

“Filling the Ranks”

A Report for the Prime Minister on the State of
Recruiting into the United Kingdom Armed Forces

by the Rt Hon Mark Francois MP

July 2017

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Foreword

This report examines the state of recruiting into the United Kingdom Armed Forces, both Regular and Reserve. This is an issue which is proving to be an increasing challenge in an era of record employment.

The study, which was undertaken between July 2016 and July 2017, has included visits to MOD HQ, Air Command, Army Command, Joint Forces Command, Naval Command and several units, including Armed Forces Careers Offices (AFCOs). Meetings have been held with recruitment and training related personnel in all three Services, including the three principle personnel officers (PPOs), the Chief of Defence People (CDP), senior Reserve officers and also discussions at Chief of Staff/Vice Chief of Staff level as well.

In order to gain some comparison with industry, meetings were also held with BAE Systems, Babcock International and also a meeting with the Business Services Association (BSA) including representatives from; Serco, Kier Construction, Compass Group, Engie, Amey, PA Consulting, Baachu Works, Interserve and AECOM.

I am very grateful to Mr Simon Goldstein, an Army Reserve Colonel currently attending the Royal College of Defence Studies and to my Parliamentary Assistant, Miss Sophie Bond-Jones, for all of their assistance in helping to research and compile this report. In addition I would also like to thank Wing Commander Paul Maguire, for his assistance in arranging the visits programme and for liaising with the MOD generally.

The report produces twenty recommendations to help improve recruiting performance in the Ministry of Defence, including in key areas such as medicals and the recruitment of women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) personnel. The report also considers what some other Government Departments can do in order to support the national recruiting effort.

I hope this report will provide a useful contribution to the Defence of the Realm.

Rt Hon Mark Francois MP

Former Minister of State for the Armed Forces 2013-15

July 2017

Executive Summary

Chapter One: The Recruiting Environment – A Perfect Storm¹

1. A combination of factors has made recruiting into the Armed Forces increasingly difficult in recent years. These include near record employment (currently the unemployment rate in the UK is 4.5%, the lowest since 1975) and also demographic change. The UK has an ageing population with those of military age declining as a proportion of the total. In addition, the proportion of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) members of the population is forecast to rise, in a segment of the community which has, hitherto, shown a low propensity to apply for military Service.
2. Moreover, the ending of the deployment to Afghanistan in 2014 has removed the “recruiting sergeant” of active land warfare operations, a factor which has traditionally helped to maintain interest among young recruits, who have regularly seen footage of British troops involved in overseas conflicts relayed into their homes. To this must be added a shrinking military footprint, as the MOD’s estate has been downsized in recent years, partly in order to meet other policy objectives, such as provision of land for housing. This has led to a situation where in many towns around the United Kingdom the only remaining military presence is provided by cadet units.
3. These trends are exacerbated by other factors such as an increase in obesity in the United Kingdom in the past two decades plus an increase in post 16 year olds staying on in education (a factor which has particularly affected recruiting in the Army).
4. Taken together, the combination of all these factors has created something of a “perfect storm” against which military recruiters have had to battle. This seems unlikely to abate in the years immediately ahead and the scale of this challenge for manning the Armed Forces must therefore not be underestimated.

Recommendation 1:

- (i) *With today’s challenging environment for recruiting into the Armed Forces likely to persist, recruiting must now be identified by the MOD as a strategic priority and pursued and resourced accordingly.*

Chapter Two: The Current State of Play – Running to Stand Still

5. The Regular strength of the UK Armed Forces is currently 138,350, 4.8% below the required number (liability). In the year to April 2017, 12,950 people joined the UK Regular Armed Forces but in the same period 14,970 left.
6. A combination of lower retention than expected and failure to achieve recruiting targets means this under manning is worsening and indeed has been for some time. The Royal Navy and the RAF are now running at around 10% short of their annual recruitment target, whilst for the Army the shortfall is over 30%. Constant pressure on recruiting budgets has only compounded the difficulty.

¹ Detailed footnotes are contained in the main chapters of the Report.

7. The retention issues are formally beyond the scope of this report but are referred to briefly in chapter two. However, while more personnel continue to leave each year than to join, the recruiting organisations across the Services are increasingly “running to stand still” to try to fill the widening gaps in the ranks. Whilst the most serious problems remain in the Army, this is also likely to prove an increasing challenge for the Royal Navy and the RAF as their liability will increase by several hundred over the next few years, in order to accommodate new equipment (such as the two new aircraft carriers and the new P-8 Poseidon anti-submarine warfare aircraft). Recruiting thus remains a challenge for all three Services.

8. This continuing process of “hollowing out” in the ranks, while costing the Armed Forces valuable experience, also threatens to compound the problem by increasing the pressure on those personnel who remain. Whilst some elements of the Armed Forces maintain a high tempo of operations, this problem is likely to become increasingly difficult to sustain in the medium to long term.

Recommendation 2 and 3:

- (ii) *Decision makers must acknowledge this process of hollowing out in the ranks of all three Services and the reasons behind it. Whilst seeking to address the issues affecting retention, the Ministry of Defence must also address the other side of the coin by improving its recruitment performance, in order to prevent further thinning out of the ranks in future.*
- (iii) *Whilst the recruiting situation remains so challenging the Department must resist cutting back on recruiting budgets to achieve in-year savings.*

Chapter Three: BAME Representation – A Long-term Challenge

9. The MOD has a target that 10% of recruits should be from a BAME background by 2020. This target is proving particularly challenging to meet. BAME personnel represented 7.7% of the intake into the Regular Armed Forces in the 12 months to 31 March 2017 (the corresponding figure for the Reserves was 6%). As this report was being written, there are currently no BAME officers of two star rank (Major General) or above in the UK Armed Forces.

10. Part of the reason for this difficulty appears to be historical. Each of the Armed Services have undertaken initiatives in the past to seek to improve their number of BAME recruits but these have often been sporadic in nature and not pursued over the long term. For instance, the Royal Air Force established a Black and Asian recruiting team only to disband it in 2011 due, in part, to funding pressures. Moreover, the severe funding pressures on the Department in the aftermath of SDR 2010 meant that these initiatives were not always as highly prioritised as they might have been.

11. Since SDR 2015 there has been a renewed emphasis on the recruitment of BAME personnel and all three Services now have programmes underway to assist in this objective, supported by a number of studies being undertaken at the Centre. The Department has established a Diversity Advisor to provide advice to the three Services in this context.

12. Nevertheless, given the sporadic and sometimes “stop/start” nature of initiatives in the past, which have tended to be counterproductive, it is likely to take time to rebuild confidence in the BAME community that the MOD is really serious about employing more BAME recruits. The Services appreciate this and realise that they face a challenging task as a result.

13. That said, more resources are now being applied to BAME recruitment but it is important that funding is maintained and that the Department is seen to be in this market for the long term.

Recommendations 4 and 5:

- (iv) *Engagement with the BAME community across the single Services and at the MOD needs to be consistent, persistent and to demonstrate long-term commitment if the 2020 target of 10% of recruits from BAME communities has any chance of being achieved.*
- (v) *More work needs to be undertaken to nurture talented BAME personnel, in order to achieve higher representation at star rank, as a clear demonstration of potential career progression in the Armed Forces.*

Chapter Four: Female Representation – An Increasing Success

14. The MOD has a target set by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces that 15% of all recruits to the Armed Forces should be female by 2020. Currently female recruits represent 9.4% of the intake into the Regular Armed Forces in the year to 31 March 2017 (the corresponding figure for Reserves was 15.4%). The RAF has the highest proportion of female recruits in the same period, also at 15.4%.

15. There is a higher penetration of female officers at senior rank than for their BAME equivalents in the Armed Forces. At the time of writing this report the RAF have three female officers of two star rank, there is one female officer of two star rank in the Army and none in the Royal Navy. In addition, Penny Mordaunt MP (Minister for State for the Armed Forces 2015-2016) was the first female MinAF in history.

16. The Ministry of Defence is now also introducing women in ground close combat (WGCC), thus demonstrating that all areas of the Armed Forces (including the Special Forces) will be made available to female candidates. Female applicants will have to pass the requisite physical standards – which will be maintained as the same as for their male counterparts - an important point in maintaining confidence in the process. Suitably qualified female candidates should begin to take places in the RAF Regiment from September 2017 and in the Royal Armoured Corps and the Infantry in 2018. It is recommended that maximum publicity should be afforded to these initial successful candidates in order to encourage women more widely to consider the Armed Forces as a career.

17. In addition, the new Flexible Engagement System (FES) which is being introduced later this decade will increasingly affect the ability to attract and retain a diverse work force. FES will, in principle, allow individuals access to a spectrum of commitment types allowing variations to both working time (full-time/part-time) and deployability, with the current barriers between Regular and Reserves reduced.

18. This flexibility should be particularly helpful in assisting women in enjoying full careers in the Armed Forces over a period of time, despite child care responsibilities. Overall, it is considered that female recruitment is starting to show real success and this is one area where we can afford to be more ambitious. The Royal Air Force are already intending to raise their target to 20% by 2020.

