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# Professional Military Education in Australia: Has it All Gone Terribly Right?

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## Abstract

*In this article we discuss the contemporary challenges facing the delivery of Professional Military Education (PME) in Australia. Rather than criticising the current state of PME, we believe it is more productive to explore how positive outcomes can be secured within the constraints facing decision-makers over the next five to ten years. PME should, we argue, be regarded as an umbrella term that incorporates a much broader set of defence and security related educational processes and outcomes. Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, recently announced a review into Joint Education and Training. Our intention is to discuss PME issues within the context of the historical development of Defence’s key PME provider in Australia—the Australian Defence College—and in so doing offer some points relevant to CDF’s review.*

## Introduction

This article has three primary objectives. First, it seeks to present an account of the state of Australian PME. We think that it is important that our colleagues in the wider Defence and academic community understand what PME is ‘on the ground’. The second task is to encourage a debate between interested parties with a stake in PME—nationally and internationally. To that end, the third aim of this article is to sketch out some modest proposals as we develop the argument. These we believe could be useful for CDF’s Joint Education and Training review to be carried out by the Commander of the Australian Defence College. Our analysis is based on three core assumptions. The first is that PME is critical to the sustainability of Defence as an institution. Second, PME is central to recruitment and retention issues. And third, PME is the ace in the capability deck. Before we begin the discussion it is worth establishing the current health of PME in Australia.

## What the academics say

Attempts to provoke a public discussion on PME issues are evident in the recent writings of two academics whose long association with PME in Australia and overseas mean that their views need to be considered. Interestingly, both arrive at a similar conclusion even though they come at the issue from very different positions. Jeffrey Grey argues that:

Midway through the first decade of the 21st century, the officer PME system in Australia is in profound disarray, and is fundamentally failing the organisation of which it should be the intellectual gatekeeper and guiding beacon.<sup>1</sup>

Grey develops his concerns in the following manner. The PME system, he says, lacks continuity and alignment with ‘no central coherent philosophy that unifies the whole’.<sup>2</sup> The push to

outsource ADF education, Grey argues, has resulted in ‘credentialism’ and in some cases the ‘accredited degree qualification is a joke’.<sup>3</sup>

Ross Babbage strikes a similar note of alarm. He claims that:

The Defence officer education system currently fails to achieve the high levels of excellence required. It also lacks flexibility and adaptability, and it does a very modest job of inculcating such key characteristics in those sent to participate in the courses.<sup>4</sup>

Grey states it explicitly and Babbage notes it implicitly: this ‘failure’ damages the warfighting capacity of the ADF.<sup>5</sup> This is a serious claim to make. Yet finding a point where an assessment of these claims can be made fails as neither author offers evidence to substantiate their assertion. If this ‘failure’ is so acute as to require no evidence then why is it that success seems to dog Australian forces on operations where the weaknesses perceived by Grey and Babbage ought to be fully exposed? Assuming that Babbage and Grey believe that problems with PME will impact adversely on future ADF operations, they need to specify how, exactly, this might come to pass. Unfortunately, it is not clear from their writings where they think the weaknesses they identify will become manifest in future operations.

## **PME: Military success from defeat**

The idea that educating the officer corps of armed forces can contribute directly to improving their leadership qualities (and thus the effectiveness of the armed forces as a whole) can be traced to a series of devastating defeats inflicted on Prussia by Napoleon in the early 19th century. Following the decisive French victory at Jena-Auerstadt in 1806, the Prussian high command responded by introducing a program to educate a small cadre of officers on the broad theoretical and practical parameters of war. This was an era when the intellectual mastery of war as a science was seen not only as a desirable, but indeed necessary, means of attaining victory in combat.<sup>6</sup> Few would argue against the proposition that a well-educated military is the best capability a state can have as it looks to prosecute warfare.

Battlefield defeat certainly crystallises the need for PME reform. The American experience is illustrative. After Vietnam the US military went through a restructure and expansion of its PME programs. But particularly critical was the attention given to PME by Congress culminating in the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. Some US politicians have since come to see their role as ‘champions’ of PME.<sup>7</sup> Within the military, direct responsibility through to the highest levels in the chain of command were given reporting duties on PME. It is interesting to note the degree to which there is a keen political engagement and understanding of the importance of PME at the strategic level within the US system.<sup>8</sup> Eliot Cohen suggests that the US military will once again embark on another round of questioning its PME structures due to its involvement in Iraq.<sup>9</sup> PME in Australia does have its problems but unlike our major allies it would not appear to be facing a crisis.

Sorting out those problems is an ongoing process within the individual PME institutions. What is now needed is a strategic level analysis of how those various institutions function to support an educative continuum of PME. The CDF recently announced a Joint Education

and Training review to be headed up by the Commander of the Australian Defence College (COMADC), Major General David Morrison. As COMADC, Morrison is well positioned to carry out the review. A graduate of the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (CDSS) at the ADC in 2002, Morrison's command experience will bring insight into how effectively officers are prepared by the current PME structures.

