

**Defence communications: capability;
structure; resourcing; and reform**

1. Summary

This report summarises the main findings and recommendations from a series of capability reviews carried out across Defence organisations between April and July 2014.

The reviewers concluded that there are three key aspects to improvement of Defence communications¹.

- The first priority is the collaborative development of a set of communications objectives and identification of key main audience groups to form a pan-Defence communications strategy. This should be focussed and distinctive. Work on this has been underway for some while and is currently (at time of writing) is awaiting approval.
- Second, is the presentation of this strategy across Defence, when signed off, in a way that unifies staff with a shared purpose and clarifies the vision. It needs telling in different ways to make it relevant to different target groups.
- Third, is a process of structural and operational reform across Defence communications. The immediate area to address, for most of the organisations reviewed, is the lack of a professional communications leadership cadre with the authority and skills necessary to establish a precise, measurable set of communications objectives and strategies within their own areas. The absence of a pan-Defence strategy is not an excuse for the lack of organisation-level strategies. Without credible leadership the value that communications can bring to an organisation's business is reduced. This will take time to improve.

The first two points have to be addressed as a matter of urgency, given external pressures and timings. The Director of Defence Communications (DDC) is aware of the urgency to reform across all three areas. The MOD's delay in getting agreement to the communications strategy has driven concern among some senior leaders, perhaps unfairly, that too much of the focus is on the third area. These three steps are reminiscent of the way that government communications as a whole is reforming, and lessons can be learned from this.

This report endorses DDC's plans to put in place a fundamentally reformed DMC, renamed Directorate of Defence Communications (DDC), IOC on 1 September. This new central function should achieve more effective central co-ordination, more efficient utilisation and sharing of assets, and better audience understanding. By taking a stronger stance on professional leadership and mandating several areas of good practice, it will also go some way to address the shortcomings of Defence public relations, internal communications and marketing that are set out in this report.

Conclusion

Although Defence communications are not performing well, by following the priorities listed above, the operation could be reformed to provide significant benefits across Defence. Communications can be made swifter and more efficient. A more proactive, coherent stance will help leaders set the agenda. And there will also be an improvement in recruitment and retention both for the Frontline Commands, and more widely a sense of shared purpose.

¹ As shorthand, the Cabinet Office (CO) uses the term "communications" throughout this report. However, CO acknowledges that the term "Defence Communications" also embraces information operations, psychological operations, which fall outside the scope of this report.

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2. Background to reviews

- The Cabinet Office is running a communications capability programme across Whitehall and arm's length bodies. As part of this programme, it has reviewed the public relations, internal communications and marketing capability of four military and five Defence civilian organisations and, in brief, DMC's reform plans. It also obtained the views on communications from senior leaders across Defence. The fieldwork took place in May – June 2014.
- Each review had a team of separate, independent reviewers, supported by a Cabinet Office capability review lead. This over-arching report was put together by an oversight board including an external communications leader, the Director of Defence Communications, the Executive Director of Government Communications and the Deputy Director of Government Communications Policy and Capability.

To note:

As shorthand, the Cabinet Office (CO) uses the term “communications” throughout this report. However, CO acknowledges that the term “Defence Communications” also embraces information operations, psychological operations which *fall outside the scope of this report*. The TORs as set out in the 26 February Project Initiation paper are at Annex A.

3. Overview of the context for the Defence reviews

Reputation and future risks

- Defence communications has a mixed reputation within MOD and its associated organisations, across Whitehall, and externally. It is seen as largely reactive, sometimes poorly co-ordinated, over-complex in structure, short-termist and deficient in the use of up-to-date methods. There is general acknowledgement that Defence public relations, internal communications and marketing need to be improved. These reviews largely corroborated this reputation.
- Public approval ratings for the Single Services are very high. This positive sentiment might be directed more at the serving men and women rather than the institutions themselves. Looking ahead, the public perceptions environment is challenging. Risks include: post-traumatic stress; housing; redundancies; and pressure on the public purse in the run-up to SDSR 2015.
- Regular and Reserves recruitment deficits will continue to present substantial reputational and operational challenges.

