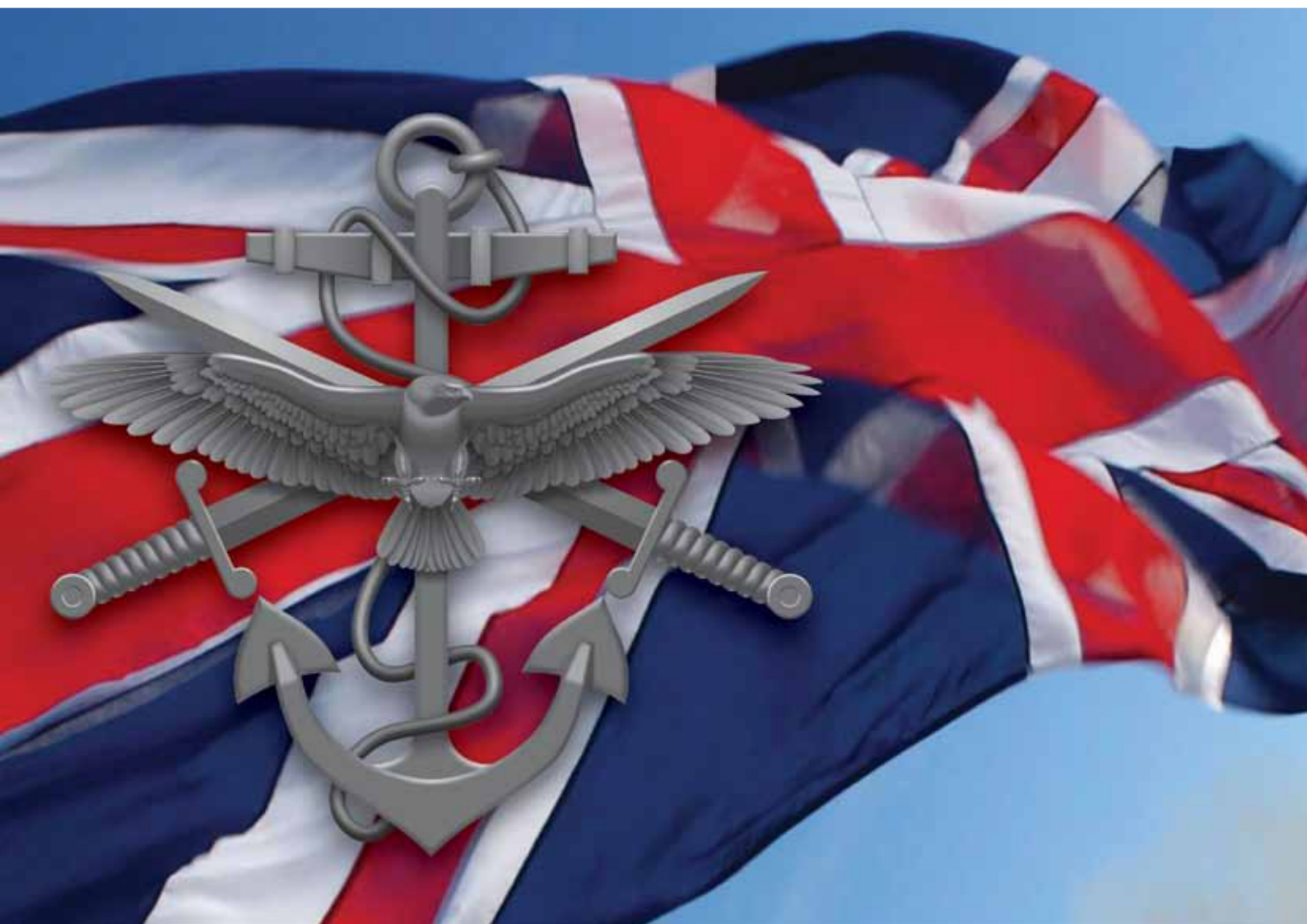




MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT: TODAY AND TOMORROW



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

**An Enduring Covenant Between
The People of the United Kingdom
Her Majesty's Government**

– and –

**All those who serve or have served in
the Armed Forces of the Crown
And their Families**

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

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FOREWORD

**by Secretary of State for Defence
The Right Honourable Liam Fox MP**

The Armed Forces Covenant is the expression of the moral obligation the Government and the Nation owe to those who serve or have served in our Armed Forces and to their families. The men and women of our Armed Forces continue to demonstrate on a daily basis the commitment and bravery for which they are renowned. Whether in Afghanistan, or on other current operations around the world, they apply their considerable skills in the national interest to keep the citizens of this country safe. They do not serve for an easy life; they risk life and limb on our behalf, and they sacrifice some of the freedoms that many of us take for granted.

In return, they deserve not only our respect and gratitude, but also our constant attention to how they are treated and the impact that Service life has on them and on their families.

This paper sets out the range of actions that the Government is taking to rebuild the Covenant. All branches of Government have a responsibility to remember our obligation. Rebuilding the Armed Forces Covenant will be neither quick nor easy. A strong economy is a national security imperative. In the current financial situation, hard decisions are being made and, unfortunately, some of them will have an impact on our Servicemen and women. It is all the more important, in these difficult circumstances, that we establish the right direction of travel and make clear what we are trying to achieve.

In compiling this programme, we have drawn gratefully on the ideas of Professor Hew Strachan and Dr Andrew Murrison MP, and we also acknowledge steps taken by the previous administration. It is one of the strengths of the Covenant that so many can play their part, whether in Government, the voluntary and charitable sector, or private individuals. The duty falls on all of us, so together we must rebuild the Covenant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Liam Fox'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large loop at the end.

INTRODUCTION



The Coalition's Programme for Government made rebuilding the Military Covenant a clear priority in the days following the General Election, and outlined some of the measures that would take us towards that goal. We have made good progress on those measures over the last year and, at the same time, we have been rewriting the Covenant itself on a tri-Service basis, as an Armed Forces Covenant.

The Armed Forces Covenant, and guidance on its implementation, is being published in parallel with this document. An important feature is that it shows the multi-dimensional nature of the Covenant. The duty we owe as a Nation and as a Government to current and former members of the Armed Forces, and to their families, covers a wide range of issues and areas of national life. Though based on a straightforward moral obligation, fulfilling that obligation requires action across the whole of Government and beyond.

Over the last five years, political and public debate in Britain has seen increasing attention paid to the issues which underpin the Covenant. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have put the question of how we treat current and former members of the Armed Forces back where it belongs, at the heart of our national life. There was a widespread perception within society that the Covenant was not being honoured and many, across the Nation, have responded. Homecoming parades have become an integral part of civic life. Support for charities and voluntary organisations connected with the Services has increased.

The last Government also responded to the wave of support for our Armed Forces. With the publication of the Service Personnel Command Paper in July 2008, it announced some practical steps to help Service personnel and their families in accessing public services. It set up structures, like the External Reference Group and Armed Forces Advocates in Government departments, to take work forward. These measures received broad cross-party support, but they were only a starting point to repairing the damage that had been done.

The task inherited by the current Government, therefore, was to rebuild the Covenant, building on the initial steps, by taking new practical measures, and planning more for the future. Much has been delivered already and more is in the pipeline. The Operational Allowance has been doubled and changes have already been made to Rest and Recuperation rules. A Pupil Premium is to be introduced in England for Service children and a new fund will support State Schools catering for significant numbers of Service children. A brand new scheme is already in place to provide scholarships for bereaved Service children to study at university; additional support is available for ex-Service personnel to study at university too. In order to strengthen the ties of the Armed Forces Community with the wider community in which they live, we are introducing an Armed Forces Community Covenant Scheme and have set aside funds to support projects at the local level. We are also going to launch a veterans' card, used to access commercial discounts and privileges, and encourage businesses to go further in the discounts they offer through use of this card.

In addition to these and other commitments in the Coalition Programme, and some unfinished business from the 2008 Command Paper, the Government commissioned reports from Dr Andrew Murrison MP, to look in particular at the support for Service personnel and veterans who may suffer from mental health problems due to Service, and from Professor Hew Strachan, who led an independent Task Force to look at innovative ways to support the Covenant. The Government has accepted all of the recommendations put forward by Dr Murrison and its response to Professor Strachan's report is also published today.

This publication draws on these different strands of work, and summarises the measures that the UK Government is implementing in the coming year and beyond, across all the different areas which relate to the Armed Forces Covenant. It puts those measures in the context of developments in recent years, so that the reader is clear about the progress that has been made, and what the future holds. It should be read in conjunction with the Armed Forces Covenant and accompanying guidance note, which underpin the Government's plans for supporting the Armed Forces community. For ease of reference this document reproduces, and covers the same areas as, the Covenant guidance note, to provide a clearer sense of what the UK Government intends to achieve.

The Armed Forces Covenant sets a framework for how the Armed Forces Community should expect to be treated, but it is not possible to specify in detail how it will be applied in every case and at every time. The demands of Service and other constraints may prevent these expectations and aspirations being met in some circumstances. However the Covenant should influence policy, service delivery and standards in the areas and ways set out in this document.

Actions being taken by the Devolved Administrations to assist the Armed Forces community, either in parallel to measures taken by the Westminster Government or independently, are not included in this document. They are matters for the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in accordance with their devolved powers. However they constitute an important pillar of work to support the Covenant. In many cases, particularly in Scotland and Wales, actions to support our people have been delivered by routes which reflect the different legislative landscape and the way their public services are arranged. What matters is that they too have a responsibility to live up to the Covenant and we shall take a keen interest in how they progress with this. We look forward to working with their new Governments to take this work forward following their May 2011 elections.

Unfortunately, the disastrous financial situation inherited by this Government has made the task of rebuilding the Covenant far more difficult. In many areas, doing more to honour the Covenant depends on attitudes and actions rather than resources, and the Government will take action where it can. But in others there is little alternative to sustained investment. As a result, the Government will not be able to go as far or as fast as we would like in rebuilding the Covenant.

We will not forget our commitment, nor pretend that all is well when it is not. That is one reason why we are for the first time properly recognising the Covenant in law within the Armed Forces Bill. This will require the Defence Secretary to set out to Parliament annually in an Armed Forces Covenant report the position on vital issues including accommodation, education and healthcare. Each year the production of this report will provide an opportunity for the Government to comment on progress against these initiatives. It will also help Government, in conjunction with the External Reference Group for the Armed Forces Covenant, to identify further steps which need to be taken to rebuild the Covenant. This document should be read in that context, as representing the first steps. There will be more in the future. This Government is committed to seeing this process through, and delivering the support our Armed Forces community deserve.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE



Covenant Guidance

Service personnel should be sustained and rewarded by Terms and Conditions of Service which recognise the freedoms and choices that they have voluntarily given up. These Terms and Conditions of Service should be fair to personnel and wherever possible give flexibility to match family circumstances, whilst meeting the needs of the MOD and conforming to wider Government policy. They will be held under regular review by the MOD.

The terms under which individuals serve, such as enlistment and engagements, are binding in every sense. The conditions offered, in return for the commitments and risks to which Service personnel are subject, should be fair in terms of both the financial and non-financial package. The recommendations of an independent body should constitute an integral part of the process used to determine pay.

What this means for Service personnel...

Current situation

The total remuneration package for Service personnel – which includes free medical care, pensions, subsidised accommodation and a range of allowances on top of basic salary – remains at the top end of the public sector. The Armed Forces' Pay Review Body (AFPRB) has a crucial role in providing independent advice and ensuring that pay, in particular, continues to be set at a fair level, which supports recruitment and retention of the people we need now and in the future.

