International Business Expansion
Achieving certification significantly enhances GA-ASI's competitive advantage in international UAS procurement efforts. As more nations seek advanced, certifiable platforms for integration into civilian airspace, the MQ-9B's compliance with NATO and other international standards sets a stable expectation for reliability and safety.  As part of certification, GA-ASI has achieved accreditation as an approved design and test organization by the UK MAA. This accreditation enhances the company's credibility, and when combined with the MTC, positions GA-ASI as a key NATO-aligned UAS provider.

Export Sales Facilitation
Receiving USG export approval for the UK customer to receive the UK Protector UAV has created a valuable precedent that has streamlined more recent and future USG export approvals. Subsequent license applications referencing the precedent have moved faster and encountered fewer objections since the technical capabilities have already been evaluated for exportability by the USG. New customers can now more easily receive USG export approval, streamlining acquisition timelines and reducing risk.

Long-Term Sustainment Contracts
UK UAS operation under the MTC requires a sustainment contract to be in place. The SkyGuardian Global Support Solutions (SGSS) contract under the accredited Design Organization GA-ASI was recently awarded and provides a long-term sustainment contract opportunity for GA-ASI. This will allow for reliable cash-flow and entices future customers to embrace design commonality for sharing of sustainment costs.

Strengthened UK-US Cooperation
The MTC enables deeper collaboration between the UK and United States (US) on future unmanned systems development and deployment.

Certifiable Design Strategy Validation
The MTC validates GA-ASI's certifiable design strategy. The legacy Reaper design was already internationally proven as a mission-effective platform, but lacked the documentation and design required for certification.  This design was overhauled, creating MQ-9B and UK Protector to meet stringent

airworthiness and regulatory standards.  In doing so, the UK Protector sets a new benchmark for safe, reliable, and globally deployable remotely piloted aircraft. The MTC strengthens GA-ASI's MQ-9B product line as the company transitions from the legacy MQ-9A, reinforcing the adaptability of the MQ-9B platform to meet unique domestic and international customer needs, including integration of customer-specific weapons and payloads, sovereign data handling, and compliance with bespoke regulatory frameworks.

➢ **Clearly define the value of this program/project to your customer**

Replacement for Phased-Out Reaper
The RAF plans to retire the MQ-9A Reaper in 2025. The UK Protector is a much-improved replacement for the Reaper. It is a next-generation evolution of the Reaper, offering longer endurance, greater Maximum Takeoff Weight (MTOW), increased weather capability, enhanced safety systems, and the ability to handle a variety of payloads and enhancements in development.

Deployment Expansion
This certification confirms that the platform meets stringent airworthiness and safety standards, allowing it to operate in non-segregated civilian airspace in the UK and abroad. For the MOD, this means broader deployment opportunities, including flexible training environments and routine transit through shared airspace without the need for special accommodations, ultimately enhancing operational readiness and reducing logistical barriers. Moreover, certification improves interoperability with NATO members, enabling UK Protector to contribute meaningfully to multinational operations and ensuring alignment with allied airworthiness standards.

Operational Flexibility
The MTC unlocks the full potential of UK Protector as a dual-use platform, capable of performing not only military missions such as precision strike and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), but also civil missions like border surveillance, maritime patrol, and disaster response. It enables seamless integration into national and international airspace systems, expanding UK Protector's utility beyond traditional conflict zones and allowing its use in support of homeland security and humanitarian efforts. Certification helps to ensure that UK Protector aligns with future airspace integration policies, future-proofs the platform for evolving operational demands, and supports the MOD's ambition for a more agile, interoperable force.

Increased Autonomy
This regulatory milestone also supports the UK's strategic autonomy, reducing reliance on foreign oversight for deployment decisions and strengthening sovereign control over operational capabilities.

Lowered Risk to Life
UAS present a lower risk to life compared to manned aircraft primarily because they do not carry a human pilot onboard, which removes direct exposure to physical danger during high-risk missions. This is especially important in combat zones, disaster areas, or hostile environments where the threat to personnel is high. Due to the remote operation of the UAS, pilots and sensor operators can be located thousands of miles away and out of harm's way.

Lowered Environmental and Health Impact
The certified design of UK Protector's maintenance consumables (lubricants, paints, cleaners, sealants, etc.) reflects the MOD's commitment to reducing the environmental and human health impacts of

hazardous chemicals by meeting UK REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals) standards.

