



Reserve Defence Force Representative Association

Comhlachas Ionadaitheach na nÓglach Cúltaca

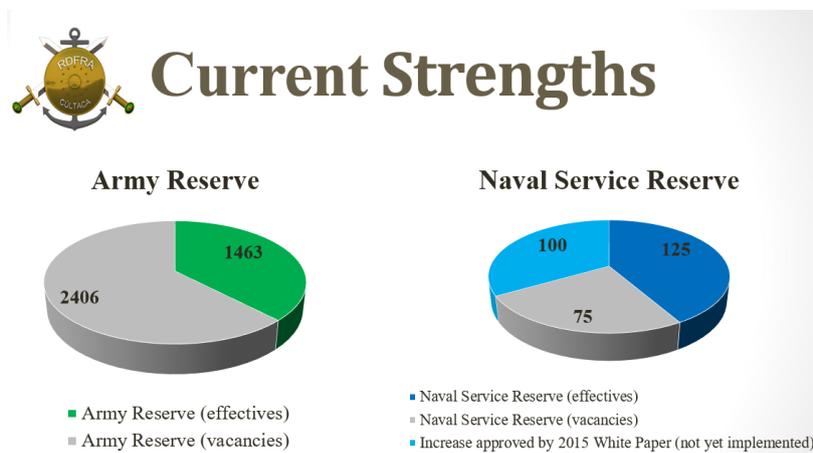
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Opening Statement to Commission on Defence Forces (16 Feb 2021)

On behalf of the Reserve Defence Force Representative Association, I would like to sincerely thank the Commission for the opportunity to make this presentation today. The RDF certainly faces a broad and complex series of challenges at present, but it is the Association's firm belief that the work of this Commission – and the recommendations that will arise from that work – will ultimately save the Reserve and secure its future. To say that we have placed all our hopes in the Commission is not to overstate the matter, but we are confident that this hope is well-founded.

RDFRA has no desire to take up the Commission's time discussing past wrongs or missed opportunities; the future of the force is our primary concern. However, it is worth spending a few moments discussing where we are at present, as it provides a useful starting point for our presentation.



The Army Reserve currently has an effective strength of 1,463 personnel, or 38% of establishment. The Naval Service Reserve currently has an effective strength of 125 personnel, or 62% of current establishment. There is currently no establishment for an Air Corps Reserve. Overall, the Reserve Defence Force, from its formation in 1929 until very recent times – with, perhaps, the period of the Second World War being the only exception – has been, arguably, of only peripheral concern to the Department of Defence and Military Management. In the main, this stemmed from an uncertainty over what the State actually wanted the RDF to do.



