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Educating Strategic Lieutenants at Sandhurst

An Jacobs

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ABSTRACT: This article examines how well military education at the Royal Military Academy of Sandhurst delivers lieutenants capable of coping with the complexities of their operational environment and the strategic implications of their decisions.

In the late 1990s, US Marine Corps General Charles C. Krulak introduced the concept of the “strategic corporal,” which emphasized the idea that even lower-level military leaders must be mindful of the possible strategic implications of tactical and operational decisions.¹ Krulak maintained militaries in post-Cold War operations had to be prepared to engage in full-scale military interventions, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian aid missions. In complex and fluid operating environments, waiting for orders from higher up the chain of command could jeopardize time-critical decision-making and negatively impact operational outcomes.

Krulak’s strategic corporal concept led to a shift among Western militaries on the subject of strategic thinking. Increasingly, leadership responsibilities were transferred down the chain of command, even to the level of corporal. Fostering strategic thinking at the lower levels of command presents threats and opportunities, but also calls for training and education beyond traditional soldiering skills.²

Building on the notion of the strategic corporal, this article explores the concept of the strategic lieutenant and asks to what extent military education for young officers reflects new strategic and operational realities. Specifically, it examines whether the British Royal Military Academy of Sandhurst (RMAS) produces strategic-minded officers. The RMAS Commissioning Course aims to train and educate officer cadets to become strategic lieutenants imbued with a substantial amount of knowledge and understanding of the complexities of an ever-changing operational environment. The academy’s applied learning approach to military education represents an integrated model of military training and education and aims to enhance the strategic mindedness of young British Army officers.

The aim of this article is threefold. First, it explores the extent to which key changes in Britain’s strategic context since the end of the Cold

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1 Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

2 Johan W. J. Lammers, “Commanding the Strategic Corporal” (working paper, Department of War Studies, King’s College London, December 2016).

War are reflected in Britain's military educational programs for young officer cadets. As the article demonstrates, lessons learned from recent operational deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan have been among the key drivers for change, and have helped fuel the enhanced focus on education in the professional development of young officers.

Second, this article addresses the specific educational model Sandhurst applies to enhance strategic mindedness in British Army officers and considers some challenges this model represents. It explains how RMAS prepares strategic lieutenants through blended learning—an integrated approach to training and education, where classroom learning is put into practice and applied in exercises. The yearlong Commissioning Course is augmented by extended academic learning through the recently launched Army Higher Education Pathway (AHEP), a mechanism to optimize officers' professional development during the first stages of their career.

Third, this article takes a first step toward measuring the effectiveness of the Sandhurst model in educating strategic lieutenants, while also considering the difficulties of evaluating educational outcomes.

Strategic Context

The British strategic context since the end of the Cold War has witnessed both continuity and change. Immediately after the end of the Cold War, *Options for Change*, the 1991 defense review, used the “peace dividend” as an opportunity to cut defense spending from 4.1 percent to 2.4 percent of the gross domestic product.³ Despite concerns the proposed cuts lacked strategic vision and excessively limited operational capability, especially following the Persian Gulf War, the focus on downward budget pressure preoccupied the minds of government leaders led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major.⁴

When the Labour Party took office in 1997, it committed to a new defense review, which reflected the refusal to give up capabilities and the desire to remain prepared for all eventualities in an uncertain and unpredictable security environment.⁵ While the Franco-British St. Malo declaration (1998) demonstrated more continuity than change and an enduring preference for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Labour Party added the “force for good” element to Britain's traditional foreign policy ambitions, embodying a liberal interventionist approach under the banner of intervening for the global good.⁶

3 International Security Information Service (ISIS), *Options for Change: The UK Defence Review, 1990–1991*, no. 21 (Brussels: ISIS, 1991).

4 Timothy Garden and David Ramsbotham, “About Face—The British Armed Forces, Which Way to Turn?” *RUSI Journal* 149, no. 2 (2004); and Mitch Mitchell, *Decline, and Fall? The Influence of Military Thinking on Britain's Strategic Culture*, Seaford House Papers (London: Royal College of Defense Studies, 2013).

