



# Royal Military College St-Jean

## Comprehensive Report

### Brand, Marketing-Communication

December 2021

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# Introduction

The primary objective of the mandate was to provide the RMC Saint-Jean marketing team with the customer/target insights they require in order to develop a relevant, coherent and compelling brand strategy and communications plan which can be integrated into the overall CAF marketing-communications program. Secondary objectives included: increasing the number of applications by Francophones, women and diverse communities, as well as building brand awareness amongst the Francophone public and finally, becoming a renowned institution for Military and International Studies. This is the final report for mandate ref. #W6509-210031/C Client.

# Methodology

The research approach was a combination of desk research, in-depth analysis of communications materials and interviews with internal and external audiences. The interviews were in the form of 2-hour focus groups. Focus groups took place during May, September and October. The total number of participants was 150.

The recruitment screening process was designed to identify and exclude those who had strong negative views of the military.

# Methodology

## **Internal Groups (42 participants)**

- Group A: 6 Junior Officer and Naval Cadets, (Francophone and Anglophone) May 17/21
- Group B: 6 Senior Officer and Naval Cadets, May 17/21
- Group C: 6 Military Personnel, May 18/21
- Group D: 6 Administration Personnel, May 25/21
- Group E: 6 Academic Personnel, May 25/21
- Group F: 6 Recruiters Montreal and Quebec region, May 19/21
- Group G: 6 Junior Officer and Naval Cadets, Francophone, QC, Sept. 21/21

## **External Groups (Youth 72, Adults 36)**

- Groups 1, 2,3: Girls 14-15 years old
- Groups 4,5,6,: Boys 14-15 years old
- Groups 7, 8, 9: Girls 16-18 years old
- Groups 10, 11, 12: Boys 16-18 years old
- Groups 13,14, 17,18: Guidance Counselors, split by French, Anglo/Allo
- Groups 15, 16: Teachers, Principals, split by French, Anglo & Minorities

# What we learned

## Internal Groups - Findings

### **1 OPPORTUNITY TO CLARIFY RMC-SAINT JEAN'S POSITIONING**

Across all groups, with the exception of the French-speaking QC cohort, there was a lack of shared understanding of the positioning of RMC Saint-Jean. The purpose of the school, the key differences vs. RMC Canada in Kingston, whether it's a college for Quebecers or for all Canadians, who the target is, was the subject of debate amongst the internal stakeholders. This lack of clarity regarding positioning did not emerge amongst the French-speaking QC cohort however. In fact, the feeling of pride was strong and it was suggested that RMC Saint-Jean could be the flagship for the Forces. RMC Saint-Jean was described as "the CAF at its best".

### **2 AWARENESS OF RMC SAINT-JEAN AMONGST ANGLOPHONES IS CLOSE TO ZERO**

In every instance, Anglophone students had absolutely no awareness of the existence of RMC Saint-Jean prior to applying, even after visiting recruitment centres in their respective provinces. Each student thought they were applying to RMC in Kingston. Some students mentioned that they thought RMC Saint-Jean was the college for those who didn't have the prerequisites for Kingston.

### **3 TOP-OF-MIND BENEFITS OF ATTENDING RMC SAINT-JEAN DESCRIBED IN FUNCTIONAL TERMS**

Internal stakeholders named free university education and long-term job security as the primary drivers for attending RMC Saint-Jean. Other benefits such as smaller class sizes, attentive and supportive staff, military training, bilingualism and leadership opportunities emerged as compelling and differentiating features of the College with the strength to create a strong value proposition.

# What we learned

## Internal Groups - Findings

### **4 ANGLOPHONE STUDENTS MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE NEGATIVES FEELINGS**

The concern was expressed that RMC Saint-Jean was not perceived as a high-quality, prestigious institution by outsiders. Concerns that were mentioned include the lack of recognition for RMC Saint-Jean as a university (“it is not on university lists”), the view that RMC Saint-Jean is where people who are rejected from RMC in Kingston go, and the reality that transfers are only one-way (from RMC Saint-Jean to RMC). The French-speaking QC cohort did not express any such concern, nor did they spontaneously compare themselves to any other College.

### **5 DIVERGING VIEWS ABOUT THE ASPIRATIONAL TARGET FOR RMC SAINT-JEAN**

Questions surrounding brand relevance or “this is a brand for people like me”, revealed a general lack of understanding regarding what applicants are “signing up for”, particularly amongst the Anglophones. Aside from the pool of potential applicants who were familiar with military culture (more prevalent in the French-speaking QC group), there was little agreement on who RMC Saint-Jean is “really for”. At its best, it is described as a buffet of different things for different people. At its worst, it is described as a negative experience or “pitch and switch” where the applicant feels misled. The exception was the French-speaking QC group who chose RMC Saint-Jean with full awareness of the opportunity and identified with the four pillars stating that it was “for them”. There was also a view that RMC Saint-Jean is a college mainly for people from Quebec and that RMC in Kingston is for all of Canada.

