



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

### **Executive Committee Meeting**

**held on Thursday 23rd November 2023 from 1100hrs to 1500hrs at ULOTC,  
Yeomanry House, Handel Street, London, WC1N 1NP**

### **Minute**

#### **Present**

Mr J S Castle (Chairman); Dr M Vilnay (Vice Chair); Rev Professor J P Taylor (Treasurer); Ms C Kinkead; Professor G Matthews-Smith; Professor M Siva-Jothy; Dr F Ruddell; Professor A Haniff; Maj I Stoney; Col J Powell; Col L Brooks; Lt Col A Coulson; Cdr A Loring RN; W/Cdr M Dewar

#### **Apologies**

General Sir P Wall (President); Mr J Norris (Secretary); Dr A MacLaren; Professor D Dunn; Gp Capt R Caine

- NOTED: The Chairman thanked the Commanding Officer London UOTC for hosting the meeting and conference.

#### **1. Minutes**

- APPROVED: The Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (COMEC\_Exec\_2023\_11\_A1)
- The minutes of the COMEC AGM of 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were received (COMEC\_Exec\_2023\_11\_A2)

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

- Student representation on the COMEC Committee: Prof Siva-Jothy reported that he had contacted RMAS with regard to student representation.

#### **3. Chairman's Report**

- NOTED: The Chairman noted his thanks to Group Captain Caine for his service to the COMEC Committee and as UAS Staff Officer. He welcomed

Group Captain Barker to the Committee and three new members of the Committee elected at the AGM in September.

- NOTED: The Chairman pointed out that at the next AGM there would be four vacancies on the Executive Committee: The Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer have reached the end of their terms of office. The Chair and Vice Chair are both eligible for re-election.

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

- NOTED: The Treasurer updated that all MECs had paid except Bristol, which is currently three years in arrears, and this matter was still in progress. The Treasurer explained that the MEC Chair is feeling to be badgered and asked the Chairman to intervene.
- NOTED: There is a deficit resulting from the cost of the AGM and Conference which has been paid early in the year, whereas as income is due later in the year. The Treasurer said that the AGM had been expensive but had been one of the best. Already subscriptions are beginning to be paid.
- NOTED: The Treasurer explained how difficult it is to deal with the financial departments of a large number of universities which all had different systems and requirements. If an invoice is not presented in the correct format, the finance department returns it unpaid and without comment. This makes life very difficult for both the Treasurer and the Secretary and resulted in much waste of time. This is seen as a matter for the MECs to sort out.
- NOTED: A member asked what sanctions could be applied to defaulting universities. The Treasurer pointed out that all MECs were members of COMEC by definition, and they cannot be expelled.
- NOTED: A member questioned the situation regarding the payment of travel expenses for Executive Committee members to travel to meetings. The Treasurer pointed out that the situation is not clear at present, though there was an assumption that universities would pay the expenses of their delegates. He stated that, on occasion, COMEC had paid travel expenses for travel for committee members.

<b>31-Oct-23</b>				
		<b>Notes</b>	<b>Year 2023-2024</b>	<b>Year 2022-2023</b>
			<b>31-Oct-23</b>	<b>31-Oct-23</b>
			<b>(3 months)</b>	<b>(12 months)</b>
<b>Income</b>				
MEC Subscriptions (paid)	Note 1		1,400	6,300
Conference / AGM Delegate fees				2,590
Bank interest				19
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,400</b>	<b>8,909</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>				
Sep 2022 AGM/Conference			4,085	3,073
Executive Meetings: general costs				
Executive Travel & Subsistence			2,850	3,182
COMEC Prize			512	541
Publications / Occasional Papers				
Web site support			22	372
Administrator			750	3,000
Postage and stationery				
<b>Total</b>			<b>8,219</b>	<b>10,168</b>
<b>Surplus / Deficit</b>			<b>-6,819</b>	<b>-1,259</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>				
<b>31-Oct-23</b>				
<b>Opening Balance</b>			11,757	13,016
Surplus / Deficit for period			-6,819	-1,259
<b>Closing Balance</b>			<b>4,938</b>	<b>11,757</b>
<b>Represented by:</b>				
Current Account			1,546	4,861
Savings Account			2,377	2,377
Debtors and prepayments	Note 2		1,050	4,679
Creditors			-35	-160
<b>Total Net Assets</b>			<b>4,938</b>	<b>11,757</b>
<b>Notes from Treasurer:</b>				
<b>Note 1</b>				
<b>Note 2</b>	3 years of arrears of subscription still promised by Bristol MEC			