Recommendations 6 and 7:

- (vi) *The Ministry Of Defence should set a new stretch goal of 20% of recruits being female by 2025.*
- (vii) *Maximum publicity should be given to the introduction of women in ground close combat (WGCC) to highlight that all areas of the Armed Forces are now open to female candidates.*

Chapter Five: Lateral Recruitment into the Armed Forces – A Widening Opportunity

19. The Armed Forces have traditionally had “a bottom fed” structure, with recruits entering from an early phase and developing skills as they progress in their careers. This is in contrast to private industry, where manning companies often includes apprentices and graduates beginning their careers but with necessary expertise also being recruited in from the outside.

20. In an era of high employment and shortages in the economy in particular trades, such as engineering, this is now proving to be a particular challenge for the Armed Forces, all of whom now face manning difficulties in what are traditionally referred to as “pinch point trades” (of which nuclear engineering is a prominent example).

21. However, given the pressures that they face the Services have now begun experimenting with greater examples of lateral recruitment (i.e. bringing in specialists directly from outside into the Armed Forces). The Navy have been experimenting to some extent with nuclear engineering, whilst the Army have been considering the use of civilian helicopter pilots and the Air Force civilian pilots for its A340 airbus aircraft.

22. Given the pressures which all the Services are under in competing for manpower, there now seems some appetite for a considerable widening of the approach in principle towards lateral recruitment and being prepared to “buy in skills” from industry in order to fill particular gaps in the ranks. This would represent a challenge in certain pay scales but would also constitute a considerable cultural challenge, particularly for those who have been in the Service for many years and who have “come up the hard way”. Nevertheless, the MOD must appreciate it is now in a 21st century market place and such is the pressure on the Armed Forces that now is the time to consider lateral recruitment far more generally – something which now has some support at Chief of Staff level.

Recommendation 8:

- (viii) *It is recommended that the Services think far more broadly about the concept of lateral recruitment and how this could be used to confront manning challenges in the 21st century.*

Chapter Six: Medical Policy for Recruits – A Need for Review

23. The medical standards for joining the Armed Forces are laid down in Joint Service Publication 950 Medical Policy (JSP 950). This includes broad policy for deferrals/medical appeals, although the detailed mechanism is a matter for each Service. The medical process for recruiting is currently outsourced in all three Services to Capita, which has attracted a degree of adverse comment.

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24. At present, over 90% of individuals who are failed when attempting to join the Army do so on medical grounds. According to a “snapshot analysis” taken from the Army Recruiting Review in February 2017, over a twelve month period 14,269 applicants (both Regular and Reserve) were failed on medical grounds; as opposed to 575 who were failed for prominent tattoos; 262 for residency requirements and 182 for having unacceptable criminal records. Detailed figures were not available for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force but the trend of a high number of medical failures is believed to be generally similar.

25. In addition, the MOD maintains high physical standards for its recruits but once candidates have joined the Services, if they then become injured (perhaps due to some accident in training for instance) then, depending on the injury, they are often medically downgraded but retained in the Service, rather than being discharged. Therefore, in practice, a two tier system operates; one tier for applicants and a second tier for those already in Service. This point also drew considerable comment from respondents.

26. At a time when the Armed Forces are crying out for recruits they have to cope with a medical system which appears bureaucratic, inflexible and which often does not demonstrate sufficient attention to individual circumstances and medical histories. This system as it currently exists, is one of the most important barriers to achieving the recruitment targets which the Services have been set – and is almost entirely self imposed.

27. Whilst some candidates will always be unsuitable to join the Armed Forces on genuine medical grounds, too many applicants are voluntarily abandoning their efforts to join up because they have become disenchanted by the medical process, including lengthy delays as a result of the deferrals/appeals procedure; rather than continue waiting they simply vote with their feet.

28. The scale of the problem must be appreciated. While the over 14,000 medical failures referred to above included both Regular and Reserve candidates, the Army’s shortfall in recruiting of 3,000 Regular recruits in 2016/17 represents slightly over 20% of this number. While medical standards would not necessarily have to be reduced per se, a change in the *interpretation* of these standards, to adopt a more common sense approach, would go a long way to addressing the recruiting shortfall which the Armed Forces – and in particular the Army – currently face.

29. The consistent message which came from visits and interviews was that the medical system for recruits needs to be looked at afresh. In order to take a truly objective view of this a highly qualified expert in occupational health from the private sector could be asked to take a look at MOD’s medical system for recruits and how it should be improved.

Recommendation 9:

- (ix) *It is strongly recommended that a comprehensive review of JSP 950 and the administration of medicals for recruits should be conducted by an external expert drawn from the occupational health industry, in order to check if the system is working as efficiently as it might.*

Chapter Seven: The Recruiting Partnering Project – A Need for Plan B

30. In 2012, the Army outsourced its recruiting function to Capita via the Recruit Partnering Project (RPP). The project has had a chequered history, including a number of information technology challenges. Regular soldier applications, which were circa 70,000 in 2011/12 fell to circa 45,000 in 2012/13 and have remained broadly at that level ever since. In 2016/17 the Army recruited just under 7,000 recruits, some 3,000 short of its actual requirement. This follows on from a shortfall of some 2,500 the year before.

31. The contract is subject to renewal in 2022 but for the last year or so the Army has been closely involved in seeking to renegotiate the terms of the contract with Capita, in order to improve its performance. This renegotiation was being finalised as this report went to print.

32. However, due to the very poor performance of RPP to date, a question must be raised as to what should happen if the desired improvements do not materialise? The MOD has conducted some very preliminary work on an alternative to RPP which might comprise re-letting the contract and/or bringing some elements of it back in house. However, this work has not reached an advanced stage and still leaves the Army vulnerable in manning terms if the desired improvements in the contract cannot be achieved.

Recommendations 10 and 11:

- (x) *It is strongly recommended that the preliminary work on an alternative to the RPP contract should be accelerated in order to provide a viable alternative within twelve months, should the desired improvements in contract performance not be achieved.*
- (xi) *No further work should be done by the MOD, the Royal Navy or RAF for a change to an RPP type solution until the success or otherwise of the renegotiated RPP contract has been established beyond doubt.*

Chapter Eight: The Reserves – Solid Progress

33. In July 2013 the Government published a White Paper entitled “The Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued” which envisaged an ambitious revival and expansion of Britain’s Reserve Forces under the heading of Future Reserves 2020 (FR20). The roll out of this programme was initially complicated by a combination of excessive bureaucracy, delays to medicals for recruits (see chapter 6) and IT problems (see chapter 7).

34. In response, the three Services and in particular the Army, where the greatest problem lay, committed additional resources to reinforce the recruiting effort and now, several years on this has borne fruit. As at May 2017 the trained strength of the Army Reserve is 26,730 as against a target of 26,700; the Maritime Reserves (including the Royal Marine Reserve) stands at 2,590 against a target of 2,320 and for the RAF Reserves (including the Royal Auxiliary Air Force) the figure is 2,140 against a target of 1,860.

35. Reserve recruiting now enjoys support from across British industry, including the BSA, the CBI, the FSB and the IOD and is an important part of the Armed Forces Covenant. In addition considerable success has been achieved by offering “recruitment bonuses” to ex-Regulars who have left the Services but have then re-joined their Reserve counterparts.

36. While there is no room for complacency this has only been achieved with considerable investment, of both money and effort, by the Regular as well as the Reserve Forces. If the targets in FR20 are to be met then it is vitally important that this earmarked funding is continued and not sacrificed to in-year savings, which would run the risk of seriously compromising the momentum which has been achieved to date.

Recommendation 12:

(xii) After a difficult start and considerable effort, good progress has now been made on the Reserves agenda but it is vital that earmarked funding for the Reserves is maintained if the targets in FR20 are to be achieved.

Chapter Nine: Support from other Government Departments – A Collective Endeavour

37. Given the scale of the recruiting challenge, as outlined in this report, it is important that recruiting for the Armed Forces is accepted as a responsibility for the whole of Government and not just the Ministry of Defence.

Recommendation 13:

(xiii) Recruitment for the Armed Forces should be regarded as a responsibility across Government, akin to the pan-Government support for the Armed Forces Covenant, where other Departments accept they have a role to play.

38. Below are some examples of where other Government Departments can assist in the recruitment effort.

9a. Department for Work and Pensions

39. The Ministry of Defence has a number of Armed Forces Careers Offices (AFCOs) around the country but these are vastly outnumbered by the number of Jobcentres operated by the Department for Work and Pensions. In 2012 the MOD and DWP signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to record an arrangement reached between the two departments concerning the recruitment of Regular and Reserve candidates. Inter alia, this included liaison between the Jobcentre directorate and single Service recruiting groups, increasing contacts between AFCOs and Jobcentres and advertising of vacancies for the Armed Forces on the appropriate Jobcentre directorate IT systems.

Recommendation 14:

(xiv) The MOD/DWP MOU has now been in operation for some five years and it should now be renewed and refreshed to see what further benefit could be produced for the recruiting effort.

9b. Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

40. As the sponsoring department for British industry, the department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) also has an opportunity to contribute to the recruiting effort. This could principally be achieved by encouraging more companies to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC). To date over 700 companies have already done so, ranging from small owner managed businesses to major FTSE 100s such as Barclays Bank and Tesco. The AFC

comprises a variety of commitments including offering discounts to serving personnel, veterans and their families; offering job interviews to military spouses and veterans and supporting Reserve Service among employees.

