



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

### **Executive Committee Meeting**

**Held on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at 1100hrs to 1230hrs using Microsoft Teams**

### **Minute**

#### **Present**

General Sir P Wall (President); Mr J S Castle (Chairman); Dr M Vilnay (Vice-Chair); Rev Professor J P Taylor (Treasurer); Mrs S Bedford; Dr R Hall; Ms C Kinkead; Professor P Ivey; Professor M Siva-Jothy; Mr A Smith; Dr J Smith; Maj I Stoney; Gp Capt I Sharrocks; Col N Tougher; Col D Gray; Lt Col M Bishop

#### **In Attendance;**

Mr Jason Norris (Secretary)

#### **Apologies**

Cdr N Downing RN;

- NOTED: The Chairman welcome new members to their first Executive Meeting.
- NOTED: The President 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.

#### **1. Minutes**

- APPROVED: The Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020 (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_A1)
- RECEIVED: The draft Minutes of the AGM meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020 (COMEC\_2020\_11\_A2)

#### **2. Matters Arising**

- There were no matters arising

### 3. Chairman's Report

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from the Chairman (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_B)

### ***Chairman's Report***

*Meeting: 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2020*

#### ***Progress to date:***

- *JSC elected as Chairman August 2020*
- *(No re-counts; no claims of vote rigging; no Supreme Court indictment)*
- *Initial discussions with our President*
- *Introductory discussions with new Exec members, Simone Bedford, Michael Siva-Jothy and Andrew Smith*
- *Initial meeting with MEC Chairs – 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020*
  - *90% attendance*
  - *Intended as a “one-off”*
  - *But popular; with request for regularity*
  - *Propose a one-hour evening session three weeks ahead of executive meetings*
  - *Rolling Chair (from Executive members)*
- *Talked to OTC CO's – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020*
  - *Set up via Cols Tougher and Bishop as part of their monthly meeting*
  - *Brigadier present*
  - *Introductory message*
  - *Included my views on welfare which had resonance with Bgd*
- *Initial discussions with Commander Neil Downing and Gp Cpt Ian Sharrocks to establish similar CO Intro Interface*

#### ***Coming up - WiP***

- *Streamline meetings*
  - *Reports to Exec to be read by all and notes taken ahead of the meeting*
  - *Reporter will present 3 minute (only) Executive summary*
  - *Exec will then interrogate each report*
  - *Minutes of previous meetings to be read and any corrections or matters arising noted ahead of meeting.*
- *Above designed to allow substantive talk and discussion on salient factors affecting MECs, COMEC, Executive, etc*
- *Improved Communications are essential. Each Exec member appointed one/two MEC chairs. (See COMEC\_EXEC\_2020\_11\_E\_MEC\_Exec\_Contacts)*
  - *Periodic meetings (virtual)*
  - *Encourage students to join-in for their comment*
  - *Build relationship.*

- *Report back to Exec Meeting on issues/areas of good practice to share.*
- *Future areas for ACTION*
  - *Excellence*
  - *Constitution*
  - *Communication*
  - *Support*
  - *Sharing*
  - *Operations*
  - *RFCAs*
  - *Diversity*
  - *Welfare*
  - *Research*
  - *Relevance*
- *(Other salient topics welcome)*

*Jim Castle*

*10<sup>th</sup> November, 2020*

#### **4. Treasurer's Report**

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from the Treasurer (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_C)
- NOTED: COMEC are on track with expected pattern of spend.
- NOTED: The Treasurer noted there were three MECs outstanding in terms of 19/20 COMEC subscription payments, however there was high confidence these would be received in due course.
- **ACTION: Invoices will be sent to MECs in January 2021 for the 20/21 COMEC subscription payments.**

#### **5. Reports from the Service Staff Officers**

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from each of the Service Staff Officers:
  - a. Royal Navy (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_D1)

*19 Nov 20*

*COMEC Executive*

### **COMEC EXECUTIVE MEETING 19 NOV 20 – URNU REPORT**

#### **Introduction**

1. *Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions implemented by Her Majesty's Government (HMG) and the Devolved Powers, the*

*activity of the University Royal Naval Units (URNU) has been seriously curtailed. The re-start of activities at the start of the new academic year has been challenging due to varying restrictions across the regions. The organisation delivered a range of Command, Leadership and Management (CLM) and Adventurous Training and Sport (ATS) activities, in line with HMG restrictions, and in a C-19 safe manner, during Q3 20. However, the level of activity has been significantly reduced due to local government and operational restrictions.*

*2. Due to the developing situation at the start of term, Training Night (TN) face to face (F2F) activity was paused until 1 Nov 20. However, alternative CV-19 safe activities did go ahead in units located within lower risk areas, in order to promote mental health and facilitate the ongoing viability of the organisation. Individual URNUs were directed to take advice from the MECs associated with the universities to whom they were affiliated, in order to place the welfare and duty of care (WDoC) of both Officer Cadets (OCs) and staff at the centre of their planning.*

