



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

Executive Committee Meeting

**held on Thursday 18th November 2021 from 1100hrs to 1500hrs at ULOTC,
Yeomanry House, Handel Street, London, WC1N 1NP and Microsoft Teams**

Minute

Present

Mr J S Castle (Chairman); Dr M Vilnay (Vice-Chair); Rev Professor J P Taylor (Treasurer); Dr R Hall; Ms C Kinkead; Dr G Matthews-Smith; Professor M Siva-Jothy; Mr A Smith; Maj I Stoney; Col N Cheshire; Col D Gray; Lt Col M Bishop; Cdr T Stevens RN

In Attendance

Mr J Norris (Secretary); Mr K Thompson

Apologies

General Sir P Wall (President); Professor P Ivey; Gp Capt I Sharrocks; Wg Cdr M Dewer;

1. Introductions

- NOTED: The Chairman welcomed Cdr T Stevens and Dr G Matthews-Smith to their first COMEC Executive meeting.
- NOTED: The Chairman re-affirmed the responsibility of COMEC Executive members to be representative of all MECs, USUs and other stakeholders.

2. Minutes

- APPROVED: The Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 1st September 2021 (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_A1)
- RECEIVED: The draft Minutes of the Annual General meeting held on 1st September 2021 (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_A2)

3. Matters Arising

- CONSIDERED: Any matters or action points arising (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_A3)

Matters Arising (Min 2 1 September 2021)

- RESOLVED: An initial working party including the Chairman, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and Professor M Siva-Jothy to be convened to start reviewing the COMEC Constitution and MEC Terms of Reference. It was noted a meeting is being organised for December 2021.
- ON AGENDA: The Chairman requested Professor P Ivey, Ms C Kinkead and the Treasurer investigate HE engagement further with the Army Engagement Group once Maj R O Wilson's replacement is in post. Ms C Kinkead will report at the November meeting,
- **ACTION: The Chairman requested a working group be formed to discuss widening AFC University membership and Col D Gray, Cdr N Downing and the Chairman will meet to discuss further. The Chairman noted he will organise and report back at the next meeting**
- ON AGENDA: The Chairman requested the COMEC Prize criteria be discussed at the November COMEC meeting with specific input from the Service Staff Officers. The current criteria will be circulated with the agenda.

Chairman's Report (Min 3 1 September 2021)

- IN PROGRESS: The Secretary to write out to MECs to confirm which Universities are affiliated to them and create a map for the COMEC website.

Treasurer's Report (Min 4 1 September 2021)

- ON AGENDA: The Treasurer noted a surplus this year due to the pandemic and reduced travel. The Treasurer expects this will revert to a managed deficit noting current policy to reduce reserves. The Chairman requested a review of the policy to reduce reserves and would like to discuss at a later meeting.

Reports from the Service Staff Officers (Min 5 1 September 2021)

- RESOLVED: Ms C Kinkead asked about reviews noted under paragraph 5 of the Army report (G8 Finance) – when will the reviews be completed and will the outcomes be documented and shared? It was noted these would be completed with integrated review outcomes.
- **ACTION: The Chairman asked about the outcomes and any action from the OFSTED reports and could these be shared by the Army? Col N Cheshire confirmed he is happy to share the reports when signed off (they are also available publicly). Col N Cheshire will also provide a short synopsis, including which MECs have been reviewed, to the next meeting.**
- ON AGENDA: It was noted it would be useful to add DTUS / DSUS implementation to the November meeting agenda.

Relations with MECs (Min 9 1 September 2021)

- COMPLETE: The Chairman noted the COMEC / MEC Chairs Forums will continue in 21/22. The Secretary will also copy MEC Secretaries to the invite

and request MEC Chairs nominate another MEC member if they are unable to attend. Dates will be set up for the whole year to allow for more notice. The next MEC Forum will be chaired by Professor M Siva-Jothy and focus on the MEC Terms of Reference.

4. Chairman's Report

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from the Chairman (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_B)

Chairman's Report Date: November 2021

This period takes us from the Conference, through until now. I aim to report on activity from the conference onwards, (but not necessarily in chronological order).

Arrivals

I would like to welcome Gerri Matthews who comes from a research background. As with us all, I am positive she will be able to adapt to any role we place upon her.

Departures

Sadly, we have to say goodbye to Simone Bedford. Simone has resigned from her role due to personal circumstances. We wish her well.

Conference 2021

I must first mention and thank the following individuals who formed the COMEC "A" Team set with the task of creating and administering our annual conference. To ensure blushes, I will name them as Margi Vilnay; Jason Norris and Carol Kinkead.

Equally, I would like to thank Team RAF, led by Gp Capt Ian Sharrocks. His team included the excellent duet of Dave Newton and Anita Thompson. Thanks also to Station Commander Dan Startup and his team including the Halton events manager and his staff. Also the drivers, (who with good humour), ferried us between Wendover and the base.

I have also extended, on your behalf, personal thanks to our excellent range of speakers. Thank you finally, to all the delegates for their contribution in making the 2021 Conference a very successful event.

The Conference contents will be reviewed under Agenda Item 10.

Conference 2022

Thoughts now move to next year. Similarly, we are envisaging a two-day event. Most likely dates; 31st August and 1st September; or 7th and 8th September.

This will be hosted by the Army. Subject to negotiation, the desired venue would be RMAS. This proved to be an excellent location, the last time.

COMEC President

General Sir Peter Wall has very kindly agreed to stay in post until such time as a suitable replacement becomes available. This may therefore take him beyond the official end of his term in September 2022.

