

Streamlining For Success: The Standard Cadet Course

In 2005, as part of the Sustaining Progress Modernisation Agenda for the Defence Sector, the system of inducting officers into the Defence Forces was the subject of a joint examination by RACO, the military authorities and Department of Defence officials. Among the outcomes were decisions to change the duration of the cadet course from 21 to 15 months and to put systems in place to increase the numbers of graduates and qualified serving soldiers applying for cadetships. The initiatives introduced to achieve the latter included specific targeting in the cadetship advertising campaign, interview weightings of 10% to university graduates (level 8 honours degree or higher) and 6 to 8% to serving soldiers, depending on rank, as well as pay and career incentives. For example, graduates who successfully complete the cadet course are now commissioned as Lieutenants, rather than Second Lieutenants; this also ensures that on commissioning they have a relatively attractive starting salary of almost €40,000.

The 82nd Cadet Class was the first class inducted under these new arrangements. Members of this cadet class recently completed their cadet education and training and received their Presidential Commissions from the Minister for Defence at a ceremony in the Defence Forces Training Centre on the 17th January 2007. The review of the Standard Cadet Course, the benefits of the skills and experiences that both graduates and serving soldiers bring to the cadetship, as well as the various incentives used to attract such applicants are reviewed in this article. SIGNAL speaks to members of the senior staff in the Cadet School, members of the 82nd Cadet Class and some of their successors in the 83rd Cadet Class.

The Staff Perspective

The military profession is different to other walks of life and provides a diversity that few other careers can match. The underlying ethos of training on the Standard Cadet Course is based on the values and culture of the Defence Forces and the course is structured to prepare cadets to give leadership, ultimately in highly stressful and critical situations. However the right to lead our soldiers, sailors and airmen is earned and those we lead deserve the highest calibre of leadership: this is always the primary consideration in any review of the Standard Cadet Course. This review was conducted by the Cadet School in conjunction with Defence Forces Headquarters, the Defence Forces Training Centre and the Military College; they were informed in that undertaking by the work of a Study Group that sought the opinion of unit commanders and a focus group of recently

commissioned officers.

Lieutenant Colonel Colm Campbell has been Commandant of the Cadet School throughout the review period. "The review of the Standard Cadet Course sought to build on the excellent work that had taken place in the past. The development of leadership is multifaceted and therefore all aspects of the course were examined. This was not just an examination of what the Cadet School does or the time it takes, but equally as important, why and how we complete all aspects of education and training. Cadets come from a wide variety of backgrounds and the Defence Forces greatly benefits from this. The Cadet School values all its cadets and each has a significant contribution to make. The increased input of graduates and serving soldiers in cadet classes is a significant factor that will facilitate further development of the course. It has enabled us to move to experiential learning where we can draw on the experience of our cadets to facilitate class discussion to support the taught instruction. For example, in the class recently commissioned three cadets had overseas service with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and experience can be used in lectures for the betterment of all. However, we must strive for constant improvement.

Although the revised course is in place for a short time, lessons have been identified and acted upon. This process of ongoing review is an integral part of education and training throughout the Defence Forces." Lieutenant Colonel Campbell stresses that a significant factor in the performance of cadets is that they really want to be here as members of the Defence Forces and the ethos, values, variety, responsibility and challenge of leadership are major attractions. "The graduates, for example, have excellent qualifications but they want something more out of life and I believe that the Defence Forces is ideally positioned to

provide them with that range of opportunity.” He adds that the cadet course has always evolved and that this is another step on that road. All of the School’s staff contributed to the review of the course and the changes made have been challenging for all. “It’s been a challenge for the staff, both officers and NCOs. However, the introduction of the Specialised Instructors Course for designated training institutions, the Pre-Course Orientation and Training for Instructors Course and regular in-house staff training at all levels have greatly helped. These are conducted with the assistance of external experts, helping to ensure best practice in the delivery of education and training. Furthermore, the Defence Forces continually examines and monitors developments in other armed forces, as well as the practices in third-level institutions throughout Ireland. For example, the Defence Forces has had a close association with NUI Galway for almost forty years, and more recently with NUI Maynooth who assist in the delivery of the MA programme to senior officers attending the Command and Staff Course. This specific review addressed many of the contemporary issues in the field of military leadership, whereby military and academic training and education and personal and professional development are integrated within a cohesive framework. The provision of high quality education and best practice in academic training has been developed to complement military training while retaining the core values and discipline required by the Defence Forces.”

