



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

Executive Committee Meeting

**held on Thursday 25th February 2021 from 1100hrs to 1300hrs 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; Dr J Smith; Maj I Stoney; Col N Tougher;
Col D Gray; Lt Cdr P Yates RN; Lt Col M Bishop; Wg Cdr M Dewer

In Attendance

Mr Jason Norris (Secretary); Col N Cheshire; Mr K Thompson

Apologies

Mr A Smith; Cdr N Downing RN; Gp Capt I Sharrocks

1. Minutes

- APPROVED: The Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 19th November 2020 (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_A1)

2. Matters Arising

- To Consider: Any matters or action points arising (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_A2)

Treasurer's Report (Min 4 19 Nov 2020)

- RESOLVED: Invoices will be sent to MECs in January 2021 for the 20/21 COMEC subscription payments.

Conference (Min 6 19 Nov 2020)

- RESOLVED: MEC Chairs would be asked for input on the conference agenda.

Relations with MECs (Min 7 19 Nov 2020)

- RESOLVED: It was requested the named contacts set up a call with MEC Chairs by the next meeting.
- NOTED: Some Executive members had already made contact with their MEC Chair contacts.

Publications (Min 8 19 Nov 2020)

- RESOLVED: The Executive approved the publication “The Challenge of Complexity” as an Occasional Paper supported by COMEC in electronic format. Maj I Stoney will take forward with the authors.
- NOTED: The Occasional Paper will be published imminently following final review with authors. The Chairman welcomed the contribution and engagement by the MEC.

3. Chairman’s Report

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from the Chairman (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_B)

Chairman’s Report 11th February, 2021

*Welcome to the first report of the New Year. I warn you, it is of some length, so I have included an **Executive Summary**. The summary will be presented at the meeting, so please read the full document ahead.*

I make no apologies for the appearance of a call to action. You can assume my activities (discussion and reading) are implicit in its compilation.

Executive Summary

It is more than a century since Haldane established the MECs. Over that time;

- *The World has changed beyond recognition;*
- *Defence is undergoing a Cosmic shift (literally);*
- *Our foes and their ability to “weaponise” are evolving constantly*
- *Higher Education is changing in the way it is delivered;*
- *The value of the Veterans community is being increasingly acknowledged.*

So what about COMEC and the MECs? Cynics would say, we are following the same old and well-trodden paths. We are “Committees”, but should we slavishly follow the rules of committee at the expense of creativity? After all, the HE sector is fundamentally about creativity.

We cannot stay static, while the world changes continuously around us. We have to adapt to whatever changes/challenges are placed before us, otherwise we become irrelevant.

ACTION is necessary. Here are my proposals:

- *Broker the science, philosophy, technology, research, management systems, etc our host institutions can provide to Defence.*
- *Work with Defence to facilitate IOpC (Integrated Operating Concept) using our host institutions as a tool*
- *Use our host institutions to maximize the potential of the Veterans Community and assist them with successful transition*
- *Make any necessary (COMEC) constitutional changes to facilitate the above.*

Introduction

Rationale for Change

The Haldane Reforms of 1908 established the OTCs in Universities with the requirement of a Committee of Military Education. URNUs and UASs were to follow. In 1919, the The Central Organisation of Military Education Committees of the Universities of the United Kingdom (latterly COMEC) was formed to act as a single PoC.

One hundred and two years later, we are doing much the same, often embroiled in the process of Committee. We are presented with materials, we talk about them, we act upon them. Until recently, we did little to make our activities known to the MECs. Until very recently, we did not “talk” (properly) to the MECs. We were seen as responders, not Leaders.

With the above in mind, it is perhaps no wonder that some of those we interact with, see us as “irrelevant”.

Aim

In broad terms, we must put ourselves at the centre. We must harness the creative, innovative and educational “power” of the University Sector (as a whole) for the benefit of Defence and the wider Community (including the Veterans and their families). Therefore, our aim should be to:

- *Make COMEC a high value asset to Defence and its wider community, (for the common good of the Nation)*

(MECs are integral to this).

Objectives

Broadly to seek outlets for University talents in the Defence and Defence Community space.

- *Provide a flexible constitution that can predict/adapt/respond to change*
- *Examination of what is happening in the world in order to identify targets*
- *Place the University sector at the centre of **Defence** from an Educational and Research perspective, (including assistance with IOpC)*

- *Place the University sector at the centre of the **Veterans and Families Community***

Individuals and host universities are already in this space, with some connectivity (collaboration). What COMEC will potentially bring is TOTAL connection. This implies strength, reduction of wasted effort (no reinventing the wheel) and promotion of best practice. Simultaneously maximizing the potential of all.

Being realistic, the objectives are likely to be achieved over time. In addition, they can be added to as resources allow and to reflect changes that are happening around us.

The Constitution

I do not intend to examine this here, but as a minimum, it needs detailed examination to ensure it is fit for purpose and to allow our role to adapt and to reflect impending or recent change in Defense and Community needs.