Open Door / ASCN International Webinar and Working Roundtable Program on Military, Veterans and Families Wellbeing

We continue to engage with this organisation. It offers a collaborative role on an international basis. The current extent involves AUKUS plus Canada and NZ (essentially, the 5-Eyes grouping). The plan is to use our website, in part as a repository for International research into related military, veteran and family matters. I have asked Carol Kinkead to engage and initially report on stress testing / risk analysis.

MEC Chairs Forum

These continue on a regular basis usually a few weeks ahead of COMEC Exec. Chairs have now been encouraged, via the secretaries, to send representatives where they cannot attend themselves.

The last meeting was led by Mike Siva-Jothy with a single item agenda; MEC Terms of engagement. Mike to report under a separate item.

COMEC ToCs

These will be reviewed by a small group, led by the COMEC Chairman. The primary aim being to examine what exists and make any necessary adjustments to reflect current circumstances

Covid

Some form of normality seems to be returning to the USUs which is a positive. Ironically USU students are probably getting better engagement than many civilian students, particularly in Scotland. It would be interesting to know the vaccination uptake for our students.

From our perspective, we continue due diligence in terms of vaccine uptake and LFTs ahead of and following meetings.

Jim Castle

Chairman – COMEC (UK)

5. Treasurer's Report

- RECEIVED: An Executive Summary from the Treasurer (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_C)
- NOTED: The Treasurer noted Sussex MEC are one year in arrears. The Chairman passed his thanks to the Treasurer on managing MEC subscriptions noting ongoing challenges.
- NOTED: Discussions were had regarding the current policy on reducing the COMEC budget reserves to 1 year turnover. The Treasurer noted this originally came from charity guidance that reserves should not continue to accrue. The Chairman noted the need to be more strategic on spend and there were a number of views on how the budget could be used e.g. subsidising the COMEC conference to allow more cadets to attend. The Treasurer noted now that travel had resumed a deficit position is now projected and COMEC would need to consider income over the longer term. The Chairman noted the budget should be kept under regular review and Executive members should table any suggestions on spend.

6. Reports from the Service Staff Officers

- To Receive: An Executive Summary from each of the Service Staff Officers:
 - a. Royal Navy (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_D1)

UNIVERSITY ROYAL NAVAL UNITS REPORT TO THE COMEC, NOVEMBER 2021

Introduction

1. *This report covers the period Nov 20 to Nov 21 and highlights significant activities undertaken by the University Royal Naval Units (URNU). Despite the continued evolution of the URNU organisation nationwide, the organisations' mission statement remains:*

“To inspire individuals through Leadership and Maritime Training, whilst facilitating a career in the Royal Navy for those who choose.”

2. *To achieve this mission the 16 URNUs are set a series of output requirements by Commander Universities, Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC). These include delivering the URNU training syllabus, maximising recruitment to the individual units, at sea experience, Adventurous Training and Sport and engagement with local communities.*

3. *As CV-19 restrictions ease, face to face activity has become a regular occurrence. However, certain planned training has been constrained by local CV-19 mitigations and the need to observe regulations set by the UK Devolved Assemblies. The units continue to adopt innovative approaches to training delivery, often providing*

a blended format to meet the needs of student Officer Cadets (OCs) who are studying remotely or are unable to attend on a training night.

4. *The units continue to work collaboratively within the national Naval Regional Command structure, under the guidance of BRNC, to ensure that the welfare of students and staff remains at the centre of all activity.*

5. *The personnel situation within the organisation is improving, with all gaps in unit Command and Coxswain (ie. Second-in-Command) positions due to be filled. When gapping occurs, support is provided via regional and national level resources.*

Achievements

6. *The key achievements for the URNUs this year have been:*

a. *Maintenance of activity during the CV-19 pandemic and the return to face to face training.*

b. *Drawdown of URNUs Southampton and Sussex in parallel with the opening of URNU Solent.*

c. *Opening two new units, URNU Belfast and URNU East Midlands (at Nottingham).*

Student and Staff Welfare

7. *As always within the URNU, student welfare is paramount. All are encouraged to consider how they can contribute to the mental and physical well-being of themselves and their colleagues. If URNU staff have concerns about students they will direct them to university welfare services. They can also call upon RN support if appropriate. In addition, each unit has a trained Mental Health First Aider in place.*

URNU Root and Branch Review

8. *Progress towards the recommendations of the 2* Root and Branch Review of the URNUs (reported previously) is outlined below.*

a. **Governance.** *Extensive work has been undertaken to ensure University Department Standing Orders provide comprehensive policy guidance and direction for all aspects of URNU activity.*

b. **Regional Structure.** *A regional delivery model was implemented to provide training and support aligned with the Naval Regional Commands in Sep 21. Examples of this in practice include regional New Entry training weekends during the autumn term.*

c. **URNU Transformation.** *The geographical laydown of the URNU organisation has been reviewed, taking into consideration distribution of potential new members. Endorsed by both the Naval Executive Committee and the Secretary of State for Defence, this now includes:*

(1) *Optimisation of the organisation's footprint in the south of England by amalgamating URNU Southampton and URNU Sussex to establishing a new URNU Solent within HM Naval Base Portsmouth.*

(2) *The establishment of URNU Belfast and URNU East Midlands.*

(3) *A pilot of a Virtual URNU concept. This will exploit the lessons learnt about remote working and engagement during the CV-19 pandemic, increasing the reach of the organisation to students who cannot access existing units.*

d. **Training Syllabus.** *The URNUs have been assigned a Training Requirement Authority which has approved the formal development of a Role Performance Statement and a Formal Training Statement (fundamental requirements of all individual training within the RN) as the foundation of a new URNU Training Syllabus. Of note, this is aligned with Maritime Reserves Initial Officer Training, which is itself aligned with that for the regular Service, ensuring our students get the best experience and understanding of the modern Royal Navy. There are four pillars to this syllabus:*