Experience for Future Business
Finally, the UK MOD Remotely Piloted Aircraft System Delivery Team (RPAS DT) gained invaluable experience working with the UK MAA on this certification program. They built a relationship with and learned how to meet the level of scrutiny the MAA requires. The MAA states in their official review of the Initial Type Cert Exposition (iTCE) data package submitted in the application for the MTC: "This is a significant achievement for the Delivery Team and Industry Partners and given the historical background on this, first of type, MTC application, the work is to be applauded… The MAA is grateful to the Applicant for the high quality of the iTCE Update submissions and looks forward to continued close engagement between our respective teams…" Gaining experience with the MAA's certification process has set up the RPAS DT to be able to manage and lead future certification programs with GA-ASI for the UK MOD and other NATO nations.

➢ **Clearly define the value of this program/project to members of your team; quantify if possible**

The UK Protector certification program at GA-ASI provided substantial benefits to the team members involved, both professionally and technically. As GA-ASI embarked on developing its first certified UAS, the company established a dedicated certification team to tackle the complex requirements of airworthiness and regulatory compliance. This initiative offered team members a unique opportunity to pioneer a critical new product team within the organization, gaining deep expertise in certification frameworks, safety standards, and systems engineering.

Collaboration
Participation in the program enabled team members to work closely across disciplines – including electrical and mechanical design, reliability and maintainability, safety, sustainment, project engineering, test, quality assurance, and software – fostering a collaborative environment focused on achieving this critical company milestone. The hands-on experience built valuable skills in systems integration, technical documentation, and regulatory engagement.

Preparation for Delta Certification Programs
Experience working on the program has also positioned the team to lead future delta certification efforts. Whether adapting the certified baseline to new mission configurations, customers, or regulatory environments, the team now brings proven knowledge, process discipline, and confidence to the challenge. The foundation laid by the initial UAV certification effort ensures GA-ASI can scale its certified product line efficiently while maintaining the high standards required for global airspace integration and customer trust.

➢ **Clearly define the contribution of this program/project to the greater good (society, security, etc.)**

Civilian Missions
Because the MTC allows the UK Protector to fly in civilian airspace, it paves the way for broader use of UK Protector in support of humanitarian missions, search and rescue, disaster relief, and border security, providing services that protect and assist civilian populations for the good of society.

Strengthened Alliances
The UK Protector's certification effort has not only benefitted its own national interests but it is also serving the collective defense needs of NATO. Through the NATO Support and Procurement Agency

(NSPA), the UK MOD is leading the certification process on behalf of other NATO member countries acquiring variants of the MQ-9B platform. The experience gained by working towards the initial MTC has been invaluable to both GA-ASI and the UK MOD and will support future related business. The UK Protector's MTC serves as the foundational certification, allowing future allied nations to leverage existing evidence and certification for common architecture, substantially reducing risk. The program maturity promotes interoperability, accelerates delivery, and ensures a consistent safety framework across NATO forces. By setting a high and exportable standard for certified unmanned aviation, the UK Protector MTC strengthens the long-term security architecture of the allied forces. It supports multinational collaboration, joint mission readiness, and the secure integration of UAVs into complex airspace environments.

## SECTION 3: ORGANIZATIONAL BEST PRACTICES AND TEAM LEADERSHIP
Value: 35 points
Use 12 pt. Times Roman typeface

Please respond to the following prompts:

➢ *15 points:* **Describe the innovative tools and systems used by your team, how they contributed to performance and why**

GA-ASI employed a suite of innovative digital tools and systems to support efficiency, traceability, and regulatory compliance throughout the UAV certification effort.

Integrity Life Cycle Manager (ILM)
The System Test and Qualification (ST&Q) team at GA-ASI used the ILM application to link requirements (performance, qualification, certification, and interface) to test points. Within ILM, GA developed a new hardware test architecture specifically for Complex Electronic Hardware to enable hardware certification in accordance with industry standards like DO-254.

Test Executive
Test Executive platform was used for automated testing in the development of the certified software. Test Executive retrieves and sets test inputs, executes the software, collects the results, and reports a PASS/FAIL result for the test. Test Executive and supporting test architecture generated digital waveforms, measured the digital waveform outputs acquired from the unit under test, and compared the two to result in a PASS/FAIL result. This automated system allowed for organized and efficient testing and DO-254 certification of the Complex Electronic Hardware and DO-178 certification of software.

Access Database
Access database was employed to log certification requirements, their compliance approaches, means of compliance, and Level of Involvement (LOI) codes, and linked them to compliance evidence within artifacts and compliance claims located within compliance declaration sheet deliverables. Lessons learned through use of this software tool have driven improvements to data management processes for sustainment efforts and future customers.

