

# PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

## Introduction and Context

1. The contextual framework for PME is rapidly changing: the return of great power politics to the grand strategic environment and the challenge to international and institutional norms; national fiscal realities; the impact and democratization of technologies and innovation; the ubiquity of speed of light information; rapidly evolving needs of our core stakeholders and individuals' expectations; and the rapidly advancing understanding of adult learning and its associated andragogy, are all driving change in current Defence Academy (DefAc) approach to learning, structures, processes and outputs.

2. The declared mission of the DefAc is to 'deliver the intellectual edge for success on operations, and leadership in government, with our allies and coalitions in an era of persistent engagement.' The DefAc vision is to continue to be recognised for delivering a 'global gold standard' of defence education. Changing the 'what' and 'how' of PME is essential if we are to deliver both vision and mission.

3. The DefAc delivers three high-level objectives: UK joint Defence education; international Defence Engagement (DE) through education; and Defence education research. The political framework is that of a 'Global Britain' and 'international by design'.

4. In the UK, the J7 Joint Force Development (JFD) Enterprise does not sit authoritatively at the heart of Defence planning. The history to this is convoluted but the net effect is the loss of primacy in determining and directing education policy to meet Defence's needs. The ongoing Modernising Defence Programme is examining options to re-integrate the D7 JFD enterprise into the heart of the strategic HQ. The perceived benefits include aligning responsibility with authority, prioritization and allocation of resources and to champion J7 led rapid exploitation of novel concepts via education, wargaming, experimentation and evaluation; and then convert that to applied concepts via doctrine, training, the Defence Exercise Programme and an operational lessons process. An elevated J7 Enterprise will improve the plug-and-play with our partners and allies.

5. This short paper provides the Military Education Coordination Council (MECC) with an update on the UK DefAc's approach to evolving Professional Military Education (PME).

## Principles, Approach and Coherent Actions across the DefAc

6 **Principles.** The DefAc seeks to shape future PME by:

- Delivering high-quality education that is sharply focused on the strategic context and Defence need, rather than 'comfortable' and recognizable paradigms.
- Delivering education using the technologies and techniques that deliver the best outcomes to the maximum number at the point of need.
- Delivering course content that is up-to-date and predictive of change.
- Streamlining education structures and supporting functions to achieve synergy while ensuring the student learning experience is optimised.
- Developing an educational research capability to underpin the DefAc's offer and support the JFD Enterprise, including networking and collaborating with relevant external institutions beyond just the narrow purview of the defence and security community.
- Aggressively shaping our structure, supporting contracts and estate to our needs and resource base.

- Retaining and enhancing the DefAc reputation as the PME provider of choice for UK Defence, wider government and UK industry.
- Building a workforce that is diverse, inclusive in nature and thought, and empowered.
- Operating in an effective, efficient and economic manner, including seeking revenue generation from our IP, to deliver our business outputs at minimum net cost.

7. **Approach.** Central to the DefAc approach to future PME is ensuring that curricula are focused, agile enough to rapidly account for changes in the strategic environment, and meet today's needs of our customers and people. To achieve this our underlying approach is to:

- Have a constantly enquiring and self-critiquing, learning-based, adaptive approach.
- Work as an inclusive, integrated, effective Whole Force, recognising people as our most important asset, promoting appropriate challenge across all activity.
- Optimise the student experience and outcomes through embracing those modern educational practices that add value.
- Be outcome focused, responsive and proactive to emerging demands, and able to adjust education through rapid assessment, testing and application.
- Be recognised for innovation and adaptation where the best want to work.
- Be efficient, effective and economic in delivering value for money.
- Underpin our educational offers by internal and external cutting-edge research.
- Consistently strive to develop and deliver best-practice joint education.
- Support national DE objectives to contribute to Global Britain by being international by design.

8. **Intellectual Leadership.** Core to delivery will be intellectual leadership, which demands that we grow our own understanding of the environment for which we are preparing students. This requires faculty to be masters of their craft and to embrace intellectual curiosity and professional debate, such that it permeates throughout the DefAc and graduates are seen to be 'thought leaders' for Defence. The DefAc will increasingly be an arena for debate, not simply an extended classroom.

9. **Cost Reduction.** Maximum efficiency and effectiveness will underpin all DefAc activity. Cost reduction will continue through ongoing scrutiny of existing business to drive out unnecessary portfolio, structural, process and legacy costs; the new will drive out the old where the priority and resource demands it.

10. **Development Faculty.** The creation of this new faculty will reach horizontally across all other faculties to allow the DefAc to horizon scan for business and education development opportunities, exploit the benefits of scale, focus course analysis and design and development capacity where needed and coordinate strategic options.

11. **Defence Engagement.** The DefAc will continue to play a significant role in DE activity by educating students from allied and partner countries in the UK and by delivering training offsite and overseas. Headquarters DefAc will inform Defence's DE strategy to ensure this activity is directed to gain the best effect for the UK.

## **PME Initiatives**

12. The DefAc has committed to undertaking a significant review of its joint PME to Regular and Reserve OF-4s (and Ministry of Defence Civil Servant equivalents) and above. Its vision is to establish a coherent education pathway that will provide Defence with high quality, through-career and flexible joint education. The programme has two major work-strands:

- The Strategic Leader Programme (SLP) that will prepare our future 2 to 4-star military and civilian leaders (and includes the current Higher Command and Staff Course (HCSC)); and
- The Advanced Career Development Pathway (ACDP) for OF-4 to OF-5/1-star.

