



Boosting Recruitment by Incentivizing the Direct Entry Officer Plan

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Exercice Solo Flight

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BOOSTING RECRUITMENT BY INCENTIVIZING THE DIRECT ENTRY OFFICER PLAN

INTRODUCTION

I think it's really important for us to acknowledge that a prolonged period of time where more people are leaving than joining the Canadian Armed Forces isn't sustainable.

– The Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of National Defence (MND)¹

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is in a recruitment crisis. According to the MND, the CAF is in a “Death Spiral” with a gap estimated at approximately 15,000 personnel and a struggling recruitment unable to meet the annual targets from the Strategic Intake Plan (SIP). For junior officers, the gap sits at more than 2000 unfilled positions and counting.² Although the gap is lower for officers than the non-commissioned members (NCMs), the recruitment problem is more complex. The requirement for officers to have an undergraduate bachelor’s degree limits the number of applicants available to fill the vacant positions.

The CAF recruits new officers externally through three main intake streams. The Regular Officer Training Plan (ROTP) and Continuing Education Officer Training Plan (CEOTP) are geared to the younger demographic and offer access to undergraduate university programs. The Direct Entry Officer (DEO) entry plan is geared towards a larger demographic of applicants that have already completed their undergraduate university degree. To rapidly resolve this recruitment crisis, the CAF will need to prioritize the DEO plan with new and innovative measures.

There is an opportunity for the CAF to boost enrolment of new officer candidates through the DEO plan with an education incentive and a raise in the DEO pay rate. The education incentive recognizes that student debt from post-secondary education is a rapidly growing problem in Canada. This education incentive would come at a much lesser cost than closing the personnel gap using the ROTP and CEOTP. A significant increase in the DEO pay rate recognizes that the CAF is no longer competitive against other workforces. It would also make joining the CAF affordable for mature applicants with family and financial commitments. If the CAF does not implement these measures, it will prolong this unsustainable gap of more than 2,000 junior officers.

In urgently resolving the recruitment crisis, the CAF must provide an education incentive and increase the starting pay rate for new officers enrolling under the Direct Entry Officer entry plan.

This paper will examine the CAF recruitment woes for officers, the growing student debt reality, and the proposed measures in closing the personnel gap.

¹ Akin, David. “Military culture reform is key to fix recruitment ‘death spiral’: minister”. Accessed 21 May 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10378182/canadian-forces-sexual-misconduct-recruitment-death-spiral/>

² Canada. Department National Defence. “MCS Personnel Dashboard” Accessed 16 April 2024. <https://mcs-lcm.forces.mil.ca/MCSPersonnel/persAttritionNew.aspx>

CAF RECRUITMENT WOES

The current gap between the Canadian Armed Forces' actual force size and our authorized force size is unsustainable and needs to be filled rapidly.

– From *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*³

According to the MND, CAF recruitment is currently in a “Death Spiral” and unable to recruit soldiers. The CAF is short of “15,000 men and women, with none of the quotas near being met”.⁴ High attrition rates continue to negatively impact the force and recruitment cannot fill the void. Furthermore, recruitment also fails to generate the authorized growth of the force to 71,500 Regular Force and 30,000 Reserve members initiated under Strong, Secure, Engaged – Canada's Defence Policy.⁵ For junior officers, the gap sits at more than 2000 positions currently unfilled and counting.⁶ The CAF needs measures to urgently increase recruitment and increase retention to close the gap.

Recruitment and retention are closely connected. Recruitment increases personnel strength and counts towards meeting the SIP target objectives. Retention reduces attrition of personnel and in the same vein, reduces the size of the SIP objectives. As alluded by the MND, the “Death Spiral” is the outcome of when recruitment and retention are both underperforming simultaneously. Looking at the junior officer level, the current gap needs to be filled primarily from recruitment. Retention is important, but it is a finite mean and only slows down the “Death Spiral”. Recruitment plays a more important role in recovering from the “Death Spiral” and ensures that the institution also grows to the desired state. If recruitment is left in crisis, the gap in junior officers will continue to grow to become unsustainable.