*3. Currently the personnel situation within the URNU Organisation is deemed to be fragile due to ongoing gapping related to higher priority operational commitments. At present, 1 out of 15 x COs' positions are gapped, while 7 out of 15 x Coxns' positions are soft / hard have no formal incumbent.*

### **Priorities**

*4. In line with Capt BRNC's current intent, Commander Universities (Cdr U) is still tasked with delivering the higher-level priorities set for the Universities Department (URNU and JD) at the start of the current term:*

- a. Provide Welfare and Duty of Care (WDoC) to JD, URNU Staff, Training Officers (TOs) and OCs, through ongoing remote interaction.*
- b. Provide resilience to BRNC Command, as a group or, as individuals.*
- c. Deliver Military Assistance to Civilian Authorities (MACA).*
- d. Deliver FOST Directive 002/19.*
- e. Return to business as usual (BAU) post COVID-19.*

*5. Having taken into account the overarching priorities of BRNC Command, our main effort as a department within BRNC Command, while delivering the priorities highlighted in para 5a, 5b and 5c continue to be:*

- a. Look after our people (Staff; URNU; JD).*
- b. Achieve the effect set out in FOST Directive 002/19, by delivering on the recommendations set out in the FOST Directive Phase 1 Briefing Paper.*
- c. Prepare for the return to Business as Usual (BAU).*

**COVID-19**

6. *The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of how we live and work. BRNC Command directed the URNU to pause the majority of F2F training in Oct 20 to enable OC to settle back into their new surroundings after the prolonged break and mitigate against identified risks. However, virtual training was continued in an efficient and effective manner, by utilising civilian and defence managed Virtual Learning Environments.*

7. *Continuing to plan for success, the organisation was prepared to re-start F2F activities in a CV-19 safe manner in Nov 20. However, due to the second lockdown in England a further pause in F2F training was instigated.*

- a. *URNUs in England (12) have paused all F2F training in light of National lockdown. Training and WDoC will be delivered virtually, with a view to restarting F2F contact, taking into account local circumstances, wef 2 Dec 20, pending local restrictions.*
- b. *Units located in the devolved powers (3) are continuing to deliver on Mission Statement, taking into consideration regional guidelines.*

**Welfare Duty of Care (WDoC)**

8. *At this difficult time, the need for WDoC to take primacy has been clearly identified. With this in mind, each individual is being encouraged to carefully consider how they can contribute to the mental and physical well-being of their colleagues. The permanent staff at unit level continue to signpost Officer Cadets for whom they have concerns to University Welfare Services. However, additional risk mitigation measures including Mental Health First Aid training and pastoral support from the RN Chaplaincy Service are being investigated.*

9. *It is currently anticipated that Ofsted will conduct WDoC Inspections on up to 3 x URNU on a blended basis during the 20/21 reporting cycle.*

**URNU Root & Branch Review.**

10. *To provide a baseline position and understand the future direction of the URNUs, Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST)<sup>1</sup>, Commander Universities (Cdr U) has conducted a review into the effectiveness of the organisation. Phase 2 of the review, which was informed by the initial paper presented to FOST<sup>2</sup> in Jan 20, is now nearing completion. Whilst further transformational change will be required in the medium / long term, BRNC Command is confident that the changes that have already been implemented and are currently being considered will ensure that the URNU organisation is ready and capable of supporting the new Royal Navy.*

---

<sup>1</sup> FOST Directive 002/19

<sup>2</sup> 20200124-FOST Directive Phase 1\_FINAL-OS

11. Over the last six months, URNU Permanent Staff and TOs have made significant progress in delivering outcomes within the five key Workstream (WS) areas: Governance; Training Syllabus; Administration; Training Delivery and Business Continuity.<sup>3</sup> These WS align with the URNU Organisation's core functions and recognise the fact that the organisation must evolve and transform while delivering BAU to the existing cadre of OCs. For situation awareness the progress made during to date is outlined below.

## 12. Governance.

a. The 2020 Edition of University Department Standing Orders is now live and will continue to develop with a view to it becoming the overarching governance document for the URNUs, Medical Cadets and Bursars.

b. The adaptation of a new URNU Mission Statement has been endorsed by Captain BRNC:

*'To inspire individuals through leadership and maritime training, whilst facilitating a career in the Royal Navy for those who choose.'*

c. The adaptation of a new URNU Tag Line has also been endorsed for use on all Social Media platforms as well as the URNU pages within the RN website:

*'Learn today, Lead tomorrow.'*

d. **Regionalisation.** The creation of five regions consisting of 3 units in each has been endorsed:

(1) North	Edinburgh, Glasgow, Northumbrian
(2) Central North	Liverpool, Manchester, Yorkshire
(3) Central South	Birmingham, Cambridge, Oxford
(4) South East	London, Southampton, Sussex
(5) South West	Bristol, Cardiff, Devon

