

Independent Advisory Panels

Summary Joint Report to the Commander of the Initial Training Group

December 2008

Background

Independent Advisory Panels were established in 2005 to provide advice, support and challenge to each of the Training Regiments and the Foundation College operated as part of the Initial Training Group (ITG) of the British Army.

The Panels are made up of civilians with relevant knowledge and experience.

In the first two years of their operation the Panels operated independently of each other. In 2007 the Chairs of all the Panels met with the Commander of the ITG and the Commanding Officers of the Regiments to identify areas of common interest and concern and to provide advice on issues affecting the whole Group.

The main work of the Panels continues to focus on the individual Regiments or the College to which they relate. Their detailed local reports will be found on the individual Regiments' websites. This report provides a brief summary of the issues which emerged from consideration of the individual reports by a meeting of the Panel Chairs, held on 20 November 2008. It identifies matters which merit consideration at ITG level.

Strengths

The main purpose of this summary is to set out the areas of work where the Panels consider that further development would be beneficial. It is important to stress that this is done in the context of the very positive view which the Panels have of the work of the ITG. We have been particularly impressed by the work referred to in this section, but this is by no means an exhaustive list of the strengths.

All the Panels have commented positively on the professionalism of the permanent staff (military and civilian) who work with the Soldiers Under Training (SuT). Although we have some recommendations regarding preparation for the training role, we have no doubt as to the commitment, energy and dedication of the people whose work we have observed. SuT make remarkable progress under their leadership and guidance.

The education provided in basic skills, including application of number, communication skills and ICT is good, and is often successful in re-engaging young people who had limited success in academic study at school.

Great care is taken to ensure that SuT have access to appropriate welfare and medical support, and these services are generally of a high standard.

Systems for risk management are well developed and conscientiously implemented.

The major changes affecting all the units of the ITG, including significant changes in role and location, have been very effectively managed.

Areas for Further Development

Retention

The proportion of SuT not completing their training is too high. The reasons for this are complex, ranging from the personal to the organisational. Whilst we cannot fail to register this in this report, we are clear that this matter is being given careful and urgent attention by the ITG and their subordinate units.

Preparation for posting to and working in a training regiment or the Foundation College.

The preparation of instructors would be greatly enhanced if arrangements could be made to ensure that all instructors have followed the necessary training before they take up their training role. The significance of this observation is particularly strong in cases where instructors come to training roles following demanding operational tours.

Workload

Instructors work is demanding and stressful. The combination of a long working day, time spent off site on exercises and the short down-time between courses combine to put instructors and their families under pressure. On the whole NCOs respond positively to these challenges and seek to minimise adverse effects for SuT. The Panels recognise the very significant pressures on the resources of the Army at this time, but this situation represents a significant risk, and the longer it continues the more significant it is likely to become.

Training and Education

As noted above, we are generally impressed by the training and education programmes and their delivery. We have, however, identified the following questions which we consider require careful consideration:

- Is the balance between classroom and practical work right, particularly in the early weeks? SuT understandably prefer practical work. The more it is possible to reflect this preference in the programme, the greater will be the motivation and engagement of SuT.

- Are the programmes designed to assist SuT with learning difficulties or for whom English is an additional language adequately focused on the literacy and language skills they need to be a successful soldier? The greater the perceived relevance of these programmes, the stronger will be the SuT's motivation for persevering in work.
- Is the overall syllabus over-crowded? It appears that some topics are included, but covered rather cursorily and perhaps, therefore, to little effect. More and deeper attention to a narrower range of skills, knowledge and attitudes might actually provide a better basis for a young soldier's further development.

Equal Opportunities

Officers demonstrate a clear commitment to the principles of equal opportunities and there has been some very significant progress in this area. The Panels consider that a number of practical issues, such as the development of language skills for those for whom English is an additional language and the range of social facilities attractive to young women soldiers, require further attention. Whilst the particular issues will vary from regiment to regiment, we consider that this is an issue which should be considered on a systematic and consistent basis.

Welfare and Consultation with SuT

In general we regard the provision of welfare services as a strength across the ITG and have been pleased to see the arrangements made to enable SuT representatives to engage with their officers to address issues of concern. We are, however, struck by the relatively complex management of these arrangements, reflecting the range of military and voluntary organisations involved. We consider that there is potential for improvement in the services provided for SuT and in value for money from a careful review of these arrangements.

20 December 2008