



Ministry
of Defence

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LUKE POLLARD MP

Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry

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Dear Tan,

Following our recent correspondence regarding capability updates the Defence Committee receives from the Ministry of Defence, I am writing to provide the Committee with the first of the agreed single quarterly updates.

The summer edition provides updates on the Royal Air Force's Military Flying Training System, as well as Shipbuilding and Ship Availability from the Royal Navy. I have also enclosed an introductory summary to the Military Strategic Headquarters, noting the interest the Committee has taken in the changes made under Defence Reform, which I hope the Committee will find useful.

These updates are provided amid the backdrop of the publication of the Defence Investment Plan (DIP) on 30 June, which represents significant progress in implementing the vision set out in our Strategic Defence Review. We will spend nearly £300 billion over the next four years to transform the UK Armed Forces for the wars of today and tomorrow. That includes an additional £15 billion, of which most is extra day-to-day spending for training and improving availability of ships and aircraft to increase our war-fighting readiness. We look forward to discussing the DIP in more detail with the Committee in due course.

I trust this provides a helpful, consolidated update. Please do let me know if there are any further topics that are of particular interest to the Committee.

Best wishes,

LUKE POLLARD MP

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Future Programme of Updates

The Committee will be receiving capability updates in line with the following schedule:

Q1 (End of March)	Q2 (End of June)	Q3 (End of Sept)	Q4 (Pre-Christmas)
F-35 and A400M Armoured Fighting Vehicles	UK Military Flying Training System Shipbuilding and Ship Availability	F-35 and A400M Armoured Fighting Vehicles	UK Military Flying Training System Shipbuilding and Ship Availability

UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS)

UKMFTS is a 25-year, £3.8 billion Public Private Partnership, contracted to 2033. The programme delivers aircrew training for all three Services, namely: Fast Jet, Multi Engine, Rotary Wing and Remotely Piloted Air System Pilots (RPAS); and Rear Crew / Mission Aircrew. UKMFTS includes the provision of all training aircraft, simulators, courseware, instructors, and infrastructure. At any one time there are c.690 trainees in the system, across 20 aircrew specialisations, operating seven aircraft types from six UK sites.

RAF Pilot Holding Times – Crewed Pipelines

Training timelines within UKMFTS continue to reduce. There is currently one trainee waiting to start flying training, who will commence in June 2026. 31 pilots are in the post-Elementary Flying Training (EFT) hold (compared to 45 a year ago, and 61 two years ago). Of these 31, there is one Fast Jet pilot (waiting three months), 28 Multi Engine pilots (having re-streamed trainees awaiting RPAS to the Multi Engine pipeline to significantly reduce their holding times), and two Rotary Wing pilots who have been selected from the Multi Engine holding pool.

29 pilots are holding following completion of their UKMFTS Phase 2 Flying Training, awaiting the start of Phase 3 training on a front-line Operational Conversion Unit (OCU). These comprise ten Fast Jet pilots (waiting four months), ten Multi Engine pilots (waiting between four and eight months), and nine Rotary Wing pilots (whose 15–20 month holdover reflects Chinook Operational Conversion Unit (OCU) delays and the withdrawal of Puma).

RAF Pilot Holding Times – Uncrewed Pipeline

For the RPAS pipeline, there are eight trainees in the post-EFT hold waiting another 9-14 months pre-OCU. This has been driven by repeated delays to the Protector Programme. Where possible, individuals have been re-streamed to crewed platforms to reduce this hold.

Rotary Wing Training

UKMFTS Rotary Wing training has been constrained due to a worsening situation surrounding aircraft availability from Airbus Helicopters UK (AHUK), driven by a lack of civilian licensed aircraft engineers to support aircraft maintenance. AHUK have recently exposed the extent of the issues they face; the full impact on the Department's Rotary Wing aircrew pipeline is not yet known. However, if AHUK performance is not fully addressed, it is likely that there will be a delay to UKMFTS providing sufficient trained personnel to the front-line in line within agreed timelines. The Department is actively driving recovery and exploring all options available to meet training timelines while appropriately holding Ascent, as the prime contractor, and AHUK, as the aircraft maintenance provider, to account. More detail will be provided in future updates as the recovery plan matures.

Multi Engine Pilot Training

The increased front-line demand for Multi Engine pilots is being addressed through an expansion of Multi Engine pilot training using a blended civilian and military approach. Leading Edge Aviation, based in Oxford, are on contract to train up to 24 fixed-wing ab-initio pilots and 12 Multi Engine cross-over pilots from June 2026 to March 2028. The first trainees are now on course, with training supervision being provided by UKMFTS military personnel.