Units will retain their individual identities and there will be no change in footprint at this stage. However, each region will be overseen by a Regional Chief of Staff (Senior CO) who will be supported by the other two COs who will take on the roles of Operations Officer (Sea) and Operations Officer (Shore)

e. **URNU Transformation.** The geographical laydown of the URNU organisation has been reviewed taking into consideration distribution of eligible Potential Officer Cadets. As a result of the review, BRNC Command

---

<sup>3</sup> UTM 18/20 – Establishment of Workstreams to deliver University Royal Naval Units Review

*is now scoping the possibility of relocating 1 x URNU as well as the opening of 2 x URNU in new locations. Further information will be provided in due course. However, it is envisaged that these proposals will increase the reach of the organisation giving more students access to the URNU offer. In addition, as part of this strategic study, consideration will be given to the development of a Virtual URNU to exploit innovative training models that have been trialled during the CV-19 pandemic.*

**13. Training Syllabus.** *The URNUs have now been assigned a Training Requirement Authority which has approved the Role Performance Statement for URNU OCs. This is being developed into a Formal Training Statement which will form the basis of the new URNU Training Syllabus.*

*a. **Alignment.** Having liaised with the Maritime Reserve and considered good practice within other USUs, BRNC Command is now working to align the URNU syllabus with the RNR's Initial Naval Training (Officer) syllabus.*

*b. **Training Logs.** At present, suitably qualified and experienced personnel are working on the training documentation with a view to rolling out an interim CV-19 friendly package in Q4 20. The new training package will be based on four training pillars, which OCs will be exposed to during their University experience. A system of learning credits will also be introduced which will enable the students to gain credits in each of the four area:*

*(1) Militarisation.*

*(2) Marinisation.*

*(3) Command, Leadership and Management.*

*(4) Adventurous Training & Sport.*

*c. **Training Programme.** In the short term the COs and Senior TOs will be provided on broad guidance in relation to the syllabus content. However, it is envisaged that the various syllabus working groups will have produced DSAT compliant training materials that will facilitate the roll out of the new URNU Training Syllabus in Q3 21.*

**14. Administration.** *Following a series of comprehensive deep dives into how: URNU pay and allowances, reporting plots and stores are administered a Director People and Training has endorsed the move of all URNU related administrative activity to BRNC Command's Unit Personnel Office. This has resulted in a complete review into how human resources and physical resources are supplied.*

**15. Training Delivery.** *During the course of the review, the vital role of the URNU Training Officer has been considered and evaluated. Whilst these individuals are List 7A reserve officers their TACOS are unique as they have no call out liability and are regarded as civilians in terms of the law. However, the vital role that they play in the development of URNU OCs and the overall management of each URNU has now been*

*recognised. The overarching mantra of: Recruit; Train; Retain; Recognise, has been adopted and long-awaited career management strategies have been adopted.*

*16. **Business Continuity / Business as Usual (BAU).** Perhaps the most challenging area to transform, the workstream lead for this area has been required to adopt the evolving changes while ensuring that the overall experience of current OCs remain positive. To achieve this a variety of unique business approaches have been adopted, so that the workstream lead can ensure that change is managed and that existing personnel are made fully aware of the reasons for change.*

### **Recruitment Strategy**

*17. With the support of RN Media Comms and Engagement (RNMCE) the new URNU Webpages, that are hosted within the official RN website, have been launched and developed to become key recruiting tools to which all Social Media interest is driven. Through the use of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the URNU organisation has enhanced its corporate image and significantly broadened its virtual footprint at a time when recruiting by traditional means has been very challenging.*

*18. Due to the CV-19 pandemic, the challenge of recruiting to full-liability has been even greater as we are only required to recruit new OCs but also to re-recruit / re-invigorate the existing OCs who will not have had face to face contact with the unit for over 6 months. In preparation for what was clearly going to be a challenging recruiting environment individual COs encouraged with MECs to ascertain the likely format of Freshers' Fayres. Novel virtual recruiting strategies were exploited to supplement proven face to face techniques, but it quickly became clear that the quality of student led virtual fayres varied significantly. Through close liaison with Captain Naval Recruiting (CNR) and RNMCE the organisation therefore proactively sought opportunities to increase its social media footprint and drive footfall to the RN supported website where interested individuals are encouraged to engage at a virtual level prior to submitting Expression of Interest forms.*

*19. This year, challenging recruiting targets have been set for each unit and COs have been directly to over-recruit by 15% to account for the expected rate of medical failure and voluntary withdrawal. As there is clearly a risk that some units may find themselves with more than 51 students, the Command is content to veer liability, and funding, between units at a regional level, if the need should arise. However, the character and success of an URNU is intrinsically linked to its members, so quality rather than quantity will still be the watchword.*

*20. Recruiting is currently judged to have gone well despite the challenges brought about by the CV-19 pandemic. Staff and OCs have risen to the challenge recruiting in excess of 280 new members during the course of the initial recruiting window. However, due to identified demand, it has been agreed that the 20/21 recruiting widow should remain open until Jan 21 and that a further targeted Facebook recruiting campaign should be instigated in Dec 20.*

