



CRFCA

Council of Reserve Forces'  
and Cadets' Associations

# THE UNITED KINGDOM RESERVE FORCES

EXTERNAL SCRUTINY TEAM

ANNUAL STATUTORY REPORT  
2023



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## FOREWORD

1. We would like to record our appreciation of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the three Services who, as ever, provided our team with substantial briefings and interacted with the team positively throughout.
2. It is disappointing to again have to comment on the MOD not meeting the apparent intent of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 in placing the 2022 Report in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament in a timely fashion. Last year it took 10 months for the 2021 report to be submitted, and this year it has still not been placed in the Parliamentary Libraries, 12 months on, despite numerous Parliamentary questions in both Houses requesting its publication.
3. It is our understanding that the intent of the Act was to create an annual dispassionate report to Parliament on our Reserve Forces so they would not be neglected in the context of the perennial challenges of defence priorities and spending. Such long delays seem to undermine that. It is also not clear to us why the report could not be published without waiting for the detailed response to be formulated, as occurred each year until 2019. It is our understanding the Services value our external assessments and we are aware they provided detailed responses to our 2022 report which could have been the basis for the Secretary of State's response to us and we would accordingly have published such a response in today's report.
4. Sadly, this response has not been received as we finalise this year's report, but we are more concerned as to why the report itself has been suppressed for so long.
5. Last year we concluded there was a real risk of a tangible decline in the health, and thus capability, of our Reserve unless there was a coordinated approach to ensuring there was a clarity of purpose for all personnel and units, combined with demanding training, appropriate scales of equipment and sufficient logistical and administrative support. In addition to the ongoing failings of the recruiting system the manning figures suggest this equation is not in balance, so this risk continues.
6. But this year's report acknowledges the pace of geopolitical change and the impact this is having on defence and the inevitable changes that will follow in the Defence Command Paper refresh and future Defence Plans and Reviews. So now is not the time to make too many detailed comments and recommendations on the Reserve but to emphasise again the critical nature of the equation we describe in the previous paragraph. This will be most important as Defence considers how it makes best use of the citizen servicemen and women to achieve mass and scale and have the benefit of many niche specialist skills.
7. With our longstanding assessment of the Reserve and their people, if we were asked for an opinion on the role the Reserve might, and is able to deliver, we would say be ambitious. We are clear the more demanding the training is, the more reservists step up and are motivated to be involved in the Armed Forces. It also strikes us that with the operating simplicity that technology provides, the training time requirement reduces and future, more modern platforms could easily sit in the Reserve.
8. Our team this year was joined by Captain Sue Jameson RD RNR but sadly Professor Gary Sheffield will step down after this year's report. There is no doubt his academic perspective has added real value to our assessment of today and his historical parallel's fascinating.



S F N Lalor  
Major General (Retired)  
12 July 2023











## INTRODUCTION

1. The Future Reserves 2020 (FR20) Independent Commission identified a requirement for an annual report by an External Scrutiny Team (EST) on the overall state of the Reserve Forces. The first two reports were provided at the request of the Secretary of State (SofS) for Defence in 2013 and 2014. On 1 October 2014, the Reserves Forces' and Cadets' Association (RFCA) had a statutory duty placed on them to report annually to Parliament on the state, and an assessment of the capabilities of, the United Kingdom's Reserve Forces (Annex A)<sup>1</sup>. Terms of Reference for the EST is at Annex B. This will be the ninth report under these statutory arrangements.
2. We submitted the 2022 Report to the SofS for Defence on 14 September 2022, due to the delay in receiving workforce statistics from the MOD. We have yet to receive a formal response from the MOD to the report and it has not been placed before Parliament as the SofS is required to do in accordance with RFA 96.
3. **Methodology.** We visited Headquarters and Formations with reserve responsibilities as well as a cross-section of reserve units around the country to understand the situation 'on the ground'. In our visits to Headquarters, we met with the First Sea Lord, Commanders Home Command and Field Army, Assistant Chief of the General Staff, Deputy Commander Capabilities RAF, Commandant General RAF Reserve, Commander Strategic Command, Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Reserve and Cadets) and senior reservists from all three Services.

## CONTEXT

4. We wrote last year's report in the context of the recently published Integrated Review (IR), Defence Command Paper, the Reserve Forces 30 Review (RF30) and the Army's Future Soldier<sup>2</sup>, all against the backdrop of the war being waged in Ukraine. The latter brought a new focus on the need for mass to bolster regular forces to be able to fight conventional and attritional land warfare and, therefore, for a credible reserve to sustain these military operations. We also noted that it was disappointing that despite the IR and Defence Command Paper being recently published, challenges in terms of lack of resources of people, equipment and training were evident. We saw real evidence of the damaging impact of negative investment decisions over the years, which in isolation could be absorbed, but have significant accumulative effect. We reported that we considered some of the unit establishments were sub-optimal for the operational tasking they were being asked to deliver, and some key equipments (Jackal being an example) were not appropriate given the time to train and demands on maintenance.
5. While clearly not the desired outcome given the clear intent of the importance of the Reserve in the above strategy and policy reviews, we concluded last year's report that there was real risk of a decline in the health of the Reserve driven by resource constraints and poor recruiting and retention.
6. With this background, it had been hoped that after such major policy initiatives, this year's report might have been able to report in more detail on the single Service plans to implement them and see how they might be addressing any of the issues highlighted in our previous report(s).

1. Reserve Forces Act 1996, s113A.

2. Future Soldier is a reform of the British Army following on from the IR and Defence Command Paper.

7. However, as a result of the pace of geopolitical change – the impact of COVID-19, the continuing war in Ukraine and the weaponisation of energy and food supplies – and its impact on the UK, the Government initiated an IR refresh, which reported in March 2023. We have yet to see how this flows through into a refresh of the Defence Command Paper, which at time of writing has not been published. We, therefore, found ourselves in the middle of a Reserve development ‘pause’ and have yet to see how the clear intent of these policies are translated into single Service plans. Consequently, we decided to produce a shorter report, ‘lite’ on content until there is greater clarity on how the high level refreshed strategy and policies impact on the implementation of the single Services plans for their future development of the Reserve.
8. But first, as for last year, Professor Gary Sheffield, team member and Visiting Professor in the Defence Studies Department, King's College London, has written a short piece of historical context – Expanding the Reserve Forces in Response to a Continental Threat: Some Parallels from History (Annex C) – which highlights a number of similarities to today's position, and is worthy of reflection as the rest of this report is read.

## REPORT THEMES

### Reserve Capability

9. We are mandated to report on the ‘state of the volunteer reserve forces’, or health, based on the metrics of recruitment, retention, provision of training and upkeep of land and buildings<sup>3</sup>. In last year's report, we feared that the challenges and complexity of Defence's investment decisions would only increase with the country's response to the war in Ukraine and, consequently, the Reserve might be neglected. We also said that there was a real “*risk of a tangible decline in the health*” of the Reserve. **Disappointing, but as indicated, based on the metrics above, we report that the state, or health, of the Reserve is poor and declining.**
  - a. We examine the recruitment and retention figures below; however, total strength and trained strength is lower compared to 1 April 2022 by some 2,000 and 1,000 respectively.
  - b. In the section on the Volunteer Estate, we report that funding for maintenance has declined year on year and the Financial Year (FY) 23/24 funding bid to start the implementation of Tranche 2 of RFCA Estate Optimisation Programme (REOP) has failed, and will have to be re-bid for FY24/25.
  - c. While there are many opportunities for the provision of challenging training and to deploy on overseas exercises across all three Services, we find that the mandatory Individual Training Requirement (ITR) takes up the majority if not all of the average service person's annual Reserve Service Days (RSD) allocation. This leaves little or no time for the training that enhances operational effectiveness of the Reserve for Defence, which also would be more exciting, challenging and rewarding for individuals, and thus aid recruitment and retention.

3. Reserve Forces Act 1996, s113A.

4. EST Report 2022, page 4, paragraph 5.



10. Despite this gloomy background, we did find there are some green shoots of optimism that indicate that the health of the Reserve can be stabilised and if remedies are applied, could recover.
  - a. The Reserve Steering Group (RSG) continues under the leadership of VCDS, gives a clear 4-star focus to matters that concern the Reserve.
  - b. There is now a strong narrative emerging that recognises the purpose of the Reserve, with the intent of making the Armed Forces more capable and resilient, and are recognised as an important part of the whole force mix. To be credible to an opponent, Armed Forces need to be able to conduct warfighting, but also to demonstrate that they can sustain warfighting. The war in Ukraine has highlighted what was known before, but perhaps forgotten, that **a reserve force is an essential ingredient of mass, which is needed to fight and win land battles that almost always are attritional against peer adversaries.** The Reserve also brings specialist, civilian capabilities that regular forces cannot readily generate or sustain.
  - c. From our visits, it is clear that this narrative is recognised and supported by the senior leadership of the single Services and Strategic Command. The single Services are very much focused on an operational mindset and to get more out of the people they have. The latter is not to impose greater demands per se, but more to make to better use. There is recognition that training needs to be appropriate and accessible, bureaucracy needs to be tamed and a different approach taken to risk in order that the Reserve is useful, usable and used.
  - d. The Army outlined the NATO Force Model (NFM) to us, which is a clear statement of purpose and ambition of what force is required for warfighting. We have believed that it is difficult to articulate clearly what it is that is required of reserve forces, without this clear statement, and then build the force structures to integrate into the whole force to deliver it. Further, **the Army has set up a Reserve Executive Committee (REC) and early decisions are positive – the move away from ‘equivalence’ between regulars and reservists (more below), the Army Reserve no longer being the lead for UK resilience and an Army Reserve Bridging Strategy 2023-26.** Its establishment will help ensure that the needs or demands placed on the Reserve are considered at the outset of planning, not as an afterthought as has happened in the past.
  - e. While the Reserve is an essential and important part of the whole force mix, that is not to say that the reservist is equal or equivalent to his or her regular counterpart. A reservist cannot be expected to be as capable as a regular when training on 28 RSDs. This has now been recognised formally by the Army. The result is that training programmes and courses can be designed to allow what can be accommodated in 28 days and, once mobilised, subsequent continuation training to prepare a reservist for warfighting. The experience of training Ukrainians is that this does not take as long as the previous 180 days.