(1) *Militarisation*

(2) *Marinisation*

(3) *Command, Leadership and Management*

(4) *Adventurous Training and Sport*

For the next year the syllabus will be considered at 'Initial Operating Capability', with students involved in regular reviews of its effectiveness, with the intent to reach 'Full Operating Capability' in Sep 22.

e. **Training Delivery.** *During the 2* review, the vital role of the URNU Training Officers has been reviewed. These personnel have unique terms and conditions of service, with the legal status of being civilians with no call out liability, and are fundamental in developing the understanding of RN ethos and core values amongst the students. A new professional development pathway has been developed for them, with implementation being led by the creation of a Training Officer Career Manager function within the Universities Department. Opportunities for Training Senior Rates and Support Staff are also being investigated to maximize talent across the whole training cadre.*

Student Recruitment

9. *The URNU pages within the official RN website have been refreshed to take account of the changes within the organisation and are a key tool in attracting new*

joiners from the student population. Students are directed to it via social media advertising campaigns, on-campus presence at students fairs and functions and peer referrals from existing members. Although yet to complete, recruitment this academic year is proceeding well, with significant numbers applying for membership nationally.

Summary

10. Notwithstanding the challenges all have faced during the CV-19 pandemic, thanks to the imagination and dedication of staff and students alike, the URNU organisation remains both relevant and successful in meeting its objectives. As the return to face to face training continues, the organisation will continue to seek all opportunities to maximise the value in its offer for students and the Service alike.

A J Stevens

Commander, Royal Navy

Commander Universities, Britannia Royal Naval College

- NOTED: Cdr T Stevens highlighted the opening of URNU Belfast. Ms C Kinkead noted she was delighted to see this up and running.
- NOTED: Ms C Kinkead asked about item 2 in the report, specifically engagement with local communities noting this has been challenging in the past. Cdr T Stevens noted one size does not fit all and the need to consider a range of activities. The Remembrance Day parade is a good example of engaging the local community.

b. Army (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_D2)

G3/COMEC SITREP/RMAS/Nov21

1 Nov 21

UNIVERSITY OFFICER TRAINING CORPS – COMEC REPORT NOV 2021

1. Commander OTC overview. *The threat of a resurgence in Covid-19 remains and UOTCs continue to follow all Force Health protection (FHP) guidance. Notwithstanding these constraints, all UOTCs are now engaged in their annual recruitment phase. The relaxation of some Covid constraints has allowed UOTCs to plan overseas activities, with adventure training planned over Christmas 2021 and annual deployments planned to Gibraltar, Holland and Cyprus in 2022. The command and control changes at RMAS are firming up and UOTCs will continue to remain an integral part of the RMAS structure. Work is being conducted in order to articulate the UOTC value proposition. Workforce numbers remains a critical pinch point, especially in the Army reserve staff space and work is underway to address it.*

2. **G1. Student numbers.** UOTC funded OCdt establishment remains at 2570. Throughout September and October UOTCs conducted 1719 medicals (Full details below). There is an element of frustration at the number of “no shows” given the total medicals available of 2044. The increased pass rate at medicals (60%) and the fall in straight failure rates (to 3.9%) is encouraging, although Refers (27%) and Defers (8.5%) remain an issue. The increased efficiency of the UOTC Entry Med Cell and a rigorous pre-screening process is credited with the success of the recruitment period.

• **Medicals by Unit 2021**

Unit	Pass	Refer	Defer	Fail	Total	Initial Allocated Numbers	Capacity given at medicals	
A&TOTR	57	41	6	3	107	144	127	
Birmingham	79	14	10	7	110	91	91	
Bristol	40	43	8	3	94	108	123	
Cambridge	37	20	3	2	62	108	111	
East Midlands	87	12	10	0	109	90	90	
Edinburgh	23	24	4	2	53	67	82	*10
Exeter	72	21	4	5	102	108	108	
Glasgow	26	26	7	4	63	67	70	*6
London	113	33	20	12	178	224	229	
Northumbria	82	22	4	2	110	108	108	*12
NW-Liverpool	53	7	22	1	83	108	108	
NW-Manchester	49	39	1	2	91	108	108	
Oxford	50	45	12	4	111	108	118	
Queens	37	16	5	5	63	72	72	
Southampton	40	30	2	3	75	90	95	
Wales	82	46	25	8	161	168	185	
Yorks-Leeds	52	12	2	2	68	108	108	*8
Yorks-Sheffield	60	15	2	2	79	91	111	
TOTAL	1039	466	147	67	1719	1968	2044	

* Due extra slots on 6 Nov

- Will focus on refers once entry medicals complete.

As at 1 Nov 21, attestations stand at 868, although these will increase daily. The target is a figure of about 1400.

3. **G1 – Staff numbers.**

a. **Army Reserve.** Reserve manning remains an issue, with gapping at approx. 30% (see table below). Comdt is writing to all Corps Colonels to address this issue and UOTCs have been prominent at the recent People Conference with a short video clip to attract staff.