### **COVID-19 Exit Strategy – Jan 21**

21. *The Universities HQ is currently working alongside the URNU COs to identify how training can be safely restarted, taking into account differing local circumstances and the ever-evolving guidelines being provided by HMG and the devolved authorities. In addition, the URNU Management Team is now considering how to mitigate against gapping, so that each unit is fully prepared to meet the challenges that we will undoubtedly face as we strive to re-start in Q1 21.*

### **Summary**

22. *During the course of the 20/21 academic year, the URNU organisation plans to: consolidate its membership; work to gain a higher profile both internally and externally; imbed the regionalised model of working; review the geographical laydown of the URNU plot; improve the offer to individual students; ease transfer between branches of the Royal Navy; improve the administrative experience for all members; and continue to fill the gaps in the military and civilian personnel plot. The 2\* mandated root and branch review of the URNUs ensures that that the organisation is transforming to meet the needs of the new Royal Navy. Each unit has demonstrated that it is ready, and able, to deliver the URNU offer, while taking into consideration the challenges that the organisation will face as the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic in Q1/2 21.*



*N E Downing  
Cdr RN  
Commander Universities*

b. Army (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_D2)

*G3/COMEC/SitRep/*

*4 Nov 20*

*Comd OTC  
COMEC Executive*

### **University Officers Training Corps – COMEC Executive – November Update**

**1. Commander OTCs' Overview.** *The remarkably fluid situation continues to evolve. Having moved from the three-tier system to National Lockdown 2.0 in England, a "Firebreak" in Wales and specific devolved guidelines in Scotland and Northern Ireland, UOTCs may be following different guidance but all remain tested safe places of work, no matter the local infection rate. RMAS Gp have issued Mission Command oriented direction which allows Commanding Officers the flexibility to deliver their training in the most appropriate manner. Working closely with Military*

*Education Committees, Regional Forces and Cadets organisations and Universities, blended activity continues.*

**2. Recruiting season.** *The focus since September has been on medicals and attestation and the table below illustrates data as at 9 November.*

<b>Event/Result</b>	<b>FY 18/19</b>	<b>FY 19/20</b>	<b>FY 20/21</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<i>EOI</i>	12235	10829	<b>6355</b>	<i>1700 EoI by Mid-August 2100 EoI before first Freshers Fair</i>
<i>Online medical questionnaire</i>			<b>2285 pass 304 fail</b>	<i>New process for 2020. 304 medicals at £1400 per medical = £425,600 of wasted expenditure prevented.</i>
<i>Medicals</i>	-	2496	<b>1906</b>	
<i>Medical passes</i>	-	1097	<b>1096</b>	<i>45% female</i>
<i>Failure rate</i>	-	31%	<b>6.2%</b>	
<i>Attestations</i>	1592	1530	<b>958</b>	<i>As at 9 Nov</i>

**3. Observations.**

**a. Expressions of interest (EOI).** *EoIs are significantly down this year in comparison to last year but an early coordinated recruitment surge, aided by a Target Market Analysis (Mediacom) and the production of professional media products (Grosvenor), ensured that UOTCs were receiving EoIs before they launched their traditional campaigns. These early EoIs were generally from more dedicated candidates than those received from freshers’ fairs. Much of the reduced EoI is down to lack of physical freshers’ fairs (traditionally 60% of UOTC EoIs).*

**b. Online Medical Questionnaire (OMQ) Pre-Screening.** *This year’s new OMQ process categorised individuals on a traffic light system based on their online responses to a series of medical questions.*

- i. Green. Candidate is taken to medical, with a high confidence of passing.*
- ii. Amber. Further medical evidence requested in order to transition candidate to “Green” or “Red”.*
- iii. Red. Candidate is unlikely to pass the medical entry standard.*

*The OMQ screened out approximately 304 candidates who would previously have been taken to a medical. This prevented over £400,000 of wasted expenditure, freeing up capacity for individuals with a high degree of potential to pass medicals.*

c. **Medical Pass Rate.** *As a result of the OMQ the current failure rate for completed medicals sits at just over 6% compared to just over 30% last year. Despite conducting over 500 fewer medicals overall, the total number of passes is almost identical to last year's figures. Approximately 200 medicals remain to be conducted.*

4. **2<sup>nd</sup> round medicals.** *Historically many UOTCs have conducted a second round of medicals in the New Year, to replace those who may have disengaged once they immerse themselves in University life, or to ensure and shortfall is made up from the initial round. Once initial attestations are confirmed and number analysed, RMAS Gp HQ will organise centralised medicals for multiple UOTCs in several UK wide locations.*

5. **Infrastructure.** *An ongoing estate review will consider opportunities for rationalisation and exploitation to unlock value within the estate and identify potential to reduce the overall long-term cost to Defence. This review will identify how the RFCA managed estate might be optimized for best delivery against Defence outputs. Noting the Reserve Estate was not considered under the Defence Estate Optimisation Programme. Defence needs an updated understanding of the Reserve Estate to inform the Integrated Review. As governance of the RFCAs is changing under Sullivan Review the Secretary of State has requested a review of The Reserve Estate which is large and geographically disparate (1881 sites). It represents only 2% of the total capital value and 9.5% of the running costs of the Defence Estate.*

