

Armed Forces enhanced access to Jobcentre Plus services and Armed Forces Champions

As part of the Armed Forces Covenant there are certain Department for Work and Pensions' initiatives that help current and former members of the Armed Forces and their families in accessing Jobcentre Plus services. A selection of these initiatives are detailed below.

Jobcentre Plus Armed Forces Champions

- The Department for Work and Pensions has an Armed Forces Champion in every Jobcentre Plus District. The Champion is there to make sure that Jobcentre Plus support, advice and guidance reflect the needs of the Service community.
- The Champion focuses specifically on the Jobcentre Plus support available to:
 - Service leavers;
 - Serving personnel currently within their resettlement period; and
 - spouses/civil partners of currently serving and ex-Service personnel.
- If you are a Service person, a Service family member or a veteran having difficulty in accessing one of the following initiatives, please ask the Jobcentre Plus staff member that you are dealing with to speak to their District Armed Forces Champion.

The role of the Armed Forces Champions is to:

- develop and maintain joint working arrangements between Jobcentre Plus and the Armed Forces community in their District;
- provide information to Jobcentre Plus staff about specific Armed Forces initiatives;
- provide an understanding of the issues the Forces community face that can be a barrier to employment;
- be the first point of contact for Jobcentre Plus staff and Services welfare/families staff to advise on queries regarding individual Armed Forces cases (including serving personnel, their families and veterans); and

- focus specifically on the Jobcentre Plus support available to Service leavers, those within their resettlement period; and spouses/civil partners of currently serving and ex-Service personnel. Where necessary and appropriate, the Champions will work to put support in place.

The Champions work in partnership with the Armed Forces community and support organisations in their District, as well as local and national employers, to identify work trials, employment opportunities and support for Service leavers and their families. They also work to raise the profile of the Service community in terms of the skills, knowledge and experience they can offer, and working with colleagues to ease some of the barriers to work being faced by Service families.

The Champion will tailor their activities to match the needs of the Armed Forces community in their District. This means some activities may differ from District to District, but the role and responsibilities of the Champion remain the same regardless of location.

The Champions are not customer facing - a Service leaver could not walk into their local Jobcentre Plus office and expect their local Champion to be based in that office. However, the Champions maintain close contact with Jobcentre Plus advisers who will make them aware of Armed Forces issues and raise points directly to the Champion on request of the customer.

Each of the Services has appointed points of contacts who form a link with the relevant Champion(s) within their area. Members of the Service community who wish to bring an issue to the attention of their local Champion can do so via their nominated Service focal point or via their local Jobcentre Plus office.

Employment and benefits initiatives

Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme

All former Service personnel have access to the full range of Jobcentre Plus services. As well as this, a person who has served in the Armed Forces for any day within the last three years can be considered for early access to the Work Programme. Service leavers on Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Income Support will be able to volunteer for the Work Programme at any point in their claim.

Armed Forces spouses specific

Spouse/partner employment opportunities

The Government is committed to providing appropriate support to the spouses or partners of Service personnel. Partners of currently serving and ex-Service personnel have access to the full range of Jobcentre Plus services. They can also be

considered for early access to the Work Programme from three months into their claim for Jobseeker's Allowance.

NI Credits for spouses following a member of the Armed Forces overseas

In April 2010, an award of Class 1 National Insurance credits was introduced for Service spouses and civil partners to cover periods where they accompanied a member of the Armed Forces posted overseas. The credits, which have been in effect since April 2011, help protect the eligibility of Service spouses and civil partners to a basic state pension and contribution-based working-age benefits.

Easing the contribution conditions for spouses/partners of Service personnel accompanying on overseas posting

In addition to the NI credits award, an easement is in place to the first contribution condition for both contributory Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA(Cont)) and contributory Employment and Support Allowance (ESA(Cont)) for the spouses and civil partners of members of Her Majesty's Forces who have accompanied their spouse or civil partner on a posting outside the UK. This will help these spouses and civil partners to claim contributory Jobseeker's Allowance or contributory Employment and Support Allowance when they return to the UK.

Easing voluntary unemployment conditionality for spouses

It is Jobcentre Plus policy that spouses/partners of Service personnel who leave employment to follow their partner will have just cause for leaving that employment provided they did not leave earlier than was reasonably necessary in order to arrange the move. This means they should not be precluded from receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) on the grounds of voluntary unemployment. Each case should be considered on an individual basis using the relevant legislation and the information provided by the person claiming JSA.

Maternity Allowance for spouses overseas

Spouses accompanying a service partner overseas are unable to claim maternity allowance from the UK. However, depending on where they live, they can either claim the local nation's maternity benefits or apply for an MOD ex-gratia payment in lieu of Maternity Allowance. Details of the scheme are in MOD DIN 2012DIN01-220 on the MOD intranet.

Foreign and Commonwealth – benefits access

Access to benefits for dependants of Foreign and Commonwealth personnel

Dependants of serving Foreign and Commonwealth personnel (including Gurkhas) who are injured, including on operations or during training for operations, may not be

able to access benefits such as Carer's Allowance if they do not qualify to settle in the UK.

Special provisions exist, whereby if a Foreign or Commonwealth member of the Armed Forces is medically discharged as a result of an injury during their period of service, the requirement for them to have completed four years of service in order to qualify for settlement would normally be waived. However all other criteria would have to be met. If appropriate, any dependants would have their application for settlement granted in line with that of the serving person.

Wounded, injured and sick – benefits access

Access to benefits for medically discharged personnel

When a Service medical board decides a severely disabled person can no longer be employed in the Armed Forces and should be discharged, DWP now uses the Service medical board evidence to determine eligibility to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) rather than conduct a face to face medical assessment.

Claims received from members of the Armed Forces who have been assessed by a Ministry of Defence (MOD) medical panel to be in their highest disability category are, wherever possible, assessed to consider whether the individual meets the Limited Capability for Work Related Activity criteria based on the MOD medical report (F Med 23) and without the need for a face-to-face assessment. This applies to the initial Work Capability Assessment for the ESA claim made at the time of discharge. In these cases the individual will be placed in the ESA Support Group.

Armed Forces Independence Payment

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) have introduced an Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP) for injured service or ex-service personnel. This benefit is designed to provide financial support to service personnel and veterans who have been seriously injured as a result of service and to help cover the extra costs they may have received as a result of their injury. DWP are responsible for making and maintaining payments.