

# LOWLAND RFCA 22/23 ANNUAL REPORT



CONNECTING DEFENCE  
WITH SOCIETY

# CHAIR'S REPORT

*Captain Andrew Cowan RD RNR*



We have opted for a different approach to this year's Annual Report. Our hugely successful online [Lowland Quarterly](#), in which our Annual Report is now published, is the perfect vehicle.

The National Audit Office, in their recent 'Good Practice in Annual Reporting' guide, advise that 'A good annual report is a key opportunity for bodies in the public sector to: engage with key stakeholders in telling their story in a clear and accessible way; outline how they have achieved their objectives and the challenges they faced; and how they have used public money.'

Lowland Quarterly tells our story in a clear and accessible way. It provides ample evidence of the depth and breadth of what our Reservists, Cadets, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and Professional Support Staff have been up to over the year, all so ably enabled and supported by our staff at Lowland House. The reports that now follow outline how we have achieved our objectives, the challenges we have faced and how we have used public money.

As Chair of the Board, I am pleased to report that we have successfully held our course over the year. We have resumed 'normal service' after the COVID-19-imposed lockdowns but, thankfully, we are now far more comfortable operating in the digital space. We battle with inflation and lack of resource, not least in Estates. We continue to develop our understanding of how we do business in a Defence landscape in which only one of our Reserve units (603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force) actually reports to a HQ in Scotland. We have continued to engage in a number of Defence reviews such as the [Reserve Forces Review 2030](#), the Reserve Estate Optimisation Programme and the Future Defence Infrastructure Services 'Value for Money' Study (could/should the Reserve Estate follow the Regular Estate (or 'Built Estate' as it is known) where crucial building maintenance and hard facilities repair services are now delivered by a contractor?). These reviews, programmes and studies are still in progress so there is very little upon which I can usefully comment.

Closer to home, we learnt towards the end of March that the MOD had 'paused' its work, until after the next General Election, on creating the Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) – when all 13 RFCAs are to be unified. The chance of securing Parliamentary time to enact the necessary legislation was considered remote. The implementation of those Sullivan Review recommendations that do not require primary legislation will continue. My view remains unchanged: NDPB will not affect our roles and responsibilities. It will be 'business as usual.'

We have followed developments in Ukraine with keen interest. Ukraine has been hugely reliant on its reserve personnel, numbering around one million. We saw Finland join NATO on 4 April 2023, bringing their 24,000 active personnel and 900,000 Reservists to the Alliance. Might such defence strategies inform thinking in the UK? Well, not yet. The UK's [2023 Integrated Review Refresh](#) (13 March 2023) found that the 'broad direction set by the 2021 Integrated Review remains right.'



There were no recommendations for changes to the Armed Forces. Rather, UK Defence will benefit by an increase of £5 billion over the next two years to replenish and bolster ammunition stocks, modernise the UK's nuclear enterprise and fund the next phase of the AUKUS submarine programme. That said, there are a few encouraging signals emanating from Whitehall about the future of the Reserves. We will keep you posted. Meanwhile, our Lowland Reservists continue to play a vital role in operations at home and overseas.

Against this backdrop, I judge the Association to be in good shape. Our membership remains buoyant, our Association meetings are well attended and our engagement via social media is impressive. The support our Professional Support Staff in the Army Cadet Force battalions provide the Cadets and Adult Volunteers is second to none, despite there being many resource pressures. Our staff at Lowland House are also in good heart; their self-evident energy, enthusiasm, enterprise and endeavour writ large in their reports. Lord Haldane's vision of 1908 for the Associations has pretty much stood the test of time:

'... they must provide ground for manoeuvres, ranges and camps, find horses and transport for mobilisation, encourage cadet corps, build up the auxiliary services of divisions and brigades, and provide for reservists and the families of men embodied.'

As ever, I remain extremely grateful to all our Association Members and other supporters. We appreciate all that our Reservists and Cadets do, in their distinct ways, to make our Nation better and stronger. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our Annual Association Meeting on 11 May at the Golden Jubilee Conference Centre in Clydebank.

I am extremely thankful all our staff at Lowland House and our Professional Support Staff in the ACF battalions for all that they do, so often behind the scenes, to enable our Reserves, our Cadets and our Association. Their hard work and commitment is absolutely essential to the effective operation of all three elements. Thank you!



# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

*Colonel Ted Shields MBE DL*



By the time this report is published, I will have been three years in post. There are frustrations and challenges aplenty but few cannot be overcome, blessed as we are with such dedicated and enthusiastic staff.

This year we have had to contend with the rise in the Consumer Prices Index by 10.4% in the 12 months to February 2023 (and construction materials price inflation peaked at 26% in January 2023) as well as having to contend with a particularly buoyant job market at a time when the public sector has been unable to keep pace with pay rises in the private sector. The Russo-Ukraine war has also resulted in some understandable but nevertheless 'last minute' changes to Cadet camps, requiring our Professional Support Staff to rapidly adapt or change their plans.

Elsewhere, there are continuing changes to the command and control arrangements (as well as the inevitable changes in staff) for all our Reserve Forces which all helps to keep us on our toes. HQ 51 Infantry Brigade, our Regional Point of Command (RPoC) at Redford Barracks in Edinburgh, has only Balaklava Company (5 SCOTS) left under Operational Command. The Brigade HQ is now firmly focussed on delivering Firm Base support to the Army in Scotland, engaging with society, enabling the (Army) Cadet Forces and enabling UK resilience operations. Engagement and enabling Cadets is also our business so it is even more critical that we communicate, coordinate and cooperate, not least because the sum is greater than its parts.

All our Reserve units, less 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force, report to HQs outside Scotland. Our staff at Lowland House march mostly to the drum of the Council of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations in London. We exist to support Defence in whatever way the Ministry of Defence sees fit but we must fight our corner for resources and ensure that the voice of the Lowlands, and Scotland more generally, is heard. That matters devolved to Scotland, especially in law and education, may differ to other parts of the UK requires us, from time to time, to remind the MOD and Service HQs that this is the case and to offer alternative solutions. This is occasionally easier said than done. We are not alone in making the case for Scotland as we work closely with Highland RFCA and HQ 51 Infantry Brigade.

Factors outside our control and organisational change have always been constants. We must adapt as best we can. Our 'business outputs' are mandated in seven Service Level Agreements (SLAs). 'Means of measurement' and 'performance indicators (or targets)' can be nebulous and/or our effectiveness in delivering these outputs is sometimes determined and agreed elsewhere by the 'Service Recipient' (such as the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Personnel) in the case of the SLA with Navy Command) and the 'Service Provider' (usually the Chief Executive CRFCA on behalf of the 13 RFCAs). Some 'performance indicators' are regularly and easily evaluated, such as those for Statutory and Mandatory Inspections and Tests. Others are not so easy to evaluate.



While I would not wish to spend my working day chasing statistics, we must all get a better sense of how we are performing. Both the Army's new SLA and HQ 51 Infantry Brigade's plan require us to 'partner closely to ensure that agreed plans, priorities and activities are coordinated and met.' Both we and Highland RFCA are 'partnering closely' with HQ 51 Infantry Brigade in matters such as Op MOBILISE (activity to increase numbers of Regular and Reserve recruiting applications) but we have yet to determine how best to 'partner' with regard to our respective 'deliverables' on the Reserve Estate.

In general terms, I would judge that we are successfully delivering against all our SLAs but, as I have stated, this is currently based more on intuition than quantitative evidence and analysis.

Where we are struggling to deliver against our SLAs is our ability to maintain the Volunteer Estate (Reserves and Cadets). We are required to maintain the estate in a safe and compliant condition – the minimum level at which the establishment should operate. We are thus funded for reactive maintenance only – as opposed to preventative maintenance – in order to restore a site to its safe state following breakage, damage or failure. Needs are identified from inspections and testing, or issues raised by end users through the help desk. In an emergency, reactive maintenance provides a temporary fix to maintain safety ahead of a permanent fix. There are few permanent fixes on the horizon although it is always possible that the Reserve Estate Optimisation Programme and/or the Future Defence Infrastructure Services proposal may deliver. Meanwhile, this situation is clearly not sustainable. It is in this environment that our nine-strong Estates team, whose portfolio comprises 345 facilities on 132 sites across 70 towns and cities over the 7,500 square miles of the Lowland area, operate every day. I pay tribute to our Estates Team.





