

From: Commodore David Eagles CMMar RFA



Commodore RFA

Commodore RFA
Dep Dir AFSUP
Navy Command HQ
Leach Building, MP2-2
Whale Island
Portsmouth
PO2 8BY

Email: David.Eagles877@mod.gov.uk

Mr Steve Doran
National Organiser
1 & 2 The Shrubberies
George Lane, South Woodford
London
E18 1BD

17 November 2021

Dear Steve,

Subject: 2021/22 PAY & CONDITIONS REVIEW – NAUTILUS SUBMISSION

Thank you for your letter dated 15 October 2021, which I am grateful for. As we continue to deliver our operational outputs and manage our way through the difficulties of the pandemic and the challenges we continue to face, I am appreciative of the support of Nautilus and your membership along with the broader workforce. Our continued partnership is pivotal to delivering the bright and secure future for the Service that we all seek.

I will address the issues raised in the letter in order of their submission.

Introduction

Thank you for acknowledging the stance of the Treasury in the decision to afford no public sector pay increases except for the very lowest paid of our workers, who will receive £250 assuming they are below the £24,000 pay threshold. We will all have noted in the news that the pay pause may well be lifted next year, and we shall examine what this may mean for the RFA as and when further information is forthcoming.

Beyond pay, I can understand the frustration felt by the perceived differences between the RFA and the RN personnel. They are, as you can appreciate, two entirely different organisations on vastly different terms and conditions of service and direct comparison is simply not appropriate. That said, I hope that some of the “Whole Force” approach will bring positive benefits in the future, such as access to RN gym facilities in training establishments we are currently working through. We will of course let you know in good time when these Whole Force benefits materialise.

Turning to the question of an independent pay review, this was attempted in 2011 by Deloitte’s. It is worth noting that this process did not reach completion as they were unable to find any other comparative organisation. We may well face similar issues now and such a review could indeed be counterproductive. I say this as we do know is that RFA personnel have continued to enjoy very secure employment and an excellent set of benefits which includes a world class pension. Whenever comparing salaries it’s always helpful to look at it on a ‘total package’ basis in order to compare. I believe the RFA offers a reasonable work life balance for its employees and it will be adding to its tangible benefits as part of One Navy. I am of course very happy to work with our TU’s to continually improve terms and conditions for our Seafarers.

Having said this, I do not rule out an independent pay review in the future as there may be some tangible benefits, but I do not believe it is needed at present.

From: Commodore David Eagles CMMar RFA

Hours of Work

Referring to your additional bullet points on members suggestions for improved working conditions I can agree to the following:

- A review to consider where days may be classed as “essential duties only” will be undertaken by the Management Board as to where time off can be taken on a rota basis. This will be on the understanding that it will be on a trial basis in the first instance across the flotilla.
- An agreement to allow a period of half a working day each week during the core working day to undertake physical training activity.
- For personnel that mutually agree to extend their appointment length for operational requirements, an additional day of rest for each additional 14 days served will be allocated.

I cannot at this time agree to casual leave or leave on articles, but I will consider this when crewing numbers allow and a trial of time off when not required for essential duties (as above) has been concluded.

Crewing

There are instances where RFA personnel are expected to work despite a number of roles being gapped, however we do not go below the level of minimum manning in order to safely operate the Ship. This remains within acceptable levels and work is undergoing to fill the most difficult gaps as soon as possible.

I am not personally aware of any positions where RFA personnel are expected to operate “far in excess” of the four month appointment. It may be that there is an operational requirement to fulfil a role, and there are cases where an individual requests either a longer or extended appointment, but such arrangements should be by mutual consent. I would be extremely concerned if it is believed that undue pressure or duress was being applied to fulfil appointments. If it was felt that this was the case, these issues should be raised through the management chain, with Capability or with me personally. If there are cases where any appointments continue to be 5 months, I will of course commit to review of these roles to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the individuals concerned. I am also ready to review the relevant section of BR875 so that the wording reflects our desire as an organisation to focus on the wellbeing of our seafarers.

In terms of seafarers undertaking duties at a higher grade, current policy will only allow individuals to be paid for one grade higher than their current grade as there is no facility to pay an individual beyond this. I am not aware of anyone who is undertaking work four grades above their actual grade and I would like to understand where you believe this is happening so the situation can be reviewed. All temporary promotions and concessionary billets should be carried out in accordance with the Advancement and Promotion policy and the appropriate risk assessments carried out as necessary.

Regarding the Shorthand Hand claims process, your concerns appear to be with the process itself rather than the policy. We can commit to a review of the process to see if this could be streamlined or improved in some way and to ensure the application of the process and policy is being correctly handled. From my understanding, when a claim form is completed and submitted it will have an effect on payments. If correctly processed by the payroll cut-off date, then this will enable the payments to be made in the next pay run. If payroll cut-off is missed, an additional month will have passed before payment. This is standard practice in a significant number of organisations and businesses. If, however I have misunderstood your concerns, or you wish the policy itself to be reviewed then I am content for you to engage with the RFA Business Partner (HRBP) further on this matter.

It is not possible or feasible to consider rota appointments or offer one ship-two crews ratio at this time. However, it remains our ambition for this to be achieved by 2025, subject to crewing levels being sufficient.