The 2011 report of the AFPRB was published in March and the Government accepted its recommendations in full, implementing them in April. These recommendations included a pay increase of £250 for full-time personnel earning less than £21,000 (around 25% of the Armed Forces) as well as a number of specific targeted measures. These included the restructuring and uplift of certain specialist pay categories including the introduction of Financial Retention Incentives and Golden Hellos, and an increase to the rate of the Northern Ireland Residents' Supplement and its extension to cover Full-Time Reserve Service and Northern Ireland-based Reserve Forces personnel.

As part of measures to tackle the budget deficit, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Government's Emergency Budget in 2010, a two-year pay freeze from 2011-12 for public sector workers, including the Armed Forces. This Government remains committed to the AFPRB process for the future and during this period of public sector pay freezes the AFPRB will continue to submit recommendations for those earning less than £21,000 and for any targeted measures proposed for particular groups.

A range of allowances are also available to Service personnel to take account of specific circumstances. Recently changes have been made to them both in line with changes applied across the public sector, and also reflecting the fact that a review of some allowances was overdue, as they no longer reflected the needs of the Armed Forces or developments in wider society. MOD will phase in the changes where appropriate and has sought to limit the impact on lower paid personnel. Allowances will change further, particularly in the medium to long term, as we seek to make them both simpler and better targeted. But any changes to the allowances package will continue to take into account the special circumstances of Service life.

Also set out in the SDSR, the Government committed to work on a New Employment Model for the future. A key driver for changing the employment model is to provide an overall package (including career structure, pay, allowances and accommodation options) that better balances the demands placed on Service personnel and their families. One aim will be to improve domestic stability, which we recognise is important for spouses' employment and children's education, while continuing to support mobility where this is essential to Defence requirements.

The Government is in no doubt about the need to maintain appropriate Terms and Conditions of Service into the future.

Future Actions

Annual pay awards for lowest ranks while the public sector pay freeze is in force

Around a quarter of all Service personnel earn under £21,000 and they will receive a minimum £250 increase each year during the two-year public sector pay freeze (2011 -12 and 2012 -13). Volunteer Reservists that fall into this category will receive a pro rata payment. We will continue to engage with the AFPRB and remain committed to that process.

Inclusion of Armed Forces in the Hutton Fair Pay Review

The Armed Forces are generally well-placed to meet the challenges outlined in the Hutton Fair Pay report published in March. Consideration of how to implement the specific recommendations within the defence context will need to take the unique characteristics of the Armed Forces into account. Nevertheless, we endorse the principles of transparency, accountability and good governance of top-level pay set out in the report. The MOD will work to implement the recommendations taking into account the distinct operational context in which the Armed Forces perform their duties.

Development of a New Employment Model

The New Employment Model being developed by the MOD will review current Terms and Conditions of Service and make adjustments where appropriate to ensure the expectations of Service personnel and the demands we place on them are balanced and fit for the future. It will recognise that, where mobility is required for service reasons, appropriate support and compensation will be available.

HEALTHCARE



Covenant Guidance

The Armed Forces Community should enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as that received by any other UK citizen in the area they live. For Serving personnel, including mobilised reservists, primary healthcare is provided by the MOD, whilst secondary care is provided by the local healthcare provider. Personnel injured on operations should be treated in conditions which recognise the specific needs of Service personnel, normally involving a dedicated military ward, where this is appropriate for them, and medical rehabilitation in MOD facilities. For family members, primary healthcare may be provided by the MOD in some cases (e.g. when accompanying Service personnel posted overseas). They should retain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the Service person being posted.

Veterans receive their healthcare from the NHS, and should receive priority treatment where it relates to a condition which results from their service in the Armed Forces, subject to clinical need. Those injured in Service, whether physically or mentally, should be cared for in a way which reflects the Nation's moral obligation to them whilst respecting the individual's wishes. For those with concerns about their mental health, where symptoms may not present for some time after leaving Service, they should be able to access services with health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture.

What this means for Service personnel...

Current situation

The MOD policy is that Armed Forces personnel should have the best possible care and we work with the UK Departments of Health and the NHS to provide this. The majority of routine day-to-day healthcare for all Service personnel, wherever they are based, is provided through military primary care health centres situated in or near their individual unit. The range of medical care that is provided will depend on the size of the local military population that a centre is required to serve, but it will generally provide high standard primary medical and dental care. In addition, most major military primary care centres will have Primary Care Rehabilitation Facilities either on site or nearby. These will provide out-patient rehabilitation and musculo-skeletal treatments for the simpler kind of sports and training injuries commonly suffered by Armed Forces personnel. Many primary care medical staff are also able to offer treatment for the less serious mental health disorders.

For personnel who require physical rehabilitation that cannot be provided at primary care centres, MOD maintains a range of more specialist facilities. There are 15 Regional Rehabilitation Units (RRUs) located in areas of major military population around the UK and overseas which offer more specialist physiotherapy to those requiring it. For those needing more specialist treatment, such as amputees, the dedicated Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Headley Court in Surrey provides a first-rate facility on an in-patient basis to all Service personnel. (More information on the treatment of injured Service personnel is contained below.)

Likewise, more specialist mental healthcare for serving Service personnel is provided through MOD's 15 military-run Departments of Community Mental Health in the UK (with additional centres in Germany, Cyprus and Gibraltar). They are located to be convenient for major centres of military population, and support the provision of healthcare that is available through Service primary care facilities. For those Service personnel requiring in-patient mental healthcare, the MOD has a contract with a consortium of eight NHS Trusts, led by South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, which delivers in-patient care in a range of facilities around the country.

In addition to the healthcare provided to Reservist personnel when mobilised, the Reserves Mental Health Programme was launched in 2006 and offers support to any Reservist deployed after 2003 who has mental health issues. To access the assessment programme Reservists can self refer or can be referred by their GP. An independent clinical review in 2010 indicated that the programme is well received and offers an effective and acceptable intervention service to recently de-mobilised Reservists. The MOD continually reviews this programme and future direction will take into consideration any findings from research by King's College Mental Health Research, the Medical Assessment Programme and the NHS Mental Health Pilots.

Service personnel who need in-patient hospital care will obtain this at any NHS hospital in the UK. The specific hospital to which they are referred may depend upon the need for a particular clinical specialty, but the majority will be treated at the nearest suitable facility, as close as possible to their family, friends and all the local welfare support provided by their home unit. The exception to this is the treatment of operational casualties, where the primary facility is the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham.

Whilst this work shows significant progress in the area of healthcare, the Government places a particularly high priority on maintaining the mental health of our armed forces personnel and set out a commitment to provide additional support in its “Programme for Government”. The majority of mental health disorders can be cured with the appropriate treatment, and the Government is currently directing additional resources at this important area of healthcare, building on the extensive military support and treatment networks already in place. Dr Andrew Murrison MP presented a number of recommendations¹ to the Government last Autumn and we have committed to acting on these. Those measures, along with others identified by the independent Covenant Task Force report, such as on a healthier approach to alcohol, are captured below.

Future Actions

Healthcare, other than that provided by the Defence Medical Services, is a devolved matter therefore the measures outlined below may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Access to a mental health wellbeing website, for Service personnel, families and veterans, to engage those reluctant to access traditional clinical services.

This will be delivered by the Department of Health (DH) working in partnership with the MOD. The DH has contracted with ‘Big White Wall’ to provide this online early intervention portal. The service will be targeted at three cohorts: veterans (potentially all leavers after a particular date); serving personnel; and families. It is expected that implementation of the pilot phase will begin in May 2011 and the service will be evaluated after 12 months.

Building a greater focus on mental health into routine service and discharge medical examinations

Work to introduce a standardised mental health assessment into routine Service Medical Examinations is under way. The MOD is currently undertaking a trial in selected units across the Royal Navy, Army and the RAF that began in May 2011. This trial will inform the further rollout of the assessment. We currently aim to integrate the mental health assessment into discharge protocols, including that for seriously injured personnel, by late Summer 2011.

¹ ‘Fighting Fit: A mental healthplan for Servicemen and Veterans’, Dr Andrew Murrison, October 2010

Better information for GPs on available help for Reservists via the Reserves Mental Health Programme

The MOD continually reviews the Reserves Mental Health Programme (RMHP) and future direction will take into consideration the findings of ongoing research by King's College London, the Medical Assessment Programme and NHS Mental Health Pilots. The MOD and DH are currently considering how communication of the RMHP to GPs could be enhanced. The development of the e-learning package for GPs by DH working with the Royal College of General Practitioners will also ensure that appropriate information is provided, to improve understanding of the health needs of reservists, veterans and families. This is planned to be in place by June 2011.

Service medical professionals in NHS bodies

The MOD will continue to work closely with NHS bodies to maximise the benefit that comes from the transfer of skills and knowledge between Service and NHS staff. This is epitomised by the recent opening of a National Institute for Health Research Centre for Surgical Reconstruction and Microbiology at University Hospitals Birmingham, which brings together both military and civilian trauma surgeons and scientists. Professional recognition of Service medical training through the MOD/UK Departments of Health Partnership Board is being developed.

A healthier approach to alcohol

The Armed Forces support the adoption of a sensible drinking culture as an important contribution to overall good health. Alcohol education and general health promotion will continue to be widely undertaken in all three Services. Across Service establishments, particularly with the advent of pay-as-you-dine, contractors are increasingly encouraged to provide "coffee shop" type facilities to meet changing demand. These are in some cases collocated with internet and wi-fi facilities and provide a relaxed environment and a welcome addition to wider welfare provision. In addition the Armed Forces Bill, introduced to Parliament in December 2010, contains a bespoke Service scheme for the testing of Service personnel for alcohol and drugs. We will continue to work with charities such as the Council for Voluntary Welfare Workers in the provision of alcohol free environments where Service personnel can relax and receive pastoral support.

Midlands Medical Accommodation Project

In January the Government announced the next phase of the project to create a new community of excellence in clinical care, research and training in the West Midlands with Carillion plc. The Midlands Medical Accommodation Project is key to exploiting and sustaining progress in military medicine that will make a real difference to Service personnel. Work is expected to begin on site at the beginning of Autumn 2011, with the relocation planned to begin at the end of 2013. Once completed, the site will be home to approximately 1400 Defence Medical Staff.

What this means for injured Service personnel...

Defence Medical Services continue to improve their deployed medical capabilities on operations. The excellence of care extends from the point of wounding, through casualty extraction using the exemplary skills of the helicopter borne Medical Emergency Response Team and on to the state-of-the-art facilities at Camp Bastion which have been designed specifically to deal with trauma casualties and ensures that seriously injured personnel receive the medical care they need. A key element of the medical care is the world wide aeromedical evacuation of personnel from operational theatres, by the RAF to repatriate personnel to the UK. This includes the movement of seriously wounded or critically ill personnel using Critical Care Air Support Teams. These teams are able to provide necessary in flight care which allows personnel to reach NHS provided definitive care in a timely manner.

Back in the UK, the quality of care for our seriously injured personnel provided at the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham is acknowledged to be first-class. The new military ward within QEH, building upon the military-managed ward at Selly Oak, was opened in June 2010. The move brought together all the key clinical services which had been used by Service personnel to one site. Military patients are treated in single rooms or four bed wards and the ward is managed in a way that ensures that military and civilian patients are treated separately. Not all seriously injured personnel are treated on the military ward; specialist clinical needs (e.g. burns and eye injuries) can dictate that military patients be treated in specialist hospitals or wards rather than the military ward. In this way, our operational casualties benefit from groundbreaking care delivered by one of Europe's leading trauma care providers in one of its most modern facilities.