# What we learned

## Internal Groups - Findings

### **6 THE MORE FAMILIAR YOU ARE WITH RMC SAINT-JEAN, THE MORE YOU TEND TO LIKE IT**

Amongst the Anglophones, despite their initial surprise to find themselves at RMC Saint-Jean, they quickly embraced and appreciated what it had to offer. In addition, the more the applicants were exposed to the campus and its students before the application process, the more they liked it. Campus visits and exposure to Sr. Officer Cadets were the most frequently mentioned “positive experiences”.

This was even more true with the French-speaking QC group. This group entered the College with favorable views that were reinforced by their on-campus experience. Higher early familiarity with RMC Saint-Jean contributed to a positive discovery, on-boarding and living experience for students from Quebec. Most frequently mentioned “high appreciation” comments were for: the well-balanced program between academics and athletics/military exercises, an inviting and family-style community and the four brand pillars.



# What we learned

## Internal Groups - Findings

### **7 RECRUITMENT PROCESS WOULD BENEFIT FROM SOME REFORM**

Across the board, the perception was that the process would benefit from reform to attract more candidates. The following are key highlights.

**THOSE FAMILIAR WITH MILITARY CULTURE.** The first theme that emerged is that the recruitment process is geared toward those familiar with military culture. In order to expand the pool of recruits, it was recommended that the RMC Saint-Jean brand target entirely new targets, atypical for the College. The main challenges mentioned were accessing high schools as early as grade 10, and having a strong presence at university fairs and employment fairs.

**LACK OF VISIBILITY FOR THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM.** The second theme was the bias in favour of RMC in Kingston and the lack of visibility for the International Studies Program. There were spontaneous and numerous mentions that the Colleges should be positioned as equal but different.

**MISINFORMED AND POORLY PREPARED RECRUITERS.** There was a widely shared perception that recruiters have low familiarity with RMC Saint-Jean and that this creates an “experience” gap. The recruitment pitch was described as misleading: ‘pitch and switch’ ex. the applicant thought they were going to one place and were sent to another; or, they thought they were entering a program for a certain occupation and were led to another. Generally, it was clear that many had a poor understanding of what they were signing up for. A frequent mention was that the College(s) are a “second thought” for recruiters.

# What we learned

## Internal Groups - Findings

AN APPLICATION PROCESS THAT IS NOT COMPETITIVE. The fourth theme that emerged is the view that the current process is slow, lengthy and sub-standard to that of other colleges. It was frequently described as “uncompetitive”, “a black hole,” “not transparent.” Examples include the mailing of acceptance letters after those sent by CEGEPs and universities. Another is that the process is opaque, difficult to understand, without clearly identified milestones that can be accessed by applicants (ex. “Where am I in the process?”). A 30-day Fast Track of provisional acceptance was suggested for consideration.

### **8 WOMEN AND VISIBLE MINORITIES NO DIFFERENT FROM ANYONE ELSE AND DISCRIMINATION NOT A TOP-OF-MIND ISSUE**

Motivations for joining the CAF were seen as no different for gender and visible minorities vs white men. The only difference mentioned in one group was that the women are more likely to orient themselves towards an occupation vs the battlefield. The topic of aggression against women arose only when prompted. In all groups this did not seem a major topic of concern. There were multiple mentions that protocols and proper training were in place to protect women against unacceptable behaviours. In a few instances, there was mention of “micro-aggressions”, e.g. “she got the job because she’s a woman”. Overall, the perception by the students was that the nature of discrimination was similar inside and outside the Forces.

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

### **9 VERY LOW AWARENESS AND FAMILIARITY OF OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FORCES AND AT THE COLLEGES**

Across all groups, without exception, awareness of what the Forces had to offer was not well understood. Every group expressed the need for more information. A few guidance counselors were aware of the colleges, but did not know the differences between them. Some asked whether RMC Saint-Jean was a CEGEP level and RMC in Kingston was university level. A few believed that RMC Saint-Jean was not very open and accessible, that visiting occasions are infrequent, that it is no longer what it used to be, and that resources are dedicated to RMC in Kingston versus RMC Saint-Jean.

Although a couple mentioned having invited the Forces to make presentations in the classroom, this was not the majority of educators. Overall, awareness of the opportunities with the Forces was very superficial and the main perceived drivers for students joining was a paid education, a physically active career, a guaranteed job and a secure future. There was little familiarity with the number of occupations available and the difference between an officer and infantry soldier was not well understood. With regard to the Colleges, there was a perception that the application process was long and arduous and “not foreveryone”, and that many students perceive the military as equal to “going to war”. Overall, many described the military as “mysterious, a lot of unknowns.”

