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An Oifig Buiséid Pharlaiminteach
Parliamentary Budget Office

Defence Forces: Analysing Ireland's Naval Service

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Key Messages

Overview

- In this paper, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) intends to explain key concepts and information regarding Ireland's Naval Service. It aims to serve as an ongoing reference document to present key material, such as Naval Service structure, set out key policy documentation and literature and present trends in Exchequer investment and personnel
- The paper draws on desk-based quantitative and process analysis using a range of Department of Defence administrative data and information. It employs a variety of analytical techniques, such as trend analyses, international benchmarking, and cost modelling, and follows the analytical approach taken by the Value for Money (VfM) Reviews and Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGEES) Spending Reviews. The paper will examine the areas in terms of its trends regarding inputs, outputs and outcomes.

Investment

- The Naval Service is one of the State's first lines of defence and has had a significant role at home and abroad in recent years, yet clearly identifying Naval Service specific investment is extremely challenging.
- Defence Vote Group spending increased from €0.9 billion in 2012 to €1.25 billion in 2024. When pension costs are excluded, defence spending (Vote 36) has risen from €0.66 billion in 2012 to €0.93 billion for 2024.
- €1.5 billion (in 2022 prices) in defence spending has been committed by 2028, as part of annual Estimates processes, to achieve LOA 2. For the Naval Service, the Commission on Defence Forces estimate the annual cost of stepping up to LOA 2 is €59.4 million of capital investment and €35 million for additional personnel.¹
- Capital spending on the Naval Service from 2011 to 2023 was at least €340.9 million.
- From 2012 to 2022 the Defence Vote surrendered over €205 million of its allocated funds, while the surrendered funds for 2023 is estimated to be almost €15.7 million.

Establishment & Current Strength

- 'Establishment strength' refers to the agreed strength of each branch. While 'Current strength' refers to the actual number of personnel in a given branch on a particular date.
- By Q1 2024, Naval Service strength was 722 personnel, significantly below the 1,094 agreed establishment strength required for the Naval service. While the Naval Service Reserve had 83 personnel, below its established requirement of 200.
- Between 2012 and 2023, the Naval Service recruited 935 personnel, with 1,180 discharges, with a net personnel loss of 272 personnel.
- The *Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces* recommended providing double crews to all naval vessels, with indicative figures suggestions of an additional 700 personnel, and increasing the Naval Service Reserve size to 400 personnel.

¹ Commission on Defence Forces, [Report Of the Commission on Defence Forces](#) (2022) pg.217-8.

Operational Capacity

- Overall, the 8 ships could theoretically complete a total of 1,600 patrol days, yet in 2023 just 520 patrol days were reported.
- The Commission on the Defence Forces provided for varying Levels of Ambition (LOA). This set out increases to flotilla size (9 vessels by 2030 at LOA 2 and 12 vessels by 2040 at LOA3) and patrol days (rising from 200 annually to 220 days under LOA2).
- The recommendations accepted in principle require that there should be up to 1,980 patrol days annually within the next few years, with potentially further growth to 2,640 patrol days annually should the Government agree to the flotilla's expansion to 12 vessels in future.
- Enabling reservists to access relevant allowances for undertaking patrols could prove to be a cost-effective recruitment and retention method for the Naval Service Reserve.
- A better resourced Naval Service Reserve could support patrols by providing additional personnel. To operate effectively this may require provisions to guarantee reservist's availability to volunteer for longer patrol durations (20 days).
- The strength of the Naval Service does not directly translate to personnel available for sea-going duties. This can be due to a wide range of reasons including their rank, being assigned onshore tasks, various forms of leave, and those providing or attending training. As a result, while headline strength of the Naval Service would imply all vessels could be crewed at any given time, the reality is likely to be considerably different.

Allowances & Credits

- Several allowances and tax credits are used as retention measures and to incentivise personnel to undertake patrols. Yet these have very high and rigid eligibility requirements and are complex to access. It is unclear whether they are having the desired impacts. Simplification of the allowances structure (range and complexity) would provide greater clarity and certainty for naval service staff and would presumably reduce the administrative burden associated with allowances.
- The Report of the Public Service Pay Commission (2019) was "constrained from addressing matters in relation to basic pay". This approach requires that reliance is placed upon a complex web of allowances and credits to incentivise recruitment and retention within the Defence Forces.
- The average number of patrol days completed from 2012 to 2022 was 55 days. This is significantly below the Naval Tax Credit requirement of 80 days or the now abolished Sea Service Commitment Scheme's 60-day requirement.
- In 2024 Patrol Duty Allowance (PDA) was doubled following 10 days of patrolling. Since 2012, the number of personnel receiving the allowance has fallen annually, with €2.5 million paid to 556 staff in 2022.
- The PBO estimates increasing PDA above the current rates, across a range of potential scenarios, would cost between €6.2 million and €12.3 million but could serve as a financial incentive for both permanent and reserve personal to volunteer for patrols.
- The PBO estimates that to pay a fully staffed Naval Service at current establishment strength would cost €55.8 million annually. At staffing levels for Q1 2024, naval pay is estimated to cost €38.6 million, leaving an underspend on pay of €17.1 million which is retained by the Exchequer.

1. Introduction

The ability of the Irish Naval Service to successfully undertake and fulfil its roles and functions is an ongoing topic of discussion amongst military personnel, academics, the Irish public, and the Houses of the Oireachtas. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, discussions about the ability of the Irish Naval Service to successfully monitor and patrol Irish territorial waters and its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and to act as a deterrent to vessels, has come under intense scrutiny following a series of high-profile events. These include media reports alleging Russian warships and submarines reportedly sighted off the coast of Ireland in January and August 2022, and in April and December 2023.^{2,3} In addition, it was involved with enforcing a UN arms embargo on Libyan arms smugglers in June 2023,⁴ and intercepting and seizing the largest drugs shipment in the history of the State in September 2023.⁵ In 2024, further media reports alleged that French, British and Norwegian aircraft searched for a Russian submarine off the west coast,⁶ drawing some criticism of Irish naval capacity from international commentators.^{7, 8, 9, 10}

The current period of global instability, including in both Europe and the Middle East, coincides with the Naval Service facing issues on recruitment and retention, and questions on how to adequately respond to threats to Ireland's national security. The high publicity of these incidents has resulted in the Naval Service becoming an area of public interest, given its role as a first line of defence for the State. To date, from 2020 to 04 September 2024, the Naval Service was the subject of 3,392 Parliamentary Questions in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

In this paper, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) intends to explain key concepts and information regarding Ireland's Naval Service. It aims to serve as an ongoing reference document to present key material, such as Naval Service structure, set out key policy documentation and literature and present trends in Exchequer investment and personnel.

- Sections 2 and 3 outline Defence Forces and Naval Service policy background.
- Section 4 outlines the organisational structure of the Naval Service.
- Section 5 presents a trend analysis of Naval Service personnel.
- Section 6 gives a broad overview of defence investment.
- Section 7 explores investment specifically in the Naval Service.
- Section 8 examines Naval Service performance and impact indicators.
- Section 9 draws the sections together into a conclusion.

² Irish Times, [Defence Forces monitor armed Russian naval vessel off west coast](#), May 2023.

³ Irish Examiner, [Ireland's lack of sonar forced British navy to chase Russian sub away from cork harbour](#), December 2023.

⁴ The Journal, [Irish Naval ship tasked with enforcing Libyan arms blockade is ready to board smuggler vessels](#), June 2023.

⁵ Irish Examiner, [Just one ship available for massive drugs operation](#), September 2023.

⁶ Irish Independent, [Military aircraft search for Russian submarine seen off the Sligo Coast](#), June 2024.

⁷ The Telegraph, [Putin's subs have exposed Ireland's shameless hypocrisy](#), June 2024.

⁸ Politico, [Ireland's the Ultimate Defense Freeloader](#), May 2024

⁹ UK Defence Journal, [NATO Maritime Patrol Aircraft monitoring waters near Ireland](#), June 2024

¹⁰ Bloomberg, [Russia Twice Sent Kilo Attack Submarine Toward Irish Sea](#), July 2024

1.1. Methodology

The paper draws on desk-based quantitative and process analysis using a range of Department of Defence administrative data and information. It also utilises data from a wide range of sources, including the Department of Defence, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, Department of Finance, Houses of the Oireachtas Parliamentary Questions, the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, the Public Sector Pay Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General, in addition to information and reports by domestic and international media organisations.

The research employs a variety of analytical techniques, such as trend analyses, international benchmarking, and cost modelling. Following the analytical approach taken by the Value for Money Reviews and Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGEES) Spending Reviews, the paper will examine the areas in terms of its trends regarding inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Table 1 sets out general themes which the paper addresses, and specific areas of focus, as part of developments in the budgeting process, for example Performance and Gender Budgeting.

Table 1: Summary of Themes Addressed in this Paper

Broad Theme	Specific Focus	Addressed?
Performance Budgeting (Public Service Delivery)	Cost of Public Services	✓
	Measures of Service Delivery	✓
	Public Service Staffing	✓
Wellbeing Budgeting	Safety and Security	✓
Green Budgeting	Climate	✓
Equality Budgeting	Gender	✓
Sustainable Development Goals	Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	✓
	Gender Equality	✓
	Life Below Water	✓

1.2. Quality Assurance

As part of the quality assurance process feedback was sought on this paper's analytical format (structure), clarity (quality of writing), accuracy (reliability of data), robustness (methodological rigour), and consistency (between evidence and conclusions).

It is important to note that any involvement in the Quality Assurance Process of this work **does not imply agreement** with the findings of this analysis.

While the authors note developments in this area have been extremely fast moving in recent months, every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained within this report is as accurate as possible and the most up to date by the time of publication.

Much of the analysis included within the paper was conducted prior to June 2024, and as such, more recent data may not have been universally incorporated. Any errors or omissions arising are the author's own.

2. Background

2.1. Irish Defence Forces Overview

The Irish Defence Forces is comprised of three separate military branches, consisting of the Army, Naval Service, and Air Corps. These are vital to ensure the security of the Irish State. The Army, Naval Service and Air Corps comprise full-time personnel in the Permanent Defence Forces (PDF) units, while currently part-time Reserve Defence Force (RDF) units exist for the Army and Naval Service, alongside their respective PDF units.¹¹

Establishment strength' refers to the agreed strength of each branch. While 'Current strength' refers to the actual number of personnel in a given branch on a particular date.

The Irish Government had committed to maintaining a Defence Forces' establishment strength of around 9,500 PDF personnel and 4,069 RDF personnel.¹² The agreed establishment strength of the PDF was recently increased by 100 to 9,600 to account for the first cohort of Commission on Defence Forces (CODF) appointments¹³; however, these posts have not been broken down by branch. This takes the combined total establishment strength to 13,669 permanent and Reserve Defence Forces personnel. As of 31st March 2024, there were 7,510 PDF staff.¹⁴

The Government has committed to increasing the overall size of the Permanent Defence Forces to 11,500, including civilians, with branch breakdowns still to be announced, and a Reserve Defence Force of 4,500 by 2028.¹⁵ This would provide a total headcount of 16,000 personnel by 2028.

Table 2: Structure of the PDF and RDF, by Branch, 2024

Branch	Permanent Defence Force (PDF)	Reserve Defence Force (RDF)	Total Strength (PDF + RDF)
Army	7,520	3,869	11,389
Naval Service	1,094	200	1,294
Air Corps	886	N/A	886
Total	9,600	4,069	13,669

Source: [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), 2022 pg. 195-196. Note: Funding for a further 400 members of the PDF was provided in 2023 and 2024. *Includes 89 personnel for Commission on Defence Forces Implementation

Table 2 presents the current establishment strength, by branch, for both the Permanent and Reserve Defence forces. The Naval Service's establishment strength is 1,094 PDF and 200 RDF personnel. As of 31st March 2024, figures show PDF Naval Service strength at 722¹⁶ Whole Time Equivalent (WTEs), along with 83 Naval Reservists.¹⁷ Figure 1 highlights the gap as of 31st March 2024, between the Naval Service establishment strength for both the PDF and RDF, indicating the present number of personnel and the existing shortfall in strength.

¹¹ There are ongoing plans to develop new Reserve units for the Irish Air Corps.

¹² [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022 pg. 195-196.

¹³ [Defence Forces, Parliamentary Question 44, 45](#), 21 November 2023.

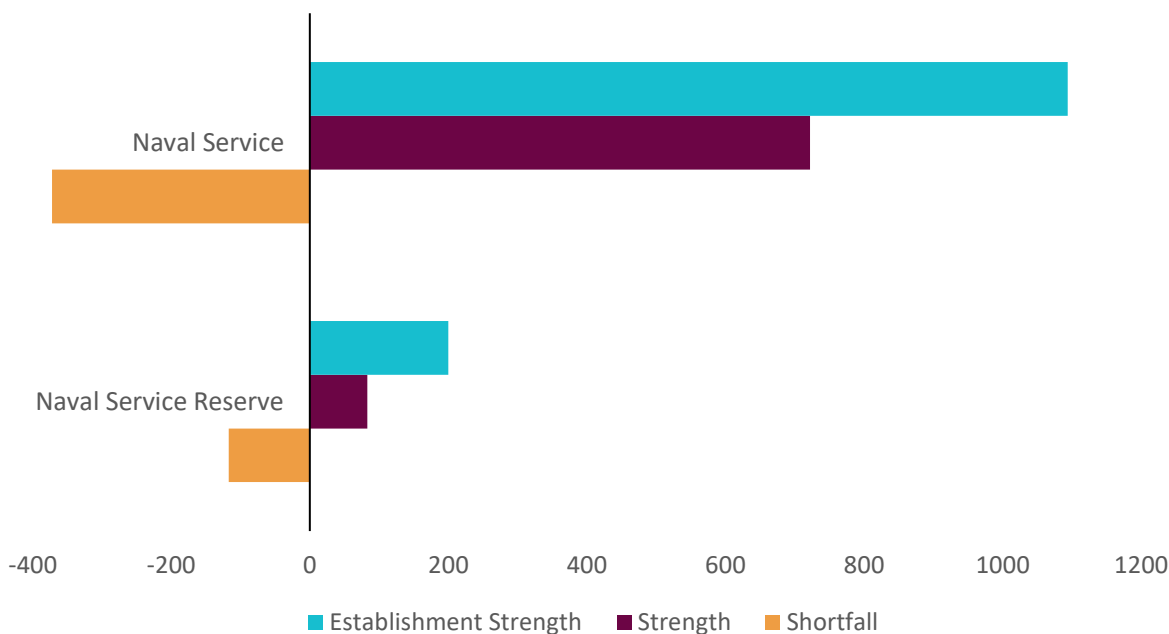
¹⁴ Department of Defence, Defence Forces Administrative data, 31st March 2024.

¹⁵ [Detailed Implementation Plan for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), November 2023.

¹⁶ Department of Defence, Defence Forces Administrative data, 31st March 2024.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Figure 1: Naval Service Establishment Strength, Strength, and Shortfall, 2024



Note: [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022 pg. 195-196 and Department of Defence Administrative Data, Q1 2024.

2.2. Overview of Naval Service

The Irish Naval Service is the State's principal seagoing agency.¹⁸ It is tasked with a general responsibility to meet the State's Defence capabilities, maritime defence requirements, uphold the Irish State's sovereign rights and a variety of defence and other important roles, such as operating jointly with the Army and Air Corps.¹⁹ The Naval Service must maintain a constant presence 24 hours a day, all year round, throughout Ireland's territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which stretches to 200 nautical miles off shore (132,000 nautical square miles).²⁰ Given the size of area it must monitor, the Naval Service is responsible for the protection of around 15 percent of Europe's fisheries.²¹

The Irish Naval Service is based in Hawlbowlane, Co. Cork, with smaller Naval Service Reserve units based in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford. The Naval Service is currently comprised of a flotilla of 8 ships, with 2 of these delivered in 2023 (see Table , pg.22). As recently as 2018 the fleet comprised 9 vessels²² before 3 ships were decommissioned in 2022.²³ These ships operate closely with the Army and Air Corps, undertaking supply and reconnaissance missions, overseas peace support operations, as well as participating in foreign visits across the world to support Irish trade and diplomacy.²⁴

¹⁸ [Ministerial Briefing](#), Department of Defence, December 2022, pg. 15.

¹⁹ [About the Naval Service](#), Military.ie, Irish Defence Forces.

²⁰ [White Paper on Defence](#), Department of Defence, August 2015, pg.38.

²¹ [Defence Forces Year in Review Statement 2022](#), Military.ie, Irish Defence Forces (accessed September 2023).

²² [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), May 2019, pg. 53.

²³ [Ministerial Briefing](#), Department of Defence, December 2022, pg. 32.

²⁴ [Roles of the Naval Service](#), Military.ie, Irish Defence Forces.

Given the Naval Services front line role in State Security, it has several key roles and responsibilities to uphold, which are unique compared to the other branches of the Defence Forces. These include the following:²⁵

- Defending territorial seas,
- Deferring intrusive or aggressive acts,
- Conducting maritime surveillance,
- Maintaining an armed naval presence,
- Countering port blockages, people or arms smuggling,
- Protecting maritime assets,
- Ensuring right of passage,
- Illegal drugs interdiction,
- Providing the primary diving team in the state, and
- Support army operations by sea lift and close naval support.

²⁵ [About the Naval Service](#), Military.ie, Irish Defence Forces.

3. Literature Review and Policy Context

To understand the current context of the Irish Naval Service, it is important to outline the policy background and context underpinning the Defence Forces since the 1990s, which significantly impacted the Naval Service. In addition, wider military reforms over much of the last decade, which were implemented following Ireland's financial crisis in 2008, have significantly shaped the organisation to the present day. The following sections provide a high-level overview of the policy literature over the years, and a more in-depth examination of key recent documents.

Within the literature there have been unfortunate lapses in breaking down the establishment strength consistently, with the PDF sometimes treated as a single entity, rather than more helpfully providing a breakdown by branch. Furthermore, the literature doesn't consistently treat civilian staff separately.

3.1. Timeline of Reforms

The Defence Forces (and Reserve Defence Forces) have been the subject of many reforms in recent decades. A major element of these reforms has been changes to the establishment of the branches of the PDF and of the reserve defence forces. Table 3 shows, in summary, the establishment strength of the PDF branches and reserve defence forces from a sampling of the published data available. It should be noted that historically, many documents were not explicit in detailing the breakdown of revisions to establishment strength.

In 1990, the [Gleeson Report](#) observed the strength of the Defence Forces of around 13,000 PDF personnel was below the establishment strength set in 1979, at 17,978 PDF and 22,110 reservists (what is now the Reserve Defence Forces (RDF)). Of the 13,000 personnel, the Naval Service establishment strength was 1,266 PDF and 675 Naval Service Reserve (NSR).²⁶⁻²⁷ Following the 1994 Price Waterhouse Review of the Defence Forces, in 1996 a *Defence Forces Review Implementation Plan* saw military strength reduced from 13,000 to 11,500 PDF personnel between 1996 and 1998.²⁸

In 2000, the first [White Paper on Defence](#) was published which further reduced overall strength to 10,500 personnel.²⁹ This set the Naval Service personnel ceiling at 1,144 personnel³⁰, and 400 naval reservists (Table 3). In 2009, a report of the [Special Group on Public Sector Numbers and Expenditure Programmes](#) aka Bord Snip Nua recommended further reductions to 10,000 PDF personnel, within 2 or 3 years "to minimise disruption and loss of expertise and capabilities."³¹ In 2011, the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure by the Department of Defence further revised down the establishment strength to 9,500 personnel,³² this set the ceiling for Naval Service strength at 1,094 PDF and 200 NSR. This establishment figure was retained for a sustained period (2011-2021),³³ in both the [White Paper on Defence](#) (2015) and [White Paper Review](#) (2019).

²⁶ [Report of the Commission on Remuneration and Conditions of Service in the Defence Forces](#), Department of Defence, July 1990 pg. 22.

²⁷ The Naval Service arm of the Reserve Defence Forces is known as the Naval Service Reserve (NSR).

²⁸ The author was only able to access a hard copy of this report. Some details of the report are available from secondary sources such as '[Dáil Éireann debate - Tuesday, 19 Jun 2012](#)'.

²⁹ [The White Paper on Defence: Review of Implementation](#), Department of Defence, 2007.

³⁰ [Defence Forces Strength, Vol. 545, No. 4](#), Dail Eireann Debate, December 2001.

³¹ [Report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes](#), Volume 2: Detailed Papers, July, 2009, pg. 46.

³² [Department of Defence and Defence Forces Statement of Strategy 2011-2014](#), Department of Defence and Defence Forces, 2012.

³³ [Department of Defence and Defence Forces Annual Report 2011](#), Department of Defence, 2012, pg. 13.

Table 3: Naval Service Establishment Strength

Category	1998	2000	2009	2012	2024	Commission
Permanent Defence Force	11,500	10,500	10,000	9,500	9,600*	11,500**
Naval Service	1,266	1,144	1,144	1,094	1,094	1,794***
Naval Service Reserve	400	400	400	200	200	400
Total Naval Service Strength (PDF + NSR)	1,666	1,544	1,544	1,294	1,294	2,194
Total Naval Strength as % PDF Strength	14%	15%	15%	14%	14%	19%

Source: [White Paper on Defence](#) (2000), Dept Defence, [White Paper on Defence Review of Implementation](#) (2007), Dept Defence, [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#) (2022). Note: 'Strength' refers to the establishment strength.

*Includes 89 personnel for Commission on Defence Forces Implementation. This was increased by a further 11 personnel in 2024 bringing the revised PDF establishment strength to 9,600. ** Includes a civilian component.

*** Indicative figures produced by the Commission, based on initial outline projections provided by the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, for the purposes of calculating an approximate annualised cost of a step up to LOA 2.

In 2022 the [Commission on the Defence Forces](#) examined the wider Defence Forces to ensure it was fit for purpose to meet immediate requirements, and develop a longer term vision past 2030.³⁴ It recommended increasing PDF establishment strength to 11,500 personnel, including a civilian component, potentially providing for an additional 950 PDF naval personnel (inclusive of a distribution of 250 joint staff) and 200 additional NSR personnel.³⁵ If fully implemented, this would increase the size of the Naval Service to c. 2,200, and allow double crewing for ships.³⁶ Double crewing ensures personnel could be rotated regularly while also ensuring ships can undertake patrols when required.

From examining the policy literature over the past three decades, it is clear that implementing the Commission's recommendations would result in the Defence Forces having the highest establishment figure since 1998 and the Naval Service having the highest establishment strength in its history. Yet it is important to note, this would simply unwind many of the staffing cuts measures introduced over successive years. In addition, the Commission outlines the additional 2,000 personnel by 2028 includes both military and civilians, but there is no clarity as to the breakdown of civilian to military staff in the proposed staffing increases. Simple assumptions would suggest that the move from single to double crewing would necessitate between 362 (LOA 2) and 496 (LOA 3) more sea-going naval service personnel (Table 9).

Table 5 provides a summary of the key messages from different defence policy documents and literature over much of the last two decades.

3.2. White Paper on Defence (2015)

In 2015, the White Paper on Defence was produced to outline the medium-term approach to defence provision and national security of the State out to 2025. This document would account for the evolving nature of threats, such as cyber security, terrorism, disruption to energy supplies and loss of critical infrastructure.³⁷ It aimed to ensure the State's defence policy was flexible, roles were consistent with requirements, and defence policy contributed to wider economic and social policy. The document

³⁴ [Minister Coveney announces Government approval to establish Independent Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Press Release, Department of Defence, 2020.

³⁵ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022, pg.217.

³⁶ Ibid, pg. 143.

³⁷ [White Paper on Defence](#), Department of Defence, 2015, pg.3.

committed to 9,500 PDF personnel, 4,069 RDF, and set out several key aspects of the Naval Service, including ambitions for the fleet, as well as its roles and responsibilities.

The White Paper set the maintenance of an 8-ship flotilla as a minimum requirement,³⁸ with a requirement for 3 additional vessels as part of the ship replacement programme, including two Coastal Patrol and one Helicopter Patrol Vessels.³⁹ A Multi-Role Vessel (MRV) would also be purchased to provide flexibility across a range of maritime tasks. It outlined there was a requirement to maintain and upgrade existing vessels, reflecting emerging operational requirements and new technology. It further proposed, where additional funding was available beyond the level necessary to maintain existing capabilities, the Naval Service should purchase additional ships. Finally, it outlined the Naval Service Reserve strength should increase to 300 as it offers a cost-effective contribution to the State's defence capability and support the permanent members of the Naval Service.

The White Paper outlined some of the Naval Service's key taskings and areas of responsibility, including how its capabilities and assets would be available to support peace operations of the United Nations. It reaffirmed the Naval Service's commitment as part of an Aid to Civil Power, such as in search and recovery operations and clearing underwater mines and explosives,⁴⁰ to engage in drug interdiction operations, such as monitoring and tracking, and support An Garda Síochána and other bodies. Finally, it outlined the role of the Naval Service as necessary for the safeguarding and monitoring of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), fisheries protection, and the protection of the marine environment within the zone. The Naval Service's primary tasking is to provide a fishery protection service, but also multi tasked with general maritime patrolling and respond to incidents, such as pollution accidents or search and rescue missions.

3.3. White Paper on Defence Update (2019)

In 2019 an update to the White Paper on Defence outlined the aggregate threats facing the State had not altered in a way to justify increasing the overall stated threat level. However, the wider global situation had become more complex and uncertain, such as with increasing cyber-attacks and espionage on other states. It proposed no new changes to Defence policy, or the establishment military strength reiterated in 2015.⁴¹ The report also acknowledged the shortfall in Defence strength and recognised the Naval Service as a branch was significantly impacted by staffing issues. The Naval Service was identified as a key priority for the resolution of staffing shortfalls, as these impact on operations and operational ability of ships.⁴²

In term of funding, the update outlined increased multi-annual capital investment for the Defence Forces under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027. For the Naval Service, this included funding a Mid-Life Extension programme for two older vessels in the fleet to ensure reliability of the vessels. It also outlined the delivery of four new Offshore Patrol Vessels between 2014 and 2018, and acquiring a Multi Role Vessel to replace the navy's flagship, the L.É. Eithne, in part due to more difficult sea conditions as a result of climate change.⁴³ Additional infrastructural funding was outlined for the upgrading and modernisation of Naval Services facilities.

³⁸ Ibid, pg.66.

³⁹ Ibid, pg. 66

⁴⁰ Ibid, pg.35.

⁴¹ [White Paper on Defence Update 2019](#), Department of Defence, 2019, pg. 2.

⁴² Ibid. pg. 3.

⁴³ Ibid. pg. 77.

However, the report identified that in order to complete identified projects further capital spending was required.⁴⁴ It noted the existing funding allocation would not provide for any other service led priorities, including radar surveillance capabilities or additional naval ships. Finally, the update outlined plans to increase the Naval Service Reserve strength to 300 reservists was postponed, with the First Line Reserve (comprising former PDF personnel) identified as a resource to address shortfalls in Naval Service strength.⁴⁵

3.4. Defence Forces Pay Commission

In 2016, a Public Service Pay Commission was established to advise the Government on public service remuneration policy and how to unwind emergency financial measures introduced from 2009 to 2015. It identified that while there were generally no recruitment issues into the public service, specific areas (including the Defence Forces) were experiencing challenges. The Pay Commission's scope was expanded to conduct a broad review of the PDF given that the evidence suggested issues with recruitment and retention in the sector.⁴⁶ This led to the Defence Forces Pay Commission being established in 2018.

