



Council of Military Education Committees of the Universities of the United Kingdom

Annual General Meeting 2020

held virtually on Thursday 3rd September 2020 at 1400hrs

Draft Minute

Apologies

General Sir Peter Wall (President); Lt Gen Richard Nugee; Maj Gen Jamie Gordon; Air Marshal Ed Stringer; Professor E Archibald; Dr J Smith

1. Minutes

- RECEIVED: The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 4 September 2019 (COMEC_AGM_2020_A)
- RESOLVED: The Minutes were approved.

2. Matters Arising

- NOTED: There were no matters arising.

3. Presidents Introduction

- NOTED: The President recorded a video address for the AGM.
- NOTED: The President reflected on current world affairs and the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. He noted COMEC and MECs ongoing role in ensuring strong academic ties between Universities and the military in both research and teaching. COMEC has a co-ordinating role to play ensuring synergies in terms of funding and ensuring both sides get the best from the relationship. The integrated Defence review in the autumn will provide further clarity about what the MoD wants from COMEC as it engages with interfaces between the military and academic world.
- NOTED: The President thanked Roddy Livingstone for his successful tenure as Chair of COMEC and wished his successor all the best for their term of office.

4. Chairman's Report

- RECEIVED: A report from the Chairman (COMEC_AGM_2020_B):

Chairman's Report to Council

Pandemic

The health and economic pandemic has required us to cancel or postpone face to face meetings and planned appointments. However, we are maintaining business continuity by meeting remotely and engaging more by alternative means with our network of universities and the Armed Forces.

The services and universities have a common imperative to go forward with a new normal, subject to no upsurge in virus cases. We both face similar challenges, whether in recruitment, deferred or phased beginnings of term, and new dynamic teaching, learning and assessment environments, as well as residential, sporting and social activities. All this must be achieved while mitigating the risk to our staff and students, and within a new resource structure. We are learning much from alternative methods of delivery, but face to face and practical interaction within a community are critical to personal development if values and standards are to be maintained.

The services have introduced innovative approaches to return to safe training in the USUs. However, this will depend upon how universities' actions and priorities affect the availability of students.

Governments in the different nations of the UK and internationally are responding separately to the evolving health and economic situation, just as each service and university determines its own response. We have much to learn from each other and have a common duty of care to our students, so I would hope that MECs would keep closely in touch with their USUs and exchange intelligence in order that the services' approaches to the pandemic are compatible with ours.

Conference:

Thank you to those who responded to the feedback questionnaire on the 2019 Conference, which members found useful, informative and engaging. Your responses informed the arrangements for this year's Conference, which we reluctantly cancelled because of the progress of the pandemic.

We have yet to confirm arrangements with the RAF for our 2021 Conference, but our present expectation would be that it may be held on 1 and 2 September at RAF Halton.

University Service Units

A major part of the Executive's work continues to be with the Service Staff Officers in support of our USUs, and our quarterly discussions have been informed by financial stringency, requiring affordability and value for money, but the quality of recruits remains strong.

We have continued to lobby on staff manning and gapping and on improving the recruiting medical process, where contract failures, under resourcing and over

complication have continued to generate backlogs. Other issues we have identified this year have included:

URNUs:

The 1st Patrol Boat Squadron service agreement for P2000 affiliation on a regional model, but with problematic sea training opportunities.

The URNU review, which will involve MECs, to provide fit for purpose revised training programme, appropriate resourcing, career structure for TOs and media promotion.

UOTCs:

The Basic Training Transformation Project, with increased efficiency, control, standardization, Reserve Service Days and more collaborative working producing efficiency gain.

The creation of Aberdeen and Tayforth Universities Officer Training Regiment in consultation with MECs, universities, 51 Brigade and Highland RFCA, while implementing lessons learned from Yorkshire and North West.

UASs:

The mitigation of restricted flying opportunities during Defence Infrastructure Organization's contorted saga on the future location of Bristol UAS, and the relocation of Yorkshire UAS.

*The protracted contractual negotiations for the delivery of Project TELUM, now expected to have new training aircraft in 2 – 3 years, simulators and be carbon neutral **University Officers' Training Corps.***

Independent Advisory Panel:

Sandhurst shared with us the IAP review and their progress report, which drew attention to a range of issues, some of which MECs and COMEC already contribute to and deliver on. These should assist us all in determining the future direction, including their intention to engage actively with their university, and our common business and industry, partners.

