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**ARMY ENGAGEMENT GROUP (AEG) ANNUAL REPORT – 2020/21**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. This annual report covers the period 01 Mar 20 – 28 Feb 21 in order to better align to current Regional Command (RC) reporting. It provides a measurement of AEG[[1]](#footnote-2) activity, summarises feedback from civilian audiences, highlights issues and their impact and introduces proposed initiatives for the forthcoming year. Event statistics are at Annex A and Audience Analysis at Annex B.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

2. Despite a challenging year with the cessation of virtually all Face to Face (F2F) Engagement (Engt)[[2]](#footnote-3) due to the pandemic and significant gapping[[3]](#footnote-4), the Group has evolved physically and conceptually. Physically we have seen the establishment of the Army Diversity Engagement Team (ADET) and the preparation for the subordination of the Army STEM Youth Engagement Team (ASYET) from Recruiting Group (RG). Conceptually, through the creation, resourcing and implementation of a virtual product to continue to INFORM, INFLUENCE and EDUCATE in order to CONNECT with society and support the wider ATTRACT. Key to delivering this new medium was the financial and commercial authority, driven forward by the AEG Business Team. Audience viewers have ranged from MPs to the Hindu Council of Wales; from school and college students to the Political Correspondent at The Telegraph.

1. The number of engagement activities reduced by 82% when compared with 19/20 but individual event attendance has increased[[4]](#footnote-5) with a shift in audience dynamics[[5]](#footnote-6). Furthermore 94% of guests say the presentation improved their understanding of the Army[[6]](#footnote-7). To exploit this going forward the Group will continue with a blend of Engt conducting F2F, virtual and hybrid events to maximise reach.
2. The AEG has continued to focus on two core priorities, *Engage to Influence* and *Engage* *to Attract.* The consolidation of capability continues to deliver synergy, with the Army Engagement Team (AET) flagship presentations conducting the ‘break in’ battle and allowing subsequent engagement by other teams within the Group or Regional Points of Contact (RPOCs)[[7]](#footnote-8). Further exploitation is expected by reinvigorating the link to DE&C Policy and Army Comms.
3. Just under 20% of guests had a neutral or negative opinion of the Army prior to an Engt, of these 72% reported their opinion had been subsequently improved, it is assessed that this will increase with greater F2F Engt.
4. A 58% increase of employers actively seeking to hire a Service Leaver or Reservist as result of the Engt[[8]](#footnote-9).
5. The AEG will continue to focus on target Groups directed by RC and RPOCs where the utility of effort is perceived to have the greatest effect, Youth, Female, UK BAME and LGBTQ+.
6. Ongoing operationalisation of the AEG through the creation of Standard Operating Instructions covering capability, planning and assurance will increase resilience, effectiveness and improve stakeholder awareness of the Group’s capabilities.
7. Due to gapping and the Army’s operational focus, there remains a requirement to increase DE&C, Army HQ and Engagement Branch’s understanding of AEG capability.

**MISSION**

1. The current AEG mission[[9]](#footnote-10) is:
	1. Synchronise with RPOCs to deliver targeted, intelligence led regional UK Engt.
	2. Exploit target rich recruiting areas and hard to reach RPOC boundaries as per the AEG Target List.
	3. Support RPOC led Army youth challenge courses. (If social distancing and regulation permits).
	4. Conduct Employer Engt in accordance with Defence People Employer Engagement Strategy and Directive.
	5. Deliver and support other UK Engt activity opportunities as per the activity set out in the RC directed Engt activity list 20-21.
	6. Provide a broader briefing capability to deliver Youth Outreach, Diversity & Inclusion, Armed Forces Covenant and Civil Engt outputs across the UK.

 in order to enable recruiting, enhance the Army’s reputation and connect with society.

**INPUTS/OUTPUTS - SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY**

1. **Presentations**. The AEG conducted a total of 59 engagement events with civilian audiences during the year. This significant decrease is due to the suspension of F2F engagement for most of the year due to COVID-19 and the gapping of the ADET for 9 months[[10]](#footnote-11). BAME representation has averaged a minimum of 13% across all events but it is undoubtedly higher[[11]](#footnote-12) and we will work harder to quantify this in future. Female representation has averaged 72%, with 6 events specifically aimed at influential female audiences. However, it’s important to note that the figures do not accurately reflect the total number of people that have received the AEG’s presentation. Feedback from schools and colleges highlight that they routinely either watch or share a copy of the broadcast with entire year groups[[12]](#footnote-13). Whilst currently impossible to accurately quantify the final reach, a conservative estimate would be that it exceeds 18,000.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  **Planned** | **Delivered** | **Cancelled** | **Postponed** | **Total** |
| AET1 | 23 | 10 | 8 | 41 |
| ABCET | 6 | 7 | 3 | 17 |
| AYOT | 20 | 21 | 35 | 76 |
| ADET | 10 |  |  | 10 |
| Total | 59 | 38 | 46 | 143 |

1. **Budget**. Whilst the AEG was not formally delegated with a budget for FY20/21, the Civ Sec is content that the AEG’s Business Manager continues to liaise directly on all budgetary and financial matters.

