

Brief Reflections of an RNIO Appointer

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My first thought on writing this blog outlining the task of allocating jobs to Instructor Officers in the Royal Navy was: that being appointed as an appointer was not an appointment one normally expected.... Excuse the word play!

In my case, I had been told that on completion of an 18 months tour of duty in HMS *Invincible*, I was pencilled in for a married accompanied, NATO staff appointment in the USA; the prospects of which delighted my family.



Cdr Bob Young aboard HMS *Invincible*, 1982
Source: Bob Young, RNIOA Gallery

Then in summer 1982, while cruising some 8,000 miles from the U.K. I received a letter from Director Naval Officers Appointments (Instructors), DNOA(I), offering the option for me to become an appointer instead of taking up the NATO position.

This seemed to me like something very challenging and entirely different to my then previous 18 years of service, so (much to my wife's chagrin) I wrote back and opted for the Whitehall posting instead of Norfolk, Virginia. [Actually we did, several years later get a married accompanied tour in the U.S.A.]

On taking up my new post, the appointing plot I inherited initially encompassed all Lieutenant Commanders (I) and all General List Lieutenants (I) – some 300-plus officers. Midway through my tenure of office, to this was added all Commanders (I); so, in total, a sizeable and quite varied population.

Sharing the same office with me in the Naval Secretary's (NAVSEC) department was the Junior Officers' appointer who managed the Short Service (I) plot. So between us we had a diverse group of some 500-plus officers to

allocate to the various I (and Common Appointment) posts throughout the R.N.

I use the term 'diverse' because within the Instructor Specialisation appointing plot there existed many 'sub-plots' (sometimes highly specialized) supporting such services and disciplines as:

- Submarines
- Royal Marines
- Information Technology
- Meteorology & Oceanography
- Engineering
- General Education
- etc., etc.

Which, when all combined, resulted in an overarching appointment plot which might be described as a highly dynamic algorithm – within which, for example, one individual officer's promotion or a health problem could trigger a 'knock-on' effect resulting in a short notice change of plans for several other officers; some of whom were not always well pleased!

To construct an appointment plot that was fit for purpose there was obviously a need for some defined 'Guidelines and Priorities' and to the best of my recollection NAVSEC's appointing guidelines in order of priority were:

Number 1 Needs of the Service

Number 2.....Individual officer's career pattern planning

Number 3.....An officer's personal preferences

Obviously if all three of the above could be successfully combined when formulating a specific appointment, then everyone was reasonably happy. This was more often the case than not, but there were times when it was necessary for the appointer to 'play hardball' to fulfil the 'Needs of the Service' requirement and in doing so become, as some would term it, the (dis)appointer!

Compliance with priority Number 2 (Individual officer's career pattern planning) depended to a large extent on which list an officer belonged.

Although all I specialization officers started their careers with short service commissions at the end of which they could opt to leave the R.N. while those wanting to continue to serve could apply for:

- 1) Transfer to a 16-year Medium Career Commission (MCC) on the Supplementary List (SL), with a further opportunity to transfer to an Extended MCC to age 50. The latter also included the prospect of promotion to Cdr (SL).
- 2) Transfer to the General List (GL)

In broad terms, many SL officers' career patterns revolved around the concept of being 'deep specialists'. For example, an SL officer who had completed the METOC Officers long course would very probably spend the rest of his career in METOC appointments; likewise for Information Technology and other specialist areas.

For those officers transferred to the General List, the appropriate career planning would involve a broader/more general range of appointments designed to well equip the officer for further promotion to Commander, Captain or even Admiral. Included in these might be a Head of Department appointment, an M.O.D. staff appointment, a Common Appointment (which could be filled by Executive, Engineering, Supply (X,E,S) officers) or I plus appropriate seagoing appointment(s).

Given that most appointments were for two or two and a half years in length (the exception being officers appointed to the Royal Naval Engineering College (RNEC) Manadon, where longer tours of duty were the rule), this constant rotation gave the appointer reasonable opportunities to structure suitable career patterns for both SL and GL officers.

As far as priority Number 3 was concerned, each officer was encouraged to complete an Appointing Preference Card. This was a very useful input to the process, but only if it were kept up to date. For example, many officers indicated on their preference card that they would like a married accompanied abroad appointment, or a sea-going appointment; but very often when such an appointment was offered to them at some later time, this was no longer an existing preference. In fact, from my memory, compiling the abroad plot was one of the most difficult to formulate; particularly since the appointing guidelines were such that only volunteers should be given such appointments.

Interactions with individual appointees to discuss future career plans and possible appointments were largely facilitated through face-to-face meetings, or in the case of

officers serving abroad, via written correspondence.

Whilst many of these face-to-face interviews took place in the appointer's office in Whitehall, another very efficient method of conducting business was for the appointer to travel to an establishment, or to ships in port, to hold 'appointing days.'

An example of this could be the Academic Training Department at HMS *Sultan*, which employed about 30 IOs of different seniorities.

The Senior Training Officer of such a department would invariably arrange for an interview office to be made available and promulgate an appropriate interview schedule. It was also normal to take lunch in the Wardroom with the head of department to discuss his or her particular personnel needs. Getting to know individual officers and HoDs in this way was regarded as an invaluable and cost-effective way of conducting business.



Academic Training IOs, HMS *Sultan*, 1986
Source: RNIOA Gallery

Not surprisingly, being an appointer required the capability of dealing with many fast-changing scenarios, such as responding to urgent requests from establishments and ships.

In an era where some Scheme of Complement posts were 'gapped' (i.e. not enough available/suitable personnel to fill them) this often required what might best be described as first class 'juggling skills'. However, in the words of Mr Micawber – "something invariably turned up"!

To end this short insight into the world of an appointer I have to say that my time spent in the role was one of the most demanding, but satisfying and enjoyable periods of my 26 years of service in the Royal Navy.