



Workplace Climate in the Defence Forces Phase 2: Results of the Focus Group Research

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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by the Irish Defence Forces in 2016. The qualitative study was commissioned to investigate in more depth the results of the 2015 quantitative survey on organisation climate. The 2015 survey ('Have your say') revealed negative results along a number of dimensions particularly pay, organisation justice, aspects of leadership, performance management, career management, aspects of commitment. The aim of the focus groups study was to

- Drill down into key themes identified as problematic and to get detailed feedback for Defence Forces personnel of all ranks and service areas
- To provide a voice to serving members to express their satisfaction levels and concerns regarding the organisation and its policies
- To further understand the results of the 2015 Your Say survey assessing Defence Forces members' attitudes and satisfaction levels regarding the Defence Forces and in particular its Human Resource Management policies and procedures.
- To further explore issues affecting the retention of personnel
- To provide a voice to serving members to express their satisfaction levels and concerns regarding the organisation and its policies in a confidential environment.

Key thematic areas were identified with the co-operation and input of the representative organisations (RACO and PDFORRA) as well as the Department of Defence and the IMG.

A plan was drawn up to allow all ranks in all services, in all barracks in Ireland an opportunity to participate. One overseas mission was also included in the focus group schedule. Focus groups were conducted between November 2016 and January 2017. In total 73 focus groups took place and there were 603 participants in total. The focus groups were led by the University of Limerick research team to ensure anonymity and confidentiality

The main findings and analysis for each section are outlined below.

Positive aspects of working in the Defence Forces

Focus group participants were asked what they enjoyed about working in the Defence Forces and what was important to them. Many participants expressed a strong commitment to what the organisation stood for, a pride in the uniform and camaraderie. For example, those with longer tenure and higher rank cited camaraderie as an important positive aspect of working in the Defence Forces – but many of them followed this with the observation that this was no longer the case for newer recruits. Job security and pension entitlements were also raised in focus groups but with the qualification that this was only the case for people who joined before a certain date. The opportunity to travel and go overseas was also cited as an important and positive feature. While the whole area of family friendly policies and work life balance emerged negatively from the focus groups, there was consistent acknowledgement that the Defence Forces are supportive of people and their families in emergency or crisis situations. Those occupying the lowest ranks often struggled in focus groups to identify positives associated with their work in the defence forces. However items that did emerge were overseas trips when they could get them, their peers and the opportunity to maintain fitness as part of the job.

Pay and Living Conditions other ranks

The pay levels of Privates in the Defence Forces was raised across all focus groups and all ranks as a critical issue. Overall, pay for Privates emerged as being a primary source of dissatisfaction for all cohorts, Officers and other ranks alike. Privates themselves were extremely dissatisfied with their levels of pay citing it as a major source of stress/distress on a daily basis. Examples were given of Privates using leave days to save on commuting costs and having to take out loans to meet basic living expenses. Privates felt they were being driven to engage in double jobbing outside of the Defence Forces. Officers, Chaplains and Privates themselves reported that financial worries were giving rise to mental health issues. Many Privates are reliant on social welfare supplements such as FIS to enable them to meet basic living costs. Duty pay emerged as a particularly contentious issue. For many Privates the cost of doing a duty exceeds the pay when issues such as commuting cost and childcare are taken into account. This has resulted in people looking for ways to avoid duties and other people being required to do them often which

in turn results in conflict and affects camaraderie. Officers and NCOs at all levels also raised the issue of Privates pay as 'shameful' to the organisation and there was a general perception of a level of injustice whereby young people serving their country are finding it increasingly difficult to participate as citizens themselves, i.e. be able to afford the basic elements that allow them to participate in Irish society.

The optic of the Defence Forces returning a large amount of their allocated budget unspent when members of the DF are reliant on social welfare supplements was also cited as having a major demoralising effect on all members of the DF and a perception that senior leadership are out of touch with troops on the ground

From an organisational point of view NCOs and Officers expressed concern at the implications of pay levels for the motivation and engagement of Privates and the knock on effect this was having on their ability to manage them to enhance organisational capability. They also reported that pay was directly impacting on turnover levels of Privates and it was the Privates with the most potential that were the ones leaving. Questions were consistently raised as to the cost of high levels of turnover among Privates, given the resources in terms of time and money spent on training them.

Officers and NCOs consistently raised the issue of military allowances in respect of privates and there were constant comparisons with the pay and allowances of Gardaí.

Whilst pay has not been as primary an issue for NCOs in the past, the effects of reorganisation coupled with the promotion system has resulted in growing rotation of NCOs. This is introducing a cost to NCOs which is negatively affecting the perception by NCOs that their pay is adequate.

With regard to living conditions Privates who lived in were critical of the conditions of their quarters. Rathmines barracks came in for specific criticism being termed hotel Rwanda by focus group participants across all ranks.

Shortages of personnel and retention

It is clear from the data available and from the focus groups that there are significant middle management gaps at barrack/unit level within the Defences forces. In the focus groups there was widespread criticism of Administration Instruction C.S.4. It was felt that the shortages of personnel were at best masked by the figures in that C.S.4 does not take account of personnel that are on training courses, participating in battlegroups and overseas. All of the focus groups from Private to Senior Officers reported severe shortages of Officers in units. Feedback from the focus groups has indicated that individual consequences of these gaps for Officers are increased workload, decreased job satisfaction, a diminution of mental and physical wellbeing and decreased engagement. This in turn is contributing to turnover among the Officer rank- representing a loss of human capital and expertise and further frustration for remaining Officers and troops. Thus there is evidence from the focus groups of a dysfunctional cycle of turnover developing. Research has identified dysfunctional turnover as: a situation where a valued employee quits and takes with them their experience and corporate knowledge. From an organisational perspective participants also expressed fears for the capability of the units and the safety of personnel if the situation continues.

Officers also indicated that the shortage of personnel and lack of middle management within units is directly affecting their ability to engage with and train Recruits and Privates, it is also affecting their ability to engage with the 667 and 451 appraisal system in a meaningful manner. Feedback from other ranks mirrored many of the issues expressed by Officers. NCOs and Privates perceive that a disconnect has developed between them and Officers. This seems to be due mainly to their day to day job, training and career being increasingly dependent on Officers who don't know them.

The focus groups also indicated gaps at NCO level due to NCOs being utilised for training/instruction and increasingly having to rotate barracks for promotion purposes. This emerged as a source of frustration for NCOs who maintain much of their job satisfaction derives from being the unit 'anchors'. Officers also expressed concern at a growing shortage of NCOs within units as they rely on them as the unit 'glue'

A high level of turnover intention among Privates and NCOs emerged which if it happens will further contribute to a loss of experience and knowledge- especially from experienced privates and NCOs.

In summary there was a widespread concern among the focus groups that the loss of experience/corporate knowledge is reaching a critical point and is already affecting operational readiness/capability.

In all of the focus groups there was unanimous dissatisfaction with the seeming mind-set among senior military management that the turnover that exists is a positive situation.

Careers and career management

Overall there was a general perception across all ranks, services and location that there is a lack of structured and supported career management. Participants in focus groups at all ranks consistently maintained that they feel they are 'on their own' when it comes to career management and deciding which courses they need to do to progress. There is no guidance on maximum points needed to be successful in promotion. As a result members feel that they are under pressure to fight for promotion at the expense of camaraderie. Lack of clarity regarding the points system has led to a point's race. This in turn has led to people doing courses that tick boxes and score points which is having a diluting effect on specialist expertise. Officers and NCOs feel that this is damaging the organisation capability/ effectiveness. They are also fearful of accidents or incidents. The NCOs further feel that the increasing pressure on them to move around for promotion is damaging the particular corporate knowledge that resides in this cohort and which has been relied on by both Privates and Officers and this is also damaging the organisational effectiveness.. The requirement to move for promotion is having an effect on family life and cost of living. This in turn is affecting retention. An overwhelming amount of NCOs interviewed for the focus groups stated that they did not intend to stay with the DF beyond their next contract.

For both Privates and NCOs, being told by the DF on one hand that being promoted within a certain time period is condition of staying in the service and then not being supported by the DF on the other hand to access the necessary courses and overseas is

damaging their perception of the DF as a fair organisation. There appeared to be a perception that the employment relationship has become very transactional on the part of the Defence Forces who continue to expect privates to enact core values and display a high level of temporal commitment.

Officers recognised that the old system of being promoted automatically may not have been ideal and recognise the advantages of meritocracy. However there were clear indications that the current system of promotions has become dysfunctional. The feedback indicated that the promotion system recognises a form of individual achievement which ignores or ‘punishes’ unit loyalty. The knock on effects of this are that people are constantly rotating in and out of units. Junior and Senior Officers are weighing up the cost to family life of constant moving/going overseas or going on centralised and lengthy courses for promotion purposes. There was clear feedback that the DF and DoD do not seem to recognise the advent of dual career families and this is a major factor in officers making decisions to leave- thus exacerbating the gap in officers at middle and senior levels (and the problems this creates).

Performance management

Feedback on the performance management system was uniformly negative across all ranks and service areas. It was felt that the appraisal systems lacked resources and supports and were not linked to career management. There was evidence that ratings for both 667 and 451 are increasingly clustered around a central tendency.

With regard to the 667 Privates and NCOs due to what they felt was a lack of meaningful engagement with the process on the part of Officers. This in turn led to consistent observations by privates and NCOs that officers ‘*don’t care about the enlisted ranks*’ or that Officers ‘*only care about their own careers*’ rather than caring about units. However, much of the feedback from Officers throughout the focus groups would indicate that they do care about the welfare of the troops. (In all of the focus groups conducted with officers the issue of the contract, pay and conditions for Privates was raised by the Officers as a huge issue). There was clear feedback from Officers that they too are frustrated by the appraisal system and how it works for other ranks. Officers pointed to the severe shortage of Officer Personnel at unit/barrack level. They feel this in turn is a key factor in what

they term a crisis with respect to training and assessing other ranks. Officer feedback was similar to what the enlisted ranks had already articulated: a lack of resources to support the system, lack of training a lack of time to engage properly due to their constant rotation and/or due to the lack of Officer Personnel in units to carry out appraisals. A knock on effect of this was appraising personnel they did not know sufficiently and feeling they couldn't give an accurate rating for fear of redress which in turn might affect their own career. In short there was a difference in views between Officers and the other ranks on the dimension of caring about the situation but in other respects both groups agreed that the system is problematic. However the situation is clearly contributing to a perception of growing divide between ranks. Dissatisfaction with the 667 system is also contributing to negative perceptions of Privates and NCOs with respect to Organisation fairness

The key issues that emerged regarding the 451 appraisal was that while Officers feel their system for performance management is better than that for other ranks, it is flawed. Officers across all levels felt that there is no genuine performance management system encapsulating clear direction and support for progression and developmental goals. It was felt that what exists is simply an appraisal instrument that is not linked in any meaningful way to a supported career/goals structure. Junior officers in particular expressed dissatisfaction that the appraisal seems to have become a box ticking exercise feeding into the wider points system for promotion and that there is a lack of guidance or meaningful discussion as part of the process. This supports much of the feedback in the section on promotions whereby Officers were critical of the lack of a clear career management structure within the Defence Forces.

Leadership

While it is important to recognise the overriding concern that senior ranks participating in the Focus Groups displayed for the welfare of their troops and for the organisation as a whole, a number of key concerns emerged in the focus groups when discussing leadership in the Defence Forces. Leadership is the most influential factor in developing a positive culture that is aligned to the values of the Defence Forces. The importance of Leadership is recognised in the Defence Forces and this is evidenced in the Leadership

Doctrine. However, there is a pervasive perception that the senior leaders of the Defence Forces are not representing their troops in the manner they expect. This has led to a sense of disconnect with the General Staff. The findings also suggest that there is a need to review the relationship between the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the representative bodies. Currently, there is a perception across rank and service that this relationship is not a collaborative one. There was a call for a move from what many see as an imbalanced relationship, with the balance of power lying predominantly within the Department of Defence, to a more inclusive, high trust and partnership based relationship with the Department of Defence. Many feel that the failure to acknowledge and address critical issues such as pay is symbolic of a lack of respect for the troops. This perception of senior leadership will also have implications for the development and maintenance of a high commitment high trust culture within the Defence Forces.

Participants felt that there are a number of issues concerning communication on the part of leaders: a lack of transparency of decision making, timeliness of communication, access to information. There was a perception that leaders sometimes didn't display moral courage in that they seemed reluctant to raise negative issues with the department of Defence.

Another finding that will have wide reaching implications for the Defence Forces is the leadership vacuum being experienced at unit level. This is affecting the relationship between enlisted and commissioned ranks, work load, performance management, work life balance and the ability to avail of courses and overseas. These leadership problems are leading to troops feeling disengaged, disempowered and without an advocate and need to be addressed by the Defence Forces and the Department of Defence

Culture

The Defence Forces culture values respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity. It is important that the members of the Defence Forces identify with the cultural values of the organisation as without the support of employees, no organisation can maintain a positive culture. While many in the focus groups expressed a pride in what the Defence Forces stand for, there was an overarching concern that positive aspects of the culture are disappearing. While many with longer tenure alluded

to the peer support and the camaraderie within the Defence Forces, there was a general perception that this was being eroded and that the culture of the Defence Forces was becoming more competitive and individualistic. This is a concern as such a culture would conflict with the values of loyalty, selflessness and team work that the Defence Forces espouses. A key theme that emerged when discussing culture was the perceived existence of a 'yes' culture whereby senior leadership never say no to requests, even in situations where there are not resources or personnel to support requests. Concerns were raised regarding the potential health and safety consequences of such a culture. Another area for concern is the perception that the leadership in the Defence Forces do not enact certain organisational values. Many of the participants feel the lack of acknowledgement of their concerns reflects a lack of respect for and loyalty to the troops. This is an area of concern for the Defence Forces as the leaders of the organisation play an integral role in the development of positive high performing organisational cultures

Stress

Overall, a significant amount of concern emerged throughout the focus groups for the level of stress experienced by members of the organisation. The source of stress varied depending on rank but is clearly linked to factors discussed in the report. Poor pay was a major source of stress for Privates, whereas NCO's and Officers had concerns around commuting, workload and safety. Participants also voiced concern that those suffering from stress often did not seek help within the Defence Forces as this may have negative effects with regard to access to overseas etc.

Work Life balance

Overall, the focus groups highlighted issues across all ranks around work life balance and the quality of life outside of work for members of the Defence Forces. Across ranks the issue of lack of notice for travel and duties has been highlighted. This has an impact on family life. For those who have children, they are forced to miss out on important events due to short notice calls for duty. On an individual level, members have highlighted the high rate of marriage breakdowns due to the increasing temporal uncertainty associated

with their jobs, as well as additional costs for travel or childcare when notice is short for duties. Officers specifically identified the requirement to relocate frequently and the lack of notice given to them as a serious issue causing work life conflict. This makes it difficult for them to decide on a location to buy a house or start a family. It is also frustrating for those who have family as they have to be away from them for uncertain periods of time. This again has been adding to the stress of the job by impacting relationships. Officers also expressed dissatisfaction at being unable to utilise their leave. It was pointed out that this is contributing to burn out. Overall the increasing erosion of down time and family time across all ranks but particularly Officers (and increasingly NCOs) is causing Defence Forces members to question the Defence Forces as a viable career.

PSS

Overall there was agreement among participants that PSS is a service that is required, especially given the increasing stress involved in being a member of the DF. However there was varied perception across locations as to the confidentiality of the PSS service. In some locations members said they would be hesitant to use PSS due to the perception that it is not confidential. Others reported a perceived stigma attached to using PSS. Many participants in focus groups felt that using it may impact a member's career. Many participants took a contrary view and indicated that they had used PSS and it had been a very positive, supportive and helpful service and that they would have no hesitation in using the service again or recommending it.

It is important that members have someone to speak to about their stress from both an individual and organisational perspective. For the individual, prolonged periods of stress can have an impact on an individual's health. Privates indicated that if they were represented by their own rank in PSS they would be more likely to use the service. A significant proportion of participants were not aware of the CareCall service available to them that is completely independent of the organisation.

Diversity

There was unanimous agreement among participants that a diverse workforce is a positive development and there should be diversity policies in place. However there was a sense among all focus group participants that the Defence Forces is focusing too much on diversity at the expense of other equally significant issues such as pay, conditions, work life balance and shortages of personnel that impact the members lives daily. This is leading to a level of frustration on the part of both male and female members. Both male and female respondents questioned the credibility of an emphasis on diversity when it was difficult for people with families to access courses important for promotion due to location and duration. In summary the general consensus was that while members recognise the merit of diversity policies, they felt that there should be an equal emphasis on policies that would enhance the working lives and thus retention of existing staff.

Medical system

When discussing the medical services, participants voiced three main concerns; the services were under resourced leading to backlogs; use of medical services could negatively affect career progression; two tier system regarding quality of service received.

There was a general perception that services are under resourced causing long delays in completing medicals that can affect access to courses and overseas. Hence, this backlog in the medical services can ultimately affect career and promotional opportunities. Participants, particularly enlisted ranks, expressed concerns they that were being denied access to courses and overseas because they had not the requisite medical examinations completed.

Representation

Overall, there was an acceptance that representation was necessary and many participants acknowledged the limitations representative bodies were working with. However, the decrease in working conditions and pay, particularly at lower ranks, has led to a growing frustration with the limited power these organisations have. This is reflected in the number of respondents questioning their intent to remain members. Certain suggestions were made including access to the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Relations Commission and to make the Collective Negotiations Agreement binding, but many including the Representative organisations themselves believe that the lack of parity in power between the DOD, the DF and they themselves is limiting the type of representation they can deliver.

1.0 Research Methodology

1.1 Background

This study was commissioned by the IMG III following the publication of the 2015 Your Say climate survey which was administered to members of the Defence Forces by the members of the University of Limerick and the Defence Forces early 2015 in order to obtain information about Irish Defence Forces members' attitudes regarding a wide spectrum of human resource issues. In particular the survey focuses on member's levels of satisfaction with their employment in the Defence Forces and factors such as commitment, leadership and perceptions of fairness and work life balance. The findings of the survey highlighted concerns in a number of different areas including pay; work life balance; leadership and commitment. This aim of this report is to further explore these areas in a more qualitative manner allowing a depth of understanding that cannot be fully achieved through quantitative methods

The aims of the focus groups were as follows;

- To further understand the results of the 2015 Your Say survey assessing Defence Forces members' attitudes and satisfaction levels regarding the Defence Forces and in particular its Human Resource Management policies and procedures.
- To further explore issues affecting the retention of personnel

- To provide a voice to serving members to express their satisfaction levels and concerns regarding the organisation and its policies in a confidential environment.

The questionnaire and the results of the survey provided a valuable insight into levels of satisfaction in the Defence Forces and of members' views on Human Resource Management policies in general. A number of concerns emerged in the report particularly in areas of organisational justice, pay, commitment and career progression. This report further explores these views. Employee perceptions of any organisation are dynamic and influenced by a wide range of issues both external and internal to the organisation. While valuable in itself as a standalone quantitative analysis of satisfaction levels at a particular time, one of the real values of conducting an organisational Climate Survey lies in periodically repeating the process and using the results over time as a guide and benchmark to assess organisational climate.

1.2 Response Rates

With a strength of circa 9100 – 9200 people, the overall response rate was 6.62 % of the overall population

1.3 Sample Characteristics

Sampling – rank (additional groups include PDFORRA, RACO, chaplains)

Number of participants per focus group – 2-30

Number of focus groups – 73

The characteristics of the general sample by rank is presented in Table 1.1 In total 603 personnel attended the focus groups. This sample was representative of the Defence Forces as a whole across all aspects of rank age profile.

Table 1.1 Breakdown of Participants

Rank	Number of Participants
Privates	222
Junior NCO's	119
Senior NCO's	97
Junior Officers	98
Senior Officers	67
Total Number of Participants	603

1.4 Procedure

The aim of the focus groups was to further explore issues that arose as areas of concern in the 2015 Your Say Climate Survey. The UL research team met with the DOD, the DF, PDFORRA and RACO to discuss the approach to the focus groups. It was agreed that the participants would be stratified by rank to ensure participants would feel safe voicing their opinions. The next step was the development of a series of semi structured questions that would capture member's views on all relevant human resource issues in the Defence Forces today. The areas covered in the 2015 survey were replicated. The focus groups took place in a centralised location to DF personnel in each barracks for ease of

administration and also to ensure a high response rate. The focus groups were led by the University of Limerick research team to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The cooperation of all Brigades and Formations ensured that an extremely high participation was achieved. The recordings and the transcripts of the focus groups remain strictly confidential and are in the possession of the University of Limerick team.

The analysis was carried out by Dr Juliet MacMahon, Dr Sarah Mac Curtain and Claire Harnett from the University of Limerick who worked closely with Comdts Karl Connolly and Joe Freeley, Work & Organisational Psychologists | Defence Forces HQ.

1.5 Design

The focus groups were designed as a supplement to the large scale climate survey to elicit further rich information on areas such as pay, leadership, culture and HR policies and procedures. The design of the focus groups was agreed by the UL Research Team, DF, DoD, PDFORRA and RACO. The questions asked were semi-structured in format and included the following area

- Why participants joined the DF and intentions to remain
- Expectations of the DF and whether they have been met
- What is enjoyable/positive about working in DF
- Concerns – both in terms of their own work and the organisation as a whole
- Work Life Balance
- Leadership and communication;
- Organisational Commitment;
- Human Resource Policies and Procedures including pay; career progression and promotion system, performance management, Personnel Support Services, Redress of wrongs, medical services
- Organisational Culture

1.6 Analysis of data

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis. The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the question being addressed. Patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development and revision.

The approach to TA that we adopted involves a six-phase process:

1. Familiarisation with the data: This phase involves reading and re-reading the data, to become immersed and intimately familiar with its content. All three researchers listened to the tapes and read and re-read the transcripts.
2. Coding: This phase involves generating codes that identify important features of the data that might be relevant to answering the questions asked. It involved coding the transcripts, and collating all the codes and all relevant data extracts, together for later stages of analysis.
3. Searching for themes: This phase involves examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes).
4. Reviewing themes: This phase involves checking the themes against the dataset, cross checking themes across interviews to determine that they tell a convincing story of the data, and one that answers the research question.
5. Defining and naming themes: This phase involves developing a detailed analysis of each theme, working out the scope and focus of each theme, determining the 'story' of each. It also involves deciding on an informative name for each theme.
6. Writing up: This final phase involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature.

In order to test for reliability, the researchers engaged in a repeated review of data. There was a strong correlation between the findings from the focus groups and the 2015 Your

Say Climate Survey. There was little variation in responses to moderator questions across the dominant themes suggesting high level of internal reliability

The results of the thematic analysis are presented in the sections below. The sections correspond with the strongest themes emerging from the focus groups. Key issues that need to be taken into account when reading this report are:

- The complexity of the data in terms of extent of interconnectivity between thematic areas
- The impact of various issues on other issues.

Thus the reader will find some seeming overlap in places and cross referencing between sections. This is unavoidable.

2.0 Positive aspects of working in the Defence Forces

Focus group participants were asked what they enjoyed about working in the Defence Forces and the answers varied significantly depending on rank, contract and tenure. While many participants expressed a strong commitment to what the organisation stood for and a pride in the uniform, this was predominantly a theme in the more senior focus groups. For example, those with longer tenure and higher rank cited camaraderie as an important positive aspect of working in the Defence Forces – but many of them followed this with the observation that this was no longer the case for newer recruits.

*‘People- friendships and esprit de corps..but changing for the young lads’
(SNCO)*

‘The commitment to each other- even from day one..used to love the way people would look after each other’ (SO)

Another important benefit of working in the Defence Forces for JO and SO ranks in particular (but not confined to these groups) was the opportunity to travel and go overseas

'I have seen the world and travelled extensively.. second to none from a travel point of view' (SNCO)

'Overseas is a positive, get an international outlook..meeting peers from other armies' (SO)

While work life balance and family support was an area of concern across all ranks and services and will be discussed further in the report, many did feel that the DF were supportive in times of crisis

'I don't know of another job outside where if something crops up you would get the support you get here' (JNCO Navy)

'I would agree and disagree on the support – it very much depends on who you are dealing with..It's individual..I would agree that the Naval Service as a whole is good at knowing when a family is in difficulty. I would have to emphasise though that the navy is not family oriented' (JNCO navy)

'I have seen that- if people have trouble at home- they are looked after. They can disappear and come back when the time is right' (SO)

Job security and the pension provided by the Defence Forces was also cited as a benefit of the DF but only for certain cohorts and ranks and depended very much on when you entered the Defence Forces and what contract you were on.

'Pension – but depends on the cohort' (SO)

'Job security and flexibility' (SO)

Career and developmental Opportunities

Those occupying higher ranks also cited opportunity to acquire skills as a benefit of working in the Defence Forces. However, the findings in this area were mixed and very much depends on rank and tenure.

'I think there is a good skills opportunity for young lads joining now- more so than we had. The maritime college gives good opportunities. I think that's one good thing for new entrants' (Junior NCOs)

'Quality of training at officer level' (JO)

'There is such a variety at officer level in what the job can entail' (SO)

'For the first 15 years I would say this is the best job, educated to 3rd level but this has changed in the last 6 years. Saying that I had some great opportunities. Salary up to the last 6 years was good but it is getting harder and harder to stay' (JNCO NAVY)

Pride in DF

Many participants at senior levels expressed a pride in the Defence Forces. However, this was often followed by concern for the future direction of the organisation.

'Yes I am [proud]. I have had some great moments...it made me more confident. It's not all negative. Like that guy said- I would hate to leave a bitter person- would like to leave shaking hands.' (SNCO)

'I am extremely proud to be in DF' (SO)

'proud to be in the navy.. especially since Mediterranean issues.. people know who we are now' (Naval SNCO)

'It gives you a sense of purpose. - you feel like you are doing your bit for your country. You are wearing your country's flag on your shoulder.' (Naval SNCO)

'I still get up sometimes and think- wow- I get paid to do this...' (Naval SNCO)

'I still get up and take pride in the uniform- that hasn't changed' (SO)

Those occupying the lowest ranks did not feel there were many positives associated with working in the Defence Forces and struggled to answer this question – however, things that did emerge were physical fitness component of the job and the support of their peers.

3.0 Pay and Conditions

In the 2015 Climate Survey it was highlighted that Defence Force members felt that their expectations regarding pay were not being met to a satisfactory extent, in fact, 55.3% felt that their expectations of pay were not being met at all. The focus groups examined the reasons behind this level of satisfaction. The findings from the focus groups support the findings of the survey and highlight pay as an area of concern for Privates and other enlisted members. Officers also expressed their concern about the pay levels of the enlisted ranks. The following section highlights the findings, separating the army, navy and air corps, as well as officers and the enlisted ranks.

3.1 Army

The focus groups highlighted a clear concern for the enlisted ranks, in particular Privates, regarding their financial wellbeing and their ability to socially engage fully in society. While NCO's are not overly satisfied with their own pay, they have shown greater concern for the newer members, in particular Privates. Concerns surrounding the issue of members paying rent, attaining a mortgage, the cost of commuting to work and the ability to pay day to day bills and provide for their families were all highlighted. The issue of members also being on Family Income Supplement caused a lot of dissatisfaction with some stating that they would be better off if they were on social welfare.

'There is a huge issue with pay for newer members' (Private)

'People have to leave to survive' (Private)

'I can't get a mortgage. Some members are even on Family Income Supplement.

We would be better off on the dole as we would have no bills (Private)'

'People are sleeping in cars. Two people in Athlone couldn't afford to pay to stay in the barracks or commute home so they stayed in their cars at the weekends' (Private)

'More than half the members have a second job just so they can make do' (Private)

'In 2005, 2006 and 2007 I was taking home about 150 a week more than now. I got a mortgage on the strength of that and now I have to work two jobs to pay for that' (Private)

'I have to live with my parents along with my wife and kids' (Private)

'Everything is going up; car insurance, bills etc. Our pay will be the last to improve as we don't have that perception. In the public there is always the perception of 'what do you do every day...' (Private)

'1916- nice to get praise but time off is not going to pay for it (travel)the praise we got was nice but we had to get up at 3am to travel and no compensation for that.....I can't go into the ESB with my medal' (Private)

In addition to dissatisfaction to overall pay, one major area of concern that emerged throughout the focus groups was the issue of 'Duty Pay'. There is a consensus among the enlisted ranks that in comparison to organisations such as the Gardaí, the defence force members are doing a job that is similar for a lot less money. This perception of inequity of pay between the Defence Forces and the Gardaí emerged in a number of focus groups across the different ranks. Members expressed concern that not only was the rate of duty pay completely dissatisfactory, doing a duty actually ends up costing them money in the form of travel, food and childcare.

'We get €20 for a 24 hour duty- that is slave labour' (Private)

'Duties – this is crazy for €20, sometimes there are two duties in a week.

– The comparison to the guards is ridiculous

– *If money improved I would stay. Before we would get €120 for a Sunday’
(Private)*

*‘Duty pay back home- you are losing money- you giving up a Sunday- 24 hours.
You are travelling from Offaly and spending 20 euro on diesel so you are
basically working for nothing’ (Private)*

Many NCO’s expressed frustration that they are unable to look after the welfare of their troops given the challenges they are faced with.

‘When we are sitting in the ‘hot seat’ with the young guys- that is THE issue and we can’t help them...The only thing we can do is give them time off so they can save a day’s childcare..’

‘You can only flog a horse so much before it will fall....these lads have to have money to pay for petrol, to pay bills, to pay childcare.....they get fed up eventually and they are gone.... and it’s the best ones that are leaving’

‘I had a young guy in this morning. He is looking for a discharge- he has a young baby. He is a one of the good ones! And he wants to stay! He said I love it here... but he has a mortgage and baby and he has been offered a job elsewhere with more money’ (SNCO)

‘There is a dignity at work policy- they could throw that in the bin..I see privates on their hands and knees scraping weeds up with a kitchen knife....and cleaning up cigarette butts...all day..yes fair enough we have to keep the place clean but supply the right equipment to them. A fella wouldn’t mind it if he was getting something back. What’s happening to privates is just unbelievable’ (SNCO)

*‘Guys are going on call outs here to support gardai- and some of the guys arrested are going into better conditions than the young soldiers that are doing their job..’
(JNCO)*

Furthermore, members are frustrated with being told by management that nothing can be done about pay, particularly when they have heard that the Department of Defence has previously handed back money to the Government. This will be further discussed in the leadership section of the report.

