



Ministry  
of Defence

# Defence Universities Alliance

## Frequently Asked Questions



# DUA FAQs

## What is the DUA?

The Defence Universities Alliance will be a collaborative, strategic network of UK Universities who are publicly committed to partnering with the Ministry of Defence, the Office of the Chief Scientific Advisor for National Security, the UK Armed Forces and the wider defence sector. The intent is that it will:

- Form a more strategic relationship between the defence and the higher education sectors.
- Build on existing connections between academia and the defence industry to support careers in the defence sector.
- Encourage and support Defence and National Security research.

## What are the aims of the DUA?

As a co-created organisation the DUA intends to build an ecosystem that will support Defence and National Security over the long term. It will focus on putting in place the infrastructure and systems that allow:

1. **Defence Research** - advancing quality Defence and National Security research and development within UK institutions, enabling the Higher Education sector to become a global leader in defence innovation.
2. **Defence Skills and Career Promotion** - ensuring that the Higher Education sector develops and equips graduates, students and other emerging talent with the skills required for careers in defence and national security, while encouraging a greater proportion of skilled graduates to consider pursuing roles in the defence sector.
3. **Collaboration** - fostering partnerships between government, academia, and industry to ensure a whole of society approach to defence and national security challenges.

The DUA will help to reorientate academia towards Defence and National Security, bring universities into the defence industrial base, promote Defence within the national student body, and provide coherence in the relationship between MOD and academia.

### What is the scale of the DUA?

At the initial launch we expect the alliance to consist of no more than 20 universities which will be spread across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as across institutions who have expertise in teaching and / or research.

Working with MOD, these initial members will shape and design the alliance, its governance structures and the agenda going forward, ensuring this is a collaborative alliance beneficial to both the MOD and the HE sector.

Once these initial principles have been established, applications for membership are expected to open again, ensuring a wider group of institutions can be part of the alliance and build on their support for Defence.

### What will the sector gain from the DUA?

Overall, the sector will gain a greater understanding of Defence strategic direction and more coherence to the relationship between the HE sector and the MOD at an institutional level. The DUA will help to develop the network and community of Defence and National Security students, researchers, and other academics.

DUA members will have the opportunity to shape and influence MOD policy in a formal structured way and increase their engagement with the MOD CSA, Senior Civil Servants, and Ministers as well as Defence industry.

Once established, the DUA will seek to address the challenges in the defence and HE sectors associated with Defence and National Security research, skills, and career promotion.

### What about 'non-traditional' Higher Education Institutions such as 'university centres,' colleges and other specialist providers?

Initially membership applications will only be open to institutions which have approval for a 'university' title. We understand that the shape of the Higher Education sector is evolving and types of entry routes into the sector are increasing. Once the alliance has been established and we look to reopen membership, we will consider widening this eligibility criteria.

### How will the DUA be governed?

Once the initial membership has been announced, we will work with these institutions to create appropriate governance. The alliance will initially be co-chaired by the MOD's Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Tim Dafforn and the Director of Growth and Missions, Sherin Aminossehe.

A steering committee will be established with senior representatives of the alliance members. Universities UK will also have a seat on this committee to represent the

views of non-alliance institutions and encourage the flow of information out of the alliance. MOD will act as the secretariat of the alliance with support from UUK.

*What are the current timelines for the development of the DUA?*

Applications for the DUA will open in April, with membership being announced in the summer. We hope the regular drumbeat of DUA workstreams will start to take shape within the beginning of the 2026/27 academic year.

*How will the evaluation process be run?*

Initial scoring and shortlisting will be conducted by MOD personnel with independent assessment support provided by wider government partners. Final decisions will be made by a selection panel drawn from Defence and other government partners which will be chaired by the Chief Scientific Advisor for MOD, Professor Tim Dafforn and the Director of Growth and Missions, Sherin Amminoshe.

Applicants will be contacted with the outcome of this assessment in June.

*What happens if your institution is not selected for DUA membership?*

All unsuccessful bidders will be contacted after the evaluation has been concluded. Institutions will then be invited to apply again in year two of the alliance when the application process will reopen to expand the membership.

Institutions not selected as an initial member of the DUA can still benefit from the work of the DUA in building stronger relationships between the MOD and academia. We hope to facilitate opportunities for non-members to contribute to discussions and understand the work of the DUA through Universities UK's involvement in the alliance going forward.

*What makes a strong application?*

A strong application will clearly showcase and evidence:

- current links and support to the Defence and National Security ecosystem
- the impacts and outcomes of this support
- how this aligns to the strategic aims of the alliance
- how an institution will then build on these relationships to develop the alliance and strengthen its support to the DUA's strategic aims

The strongest applications will use the additional evidence template to provide a detailed breakdown of their links to the defence and national security sectors within

R&D (up to the last 3 years) and careers, skills, and training. This evidence should underpin the narrative answers.

*What if I have not submitted a letter of intent?*

This does not preclude you from applying to join the DUA or impact your score. The letter of intent was to help us understand the scale of the interest in the alliance, the types of work currently supporting Defence and was of benefit in the Office for Students funding competition to show institutional commitment to supporting defence and careers in the defence industry.