The Defence Forces Pay Commission identified that despite the Exchequer devoting significant resources to recruitment, the Defence Forces still had substantial recruitment and retention problems, with an 8.1 percent turnover of personnel in 2018. It noted over half of those leaving tended to do so within the first 5 years, 75 percent of leavers did so voluntarily, and were generally amongst the enlisted ranks. It recommended:

- Certain allowances associated with military service be augmented, such as Military Service Allowance (MSA),
- The full and immediate restoration of allowances cut under the Haddington Road Agreement in 2013 (e.g., Naval Service in Charge Allowance),
- The completion of a review of technical pay for certain specialist areas (e.g., Naval Service Engineers) should be reviewed, and
- That some form of incentivising long service (higher levels of payment granted upon reaching milestone periods in employment) be considered for certain ranks.

The report highlighted that in 2018 the shortfall between Naval Service required and actual strength was almost double that of the wider Defence Forces,⁴⁷ with almost 15 percent of the entire Naval Service strength leaving the organisation in that year.⁴⁸ This personnel loss affected the ability of the Naval Service to adhere to appropriate rotation times between sea and shore duties, as well as work requirements, which further exacerbated retention issues. This loss of personnel affected the ability to undertake maintenance and Annual Patrol Plans for periods at away sea, which require each ship to conduct 200 patrol days at sea annually, consisting of 4-week patrols.

The Pay Commission also noted that personnel studying within the National Maritime College are considered part of Naval operational strength, despite them not being available for sea going duties. In addition, those responsible for delivering and overseeing the training of personnel were also considered as part of operational strength, despite being unable to relieve sea going personnel or undertake military duties. Finally, the report emphasised the highly skilled and technical nature of

⁴⁴ Ibid. pg. 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid. pg. 48.

⁴⁶ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg.4.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pg.53.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pg.56.

Naval Service personnel, given 65 percent of staff were in the technical stream and required continual and ongoing training across a variety of skills areas.

3.5. Commission on the Defence Forces (2022)

The [Programme for Government: Our Shared Future](#) (2020) committed to establishing a Commission on the Defence Forces (referred to as the Commission hereafter) to consider the appropriate medium and longer term defence requirements of the State. The Commission was to have "will have regard to immediate requirements while also seeking to develop a longer term vision for beyond 2030",⁴⁹ "with a mandate to recommend appropriate capabilities, structures and staffing of the Permanent and Reserve Defence Forces, in order to ensure they remain agile, flexible and adaptive."⁵⁰ Following the drafting of the Terms of Reference for the Commission, a report by the Commission on the Defence Forces was published in 2022.

The Commission identified understaffing as an immediate cause for concern within the Defence Forces,⁵¹ including the Naval Service, and that the necessary resources were not provided to support the delivery of the White Paper on Defence or match its ambition.⁵² Many recommendations covered pay, capital investment, and broader structural reforms to the Naval Service. To achieve these outcomes, the Commission proposed three tiers of delivery, or levels of ambition (LOA):⁵³

- Level of Ambition 1: Maintain current levels of Defence Forces capability to uphold sovereign rights and serving on peace support operations to the same degree as at present.
- Level of Ambition 2: Increasing expenditure by 50 percent to €1.5 billion (in 2022 prices).⁵⁴
- Level of Ambition 3: Provide for conventional capability i.e., the provision of full spectrum defence capabilities comparable to similar sized European countries. This involves increasing expenditure to €3 billion annually, based on Ireland's GNI*.

Recommendations specific to the Naval Service included accelerating the upgrade and replacement of the fleet, increasing the number of ships to 9 by 2030 (LOA 2), or at least 12 ships by 2040 (LOA 3). It also proposed double crewing for each ship, to support appropriate rotations, and increasing the number of annual patrol days to an absolute minimum of 220 per ship. In order to achieve these aims, it estimated that some 700 naval personnel at an estimated annual cost of €35 million, would be required.⁵⁵ The Commission stated that for the Naval Service Reserve "a minimum establishment of 400 personnel is recommended".⁵⁶

The Commission further recommended creating the positions of Chief and Deputy Chief of the Navy to raise, train and sustain the maritime force to deliver operational requirements. The Navy should comprise a structure that can manage, maintain and administer a modern and balanced fleet. It would be on par with other branches of the Defence Forces, with the Chief of the Navy responsible for maintaining a national Recognised Maritime Picture (RMP) to monitor Ireland's territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and detect and respond to any infringements on Irish sovereignty. The Naval Service should operate jointly with the Air Corps and utilise maritime patrol aircraft and surface

⁴⁹ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022 pg. 151.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pg. 1.

⁵² *Ibid*, pg. iv.

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 26-7.

⁵⁴ The Detailed Implementation Plan set the timeline for delivery as 2028.

⁵⁵ This number rises to 950 when the distribution of joint staff numbers are included.

⁵⁶ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022 pg. 130.

patrols to conduct surveillance, as well as utilising maritime UAVs, satellite technology and coastal radar.⁵⁷ Table 4 provides a summary of the recommendations under LOA 2 and LOA 3.

Table 4: Summary of Key Components of Levels of Ambition 2 and 3

Requirements	LOA 2	LOA 3
Flotilla	9 Vessels (by 2030)	12 Vessels (by 2040)
Crewing Levels	Double	Double
Patrol Days (per vessel)	200	220
Personnel (Naval Service)*	+700	+700
Personnel (Naval Service Reserve)**	+200	+200

Source: [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019.

Note:*Indicative figures prepared by Commission on Defence **The report states (pg.133) that it does not apply "the three levels of ambition (LOA) approach in the same way as adopted elsewhere in this report. The RDF is at present in such a poor state that the Commissions believes the more relevant options are quite stark: regeneration or abolition." As such the recommendation for the doubling of NSR establishment is presented as part of both LOA 2 and LOA 3.

Of the Commission's 130 recommendations, at least 18 referred directly to the Naval Service (

Table 16), with other more broadly worded recommendations also affecting the Naval Service (e.g., concerning Defence Forces pay). A target date of 2025 was identified by the Commission as reasonable to deliver some of the recommendations to achieve transformational change. With implementation already underway, 18 of the 130 recommendations were due to be fully complete by end 2023 with a further 36 due to be completed in 2024.⁵⁸ This included providing all PDF ranks with the full rate of military service allowance, and removal of the requirement for 3 star privates (Army) / Able Seamen (Naval Service) to 'mark time' for the first 3 years.⁵⁹

The Government accepted LOA 2, as identified by the Commission, with a number of follow up documents produced to identify the progress being made with implementing the recommendations. These documents included:

- High-Level Action Plan (2022), setting out the Governments response to each of the proposed recommendations.
- Update on High Level Action Plan (2023), to provide an update on the status of the 38 early actions set out in the High-Level Action Plan
- Detailed Implementation Plan (2023), built off the previous documents, and sets out the ambitious programme of work to achieve Level of Ambition 2 by 2028.

Since the publication of the Commission's report and the subsequent follow up documents, the Department of Defence has introduced other additional measures and reforms to the Defence Forces which were not outlined by the Commission's report. These include:

⁵⁷ Ibid, pg. 66.

⁵⁸ [Detailed Implementation Plan for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), 2023 pg. 4-5.

⁵⁹ This means that personnel must complete 3 years in the Naval Service before being eligible to receive a pay increment.

- Increasing the maximum recruitment age from 25 to 39 for the PDF and the RDF.⁶⁰ (affecting General Service recruits, Cadets and some specialists),
- Increasing the maximum recruitment age for Direct Entry Officer specialists to 50 years,
- Increasing the age of retirement to 60 years,⁶¹ then rising further to 62,⁶² and
- The Naval Service Sea Going Commitment scheme was extended in 2022 for a further 2 years, with applicants eligible to apply for the scheme after 1 years' service.⁶³ Subsequently, from January 2024 the Scheme was amalgamated with the Patrol Duty Allowance, into one allowance, which was doubled for personnel after 10 days of patrols, to make a "less complex" structure of sea going allowances.⁶⁴

Summary of Key Defence Literature

Table 5: Summary of Key Naval Service Literature

Report Title, Year & Author	Key Message
White Paper on Defence (2000) & White Paper Review (2007) – Dept. Defence	Reduce PDF strength by 1,000 to 10,500 personnel. Including reduction in naval strength from 1,292 establishment in 1998 to 1,144 and reduce Naval Service Reserve strength from 675 to 400. Specified navy should operate with 8 ships and should purchase a new (9th) naval ship to enhance fisheries protection when possible. Outlined replacement programme for older naval ships was being drafted.
Special Group on Public Sector Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (2009)	Identified savings of €53 million from Defence Vote. Recommended reducing PDF strength by 500 personnel to 10,000 within 3 years, saving €25 million. Extend vessel replacement programme beyond desired timeline. Reduce RDF strength from 4,900 to 4,500 and undertake a Value for Money Review on the reserve (potentially saving €5.6 million).
Comprehensive Review of Defence Expenditure (2011) – Dept Defence	Reduce Defence Forces strength by a further 500 personnel, down to a total of 9,500 PDF personnel from 2012 to 2014. Reorganisation of the army structure from 3 Brigades down to 2. Necessary to replace two naval vessels despite wider equipment cutbacks.
Comprehensive Review of 'Legacy' Expenditure Programmes and Policy Reforms (2011) – Dept Public Expenditure and Reform	Recommended abolishing the RDF, including the NSR, yielding potential savings of €4.4 million, as part of overarching resource prioritisation. Alternatively, should downsize RDF by amalgamating all units in a singular Reserve Brigade for the entire State.
Value for Money Review of the Reserve Defence Forces (2012) – Dept Defence	Reduce Reserve Defence Forces strength from 4,500 to 4,069. Within this, it reduced Naval Service Reserve strength from 400 to 200. Achieve potential savings of €11 million <i>per annum</i> .

⁶⁰ This includes 25 for the Army General Service, 27 for the Naval Service General Service, and 26 for cadetship competitions.

⁶¹ [Tánaiste announces changes to mandatory retirement age and maximum recruitment age for Permanent Defence Forces Personnel](#), Press Release, Department of Defence, 2024.

⁶² Department of Defence, 'Defence Forces Mandatory Retirement Age Increases' (June 2024).

⁶³ [Minister for Defence welcomes the extension of the Naval Personnel Sea Going Credit](#), Press Release, Department of Defence, 2022.

⁶⁴ [Increase in Patrol Duty Allowance for the Naval Service, Press Release](#), Department of Defence, 2023.

White Paper on Defence (2015) – Dept Defence	Outlined a minimum requirement of an 8-ship flotilla, including 2 coastal patrol vessels, one helicopter patrol vessel, a multi role vessel for maritime flexibility. Maintain and upgrade existing vessels for operational requirements and new technology. Additional ships should be purchased if additional funding is available. Naval Service Reserve should increase to 300 personnel given cost effectiveness in bolstering naval capacity.
White Paper on Defence Update (2019) – Dept Defence	Reaffirmed the 2015 assessment of threat levels to the State. Acknowledged the PDF, especially in the navy, was below strength. Funding provided was insufficient to deliver the equipment identified in the White Paper on time.
Defence Forces Pay Commission (2019) – Public Service Pay Commission	Naval Service turnover in 2018 was almost 15 percent, double wider Defence Forces, and impacting patrol plans and rotation times of personnel. Should increase military service allowance, restore allowances cut in 2013, introduce long service increments and review technical specialist pay for personnel with specialist skills.
Commission on the Defence Forces (2022) – Commission on Defence Forces	<p>Proposed 3 levels of ambition (LOA) options. LOA2 was ultimately approved; however, the Commission detailed the three options:</p> <p>LOA 1 is broadly the maintenance of the <i>status quo</i>.</p> <p>LOA2 involved increasing funding to €1.5 billion, increasing overall strength to 11,500 personnel. The Commission estimated this would include an additional 700 PDF naval personnel and recommended increasing the Naval Service Reserve to 400 personnel. Increase the number of naval ships to 9 by 2030, and provide double crews for each vessel.</p> <p>LOA3 involved increasing funding to €3 billion annually. This included an ambition to have a flotilla of at least 12 vessels by 2040.</p> <p>Decisions based on the options set out in the Commission's report were set out in the High-Level Action Plan for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces.</p>
High Level Action Plan for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces (2022) – Dept Defence	Set out each of the 130 recommendations identified by the Commission on Defence Forces, with the proposed response after follow-up discussions and interdepartmental consultations. This outlined 48 recommendations were accepted, 55 were accepted in principle, 17 were subject to further evaluation and 10 were to be reverted back to Government.
Detailed Implementation Plan for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces (2023) – Dept Defence	The implementation plan set out a pathway for implementing the Commission on Defence Forces' recommendations, as well as the governance arrangements to oversee them. It outlined next steps and immediate priorities for 2024, strategic objectives, governance arrangements and detailed implementation timelines

4. Structure of Ireland's Naval Service

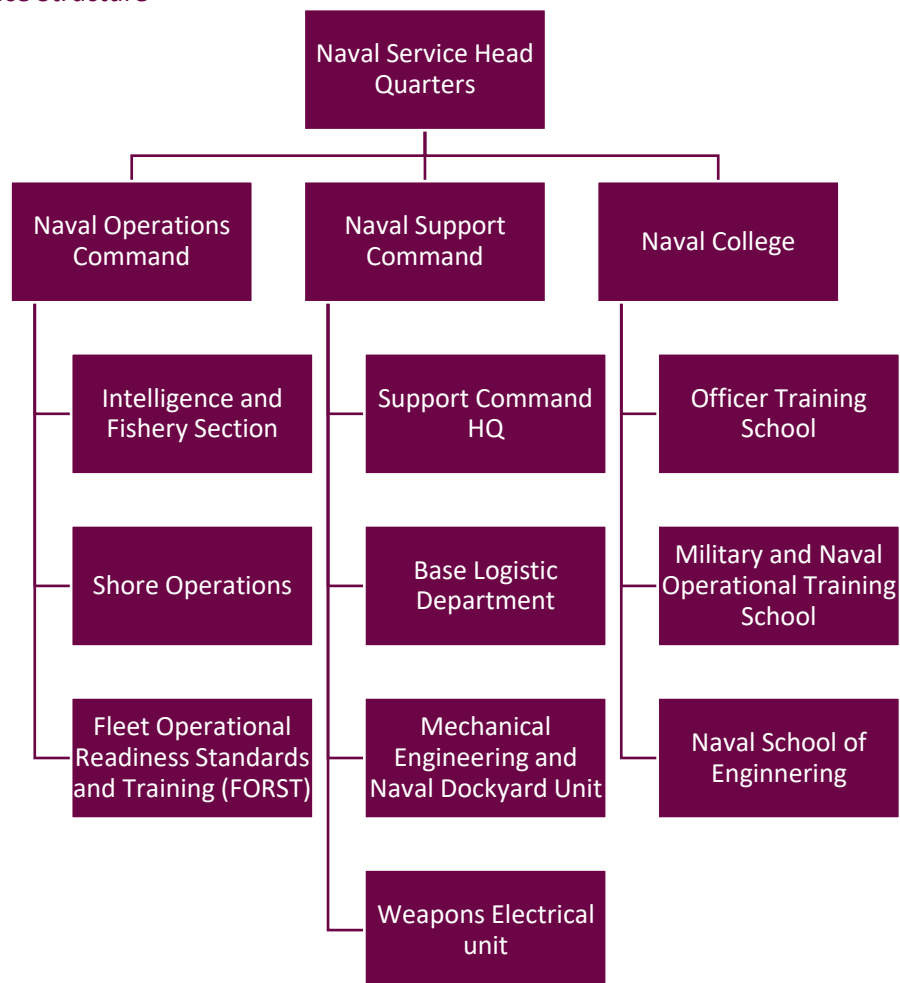
This section presents a high-level overview of the command structure and sub-units within the Naval Service. It outlines the rank structure and responsibilities including officers, enlisted, specialists and the Naval Service Reserve, and examines the vessels currently in use by the Naval Service.

4.1. Organisational and Unit Structure

The Naval Service is structured across four main branches, Naval Service Headquarters, Naval Operational Command, Naval Support Command and the Naval College. Each Naval Command is responsible for a different area, its performance and the delivery of tasks. These tasks and responsibilities range from coordination to operational and intelligence roles, vessel support and maintenance, to staff training and recruitment. Each command contains several sections, which are then comprised of several subunits. Each layer has a vital role in ensuring the proper functioning of the Naval Service, and its ability to fulfil its roles and obligations to the State.

Figure 2 sets out the core structure of the Naval Service across the 4 Naval Service Commands. Additional detail, including the 27 subunits, and details of their specific responsibility and role within the wider Naval Service are set out in Appendix 2: Organisational Structure of the Naval Service (pg.63).

Figure 2: Naval Service Structure



Source: [About the Naval Service](#), Military.ie, Irish Defence Forces, and Department of Defence, Correspondence (02 July 2024).

4.2. Personnel and Rank Structure

The Naval Service, as with other militaries and branches of the Defence Forces, operates using a rank-based hierarchy. This is a pyramid structure, divided between enlisted personnel at the bottom and officers at the top. Each component has an organisational structure determined by its own operational needs. For example, number of officers as a percentage of the Irish Defence Forces establishment strength is higher within the Air Corps (19 percent) and Naval Service (17 percent) compared to the Army (12 percent). Each rank has a set number of personnel required, known as the establishment strength, to effectively deliver Naval Service obligations.

Table 6: Naval Service PDF Rank and Establishment Strength

Military Rank	Class	Naval Service Est. Strength (2012)	Percentage of Est. Strength
Commodore	Officer	1	0
Captain	Officer	2	0
Commander	Officer	13	1
Lieutenant Commander	Officer	45	4
Lieutenant	Officer	81	7
Sub Lieutenant & Ensign	Officer	41	4
Warrant Officer	NCO / Enlisted	6	1
Senior Chief Petty Officer	NCO / Enlisted	7	1
Chief Petty Officer	NCO / Enlisted	75	7
Senior Petty Officer	NCO / Enlisted	15	1
Petty Officer	NCO / Enlisted	226	21
Leading Seaman	NCO / Enlisted	180	16
Seaman (Ordinary/Able)	Enlisted	402	37
Recruit	Enlisted	-	-
Cadet	Enlisted	-	-
Total Strength		1,094	100%

Source: [Defence Forces Parliamentary Question 229, 2023](#), [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force, 2019](#) and PBO Calculations. Note: Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO).

Table 6 presents the 2012 Naval Service establishment strength by rank, rank as a percentage of establishment strength, and the classification of each rank. In total, the Naval Service has an establishment strength of 1,094 personnel, which comprises 17 percent Officers (183 personnel) and enlisted 83 percent (911 personnel). However, by end March 2024 the Naval Service was at 66 percent of its establishment strength, with Officers accounting for around 21 percent and enlisted 78 percent of current strength.

4.3. Enlisted and Non-Commissioned Officer Ranks

Enlisted ranks, which ranges from recruits up to Warrant Officer, account for 83 percent of Naval Service establishment strength. These are personnel who enter the Naval Service, often at entry level.⁶⁵ While this contrasts with many public and private sector organisations⁶⁶ who often recruit directly for specific grades, this is in line with other international militaries. Ordinary and Able Seamen are the most numerous ranks, with an establishment strength of 402 personnel, followed by Leading Seamen at 180 personnel. Together, these enlisted ranks account for 53 percent of the Naval Service establishment strength.

Those enlisting in the Naval Service commence training at the rank of recruit, for a period of 12 weeks. Upon successful completion, they are promoted to Ordinary Seamen (O/S) and following completion of branch specialisation training,⁶⁷ over a further 12 weeks, they are promoted to Able Seamen (A/S). Completion of further Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) training, and where vacancies at non-entry grades exist, personnel can be promoted to a Leading Seamen (L/S), and subsequently to Petty Officer (P/O).

4.4. Officer Ranks

Naval Service officers account for 17 percent of the Naval Service's establishment strength, but comprise 21 percent of Naval Service strength as of 31 March 2024. Naval Officers can be recruited via Cadetships, which is an entry/ training grade, yet other avenues also exist to recruit officers, such as direct entry, commissioning from the ranks and recommissioning of ex-PDF members with specialist skills.

Officers undertaking a cadetship begin training at the rank of Cadet, with the Naval cadetship training lasting for just under 2 years (21 months) due to specific training requirements. In comparison, army cadetships occur over 17 months.⁶⁸

Certain specialised officer roles, which require unique, specialist skills, can be inducted at higher ranks (see 4.5 Naval Service Specialist Roles) via Direct Entry, or via cadetships. Direct entry Marine Engineering Officers are inducted as Lieutenants while Direct Entry Naval Service Operation Branch Officers and Naval Service Electrical Engineering Officers are inducted at the rank of Sub-Lieutenant.

Following completion of training and receiving their Commission, cadets without a third level qualification are promoted to the rank of Ensign, and automatically promoted to the rank of Sub Lieutenant after 2 years (Table 7). Those with a third level qualification are commissioned at the rank of Sub Lieutenant, and automatically promoted to the rank of Lieutenant after 4 years. Following their commissioning, the naval officers are referred to as 'Officers Under Training' (OUT), whereby they must now undergo a further 3 years training (Operations Branch Officer) or 6 years training (Marine Engineering Officer) to fully qualify in their area of specialisation. Therefore, to fully train a Naval Service officer, depending on the skills required, can take between 5 to 8 years from start to finish.

⁶⁵ Personnel can also be recruited through direct entry of specialists and the re-enlistment of ex PDF personnel with specialised skills.

⁶⁶ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022.

⁶⁷ Upon completion of recruit training, personnel are assigned to one of the following branches: Seamans, Mechanics, Communications or Logistics.

⁶⁸ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022, pg. 113.

Table 7: Promotion Timeline for Officer Entrants to Naval Service

Year	Third Level Education	No Third Level Education	Direct Entry Positions
-	Cadetship (Year 1)	Cadetship (Year 1)	
-	Cadetship (Year 2)	Cadetship (Year 2)	
1	Sub Lieutenant	Ensign	Sub-Lieutenant/ Lieutenant
2			
3		Sub Lieutenant	
4	Lieutenant		

Note: A further 3 to 6 years is required for officers depending on their branch and skill specialisations.

Together these ranks comprise 11 percent of establishment naval strength. Where certain non-entry vacancies exist, personnel can be promoted immediately to the rank of Lieutenant (7 percent of Naval Service establishment strength). Finally, the remaining officer ranks of Lieutenant Commander (45 personnel), Commander (13 personnel), Captain (2) and Commodore (1) are the most senior ranks, comprise around 5 percent of Naval Service establishment strength.

4.5. Naval Service Specialist Roles

While most entry level vacancies are filled through general service recruitment, the Naval Service also hold direct entry recruitment competitions to fill specialist positions at specific ranks.⁶⁹ This is in addition to promotional opportunities amongst existing personnel to fill these positions. These specialist roles require specific skill sets and qualifications as prerequisites for entry. For officers these are Marine Engineering Officer, Electrical Officer and Operations Branch Officer. For enlisted these are Radio/Radar Technician, Engine Room Artificer, Hull Artificer, Electrical Artificer, and Chef. However, the PBO was unable to identify the strength required across specialised roles and ranks.

As noted, there are a number of entry routes to the Naval Service depending on the specialist skills required, namely Cadetships and direct entry. While in 2020, as part of the [Emergency Measures in the Public Interest \(Covid-19\) Act](#), new measures were introduced that enabled former members of the PDF with specialist skills to rejoin the Defence Forces, including both reenlistment and recommissioning. Following the completion of the necessary military training for the appropriate rank, and depending on the career specialisation, these specialist roles may be promoted to an NCO or officer rank (at Sub Lieutenant or Lieutenant) as appropriate.

Other specialist skills recruited directly by the Naval Service, at NCO level, include radio radar technicians, hull artificers, engine room artificers and electrical artificers.⁷⁰ As with other limited direct entry roles, these are high skill areas which require prior qualifications as part of eligibility. The Commission on the Defence Forces recommended utilising this direct entry recruitment method more to quickly address vacancies in key positions.⁷¹ It is also important to note that this means that some specialist roles may require some entry level personnel to complete around 5 or 6 years of training to fully complete the trade qualification, military training or third level education.

⁶⁹ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg. 54.

⁷⁰ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg. 56.

⁷¹ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022, pg. xiii.

4.6. Naval Service Reserve

The Naval Service Reserve (NSR) is a part time organisation, with reservists used to augment PDF Naval Service crews during operational patrols for short periods. In addition, the NSR conduct their own operations and trainings within their respective ports, such as ship sightings and intelligence gathering.⁷² Currently, the NSR operates on an establishment strength of 200 personnel, across five locations in Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Dublin as well as a technical support unit. Naval Service Reserve recruit training comprises a 2-week period of full-time training, followed by a further 2-week full time training block to the rank of Able Seaman. These blocks are supplemented by additional weekday parade nights or weekend trainings as required. Further periods of full-time training are required for promotions up through the ranks.

The Naval Service Reserve operates using the same rank structure as the PDF and comes under the Shore Operations branch of the Naval Service structure (Table 18). The White Paper on Defence (2015) recommended increasing the NSR to 300 personnel, the Commission on Defence recommended further increases to 400 personnel. However, figures for Q1 2024 indicate the NSR has a strength of 83 personnel.⁷³ However, an important consideration is that in contrast to the PDF, the Whole-Time Equivalent (WTE) of a reservist is not clear. This means, while it is recommended the NSR strength be increased to 400, it is unclear whether this would result in an additional 400 WTE being available, given attendance is not mandatory and is in a part-time capacity. As a result, consideration of an appropriate WTE weighting for Naval Reservists, as opposed to headcount, should be considered to appropriately measure the true strength of the NSR for broader naval service military requirements.

It is important to note, when ships are unable to go to sea or undertake patrols, this prevents NSR reservists from completing their key training requirements. This impacts the ability to progress through the ranks and qualify in key naval service skills which can subsequently be used within the Naval Service to support their PDF colleagues. This potential inability to properly complete training poses challenges with the NSR's efficacy, retention and overall strength.

A point to note is while all ranks in the Naval Service Reserve are sea going, the Naval Service Reserve does not have access to its own ships or vessels for conducting extended offshore patrols. Instead, the NSR must augment the permanent Naval Service on any existing vessels undertaking patrols. Furthermore, while the NSR is used as an additional support on patrols, Naval Reservists cannot be used as direct replacements or substitutes for PDF staff. This is due to the fact reservists are not trained in the same specialisation skills, or for the same length of time, as the PDF. Finally, the Naval Service Reserve does not currently provide any legislative provisions to reservists to guarantee their availability to undertake sea patrols, for example, where the patrol schedule conflicts with civilian employment, given the non-mandatory nature of attendance by personnel.