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

### **10 NEED TO BUILD SEVERAL TOUCHPOINTS FOR AWARENESS, FAMILIARITY AND CONSIDERATION**

To build awareness for the College(s), educators recommended in-person presentations in the classrooms followed by field trips to the campus as being potentially the most promising, because the campus itself is attractive, and students who were permitted to go on this field trip would already have parents' permission and hence at least limited openness. For those students with an expressed interest in the Forces, Counselors occasionally recommended joining the Cadets.

Guidance Counselors believe that the most likely candidates are those with a strong need for discovery, openness, and the need to feel useful and physically active. They described the students that would fit best as those who "like school less".

### **11 GUIDANCE COUNSELORS AND EDUCATORS WILL NOT SUGGEST THE FORCES AS A POTENTIAL CAREER PATH, AND SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT TARGET AUDIENCE**

Guidance counselors and educators will not direct students to the CAF. It was seen as a controversial path potentially raising problems with both school administrators and with parents. According to educators, parents without a military connection were more likely to oppose this path for fear of PTSD, sexual aggression, injury and death. In their eyes, the military was very closely linked with combat. It is clear that parents are a much more important target audience than educators, since they are a major influencer of the education and career path considered by their children, especially at ages 14-15.

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

Even for counselors who were comfortable supporting the military path, they insisted that it would need to be positioned as informational and not as recruitment e.g. "it's up to the students to ask about it, it is not up to us to recommend it". We were told that the Commission Scolaire De Montréal would not invite the Forces to the schools and that there was no communication between them.

### **12 STUDENTS ARE UNINFORMED ABOUT JOB AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN GENERAL, AND ACCESS MORE SOURCES OF INFORMATION AS THEY AGE**

The majority of students are somewhat anxious, confused, have little idea of what direction to take, and typically fall back on the most top-of-mind professions: medicine, law, psychology, engineering or trade professions already pursued by family members. Career days/Fairs, at least as they are currently experienced, seem to have a low return on investment. Students sometimes leave more confused and overwhelmed.

Occasions where students can see a profession in action or have the opportunity to interact with the speaker in a classroom setting seems to be a promising approach. It is not enough to simply present to students - there has to be a significant opportunity for Q&A to really engage. More specifically for the Forces and/or RMC Saint-Jean, the presence of officers who are passionate about their profession is key. More visibility on social media channels was also strongly recommended. This involves paid social media, not merely organic.

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

A very small group of 14-15 year-olds expressed having contact with counselors. Descriptions of those encounters were neutral. With a few exceptions, most speakers who were invited to their classrooms were already top-of-mind occupations such as police officers, firefighters, lawyers.

Among the girls, there was more clarity on what they didn't like, than what they liked. Interests were as varied as the girls with whom we spoke, with a significant number participating in popular sports like soccer and volleyball. Passions and natural affinities were mentioned as important drivers in their choices for the future. Generally, professions that required longer study were a deterrent especially for those who defined themselves as not academically inclined. Main sources of information and inspiration were the same as for boys: family and friends followed by videos on the Internet. Parents were a major influencer among all youth.

Although factors such as interests, passions and abilities continue to drive choice as they age, the sources of information and influence expands to include a broader network including guidance counselors, friends of the family and the internet. In addition, as self-awareness grows, so does the mention of values and salary in considering options. It is notable that Psychology is a frequent mention amongst girls 16-18. Career Days seem to play a bigger role in introducing girls to professions. As may be expected, the main questions are required years of study, salary and job opportunities in the field. Only a few students had ever attended a presentation by the Forces.

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

### **13 GUIDANCE PROVIDED BY COUNSELORS AND EDUCATORS IS MORE ABOUT REALITY-CHECKING THAN EXPLORATION**

When educators described their approach, the majority said they focused on the students' current interests and aptitudes and described their role as providing a reality/feasibility check e.g. "students are influenced by friends, parents and the media and then someone brings them down to earth and tells them the truth". The guidance process was generally ad-hoc, uninspired and old-school. Most counselors focused on clarifying options, identifying high-demand occupations to students, and less on exploration and inspiration. At its best, guidance was centered around self-awareness/psychometric testing, encouraging students to volunteer and pursue internships, attend Career Days, build autonomy and to explore alternatives. Joining the Cadets was not raised as a top-of-mind option unless the student expressed an interest for the Forces – a very rare occurrence. Private schools were perceived by some as providing more opportunities for career exploration than public schools. Pamphlets were viewed as an optional information tool, whereas online resources were mentioned most frequently.