*N C Tougher TD VR  
Colonel  
Comd OTC*

- NOTED: Col N Tougher noted OTCs are coping with all the challenges of the pandemic. OTCs had to curtail activities due to the window in which students had to leave universities to return home.
- NOTED: Col N Tougher noted that concerns over recruitment have been allayed. Funds were used to engage a media company. Investments in OTC medicals mean Army can process medicals a lot quicker than before.
- NOTED: The Chairman asked about OFSTED inspections and if outcomes of these can be shared. Col N Tougher noted OTCs are compliant, and that methodology and training are good. OFSTED highlighted known issues around gapped manning. Col N Tougher will put Chairman in touch with SO2 Assurance.
- NOTED: Chairman asked about welfare and duty of care, and link to MECs, ensuring there is no detriment to students themselves. Col N Tougher noted some issues, for example, some students are unsure of route to take. It was noted that students talk to their OTC as they are familiar with it, this could include abuse issues. Col N Tougher noted the value of the chaplain cadet scheme here is significant. The Chairman noted that for some students with broken backgrounds, the military family is the first sense of belonging and support for them, so the OTC approach is commended. The Vice-Chair asked

if there had been an increase in cases during the pandemic – Col N Tougher noted not as many as might have been expected.

c. Royal Air Force (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_D3)

20201109 – 6 FTS COMEC Update

9 Nov 20

## **COMEC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE UAS UPDATE 9 NOV 2020**

### **Key Points**

- *Recruiting.*
- *UAS Student Population Breakdown*
- *HQ 6FTS AFCO*
- *Virtual UAS Proposal*
- *Modular Initial Officer training*
- *Air Estate Review*

**1. Recruiting.** *A success story so far. 6 FTS has rolled out a virtual recruiting strategy this year in response to COVID-19 having such a detrimental impact on traditional recruiting methods. More targeted online marketing on social media platforms has been successful and squadrons are currently conducting their selection interviews, mostly online, at time of writing. The University Student Deferral Scheme announcement has meant that the UAS has been able to offer up to 225 places for those students with deferred university places. Uptake has been relatively steady so far but recruiting and marketing continues to advertise these opportunities.*

**2. UAS Student Population Breakdown.** *Of the current student cohort, 30% are female and 70% male. Of our total number of students, 47.5% are studying a STEM subject of which 19% are female and 81% male. Within the STEM group 65.5% are studying a subject relating to engineering, with 14.3% females and 85.7% males. 14% of our total student population are BAME, and 13.5% of those studying STEM subjects are BAME.*

**3. HQ 6FTS Armed Forces Career Office.** *Operational since Jan 20, the HQ has been processing applications into both the UAS and direct entry into the RAF. So far, over 160 applications have been received, have been or are being passed to Officer Aircrew Selection Centre and over 60 have been offered dates to start training at RAF College Cranwell.*

**4. Virtual UAS Proposal.** *The UAS is developing the concept of virtual UAS membership. Whilst still early in concept the proposal is that students, potentially from non-COMEC affiliated universities, as well as those students that cannot commit to the current membership model could join the UAS and interact, mostly on virtual platform. This will enable the UAS to extend its reach and influence into areas where students are too far from existing Squadrons but still have an interest in the RAF whilst also diversifying the cohort of students that we currently interact with.*

**5. Modular Initial Officer Training.** *As part of Project MERCURY, the Modularisation of Initial Officer Training (MIOT), HQ 6FTS have delivered a new ground training syllabus to all our squadrons. Students will receive training delivered by the staff at their UAS, be able to access training material on the Defence Learning Environment, join virtual lessons and attend training exercises in a variety of locations. Once a member of a UAS completes all the Military Induction Module training, they will be able join MIOT directly at Module 2, the first of which will join MIOT in Sep 21. The syllabus and its delivery is aligned with the Defence Systems Approach to Training, and the same as that being delivered by the RAF Officer Training Academy at RAF College Cranwell.*

**6. Air Estate Review.** *There are several reviews of Defence Estate taking place at present. The two that are relevant to the UAS including the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association review, due to report in Jan 21, as well as an Air Estates Review that seeks to explore options for future UAS basing locations. Whilst they are independent reviews it is anticipated that they will be integrated, along with any outputs as a result of the Integrated Security and Defence Review.*