- f. There remains a deep pool of commitment amongst today's reservists – the vast majority are proud to be in the Reserves (93%), are satisfied with Service life (77%), are supported by their families (87%) and would recommend the Reserve to others (85%)<sup>5</sup>. While the Haythornthwaite Review described the sense of being valued as low amongst the Reserves (37%), this appears to reflect only the Army, and it is limited to being valued by regulars – it is 54% in the RAF Reserve. Given the challenges the Reserve has faced over the last few years in particular, with COVID-19, budgetary cuts etc, the situation is positive and suggests a talent pool waiting to be harnessed by Defence.

### Reserve Workforce Requirements

11. We continue to report against the FR20 trained<sup>6</sup> strength targets for the Reserve of the three Services: Royal Navy – 3,100; Army – 30,100; Royal Air Force – 1,860; totalling 35,060. As there had been no public announcement of any change since the issue of the FR20 report, we reported last year that in 2020, the Royal Navy amended the FR20 trained strength target to +/- 20% of 3,100 and the Army has reduced its trained strength requirement by 3,000 from 30,100 to 27,097. The Royal Air Force has set itself a more ambitious target to expand to 5,000.
12. The detail workforce statics we receive normally from the MOD were not available at time of writing this report. Rather than delay the report, we have taken the workforce numbers below from the MOD's Quarterly service personnel statistics as at 1 April 2023, reported on the Gov.uk website.

### Trained Strength

13. From our early visits to the single Service headquarters, we found that Reserve recruitment and retention had continued to worsen, and workforce numbers had continued to decline when compared to what we reported last year.

	2022 1 Apr	2023 1 Apr	Change 2022/2023
<b>All Services</b>			
<b>Total strength</b>	35,890	33,840	- 2,050
<b>Trained strength</b>	<b>31,480</b>	<b>30,350</b>	<b>- 1,130</b>
<b>Maritime Reserve</b>			
<b>Total strength</b>	3,810	3,460	- 350
<b>Trained strength</b>	<b>2,870</b>	<b>2,730</b>	<b>- 140</b>
<b>Army Reserve</b>			
<b>Total strength</b>	28,830	27,240	- 1,590
<b>Trained strength</b>	<b>25,730</b>	<b>24,810</b>	<b>- 920</b>
<b>RAF Reserve</b>			
<b>Total strength</b>	3,250	3,140	- 110
<b>Trained strength</b>	<b>2,880</b>	<b>2,810</b>	<b>- 70</b>

5. Reserves Continuous Attitude Survey 2022. The 2023 survey was not available at time of printing.

6. The point at which the Services count trained strength is different: the RN and RAF only count as trained those who have completed initial professional training (Phases 1 and 2), while, since October 2016, the Army includes those who have completed Phase 1 training in the trained strength figure.



14. The inflow figures for all three Services were down on previous year as shown in the table below.

Inflow/Outflow	2022 1 Apr	2023 1 Apr	+ / - Difference
<b>Maritime Reserve</b>			
<b>Inflow</b>	14%	9.8%	- 4.2%
<b>Outflow</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>- 1.1%</b>
<b>Army Reserve</b>			
<b>Inflow</b>	12.5%	10%	- 2.5%
<b>Outflow</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>- 0.9%</b>
<b>RAF Reserve</b>			
<b>Inflow</b>	15.4%	13.4%	- 2%
<b>Outflow</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>16.9%</b>	<b>- 0.1%</b>

15. Although outflow figures have improved marginally when compared to 1 April 2022, outflow for all three Services is greater than inflow, which until arrested, would indicate that overall trained strength is likely to reduce further. To this end, we understand that, as at 1 June 2023, the total trained and untrained strength has reduced further when compared to 1 April 2023, and it is the same for all three Services.

### Recruiting

16. As early as 2015, we commented on the inadequacies of the recruiting system, particularly for the Army, highlighting in particular the application of medical entry standards and medical deferrals, and recommended an urgent contract review in 2016 – see Annex D. MOD's response was that the contract remained under close and continual review at the highest levels. The current 10 year contract with Capita was due to end, but has been run on and is now in its 11th year. We understand that the new Armed Forces Recruiting Programme (AFRP) contract has been delayed for another four years until 2027.
17. Focusing on the Army, which has the biggest shortfall in both absolute and relative terms, currently, it receives between 20,000 to 30,000 expressions of interest a month; so, there is interest in a career in the Armed Forces. However, on average, of 100 applications, only 6 people are attested at the end of the recruiting pipeline, and the process, or time of flight, takes an average of 10 months; it takes a further 10 months to complete basic training. Twice as many leak from the pipeline for voluntary reasons, or drift, rather than being compelled to do so. We understand that reserve Army units have been given targets to achieve in terms of gaining trained soldiers by 1 April 2024. However, we heard from one unit that they know that they will fail because, given the time of flight of 20 months, a conversion ratio of 14.4:1, a basic training pass rate of 56%, there needs to be some 1,400 candidates already in the pipeline now, and they know that they are not there.

18. We heard from a serving soldier that they would not pass today's medical standard if they were trying to join now because of childhood injuries – broken bones – yet in their service they have passed every fitness test and deployed and fought on very arduous operations. It would appear that not accepting of medical risk has resulted in a huge recruiting risk. We understand the difficulties over accessing NHS records and we know that much hard work is done by staff of the Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command. Nevertheless, despite the many initiatives to improve the flow – the latest being a 1-star military judgement panel to accept what might be border line candidates – the numbers getting through the pipeline are not improving, indeed getting worse as the conversion rate has increased from 12:1 to 14.4:1.
19. We also recognise that the steps in the pipeline have to be done – online medical, recruiting group medical (RGMD), Individual Career Discussion (ICD), and an assessment. **However, despite all the efforts to improve the system, the figures above leave us to conclude that current system is not fit for purpose. By any metric, a recruit and training system that takes an average of 20 months to prepare an applicant to undertake a part-time job cannot be said to be efficient or effective.**
20. It is an axiom that the introduction of any large and major contract will have its teething problems. **We, therefore, would recommend that:**
  - a. **The journey for taking an applicant who wishes to join the Reserve through the new AFRP incorporates a clear nexus of the constituents parts, identified in paragraph 19 above, so that they do not become 'blockages' that cause applicants to give up or drift away.**
  - b. **The requirement of the reservist should be designed into the new AFRP contract from the outset, alongside the needs of the regular service person.**

#### **Reserve Force 2030**

21. We commented last year that MOD had not made a formal response to RF30, which was published in May 2021. This still is the case, some 27 months later. Nevertheless, the RF30 Implementation Team continues to provide a coordination function of various work strands involving strategic Workforce Planning, Mobilisation (simplification and improvement to the mobilisation process) and Digitisation (connectivity and better access to information).

#### **Utility and Use of the Reserve**

22. In this section, we touch briefly on some issues we observed when visiting the single Services.
23. **Royal Navy.** We observed that there is a clear shift towards a focus on capability and this change provides the ideal opportunity for the Royal Navy to take a top-down view on what it truly needs from its Reserve, rather than focussing on what the Reserve is currently capable of providing. We were told that there is to be a series of studies to look at the future Navy as a whole and it would seem that they would provide an ideal vehicle to identify and articulate that absolute need for the Reserve. **Assuming the studies go ahead, we would recommend that they have senior Part Time Volunteer Reservist (PTVR) experienced reservists attached to each one, thus ensuring reserve-informed debate and conclusion.** Similarly, as we have stated in previous reports, **we would recommend that the capability pillars should all have senior PTVR experienced reservists included in their management teams, rather than having them concentrated in Commander Maritime Reserve's (COMMARRES) headquarters.**