Sandhurst:

There are several areas where our membership could greatly assist the Armed Forces. Two which have been broached at recent meetings and our Conference are:

Utility of the University Service Units: Qualitative research into trends and forecasts on the value of the USUs in broadening the understanding of future leaders of society is not readily available. However, several members expressed expert interest in assisting Sandhurst with identifying a set of metrics that could be used to determine a non-empirical measurement of effect for UOTCs.

Defence Engagement Overseas: USU exercises overseas could have added benefit if they capitalized on existing relationships between our universities and overseas academic institutions, particularly those with strong military links. We provided Sandhurst with a few exemplars of the legion of such associations which could be exploited to mutual effect. COs will explore with MEC members what might complement their ambitions.

Duty of Care

The universities and their USUs severally exercise a responsible duty of care to their own students in their own spheres of activity, but the sharing of information between the partner institutions is of concern, so we issued a note on two aspects which might be of assistance to members:

Security:

Special security regulations subject service personnel to restrictions on travel to particular countries. USUs should brief their Officer Cadets on the regulations and maintain a notice with the current list of restricted countries. It is the student's responsibility before travelling to such a country to consult their USU for a security briefing for their, and their companions', safety/security.

Welfare:

USUs know their students' universities and are well placed to require students to inform them of any welfare issues which may present a risk to themselves or others, and to obtain their consent to release information to their universities.

MECs, and their USUs, are formally constituted by an agreement with Defence to ensure the safeguarding of students undergoing military training. It might be hoped, therefore, that universities would, in those cases where they know of a student's membership of a USU, seek to find a way to disclose in confidence to that USU material information which may be relevant to that student's welfare or that of their peers. We distributed an exemplar of good practice which might be of interest to other universities considering how to address this issue in their own circumstances.

OFSTED

MECs are responsible for overseeing the operation of the USUs, with particular regard to the balance between students' military and academic activities. Because of this common interest, we need to understand OFSTED welfare and duty of care inspections and what we may learn from the process: I assume COs will be sharing the reports with the MECs concerned.

I have feedback from some of the reports published so far, and they make very interesting reading. There are general lessons to be learned from how the university and service welfare networks and their relationship are perceived, and how far the MEC's role is recognized.

The services should be pleased with the endorsement of what is being achieved from their investment. However, MECs in general have a very low profile, and are not

supporting the welfare regime. It is suggested that their university representatives may not be senior enough to exert any influence. General findings include:

- *USUs provide a supportive and nurturing community of role models in which our students can develop their skills and confidence*
- *USUs have good support for personal safety and use of social media, though training in awareness of extremism/radicalization is wanting*
- *welfare and duty of care is a priority for USU staff, and effective, though they, rather than MECs, take the initiative with university welfare staff in trying to exchange information*
- *OCdts turn to USU staff, rather than MECs or tutors, to deconflict training and academic studies*
- *OCdts understand the welfare network in the military more than they do that in the universities*
- *OCdts have confidence in military, rather than university, staff to resolve issues*

STEM Graduate Inflow Scheme

Defence's closure of the Defence Technical Officer and Engineer Entry Scheme means that the final entry of Defence bursars at eleven universities in the four Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme Squadrons will be in 2021.

The replacement STEM Graduate Inflow Scheme is intended to be more responsive and agile to compete for graduates. It will be targeted to increase significantly the recruitment of STEM graduates and will be open to undergraduates across all UK universities. If the substantial numbers of new bursars are to be absorbed into USUs, this has the potential to distort their healthy profile and needs to be managed to maintain a wide membership with many different viewpoints and outlooks.

Prize

The Prize (£500) recognizes outstanding achievement in leadership through military expertise, public service commitment and Service Unit activities. Nominees should now have not more than three years' service with the USUs or Reserve Forces.

