



*Camaraderie Through Service*

# Association of Retired Commissioned Officers

## PRESIDENT's REPORT

### 27<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

01 OCTOBER 2021

*Camaraderie Through Service*





## **President's Report – 27<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting**

### **First Section - Internal Framework**

#### **Governance**

The Association's Rules adopted by the 2020 AGM, form the basis of ARCO's effective governance, transparency and accountability. In order to implement ARCO's objectives and to retain our relevance, the EXCOM is implementing its:

- Pension Strategy,
- Information Strategy,
- Social Media Concept,
- Mentoring Concept,
- Networking Concept, and
- Military Transition Programme.

ARCO's Data Protection and Privacy Policy promulgated in 2018, was revised by the EXCOM initially in March and subsequently in July, following research conducted by Col Des Bergin and Capt Paul Amoroso.

#### **Pensions**

Pensions, and pension related issues, remain a major focus of the EXCOM's endeavours. ARCO's Pension Strategy focuses on:

- The retention of Pension Parity,
- The value of military pensions which must be maintained into the future,
- The establishment of a statutory, independent third-party mechanism for the negotiation of public service pensions, and
- The repeal of abatement anomalies.

On 20 November 2020, prior to the public sector pay negotiations, ARCO submitted recommendations on the following issues to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform:

- Accreditation,
- Value and Determination of Pensions,
- Parity Based Framework, and
- The Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012.

Under the provisions of the 'Building Momentum' Public Sector Pay Agreement 2021 – 2022, which provides for parity over the period of the agreement, half of the 1% increase awarded from 01 October 2021, February 2022 and 01 October 2022 will be reflected in military pensions for those not benefiting from pay restoration.



The Government's decision to unwind FEMPI cuts for salaries up to €150,000 has resulted in the full restoration for military pensions up to €75,000 w.e.f. 01 July 2021.

ARCO is a proactive member of the Alliance of Retired Public Servants, and is formally represented on its Council. Recognised by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Alliance has 30 affiliated associations and 168,000 members.

Specific payment administrative details, recently provided by Finance Branch, on the increases in MSA introduced with effect from 4 July 2019, the restoration of FEMPI reductions, and the increases arising from the Public Service Agreement 2021 – 2022 will be shortly published on our website.

### **Military Service Allowance**

Since October 2019, ARCO was actively engaged with the Department of Defence and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, on the application of the increase in MSA to military pensions in payment on 03 July, 2019. The last of five submissions was made on 17 July 2020. ARCO's five submissions were inclusive in nature, championing the case for all Defence Forces Veterans, namely retired commissioned officers and enlisted personnel, coupled with spouses of deceased personnel.

On the 23 February 2021, the Minister of Defence advised ARCO that the benefit of the MSA increase will be paid to military pensions, that already include an MSA component backdated to 04 July 2019.

### **Disability Pensions**

The Government and the Department of Defence have a duty of care and responsibility to support Veterans, who suffer a disability arising from their service in the Defence Forces either at home or overseas. Disabled Veterans should have confidence in a transparent, credible, and just compensation scheme, deriving from the Army Pension Acts 1923 – 1980.

In a comprehensive submission dated 22 March to the Minister, ARCO strongly recommended the complete reform of the Disability Pensions Process. The legislative framework, and related Statutory Instruments, merit an external independent review conducted by a balanced representation of multidisciplinary experts and consultants. Guidelines for the Army Pensions Board should be freely available, current time limits for claims should be extended, and the methodology for determining the degree of disability should be based on best practice.

### **Communications**

ARCO's Website and 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.



Currently, LinkedIn has 875 (527) followers, Twitter has 590 (340) followers, and Facebook has 372 (170) Followers.

Following the 2020 AGM, the upgrading of the website domain from [www.iarco.info](http://www.iarco.info) to the Association's new brand "ARCOIreland" was successfully completed. Regarding this significant development, the President conveyed his appreciation to the Web Manager Dermot Kelly, to the Webmaster Comdt Billy Campbell, and to Lt Col Stuart McNamara for his technical advice and support.

Since the 2020 AGM, Col Declan Carbery has edited and published newsletters 39 and 40. 763 members are availing of the text-a-massage facility.

