

ANALYSIS

UK's training vision starts to fall into place

The signing in August of the first significant contract under the UK's Defence Training Review (DTR) project appears to indicate that the much-criticised programme has put its troubles behind it and is edging closer to full contract approval. Gerrard Cowan speaks to senior figures in the project about its goals for developing the training of the UK's armed forces

The GBP12 billion (USD19.9 billion) Defence Training Review (DTR) programme – the UK's largest ever private finance initiative (PFI) – has endured almost two years of media attacks, accused of being overly expensive and behind schedule.

The choice by preferred bidder Metrix of St Athan in Wales as the Defence Technical College, the hub of the programme, prompted a campaign from politicians and interest groups in the area of RAF Cosford, Shropshire, who insisted that their base was a stronger candidate with an established infrastructure and more suitable facilities.

In December 2008 the National Audit Office (NAO) said it was considering opening an investigation into the programme's pricing and scheduling difficulties. However, the signing of the GBP31 million Early Training Transformation (ETT) aspect of the programme on 17 August 2009 proved the Ministry of Defence (MoD) still had faith in the project, according to David Anderson, Managing Director of Metrix.

"We're far enough down that path now that we see [the new contract] as a logical thing to do at this stage to get the show on the road," he told *Jane's*. "The full PFI hasn't been signed yet, but ETT is the start of the work programme on the DTR contract."

The ETT contract is essentially the opening phase of DTR Package 1. It will involve Metrix

analysing the current training of the armed forces and comparing this with the MoD's 'Operational Performance Statements': the standard a person must be capable of achieving in their operational role. It will also see Metrix promote the application of modern training methods and media, such as interactive computer-based software.

The Metrix consortium is a 50-50 joint venture between QinetiQ and Sodexo. The current phase of the programme will be led by Metrix partner Raytheon, which has experience of similar projects in both the civilian and defence sectors in the US. Metrix was awarded preferred-bidder status on 17 January 2007 for the first and second packages of the programme. However, it was informed on 31 January 2008 that it had been stripped of provisional preferred-bidder status for the second package, which covers training in a broad range of disciplines including driving, catering, photography, languages and logistics. At the time, the MoD said Metrix was "unable to offer an affordable and acceptable solution".

The MoD has still to announce what approach it will take for Package 2.

Anderson said that the ETT aspect of Package 1 will focus on the training of technical trade skills. Under Package 1, the MoD intends to bring together technical training in three disciplines: aeronautical engineering; electro-mechanical engineering (covering engines on land and sea vehicles); and communications and information systems. At present, the three serv-

ices – the Royal Navy (RN), British Army and the Royal Air Force (RAF) – conduct training in these areas separately and at different locations.

"There's a geographical issue, there's a technical issue and there's a service issue, which are all contributing to a fragmentation of the way training is being done," Anderson explained. "We were brought in not just to run the training but to transform the way training was being done. DTR is basically a huge transformation and change management programme to make a much more coherent, efficient and modernised system."

To enable this transformation, the training of the three services will be carried out in one centre: the Defence Technical College (DTC) in St Athan, south Wales.

Over the next few years the St Athan base will be turned into the military equivalent of a university campus and a range of improvements made to the living accommodation and the training accommodation. The Red Dragon Hangar, a huge facility about the size of six football pitches, is the centrepiece of the project and is largely completed.

The DTC will be a wholly new type of training facility where buildings will be specifically designed to accommodate the training techniques and methods available today, while at the same time being flexible enough to facilitate the continually changing military training requirements of the future, according to Metrix.

With regard to training transformation and delivery, the DTR project will aim to reduce the amount of time trainees spend in training, while also maintaining the quantity and boosting the quality of programmes, an apparently tricky balance. Raytheon has experience of conducting work like this with the US Government, said Anderson. "They've got a track record of 'compression', of shortening course lengths while getting the same skills and knowledge into people's heads," he explained.

Metrix's Programme Director for Defence Training Rationalisation, David Appel, has joined the programme from the US company. He said Raytheon would provide expertise on ana-





lysing the current course structure and designing new ones. The company would provide management activities such as the scheduling of courses and the maintenance of statistics on the success of training, he added.

Under the ETT contract Raytheon will analyse student participation in courses, establish uli-

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mate learning objectives and use this information to compress the courses. This could be achieved by discarding elements that are no longer useful, or distributing learning so students could perhaps study outside the classroom, over the internet, for example.

"Each customer has different constraints and different models, it's not one size fits all. But it is safe to say that on average when you introduce modern technologies into the learning environment you can get upwards of 30 per cent efficiencies."

Appel explained the scope for rationalisation through the example of the training of vehicle mechanics, which is currently conducted separately by each of the three services.

"All engines do certain things, which we would call general fundamentals. All engines have pistons and spark plugs, for example. So then you can break that down to say 'why not train all those general fundamentals at the same time, because it doesn't matter what colour of uniform you're wearing'," Appel explained.

"Then you get into speciality type things. For example, there are diesel engines, there are gas turbine engines, but again it's not different between services. It's not until you get to an engine with specific characteristics for operating at altitude, on land, or under water that you might have to be specific to an individual service."

A key aspect of **DTR** is adaptability; as it is intended to oversee the training of the UK armed forces for the next 30 years, it needs to be able to respond to changes in technology. The past decade alone has seen the advent or evolution of the iphone and ipod, virtual worlds, blogs, 'serious games', etc. The trick is to determine how these could be adapted to learning and education and where the technology is in its life cycle, Appel explained.

"We try to find the right technology at the right time for the right price – it's not possible to find one that solves all the learning problems. When a new technology comes in, after a while it will plateau and be replaced by a newer technology. The key is to understand where a technology is in its life cycle. If you're going to jump on something right away you've got to be careful; we try and look at technologies that are a little bit more mature and a little bit more proven."

It is provisionally planned for the DTR contract to be signed at the end of 2010, with the college up and running by the end of 2014 or the beginning of 2015.

While cancellation of Package 1 is still a possibility and the future of Package Two remains unclear, the signing of the ETT contract, combined with support from the leadership of the opposition Conservative Party and the granting of planning approval for the DTC, suggests that the DTR will survive.

"We're very confident that we've put some of the issues that we had behind us," Anderson said. "Some of those have been rather exaggerated but nevertheless there have inevitably been things that we've had to deal with along with the MoD. This is effectively the start of the DTR programme."

Gerrard Cowan is JDW Europe Editor, based in London



Metrix's vision of a new **Defence Technical College** at St Athan (Wales) as part of the UK Defence Training Rationalisation (**DTR**) programme

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