



Ministry
of Defence

Defence Universities Alliance

Membership Application Guidance



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Defence Universities Alliance

Membership Application Guidance

Action Required

1. This document lays out the process by which universities can apply to become a founding member of the Defence Universities Alliance (DUA).
2. Universities that wish to be considered for initial membership of the alliance must complete and submit a full application by 11:59 pm on the 17th of May. All parts of the application need to be completed, as outlined in this guidance, and submitted to dos-ocsa-dua@mod.gov.uk with the subject line being your university's name followed by DUA Membership Application.

Introduction

3. As the Strategic Defence Review 2025 sets out, the nature of warfare is changing and so the composition of our defence industrial base must adapt and transform to stay at the cutting edge of development. We need to look beyond traditional defence companies to redefine the industrial base, reflecting the deep range of partners and expertise both within our traditional defence sector but also those in adjacent sectors.
4. The Defence Universities Alliance will proactively bring the UK's world class academic institutions and research centres into the new defence industrial base. This will support a whole of society approach to solving defence and national security challenges, driving growth and a thriving network of defence expertise and debate.
5. The DUA will be a collaborative, strategic network of UK Universities who are publicly committed to partnering with the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the UK Armed Forces, the Office of the Chief Scientific Advisor for National Security, and the wider defence sector.
6. The DUA aims to grow Defence research and development, promote defence skills and career pathways, and provide strategic direction to the relationship between Defence and academia in pursuit of a whole of society approach to Defence and National Security.
7. All members of the DUA, including the MOD, will formalise their public commitment to the alliance and the furthering of its strategic aims by signing the DUA Charter.
8. Applicants will formally indicate their intent to sign the charter, and their willingness to meet the obligations placed upon them by doing so, within the application process.
9. The Charter itself is available in the supporting materials for the DUA.

10. It is important to note that membership of the alliance will not be the only way in which Defence engages with the sector across research and development, and skills and training moving forward. There will be opportunities to engage with Defence available to universities that do not become members of the alliance.
11. There is no funding currently attached to the DUA, and it is not intended at this initial stage to be a primary mechanism through which funding for research or skills is allocated. There is however the possibility that the future development of the DUA may involve the development of dedicated exclusive, or advantaged, funding opportunities and or mechanisms for members.
12. MOD is committed to expanding the alliance in the future and expects to offer further opportunities for membership, once the alliance has been established and developed in partnership with the founding members selected through this call. The intention is to reopen for applications during the alliance's second year.

Eligibility

13. Applications for initial membership of the DUA are open to all English Higher Education institutions that have approval for a 'university' title as determined by the Office for Students, and to all devolved nation Higher Education institutions that have approval for a 'university title' as determined by the Privy Council.
14. MOD will perform due diligence screening on prospective alliance members to ensure that members' research security risk is being managed sufficiently and that their research and collaborations are not contributing to the defence or security capabilities of adversaries, introducing vulnerabilities into critical national infrastructure, or undermining assured capabilities. MOD will take any significant concerns into consideration when deciding on an institution's membership application.
15. Where MOD or wider government holds or develops research security or national security concerns, based on the knowledge of an institution's research collaborations, funding avenues or other relationships, the MOD may choose to reject, suspend or rescind an institution's eligibility to be a member of the alliance where deemed appropriate.

Essential and Desirable Criteria

16. Applications to the DUA will need to demonstrate evidence for meeting a series of essential and desirable criteria outlined below. The essential criteria function as a baseline for suitability for membership and will be on a pass-fail basis.
17. Where applications demonstrate that they meet this baseline the desirable criteria will then be assessed and scored to help determine the most suitable institutions for membership of the DUA.

18. The desirable criteria will be used to score applications on the evidence they provide for the strength of their existing support to Defence, National Security, and the defence sector, as well as how institutions will improve and increase this support moving forward as a member of the alliance.
19. Some additional factors will also be considered for the overall balance of institutions selected through this call as outlined in the membership decision process of this document.

Essential Criteria

- A. An existing relationship with, or support to Defence and the defence sector across at least one of research and development, skills and defence career pathways, or the teaching and training of defence sector personnel.
- B. Be a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- C. Meet a baseline for maturity in approach to research security based on self-assessment against the National Protective Security Agency's (NPSA) trusted research evaluation framework (TREF). This baseline is articulated in the application form. (The TREF itself and the NPSA's user guidance are available from the NPSA website, <https://www.npsa.gov.uk/specialised-guidance/trusted-research>.)
 - a. Where an institution does not meet all of the trusted research baseline, MOD will still consider their application for membership if they provide a credible plan for how they will reach this baseline within 6 months of becoming a member of the alliance.
- D. A formal declaration of intent to sign up to the charter of the DUA, signalling an institution's commitment to agree and abide by the obligations placed on them through membership of the DUA.

Desirable Criteria

- A. A significant relationship with, and support to, Defence and the defence sector through high quality Defence and National Security relevant research and development.
- B. Possession of specialist or sovereign capabilities, facilities or infrastructure that Defence and or the defence sector rely on.
- C. A clear plan for improving and increasing the institution's support to, and capacity for, Defence and National Security relevant research and development.
- D. Demonstration of significant support to the delivery of training, skills development, and professional development for Defence and defence sector personnel.
- E. Demonstration of significant support and contribution to the flow of graduates, and other SQEP or talent into defence career pathways.

