THE DEFENCE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

AIM

The Defence Communications Strategy aims to enhance the reputation of the Department and Armed Forces both internally and externally, through influencing the understanding, activity and perceptions of internal, domestic and international audiences.

ENDS

Our strategic communication objectives are:

- To support the Government in achieving strategic success in current operations.
- Strongly motivated Service and civilian personnel and supporting families.
- Support of the general public.
- Strong stakeholder support.
- Secure international support.
- To be seen as demonstrating and delivering the Defence Vision.

Priorities:

- Demonstrate real measurable progress on achieving operational success within a wider HMG strategy.
- Show that we value our personnel.
- Show that our Armed Forces are equipped for the tasks placed upon them.
- Demonstrate that we provide value for money to the taxpayer.
- Demonstrate the contribution that Defence makes to the country, in particular through highlighting the quality and professionalism of the Armed Forces.
- Show that we are an open Department of State committed to providing internal and external audiences with the information they need to make up their minds about Defence issues.

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The aim and ends will be achieved by ensuring that we are communicating a clear, coherent, compelling and truthful narrative. We will actively engage with internal and external audiences in order to better explain Defence to the public and to gain broad majority support for what we do. To achieve this we will need to make more effective and efficient use of communications resources across the MOD and Armed Forces, ensure that all communications activity is mutually supportive and fully joined up (both inter- and intra-

Departmental), complementary, and focused on relevant, achievable objectives.

We will deliver against our objectives through:

- Establishing a Communications "Network" across Defence working to a common set of priorities, bringing all Departmental communications activity and effect under one process with coherent governance and better integration and coordination, so that the totality of our effort adds up to more than the sum of the parts.

- Improving internal communications across the Department, with more effective feedback mechanisms, and ensuring close integration with external communications.

- A clear and persuasive narrative of the role and value of Defence in the context of wider Government Defence and Security policy.

- Working cooperatively with other parts of government on international issues (in accordance with the Comprehensive Approach).

- Developing a single evaluation framework with metrics that will track performance against communications priorities to enable re-assessment and prioritisation of effort.

- Introducing more rigorous integrated planning across the 'Network' so that resources are aligned to priorities and realigned as necessary.

- Setting communications standards and increasing the skill levels of practitioners.

- Employing an 'outcome-based' approach where possible that increases awareness and understanding, influences perceptions and activities, and changes or reinforces beliefs and behaviour.

- Recognising our responsibilities, as a Department of State, to provide Parliament and the public with clear, open, timely accurate and relevant information.

- Improving early warning of future communications threats and opportunities across Defence.

- Creating a steady stream of positive stories which directly promote MOD and the Forces' reputation but also helps to offset the inevitable bad stories.

We will enhance our communications effort by:

- Continuing to deal effectively with the pressures of the national press but concentrating greater proactive effort on regional, local, free, specialist, electronic, broadcast and non-news media.

- Taking advantage of the strength of each Service's reputation, and the high levels of public respect and support for the Armed Forces by focusing on our Forces and telling our story through Service personnel of all ranks.

- Ensuring our people are furnished with the right information at the right time, through the establishment of a coherent internal communications

strategy across defence, strengthening our internal networks and feedback mechanisms, and rationalising and improving our internal communications channels.

- Bringing greater clarity and coherence to the multiplicity of brands, sub-brands, publications and websites and managing these strategically.

- Matching channels to audiences more creatively and making full use of new and emerging technologies.

- Managing key stakeholders more strategically.

- Effectively integrating Media and Information Operations in order to create influence in accordance with doctrinal thinking.

- Greater emphasis on the use of imagery so that we can show more effectively what we are doing.

- Increased focus on international audiences, as part of the Comprehensive Approach.

Context

The Defence Context

Many factors present a challenge in presenting a clear and coherent vision of Defence. The security environment is complex and evolving. The Defence footprint across the country has reduced considerably over the last 15 years as the Armed Forces and Defence civil service has reduced in size and there is less personal 'Defence' experience among the public and key stakeholders. The relevance of the Armed Forces is less clear to some following the end of the Cold War. Defence is undergoing a period of radical change in force structures and capabilities while also involved in a higher than expected tempo of operations.