Commandant Paul Kennedy is an officer with 25 years military experience. He was the Officer in Charge of the 82nd Cadet Class, the first Class to undergo the revised Standard Cadet Course. “The development of the revised course and resultant changes for cadet education and training was a challenge in terms of planning and managing the various inputs. However it was incumbent on all the staff in the School to ensure that the finished product reached the high standards that merit the award of a commission and I believe that the highest standards were maintained. Ongoing adjustments were made as necessary and, as this was the first class to undergo the revised course, I believe that it worked very

well. In my experience the increased number of graduates and serving-soldiers brought a greater sense of maturity and experience which was of benefit to the entire Class.

Commandant Brendan McGuinness is Paul’s successor and is the Officer in

based on shared experiences in demanding circumstances. It is embedded into training to raise the combined capability of our units. People are confident when they are able to rely on the ability of their comrades in real or simulated scenarios.”



Major General Dermot Earley, Deputy Chief of Staff Support, Mr Willie O’Dea TD, Minister for Defence and Brigadier General Pat O’Sullivan, General Officer Commanding the Defence Forces Training Centre pictured at the recent commissioning of the 82nd Cadet Class.

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Charge of the 83rd Cadet Class. His Class entered the Cadet School last October after a rigorous selection and interview process and he describes the experience of the 82nd Class was a “defining” one. “While we are very satisfied with the result of the revised course, there is naturally scope for ongoing improvement, particularly in relation to the sequencing of training. Such changes are routine and we must react to the demands of the organisation, the size of cadet classes, changes in doctrine or the introduction of new equipment.”

Both officers agree that the revised course has been positively introduced and has not affected the strong Cadet School tradition of bonding between classmates and esprit de corps in the Defence Forces. “Friends you make in Cadet School are friends for life and I am satisfied that the 82nd class bonded extremely well in a challenging training environment. This type of bond is present in every Cadet Class; it’s a facet of military life and it’s

Forty-three percent of the Army element of the 83rd Cadet Class are graduates and almost half of both classes benefited from the interview weightings for graduate and serving-soldier applicants. Commandant McGuinness believes that the mixture of graduates and serving soldiers in the Class has proven both beneficial and successful. “The course is attractive to graduates and serving personnel. Advertising has greatly improved in recent years and we must continue to develop in this area.”

Cadetships for Graduates

For four members of the 82nd Cadet Class commissioned in January, Lieutenants Martin Crumlish, Denis Flynn, Liam Murray and Pól Ó Domhnaill, the memories of cadet training are overwhelmingly positive. They all agree that the shorter 15-month cadetship represents a positive incentive for university graduates contemplating applying for a career as a commissioned officer in the Defence Forces.

For Lieutenant Martin Crumlish BSc, who graduated from university with an honours degree in Computing Science, it was the lifestyle and ethos of the Defence Forces that drew him to the military profession. “Irrespective of the duration of the course, I



Lt Denis Flynn receives the ARCO sword at the cadet commissioning.

experiences that a graduate possesses. It's also a lifestyle choice and a personal challenge and definitely something different. It's the total package that makes this stand out as a career."

The Cadetship for Serving Soldiers Lieutenant Pól Ó Domhnaill who has a BA in Peace and Conflict Studies, applied for a cadetship as a serving soldier in the Defence Forces.

He served for three years in

they have completed represents quite a contrast to the civilian lifestyle they had previously experienced.

"This cadetship is very demanding academically, mentally and physically. I found the early transition into military life quite testing. The entire military lifestyle is a huge challenge, but I also found it very invigorating and achieving in this environment became something to aspire to," says Liam Murray. "I feel that now I know what I want to do and I have surprised myself with what is possible with my achievements and the high standards that this course demands."

Pól Ó Domhnaill believes that the experience within the enlisted ranks was an advantage in the earlier part of training but that advantage did not last. "I learned many things in my earlier military training, but that's just a small part of the cadet course. Fifteen months is a tight deadline to cover all the education and training set out in the cadet syllabus and as a result the 15-months is extremely intensive."

Previously Martin Crumlish worked in IT and felt that the cadetship gave him a welcome change from a civilian career and even though his IT career was financially rewarding it was not what he wanted to do for his working life. "I would have been very disappointed if I hadn't been successful with my application for this cadetship. The lifestyle change is enormous, but upon commissioning we have an attractive starting salary and we are starting at the

still would have applied. However the shorter duration of the cadetship is certainly an attraction; to me it meant that completing the cadetship appeared more attainable and this change alone is a very positive marketing tool."

