Chief of Staff's Message

To the Men and Women of Óglaigh na hÉireann

Chàirdiú

As the first month of the New Year draws to a close, I believe that it is important that I update you on where we are now, where we would like to go in the future and on the progress we are making on getting there. In my meetings with key leaders and with you in our ‘Town Halls’ and our face to face engagements, I have always emphasised the need to keep you fully informed - this is why I am writing to you today.

The General Staff continues to work hard on understanding and addressing our current challenges, in particular in relation to Retention and Remuneration. While policy decisions on pay and allowances are not within my remit, with the General Staff I am continuing to work in every way possible towards a positive, sustainable outcome to the ongoing deliberations of the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC). During his recent visit to Mali, the Taoiseach acknowledged that “low pay is an issue for the Defence Forces” and went on to say that allowances specific to Defence Force members are being considered by the PSPC. The PSPC had originally been focusing on technical appointments only, and hundreds of technical personnel engaged in a survey and interviews in mid-2018. I have always believed that this approach was too narrow - I’m glad to report that the PSPC has now broadened its survey to include Line personnel. This is not to lessen the importance of the case that we have made for our technical personnel, but broadens the scope of the Commission’s work to include all members of Óglaigh na hÉireann - as such it is a welcome development. I strongly encourage you to participate in this voluntary ‘Line’ survey, interviews and focus groups and to fully engage and to have your say, especially on the issue of allowances. Meanwhile, I continue to advocate for the opportunity to appear before the Commission to set out the unique nature of military service and to make the case in person for an appropriate remuneration package for all personnel. My call for an opportunity to appear before the PSPC has been publicly supported by Minister Kehoe.

In parallel with our efforts on remuneration, we are working hard to advance a wide range of Non-Pay Initiatives. Since my mid-year message in July 2018, while we have not made as much progress on certain issues as I would have liked, we have made steady progress across many areas. Some of these Positive Developments include;

- **NCO promotions**: So far in the current (2017) competition, we have promoted 447 NCOs, while an additional 295 Privates/ABs have been promoted to Cpl/LS. The order of merit list for this present competition expires on the 15th of May. One of my top priorities for 2019 is to reach agreement with the Department of Defence and PDFORRA on new, improved terms of reference.
for the next NCO promotion competition, so that we can proceed with the next set of promotions as soon as possible after the transfer window. As I write, Annex XYZ is being reviewed, as is the points-based system for the selection for career courses. On a separate note, I am looking forward to the commissioning of 24 members of the 10th Potential Officers Course in March.

- **Contracts:** It remains the General Staff position that all post-1994 personnel holding the rank of Private and Corporal should be allowed to continue in service beyond 21 years up to the age of 50, provided they are medically fit (with the agreed, prescribed medical grade) and operationally ready. We are continuing to engage with the Department in order to make that happen.

- **Training and Education:** We are increasing the number and types of opportunities for personnel at all ranks to further their personal and professional development. In 2018 alone, you completed over 1,100 internal and 430 external courses, including up to Level 6, 7, 8 and 9 awards. I am also delighted that we are reinvigorating fitness, sport and adventure training. I encourage you to make the most of all these opportunities.

- **Our Values:** I had the pleasure recently of calling each of the DF Values Champions for 2018 to congratulate them on their awards. These champions are role models in how they set standards and ‘live’ our organisational values through their daily behaviours. I want everyone to feel valued in an organisation that promotes personal growth, dignity and respect. This includes everyone, regardless of rank, age, gender, religion, ethnic background or sexual orientation. The more diverse and inclusive we are, the stronger we are.

- **Personnel and Family Supports:** During 2019 we will be continuing to enhance our PSS network, such as by implementing the recommendations of the Working Group on Mental Health and Wellbeing. The introduction of the families’ page on www.military.ie is another welcome development.

- **Infrastructure:** Thanks to an increase in our capital budget, we are investing more in infrastructure, and other projects are on the way, such as accommodation upgrades in Baldonnel, Plunkett and Cathal Brugha Barracks.

- **Recruitment:** We inducted 611 people last year – we know that this placed considerable strain on units, but we need this new blood to help share the burden across the organisation. Our recruitment campaign continues in 2019, with an initial focus on the Naval Service. That said, we are very aware that our current turnover rates are unsustainable in the long term. For this reason, we will continue to make the case for better remuneration, and to progress all these other non-pay issues throughout 2019.

We certainly had a very busy year in 2018, with personnel engaged on a wide range of Framework Operations at Home, on land, in the air and at sea. We deployed 3,200 personnel in support of the Papal Visit, and conducted hundreds of other tasks including EOD call outs, searches, escorts, air ambulance and emergency aeromedical missions, fishery patrols and drug interdiction operations. We also provided ceremonial duties for important state occasions, for which you received the highest praise. These outputs were matched by your Outstanding Work Overseas. Despite challenges at home, your exceptional performance and unrelenting commitment to this vital work has never wavered, a fact acknowledged by the Taoiseach during his recent visit to Mali. As I write, 675 of our personnel are serving overseas in 14 missions, in 14 countries and one sea. Towards the end of this year, we are likely to have a new partner nation in UNIFIL, when Poland is expected to join our battalion.

Over the last year there has been a lot of work done by DFHQ and the Representative Associations towards the implementation of the Working Time Directive (WTD), which is aimed at safeguarding the health, safety and wellbeing of all personnel. The successful implementation of
the Directive into our daily activities will require a change to both our mind-set and to how we plan and manage our working time. It is important that the implementation of the WTD does not have a detrimental effect on the unique military culture and ethos of the DF. I am confident that, with goodwill on all sides, we can arrive at an approach that complies with the legislation, provides for your wellbeing and also supports the operational outputs of the DF.

I’d like to say a few words about the Reserve Defence Forces. While the strength of the RDF is lower than I would like, our RDF members made an excellent contribution in 2018, with a 9% increase in Training and Support days (mandays). Our newly-appointed Director of Reserve Forces is pushing ahead with various initiatives, such as planned recruitment campaigns, a Potential Officers course and reducing ineffectivity. A number of White paper projects will in time also help to make the most of our Reservists’ talent and commitment. On the 16th of April, we will mark the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the Reserve Component - the State will use the occasion to recognise the very significant contribution that our Reservists have made to ‘Strengthen the Nation’.

Looking Forward to 2019, we certainly have a lot to do, as ever with a limited number of personnel and finite resources. I remain convinced that we will only succeed if we ‘cut our cloth to measure’ and concentrate on what we can do, as opposed to what we would like to do. In this spirit, measures are being taken to reduce Training Resource Requirements (TRRs), and thereby create more time and space in your calendars. Mindful of the pressures felt in units, I have decided that we will hold a single commemoration event in Merrion Square in November, in place of conducting multiple ceremonies. I have also tasked all commanders to reduce levels of ineffectivity – getting the maximum number of personnel back to work will again help to share the workload more evenly. Overall, experience shows that we can help to address our challenges by being more creative and innovative. I will soon launch our 2019 COS Innovation Awards and I encourage everyone to engage, no matter what your rank. Later this year, we will also be rolling out a ‘Values in Action’ programme, aimed at doing more to turn our six values into everyday behaviours.

I want to finish by saying how proud I am of each and every one of you, and of all that you accomplished in 2018, especially given the challenges that we faced together. You should take pride in the excellent work that you do and in the real difference that you make, at home and overseas. I will continue to do all in my power to drive the improvements that are needed so that you are properly supported, feel valued, have a voice and feel proud to serve in Óglaihgh na hÉireann.

Dear [Name],

[Signature]