



# Army

## Educating for War

The role of informal Professional  
Military Education in readying Army for war

*Serving the Nation*

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‘[Education] contributes towards military efficiency by fostering mental alertness and by giving the troops a vivid realization of just what they are fighting for. From this approach, [Army] tries to educate for victory’

W.G.K. Duncan, ‘Army Education and the Australian Public’, 1943





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## 1. Foreword

The profession of arms is unique in that we have exclusive responsibility for the ordered application of force in the pursuit of national interests. Professional military education forms an important part of our journey as professionals. As soldiers and officers, we undertake a great deal of formal training and education throughout our careers. The Land Domain Training System is dynamic and is continually refined to ensure we can best support our soldiers and officers. But our training alone is not enough to ensure we are ready to meet future challenges. As professionals, we must invest in our professional military education by using all possible resources available to us. Other types of *informal* education can also help us grow in the profession of arms.

This body of work seeks to refine the Army's approach to informal professional military education; to better understand how it contributes to our profession, and how we might harness its potential for the future.

The Chief of Army's strategic priorities are trust, readiness, a stewardship of resources, and to ensure we tell our story. Informal professional military education relies on **trusting** that each of us will pursue the development of our own intellectual edge. It ensures we are **ready** for the future battlefield. It ensures we make best use of our finite **resources** by capturing and sharing lessons and experience, thus **stewarding** the profession for the next generation. And finally, it allows us to **tell our story** in an engaging, coherent, and logical way.

The recommendations contained in this document will drive future planning for Army's professional military education by introducing a thread of logic to our approach. This will ensure we can continue to provide meaningful, engaging, and relevant content to support a wide demographic of users in their pursuit of an intellectual edge for the profession of arms.



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### 3. Executive Summary

This document analyses the role of informal professional military education – that which occurs beyond the classroom learning environment – in developing our soldiers and officers to be part of the Army profession. The document's findings are:

- The Army's soldiers and officers experience the effects of an unstable and complex strategic environment and belong to an organisation that desires increased professionalism.
- To participate in the Army profession, the Army's soldiers and officers must develop their cognition, character, and skills.
- A culture of learning can improve individual cognition and character, and consequently, readiness to succeed on the battlefield.
- The Army segments education into formal methods taught in schoolhouses and informal, unaccredited, methods. Informal professional military education, as a focus, offers distinct benefits: high flexibility, continuous learning, and a safe environment for the exercise of trial and error.
- The Army's soldiers and officers report noteworthy personal benefit through the use of both Defence and external informal professional military education providers.
- However, the Army's soldiers and officers report feeling inhibited by a lack of recognition of informal professional military education initiatives.

Recognising the usefulness of informal professional military education to develop soldiers and officers for the battlefield, the Army should prioritise improving the way that it plans, incentivises, and tracks informal professional military education. In doing so, the Army will find that its soldiers and officers are better enabled to participate in the Army profession.

### Recommendations

1. Army commences a public discussion about the profession of arms.
2. Informal PME platforms implement contemporary, evidence-based learning approaches.
3. Army's approach to PME maintains high flexibility, continuous learning, and the safe exercise of trial and error.
4. Army collates a broad hub of resources to support its soldiers and officers to access informal PME options, including the Chief of Army's annual reading list.
5. Army reinvigorates its mess culture to support PME.
6. Army articulates how PME features in PAR goals and provides a template for assessing officers.
7. Army introduces a system to allow soldiers and officers to track participation, set goals, and monitor progress of their PME journey.
8. Army acknowledges the contribution of external informal PME providers and actively promotes their use.
9. Army develops partner-Army awareness that informal dimensions of PME are important, and participates in other-nation initiatives to enhance interoperability and connectivity.





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## 4. Introduction

This report documents the analysis of *informal* professional military education (PME) in the Army and seeks to define this under-documented part of the Army's broader PME environment.

Informal PME does not result in civilian or military accreditation. It may be delivered through military or external providers, and may be individual or collective. Examples of individual informal professional military education within the Army include the Land Power Forum and The Cove, Army-resourced online public forums, where soldiers and officers can read articles, watch videos, listen to podcasts, interact through commenting, and enter competitions. Soldiers and officers experience collective Informal PME in impromptu lessons in the field, lunchtime discussions about military issues, or a planned educational presentation in the mess.

This document considers how this component of PME contributes to Army capability in developing practitioners of the Army profession who are prepared for war.









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## 5. Rationale and Scope

Following the Ryan Review (Ryan, 2016), the Army implemented a range of important PME initiatives to ensure that soldiers and officers build professional mastery. This document revisits the performance needs that give rise to PME, and considers the place of Informal PME, an under-explored dimension in Defence and international academic literature.

The process of analysis behind this document involved two elements of information gathering: rigorous investigation of Defence and academic literature; and a thorough process of stakeholder engagement. For the former, sources are cited throughout and a comprehensive reference list is provided at the end of the document. For the latter, contracted support was drawn upon, in order to investigate the nature of our training and its impact on the workforce. This involved interviews with fifty of our people from command teams (Annex A), discussions with educational representatives from eleven foreign militaries, and a survey of 576 people from across Army (Annex B).

The document first explores the need for the development of our people via PME, before considering how that PME can best be optimised:

- A. **Triggers for PME:** Consideration of those factors that raise the need for development of PME in the Australian Army
- B. **Performance Requirements:** Determination of the characteristics that are required of soldiers and officers in light of the above triggers
- C. **Interventions:** Consideration of the best interventions to foster the characteristics noted above, including formal and informal elements both inside and outside Army
- D. **Informal PME Plan:** Consideration of Army's Informal PME initiatives as key elements of its broader PME Plan
- E. **Conclusion**



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## 6. Definitions

**Learning:** This is the broadest term for the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours. It may occur intentionally or unintentionally. As LP 7.0.0 The Conduct of Training asserts, these acquired skills, knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours may be brand new, or may modify previously existing capabilities. As LP 7.0.3 Training and Education points out, learning may be ‘an individual, team, or organisational pursuit’.

**Learning Culture:** According to a wide ranging report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, a learning culture/culture of learning includes: ‘supporting individual learning and transformation, and allowing this knowledge to shape strategy and process; encouraging teams to learn and reflect on their work and proactively influence strategy and process change; [and] a willingness to learn and improve from the wider organisation and key decision-makers’ (CIPD 2020).

**Formal Learning:** Learning that occurs by means of intentional learning experiences that contribute to accreditation.

**Informal Learning:** This variety of learning can occur in formal or informal settings, but what distinguishes it from formal learning is that it does not contribute to accreditation. It can include learning that occurs via intentional or incidental means.

**Non-formal Learning:** Terminology regarding the formality of learning is not used consistently across all literature. Using the definitions of formal, informal, and non-formal learning outlined in a 2022 report by Cambridge University (Johnson & Majewska, 2022), non-formal learning is unaccredited learning that arises from *intentional* learning experiences, whereas informal learning is unaccredited learning that occurs via *incidental* learning experiences. In the present document, however, the term ‘informal learning’ is used to cover both intentional and incidental learning.

**Training:** The intentional, accredited development of technical skills and associated understanding. In an Army setting, these skills might relate to general soldiering or to a specific trade. It can include initial acquisition of skills, or continuation of skills. According to LP 7.0.0, training specifically aims to enable performance of a military function. This is further unpacked in LP 7.0.2: ‘Training enables individual soldiers to carry out their assigned roles across the spectrum of military activity, and enables groups of soldiers to work collectively towards a military objective.’

**Education:** ‘The development of the intellectual skills and character necessary for the understanding of professional knowledge and as a foundation for all other aspects of professional development’ (Australian Defence Force 2010, p4). It includes intentional development in cognition or character via planned learning experiences. It may be accredited (formal) or unaccredited (informal).

**Profession:** According to the Australian Council of Professions, ‘A Profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others.’

**Profession of Arms:** A disciplined group of practicing military members, characterised by: service to society; a body of specialist military knowledge; skills in the ordered application of force; a code of ethics; self-regulation; and interprofessional practice.

**Army Profession:** Nested within the profession of arms, the Army profession consists of practicing Army members, characterised by: service to society; military knowledge regarding the land domain; skills in the application of force in land and littoral contexts; the application of Defence values and behaviours; professional regulation within a wider Defence context; and inward- and outward-facing collaborative practice.

**PME:** Guided development in cognition and character relevant to the profession of arms or Army profession. It may be formal or informal, and is as broad as the profession. In other words, it may include learning experiences related to any matters of cognition or character that are relevant to the military profession. It has elsewhere been defined as 'intellectual, moral and social instruction in the profession of arms' (Australian Army 2017).

**Informal PME:** Intentional development in cognition or character, relevant to the profession of arms or Army profession, which occurs via unaccredited means. According to the Forces Command plan from 2020, 'Informal delivery of PME refers to those activities conducted within formations or units as part of force generation activities. It also includes those activities, such as individual reading or writing, which enhance the individual's intellectual component of fighting power... Informal PME will not be captured on an individual's personnel file.' A similar concept is sometimes referred to with alternative terminology, such as 'continuous professional development' (British Armed Forces), non-formal PME (Canadian Armed Forces), or 'self-directed PME' (some US contexts).

**Professional Development:** This term is somewhat broader than PME. It has elsewhere been defined as 'the pursuit of professional mastery through the guided conduct of education, training and experience' (HQ FORCOMD 2020).

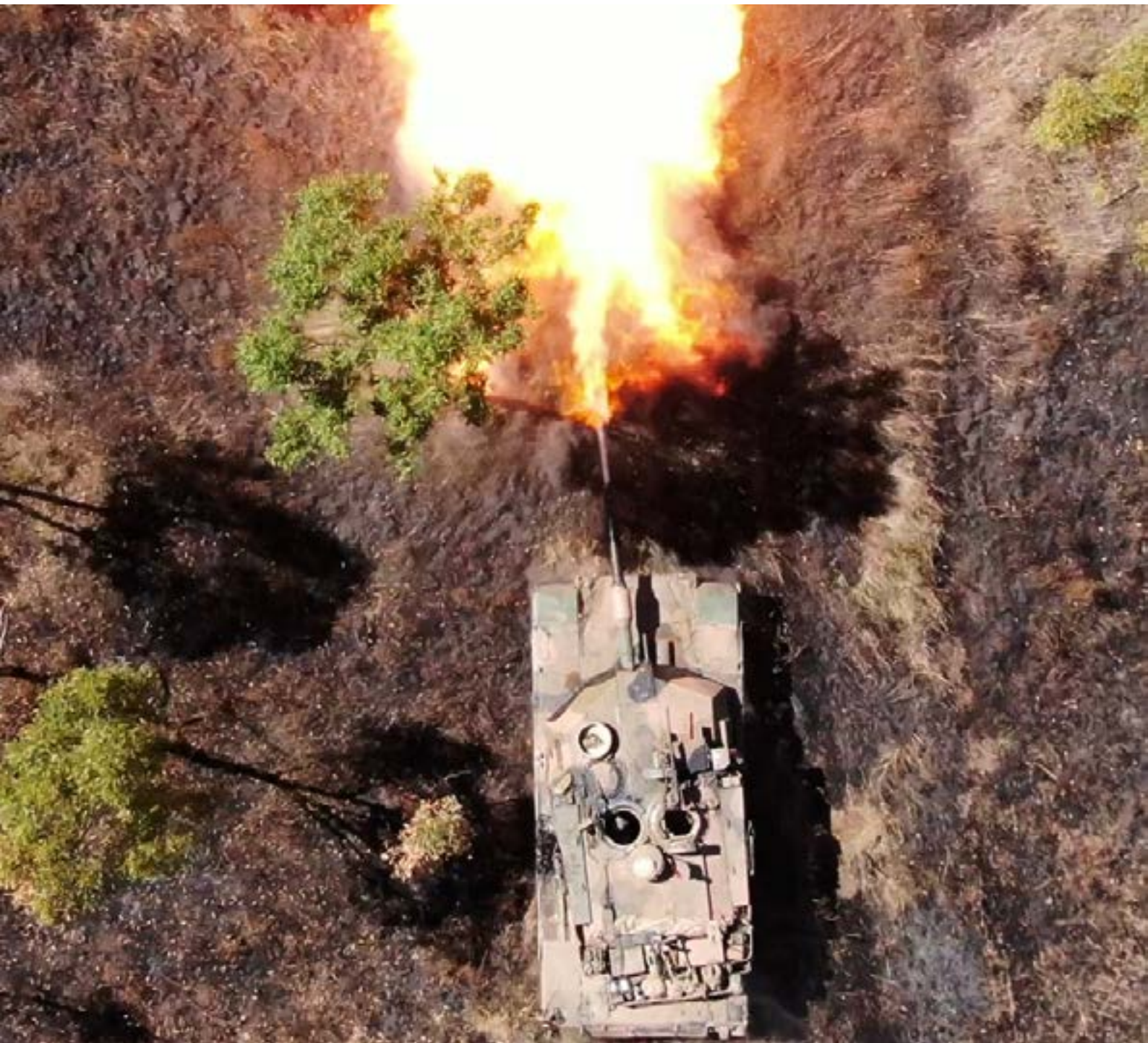


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## 7. Consultation

Representatives from the following organisations provided feedback on drafts of this document:

- Australian Army Research Centre
- Australian Defence College
- Chief of Army Initiatives Group
- Directorate of Army Education and Learning Systems
- Joint Professional Military Education Directorate







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## 8. Educating for War

### A. Triggers for PME

#### Key Question

What factors raise the need for the improvement of education for the Army profession?

#### Key Points

- Externally, a complex strategic environment raises the need for people who excel in the Army profession
- Internally, a desire for increased military professionalism raises the need for development in the Army profession
- This development occurs via discussion of the profession of arms/Army profession and improvement of PME

## Literature on triggers for PME

There are factors external and internal to Army that trigger the need for PME.

Externally, a *complex strategic environment* leads to the need for a workforce that excels at the Army profession, and is thereby prepared for war. The 2016 Defence White Paper asserted that ‘Instability in our immediate region could have strategic consequences for Australia’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2016, p 16), and the 2020 Defence Strategic Update stated that drivers affecting such instability had ‘accelerated’ beyond expectations (Commonwealth of Australia 2020, p 5). Army publications at that time spoke of an era of ‘accelerated warfare’ (Australian Army 2020), bringing with it the need for our people to be better developed in the profession of arms, so they are ready for the possibility of war.

The Defence Strategic Review of 2023 developed further the concerns of the government documents that preceded it, speaking of ‘the highest level of strategic risk we now face as a nation: the prospect of major conflict in the region that directly threatens our national interest’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2023, p 17). The 2024 National Defence Strategy reiterates this point, adding that ‘our strategic circumstances have continued to deteriorate’ since the release of the 2023 document (Commonwealth of Australia 2024, p 5).

Internally, a *desire for improved military professionalism* also triggers the need for development in the Army profession.