- a. The Maritime Reserve (MR) continues to support the Royal Navy's operational tempo through successful niche contributions such as Information Warfare's various specialisations (including Information Operations, Operational Intelligence and Cyber) and General Warfare specialisations such as Submarine Operations and Amphibious Warfare watch keepers. Within their Transformation Programme other continuing successes include the newly commissioned HMS Pegasus (Air Branch), without whom Fleet Air Arm (FAA) capabilities would continue to be under more significant stretch.
- b. However, as the Maritime Transformation has matured, we have noted there are also risks. Last year, we highlighted the restructuring that was taking place where permanent staff were being reduced in inland centres (the spoke) and concentrated at the waterfront training centres (the hub). **We were concerned that the loss of core staff combined with the transfer of responsibility for certain capabilities to national units might compromise the offer and diminish the attractiveness of the spokes.** While weekend training at waterfront units has been good, training in inland units has become less attractive because there is little mass and associated camaraderie for new joiners. As evidence, HMS FYING FOX lost staff to HMS CAMBRIA and there are currently no Phase 1 recruits or potential recruits in holding classes for initial naval training at the former.
- c. There is a wider impact as many of these inland units are in major cities – Leeds, Birmingham and Bristol – key areas for the Royal Navy to be represented as engagement and recruiting depend on a regional/ local presence. **We are concerned that a decline in the direct investment in these units may impact on the Royal Navy's ability to access the communities and industries it needs for the future to recruit both regulars and reservists.**
- d. The Royal Marines Reserve (RMR) also has been in a 'pause' as plans for reorganisation – reducing the number of units – were put on hold last year. This did have a negative impact as we heard that no new recruits had been passed out of initial training since October 2022 and outflow was at 19.6%. However, there are, again, green shoots for optimism in that the RMR have a clear statement of requirement of supporting the roles carried out by 42 Commando, based in Plymouth, of maritime security and support (ship protection, rescuing downed pilots, opposed boardings), and 43 Commando, based in Faslane, of fleet protection of UK's strategic nuclear deterrent. The RMR is integrated fully into the Commando Force change programme and recruitment and training has started again. **However, we assess while there is better clarity on the way ahead, more tangible evidence – the supply and issue of uniforms, weapons and equipment that are used by regulars – is needed and start to become available to the RMR so that they do feel truly part of one force.**



#### 24. Army.

- a. The establishment of 19 Light Brigade, commanded by a reservist, has been positive allowing for Army reserve units to be commanded and nurtured by a dedicated 1-star headquarters, and the economies of scale that come from brigading assets or functions such as support weapons. Equally positive, is that the Multi-National Field Artillery Brigade, which deploys with the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) for operations, is commanded by a reservist – Deputy Commander Reserve 3 UK Division.
- b. We had a very positive brief by the Army Medical Service (AMS) of the restructuring of the Multi-role Medical Regiments (MMR) through combining Medical Regiments with Field Hospitals. While the scalable concept is not new, the new MMRs, as a single organisation can support deployed units from point of wounding (Role 1) to hospital care (Role 3). Previously this capability was provided by separate Field Hospitals and Medical Regiments working together.
- c. The AMS also manages its workforce through global workforce management system. This allows specialist posts in 2 Medical Brigade to be filled from across the UK, rather than being limited to a few posts within one unit. Medics have the flexibility to train with their local unit, rather than to where they are posted, which may be some distance from home or workplace. The multi-role structure of the MMR also facilitates this.
- d. From our visit to the Land Warfare Centre (LWC), it is clear that early decision from the REC – equivalence being one – are positive. This recognition opens up a different approach to training and allows the development of a bespoke training system to ‘train to retain’ (training that is challenging and worthwhile), but ensures that the reservist is ‘fit to mobilise’, i.e. the reservist has sufficient core skills that he/she can be rapidly brought to the standard required for warfighting. To this end:
  1. 3 (UK) Division is conducting a trial this summer to provide challenging and demanding training on an Annual Deployment Exercise (ADE) for a composite Light Role Infantry battalion alongside the deployed battlegroup on Op CABRIT in Estonia. It allows for Defence Engagement, it practises deploying reservists in significant numbers and will provide some demanding training.
  2. The Royal Artillery has conducted a reserve training pilot that, over 15 days (including travel), qualifies gunners as safe to operate on their particular weapons system (Light Gun, Multiple Launch Rocket System, High Velocity Missile etc), artillery transport and lifting systems, driver qualifications and staff training. Thirty three courses have been run with 400 qualifications achieved.
  3. When we visited 19 Light Brigade, they briefed us on an initiative to spread the current annual ITR across two years in order that Commanding Officers can tailor role specific training better to the needs of the unit and individual. Since then, we understand that Commander Field Army has directed change to what and how the ITR are to be completed – for example, there is no need to conduct the annual Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) – which again will give greater freedom to conduct training that is worthwhile, challenges the individual and meets the ‘train to retain’, as highlighted above.

4. 19 Light Brigade also conducted a Light Cavalry concentration merging and combining specialist trade training (STT) with the Battle Craft Syllabus (BCS). The greater mass through concentration allows for better training and better use of instructors etc.

e. Last year, we commented on the reduction to unit establishments and the impact this would have on training. In our visits, we noted that there was a mismatch between peacetime establishment of units and the Future Soldier demand for warfighting where establishments have been reduced, but the warfighting increment (WFI) demand has increased. As examples, the Royal Wessex Yeomanry (reducing from 395 to 307 soldiers) were required to provide eight Challenger 2 Crews at 90 day readiness, but now the demand is 24 crews at 180 days. For some Infantry regiments the WFI represents some 85% of the Future Soldier establishment. **We consider these targets to be challenging, if not unrealistic, given reserve units historically are never fully up to strength, or have the right number soldiers with the required skill in the designated post.**

#### 25. **Royal Air Force.**

- a. We had a very positive brief on of the Reserve optimisation through Project ASTRA and the ambition to grow from 2,000 to 5,000 reservists, although not based on any specific requirement. This ambition is still being worked through and it is difficult to make definitive judgements, particularly given current workforce numbers. The emerging Agile Combat employment – dispersed aircraft operations – **could provide significant opportunity for the Reserve as, by its very nature, these operations will require more people than are available in the regular force given the efficiencies enabled by concentrating regular personnel on fewer main operating bases.**
- b. The trial of the regional support system under the Reserve Support Wing (RSW)<sup>7</sup> was completed successfully, and approval has been given to roll out the other three RSWs. As with all new concepts there was uncertainty and some resistance, but all those we spoke to at the Northern RSW at RAF Leeming were positive about the change and their ability to conduct recruiting and basic training and support the RAuxAF squadrons in their area. This, with widening opportunities for PTVR and better use of Full Time Reserve Commitment (FTRS) staff, bode well for the RAF's vision for reservists to work more flexibly across all RAF professions with better opportunities for promotion and career development.
- c. We also heard of the changes to the command and control (C2) arrangements with the majority (23 squadrons) of the RAuxAF squadrons coming under 2 Group, either through the Global Enablers or Regional pillars. All of this would clarify better who is responsible to who for what.

#### 26. **Frictions.**

Each year we highlight a number of 'frictions' that are barriers, or needless irritations to and of reserve service. While it is inevitable that such frictions will exist in any large organisation, **it is disappointing that they do exist as we consider that solutions to them are within the gift of Defence to resolve.**

- a. With the cost of fuel, it now costs some reservists more to travel to attend an evening's training than is received through pay and Home to Duty allowance, particularly if they are from a national unit.

7. The RSW provides recruiting and administrative support to other RAuxAF squadrons in their region.

- b. A reservist who is a Babcock Marine Mechanical Technical Trainer with Vehicle Maintenance and Repair qualification of Level 3 Diploma NVQ Level 3, TQUK Level 4 certificate in education and Training, is also a Class 2 Army Vehicle mechanic of 18 years' experience. However, this reservist cannot be signed off as qualified Class 1 at unit level.
- c. Another reservist is a Babcock Vehicle VOSA examiner, with appropriate qualifications, cannot, as a Sponsored Reservist Class 3 mechanic, inspect or move military vehicles.
- d. Reservist cyber specialists are recruited and serve nationally. They undergo rigorous selection and a shortened and bespoke military training package – they are recruited for specific skills without immediate regard to normal recruitment restrictions of age medical fitness and dress. Entry on rank is a Corporal. However, they serve under single Service Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS). While this, perhaps, should not matter, cyber units are losing high end cyber expertise due to lower Normal Retirement Ages (NRA) in some Services. **We would recommend a specific and new TACOS that is appropriate for a new specialism, rather than trying to shoehorn them into current TACOS designed for more general and wider use.**

#### Estate

- 27. The Reserve and Cadet Estate (Volunteer Estate (VE)) consists of some 5,000 buildings spread over 2,147 sites across the UK (1,790 of these locations are Cadet sites). The VE represents some 68% of the total Defence sites by number, but occupies only 5% in area and 3% of its running costs. Most of the VE consists of relatively basic infrastructure spread over many small, low value land parcels. As with the wider Defence estate, just under 50% of the VE is 50 or more years old.
- 28. We have reported that the fabric of VE is in decline because funding has been primarily on reactive (fix-on-fail) maintenance expenditure, and a backlog of £381m of unfunded maintenance and sustainment tasks. While the overall allocation for Hard<sup>8</sup> and Soft<sup>9</sup> Facilities Management in FY23/24 has been increased (just under £1m due to rate-revaluation), it is disappointing to report the continuing trend of a reducing allocation for Hard Facilities Management – the allocation for FY23/24 is £1m less than was allocated in FY21/22 while costs in this sector continue to rise. Furthermore, an enhancement bid is not expected to be approved. It should be recognised by senior officers that this unfunded backlog is only going to increase and eventually will have to be addressed. Sadly there are a number of examples in defence when this has not been the case and the magnitude of the issue becomes financially and politically difficult to resolve. **Given this bleak funding background and challenging operational environment, we congratulate the hard work of all the estates staff in the RFCAs to keep the VE open and functioning as best they can.**
- 29. There is on-going spend on improving Army Reserve Centres (ARC) of some £65m – Dunfermline and Raglan Barracks ARCs – but just under half of this is being spent on armouries and ammunition stores to meet security requirements, rather than wider improvements to the ARCs. Other projects already were identified through FR20 or Project NEWBURY, but were delayed because of funding constraints or in-year savings made in previous years. As reported last year, this has caused projects to increase in cost.