Excel
In Excel, the status of compliance declaration sheet deliveries was tracked. The team added meta data for each certification requirement to be able to produce reports on % complete, % compliance of submissions, and length of time for assessment by UK MOD customer per subsystem and Engineering Authority (EA) reviewer. This granularity enabled leadership at GA-ASI and UK MOD alike to make

data-driven decisions about which subsystems required additional support in processing the evidence deliveries. The same system was used for forecasting and dynamic workload balancing and prioritization across GA-ASI and UK customer certification team members.

Windchill
Windchill software was used for release and configuration management of drawings and specs. GA-ASI's configuration management process is highly regulated and a crucial part of maintaining compliance with the certification requirements.

DevTrack
DevTrack tool was used for tracing software bugs (Certifiable Test Observations and Issues (CTOIs)) discovered during testing back to their sources, tracking the change requests and fixes, and tracking the validation of the fixes during DO-178 software certification.

➢  *10 points:* **Define the unique practices and process you used to develop, lead and manage people?**

GA-ASI Compliance Verification Engineer & UK Engineering Authority Meetings
The UK Protector Program Management team at GA-ASI started out with traditional management practices – such as a focus on the cost and schedule of certification deliveries – but soon realized that the compliance findings by the UK MOD customer was not progressing as quickly as expected. In response, leadership pivoted to increase collaboration between GA-ASI experts and the UK EAs.

GA-ASI delivered Compliance Declaration Sheets (CDS) along with supporting Artifacts to the UK customer. Their UK EAs would then review the evidence within Artifacts and determine whether compliance was demonstrated or lacking per certification requirement. To assist in increasing compliance findings, GA-ASI created a new process to aid the UK EAs in their reviews. Every month, GA-ASI would host a week-long daily remote meeting with a UK EA and a GA-ASI Compliance Verification Engineer (CVE). Multiple meetings were run by GA-ASI certification team members simultaneously and involved thorough record keeping by GA-ASI to ensure actions to reach resolution of compliance disagreements were agreed and documented. An escalation path was also established to resolve disagreements, progressing to the Certification Leads up through the GA-ASI Chief Engineer and UK Technical Airworthiness Authority (TAA). The process included establishing fair ground rules, detailed agendas, and training on export compliance for all GA-ASI team members involved.

While these remote meetings were helpful in progressing the certification program, they still were lacking in providing immediate resolution. UK and GA-ASI leadership then agreed to transition to in-person meetings. The UK began flying their EAs out to GA-ASI's Poway, California office to meet with GA-ASI CVEs, subject matter experts (SMEs), Office of Airworthiness (OoA) and certification team members in-person. The visit schedules were crafted to include escalations to expedited resolution agreements by the end of each meeting week. To assist in the escalations, the UK TAA worked from GA-ASI's Poway site for a multiple-month stint, which helped progress the UK EAs' compliance reviews significantly.

In-House Resident Customer
GA-ASI created a permanent office for top members of the UK MOD certification team, including the RPAS DT Resident Airworthiness & Safety Manager (RASM) and his deputy, along with members of the test team Detachment Unit (DET), within the same building as the GA-ASI UK Protector program management office, the GA-ASI Office of Airworthiness, and the GA-ASI MQ-9B certification team. This allowed for impromptu meetings with the customer and a more complete flow of information in

support of the certification effort. The closeness with the customer avoided the time zone difficulties with remote meetings across the globe and allowed for substantial flexibility for coordinating test witnessing events.

> ➢ *10 points:* How did you leverage skills and technologies of your suppliers?

Audits
Certification of the UK Protector software and hardware were initially deemed by the UK customer to be an unsurmountable roadblock. Due to export restrictions, the UK customer could not view the certification evidence for DO-178 and DO-254. GA-ASI recommended using an US-based independent third-party contractor to review the evidence in their place, and the UK customer agreed. The UK contracted a reputable Designated Engineering Representative (DER) consulting company to perform the Stages of Involvement (SOI) audits for DO-178 Software and DO-254 Hardware certification in their place, allowing for the eventual granting of the UK Protector MTC.

Parts
The certification team collaborated with over 60 suppliers, leveraging their capabilities across both off-the-shelf components and bespoke part development to meet rigorous certification requirements. DO-178 and DO-254 were applicable to GA-ASI suppliers with Line Replaceable Units (LRUs) containing software and Complex Electronic Hardware (CEH) with Design Assurance Level (DAL) "D" or higher. Before selecting a supplier, GA-ASI weighed the supplier's ability to meet certification needs, including evaluating prior certification experience. Many suppliers provided certification artifacts for their LRUs with support from experienced consulting companies who guided and provided oversight. Others relied on GA-ASI oversight and technical assistance in their development of processes and certification artifacts.

