



Ministry
of Defence

Defence Knowledge Strategy

Version 1.0

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FOREWORD

Every day in Defence, our people bring experience, skills and expertise to the workplace. This collective knowledge is key to doing their jobs to the best of their ability and is one of our most significant strengths in meeting the challenges we face. Used well, it stops us repeating mistakes, improves how we work and enhances our shared understanding of the organisation.

As we address the issues raised by the Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot) Report, we recognise that we are not capitalising on our people's knowledge as effectively as we should. We have a habit of identifying lessons but then forgetting them and having to reinvent solutions, and we do not share knowledge reliably at key points (such as exit and handover). We believe there needs to be a fundamental change in how knowledge is valued and used across Defence. This will require changes in behaviours, ways of working and culture at every level.

This Strategy sets out how Defence can move to being an organisation that values knowledge and promotes challenge and continuous learning. Its outcomes reflect the seven strategic [Knowledge Principles for Government](#) and it outlines a range of approaches to promote good knowledge management. It draws together a number of ongoing initiatives across Defence that contribute to its overarching vision.

We recognise that achieving this vision will take time, but we firmly believe it will make us stronger and more effective as an organisation, and we commend the Strategy to you.



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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1. This document sets out a strategy for improving the exploitation of knowledge across MOD. In a Department of this size and complexity, this is a challenging task. We need to ensure MOD's vast reserves of expertise, skill and know-how are fully exploited for maximum benefit.

What is Knowledge?

2. Knowledge is not information. Some knowledge can be captured and distilled into hard information, but most knowledge is resident in individuals. It is a combination of training and lived experience, and is constantly being changed in the light of new understanding. It's something we all do in our personal lives, face-to-face or online: asking friends for advice, exchanging knowledge in an interest group, or seeking out assistance in a discussion forum. The challenge is to find ways of effectively sharing and seeking existing and new knowledge, and to make such sharing and seeking routine throughout the Department.

Why does Knowledge matter?

3. Good exploitation of knowledge brings real benefits. Open and honest pooling of experience improves lesson-learning. Individuals benefit from the transfer of knowledge provided on an immediate basis by handover exercises, and in the longer term by coaching and mentoring. Project teams benefit by being able to locate relevant expertise quickly and efficiently, and by learning from the experience of others who have been involved in similar tasks. Well-structured exit interviews ensure at least a proportion of the subject matter expertise of individuals is retained on their departure from a role or from the Department. Appropriate, evidence-based learning from experience fed back into the system improves guidance and processes. All of this, done well, can save MOD time and free up resource.

Drivers for change

4. Good knowledge management and organisational learning lie at the heart of many of the recommendations emerging from the Chilcot Report on the Iraq War, such as improving understanding, creating a "safe to challenge" culture, critical thinking and decision-making. A knowledge strategy must address, and support corrective action for, issues raised in this report and being taken forward by the Chilcot Implementation Team. Furthermore, the Defence Internal Audit of Knowledge Management in 2013, whilst acknowledging pockets of good knowledge management practice, pointed to a need for an overall strategy to bring projects together and drive improvement.
5. Knowledge is also moving up the wider government agenda, as the Rycroft Review takes forward and broadens the scope of the work on records management done by Sir Alex Allan.

VISION

6. Our vision is:

Knowledge and expertise is a valued resource throughout Defence, sustained by an environment which supports knowledge seeking and sharing, promotes challenge and encourages continuous learning at every level.

7. The Strategy to support this vision will consist of three parts, to be published individually:

- **Part One:** a set of outcomes for Defence, mapped to the seven Knowledge Principles for Government, with a phased approach to delivery.
- **Part Two:** a live capture published simultaneously of current knowledge projects and initiatives in Defence, linking them to the Outcomes, to bring together as complete a picture of the existing state of knowledge management in Defence as is possible.
- **Part Three:** a maturity model, drawn from cross-sector best practice, from which progress can be assessed, and new and amendments to current activities derived.

