

MPs gain insight into Defence Academy

From 15-17 September, 22 MPs and Peers attended the annual 'Introduction to Defence' course delivered as part of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme (AFPS).

For three decades, the AFPS has educated cross-party parliamentarians in military matters, giving them insight that they might not otherwise have and enabling more informed defence debates in their respective Houses. This comprehensive two-day residential event combines expert speakers with practical, hands-on demonstrations, to increase attendees' awareness of what defence delivers for the UK.

Defence policy, capability and acquisition, crisis response and strategic engagement were on the agenda across the two days. This year's cohort attended a series of lectures delivered by senior representatives of the MOD, UK Strategic Command, the Defence Academy's academic partner King's College London, and each of the single services.

The programme also included a visit to the Defence College for Military Capability Integration (DCMCI), part of the Defence Academy, where students were taken through a series of demonstrations by subject matter experts in cyber, simulation, and air and space. DCMCI delivers multi-domain education and training to maintain strategic advantage, reflecting the government's intent to further integrate science and technology as key elements of national security and international policy.

Parliamentarians enrolled on the AFPS can select a single service with which to continue their learning, and wear service uniform to help reinforce this connection. On completion of this introductory course, the MPs and Peers will embark on single service courses delivered by the Army, Royal Navy and RAF, as well as Strategic Command, over the coming year, to further enhance their understanding.

Major General Andrew Roe, Chief Executive and Commandant of the Defence Academy, said:

It was an honour to host another cohort of MPs at the Defence Academy on the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme. As the MPs and Peers gained understanding into how defence operates and delivers UK objectives, we were able to showcase how the Defence Academy is always evolving to provide the right training and education for our people.

DM Kineton new, safer access and main entrance completed

Planning permission was granted in December 2018 for a new approach and guard room. DIO worked with industry partners Tetra Tech and contractor Montel to undertake the works, through the Warwickshire Highways framework.

The site stores ammunition for the Armed Forces and is the largest and most modern site of its kind in Western Europe. However, the previous site entrance presented safety issues as traffic queues often formed on the B4100 outside the site as visitors queued for access and drivers had to exit their vehicles into the road.

The project created a new main entrance to the site and included provision for a new access road, guard room and parking area together with the requisite security fencing, gates and lighting. The new guard room is currently in use and the old one soon to be demolished, with the older gate now becoming an emergency gate.

Stuart Gallacher, DIO's Project Manager for the work, said:

This project has definitely improved the experience of staff and visitors to the site, but we know it's also of great benefit to local people who have to travel on the B4100 and used to get caught in traffic as a result of queues to enter DM Kineton.

Lt Col David Pickersgill, Commanding Officer of DM Kineton, said:

I am delighted the new DM Kineton Main Gate and Guardroom are now in place. This modern facility is a huge improvement and provides a developed capacity to efficiently manage vehicle flow into Kineton Station. Most importantly, it significantly enhances safety. This benefits people accessing the site and the general public as they will no longer have to contend with traffic queues on the B4100 immediately outside the gate.

I would like to extend my thanks to all involved in delivering this project, and to the local community for their patience while the construction took place.

Simon Turbutt, Managing Director, Montel Civil Engineering said:

We are delighted to have completed the construction of a new roundabout, access and guardroom for DM Kineton, and pleased that the new facility and upgraded access will enhance the experience of

both staff and visitors of the base and the general public using the public highway.

From start to finish the project has been a really positive team collaboration, this approach enabled the team to overcome a number of unforeseen challenges, ensured project and budget efficiency, adherence to project timelines, and increased overall coordination from our supply chain.

[Seed bombing project in Kenya takes root](#)

Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) staff in Kenya have been working to increase the plant life on the MOD's Kenyan training areas.

Staff from the Overseas and Training (OS & TRG) team in Kenya are introducing seed bombing to the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK). Seed bombing, also known as aerial reforestation, is a technique of introducing plants through scattering what are called 'seedballs'.