## 5. Reports from the Service Staff Officers

- RECEIVED: a verbal update from each of the Service Staff Officers:

### a. Royal Navy

#### **Annex C to BRNC 02\_04\_01**

*Dated Nov 23*

#### **UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT ACHIEVEMENTS**

##### **Workforce**

1. Overall, the workforce situation is positive. The additional civilian staff (HEO plus 2 x AOs) at BRNC have settled in well. The Universities Department Staff Officer (UDSO) is doing excellent work with the URNU budget including disentangling the URNU from wider Sponsored Undergraduate (SU) committed expenditure, and has now taken on the additional duties of Authorised Demanding Officer (ADO) for Motor Transport and as the Low Value Purchasing (LVP) / electronic Procurement Card (ePC) manager. These are a significant part of her duties which she has taken on from the Universities Staff Coxswain (USC) who is current on an Operational Tour in Bahrain until April 2024. Though his position is formally gapped, we have the short-term use of one of the former URNU Commanding Officers until she takes on her next assignment early in 2024. The SU Admin Officer is now also effectively working as a Naval Writer as well as her responsibilities as an E1 (see below). Once the complex onboarding process is complete, all Regional Admin Officer (RAO) roles will be filled for the first time. The National Training Centre EO joined on 14 August and is settling in well. The two gapped URNU CO posts (Oxford and Bristol) were filled in September and the gapped East Midlands position will be filled in November. The Full Time Reserve Service Coxswain plot remains fluid with high quality candidates generally being found to replace those who choose to move on, though not without a number of short to medium term gaps and the concomitant churn this imposes. The post of Cox'n URNU Devon is gapped whilst the incumbent completes resettlement; a replacement has been recruited and should be in post by the end of the year. The long-awaited URNU Chief of Staff (COS) has now joined URNU HQ.

##### **University Royal Naval Units Headquarters**

2. This term has so far seen visits by Cdr U, now generally accompanied by COS, to 4 Units: East Midlands, Birmingham Solent and London, plus a further visit to URNU Bristol following the recent transfer of HMS FLYING FOX to RMR Bristol and the arrival of a new CO. Delays previously encountered gaining Security Vetting sponsor accounts for Coxswains have now been resolved. Long standing problems with the Capita medical process appear to be improving significantly, and the URNUs now look like being accepted into the Royal Navy's New Recruitment Process (NRP) medical process by the end of the year. This has the potential significantly to improve outcomes for individuals.

### **University Royal Naval Units**

3. *Whilst the Summer term saw the end of routine training night activity in all units with the end of the Academic term and start of the summer holidays, in many ways it was as busy as the Easter term with most unit having a programme of activity involving all 4 pillars of the URNU syllabus. National training included 2 RYA training weekends hosted at URNU Cambridge (with Officer Cadets (OCs) and Training Officers (TOs) from Manchester, York, Northumbria, London, Virtual and East Midlands); OCs and TOs attending and supporting the Sponsored Undergraduates Acquaint Course (with URNU Belfast's Chaplain Crane supporting the Chaplaincy department throughout); a multi-unit attendance at the Tough Mudder Challenge, and 10 OCs from 5 units attending Ex WHYKAYAK (a week long kayaking expedition on the River Wye). Most units conducted ship and establishment visits including PWLS and ASTU (URNU East of Scotland) and representing the RN at Armed Forces Days around the country. Several URNUs supported the Dartmouth Regatta over the summer. The URNU HQ led Summer Conference was well attended by unit staff and TOs at MOD Garats Hay. Unlike the previous URNU Summer Camps, this year saw the URNU undertaking Ex SOLIS ARCE at Okehampton Battle Camp, supported by 32 unit staff and TOs providing Militarisation, Green Skills and CLM training, team building and a full military exercise for over 80 Officer Cadets from all over the UK. Regional training included Sports and AT activity (Scotland and Northern Ireland units at Rothiemurchus), regional CLM training weeks or weekends and sports activity supporting fundraising. URNU East of Scotland won the Dasher Award, generously donated by the Honourable Society of Knights of the Round Table. This award recognises the unit that has collectively put in the best performance overall during the year based on self-penned citations, and covers every aspect of URNU activity from routine drill nights to overseas expeditions. Recruiting into the URNU this term has faced some challenges with more radical Student Unions blocking access but overall appears to have been a success with a real likelihood of our achieving our maximum numbers of 867 Officer Cadets across the enterprise.*