The [Defence \(Amendment\) Act](#) (2021) removed the prohibition of reservists serving overseas, enabling reservists to volunteer to be deployed abroad, depending on skills and expertise requirements. The Department outlined there is ongoing work to develop and implement employment protection measures for civilian employment, but only where reservists volunteer to be deployed in support of the PDF. The Commission recommended considering employment protection legislation "to protect reservists and ensure their availability when needed."⁷⁴

⁷² [Military.ie](#), About the Naval Service Reserve.

⁷³ Department of Defence, Defence Forces Administrative Data, 07 June 2024.

⁷⁴ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022, pg. xxvi.

4.7. Naval Service Vessels

The Naval Service flotilla currently comprises of eight ships, which includes four Offshore Patrol Vessels, two Large Patrol Vessels, and two Inshore Patrol Vessels purchased from New Zealand in May 2023.⁷⁵ Each vessel completes no more 200 patrol days annually,⁷⁶ suggesting a potential total of 1,600 patrol days may be completed between 8 vessels. In August 2023, The Naval Service adopted a three-ship operational posture with two ships operational and another ship on stand-by. The decision to reduce the number of operational ships was made as a result of the previously acknowledged recruitment and retention difficulties in the Naval Service, in particular for specialist positions.⁷⁷ Further details on each vessel is provided in Table 8.

Under the different level of ambitions proposed the Commission recommended increasing the fleet to between 9 by 2030 (LOA 2) or 12 ships by 2040 (LOA 3) and increasing the minimum annual patrol days to 220 days per ship (LOA 2). This would potentially increase the number of annual patrol days to between 1,980 and 2,640 days if adopted. Yet this was predicated on an additional recommendation each ship be double crewed, to allow for sufficient rotation times for naval staff to minimise workload and the negative impacts and work life balance of sea going duties.⁷⁸ It indicated this recommendation would deliver around 2,000 patrol days per year, over twice the 810 patrol days completed in 2022. With this capability the Commission believed it would provide a greater prospect for the Naval Service to participate in overseas peace support operations, crisis management and humanitarian relief.

Table 8: Naval Service Ships, 2024

Ship Name (Series)	Core Crew	Year Entered Service	Years' Service	Length (m)	Vessel Type
L.É. Roisin (P.51)	44	1999	24	78.8	Large Patrol Vessel
L.É. Niamh (P.52)	44	2001	22	78.8	Large Patrol Vessel
L.É. Samuel Beckett (P.61)	44	2014	9	90.0	Offshore Patrol Vessel
L.É. James Joyce (P.62)	44	2015	8	90.0	Offshore Patrol Vessel
L.É. William Butler Yeats (P.63)	44	2016	7	90.0	Offshore Patrol Vessel
L.É. George Bernard Shaw (P.64)	44	2018	5	90.0	Offshore Patrol Vessel
L.É. Aoibhinn (P.71)	24	2023	-	55.0	Inshore Patrol Vessels
L.É. Gobnait (P.72)	24	2023	-	55.0	Inshore Patrol Vessels

Source: [The Fleet - Defence Forces](#) (military.ie).

The existing naval vessels commenced service at different stages, ranging from 1999 to 2023. The size and crew of each vessel differs, varying from 55 to 90 meters long, with most vessels requiring a crew of 44 personnel (comprised of 38 enlisted and 6 officers). The two recently delivered Inshore Patrol Vessels were purchased under the naval regeneration plan,⁷⁹ to replace two now decommissioned

⁷⁵ [Ceremonial handover of two Inshore Patrol Vessels from the New Zealand Government to the Irish Government](#), Press Release, Department of Defence, 2023.

⁷⁶ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg. 57.

⁷⁷ [Dáil Éireann debate - Tuesday, 2 Jul 2024](#).

⁷⁸ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg. 57.

⁷⁹ [Irish government buys two new naval patrol vessels](#), BBC News, March 2023.

ships. These are much smaller at 55 meters in length and require a smaller core crew of 24 personnel. Yet, questions were raised around suitability and whether these new vessels are “fit for purpose”.⁸⁰⁻⁸¹

Taking these figures, Table 9 shows core crew required to man all the current 8 vessels in the Irish Naval Service, as well as the Multi Role Vessel due to be purchased, to undertake sea going activities. It also includes estimates for the Commission's recommendation to provide for a double crew for ships, to allow appropriate rotation times. Based on the present number of vessels, a crew of 362 sea going personnel would be required to crew each ship at its core levels. This is estimated at 337 enlisted and 55 officers, assuming the ratio of officers is the same as on current vessels. As noted in Table 11, in 2024, there are 722 personnel out of 1,094 needed. With the purchase of the Multi Role Vessel, total sea-going crew requirements (362) will exceed 50% of current strength (722).

Table 9: Core Crew for Naval Service Vessels (LOA 2 and LOA 3)

Ship Name (Series)	Core Crew	Core Crew (Double Crew Vessels)	Level of Ambition (LOA)
L.É. Róisín (P.51)	44	88	LOA 2
L.É. Niamh (P.52)	44	88	LOA 2
L.É. Samuel Beckett (P.61)	44	88	LOA 2
L.É. James Joyce (P.62)	44	88	LOA 2
L.É. William Butler Yeats (P.63)	44	88	LOA 2
L.É. George Bernard Shaw (P.64)	44	88	LOA 2
L.É. Aoibhinn (P.71) (Purchased 2023)	24	48	LOA 2
L.É. Gobnait (P.72) (Purchased 2023)	24	48	LOA 2
Multi Role Vessel (Purchase Ongoing)	50	100	LOA 2
Crew Requirement	362	724	
New Vessel 1 (Recommended by 2040) *	44	88	LOA 3
New Vessel 2 (Recommended by 2040) *	44	88	LOA 3
New Vessel 3 (Recommended by 2040) *	44	88	LOA 3
Additional Crew Requirement under LOA 3	132	264	

Note: * Denotes vessels are assumed to be the same size and require the same core crew as most other vessels in the naval flotilla, until otherwise specified.

Table 9 includes estimates for the Commission's recommendation to provide for a double crew for ships, to allow appropriate rotation times, as well as the LOA 3 proposal to have a flotilla of 12 ships by 2040. Under this approach (not currently Government policy) up to 264 additional naval service crew would be required to ensure all vessels are fully double crewed and available to undertake

⁸⁰ [Two New Zealand naval ships bought by Ireland for €26m were 'deemed not fit for service'](#), Irish Independent, April 2023.

⁸¹ [New Zealand navy patrol ship sale: Decade-old boats deemed not fit for service, transferred to Ireland](#), New Zealand Herald, April 2023.

patrols. As noted by the Commission on the Defence Forces, LOA 2 may be adopted as an "interim position en route to LOA 3".⁸²

The Naval Ship Replacement Programme saw four new ships purchased and introduced into service between 2014 and 2018. This was in conjunction with the Naval Service Mid-Life Refit Programme to refit older ships commissioned in 1999 and 2001 to ensure they met the minimum operational lifespan of 30 years. This mid-life refit required undertaking necessary upgrades to vessels to ensure they meet operational capability requirements, completing any remedial works to the hull and superstructure and updating the necessary internal systems and communications.⁸³ One ship (L.É. Roisin) recently completed a mid-life refit,⁸⁴ while a second vessel (L.É. Niamh) is undergoing a mid-life refit and would be placed in operational reserve upon completion.⁸⁵

Several documents outline the measures concerning investment and maintenance of the Naval Service's vessels. This includes the [White Paper](#) (2015), the [Defence Forces Equipment Development Plan 2020-2024](#), and the [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#). Each document commits to purchasing a Multi Role Vessel to replace the previous flagship, the LÉ Eithne, that was decommissioned in 2022. First referenced in 2015, in September 2023 there were reports of tenders being sought for a €200 million Multi Role Vessel to provide a flexible and adaptive capability for a wide range of maritime tasks, both at home and overseas, to enable helicopter operations and provide freight carrying capacity.⁸⁶ Typically, these class of vessels are larger than those in the current naval flotilla at 150 meters, and would require larger crews of 45 to 50 personnel to be able to go to sea.⁸⁷ Recent reports in January 2024 suggest the cost of purchasing this vessel has now increased to €300 million.⁸⁸

The [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#) committed to the mid-life refit of the LÉ Niamh to prolong operational service and to continue the Naval Vessel replacement and renewal programme.⁸⁹ While the [Defence Forces Equipment Development Plan 2020-2024](#) outlines between 2021 and 2024, all existing Naval Service Reserve motor launches will be replaced by more modern and cost-effective vessels,⁹⁰ supported by €142 million in funding from 2022 to 2025.⁹¹

⁸² [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022 pg. v.

⁸³ [Defence Forces Equipment Development Plan 2020 – 2024](#), Department of Defence, 2018.

⁸⁴ [Update on the 38 early actions from the High-Level Action Plan for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Department of Defence, March 2023 pg. 20.

⁸⁵ [Parliamentary Question 118](#), Naval Service, February 2023.

⁸⁶ [Defence Forces Equipment Development Plan 2020 – 2024](#), Department of Defence, 2018.

⁸⁷ [State to pursue new €200m ship project](#), Irish Examiner, August 2023.

⁸⁸ [Documents reveal bill for Ireland's largest naval ship is likely to reach €300m](#), The Journal.ie, January 2024.

⁸⁹ [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#), Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Deliver and Reform 2021 pg. 151.

⁹⁰ [Defence Forces Equipment Development Plan 2020 – 2024](#), Department of Defence, 2018.

⁹¹ [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#), Dept. Public Expenditure, NDP Deliver and Reform, 2021 pg.44.

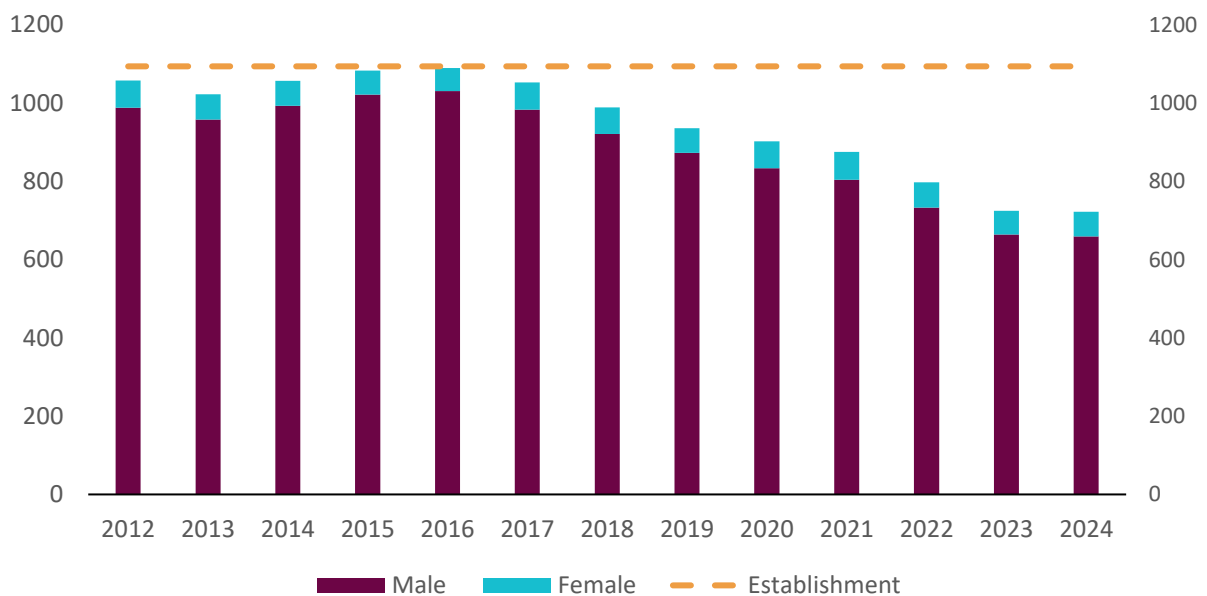
5. Naval Service Personnel

This section examines the trends in Naval Service personnel, including current strength, strength by rank, recruitment and discharges and gender breakdown. Given the Defence Forces comprises both PDF and RDF, Naval Service Reserve data is set out where possible.

5.1. Naval Service Strength

Within the wider Defence Forces establishment strength, PDF Naval Service strength is set at 1,094 and 200 Naval Service Reserve. Overall, the Naval Service accounts for 11.5 percent of PDF establishment strength of 9,500 and the NSR around 5 percent of establishment RDF strength.⁹² In total, combining both Naval PDF and NSR, the Naval Service accounts for 9.5 percent of total Defence Forces establishment strength.

Figure 3: PDF Naval Service Strength and Gender Breakdown 2012 to 2024



Source: [Department of Defence Annual Reports 2012 to 2022](#) and Dept. Defence Administrative Data, 2024.

Note: Figures for 31st March 2024.

Figure 3 presents the trend in PDF naval personnel strength from 2012 to 2024, divided between males and females. The total strength of the Naval Service was largely static from 2012 to 2017, with strength reaching its closest level to establishment (1,094) in 2016 (1,090 / 99.6 percent of establishment). However, the Naval Service has undergone an annual decline in personnel since 2016, with a strength of 722 by Q1 2024 or 66 percent strength. As a result, the Naval Service is at its lowest in terms of staffing strength than at any point in the last decade. Figure 3 also presents the annual male-female breakdown, which shows on average since 2012, males accounted for 93 percent of PDF Naval personnel, and females just 7 percent. By Q1 2024, the proportion of females was at its highest, accounting for 9 percent.

Not all naval personnel are assigned for sea going, as staff are also required for shore activities, such as maintenance, administration or for training and upskilling personnel. As a result, it is incorrect to interpret the total Naval Service strength as being personnel readily available for sea patrols due to a variety of reasons. This can also be due to their rank, onshore taskings, medical or personal reasons

⁹² PDF establishment strength has been increased to 9,600 as of early 2024; however, the branch breakdown of the additional 100 strength has not been stated.

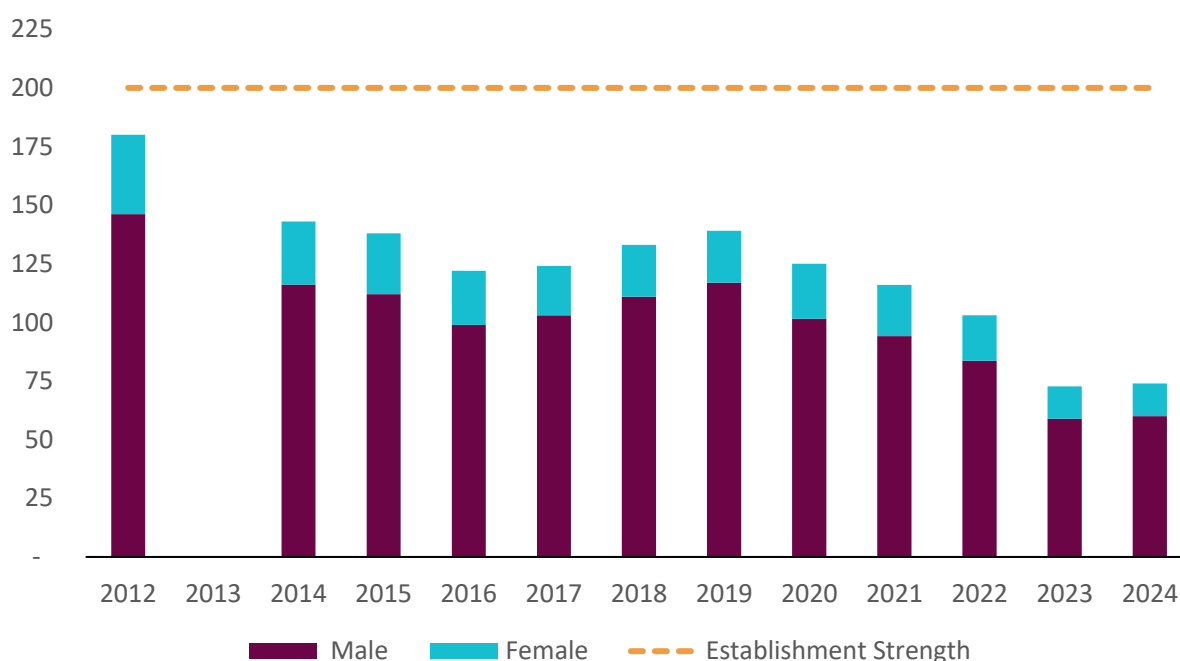
(e.g., maternity leave) or on annual leave. Furthermore, personnel unavailable due to statutory leave are not replaced. Personnel undergoing essential training at the Maritime College or delivering/undergoing military training, are still considered part of the operational strength but are unavailable to perform any sea going duties. While to achieve promotions, personnel must attend and complete specific military and specialisation courses. This attendance is categorised as seashore rotation. As a result, the total availability of personnel to crew vessels for patrols is a portion of the Naval Service’ reported strength.

In 2018, the Defence Forces Pay Commission estimated 234 personnel⁹³ or (24 percent of effective strength) were unavailable for sea going duties, as they were undergoing essential training. If this ratio is applied to the strength of 722 in Q1 2024 this suggests 174 personnel are unavailable for patrolling, which leaves just 548 PDF personnel available for sea going duties. Once other factors are considered, such as personnel being unavailable due to sick leave, annual leave, or maternity/paternity leave, onshore postings etc., the figure available for sea patrols would be further reduced. Therefore, it is likely the minimum core crew requirement of 312 personnel being available for patrolling) may be hard to guarantee based on current Naval Service strength.

5.2. Naval Service Reserve Strength

Figure 4 shows the trend in NSR personnel from 2012 to Q1 2024, separating male-females. The established strength is currently 200 personnel, with the Commission recommending increases to 400. However, as noted previously, naval reservists sign up in a part time capacity and attend training at their discretion. In 2012, the NSR strength was 180 personnel, or 90 percent of the establishment strength. Following marginal increases between 2016 and 2019, the overall trend has been a consistent reduction in the number of naval reservists. In Q1 2024, there were 83 Naval Reservists nationally, or 42 percent of the requirement.

Figure 4: Naval Service Reserve Strength and Gender Breakdown 2012 to 2024



Source: [Department of Defence Annual Reports 2012 to 2022](#), Dept. Defence Administrative Data 2024, and PBO’s calculations.

Note: Naval Service Reserve data for 2013 does not exist due to the reorganisation. Figures as of 31st March 2024

⁹³ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg. 57.

Since 2012, males account for an average of 80 percent of naval reservists, with females comprising the balance of around 20 percent. This percentage is significantly greater than the number of females involved in the wider PDF (7.26 percent),⁹⁴ the PDF Naval Service (8 percent), and above the Department of Defence's target of 12 percent female participation for 2022.

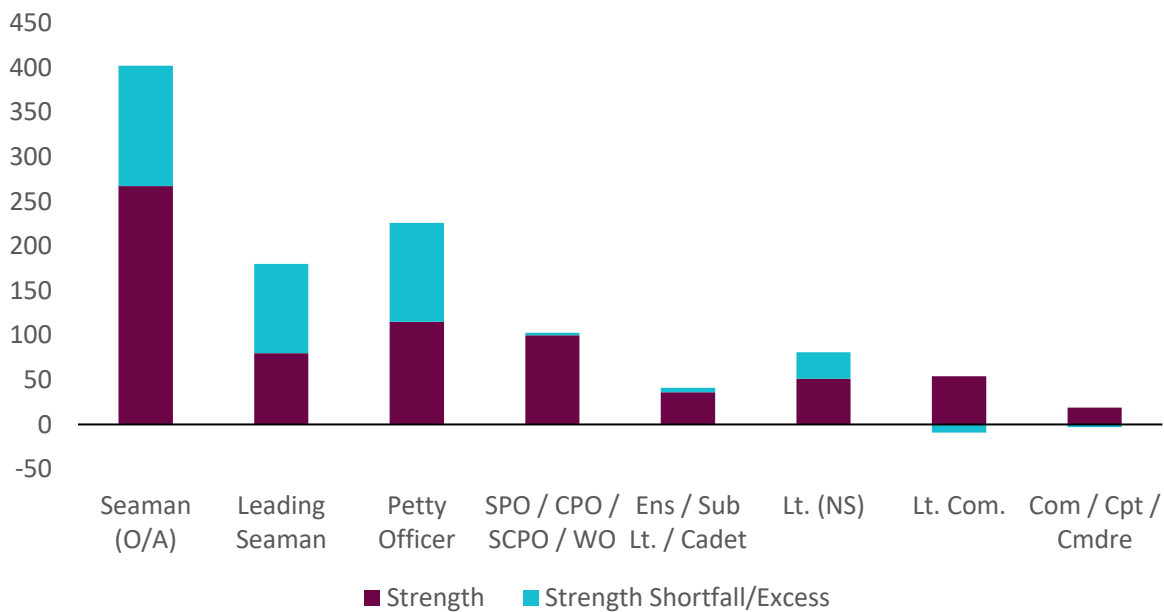
A complicating factor with the NSR is reservists are classified as either "effective" or "non-effective". A reservist is 'effective' where they are actively engaged with military training, duties or patrols. While 'non-effective' means they were absent from any training for the last 2 years but have not yet left the Reserve Defence Forces. This results in challenges with clearly identifying the actual strength of the Naval Service Reserve and whether the 83 personnel reported are actively contributing to the Naval Service Reserve, or just present on paper.

5.3. Rank Structure and Strength

Error! Reference source not found. 5 shows Naval Service establishment strength, by rank, and strength as of Q1 2024. This highlights the variation in understaffing amongst certain ranks. In total, there should be 1,094 Naval Service personnel, yet by the end of March 2024, there were just 722 personnel.

As of Q1 2024, Naval officer ranks were largely at, or above, full strength requirements. The rank of Commodore was operating at 100 percent strength, while Captain was 50% over strength, Commanders were 15% over strength, Lieutenant Commander were 20% over strength, Lieutenants (Naval Service) were 37 percent below strength, while Ensigns, Sub Lieutenants (including cadets)⁹⁵ were 12 percent below strength. Overall, naval officers were 13 percent, or 23 staff, below strength. Understaffing at officer level was concentrated amongst the two junior officer ranks, Sub-Lieutenant, and Ensign.

Figure 5: PDF Naval Service Strength by Rank, March 2024



Source: Department of Defence Administrative Data, 2024, [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019 and PBO Calculations.

Note: Strength used here is from the 31st March 2024.

⁹⁴ [Implementation of the Recommendations of the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces: Discussion](#), Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, Sept 2023.

⁹⁵ Cadets are included here as they receive a commission as an officer upon the completion of training.

However, examining staffing only by rank can mask understaffing within skill specialisms within officer cohorts. While personnel strength may be met, there may be a skills deficit in key areas. Furthermore, understaffing will be most visible amongst junior ranks given once vacancies arise at higher ranks, these vacancies will draw from junior ranks to be filled if suitable personnel are eligible for promotion. This ensures existing vacancies work their way into the junior ranks instead.

Table 10 highlights the differences between strength gaps across each rank in further detail as of 31st March 2024. Strength gaps were more significant amongst enlisted and NCO ranks. Senior NCO ranks, such as Warrant Officers (WOs) and Senior Chief Petty Officers (SCPOs), are currently at full strength. Chief Petty Officers (CPOs) were at 101 percent strength while Senior Petty Officers (SPOs) were at 73 percent strength. In comparison, Petty Officers were operating at 51 percent strength, Leading Seamen at 44 percent strength, and Seaman (including both Able and Ordinary) at 66 percent strength. This emphasises the gaps in Naval Service strength are concentrated amongst the lowest ranks as, in total, out of an establishment strength 911 enlisted and NCO positions across Seaman (O/A), Leading Seaman, Petty Officer, and Senior Petty Officer (SPO) / CPO / SCPO / WO, there were around 349 vacancies as of March 31st.⁹⁶ Any policy measures must be more targeted to resolve the issues directly impacting these ranks.

Table 10: Naval Service PDF Established and Strength

Rank	Naval Service Est. Strength (2012)	Naval Service Current Strength (2024)	Rank Percentage of Est. Strength
Commodore	1	1	100
Captain	2	3	150
Commander	13	15	115
Lieutenant Commander	45	54	120
Lieutenant	81	51	63
Sub Lieutenant & Ensign	41	28	68
Warrant Officer	6	6	100
Senior Chief Petty Officer	7	7	100
Chief Petty Officer	75	76	101
Senior Petty Officer	15	11	73
Petty Officer	226	115	51
Leading Seaman	180	80	44
Seaman (O/A)	402	267	66
Recruit	-	-	-
Cadet	-	8	-
Total Strength	1,094	722	66%

Source: Department of Defence Administrative Data, 2024, [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019 and PBO Calculations.

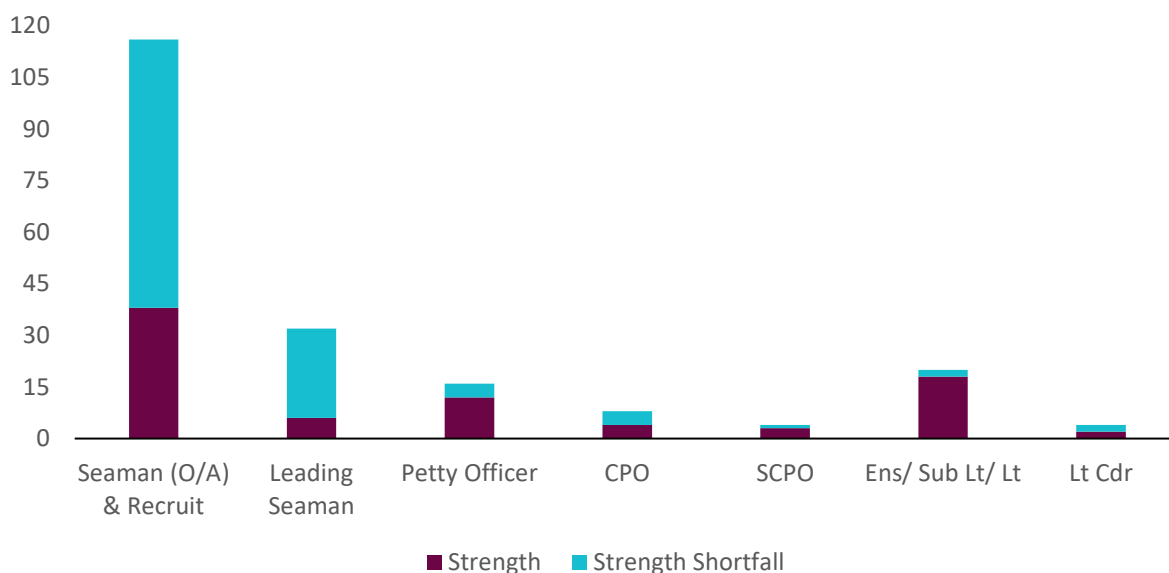
Note: Rank breakdown figures used here are correct as of 31st March 2024.

⁹⁶ This does not account for 8 cadets who are considered as enlisted personnel while in training.

Figure 6 shows the current and established strength for the Naval Service Reserve for 2024. While the Naval Service Reserve should have 200 personnel, by Q1 2024 it had just 83. There is a personnel deficit across all NSR ranks, which again is more significant amongst enlisted, and NCO ranks than officers. This is a similar structural challenge that is also visible in the PDF Naval Service. However, it is important to note there are certain ranks which do not exist within the Naval Service Reserve, such as the ranks of Cadet, Senior Petty Officer, Warrant Officer, Commander, Captain and Commodore.

