



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

Organisational Capability Review: Implementation Plan

July 2022

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Message from Secretary General

I welcome this report on foot of the independent examination of the Department of Defence which has been completed through the Organisational Capability Review (OCR) process. I compliment and thank the OCR team for their work.

The Department of Defence is unique in a number of ways, particularly in its structure of civil and military staff. This civil-military approach facilitates business planning processes with a common view of strategic goals and objectives.

The key challenges facing the Department at present include:

- » remaining responsive to significant changes in the defence and security environment;
- » implementing the recommendations in the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces;
- » continuing to fulfil our existing and future EU and international responsibilities;
- » supporting our unique areas of responsibility which includes the Office of Emergency Planning and Civil Defence;
- » wider public sector reform programme;
- » addressing Programme for Government commitments;
- » progressing Enterprise and Defence Forces Initiatives;
- » continuing to manage the impact of operating as a fully decentralised Department.

This is a time of significant change for the Department of Defence with the completion of this Review, the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, and changes in personnel at a senior level.

The nature of conflict is continuing to evolve. We are witnessing how quickly the geopolitical situation can change as evidenced with conflict within the boundaries of Europe.

We have seen the impact of a pandemic on a global scale and how this affects each individual. There are also Emerging Disruptive Technologies which cover new concepts with the potential to revolutionise military capabilities, strategies and operations.

All these elements point to the requirement for the Defence Organisation to be knowledgeable, agile, future focused and proactive to prepare and adapt to this fast changing and increasingly dynamic defence and security environment.

The Department continues to focus on strategic policy development and evaluation and the staffing profile reflects this focus. In this context, the Review has identified the continued need to enhance the Department's policy development and evaluation capacity. This implementation plan is our response to the OCR Report.

I wish to thank colleagues across the Department and in the Defence Forces for their engagement in the process. I also wish to thank our stakeholders for their valuable inputs to the Review.

I look forward to implementing the recommendations in the Review, in conjunction with my Management Board, wider Management Group and Departmental staff together with the Chief of Staff and his General Staff, where we will build upon existing strengths and seek to address the considerable challenges facing the Defence sector.

Jacqui McCrum
Secretary General
Department of Defence
July 2022





Roles and Responsibilities of the Department of Defence

The Department of Defence has a unique structure, in comparison to other Government Departments in the State, in that it comprises both civil and military elements.

The civil element of the Department is headed by the Secretary General, who is the principal policy adviser to the Minister. Defence Forces' Headquarters also forms part of the Department under the Defence Act 1954, with the Chief of Staff designated as the Minister's military adviser.

The primary role of the civil element of the Department is to support the Minister, by providing policy advice and support on Defence matters. This includes the management of legal, regulatory and litigation policy and related matters on behalf of the Minister; the management of human resources and industrial relations matters; and the coordination of the delivery of security, emergency and community services by the Defence Forces.

The Department has unique elements within its remit, which are not replicated in Ministries of Defence, generally. This includes the strategic management and development of Civil Defence, the management of the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) and the provision of funds to both the Irish Red Cross and Sail Training Ireland.

The functions undertaken by the civil element of the Department encompass:

- » the formulation and provision of policy advice in the Security and Defence, Civil Defence and Emergency Planning and resilience spheres;
- » co-operation with the Department of Foreign Affairs in respect of Ireland's International Defence Policy objectives;
- » the oversight and management of the Defence Votes;
- » providing liaison between the Defence Forces and other Government Departments, public authorities, public representatives and international organisations;
- » managing a diverse range of defence business including resource management and the generation and delivery of military, civil defence, and departmental capabilities; and
- » Governance of all matters within the remit of Defence and the regulation and control thereof according to law.

The Department Profile

The Department of Defence has staff located in Kildare, Galway, Tipperary, Cork, Dublin, Brussels and New York. It is the only fully decentralised Government Department with the Department's HQ based in Newbridge, Co. Kildare.

The Department is currently organised into four Divisions:

- » International Affairs and Legislation;
- » Strategic Planning, Capability Development and Corporate Support;
- » Defence Capability (People) and;
- » Emergency, Operations and Infrastructure Oversight.