'Department of Defence handed back €27 million but say they can't do anything about pay'

'The Defence Forces said they saved €4 million...what are they saving it for? They are telling the world they saved all this money but they are not concerned about their own lads'

The issue of pay also emerged in discussions with Officers. Largely it was not brought up as a primary issue for the Officers themselves; however, they showed great concern for the enlisted ranks. While some participants indicated that their pay doesn't match the level of work they have to do and this caused some dissatisfaction, the focus of the discussions centred around losing Private soldiers as they are unable to live on the wages provided by the Defence Forces.

'A big change is cnl who represent .4% and the privates who represent 45%. The private is commuting on a 1/4 of a cnls wages. That is not the way it should be. We used to have married quarters- there were supports- Accommodation was bulldozed because it cost money. Hospitals etc- all gone those supports' (SO)

'There are a lot of people leaving because of pay and conditions'

'Conditions are not good enough. Nobody can stand over it. Some soldiers cannot live on the wages they get.'

'Privates are leaving as cannot survive and there are NCOs on Family Income Supplement'

'Pay is a major factor why people are leaving and one of the places that can be ring fenced is the military allowance and that should be done. We as officers have a responsibility to our Privates and NCO's many of whom are on FIS which

is an absolute disgrace- and the only way to do that is to ring fence the military allowance.’ (SO)

‘90% of what used to be available to the soldier is gone- what used to be available to compensate for the difficult way of life. We did say there is good flexibility- but at times there is absolutely zero for these guys- Christmas, new year..when they have to duties. And on call all the time.’ (SO)

‘It’s ingrained in us as soldiers that we don’t want to be ‘going public’ (like the gardai) The last thing we want to do is be moaning to the public about pay. We want them to be proud of us but when you see your soldiers in the circumstances that they are and you see what a recruit earns and you are saying to yourself- how do you survive on that- you have more children than me, how do you survive..;’ (SO)

‘My biggest problem since I became unit commander is seeing guys who- excellent young guys with 3 years’ service maybe 4 who are contracted and only have so long to serve and they come in to me and they say Sir..i am leaving and you say why- you have a fantastic future...and they say- I can get more money working in a shop. I had a guy who was driving two and half ton vehicles- he has amazing skills. And done amazing skills...but he can make more money to support himself and his kids by selling a shirt to someone..its shameful that our senior leaders- we cannot stand over 25% of our people being on FIS. At some point someone has to say- this is unacceptable...and that senior management. (Unanimous agreement in room). It is not acceptable to hide behind the economic situation’ (SO)

‘If the government acknowledges that guys are not being paid enough that they are willing to supplement that- I mean- it’s the same money- whether its coming out of the pay budget or social welfare- ...its embarrassing- to be signing forms for FIS for NCOS’

‘We move around a lot and our private soldiers move around a lot and 10 or 15 years ago the accommodation issue came up and they started to do up the accommodation. But then they decided this was a money factor and that they would start charging more for it...so it meant that I had privates in the 2nd battalion who were in effect not able to live in any more because that would

be a quarter of their weekly wage..except they were very young and I needed them there for certain task and they were learning their trade and doing courses and so on..So what it meant was a guy was getting on a bus in Blessington at 5 in the morning to get to work- when in fact there was a perfectly good bed – now empty-and in fact it would have suited us to have him in the barracks. The values I wanted was teamwork and integrations the value that mattered to department of defence was value for money- or more precisely cost- there was zero understanding of the ethos we were trying to create and integrate that guy into the organisation and make him feel valued and make him feel part of that organisation. We were talking about 40 euro a week in real terms- but that guy would have been quite happy to give 19 hours out of the day to work on late to learn a trade, do a course, whatever we ask of him...’(SO)

3.2 Navy

The focus groups have highlighted that pay is a major, if not the number one issue, for members of the enlisted ranks in the army. This situation is also evident in the Navy. One issue that emerged was the inability for a junior member of the organisation to have any quality of life away from the ships. The low levels of pay for the type of work that members of the Navy do was a cause of concern raised across the different ranks. While the type of work cannot be compared to a private sector job, participants highlight the differences between private sector pay and their own.

‘Pay is going backwards’

‘You have 19, 20 and 21 year olds on the ground in the med dealing with that front line- not the Captain on the bridge. That person is earning €290 a week into their bank account and what they are dealing with out there.....If you put a private sector person into that scenario out there they wouldn’t do it for less than €300 an hour not to mind a week..’

‘For the first 15 years I would say it was the best job- educated to third level. That has changed in the last 6 years..... Salary up to last 6 years was good- but it’s getting harder and harder to stay.’

In addition, Senior NCO's in particular were concerned that the issue of pay is leading to retention issues in the Navy. The consensus was that young people will join for a few years, get some training and leave to find a better paying job. One participant even compared the Navy to JobBridge.

'Junior staff never leave the ship as they can't afford rent'

'Can't hold on to young guys because of pay, long hours (16-18 hours a day) and insufficient rest periods'

'DF has been turned into a JobBridge'

While Senior NCO's did show concern for the younger members, they themselves were also dissatisfied with their level of pay. They expressed a feeling of frustration and inequity when making comparisons between their responsibility and pay with that of Junior Officers.

'At 22 years in the NAVY pay is ridiculous- in comparison to what we would class as junior managers. The workload is also ridiculous- and it's only the goodness of people at the moment of our rank that is keeping the place afloat'

'I think we hold more responsibility over the seaman rank than junior officers but I would have to question what we are getting in return for that'

Furthermore, there were concerns raised in the focus groups about where money is being spent within the Navy. There is a feeling that the focus should be on paying its members rather than building new ships.

'They throw money at new ships and won't pay the men a living wage'

'They say they can't pay us but they are building these big new ships. Who is going to man these new vessels?'

Similar to the Officers in the army, the Officers in the Navy were primarily concerned for the junior members of the organisation when it came to pay. There is a sense that while the demand is greater on each member of the Navy, the pay does not reflect this. It is also perceived by Officers that senior management in the Defence Forces are out of touch with the reality of lives of the people on the ground. There was also concern that people are leaving the organisation due to pay.

'We do more, for longer, for less and with less recognition and acknowledgment today'

'Some people have left to work in bars. While the money is the same they have a better work life balance'

'One person has been working full time for two years with the navy. He is single and still has no money to buy a pair of runners'

3.3 Air Corps

Similar findings emerged in focus groups with members of the Air Corps. They are also dissatisfied with pay. Their level of pay and requirements to live in and pay rations has caused them to be dissatisfied.

'We are paid and treated as an apprentice but are technical training students. In the army we would get paid a 3 tech. There is a difference in pay scales.'*

'We have to live in and pay rations but others don't have to pay rations'

'Cadets in the same location don't pay rations'

'€40 is a lot of money to us'

Like with the apprentices, pay is also a big issue for the airman and NCO ranks. Overall there is a sense that there is a disconnect between the pay scales and the cost of living.

Similar to findings in the army, the air corps members feel that the pay between the Gardaí and themselves should be much closer than what it is. It is also felt that decision makers are disconnected from the reality faced by members of the organisation as it doesn't affect them.

'Disconnect on pay scales. People cannot fill their cars to get to work. It is easy to take a 20% pay cut at 200k. They don't know, it doesn't affect them.'

'We are not paid the same as the Gardaí. We should be getting a lot more'

The officers in the Air Corps also agree that pay is an issue. They have highlighted the likelihood of the junior members being on Family Income Supplement as well as the attractiveness of the money in the private sector.

'In first 5/6 years and have a child you are likely to be on Family Income Supplement'

'Pilots can easily get about 40-50K a year if they leave. An ATC could get 30k if they leave...engineers also'

3.4 Chaplains

In a focus group with the Chaplains the issue of pay was raised as being a primary issue for those in the enlisted ranks. They highlighted the issue of members being on FIS and also the fact that they are slow to encourage members to stay in the organisation.

'The number of personnel that are on FIS. That is absolutely disgraceful- that people in Government jobs could be on FIS ...there is something very wrong in the system' (Chaplain)

'Do you want professional DF of young men and women trained to the highest calibre and paid accordingly? there is responsibility when someone is the last line of defence between democracy and anarchy- and people forget that...if pay was sorted I think a lot of issues would be resolved.' (Chaplain)

'I have been trying to encourage people to stay...but now I am saying- there is no prospect of promotion, no prospect of overseas, they will be moving from 278 to just over 340...you know what there are better jobs in XXXX (retail org)...why would I encourage them to stay in the army...its now against my better instinct to try and get them to stay...340 wouldn't pay the bills..' (Chaplain)

The representative organisations also highlighted pay as a primary issue, comparing pay in the Defence Forces to other public sector employees. They also highlight the concern that military management have taken the issue of pay off the table when it comes to negotiations.

'I think at the highest level – government- that they completely undervalue defence. It starts with pay- 500 euro a week less a person in the DF earns than someone in An Garda Siochana, 300 euro less than a civil servant. The dole is about 188 euro. A private soldier is earning about 340 euro a week. That means he is better off on social welfare than in this organisation. Why would you implement military discipline when a fella is doing the best he can to come into this organisation on a daily basis. I don't think the defence act and military regulations are in line with what the government pays those lad. I think on average the pension in the DF doesn't mean someone in the DF has job security at a basic level. A private soldier will not be able to purchase a house. 2nd It will not be able to purchase a house unless they go overseas. A garda earns over six times with allowances than some of them in the df and they never have to leave home..there is no job security, there is no long term strategic vision for the organisation at a government level and to place it at the department is probably too low a level..even then it's the public that elected the government so you have to question what is Irelands' (Raco)

'We are reluctant to mention pay as military management have said its off the table- but if you were to ask everyone in the room their top three grievances-pay would be top of the list. If you created a venn diagram of grievances-- pay would be the big middle and other things would be related but not the big one. Pay is th number one issue and it's the driving factor for guys leaving...the attitude is-

I was making more money 5 years ago- I can make more money outside. Its soul destroying- I have been involved in training young soldiers the last four years the wont stay much longer than 6 years..we are now seeing guys with 3 months service, 6 month, 12 months were they go to jobs and its look- I can work in a hotel and make more than here, I don't have to go to the glen for a week and so on...other issues are important- I am not saying they aren't but pay has to be. (Raco)'

'In first 5/6 years and have a child you are likely to be on FIS' (PDFORRA)

3.5 Implications of Findings on Pay

Overall, pay emerged as being a primary source of dissatisfaction across members of the Defence Forces. While the concern was primarily for the junior members of the organisation, the NCO's and Officers saw pay as being a key issue that impacts their job in managing the junior members of the organisation on a daily basis. The implications of the findings are outlined below:

- Focus groups consistently highlighted dissatisfaction across the organisation with pay, particularly for the enlisted ranks. Members are expressing concerns about their ability to remain in the organisation. With current levels of pay there is a high risk of a very high level of turnover in the organisation. Participants compared their situations as a member of the Defence Forces to the more favourable option of claiming social welfare. It was also reported that a number of members are in receipt of Family Income Supplement.
- With duty pay being so low, many participants expressed that doing a duty is costing them money. This has added to the financial burden that many members already experience. Some members have highlighted concerns that it is the same people who get asked to do duties all the time. People are already finding ways not to do a duty and this problem is likely to escalate.
- Throughout the focus groups participants compared their pay to those in the private sector as well as those doing similar work with the Gardaí and County Councils. This comparative highlighted not only how low they felt their pay is

but also how low their quality of life is because of their pay. They feel socially excluded in comparison to peers on other organisations.

- Evidence from the focus groups suggests that Privates are unable to participate fully in society. This is due to pay levels.
- Concerns raised over where management have decided to spend money also caused members a deal of frustration. This has a negative impact on the perception of the organisations leaders.
- As previously mentioned, there is a high risk of the Defence Forces having a dysfunctional rate of turnover. While some attrition is normal in organisation, a high level will leave the organisation with significant gaps in capabilities. The organisation invests a large amount of money in training recruits to a high standard but with high turnover rates, there will not be a return on that investment.

3.6 Conditions

The issue of the quality of living conditions for those who stay at their barracks came up across a number of different focus groups. The following section highlights the concerns, separating the army, navy and air corps. Accommodation concerns were raised primarily by the enlisted ranks.

3.6.1 Army

In the Army the Privates who lived in were quite dissatisfied with the conditions in the living quarters. The NCO's expressed a concern for the Privates, adding it to the list of reasons why people will not stay in the Army. Lack of basic facilities such as showers and a suitable mess were among the concerns. It was also highlighted that while the outside of these buildings are maintained well, it is a different situation on the inside.

'There is a lapse in basic conditions in the accommodation'

'People in Apollo house wouldn't live in the accommodation'

'2 showers for 40 lads and it took 4 years of asking to get another 2'

'Everything looks ok from the outside'

'There are no facilities to buy lunch at the barracks'

'You will not fit 200 privates in the mess. People are eating in their cars'

'Guys living over there in hotel Rwanda (name given to accommodation in Rathmines for privates) - there is no hot water, the water isn't on in urinals for some reason, no toilet roll, walls are crusted with damp. Yeah I think they are going to do something- but its 10 years too late...we have been banging on for 10 years and living in squalor...and they can restore McKee officers mess!!...and they handed back millions at end of 2016...' (JNCO)

In addition to the poor facilities, there is frustration among the Privates and NCO's as to where the organisations money is being spent. They have suggested that rather than putting money into the living quarters it is spent on improving the already well equipped officer's mess or even installing an astro turf soccer pitch that they felt was not a priority.

'The money granted went to the officer's mess rather than the living quarters'

'Cathal Bruagh got an astro turf when there are awful conditions in the accommodation'

'14 million euro was supposed to be spent on J block but went into the officer's mess'

'Didn't need a soccer pitch costing €200,000'

3.6.2 Navy

As mentioned previously, while younger members in the Navy accept that they have to live on ships due to not being able to afford rent, life on the Island provides no quality of life outside of work.

Aside from being at sea, when members are at the island, in particular the younger members, there is nothing for them to do in their downtime. These members are living on ships and find it very difficult to leave the island which gives them no quality of life outside of work.

'No football pitch on island'

'There should be a library and Wi-Fi'

'There are problems getting off the island that need to be sorted. If a guy goes at a certain time to do shopping the way the bus works he will miss dinner coming back'

'There is nothing for recruits to do in evenings'

3.6.3 Air Corps

Living conditions was a major concern for Apprentices in the Air Corps. Lack of amenities and poor standards of accommodation is something that they find very demoralising. They also feel that it is a Health and Safety issue.

'Conditions are not up to standards'

'A substandard hostel that was supposed to be renovated'

'It is a timber box, it would go on fire if you put a match to it'

'There is one washing machine for 23 people'

'Dryers and machines have been broken for the last 6 months'

'2 windows in the bathroom have been stuck open since October 2015'

There is also frustration as they are going through the channels to get something done about these conditions but they feel that nobody cares as nothing is being done about it.

'We are communicating these issues down the line and nothing is being done'

'They don't care about us. It doesn't seem like a big deal to anyone else'

Another cause of frustration to the Apprentices is the lack of healthy options for their dinner. They pay to eat in the mess and cannot afford to buy their own food but get served poor options. This contradicts the requirement for them to be fit and healthy.

'Always hounded for health and fitness'

'Options were fried battered fish or rib steak in a white bun and chips'

'Can't afford to buy own food as we pay €40 to eat here and can't leave at lunch time'

'A very good dinner would help'

'Very unhealthy options'

'Good options are kept for the NCO's'

3.6.4 Implication of findings on Conditions

Overall, for those who live at the various barrack for any period of time, they are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the conditions provided. This has led to a number of issues that have implications for the organisation.

- The members who live in feel undervalued due to the conditions they have been provided with. They feel that they are not being listened to when they ask for their conditions to be improved.
- The poor living conditions also impacts work life balance. For example, not being able to leave the Island in the Navy. As will be discussed in section 4.0 this will in turn affect the turnover of personnel.
- There was also an issue where money was invested in an officer's mess in comparison to improving conditions in the living quarters. This is in addition to spending a large sum of money on a soccer pitch. This leaves members feeling a

larger divide between the perceived importance of officers versus the enlisted ranks.

4.0 Staff Shortages and Retention

The issue of ‘critical gaps’ in personnel emerged as a key theme in all focus groups. Particularly highlighted were gaps in middle management areas mainly among Officers and increasingly among NCOs. A number of serious outcomes and implications for the Defence Forces relating to shortages and turnover were raised in the focus groups. In this section shortages of Officer personnel is examined as well as the overall issue of retention of officers and other ranks. The implications of this are discussed.

Contemporary research in the field of HRM indicates that for organisations critical success factor lies with the quality/availability of talent and human capital (Sparrow and Makram 2015). Talent management has been referred to as the new strategic cornerstone for organisation effectiveness (Kontoghiorghes 2016). This is particularly salient in service type sectors where it is recognised that businesses rely on intangible assets –in particular human capital to achieve successful outcomes. In an increasingly global competitive market for talent, organisations are being advised to look at ways of ‘locking’ in their core talented personnel and a key tenet of effective talent management is the avoidance of reactive hiring. (Price Waterhouse Cooper 2013, Cappelli, 2008). Furthermore recent research (Collings 2014) in the area of talent management questions the view that lower ‘level employees’ (such as Privates in the context of this report) do not meet criteria to be deemed ‘talent’. Indeed such employees should possibly be front and central to talent strategy if they are at the front line of organisation operations (Ton 2011). Aligned with a focus on talent retention is the issue of turnover. Research on turnover makes a distinction between functional turnover of employees and dysfunctional turnover (Morin and Reynaud ,2009) Functional turnover refers to an individual who adds little value to the organisation, or for whom the cost of replacement by the organisation does not exceed the cost of retention. Dysfunctional turnover refers to a valued employee who quits and takes with them their experience and corporate knowledge (Renaud et al, 2014). Boxhall (2013) highlights perceptions and assessments of employees of fairness

of rewards and other benefits relative to the employee's perceived contribution to the organization as a key contributing factor to the loss or retention of key talent.. These assessments traditionally focus on reward, promotion, status, and workload. Collings (2014) refers to this as the 'contribution axis' Dysfunctional turnover has been highlighted as having a particularly negative outcome for military organisations due to factors such as a higher cost of replacement because of the specialist nature of the skills and thus the length of time it takes to replace experienced personnel (Dupre and day 2007). Intention to leave can also have negative effects on an organisation as employees who have formed such intentions have been found to distance themselves psychologically from their work, be less focused and less likely to work to full potential (Reynaud et al 2014). Furthermore in a longitudinal study Huffman et al (2005) found that turnover intentions closely respond to actual turnover of military personnel.

The advantages of functional retention on the other hand is summed up by the following quote:

High functional retention or a firm's ability to retain a high value-added resource constitutes a key organisational outcome for three reasons: first, by staying with the firm, these key employees contribute to profits (e.g. eliminating replacement costs); second, their retention minimises the loss of skills and resources, a loss which can hamper the achievement of objectives (loss of know-how, customer dissatisfaction); third and lastly, their desire to stay reveals their job satisfaction, which carries additional gain (Reynaud et al 2014: 418)

The issue of 'critical gaps' of management personnel in units emerged as a key theme in all focus groups with Officers and other ranks. Shortages of officers and NCOs in units were identified as problematic. The feedback from the groups was that the gaps were due to two key things. Firstly there was a palpable frustration among Officers with Administration instruction C.S.4 regarding numerical establishment. Officers who were assigned to units/companies were missing from those units because they were on courses for promotion, serving overseas or on battlegroups and they are not replaced. The reality is that there are much fewer Officers and NCOs manning the units than are reflected in this system of assessing establishment numbers. Secondly Officers who participated in

the focus groups were alarmed at the amount of Officers with significant experience and expertise who were choosing to exit the organisation. Turnover and rotation of experienced NCOs were also identified by all ranks as growing problems which will have long term effects on organisations capability. Turnover of Privates was also seen as a problem whereby the organisation is losing people who display potential for promotion and valuable organisation contribution and also longer serving Privates with valuable unit knowledge

4.1 Establishment vs capability on the ground

In the focus groups there was widespread criticism of Administration Instruction C.S.4. It was felt that the shortages of personnel were at best masked by the figures in that C.S.4 does not take account of personnel that are on training courses, participating in battlegroups and overseas. These officers are not replaced. All of the focus groups from Private to Senior Officers reported severe shortages of Officers in units as a result:

'We are shy- we are well shy of establishment- but there is false representation. They are including all the number of people who are being trained...'

'It all looks good (establishment) on paper but it's not good on the ground and we are having to manage the inefficiencies.'

'We look at strength instead of trained strength. For readiness. Really we have about 5500 trained strength we don't look at how truly ready we are...'

'We have a huge issue with officer movement- We have 100 officers pulled out every year for career courses- that's not allowed for. We have officers overseas..not allowed for . So every year you have hundreds of officers who are meant to be in jobs who aren't because they are doing things that are not allowed for (in terms of replacement) so the gaps for instance company commanders and platoon commanders are not there..and because they are not there there is no one to mind the troops to train them..the military system works really well when it's manned...but..resources need to match demand..' (SO)

'Effect of low manning levels on the whole organisation as well as on officers. I have been in a company in XXXXXXXX so in that company there has been a commandant, and myself- the only two officers,,In three and a half years I have had 6 bosses- 6 commandants. So none of the soldiers know who the commandant is- haven't a hope- cos they have been there an average of 7 months..then I become the continuity there. For the last year I have been the only LFT in XXXXXXXX so we are operating at 10% manning levels. Inevitably I get pulled and dragged to all sorts of different jobs..none of the officers in that company know the troops. I am giving out 667s to troops- out of every 3 that come in 2 I don't know their names and I am giving them their performance appraisal..that's a bad situation- speaks for itself' (JO)

'We describe ourselves as a learning organisation but we can be down 40% in units'(SO)

'We are in a spiral that's getting worse and to stop it we have to hit the brakes and do something very different to what we are doing. One thing that everyone in this room (of 40) would say if we could wave a wand is say- bring us back to full strength- not just on paper but in reality..until something radical is done- a long term plan that we can be on board with the spiral will just get worse'(SO)

'We are supposed to have 5 junior officers and there is only me' (JO)

'There is a lack of junior officers. 21 Lt's supposed to be in XXXXXXXX. Now there are 5 with even more work to do-We are just fed up'

'You go to units- we don't have the lieutenants and sergeants we should have. We don't have captains. We are missing that whole middle management sandwich at unit level. You might have your three commandants- but if you don't have your captains in the middle or your sergeants- you could have 200 gunners or privates who are not getting the leadership to bring them on. I don't know how we can deliver job satisfaction to an individual who is going in to that every day.'

4.2 The turnover issue

A key concern was the profile of Officers who are retiring/leaving the DF. These were identified in the focus groups as those with 10-30 years' experience and the corporate knowledge and experience that is embedded in that group. The reasons cited for people leaving included increasing stress due to the constant movement of Officers to fill gaps and for promotion, pressure on family life of the unpredictability and pressure on physical and mental wellbeing with the demands of filling the current gaps. These specific issues and the effects on individuals are discussed in more detail elsewhere in the report. Serious concerns from an organisational level are presented here. Key concerns as illustrated from the quotes presented here are that the DF is reaching a point of being hollowed out in terms of experienced human capital, that notwithstanding the increased recruitment of cadets it would take 10 plus years to replace the expertise that has been lost. Furthermore concerns were expressed that it will be difficult to get cadets up to the standard required as the mentoring capability is being lost with those that are exiting/retiring. As highlighted in other sections there was widespread frustration at a perception that there is a focus on recruitment and that retention is not a priority. This in turn is leading to a sense of disconnect/divide between all ranks and Senior Military management/The DoD and a fear for future capability of the Defence Forces

'We are losing people. We are losing recruits faster than we are taking them in. we had a net loss of recruits in the navy last year. We lost more people than what we inducted. The training programme for cadets is such a long term process that by the time we get them functional its too far along down the road but on paper it looks fine' (SO)

'Military organisation is a 'can do' organisation...that can work in two ways. Currently it's a 'will do', without the resources that are needed it will lead to 'make do'..It's stepping down all the way through ...It will become an 'undone' organisation and people continuing to leave.. ..And the value being placed on corporate knowledge?...it takes less money to retain corporate knowledge than it takes to train them up from the start. The figures are fudged- if I retire tomorrow- my replacement is a cadet- and he is never going to attain my salary- ever...their pension entitlement and mine is different..and it will take them 15-20 years or more to get to my level'(SO)

'Losing 60 people per month, retention is one of the major issues. We spend enormous resources recruiting people, training them, looking after them, doing our best for them and we are losing 10% of them annually'(SO)

'We will struggle to deal with retention issue and the focus is solely on recruitment'(SO)

'I think everyone of us have considered leaving..(group of 10 senior officers). We do have different terms of service- it might be better for us to leave based on pay we can get in private sector- but we all love the DF but there are inherent issues with the organisation and we don't see a move on it.'(SO)

'No-(when asked if was going to remain) There are too many people leaving- I have 5 years to go on my contract and am thinking of doing something else when it ends' (JO)

'We are losing it already (talent) because the people who are so concerned about risk are the people who can see the risk are saying I am not prepared to accept this any more I will go elsewhere. But these are the people we need to stay because they can identify the risk in the first place' (SO)

'The way the resources are- to provide troops for missions overseas, the way recruitment is going to replace the retention we don't have. It's like the emperor's new clothes. We are supposed to be creating this psychological freedom to allow people to innovate. How can they innovate if they don't have time to do their own jobs! There is a serious degree of frustration among people who are doing double/triple their jobs because their counterparts have left to civvy street and they are being replaced by cadets and recruits who are 15 years behind that experience- they are not going to replace that capital! It's just a numbers game for the DoD...' (SO)

'For my vintage we have the 12 year, 20 year pension- so I know I can go if I want to..I don't see myself having a long term career in the DF as I live in XXXXXXXX and I don't want to live in Dublin/Newbridge.'(JO)

'I am a grad- if I come to a point where I don't see any enjoyment- like admin/location/no work life balance...I would just move on' (JO)

'50% of the officers that left in last year left of their own accord- i.e. early- not retirement age' (SO)

4.3 Turnover as a positive

A consistent perception that very senior military management viewed turnover (particularly among the lower ranks) as completely positive emerged from the focus groups with Officers and other ranks. This was a source of frustration and anger.

'They (military management) think turnover is good. They think a commandant leaving the DF and working for Aldi is going to in some way champion the DF. Chances are that commandant will never mention the DF ever again. Likewise Lieutenants and Captains leaving- they seem to think this is a great thing- it's not! We are losing corporate knowledge that takes 20 years to develop. By bringing in 100 new cadets that we all see on the square today- in 20 years' time they will be able to do the job of the Commandant that's left..but this is being championed by military management as a good thing?!'(SO)

'It's very frustrating-the ostrich approach and this attitude- people leaving the organisation is a good thing!..people are not leaving the organisation to enhance the Df reputation and make society better- they are leaving because they are coming under so much pressure internally and so much pressure from their families- they don't always want to go.'(SO)

'The department make no secret of the fact that they like this 5 year rotation policy..The attitude is they will get 5 years out of someone and they move on- it feeds into that regime of- a small bit of service and you are gone- but it's the expertise and the knowledge and the competencies that you are losing because as they progress through the system you rely on them to feedback into the training and development of the cadets and recruits that are coming in in the next few years behind them and that's being lost..'(SO)

'Chief of staff has said- don't worry about people leaving because we are getting numbers in that's ridiculous' (Private)

'Units that we are commanding where we are at 25% strength...one in 4. 3 out of four are gone- gone or gone overseas or training...and the vacancy is not being filled. We are focusing on quantity in volume not quality...we are focusing on the latest policy, the latest buzzword..but how many organisations are inducting 10% of their organisation over the last two years- nobody. It's unsustainable what we are doing. We are haemorrhaging our corporate knowledge..' (SO)

'Turnover can be deemed as good..up to a point. But they are profit making organisations. We are not. We need consistency. If we don't have that people are leaving at the rate they are leaving...and when senior management are on record as saying turnover is good for the organisation. Good for Ireland...I just don't buy that!' (So)

4.4 Impact of shortages and of turnover of Officers

The direct individual impacts of turnover and shortages identified by Officers was that double and triple jobbing and shadow work was being forced on them. The knock on effects of this on officers individually were reported as, stress and concerns for safety and high levels of uncertainty regarding where they would be posted and a questioning of their own future in the DF. The knock on effect on troops were identified by Officers as: a shortage of personnel to train or do exercises with the recruits and troops resulting in Privates *'spending their days with a mop and bucket'* or doing nothing, 667s not being conducted effectively or at all (discussed in detail in Section 5.0), NCOs having to pick up the slack, and a growing disconnect between Officers and troops.

'What frustrates me personally is that you do your training and you move through the system and you expect to be doing the job..but I find as a LT CoL that I am doing the job of a Captain ...because the supporting people are just not there...because they may be overseas or engaged in training for promotion so there are gaps' (SO)

'There are currently 4 commandants in XXXXX who because people are leaving the DF and going overseas- now those 4 are completely uncertain where they will be in 6 months. Nobody is talking to them or telling them and then when they go..- I had a Commandant who was sent to XXXXXX from XXXXXX this morning and was told he will be there for 18 months..but we both know that could be 36...there seems to be no planning or military management to give Officers certainty. You are supposed to know maybe a month or two before you come home (from overseas)...at best you might be told a week before...but more often it's when you are on your 4 weeks leave when you get back...a phone call in the 3rd week of leave' (JO)

'We need numbers- retention is a big issue. It's a crisis at the moment..we don't enjoy it anymore- for the last year – for the first time in my career I worry about what I am going to do the next day because I don't have the resources. And a lot of my peers in the room feel the same- you can't enjoy a job you are doing badly..so that's mental well being but there is also physical wellbeing because of the hours you are working- so if you get an opportunity outside you are going to take it. Your family can see you are stressed you are not a nice person to be around. All comes back to manning levels..'

'it all comes back to numbers and the Department..it's not always JIs fault- they fight tooth and nail- it's taken me two years to get XXXXX inducted- I have approval but even now there are hold up from the Department of Defence- they are dragging their heels. JI don't have the staff so they have to be reactive..so there is no plan and where there is no plan there is no certainty- so then you have family going- what do you mean you don't know where you will be next year- you going overseas, where are you going, no idea, when will you be back- no idea- it's a joke! Last time I was overseas there was a huge spread of officers from all over the world- they all knew what they were going back to. They were laughing at me- two weeks before I went home they asked where I was going- I said I have no idea!'

'We are meant to be a contingency organisation..when something happens we need to step up- but we can't do our day to day job- let alone if something happened- so there is a huge gap there..'