KNOWLEDGE PRINCIPLES

8. The Knowledge Principles for Government published in 2016 set out seven strategic principles which Departments can adapt to suit their particular circumstances. This strategy is based on these Principles.

Knowledge Principles for Government



STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

9. *Knowledge is valued and Knowledge needs the right environment in order to thrive.* Knowledge will not be valued nor will it thrive if there is no will to do this at all levels throughout the organisation. Leaders must set the right example, and all staff must understand and have faith in the benefits of sharing and seeking knowledge. This strategy will therefore identify the primary barriers to achieving this, and enablers to help overcome them.
10. *Knowledge is captured where necessary and possible; Knowledge is freely sought and shared; and Knowledge increases in value through re-use.* This strategy will focus primarily on fostering a knowledge-sharing and seeking culture and promoting knowledge re-use through continuous application of learning.
11. *Knowledge underpins individual learning and Knowledge underpins organisational learning.* Learning in this context encompasses education, training, lived experience and the application of all three to create new knowledge and contribute to both business improvement and personal development. The *Defence Organisational Learning Strategy* (DOLS) is already addressing these two principles. This strategy and DOLS are mutually supporting; the strategies reinforce each other's core messages, tangible benefits and practical outputs.

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

12. These Outcomes have been devised in line with the Knowledge Principles, and will be underpinned by the Maturity Model which will form Part 3 of this Strategy.

Outcome 1: Defence identifies and promotes the value of knowledge and the personal and business benefits of sharing experience and expertise.
(Principles 1, 4, 5)

Defence:

- 1.1 Recognises that the collective knowledge, experience and expertise of our personnel, military and civilian, is, when properly exploited, a significant and beneficial resource.
- 1.2 Promotes the benefits of collective knowledge as a vital business resource throughout the organisation.
- 1.3 Builds knowledge management into corporate business objectives.
- 1.4 Provides training in appropriate techniques and skills.

Outcome 2: Leaders throughout the organisation actively support and practise knowledge sharing and promote knowledge management.
(Principles 1, 2)

Defence:

- 2.1 Uses a network of senior "champions" to model good knowledge seeking and sharing behaviours and lead by example.
- 2.2 Enables a "safe to try" ethos, where individuals are able to challenge, and to try ideas out and learn from both success and failure.
- 2.3 Empowers leaders to direct, enable, govern, practise and reward knowledge seeking and sharing.

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Outcome 3: Defence identifies and captures knowledge and expertise from individuals and learns and applies lessons from specific projects and operations.

(Principles 3, 5, 7)

Defence:

- 3.1 Mandates handovers and exit interviews and provides training in techniques.
- 3.2 Supports evidence-based after-action reviewing and lesson learning and sharing.
- 3.3 Ensures captured knowledge is not just stored according to good information management principles but also re-applied to update and improve guidance and process.

Outcome 4: Defence is a “review and learn” culture, allowing teams and individuals time to reflect on experiences and to identify and share lessons learnt from them.

(Principles 4, 5, 6, 7)

Defence:

- 4.1 Supports regular knowledge exchange across Defence, defence partners and the wider public sector.
- 4.2 Supports and encourages continuous learning through mentoring, shadowing, discussion and active participation in communities of practice as well as formal training.
- 4.3 Allows and supports time for learning and reflective practice as a core work element for teams and individuals.

PHASE 1: APPROACH

- 13. Given MOD’s size and complexity, we need to take an incremental approach to improving knowledge exploitation. We also recognise that there are existing projects around the organisation focusing on various elements of knowledge management. These will be captured in Part 2 of this Strategy.
- 14. The approach will therefore be to address short, medium and longer term objectives to help realise the fundamental vision, while capturing and bringing together ongoing initiatives to deliver an overall picture.
- 15. Knowledge will not be valued nor will it thrive unless the organisational culture, from senior leaders down, supports it. Defence’s short-term objectives against Outcomes 1 and 2 will therefore be:
 - a. To demonstrate the value of knowledge through the accumulation of hard evidence via case studies and team-level pilots, and communicate that value to leaders and teams.
 - b. To encourage leaders at senior and team levels to model good behaviours and foster a working atmosphere of openness and trust¹.

