

At the business end of defence management in the United Kingdom there is, from time to time, a period when a number of senior departures fundamentally affect the nuance in which the long-term plans for the Department are thought through.

Either by accident or design, Sir Bill Jeffrey also has a (literally) once in a lifetime opportunity to overhaul the MoD's management style because there are so many almost-simultaneous changes in the top management team. But observers fear that he won't, either because of timidity or because civil service leopards can't change their spots, whatever they might say.

Additionally, departures such as David Gould from the then DPA (now DE&S organisation), 2PUS Ian Andrews, Commercial Director Stan Porter and Finance Director Trevor Wooley has taken over a century of experience away from the MOD memory banks.

However, a number of successors are either MOD lifers or else have taken leaves of absence away from the Department, only to be drawn back by its gravitational pull – some after an extremely brief sojourn elsewhere, suggesting something is not quite right in the succession planning arena. The MOD they face has a more hybrid structure of outsiders and subtle political appointees to navigate than in the past.

In addition, the pressure on funding, driven by operations will distract senior uniformed staff at the MOD from worrying about the niceties of "back office efficiencies" and "process streamlining", at a time when the generational challenge of renewing the nuclear deterrent looms large amongst a backdrop of equipment shortcomings in the face of the enemy, next generation programmes and retention of personnel.

The next Second Permanent Under-Secretary's resume is enlightening and given Treasury scepticism of the Department's ability to manage IT programs will be crucial in gaining control of MOD efficiency saving programmes. The loss of Ian Andrews will be most keenly felt in Defence Estates as they approach the start of re-competing the five Defence Prime contracts for managing the physical estate in the UK, where both significant improvements and cost savings are the order of the day.

Lastly, Parliamentarians and the military will miss the passing of this generation who demonstrated the guile necessary to pilot the MOD through near two decades of resource shortages for which shining lights such as Tom McKane will have to pick up an ever heavier baton.

The new team (from what is generally known and what we hear on the grapevine)

Ursula Brennan is taking over from Sir Ian Andrews as 2nd PUS. She's only been DG Corporate Performance at Justice since April, and there is some difficulty getting a release date for her at the moment. Sounds like a good one!

Ian Andrews is likely to spend only a couple of weeks with her parallel running, then will report back to Sir Gus O'Donnell the Cabinet Secretary for reassignment. As he's an accredited reviewer, that skill could be rather useful from a different, non-Departmental perspective.

New Strategy Director is Tom McKane, former Director General Strategic Requirements, and a man marked down for big things since his work on changes in Defence Acquisition and Through Life Capability Management as part of Defence Industrial Strategy 1. (Still no confirmed sighting of DIS2...)

There's to be a new Finance Director, currently unknown (Let's posit for the sake of argument he/she is A. Darling-Nark). Trevor Woolley, regarded internally as the best finance man around, hasn't been transferred anywhere else yet and looks like could be a loss to the Civil Service.

Policy Director will be Jon Day, currently at NATO, who as Director of Defence Policy co-ordinated the Strategic Defence Review ten years ago. That experience could yet be invaluable.

The new HR/Personnel head is Susan Scholefield, coming back to the MoD from Communities and Local Government. Her background is a bit "harder" than this post might imply, so she could be one to watch further. Richard Hatfield, who is also a previous Policy Director, now outgoing to Transport, is considered a bit of a miss.

Current Commercial Director Amyas Morse is of course an outsider who has been in post a little while. However, there are muttered doubts about his ability to get on with key overseas customers like those from hot sandy places.

The increasing complexity of defence management in an environment where resources, by various metrics, are either static or decreasing whilst operational tempo remains high places a particular premium on people who know how to manage defence for best effect. Exercises such as the defence change programme (and its many components) plus reworking the Equipment plan from annual to bi-annual (and now back again ?) have only serve to confuse and complicate critical decision making under pressure.

Greater resourcing of the defence enterprise coupled with some space to think sensibly about streamlining key processes is essential for the long term health of defence in the United Kingdom. Discouragingly, across the Atlantic, despite vastly greater investment the problems remain similar, complicated by a larger scale of bureaucracy. Maybe to paraphrase an old advert, we're number 2 so we have to try harder....