



From Colonel J G Robinson CBE

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Dear Fellow Gurkha,

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BRIGADE OF GURKHAS UPDATE

Following the recent announcement by the Minister for the Armed Forces on the latest Gurkha growth, including a new battalion (3RGR), I felt it timely to provide a consolidated update to you all to explain how we got to where we are and what the future may look like. I am also including a few updates on other topical issues.

Why are we growing?

The headline is that the Brigade of Gurkhas (BG) will grow by c.75% over the next 4-5 years. You will be aware of the Army's manning challenge that our Gurkha growth will help alleviate. It is interesting to know that the investment that the Army is putting into recruiting is starting to bear some fruit but nonetheless, wider Army under manning continues to present opportunities for us. Our growth is in support of this but it also provides us with both greater mass and broader employment opportunities.

From a Brigade perspective the increase in posts allows us to offer enhanced careers for our soldiers. Since the TACOS Review of 2007 Gurkhas have been able to transfer out of the BG to the wider Army after 5 years' service and this has increasingly become more attractive as gaps in the Army presented new opportunities, offering better promotion prospects away from the highly competitive environment of the Brigade. During the four years of redundancy (2011 to 2104) that hit the Brigade hard, we actively sought transfer opportunities for those selected for redundancy and this generated further momentum to transfer.

From 2008 all new Gurkha Intakes joined on the Versatile Engagement (VEng) (Short) contract of 12 years. Selectively soldiers can then be employed for a further 12 years (VEng (Full)). For our soldiers, who all seek to achieve full 24-year employment, this presents a challenge. It is not possible to keep them all for 24 years as this would have a detrimental impact on promotion rates and deployability. Each Gurkha cap badge analysed its conversion rates and they were alarmingly low in comparison to their parent British cap badge (where far less British soldiers serve up to 12 years anyway). This presented a further reason for many of our soldiers to transfer out and seek better VEng (Full) prospects outside the Brigade. While some transfer is necessary and acceptable, we reached a stage where it was having an impact on our own manning so something needed to be done.

In our Gurkha growth we have tried to target employment that will both increase our promotion chances and the type of employment where more of our soldiers can serve for longer within the Brigade. For example, posts in the Training Organisations (where we excel and already have many posts in places such as Sandhurst, Brecon and Blandford) do not need the same level of deployability and thus help offer higher conversion rates. In a smaller Army liability is king, so finding and agreeing change of liability from British fill (UKTAP) to Gurkha fill (GURTAM) has been a gradual and persistent negotiation. Each year has brought more opportunities as under-manning trends are identified with a

need for Gurkhas to assist. This has been an on-going process of identification and discussion led by HQBG and BG corps units with their parent corps. All growth is being delivered within Gurkha Employment Principles. Furthermore, it must be recognised that this growth would not have been possible without the exceptional reputation of high performance, adaptability and professionalism that has been built up over the years.

Where are we growing?

The first opportunity came in 2016 in the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) Support Battalion, based in Gloucester. The previous Defence Review had removed the Pioneer capability and the RGR elected to take on the Support Battalion's Assault Pioneer Troop. We also sought posts in locations where we are already based and delivering Training Support such as Sandhurst, Catterick and Brecon and took on a new company in Warminster which we named Tavoletto after the WW2 battle honour awarded to 7GR in Northern Italy. Altogether this first phase of growth provided 233 posts and included new employment opportunities such as instructors at University Officer Training Corps, the Escape and Evasion School, and CQMSs at RMAS.

Later in 2016, to support the Royal Signals, two new squadrons of QGS were authorised; one to support 3 Div Signal Regiment which supports 3 (UK) Division HQ, a very high-profile role, and one to 16 Sig Regt in Stafford. At the same time, two additional QOGLR squadrons were endorsed to support the RLC; one driver squadron at 9 RLC in Abingdon in the close support role and one supply squadron in 4 RLC based at Hullavington. At the same time the decision was taken to re-role 10 QOGLR to the close support role, one of only two Close Support Logistic Regiments; testament to Gurkhas' high deployability.