Amongst the officer ranks, Lieutenant Commander, the highest rank in the NSR, is currently at 50 percent strength. This is followed by 90 percent strength at Lieutenant and 50 percent for Ensign and Sub Lieutenant ranks. Amongst NCO ranks, Senior Chief Petty Officer is at 75 percent strength, followed by 50 percent at Chief Petty Officer and 75 percent at Petty Officer rank. Finally, Leading Seamen are at 19 percent strength, with 33 percent amongst Ordinary Seamen, Able Seamen, and recruits. Within Naval Service Reserve units, NSR Seamen have an establishment figure of 116, as of Q1 2024 there was a strength of 38 personnel. While there is a requirement for 32 Leading Seamen, in 2024 there were only 6. This highlights the significant challenges in recruitment and retention amongst the lower ranks of the Naval Service Reserve. In total, as of Q1 2024, the NSR was at just 42 percent strength. (See Table 23 for further detail).

Figure 6: Naval Service Reserve (NSR) Strength by Rank, 2024



Source: Department of Defence Administrative Data, 2024, [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019 and PBO Calculations.

Note: Rank breakdown figures used here are correct as of 31st March 2024. The rank of cadet, senior petty officer and warrant officer do not exist in the Naval Service Reserve, while Lt. Cdr is the highest attainable NSR rank.

Table 11 presents the current strength, by rank, of both the PDF and NSR, as a percentage of their establishment strength. It is evident senior officer and senior NCO ranks have the fewest personnel shortfalls across all ranks, both PDF and NSR. This ranges from 101 percent strength for CPO to 63 percent strength for Lieutenants in the PDF, while in the NSR it ranges from 50 percent for CPO to 75 percent amongst Lieutenants. Relative to the PDF Naval Service, the NSR have only a higher proportion of strength amongst Petty Officers, but all other ranks are significantly below the PDF's proportion of strength.

Shortages amongst the enlisted ranks are highly visible, such as with the PDF at 62 percent strength and the NSR at 33 percent. Amongst Leading Seamen, the PDF are at 44 percent and the NSR's 22 percent. This demonstrates in both the PDF and NSR, the staffing shortfalls are concentrated amongst

the lowest ranks. As a result, given enlisted ranks are where the greatest staffing shortages occur, this has direct impacts on Naval vessels ability to go to sea as they require 38 enlisted personnel, per ship, in most of the current flotilla.

Table 11: Naval Service Current Strength as a Percentage of Established Strength, 2024

Rank (Officers, NCO and Enlisted)	PDF Naval Service % of Establishment Strength	Naval Service Reserve % of Establishment Strength
Commodore	100	N/A
Captain	150	N/A
Commander	115	N/A
Lieutenant Commander	120	50
Lieutenant	63	90
Ensign and Sub Lieutenant	68	50
Warrant Officer	100	N/A
Senior Chief Petty Officer	100	100
Chief Petty Officer	101	50
Senior Petty Officer	73	N/A
Petty Officer	51	75
Leading Seaman	44	19
Seaman (O/A) & Recruit	66	33
Cadet	-	N/A

Source: [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), Department of Defence Administrative Data, 2024 and authors calculations.

Note: Strength as of 31st March 2024. Ranks with 'N/A' are not permitted within the Naval Service Reserve.

Despite the high visibility of staff shortages amongst enlisted, the current data also masks challenges with staff turnover amongst officers. Where vacancies exist amongst senior officer ranks, junior staff will be promoted to fill positions as they arise (where eligible for promotion), until the vacancies are concentrated within the junior officer ranks. As a result, more granular data on both the number of personnel, and ranks of officers being recruited and discharged, would help identify the specific personnel challenges for officer ranks.

Given the high volume of turnover in staff, this may suggest staff with less experience are being promoted into senior roles more quickly to ensure gaps at senior grades are addressed as soon as possible (where eligible for promotion and possessing the skill set required). In any event, the pool of potential candidates for promotion is smaller by virtue of the significant gap between strength and establishment amongst enlisted personnel.

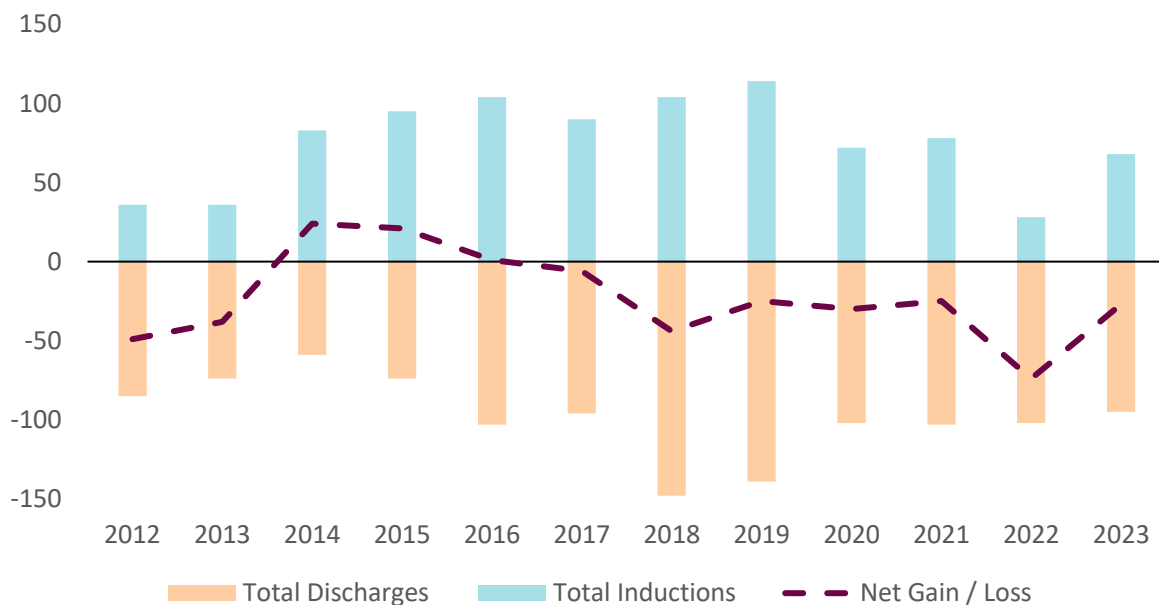
As a result, any policy mechanisms to recruit and retain Naval Service staff, focused on achieving establishment strength and ensuring ships can begin patrolling regularly, must specifically focus on addressing the challenges experienced amongst the lower ranks. Yet it must be considered that the requirements of the NSR and PDF Naval Service enlisted differ. So, while issues may be shared, creative solutions to address the challenges of recruitment and retention may not be the same for both the permanent and reserve naval service.

5.4. Recruitment and Discharges

To achieve the Naval Service establishment strength, there must be a balance between the recruitment and discharge of personnel. To increase the number of naval personnel, the numbers recruited must be higher than the number of personnel discharged, while in addition there must be a high retention rate to minimise the numbers leaving. As noted in Section 4.3 and 4.4, training enlisted and officers in the Naval Service to the required standard needed can vary from 6 months to up to 8 years, depending on the level of skills specialisation. This time is in addition to that required as part of the recruitment process. This represents a substantial amount of time spent both being recruited and undergoing training, and therefore the loss of staff should also be considered in terms of the time and resources lost, given the challenges in replacing any staff.

Figure 7 shows the trends in Naval Service recruitment and discharges from 2012 to 2023. At the height of the financial crisis in 2012 and 2013, there were substantially higher levels of personnel leaving the Naval Service than being recruited, as a result of the public sector recruitment embargo. However, from 2014 to 2016, the number recruited exceeded the numbers leaving. Despite this, from 2012 to 2016, there was an overall net loss from the Naval Service of 41 staff, with 354 personnel recruited and 395 discharged.

Figure 7: Total Naval Service Inductions and Discharges 2012 to 2023



Source: [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), Department of Defence Administrative Data 2024 and Houses of the Oireachtas Parliamentary Questions 2019-2023.

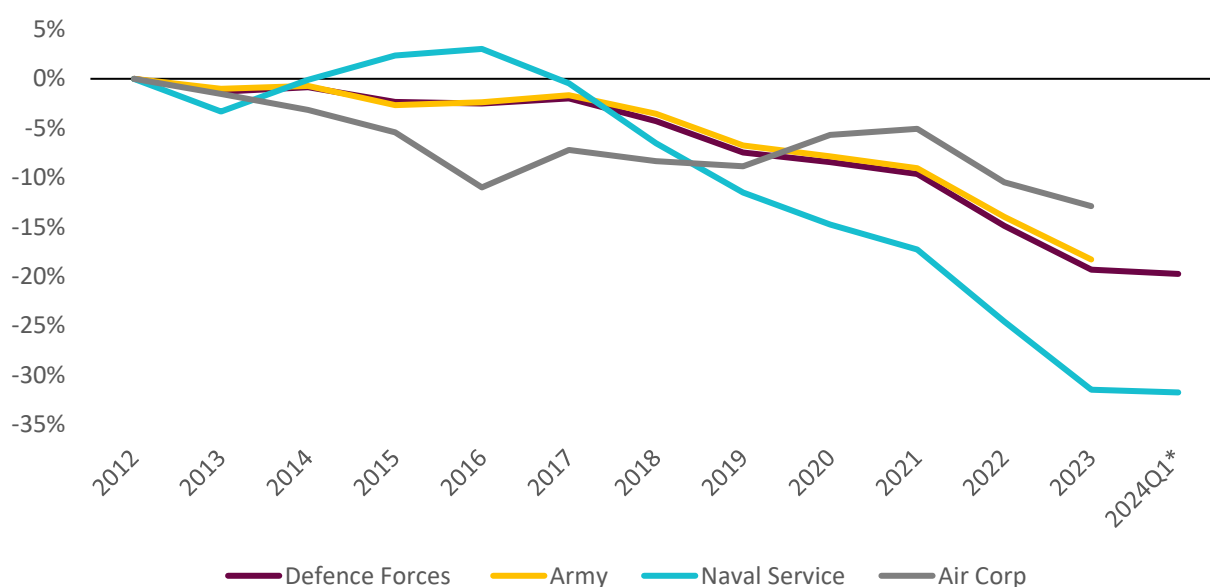
- From 2017 to 2019, the number of personnel recruited increased slightly, but did not keep pace with the level of personnel discharged, with a net loss of 75 staff.
- Following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the gap between recruitment and discharges narrowed considerably to a net loss of 25 staff in 2021.
- Yet overall, from 2019 to 2022 there was a significant reduction in recruitment, dropping from 114 inductions in 2019 to 28 in 2022. In total, from 2019 to 2022, there was a net loss of 154 personnel.
- The PBO estimates that from 2012 to 2023 (inclusive), the Naval Service has inducted 935 personnel and discharged 1,180 personnel. This leaves a net loss of 243 naval personnel in this timeframe.

However, further data on whether discharges were voluntary, or not, and the ranks of personnel who have discharged would improve understanding of the specific challenges.

Taking this information, it is possible to compare the net change in personnel trends from 2012 to 2022, in the Naval Service with the wider Defence Forces (Figure 8). This allows a comparison as to whether naval personnel turnover is higher than the army and air corps, as identified by the Defence Forces Pay Commission in 2018. Figure 8^{Error! Reference source not found.} shows the net annual change in personnel in the Naval Service was higher than the wider Defence Forces over the last decade. Substantial army personnel losses occurred in 2012 after the reorganisation abolished the Western Brigade and closed several army barracks, but which did not impact the Naval Service or Air Corps.

Figure 8 also shows year-on-year change at end Q4. Updated figures provided to the PBO show that Naval Service strength reduced in Q1 2024 compared to Q4 2023 (see Figure 8 below).

Figure 8: Change in Defence Force Strength (baseline 2012)*



Source: DPER Data Bank, [Public Service Numbers](#), and Department of Defence Administrative Data (2024).

On average, from 2013 to 2023, the Naval Service experienced a net loss of 3.15 percent of total personnel annually, compared to 1.8 percent in the Army and 1.3 percent in the Air Corps.

- These losses have been particularly pronounced since 2017, with net Naval Service losses averaging 5.6 percent annually (to 2023 inclusive), compared to 2.5 percent in the Army and 0.3 percent for the Air Corps.
- The loss of personnel slowed in 2020 and 2021 (with increases in the air corps strength in both years). This may have been related to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on alternative employment opportunities.

By examining the trends over the last, Table 22 (pg.67)), it is evident the Naval Service is still facing particular challenges with staff retention, compared to other military branches. In 2018, the Defence Forces Pay Commission identified a 5-year average (2013-2017) of 5.45 percent of total staff exiting the naval service.⁹⁷ However, this report considered personnel exiting, rather than the net result of staff changes after recruitment was considered.

⁹⁷ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019 pg.56.

6. Defence Forces Investment

Militaries must invest heavily, through both current and capital spending, to ensure they can access necessary equipment as part of national defence. This involves utilising current spending to cover the cost of personnel pay, such as soldiers and sailors, as well as other areas spread across multiple subheads,⁹⁸ for all branches, such as allowances.⁹⁹ Militaries must also use capital spending to invest in purchasing and maintaining the most modern capital infrastructure and equipment, such as buildings, weapons and vehicles, including the naval fleet. As the Naval Service is just one branch of the Defence Forces, it competes with the army and air corps for funding, to allow it to purchase new and maintain existing capital equipment and infrastructure.¹⁰⁰ However, a minimum level of investment is required to ensure the Naval Service can maintain its required strength as well as deliver on the obligations and responsibilities set by Government.

6.1. Defence Forces Spending

The Defence Vote Group, which comprises Vote 36 Defence and Vote 35 Army Pensions, has seen its budgetary allocation increase from €0.9 billion in 2012 following the financial crisis and the Defence Forces reorganisation, to around €1.2 billion by 2023 (Figure 9). The *Revised Estimates for Public Service (REV) 2024* provided some marginal increases to give an overall allocation of €1.25 billion for 2024. The allocation is comprised of current spending, including pay and non-pay (e.g., food, allowances etc.), capital spending and pension costs. The composition of these spending categories has changed over time. For 2024, the majority of the budget allocation to the Defence Vote Group is comprised of:

- Current (pay) and pensions related spending (69 percent),
- Current (non-pay) (17 percent), and
- Capital (14 percent).

Current spending on pay and salary costs averaged around 50 percent of total Defence Group spending since 2012, however in the Budget allocation for 2024 it accounts for 44 percent. Pensions averaged around 25 percent of total spending during the same period. Current non-pay averaged 15 percent of total Defence Group spending, from 2012 to 2014, capital spending was 1 percent, but which increased to 18 percent in 2023, with 14 percent allocated for 2024.

In 2015, arising from a Circular (07/14), the purchase of all plant, machinery, vehicles (including military vehicles) and equipment should be classified by Departments/Offices as capital spending, certain categories of expenditure (below €1,000) were reclassified as capital expenditure to align with EU requirements.¹⁰¹ Therefore, from 2015 to 2023, defence capital spending averages at 13 percent.

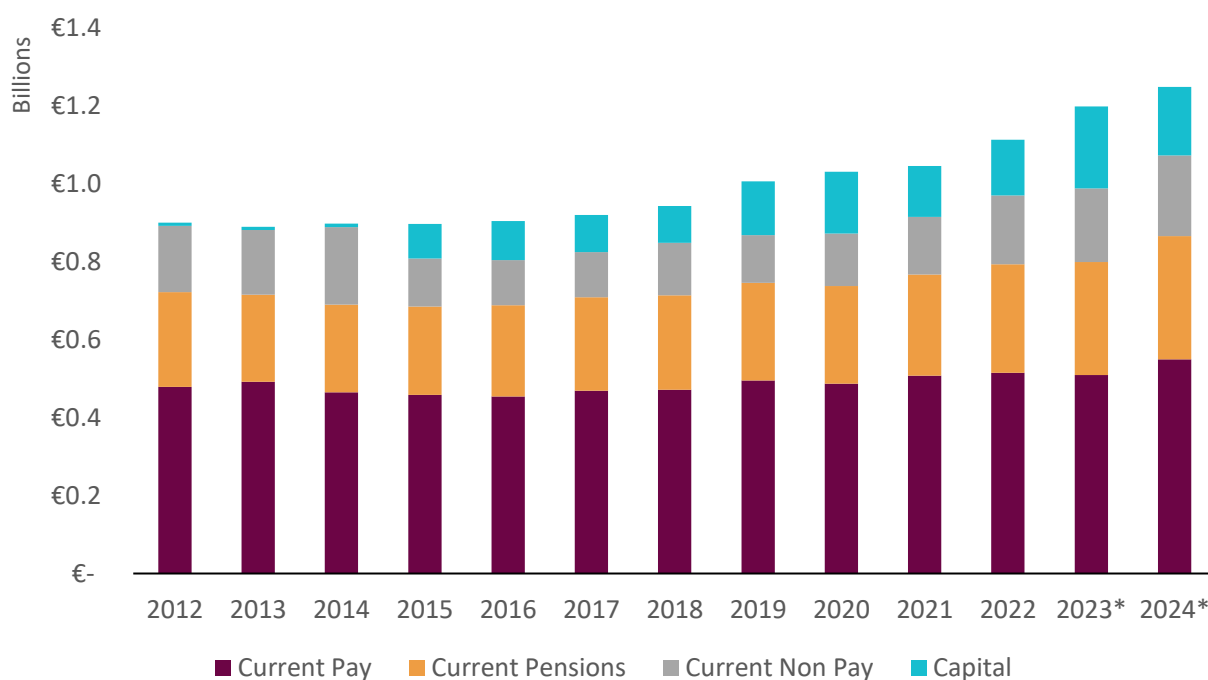
⁹⁸ Budget allocations are ordinarily spread across Programmes. Programmes comprise subheads which identify specific areas to which funds are allocated.

⁹⁹ Other areas under 'Current Spending' include maintenance, utilities, IT costs, training, fuel and other operational costs.

¹⁰⁰ Compete in this context means that the finite resources allocated for Defence must be divided between the various branches. It does not imply the services compete with each other to secure funding.

¹⁰¹ [Appropriation Accounts, Vote 36 Defence](#), Comptroller and Auditor General Report, 2015.

Figure 9: Gross Spend (Defence Vote Group) 2012 to 2024*



Source: [DPER Databank](#) and [Budget 2024 Expenditure Report](#). Note: 'Current (Non-Pay)' spending includes items such as fuel, catering, maintenance, utilities, training and information technology. Figures for 2024 refer to the budget allocation rather than actual spend. *2023 and 2024 figures provided by the Department of Defence to the PBO (11/06/2024).

Examining the Defence Vote Group with other Departments, with a roughly similar budget allocation, provides a high-level trend in spending over time, to identify how defence spending has changed relative to other policy areas. This does not intend to draw comparisons between the role and functions of various Departments or Votes, it simply aims to show the relative prioritisation of Votes receiving similar levels of Government funds. The selected Votes share a common 24-7 all-year round service provision requirement.

In 2017, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform outlined Ireland had allocated less capital to all other functions than the EU15 average, in particular to the area of Defence.¹⁰² In addition, it noted certain sectors, such as defence, did not account for a significant share of overall public capital investment.¹⁰³ This was further reiterated in a follow up report in 2021.¹⁰⁴ This indicated defence tends to receive lower levels of capital allocation than would be desirable, relative to other Departments.

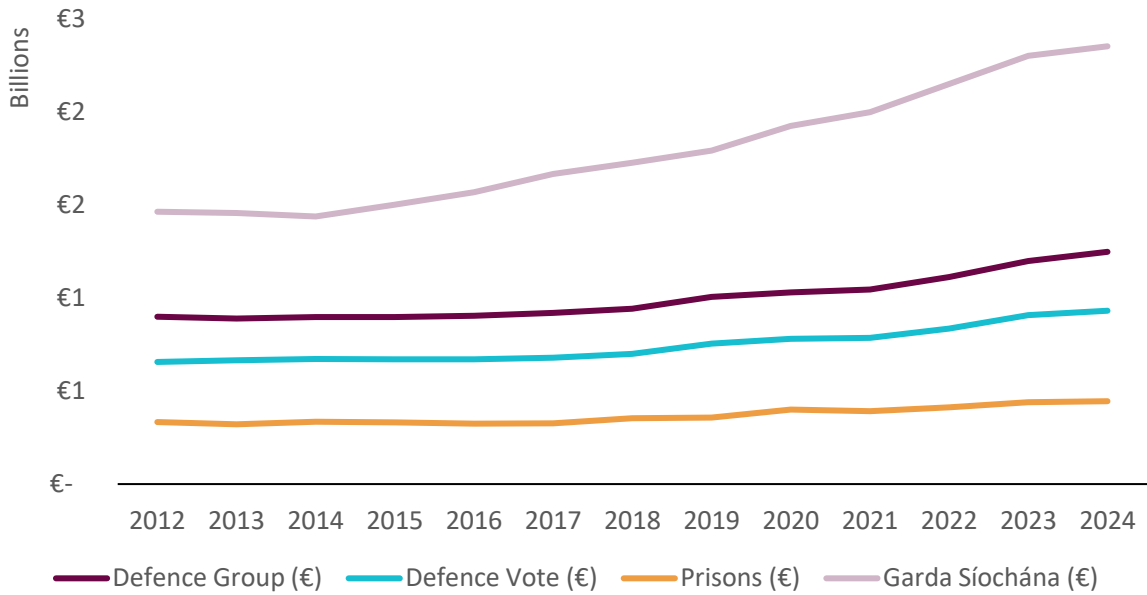
As the Commission on the Defence Forces recommended increasing investment in defence to €1.5 billion by 2028 (in 2022 prices), it is important to isolate spending on defence purposes and military capabilities, from other Defence Vote spending, such as on pensions, which accounts for 25 percent of total Defence Vote Group spending but does not contribute to ongoing security investment. Excluding army pensions, the total current and capital defence spending drops to €0.66 billion in 2012, with €0.93 billion allocated for 2024. Given the Defence Forces is comprised of 3 branches, the Naval Service is allocated a portion of this spending to provide for personnel, and investment and maintenance of new infrastructure and equipment.

¹⁰² [Infrastructure Capacity and Demand Analysis](#), Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2017.

¹⁰³ [Review of the Capital Plan 2016-2021, Progress Report and Update on Public Investment Priorities](#), Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2017.

¹⁰⁴ [NDP Review: Infrastructure Demand Analysis across Selected Sectors](#), Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2021.

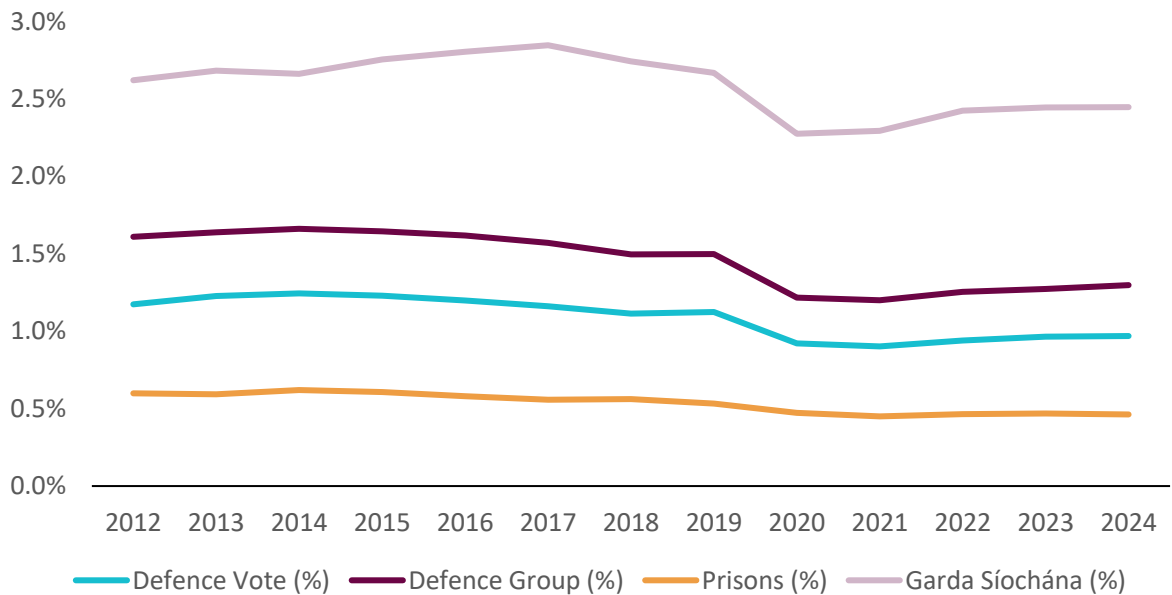
Figure 10: Vote Group Spending 2012-2024



Source: [DPER Databank](#).

From 2012 to 2024, the Exchequer’s overall budget increased from €56 billion to around €96.3 billion allocated for 2024. This is an increase of over €40 billion (72%). During this time, the overall Defence Group accounted for 1.5 percent of total Exchequer spending, on average (when army pensions are excluded, defence spending accounts for 1.1 percent). In comparison, the Garda Síochána Vote averaged 2.6 percent, and Prisons 0.54 percent. Figure 10 and Figure 11 show trends in spending and allocation for the Defence Vote Group, the Defence Vote (excluding the Army Pensions Vote), Prisons, and the Garda Síochána, Figures from 2012 to 2022 are outturn figures, while 2023 and 2024 figures are subject to change.

Figure 11: Vote Group Spending 2012-2024 (% of total Voted spending)



Source: [DPER Databank](#) and PBO Calculations.

Note: ‘Defence Spending’ refers to Vote 36 and excludes Vote 35 spending on Army Pensions. 2023 figures are provisional outturn and 2024 figures reflect the allocation, and may be subject to change.

These graphs both highlight an important aspect of analysis of public spending. Despite growth in the spending/allocations to the various Votes over the timeframe shown, their priority (how much they make up of total spending) has generally fallen. For example, the Defence Vote peaked at 1.24% of Voted spending in 2014, hitting just 0.9% of gross spending in 2021, and has been rebounding since to 0.97% of the gross allocation in 2024. Specifically, they highlight despite rising monetary allocations - sometimes even large monetary increases - Votes can decline as a budgetary priority. Over the period 2012 to 2024, gross spending/allocations across all Votes (excluding Defence and Army Pensions) has risen 72.6%, compared to 38.7% for the Defence Group. In effect, while Defence spending is up over the period, it is growing at a slower rate than other non-Defence areas.

In other words, the Defence Group made up c.1.6% of gross spending in 2012, if that were true of the gross 2024 allocation, it would have an allocation of more than €1.55 billion. Its 2024 allocation is almost €1.25 billion. The Defence Group was most significant in 2014 (c.1.7% of the Gross spend), if that held true in 2024, the allocation would be almost €1.6 billion. Since 2020, once army pensions are excluded, spending on defence increased from 0.9 percent to 1 percent.¹⁰⁵ As a result, spending on defence has remained largely stagnant as a percentage of Government spending.

6.2. Surrendered Funds

In any given year, a Vote may run a surplus (spending less than the resourcing allocated). These surpluses can either be deferred or surrendered. While these concepts are discussed in a separate [PBO publication](#), surrendered funds are the resources allocated that are unused, and returned to the Exchequer.