The Ryan Review stated, ‘it is not clear that Army has adequately defined what it means by professional mastery and importantly, what this necessitates in our performance needs and professional education continuum’ (Ryan 2016, p 51). There have certainly been measures since then to tighten ADF and Army accounts of professional mastery.

In a 2023 paper, Professor Michael Evans continues to lament the loss of professionalism in general, and a coherent Australian profession of arms in particular. He points to numerous calls over the last twenty years to renew a sense of the Australian profession of arms, including those by Zimmer and McKern, Jeffrey Grey, Smith and Bergin, and others (Evans, 2023). Evans (2023, p 18) sees ‘professionalism’ as ‘a defined body of expert knowledge based on a system of continuing education’, and pleads for renewed attention to be given to its military application.

Moffitt and Stanford (2023) argue that ‘the top end of the ADF has both ballooned in numbers and been professionally dumbed down’. A 2024 analysis argues that the ADF has been steadily moving from having the hallmarks of an ‘institution’ to having those of an ‘occupation’, with the result that ‘military employment can no longer be easily defined as a profession’ (English, Hoglin, & Paton 2024). However, the Chief of Army’s 2024 message for Army’s birthday asserts, ‘The Australian Army is a national institution, a profession and a fighting force’ (Chief of Army 2024). He has also previously welcomed efforts to ‘enhance... our professional mastery’ (Chief of Army 2024). Clearly, this represents a desire that Army should improve its professionalism.

Australia is not alone in identifying a need for further professional renewal. General Gary Brito (2024) makes very similar comments about the US Army. He writes, ‘The Army profession isn’t broken; it simply needs to be stewarded more thoroughly’ (Brito 2024).

According to Professor Evans (2023), both an improved conception of the profession of arms, and a revitalisation of PME, are necessary to renew professionalism in the ADF, with a view to enabling our people to be ready for war.



It is clear from relevant literature, then, that an increasingly complex strategic environment, and an appetite for improved military professionalism, trigger the need for development in the understanding of, and education for, the Army profession.

***“an improved conception of the profession of arms,  
and a revitalisation of PME, are necessary.”***

***RECOMMENDATION 1:*** *Army commences a public discussion about the profession of arms.*



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## B. Performance Requirements

### Key Question

In light of the triggering factors noted above, what characteristics are required of soldiers and officers?

### Key Points

- According to Defence and academic literature, practitioners of the profession of arms need development in cognition, character, and skills.
- While these overlap, development in cognition and character can be directly enhanced through PME.
- Conversations with Australian Army leaders indicate general agreement with the literature, with some variety: some emphasise skills, some emphasise character, and some debate the level to which all soldiers need to demonstrate intellect. There is a widespread sense that PME opportunities and execution are not currently optimised, and that a culture of learning needs to be better developed. Views are divided on how this might be incentivised and achieved.

## Literature on Performance Requirements for PME

The FORCOMD plan for PME from 2020-2025 looks to the needs of the military professional of the future, and includes elements of cognition, character, and skills (emphases added) (HQ FORCOMD 2020):

The military professional of 2028 needs to be able to *understand* increasingly complex problem sets, situated across multiple domains, so that they can make and communicate an *ethical decision* in a compressed timeframe. They must be able to *harness emerging technologies* and outwit AI-enabled adversaries, yet still be able to connect and empathise with local populations.

These three components of cognition, character, and skills align with the Australian Army's doctrinal position on the generation of land power. According to LP 3.0.32 The Fundamentals of Land Power, it is when intellectual, moral, and physical components combine that Army's capacity to operate is optimised.

***“It is when intellectual, moral, and physical components combine that Army's capacity to operate is optimised.”***

The three components also cohere with The Australian Council of Professions' definition of a profession as (emphasis added) (Australian Council of Professions 2003):

a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to *ethical standards* and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as, possessing special *knowledge* and *skills* in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others'.

In a 2017 publication regarding 'Evolving an Intellectual Edge', 'individual and collective military skills' are seen as coming under the purview of 'training', while 'intellectual, conceptual, and ethical foundations' are seen as belonging especially to 'education' (Australian Army 2017).

The Australian Joint PME Continuum 2.0 (2022) sees professional mastery as broadly combining cognition (Defence mastery), skills (technical mastery), and character (social mastery), with PME having a special interest in developing the dimension of cognition.

The Ryan Review (2016, p 88) identified this cognitive component as a point of potential advantage over adversaries: 'with the decline of our technological edge, a cognitive edge must be developed'. This idea of the need to develop an Australian military 'intellectual edge' had been around since at least 2000 (Zimmer and McKern, 2000), but with The Ryan Review it became a central element of Army's discussion of professional readiness for war.

Our people participate in the 'profession' in varying ways, correlating with different varieties of cognition, skills, and character being relevant. English, Hoglin, and Paton (2024) argue that, given the current spectrum of participation in the ADF, it is useful to take a 'heterogeneous approach' to understanding and incentivising our people. Their central thesis is that at the core are those for whom their service is a profession – not just an occupation. They contribute to, and are incentivised by, a culture of service, loyalty, and professionalism. This has implications for the way in which Army pitches and motivates development in the profession for different people.



## Stakeholder Engagement: The Army Profession and PME

Extended conversations were held with fifty of Army's people with experience in command teams. They included officers ranging in rank between Warrant Officer Class 1 and Lieutenant General. Some of their input is presented below.

*What do those with command team experience want of practitioners of the Army profession?*

- A number of people identified 'warfighting' as being key to the Army profession. One RSM commented that 'the profession of arms means preparing us for our warfighting, whatever it needs to be – there's no other organisation for that, apart from us.'
- Many pointed to issues of character as being crucial to the enactment of warfighting. This was more frequently raised than any other desirable characteristic. One senior officer commented, 'war is primarily a moral challenge, rather than a skills challenge.'

*What do those with command team experience think of education for the Army profession?*

The importance of informal PME, alongside formal educational approaches

- There was broad opinion that informal PME was important and that it provided considerable individual and collective value. Almost exclusively, they saw it as contributing to and enhancing operational effectiveness.

Developing key attributes

- There was broad agreement with the need for practitioners of the profession to undergo development in cognition, character, and skills.
- Some saw cognition and character as the purview of PME, while others saw more overlap between the three areas, given that cognition and character generally relate to the application of skills. In fleshing out this opinion, one senior officer commented, 'learning is always messy, always iterative, never linear.'

The place of cognition

- One important theme was the value with which informal PME assisted the development of a professional mind, replete with curiosity and imagination.
- At the same time, there were some doubts about whether the level of cognition envisaged by PME efforts was really relevant to junior soldiers. One RSM commented, 'the higher level stuff is irrelevant to them. They need targeted PME such as counter-drone techniques.' Another commented, 'I'm not sold on intellect. I think we expect soldiers to be too smart.' These people expressed concern that the end state of military education should not be lost: a readiness to fight and win.

The need for a learning culture

- A number of people pointed to the development of a learning culture as being crucial.
- One senior officer said that Army needs to develop 'a culture, leadership-driven, oriented to learning.' He added, 'Our organisation, being very hierarchical, finds this difficult.' Another senior officer proposed the term *bildung* to refer to a culture that promoted mentoring and mutual development. An RSM proposed that PME could be reworked so as to promote 'a culture of learning rather than forcing it into their schedule'.

- Several interviewees saw the dwindling number of Messes and diminution of the Mess as part of Army life as reducing suitable and conducive spaces for a learning culture to thrive. They observed synergies between unit PME and Mess life because they are woven together.

#### Hesitations regarding PME

- Numerous RSMs passed on some negativity regarding the label 'PME', on the part of soldiers under their care.
- One said that 'as soon as we label something PME, people think about being forced to read books and write reports'. Another said, 'I hate the term PME'. Another commented, 'PME as it currently stands feels forced, sitting in a room and subjecting people to it once a week as a formal thing.' Another RSM commented, 'We bombard ourselves with PME and we read stuff, but does it really help? I think, "Oh no, not another PME session, why do I have to listen to this?"' A number of these people pointed to time pressures as a contributing factor.

#### Desire for flexibility

- At the same time, there was a positive regard for more flexible educational strategies.
- One RSM expressed doubt that his soldiers were using Defence-supplied educational initiatives. 'But I think they do go to Instagram, YouTube, and other informal platforms that they enjoy using.' Another said, 'Informal development is the best type – the coffee break, the five-minute thing, the opportunities together. We form bonds and friendship, and that's the best place for learning.' Another said, 'We need highly flexible options.'
- Many senior officers and RSMs commented that intrinsic motivation is key for both longevity of individual PME and mastery of a particular field. Allowing people to find particular PME interests in which they develop deep knowledge borne of interest enables these two aspects to come to the fore. One RSM commented, 'Army could improve its PME by reinforcing self-driven learning.'

#### Recognition of progression in professionalism

- A number of senior officers pointed out that members of the Army experience professionalism as a journey: Early in their career they predominantly draw from an established body of knowledge to provide a foundation that they can apply. Later, at a time that varies from professional to professional, they contribute to it.
- Also, the initial focus of PME should be tactical to draw direct relevance to the member's rank and role and add value to their organisation.
- During the early career stages, trainees and junior soldiers and officers should be inculcated with the understanding that PME is a core aspect of being a professional. Clear guidance to that effect should be provided, with units offering structured PME programs that embed good habits and clear examples of what good PME looks like.
- Explicitly understanding the place of personal responsibility was seen as a sign of professional maturation in a profession where, formal courses aside, there was no directed PME. This was noted as being unlike other professions (interviewees regularly mentioned teaching, legal and medical professions) that have mandated and ongoing individual professional development requirements necessary to maintain membership of the profession the individuals

The need for an environment that is safe for trial and error

- A number argued that it is important to create an environment of rigorous discussion (promoting psychological safety but allowing discomfort) where rank and hierarchy are respected but not genuflected: junior ranks should be able argue their perspective.

The need for guidance regarding external content

- Discerning between opinion on the one hand, and peer reviewed or deeply experienced content on the other hand, is an expanding challenge. It is also an opportunity for Army / Cove to provide the guide to better resources

The need for dedicated time

- A prominent theme was that engagement in informal PME was regularly challenged by pressure from an expanding workload compounded by personnel hollowness. This often saw PME reduced, postponed or even cancelled. Finding and securing the time for informal PME, whether as a unit or as an individual, was an ongoing challenge. The reserve officers noted that this is exacerbated for reservists both in unit and as an individual.
- Notably, while all saw that additional money would be useful this was not the main concern. Commanders' and Leaders' interest of and experience in PME was the most important factor. Effective and engaging PME is being undertaken without additional resources when these two groups are committed.

The need for balance, rather than under-selling or over-formalising

- Many expressed caution with regard to over-formalising PME. A senior officer said, 'You can probably foster learning more effectively informally with no resources than you can with an expensive auditorium with passive learning going on as people watch a PowerPoint.' Interviewees placed great emphasis on the warning that over-governance – wrapping the endeavour in rules, strictures, and structures would damage, rather than enhance, development.

Mixed opinion on incentivising PME

- A number of people recognised that flexible and self-directed methods may require incentives to be successful.
- One senior officer expressed doubt that voluntary educational approaches could be successful: 'If you don't count it, it doesn't count.' An RSM said that we need 'some sort of incentive that helps people to pursue self-directed learning and get better at resilience and these other areas.' Another proposed, 'We should track informal learning and give quarterly roundups of how much we've conducted within units. You would be surprised at how much informal collective training is happening, via quick soldier's fives, or corrective training, or on-the-job informal learning.'
- A few people suggested that voluntary PME might be incentivised by relating it to career progression. One asked, 'Why shouldn't this add to their pay grade?'
- But there was also some awareness that such incentives might be at odds with the development of a voluntary learning culture. One RSM commented, 'This idea of incentivising seems to be important. At the same time, we want to develop culture and motivation.'
- Many interviewees saw that informal PME needs to become a focus for commanders and leaders in terms of attention and engagement i.e., reward it with their time and energy.

## Discussion

It is worth relating this consideration of the views of our people to the previous discussion of Defence and academic literature.

According to the literature, our people need mastery in the dimensions of cognition, skills, and character, so as to be better prepared to defeat adversaries in war.

***“Army’s people need mastery in the dimensions of cognition, skills, and character, so as to be better prepared to defeat adversaries in war.”***

According to *Evolving an Intellectual Edge* (2017, p 5), ‘the end of Army’s PME Strategy is: *Army is able to build and sustain an intellectual edge that enables it to succeed in preparing for and executing operations within a joint force in war*’.

Conversations with people in positions of leadership strongly backed up this perspective, though with a variety of different emphases. Some emphasised the need for skills, some drew primary attention to character, and some urged nuance regarding the level of cognition that should be required of different members, at different stages of their professional journey.

In terms of developing these characteristics in people, with a view to their readiness for war, there was some diversity in leaders’ opinions. While many were positive about PME, some felt that the label brought connotations of inflexibility and irrelevance. Many agreed strongly on the need to make use of informal PME in fostering a culture of learning, but were divided on how this should be incentivised whilst avoiding over-governance.

This brings us to a consideration of just what interventions might be appropriate to develop practitioners of the Army profession.



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## C. Interventions

### Key Question

What interventions best cultivate professional masteries of cognition, skills, and character among our people, with a view to fostering readiness for war in an unstable and complex strategic environment?

### Key Points

- There is evidence that the development of a culture of learning via education makes a significant difference to battlefield success
- Although Informal PME is often left out of Australian and international discussion of PME, it contributes distinctively to the development of a learning culture, by offering high flexibility, continuous learning, and a safe opportunity for learners to exercise trial and error without career repercussions
- Australia already has a substantial Informal PME landscape, although to date it has been under-documented

## Literature

### *What variety of interventions?*

It seems intuitive that education would enhance the profession. After all, in a substantial study by the Australian Department of Education, higher levels of education were demonstrated to bring wide ranging general benefits. Even after controlling for differences in income, higher levels of education correlate with 'increased community engagement, improved family and child health and well-being, reduced tax burden for public services, a cleaner environment and reduced crime' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022).

But can education be correlated with the desired military end-result of battle effectiveness?

### ***“Can education be correlated with the desired military end-result of battle effectiveness?”***

One researcher who has explored the relationship between education and battlefield effectiveness is Nathan Toronto (2017). In his book *How Militaries Learn*, he demonstrates that those states that attain a military educational culture of excellence (as measured by features such as military educational institutions and critical-analytical literary output) are more likely to achieve battlefield victories. They also suffer less casualties, than those states without such an educational culture, even accounting for other variables such as material capabilities. One example of Toronto's (2017, p 99) analysis will suffice here:

Even given this high bar for establishing a link between military education and battlefield effectiveness, the data on interstate wars since 1945 indicate a 20 percent swing in the probability of political victory if a state has a war college. Thus, having an advanced military education system matters for both tactical performance and political victory in war.

