

Association of Retired Commissioned Officers

PRESIDENT's REPORT

26TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

02 October 2020

Camaraderie Through Service





PRESIDENT's REPORT – 26th AGM

First Section - The Internal Framework

25th Anniversary

ARCO hosted a successful reception on 16 October, 2019 in the St Stephen's Green Club, Dublin, marking the Association's 25th Anniversary.

Attendees included the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Members of the Oireachtas, Representatives from Political Parties, the Defence Forces, the Department of Defence, RACO, PDFORRA, RDFRA, CAOGA, DFBF, Veterans Associations, Retired Public Servants Associations, and the Media. Senator Michael McDowell SC was the Guest Speaker.

Relevance

Substantial benefits are accruing from ARCO's 2019 Workshop titled "*ARCO's Future Relevance in the Evolving Environment*", including succession planning, the need to be relevant to retirees of all categories and genders, and the requirement for new ideas, new culture, and new trends.

The Relevance Action Plan (2019 – 2020) consisted of five components namely: Governance, Information, Membership, Website and Communications. Since the 2019 AGM, the associated 37 tasks were addressed, and the Relevance Action Plan was formally closed by the EXCOM in August.

Governance

As members are aware, the Association's Rules form the basis of ARCO's effective governance, transparency and accountability.

Consequent to a priority from the 25th AGM, during Q2 and Q3, the EXCOM reviewed the Association's Rules, which included an aim and revised objectives adopted at the 2019 AGM. The associated Working Group consisted of Gerry McNamara, Senan Downes and Brendan McAndrew. The review process was informed by advice offered by Billy Nott. The EXCOM endorsed the revised Rules at its August meeting. A proposal to adopt the revised Rules will be formally presented for adoption during the 2020 AGM.

In order to advance objectives adopted at the 2019 AGM, the EXCOM has endorsed an Information Strategy, a Social Media Concept, a Mentoring Concept, and a Networking Concept.

Pensions

Pensions, and pension related issues, remain a major focus of the EXCOM's endeavours. ARCO's strategy focuses on the Restoration of Pensions, the Determination of Pensions, Pension Negotiation, and Abatement.



In advancing pension related issues, ARCO is a proactive member of the Alliance of Retired Public Servants, and is formally represented on its Council. The Alliance has 148,000 affiliated members. ARCO's lobbying document promulgated during the 2020 General Election included a section on military pensions.

Since October 2019, ARCO strongly advanced the argument that absolutely no grounds exist, for not including the 2019 MSA increase in those military pensions that were already in payment on 03 July, 2019. This position was reflected in four submissions made to the Minister of State with Responsibility for Defence on 31 October, 16 December, 15 January and 05 March, followed by a fifth submission on 17 July to the Minister for Defence. The Department of Defence had referred the issue to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. All submissions are available on our website.

Information on Disability Pension Benefits was published on the Department's website on 21 October 2019.

As a response from the Department on ARCO's submission on the appeals mechanism for Disability Pension applications, failed to address all of the issues advanced by the association, the EXCOM will revisit the legislative provisions, the application procedures, the assessment process, and the appeals mechanism in 2020.

Under the provisions of the Public Sector Pay Agreement, which provides for parity over the period of the agreement, half of the 2% increase awarded from 01 October, should be reflected in military pensions.

ARCO has noted the Government's announcement, made in September, to unwind FEMPI cuts for salaries up to €150,000 between October 2020 and July 2021, moving towards full restoration of cuts for military pensions in payment.

ARCO will be encouraging the Alliance to be fully engaged in the next round of pay negotiations for public servants. In this context, during October, ARCO will be making a submission to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, focussing on parity and representation.

The attention of ARCO members employed in the Public Sector is directed at a circular released on 17 September by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, prescribing for the application of the 40-year pensions benefit cap. The circular (13/2020) is available on our website.

Communications

Website Updates. ARCO's redesigned website was launched on 11 April. The project was implemented by ARCO's Web Master Dermot Kelly, supported by our Web Manager Billy Campbell.

ARCO Brand. In September, ARCO's website domain was transferred from *iARCO.info* to *ARCOIreland.com*. The acquisition of *ARCOIreland* as the Association's brand, is a significant communications development. The brand is used for our Social Media Platforms' handles.



Social Media Platforms. ARCO's Social Media Platforms provide cost effective and efficient communications support for its membership, provide a marketing tool for the Association, and, in parallel, convey appropriate and relevant information to ARCO's Target Audience. The EXCOM has yet to fill the appointment of Social Media Coordinator. ARCO's LinkedIn platform went live on 13 May, Twitter on 14 May, and Facebook on 16 May. Links to the three platforms are available on the Website's Home Page. The President acknowledged the support provided by Lt Col Stuart McNamara in acquiring ARCO's new brand, and his advice during the establishment of ARCO's social medium platforms. Currently, LinkedIn has 527 followers, Twitter has 340 followers, Facebook has 170 Followers.