Recommendation 15:

- (xv) *BEIS should encourage UK companies and overseas companies operating in the UK to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant, with particular emphasis on releasing their employees for Reserve Service.*

9c. Cabinet Office

41. The Cabinet Office have a particular role to play given their responsibility for signing off advertising budgets for Government Departments. The recruitment efforts of all three Services are particularly dependent on paid advertisements, with campaigns designed to encourage potential recruits to either come forward to AFCOs or to make contact online. Timely approval of recruitment advertising is very helpful in allowing MOD to plan its advertising spend (and to protect this spending from in-year pressures).

Recommendation 16:

- (xvi) *The Cabinet Office should attempt to give timely clearance to proposed recruitment advertising in order to help provide stability in the recruitment process.*

9d. Department of Health

42. Prompt access to medical records has often been a considerable issue in the recruitment of candidates into the Armed Forces. Young, technologically aware candidates are often reluctant to accept delays while medical records are sought from GPs. Ministers at the Department of Health have, in the past, appreciated this problem and attempted to assist. However, more could probably be done via the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) to heighten the importance of timely completion of medical paperwork as an aid to Defence. The Department of Health with its contacts with the RCGP could certainly assist in this area.

Recommendation 17:

- (xvii) *Department of Health Ministers and officials should assist MOD in promoting to the RCGP the importance of timely completion of medical requests for information from the Armed Forces recruiting organisations.*

9e. Department for Education

43. Given the shrinking size of the Armed Forces since World War Two and the reduced military footprint, unless they have served in a cadet unit, or already come from a military family, young people leaving school have very little, if any, experience or exposure to the Armed Forces. Surveys show for instance that the Army is regarded as considerably less important by 18-24 year olds than by those aged 40 and upwards. One way to address this would be to make the role of the Armed Forces a part of the national curriculum, so that every child leaving school will have at least a basic understanding of our Armed Forces and the role they play defending our nation.

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44. In addition, the cadet forces provide an important opportunity for young people to experience the military ethos and cadet units exist up and down the country including in a number of secondary schools in both the private and public sectors. In many cases these cadet units are the only remaining military footprint in towns across the UK. At present there are approximately 130,000 cadets across the UK (compared to Regular Armed Forces of 138,000).

45. The Government has a programme of seeking to expand the number of cadet units in state schools and over the last few years over 350 new units have been established, some of them in deprived areas and/or areas with a high ethnic mix.

46. There are legal constraints on direct recruitment from the cadet forces but within these constraints it may still be possible to provide further information to cadets about potential careers in the Armed Forces – should they wish to pursue such a route of their own volition.

Recommendations 18, 19 and 20:

- (xviii) Ministers at the Department for Education should introduce a topic on the role of the Armed Forces into the National Curriculum to address school leavers' limited understanding of their role.*
- (xix) The programme to create cadet units in state schools should be continued and expanded to give children from a variety of backgrounds, including under privileged areas and BAME communities a greater opportunity to experience the military ethos and to benefit from it.*
- (xx) Within the legal constraints, greater efforts should be made to explain to cadets the benefit of Service in the Armed Forces and how they can apply – should they wish to do so.*

CHAPTER 1

The Recruiting Environment – A Perfect Storm

Introduction

1. A combination of factors has made recruiting into the Armed Forces increasingly difficult in recent years. This includes economic and demographic factors as well as other changes which, when taken together, have created something of a “perfect storm” for recruiters. A brief explanation of each of the factors is outlined below.
2. **Record employment.** Currently the unemployment rate in the UK is 4.5%,² the lowest since 1975. Employment is at near record levels whilst the drop in unemployment for 18-24 year old males (the main target audience) has been quite dramatic (18-24 year old females shows a similar trend). This makes the recruiting environment for the Armed Forces very challenging.
3. The Armed Forces have traditionally benefitted from periods of high unemployment, with Service in the Forces often seen as a “way out” from deprived communities. The near record level of those in employment has depressed this source of recruits for the forces.
4. In addition, skills shortages in a thriving economy have meant there has been particularly fierce competition for recruits from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) backgrounds, which, in turn, has led to shortages in technical trades in the Armed Forces.
5. **UK demographics.** The UK has an ageing population and one becoming ethnically more diverse. The 18-24 population rose to a peak in 2012 but is now starting to fall and will present a challenge for the future. 1:8 of the population are now non-UK born (1:11 in 2004).³ Further the proportion of BAME citizens, a community that has, hitherto, shown a low propensity to apply for military Service, is forecast to rise.
6. **The draw down from Afghanistan.** Highly publicised involvement in overseas campaigns has traditionally acted as “a recruiting sergeant”, for the Armed Forces, in particular the Army. It is notable that applications for the Army suffered a step change downward between 2011/12 and 2012/13 and the following years, as the campaign in Afghanistan drew to a close. Since that time, applications from the Army are considerably lower. However when the Armed Forces were fully involved in Afghanistan (and Iraq) there was no shortage of applications.
7. **Rounds of Redundancy post SDSR 2010.** The UK Armed Forces have declined considerably in number since the end of World War Two, with a particular step change following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War. More recently, the Forces experienced a further round of redundancies in the aftermath of the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 (SDSR 2010). This led, for instance, to four rounds of redundancy in the Army and two in the Royal Navy, plus reductions in the Royal Air Force as well. The combined effect of this drawdown significantly complicated the recruitment picture, with the Armed Forces still attempting to recruit new (younger) personnel whilst often making more experienced personnel redundant. To some extent this created a perception that the Armed Forces were no longer “open for business”, which is still playing out today.

² Office for National Statistics – Time Series – Unemployment 12 Jul 2017 – www.ons.gov.uk.

³ Office for National Statistics – Statistical bulletin – Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality – 25 Aug 2016.

8. **A shrinking military footprint.** The recent much publicised selling-off of a large number of military bases and estates is the latest manifestation of this challenge. In many towns in the UK, cadet units are now the only remaining military presence. Rationalisation of the military estate in order to run it economically and efficiently is necessary but this presents a challenge to Armed Forces recruiting, especially the Army, which in past decades has used a generally wider geographical footprint than the other two Services.

9. **Fitness/obesity.** Obesity in the UK has risen significantly in the past two decades.⁴ In the last twenty years the percentage of those classified as obese has doubled. The UK has been nicknamed in the popular press as the fat man of Europe⁵ with the highest proportion of obesity of 27% i.e. a Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 30. A further 36% are overweight (BMI of between 25 and 30). With fitness important for the Armed Forces this obesity trend restricts the pool of suitable applicants and may discourage those who are overweight, even if they are actually fit enough.

10. **Post 16 year olds staying on in education.** Under 18 year old recruits (U18), either Junior Entry or U18 who start on the normal Soldier Entry course are a significant source of high quality other ranks manpower especially for the Army. Post 16 year olds staying on in education will present a challenge, especially to U18s entering the Soldier Entry course albeit this has not yet been quantified. U18s entering the Armed Forces has been subject to legal challenge by Child Soldiers International. The High Court rejected their case and commented favourably on the life affirming experience for these recruits.⁶ However, this still remains something of an issue and the prospect of the Armed Forces, especially the Army, being legally barred from taking U18 recruits would have a most significant effect upon manning.

11. **Commonwealth troops residency.** In 2013 the waiver of the 5 year residency requirement for Commonwealth Troops was terminated. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of Commonwealth recruits. In 2016, with Home Office agreement, a limited exception was made for 200 in restricted trades. Currently there have been over 13,000 applications for these places – the window for applying has been closed for the next two years as a consequence. Given the competition for places, the successful applicants are some of our physically fittest recruits but the resultant gap of over 500 recruits has had to be filled elsewhere.

12. Taken together this “perfect storm” has created a very difficult situation against which military recruiters have had to battle. Whilst economic conditions remain good and barring a new overseas military commitment as yet unforeseen, this combination of factors is likely to continue into the medium term and it is against this increasingly difficult background which efforts to fill the ranks in the Armed Forces must be judged.

Recommendation 1:

- (i) *With today’s challenging environment for recruiting into the Armed Forces likely to persist, recruiting must now be identified by the MOD as a strategic priority and pursued and resourced accordingly.*

⁴ House of Commons Briefing Paper 3336 *Obesity Statistics* dated 20 Jan 2017.

⁵ “Britain, the fat man of Europe” The Times 1 Apr 2016 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/britain-the-fat-man-of-europe-7j079wd59>.

⁶ Old Square Chambers briefing on the 2015 case <http://www.oldsquare.co.uk/news-and-media/cases/child-soldiers-international-v-the-secretary-of-state-for-defence-2015-ewhc>.

CHAPTER 2

The Current State of Play – Running to Stand Still

Introduction

1. The UK's Regular Armed Forces are currently below their required establishment (referred to in military circles as "liability"). As at 1 May 2017, UK Regular strength stood at 138,350 personnel, which is 4.8% below establishment. A combination of lower retention than expected and failure to achieve recruiting targets means this under manning is worsening.
2. Regular recruiting is underperforming. For the RAF and Navy the main concern is pinch point trades, and in the Army manpower in general. In terms of bulk, the majority of the shortfall is caused by Army other ranks (OR) with recruiting only achieving 68% of its target in the year to 31 March 2017.