<i>NATO Code</i>	<i>OF4</i>	<i>OF3</i>	<i>OF2</i>	<i>OF1</i>	<i>OR8</i>	<i>OR7</i>	<i>OR6</i>	<i>OR4</i>	<i>OR3</i>	<i>OR2</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Rank</i>	<i>Lt Col</i>	<i>Maj</i>	<i>Capt</i>	<i>Lt/2Lt</i>	<i>WO2</i>	<i>C/Sgt</i>	<i>Sgt</i>	<i>Cpl</i>	<i>LCpl</i>	<i>Pte</i>	
<i>Ser</i>	<i>(a)</i>	<i>(b)</i>	<i>(c)</i>	<i>(d)</i>	<i>(e)</i>	<i>(f)</i>	<i>(g)</i>	<i>(h)</i>	<i>(i)</i>	<i>(j)</i>	<i>(k)</i>
<i>Establishment</i>	19	108	126	93	44	101	57	8	78	88	722
<i>Filled</i>	18	106	101	55	42	68	29	6	41	37	503
<i>Gapped</i>	1	2	25	38	2	33	28	2	37	51	219
<i>% Gapped</i>	5%	2%	20%	41%	5%	33%	49%	25%	47%	58%	30%

b. **Regular Army.** On the Regular front UOTCs have 15 x OF4 – the COs – these are all Regular but are in Reserve Pids. On the UOTC establishment are 94 UKTAP posts:

a. 13 x OF3 posts – These are the XOs but three are currently filled by FTRS on manpower substitution because there was no fill on the Regular Board.

b. 16 x WO1 – The RSMs - All filled.

c. 65 x Sgt/SSgt – these are the PSI slots of which 53 are filled – but the gap is disproportionate in places. Queens have 3 x PSI slots but two are gapped.

c. **FTRS.** UOTCs have 81 FTRS on establishment and 81 filled (although this includes 2 who are FTRS (FC) as fill for the Regular XO post)

d. **Civil Servants.** UOTCs have 91 civil servant posts of which 80 are filled.

4. **G7 Training.** The last report focussed on the summer Annual deployment exercise (ADX). Weekend training towards Modules A and B will commence in early November once attestations are completed. UOTCs entered 11 teams into the rigorous Cambrian patrol competition throughout October gaining several medals and commendations for their performances. This compares extremely favourably against the 15 teams entered from the entire Reserve Field Army.

5. **G8 Finance.** The financial position remains difficult across Defence and UOTCs still remain subject to scrutiny. An in-year savings measure was held against the UOTCs reducing their total RSD budget to **£7,021,361.88**. UOTCs have adapted their training programmes and it is anticipated that they will remain within the revised budget allocation. As of 1 Oct, the total spent was **£3,229,594.88**

{electronically signed}

N Cheshire

Col

Commander OTC

- NOTED: Col N Cheshire noted the successful online recruitment process this year and expects to enrol 2000 new officer cadets joining OTCs. The Chairman noted he had heard positive noises from all services on online recruitment and also highlighted the positive profile impact of having an in-person military stand at Freshers Fairs. Col N Cheshire noted they expect to operate both in-person and online recruitment channels pandemic restrictions permitting.
- NOTED: Col N Cheshire noted plans this year to organise adventure training and skiing trips including overseas.
- NOTED: Col N Cheshire noted internal discussions to increase throughput of cadets. The current model is a 3 year construct but may reduce to 2 years, possibly providing cadets the opportunity to join the Basic Training Course in the Army allowing fast track through training. Col N Cheshire noted on average the OTCs send 300 cadets to the Army Reserve.
- NOTED: The Chairman noted he has a meeting lined up with Major General Capps, Commandant of Sandhurst.

c. Royal Air Force (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_D3)

20211021 – 6 FTS COMEC Report

21 Oct 21

Comdt 6 FTS

COMEC Executive

COMEC EXECUTIVE MEETING 18 NOV 21 – 6 FTS REPORT

Comdt 6 FTS Overview

1. A busy period for 6FTS with the safe return to flying being a notable achievement. A comprehensive plan for the return to flying following the aircraft manufacturer directed grounding has been a great success. With nearly half of the aircraft fleet now returned it has been possible to conduct the staff training required to recommence UAS student flying experience sorties. Students have now been flying at a variety of locations and with more sites declaring their readiness we can expect these opportunities to expand in the coming months. The opportunity for the students to take part in UK and overseas adventurous training as well as air power study exercises has been positively received by the students. This must be set in context of the additional necessary planning measures that are in place to ensure that these activities comply with COVID and medical assurance policy. Additional departmental financial pressures have meant that we have had to plan overseas activity differently this year which means that the scope of overseas adventurous training opportunities will be less

expansive than in previous years. That said we still anticipate delivering challenging and rewarding skiing expeditions in the coming months that will be a welcome return to winter sports; the two previous winter seasons having been COVID disrupted. The recruitment season is now in full swing through a hybrid of online and face-to-face recruitment. Evidence suggests that it is progressing well and that our overall recruiting targets should be achieved.

Recruiting

2. *Recruitment of new members to the UASs is well underway, most of our sqns have a healthy number of applicants, with just two currently under target. The calibre of applicants is reported to be high, which reinforces the view that our online marketing strategy, whilst producing fewer applications, those we do get are of a higher quality as app profiling targets specific demographics. The planned 2022 recruitment of a marketing manager will help 6 FTS understand and increase online potential in this space. This HQ has and will continue to engage at a bi-weekly stakeholder meeting with Capita, RAF and Navy at the forum to discuss local challenges, specifically lack of medical appointments in hotspot locations (i.e. London & Bristol) and potential solutions¹. Although early days, no UAS has reported a lack of medical availability.*

¹ *Medical issues are the most significant cause of delay in the recruitment process into the UAS.*

UAS Student Population Breakdown

3. *Of the current student cohort (663 members), 33% are female and 67% male. Of our total number of students, 44% are studying a STEM subject of which 24% are female and 76% male. Within the STEM group 63% are studying a subject relating to engineering, with 20% females and 80% males. 15% of our total student population are BAME, and 39% of those studying STEM subjects are BAME. For comparison the current RAF diversity targets are 10% BAME and 15% Female respectively.*