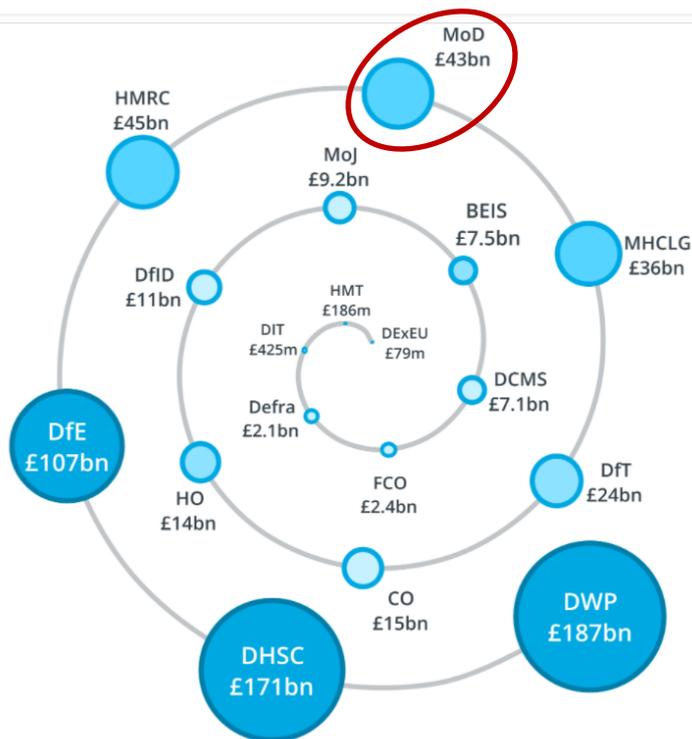
ACTION: Establish a working party to examine and develop the COMEC Constitution

The New World Order

Defence and cash flow

Superficially, Defence spending is growing as indicated by MoD in https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919361/20200227_CH_UK_Defence_in_Numbers_2019.pdf

Unfortunately, this is not as good a picture when compared with overall Government spending. Whilst over the last 50 years, spending on Health, Social Services and all other Departments has increased almost year on year, that on Defence has declined in real terms. (This is mainly resulting from redistribution of funds coming from a pot that remains broadly similar in size). There is strong argument to say Defence spending has declined in relation to others. Putting spending into context;



(Institute for Government; analysis of HM Treasury, July 2019 – dominantly Resource expenditure shown plus much smaller percentage of capital investment)

MoD is 5th in line behind DWP, Health, Social Care, Education and even HMRC. This may come as some surprise when considering the primary role of any Government, is the defence and security of the Nation. Even more of a surprise when we consider the escalating threat.

The main office resources of the MoD have been reduced, (as has the front line). This reduces their capacity to act within the peripheral areas beyond the management and financing of the “fighting force”

Threats

“The nature of war remains constant: it is visceral and violent... and it is always about politics. What is changing is the character of warfare, which is evolving significantly due to the pervasiveness of information and the pace of technological change.”

(General Sir Nick Carter GCB CBE DSO ADC Gen, Chief of the Defence Staff)

According to MoD in their paper, Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept, we are faced with:

- *Adversaries who don't recognise the rule of law*
- *Pervasive information and new technologies have enabled new tools and techniques to undermine our cohesion*
- *Adversaries have studied the Western Way of war and modernised their capabilities accordingly*
- *Adversaries proliferate their capabilities to proxies*
- *The effects of 'lawfare'*

The paper goes on to explain:

We all face diversifying, intensifying, persistent and proliferating threats, from resurgent and developing powers, and from non-state actors such as violent extremists.

*Using all instruments of statecraft, their goal is to win without fighting: to achieve their objectives by breaking our willpower, using attacks below the threshold that would prompt a war-fighting response. These attacks on our way of life from authoritarian adversaries and extremist ideologies are remarkably difficult to defeat without undermining the very freedoms we want to protect. **We are exposed through our openness.***

The pervasiveness of information and the pace of technological change are transforming the character of warfare. Old distinctions between 'peace' and 'war', between 'public' and 'private', between 'foreign' and 'domestic' and between 'state' and 'nonstate' are increasingly out of date.

*(They)..... work in the seams of our institutions, exacerbate societal divisions and prejudices, and lead people to cooperate, wittingly or unwittingly, in the **undermining of democracy.***

*The **triumph of the narrative** increasingly determines defeat or victory and hence the importance of information operations.*

Established techniques, such as assassination, deception, economic coercion, espionage, theft of intellectual property and subversion gain potency through the clever use of cyber, digitized information, and social media. Psychological insights into how these channels can be manipulated enhance their effectiveness.

*combined effect is designed to force an adversary to become politically cowed, thus **achieving objectives without the need to escalate above the threshold of war.***

commercial technologies have disrupted the economics and character of warfare.

*All sit alongside traditional war fighting tech. Many have modernised and expanded their capability, as well as proliferating it to their proxies, to challenge us above and below the threshold of war, **looking to counter the advantages we have enjoyed for the last 30 years** such as air superiority, strategic mobility and unconstrained use of the electromagnetic spectrum.*

Also, nuclear states are modernising their strategic capabilities and limited tactical nuclear weapons are a credible operational consideration for some.

With Covid-19 and all its variants, fresh in our minds and very much still with us, we might think beyond natural causes. I am not saying that Covid is an example of Bio/Economic Warfare, but if you read APPENDIX 1, this might make us think.

In summary, warfare today is changing and has been changing for some time. So what can we do about it? The answer hopefully lies in IOpC, the Integrated Operating Concept

IOpC – the Integrated Operating Concept

*In the simplest of terms, IOpC recognises that warfare has changed considerably and suggests that today’s Defence has to be able and equipped to fight not only **traditional warfare, but, economic, media, bio, chemical, cyber, space and all other methods** our adversaries choose to deploy.*

I fuller Introduction to IOpC can be found at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/922969/20200930 - Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/922969/20200930_-_Introducing_the_Integrated_Operating_Concept.pdf)

Defence against all forms of warfare, will likely be incorporated in any structural changes to MoD. They are already very good at traditional warfare and hopefully have answers to Bio and Chemical attacks. Increasing confidence is also being manifested in Cyber and Space.