Although the gap is less for officers than NCMs, the recruitment problem is more complex because of the requirement for having a bachelor's degree. This requirement originated from the recommendations made in the 1997 Report to the Prime Minister by then MND Doug Young. The 1997 Report “directed that Canadian Forces officers would, with the exception of those commissioned from the ranks, require an under-graduate degree.”⁷ Known as MND 10, this policy states that a “bachelor's degree serves as a recognized credential of the level of intellectual ability that society expects of its professionals.”⁸ As a result from this institutional change, the CAF intake streams for new officers were transformed to meet this requirement by either providing the means for members to obtain undergraduate degrees internally or recruiting applicants with undergraduate degrees. To address this complexity in recruiting officers, there

³ Canada. Department of National Defence. “Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence”. Accessed 2 May 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2024/04/our-north-strong-and-free-a-renewed-vision-for-canadas-defence.html>

⁴ Granatstein, J.L. Canadians are finally waking up to the funding crisis that's sent the Canadian Armed Forces into a “death spiral”. Accessed 20 March 2024. <https://www.todayville.com/canadians-are-finally-waking-up-to-the-funding-crisis-thats-sent-the-canadian-armed-forces-into-a-death-spiral/>

⁵ Canada. Department National Defence. “Strong, Secure, Engaged. Canada's Defence Policy”. Ottawa, 2017, 19

⁶ Canada. Department National Defence. “MCS Personnel Dashboard” Accessed 16 April 2024. <https://mcs-lcm.forces.mil.ca/MCSPersonnel/persAttritionNew.aspx>

⁷ Colonel R.T. Wakelam, “So What's in a Degree” Canadian Military Journal, vol. 4, no 2. Accessed 2 May 2024. <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo4/no2/doc/v4n2-p64-66-eng.pdf>

⁸ Ibid

are now three main intake streams to enroll in the CAF as an officer: the ROTP provided through the Royal Military College (RMC) or by a civilian university, the CEOTP and DEO. ROTP and CEOTP aim to offer post-secondary education while the DEO plan aims to recruit personnel with undergraduate university degrees.

In urgently resolving the recruitment crisis, the DEO plan needs to be prioritized. The DEO plan is accessible to a wider pool of applicants, and it is not age limited. Applicants can enroll at any time after completing their bachelor's degrees. Both ROTP and CEOTP streams are limited to the younger demographic, ages 16 to 18 years old, wanting to enroll in post-secondary education. Both ROTP and CEOTP streams also aim at recruiting students that will later become new officers vice enrolling new officers for immediate employment. The DEO plan aims to recruit new university graduates and people wanting to make a career change. As such, it is important to point out that, normally, half of new CAF officers enroll through this plan. While recruitment in the CAF is underperforming, the annual number of university graduates is steadily growing. In 2021, there were 351,513 new university graduates which is nearly double of the number of university graduates in 2001.⁹ With a personnel deficit of over 2,000 junior officers, prioritizing the DEO plan stream provides access to a wider and growing audience of university graduates.

The most important problem in recruiting with the DEO plan is the lack of incentives and lower pay rate. While the ROTP and CEOTP streams provide essentially government paid education, the DEO stream does not provide any paid education. In Report 6 from the Auditor General on RMC, the DEO plan is depicted as “case candidates already have a degree—so there is no cost to National Defence for their education.”¹⁰ New officers enrolling in the CAF through the DEO stream are not being offered paid education as other streams are. In addition, the DEO plan starting pay rate is also significantly lower than the ROTP stream which is significantly more competitive with other workforces. A new officer enrolled through the DEO plan earns \$4,853 per month while a new officer enrolled ROTP earns \$5,675 per month at the rank of Second Lieutenant.¹¹ This delta, between the DEO and ROTP streams, grows to more than \$1,000 per month at the rank of Lieutenant. This disparity is allowed to occur when many new officers are performing the same roles while undergoing training to occupational qualifications. Compared to the Government of Canada (GOC) pay rates, the DEO starting pay rate is less than an Administrative Service-1 (AS-1) at step 1 who earns \$5,136 per month.¹² To urgently boost recruitment of new officers, the DEO plan needs measures offering incentives and competitive pay rates. Otherwise, the recruitment crisis will continue to persist.