In 2017 more opportunities were negotiated and by 2018 a further 113 posts around the Army had been identified, many of them singleton posts for officers and SNCOs. Following the positive impact the first soldiers made in the ARRC Support Battalion, GURTAM liability there was increased to 104 posts. Gurkha cap badges also identified other posts within their parent cap badge liability; for example; instructors at the Defence Food Service School and Royal School of Mechanical Engineering at Minley, posts in Director Information's organisation in Army HQ, instructors at the Mission Training and Mobilisation Centre (MTMC) and SO3 roles in HQ Home Command.

In early 2019 the latest package was announced. This will see the following additional Gurkha growth:

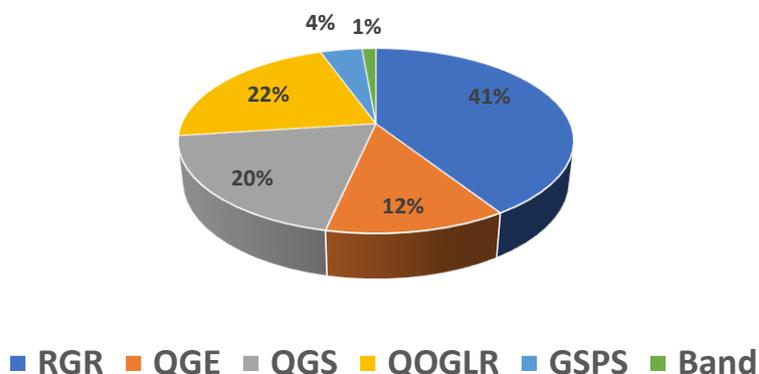
- **QGS.** Two more QGS squadrons, with locations to be confirmed. This brings the number of new QGS squadrons to four.
- **ARRC Support Battalion.** The remainder of the ARRC Sp Bn (which will then become a termed Gurkha battalion), will convert to GURTAM, an additional 120 posts mainly for QOGLR, RGR, QGE and GSPS.
- **Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas.** An uplift to the Gurkha Band by 13 posts to make it a Type 54 Band along with the other Army Bands following the recent Army Band Review
- **QGE.** One new QGE field squadron, location to be confirmed.
- **3RGR.** The 2015 Defence Review identified a requirement to establish five new Specialised Infantry Battalions and 3RGR will be formed as the fifth of these. Its role of training other armies in a high-threat environment will play well to Gurkha strengths and it is rank rich with very few junior ranks. It will be predominantly RGR and have some QGE, QOGLR and GSPS. We plan to grow a company and some command/support elements this year but the remainder of the battalion will grow when a barracks is available. We are scoping options and plan to be located within the Specialised Infantry Group which is gradually being established over the next 4 years in Pirbright/Aldershot. Timelines for building this capability to battalion strength and then being operationally ready, after the required nine-month training package, are currently being worked on.
- **UK RGR battalion.** An uplift to the UK RGR battalion which is part of 16 Air Assault Brigade. A new and significant enhancement to its role sees it now taking its turn with the two PARA battalions on the Air Manoeuvre Battle Group roster as the UK's High Readiness Standby Intervention unit and the UK RGR battalion will receive an uplift of 29 posts.

Additionally, the GSPS have both grown with the Brigade sub-unit growth and have taken advantage of added wider employment opportunities.