In addition the recently opened National Institute for Health Research Centre for Surgical Reconstruction and Microbiology at University Hospitals Birmingham brings military and civilian trauma surgeons and scientists together to share innovation in medical research and advanced clinical practice in the battlefield to benefit both Military and NHS trauma patients at an early stage of injury. The centre will build upon existing research into complex trauma injuries including the effects of blast wounding, stemming blood loss, resuscitation, surgical care following severe injury and fighting wound-infection. The Department of Health, the MOD, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Birmingham have collectively invested £20m in the centre.

Beyond the clinical facilities that are required to treat Service patients, additional investment in infrastructure, by both the Public and Charitable Sectors, can play a vital role in helping patients and families to recover. Developments include the provision by

the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association – Forces Help (SSAFA-FH) of Norton House near Headley Court and a second facility in Birmingham, offering a “home from home” for family members visiting seriously injured relatives.

Each Service is responsible for the management and support of their respective personnel recovering from serious injury and illness. All three Services have recently modified or enhanced their existing structures to deliver a more coherent recovery pathway for all injured and ill Service personnel, constituting an overall Defence Recovery Capability while acknowledging their individual Service arrangements and responsibilities. In support of this a Defence Recovery Steering Group (DRSG) was established in March 2011 to manage the scale, complexity and sensitivity of Defence Recovery. The DRSG is the MOD’s principal forum for monitoring and approving issues relating to requirement, implementation and development of recovery initiatives across the MOD, in cooperation with key partners, and provides direction and guidance to single Service recovery capabilities. Its creation outlines the fact that the development and success of Defence Recovery is reliant upon cooperation between the Service recovery programmes and their strategic partners, The Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes.

The Naval Service Recovery Pathway, established last year, is a joint venture between the MOD, Help for Heroes and The Royal British Legion. All Royal Naval Bases, Air Stations and Royal Marine Units look after personnel that have a realistic and timely expectation of regaining full fitness, with Royal Navy Recovery Cells co-ordinating the support available from the Base Welfare, Medical, and Physical fitness facilities. Hasler Company is designed to cater for those with injuries that are beyond the capability of the Recovery Cell care. Its role is to command, manage and care for personnel recovering from the most severe and complex service limiting injuries and those recovering from serious illness. Its aim is to ensure that injured personnel are able to achieve their maximum recovery potential. Patients have access to multidisciplinary assessment and treatment capabilities, mental health support, extensive physiotherapy, rehabilitation instructor and physical training instructor resources. Patients also have direct and prioritised access to adjacent NHS care.

The MOD has committed £9M over the next four years for the Naval Service Recovery Pathway. A project in conjunction with Help for Heroes is being developed to deliver the required enhanced infrastructure. Additionally, the Royal Navy can access Help for Heroes funds to assist in the delivery of individual recovery plans, administered through the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

The Army established the Army Recovery Capability (ARC) in February 2010 as a joint venture between the MOD, Help for Heroes and The Royal British Legion. The ARC ensures that injured and ill personnel have access to all the key services and resources needed to help them return to duty or make a smooth transition to an appropriately skilled civilian life. The ARC is staffed by military and civilian personnel with, for example, welfare, education, resettlement and legal experience. It also includes permanent representation from the Service charities, commercial and employment sectors. It works closely with all the elements of defence medical and welfare services, as well as external providers, ensuring the ARC has a truly joined-up approach.

When an individual is taken under the command of the ARC they are assessed and then an individual recovery plan is developed, focusing on the best outcome for both the individual and the Army. The support is delivered through 11 Personnel Recovery Units located throughout the UK and Germany. These units will have responsibility for the individual until the point when they are able to return to duty or transition to civilian life.

The MOD is in the process of establishing four tri-Service Personnel Recovery Centres that will offer a residential capacity. They create the kind of conducive military environment proven to assist Service personnel in their recovery. This capability has been enhanced by The Royal British Legion Battle Back Centre which will deliver programmes that promote confidence and independence through the use of adaptive sport and adventure training. The focus is on optimising what individuals can rather than what they cannot do, in order to promote a positive mental attitude throughout an individual's recovery.

The ARC represents a multi-million pound commitment by the MOD and Service charities partnership. The MOD has committed £35m over the next four years to the ARC project. Help for Heroes has committed a total of £70m for the building of the Personnel Recovery Centres, including £15m over four years to support Individual Recovery Plans and a further £6m for a quick reaction fund to respond to immediate welfare needs which will be managed by the Army Benevolent Fund - The Soldiers' Charity. The Royal British Legion has also committed £50m over ten years, which represents the largest single contribution in their 90-year history. This will be used to fund The Royal British Legion Battle Back Centre with the remainder supporting the running costs of all four Personnel Recovery Centres.

For Royal Air Force personnel, the Personnel Holding Flight (PHF), located at RAF High Wycombe, is responsible for establishing the optimal support package for each individual who is long-term sick, or unable to undertake their duties on medical grounds. Working in conjunction with their parent unit, they determine who is best placed to provide appropriate support. Factors taken into consideration include: an individual's home and family location, availability of appropriate housing, the provision of ongoing medical treatment and the length of time an individual has limited employment capabilities. For those parented by it, the PHF provides full command, welfare, re-skilling, education, enhanced resettlement and personnel support up to the point where an individual either returns to duty or is discharged through the Medical and Employment Review Board process. The Officer Commanding PHF also acts as the Personal Recovery Officer for those personnel who, following attendance at an Assessment Skills Course, complete an Individual Recovery Plan. Although Individual Recovery Plans will be funded by the RAF Benevolent Fund, the RAF currently accesses this resource through the Army Recovery Capability. Overall, the majority of wounded injured and sick personnel in the RAF remain with their own Unit. However, PHF works in partnership with RAF Medical Boards and parent unit staffs to keep apprised on complex individual cases. If the need for enhanced support is identified, the parent unit will discuss whether an individual should be referred to PHF for long-term parenting support.

For some, illness or injury leads to them leaving the Armed Forces. Alongside the existing arrangements governing the coordination of welfare support to those leaving the Services, the MOD has developed a Transition Protocol with the Department of Health and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services to ensure a seamless transition for ill and injured Service personnel from military to civilian life. The Protocol was agreed by Departments in September 2010 and the initial trial period concluded in March 2011, after which lessons learnt were incorporated and it became Tri-Service and Health Department policy.

The Protocol sets out the responsibilities and procedures for planning the transition of health and social care for ill and injured Service leavers to local public providers. It is intended to ensure that a bespoke Transition Plan can be agreed by the receiving care providers at an earlier stage than previously occurred. A Multi-Disciplinary Team drawn from MOD representatives (such as the Veteran's Welfare Service) and local service

providers is brought together at least 3 months in advance of the discharge date to assess the medical and social needs of the Service leaver. The Protocol provides a mechanism for the development of an appropriate care package which will be drawn together by the MOD Case Coordinator in liaison with the relevant health and social care experts within the Primary Care Trust and Local Authority. This should ensure that a care package provided by local service deliverers is in place from the moment an injured Service leaver is discharged.

What this means for families....

Current situation

Dependants accompanying Service personnel posted overseas, such as in Germany and Cyprus, receive medical and dental care on the same basis as their serving spouse, either directly from deployed members of the Defence Medical Services or through direct arrangements with the host country's medical services. We will continue to ensure that, as far as practicable, this healthcare is broadly equivalent to that provided by the NHS in the UK.

The majority of healthcare support provided to Service families in the UK is provided by the local NHS body. There have been a number of improvements made in this service over the last few years to recognise the particular needs of this community. For example Service families awaiting NHS treatment who are required to move as the result of a posting have their waiting time taken into account in the new health area to ensure there is no unnecessary delay in getting treatment according to their clinical need. Also the MOD ensures, wherever possible, that those families undergoing a course of IVF treatment are not moved to a different location before it is completed.

Access to dentists was one of the most common frustrations expressed by Service families in recent years. The Department of Health works closely with MOD to ensure Service families are able to access NHS dentistry in the same way as the rest of the population, and are not disadvantaged by the fact that they move more frequently than others. Efforts have focussed on those areas of the country where there are the highest numbers of Service personnel and therefore assumed to be the highest number of dependants. However all local health authorities have been informed and reminded of the requirement to be aware of the specific needs of Service dependants and to ensure that these needs are addressed within their commissioning plans. Some health areas with large Service populations have been working with local bases to raise awareness of the availability of NHS dentists in their areas. The DH Guide to NHS dental services also includes a specific reference to the needs of Service families. We will continue to monitor this issue.

We also recognise the mental health needs of Service families. As for Serving personnel and veterans, further support for families will be made available, for example by being able to access the Big White Wall mental health and wellbeing website referred to earlier in this section, once established. In other areas of healthcare, their needs will be kept under review, and their specific situation taken into account during any wider reforms of healthcare in the UK.

Future Actions

Healthcare is a devolved matter therefore the measures outlined below may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

IVF treatment for seriously injured veterans

The Independent Medical Expert Group, set up as a result of the Lord Boyce Review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme recommended that veterans suffering serious genital injuries be guaranteed three cycles of IVF. The Government is committed to ensuring this recommendation is implemented.

NHS Reform

MOD will continue to work with the Department of Health to ensure that Service families are duly considered during the NHS reform process and safeguard provisions currently in place to ensure Service families do not encounter disadvantage in accessing NHS services.

Mental health support for families

The Department of Health have contracted with 'Big White Wall' to provide an on line service to Service families. This will be trialled during 2011 with a view to wider roll out in 2012. The additional mental health support for veterans being commissioned by DH will also ensure that, where appropriate, the mental health needs of the families are taken into account.

What this means for veterans...

Current situation

There are a wide range of existing processes to ensure successful transition of healthcare support as personnel move from Service to civilian life. The MOD also has a role in continuing to support the health needs of veterans which are overseen by the joint MOD/UK Departments of Health Partnership Board. Specific measures are already in place to support veterans in their healthcare needs. Those who have a condition related to their time in service can continue to receive priority treatment, subject to the clinical needs of others. In addition Armed Forces personnel who are injured and require prosthetic limbs should continue to receive on discharge from the Services the standard of prosthetics provided by Defence Medical Services subject to clinical need. Dr Andrew Murrison MP is

currently reviewing the NHS provision of prosthetics to veterans in England and will report on this in June 2011.

Every year approximately 22,000 Armed Forces personnel leave Service and return to civilian life. The great majority do so without any difficulty. However, for others the transition is more difficult. Those who have been seriously wounded can face a lifetime of reliance on health and social care services. During the last 12 months, regional Armed Forces Networks have been set up across England to ensure that the healthcare needs of veterans are met by public healthcare providers. The Networks bring together the NHS, the Armed Forces and the charitable sector to improve communication strands between all stakeholders to ensure the smooth transition of Service personnel from military into NHS care as they return to civilian life.

In terms of mental health support, six community veterans' mental health pilots were established in 2007, following concerns that some veterans were unwilling to use NHS services or that the NHS was unsuitable for their specific needs. An independent evaluation of the pilots was conducted by the University of Sheffield's Centre for Psychological Services Research, who published their findings in December 2010². The Evaluation Report identified key components of successful services and made a number of recommendations. The findings will be used by the NHS in England to inform planning of NHS veterans mental health services from 2011 onwards.

Following the recommendations by Dr Murrison, a new 24-hour veterans' mental health helpline was launched in March this year. It is operated by the "Rethink" charity on behalf of Combat Stress and funded by the Department of Health. From December 2010, DH has been discussing with the Armed Forces Networks how best to commission the uplift of 30 (whole time equivalent) veterans mental health professionals to deliver improved NHS mental health services to veterans in England. The increased capability will be delivered during 2011. These new mental health professionals will forge links with health and other statutory agencies and with the voluntary sector while undertaking outreach work to identify cases and refer individuals to veterans' organisations and other professionals. As part of this work, Mental Health trusts will also now formulate plans for managing referral cases as part of the commissioning process.