Fast Jet Pilot Training

Fast Jet pilot training in Training Year 2026/2027 is forecast to meet the front-line demand via a blend of sovereign training (Hawk T2) and the international outsourcing of pilot training to NATO and other partners (US, Italy and Qatar).

To assure Basic Flying Training (BFT) capacity for future training years, the Department is exploring final options to increase the Texan fleet with the purchase of four additional aircraft. If this is not achievable, due to financial prioritisation or suitable commercial / procurement mechanisms, the Department will pursue alternative solutions to ensure that sufficient trainees graduate from the BFT phase of training to progress on to Advanced Jet Training (AJT).

Work is continuing to procure a replacement Jet Training System in anticipation of the Defence Investment Plan. The MOD remains platform agnostic, with the emphasis on the delivery of a system that integrates aircraft, synthetic training devices and expert instruction. The MOD continues to conduct all industry engagement in accordance with Government Procurement Policy.

The Department remains fully committed to restoring resilience within UKMFTS and ensuring the system continues to deliver the quality and quantity of world-class aircrew required by Defence.

Shipbuilding and Ship Availability

The Royal Navy (RN) works 24/7 to maintain national defence and remains ready for conflict or to support allies in crisis. The RN is accelerating the adoption of autonomous capabilities to create a Hybrid Navy operating under the principle of “uncrewed wherever possible, crewed only where necessary”.

The Surface Fleet continues to meet its UK and NATO commitments against a background of sustained operational demand. Alongside sustained operations such as the protecting Continuous At Sea Deterrent, homeland defence and providing a persistent global presence, the Surface Fleet has seen significant additional operational demand in recent weeks. This includes:

- a) Operation FIRECREST, led by a UK Carrier Strike Group, is reinforcing NATO's deterrence in the Euro-Atlantic and High North.
- b) The UK and France are leading a defensive multinational military mission to support freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. In service of this RFA Lyme Bay has been converted to be a ‘mothership’ for autonomous mine hunting equipment and HMS Dragon has been deployed.
- c) Continued response to Russian naval presence around UK waters, including interdiction and boarding of the shadow fleet tanker, the Symrtos.

The table below provide a snapshot of availability as at 1 June 2026, broken down by ship class or output. For the purposes of this return, “available” refers to platforms assessed as able to contribute to Defence outputs at the snapshot date. It should not be read as equivalent to immediate high readiness or deployability, and should be interpreted in the context of operational, maintenance and regeneration cycles. Separately, a ship may be “in service” where it has been formally accepted into service and has not reached its Out of Service Date, but that is not itself a readiness state.

Class	Availability
Queen Elizabeth Class Aircraft Carrier (2 in total)	100% available
Type 45 Daring class destroyer (6 in total)	50% available 50% unavailable
Type 23 Duke Class Frigate (7 in total)	57.1% available 42.9% planned maintenance
River Class Batch 2 Offshore Patrol Vessel (5 in total)	80% available 20% planned maintenance
River Class Batch 1 Offshore Patrol Vessel (5 in total)	100% available
Maritime Mine Counter Measures Vessel (8 in total)	87.5% available 12.5% planned maintenance
Survey Vessels (3 in total)	66.7% available 33.3% planned maintenance
Archer Class Inshore Patrol Vessels (16 in total)	87.5% available 12.5% unavailable
Gibraltar Squadron, Patrol Launch (2 in total)	100% available

Hybrid Navy

The RN is continuing to accelerate delivery of its Hybrid Navy approach, progressing the integration of autonomous and uncrewed systems across multiple operational environments.

Key progress includes:

- a) Continued operational integration of uncrewed systems, including deployment of autonomous mine hunting equipment as part of the UK's contribution to a future multinational mission in the Strait of Hormuz.
- b) Procurement and introduction of additional uncrewed platforms, including 20 uncrewed surface vessels under Project Beehive.
- c) Progress in autonomous aviation, including further investment in UK autonomy capability following the successful test flight activity for the Proteus platform.
- d) Further experimentation and interoperability work through initiatives such as Maritime Big Play and Atlantic Net.

This activity demonstrates continued progress in scaling autonomous capability and integrating uncrewed systems alongside the existing fleet. Over the next period, the RN will continue experimentation, integration activity, and capability development to support delivery of the Hybrid Navy.

Shipbuilding

16 RN ships are in build or ordered: eight Type 26 frigates, five Type 31 frigates and three Fleet Solid Support Ships. The Defence Investment Plan published on 30 June 2026 considers the next generation of naval shipbuilding requirements, including the next generation of air defence and amphibious capabilities.