## The Australian Defence College

It is pertinent at this point to outline how and why the ADC was established and what its various proponents believed its role should be. Major General Peter Day has observed that the process by which the ADC evolved was attenuated with strands of the debate dating back as far as 1959.<sup>10</sup> However, by the 1980s the momentum for change was palpable. The Butler Report of 1984 argued that officer education beyond that provided by the Joint Services Staff College (JSSC) was required. Major General Butler argued for a 12-month course that would 'prepare officers for high command'.<sup>11</sup> The course would ideally cater for 35 course members. With 25 of those course members being drawn from the Department of Defence and the Services, the balance would come from other Federal and State departments along with five from overseas and some from private enterprise. The creation of the National Defence College would also have a strategic research element to support the teaching programs.

The Butler report and later the Hammett report made it clear that the lack of an indigenous National Defence College was a deficiency in Australian officer education. In 1986 Professor Harry Gelber—in conjunction with the Hammett review process—established a clear rationale for the creation of a national college:

What is needed is an Australian solution to special Australian problems. Given the official emphasis on Australian independence, it is right to ask whether, by its failure to establish its own national defence courses, Australia can continue to remain out of step with, and dependent on, her major allies and friendly nations in this area?<sup>12</sup>

Gelber went on to offer some critical insights that remain as fresh today as they did in the mid-1980s. Key to his recommendations were 'high-quality staff' and a 'carefully developed curriculum' that would 'give the new institution professional and academic credibility'.<sup>13</sup> He expanded these themes in the report and they remain relevant two decades later.

Unlike Gelber and the series of prior reviews and reports, in 1989 Cathy Downes articulated the purpose of officer education in the concluding remarks to her exhaustive study: *Senior Officer Professional Development in the Australian Defence Force: Constant Study to Prepare*. Downes claimed:

The senior officer corps is a *sine qua non* in the effort to modernise the Australian Defence Forces, to produce effective war-fighting capabilities and doctrines, and to develop responsive military and defence strategies for the future. The influence of this corps of officers extends further into the future and is of broader consequence than any single weapon system or platform...<sup>14</sup>

Pulling these threads together into a coherent ‘blueprint’ for action fell to Brigadier Adrian D’Hagé. In his 1991 report to then CDF General Peter Gration, D’Hagé distilled the overseas experience in senior officer training and arrived at an ‘Australian model’ for a National Defence College.<sup>15</sup>

Our interpretation of this history of the development of the ADC suggests that many of the issues that need resolving today were canvassed and discussed in the various reports leading up to the creation of the ADC. Because the focus of that process was to create a functioning PME system quickly, a raft of issues that could not be resolved then understandably fell by the wayside. We argue that the current PME review is timely in that it has sufficient intellectual space to reflect on where improvements can be made without the rush to create a new PME system. One area that warrants exploration is whether the right type of staff and the balance between military and civilian involvement in PME meets requirements.

Unlike its overseas equivalents—which have faculties of academic, military, and public service members, of whom some are permanent—the ADC has no permanent faculty as such. The co-located colleges of the ADC have military and public service directing staff. The directing staff are rotated out every two years for military officers and every three years for public servants.<sup>16</sup> A permanent staff of academics and/or military officers, it could be argued create a less flexible environment. There are counter arguments that continuity suffers as a consequence of staff turnover at the directing staff level. However, continuity should reside in systems not individuals. If there is a serious continuity problem the ADC has yet to suffer from it. Of course, new perspectives and different ways of doing business need to be grounded by past experience, but established means of transmitting knowledge from one rotation to the next should be a particular strength of this military environment. Nevertheless, churn at the top of the organisation is a serious matter.

Since the ADC was established no Commander has seen out the full-term of his posting. Rear Admiral Gates was dual-hatted as COMADC and Chair of the SIEV-X review. Before Major General Molan left the ADC to take up the position of Deputy Chief of Staff, Strategic Operations, Multi-national Force in Iraq, he undertook a range of other duties. Rear Admiral Bonser, like Gates, was dual-hatted undertaking the review into military justice. Since 2002 there have been four Commanders of the ADC. Within the last three years at the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies Centre (CDSS) there have been as many Principals. The Australian Command and Staff College (ACSC) has also experienced significant turnover at the senior levels. Whether that rate of change undermines the institutional strength of the ADC is worth further investigation in the PME review.

### **In the schoolhouses now<sup>17</sup>**

Anyone involved in the design and delivery of educational product—particularly in the military context—appreciates that it is a complicated business hammered out on the anvil of compromise. Pressure to include everything that is thought to be important can result in courses being ‘an inch deep and a mile wide’.<sup>18</sup> Striking an appropriate balance between specific single Service requirements, joint aspects, broader strategic studies, and leadership and management is a difficult task.