## SECTION 4: DEALING WITH PROGRAM COMPLEXITY
(VOLATILITY, UNCERTAINTY, COMPLEXITY, AMBIGUITY, or VUCA)
Value: 25 points
Use 12 pt. Times Roman typeface

Please respond to the following prompts:

> ➢ *10 points:* Describe UNIQUE areas of VUCA faced by your program and why. (Please avoid the issues surrounding Covid-19 pandemic, which was faced by all programs.)

Volatility
An area of volatility that the program faced was the rapid turnover in UK EAs reviewing and approving of the certification deliverables. As the customer is a military organization, each posting only lasted between two to three years. Each new UK EA came in without prior knowledge of the UK Protector UAS, which required spool up time to complete their reviews. Turnover generated more requests for information (RFIs) and each new EA had the potential to disagree with past UK EAs' judgement calls that set the methodology for how GA-ASI would be showing compliance. With 16 certification subsystems over the course of 10 years, the number of UK EAs working on the program was a large source of volatility.

Uncertainty
Uncertainty was exhibited during the planning and compliance-approach development phase of the program. Even when requirement compliance approaches were agreed to between GA-ASI and the UK

EAs, there was an uncertainty about whether the UK MAA would always agree with the UK EAs' compliance findings months or even years later after the Type Certification Exposition (TCE) was submitted.

Complexity
The complexities associated with this program were exemplified when design updates impacted safety-critical systems subject to DO-178 and DO-254 certification standards. What began as a targeted enhancement often triggered broader system-level changes. Each modification potentially cascaded through software and hardware architectures, affecting interfaces, dependencies, and test environments, while simultaneously altering the certification landscape. Complexities increased as the teams worked to integrate modern avionics or functionality while preserving backward compatibility and maintaining safety margins.

Ambiguity
At the start of the CVE/EA meetings to discuss issues with certification requirement compliance findings, the meetings notes and action items would reflect agreements on paths forward per Compliance Declaration Sheet (CDS), usually containing multiple requirements. In the weeks following, it was found that the notes were sometimes too ambiguous to keep all parties accountable. Differing interpretations of the meeting notes proved that they were ineffective in their current level of detail.

➢ *15 points:* **Explain how your team responded to these challenges. What changes did you make, what were the results?**

Volatility
To mitigate the effects of the volatile UK EA postings, GA-ASI would assist in bringing the new EAs up-to-speed on the UK Protector aircraft. GA-ASI would invite the UK EAs to visit in-person to tour the manufacturing facilities and view the aircraft in-person. GA-ASI would also provide system-level educational material on the aircraft and host longer than usual meetings to answer questions early in their posts. These actions helped to integrate the new members to the UK team faster than before.

Uncertainty
To protect GA-ASI from uncertainty in MAA compliance findings of the TCE, the contract between GA-ASI and the UK MOD was written to exclude responses to comments returned by the MAA. When comments began to flow back from the MAA, the UK MOD required assistance in answering them. GA-ASI proposed a Not to Exceed (NTE) value ad hoc contact to scope supporting MAA queries. The NTE nature of the contract was fitting for the uncertain magnitude of queries that could come back from the MAA. This was amenable to both GA-ASI and the UK MOD since the price would match whatever scope ended up being needed.

Complexity
Supporting the complexities of the UK Protector UAS required managing interconnected, interdependent elements such as multiple teams and changing designs. This included dependency tracking and creating processes for structured communication across multiple functions. An example of this is the Configuration Control Board for determining documentation impacts of design changes and using integrated master schedules (IMSs) across programs to determine schedule impacts.

Ambiguity
To reduce the conflicts and confusion caused by ambiguous CVE/EA meeting notes, the level of detail and quality of meeting minutes and action items needed to significantly increase. Steps included adding a

designated meeting moderator for each CVE/EA meeting specifically tasked with taking live notes shared with both parties, specifically assigning internal actions at the time of the meeting, recording actions per requirement as opposed to per CDS, and keeping the UK customer involved by creating and routinely sharing a tracker containing status per requirement. The requirements tracked were adjudicated against the UK's Certification Log monthly and any discrepancies were resolved between the GA-ASI and UK teams.

## SECTION 5: METRICS
Value: 15 points
Use 12 pt. Times Roman typeface

Please respond to the following prompts, where predictive metrics indicate items that provide a view of how yesterday's actions and today's actions will affect the future timeline, cost or other requirement.