⁹ Statista. “Number of university graduates in Canada from 2001 to 2021”. Accessed 20 May 2024.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/449035/university-graduates-in-canada/>

¹⁰ Canada. House of Commons. “Report 6, Royal Military College of Canada—National Defence, of the 2017 Fall Reports of the Auditor General OF Canada”. Accessed 15 April 2024.
<https://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/42-1/PACP/report-46/page-18>

¹¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/pay-pension-benefits/pay/regular.html#toco1>

¹² Canada. Treasury Board Secretariat. “Program and Administrative Services (PA)”. Accessed 21 May 2024.
<https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/agreements-conventions/view-visualiser-eng.aspx?id=15#toc825228255>

GROWING STUDENT DEBT REALITY

There is an opportunity for the CAF to boost enrolment of degreed candidates through the DEO plan. Debt from post-secondary education is a rapidly growing problem in Canada. For recruiting officers under the DEO plan, the CAF must adapt to a new reality of growing post-secondary education debt. Average annual university tuition fees have significantly increased over the past years from \$4,558 in 2007 to \$7,076 in 2023.¹³ This represents an increase of \$10,072 for a 4-year bachelor's degree without factoring the increase in living expenses. According to Maclean's Education, students living at home spend \$9,300 per year on average and for those living away, it's closer to \$20,000 per year.¹⁴ Added over a 4-year bachelor's degree, the full cost of university education ranges between \$37,200 and \$80,000. As a result, 48% of bachelor's degree graduates end up with a large debt of \$25,000 and over which is a 15% increase since 2020.¹⁵ In 2020, Statistics Canada calculated the average student debt after graduating with a bachelor's degree at \$30,600.¹⁶ According to an analysis from Hoyes & Michalos, the 20 to 24 year old demographic hold the most student loan debt and women make up the majority of Canada student loan debt borrowers.¹⁷ As the cost of living and education is on the rise, student debt is growing and becoming less manageable. This is an area where recruiting with an education incentive could provide immediate relief from student debt.

Furthermore, there is growing number of students facing insolvency. Repayment of student debt takes approximately 10 to 15 years. According to an analysis from Hoyes & Michalos, student insolvency is on the rise as student debt contributed to more than 1 in 6 (17.6%) insolvencies in Ontario in 2018.¹⁸ Extrapolating these numbers, it means that roughly 22,000 former students filed insolvency across Canada in 2018.¹⁹ This reality affects prospect DEO applicants. Facing growing debt, they are less inclined to join the CAF due to the financial commitments and the uncertainty associated with new employment and possible relocation across Canada. The CAF must take this opportunity to recruit university graduates with an education incentive to alleviate the burden of student debt.

In addition to growing post-secondary education debts, the DEO plan pay rates are also not competitive. With lower pay rates, joining the CAF is less affordable. In fact, it is unaffordable for mature applicants with growing families and more financial commitments. As mentioned earlier, the starting pay under the DEO plan is \$4,853 per month while the starting

¹³ Statista. "Average undergraduate tuition fees for Canadian citizens in Canada from 2007 to 2023". Access 21 May 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/542989/canadian-undergraduate-tuition-fees/>

¹⁴ Maclean's Education. "The cost of a Canadian university education in six charts. Accessed 6 May 2024. <https://education.macleans.ca/financial-tips/the-cost-of-a-canadian-university-education-in-six-charts/>

¹⁵ Canada. Statistics Canada. "Student debt from all sources, by province of study and level of study". Accessed 16 April, 2024. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710003601>

¹⁶ Canada. Statistics Canada. "Student debt from all sources, by province of study and level of study". Accessed 16 April, 2024. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710003601>