4. *Sea time has been achieved in various platforms including ALBION, QUEEN ELIZABETH, PEMBROKE and TYNE but most notably during an extensive period at sea on BALTOPS in the P2000s which ran until 3 July. During this period, the URNU achieved an extraordinary 680 days at sea for 70 personnel spread over 6 hulls. With the relationship with CFS now well re-established post Op ISOTROPE, the URNU look to attend BALTOPS in 2024 and hopefully another period of RFA sea time in January. Above all else, time at sea serves to inspire OCs to apply to join the Naval Service with a number of former URNU cadets joining BRNC and RALEIGH in September, another off to the RFA as a Logistics Officer, and 4 URNU cadets attended this year's RNR Accelerated Officer Programme (AOP), a third of all attendees. In the future it is hoped to send URNU OCs on to the Accelerated Rating Programme at RALEIGH, however, this currently remains an aspiration. Two flying camps took place at RNAS Yeovilton courtesy of 727 Naval Air Squadron, the first during the end of Easter leave in late April and the second at the beginning of the summer term in early May. These were hugely successful and very much enjoyed with one OC joining as an Air Engineer in September with an aspiration to become a Maintenance Test Observer as a result of support received from 727 NAS. Finally, URNU Belfast took 10 OCs to Malta for a Maritime Power study trip (EX PEDESTAL); OCs researched*

key moments in WW2 in which Malta as a Naval Base featured heavily. In a series of site visits they presented their findings to the CO and the visit culminated with some AT (sailing).

5. Charitable events remained a feature of many URNUs during this period highlights including URNU Belfast's Help For Heroes 150-mile charity walk and URNU East of Scotland's extensive activities to support Poppy Scotland by running the Edinburgh Marathon and attending Armed Forces Day. URNU East of Scotland and Belfast OCs also conducted charity conservation work in the Cairngorms National Park. URNU Devon hiked the South West Coast Path to raise money for the RNRM Charity and for the Defence Medical Welfare Service, a mental and physical welfare charity for those in the Services.

6. The URNU is now a regular feature in Navy News, with the aim of expanding the first one-page spread that appeared in the April edition to a regular 2-pages in the near future. The URNUs remain very active around the regions supporting the NRCs with Defence Engagement (DE), and in conducting the 4 pillars of their training. In many parts of the Midland and Northern England, the URNUs, along with the Sea Cadets, have become the face of the Royal Navy for DE activity, sometimes alongside but often separate from the DE activities of the Maritime Reserves. Though the URNU is not, and never will be, a 'hard' recruiting tool, it remains highly effective as a 'soft' tool and its importance in this capacity is only likely to increase in the future. In particular, the URNU is proving effective at penetrating the former industrial heartlands, engaging with the BAME communities and demonstrating the Naval Service as a diverse and inclusive organisation.

### **Sponsored Undergraduates (SU) Office**

7. The SU Office has had an exceptionally busy term running 2 Sponsored Undergraduate Acquaint Courses (SUAC) at BRNC, largely conducted in-house / using BRNC Executive Department resources. Next year's courses should be the first to be run with Training Management Group (TMG) support, a first for the Universities Department. Between the 2 SUACs, the first Medical Officers and Dental Officers (MODO) welfare weekend was conducted, coinciding with the BRNC Open Day, to assist newly graduating MODOs in their transition to their Foundation Years and registration with the General Medical and Dental Councils. Also, between the 2 SUACs, the first Drummond Division Acquaint Weekend (DDAW) was run during the working week (!) at HMS SULTAN with visits to the dockyard and HMS COLLINGWOOD. Future DDAW will be weekends conducted at BRNC with the intention being for Defence STEM Undergraduate Scheme (DSUS) cadets and University Cadet Entry (UCE) midshipman to attend R&A's engineering Look at Life (L@L) courses with a view to 'selling' the benefits of the 2 schemes to putative naval engineers, a great way to support the recruiting effort. UCEs and DSUS will also get the benefit of the establishment and ship visits conducted during L@L as well as acting as brand ambassadors (for an exceptional offer).

