



President's Report (Abridged) 2019 AGM

First Section - Internal Framework

25th Anniversary

On the 24th June 1994, ARCO was formally launched in the Constitution Room of the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, followed by a reception at the Mansion House. Most prominent among the Founding Fathers were: Col Kevin Hanley, Col Jim Fagan, Lt Col Frank Neill, Lt Col Jackie Deveraux, Capt Ray Tumulty and Comdt Leo Quinlan.

To mark its 25th Anniversary, ARCO is hosting a reception on Wednesday, 16 October, in St Stephen's Green Club, commencing at 1830hrs. The list of invitees includes the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Government Ministers, Representatives from Political Parties, the Defence Forces, the Department of Defence, RACO, PDFORRA, RDFRA, CAOGA, DFBBF, Veterans Associations, Retired Public Servants Associations, and the Media. Senator Michael McDowell SC will be the Guest Speaker.

Relevance

Whereas a key objective of ARCO is to promote, and protect the rights, interests and quality of life of its members, coupled with eligible spouses or civil partners, the prevailing operational environment behoves the EXCOM to analyse the internal and external relevance of the Association.

For example, ARCO's relevance to retiring officers in 2019, is somewhat different than that which prevailed, when the Association was formally launched in June 1994. In recent years, there is a radical change in the retirement profile of commissioned officers, with a movement towards early retirement, and, in some cases, retirement without pensions.

In this context, on 26 September, under the stewardship of Col Con McNamara, ARCO hosted a successful Workshop in the Military College, titled *ARCO's Future Relevance in the Evolving Environment*. Engaging with Defence Forces Headquarters, with RACO, and with both serving and retired officers, the results of the Workshop are informing the EXCOM's efforts in advancing ARCO's aim, objectives and outreach programme.

In order to advance the outputs of the 2019 Workshop, the EXCOM launched its Relevance Action Plan at its September meeting. The plan has five components namely: Governance, Information Campaign, Membership Campaign, Website and Communications. The Plan's 37 Tasks will be addressed, as appropriate during the remainder of 2019 and the first six months of 2020.



Governance

As all members are aware, the Association's Rules form the basis of ARCO's effective governance, transparency and accountability. In advance of a complete review of our Rules, which will take place in Q2 of 2020, and in the context of ARCO's relevance in a dynamic landscape, and especially with regard to the evolving profile of retiring officers, the EXCOM has drafted a specified Aim for the Association, and redrafted the existing Objectives. ARCO's proposed Aim and revised Objectives were stress-tested during the August Workshop, and later will be formally presented for adoption at the 2019 AGM.

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. Following on from RACO's acceptance of the Pay Commission's Report, in the short term, ARCO will be proactive in ensuring that the imminent increase in MSA for serving personnel, will be reflected, as appropriate, in military pensions. In the medium term, ARCO will be encouraging the Alliance to be fully engaged in the next round of pay negotiations for public servants.

And a final note on Pensions: In the likelihood of a General Election, the EXCOM will revisit its lobbying posture, as contained in its Strategy on Pensions, and communicate a revised lobbying document to its members. There is a strong possibility that such a revised lobbying posture, will also reflect ARCO's recommendation, promulgated last July, on the establishment of an Independent Defence Forces Commission.

Communications

At its September meeting, the Executive Committee endorsed an Information Strategy and will be developing a Communications Strategy in the Second Quarter of 2020. In the last twelve months, ARCO's approach to communications was by means of Regional Meetings in Finner Camp and Collins Barracks Cork, numerous postings on our Website, two Newsletters, and our Text-A-Message Service.

In the context of our Website and Texting Service, I commend Comdt Billy Campbell's endurance whilst managing our Website and Texting Service. I would also like to put on record the EXCOM's appreciation of the Newsletter Editor - Col Declan Carbery.

Activities

Outputs since the 2018 AGM include, the Combined Veterans' Strategy, the Workshop on ARCO's Relevance, a Review of our Objectives, a Review of our Bereavement Booklet, the



elaboration of a Information Strategy, and as previously mentioned, the 25th Anniversary Reception taking place on 16 October.

Arising from Col Billy Gibson's informed presentation at the 2018 AGM, the EXCOM has successfully advanced awareness of the Registration of Foreign Births and Deaths within the Department of Defence, Defence Forces and Retired Officers. The EXCOM is grateful to Col Dick Heaslip for taking the lead on this project. In order to bring complete closure on this issue, the EXCOM remains engaged in ensuring that appropriate legislation is enacted.