The Communications Context

Huge changes have taken place in society and the media which pose challenges to how we communicate. The public places more trust in personal networks rather than 'traditional' methods of communication like news or advertising. The way we communicate has to adapt, to better reflect audience culture, attitudes and expectations.

Key societal and media developments that will impact on our communications include:

- Increasing public demand for transparency but at the same time demanding increased personal privacy.

- Households are changing - the 'nuclear family' no longer the norm.

- People are more confident and 'connected' with technology.

- Public 'short-termism' (e.g. rising debt and falling savings) but alongside increasing concern for long term issues outside their personal lives (e.g. the environment).

- Explosion of media channels resulting in fragmentation and loss of shared experience (e.g. 1995 saw 225 TV shows drawing in audiences of 15m+, in 2004 there were 10 and none in 2005).

- The Internet has replaced 'traditional' media as the preferred, most trusted information source after personal contact.

- Newspapers are in long term decline (-2% pa) - being replaced by 'free-sheets', email, SMS, 24 hr electronic bulletins and 'Web 2.0'

- Citizen reporting, 'blogs' and mobile phone/digital camera images taken by amateurs becoming an increasingly important news source.

- Constant immediacy of media (real time) reporting – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Fragmentation in society and the media, with fewer shared experiences, mean that *generic communications strategies* are unlikely to succeed. Segmentation and targeted communications will be required.

We will not get our message across through 'traditional' media alone, (especially increasingly politicised national press). We need to exploit the many emerging channels and take advantage of their being increasingly trusted. We also need to get our messages direct to the public without going through potentially distorting media. It will be impossible to control the tide of new technology and channels or the way information is exchanged outside of 'traditional' channels.

Public and Armed Forces Perceptions

Despite the challenges, our polling shows that the reputation of the Armed Forces as a whole and the Single Services is very strong and durable. It compares very favourably with most public and private institutions. MOD's reputation, while less favourable, is stronger than most other Government Departments. Internal surveys show that our people are highly motivated by what they do and feel it is important.

But there are specific areas for attention:

- Operations in Iraq are not supported by the majority of the public and operations in Afghanistan are supported by only a narrow majority. There is a lack of public understanding of the rationale behind each mission.

- There is a growing perception that – particularly on operations - our Armed Forces are not as well equipped as they should be and that we do not look after our people as well as we should.

- Internal Communications has tended to take second place to our engagement with the media. Yet our own people are our most effective advocates in promoting our activities, and they can be our most damaging critics.

MEANS

Priorities and Outcomes

Demonstrate real progress on achieving operational success within a wider HMG strategy by:

- Establishing a common truth between briefings in theatre and in MOD so that (a) our corporate channels reflect theatre realities and (b) theatre are aware of corporate priorities.

- Telling the story through our people.

- Continue with our 'embed' policy which has been successful both in demonstrating the tactical and operational success of our Armed Forces and in introducing media to the reconstruction and development line of activity.

- Greater emphasis on UK regional media.

- Develop a narrative to show how tactical actions are leading to a strategic end, involving all relevant government departments, as part of the Comprehensive Approach.

- Develop a strategy for getting the Comprehensive Approach higher up the pan -Whitehall agenda, building on the outcome of the Capability Review.

- In Iraq, focus on the transition to Provincial Iraqi Control whilst continuing to maintain 'Overwatch' and Training Team activity.

- In Afghanistan (assuming there is evidence of reconstruction) – highlight the reconstruction and development in Helmand Province and elsewhere in Afghanistan, that has only been possible because of the military's efforts in maintaining the security situation.

- In Bosnia, focus on the success of the mission to demonstrate that things can be brought to a successful conclusion.

- Securing international support by making more use of European media, recognising the contribution of allies, ensure linkage with NATO and EU partners, encouraging allies to adopt a more proactive approach to communications and helping them to develop their media effort.