8. With the second group of UCEs commissioning in March, the 4 new midshipmen have enjoyed a fantastic term with a 7-week BALTOPS deployment with CFS followed by a 4-week East Coast cruise with cadets from the US Naval Academy (USNA) at Annapolis. As well as providing exceptional training, both deployments

*provided opportunities for port visits, wider DE through working with cadets from a number of other nations, and building the relationship between BRNC and USNA. The USNA East Coast cruise is strongly supported by British Defence Staff (Washington) with the UCEs really stepping-up and taking leadership roles in commanding and navigating the USNA's Yard Patrol (YP) craft, despite all being engineers! They are all now at university and are settling into their studies and their activities as affiliates to the URNU.*

9. *Whilst the Sponsored Undergraduate Staff Officer (SUSO) and his team have delivered some outstanding activities this term and progress continues to be made in integrating some training through TMG, the previously reported problems continue to apply to the lack of life support being provided through Project HESTIA. The unilateral decision to cease supporting SUs: Doctors, Dentists, UCEs and Bursars despite their being College business for decades has imposed significant challenges. The MODOs found themselves as the only regular Naval personnel out of 28,500 without any UPO support whatsoever. By calling on the good offices of the Fleet Writer (WO1 Ramsey) and providing in-house training to the SU Admin Officer (SUAO) for the more straightforward transactions, the more complex issues will now be supported by UPO NELSON with UPO CTCRM advising on the onboarding of new personnel. This state of affairs is the consequence of the contract not being scoped properly and is highly unsatisfactory. A contract amendment is now being progressed by the Deputy SU Staff Officer which will hopefully improve the situation in the longer term, though how long is not known owing to other Navy-wide issues with the contract.*

10. **SU Finance.** *SU Finance continues to impose considerable challenges, largely due to the various stakeholders in Navy Command HQ not understanding the differences between the URNU (a Navy-run University Society), and the Sponsored Undergraduates, all of whom have been offered careers in the Royal Navy. Indeed, some (MODOs and UCEs) are already full-time salaried personnel. To add to the complexity, the DSUS scheme is largely, though not entirely, funded by UKStratCom whilst the remainder of the funding for engineers comes from Captain (R&A), and for MODOs from a separate Navy Command budget. The SU Office also administers bursaries and scholarships on behalf of Captain (R&A) to the Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme (DTUS) cadets, and to Naval scholars though they are not under the authority of Captain,*

- NOTED: Cdr. Loring said that the URNU had appointed its first transgender ambassador, and once it is known how the individual will set about the appointment Cdr. Loring will report to the Committee. The URNU represents a safe space for trans people, and the appointment has been approved at 2-star level. Diversity and inclusion is part of the URNUs' aim.

#### **b. Army**

G3/COMEC SITREP/RMAS/NOV23

10 Nov 23

COMEC Secretary

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

1. **Deputy Commandant RMAS (UOTC) overview.** *After a very successful summer with ADXs and AT expeditions successfully completed, the start of the autumn term, as usual, has focused on recruiting our new intake at Freshers. Despite the difficulties faced elsewhere in Defence recruiting, we have had a bumper intake with nearly 1800 students coming forward to join the UOTC. The vast majority of these now just need their GP documents reviewed following their physical medicals, whilst we are getting them started on the Module A syllabus training. Currently, we are seeking to maintain the 'offer' to all our OCdts, whilst we plan ahead under some uncertainty under In Year Savings Measures (IYSM) imposed on us. Our mission, easily translated into our 'ATTRACT' space, continues to be:*

*'The UOTC is to deliver leadership development for selected students through military training, adventure training, personal, intellectual and social development physical training and sports. On behalf of the Army, it is to engage with higher education institutes to support RC civil engagement and contribute to Army inflow'.*