8. Building maintenance, fire safety systems, lighting, plumbing are examples.

9. Waste management, landscaping, rents and rates are examples.

30. The REOP looks to optimise and improve the estate, which we support as we have previously reported that the VE is too large. The REO programme in Tranche 2 had planned a number of defence collaboration hubs in major conurbations and to modernise existing regional and small hubs, but none gained any funding in FY23/24. While we understand the ever continuing pressures on defence funding, **we find this disappointing as, yet again, plans to improve the VE effectively have been put on ice for another 12 months.** We understand that for FY24/25, a number of options are being planned from 'Lite' of 3 major works requiring investment of £145m, and 'Focused' of 10 major works requiring £450m. While the upfront costs undoubtedly are large, they are offset by disposal receipts (£30m and £60m respectively) and reduced operating costs. **We would recommend that if Defence is to optimise and improve the VE, a start has to be made, if only the 'Lite' option in 2024/25.** This will allow Defence to test and adjust the concept of Defence Collaboration Hubs in key urban conurbations. These are to be intended to be Military points of presence across the country that facilitate mobilisation, but they also would: strengthen Defence's ability to respond effectively to Resilience tasks; and provide a focal point for training and Regular-Reserve integration across the Services. In supporting modern ways of working, these hubs will strengthen bonds with employers, academia, local authorities, communities and emergency services and deliver multi-agency capability. They will balance the need for a more efficient use of the Defence Estate, the regional footprint and manageable travel time, all to aid, national capability and Reserve recruiting and retention.

## RESERVIST HEALTH

31. Demand and delivery have increased year on year. In 2021, Defence Primary Health Care (DPHC) delivered 4,229 appointments, of these 2,558 (60%) were delivered in the evening or at weekends. In 2022, appointments increased by 25% to 5,637, 3,076 (55%) of which were delivered out of hours. An extrapolation from data from one Region would suggest that DPHC primary medical care centres delivered a further 5-6,000 appointments during working hours. Nevertheless, approximately 20,000 (54%) personnel are out of date for the mandatory two yearly audiometry assessments and 6,645 personnel are downgraded, of whom 2,358 (55%) are not in date for the mandated annual review. **This would suggest that the effective strength of the Reserve is substantially below the trained strength numbers highlighted in paragraphs 13 and 14 above.**

32. However, only 18% of reservists are in date for all required medical standards.<sup>10</sup> It is assessed that the majority would require up to three appointments over six months to meet the standards as set out in policy. This is not helped by under reporting of injury or illness – current data suggests that 82% of the Reserve population is Medically Fit for Deployment (MFD), which exceeds the figure for regular personnel, and would call into the question the validity of this figure. There is no mechanism to capture civilian dental fitness data – reservists only are assessed on entry – and, while pre-mobilisation dental assessment and treatment is available by DPHC, it is not currently mandatory.

<sup>10</sup>. In date Joint Medical Employment Standard, in date for 2 yearly audiometry assessment, in date for service vaccinations (UK national vaccinations plus Hepatitis A/B and Yellow Fever), Source Defence Health Information Requirement Dashboard.



33. If an increased readiness for the Reserve is required in the future, this needs to be matched by a better understanding of health metrics and the necessary policy and resources to deliver against the requirement, which we would support as otherwise medical policy requirements would limit use of reserves in their own areas by demanding inoculations akin to overseas deployments. In this vein, to improve the data, from July 2023, the initial medical record for recruits will be based on their NHS primary medical record rather than on a targeted questionnaire ensuring, for example, that UK vaccination data is routinely collected (currently around 5,000 records are missing).
34. Self-declaration tools have been used to support recent UK based mobilisations and are under consideration for inclusion in the Theatre Employment Standard for UK operations. **To improve medical fitness and readiness, in past reports we recommended that reservists are vaccinated at the conclusion of their initial training. We would recommend further that consideration is given to:**
  - a. Whether this also could be done when attending specialised training and in the preparation for overseas exercises, i.e. when Defence has a captive audience.
  - b. A lever, perhaps the Certificate of Efficiency, is used to encourage compliance with existing policy requirements such as updating medical status and having an audio assessment every two years.
  - c. Certifying reservists employability as MFD/MLD only if in date with medical standards in the same manner that aircrew cannot be certified Fit to Fly if out of date with medicals.

## CONCLUSION

35. Despite the positive initiatives we have reported, it is disappointing to have to report that the state or health of the Reserve is poor, and the risk we forecast last year of a clear decline is becoming more apparent. In most circumstances this would be most depressing, particularly given the importance attached to the Reserve in the IR and Defence Command Paper, and all the subsequent hard work and resources that went into making the FR20 Programme a success.
36. What we hope will rescue this situation is that we detect a clear recognition, energy and determination to correct it. The high-level building blocks are being put in place through a clear Defence Reserve narrative, the recognition that warfighting requires mass and reserves, and a force structure that is beginning to emerge. **But matters will not improve until the downward arrows of recruitment and retention are corrected.** We consistently have reported inadequacies in the current recruiting system and, given that the current recruiting contract has four years to run, unless there is a step change in how the pipeline is managed, or elements within it, we have little confidence that the current situation can be solved quickly.
37. Beyond the recruiting inadequacies, we will continue to observe that the equation of reserve service must be tested and in balance. If there is not clear purpose, sound structures, with the appropriate quality and quantity of equipment, demanding training, sufficient administrative and logistical support, the volunteer Reserve will not be impressed and will take their time and energy elsewhere.
38. We would conclude by commenting if the Reserve continues to be undermanned, it will not be because there are insufficient men and women who are interested in military service, and this should not be cited as the case and used as an excuse.











**Annexes:**

- A. External Reporting Provisions of the Defence Reform Act 2014.
- B. External Scrutiny Team: Terms of Reference.
- C. Expanding the Reserve Forces in Response to a Continental Threat: Some Parallels from History.
- D. Previous Report Recommendations – 2013 to 2022.
- E. External Scrutiny 2023 Report – Main Recommendations.
- F. External Scrutiny Team – Membership.



## EXTERNAL REPORTING PROVISIONS OF THE DEFENCE REFORM ACT 2014

The Defence Reform Act 2014 placed a responsibility on Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations to submit an annual report on the state of the UK's Reserve Forces under the following provisions.<sup>1</sup>

### 113A Duty to prepare report on volunteer Reserve Forces

- (1) An association must prepare an annual report on the state of the volunteer reserve forces so far as concerns the area for which the association is established.
- (2) A report on the state of the volunteer reserve forces is a report that sets out the association's assessment of the capabilities of the volunteer reserve forces, having regard to the duties that may be imposed on members of those forces by or under this Act or any other enactment.
- (3) The assessment referred to in subsection (2) must, in particular, include the association's views on the effect of each of the following matters on the capabilities of the volunteer reserve forces:
  - (a) the recruiting of members for the volunteer reserve forces;
  - (b) the retention of members of those forces;
  - (c) the provision of training for those forces;
  - (d) the upkeep of land and buildings for whose management and maintenance the association is responsible.
- (4) A report under subsection (1) must also set out the association's assessment of the provision that is made as regards the mental welfare of members and former members of the volunteer reserve forces.
- (5) An association must send a report under subsection (1) to the Secretary of State –
  - (a) in the case of the first report, before the first anniversary of the day on which the last Future Reserves 2020 report prepared before the coming into force of this section was presented to the Secretary of State, and
  - (b) in the case of subsequent reports, before the anniversary of the day on which the first report was laid before Parliament under subsection (6).
- (6) On receiving a report under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must lay a copy of it before Parliament.
- (7) The duties under this section may, instead of being performed by an association, be performed by a joint committee appointed under section 116 by two or more associations in relation to their combined areas.
- (8) Where by virtue of subsection (7) a joint committee has the duty to prepare a report –
  - (a) references in subsections (1) to (5) to an association are to be read as if they were to the joint committee, and
  - (b) section 117(1)(a) (power to regulate manner in which functions are exercised) has effect as if the reference to associations were to the joint committee.
- (9) In subsection (5)(a), 'Future Reserves 2020 report' means a report prepared by the External Scrutiny Group on the Future Reserves 2020 programme.

1. Inserted in Part 11 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 (reserve associations), after section 113.

## **COUNCIL OF RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATIONS EXTERNAL SCRUTINY TEAM: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. The FR20 Report<sup>1</sup> was commissioned by the Prime Minister in October 2010 in recognition of the relative decline and neglect of Reserve Forces.

### **PURPOSE**

2. The Commission identified<sup>2</sup> a requirement for an annual report on the overall state of the Reserve Forces. It recommended that the Council of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations (CRFCA) was best placed to meet this requirement, given its existing provision by (non-discretionary) statute to provide independent advice to the Defence Council and Ministers on Reserve Matters. The Defence Reform Act 2014 sets out the duty of the CRFCA to prepare annual reports of the state of the volunteer Reserve Forces. Roles and responsibilities in the production of the reports are set out in the Enabling Agreement.<sup>3</sup>

### **ROLE**

3. The CRFCA External Scrutiny Team is to report to the Secretary of State for Defence on the state of the volunteer Reserve Forces and provide independent assurance to Parliament.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

4. After consultation with the MOD, the RFCAs will appoint the Chair of the CRFCA External Scrutiny Team. The Chair will be appointed for a maximum of five years.
5. Membership of the External Scrutiny Team should be no greater than eight, to be decided by the Chair after consultation with the MOD through VCDS. It should provide representation from the three single Services, appropriate Regular and Reserve experience and independent expertise. Whilst its composition may change, the External Scrutiny Team must retain the expertise that enables the Chair to perform his duties effectively. The membership should include at least one member who is able to assess the provision made as regards the mental welfare of members and former members of the Reserve Forces.