Manning⁷

3. The full time trained strength of the UK's Regular Armed Forces, as against their liability figure since April 2016 is given in the table below:

Year	Full time trained strength		% surplus deficit
	Liability	Manning	
1 Apr 16	146190	139910	-4.1%
1 Jul 16	145950	139810	-4.1%
1 Oct 16	145720	139480	-4.3%*
1 Dec 16	145560	139350	-4.3%**
1 May 17	145270	138,350	-4.8%***

- * By Service the deficits are 2.1% RN/RM, 4.3% Army and 6.2% RAF.
- ** By Service the deficits are 2.4% RN/RM, 4.4% Army and 5.8% RAF.
- *** By Service the deficits are 2.6% RN/RM, 5.4% Army and 5.1% RAF.

4. In the year to 30 April 2017, 12,950 joined the UK Regular Armed Forces but in the same period 14,970 left. This situation regarding under manning is worsening and has been for some time. The reasons for the increase in personnel leaving the Armed Forces are formally beyond the scope of this report but they include; separation away from families because of operational commitments; quality of Service accommodation (particularly for individual servicemen and women) and also to some degree pay.⁸
5. While more personnel continue to leave each year than to join this, in turn, increases the pressure on those personnel who remain, particularly in highly sought after areas such as engineering personnel across all three Services. Against this background, the Service recruitment organisations are increasingly "running to stand still" to try and fill the widening gaps in the ranks.

⁷ Figures in this section are from the MOD UK Armed Forces Monthly Personnel Statistics at 1 May 2017 published 15 Jun 2017.
⁸ UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2017, published 25 May 2017.

Filling the Ranks

6. This problem is compounded to some degree by the MOD's own budget process, which often sees top level budget holders (TLBs) under pressure to achieve in year savings, in the context of which recruitment spending can sometimes be perceived as a soft target. For instance, in FY 2016/2017 the Royal Navy reduced its recruitment budget by some £3 million in year, which is thought to have contributed to its failing to meet its end of year recruitment target.

Recruiting⁹

7. The end of year performance for each of the Services in the year to 31st March 2017 is given in the table below.

2016/17	Regular officers			Regular other ranks (ORs)		
	Target	EOY		Target	Est EOY	
RN	390	354	91%	2383	2088	88%
RM	40	40	100%	896	713	80%
Army	656	573	87%	10203	6921	68%
RAF	590	550	93%	2020	1822	90%
Total	1798	1511		15486	11931	

8. As can be seen the Royal Navy, with its “Made in the Royal Navy” campaign achieved 88% of its recruitment target. Similarly, the Royal Air Force with its “No Ordinary Job” campaign achieved 90% of its recruitment target. However, the Army, which is currently rolling out a new “Belonging” campaign, achieved only 68% of its required target, being over 3,000 recruits short. This follows on from a similar deficit of 2,500 recruits in 2015/16, which means the Army currently faces a really serious recruiting challenge (see chapter 7).

9. However, recruiting is also proving challenging for the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, which is exacerbated by an increase in liability of several hundred personnel for both Services in the next few years. This is in order to man new key equipment coming into Service, such as the two new aircraft carriers and the new P-8 Poseidon anti-submarine warfare aircraft respectively.

Reserves state of play¹⁰

10. After much hard work, the situation in the Reserves is now more encouraging than hitherto and the actual trained strength at May 2017 against the target strength is shown below.

	1 Apr 17 target trained strength	1 May 17 actual trained strength
Maritime Reserve	2320	2590
Army Reserve	26700	26730
RAF Reserves	1860	2140

11. As at May 2017 the total trained and untrained strength of the Tri-Service Future Reserves 2020 was 36,310, an increase of 1,420 personnel or 4.1% since May 2016. Whilst there is no room for complacency, manning and recruiting of Future Reserve 2020 (FR20) has clearly improved. Whilst Army Reserve Officers still presents a challenge, the FR20 original target

⁹ All figures in this section from MOD CDP – Single Service Recruiting Performance Quarterly SITREP – Q4 Jan to Mar 2017.

¹⁰ All figures in this section from the MOD UK Armed Forces Monthly Personnel Statistics at 1 May published 15 Jun 2017.

level of 30,000 trained soldiers remains challenging but is now probably achievable – providing that resources are not diverted elsewhere. This is also because of five years of intense extra effort by Reserve Units themselves, supported by much extra resource, especially in the Army space (see chapter 8).

Shortages of Specialists

12. Whilst the Regular Armed Forces as a whole are 4.8% short in manning terms against their planned liability, the situation is often considerably worse in highly specialised areas. These are often referred to as “pinch point trades”. As basic examples the Royal Navy faces a number of shortages in experienced engineering grades, in particular nuclear engineers connected with the submarine fleet. The Army has a shortage in qualified engineering personnel (especially aeronautical engineering) and also faces real challenges in the provisions of experienced signals personnel (due in part to severe competition from the telecommunication companies). The RAF also faces pressure on its engineering grades and also on its pilots (due to ongoing pressure from the commercial airlines).

13. The continuing “poaching” of highly desirable skilled personnel by commercial companies is something to which the MOD is finding it difficult to respond adequately (see chapter 5).

14. These trends have now been visible in the Department for several years. The continuing process of “hollowing out” of the ranks, whilst costing the Armed Forces valuable experience, also threatens to compound the problem by increasing the pressure on those personnel who remain. Whilst the Armed Forces continue to maintain a current high tempo of operations, the problem is likely to become increasingly difficult to sustain in the medium to long term.

15. Action needs to be taken on those factors which affect retention, although it is appreciated that this is difficult to do in a constrained budgetary environment. Nevertheless, too many are leaving too quickly and the MOD must seek to address this.

Recommendation 2 and 3:

- (ii) *Decisions makers must acknowledge this process of hollowing out in the ranks of all three Services and the reasons behind it. Whilst seeking to address the issues affecting retention the Ministry of Defence must also address the other side of the coin by improving its recruitment performance, in order to prevent further thinning out of the ranks in future.*
- (iii) *Whilst the recruiting situation remains so challenging the Department must resist cutting back on recruiting budgets to achieve in-year savings.*

CHAPTER 3

BAME Representation – A Long-term Challenge

Introduction

1. The MOD has a Prime Ministerial target that 10% of all recruits to the Armed Forces should be from a Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) background by 2020. This is a challenging target. As at 31 March 2017, BAME personnel represent approximately 7.2% of the Regular Armed Forces with a breakdown by Service shown in the table below.

State of play

2. **The Armed Forces.** BAME personnel are represented as follows:^{11 12 13}

Regular Armed Forces Recruits	1 Oct 2015 = 7.0%	31 Mar 2016 = 7.0%	31 Mar 2017 = 7.2%
RN/RM	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%
Army	10.2%	10.2%	10.6%
RAF	2.1%	2.2%	2.2%
FR20 Recruits	1 Oct 2015 = 5.1%	31 Mar 2016 = 5.3%	31 Mar 2017 = 5.4%
Maritime Reserves	2.9%	3.0%	2.9%
Army Reserve	5.4%	5.6%	5.8%
RAF Reserve	3.9%	3.9%	4.5%

3. **Recruit intake.** For Regular recruits, in the 12 months to 31 March 2017 BAME personnel represented 7.7% of the recruit intake (or 6.0% in the Reserves). The position, including for Reserves is laid out in the table below.

Regular Armed Forces Recruits	12 mths to 1 Oct 15 = 5.4%	12 mths to 31 Mar 16 = 5.2%	12 mths to 31 Mar 17 = 7.7%
FR20 Recruits	12 mths to 1 Oct 15 = 6.1%	12 mths to 31 Mar 16 = 6.4%	12 mths to 31 Mar 17 = 6.0%

4. BAME personnel account for a significantly lower percentage of officers (2.4%) than Other Ranks (8.3%) in the Regular Armed Forces. In Reserves the proportions are closer, 3.7% of officers and 5.8% of Other Ranks.

5. Significantly, as this report was being finalised, there are currently no BAME officers of two star rank or above in the UK Armed Forces. This is a serious omission as potential BAME recruits will want to see evidence of career progression to encourage them to join. In addition, the issue is thought to be particularly relevant to some of the gatekeepers in certain ethnic groups who are keen for their offspring to develop professional careers and want to see clear evidence of advancement.

¹¹ UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics 31 Mar 2015 16 ONS published 25 Nov 2015.

¹² UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics 31 Mar 2016 16 ONS published 26 May 2016.

¹³ UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics 31 Mar 2017 published 29 Jun 2017.

6. In fairness, recruiting BAME personnel is not only a challenge for the Armed Forces. By way of comparison, BAE systems have been running a BAME recruitment programme of their own for some four years but after considerable effort, only approximately 3.5% of their new apprentices now come from a BAME background (although the figure for graduates is higher at around 8%)¹⁴.

7. Part of the reasons for MOD's difficulty in this area appear to be historical. Each of the Armed Services have undertaken initiatives in the past to seek to improve their number of BAME recruits but these have been uncoordinated, often sporadic in nature and have not been consistently pursued over the long term. For instance, the Royal Air Force established a Black and Asian Recruiting Team, only to disband it in 2011 due in part to funding pressures.