However, it is important to Toronto that education be seen as part of a wider ecosystem. At the state level, the factors of political will and access to capital are relevant to the attainment of a military educational culture of excellence. At the ground level, matters such as behaviour-modelling by leaders is relevant to uptake by soldiers and officers.

A specific historical argument is made by Visser (2016) in an analysis of the British Army in the Second World War. Visser argues that one factor explaining differences in battlefield performance between the British and German armies in the Second World War is the matter of organisational learning capability. Obstacles to learning in the British Army, seen in matters of empowerment, openness, knowledge dissemination, and development of human resources, represented a 'defensive' and relatively weak learning cycle. This contrasts with the 'more productive learning cycle' of the German army, and is linked by the author to contrasting battlefield success in certain instances. Visser's argument is not directly about education, but it relates to matters of central interest to PME: development of a culture of learning, which grants empowerment of critical thought and reflection among participants in the profession of arms.

An Australian analysis of the 'dichotomous training philosophies adopted by Von Seeckt [of the German *Reichswehr*] and the British Army during the interwar years' comes to similar conclusions (McLennan, 2012). Among the lessons to be heeded by the Australian Army is the need for 'the relentless pursuit of learning, improvement and physical and mental robustness' (McLennan, 2012).

A US analysis of the significance of PME in the development of the US Army points to the Mexican War (1846-48) as demonstrating the relevance of PME for battlefield effectiveness (Naughton,

2017). This study examines changes in military education in the lead up to that war, and takes note of interpretations of the significance of education that were made by participants. It concludes, 'The superb combat performance of West Point officers during the [Mexican War] was due to PME combined with practical field experience. The curriculum taught in the classroom directly translated to a force multiplier on the battlefield' (Naughton, 2017).

In an analysis of state-on-state conflicts from 1945 until Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Andrew Roberts and General David Petraeus conclude that one of the critical factors is that a military force must be 'a learning organisation', for which a culture of learning pervades its activities (Petraeus & Roberts, 2024).

It is noteworthy that a number of these analyses point to a culture of learning as being important for a successful army. This is important, and will be returned to later in this document. At this point, it is enough to note that a military environment of learning, developed via educational interventions, makes a demonstrable difference to battlefield success.

***“A military environment of learning, developed via educational interventions, makes a demonstrable difference to battlefield success.”***

*What source of educational interventions?*

But do educational interventions need to be conducted by Defence, or can the same end be achieved by sending people to civilian higher education opportunities?

According to General David Petraeus (2017), 'the most powerful tool any soldier carries is not his weapon but his mind'. He advocates giving officers from warfighting branches opportunities for civilian graduate-level education. He insists that this sort of education is relevant to their very warfighting, not just to academic or staff appointments. Leadership in warfighting, he says, requires the sort of academic stretching that is the specialty of high level civilian education, contributing to 'the development of the flexible, adaptable, creative thinkers who are so important to operations in places like Iraq and Afghanistan'.

Evans (2023), on the other hand, is sceptical of the practice of 'outsourcing' too much to universities. He proposes that a further formal internal educational tier be added to those of (1) military training and (2) academic education. This third tier would involve career-long 'professional foundation studies'. Professional foundation studies would take the form of numerous "just in time" blended and short (remote-residential) joint courses, taught by soldier-scholar specialists.

*What kind of educational interventions?*

But, whether offered externally by universities or internally by Defence professionals, a further question is relevant: what kind of learning experience best fosters the ongoing development of cognition and character? Megan J. Hennessey (2020) raises precisely this question when she asks, 'How can we know if Professional Military Education works?'. She advocates giving attention to applied educational research, to determine what learning methods should be preferred in the pursuit of a military intellectual edge.

A 2024 article on the 'Neuroscience of Learning' considers the types of learning events that will most effectively transform performance (Andreatta, 2024). The article proposes that learning designers should try to include creative prompts of insight, timing that is chunked according to attention spans, narrative that incorporates images, inclusion of multiple senses, and safe opportunities for failure.

## Member comments

*'I sometimes visit the Cove or the Forge, but I find a lot of it really boring, some of it is just like reading doctrine being robotically rephrased.'*

CAPT, South East Qld

*We need 'continued development of the present options to be more engaging. Those of us who are less "intellectual" often drift away from informal PME that is not immediately relevant or engaging. I find peer-to-peer level interaction, or the lessons of those who went immediately before me, to be the most interesting.'* LTCOL, ACT

*'I would encourage a modern-day approach, rather than the traditional presentation by a high ranking person within your unit or brigade etc. as it generally loses the interest of a lot of people. Maximise the use of a wide range of resources outside the organisation to ensure it is engaging.'*

CAPT, South East Qld

The Australian Joint PME Continuum 2.0 acknowledges that the mere delivery of content is not enough, but that the development of an intellectual edge will require the cultivation of carefully considered learning products that are tailored to different levels. As learners progress, such learning environments will increase 'the opportunities for in-depth learning experiences where learners can actively employ diverse thinking systems over a sustained period'. This is especially the case for Defence and social masteries (that is, cognition and character):

*Defence mastery and social mastery in particular, benefit from progressing quickly beyond formal instruction into deeper understanding and internalisation of underlying principles. This allows us not only to develop unique solutions to previously unknown problems, but also to add to the organisation's collective wisdom by improving its knowledge, principles and resultantly its intellectual edge.*

Chow and Bowers (2021) argue that Australian PME needs to develop further opportunities for the development of creative and critical thinking, and for these opportunities to allow the exercise of risk, without damage to career. As with most other analyses, the PME in view here seems to be the formal learning environment.

### *Formal or informal educational interventions?*

Army's formal learning environment is itself going through modernisation in line with advances in educational research. This can be seen in the 2020 document The Future Ready Training System (Australian Army, 2020). According to this document, the renewal of Army's learning environment is designed to 'prepare cognitively agile and professional people, and high performance teams, in order to thrive and succeed in an accelerated warfare environment'. While this document does not make reference to Informal PME, it lays out the objective that Army's learning environment as a whole will 'enable professional mastery through a culture of continuous learning' (Australian Army, 2020).

Those who work in the coordination of Army's formal learning space apply learning science to Army's training and education, with a view to delivering a thoroughly modernised educational system. Informal learning spaces have received less attention. It is to these that we now turn.



A 2023 analysis of informal learning in Australian organisations points out that ‘informal learning and training is a major contributor to training in workplaces’, allowing workers to develop themselves and adapt to emerging technologies without waiting on accrediting courses (Smith & Smith, 2023). Of the Australian organisations that were researched, 28% reported that informal learning was more important for their people than formal courses, while 54.8% reported that it was equally important. This finding is not unusual in educational literature. Another article reflects, ‘while the majority of workplace learning is informal, most organizational resources devoted to learning are allocated to more formal means, such as training’ (Moore & Klein, 2020).

A substantial 2016 study asserts that informal learning in general ‘is increasingly important in the rapidly changing knowledge economy’ (Van Noy, James, & Bedley, 2016). The study notes that there are some drawbacks to informal learning, including the fact that it holds most promise for those who are already more educated and driven, and the fact that it can occur in tension with other demands on an individual’s time. These drawbacks need to be mitigated against if it is to be encouraged. But it also brings unique advantages. In exploring the benefits of one variety of informal learning (‘noncredit learning’), the authors identify flexibility, lifelong learning, and the ‘low-pressure opportunity to explore education’ as notable (Van Noy, James, & Bedley, 2016).

These three benefits are worth considering in relation to PME. The first benefit (flexibility) can be seen in the ability for unit PME to change quickly according to unexpected needs and opportunities, as well as in the ability for online Informal PME platforms to be accessed on non-protected networks, by any number of learners, thus being quickly scalable.

### Member comments

*‘Video content like infographics on YouTube is extremely engaging and informative. Podcasts will also provide flexibility for access.’* WO1, North Qld

*We need ‘more courses such as COVE+ which can be accessed at any time and self-paced.’* PTE, WA

The second benefit (lifelong learning) resonates with the call of Michael Evans, and of the Future Ready Training System document, for PME to be continuous and career-long rather than only clustered in episodic courses.

### Member comments

*‘Obviously formal Defence courses hone and update the skill sets from a mastery perspective however these can be time consuming and not necessarily contemporary given the liability of preparation and the TMPs needing constant review. I find the external PME very valuable in keeping current and providing a reasonable platform for knowledge and updates.’* LTCOL, ACT

*‘Success in our profession of arms demands a blend of discipline, resilience, leadership, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning.’* MAJ, NSW

*‘We need to place greater emphasis on bite-sized life-long learning opportunities (vs only on periodic collective training) and give people the time to complete it.’* LTCOL, ACT

The third benefit (low-pressure opportunity to explore) fits with the plea of Chow and Bowers (2021), as well as the article on the neuroscience of learning noted above, to have learning opportunities that allow the exercise of risk without fear of career repercussions. This sort of environment of trial and error can be seen both in online Informal PME platforms (where participants can engage in the contest of ideas without Chain of Command permission, and without fear of being marked wrong), as well as in the mess culture that is, at its best, home to robust face-to-face Informal PME. While this mess culture is under threat due to contractual outsourcing, it holds potential to be an important site for peer development.

### Member comments

*'The officer and SNCO mess needs to be invested in, both the physical facilities and the culture. This is where people come together and share their personal achievements and failures so the wider cohort can learn from them.'*  
MAJ, South East Qld

*We need an 'open forum for inclusive access, no pressure to participate coupled with an emphasis on the importance to open one's mind to new ideas and challenge current "knowns".'* WO1, Vic

*'Games and competitions (either military or otherwise) provide the opportunity to practice in a safe environment, and which also provides an immediate feedback loop.'* MAJ, ACT

*'The value of the shared opinion to help refine, confirm or refute our own views and beliefs is invaluable... Opportunities to coordinate the differing views will achieve this more effectively (and deeply) than can be achieved through formal instruction.'* MAJ, NSW

These benefits are far less natural to the formal learning environment, and can be regarded as particular advantages of Informal PME.

An Australian government guide to informal learning finds similar advantages (Halliday-Wynes & Beddie, 2009). With regard to flexibility, it points out that 'informal learning can be adapted to better suit the learner's goals'. With regard to lifelong, continuous learning, it points out that informal learning 'gives employees the opportunity to learn and keep their skills up-to-date, while being part of the overall workplace culture rather than just its training regime' (Halliday-Wynes & Beddie, 2009). With regard to exercising risk without fear of career repercussions, it points to 'trial and error' as a key benefit of this style of learning.

In summary, informal educational approaches distinctively contribute to a culture of learning by offering *high flexibility, continuous learning, and the safe exercise of trial and error*.

***"Informal educational approaches distinctively contribute to a culture of learning by offering high flexibility, continuous learning, and the safe exercise of trial and error."***

***RECOMMENDATION 2: Informal PME platforms implement contemporary, evidence-based learning approaches.***

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** *Army's approach to PME maintains high flexibility, continuous learning, and the safe exercise of trial and error.*

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** *Army collates a broad hub of resources to support its soldiers and officers to access informal PME options, including the Chief of Army's annual reading list.*

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** *Army reinvigorates its mess culture to support PME.*

#### *Incentivising Informal PME*

The divided opinion among those who were interviewed regarding incentivising PME is also reflected in the literature.

On the one hand, there are benefits to offering incentives such as extra pay or other external rewards to motivate the development of professional attributes, currency, and innovation. Such incentives can assist those who are early on in their professional journey to adopt healthy professional patterns. They can also allow professional practitioners the time and energy to devote to activities of learning and improvement. In a US analysis of the impacts of employer-provided 'exceptional benefits' on employee retention, it was found that such benefits – including financial contributions to professional development – boosted employee morale and aided retention in the organisation under analysis: 'Staff want to feel recognized and appreciated for their efforts' (Willson-Fall & Taylor-Cook 2024).

On the other hand, there is evidence that the introduction of rewards for achievement, for activities that were previously motivated by organisational culture, can actually have a demotivating effect. This may be because the incentive of reward is perceived as more transactional than the incentive of rising to organisational culture, resulting in learners settling for achieving minimum requirements for reward. In turn, this could reduce willingness to exercise risk or access continuous learning. According to one analysis, 'At least two dozen studies have shown that people expecting to receive a reward for completing a task (or for doing it successfully) simply do not perform as well as those who expect nothing (Kohn, 1993)... In general, the more cognitive sophistication and open-ended thinking that is required for a task, the worse people tend to do when they have been led to perform that task for a reward' (Robinson, et al., 2021).

It seems that a carefully balanced approach is necessary. It is at this point that we must return to a concept that was noted earlier in the document: that of a heterogeneous workforce, consisting of a professional core and an occupational perimeter. According to an article that reflects on distinctions within the ADF workforce (English, Hoglin, & Paton, 2024), those closer to the perimeter will especially be helped by the 'occupational' incentives of pay and benefits, while those closer to the core will be more attuned to the professional incentives of institutional culture.

***“The introduction of rewards for achievement, for activities that were previously motivated by organisational culture, can actually have a demotivating effect.”***



The Joint PME Continuum document recognises that participation in the profession of arms is not static: ‘the Profession of Arms is introduced from the most junior levels. However, its prominence becomes increasingly important from late JPME Level 2 and into Level 3.’ It may be useful to regard this development as a movement from the perimeter towards the core. A graduated approach to incentivising PME could reflect this, by highlighting extrinsic benefits from the outset of one’s career, and from there, steadily increasing the autonomy and influence associated with a sense of professional calling.

The diagram below aligns this proposal with the levels of the Joint PME continuum:



It is the development of a communal *culture of learning* that is frequently linked to a higher rate of battlefield success. Incentivising people via leader-modelled professional culture is therefore the ultimate aim, with the highlighting of extrinsic benefits at the foundational level being a means of graduated induction into the profession.

Before fleshing out each of these stages further, it is worth pointing to a comparison with another well-established profession. One incentive for professional development in the medical profession is the logging of hours. These hours might include formal courses or informal learning sessions, and might be logged via personal or organisation-provided means. A review of the British health profession illustrates the great variety allowed by this model (Karas et al, 2020):



CPD [Continuing Professional Development] is now mandatory for the approximately 1.5 million individuals registered to work under 32 regulated titles in the UK. Eight of the nine regulators do not mandate modes of CPD and there is little requirement to conduct interprofessional CPD. Overall 81% of those registered are required to engage in some form of reflection on their learning but only 35% are required to use a personal development plan while 26% have no requirement to engage in peer-to-peer learning.

While the logging of hours is not mandated for the conduct of PME in Army, this glance at the medical profession illustrates that a highly regarded profession has room for a range of formality in its enactment of continuing professional development.

### *Early career*

A child learns to ride a bicycle by starting off with someone holding it upright while they pedal. After a while, they progress to doing it by themselves. Similarly, recruits, and officer and staff cadets begin their time in Army by having the timing and variety of their physical training mandated for them. As they progress through their career, they are expected to take more initiative themselves. From an educational perspective, this sort of graduated approach to learning makes use of the 'zone of proximal development', whereby the learner is presented with a goal that is not too far out of their reach. The same approach is relevant for inducting professionals into the habits that will later come to be part of their voluntary Informal PME. At the foundation stage, then, our people should be inducted into the use of Informal PME platforms. This could take place by providing guides to the range of Defence and external PME platforms available, and by adapting some of these for inclusion in formal courses.