The Department's Headquarters in Newbridge is the location for approximately 48% of the civil element staff of the Department including the members of the Management Board, which currently comprises of the Secretary General, three Assistant Secretaries and a Director. Civil Defence Branch is based in Roscrea, Co Tipperary. The Department has a small presence in Dublin, comprising less than 4% of the workforce. This includes both the Office of Emergency Planning, based in the National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC) in Agriculture House in Kildare Street, as well as the staff of the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces.¹

The Department's Finance function, including pay and pensions, is based at Renmore in Galway. The Department's Finance Branch Pay Administration Section is responsible for the oversight of payment by the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) of the pay, allowances and travel and subsistence claims to all Defence Forces personnel (officers, enlisted personnel and reserves).

Pensions Section provides a comprehensive pension service for the Defence Forces, including the oversight of payment by the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) of pensions on a monthly basis to more than 12,000 military pensioners in a variety of categories.



¹ The ODF staff are separate and independent from the Department in relation to their management and discharge of duties, but staff salaries are paid from the Department's Vote and are therefore included in the Department's employee numbers.



Six civil servants are seconded to the Department of Foreign Affairs and work in the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union, based in Brussels. One civil servant is seconded in the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations New York. One civil servant is seconded as a Seconded National Expert (SNE) to the European Commission Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space. One civil servant is currently seconded to the National Security Analysis Centre (NSAC) as the liaison between the Centre and the Department.

The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, are increasingly working collaboratively, with fifteen Department civil servants assigned directly to work within military units, providing skills including accounting, analysis, and procurement within military units. One civil servant is employed as Secretary to the Army Pensions Board. A number of civil servants are embedded in military units including the Central Medical Unit (CMU) in St. Bricin's Military Hospital, Military Finance and Military Intelligence, with further recruitment underway. In 2021, civil servants and civilian employees were assigned to the Fisheries Monitoring Centre in the Naval Service Headquarters.

The number of civil servants in the Department of Defence as at 31 May 2022, was 389, of which 68% are female and 32% male. This is reflected at Management Board level with 60% female membership of the Board.

As at 31 December 2021, the percentage of employees in the Department who declared a disability was 4.66%.

Significant resources have been assigned in the Department in recent years to areas such as Defence Forces HR policy, capability development, procurement and to meet the demands of newly assigned work, arising from the Critical Entities Resilience Directive.

There have been significant increases in a range of other aspects of work in the period from 2016 to 2021, including:

- » An 80% increase in reports received from the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces;
- » A 94% increase in parliamentary questions;
- » A 500% increase in Protected Disclosures from members of the Defence Forces;
- » A 23% increase in Freedom of Information requests;
- » A 433% increase in Access to Information on the Environment requests.

The Department continues to adapt to changing circumstances to deal with new and emerging issues. The Department is undertaking, with the assistance of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), a strategic review of its functions and internal operations. The review will consider requirements to meet future demands and the impact of matters arising from this OCR and the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces.



OCR Findings and Recommendations

The OCR of the Department of Defence commenced in May 2021. The Review team engaged with staff and external stakeholders through a series of interviews and workshops where they gathered evidence aimed at assessing the capability of the Department from a wide range of perspectives. The report completed by the OCR team was subsequently reviewed and validated by an External Review Panel comprised of:

- » Mr. John McCarthy, former Secretary General, Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government,
- » Ms. Ann O'Connell, former Partner with PWC, and
- » Mr. Joe McDonagh, Associate Professor of Business, Trinity College Dublin.

The programme of reviews is overseen by a steering group of sponsoring Secretaries General from the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB):

- » Mr. Mark Griffin, Secretary General, Department of Environment, Climate and Communications;
- » Ms. Oonagh McPhillips, Secretary General, Department of Justice;
- » Mr. Ken Spratt, Secretary General, Department of Transport; and chaired by
- » Mr Seán O'Foghlú, former Secretary General of the Department of Education.

While the OCR sets out a number of ways in which the Department can improve, it also acknowledges the Department's strengths. The OCR comments favourably on the high calibre and dedicated personnel at every grade across the Department. It recognises that the Department possesses the skills and capability necessary to develop policy and strategy.

At the time of Review, the Management Board was regarded as being experienced and one which possesses a significant amount of in-depth expertise. Similar to other areas of the Department, there have been changes in personnel on the Board arising from retirements and staff mobility.