I am just as proud of all that our Engagement & Communications, Cadets & Youth, Finance & Admin Teams and Professional Support Staff have delivered this past year. Their reports – and some of their stories in various editions of Lowland Quarterly throughout the year – are testament to their hard work, initiative and enthusiasm. Our Association, Reservists, Cadets and Defence in the round are very well served. I was very pleased that four members of staff were invited last year to the Garden Party at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, of whom three were presented to the then Duke of Rothesay. If all goes well, three more members of staff will be invited this year. They – and their colleagues – deserve such public recognition.

Looking ahead to the coming year, I am keen to see what we can do to better support our Reservists. We have seen how much Ukraine and other nations, such as Finland, rely on their Reservists for their national defence. Of course, such commitment is a strategic matter and RFCAs hold very few levers but there might be something more that we can do, even if it is to better support the status quo. We kindred spirits recognise the exceptional contribution that our Reservists make to national Defence as well as the values and skills that they bring to their civilian workplaces and society more generally. Our nation is the better for it. Would that there were more Reservists, properly resourced.

Elsewhere, we will continue to streamline our internal processes which is as much about making better use of technology as it is about being even slicker in the way in which we deliver our business outputs. Finally, a number of exciting developments are now on the cusp for Dechmont Range and Training Area. We need to determine how we pull these together – probably with little or no MOD investment – into a coherent whole to benefit our Reservists and Cadets. Its location is so convenient for many of those whom we support which means they spend less time travelling, more time training and reduce the carbon footprint into the bargain.

It has been another fulfilling year with some ‘stand out’ moments for me: Estates completing refurbishments at Glasgow and Strathclyde UOTC and ACF sites at Duns, Kelso and Selkirk; our Engagement and Communications Team being awarded the UK Civil Service’s ‘Team of the Week’ in January (out of a cast of nearly 5 million); our Engagement Team organising the visit of 14 employers to Norway to see Royal Marine Reservists on exercise as well as the superbly-delivered award ceremonies for Employers’ Recognition Scheme Silver and Gold winners and various Lord-Lieutenants’ awards ceremonies; and our Professional Support Staff delivering exceptional summer camps for our ACF battalions. Thank you to all our staff and to our members for all that you do to deliver so much for our Reserve Forces and Cadets.





# CADETS AND YOUTH REPORT

Elaine Ferguson || Deputy Chief Executive



It has been an exciting year for the Tri-Service Cadets, the first full year back since COVID-19 struck three years ago. Whilst the number of Cadets has risen, there is a Cadet skill deficit which all are working hard to address.

The Lowland Quarterly and our social media pages constantly highlight the amazing successes and awards of the Cadets and CFAVs. Three stories that particularly stood out in 22/23 were:

1. [Army Cadets Explore Normandy](#)
2. [Port Edgar Boat Station Opened](#)
3. [Fieldcraft Camp with West Lowland RAF Air Cadets](#)

There are two particular challenges that the Cadet programme will face over the coming year:

1. Further budget restraints
2. Operational requirements on the Defence Training Estate. Such requirements have the capacity to affect Cadet training opportunities and camp.

However, I am in no doubt that it will be another hugely successful year due to the dedication of the CFAVs and the enthusiasm from the Cadets.

| Organisation     | CFAVs | Cadets | Duke of Edinburgh Awards  |
|------------------|-------|--------|---------------------------|
| Army Cadet Force | 342   | 1393   | Silver - 2<br>Gold - 36   |
| RAF Air Cadets   | 301   | 1073   | Silver - 1<br>Gold - 8    |
| Sea Cadets       | 327   | 478    | Silver - 1<br>Bronze - 15 |

Table shows the number of CFAVs and Cadets in each organisation and number of Duke of Edinburgh Awards achieved.

# ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Colin Vooght || Head of Engagement



The year began with the ongoing challenge of the pandemic preventing face-to-face engagement. Surprisingly, this has not curtailed the desire by employers to sign the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) or to embark upon the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), as the figures below clearly demonstrate. Meanwhile, communication outputs have been affected due to the decrease in physical activity and consequential reporting. This negative has been turned around by an impressive and significant increase in the Association’s digital presence, including the extensive use of videos. The Cadet Adult Recognition Awards have become the flagship for this activity.

The award of Lord-Lieutenant Certificates for Meritorious Service was also a casualty of the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. However, the outstanding 97 certificates have now been presented.

| Year | AFC | Silver ERS | Gold ERS |
|------|-----|------------|----------|
| 2019 | 146 | 49         | 7        |
| 2020 | 210 | 57         | 12       |
| 2021 | 255 | 44 (*)     | 18       |
| 2022 | 314 | 110        | 26       |
| 2023 | 381 | 110        | 32       |

(\*) Employers must sign an AFC and achieve Bronze and Silver ERS awards before receiving the Gold award. Therefore, Bronze becomes Silver, which then becomes Gold.