In January 2024, something like this was trialled with staff cadets at Royal Military College -Duntroon, as a cohort of learners was required to conduct their choice of a Cove+ course, and undertake its associated assessment, as part of their ab initio training for what was previously a service writing task. The package master regarded this trial as successful, and those who marked the assessments commented on the high quality and impressive creativity of learner outputs. The students therefore met the requirement to produce a standardised written document, as well as learning about a topic of their choosing.

Keeping in mind the concerns of RSMs noted earlier in this document, there is no need for the resources offered to newly enlisted soldiers to be overly academic or esoteric. Rather, within the range of resources on offer, there should be many that simply reinforce elements of cognition and character relevant to basic soldiering skills. It is important to remember that Army operates in teams, and not every team member needs the same areas or strengths of intellect. A broad range of types of assessment should also be included, such as allowing varied modes of reflection on videos, podcasts, and wargames. The goal is to form habits of reflection and critical thought, so that soldiers are empowered to stretch their cognitive contribution to their team's success.

At this foundational stage, extrinsic incentives are highlighted, and ought to include a wide range. These might include:

- Career opportunities for certain accomplishments
- Prizes, similar to those awarded for sporting or PT accomplishments

One way of better tracking informal PME would be to add functionality to existing online PME platforms, allowing users to sign in, keep track of their own PME activities, see others' accomplishments, join in team activities, access recommended reading resources, and earn prizes.

## Member comments

*We need 'to link in procedures pertinent to the field environment and become better at the basics' PTE, North Qld*

### Mid career

With progression in rank, soldiers and officers should be expected to take more of an active interest in driving their own PME journey. Team leaders should set a culture that values individual and collective Informal PME, whether on the field, in the mess, in the classroom, or in an office. Drawing on resources from Defence and external Informal PME providers, leaders can role model a commitment to excellence of cognition and character.

This needs to be brought more explicitly into performance appraisal goal-setting, such that people are asked to outline their PME plans for the period. However, the means by which PME plans are executed remains at the discretion of the individual and may include Defence or external resources.

## Member comments

*'I have been afforded the freedom to conduct my own PME, and my unit culture has encouraged the officers within the Bn to be intellectually curious.'*  
MAJ, NT

If a unit hosts mandatory PME sessions, these would be appropriate to list in the agreed goals of a performance appraisal. This is similar to the way in which, if a unit hosts mandatory PT sessions, they would contribute to the fulfilment of personal PT goals. Coordinators of mandatory unit PME should ensure that sessions accentuate the hallmarks of flexibility, continuous learning, and a safe environment for trial and error. This might mean including optional components for the sake of flexibility ('attend option 1 or option 2'); combining the event with social interaction at the mess for the sake of fostering continuous learning between work and social environments; and inviting genuine debate on acceptable topics for the sake of fostering the safe exercise of contestation.

It will be seen in section 4 that many people report dissatisfaction with their experience of unit PME. Their reasons frequently relate to a lack of flexibility, interaction, and relevance. This does not mean that unit PME should be avoided; just that it should be continually optimised.

While the extrinsic incentives mentioned in the previous section still apply, many will find that intrinsic incentives begin to hold increasing sway at this point – specifically, the desire to better oneself as a practitioner and contributor to the Army profession.

## Member comments

*'I enjoy informal PMEs that are social and two-way conversations: online synchronous sessions (e.g. A day in the life of a xyz; What's happening at x unit; Intro to new capability chats; etc) would be great, where someone presents and listeners have the chance to ask questions. If this was done over 'lunch hour', even better, as I would be more inclined to join then when I'm not super busy.'* MAJ, South East Qld

### *Advanced career*

Role modelling the uptake of Informal PME is important as people move into positions of higher leadership. Research suggests that the creation of a learning culture is ‘not just about formal learning – informal and social learning are increasingly important... [T]his requires organisational support’. Organisations that want to develop a learning culture should urge managers ‘to be role models, to demonstrate how learning is part of everyone’s role’ (CIPD, 2020).

This perspective is pervasive in literature on the topic. One study of the development of a learning culture in a medical setting found that ‘leadership roles had considerable impact in nurturing learning culture and constraining punitive culture’ (Kim & Newby-Bennett, 2012). A research article on organisational management states, ‘We are convinced that in knowledge organizations one of the main priorities of leaders should be to start shaping a culture facilitating learning’ (Ribiere & Sitar, 2003).

Those who are advanced in their career therefore need to be resourced and encouraged to formulate plans for their role modelling of Informal PME. Again, this should be brought explicitly into PAR goal setting at this level.

### **Member comments**

*‘We all look for role models and connect with those that wear the uniform and listen to their experiences.’ WO1, ACT*

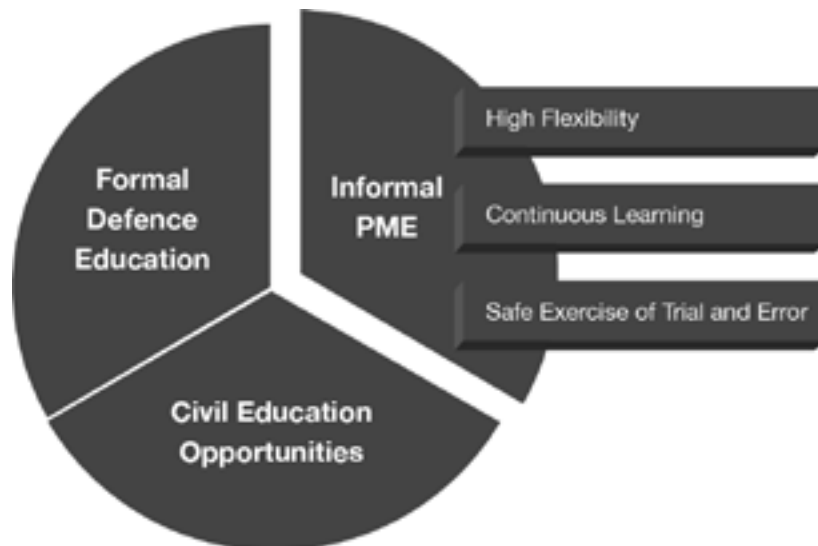
**RECOMMENDATION 6:** *Army articulates how PME features in PAR goals and provides a template for assessing officers.*

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** *Army introduces a system to allow soldiers and officers to track participation, set goals, and monitor progress of their PME journey.*

### *Complementary educational interventions*

In a comprehensive military learning environment, a range of complementary educational approaches is needed, including (1) in-house formal education; (2) cooperation with the civilian education sector; and (3) investment in the flexible, lifelong, safe opportunities afforded by Informal PME.

*“A range of complementary educational approaches is needed, including (1) in-house formal education; (2) cooperation with the civilian education sector; and (3) investment in the flexible, lifelong, safe opportunities afforded by Informal PME.”*



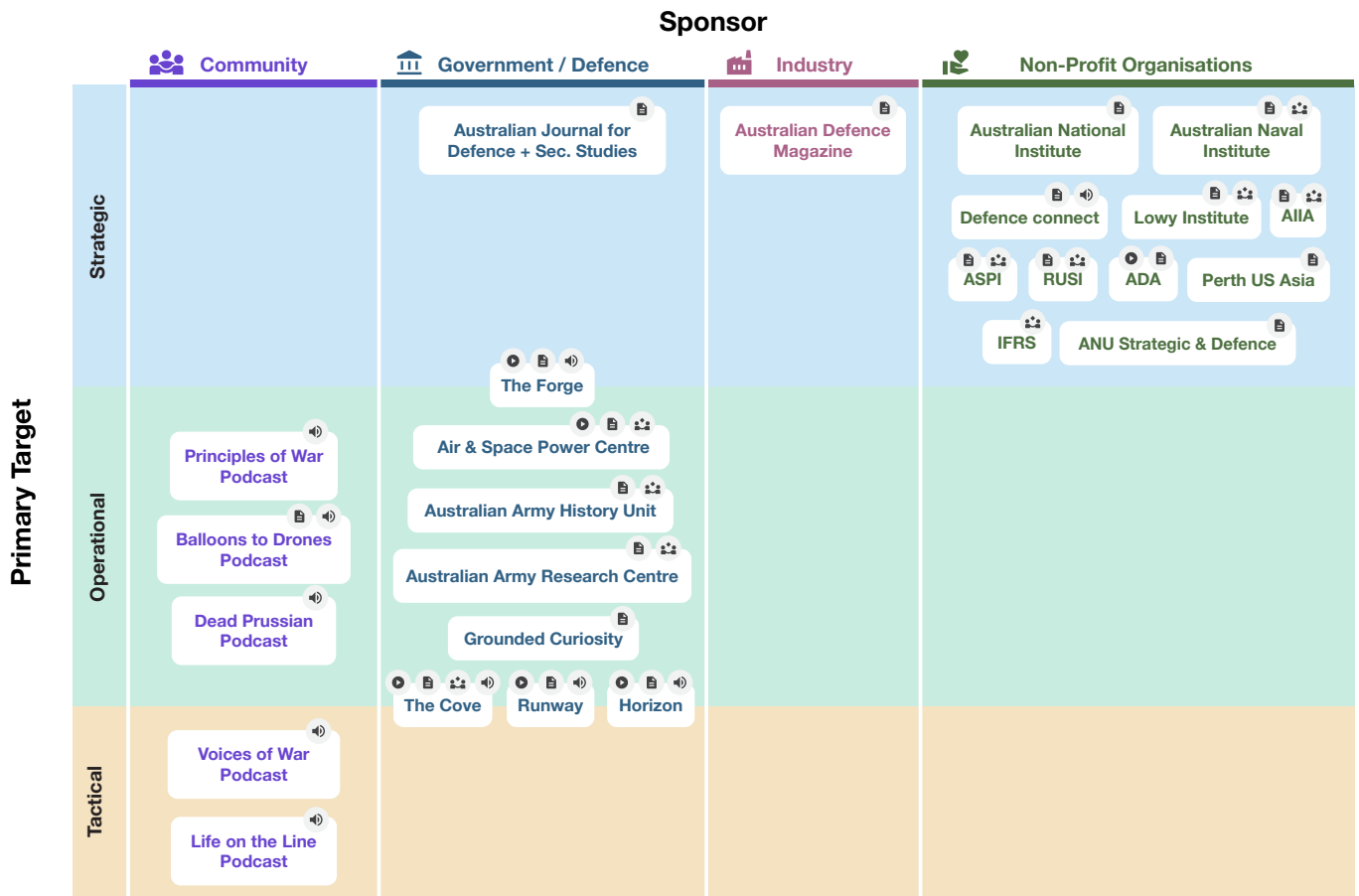
This is indeed happening in practice both in Australian and international contexts. But the informal component is rarely included in official considerations of the contribution of PME to capability. This is also true internationally. As an example, a 2024 review of PME in the US Department of Defense does not include Informal PME, non-formal PME, or self-directed continuous professional development in its purview (Hubble et al., 2024). A 2020 article by a US Marine Corps captain laments, ‘this self-directed PME is a vital part of the education continuum for the Marine Corps, but its massive potential is simply not harnessed at present’ (Mercer, 2020). An Australian reflection raises a similar concern: ‘due to minimal tracking of professional development outside of formal courses, Defence is underutilising and under supporting a significant and diverse set of skills and knowledge’ (Mai-Khoi Vu, 2022).

We now turn to an analysis of the Australian Informal PME landscape.

## Mapping the Broader Australian PME Landscape

The Australian PME landscape is broad. Just considering Informal PME, there are collective face-to-face platforms across Army units, where informal learning happens in the context of mentoring, planned learning sessions and impromptu sharing; as well as online platforms that provide PME resources for individuals to access for self-directed learning. These online platforms include Defence-resourced websites as well as external PME providers. To give a better idea of their breadth, this section will provide a snapshot of some of the online Informal PME platforms that cater to members of the Australian Defence Force.





The image above displays a number of the Australian platforms that create and curate content related to the profession of arms. While the position on the chart indicates a ‘primary target’ in terms of content and audience, a number of the platforms stretch across multiple levels. The icons at the top of each platform represent the type of content provided: video; written; face-to-face events; and audio content. It is important to recognise that while this infographic provides a glance at the breadth of informal PME platforms providing content for Australian audiences, not all of the platforms are equal in terms of quality, output, or influence. For example, some of the platforms are manned by a single person and feature sparse content without peer review. By contrast, submissions to the Australian Army Research Centre (AARC), for example, undergo a double blind review process followed by an editorial process, with an output that includes three journal issues per year, twenty-five academic-reviewed papers, up to twenty peer-reviewed book reviews, occasional papers, and online posts.

It can be seen in the chart that while community members are more likely to produce audio content, focusing on tactical or operational interests, industry and non-profit organisations especially provide written content related to strategic-level interests. In between these, government/Defence platforms feature a wider range of modes of delivery (written, audio, video, face-to-face), and traverse tactical to strategic interests, depending on the platform.

The PME platforms represented here cohere with the definition of Informal PME provided at the beginning of this document, providing ‘intentional development in cognition or character, relevant

to the profession of arms... via unaccredited means.' Though they are not all moderated by Defence, they nevertheless contribute to military capability, and should be taken into account as Army considers the development of its people.

The fact that external providers are willing to add to Army capability is both a risk (because Defence access to resources may be undiscerning) and an opportunity. To achieve improved situational awareness, Army could track the variety of external PME platforms that resource its members, and periodically survey its members to learn how these providers are impacting their development in cognition and character. In view of its ongoing findings, Army could mitigate the risk of lack of member discernment by offering curated guides to external platforms. This, in turn, would enhance the opportunity provided by the existence of external PME providers, as an aid to member development.

In defining PME above, this document states that it 'may include learning experiences related to any matters of cognition or character that are relevant to the military profession'. For this reason, it is not only explicitly military resources that may aid our people's development in the Army profession. Just considering online resources, there are numerous free or subscription services that aid literacy, numeracy, language skills, critical thinking skills and other areas. Army could gauge and support uptake of such aids by our people.

### Member comments

*I value 'external news and information from multiple sources.'* MAJ, Vic

*'Podcasts provide an easy way to access other peoples lived experiences. The downside is that it is up to the listener to interpret these experiences as positive or negative and figure out ways to insert these into their own lives.'*  
SGT, North Qld

*'We can confidently estimate a higher number of Army personnel use unregulated, unapproved, non-ADF affiliated platforms (namely Instagram or Facebook groups) to engage in interesting, valuable conversations which enhance the PME experience.'* CAPT, NSW

*'There is a greater volume of high quality academic content and editorials with intellectual edge available through open source websites and journals than is developed internally to our organisation.'* MAJ, Vic

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** *Army acknowledges the contribution of external informal PME providers and actively promotes their use.*

## The International PME Landscape

Much of the PME landscape considered above is limited to Australia. However, soldiers and officers access a range of international Informal PME platforms, including blogs, podcasts, videos, books, wargaming communities, and PME websites.