Communications role, objectives and strategies

- Communications and marketing have an important role in Defence business and are taken seriously by the Defence Board. The role for communications in the civilian and military organisations includes:
 - positioning the military as an effective force in helping deliver security and underpinning the prosperity of Britain and its place in the world;
 - providing Defence personnel with recognition and respect to ensure their engagement and support (this includes families, reservists and civil servants);
 - reputation management – proactive and reactive;
 - recruitment and retention; and
 - stakeholder engagement to create advocacy and influence the debate among a diverse group, ranging from think tanks, to NATO, and from Defence commercial partners to local communities.
- The role for communication on an organisation-by-organisation level is set out in each review summary (see Annex B).
- A pan-Defence narrative and strategy has been in development for several months. Communications alignment between the Single Services and with political leadership has had some low points in the past ten years, although trust is now slowly being regained.
- The Single Services' recruitment marketing campaigns have among the largest budgets in government communications.
- Some of the civilian organisations reviewed have been subject to significant organisational transformation, with an adverse impact on their communications capability. Only two had a communications strategy.

Resources

- 546 posts are in Defence communications and marketing (within the scope defined by the review terms of reference), as at March 2014 (see Annex D). An explanation of

this figure relative to the DOC Audit is at Annex E. (DOC Audit: *Defence Communications, Engagement and Influence*, MoD DOC Audit Report 13/3, 28 November 2013).

- The total current cost for communications and marketing across Defence is £83.9 million. This *includes* recruitment marketing but *excludes* communicators who devote over 50% of their time on other duties. The reviewers encountered numerous instances where staff were taken out of scope during the course of this review. The real figure, when these are included, is therefore higher.

4. Main findings

- Findings at a senior leadership level at MOD and the Services

Strategy development and agreement

- There is wide consensus that an agreed pan-Defence narrative is much needed. The Single Services are committed to engaging with this at the highest level and told reviewers that they are prepared to confine their messages so that they fall within its boundaries.
- Work on this is currently underway: the process began in autumn 2013 with wide-ranging work on Vision and Mission. The DDC is still awaiting final approval from the Defence leadership on a strategy. He is fully aware of the urgent need for implementation of a new strategic approach.
- Most importantly, this strategy should be co-created in a shared process across key, senior stakeholders. There is more that could be done in ensuring that this process is collaborative, with perhaps more proactivity is required from Single Service chiefs in ensuring active participation and shared ownership.
- The current draft requires refinement to make it more precise and targeted. Getting a draft that is distinctive and meaningful will need negotiation.

Managing the strategy's integrity

- Maintaining disciplined adherence to the strategy will require further rebuilding of trust between political leaders and military leaders in the field of media briefing, something that is already improving.
- The 2015 election and the SDSR will put this under immense pressure.

- DMC-level findings

- A review team spent a day scrutinising the principles and intentions behind a new DMC structure. The objectives, structure and adoption of new practices were seen as strong.
- However, there is a need – fully acknowledged by DDC – for communicating the rationale behind the new structure to audiences beyond the immediate Directorate. The Director's options for doing this have been constrained by having to 'build the plane while flying it'.
- Reviewers were encouraged that DDC is now taking a positive lead in communicating these reforms to key stakeholders across Defence and urge that efforts are re-doubled.
- DDC has also been working closely with business process planning specialists to ensure proposed processes within the new structure are optimal.
- Internal communications has improved but originates from too many different areas and needs better co-ordination. This is fully acknowledged by DDC and the proposed new structure addresses this fragmentation.
 - Reviewers also picked up that it is difficult (or seen as difficult) for the individual organisations to be able to input to the intranet, for example, content about their own organisations. DDC took responsibility for the Defence intranet from CIO at the beginning of 2014 and is proposing systematic change to address this and other issues.