2. **G1.** *Gapping of key staff posts still remains an issue in many of the UOTCs, especially with our Reservist instructors and staff. This is now further complicated by the IYSM with regards to the optimisation of full-time posts. The small UOTC HQ within the RMAS Group has had one of its new members of staff taken in a trawl, as SO3 DSUS goes to help the effort elsewhere. The UOTC programme via the Entry Medical Cell (UEMC), continues the review and final medical clearance of our new intake of 1800 new OCdts, via their GP records.*

3. **G5 Recruitment Plans.** *The UOTC continues to plan for a larger second intake after Christmas on top of the usual Oxbridge effort. TONIC have continued to support our recruiting effort online and no doubt contributed to our current autumn success. Maintaining the offer as best as possible is now key to our future recruiting efforts as, due to reputation, past student experience matters.*

4. **G7 Military Training.** *As we start into the new academic year, UOTCs continue to deliver Module A and B of the RMAS Commissioning Course Short (CCS) syllabus over a number of weekends, primarily to their first and second-year students, with final training objectives planned for completion at ADX. Some students will choose to attend Modules of the CCS at RMAS, but this will mainly take place in the summer.*

5. **G7 Overseas Training.** *Overseas training exercises (OTXs) undoubtedly provide a key piece of the UOTC offer but only one of our units is currently planning on deploying to Gibraltar on Ex BARBARY WARRIOR in the summer. In addition, other overseas opportunities usually on offer as part of our ATTRACT effect, will not be over the course of this year due to IYSM.*

6. **G7 Other Training (AT).** *Approximately half our units have maintained their Alpine AT forecast for this winter, with places being shared out where possible. Participation in other AT type challenges will be more limited going forwards, but events as the 'Ten Tors' in the SW of England offer hope as we do not own and organise them. Ex NORTHERN LIGHTS in Edinburgh during late March and the*



*Queen's Challenge Cup (QCC) competition at RMAS in April are still scheduled to take place at the moment. It is currently being planned for QCC to include some further military elements in its competition beyond the usual team sports.*

**7. G8 Finance.** *The financial position remains very difficult across Defence and UOTCs remain subject to extremely close scrutiny, especially with regard to Reserve Service Days (RSDs) for their OCdts and staff. Activity and cost savings are the order of the day and we are actively having our expectations for next year managed downwards unfortunately.*

*{electronically signed}*

*T J Irwin-Parker*

*Lt Col*

*COS UOTC*

- NOTED: Colonel Powell said that the OTS were now under sudden and harsh financial pressure. All Adventure Training (AT) and Staff Rides have been cancelled. In the past Reserve training days (RTD) have been pooled and expended as necessary to ensure the smooth and safe running of training activity, and this relied on staff members doing extra days. The new measures mean that an individual's RTD have been capped and cannot be exceeded. RTD are now based on establishment and not on unit enrolled strength. The effect of these strictures is to bring training to an end, and may result in OTCs closing or amalgamating. This will also have an effect on recruitment/retention since new recruits were promised AT when signing up. Even attendance at Remembrance parades is now voluntary, though it is pleasing to note that officer cadets paraded nevertheless. The aim is a budget cut of 25% overall.

The aim is that no-one should be denied their annual bounty. Even small amounts of cash are being clawed back, with no sympathy shown by the finance department. Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) posts are no longer being appointed, and as a result one OTC has no Adjutant, QM or RQMS.

- NOTED: The RN and RAF staff officers agreed that they, too were under financial pressure, though not so severely as the OTCs. The four URNU units are currently lodgers within OTC barracks and could be affected by OTC closures/amalgamations. Colonel Brooks pointed out that the aim of the savings was to protect the field training units. One third of RAF welfare staff are missing because of the pause in recruitment, and because the UAS units are involved in training Ukrainian pilots, the flying opportunities for cadets have been reduced.

