



Ministry  
of Defence

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E-mail: [REDACTED]

24 July 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your E-mail of 25 June requesting the following information:

*“Under the Freedom of Information, I request:*

*All articles on your departmental intranet system from 1st January 2020 relating to Universal Credit, Asylum Seekers and Black Lives Matter.*

*In addition, I also request all comments in the comments section relating to said articles”.*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). I can confirm that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) holds information within the scope of your request. A search for the three key phrases “Universal Credit; Asylum Seekers; Black Lives matter” was conducted and five articles within scope of your request were found. These are attached at Annex A. Please note no articles were found containing the words Asylum Seekers. There was one mentioning Universal Credit and four reference Black Lives Matter. An extract to the all staff dial in that took place on 17 June 2020 has been included. This is the only part of the dial in transcript that refers to Black Lives Matter and is therefore the only part of the transcript that falls within scope of your request.

As links to the articles would not be accessible to you they are copied and pasted into a word document. Please note there are no comments attached to these articles, so no information held in respect of that part of your request

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact us in the first instance at the address above. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

DDC Secretariat Parliamentary.

## **Annex A to FOI 2020/07234**

### **ASYLUM SEEKERS**

NIL

### **UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

1. 25 March 2020: Cabinet Secretary Mark Sedwill's message to Civil Servants

Dear Colleagues,

On Monday, in his national address, the Prime Minister set out new measures to tackle the coronavirus emergency. The full details can be found on GOV.UK. By adopting these measures we can limit transmission, and reduce pressure on the NHS and other vital public services. You will receive specific guidance from your department. However, I thought it important to explain the principles I expect to apply to the public service, given our vital role in supporting the citizens of our country, especially those most vulnerable, through this crisis.

As the Prime Minister set out, we and our families should stay at home, except to shop for necessities, for our own or others' medical needs, to take exercise once a day, and to travel to and from work. Many frontline public servants are also key workers, entitled to send our children to school. Schools have been given guidance on how to ensure the children in their care minimise the risk of transmission. Similar guidance is being issued to employers to enable those who cannot always work from home to operate safely in the workplace and in transit, for example by varying working patterns to avoid the rush hours.

It is also vital that the public services, on which our citizens rely, continue uninterrupted. Some are under considerable pressure: DWP, for example, is handling a sharp increase in claims for Job Seeker's Allowance and **Universal Credit**. Many others are directly involved in responding to the crisis, notably those contributing to the shielding programme for those most vulnerable to the disease. The Prime Minister and Cabinet paid tribute just today to the outstanding efforts of the entire public service in leading the nation's response to the crisis.

Many civil servants can and should work from home, but many cannot if we are to maintain the public service provision to which we are all committed. Your department will ensure that if you have to operate from your workplace you can do so safely in accordance with public health guidance.

As both the head of the service and as a citizen, I am immensely proud of the commitment, resilience and morale of the entire public service. I know I can count on everyone to exemplify those values as we help the Government navigate the country through this emergency, and provide the services and the leadership in our communities on which our fellow citizens rely.

Thank you.

### **BLACK LIVES MATTER**

1. 16 June 2020: Standing up to racism: A message from Mike Driver

During this unprecedented period, we know that black and ethnic minority colleagues across the Civil Service are feeling anxious and angry about the impact of COVID-19 on their families, communities, and wider global events.

The recent killing of George Floyd, and the grief, anger and dismay that we have shared has once again highlighted the persistent stain on our society of systemic racism and discrimination. We all feel it, we all know it, we have strong and shared frustration, and we all have a responsibility to respond to change this situation and to deliver tangible improvements.

I have spent a lot of time recently listening to the perspectives of those who live with the impact of overt, hidden, and embedded discrimination every day. Listening to these personal and emotional stories has been uncomfortable, compelling and challenging, particularly as a white man. I know I still have a lot to learn. I encourage you all to do the same; take the time to understand the lived experience of black colleagues in your teams and engage in this conversation. Use your increased understanding to ensure that the actions, networks, approaches, policies and programmes you are developing genuinely reflect the concerns of all communities. This is how we will support shaping and driving an effective response together.

Talk about race. Discuss the importance of being more bold and proactive in tackling discrimination. We are all leaders. We are all responsible for impacting positive change; in ourselves, in our teams and in our organisations. We must act, have clear plans and precise measures to hold ourselves to account. Leadership is required at all levels to progress on this journey. We need more honesty, transparency, and disclosure than we have ever had before.