The ADC has recently undergone major change in the way it conducts its courses. In 2006 both the ACSC and CDSS implemented new curricula after several years of assessment and review.<sup>19</sup> With the emphasis on warfighting the curricula have been restructured in line with the 'Commander's Intent' laid down by former COMADC Major General Jim Molan and agreed to by the Chiefs of Service Committee (COSC) in 2004.<sup>20</sup> It is still early days and there will no doubt be areas that need refining. Yet there is a strong sense that both colleges now have courses that better meet Defence requirements. It is also fair to say that the ADC has made significant progress towards becoming a smart(er) customer of academic services. It is now able to identify providers who understand the Defence 'practitioner-oriented' requirement.

A curriculum is only as good as the institutional integrity that supports it. There are a number of areas where organisational improvements to the ADC and across the range of PME institutions would produce better results. Some simple internal restructuring to squeeze out synergies, reduce duplication, streamline the support programs and continually check the 'learning continuum' would yield stronger dividends. While the ADC is a relatively young organisation it shows signs of moving quickly in the right direction. Building an ADC 'culture' by recognising the strengths of its constituent elements to produce a tighter alignment is one bigger issue certainly worth exploring.<sup>21</sup>

The challenge in the near to medium term will be to maintain Australia's established reputation as a leader in delivering high quality PME outcomes. This is going to be difficult in an environment where the ADF will be assigned additional operational commitments by government. Members of the ADF—as well as Defence civilians—who are best qualified for professional development via a sustained PME program, are also likely to be the strongest candidates for extended deployment or placement directly related to the military's higher tempo operational commitments. The higher the operational tempo, the more likely the small number of recent graduates of PME programs—who remain among the best qualified to teach and mentor new course members within these programs—will be assigned to operational command, staff, and senior leadership appointments within Defence. That trend, far from being assisted by new developments, will become even more compressed. As Murray Simons claims, 'smaller personnel numbers will make it harder for units to sustain long absences to PME courses'.<sup>22</sup> If Simons is right, then the major impact will be that fewer personnel for shorter periods of time will be available at any given time for PME.

PME is critical to operational success but just as important, operational experience is essential to developing a strong PME. What we advocate is a more deliberate approach to having officers with recent operational experience brought back to the ADC to teach and mentor even if for a short period of time. To some degree this does happen at ACSC but less so in other areas. A more coordinated approach across all the Services in consultation with the ADC and career management would produce better results. Moreover, it is also critical that the 'lessons learned' from operational experience be fed back into curriculum development. These twin processes if systematised would ensure an effective and efficient cycle of continuous improvement.

Twelve-month courses that allow intellectual reflection and development should always exist. But the rigidity of march-in January and march-out December courses with full-time face to face attendance may no longer be feasible or even desirable. That method might be administratively easy but is it what Defence needs? Perhaps a more flexible and modularised 'plug and play'

model would be more effective. The yawning gap in the ADF PME is the absence of ‘islands of education’ between ACSC and CDSS. The development and level of responsibility between MAJ(E) and COL(E) is significant and there is a clear requirement to provide specific educational product to support officers in that phase of their careers at the LTCOL(E) level.

The increased operational tempo and the demand to staff a new Defence establishment at Bungendore will put great strain on personnel availability. The critical questions for PME are: Is the current educational program what the emerging officer corps wants? Can we recruit and retain officers by offering them a traditional form of educational experience? Given the somewhat transient and erratic nature of career and deployment, Defence needs an officer education system that supports what James Schneider calls the ‘expert learner’ concept.<sup>23</sup> As Brigadier General Thomas Phillips notes, ‘The simplest test of whether the Army officer is a true professional is in the evidence of his professional study’.<sup>24</sup> This reminds us that the officer should look for learning opportunities as much as Defence should provide them.

Generational change now upon us signals that those entering Defence are looking for a different pattern of work experience where mentoring, leadership, and opportunity for responsibility are uppermost—they are a different kind of raw material. A watershed event passed largely unnoticed when the first officer to graduate from ADFA (1989) graduated from CDSS (2005). This significant event should make us alive to an emerging trend. For the last five years at ACSC there have been officers who enter with solid academic credentials from ADFA and elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> Retaining these officers is best achieved by giving them a challenging curriculum that is tightly focused on developing a professional body of knowledge and preparing them for the posting after next rather than another academic qualification.<sup>26</sup> Providing these officers with a problem solving skill set to adapt to different environments will mean that Defence will have a more flexible personnel base and the officers will have higher levels of job satisfaction. The on-going debate within the intelligence community over methodological approaches to analysis and problem solving is directly relevant to recasting PME.<sup>27</sup>

In the wake of 9/11 considerable effort has been devoted to rethinking intelligence models. What emerges from that process is the general proposition that some systems and models of analysis are inflexible and simply incapable of finding nuance. So often things that ultimately turn out to be critical tend to happen in the margins—passing by unnoticed. Striking the balance between detail and theme or the particulars and the model requires fine judgement. As we move from the tactical to the strategic, the demand for a capacity to think through a problem becomes vital. Problem solving operates at a number of levels and arguably in the modern security context the tactical, operational, and strategic levels have become so blurred as to render them almost irrelevant. Defence education should therefore seek to develop complex problem solving skills across all levels—officers, NCOs, and civilians.<sup>28</sup>

