

## Building the Defence Technical Academy



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Metrix Property Services is the name given to the part of the Metrix consortium that will deliver the planning and construction of the Defence Technical Academy (DTA) site over the course of the next five years as well as the crucial delivery of the support services for the rest of the contract life. The delivery programme for this massive undertaking, the Defence Training Review (DTR), constitutes one of the largest Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects ever undertaken in the UK. This project is defined by the excellent training which will be offered to the UK Armed Forces, but also by a partnership of world-leading organisations and companies. QinetiQ will lead a number of sub contractors including Raytheon Systems, EDS, Nord Anglia and the Open University which will, working in partnership with the training colleges at HMS Sultan, Blandford and RAF Cosford, deliver the training programmes at this exciting new facility.

So it is a wide range of training providers that will help to deliver the DTA's training solution. But there is also an enormous real estate component to this project. Through the creation of the DTA, Metrix will create a substantial new development. Centred at St Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan in South Wales, the DTA will be a world-class facility of which the UK Armed Forces can be proud. **Duncan MacRae** is managing director of Metrix Property Services. Here he talks about the design progress and construction development of the DTA.

The DTA will be a wholly new type of training facility, providing the Armed Forces for the first time with a purpose-built training facility, where buildings will be specifically designed to accommodate the training techniques and methodologies of today while at the same time being flexible enough to facilitate the continually changing military training requirements of the future. It is our intention that the DTA will provide a fitting home for the servicemen and women who will train at St Athan over the course of the next 25 to 30 years. As such my job is to take the core elements of the DTR programme, one of the largest and most complex PFI projects ever undertaken by the MoD and express, through expert planning, design and architectural excellence, the DTR vision to transform the way specialist training is delivered to provide better support to the future needs of the Armed Forces.

What does the DTA aspire to be? It will provide modern technical skills, training and facilities and will transform training delivery through new methodologies and technologies by the appropriate and timely use of distance and blended learning. As such the DTA's facilities will need to be flexible and adaptable to the dynamic style of training that will be offered. The DTA will in short offer superb new training facilities that will evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of the UK's Armed Forces.

In practice a town comes of age when its residents buy homes in its centre, lured by the convenience of being able to walk to the nearest shops, or even place of work. The DTA in St Athan, because it is similar in size to a small town, will have all the facilities that you would expect of a small town: shops, pubs, restaurants, and places of worship. It therefore promises to mirror a modern town's level of convenience for the servicemen and women who will train there, as well as the training community who will be stationed at the site. Excellence in classroom design and excellence in sports and leisure facilities will be a hallmark of the DTA.

Let me try to orientate the newcomer to the future DTA, a prospective 'new student' to St Athan. The focal point for the site will be one of the largest covered facilities in Europe, Red Dragon Hanger. This was constructed around four years ago and was originally designed for aeronautical research. Now it is to be given an exciting new lease of life. To put the size of this facility into perspective the Red Dragon Hanger is big enough to contain six VC10 aircraft. Furthermore, it is perfectly laid out and equipped to carry out training, both on the assets themselves, the aircraft and the vehicles that it will contain, and within the classrooms that will be built in and around it.

The classrooms will be located within the technical area so students will be able to look out at the assets that they are learning about in addition to taking classes in purpose-built facilities that will be attached to the hangar. The DTA's brand new accommodation blocks will contain more than 3700 bedrooms and one can readily see from the images and diagrams used within this article that we are creating a site which will not only be an excellent environment for learning, but also one that will provide an exciting modern living environment with all the sporting and leisure activities expected by both the trainees and trainers as well as local residents. The DTA will be an environment that will attract and retain the Service personnel of the future and will, we believe, project the right image and make the right impression on young people who want to make a career in the Armed Forces. Overall, the vision of the DTA at St Athan is to ensure that all who train there – all those who provide the training and who help to manage the site – will be given the best facilities, the best tools and the best maintained environment that can be devised in a modern campus environment.