Welcome to the
The Independent Advisory Panel (IAP)
ANNUAL REPORT for 2019
CONTENTS

1. Welcome and overall summary from the IAP Chair
2. What is the “Army Foundation College”?
3. What is the “IAP” and what does it do?
4. IAP members
5. IAP activities in 2019
6. IAP reports submitted and issues discussed in 2019
   - Commendations and Improvements observed in 2019
7. Themes and priorities for 2020
8. Summary for 2019
9. Recommendations
10. Commanding Officer’s response
11. Annex 1: IAP members in 2019
1. Welcome and summary from the IAP Chair

Welcome to this year’s Annual Report of the Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) of the Army Foundation College, Harrogate (AFC (H)).

I joined the IAP in July 2014 and became Chair in January 2019. In our role as independent observers of the College, we see the constant effort that goes into helping as many of the Junior Soldiers (JS for the remainder of this report) as possible, graduate successfully at the end of their courses and go on to progress their army careers after Graduation. This report outlines the College’s role, describes what the IAP is, summarises our work in 2019, and concludes with our overall summary and recommendations.

It has once again been a busy year for the IAP, with regular visits to talk to the JS and Permanent Staff (PS), attending many College events, and of course holding our IAP meetings where we discuss our observations and recommendations with College leadership. We have worked closely with the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Richard Hall MBE, and his leadership team, to oversee some significant changes and improvements that in our belief have strengthened the “Duty of Care” at the College.

I wish to thank Lt Col Hall MBE for his support, expertise and candour. We are welcomed wherever and whenever we visit and our reports are read and fully responded to. I also want to thank the entire HQ team and the PS of the College for their knowledge and input which is essential to our work with the JS. The IAP is dependent on this level of openness and dialogue in order to perform our roles in an informed and effective way.

I am very grateful to every IAP member – there are ten in all – for the great enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment they bring in helping to ensure that every JS who is at the College is safe, well supported and given every encouragement and opportunity to succeed. In other words, that the Duty of Care is properly in place.

Finally, and most importantly, I also thank the JS at the College for their openness about what they enjoy and what they find challenging and for their cheerful readiness to talk to us, whether it’s in the Lines, in the Cookhouse, on an Exercise or whilst studying in the Education Wing.

This report is aimed at current parents and families of JS in training, at any teenager thinking of coming to the Army Foundation College in the future and to anyone who wants to know about the IAP at Harrogate and our role. We are a group of civilians who bring a “fresh pair of eyes” and a “critical friend” approach to the training of the JS and we are determined, for the benefit of everyone at the College, to help it continuously improve.

Mark Roberts
December 2019
2. **What is the “Army Foundation College”?**

The AFC (H) at Uniacke Barracks outside Harrogate, North Yorkshire, trains future soldiers for all Army cap badges except the Royal Military Police, Military Intelligence and Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps. AFC (H) is a totally purpose-built facility which opened in 1998 on the site of the former Army Apprentices College. Any school leaver aged between 16.5 years and 17.2 years can attend, providing they meet the entry criteria (see [www.army.mod.uk/join](http://www.army.mod.uk/join)). At any time, there are approximately 1,300 male and female JS in training at AFC (H), overseen by over 400 permanent military and civilian staff. Non-military education and training of Junior Soldiers at AFC (H) is provided by TQ Pearson Ltd in the specialist Vocational Education Wing at the College.

There are two full-time residential courses at AFC (H):

- **A 49-week Long Course** (including eight weeks’ holiday) for those Junior Soldiers joining the Household Cavalry, Royal Armoured Corps, Royal Artillery, Infantry and some Royal Logistic Corps roles. There are two different entry points - September and March. Junior Soldiers who graduate from AFC (H) will progress to a short Initial Trade Training course (Phase 2) and then move into the Field Army as 18 year-old adult soldiers.

- **A 23-week Short Course** (including three weeks’ holiday) for those Junior Soldiers joining the more technical branches of the Army. These are Royal Engineers, Royal Signals, Army Air Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Corps of Army Music and some Royal Logistic Corps roles. There are two different entry points - September and March. Junior Soldiers who graduate from AFC(H) will progress to a longer Initial Trade Training course (Phase 2) and then move into the Field Army as 18 year-old adult soldiers.