HQ 6 FTS Armed Forces Career Office

4. *The HQ 6FTS Virtual Armed Forces Careers Office (HQ 6FTS VAFCO) continues to operate and process applications from serving UAS OCdts wishing to join the Regular RAF, either via the AF Sponsorship Scheme or as Direct Entrants. The Annual RAF Sponsorship Board sat in late September and awarded 37 bursaries to UAS OCdts, most of whom were allocated their first choice of role. At present, the UAS OCdts still in the system have been offered start dates for Modular Initial Officer Training in late 2021/2022, but still awaiting/undergoing medicals. From Dec 21, the RN and RAF are to introduce a more interactive application tool which it is hoped will be better suited to the task and students applying for careers in these Services. Continued career advice and guidance will be provided by the HQ 6FTS VAFCO. As we move forward, noting the challenges still presented due to CV-19, we are working with the Officer & Aircrew Selection Centre to offer more availability and hopefully return to pre-pandemic levels at some point in 2022.*

Modular Initial Officer Training (MIOT).

5. *The delivery of face-to-face training, in a COVID-19 safe manner, is continuing at pace both at the HQ and at our sqns. The two students that have entered MIOTC at week 7 have been progressing on course well and feedback has been positive to date providing evidence that the UAS Accelerated Training Pathway (ATP)² is working as designed. In this period, we managed to conduct Induction Training to the last few of our OCdts who had previously not be able to attend this training element at the HQ. We have also delivered First Aid training, a Range & Security course and introductory Fieldcraft training. In the coming weeks, we are running a Pre-MIOT course, during which 6FTS will prepare another four OCdts to join RAF OTA*

¹ *The UAS ATP is the accredited Phase 1 training delivered to students during their service in the UAS that enables them to miss the first 6 weeks of Initial Officer Training.*

Project TELUM

6. *TELUM In Service Date (ISD) has been delayed by at least 5 years due to SLT direction to incorporate a 'Net Zero at Point of Activity' propulsion system in accordance with UK Govt (2050) and ASTRA (2040) aspirations; ISD no earlier than 2027. This is due to, as yet, insufficient levels of technological maturity. At this early stage, the propulsion solution is considered likely to be either electric, hydrogen or some form of hybrid: however, TELUM remains solution-agnostic: and significant work is ongoing to further Defence understanding of the potential technical solutions. NB. Electric propulsion is well understood technically and starting to be fielded globally: the issues are concerned with Air Safety (3rd Party Aviation Risk associated with flying circa 20,000 minors per annum); military registration of the air system; and governance and assurance. In the interim, work is ongoing to ensure a seamless transition between the end of the current contracted flying provision and the replacement capability.*

K Thompson

*K Thompson MA
SO2 Force Development
HQ 6 FTS*

d. Defence People (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_D4)

DEFENCE PEOPLE (RF&C) UPDATE FOR COMEC – NOV 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 outcomes from the Spending Review and Integrated Foreign, Defence and Security Review. R&C remains actively engaged regarding any measures that might affect Reserves and Cadets.*

Reserves Policy

2. **Reserve Forces 30 Review.** *The Reserve Forces Review was published in May 2021. Conducted by a small team led by a senior serving reservist and former Minister of Armed Forces, Brigadier The Rt Hon the Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton TD PC. The report follows 10-months of research and engagement and suggests how Defence may build on earlier work under the £1.85-billion Future Reserves 2020 programme.*

a. *RF30 is capability driven and offers 18 recommendations for consideration. It is designed to help inform wider work to establish the UK's future defence and security requirements, taking account of the increasing need to meet emerging risks and threats. It sits alongside the recently published Integrated Review and the Integrated Operating Concept 2025.*

b. *Defence will engage with key stakeholders, including current and future employers of reservists, and other parts of government and industry, to fully understand the implications of the RF30 recommendations and their coherence with wider Defence work before reaching final decisions on the way forward. A formal, detailed response can be expected at the end of the year.*

3. **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 re-build a culture of readiness and re-establish our ability to mobilise reservists 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.*

4. **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. Good progress has been made on all fronts and the team (now at full complement) will be looking to engage with the wider RFCA network in due course.*

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

5. *The trained strength of the Volunteer Reserves continues to be relatively stable. As at 1 April 2021, the trained strength of the FR20 population was 32,700 (from around 22,000 at the beginning of the Future Reserves Programme), with about 4,700 more in training.*

6. *This is comprised of:*

- a. *Maritime Reserve: 2,870*
- b. *Army Reserve: 26,940*
- c. *RAF Reserve: 2,890*

7. *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. 2,300 at its peak) as well as for other operations in the UK and overseas.*

Employer Engagement

8. ***Overall Assessment.*** *We assess that EE has now reached an Operational Pause; FR20 is largely delivered, and largely successful. Preparations must now be made to move to the next phase of employer engagement which is likely to have 3 main sections:*

c. ***Retention of the MOD/Employer Relationship.*** *Essentially this will require effort to preserve and develop where necessary the work that has already been achieved with FR20 in the 2013-2021 timeframe. Key to this will be ensuring that the work outlined below does not impede/fracture that MoD/employer relationship.*

d. ***Support to RF30.*** *RF30 represents a new paradigm in EE terms. Both employers and employees/reservists will be asked to do more, often outside agreed or understood tempos and routines. Any campaign to develop or embed even part of RF30 will require a sophisticated EE campaign to ensure understanding and consent on all sides.*

e. ***AGILE STANCE Campaign Plan (ASCP).*** *As a campaign plan, AGILE STANCE may fundamentally change the way UK prepares, delivers and sustains her Armed Forces in the future. The role of Reserves in ASCP is being developed and will require a strong EE element in support, not least in the work being done to stand up a Strategic Reserve.*