Show that we value our personnel by:

- Ensuring that all internal stakeholders convey messages on key personnel issues (e.g. Manning, Accommodation and Allowances) which are consistent with a single core script.

- Highlighting the contribution of the Reserve forces.

- Acknowledging problems in personnel support (medical, accommodation, trainee welfare) but showing clearly what we are doing to address them and balancing by showing current excellence.

- On training, focus on the extensive investment in people with skills for life, ranging from the highly technical to general training.

- On welfare, focus of the full range of support given to Service personnel (Regular and Reserve) on both operations and return.

- Helping the Command Chain to brief their personnel.

- Make more use of internal channels (e.g. include in corporate briefings).

- Collate facts and figures for personal equipment – Totals delivered and a "typical" personal kit set. Publish in internal channels and include in presentations.

- Create visible internal communications from senior command chain (and harness what single-Services are already doing).

- Highlighting the steps we are taking to maximise Force Protection.

Show our Armed Forces are equipped for the tasks placed on them by:
- Working more closely with industry to communicate our messages as part of "Team Defence"

- Showing the excellence of equipment on operations

- Placing less emphasis on future big ticket items and more on the equipment being provided today;

- Focusing on new capabilities as well as equipment. This includes highlighting the introduction of new equipment as it is deployed on operations.

- Showing the role played by military personnel in the equipment acquisition and support process.

- Periodically, review how our forces have advanced against previous benchmarks (e.g. Falklands in 1982) and the success of recent Urgent Operational Requirements.

Demonstrate that we provide value for money to the taxpayer by:
- Showing the initiatives we are taking to rationalise tail functions so that more resources are available to the teeth.

- Showing the range of activities funded from the Defence budget – at home and abroad.

- Explaining the future need for strong defence.

- Proactive engagement prior to Major Project Report 07 to offset the media's tendency to highlight the weak areas when there are success stories to be told.

Demonstrate the contribution that Defence makes to the country, in particular through highlighting the quality and professionalism of the Armed Forces by:

- Highlighting the link between our defence capability and the country's position in the World, its prosperity, and its ability to improve the lot of its citizens.

- Exposing the internationally recognised quality of our training through *inter alia* the Trainee Welfare strategy.

- Promoting activity that exposes the diverse range of Armed Forces' individual and collective achievements, which the public can relate to and compare to broader society (e.g. sport, expeditions, wider practical skills and charitable work).

- Capturing and making widely available annotated imagery of successful Armed Forces engagement across the full spectrum of military activity.

- Highlight Service personnel's personal courage (e.g. through Operational Honours and Bravery Awards in the UK).

- Commissioning documentaries that illustrate the quality and professionalism of the Armed Forces.

- Create a page on web-sites to list military successes.

- Paying greater attention to communicating the contribution of defence in the community through jobs, the activities of the reserves, cadets, met office etc.

- Showing how defence impacts on people's lives at home – through EOD, fishery protection, search and rescue, flood relief etc.

<u>Show that we are open Department of State committed to providing our people and the Public with the information they need to consider defence issues by</u>:

- A co-ordinated programme of engagement with senior stakeholders

- Keeping Parliamentarians informed through greater access to the Armed Forces on operations so that they can rely on first hand information.

- Encouraging Service personnel to convey positive messages on Service issues since polling indicates the Public listens to them.

- Improving internal communication, providing information without appearing to dictate what our Armed Forces should think.

- Co-ordinating our media operation with OGDs, in particular FCO and DfID, to ensure a coherent cross governmental approach to the provision of public information and to place the military line of operation within the context of an overarching HMG strategy.

- Establish a network of in-house channels to share material, and ensure consistency of message.

Governance

The current architecture for communications is complex and fragmented. Too many groups appear to have some 'communications' responsibility, their connectivity is either absent or misunderstood, no one pan-Departmental group appears to have clear overall ownership and responsibility for delivering outcomes and there is a lack of cohesion between functional and operational strategies.