From: Commodore David Eagles CMMar RFA

Leave

I am delighted to confirm that a commitment has already been made to the TU's to resume 3 month appointing cycles as soon as practically possible. The trial was considered a success and we will recommence as soon as possible, with the current intention being by the summer of 2022.

A review of Extended Tour Allowance will not be undertaken at this time as I believed that 15 days is a suitable time for it to commence.

As for the issue regarding Magellan incorrectly accruing leave, a commitment has already been provided to the TU's in the quarterly meetings that this will happen when we change over to One View. In the meantime, individual cases will be looked at where individuals are leaving the RFA and the correct leave will be calculated prior to their final pay being calculated.

Travel

I am unable to commit to any of your requests regarding travel at this time.

Uniform

A project to review costs of all allowances and where cost savings and improvements could be made is being undertaken by the RFA HRBP team at present. All funding of allowances comes from the annual pay budget of the RFA and so a careful balance must be struck. Where there is an opportunity and the money to do so, consideration will be given to increasing where possible. The RFA HRBP will keep the MTUs updated on their work.

Line Management and HoD Allowances

It is believed that all line managers are adequately compensated for the possibility that they will be required to manage a team or department. There is no mechanism in place to compensate people for the number of people they manage, as this would create division and cause additional problems and complexity. Sometimes we benefit from being in a singleton post, but equally, hugely valuable management experience is gained by having a team to develop and lead.

Pers Ops

The issues in the area of personnel support has been addressed in a number of forums, especially the quarterly meetings. A review of all gapped posts is being conducted by Zoe Taylor as the RFA HRBP and Captain Peter Selby and will feed into an overall RFA climate study by Cdre Rob Wood. Both myself and my management team are continuing to press hard for the approval to fill critical posts. I will continue to keep the TUs informed of progress in these matters.

All appointers have their own dedicated skype number which follows them around whether at home or in the office and they should have this at the base of their emails. Options to improve the structure and working environment for the appointers is ongoing at present and part of the RN Transformation. We take your feedback about multiuser email addresses and will feed this into the suggestions as part of the review in to pers ops.

It is agreed that an individual should have a career meeting once a year, this should be as part of the PDR process which is also currently under review by the Management Team and RFA HRBP.

Shore Posts

A proposal has been put forward to the TU's of a change of wording to the Shore Post Policy on 08 October and I hope that further discussion will take place between the RFA HRBP and TUs on this as the change of wording will help to resolve some of the issues and misunderstandings around application of the policy and process.

Further to the above, I agree that the process of shore appointments could also be supported by a document available to employees which would show shore post criteria and vacancy dates. This can be taken forward as soon as a suitable person can be found to manage this exercise.

From: Commodore David Eagles CMMar RFA

Consideration will also be given to your proposals of making the NAVY AFSUP-CIS SO3C role the Head of Specialisation a temporary acting 1/O(CIS) role and this will be tabled at the Management Board.

There are a small number of shore-based roles that benefit from a longer appointment length, a review of shore-based roles and suggested appointment lengths will be undertaken as soon as manning allows.

Mental Health Wellbeing and Welfare

Thank you for acknowledging the improvements already made in this area for Seafarers. The management team and I will continue to explore ways to improve life on board for our seafarers and we do appreciate that a part of this is access to Wi-Fi and tv and the importance of the connection to life at home. These areas will remain under review and all of the team know that I am open to practical suggestions as to how we can continue to improve this situation.

D&I training is available in the MOD and is part of the requirements of mandatory training for all. The RFA will be seeking to take steps in the future to encourage all staff to complete the D&I mandatory training. Furthermore, Paul Owen has been appointed as the D&I champion and will also sit on the Herald Committee who will also have a responsibility for improving D&I awareness as well as a "safe space" and point of escalation for anyone who is experiencing any issues. D&I trained personnel on board is not something that we can commit to at present. HR Business Partners are available on shore to support anyone who requires assistance in this area to answer queries, provide information and signposting. The civil service provides a large number of resources available on DEFNET for all personnel to access and specific line manager resources for line managers.

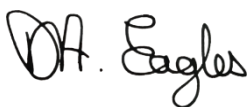
One Navy and Corporate Identity

One Navy is about brigading all elements (RN, RM, RFA, Mainstream CS and Reserves) to pull together, work seamlessly and deliver the required output as a coherent, unified workforce. I remain firmly of the view that this does not present an existential threat to the RFA. The process is not about integrating the RFA into the RN and does not present any threat to our status as MOD employed UK registered civilian seafarers. Alongside our colleagues in the Royal Marines, we have a unique identity and ethos as a Service within the broader RN and we can look to the future with confidence and pride.

Conclusion

I have tried in this response to give my considered views on each proposal that has been put forward. As I have indicated, I believe that there are genuine benefits in some of the proposals, although further work may be needed for others. Even in those areas I cannot agree to, I fully accept that these were made to positively support all of us within the RFA. If I have misunderstood the specific substance of these proposals, then I am happy to address this in the discussions I have with TU representatives as we continue to work in partnership for the good of the RFA.

Yours sincerely



D A Eagles CMMar

Commodore Royal Fleet Auxiliary

cc: Mr Marc Williams, Nautilus Representative RFA