### Member comments

*'The US military is very cleverly using some of its personality driven social media influencers to good effect. This is achieved in the guise of good humour and engaging content.'* MAJ, North Qld

*I appreciate 'YouTube channels that discuss advantages and disadvantages of equipment being used by overseas armed forces, examples: YouTube channel called Task & Purpose, which breaks down information from both sides of the fence with information found on open source websites, news sites and other bloggers and tries to distinguish fact from fiction.'* PTE, NSW

### International Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms have become an integral part of modern life, with the military being no exception. While the military has traditionally embraced social media for its efficiency in reaching large audiences and recruiting younger generations, these platforms are also playing an increasingly important role in Informal PME. Platforms like Telegram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram have emerged as virtual locations in which military members collaborate, share best practices, and learn from each other's experiences in real-time.

Platforms like Telegram allow service members to form private groups and communities to discuss topics relevant to their units and professional development (Giroux, 2021). Additionally, social media provides a platform for military thought leaders and subject matter experts to share their insights and analysis. Through blogs, and social media commentary, these individuals can reach a wide audience of military personnel, with X and Instagram's influencer networks becoming important hubs for this type of Informal PME (Lanz & Eleiba, 2020). Accounts dedicated to military news aggregate information from various sources, keeping users informed about emerging threats, geopolitical trends, and lessons learned from recent conflicts. It is evident that the use of these platforms is not without its risks, as with anything exposed to the social media environment. However, as the military continues to adapt to the digital age, leveraging these platforms for professional development and knowledge sharing may prove crucial for maintaining a well-educated and adaptable force (UK Government 2021).

Annex C includes a snapshot of some of the popular sources of Informal PME on prominent social media platforms.

### International Militaries

The preparation of this document has involved discussion with members from military educational departments of numerous international partners, including the US, UK, New Zealand, Canada, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, Tonga, and Papua New Guinea.

Discussion with these partners suggests that, while Informal PME initiatives are sometimes available, they are generally not included in official considerations of educational contribution to capability.

Further, some cultures place less value on self-directed or impromptu learning, resulting in Informal PME initiatives having less traction. A number of international partners expressed bewilderment that military members might voluntarily pursue educational initiatives for no reason other than a sense of professional calling. One such international military member commented on what he considered to be the distinctively 'foreign' circumstance of allowing the contest of ideas at all levels: 'In Australia, you can be top-down or bottom-up; but in our country, it's only top-down.' Australia would be wise to ponder how to further consolidate this distinctive strength, and how best to support regional partners with variant educational and hierarchical cultures.

One international military that is currently giving attention to the role of Informal PME is that of Canada. In introducing a 2023 document, the PME Staff of the Canadian Army Command and Staff College (CACSC) write, 'the importance of non-formal PD has increased, and individuals are seeking self-improvement in increasing numbers to remain both competent and competitive' (Rickard & Buckingham, 2023). In the Canadian Armed Forces professional development framework, therefore, one of the four 'pillars' of professional development is non-formal self-development (Canadian Armed Forces, 2023). Further, the Canadian Army Modernization Strategy of 2021 'strongly encourages non-formal PME' (Canadian Army, 2021). While the role of dedicated non-formal PME platforms is not included in any Canadian Army directive, the CACSC PME cell does maintain an online Informal PME platform, Line of Sight. Like Australia's Land Power Forum or The Cove, this is an official Army output. The website states the intention that 'members of all ranks will be able to share their insights and "learn" according to their own unique needs'.

However, this attention to the value of Informal PME is the exception. If future warfare is expected to involve integrated, multi-national forces, then it makes sense for Australia to lead discussion of the value of Informal PME among our allies and regional partners. It may be that our analysis and initiatives will be able to spark the further refinement of PME in international contexts. Avenues could include participation in international forums on PME, sharing of relevant materials, and hosting online or face-to-face multi-national discussions.

***RECOMMENDATION 9: Army develops partner-Army awareness that informal dimensions of PME are important, and participates in other-nation initiatives to enhance interoperability and connectivity.***



## Discussion

It would be fair to ask whether Australian military members should really be expected to take up voluntary learning opportunities, particularly in the context of the heightened prospect of war.

In the context of large scale combat in the Pacific, with Australia facing a hostile threat from the North, one of the strategies adopted in the 1940s was development of cognition and character through voluntary education. To cite an article from 1943, education ‘contributes towards military efficiency by fostering mental alertness [i.e. cognition] and by giving the troops a vivid realization of just what they are fighting for [i.e. character]. From this approach, the [Army Education] Service tries to educate for victory’ (Duncan, 1943).

Educational initiatives at that time represented the biggest leap forward in voluntary adult education that Australia has seen. They involved millions of Australians, engaging in a broad range of activities designed to develop both cognition and character. These initiatives made use of talks, films, music, discussion groups, face-to-face instruction, distance learning, publications, hobbies, ‘debates, panel discussions, open forums, quizzes of various types, daily news broadcasts and wall newspapers’.

Many of these initiatives parallel the sorts of informal learning found in the online platforms of Australia’s broad PME landscape. The task of voluntary military education platforms ‘arousing and holding the interest of adults in their leisure hours’, for the sake of optimising our chances of victory in war, is therefore not unprecedented.

***“The task of voluntary military education platforms ‘arousing and holding the interest of adults in their leisure hours’, for the sake of optimising our chances of victory in war, is... not unprecedented.”***

Further, the data that will be considered in Part D indicates that voluntary educational opportunities are already finding significant traction.

The present document is not the first to note that individual engagement with Informal PME has been insufficiently taken into account by Defence. A 2020 article by the then-director of Joint PME at the Australian Defence College stated, ‘Defence does not mandate that continuous professional development occurs, nor provides a mechanism to track and manage such development. *Individual responsibility* is the missing part in the JPME Continuum, ADF doctrine and many other nations’ learning publications’ (Barrett, 2020).



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## D. Informal PME Plan

### Key Question

How should Army incorporate Informal PME into its broader PME Plan? This question needs to be considered alongside an examination of the Army's current implementation of Informal PME.

### Key Points

- Army implementation of a Joint approach to PME includes recognition of the place of Informal PME
- The PME cell of the Directorate of Army Education and Learning Systems oversees formal, and informal components, with its key platform for Informal PME being The Cove.  
Other Army providers of informal PME include the Australian Army Research Centre (AARC) and the Australian Army History Unit (AAHU).
- Soldiers and Officers make significant use of Informal PME resources, but many express frustration that this dimension of learning is under-valued in terms of time allocated to do it justice
- Informal PME needs to be further articulated as a distinctive component of Army's overall PME plan, such that our people are better supported in their development in the Army profession

## Literature

In this section, the relevant literature takes the form of ADF and Army documentation regarding its enactment of PME in and beyond the internal formal learning environment. First, direction at an ADF level will be considered. Following that, Army implementation will be considered, with special attention given to the Army's dedicated PME cell, within the Directorate of Army Education and Learning Systems.

### *ADF Joint PME Continuum*

The Australian Joint PME Continuum 2.0 outlines five learning levels, at which deepening achievement of Defence, technical, and social masteries occurs. The document acknowledges that the formal learning environment contributes directly to this development, but also that more is needed: 'While Defence's formal training system is very effective for preparing JPME Level 1 and 2 personnel to perform in the workplace, progressing to the later stages of Level 2 and beyond requires more sophisticated approaches.'

Those 'more sophisticated approaches' will include 'indirectly developing character and cognitive skills' in formal learning settings, as well as providing bespoke application of relevant resources to personnel in a range of situations and environments.

Of particular interest here is the document's acknowledgement that some areas of learning – especially those related to Social mastery – might best be developed through 'non-formal', 'informal', or 'incidental' means – but detailed attention to Informal PME is beyond the purview of that document.

***“Some areas of learning – especially those related to Social mastery – might best be developed through ‘non-formal’, ‘informal’, or ‘incidental’ means.”***

The document also warns against obsession with qualifications, urging that the development of professional wisdom 'requires a genuine desire to improve', rather than simply the accumulation of course credits. While much of the document is given to consideration of how to make the most of formal courses, it ends by once again urging practitioners to think about PME as broadly as possible: 'Defence needs to invest more in growing leaders who not just survive, but thrive in complex adaptive systems. There is no recommended Course of Action (COA) with definitive lines of operation and decisive points for holistic JPME. Every situation is unique and constantly evolving.'

The ADF continues to develop resources that range from formal to informal at a joint level. An example of an informal resource is the Social Mastery Learning Hub, a 2024 initiative on ADELE, Defence's learning management system. This hub has no assessments or course completion requirements, and is not directive regarding user engagement.

### *Army Implementation*

A plan for the delivery of Army PME through Forces Command from 2020-2025 speaks of the development of an intellectual edge through the coordinated delivery of different types of PME (HQ FORCOMD, 2020). This document clarifies distinctions between formal and Informal PME. *Formal PME* refers to that which takes place 'on career courses managed by military training establishments', as well as courses provided directly by civilian education institutions.



*Informal PME* refers to unit or individual activities ‘which enhance the intellectual component of fighting power’.

The document points to The Cove as a prime example of delivery of Informal PME.

Apart from that document, interestingly, there is very little explicit attention given to the role of Informal PME in Australian or international literature. Given the amount, and influence, of Informal PME explored in the previous section, this is surprising. Numerous possible reasons present themselves. One is that, as seen in the PME landscape analysis, many Informal PME providers are external to Defence organisations, and therefore not considered to be part of military education. Another reason is that, by definition, Informal PME lacks accrediting data and so is hard to measure. A further reason is that organisations have historically underestimated the extent of the influence of informal learning. Over twenty-five years ago it was reported that ‘Traditional educational structures have largely discounted informal learning’ (Hager, 1998). Much has changed, but military educational structures are more traditional than most, and have lagged behind the recognition of informal learning that has since blossomed in other areas of education.

***“There is very little explicit attention given to the role of Informal PME in Australian or international literature.”***

#### *PME Cell*

The PME Cell within the Directorate of Army Education and Learning Systems resources PME across each of the delivery types identified by the Forces Command plan considered above. In terms of *formal PME*, it coordinates individuals’ access to civilian education through Army Education Schemes, and provides the Cove+ suite of courses.’ In terms of *Informal PME*, it creates and curates a wide variety of content that can be applied in bespoke ways by individuals and units, as well as providing means for members to contribute to, and engage with, this content. Its chief platform for this informal delivery of PME is The Cove, which will be considered in further detail below.

#### *Informal PME Across Army*

Before considering The Cove, however, it is important to recognise that Army’s implementation of informal PME is far broader than that platform. As the Chief of Army’s 2017 Directive on PME points out, in-unit PME is ‘a vital part of the *informal* element of Army’s future learning’. At Army units across Australia, unaccredited PME programs are designed to promote an intellectual edge by providing expert-led sessions on military topics.

Further, a variety of face to face, written, and online resources provide opportunities for Army members to interact and contest ideas. An important online resource is the Land Power Forum, a platform provided by the AARC to promote the contest of ideas regarding future warfare. An important written resource is the *Brief History of the Australian Army*, supplied by the AAHU to all new Army recruits. A notable face-to-face source of informal PME is the range of Army Museums managed by the AAHU, attracting 80,000 visitors annually. An online resource at a Defence level is the Wargaming Community of Practice, a platform that brings together ADF personnel who are interested in the role of wargaming in improving readiness for war.

## The Cove

The Cove was founded in order to function as a professional community hub. The Cove website provides articles, podcasts, videos, live-streamed events, competitions, and other resources. Though targeted at Army members, it is publicly accessible, and operates at an 'official' classification. The Cove website receives about 45,000 article views per month, while monthly podcast listens number in the low thousands. Monthly average video views from early 2024 were just over 150,000.

### Member comments

*'I think informal PME needs to be elective to the individual. The Cove is a good example. There we can find articles that interest you or discuss your trade. I think PME has a bad reputation as it is often mandated by Units that do not have the capacity to build anything meaningful.'* CAPT, South East Qld

*'I have often looked into the Cove, however I find the content on there to be boring and lose interest. Seems like a bit of fluff someone was forced to write to look good.'* CPL, NSW

*'Continue the Cove. Allows for learning at own pace/time.'*  
LCPL, South East Qld

It might be asked why Army devotes resources of personnel and funding to the provision of Informal PME, given that this is a dimension of learning that frequently occurs voluntarily anyway, and is significantly resourced by external providers. But just to state the question this way indicates a key vulnerability of informal learning: it is subject to uncontrolled influences. The presence of a dedicated PME cell that resources Informal PME within Army allows members to look to a trusted provider for the creation and curation of content that fits with Defence values and service needs. It also provides a central hub for the sharing and contesting of ideas among members. Further, the maintenance of official PME platforms under the direction of the PME cell, the AARC, and the AAHU provides Army with instantly scalable educational capabilities. Intellectual property on these platforms is able to support 100 people or 100,000 people for very little difference in resourcing. If the government calls upon the Defence Force to quickly scale, these flexible educational platforms may prove crucial.

To further illustrate the value of Informal PME, the total costs associated with the Army Training System for FY 24/25 are more than \$70m. The total budget allocation for the PME cell is less than \$1m; less than 1.5%. Does Informal PME contribute more than 1.5% of Army's collective intellectual capacity? This question will be answered as we turn to a consideration of the views of our people.

## Stakeholder Engagement: Army Members and PME

What do our people make of the Informal PME that is offered to them? In the development of this document, 576 Australian Army soldiers and officers (about 1.3% of Army) supplied their views on Informal PME and their own development in the Army profession. These members came from a wide range of ranks, corps, SERCAT, and experience in Army. Some findings regarding these members can be found below, while fuller findings and associated charts can be found in Annex B.

### *Views on the Profession*

Members were asked about the most important attributes for members of the Army profession. Across almost all groups, psychological and cognitive abilities were rated as the most important, followed by technical and tactical abilities, with leadership and ethics coming in third.

### *Engagement with Informal PME*

Out of several options given, The Cove represents the Informal PME content most engaged with by respondents, followed by military news sites, military podcasts, and The Forge.

Most members reported engaging with Informal PME weekly or monthly.

### *Relative Importance of Formal and Informal Learning*

Just under half of respondents (279) reported that, of several options given, formal Defence courses had done the most to develop their cognition and character. Informal PME came in second, with 210 respondents. Interestingly, of these 210, most (134) said that it was Informal PME from providers external to Defence that had had the biggest impact.

### *Types of Informal PME*

One respondent's comment illustrates the types of Informal PME accessed by our people: 'Mandatory PME (least effective), News/Military podcasts (Most effective for Strategic), audio books (Most effective for Operational), realistic gaming simulators (most effective for decision making).'

