



## Army Training Regiment (Lichfield) Independent Advisory Panel

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### **Executive Summary - Annual Report 2007**

#### **Background and Approach**

In response to Parliamentary and Adult Learning Inspectorate recommendations, the Army's Initial Training Group (ITG) set up Independent Advisory Panels (IAP) at each of its 5 training establishments across the country. Each IAP, which is made up of local opinion formers from outside the military, provides independent scrutiny to the Army's work. IAPs do not have statutory powers but do offer advice and support in identifying areas for improvement.

ATR (Lichfield), based at Whittington Barracks, established an IAP in March 2006. The scope of the Panel's work was informed by the Army's national review of training provision which decided that ATR (Lichfield) would close in early 2008. The IAP focussed on recruitment, the welfare of recruits and staff, health and safety, relationships, the training programme and the quality and quantity of food. The planned closure of the training establishment meant that only limited work was undertaken around the facilities and accommodation.

The Panel's approach involved interviewing individuals and groups covering many aspects of day to day life at ATR (Lichfield). Over 140 recruits at different stages of training were interviewed in small groups as well as friends and family of recruits attending Passing Out Parades. Military personnel including junior and senior NCOs, Troop Commanders and Officers right up to the Commanding Officer were also interviewed. Personal questionnaires, both anonymous and identifiable, were also completed by recruits with questions covering issues from bullying to how seriously complaints are taken.

#### **Recruitment and Induction**

IAP members were keen to understand if recruits' perception of the Army gained from media and advertising, and particularly from their recruitment process, was supported by their experience at ATR (Lichfield).

The quality and accuracy of information from different recruitment venues appeared to vary but the overall findings suggested recruits felt they knew what to expect once in training. An issue which was raised by countless recruits was around the information provided on what they should purchase prior to arriving at ATR (Lichfield). Significant expense was incurred by recruits buying items of clothing and equipment, at the suggestion of recruiting personnel and written information provided by the Army, only to find it was unnecessary or unsuitable. There was genuine consternation over this and whilst improvements have been made locally the Panel are of the opinion this also needs addressing by the Army centrally.

The Panel are concerned at the longwinded recruitment route for those from Commonwealth countries. In some cases the bureaucratic and logistical quagmire facing potential recruits was not only excessively costly but also detrimental to them training with the British Army. The IAP strongly recommends that the relevant Government departments address these difficulties in order to improve and maintain recruitment from Commonwealth countries.

## **Health & Safety**

Members of the Independent Advisory Panel have been impressed with the general training regime and, in particular, the Army's efforts to ensure recruits are safe in hazardous environments like shooting ranges. Many recruits felt the Army was 'over protective' in some areas of training whilst a number of Troop Commanders and, to a lesser extent, NCOs were also of the view that health & safety concerns 'get in the way of training recruits to be a soldier'. The latter was also reflected during discussions with Commanding Officers from other ITG training establishments.

At ATR (Lichfield) there were isolated incidents of recruits feeling they had limited or insufficient cleaning materials to keep their accommodation safe from biohazards. After raising this issue with the CO the IAP found, during subsequent interviews with recruits, that the problem appeared to have been resolved.

Some issues were raised around hygiene and food handling practises in the main catering facilities. The Panel is satisfied they were isolated and of low health risk and had an assurance from the CO that concerns would be addressed by the commercial caterers. The issue of recruits running out of time to have meals, particularly breakfast, because of queuing was raised on a regular basis. The excessive rationing of fruit was a concern during the early stages of the Panel's work but after raising this with the CO changes were made and it ceased to be an issue.

Interestingly recruits, even in the very early stages of training, felt the answer to all catering problems would be for the Army, rather than the private sector, to provide the meals service.

## **Training**

Generally recruits felt the training programme was 'about right' in terms of the work to free time balance. There was some disappointment at the lack of 'own time' physical exercise and particularly the lack of competitive sport. The majority of recruits felt the physical activities during training were less intensive than expected.

Some newly posted Troop Commanders felt the physical activities undertaken by recruits during training were too easy. The IAP believes the balance between 'pushing' recruits physically and ensuring that the drop out rate due to over exertion or injury was kept to a minimum was sensible. Panel members do consider that physical standards are at the lower end of what is appropriate but understand that physical expectations are greater on entry to Phase 2 training.

## **Welfare and Relationships**

Almost without exception recruits were certain that the Army is genuinely concerned about their personal welfare. The level of certainty impressed Panel members. At all stages of training recruits felt generally confident about the Army's ability to deal with bullying if required.

The IAP gave significant focus to the potential of bullying during the period of the Panel's work and found that recruits were almost dismissive of it being a problem at ATR (Lichfield). Despite that focus the Panel found no substantiated incidents of bullying between recruits. It was also made clear to Panel members on more than one occasion that any sign of serious relationship issues or bullying were dealt with using arbitration within the Troop.

Homesickness was cited as the main reason for new recruits leaving training. There was general agreement that the Army tries hard to help those suffering from homesickness and in most cases where recruits have left it was considered by other Troop members to be inevitable.

In both open interviews and confidential questionnaires it was clear that, almost without exception, recruits felt that any 'issues' could be reported easily. There was a high level of confidence that concerns would be acted upon by staff although that confidence reduced marginally as recruits progressed through their training. There was some criticism at the lack of feedback for recruits on any issues raised.

The Panel gained an impression that the efficient running of the training regime relies heavily on the goodwill of NCOs, particularly junior ones, to work on a regular basis during their own down time. This was seen by them as part of the job and, whilst there was concern by those affected, it was seen as something that was needed to ensure their recruits were not put at risk or their chances of success diminished. A shortage of appropriately trained instructors has been a problem at ATR (Lichfield) and was also confirmed as a major issue during talks with other IAPs at ATR (Pirbright).

### **What struck the Panel?**

The apparent absence of Army career options via education/careers advice for young people

The determination of the Army to prevent and deal with any form of bullying

Recruits' confidence in the Army's concern for their welfare

Friends and families of recruits view, without exception, about the positive change seen in communication, life skills and confidence since starting training

The determination, despite difficulties, of Commonwealth recruits to train only with the British Army, 'because it is the best in the world'

With significant physical exertion, recruits sometimes missing meals because of a lack of time

The strain which international operations are placing on staffing the Army's training regime

**END**

The full IAP Report is available on request or online at [www.xxxxxxxxxxxx/tobeagreed](http://www.xxxxxxxxxxxx/tobeagreed)

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