The UK Government will continue to provide support to veterans' health needs, and in particular, focus on their mental health as set out below.

² 'An evaluation of Six Community Mental Health Pilots for Veterans of the Armed Forces', University of Sheffield, Dec 2010

Future Actions

Healthcare is a devolved matter therefore the measures outlined below may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Follow on treatment available after discharge from the defence Departments of Community Mental Health

MOD policy for management of the defence Departments of Community Mental Health is currently being revised to allow Service personnel, who have mental health issues whilst serving (or identified at the release medical), to continue to access the military mental health centres for up to 6 months after discharge. Arrangements to ensure follow-on treatment is provided are planned to be in place and operational by late Summer 2011.

Introduction of an E-learning veteran's health package

The Department of Health is working with the Royal College of General Practitioners to develop an e-learning package to help GPs when treating reservists, families of those serving in the Armed Forces and veterans.

Launching a Veterans' Information Service

The Veterans Information Service, which will be operated by the Department of Health for veterans in England, will provide veterans with key information regarding a range of available support services, gather evidence to support future commissioning, and provide the opportunity for veterans to request targeted contact including mental health and substance abuse services. A trial will be conducted during early 2012 with further rollout scheduled thereafter.

Implementation of the Mental Health Pilots Evaluation Report

The findings will be used by the Department of Health in England to inform planning of NHS veterans mental health services from 2011 onwards.

Study on prosthetics provision

Dr Andrew Murrison MP is reviewing the effectiveness of prosthetics services in the NHS in England, for those veterans who have lost a limb due to activities while serving their country. Dr Murrison is expected to report to the Secretaries of State for Health and Defence and the Prime Minister by the end of June 2011 and the Government will look favourably on his recommendations.



EDUCATION

Covenant Guidance

Children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education (including early years services) as any other UK citizen in the area they live. The Services should aim to facilitate this in the way they manage personnel, but there should also be special arrangements to support access to schools if a place is required part way through an academic year as a consequence of a posting. For personnel posted overseas, the MOD provides early years and educational facilities where the numbers support it, although the range of provision and choice may not be as great as in the UK. In certain cases assistance will be available to support Service children's continuity of education, given the requirement for mobility.

Service personnel should expect to receive appropriate training and education for both personal and professional development, including the opportunity to gain nationally recognised civilian qualifications, in order to support them throughout their Service career and to prepare them for life after leaving the Service.

What this means for Service personnel...

Current situation

The MOD is a major provider of training and seeks to provide opportunities for all personnel to gain nationally recognised qualifications as they progress through their careers. Much of this training is formally accredited and therefore recognised by civilian employers at the end of their Service careers. The MOD also promotes lifelong learning among members of the Armed Forces, and this is encouraged through the Learning Credit schemes. The Standard Learning Credit (SLC) scheme provides financial support, throughout the Service person's career, for multiple, small-scale learning activities. The Enhanced Learning Credit (ELC) scheme, launched in April 2009, was designed to complement the SLC scheme by providing larger scale help to personnel who qualify, with a single payment of up to £2000 in each of a maximum of three separate financial years, to assist with the cost of further and higher level learning. In April 2011 the ELC scheme was enhanced and the financial support offered to Service leavers to study at colleges of further education or university for a first further or higher education qualification was extended to more personnel by reducing the qualifying period of service from six years to four and abolishing the qualifying period for personnel who are medically discharged. This financial support will cover the total cost of tuition fees and is available to Service leavers during their last two years of Service up to ten years after their discharge.

The Armed Forces continue to invest in the education and personal development of their personnel. Apprenticeships and Level 2 qualifications (the equivalent of achieving GCSEs grades A* to C, BTEC First Diplomas and Certificates) are already offered to all eligible Service personnel who do not hold them and MOD is on track to meet the Leitch Skills pledge³ of 95% of all personnel holding Level 2 qualifications by 2020. The Army runs the largest Public Sector apprenticeship scheme in the UK, for which it receives considerable funding from the Skills Funding Agency and achieves completion rates of 88%. In addition, the Army Graduate Programme was launched in March 2011, giving all non-graduate officer recruits the opportunity to gain a degree over the first six years of their military service.

The MOD also recognises the importance of life skills training throughout Service careers. Each of the single Services has training programmes designed to address areas including financial awareness and advice on home purchase. For example in support of the Army Recovery Capability, the Army runs bespoke assessment and life skills courses addressing many of these issues specifically for wounded, injured and sick soldiers.

The MOD is committed to continuing to improve the training opportunities available to Service personnel. Some specific examples are highlighted below.

³ 'Leitch review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills – final report' HMT, Dec 2006

Future Actions

Expansion of training opportunities for under 18s

From 2012-13 those under 18s who do not hold a Qualification and Credit Framework Level 3 qualification (the equivalent of achieving A levels, GCSEs in applied subjects, BTEC National) will be able to participate in appropriate full-time education or training.

Improvements to the Army's education programme

The Army is working on developing an improved model for the 'educational offer' to Service personnel, including a single Personal Development Fund; Individual Learning Accounts; qualifications drawing on and linked to military service; and full alignment with emerging Government initiatives. With the infantry adopting a Public Service apprenticeship from August 2011, the opportunity to complete an apprenticeship programme will be made available to the majority of soldier recruits. Revised career and specialist training courses should provide, from late 2011, opportunities for senior soldiers to gain teaching qualifications.

What this means for families....

Current situation

Educational opportunities for Service children are one of the most important concerns of Service families. The MOD has appointed a Director of Children & Young People to work closely across Government to provide direction, co-ordination and cohesion to the support provided to Service children and young people both by the MOD and by external organisations. A Service Children & Young People's Trust Board has also been established which includes the Armed Forces Advocate from the Department for Education, as well as Local Authority representatives. The Trust Board has also published a Children and Young People's Plan and has established priority groups to develop work strands. This new focus is supporting improvements to the learning and play activities available for Service children. It includes providing access to a range of learning pathways so that they are able to meet the challenges of adulthood and to enter the world of work.

Significant steps have already been taken to understand the needs of Service children and ensure that they are not disadvantaged and that their specific needs are addressed. Fair Access Protocols have been included within the School Admissions Codes to ensure that Service children are not disadvantaged in accessing school places. This includes the ability to apply for a school place on receipt of a posting notice and the ability for schools to exceed admissions numbers to make a place available for a Service child. The MOD will engage with a DfE consultation in 2011 - 12 looking at admissions and the appeals process to ensure Service children and their families are taken into account.

The DfE have announced a Pupil Premium for Service children to help schools provide pastoral and educational support for those pupils facing difficult social challenges. A

Service child indicator is now part of the Annual School Census in England and the DfE can now identify separately the children of parents in the Armed Forces, and it is therefore now possible to compare the educational attainment of these children with their peers. Comparative analyses of the attainment of Service children in England with that of non-Service children have revealed that many children from Service families do very well at school. However, a further study by DfE also showed that Service children may be distinctive from other groups of children in a number of ways and affected by mobility, social and emotional needs, bereavement, attendance and levels of parental involvement. Educational support for Service children is a priority for this Government and DfE will continue to take steps to ensure Service children are considered in the development of education policy, and where available, the most up to date research and good practice is made available on issues relating to Service children, to support local authorities and schools in their actions.

In April this year a new scheme funded by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Department for Education and MOD to provide university and further education scholarships in England to the children of Servicemen and women killed on active military service since 1990 was launched. The aim of the scheme is to give the children of those killed in the service of their country a head start in life by helping them through further education and giving them the opportunity to obtain a university degree. The scheme includes all children whose parent died wholly or predominantly due to their service. The Further Education scholarship of £1500 per year will be paid for education and training between the ages of 16-19 years. The university scholarship is intended to contribute to the cost of taking a first undergraduate course at a publicly-funded UK higher education institution and in England has been set at £8240 for the academic year 2010-11 (backdated for those who commenced their studies in September 2010). It will be reviewed for subsequent years as a result of the changes to university funding.

Educational support for Service children remains a priority for this Government and a number of further actions, set out below, are planned. This includes the important area of support to those children who have been bereaved.

Future Actions

Education is a devolved matter therefore the measures outlined below may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Pupil Premium for Service children

The Department for Education is including Service children as part of the Government's pupil premium scheme for England. This is to recognise the additional support that schools need to provide to Service children to mitigate the effects of separation from deployed parents, their frequent changes of school, including help settling in and changes of syllabus. The money will be distributed to Local Authorities who will then pass it on in its entirety to schools with Service children. The rate will start at £200 a pupil in 2011-12. The Service pupil premium will be given to schools for every Service child on their roll in the Annual Schools Census which was conducted on 20 January 2011. There are around 36,000 Service children currently recorded on the school census in England.

£3m Support Fund for State Schools with Service Children

Government is introducing a new fund of £3m per annum over the next four years, from 2011-12 to 2014-15, to support State schools catering for significant numbers of Service children or the children of Reservists. This is intended to help ensure that schools are equipped to deal with exceptional or changing circumstances as a result of troop movements and/or operational deployments. The fund will be designed to help State schools, and the military families they serve, cope with unpredictable needs and will be in addition to the regular extra funding they will receive via the Service children's Pupil Premium.

Development of a new strategy to address the impacts of mobility on the education of Service children and young people

The MOD is developing a unified and proactive strategy to mitigate the potentially adverse affects on the education of children and young people of Service-related mobility and operational deployment. This work will include facilitating the move of Service children between schools in different countries; ensuring that schools are aware and actively involved in supporting children and young people before, during and after deployment of parents; and providing information and advice as well as supporting parents at meetings with schools, local authorities, and at tribunals.

Consultation on Schools Admission Code

DfE will engage with MOD on a consultation in 2011-12 looking at Admissions and the appeals process to ensure Armed Forces children and their families are taken into account.

Supporting Service children's education through flexibility in Service accommodation provision

We will look at how to increase the flexibility in the provision of military accommodation to assist families being moved at important stages of their children's education. The MOD Tri-Service Accommodation Policy already allows personnel to apply for the retention of their property in certain circumstances (such as welfare, medical or educational reasons or when serving unaccompanied), for specific periods of time, but we are committed to looking at further flexibility in this area.

New State Boarding School places

From September 2011, three new State Boarding Schools will be open which will provide an additional 210 boarding places. The Wellington Academy will provide 100 boarding pupils, The Priory Academy Lincoln will provide 60 places and The Harefield Academy will provide 50 places. In addition to this The Duke of York's Royal Military School is now an academy and 200 additional places will be allocated (although boarding places will no longer be exclusive to Service children). Queen Victoria School at Dunblane continues to offer boarding places, within the Scottish state education system, for the children of Scottish Service personnel and those who have served in Scottish units. The school, funded by the MOD, offers boarding places for 270 Service children.

What this means for veterans...

Current situation

Enhanced Learning Credits, built up during service can be used to fund education for up to ten years after an individual has left the Armed Forces. The ELC scheme can provide larger scale help to personnel who qualify, with a single payment of up to £2000 in each of a maximum of three separate financial years, to assist with the cost of higher level learning. In addition, Service leavers with six years service, who have been members of the ELC scheme, with additional funding support from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills can access a first further or higher education qualification free of charge at the level for which they are academically qualified on leaving the Service. This funding can be used by those interested in accessing the DfE 'Troops to Teachers' scheme, further detail of which is found in the section on Transition later in this document.

Future Actions

Education is a devolved matter therefore the measures outlined below may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Financial Support for Service leavers to study at University

The financial support offered to Service leavers to study at university will be extended to more people by reducing the qualifying period of service to four years and abolishing the qualifying period for personnel who are medically discharged. The financial support will cover the total cost of tuition fees.

