Early in 2014 the Ministry of Defence announced the completion of a major project in Staffordshire to establish a new focus for military medical training in the UK. Integrated into the existing fabric of historic buildings at Whittington Barracks, these new state of the art training facilities include a learning centre, lecture theatre, dining and welfare facilities while a concurrent project on the site created accommodation for over 800 personnel. The new facilities sit alongside the Defence Medical Services Headquarters building completed in 2010 which includes the HQ of the Surgeon General.

The challenge
This is a large, complex site, with over thirty buildings and 800 destinations employing specialised language and the free use of acronyms. It must be accessed by a variety of user groups whose familiarity with the layout will vary significantly. It is also a live military base subject to strict security.

Introduced by main contractors Carillion into the team led by MMA Project Manager Commander S. J. J. Brown RN, Modulex consultants were charged with the wayfinding design and implementation of a comprehensive external and internal sign system for the whole Whittington site. Budget was tight and the time scale challenging.

The solution
Drawing on its unrivalled global expertise in the signing of large facilities and complex sites, Modulex devised a solution based on Pacific, its highly successful modular system, which offers cost-effective and elegant support for both exterior and interior signs. A colour-coded system was adopted for the exterior wayfinding, assigning prominent colours to four functional categories: living, working, community and support. These colours were employed on maps displayed on monoliths at key positions on the site and as vertical bands on monoliths and wall-mounted signs at the entrances of buildings.

The crest of the Joint Services Command provided a prominent element on main destination signs and was applied as a “ghosted” and cropped graphic motif on selected exterior monoliths. Using the crest is appropriate, this is a joint services (RN, RAF, and Army) project, and using it graphically in this way, almost as a corporate logo, supports the client’s wish for the design of the new facilities to avoid an excessively institutional character.

Also to this end, certain interior areas were named after prominent individuals in the history of military medicine and wall-mounted plaques carrying their pictures and personal stories were introduced.
A further opportunity to add character and human interest to the scheme was provided by the introduction of environmental graphics – large scale mural images drawn from MOD photographic archives - which serve to enliven public spaces and provide useful “landmarks” to help visitors orientate themselves.

Benefits
Whittington is no longer a barracks. Thanks to the vision and determination of the management team and their collaborators its impressive modern facilities now offer the visitor the atmosphere of a university campus or corporate HQ. By providing an appropriate sign system under budget and on time, Modulex is proud to have made a contribution to the country’s new home of military medicine.

“My initial high confidence in Modulex’s capability and breadth of expertise has been fully justified. An all round professional team, they were asked to design, advise on and deliver a complex range of diverse and ever evolving solutions to meet our needs. This they have achieved comprehensively in an upfront and honest manner. I would recommend them unreservedly for similar such projects.”

Commander S.J.J. Brown, RN, MMA Programme Manager