Understaffing of barracks was also highlighted as affecting the experience of recruits. The feedback was that there is simply not enough officers on the ground to train recruits or to engage in exercises with the troops. It affects the integrity of the 667 system (discussed in detail in the performance management and promotions sections) The knock on effect of all of this is a perception among other ranks that the DF is an unfair organisation and troops are frustrated with Officers who don't know them but who are carrying out 667s which in turn is contributing to a sense of a growing divide between the ranks

'On a personal level. We all have troops under our care. We have a duty of care to them. We are still at that stage at the coalface where we are interacting with these boys and girls day and night. Days are getting shorter and nights are getting longer where you are not able to do things with them..because you are pulled every way. The troops need leadership. The need it from the top. If they don't see it....they are not fooled by one visit to a barracks...they are all on social media they are on everywhere. They see it. and if they don't see their plight being pushed from the top- that's where they see the disconnect..' (SO)

'Because of understaffing it takes us away from exercises' (JO)

'We all our training resources are being gobbled up to deal with the new recruits to replace people and we can't then train the people we have so they are doing nothing..' (SO)

'There is a huge gap now between the other ranks and the officers and its getting wider because before the it was on the ground with the troops. Now the Lieutenant is in the Adjutants office..because there is so many gaps the LFT are doing jobs they shouldn't be doing... troops don't even know the names of Officers' (SO)

'I also find that the amount of shadow work we now have to do personally as a result is taking us away from going out on the ground and talking to groups. And that is causing issues- not making connections with the troops- talking on one to one- talking about their families, if they were having difficulties,- which you

would have done 20 years ago. now we don't have the time to go out, and they are living away as well- commuting,,,so the connection is lost'(SO)

'A lot of issues with privates apart from pay is we are just not there (commandants). It might not always be good news either- we might be telling guys you are not suitable for promotion, yet and you need to do x and y- but at least the leadership and transparency and consistency would be there back in the unit and we would have the power to do that'(SO)

'Everything is compressed and we don't have time to mentor...we need to review the re org and admit things went wrong'(SO)

4.5 Exacerbating turnover

The effect of shortages/turnover is clearly having an effect on Officers thinking about their future in the Defence forces

'I'm here because I have to be. The psychological contract is disintegrating. It is not practical anymore' (SO)

'I love the army, don't want to leave but may be forced to' (So)

'The amount of people comparing CV's around the barracks is shocking!'(SO)

'You look at people at the rank above you- and they may have served a year in that rank and gone- some of the finest people and you say- he has just cut all ties and gone..'(SO)

'I think everyone of us have considered leaving (group of 10 senior officers). We do have different terms of service- it might be better for us to leave based on pay we can get in private sector- but we all love the DF but there are inherent issues with the organisation and we don't see a move on it..'(SO)

4.6 Effect of Shortages and Turnover on Operational Effectiveness and Safety

The focus groups with personnel across all ranks elicited a widespread concern that current shortages of Officers and NCOs are having an effect on unit capability and also unit cohesiveness and there also are safety concerns (which is discussed in more detail in section 10.0)

'We are already seeing it in the army- little accidents..There is going to be a big accident. Guys are so much more inexperienced, they are so much more..they are getting to rank earlier- are younger and they haven't seen the same type of things, they haven't been involved in it..its going to come and if it keeps on unravelling it will come. We fear a serious incident with a number of deaths...it could be overseas..'(SO)

'If we get people to Syria, they have to be trained but to train a person to that standard. You have to have consistency in the unit, you have to have experience you have to have management systems and a lot of what you are hearing is a lack of ncos, senior ncos, officers- the middle management. It's that that brings them through individual/collective training that brings them to exercises. They control the risk, manage the risk. They are the barometer the litmus test, the glue in order to meet standards to get overseas. So if that goes or is limited and we the leadership/the leadership doesn't put enough emphasis on the unit itself, well that glue will go and there will be big problems then'(SO)

'We have got to the point in units where we are operating in such compromised environment that we are not letting our good people do what they are good at and as a result they don't....they don't practise, they are not getting necessary experience they are not moving on. We are going to have guys at commandant rank who are incapable of making a decision.'(SO)

'Knowledge in the DF is at an all time low as best people are getting out'(SNCO)

'if I send young guys on courses and in 3 years they are gone- that's no good to me- and it's costing the army'(SNCO)

'The pre 2004 people are going to go...once we come to that point I would be frightened to think what's going to happen. It's going to come to the point where someone is going to get seriously hurt or killed... the standards are going' (NCO)

4.7 Feedback from other ranks on turnover and intent to stay

As with the Officer focus groups, the focus groups conducted among NCOs and longer serving Privates revealed a strong sense of attachment to the Defence Forces and an acknowledgement among many of what the Defence Forces had 'given' them in the past. However there was almost unanimous feedback from all ranks that the re-organisation has changed the culture of the organisation, that work is becoming more unfulfilling, stressful, and problematic from a family point of view and that many are looking to the first possible point of exit.

'I am studying in my own time outside specifically so I can leave' (SNCO)

'I have 80 new recruits under 25 and I have lost 10 of them already' (SNCO)

'When you are in training its great- and then bumph..I won't be staying' (Private)

'I am only here to see out the end of 21 years. I know for a fact I am gone on that day' (JNCO)

'If you had asked me 5 or 6 years ago- I would have said I love the place.. not now' (JNCO)

'I would rather stay but I will have to go- I had a qualification the army won't recognise- I can earn more money outside..There are at least 15 leaving from here' (experienced Private with 10 years+ experience)

'After 22 years I am sad that I am here because I have to be- not because I want to be' (SNCO)

'Forget recruitment- we are haemorrhaging people. Haemorrhaging middle management' (Senior NCO)

4.8 Navy and Air Corps

The feedback from Officers in the Navy and Air Corps mirrored that of the Army in many respects but there were some specific issues to each. In particular the Air Corps focus groups revealed high levels of stress among officers with regard to operational safety. (This is discussed in more detail in section 10.0) Quotes from other ranks in the Air Corps are included here to provide a holistic perspective of views from each service)

'We are short 50% in a technical unit. People are technically competent but don't have the career course'

'There is going to be a huge safety issue in the air corps..its simply experience and aviation is one of those areas like medicine where you learn that experience over time. I know its similar in the army but in the air corps there is such a direct relationship between safety and experience.. '

'I am in the air corps. We are in Baldonnell we have people leaving- money is obviously an issue..but one of the biggest reasons people are leaving is that they know that in another organisation is they can plan their lives'

'Air Traffic Services – they are qualified in all technical ...but couldn't be released to do the commander course so they left'

'The elephant in the room from the air corps- is the retention issue. We did hold on to people before the financial crisis ended- now the door is wide open and people are leaving- but the cost of those people leaving is exponentially more than just replacing them with trainees.'

'In the air corps we have seen that with three or four fatal accidents. The reports are there. And in them you see that there are various contributory factors. On occasions are leadership or management at various levels not being there or present. The lads talk about unit commanders needing to be there...an absence of a unit commander may not directly contribute to something but a culture can build up over time where there will be risks if people are not there keeping their finger on the pulse'.

'Good people who would make good Lt Col's have left'

'4 guys in a unit where there should be 14 and 3 fatal accidents in 20 years – way higher than other DF's we are not resourced. A shortage of personnel contributed'

'A good example is the air corps. This year through retirements we have lost more flying hours experience than we are capable of producing in the entirety of 2017'

'In the hangars- there has been a mass exodus in the last two years, an awful lot of personnel have left- due to pay, progression, a lack of job satisfaction, not feeling appreciated, a two tier system- you come in one gate and you get the XXXX end of the stick (airmen/apprentices)'

'A lot of people before they leave say there is safety issue coming up with the lack of personnel- it's a vicious circle- they don't want to give you the time off which they would have given you in the past. But because they don't have the personnel to carry out the work..the hours change around and you are resting off less and less...so you could have the same two guys carrying out the DIs on aircraft who are on then for the whole weekend in here- yes it could be quiet both other weekend you could be screwed- that's just not safe- and it's not done outside of here...(airmen/apprentices)'

'The people who are leaving are experienced and there is no one replacing them...experience levels are dropping..(airmen/apprentices)'

'Guys leave here and work in Aldi and bars and they are getting more- the work might be mundane but they are getting more than here where they are responsible for peoples safety..(SO)'

The Navy

Feedback from the Navy was similar to the Army: shortages of personnel is leading to increased workload for Officers and NCOs. There are individual outcomes from that such as stress, (discussed in more detail in section 10.0), increased time away from home,

increased uncertainty as to being at sea or at home. Organisational outcomes include: fears from a safety perspective, fears for organisational capability and not enough middle managers to train younger personnel, a growing divide between officers and other ranks.. There was widespread frustration among all ranks that money was being invested in more ships when there was not enough experienced personnel to manage/man these. Retention across the board was identified as an issue for the Navy. Senior officers and NCOs reported a very high level of turnover among newer recruits. The key issue for Naval recruits in this regard according to all personnel is pay and conditions. (This is reported in more detail in section 3.0 under the heading of Pay)

'People coming back from overseas or on a mission with the Navy- they don't know where next appointment is going to be. There are gaps- huge gaps. We are running at about a 3rd of our officer strength. Then you have to prioritise who you are putting where. But if 6 months' notice is given - that can change- if someone else retires or whatever in that time...one situation like that has a big knock on- on maybe 4 people minimum- because of the amount of gaps..(SO)'

'They spend less time on retention than recruitment, Resources are big issues. We are always scrambling for trained people' (SO)

'There is a lack of experienced Senior NCOs on the ships'(SO)

'When the ordinaries- when they go to sea- they go for two years and its bad enough the being away from home and so on.. they are expected to go to sea at drop of a hat-a day ,two days' notice...they are not told anything- it's a shortage of staffing and the people above don't care- there is no human thing with it- it's just get out there' (NCO)

Leaders do not identify retention as an issue. The policy is to recruit rather than retain. (SO)

'The white paper was a lost opportunity..they have essentially tried to maintain the status quo and throw the same amount of resources, the same amount of people yet the demands will slowly creep up. In the navy for example- we have 8 ships but we don't have enough people to man 7, yet they just said- deal with it. the white paper on defence for the next 10 years which maybe could have looked

at that and come up with a solution. But just maintaining the status quo... We have 8 ships there is rumours of a 9th we barely have enough to man the 7...what the hell is going on here..!’ (SO)

‘I have 80 new recruits under 25 and I have lost 10 of them already’ (SNCO)

‘I am only here to see out the end of 21 years. I know for a fact I am gone on that day’ (J NCO)

‘There is going to be a massive void- it takes 5 years to train a guy up to be competent at sea’ (SNCO).

‘A lad left recently- brilliant at his job..went into his last meeting..and they said any issues and he said I have been telling you for 5 years and you haven’t done anything- I am out of here – good luck! When I see the likes of him leaving and a few more senior NCOs recently have left...that’s it..these were the cream of the crop.’ (JNCO)

‘There is a total lack of recognition for everything- well done? ...not down here!. Most of us are in environments where we put in extra days extra nights..they see its done and that’s all they care about. What needs to be done won’t be done unless we come in at 7.45...and that’s down to a lack of officers and they just don’t recognise that..we won’t do it for much longer’ (NCO)

‘At least 10% coming back from the med will apply for discharge...This affects us as we don’t have junior staff to do the work ... Biggest obstacle we have is retention’ (SNCO)

‘48 new entrants and at the end of this month we will be lucky to have 5% left’ (SNCO)

Only thing keeping me on this island is that it’s paying my medical expenses currently’ (coming from NCO with 21 years’ experience)

‘For the first 15 years I would say it was the best job- educated to third level- Changed in the last 6 years. Saying that I had some great opportunities. Salary up to last 6 years was good- but it’s getting harder and harder to stay (JNCO)’

4.9 Implications of Findings

It is clear from the figures available and from the focus groups that there are significant gaps at barrack/unit level within the Defences forces particularly at middle management level (Officers and NCOs). Feedback from the focus groups has indicated that individual consequences of these gaps for Officers and NCOs are increased workload, decreased job satisfaction, stress and decreased engagement. This in turn is contributing to turnover among the Officer rank- representing a loss of human capital and expertise and further frustration for remaining Officers and troops. Thus there is evidence from the focus groups of a 'vicious' cycle of turnover developing. Research has identified dysfunctional turnover as: a situation where a valued employee quits and takes with them their experience and corporate knowledge. The Defence Forces needs to examine why this is occurring and look at ways of containing it.. From an organisation perspective fears were expressed that the capability of the units is being compromised and this will get worse if the situation continues. This in turn has given rise to serious concerns regarding safety and operational readiness. Feedback from other ranks also mirrors many of the issues of Officers. Furthermore NCOs and Privates perceive that a disconnect has developed between them and Officers. This seems to be due mainly to their day to day job and career prospects being increasingly dependent on Officers who don't know them and/or don't have time to engage with them. The focus groups indicated gaps at NCO level due to NCOs being utilised for training/instruction and moving for promotion purposes. Ncos were identified by senior officers as the organisational 'glue' and that erosion of stability and corporate knowledge at this level will have serious consequences. A high level of turnover intention among Privates and NCOs emerged which if it happens will further contribute to a loss of experience and knowledge- especially from experienced Privates and NCOs. Key findings are:

- Shortages of experienced Officers is leading to a lack of personnel to train recruits/Privates. As discussed in other sections this is affecting morale of the other ranks.
- Shortages of Officer personnel is affecting the integrity of the 667 system of performance management

- Shortages of Officers and NCOs is limiting the amount of training and development that recruits privates and other junior staff are receiving at unit level. There is a fear that this will hinder capability both for at home and overseas and also will give rise to safety issues
- There was a widespread concern among the focus groups that the loss of experience/corporate knowledge is reaching a critical point and is already affecting operational readiness/capability.
- Shortages of personnel on the ground has been identified as a safety issue- particularly by Air Corps personnel but also by Army and Navy personnel
- Gaps in personnel is exacerbating the rotation of Officer personnel which is causing issues from a family point of view, and is affecting the sense of engagement / job satisfaction of officers themselves.
- Gaps in Officer presence in units is increasing the workload of remaining Officers in units and has been identified as a factor leading to increases in stress and a diminution of physical wellbeing.
- The growing situation of NCO shortages is leading to a break in middle management capability and unit intelligence. Furthermore this is creating further distance between the officers and other ranks as NCOs have traditionally provided this link.
- The rotation of officers due to the shortage of available Officers is affecting the relationship between Officers and other ranks.
- In all of the focus groups there was unanimous dissatisfaction with the seeming mind-set among senior military management that the turnover that exists is a positive situation.

5.0 Promotions and Career Management

In the 2015 climate survey report commitment to the DF was found to be significantly correlated to met expectations in terms of career development and 93% of respondents indicated that career development was a key expectation. However over 60% of respondents indicated that they felt the promotions policy in the DF was unfair. In terms

of rank the cohort who emerged as having the most negative perception of the promotions policy were the Junior NCO rank with 73% of respondents in this rank disagreeing that the Defence Forces have a fair promotions policy. Results from Junior Officer (63%), Senior NCO (61%) and Private (54%) ranks also indicated a negative perception of the promotions policy within the Defence Forces. This perception was consistent across all services. Those in the DF with a length of service between 6-10 years emerged as particularly dissatisfied. The following sections explore why people feel this way within the DF. Particular issues with the appraisal system are highlighted in detail in section 6.

In this section the issues are analysed by rank rather than service area as promotion occurs from rank to rank. However a summary of issues related to service area will be presented at the end of the section.

5.1 Privates

There was unanimity among the Privates across the focus groups that they view life in the DF as a job rather than a career. There was consistent feedback that Privates joined for a career but felt they were not getting the opportunity to advance this and that many of them were now resigned to serving for 5 years and then moving out of the DF. Reasons for this are linked to issues such as pay, work life balance and not being given the opportunity to ‘soldier’ due to lack of Officers on the ground to facilitate. (These issues of themselves are discussed elsewhere in the report). In the following sections the relationship between a growing disillusionment regarding a career in the DF and opportunities to advance that career through promotion are explored. Longer serving privates who had pension entitlements were looking to serve until their next pension point and leave. Newer privates who do not hold the same pension entitlements were looking to the next possible exit point.

Privates were asked if they would recommend the defence Forces as a career and there was unanimity across the groups that they would not. Groups consistently added to this by stating that for them it was not a career any longer but a job. This was consistent across privates who had longer tenure and those who had a year’s tenure:

'Not a career any more (unanimous in room)'

'I used to love career in DF now...'

'It's a 5 year job not a career'

'Recruit training is the best time of your army career cos you're doing all this stuff...and you are led to believe all this crap- and then you come out...and it's a mop and a brush'

'They are advertising- when you are in recruit training your told- when you are finished this you can go on courses, you will get overseas within 12 months. It's not true at all. Its false advertising'

The key issue for Privates with respect to promotion is one of access: access to courses and access to overseas. Access to both these items is of critical importance to privates as their contract of tenure is linked to fulfilling a certain number of courses and overseas missions:

'Trying to get on courses we need is difficult'

'Within the bracket of contracts 9up to 5, 5-9 etc.) you have to tick the boxes but if you don't get good 667s or get the courses or get overseas... but so many people fighting for them we are not guaranteed. That's your career gone..I have 2 done but need a 3rd to sign on for next contract but I applied for 2 in last few years and was turned down..'

'My first 667...I was told- you have done no courses...but he didn't take into account all the 12 or 15 courses I had applied for...at the time there was 200 people fighting for those courses...'

'It's very hard to get on those courses-you you don't have the same criteria as civvy street. I wanted to do a heavy vehicle mechanics course. I passed the aptitude tests.....I rang fas..It's now SOLAS to find out did I need foundation maths and they said no it's beneficial but not essential that you needed 5 subjects across the board. But that it was up to the employer if they wanted to add

additional requirements. I didn't get it on the maths and everyone I asked here blamed SOLAS- said it was their requirement. I told them it's not- that it's changed- but they still wouldn't change the criteria....so it's made it more difficult.'

'For that competition- 500 people (in the DF) applied for 12 vacancies...they can only handle 12 at one go.'

'With cutbacks less courses to get promoted to NCO'

'There is clarity around what you need to do to move up/stay but no resources to allow people to meet those targets'

'A lot of people want to move up but can't as too many people waiting'

'10 apprenticeships every year..not enough'

'There are 2 spots every year for a leaving cert course and there are over 300 in the battalion'

'I am in my final year of a psychology degree and to use it I have to go up the ranks..'

'I am here 6 years- technically I am not meeting my contract as I don't have all the courses- technically they can put me out on my ear but I have been signed on because I was applying...but it's difficult.'

'NCOs courses are like hens teeth'

'There should be courses for becoming a leader- very hard to say- I am in charge of you now it changes friendships' (Able seaman)

'Access to overseas is difficult- need to get 3 in 12 years'

'100 lads on one unit with no overseas trip'

I was lucky when I did my course outside of here- I am in a small unit and my CS is very educationally minded but in the large battalions you are just a number so

getting time off for a course even outside your normal hours if you are doing a lot of duties can be difficult..guys in artillery were getting courses before me'

Access to courses and the issues involved in fulfilling the contract requirements was also recognised as a problem by Officers and NCOs who had responsibility for Privates.

'In the 5 or 9 years you have to have certain course done to achieve a certain rank. I can't get people on courses- there are not enough places for them to get on technical courses. I have people whose 5 years and 9 years are up but they couldn't get overseas as there are not enough places- that's a big problem' (SO)

'The principle was that we would no longer have 58, 59, 60 year olds who can't do anything- that was a blunt statement.. and then people would have to attain a certain amount x years. That was fine if there was equality of opportunity and we didn't have the reorg and before the moratorium.... now you might have an ordinance corporal up against an infantry man and there might be 6 corporals chasing one vacancy...the system is good in principle but there are problems of equality of opportunity, secondly we don't have systems to support it and thirdly not everyone can be a fighting soldier all the time. We actually need some older soldiers to do stuff like cutting grass, running messes and so on. So it's a good idea in some ways but to give everyone that blunt instrument..' (SO)

'We came in we knew we had a career- but now lads only have a job' (SNCO)

'DF has been turned into a jobs bridge' (SNCO)

'Privates now are not always interested in day to day work. They have been told you need to have xy and z courses and you need overseas...so all they are interested in is when is this course on, when is that course on..I have to do this or that... unit commanders are unwilling to not let them go as they are ticking their own boxes. Our authority is being watered down' (SNCO)

The Contract and Fairness

For Privates recruited since the advent of the 5 year contract promotion is a significant issue as failure to get promoted or to be seen to try to get promoted will affect their tenure. The perceived lack of fairness in the administration of this system is clearly affecting morale and privates perceptions of the organisation as a fair organisation.

'Reasons why you not selected are not clearly outlined to us'

'Distribution of trips around the country is not clear'

'It's actually all down to geographical location. If you were stationed in the Curragh. The Curragh get a trip every 4 years whereas XXXX get one.....for us we were lucky to get one! Some lads who joined the same time as us won't see a trip for at least another two years then their contracts are up. They are seen to be applying for overseas so they will get signed on but they don't have the overseas trips so they won't get promoted to NCOS courses- so when 9 years come...they are gone'

'Proof that applications have been made have to be on file for you to be kept on- but sometimes they are not or are 'lost''

'Files get 'lost' regularly'

'It's who you know not what you know'

There was also evidence from the focus groups that Privates felt there was a lack of reciprocity from the defence Forces in return for having to accept a possible 5 year 'career'. It was consistently pointed out that during those 5 years (or possibly 9 years) that Privates were expected to give almost total temporal commitment to the DF which had a huge impact on their personal/family life. In return they felt they were getting very little, not only in terms of pay (which is discussed in section 3.0) but also in terms of some support from the DF in preparing for life in 'civvy street'. This was another factor affecting perceptions of fairness

'No prep for life outside if we have to leave- no focus on that'

'There is no exit strategy for enlisted ranks'

'I can retire at 39 but won't get pension until I am 64. And what can we do in between- sure all we know is the army. How do we fill that gap? We are going into the big bad world then. Pretty much being thrown out there by the sounds of it.'

'All we are being qualified for is to be security guards. If they would qualify us to go out and get a decent job...'

'You have to give 24 hours a day to DF. These new guys coming in when they have the 5/12 years and they are not meeting the criteria they are being let go. There's no giving back to retrain people to reskill them. You are releasing them back into the workforce ...age 30 plus - with no qualifications.. ...skills...but they also don't have the work experience of their peers...'

The situation with contracts and Privates is also frustrating for Senior Officers who have to manage units. This is evidenced by feedback such as this:

'I think there is always going to be people who don't make the rank of sergeant and we have always accommodated them. I think we need a certain amount of them...a guy who joins at 17..and by the time he is 29 he has to have all these things done overseas and so on...ok...but to tip him out on the street- I don't think that is right. I think there has to be a certain amount of retention because they (longer serving ptes) are invaluable and they do certain tasks... There has to be a better model' (SO)

Promotion and Work Life Balance Ptes and NCOs

Whilst the conflict between family life and defence forces life has been highlighted in other sections it was also brought up in focus groups by privates as something which hindered their ability to fulfil the promotions criteria. Travelling to get promoted was also raised as an issue by some Privates

'It's not a job designed for family- you sacrifice family/having relationship for career' (PTE)

'Having to go away for 6 months to do an ncos course- there is enough hours in the day do do this without driving lads all over the country. could they not make the courses longer and the hours shorter or something..' (PTE)

'I have a little girl (female private). I missed out on it this time..but I will have to go to cork for 6 months an leave her. if an overseas comes up I will have to pick overseas over promotion as its money...its not viable.'

The perceived treatment of Officers with respect to career and retention was another theme that emerged from the focus groups with privates and was clearly contributing to a sense of 'them and us'. While there is provision within the defence forces for other ranks below a certain age to reroute through the cadet system, there was not much awareness of this among Privates. Privates were critical of a perceived lack of ability to move through the ranks to Officer.

'Why can't a private get an education like officers?'

'young lads who see a future in the DF should also be given the chance to do a cadetship.....rather than cadets coming out of school (college cadets) out of nappies- and then coming straight in and telling a guy what to do who knows a lot more than he does...a guy who is 15 years on the job...you can see why they get pissed off'

'There should be a way good lads who come in as privates can go up to officer rank. that way you would get experienced guys becoming officers instead of these guys coming at us straight from school'

'its mad- I can be here 4 years get experience- get overseas- but I can't go on to be an officer- but some young guy who did a degree but has no life skills/work experience- can walk into a cadetship...'

'you would see a possibility for a career if we could do it. a lot of guys are here now for 5 years and that's it...a lot of us stay only because there was a recession and there want jobs and all this crack- so if you could see a career...then'

'you would feel more appreciated.- you would also have more of an understanding of the people under you...'

'it would be a proper reward- for all those times in the rain in the Wicklow mountains!!!'

Privates were critical of the trend towards doing courses that 'tick boxes' and earn points for promotion and thus being retained, rather than courses that enable people to become expert in a particular area within the service. The feedback indicated that this was driven by the system whereby more points are awarded for certain courses

'No longer specialised courses – its grab what you can' (PTE)

'You get 1 point for a 5 week course where you are out on the ground- but you get a point too for an eccl course sitting in front of a computer...clever people go down the avenue of doing all the computer courses. we have to do recce courses..and getting the exact same points as some easy one'(PTE)

'I did a 5 year course and got 1 point for that....a mechanics course. I come off that and have a level 7...and I get one point. Another person who has done courses like a week's medical course whatever- that are not valuable to the unit... - they get 10 points. because its one course. I have to do classes' external- and travel to them...but because its one 5 year course I get one point...' (PTE)

'The only reason I am still here is no qualifications for outside' (PTE)

'I would rather stay but I will have to go- I had a qualification the army won't recognise- I can earn more money outside' (PTE)

Effect on Camaraderie

The promotions system linked to the tenure implications of the 5 year contract was also seen by Privates as having an effect on esprit de corps/camaraderie. Given the importance of esprit de corps to a military organisation this aspect of the promotions system seems to be working against the core values of the Defence Forces.

'We are all fighting each other for contracts'

'It affects camaraderie when you see people getting courses they don't deserve or who have had them already'

'You are trying to get courses to better yourself and you start stabbing people in the back to get ahead of someone else like'

'Competition is killing that. There will be lads redressing. I applied for a course, XXXX applied for a course. He got it and I wasn't happy. Not saying you would do it ...but that's what's going on. Lads fighting with each other... you are asking why did he get it and why didn't I...that's the way its gone- lads jumping over each other to get stuff..'

'It does definitely affect it (Camaraderie) especially for promotions down the line like...someone jumps in sticks a knife in your back to get ahead of you.'

'Knock on effect of the 5 year contract is no loyalty to the df and no loyalty to each other'

5.2 NCO'S and the promotion System

The Feedback from NCOs both Junior and Senior reflected much of what has been reported by the Privates (access to overseas, access to courses etc.). However an issue that emerged as particularly critical for NCOS was the emerging requirement to move around for promotion purposes. Page 9 of the NCO promotion agreement states:

"Career development is diminished in the case of Army personnel without a record of overseas service and associated performance accomplishment at a range of rank and appointment levels"

We examine in this section the impact that this is having on perceived unit loyalty, pressure on NCOs in terms of family and cost and specialist knowledge.

Contracts

The issue of contract requirements whereby tenure is dependent on promotion within a certain timeframe was brought up by NCOs as an issue affecting them personally.

'In theory if you don't meet your contract you can be put out- and that's putting people under tremendous pressure- if you have kids and a mortgage..if fellas don't meet that rank- there is a fear that they will not be able to pay the mortgage- so I have to keep my job- how do I do that- I have to keep travelling to the four corners of the country which means family life suffers'(JNCO)

'There are so many contracts flying around now- it would be much cleaner if we had a 21 year contract limit. So you have a chance of a career but after 21 years you are gone- so there are no old NCOs and people are getting promoted at a younger age..and the skills set is not there and transfer of knowledge and skills'(JNCO)

'I think contract is good in certain ways as it puts a bit of fire under people. Years ago people came in got their rank and sat on it for 30 years..but the other side is its putting people under terrible pressure'

'It is good when you are younger and full of energy..but as you start to get older and have families- then work life balance kicks in...'

Career development

The issue of guidance regarding career development has already been highlighted in the section on Performance appraisal but there was a significant amount of feedback especially from NCOs that there is a lack of structured formal support in the form of guidance from the organisation for personnel to help them decide on courses and direction

'We should have the CS bring people in and steer people in the right direction- you should be doing this course- you should be going down this route- or your commandant should be doing it...there is no- you are good at this- I will try to get you on a course to progress this- everything you do you do yourself'

'You are 100% on your own to get up the line.'

'You are hunting people down- for instance we needed to get on ranges to get that done for overseas and it was up to us to chase it chase it...'

Access to courses and Overseas

The NCOs like the Privates had issues with the availability of overseas postings. NCOs did however raise a concern that Officers were taking on roles overseas that NCOs used to fulfil, thus leading to a shortage of places for NCOs. NCOs were also frustrated by the lack of notice for courses at times and in smaller units the difficulties of being released. They also pointed out that often courses are not relevant to their particular area of work but they do them anyway for promotion purposes.