This has provided opportunities to recruit, from open competitions, new members to the Board who will bring with them a broad range of skills and expertise.

There will be further restructuring of the Board to give effect to the implementation of the recommendations from this OCR, the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces and the strategic review.

The OCR contains 55 recommendations which are listed under four broad headings, i.e.:

- » **Leadership;**
- » **Policymaking;**
- » **Delivery;**
- » **Business Support Functions.**

Leadership

SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The OCR recognises that Senior Management in the Department, which comprises the Management Board and Principal Officers, face an ever-increasing multiplicity of demands on a daily basis. The Review acknowledges that the Department has a significant strength in that the Management Board is very dedicated, highly experienced and deeply knowledgeable on matters relating to both the Department specifically and the defence sector generally. It also found this strength to be augmented by a cohort of Principal Officers (POs) who are similarly committed, skilled and proficient on matters relating to their everyday work.

Given the nature of the business of the Department, matters of security or political sensitivity are directed to higher levels for action or decision. These matters can arise quite suddenly and the urgency to respond can demand considerable amounts of time and resources available. This represents a challenge of remaining strategically focused while also responding in tight timeframes to immediate matters. The Management Board will develop opportunities to enhance the balance between corporate and strategic issues on its agenda to allow for the consideration necessary for broader strategic issues. The Board will examine opportunities to develop how particular tasks are discharged and by whom. The delegation of issues to the appropriate grades will be supported through the Personnel Management Development System (PMDS) and engagement with the Assistant Principal (AP) and Higher Executive Officer (HEO) staff networks in the Department.





DEPARTMENTAL ACCOMMODATION

While the Department has implemented the recommendations from Government for a hybrid model of remote working, there is very strong evidence of a need for the Department to have a permanent suitably furnished and functional Dublin-based premises in the vicinity of Government Buildings. This is required to allow senior management and other officials to support the efficient and effective conduct of engagements with the Minister as well as other Dublin-centric elements of the Department's official business.

This office space in Dublin would provide a base to work, and would lessen the time lost commuting during core hours. The Department is the only Department of State without a permanent office base in Dublin. The Department will continue to engage with the Office of Public Works (OPW) in securing accommodation arrangements close to Government Buildings.

Leadership

CROSS GOVERNMENT WORKING

The OCR reflects on the Department's engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The OCR acknowledges that the Department interacts well across the broader civil and public service. There are important cross-departmental dimensions to the work of the Department of Defence and meeting our goals and objectives is often critically dependent on the inputs and co-operation of other Departments and Agencies.

Throughout 2021, the Department was represented on almost 130 inter-departmental groups and committees. In this capacity, Department officials have contributed to the delivery of quality policy and strategy outputs and have ensured Defence policy priorities are established on the wider Government agenda.

Notwithstanding the wide range of elements of Government with which the Department engages, there are opportunities to engage and network further to ensure a more developed understanding of the role of the Department and the Defence sector. The OCR acknowledges that the role of the sector and the Department needs to be better understood by both those with whom the Department engages and also the public.



COMMUNICATIONS

The Department is taking steps to improve both internal and external communication. A dedicated Communications Branch has been established to provide the Department with a more strategic approach to communications. The Communications Branch will continue to promote the Customer Action Plan and Charter and will develop a comprehensive internal and external communications strategy.

The OCR concludes that internal communications within the Department are generally good, with the majority of staff expressing satisfaction regarding the frequency and quality of information from their managers and the corporate business areas. The OCR makes some recommendations in relation to improving communication with staff and acknowledges the changed working environment which was introduced in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Department will continue to engage with the National Shared Services Office to ensure staff are kept informed on developments in the context of the transition of the finance function to the Financial Management Shared Service Centre (FMSSC).

Following consultation with various Stakeholders, including Representative Associations, an Action Plan for the Dissemination of Pensions Information was developed. The Action Plan aims to improve access to pensions information and identify information gaps, and has been substantially implemented.

Of the 20 action items identified, 11 have been closed, 3 are marked as ongoing as they are recurring actions; a further 5 items are in progress and 1 item (relating to assessment of the level of pension knowledge) was deferred due to Covid 19 restrictions and will be considered pending completion of all other Items in the Action Plan. It is anticipated that the 6 outstanding items will be progressed in the second half of 2022.