¹⁷ Hoyes & Michalos. "Student Debt Crisis - A Generation Buried in Student Debt" Accessed 16 April 2024, <https://www.hoyes.com/press/joe-debtor/the-student-debtor/>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

pay for ROTP is \$5,675 per month.²⁰ By doing a simplified budget, the DEO starting pay rate is not enough when factoring student loan payments. On a 5-year term under the government National Student Loan Program, payments for a student loan of \$30,000 will be approximately \$600 per month.²¹ On a 10-year term, payments for a student loan of \$30,000 will be approximately \$350 per month.²² Once the monthly payment is made, the margin left for living expenses is less than \$3,000 especially on a repayment term with a gross income of \$4,853 per month. This reality, in turn, makes it less affordable for applicants enrolling in the CAF. It is not affordable for mature applicants with families and other financial commitments. One could conclude that, with the current DEO pay rates, the pool of applicants for the DEO plan gets to be very limited. Without an education incentive and an increase in starting pay rates for the DEO plan, the CAF will miss on the opportunity to recruit new degreed officers.

PROPOSED MEASURES FOR RECRUITMENT

Going forward, we will change our approach to recruitment by taking new and innovative measures on an urgent basis to fill this gap.

– Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada’s Defence²³

New and innovative measures are crucial to close the personnel gap under the new defence policy. Recruiting officers will require prioritizing the DEO plan with new incentives in key areas. Both ROTP and CEOTP streams offer paid education while the DEO plan does not. As previously discussed, an applicant with a bachelor’s degree will carry an average of \$30,600 in student loan debt. As such, a proposed education incentive of approximately \$30,600 would alleviate the debt burden for new degreed officers joining the CAF.²⁴ Given the urgency of the situation, the ROTP and CEOTP cannot fulfill this requirement in an urgent basis because it takes between 3 to 4 years of university education to earn a bachelor’s degree. As it is available to a larger pool of applicants, prioritizing the DEO plan provides this rapid effect in closing the officer personnel gap if properly incentivized.

Moreover, this proposed education incentive comes at a much lesser cost than closing the personnel gap using the ROTP. Figures from the Auditor General in Report 6, Royal Military College of Canada, indicate that “the cost to educate an Officer Cadet at RMC included the annual operating cost per full-time-equivalent student (\$55,000) plus salary and benefits, less fees for room and board.”²⁵ Over a 4-year university program, a new degreed officer educated at

²⁰ Canada. Department of National Defence. “Regular Force pay by rank”. Accessed 16 April 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/pay-pension-benefits/pay/regular.html#tocol>

²¹ Canada. Government of Canada. “Loan Repayment Estimator” Accessed 16 April 2024. <https://tools.canlearn.ca/csigs-scpse/cln-cln/crp-lrc/af.nlindex-eng.do>

²² Ibid

²³ Canada. Department of National Defence. “Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada’s Defence”. Accessed 2 May 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2024/04/our-north-strong-and-free-a-renewed-vision-for-canadas-defence.html>

²⁴ An obligatory service component would also need to be included with the incentive similar to ROTP and CEOTP.

²⁵ Canada. House of Commons. “Report 6, Royal Military College of Canada—National Defence, of the 2017 Fall Reports of the Auditor General OF Canada”. Accessed 15 April 2024. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/42-1/PACP/report-46/page-18>

RMC under the ROTP costs approximately \$220,000. The Auditor General also reported that “RMC was the costliest way to educate future military officers—about \$40,000 more per year than sending an Officer Cadet to a civilian university through the ROTP-civilian plan”²⁶ Adding this data, a new degreed officer educated at a civilian university under the ROTP cost approximately \$60,000. Compared to the ROTP, a proposed education incentive of approximately \$30,600 is nearly 14% of the cost for a new degreed officer educated at RMC and 51% for civilian university. At the same time, the proposed education incentive would provide an immediate financial relief as it takes from 10 to 15 years to repay student debt. Closing the officer personnel gap with an education incentive is the least expensive option which provides immediate debt relief for new officers enrolling under the DEO plan.