The 15-month duration was an added incentive to apply for Lieutenant Denis Flynn BSc MSc "for some reason I thought before I came here that the Defence Forces favoured school leavers. After completing my Bachelor of Science degree I subsequently completed a Masters in Molecular Genetics. The military profession had always appealed to me, so the choice for me was between pursuing an academic career in science or a career in the Defence Forces. The fact that this new system of cadet induction also gives university graduates a 10% interview bonus for academic achievement shows that the Defence Forces is looking more for people with a variety of life experiences and qualifications."

Lieutenant Liam Murray BSc graduated with an honours science degree specialising in computational physics. For him, the incentive of being commissioned after 15 months at a higher rank and greater salary than heretofore made a cadetship something definitely worth pursuing. "Application for a cadetship is open to those between the ages of 17 and 28 and in general a graduate cadet is three or four years older than the school-leaver. That age difference can make quite a difference when coupled with the various

the 1st Infantry Battalion in Dún Uí Mhaoilíosa, Galway, during which time he was posted overseas for six months on peacekeeping duties with UNMIL. "For me the application process for the cadets was straightforward: as a serving soldier I would have had a 6% interview bonus but I am also a third-level graduate, so I got the higher 10% graduate bonus instead. This advantage coupled with the increase to 28 of the upper age limit rekindled my interest in a cadetship." The move by the Defence Forces to attract graduates is seen by Pól Ó Domhnaill as a very sensible way of inducting what he refers to as 'trained minds'. "Getting a degree is difficult and expensive. All commissioned officers are university educated after they are commissioned, but if the organisation can attract people with these graduate qualifications then it's a real gain in experience."

Five members of the 82nd Cadet Class who were commissioned in January had previously served as enlisted personnel in the Defence Forces.

The Military Life & Career

All the cadets agree that the profession they are now embarking on and the training



rank of Lieutenant; these are great benefits in addition to doing a job that is really challenging and enjoyable.”

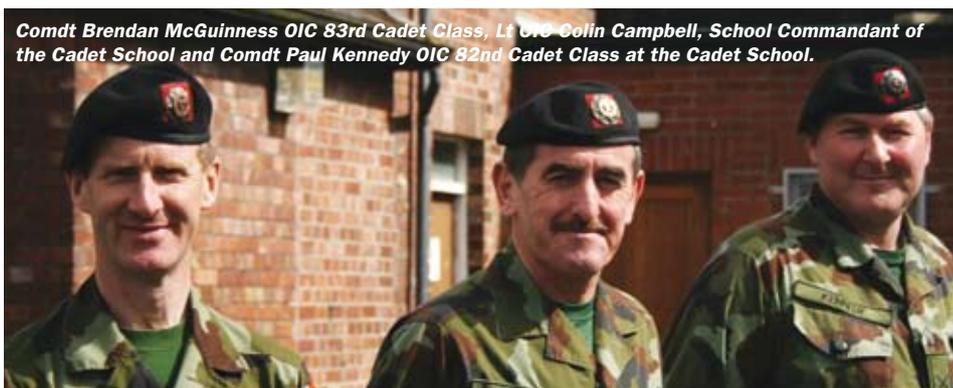
Overseas Service

The frequency and diversity of peacekeeping service overseas plays a significant part in all officers' career paths and for the officers of the 82nd Cadet Class the attraction of being deployed overseas over the coming years is quite apparent. Such tours of duty typically last for periods from 6 to 12 months; however, there are many other overseas appointments that range from 18 to 36 months. “It’s one of the key attractions,” says Lt Liam Murray. “Overseas service is a major undertaking and it’s something which I and my peers are eager to experience.”

Similarly, Lt Pól Ó Domhnaill believes that the chance to serve overseas is an exciting challenge; “The reputation of Irish army officers engaged in overseas operations over the last 50 years is very high and this means that standards expected of each of us will be equally demanding. We could soon find ourselves operating in a wide variety of challenging situations worldwide and we will have to work alongside personnel from other armed forces in fully integrated, multinational and multilingual environments. ”

Marketing the Cadetship

While the lure of this 15-month cadetship is all too apparent to those who have



Comdt Brendan McGuinness OIC 83rd Cadet Class, Lt Col Colin Campbell, School Commandant of the Cadet School and Comdt Paul Kennedy OIC 82nd Cadet Class at the Cadet School.

been successful, in light of the recently introduced incentives, particularly for university graduates, SIGNAL inquired if there are potential marketing improvements for cadetships that the Defence Forces could introduce?