5 Ministry of Defense (MOD), *Strategic Defence Review*, Command Paper 3999 (London: MOD, 1998).

6 Mitchell, *Decline and Fall?*; and MOD, *Strategic Defence Review*.

The global ambitions and responsibilities resulting from such an approach soon became visible in deployments in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq.⁷ Yet, the reputation of the British Army was dented somewhat as a result of experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Substantial human and financial costs combined with limited operational successes caused domestic public support and political appetite for British deployments to wane, seemingly leading to the end of the “era of interventionism.”⁸

When the Cameron government took office in 2010, questionable levels of success in Iraq and Afghanistan had already left their mark. Cameron proposed a foreign policy based on national priorities, economic interests, and rationality; however, this instrumentalist approach was criticized as a mismatch between ambitions and resources.⁹ Indeed, while public opinion and political appetite for deployments had decreased, global ambitions and the global threat picture had not. Accordingly, the 2015 defense review emphasized threats facing Britain were larger, more diverse, and more complex, thus requiring greater resourcing.¹⁰

Today, the British government is confronted with a list of daunting challenges: balancing a shrinking defense budget with global foreign policy ambitions, dealing with the challenges of “Brexit” negotiations and related uncertainties, reassessing the meaning of the “Special Relationship” with the United States under the Trump administration, and ensuring preparedness for the Russian threat. Indeed, General Nicholas P. Carter, then chief of the general staff, in January 2018 described Russia as the biggest “state-based threat to [the UK] since the end of the Cold War,” and the “most complex and capable security challenge.”¹¹ As a result of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s increasing assertiveness, the shift in British foreign policy away from deployment to armed conflicts overseas never materialized.¹²

Despite foreign policy shifts and changes in the nature of global conflict following the end of the Cold War, Britain’s role in the wider strategic context in which it operates has seen more continuity than

7 Adrian L. Johnson, ed., *Wars in Peace: British Military Operations since 1991* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies and Security Studies, 2014).

8 Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); and Johnson, *Wars in Peace*.

9 Office of the Prime Minister, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, Command Paper 7953 (London: Office of the Prime Minister, 2010); and House of Commons, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review and the National Security Strategy: Sixth Report of Session 2010–12*, H.C. Rep. No. 761 (2011).

10 Office of the Prime Minister, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, Command Paper 9161 (London: Office of the Prime Minister, 2015).

11 Nick Carter, “General Nick Carter: Dynamic Security Threats and the British Army,” RUSI, streamed live on January 22, 2018, YouTube video, 1:10:15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C106NswL4iA>

12 Matthew Ford, “Influence Without Power? Reframing British Concepts of Military Intervention after 10 Years of Counterinsurgency,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 3 (2014): 495–500; United Kingdom (UK) Department for International Development, UK MOD, and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Building Stability Overseas Strategy* (London: MOD, 2011); and MOD, *International Defence Engagement Strategy* (London: MOD, 2013).

change, and long-standing traditions remain prominent in British strategic thinking. At the forefront of these traditions are Britain's self-identification as a country that endeavors to continue playing a powerful role in the world with a high level of ambition to exert global influence and with a security and defense policy predominantly aligned with and through NATO and alongside the United States. Nevertheless, Britain had to reflect on its role in a changing international context, and how best to educate its young officers to operate effectively within it.

Educational Adaptation

At Sandhurst, program adjustments can materialize through formal, informal, academic, and military channels. Lessons learned and suggestions for change may come top down, bottom up, or sideways, making it a flexible system that allows for an inclusive approach.¹³ The implementation of changes, however, may take time to materialize and to be reflected in the Sandhurst educational program.

Formal change processes can start as high as the defense secretary or cascade down via the chief of the general staff, the Capabilities Branch, and the Department for Personnel (DEPERS). Within DEPERS, the Individual Development Branch sets the standards for individual officer development throughout an Army career, and more specifically, the standards on training requirements are set by the Training Requirements Authority.¹⁴ The Sandhurst Group then translates these requirements into a program of education and training through the Training Delivery Authority.¹⁵

Sandhurst leadership is responsible for the specifics of course programming and educational requirements, and the faculty has substantial flexibility to design courses while ensuring compatibility with military training.¹⁶ The course may also undergo adaptation as a result of suggestions made by RMAS senior (military and civilian) management, higher ranks of the Field Army, subject matter experts in the relevant academic departments, and officers returning from operational deployments. In practice, all staff members associated with the educational program at Sandhurst monitor wider developments and trends and suggest changes when deemed appropriate.