**PERSONNEL**

1. **Military Workforce**.
	1. **Liability**. The AEG will be at 81% (22/27 personnel) of its liability as at 31 Mar 21. This includes the re-subordination of the ASYET.
	2. **Structure**. Recruiting into the ADET remains a challenge, as the TACOS[[13]](#footnote-14) limit the talent pool. Comd AEG will review and determine how to maximise talent within the Group.
	3. **AEG Diversity**. The diversity of the Group enables it to reflect the parts of society we wish to engage and connect with. Importantly this provides relevance and resonance with our audiences, making it a genuine force multiplier; the Groups ability to engage with MS7 enables this and must continue to be facilitated.
2. **Civilian Workforce**. The Civilian Business Team is currently gapping 1 of its 3 E1 Marketing Assistant’s posts. The current freeze on external and cross-Govt recruitment is severely hampering our efforts to fill this post. The post has been advertised internally on a number of occasions without success.

**OUTTAKES/OUTCOMES – SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY**

1. **External Audience Perceptions**. AET VE events still provide guests with the opportunity to ask questions to both the AET and the RPoC Senior Military Host (SMH). Audiences continue to be highly enthusiastic and supportive during these Q&A sessions and in their overall response to the events. They have been particularly well-received as, in the early days of the pandemic especially, the AET was one of the few groups delivering any form of Engt. A follow-on Survey Monkey e-questionnaire is sent out following each event, this serves two purposes: providing useful Measurement of Effect (MoE) input and providing RPOCs with information on where best to focus follow-up action.
2. **Targeting**. The AEG has continued to approach, and work with, target relevant audiences throughout the year, despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic. The methods of reaching target audiences and creating opportunities continues to develop, with emphasis placed on creating better relationships with audience leads in HQ RC and the RPOCs. The coordination of targeting efforts within the AEG has been improved with the introduction of a quarterly planning meeting looking at activity in the following and subsequent quarter. The AEG teams continue to self-generate much of their work, with the AEG HQ looking at themes, target audiences and future opportunities and relationships.
3. **Break-In Activity**. So-called ‘break-in activity’ has been somewhat restricted during 20/21. That said, an opportunity to engage with the Hindu Council of Wales is being pursued by 160X and the AEG are engaging with a Bangladeshi Councillor from the HQ SW AO. Additionally, all members of the AEG are directed to exploit contacts and proactively look for opportunities.
4. **Employer Engagement**. Employer engagement has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. While the AEG has made the transition to offering Virtual Engt (VE), uptake has been limited. With few business events running, there has been little opportunity for employer engagement. As COVID-19 restrictions lift in 2021, this is expected to be an area of enhanced focus for the ABCET.
5. **Youth Engagement**. Youth Engt has been significantly reduced during COVID-19. The AYOT was engaging F2F until 14 Mar 20, and whenever restrictions have allowed, the team has defaulted to F2F Engt. This is in part due to safeguarding concerns around VE in the youth sphere and a preference from all parties to conduct F2F where possible. Most events have been postponed. The AYOT have conducted Continual Professional Development during lockdowns. The ASYET are resubordinating from RG to the AEG on 1 Apr 21.

**RECENT INITIATIVES**

1. **Virtual Engagement.** The main initiative this year was the introduction of a VE capability. Developing this quickly enabled the AET to continue to operate for the majority of the year. This not only facilitated RPoCs engagement with their targeted audience but also follow-on Engt opportunities for their staff and RETs. Every VE/1hr broadcast consists of an introduction from the RPoC SMH, an abridged version of the award-winning ‘Your Army’ presentation and a Q&A session. The presentation provides an opportunity to convey key Army and Defence messaging and allows the RPoCs to demonstrate how they have been supporting either the devolved Governments or their Local Authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Analytics captured at each event enable the AEG’s Business Team to provide RPoCs with details of who viewed each broadcast (Name, Position & Organisation) as well as their contact email address, enabling further exploitation. A separate list of all those that registered but did not view the broadcast is also supplied. The RPoCs then determine if they wish to send them a copy of the recorded broadcast. Whilst F2F events undoubtedly provide the most effective form of engagement with the Public, VEs have a series of advantages, enabling a larger geographical area to be targeted thereby increasing reach, attendance and tempo. They are more attractive to certain guests because the commitment in terms of time and effort is less, guests can watch from the home or office and lastly reduced T&S costs.