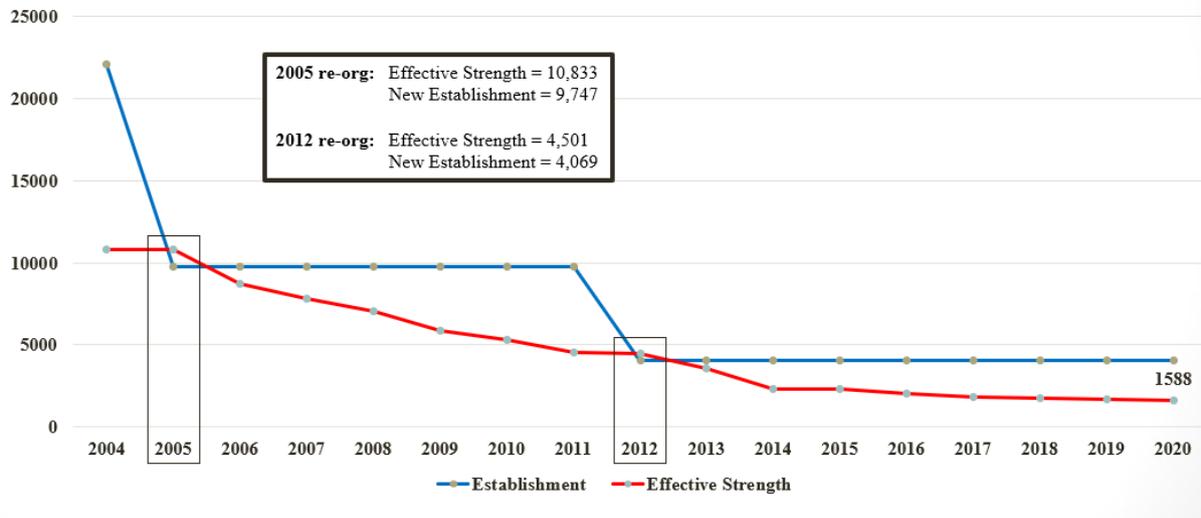
History of re-orgs

1929	• Volunteer Reserve Force formed...
1934	• ...re-organised into Volunteer Reserve ...
1940	• ...re-organised into Local Defence Force (LDF) .
1940	• Maritime Inscription formed
1947	• LDF re-organised into An Fórsa Cosanta Áitiúil (FCÁ) .
1947	• Maritime Inscription re-organised into An Slua Muirí (SM) .
1959	• FCÁ integrated with PDF...
1979	• ...FCÁ de-integrated from PDF.
2005	• FCÁ and SM re-organised into Reserve Defence Force (RDF) (AR & NSR)...
2013	• ...re-organised into “ Single Force Concept ” RDF...
2022	• ???

The Volunteer Reserve Force of 1929 became the Volunteer Reserve in 1934. In 1940, this was re-organised into the Local Defence Force while, in the same year, the Maritime Inscription was formed. Post-war, in 1947, Local Defence Force was restructured to become *An Fórsa Cosanta Áitiúil* (better known by its initials, the *FCÁ*), while the Maritime Inscription became *An Slua Muirí*. Twelve years later, in 1959, the *FCÁ* was integrated with the PDF, and then de-integrated from the PDF twenty years after that, in 1979. In 2005, both the *FCÁ* and *An Slua Muirí* were disbanded and replaced with the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve elements of the new Reserve Defence Force, or RDF for short; limited integration of Army Reserve elements into the PDF temporarily returned. In 2012, the RDF was again re-organised into the current “Single Force Concept” RDF. Nine years since that last re-organisation, the force finds itself at the lowest point in its history.



Re-organised down and down... (Contemporary strength = new establishment)



In total, ninety-two years has seen seven re-organisations, and with a consistently downward trend. The last of the twentieth century establishments was revised downwards to 9,747 in 2005, at a time when the force had an effective strength of 10,833. This latest establishment figure was again revised downward to the current 4,069 establishment figure in the re-organisation of 2012, at a time when the force had an effective strength of 4,501. The establishment of the force after each re-organisation was simply re-structured in line with the contemporary effective strength. Arguably, no more consideration was given to each RDF re-organisation than a simple contemporary-strength-equals-new-establishment conversion.

Without a clear purpose and place in the Irish defence infrastructure, the Reserve has understandably suffered from a lack of Permanent forces engagement over the years, a lack of utilisation by same, along with critical underfunding. Members are considered as volunteers who are expected to perform a significant proportion of their military duties for free, while in some areas, there are enduring organisational culture issues that result in reservists being perceived as mere military hobbyists, despite the robust training standards that are now characteristic of Reserve courses, or the external qualifications and skills that reservists bring to the Defence Forces from the civilian world. Put simply, for much of its history, the Reserve has been treated as an afterthought or a distraction. As an integral part of any defence infrastructure, this should not be the case.

That is where we are, but obviously the Commission’s focus must necessarily be on where we are going, and how to get us there. Therefore, this presentation will outline RDFRA’s views on the capabilities, structure and staffing of the future Reserve, as well as other key recommendations for securing that future.

Capabilities

In terms of capabilities, the RDF should first be repurposed from its current status as a strategic reserve to become an operational reserve, capable of being utilised operationally both domestically and overseas. The Defence Acts, along with all regulations, recruitment, training, structure, disposition, etc. should support this objective. Incessantly “training for training’s sake” – as is currently the case – produces no meaningful outputs, while the RDF’s two roles assigned to it in the 2015 White Paper on Defence – namely to augment the PDF in crisis situations and to carry out ceremonial events – are far too limited.