¹ Building on the “*Safe to Challenge*” initiative championed by the Chilcot Implementation team.

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16. At the same time, we must address the remaining Outcomes. Initial objectives here will be:
 - a. To build on existing knowledge-sharing networks, both internal and external, by actively demonstrating and promoting their use for effective knowledge transfer.
 - b. To encourage and support the development of effective Communities of Practice², aligned and coherent with the current DOLS initiative.
 - c. To ensure lessons are not merely identified and stored but are learned and actively fed into guidance and business processes.
 - d. To find ways of encouraging and supporting reflective learning by individuals and teams.
17. We recognise, however, that the promotion of KM techniques in themselves, even with education in their use, is not going to lead to an overnight shift to a knowledge sharing and seeking culture. Individuals are subject to their own internal preferences and biases and inevitably some will be less comfortable than others with new ways of working.
18. It would thus be counterproductive to try to force change. Because knowledge resides in individuals and is (largely) not set down, it cannot be demanded in the same way as hard, recorded, information. The drive for change in this area works best when people believe in its value.
19. Therefore, as well as seeking to persuade them of the benefits through best practice case studies, senior leader role-modelling and KM piloting, as part of the piloting work we will identify and test a range of cost-efficient incentives to change. Recognition and reward are powerful tools, from informal words of thanks to formal award programmes. We will evaluate incentives and encourage widespread use of those which prove to be most effective.
20. Reflective practice also has a major part to play, particularly in individual and organisational learning. Parts of Defence are very skilled at reflective learning by way of after-action reviewing, lesson learning and so on. However, this practice must become routine throughout the Department, and lessons learnt need to be applied (adapted where necessary) through improved guidance, doctrine and process.
21. This will not be a rapid process. Lessons cannot be fully learnt unless they have been identified, accepted and applied, and that means the barriers to reflective learning must be removed. Lack of a “safe-to-try” culture is one barrier, identified at Outcome 2.2 in this strategy. Lack of trust, fear of sanction, and the “knowledge-is-power”³ mentality are further barriers.
22. DOLS is taking the lead in improvement of organisational learning pan-MOD. In the short-term, therefore, this strategy will focus on fostering the practice of reflective learning within teams. We will use the pilots to try out reflective learning techniques and find effective ways of working collaboratively to learn from experience.
23. To underpin all this work, we will begin to develop a Knowledge Management Maturity Model. This will form Part 3 of this Strategy. We will draw on existing maturity models from across government and other sectors with the aim of delivering a scalable model

² “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better.” Definition by Etienne Wenger.

³ “Knowledge is Power” includes fear of losing position, favour or personal worth as well as the more common perception of ego or influence.

that will be in its essence applicable cross-government. In MOD, in line with the Knowledge Principles, the intention is for it to work at TLB and team levels. The model should help teams, and TLBs, identify areas for improvement, and provide examples of the type of evidence that will demonstrate progression from level to level. While there may ultimately be an element of Holding to Account in using the model, its primary function will be to encourage and enable progress, and we will consult with TLBs to ensure the final model is a helpful tool rather than a reporting burden.

PHASE 1: DELIVERY

Outcome 1

24. The principal focus will be on business benefit and mitigating business risk. We will aim in the first phase to build up a body of evidence of what works, by doing small-scale pilots at Band B or military equivalent team level, identifying:
- a. three business priorities,
 - b. three risks to delivery of those priorities, and
 - c. appropriate knowledge management techniques that could be used to address those risks.