## **The Second Section - External Framework**

### **Defence Community**

Of the 30 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. A virtual meeting was held with the Minister on 13 November 2020.

On 14 December 2020, with the support of a Defence Forces chaplain and School of Music instrumentalists, ARCO hosted a Commemorative Ceremony at the Army Plot Glasnevin, honouring Col Justin McCarthy DSM, the first officer to die while on UN Service. The ceremony took place on the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his military funeral.

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 FOC NS. The COS hosted a meeting with ARCO on 14 September 2021.

On 17 November, 14 May and 14 September, ARCO made presentations to students on the Transition to Civilian Life (Pre-Retirement) Courses.

The 2021 quarterly meetings with the Department of Defence and DFHQ and the Veterans' Associations were affected by Covid-19. The last such meeting was held on 07 April, and a virtual meeting is scheduled for 07 October.

Likewise, Covid-19 restrictions resulted in either the cancellation or restricted attendance at State and Military Ceremonies, e.g. Arbour Hill, Easter Sunday, 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Niemba Ambush, Army Commissioning, Reviews of Overseas Units and Veterans' Day.

Nevertheless, ARCO was represented at the National Day of Commemoration on 11 July and the Naval Service Commissioning on 16 July. The President presented An Claidheamh Gascíochta to Cadet Shane Ahern at a special ceremony in The Military College on 04 March, and represented ARCO at the Transfer of Authority Ceremony between Vice-Admiral Mark Mellett DSM and Major-General Seán Clancy on 16 September.



Finally, ARCO has a fruitful relationship with RACO advancing issues such as Pensions, Military Transition Programmes and ARCO's Membership Campaign. ARCO maintains a mutually supporting 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. On the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of Óglaigh Náisiúnta na hÉireann, ARCO salutes the initiative, foresight, and determination of those Defence Forces Veterans involved in the establishment of ONE on 10 March, 1951.

During Covid-19 pandemic members of ARCO worked alongside our ONE and IUNVA colleagues supporting HSE in testing centres. Currently volunteers from the three associations are engaged in the delivery of food and material to veterans' families in need of material support.

ARCO is actively engaged in advancing the Combined Veteran's Strategy, collectively submitted by ARCO, ONE and IUNVA in December 2018. Whereas the Strategy informs the agenda of meetings with the Department of Defence, only limited progress has been made in advancing the seven goals<sup>1</sup>.

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.

ARCO strongly recommends that a Commissioner for Veterans be appointed, and that a Joint Office for Veterans' Affairs, consisting of personnel from the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, be established without delay.

### **Commission on the Defence Forces**

On 16 September 2020, ARCO presented its recommendations on the composition and terms of reference for the Commission on the Defence Forces to the Minister for Defence.

Following an invitation from the Minister, ARCO submitted a supplementary paper on 04 November.

In December, the Commission's Chair, Mr Aidan O'Driscoll contacted ARCO's President. This was followed by a constructive discussion which took place on 06 January.

The EXCOM convened a Working Group under the leadership of Brig Gen Séamus Ó Giolláin, consisting of Brig Gen Paul Fry, Brig Gen Peter O'Halloran, Capt Dave Barry (NS), Col George Kerton, Col Eamon Caulfield, Lt Col Seamus Rouine and Capt Paul Amoroso.

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<sup>1</sup> 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



ARCO's submission dated 26 February focussed on Structures, Capabilities (Land, Air, Maritime, Cyber and Space), Reserves, Human Resources, Education and Training, and Veterans' Affairs.

Making radical recommendations, ARCO's submission outlined a mid to long term level of ambition. The submission recognised that the identified capabilities will require considerable additional investment, increased personnel levels, and will take many years to achieve full operational capability.

From a veteran's perspective, ARCO's recommended the elaboration of a Veterans' Policy, the appointment of a Commissioner for Veterans, and the immediate establishment of a joint Office for Veterans' Affairs consisting of personnel from the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces.

Copies of the submission dated 26 February were provided to the Minister for Defence, the Chief of Staff and the Secretary-General. The submission was also posted on the ARCO's Website.

A summary of ARCO's key recommendations was submitted to the Commission on 12 April, followed by a virtual meeting which took place on 16 April.

### **Review of the Department of Defence**

Whereas along with other interested parties, ARCO's recommendation that the Terms of Reference for the Commission on the Defence Forces should incorporate the Department of Defence was not accepted by the Government.