“I believe the salary could be promoted more as it is quite significant,” says Lt Denis Flynn. “The advertising for cadetships is very innovative and it does work. During our cadetship we participated in a number of career exhibitions and it’s obvious that there are elements of the cadetship that prospective applicants were not aware of. While university students may be enjoying the academic discipline they are studying, it is not always indicative of suitability for a career in that field. I think the marketing campaign would benefit from more advertising on campus in third-level institutions. ”

Lt Martin Crumlish believes that if cadet advertising was more prolonged and more targeted at select audiences, then the Defence Forces will certainly attract many more graduates. “We need to compete on a level footing with multinational organisations that are seeking to recruit the best university graduates in various disciplines. But because of the life experiences that this career offers, the attractions of a cadetship will definitely stand out.” Furthermore, he also believes that were the Defence Forces to send young commissioned officers with cadets as integrated recruitment teams to colleges, universities and recruitment fairs, it would allow prospective applicants to get a truer first hand account of the career of an army officer and a more rounded perspective of life within the Defence Forces.

The Next Generation

Cadets Anna Edgeworth, Daniel Morrogh and Brendan Kelleher are members of the 83rd Cadet Class who entered the Cadet School last October. Six months into their training,

they find themselves on a very demanding and steep learning curve.

Cadet Daniel Morrogh BSc PhD graduated from Trinity College Dublin with an Honours Bachelor of Science degree. At that time, he considered applying for a cadetship but opted instead to complete a Doctorate in the same field in Germany. “I’m 27 now, and when the opportunity arose to go for this it was a now or never situation and I’m delighted to be here. The challenges of becoming an army officer are very appealing to me – but most of all is the opportunity of commanding and leading soldiers both at home and overseas.”

“I’d say that the 15-month cadetship made it particularly appealing” says 24-year-old Anna Edgeworth who graduated from DCU with a BEng in Mechatronic Engineering. She finds the dynamic nature of cadet training and military life both diverse and challenging. As an engineering graduate, she had worked in that field before applying for the cadetship. “While I enjoyed working as an engineer, it’s not something that I had considered doing for the rest of my life. The Defence Forces opens up a whole new range of opportunities. The lifestyle is appealing, the camaraderie forged in the Defence Forces is unique and the daily interaction with people in a variety of different challenges is stimulating.”

A graduates’ background of academic achievement and life experience is something that Cadet Brendan Kelleher BSc believes has helped him and other graduates to adapt more easily to life in the Cadet School - he studied business at UCC. The salary expectations for a graduate upon commissioning as an army officer, starting at approximately €40,000 per annum, was also a positive enticement. Like his predecessors in the 82nd Cadet Class, he believes the salary issue should be marketed to graduates who are potential cadets of the future. “I believe that many students in their



third or fourth year at university may be looking for a change of track and I think that increased marketing of cadetships in universities could have tangible benefits.”

The attraction of overseas service in the future is just as apparent in the 83rd Cadet Class as with their senior Cadet Class. “For me it is a massive attraction,” says Cadet Daniel Morrogh. “The military profession has always attracted me, and there’s no doubt that the opportunity of serving on overseas missions is a career goal for all of us. There is also the attraction of the wide variety of work and the intensity of these challenges that I like. There’s the obvious physical nature of the job, but more importantly the leadership and management qualities and the professional military skills that are required, as well as the need for effective personal interaction. The variety in lifestyle and job satisfaction is what makes me want to do this job.”

Brendan Kelleher is also looking forward to the unique nature of overseas service. “That is an officer’s chance to test his skills in an operational overseas environment. One of the core objectives of the cadetship is to train officers for command in challenging situations and at testing levels of responsibility. It can be daunting, naturally, but the Cadet School does empower you in a very specific and gradual way so you get used to leading at various levels. It’s all about building confidence and capability.”

Conclusion

Lt Col Campbell concludes by stating “there have been approximately 2,600 graduates from this School since it was founded in 1928. It still has as its purpose the training and education of young men and women to take their place as officers and leaders in the Defence Forces. The Standard Cadet Course has changed over the years and it continues to evolve but the golden thread remains the development of leaders of character and competence.”

Applications for cadetships for 2007 in the Army, Naval Service, Air Corps and Equitation School closed on 12th March 2007. However information on the cadet competition is available online on www.raco.ie and www.military.ie.

Right: 2nd Lt Trevor Gethins takes the Oath of Allegiance. Below: Officers signing their official commissioning scrolls.

