

Airbus and BAE Systems among industry giants to sign new commitment to keep 'Britain safe'

Defence heavyweights including Airbus, BAE Systems and Babcock, have signed up to a new UK charter highlighting their commitment to cutting carbon emissions, building a more diverse and dynamic workforce and keeping Britain safe.

The UK Defence ESG Charter, launched on Thursday (January 25), was spearheaded by ADS – the leading trade body for Britain's defence, aerospace and security industries – and has been signed by some of the biggest names in British industry.

Kevin Craven, chief executive of ADS, described the charter as the "foundation for a better sector" and encouraged more firms to sign up to its aims. The charter's inaugural signatories are ADS, Airbus, Babcock, BAE Systems, Leonardo, MBDA, QinetiQ, and Thales.

Mr Craven said: "The UK is facing an increasingly complex threat landscape: war in Europe, rising cyber-attacks and the devastation of climate change all pose risks to our national security and economic prosperity. We must work together to strengthen our defences, support our armed forces, cut carbon emissions, build a more diverse workforce and deliver sustained growth to every nation and region in the UK.

"Sustainability is not the responsibility of a single organisation, it is an effort that requires collective action. This ESG Charter outlines our firm commitment to building a stronger, fairer and more prosperous Britain. It is the foundation for a better sector. We want to enhance our sustainability and secure the long-term access to financial

services that are vital for Britain's safety and prosperity.”

The ESG Charter outlines the industry's commitment to cutting carbon emissions to help Britain reach its net-zero target by 2050 and develop innovative new technologies for the armed forces.

It also pledges to cut Britain's skills gap by forging more partnerships with colleges, universities and local communities to encourage more people to consider careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). The charter also outlines a commitment to improve diversity, equality and inclusion across all levels.

The value of the sector to keeping Britain's national infrastructure safe, supporting the armed forces and shoring up the nation's defences against cyber-attacks are also highlighted in the document.

It commits to “improve and sustain a strict, efficient and comprehensive export control system” and play a pivotal role in Britain's prosperity and protection.

The defence sector delivers a £9.8bn boost to the British economy every year and employs more than 147,500 people. Seventy per cent of defence jobs are outside London and the industry supports 6,900 apprenticeships.

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James Cartlidge MP, minister for defence procurement, said: “The invasion of Ukraine has highlighted in the starkest possible way the fragility of the most important social value – peace. It's more important than ever we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our partners to ensure they can continue protecting our way of life, alongside becoming more sustainable, reducing skills gaps and promoting a diverse workforce.

“I urge more companies to sign up to the new UK Defence ESG Charter, which champions the vital role the sector plays in Britain’s security and prosperity.”

Ben Bridge, Airbus defence and space UK chair said the UK’s security had “never been so important” in an “increasingly volatile geopolitical world”.

He added: “The defence industry plays a pivotal role in providing that security and we must balance the very important elements that come with responsible ESG investment and the need to ensure a solid and thriving defence sector. Now is the time to invest more, not less, in our sovereign capabilities.”