JS graduate from AFC (H) every February or August each year, depending on when they joined a Short or Long Course.
3. What is the “IAP” and what do we do?

Independent Advisory Panels (IAPs) were created by the Ministry of Defence after the 2006 Inquiry into the deaths of four soldiers at Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut in Surrey. As a result of the Inquiry’s recommendations, all under-18 JS training was moved into totally separate establishments instead of being alongside adult recruits. In due course, IAPs were introduced as a new source of assurance to JS, their families and the Army. The IAP has existed at AFC (H) since 2007 and the College is the only Army training establishment in the United Kingdom where all recruits are over 16 but under 18 on arrival, throughout their course and on departure.

Under the law, anyone under 18 is a minor and not an adult. There is therefore, a “duty of care” to protect them from all avoidable harm. *The role of the IAP is to help focus on that duty of care and on whether it is being delivered in the daily life of JS, whether in training, in the classroom, on the parade ground, in the gym, out on military exercises or in the living accommodation at AFC (H).*

Two IAP members, one female and one male, are attached to each of the five companies at the College and they produce a written report on any activity they observe. We can visit AFC (H) or an off-site training activity whenever we like. Our visits are a mixture of pre-arranged visits to enable us to speak to the JS within a normal training day and informal, i.e. not prearranged, when we might visit in the evening or at weekends. On every visit, a key part will be talking directly with the JS themselves about their experiences so far.
4. **IAP members**

IAP members are unpaid civilian volunteers, who can serve for a maximum of seven years. They are totally independent of the College and are recruited for the range of their expertise and experience in the commercial and industrial world, the public services and education. The majority of the members are parents themselves and they live in and around the Harrogate District. All have full DBS (Disclosure Barring Service) Clearance to allow them to work with under-18s.

*See Annex 1 for a full list of IAP members at AFC (H) in 2019.*

5. **IAP activities in 2019**

Whilst our primary concern is upholding the Duty of Care for the JS, we are interested in the complete range of experiences offered to JS at the College. This includes observing how they live and work successfully as JS, how their educational achievement develops and also how they mature as young adults.

Their personal challenges may range from severe homesickness in the early weeks, to getting on with the other JS in their section or platoon, to meeting the physical demands of the course and in getting their kit in good order under time pressure. Every day they will be encouraged to try new experiences and do their best to succeed at them, overseen by the PS.

In April almost all the IAP members attended an Induction Day at the AFC, visiting the Junior Ranks Dining Facility, the Laundry, the Welfare Centre, Medical Centre and the Indoor Range. This gave the members a first-hand opportunity to engage with the staff operating these important amenities, to learn more about their operation and to raise observations about any frequently mentioned comments by the JS.

Following our Annual Report in 2018, and in addition to our core focus on JS Duty of Care, we focussed on the following themes for 2019:

- Supporting the College in its efforts to ensure that Permanent Staff (PS) arriving at the College are fully pre-trained; that they arrive fully prepared to fulfil their role modelling responsibilities to the JS and are able to communicate effectively with the JS in order to support them in their transition from incoming school leavers to outgoing JS.

- Encouraging the College to provide clearer and repeated explanations to the JS at section level about aspects of daily life and training at AFC (H).

- Supporting the College to resolve remaining timetabling difficulties and compression within the Short Course which leads to increased pressure on PS within the Company, at times.
• Encouraging the College to maintain as consistent approach as possible on the implementation of sanctions across Companies particularly as regards ensuring that the College standard on mobile phone access time is understood by all JS and PS.

• Continually reviewing any negative comments about the quality, choice and service within the JRDF (Junior Ranks Dining Facility), which appeared regularly in JS feedback.