8. The severe funding pressures in the Department in the aftermath of SDR 2010 meant that BAME initiatives, some of which were still nascent, were not always as highly prioritised as they might have been and indeed a number were cancelled. This very patchy picture has not only failed to deliver sufficient recruits but has also tended to provoke confusion among target BAME audiences, who were not always sure whether MOD had a serious commitment to them or not.

What is being done?

9. Following the setting of BAME targets in 2015 there has been a change of emphasis and central funding has been made available to the three Services from the MOD. This money has been allocated over multiple years with most of the effort devolved to each of the three Services, with funding reviewed annually.

10. All 3 Services use mentors of successful BAME personnel to encourage more recruits. There is currently no shortage of activity but there is a need for consistent, persistent effort across the Services for the long term. Funding and personnel/teams established for this purpose need to be protected, not sacrificed as an early expedient to budgetary pressures.

11. In BAME communities that are relatively unfamiliar with the Armed Forces a sustained and measured approach, to gradually build up familiarity is needed, especially with gatekeepers. Precipitous recruiting drives to attempt 'quick wins' are potentially counterproductive, as they risk a loss of credibility. Equally, erratic engagement, as evidenced in the past, is likely to lead to a lack of success.

12. All this said, since SDR 2015, there has been a renewed emphasis on the recruitment of BAME personnel and all three Services now have programmes underway to assist in this objective, supported by a number of studies being undertaken at the Centre. The Department has established a diversity advisor to provide advice to the three Services in this context.

13. Work also needs to be undertaken to identify and nurture BAME talent at an early stage with a view to producing suitable candidates for promotion. The work that the Services have undertaken in promoting female talent (see chapter 4) needs to be reproduced to some extent in regards to BAME personnel and the lack of BAME personnel at the two star level needs to be remedied as soon as practically possible.

¹⁴ Based on an interview with BAE Systems Executives in Oct 2016.

Filling the Ranks

14. All three Services realise that they face a particularly challenging task in this area but considerable effort is now underway to address the problem. The key here is credible long term effort with a clear commitment from the MOD and the Armed Forces to the BAME communities they seek to encourage to join.

Recommendations 4 and 5:

- (iv) *Engagement with the BAME community across the single Services and at the MOD needs to be consistent, persistent and to demonstrate long-term commitment if the 2020 target of 10% of recruits from BAME communities has any chance of being achieved.*
- (v) *More work needs to be undertaken to nurture talented BAME personnel, in order to achieve higher representation at star rank, as a clear demonstration of potential career progression in the Armed Forces.*

CHAPTER 4

Female Representation – An Increasing Success

Introduction

1. The MOD has a target set by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces of 15% of all recruits to be female by 2020. In the year to 31 March 2017, female personnel represented 10.2% of the Regular Armed Forces whilst the proportion for the Reserves was somewhat higher at 14.0%, as shown in the table below.

State of play

2. **The Armed Forces.** Female personnel are represented as follows:^{15 16 17}

Regular Armed Forces Recruits	1 Oct 2015 = 10.1%	31 Mar 2016 = 10.2%	31 Mar 2017 = 10.2%
RN/RM	9.1%	9.3%	9.3%
Army	8.7%	9.0%	9.1%
RAF	13.8%	14.0%	14.0%
FR20 Recruits	1 Oct 2015 = 13.6%	31 Mar 2016 = 13.8%	31 Mar 2017 = 14.0%
Maritime Reserves	15.7%	14.9%	15.0%
Army Reserve	12.9%	12.9%	13.2%
RAF Reserve	19.1%	19.6%	20.6%

3. With regards to the percentage among Regular recruits in the 12 months to 31 March 2017 females represented 9.4% of recruits (with the highest proportion of 15.4% in the RAF). Among the Reserves the proportion of female recruits was 14.6% (with the RAF again being the highest at 23.9%).

4. **Recruit intake.** Female proportion of recruit intake

Regular Armed Forces Recruits	12 mths to 30 Sep 15 = 9.8%	12 mths to 31 Mar 16 = 9.7%	12 mths to 31 Mar 17 = 9.4%
RN/RM	10.4%	9.1%	9.0%
Army	8.4%	8.5%	8.0%
RAF	14.6%	15.6%	15.4%
FR20 Recruits		12 mths to 30 Sep 16 = 14.6%	12 mths 31 Mar 17 = 15.4%
Maritime Reserve		17.0%	19.4%
Army Reserve		12.3%	13.6%
RAF Reserve		21.6%	23.9%

¹⁵ UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics 31 Mar 2017 16 ONS published 29 Jun 2017.

¹⁶ UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics 31 Mar 2016 16 ONS published 26 May 2016.

¹⁷ UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics 1 Oct 2015 16 ONS published 25 Nov 2015.

What is being done?

5. There is a higher representation of female officers at senior rank than for their BAME equivalents in the Armed Forces. At the time of writing this report, the RAF (who for some time have had a programme devoted to nurturing female talent) have three female officers of two star rank and there is also one female officer of two star rank in the Army but none in the Royal Navy.

6. The Ministry of Defence has been able to make much of this in media terms in order to show the career progression that is possible for female officers but it would clearly be desirable to see female candidates reaching three star rank or above in the relatively near future. In addition, and as a ministerial example, Penny Mordaunt MP (Minister of State for the Armed Forces 2015-2016) was the first female MinAF in history.

Women in Ground Close Combat (WGCC)

7. The Ministry of Defence is now also introducing women in ground close combat (WGCC), meaning that women in future will be allowed to serve in the Royal Marines, the Infantry and the RAF Regiment. Places will be made available to female candidates who can pass the requisite physical standards – which will be maintained as the same for their male counterparts – an important point in maintaining confidence in the process.

8. In addition, women will be allowed to apply for posts in the Special Forces, again entirely on merit, thus clearly demonstrating there are no longer any areas of the Armed Forces which are off limits to female personnel.

9. Suitably qualified female candidates should begin to take places in the RAF Regiment from September 2017 and in the Royal Armoured Corps and the Infantry in 2018. Whilst it would take some time for the absolute numbers of WGCC to build, the opportunity should be used at an early stage, with exemplars, to demonstrate unequivocally there are no longer any restrictions of opportunity for women serving in the Armed Forces.

10. In addition, the MOD plans to introduce the new Flexible Engagement System (FES) later this decade which will positively affect the ability to attract and retain a diverse work force. FES is designed to allow individuals to decide on their level of commitment, including opportunities for work both in full time or part time, with the current barriers between Regular and Reserves being reduced. This flexibility should be particularly helpful in assisting women in enjoying full careers in the Armed Forces over a period of time.

11. Overall, female recruitment (including representation at senior level) is starting to show real success and this is one area where the Ministry of Defence can afford to be more ambitious. The 15% recruit target by 2020 seems likely to be met and the Royal Air Force are already intending to raise their target to 20% by 2020. Defence as a whole should seek to do likewise.

Recommendations 6 and 7:

- (vi) *The Ministry Of Defence should set a new stretch goal of 20% of recruits being female by 2025.*
- (vii) *Maximum publicity should be given to the introduction of women in ground close combat (WGCC) to highlight that all areas of the Armed Forces are now open to female candidates.*

CHAPTER 5

Lateral recruitment into the Armed Forces – A Widening Opportunity

Introduction

1. The British Armed Forces have traditionally had a “bottom fed structure”, with recruits entering from an early stage and developing skills as they progress in their careers. This is in contrast to industry where companies may seek to recruit apprentices and graduates into their work force but who are able to buy in specialist skills from outside as well. As one senior BAE Systems Executive put it in an interview:

“We are different from you. Like you, we try to bring talent in at an early stage and grow it organically but when we have shortages or particular niche skills that we lack we are prepared to buy this in from outside, in other words we go to the market when we need to”¹⁸.

State of play

2. There is certainly a problem with the Armed Forces training individuals to a high level in what remain very marketable skills but after the minimum return of Service (or at some later date), those personnel subsequently leaving for the civilian sector. The Armed Forces face a constant battle of having personnel “poached” from industry and now have a system of retention bonuses and payments in an attempt to alleviate the problem but they cannot directly repay in kind. In an era of high employment and shortages in certain highly skilled trades this is now proving to be a particular challenge for the Armed Forces, all of whom face manning difficulties in “pinch point trades”.

3. The Armed Forces already retain a number of Professionally Qualified Officers (PQOs) in fields such as Doctors, Lawyers and Padres, which allows people from those professions to serve in a military context. These people are given military training but are retained primarily for their specialised skills rather than their martial ability.

4. In addition, the Armed Forces have sought to use Reserves in order to bring in further specialists within its ranks. Recruitment of cyber specialists is an obvious example but as another for the new Poseidon P8 fleet the RAF are actively targeting former pilots who are living in Scotland, where these aircraft are to be based. Quite some publicity has already been given to the recruitment of cyber specialists into the Reserves to complement the skills already present among their Regular counterparts.

Lateral recruitment

5. Under pressures to fill key gaps, the Armed Forces have begun to experiment with a limited amount of lateral recruitment (i.e. bringing in specialists in directly from outside into the Armed Forces, to fulfil a particular role). The Navy have been experimenting to some extent with nuclear engineers while the Army have been considering the use of civilian helicopter pilots and the Air Force civilian pilots for their A340 Airbus aircraft.