An historical assessment of the changes in military education at Sandhurst since the 1970s demonstrates the recent culmination of a trend toward an enhanced focus on academic study and reflects some lessons learned from recent military operations. The Cold War period witnessed two landmark changes in the approach to officer education. In the early 1980s, three academic departments were established: political and social studies, war studies and international affairs, and the communications department. The establishment of these departments reflected changes

13 Interview 4. 2017. Staff Member RMAS, November 27, 2017.

14 Interview 1. 2017. Staff Member RMAS, September 21, 2017.

15 Interview 2. 2017. Staff Member RMAS, October 16, 2017.

16 Interview 5. 2018. Staff Member MOD, January 30, 2018.

in the academic world (where international politics was becoming a separate discipline) and assumptions regarding necessary knowledge and skills for young British Army officers.

A few years later, a second groundbreaking decision was made to merge military training and education into a blended learning approach, to maximize officer cadet time at the academy and to ensure the practical application of learning outcomes.¹⁷ While there have been content-related changes since, such as courses on counterinsurgency and stabilization, the overall format and approach of the blended learning Commissioning Course has remained largely unchanged.¹⁸

Discussions during the 1990s focused on the importance of military education for enhancing young officers' understanding of the new strategic context and preparing them for a wide range of operational deployments. But apart from some changes to course content, these discussions did not develop into policies, and it was not until 2015 that the Sandhurst educational program underwent notable structural changes. Until 2015, academic education for all officer cadets at RMAS was taught at the undergraduate level only. But in January, Sandhurst implemented its biggest educational change in decades and, for the first time, offered separate but parallel undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

It is important to note Sandhurst is not a university, but a military academy where training and education exist alongside each other. The decision to offer both programs in a training-intensive environment demonstrates the enhanced importance given to officer education. Soon after the postgraduate program was launched in 2018, AHEP was introduced. The pathway offered degrees in leadership and strategic studies throughout the first years of service to maximize the potential of young British officers.

A wide array of factors influenced major changes in the Sandhurst higher education program—particularly the decision to introduce the postgraduate course and AHEP: the personal interests and beliefs of those in leadership, recruitment and retention policies, and the need to maximize learning and reflect diversity in backgrounds at RMAS. But the lessons learned from operational experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan also played an important role in recent decisions regarding the British Army's higher education policy.

As a result of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army has more "battle hardened and experienced officers and soldiers than [it] has had for several decades."¹⁹ Many returning officers have provided

17 Interview 3. 2017. Staff Member RMAS, November 27, 2017; and Richard Holman Thain, Ambrose McDonough, and Alan Duncan Priestley, "The Development and Implementation of a Teaching and Learning Strategy at a Modern Military Academy," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 32, no. 4 (2008): 297–308.

18 Ian F. W. Beckett, "British Counter-Insurgency: A Historiographical Reflection," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4–5 (2012): 781–98.

19 James K Wither, "Basra's Not Belfast: The British Army, 'Small Wars' and Iraq," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 3–4 (2009): 611–35.

valuable feedback to RMAS on how to improve the professionalism of the British Army in contemporary conflicts. Although much of the blame for recent operational failures went to the political level, where the Army's general weaknesses and gaps in the training and education of young officers received fierce criticism, there was a growing belief that standards of training and education needed adjusted to deliver officers who were fit for purpose.²⁰

Indeed, Iraq and Afghanistan have “severely tested assumptions of [the UK’s] competence in counter-insurgency and the ability of its institutions to adapt to unconventional conflicts.”²¹ Such criticisms posed the question of a need for institutional reform not only in the wider Army as a whole but also in officer education more specifically.²² The drivers behind the resulting changes included military and civilian actors, working through both formal and informal structures, with a strong impetus from lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Sandhurst model of developing young officers through a one-year intensive and integrated course is substantially different from most other NATO military academies, which often offer four years of academic study alongside military training. Recent changes, however, demonstrate a trend toward increased importance given to academic study. While also reflecting the needs of recruitment and retention, this trend demonstrates an increased desire on the part of the British Army to develop young officers who are not merely good tactical-level decisionmakers but also cognizant of the potential strategic implications of their decisions—in other words, strategic lieutenants.