- The notion that all communications leaders in Defence should report directly to DDC received mixed feedback. Many saw it as missing the point and trying to impose reporting machinery whereas what is needed is a strategic direction to get behind and leadership of professional practices to aspire to.
 - DDC is sensitive to these views.
 - In particular internal communications in each organisation reviewed is a high priority and requires local leadership.
- Organisational level findings – communications practice across civilian and military organisations
 - Professional leadership is generally below the standard reviewers expected and is largely responsible for what they saw as a mixed and in some cases substandard communications function across the organisations. Objective assessment of this was difficult because, aside from recruitment, evaluation data is absent.
 - Reviewers found that communications objectives were either missing or very vague, and likewise strategies to achieve them. On a positive note, the Royal Navy is the best performer in this area.
 - Because evaluation, with the exception of recruitment marketing, is minimal, assessment of communications and marketing performance against objectives is guess-work.
 - On the military side, the reviews found that structures are convoluted and excessively rigid, military jargon is endemic and skills need improving. Recruitment aside there was little audience focus or prioritisation.
 - Reviewers were unanimous that Single Services' recruitment marketing and public relations should work much more closely together. They rejected the argument put forward that seamless collaboration between the recruitment marketing teams and the separate, wider corporate communications and public relations teams would, de facto, dislocate recruitment marketing from the rest of the recruitment operations. Close integration of both sides should be achievable: command structures should not inevitably lead to weak integration².
 - Some of the communications in the civilian organisations is weak, in particular in setting objectives, developing strategies and internal communications. However the picture is mixed: UKHO communications was seen as relatively effective; DSTL has some strong professionals, stymied by illogical structures; DBS was seen as well below standard but now improving with a new leader. DIO was seen as very poor but with encouraging leadership forthcoming under Capita. DE&S has some very competent professionals at a working level but professional communications leadership is weak. In many civilian organisations the poor standard of internal communications was seen as impeding organisational performance.
 - The picture is not entirely negative. Public perceptions of the Services are high, although the meaning and implications of these perception figures need more probing. Internal communications for the Army and Royal Navy seemed good, albeit very well-resourced. Some photographic and video work was seen as strong, as are events management and recruitment digital activity.

² An example from the private sector is First Direct Bank and from the public sector, HMRC. Both organisations have ensured that their operational and customer handling divisions work seamlessly with communications and marketing.

- Organisational level findings – resource management
 - Overall, in some reviews the reviewers came away with the impression that cost control organisations could be improved. They were not given the impression it was pursued vigorously between the organisational groups. For example, the only mentions of communications shared services were from DBS’ design studio and JIAG training.
 - Reviewers concluded that there is significant opportunity for better cost control and for communications shared service centres across Defence to create efficiencies. This spans publication development, digital asset management, sharing of research and insight and photography. Other departmental groups manage to make savings through sharing services. Levene recommendations do not prohibit savings of this nature.
 - There is some opportunity for headcount reduction in the Royal Navy Media & Communications team, that of the Army, in JFC (with Herrick wind down) and in DBS. For the Royal Navy and Army in particular, reviewers felt they had over-staffed regional operations. They also felt that some staff numbers were high in areas such as graphic production and photography, which had staff with roles which were under 50% dedicated to communications. Overall, any headcount reduction should be done in concert with simplification of structures and improved professionalisation.
 - Overall, reviewers felt that management information was poor. This criticism applies to DMC as well. The review team saw constant shifting of headcount numbers and costs.

- The organisational reviews had the following specific observations. A summary:
 - Military organisations
 - Royal Navy communications was seen as the best performer overall. There is opportunity for cost-saving in the regional teams and better integration between recruitment and public relations is essential.
 - Army communications was seen as somewhat fragmented and in need of greater professional sophistication. The same comments that applied to the Royal Navy, in terms of integration with recruitment and staff savings, were reached independently by Army reviewers.
 - The RAF team was seen as the weakest of the three Services with no strategy and an altogether tactical operation. Internal communications also seen as the weakest of the three. However, it was recognised as being a relatively lean team.
 - JFC /PJHQ – The calibre of the deployed communicators based in Afghanistan, and their media skills, are impressive. High quality of content was evidenced by, for example, BBC coverage on Afghanistan. However reviewers were concerned that PJHQ did not harness sufficiently the collective learning and expertise of deployed communications personnel returning from Afghanistan. The other headline finding from the review is the strong sense of cross-service collaboration and mutual respect within PJHQ and the availability of operational content, much in video form. The reviewers did not think that this is exploited to maximum effect across the Services’ communications.
 - Civilian TLBs
 - UKHO was seen as relatively strong.

