



Royal Commission Update - Wagga Wagga Day 2 - 29 November 2022

RSL References

Positive:

- Reference to National ESO Forum - will continue to listen to this important group

Negative:

NA

General remarks

- Some recommendations on urgent action in the Interim Report

8:30am - 12:15pm - Colonel Andrew Deacon Commanding Officer, 1st Recruit Training Battalion, Kapooka

- Experience with Military Police and Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Applied for role at Kapooka - experience has shaped his approach to unacceptable behaviour
- Has had a three-year tenure - doesn't believe longer than this would be ideal
- Kapooka Commander has three priorities
 - Safe and effective delivery of recruit training
 - Training modernisation - looking for ways to improve
 - Meet Directed Training Requirement

Demographics of recruits

- We recruit from society - changes in society impacts recruits we see
 - Predominantly young Australians 17-23
- Standard for those in combat roles in Army require 7.5 on beep test on entry, for non-combat roles it is 6.1 - during training these are combined platoons
 - Non-combat recruits involved in all aspects of training
- Younger age groups more vocal, willing to question, stand up for rights, discuss mental health
 - Recruits will call out behaviour that is unacceptable
 - Has led to change of leadership ethics to become more participative, small group discussions, self-reflection
 - Kapooka's approach is normalising conversations about mental health - getting support is OK - focus on long-term wellbeing
 - Try to have professional support available if, and when, they need it

1RTB Training

- Will always be an element of risk in training – need to reduce this risk as much as possible
- Overhaul of physical training in July 2021 – standard required in PT sessions are now calculated on individual best effort basis, while maintaining a team ethos
 - Despite change, instance of injury has remained constant
- Reviews injury data weekly, and as part of monthly and quarterly reporting
- Five courses conducted at Kapooka – most recruits going through Army recruit course
 - Army pre-conditioning program for recruits who don't meet the Army's physical standard
 - Indigenous pre-recruit program focussed on fitness and Army Indigenous Development program is academic focussed
- 6000 planned recruits through Kapooka per year – achieving about 65-70% of this in 2022
- Instructors usually remain within a company for a year of their posting, with the ability to move after 12 months
- Instructors will spend all day with recruits
- Yelling can be used for particular purposes – urgency etc.
 - Can be inappropriate use of yelling – this can impact on recruit's personal wellbeing
 - Instructors can be helped to not use inappropriate yelling
- Length of training contemplated to be shortened in 2023 – being piloted – 8 weeks instead of 12
 - Intent being to move recruits through training system more quickly to get them into deployable roles, allowing for faster deployability
 - Includes removal of content – reducing time, not necessarily increasing the load
 - Less PT than what a 12-week recruit would do
 - Removed content will be taught elsewhere – content to be removed determined through Royal Military College (RMC) – includes weapon training and revision time
 - Trial to be evaluated, but this is yet to be finalised
- De-loading – during training you will increase load, reach a peak, then taper off to allow for recovery
 - Some lower tempo weeks during recruit training course i.e. less physical activity
 - There could be more de-loading in the course, but there is a challenge of time – trying to improve this all the time

Injuries of recruits

- Since 2012, 3735 injuries as recorded at Kapooka – about one in 10 suffering an injury – compared with Navy where 4 in 100 suffers some kind of injury
 - Army course is physical – can't speak to Navy – highest proportion of injuries are soft tissue injuries, with a majority coming from field training
- Medical resources at Kapooka – has had to raise concerns about resources available through to Joint Health Command
 - Raised the amount of clinical psychological support available in Kapooka – there were too few
 - Got more, but would prefer more
 - Clinical psychologist was not available on base for a period of time – previously 3 people were available
 - There is now a clinical psychologist working in FIFO – 4 weeks on base and 2 weeks telehealth – this is inadequate for ongoing treatment
- Reporting of injuries can be delayed or ignored – this is a difficult thing to try and improve
 - Tried to improve accessibility of medical services available
 - Human nature element at play where they want to continue to progress – so if they can manage an injury, they may not report
 - Every instructor will inform recruits that if they have an injury, they should report it at earliest