### **BASELINE AND METRICS**

6. 1 April 12 is to be taken as the baseline date from which progress of the Future Reserves 2020 Programme will be assessed.
7. RF&C will undertake coordinating activity with the single Services to ensure that the External Scrutiny Team has the assistance it requires to enable them to assess trends based on MOD manning and demographic information (such as age). Metrics to be routinely monitored are to be agreed in consultation with the MOD but may include:
  - a. Outflow rate and return of service;
  - b. Fit for Employment; Fit for Role; Fit for Deployment;
  - c. Percentage achieving bounty;
  - d. Gapping levels of Regular, Reserve, FTRS and Civilian Permanent Staff who support the Reserve community.

1. Future Reserves 2020: The Independent Commission to Review the United Kingdom's Reserve Forces. July 2011.

2. Para 104 (p. 43).

3. Enabling Agreement dated 7 October 2014.

## ASSESSMENT

8. The External Scrutiny Team's report is to be set in the context of the ability of the Reserves to deliver capability required by Defence, and should assess the state of the Reserves including:

- a. progress against delivery of the FR20 Mandates and in the context of the recommendations of the FR20 Report, the condition of the Reserves.

and beyond the FR20 Programme:

- b. the recruiting of members for the volunteer Reserve Forces;
  - c. the retention of members of those Forces;
  - d. the provision of training for those Forces;
  - e. the upkeep of land and buildings for whose management and maintenance the Associations are responsible.
9. CRFCA will be involved in the development of the Programme through the Reserves Executive Committee.

## ACCESS

10. RF&C will assist in facilitating access to serving military personnel, sites and furnishing additional data as required.

## COSTS

11. Funding to cover the External Scrutiny Team's total personal expenses in the order of £9-10K pa<sup>4</sup> has been agreed. RF&C will provide advice on the submission of claims and recovery of expenses.

## MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

12. Media engagement, if necessary, is to be conducted through MOD DDC in conjunction with RF&C.

## DATE AND FREQUENCY OF REPORTS

13. The External Scrutiny Team shall present a report to the Secretary of State for Defence annually, reflecting the requirements of the Defence Reform Act 2014.

14. The Secretary of State for Defence will deliver the report to Parliament.

<sup>4</sup> This is recognised as an early estimation and reflecting steady-state costs beyond Yr1. CRFCA can bid for further funding as required as part of GIA.







## Expanding the Reserve Forces in Response to a Continental Threat: Some Parallels from History

After the First World War, in 1919, the Secretary of State for War and Air, Winston Churchill, was instrumental in introducing what became known as the 'Ten Year Rule'. This ordered the three Services to plan 'on the assumption that the British Empire would not be engaged in any great war during the next ten years'. This was sensible enough in the circumstances, but eleven years later Churchill, by then Chancellor of the Exchequer, put the Ten Year Rule on a permanent basis. This meant that it was reset every year: war was always deemed to be a decade away, and defence spending could therefore be restrained. This suited the Treasury, but this revised version of the Rule posed major problems for the modernisation of the Armed Forces.

Much changed, and the international situation darkened, over the next few years. The Ten Year Rule was abandoned in 1932, following Japanese aggression in Manchuria in 1931. This was the beginning of what proved to be a major challenge to British interests in Asia which eventually folded into the aggression of Fascist Italy in the Mediterranean and of course the existential threat posed by Hitler's Germany. In their 1932 annual review, the British Chiefs of Staff had opposed the Rule, and had extended their critique. In Professor Brian Bond's words, they claimed 'that British public opinion had not been educated or encouraged to understand the need for defence preparations. After all military preparedness was not inconsistent with a peace policy'. In 1932 the Second World War was just seven years away. Rearmament in the second half of the decade, which included investment in Reserve Forces meant that the UK's military entered the war in better shape than at the low point of the early Thirties.

It is all too easy to draw 'lessons' from history, and apply them to the present day. Such attempts are fraught with difficulties. Circumstances are never identical. Issues may appear to seem straightforward, but on deeper probing they almost invariably prove to be more complicated and nuanced (the Ten Year Rule is a case in point). Nonetheless, a careful reading of history can provide useful pointers for political and military practitioners and decision-makers. History does not provide blueprints but can give 'approximate precedents'<sup>2</sup>. Events have occurred in the past which, while not identical to current situations, are close enough to be worth studying, to examine what worked and what did not, if there are obvious mistakes to be avoided or courses of action which are promising. The study of the past to inform the present is not an exact science. It is certainly not infallible. Nonetheless it is an extremely useful tool, which can act as a guide through the labyrinth of international politics and strategy.

The decade of crisis from the Wall Street Crash of 1929 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 certainly offers an approximate precedent for the current period of international instability. Even before the events of February 2022, the rise of China, the turmoil caused by the election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States of America in 2016, and the period of domestic and international turbulence triggered by the outcome of the Brexit 2016 referendum meant that it was common for commentators to draw parallels with the 1930s, and indeed the period before the First World War. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has made the comparisons with the later interwar period even more obvious – although there are some important differences.

A study of early twentieth century history shows that the UK's Reserve Forces had three important roles: as a deterrent; as reinforcements for Regular forces; and as a means of mobilising society for war.

1. Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980), pp.24, 94-95.

2. Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996), p.600.

### Deterrence

Deterrence, which at its simplest is ‘causing someone not to do something because they expect or fear that they will be worse off if they do it than if they do not’<sup>3</sup>, revolves around the ‘three Cs’: capability, credibility, and communication. Capable armed forces enhance the credibility of a state’s defences, which can be communicated to potential adversaries in various ways. Obviously, the UK’s Armed Forces, of which Reserves formed a part, did not deter Germany either in 1914 or in 1939. But that is not to argue that conventional deterrence does not work. As one scholar has noted, ‘successful deterrence is usually invisible – an adversary may back down conspicuously during a confrontation in response to a deterrent threat, but the causes of crisis outcomes are often ambiguous’<sup>4</sup>. The UK’s primary deterrent is the strategic nuclear forces operated by the Royal Navy, but exclusive reliance on nuclear weapons as a deterrent narrows the options of a government to a dangerous degree. Faced with an adversary with robust conventional forces, at the very least, a potential aggressor’s decision-making is made more complex and challenging.

Russia’s re-emergence as a threat to NATO and the UK should move these debates out of the university seminar room and into the political arena. The current state of the UK’s hollowed out, under-resourced Reserve Forces cannot but reduce the credibility of the British deterrent. That is not to advocate a massive expansion back to Cold War levels, let alone to that of 1914 or 1939. Financial and other reasons rule that out. However, a more modest increase in the size of Reserve Forces, or even simply adequate resourcing of the existing ones (including the acquisition of sufficient equipment stocks for warfighting) would send a clear message to friend and foe alike that the UK is taking conventional defence and deterrence seriously. The Chamberlain Government doubled the size of the Territorial Army (TA) in March 1939 as a response to Nazi Germany’s ripping up of the 1938 Munich Agreement by the military occupation of rump Czechoslovakia. This was intended as a shot fired across Germany’s bows. It failed to deter Germany but did serve an important purpose in signalling to the UK’s future partner France that Britain was moving up a gear in its preparation for war. Doubling the TA in 1939 caused disruption to the existing organisation, but a much smaller expansion now would be more manageable.

### First Line of Reserve

At the beginning of both world wars, Reserve Forces provided vital reinforcement for the Regulars. Twenty squadrons of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF) were deployed alongside the Regular RAF in 1939. During the Battle of Britain 14 out of 62 Fighter Command squadrons were from the RAuxAF. In 1914, battalions of the Territorial Force (later TA) were deployed from October 1914 to the front line. In both wars pre-war Reserve Forces and Regulars together held the line, metaphorically and literally, buying time for Britain to mobilise. In more recent wars of choice, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, reservists were an integral and vital role in the UK’s military deployments. For example, in 2004, some 1200 TA soldiers (about 10% of which were women) were involved in Operation TELIC 4 in Iraq. The TA contingent comprised 14% of the UK force<sup>5</sup>. Whether deployed as entire units, or in sub-units, or even as individuals, the UK’s Reserve Forces will play a similar role in future.

3. Karl Mueller, ‘The Continuing Relevance of Conventional Deterrence’, in: F. Osinga and T. Sweijts (eds.), *NL ARMS Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2020* (The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2021), p.48.