Conversion from Strategic Reserve to Operational Reserve



To support operational capability, RDFRA have identified two categories of capability that should be assigned to two categories of reservist. Firstly, there is the area of organic Defence Forces capabilities, i.e. capabilities that are developed and accredited internally by the Defence Forces. Secondly, there are capabilities that are not organic to the Defence Forces, i.e. qualifications that are accredited by external institutions.



Capabilities

Two (2) categories of capability:

1. Capabilities **organic** to the Defence Forces
(i.e. internally accredited skills/qualifications)
2. Capabilities **non-organic** to the Defence Forces
(i.e. externally accredited skills/qualifications)

RDFRA proposes that one category of reservist – which we are referring to as the Reinforcement Reserve – should be given the role of providing a surge capacity in the areas of organic Defence Forces skills, and to support operations both domestically and overseas. Additionally, the Association proposes that a second category of reservist – to be called the Specialist Reserve – should be given the role of providing specialist skills that are accredited externally to the Defence Forces, in an individual or group capacity, and to support operations both domestically and overseas. Both of these categories of reservist – Reinforcement and Specialist – should come under the overall umbrella of the Reserve Defence Force (Second Line Reserve). The proposed structure of this revamped RDF is outlined further in this presentation.



Capabilities

Two (2) categories of reservist:

1. The **Reinforcement Reserve**
Role: “To provide a surge capacity in the areas of organic Defence Forces skills, and to support operations both domestically and overseas”.
2. The **Specialist Reserve**
Role: “To provide specialist skills that are accredited external to the Defence Forces, in an individual or group capacity, and to support operations both domestically and overseas”.

The proposed capabilities of the Reinforcement Reserve would require its members to be fully competent in relevant organic military skills. Therefore, greater and more flexible opportunities to obtain such military skills would be required going forward. One of the primary methods of securing this goal would be the modularisation of all military courses in order to make them accessible to reservists. There should be no differences in capability between a member of the Reinforcement Reserve and a member of the PDF of the same rank or appointment, but it must be accepted that reservists require modularised training – conducted, perhaps, over lengthier time periods – in order to attain that level of proficiency. Blended learning, which has seen more widespread adoption by the Defence Forces in recent months, may partially address this issue.

It is also recommended that corps- or branch-specific training be introduced at an earlier stage in a reservist’s career; currently, Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve training for new entrants is generic until they reach the rank of 3*Private or Able Rating. The retention of generic recruit training, but with the introduction of corps- or branch-specific training for 2*Privates and Ordinary Ratings, would develop meaningful capability at an earlier stage in a reservist’s career.



The proposed capabilities of the Specialist Reserve require flexibility and individual skills-recognition in order to work. Instead of a restrictive establishment structure for each Specialist Reserve element, RDFRA is proposing that rank in the Specialist Reserve should reflect individual qualifications possessed, regardless of how many NCOs or officers of the same rank that this might create. The only control measure should be a limit on the overall number of

personnel that each element of the Specialist Reserve can accommodate, but otherwise it should not matter how many of each rank there are, so long as each individual's qualifications are deemed commensurate with holding that rank. Furthermore, instead of an overly-specific list of pre-approved qualifications that outlines – and therefore restricts – what is and is not a “specialist”, all applications for the Specialist Reserve should be individually assessed for potential military value. Persons may apply with qualifications that do not obviously “fit” into any military corps or branch, but their specialist skills may still provide a force multiplying capability in other key areas.