HOUSING



Covenant Guidance

In addressing the accommodation requirements of Service personnel, the MOD seeks to promote choice, recognising the benefits of stability and home ownership amongst members of the Armed Forces where this is practicable and compatible with Service requirements, and also that their needs alter as they progress through Service and ultimately return to civilian life. Where Serving personnel are entitled to publicly-provided accommodation, it should be of good quality, affordable, and suitably located. They should have priority status in applying for Government-sponsored affordable housing schemes, and Service leavers should retain this status for a period after discharge. Personnel may have access to tailored Armed Forces housing schemes or financial arrangements, depending on their circumstances, to help them in purchasing their own property. Those injured in service should also have preferential access to appropriate housing schemes, as well as assistance with necessary adaptations to private housing or Service accommodation whilst serving. Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to social housing and other housing schemes as any other citizen, and not be disadvantaged in that respect by the requirement for mobility whilst in Service.

What this means for Service personnel, families and veterans...

Current situation

Progress has been made in both defence housing and other housing solutions for Service personnel. MOD is committed to a fair charging policy for defence housing, providing subsidised accommodation below market prices that reflect the size, location and condition of the property. Concerning the condition of its property, Defence Estates carried out a wide-ranging condition survey of Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in England and Wales which was completed in March 2010. This was the first undertaken for many years, and complemented the smaller scale surveys carried out in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The overall results showed that more than 90% of UK SFA were in the top two (of four) condition standards. In addition, the surveys provide a detailed picture of the SFA estate in the UK, thus enabling better investment decisions to be made.

£61.6 million was allocated for the upgrade of, and improvements programmes for, Service accommodation in financial year 2010 -11. This allowed for the upgrading of some 800 Service family homes to the top standard, with a further 4,000 properties benefiting from improvements such as new kitchens and bathrooms, double glazing, boilers and improved insulation. As well as making homes more comfortable, these improvement measures have the added benefit of reducing energy costs for occupants.

The MOD is committed to continuing with its programme of improvements to SFA, subject to financial constraints. Its strategic focus is to bring the lower two standards of SFA in the UK (some 1,500 properties) up to the top two standards or dispose of them. To facilitate this, properties at the lowest condition are no longer routinely allocated to Service families, and, under current plans, this provision is to be extended to those properties at the next condition standard from January 2012.

To improve the level of support offered across the MOD estate, the MOD announced in March the creation of a new Defence Infrastructure Organisation. The new infrastructure arrangements and organisation are being designed to enable more efficient and coherent management of the estate. The Housing Prime Contract will be renewed as part of the Next Generation Estates Contract programme which aims to develop the optimum mix of future commercial arrangements for the Defence estate. MOD has also launched a Future Accommodation Project, as part of its New Employment Model (as referred to in the section on Terms and Conditions of Service), which aims to develop costed options for a different approach to the provision of accommodation, which will better meet future needs for affordable and good quality living accommodation, during and in transition from, Service. MOD has committed to these and other steps to improve the accommodation options it offers to Service personnel and their families. These are captured below.

Living in MOD provided accommodation is not the right answer for all Service personnel and their families. We recognise the importance of helping and encouraging Service personnel to own their own homes. We have, for example, worked in England with the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to develop a pilot, bespoke, shared equity scheme for the Armed Forces which was launched in January 2010. MOD will be providing funding for the scheme over the next three years. The scheme is open to regular serving members of the Armed Forces. Eligible Service personnel must have four to six years' continuous service at the time of first application and not be able otherwise to afford to purchase a suitable property on the open market.

In addition, Service personnel are considered a priority group, provided they meet the eligibility criteria, for other affordable homes schemes in England. Service personnel can retain their 'priority status' for affordable homes schemes for 12 months after leaving their Service. In the event of death in Service, this priority status can transfer to their bereaved spouse/civil partner. Service personnel injured in Service have their lump sum compensation payments disregarded for purposes of the capital means test for the affordable homes schemes and for purposes of the Disabled Facilities Grant means test in England, which help the disabled to adapt their homes to take account of their particular needs.

For some Service leavers social housing is an option they wish to pursue on leaving their Service. Local connection to an area is considered when being assessed for social housing waiting lists. Legislation has been changed to enable Serving personnel and Service leavers to establish a local connection in an area in which they have served/are serving placing them on a level footing with civilians already living in the area. In addition seriously injured personnel are given 'additional preference' for suitably adapted social housing in England. We are aware that some Local Authorities have chosen to go further than this and offer additional priority for social housing to those who have recently left or are soon due to leave their Service.

The MOD works in partnership with other Government departments and the voluntary and community sector to provide supported housing for homeless veterans. Mike Jackson House in Aldershot was opened in 2008 having been built on land gifted by the MOD. It provides a 25 unit supported housing facility (one bedroom flats) for Service Leavers (for up to 18 months) until they find suitable accommodation. It also helps with developing independent living skills and finding suitable 'move on'/permanent accommodation and employment. The Beacon – a further supported housing project is underway in Catterick in North Yorkshire and will provide a 31 bed facility for homeless veterans, again on land gifted by MOD and in partnership funding with the Homes and Communities Agency and the Department for Communities and Local Government. In addition to accommodation, the Beacon will offer ex-Service personnel support back into education, training and employment, and facilitate social enterprise to give valuable training and much needed support to residents.

Future Actions

Provision of affordable and social housing is a devolved matter therefore the measures outlined below may differ from the specific actions being taken in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Look at whether there is scope to refurbish Armed Forces accommodation from efficiencies within the MOD

The Coalition Government is committed to continuing to refurbish Armed Forces accommodation. Work on efficiencies across MOD is ongoing, and whilst we are developing work around the Future Accommodation Project, we will continue to consider where efficiency savings can be utilised to improve accommodation.

Develop an alternative approach to the provision of accommodation for Service Personnel and their families.

MOD has launched a Future Accommodation Project, as part of its New Employment Model, which aims to develop costed options for a different approach to the provision of accommodation, which will better meet future needs for affordable and good quality living accommodation during, and in transition from Service. The project should complete by Summer 2012.

The Next Generation Estates Contract (NGEC) programme

NGEC aims to develop the optimum mix of future commercial arrangements for the Defence estate, once the current contractual arrangements with Industry to provide management, maintenance and development of SFA in the UK expire. The NGEC programme will replace these arrangements with a single end-to-end process for the provision of Service housing that delivers the best possible service for Service families and achieves best value for money for the UK taxpayer. It is due to be implemented in April 2013.

Continued support to the Armed Forces Home Ownership Scheme

The MOD will continue to provide funding over the next three years for the pilot, bespoke, shared equity scheme for the Armed Forces. The potential for expansion of such schemes, including across the UK, will be considered as part of the Future Accommodation Project review.

Raise awareness of the Government's low-cost home ownership schemes

We will continue to work with relevant stakeholders including Defence Infrastructure Organisation, Housing Information Centres, Local Service Commanders, HIVE Information Centres, Family Federations and the Joint Service Housing Advice Office to raise awareness of the programme, placing a particular emphasis on informing and educating Service personnel earlier on in their career. In addition, the potential of such schemes will be considered as part of the Future Accommodation Project.

Improvements to Defence Infrastructure Organisation Customer Care

The MOD is actively looking to improve customer care for personnel living in SFA, including by providing a network of local Drop In Centres which will enable families to resolve their issues locally at a one stop shop. This concept will be considered within the NGEC. In addition improved and ongoing training has ensured that officers at the Housing Information Centres are better equipped to handle complex situations requiring a flexible approach to applying accommodation policies (such as when circumstances justify allocating a family SFA of a different type to their entitlement).

BENEFITS AND TAX



Covenant Guidance

Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to benefits as any UK citizen, except where tailored alternative schemes are in place. They will also contribute through taxation, but the taxation system may be adapted to reflect their particular circumstances (a current example would be the Contribution in Lieu of Council Tax arrangements).

What this means for Service personnel...

Current situation

This is an area where Government will continue to monitor policy developments to make sure they take proper account from the outset of the specific requirement of the Armed Forces to ensure they are not disadvantaged. For example, Service accommodation in England, Scotland and Wales is formally exempt from the Council Tax regime and the MOD instead pays a Contribution in Lieu of Council Tax (CILOCT) to Local Authorities, broadly equivalent to the amount of Council Tax that would otherwise be due. The average contribution, determined by the type of property occupied, is then recovered from Service occupants with their accommodation charge as a CILOCT. This ensures Service personnel

pay the same charges for similar accommodation wherever they are serving in the world and contributes to funding of equivalent local services.

Nevertheless the consumption of local services by Armed Forces personnel is not always the same as their fellow citizens, especially when deployed on operations. The Council Tax Relief payment, currently £148 for a 6 month tour, can be claimed by Service personnel serving on specified operations. Whilst members of the Armed Forces are not exempt from paying tax, the Council Tax Relief payment and the Operational Allowance, which is paid as a lump sum, are both tax free payments.

Many Service personnel who live in Service accommodation also own their own home. Those who do own or rent private accommodation are responsible for paying Council Tax direct to the appropriate Local Authority. For these Service personnel, a 10-50% council tax discount may be claimed from their Local Authority, where their main job-related dwelling is provided by the MOD anywhere in Great Britain.

Future Actions

Increase in Council Tax Relief

MOD will double council tax relief for all Service personnel on eligible operations overseas. Eligible personnel will receive council tax relief of 50% of the average council tax paid in England for the period of their deployment. This will be an increase on the current rate which is set at 25%.

What this means for families....

Current situation

Historically some spouses have found it difficult to maintain a National Insurance record if they follow their serving spouse abroad. Changes to social security legislation which came into effect in April 2010 have enabled eligible spouses and civil partners to accrue National Insurance credits when accompanying a Service person on an overseas tour. This ensures that they are able to access National Insurance related benefits, such as Job Seekers Allowance, on return to the UK. The credits can be used from April 2011.

At present the Government has no plans to make further adjustments to the tax and benefits system for Service personnel and their families but will keep this issue under review.

What this means for veterans...

Current situation

Some veterans will require continued financial support from Government in addition to any Armed Forces pension entitlement they may have. The Government is committed to making accessing this support as straightforward as possible. For example the Department for Work and Pensions currently uses Service medical board evidence in place of a face-to-

face medical assessment to determine eligibility for Employment and Support Allowance for those people who are found to be in the highest disability category at their medical assessment board.

Those who are injured in service have access to compensation payments which are covered in the section on Support after Service. They also have access to the state benefit system. In 2005 a full review of the treatment of compensation payments when assessing entitlement to income-related benefits was carried out. The aim was to introduce rules which would be fair and consistent to all claimants who suffer bereavement or personal injury. As a result, more flexible and generous rules were introduced for people who receive compensation for personal injury so that all capital payments made for personal injury are disregarded for the first 52 weeks of income-related benefit claims. Thereafter if the capital is placed in a personal injury trust it continues to be disregarded. A further review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme was conducted by Lord Boyce who published his report in 2010. Further information on the outcome of this review can be found in the section on 'Support after Service'.

In addition the first £10 per of any Guaranteed Income Payment paid from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme or payment made under the War Pensions Scheme is not taken into account when entitlement to income-related benefits is assessed. This £10 weekly disregard is paid in recognition of the fact that these disabilities arose as a consequence of serving in the Armed Forces. The same rules apply to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, which are administered by Local Authorities who have the discretion to go beyond the £10 disregard including disregarding it entirely. The evidence to date suggests that most choose to exercise this discretion.

The provision of benefits to veterans, particularly in light of the reforms of the welfare system will be kept under review.

Future Actions

Development of the Universal Credit

As the Government develops its plans for a universal credit to replace many of the benefits currently available, it will ensure the needs of veterans and their specific circumstances are taken into account.