6. IAP reports submitted and issues discussed

In all, IAP members made over 40 visits to see JS in 2019. This is similar to the number of visits made in 2018. Any queries, compliments or recommendations for improvement contained in these reports, and actions agreed in response, were recorded in the IAP Action Log. This Action Log is discussed at each half-termly meeting between the IAP, the Commanding Officer, the Company Commanders and other members of the College Leadership Team. An individual report is only “closed” when the IAP member who made the report is satisfied with the response. This year those meetings took place on 5 February, 2 April, 4 June, 30 July, 8 October and 3 December. In total, 30 recommendations generated an action in response. These included:

• **Discipline.** Disciplinary matters do feature in our reports. The overwhelming theme is that discipline must be consistent across the College both for JS and PS.

• **Mental Health.** Issues relating to mental health have been high on the agenda both in private IAP meetings and in the half-termly meetings between the senior leadership and the IAP. The IAP fully supports the efforts of the College to continually scrutinise and improve mental health provision.

• **Permanent Staff Morale & Support.** Both the College and the IAP recognise the importance of the well-being of the PS so this is something that receives a good deal of our attention. Appropriate pre-arrival training and support while they are at the College is essential to the PS being able to properly train and support the JS. This requires a consistency of approach across the Companies both in terms of training requirements and approaches to disciplinary matters

• **Timetabling.** The complexities involved in scheduling each Company and Platoon utilising the shared resources of the College are enormous. In our opinion, timetabling has improved significantly since raised in 2018, yet there remain occasional examples where mealtimes are extremely rushed, and the logistics for the JS moving about the College are not always practical.

• **Recruitment & College Loading** (especially from Sept 2019). The suitability of some of the JS arriving at the College for training as JS, seems to be becoming more of an issue, either because of medical issues or because of preparedness and expectations of what training at the College involves.
The IAP is aware of the effort ongoing to address these issues at AFC(H) and, where additional support may be required, that these issues are being communicated along the chain of command beyond the College.

Commendations and Improvements observed in 2019

- **Permanent Staff.** It is extremely pleasing to note the number of times that JS identify PS by name as a result of their exemplary leadership. We also see positive, professional and strong rapport between the JS and PS at every level.

- **Discipline updates to the IAP.** At the request of the IAP, the members receive a periodic informal update from the Adjutant on any disciplinary matters relating to the JS and the Permanent Staff at the AFC. This briefing enables the IAP to be aware of any emerging trends or incidents, which often have an influence on the culture and morale of the AFC.

- **Internal Communications.** Good levels of communication between College HQ and the individual Companies is vital to the success of the College as whole. The IAP very much support the efforts of the CO and his staff to maintain good, open and consistent levels of good communication.

- **Education.** The educational side of the College is regularly complemented by JS. It is extremely pleasing when we meet with JS and are told that having arrived at the College, sometimes with no qualifications at all, that they have passed all their exams and are looking forward to their future career in the Army.

- **Physical Training.** The new physical training regime based on core strength and technique seems to have been a great success with reported injuries significantly down on this time last year. As an example, Project Achilles is a programme introduced at the AFC to provide additional training to JS heading for a career in the Parachute Regiment, so that they are better prepared to the rigours of their Phase 2 training. It includes extra meals and increased Physical Training, and has had the impact of significantly improving the performance of the JS from the AFC at their Phase 2 training.

- **Smoking Ban.** The College should be commended for encouraging JS and PS to stop smoking. Particularly impressive are the efforts of some Companies to provide their JS with an alternative to the social, downtime aspect of smoking by developing the utility areas in the lines, into pleasant spaces to relax and socialise.

- **Parental Engagement.** The presentations by the CO and OCs on Reception Days are very valuable. They always seem to be well received and very much encourage good parental engagement and communication throughout each JS’s time at the College.

- **Junior Ranks Dining Facility (JRDF).** Problems with the food and service provided by the JRDF are sometimes identified and should continue to be monitored. However, there is potential for the College to better manage the realistic expectations of the JS. Food choices and variety will inevitably, not always be to everyone’s taste.

We have also been invited to observe specific training exercises. We continue to be pleased to see the high levels of planning, supervision and support for the JS, from each other as well as from the PS, in all of these.
7. Our Themes and Priorities for 2020

Our first priority will remain our focus on the Duty of Care and welfare for JS at AFC (H). We will provide every support we can to the Commanding Officer and the leadership teams to ensure continued positive outcomes and experience for the JS. This includes supporting the work done by the College to continually scrutinise and improve mental health provision where required, and by establishing open and effective dialogue with Permanent Staff.