Flexibility and Recognition attracts Specialists

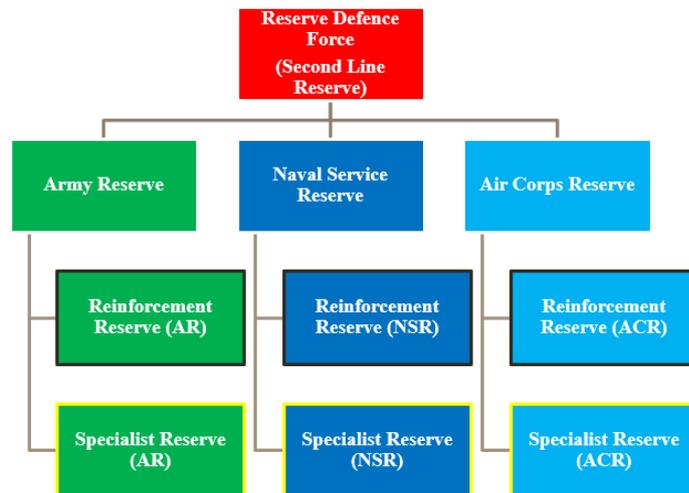


Structure

In terms of structure, RDFRA proposes that the Reserve Defence Force (Second Line Reserve) be comprised of the Army Reserve, the Naval Service Reserve, and also a new Air Corps Reserve element. Subsequently, each of these three branches of the service should comprise a Reinforcement Reserve component and a Specialist Reserve component.