## **Not what to think but how to think**

In the ‘Commander’s Foreword’, to the ADC’s *Strategic Plan 2005–2015*, former COMADC Rear Admiral Mark Bonser claimed that:

Tomorrow's practitioner must have the capacity to synthesise diverse information, use their intellectual agility to determine relationships between variables, and then to apply this to higher order problem solving.<sup>29</sup>

Bonser sought to use the backdrop of 'strategic ambiguity' to suggest that the study of theory, history and contemporary events, while important, was not sufficient. He argued that the 'how and what taught previously needs to be reconsidered' as does program delivery. This new context means that 'Traditional methods of teaching sit uneasily with this new set of demands'. Nowhere in this document is mention made of PME. Although undeveloped, this line of thinking suggests that for Bonser there existed a degree of frustration that the PME nomenclature did not accurately capture the opportunities and constraints Defence educators now face. We sense that Bonser's concern was about developing an educational framework that could evade the crude trifurcation of tactical, operational, and strategic levels of analysis. If correct, then we see merit in a PME system that would explore these issues and possibly recast the approach to teaching that may have extremely positive effects for mid-ranking officer retention where it can be utilised in ways that produce a transformative shift in course member thinking.

## **The new and not so new**

Operational tempo and the types of operations the ADF are now grappling with present particular challenges for PME. Here we do not want to use those hackneyed phrases such as 'in the post-Cold War environment' or the 'arc of instability' or 'failed states', even though they retain a degree of currency for describing systemic change. Let's just recognise that the circumstances and situations in which ADF personnel now find themselves are different from what once could be anticipated. The demands—especially those surrounding the potential political costs—are now far higher. Make no mistake, operational success by an individual or the ADF at large rests on PME foundations—it is a major capability asset. Call it what you will, this 'new' context requires a highly professional outfit from top to bottom.

In this 'new' environment doctrine will remain critical. But there is sometimes a need to move beyond doctrine. That demands a capacity to comprehend the intent of government policy and interpret that within a fast moving military environment with an increasingly 'embedded' media close at hand. That this requirement might unfold in a coalition, multinational, or inter-agency operation where peacekeeping, peacemaking or warlike conditions may all exist simultaneously alerts us to the need to educate in particular ways. Defence needs to get more of its personnel through the PME system in quick time. We have the appropriate structures in the current schoolhouses to achieve this but some redefinition of how they function is warranted.

Leadership and ethics should form the core of PME. Individual and collective leadership is something that Defence has always expected from its personnel. The organisation spends considerable time and effort inculcating leadership values. George Reed and his co-authors provide a timely reminder of the centrality of leadership when they claim:

Leaders should be values champions for organizations and must be attuned to issues of climate and culture. We also need leaders who can communicate effectively to a wide range of audiences.

They need to inspire soldiers and also be able to address the American public and the international community through the unblinking eye of the television camera.<sup>30</sup>

As we use the term here, 'ethics' is not solely an appreciation of the laws of war. For a truly professional military, ethics incorporate a fundamental set of guiding principles that go beyond the laws of war and international legal obligations. These principles provide an enduring moral compass that supports complex problem solving and effective decision-making that underpins operational success.

## Confidence in our own capacity

There are, as one would expect, a number of 'institutional' difficulties in the world of PME. Some of these stem from the single Service approach of the past and the evolutionary integration into an ADF from the mid-1980s. Combining the Service Staff Colleges into the Australian Command and Staff College only happened in 2001. While that process was building, the wrecking ball of short-term reform had all but demolished anything that resembled Joint Education and Training within Defence. Subsets remain today but function under great strain. In some cases they are burdened by managing the competing expectations and interests of users and providers. Possibly the major difficulty is that policy development remains separate from the delivery arm of PME.

How the myriad elements of Defence education fit together is often difficult to comprehend. Individual units excel but there is little integration and, despite best efforts, the continuum is often more happenstance than planned. The 'closed-shop' nature of some of these elements is a real barrier to taking best practice elsewhere and adapting it. As understandable as it is to want to protect what one has developed it is myopic to think that others may not have something to offer. Yet these criticisms still miss the bigger point. Without a broad strategic framework that articulates the educational requirements coherently, elements will continue to operate in ways they have done in the past. The current PME review should therefore examine very closely the need to bring the policymaking areas of PME into closer alignment with the development and delivery elements. These matters can be resolved through an organisational restructure and by making sure that those who are appointed to oversee the change remain in place to complete the task.