**FORTHCOMING CHALLENGES**

1. **Future Challenges**:
	1. **Civilian Workforce**. The AEG is currently gapping one E1 Marketing post. These posts provide the vital audience generation input for AET events and any gapping has a direct effect on output. External recruitment action last year resulted in a candidate being offered the vacant post. However, this person, and the two reserve candidates, all found other posts during the lengthy time that it took DBS to go through the vetting process. It should be noted that the AEG was previously established for 4 E1 Marketing Assistants. This level of manpower enabled the AET to deliver 50 large-scale events. One post was dis-established, without the AEG’s knowledge, prior to re-subordination to RC in 2017. A BC seeking to re-establish this post still sits with Civ Sec. Our current strength means that the Team can only support a maximum of 23 events, whereas the demand for AET events amongst the RPoCs is considerably higher. It’s also worth noting that AET events are the catalyst for further engagement opportunities for the wider AEG and the RPoCs[[14]](#footnote-15).
	2. **Military** **Workforce**. Comd AEG will continue to review the ADET TACOS and Groups overall structure.

**FUTURE INITIATIVES**

1. Work will continue throughout FY21/22 to facilitate:

a. The cost benefit analysis of hybrid Engt events, to increase reach in terms of overall numbers and audience demographic.

b. Better use of social media to ensure that the AEG can reach wider audiences. In conjunction with HQ RC work to identify the liability needed for a Social Media Secretary.

c. Ensure Marketing, ADET and ASYET liability is filled to utilise its full capability.

d. Continued refinement of the planning process, incorporating timely Army E&C input throughout the year and accessing regional products to better focus AEG activity.

e. Review and update Measurement of Effect and Performance criteria for the Group in support of the RC Plan.

f. Promulgate AEG SOIs to RPOC and RC Engt Br staff to enhance capability awareness, planning considerations and booking process.

1. Greater exploitation of flagship events such as the Comdts’ Parade at RMAS for hosting influential guests.
2. Continue to build stakeholder awareness, especially with Army HQ specifically both E&C and D&I, RG and APC MS7.
3. Continual updating of all products and outputs to remain current.

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Commander AEG

Annexes:

A. Summary of AEG Statistics for 20/21.

B. Audience Analysis for 20/21.

Distribution:

Army E&C Pol HC COS RC for GOC, COS & AD UK Ops/Engt ARITC for COS

All RPOC Comds and COS LONDIST RFCA for Engt Leads

Annex A to

AEG/02-03

Dated 26 Mar 21

**SUMMARY OF AEG STATISTICS FOR 2020/21**

1. **Overview**. The AEG conducted a total of 59 engagement events a significant reduction in activity compared to 19/20. AET1 activity is RPOC led, with other teams reliant on third parties (schools, businesses, community groups) for their events. With F2F events cancelled and schools closed for most of the year due to the pandemic, engagement requests significantly reduced. It should also be noted that the ADET was unmanned until Nov 20. A summary of presentations delivered is shown in Table 1 below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Briefing Team** | **No of Events****2019/20** | **No of Events 2020/21** | **Change from 19/20** |
| AET 1 | 33 | 23 | 30% decrease |
| ABCET | 40 | 6 | 85% decrease |
| AYOT | 146 | 20 | 86% decrease |
| ADET | 110 | 10 | 91% decrease |
| **Total** | **329** | **59** | **-82% decrease** |

**Table 1**: Number of engagement events delivered by AEG

2. **Regional Representation.** Every RPoC, bar 11(Inf) Bde and 38(NI) Bde, have utilised the platform developed by the AEG for AET events. Virtual Engagement (VE) has allowed greater reach and tempo[[15]](#footnote-16), while potentially allowing for easier access to remote areas e.g. Shetlands.

**Target Audience Engagement**

3. **Targeting**. Guests at AET events are targeted by the AEG’s Business Team following direction given by Reginal Command and RPoCs. Much of the focus this year has been on the Youth and Education sector. The nature of the invitations (e-invite) and the fact that teaching has been predominantly conducted remotely has resulted in invitations (and subsequent broadcasts) being shared with MTA, something wouldn’t happen with F2F events.