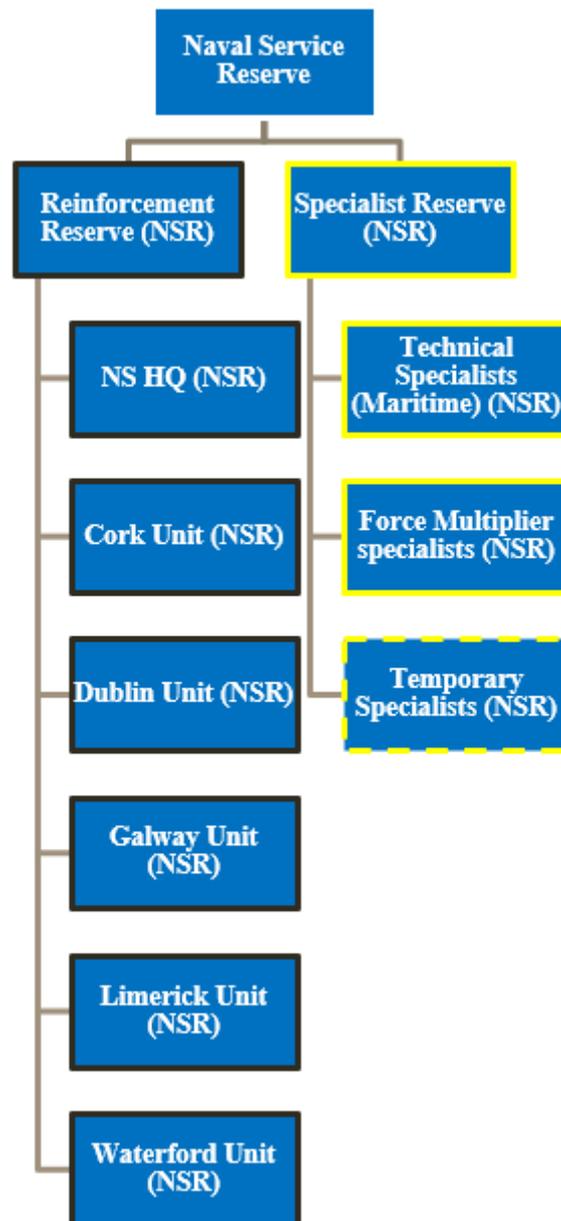
Structure



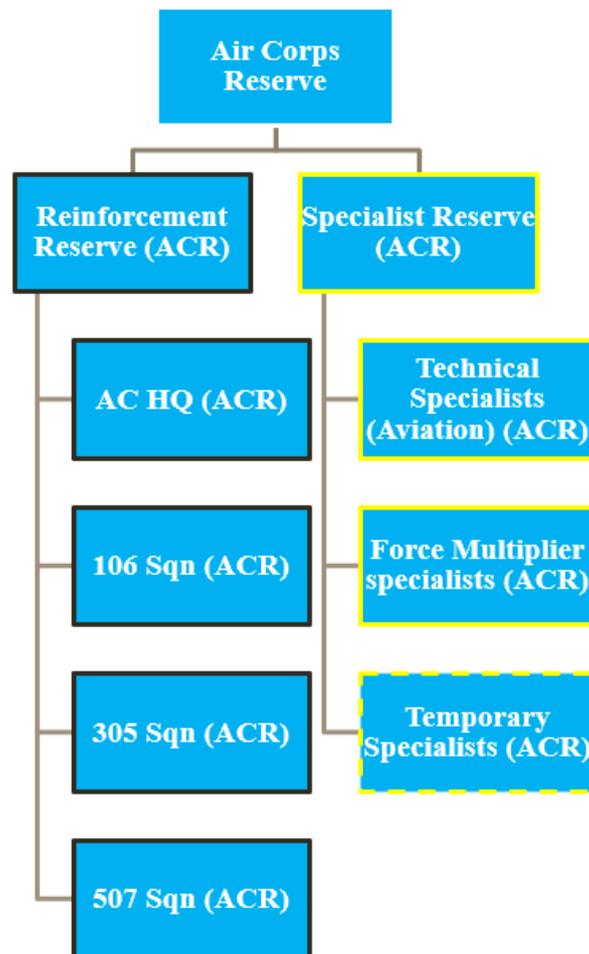
For the Army Reserve, its Reinforcement Reserve component should comprise all staffs at various HQ levels, all instructors and staffs at relevant conducting institutions, schools, and training centres, and all personnel of the Artillery, Cavalry, Infantry, Military Police and Transport corps. RDFRA is of the view that the skills necessary to effectively function in these appointments are military-organic ones. Meanwhile, the Association proposes that the Army Reserve’s Specialist Reserve component should comprise all personnel of the Communication and Information Services, Engineer, Medical and Ordnance corps, as the desired qualifications to be held by reservists in these areas are generally accredited external to the Defence Forces. Furthermore, two additional groups of Specialist Reserve should exist. One – a “Force Multiplier” group – should exist for specialists whose qualifications do not obviously “fit” elsewhere in the Army Reserve but who are still of military value, while a “Temporary Specialists” group should exist to permit reservists in the Reinforcement Reserve – who also possess specialist skills but who do not wish to be primarily employed in this manner – to temporarily transition into the Specialist Reserve when needed.



In terms of the Naval Service Reserve, its Reinforcement Reserve component should comprise all personnel at Naval Service HQ, along with all personnel in the proposed five operational units. Meanwhile, the Specialist Reserve component should comprise three sub-groups; the “Technical Specialists (Maritime)” – intended for the likes of naval watchkeepers, medical professionals, marine engineers, electrical engineers, etc. – and then a “Force Multiplier” group and a “Temporary Specialists” group, both of which have the same function as their Army Reserve counterparts, but obviously in a maritime or naval context.