Across the Government Finance Function and the Civil Service, we have zero tolerance for racism. We are committed to tackling racial inequality in all its forms. We each have a responsibility to call out racism where we see it, and to exercise our professional duty to act where inequality persists or thrives. We all have a role to play in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our colleagues, and for everyone to be in the right environment to have a voice. As leaders, whatever our race, this cannot be a passive or reactive role. We need to work to be anti-racist; to break through any fear of talking about race, to grow our understanding by listening, believing and supporting our BAME colleagues, and to deliver outcomes that genuinely create a shared sense of belonging, inclusion and equality.

I encourage you to connect with our highly active Government Finance Function people networks, including the GFF D&I Working Group, which provide access to community and support, as well as acting as an effective channel for ensuring collective concerns are spotted, raised, and addressed.

The Civil Service has committed to be the most inclusive employer in the UK, and we all have a responsibility to ensure the Government Finance Function and everyone in it plays their full part.



Everyone feels lonely sometimes. People can be in a crowded room and still feel alone, but the lockdown will have left more of us feeling socially disconnected, by distance, from colleagues, families and friends.

For this year's Loneliness Awareness Week, the theme is 'One less lonely voice'. The virtual campaign encourages us all to take the 'one' out of loneliness (signifying one less lonely voice), by getting involved in conversations about loneliness, to build our understanding and help ourselves and others to manage feelings of loneliness that we may currently be experiencing.

In times like these we need to support one another, and we should feel able to ask for help if we need it, so take a moment to make that call or send that message to somebody that you have not been in contact with for a while. For someone who is feeling lonely, those small gestures can make such a huge difference to their health and wellbeing.

#### Guidance and advice

Throughout this week we're sharing guidance and tips, on our social media pages and in our internal communications, to help you, and those in our communities, deal with feelings of loneliness and to provide advice on what you can do to help those around you to feel connected.

We're also promoting the new Psychological First Aid Training launched by Public Health England this week and available online. With the course aimed at frontline workers and volunteers we're encouraging all MDP staff, especially line managers, to complete the training where possible.

There are a range of health and wellbeing support services available to us all and some of these are specifically for police personnel. Further information is provided in our COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Booklet.

Support available in the MDP includes a pool of Mental Health First Aiders at locations across the Force, our own dedicated Force Welfare Officer and the opportunity to connect with colleagues via staff networks, which include the MDP LGBT+ Network, the Race Network and the Gender Network.

#### It's ok not to be ok

The tragic death of George Floyd in the USA and the **Black Lives Matter** campaign, with protest activity that some of our officers have been involved in policing, continue to have a profound impact on many of us and colleagues may be feeling isolated with thoughts and feelings that they would like to share or talk to someone about.

June is Pride Month, with virtual rather than public events this year, and although a time to celebrate, there will be people who, wherever they are, don't feel that they can be their true selves and need someone to talk to.

The easing of the lockdown will also have generated different feelings for us all – some feeling relief, others feeling anxious and unsettled. All those feelings are valid, and nobody should feel alone and unable to talk about how they are feeling.

Our Mental First Aiders, Force Welfare Officer and staff networks are there to support you and to signpost guidance and advice, so don't hesitate to reach out for a chat and to ask for help.

Remember it's ok not to be ok, and it's always good to talk...every mind matters – we all matter – and now, more than ever, we need to look after each other and help anyone who is feeling alone.

### 3. A message from the Permanent Secretary on racism, diversity and inclusion in Defence – 5 June 2020

Dear Colleagues,

We briefly touched on the topic of discrimination in our all-staff dial in, and we want to take a moment to continue this vital conversation around race and inequality, and what it means for us as individuals, for Defence, and for the world around us.

The tragic death of George Floyd in the USA last week has had a profound impact on many of us. Systemic racial inequality is not unique to America, but also it has deep roots within UK society, including Defence. At the same time, ongoing research on Covid-19 increasingly shows that its deadly impact is felt harder in BAME communities.

Let us be clear, any form of racism or discrimination is absolutely unacceptable. Our overriding objective under the 2018-2030 Diversity and Inclusion strategy is to eliminate discrimination throughout Defence. But we recognise that we are some way from this, and discrimination is still experienced by some of our people.