4. **Attendance.** Table 2 gives the breakdown of attendance at events by team, focusing on BAME, Females and Education & Youth. It should be noted that these figures relate to ‘direct engagement’ only[[16]](#footnote-17):

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Briefing Team** | **Audience size** | **No of BAME** | **%** | **No of Female** | **%** | **No of Ed & Youth (incl MTA)** | **%** |
| AET 1 | 1,952 | 161 | 8% | 887 | 45% | 446 | 23% |
| ABCET | 310 | 81 | 26% | 115 | 37% | 115 | 37% |
| ADET |  4,050 | 422 | 10% | 3,794 | 94% | 286 | 7% |
| AYOT | 1,273 | 309 | 24% | 673 | 53% | 1,273 | 100% |
| **Total** | **7,585** | **973** | **13%** | **5,469** | **72%** | **2,120** | **28%** |

**Table 2**: Audience breakdown by team

Copies of AET1 broadcasts have been sent to over 100 people, predominantly school and college careers advisers, who requested a copy to share with their students. Most share it with entire year groups (300+) and so the final audience reach for AET1 is significantly higher than the figure shown below, conservatively in excess of 10,000 people.

8. **Target Audience**. Table 3 provides the focus of events by target audience:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Target Audience** | **No of Events** | **%** |
| Youth/Educational | 31 | 52% |
| Gatekeepers | 23 | 39% |
| Employers | 4 | 7% |
| Influencers | 1 | 2% |
| **Total**  | **59** |  |

**Table 3**: Focus of AEG events by Target Audience

 Annex B to

AEG/02-03

Dated 26 Mar 21

**AUDIENCE ANALYSIS**

1. **Audience Perceptions**. Whilst VE events aren’t nearly as intimate as their F2F counterpart, they do still provide an opportunity for guests to ask questions during the Q&A sessions that follow the formal presentation. An average of around 30 questions are asked at every event, with the 30 min session allowing approximately 10-15 of these to be answered during the broadcast. Those unanswered, are recorded on the event portal and then answered by either the RPoC or the AEG. In addition, a large number of supportive comments are left by guests.
2. **Exploitation/Validation**. Following AET1 broadcasts this year a Survey Monkey questionnaire was sent out to 1,612 guests, with 475 returns being completed. This 30% response rate compares favourably with the average Government response rate of 25%. Analysis of the responses have highlighted the following:

a. 94% of guests say that the presentation improved their understanding of the Army – up from 91% last year.

b. 93% said that they were now more likely to recommend a career in the Army – a 10% increase from last year. Teachers and students frequently express surprise at the opportunities available in the Army[[17]](#footnote-18).

1. 93% watched the full hour broadcast. The remaining 7%, due predominantly to work commitments, only watched the ‘Your Army’ presentation i.e. didn’t stay for the Q&A.

d. 19% of guests judged their pre-event opinion of the Army as being either low or neutral an indicator that the AEG Marketing Team’s efforts to target those who aren’t necessarily supportive of the Army are effective. Of these, 72% reported that their opinion was now higher as a result of viewing the broadcast. Whilst the ‘conversion’ rate is slightly lower than last year (80%), it is still high considering we aren’t engaging with our guests in person[[18]](#footnote-19). It’s also worth noting that a number of students and school/college careers advisers are included within the 72%.

e. 71% of those employers who don’t currently have a Service Leaver or Reservist in their company would now actively seek to hire one as a result of the presentation – a significant increase of 13% from last year.

f. The survey directly achieved 81 requests for follow-up Engt activity – an increase of 53% from last year, despite fewer AET1 events. Follow-up Engt with those that registered but did not attend on the day has resulted in an additional 14 requests i.e. totalling a further 95 engagements.

g. 11% of the audience was aged between 14-18. We know that youth gatekeepers have passed our invites onto young people, this very rarely happens with F2F events and partly explains why historically only a handful of young people attend events during the course of a routine tour year. Table 1 (20/21) below shows the audience breakdown by age range with arrows indicating audience % increase/decrease or no changed in comparison to last year, Table 2 (19/20).