9. ***Employer Recognition Scheme.*** *The revised ERS Directive was issued in Jan 21 and the 4 regional Gold award ceremonies are now underway. Current numbers are 354 Gold winners, 976 Silver and 3000 Bronze. Of these, there are 14 Gold, 22 + 2 expired ERS Silver (i.e that expired and have not yet been renewed (2014-2017) and 22 Bronze winners in the University sector.*

10. ***Anchor Events.*** *Reserves Day used online engagement to a much greater degree in order to achieve better coverage with the target audiences. Reserves Day saw a change of tack this year as RF&C with a film celebrating Reserve service to support a central, virtual Ministerial event used in support of regional events. This provided the opportunity to place RD on a proper 'online footing' for the future. The model allows for greater coverage and penetration with target audiences, whilst minimising the inconvenience to reservists themselves, which has in the past been a source of friction.*

Col Darin Gray VR
Assistant Head Reserves, Defence People (RF&C)

- NOTED: Col D Gray noted the imminent Army announcement in the House of Commons which will allow next steps on the Army plan and how this responds to the integrated review. Col D Gray also noted plans coming through the House of Commons on implementation of the integrated review.
- NOTED: Col D Gray noted Employer Recognition Scheme awards continue to progress and it was great to see academics featuring across the board.
- NOTED: Col D Gray noted the MoD are encouraging RFCAs to maintain close links with the education sector to support readiness for the future. The Chairman noted a mixed picture of RFCA engagement with MECs however, this is something that is being considered for the MEC Terms of Reference and advisory guidance. The Vice-Chair suggested inviting the MEC Chairs to meet with RFCA to discuss ways in which they can collaborate. Dr G Matthews-Smith noted MECs operate in a very independent way and suggested a scoping study to obtain MEC perspectives and how these could change in future.
- NOTED: Col D Gray noted RFCAs are independent organisations and have different objectives by region, governed by their members. Through RFCA reform MoD aims to keep regional focus but also have a link to one national organisation that reports in to MoD. Once the legislative requirements have been met the MoD will seek to set up a non-departmental public body (NDPB) that can direct activities.
- **ACTION: Col D Gray requested a meeting with the Chairman and education links in Defence Relationship Management to improve military / academic relationships going forward.**

- RECEIVED: An update on the DTUS (Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme) / DSUS (Defence STEM Undergraduate Scheme) implementation.
- NOTED: Col N Cheshire noted responsibility moving away from Defence Academy. Lt Col M Bishop noted there will be 112 Army DSUS candidates per year with first intake in September 2022. Legacy DSUS candidates will join UOTCs but it is not clear whether the 336 DSUS students (at full capacity) will be on top of, or instead of, existing establishment. DTUS students will remain under the Defence Academy.
- NOTED: Cdr T Stevens noted a similar experience for the Navy with less numbers. By October 2024 the DTUS legacy students should have completed and DSUS students will be managed by single services. The RN intend that the URNU structure will provide oversight and will seek to minimise any negative impact on other students / capacity.
- NOTED: Mr K Thompson noted for the RAF that they expect DSUS numbers to be between Army and Navy. Wg Cdr M Dewar is overseeing this.
- NOTED: The Vice-Chair noted there was agreement with AFBE (Association for Black and Minority Ethnic Engineers) to work with RAF around diversification of recruiting. The Vice-Chair noted they would also be willing to support RAF / RN and the Vice-Chair would be pleased to introduce them.

7. COMEC Prize

- **CONSIDERED:** The Chairman requested the COMEC Prize criteria be discussed at the November COMEC meeting with specific input from the Service Staff Officers. (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_E)
- **NOTED:** The Chairman suggested revisiting the prize criteria so it is more inclusive to those students that may not have had the opportunity to reach their potential, as well as recognising their development and achievements specifically while on the USU. This has the added benefit of raising the profile of the USUs and evidence that the USU and its staff can make a significant positive difference to individuals joining.
- **NOTED:** There was wide ranging discussion on how best to measure these criteria, how it may be perceived by students and supported by USU COs. Solutions could include scoring on attributes set by services such as teamwork, leaderships, communication. An additional Year 1 prize could also be offered based on cadet development and achievement over the first year.
- **ACTION: The Chairman noted general agreement on principal and requested the COMEC Prize Sub-Group now consider the options in detail and decide on how best to take forward.**
- **NOTED:** The Vice-Chair has stood down as Prize Adjudicator and Maj I Stoney has agreed to take over with immediate effect.

8. COMEC President

- **CONSIDERED:** The Chairman would be pleased to consider possible candidates for the next COMEC President.
- **NOTED:** The Chairman noted that General Sir P Wall is happy to remain as COMEC President until a suitable successor has been identified and in post. The key attribute required is connections into the MoD. It was noted COMEC should consider candidates from all services.
- **ACTION: COMEC Executive members to email any suggestions to the Chairman.**

9. Engagement

- **ACTION: The Chairman requested Professor P Ivey, Ms C Kinkead and the Treasurer investigate HE engagement further with the Army Engagement Group once Maj R O Wilson's replacement is in post. Ms C Kinkead will report at the February meeting.**

10. Conference

- **RECEIVED:** Feedback from the 2021 COMEC Conference at RAF Halton (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_F1 & COMEC_Exec_2021_11_F2)

COMEC Conference Feedback Summary 2021

Feedback from all participants was requested after the conference which was hosted by the RAF and took place in Halton House between the 1st and 2nd of September 2021.

Out of the 51 attendees 9 filled out the feedback form; 4 from the COMEC exec with a university affiliation and 1 with a military affiliation. 2 military attendees and 2 university staff. Unfortunately, no cadets participated.