Civil/Military Framework

The Constitution vests supreme command of the Defence Forces in the President and provides that the exercise of such command shall be regulated by law. The governing legislation is contained in the Defence Acts, 1954-2021, which provide that military command of, and all executive and administrative powers in relation to, the Defence Forces, including the power to delegate command and authority, shall be exercisable by the Government and through and by the Minister for Defence. The mandate of the Department reflects the global concept of civil democratic control of armed forces.

The Department of Defence has Defence Forces Headquarters (DFHQ) as a constituent part of the Department, with the Chief of Staff currently reporting directly to the Minister on certain matters. This can, at times, lead to contested space with regard to the extent to which the Minister wishes civil servants to act on his behalf.

The OCR acknowledges the Department and the Defence Forces have devoted considerable time and energy to fostering and developing shared approaches to pursuing and achieving shared goals. The OCR notes that both formal and informal structures and mechanisms are in place for the operation of joint arrangements ranging from strategic planning to business delivery.

A unified Strategy Statement as a basis for the delivery of agreed priorities has been prepared for the past two decades. The Management Board will consider the risks relative to benefits of introducing separate Statements of Strategy in the future.



A review of the Defence Acts 1954-2021 and secondary legislation is a priority for the Department. This will be necessary as requirements emerge from the implementation of the recommendations in the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces. A key consideration in the review will be to clarify which Defence management responsibilities will rest with the civil element of the Department, which rest with the military element of the Department and which are necessarily shared. Governance, responsibility and accountability will be key features of any change.

Leadership

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Strategic Management Committee (SMC) provides the means by which senior civil and military management can engage in discussions on policy development and oversight of its implementation while respecting the separate lines of authority within the Department's civil and military structures. The Secretary General and Management Board, in consultation with the Chief of Staff and military colleagues will consider ways in which to further enhance the approach to address the future challenges facing the defence sector.

HIGH LEVEL PLANNING AND PROCUREMENT GROUP

The High Level Planning and Procurement Group (HLPPG) is a joint civil/military group whose role is to develop and implement multi annual rolling plans for the Defence Forces for equipment procurement and disposal and infrastructural development (including property acquisition) based on the policy priorities in the White Paper on Defence.

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

Capability Development is an activity that currently operates under a number of civil and military Units and Branches but there is no single unit or function currently co-ordinating or leading this role.

A joint civil-military project team, established as a result of a commitment in the White Paper on Defence examined the requirement for the Defence Organisation to develop a codified Capability Development Planning Process which would underpin the capacity of the Defence Forces to continue to fulfil all roles assigned by Government. This has been completed recently and an agile planning process is being commenced.



CIVIL/MILITARY CO-OPERATION

In addition to formal structures, there is extensive and frequent informal engagement between civil and military staff at all grades and ranks. The OCR found that relationships between the Department and the Defence Forces below senior level are generally very well managed and effective.

It acknowledged that the relationship between the senior cohort on the civil and military sides had become extremely strained in the recent past but there were strong indicators that the situation was improving with new appointments at the most senior level on both sides.

The operation of the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) is an excellent example of joint Civil/Military structures. The Department and Defence Forces will examine ways in which structures can be developed to further enhance Civil/Military collaboration.

The OCR acknowledges that the Department's induction programme, which includes a joint civil-military component is well regarded. The Department will, in collaboration with the Defence Forces, explore opportunities for civil staff to participate in courses run for military staff along with reciprocal arrangements for military staff. A civil/military programme will be developed so as to improve departmental understanding of the environments in which the Defence Forces operate, and develop understanding amongst the latter of the work of the Civil Service, wider government and the Oireachtas.

Policy Making

The Department has a strong track record in the formulation and provision of policy advice and assessment/oversight of policy implementation once decided by Government. The strength of the Department's skills was recognised across Government with the Department being charged with leading the embedding of project and programme management across the public service.

The Department will review existing arrangements in respect of the Programme Management Office and where necessary develop a framework to support the efficient and effective implementation of future projects.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

In terms of broader EU and international issues, the OCR acknowledges the strong engagement by the Department in a very politically sensitive environment.

The Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs work very closely and constructively together, particular in relation to the development of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) at EU level. This work is coordinated between the respective Departments' headquarters, the Defence Forces, as required and Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels. Much of the preparatory work in terms of policy formulation in the field of CSDP is done through the Politico-Military Group (PMG) and subsequently in the Political and Security Committee (PSC). The Department of Defence plays a very full and active role in the work of both the PMG and the PSC in ensuring that the views of the Department are reflected in positions taken by Ireland.





The OCR records that Brussels-based staff are seen as bringing a significant level of expertise to their roles and their engagement with the Department of Foreign Affairs is well-established and managed.

Ahead of Ireland taking up its seat on the UN Security Council in January 2021, Defence representation at the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations in New York (PMUNNY) was increased with the assignment of an official from the Department of Defence and an additional military representative (staffing now includes one Department of Defence Assistant Principal, one Defence Forces Colonel and one Defence Forces Lieutenant Colonel).

This has provided for a more direct and efficient line of communication between the Department of Defence and the PMUNNY on a range of important issues of interest to the Department. The posting, for the first time of a civil servant from the Department, has been of significant benefit to the contribution of the success of the peacekeeping team in PMUNNY, most notably in relation to the Resolution on Peacekeeping Transitions (UNSCR 2594) adopted by the UN Security Council during Ireland's Presidency of the Council in September 2021. The Resolution focuses on the transition from UN peace missions to a UN civilian presence that supports peacebuilding in post conflict environments, and ensuring that civilians stay protected throughout this process. This overall Irish initiative involved cross-governmental engagement by the Department of Foreign Affairs, PMUNNY and the Department of Defence.

The Department will continue to examine the staffing structures and supports required to continue to shape Ireland's contribution to international Security and Defence.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) supports the Minister for Defence in his role as Chairman of the Government's Task Force (GTF) on Emergency Planning. The OEP, through the GTF, works with Government Departments and other key public authorities in order to ensure the best possible use of resources and compatibility across different emergency planning requirements. The OEP will prepare strategic emergency management guidelines relating to scenario planning and for their use primarily by those lead Departments for each of the emergencies identified in the Strategic Emergency Management – National Structures and Framework document.

The Department of Defence has recently undertaken responsibility for coordinating and supporting the Irish position on a number of issues relating to resilience, which have wide-ranging impacts. The Government Task Force on Emergency Planning is facilitating support to a whole-of-government approach to these complex new areas of work.

One of these new areas of work is the negotiation of the new Critical Entities Resilience Directive. Once transposed into law and implemented, it will support Ireland and other EU Member States in ensuring that critical entities are able to prevent, resist, absorb and recover from disruptive incidents, whether they are caused by natural hazards, accidents, terrorism, insider threats, or public health emergencies.

Under this proposal, Ireland is obligated to establish specific measures aimed at ensuring the provision of services essential, in the internal market, for the maintenance of vital societal functions or economic activities. In particular, Ireland will be required to identify critical entities and to support them to meet their obligations aimed at enhancing their resilience. As part of this work, the Department of Defence will design and put in place an appropriate structure to regulate the resilience of critical entities in the state.

In December 2021, the European Council took stock of work to enhance the EU's collective preparedness, response capability and resilience to future crises. This work is currently a major cross-cutting political priority for the EU. To progress this work, the Department of Defence is representing Irish interests in discussions in Brussels on strengthening the EU's crisis response and preparedness and building and monitoring resilience. It is anticipated that this work will result in a roadmap on strengthening EU crisis management and ongoing EU engagement in this area.

The Department of Defence has also recently joined a network of European crisis centres. This network aims to support the sharing of information and expertise on strategic emergency issues, which will help inform the national approach. In addition, in order to support constructive and inclusive dialogue, plans are being developed to hold an annual all-island conference on disaster risk reduction. The inaugural conference will focus on resilience.

The Department of Defence will play a key role, nationally and internationally, in preparing for future crises and supporting the State to become more resilient.



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Department of Defence has embraced a number of public sector ICT shared service initiatives and is currently availing of a number of key services from the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). These services include the Build to Share Managed Desktop, eDocs, ePQs, eSubmissions and eRisk, which have been rolled out across the Department.

The Department's rapid response to the Covid 19 pandemic required all staff who needed to work remotely to be able to do so. The delivery of remote access solutions and associated video conferencing technologies was a significant challenge and a key enabler in ensuring that the Department could function appropriately throughout the pandemic.