*K Thompson MA  
SO2 Force Development  
HQ 6 FTS*

- NOTED: On student welfare Gp Capt I Sharrocks experience has been the same as the Army, the students use UAS as a release and it is seen positively. Gp Capt I Sharrocks understood all the OFSTED reports all now published as of the end of October 2020. Similar to the Army, the welfare for students is highly valued.
- NOTED: Gp Capt I Sharrocks highlighted recruitment was very successful noting places for 350 students per annum, and had received 1000 applications. It was noted some students could not start university courses in Sept / Oct so it was arranged for them to join their home town UAS in the meantime. Gp Capt I Sharrocks noted the need to achieve better diversity in the UAS/RAF.
- NOTED; Gp Capt I Sharrocks noted modular training is now formally recognised by the RAF. This buys out the first 6 weeks of officer training if students complete the UAS programme. Lt Col M Bishop asked which elements were recognised and Gp Capt I Sharrocks noted the military skills module was now exempt and, in addition, flying training will also be able to buy out elementary flying training in a year's time. Students would join RAF Cranwell in Week 7 and then proceed straight to basic flying training. It was noted there is not yet a similar offer for reserves due to challenges of making this work however it is expected to fast track basic reserve training. Col N Tougher noted this was also something being looked at in OTCs and Army.
- NOTED: The Chairman asked if other services were looking at the home and virtual USU membership – Lt Col M Bishop noted this was being looked at under the deferred cadet scheme and students would be able to start training in their home town and transfer to the University OTC unit.

- NOTED: The Vice-Chair noted the numbers were impressive in relation to number of females and BAME studying engineering entering the UAS. Gp Capt I Sharrocks noted the ethos has changed from a flying club who go to the bar, to a flying school with leadership elements, not just focussed on the fast jet community. A targeted media campaign using Facebook and RAF media has also helped to encourage diversity.

d. Defence People (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_D4)

## **DEFENCE PEOPLE (RF&C) UPDATE FOR COMEC – NOVEMBER 2020**

### **Defence Overview**

1. *The department's priorities are focusing on the immediate challenges posed by living with COVID 19 and ensuring Defence's and HMG's outputs are not adversely affected. The department continues to work on the Spending Review and Integrated Foreign, Defence and Security Review. R&C remains actively engaged regarding any measures that might affect Reserves and Cadets.*

2. *MODs response to Covid-19 has been deemed as a success and in particular the Reserves have demonstrated their value as part of the whole force. More than 2400 reservists were initially called into permanent service, as part of the Covid-19 response force of 20,000; demobilisation of the majority is under way although it has reached an irreducible minimum of c700 IRs and SQEP personnel. The main contributions from reservists were to work in co-ordination roles in local hubs; to provide logistics expertise; to deliver supplies of PPE; and to help construct the Nightingale hospitals. There were very few appeals and the overwhelming support of employers, in a volatile situation, is testament to the successful employer engagement programme conducted by RF&C and DRM since 2014.*

3. *Defence is now working to identify lessons from this period and ensure that the possible adverse impacts of lockdown are managed through effective engagement of Reserves and the Reserve offer is not diminished.*

### **Reserves Policy**

4. **Reserve Forces 30 Review.** *The review, now nearing completion, is led by Brigadier The Rt Hon The Lord Lancaster and will support Departmental thinking around Transformation and delivery of the Campaign Plan. The review continues to draw on other studies for information and to avoid duplication of effort. The review has so far been through MPLT, DPLT and sS scrutiny. It has also been briefed to Service Chiefs; on the basis RF30 is a review the Chiefs agreed the direction of travel. The RF30 review is currently at its draft report stage and publication of its findings and recommendations are due in late November.*

5. **Use of Reserves.** *As part of the Department's focus on Enterprise Approach we are examining ways that we might make better use of the Reserves. Specifically, the Ex AGILE STANCE campaign will look at the ability to assure our ability to mobilise at mass and pace. This will require a supporting employer engagement LOD. We are*

*actively considering the lessons arising from COVID 19 and how this and RF30 work shape the future role of Reserve Forces. Through the Defence Plan we are also looking to optimise the use of Reserves and develop better metrics to define the utility of reservists outwith Mobilisation.*

6. **RFCA Review.** *The Review completed in 2019 and the main recommendation to merge the 13 RFCAs and their joint committee, the CRFCA, into a single executive NDPB was approved in Mar 20. Defence Ministers and ExCo have given their approval to the recommendations in full and directed ACDS R&C to develop the proposals and way forward with the RFCAs, Cabinet Office, HMT, and other key stakeholders. The new structure and operating model is currently under development by RF&C and the RFCAs, with support from Cabinet Office, HMT, and relevant teams in MOD. The intention is for legislative change to be affected through primary legislation to be brought forward in the second or third session.*

7. **Digital Optimisation.** *R&C are looking at a digital optimisation solution for Reservists and have integrated the programme into wider transformation programme reporting. The Service for Experienced Rejoiners and Volunteer Engagements platform (SERVE) portal was successfully launched by CDP on 24th June and has now gone live. The portal is expected to evolve to meet user requirements potentially also enabling online applications.*

#### **FR20 (Update info from the latest UK Armed Forces QSPS info)**

8. *The trained strength of the Volunteer Reserves continues to increase. As at 1 Jul 2020, the trained strength of the FR20 population was 33,010 (from around 22,000 at the beginning of the Future Reserves Programme), with about 4,000 more in training.*