The Governance arrangements for defence communications should reflect the following key principles

- Owned by the Defence Council and the Defence Management Board to ensure buy in from Ministers and the top management of Defence.
- A Strategic Communications Group at 2* level, chaired by DGMC to ensure the effective delivery of the Strategy.
- Recognise the responsibility of the Service COS for their Services' reputation.
- Single Services deliver their part of the defence wide strategy through their communications assets.
- Sub Groups on key priority issues (Iraq, Afghanistan, Personnel, Equipment, Resources).
- Everyone in Defence understands their role in delivering the communications effort
- Clear top level messages on key issues for all to use.
- All elements of the Department's communications network pointing in the same direction.
- DGMC to have overall responsibility for the strategy, analysis, planning, co-ordination and determining defence wide communications priorities – internal and external.

DGMC will, through the Strategic Communications Group, ensure that the MOD implements an effective Communication Strategy that maintains and improves internal and external awareness, reputation and understanding of the MOD, the Armed Forces and operations, joint organisations and Defence Agencies by:

- Reviewing the Communications Strategy, ensuring it is being delivered effectively and that it remains current and fit for purpose.

- Owning and developing policy for communications across Defence.

- Strategically managing the Defence Identity and Brands

- Approving and enforcing pan-defence communications standards and style guides

- Ensuring resources and professional capacity are deployed effectively and in line with strategic priorities.

- Monitoring and reviewing risks associated with the Communications Strategy.

- Resolving issues when the delivery of priorities is threatened.

- Escalating issues to DMB when a resolution cannot be reached.

Defence Identity & Brand Management

Defence Identity exists but it is not clearly defined or managed. There are hundreds of sub-brands and logos utilised throughout Defence, across a wide range of applications, which bear little or no association with Defence, MOD or the Services. There are no standards or formally endorsed style guidelines against which these have been created and marketed. The prefix Defence is now being used for at least 24 external organisations and appears regularly on a range of external consultants' and contractors' business cards. DirectGov's Web Convergence Report (Oct 2006) identified 47 independent and unconnected MOD Websites

The Departmental Plan articulates the requirement for Defence to "act as one organisation with a shared purpose", by implication, it identifies the need to develop a communication vehicle to meet this challenge. The Defence Vision articulates the standard against which the whole Department should perform and lays out an aspiration for future standards.

Way Ahead

- Enhance the management of reputation by bringing greater coherence to multiplicity of brands and sub-brands and managing them strategically.

- Establish a Brand architecture/hierarchy.

    o Establish which brands, and their interaction, offer the best means of achieving our communication effects.

    o Establish the clarity about the key Defence brands and understand what each one is for and to whom it is aimed at.

    o Introduce a clear standards and tools to manage brands, sub brands and logos.

- Establish control of marketing (& licensing) and communication research across defence.

Resources

Current position

We have no clear idea of the number of people involved in defence communications work or their costs. Over 1000 people in MOD have a media/communications job code. This excludes many military personnel involved in communications work. Of this only 107 work to DGMC.

By moving to a more strategic approach it should be possible to both generate efficiencies and deliver more effective outcomes. Implementation of the communications strategy should enable us to:

- Drive out inefficiencies – by reducing duplication or parallel working, centralising resources where sensible to do so and identifying areas of work that could be outsourced or stopped

- Rationalise the set of printed products, internal magazines and websites

- Establish and control the brand architecture.

- Monitor and allocate resources according to strategic priorities, rather than in organisational stovepipes.

- Better coordination of planning and delivery

Future Activity

In order to ensure resource is used efficiently, effectively and is focused on priority activity we need to put a programme of work in place to:

- Establish a baseline of human and financial resource assigned to communications.

- Examine where efficiencies and more effective coordination can be achieved by delivering and managing communications channels (e.g. internet) through central shared services arrangements.

- Develop a system for pan Defence communications planning and assigning resources to agreed priorities, rather than in ad hoc stovepipes

- Aim for an overall reduction of the number of people engaged in communications activity and increase the skill level through a combination of in-house training and Government Communications Network.