In the period 2012 to 2022 the Defence Vote (Vote 36) surrendered over €205 million of the funds it had been allocated. The estimated surrender for 2023 is almost €15.7 million.¹⁰⁶ These surrendered funds are illustrated in Figure 12. The Department notes this surrender is primarily composed of two elements:

- Excess appropriations-in-aid: Income to the Vote over and above approved levels. A Supplementary Estimate would be required for the Defence Vote to retain and use these funds,¹⁰⁷ and
- Offsetting Surrender: the Defence Vote (Vote 36) can be required to use its surrender to fund supplementary estimates for the Army Pensions Vote (Vote 35). These funds would be expected to be part of Vote 36's current allocation and as such, their surrender to supplement the Army Pensions Vote would not be expected to have impacted on investment in maintaining or expanding the capacity of the Defence Forces.

Importantly, while over €205 million was surrendered over this period, an estimated €8.78 billion (gross) was spent by the Defence Vote. In effect this means that 97.5% of available resourcing was utilised. Of the balance, some was used to fund shortfalls to the Army Pensions Vote.

It is important to note capital carryover was very limited in the period (€1.8 million). This suggests surrender has been almost entirely related to current spending. In summary, in budgeting for the Defence Vote Group, the amounts sought have largely been sufficient for its needs; however, there

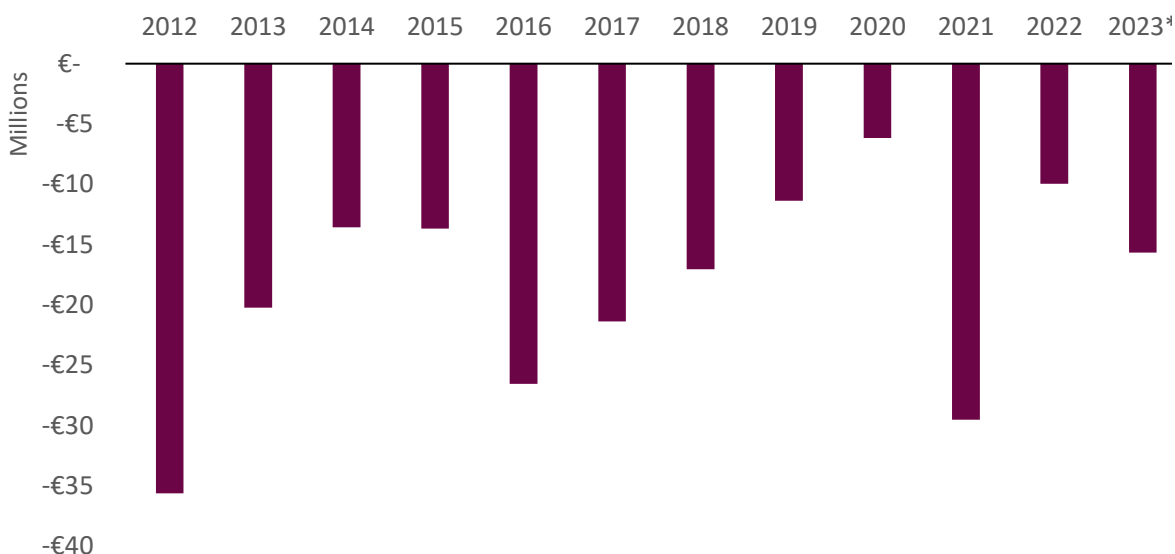
¹⁰⁵ The framework around Defence Forces pay funding was changed in recent years, from providing funding for the establishment figure of 9,500, to the prevailing strength of the Defence Forces, plus additional net recruitment. This enabled a redistribution of some funds from pay to current (non-pay) and capital.

¹⁰⁶ This estimates is based on the methodology set out by the PBO in [Capital Carryover and Surrendered Funds](#) (2024).

¹⁰⁷ See Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, [Public Financial Procedures](#) (2012) and PBO, [Appropriations-in-Aid in the Revised Estimates for Public Services](#) (2018).

has been some reallocation of funds within the Group. The PBO previously noted that the Army Pensions required Supplementary Estimates each year in the period 2007-2017, with the Vote subsequently requiring Supplementary Estimates in 2018, 2019 and 2022.¹⁰⁸

Figure 12: Surplus to be Surrendered (2012 to 2023)



Source: Comptroller and Auditor General, [Appropriation Accounts 2012 to 2022](#), and [Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024](#) (December 2023).

6.3. International Context

It is useful to examine the overall international context of defence spending across other EU countries, to understand the wider context of Ireland’s own military investment. The Commission on Defence repeatedly outlined the “levels of spend on defence in Ireland are markedly low against comparable international benchmarks.”¹⁰⁹ In its report, it identified several European countries, selected on the basis of population, geographical size, and economic wealth similar to Ireland.

The Commission initially compared Ireland’s level of spending to 8 other EU countries, five of whom were in NATO. However, since the Commission’s report, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, two further comparators have become NATO members (Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024)).¹¹⁰ The comparator countries are:

- Austria (not a NATO member),
- Belgium (founding member 1949),
- Denmark (founding member 1949),
- Finland (joined NATO 2023),
- Netherlands (founding member 1949),
- Norway (founding member 1949),
- Portugal (founding member 1949), and
- Sweden (joined NATO 2024).

Despite recent budget increases, Irish military spending is low when compared against international benchmarks.¹¹¹ The Commission on Defence noted it is clear from the international context “low spending on Defence in Ireland compared to our European neighbours is well known, both in Ireland and among our partner countries.”¹¹² It is important to recognise defence policies will vary from

¹⁰⁸ PBO, [Supplementary Estimates 2017](#) (2017) p.6.

¹⁰⁹ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, Commission on Defence](#), 2022, pg. 137.

¹¹⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, [NATO member countries](#), 2024.

¹¹¹ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, Commission on Defence](#), 2022, pg. 137.

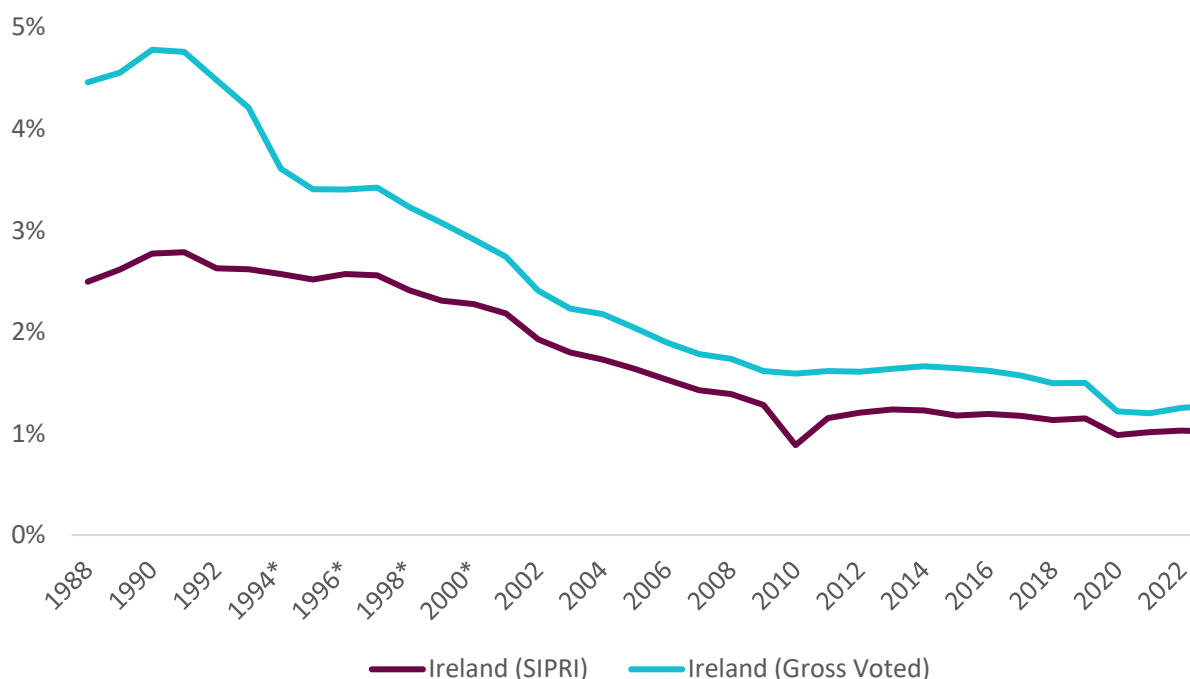
¹¹² *Ibid*, pg. 140.

country to country, and Ireland has no obligation to spend any specific amount on defence. Additionally, measures relying on GDP measurements may distort analysis of spending in Ireland

Figure 13 shows that Ireland's military expenditure has been in a general decline since 1991, and includes two measures of spending on Defence in Ireland

- The first, is from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),¹¹³ and measures military spending as a percentage of Government spending for the period 1988-2023.
- The second, is the gross spend on the Defence and Army Pensions Votes as a percentage of gross spending reported in the Appropriation Accounts (1988-1993) and the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform's Databank (1994-2024).

Figure 13: Defence Spending in Ireland



Source: PBO based on SIPRI, [SIPRI Military Expenditure Database](#) (Accessed 04 July 2024), Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. '[Databank](#)' (Accessed July 2024), and Comptroller and Auditor General, [Appropriation Accounts 1988-1993](#). Note: *1994 to 2000 reflect SIPRI estimates.

These measures reflect broadly similar trends, although initially defence spending looks considerably higher under the second measure. The reasons for this aren't within the scope of the paper to address; however, the scope and prioritisation of public services changes from year-to-year. As such, it's probable the variety of public services has expanded over the timeframe, contributing to a decline in the significance of spending on the Defence Group. In addition, the strength of the PDF has reduced over the period, with around 13,000 PDF members in 1990 compared to 7,510 at end Q1 2024.¹¹⁴

Under SIPRI's methodology defence spending (as a % of Government spending) was highest in 1991 (2.79%), bottoming out in 2010 (0.89%), and has rebounded to 1.02% in 2023. It should be noted looking at gross defence spending in Ireland (the gross spending of Votes 35 and 36) would show in 2024 spending on defence is anticipated to comprise about 1.3% of Gross Voted Spending i.e.,

¹¹³ SIPRI is the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control, and disarmament.

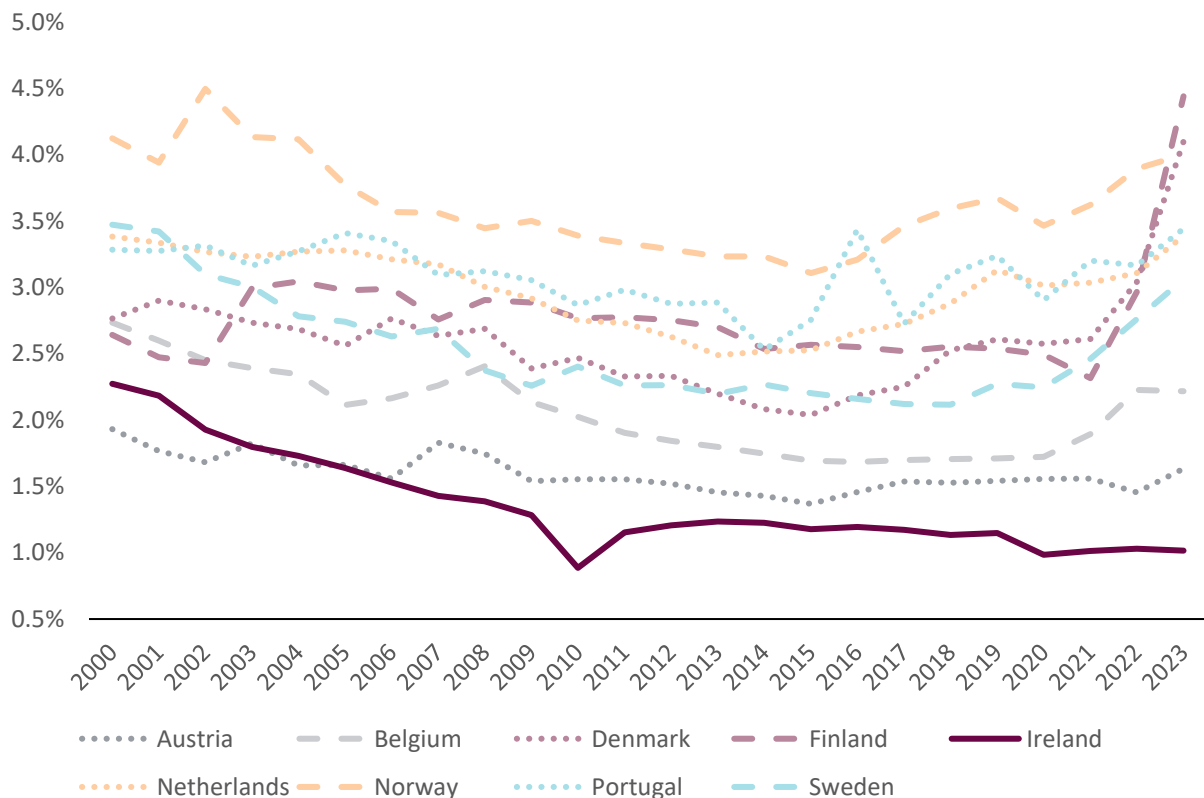
¹¹⁴ [Report of the Commission on Remuneration and Conditions of Service in the Defence Forces](#) (1990).

methodological differences in calculating the significance of defence spending will produce differing results.

In comparison, other EU countries the Commission examined displayed a general decline in military spending from 2000 to 2015, yet over the last several years these other EU states increased military investment, to varying degrees as a proportion of Government spending.

Figure 14 shows military spending as a percentage of total Government spending for these selected countries over two decades, from 2000 to 2022. This shows, of the other 8 comparable EU countries, Ireland has the lowest level of spending on defence as a percentage of Government spending. As noted by the commission, “these countries were selected having regard to relative size, population, and broadly similar levels of economic prosperity.”¹¹⁵

Figure 14: Military Spending as a Percentage of Government Spending 2000 to 2022



Source: [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#) and PBO's calculations

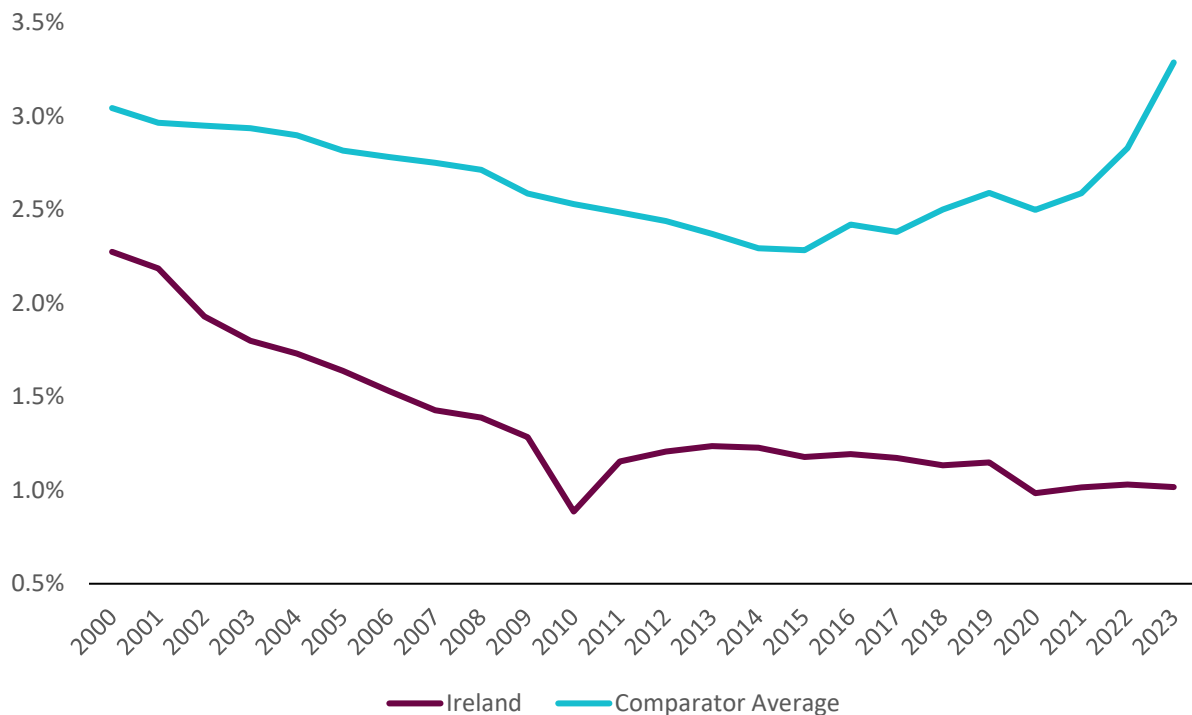
Figure 14 shows for almost the entire period (2000 to 2023) Ireland has spent proportionately less on Defence than any other comparator state (except for Austria in the early 2000s). Ireland's spending comes into sharper focus when compared to the average for comparator states in Figure 15. This shows Ireland has (since 2015) been on a divergent path in terms of the priority of defence spending relative to the average for comparator states.

- In 2000, 2.27% of total spending in Ireland was on defence, compared to 3.05% across comparator states. In effect, Ireland's spend on defence was about 74.4% or the proportion relative to comparator states.

¹¹⁵ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, Commission on Defence](#), 2022, pg. 137.

- In 2023, 1.02% of total spending in Ireland was on defence, compared to 3.29% across comparator states. In effect, Ireland's defence spend was just 31% of the proportion allocated by comparator states.
- The increase in the average for comparator states in 2022 and 2023 is likely significantly attributable to increased spending associated with investments in Defence Capabilities and/or military aid as a direct consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Figure 15: Military Spending as a Percentage of Government Spending 2000 to 2024 (Ireland vs average of Comparator States)



Source: [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#) and PBO's calculations.

The Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces was finalised and published on the 9th of February 2022, to outline potential recommendations. However, this occurred just weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many of the comparator countries significantly increased military spending. This includes the Netherlands increasing from 2.9 percent in 2021 to 3.67 percent, while Belgium increased spending from 1.9 percent to 2.3 percent over the same time. In comparison, Irish investment remained static at around 1 percent, with the Commission indicating an increase of only 0.01 percent, while general Government spending increased by 1.9 percent during this time.

Taking the Irish Government's allocated Defence spending of €1.22 billion for 2025 and 2026,¹¹⁶ along with the respectively planned levels of overall Government spending, this suggests a potential spend of around 1.2 percent on Ireland's military. This would be below the other comparator countries for the last two decades. However, additional increases in addition to this projected spend will be sought to achieve the LOA2, with spending of €1.5 billion representing 1.5 percent of overall Government spending.

¹¹⁶ [Expenditure Ceilings 2025 and 2026](#), Houses of the Oireachtas.

7. Naval Service Investment

Taking the previous information on wider defence spending, this section aims to explore the extent to which defence spending is allocated specifically to the Naval Service. As noted, the general defence spending allocation for 2024, when army pensions are excluded, is around €0.93 billion. Within this figure, capital and current spending, including pay and non-pay, must be allocated across all three military branches.¹¹⁷

While the data below attempts to identify Naval Service specific spending where possible, some spending that benefits Naval Service personnel may be categorised under wider defence spending categories. This includes items such as the Defence Forces Medical Care Scheme, catering, uniforms, general operating costs (e.g., light and heating), litigation, or education and training. This means, in addition to the spending identified below, there are components of Naval Service-related spending which cannot be easily extracted from wider Defence Forces spending, these are however expected to have a relatively low financial cost in comparison. Therefore, the PBO would note a degree of caution should be employed when interpreting these figures.

7.1. Capital Spending

Capital spending for the Naval Service is essential to ensure that equipment and vessels can be maintained to the required standard. In addition, capital spending enables the Naval Service to purchase new equipment, new vessels and to undertake essential maintenance on existing equipment to prolong lifespan and maintain operational effectiveness. Capital spending for the Defence Forces is outlined under a number of different documents and Government plans, namely the Defence Forces Equipment Development Plan (2020), National Development Plan (2021), and the Defence Forces Capital Infrastructure Development Plan (2022).

The [Defence Forces Equipment Development Plan 2020-2024](#) outlines plans for the continued re-equipment of the Defence Forces. Capital funding for defence equipment is also provided under the [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#), which allocated €697 million from 2021 to 2025.¹¹⁸ This allowed investment for the mid-life refits of the L.É. Róisín and L.É. Niamh, modernisation and replacement of ships main and secondary weapons, heavy lift machinery and equipment in the naval dockyard, and the purchase of a multi-role vessel and naval service reserve motor launches. In addition, this funding provides wider investment, in areas such as IT and communications, which all military branches benefit from.

Other capital spending within the wider defence forces is underpinned by the [Defence Forces Capital Infrastructure Plan 2022-2027](#), which sets out a strategic programme for project delivery for infrastructural investment across the Defence Forces. However, this is intended for buildings and infrastructure, rather than capital spending on equipment, such as Naval Vessels. In total, it sets out an estimated total of €355 million from 2022 to 2027, with around €136.6 million specifically earmarked for Naval Service infrastructure (See

Table 17 sets out the projects from the Defence Forces Capital Infrastructure Development Plan (2022) which are attributable to the Naval Service. These projects are funded on a multi annual basis under subhead A.13 'Defence Forces Built Infrastructure – Construction & Maintenance' of Vote 36 Defence.

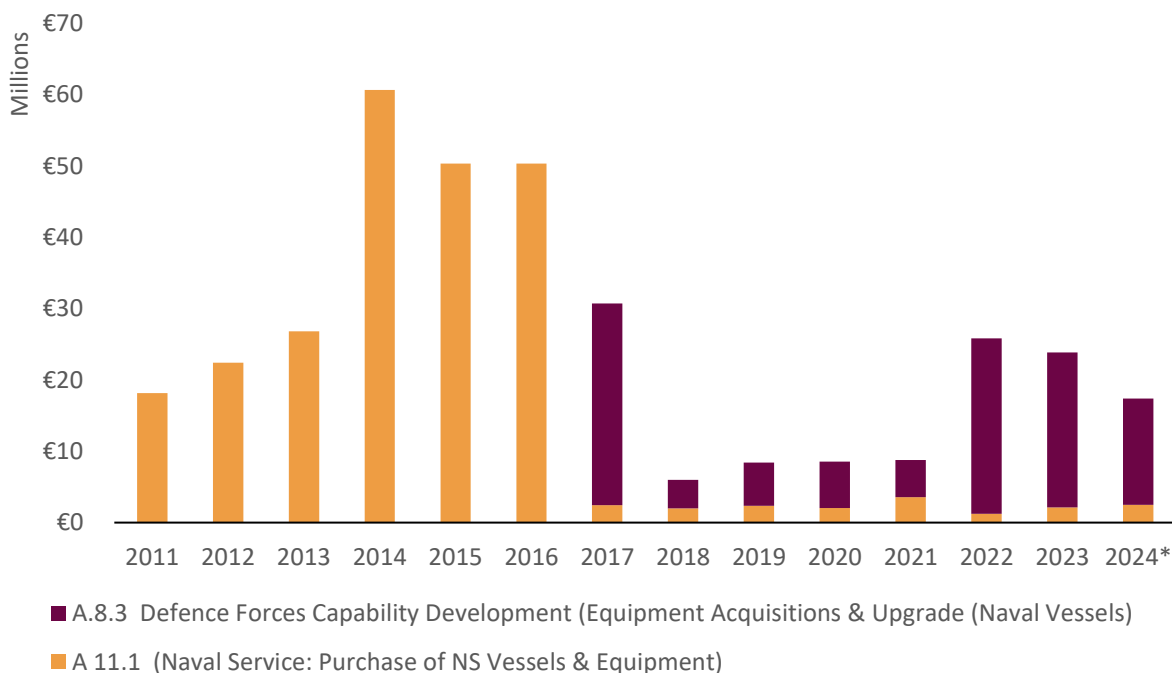
¹¹⁷ See Parliamentary Budget Office, [An Overview of Current and Capital Spending within Government Expenditure](#) (2023).

¹¹⁸ [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#), Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2021, pg.44.

Table 17 for further details). While in April 2024, as part of the overarching NDP review process, revised allocations of €215 million for 2025 and €220 million for 2026 were announced to help with the modernisation and upgrading of military equipment and infrastructure in the longer term.¹¹⁹

Figure 16 shows specific Naval Service capital expenditure for equipment acquisitions and upgrades for the period 2011 to 2023 and the estimated spend for 2024. In the period to 2011 to 2023 a total of €340.9 million of capital spending is directly attributable to the Naval Service.¹²⁰

Figure 16: Naval Services Capital Spending, 2011 to 2024



Source: Department of Defence, Correspondence (02 July 2024).

* Note: 2024 data reflects the budget allocation rather than final spend.

As a result, the true level of capital investment in the Naval Service is not illustrated above. If infrastructural projects were included, capital spending would be considerably higher. Analysis of the [Defence Forces Capital Infrastructure Plan 2022-2027](#) shows some €136.6 million of infrastructural spending attributable to the Naval Service. This represents 38.4% of the infrastructural spending set out in the plan. Relative to the strength of the Naval Service, its infrastructure spend is significant. There could be various reasons for this:

- Naval Service infrastructure may simply be expensive in nature (e.g., €36 million for additional berthage and associated works (as part of a €140 million jetty project)),
- There may be a need to address historic underinvestment or other historic costs (e.g., €30 million for the remediation of the ISPAT site (Haulbowline)), and/or
- The Naval Service is being allocated additional funds to provide for substantial additional or upgraded infrastructure.

While other related Naval Service capital spending on equipment or vessels may have occurred, such as for weapons, IT infrastructure etc., these are not reported individually for each military branch.

¹¹⁹ [Tánaiste Welcomes Increased Capital Funding for Defence](#), Dept. Defence, Press Release, April 2024.

¹²⁰ €341m is the actual 'booked' Naval Service capital spend. However, from 2011-2014 this was captured as current spending but is reported here as capital funding.