Satisfaction rating (out of 5) of activities at the conference are as follows:

Day 1	COMEC AGM	4.43
Day 1	Post dinner speech; Air Cdre Simon Harper	4.67
Day 2	Keynote speaker 1; AVM Paul Godfrey; "The New UK Space Command"	4.89
Day 2	Keynote speaker 2; Mr Jim Castle; "HE; Veterans and Family Engagement"	4.22
Day 2	Workshop; "Moving Forward"	4.56

The following ratings were given for the hospitality on the 1st evening

Day 1	Formal dinner	5
Day 1	After dinner drinks/ networking	4.89

The conference received an overall rating of 4.75 out of a possible 5.

There was space for people to provide written feedback on what they enjoyed in particular, what could be improved and any general comments. Please see below;

- Is there anything you enjoyed in particular?

"Wonderful to meet in person at last. I particularly enjoyed chatting informally with the RN and RAF staff and with the cadets."

"The most purposeful & relevant AGM I have attended. The direction Jim & the executive are taking is a very welcome change that has breathed new life into COMEC"

"Great venue and location. Speakers were focused on the subject matter they delivered, and happy to interact and take questions from the participants."

"Smooth well organised conference. Excellent speakers"

"The evening reception was a lovely event."

"Meeting COMEC members and being able to understand the organisation more whilst networking. The UK Space Command brief was excellent and inspiring."

- Is there anything we could improve on?

"I don't think there was enough 'inter-MEC' networking, especially as we were all trying to swap COVID/post-COVID notes."

"No, very happy. While every conference has challenges, the professionalism of the organisers from COMEC and the input from the RAF at Halton made this a most informative and enjoyable event."

"My thanks to all the other staff at RAF Halton who worked so efficiently in the background to make the conference such a success."

"Maybe do an introduction welcome, little groups of COMEC, University Staff, Military and cadets at the beginning having a discussion to ensure personnel understand who is who in a professional setting."

- Please add any additional comments or suggestions below

"Workshop was good- great way of getting to meet new people. Perhaps if it was earlier in the programme that would bring further networking benefit"

"More time for the workshop (and potentially more workshop activities) would have allowed a fuller response."

"Ask each MEC to provide one PowerPoint slide, which are assembled in advance, and each MEC gets 1 minute to speak to the key point on the slide. Do this early on (even before AGM) so we know who we really need to talk to."

"The conference was superbly organised by our hosts."

- NOTED: The Chairman noted the very positive feedback and thanked all those involved.
- NOTED: The Vice-Chair noted there was also excellent feedback on the hosting by the RAF and that delegates enjoyed the networking aspects in particular.
- **ACTION: Consider on the spot feedback for the next conference and a networking session at the beginning of the conference schedule.**
- NOTED: The Chairman noted the Army was not well represented at the conference and a plea was made for the Army to support this in future. Col N Cheshire noted there was a timing clash with the OTC CO Conference but would work towards better attendance at the COMEC Conference in future.
- CONSIDERED: Feedback from the COMEC Conference Workshop (COMEC_Exec_2021_11_G)

2021 COMEC Conference Workshop Outcomes:

Group outcomes are colour coded.

Group 1: Katie (Greater London RFCA); Chris (London UAS); David (Chair W Midlands MEC); Will (Yorkshire UAS cadet); Beth (Wales URNU cadet); Carol (Edinburgh MEC)

Group 2

Group 3

Group 4

Group 5

MEC Recognition in your University

What DOES the MEC do? (There was some confusion about the MEC role from outwith the MEC)

MECs don't seem to have a lot of influence on the Academic side.

It was generally agreed that 'functional' MECs had good relations with their military constituents, but their influence and relevance to their Universities was less well developed. Senate-facing influence / reporting was not seriously embedded in University Governance.

The cadets were slightly confused as to what a MEC actually did (fair point - and one that needs addressing).

- *Enabling Group = freshers fair etc*
- *Varies across Universities noting some have student union issues (not recognised as a University society)*
- *Disconnect between communication with uni>mec and mec>uni*
- *Universities not recognising the importance of veterans*
- *MEC name does not help – should this be changed?*
- *Is there good representation of each uni at local MEC?*

- *University does not know about MEC – invite to training nights etc*
- *Need student representation*
- *Rotate services to speak with MECs*
- *Put pressure (from MEC) on University to sign Armed Forces Covenant*
- *No veterans champions*
- *Not uniform across UK e.g. MEC / service unit interactions*
- *Event invites for MEC members*
- *Relationship with CO and MEC*
- *Attendance at student union fairs difficult - anti military*
- *Service units have good pastoral care*

NI – Queens and Ulster Universities. AFC does not exist in NI, however principals followed

- *Works with NIRFCA, which has own HE committee*
- *NIMEC mainly run and funded by Queens. Reports of running MEC go to chancellor of Ulster. Ulster MEC members advocate.*
- *No student members or representation of student union*
- *MECs approach USUs / COs*

Edin – 3 out of 4 universities signed up to AFC

- *Usually chaired by Edinburgh, now increasingly spread between members*

East Midlands – 8 universities. Birmingham Chair. Engage with USUs

*Discussion about lack of structure within MECs e.g. traditional lead university
MECs accountability e.g., time off for training, MEC can approach VC. Is there a
process for USU CO concerns?*

Briefings of MEC at induction camps / student representative.

MEC Relationship with Service Unit

We focussed on student welfare for this discussion - Chris pointed out that exercises were the point at which student welfare issues became very obvious (particularly mental health issues) (the students agreed) but when the CO approached the MEC to discuss the issue the data-protection issues arose and the Universities protocols meant the issue couldn't get resolved. There were several layers of problems wrapped up in this. Students felt it was easier to approach their USUs to discuss this, but they are not eligible for support via that route. Additional complications are the different support structures in different Universities in the same MEC. The consensus from the military side was that MECs could do more to improve this.