### *What Members Want from PME*

Members expressed a wide range of opinions on what PME should be like. A large number expressed the desire to maintain high flexibility and voluntary self-direction, while improving Defence recognition of the time required.

## **Discussion**

In the light of the above, how might we better understand the informal dimension of PME as part of Army's broader PME Plan?

According to Defence and Army documentation, Informal PME fits into a comprehensive approach to PME, which includes formal and informal dimensions. To date, the informal dimension has not received dedicated explication. The significant impact of informal learning reported by our people above reinforces the value of doing so now.

*The specific contribution that the informal dimension makes to an overall PME plan is the enhancement of a culture of learning, via high flexibility, continuous learning, and the safe exercise of trial and error. While present to some extent in formal learning, these characteristics are heightened in informal settings, where learning is conducted voluntarily as a commitment to the profession, rather than as a transaction for a reward.*

Such voluntary learning has a strong history in the Australian Army, being recognised in 1943 as an exemplary approach to adult education. Our people continue to make significant use of Informal PME, heavily accessing Informal PME platforms from within and outside Defence, including substantial use of international platforms. However, pursuit of Informal PME is constrained by a lack of recognition by Defence, made manifest in minimal guidance with regard to external platforms, and a perceived lack of allocated *time* – both for self-paced Informal PME using online platforms, and for opportunities to learn from others in informal collective settings such as the mess.

The perception of a lack of time is undoubtedly linked to the impressions members receive from the orders, priorities, allocated schedules, and role modelling of their supervisors. A key to invigorating a culture of voluntary learning is for leaders to display a commitment to informal learning themselves. While this comes at the cost of time, the demonstrated link between a culture of learning and battlefield success arguably makes it a cost worth paying. The incentivising impact of leaders who take informal learning seriously will pay off in time of war. Incorporating Informal PME explicitly in Army's PME plan will help to support leaders in making this happen.

Earlier in this section, the question was raised: Given that Informal PME accounts for 1.5% of the budget that Army devotes to learning, does Informal PME contribute more than 1.5% of Army's collective intellectual capacity? According to the information gathered from our people, over a third (210 out of 576) say that informal PME has contributed more to their cognition and character than formal Defence courses. Of course, this should not be crudely translated into budget figures, but it is illustrative of the value that our people find in Informal PME.

This document is titled Education for War. It is worth acknowledging that as a nation moves along a pathway to war, its priorities will necessarily change. It may be that in the context of engagement in large scale combat operations, it will become useful for widely accessed PME platforms to pivot so as to become avenues of public communication or providers of basic training. When that happens, their function of enhancing a culture of voluntary learning will be understandably reduced. Until that time, there is an opportunity to enhance the intellectual edge of the Australian Army, so as to optimise advantages over adversaries.



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## E. Conclusion

In the context of an unstable and increasingly complex strategic environment and a desire for increased professionalism, Australia needs to continue to develop the cognition, character, and skills of participants in the Army profession. There is evidence that development of such elements through educational interventions impacts on battlefield success.

A well-rounded PME system will include both formal and informal components. While the formal component offers benefits such as accreditation and mandated participation, the informal component offers complementary benefits in its contribution to a learning culture: high flexibility, continuous learning, and the safe exercise of trial and error.

While the informal component already has extensive breadth and uptake among our people, with many reporting that it benefits cognition and character even more than formal learning initiatives, its contribution to Army capability is not sufficiently tracked or incentivised. Army should seek to improve its recognition of Informal PME, and to be smarter in the way it incentivises the participation of a heterogeneous workforce, so as to optimise Australia's readiness for war.

### *Questions for Consideration*

- This document demonstrates the breadth and significance of Informal PME. Why is the informal dimension so widespread in PME practice, and yet so absent in PME literature?
- This document identifies three unique strengths of informal learning. How can Informal PME play to these strengths in the context of complementary approaches to learning? Specifically, how can it make the best use of its high flexibility, continuous learning, and opportunity for the safe exercise of trial and error?
- Related to the above question: Does Army's provision of Informal PME through AARC, AAHU and The Cove offer sufficient opportunities for members to 'fail' safely, by engaging in the risky contestation of ideas? To what extent do members participate by sharing comments? Are there better ways to enable this?
- Army members have expressed numerous ideas for the enhancement of Informal PME. How can Army draw on these ideas for the sake of continued improvement?
- An Australian government guide to informal learning (Halliday-Wynes & Beddie, 2009), referenced earlier in this document, states that 'informal learning becomes an important element in workforce development and something to be factored into broader policies concerning work-related training'. It is worth considering how this might be applied in an Army setting. How can Army policies be developed in cognisance of the contribution of informal components of PME to the development of cognition and character?
- Many people point to a lack of time as a key factor constraining PME. In what ways can this be further addressed?



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## 10. Annex A: Command Team Leaders' Views on Informal PME

What do those with experience in command teams make of Informal PME? In conjunction with consultants from Deloitte, interviews were conducted with fifty such people, ranging in rank from Warrant Officer Class 1 to Lieutenant General. The following is derived from an analysis of those interviews.

### What is your view of the relative importance and value of informal PME?

- The unanimous response was that informal PME was important and that it provided considerable individual and collective value. Almost exclusively, they saw it as contributing to and enhancing operational effectiveness.
- Many linked informal PME directly to being a member of the profession of arms (PofA) often stating words to the effect that 'one could not consider themselves to be a professional without personal engagement with informal PME'. Some saw a link between effective and interesting informal PME – whether individual but especially collective – with retention and professional satisfaction.
- A theme was that there is what could be coined a PME life cycle for a member of the PofA. Early in their career they predominantly draw from established body of knowledge to provide a foundation that they can apply. Later at a time that varies professional to professional they should contribute to it. This was not meant to constrain those more junior or less experienced from applying professional imagination or creativity; rather that building the mental and professional models takes knowledge and experience. As well as this, the initial focus should be tactical to draw direct relevance to the member's rank and role and add value to their organisation.
- Another theme was the value with which informal PME assisted the development of a professional mind, replete with curiosity & imagination. This, along with contribution to character development (in a semi heroic / great person model) was viewed as another facet that informal PME supported and complemented.
- Many commented that intrinsic motivation is key for both longevity of individual PME and mastery of a particular field. Allowing people to find particular PME interests in which they develop deep knowledge borne of interest enables these two aspects to come to the fore. This would rest alongside and complement the more structured informal and formal PME programs. However, and this could be superficially viewed as antithetical to the ideal of intrinsic motivation, particularly during the early career stages trainees and junior soldiers and officers should be inculcated with the understanding that PME is a core aspect of being a professional. Clear guidance to that effect should be provided, along with leaders providing role modelling, and training institutions and units offering structured PME programs that embed good habits and clear examples of what good PME looks like.
- It is important to create an environment of rigorous discussion (promoting psychological safety but allowing discomfort) where rank and hierarchy are respected but not genuflected...junior ranks should be able to argue their perspective.

- Other areas where interviewees saw potential value were in the understanding of what it is to be a professional soldier, one's responsibilities to other soldiers and one's responsibilities to one's society. This was extended to understanding the Army's place within Australian society.
- Mitigating the theory practice paradox – interviewees indicates that both types of informal PME assisted here. Several emphasised that while reading military history and personal accounts of combat and war was useful, people gained most value when this was coupled with a considered discussion and/or writing about it.
- PME complementing & extending on collective training. Several interviewees related value from informal PME supporting and being supported by collective training. Informal PME could be used to extrapolate on those areas where collective live and simulated training have limits. PME, for example, using historical examples, can be incorporated into collective training but this need not be solely a lecture and requires follow up discussions that elicit more fulsome engagement and considered professional thought.
- PME through military history and providing knowledge from those who fought in war promotes understanding of how combat and warfighting affects individuals, teams and units. This can assist in providing mental models that reduce the shock of combat and assist operational effectiveness. It also enables soldiers and officers to rehearse how they might react and respond. Finally, several made mention of how this understanding can support enhancing realistic collective training.
- These themes were consistent across Corps and service category. A challenge for those serving in the Reserve was how to undertake and to encourage individual informal PME and how to incorporate unit PME in a crowded program and the RTS demands when most personnel are part-time.
- Others commented that well run PME can break down barriers and enhance trust through open discussions around carefully selected topics / books/ articles etc. Rank barriers can be reduced and the concept that good ideas can be generated at every and any level. It can be used to support mission command and develop understanding of manoeuvre warfare and how that relates to unit and formation operational concepts.

## **What individual informal PME have you done during your career? What has had the greatest effect? What was the least effective?**

- For many interviewees there was an inflection point in their career that elevated PME in their mind and changed their approach. Often, this occurred when they were a Captain or Major, either through Unit PME or when attending a formal course. Others, especially those serving in or exposed to the Armoured Regiments, had their switch turned to on by the established and institutionalised Unit program that emphasised PME's value and importance, provided exemplars, and impressed that each Officer was responsible in significant part for their PME.
- Explicitly understanding this responsibility was seen as a sign of professional maturation in a profession where, formal courses aside, PME was not directed. This was noted as being unlike other professions (interviewees regularly mentioned teaching, legal and medical professions) that have mandated and ongoing individual professional development requirements necessary to maintain membership of the profession the individuals.
- Reading or listening to military history featured regularly as did maintaining currency and contemporary views on the PofA via journal papers and professionally related articles. Many mentioned listening to PME or related podcasts as a way they undertook individual PME.

- The Cove was highlighted as step change for individual Army PME and many also mentioned other sites such as Wavell Room, War Room, ASPI, Lowy, Grounded Curiosity and the Forge along with many others. Access to most of the US Army and USMC doctrine was also viewed as a bonus and the improvements to ADF doctrine accessibility.
- Consistently, RAAC was held up as the best example of unit PME, with 1st Armoured Regiment being singled out as the exemplar. Similarly, although not as consistently, 1st Brigade was highlighted as the formation whose PME approach was most commendable. Thus, Army has several examples of what good collective informal PME looks like.

## How do you assess the state of Army's informal PME?

- Interviewees were asked to consider this question from a current perspective and to reflect on this across their careers.
- Informal PME was generally perceived as being ad hoc and driven by the personality of the Commander. If the COMD believed informal PME was important then it was undertaken and whether it was a core or discretionary activity would vary on the strength of that belief.
- At times, interviewees reflected that they had been in units where no PME had been undertaken. In other units it was a desirable but was likely postponed or cancelled due to higher priority and more pressing tasks. Thus, a fair assessment is that over the last 30 years unit PME has varied from a nadir of being non-existent to superficial and ad hoc then lifted to desirable & usually incorporated into the program and finally to a peak of established, institutionalised and seen as core business. RAAC was often emphasised the epitome with 1 Bde, influenced when 1st Armoured and 2nd Cavalry Regiments were a part of the Bde, being the formation that exemplified informal PME best practice. In these instances, informal PME programs were considered essential, protected and viewed as business as usual.
- A conclusion the interviewer drew was that the measure of success for informal PME – individual but particularly collective – was that its absence would be seen as unusual and a deviation, as opposed to presently where its presence and effective delivery is commendable. This should be considered in the light that most if not all Brigade Commanders directed that informal unit PME was to be conducted and ensured that their HQ had an effective program in place.
- A theme identified was that Combat Brigades and Arms Units tended to have more tactically focussed programs and ones that emphasised the nature and character of war and combat, whereas Support Brigades and Service Corps had PME programs that focussed on more practical and technical application to war and combat. This often involved dual use knowledge, for example, medical understanding gained through emerging developments in emergency medicine that can be applied to military medicine, or supply chain innovations from domestic or international markets at a scale Army struggles to replicate on exercises. Further comment from Logistics officers was that their units and formations deliver support that enables other formations and units to RTS. As a result, several interviewees commented that a unit PME focus was how the formation's non-CSS units operate including embedding NCOs and Officers
- Broadly, the group indicated that informal PME has improved over the arc of their career. It is becoming more structured with most units and formations issuing directives and undertaking a program. They were less confident that this is the case in higher HQ beyond formation.

- Certainly, all acknowledged that the resources available within Army and the ADF and beyond now are greatly improved. This prompted several discussions around the challenge of the amount of PME content to hand then determining the value and credibility of the content. Discerning between opinion and considered professional wisdom, is an expanding challenge – and an opportunity for Army / Cove to provide the guide to better resources thereby avoiding damning resources while highlighting those recommended ones.
- A prominent theme was that informal PME was regularly challenged by pressure from an expanding workload compounded by personnel hollowness. This often saw PME reduced, postponed even cancelled. Finding and securing the time for informal PME whether at unit or as an individual was an ongoing challenge. The reserve officers noted that this is exacerbated for reservists both in unit and as an individual.
- Notably, while all saw that additional money would be useful this was not the main concern. Commanders' and Leaders' interest of and experience in PME was the most important factor. Effective and engaging PME is being done without additional resources when these two groups are committed. Extra money was acknowledged as being useful to elevate for example bring visiting lecturers to the Unit (physically or virtually).
- The challenge of geographic dispersion for unit and formation PME was discussed as being an issue, not insurmountable but requiring innovation. Several interviewees noted that Covid and concomitant lockdowns were a forcing function that enabled Army to swiftly adopt then adapt virtual learning.
- Several interviewees discussed that while the situation at unit and formation was reasonable and was improving with emergence of consistent PME scheduling that was considered and contemporary, this appeared to cease beyond formation with informal PME becoming ad hoc to barely evident.
- Several interviewees saw the dwindling number of Messes and diminution of the Mess as part of Army life as reducing suitable and conducive spaces for PME to be conducted. They observed synergies between unit PME and Mess life because they are woven together. The Mess (for the Officers and for Warrant Officers and SNCOs) was conducive to the style and type of conversation about the PofA that enabled PME. Some commented that the Mess reduced the constraining effect that hierarchy and rank can play in conversations between subordinates and superiors.
- Several interviewees stressed that there is considerable appetite for PME with the Other Ranks. This was seen as an opportunity for Army to exploit and a way to enhance Army's collective intellectual edge. Several reflected that there was insufficient contribution to the professional body of knowledge and acknowledged that they were at fault as much as any.

## **What measures or approach should be enacted to improve Army's informal PME?**

- Institutionalise informal PME as a part of business as usual and where its absence is unusual rather than its presence being commendable.
- Across the board the sentiment was to make informal PME interesting and enjoyable, professionally valuable and clearly so to those undertaking it, relevant and appropriate for rank and position.