*What if my institution is a research intensive organisation or a teaching intensive organisation but not both?*

Where institutions define themselves as an R&D intensive organisation or a teaching intensive organisation, they should still provide the most applicable answers and evidence for every question and section in the form. If your institution has no evidence to support an answer, please state this and it will be taken into account. The TEF and REF scores that the application requests also ensure that institutions with excellence specifically in research or specifically in teaching will be considered fairly against those with strengths across both.

Through the shortlisting and final selection board we will ensure that DUA membership will be made up of institutions with a spread of specialisms across defence R&D and the development of skills for careers in Defence.

*Is there funding attached to joining the DUA?*

Currently there is no funding attached to the DUA, and it is not intended at this 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.

*Will membership of the DUA affect current and future contracting between MOD and the HE sector?*

Currently the DUA is not intended at this stage to be a mechanism through which contracting between the MOD and the HE sector occurs. However, in order to encourage and support Defence research the DUA will work to suggest practical and realistic improvements to the contracting processes between MOD and academia.

Membership of the alliance will not be the only way in which MOD engages with the sector across research and development, and skills and training moving forward. There will still be opportunities to engage with Defence available to universities that do not become members of the alliance.

### How long will the DUA run for?

The DUA will run as long as the partnership remains beneficial to both sectors. Once institutions have been selected they will be members of the DUA for life. However, MOD will monitor members and should any concerns develop over national security or behaviours against the aims of the DUA, MOD will seek to address these with the institution, and if necessary, cease their membership.

### Can institutions leave the DUA after becoming a member?

Yes. Membership of the DUA is voluntary, and institutions may choose to leave at any time without penalty. However, we would seek feedback on your decision to help inform the alliance going forward.

## **Updated FAQs**

### How should we reference more sensitive research within our application?

The maximum information that can be included in the application form, and the additional evidence template, is OFFICIAL. Where universities conduct more sensitive research they should engage with the funders and sponsors of that research to understand what can be referenced at OFFICIAL.

If you conduct any research where no description or reference can be included at OFFICIAL, and funders or sponsors have not engaged to provide approved wording please use the following statement within the additional evidence template....

*'There is research activity we conduct for Defence, or other governments, or industry, that cannot be referenced at OFFICIAL.'*

### What are we requesting for your REF score?

We are asking for institutions Grade Point Average (GPA) for their REF score, as well the total number of units of assessment this GPA was calculated from. The figure should be calculated using the [methodology described by Times Higher Education](#) or drawn directly from [Times Higher Education's summary table](#).

The application form has been updated to clarify this.

### How should devolved nation institutions answer the TEF rating question?

As devolved nation institutions do not submit to the TEF we have provided a small text box in this section where alternative evidence for an institution's commitment to the quality of its teaching can be provided. Institutions that do submit to the TEF do not need to submit anything to this box and can just put NA.

*What do we mean by the phrase for the last 3 years up to now for R&D information within the additional evidence template?*

We want you to provide information on any current / ongoing R&D activity as requested and then also previous R&D activity conducted within the last 3 years. For this we mean within the last 3 financial years according to the financial year your institution runs to. So R&D activity for FY 23/24, FY 24/25, FY25/26, as well as any current / ongoing R&D activity.

We understand institutions may run to differing financial years and not have completed the FY 25/26 which is why in the form itself we request total funding amounts to be included for just FYs 23/24 and 24/25.

*How will the information institutions provide be treated?*

Applications will be treated as commercially sensitive, and no individual information will be shared with any industry or academic partners. Applications will be handled using government IT systems accredited to handle all tiers of information at OFFICIAL.

Applicants should be confident that the information they are providing is not breaching any confidentiality clauses or contractual obligations and where they are unsure of this, they should engage with the sponsors or funders of specific research activity to understand what can be shared within their application.

Applicants can choose to password protect their additional evidence template if desired.

*Is the team accepting letters of support?*

No, we are not accepting letters of support within the application process.

*Does MOD funding include DASA and UKDI funding?*

Yes, DASA and UKDI funding is considered as MOD funding and should be included as such.

*Should you include UKRI funding with Defence relevance?*

This information is not essential, but you may include UKRI funding, Research Council funding, or any other public or research institute funding where the research is tied specifically to Defence and National Security outcomes or thematic areas if you feel it supports your application. Please make this clear in your application where doing so.

*Does the total number of Defence PhDs requested include fully or part funded or both? Does this also include Defence Doctoral Focal Awards?*

The total number includes all of the above, please distinguish between these within the additional evidence template. The total number does not include industry-funded PhDs aligned to Defence relevant subjects that have no MOD co-funding, but these should be noted in the Careers tab in the additional evidence template where relevant.

*What do we mean by research type?*

We are looking to understand if each R&D activity is Basic Research, Applied Research or Experimental Development as defined within the Frascati Manual.

*Please can you clarify whether the character limit is including or excluding spaces? Also, is there any tolerance to these limits?*

The character limit we will be using will be “Characters (no spaces)”

The easiest way to check for the character count will be to highlight the section you are working on, go to the review tab and select word count.

Due to the expected number of applications, we will only be able to review applications within the stated limits.

*Will you be accepting previous versions of the application form?*

Yes, we will be accepting previous versions of the application form as we have only amended text to clarify questions where appropriate and not made substantial changes.