'It's very very hard to get overseas to fulfil contract- I can apply though multiple roles but not everyone can' (SNCO)

'Opportunities have dried up. Very difficult to get NCO's overseas.' (SNCO)

'If you look at jobs officers are doing overseas- they are doing jobs corporals and sergeants were doing years ago- this is to allow them to tick their boxes...so the enlisted ranks can't get overseas as often..to fulfil their contracts..' (JNCO)

'Officers are filling roles that we should be getting overseas' (SNCO)

'No moratorium on officers- sent them overseas to hide them' (JNCO)

'There are courses and when you get on them there seems to be a good spread of ranks- but you wonder when you have applied three or 4 times and then you see a lad who is younger or less experienced getting it..when a course starts on a Monday the names only come out on a Friday- so you can't find out why you didn't get it..' (JNCO)

'I came out of (Private)training into an anti tank platoon and I didn't have any anti armour courses done and the lads that came out with me didn't have one done for 2 years...' (JNCO)

'The MP to get promoted has to have the infantry standard course but to get on that they can't get the points to because they don't do the weapons courses...so a lot of them are clock watching ready to go- there is absolutely no joined up thinking..'(JNCO)

'If you are in a certain unit your promotion prospects could be hindered as you can't be released to do courses' (JNCO)

'Now everything is centralised. So if you have a lot of bodies on courses it affects small units. So if guys can't be released to do a course they can't get qualified- even if there is a vacancy there for them..it becomes a catch 22' (JNCO)

'Sometimes courses are advertised this week to start next week...and you do have it in the back of your mind have they already picked people...and people can be on leave or away resting off and might not see it...' (JNCO)

'Courses are not made available for people to fulfil their contract requirements plus courses are often just put on the board the day before the closing date. More opportunities need to be provided in terms of courses' (JNCO)

'Below the rank of officer there is a need for more 3rd level education'

'Officers get paid education but not the other ranks' (SNCO)

Individual impact of NCO promotion system

A theme which emerged strongly from the NCO interviews was the pressure on NCOs to move units for promotion that has developed since the reorganisation. It was felt that this had huge personal costs to NCOs in terms of family and financial costs. NCOs were beginning to question their future in the Defence Forces

'Location of postings we need to be able to apply for our own brigade' (JNCO)

'If someone wants to get on you have to tick boxes that they have served in different places- penalised for actually being loyal to a unit.' (JNCO)

'Up to recently officers had to move- now to get promoted so do we.' (SNCO)

'When you are qualified You fill in form as to where you are happy to be promoted to...but depending on how close your contract is to coming to an end you might have to make that jump ...in case you lose the job...so you have to go home and tell wife/partner that you have to go to Galway to get promoted- that brings on financial other stress and it snowballs...' (SNCO)

'Demographic- being here in cork- all courses are up there...the golden triangle is up there in the Curragh and DFHQ. If you are not based there your family life is going to suffer immeasurably you know...all the courses are there and 6 8 10 weeks up to 6 months- too far to commute so you have to stay there and come back weekends, house is in SXXXX you are the worst in the world..and you are doing that for an extra 10 euros a week! Very hard to justify' (JNCO)

'The NCO's run a unit; they need to be constant rather than moving around' (SNCO)

'In our corps (ordinance) we don't really have to move but downside is there are very few opportunities to get promoted to senior NCO...' (JNCO)

'We know a guy who was living in Donegal and to get to senior NCO he took promotion in Cork. It's costing him a XXXXXX fortune to travel home..the amount of senior NCOs moving out of barracks and they are around 50 plus years of age!'(JNCO)

'There is no incentive currently to stay on..When you have done courses then you are brought back to instruct so it's a vicious circle..you can write off 8-10 weeks away every year. That has a huge effect- I have 2 young kids and my partner is working full time too so she has to drop the kids at 6.45 and collect at 5.30 when I am not available...which is more and more..' (JNCO)

'A guy wouldn't mind moving to get promoted if he got a decent pay rise..' (JNCO)

'Quality of life..pay is a huge issue- but quality of life has gone down...If you get promoted you will have to travel up and down the country. You are expected to do this constantly.' (junior NCO)

5.2.6 Organisational Impact of NCO promotions system

In focus groups with Senior Officers the impact of the promotions system with respect to NCOs was brought up voluntarily by participants. It was viewed as something which was affecting unit effectiveness and morale and ultimately retention of this cohort. There was consistent feedback that the promotions system was taking people from units and as a result unit loyalty and knowledge was being eroded. As with Officers, NCOs felt that unit loyalty was penalised when it came to promotion and this is putting the effectiveness of units at risk. They also felt that the system was affecting camaraderie:

'The changing NCO structure has a big impact on morale' (SO)

The new system encourages go ahead NCOs to jump from job to job, tick boxes and be not available. And you can get an NCO shoehorned into your unit- you don't know him from Adam. It's taken out of unit commanders hands (SO)

Officers always understood they had to move. But for NCOs they got their experience at unit level- but now its changing- officers and NCOs out of barracks and trying to get back and its causing problems(SO).

Once the competition was unleashed on the other ranks and they had to get on the road..and go and move and travel – that's where the dissatisfaction has set in. I am not sure its actually as transparent as the old system(SO)

'The NCO competition is completely flawed and it effects all of us' (SO)

'Normally when people go for promotion- it's the best people in the unit..so if you have someone who has all the courses done- you think great- now we have potential for an NCO in the unit who has the knowledge and skills- but the DF then say- there is a vacancy in Galway- so we have just given away one of our best people to Galway. So we are losing the best and keeping those who are not able. People can't refuse to travel- for fear they will lose their job.' (SO)

'Loyalty to unit is gone- you are doing courses outside unit- so you are constantly taking from the core unit.' (SNCO)

'The cadets join as cadets...NCO rank we never had that...we had maybe a bit of luck where you were and so on but you did your prelims etc....but you stayed in your unit. You were loyal to your unit and your unit was loyal to you...that's gone now. Unit cohesion has gone now because people are ticking boxes- as soon as an opportunity arises people will move' (SNCO)

'If you stay in your unit, remain loyal, mentor the troops. You have done the work in that unit. That will punish you whereas 20 years ago it would get you to where you are. it wasn't always the way- some people would have had different talents and moved into different places...but you are being punished for loyalty.' (SNCO)

'Guys have done 20 years in a unit and in last 5 years they have moved up to 5 times...now- the private is not going to be the corporal in the unit, the corporal is not going to be the sergeant and the sergeant is certainly not going to be.... What we have now especially in training depots is people in ranks they never wanted to be in, they are teaching or instructing in things they don't believe in...we used to have lads in units- infantry units for example because they wanted that..now there are infantry lads in admin roles that they don't want to be in' (SNCO)

'Before if you were loyal to a unit you knew you would get promoted- now people can get promoted into the unit- the unit has no say...' (JNCO)

'There is no loyalty to the unit – no cohesion' (SNCO)

'You are punished for loyalty and for mentoring the troops' (SNCO)

'The roundabout that officers were subject to- now we see NCOs doing it and the continuity is not there any more' (SO)

Dilution of expertise

NCOs expressed concern that the 'point's race' for promotion and the requirement to move to get promotion posts was diluting expertise of soldiers across the board

'Female paramedic- needed here but gone to an admin role- to get promoted (senior NCO)'

'To get promoted you have to leave your specialist area to an area in which you have no experience. This dilutes capabilities...Corporate knowledge is lost (junior NCO)'

'People are in ranks they never wanted to be in – moving into areas that you are not qualified or experienced in... There is a fear for the future of the army' (Senior NCO)

'Money is spent on guys being mohag drivers or whatever and one fell swoop of a promotion- he is moved into a completely different area.' (SO)

'I get sergeants in now and the first thing they do when they arrive is put in for transfer. They have excellent courses done but none of them relate to the promotion. They can't do the work...it's not their fault..and they are no sooner in the door than they want out- want to get back closer to home-which you can't blame as they are not being paid the money'(senior NCO)

Camaraderie

NCOs views on the effects of the promotion system on camaraderie was similar to that of Privates. Whilst a certain amount of competition is acceptable the general view was that when the stakes are so high in terms of the link between promotion and tenure, and there are too few competitors for too few places , then competition becomes dysfunctional and works against the core value of esprit de corps

'The management of the points system has pitted friends against each other' (Junior NCO)

'To get on you have to willing to stand on your fellow soldiers' (senior NCO)

'Esprit de corps gone- just not there..it's me me me now- he used to be your buddy- now he is your rival' (senior NCO)

*'I saw a comment on face book that two guys who were best friends, trained together, went to each other's weddings etc. are now enemies..because of the cut throat system of promotions...if you start at same time you will be cutting the back off each other to get the points and get through interviews. It's a shame-'
(junior NCO)*

'Camaraderie was there years ago but it's slowly slipping away because we have to fight for courses. '(JNCO)

Points Allocation for Promotion

The points system was raised by NCOs just as it was with Privates. It was felt that there was no logic to the points allocated to different courses in many cases and also that the system encourages people to do courses that are not relevant to their work area but are useful in building up points for promotion. Chasing points was highlighted by Officers. And NCOs as creating unnecessary competition for courses, causing difficulties for people if one is selected and the other is not, drawing people away from core work areas and causing redresses if people don't get on courses. It was suggested that if there was a cap put on courses for promotion and points awarded for specialisms and/or for time spent in a unit, that this might create a better system

'Specialist courses not allocated points- the points system in general'

'Points system is a joke' (SNCO)

'Points for a 5 year course=1. You can get more for a week long course' (S NCO)

'Points system needs to be fair and equitable' (SNCO)

'To be in the XXX you have to have a recce course done...not everyone is going to pass that..but now because privates are told they 'have to do x amount of course, we have to water down the course. Watering down the standards'

'The points system causes problems...it doesn't matter who is good...it's who got the most courses. For instance a CQ who has 16 years done. Because he needs three courses

he will go on an orderly room's course. It doesn't matter what as long as he is getting points' (SNCO)

'Before you had to fight to get on to an NCOs course – you had to do the prelims and you had to do 2 weeks of prelim in unit and 2 weeks in training depot and we had to pass all of those-just to get on the course- you had to be eager and ambitious. Now- it's just keep running until they pass and standards are dropping' (SNCO)

Opportunities to get Promotion to Officer

Junior NCOS were interested in progressing to officer rank through the CFR route but felt that this wasn't given genuine support by the DF in that very few courses were run and very infrequently. Also there was a perception that officers who came from the ranks were never accepted by officers who came through the cadet route.

'There should be clearer pathways up to officer role'

'Need to promoted through the ranks as well as cadets' (senior NCO)

'Ranks won't go for promotion that way- they are not accepted by officers- they don't 'wear the ring' (senior NCO)

'That would be good- but it's only a token at moment- one competition every 8 years where only 10 people get promoted-whereas they take in how many cadets every year?...'

'My honest opinion is no one should be an Officer without serving some time as a soldier..a young guy serves 15 months in cadet school straight after college and he comes out..no skills over troops, never dealt with troops. It's a social work job as well as everything else- you should be able to deal with everything that comes through that door, sickness, issues at home...they are not trained for that. I strongly believe that guys like this guy here (points to another NCO) who has experience, been on the ground, trained people made decisions- big decisions...(compared to) a young It who is given a task where he has no knowledge- or experience- that's wrong..'(Senior NCO)

'I think everybody should walk the footsteps of a soldier for a while..'(SNCO)

'The problem is- there are so few getting promoted like that t- there is a huge snobbery- you don't have the class ring...'(JNCO)

'A few years ago I was in Syria- there was two LTs promoted like that. There was an officer's party and they were not invited.'(SNCO)

'It's a class system.'

'I would think about it- but for me- I am 30 now- if I was to do that 9 month course- then I would be back to square one and all the stuff I did to get to sergeant wouldn't count for anything...and then on top of that I wouldn't be accepted ...'(JNCO)

'Should be more structured and more often...they say they can't get officers- well promote from within...they will say some of us are overage- yes but we have been in the army!! So that shouldn't be an issue...' (JNCO)

'You would be the oldest lt- and then you would be under pressure as you can only serve in that rank until 45...' (SNCO)

'I would have moved to officer if I had the opportunity. They are better payed and have better conditions. They know they will be commandant in X amount of years.Their career is managed, ours is not' (JNCO)

'There was a recommendation to run a potential officers course bi annually but that didn't follow through.'(JNCO)

Delay in filling promotions

Delays in filling promotion was another issue that NCOs felt was affecting their perception of the organisation

'I did course in 2009....it took 2 years to get promoted..that can be hard to accept and stay motivated. It can be hard for guys to do courses but have no idea when they are going to see promotion' (JNCO)

'We have 8 qualified individuals waiting on promotion. They are not in the rank yet so they are losing out on points.' (SNCO)

'Another problem is that before if you fulfilled the courses etc. you qualified one week and got your NCO stripes the next instead of 2 years down the line...There is such a slowdown in promotions' (JNCO)

5.3 Naval Service

The above sections and quotes come mainly from the Army brigades. The feedback on promotions was similar in the navy with the following feedback reflecting the issues highlighted above

'Lots of lads using the Navy as a stepping stone' (AS)

'My prior learning is not recognised- need more transparency in RPL' (AS)

'Access to promotions unfair' (AS)

'Generally everyone is looking out for their own career' (AS)

'The biggest unfairness is to the young fellas coming in- you wouldn't blame them for leaving' (JNCO)

'Recent promotion completion for NCOs. Last June told no more until end quarter 2- next June. Single officer's appointment has to be filled within three weeks- that's because if his appointment isn't filled he can't run for flag officer as he has to have 12 months in the rank. So yet again here we are with the lower ranks being put on long finger. Within my division there is 18 vacancies and 18 people qualified...no delay for the officers..' (JNCO)

'Huge amount of unfairness.- senior ranking Officer went up three ranks in the recession. This place was on its knees and lads crying doing the job of a rank above but no recognition, no pay at all. It was horrible- I was a leading hand at sea doing job of PO for a year. I came in one Friday morning and they said- you are on another ship and going out Monday'

On CFR

As with the army there was consistent feedback from Naval NCOs that CFR should be available but the programme is run very infrequently and there is a perceived issue of acceptance of CFR officers and Officers who come through the cadet route

'There were two lads who upped their quals- went to college- now two of them are gone. There is vacancies for electrical officers. They looked for it- they were not even entertained. One guy was under pressure at home and had about 3 years to go to pension...a young guy in cadet training with the same qual was taken instead..they probably didn't 'fit the bill'- as they had 16 years' service in the 'lower ranks'' (JNCO)

'I have asked XXXXX why can't we have a clear career path and he went off on a long winded thing about how complicated it was etc. and maybe that's true- but the knowledge base you are losing...especially those two senior guys (NCOs) who left..'

'One or two officers have come through the ranks- they are the best officers here...but there is a mentality- you don't wear the ring..The direct entry guys as well don't always 'fit the bill' either' (SNCO)

'Master is a closed shop for officers now as only as they see it's good for job opportunities a way out of here. If you want to do a masters now you have to do it off your own back...that's typical of this place'

On the perceived effect of promotions on Officers

NCOs in the Navy perceived that the promotion system for officers was impacting negatively on the ability or willingness of officers to take command of their own ships

'Ships captains don't look after the ships- they are run by command outside. There was a point where officers could think for themselves but young officers

are afraid of the captains and the captains are afraid of the command- it's all about looking after their career.'

'None of them can think for themselves any more- they are focussed on career. Not all of them- there are some very good captains- but most of them'

'How can you look after a ship working in an office-you don't know the men. The captain knows the men. How can it be dictated by someone in an office who doesn't know what's going on. He just sees a boat. Captains won't challenge as it's a black mark against their career.'

'They just pass the problems on. Not everyone- but there is an overall culture of looking after their own career'

5.4 Air Corps Airmen and promotions

The overall feedback from the Air Corps other ranks was similar to the army. One specific issue to the Air Corps was a feeling that they had to do courses that were not relevant to their service to get promoted and which took them away from relevant experience

'Its madness- you have to go off and do 6 months in the army to get promoted to wherever you are in the air corps- it's not specific to your job and you are in fact losing out on experience while you are away- and missing out on aircraft courses. The navy promote on experience at sea- but here you have to go off to the army.. '

'Always allowed cadets in but didn't take in apprentices'

'The courses attached to promotion are military based and not connected to a technical role'

'It makes no sense for us to run around the Glen'

'The apprenticeship we do is worth 2 points...whereas you can go and do a kayaking course for 6 points. Also when you are doing the 4 year apprenticeship

you might have to do say a computer course- which other people get separate points for but because its 'part' of your apprenticeship you get nothing for them. You could do a number of courses under the apprenticeship which individually are worth 10 plus points but because they are under the apprenticeship you don't get that credit'

'Very hard for the air corps to get overseas and this impacts pay and promotion though some senior NCO's have mentioned overseas issues to higher ranks.'

'The courses that are there for points- they have very little to do with the work we do- in air hangars or air traffic control..they are not relevant to us. If a guy working here went off and did army related courses for 5 years and another guy did course relevant to our job- the guy who does the army relevant courses will be far better off career wise due to the points.. and we end up with people who are not competent in the job as they have done the wrong courses!'

5.5 Promotions system and Perceptions of Leadership

There were a lot of comments from the ranks regarding leadership and this is reported in more detail in another section of the report. However it is worth highlighting here that there were a number of observations from both Privates and NCOs that the constant 'looking up' and moving around by officers intent on promotion is having an adverse effect of leadership and unit effectiveness. It is also contributing to a growing divide between the ranks.

'They are told not to make decisions- it's all about ticking boxes (comment about officers)'

'Officers coming through have their own agenda (promotion) we end up having to balance everything' (Senior NCO)

'the higher ranks get promoted off the sweat of the privates...(all in room agreed with this)'

'Good units- no recognition given to the privates- all goes to the officer'

'we won a competition last year and we were not off the range last year and were approached by an officer- this is a great help for my promotion...we were the ones running up and down like eejits- weekends gone practising...and no recognition for us'

5.6 Summary: Privates NCOs and Promotion:

People feel that they are under pressure to fight for promotion at the expense of camaraderie. The points system for promotion has led to people doing courses that tick boxes and score points which is having a diluting effect on specialist expertise. NCOs feel that this is damaging the organisation capability/ effectiveness. They are also fearful of accidents or incidents. The NCOs further feel that the increasing pressure on them to move around for promotion is damaging the particular corporate knowledge that resides in this cohort and which has been relied on by both Privates and Officers and this is also damaging the organisational effectiveness. The requirement to move for promotion is having an effect on family life and cost of living. This in turn is affecting retention. A significant amount of NCOs interviewed for the focus groups stated that they did not intend to stay with the DF beyond their next contract.

For both Privates and NCOs, being told by the DF on one hand that being promoted within a certain time period is condition of staying in the service and then not being supported by the DF on the other hand to access the necessary courses and overseas is damaging their perception of the DF as a fair organisation. There appeared to be a perception that the employment relationship has become very transactional on the part of the Defence Forces who continue to expect privates to enact core values and display a high level of temporal commitment. Low levels of normative commitment and high levels of continuous commitment were evident in the 2015 survey.

There may be some justification in an argument that *some* turnover is healthy but recent research would indicate that hollowing out of organisations is not healthy. Privates may be the 'cheapest' element of human capital in the DF but experienced members are a source of valuable corporate intelligence and can also be invaluable in mentoring recruits. There are also costs in constantly recruiting new personnel as opposed to investing in retention and this needs to be examined.

5.7 Promotions and the Officer Ranks

With respect to promotions some key concerns emerged from focus groups. The pressure Officers felt they were under to constantly move around to different units for promotion purposes was the most significant issue. This in turn was creating pressure with regard to family life, and physical and emotional wellbeing. Likewise the location and duration of the key courses in the Curragh was perceived as hugely detrimental to family life. In the section on appraisal (section 6.0) Officers highlighted the lack of conversation and discussion within that system around career planning. This was also highlighted when discussing promotions/career and Officers clearly felt there was no sense of formal career planning and no guidance or directional support. This results in people simply jumping from unit to unit and on to courses to gain points to gain advantage in the promotion system. The perceived consequence of this is a dilution of specialist expertise and a lack of continuity within units in terms of leadership. Officers unanimously felt that unit loyalty was viewed negatively and ‘punished’ in promotions terms. For many respondents the effect of the promotions system on family life was leading them to question their future in the Defence Forces.

Some of the following comments give an overview of the thoughts of Officers:

‘Meritocracy is a good thing- stopped people getting promoted automatically based on tenure- but I think it’s got to the stage where the whole organisation is people ticking boxes’ (SO)

‘On meritocracy- I think from the officer’s point of view we have stopped people being just automatically being promoted..I think though that I as a manager should have a say in someone’s promotion. A commandant will have 4 or 5 bosses in their time as commandant- so all those should have an input..then if one thinks I am bad but 4 think I am good- then it can be seen.’(SO)

‘Competition has always been a part of the army since the day I joined’

‘It’s a dysfunctional system’

'We have moved on a generation- we are involved with our families- we are having families later- we have children who are 6-7. There is a huge overseas commitment. We are now looking at moving to Lt col rank and there is a commitment- 'you need to step up and play the game and move here here and here'. There seems to be no move to counter that'

Career planning

Most Officer focus groups indicated that there was no formal career plan for individuals- the system is basically get as many courses as you can and work in the units that get you experience to tick boxes.

'There is no career planning. We know the people who are supposed to do it are over tasked.' (SO)

'There is no plan-after I finished university I got lucky..was on a military logistics course with 6 others. we had done it in college. At the end we asked the director of logistics how we progress career this way..he said very bluntly- you might get lucky you might not... that's not how it works. so how can we plan a career if the director of logistics is telling us there is no planning!!' (JO)

'it depends on numbers (if career development takes place). we are tied to what others are doing...sometimes if someone gets a course before you- they are then seen as the SME and might be allowed to do more in that area and you would be turned down as a result as there are only so many..can be the luck of the draw- a lot of external factors that can stop you..and then you can get luck and doors can be opened up...timing and luck count..you are working year to year- you can't guarantee if the course will run, if you get a place.' (JO)

'There is also an issue where troops and officers are not taught about managing their own careers...what do they need to be doing... now everyone is looking to other people to see what they are doing..we do need more career guidance' (JO)

'You may have noticed- none of us have talked about money/too much work- we want better professional development and guidance..recognition of what we do

well, and not so well and a plan as to what we need to do to get where we need to be..'(JO)

'The reason people are constantly box ticking- is they see their colleagues and its working for them. None is saying stop. No one sits down with individuals and says- I am going to manage your career... as in- for the next 5 years...no- you have to do all that yourself..and the effect of that then is you can't tell your husband /wife etc. where you are going to be..'(SO)

'These are all unwritten rules- the moving around and ticking boxes- it's should be up to HR to sit us down and say you don't need to do this..the promotion system is fine- it's the way it's being interpreted and implemented because there is no clear guidance..'(SO)

'The first thing we need to do is stop that system straight away (points ticking rotation)' (SO)

'There is no career planning- management are overwhelmed with other stuff' (SO)

'Sheep dip and box ticking' (SO)

'No one has ever sat me down and said this is where you could be in 5 years and this is what you need to do...a career guidance teacher in secondary school would do better. the army just doesn't do it...'(JO)

'It's become a point's game.'(SO)

'If you are in DFHQ you have way more options- so it's where you are based' (JO).

'it comes back to no proper defined structure. there is a junior command and staff course being run next year- there was supposed to be two (April and August) but now the august one may not be running one and we are out here (JO Golan) (interjection by another J. officer) – I haven't even been informed of that- and that's the course I have to do to get promoted!'

A number of consequences of this 'box ticking' were highlighted in the focus groups and these are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Unit Loyalty

Firstly there was consistent feedback that unit loyalty was viewed negatively and that this prompted Officers to constantly move in and out of units to protect their promotion chances. Thus the promotion system forces people into a state of self-interest which most of the focus group Officers felt was damaging the Defence Forces

'Loyalty to unit also an issue- if we serve in say Athlone with a unit for 10 or 12 years well then we are seriously hampered when we go for promotion to Commandant...(interjection by other officer)-even though they are the hardest jobs!...because you are in charge of troops. I was told I would have to do a couple of months in a desk job to get promoted which I feel is wrong...but it's the same for us all..' (JO x2)

'The way it's going now you don't have to have leadership qualities to be promoted, you need to have good office politics skills. So box ticking, a bit of nepotism...that's how you get promoted. Real leadership- where do you get it- in the units..but staying in the unit is bad for your career- so do the sheep dip into a unit..and get out of there as fast as I can because Newbridge is where I need to be as that's where they give out the goodies' (SO)

'Perception building over time..as nobody has given clear guidance. So you look at the people 5 or 6 years ahead of you who have got promoted...the people who have done x y and z whereas those who didn't were not promoted- so we of our generation see that if you stay in a unit it will go against you. It's never actually been said....'

'the system promotes self-interest. it promotes a lack of continuity. the senior officer for instance ticks the boxes and moves on so he is not really looking after either junior officers or the people below that...so I just do what I have to do and move on and let someone else pick up the pieces' (JO)

'One officer came to our unit with the stated objective of using it to get promoted. 12 months to the day when he got the report he need to say he served in a line unit- he was gone...the problem then is for the people who get left behind..' (JO)

'In my career it's been clear that the people who move around are the people who do well- they don't spend time in units. And I have been told by senior people- its- don't get your hands dirty with troops- that will stop you getting promoted. I have been told myself by Cols...hmmm...you have spent a long time in units...you are going to have to do a bit now before you will be suitable to be LT COL..but at the end of the day the majority of the DF is in the units- that's where our human capital rests mostly. And the people who are at that - they don't get rewarded- it's seen as a negative to spend too much time with troops. We need to change that mind-set. I have been overseas with multinational missions. We are nearly unique...the Americans, British, kiwis etc. they are killing each other to be in units because that's where they get promoted from. Working with the troops on the coalface doing the job...that's valued. If it was valued here that's where people would want to be. You would have the best in the units...and often they are. But now they are leaving'. (SO)

'One of the biggest things is that for senior officers time spent in a unit is seen as time wasted- so they don't get to know people..if you spend a year with a unit you will get to lose out to a guy who spent time at a desk. (Interjection) even if it's only 6 months.. so nobody wants to spend time in units and that that has effect on NCOS and everyone...and now the NCOs are doing it...the only way I see that being rectified is if they give value to time in units- the same as desk jobs..and score it with the same points...' (JO)

'You have to work in areas in which you have no interest to get promoted and You are looked down on if you don't move around' (JO)

'Soldiering units are seen as bad for your career but you should have to spend time in one place' (JO)

'Some of us don't have the 'sexy' jobs. Some of us are down at grassroots level actually managing people- and the perception quite often out here in the 'outposts' is that there are people in Dublin- in well-staffed offices, they don't

see soldiers, they don't deal with their issues, careers. They deal with paperwork- they create paperwork, aspirational ideas and stuff like that. And they get very high appraisal ratings.' (So)

'At officer level if you don't tick all the boxes- you know you won't get promoted. And with the timeline you have- you can't afford to spend two or three years It would be better for organisational capability if guys would spend time in ...- say if they had two appointments in 6 years. that would probably give more value to the organisation than going around- a year here and there. The organisation is losing capability of experience'

Specialist Knowledge

A second major issue from an organisational point of view is that many of the Officer focus group participants echoed the feedback from NCOs in terms of a growing issue of skill and expertise dilution. As people were 'mopping' up courses to gain points and moving around, it was felt that specialist expertise and knowledge was being eroded

'Well anecdotally it has been said by senior officers that you need to tick all these boxes- and specialisation is punished.....so if you stick at one area and become very good at it- it will negatively affect you for promotion....it seems that its better to be 'a little bit alright' in lots of areas instead of being excellent in one field' (JO)

'The organisation actually encourages mediocrity now based the system- go tick your boxes don't rock the boat be a jack of all trades and a master of none.' (SO)

'There is a big emphasis on box ticking to get promoted. This is leading to a loss of knowledge You are only getting good at a job and you are told to move on. I am doing jobs over my head. I am only commissioned one year' (JO)

'Specialisms are not recognised..for instance I had MSc in HRM but had to move into a different area to get promoted...so a masters is required for promotion but it does not need to be relevant'

'We need to stop rotating people so quickly so they can develop a level of corporate knowledge. That they can become an expert in the subject matter area or even more expert in the area...and build up relationships. One or two years is not enough in a job- we need 4 or 5' (SO)

There was also a perception among Junior Officers that if you do specialise and are seen as useful or important to the unit- then that will work against being freed up to do courses for promotion so it is not in ones interest for promotion purposes to be excellent in an area..

'if you get caught ..say seen as a subject matter expert in a unit and they won't let you leave- you will lose out..' (JO)

'It is not the best guys who are doing well in the promotion competitions as if you are good, you can't access courses'

Impact of promotions system on Units

The issue and effect of Officer shortages has already been highlighted in section 4.0. In this section we have already examined the perception that unit loyalty negatively affects careers. There was a widespread perception that as a result the promotions system has contributed to the shortage of Officers in units because of officers leaving units after 'ticking the box' and that this is having a knock on effect of unit capability. While this has been discussed previously the quotes here underline the perceptions that exist as to how the promotions system particularly contributes to this situation

'Before we had moral courage in the units- and people were well able to stand up for themselves and their units...the 451 didn't matter as you would get promoted -but since the merit/points system came in we became all of a sudden a zero defects army and all good news- so the more good news I give you the better for me...' (SO)

'We have a leadership doctrine that says all the right thing..but the heavy lifting of the army is done by the units and there is no allegiance or loyalty to units now

because the new system has created a box ticking to pick up points. And now all the problems we have of understaffing.' (SO)

'If you are a unit/squadron commander you need to spend time get to know people in order to manage projects effectively. Nothing happens within 12 months or a year. You don't even know people after that time depending on the size of the unit.' (SO)

'I was lucky to get back into the XX battalion a number of times and my last trip overseas was with them. It fantastic and makes such a difference when you know the CS, you have known him since he was a corporal. You know everything about him, you trust him. He trusts you. You mightn't know all the privates but he does and you automatically have a link through him. We are losing that information.' (SO)

'In the old days general/commander used to know the privates but now everyone is looking to the next job. Looking after our people has suffered because it's becoming so competitive'

'So many captains are overseas ticking that box that we are down 40% on captains serving in units and they are very very important at a certain level. Same commitment to send Lt cnls overseas every year- something has to be done- it's not sustainable.' (SO)

'We have units at 25% strength- you go up to DFHQ- they are not at 25%. The issue is- junior officers and NCOs if they can do it want to get to DFHQ as quickly as possible- why- that's where they will get promoted, that's where they will get courses and profiles because they won't get it in a unit now...so the whole thing is self-perpetuating' (SO)

'We need to start focusing everything on the unit again. So officers- even at our rank need to be tied to one unit. Other ranks need to be tied to that unit. It should become the exception not the norm that you leave that unit'.

'At officer level if you don't tick all the boxes- you know you won't get promoted. And with the timeline you have- you can't afford to spend two or three years

It would be better for organisational capability if guys would spend time in ...- say if they had two appointments in 6 years. that would probably give more value to the organisation than going around- a year here and there. The organisation is losing capability of experience.'

'Our systems of promotion and our career course selections are such that people have to do all these courses- it's for themselves- not for the benefit of the organisation'

Camaraderie

The Officers who participated in the focus groups felt strongly that the promotions system was affecting esprit de corps/camaraderie across the Defence Forces. This was seen as problematic as camaraderie is seen as an essential factor in operational effectiveness especially in conflict zones.