Networking

Defence

:

Our remit extends to wide collaboration between universities and Defence and support for the Forces community, and MECs are the continuing presence in universities championing this partnership. We continue to review our alliance with Defence, and inform our deliberations in the light of current needs, especially:

- *the Integrated Review of foreign policy, defence, security and international development to match ambition to resources*
- *the wide ranging programme of reforms across all the services to shift the focus to a multi-domain approach to win the information war*

MECs:

We have begun the process of asking a few MECs per Executive meeting for a brief informal report on their activities to get an appreciation of what is important to them, their activities, good practice or issues of concern, in order to improve engagement. The Tayforth, Exeter and Northumbrian reports have been excellent, showing just how busy they have been and giving us a real sense of their activities and priorities.

We were in discussions with Liverpool MEC about hosting our May meeting as part of our plan to enhance communication and the exchange of ideas with MECs by holding a meeting each year outwith London. Cdr URNU arranged an innovative programme to engage with some members and students of Liverpool and Manchester & Salford MECs at Naval Regional Headquarters, but the pandemic prompted cancellation of the visitation.

You are reminded that MEC chairman are welcome to attend meetings of the Executive as observers, though not at COMEC expense. MECs may also raise items of business for the agenda, and present them in person. The dates of meetings are published a year in advance on the events page of the website at www.comec.org.uk/category/events/. Agendas are normally published a week before the meeting, to be followed by the Minutes after they have been approved at the next meeting.

Publications

The COMEC Conspectus, which is intended to publicise to our strategic allies and others what we do and for whom, is published at <https://www.comec.org.uk/publications/>.

Occasional Paper No. 12: The Ethics of Fighting Power by Patrick Mileham should be available shortly, with shortened versions offered to the officer academies for adaptation to their requirements.

Dynamic Twitter Feeds

The website is maintained as an informational source of reference and of referral to other related sites. I would commend our Dynamic Twitter Feeds page www.comec.org.uk/updates/ to keep abreast of news from our USUs, the Armed Forces, our strategic allies and associated organizations.

Reserve Forces 2030 Review

The enterprising and visionary review aims to establish how to harness and unlock the potential of the specialist knowledge and expertise of reservists. We have engaged with the review team looking at recruitment, training and retention, and also at how they might use some modern networking technology to keep in touch with USU graduates to maintain their interest and benefit from their ongoing non-military experiences.

Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme

We hope that, in the abridged duration of the scheme, the option of a day in a USU might be retained within parliamentarians' attachment requirement of 15 days.

We would remind MECs and USUs to include local parliamentarians in guest lists as appropriate in order to introduce them to how these units operate. Otherwise, Defence may miss out on an important aspect of their ability to influence policy in the future.

The Ulysses Trust

The Trust may be able to provide financial support for unit expeditions or adventurous training. Their Summer 2020 Newsletter, <https://www.ulyssustrust.co.uk/2020/summer-2020-newsletter/>, includes an article promoting the benefits of UK-based expeditions.

- NOTED: The Chairman noted that a CO had raised the requirement of licenced full versions of video conferencing software with the increasing move to hybrid communications. The Chairman suggested MECs could discuss this with their Universities who may be able to assist here by making COs visiting or honorary staff members thereby allowing them access to their software. It was noted that the MoD are making changes to their infrastructure to enable full use of video conferencing software.
- NOTED: Discussions were had around welfare of students and communications between USUs, MECs and Universities. It was noted having senior University staff on the MEC helped resolve some of these issues and ensuring a connection on the MEC to the University's welfare services supported discussions.

5. Treasurer's Report

- APPROVED: The Annual Statement of Accounts 2019-20 (COMEC_AGM_2020_C)

Treasurer's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2020

Treasurer's Comments

Profit and Loss Account

Because of Covid19, this was an exceptional financial year for COMEC (as for most organisations).

At the end of the financial year, seven MEC subscriptions remained outstanding (presumably as a result of administrative issues during the lockdown period). On the assumption that these subscriptions will eventually come to hand, they are included in the accounts and balance sheet for the year (see below).

It should also be noted that as a result of travel restrictions arising from Covid19 we have had a reduction in our anticipated travel and meeting costs for the year.

The formal accounts thus show an excess of income over expenditure for the year.

Balance Sheet

Our policy has for some time been that we should reduce our reserves (that is, our total net assets) over a period of years to the equivalent of one year's income (ordinarily around £6,650). The recent excess of income over expenditure has not been typical. However, even if our income and expenditure were to return to their previous pattern, I would anticipate that we will not achieve this target for several more years.