We will:

- ask pilot teams to review progress at intervals and report back honestly on outcomes: feedback will be used to review and refine the programme as it rolls out further across the organisation. (Sub-outcomes 1.1, 1.2)
- use evidence from existing projects (collated under Part 2 of this Strategy) to build a bank of case studies. (1.1, 1.2)
- use masterclasses, roadshows and the pilot programme to educate people in the use of existing e-networks, such as Defence Connect and the Knowledge Hub, for sharing and seeking knowledge and expertise across teams and organisations. (1.2, 1.4)
- use masterclasses, Sharing New & Acquired Knowledge (SNAK) sessions and super-users to promulgate KM techniques. (1.4)

Outcome 2

25. We will incentivise a “safe to try” culture across MOD. This should not be read as an “acceptable to fail” culture. The aim of a “safe to try” culture is to allow individuals and project teams to experiment with ideas and be open and honest about what did and what did not work, be that on specific tasks, projects or operations. The lessons generated are then fed back into the business in the form of new guidance, updated process or new ways of working. The main objective of “safe to try” is to examine, critically but not punitively, minor errors and failures with a view to preventing major failures.
26. For a “safe to try” culture to work, it needs to be based on trust, honesty and openness. This must be endorsed and actively promoted by leaders throughout the organisation, but particularly at senior levels. If people do not feel it is safe to acknowledge problems to their most senior leader, then there is little chance of convincing them that it is safe to do so at any level.

27. We will therefore:

- recruit senior “champions” who themselves model this behaviour to help communicate the benefits of a “safe to try” culture. (Sub-outcomes 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)
- use internal and external networks to identify good practice and present evidence of the tangible business benefits of such a culture. (2.2)
- identify and promote the opportunities for innovative knowledge exploitation offered by new tools such as MODNET.(2.2)

Outcome 3

28. The aim of knowledge capture is to supplement the corporate memory by recording experience and expertise, enabling it to be re-used in the future. Good succession planning must incorporate elements of knowledge capture. Phase 1 actions to develop knowledge capture will include:

- Using the pilot programme to demonstrate the benefits of well-planned handover and exit interview programmes. Where expertise in these techniques already exists in Defence, we will utilise that expertise to help with development. (Sub-outcome 3.1)
- Ensuring a knowledge capture process of regular after-action review and learning from experience is incorporated into early-stage project planning (3.1 – see also 4.2)
- Building on existing mentoring and shadowing programmes to demonstrate their potential for knowledge sharing and transfer. (3.2 – see also 4.3)
- Capitalising on existing good practice in Defence and wider government to begin an evidence-based cultural shift from simply storing captured knowledge to applying and re-using it via active after-action review programmes. (3.3)

Outcome 4

29. To address the final Outcome, we will cover learning. In the initial phase, we will work with Head of Information Professions (HoIP) to focus on continuous professional development and on the learning and application of lessons.

30. Individual learning which has a cost, either in time or money, attached, is increasingly frequently restricted to what is perceived to have direct business benefit. Managers rightly want to make the best use of the limited resources at their disposal.

31. However, there is a case to be made for learning that may not seem directly business-relevant, but which can increase the engagement and productivity of the individual. Learning that develops personal confidence, cognitive, critical and/or analytical abilities, interpersonal skills, or broadens professional horizons, should be encouraged.

32. The challenge is to find cost-efficient ways of delivering learning, both individual and organisational. As effective techniques for knowledge exchange and learning from experience, we will:

- Support and encourage the DOLS drive to build a network of Communities of Practice (CoPs) across MOD. Active, engaged CoPs are excellent vehicles for exploiting expertise and knowledge. The challenge is to ensure that, once

established, they thrive – and that they themselves do not become silos. (Sub-outcome 4.1)

- Promote increased uptake of existing schemes: mentoring, reverse-mentoring, coaching and job-shadowing/exchange; and provide guidance on how best to exploit them. (4.2)
- Encourage time to be built in to work schedules for reflective practice. This should not just be time for the individual to reflect. Managers, individuals and teams should have conversations about what has been learnt and how it can be best applied back in the workplace. (4.3)