'Senior officers don't give a XXXX about junior officers because they are so concerned with their own career'(JO)

'Culture has come toward a competitive system- we shouldn't have to compete on a daily basis with your fellow officers'(JO)

'I am looking after me is the mindset that has set in'(SO)

'Promotions system is designed in such a way- whether it was intended or not- that it becomes very personal- so individuals are pitting themselves against everybody else- so it has become very competitive..and it's about looking after yourself. That changes everything you are supposed to be about. Now we have done the same thing to the other ranks- teaching them you go off and look after yourself, look after yourself..and that's not what we are supposed to be about...we are supposed to be look out for each other..your comrades...that's lost..' (SO)

'I am worried that the values are being eroded to the point there it's not about loyalty and selflessness but it is all about selfishness. You have to ask people

sometimes to do things that are not nice- that are dangerous, you have to expect them to do it when you say it to them and to look out for their fellow soldiers. '.(SO)

'I think part of the problem is- we look towards industry and everywhere else for best practice. And we try to weld external best practice into an organisation that's not profit driven, that's not product driven...That's very much driven by personnel, what they do and how they do it. What we need is commitment, loyalty and these kind of things which a lot of HR practices are not driven towards. And as a result what happens is we have people moving around the whole time, where the old system- and I am not saying we shouldn't change- we do have to change- but the old system was identity, culture, loyalty and values were built from the bottom up and the top down and led by people who were there, invested in each other, invested in the unit and we don't have that now..... Everybody is coming around the houses...to look after their own promotions- because that is what is required now by hr policies which are enforced upon us..by external organisations whether it's the department of defence or the public services commission. We are not a public service- we give service to the state and to the flag. We are there to do things other people won't do, to take risks other people don't and that's why we need people to be committed to each other- because they take risks that other people don't'(SO)

Career vs family

All Officers across the board felt that the promotions system was seriously impacting on family life. Work life balance has been discussed elsewhere in the report but the need to move around for promotional purposes and the resulting uncertainty was cited as having a direct effect on the following: relationships, family life, ability to plan families, deciding to buy a home. There was a perception that among the most senior staff of the Defence Forces there is an attitude of *'I did it so you do it'*. However Officers pointed out that family structures have changed significantly with dual career couples being the norm, people reaching Commandant level at an age when children are younger. Furthermore

married quarters are no longer available to Officers. Thus the attitude that *'this is how it has always been'* is no longer perceived as valid.

'It's easier for someone in the 'right' geographical location to get promoted..to get the better boxes ticked..one guy we knew from Kerry- it was a 5 hour journey to get home from the curragh- so if he wanted to settle down,...he would have to give up his future in the job to do that.'(JO)

'A lot of our class are leaving because if we want to get promoted we have to move to the Curragh- and if we have family that's a problem'(JO)

'Everything is centralised in Kildare/Dublin'(JO)

'The system assumes that young officers are footloose and fancy free. This leaves major uncertainty for buying a house Coming back from overseas and you don't know where you are going to be placed Notice is left until the last minute – they are holding onto information'(JO)

'I want a career in the DF- but it depends on if I get promoted where they will try to transfer me..I just can't commute to Dundalk for instance..It's not feasible with my family. but if they say Dublin or newbridge- then happy days..so it's that uncertainty and not knowing..'(JO)

'We have moved on a generation- we are involved with our families- we are having families later- we have children who are 6-7. There is a huge overseas commitment. We are now looking at moving to Lt col rank and there is a commitment- 'you need to step up and play the game and move here here and here'. There seems to be no move to counter that- to say why do we need more than quarter of our commandants overseas..'(SO)

'it comes back to the old ways...these guys were junior officers, wives, not working the man went to work. these guys don't seem to realise it's not like that any more- partners/wives work.. it's not as easy for families to move' (JO)

'A lot of those senior officers were around in a time where accommodation was provided for their families if they had to move around so they don't see the problem..'(SO)

'No facilitation of dual careers in families' (SO)

'There are a number of international people on our course (senior officers) and certainly one of them knew about 2 months ago where he is going to be after this course. So we on this course recently had a high level briefing and somebody asked about that particular issue- about knowing where you will be after the course. The other course had 6 weeks left at the time. It was noted as a point that was valid...then word came down the line the next day that in line with previous years.. you would get 4 weeks' notice. That's difficult when you have families and kids. That puts stress on people. The impression was then- that's just the way it is..put up' (SO)

'(Re family and where you get posted) - its hope and luck and maybe a bit of understanding (from DF) and that understanding doesn't always come..' (SO)

'I think the army needs to refocus on one or two things- maybe just rotate people overseas and allow them stability when they are at home but not both..' (SO)

Fairness of System

A clear theme emerged from the focus groups around the perceived fairness of the promotions system. Many respondents felt that the promotions was subjective and the phrase 'who you know' cropped up many times in focus groups with Senior and Junior Officers. Being in the 'right location' and in contact with the 'right' people was also strongly perceived to affect promotion chances

'Bottom line it's not a 'fair' process- (general agreement in the room)...it's not the best people getting promoted' (JO)

'Sometimes advertised opportunities are already decided – not an open and transparent selection process' (JO)

'You are not always told the truth when you don't get a course' (JO)

'I am an officer based in XXXXXX. A major issue is the western region- in particular XXXXXX, XXXXXX are not within commuting distance to DFHQ to progress careers..and that impinges on careers and certainty' (JO)

'In terms of promotions you have to look after yourself. There is inconsistency in the selection process. It is all who you know'

'Future General Staff are selected well in advance, dipped in here and there and protected' (SO)

'You are not being judged on how good a job you are doing but what job you are in..there are certain appointments out there..the fact that you are linked to that appointment- the perception of you being good is increased- but you might have actually done nothing much in that job' (SO)

5.8 Air Corps and Navy

The Officer group in the Air Corps largely supported the feedback above but also had some specific issues in relation to their own situation. In terms of releasing people to do courses for promotional purposes senior officers felt that they were so severely understaffed that releasing people was a problem and would compromise safety and effectiveness. It was also felt that some of the courses were not relevant to the direct requirements of the job of the Air Corps:

'Very limited places but also can't release someone for 6 months because at 50% strength'

'We are hugely frustrated for the people under our command'

'Recognition of courses is insane' - 6 month course for pilot not recognised where a computer course is

'Corporals are doing higher jobs. We could make people supervisors without sending them on courses. This would help'

'A lot can be done to change if policies are altered'

'Management in the unit feel pressure as a fatal accident is going to occur'

'Numbers do impact ability to get promotion'

'The army are running courses to waste time. We can't give opportunities in the air corps'

'The structure doesn't change even with additional responsibilities'

'89 days away from home to be in Athlone, sharing rooms'

Navy

The feedback from Naval Officers was very similar to the Army as evidence from the quotes below

'There is no training syllabus'

'There is no career plan – it is up to you to manage your own career.'

'Sometimes advertised opportunities are already decided – not an open and transparent selection process'

'Professional development, it's not a coherent policy. There is no effort or money put into it and certainly no succession planning.'

'We don't have a career path due to lack of numbers – just filling gaps'

'Some member had issues with their blood pressure. They were told they cannot go for promotion but two weeks later they were put into that position in an acting capacity'

'CSS- not relevant to the navy but told to do it'

Suggested Solutions to promotions issues:

Personnel who attended focus groups were asked to suggest solutions to the promotions issues and the following are representative of the suggestions made by Officers

'Stop the points race and limit it to 3 points..and once you have 3 instructor or whatever course done- that's it then you can stop..' (so)

'Predictability, short term and long term, how long am I going to be in this job, what is my next job going to be, when am I going overseas..where am I going, how long for.You talk to people in other military organisations and they seem to be able to sit down with staff and be told- this is the plan for you for next 3 years...this allows for planning family, look after existing family and gives parameters for tackling the job...its good for the organisation. That predictability is good. We deal with unpredictability and uncontrollable every day in the job and training but in this area predictability is important' (SO)

'Decentralise some functions so people can have a career in regional area' (SO)

'It would help if we gave credit and points for say 5 years in a battalion instead of 'a range of military experience' – we have gone from one end of a spectrum to another..'

'A mapping system and career management could be developed to ease the uncertainty'

'A better model would be if:

- Unit commander allowed to make decisions for instance this corporal- yes he has 21 years but he has skills sets I cannot replace...*
- Selection for courses taken away from central command*
- There has to be some discretion where people get rewarded for their loyalty and where they have a purpose. For instance in a garrison this size there should be 30 people dedicated full time to the running of it- regardless of age or rank...problem coming down the line- I won't have people to do tasks like*

landscaping and so on...Having said all that very few very very few have left involuntarily so far...'(SO)

5.9 Promotion and Officer Rank: Summary

Officers recognised that the old system of being promoted automatically may not have been ideal and recognise the advantages of meritocracy. However there were clear indications that there is a widespread perception that the current system of promotions has become dysfunctional. The feedback indicated that the promotion system recognises a form of individual achievement which ignores or 'punishes' unit loyalty. The knock on effects of this are that people are constantly rotating in and out of units. Junior and Senior Officers are weighing up the cost to family life of constant moving/going overseas or going on centralised and lengthy courses for promotion purposes. There was clear feedback that the DF and DoD do not seem to recognise the advent of dual career families and this is a major factor in Officers making decisions to leave- thus exacerbating the gap in Officers at middle and senior levels.

The result of rotation and shortages of Officers means they are not in a position to engage properly with the appraisal (and promotion) system for other ranks. Units are undermanned resulting in a lack of military training for recruits and Privates which is having a knock on effect on the perception of Privates and NCOs of the DF as a fair organisation or one that offers a fulfilling career. NCOs perceive that they are doing the jobs of Officers, Unit Officers feel they are being stretched in terms of work are doing the jobs of other Officers. There are concerns for safety and long term effectiveness of units.

5.10 Implications of Findings overall

- Privates are finding it difficult to access courses and overseas necessary to fulfil contracts.
 - This is creating stress and pressure for Privates
 - This is affecting perceptions of fairness

- The points system for all ranks to score for promotions has no cap so a points race has emerged
 - People are doing courses that may not have relevance to their area of work/expertise. While this is sometimes a positive thing in this instance it is diluting expertise and taking people away from units
 - People are focused on points rather than doing their day to day job
- Unit loyalty is being eroded as it is viewed negatively for promotion
 - There is a fear for unit and overall organisation capability being eroded
- Officers are 'over' rotating for promotion.
- NCOs are beginning to rotate to get promoted
- The rotation of Officers and now NCOs, coupled with existing shortages of Officers is leading to inconsistency of leadership/middle management in units
- Constant movement and rotation for promotion is affecting family life and is becoming stressful
- The effects of rotation are causing people to question their future in the defence Forces
- People feel there is no coherent career planning to support the promotion system
- People feel that camaraderie is being eroded by the promotions system as it currently operates.

6.0 Performance Management and Performance Appraisal

In this section the key results of the focus groups are presented examining attitudes to the process of appraisal examining in particular the 667 and 451. The results are examined firstly by rank as appraisal is utilised when people are being assessed within rank or applying to move from one rank to the next. This will be followed by summary of the findings within each service area

Performance management systems are introduced in organisations to provide a clear and measurable systematic process for developing the performance of individuals and teams and ultimately improving organisational performance. A stated objective of PMS is to provide a means of getting better results by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals standards and competency requirements. (Armstrong 2009). In the public sector such systems are largely associated with promotion as reward rather than individually based pay systems as pay scales in the public sector is not associated with variable pay outside of scales and allowances.

Whilst there are obvious potential advantages from a promotion system based on meritocracy the introduction of performance management in public sector organisations has been recognised as particularly complex and one where the type of performance systems appropriate for a private sector organisation may come unstuck. There is a growing body of research which examines PM in public sector organisations. This research has highlighted that the key resource in public service organisations is the human capital and key outcomes are items such as capacity for problem solving, leading others and implementing policy. When a performance management system is introduced that becomes audit driven there is potential for conflict (Anaboldi et al 2015, Diefenbach 2009).

Factors that have been identified as crucial to the success of PMS include: organisation support and resourcing of the process, personnel trained to engage with the process, a system that is appropriate for the particular nature of the organisation. Factors that have been identified as detrimental to effective performance management systems are: a lack of resourcing to support the system, belief by personnel that they are being evaluated incorrectly and/or by the wrong person, a lack of training for personnel, moves to central tendency of performance reviews, lack of two way interaction and discussion and perceptions of unfairness or inequity.

Performance appraisal in the defence forces is linked to areas such as promotion and also to contracts thus perceived effectiveness/fairness of this system would be expected to have an effect on satisfaction levels.

The area of performance appraisal within the defence forces was identified as an area for concern in the 2015 survey with low levels of satisfaction. The aim of this section is to

‘unpick’ the reasons for dissatisfaction. The data from this section will be evaluated with the promotions section which follows it

6.1 Satisfaction with Appraisal among enlisted Ranks- the 667

The results of the 2015 survey indicated that there was a negative perception of the performance appraisal system among Privates (mean 2.6), Junior NCOs (mean 2.1) and Senior NCOs (mean 2.1). This perception became more negative as length of service increased and was consistent across all services (Navy, Army, Air corps). This issue was explored in depth in the focus groups and a number of key issues emerged:

Firstly there was agreement that the 667 was important for promotion purposes

‘667 are so important in my eyes you know,, and yet they are not being processed properly- OR people don’t even get one..you talk about ticking boxes for promotion- this is one of the most important’

‘People are now working for their 667 not because they love the job.’

‘If you have a good 667 you are more likely to get on course- but if you have a bad one you won’t get them..’ (PTE)

‘There is a lot of emphasis on the 667 for promotion’

We don’t have them but we should’ (apprentices air corps)

However the negative perception of the appraisal system that emerged in the 2015 survey was strongly supported in the focus groups

‘An absolute disgrace’ (NCO)

‘This is just paying lip service to performance management. It hasn’t changed with time’. (PTE)

‘Not worth the paper it’s written on’ (PTE)

'667 Its rubbish- an absolute joke' (JNCO)

'For us the 667 is a disgrace- I can see how it does work when you go up ranks, but for us it doesn't because the person writing it- hasn't the faintest idea who we are!'(PTE)

The focus groups highlighted a number reasons underpinning dissatisfaction. A key issue was the extent to which the person conducting a 667 actually knew the DF member, their work history and their performance. It was asserted that very often 667s are being conducted by Officers with little or no knowledge of the person they are reviewing. This view was articulated in every focus group conducted with privates, Junior NCOs and Senior NCOs. There was also feedback that 667s are not being conducted within the required timeframes which can cause problems for privates in terms of getting overseas and promotion. The effect of this was clear from the feedback in that the perceived credibility of the 667 is being undermined among the enlisted ranks. As a result the credibility of the officers conducting 667 is also being questioned.

'Completed by officers who don't know us'(pte)

'You go to an officer for an appraisal and he doesn't know who you are'(Pte)

'Given by people who don't see you from one end of the year to the other'(Pte)

'Ticked box that says he knew me very well but he had to ask me my first name'(pte)

'There is a box to tick- 'how well do you know this person' and more often than not they tick 'very well'...but they don't!! They tick it because they don't want to admit they don't know the boys that are under them...cos it will look bad on them and their own career'(pte)

'The 667 are very important in anything you want to do...career...if you want to do an NCO course...(pte)

'They say they know this person very well and they have never met the person before in their life. He is only here to tick a box and move on to another unit or wherever he is going.....they don't give a XXXX'(pte)

'You expect your 667 to be filled out by someone who sees you throughout the year- who is with you on exercises, who is able to see the person that you are developing into...see yeah- he is in every day, rarely goes sick, is applying for courses applying for overseas..this lad seems to be good...but it just seems to be tick the box...should be NCO or CS- they should have an input'(pte)

'The last 667 that was done for us here was done by an officer that was about 2 months out of cadetship...never worked with any of us. Half of us didn't know him until we went into the room...and that's put in our personal file for the years and if we go for an NCOs course every 667 is looked at for last 8 years.'(pte)

. 'I haven't had last two 667s cos they know I am going..' (NCO due to retire in a year)

The rank of NCO were particularly dissatisfied with the operation of the 667

'It's supposed to be Company Commander..but not consistent. It can be lieutenants- straight out of cadet school that are told to do it- they don't know anyone...I had one done by a guy who didn't even know my name- only from my tag- if I had asked him my first name he wouldn't have had a clue- and there he is doing my 667 and telling me about my military career in the last 12 months and where I need to improve- he didn't even know my name..' (JNCO)

'So an officer who is here a few weeks is telling us with our 17,20 plus years experience.. how good or bad we are...and they only met us a month ago... (JNCO)'

'It's a bit disheartening when you might have had a tough year, been away from home a lot. You might have committed to a battlegroup for a few months- then you come in and there is this young fella sitting in front of you. It's not his fault- he has been ordered by his company commander..' (SNCO)

'Depending on the unit- if the officers have an interest in doing the 667 they will do it. I am from the XXXX XXXXXXXX XXXX and I can tell you 667 for privates and NCOs have not been done since 2012...I also know in XX brigade since 2014...so if the officers don't care then they are not going to be done. So if I get asked for a conduct

rating- I can't input them unless I have a 667...then those people can't apply for career courses because their 667s haven't been done'(SNCO)

There was also consistent feedback from the focus groups that the 667 involved no genuine discussion around goal setting or helping personnel identify what they needed to do for promotion- that it was becoming nothing more than a box ticking exercise.

'Box ticking- not individual'(JNCO)

'This is just paying lip service to performance management. It hasn't changed with time'.(Pte)

'There is supposed to be a quarterly conversation-they are supposed to bring you in at start of year and discuss goals..ask you what you hope to achieve and agree those- does that happen? (Unanimous laughing among NCOs present) No!(JNCO)

You never hear- how can I help...all you hear is what courses have you done this year..(JNCO)

The rating also emerged as a contentious issue. Enlisted ranks were generally of the opinion that Officers had a policy of not awarding excellent. NCOs also expressed frustration that no one was ever rated 'poor' as they then had to deal with underperforming privates who had been rated good or above average. In general it was felt that ratings had moved to a central tendency.

'Officers won't rate people above average for 1st three years'(pte)

'We were told for the first three years of your career you are going to be rated average...Any Officer will tell you that- that's just the way it is...they will tell you your experience is low so they can't score you anything above average...' (Pte)

'My experience is that the officer giving the 667 haven't a clue who we are and they give a lesser one (667 grade) cos they don't know you'(pte)

'You talk to dinosaurs in this place and they say no one is excellent- which is wrong- because there is always excellent people in any workplace. Equally- we never seem to have poor in here- its less hassle for them (officers) (comment from NCO)'

'667 are done different by different officers- one might give good when another might give average...it needs to be looked at across the board.' (JNCO)

'Some officers will tell you- I can't give a corporal a better rating than a sergeant...why? You are rating me as a corporal- not against another rank!' (JNCO)

A perception of subjectivity was also raised- and in many cases this was linked to an assertion that officers were not trained to conduct performance appraisals

'Its they way they are educated – or not to deal with it- it's a problem' (SNCO)

'So this year I get one off you- you interpret it one way, next year I get it off another and he interprets it a different way- there is no consistency' (JNCO)

'It is very subjective. The person writing it could be only one month in the seat. If the report is wrong and you refuse to sign it then you are in trouble. New people wouldn't not sign it' (PTE)

'Ratings depend on your relationship with the boss' (PTE)

'No one is trained how to do a PA or how to engage with one' (SNCO)

'I have worked in cadet school- they don't train them in doing appraisals- Educate officers to write them' (JNCO)

Challenging a 667

There was divided opinion among the enlisted ranks as to whether they would challenge the outcome of a 667. In general younger Privates said they would not whilst longer serving Privates and NCOs felt they would be more likely to:

'In first 3 to 4 years would not feel comfortable challenging a rating'(pte)

'Can you challenge it- not at our level'...(Pte)

'you can challenge it but they won't change it'...(Pte)

'With experience you might challenge your rating' (JNCO)

'Often people feel intimidated to agree with their review'(Pte)

'If you are a relatively new you would feel kind of intimidated to sign it even if you don't agree and the Officers say oh go on- it won't affect you...but it does!'(JNCO)

NCO Input

There was a widespread consensus (mainly from Privates) that NCOs should have an input into 667. However NCOs themselves whilst recognising the merit of their input, were wary of being pulled in to actually completing these with no reward or support.

'NCOs and Sergeants should have an input- they know us' (PTE)

'NCOs should be doing them- sergeants should be doing them for corporals and so on' (PTE)

'Should be some input by senior NCO' (Pte)

'Should have a multiple input for 667 to avoid bias' (NCO)

'Should be a formal consultation process with NCOs' (NCO)

'Corporals, CSs should be going in and saying to an officer...yes xxx is a good lad or whatever- there is none of that'(NCO)

Overall the feedback on the operation of the 667 system was consistently negative across the service areas. Whilst personnel, (NCOs in particular) recognised to some extent that the problems were exacerbated by issues outside of many Officers' control such as

shortage and turnover of Officers, lack of training of Officers, it was clear from the reaction in the focus groups that there is a level of the frustration among the ranks with regard to the operation of the 667. It was clear from the comments that the situation is also contributing to a growing divide between the other ranks and Officers

I have XX young guys under me at sea and I am conscious of how they need to progress and so on.. what I do- I do it every 2 weeks- worst case every 4 weeks. I sit down and ask them how they are..are you happy yes or no...and so on. I write it down and go to Divisional Officer..I say- this is what you need to take note of- you have a diary- put it in..and just so you know- you should be doing this!! You are the leader- but they don't care...and they know muggins here will do it..We do what Officers should be doing because we care' (NCO)

'Continuity is different for us and for the Officers in that they move around a lot for promotion. And there is no consistency because of that....if you had an Officer who was here 365 days they could write a great 667- and 667 are so important in my eyes you know,, and yet they are not being processed properly- OR people don't even get one' (SNCO)

'Sick of babysitting children (officers) I show him how to do his job even though he evaluates me. I don't like the way it has gone'(JNCO)

Officer's perception of the 667

Feedback from Officers also indicated a sense of frustration with the 667 system. Contrary to feedback from the other ranks there were indications throughout the focus groups with Officers (particularly Senior Officers) that they are very concerned for the working lives and welfare of the NCOs and Privates. Much of this is evident in Officer feedback in other sections of the report (particularly on pay and working conditions of Privates). The only difference in feedback from Officers on the 667 was that they attribute much of the perceived failings of the appraisal system to the shortage of Officer personnel on the ground in units, and a lack of consistency of Officers in units due to the constant rotation.

'667 means nothing..we don't have time to give people feedback. It takes time to be a leader and the time isn't there. There are factors that require attention' (SO)

'The potential of the system is fabulous but we don't have the time..the reason people feel their reporting officer doesn't know them very well...is probably because they don't! so it makes it easier for them to challenge and feel disgruntled- whereas if it was platoon commander who knew them they might accept it..but if it's the CO who sees them once a year- it's hard to justify' (SO)

'There is a soft skills issue too- a 2nd Lieutenant comes in and has no mentor to do these reviews except a senior captain who is filling the job of CO. and the corporals and privates see this... '(SO)

'It's unfair of me to write reviews for guys I don't know'(JO)

Feedback from Officers also indicated a move towards a central tendency with respect to rankings on the 667 Thus it was easier to rate towards the centre

'667 – If you write a poor or honest 667 you are told to change it. We have had no training in this' (Junior Officer)

'We have been given no training in the competency framework. We need to be shown how to counsel '(SO)

'The average is now above average..so anything else is poor..so you are caught because there some really good privates- but if you give them 'good' someone else is giving poor guys excellent so that's not fair.' (Junior Officer)

'Infantry men tend not to get such high ratings because you just don't know them. You see their outputs but you don't know them. I saw a huge gap in corps I dealt with overseas- smaller ones got higher ratings'

'A unit commander has very tools to reward people now as he just doesn't have the autonomy or authority he used to- because he wants to get promoted and he is not going to take risks. So a good rating is a good way to reward someone- we can't increase pay and time off is problematic.' (SO)

'You also depend on your quartermaster ..whatever for loyalty on the ground..and if they walk out pissed off with a rating..that causes issues- and you are mindful of that!'(SO)

'if you give 'average' you face a redress'(JO)

'Have to write 667s for those you don't know so the tendency is just to give a middle rating'(JO)

'667 system is good but there is not enough people to administer it'(JO)

'The PM system works well on paper but due to numbers and custom and practice it isn't being adhered to'(JO)

'Lack of staff to fill them out'(SO)

6.2 Summary on the perceptions of 667

Overall the feedback in the focus groups pointed to significant levels of frustration on the part of Privates and NCOs due to what they felt was a lack of meaningful engagement with the process on the part of Officers. This in turn led to consistent observations by privates and NCOs that officers *'don't care about the enlisted ranks'* or that officers *'only care about their own careers'* rather than caring about units. However much of the feedback from Officers throughout the focus groups would indicate that they do care about troops. (In all of the focus groups conducted with officers the issue of the contract, pay and conditions for Privates was raised by the Officers as a huge issue). There was clear feedback from Officers that they too are frustrated by the appraisal system and how it works for other ranks. Officers pointed to a severe shortage of Officer Personnel at unit/barrack level due to the amount of personnel serving overseas, in battlegroups and on courses. This in turn is resulting in a crisis with respect to training of new recruits and assessing them effectively. (This is also discussed in the section on Staff shortages). Officer feedback was similar to what the enlisted ranks had already articulated: a lack of resources to support the system, lack of training a lack of time to engage properly due to their constant rotation and/or due to the lack of Officer Personnel in units to carry out appraisals. A knock on effect of this was, not knowing the personnel they were appraising

and feeling they couldn't give an accurate rating for fear of redress which in turn might affect their own career. In short there was a difference in views between Officers and the other ranks on the dimension of caring about the situation but in other respects both groups agreed that the system is problematic. However the situation is clearly contributing to a perception of growing divide between ranks. Dissatisfaction with the 667 system is also contributing to negative perceptions of Privates and NCOs with respect to Organisation fairness and this is something that needs to be addressed.

6.3 Performance Appraisals Officers – The 451

The shortage of Senior Officers and a lack of continuity of working relationships emerged once more as an issue. This time in relation to perceived problems with the performance management system for Officers and the appraisal tool: the 451. A constant refrain that came out of many of the focus groups with Officers across ranks regarding the performance appraisal system is summed up in the following quotes:

'We have performance appraisal- not performance management' (SO)

'We don't really have performance management- it is performance appraisal as there is a lack of continuity. Since the reorg we have a system that doesn't capture us properly...and that causes huge problems' (SO)

'There is an increasing workload, less numbers, new pension issues, major uncertainty, a disconnect with management and lack of performance management' (SO)

As with the enlisted ranks, the issue of rating emerged as a key issue for Officers- mainly the Junior Officer rank. There were assertions among the Junior Officers of a move to central tendency which in turn gave rise to a view that excellent people were not being acknowledged and poorer performers were being protected.

'451 – Depends on how you get on with your boss. There is no objectivity. Every Officer is very good, even if they are bad. There are very few given excellent' (JO)

'It is only your last 451 that counts and they just give a very good. It doesn't serve a purpose for feedback' (JO)

'These days when we write 451s for guys we think- I better write him 'up' as he is going to be competing. And that's not doing the organisation any good' (SO)

'Some COs say I don't give excellent' (JO)

'Poor performers get marked up – it protects poor performers' (JO)

'I don't give excellent because of your rank'- that what I have been told for last PA' (JO)

'We don't have a proper appraisal system. Everyone gets 'very good' and that's it. If you don't get that it means you are extremely poor.' (JO)

'We have all heard that Junior Officers don't get excellent.' (JO)

"I will give a good as I didn't see you much this year and will give a very good next year" (junior officer relaying what he was told)(JO)

'It needs to be weighted off your actual performance and achievements rather than another individual's perception of your performance.' (JO)

'Compare commanding officers and you know what your rating is going to be' (JO)

A further issue highlighted by the focus groups by all officer ranks is that of continuity. With Officers moving around and overseas at an increased rate for promotion purposes and to fill gaps in staffing, Officers indicated that a number of difficulties arise: Firstly the ability of reviewees to spend enough time in one role to display competence and meet objectives in that particular role is being undermined, Secondly reviewers change constantly as Officers move around leading to a lack of continuity of relationship between a reviewing Officer and a more Junior Officer. This mitigates against ability of reviewers to effectively assess and reflect on the reviewee's performance and development needs and goals.

'It does capture most things- the competency framework will help it further. I think the enlisted rank one is more flawed than the Officer one. There is a big problem with the development piece where people are overseas and so on. Our system doesn't support all that. We have such mobility in the officer rank that it makes it difficult to have continuity or conversations' (SO)

'Appraisals are not realistic. There is a poor chance your boss will be the same at the end of the year'. (JO)

'No facilitation to meet various objectives in the job. You just know what you have to do and are moved again. Time in one position should be recognised' (JO)

'We need consistency- it's not there as the (senior) Officers are looking up and turning over.'(JO)

A further issue highlighted mainly by Junior Officers was getting developmental and genuine personal feedback as part of the process. There was consistent feedback from Junior Officer groups that they thought the idea of performance management was positive, but that the system in place was not working. As with the enlisted ranks there was a clear indication from Junior Officers that the credibility of the system was being undermined. A practice of cutting and pasting 451 content was widely reported by Junior Officers as was a lack of opportunity to have discussions on career management/focus as illustrated by the following comments from Junior Officers

'There are discrepancies- some reports are literally photocopied...there is no specific HR department to monitor and train- people do know that'

'My last 451 as a lieutenant.- I met the officer. he didn't know me- hi my name is CCC,. he had cut and pasted the narrative from someone else's..so it wasn't specific to me'.

'It does happen because if a commander has people say lieutenants- doing roughly the same jobs they can cut and paste sections..it shows though that the effort we are being required to put in to our appraisal is not being put in by them..'

The issue of a lack of genuine discussion re goal setting and career progression was raised in the focus groups with Junior Officers. This links back to criticisms of the whole promotions process where Officers across the board felt that the Defence forces have no clear guidance for people on managing their careers. This has resulted in the current 'points race' where Officers feel they have to compete on points to get ahead.

Make it meaningful- this is what you are good at this is what you are bad at this is what you need to do. Make it about development not points'(SO)

'Nobody will sit down with you and set goals'(JO)

'I chased my last three commanders for my 451 but none of them wanted to do it...I wrote my own narrative for the last three. I had to literally ring them and say – will you please sign that..Nobody gave me any constructive criticism. Nobody told me what I need to be doing to excel as an officer'..(JO)

'451 doesn't feed into your career plan or relocation Only the last year matters.'(JO)

'You can't argue your point. They are not willing to accept input. It should be two way'(JO)

6.4 Summary

The key issues that emerged from the focus groups was that while Officers feel their system for performance management is better than that for other ranks, it is flawed. Officers across all levels felt that there is no genuine performance management system encapsulating clear direction and support for progression and developmental goals. It was felt that what exists is simply an appraisal instrument that is not linked in any meaningful way to a supported career/goals structure. Many Officers linked the shortcomings of the system back to the shortage of personnel available to manage the system and also a lack of infrastructural supports. Junior officers in particular expressed dissatisfaction that the appraisal seems to have become a box ticking exercise feeding into the wider points system for promotion and that there is a lack of guidance or meaningful discussion as part of the process. This supports much of the feedback in the section on promotions whereby Officers were critical of the lack of a clear career management structure within the

Defence Forces. There was also a widespread perception of a move to a central tendency with respect to ratings. If this is the case then there is a risk that the appraisal system will actually work against that which it is supposed to achieve: a framework to motivate individuals to provide clear guidance and to enhance individual and organisational performance.