9. *This is comprised of:*

- a. *Maritime Reserve: 2,890*
- b. *Army Reserve: 27,290*
- c. *RAF Reserve: 2,830*

10. *Reserves from all Services continue to operate in every theatre alongside their Regular counterparts. More than 2,500 reservists are currently called out for permanent service. This reflects the numbers called out as part of the response to the COVID 19 pandemic (which reached approx. 2400 at its peak) as well as for other operations in the UK and overseas.*

#### **Employer Engagement**

11. **COVID-19.** *The most significant event during the reporting period was the COVID-19 pandemic and the response from Defence. Defence generated a force of circa 20,000 personnel of whom circa 2,400 were reservists at the high-water mark. Those reservists fulfilled functions ranging from manning mobile testing units to general support tasks and specialist capabilities. The reservists were mobilised at pace in a dynamic situation where employers were facing challenges on several fronts.*

*There were novel aspects too including furlough and self-employment support schemes to be navigated.*

**12. Employer support to operations.** *This was sustained through the relationships built up via the Armed Forces Covenant in business. The Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Reserves and Cadets) was able to write to employers whilst Defence Relationship Management was able to use various electronic platforms to clarify the narrative, and support questions and answers. At the first time of asking the Armed Forces Covenant business network and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme alumni, proved highly effective in terms of enabling communication between Defence and employers leading to efficient force generation and sustainment of the reserve component of the force.*

**13. Measurement of Effectiveness.** *The Armed Forces Covenant in business is delivering against its objectives in terms of output. Empirical measurements were put in place to establish an evidence-based approach to engagement and an independent Employer Attitude Report was delivered in August 2020. Both internal measurement of effect and the external report reveal consistent improvement in Armed Forces Covenant output and approval ratings in relation to reserve service.*

**14. Armed Forces Covenant.** *Despite the current circumstances, organisations and employers continue to sign the Armed Forces Covenant at great pace with an average of 30 a week, an increase from the last reporting period. It is predicted that by the end of 2020 the total will surpass 6,000. Organisations that have signed continue to come from all regions around the United Kingdom and from different sectors as well as a variety of sizes with micro and small companies in particular. Key signings this year included Skanska, 3M and Highways England whilst every University from across the East Midlands also came together to sign the Covenant.*

**15. Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.** *The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS), launched in 2014, encourages employers to support Defence and inspire others to do the same. The scheme encompasses Bronze, Silver and Gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to Defence and the Armed Forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant. To obtain a Gold Award, organisations must be an exemplar within their market sector, advocating support to Defence People issues to partner organisations, suppliers and customers with tangible positive results. This year it was announced on 30 July 2020 that a total of 127 organisations were awarded Gold from a wide range of sectors and included companies of all sizes from SMEs to FTSE100 as well as Councils and NHS Trusts. A total of 13 universities were awarded Gold. The rise in the number of Gold Awards gives testament to the traction achieved with Covenant signatories and the tangible outputs delivered to the Armed Forces community. Having achieved this traction, it is a challenge to continue with the current boarding system and central awards events. A formal internal review of the DERS has been undertaken during summer 2020 and will report in Oct 20. Implementation of any required changes will be applied to the 2021 awards.*

**16. Civil Service Reserves Challenge.** *Once again, the latest data is encouraging, with continued progress in the number of Civil Servants joining the Reserves. Civil Servant Reservist numbers sit at 1843 as at 1 July 20 – this is*

*approximately 0.83% of the estimated eligible total of CS (and 0.49% of the overall total). The Civil Service continues to make up approximately 5% of the total Reserves trained strength.*

*Col Darin Gray*

*Assistant Head (Reserves), Reserves and Cadets*

- NOTED Col D Gray noted thanks for COMEC input into RF30 and noted outcomes to be delayed due to current spending announcements.
- NOTED: Col D Gray thank COMEC / MECs for their effort in increasing participation in the Armed Forces Covenant. There is a regular increase in numbers as well as more employers moving to Silver and Gold.
- NOTED: Col D Gray noted the Assistant Chief of Defence Staff proposed a joint paper with COMEC on future direction and supporting global Britain, as noted by the President at the start of the meeting. The Chairman welcomed the approach.
- NOTED: The Chairman asked about the change in RFCAs and impacts on MECs noting the current RFCA representation at MECs and discussions around estate issues for service units. Col D Gray noted there would be a separate estate review and a changing relationship both with MECs and USUs – this will be dependent on how legislation changes.
- NOTED: Col N Tougher asked about RF30 and implications for OTCs. Col D Gray noted recommendations have come out to services although delay in taking forward by the Secretary of State due to other recent announcements. Col N Tougher also raised issues of resourcing regarding the new DTUS squadrons noting the requirements to train an addition 300+ students.