There is a clear requirement to build upon the work already completed in enabling the Department to avail of various digital solutions that have been successfully delivered over recent years. This will involve engagement with all Branches to look at current business processes, to identify where appropriate digital solutions should be applied effectively, and to implement accordingly.

The Management Board will review existing Governance arrangements to establish the optimal manner in which ICT projects are selected, prioritised and funded. The Department will conduct an audit of legacy databases and develop a phased programme for the discontinuation and replacement of all outdated systems applications. The Department will also engage with the Defence Forces to review information sharing opportunities on matters of mutual interest.

DATA MANAGEMENT

The role of the civil element of the Department in the development of legislation and policy needs to be based on robust analysis. The types and volumes of information available are vast and require tools and techniques to source and collate valid and reliable data, to provide the evidence base for Defence Policy options in a timely manner.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to "create a strategic policy unit for the complex data analysis, programme evaluation and policy development within each department charged with delivery in such core areas".

The Department will review existing and potential data sharing arrangements with the Defence Forces including on matters relating to strategic workforce planning, military personnel management, procurement and the delivery of investment programmes. As outlined in the OCR report, the Department will provide input and support to military colleagues to facilitate the development of a new fit-for-purpose HR Application for the Defence Forces.

Delivery

PROCUREMENT

There has been an emerging requirement in recent years for in-depth analysis and evaluation of procurement projects. A Business Process Review of the Contracts Branch in the Department is currently underway and nearing completion.

The review is examining the procurement lifecycle from capability development to ex-post evaluation. The Department and Defence Forces will give due consideration to the recommendations arising from the Review. This will include consideration of but not limited to, a dedicated appraisal resource to give advice and support to civil and military staff, including on compliance with the Revised Public Spending Code. Consideration will also be given as to what matters that will be appropriate to the new Capability Development Branch and the further devolvement of matters to the Defence Forces within a Governance framework.

GOVERNANCE AND RISK

A Risk Management Policy is in place which sets out the policy and guidance by which the Department manages its risk. The approach to risk management is aligned to the Risk Management Guidance for Government Departments and Offices (2016). Significant work has been undertaken in this area in the last couple of years. A joint civil/military Strategic Risk Register captures the strategic risks identified for the Defence Organisation. The establishment of a permanent Risk Office in the Department will assist in providing coherency and uniformity of approach towards Risk Management across the Department.



INNOVATION

A joint civil-military Research Technology and Innovation Unit (RTI) has been established in the Department. The RTI Unit aims to build on the experience of the Defence Enterprise Committee (DEC) and will focus on Research & Development and Innovation addressing the capability needs of the Defence Forces.

The mission of the RTI Unit is to cultivate and foster a resilient innovation culture within the Organisation to enhance Defence capability, while contributing to societal benefit, through a sustainable research, technology and innovation ecosystem.

The RTI Unit concentrates its efforts within five Strategic Themes:

- i. Governance
- ii. Ecosystem
- iii. Emerging Technology
- iv. Innovation Acceleration
- v. Innovation Capacity

In November 2021, the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces hosted a high-level webinar for Irish security and defence enterprises, providing information on EU funding opportunities and engagement in cross-border European programmes and projects.

In line with the objectives of the strategic theme “Ecosystem”, the RTI Unit has entered into partnership with Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) to create the “SFI – Defence Organisation Innovation Challenge”, with the overarching ambition to develop new technologies aligned with our National Defence Policy, that also has potential to deliver significant societal impacts within Ireland. Under the Challenge, research teams based at eligible Irish research bodies were invited to apply for funding to address one of five challenges, or to propose disruptive ideas for technologies across several areas of interest to the Irish Defence Forces.



The Challenge has reached the nine-month “seed phase” with five projects recommended to the SFI Executive to proceed and awarded funding of €200k following review of the ten projects selected for the concept phase by an international academic panel. The final award for the winning project will be announced in December 2022.

In line with the objectives of the strategic theme “Innovation Acceleration”, the RTI Unit will deliver a Defence Innovate Programme in 2022. Defence Innovate will provide Department of Defence and Defence Forces staff with once-off small scale financial grants to implement solutions to challenges they have identified in their work environment. Defence Innovate will enable the freedom to innovate, empowering people to make local improvements. It aims to unlock intrinsic motivation and create a shared responsibility for outcomes; and contribute to developing an enhanced culture of innovation in the Department and the Defence Forces.