Type 26

The Type 26 programme remains on track to meet all user requirements and deliver eight world-class anti-submarine warfare frigates to replace the anti-submarine warfare Type 23. The first ship is expected to enter service from the late 2020s, with the remaining ships entering service through the 2030s.

Norway's decision to buy at least five Type 26 frigates means that our nations, and NATO, will benefit from a combined fleet of at least 13 Type 26 frigates. This combined fleet will be truly interoperable, sharing maintenance facilities, technology, and equipment to create truly joint force.

Construction continues on the Clyde, with continued work to improve efficiency through investment in shipbuilding facilities, infrastructure and workforce development.

The programme remains focused on delivering advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare capability and sustaining the UK shipbuilding enterprise over the long term.

Type 31

The Type 31 programme continues to progress, supporting the delivery of a flexible and exportable frigate capability for the RN.

In February 2026, the programme reached two significant milestones, with first steel cut on HMS Bulldog and HMS Active rolled out of the assembly hall. A further Type 31 milestone is expected in Q4 2026, with HMS Bulldog due to reach keel laying at Rosyth, marking continued build progress. Other progress includes:

- a) Continued build activity and programme development.
- b) Ongoing work to realise programme benefits, including improved capability and platform design for future operations.
- c) Sustained progress in export opportunities linked to the Arrowhead 140 design, supporting UK industry and international partners.

Looking forward, activity will continue to focus on build progress, capability delivery and realising programme benefits.

Fleet Solid Support Ship

The Fleet Solid Support (FSS) ships are support vessels that will be operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. They are designed to deliver munitions, supplies and provisions to the RN while at sea, thus extending the operating duration of the Surface Fleet.

A £1.6 billion contract was awarded to Navantia UK in 2023 for the construction of three Fleet Solid Support ships for the construction of three Fleet Solid Support ships, supporting long-term improvement in UK shipbuilding capacity and sovereign capability. The first ship is expected to enter service in the early 2030s, with all three ships entering service during the early to mid-2030s. The programme is also expected to support associated workforce growth in the RFA over the coming decade.

Following their takeover of Harland & Wolff, NUK is executing a £115 million revitalisation, recapitalisation and modernisation programme across its four UK shipyards, which include the fabrication facilities in Methil and Arnish in Scotland. NUK has built a new purpose-built transport barge at their Methil yard, demonstrating NUK's investment. The barge has arrived in the Appledore shipyard and will be used for the build and transport of FSS blocks.

Military Strategic Headquarters (MSHQ)

MSHQ

On 1 April 2025, the then Defence Secretary announced the creation of four new areas under Defence Reform: the Department of State, Military Strategic Headquarters (MSHQ), National Armaments Director Group and the Defence Nuclear Enterprise. The MSHQ is the central command hub for the UK Armed Forces, led by the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS). MSHQ directs and commands our Armed Forces, bringing together military strategy, operations, and force development under one integrated structure to ensure we can deter, fight and win.

MSHQ is made up of three interconnected pillars: a Central pillar that provides and coheres decision support to CDS and the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS); Force Development, which designs the shape of the Armed Forces and future capabilities; and Military Strategy, Operations & Commitments, which directs military activity today. They are supported by specialist functions including Intelligence, Medical Services and Digital. MSHQ is led by CDS through the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The Heads of the four Military Commands (Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and Cyber & Specialist Operations Command) sit in the MSHQ.

What does MSHQ contribute

The MSHQ provides strategic leadership across the Armed Forces, developing the strategies, plans and capabilities that enable Defence to deliver its outcomes. MSHQ determines integrated force design, directs military operations globally, manages NATO contingency planning, and provides military advice to Ministers. We ensure our Armed Forces are more lethal than the sum of their parts: moving from a joint to an integrated force.

How things have changed

CDS commands the Service Chiefs, with collective responsibility for delivering military outputs ensured through the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The Chiefs' strategic intent is driven by the VCDS through the MSHQ Board. MSHQ is embedding "One Defence" behaviours, implementing strategic workforce planning, and championing innovation and digital technology. The approach prioritises evidence-based decision-making and tight alignment of resource to Defence priorities.

How MSHQ works across Defence

MSHQ works hand in lockstep with the Department of State, National Armaments Director Group, and the Defence Nuclear Enterprise. Its structures support collaboration across government, with NATO, allies and international partners. The integrated force is developed with the Military Commands through clear lines of responsibility and accountability to deliver for Defence: with a relentless focus on the core priorities of readiness, modernisation and people.