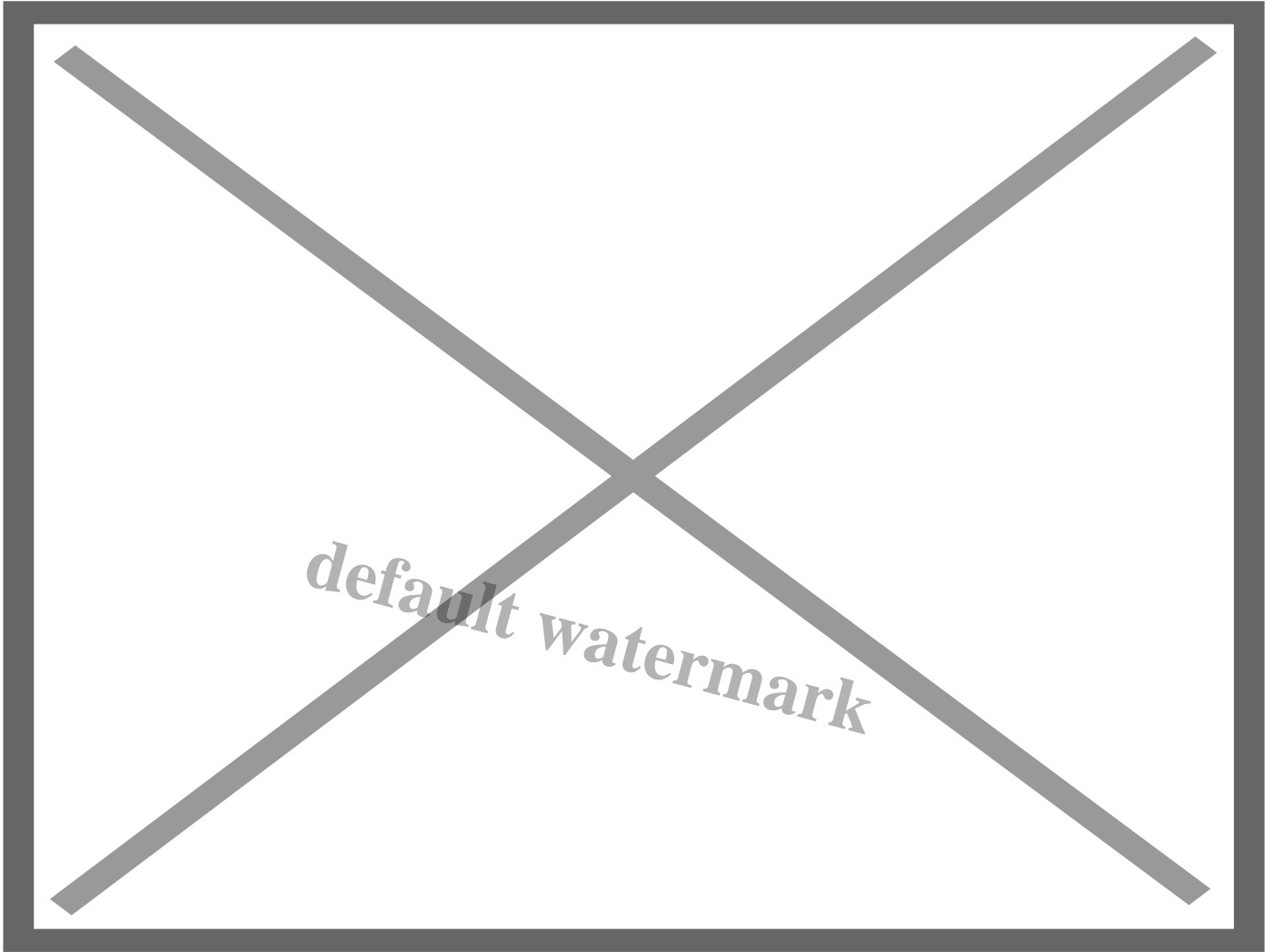




Activists call out Labour's dangerous militarisation of higher education

Description

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Labour's Defence Universities Alliance (DUA) would be a "a dangerous [militarisation of higher education](#)", according to the campaign group [Demilitarise Education](#) (dED), which is calling on universities, students, staff, trade unions, and local communities to oppose the initiative.

Defence Industrial Strategy 2025

The DUA was initially announced in September 2025 in the [Defence Industrial Strategy](#) which said:

We will establish a Defence Universities Alliance (DUA) to form a more strategic relationship between defence and the higher education sector.