7.2. Current Spending

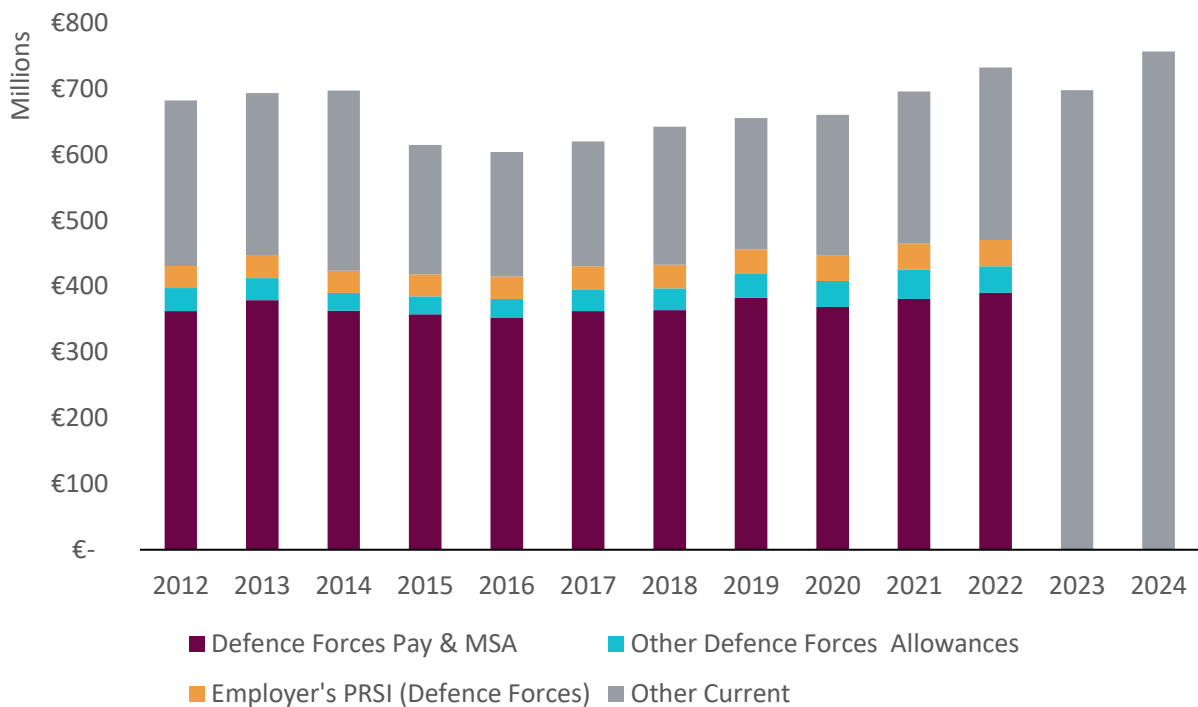
Current spending relates to the day-to-day spending of a department or organisation. This includes areas such as pay and salaries, and non-pay on items such as food or energy costs.¹²¹ Current expenditure on PDF pay, comprises a substantial proportion of defence current spending, given the requirement to maintain a permanent, full time defence force in the State.

Figure 17 presents current spending for the Defence Forces for the period 2012 to 2024. Where data is available (2012-2022) this is broken down to identify spending on pay (including the Military Service Allowance) and other allowances. For 2023 and 2024 the equivalent data is not yet available.

Current spending for 2023 (€697.7 million, provisional outturn) and 2024 (€756.7 million, allocation) are subject to change, but can be broken down into two primary categories:

- Pay: Pay spending in 2023 is over €508.8 million, rising to almost €549.7 million in 2024, and
- Non-pay: Non-pay spending was over €188.9 million in 2023, rising to over €207 million in 2024.

Figure 17: Defence Forces Current Spending and Allocation (2012 to 2024)



Source: Comptroller and Auditor General, [Appropriation Accounts 2012 to 2022](#), and Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Databank'. Note: 'Other' includes all other current spending under Vote 36: Defence including the pay and allowances for civil service staff of the Department of Defence. Figures for 2023 reflect the provisional outturn (spend), and 2024 figures reflect the budget allocation.

For 2024, the pay allocation has increased to €549.7 million,¹²² with Budget documents outlining “the level of funding will support the hiring of an additional net 400 PDF recruits and provide extra staff... to enable implementation of the ambitious reforms set out in the Commission on the Defence Forces.”¹²³ It is not entirely clear how this aligns with 2023 changes to the Defence Forces pay

¹²¹ Parliamentary Budget Office, [An Overview of Current and Capital Spending within Government Expenditure](#) (May 2023).

¹²² DPER Databank, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 2024.

¹²³ [Budget 2024 Expenditure Report](#), Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 2023 pg. 66.

allocation process, with the pay allocated based on the number of existing personnel in the Defence Forces rather than the agreed establishment figure.¹²⁴

The 2024 pay allocation (€549.7 million) is an 8% increase (+€40.9 million) compared to the provisional outturn on pay for 2023. If pay allocations are informed by the number of existing personnel rather than establishment numbers, pay would have been expected to decline year-on-year, as Q4 employment (WTE) of the Defence Sector was 8,305.6 in 2022 and 7,917.2 in 2023 (a reduction of 4.7%). While the [Public Service Agreement 2024-2026](#) may have contributed to some of the increased pay allocation for 2024, it is not clear if the 2024 allocation to support the hiring of additional naval service personnel includes funding for their pay - as this would contradict the new approach for pay allocation introduced in 2023.

Between 2012 and 2022, an average of 59 percent of the Defence Vote's current spending went on pay (including the MSA), with 5.5 percent on allowances (pay and non-pay), and 35.5 percent on other current spending.

Despite the wider public sector pay restoration over the decade, the overall headcount of personnel in the Defence Forces, and especially the Naval Service, continued to decline (See Section 5.1, pg.25). Despite the 8 percent increase in current spending between 2012 and 2023, there was a reduction of over 1,800 PDF personnel. Therefore, the increases to current spending would largely reflect pay increases from the public sector pay agreements over the last decade, rather than increased headcount of military personnel. Previous pay agreements include:

- Haddington Road Agreement 2013 to 2016,¹²⁵
- Lansdowne Road Agreement 2013 to 2018,¹²⁶
- Public Sector Stability Agreement Extension 2018 to 2020,¹²⁷
- Building Momentum Agreement and extension 2021 to 2023,¹²⁸⁻¹²⁹
- Public Sector Pay Agreement 2024 to 2026.¹³⁰

7.3. Naval Service Pay

As noted above, pay comprises a significant component of Defence total current spending. As a result, this very likely also accounts for a large amount of Naval Service spending, through the payment of wages and salaries for the estimated c.720 current personnel. The Commission on Defence recommended the introduction of long service increments for personnel.¹³¹ Currently Naval, and Defence Forces generally, pay scales are shorter (up to 4 or 7 salary points) compared to the wider civil and public service, such as civil servants (up to 16 points), Gardaí (up to 22 points) and teachers (up to 25 points).

¹²⁴ [Defence v Public Expenditure: Row Flares up over where savings made on pay should go](#), Irish Independent, 2023.

¹²⁵ [Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016, Haddington Road Agreement](#), Dept. Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 2013.

¹²⁶ [Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018](#), Lansdowne Road Agreement, 2015.

¹²⁷ [Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020](#), Workplace Relations Commission, 2017.

¹²⁸ [Building Momentum – A New Public Service Agreement 2021-2022](#), Dept. Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 2020.

¹²⁹ [Minister McGrath welcomes strong endorsement by public service unions of extension to Building Momentum pay agreement](#), Press Release, Dept. Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 2022.

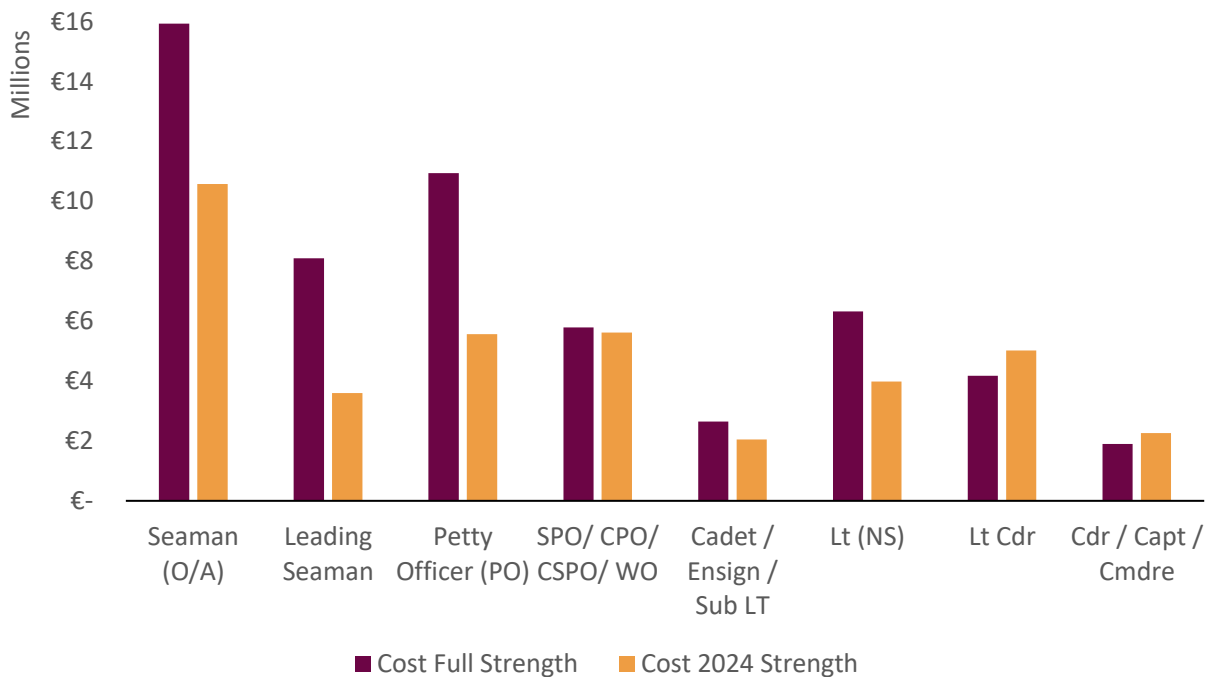
¹³⁰ [Minister Donohoe welcomes proposals on a new collective pay agreement for the public service](#), press release Dept. Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 2024.

¹³¹ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022, pg. 125.

As pay costs vary due to rank and length of service, Figure 18 presents the estimated pay costs of the Naval Service for both the establishment strength and current strength, by rank. To account for variations in length of service and new entrants amongst naval personnel, the PBO uses the midpoint of the salary scale for each rank (inclusive of MSA), to provide an estimate of Naval Service pay costs at current and establishment strength. This reflects that staff are on different stages of the salary scale, yet it excludes other tax credits or allowances.

Using this methodology, the PBO estimates total Naval Service pay at full strength should cost the Exchequer around €56 million annually. While at current naval strength, the PBO estimates Naval Service pay costs to be slightly below €39 million, i.e., current staffing levels require just c.69% of what would be required to fund the full establishment strength of the Naval Service. All else being equal, the pay cost of the Naval Service would increase by c.€17 million annually if all current vacancies were filled. This can be subdivided into €15 million for enlisted and €2 million for officers. However, this methodology excludes payments for other military allowances and schemes. Following the [Public Service Agreement 2024-2026](#), this is estimated to have resulted in a €2 million increase to Naval Service current spending on salaries. By 2026, the pay agreement may increase Naval Service pay costs by a further €4.5 million.

Figure 18: Estimated Naval Service Pay Costs 2024



Source: Department of Defence Administrative Data and [Defence Forces Pay Scales](#).

Note: This analysis was conducted in early-mid 2024, with strength as of March 2024. Salary Scales include Military Service Allowance but may not include more recent impacts from the most recent Public Sector Pay agreement. Figures exclude other additional allowances or credits available to personnel.

- The highest ranks (Commander, Captain and Commodore), roughly align between full and current strength, with a slight overspend of €0.36 million due to slight over staffing.
- Amongst Lieutenant Commanders, there is an overspend of €0.84 million due to overstaffing above the establishment strength.
- For Naval Lieutenants, there is an estimated underspend on pay of €2.34 million.
- At Ensign, Sub Lieutenant and Cadet ranks, there is an estimated pay underspend of €0.6 million relative to if the Naval Service was at full-strength.

- Amongst senior NCO ranks (Senior Petty Officer, Chief Petty Officer, Chief Senior Petty Officer and Warrant Officer) there is an estimated pay underspend of €0.16 million.
- There is an estimated underspend on Petty Officer salaries of around €5.3 million at full strength.
- For Leading Seamen rank, there is an estimated underspend of €4.5 million, and €5.3 million for Seaman rank.

7.4. Allowances and Tax Credits

As noted above, total allowances (pay and non-pay) cost around €50 million in 2023 with €48 million allowances projected for 2024 (excluding Military Service Allowance). Together, these account for about 10 percent of Defence current spending. There is a wide and complex, range of allowances available to the whole PDF, such as Military Service Allowance (MSA), to compensate for the challenging aspects of military life. While several other allowances are specifically designed for the naval service, such as Patrol Duty Allowance (PDA) to compensate for undertaking naval voyages for weeks at a time. Yet, it is important to note, the naval specific allowances available to the PDF Naval Service are not accessible for members of the Naval Service Reserve.

The PBO estimates, across the Defence Forces, there are around 134 different types and rates of allowances in operation, with at least 26 of these specific to the Naval Service. A full list of allowances for 2024 can be found [here](#), while further information on the allowances and credits available to naval personnel are included in Table 7. The PBO notes that where tax credits are used to increase the take home pay of naval personnel, these credits are only accessible where sufficient tax is paid. As a result, tax credits may not be easily accessible to lower naval service ranks who may not pay high enough levels of taxes to access any tax credits introduced.

A key aspect of these various military allowances is that they can be paid concurrently, meaning personnel can receive a combination of allowances at the same time. For example, personnel may be in receipt of Military Service Allowance, Patrol Duty Allowance, and the now abolished as of 2023 Naval Service Sea Going Scheme, all at the same time, separate to their standard pay. In addition to this, rates for the same allowance can differ between officers and enlisted based on rank, while different allowances are only available to either officers or enlisted. Further issues arise given the variation with the payment frequency of allowances, as some are paid daily and others on a weekly or annual basis. This is evident in the Naval Service where Patrol Duty Allowance is paid at a daily rate, the now abolished Sea Going Commitment Scheme was paid on a 6-month basis, while the Naval Tax Credit (which is operated by the Revenue Commissioners) is paid annually, until end 2024.

This overly complex approach creates unnecessary challenges given the current structures and how some allowances are pensionable or taxable, while others are both or neither.¹³² In addition, the pension derived from an allowance can also vary with the number of years' service. Simplifying the allowances system, and amalgamating different allowances where possible, would yield substantial benefits to Naval Service staff by providing greater certainty on their net take home pay as well as their pensionable contributions upon retirement.

¹³² [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022 pg.119.

Table 7: Key Naval Service Allowances and Tax Credit Schemes

Allowance	Details
Security Duty Allowance	Introduced in 1974, to compensate personnel for the hardships and inconvenience associated with duties at sea. ¹³³ Paid to all PDF (including the navy) to compensate for exceptional duties of a security nature over and above normal peacetime pattern of military duties, e.g., guards on military posts such as naval bases, or protecting vital installations. ¹³⁴ This ranges from €31 to €127 per day, depending on day of the week, bank holidays etc.
Patrol Duty Allowance	Introduced in 1978, to account for the demanding conditions of being at sea. Payable to personnel undertaking sea-going duties. This is paid to all ranks for each patrol day at a rate of €64.27 per day. ¹³⁵ From January 2024 the rate will remain at around €64 for the first 10 days of patrolling and then increase to around €129 for each patrol day thereafter. ¹³⁶
Military Service Allowance (MSA)	Introduced in 1979 this allowance is not specific to Naval Service staff. It is intended to compensate personnel for the unique conditions and disadvantages of military (naval) life, such as liability for duty 24 hours, 7 days a week, as well as bad or uncomfortable conditions. It is paid to all PDF personnel up to the rank of Captain/ Lieutenant (NS). ¹³⁷ Before 2023, personnel with less than 3 years' service did not receive the full rate of MSA. ¹³⁸ This ranges from €57 to €163 per week depending on rank and service.
Naval Service in Charge Allowance	Payable to Marine Engineering Officers and engineers at sea to compensate them for their extra responsibilities. It is payable in the same circumstances and in respect of each day for which Patrol Duty Allowance is paid. ¹³⁹ This rate is €26.4 per day, depending on rank.
Diving Allowance & On Call Allowance	Diving is an essential operational Naval Service skill, in recognition of this a daily allowance of €60 is paid. Call Out Allowance is paid to Naval Divers in respect of each Saturday/Sunday & Public/Defence Forces Holiday for which they are rostered on call and are not called out. ¹⁴⁰ This payment amounts to €30.38 per day, depending on rank.
Sea Going Naval Service Tax Credit	A tax credit initially worth €1,270 <i>per annum</i> introduced in 2019. This credit may be availed of if personnel spent at least 80 days or more at sea in the preceding year. This increased to €1,500 <i>per annum</i> in 2021. Previously personnel were required to serve for 3 years before eligibility, but is now accessible to personnel after 1 years' service. ¹⁴¹ Budget 2024 extended this scheme until 2025. ¹⁴²
Sea Service Commitment Scheme	Introduced in 2021 as a retention measure, scheme eligibility required personnel serve an aggregate of 24 months at sea and undertake a minimum of 240 patrol days over a maximum 48-month (4 year) period. They must complete a minimum of 60 patrol days in each 6-month period to qualify for 4-staged payments of €2,500, totalling €10,000. ¹⁴³ Personnel must have completed one years' service and serve in a sea-going appointment to be eligible (down from 3 years' service previously). ¹⁴⁴ This scheme was abolished at the end of 2023.

Source: [Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019 and [Defence Forces Allowances, Parliamentary Question 515](#), Dáil Éireann Debate, 2012.

Note: Some other allowances are also available to naval personnel, such as for foreign language proficiency

¹³³ [Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg. 81.

¹³⁴ [Ibid.](#)

¹³⁵ [Naval Service, Parliamentary Questions 9](#), Dail Eireann Debate, October 2020.

¹³⁶ [Increase in Patrol Duty Allowance for the Naval Service](#), Press Release, Department of Defence, 2023.

¹³⁷ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019 pg. 81.

¹³⁸ [Update on the 38 Early Actions from the High-Level Action Plan for the Report of the Commission of the Defence Forces](#), 2023 pg.14.

¹³⁹ [Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019.

¹⁴⁰ [Report of the Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019, pg. 81.

¹⁴¹ [Budget 2024 Tax Policy Changes](#), Department of Finance, October 2023.

¹⁴² [Update on the 38 Early Actions from the High-Level Action Plan for the Report of the Commission of the Defence Forces](#), 2023 pg.14.

¹⁴³ [Naval Service, Parliamentary Questions 101](#), Dail Eireann Debate, February 2021.

¹⁴⁴ [Update on the 38 Early Actions from the High-Level Action Plan for the Report of the Commission of the Defence Forces](#), 2023 pg.14.

While additional allowances were introduced in recent years to improve retention, e.g., Sea Going Commitment Scheme, tech pay increases etc, these are still complex and have not had the desired effect, with inductions only exceeding discharges once since 2016. Other questions arise with the Naval Service Reserve, who do not receive certain military allowances, such as the naval tax credit schemes, which were designed with the intention of being inaccessible for the Naval Service Reserve.¹⁴⁵ This removes a financial incentive for naval reservists to volunteer to crew ships for patrols. Enabling naval reservists to access allowances may incentivise greater participation and support the Naval Service’s ability to provide additional crew when undertaking patrols. This would also assist PDF naval personnel’s eligibility to meet the number of sea patrol days completed criteria for existing tax and remuneration schemes. However, it must be acknowledged that a naval reservist may not have the same level of experience or knowledge to operate as a replacement for PDF Naval Personnel.

While many allowances and credits were introduced with the intention to increase take home pay and encourage sea going by naval personnel, the restrictive criteria when introduced (e.g., requiring 3 years’ service) and excluding the Naval Service Reserve means the allowances are not having the desired impact or sufficient take up. The Commission on Defence proposed reforms to simplify the criteria and expand the eligibility for remuneration to tackle this. For example, with the Sea Going Commitment Scheme (abolished at the end of 2023), its criteria presented challenges for female personnel, as taking maternity leave reduced the likelihood of achieving the scheme’s requirements to undertake a set number of patrols in a 6-month period. Where crew are on sick leave or paternity leave, this may prevent vessels going to sea and therefore negatively impact other sea going personnel for the accessing the financial scheme, by not completing the necessary patrol days.

Table 8: Commission on Defence Pay Recommendations and Update 2023

Recommendation	Status	Status Update (as of November 2023)
Remove requirement for Able Seamen to ‘mark time’ for the first 3-years at that rank	Completed Dec. 2022	All personnel of Able Seaman rank are now paid full rate of Military Service Allowance (MSA) applicable to the rank, and requirement for cohort to ‘mark time’ for 3 years removed.
Ensuring personnel of Able Seaman rank are paid the full rate of MSA applicable to the rank	Completed Dec. 2022	Measures resulted in pay rates (including MSA) for Able Seamen in their first 3 years of service, starting at €37,147 (year 1), €38,544 (year 2) and €39,832 (year 3)
Providing immediate access to Sea Going Service Commitment Scheme to direct entry personnel in the Navy	Completed Dec. 2022	Sea Going Commitment Scheme extended for further 2 years, with eligibility requirements revised. Applicants require 1 year service rather than 3 years.
Replacing the existing sea-going allowances with less complex sea-going duty measures	Completed Nov. 2023	Existing sea-going allowances replaced with less complex sea going duty measures
The introduction of a mechanism to provide for ongoing review of the application of existing specialist pay rates and allowances to groups and categories of military personnel, and to make recommendations, within pay policy parameters, where adjustments are required.	Accept in Principle (Q1 2025)	Review mechanism for existing specialist pay and allowances introduced.

Source: [Update on the 38 Early Actions from the High-Level Action Plan for the Report of the Commission of the Defence Forces, 2023](#)

¹⁴⁵ Naval Service, [Parliamentary Question 212](#), Dail Eireann Debate, November 2020.

Tale 12 sets out some Commission on Defence's recommendations concerning naval service allowances, their status and some further details. Despite the implementation of some reforms, there appears to be a time lag in terms of impacting retention. For example, in 2021, 108 out of 850 Naval Service personnel (13 percent) availed of the Sea Commitment Scheme which was introduced in 2020. After improving the eligibility criteria in 2022, as recommended, the number availing of the scheme decreased to 38 out of 760 personnel (5 percent).¹⁴⁶ While data for 2023 is not yet available, only 12 personnel received all four stages of the scheme's payment.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, when implementing new policies or the Commission's recommendations, identifying the desired outcome for the reform is essential. Identifying intended outcomes is essential to determine if reforms are effective, and updates are not left open to interpretation. For example, "existing sea-going allowances replaced with less complex sea going duty measures".

7.5. Patrol Duty Allowance (PDA)

Patrol Duty Allowance (PDA) is the best means to assess the number of personnel undertaking sea patrols annually. This is because it is a daily allowance paid for each day at sea completed, as well as being a flat rate of €65.72 for enlisted and €66.13 for officers before tax.¹⁴⁸ While previously this was paid at a set rate each day, from January 2024 after 10 days at sea, this allowance is doubled to €131.44 for enlisted and €132.26 for officers before tax.¹⁴⁹ It is the useful proxy to examine the number of sea going personnel annually, given other allowances may not factor in all personnel, as they are paid regardless of whether naval personnel are not at sea (e.g., MSA), or as all necessary qualifying criteria may not be fully met by personnel undertaking sea patrols (e.g. Naval Service tax credit). It is important to note that not all naval personnel are rostered for sea going activities, and therefore, even if the naval service were to reach full establishment strength, not all Naval personnel would receive PDA.

Figure 19 shows the total amount of current spending paid as part of the naval Patrol Duty Allowance and the total personnel receiving PDA from 2012 to 2022. It is worth noting from 2017-2019 the Naval Service operated in the Mediterranean on UN operations which would increase the number of personnel in receipt of PDA.

- In 2012, PDA cost €3.34 million and was received by 923 personnel,
- By 2016, spending on PDA was €2.22 million, and was received by 656 personnel,
- In 2017 spending increased to €2.46 million, with recipients increasing to 798,
- By 2021 spending had fallen to €1.66 million for just 502 personnel, and
- In 2022 PDA rebounded, with spending increasing to €2.25 million and 556 personnel being in receipt of the allowance.

This suggests around 51 percent of the establishment Naval Service strength are in receipt of the Patrol Allowance, while 67 percent of the current Naval Service strength received the allowance. This would be concentrated amongst enlisted ranks who comprise most of a ship's crew.

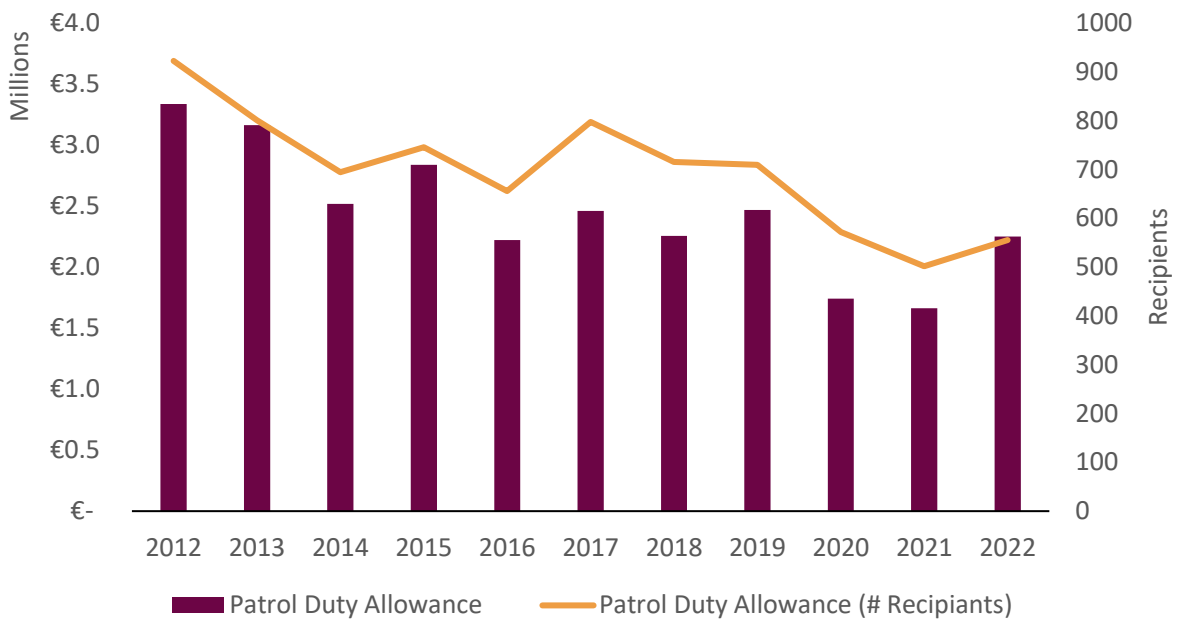
¹⁴⁶ [Naval Service, Parliamentary Questions 85](#), Dail Eireann Debate, October 2023.

¹⁴⁷ [Just 141 naval personnel have claimed sea service bonus](#), Irish Examiner, September 2023.