- DSTL has good communications staff but no senior communications representation at a leadership level and a structure the reviewers thought was unhelpful and provided poor leadership.
- DBS is over-resourced and under-professionalised, but is set to improve under new communications leadership.
- DIO will soon receive Capita communications leadership
- DE&S is urgently in need of communication leadership and a strategy to support its organisational development and its materiel strategy.

5. Recommendations

- At a senior leadership level
 - Make the **communications strategy development process** more effective by:
 - collaborative development among a small number of senior leaders;
 - developing a set of words that is distinctive enough to rule some activities out, as well as direct proactive communications; and
 - ensuring that the necessary discipline and governance is in place to manage flexibility of expression within tolerable limits.
 - This process should be initiated by the **most senior leadership** and facilitated by the Director of Defence Communications (DDC).
 - **Work on this is urgent.** Senior leaders must reach a conclusive decision on the communications strategy as soon as possible if DDC is to proceed with the development of coherent messaging across Defence and the much needed reforms that flow from it.
 - Put **governance structures** in place. This is already underway:
 - reformed governance arrangements across communications is being proposed by DDC in the form of a new 3* body. This would mean oversight of communications and direction-setting being undertaken by more senior individuals than currently constitute the Defence Communications Board;
 - the forthcoming launch of a reformed and more strategically-focussed Directorate of Defence Communications in September will also be helpful in ensuring consistent adherence to the strategy across Defence communications.
- Pan-Defence communications
 - **Reporting lines:** with more effective communications governance in place (including the formation of a 3* Defence Communications Board), solid line reporting from the Single Service communications leads to the DDC may not be essential.
 - However, communications leaders from the civilian organisations should have either a solid or at least dotted reporting line in to the DDC.
 - In the area of **professional practice**, the DDC has worked closely to support the Executive Director of Government Communications' (EDGC) drive to introduce evaluation for all programmes; introduce a professional development programme; mandate digital skills; and work with colleagues to showcase good practice. DDC's new role as Defence Authority for Communications will now give him the formal

authority to mandate such changes across Defence. Part of this will be to put **communications processes** in place.

- This is already underway. The DDC process documents and templates are currently in draft form. As presented to reviewers, they need refinement.
- Also following the Cabinet Office lead, communications should contradict Levene and, for non-recruitment marketing activity, introduce a **spending controls gateway**.
- **Cost savings** can be made in a number of areas, from digital asset management to design to photographic to research. Cost control and management is weaker than in government or commercial groupings.
 - A cost control tasking group should be set up to identify and realise poor controls and efficiency opportunities. One area to look at is making more use of J9 as the first repository for all stories and information regarding operational communications rather than duplicating this across the Services. Another area is in graphics and broadcast facilities.
 - (See also proposals for pan-Defence communications professional practice and cost control gateway noted above.)
- At DMC-level
 - The DDC has to invest further time into **developing deeper relationships** with the military organisations in particular, and in explaining the rationale and benefits of the proposed DMC reforms.
 - The reviewers recommend that internal and stakeholder communications functions are kept in the civilian TLBs and not taken on by DMC although DDC should set standards and requirements in line with GCS guidance. DMC should continue to lead on national media and on proactive pan-Defence campaigns, plus digital, brand and pan-defence internal communications, and take on a strategic leadership role more widely.
 - **Internal communications** is fragmented across Defence and originates from a number of areas in 'Main Building' (MB). It should all be editorialised by DMC and funnelled through one team.

This has already been proposed by DDC in the wake of a recent review (Fitzpatrick 2014).
- Organisation-level recommendations
 - Across the Single Services
 - All three should ensure, formally and informally, that the media and communications teams and recruitment marketing work much more closely together. Command structures should not be allowed to remain a barrier to this. Reviewers suggested that co-location and twice weekly team updates are among the less formal ways to encourage closer collaboration.
 - Communications leadership needs greater professionalisation.
 - The Single Services should consider the structure suggested by the RAF review team with strategy, planning and content at the centre and audience expertise at the 'spokes'.
 - Military organisations
 - Royal Navy communications should restructure to create functional coherence between media and communications and recruitment marketing. It should make regional public relations more efficient.