The DUA will build on existing connections between the sectors to support careers in the defence sector and encourage ethical defence and security research.

We will work closely with [Universities UK](#) and universities across the UK to establish the DUA, recognising that the relationship between the sectors is critical in supporting the

UK's national security and economic growth.

Further details about the DUA were revealed in the government's [call for applications](#) which was published on 20 April 2026. The call included a DUA Application Form, [guidance](#) the [DUA Charter](#) and answers to [frequently asked questions](#) (FAQ).

The DUA Charter [said](#)

There is a need to look beyond traditional Defence companies to redefine the industrial base, reflecting the deep range of partnerships and expertise within institutions throughout society and reorientate them towards UK Defence and National Security.

The Defence Universities Alliance will proactively bring the UK's world class academic institutions and research centres into the new defence industrial base to support a whole of society approach to solving national security challenges, driving growth and supporting a thriving network of Defence expertise and debate.

While helping to cohere a strategic direction to the relationship between Defence and academia.

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It [also said](#) that, by signing the charter, members would:

commit to actively growing research and development activity and capacity in defence and national security relevant fields and technologies to support defence aims and objectives.

It [responded](#) to the charter commitment, saying:

This means institutions would dedicate resources, research capacity, and career services to advancing military technology and encouraging students into militarised industries, effectively becoming formal partners in the UK's war machine.

Open statement

The campaign group's criticism of the DUA was explained in an [open statement](#) published on 26 May 2026, which was co-signed by [World Beyond War](#) [Action on Armed Violence](#) [Loughborough Action for Palestine](#) [Stop the War](#) [Boycott, Divest, Sanction Group](#) [UCL](#) [CND](#) [People & Planet University & College Workers for Palestine](#) [Quakers in Britain](#) and [Campaign Against Arms Trade](#)

The statement [said](#)

The DUA represents a dangerous militarisation of higher education that fundamentally undermines the core purpose of universities.

By officially defining institutions as part of the "Defence Industrial Base," the government is treating campuses as extensions of military infrastructure rather than spaces for independent inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge that serves humanity.

It [added](#) that the alliance "threatens academic freedoms" by:

Redirecting research priorities away from addressing pressing social, environmental, and humanitarian challenges toward military applications.

And by:

Compromising institutional independence by making universities dependent on arms/military funding and strategic alignment.

Funding pressures

In a section of the [DUA FAQ](#) on whether universities would receive funding by joining the alliance, it said:

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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.

The dED statement [added](#) that the alliance threatens academic freedoms by promoting:

military career pathways prioritised through UCAS-linked partnerships and £182M for Defence Technical Excellence Colleges, creating institutional pressure to align with military priorities.

And by:

creating ethical conflicts for researchers and students whose values oppose war and militarisation.

dED also [said](#)

At a time when devastating conflicts continue across [Congo](#) [Sudan](#) [Ukraine](#) [Palestine](#) and beyond, universities should not deepen their entanglement with industries that profit from violence, displacement, occupation and human suffering.

Campus protests

In February 2026, activists [stopped a presentation from defence firm Thales](#) which has been linked to Israel's attacks on Palestinians, at a Queen's University Belfast (QUB) conference. Organisers ushered attendees out, leaving activists free to hang up Palestine flags and plaster the place with 'boycott Israeli apartheid' stickers.

Later in March, activists [disrupted the North West Apprenticeship and Careers Expo](#) which was held at the University of Central Lancashire (Uclan). They were targeting the presence of [BAE Systems](#) the largest arms manufacturer in Europe.

The [statement](#) from dED issued a call to action aimed at those who share the view that higher education should not become part of the military-industrial complex. It said:

We call on universities, students, staff, trade unions, and local communities to oppose this initiative and defend education as a space for democratic inquiry, critical thought, and collective liberation.

This statement calls on universities not to become founding members and not to sign the charter to join this harmful alliance.

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It recommended that supporters of the statement form cross-sector coalitions, demand democratic processes inside higher education institutions to oppose militarisation, organise educational campaign, develop ethical alternatives, use institutional power to oppose DUA membership, and to document expose partnerships between universities and the military.

The MOD and Department for Education were approached for comment.

Defence Investment Plan

With the government widely expected to publish its long-awaited Defence Investment Plan [next week](#) and universities creaking under financial strain, it is likely that higher education leaders will be even more tempted to exploit potential opportunities for funding from the military-industrial complex, setting them on a collision course with academics and students who oppose war.

Featured image via [Dan Kitwood/Getty Images](#)

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