opportunity and get it treated, so the damage from the injury can be minimised

- Also recorded in Sentinel system, to have medical record of the injury and have it noted
- Instructors receive a Pre-Raise Brief before a recruit class arrives – including physio from Joint Health Command about how some injuries may present or what they might observe
 - Want instructors to be able to identify a change so they can refer them to medical system
- Delays during rehabilitation at Kapooka – can be moved on if close to graduating or can undergo rehab/convalescence at Kapooka
 - Response is individualised
 - Where staff members are injured, try to keep them with their team – may be light duties etc.
- Suggestion injuries should be reported daily
- Suggestion during rehabilitation process, should participate in other forms of upskilling –
- Recruits have administrative requirement to start a will at Kapooka (not necessarily finished) – absolute requirement pre-deployment
 - Will is retained in PMKEYS HR system – can be checked – must be completed by the time they're with their unit
 - Legal corps provides advice re. wills – paralegal etc. will help put the wills together

Selection and training of Instructors

- 3 week Recruit Instructor Course, 2 week ADF Instructor Course
- Selection of instructors is fundamental – selected through the Army's Career Management Agency – Kapooka can voice concerns with the selected instructors, but don't directly select them
 - Have had issues with the performance of some of the Instructors
- People differ in capacity, responses to stress, and behaviour towards others
- Anyone who engages in bullying behaviour ought not to be an instructor – same for those involved in sexual misconduct
 - Others who should be precluded are broadly those who have engaged in unacceptable behaviour, but needs to be judged on case-by-case basis
- Training of Instructors in five days of formal training focussing on delivery/method, with another 10 days of Unit Induction Training, which may focus more on content and Kapooka context
 - Do mandatory suicide awareness training, but in terms of mental health, need to have a look at better prepping our instructors re. recruit's mental wellbeing i.e. vicarious trauma training
 - More tools we can give Instructors to deal with stressful circumstances or know themselves, the better
- Basic instructor training offered as everyday part of career progression
- Instructors are supported through Chain of Command – provide assistance through Instructional Development platoon – support through the medical system – chaplains
- Kapooka has the workforce needed to do the training required

Instructor Fatigue

- Essentially removed from families during a course, a week before and a week after each
- If there is an issue, will be taken to Commander through the Chain of Command

Unacceptable behaviour and Workplace Behaviour Survey

- Commander received survey results 10 months late – unhelpful
- Each recruit class is surveyed in final stages of their course
- High incidence of bullying instigated by instructors, with increase in rate reported from 2019 to 2021
 - This also occurs with other forms of unacceptable behaviour

- In 66% of cases, no action was taken in response to unacceptable behaviour
- Psychosocial safety climate
- 20% of recruits have said Instructors have not demonstrated that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated, while 31% say incidents of unacceptable behaviour have not been dealt with well
- Upon receiving report, will pore over it to analyse it and make improvements

Separation process at Kapooka

- Medically discharge population have a hazard ratio 2.8 times those who voluntary separate
- Medical discharge rate at Kapooka is less than 1% in 2022 - this has been relatively stable from a percentage perspective
- The process of discharge is an individual process based off individual circumstances - recruit goes to MECRB - receive a J51 or J52 form - will do a period of rehabilitation/convalescence or will commence transition process
 - Includes DVA claims, access to support mechanisms, upskilling, career and resettlement planning, meeting with Joint Transition Authority
 - Recruit claims to DVA are prioritised to be finalised - no recruit would leave Kapooka without a finalised claim
 - Then there is a final clearance process - health checks, administrative processes
- Mandatory appointment with medical officer as part of separation process
- Access to psychological support is dependent on individual - as part of health exam, will be assessed for psychological wellbeing
 - Can be referred to psych or mental health support, but it is driven by the individual
 - Consideration given to more psychological support being provided to recruits transitioning out
- Support provided to recruits is much improved from what it was - but individual needs to chose to access the support
 - Is becoming holistic in terms of preparation for their transition