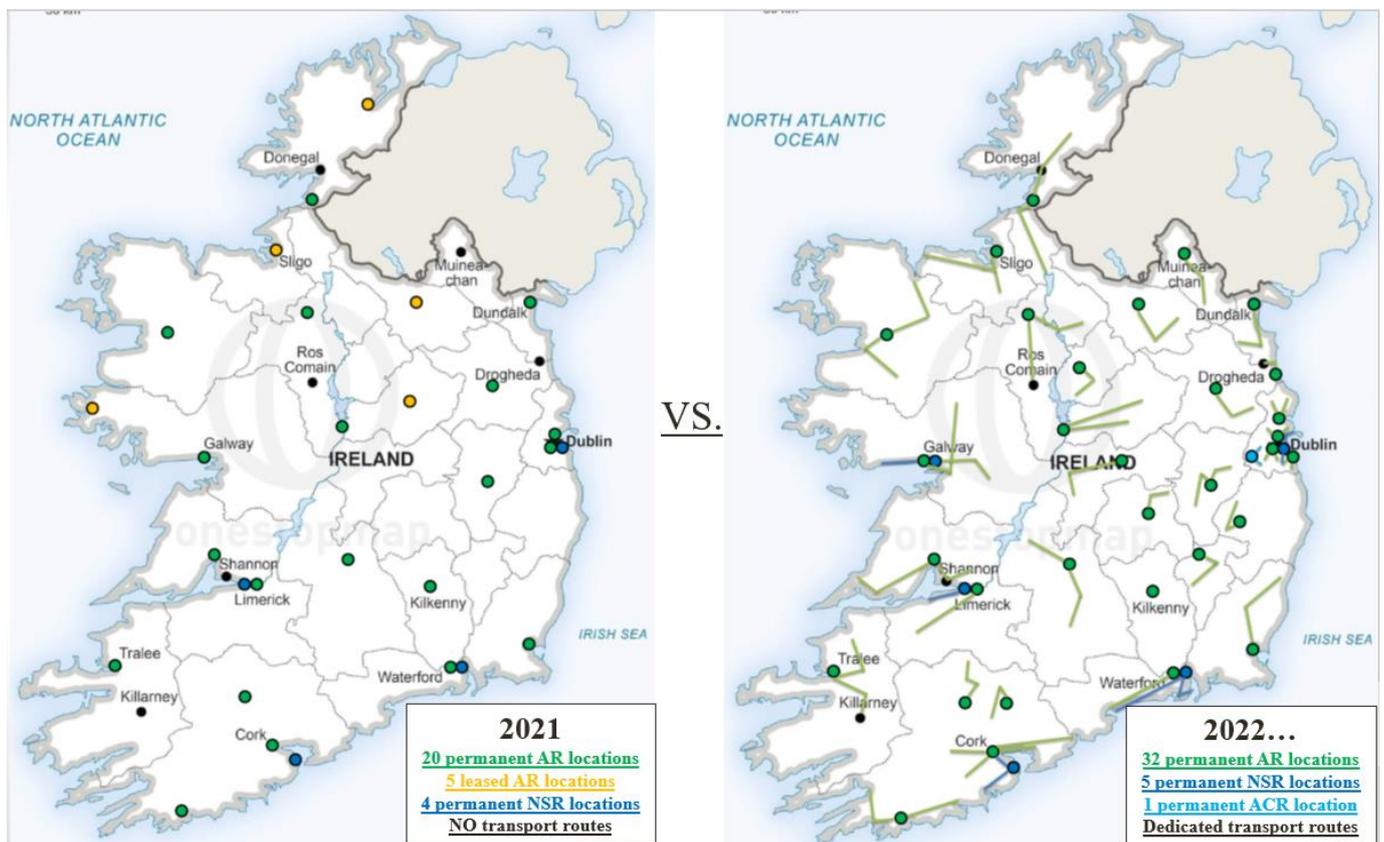


As for the proposed new Air Corps Reserve, its Reinforcement Reserve component should comprise all personnel at Air Corps HQ, along with all personnel attached to the various Operations Wings. RDFRA recommends that the reservists attached to No 1 and No 3 Wings be tasked as Air Corps infantry – similar to the RAF Regiment – with training to focus on Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), recovery of downed aircrew (Joint Personnel Recovery/JPR), and in-depth defence of airfields, etc. The reservists attached to No 5 Wing should be trained as drivers and logistics/administrative support personnel, in keeping with the role of this Wing. The Air Corps Specialist Reserve component should comprise three sub-groups; the “Technical Specialists (Aviation)” – intended for the likes of pilots, air traffic controllers, loadmasters, aeronautical engineers, etc. – and then a “Force Multiplier” group and a “Temporary Specialists” group, both of which have the same function as their Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve counterparts, but obviously in an aviation context.



RDFRA’s proposal on the topic of Structure also gives significant consideration to geographical and proportional dispersion. The Association recommends that every county within the State – and every region, in instances where counties are administratively subdivided – be provided with at least one permanent RDF location, and that these be serviced by dedicated military transport routes through local populous urban centres, operated by suitably qualified reservists. In most cases, there are already either permanently occupied barracks or State-owned RDF facilities in each county or region that could satisfy this requirement, but in counties Carlow, Cavan, Laois, Longford, Monaghan, Offaly, and Sligo – and in the regions of Fingal and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown in county Dublin – this is not the case. It is worth noting that, together, these counties or regions comprise an estimated 27% of the population of RDF-service age in the State.

