



Wilton Park

## Background Paper

# Connected forces, educated minds: transformation and professional military education

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### Introduction

Professional military education will be critical to future military success. The revolutionary change in both the international system and society is normally only associated with war. Any such revolution forces choices to be made. Moreover, the costs of the armed forces are rising at a time when the social base upon which they rely is undergoing profound change in the midst of the worst financial crisis for a century. With efficiency given higher importance than effectiveness the preservation of institutions is too often thus placed before proper consideration of their role as enablers of strategic effect. In such circumstances intellectual interoperability will be critical to mission command success. Such interoperability will in turn demand a radical overhaul of professional military education. However, any such reform will require go against a pressing bureaucratic tide in which process is placed above strategy and in which again efficiency is seen as more important than effectiveness. At the very least the military (and civilian) learner must be placed at the heart of outcomes but such change will demand a vision from a military leadership often too busy with operations to consider the role of professional military education and thus to make educated choices about what exactly they want and can expect from education providers. To that end, professional military education must grasp the very latest professional education concepts and technologies to create an immersive learning environment shared across the Alliance in which knowledge, skills and competence are seen in the round.

The need is pressing. NATO and EU forces face an extensive and growing task-list. However, it is unlikely that significant more moneys are likely to be found for extra personnel or equipment. Defence education and academies have served the armed forces well. However, the role and value of cost-effective, innovative professional military education must play an enhanced role in promoting effect in an age of austerity and strategy. In the first instance the focus should be on the strengthening of the knowledge base so that education can better act as a force enabler and effects multiplier. Given the need to focus on the learner, particularly in theatre where the need for education is at its greatest and where sound education faces its sternest test defence academies must thus seek to become learning machines for outcome-based education. Additionally defence academies must seek to better act as a critical nexus of security knowledge able to generate and share critical knowledge to all stakeholders and partners, including police forces, government, relevant civilian organisations and industry. Technology will play a central role as a key enabler in the life-long contract between educator and learner in support of blended learning programmes with e-learning central to support deployed personnel.

## **The Conference Mission**

The focus of the conference is NATO military professionals better prepared through education to command success and forces better connected through intellectual interoperability. Therefore, the conference will consider the very best of contemporary professional education through four elements to promote connected forces, educated minds – the knowledge, skills and competency base, learning goals and methods, better exploitation of technology and future leader education. The primary conference mission will be to help establish an international consensus on the body of knowledge required to support military effect in complex environments as the first step towards re-energising professional military education as a strategic enabler. Thereafter, the conference will consider reform of defence education to provide a cost-effective means to enhance military effect and the creation of a better nexus between researchers and armed forces so that lessons-learned from operations can be assessed scientifically and rapidly result in improved performance.

## **Knowledge, Skills and Competence**

*Empowering the Learner:* The generation and transfer of relevant knowledge will be critical. Professional military education should thus be founded on a simple principle – ensuring the learner knows and understands all that is needed at every level of command to be mission effective. To that end, such innovation will to some extent require a reversal of the educator-learner relationship by affording leadership to the latter and by academies providing a safe learning environment in which risks can be taken to refine intellectual curiosity into cutting-edge effect so that knowledge leads to creativity.

*Exploiting Research:* Central to a learner-centric approach will be the strengthening of research skills and the role of research as a means to generate and act upon environmental and technical factors vital to mission success. This will be particularly important in hybrid warfare where understanding historical, cultural and political context is a key enabler of mission success.

## **Learning**

*Clarity of Education Focus:* Immersive education generates profound challenges abound for the educator not least because there is little or no intellectual consensus as to the core role of professional military education. However, there is a self-evident need for clarity of focus on learning outcomes with an emphasis on creating expanded opportunities for learning success. That will require a deeper working knowledge of technical fundamentals and developing skills that lead to the creation of new products and systems all devoted to creating officers able to cope with the pressures of hybrid war.