However - as David pointed out - University regulation forbid staff from discussing students' issues with their own parents - so it's unrealistic to expect MECs to be able to solve this problem.

This is, however, an urgent issue that needs to be discussed and minuted. A hypothetical was raised which highlights the problem:

UASs have solo flying as a training goal - instructors need to know that their solo flyers do not have mental health issues that are not being professionally dealt with. The current system means there is ample opportunity for the student to fall through the gaps.

We agreed that an action from this discussion should be dealt with by COMEC as a question:

“How do MECs improve USU-tutor interactions to better support cadet /student welfare?”

We felt that tasking MECs / COMEC to make University Executive aware of this issue as a suitable and doable role / objective.

Also we felt that a MEC handbook for all incoming cadets with contact points for student support and services could go some considerable way in addressing this issue and some of the issues in the preceding discussion.

- *Card for mental / physical health – contact details*
- *University study and military commitment puts students under pressure*
- *Universities offer good welfare for students*
- *Mental health trained staff would be helpful*
- *GDPR killing comms between University and Units*
- *Units make clear University study must come first. Note there is difference in available time depending on degree subject studied.*

Midlands involved

*NI MECs invited to USU exercises
Interviews: MEC, COs, HQ Discussion*

Action Plan

1. *MEC name – change so name make obvious its function. Standardise Terms of Reference across MECs (although be careful responsibilities / activities are not diluted)*
 2. *Communication – need more across all levels of University, to cadets etc*
 3. *Veteran Perspective – need to think about specific needs of that group – set up sub-group focused don this activity? Numbers are increasing in HE? How to identify them? Note not all veterans want to be involved in working with cadets. Recognise complexity of issues.*
 4. *COMEC to commission an update of the “Benefits of USUs” occasional paper – number of changes since last published and need to focus on student / university / union / military*
 5. *Add student representation to MEC – they can input to comms / ideas. Need student representation from each service.*
 6. *Encourage “purple” cross-service interaction – prizes / inter service sports events sponsored by MEC. Invite Uni VC.*
- *MECs and USU – two way comms between students and MEC members*
 - *MEC brief at start of year – virtual (A sell of the MEC). Add links to media, website via University web teams*
 - *University advertisement of MEC on website, link to RFCA, USU – “build the brand”*
 - *MEC and USU work together to engage uni (joint action plan)*
 - *Volunteers TORs for MEC members and build into action plan (these can come directly from COMEC)*
 - *Develop strategy for MECs to engage between students, USUs and tutors for pastoral support. Agreement required (GDPR) to allow for this dialogue (from student)*
 - *Ensure MEC members are active – 2 way process between Units and MEC. MEC members to attend new entry weekend / training night and formal unit events*
 - *MEC term of reference review with USU contribution*
 - *How are the MECs quality assured? Introduce an independent role*
 - *Who does the MEC feed in to? Relationship of lead MEC Universities (Action MEC/COMEC)*
 - *Key MEC participation e.g. induction weekend, annual formal dinners, training evenings. Driven by local links or from a HQ requirement, to be investigated (Action USUs)*
 - *What are the written terms of reference for MEC members to the USU? For use by USU staff & students. Uniformity in MEC, standardisation at local MEC level (Action MECs)*
 - *MEC participation of USU key induction events, in person. Effect to be achieved; making students & staff aware of their MEC and that they do (Action MECs and USUs)*

- *What do the USUs expect or want from the MECs? Signposting to university services.*
 - NOTED: The Vice-Chair highlighted feedback that students were not aware of MEC or COMEC and had little or no representation. There were also issues around communication, pastoral care and recognition of a MECs wider purpose.
 - NOTED: The Chairman noted the need to push the communications agenda, and this has been progressed with the MEC Chair's Forum. This also allowed informal discussion at the last meeting of the MEC Terms of Reference.
 - **ACTION: The Chairman suggested we ask MEC Chair's to invite a CO or student representative to the next MEC Chair's Forum to widen representation.**
 - **ACTION: Dr G Matthews-Smith agreed to send out a questionnaire to MECs that would crystallise a set of themes that would come to the next conference for further discussions and support development of an action plan.**
 - **ACTION: The Vice-Chair will approach the Secretary of HR Scotland to support development of the COMEC vision and principals, as well as creative ways of marketing these with MECs.**
- RESOLVED: Confirmation of timing, venue, proposed agenda of the COMEC Conference 2022
- NOTED: Col N Cheshire noted he expects to be able to host the COMEC AGM & Conference 2022 at Sandhurst. The Chairman suggested the 31st August – 1st September or 7th September – 8th September. Col N Cheshire will confirm and come back to Conference Sub-Committee (Vice-Chair, Secretary and Ms C Kinhead).
- **ACTION: Conference Sub Committee and Col N Cheshire to report back on draft conference proposals at the February Executive meeting. The Committee to consider changing the name from Conference to Working Group.**

11. Any Other Business:

- **ACTION - Dr G Matthews-Smith suggested this would be a good opportunity for a new occasional paper updating the benefits of the USU. The Chairman agreed this to be taken forward and also a paper on Space Command that AVM Godfrey could support.**

12. Dates and Venues of Future Meetings:

- APPROVED: The dates and venues of future meetings subject to pandemic restrictions:
 - Thursday 17th February 2022 (Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting)
 - Thursday 19th May 2022 (ULOTC, London)
 - September 2022 AGM & Conference (Army)

- Thursday 24th November 2022 (ULOTC, London)