In terms of proportional dispersion, RDFRA’s recommended new structure takes into account the percentage of the population of Reserve-service age in each county or region, in order to ensure that no county or region has a proposed new establishment in excess of what it could be reasonably expected to provide, proportionally speaking. This stands in contrast to the current establishment distribution, where some rural areas of low population density have RDF establishments that equal those of densely populated urban centres.



Staffing

On the matter of Staffing, RDFRA focussed exclusively on PDF support staffing when drafting this element of our submission. The Association is of the view that, without the correct PDF-RDF interface, reservists will remain forever on the periphery of the Defence Forces.

Firstly, Reinforcement Reserve elements – whose role will focus on providing surge capacity in organic Defence Forces skills – will require Mentoring staffs comprised of PDF officers and NCOs. The focus of these Mentoring staffs must be on training and upskilling the Reinforcement Reserve in order to ensure that the Reinforcement Reserve is fully capable of delivering on its role, to ensure that it operates using the latest doctrine at all times, and to make the Reinforcement Reserve as self-sufficient as possible in all matters of administration and logistics.

Conversely, given the specialist qualifications and skillsets that members of the Specialist Reserve will possess, it will be unnecessary to establish Mentoring staffs for the Specialist Reserve. However, given that such personnel will be employed by the Defence Forces in their specialist capacities, Logistics and Administrative Support staffs – comprising officers and enlisted personnel of the PDF – should be established to support each Specialist Reserve element in these areas.

Finally, dedicated RDF Recruitment staffs – comprising PDF and RDF personnel – should be established at regional level (for the Reinforcement Reserve) and national level (for the Specialist Reserve) in order to handle all aspects of RDF recruitment.

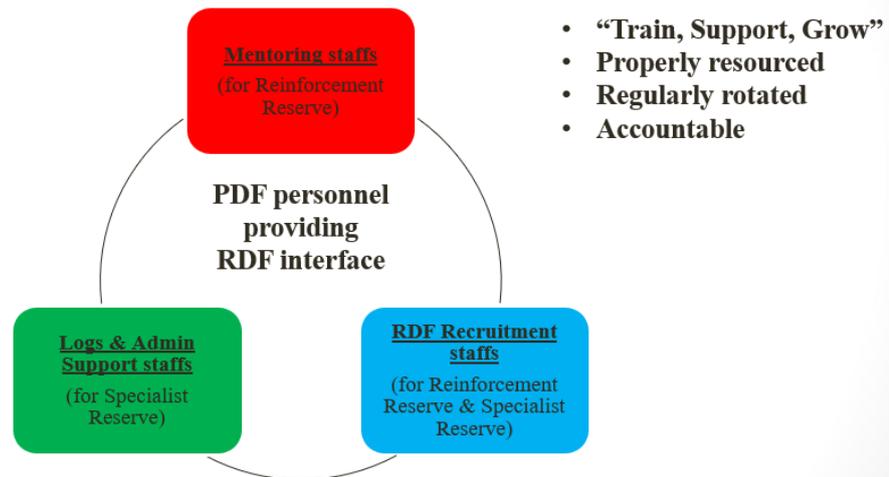
For the Mentoring staffs in particular, in order to properly discharge their responsibilities of training and upskilling the Reinforcement Reserve and ensuring that the Reinforcement Reserve operates using the latest doctrine at all times, it is vital that these personnel are regularly rotated back to PDF appointments in order to remain current. Therefore, it is recommended that no member of a Mentoring staff should remain as such for more than two (2) years.

It is similarly vital that Mentoring staffs should be considered responsible for the standards and outputs of their Reinforcement Reserve elements. The Annual Confidential Report of each member of a Mentoring staff should reflect the effective strength, operational readiness levels,

and other relevant outputs of the Reserve element they are assigned to mentor. In terms of capabilities, the RDF will only ever be as good as what the PDF make it.



Staffing



Additional points to note/areas to address

There are many other benefits to implementing RDFRA’s proposal. Aside from the return of a full-strength RDF with a meaningful purpose for the first time in its history, a geographically dispersed RDF would allow the Defence Forces to maintain a footprint in all counties or regions within the State. This, in turn, makes the Defence Forces more visible in general, and also allows the RDF to act as a feeder for PDF recruitment.