Articles. An Cosantóir published an ARCO article in its June edition, and an article titled *Relevance of ARCO in 2020* was published in the summer edition of the Signal Journal.

Text-a-Service & Newsletters. The President acknowledged Billy Campbell's endurance whilst managing our Website and Texting Service. I would also like to place on record the EXCOM's appreciation of the Newsletter Editor - Declan Carbery, who produced Newsletters 37 and 38 since the last AGM.

Second Section - The External Framework

Defence Community

Of the 21 associations catering for retired public servants, ARCO is the only association with formal access to a member of Government. ARCO values this unique position, and actively engages with the Minister of Defence. This engagement includes formal meetings on an annual basis. Unfortunately, a meeting scheduled in February 2020 was postponed on account of the General Election, and the 30 September 2020 meeting was deferred on account of Covid-19 restrictions.

Since its establishment in 1994, in addition to formal meetings with the Chief of Staff, ARCO has benefitted from a mutually supportive interface with all members of the General Staff, the GOCs and FOCNS. The COS hosted a meeting with ARCO on 09 September.

The 2020 quarterly meetings hosted by the Department of Defence and Defence Forces Headquarters for the recognised Veterans' Associations were deferred on account of Covid-19. The last such meeting was held on 23 October 2019.

ARCO was represented at the Defence Forces Remembrance Ceremony on 04 December, the Air Corps Commissioning Ceremony on 06 December, the Army Commissioning Ceremony on 20 February, (Lt Turlough Gallagher, 27 Inf Bn, a qualified doctor from Tattyreach County Tyrone, was the recipient of An Claidheamh Gascíochta), and the National Day of Commemoration in July. Unfortunately, restrictions associated with Covid 19 resulted in the cancellation, of Veterans' Day, the Annual Mass in Arbour Hill, and the Easter Sunday Ceremony. On account of limitations on the number of attendees, ARCO was unable to attend the Naval Service Commissioning Ceremony, or Reviews of Overseas Units. Likewise, on account of Covid-19, the Regional Meetings planned for Custume Barracks, Athlone (21 April) and Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, (23 June) were postponed. These meetings will be rescheduled for 2021.



Finally, ARCO retains a fruitful relationship with RACO on matters of mutual interest such as Pensions, Veterans' Policy, Commission on the Defence Forces, the independent Permanent Pay Review Body, and ARCO's Membership Campaign. ARCO retains a fruitful interface with the Irish Defence Forces Officers' Club.

Veterans' Associations

ARCO remains actively engaged with ONE and IUNVA, in advancing the interests of Defence Forces Veterans. The Combined Veterans Strategy (07 Dec 18) forms the basis of agenda items for meetings with the Department of Defence¹. ARCO strongly recommends that an Office for Veterans' Affairs, consisting of personnel from the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, be established, without delay. Identifying the Combined Veterans' Strategy as a starting point, ARCO continues to advocate the absolute requirement to articulate and institutionalise an inclusive and comprehensive Government's Veterans' Policy.

National Security Strategy

ARCO welcomes the Government's decision to develop the inaugural National Security Strategy. As part of the national consultative process, albeit with a restricted timeframe of 25 days within the festive season, on 28 December, made a comprehensive submission to the National Security Analysis Centre in the Department of An Taoiseach. Whereas a wide range of security issues falling under the domain of defence were discussed in ARCO's submission, its format reflected the following four issues, provided by the National Security Analysis Centre on 05 December:

- Principle Threats (Risks) to Ireland's National Security,
- National Security Strategic Goals (Objectives),
- Relevance of Traditional National Security Policies and Approaches, and
- Required Strategic Capabilities Approaches (Means).

The submission was subsequently posted on ARCO's website and circulated by the Region Representatives.

Commission on the Defence Forces

Arising from the provisions of the Programme for Government, ARCO welcomes the Government's decision to establish a Commission on the Defence Forces.

Representing ARCO, the President participated in the IDFOC's webinar on the Commission on the Defence Forces on 23 July. On 16 September, ARCO submitted its recommendations to the Minister for Defence, on the Composition and Terms of Reference for the Commission on the Defence Forces. The scope of the Commission's endeavours should not be limited to the Defence Forces, but must encompass the wider parameters of Ireland's Defence Policy.

