**Submission to Phase 3 of the Review into the Treatment of Women at ADFA**

Paul Petersen

The Skype incident at ADFA in 2011 triggered an unprecedented process of review, inquiry and investigation into how women are treated at the Australian Defence Force Academy. While ADFA had previously undertaken reviews and made changes in this area, the AHRC Phase One Report into the Treatment of Women at ADFA was particularly important because it provided *external* scrutiny of this matter. Even with the best intentions, organisations have blind spots, and the Phase One Review identified several areas that another internal review might have missed.

Of these, the matter I thought most important was the Review’s conclusion that ‘widespread, low level sexual harassment exists at ADFA’. No sensible leader tolerates unacceptable behaviour within their organisation, and I had thought we at ADFA had been particularly vigilant on this matter. It was therefore profoundly disappointing to find the Review concluded a large proportion of female cadets experience behaviour that the AHRC considers to be harassing or discriminatory. Of additional concern was the Review’s observation that many of the cadets who had experienced this behaviour did not consider it to be ‘unacceptable’. This was one of our blind spots – in focussing on formal reporting and disciplinary responses, we had actually created obstacles to other forms of action about equity issues. As the Phase One Review noted, staff and cadets often viewed matters of equity and diversity in punitive terms rather than as an essential part of leadership and ethical behaviour.

If implemented well, the Review’s recommendations on educating new cadets, and on streamlining Defence’s system for managing issues of respect, equity and diversity will help ADFA to spend less time managing reports and inquiries, and more time promoting respectful relationships. Whether intended by the Review or not, this will reduce the centrality of the chain of command in reporting and resolving problems. It may take time to get the right balance between chain of command responsibilities and the role of alternative pathways to resolution of equity issues.

The Phase One Review also made several recommendations regarding the unique challenges associated with training and managing young adults. In particular, the Review recommended consideration be given to ‘first year single service training and work placement for all ADFA cadets’. This would emulate the Naval Officer Year One (NOYO) scheme – which has worked reasonably well for several years.

As noted in my submission to the Phase One Review, I am of the opinion that delaying the arrival of midshipmen and cadets at ADFA by a year is a good idea. The extra year of life experience would mean cadets commence their military careers a little older and wiser, with likely beneficial effects on how women are treated by male peers.

Despite this, I remain of the view it is not sensible to extend the NOYO scheme to Army and Air Force cadets at ADFA. Such an approach will simply transfer risk from ADFA to other training establishments. Moreover, officers often find themselves deployed on combat operations soon after graduation. In such cases, their culminating training must be in single service military skills – not academic study.

The effect sought by the Phase One Review can, however, be achieved with a different approach - by offering incentives to recruit students who have already completed one or more years of their undergraduate degree. At the moment, such students are discouraged from attending ADFA, and are normally re-directed to Creswell, Duntroon or the RAAF College. There are administrative difficulties in recruiting students with advanced academic standing, but doing so has the following advantages:

* Cadets arrive with proven university academic performance
* Cadets spend less time in training
* Defence achieves significant salary savings

With regard to the treatment of women, such a change would mean cadets commence their adult lives in a gender-balanced environment (notwithstanding the inappropriate behaviour reported in some university residential colleges). A ‘normal’ university allows women access to family support and hometown friends to an extent not possible at ADFA. Both men and women would arrive at ADFA having moved through the decisive first year of adult life in a less foreign place.

It is a short step from this approach to one where Defence recruits fully qualified university graduates. While closure of ADFA is outside the terms of reference for the Review, it is a question that should – in the longer term – still be considered. There are significant resource, personnel, infrastructure and budget efficiencies associated with such a change to officer education. It would also eliminate the enduring challenge faced by every military academy in socialising young men and women from adolescence to adult life. This should be the role of families, friends and wider society – not the Australian Defence Force Academy. This was the view I expressed to the Phase One Review, and in three years as Deputy Commandant at ADFA, it did not change.

In suggesting this, I am *not* being critical of the Defence personnel, University staff or cadets who work and study at ADFA. The Skype incident reinforced a stereotype of an academy infected with systemic bastardisation and sexual harassment, but this was not the finding of the Phase One Review. Nor was it my own experience, and being Deputy Commandant of ADFA was a highlight of my Army career. With very few exceptions, the staff and cadets at ADFA were people I was proud to serve with, and they will go on to serve Australia conscientiously, capably and courageously. They do not deserve to be stereotyped by the stigma now associated with ADFA.

I would like to close by noting the professional manner in which the cadets and staff at ADFA responded to the Phase One Review. If occasionally jaded, they were supportive of this and the many other reviews, investigations and inquiries that looked at the Academy in 2011. I doubt any other equivalent organisation has been subjected to the same level of forensic scrutiny, and there was some vindication for them in your findings.

ADFA is more than a military university; it is a place to train the future leaders of the Australian Defence Force. This is the real imperative for change, because good leadership is not defined in any way by gender. The Review has shown that more can be done to achieve an Academy that emphasises this.

Paul Petersen

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