¹⁴⁸ [Increase in Patrol Duty Allowance for the Naval Service](#), Press Release, Dept. Defence, 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

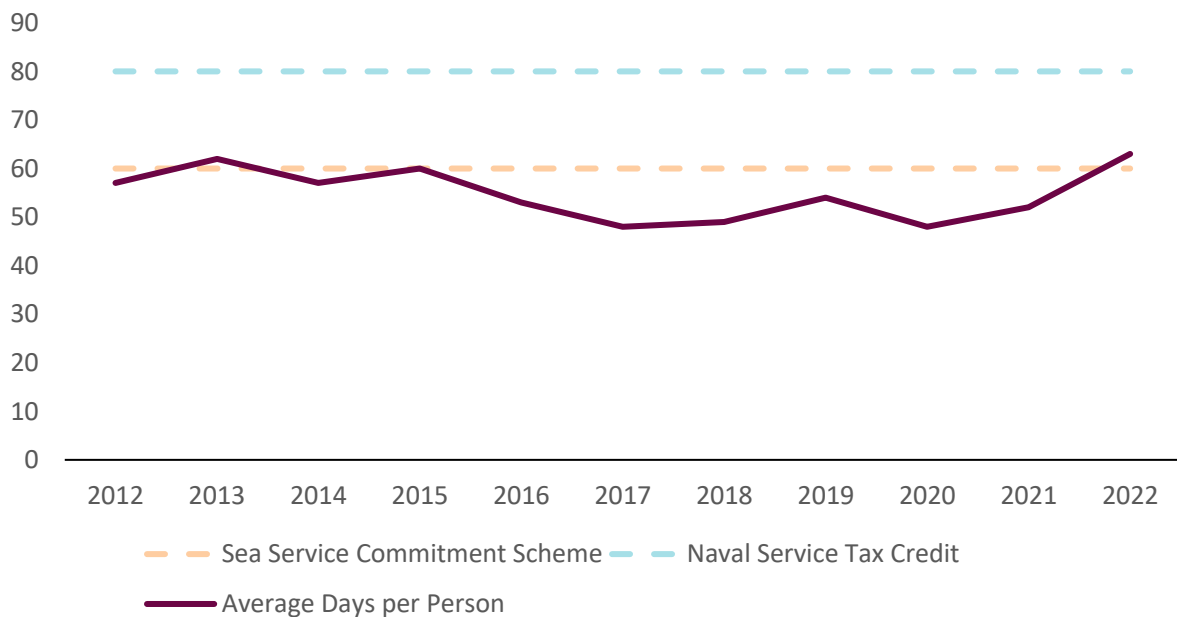
Figure 19: Patrol Duty Allowance: Cost and Recipients



Source: [Comptroller and Auditor General Appropriation Accounts 2012 to 2022](#).

Figure 20 shows the average number of patrol days per naval personnel from 2012 to 2022, and the number of days required in a given period for the Sea Going Commitment Scheme (60 days) and Naval Tax Credit (80 days). In 2013, the average number of patrol days completed per person was 62, falling to 48 in 2020. By 2022, this increased to 63, the highest over the decade. This highlights while the average number of patrol days per person has been increasing, eligibility for remuneration schemes designed to incentivise personnel to undertake patrol days are set significantly higher than the average days completed per person for much of the last decade. While the Sea Going Scheme was ceased? at the end of 2023 to make way for “less complex” allowances, the Naval Tax Credit is due to run until the end of 2024 despite requiring substantially higher patrol days than are completed on average.

Figure 20: Average Patrol Days Completed (2012-2022)



Source: DPER [Databank](#), [Comptroller and Auditor General Appropriation Accounts 2012 to 2022](#) and PBO calculations.

This analysis is made more challenging by the inability to isolate non seagoing personnel. Declining Naval Service strength, in particular since 2016, aligns somewhat with decreased patrol days (see Figure 23, pg.56). Despite the decline in available personnel and the total number of patrol days completed, the average patrol days completed per naval service personnel has tended to increase since 2017 (Figure 20). This implies that a smaller sea-going cohort of naval service personnel have been required to crew vessels to deliver patrol days. While the completion of more patrol days *per annum* may render personnel eligible for various allowance and credits, excessive reliance on a relatively small cohort to deliver patrol days risks counter-productive outcomes, such as staff burnout, and potentially could result in additional exits.

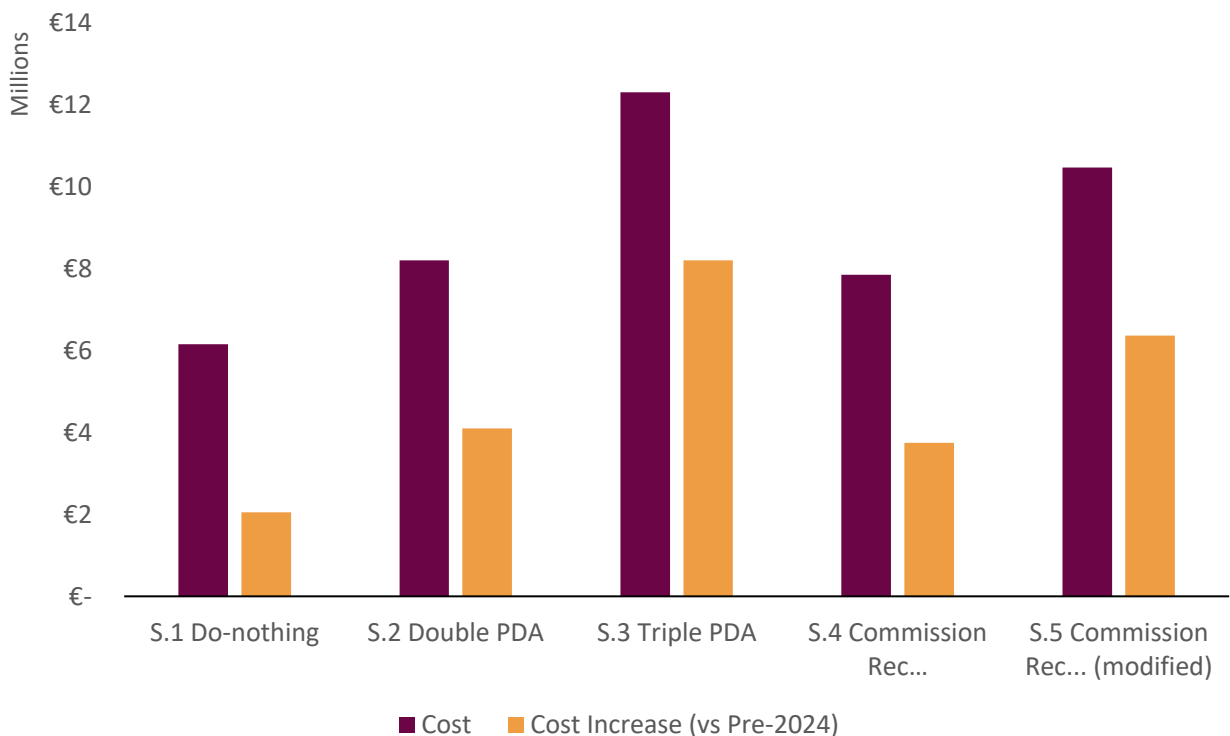
It is therefore important to balance ensuring naval service personnel are adequately remunerated for their service, and that allowances and credits have reasonable eligibility requirements, while also ensuring that excessive pressure isn't placed on a relatively small number of personnel to ensure the Naval Service is able to dispatch vessels on patrol as required.

7.6. Patrol Duty Allowance Scenario Analysis

As Patrol Duty Allowance is paid at a daily flat rate, this makes it possible to attempt to estimate the total cost associated with a full-strength Naval Service. This can be calculated on the basis of known core crew requirements (see Table , pg.23) and flotilla size, and annual patrol days (200 at present, 220 under LOA2). This would assume all eight ships each have their respective full crews, and all vessels complete the required 200 annual patrol days.

As of January 2024, the payment of PDA was subject to change, rising from a base rate of €65.72 daily to double that (€131.44) on the 11th and subsequent days of a patrol. The current application of PDA results in an average daily payment of €98.58.

Figure 21: Changes to Patrol Duty Allowance



Source: [DPER Databank](#), and PBO calculations. Note: The Cost of Patrol Duty Allowance assumes all 8 ships are fully staffed only by PDF personnel and complete the required 200 patrol days.

Figure 21 presents a scenario analysis examining five different rates for Patrol Duty Allowance, assuming all the necessary conditions set out above are met. The scenarios analysed are as follows:

- 'Pre-2024': This models the rate of PDA (flat rate of €65.72 daily) before the January 2024 policy change. This provides context to the new rate for comparative purposes.
- 'Do-nothing': PDA rate of €65.72 per day for ten days, doubling to €131.44 per day after ten days.¹⁵⁰ For a 20-day patrol, this averages to €98.58 per person per day.
- Scenario 1: Doubling the rate of PDA to €131.44 per day for all patrol days.
- Scenario 2: Tripling the rate of PDA to €197.16 per day for all patrol days.
- Scenario 3: Commission's recommendations of double crew, nine ships, 220 patrol days annually and double PDA rate after 10 days.
- Scenario 4: Commission's recommendations of double crew, nine ships, 220 patrol days annually **but** with PDA paid at twice the end-2023 rate for all patrol days.

Table 9: Summary of Scenario Analysis

Scenario	Summary	Patrol Duty Allowance (Daily Rate per person)	PBO Estimated cost to Exchequer
Baseline - 'Do-Nothing'	The 'Do-Nothing' policy scenario costs the PDA for the current flotilla (8 vessels) assuming they have their core crew and complete 200 patrol days. The PDA rate is based on the first 10 days of a patrol being paid at a rate of €65.72, and patrol days in excess of this are paid at double that rate.	€65.72 (first 10 days) and €131.44 for remaining days.	€6.2 million
Scenario 1 - Double PDA for all patrol days	This scenario applies the increased €131.44 PDA rate across all patrol days.	€131.44	€8.2 million
Scenario 2 - Triple PDA	This scenario trebles PDA to €197.16 per patrol day.	€197.16	€12.3 million
Scenario 3 - Commission on Defence Recommendation	This scenario maintains the current €197.16 for PDA but includes the core crewing of the Multi Role Vessel which is being added to the flotilla and provides for an increase in annual patrol days from 200 to 220 per vessel.	€197.16	€7.9 million
Scenario 4 - Commission on Defence Recommendation (modified)	Scenario 4 is a modification of Scenario 4, modifying it by providing for the higher rate (€131.44) of PDA to be paid across all patrol days.	€131.44	€10.5 million

This demonstrates the implications of significant increases to the rate of Patrol Duty Allowance to the gross salaries of naval service personnel. Increasing PDA rates may achieve enhanced rates of retention while simultaneously making the Naval Service a more attractive employer, at relatively modest cost to the Exchequer. Yet it is important to note, PDA is only recently available (end 2023) to members of the Naval Service Reserve for any patrol days undertaken. The scenario analysis also highlights while changes to PDA have a significant impact on remuneration for naval personnel,

¹⁵⁰ [Increase in Patrol Duty Allowance for the Naval Service](#), Press Release, Dept. Defence, 2023

increasing PDA would have a moderate financial impact in terms of overall defence spending, with even significant changes to the average daily rate having reasonably modest costs.

In the period 2012 to 2022 the average number of patrol days completed was c.55 per Naval Service personnel. In reality, some personnel may participate in 0 patrol days due to onshore duties etc., while others may complete considerably more. However, to estimate the potential financial outcome to an individual under each scenario analysed, the calculations were based on the gross PDA payable assuming 55 patrol days completed for each scenario. Table 10 shows the gross financial benefit accruing under the various scenarios and provides the pre-January 2024 position for comparative purposes.

- The baseline scenario is worth €1807.3 more on average compared to the pre-2024 position per person per annum?.
- A move to the Commission's recommendation (Scenario 3) would result in no change to the rate at which PDA is paid; however
- If the Commission's recommendation to increase annual patrol days to 220 (+20) translated to a *pro rata* (+10%, c.6 days) increase in patrol days for naval service personnel, it could result in an additional payment of ~€591 *per person, per annum*.

Table 10: Individualised Scenario Analysis

Scenario	Gross PDA
Pre-January 2024 Policy Change (doubling rate after 10 patrol days)	€3,614.6
Baseline: Do-nothing	€5,421.9
Scenario 1: Double PDA	€7,229.2
Scenario 2: Triple PDA	€10,843.8
Scenario 3: Commission Recommendation	€5,421.9
Scenario 4: Commission Recommendation (modified)	€7,229.2

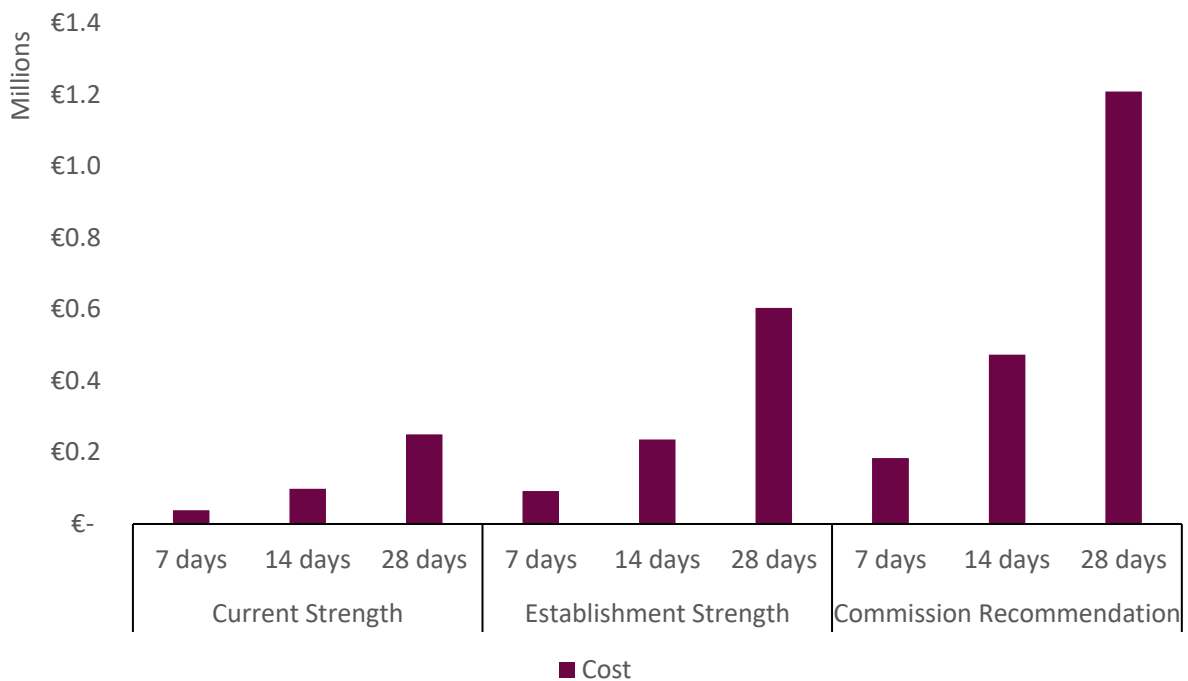
Naval Service Reserve

Figure 22 presents the estimated total cost of expanding Patrol Duty Allowance to naval reservists under three scenarios for 7 days, 14 days and 28 days of patrolling.

While naval reservists would normally participate in patrols of around 14 days, the alternative scenarios of seven day and 28 days allow for a comparison to assess the potential scalability of costs for utilising reservists to supplement the availability of crews on vessels. The scenarios examine the baseline daily rate of €65.72 per person for less than 10 days, doubling to €131.44 thereafter. These scenarios are set out based on:

- Current NSR strength (83 personnel as of Q1 2024),
- Current establishment strength (200 personnel), and
- Increased establishment strength (400 personnel) in line with the recommendation of the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces.

Figure 22: Cost of Naval Service Reserve Patrol Duty Allowance Scenario Analysis



Source: [DPER Databank](#) and PBO calculations

Figure 22 shows if the NSR’s current strength completed a single 7-day patrol and were paid under current PDA rates, this would cost ~€38,200. For longer patrols, the cost rises primarily as payment rates double for patrols over 10 days long. The cost of the current NSR strength completing a single 28-day patrol would be ~€250,900.

These costs rise considerably in the event that the NSR’s strength rises, even to just 200 personnel. In that event, a single 28-day patrol completed by all NSR personnel would cost an estimated €604,600. This doubles in the event that the NSR strength doubles, in line with the recommendation of the Report on the Commission on the Defence Forces, to ~€1.2 million.

All Naval Service Reserve ranks are seagoing, with Naval Service Reserve serving as an augmentation to PDF crew. While NSR personnel cannot be seen as a direct replacement or substitute for members of the permanent Naval Service, extension of the PDA at current rates (assuming each NSR member completes a single 28-day patrol) would cost just over €1.2 million – while providing a total of 11,200 additional personnel patrol days. This is a significant amount of additional capacity for a relatively minor additional spend.

This highlights that the Naval Service Reserve offers a cost-effective way of mobilising additional crew to support the staffing of vessels when undertaking patrols. The Naval Service Reserve has the potential to support the Naval Service in its operations. However, the length of vessel patrols and the capacity of reservists to secure sufficient time away from other commitments (work, education etc.),¹⁵¹ as well as reservists being unlikely to have the full range of skills and experience that permanent Naval Service crew would have limits the capacity of the NSR to compensate for under establishment strength in the Naval Service.

¹⁵¹ See discussion on the Naval Service Reserve pg.26.

8. Naval Service Performance Indicators

As with any use of public funds in State services, it is beneficial to understand the key outputs of the Naval Service, as identified by the Department of Defence. This section examines the Naval Service impact and performance indicators from 2012 to 2023, as identified and reported in the Public Service Performance Reports (PSPR) and the Revised Estimates for Public Services (REV).

8.1. Patrols and Boardings

Given the Naval Service is “the State’s principal seagoing agency maintaining a constant presence 24 hours a day” all year round, undertaking naval patrols has been identified as a key deliverable. Both the PSPR and the REV list the number of Naval Vessel Patrol Days as a context and impact indicator, indicating achieving the required number of patrol days is a key deliverable for the Naval Service.¹⁵²

Figure 23 shows both the number of Naval Service patrol days and boardings from 2012 to 2023, along with the overall number of naval service personnel. While naval strength is not explicitly listed as an indicator, achieving 100 percent wider PDF Defence Forces strength is, this indicates a full-strength Naval Service is, by association, also an indicator. As noted earlier in the document, since 2016 there has been a gradual decline in the number of Naval Service personnel from 1,106 to 722 as of Q1 2024.¹⁵³ These figures exclude Naval Service Reserve personnel, who may be available for patrols.

The total number of naval patrol days undertaken has fluctuated over the decade but has largely aligned with the same trend as total number of naval personnel. In 2013, 994 naval patrol days were recorded, which increased to 1,408 in 2017, the highest over the last decade, but the number of naval patrol days has declined steadily ever since, with 520 patrol days completed in 2023. This is the lowest number over the last decade and also corresponds with the lowest strength of the Naval Service over the same time. The Department reflected to the PBO there is a significant amount of work undertaken by Naval Operations Command Centre at the Naval Base, as part of intelligence gathering and remote monitoring of vessels by the Naval Service.¹⁵⁴

Another context and impact indicator for the Naval Service corresponding to the number of patrols, is the number of boardings conducted. In 2012, 1,329 boardings were undertaken by the Naval Service. By 2016, this fell to 1,249 boardings and to 772 in 2019, before recovering slightly (from a 2021 low point of 284) to 350 boardings by 2022. The reductions in boardings could be a result of a reduced ability for Naval Service vessels to undertake patrols, for a variety of reasons.

The Department of Defence noted that, in collaboration with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and European Fisheries Control Agency, a risk-based approach to naval boardings was agreed to better utilise resources.¹⁵⁵ This has resulted in fewer boardings being delivered but increasing the quality of each boarding. In addition, the Commission on the Defence Forces recommended SMART metrics, or a risk-based approach, should be developed which would focus on quality and effectiveness of enforcement, rather than the quantity.¹⁵⁶ This should ensure a balance between sea going activities and impactful enforcement. This recommendation is currently being progressed with a year-long pilot programme that is nearing completion.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, [Public Service Performance Report 2023](#), pg. 49, 2024

¹⁵³ Department of Defence, Defence Forces Administrative Data, 2024

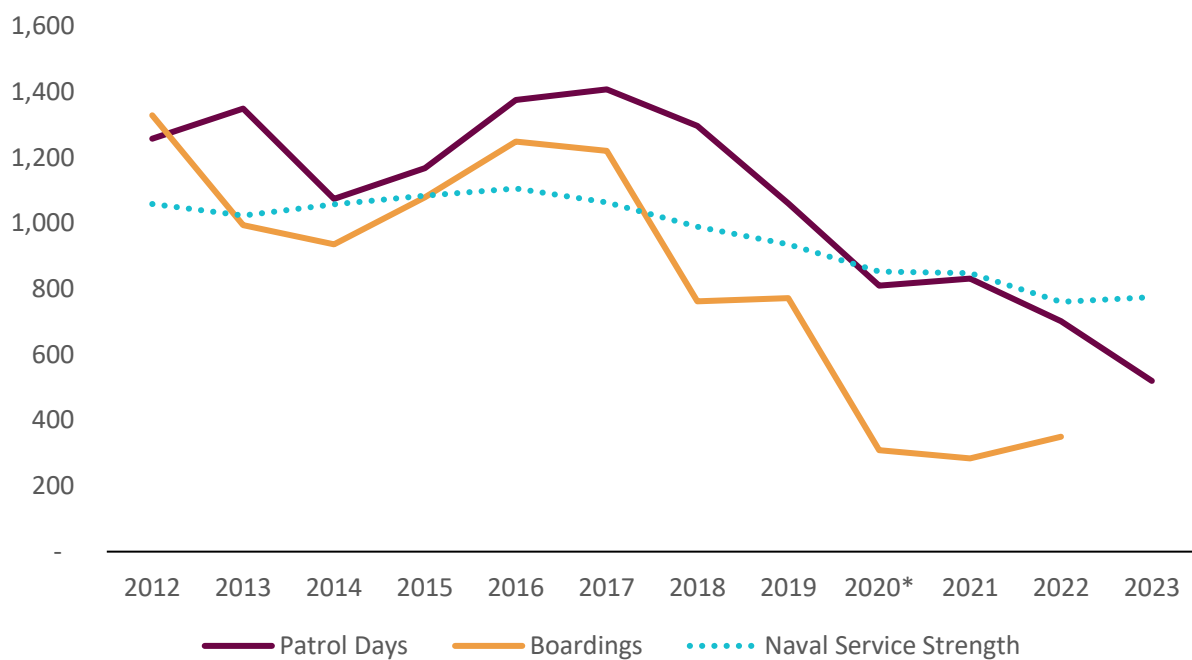
¹⁵⁴ Department of Defence email correspondence with the PBO, 12th April 2024

¹⁵⁵ Department of Defence email correspondence with the PBO, 12th April 2024

¹⁵⁶ [Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), Commission on Defence, 2022 pg. 36

¹⁵⁷ Department of Defence email correspondence with the PBO, 12th April 2024

Figure 23: Naval Service Patrols, Boardings and Strength



Source: [Revised Estimates Volumes for the Public Service 2012-2024, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, Public Service Performance Report 2023 \(2024\)](#), and [DPER Databank](#).

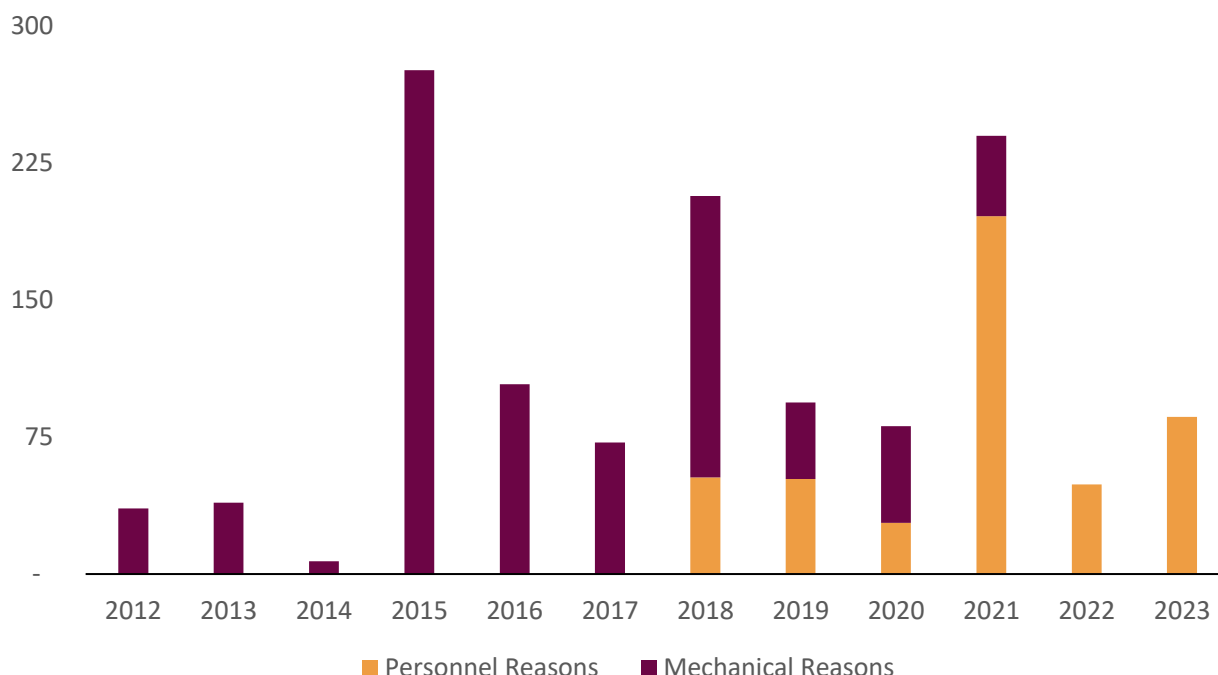
Naval Service patrols may be cancelled for a variety of reasons. These can include bad weather conditions, mechanical issues, undertaking vessel maintenance and personnel shortages. While some of these issues are outside the control of the Naval Service, others, such as repairing vessels are the responsibility of the Naval Service to ensure the availability of ships for patrols. Reductions in personnel strength decreases the availability of personnel who can be rostered to undertake naval patrols and conduct maintenance. Successive years of net personnel losses increases the pressure on available personnel, impacting on sea/shore rotation times causing further retention difficulties.¹⁵⁸ Given the reductions in naval personnel in recent years, this is a major concern for ensuring naval vessels are available for patrols.

Figure 24 shows the total number of cancelled naval patrol days from 2012 to 2023, by reasons for the cancellation. Where a patrol is cancelled, only one reason is recorded, even in circumstances where multiple reasons may occur. The two reasons cited for cancellations are mechanical issues or personnel reasons. From 2012 to 2018, mechanical issues were the main reasons for cancelled patrols, however personnel reasons have become the most common reason patrol days are cancelled since 2021. In 2015, 276 patrol days were lost for mechanical reasons, before falling to 44 in 2021. From 2012 to 2017 there were no cancellations due to personnel reasons. In 2018, personnel reasons resulted in 53 lost patrol day, increasing to 196 days in 2021 and 86 days in 2023. This indicates that in total over the last decade, 1,291 patrol days were lost, or just under a full years' worth of patrolling due to a variety of reasons.

While the number of patrol days lost due for mechanical reasons has decreased in recent years, the number of days lost due to personnel reasons has become more prominent, accounting for around 66 percent of patrol days lost since 2018. However, it is likely the large number of personnel days lost in 2021 relates to the Covid-19 pandemic.

¹⁵⁸ [Public Service Pay Commission: Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force](#), 2019.