Blended Learning

The Sandhurst interpretation of strategic mindedness is executed through an approach of “blended learning,” in which military training and education are integrated to allow cross-fertilization in the learning process and maximize student potential. It reflects the RMAS ethos of a student-focused and active learning environment.²³ While not an academic course, the Sandhurst Commissioning Course is a yearlong intensive and highly integrated program where academic subjects delivered by three academic departments (Defence and International Affairs, Communications and Applied Behavioral Science, and War Studies) are taught alongside military training, and where classroom learning is applied in military exercises. This intensive civil-military cooperation helps develop strategic-minded lieutenants.

20 Graeme Lamb, “Operational Success—Strategic Failure,” *British Army Review* 137 (Summer 2005): 48–51; Wither, “Basra’s Not Belfast”; and E. J. R. Chamberlain, “Asymmetry: What Is It and What Does It Mean for the British Armed Forces?,” *Defence Studies* 3, no. 1 (2003): 17–43.

21 Johnson, *Wars in Peace*.

22 Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars*.

23 An Jacobs and Norma Rossi, “Best Practices in Academic Contributions to UK Defence Engagement: Teaching International Conflict Management in Chile,” *Wish Stream Journal* (2018): 76–77.

The Commissioning Course is taught across the junior, intermediate, and senior terms with the blended learning approach omnipresent throughout the year. Under this construct, students may, for example, have military tactics, physical training, and academic study all in one morning. While certain academic subjects are taught in classroom settings such as seminar groups, interactive lectures, or centralized lectures, the blended learning approach comes to life in exercises.

The first comprehensive exercise where blended learning is applied is Exercise Normandy Scholar, which takes place at the end of the junior term and is delivered jointly with academic and military personnel from the War Studies department. It covers two main themes: military decision-making through the combat estimate and developing an understanding of the realities of war. While an initial lecture provides the strategic, operational, and tactical overview, cadets also receive a realistic problem for a combat estimate prior to deploying to the exercise, on which they receive feedback afterward through a staff-led discussion. By the end of the exercise, students are expected to have a better understanding of the history of the battle, its military-tactical details, and the usefulness of a combat estimate.

Second, Exercise Agile Influence is a multiagency negotiation exercise led by the Communications and Applied Behavioral Science department that enhances cadets' understanding of the human terrain and the relationships between different actors in a conflict-affected village reflecting tribal dynamics, state actors, nongovernmental organizations, government departments, and indigenous peoples. This daylong exercise exposes the cadets to role-playing and is predominantly influence focused.

Third, and building upon Agile Influence, the weeklong Exercise Templar's Triumph is a stabilization exercise in a complex human terrain comprised of regular forces and various insurgent groups. Cadets must create an environment of sufficient stability to allow government forces to flourish. Cadets are asked to take the roles of government forces, opposing forces, and the civilian population by expanding on skills and knowledge acquired through previous exercises. They are expected to learn to think like the enemy and to conduct estimates on how to unhinge rival forces. The multiagency context they are provided has additional assets in this exercise, such as search teams and dogs, media teams, political advisers, and bomb disposal teams. This exercise is also the key testing ground for the concept of the law of armed conflict.

Finally, Exercise Dynamic Victory exposes the officer cadets to a truly complex and mixed operational environment of states, insurgents, proxy forces, and state-controlled deniable forces ("little green men").

Exercises are also being converted to the Decisive Action Training Environment to include elements of contemporary operations such as cyberwarfare and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles and to learn lessons from partners in conflict. This allows students to apply their

knowledge and skills to solve tactical problems in a range of scenarios derived from actual threats.

The exercises at Sandhurst, in general, reflect the mission command culture of the British Army, where initiative, responsibility, and trust are central ingredients. The elements of initiative and trust are especially relevant as they underscore the need for a thorough understanding of operational complexities and the wider strategic picture at all levels of decision-making.²⁴ The Information Age generates circumstances where this interpretation of mission command is the fundamental basis of success.²⁵

In sum, the Sandhurst approach puts thinking at the forefront, and applied knowledge and intellectual skills are valued higher than academic knowledge in the narrow sense of the word. Blended learning and exercises enhance the strategic mindedness of officer cadets by exposing them to complex environments. In addition, the blended learning approach provides flexibility, allowing RMAS to make adjustments when necessary, so students are exposed to relevant operational challenges. As a result, the design of the exercises themselves reflects the growing complexity of the British strategic context and its operational requirements with regard to context, skills required, and types of deployments.²⁶

The British Army Higher Education Pathway

While blended learning was adopted as the educational practice at Sandhurst before the end of the Cold War, British officer education has also witnessed substantial adaptations more recently. At the start of 2015, RMAS introduced postgraduate education alongside its already existing undergraduate strand, to allow students with a relevant educational background to embark on a master's degree in the early stages of their officer career. This marked the beginning of a broader acknowledgment of the importance of military education in the wider Sandhurst curriculum, and in 2018, pathway was set in motion.

