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REINFORCING A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR RCAF OFFICERS

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REINFORCING A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR RCAF OFFICERS

AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to examine the Individual Training and Education (IT&E) opportunities available to Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) junior officers during Developmental Periods 1 and 2.

INTRODUCTION

2. Upon completing the Basic Military Officer Qualification (BMOQ), RCAF officers are expected to complete both the Canadian Armed Forces Junior Officer Development (CAFJOD) and Air Force Officer Development (AFOD) programs. The CAFJOD program provides all junior officers with a standardized body of foundational knowledge using experience, formal education and mentoring techniques.¹ The AFOD program complements this with additional education required for RCAF officers employed in an Air environment. Together, these two professional development programs are delivered during Developmental Periods (DPs) 1 and 2 of an officer's career. At times, DP 1 and 2 courses can appear as a lump sum collection of courses and can be overwhelming for the officer when attempting to complete all at once. However, when spread out across the career path, as intended, these professional education courses complement junior officer development as they progress through the ranks and gain occupational and leadership experience.

3. This service paper will explore the content and delivery options for the various components of professional education and development for junior officers in the RCAF. First, it will examine the requirements and delivery during DP 1 when officers have completed BMOQ and enter the phased training cycle for their specific occupation. Second, it will examine the initial components of DP 2 for the AFOD program, Blocks 2-5, and the delivery methods employed for those courses. Finally, this service paper will examine the content and delivery options for the Air and Space Power Operations Course (ASPOC) and determine if any overlap exists between the course and the pre-requisite AFOD program.

DISCUSSION

4. For RCAF Officers, the first phase of RCAF Professional Development (PD) is intended to introduce many concepts including history, heritage, organization of occupations, wing structure, and all other useful information for working in an air

¹ CFLRS Distance Learning Division, *Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School Student Guide*, (Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School, 2013), 1, accessed 9 October 2019, http://www.dnd.ca/assets/FORCES_Internet/docs/en/training-establishments/student-guide.pdf

environment.² It provides an overall explanation of the Air Force team and the structures that exist within. The target audience for this DP level is the officer that has completed BMOQ but has not yet commenced their occupational training. Chapter 5 of the Officer General Specifications (OGS) lists the required tasks, skills, and knowledge for RCAF officers for DP 1. These have been analyzed and sorted into common groups with observable and measureable standards identified in the Air Force Officer DP 1 Qualification Standard (QS) document published July 2017.

5. To meet the requirements of RCAF Officer DP 1, AFOD Block 1 was developed as a distance learning course and is delivered via the Distance Learning Network (DLN). The course is approximately 30 hours of course work,³ including tests. The AFOD Block 1 course is available through self-registration thus allowing officers to register and complete the education at their own pace. For an introductory course, the online self-paced format is beneficial to allow junior officers to complete course content as their schedules permit. The added benefit of this introductory RCAF content being packaged in an online self-register/ self-paced format is evident when non-RCAF officers being posted or deployed in an air environment are able to access the content thus better preparing themselves to integrate with their air force colleagues.

6. Once an officer has completed their occupational training and is working within their chosen field they have moved on to DP 2. Officers progressing through this developmental period gain experience in both their occupational and leadership skills. The AFOD DP 2 educational components are intended to compliment occupational training and are broken down into 4 blocks as follows:

- a. AFOD Block 2 – focused on *the individual in the RCAF*; using the themes of communications, operations, and leadership. 30 hours of distance learning, self-registration, self-paced, delivered via DLN, unlimited registration;⁴
- b. AFOD Block 3 – focused on *RCAF strategic doctrine and guidance*; organization and application of doctrine to operational capabilities. 60 hours of facilitated distance learning, delivered over 17 weeks, via DLN, 4 serials per year, 60 students per serial;⁵
- c. AFOD Block 4 – focused on *the leader in the RCAF*; exploring critical thinking, decision making, time management, team, and project management. 50 hours of distance learning, self-registration, self-paced, delivered via DLN, unlimited registration;⁶ and

² Department of Professional Military Education, *Air Force Officer Development Program Blocks 1-4*, (RCAF Barker College, 2017), accessed October 7, 2019, https://collaboration-airforce.forces.mil.ca/sites/AirStaff/cfsas_eeafc/dpme_dfmp/AFODBlock5/SitePages/Home.aspx.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

- d. AFOD Block 5 – focused on *leading people and planning operations in the RCAF*; leadership and institutional problem identification and solutions, introduction to the Air Task Force and the Operational Planning Process. 80 hours of residential learning (2 weeks), delivered at RCAF Barker College, 6 serials per year, 32 students per serial.⁷

7. In 2017-18, AFOD Blocks 2 and 4 were reformatted from serialized courses to the self-registration/ self-paced format via the DLN. The update to delivery format was due in part to feedback received from end users indicating a more flexible approach to professional development was preferred. As schedules often changed without notice, the serialized format of training was inhibiting officers' ability to access to AFOD courseware. Since many RCAF occupations proceed through DP 2 at different rates, significant gaps between training phases, temporary low operational tempo, and other such schedule shifts often provide white space for officers to fill. The update to the self-registration/ self-paced format was a positive change allowing officers to manage their individual professional development opportunities as their schedules permit.