Figure 24: Cancelled Naval Patrol Days, 2012 to 2023



Source: [Naval Service Parliamentary Questions 437](#), April 2022, [Parliamentary Question 23](#), February 2023, Parliamentary Question 636, February 2023 and [Parliamentary Question 147](#), December 2023.

The decline in patrols cancelled due to mechanical reasons is not the focus of this paper; however, there may be several reasons for it. Firstly, much of the flotilla is relatively recently in service (see Table , pg.22). Further, reduced patrol days (see Figure 23, pg.56) may be resulting in reduced wear and tear on the flotilla. Personnel shortages may also contribute to reductions in the overall number of patrols, therefore reducing the likelihood of impromptu/unanticipated mechanical issues resulting in cancelled patrols.

8.2. Performance Indicators & Performance Budgeting

As conducting naval patrols is an important performance indicator of the Naval Service, it is useful to examine the other performance indicators, set by the Department of Defence, which are relevant to the Naval Service. As “performance-based budgeting aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public expenditure by linking funding of public sector organisations to the results they deliver”¹⁵⁹ it is important to ensure sufficient attention is given to the Naval Service to enable appropriate assessment of its deliverables. The rationale of appropriate performance indicators is to “ensure that when formulating expenditure plans, decision makers take into account the results to be achieved by the expenditure.”¹⁶⁰

Table 11 presents the relevant performance indicators from the Defence Forces, which would include the Naval Service, under the [Public Service Performance Report 2023](#) and the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024* (the REV). These state the target output for 2023 and the current output based on PBO estimations. Many of these indicators refer to the overall strength of the Permanent Defence Forces, the Reserve Defence Forces and the percentage of females in the PDF. While the number of naval patrol days committed to sea fisheries patrols is listed as a key impact indicator, there is limited detail provided.

¹⁵⁹ [Public Service Performance Report 2022](#), 2023.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Table 11: Defence Forces Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	Target (2024)	Current Status (2024)	PBO Comment
PDF strength as a percentage of PDF establishment (9,500)*	N/A	78% (as of 31 March 2024)	This metric appears to have been discontinued as of 2023 in favour of a metric tracking strength numbers (rather than strength as a % of establishment).
Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve effective strength as a percentage of establishment (4,069)	95 - 100% (3,866)	35% (1,434)	This metric appears to have been discontinued as of 2023 in favour of a metric tracking strength numbers (rather than strength as a % of establishment).
PDF Strength	8,100	7,510 (as of 31 March 2024)	It would be useful to establish clear targets for the branches rather than the PDF as a whole.
Net increase in Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve strength	5 - 10%	-	Should outline a Naval Service Reserve specific subcategory, separate from the Army Reserve.
Naval Service patrol days committed to sea fisheries protection**	90%	-	Should clearly state the number of patrol days to be undertaken.
Percentage of Female Personnel in the PDF (Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, Privates)	12.0%	7.6%	Should set Naval Service and Naval Service Reserve specific category / target to achieve

Source: [Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024](#) (2023), [Public Service Performance Report 2023](#) (2023), Department of Defence, Administrative Data (July 2024) and PBO calculations.

* Establishment strength rose to 9,589 in 2023 and to 9,600 in 2024.

** There are no longer annual targets set with the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency as they are reviewed on a continuous basis throughout the year, this metric encompasses the sea fisheries protection element of Naval Service patrol days.

The key challenge with the existing performance indicators is there is limited detail specifically for the Naval Service, as the indicators generally refer to the Defence Forces as a whole. This makes it difficult to assess whether Naval Service investment is being used to its full potential. The PBO comments how these performance indicators may be improved by providing further detail, particularly for the Naval Service, to meaningfully evaluate whether the level of investment provided is meeting defence needs. While this paper's focus is explicitly the Naval Service, some of these improvements to context & impact indicators, and performance metrics could likewise be applied in respect of the other branches.

Table 12 sets out the context and impact indicators from the [Public Service Performance Report 2023](#) and REV 2023. This sets out the impact indicator, recent information for 2023, along with some comments from the PBO about how these indicators could be improved. These indicators outline key aspects related to the Defence Forces which are beyond the immediate control of the organisation but provide useful information about the organisation. For example, the number of annual applicants is outside the control of the Naval Service but gives information that is useful in a broader sense. Overall, the impact indicators should develop in further detail, aspects specific to the Naval Service to help improve the overall assessment of the performance impacts of the Naval Service.

Table 12: Current Context and Impact Indicators, Revised Estimates 2024

Impact Indicator	2022	2023	PBO Comment
Naval Service Vessel Patrol Days	790	520	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should set as a performance indicator with associated targets for same. With 8 ships, at a maximum of 200 patrol days, this would suggest a total of 1,600 days. 9 Vessels at 220 days, would suggest a total of 1,980 days.
Number of inductions to the PDF	435	415	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should identify a necessary recruitment intake to address the shortfall in overall personnel, in addition to analysing Naval Service exits at across both ranks and length of service. Should establish a Naval Service and Naval Service Reserve specific category / target for inductions.
Reserve Defence Force training days	16,632	19,442	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should identify a targeted number of RDF training days to maximise the use of the RDF's budget allocation, given some aspects of the RDF are unpaid. Should establish a Naval Service Reserve specific subcategory / target to identify the engagement of NSR in undertaking patrolling.
Percentage of Female inductees to the PDF	8.5%	8.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should identify the percentage of female inductees by branch and also by PDF and RDF.

Source: Revised Estimates for the Public Service 2024, [Public Service Performance Report 2023](#) (2023), Department of Defence, Administrative Data (July 2024), and PBO calculations.

8.3. Climate Goals

While acknowledging the Defence Forces carbon emission reduction of 35 percent from 2017 to 2022,¹⁶¹ the PBO notes the limited information provided on climate related performance indicators and green budgeting. As the Defence Forces must reduce from 60.5 KtCO₂ to ~25.8 ktCO₂ by 2030,¹⁶² developing specific climate indicators and targets for the Naval Service, and other branches, would improve the understanding of the defence sector's contribution to the 51 percent carbon emission reduction by 2030. However, it is challenging to see how the objectives of increasing the flotilla size and increasing the number of patrol days can be achieved while also reducing the sectoral carbon emissions significantly.

More broadly, Ireland's current overseas deployments are limited in scope.¹⁶³ Reduced activity (such as indicated by reductions in patrol days) may be a significant factor in the Defence Force's progress in reducing its total CO₂ emissions. If the full ambition of LOA 2 is to be recognised, patrol days could potentially reach 1,980 annually (compared to just 520 in 2023).¹⁶⁴ It is not clear if it will be possible to achieving this level of patrol activity while continuing to reduce carbon emissions.

¹⁶¹ [Department of Defence and Defence Forces Annual Report](#), 2022, pg. 142.

¹⁶² [Annual Report 2023 on Public Sector Energy Performance](#), SEAI, 2024, pg. 33

¹⁶³ Irish Defence Forces, '[Current missions](#)' (Accessed 11 July 2024).

¹⁶⁴ Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, [Public Service Performance Report 2023](#) (June 2024) p.49.

9. Conclusion

This paper examines expenditure related to the Irish Naval Service, trends in Naval Service personnel, and some of the associated Naval Service outputs. It explores current and capital spending related to the Naval Service, and the strength of personnel across ranks to identify where exactly there are shortfalls. Table 13 presents the objectives underpinning this research project, and the associated outcomes with how each objective has been addressed.

Table 13: Research Project's Objectives and Outcomes

Objective	Outcome
To present the literature and policy documentation concerning the Naval Service.	Examined the range of policy literature, and other relevant documentation, from 2000 to date, outlining the key aspects relevant to the Naval Service.
To improve understanding of the Irish Naval Service strength and how it is organisationally structured.	The paper presented the structure of the Naval Service, its branch commands and subunits, the number of vessels and the organisational rank structure.
To examine data on Defence spending on the Naval Service and identify trends from 2012 to 2022.	Outlined the estimated current and capital spending on the Naval Service, and overall Defence Forces spending from 2012 to 2022, with 2023 and 2024 data included where possible.
To improve understanding of the challenges and pressures facing the Naval Service, particularly in relation to personnel shortages.	The paper identified that personnel pressures exist primarily amongst the lowest ranks, while the Naval Service was identified as having the highest average turnover of staff, relative to the army and air corps.
To improve understanding of the different allowances, tax credits and schemes available to the Naval Service.	Presented several allowances currently available to the naval service, and outlined the challenges associated with several of them, as well as the complexity of structure.
To examine the potential cost implications arising from changes to the Naval Service Patrol Duty Allowance.	Presented a Scenario analysis estimating a baseline cost of a fully staffed Naval Service with increased PDA, as a means of simplifying the allowances available.
To examine, where possible, the Naval Service Reserve, its strength, roles, and how it fits into the wider Naval Service.	Outlines the NSR's structure and role, its strength by rank, and estimates a cost of extending PDA to a fully staffed NSR.

This paper demonstrated there is a lack of clarity involved with accurately quantifying the level of investment that is specifically dedicated towards the Irish Naval Service. While generally capital spending is well documented, there were challenges with clearly identifying the level of Naval Service specific current expenditure for pay and allowances.

The PBO estimates at current strength, the 2024 cost of Naval Service current spending on pay is around €34 million. Allowances have averaged around €3.6 million annually since 2018, with capital spending averaging about €14.1 million.

The PBO estimates that at full strength, Naval Service spending on pay would be around €55.8 million. This suggests a shortfall of spending on pay to be around €17 million (before allowances are included) arising from shortages in personnel. The PBO therefore estimates the cost associated with a full-

strength Naval Service, with all 8 ships operational for the required number of patrol days to be around €75 million. However, this is a conservative estimate, and would vary depending on a range of factors, such as fuel costs, pay agreements, number of personnel in receipt of seagoing allowances, and the implementation of the Commission on Defence Forces' recommendation to increase the required patrol days to 220 days annually and provide for double crews.

Reforming the allowance system is crucial to simplifying the process of remunerating personnel. Currently, determining current spending attributed to the Naval Service is excessively complicated due to the plethora of allowances, schemes and credits which currently exist in attempts to improve pay. Many of these schemes and allowances can be paid concurrently and at different points of the year, in addition some are taxable, pensionable, both or neither. This creates an overly complex system of remuneration with associated administrative burdens. Simplifying the remuneration structure for the Naval Service may make employment in the Naval Service more attractive as remuneration can be more easily communicated to prospective recruits.

Furthermore, the eligibility criteria for the new schemes are overly complicated, and difficult to achieve. This is evident in how, with the Sea Going Commitment Scheme introduced in 2020, just 93 personnel received the allowance in 2021, with 103 in 2022,¹⁶⁵⁻¹⁶⁶ and 151 personnel by September 2023.¹⁶⁷ This averages 15 percent of the Naval Service over a 3-year period. Amalgamating the scheme with Patrol Duty Allowance is a welcome development in the simplification of the sea going allowance system for personnel.

A systemic review of all existing allowances available should be conducted with the aim of reducing and simplifying the allowance system within the Defence Forces. This could be reviewed as part of the [IGEES Spending Review process](#). Patrol Duty Allowance is a relatively straightforward allowance for current and prospective personnel to understand. Increasing Patrol Duty Allowance is potentially an effective mechanism to increase the financial reward for personnel to undertake naval patrols and offer a simple solution to address shortages of personnel for naval patrols. For potential reforms to Patrol Duty Allowance, the PBO estimates that at full strength, with all ships meeting the minimum patrol days required, PDA currently costs around €6.15 million annually. Increasing PDA to align with the recommendation of the CoDF would increase this to €7.85 million. Applying the double rate of PDA across entire patrols (rather than after 10 days) would increase the annual cost further to ~€10.47 million.

Further consideration of the resources required to effectively maximise Naval Service Reserve personnel to support vessels undertaking patrols should be considered. The PBO estimates that PDA for the NSR will have an annual cost of c.€251,000 at the NSR's current strength (assuming reservists each completed 28 days patrolling). Under the same assumptions the cost would be ~€605,000 if the NSR reached establishment strength. This would double to c.€1.2 million if the CoDF's recommendation regarding the NSR's establishment (doubling to 400) were achieved. Other Naval Service Reserve aspects must also be considered. This includes identifying a WTE rating for a Naval Service Reservist, and allowing those who undertake naval patrols to receive the same allowances and schemes as the PDF undertaking naval patrols. This would incentivise Naval Service Reservists to undertake patrols, supplementing, when necessary, PDF crew requirements.

Improved data collection on the Naval specific spending for pay and allowances would assist with identifying the necessary investment for addressing issues. Identifying the different costs associated

¹⁶⁵ [Department of Defence and Defence Forces Annual Report 2021](#), Dept Defence, 2022. Pg. 60.

¹⁶⁶ [Department of Defence and Defence Forces Annual Report 2022](#), Dept Defence, 2023. Pg. 73.

¹⁶⁷ [Just 141 naval personnel claimed sea service bonus](#), Irish Examiner, September 2023.

underpinning the Naval Service will allow for a more effective use of investment to maximise the number of ships patrolling.

Given increased geopolitical uncertainty and increased military conflicts around the globe an adequate assessment of the financial requirements of the Naval Service, as Ireland's first line of defence is essential. Combined with supply constraints and increased costs of capital equipment during periods of conflict, combined with personnel shortages, it is imperative to take clear steps to understand the needs and requirements of the Irish Naval Service.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance Process:

To ensure the accuracy and methodological rigor in this research, the authors engaged in the following quality assurance process:

Internal / Departmental

This process involved seeking internal quality assurance from line management, feedback from other internal sections, as well as an internal peer review process throughout the drafting and preparation.

External

This involved seeking external review from key stakeholders in the area. This included the Department of Defence and the various Representative Associations, in addition to engaging with other external experts.

Appendix 2: Organisational Structure of the Naval Service

Figure 2 sets out the high-level structure of the Naval Service. The Naval Service hierarchy is overseen at the Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ). Sitting under the NSHQ are the:

- Naval Operations Command,
- Naval Support Command, and
- Naval College.

Table 14 presents the sections/subunits making up the three command branches of the Naval Service's structure. Each has a specific responsibility and role to play within the wider Naval Service.¹⁶⁸

Table 14: Naval Operations Command

Naval Service Head Quarters		
Naval Operations Command	Naval Support Command	Naval College
Intelligence and Fishery Section <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Naval Intelligence ▪ Specialist Navigation Centre ▪ Fishery Protection Supervisory and Information Centre ▪ Naval Computer Centre. 	Support Command HQ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personnel Management Section ▪ Maintenance Management, Planning, and Inspectorate 	Officer Training School
Shore Operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HQ Section ▪ Naval Service Operations Room ▪ Naval Service Reserve Staff Officer ▪ Diving Section (Specialist Unit) ▪ Operational Security Section ▪ Naval Base Communications Centre ▪ Boat Transport ▪ Sea Fisheries Monitoring Centre 	Base Logistic Department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Naval Technical Stores ▪ Central Supply Unit ▪ Accommodation and Messes Section ▪ Base Engineering Maintenance Section ▪ Road Transport Section ▪ Naval Dockyard 	Military and Naval Operational Training School
Fleet Operational Readiness Standards and Training (FORST)	Mechanical Engineering and Naval Dockyard Unit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plant and Machinery Section ▪ Naval Dockyard 	Naval School of Engineering
	Weapons Electrical Unit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communications Technical Section ▪ Electrical/Electronic Section ▪ Ordnance Section 	

Source: [About the Naval Service](#), Military.ie, Irish Defence Forces.

¹⁶⁸ [About the Naval Service](#), Military.ie, Irish Defence Forces.

Appendix 3: Other Defence Forces Information

Table 15: Former Naval Service Ships

Ship (Series)	Year Entered Service	Year Retired from Service	Service Duration (Years)	Status
L.É. Emer (P.21)	1978	2013	35	Sold (€320,000)
L.É. Aoife (P.22)	1979	2015	36	Sold (€110,000)
L.É. Aisling (P.23)	1980	2016	36	Sold (€110,000)
L.É. Eithne (P.31)	1984	2022	38	Scrapped
L.É. Orla (P.41)	1989	2022	33	Scrapped
L.É. Ciara (P.42)	1989	2022	33	Scrapped

Source: [Irish Times 2013](#), [RTE 2015](#), [Irish Examiner 2017](#), [Ministerial Briefing](#), Dept. Defence 2022.

Table 16: Naval Service Related Commission on Defence Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Government Position	Planned Completion Date
4	The creation of three Service Chiefs, and Deputy Service Chiefs, for the land, air and maritime forces and a Joint Force Commander, who should also be the Vice-CHOD, supported by a Deputy Commander this high level leadership team may be formalised as a Command Board or similar title and should support the Chief of Defence in managing issues connected to the development of the Joint Force	Revert	Revert to Government July 2024
5	The Army, Air Corps and Naval Service should become services, have service headquarters, and have parity of esteem.	Revert	Revert to Government July 2024
8 (ii)	The ARW should renamed IRL SOF and include permanent Air and Maritime Task Groups in Casement Aerodrome and Haulbowline Naval Base	Accept in Principle	2028
21	The creation of a structure to provide a recognised career path for Naval divers that permits rank progression for enlisted personnel within the Naval Service Diving Section.	Accept in Principle	2026
32	Setting an overall female participation rate of 35% to be achieved through a combination of entry-level inductions and civilisation, as well as direct entry into more senior and specialist, position across the organisation.	Accept in Principle	2028
37	A guaranteed minimum female participation rate of 35% on all command and other relevant courses by 2025	Accept in Principle	2028
56	Removing the requirement for a... Able Seaman to 'mark time' for the first three years at that rank	Accept	Completed Dec. 2022

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57	Ensuring that all personnel of... Able Seaman rank are paid the full rate of MSA applicable to the rank;	Accept	Completed Dec. 2022
58	Providing immediate access to the Sea-going Service Commitment Scheme to direct entry personnel in the Navy	Accept in Principle	Completed Dec. 2022
59	Replacing the existing sea-going allowances with less complex sea-going duty measures	Accept	Completed Nov. 2023
61	On the basis that all personnel should, in the first instance, be paid the full rate of MSA applicable to their rank, MSA should be abolished and the full applicable rate integrated into core pay.	Further Evaluation	Further Evaluation Due Dec 2024
68 (ii)	The establishment of the RDF should include, at a minimum... a Navy Reserve of 400.	Accept in Principle	2028
73 (i)	Defence Forces should urgently develop revamped and efficient recruitment process for the...Naval Service Reserve. For the ... Naval Service Reserve a maximum recruitment time of eight weeks from application to initiation, should be set	Accept in Principle	June 2024
73 (ii)	The Defence Forces should urgently develop revamped and efficient recruitment processes for the... Naval Service Reserve. For the... Naval Service Reserves, a fast-track system should be developed for those who wish to join the First Line Reserve (FLR) on discharge from the PDF.	Accept in Principle	July 2024
80	Ireland should deepen its engagement with the implementation of the EU's Maritime Security Strategy	Accept in Principle	Q4 2025
81 (i)	A whole-of-government National Maritime Security Strategy... should be developed. As part of this, or in advance, the powers required by the Naval Service for effective enforcement, in support of national security, in the maritime domain should be addressed.	Further Evaluation	Further Evaluation TBC
84	A whole of government air and maritime services 'needs analyses' should be undertaken in the short term in an attempt to highlight trends and predict needs into the future over a 10-20 year period.	Further Evaluation	Further Evaluation TBC
88	An accelerated programme of Naval vessel replacement to ensure a balanced fleet of 9 modern ships by early in the next decade;	Accept in Principle	2028
89	That all modern vessels be double crewed to ensure each vessel spends an absolute minimum of 220 days at sea per year, with this being phased in over the course of the vessel replacement programme;	Accept in Principle	2028
90	That SMART metrics for patrol days should be developed and agreed between the Naval Service and the SFPA focused on quality and effectiveness of enforcement activities rather than quantity;	Accept in Principle	Dec. 2024
102	By 2040 the Naval Service would comprise a balanced fleet of at least 12 ships, supported by appropriate technology, as part of a joint Defence Forces structure;	Revert	Revert to Government 2028

124	The future Naval legal branch should include additional legal officers with appropriate maritime law and fisheries law specialisations.	Further Evaluation	Further Evaluation TBC April 2024
128 (ii)	Modernisation of the Naval Service Diving Section with the establishment of a Defence Forces' School of Diving	Accept	2028
128 (i)	Modernisation of the Naval Service Diving Section with establishment of a diving safety office reporting directly to the Chief of the Navy	Accept	2028

Source: [Detailed Implementation Plan for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces](#), 2023.

Table 17 sets out the projects from the Defence Forces Capital Infrastructure Development Plan (2022) which are attributable to the Naval Service. These projects are funded on a multi annual basis under subhead A.13 'Defence Forces Built Infrastructure – Construction & Maintenance' of Vote 36 Defence.

Table 17: Defence Forces Capital Infrastructure Development Plan 2022 to 2027

Naval Service Projects	Status (Nov 2022)	Timeline for Delivery	Projected Cost
Haulbowline Spencer Jetty Stabilization	Completion	2022	€2,925,894
Block 8 - conversion to accommodate ships' personnel ashore	Completion	2022	€4,230,223
Refurbishment of Unit 50 & 51, Haulbowline	Construction	2022 - 2023	€604,759
Upgrade of Block 4 – New Accommodation	CC Procurement	2023 - 2024	€9,579,498
Block 9 refurbishment – HQ Comcen/Store	CC Procurement	2023 - 2024	€9,253,655
Remediation of ISPAT site	DT Procurement	2023 - 2025	€30,000,000
Old Comms Building Fire Repair & Upgrade - Cadet Accom	DT Procurement	2024 - 2025	€3,800,000
Cadets Mess - internal alterations and refurb	DT Procurement	2024 - 2025	€3,300,000
New Gym at Old Tank Building	Design Brief	2024 - 2025	€6,000,000
Dredging	In Planning	2024	€6,600,000
ISPAT Site Development - New Entrance / Security Access	Design Brief	2025 - 2026	€800,000
Additional berthage - West Wall, Graving Dock	In Planning *	2025 - 2026	€2,500,000
Haulbowline - Main Workshops Dockyard	Design Brief	2026	€12,500,000
NS -ISPAT Site Development - Block 10 refurbishment for offices	Design Brief	2027	€8,500,000
Additional berthage and associated works (New 140m Jetty) - Phase 4	Design Brief	2027	€36,000,000
Total Naval Service Investment (2022 – 2027)			€136,594,029
Total DF Infrastructure Plan Investment (2022 – 2027)			€355,511,654
Percentage of Capital Infrastructure Investment in Naval Service			38.4%

Source: [Defence Forces Capital Infrastructure Development Plan 2022-2027](#), Dept. Defence, 2022.

Note: Measures include relate only to the investments in Naval Service specific infrastructure

Table 18: Defence Forces Strength by Branch, 2012 to 2023

Year	Defence Forces Strength	Army Strength	Naval Service Strength	Air Corps Strength
2012	9359	7510	1058	791
2013	9236	7434	1023	779
2014	9279	7456	1057	766
2015	9140	7309	1083	748
2016	9126	7332	1090	704
2017	9173	7386	1053	734
2018	8957	7243	989	725
2019	8659	7002	936	721
2020	8568	6920	902	746
2021	8456	6830	875	751
2022	7966	6460	798	708
2023	7550	6136	725	689
2024Q1*	7,510	6,087	722	701
Net Change +/-	-1,849	-1,423	-336	-90

Source: Department of Defence Administrative Data (June and July 2024).

Note: Q1 2024 data included where possible.

Table 23: Naval Service Reserve Defence Forces Strength by Rank, 2012 to 2023

Rank (Officers, NCO and Enlisted)	NSR Establishment Strength (2012)	NSR Current Strength (2024)	Vacancies
Lieutenant Commander	4	2	2
Ensign, Sub Lieutenant, Lieutenant	20	18	2
Senior Chief Petty Officer	4	3	1
Chief Petty Officer	8	4	4
Petty Officer	16	12	4
Leading Seaman	32	6	26
Seaman (O/A) & Recruit	116	38	78
Total	200	83	117

Source: Department of Defence Administrative Data (July 2024).

Note: Figures are correct as of 31st March 2024

Séanadh

Is í an Oifig Buiséid Pharlaiminteach (OBP) a d'ullmhaigh an doiciméad seo mar áis do Chomhaltaí Thithe an Oireachtais ina gcuid dualgas parlaiminteach. Ní bheartaítear é a bheith uileghabhálach ná críochnúil. Féadfaidh an OBP aon fhaisnéis atá ann a bhaint as nó a leasú aon tráth gan fógra roimh ré. Níl an OBP freagrach as aon tagairtí d'aon fhaisnéis atá á cothabháil ag tríú páirtithe nó naisc chuig aon fhaisnéis den sórt sin ná as ábhar aon fhaisnéise den sórt sin. Tá baill foirne an OBP ar fáil chun ábhar na bpáipéar seo a phlé le Comhaltaí agus lena gcuid foirne ach ní féidir leo dul i mbun plé leis an mórfhobal nó le heagraíochtaí seachtracha.

Is de chineál ginearálta í an Fhaisnéis. Baineann éiginnteacht le ráitis réamhbhreathnaitheacha agus d'fhéadfadh go dtiocfaidh nithe suntasacha chun cinn mar thoradh ar an bhFaisnéis. Ní sholáthraítear ráiteas cinntitheach leis an bhFaisnéis i ndáil le haon saincheist ar leith nó i ndáil le himthoisc phearsanta. Ní comhairle atá san Fhaisnéis. Ní mór a dheimhniú duit féin go bhfuil an Fhaisnéis a sholáthraímidne, an Oifig Buiséid Pharlaiminteach agus Coimisiún an Oireachtais (lena n-áirítear seirbhísigh, gníomhairí agus conraitheoirí na hOifige agus an Choimisiúin) oiriúnach agus iontaoifa. Ní ghlacaimid aon fhreagracht as cruinneas ná oiriúnacht, ná eile, na Faisnéise agus ní thugaimid aon ráthaíocht ná aon ghealltanais ná aon bharánta i leith an chéanna; ná go mbeidh ár leathanaigh ghréasáin nó an Fhaisnéis nó ábhar eile saor ó earráidí, saor ó víris nó saor ó shárú. Ní ghlacaimid aon dlíteanas (lena n-áirítear i leith éilimh maoinne intleachtúla) a eascróidh as aon ábhar tríú páirtí nó aon suíomh gréasáin tríú páirtí a gcuirfimid nasc ar fáil chuige nó dá ndéanfaimid tagairt. Ní ghlactar le haon dlíteanas ar bith, a mhéid is mó a cheadaítear faoin dlí is infheidhme nó (i) as aon iontaoibh a chuirfear san Fhaisnéis nó san ábhar ar ár leathanaigh ghréasáin nó (ii) as aon chaillteanas nó damáiste a eascróidh as an úsáid a bhainfidh tú as na leathanaigh ghréasáin sin nó i dtaca leis an úsáid sin. Féach ár [bhFógra Séanta cuimsitheach anseo](#). I gcás aon easaontacht a bheith idir an Séanadh seo agus ár bhFógra Séanta cuimsitheach, is ag an gceann deireanach a bheidh an forlámhas.

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