Charcoal dust is combined with nutritious bindings and formed into a ball around seeds, which protects them from damage and animals. Charcoal, which is made from felled trees, is a very common form of fuel in Kenya. The dust is a waste product from the production process and is often left in piles in urban areas, polluting the environment. Using charcoal dust to make seedballs removes some of these piles and uses the waste product to grow new trees, helping to replace those used to make the charcoal in the first place.

The seedballs are scattered and when conditions are suitable with sufficient water and sunlight, the seeds will start to germinate and break through their protective housing. It can take as little as a month for new plants to be established in previously barren areas.

As part of a project looking at the impact military training has on the land we lease, the OS & Trg team worked with colleagues in DIO's environmental team. They were able to obtain funding to purchase 16 bags of native grasses and acacia trees, each weighing 25kg, to replant areas which have been impacted by training. This allowed the team to study the impacts of the seedballs, trying different methods of distribution, placing the balls in full sun or shade, and experimenting with burying and scattering the balls for the best effect.

Sam Seaton, DIO's OS & Trg Business Manager in Kenya, led the project. She said:

I've loved working on this and seeing how much everyone wants to get involved. I'm optimistic that we'll start to see much more greenery on the training estate as this project continues.

Understanding how our training affects the local wildlife and growth is key to ensure we understand the long-term impact of training in Kenya. By doing these studies we form a picture of the ecosystems on our leased land to protect it for future generations. Healthy ecosystems clean our water, purify our air, maintain our soil and regulate the climate.

BATUK staff also took the opportunity to engage with the local community. Following a fire at Lolldaiga, the DIO team had purchased further seedballs for a mass drop from a helicopter to restore the area. Equity Bank, one of the many local companies that BATUK works with on the high street in Nanyuki, purchased a bag of seedballs and donated them to DIO to scatter, as did other local businesses. Lt Col Finlay Bibby, Deputy Commander of BATUK, was instrumental in helping Equity Bank to plant some seedballs and saplings to enable re-growth in the area.

DIO Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Longwell taking receipt of seedballs from Teddy Kinyanjui of Seedballs Kenya.

The DIO team worked with Seedballs Kenya, an organisation which chooses suitable native plants. DIO Commander Lt Col Paul Longwell took receipt of sacks of seedballs from Teddy Kinyanjui of Seedballs Kenya. He said:

I'm really pleased to have been able to support this project. It's fantastic to see growth already starting from the seedballs we've scattered so far and I'm really looking forward to seeing the difference in a few months' time.

The intention is to offer visitors to BATUK the opportunity to scatter seeds to offset their carbon footprint from the flight.

[London International Shipping Week 2021 gala dinner](#)

Introduction

Thank you and it's wonderful to be here in the glorious, historic setting of

the National Maritime Museum on the banks of Thames.

Millennia ago, a man took a fallen tree trunk and noticed that if he pushed it beyond the marshes and into the swell of the tidal River, that it floated. If hollowed, it could take his tools, his hides, and he could sell them to another tribe and bring back gifts and goods from them.

Thousands of years later, the great traders of the age of sail connected the far corners of the world, at speed, and for the first time, ordinary people began to understand a little of the world outside their country.

When I was a boy, I had a poster of the Cutty Sark above my bed, all sails rigged, cresting a wave – the very epitome of maritime dash and flare. You could almost smell the salt.

And so this place has served as this city – and this country's – gateway to the world from dark, mysterious, prehistoric times, through the ceaseless roaring torrent of history, until today, and earned its place in the heart of the nation.

And so we are in the right place, for London International Shipping Week – the premier global maritime event and the UK's second-largest international conference this year, after COP26.

It's been so good to finally meet many of you in person for the first time this week. We saw each other at the London Stock Exchange event on Monday morning and then you saw me again for the second time half an hour later at the FCD0, and again for the third time an hour later at Trinity House.

I think I am probably on my tenth encounter in 4 days with half of you by now, so my sincere apologies for your having to see so much of me.

But on that note, may I start by celebrating one hugely important thing. That we are all here, together, in person. Doesn't it feel good? Renewing friendships, establishing new ones, and reaching hands across the oceans. That alone is something to cheer.