2:00pm - 5:15pm - Commander Alisha Withers Commanding Officer, Royal Australian Navy Recruit School, HMAS Cerberus

Recruit School

- 107 staff, with room for 121 - i.e. a little understaffed
 - No current impact, but if recruitment was full, impact on staff respite - can lead to burnout
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 - Obstacles to increasing staffing levels - can attract junior sailors, but not junior officers
 - Can be additional pressure on staff, with senior staff not able to provide as much support to junior staff as needed
- Gender diversity within staff cohort - 40% of staff are female, both by coincidence and design
- 59 recruits - 1 Division, 4 classes - each division has 8 recruit instructors
 - Each intake is a division - can be up to 150 recruits
 - Can have 3 divisions online at any one time, offset by three weeks
- Recruit cohort in 2022 - 32% female
 - Recruiting is down and not meeting targets - about 45%
 - No benefit in Recruit School being involved in Recruit selection
- Recruiting process
 - Some recruits feel like they've been rushed through recruiting process - not emotionally

adjusted - Defence Force Recruiting 'rushed them through the door'

- Some recruits can't swim upon entering recruit school
- Younger age - issues with maturity

Recruit training

- 9 weeks training - not enough to teach re. illness, injury, acceptable behaviours, for a lot of people
 - System in place if 9 weeks is not long enough - can provide additional training
 - Also have a separate division for mentoring recruits, with one-on-one work, to get them up to standard
 - Often this is for swimming ability, fitness, weapons training, behavioural standards i.e. adhering to ADF standards, how they treat others, lack of drive to be better
 - Will be put on a supplementary training plan - this is tailored around whatever the recruit is deficient at
 - No analysis of how effective this supplementary training has been
 - This transfer rate for additional training sits at about 15%
 - When being transferred back a division, they lose the relationship with their original division - can affect pride
 - There is perceived stigma on being transferred back - try to have positive messaging re. transferring back
 - Mental health supports are available for those being transferred back
- Often difficulty in swimming competency, particularly in older cohort or those with a CALD background - for those who don't swim, Navy pays for civilian lessons to upskill them before they join
- Developed new strength and conditioning program at Cerberus - this is an education process that has reduced injuries
- Aspects of Recruit School that might be stressful include:
 - Older recruits can struggle with discipline and living with younger recruits - can find it harder to adjust

Instructor training

- Instructors aged between mid-20s to early 40s, with a majority in the younger age bracket
 - Younger age bracket can be an at-risk cohort - but they understand the supports available to them
- Recruit instructors trained in instructing techniques
- Within staff there is a chaplain - one of the first lines of response - mental health first aid
 - Confident chaplain can make mental health first aid judgements
 - Not equipped to make mental health assessments
 - Also have a Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officer that is non-religious
 - This year, chaplaincy support is sufficient to support recruits in crisis, but if it was fuller, it might not be
- Some recruits are from vulnerable cohorts - staff are trained in mental health first aid from a leadership perspective - 1 day course
 - There is ancillary exposure to challenges recruits face
 - Annual mandatory suicide awareness training - online multiple choice - takes one hour to complete - considers this adequate
- In all professional development courses, there is always a module on mental health first aid
- Recruit instructors have provided counselling to recruits in distress - seen this done in a really positive way, including on drawing on other supports - sows training is where it needs to be
 - This happens one recruit per intake (12 intakes in 2022)

- Recruits can go straight to on-base medical centre or psychologist, mental health nurse, or a doctor
 - This may come with some wait time, but if a recruit is in crisis, someone will be made available ASAP
 - If Cerberus were at fuller capacity, this could be a longer wait

Recruits who are struggling

- Recruits who are struggling contribute to determining their course of treatment etc.