4. Muller, op.cit, p.55.

5. Guardian 14 October 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/14/iraq.military> viewed 1 July 2023.



**Mobilisation of society**

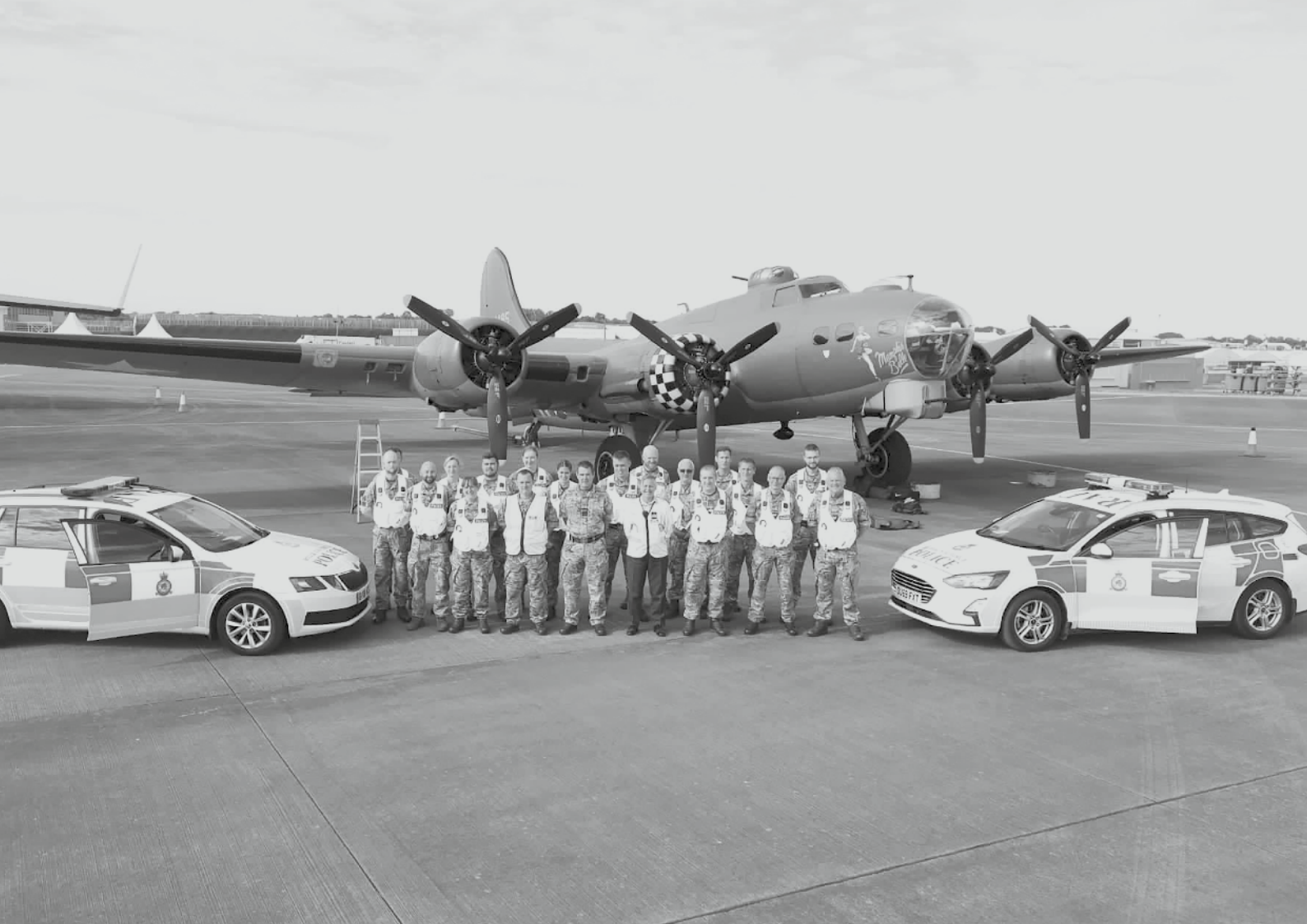
Expansion of the TA in 1939 brought home to the British population the gravity of the situation, and that need for huge efforts in the event of war. This 'cultural mobilisation' ran alongside physical mobilisation, and did much to address the criticisms of the Chiefs of Staff in 1932 that the public had not been alerted to the timeless relevance of the Latin phrase 'Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum' (if you desire peace, prepare for war). Not the least benefit of increased spending on Reserve Forces today is that it would draw attention to the elephant in the room: that the return of interstate war to the continent of Europe poses a threat to the UK, and a modest building up of conventional defences is necessary to enhance the UK's deterrent posture.

Britain has moved a long way from the militarised, National Service society of the early Cold War period. In more recent years, the Iraq War did much in the eyes of a section of public opinion to discredit the use of war to achieve political aims. Building up Reserve Forces would help bridge the gap between the population at large and the UK's Armed Forces, especially by reforging links at local level. Concentration on the defensive and, above all, deterrent value of Reserve Forces in the face of an emerging threat would help to counter accusations of militarism: the UK has a long tradition of part-time citizen troops defending the country in time of crisis.

If necessary, Reserve Forces could serve as a cadre on which to expand the UK's Armed Forces in the event of a general war. It is not suggested that this is likely, but a clear lesson from history is that failure to plan for this eventuality in peace time led to an ad hoc response in time of war. As consequence, under-trained, inexperienced and poorly equipped troops were sent into battle, with sometimes disastrous results. This was the fate of some Territorial units in the Norway campaign of 1940, and in France a few weeks later. Investing in Reserve Forces in peacetime is best seen as an insurance policy. Like any type of insurance, you can gripe at the premiums but when the worst happens be mightily glad that you kept up the payments.

**Conclusion**

The year 2023 is different in myriad ways from 1938, and the challenge presented today by Putin's Russia is not the same as the one posed in the past Hitler's Germany. Nonetheless there are uncomfortable parallels. We have reached, if not already passed, a '1932 moment', in which the modern equivalent of the Ten Year Rule needs to be discarded. Prudence demands increased investment in defence, not least in Reserve Forces. It is sometimes said that to prepare to fight makes war more likely. On the contrary: in circumstances of 2023, just as in the 1930s, to show weakness is to court danger. Even a modest investment in Reserve Forces would enhance the UK's deterrent posture and make us all safer.



## PREVIOUS REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

### SUMMARY OF 2013 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 13.1** ([Link to the Commission's recommendations 3, 4 & 8](#))

As a matter of priority the Department should issue a plain-English narrative which sets out the Reserves proposition: a narrative which is commonly adopted across all the Services and, as a minimum, covers the purposes of the Reserves; the manner in which they are likely to be used; and individual levels of obligation.

**Recommendation 13.2** ([Link to the Commission's recommendations 6 & 12](#))

FR20 manpower metrics should be more granular for the period to 2018 to demonstrate changes within the recruit inflow pipeline and should not concentrate solely on the achievement of Phase-2-trained Reservists.

**Recommendation 13.3** ([Link to the Commission's recommendation 26](#))

Priority must be given to fund and introduce quickly an effective management information system which accurately captures Reservists numbers; states of training, preparedness; availability; attendance; and skill sets.

**Recommendation 13.4**

More analysis is undertaken to determine the causes of 'manning churn', to better inform how retention measures could be better targeted.

**Recommendation 13.5** ([Link to the Commission's recommendations 2 & 21](#))

In parallel to development of pairing/parenting responsibilities, further analysis is needed for scaling of equipment and vehicle holdings at Reserve unit level, including the provision of low-tech simulation alternatives.

**Recommendation 13.6** ([Link to the Commission's recommendations 5, 6, 17, 18 & 23](#))

FR20 Army basing should take account of regional capacity to recruit, not just to facilitate proximity, and should also be phased to initially preserve current TA manpower until such time as alternative inflow is more fully developed.

**Recommendation 13.7** ([Link to the Commission's recommendations 8, 22 & 23](#))

That work is initiated to look at the potential to employ Reserves with critical skills, where their employment was best served in a reach-back rather than deployed role; and that their TACOS be examined for appropriate adjustment.

**Recommendation 13.8** ([Link to the Commission's report, Annex C, paragraph 8](#))

That senior military and political leadership initiate a comprehensive information campaign with the Services' middle management to address the cultural change necessary to secure FR20, drawing on the narrative we recommend above.



## SUMMARY OF 2014 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 14.1** Further work on Whole Force and the New Employment Model, coupled with the desirability of easier transfers between Regular and Reserve service, suggest that the necessity of merging the Armed Forces' Act and the Reserve Forces' Act should be kept under review.

**Recommendation 14.2** The narrative developed for the White Paper should be updated to take account of FR20 delivery to date and used more extensively to market the value of Reserve service and the recruiting offer. It should also be used more extensively cross-Government.

**Recommendation 14.3** FR20 measures which seek to bring down the average age of Reservists should be phased to follow those measures which will rely heavily on Reservist knowledge and experience for their introduction.

**Recommendation 14.4** The single Services should examine the scope to apply a 'special measures approach' to turning round those units and sub-units most in need of assistance in reaching FR20 targets.

**Recommendation 14.5** The single Services should examine a range of measures which better preserve the corporate memory of their Reserve components, including procedures for recording whether and how savings measures are planned to be restored during programming.

**Recommendation 14.6** Recruiting processes should be subject to continuous improvement measures, with recognition that central marketing and advertising campaigns must be complemented by appropriately funded local/unit activity to nurture and retain applicants through the process.

**Recommendation 14.7** Final decisions on Reserve Centre laydown and unit/sub-unit closures should be re-tested against local recruiting capacity and retention factors.

**Recommendation 14.8** In order to ensure that necessary differences between Regular and Reserve service are appropriately managed, the single Services should consider the reintroduction of a dedicated Reserve career management staff branch (predominantly manned and led by Reservists) within their Personnel Headquarters.

**Recommendation 14.9** Command appointments of Reserve units should continue to provide opportunity for part-time volunteer officers. When part-time volunteers are appointed, command team manning of the unit should be reviewed to ensure that the commanding officer is fully supported with no gapping in key headquarters posts.