As the ADC model was being developed in the latter part of the 1990s these sorts of concerns were recognised. The former Head of Joint Education and Training, Rear Admiral John Lord, assured that the creation of the ADC would go a long way to providing the much needed organising principles and institutional framework for PME.<sup>31</sup> It is worth quoting at length from his 1998 comments:

...the minimum critical specifications for a successful ADC would be for it to have the capacity to coordinate the customisation and delivery of education and training services to a diverse range of Defence constituencies. It would do this in ways that both maximise learning effectiveness and administrative efficiency. ...We see the ADC in a mediating relationship between Defence as a consumer of education services and the higher education system as a provider. ...The creation of a peak or premier coordinating institution such as the ADC will place current institutions within

a policy and institutional framework designed to support the Defence education continuum as a whole. It thus creates the conditions for an ongoing critical examination of how different elements of the continuum ... best contribute to the education outcomes served by the college...<sup>32</sup>

The idea of creating an educational 'clearing house' for Defence was sound. Between the time these comments were made and the commencement of the ADC, the drive for cost efficiencies and the dire need to get ACSC established on schedule, restructure JSSC, and fix the curriculum problems of the forerunner to CDSS, these strategic issues gave way to more tactical concerns. The staffing levels needed to achieve the sort of institutional support deemed necessary from the mid-1980s onwards were never realised. Although we cannot provide a detailed explanation of why this happened because it is another large research piece on its own we can at least provide a useful context to begin framing an answer.

## The Defence Efficiency Review

In the late 1990s Defence education and training became part of a wider drive for rationalisation and cost efficiencies of a new government. Defence Minister Ian McLachlan launched a wide ranging review into Defence and how it could do its business better. The 'Defence Efficiency Review' found in relation to Defence education:

We believe that there are substantial benefits to be obtained by managing officer education as a single process, and for there to be a greater emphasis on joint officer education. We have been unable in the time available to make specific proposals, but believe the potential for savings and a better product is substantial.<sup>33</sup>

The authors of the review went on to argue that they were 'reluctant to create a Joint Training Command or an Executive', and argued that Commandant ADFA in consultation with the Rector should have responsibility to develop and implement policy.<sup>34</sup>

With the 'strategic' framework set, a sub-Review Team structure was created to drill down into each of the issue areas identified by the Senior Review Panel. The relevant (and for our purposes more interesting) material is therefore to be found in the 'Addendum to the Report of the Defence Efficiency Review: Secretariat Papers'. Throughout the discussion on education and training the term 'joint' appeared to become synonymous with efficiency:

In the short to medium term, the rationalisation of schools and facilities along joint Service lines would achieve efficiencies through reducing running and support costs and management overheads, freeing funds tied up in facilities and assets, releasing delivery staff for operational tasking, and creating conditions for further management improvement through adoption of standard processes, rationalisation of curriculum and market testing.<sup>35</sup>

However, at the higher levels of Defence education the review presented some critical insights around the idea of amalgamating JSSC and the Australian College for Defence and Strategic Studies (ACDSS).<sup>36</sup> Efficiency alone, they said, would not be the 'principal driver' for the restructuring of JSSC and ACDSS. As is often the case the interesting discussion took place in the margins. The panel certainly recommended that one senior officer college be established

but that there was merit in this college delivering a ‘flexible range of educational services’ with ‘more focused courses’ through a ‘series of interventions spread over a longer period in an officer’s career’.<sup>37</sup>

It would be easy to suggest that the rush to extract efficiencies from the Defence system created many of the problems we have discussed. But what is very clear is that the review process was anything but a crude cost-cutting exercise when it came to senior officer education. We claim that in the current context some of the observations made in the past about the type and form of PME curriculum required remain highly relevant. Why that did not transpire probably had to do with institutional politics within Defence more than government directive. The point we want to reinforce, and suggest the PME review consider seriously, is the development of flexible packages of educational product with a sharper focus on relevant and supportive programs of study that officers can access at the appropriate time in their careers.

### A PME fit for the practitioner

PME in Australia must be based on a coherent and flexible continuum that takes personnel through a series of educational experiences that develop into a professional body of knowledge of warfighting. Ordering that continuum as tactical, operational, and strategic is no longer useful. A more flexible process would see all three elements and then combinations of them taught up and down the PME hierarchy. Sectors of the public higher education system have a role to play. But Defence really does need to set the agenda and map out the key learning outcomes that will enable ADF personnel to do the tasking demanded. That requires high level coordination and an overarching authority to guide it with an appointment at a senior level with direct access and responsibility to CDF—COMADC would appear to be the logical choice.<sup>38</sup> There would be merit in establishing around that position a small team with specialist expertise able to help formulate education policy and oversee delivery. More importantly, that group would be used to measure effect.<sup>39</sup>

‘The future’, as the French poet Paul Valéry wryly noted, ‘is not what it once was’. And yet it is all too easy to exaggerate the *degree* of change internationally. It is worth pointing out that the international system itself and the way it functions, remains largely unchanged since the Cold War. States remain the highest sovereign authority in international relations, material ‘hard power’ capabilities still trump normative ‘soft power’ capabilities in international relations, and the ‘threat spectrum’ for states is no more dangerous now than it was during the Cold War.<sup>40</sup> The workings of nation building and state making are just as problematic, and for Australia these twin processes are readily identifiable in many of our struggling neighbours.