*Outcome-based Education:* Examples of such education should be sought from other fields. Medical education has placed a renewed emphasis on outcome-based education with individuals being assessed after each year of development. This is supported by a far flatter command hierarchy in which the emphasis is placed on the creation of teams of professionals designed to deliver relevant results in an often uncertain environment.

*The Professional Military Education 'Market':* There also needs to be a broader understanding of the defence education market within the security realm. This will enhance both defence education and defence academies to pass the test of relevancy which is likely to become more severe. 'Clients' would be drawn from beyond the traditional pool and reach out "all those in the food-chain of security" to officers above the two-star rank, as well as partners in government and industry.

*Outreach to other Security Stakeholders:* To modernise the provision of professional military education it would be useful to model the value of said education to marginal stakeholders as that will assist in the validation of the relevancy of programmes.

*The Value of Enduring, Immersive Learning:* Life-long learning will need to be reinforced by a concept of "enduring, immersive learning" in the learner and a realisation that failure is a possibility. Only then will sound metrics be established for both education and learner given

the specific need to enhance the effect and utility of the use of force and associated actions in pursuit of mission success. Moreover, aligning NATO education and training with international civil/military standards will provide the vehicle for standardisation of mutually-recognised qualifications across the Alliance. Should the 2010 Bologna Accord and the creation of a European Higher Education Area provide the basis for professional military education? Many defence academies are now accrediting course at both Bachelors and Masters levels (BAMA).

## **Technology**

*The Utility of Technology:* Technology could be used to far greater effect in learning but greater understanding is needed by both educator and learner as to the utility and possibility of technology. It may in any case be easier for younger generations (Generations Y and Z) for whom the use of technology as a conduit and interface with information is a matter of routine.

*Exploiting the Information Environment:* The twenty-first century information environment will be unstoppable and the challenge for the educator will how best to utilise technology in support of 'blended learning' without chasing the latest technological fads. Indeed, the emphasis should be placed on how best to exploit existing technologies. Technology will likely enable new knowledge communities that should in turn reinforce life-long learning through improved distance learning and enhanced choice and control for the learner.

*Understanding Constraints:* To understand the use of technology several potential constraints will have to be addressed including the utility of single-site defence learning centres in a life-learning realm, the role and utility of the defence educator. However, the most pressing consideration will be to understand the technologies learners will need to master as a pre-requisite for learning and how that may change.

*The Value of Personal Interaction:* Technology creates "serendipitous intellectual capital" and could lead to isolation of the learner from others. It is likely that personal interaction and core teaching will remain vital if academic rigour is to be maintained. Technology will doubtless prove useful for learning skills and simulation but it must be seen as an enabler and not an end in itself. Knowledge content through sound academic programmes must remain central to the ethos of professional military education. Therefore, in designing blended learning programmes the most important consideration is the extent to which the educator maintains control. Technology can reinforce such control by preventing "forgetting" but the educator must maintain control over content, process and outcomes.

## **Future Leaders**

*Promoting Leadership:* One of the central tenets of sound leadership is an ability to make a good decision reflectively. Military professionals need abstract as well as practical knowledge, skills and competences if they are to be equipped for dealing with complex contingencies. In a sense the educator is tasked with "developing the post-modern warrior".

*Focus on Military Art:* The focus on military art must be maintained so that a balance is struck between knowledge and invention. There is a further balance that must be struck between "assimilative knowledge" which creates a "thermostat of conformity" and the needs of the reflective military practitioner or officer-scholar. Academies must create the conditions high-quality enquiry by offering multiple perspectives, reveal the uncertain nature of what is divergent knowledge and thus provide an opportunity to experiment and fail.

*Extending the Military-Academic Partnership:* If professional military education is to act as an intellectual force multiplier at all levels of mission command military-academic partnerships must also be extended. Indeed, there is a need to re-discover strategy at the two, three and four star level. Such a step will help shift a move away from management back to leadership.