### **c. Royal Air Force**

*20231110 – 6 FTS COMEC Report*

*14 Nov 23*

*Comdt 6 FTS*

COMEC Executive

## **COMEC EXECUTIVE MEETING 23 Nov 23 – 6 FTS REPORT**

### **Comdt 6 FTS Overview**

1. Since the last report the UAS has moved into the annual recruiting cycle. 6 FTS anticipate that it is on track to reach its target student population of 1000. On a broader workforce point the impact of restrictions on civil service recruiting has been palpable with a significant number of workforce gaps across the organisation affecting the administrative support available to the students. To put that into perspective that is approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the civilian workforce on the squadrons and this has caused very significant disruption in some areas. A comprehensive workforce review has been conducted to mitigate these changes, the results of which will be available in the next report. From a flying perspective, the technical issue with the propeller of the Grob Tutor caused a pause in flying for some weeks. A technical fix has now been introduced so that flying again is back on the programme for the students and the full breadth of flying outputs are underway. The continued deployment of UAS staff to support wider Defence commitments has meant that staff members have been either deployed or on standby to deploy on these tasks, often at short notice. This has meant that the delivery of some 6 FTS activities has been locally disrupted but overall the impact has been manageable to date. The support of international defence training has again become a priority task and 6 FTS is delivering vital Elementary Flying Training for the Ukrainian Air Force.

### **2. UAS Recruiting**

2023 recruiting period has been successful with 1,080 application vs 1,150 in 2022. 500 selected to target 400 new entrants for the 2023 cohort, even allowing 20% for attrition through the pre-employment process. Although early to provide meaningful stats on the joining medical, progress looks healthy with just isolated locations with higher than average 'temporarily medically unfit' outcomes. Sickle Cell screening hovers at 15% of selected students requiring blood tests. Medical availability appears stable with all UAS able to book clinics within 4 weeks and at a reasonable distance.

### **3. Staff Recruiting**

Civil Service and more specifically the MOD, is scrutinising all civilian applications to recruit and only the highest priorities (where risk to life is an issue) are being authorised. Reservist employment market for training staff has demonstrated a downturn in applications. As a result, 6 FTS is exploring alternative solution to 'plug the gap' with regular serving staff. Long term solution is in development but will likely continue to be an unstable period with an approaching general election.

### **UAS Student Population Breakdown**

4. Of the current student cohort (653 members), 28% are female and 72% male. Of our total number of students, 53% are studying a STEM subject of which 17% are female and 83% male. Within the STEM group, 73% are studying a subject relating to engineering (14% females and 86% males). 11% of our total student population are

from the BAME community, and of those, 43% of those studying STEM subjects. For comparison the current RAF diversity targets for Regular Service are 10% BAME and 15% Female respectively. The levels of ambition outlined under the ASTRA initiative are 20% BAME and 40% female inflow into the RAF by 2030. 6 FTS have been tasked with supplying 30% of all Modular Initial Officer Training places for the RAF; this will be a steep challenge as the organisation cannot control which professions (E.g. Pilot, Engineer etc) are open nor control the Recruitment and Selection process. However, 6 FTS are planning to build on good practise, engagement, and continuous improvement and education to improve our numbers to the greatest possible degree. In the last recruiting year 6 FTS provided around 21-29% of all Officers and Reserves that joined the RAF.

### **HQ 6 FTS Armed Forces Career Office**

5. This has been an extremely busy year in the 6 FTS Virtual Armed Forces Careers' Office (VAFCO) and with The UAS Bursar Scheme (UAS BS) open until 31 Mar 24, and the current UAS Recruitment Programme ongoing, it is anticipated that the flow of applications will continue at a steady pace going forward.

6. The recruitment program for pilots into the RAF has significantly changed with increased opportunities for Direct Entrants (DE) and RAF Sponsorship for Training Years 2024, 2025 and 2026 anticipated. Indeed, it was pleasing to see the 2023-2024 UAS BS, open from April 2023, now including the pilot branch once again. This has in turn produced an increase of pilot applications to the 6 FTS VAFCO this year, with just over 200 applications received so far. Of these, approximately 30 OCdts have chosen the bursary option, which enables them to complete their degrees first. Furthermore, with a Service need to allocate proven candidates, at short notice to the February 2024 MIOTC, another 9 OCdts from last year's Pilot Board have now been brought forward for selection.

7. The UAS BS now also includes the new Defence STEM Undergraduate Scheme (DSUS) roles for Engineering Officers, offering them an opportunity to receive an annual bounty and up to £9,000 towards their academic fees. Of the UAS OCdt applications received so far, for this inviting and unique opportunity, 8 have been provisionally selected. Additionally, we have had approximately 100 applications from UAS OCdts choosing other commissioning branches in the RAF, either as Direct Entrant (DE) for via UAS Bursary (at least 10 of which want to become DE Engineering Officers). Finally, the Medical Officer UAS BS has been reopened, and we have received more than 10 applications from UAS OCdts and another 2 applying to move from a Bursary to an RAF Cadetship on next year's Board (April 2024).