8. Although self-registration and self-paced formats are allowing RCAF officers to complete AFOD blocks as their time permits, course critique feedback indicates a lack of standardization when it comes to duty hours being allotted for professional development education and courses. Many students report having to use personal time to complete online learning since the DLN is also accessible via the internet. This practice is contrary to DAOD 5031-8 which stipulates Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members must be allocated duty time for required Individual Training and Education (IT&E) without causing an increase in normal duty hours or a decrease in off-duty time.⁸ Supervisors should be cognizant of junior officers' professional development needs and work together to set professional development goals and determine adequate duty time to accomplish them.

9. As noted above, AFOD Block 3 focuses on RCAF strategic doctrine and guidance translating to operational capabilities. The initial offering of AFOD Block 3 was serialized distance learning allowing junior officers to interact with the courseware however the instructional design did not enable the officer to interact with the doctrine itself or with their peers to discuss concepts. In 2017, based on recommendations from the AFOD End-to-End Review, AFOD Block 3 underwent a significant change in format. The course remained serialized distance learning however the new format was much more interactive allowing students to engage with both peers and facilitators to analyse and discuss air force doctrine and its applicability to operations. Course critiques of the new format indicate the online interaction with peers is a welcome addition, however the time constraints of the facilitated discussions are proving difficult for many students to

⁷ Department of Professional Military Education, *Air Force Officer Development Program Block 5*, (RCAF Barker College, 2017), accessed October 7, 2019, https://collaboration-airforce.forces.mil.ca/sites/AirStaff/cfsas_eeafc/dpme_dfmp/AFODBlock5/SitePages/Home.aspx.

⁸ Department of National Defence, *DAOD 5031-8, Canadian Forces Professional Development*, (Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 2017).

commit. As air crews and support squadrons become increasingly over-tasked, junior officers have less and less time to commit to online facilitated discussions over the 17-week period and many students voluntarily withdraw from the course due to competing higher priorities. Since completion of AFOD Block 3 is necessary prior to advancing through DP 2, the end result is an unnecessary pause in the officers' professional development education which may have career implications further down the line.

10. The culmination of the AFOD program is the residential session for AFOD Block 5. This two-week course allows officers, typically second-tour captains, to pull together all the components of the previous four blocks and engage with their peers on leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, air operational planning, and the joint environment. The course is generally viewed as the best of all the AFOD program blocks as officers have the opportunity to put theory into practice and engage with their peers face to face. The added benefit of being removed from the work place allows students to focus solely on the course content without being distracted by their day to day work tasks. With completion of AFOD Block 5, RCAF officers complete the AFOD program and RCAF officer DP 2 (National Qualification code ALJK) which is a requirement for promotion to Major by all Air Force managed occupations.⁹

11. The annual production rate for AFOD Block 5 is 100%, producing 192 graduates per year (6 serials of 32 students).¹⁰ However, this statistic is unreliable as it is based on the human and infrastructure resources available to deliver education at RCAF Barker College. A more accurate statistic would be graduate production numbers compared to a predetermined annual goal of AFOD graduates, however the RCAF has yet to produce the required throughput numbers for any of the AFOD DP 2 courses.

12. In 2016, the Air and Space Power Operations Course (ASPOC), formerly called the Airpower Operations Course with National Qualification code ALJG, was created. The intent was to fill an identified gap of Air and Space Power knowledge for RCAF officers who had completed DP 2, but did not have the requisite knowledge and experience to be employed in planning air operations. It is important to note, it is not mandatory for all Captains to complete ASPOC, select RCAF officers who have completed the RCAF DP 2 qualification are identified to attend as a precursor to being promoted to Major. Upon comparison, the course content for AFOD Block 5 and ASPOC complement each other quite well. The introduction to the OPP in AFOD Block 5 dovetails well into the multiple Air Task Force (ATF) exercises conducted during ASPOC. Based on the After Action Report from serial 1702, the portions of the course that overlap are the initial week 1 review of AFOD Block 5 and guest briefers brought in to address specific areas external to regular RCAF operations.¹¹

⁹ 2 Canadian Air Division, *Directorate of Air Force Professional Development - RCAF Officer PD*, (RCAF, 2018) accessed 7 October 2019, <http://rcaf.mil.ca/en/2-cad/rcaf-pd/rcaf-pd.page>

¹⁰ Department of Professional Military Education, *Air Force Officer Development Program Block 5*, (RCAF Barker College, 2017), accessed October 7, 2019, https://collaboration-airforce.forces.mil.ca/sites/AirStaff/cfsas_eeafc/dpme_dfmp/AFODBlock5/SitePages/Home.aspx.