But what about the “softer” forms, such as Economic and Media? Even if competent, will they have the resources? (refer to Defense and Cash Flow). Could the University sector act as “Reserve” Forces on the Economic and Media warfare platforms? In some ways, Universities are already acting as “Reservists” regards Defence Research (DASA), so why not?

Defence Education and Research

Universities have been involved in Defence research for many years if not centuries. Today, Cranfield University specialises in this area. The University Defence Research Collaboration (UDRC) has existed for around twelve years (<https://udrc.eng.ed.ac.uk/>), but the list of academic involvement appears small. MoD Research funding has been opened to a wider audience with DASA, (inviting Universities to engage as individuals or collaboratively). Other organisations exist.

In relation to Defence Education, this is COMEC’s theoretical expertise (Military Education). In reality, we do not participate in the “education” of the cadets, but rather oversee. In addition, there are numerous courses offered by the Universities in areas such as Defence Studies, but these seem peripheral in the actual education of those who will Serve.

In both Research and Education, universities are involved, but at the outer edges. The apparent lack of Involvement in IOpC would be an example. The work could also be described as disjointed, even though some collaboration exists.

In essence, the full potential of universities in assisting Defence, is not being fully utilised.

ACTION: Examine the current involvement of Universities in both Education and Research, with a view to expansion and creation of more of a “Joint Forces” approach

Veterans and Families Communities

Overall, Universities are well engaged with the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC), which to date (through ERS), tends to focus on Universities as Employers. Clearly this misses out on development of ex-military talent. That said, the more enlightened universities have seen that they could have a significant role to play in this field. Universities are also being encouraged by their “funders” to engage with “widening participation” with Veterans and military families being highlighted as one of the cohorts.

Using the AFC in a wider context, some universities have come together as one, in;

- *the promotion of AFC;*
- *establishment of Champions;*
- *and driving the education piece.*

For example, in Scotland, every university (and most FE Colleges) are part of the HeFe Veterans and Armed Forces Champions Network (HeFeVCN). The Chairman of this organisation (also the writer), sees that this body should be extended across the UK. In so doing, duplication of effort could be avoided and best practice promoted across the nation.

COMEC may be a vehicle to assist in this process; we being already linked to the RFCAs who administer AFC on behalf of MoD. This would provide further support to MoD.

ACTION: Examine ways in which COMEC can assist in the spread and development of the AFC.

Conclusion

There is a whole range of activities that universities could be involved in the Defence, Veterans & Families space. The nation as a whole is under-utilising the university talent pool, (partly as a result of its fragmentation).

COMEC, as a universal body is well placed, (assuming appropriate resourcing), to assist as a facilitator and coordinator in all matters pertaining to Universities, Defence and associated issues, (including health).

J S Castle

Chairman

15th February, 2021

APPENDIX 1 – Biosecurity: Is it time for the World to be ready?

Extracted from <https://www.forces.net/news/comment/biosecurity-now-time-world-be-ready> 10th February 2021

Over the last few weeks, we have learned from the French open-source investigation site Openfacto that Russia most likely has a biological weapons programme, alongside their chemical weapons programme.

China is just allowing WHO investigators to the Wuhan Level 4 containment laboratory, where some American politicians claimed last month that COVID emanated from, but long after the 'COVID' horse has bolted.

Notwithstanding this, China has many questions to answer and the many high-level biosecure labs around the world, storing pathogens like COVID are a key vulnerability.

If this is not the global wake-up call to get biosecurity sorted, an awful lot of people may have died from COVID, amid little advancement in this area.

Biosecurity is the poor relation of the 'other' securities, especially cyber, for good reasons.

A pandemic or biological terror appeared an unlikely threat especially on a global scale, until COVID struck.

The US and the UK must now prepare for the next pandemic or biological terror event to ensure physical and economic resilience.

Like any threat, with the appropriate mitigation in place, upfront, respective governments can provide the required resilience to their people and economies.

In the future, we should think of weaponised biology as no less of an existential threat to the planet in the 21st Century than weaponised atomic science to the 20th.

A soldier practises use decontamination powder during Exercise Shader Tempest, a chemical attack scenario, last year (Picture: MOD).

From a biosecurity perspective, the impact of a 'not very toxic' pathogen has blind-sided us all, possibly more than a very toxic one, due to its rapid global transmission.

Advances in technology have meant that many civilian research projects in medicine have the potential to be used in military applications and biosecurity protocols are used to prevent dangerous biological materials from falling into the hands of malevolent parties.

Controversial experiments in synthetic biology, including the synthesis of poliovirus from its genetic sequence, and the modification of H5N1, a highly infectious flu variant, for airborne transmission in mammals, led to calls for tighter controls on the materials and information used to perform similar feats.

Ideas include better enforcement by national governments and private entities concerning shipments and downloads of such materials, and registration or background check requirements for anyone handling such materials.



CORONAVIRUS

Sitrep: Coronavirus Disruption Shows West Is 'Vulnerable'

25th September 2020

The economic impact alone requires us to mitigate this threat, which hitherto the risk was 'likelihood low but impact massive' and with these odds, most thought a risk worth taking.

Not now; future likelihood is at least medium or likely and warrants our undivided attention.

The [Salisbury nerve agent attack](#) in 2018 is a massive neo advert to every dictator, despot, rogue state and terrorist of the huge impact to be gained from a chemical attack; COVID has, no doubt, done the same for biological attack.

It is very difficult for governments to take risk in such situations.

British soldiers carrying out decontamination work on Sergei Skripal's Salisbury home in 2018.