Second Section - External Framework

Defence Forces

As advised at last year's AGM, on 16 September 2018, ARCO released a *Statement of Concern* on the serious deterioration of the service conditions, and the depletion of strategic defence capabilities in the Defence Forces. ARCO's stated position on these significant issues remains credible and relevant, reflecting the ethos and values of its membership.

Of particular concern to ARCO, is the inordinate delay in addressing the adverse effects of inadequate remuneration accruing to our serving colleagues in Óglaigh na hÉireann. In addition, ARCO remains deeply concerned with the manner in which the retention challenges, across all ranks, within the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, are being addressed and the adverse effect it has on strategic capabilities. Likewise, ARCO is fully aware of the deteriorating living and welfare standards endured by families of serving personnel, dependent spouses and children, and, in some cases, retired single personnel.

On 29 April, 2019, ARCO released another statement highlighting these issues, in the context of the Respect and Loyalty Parade, which took place on 04 May, in Cork. According to the organisers, the key objective of the Cork parade was to publicly highlight the unsatisfactory pay, and service conditions, pertaining to personnel of the Defence Forces. In the context of the above key objective, as retired commissioned officers, in solidarity with serving commissioned officers, enlisted personnel, and their respective families, and acknowledging the endeavours of the General Staff along with the Representative Associations RACO and PDFORRA, the Executive Committee encouraged ARCO's membership to support the Respect and Loyalty Parade in Cork.

On 10 July, 2019, arising from the Public Sector Pay Commission's Report and the associated Government's Implementation Plan, ARCO called on the Minister for Defence to present formal proposals to Government establishing without delay, a statutory based, permanent and independent Defence Forces Commission, in order to address remuneration (including pensions), service and retention conditions, and the conciliation and arbitration architecture. This recommendation was further advanced in a statement released on 01 August, in the context of the Respect and Loyalty Parade which took place in Galway on 10 August.



ARCO's position on these issues, especially its recommendation in July for the establishment of a Defence Forces Commission, has received favourable responses from Óglaiġ na hÉireann and its Representative Associations, and the recommendation for an independent Defence Commission has been championed by both political, non-political actors, and by the media.

Defence Community

Of the 21 associations catering for retired public servants, ARCO is the only one 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, with the 2018 meeting taking place in Government Buildings, on 12 December.

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. In 2019, ARCO participated in Veterans' Day, and was represented at State and Military Ceremonial such as the National Day of Commemoration, the Annual Mass in Arbour Hill, the Easter Sunday Ceremony, Commissioning Ceremonies, and Reviews of Overseas Units.

Since the 2018 AGM, ARCO, ONE and IUNVA have held quarterly meetings with officials from the Department of Defence and officers from Defence Forces Headquarters. To date, these took place on 03 April, 15 May, and 24 July.

Finally, ARCO retains a fruitful relationship with RACO on matters of mutual interest such as Pensions, Veterans' Strategy, Veterans' Policy, Pay and Service Conditions of serving personnel and their respective families, and ARCO's Membership Campaign.

Veterans' Associations

ARCO remains actively engaged with ONE and IUNVA, in advancing the interests of Defence Forces Veterans. On 07 December, 2018 a Combined Veterans' Strategy was formally submitted to the Minister for Defence, the Chief of Staff and the Secretary-General. The Strategy informs meetings with the Department of Defence. 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.

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, I would like to take this opportunity of sincerely complementing ARCO's Officers and Regional Representatives for their steadfast support in advancing the Association's ethos, values and objectives during 2019, thus supporting to the best of our ability, the interests and needs of our membership.

On a personal basis, the Vice President - George Kerton, Honorary Secretary - Joe Ahern, Honorary Treasurer - Richard Cummins and Hon Membership Secretary - Dick Heaslip 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, I would like to formally acknowledge the guidance, advice and support I personally received from the immediate Past President - Gerry O'Flynn, during the last 12 months.

With 25 years 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 both internal and external outputs, addressing numerous issues such as the ARCO's Relevance, Governance, Pensions, Communications, ARCO's Concern of the prevailing Defence Forces Environment, Veterans' Strategy and ARCO's 25th Anniversary.

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