¹¹ Ronald Shaw, *APOC 1702 Observations*, (RCAF Barker College, 2017), 1-2.

13. The strategic intent of ASPOC is to prepare RCAF officers to be effective leaders and Air Power professionals employed at the wing, ATF, and Air Component levels.¹² A secondary effect of this new course has been RCAF officers being better prepared for the professional demands of DP 3 as well as completion of the Joint Command and Staff Program (JCSP). With 3 planned serials per year and 36 students loaded per serial,¹³ the RCAF Air Warfare Centre (RAWC) produces 108 graduates per year. The RCAF has yet to determine how many officers require the ASPOC qualification therefore, as with AFOD Block 5, the annual production rates of ASPOC graduates are unreliable without annual production requirements being clearly identified. The ASPOC QS identifies a significant resource bill to deliver each serial, pre-determined annual production requirements would contribute to the business planning process and allow the RAWC to be staffed and budgeted adequately to deliver the course.

CONCLUSION

14. Overall, the professional development training and education courses delivered by the RCAF for DP 1 and 2 are sufficient to meet the goals of the RCAF. Junior officers are meeting and in some cases exceeding, the requirements for promotion to Major. However, closer examination reveals there are areas for improvement which would strengthen the RCAF officer corps with a deeper understanding of RCAF culture, operations and capability while assigning resources in a more efficient manner.

15. Upon reviewing RCAF PD at DP levels 1 and 2 as a continuum of education, it is evident there is duplication of training and limited inputs from end users when determining delivery methods. Review of the task lists from all the QS documents reveals repetition in training, specifically at the DP 2 level, for many of the tasks listed in Chapter 5 of the OGS and the AEPRs. Repetition of training and education to the same proficiency levels result in inefficient use of resources and unnecessary time away from home and duty for students. Course delivery formats also contribute to the significant amount of non-duty time required by junior officers to complete PD courses. Specifically, the AFOD Block 3 course was redesigned based on recommendations from the AFOD End-to-End Review. Key stakeholders, such as students and unit commanders, were not engaged to determine if a shorter residential course would be easier to plan for instead of longer facilitated DL.

16. Aside from education content and delivery, many of the control mechanisms for RCAF officer PD are lacking specific direction to commanders thus placing PD as a lower priority to operations and occupational training. Unlike occupational training, the RCAF has yet to identify annual production requirements for PD courses. Training establishments produce graduates based on current recourses available versus meeting organizational requirements. As recourses deplete and are redirected elsewhere, training establishments struggle with limited staff, infrastructures and finances. Both middle and senior leadership are not providing junior officers the necessary time to complete PD

¹² RCAF Air Warfare Centre, *Air and Space Operations Course*, (RCAF, 2019), accessed October 7, 2019, <http://w08-ttn-vmweb01/rawc/en/awe/air-and-space-power-operations-course.asp>.

¹³ Ibid.

during duty hours. Annual production requirements would provide the Chain of Command the organizational support required to prioritize PD for junior officers. Whether there is a lack of PD goal setting and review during performance interviews, or risk management of higher priority tasks, junior officers do not have the support required from supervisors to adequately progress through the professional development requirements of the RCAF DP 1 and 2 levels. The end result being many senior captains meriting for promotion to Major however they cannot receive the promotion as they lack the required qualification for DP 2.

RECOMMENDATION

17. Based on the conclusions noted above, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration:

- a. Course content: Directorate of Air Force PD conduct a document alignment to ensure all tasks from the OGS are captured in the AEPR and the appropriate QS. All repeat and redundant tasks are either removed from training or placed at the most appropriate level. Review of AFOD Block 5 and ASPOC content be conducted to ensure repeat briefs are not being delivered;
- b. Course delivery: Directorate of Air Force DP complete a training needs analysis to determine the optimum methods of delivery for DP 2 courses. Specifically, it is recommended the AFOD Block 3 course be considered for residential sessions to maintain the Commander's intent of students interacting with RCAF doctrine and discussing concepts with their peers, however an 8 to 10 day residential course may alleviate the pressures of 17 weeks of facilitated DL and the continued scheduling issues faced by Block 3 students;
- c. Training requirements: Directorate of Air Personnel Strategy conduct an analysis of annual production requirements of qualified DP 2 RCAF officers. This would provide data supporting annual training production requirements for all RCAF PD courses and allow training establishments to business plan their human and financial resources to meet organizational goals; and

- d. Leadership support: RCAF leadership support a culture of continued professional development starting at the beginning of an officer's career by providing improved direction regarding professional development for junior officers. Whether in the form of a Canadian Air Division Order (CAD O) for Professional Development priorities, improved PD goal setting during performance interviews, or relief of unit demands providing junior officers the necessary time to complete PD education and training. This type of support from RCAF leadership will set the tone for PD education, preparing junior officers for promotion to Major and strengthening the RCAF as a whole.

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