This new mechanism awards young officers the opportunity to complete BSc and MSc degrees in leadership and strategic studies through the RMAS partnership with the University of Reading during the first years of their service. It seeks to “maximise . . . talent and develop individuals with higher conceptual and analytical skills to support future roles.”²⁷

As discussed above, launching AHEP was driven to some extent by the British Army's aspiration to regain its domestic and international standing after failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, which resulted in a renewed focus on the education of young officers from the very early

24 Sergio Catignani, “Getting COIN² at the Tactical Level in Afghanistan: Reassessing Counter-Insurgency Adaptation in the British Army,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 513–39.

25 Jim Storr, “A Command Philosophy for the Information Age: The Continuing Relevance of Mission Command,” *Defence Studies* 3, no. 3 (2003): 119–29.

26 Interview 5. 2018. Staff Member MOD, January 30, 2018.

27 Maj Gen Paul Nanson, quoted in British Army, *Army Higher Education Pathway: Lead and Learn—Degrees While You Serve* (London, British Army, 2018), 2.

stages of their educational path in the Army.²⁸ While some suggested the most urgent educational requirements existed on the midranking officer level, the decision was made to adjust the educational structure early in officers' careers, starting at Sandhurst. This approach sought to tackle what had been criticized as a "deeply entrenched anti-intellectual tradition. . . . that discourages critical thinking."²⁹

The AHEP mechanism implemented through the Individual Development Branch and related courses will continue during the early stages of an officer's career to link training, education, and professional roles. It also seeks to enhance military education within the British Army and to develop higher-level conceptual and analytical skills to support future responsibilities. Its purpose is to maximize talent and to professionalize thinking in the Army, create agile minds, and enhance diversity in the officer corps. It reinforces relevant theories as well as historical and current military events through reflective and applied learning. The pathway adopts an integrated approach, where credits can be earned through education, training, regimental duty, and operations, to support the young officer in "being professionally capable, intellectually eager and able to adapt and learn to succeed in a complex and rapidly evolving world."³⁰

This "lead and learn" pathway, as AHEP is also referred to, aims to strengthen the British Army's lifelong career leadership and professional development opportunities. The rationale behind it is to evolve and adapt "to changing environments. . . . by developing conceptual and intellectual capacity. . . . and enable[ing] Officers to approach novel situations and develop creative and effective solutions to volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous problems."³¹

In practice, the AHEP means officer cadets at Sandhurst can, depending on their qualifications, step into a BA or MA in leadership and strategic studies in partnership with the University of Reading and its Henley Business School. Thus, "for the first time, the majority of early career courses from [the Sandhurst Commissioning Course] to the [Intermediate Command and Staff College] will be academically recognized."³² The courses delivered by the academic departments at Sandhurst are validated as one-third of the total degree (see figure 1).

Although the degrees will start at Sandhurst, they will continue during the early stages of an officer's career by adopting a unique approach that links training, education, and leadership experience. As such, AHEP underscores once more the philosophy behind the flexible and applied blended learning approach at Sandhurst.

28 Interview A. 2015. Staff Member MOD, June 25, 2015.

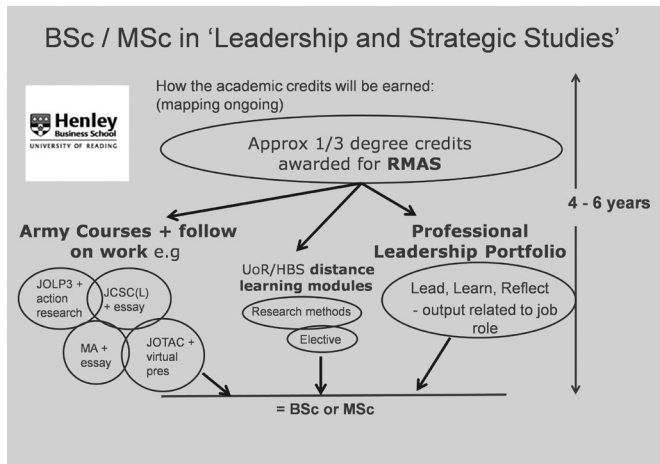
29 Daniel Marston, "Force Structure for High- and Low-Intensity Warfare: The Anglo-American Experience and Lessons for the Future" (discussion paper, National Intelligence Council 2020 Project, Washington, DC, 2004); and quote in Tom Mockaitis, "Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 4 (2013): 760–62.