Total Gurkha Growth by Rank¹

	OF3 Maj	OF2 Capt	OF Total	OR9 WO1	OR8 WO2	OR7 SSgt	OR6 Sgt	OR4 Cpl	OR3 LCpl	OR2 Pte	OR Total	Total
RGR												
RGR	6	12	18	1	16	46	45	100	72	117	397	415
Total	11	52	62	4	40	89	120	309	304	724	1590	1652
QGE												
QGE	3	7	10	1	5	16	13	36	48	80	199	209
Total	4	15	19	1	11	30	31	93	131	209	506	525
QGS												
QGS	3	5	8	1	9	1	29	25	117	110	292	300
Total	6	24	30	1	16	35	83	135	259	205	734	764
QOGLR												
QOGLR	2	11	13	2	9	25	42	72	83	190	423	436
Total	3	23	26	3	18	45	83	151	184	364	848	874
GSPS												
GSPS	2	5	7	0	5	8	15	15	12	8	63	70
Total	3	11	14	1	13	17	27	39	24	25	146	160
GCAMUS												
Band	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	3	3	3	13	13
Total	0	1	1	1	2	4	7	9	12	19	54	55
BG TOTAL												
BG TOTAL	16	40	56	5	44	97	147	251	335	508	1387	1443
Total	27	125	152	11	100	220	351	736	914	1546	3878	4030

BG cap badge breakdown after growth is complete.

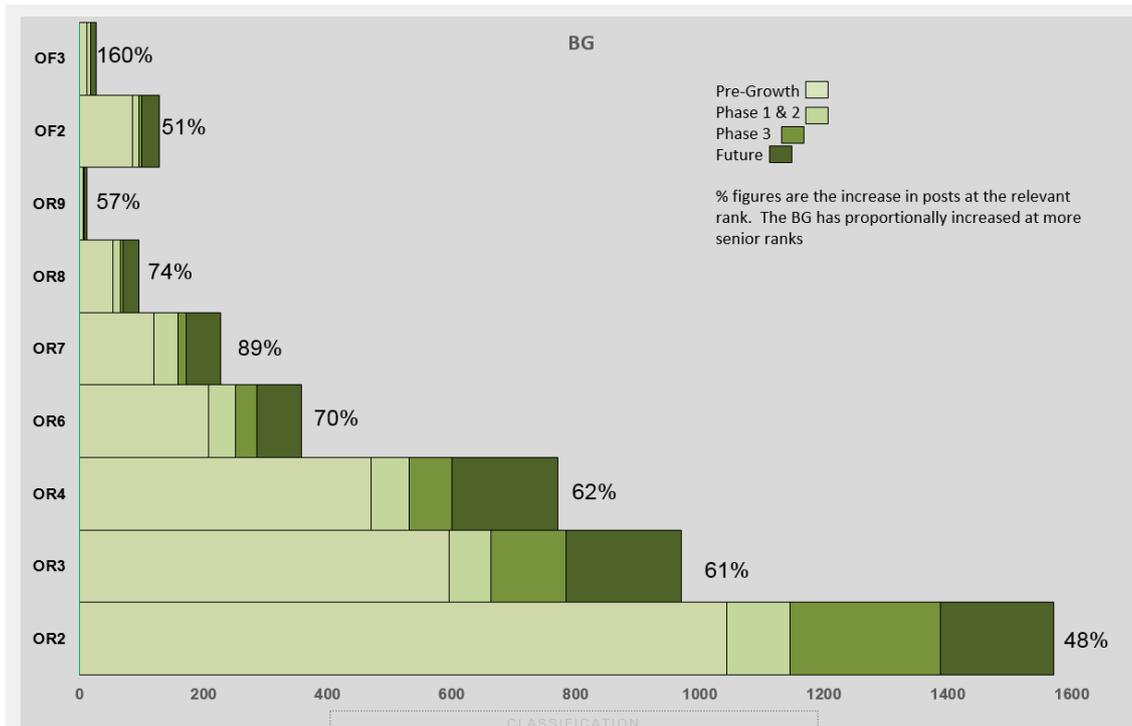


¹ The table shows the current planned growth by cap badge and rank – this is currently still be worked on and so should not be taken as the definitive final figures.

How does that help our career prospects?

Some of the growth was pure capability enhancements. For example, the BG corps' new squadrons assist the Army manning challenge and provide wider exposure of Gurkhas but they do not improve our career prospects. Some of the Training Support manpower composed of mainly junior ranks does the same. But elsewhere we have gained more posts of officer/SNCO/JNCO rank to compensate. So, the overall result is a positive uplift to promotion and to VEng (Full) conversion opportunities for full service.