RESPONSIBILITY OF CARE



Covenant Guidance

The Government, working with the chain of command, has a particular responsibility of care towards members of the Armed Forces. This includes a responsibility to maintain an organisation which treats every individual fairly, with dignity and respect, and an environment which is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. Special account must be taken of the needs of those under 18 years of age. The Government has a responsibility to promote the health, safety and resilience of Servicemen and women; and to ensure that they are appropriately prepared, in the judgement of the chain of command, for the requirements of any training activities or operations on which they are to be engaged. However operational matters including training and equipment fall outside the scope of the Armed Forces Covenant.

What this means for Service personnel...

Current situation

The Armed Forces aim to ensure that all their personnel are treated fairly and with dignity and respect and they have in place a number of initiatives to advance Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Services. In addition, based on work carried out in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the recommendations of the Service Complaints Commissioner in her Annual Reports to the Secretary of State, the three Services have initiatives in action to build confidence in the system for dealing with complaints of bullying and harassment.

The Navy have implemented a number of specific measures, including a Strategic Diversity Action Plan and Diversity Dashboard reviewed regularly by 2nd Sea Lord; Minority Support Groups/Networks; introduction of mandatory Core and Advanced Training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as an integral part of Command, leadership and management; establishment of Equality and Diversity Adviser networks to provide advice and guidance; introduction of mediation for resolution of workplace based conflict; improved management of Service Complaints; and improved internal and external communications signposting to sources of support.

The Army has set up a new Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination complaints and handling capability. It has a confidential complaints phone line that allows Army personnel to speak out about unfair treatment without being deterred by a bureaucratic process. The team is able to resolve matters, direct action or provide advice in order to prevent, end or deal with unacceptable behaviour. The Army is also expanding and modernising the way it educates personnel about their responsibilities regarding respect, inclusion and fair treatment.

The RAF has undertaken a number of steps in this area. The RAF Mediation Service is a 350+ strong trained Network designed to complement existing mechanisms for addressing grievances, complaints and related issues. In addition it is running an Equality & Diversity symposium with a view to presenting best practise and delivering knowledge on Inclusivity and Diversity issues in the Autumn and an Equality & Diversity Advisor (EDA) road show during Spring 2011. The RAF is also committed to supporting their Minority Support Groups and Networks. For example, the RAF Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual and Transsexual Forum (RAF LGBT) will support work on delivering sponsored training for the RAF LGBT community via a partnership with Brighton NHS Trust. Additionally, through a new 'At Ease' campaign, the RAF will promote both the Mediation Service and the Complaints options, to better advertise the engagement process for minority groups. This campaign will also reiterate the RAF Harassment and Bullying policy.

The MOD takes special account of those Service personnel under the age of 18. Its policy on the care of these Service personnel makes clear that their care and welfare requires particular attention by the Chain of Command. We have robust and effective safeguards in place to ensure they are cared for properly and are not placed unnecessarily at risk. The policy is reviewed regularly to ensure in particular that it keeps pace with any changes in legislation that affect young people.

We will continue to utilise the findings from annual external inspection by Ofsted to maintain oversight of young people undergoing training.

What this means for families....

Current situation

We have a responsibility to ensure that Service children and young people are supported and protected and that they are able to feel safe in the Armed Forces environment. We achieve this by safeguarding vulnerable children and young people, by maintaining an effective social worker workforce and by preventing and addressing bullying, violence and abuse of children and young people. In overseas locations MOD delivers this welfare support, and in the UK, where the Local Authorities deliver this care, the MOD will work to ensure that Service children's needs are being addressed in local plans. We aim to provide a structured and co-ordinated range of opportunities for Service children and young people so they can have their voice heard to help shape the services available to them, helping them to develop personal and social skills and to promote their wellbeing and reduce behaviour that puts them at risk.

The new focus for children and young people within the MOD will continue to drive forward work in this area. They will seek to ensure that agencies identify and agree appropriate thresholds for intervention; ensure that there is appropriate Service representation on Local Safeguarding Children Boards where there are high concentrations of Service population; and ensure that all staff working within the MOD who work with children and young people receive safeguarding training.

DEPLOYMENT



Covenant Guidance

The special impact of operational deployment on both personal and family life should be recognised. Depending on the nature of the operation, this may include financial support to deployed personnel, welfare support to individuals and family members, and where possible facilities to enable good communications with home.

What this means for Service personnel...

Current situation

There are a range of allowances that are provided when Service personnel are deployed. These are kept under review. For instance last year the main Operational Allowance was doubled by the Coalition Government. Service personnel now receive £5,280.88 tax free for a 182-day (six-month) tour if deployed in an entitled operational area. Payment is in the form of a single lump sum paid on completion of operational service.

Another priority area when the Coalition took office was Rest and Recuperation for those on operations. Amendments have been made to Rest and Recuperation policies across the

Services to ensure that any days missed during a period of Rest and Recuperation due to delays on the airbridge will be added to Post Operational Tour Leave.

Communications with families and friends are highly valued by those who are deployed. British Forces Post Office already provide Forces Free Air Letters and families can send packages of up to 2 kg free of charge to all operational locations and they make every effort to deliver to all forward locations as soon as possible. There are of course occasions when the tactical situation and availability of helicopter lift may delay delivery but this is reduced to a minimum. It is also necessary to suspend temporarily all communication from theatre following a serious casualty or death to ensure that next of kin can be informed by the necessary welfare organisations; this is understood by all deployed personnel and is a vital part of the casualty notification process.

The deployed welfare package is regularly reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of both Service personnel and their dependants. All Service personnel receive 30 minutes of publicly funded telephone calls per week to both landline and mobile phones and can purchase as many additional privately funded minutes as they wish. The cost of making privately funded calls has recently been reduced from 10.5p to 5.5p per minute for landlines. Access to welfare telephones has recently been reviewed and ratios halved from 1:30 to 1:15; the policy has also been amended to ensure that isolated detachments of 15 personnel or less have access to at least one welfare telephone.

The internet is becoming an important means of communication for Service personnel. The MOD currently provides fixed internet access (full broadband) on Main Operating Bases at a ratio of 1:50 and in addition provides email only access via WiFi for use with personal laptops. In Forward Operating Bases, mobile internet (WiFi) is provided that allows both internet access and email from personal laptops. Internet use is not limited by time, however in a number of smaller more austere locations it can not be provided due to insufficient infrastructure. Where this is the case, the MOD has introduced a text link facility instead.

All welfare communications are provided against an agreed and publicly funded entitlement, which meets the welfare requirement within operational constraints. However over recent years Paradigm Services Ltd (the welfare phone contractor) has provided an additional 45 minutes of free calls to those deployed on operations over the Christmas period. They have also developed a Charity Card system which enables charities to sponsor communications. Over the last year, the charity "Calls for Heroes" and the RAF Association have both purchased over a thousand of these cards; individual units have also bought cards through their welfare funds.

By their very nature, military operations are stressful for all those involved. The levels of stress felt by individuals can vary greatly and no two people will deal with their experiences in the same way. On return from operations, some will have no residual effects while others will take much longer to adjust to routine military and family life. In order to ensure that Service personnel returning from operational theatres are given time to re-adjust, a period of decompression is provided as part of their deployment, immediately after leaving the operational theatre and prior to their return to the UK. The aim of a period of decompression is to reduce the potential for maladaptive psychological adjustment.

Decompression is one element of a complete Post Operational Stress Management cycle which fulfils three functions designed to improve the quality of homecoming. This is achieved by giving personnel the opportunity to rationalise, contextualise and talk through operational experiences. During this period of decompression Service personnel

will receive mandatory health, safety, and welfare briefings and be given the opportunity to unwind together wherever possible, all of which combine to facilitate adjustment to a non-operational routine and the management of expectation concerning returning to the home unit. Importantly, decompression also provides an opportunity for mental health readjustment for those who need it. Formed unit personnel have for some time undertaken decompression at Camp Bloodhound in Cyprus and this has recently been extended to include individual augmentees. Additionally, attendance at 'Recall days' and return to work interviews are mandatory requirements which underpin the normalisation process aiming to ensure that any potential issues or adverse reactions to a deployment are identified.

All of the operational welfare package is closely monitored to ensure it meets the needs of Service personnel but at this time no specific further actions are identified.

What this means for families....

Current situation

The lead up to deployments can be a stressful and busy period. Most units, therefore, programme pre-deployment leave to ensure family matters can be attended to before going away. During the deployment itself, families' welfare is catered for by the parent unit or if the unit itself is deployed by the formal rear party. Families receive two additional travel warrants, if based in the UK, or a return journey to the UK if based abroad for a 6 months tour. This helps maintain links to those who can provide moral support. Journeys are transferable to allow relatives or friends to visit the family if desired. In addition to rest and recuperation taken during the tour (14 nights for a 6 month tour), Service personnel also receive post operational tour leave (1 day for every 9 deployed) which equates to 4 weeks leave after a 6 month tour.

These measures are in addition to the formal welfare support always provided by the chain of command and other welfare related organisations or charities. Units with deployed personnel receive a Families Welfare Grant to assist in providing welfare related activity for the duration of the tour. For an average unit this equates to some £35K over a 6 month period. Family welfare support can include the provision of communications equipment (Internet facilities and telephone lines) for HIVEs and Community Centres and subsidising the cost of families' activities which help with morale. In addition each Service operates a community support website and maintains online forums which enable two-way communications with personnel in theatre and promote networking and support to members of the community. Current support packages include a deployment information pack (including useful telephone numbers, sources of support and websites) and a nominated welfare point of contact to families of those deploying. Use is made of as many forms of media as possible to keep families informed. Following a deployment, families support remains in place, including face to face support and information packs.

The MOD acknowledges that living in the community, away from a Service environment, can be an issue for the families of Reservists or for Regular Service personnel who choose to live off base in their own homes. For both groups, activities such as briefing events and community support activities are often centred on the unit. DVDs for both families and children are being developed to deal with the emotional demands of deployment, separation and Service life. Deployment Journals have also been developed by the RAF for use by older children, as well as Deployment Wall Charts.

The Strategic Review of Reserves 2009 recognised that more direct welfare support was required for families and as a result the three Services have provided more tailored welfare literature improving the quality of information to families of deployed Reservists before, during and after mobilisation. Reservist families for whom the distance to their unit is not an issue have access to the various agencies that can provide support if required. All personnel that transit through the Reserves Training and Mobilisation Centre or the other single Service centres receive a welfare pack, a welfare brief with comprehensive information for the individual to pass to their family together with contact details for Welfare Officers. There is a continuous rolling programme of briefs to ensure the Chain of Command is fully advised on the need to include individual reservists in their welfare plans.

FAMILY LIFE



Covenant Guidance

Service families give up certain freedoms and choices in order to support the Service. To sustain family life, family members should have the same access to childcare, training and employment opportunities as any other citizen. Support should be available to minimise the impact of mobility caused by Service, drawing on active monitoring by the chain of command. Support should also take into account the effects of postings to remote locations, often away from family connections, for example in promoting transport and accessibility measures.

What this means for families...

Current situation

The Government understands the critical importance of supporting the families of Service personnel. It recognises that the frequent moves required by the Armed Forces can have a disruptive effect on family life, including the career of the spouse. A number of steps have been taken to try to help minimise the disadvantage caused. For example, Service family members can access spare capacity in Service learning centres to improve their basic skills aiming to enable them to achieve Level 2 Basic Skills qualifications in line with

the Leitch Skills Pledge³. In addition, family members are able to access a range of elective e-learning opportunities including National Vocational Qualifications in IT, Customer Service and Business Management. The Royal British Legion also launched a "Service Families Employment Portal" on their Civvy Street website (www.civvystreet.org) in early April 2010. This site provides functionality which enables searches based on MOD locations, and collects data feeds from some of the major online recruitment organisations as well as directly from businesses. Industry partners within the Defence Career Partnering (DCP) programme can also add vacancies directly on to the site.