And as I look around me at the wonders of the Museum, I find myself wondering how the Maritime heroes of the past would have coped with the strange world in which we find ourselves. Would the Battle of Trafalgar, for example, have gone differently if Nelson had ordered that the fleet "engage the enemy more closely" if he were then told that it would be against social distancing rules?

And would the signal "England expects that every man will do his duty" have echoed down the ages if, instead of being hoisted above the shot-strewn sails of HMS Victory, it had been posted in the chat function of Microsoft Teams?

I am also conscious, that in this new Zoomified world, we have become accustomed to the use of a fearsome weapon, available to our host Lord Mountevans, that was not available to Lord Nelson.

My friends, I am very aware, that should I keep you for too long from your

dinner, that he may consider it to be his solemn duty to reach for the mute button, and condemn me to highly animated silence. And so I shall not trample upon your patience for long.

But I do fervently want to take just a little of your time to celebrate this week – or really, to celebrate what it means. Because what we are marking and celebrating here today – after nearly 2 years of struggle, of suffering and of strife – is that this is a maritime nation, proud in soul and core, in every way as it was when the Cutty Sark raced back from India, white sails billowing, to get the best prices for the tea she carried.

And it matters not that the tea is now in boxes delivered by Amazon, rather than chests delivered by sail. It all crests the waves in just the same way.

And nor is maritime just about imports and exports – critical though they are. It's about the people, the talents they have and the blessings they bring – from professional services and law to insurance and the digital economy – my friends, maritime is in the very blood and soul of this nation.

And haven't we celebrated some milestones? The International Chamber of Shipping has celebrated its centenary, whilst the International Marine Pilots Association turned 50 – 2 great international institutions that call the UK home. This alongside the IMO, which hosted this year's conference, reaffirms that London really is the home of maritime.

And finally, on a personal note, I was delighted to open the new cruise terminal at Southampton, only yesterday, almost a year to the day after my first visit to the same site as maritime minister, when we thought we were in the midst of the COVID storm, but so much still lay before us.

The cruise industry has been hit particularly hard during the pandemic. But supporting over 80,000 jobs and with over £9 billion of economic value at stake – £2.5 million of value to the local area every port call – it is too important to sit idle. Which is why my DfT team and I have worked relentlessly, across government and with industry, to restart international cruise – safely, securely, robustly, to be sure – but a restart all the same.

COVID-19

And now most of our economy is back up and running. Thanks to our world-leading vaccination programme, which has saved lives and allowed us to get back to normality.

But I'm sure we all remember the dark days of last year. I joined the government a year ago, right in the middle of our pandemic response. Quite a baptism of fire to be honest, for my first ministerial gig – I attended the Select Committee to explain the government's handling of the crisis, after a grand total of about 4 hours in the job.

But as soon as I opened my first Red Box, the extent of the damage on lives and livelihoods was clear.

Government rightly stepped in, committing an initial £330 billion to keep the economy moving, providing essential support to industries such as maritime.

But it's important to realise that when many of us could adapt to pandemic life through homeworking, for the maritime sector, business often had to continue as usual. And in the most trying of circumstances.

The sector ensured that our supermarkets remained stocked, medicines flowed into our hospitals and fuel stations had enough to allow essential journeys to continue.

We cannot overstate the role that the maritime industry, from engineers to cargo handlers, pilots to harbour masters, played in helping Britain keep the lights on over the past 18 months.

I would like to pay special tribute to our seafarers, who have felt the effect of the pandemic acutely through the crew change crisis, often unable to get home to their families and loved ones. And I am proud to say that we were the first country to declare seafarers as key workers and our efforts to promote and protect their welfare continue to be a priority.

Importance of maritime

Yet this sector's importance lies in more than just getting the UK through the pandemic.

You're an economic heavyweight, contributing £17 billion to the UK economy, supporting over 1 million jobs, most of them highly-skilled, productive and well paid.

In fact, shipping is responsible for carrying 95% of UK trade by volume, yet it is largely invisible to the public who rely on it – until, of course, something goes wrong. That's why a thriving UK economy will always have maritime at its core. Because if we are to create and attract the highly-skilled jobs of the future, we need to position Britain at the forefront of autonomous shipping. And if we are to achieve our ambitious domestic net zero target, we need to accelerate progress on cleaner fuels and green shipbuilding.