**Table 1**: Audience age range – 20/21

**Table 2**: Audience age range – 19/20

1. **Overview**. The points above are encouraging and should dispel the fear voiced by some regarding the utility of VE. As shown, these events have led to a sharp increase in the number of follow-on Engt opportunities for the RPoCs and specifically the RETs, accepting that lockdown restrictions have impacted on follow up activity. Furthermore, Table 1 shows these events reached new audiences and break-in activity within a large number of education establishments. The AEG believe there will be a greater emphasis in 21/22 on society connected and reputation enhanced. This could further alter the audience demographic. Further analysis is required to better understand the 65+ demographic, who we are unlikely to influence, but can inform, versus the more traditional Gatekeepers (31- 64 age group), where we can influence, and connect. This demonstrates the importance of using both F2F and virtual events, so called blended engagement, while also seeking to conduct hybrid[[19]](#footnote-20) events. The AEG is working on ways to exploit the wider reach e.g. students watching broadcasts with their teachers and copies of the broadcast being included in future lesson plans. These VEs have additionally provided the wider Army with engagement opportunities e.g. Army Strat were alerted to the comment made by the Wolverhampton MP who wanted to know how MPs could better promote career opportunities within the Army to schools in their constituencies.
2. **Q&A Analysis**. As a result of the audiences that have been targeted and attracted to these events (Youth & Education), questions relating to recruitment and opportunities within the Army have dominated. The pie chart below shows approximately a third of all questions related to recruiting and is another indicator of how many young people viewed these broadcasts. The subject of Veterans continues to be a recurring theme, although questions aren’t as critical as they have been in previous years, furthermore mental health has been rarely raised. Guests are keen to know the percentage of Female and BAME soldiers, as well as details on how many achieve senior Officer status. Overall, most guests find the presentation to be enlightening and are surprised by some of the information and facts that they hear e.g. a number of careers advisers were unaware that the Army was recently announced as the top Apprenticeship Employer in 2020[[20]](#footnote-21). A teacher at a recent event commented that they were ‘very surprised that the Army was such an inclusive employer’. This demonstrated the need to inform and myth bust and will be an area of growth through 2021.

 

 32% Recruiting

 9% Veterans

 9% Education

 9% RFCA/AF Covenant

 9% Lived Experience

 8% Racism/Equality

 7% Operations (incl MACA)

 7% Cadets/Youth

 5% Reserves

 4% Mental Health

 1% Climate

Climate

1. **Data Capture**. Every AEG event is recorded on UCE and a range of statistical and anecdotal evidence is available on request. Work continues to exploit the benefit of Initial Preparation of the Engagement Environment (IPEE) in order to deliver the full range of output and R2
1. The AEG consists of 5 teams; the Army Engagement Team (AET) delivers flagship presentation in support of RPOCs; the Army Business and Communities Engagement Team (ABCET) which can be task organised to engage with specific target audiences such as Employers/Businesses, faith groups, social/youth clubs; the Army Diversity Engagement Team (ADET) which provide a bespoke Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) brief focused on Females, BAME and LGBTQ+; the Army Youth Outreach Team (AYOT) designed to ATTRACT, EDUCATE and CONNECT, complemented by the Army STEM Youth Engagement Team (ASYET) from 1 Apr 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. There was no report in 2019/20, this year saw a reduction of 83% from 2018/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The Group gapped 26% of posts for >6 months in 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Annex A Table 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Annex B Table 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Annex B Para 2a. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. AET 1 events triggered a further 95 requests for Engt. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Annex B Para 2e. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Due for revision in 2021 in line with the ongoing RC Estimate. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. First ADET post was filled in Nov 20 and the capability required significant reinvigoration. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. AET1 guests ethnicity is calculated from their names or organisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. ‘*Fantastic event, my student year group watched this event in our hall’* - STEM Academy Careers Adviser [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. FTRS Limited Commitment, limits travel allowances and provision of domestic accommodation. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. The 23 AET1 events in 20/21 have so far generated 95 requests for follow-on engagement activity [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. In one 7 working day period AET 1 were able to present to the West Midlands, Mid Lothian, Devon and the South East RFCA, while concurrently conducting planning for future events. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. The Survey Monkey questionnaire also seeks to ascertain the level of access afforded by each AET 1 to others (ie. ‘2nd and 3rd order engagement’) and hence the number of people to whom he or she might have wider influence. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Pupils really enjoyed watching it and they didn’t realize the Army had so many different jobs - School Careers Adviser [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Guests frequently comment how impressed they are by the young soldiers that they meet at AET1 F2F events [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. These are F2F events, that are live streamed to a virtual audience, who can participate alongside the physical audience. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. I was interested to learn that of over 200 roles in the Army 24% are STEM based. In my role at Scot Eng, I go to school careers events and, given the current climate, it would be good to provide students with more knowledge of the roles available to them in the Armed Forces and the apprenticeships, further education and life experiences the Armed Forces offers. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)