There are the challenges we must address to develop resilience to the next pandemic or a bioterror attack, around policy, medicines and equipment.

When it comes to policy and legislation, there is the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (BTWC), ratified in 1975, though a poor cousin to the Chemical Weapons Convention, it is designed to prevent the development and proliferation of Biological Weapons.

However, it is poorly funded and supported and does not have a body like the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to police it.

A quick and effective win could be to properly fund the BTWC and create an Organisation for the Prohibition of Biological Weapons to police it – perhaps an extension of the OPCW's remit would be the most effective mechanism?

Allied to a biological early warning system to track pandemics or bio terror, like a weather map, showing its progress around the globe and mostly likely run by the World

Health Organisation; these two measures alone would put us well on the road to mitigating and suppressing these threats in future.

If we are not to suffer a COVID-type pandemic every five years or so, and the ultimate terror of a biological weapons attack, we must get our Bio Security plans up to speed in short order.

Biosecurity has been the poor relation of the other securities, especially cyber and it now requires our undivided attention.

Brexit and COVID-19 will fade into next year, but future pandemics and bioterror require active measures, currently missing, to make us all resilient to them.

In the future, we should think of weaponised biology as no less of an existential threat in the 21st century to the planet, than weaponized atomic science in the 20th century.

By Hamish de Bretton-Gordon OBE, former British Army officer and former commanding officer of the UK's Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Regiment and NATO's Rapid Reaction CBRN Battalion.

- **ACTION: The Chairman noted that small teams would be set up to discuss each action noted in his report with recommendations. The Executive would then agree on next steps.**

4. Treasurer's Report

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from the Treasurer (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_C)
- NOTED: Invoices for 20/21 COMEC subscription payments were sent out in January and seven MECs had paid to date.

5. Reports from the Service Staff Officers

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from each of the Service Staff Officers:
 - a. Royal Navy (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_D1)

25 Feb 21

COMEC Executive

COMEC EXECUTIVE MEETING 25 Feb 21 – URNU REPORT

Introduction

1. *Due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and the current national lockdown, Face to Face (F2F) activity by the University Royal Naval Units (URNU) has been seriously curtailed. However, the units have been able to successfully deliver virtual training, provide Welfare Duty of Care (WDoC) and ongoing Mental Health support, since the initial lockdown in Mar 2020.*

2. *Individual URNUs have been directed to liaise closely with their associated MECs to ensure that they are fully aware of the situation within the universities to whom they were affiliated. They have also worked collaboratively within their own regions and with the Universities Department at BRNC in order to place the 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 associated with higher priority operational commitments. Due to the gaps at CO (40%) and Coxswain (47%) level, the organisation has moved to the regional operating model illustrated in Annex A, in order to provide stability and medium-term sustainability.*

Command Climate

4. *To deliver against the Command's mandated outputs and priorities, the Universities Department continues to strive to guarantee:*

- *a safe and secure environment;*
- *a respectful, inclusive, empowering & professional working environment;*
- *an atmosphere where honesty, openness & reasonable challenge flourishes;*
- *a strong safety culture led by intelligent risk management; and*
- *a strong community spirit looking after the URNU family.*

Priorities

5. *In line with Capt BRNC's current intent, Commander Universities (Cdr U) is working with the URNU Commanding Officers to deliver the priorities set for the Universities Department for Term 21-1:*

- a. *Provide resilience to BRNC Command, as a group or, as individuals.*
- b. *Deliver Military Assistance to Civilian Authorities (MACA).*
- c. *Provide WDoC and Mental Health support to Jolly Division, URNU Staff, Officer Cadets (OCs) and Training Officers (TOs), through ongoing remote interaction.*
- d. *Restart face-to-face training delivery within URNUs in Q2 21.*
- e. *Manage the optimisation of the South Coast URNU footprint by 30 Jul 21.*

6. *Taking into consideration the enduring situation, the Universities Department will also endeavour to complete the following priority tasks in the medium term:*

- a. *Embed OFSTED support and assurance recommendations into routine business*
- b. *Open two new URNUs by 30 Aug 21*

- c. *Continue to 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.*
- d. *Return to Business as Usual (BAU).*

COVID-19

- 7. *BRNC Command directed the URNU to pause F2F training in Oct 20 to enable OCs to settle back into their new surroundings after the prolonged break, and to mitigate against identified risks. However, virtual training was continued in an efficient and effective manner, by utilising civilian and defence managed Virtual Learning Environments.*
- 8. *Some F2F training recommenced in Wales in Nov 20. However, due to further CV-19 related restrictions and uncertainty in relation to student travel, it was decided that the organisation as a whole should take extended Christmas Leave from 10 Dec 20 to 28 Jan 21.*
- 9. *The latest nationwide lockdown which commenced in late Dec 20, alongside sS In Year Savings Measures, forced further adjustments to the organisation's planned restart programme for Q1 21. Again, the re-start of F2F training had to be postponed. However, local, regional and national initiatives were put in place to ensure that staff, OCs and TOs were able to continue to interact on a virtual basis.*

Welfare Duty of Care (WDoC)

- 10. *At this difficult time, the need for WDoC to take primacy has been clearly identified. Each individual continues to be encouraged to considering how they can contribute to the mental and physical well-being of their colleagues. The permanent staff at unit level continue to signpost OCs, for whom they have concerns, to University Welfare Services, while additional risk mitigation measures have been investigated and implemented. Each unit now has a trained Mental Health First Aider in place, while progress has been made in identifying link RN / RNR Chaplains for each region.*
- 11. *Due to the cessation of F2F training, it was agreed that Ofsted would conduct Support and Assurance Visits (SAV) on the headquarters rather than individual units. Consequently, the URNU HQ SAV, which took place on Wed 17 and Thu 18 Feb 21 focused on the following themes:*
 - a. *Quality Assurance (QA), Self-Assessment Review (SAR) and Quality Improvement Action Plan (QIAP).*
 - b. *Management and Analysis of Data.*
 - c. *Welfare, Care and Risk Management.*
 - d. *Staff Training.*
 - e. *Recruiting and Selection.*

f. Quality and Assurance of Training.