¹⁸ Transcribed from an interview with a senior BAE Systems Executive Oct 2016.

Filling the Ranks

6. However, there now seems some appetite within the Services for a widening of the approach in principle towards lateral recruitment and to being prepared to buy in skills from industry in order to fill in particular gaps and niches.

7. This would represent a challenge in certain pay scales but would also constitute a considerable cultural challenge, particularly for those who have been in the Service for many years and have “come up the hard way”. Nevertheless, MOD must realise it is in the 21st century market place and should be more willing to consider greater use of lateral recruitment, particularly in specialist roles.

8. This concept of greater lateral recruitment already appears to have garnered some support at Chief of Staff level.

Recommendation 8:

- (viii) *It is recommended that the Services think far more broadly about the concept of lateral recruitment and how this could be used to confront manning challenges in the 21st century.*

CHAPTER 6

Medical Policy for Recruits – A Need for Review

Introduction

1. The medical standards for joining the Armed Forces are laid down in the Joint Service Publication (JSP) 950 Medical Policy. This includes broad policy for deferrals/appeals, although the detailed mechanism for doing so is a matter for each Service.
2. At present, over 90% of individuals who are failed when attempting to join the Armed Forces do so on medical grounds.¹⁹ According to a “snapshot analysis” taken from the Army Recruiting Review in February 2017 over a twelve month period 14,269 applicants (both Regular and Reserve) were failed on medical grounds; as opposed to 575 who were failed for prominent tattoos; 262 for residency requirements and 182 for having unacceptable criminal records. Detailed figures were not available for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force but the trend of a high number of medical failures is believed to be generally similar.
3. Of the medical failures outlined above 4,297 were for psychiatric reasons, 3,505 were for muscular skeletal issues, 1,358 were for respiratory complaints, with the remainder being for a variety of other medical issues. This number of over 14,000 medical failures is thrown into stark relief when compared to the Regular Army shortfall of recruits of just over 3,000 in 2016/17.

Background

4. The medical process for examining recruits is outsourced in all three Services to Capita, which has led to some problems in the past. For instance, the Defence Operational Capability (DOC) Audit²⁰ of March 2016 stated that for the Royal Navy and for the RAF

“It is recommended that the existing policy for, and approach to, medical testing is reviewed to ensure that it is as efficient as possible”.

5. Since that time the Royal Navy has renegotiated its medical testing policy with Capita but it is still believed that there is further room for improvement in this area. As well as the work by DOC in this field the FR20 External Scrutiny Team (EST), which concentrates on the Reserves, has also made consistent unfavourable comment on the medical process in its reports. For example, the 2014 EST report stated:²¹

“Throughout this reporting year the consistent message we received on every unit visit (of all three Services) has been the continuing very poor performance of the medical screening process”

6. In 2015, the EST report found as follows:²²

“Without exception we are told by every recruit we talk to that the time taken to pass the medical screening is the greatest disincentive to join.”

¹⁹ Snapshot analysis taken from the Army Recruiting Review, Feb 2017.

²⁰ Defence Operational Capability Audit 15/02 Defence Recruiting dated 23 Mar 2016 Chapter 4 RN and RAF recruiting.

²¹ Future Reserves 2020 External Scrutiny Team 2014 Report.

²² Future Reserves 2020 External Scrutiny Team 2015 Report.

7. In 2016, the deferrals (appeals) process was also commented upon in a formal report recommendation:²³

“16.3 The high incidence of medical deferrals and time to resolution remain under close scrutiny in order to reduce both”.

8. This experience was borne out yet again by the author during a visit to 600 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Airforce in January 2017, when the longevity and complexity of the medical process was by far the single biggest issue raised during a group discussion with members of the Squadron.

9. Indeed, among interviewees in this report generally, there was much comment/feedback on the whole medical process and the long time taken to deal with deferrals and/or appeals. Many respondents felt that the system was overly complex and/or highly bureaucratic and needed to be streamlined in some way.

10. In addition, there was frustration that relatively minor ailments such as asthma or eczema have been able to prevent very willing candidates from pursuing military careers and there were suggestions for a more enlightened approach in this and similar areas.

11. A paragraph from the 2017 Tri Service External Scrutiny Report (recently published in July 2017) bears repeating at length, as it acts as a very good summary of the problems inherent in the current system. Although this relates to the Reserves, the problems are very similar for the Regulars as well.²⁴

*“It is commonplace on every unit to hear that default referrals have been based on instances such as nonrecurring childhood ailments (brief use of an inhaler or a very minor fracture); precautionary prescriptions that were then never used; or emotional stability because of stress/counselling in the wake of, say, a family bereavement. Medical deferrals also receive a bad press from recruits, especially in the case of manifestly athletic candidates (in at least one case playing at national level) to whom a rigid Body Mass Index has been applied. As we say earlier, we acknowledge the grounds for a specific medical standard but it does seem clear to us that in too many instances it is being applied without adequate background knowledge or common sense. We are also told that the medical opinion being applied differs widely between locations. One unit which initially experienced a near 100% referral rate, went to the lengths of making their local Capita assessing GP an honorary unit member to address the problem – which it did. As medical assessments are now conducted under civilian contracts it is reasonable to assume that the assessing GPs and their staff have little Service background. If they are to deliver this Service effectively, they need better instruction/direction and we sense there needs to be better quality control across the regions. **The single Services should review their recruiting medical contracts to ensure assessments are carried out with a greater degree of consistency and common sense.**” (Emphasis as in the report).*

²³ Future Reserves 2020 External Scrutiny Team 2016 Report.

²⁴ Future Reserves 2020 External Scrutiny Team 2017 Report.

The Two Tier System

12. Moreover, the MOD maintains high physical standards for its recruits, as per JSP 950, but once candidates have joined the Service, if they become injured (either on operations or in training) then, depending on the exact extent of the injury, they are often medically downgraded but retained in Service – rather than being discharged. Therefore, in practice, a two-tier system operates; one with a very high bar for initial applicants and a second tier for those actually in Service. This point also drew considerable comment from respondents.

13. There is also a wider question as to whether in the 21st Century, high standards of physical fitness are required for all trades within the Armed Forces. To take a relatively simple example, is it necessary that cyber warriors are as physically fit as recruits for the Infantry? This is a sensitive issue but it is probably one which bears further examination, as ever more sophisticated equipment is introduced into the MOD's inventory in the years ahead.

The Urgent Need for Review

14. At a time when the Armed Forces are crying out for recruits they have to cope with a medical system which appears bureaucratic, inflexible and which often does not demonstrate sufficient attention to individual circumstances and medical histories. This system as it currently exists, is one of the most important barriers to achieving the recruitment targets which the Services have been set – and is almost entirely self imposed.

15. Whilst some candidates will always be unsuitable to join the Armed Forces on genuine medical grounds, too many applicants are voluntarily abandoning their efforts to join up because they have become disenchanted by the medical process, including lengthy delays as a result of the deferrals/appeals procedure; rather than continue waiting they simply vote with their feet.

16. The scale of the problem must be appreciated. While the over 14,000 medical failures referred to above included both Regular and Reserve candidates, the Army's shortfall in recruiting of 3,000 Regular recruits in 2016/17 represents slightly over 20% of this number. While medical standards would not necessarily have to be reduced per se, a change in the *interpretation* of these standards, to adopt a more common sense approach, would go a long way to addressing the recruiting shortfall which the Armed Forces – and in particular the Army – currently face.

17. Overall, the consistent message which came from visits and interviews was that the recruit medical system, needs to be looked at completely afresh. In order to take a truly objective view of this, perhaps the best way would be to employ a highly qualified expert in occupational health from the private sector, to come in and take a look at the MOD's medical system as it affects recruiting and whether there are ways in which it can be improved.

Recommendation 9:

- (ix) *It is strongly recommended that a comprehensive review of JSP 950 and the administration of medicals for recruits should be conducted by an external expert drawn from the occupational health industry, in order to check if the system is working as efficiently as it might.*

CHAPTER 7

The Recruiting Partnering Project – A Need for Plan B

Introduction

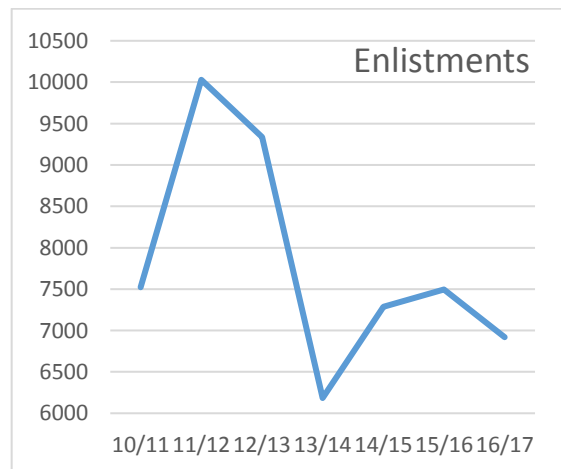
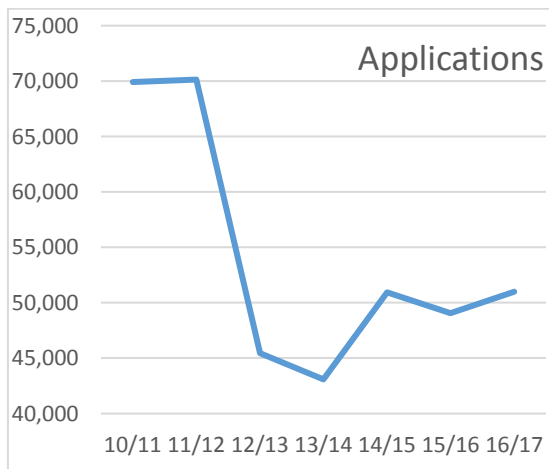
1. In 2012, the Army outsourced its recruiting function to Capita via the Recruit Partnering Project (RPP). The project has had a difficult history, including a number of complex information technology challenges, but with the programme now having run for some five years it is evident that RPP has been underperforming significantly below initial projections.