We continue to highlight our view that longer leadership postings of the Commanding Officer and other key staff would be beneficial for continuity at AFC (H) and take additional steps to minimise risk of miscommunications at handover points.

We continue to support the Army in its work with the recruiting group to ensure the suitability of trainees arriving at AFC(H), especially in light of increasingly high numbers of new entrants following the successful recruitment campaigns.

We continue to fully support the College’s decision to introduce a smoking ban and must encourage the use of whatever mechanism are put in place to make it easier for PS and JS to give up smoking.

8. Summary for 2019

On the basis of our observations on IAP visits to AFC (H) during 2019, the IAP is confident that the Duty of Care to Junior Soldiers is actively embedded throughout the College. The increasingly open culture at AFC (H) has continued, led from the top down, which benefits all and enables us to undertake our role in a more informed way. We would hope this continues with successive Commanding Officers.
9. **Recommendations**

In the opinion of the IAP, the relatively frequent change of Commanding Officers and other senior staff at the AFC (H) every two years, means that there is a loss of leadership momentum and organisational memory. For an organisation so significant to the future Army, this represents a loss of potential. A longer period of command would be beneficial.

The IAP sees a strong benefit in the AFC (H) having more input into the selection of key personnel such as Company Commanders and Senior Instructors. The College is well placed to identify the specific attributes required for these postings.

We note the growing awareness of the emotional and mental health needs of a significant minority of young people. AFC (H) is also aware of the growing pressures relating to this and the need to make appropriate provision for these young people as part of a modern welfare service at the AFC. We support this.

We have observed over the last year a growing frustration at the number of JS who arrive at the College on reception days but who for either medical or other reasons leave very soon afterwards, sometimes within a matter of days. We support the work of the College in working with the Army recruiting group to ensure that the selection procedures are robust and appropriate and in so far as possible, ensure that JS arriving at the College are suitable candidates who are well prepared for training at AFC(H).
10. Commanding Officer’s Response

Firstly I must thank the IAP for their invaluable contribution to the College. As I have said many times over, they represent the most effective of assurance mechanisms and are eloquent and unafraid in their approach to ‘holding to account’ the people, policies and culture that represents the fabric of the College. This report comes as no surprise. We have been wedded at the hip with every member of the panel and have met frequently throughout the year to discuss findings and solutions. This is exactly the way it should be and it results in an open, honest relationship where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than failures and continuous improvement sits at the heart of every conversation.

Picking up on the three key recommendations. The extension of command tour is fully understood. The role of Commanding Officer, for example, straddles that of a Managing Director, Headteacher and traditional CO. There is much about the training of U18s that is unique and the policy relating to safeguarding and welfare can be daunting to the uninitiated senior and middle managers. Combined with the second recommendation relating to the College having input to the selection of key staff, it paints a picture that the key concern remains the appropriateness of the College staff. I think this is right and this is where pressure should continue to be applied. In an organisation like the College, there is a very appropriate quote from the Management Guru Peter Drucker “Culture eats strategy for breakfast”. It means no matter how good your plans and policies, without the right people with the right values, the organisation will stutter. This is why a significant amount of training is invested in those staff who are assigned in. From training at the ARITC Staff Leadership School (3 weeks) through the College induction (1 week), Command and Leadership training (1 week) and then shadowing and observing at Company level (first 6 months), a lot of time and effort is invested into new arrivals to inculcate the culture we want. A key ingredient of this success is getting the instructor selection right in the first place and the College has initiated Potential Instructor Briefing Days to inform the Field Army (where the instructors come from) as to the qualities we seek and the expectations made of the staff. We have been helped in 2019 by the successful Raw Recruits documentary too. A national TV documentary, it has helped give an insight into the life of an instructor, albeit with much of the behind the scenes graft by the staff not shown. Therefore, while we cannot influence tour lengths and we do not select our incoming staff, we have reached upstream to inform, educate and influence on the selection and training of the right type of people for a role that is hugely privileged and carries great responsibility. The final recommendation relating to improving and modernising Mental Health provision at the College is also very welcome. As the Army’s thinking on the topic has evolved, the College has been at the forefront of championing change from policy through to the establishment of an
on-site Mental Health Practitioner. We have firmly separated the conflated issues of mental ‘resilience’ from ‘health’ and invested in both. We are in the process of updating our resilience training and embedding practical exercises into every lesson and event; we are front loading the training so that the very first instruction a soldier receives in her career is resilience based; we have secured rapid access to mental health support and are in the process of recruiting for a therapist to work as part of the College team; and we have established a working group which is empowered to deliver solutions to help support the resilience and health of staff and Junior Soldiers. With more to do in 2020, the framework for a step change in 2020 has been built.