URNU Root & Branch Review.

12. To provide a baseline position and understand the future direction of the URNUs, Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST)¹, directed Commander Universities (Cdr U) to conduct a review into the effectiveness of the organisation. Phase 2 of the review, which was informed by the initial paper presented to FOST² in Jan 20, was completed in Nov 20. Whilst further transformational change will be required in the medium / long term, to imbed the recommendations of the review, 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 to support the Royal Navy as it transforms to meet the needs of the nation..

13. Over the last twelve 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.³ 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 progress which has been made since the last COMEC Executive meeting is outlined below.

14. **Governance.**

a. The 2020 Edition of University Department Standing Orders is currently being updated to incorporate the results of the mandate work that has been completed since Jun 20. Version 1 will be issued in Feb 21, with a view to a further update, incorporating a section, relating to Medical Cadets and Bursars, being issued in Jul 21.

b. The new URNU Mission Statement has been adopted by all units and now forms part of the URNU offer to its members:

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

c. **Regionalisation.** The stand-up of a regional delivery model, as illustrated in Annex A, has enabled the URNU Organisation to continue to deliver all aspects of the URNU package, despite ongoing gapping at both the CO and Coxswain level.

d. **URNU Transformation.** The geographical laydown of the URNU organisation has been reviewed taking into consideration distribution of

¹ FOST Directive 002/19

² 20200124-FOST Directive Phase 1_FINAL-OS

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

eligible Potential Officer Cadets. BRNC Command has now briefed the Naval Executive Committee on its intention to:

- (1) Optimise the organisation's footprint on the South Coast by establishing a new URNU within HMNB Portsmouth, with spokes reaching out to Southampton and Brighton.*
- (2) Scope the establishment of two further URNUs in Northern Ireland and the East Midlands.*

15. Training Syllabus. *The URNUs have now been assigned a Training Requirement Authority which has approved the formal development of Role Performance Statement and 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 continues to work to align the URNU syllabus with the RNR's Initial Naval Training (Officer) syllabus.*
- b. An **Interim Syllabus** has been issued to take account of the ongoing restrictions, provide the OCs with the opportunity to succeed, and pilot aspects of the proposed new syllabus prior to IOC in Sep 21. The interim package is based on four learning pillars, to which OCs will be exposed during their time in the URNU.*
 - (1) Militarisation.*
 - (2) Marinisation.*
 - (3) Command, Leadership and Management.*
 - (4) Adventurous Training & Sport.*
- c. During the course of the pilot, SMEs from within the organisation will conduct a Training Needs Analysis to inform ongoing Training Design. The new syllabus that will undergo continuous development prior to reaching FOC in Sep 22, will deliver an enriched training experience, in a blended fashion, through enhanced learning opportunities designed to improve the likelihood of the long-term retention of individuals within the wider Naval family.*

16. 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 eyes 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 fully adopted while a long-awaited through career professional development strategy has been put in place.*

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

Administration.

18. *Following a series of comprehensive deep dives into how: URNU pay and allowances, reporting plots and stores are administered, Director Personnel and Training has endorsed the move of all URNU related administrative activity to BRNC Command's Unit Personnel Office.*

Recruitment Strategy

19. *The new URNU Webpages, that are hosted within the official RN website, have been key to the success of this year's virtual recruiting campaign. The use of a wide range of social media platforms has enabled the URNU organisation to significantly enhance its corporate image. Internal and external social media platforms have driven potential recruits towards the expression of interest facility on the webpage, significantly broadening the organisation's virtual footprint at a time when recruiting by traditional means has been impossible.*

20. *To take account of the challenging recruiting environment, the recruiting window was extended from Sep 20 to Dec 21. During this period, individual Units were encouraged to take advantage of all available opportunities. Despite, initial concerns, the vast majority of existing OCs who had not had face to face contact for over 6 months returned to the organisation. The quality of virtual Freshers' fayres varied significantly across the country with some units experiencing great success, while others finding what were often student led events frustrating. Through close liaison with Captain Naval Recruiting (CNR) and RNMCE the organisation 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. This approach proved successful with the organisation reaching 95% capacity by Dec 20.*

21. *Recruiting was judged to have gone well despite the challenges brought about by the CV-19 pandemic. Staff and OCs have risen to the challenge, attracting in excess of 300 new members. The calibre of applicants was also deemed to be better than usual with a higher percentage success rate at interview being achieved.*

Summary

22. *The 20/21 academic year is already proving to be one of the most challenging in the organisation's history. Many of the targets outlined for the year have been achieved, but the CV-19 pandemic has had a far reaching impact on the way in which the URNUs are likely to operate for the foreseeable future. The organisation has gained a higher profile both internally and externally; imbedded the regionalised model of working; reviewed the geographical laydown of the URNU plot; eased the transfer between*

branches of the Royal Navy; and improved the administrative experience for all members. The 2 mandated root and branch review of the organisation has ensured that that the organisation is transforming to meet the needs of the new Royal Navy and we are now looking forward to seeing how the lessons of the pandemic can help us to more effectively deliver our mission in the future.*



*N E Downing
Cdr RN
Commander Universities*

- NOTED: The Chairman thanked Cdr N Downing RN for his report in his absence.

b. Army (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_D2)

G3/COMEC/SitRep/

1 Feb 21

Comd OTC
COMEC Executive

University Officers Training Corps – COMEC Executive – February Update

1. Commander OTCs' Overview. Remarkably little has changed since the November update. The constituent nations remain in lockdown, with the vast majority of students receiving online tuition. In line with direction to all Defence personnel not directly involved in supporting the Covid-19 pandemic activity under Op RESCRIPT, UOTCs are dispersed and working from home wherever possible. Only essential activity sees individuals in the workplace for minimal periods. These are testing times and the welfare of our students and staff remains our primary concern. Mental and physical health considerations reinforce the need to remain connected to all our people at the both the group and individual level.