Table shows AFC and ERS recipients

Across [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) the Association has gained 863 followers in the last financial year, bringing the total to 6,334, with an average engagement rate of 8%, well above the industry standard. Video content has continued to play a strategically important part which has resulted in over 90,000 video views this year.



|                     |   |           |
|---------------------|---|-----------|
| Growth in Followers | How many followers we've gained across all five of our social media channels.                         | 863       |
| Growth Rate         | A % measurement of how many new followers we have in relation to our total audience.                  | 6%        |
| Impressions         | The amount of times content is displayed on social media feeds.                                       | 1,001,580 |
| Engagements         | The total number of interactions on our content including: likes, shares/retweets, links clicked etc. | 44,801    |
| Engagement Rate     | A % measurement of how much our audience interact with our content.                                   | 8%        |
| Video Views         | The number of times our videos have been viewed across all five our social media channels.            | 90,808    |

Table shows social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter) statistics for 22/23

With over 44,000 page views in 22/23, the Lowland [website](#) continues to be an important tool to keep our network informed and engaged. As well as publishing 75 [website articles](#), the RFCA has been featured in and contributed to nine press articles.

The team has seen an increase in units getting in touch for marketing and communications guidance and training. In addition, we have provided seven formal consultancy sessions throughout the year.

The Communications team has worked with and equipped over 50 businesses and organisations with assets and tools to help them advocate for Defence through campaigns like the ERS, the CARAs and the Cadet and Youth Job Fair. Many of these organisations have gone on to use their vast networks to promote Defence people and Lowland RFCA, furthering our reach and message.



# ESTATES REPORT

Alistair Forsyth || Head of Estates



The Lowland Estates team continues to manage reactive and compliance works on a daily basis. Our nine members of staff fall into three categories: Compliance, Hard Facilities Management and Soft Facilities Management. This new organisational structure helps us to more effectively deliver a safe, functional and compliant estate for the Reservists and Cadets.

22/23 saw the Estates team work on a range of projects including a parade ground refurbishment for 1143 (Portobello) Squadron Air Training Corps and the completion of the refurbishment of GSUOTC (Glasgow and Strathclyde University Officers' Training Corps).

Planning has resumed for works at Livingston Army Reserve Centre and for a new HQ for South East Scotland Wing RAFAC at Colinton Road. Both projects are due to be completed by Mar 24.

Spending for 22/23 is detailed in the table below.

|  |                            |             |
|--|----------------------------|-------------|
| Grounds Maintenance (grass cutting, weeds, trees and vegetation) | Soft Facilities Management | £124,375k   |
| Reactive Maintenance (fault reports and works orders)            | Hard Facilities Management | £910,740k   |
| Statutory Mandatory Inspection and Testing                       | Compliance                 | £605,292k   |
| Completed Projects   | Hard Facilities Management | £2,7000m    |
| Total  |                            | £4,340,407m |

Table shows Estates spend for 22/23

22/23 saw the completion of projects which included:

- Duns, Penicuik, Jedburgh, Kelso & Selkirk ACF refurbishments
- Asbestos removal in high-risk asbestos sites
- Refurbishment works at GSUOTC



2127

In 22/23 the Estates team processed 2127 faults. On average that is 8 per working day. Faults might include pest control or boiler breakdowns.