### **The Strategic Leader Programme (SLP)**

13. The SLP has been developed and its first cohort will start in January 2019. The SLP is a modular, flexible, coordinated and through-career development pathway. It consists of a series of short residential modules that students can take without creating dislocation to their day-to-day jobs, as well as longer residential courses. It is designed to prepare individuals for the challenges of strategic leadership, with an emphasis on self-awareness, cross-cultural leadership behaviours and strengthening individual resilience as well as giving students, through the Strategic Business Programme (SBP), the necessary business acumen needed to operate effectively at Board level in UK Defence.

### **The Advanced Career Development Pathway (ACDP)**

14. **Advanced Command and Staff Course (ACSC).** Currently, this is a 9-months' long course for students at the OF4-level. The current course has 154 UK students (5 Civil Servants) and 103 Internationals. ACSC aims to help build analytical/cognitive skills; inculcate academic rigour and provide students with a suitable qualification – an optional master's programme. The latter is an MA in 'Defence Studies' gained through King's College London (KCL). From 2020, optional modules will be on offer within this MA allowing students greater choice in adopting an education pathway that suits both their interests and Defence's needs. They will then be able to gain either an MA or an MSc in 'Future Conflict'; in 'Strategy', or in 'Innovation and Defence Management' – the exact masters awarded being determined by the aggregate of the core and selected modules. Space is being created in the ACSC programme to accommodate these changes by reducing the blocks of time devoted to 'International Security Studies', 'Strategic Studies' and 'Operational Studies'.

15. **New Master's Programme.** Additionally, this academic year (2018-2019), 12 students on the ACSC have been selected to undertake a new Master's by Research (MRes). This programme is a deliberate move to both harness the intellectual horsepower of the cohort to research real-time problem sets and to build a cohort of research-capable staff officers. This meets the Chief of the Defence Staff's ambition to engage with matters of the moment and our determination to maximise the value derived from the approximately 5,500 years of experience that arrives with every ACSC class.

16. **Future ACSC.** Work is well advanced on the ACDP to analyse and refine the PME requirement for OF-4 and equivalents; the report is due this November. A key objective is how best to deliver ACSC content with the 80 % of the Career Field cohort not selected to attend the ACSC, as continuous professional development to increase the capability of these personnel. In addition, it is examining delivery options to ensure best use of technology and technique. The aim is to reduce time spent in residential education and deliver education that enhances the majority of the cohort's ability to act in the rapidly evolving strategic context.

17. **Higher Command and Staff Course (HCSC).** UK Defence has significantly changed its approach in and the structure and syllabus of its HCSC to take account of the changing operational and strategic environment. The HCSC is for the OF5-6 level, is 4-months' long, has 30 UK students (including 5 Civil Servants) and 10 Internationals. It is designed to develop our future strategic leaders. Changes include: increasing reflection time by 36% and peer-to-peer learning by 125%; reducing time spent in lectures (down 39%), on

exercises (down 30%) and the duration of the Staff Ride (down 40%). There is greater emphasis on warfighting at the operational level and increased study of operational art as practiced by potential adversaries – Russia and China. The course has a revised curriculum with increased opportunities for students to innovate and to experiment in order to ‘fail safely’. Of particular note is the introduction of a ‘disruptive mentor’ who, in wargaming scenarios, encourages students in the pursuit of innovation, creativity and in the challenge of authority. In line with this new thinking, the HCSC’s assessment criteria have been altered to allow for a less competitive environment to develop. This gives students greater scope to express their ‘intellectual agility’. It is this capability that our HCSC staff sees as the ‘ultimate hedge against future uncertainty’. They stress that ‘the revised curriculum focuses unrelentingly on helping achieve intellectual overmatch and reinstalling the art and science of warfighting at the operational level; skills that cannot be ‘traded out’ by technology’. It is likely that a similar approach and focus will feature in the ACSC as part of the ACDP.

## **Developments in Education and Learning**

18. Along with the work-strands above, the DefAc continues to research and examine the optimal approaches to teaching and learning in the UK PME space. The increasing complexity of the strategic and operational environments is leading the DefAc to adopt teaching methodologies that can generate in learners the adaptive thinking capabilities required. Recognising this, faculties are looking to adopt a more ‘active learning’ approach that is less instructor-led and more student-driven. Here, critical thinking is promoted by engaging students in the likes of problem-solving activities, group discussions and collaborative learning, while allowing for the vital element of ‘productive failure’. Faculties will be focusing too on the positives that can result from such as ‘flipped classrooms’ and in creating more space for student reflection. In this same vein, the DefAc is also looking at the advantages of replacing techniques that favour the ‘horizontal development’ of leaders with those that seek ‘vertical development’, where the focus is on producing leaders with higher levels of decision-making effectiveness. Blended learning is also seen as an increasingly attractive option but this does rely on the availability of instructors skilled in the technologies to be used.

## **PME Conference**

19. Many of the topics discussed above will be unpicked further at a PME conference titled ‘PME: Re-imagining the Future’ at the DefAc over the period 5-6 December 2018.

## **Conclusion**

20. Developing the intellectual edge for success on operations, and leadership in government, with our allies and coalitions in an era of persistent engagement is the primary purpose of the DefAc. This short paper has touched on some of the principal initiatives through which the DefAc will support Defence to help build and gain advantage through the conceptual component. The focus on developing an intellectual edge is the DefAc’s highest priority and this will mean innovating to meet need at pace while maintaining the quality. I look forward to discussing and expanding on the above with colleagues.

## **CEO DefAc & Comdt JSCSC**