2. Recruiting season. Medical selections have now been all but completed bar one further weekend planned in March for up to 80 students from Cambridge and London universities. Dispensation has been received to allow virtual attestations of new students into UOTCs. The ability to do so has proven invaluable. The majority of those attested through East Midlands UOTC have experienced this as a result of the strict Nottingham lockdown.

Results as at 2 Feb:

Event/Result	FY 18/19	FY 19/20	FY 20/21	Remarks
Completed Expressions of Interest (EOI)	12235	10829	5062	
Online medical questionnaire			2285 pass 304 fail	New process for 2020.
Medicals	-	2496	2132	982 medical cases reviewed. 328 cases received yet to be reviewed. 795 pass pendings to be reviewed.
Attestations	1592	1530	1345	UOTCs reduced from 2864 to 2570 established OCdts.

3. **Training.** Between 14% and 40% of the training objectives for Module A and Module B have been completed. The lockdown enforced delays to practical elements of the syllabus and makes the likelihood of a consolidated delivery of modules on the annual deployment exercises in summer 21 an increasing probability. No overseas annual deployment exercises will occur during TY 21/22.

N C Tougher TD VR
Colonel
Comd OTC

- NOTED: Col N Tougher noted recruitment has not suffered due to no physical presence. The Army invested in digital platforms which have converted well to attestations.
- NOTED: Col N Tougher noted OTCs have a new General and await to see any vision changes or variations to approach following the previous review.
- NOTED: Col N Tougher noted OTCs are doing as much as they can virtually and hope to return to face to face training. It is anticipated there will be less money available to pay staff and students compared to last year. It is not clear what this will look like and it may require the influence of COMEC if this results in offering less to students.
- NOTED: Professor P Ivey noted he would like to see the digital recruitment process maintained post pandemic noting the benefits it brings to raising profile and widening reach, without having to deal with the political issues of some student unions. Lt Col M Bishop confirmed the plan to maintain a collective online campaign but does not yet have evidence that it attracts a more diverse audience. Col N Tougher noted assurance from Brig J Carr-Smith money would be available to continue the digital recruitment campaign.
- NOTED: Professor P Ivey asked about the initiative whereby students wanting to join USUs in the following year at University could engage earlier at their local USU. Col N Tougher noted the Deferred Entry Scheme is a tri-

service government initiative but he did not have an update on next steps. It was noted at the meeting that uptake had been low to date.

- NOTED: The Chairman noted the need to look at widening opportunities, for example for disabled students that may not be able to serve physically but could work on cyber. Col N Tougher noted increasing recognition that not everyone needs to be physically fit and in future not all individuals will need to do the full Sandhurst training.

c. Royal Air Force (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_D3)

20210204 – 6 FTS COMEC Report

4 Feb 21

Comdt 6 FTS
COMEC Executive

COMEC EXECUTIVE MEETING 25 FEB 21 – 6 FTS REPORT

Comdt 6FTS Overview

1. Another challenging period for all concerned during the latest lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions. Opportunities remain for limited face-to-face training activity in direct support of Phase 1 training but the majority of training activity with the UAS students remain virtual. Planning has taken place to conduct broader Force Development activity later in the year (Adventurous Training and Air Power Study Exercises) with plans on the shelf and ready to go when the COVID situation allows. Similarly, the challenge to keep aircrew current for a safe return to UAS student flying has been successful so far. Despite the current limitations we have been successful in several areas, e.g. recruitment, delivering virtual training and operating as a virtual Armed Forces Career Office in order to enable UAS students to have a more streamlined entry to the RAF.

Recruiting

2. Overall the Recruitment numbers are strong and the shift to online recruiting has been largely successful and the FTS is on target to reach near full establishment. Issues with obtaining timely medicals have been significant this year and are expected to continue into the early spring as COVID impacts the ability of CAPITA to deliver the number of appointments required. This has resulted in delayed attestations, kitting and inductions which has a knock-on effect on the activities that these new students are able to take part in. Students are participating in virtual engagement while we near work through this difficult period.

UAS Student Population Breakdown

3. Of the current student cohort (742 members), 32% are female and 68% male. Of our total number of students, 45.8% are studying a STEM subject of which 20% are female and 80% male. Within the STEM group 76.7% are studying a subject relating

to engineering, with 15% females and 85% males. 14.2% of our total student population are BAME, and 13.8% of those studying STEM subjects are BAME.

HQ 6 FTS Armed Forces Career Office

4. Operational since Jan 20, the HQ Virtual Armed Forces Careers Office has been processing applications from serving UAS students into the RAF, via the RAF Sponsorship Scheme or Direct Entrant routes. So far, over 230 applications have been received, of which over 60 have already been offered a bursary or DE into the RAF. Currently, a further 51 candidates are awaiting attendance at the Officer Aircrew Selection Centre. 47 candidates have either been rejected or withdrawn, with a good number intending to reapply. This good news story has meant that the experience for our students has improved dramatically. The time taken to process them through the VAFCO has reduced the staffing time from 3-4 months down to *circa* 6 weeks.