## 6. Conference

- RESOLVED: Discussions were had regarding the timing, venue and agenda of the COMEC Conference. It was confirmed the conference would be at RAF Halton, on 1-2 September 2021 and a group led by the Vice-Chair, with Ms C Kinkead, would take forward conference and agenda planning with the RAF.
- **ACTION: MEC Chairs would be asked for input on the conference agenda.**

## 7. Relations with MECs

- CONSIDERED: Means of improving engagement, including:
  - a. APPROVED: Asking a few MECs per Executive meeting for a brief report on their activities.
  - b. APPROVED: Designation of a member of the Executive as a contact for each MEC (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_E). **ACTION: It was requested the named contacts set up a call with MEC Chairs by the next meeting.**
  - c. APPROVED: MEC Chair Teams Meetings
  - d. CONSIDERED: Issues raised by MEC Chairs at the introductory meeting

**COMEC Executive MEC Chair Contacts**

<b>COMEC Executive Member</b>	<b>MEC</b>	<b>MEC Chair</b>
Mr J S Castle (Chair)	London	Paul Ivey
Dr M Vilnay (Vice-Chair)	Wales	Ross Hall
Rev. Prof. J P Taylor (Treasurer)	Bristol	Nick Norman
Mrs S Bedford	Aberdeen	Filippo Antoniazzi
	Manchester and Salford	Sam Grogan
Dr R Hall	Cambridge	Simon Gregory
	Northumbrian	John Hogan
Prof. P Ivey	East Midlands	Adrian Spencer
	Oxford DMI	David Parrott
Ms C Kinkead	Edinburgh	Tina Harrison
	Sheffield	Jonathan Raynor
Prof M Siva-Jothy	Exeter	Alan Hill
	Queen's Belfast	Alistair Finlay
Mr A Smith	Glasgow and Strathclyde	Andrew McLaren
	Sussex	Peter Stock
Dr J Smith	Leeds MAFNEC	J Roger Gair
	Tayforth	Eddie Simpson
Major I Stoney	Liverpool	Paul Redmond
	West Midlands	David Dunn

- NOTED: The Chairman noted it is one of COMECs responsibilities to build on relationships with MECs noting some MECs do not feel they are getting enough value from COMEC.
- NOTED: The Chairman noted the success of a virtual meeting with MEC Chairs he implemented with 80-90% attendance. This took place at 6pm on a weekday evening, set up by the COMEC Secretary, and lasted for 1 hour, which allowed people to put aside day jobs. The meeting generated a useful sharing of issues / best practice and it is proposed these virtual meeting take place 3-4 weeks prior to the regular November, February and May Executive meetings. It is proposed the Chair of these meetings rotates around the Executive. A few themes from the first meeting included:

- Excellence
- Constitution – the Chairman noted the need to look at this and set up a small working group to review.
- Communications
- Support
- Sharing of good ideas
- Operations
- RFCA's – noting the MEC Chairs wanted more detail on changes.
- Diversity
- Welfare
- Research (also noted by the President) – the Chairman noted the MECs and associated Universities make up a huge pool of research capability. The Chairman noted DASA and using this as a route to input into the research space.
- NOTED: Professor M Siva-Jothy agreed the need to develop new channels of communications and sharing best practice. The new MEC Chairs / COMEC Teams channel will be a useful resource and can input into the COMEC Executive agenda.

#### **8. Publications**

- CONSIDERED: “The Challenge of Complexity” proposed Occasional Paper from Tayforth MEC (COMEC\_Exec\_2020\_11\_F).
- NOTED: The paper was welcomed by the Executive and commended for its content.
- **ACTION: The Executive approved the publication as an Occasional Paper supported by COMEC in electronic format. Maj I Stoney will take forward with the authors.**

#### **9. Prize**

- RESOLVED: Appointment of adjudicators.
- NOTED: Dr R Hall would continue as Chief Adjudicator with the Vice-Chair and Ms C Kinkead supporting as Adjudicators.

#### **10. Any Other Business:**

- APPROVED: The COMEC Secretary was invited to continue in the role for an additional term of 4 years.
- NOTED: The Chairman noted the veteran champions network noting he managed to persuade every single university in geographic area of Scotland to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and appoint one person in each institution as point of contact. The Chairman wants to push this out to all of the United Kingdom, with Col D Gray and Presidents support, for all people with a military background. Dr R Hall noted this has also been instigated in Wales and he is Armed Forces Champion at his University.

**11. Dates and Venues of Future Meetings:**

- CONSIDERED: The dates and venues of future meetings subject to pandemic restrictions:
  - Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021 (TBC: Virtual Teams Meeting)
  - Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021 (TBC: ULOTC, London)
  - Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> – Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2021 (RAF Halton, Conference)
  - Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 (TBC: ULOTC, London)
  
- NOTED: The Chairman proposed that one meeting each year should remain as virtual even after restrictions are lifted. This will reduce travel costs for both MECs and COMEC and reduce COMECs carbon footprint. The Vice-Chair noted we should consider two virtual meetings per year and the Chairman noted this would be further consulted on.
  
- NOTED: The Chairman thanked everyone for their contribution and hoped the President would continue to attend future Executive meetings where possible.