For me, the key takeaway from London Shipping Week is that whilst the UK is a world leader in maritime, especially in the areas of environmental innovation and business services, that status is not guaranteed. In an increasingly competitive global industry, we must invest in and support the industry – so it can grow and meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Crucially, that means continuing to secure the UK's competitive advantages across a range of fields, including maritime law, finance and insurance.

We need to protect and promote our maritime clusters of excellence across the UK, whether that's leisure marine in Cornwall or ship design in Scotland.

And we know the UK flag has a global reputation for trust and excellence, so

we will ensure it remains one of the top performers on the Paris and Tokyo white lists. Throughout, we will reinforce that the UK is the best place to do business – constantly improving our offer to customers.

For example, this week we launched the UK's new Shipping Concierge Service. It provides a 24/7 one-stop shop for international maritime organisations looking to invest and operate in the UK. They will have access to a streamlined service which connects them to the experts in government, industry and academia.

But a thriving maritime sector isn't just good news for London. As an island nation, this sector can play an important role in levelling up. That's the thinking behind our ambition to invest in 8 new freeports, which will serve as national hubs for international trade by simplifying import procedures and suspending customs duties. They will attract investment, regenerate local areas, and create jobs – from the Humber to the South East.

And finally, we know that to capitalise on our hard-won independent status outside the EU, maritime will be key to fulfilling our new global trade links. That's why we should all be encouraged by Lord Frost's words earlier this week. He set out a range of opportunities to reduce regulatory burdens or adapt them to UK circumstances.

This includes a particular priority for me – the revocation of the port services regulation – which we will start as soon as the legislative programme allows. This is a prime example of legislation aimed largely at continental member states yet ill-suited to the highly decentralised, efficient and competitive sector here.

Future technology

Now, throughout this week there has been considerable emphasis on innovation. On ensuring maritime can rise to meet the challenges of the future. And with maritime trade expected to double over the next decade, the industry must consider how it can meet that demand efficiently and sustainably.

One way is by being ahead of the technological curve, using technology to make shipping smarter. By doing so, more vessels and equipment can operate autonomously, safely and at lower cost.

Take big data, used in a maritime context it could allow for autonomous in-voyage maintenance, avoiding costly stops in dry dock. Or artificial intelligence, which will give seafarers information to make better decisions on the environmental performance of vessels whilst enabling more dangerous jobs to be done remotely.

And these developments represent a huge economic opportunity. The UK could secure a 10% market share in a global maritime autonomy market worth \$136 billion within the next 12 years. And government is providing support by first consulting, and then legislating, for the regulation of autonomous vessels.

But let me be clear, technological developments don't spell the end for crewed vessels. We'll still require crews, but they will be even more highly skilled teams specialising in IT and electrical engineering. And to ensure a steady pipeline of talent, we're increasing funding for new cadet training and will continue to use the apprenticeship levy to recruit into the 20 maritime-specific apprenticeships available.

Net zero

But I can't talk about the future without mentioning decarbonisation. In July, the UK launched its most comprehensive plan ever for cleaning up our transport network.

The [Transport decarbonisation plan](#) set out our ambition to accelerate our transition to green shipping. However, as vessels are long-lived assets, we must work with industry to make the right decisions and avoid potentially costly long-term mistakes. That is why we're looking to establish UK SHORE, a dedicated unit in my department to lead this work. And why we will consult on ending the sale of new non-zero domestic vessels.

Shipping may not get the attention planes and cars get in the decarbonisation debate, yet we know that shipping pollutes more than rail and buses combined. That's why the Secretary of State has this week announced that we will join other nations in supporting a world-leading absolute zero target for international shipping emissions by 2050. It's ambitious, yes, but given what I have seen this week, it's within reach.

A case in point is the Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition. It has brought scientists, academics and industry together to develop a range of projects from hydrogen-powered vessels to e-chargepoints at ports. It's been a huge success so far, with more bids than we had originally planned for.