Provide charts/graphs that illustrate performance to these metrics:

➢ **What are your predictive metrics?**
➢ **How did you perform against these metrics?**
➢ **How do your predictive metrics drive action toward program excellence? Please provide examples.**

In the UK Protector certification program, burn-up charts were essential tools for tracking progress against the baseline delivery plan for compliance data. These visualizations provided real-time clarity on how many deliverables had been completed, how many remained, and whether the team was on pace to meet schedule expectations. Burn-up charts showed cumulative progress toward the total scope, making it easier to identify trends, anticipate risk, and drive informed decisions.

To forecast work and resource needs, the team used a detailed estimation process based on calculated labor hours per requirement. This approach leveraged historical data, requirement complexity, and subject matter expertise to predict workload across phases and allocate resources accordingly. These forecasts supported dynamic task management and improved prioritization, helping the team level-load work, balance capacity, and avoid bottlenecks.

Each certification artifact and requirement were tagged with a subsystem in the program's internal data tracking tools, providing insight into specific technical areas. This granularity enabled the team to detect which subsystems were progressing smoothly and which required additional customer involvement or internal focus to resolve issues. Additionally, the status of each requirement was tracked and categorized as compliant, needs additional evidence, acceptable non-compliance, or in review. This clear categorization helped leadership assess program health at a glance and identify systemic trends.

As a result, the team was able to present compelling data to program leadership, which supported the case for creating and implementing new processes aimed at increasing customer collaboration. These initiatives included targeted technical working sessions between GA-ASI CVEs and UK EAs, escalation paths and timelines through engineering leadership, and more iterative review cycles of GA certification deliverables. This structured engagement directly aligned the certification work with evolving customer expectations, improved resolution timelines, and reinforced trust and transparency between stakeholders.
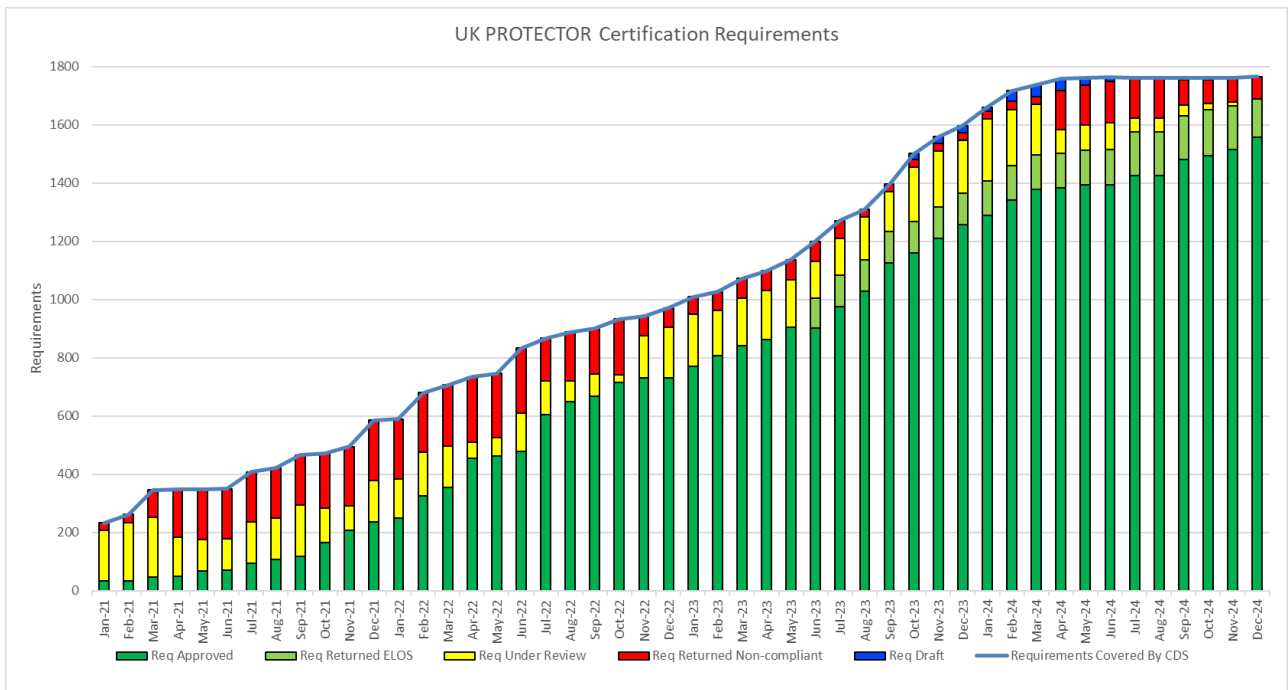
Figure 1: Example Certification Requirement Delivery Burn-Up Chart from Dec-2024