2. In 2016, the Army hired McKinsey, supported by the Army Recruit Training Division (ARTD) to conduct an Army Recruiting Review of the performance of the RPP. The executive summary states the following of historical and current performance²⁵.

- Regular soldier applications, which were c70,000 in 11/12, fell to c45,000 12/13 and has remained broadly at around that level ever since.
- Regular soldier enlistments fell from c10,000 in 12/13 to 6,500 – 7,500 from 13/14 onwards.

3. By year:²⁶

Year	Regular Army Applications	Regular Army Enlistments
2010/11	69912	7524
2011/12	70135	10029
2012/13	45438	9335
2013/14	43082	6184
2014/15	50939	7285
2015/16	49049	7494
2016/17	51000	6921



²⁵ Army Recruiting Review – an executive summary by GOC Army Recruit Training Division, Feb 2017.

²⁶ Annex A to GOC/ARTD/RPP The Future of RPP dated 11 Oct 2016.

4. The withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan in 2013/2014 may have had some subsequent effect on Army recruiting levels (see chapter 2). Nevertheless, this is unlikely to have accounted for all the diminution in performance. In simple terms, the Army currently needs to recruit around 10,000 new recruits a year and RPP is only producing around 7,000. The risk is that this shortfall is then carried through, year on year, to magnify the extent of the problem.

Renegotiation of the RPP Contract

5. The RPP contract is subject to renewal in 2022 but for the last year or so the Army have been closely involved in seeking to renegotiate the terms of the contract with Capita, in order to improve its performance. This renegotiation was being finalised as this report went to print. However, a shortfall of some 3,000 recruits per annum is unsustainable if the Army is to maintain its current liability of 82,500 Regulars. Due to the very poor performance of RPP to date, a question must be raised as to what should happen if the desired improvements in the renegotiated contract do not materialise?

6. In addition, further contingency work may be necessary as the strained financial situation that Capita now find itself in has been well publicised in the press²⁷. For example, the Chief Executive has announced that he is stepping down early due to poor financial performance by the company. Further shocks to Capita in the current uncertain and challenging market environment could upset planned outcomes for RPP as well.

RN/RAF inclusion in an RPP-style Tri-Service contract

7. Given the last five years of RPP performance, the condition that a Tri-Service recruiting solution should be explored as soon as possible,²⁸ should now be postponed indefinitely. Such an option should only be opened again for examination once evidence-based advantage is obvious. At the very least this should only be as part of the work on the 2022 successor of RPP. Currently there is nothing to suggest that RPP is the right approach for either Service.²⁹

Plan B

8. MOD has conducted some very preliminary work on an alternative to RPP which might comprise re-letting the contract to another supplier and/or bringing some elements back in house (although it would not be practical to bring the whole contract back in house in anything other than the medium term). However, this work has not reached an advanced stage and still leaves the Army vulnerable in manning terms if the desired improvements in the contract cannot be achieved.

9. In summary, if one was seeking to get to Dublin, one would not start from here. Nevertheless the Army has put the tremendous effort into seeking to renegotiate the RPP contract but, given the history of the whole project and compounded by Capita's financial difficulty, it would be wrong to blindly assume that the renegotiated contract will now work as required.

²⁷ Financial Times 2 Mar 2017 <https://www.ft.com/content/45b27fe2-ff22-11e6-8d8e-a5e3738f9ae4?mhq5j=e1>.

²⁸ From the Treasury Approval to Place Contract Letter²⁸ dated 2 Mar 2012.

²⁹ Also the explicit view of the Royal Navy in response to the DOC Audit.

10. Therefore, it would seem prudent to accelerate the nascent work which has now begun on an alternative to RPP and ideally to complete this work as quickly as possible and within 12 months at the latest.

Recommendations 10 and 11:

- (x) *It is strongly recommended that the preliminary work on an alternative to the RPP contract should be accelerated in order to provide a viable alternative within twelve months, should the desired improvements in contract performance not be achieved.*

- (xi) *No further work should be done by the MOD, the Royal Navy or RAF for a change to an RPP type solution until the success or otherwise of the renegotiated RPP contract has been established beyond doubt.*

CHAPTER 8

The Reserves – Solid Progress

Introduction

1. In July 2013 the Government published a White Paper entitled “The Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued” which envisaged an ambitious revival and expansion of Britain’s Reserve Forces, under the heading of Future Reserves 2020 (FR20). The roll out of this programme was initially complicated by a combination of excessive bureaucracy, delays to medicals for recruits (see chapter 6) and IT problems (see chapter 7).
2. In response, the three Services and in particular the Army, where the greatest problem lay, committed additional resources to reinforce the recruiting effort. This included a number of measures under the heading Op FORTIFY, (which encompassed devoting more Army personnel to assist Capita with the recruiting task and the payment of re-joining bonuses of up to £10,000 to ex Regulars who re-joined the Reserve forces after leaving Regular Service).
3. Now, several years on, this intense activity has borne fruit. The trained strength of the Reserves, at May 2017, as against their future targets for April 2018 are given in the table below.³⁰

Service	1 May 17 actual trained strength	1 April 18 target trained strength
Maritime Reserve	2590	2790
Army Reserve	26730	28600
RAF Reserve	2140	1860

Reserve manning

4. As can be seen, the Maritime Reserves are currently well set to meet their 2018 target, while the RAF Reserves have already exceeded it. The Army Reserve figure of 26,730 trained soldiers is flattered by a change in the definition of “trained strength”, as agreed with the Office for National Statistics in 2016 which now includes those soldiers who have been trained to Phase 1 (basic military training) as opposed to Phase 2 (specialist trade training). This change in definition now also applies to the Regular Army as well, whereas for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, their trained strength still only includes those personnel trained to Phase 2.
5. Nevertheless, even given the change in definition when judged against the situation back in 2013 (and indeed the parlous state of the Territorial Army in 2010) the achievement of nearly 27,000 trained soldiers is still very creditable. Achieving the original FR20 target of 30,000 trained soldiers is still a considerable challenge but will only be achieved, given sufficient resource.
6. The Army must take action to stem the outflow rate of the Army Reserve (which was 13% over the 12 months to April 2017). This is partly a challenge for good leadership at unit and sub-unit level but can also be assisted by exciting and demanding training, sometimes twinned with Regular Army counterparts, as envisaged under the original FR20 concept.

³⁰ Figures in this section from the MOD UK Armed Forces Monthly Personnel Statistics at 1 May 2017 published 15 Jun 2017.

Employer Support

7. Reserve recruiting now enjoys support from across British industry, including the Business Service Association (BSA), the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the Institute of Directors (IOD) and is an important part of the Armed Forces Covenant. However, there are still many companies who have not signed the Covenant and more could be done across Government to encourage them to do so (see chapter 9).

Reserve Resources

8. The original White Paper envisaged the sum of some £1.8bn to be committed to the Future Reserves Programme in order to make it a reality. As can be seen above, several years of good progress have now been made. However, the problems with the RPP contract (as outlined in chapter 7) have often affected Army Reserve recruiting as well and much time and effort has been expended to compensate for that. For example the External Scrutiny Team 2016 made the following comment in its report:³¹

“Unless the Partnership (RPP) can deliver as a matter of routine and without frequent unit interventions there is a strong probability that numbers would soon fall away. For this reason we also recommend that all the Services examine which temporary FR20 expedients, such as Army Op FORTIFY measures, should be retained in core to support the Reserve once FR20 has run its course.”

9. Whilst there is no room for complacency, the success to date has only been achieved with considerable investment, of both money and effort, by the Regular as well as the Reserve Forces, in particular, for the latter, at unit and sub-unit level.

10. If the targets in FR20 are to be met then it is vitally important that the earmarked funding for the Reserves is continued and not sacrificed to in-year savings, which would run the risk of seriously compromising the momentum which has been achieved to date.

Recommendation 12:

(xii) After a difficult start and considerable effort, good progress has now been made on the Reserves agenda but it is vital that earmarked funding for the Reserves is maintained if the targets in FR20 are to be achieved.

³¹ External Scrutiny Team report 2016.

Chapter 9

Support from other Government Departments – A Collective Endeavour

Introduction

1. Given the scale of the recruiting challenge, as outlined in this report, it is important that recruiting for the Armed Forces is accepted as a responsibility for the whole of Government and not just the Ministry of Defence. Conceptually this could be considered akin to the pan-Government support for the Armed Forces Covenant, where other departments accept they have a role to play.