- An undertaking for all ranks from PTE to LTGEN. Ensure PME supports people to enhance performance their current role and rank along with preparing them for the next rank and its associated positions.
- Link to socially enjoyable activities as this will incorporate PME better and it will be associated positively.
- By understanding that for many there is an inflection point where PME comes into its own for a professional those overseeing, developing and delivering PME (formal and informal) should incorporate opportunities that enable this to occur. All interviewees mentioned the importance of intrinsic motivation and that engendering this was a priority.
- Embed into collective training and operational preparation.
- Incorporation into the lessons learnt cycle: selectively include in the next exercise cycle with focussed PME in between to support knowledge development.
- Several interviewees indicated that mentoring was an effective way.
- The Reserve officers interviewed offered that providing support for individual informal PME to be ingrained, for example by providing an allocation of ARTDs specifically for self-paced PME study would be valuable. The argument that such an allocation would be misused by a few would be countered by the great majority who would use the paid time to assiduously undertake PME well beyond the allocated time. It would be a sign of good faith that underlined informal PME's importance.
- Increased expectation, if not demand, for longstanding members of the PofA to contribute to the professional body of knowledge. Several commented that notwithstanding its diminution over their career, anti-intellectualism had not yet fully transformed into intellectual acceptance and was a way from professional intellectualism being embraced.
- Many interviewees emphasised that Army is at its heart a command hierarchy and therefore CA and Commander directives on informal PME should be used. Notably all Bde Commanders interviewed had such a Directive. Some interviewees commented that COMD 1 Div's approach to exercises that they attended involved what can be best understood as high level and high quality PME.
- Across the board interviewees saw that there was an opportunity for Army to more fully harness informal PME and that doing so incurred little financial resources rather an allowance for time, considered thinking and effort.

## **How can it be encouraged (without it becoming formal PME or yet another task to be complied with or reported on etc)?**

- Many interviewees saw that informal PME needs to become a focus for commanders and leaders in terms of attention and engagement i.e., reward it with their time and energy.
  - o Both must model the PME behaviour sought.
  - o They must attend informal Unit and formation PME not merely open it or organise it – if it interests the Boss it will fascinate their people.
  - o They need to ask questions of their people as to what they are doing themselves and discuss what they are doing and communicate how it is providing value and expanding knowledge.
  - o This combination will assist it become part of business as usual.

- As mentioned in the previous section incorporating PME into that which is already important, and part of the Army's culture, for example as a part of collective training, will be beneficial and likely enhance informal PME.
- Commend and celebrate when it is done well.
- Use the extant system to formally record excellent contributions to PME or its use in professional activities.
- Inquire when informal PME is not being conducted whether by one of the team or by the team itself.

## **Should / how can we reward individuals who undertake and contribute to informal PME?**

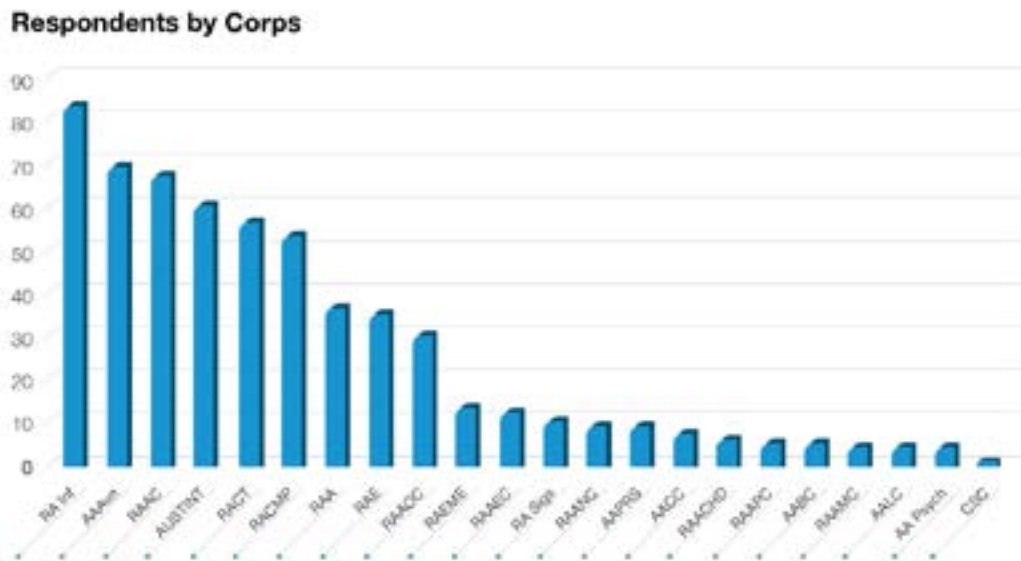
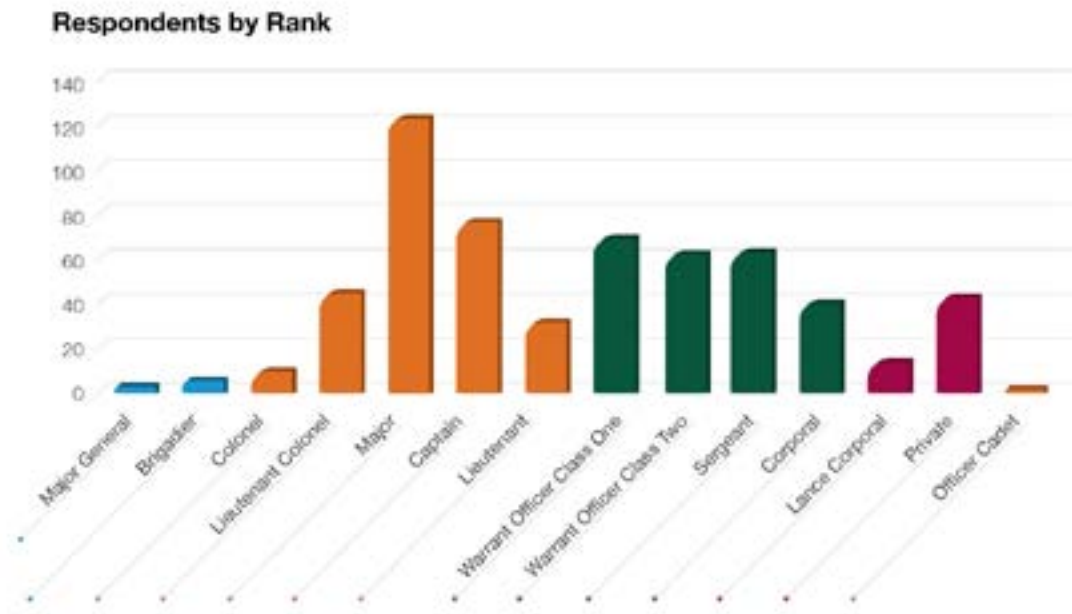
- The group was divided on whether this was necessary or desirable.
- Several thought that undertaking and contributing to PME was an integral part of being a professional and that any reward would be that which accrued by professional success derived from being better professionally educated.
- Others believed that using existing mechanisms (mention in PAR, commendations etc) along with applying sound leadership (praise in public and direct acknowledgment along with awareness of those who are going above and beyond) was the best route.
- A few mused around whether reporting on this via the PAR, including adding a box (harder to implement now that the PAR is Joint in nature), was the avenue to ensure adequate recognition and to support elevating PME's standing.

## **What are the pitfalls that should be avoided as Army continues to develop informal PME?**

- Informal PME remaining ad hoc and personality based rather than endeavouring to see it culturally ingrained and institutionalised.
- Interviewees placed greatest and most consistent emphasis that over-governance – wrapping the endeavour in rules, strictures, and structures would damage development and be significantly retrograde.
- Creation of homogeneity across Army that would limit independence or deny creativity and imagination, or limit the scope for interesting, enjoyable and engaging PME. There is an obvious tension with the demand to institutionalise informal PME and sees the obvious risk that Army's proclivity for overcontrolling activities from the top down is overexercised. Nuance and sophisticated application of Commander's intentions and directive control – a case of providing direction what to achieve not how to do so.
- Unimaginative going through the motions to tick the box training.
- Zero defect mentality – accept that there will be hits and misses. Zero defect will guarantee unimaginative and unengaging PME that will be counterproductive.

# 11. Annex B: Soldiers' and Officers' Views on Informal PME

What do our people make of the Informal PME that is offered to them? In the development of this document, 576 Australian Army members (about 1.3% of Army) supplied their views on Informal PME and their own development in the Army profession.



### *Views on the Profession*

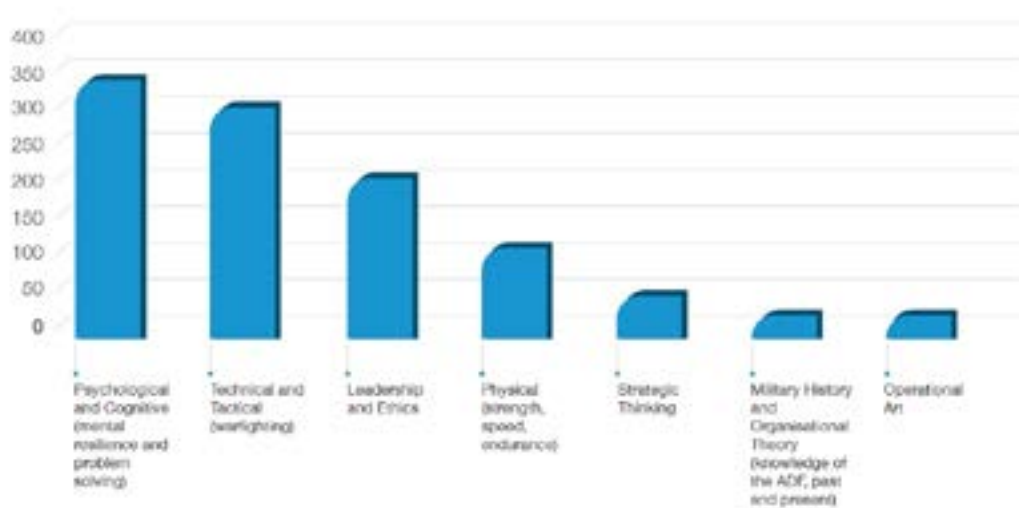
Members were asked about the most important attributes for members of the Army profession. Across almost all groups, psychological and cognitive abilities were rated as the most important, followed by technical and tactical abilities, with leadership and ethics coming in third.

Junior ranked soldiers, however, considered technical and tactical abilities to be the most important, followed by psychological and cognitive abilities, and then physical abilities, potentially suggesting focus on developing core warfighting capabilities and physical fitness in early career stages.

Combat corps respondents shared a similar sentiment: technical and tactical came in first, followed by psychological and cognitive abilities, and then physical abilities.

Fewer respondents prioritised strategic thinking, military history and operational art in their responses.

**Perceived as the most important attributes for members in the profession of arms**

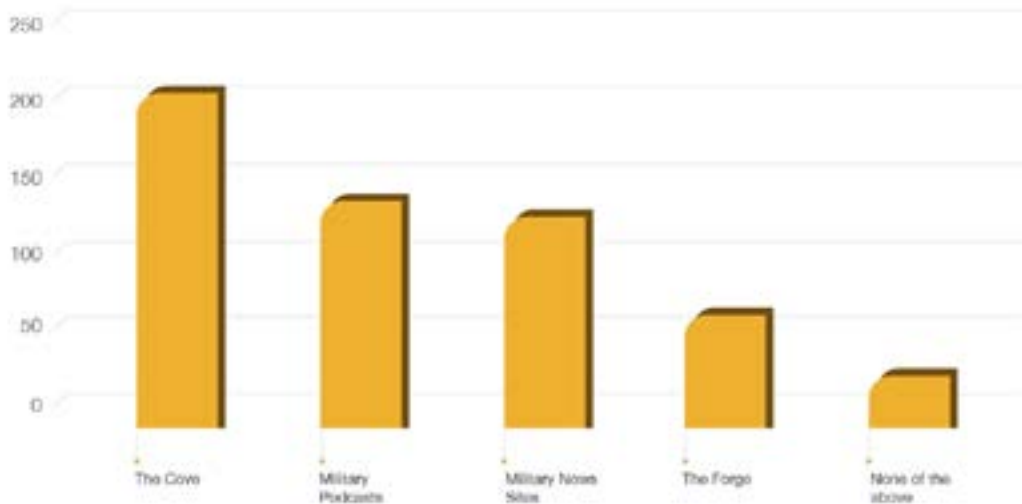


### *Engagement with Informal PME*

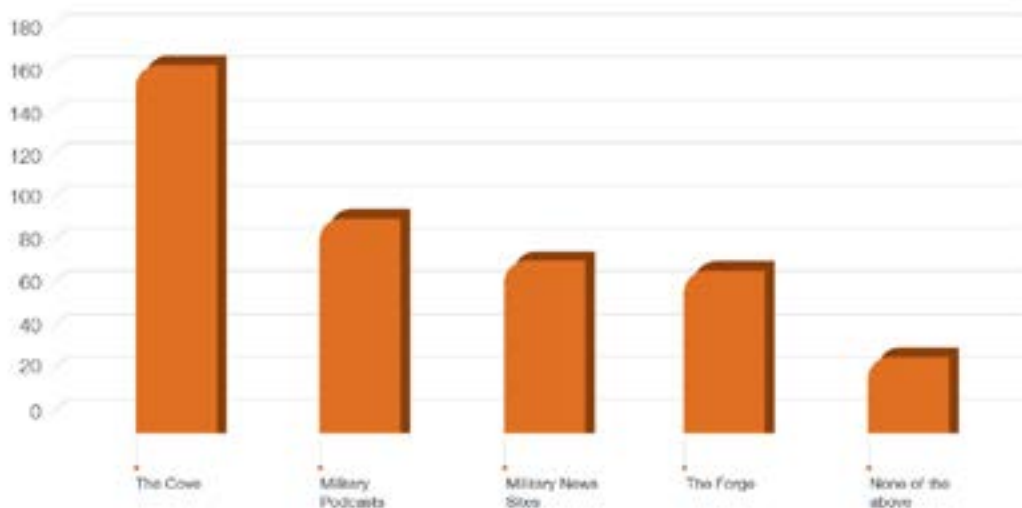
Overall, The Cove represents the Informal PME content most engaged with by respondents, followed by Military News Sites, and Military Podcasts. The Forge was less engaged with. A notable number of respondents reported not engaging with any of the listed PME products (18.4% of respondents). Most of these were Other Ranks.

A higher percentage of non-combat corps reported no Informal PME engagement compared to combat corps.