- Army Media & Communications should change, to create better professional capability, closer links between public relations and recruitment (or at least create stronger functional coherence) and greater efficiency in regional public relations. It is an anomaly among the three Services that the Army's strategy team is siloed from both public relations and recruitment marketing and reviewers felt that this created further fragmentation.
- RAF to develop communications objectives and strategy, working with DDC. It should re-design its communications structures once this has been done.
- PJHQ & JFC must harness the collective learning and expertise of deployed communications personnel returning from Afghanistan. It must also make available operational content, much in video form, as the key source of communications materials as a shared service.
- Civilian organisations
 - UKHO – no major changes recommended
 - DSTL- create a fairly senior, accountable and effective leadership for communications, at G6/B1, for an interim period, to increase understanding of DSTL's purpose, role and impact among external stakeholders (MOD, wider government, industry) and build relationships with strategic partners.
 - DE&S – make senior appointment after the review report has been considered. The reviewers' contention is that the role should be that of a Corporate Affairs Director, reporting to CDM but accountable to DDC for external communications. The role should have responsibility for all internal communications. The post holder should create a communications plan to provide clarity about organisational purpose.
 - DBS – restructure and professionalise, providing support from DMC to the new communications lead.
 - DIO – effective internal communications is essential. Pan-Defence and stakeholder communications management is a matter for Capita and DDC to agree.
- Digital social, IT systems and intranet
 - A recurrent theme in the reviews was that a combination of poor IT infrastructure, security concerns and HR permissions had led to a scenario where there is very limited use of social media. It is certainly not in the province of most communicators and only the recruitment marketing side seemed to use it with any sophistication.
 - There are one or two examples of good practice, such as the DIO blogs on gov.uk and DSTL on Facebook, but overall this is another area where Defence looks behind the modern era.
 - DDC is leading significant change in this area. In line with his mandate for improving professional practice, he should mandate the development of digital skills for all communicators.
 - DDC is also planning an overhaul of the Defence intranet.

6. Recommendations summary table

(For more detailed recommendations please see individual reports, summarised in Annex B)

Leadership-level	
Strategy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a set of focussed and distinctive communications objectives and key themes for main audience groups to form a pan-Defence communications strategy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It should be co-created in a shared process across key senior stakeholders. • Present this strategy across Defence in a way that unifies staff and clarifies the vision. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tell it in different ways to make it relevant to different target groups. • Reform Defence communications structures and operations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Put professional communications leadership in place to establish a clear set of communications objectives and strategies within their own areas.
Governance of communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform governance arrangements across communications. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reconstitute Communications Board with more senior individuals.

Central initiatives acting across Defence communications	
Professionalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DDC to put professionalisation programme in place. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ mandate evaluation, digital skills and professional development. Also focus on digital and moving image, not just stills.
Cost control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a cost control and shared service development tasking team.
MOD's internal communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify structures so that all MB internal communications comes via DMC.

Organisational level	
DMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain vision and intent behind reforms.
Army	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructure, to create better professional capability, closer links between communications and recruitment (or at least create functional coherence) and greater efficiency.
Royal Navy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications restructure to join corporate and recruitment communications (or at least create functional coherence) and realise efficiency savings as identified by reviewers.
RAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop communications objectives and strategy, working with DMC/DDC. It should re-design its communications structures once this has been done.

PJHQ & JFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PJHQ & JFC must harness the collective learning and expertise of deployed communications personnel returning from Afghanistan. It must also make available operational content, much in video form, as the key source of communications materials as a shared service.
UKHO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No major changes recommended
DSTL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a senior, accountable and effective leadership for communications, G6/B1, for an interim period, to increase understanding of DSTL's purpose, role and impact among external stakeholders (MoD, wider government, industry) and build relationships with strategic partners.
DE&S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make senior appointment after the review has been considered. The role should be that of a Corporate Affairs Director, reporting to CDM with responsibility for all internal communications, and to create a communications plan to provide greater clarity of organisational purpose.
DBS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support new leader both from DMC and within DBS leadership.
DIO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a matter for Capita and DMC to discuss, but reviewers were very encouraged by the approach Capita is taking with a senior communications leader.