- F. A clear plan for improving capacity for and support to the training, skills development and professional development of Defence and defence sector personnel.
- G. A clear plan for improving and increasing support for, and contribution to the flow of graduates, SQEP, and other into defence career pathways.
- H. Demonstration of existing promotion of defence career pathways, within a balanced portfolio of career guidance.
- I. A clear plan for, and a commitment to, becoming more public and raising the profile of their institution's support to Defence and the defence sector, and the importance of Defence and National Security outcomes within this.
- J. Clear demonstration of the alignment between the DUA's strategic aims and the institution's strategic aims.

Application Process and Scoring

- 20. The application window will run from the 20th of April to the 17th of May.
- 21. Institutions will need to complete the DUA application form and the additional evidence template and then submit as an email addressed to dos-ocsa-dua@mod.gov.uk.
- 22. Please ensure that no information above OFFICIAL is included within your application.
- 23. The main application form consists of an initial section that assesses whether institutions meet the essential criteria, and then 3 individual sections which between them comprise the strategic aims of the alliance as set out in the charter. The 3 sections are:
 - a. Research and Development
 - b. Skills, Training and Careers
 - c. Promotion and Collaboration
- 24. Each section consists of questions which will all be individually scored out of 4. Scoring will be based on how well the evidence provided demonstrates the desirable criteria relevant to that question, according to the scoring scale shown in table 1.
- 25. Where institutions define themselves as an R&D intensive organisation or a teaching intensive organisation, they should still provide answers and evidence for every question and section in the form. If your institution has no evidence to support an answer to a question it is acceptable to state this. Where your institution has no evidence to support an answer to a question, as it is not an area in which you currently provide any support relevant to Defence and National Security, we request you please note this succinctly in the space for that question's answer.

26. Where the MOD receives a significantly high number of applications, we reserve the right to conduct an initial sift of applications using the essential criteria section and a key question from each individual section. The key questions from each section are question 6 within the R&D section, question 13 in the Skills and Careers section, and question 18 in the collaboration and promotion section.

Table 1: Scoring Scale Descriptions

Score		Description
4	Excellent	Very clear, well reasoned and evidenced explanation within the answer of how the institution meets the criteria relevant to that question. No material weaknesses in explanations or in the evidence referred to or provided.
3	Very Good	Clear, well reasoned and evidenced explanation within the answer of how the institution meets the criteria relevant to that question. Some gaps in explanations or the evidence referred to or provided.
2	Satisfactory	Minimal explanation within the answer of how the institution meets the criteria relevant to that question. Answer contains material inconsistencies or weaknesses in the explanation or evidence referred to or provided.
1	Poor	Minimal explanation within the answer of how the institution meets the criteria relevant to that question, or minimal evidence to support this explanation. Answer contains material inconsistencies or weaknesses in the explanation or evidence referred to or provided.
0	No Score	No explanation of how the answer meets the criteria relevant to the question, or no evidence to support this explanation. Answer contains significant, material inconsistencies or weaknesses in the explanation or evidence referred to or provided. No confidence in the answer provided.

27. Each section, excluding the essential criteria section, will receive an overall score out of 4, comprised from the individual scores for each question within that section.

28. Not all individual question scores within a section are weighted equally towards that section's score. The individual weighting of a question towards its section score will be listed next to the question and expressed as a percentage.

29. Questions 6, 7, 12, and 13 require a more detailed breakdown of evidence, alongside their written answers, to be provided within the additional evidence form. These are clearly marked as additional evidence questions. Guidance on what information should be included is provided in the guidance tab and

the column headings within the additional evidence template, which is available within the application materials.

30. The additional evidence template is mandatory, and is not scored individually, but will be considered within the score of each relevant question it supports as listed above.
31. Each application will have an overall score out of 4 that is comprised from the 3 section scores. Each section score has an equal weighting towards an application's overall score, meaning that each section (outside of the essential criteria section) will contribute 33.33% towards an application's overall score out of 4.
32. Each's institutions section scores and overall application score will then enter the membership decision process as outlined below.

Membership Decision Process

33. A total of up to 20 universities will be selected as founding members of the alliance. The total balance of universities across the initial membership will be determined by their application scores as well as other factors that will also be considered in the overall decision.
34. MOD is committed to making Defence an engine for growth across the UK with the intent for the DUA to be representative of the academic sector across the UK. This means geographic spread across the initial membership will be considered when determining the up to 20 institutions most suitable to be selected as founding members of the alliance.
35. Research Excellence Framework (REF) scores and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) scores have been requested as part of the application process, to be considered alongside an application's section scores and overall score, rather than contributing directly to them. This is to ensure the alliance is composed of high-quality institutions, and to also ensure institutions with excellence specifically in research or specifically in teaching are considered fairly against those with strengths across both.
36. Initial scoring and shortlisting of applications will be conducted by MOD personnel, with independent assessment and support provided by wider government partners.
37. A final decision on the institutions successful in applying for initial membership of the DUA will be made by a selection panel formed from Defence, government partners, and independents, which will be chaired jointly by the Chief Scientific Advisor for MOD and the MOD Director of Growth and Missions.
38. For any further questions or help with your application please contact the DUA team at dos-ocsa-dua@mod.gov.uk.