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

### **14 OVERALL, STUDENTS' #1 OBJECTIVE WITH THEIR OCCUPATION IS TO MAKE MONEY, SO SALARY HAS TO BE PRESENTED AS MERELY PART OF AN OVERALL VALUE PROPOSITION THAT INCLUDES OTHER BENEFITS**

According to educators, most students are focused on making as much money as possible in the shortest amount of time. Salary was mentioned as the #1 driver followed by personal interests. This was confirmed in discussions with students, many of whom expressed the view that they did not want to extend their schooling beyond the necessary. Higher education for personal development is not a mainstream ambition. Depending on the socio-economic context of the family, there were parents who strongly encourage their kids to get into the job market as soon as possible (lower income) and others encouraging further education (higher income).

### **15 YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A TRADITIONAL DEFAULT VIEW OF THE FORCES AND VERY FEW REFERENCES**

Overall, young people perceive the Forces as largely equivalent to combat. Among girls, a majority spontaneously mentioned service to their country as being the main reason to join the military. Other less frequent mentions were prestige, helping others and the social advantages it provides. Very few knew someone in the military, therefore the references were the media or movies and by extension, soldiers. When prompted, paid university, a guaranteed job and a good foundation for a civilian career were perceived as strong drivers to consider the Forces.



# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

### **16 THERE IS A VERY FAVOURABLE PERCEPTION OF THE CADETS**

Unlike their preconceptions about the Forces, the perceptions of the Cadets were based on what they had heard from their peers, and the stories from their friends were overwhelmingly positive. Positive mentions included: intense training, new friends, survival skills, discipline, and learning English among Francophones. However, the girls did not believe that joining the Cadets automatically meant a desire to join the Forces. Very few girls were tempted to join despite the positive feedback.

### **17 AWARENESS OF THE COLLEGES IS NONEXISTENT**

Even when prompted, there was no awareness for either RMC Saint-Jean or RMC in Kingston. However, upon learning of their existence, especially in Quebec, it was generally viewed as cool and positive. Main reasons were that it made it easy to join because it was nearby, that it was good to be able to complete both CEGEP and university in one place, and that it is good to know you will have a secure future.

As young people age, practical considerations such as a paid education, a guaranteed job, good social benefits and a fair salary feature as reasons to join the Forces. Stability became a key theme among those aged 16 to 18. In addition to these practical reasons, other mentions were unconventional career, travel, service to others and country. Of all the mentioned reasons, paid education features as the most important.

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

### **18 THE 4 PILLARS MAKE SENSE, BUT FOR SOME THE ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS ARE A BARRIER, AND FOR OTHERS THE PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS ARE PERCEIVED AS TOO MUCH**

There was a huge difference in perception of the four pillars between internal audiences (where they are perceived as positive) and external (where they are often perceived as intimidating). Once the girls 14-15 years-old were described the 4 pillars, they said it made sense with the exception of high academic standing which they did not associate with the Forces. Although learning about the opportunities of becoming an Officer piqued their interest, many of the 16-18 year-old girls said they would not pursue this path because of the perceived physical and/or academic challenges associated with the pillars. When asked if the fact that they will be paid while developing these skills would make a difference, the answer was “no” as “these competencies could be acquired elsewhere”. In response to the 4 pillars, the boys accepted them as “making sense” with the only exception being the “high academic standing.” A few mentioned not understanding why this was so important.

# What we learned

## External Groups - Findings

### **19 PRESENTATIONS BY THE FORCES NOT ENOUGH TO COUNTER PRECONCEPTION THAT 'THIS IS NOT FOR ME', SO IT IS CRITICAL TO CREATE A POSITIVE PERCEPTION AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE (BEFORE AGE 16)**

Similar to the view expressed by the older girls, among 16-18 year-old boys the feedback regarding counseling was highly variable; when described in positive terms, it helped them select which CEGEP they should attend. Career Days and Job Fairs were viewed in favorable terms. A minority of the boys confirmed that they had attended presentations by the Forces but overall, it seems that there was a low impact on them and that interest levels were predetermined for most as "this is for me" or "this is not for me". However, it should be noted that in the internal groups (students who are already at RMC Saint-Jean) presentations by the Forces were perceived as raising familiarity and having motivated them to seek further information. This underlines the importance of creating a positive perception as early as possible (before age 16).

### **20 PAID EDUCATION AND JOB SECURITY ARE MAIN DRIVERS TO JOIN THE FORCES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE OVERALL**

Overall, a paid education, a clear and secure future and a guaranteed job were the dominant mentions. Among boys 16-18 years-old, joining the Forces sometimes emerged spontaneously as a 'last choice'. Reasons include the mental risk e.g. PTSD, the demanding physical performance and the perception that you do not need to be academically strong - so it may be a good option if all else fails.