COMEC Financial Statements 2020

Income and Expenditure Account

For the year ended 31 July 2020

	2020	2019
	£	£
Income		
<i>MEC Subscriptions due</i>	6,650	6,650
<i>Bank interest</i>	4	5
Total income	6,654	6,655
Expenditure		
<i>Annual Meeting and Conference (Sep 2019)</i>	1,676	1,166
<i>Executive meetings</i>	1,118	2,350
<i>Travel for Representation</i>	387	131
<i>COMEC Prize</i>	512	500
<i>COMEC Occasional Papers</i>	18	262
<i>Website</i>	611	41
<i>Administrator honorarium</i>	1,500	1,500
<i>Postage and stationery</i>	16	34
Total expenditure	5,838	5,984
Profit / (loss) for the year	816	671

Balance Sheet

As at 31 July 2020

	2020	2019
	£	£
Opening balance at 1 August 2019	8,439	7,768
<i>Profit / (loss) for the year</i>	816	671
Closing balance at 31 July 2020	9,255	8,439
Represented by:		

<i>Current account</i>	<i>4,448</i>	<i>4,985</i>
<i>Savings account</i>	<i>2,357</i>	<i>2,354</i>
<i>Debtors</i>	<i>2,450</i>	<i>1,900</i>
<i>Creditors</i>		<i>(800)</i>
<i>Total net assets at 31 July 2020</i>	<i>9,255</i>	<i>8,439</i>

6. COMEC Prize

- REPORTED: The COMEC Prize Winner 2019 is APO F Hoppé of Glasgow & Strathclyde Universities Air Squadron. The runners up are Deputy Snr Mid Z Ferguson of Liverpool URNU and SUO A Wilson of Manchester & Salford UOTC.
- NOTED: The Chairman noted on behalf of Dr R Hall there was good representation across the country and candidates were of an exceptionally high standard.
- RECEIVED: An excellent presentation by the prize winner APO F Hoppé.

7. Nominations to the Executive Committee

- NOTED: There are five vacancies on the Executive occasioned by the completion of term of office for Roddy Livingston (Chairman, not standing for re-election), Bryden Ritchie (former Vice-Chairman, following earlier resignation), Patton Taylor (Treasurer, eligible for re-election), Hugh Hamilton (not eligible for re-election), Jim Castle (eligible for re-election).
- NOTED: Nominations have been received by the due date in respect of the following:

Chairman

Mr Jim Castle (Glasgow & Strathclyde MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D1)
 Professor Paul Ivey (London MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D2)

Vice-Chairman

Dr Margi Vilnay (Tayforth MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D3)

Treasurer

Professor Patton Taylor (COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D4)

Executive Committee Member

Mrs Simone Bedford (Northumbrian MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D5)
 Professor James Davenport (Bristol MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D6)
 Dr Fred Ruddell (Queen's Belfast MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D7)
 Professor Michael Siva-Jothy (Sheffield MEC;
 COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D8)
 Mr Andy Smith (East Midlands MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D9)
 Professor Adrian Spencer (East Midlands MEC; COMEC_Exec_2020_09_D10)

- RESOLVED: There being only one nomination for Vice-Chairman and Treasurer, Dr Margi Vilnay and Professor Patton Taylor were ratified by the AGM and duly elected for a term of four years.
- RESOLVED: There being two nominations for Chairman and six nominations for Executive Committee Member received by the due date for these vacancies, a vote was held. Mr Jim Castle was duly declared elected as Chairman for a term of four years. Mrs Simone Bedford, Professor Michael Siva-Jothy and Mr Andy Smith were duly elected to the Executive Committee as Ordinary Members for a term of four years.

8. Any Other Business

- NOTED: The Chairman noted thanks to the Service Staff Officers, Armed Forces and Defence who supported the relationship with COMEC. The Chairman also thanked MECs for exchanging ideas and supporting the USUs.
- NOTED: The Chairman thanked the President for his advice, encouragement and wise council as well as members of the COMEC Executive for their support, understanding and endurance over the last few years.

9. Dates of Next Meeting

- NOTED: The date and location of the next Conference and AGM will be announced after confirmation of the arrangements with the RAF.