Culture

- Positive culture - try to empower staff to get best out of themselves and recruit instructors - given leeway to tailor instructing to their own styles
- There are no cultural challenges at Recruit School
- Training at Recruit School sets the tone for the recruit's career - positive culture at school shows recruits the best and show them what is possible
- Defence Values - Service, Courage, Respect, Integrity, Excellence - are displayed at the Recruit School - intended to guide behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour

- Main cause of unacceptable behaviour is that recruits are transitioning from civilian life to Defence life
- Recruit School has highest number of instances of unacceptable behaviour recorded among all Defence schools since 2019
 - Reflective of strong reporting culture at Recruit School - staff, other recruits, recruits themselves can report unacceptable behaviour
 - No concerns - majority of reported incidents are not substantiated in the end
 - Any unacceptable behaviour report is brought to attention of executive officer - will initiate fact-finding - will take from there depending on what is found - complainant will be counselled on why a matter hasn't been substantiated - if substantiated, disciplinary action will be taken
- Higher levels of staff reported as perpetrators, with higher proportion of recruits as victims
 - Often also recruit on recruit low-level unacceptable behaviour - low-level name calling etc. - during early days of recruit training affected by transition in to Defence
- No formal analysis of the data on unacceptable behaviour
- Categories of unacceptable behaviour include harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, abuse of power
- Annual awareness training for staff on what constitutes unacceptable behaviour
- For younger recruits, often the punishment is informal counselling, as they are learning the expectations on them

Workplace Behaviour Survey results

- In 2021, 35% of those surveyed had experienced unacceptable behaviour (recruit cohort of 928 recruits means this would be 236 individuals)
 - Believes this is not terribly concerning but also believes this is worth communicating
- Bullying was reported by 12%, sexual misconduct reported by 8% - this can be attributed to newer recruits adjusting to transition
 - Women experiences bullying and sexual misconduct at a higher rate than men
- Levels of unacceptable behaviour were lower than Whole of Defence - Sexual Misconduct is higher at Recruit School than Whole of Defence
- Particular recruits at risk of being ostracised include those who are not as socially outgoing or are more socially awkward

- More than 20% of recruits who experienced unacceptable behaviour did not report, with some feeling incidents weren't serious enough to report - but the other reason for not reporting was a lack of trust in the system
- Women have a lower sense of psychological safety than men
 - Will try to provide environment for people to speak up and feel safe and secure
- Are the unacceptable behaviours gendered? Are they about abusing power?

Sexual misconduct

- Sexual offences support person (SOSP) - Implemented at Cerberus in 2019 - provide support to both alleged perpetrator and complainant
 - Independent person who can explain available supports, process, etc.
 - After the event program, with two SOSPs on-base
- Only been utilised once at Recruit School in 2022
- Separation between men and women, both in Recruit School and at sea

Transition

- Discharge medical → meeting with Transition coach → get them home ASAP → maintain contact with them during this process
- All recruits looking to separate are given access to the medical system - Commander will also sit down and have an exit interview with each recruit discharging
- No recruit has left in 2022 due to behaviour of another recruit
 - Acknowledges recruits could be reluctant to report
- Certain forms when ADF members apply to transfer or separate - would a recruit ever not be approved to discharge - this has not happened while the Commander has been at Recruit School, they've all been approved
- When recommending length of waiting time between separation and potential re-enlistment, these determinations are made based on experience of staff with the recruit
- Always ask recruits whether they could have been supported in their Transition into the Navy during exit interview

Suicide and suicidality

- AIHW Nov 2022 report vulnerable cohorts - i.e. those under 30 who have left service, particularly those who have served less than a year
 - No opportunity to talk the report through with Chain of Command - would have been helpful to understand risk factors at a deeper level
 - Not circulated AIHW among Commanders
- Victims of unacceptable behaviour only followed up by Recruit School when there has been an ongoing investigation
- No support for recruits who have been discharged from Recruit School
- Some serious incidents of suicide ideation at Recruit School - no analysis of why this occurs
- 4-5 recruits sent for a mental health intake assessment each week - Cerberus does this for the smallest indications there may be an issue
- Member support is provided through Divisional system, through Chain of Command - responsive to what the individual needs
- Has not considered data re. recruit suicidal ideation, although this may be useful
- Young men may not have skills to express emotions or stress they are feeling - stress may be articulated through suicidal ideation - character development training tries to equip them with these skills - there is also emotional intelligence training (social mastery)