Improvements in BG Promotion Opportunities



VEng Conversion Rates

Before we started the growth, the percentage across the Brigade we were able to offer a full 24-year career to was only c.28% of each Recruit Intake. The percentage varied across the different cap badges, with the Band and GSPS able to offer higher conversion rates than others; with RGR only able to offer a full career to c.17%. Once all the growth has been factored in, the conversion rates for each Intake will rise to c.64%; a significant increase in offering full career opportunities within the BG.

Pre-Growth		Future Growth	
RGR	18%	RGR	59%
QGE	32%	QGE	63%
QG Signals	33%	QG Signals	69%
QOGLR	37%	QOGLR	71%
GSPS	75%	GSPS	95%
GCAMUS	100%	GCAMUS	100%
BG Av = 28%		BG Av = 64%	

How will we meet this growth?

Instinctively people will immediately assume that we will simply increase recruiting to produce the numbers. Yes, it will help, but we have to be conscious of the long-term implications, especially for future structures and sustainability. Extra-large intakes mean opportunities for promotion and full service are reduced for larger cohorts and this in turn will drive up transfers out of the BG, impacting on operational effectiveness. Thus we seek to use our recruiting but in concert with other manning levers such as VEng conversion and some short extensions of service.

So in the near term we have increased recruiting. At short notice Recruit Intake 19 was uplifted to 400 and we will now bring in 432 each year for as long as we need to. 432 is the maximum that the Infantry Training Centre (ITC) can take in one company; the ITC training is vital for the successful transition from Nepali youth to Gurkha soldier and is the bedrock of our success. You will know that we recruit agnostically in Nepal and all our new recruits undergo 39 weeks basic infantry training, education, culture and language training together, during which time we can assess them and allocate them to BG cap badges. Having negotiated a change in statute law, from this year all recruits will be required to serve for seven years before they are able to transfer out of the BG.

We will also use VEng conversion to grow and we are able to offer extremely high opportunities for conversion to 24 years' service during the period of this growth. We have even had some transferees (who have retained their Nepalese citizenship) transfer back to us from the wider Army and a few have rejoined the Brigade from civilian life. Special dispensation has been given to us to extend our Gurkha Officers' commissions to meet the manning need too. To achieve the strategic gain, there may be some short-term pain within our existing units.

The synchronization of the growth over the next 4-5 years is being developed and the recent uplift announcement is being interwoven with our current growth plan. It maybe that in time that the Army requires us to add to this growth further.

What opportunities and challenges does this pose?

First the Brigade will grow from c.2560 to c.4700 (including those in training); this significant increase will see us cement ourselves fully within the Army ORBAT and remove uncertainty regarding our future. That feeling many of us have had over the years of never quite knowing what our future maybe is now gone. We will go some way to easing the Army's manning challenge and deliver additional capability in areas that match our strengths. In doing so our soldiers and officers will, for the first time, be employed widely - especially in previously unavailable roles, enhancing their own experience and in time bringing it back to our units. Significantly more of the Army will be exposed to Gurkhas, understand us better and see our qualities.

However increased mass comes with challenges; less family stability, rapid promotion pull-through and more soldiers serving at external non-Regimental Duty employment. Enhanced personnel management will become part of the care we provide to our people. Maintaining the strength of ethos and Brigade/Regimental brand across a broader and more dispersed Brigade will also require strong communication, effective chains of command and conscious focus on our kaida.

How will the new units be looked after?

As part of our remit to the Government of Nepal to look after our Gurkha communities and maintain their religious and cultural support, we will ensure that all new locations of sub-unit size and above receive the same support that our current Gurkha units do. This will include; a temple, access to Religious Leaders (pandit and lama), Gurkha Community Support Worker, a messing area and access to BFBS Gurkha Radio through a local transmitter. This is being delivered by public and non-public funds.