**Have you engaged with any of the following individual informal PME products, tools or content? (Officers)**



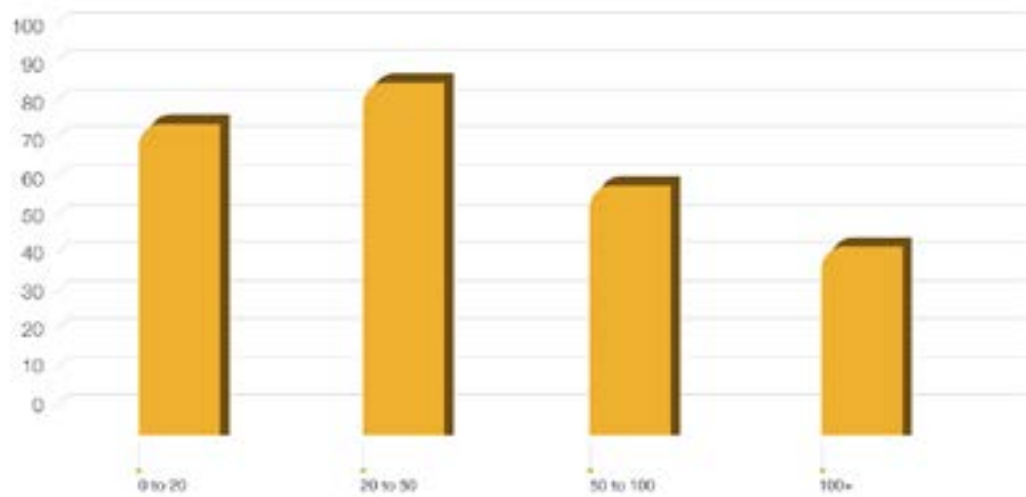
**Have you engaged with any of the following individual informal PME products, tools or content? (Other Ranks)**



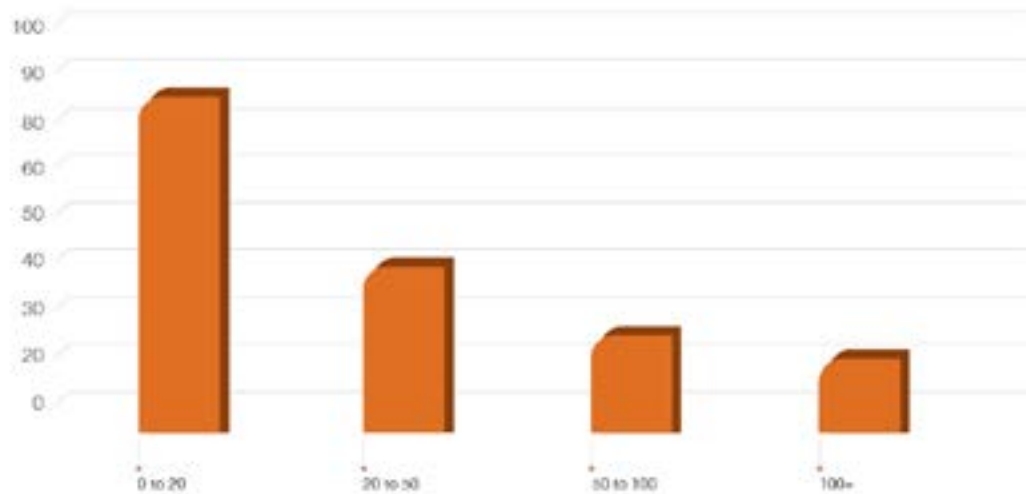
Most members reported engaging with Informal PME weekly or monthly. Officers showed a higher rate of Daily and Weekly engagement, while junior ranks reported the lowest frequency of engagement with Informal PME. This resulted in a significant discrepancy in terms of overall hours per year devoted to Informal PME.



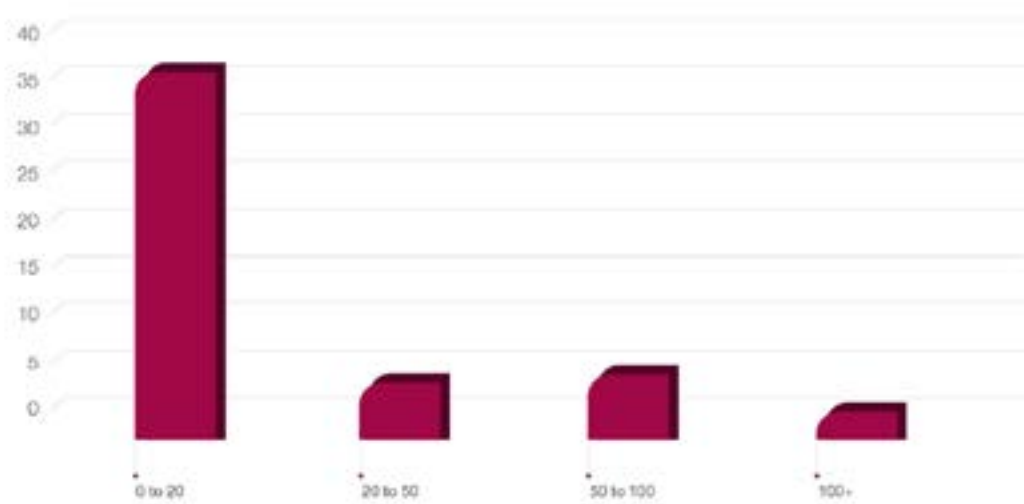
**How many hours of individual informal PME did you complete last year? (Officers)**



**How many hours of individual informal PME did you complete last year? (Other Ranks)**



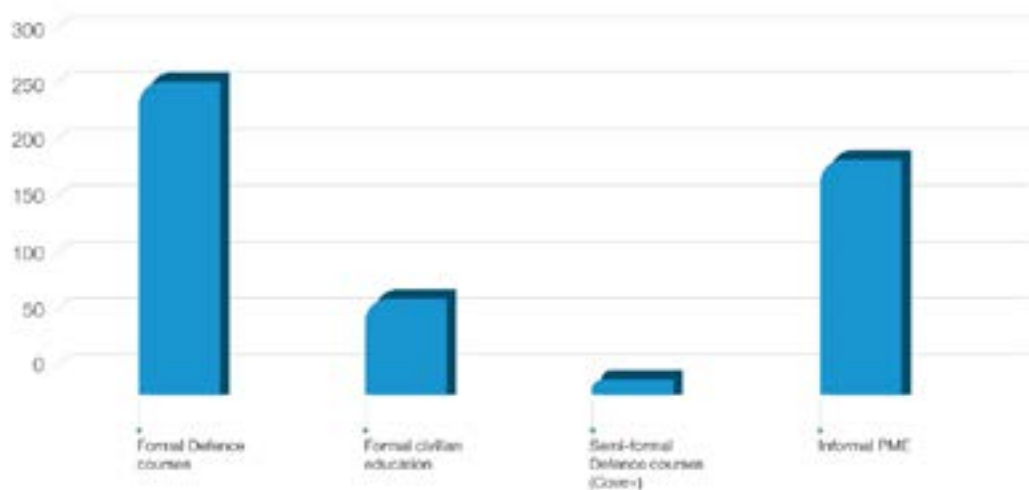
**How many hours of individual informal PME did you complete last year? (PTE-CPL)**



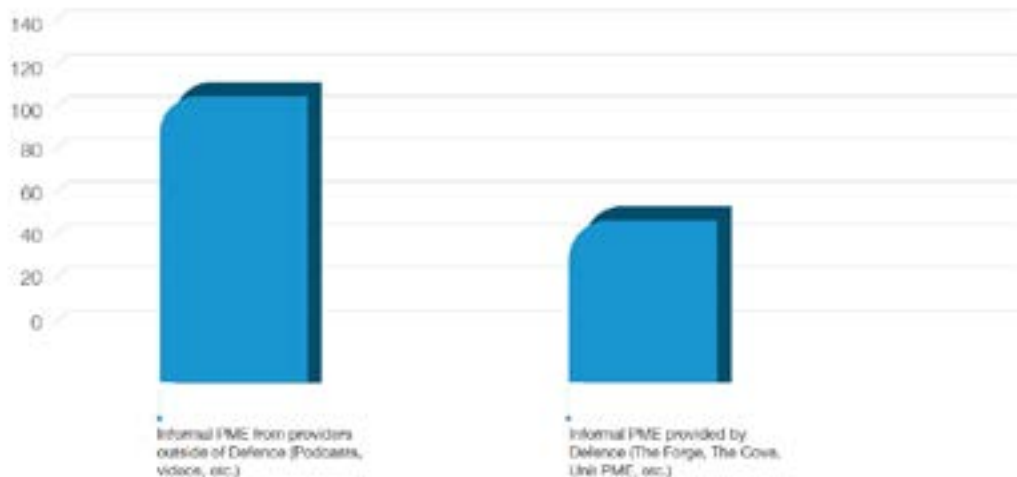
*Relative Importance of Formal and Informal Learning*

Just under half of respondents (279) reported that, of the options given, formal Defence courses had done the most to develop their cognition and character. Informal PME came in second, with 210 respondents. Interestingly, of these 210, most (134) said that it was Informal PME from providers external to Defence that had had the biggest impact.

**Of the following, which has most contributed to the development of your cognition (knowledge, understanding and problem-solving) and character (ethics, values and leadership)?**



**Of the following, which has most contributed to the development of your cognition (knowledge, understanding and problem-solving) and character (ethics, values and leadership)?**



### *Types of Informal PME*

Members offered comments on their use of Informal PME. The key themes were as follows:

- Podcasts and videos, covering military history, leadership, contemporary warfare and current issues
- Self-directed learning, reading, researching topics of interest, open-source media
- Social learning, informal conversations with peers and superiors, small group discussions
- Guest speakers, real-world experience
- Mentorship and networking, mentor relationships with experienced personnel and professional networks
- Reading and study of books and articles, resources such as The Cove
- Practical application, exercises, wargames, real-world training scenarios
- Gaming, military themed video gaming for the development of decision-making
- Civilian education, diverse perspectives
- Self-reflection and personal development

One member summarised, 'Mandatory PME (least effective), News/Military podcasts (Most effective for Strategic), audio books (Most effective for Operational), realistic gaming simulators (most effective for decision making).'

### *What Members Want from PME*

Members expressed a wide range of opinions on what PME should be like.

A number expressed the desire to maintain high flexibility and voluntary self-direction, while improving Defence recognition of the time required:

- 'We need tracked, longitudinal self-paced continua of self-selected PME content.'
- 'Due to manning and tempo all units are busy. A mandatory Cove activity is a hindrance more than a help in maintaining economy of effort and forward momentum.'
- 'We need more time to become thinkers, have quality discussions and therefore develop more effectively. All we need is time to do so.'
- 'We used to have time to "chew the fat", "tell war stories" etc that were learning opportunities in disguise. You don't have enough time to make all the mistakes yourself so learn from others.'
- 'A culture that encourages certain hours of a week/month at unit devoted to PME, to work on a relevant area of study that interests the learner, with learnings documented in a reflection journal'
- 'The recent history of the Cove has seen it used as a platform to force PME which is not helpful'
- 'There is no time. I don't say this lightly. Between doing my job, attending promotion courses, attending courses to maintain my currency in certain qualifications and extra regimental tasks, I am flat out getting everything done'
- 'Higher quality less often and generating a culture of people wanting to do it themselves rather than relying on it being done for them'
- 'It doesn't matter what you do if there is no time allocated for it. Allocate the time, and people will do it. Most will not do this at home'
- 'I believe there is sufficient quality material out there for Informal PME. it is a matter of finding the time to dedicate to PME activities.'
- 'PME seems to be a low priority and every effort to make people accountable or committed to it becomes over bearing. I argue it should be more decentralised and versatile – such as recognising tertiary pursuits as valid PME.'
- 'We need to place greater emphasis on bite-sized life-long learning opportunities (vs only on periodic collective training) and give people the time to complete it.'
- 'If it isn't scheduled, it won't happen, as pers are too busy with admin and training.'

*A few held that PME ought to be exclusively formal, and managed by Defence:*

- 'All essential/required training should be nested into individual training or collective training. If it is important it should be conducted by the appropriate people – not be ad hoc and uncontrolled'
- 'Roll PME information into formal courses to complement the doctrinal training with contemporary information'
- 'Make it formal'

*A number of members pointed to approaches or learning methods that they would find helpful.  
Key themes were as follows:*

- Interactive learning and social learning
- Micro-learning
- Guest speakers, speakers with real-world experience
- Podcasts and videos
- External PME providers
- Self-paced learning
- Relevant, practical learning
- Enhanced use of technology
- Encouraging critical thinking and debate





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## 12. Annex C: International Social Media PME

Following is a snapshot of some of the popular sources of Informal PME provided on four prominent social media platforms. Some sources are Australian; most come from other parts of the world:

### 1. X (Formerly Twitter):

Mick Ryan, AM. @Warinthefuture.

Authored by retired Australian Army Major General Mick Ryan, this channel focuses on global modern warfare trends from an Australian perspective. This channel currently has 347,000 followers on the X platform.

OSINTtechnical. @Osinttechnical.

This channel focuses on Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) from around the world. It has a particular focus on international military technology developments and use. The channel has 932,000 current followers on the X platform.

Institute for the Study of War. @TheStudyofWar.

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is a policy research organisation which focuses on international national security issues. The channel has 718,000 current followers on the X platform.

Critical Threats. @criticalthreats.

This channel focuses primarily on international national security threats and tracks global security challenges. The channel has 84,000 current followers on the X platform.

### 2. Instagram:

@Conflictobserver

This channel focuses primarily on current military engagements with analysis of recent combat footage and materials. This channel has approximately 312,000 Instagram followers.

@Greydynamics

This channel covers defence technology and military systems analysis. It has around 28,000 Instagram followers.

@Vermillion\_China

This channel covers ongoing strategic issues related to China and provides analysis on the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) capabilities. This channel has approximately 32,000 Instagram followers.

@Defensebulletin

This channel covers international defence related news and analysis. It has approximately 9,000 Instagram followers.

### 3. YouTube:

#### War Leaks – Military Blog

This channel is an independent education and documentary military channel. It is devoted to armed forces and military technologies, with many current videos from a range of conflict zones around the world. The channel has approximately 2,400,000 subscribers on the YouTube platform.

#### VSB Defense

This channel primarily focuses on comparing military forces from different countries around the world. It reviews and ranks the military forces and capabilities of more than 100 countries with specific comparisons conducted on individual military platforms and units. The channel has 807,000 current subscribers on the YouTube platform.

#### The Military Show

This channel produces daily videos analysing different military conflicts and military equipment from around the world. It provides analysis on real-time current conflicts along with videos outlining hypothetical future military scenarios. The channel has 809,000 current subscribers on the YouTube platform.

#### Military Excursions

This channel provides an overview of a range of military subjects and capabilities, which is predominately presented from the perspective of the United States Armed Forces. The channel has 417,000 current YouTube subscribers.

### 4. Telegram:

#### War Noir

This channel posts pictures and videos from conflicts and insurgency movements from around the world. It provides a particular focus on the types of weaponry and ammunition that different insurgencies are utilising as well as their developments in TTPs. The channel has 34,000 active subscribers on the Telegram platform.

#### Combat Footage

This channel provides current footage of real-time combat operations, outlining new and emerging battlefield weapons and trends. This channel has a particular focus on the current Russia-Ukraine war. The channel has 97,000 active subscribers on the Telegram platform.

#### Clash Report

This channel provides footage and analysis from ongoing military engagements around the world. The channel has 30,000 active subscribers on the Telegram platform.

#### Our Wars, Today

This channel provides, pictures, videos and analysis from a variety of international hot spots. The channel covers both conventional military forces and insurgency movements. The channel has 48,000 active subscribers on the Telegram platform.