PHASE 2: APPROACH

33. Part 2 of this strategy draws together existing projects around Defence that have one or more of the Knowledge Principles as a key component. This will allow us to see more clearly what is being done well, where there are gaps to be addressed, and where there may be synergies to be exploited, across the organisation.
34. As we build the existing picture through compiling Part 2 and reviewing Phase 1 actions we will communicate good practice wherever it emerges. The data-gathering for this exercise will also feed into the strategy's Phase 2 objectives, particularly in the area of evidence collection. Good quality evidence will help drive implementation of the medium-term strategic objectives.
35. The first of these objectives will be development of meaningful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and benchmarks for KM improvement. Knowledge Management is a subjective discipline, and quantitative KPIs are not always indicative of qualitative improvement. For example, it is not numbers joining a social media platform such as Defence Connect that makes it successful; it is active engagement with that platform. This means measuring "likes", comments, participation levels in groups, successful project collaborations and so on. That in turn requires the platform to have reached a certain level of maturity. It is not always helpful to base an assessment of KM success or failure on early quantitative indicators.
36. We will therefore use evidence from Phase 1 actions to develop KPIs which measure genuine KM engagement and improvement across Defence. We will also use the Strategy Part 2, together with evidence from strategic partners across government and other sectors, to continue to identify and communicate good practice benchmarks which can be used by teams across Defence.
37. Phase 1 evidence will also be used to identify incentives to good KM which have worked well in practice, in order to encourage wider rollout of such incentives. Where financial incentives are involved, it is particularly useful to have evidence of the return on investment, but we will also assess the impact of non-financial incentives, to determine which are most effective.
38. Entrenching good knowledge practices will, however, require more than KPIs and incentives. Defence must ensure elements of knowledge management become routine day-to-day activities. The second Phase 2 objective will therefore be to embed these elements into working practice. In particular, in line with Knowledge Principle 3, we will seek to ensure induction and handover, and exit interviewing, are done as standard across Defence. We will review and update guidance on how these should be conducted. We will also review mechanisms available to us to communicate the benefits of these activities and ensure they are realised.

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39. We will assess the value of informal knowledge transfer programmes such as mentoring and shadowing schemes, encouraging wider uptake where there has been a proven benefit.
40. As the Defence Organisational Learning Strategy CoP programme matures through the building and nurturing of successful CoPs, we will review and share lessons to encourage further development of CoPs around Defence.
41. The roll-out of MODNET will deliver enhanced ICT capabilities to Defence. This in turn will provide opportunities to enhance knowledge management by exploiting these new capabilities. We will:
 - look at ICT coming on stream to identify how it could be used for knowledge management purposes, and communicate that throughout the organisation.
 - investigate cost-effective ways of upskilling staff, such as communities of practice and train-the-trainer schemes, to ensure staff can deploy new technologies to best effect.
42. Evidence from Phase 1 and from the capture and analysis of projects under Part 2 of the Strategy will build a picture of existing reflective learning practices around Defence. The Phase 2 objective will be to communicate more widely the value of reflective learning, and build it in to routine ways of working. We will investigate the feasibility of using the Performance Appraisal process to assist this through objective setting and in-year performance discussions.
43. As well as maintaining piloting in individual teams, we will develop the roadshow/workshop format to continue communicating the benefits of knowledge management and the aims of the strategy on a wider scale.

CONCLUSION

44. Properly followed through, this strategy will deliver an overall, quantifiable improvement in the way MOD handles its collective knowledge. The focus is firmly on the people as it is only with their cooperation and commitment that collective behaviours will change. Aspirations are underpinned by practical techniques designed to deliver them incrementally over time. Existing good projects in the knowledge field will continue their work, but will be identified under Part 2 so that their contribution to delivery of the overall strategy is clear.

DEFENCE KNOWLEDGE OUTCOMES