### **Force Development**

8. Force Development training across 6FTS has continued at pace since the last report. Sqns have conducted a variety of adventurous training across the UK, developing skills and leadership. Some of our OCdts/APOs have been canoeing in Canada and Sweden, mountaineering in France and Italy, sailing in Croatia, and climbing in Spain. As we move towards winter, our plans for skiing expeditions are very well matured and we expect to take almost 200 OCdts/APOs on challenging, but rewarding, exercise across Europe. With the help of the RAF Charitable Trust (CT),

*we are holding the final selection panel for the Inspire Adventure Award in December. This award enables an expedition which without the financial help of the RAF CT would not be achievable. The proposals are made by OCdts/APOs on sqn and the winner will be awarded a £15,000 prize.*

### ***LAF2 and Proj TELUM***

9. *Work within the LAF2 arena is currently focussed in the ‘business as usual’ space, with capability development efforts continuing to focus on ensuring that the Tutor aircraft remains fit for purpose – i.e. safe to operate; equipped appropriately to modern standards; and regulatory-compliant, in order that 6FTS operations can continue without restriction. Work to implement the cockpit upgrade continues and we have been well supported by our contractor in returning the fleet to full flying status after a short grounding earlier in the year associated with a propeller hub oil seal failure. Elsewhere, we continue to regrow our pilot cadre post-pandemic in order to restore our flying output to pre-COVID norms.*

10. *Work on Proj TELUM, the successor to the current LAF2 capability, formally resumed in September with a high-level Stakeholder Engagement event on Wed 25 Sep 23, RAF Wittering, followed by a reinvigorated Youth Aviation Programme Board. This marks the start of the next stage of the project, as initial feedback from Project MONET, the ongoing Rapid Capabilities Office-led exploration of Sustainable Aviation Technologies, starts to filter through. Project MONET itself awarded 2 technology demonstrator aircraft contracts in Mar 23, which will demonstrate the broadest range of sustainable technology options potentially available to light flying training aircraft in the short to medium term. Both air systems are currently in build and scheduled to make their initial flights in Summer 2024. Pj MONET itself will report fully in Spring 2025 and the findings will inform Pj TELUM decision-making. though again noting that the award of the TELUM contract will be the result of a commercially fair and open competition. A potentially viable TELUM air system is anticipated by the end of the decade.*

### ***K Thompson***

*K Thompson MA  
SO2 Force Development, HQ 6 FTS*

- NOTED: Dr Ruddell suggested COMEC putting the financial problems faced by the USUs in writing and sending through the chain of command. The Chairman wondered if the COMEC fees should be raised so that assistance could be provided to units. Prof. Matthews-Smith’s university were currently carrying out a study and reporting upon the situation regarding school cadet forces, and this may help. The Chairman recommended forming a working group composed of the Chairman, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Prof. Matthews-Smith to consider the COMEC response. Colonel Powell suggested waiting to see what happened in the next couple of weeks in connection with the financial strictures, and then perhaps the President could be asked to raise the issues with MoD.

### **d. Defence People**

- NOTED: Colonel Brooks gave a Power Point presentation updating on the latest MoD strategic thinking following the production of a number of reports: RF30; the government's Integral Review 2023; Defence response to a volatile world; the Haythornthwaite Report (carried out by a businessman into incentivising people in the new era aimed at modernising the offer to service personnel)

Currently, the reserve forces are not fully integrated into the defence plan. Some nations, notably Ukraine and Israel, are good at mobilising reserves – these are principally those former service personnel who remain as reservists after leaving the forces. The UK needs to deal with a changing world and produce a National Defence plan, backed with the requirement to raise defence spending to 2½% of GDP. The Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) is the Reserve Champion, and reserves must be recognised and incorporated into the plan.

The RF30 paper is aimed at a pan-defence reform to the reserve for the future. It is to produce a revision of the terms of service of reservists.