It is also worth noting that, while in March 2020 it was reported that 6.9% of the PDF were female – with females comprising 4.2% of overseas missions – as of December 2020 the effective strength of the RDF is 13.3% female, almost double that of the PDF. The current Army Reserve Potential Officers Course – which is in the process of training the next generation of Army Reserve managers – is 24% female. The part-time nature of Reserve service tends to make it more attractive to females because, by definition, the RDF has inherently flexible working practices.

Given that retention of working mothers is linked to family-friendly organisational cultures, and that – as of March 2020 – it was reported that 50% of serving PDF female personnel are mothers, temporary service on one of the proposed PDF staffs attached to the RDF may be beneficial for PDF female personnel. Depending on the specific nature of the appointment that they may hold on such a staff, and given the part-time nature of the RDF, they may also be in a position to avail of a short-working-week as a result. Furthermore, PDF personnel seeking a career break may be able to take up appointments temporarily on the strength of the RDF (i.e. become reservists themselves) for the duration of their career break, before returning to the PDF afterwards with no break in military service. Overall, such measures may promote retention of personnel within the PDF.

Anecdotally, a significant proportion of RDF members also have heritage links to other countries, often places where the military has greater visibility or where military service – either of a voluntary or compulsory nature – is more widespread among the population than in Ireland. Often, such members have strong traditions of military service in their families, and while preferring to work or study in a civilian capacity full-time, they see service in the RDF as a part-time way of engaging with this aspect of their heritage.

However, securing the future of the RDF requires the implementation of other foundational enablers; if these are not also introduced, the whole enterprise is doomed to fail.

The RDF requires a functional recruitment system that is implemented on a formally-structured basis, supported by PDF and RDF staffs, and properly resourced with appropriate oversight by higher headquarters. Recruitment must also be cognisant of the differing reasons why persons join the Reserve; some to have a fundamentally military experience that differs considerably from their civilian career, some to put their civilian qualifications to use in a military environment, and some to do both. That is why both the Reinforcement Reserve and Specialist Reserve need to exist, with the “Temporary Specialists” group to permit transiting between the two.

The force also needs a functional promotion system that rewards a commitment to personal upskilling and professional military education, rather than simply length-of-time served in current rank. Coupled with this, the need for career courses to be run on a structured, predictable cycle.

In order to convert the RDF into an operational reserve, capable of being utilised domestically and overseas, PDF unit commanders must be able to exert meaningful operational control over their respective reservists. This can only be achieved via the implementation of employment protection for reservists, along with associated employer engagement and supports. This would guarantee the availability of reservists when required, but also guarantee that reservists' civilian employment would not be adversely affected if they were formally called upon.

Ultimately, you get what you pay for, and attempting to build an RDF of dedicated, part-time professionals on a sometimes-you-get-paid, sometimes-you-do-not model is thoroughly unsound. The introduction of fair and appropriate remuneration for service is vital, including appropriate pay rates, allowances, gratuities and tax credits, with no more unpaid service of any kind.

Finally, with a new operational role for the RDF, there must be a significantly increased resource allocation – such as financial resources, training facilities, personal equipment, dedicated unit vehicles, etc. – in order to support this. The annual RDF budget is currently €2.15m per annum, or 0.28% of the 2020 Defence budget. It is simply impossible to run a meaningful Reserve force on a third of one percent of the budget.

And so, there is a lot of legislative, regulatory and cultural change needed. This Commission represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the RDF to finally be considered as an integral element of the Irish defence infrastructure, and we sincerely hope that this will follow the concluding of the Commission's work. Thank you.



Other supports/enablers

- Functional recruitment system
- Functional promotion system
- PDF operational control / RDF reliability
- Employment protection / Employer engagement / Employer supports
- Remuneration
- Resources
- In summary: **“The RDF needs a meaningful operational role, and then – underpinned by legislation and regulations – to be properly structured, trained, resourced, paid and supported to deliver on that role”.**