The newly formed Brigade Cultural and Language Team (BCLT), formerly the Nepali Language Wing at Catterick, has been moved to Sandhurst and now sits under command of HQBG. It will conduct a series of Outreach activities to some of the nine new locations the BG will be employed. The role of

BCLT Outreach will be to ease the arrival of new Gurkha units by educating the commanders and staff in; Gurkha language, culture, religion, history and kaida. BCLT will also enhance its distance learning and on-line support offerings including a “Johnny Gurkha” language app for mobile phones.

Has recruiting changed?

The process has remained largely unchanged for many years. It is easily understood by the stakeholder population and is efficient. It is by nature a rudimentary process, lacking the complexity of computers and recruiting offices used in UK. It remains an annual cycle; Advertising-Registration-Regional Selection-Central Selection-Induction-Attestation.

HQBG continues to deliver the Statement of Recruiting Requirement stipulating the selection criteria, with due recognition of current Army recruiting policy. But we rightly are allowed to be different; downsizing large numbers to a group who will serve with distinction in the Army for the next 24 years. Continued assessment of the quality of our serving young Gurkhas in BG units, having completed relevant Phase 2 training and coping with the rigours of the Field Army, demonstrates that our unique recruiting and initial training process works and delivers what we need.

This year the Army brought in Physical Employment Standards (PES); physical tests that are related to relevant employment by arms and services with differing tests set for joining and for in-service. In line with this a number of our physical tests have been adjusted, but again we have had the freedom to adopt ones which work best for us within the recruiting environment of Nepal.

Will we recruit Nepalese females?

By now you know that the Army, and Defence, has opened up all areas of employment to females, including combat roles. The infantry will be taking its first female entrants later this year. The BG is looking forward to opening up its ranks to Nepalese females and discussions are on-going with the Nepalese Government whose agreement is required before we can start. Should it be agreed, it is intended that females will compete with males on equal terms and, will undergo the same cap badge selection process as the men. As I write, the current recruiting cycle, due to deliver recruits to UK in February 2020, will be male only and discussions with the Nepalese Government continue.

Pensions and Veterans Concerns.

You will be aware that the Government recently announced an uplift for those on the Gurkha Pension Scheme (GPS). The basis of the uplift was the 7th Indian Civil Pay Commission (CPC) which produced very large increases for the Indian public sector in 2016. The GPS pays due regard to the CPC figures and in the past has aimed to double them, within affordability. The GPS increases of 10 - 34% compare to this year's Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) uplift of 3% and will see an increase to the GPS of £15M annually. The GPS increase also comes with a grant to the Gurkha Welfare Trust of £25 million over the next 10 years to enable them to enhance its medical provision to all veterans in Nepal. This was one of the grievances of Satyagraha and will now be met.

Whilst some may feel that this uplift is insufficient, it is worth recognizing that it has taken more than 2 years of inter-governmental negotiations to gain an uplift of this scale, especially hard won in the current UK financial climate. The GPS has maintained increases in line with Nepal inflation over the years and therefore overall has increased by over 385% since 2000 with most pensioners seeing increases of approximately 1000%. During the same time the AFPS has increased by around 55%, based on lower UK inflation. The new GPS pension increases will also be backdated to the 7th CPC implementation in 2016, costing £45M, so our GPS pensioners will shortly get a very healthy uplift in addition to a lump sum. Many compare GPS directly with the AFPS. The two are designed for different circumstances with the GPS payable immediately on retirement and after a shorter span of service.

Summary

While necessarily long and detailed, I trust that this update provides useful background to several major changes that have occurred over the last few years. Much messaging has been fed out piecemeal and so the opportunity to put everything together and explain the strategic transformation has been taken. In future years we may well see more Gurkha growth to further assist the Army on top of that already agreed. We will, of course, keep you all updated through our GBA website (www.gurkhabde.com), Parbate magazine and BG social media. In the meantime, I conclude by emphasising that our Brigade is an exceptionally strong position, embedded across the Army with increasingly key and highly deployable roles, and it continues to maintain the high reputation created by our forefathers.

Jai BG!

Colonel BG