30 Interview 6. 2018. Senior Officer, Sandhurst Group, May 7, 2018.

31 British Army, *Army Higher Education Pathway*.

32 British Army, *Army Higher Education Pathway*.

Figure 1. BSc/MSc in “Leadership and Strategic Studies”



Challenges of the Sandhurst Model

While the British Army and wider Ministry of Defense have expressed great confidence in the value and effectiveness of the blended learning approach and the wider educational pathway, they do present challenges specific to the Sandhurst model.

Firstly, academic departments at RMAS only have a limited amount of time with the officer cadets during their Commissioning Course. While other military academies may follow more traditional academic structures and approaches, officer cadets spend no more than a year at Sandhurst, during which they are exposed to an extremely demanding program of both military training and education.

Finding a perfect balance between a demanding and stimulating course, on the one hand, and leaving time and space for reflection to allow students to internalize learning processes, on the other, is therefore, a continuously challenging task. It is an ongoing quest to find ways to maximize students' learning potentials and to find the most effective and suitable balance between training and education. This challenge has been mitigated to some extent by the launch of the AHEP mechanism, which allows for a continued blended approach beyond RMAS.

Secondly, the approach requires close civil-military cooperation between academic departments and military instructors. Especially when change processes are taking place, all relevant stakeholders need to be mindful of the direction of change, to adjust academic courses, military training, and joint exercises. In addition, with a tight time schedule and a lot to fit in during the duration of the Sandhurst course, effective programming reflective of the desired learning outcomes is also a challenging task. This need for close cooperation between civilian and military personnel increases mutual understanding and respect to

further support linking strategic and operational knowledge key for developing strategic lieutenants.

Thirdly, while students at other military academies commence officer training and education after secondary education, and with little or no previous academic experience, students arriving at Sandhurst come from a variety of educational and professional backgrounds. The majority of cadets have already completed an undergraduate degree in areas as diverse as humanities, natural sciences, engineering, and sport science prior to arriving at the academy. Most of these students will enroll in the postgraduate strand. The remaining students will enroll in the undergraduate course, as they have come up through the ranks, completed A-levels, or come with work experience, and therefore have been exposed to less academic study.³³ This factor demonstrates the diversity of the background represented in the student cohorts.

While there is value in training and educating an already diverse cohort of students, doing so also poses challenges for the academic curriculum. The student diversity encourages the academic staff to adopt innovative teaching styles such as problem-based learning, classroom debates, group work, and learning through exercises to ensure that collective learning takes place and the student diversity works as a tool to maximize individual learning outcomes.

Measuring Effectiveness

Measuring the effectiveness of the blended learning approach and the AHEP is challenging for various reasons. While RMAS continuously conducts evaluations regarding the Commissioning Course as a whole, student evaluation forms do not inquire about the effectiveness of the program and the learning outcomes at later stages of officers' careers. Similarly, the academic evaluations are predominantly concerned with content-related feedback, and to what extent the students feel that they enhanced their academic skills, knowledge, and understanding as a result of the Sandhurst military education program.

The blended learning approach has stood the test of time since the 1980s, demonstrating the long-standing support for this approach across military ranks. A number of senior military officers—including the current Commandant of the Sandhurst Group Major General Paul Nanson—have emphasized the value of incorporating academic learning into military training and expressed appreciation for the military education they were exposed to while at Sandhurst during later stages of their career.

As the introduction of a postgraduate strand and the implementation of the AHEP are such recent developments, it is too early to measure their impact and to assess the effectiveness of the current curriculum throughout officers' career. But monitoring young officers' first year of

33 An Jacobs, "Teaching IR at Sandhurst: Blended Learning through an Integrated Approach," in "International Relations in Professional Military Education," special issue, *Infinity Journal* (Winter 2016): 50–55.

service over the next decade will shed some light on this. Captains and majors can reflect on the value of their learning at Sandhurst and beyond, and how AHEP has helped them develop as strategic-minded officers.