²⁶ Ibid

| Pay Rate – Second Lieutenant or Acting Sub-Lieutenant | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Basic | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 |
| ROTP | \$5,675 | \$5,758 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| DEO | \$4,853 | \$5,264 | \$5,726 | \$6,097 | \$6,514 | \$6,932 | \$7,349 | N/A |
| Pay Rate –Lieutenant or Sub-Lieutenant | | | | | | | | |
| ROTP | \$6,185 | \$6,604 | \$7,024 | \$7,442 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| DEO | \$5,336 | \$5,796 | \$5,970 | \$6,185 | \$6,396 | \$6,604 | \$6,864 | \$7,024 |

Table 1 – ROTP vs DEO Pay Rates²⁷

Recruitment in the CAF must also “ensure that current and prospective Canadian Armed Forces members have financial security for them and their families...”²⁸ Increasing the pay rate for the DEO plan to match the one for the ROTP is a measure that increases financial stability. As discussed earlier, the current DEO pay rate is not competitive against other options in the workforce and not affordable for many wanting to join the CAF. As depicted in Table-1, the DEO pay rate is substantially lower than the ROTP pay rate by \$600 to more than \$1100 per month depending on pay level and rank. It is also lower than the pay rate for an AS-1 classification in the public service. The basic pay rate for a DEO Second Lieutenant of \$4,853 per month (i.e. \$58,236 per year) is slightly over the national Low income cut-offs (LICOs).²⁹ For a family of 4 living in a medium size urban centre (population of more than 500,000), this is only \$4,000 over than the LICO of \$54,594 per year.³⁰ It is important to point out that the DEO and ROTP – Civilian University streams have similar educational paths and have the same employment at the earlier ranks which is either awaiting for or undergoing occupational training. According to Report 6 from the Auditor General, the ROTP – RMC stream is also very academically focused with a lesser focus on military training. As a result, the pay rate discrepancies should not exist to be equitable. If the starting pay rates for DEO equaled the ROTP pay rates, they would be significantly more competitive with other workforces and provide increased financial stability for new officers enrolled under the DEO plan. In closing the personnel gap of more than 2000 positions for junior officers under the new defence white paper, the CAF must offer an education incentive along with increasing the starting pay rates to new

²⁷ Canada. Department of National Defence. “Regular Force pay by rank”. Accessed 16 April 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/pay-pension-benefits/pay/regular.html#tocol>

²⁸ Canada. Department National Defence. “Recruitment and Retention – Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs (SECD) - Arctic Security - April 24, 2023”. Accessed 16 April 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/proactive-disclosure/secd-april-24-2023/recruitment-retention.html>

²⁹ Statistics Canada. Low income cut-offs (LICOs) before and after tax by community size and family size, in current dollars. Accessed 9 May 2024. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110024101&pickMembers%5B0%5D=2.2&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2018&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2022&referencePeriods=20180101%2C20220101>

³⁰ Ibid

officers enrolling under the DEO plan. These measures are necessary to boost officer recruitment urgently and must be prioritized. Similar measures should be considered to boost NCM recruitment as well.

CONCLUSION

In urgently resolving the recruitment crisis, the CAF must provide an education incentive and increase the starting pay rates for new officers enrolling under the Direct Entry Officer plan. This paper examined the CAF recruitment woes for officers, the growing student debt reality and the proposed measures for closing the officer cadre gap. Recruitment is currently in crisis in the CAF. As alluded by the MND, the institutional “Death Spiral” occurs when recruitment and retention are both underperforming simultaneously. Looking at the junior officer level, the current gap sits at over 2,000 junior officers and needs to be filled primarily from recruitment. As such, prioritizing the DEO plan stream provides access to a wider and growing pool of university graduates.

As the cost of living and education is on the rise, student debt is growing and becoming less manageable for many. With the current DEO pay rates, the pool of applicants for the DEO plan gets to be very limited. The CAF must take this opportunity to recruit university graduates by offering an education incentive to alleviate the burden of student debt. Without an education incentive and an increase in starting pay rates for the DEO plan, the CAF will miss on the opportunity to recruit new degreed officers. Given the urgency of the situation, the ROTP and CEOTP cannot fulfill this requirement on an urgent basis. Prioritizing the DEO plan and closing the officer cadre gap with an education incentive of approximately \$30,600 remain the least expensive option for the CAF.

In conclusion, closing the personnel gap for more than 2000 junior officers requires the CAF to offer an education incentive along with an increase in the pay rates for new officers enrolling under the DEO plan. These measures are necessary to boost recruitment urgently and must be prioritized. Similar measures should be considered to boost NCM recruitment.

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