

## UNIVERSITY OF READING

### WAYS OF WAR CENTRE / HENLEY BUSINESS SCHOOL SEMINAR SERIES:

#### ‘CHALLENGING CONTEMPORARY WISDOM’

(... is everything really ambiguous or can clarity be developed if Defence is brave enough to do so?)

**Background.** Contemporary thinking on defence and security sits within a discourse rooted in ambiguity. Persistent change, perpetual adaptation, evolving complexity and constant innovation are all acknowledged factors of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century strategic operating environment. To which can be added the ubiquity of communicated information, the ease with which it can be manipulated and thus the now relative nature of ‘truth’. Nevertheless, to be successful, defence policy and planning must lead to capabilities and strategies that are, or could be decisive.

**Focus.** This seminar series will explore the ambiguity/decision paradox outlined above to determine if and where novel ideas, behaviours and practices can remove or bypass ambiguity, enable better decision making and ultimately, enhance the decisiveness of strategy, campaigns and operations.

**Programme.** The programme will deliver one seminar per term during Academic Year 17 – 18, each focused on a particular ambiguity challenge. Outline working titles are as follows:

- Seminar 1: Autumn Term 2017 – ‘Command, Control and Leadership’;
- Seminar 2: Spring Term 2018 – ‘Developing and Delivery Capability’;
- Seminar 3: Summer Term 2018 – ‘Managing Political and Public Expectations’.

**Structure and Output.** Each seminar will be structured around a dialectic led by a ‘contrarian-in-chief’ – a senior military, industry or political figure who will challenge current convention and wisdom where it heightens the effect of ambiguity, or limits the MOD’s ability to better cope with it. Small group discussion will then disassemble this challenge before reconvening in plenary to discuss their utility. Key point reviews will be promulgated after each seminar; a published monograph on completion of the programme.

**Location.** Seminars will be held at the Meadow Suite, Park House on the University’s Whiteknights Campus in Reading. Each will begin at 0930 and close at 1700. A working lunch will be provided and a cash bar available on completion for networking and further discussion.

**Attendance.** Attendance will be sought from across the Defence Enterprise. In the first instance, please register interest with Dr David Reindorp at [d.reindorp@reading.ac.uk](mailto:d.reindorp@reading.ac.uk).

**Seminar 1 – ‘Command, Control and Leadership’.** Seminar 1 will take place on 13 Dec 17; Lt Gen Sir David Capewell has agreed to be ‘contrarian-in-chief’. After an initial scene setting, Sir David will introduce his ‘master question list’ of ambiguity related, inspired or driven challenges to how Defence currently exercises command and control, and selects, trains and empowers its leaders.