Modular Initial Officer Training.

5. Work continues to prepare some of our final year UAS students to join the newly Modularised Initial Officer Training (MIOT) in Sep 21. Through a blended approach, including virtual lessons, to training delivery 6 FTS are providing the necessary skills and knowledge to our members across the UK. It is expected that a cohort of UAS Bursars will form most of the pilot group joining MIOT later this year, their progress will be closely tracked and reviewed once complete.

Virtual Ofsted Support and Advisory Visit of HQ 6 FTS

6. On Wed 27 Jan 21, HQ 6 FTS was inspected by two HM Inspectors from Ofsted. The inspection, conducted entirely on-line through MS Teams, was the first such virtual inspection of an RAF training establishment. The format and process worked well and although the Inspectors were not able to conduct direct engagement with UAS students or assess the infrastructure in situ both sides found the process useful and a viable format for the scope of the visit. A verbal debrief was conducted at the end of the inspection, feedback was largely positive, no major actions or concerns. A written report is expected by the end of February.

COMEC Conference 2021

7. Planning for the COMEC Conference 2021 is underway with the help of three COMEC committee members. The event is scheduled to take place at RAF Halton 1 and 2 Sep 21, COVID-19 restrictions permitting. At present it is expected that the Conference will largely follow the format of the previous RAF hosted event in 2017. With COVID restrictions still likely to be in force, close cooperation between the committee and the 6 FTS Team will be vital to ensure that key decision points are identified in a timely manner based on the prevailing COVID restrictions in place at the time.

Air Estate Review

8. There has been a lot of activity in the defence estate arena. The Reserve Forces and Cadets Association Estate Review provided recommendations to Ministers to

optimise Reserve and Cadet Force operating locations. Alongside this, the Air Estate Review has sought to refine a UAS/AEF Future basing strategy and has been principally authored by 6 FTS. The Air Estate Review recommendations will be presented to the Air Force Executive Committee for consideration in Feb 21. The proposals seek to address current long-standing basing issues as well as bring clarity and coherence to future operating locations. Part of the work seeks to address some gaps in our reach to both university students and Air Cadets such as in areas of known shortfall; notably the SW, SE, North Wales and the Highlands and Islands.

9. Each RAF station is also conducting a review of their infrastructure under their local Estates Management Plan, to review buildings use and condition to try and provide a mechanism for prioritising any future refurbishment or rebuild/repair requirement. The infrastructure across 6 FTS is varied, ranging from excellent, with purpose-built accommodation to the majority where squadrons have been allocated whatever building was available at the time of occupation. The challenge will be to ensure that as a gateway organisation for RAF entry that the overall experience of the university students is positive and reflects the future operating environment.

K Thompson

K Thompson MA
SO2 Force Development
HQ 6 FTS

- NOTED: The Chairman queried what flight simulator training is currently available for students noting the reduced ability to fly. Wg Cdr M Dewer noted that synthetic flying opportunities are part of project TELUM and current simulator availability is patchy in UASs. Wg Cdr M Dewer also noted the net zero emissions aim with a move to electric or bio-fuel aircraft in the future.
- NOTED: The Executive commended the increasing diversity of the UAS student body.

d. Defence People (COMEC_Exec_2021_02_D4)

DEFENCE PEOPLE (RF&C) UPDATE FOR COMEC – FEBRUARY 2021

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. MOD's 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 has taken place 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.

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 internal 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 March.

5. **Flexibility of Commitments.** The Armed Forces Bill has received clearance and introduced to the House of Commons on Tuesday 26th January. The Bill contains amendments to sections 24 and 25 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 and will enable greater choice and flexibility in the way that Reservists can serve in the Armed Forces in the future.

6. **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.

7. **RFCA Reform.** The new RFCA NDPB structure and operating model is currently under development by RF&C and RFCA representatives, with support from Cabinet Office, HMT, and relevant teams in MOD. Internal MoD programme governance has been established and the intention is for legislative change to be affected through primary legislation to be brought forward in the second or third session.

Future Reserves 20

8. The trained strength of the Volunteer Reserves continues to increase. As at 1 Oct 2020, the trained strength of the FR20 population was 32,670, with about 4,000 more in training. This is comprised of:

- a. Maritime Reserve: 2,870
- b. Army Reserve: 26,950
- c. RAF Reserve: 2,850

9. Reserves from all Services continue to operate in every theatre alongside their Regular counterparts. Some 1,300 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

10. **COVID-19.** Reserves continue to play a part in the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with around 400 still deployed. The response from employers in general has been excellent with very few disputed mobilisations, and most employers keen to help despite their own difficulties given the economic situation. RF&C continue to work in close collaboration with Defence Relationship Management on the planning and execution of Employer Engagement (EE) plans.

11. **Greater Manchester MACA.** A MACA task assisting the authorities in Greater Manchester to carry out mass asymptomatic testing on the local population has been agreed with DHSC. SofS directed that a Reservist role in that task be explored. At present it is planned that c90 Reservists augment the regular personnel deployed on the task, serving on Reserve Service Days (RSD) TACOS. This provides greater flexibility than traditional mobilisation but does have some drawbacks, principally the lack of assurance concerning force numbers and structure that mobilisation provides. This is a novel concept which requires bespoke EE support. There are a number of MACA tasks emerging which might include Reserves, including 2 sub units to test cross-channel hauliers in Kent and ongoing force sensing of Defence Medical Service Reservists. There is a change in focus to utilising local force elements where possible and it is likely that local Reserve elements will be built into MACA tasks throughout winter 2021. MOD is mindful of potential consequences including planned training.