**Recommendation 14.10** The MOD should consider the option to restore the FR20 Commission's proposal that a contingency reserve fund should be established to be available for short duration domestic operations making use of Reserves.



## SUMMARY OF 2015 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 15.1** The MOD give further consideration to how it will safeguard the ability of Reserves to play a proportionate part in resilience operations, especially once the Reserves are at full manning and would otherwise have to dilute funds for annual training to offset costs.

**Recommendation 15.2** Working within the existing governance system, build more inter-Service cooperation on experimentation and best practice on recruiting and retention, whether or not initiatives are universally adopted.

**Recommendation 15.3** The three Services should review the separate roles played by the national call centres, the Armed Forces Careers Offices, the recruiting field forces and Reserve units to ensure that they are clearly optimised for Reserve recruiting.

**Recommendation 15.4** The MOD and the Services should review the medical entry standards required of recruits and ensure that the screening contracts are appropriately incentivised and assured to achieve success.

**Recommendation 15.5** The Services should initiate work to determine the recruiting resources necessary to ensure steady state manning of the Reserve beyond the FR20 period.

**Recommendation 15.6** The Services should examine what more could be done to enhance manning through retention-positive measures, at least in the short term, including bespoke extra-mural activities targeted at the Reserve.

**Recommendation 15.7** FR20 planning and risk mitigation should increasingly turn more attention to the growth of capability within the Reserve component, rather than a slavish pursuit of numerical growth.

**Recommendation 15.8** Army Reserve basing requirements should be revisited as a consequence of availability of funds to deliver the original basing concept and on the evidence of other FR20 achievement; link to Recommendation 15.10.

**Recommendation 15.9** DIO and the Services should review their multi activity and support contracts and, where relevant, explore ways in which they can be amended to ensure that they are Reserve-friendly.

**Recommendation 15.10** The Services should conduct a command-led stock-take on all aspects of FR20 implementation by the end of FY 2015/16 and share lessons learned; link with recommendation 15.8.

## SUMMARY OF 2016 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 16.1** An urgent contract review of the Army Recruiting Partnership.

**Recommendation 16.2** The Services undertake more granular analysis within their data gathering, to reduce the risk of specialist manning gaps in the final years of FR20 and beyond.

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

**Recommendation 16.4** The Royal Navy and Army absorb recent innovations in officer Phase 1 training into their core officer development activity, as the issue will require sustained attention well beyond the timeframe of FR20.

**Recommendation 16.5** Consideration be given to greater cross-pollination, shared practice and coordination between the three Services in the officer recruiting environment, particularly in the area of achieving greater penetration of the Higher and Further Education recruiting hinterland.

**Recommendation 16.6** The Services keep under review the impact of losing Op FORTIFY enhancements (or Service equivalents) and, where appropriate to sustain recruiting beyond 2019, bring relevant elements into their core activity.

**Recommendation 16.7** The Services examine units which have a significant young officer deficit to determine whether a poor proposition might be the cause and, if so, to assess whether it can be legitimately improved.

**Recommendation 16.8** The Army consider how the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force use their Reserves in order to develop a better understanding of potential use of Auxiliaries in the Army Reserve; and that such analysis helps shape policies for the future employment system.

**Recommendation 16.9** The Army revisits the decision to withdraw LADs from Reserve units to create REME battalions.

**Recommendation 16.10** The manner in which Reserves can be routinely employed on national operations or for back-fill be revisited.

**Recommendation 16.11** The Reserve narrative be reviewed to ensure it cannot be interpreted as intent to prevent use of Reservists for routine mobilisation and on national operations.

**Recommendation 16.12** Work on defining the Army Reserve officer career pathway be re-invigorated.

**Recommendation 16.13** Defence reviews whether a more flexible range of employment terms should be considered, to better incentivise recruitment and to provide more agility within a whole force approach to employment.

**Recommendation 16.14** As options are considered for disposal of Regular estate, decisions are not taken before current or potential usefulness to Reserve capability-building has also been taken into account.

**Recommendation 16.15** MOD and the Services recognise incomplete cultural change will be the main impediment to FR20 delivery and long-term Reserve sustainability, and introduce specific measures to inculcate cultural change.

**Recommendation 16.16** The importance of localism for effective sub-unit command be addressed by simplifying systems where possible; providing adequate permanent staff support; and keeping training requirements at practical levels.

## SUMMARY OF 2017 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 17.1** A repeat recommendation that a formal contract review of the Recruiting Partnership be undertaken. (Paragraph 19)

**Recommendation 17.2** That the continued employment of RSUSOs is revisited. (Paragraph 20)

**Recommendation 17.3** That the use of medical waivers during recruiting should be better advertised to RN and Army units, and other relevant participants in the recruiting chain. (Paragraph 21)

**Recommendation 17.4** That the Army should examine where the medical waiver authority is best lodged. (Paragraph 21)

**Recommendation 17.5** That the single Services should review their recruiting medical contracts to ensure assessments are carried out with a greater degree of consistency and common sense. (Paragraph 23)

**Recommendation 17.6** That the Services identify which units have experienced the most successful officer recruitment and explore the best means by which their successes can then be exported to less successful units. (Paragraph 24)

**Recommendation 17.7** The Army should revitalise work to create a Reserve officer career pathway. (Paragraph 28)

**Recommendation 17.8** That the Army develop and implement a policy to support appropriately Reserve unit commanding officers when the incumbent is a part time volunteer. (Paragraph 30)

**Recommendation 17.9** That the MOD, Joint Forces Command and the single Services review the terms under which Reserves are included on or in support of operations, in order to develop protocols which make their inclusion easier. (Paragraph 35)

**Recommendation 17.10** That the Services resist short-term in-year budgetary palliatives which directly or indirectly reduce routine Reserve activity. (Paragraph 37)

**Recommendation 17.11** That the Services now initiate work to determine optimum return-of-service/retention rate(s) for their Reserves and put in place measures to achieve them, with the same vigour that they have applied in their recruiting effort. (Paragraph 39)

**Recommendation 17.12** That work on the Reserves Estate Strategy be re-invigorated and accelerated, continuing to draw on local and regional expertise. We further recommend that priority is given to ensuring adequate funding is made available to sustain the existing VE until a new strategy can be implemented. (Paragraph 48)

**Recommendation 17.13** That the MOD update the work on mental health in the Services that it has undertaken with King's College and commission fresh work to look specifically at the current situation for Reserves. (Paragraph 51)



## SUMMARY OF 2018 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 18.1** Given the challenging recruiting environment encountered by the three Services and the failure of the DRS, we recommend that the MOD and Services do not take further savings measures from the FR20 £1.8bn funding to manage FY18 in-year financial pressures. (Paragraph 15)

**Recommendation 18.2** We would welcome an update on the proposed revisions to JSP 950 when these actions are completed. (Paragraph 22)

**Recommendation 18.3** Given the criticality of DRS to the inflow of applicants to recruits, we recommend that 'Hypercare' is continued until all three services are confident that DRS works as intended reducing the 'time of flight' between application and being loaded on a Phase 1 recruit training course. (Paragraph 26)

**Recommendation 18.4** Linked to paragraphs 16-26 above, until the frictions in the recruiting system are ironed out, whether induced by DRS or Service policies, we recommend that Op FORTIFY measures, such as the RSUSO, are continued beyond FR20 until the Services hit their trained strength FR20 targets and they are confident that manning is on an even plateau. (Paragraph 27)

**Recommendation 18.5** We recommend that the three Services continue to examine that their courses – particularly those run by Training Schools – policies and processes and are adapted to take account of the needs of the reservist. (Paragraph 32)

**Recommendation 18.6** We recommend that MOD produce an agreed costing method to compare the cost of regulars and reservists, drawing on the above work and that done by the Land Environment Military Capability Output Costs (LEMCOC), and examine the opportunities to further increase their utility and value to Defence. (Paragraph 36)

**Recommendation 18.7** We continue to recommend that MOD should consider the option to restore the FR20 Commission's proposal to establish a contingency reserve fund to be available for short notice and duration operations. (Paragraph 37)

**Recommendation 18.8** That the Reserves Estate Strategy be re-invigorated and accelerated, continuing to draw on local and regional expertise. We further recommend that priority is given to ensuring adequate funding is made available to sustain the existing Reserve estate until the new strategy is implemented. (Paragraph 49)

## SUMMARY OF 2019 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 19.1** The MOD and the Services do not take further savings measures from the FR20 £1.8bn funding, given the FR20 programme trained strength targets have been missed and ask MOD and all Services to clarify what funding remains, and plans to spend it over the next four years. (Paragraph 7)

**Recommendation 19.2** That: the Services determine what is the optimum percentage of Reservists within a deployed force (between 5-8%), which meets the requirement to mobilise Reservists to sustain the Whole Force Model, while being sustainable in the long-term, and fund this accordingly in their annual spending programme. (Paragraph 12)

**Recommendation 19.3** That they [initiatives to allow for mobilisation on training tasks and a tiered mobilisation package for DAOTO] are developed further as a matter of priority, particularly the tiered mobilisation package as it would broaden the range of manning levers available to Commander, and thus enhance the utility of the Reserve, and answer the requirements to modernise, exploit and use the Reserve more efficiently as identified by the Commission. (Paragraph 16)

