Ministry of Defence

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Ref: FOI2015/04175

13 May 2015

Dear ▮▮▮

Thank you for your request of 3 May 2015 to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in which you asked the following questions:

> *1. Why are people with Aspergers Syndrome/ Autstic spectrum disorder unable to join the Armed Forces including the RN?*

> *2. What medical evidence/studies back this up?*

Your enquiry has been treated as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. I can confirm that the MOD holds information within the scope of your enquiry and I would like to answer your questions together.

It is our policy that Armed Forces personnel should be recruited to be fully fit for deployment worldwide on operations. For this reason, the Services do not recruit personnel with existing medical conditions which may adversely impact on the effectiveness of the Armed Forces, or which may themselves be exacerbated by military circumstances.

This is particularly relevant in cases of individuals with autism or Asperger's Syndrome, as military personnel are expected to perform in multiple roles, which may be difficult for someone suffering from these disorders. Further, all military personnel are required to work in close-knit teams, and in operational environments where the pressures are such that anyone with significant disability in social interaction may potentially be a danger to themselves or their team. These two diagnoses have significant disability in social interaction as part of their defining features.

The policy on medical conditions that prevent entry into the Services is contained in Joint Service Publication 950 and I enclose the section that covers autism and Asperger's Syndrome. This has recently been revised to allow some minimal degree of relaxation for those who do not display classic symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome or where their diagnosis may be in doubt. It places more emphasis on the ability to perform as part of a team and to function within a simulated military environment and less on medical opinion.

There is a robust mechanism in place to ensure that the medical criteria for the Armed Forces are reviewed on a rolling basis and when new evidence comes to light. There are occupational medicine consultants employed to ensure that direction and guidance is updated as necessary. There is also the Medical Employment Standards Working Group (MESWG) which is a body composed of specialist occupational physicians from all three Services, including those representing the single Service recruiting organisations. The MESWG meets regularly throughout

the year, keeping military medical standards for recruits under regular periodic review and ensuring these take account of emerging medical evidence, improved diagnostic procedures and treatments.

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 the Headquarters of the Surgeon General in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Deputy Chief Information Officer, 2nd Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail 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 FOIA. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not 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,

Headquarters of the Surgeon General