As a final reflection on the year and look forward to 2020, I am delighted with the pace of change and innovation. With a completely full College (over 1300 recruits in training) which shows no sign of abating next year, it is more important than ever for the successful outcomes for recruits to be maximised. For next year we will bring in a ban on smoking in College grounds for the staff in order to role model healthy behaviours. We will invest more in the training for infantry recruits to better prepare and inspire them to be successful in their chosen careers. We will open up new facilities, including a mountain bike track an indoor small-bore shooting range, a volleyball court, a 5-a-side football pitch, better common room facilities and more privacy for instructor accommodation on camp. We will refine the training programme to remove compression and begin work to develop completely new Long and Short courses (CMS 2021). And we will continue to invest in our world class leadership, education and sports and skills training.

I thank again the IAP for continuing to hold us to account, for helping drive the right improvement culture and for the frequent identification of excellence that our young instructors deliver on a daily basis.
Annex 1: IAP members in 2019

*Alamein Company:* Richard Corby is a Chartered Surveyor with wide experience in the property sector and is the director in charge of the Leeds office of a national practice. He has been a trustee of Leeds Counselling for over 20 years. He lives in Harrogate and was appointed in August 2014.

*Alamein Company:* TBC – Recruitment Underway

*Burma Company:* Ann Mannion (Vice Chair) is managing a DfE funded project for the University of York. She and her husband live in Summerbridge. Appointed May 2014, Vice Chair January 2019.

*Burma Company:* John Parker is a retired businessman with extensive international experience, most recently in the healthcare sector. He was for nine years Chair of By the Bridge, a private fostering business. Appointed September 2014.

*Cambrai Company:* Mark Roberts (Chair) undertook a series of senior marketing roles before founding and running his own speciality beer company. He is also a Leeds City Region LEP Board Member. He lives in Harrogate and has a young family. Appointed July 2014, Vice Chair from June 2017, Chair from January 2019.

*Cambrai Company:* Sarah Nattress is a Chartered Accountant who was a Director at PriceWaterhouseCoopers. She specialised in Government and Public Services assignments and was the national lead for the firm’s contract to quality assure Work Based Learning for young people, including within the Armed Forces. She now has a young family and lives in High Birstwith. Appointed in August 2015.

*Peninsula Company:* Peter Chambers was once a Junior Soldier himself before being commissioned into the Royal Engineers. He then became Head of Strategic Development for BT and now runs a coaching and mentoring business. Appointed July 2013.

*Waterloo Company:* Caroline Hatton is a non-practising barrister with experience in the public and private sectors. She has worked as an in-house legal adviser for various organisations. She recently served as a non-executive director within the NHS. Caroline is also a school governor at a local primary school. She has two grown up children and lives in High Birstwith. Appointed June 2016.

*Waterloo Company:* Carl Nelson is the founder and director of a community interest company providing vocational training to young people in the Harrogate District who are excluded from mainstream education. He is a former Police Office, latter serving as a Detective Sergeant on a major crime team. He is the parent of a JS who graduated from the AFC (H) in March 2017. Appointed September 2017.

*Peninsular Company:* Rajinder Richards is a qualified Solicitor with many years’ experience in Civil Litigation. She has extensive knowledge of Court Procedures and has a keen interest in Mental Health Law and Welfare rights. She has also served on North Yorkshire Police Authority, Harrogate Borough Council’s Standards Committee and was an Associate Hospital Manager. Appointed June 2017.