The [winning projects were announced yesterday](#), receiving a total investment of £23 million – including a somewhat psychedelic-sounding “green submarine” – don't worry, I won't sing. If successful, these projects will then be rolled out to the mass market. Accelerating our progress to reducing maritime emissions as quickly as possible.

Conclusion

And so I want to leave you to think about what maritime is. Not what ships are – steel, wood, power-trains and props – that is what maritime needs.

What maritime is, is freedom. The freedom to stretch hands across the ocean, to greet an old friend and to sample their culture and their food, the spices of the East, the richness of Europe, to see the dynamism of America, to celebrate the brotherhood of the Commonwealth – to share our talents and in sharing grow them all.

And so forgive me if I do, for a moment, dwell upon the glories of the past, because they are also the glories of the present. The urge that spurred the man in the canoe, Lord Nelson, the Cutty Sark and all of you – is the same.

To pursue the ever-receding horizon, to push the boat beyond the reef, to feel the first rock of waves on the hull, to explore, to seek, to find.

Maritime will thrive because maritime is mankind. And I am proud to sail on that voyage, with you.

[British troops in Mali help investigate massacre](#)

Scores of gunmen attacked a number of villages on 8 August around Outtagouna, close to the Niger and Burkina Faso borders in the south-east of the country, leaving dozens of people dead. Armed groups aligned to Daesh and al-Qaeda are known to operate in the region.

In the hours after the killings, reports of the massacre started to reach the British contingent to the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) at their base in Gao, 150km to the north. Drawn from 2nd Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment and the Queen's Dragoon Guards, the Long Range Reconnaissance Group (LRRG) provides a highly specialised capability to reach remote areas by travelling long distances across difficult terrain.

MINUSMA's Force Commander Lt Gen Dennis Gyllensporre tasked the LRRG to bring forward planned operations and launch immediately to the area in their specially designed off-road desert vehicles, with the 250-strong UK Task Group arriving at the scene less than 36 hours after the attacks.

The troops immediately secured the villages, providing protection from further attack and allowing a special UN Human Rights team to interview locals and collect physical evidence left by the attackers. Due to their rapid arrival, the LRRG were able to provide critical information to support the UN investigation, which will aim to help bring the perpetrators to justice. The UK personnel were also able to use their human security training to engage with all sections of the local population to understand the situation and provide reassurance, with female peacekeepers engaging with local women.

Armed Forces Minister James Heappey said:

"The loss of so many innocent lives is a terrible tragedy. This horrific event is a sad reminder of why UK troops are deployed to this difficult and dangerous UN peacekeeping mission.

"The UK Task Force's swift reaction assisted the UN Human Rights Officers to collect vital information about the massacre that might one day see violent extremists held accountable for their crimes, while also providing a measure of security to these traumatised communities in the wake of this disaster."

The LRRG's uniquely specialised ability to not only deploy at great distances but also stay out on the ground for long periods, meant they were able to remain at the scene for three weeks, enabling the UN to not only investigate the massacre but also protect the villages from further attack.

Following the return of the UN investigators, the Task Group continued patrolling the area at night and flew unarmed Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) drones over the villages to deter and guard against any further attacks on civilians.

Furthermore, due to the continued security they provided, a field mission from the UN Civil Affairs Division was able to travel to the area, allowing MINUSMA's community liaison officers to access villages not visited for several years.

LRRG Commanding Officer Lt Col Will Meddings said:

"Given the size of the sector we operate in, it is impossible for MINUSMA to be everywhere, all the time.

"However, this operation clearly demonstrated the versatility and wide range of capabilities the British Army brings to the UN mission, deploying rapidly to remote areas to protect towns, respond to attacks on civilians and enable the UN's civilian teams to do their work."

The LRRG have been operational in Mali for nine months, after deploying in December 2020. In that time, the Task Group has pushed out into areas where peacekeepers have not previously had a presence, enabling the UN to protect civilians, gather intelligence and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to remote communities that would previously have been unreachable.

In May 2020, in the first operation of its kind by UN forces in the country, they seized a cache of weapons hidden by suspected Daesh militants who had been threatening local communities.