By overlooking the lessons of history we run the risk of misunderstanding contemporary world dynamics. By reifying ‘critical’ thinking over strategic thinking we run the additional risk that insufficient attention is devoted to long-term strategic change, by any measure a core intellectual business of Defence. None of this is to deride critical thinking skills, but two points need to be made. First, critical thinking is not strategic thinking. And it is the latter more than the former that Defence really needs. What we expect of senior officers is a capacity to synthesise large and complex slabs of information and distil it into sound assessments on which policy can be

formulated. Second, the essence of an effective military rests on a solid base of leadership and ethics. Both strategic thinking and, leadership and ethics are generic skills required across Defence.<sup>41</sup> While not advocating specific courses on these topics alone we argue for a more integrated approach. Drawing on recent experience illustrates the point we seek to make.

At ACSC this year Commandant Brigadier Wayne Bowen's staff have structured the curriculum so that there is an opportunity for course members to undertake a five-week research project. Course members in consultation with key Directing Staff select a research topic and a mentor is appointed. At the end of the period each course member has to present the findings of the research. With senior officers and topic specialists present the course members give a 30-minute presentation and then are subject to intense questioning. The focus of the questioning is not as would be expected in an academic setting—i.e. the merits or otherwise of a set of arguments—but in every case: How did this research help prepare you for leadership? Put simply, in this context the 'academic content' was used as a vehicle to gauge professional development. And that is why PME is so different from public higher education in the broad. The expectations of leadership we have are so much higher because the costs of failure are so much greater. The take home message is that content is important but how it is arranged and how it is used to achieve Defence-specific learning outcomes lies at the heart of PME.

Defence educates and trains for many purposes but the prime reason is to enhance warfighting. PME in that context must centre the ADF 'student' as a receiver of a professional body of knowledge. Effective PME is about imparting that professional body of knowledge efficiently and bringing to that a capacity to engage in ways that utilise scholarly assets—research, application of logic, and a disputatious attitude. A decade ago William Wallace drew attention to the distinction between scholarship and scholasticism when he noted:

Scholarship necessarily involves conceptualization, categorization, and explanation, and assumes transmission of the knowledge gained to others. Scholarship hardens into ideology or dogma when the contingent basis for explanation—the necessary doubt which should accompany all intellectual discovery—is forgotten. It deteriorates into scholasticism when its practitioners shift from attempts to address common questions from different perspectives to competition among different 'schools'; in which each multiplies definitions and explanations, develops its own deliberately obscure terminology of competing groups. ...[scholasticism] developed out of the overpreoccupation of medieval university teachers with disputes with each other rather than with an engagement with the problems of the world beyond their monastic or university walls.<sup>42</sup>

Defence needs a PME that promotes scholarship and eschews scholasticism; the touchstone of PME has to be a strong practitioner focus served by a relevant and engaging curriculum that prepares all of its graduates to meet the challenges of warfighting in these tangled times. Leadership and ethics should form the core of PME supported and informed by a practitioner focused professional body of knowledge.

## Conclusion

The operational tempo for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has increased dramatically since 9/11, with major commitments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Solomon Islands and, most

recently, East Timor. As a consequence, there has been a more intensive mining of the ADF's senior officer ranks to fill combat related leadership roles to service expanding operational commitments.<sup>43</sup> The imperative of more frequent rotations for those involved in combat deployments has also accentuated the need for 'talent mining' in the ADF. As a medium sized armed force, this has inevitably placed strains on the capacity of the ADF to ensure continuity and stability in senior ranked appointments across Defence. This pressure, in all likelihood, will only increase in coming years especially if Australia is called upon to support operations in the Middle East and Asia while it continues to 'backfill' existing commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, expanding Australian-led commitments in Solomon Islands, and East Timor may be followed by other operational deployments in the South Pacific.

In this demanding context, PME will become more, rather than less, important for Australia. ADF peace enforcement type operations in Iraq, Solomon Islands, and East Timor have all required close cooperation with the local population and an appreciation of the highly fluid political climate framing Australia's respective military contributions. In many respects, these types of theatres are much more challenging for the ADF than state-on-state conflicts. The reality is that ADF deployments since the end of the Cold War (with the notable exceptions of Gulf Wars I and II) have largely been tasked to deal with conflict within states where senior personnel are required to cover an array of difficult missions in addition to warfighting. These include: brokering negotiations between local parties, providing force protection for state building, and supporting local forces against ethnically/religious based militants. These are not merely 'operational' level tasks. They are operational tasks with extraordinarily sensitive strategic implications. Without a firm foundation in PME, ADF and Defence leaders may struggle to ensure that the future implications are positive for Australia.