Service families in the UK have access to the full range of Jobcentre Plus services. Jobcentre Plus has established a network of Armed Forces Champions in each Jobcentre Plus district. The 'Champions' ensure the concerns and issues affecting Service Personnel and their families are integrated within the wider work of Jobcentres so that the support, advice and guidance offered reflect their needs. The Champions are also working with national and local employers to raise the profile of the Service community in terms of the skills, knowledge and experience they can offer.

The Coalition Government are introducing a new Work Programme, which will supersede much of the confusing and inflexible range of existing employment support by the summer of 2011. It will be delivered by the best of the private, public and voluntary sector, and will support a wide range of people to help them move into sustained employment through an integrated and personalised system of back-to-work support. Partners of current or former Service personnel will, along with ex-Service personnel, have early access to the Work Programme from the 3 month point of their claim for Jobseekers Allowance, with the agreement of their Jobcentre Plus adviser.

Support to Service children and young people is another area where progress is being made. The MOD has appointed a Director of Children and Young People to work closely across Government to provide direction, co-ordination and cohesion to the support provided to Service children and young people both by the MOD and by external organisations. A Service Children and Young People's Trust Board has also been established which includes the Armed Forces Advocate from the Department for Education, as well as Local Authority representatives. Progress to date has included targeting support to parents, children and young people prior to/immediately following a move, and improved liaison with key UK Local Authorities where significant numbers of Service families are resident, to ensure that the particular needs of Service children and young people resident in the UK are taken into account when planning services and targeting resources.

Childcare is often raised by Service families as an issue of concern. Childcare is the responsibility of Local Authorities and they have a remit to ensure that there is sufficient childcare provision to meet the requirements of parents in their area. Although the provision of childcare is not MOD core business, there are childcare settings on some MOD establishments. The MOD and the single Services will continue to work with Local Authorities to ensure they meet their obligations to conduct a full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA). Units and Local Authorities are aware of the CSA procedures and have been working together to identify and promote relevant initiatives. One such initiative is the RAF Benevolent Fund 'Airplay' programme which supports the work of the RAF Community Development staffs by delivering youth work, play work, out of school and holiday activities through a partnership with '4Children'.

3 'Leitch review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills – final report' HMT, Dec 2006

Finally, MOD has extended the Armed Forces' Occupational Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave Schemes to allow fathers and civil partners in the Services to take paid Additional Paternity Leave for children due to be born/adopted on or after 3 April 2011.

The Government remains committed to doing more to ensure family life is as stable as possible and that steps are in place to mitigate the effects of mobility, including to overseas locations. The following measures have been designed to help achieve this.

Future Actions

Some of the measures outlined below fall within Devolved matters therefore may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Balance demands on Service Personnel and their families through a New Employment Model

MOD is working on developing options for a New Employment Model for the future. One of the key drivers for changing the employment model is to provide an overall package (including career structure, pay, allowances and accommodation policies) that better balances the demands placed on Service Personnel and their families. One aim will be to improve domestic stability, which assists spouses' employment and children's education, while continuing to support mobility where it is essential to Defence requirements.

Additional support for Service families within the reformed Work Programme

The reformed Work Programme, which will replace Flexible New Deal by the summer of 2011, will take special account of the partners of current or former Armed Forces personnel. They will have early access to the Work Programme to help them back into employment from the 3 month point of their claim for Jobseekers Allowance, with the agreement of their Jobcentre Plus adviser.

Improving portability of Criminal Records Bureau checks to improve Armed Forces families employability

The Government have adopted an idea in response particularly to views from the public through the Spending Challenge process. The Home Office will make it easier for employers to share CRB checks, reducing the need for multiple checks, and will reduce considerably the numbers of positions requiring such checks. The Government introduced legislation in February 2011 in the Protection of Freedoms Bill to bring about this change, which is expected to become law in early 2012.

Removing residency requirements for disabled service personnel and their families who are posted overseas on UK bases

Amendments to the Blue Badge legislation are being made by the Department for Transport which remove residency requirements for disabled Service personnel and their families who are posted to UK bases overseas. This will enable them to apply for a badge for use in the UK and countries where reciprocal arrangements are in place. Currently Local Authorities are only able to issue badges to applicants living in their area.

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

The MOD and the single Services will reinvigorate their efforts to work with Local Authorities to ensure they meet their obligations to conduct a full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment taking into account the needs of Service children in their local area.

COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES



Covenant Guidance

It is for the commercial sector to determine its approach to members of the Armed Forces Community. The Government should work with the commercial sector towards a situation where they have as good access to commercial products and services, including financial services, as any other citizen. Providers of products and services should be encouraged to understand and mitigate the circumstances faced by this community, such as mobility and deployment, and to welcome and cater for its members as good and valuable customers.

What this means for Service personnel, families and veterans...

Current situation

The Defence Discount Brochure (and online version accessible via www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk) provides access to a wide range of special offers and discounts from commercial organisations. This covers a spectrum of products including holidays, insurance and days out. The discounts can be accessed by all serving members of the Naval Service, Army, Royal Air Force, NATO personnel (serving in the UK), MOD Civil Servants, Reservists, Cadets, Service families, veterans and members of the Royal British Legion.

We recognise the nature of Service life can mean Service personnel and their families can sometimes be disadvantaged in accessing commercial products and services. Although consideration and resolution of such issues will normally be a matter for the commercial sector, the Government remains vigilant in relation to where they are arising, and where it can help improve the position. The measures below reflect this.

Future Actions

Make BFPO a recognised UK postcode

Over the last 12 months, BFPO has investigated and proposed a technical solution which will allow BFPO addresses to be recognised as a UK postcode. This will facilitate financial services and online retail for those with BFPO addresses as well as the completion of Government online forms. Discussions are underway with the credit reference agency Experian to ensure there are no unintended credit rating consequences as a result of larger BFPO geographic regions compared to UK postcodes. The system should be fully functional before the end of the year.

Working with the banks and building societies on lending to Service personnel

The Government is committed to doing more to support lending to Service personnel. The MOD is working with lenders and their professional bodies to develop guidance for their dealings with members of the Armed Forces. In establishing this guidance, lenders would put on record their intention to take account of the special circumstances of Service personnel, veterans and their families. The results of these discussions with lenders will be announced later this year.

TRANSITION



Covenant Guidance

Support should be available for all Service personnel in order to assist their transition from Service to civilian life. Provision should include training, education, appropriate healthcare referral and job-finding preparation and assistance. It should also include information, advice and guidance on such matters as housing and financial management, and the availability of support from Government Departments and the Voluntary and Community sector. The level of support will be dependent upon individual circumstance.

What this means for Service personnel and veterans...

Current situation

MOD offers significant support for those transitioning from Service to civilian life including advice on finding a new job, housing and healthcare. Resettlement support for those that have served more than four years is delivered by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), a partnering arrangement between MOD and Right Management Limited. More is being done to enhance this provision, such as upgrading the CTP website to include self-assessment, a CV builder, and more jobs for Service leavers. The CTP range of training programmes has been reviewed to prepare Service leavers for a wider range of relevant

and sustainable employment opportunities, and the list of commercial organisations working in conjunction with the CTP is continuing to expand. We are also planning to offer an enhanced resettlement programme for the Early Service Leavers, ie personnel who leave the Armed Forces within four years. These measures along with others to improve the resettlement package are captured below. Service personnel with 6 years service, who have been members of the Enhanced Learning Credit scheme, can access free of charge a first, further or higher education qualification at the level for which they are academically qualified on leaving the Service.

For wounded, injured or sick personnel, a new Defence Employment and Opportunities Team has been created to manage and facilitate employment opportunities for all three Services. Tri-Service employment and work placement opportunities will be offered through organisations including the Career Transition Partnership, Regular Forces Employment Association, Remploy, Royal British Legion, Defence Career Partnering and The Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations.

A key issue for Service leavers is finding suitable private accommodation, often for the first time, as their entitlement to Service accommodation comes to an end. Information on the measures in place to support them in doing so can be found in the 'Housing' section of this document.

Future Actions

Some of the measures outlined below fall within Devolved matters therefore may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Improving resettlement support for Early Service Leavers

MOD are developing work to offer an enhanced resettlement programme for Early Service Leavers (ESL), i.e. personnel who leave the Armed Forces after less than four years. This work includes identifying industry best-practice solutions that will help Early Service Leaver employment or other tailored support such as training. Following consultation with the commercial, public and Voluntary and Community Sectors, we plan to run a 12 month trial of enhanced provision for Early Service Leavers from this year.

Launching a Troops to Teachers scheme

The Government will launch a 'Troops to Teachers' scheme to bring more Service leavers into the classroom. The Department for Education (DfE) will fund a new Teach Next programme to attract high quality graduates to train as teachers. The Initial Teacher Training strategy will offer bursaries or scholarships to groups of people who are seen as good candidates for the teaching workforce including Graduate Service leavers. DfE will also work with higher education institutions, to offer shorter, bespoke courses that will enable Service leavers to gain the qualifications they need to become teachers. In addition DfE will work to encourage Service leavers to bring their particular skills, training and life experiences into the classroom, working as pupil mentors and champions where they do not wish to train as teachers. The scheme will be introduced, in phases, during 2011 and 2012.

Attracting Service Leavers into the Volunteer Reserves

The Future Reserves 2020 Study was launched last year to look at the future role and structures of the Reserve Forces and is due to report to the Prime Minister by July 2011. Among the broad range of issues under consideration, the Study will consider innovative terms and conditions of service to attract all forms of service to man a balanced force structure comprising Regulars, Reserves, Contractors and Civilians optimised to meet Defence's requirements. A key element will be to ensure Defence continues to offer the challenge, reward, training and support which attract people, including ex-Regulars, to volunteer for reserve service and the scope for involving ex-Regulars will be examined. This could be a positive factor in the transition of some Service leavers to civilian life.

Work with the Forces in Mind Trust to support veterans and their families

Last year, a partnership of Service charities and mental health organisations, led by the Confederation of Service Charities (COBSEO), was announced as the preferred bidder to form the Forces in Mind Trust. This independent Trust will be responsible for a £35 million lottery-funded grant supporting current and former UK Service personnel and their families over the next 20 years. The Government welcomes the selection of COBSEO as the preferred bidder and we look forward to supporting them in taking this work forward.

Opt-out rather than opt-in for contact with Service charities

The Government welcomes the work of the Service charities which seek to identify Service personnel who may require support when they leave the Armed Forces. The MOD is happy to share data to assist in that aim, where appropriate, but it must be in a way that complies with legislative obligations on data protection, and in a manner that protects those Service leavers who would not wish us to share their details. The MOD is currently working with COBSEO, as the representative of Service charities, to identify the best way to develop this idea.

SUPPORT AFTER SERVICE



Covenant Guidance

The Covenant involves an obligation for life, and the commitment and sacrifices made by veterans in the past, as well as their continuing value to society, should be properly recognised in the support they receive. In accessing services, former members of the Armed Forces should expect the same level of support as any other citizen in society. Pension schemes should be fair and appropriate to the particular circumstances of Service personnel. All veterans will be able to access advice and in some cases, additional support, from the MOD (Service Personnel and Veterans Agency), elsewhere in government, and the charitable sector, although their access may be affected if they do not live in the UK.

Those who have been injured in Service, or have a health condition relating to Service, should receive additional support which may include a financial element depending on their circumstances (e.g. through the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme or War Pension Scheme). Bereaved families should receive assistance commensurate with the loss that they have suffered, including help during the vital but difficult inquest process.

What this means for Service personnel and veterans...