Key issues that arise are:

- Shortages of Officers to conduct appraisals:
- A lack of continuity of reporting relationship between Officers which hinders genuine assessment
- An assertion by Junior officers that there is a practice of cutting and pasting of narratives in the 451 forms
- A focus on the points aspect of the 451 rather than a genuine developmental interaction
- A move to central tendency when assessing Junior Officers

7.0 Leadership

The Defence Forces is not a monolithic organisation but a ‘diverse collection of organisations – army, navy, and air force – roles, cultures and people’ (Wong, Bliese and McGurk, 2003) requiring effective leadership at strategic, operational and tactical levels. The Defence Forces define leadership as ‘influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation; developing and evaluating the individual, unit and organisation; while achieving the mission’ (Leadership Doctrine 2016). Effective and supportive leadership can directly and indirectly influence important organisational outcomes such as stress, performance, well – being and turnover intent. Dupre and Day (2007) found that supportive management was directly related to employee job satisfaction and indirectly related to employee health and intent to leave in a study conducted on the Defence Forces in Canada. They suggest that focusing on variables such as management support that are within the control of the Defence Forces can be an effective way of reducing costly organisational outcomes such as poor mental health and intent to leave.

Effective leadership is at the core of the Defence Forces do. The Defence Forces advocate that every member, regardless of rank or appointment, is a Leader and that leadership training and development opportunities should be available to all organisational members. However, the findings from the 2015 Your Say Survey highlighted certain leadership challenges for the DF. The survey results highlighted a perception that leaders in the DF are less skilled in the area of people management than in other areas of leadership, with this perception being strongest amongst the lower ranks. The results also highlighted a perception that the values of the organisation are not being enacted on a daily basis. Again this perception decreased with rank. Another area of concern in terms of leadership that emerged from the report was the lack of top down communication and this was across rank and service. Leadership in the Defence forces has emerged as a dominant theme in all the focus groups and across all ranks and services. It is important to note that in the focus groups with more senior ranks, many of their concerns focused on the situation of those reporting to them rather than their own concerns, demonstrating a strong regard for the welfare of their troops throughout the process which is to be commended. A number of sub-themes emerged in the area of leadership and each of these will be presented in the following section: disconnect; leadership vacuum; motivation; communication and respect.

7.1 Disconnect

A prevalent theme that emerged when talking about leadership in the Defence Forces was the perception of a disconnect between the leaders of the Defence Forces and those they are leading. This disconnect emerged in a number of different configurations, namely disconnect between the Defence Forces and Department of Defence (DoD); senior staff and the Defence Forces (DF); Officer and non-Officer ranks.

7.2 The relationship between the Department of Defence and the Defence Force

The relationship between the DOD and the DF was a concern that was voiced in all focus groups across rank, service and geographical location. Participants perceived the relationship as a power struggle between the DOD and the DF with the balance of power

lying predominantly in the hands of the DOD. Many participants expressed the view that senior DF leadership were unwilling or unable to what was termed 'take on' the DOD and that senior management were not representing the forces in this power play.

'There is an unwillingness to take on the department – no one in general staff standing up and banging the table' (SO)

'Senior management hamstrung by DOD' (PTE)

'We are an inconvenience to the department of Defence' (JO)

Military management don't have the capability or tools to fix the problems, D.O.D have all the power. The attitude of the D.O.D is 'isn't that what you signed up for?' (SO)

'Leaders cannot come back to give more to people due to the Government... They are aware that the situation is unsupportable and has potentially dangerous consequences' (SO Navy)

The trinity of power does not work – massive distrust – over reverence – that happens so high. (SO AIR CORPS)

'My biggest bug bear is the relationship that exists between the DF and the Department of Defence and it's at the root of so many issues- it feeds into the HR issue, finances and all kinds of things. It's a dysfunctional relationship. I have been involved in a lot of cases involving staffing that ultimately come to someone in the department to adjudicate,, - I think they see us as civil servants- they don't recognise that we are doing a different job. I call it the department for the suppression of defence costs. What they are interested in is money- they are not to my mind really interested in capability and enhancing capability. They certainly don't have any awareness for an organisation that's working hand in glove with us should, of how we operate or what we are about..some of these people are working there 20 years..and they still don't get us..' (SO)

'The DOD does not care' (Pte)

A common theme, particularly among the more senior ranks was the acceptance that the relationship between the DOD and the DF was a unique one and that while it was considered appropriate that certain concessions were made by the DF, that in return the DF should be awarded respect and an equal seat at the table. This, many felt, was not currently happening. There was also a view, particularly at senior level, that leaders' ability to make decisions and do their job was being in some way hampered by DOD involvement and that control and autonomy were being eroded;

'We do not have certain powers when sitting at the table, and we agree to that, but we should be respected for this and treated accordingly' (SO)

'We have got to the point in the navy that even if we want to put a ship alongside a port we have to get permission from naval operations who have to get permission from the department of defence- for reasons unknown to us!- we are being micro managed and our ship knows that..I have been told- you have one XXXX up- be bold once- but use it wisely....so you know when you do that the inevitable phone call will come and when mine did my com op who took the call said- will I tell them you are not here...I was- of course I am here- we are 200 miles off the coast!...but the whole ship know you have taken one for them..and they got a shore leave for a night. But I have been a long time at sea and I have never seen that level of micro managing and where a captain has to carry that burden he does now where you are almost afraid to make a decision at sea.....' (SO)

'In the last 7 years I have seen the DOD taking over the power and as a consequence a col/general who should have the power is in a very unusual situation that they don't have the power they should have- that's not good.. as the lads have a perception then that they (senior staff) are doing nothing....but hands are tied by the DOD who by the way are kept in their jobs by the military!!'
(Chaplain)

'DOD –they slow down everything' (SO)

'The DOD are micromanaging the most senior people' (SO)

There were perceptions of a lack of trust between the DOD and the DF in many of the focus groups and many participants expressed the view that the DOD did not understand the reality facing the troops and that the main priority was a focus on cost cutting and recruitment rather than retaining and motivating existing employees.

'We mean nothing to our bosses and the government' (Pte)

'I think the personal contract between the individual and the state is broken/damaged. Things have become transactional now. Especially for other ranks. Officers not so much. I think the personal contract is irreparably damaged at the moment' (RACO)

'Lads don't have trust in leaders, the system and that they are being treated fairly.' (SNCO)

'As rep orgs raco/pdforra- we feel like we are the dirt on the bottom of governments boot. They will pat you on the back and tell you you are a great lad after marching down O'Connell street..but when it comes to pay in particular- we were told by general staff- forget about negotiating on pay...when the white paper came out'(RACO)

'Our governments treat the DF like 'bone china' in the grandmothers dresser- lovely to look at, take it out now and then when you need it but at the end of the day it's not really that important. Look- what ministry was stepped down by the current government- they don't see it as important.' (RACO)

7.3 Senior staff and DF

As highlighted above, a common theme emerging in all the focus groups was the perception that senior leaders were not representing the troops in negotiations with the DOD and that many participants felt were not demonstrating moral courage in this respect. Many participants felt disconnected from senior leaders and a common theme emerging from the lower ranks was that senior management were removed from reality of the troops on the ground.

'Everyone is looking after themselves – that is where you will find dissatisfaction- those young fellas- they expect the guys at the top to fight for them and they are not seeing that. what the new contracts have created'(SO)

'Important that top leaders look out – but also need to look down..not happening'(SO)

'Military management have completely disengaged...Not dealing with our issues only because there hasn't been an accident. When that happens the wing commander will be hung out to dry' (SO Air Corps)

'DCOS support came down here two weeks ago-- and basically the message was- if you feel your expectations from the climate survey are not being met or your career goals are not being met – basically you don't have to stay here..what we took from that was- if you don't like it here- there is the door. I went home that night totally disillusioned. Sat down with my wife and said- it's time to go' (JNCO Navy)

'Ships captains don't look after the ships- they are run by command outside. There was a point where officers could think for themselves but young officers are afraid of the captains and the captains are afraid of the command- it's all about t looking after their career.

... Not all of them- there are some very good captains' (JNCO)

Many expressed a concern that the new promotion structure was forcing leaders to focus on their own career rather than the unit and that often those on the ground were forgotten. There was general agreement across ranks and service that the unit was the heart of the military and its mission but that leadership in the units was being jeopardised because of a system that focused upwards. This has also been highlighted in the section on career progression;

'To get to the top you have to have good office politics skills – where do you get real leadership? In the units' (SO)

A finding that emerged in the 2015 survey was a perception of disconnect between older and younger generations. 58% of respondents agreed that there was disconnect between the younger and older generation with 28% reporting a neutral response. This was echoed in the focus groups when talking about senior leadership in the DF. Respondents across the lower ranks and in the lower age bracket voiced a belief that senior management was removed from the troops' day to day experiences and that they were unaware of the many challenges they face. Many younger respondents, particularly at Junior Officer Rank, reported experiencing a lack of understanding regarding family issues around lack of planning and time spent away from the family. This is becoming increasingly difficult due to societal and organisational changes such as dual career families, discontinuation of married quarters and reorganisation. However, many respondents stated that their concerns in this area were not acknowledged by senior leaders.

'The tell us 'we went through it so should you' (JO)

'They don't see things the way we do – they are a lot more conservative. The attitude is the wife will mind the kids' (JO)

'Military management come from a generation that single income could support a household and wife could move with them. Now wives/partners working- you can't just up sticks and move to the Curragh....so they are- what's the problem?' (SO)

7.4 Officers and other ranks

A common theme in all the focus groups with the enlisted and many of the commissioned ranks was a concern about the growing divide between Officer and non Officer ranks. While there was some recognition that the dual structure was an integral part of the organisation, many respondents voiced concerns that a growing divide between the officers and non-officers was taking place leading to tension. A number of reasons for this growing division were put forward by the different ranks including the lack of Officers on the ground leading to less time with the troops, the increased paper work for Officers also leading to less troop time, a disparity in living conditions, medical services, career/overseas opportunities, a lack of recognition of the contribution of the NCOs, and a flawed performance appraisal system.

There was recognition across ranks that, in recent years, there were fewer Officers available in the units due to overseas, participating on courses or exiting the DF. This was seen as a key factor contributing to the growing disconnect between Officer and non-Officer ranks as there is less interaction between the two groups, something that is captured in the quote from RACO below;

‘There is a huge gap now between the other ranks and the officers and its getting wider because before the lft was on the ground with the troops. Now the lft is in the adjtans office..because there are so many gaps the LFT are doing jobs they shouldn’t be doing... troops don’t even know the names of officers..’ (RACO)

Frustration was expressed in many NCO focus groups that their experience and knowledge were at times not acknowledged by Officers with much less experience, something they identified as causing further division between enlisted and commissioned ranks. While there was some recognition that Officers themselves were under pressure, they felt there was a need for more recognition of the corporate knowledge and contribution of NCO within the organisation.

‘If you are here 30 years and someone is in only 2 years and is at a higher rank, they often won’t take your advice’. (SNCO)

‘There are some individual officers who are outstanding but there is a general thing- You are beneath them and that’s it. it doesn’t matter what qualifications or intelligence you have’ (JNCO)

‘No issue with respecting the rank..but if I have a young officer and I give him advice and he looks at me and gives me the ‘it’s my way or the high way’ ...what are they being taught about leadership!- when a young lewie won’t recognise the opinion of an experienced senior sergeant...’ (JNCO)

‘If in a private company , leaders would not be in their roles – no aircraft experience and yet managing a hangar – they haven’t a clue – its officer and

rank – you cannot question – you know what they are saying is wrong. Piece of paper just going in bin after you leave’ (Airman)

An issue that emerged, particularly in the private and JNCO focus groups was the sense that the Defence Force had become a ‘two tiered’ system with regard to living conditions, medical services and career opportunities and this was leading to an ‘Us v them’ mentality within the Defence Forces. These ranks in particular, while recognising the leadership skill of individual Officers, expressed a growing sense of injustice in the system and that this inequity was leading to resentment at times.

‘It’s an organisation for officers’ (Pte)

‘There are two completely different armies’ (Pte)

‘Don’t care about us, in a different world’ (Pte)

‘It’s like a caste system’ (Pte)

‘Massive divide between officers and other ranks- its two different armies. You are sitting down with one fork out of a ration pack- and you are looking in a window where they have cutlery on the table...’ (JNCO)

7.5 Leadership Vacuum

A prevalent concern throughout the focus groups when discussing leadership was what was described as the ‘leadership vacuum’. All ranks across all geographical locations and services have highlighted a decrease in the number of leaders in the Defence Forces over the last number of years and that the number of officers/leaders on paper is in no way indicative of the actual number of Officers on the ground. This ‘leadership vacuum’ at ground level is occurring for a number of reasons –many in a position of leadership are leaving the organisation because conditions are more favourable outside the DF, a number are stationed overseas while ‘on paper’ are still in their own positions and Officers may be attending courses that prevent them from carrying out their duties. This lack of leadership in the units is having negative consequences across ranks and service

affecting job satisfaction, performance and unit morale and has been discussed in more detail in Sections on staff shortages and promotion;

'If we get people to Syria, they have to be trained but to train a person to that standard. You have to have consistency in the unit, you have to have experience you have to have management systems and a lot of what you are hearing is a lack of ncos, senior ncos, officers- the middle management. ...They are the barometer the litmus test, the glue in order to meet standards to get overseas. So if that goes or is limited and we the leadership/ don't put enough emphasis on the unit itself, well that glue will go and there will be big problems then.' (SO)

Participants across ranks and services highlighted a number of worrying consequences of this gap in leadership including increased workload for all, individuals occupying roles they are not qualified for or experienced in, not enough leaders to train troops (leading to frustration of troops as the nature of their work is often removed from military duties), increased amount of time behind desks and less time with troops (this is exacerbating the growing divide between commissioned and non-commissioned ranks highlighted above), a lack of mentoring, problems with performance management and the constant movement of Officers to fill vacant positions leading to a lack of continuity in units.

The constant movement of Officers to fill vacant positions was perceived to be a major concern for many reasons. Junior Officers in particular cited the constant movement as one of the main reasons Officers at this level were leaving the DF. This constant change of location was found to have severe negative effects on work life balance and was preventing them from settling in one location and making plans for the future. Junior Officers felt unable to buy houses, settle down and have families due to the constant movement with little notice. While this was one of the dominant concerns expressed by Officers, it is also becoming an issue for NCOs and has emerged as an issue under other themes throughout the report;

'While officers have also moved, NCOs now have to move to progress – this is affecting units' (JNCO)

'I am a homeowner but I rent my house out as I am never able to live there due to changing locations' (JO)

'Moving people to fill gaps – creating other gaps, inability to plan and effect on family life' (JO)

'No career path due to lack of numbers – just filling gaps..we are supposed to have a routine ashore and very little notice to where and when you are going' (JO)

'Major issue with leadership at JO level is that people are moved around to plug gaps at short notice...– gaps plugged at one level/location create gaps elsewhere'

'The system assumes that young officers are footloose and fancy free, This leaves major uncertainty for buying a house' (JO)

'Coming back from overseas and you don't know where you are going to be placed....Notice is left until the last minute, they are holding onto information' (JO)

'I cannot start a life because of the uncertainty of where they will send me' (JO)

Junior Officers also expressed concerns that career development opportunities were being affected because of this gap in leadership, stating that many Junior Officers were denied access to courses because they could not afford to lose them.

'Not getting to upskill due to no cover while we are on the courses, Cannot avail of opportunities' (JO)

They expressed frustration that they were spending less time with troops because of the increase in paperwork and a number of participants at both Junior and Senior Officer level expressed concerns regarding completing 667s effectively and training troops because of the volume of paper work on their desks. This concern for those they are

leading and their frustration with the lack of resources to lead them in the way they feel they deserve was something that emerged in many of the focus groups with officers at all ranks

'We should be taking the troops out but we are just doing paperwork'

'We can't fulfil our jobs. We cannot help the good guys that report to us' (JO)

'We cannot lead..we are snowed under with paperwork' (JO)

This concern was echoed by those receiving the 667s. Privates stated that many of their leaders did not stay in one unit long enough for them to get to know them and that this had detrimental effects on performance management and morale (see section on performance management for a more in depth discussion).

This lack of continuity of Officers was found to be having adverse effects on the units as a whole and while many across ranks perceived this to be a systems problem, many also acknowledged that it was having a worrying effect on the relationship between Officer and non-Officer ranks and on leaders' ability to lead.

7.6 Motivation

Another common theme among NCOs and Officers both junior and senior was the difficulty in motivating troops. NCOs and Officers recognise that those at more junior levels are increasingly disengaged and frustrated for a number of reasons including poor pay, poor career opportunities, commuting amongst others (see sections 3.0 and 4.0 for a detailed discussion on pay and career development). This, many leaders feel, makes it extremely difficult to lead and motivate staff.

'You are a counsellor for the younger guys, expected to motivate them and train them, get them to stay and deal with all their problems – yes there is PSS but where are they at 3 in the morning?' (JNCO, navy)

'As middle managers we have to try and incentivise the junior staff and that is affecting us' (JNCO)

Less prevalent was the view amongst more senior ranks that it was difficult to motivate troops due to there being little consequences for actions and a significant minority of leaders expressed a difficulty in holding people accountable or the ability to provide difficult feedback;

‘As a unit commander you want to do right by your unit and their careers but if you know in your heart and soul that this guy isn’t up to it..and you commit that on paper, you will face a back lash. You are open to redress because the previous guy didn’t have the stomach to tell the guy, look...and then if you give an average, you face a redress’

‘The organisation encourages mediocracy..don’t rock the boat’ (SO)

Many senior leaders also acknowledged that it was difficult to motivate others when they themselves were not motivated. Senior leaders at both commissioned and enlisted ranks often expressed grave concerns for the troops they were leading and the organisation itself. Many at senior levels recognised that they were in a very different situation to troops at lower ranks and were troubled by the changes taking place.

‘System has led to people focusing on their own career rather than motivating others’

‘Everyone is looking up, no one is looking after the people on the ground’

‘They are coming back mentally scarred, coming back and being sent out to the west coast on patrols and not getting much more than the dole....and we have to motivate them to stay..we can’t even motivate ourselves’ (SNCO)

Less prevalent but worthy of note was the view that the new system’s focus on all DF members being a leader could be problematic. In certain focus groups, particularly in the higher ranks, participants questioned the idea that everyone was a leader and further questioned that everyone wanted to be a leader.

'Everyone is a leader?– they are not – you can be marked down if you demonstrate leadership as a private' (Pte)

'We have to look at the promotion system which I think is the most damaging aspect of the whole DF at this moment in time. Not everyone is meant to be a corporal, not everyone is meant to be a sergeant... but with the way it's now structured you have to be seen to be becoming a leader.' (SO)

'Everyone could find their role in the old df. They were not all 'stellar' but they had a role' (SO)

'People are competing for positions that they don't even want' (SO)

7.7 Communication

Communication and informational justice was an area of concern in the 2015 survey. The focus groups reflect this finding with all ranks and services agreeing that communication, particularly top down communication was an issue of concern. The one exception in this area was DFHQ and while participants expressed satisfaction with the communication they received, they did acknowledge that they were in a unique position and that this was not the case for many other locations. All other locations expressed dissatisfaction in the level of communication received. For example, many participants indicated that they did not know about the focus groups until the morning that they were taking place. Many participants, particularly at Junior Officer Rank, felt this lack of communication was having a detrimental effect on their ability to plan and organise their work/life balance. Senior leaders themselves acknowledged that top-down communication was often wanting and opined that this was because they themselves did not have the information to give troops. Members of PDFORRA also believed that communication and provision of information was an area of concern for the Defence Forces and they expressed growing reluctance and frustration when communicating with their members as the information they would give to members might then change. This, they stated, was having an adverse effect on their credibility with troops. Participants across rank and service felt there was a lack of transparency around decisions made in the organisation and that staff was 'being kept in the dark'. Another reoccurring concern was the lack of rationale provided to staff

about decisions that concerned their working lives including location, provision of overseas and access to courses.

'Communication stops at certain ranks' (SO)

'The fact that communication is so bad- and doesn't trickle down (from Above) makes things worse..' (Airman)

'Units are not being briefed and there is very little bottom up engagement' (SNCO)

'Give you an example- I was overseas and in July I emailed my command structure- I knew I was going back to sea so I asked- when am I going and where am I going so I can plan- guess when I got a reply- three days ago (December) after three queries and even at that I had to go in and fight and battle and say- I NEED to know. The guy who is sending me back doesn't care- he is not going to sea himself- it doesn't affect him.' (JNCO)

Another concern amongst participants was a growing reluctance to communicate 'bad news as this many felt, could have adverse effects for the 'messenger'. There was a prevalent belief that senior leaders did not want to hear any negative information and that this was causing further division between senior leaders and troops as senior leaders are not aware of the reality on the ground and the extent of the problems facing the DF. Many participants expressed frustration that those at the top did not acknowledge the retention problem;

'Leaders do not identify retention as an issue. The policy is to recruit rather than retain'

'Before we used to have excellent experience. Now it is much different but perception at the top is that the level of expertise still exists'

'Nobody wants to give general staff bad news..why not- you won't get promoted..DFHQ will not bite the bullet and give general staff bad news so when

general staff come to a unit or brigade and hear this type of stuff it comes as a shock to them'

'And all good news- so the more good news I give you the better for me...

'Bad news won't get promoted. So it's avoided' (SO)

A less prevalent issue but one that did emerge in several focus groups, particularly at the lower levels concerned the language used by senior management when communicating with troops on the ground – many privates in particular felt distanced from the language used by senior management referring to it as corporate speak and this was increasing the sense of disconnect between the troops and their leaders.

'They do not speak our language, only corporate speak' (Pte)

'DCOS are behaving like they are Uber, they are not speaking the language of everyone else. They have washed their hands of the pay issue' (Pte)

'Leaders need to get to the level of the guys on the ground and avoid corporate speak' (Pte)

An awful lot of officers don't perceive themselves as having careers any more- just jobs. A lot of that is because management have started using commercial language. Management don't talk to us in military talk any more. We are spoken to as if we were a business. We produce things and we have customers and stakeholders...and ok a certain amount of that is forced upon us because of the way we operate now..but it has changed our culture' (RACO)

7.8 Respect

There was an overall feeling in the focus groups that those in senior leadership positions within the DOD and the DF were removed from the situation of the troops on the ground. The vast majority of the participants at lower ranks felt 'let down' by the organisation and many indicated that the lack of recognition and deteriorating pay and working

conditions symbolised a lack of respect for those on the ground. They were also frustrated with senior leaders' unwillingness to address or acknowledge these concerns

'Sign of a good organisation is how they look after the lowest rank and this is not happening' (SO)

'On a personal level. We all have troops under our care. We have a duty of care to them. We are still at that stage at the coalface where we are interacting with these boys and girls day and night. Days are getting shorter and nights are getting longer where you are not able to do things with them..because you are pulled every way. The troops need leadership. The need it from the top. If they don't see it....they are not fooled by one visit to a barracks...they are all on social media they are on everywhere. They see it. and if they don't see their plight being pushed from the top- that's where they see the disconnect..' (SO)

7.9 Implications of Findings

While it is important to recognise the overriding concern that senior ranks participating in the Focus Groups displayed for welfare their troops and for the organisation as a whole, a number of key concerns emerged in the focus groups when discussing leadership in the Defence Forces that need to be addressed. Leadership is the most influential factor in developing a positive culture that is aligned to the values of the Defence Forces. The importance of Leadership is recognised in the Defence Forces and this is evidenced in the Leadership Doctrine. However, there is a pervasive perception that the senior leaders of the Defence Forces are not representing their troops in the manner they expect. This has led to a sense of disconnect from the General Staff. The findings also suggest that there is a need to review the relationship between the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Representative bodies. Currently, there is a perception across rank and service that this relationship is not a collaborative one. There was a call for a move from what many see as an imbalanced relationship, with the balance of power lying predominantly within the Department of Defence, to a more inclusive, high trust and partnership based relationship. Many feel that the failure to acknowledge and address critical issues such as pay is symbolic of a lack of respect for the troops. This perception will have implications for the development and maintenance of a high commitment high

trust culture. Another finding that will have wide reaching implications for the Defence Forces is the leadership vacuum being experienced at unit level. This is affecting the relationship between Officer and non-Officer ranks, work load, performance management, work life balance and the ability to avail of courses and overseas. These leadership problems are leading to troops feeling disengaged, disempowered and without an advocate and need to be addressed by the Defence Forces and the Department of Defence. In summary, the main findings are:

- A growing sense of disconnect. This is occurring at many different levels, including the Department of Defence, General Staff and between ranks (commissioned and non-commissioned)
- The existence of a leadership vacuum at unit level that is having organisational wide effects
- The perception that communication is unclear and lacking transparency
- Leadership challenges around motivating troops who are becoming increasingly disengaged

8.0 Culture

Organisational culture refers to a set of basic assumptions that are shared among the members of the organisation (Martins and Terblanche 2003). It includes the ethos and values of an organisation, which are expressed through the way it operates and the practices it undertakes (Johnson, 2013) Robbins (1996) argues that the shared values that are provided in a strong culture ensure that members of the organisation are all on the same track. The Defence Forces culture values respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity. It is important that the members of the Defence Forces identify with the cultural values of the organisation as according to Sadri and Lees (2001), without the support of employees, no organisation can maintain a positive culture. The 2015 survey found that over all, members of the Defence Forces identify and agree with the organisations cultural values. However, it also found that many members believe the values of the organisations culture are not enacted on a daily basis. This disconnect between espoused and enacted values was one of three sub- themes that emerged in the

focus groups when discussing organisational culture. The three sub-themes are the decline in collegiality, the prevalence of a Yes culture and a disconnect between espoused and enacted values.

8.1 Decline in Camaraderie

Team work, loyalty and respect for one another are key values of the DF and core to the mission of the DF. A recurrent theme in the focus groups was the unique sense of camaraderie experienced in the DF, something that also emerged in the 2015 survey. When participants were asked what they enjoyed about working in the DF, the resounding response particularly at NCO level was the peer support and camaraderie with others. This was recognised as a major strength of the DF and a necessity in a military culture involving risk and requiring high trust. However, participants also felt that the comradeship between troops was being swiftly eroded by a promotional system that rewarded individualistic behaviour. The deterioration of camaraderie in the DF was a concern across ranks and service. While many at senior level felt this was not such an issue at their level, they expressed concern that this was being eroded at lower levels for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons for this, many agreed, was the new promotion system which has resulted in people becoming more individualistic and competitive in order to progress. The new contracts and the pressure to reach certain positions in order to remain in the DF have created a competitive culture where people are looking out for themselves and competing against their peers. This is leading to a decline in important DF values such as team work and loyalty – values that many believed are core to a military culture that is adaptive and involves risk.

‘we do that [create bonds] with them because it is a military necessity- We can’t send troops overseas- send them to Syria- unless they have those values, unless they have that military culture that is successful and can adapt to the environment. We can only create that by creating the bond and you have to work on that...everything needs to reinforce those values....’ (SO)

‘And as a result what happens is we have people moving around the whole time, where the old system- and I am not saying we shouldn’t change- we do have to change- but the old system was identity, culture, loyalty and values were built

from the bottom up and the top down and led by people who were there, invested in each other, invested in the unit and we don't have that now...because policy says you need to have this many people qualified to go for an interview, instead of people who knew the people involved doing the boards...which means that everybody is coming around the houses...to look after their own promotions- because that is what is required now by hr policies which are enforced upon us..by external organisations whether it's the department of defence or the public services commission. We are not a public service- we give service to the state and to the flag. We are there to do things other people won't do, to take risks other people don't and that's why we need people to be committed to each other- because they take risks'(SO)

Many participants across rank and service perceived a decrease in loyalty at unit level, many again citing the new promotion structure as playing a pivotal role in this shift. In the new system, many believe that members of the DF are no longer rewarded for unity loyalty and that in order to progress your career, you must focus on your own career trajectory. This, many believe, is having a detrimental effect on unit morale. This is discussed in detail in the sections on promotions and careers;

'Promotion system has resulted in people looking upwards and becoming more focused on their own careers' (SNCO)

'Perception of 'them and us' and this is being accentuated by the new contracts' (Pte)

'Group ethos is being destroyed by a system that creates competition for scarce resources' (SO)

'It's gone really competitive. Camaraderie is going and that's what holds us together' (Pte)

'Knock on effect of the 5 year contract is no loyalty to the df and no loyalty to each other' (SO)

'Promotions system is designed in such a way- whether it was intended or not- that it becomes very personal- so individuals are pitting themselves against everybody else- so it has become very competitive..and it's about looking after yourself. That changes everything you are supposed to be about. Now we have done the same thing to the other ranks- teaching them you go off and look after yourself, look after yourself..and that's not what we are supposed to be about...we are supposed to be look out for each other..your comrades...that's lost..' (RACO)

'I think the culture that's developing where guys are competing- that is going to cause long term damage to operational effectiveness' (RACO)

'Comradery gone, you can't afford to go out with each other anymore' (PDFORRA)

'You and your best friend are going for the same vacancies...seeing things like hiding notices on courses' (PDFORRA)

'Don't see camaraderie in current system- now its dog eat dog' (SNCO)

'To get on you have to willing to stand on your fellow soldiers' (SNCO)

'Esprit de corps gone- just not there. It's me me me now- he used to be your buddy- now he is your rival' (SNCO)

'Loyalty to unit is gone- you are doing courses outside unit- so you are constantly taking from the core unit.' (JNCO)

'The army culture has changed so significantly..I have seen the esprit de corps..gone!..It's a job now. I never heard that word only in the last 3 years..'father it's a job'..' (Chaplain)

'if you have culture of all and reduce it to a culture of me..then I am fighting for promotion and courses and I don't care any more and will do everything in my power to get ahead of my colleagues...I will walk over him- '

'All of a sudden the organisation is turning in on itself like a dog who hasn't been fed its dinner...so it's starting to eat those around it...and the first thing to go is camaraderie- the essence of the DF... these bonds are starting to dissolve- and that's threatening the very fabric of the DF...the uniform is coming apart at the seams and we are trying to patch it up, doing too much and over recruiting....we need to get back to basics.. we are losing compassion, the value of the individual, the soldier' (Chaplain)

Another reason offered for the demise in camaraderie is the lack of facilities for Privates to get together and interact on a social basis. Participants at NCO level in particular highlighted a change in how Privates interact, with a number of participants expressing dismay at seeing Privates sitting in their cars at lunch time because facilities are not in place or morale is so low. Another issue that emerged, particularly with NCOs in the navy, was the prevalence of social media and how this was diminishing face to face communication/interaction between troops.