Defence is an international, outward looking department, and diversity must be one of our top priorities. In ExCo and in our meetings with the Chiefs and TLB holders, we have been, and will continue to reflect on and discuss our own behaviours and attitudes. We have created a group to analyse Covid-19 impacts on staff, including BAME colleagues who are among those most vulnerable to the Covid-19 crisis. We are creating strategies on how we mitigate the risks to these groups. Although we've seen a small increase of BAME representation in our staff from 2019, our workforce doesn't yet represent the society we serve, within the Armed Forces or the Civil Service. This is something we are determined to change.

On our part, we will be bringing the discussion of race and inequality to our Executive Committee meeting in the next month. Our next all-staff dial in will also be centred around this topic, where we can discuss what we hope will be many responses to this note.

It takes more than just the efforts of the leadership, it takes every single one of us in Defence to reflect inwards to consider how we can use our voice to support the dismantling of discrimination. We all need to challenge inequality where it persists or thrives.

For BAME members of our staff, we recognise that this is a difficult time. Please do utilise the networks and resources listed below, as it's vital to us that everyone can access support.

This message will be followed by more articles and blogs in the coming weeks including support for BAME colleagues, educational tools, and opportunities to amplify the BAME voice within our organisation. Many of you will know that Sherin Aminossehe is our new Race Champion in MOD, and we're confident that her priorities, along with other champions, will bring strength and action to this crucial dialogue. She will work closely alongside our Race Networks, who have been doing some incredible work in this area.

The ability and space to communicate about diversity and inclusion has never been more important. If you want to join this conversation, and particularly if you don't feel heard, safe, or supported, please email [People-Diversity-Inclusion@mod.gov.uk](mailto:People-Diversity-Inclusion@mod.gov.uk).

Sincerely,

Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary

**#blacklivesmatter**

If you'd like to discuss this more please get in touch with your local D&I team or D&I advisor or practitioner

4. Extract from all staff dial in 17 June that falls within scope of this FOI request is shown below. Stephen Lovegrove Permanent Secretary is speaking after the introductory paragraph.

I'm going to open up by coming to Stephen first. Stephen, there's quite a lot of questions on the Slido to do with Defence and the **Black Lives Matter** movement and hashtag. I wonder whether you might want to comment on that and say anything else that you wanted to in opening today.

Sure, yes, thanks very much, Siobhan. Just to take the **Black Lives Matter** point first up. When I republish or retweet the **Black Lives Matter** words, what I'm doing when I say that is supporting the three words, **Black Lives Matter**, as a statement. It's not a political position whatsoever. It's not a gesture of support for any particular organisation. It is about the general principle of recognising that, at the moment, there is a problem that we, as a society, need to fix. And I would assume that people would take it in that spirit, and if they don't, well, this is the opportunity for me to put that point of view, and put the record straight on that, and also for, I hope, that particular issue to be put to bed.

I do think, in general, that there are moments in the national story which we need to recognise what they are, and it seems to me that this is one. We've known in Defence for sure for a long time that we have a problem, not to put too fine a point on it, with diversity. When I say diversity, I don't mean just ethnic diversity, but also sexual diversity, sexuality, faith, disability, social background, you name it. We are, at the moment, not doing as well as we need to. And it is really important that we do, because it is important that Defence, perhaps of all organisations, need to look like the country that it serves.

We have a long way to go to get to the place where I think we need to be. CDS will no doubt talk about the Armed Forces, but just as a Whitehall department, we are on the bald numbers at the bottom of the rankings. That's not something that I'm comfortable with, and I suspect most people are comfortable with either.

Now, I know there are specific reasons—and some of them have come out on the Slido—why we might find it more difficult to get to some of the figures in this area that we might like to. We have a lot of people working in areas of the country where there is less ethnic diversity, for instance, East Anglia and the west country. Equally, somebody else has pointed out on Slido that 40% of people who live in London are of a non-white background. That isn't something which is reflected in a main building, that's for sure.

I mean, I think it is kind of being a bit wilfully blind to the reality of what we have here to think that there isn't a question. As I say, I want to make the most of what Baroness Goldie sort of rightly called the momentum of this moment really to try and make some real progress, and to really accelerate, with action, some of the things that we've been talking about for a long time. And no doubt we're going to talk about some of the details of that, the resourcing of the programs, what we do on recruiting and so on.

There's a variety of reasons for it, but one of them is that if we don't, there is a danger that Defence, being the kind of organisation that it is, will fall even further behind the rest of Whitehall and the rest of society, which is recognising this as a moment of change. And that is a place where I think none of us ought to be even remotely comfortable at all, and one that I'm determined we don't fall into.