For the purpose of this article, a sample group of 75 students was asked to complete a questionnaire anonymously with specific reference to strategic thinking skills. The students were asked to assign a value of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) to the following statements:

1. The Sandhurst approach of delivering military education and training alongside each other and bringing them together in exercises has given me the ability to put classroom learning into practice.
2. The Sandhurst approach has given me the ability to see the bigger strategic picture in operational situations.
3. I feel confident about my ability to understand the bigger strategic picture in operational situations.
4. The Sandhurst program has helped me to better understand the complexities of operational environments.
5. I consider myself a strategic-minded young officer/officer cadet.

While the results are preliminary and incomplete, they nevertheless provide interesting initial insights into students' perspectives of how the Sandhurst program contributes to strategic thinking. In addition, a few interesting observations can be made about the initial data.

Firstly, as a general point, the answers demonstrate the majority of the students have answered the above questions with a four (considerably) or five (very much). Not a single student has responded "not at all" to any of the questions, and only an average of 4.2 percent of the students responded with "to some extent" across the five questions. We can, therefore, assume the sample group overall sees a positive correlation between the Sandhurst course and developing into strategic-minded officers.

Secondly, while for three out of five questions, 20 percent or less of the student sample selected "moderate," 30 percent or more selected "moderate" for question one (has the Sandhurst approach given the student the ability to put classroom learning into practice) and question five (do the students consider themselves strategic-minded officers) scored. This feedback may suggest there is room for improvement in these areas.

Furthermore, some of the students who "moderately" considered themselves a strategic-minded officer, also said the Sandhurst program "very much" helped them to understand better the complexities of operational environments. Such responses demonstrate the students do not necessarily equate understanding complex realities with "being" a strategic lieutenant. Ensuring the knowledge and understanding acquired through military education is internalized and adopted in a way that influences a young officers' decision-making may be something to consider in this respect.

Acknowledging the limits of this questionnaire and the related findings, we can draw no definitive conclusions from these data. But these initial student responses can provide a starting point to plan and execute future targeted questionnaires on a larger scale. Sandhurst can then gather more data and conduct accurate statistical analysis to be better informed about the impact and effectiveness of the Sandhurst Commissioning Course in developing strategic lieutenants.

Conclusion

This article has shown there are elements of continuity and change in Britain's strategic context, as well as its approach to military education at Sandhurst. While the link between changes on the strategic level and changes in military education is hard to detect, at least certain recent structural changes to the curriculum have been influenced by strategic experiences. The increased importance given to military education, reflected in the introduction of a postgraduate course in 2015 and the launch of the AHEP in 2018, was influenced by—among other factors—lessons learned from operational experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Sandhurst educational philosophy is firmly based on interactive and applied learning, as reflected in the blended learning approach that combines training and education through flexible and active pedagogy. The blended learning approach has been a consistent tool to enhance officer learning since the 1980s and has been applauded for its worth by all military ranks. Only time will tell whether the recent changes in military education will be considered equally effective.

The initial questionnaire provides some useful directions for future evaluations and further research. Firstly, more than 30 percent of the students labeled the Sandhurst approach only moderately conducive to putting classroom learning into practice and considering themselves only moderately as strategic-minded officers. Making further inquiries about the reasons behind these scores through more extensive questionnaires will help RMAS understand what measures can be put into place to improve this score. This is linked to the wider theme of this volume—how are strategic lieutenants developed successfully, which is an underexplored but valuable research topic.

Secondly, student responses suggest there is a discrepancy between developing strategic thinking, on the one hand, and actually being a strategic-minded officer, on the other. Future evaluations would benefit from exploring this issue further. In addition, further research on how to internalize learning in fast-paced, intensive, and demanding military environments; to adopt skills and knowledge in everyday life; and employ learning outcomes in professional tasks will offer useful insights for the study of military education. Enhancing the understanding of the impact of blended learning can feed into the design of the Sandhurst curriculum to improve further the quality of the strategic-minded British officer.

Finally, the blended learning approach overall has been applauded and appreciated by officers at later stages in their career. But at the same

time, more than 30 percent of students at Sandhurst label its effectiveness for applied strategic mindedness as “moderate.” This might imply a delay in the learning process between Sandhurst and the subsequent courses at the Defense Academy in Shrivenham. As the AHEP offers a more continuous process of military education, it will be a valuable exercise to measure not only its impact over the next two decades but also the effectiveness of RMAS and the overall British approach to military education.