**Recommendation 19.4** That:

- The three Services review their ongoing support arrangements for Reserve recruiting, to ensure the successful lessons of FR20 are not discarded; and
- RSUSOs are taken onto units' permanent strengths now in recognition of the vital role they play. (Paragraph 18b)

**Recommendation 19.5** That similar work being done by the Australians and Canadians to minimise the steps in the [recruiting] process (including introducing a one-stop shop) is studied closely before the contract is re-let. We further recommend that ambitious targets should be set – one month if there are no issues, and six months if there are, and success or failure should be judged on these targets. (Paragraph 19)

**Recommendation 19.6** That the Services continue the drive to adapt their Service policies and practices to take account of the needs of the Reservist. (Paragraph 21)

**Recommendation 19.7** We recommend that the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force consider adopting such a system in order to ensure reservist knowledge and input is considered during policy formulation and operational planning, and be able to grow a Reservist (part-time) two star officer. (Paragraph 22)

**Recommendation 19.8** Identified and approved FR20 [infrastructure] projects are not subject to the 'exceptions, suspension' regime in order that agreed funding for the estate is spent as intended and not delayed. (Paragraph 25)

**Recommendation 19.9** That the three Services further promulgate the OH, rehabilitation, dental and mental health services in order to make Reservists fully aware of the medical services available to them. (Paragraph 27)

**Recommendation 19.10** That consideration is given to a means whereby Reservists submit some form of annual health declaration and/or have routine medicals linked to birthdays. (Paragraph 29)

## SUMMARY OF 2020 REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 20.1** That all three Services develop and maintain Financial Incentives to recruit ex regulars, particularly for those trades and skills that are expensive to train and develop, acknowledging this is a cost effective method for manning the Reserve. (Paragraph 15)

**Recommendation 20.2** That the Reserve, through embedded part-time reserve staff posts should be involved in all aspects of the Whole Force:

- Across all Defence Lines of Development (DLOD) – particularly force design, and capability development.
- In the MOD (Secretariat Policy Operations (SPO)) – the MOD's operations cell – Standing Joint Command (SJC) Headquarter (HQ) and Land Operations Centre (LOC).
- As operational staff of higher HQs. (Paragraph 19)

**Recommendation 20.3** That an assessment is made on the requirement for an uplift of personnel to meet the workload of managing a mobilisation and that additional personnel are mobilised to reinforce the RHQ of the mobilising unit, as enablers, before and throughout deployment. (Paragraph 21b(1))

**Recommendation 20.4** That the issue of the provision of REME support to equipment heavy units, whether for training or operations, is revisited as the current process does not appear to be working. (Paragraph 21b(2))

**Recommendation 20.5** That:

- The Services and the MOD review their plans for mobilisation so that it accommodates individuals as well as mobilising large numbers/units at short notice and rapidly.
- Reserve mobilisation expertise (staff posts with experience and expertise) is integrated into such areas as the SPO, SJC and LOC by creating embedded part-time reservist posts within those organisations.
- The process for pre-mobilisation medicals is reviewed and appropriate standards adopted for overseas and homeland operations.
- Revised processes are exercised routinely not only in units, but also the SPO, SJC and LOC. (Paragraph 25)

**Recommendation 20.6** That MOD considers reviewing the capacity of the RF&C staff branch in the MOD in order that it is manned adequately to meet the demands it is set. (Paragraph 28)

**Recommendation 20.7** That there is scope to consider developing a mobilisation package in support of those reservists deploying on shorter DAOTO, which is different to one that supports those on longer specific named operations or those that are more akin to warfighting. (Paragraph 29)

**Recommendation 20.8** That the requisite training courses are adapted through modularisation, distribution, concentration and remote/virtual learning, and are assessed and measured on this basis. (Paragraph 32)



**Recommendation 20.9** That the MOD urgently produces a transparent and agreed costing method across all three Services to compare the cost of regulars and reservists drawing on the Land Military Capability Output Costs (LEMCO). (Paragraph 36)

**Recommendation 20.10** That:

- Any receipts raised through optimisation/rationalisation of the Volunteer Estate should be reinvested back into new estate or maintenance for the Volunteer Estate.
- When the Volunteer Estate Review reports, and if a programme of work is proposed or required, funding is identified and ring-fenced so that it is not subject to subsequent in-year budgetary pressures. (Paragraph 44)

**Recommendation 20.11** That Reservists submit an annual health declaration. (Paragraph 48)

**Recommendation 20.12** That, like the Royal Navy, the Army and Royal Air Force undertake periodic medicals for its reservists, linked to age/birthdays. (Paragraph 48)

**Recommendation 20.13** That such innovations [medical] required to facilitate the rapid mobilisation of the Reserve for Operation RESCRIPT are developed further, codified and adopted by all three Services. (Paragraph 50)

## SUMMARY OF 2021 REPORT MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 21.1** That the same intensity of focus and consistency that led to the success of Army regular recruiting is applied to the Reserve, particularly given that the reductions to regular strength increase the importance of having a fully manned Reserve.

**Recommendation 21.2** That the Reserve, through embedded part-time reserve staff posts, should be involved in all aspects of the Whole Force across all Defence Lines of Development (DLOD) – particularly force design and capability development.

**Recommendation 21.3** That the MOD produces a transparent and agreed costing method across all three Services and, in addition, a contingency fund is identified and ring fenced to allow that use so that this almost perennial debate, or friction, does not arise.

**Recommendation 21.4** If reservists are to be deployed on operations using RSDs more frequently and as a matter of policy, we recommend that the MOD reinvigorate the work to develop an appropriate package of support.

**Recommendation 21.5** That RF30 takes forward work to simplify the TACOS available and guidelines, or policy (rules) for the appropriate TACOS to meet a given situation; i.e. RSDs for routine training; enhanced RSDs for short operational deployments (maximum 28 days) whether homeland resilience or DAOTO; and full mobilisation for longer deployments and more kinetic operations.

**Recommendation 21.6** That Defence should be more forward leaning in making use of appropriate civilian courses and the recognition and accreditation of civilian qualifications, in lieu of military courses.

## SUMMARY OF 2022 REPORT MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 22.1** That reserve recruiting has a consistent and transparent marketing spend, and staff focus.

**Recommendation 22.2** That unit structures should be reviewed and tested against the offer to ensure that they are sufficient for unit cohesion to allow quality training, thus meeting the professional and technical development of all ranks.

**Recommendation 22.3** That further consideration is given to our 2016 recommendation that the Army revisits the decision to withdraw LADs from Reserve units to create REME battalions.

**Recommendation 22.4** That a decentralised system is practised and embedded into the mobilisation process.

**Recommendation 22.5** That Defence articulates a clear statement of the medical requirement needed of the reservists in this era of greater use of the Reserve, and an acceptance that changes to current policies will require resources to implement.



## EXTERNAL SCRUTINY 2023 REPORT – MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

**23.1** We, therefore, would recommend that:

- a. The journey for taking an applicant who wishes to join the Reserve through the new AFRP incorporates a clear nexus of the constituents parts, identified in paragraph 19 above, so that they do not become ‘blockages’ that cause applicants to give up or drift away.
- b. The requirement of the reservist should be designed into the new AFRP contract from the outset, alongside the needs of the regular service person. (Paragraph 20)

**23.2** We would recommend that the Royal Navy’s capability studies have senior Part Time Volunteer Reservist (PTVR) experienced reservists attached to each one, thus ensuring reserve-informed debate and conclusion.

**23.3** We would recommend that the capability pillars should all have senior Part Time Volunteer Reservist (PTVR) experienced Reservists included in their management teams, rather than having them concentrated in Commander Maritime Reserve’s (COMMARRES) headquarters. (Paragraph 23)

**23.4** We would recommend a specific and new TACOS that is appropriate for a new specialism, rather than trying to shoehorn them into current TACOS designed for more general and wider use. (Paragraph 26d)

**23.5** We would recommend that if Defence is to optimise and improve the VE, a start has to be made, if only the ‘Lite’ option. (Paragraph 30)

**23.6** To improve medical fitness and readiness, in past reports we recommended that reservists are vaccinated at the conclusion of their initial training. We would recommend further that consideration is given to:

- a. Whether this also could be done when attending specialised training and in the preparation for overseas exercises, i.e. when Defence has a captive audience.
- b. A lever, perhaps the Certificate of Efficiency, is used to encourage compliance with existing policy requirements such as updating medical status and having an audio assessment every two years.
- c. Certifying reservists as MFD if in date with medical standards in the same manner that aircrew cannot be certified Fit to Fly if out of date with medicals. (Paragraph 34)

## EXTERNAL SCRUTINY TEAM – MEMBERSHIP

### **Chairman:**

Major General (Retd) S F N Lalor CB TD

### **Members:**

Rear Admiral (Retd) C J Hockley CBE DL

Brigadier (Retd) P R Mixer OStJ QVRM TD DL

Air Commodore (Retd) P E O'Neill CBE

Captain S C Jameson RNR RD

Colonel (Retd) G Straughan OBE TD

Professor G Sheffield MA FRHistS FRSA

### **Clerk:**

Major General (Retd) J H Gordon CB CBE









The Council of RFCAs  
Holderness House,  
51-61 Clifton Street,  
London EC2A 4EY

Tel: 020 7426 8350

Email: [co-info@rfca.mod.uk](mailto:co-info@rfca.mod.uk)

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/reserve-forces-and-cadets-associations](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/reserve-forces-and-cadets-associations)