12. **Anchor Events.** RF&C are finalising plans for the Partnering with Defence seminar on 11 Mar 21. This event is likely to be virtual with key note speeches by Min AF and CDP followed by plenary and panel sessions on current and future resilience involving MOD officials, Reservists and employers. The highlight is a closing talk by Dame Kelly Holmes. Plans are also underway for the delivery of the Defence Insight Brief 19 May 21 which will again most likely be virtual and for Reserves Day. Reserves Day sees a change of tack this year as RF&C will deliver a film celebrating Reserve service to support a central, virtual Ministerial event which can then be utilised in support of regional events as commanders see fit.

Col Darin Gray VR

Assistant Head Reserves, Defence People (RF&C), MOD

- NOTED: Col D Gray highlighted 3 key points from the report: 1) Military effort supporting Covid response and testing / vaccination support. A number of academic staff are also supporting reservists with thanks from Defence. 2) Integrated Operating Concept and Reserve Forces 30 Review: This is due to be published in next couple of weeks. Once officially published it will be a useful trigger for discussion with Higher Education. Col D Gray suggests that, following initial consultation, there should be more formal discussions

- between COMEC and Defence People on how we can support and work together to build up to new level. 3) Defence relationship management – there is a “Partnering with Defence” Conference on 11th March which is online this year. Members are encouraged to sign up and join the conference.
- NOTED: General Sir P Wall noted defence is at a crossroads. The Integrated Review looks to be underpinned by offer from PM on £60.5B, some of that is new money but a lot of it is buying out existing risks in the programme. This reduces time to look at new and exciting things. Gen Sharon Nesmith has now taken over at Sandhurst and there is a need to align our thinking. There is a lack of clarity from the MoD on what they want COMEC to do. These conversations will be better when we can meet face to face later this year. We need to be engaging with Gen Swift (Chief of Defence Personnel), Defence Academy and Integrated Review decisions. The General supports the Chairman’s tone on next steps noting we need to be clear on what we want to achieve and break new ground. We need to be patient on how fast we can get people to engage and defer to the military on whether things can be speeded up.
 - NOTED: The Chairman queried the synergy between the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) employers and understanding of reservists needs (thinking of Covid, has it been easier to bring the reservists away from employers who are AFC signatories over employers than are not). Col D Gray thinks there is synergy but does not have empirical evidence yet noting there is a directed effort and the majority of employers were supportive. There were 2300 employers mobilised in first wave. The number of objections by employers are very small (5-10). Employers that appealed against were due to the employee being a key worker and detrimental to the Covid response and so was justified (eg NHS, National Rail). The Gold AFC employers were front and centre with Defence in supporting the Covid reservist response.

6. Conference

- RECEIVED: An update on the conference preparations by the Vice-Chair
- NOTED: The Chairman has approached the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, the Rt Hon J Mercer MP who has agreed to attend the COMEC Conference.
- NOTED: The Chairman thanked all those involved in organising the conference. The MEC Chairs had fed back positively on including cadets in the conference. Live streaming of the conference was also being explored.

7. Relations with MECs

- RECEIVED: An update on COMEC Executive discussions with MEC Chairs.
- NOTED: Professor M Siva-Jothy noted he had contacted Exeter and Queens MECs where a range of topics were discussed which linked in to some of the topics discussed at this meeting. Professor M Siva-Jothy hoped to join the MEC meetings as an observer and feed in the COMEC vision.
- NOTED: Ms C Kinkead suggested it would be useful to develop a terms of reference and guidance document for MEC discussions to ensure confidentiality and consistency.

- NOTED: The Chairman noted the MEC Chair meetings were going well with good attendance. Discussions centered around research hubs and how to better link these. There were also discussions on the Veteran Champions network and GDPR issues. Discussion were also had on diversity in the MEC and engaging cadets for the COMEC Conference.
- **ACTION: The Chairman requested the Executive share bullet points with the Secretary on MEC meetings so these can be collated.**
- **ACTION: The Sussex MEC Chair noted that in Sussex, Brighton and Chichester there are students that want to join an OTC but there is no provision at this time. Would it be possible for the Army to consider an OTC in Brighton? Col N Tougher noted this was tried previously but did not work for a number of reasons. Col N Tougher will speak with the Sussex MEC Chair.**

8. Any Other Business:

- NOTED: The Chairman welcomed Col N Cheshire as the new Commander OTCs and thanked Col N Tougher for all his work in support of OTCs and contribution to COMEC.
- NOTED: Col N Tougher noted OFSTED reports would be shared once available.
- APPROVED: Dr R Hall suggested widening the COMEC prize criteria to include voluntary and charity related work due to the pandemic.
- **ACTION: The Vice-Chair suggested MEC Chairs should be invited to one COMEC Executive meeting per year as observers. The Chairman agreed and noted commitment to have at least one COMEC Executive meeting virtually going forward, this may be an opportunity for MEC Chairs to attend.**

9. Dates and Venues of Future Meetings:

- CONSIDERED: The dates and venues of future meetings subject to pandemic restrictions:
 - Thursday 20th May 2021 (TBC: ULOTC, London)
 - Wednesday 1st – Thursday 2nd September 2021 (RAF Halton, Conference)
 - Thursday 18th November 2021 (TBC: ULOTC, London)
 - Thursday 17th February 2022 (TBC: Virtual Teams Meeting)