Business Support Functions

STRATEGIC HR

Human Resources Branch provides a broad range of corporate support roles to the Department including the provision of HR services for the civil service element of the Department and civilian employees based in military installations. The Branch services the Department's Learning and Development function and is responsible for managing the Industrial Relations mechanisms for civil servants and civilian employees. In planning and developing for the future of the Department, there is a growing need to focus on strategic HR. The HR function in the Department will be renewed and re-organised to focus on strategic business delivery.

SUCCESSION & WORKFORCE PLANNING

Between April 2019 and May 2022, a total of 100 staff left the Department, through retirement, conclusion of contracts, resignation, death in service or transfer on mobility or by promotion to another Department or Civil Service Body. 93 new staff joined the Department during the same period. This represents an average turnover of staff for that period of around 8.6% per annum.

The Department is not unique in the challenge of a "retirement cliff", which is facing the Civil Service in general. 55% of staff in the Department are aged 50 years or over. The average age of staff across the Department is 51 years.

While this presents challenges in relation to succession planning and knowledge management, it also presents opportunities for the Department in terms of talent and skills that new staff can bring from experience in other employments in both the public and private sector. We have already benefitted from this at all grades up to and including Secretary General.

To help mitigate against the challenges posed by staff departures we will build on existing policies to develop Strategic Workforce Planning, including succession planning, and knowledge management.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The OCR acknowledges the very positive developments the Department has undertaken recently which have improved knowledge management in the Department. This includes: the recruitment of an Archivist, the publication of a Records Management Policy, the establishment of a cross-divisional Records Management Committee to oversee delivery of the policy, and the move to the electronic records and file management system, eDocs. The Department will continue to further develop and adapt similar arrangements to meet future requirements.

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The Department has a broad range of skills and qualifications available through our staff to support the delivery of our business priorities. The challenge is to ensure that the relevant skills and expertise match the role of the job. The Department will carry out a skills needs analysis to assess the skills needs in the various Branches and as a matching exercise, a skills audit of staff to identify the qualifications, experience and expertise available. This will assist in the deployment and mobility of staff and will also assist the identification of future learning and development needs.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The Department's migration to eDocs is now complete, and the policy going forward advocates electronic records management to the maximum extent possible. A records management policy has been approved and endorsed by the Management Board and must be adhered to by all staff. The policy went live on 1 June 2022. Periodic audits will be conducted to ensure staff compliance.

To support the implementation of the Department's records management policy, Records Management Section, in conjunction with Learning & People Development, have developed an eLearning course which is mandatory for all staff.

Staff can access the records management policy and a comprehensive training guide, which covers both the records management policy, and the eDocs application, through the Department's intranet.



Oversight in Progressing the Implementation Plan

The Senior Management Team, which includes the Secretary General, Management Board and the Heads of Branches, will have primary responsibility for oversight implementation of the actions contained in this Implementation Plan.

The OCR was conducted in a similar time frame to the Commission on the Defence Forces. While the OCR concentrates on the civil element of the Department, the implementation of the recommendations in the Review cannot occur in isolation and will be consistent with the implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces.

One of the recommendations in the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces is for the urgent and critical implementation of a Strategic HR approach in the Defence Forces to be led by an externally recruited Head of Strategic HR in the Defence Forces working with an externally recruited Head of Transformation. This will necessitate an evaluation and planned transition of those roles and functions of the civil servants in the Department who currently have responsibility for these HR Tasks.

The OCR contains a number of recommendations which will require the Department to re-allocate resources and where appropriate, seek the recruitment of additional personnel. This will be in areas such as a defence research unit, specialist procurement advisory service, dedicated appraisal unit and corporate functions.

In accordance with the recommendation in the OCR, the Department will seek to appoint an additional Assistant Secretary who will be assigned solely for the purpose of leading the programme of change that will arise from the Report on the Commission on the Defence Forces, this OCR and the Strategic Review.

For a period of two years following publication of this Plan, progress reports, providing updates on actions, will be prepared on a quarterly basis for consideration by the Senior Management Team.

This process will provide opportunities to discuss progress, as well as identifying and addressing any new developments which may impact on the successful implementation of actions set out in this Plan.



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