The ADC may not be perfect, and there are many issues yet to be resolved, but it does provide the intellectual and institutional framework for officer PME in Australia. That is a far cry from where things stood less than a decade ago. In any case it is what we have and thus what we have to work with. Improving the PME system in Australia as we have argued will require some changes to the institutional structures as well as to the curricula. The integrity of the schoolhouses is critical and they must be staffed with people best suited and qualified to do the task. A more systematised approach to bringing personnel with recent operational experience to instruct and mentor would prove beneficial. Feeding in the 'lessons learned' from operations to the curricula is vital if Australia is to build a durable PME. These institutional changes should support and reinforce the best curricula that can be developed.

Adopting a rigorous process to make sure that the education continuum is coherent and meets the needs of current and prospective personnel sounds easy but it will take time and research. Developing problem solving skills at the strategic level across the whole of Defence and making leadership and ethics the core of PME will help focus our efforts. And as we have argued there are opportunities to modularise and make flexible the various entry points into the schoolhouses by exploring the 'expert learner' concept. This could be a useful starting point, as it will drive us to think, who are we educating and how that is best done.

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## NOTES

1. Jeffrey Grey, 'Professional military education and the ADF', *Defender*, Spring 2004, p. 26.
2. *ibid.*, p. 27.
3. *ibid.*, p. 28. Such observations on accreditation, we note, are not peculiar to the PME system in Australia alone. The registrar at Canada's Royal Military College recently remarked, 'it is unfortunate that officers are advised to obtain a degree, rather than an education'. See Lieutenant-Colonel David Last, 'Military Degrees: How High is the Bar and Where's the Beef', *Canadian Military Journal*, 5(2), 2004, p. 29. While space prohibits a deeper discussion of this matter it is useful to note that a distinction between 'hunters' (military career-orientated) and 'collectors' (those who exit at mid-rank with as many qualifications as possible) is one that warrants far more study in the PME debate. Murray Simons pointed this out several years ago in a very engaging discussion about PME issues. See note 21 for detail.
4. Ross Babbage, *Preparing Australia's Defence for 2020—Transformation or Reform?*, Kokoda Paper No. 1, October 2005, p. 36.
5. Grey, 'Professional military education and the ADF', p. 27. See also the discussion of Ross Babbage's claims by Patrick Walters, 'No place for timid in urgent reforms', *Australian*, 10 October 2005.
6. For background see, Detelf Bald, 'The Impact of Tradition on the Education of the Military in Germany', *Military Affairs*, 45(3), 1981.
7. Affectionately known as the 'Godfather' of PME, Ike Skelton is a case in point. In 2004 he was the Ranking Minority Member on the Committee on Armed Services.
8. Note the contrast with Australia. For an Australian perspective it is worth reading the recommendations offered up in the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Officer Education: The Military After Next*, AGPS, Canberra, 1995.
9. The American capacity for self-reflection and criticism in this area is the benchmark. See Eliot Cohen, 'The US Military After Iraq: A Speculation', *RUSI Journal*, February 2006. In his analysis Cohen draws on the highly critical piece written by British Army Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, 'Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations', *Military Review*, November–December 2005. For an historical account of the development of PME in the US see John Yaeger, 'The Origins of Joint Professional Military Education', *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 37(2), 2005.
10. See his, 'What Price Officer Education?', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 120, 1996, p. 4.
11. *Senior Officer Development Review 1984*, Vol. 1, p. viii.
12. Harry Gelber, *A Programme for the Development of Senior Officers of the Australian Defence Force*, Australian National University, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Working Paper No. 119, Canberra, 1986, p. 13.
13. *ibid.*, p. 22.
14. Cathy Downes, *Senior Officer Professional Development in the Australian Defence Force: Constant Study to Prepare*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 55, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1989, p. 109.
15. A.S. D'Hagé, *National Defence College of Australia*, Report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, April 1991.

