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Dame Meg Hillier
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

18th November 2022

Defence's Digital Strategy – additional information

Dear Chair,

During the Public Accounts Committee's oral evidence session on Defence's Digital Strategy on 14 November 2022, my Departmental colleagues and I made a commitment to write back to the Committee on two issues. Please find responses on these issues below.

1. In response to a question from Nick Smith MP, to provide evidence on increasing interest in Defence Digital roles as a result of the Department's recruitment activity.

Defence Digital has brought in recruiting experts from the private sector ('Talent Acquisition Business Partners') to increase interest in its roles through: better advertisement content; greater promotion in advertisement of the range of benefits of working in Defence (such as hybrid working and flexible working options, training and development and career opportunities, and explaining the nature, importance and relevance of our work); greater use of social media (eg. LinkedIn) and job boards (eg. indeed.com); and attendance at specialist careers fairs.

As a result of these efforts, over 34% of applicants now report that they found Defence Digital roles through 'non-traditional' routes such as social media and internet searches rather than through the use of the Civil Service Jobs page. Moreover, this figure is increasing: the equivalent figure for the previous quarter was just under 17% of applicants. Other regular reporting established this year also suggests an upward trajectory in the number of applications for Defence Digital roles. For the year to November 22, the average level of applications for all Defence Digital roles – including the key Project Delivery and Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) professions was 6.1 applicants for every vacancy. This is a significant increase from when this data was first available, in August 22, which showed an average of 3.6 applicants for each vacancy.

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2. In response to your question about achievements in Defence's Digital programmes, to provide further detail on the timescales for the delivery of the Readiness Reporting and Deployability Discovery (R2D2) software project.

The R2D2 project delivers a digital service that can be used to model the ability of military organisations to meet the demands of a potential deployment of forces, taking account of a range of relevant military capability criteria. Ultimately, the full capability and benefits of the service can only be realised at the SECRET level of classification. The service will strengthen Defence's ability to manage UK Armed Forces' current and future commitments, with key benefits including significant reductions in the time and staff effort needed to create objective, evidence-based assessments; an ability to deal with greater levels of complexity and a far wider range of potential deployments; and much increased speed of decision-making.

The R2D2 project has already deployed a service to Defence's core MODNET IT (at OFFICIAL), which allows users to undertake a manual assessment process. Parts of the application are still being developed, but trials at OFFICIAL are underway in the Front-Line Commands and will conclude by June 2023. These trials will give the Department the confidence that the solution is ready for automation and deployment to SECRET. After the completion of the OFFICIAL trials, we plan to conduct and conclude subsequent trials on MODNET SECRET by the end of next year. This would allow R2D2 – including an automated view of workforce readiness - to be used for readiness reporting from the first quarter of 2024, with the subsequent introduction of automated views for the other relevant components of military capability.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. Lee', written over a horizontal line.

Laurence Lee CMG

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