'Morale is so low no-one will go into the mess'

'The biggest complaint overseas is lack of Wi-Fi. Lads just don't engage with each other' (SNCO)

8.2 Yes Culture

A key theme that emerged in the focus groups, when discussing the culture of the DF, was the existence of a many referred to as a 'YES' culture, particularly within the commissioned ranks. Many participants referred to the DF culture as a 'can do' culture where the norm is to say yes to all requests, with many acknowledging that this in itself can and has been a positive feature of the DF culture. However, they expressed growing concerns that the DF is saying yes to things that it can no longer deliver on given the limited resources available and that this is now becoming a health and safety issue. While this view was expressed across services, it emerged as a particular concern in the air corps and at senior ranks.

'Every time we an engineer away on course, a guy under pressure – physical risk of a pilot flying a plane not maintained. We are sending guys out – safety margin is going down and down. We are on average 40%' (SO Air Corps)

'There is a massive risk attached to everything. If it goes wrong someone dies- you can't walk away from that. People need to realise if you keep cutting corners and asking people do do more with less you will have issues- but ultimately you will have a dead body. '(SO)

'The DF has a culture of saying yes to everything and everyone even when we do not have the resources to do so. Senior management need to go to the department and say they can't reach the levels of output they are being asked' (SO)

'Health and Safety standards are stretched....We have to learn to say no and restructure' (SO navy)

'Officers don't want to get a black mark so they won't challenge authority' (JO)

'Our greatest strength and our greatest weakness is our 'can do' attitude, we will always say yes – the knock on effects of this can be seen in the climate survey' (SO)

'We are the victims of our own success and obedience' (SO)

8.3 Espoused values versus enacted values

Another theme that emerged when discussing organisational culture was the belief that leaders are not enacting the values of the organisation on a daily basis. This also emerged in the 2015 survey as a concern and has been found in the literature to be related to increased cynicism and decreased commitment. Leaders at the apex of the organisation play a pivotal role in developing and maintaining organisational culture and the perception amongst organisational members that leaders are not living by the values of the organisation can negatively affect commitment to the organisation and what it stands for.

'When we look upwards, we don't see the values being espoused to us' (JO)

'Leaders are not enacting the values. Some officers are great but a lot are just paying lip service.' (JNCO)

'Leaders not enacting values – I wish that they would do away with the DF values..no one is in the unit they want to be in' (SNCO)

8.4 Implications of Findings

The Defence Forces culture values respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity. It is important that the members of the Defence Forces identify with the cultural values of the organisation as according to Sadri and Lees (2001), without the support of employees, no organisation can maintain a positive culture. While many in the focus groups expressed a pride in what the Defence Forces stand for, there was an overarching concern for the direction that the organisation as a whole was heading in. While many with longer tenure alluded to the peer support and the camaraderie within the Defence Forces, there was a general perception that this was being eroded and that the culture of the Defence Forces was becoming more competitive and individualistic. This is a concern as such a culture would conflict with the values of loyalty, selflessness and team work that the Defence Forces espouses. Another area for concern is the perception that the leadership in the defence Forces do not enact certain organisational values. Many of the participants feel the lack of acknowledgement of their concerns reflects a lack of respect for the troops. This is an area of concern for the Defence Forces as the leaders of the organisation play an integral role in the development of positive high performing organisational cultures.

The key findings in this area are:

- The decline in camaraderie and the emergence of a competitive and individualistic culture in the Defence Forces
- The prevalence of a Yes culture which prevents any negative communication from being voiced

- A perception that there is a disparity between the values being espoused and the values being enacted by those in leadership positions in the defence Forces

9.0 Work Life Balance

The 2015 Climate Survey report discussed the importance of work life balance and the impact that work life conflict can have on recruitment, retention, job commitment and job satisfaction. The survey found that 44% of respondents disagreed that the Defence Forces are supportive of the family. In addition, almost 45% of respondents indicated a lack of awareness of the family friendly policies in the Defence Forces. The focus groups provided participants with an opportunity to voice their view on work life balance while working for the Defence Forces. The following section highlights the findings, separating the army, navy and air corps, as well as officers and the enlisted ranks.

9.1 Army

The focus groups highlighted a significant level of dissatisfaction among the enlisted ranks with the issue of work life balance. Participants felt that working with the Defence Forces meant making a lot of sacrifices at home as there was pressure put on them from management. They felt that they could not make plans with their families as they are often called upon for work and this has led to some families falling apart.

‘If the army wanted you to have a wife you would be issues one’ (Private)

‘There is a high rate of divorce’ (Private)

‘Drives an awful wedge between families’ (Private)

‘Family plans? There is no plans’ (Private)

‘Management expect you to be married to them’ (Private)

One of the major concerns expressed in relation to work life balance is the lack of notice given for travel or duties. This impacts members of all ranks ability to plan things in their own life, for example, childcare, time with family and attending classes to upskill. There is also a fear of being charged if members do not answer their phones on their time off.

‘Getting calls at home on a private number. If you don’t answer the call you will get charged’ (Private)

‘You need to educate yourself but you can’t afford to or can’t guarantee you will be off to make the classes’ (Private)

‘Lack of advance warning for things, 2 days’ notice..’ (Private)

‘Even if they notified people.... Things are normally last minute...you find out Friday evening you are going Sunday morning down to Cork or something. You could be gone for a week and given two days’ notice’

‘My work in the defence forces affects my wife’s ability to work. She works in a bar and she would get double time on a weekend.. and she can’t do it because I get called in- that’s more money gone- another 70 euros’

‘We were at a guy’s wedding and we all got a text to report in in the morning...at his wedding’

In addition to lack of certainty each week, another aspect of their role in the Defence Forces that causes conflict with their family lives is geographical location and the financial costs that are associated with commuting. In order to attend courses members are required to be away from their families, some with no way of getting home at the weekends and others not being able to afford to commute. This adds to the financial strain that participants referred to as discussed in section 3.0. Some participants felt that they should be able to apply for positions in their own brigade rather than being moved around the country.

‘Driving 3 hours a day to fulfil contract’

‘We need to be able to apply for our own brigade’

'There's some days there you could be leaving at 5 am to get to cork, it's not stable at all...you come home at 7 that evening and you could be gone somewhere else the next day'

'I was up in the Curragh doing a course and I had no car so I was gone for 10 weeks. I didn't see the child for 10 weeks and was away from family. Then you'd think you would get a bit of leeway when you come back...no I was stuck on a duty the very first day I was back'

Another issue that emerged that has a knock on effect on work life balance is the perceived lack of fairness in the allocation of duties. In some locations there are arguments that the same people get them too often and others find a way to get out of them.

'Some people did six 24 hour duties in a month'

'It falls back on the same individuals.... Some guy will be told and will have no interest in going anywhere so he goes sick or whatever and the good lad, he gets the phone call and he's being creased then...'

There were also some concerns expressed in the focus groups around the requirements to go overseas for women with families. In one situation a woman with a child had been overseas for 6 months and there was a high possibility that she would be sent away for another 6 months shortly after returning.

'It's just not family friendly...XXX there (female) has been overseas for 6 months and she might have to go away for another 6 months...'

In another case, a female member will have to leave the Defence Forces at 21 years because she has not been overseas in the last few years. Even though she has been on four overseas trips this requirement still stand, but her childcare commitments make it impossible for her.

'I need to do a trip 18-21 years to get another contract but it is not possible for me due to childcare commitments'

Similar to the enlisted ranks, the Officers of the army felt that due to the requirements of the Defence Forces on them, they have to make sacrifices in their personal lives, some saying that it is not viable to start a family while working for the Defence Forces. Participants expressed that this requirement was making them think about their future in the organisation.

'Now it is not viable to settle down and start a family'

'The better halves are surprised by the HR policies and lack of notice given for moving or travel'

'There is a need for a job that is family friendly...this is just a reality of today and the Defence Forces need to face it'

'I am away from my bed 14 weeks in the year with a young baby at home and I haven't been oversea- duties'

'In XX we don't leave the grounds midweek'

'I have no idea what the family friendly policy is- it's make it up as you go along...there is no formal policy..'

Two primary causes of work life conflict that emerged for the officers were the requirements of their contract to relocate on a regular basis and the lack of advanced notice for relocating. The officers could not settle down and buy a house in any particular location as they could be moved anywhere. Those who had bought a house had to commute long distance just so they could see their family.

'There is a lot of relocation uncertainty....Where would you buy a house? You could be moved anywhere'

'Coming back from overseas and you don't know where you are going to be placed'

'I had to change my entire job to get back to XXX, otherwise I would have been sent to Donegal'

'I have a wife and kids up the country. I have to do two years and that's nearly up. Every time I drive to work its two hours and you pay for that'

The participants were also frustrated with the lack of notice given to them before relocation. This gives them no security to do something as simple as pay a gym membership or buy a pet. There is also a lack of notice given when the officers are required to take troops on training. All of this puts pressure on their personal lives.

'No security that we are in any barracks long enough to pay for a gym membership'

'Very short notice if I have to go to the Glen or Dublin'

'There is a lack of knowledge of the future. You cannot project where you will be in 2 years'

'Feel stranded. You don't know where you will be placed'

'Got told I had to go over a mountain with troops at an hours' notice....but the senior officer gets all the plaudits'

'Told on Thursday I will be in Athlone on a Monday. Then I was told it might be for a year. I was told after 6 months that this was permanent...I couldn't forward plan....mind boggling...no explanation given..'

'13 years in the army and I never been able to get a dog!!- no seriously there's no stability- you could be called on Friday that you are going away for 8 weeks on a Monday..'

'Told on Thursday I will be in Athlone on a Monday. Then I was told it might be for a year. I was told after 6 months that this was permanent...I couldn't forward plan...mind boggling...no explanation given..'

Another issue that emerged for the officers was the inability for them to use their leave. Due to workload and lack of resources they are unable to use their leave and naturally this has an impact on their lives outside of work.

'I have a lot of leave I can't use'

'How is it meant to motivate me when I can't take leave?'

'I can't take annual leave- buy it off me or let me carry it over'

Officers are dissatisfied about the level of traveling and commuting. While they accept that it was the way of the army traditionally they feel that while life and society are evolving, the Defence Forces is not. They highlighted how there are no longer married quarters and families today are more likely to have dual careers. The Officers do feel that this issue has worsened since the reorganisation and that it could be improved. They also expressed concern about the model on which the Defence Forces operate, stating that times have changed but the military isn't changing with it.

'The travel and commuting is part of military life, however, it is getting worse since the reorganisation'

'It could be improved; there is no plan or system. A mapping system and career management could be developed to ease the uncertainty'

'Before things were very different, there were schooling and marriage quarters'

'We are missing the support structures'

'There are officers in Dublin from Cork and the only way they can get back to Cork is to go overseas...and there are officers from Dublin in Cork..'

9.2 Navy

Participants from the enlisted ranks of the Navy agree that work life balance is very difficult to have while working in the Navy. While there were a number of people who highlighted how good the organisation has been to them when there have been a difficult situation in their family, they agree that as a whole the Navy is not family oriented. One also added that even when there is a family crisis, the support that the Navy will give will all depend on the individual they are dealing with.

'I would agree that the naval service as a whole is good in knowing when a family is in difficulty. I would have to emphasise though that Naval service is not family oriented'

'I don't know of another job outside where if something crops up you would get the support you get here'

'I would agree and disagree on the support... it very much depends on who you are dealing with...its individual.'

'Work life balance is shocking'

One of the primary causes for the lack of work life balance amongst the participants was the lack of resources available to them. The need to get to work before their start time, they are finding that they need to take work home and there is a lack of downtime when at sea.

'We bring work home with us'

'Work will not get done unless we are in at 7.45am'

'You're out at sea with 16 hour days. These days can be very long at sea but you manage it..... there is nothing at the end of it...a weekend or anything. When you drop anchor at a port or whatever, its straight back out with no downtime'

Aside from being at sea, when members are at the island, in particular the younger members, there is nothing for them to do in their downtime. These members are living on ships and find it very difficult to leave the island which gives them no quality of life outside of work.

'No football pitch on island'

'There should be a library and Wi-Fi'

'There are problems getting off the island that need to be sorted. If a guy goes at a certain time to do shopping the way the bus works he will miss dinner coming back'

'There is nothing for recruits to do in evenings'

The participants also feel that their role in the Defence Forces puts a strain on their personal relationships with some even breaking down. This concern was also highlighted by the enlisted ranks in the army.

'In all seriousness if you wanted to have a look at the stats...in the Defence Forces as a whole for relationships breaking down....'

'Very hard to have a relationship when based at sea/on island'

Lack of notice also emerged as an issue that would cause work life conflict for participants. People are expected to go to sea with little notice due to the shortage of staff. There is also a sense that management don't care.

'When the ordinaries they go to sea they go for two years and its bad enough the being away from home and so on. They are then expected to go to sea at the drop of a hat, a day or two days' notice...they are not told anything- it's a shortage of staffing and the people above don't care- there is no human thing with it- it's just get out there'

'These problems were highlighted 15 years ago and nothing was done- they introduced an 8 point plan to improve WLB and it went out the window'

In addition to lack of notice, it was also expressed that there is an over reliance on certain members. They find that when they have done their share and it isn't their turn to go to sea, if others have a better excuse then they will be caught for it again.

'Last Christmas I was told I had to go to sea on the 27th. It took me days to go home and tell the wife and kids I was going to sea on the 27th. In fairness I got two weeks' notice but I went from 5th to first on a list because people before me said they couldn't do it for whatever reason- but I had done three Christmases in a row....'

The officers in the Navy also felt that there is no work life balance while they are working with the organisation. They end up having to sort out problems on their days off with no recognition for it. The only reason they keep doing this is for their personal pride.

'There is no work life balance'

'You must answer the phone on days off and try to sort out problems. The more senior people will say 'you deal with it, I'm having my weekend'.'

'Due to personal pride you won't let the problem build up. This causes trouble at home and there is no thank you on a Monday morning'

In addition, the officers are dissatisfied with the lack of notice given for presenting on a ship. This short notice upsets family plans and whether or not you go depends on how good the excuses given are.

'Could get a phone call today to present on a ship for 2 weeks tomorrow morning. The person with the excuse that isn't the most important has to go'

'You don't want to answer the call'

'If you only get 3 days' notice to go to sea that upsets family plans'

9.3 Air Corps

For the apprentices in the Air Corps there is frustration at the lack of work life balance. As illustrated in section 3.0 they feel that they are on does not afford someone to have a quality of life outside of work. As they live in, it is rare that they leave the grounds even during downtime. They feel that there is nothing for them to do and they don't have a mess.

'Nothing for us to do in the evenings'

'Tuesday and Wednesday we are left out but need to be back by 11.30pm'

'We brought our own TV and PlayStation. There is no common room'

'No kettle or mess ...they are only for NCO's and officers'

'We go to our bedrooms when finish class'

'Some people have access to the NCO mess. It is locked most of the time and if anything happens an apprentice will get blamed'

The other enlisted ranks are also dissatisfied with work life balance. It was expressed that due to their low pay they are unable to afford to do activities that their children want them to do which puts pressure on their home lives.

'It also comes back to what you are bringing home. I am telling my kids we cannot afford things. With my disposable income you are limited in terms of what you can do with your family'

Another concern that arose was the fact that they are given short notice for duties. Some participants shared how they had to cut their annual leave short to get a job done. It is

also highlighted that where their services are required, the people who live the closest tend to be relied upon more and more.

'We are losing leave. I was on holiday and had to come back with 2 days' notice as I was the only one suitably qualified to do the job'

'If there are floods or snow etc. I live close so will be the first to be called. This is happening more and more frequently'

The officers in the Air Corps also voiced some concerns around the lack of work life balance in their roles. With demands being greater and people leaving, they feel that duties are coming around quicker than before. They are unable to take time off to spend with their families and when they are taking time off they need to take work related calls.

'We are taking calls on Christmas day'

'Can't even get 2/3 weeks off to spend with family'

'More people leaving so duties come around quicker'

'Majority are working through lunch or extra hours'

The participants acknowledged that there are family friendly policies on paper, however, they highlight that the reality is that they are just on paper and not put into practice.

'On paper it is family friendly but this is propaganda. In reality they are telling people to get on with it'

9.4 Implications of findings

Overall, the focus groups highlighted issues across all ranks around work life balance and the quality of life outside of work for members of the Defence Forces. A synopsis of the concerns and their implications are below:

- Across ranks the issue of lack of notice for travel and duties has been highlighted. This has an impact on family life. For those who have children, they are forced to miss out on important events due to short notice calls for duty. This frustration is heightened by the perception that it is the same people being called for duties all the time. On an individual level, members have highlighted the high rate of marriage breakdowns due to their commitment to the organisation, as well as additional costs for travel or childcare when notice is short for duties. From an organisational perspective this issue again contributes to the risk of high turnover, meaning more costs on recruitment and training and gaps in expertise.
- For officers, there is a great deal of concern around the requirement to relocate frequently and the lack of notice given to them. This makes it difficult for them to decide on a location to buy a house or start a family. It is also frustrating for those who have family as they have to be away from them for uncertain periods of time. This again has been adding to the stress of the job by impacting relationships. It also has an impact on their intent to stay in the organisation.
- Another issue for officers was the inability to use leave. Leave is important for any employee of any organisation. In a highly stressful environment such as the Defence Forces, using leave to spend time with family and de-stress from the job can help prevent burnout and in turn long term absences.
- Finally officers also highlighted that when they do get to take time off, they are constantly on the phone sorting out work related issues. Again this is not something that should be of concern in their personal time.

10.0 Stress

In the 2015 Climate Survey it was highlighted that 16% of the Defence Force members felt they could not cope in the month prior to participating in the survey. In addition 31% of respondents feel anxious when they think of work and 40% worry about work in their free time. This represents a significant portion of members of the Defence Forces. The individual and organisational consequences of stress and anxiety warrant careful consideration. The focus groups provided participants with an opportunity to discuss

what factors cause them stress at work. The following section highlights the findings, separating the army, navy and air corps, as well as officers and the enlisted ranks.

10.1 Army

Two main causes of stress for the enlisted ranks in the army emerged from the focus groups; financial strain and geographical location. It was also mentioned across a number of different focus groups that there is a high rate of mental health issues in the Defence Forces. As outlined in section 3.0 pay is a major cause of dissatisfaction, however, it goes beyond dissatisfaction and causes members a large amount of stress.

‘There are high rates of mental health issues in Defence Forces’

‘More than half the members have a second job just so they can make do’

‘I have to live with my parents along with my wife and kids’ (Private)

In addition to pay, geographical location is also a point of stress for the enlisted ranks. As pointed out in the 2015 Climate Survey, just below 30% of respondents have considered leaving the organisation because of commuting alone. This is alarming considering the loss of knowledge and skills that turnover causes.

‘Stress is being caused by geographical and financial issues’

‘I am driving from Cavan and in mortgage arrears. I am double jobbing and doing the job of CO’s’

‘We are commuting from XXX to XXX every day, that’s €90-€120 on diesel a week.....driving 3 hours a day to fulfil our contracts’

‘In theory if you don’t meet your contract you can be put out- and that’s putting people under tremendous pressure- if you have kids and a mortgage..if fellas don’t meet that rank- there is a fear that they will not be able to pay the mortgage- so I have to keep my job- how do I do that- I have to keep travelling to the four corners of the country which means family life suffers’ (JNCO)

In discussions with Officers in the army geographical location was highlighted as an issue. This will be discussed in section 9.0. A primary cause of stress for the officers was an increase in workload and less members to take some of the burden. This has also been discussed in more detail in section 4.0.

'There are two junior officers out of what should be nine in one specific area'

'We are double and triple jobbing'

'There is no retention of highly trained expertise with no incentive to stay'

'There are too few people for too many jobs'

Contributing the stress caused by lack of numbers, there is a perception that management are focusing on recruitment rather than retention.

'Organisation is in more trouble than management thinks'

'Need to retain the right people with pay and conditions'

'Stop bringing in new people with lies, no supports and accepting they will be there for two years. People realise- I am giving, giving giving and there is nothing coming back (ref to recruits). It's a broken boomerang' (SO)

'We need numbers- retention is a big issue. It's a crisis at the moment..we don't enjoy it anymore- for the last year – for the first time in my career I worry about what I am going to do the next day because I don't have the resources. And a lot of my peers in the room feel the same- you can't enjoy a job you are doing badly..so that's mental well being but there is also physical wellbeing because of the hours you are working- so if you get an opportunity outside you are going to take it. Your family can see you are stressed you are not a nice person to be around. All comes back to manning levels..' (SO)

One recommendation that emerged from the focus groups was that there should be realistic numbers accounted for. With the numbers not taking into account people on courses or overseas, there is an inability to plan and organise efficiently.

'There needs to be a separate establishment for overseas'

'CS4 does not take account of people overseas and courses. This leads to an increased workload and stress'

10.2 Navy

Similarly to the army, the enlisted ranks in the Navy have highlighted financial strain as one of the primary stressors in their job. This in addition to the type of work they are doing and the things that they experience while at sea is causing a tremendous amount of stress.

'They are coming back mentally scarred, coming back and being sent out to west coast for patrols and not getting much more than the dole- and we have to motivate those to stay- we can't motivate ourselves!' (JNCO)

'You go home stressed off your head from here' (JNCO)

Furthermore, the turnover of members is causing the enlisted ranks stress as the workload is increasing but there is less people to complete it.

'It's getting harder to do the job with people leaving'

'Workload is far greater'

'It's not worth the stress that comes with it. in some areas I work in you go home stressed off your head and you wonder- why am I stressed like this. But the reality is- you are working with cadets and recruits- you are taking all their troubles on board. I am expected to be a counsellor, you are expected to motivate them and get them to stay and train them at any hour of the day. Yes I get an instructors allowance but it's

not worth the paper it's written on – not for what you are dealing with..I ended up in hospital because of it...because people above me not doing their job... ’ (JNCO)

Like with the officers in the army, a primary cause of stress for the officers in the Navy is the fact that demand is increasing and they don't have the resources to meet the demand. They highlight that the levels of output that they are being asked to achieve are not realistic. There is further concern that the officers feel they are unable to do their jobs to the best of their ability because they are doing more than one job.

‘With the limited time and increasing workload we are only half doing jobs’

‘Need to analyse output and resources’

‘Senior management need to go to the department and say they can't reach the levels of output they are being asked’

‘We were given an 8th ship but only have the number of people for 7’

‘There is no time for workforce planning. Numbers and workload are the key concerns’

It also emerged from the focus groups that officers feel that the reasons behind the lack of experienced resources is the focus of management on recruitment rather than retention.

‘We have lost key technical skills but the same output is expected’

‘They spend less time on retention than recruitment. Resources are big issues. We are always scrambling for trained people’

10.3 Air Corps

Poor pay was among one of the main stressors for the enlisted ranks of the Air Corps. This was highlighted in section 3.0. In addition to pay, the lack of skilled personnel with a large workload sparks safety concerns in the members.

'We have flight safety issues due to lack of personnel'

'The same two guys doing the checks on an aircraft from a weekend. They have a large workload which is not safe'

'We are down to 40% in personnel of what we should have'

The officers of the Air Corps have echoed the concern of the enlisted ranks. For them, the lack of technical staff to meet the current demands causes huge stress and some even commented that it keeps them up at night.

'We are short 50% in a technical unit'

'We can't do things safely. We need to say no to outputs.'

'We are double and triple jobbing. That would be illegal in the private sector'

'It keeps us up at night.. 'is this safe'... we are signing off on people who don't have experience'

The participants also highlighted the concerns around management's focus on recruitment rather than retention. This issue was highlighted across the Officer core in the army, navy and air corps. They also added that the official numbers of personnel are a lot higher than the actual numbers. These shortages have caused stress to the Officers. Shortages have been discussed further in Section 4.0.

In a focus group with the Defence Forces Chaplains, the severity of the stress issue among the organisations members was also a major topic for discussion. They feel that the organisation is not handling the issue of stress or mental wellness appropriately.

'they come to us (with mental health issues) because they know we won't say anything and that's the sad thing- and we might call in favours from counsellors- but as a result they are not in the medical system..mental wellness is something

we can aspire to- and we can all become unwell for whatever reason..but it's a period of a life that can be turned around if you receive the right support and nurture. but if you have to hide this..what does that do to the individual!! they come to work with a smiley face and inside they are crying'

'A private soldier that I knew had to get a loan from the credit union to see a psychologist. to get his problem sorted...why couldn't he go to the DF...why does he have to go private...its just madness! but if he did he would be downgraded straight away and class as unfit...it's just crazy!. and we have guys doing the same for ears and legs and knees and so on...the fear! they depend on overseas money to put things right- to square up all the bills..all the basic things are coming at them left right and centre'

'(with regard to mental health) the Df are hiding from a bigger problem..and we are losing personnel because of it'

Focus groups with the representative bodies, PDFORRA and RACO, also echoed the concerns raised across the other focus groups in relation to stress.

'Out of work for 2 years due to work related stress' (PDFORRA)

'Stress- if you equate that to an organisation people 1000 people on a monthly basis are unable to cope- that's a cause for concern...what are management going to do to take care of that.' (RACO)

'The US military has moved on in that regard (treatment of stress) the Irish defence forces has not.there is no screening for mental health before coming in..' (RACO)

10.4 Implications of findings

Overall, a significant amount of concern emerged throughout the focus groups for the level of stress experienced by members of the organisation. The source of stress varied depending on rank. Poor pay was the major source of stress for Privates, whereas NCO's

and Officers had concerns around commuting, workload and safety. The implications of the findings are outlined below:

- Poor pay has caused a significant amount of stress to members of the organisation who are on the lower levels of pay. Many members expressed how they are struggling to pay rent, mortgages or even put food on the table. In addition, commuting for work and duties has also been a source of financial pressure and thus stress. The potential damage that his level of stress can do to an individual is significant.
- For the individual, prolonged periods of stress can have an impact on an individual's health. If members have to be out on sick leave due to stress, this just magnifies their stress even more as they are not earning.
- Since the Re-Org, there has also been more pressure on Privates to commute for work. Participants also found this to be stressful as it puts pressure on their family situations and adds costs such as travel, childcare etc.
- Officers have expressed that management's focus on recruitment rather than retention is their primary source of stress. This has led to having higher numbers of inexperienced members while those with significant experience and capability are leaving. The workload is increasing and there are fewer members to do the work, so this has led to an inability to meet demand to the standard required. Members are feeling overworked and Officers fear for the safety of their members and the capability of performing to the best possible standard.
- Officers in the Air Corps have also highlighted that concerns about safety is a huge stressor for them. They are worrying constantly that something could happen to those they have signed off on because they don't have a lot of experience. The issue of the organisation not looking at retention is a large factor with this.

11.0 HR Policies

11.1 Redress of Wrongs

Participants were asked how satisfied they were with the redress of wrongs system within the Defence Forces. There was a largely neutral response from personnel in the 2015 survey when asked if they perceive complaints are acted upon in a timely manner (mean 2.9) and if informal complaints are acted upon effectively (mean 2.96). There was a more positive response to the statement ‘ I would not use the complaints procedure as I fear it would damage my career’ (mean: score: 3) indicating some issues around the use and effectiveness of the system. Two main findings emerged from the focus groups regarding participants’ perception of the effectiveness of the redress of wrongs; a reluctance to use the system and a frustration with the ineffectiveness of the system

Firstly, many respondents within the enlisted ranks particularly at Private level expressed a reluctance in using the system, perceiving negative consequences if they were to do so.

‘Redress – you will suffer afterwards. You may win the battle but you will lose the war’ (SNCO)

‘I would not be comfortable using it..it will come against you’ (Pte)

‘I would be careful using redress of wrongs, would not want to bring the heat on me’(Pte)

‘I would be wary of using it...in case it comes back, you hear stories..all of a sudden you couldn’t get opportunities – little things like washing dishes in the Curragh’ (Pte)

This reluctance decreased somewhat with rank, however.

‘In this room, we would not be afraid to raise a redress’ (JNCO Navy)

There was also a perception at Officer Rank that the redress system was not a system they would use because it was considered inappropriate to complain as an Officer and that it was not part of the ‘yes’ culture.

'You can't complain as an Officer' (JO)

'Officers don't redress..there is a stigma' (SO)

Secondly, the majority of respondents across rank and service expressed a lack of confidence in the redress of wrongs system. Many expressed a frustration at the length of time the process took, stating that it was often too late for the issue to be resolved by the time the process was completed.

'It is designed to wear you down' (PDFORRA)

'Doesn't happen fast enough. Timeframes don't work, the course could be over by the time you get word back' (JNCO)

However, it was acknowledged by a small number of participants that the system could be effective 'depending on the person you got'.

At Officer Rank, many were frustrated by the amount of paperwork associated with the process and how it took them from their troops.

'Too much time to complete..it is a drawn out process and the damage is often done' (SO)

Other issues that emerged in the focus groups were a concern that the system was open to exploitation and not policed adequately. Participants, particularly at Officer rank, indicated that it can affect how performance is managed. For example, some participants expressed a reluctance to give a poor performance rating in 667s for fear of a redress being taken.

'Can be exploited by some' (SO)

‘Open to abuse and not policed properly’ (SNCO)

While a high number of participants expressed a reluctance to use the redress system, it was also acknowledged that there was a high volume of complaints within the system. This apparent contradiction is occurring, it was suggested, because there are no other mechanisms to deal with decisions that are perceived as unfair or lacking transparency. Therefore, despite certain reservations, participants have expressed they have no choice but to use the system. It was also suggested in a number of focus groups that the high volume of redresses was linked to basic management issues arising from personnel shortages that should not be dealt with under this system. This was leading to a high volume of complaints which was costing the organisation valuable time and resources, taking Officers away from other duties, thereby further compounding the leadership vacuum problem;

There is a growing number of these [redresses] and many are due to gaps in management that should not be in the redress system at all. If we were managing at full capacity, many of these issues would not arise’ (SO)

11.1.1 Implications of Findings

It is extremely important to have an effective system of redress in an organisation that is perceived as fair and open to all. Many of the participants in the focus groups expressed a reluctance to use the current system, citing a fear of possible repercussions for doing so. This was predominantly at the rank of Private and this perception decreased with rank. However, it was also acknowledged that there was a backlog of redresses that were proving costly in terms of time and resources to the organisation that, many felt, were occurring because of the redress system itself and because of the issues arising from the shortage in leaders on the ground.