¹ Seven Strategic Goals were identified to advance the combined Veterans' Strategy: Interface with the Department of Defence and Defence Forces, Transition from Military to Civilian Life, Accreditation of Unique Military Skills, Pensions and Ancillary Support, Medical Treatment, Social Housing, and Recognition of Military Service



Likewise, the establishment of the Government's Permanent Pay Review Body should not have to wait until the Commission reports (expected by December 2021). As advanced on previous occasions, ARCO strongly contends that a statutory based, independent Permanent Pay Review Body should be established without delay, and that military pensions fall within its remit.

ARCO's submission was posted on our website and circulated by the Regional Representatives. The submission is receiving considerable traction in the media and on social media platforms.

Networking

In January, availing of the competencies of Philip Quinlan and Paul Amoroso, and in consultation with the IDFOC, the EXCOM endorsed a Networking Concept, which has the potential of accruing significant benefits for ARCO.

On an annual basis, it is envisaged that ARCO will run at least two Networking Events, in various locations in Ireland, in order to consolidate the Defence Community network, raise ARCO's profile, and attract new members. The audience will consist of members of ARCO, and the wider Defence Community, encompassing the Defence Forces, Department of Defence, Representative and Veterans' Associations, and beyond.

The EXCOM intended to host a 4-panel Networking Event during Q4, in the Keadeen Hotel, facilitating a discussion on a topic related to the subject of security and defence, with a focus on one or more dimensions of land, sea, air, space, and cyber. However, on account of Covid-19, during its August meeting, the EXCOM decided to defer any Networking Events until 2021.

Military Transition Programmes

As part of its outreach programme, ARCO conducted six 6 weeks of consultations with JP Morgan's Military and Veterans' Affairs Section, located in London. During its August meeting, the EXCOM discussed J.P. Morgan's inaugural Dublin based, 6-month Military Transition Programme (February – July 2021) for Defence Forces officers and enlisted personnel, who have retired in the last two years.

Subsequent to an EXCOM decision, an information flyer was posted on ARCO's website and social media platforms on 26 August. A significant number of retired Defence Forces personnel participated in the Orientation Day on 09 September.

Both the Chief of Staff and RACO expressed their complements on ARCO's initiative regarding Military Transition Programmes. ARCO continues to engage with JP Morgan, other similar bodies, and with RACO, on Military Transition Programmes

Mentoring

On behalf of the EXCOM, the President took the opportunity to formally launch ARCO's support for the Defence Forces Monitoring Programme. Arising from the EXCOM's Mentoring Concept (20 Mar 20), ARCO members will shortly be invited to submit expressions of interest to participate, as mentors, on a voluntary basis, in the Defence Forces Mentoring Programme.



Following the competition of the inaugural Defence Forces Mentoring Programme, and orientation day will be conducted on Q2 of 2021, for those interested to participate in the programme. Thereafter, the Defence Forces will provide appropriate training to those ARCO members who have been selected for particular programmes. It is envisaged that the first of such programmes involving ARCO mentors will take place in Q3 of 2021.

Reinforcing ARCO's motto, and its outreach programme with serving officers, this mentoring initiative reciprocates the investment and experiences accruing from service in the Defence Forces.

Conclusions

In conclusion, let us remind ourselves that while **operating on a voluntary basis**, the governance and management of the Association is exercised under the direction of the President, by the Executive Committee.

Accordingly, the President took the opportunity of sincerely complementing ARCO's Officers, Regional Representatives and those co-opted on to the EXCOM, for their steadfast support in advancing the Association's ethos, values and objectives during 2020, thus supporting to the best of our ability, the interests and needs of our membership.

On a personal basis, the Vice President - George Kerton, Secretary - Joe Ahern, Treasurer - Richard Cummins, Membership Secretary - Dick Heaslip and Webmaster – Billy Campbell, and Newsletter Editor – Declan Carbery deserve special recognition.

Likewise, we appreciate the work of Liam MacNamee, Sean Scanlon and Seamus Rouine in advancing ARCO's interests within the Defence Forces Benevolent Fund, CAOGA and the Alliance of Retired Public Servants. In the same light, the President formally acknowledged the guidance, advice and support I personally received from the immediate Past President - Gerard O'Flynn, during the last 12 months.

With three decades of continuous service to the Defence Community, ARCO's posture for the short to medium term is to protect its legacy, whilst advancing reality and relevance.

In presenting is Report, the President focussed on both internal and external outputs, addressing numerous issues such as Relevance, Governance, Pensions, Communications, Defence Community, Military Transition Programmes, Networking and, finally, the President took the opportunity of formally launching ARCO's support to the Defence Forces Monitoring Programme.

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