I am writing to provide you with an update on the Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve), as we undertook to do in the Government response to your Committee’s Report: Future Army 2020.

In your report you noted the invaluable role of specialist Reserves and welcomed the establishment of the Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) – “the Cyber Reserve”. You noted too that potential recruits in this area with the right skills may include some individuals who would not usually consider a career in the Armed Forces and that the MOD would require a flexible approach if they are to be integrated effectively.

The creation of the Cyber Reserve was announced in September 2013, with the aim of engaging additional experts in order to defend against the growth in the cyber threat. The creation of the Cyber Reserve is able to make an essential contribution to national security and the Unit is planned to provide support to the Joint Cyber Unit (Corsham), the Joint Cyber Unit (Cheltenham), and tri-service information assurance units.

Recruitment began in October 2013 and is aimed at as wide a spectrum as possible including those who work in cyber-related companies, government and academia, former Service personnel, and former and existing Reservists. We have also been keen to attract individuals who may not be professionally engaged in cyber work but who nonetheless have the right technical skills.

In promoting the Cyber Reserve, we have been clear to emphasise the importance that the Department places on this work and the part it can play in the UK’s cyber security. We have also promoted the positives for those involved. For the Reservists it is an opportunity to play a key and unique role while having the opportunity to be part of a proud history and ethos of either the Royal Navy Reserves, Army Reserves, or RAF Reserves. For employers, it is a chance for their staff to develop their professional experience and qualifications and also to grow in terms of self-confidence, decision-making and communications skills.
The resulting interest in joining the Cyber Reserve has been very healthy, both in terms of quality and quantity. I know that you will understand the need to protect details of exact recruitment profiles and targets in order to avoid releasing information that could be of use to our adversaries. I can confirm however that against our initial targets, which we aim to meet by April 2015, we are on track and are confident that sufficient numbers of suitably skilled volunteers are applying to fulfil the requirements of this capability. As the Committee identified, being more flexible with eligibility criteria is a sensible and appropriate approach to meeting our targets and attracting those who either could not have been considered or may not have volunteered in the past. The Cyber Reserves are recruiting on a case-by-case basis and this has included numerous individuals whose applications would have been unlikely to succeed under the previous rules. We have been able to accept them based on their talent, skills and expertise to meet cyber threats, often gained from significant previous experience.

Individuals are initially assessed based on their application form, and if successful at this stage, they are invited to attend a more detailed Joint Cyber Reserve Selection Board. We have increased the frequency of these Boards in order to maintain momentum and to be as flexible as possible to try and meet applicants’ availability. Successful individuals at the Board stage are then able go forward to the single Services and vetting authorities for training, medical and vetting processes. Security vetting is of course a careful and necessary precursor to sensitive work that inevitably takes time, but all Cyber Reserves are afforded priority status to minimise the time taken. We are also tracking all recruits to avoid any unnecessary delay either at this stage or elsewhere in the recruitment process.

Reservists who do not already have military experience and who require Phase 1 military training attend either a mainstream recruit training programme or a much-abridged training course, the Cyber Reserve Induction Package (CRIP). In Spring 2014 the first Cyber Reserve recruits completed their initial Single Service and Cyber induction process. The first three CRIPs have been completed and we have received positive feedback from the recruits regarding the new course.

Finally, Reserves move into workplace induction at their nominated sub-units (Corsham, Cheltenham or the tri-service information assurance units). Workplace training began last month and I am please to say that our first Cyber Reserves are now gaining familiarity with the operating environment and working alongside their counterparts as full members of the Cyber Reserve.

I hope that this gives you some reassurance that we are adopting the flexibility that you identified and are working to ensure we stay on track for the Cyber Reserve to be fully operational in the next two years.

I hope that this is helpful

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