Nevertheless, a review of the Department of Defence is currently underway as part of the Civil Service Renewal Plan. This review is the sixth departmental review since the process commenced in 2016.

In accordance with Action 20 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, the purpose of the review is to "embed a culture of regular and objective assessments of the capacity and capability of Departments to achieve its objectives and take the necessary action to close any gaps."

The current review of the Department of Defence is overseen by an External Review Panel nominated by Civil Service Management Board. An independent Capability Review Team, consisting of three officials from the Department of Expenditure and Reform is conducting the review.

During its September meeting, the EXCOM examined an invitation dated 20 August from the Secretary-General seeking ARCO's assistance and cooperation in the review process as an external stakeholder. The review is focusing on four key areas: Leadership, Strategy, Delivery, and Organisational Capability.



Following preliminary discussions with the Capability Review Team, the EXCOM is currently preparing its views, which will be conveyed to the Review Team during the course of a virtual interview taking place in October.

### **Networking**

Networking is a new direction for ARCO, providing communications and opportunities, for both our members and the wider Defence Community. On an annual basis, it is envisaged that ARCO will host 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. Events will be based on relevant defence, security, leadership and management themes.

Unfortunately, due to Government Covid-19 restrictions, ARCO's networking events have been deferred to 2022. In addition, ARCO's social media platforms provide a valuable means of networking, and increasing awareness of trends in the marketplace and in the wider Defence and Security domain.

### **Military Transition Programmes**

As part of its outreach programme, ARCO conducted six weeks of consultations with JP Morgan's Military and Veterans' Affairs Section. These discussions led to the sharing of material for J.P. Morgan's inaugural Dublin based Military Transition Programme, which took place from February through July 2021, catering for Defence Forces personnel of all ranks, who retired in the previous two years. Two Irish based retired officers participated in this programme – one from the Defence Forces and one from the British Armed Forces.

On 26 August, ARCO hosted an informative webinar on Military Transition Programmes organised and moderated by Capt Philip Quinlan. 174 registered for the event, of which 50, along with the three speakers, participated in the webinar. 727 viewed the event page on Eventbrite. The Speakers were:

- Michelle Osborne, a Royal Airforce Veteran, JP Morgan Chase & Co.,
- Eoin Rochford (80th Cadet Class), Goldman Sachs and
- Dan Barter, a Royal Corps of Engineers Veteran, EY UK Office.

ARCO continues to explore the concept of Military Transition Programmes, engaging with interested parties on the issue. The Minister, Chief of Staff, Secretary-General and RACO have expressed their compliments on this initiative.

### **Mentoring**

ARCO's support for the Defence Forces Monitoring Programme was formally launched during the 2020 AGM.



Last February, members were invited to submit expressions of interest to participate, as mentors, on a voluntary basis, in the programme. Twenty-six expressions of interest have been provided to the Defence Forces Mentoring Council. Some of the ARCO volunteers have been contacted, and the relationships with Mentees have started.

ARCO retains a proactive interface with the Defence Forces Mentoring Council. Reinforcing ARCO's motto, and its outreach programme with serving officers, this mentoring concept reciprocates the investment and experiences accruing from service in the Defence Forces.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, let us recall 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, I would like to sincerely compliment 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 2021, thus supporting the interests and needs of ARCO's membership.

Likewise, we commend the work of Brig Gen Liam MacNamee, Lt Col Seán Scanlon and Lt Col Joe Ahern in advancing ARCO's interests within the Defence Forces Benevolent Fund, CAOGA and the Alliance of Retired Public Servants.

On a personal basis, the Vice President – Brig Gen Séamus Ó'Giolláin, Secretary – Col Brendan McAndrew, Treasurer – Col Brian Monahan, Membership Secretary – Col Des Bergin, Webmaster – Comdt Billy Campbell, and Newsletter Editor – Col Declan Carbery deserve a special tribute.

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 the President's Report, you will recall that I focussed on internal and external outputs, addressing issues including, Governance, Pensions, MSA, Disability Pensions, Communications, Defence Community, Veterans Associations, Commission on the Defence Forces, Review of the Department of Defence, Networking, Military Transition Programmes, and Monitoring Programme.

**END**