16. Again there is an interesting contrast with the US see, Admiral Charles Larson, *Study and Report Related to Permanent Professors at the United States Air Force Academy*, April 2004.
17. We take this term from Admiral Shulford of the US Navy. We are attracted to his argument that 'the schoolhouses are the lynchpins of organisational and cultural change', see his 'President's Forum', *Naval War College Review*, 59(1), p. 12.
18. Eric Stevenson, 'Educating the Community's "Cream": Common Military Training at the Australian Defence Force Academy', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 120, 1996, p. 12, offers an insightful account of the pressures.
19. ACSC and CDSS are co-located at Weston ACT. The third element of the Australian Defence College is the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA).
20. Molan's role in reshaping the curricula should not be understated.
21. The Canadians, it would appear, have created a highly productive relationship between the Canadian Forces College (CFC) and their Royal Military College (RMC) in ways that could be germane. See Murray Simons, *Professional Military Learning: Next generation PME in the New Zealand Defence Force*, Air Power Development Centre, Canberra, 2005, p. 29.
22. *ibid.*, p. 5.
23. See his 'Transforming Advanced Military Education for the 21st Century', *Army*, 55(1), 2005, p. 16.
24. 'The American Professional Soldier', *Army*, 56(2), 2006.
25. Prior to 2006 ACSC course members could undertake an additional course of studies to the psc(j) to achieve a Masters in Management Studies during their year of study. Directing Staff report that the 2006 cohort is now more focused on the psc(j) since the Masters has ceased.
26. There has been much written lately about retention and PME. The following are indicative of a global questioning about this issue at the senior level: Air Vice-Marshal Brian Burridge, 'Post-modern Military Education: Are We Meeting the Challenge?', *Defence Studies*, 1(1), 2001; Lieutenant General Anthony Palmer, 'The War for Talent', *RUSI Journal*, April 2003; Major General William Burns, 'The Education of "A Modern Major General"', *Naval War College Review*, 57(1), 2004; and General William Richardson, 'Getting West Point Back on Mission', *Military Review*, March–April 2006.
27. This is a massive literature with many interesting points of convergence with PME, even though this is never teased out fully. The interested reader could start with, Carmen Medina, 'What to do When Traditional Models Fail', *Studies in Intelligence*, 46(3), 2002.
28. As an aside we draw the reader's attention to an interesting rethinking about the role of military history in teaching PME. This, we believe, could potentially be used to good effect. See, Jeremy Black, 'Rethinking Military History', *RUSI Journal*, June 2005. For an approach that appeals to us see, Gerrit Gong, 'The Beginning of History: Remembering and Forgetting as Strategic Issues', *Washington Quarterly*, 24(2), 2001.
29. Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Defence College, Strategic Plan 2005–2015*, 2005.
30. George Reed, et al., 'Mapping the Route of Leadership Education: Caution Ahead', *Parameters*, 34(3), 2004, p. 55. See also the comments by Conrad Crane as quoted in David Nason, 'Ethics in spotlight as war crime fears grow', *Weekend Australian*, 22–23 July, 2006.

31. JET was created to make the changes determined by the Defence Efficiency Review. It was set a three year timeframe to accomplish the task. The position of Head JET ended in April 1999.
32. Speech by Rear Admiral John Lord, 'Education and Training for the Australian Defence Force', given at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre Conference 21–23 September 1998 at the ANU, Canberra, p. 7.
33. Commonwealth of Australia, *Future Directions for the Management of Australia's Defence*, Canberra, 1997, p. 50.
34. *ibid.*, p. 51.
35. Commonwealth of Australia, *Future Directions for the Management of Australia's Defence*, 'Addendum to the Report of the Defence Efficiency Review: Secretariat Papers', 1997, p. 297.
36. The Australian College for Defence and Strategic Studies was opened in October 1994 and retained its title until the end of 1998. From 1999 to the end of 2000 it was known as the Australian Defence College. It became the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies in 2001.
37. Commonwealth of Australia, *Future Directions for the Management of Australia's Defence*, 'Addendum to the Report of the Defence Efficiency Review: Secretariat Papers', 1997, p. 315.
38. The position of COMADC was in fact created out of the Head of Joint Education and Training.
39. We have in mind an ongoing evaluation team with reporting responsibility to COMADC. There is merit in that group implementing the kind of strategy as outlined in the, United States Government Accountability Office, *Military Education: DOD Needs to Develop Performance Goals and Metrics for Advanced Distributed Learning in Professional Military Education*, July 2004.
40. For discussion on this theme, see Andrew O'Neil, 'Keeping the Contemporary Threat Environment in Perspective', *Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 31 May 2004, available at: <<http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/drawingboard/digest/0405/oneil.html>>.
41. This has long been recognised as a problem in Defence see the KPMG report, *Report on the Needs Analysis for Strategic Education in the Defence Organisation*, Joint Education and Training Executive, Department of Defence, May 1999. For a scholarly perspective see, David Auerswald, et al., 'Teaching Strategy Through Theory and Practice', *Defence Studies*, 4(1), 2004; Hew Strachan, 'The Lost Meaning of Strategy', *Survival*, 47(3), 2005.
42. See his, 'Truth and Power, Monks and Technocrats: Theory and Practice in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 22(3), 1996, p. 311.
43. This is not to suggest that such pressures are unique to the ADF. US armed forces are facing considerable pressures—including direct pressure from the Secretary of Defence himself—to 'abbreviate' PME during a 'high stress period'. As Holmes points out, 'plucking an officer from the classroom' yields immediate tangible benefits for decision makers, while the longer term drawbacks are rather remote and abstract for political leaders. See James Holmes, 'Restore History and Theory to Military Education', *The American Thinker*, 26 May 2006, available at: <[http://www.americanthinker.com/articles.php?article\\_id=5528](http://www.americanthinker.com/articles.php?article_id=5528)>, accessed 1 June 2006.

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