2. To some degree this has begun already, with Government departments having accepted a Challenge that 1% of their eligible Civil Servants (i.e. those under 50 and from a British or Commonwealth background) should become Reservists. There has now been some progress on this campaign. In the twelve months to January 2017 the number of Civil Servants who are Reservists reached 1,455, an increase of 11.5%, which now represents 0.7% of the eligible Civil Service workforce across all departments. Incidentally, the MOD is a major contributor to the Challenge, with 934 serving Reservists, which is approximately 3% of the MOD eligible workforce.³²

3. In addition, this chapter includes a number of Government departments who have the ability to assist the Ministry of Defence in recruiting via other means and makes recommendations on how they can best contribute to this process.

Recommendation 13:

(xiii) *Recruitment for the Armed Forces should be regarded as a responsibility across Government, akin to the pan-Government support for the Armed Forces Covenant, where other Departments accept they have a role to play.*

9a. Department for Work and Pensions:

4. The Ministry of Defence has a number of Armed Forces Careers Offices (AFCOs) around the country but these are dwarfed by the number of Jobcentres operated by the Department for Work and Pensions. In 2012 the MOD and the DWP signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to record an arrangement reached between the two departments concerning the recruitment of potential Regular and Reserve candidates to the Armed Forces. The purpose of the MOU was to articulate the roles, relationship and responsibilities of the Ministry of Defence recruiting organisations (Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, Army) and Jobcentre Directorate within the Department for Work and Pensions. This MOU entailed a number of responsibilities on both sides. For instance, amongst other things the MOD undertook to provide appropriate liaison between the Jobcentre Directorate and Single Service recruiting groups; provide details on recruitment marketing campaigns; provide a local communications contact at each AFCO for the DWP to liaise with and to ensure that AFCO recruiting staff maintain regular contact with their local Jobcentre Directorate offices by undertaking onsite quarterly visits.

³² Figures of Civil Service Reservists from the Office of the Chief of Defence People, as at Jul 2017.

5. For their part the DWP Jobcentre Directorate undertook to provide a national Jobcentre Directorate point of contact to advise the MOD recruiting policy cell; provide a Jobcentre Directorate point of contact to the relevant AFCO from each Jobcentre Directorate geographical region; advertise vacancies for the Armed Forces on the appropriate Jobcentre Directorate IT systems; refer suitable candidates who meet the employment requirement to the Armed Forces customer responses agencies and to invite AFCO staff to local Jobcentres to build a working relationship between the Jobcentre Directorate and the Ministry of Defence. This should also enable AFCO staff to talk to unemployed clients and make them aware of opportunities within the Armed Forces.

Recommendation 14:

(xiv) The MOD/DWP MOU has now been in operation for some five years and it should now be renewed and refreshed to see what further benefit could be produced for the recruiting effort.

9b. Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

6. As the sponsoring department for British Industry, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) also has an opportunity to contribute to the recruiting effort. This could principally be achieved by encouraging more companies to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC). Much work has been done across Government in the last few years to promote the Armed Forces Covenant. For example, all the major local authorities throughout Britain have signed up to the “Community Covenant”, a bespoke version of the Covenant designed for local authorities which encourages them to support the wider Armed Forces family, for instance by providing some priority in the allocation of public sector housing to veterans and their families.

7. In addition, businesses were encouraged to sign up to the “Corporate Covenant”, which encouraged them to undertake a number of actions in support of the wider Armed Forces family. This could range from supporting Armed Forces Day in their workplaces through to offering discounts on goods and services to Service personnel, veterans and their families but also to support Service in the Reserve Forces, for instance by providing up to two week unpaid (or ideally paid) leave to employees who decide to sign up to the Reserves.

8. To date, well over 800 companies have signed up to the Corporate Covenant, varying from small owner managed engineering businesses to the likes of Tesco and Barclays Bank but still there are many other British companies who have not signed up and from whom a commitment would be very welcome.

9. More recently, both the Community Covenant and the Corporate Covenant have been combined under the general heading of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and it is this which MOD now promotes. However, BEIS could play a valuable role in seeking to persuade those companies who have not signed the Armed Forces Covenant to do so, particularly the remit for encouraging recruitment into the Reserves.

Recommendation 15

(xv) BEIS should encourage UK companies and overseas companies operating in the UK to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant, with particular emphasis on releasing their employees for Reserve Service.

9c. Cabinet Office

10. The Cabinet Office have a particular role to play given their responsibilities for signing off of advertising budgets of Government Departments. Recruitment efforts for all three Services are particularly dependent on paid advertisement with campaigns designed to encourage potential recruits to come forward either to AFCOs or to make contact online.

11. Internal battles have often been fought within the Ministry of Defence to try and safe guard these recruitment budgets from wider budgetary pressures, as experience shows that cutting the recruitment advertising spend often has a direct relationship with the number of recruits subsequently enlisted. The Cabinet Office could assist by seeking to give early approval to these submissions, thus helping to provide stability in the recruiting process overall.

Recommendation 16

(xvi) The Cabinet Office should attempt to give timely clearance to proposed recruitment advertising in order to help provide stability in the recruitment process.

9d. Department of Health

12. Prompt access to medical records has often been a considerable issue in the recruitment of candidates into the Armed Forces. In the “age of the app” young, technologically aware candidates are often not prepared to accept delays while medical records are sought from GPs. Ministers at the Department of Health have, in the past, appreciated this problem and have attempted to assist. This has led to some success, for instance with the Army being allowed prompt access to the personal health care records of candidates thus helping to shorten the “time of flight” of the recruitment process.

13. There still remains an issue about the time in which it takes General Practitioners to process requests for medical information and, while Ministers have now probably done nearly all they can, it is recommended that work should be undertaken with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) to try and heighten the importance of timely completion of such paperwork as an aid to Defence. The Department of Health with its contacts with the RCGP could certainly assist in this area.

Recommendation 17

(xvii) Department of Health Ministers and officials should assist MOD in promoting to the RCGP the importance of timely completion of medical requests for information from the Armed Forces recruiting organisations.

9e. Department for Education

14. Given the shrinking size of the UK’s Armed Forces since World War II and also the shrinking footprint of military installations around the country (see chapter 2) unless they have served in a cadet unit, or already come from a military family, most people leaving school have very little, if any, experience of or exposure to the Armed Forces.

15. Decision makers probably overestimate the degree to which young people understand the military and its ethos and in fact some surveys have shown that they have very little understanding at all. The annual PwC Forces for Change survey³³ found that 18-34 year olds were less aware of the job opportunities provided by the armed forces with only 75% of respondents believing the Armed Forces were important to the UK economy in offering jobs and employment opportunities compared to the national average of 81%.

16. YouGov³⁴ in 2013 found a similar discrepancy in young people's attitudes towards the Armed Forces with 54% of 18-24 year olds believing the Army is important to serving Britain's national interest compared to 82% for 25-39 year olds, 90% of 40-59 year olds and 93% of over 60s. One way to address this would be to make information on the role of the Armed Forces a part of the national curriculum, so that every child leaving school will have at least a basic understanding of our Armed Forces and the role they play in defending the nation.

17. The cadet forces provide an important opportunity for young people to experience the military ethos and cadet units exist up and down the country, including in some schools, and in many cases are the only remaining military footprint in many towns across the UK.

18. As at July 2017, approximate numbers of cadets are; Army Cadets 39,760; Sea Cadets 14,100; Air Training Corps 32,860 and Combined Cadet Force 41,830, giving a total of 128,550 cadets³⁵. This compares to a Regular strength for the UK Armed Forces of just over 138,000 at present.

19. The Government has an ongoing process of seeking to expand the number of cadet units in state schools and over the last several years over 350 new units have been established. A number of these new units have been created in schools in under privileged areas and also some of them in areas with a high BAME content.

20. While there are legal constraints on direct recruitment from cadet units, they nevertheless have traditionally provided a valuable flow of recruits into the Armed Forces. As one example, the current Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshall Sir Stephen Hillier, is a former air cadet. Within the legal constraints, it still may be possible to provide further information to cadets about potential careers in the Armed Forces – should they wish to pursue such a route voluntarily. This is a sensitive area but it is probably one in which, given the correct leadership, further progress could be made.

21. In addition, consideration should be given to further expanding the creation of new cadet units in secondary schools, with a particular emphasis on under privileged and BAME areas in order to give young people from these backgrounds some experience of the Armed Forces ethos.

Recommendations 18, 19 and 20

(xviii) Ministers at the Department for Education should introduce a topic on the role of the Armed Forces into the National Curriculum to address school leavers' limited understanding of their role.

³³ PwC Forces for Change Survey 2017 <http://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/assets/forces-for-change-2017.pdf>.

³⁴ YouGov attitude survey 14 Sep 2013 <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2013/09/14/younger-britons-less-army-important/>.

³⁵ Cadet numbers from the office of the Chief of Defence People, Jul 2017.

Filling the Ranks

- (xix) *The programme to create cadet units in state schools should be continued and expanded to give children from a variety of backgrounds, including under privileged areas and BAME communities a greater opportunity to experience the military ethos and to benefit from it.*
- (xx) *Within the legal constraints, greater efforts should be made to explain to cadets the benefit of Service in the Armed Forces and how they can apply – should they wish to do so.*