The Chief of Defence People (CDP) Vice Admiral Phil Hally appreciates that there is presently a dire recruiting situation, personnel are leaving the services and the recruitment climate is difficult meaning that those leaving are hard to replace. The matter needs to be addressed, though there is no “new money” to achieve this.

The USUs provide exactly what the CDP is looking for: STEM, diversity etc. It is accepted that wars are started by regular forces but finished by reservists. Ukrainian soldiers are training in the UK with a 35-day package delivered by a mix of UK regular and reservist staff.

It is noted that the reserve units have an “atomised” footprint across the UK.

## **6. COMEC Prize**

- NOTED: Ms Kincaid was appointed the lead member for the COMEC Prize upon the departure of Dr Hall. Ms Kincaid has developed a grid for assessing the prize contestants and this is aimed to be more objective and less subjective than the previous system. She is also reducing the paperwork involved.

## **7. COMEC President**

- NOTED: The Chairman has received a letter drafted by General Sir Peter Wall which he proposes to send to the Vice-Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) with request that the Chairman comments upon it. General Wall appreciates that COMEC is of value but that the organisation requires a President. He has already approached the CDP on the matter. Though several recently retired senior officers have been approached none have accepted the appointment. It was agreed that the Chairman circulates his thoughts to the Exec. for comment, prior to replying to General Wall.

The Chairman has also discussed the situation with the veteran COMEC Conference attendee Dr Mike Smith of Birmingham University who pointed out that, in the distant past, COMEC sent representatives to various MoD committees, but this system ceased some time ago.

## **8. Nominations to the Executive Committee**

- NOTED: The Chairman pointed out that at the next AGM there would be four vacancies on the Executive Committee: the terms of the Chairman Mr Castle, Vice Chair Dr. Vilnay, the Treasurer Rev Professor Taylor and Professor Siva-Jothy come to an end. All except for Professor Taylor are eligible for re-election.

The question of student representation on COMEC was raised – it was thought that this would be difficult for students in the third year to attend because of their studies. It would, therefore, be more appropriate to encourage student representation on the MECs.

Colonel Powell considered that student members of COMEC would be completely inappropriate.

## **9. COMEC Constitution and MEC Terms of Refence**

- NOTED: Rev Professor Taylor, the lead member for the revision of the constitution, outlined the progress so far. At the last AGM the factually updated Constitution was presented to the meeting, and the meeting voted to accept it.

Any MEC may propose amendments to the Constitution, though these must be notified so as to allow them to be circulated 3 months prior to the next AGM.

At present, those MEC members present at the AGM are each entitled to vote. It was suggested that each MEC should have one vote whether any of its members were present or not: Prof Taylor pointed out that this will require an amendment to the constitution.

Appendix 2 gives suggested terms of reference for MECs, and this Appendix needs one or two minor changes – the statutory role of the MECs needs to be included. (it remains for each MEC to decide its terms of reference)

The Constitution has been approved for now, but needs to be discussed at the next AGM.

Some other Appendices need addressing prior to the next AGM. In addition, Standard Operating Procedures for the COMEC Executive Committee need to be formulated.

## **10. Conference**

- NOTED: The 2024 Conference is sponsored by the Royal Air Force. Wg Cdr Dewar intends that it be held at RAF Cranwell; however, the only available dates fall in late September. The Scottish universities will be in mid-term by this time, and it would not be possible for staff members or students to attend. Wg Cdr Dewar agreed to look into the use of alternative venues at convenient dates.

## **11. Any Other Business**

- NOTED: The Chairman asked if anyone had other matters to discuss
  - a. Prof. Matthews-Smith announced that she was holding a conference in Scotland 22/28 September and that the committee members are welcome to attend. Accommodation is available at reasonable cost. The conference will include the military tattoo and will deal with a range of key issues facing the armed forces.
  - b. Colonel Brooks announced that she would be represented at the February meeting by her deputy Lt Col Coulson.

- c. Prof. Haniff suggested the formation of a working group to see how MECs are financed.
- d. There should be consideration of alternative venues for the COMEC Committee meetings – discussion was deferred until the next meeting.

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

CONSIDERED: The dates and venues of future meetings:

- Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024 (Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting)
- Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (ULOTC, London)
- September 2024 AGM & Conference (Royal Air Force)