11.2 Medical services

While satisfaction with medical care was broadly positive in the 2015 Your Say climate Survey, there were some issue with utilising medical care provision with respect to

opportunities to go overseas (Overall mean 3.1). Privates, NCOs and Junior Officers all indicated a higher than average agreement with the statement- 'I would not use medical provision for fear it would jeopardise overseas prospects' in the survey. This belief also emerged in the focus groups. When discussing the medical services, participants voiced three main concerns; the services were under resourced leading to backlogs; use of medical services could negatively affect career progression; two tier system regarding quality of service received.

There was a general perception that services are under resourced causing long delays in completing medicals that can affect access to courses and overseas. Hence, this backlog in the medical services can ultimately affect career and promotional opportunities. Participants, particularly enlisted ranks, expressed concerns they that were being denied access to courses and overseas because they had not the requisite medical examinations completed.

'Problems getting medicals- there are 800 in the barracks and 2 officers to do medicals. 5 a day max...Lads came from limerick to get a medical done down here. The doctor came down in the bus with them. He went into the doctor first and got certified sick- he came out and said- right no medicals from me I am off sick from now..It's a circus' (Pte)

'There are not enough medical doctors, delay for medicals and this can impact overseas and promotion' (SO)

Participants, particularly at Private and JNCO Rank expressed reservations about using the services for certain ailments as there was a perception that they could then be downgraded also affecting access to courses and overseas, and ultimately their career progression. Many felt the medical standards were prohibitive and needed to be reviewed, providing examples that the use of orthotics or antibiotics could lead to a downgrade;

'I wouldn't feel comfortable using medical service...if you have to go sick or go on medication it will be held against you.' (Airman)

'There is a fear to declare an illness as you could be downgraded' (Pte)

'Can be downgraded for ridiculous issues, people hide medical issues to avoid being downgraded and many use civilian doctors' (JNCO)

'Sore throat, cold, flu, headache you are safe. Everything else don't bother going' (Pte)

'There are three different medical standards – sea going should be the only one' (Seaman)

This fear of using the services when genuinely in need was leading to the use of civilian medical services at their own cost or not dealing with issues that should be dealt with. The area of mental health, in particular, emerged as a concern and something many participants felt was an issue that could not be voiced because of the repercussions career wise. Many participants voiced concern that the extent of stress and mental health issues were 'under the radar' because of fear of the consequences;

'Would pay to go to civilian so that it does not affect my career' (Pte)

'Would not use formal services for mental health issues as there would be perception of being unfit for job' (Pte)

'As soon as you say you feel stressed you are gone...don't ever give that man a rifle again- the trust is gone. They say send that man down to the BMO. It could be just that something has happened at home..he will medically downgrade you. And they will never upgrade you again.' (Pte)

Another concern, particularly for the enlisted ranks, was the two tier nature of the system. There was a prevalent belief that the quality of medical services received depended on whether you were enlisted or commissioned. This was reflected in two ways, direct references to a two tier system by participants and in a disparity in perceptions of effectiveness of the system between enlisted and commissioned ranks. Commissioned ranks were generally much more satisfied with the service received than enlisted;

'Two-tiered system, excellent for us but not for soldiers' (JO)

'Medical systems – two tiered systems – one to beacon and one to Tallaght' (JNCO)

'An officer and NCO got the same injury at the same time but got very different treatments' (SNCO)

However, there were notable exceptions reflected in the quotes below

'My young lad was in St Lukes last year and the army paid for it' (JNCO)

'We get dental, and currently physio and that's great- but there is talk of pulling these...its bad enough to have wage cuts- but leave us the other things!' (JNCO)

Less prevalent but worth noting was the perception that the medical services could at time be used inappropriately. For example, while many expressed a reluctance to use the medical services when genuinely in need, there was also some recognition by all ranks that the services were sometimes used to get sick leave if they needed time off or could not afford to commute.

11.2.1 Implications of Findings

Overall, the findings suggest that many participants are dissatisfied with the medical services particularly with respect to the negative effect it can have on access to courses and overseas. While the perception of the medical services becomes more positive within the commissioned ranks, the reluctance to use the medical services for real medical issues and the delays in accessing medicals necessary for career development are areas of concern for the Defence Forces as this ultimately can affect both the wellbeing and career opportunities of the organisation's members.

11.3 PSS

In the 2015 Climate Survey it was reported that while there was a high level of awareness of the services provided by PSS, there was a low reported take up on the services. The

focus groups sought to gain a greater understanding of the participant's views on PSS. The following section highlights the findings, separating the army, navy and air corps, as well as officers and the enlisted ranks.

11.3.1 Army

The findings of the focus groups indicate mixed opinions on the services offered by PSS amongst the enlisted ranks of the army. There was agreement among participants that PSS is needed as there are a large number of members going through difficult times. There were a number of participants who utilised the service and were very satisfied;

'Yes it's good, I have used it. My dad died last year and they helped. I think highly of them. You can walk in any time to them'

'There are a lot of people suffering depression in the barracks'

'PSS is a good system'

However, while there was agreement of the need for a service like PSS, a lot of participants indicated that they personally would not use it. There is a fear that the service isn't entirely confidential. This opinion was mixed across the focus groups and varied from barrack to barrack.

'There is a fear that the PSS talk to the NCOs'

'The lads don't trust them'

Another fear that emerged regarding the use of PSS was the stigma associated with being seen to use it. Not only do people feel that they would be looked down upon for using PSS, they also fear that it will come against them in their jobs.

'There are a lot of people suffering depression in the barracks but if you go to PSS you might get taken off'

‘Certainly you do not mention mental health’

‘People would rather have a fight with their partner than go and talk to someone in here’

‘Fear that if tell someone anything it would be used against you’

‘Not an issue with PSS itself but rather the perceptions that exist of what might happen if you use it’

In addition to this, some privates felt that if there was a representative from their rank in PSS, then they would be more likely to use it. They feel uncomfortable speaking to officers and NCO’s. In one particular focus group there was a private who had trained a psychotherapist, however they were not allowed have a role in PSS;

‘Only officers and NCOs allowed to be in PSS. Would feel more comfortable talking to a private’

Finally, some participants indicated that if the service was independent they would be more likely to use it. In one focus group, one participant highlighted that the CareCall service was available and completely independent, however nobody else in the room had ever heard about it.

‘There is a service outside that you can use and it is confidential’

When discussing the issue of PSS with the officers in the army they have echoed some of the concerns of the enlisted ranks. They have concerns about the stigma attached to using the services and indicate that they would rather go to their peers for support.

‘I am not comfortable using it at all. There is a stigma attached if you are seen to use it. People make judgments. We just go to peers for our support’

'I would not use it as it is in a work setting so would not be comfortable but it can be useful in certain circumstances'

'It's good as a leader to send people to but would not use personally'

'If you were in any other organisation you would go to your doctor, get time off get better and come back- stress and depression are treated as a medical condition...you come in here and you are downgraded- your career is finished'
(JO)

11.3.2 Navy

Similar to the army, the enlisted ranks in the Navy had mixed opinions on PSS. While there was agreement that the service is needed, there was hesitance for a lot of members to use it due to the stigma attached to it and a fear regarding the lack of confidentiality.

'I think an awful lot of people are afraid to be seen going as there is a stigma attached to it'

'The perception is that if you are seen going over the hill and in that door that everyone will be saying.. 'look at your man. There is something going there.. his head is wrecked''

'I used them twice and like the other guy there I heard it will be all over the place but I never heard it back'

One participant had shared a positive experience they incurred while using the services of PSS.

'I had a huge PSS and It was a turning point for me. It was confidential-for me personally. I got my life sorted out- and it worked for me.'

Finally, like with the army, the issue was raised as to whether the service should be run independently of the Defence Forces. Again, only one person in the group was aware that there was an external confidential service.

'Would it not be better if we could approach PSS outside of here, like maybe another barracks or whatever?'

'You can do it through an outside company. You can get a card with a list of counsellors and you can call them, but I only know that as I was in the college'

In agreement with the enlisted ranks, the officers in the Navy thought that PSS is a good service and it is needed, however, they feel that it is often not used for the right reasons.

'The service itself is good but is open to abuse to get out of going to sea'

11.3.3 Air Corps

As with the army and the navy, the enlisted ranks of the Air Corps have mixed views on PSS. The issue of the stigma of being seen going to PSS or the repercussions it can have on your job was raised as a concern.

'There is still a stigma if you are using this'

'There is a stigma there. Not about being seen going to PPS but if they don't promote you because of depression'

'Just the fact of being seen going to them creates a stigma'

Others indicated that they would use PSS but only for short term issues. Some have had good experiences, while others say it depends on the PSS officer.

'In the main they are good enough once it is short term'

'PSS is pretty good..... I can approach anyone but it depends on who you work with'

'It is down to the PSS officer, it depends on what hat is he wearing'

With mixed reviews on using the service the enlisted ranks of the Air Corps agree that there is a need for a service like PSS.

'There were 7 suicide in 7 years in one area'

The officers in the Air Corps also felt that PSS was a service that was needed but felt that it is under resourced.

'The service is under resourced so it can't be effective. They are playing catch up'

11.3.4 Implications of findings

Overall there was agreement among participants that PSS is a service that is required, however, there are some issues with the service as it stands. The implications of these issues are highlighted below:

- There were mixed opinions about the PSS service across the various barracks. While participants in some barracks were satisfied with the PSS service, others had reservations about using the service in their particular barracks.
- Members are hesitant to use PSS due to the perception that it is not confidential and using it may impact a member's career. As highlighted in section 10.0, there are high levels of stress among members at all ranks. It is important that members have someone to speak to about their stress from both an individual and organisational perspective. As mentioned in the section on stress, for the individual, prolonged periods of stress can have an impact on an individual's health. If members have to be out on sick leave due to stress, this just magnifies their stress even more as they are not earning.

- There is also perception that there is a stigma associated with using PSS. This is making members hesitant to use the service leading to the aforementioned issues for the individuals and the organisation.
- Privates have indicated that if they were represented by their own rank in PSS they would be more likely to use the service.
- Another issue that emerged was the lack of knowledge among participants about the CareCall service available to them that is completely independent of the organisation. As the Defence Forces do not know which members are using the service there is less of a stigma attached and less of a fear that it could impact career prospects.
- Some participants have had a very positive experience with PSS.

11.4 Diversity

The 2015 Climate Survey report identified that when it came to gender diversity, there was generally a neutral or negative response to the questions asked. These questions looked at how people were treated fairly regardless of gender, whether all genders were presented with the same opportunities and if gender issues were treated adequately by the organisation. While gender diversity was not brought up as an issue by participants of the focus groups, they were asked for their perspectives on diversity as a whole in the organisation. The only diversity issue that was brought up was that of gender. The following section highlights the findings, separating the army, navy and air corps, as well as officers and the enlisted ranks.

11.4.1 Army

Diversity did not emerge as an important issue across focus groups with Privates. Most of these groups had no opinion either way on diversity. A female member did highlight that she believes her male colleagues have a perception that women have it easier in the

Defence Forces. This is something that dissatisfies her as she felt that she had given as much as any other member of the organisation for the duration of her career.

'Perception that women have it easier'

When discussing the issue of diversity in their focus groups, NCO's were concerned about the recruitment campaigns targeting women to join the organisation. There was a general consensus that this was just to jump on a gender equality bandwagon and served no true purpose as to the strategic direction of the organisation. NCO's in general felt that they would treat a female and a male equally.

'Targeting women is just a PR stunt'

'They are just jumping on a bandwagon...everyone else is doing it..so must we'

In a focus group with PDFORRA, members highlighted issues of unfair treatment towards women who returned from maternity leave. In one specific example, someone who took two extra months off was paraded on their return.

'Women who came back from maternity and took two extra months were paraded'

Another case that emerged during focus groups was a female NCO who is unable to stay after 21 years due to being unable to go overseas because of family commitments. This is despite having been on four overseas trips already.

'I have to leave DF at 21 years because have not been oversea in the last few years since having children (has been on 4 overseas trips) – needs to do a trip 18-21 years to get another contract – yet this is not possible due to childcare commitments' (JNCO)

Others participants expressed the view that in certain situations, there is bias towards women in the organisation. When it comes to training and fitness, it was claimed that women are often given chances that men would not be given.

‘Yes there is bias towards women’

In a similar way to Privates, Junior Officers highlighted their issue with the campaigns directed at recruiting women. Some feel that it is positive discrimination and that gender is a priority of leaders but there are other issues of equal importance to focus on.

‘You don’t see the INMO going out actively searching for men..there is positive discrimination. This is a job that appeals more to men.’

‘Gender/LGBT seems to be the priority not soldiering’

‘Females are sick of the PR campaign as well and having to get into photos.’

Furthermore, the Officers felt that gender would not be an issue among members if the management didn’t make it one. They highlighted that everyone is in the organisation to achieve the same end goal and gender should not make a difference to this.

‘We all wear green we want to do a job and do it well’

‘Modern society doesn’t care about any of that stuff- but it’s the focus for senior leadership’

11.4.2 Navy

In the Navy, Junior NCO’s expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of planning around the introduction of the maternity leave policy. Their primary concern was the lack of personnel available to fill that woman’s position for 2 years that they can’t go to sea. They felt that this relatively new policy was not well thought out.

‘There was no policy on maternity until last year’

'I don't think it was thought out- a female- gets pregnant- no policy until last year- out of loop for 2 years. Comes back and expected to come back to sea- 2 years where males pick up the slack'

'It's very difficult to fill a void when someone is gone for 2 years- who is going to fill the void- not thought out'

The Junior Officers in the Navy expressed similar views to the NCO's. They feel that command believe there is an issue between male and female officers, however, that is not the case. The issue, they believe, is lack of planning to cover maternity leave. From a female officer's perspective, they appreciate not having to go to sea for two years but are aware that others must cover for them. It was also highlighted that there is no similar policy for men.

'Command think that male junior officers resent female junior officers for having families. This is not an issue. There is just no plan to cover maternity leave'

'(Female's perspective)... very difficult to have work life balance. Won't be on a ship or sea relief for 2 years as just had a baby, but others have to pick up the slack'

'Nobody looked at the consequences of the maternity leave policy.'

'No similar policy for men'

A further concern that the Junior Officers brought up in relation to the maternity leave policy is the impact it can have on promotions. It was claimed that while on paper being on maternity leave is not going to have an effect on promotion, in reality it does.

'On paper maternity leave doesn't impact promotion but indirectly it does'

11.4.3 Air Corps

There were no issues around diversity brought up during focus groups with members of the Air Corps.

11.4.4 Implications of findings

Overall, there is a sense that the Defence Forces is focusing too much on Diversity at the expense of equally significant issues that impact the members lives daily. A number of comments were made in relation to the current situation on diversity and the implications are outlined below.

- Some focus groups expressed the view that female members of the DF are facilitated in certain areas such as access to courses and overseas to a greater extent than men and it was felt that this amounted to reverse discrimination.
- Reference has been made to the maternity leave policy. The focus groups highlighted that the issue was not that women were resented for taking maternity leave, but that there was no plan to cover them while they are out. This again feeds into the issue of lack of personnel to meet demand.
- Both male and female members of the focus groups across all ranks questioned the credibility of the emphasis on creating a diverse workforce, when it was difficult for those with family or caring commitments to access career course due to location and duration of these course.
- Finally, there have been a number of cases highlighted in focus groups where women were treated unfavourably because of their family situations. Once example is a woman not being able to renew a contract due to her family situation not allowing her to go overseas for the fourth time.
- The issue of LGBTQ members was not perceived as an issue by members of the focus groups who basically felt that once a person was wearing green they were all in the DF and that was that.

12.0 Representation

Overall representation was perceived as a positive development (mean 3.34) in the survey. This was echoed in all focus groups across rank and service. However, there was variation in levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the representative groups across rank and service. The vast majority of participants agreed that there was a real need for representative bodies for the Defence Forces. Most participants also agreed that it was appropriate that the Representative Bodies did not have union status – however, this view was less prevalent at private rank. While there was overall agreement that representation was necessary and to be welcomed, many did express the view that both RACO and PDFORRA were seriously limited in what they could achieve due to power disparities between DOD, DF and Representative Bodies – with many participants expressing the view that the Representative Bodies did not have ‘a seat at the table’. There was recognition that the imbalance in power and the inability to take strike action prevented the Representative organisations from achieving many of their aims. Both RACO and PDFORRA expressed frustration with the relationship between their organisations and the DOD and called for a more inclusive relationship.

‘There is a need and they are doing a good job in difficult circumstances’ (JO)

‘How much power do the representative bodies really have? Their hands are tied. All they can do is make suggestions’ (Pte)

‘Big weakness /issue is a complete disregard for any grievance on the ground or an understanding that the idea of raco/pdforra is to represent members and promote fairness and equality throughout and when I t comes to trying to negotiate or convey issues or grievances or where there are breakdowns on behalf of members in equality and fairness, the rep organisations are completely disregarded by the department. You end up having to go through adjudication to get a response or an answer to something that’s already agreed...so where is the process...the fact there have been so many adjudications is evidence to support that’

‘RACCO are important and it is appropriate that they are not a union. It would be better if they had a seat at the table’ (SO)

There were mixed findings regarding the effectiveness of the representative bodies across rank and service. While many recognised the constraints that PDFORRA and RACO were working under, there was growing frustration particularly at Private Rank that more was not being done to improve conditions. This led to a number of Privates expressing dissatisfaction with their representative body, with a number of participants expressing intent to leave the organisation;

'I left PDFORRA. I asked PDFORRA rep why didn't you push for the promotions – he said our hands were tied, we were not allowed' (JNCO, NAVAL SERVICES)

'I am a member of PDFORRA only because we can't get out of it...they make it very difficult' (Pte)

However, PDFORRA themselves expressed dissatisfaction with the communication they receive from the Department of Defence and the DF and expressed a growing reluctance and caution when communicating with their members as they may later find the communication had been changed.

'Being told one thing and others being told no and vice versa.. We don't want to give information now' (PDFORRA)

There were also mixed findings across service with a number of participants in the naval services and air corps expressing the view that the representative bodies were predominantly focused on army concerns and that differences between services and their issues needed to be considered more by PDFORRA and RACCO.

'The Naval Service are the poor cousins to the DF as a whole and RACCO' (JO)

'Can be good at an individual level but not so much collectively. Representation is very army oriented..our voice does not get heard' (JO)

'We all have different issues in the Army/navy/air corps but we just have a one size fits all in PDFORRA and that can't work..' (SO)

Overall, there was an acceptance that representation was necessary and many participants acknowledged the limitations representative bodies were working with. However, the decrease in working conditions and pay, particularly at lower ranks, has led to a growing frustration with these bodies. Certain suggestions were made including access to the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Relations Commission and to make the Collective Negotiations Agreement binding, but many including the Representative organisations themselves believe that the lack of parity in power between the DOD, the DF and they themselves is limiting the type of representation they can deliver.

12.1 Implications of Finding

There is widespread agreement that their Bodies are a necessary and positive development for the Defence Forces. However, many participants expressed frustration that the relationship between the Representative Bodies and the DF and DoD was imbalanced and low in trust. This was seriously limiting the ability of the representative bodies in achieving real representation for their members.

13.0 Recommendations

Recommendations for Pay

As discussed in Section 3.0, pay is a major issue for members of the Defence Forces. Not only have junior members highlighted that they are struggling to pay bills and provide for their families on the pay they receive from the organisation, but a number are also receiving Family Income Supplement. This emerged from the focus groups as a major source of frustration and anger among all focus groups across all ranks. Members felt that the organisation is not paying a living wage that will enable its employees to engage fully as a citizen of Ireland. By that it means that many of the junior members of the organisation are unable to participate fully in society and enjoy the experiences afforded to comparators such as getting a mortgage. It is recommended that the DoD and Military

Management review the current pay situation. Some focus groups identified military allowance as an area that could be examined in this regard.

Recommendations for Staff shortages

The issue of staff shortages (particularly officers at middle level and now NCOs) across units has been highlighted in all focus as a critical factor undermining core areas such as safety, credibility of appraisals, operational effectiveness and giving rise to family instability stability, stress, perception of organisation as fair, lack of meaningful work and ultimately intention to leave the defence forces.

All of the focus groups called for a stronger focus on retention. We recommend that this be given serious attention.

Focus groups highlighted administration instruction C.S.4 as presenting an unrealistic perspective as no account is taken of people on courses, people overseas, at battlegroup or on long term leave. This in turn gives rise to a sense of frustration and a perception of Leadership being disconnected from realities. Establishment figures need to take account of the real numbers in units.

Recommendations for Promotions system.

While all focus groups recognised the legitimacy of a system based on meritocracy. A number of fundamental problems stemming from the promotions system were identified. These are having a detrimental effect across the Defence Forces in terms of continuity of personnel, unit loyalty which in turn is affecting unit effectiveness, family issues which are discussed in detail in the section on promotion. Our key recommendations on the issue of promotions are:

- There is widespread frustration among all ranks that there is a lack of formal career structure and guidance. That people feel it is up to them entirely to work out how to develop career and get promoted. This has resulted in a 'grab what you can' culture with regard to courses and points in an effort to maximise promotion potential. We

would recommend that a medium to long term strategy would be to introduce some form of structured career service within the Defence Forces

- Aligned to recommendation 1 .The point's race that has developed needs to be more controlled. Many focus groups suggested putting a cap on the amount of points and courses that are needed for promotion. This in conjunction with more structured mentoring would enable people to balance the time spent chasing promotion with focusing on their work in units and also family life. This would also allow people to pick courses that are more relevant to their job and address concerns raised regarding the dilution of specialisms.
- There was widespread feedback among the focus groups at all levels. Points should be given for unit loyalty. There was unanimous feedback that unit loyalty is punished. While personnel recognised the need for gaining some experience in places such as DFHQ, battlegroup, overseas, it was felt that the seeming total lack of disregard for unit loyalty is detrimental to the efficacy and readiness of units and is exacerbating the constant movement of Officers (and now NCOs). This in turn is affecting the camaraderie in units and the credibility of the appraisal system Therefore we recommend that a system for assigning points for unit loyalty be developed
- There was concern across all ranks as to the notice given for courses and also for the transparency of selection for these. This needs to be addressed.
- There was a call among many focus groups for courses to be modularised (particularly lengthy courses) to facilitate those people living outside the Newbridge/Curragh/Dublin area. There were also calls for decentralisation of courses and training. We would recommend that this be examined.
- The 5 year contract for Privates was raised in all focus groups as problematic. Firstly Privates are finding it difficult to access courses and to get overseas to fulfil the terms of contract and to access promotion. This is leading to a widespread stress and disengagement among privates which is also an issue for concern among officers and NCOs managing them.

Recommendations for Appraisal

Currently the 667 appraisal system is failing due to a lack of meaningful engagement. From the evidence of the focus groups a key factor is the lack of consistency of Officer Personnel on the ground. This is resulting in the problems highlighted in the section on 667s. The effect of these problems goes beyond the immediate context of the 667 and 451 and is having a wider effect on perceptions of organisational fairness. Problems with the 451s have also been highlighted for similar reasons. Therefore a key recommendation would be a root and branch review of the sustainability of the appraisal system under current conditions. It is widely accepted from research that performance management systems will fail/lose credibility unless they are adequately resourced and there is full engagement and there is widespread evidence from the focus groups that this is happening. Adequate resourcing in terms of reviewers who know the personnel and can competently review their performance does not seem to be possible with the current shortages of relevant Personnel in the Defence Forces. Until such time as there is stability and continuity of personnel in units (i.e. Officers) it does not seem that the performance appraisal system will function in a constructive way. With this condition as a qualification we would also recommend:

- There should be a role for NCOs in the appraisal of privates but this should be achieved in conjunction with consultation and agreement of NCOs
- Reviews need to be conducted in a more meaningful manner with early career officers and Privates so that they have some career focus and guidance
- We have examined the metrics on the current 667s and we would question the measurability of a number of these (especially by a reviewer who does not know a private/NCO well). Examples are: Zeal, Firmness in control, Intelligence, Loyalty, Devotion to duty. These need to be re-examined.
- There has been consistent feedback by Junior Officers of cutting and pasting elements of 451s. The root cause of this may well lie in the time famine being experienced by reviewers due to staff shortages. However the outcome is a lack of trust in the integrity of the 451 system. This needs to be reviewed
- Feedback from officers consistently indicated a lack of training in conducting appraisals. Reviewers need to be trained in conducting appraisals.

Recommendations for Leadership

The relationship between the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Representatives Organisations needs to be reviewed. There is a prevalent perception that the current relationship is an imbalanced one with all control lying with the Department of Defence. It is recommended that there is a move towards a more inclusive partnership.

The leaders of the DF need to recognise the importance of meaningful action on both a symbolic and practical level. Many participants perceived the lack of acknowledgment of issues such as pay by senior management as indicative of a lack of respect. A recommendation of this report is that senior management need to communicate more directly with the troops. The post survey presentations by senior management were welcomed by many in the focus groups, however, the issue of pay being ‘off the table’ was a source of frustration for many. This exacerbated the perception amongst troops that senior management were removed from the reality of troops on the ground and were not championing the needs of the troops.

While the 2015 survey and 2016/7 focus groups are valuable mechanisms for eliciting bottom up communication, it is important that the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces are seen to be taking on board the feedback gathered in these forums in a meaningful manner. Communication channels throughout the organisations could be reviewed and improved in terms of transparency, timeliness, effectiveness and access to all of relevant information. For example, many participants at lower levels indicated that they did not have access to ICON, the organisation’s internal communication system. In particular, it is recommended that communication relating to decision making affecting members’ working lives (e.g. promotion, access to courses and overseas) needs to be transparent and timely.

Recommendations for Culture

There is a perception that leaders are not enacting the values of the organisation. It is important for leaders to understand their symbolic importance within the organisation. Employees look to their leaders in times of change and are extra vigilant – if leaders are

perceived as not enacting their espoused values, this will lead to cynicism within the organisation and have adverse on the organisational culture.

Many participants felt the Defence Forces need to be more realistic in term of what it takes on given what they perceived as the limited resources available to the organisation. While many feel the 'can do' cultural norm prevalent in the Defence Forces is a unique and, at times, valuable aspect of the Defence Forces, it is also recognised that this 'Yes Culture' may pose health and safety issues if the requisite resources to carry out the request are not available.

Peer support and camaraderie is an important part of the Defence Forces culture. The perceived decline in levels of camaraderie and the possible causes of this need to be addressed.

Recommendations for Work Life Balance

The focus groups indicated a lack of clear and explicit family friendly type policies apart from a hot desking initiative. This needs to be reviewed by the Defence Forces- particularly given the emphasis on promoting diversity. Family friendly policies are an integral element of diversity management.

The limited ability for members to have work life balance is attributed to a number of issues. The first issue is the lack of notice given for those who have to travel for duties. The second issue is the pressure on officers and senior NCOs to relocate. These issues could be eased with a strategic workforce plan that can indicate to members where they will need to travel to in advance so that they have ample time to make arrangements in their personal lives.

Promotion courses are an area that needs to be reviewed particularly lengthy courses in one location which are a barrier to those with families and caring responsibilities. It is recommended that the centralisation and duration of some courses be reviewed

Another recommendation in relation to the pressure on officers and NCOs to relocate is to reward unit loyalty when it comes to promotion criteria. This will enable members to settle down in one specific area as well as having consistency in their roles.

Finally, many members of the Defence Forces, particularly officers, have highlighted that they are unable to use their leave. This again can be factored into workforce planning. However, in order to effectively plan there needs to be realistic figures of the manpower available at any one time. Therefore, it is recommended that there is a separate establishment to show those who are on courses or overseas.

Recommendations for Stress

There were a number of factors that emerged in the focus groups that contributed to the high levels of stress expressed by the participants. One such factor was that of the poor pay levels. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, it is recommended that pay of other ranks, particularly privates, is reviewed. Another factor that has contributed to stress is the amount of travelling that members must do, particularly since the Re-Org. It is recommended that the Defence Forces begins to strategically plan ahead for their workforce, forecasting where vacancies will arise and offering them, where possible, to those who have expressed to be located in those particular areas.

Finally, workforce shortages and job rotation have contributed to stress for reasons outlined in section 4.0. It has also lead to major safety concerns as officers are relying on people with limited experience to complete certain tasks. It is recommended, for reasons outlined in section 4.0, that the organisation engages in a strategy that will focus on replacing people who are overseas, on battlegroup and courses to alleviate these shortages.

An issue that emerged in the focus groups was a reluctance to approach the organisation if suffering from stress as many perceived this would have negative consequences for career prospects. This is driving stress ‘under the radar’ and there was a concern across rank that stress is not being dealt with in the Defence Forces. This needs to be reviewed

and some participants suggested access to civilian services supported by the defence Forces.

Recommendations for Redress of Wrongs

Many participants called for a review of the criteria used in the redress of wrongs system as there was concern that it was being used inappropriately.

The volume of redresses in the system and the associated costs is a concern for the Defence Forces as is the length of time taken to bring redresses to conclusion. The reasons for both the volume and the delays need to be further explored by the organisation.

Recommendations for Medical Services

A key concern that emerged in the focus groups when discussing the medical services was the backlog of medicals necessary to access courses and overseas. Many participants, particularly Privates, expressed concern that the delays in accessing medicals were affecting their promotional opportunities. This needs to be reviewed by the Defence Forces.

There was also a concern, predominantly amongst Privates, that they would be reluctant to use the medical services as it may negatively affect their career progression due to downgrades. They called for a review of the policy/criteria in place to make decisions to downgrade organisational members. Concern was expressed in some focus groups that there was little rationale provided for some of these decisions and this needs to be addressed.

Recommendations for PSS

It was brought to our attention during the focus groups that there is an external counselling service available to DF members, however, there is very limited knowledge

of this service. It is suggested that members are informed that this service is available and that it is completely independent of the organisation.

Privates have also expressed that they would be more likely to use PSS if there was representation from their own rank. It is recommended that management consider making this possible.

The issue of mental health was raised in many focus groups. It is widely felt that mental health issues carry a huge stigma within the force. Mental health issues can be short term and temporary as well as long term and there is a recognition in workplaces in general that people suffering from mental health issues can be facilitated in the way people with other illnesses are. The Defence forces need to review the seeming blanket approach to dealing with mental health issues from a HR point of view.