Evaluation

We need to be able to measure the impact of our communications efforts both internally and externally. At present we do not have a clear set of metrics that can tell us whether or not our strategy is succeeding. What evaluation we do is incoherent (a lot of activity across the Department working to no single plan and with no overall visibility), and in some cases under-resourced.

Internal

- DASA Attitudinal Surveys – measuring opinion amongst armed forces and civilian staff within the Armed Forces and MOD.
- COS Briefing teams.
- Single Service Continuous Attitude Surveys (being replaced by a Tri-Service survey).
- Family surveys.

External

- Metrica – monthly media analysis of national broadcast and print media in respect of Iraq and Afghanistan. Measures favourability of articles against our key messages. While not perfect, this gives us a fair idea of reporting trends across the media as a whole.

- Ipsos MORI – six-monthly polling on the British public's attitudes towards the Armed Forces, the single Services and the MoD. The poll also measures people's attitudes towards the Armed Forces' involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Supported by annual Focus Groups. This should be expanded into asking more questions about top issues facing the Dept.

- Ad hoc polling on major issues (e.g. Trident).
- Surveys of potential recruits and gatekeepers by single Service recruiting organisations.
- Single service reputation surveys.
- In theatre polling by DTIO.

Additional research relevant to Defence issues is carried out by the media and other agencies (e.g. the BBC).

As a matter of priority, we need to:
- Gain full visibility and understanding of all research and analysis activity – both that we sponsor and that we do not (e.g. BBC and OGD monitoring and analysis).

- Ensure that all MOD/Armed Forces research is mutually supportive and aimed at delivering clear business effects: specifically that results should play a key role in deciding our communications priorities and how best to deliver them.

- Establish better linkages between Central reputational polling and that done elsewhere in MOD (eg in theatre by DTIO, in UK by the single Services and recruiters).

- Eliminate duplication.

- Improve our analysis of the results and outcomes.

- Feed the analytical results back into our planning process.

Stakeholders

Importance

Much good work is already underway to engage with key stakeholders who can influence broader perceptions of defence, through the single-Service engagement strategies and other contacts. This should continue. But we need to do more to join up our approach. The aim is to increase their understanding of what we do and, where possible, encourage them to become advocates for us.

As a first step, we have sought to establish how we are viewed by a representative sample of stakeholders agreed by the DMB. This would help us determine how best to develop the relationships with them.

Initial engagement

Last summer the DMB agreed a programme of engagement with around 30 selected stakeholders to find out their views on Defence and on their dealings with the MOD and Armed Forces.

The results show that, overall, opinions differed between:

- Those stakeholders who were 'operational partners' (mostly from industry) who had strong working relationships with us.

- Those who can be regarded as 'policy shapers' (including public bodies, academics and Non-Governmental Organisations), some of whom had very little contact with us.

The 'operational partners' were generally very positive about their relationships with us, though they had some concerns about our bureaucracy, speed of decision-making and resource issues. The 'policy shapers' tended have rather stereo-typed images of us and felt we were aloof, secretive, and should be doing more in the wider world as a 'force for good'.

Next steps

We now need to verify that we are identifying the right people and organisations and have a clearer picture of their current contacts with the MOD and Armed Forces. We also need to ascertain the extent to which it matters that certain 'policy shapers' do not have a positive view, and assess the extent of their influence.

We therefore believe we need to do some more preparatory work in order to get the most out of a defence wide stakeholder engagement programme by the DMB. This includes:

- Mapping more clearly who our key stakeholders are across the MOD and Armed Forces

- Plotting the extent to which all identified stakeholders are currently engaged by our most senior Officers and Officials and where there may be overlap or gaps

- Prioritising those stakeholders who have influence and relevance but with whom there is little contact or it is viewed as being negative

- Suggesting a simple method of co-ordinating contacts and sharing the information gleaned so that we can gain most benefit and the stakeholders themselves are not overloaded.

- Proposing a systematic and co-ordinated programme of engagement by specific DMB members with specific stakeholders.

Objective of this further work

Our objective is to obtain a targeted initiative to achieve more powerful and informed advocacy on our behalf where it can do most benefit and to capitalise on the productive relationships which already exist.