3663

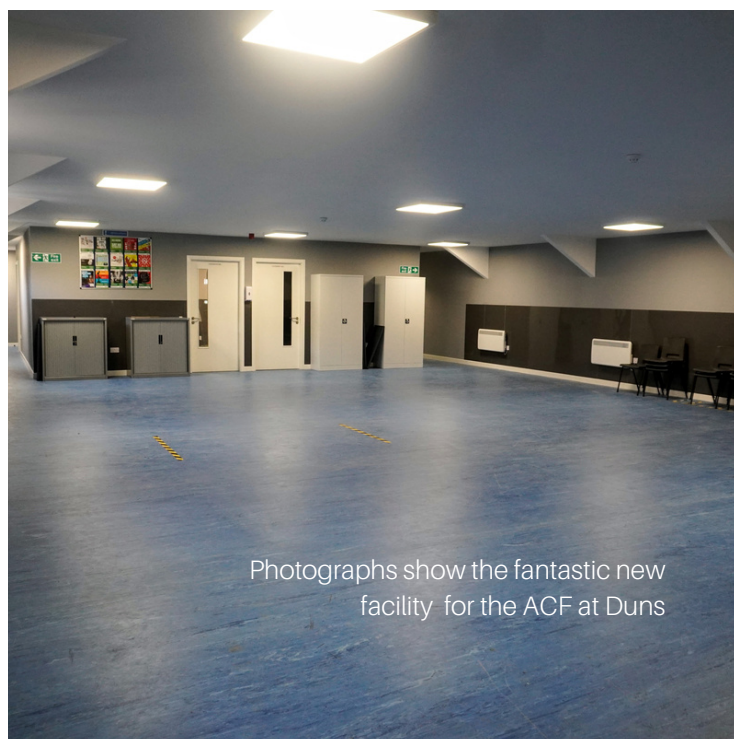
Additionally, 3663 Statutory Mandatory Inspection Tests were carried out across the estate. This equates to 15 per working day, all of which have to be organised, managed and paid for.



A total of 5 boilers were replaced across the estate due to failure.



£125,000 was spent on emergency works in five locations as a result of flood damage.



Photographs show the fantastic new facility for the ACF at Duns

# FINANCE REPORT

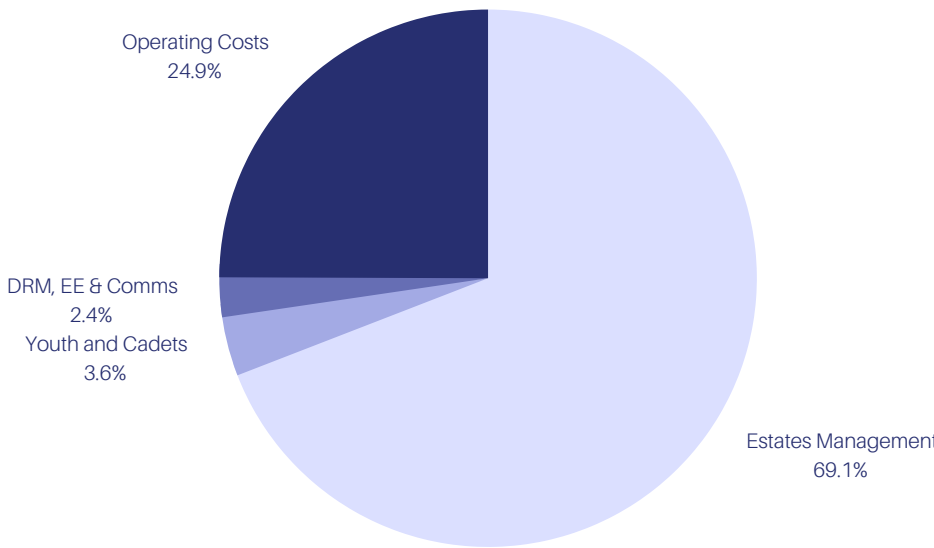
Angela Emslie || Head of Finance

The Council of RFCAs and the MOD determine how much funding Lowland RFCA receives. In 22/23 we received:

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Budget 22/23   | £6,130m |
| Uplift to Budget (additional money given in-year driven largely by Estates projects)                         | £976k   |
| Advance Brought Forward (money brought over from 21/22 for projects and purchases that span financial years) | £1,413m |
| Total Budget   | £8,519m |

How we spend this funding is determined by our SLAs. In 22/23 the allocation for spending was:

- Estates Management - £5,888m
- Youth and Cadets - £303k
- DRM (Defence Relationship Management), Engagement and Communications - £203k
- Operating Costs - £2,125m



There was little change to the amount of funding our budget lines received (i.e. budgets for staffing, travel, or I.T.) from 21/22 to 22/23. With the current economic climate this has provided our resource managers with an enormous challenge; whilst everything gets more expensive they must maintain outputs (without compromising on deliverables) whilst receiving no extra funding.

This was seen clearly in Estates with rising labour costs and materials, putting pressure on already lean funding. An additional £153k was approved for Estates to plug the gap to ensure we continue to have a safe and compliant Estate.

Audited accounts will be available after 31 May 23.