Current situation

The Service Personnel & Veterans Agency (SPVA) provides pay, pension and support services to both Service personnel and the Veterans Community, directly serving around 900,000 personnel. In addition to SPVA there are many other organisations that provide help and support to UK veterans, from Government, Local Authorities, independent bodies and the charity sector. Whilst it is commendable that so many organisations offer help to ex-Service personnel and their families, the number of organisations can mean it is sometimes difficult to know who to contact for advice on a particular topic. Veterans-UK is, therefore, now designed to be the first stop for veterans. The website www.veterans-uk.info, e-mail advice point veterans.help@spva.gsi.gov.uk and helpline provide information on services from a variety of different organisations in one place.

In November 2009, Kent County Council became the first Local Authority to sign up to the Armed Forces Community Welfare Pathway. Since then, Hampshire County Council, Wigan Council, Fife Council and North Yorkshire County Council have established pilot schemes and Vale of Glamorgan Council is currently establishing a Welfare Pathway initiative. The scheme is designed to improve access to support from statutory providers and the voluntary and charitable sector for the Armed Forces Community; that is Service personnel and their families, Service veterans and their families and widows/ers of those who died whilst serving. It is designed to improve co-ordination between Local Authorities, other Government services such as those provided by the National Health Service and JobCentre Plus, and the voluntary and charitable sector. The aim is to improve awareness of the issues of concern to the Service and veterans communities among the various providers of support and help them co-ordinate their activities to ensure that the Armed Forces community are able to access the support to which they are entitled, and enable co-operation between statutory providers and charities.

Advice on support for veterans is already available through a wide range of telephone lines and online sources, from Councils, the NHS, various charities and the Veterans UK Helpline mentioned above. However, for those who are unsure which number to call, the Welfare Pathway offers a National Point of Contact telephone number. This is not a help line, but a signposting service, which can direct callers to the most appropriate Service/Veterans' helpline. The pilot scheme is scheduled to run until October 2011.

The Armed Forces Pension Schemes (AFPS) currently provide generous financial packages to members of the Armed Forces and their dependants and are key retention factors for the Armed Forces. The schemes pay defined benefits based on the individual's salary and length of service. Members receive full career pensions at age 55 and tax-free lump sums of 3 times the annual pension. Provided they have completed enough reckonable service AFPS members who leave before 55 receive an Immediate Pension or Early Departure Payment (depending on which scheme they belong to) at around age 40.

The Government also recognises the additional support required for those that have been injured and manages two compensation schemes, the War Pensions Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. In December 2008, the MOD doubled the lump sum awarded for the most serious injuries, raising the maximum lump sum payment to £570,000. For less serious injuries, increases followed a graduating scale from 10% up to 85%. The AFCS was further reviewed by the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral the

Lord Boyce in 2010. The Review found that whilst the scheme is fundamentally sound, there were several areas where recommendations were made for improvement. The headline changes which have all now been implemented are:

An increase to the Guaranteed Income Payment (GIP) and Survivors' Guaranteed Income Payment (SGIP) to reflect loss of promotion opportunity; increased age of average death; any salary forgone from second or third careers; and the change in discount rate from 3% to 2.5%

- An increase of up to 25% on all lump sum awards other than the highest (tariff levels 2-15);
- The maximum award for mental illness to be increased;
- The creation of a new independent expert medical body to advise on compensation for specific, relevant illnesses and injuries such as hearing loss and mental health;
- An increase to the time limits in which claims can be made;
- A new, fast payment to provide interim compensation for claims at tariff levels 1-8 of up to £60,000 in advance of submitting a full claim.

In addition many of those who receive payments under AFCS are also entitled to other state benefits and support. These were discussed earlier in the section on 'Benefits and Tax'. There are however areas where the Government feels it can go further. These are outlined below. Information on more specific support for injured veterans e.g. health and housing can be found in the relevant sections of this document.

We recognise the need to support former Service personnel immediately after they have left the Armed Forces and for the longer term. This is particularly true for those who need the most help, such as those who may be suffering with the mental health impacts of their Service career. We are committed to taking forward the following measures:

Future Actions

Some of the measures below fall within Devolved matters (such as Transport) therefore may differ from the specific actions being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Changes to Service pensions

Following Lord Hutton's interim report, the Government announced in the Spending Review, that Service personnel would be exempt from an increase in employee contributions, although this is likely to be reviewed with the introduction of future pension schemes. In his final report Lord Hutton recommended a number of significant changes to public service pension provision in order to make it possible for public service employees to have continued access to good quality, sustainable and fairer defined benefit pension schemes. These recommendations include (but are not limited to); the future model for pension provision should be a Career Average Revalued Earning (CARE) pension scheme, which provides a defined benefit pension based on a percentage of the salary earned in each year of a working life; the Armed Forces Normal Pension Age should move from 55 to 60; and pension scheme members should have greater choice over when to start drawing their pension benefits, so they can choose to retire earlier or later than their Normal Pension Age, with their pension adjusted accordingly on an actuarially fair basis. He also recommended that accrued rights should be protected. The Government has accepted Lord Hutton's recommendations as a basis for consultation with public sector workers, trades unions and others, recognising that the position of the uniformed services will require particularly careful consideration. We will work to ensure that the Armed Forces Pension Schemes continue to reflect the unique role that Service personnel fulfil and that any new pension scheme remains a valuable component of the total remuneration package.

An improved veterans' charity online portal

The MOD will strengthen the www.veterans-uk.info portal to provide more detail on the services provided by Service and ex-Service charities and will make the StartHere (www.starthere.org) service, which is an independent charity, more prominent within the site.

Continuous automatic entitlement to Blue Badges for seriously injured Service personnel and veterans

Access to the Blue Badge scheme will be eased for seriously injured Service personnel and veterans in England. This will ensure automatic entitlement to a Blue Badge for those with a permanent mobility-related condition.

Easing access to concessionary travel for seriously injured Service personnel and veterans

The Department for Transport will introduce new guidance in England so that seriously injured Service personnel and veterans who fall within the categories of disability set out in the Transport Act 2000 will automatically be eligible, without further assessment, to concessionary bus travel.

AFCS Compensation payments and link to other benefits

An independent Commission on the Funding of Care and Support is currently considering how to achieve an affordable and sustainable funding system for care and support for all adults in England and both in the home, and other settings. The Commission is due to report in July this year. A White Paper on the future of social care will be published by the end of the year. Government will need to consider the relative roles of different public funding streams in this review. We will look again at AFCS payments within this context to consider how to ensure that Guaranteed Income Payments made under this scheme are not required to be used to pay for social care provided by the public sector, as recommended by Lord Boyce in his review of the AFCS.

What this means for bereaved families....

Current situation

We are aware of the need to ensure that families receive adequate support, especially during the most difficult times. Each of the Services offers ongoing practical support for the Next of Kin and Emergency Contacts (if different) of deceased, missing or injured Service casualties. The initial point of contact for the bereaved with the Services is the Visiting Officer (VO). The VO's role is often long term and is to support the bereaved and help them cope with the many and various tasks which need to be addressed to adjust to life after a death in Service and to prepare for the future. Each Service provides a similar level of support to the bereaved however each has unique traditions and support networks, and is responsible for the ongoing contact with, and support to, the bereaved. Each Service does its utmost through the selection, training, briefing and support of VOs to provide the best service possible for the bereaved family.

The Defence Inquests Unit (DIU) was established in 2008 to coordinate and manage all Defence related inquests into the deaths of Service and MOD personnel, who die on, or as a result of injuries sustained while on operations; and those who die as a result of training activity. The Unit's key role is to assist Coroners so that they complete relevant inquests fully, thoroughly and as quickly as possible. They work with Coroners helping their understanding of military related complex issues which generally are outside their experience. For example an MOD familiarisation event was held last year to provide Coroners with awareness of equipment and procedures used in theatre. This was attended by approximately 30 Coroners and the MOD plans to repeat the event annually. A one-

day training event on handling Service personnel deaths, which included military themed presentations, was also held in 2010 and attended by approximately 60 Coroners. Induction and continuation training for coroners, their deputies and assistant deputies will continue with the MoJ Coroners Training Group planning for the future.

The DIU also provides detailed briefs and guidance to Coroners when requested to aid their understanding of an incident so that they have all the relevant facts to conduct an open, fair and timely inquest. This enables families to be provided with an accurate account of how their loved one died. Whilst the timing of an inquest is a matter for the Coroner we aim to complete inquests for deaths where there is no Service Inquiry within nine months and for cases where there is a Service Inquiry within eighteen months.

Support is available to bereaved families before, during and after an inquest. Families are kept fully informed of preparations through dedicated single Service teams. MOD provides funding for attendance by three family members at inquests into deaths deemed attributable to service, and consideration of additional family members on application. Where possible, inquests are transferred to the coroner nearest to the Next-of-Kin, which is less stressful for families and helps prevent backlogs. The MOD has produced a DVD for the family of the bereaved to try to improve understanding of what to expect from and at an inquest and to make the whole process less daunting and stressful.

To provide further support, the Independent Inquest Advice Service, a service run by the Royal British Legion and jointly funded by the MOD, is offered to the families of those who have died in service who are faced with the prospect of an inquest. It provides free legal advice and assistance but does not represent bereaved families.

In addition to the support services outlined above, MOD has taken a positive and practical step in enabling bereaved families to remain in Service accommodation for up to two years following a bereavement, which also supports families at this most difficult of times. Furthermore, resettlement entitlement, including associated funding, which the Serving person would have been entitled to, is transferred to the bereaved spouse or civil partner.

RECOGNITION



Covenant Guidance

The Armed Forces Community is entitled to appropriate recognition for the unique service which it has given to the nation, and the unlimited liability which the Service person assumes. This recognition will include national commemorations and celebrations such as Remembrance Sunday and Armed Forces Day. The award of campaign medals and individual gallantry awards will continue to be used in recognition of individual sacrifice and meritorious service. The HM Armed Force Veterans Badge is available to all veterans in recognition of their service.

What this means for Service personnel, families and veterans...

Current situation

The Government understands how important recognition can be for the Armed Forces, veterans and their families. The 2008 National Recognition Study sought to open up the issue of recognition for wider debate. The report concluded that the Armed Forces enjoy 'immense respect and gratitude on the part of the nation' and made a number of positive recommendations including the institution of Armed Forces Day and greater support for homecoming parades.

Armed Forces Day takes place on the last Saturday in June. The day is an annual opportunity for the nation to show their support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces: from currently serving troops to Service families and from veterans to cadets. There are hundreds of local events which take place in towns and cities across the UK with a national event hosted by a major city. Cardiff was nominated to host the national event in 2010. The next national event will take place in Edinburgh in June 2011 and many other events are again taking place across the country. The HM Armed Forces Veterans' Lapel Badge was launched in May 2004 to raise the profile of veterans by assisting the public to recognise them. All veterans are eligible to apply and over 800,000 badges have been issued since the scheme was launched.

UK operational medals are an important element of the moral component of fighting power. For the vast majority of Service personnel, who do not earn individual recognition for gallantry or meritorious service, campaign medals are the means by which dangerous and demanding operational service is recognised by the nation. The system of medallic recognition for operational service has been in use since the early nineteenth century to provide the forces involved with visible recognition of their having faced the risks and rigours of a particular campaign – which might be anywhere on a scale ranging from global conflict, through large scale military engagement to the deployment of relatively minor expeditionary forces.

The procedures for considering the institution of a British award for the Armed Forces have been followed for many years, with only minor changes. In the case of campaign service or an emergency situation, the process starts if the Commander-in-Chief at the time considers that a medal for service in the particular theatre is justified. Timeliness is of great importance in order for the passage of time not to influence the relative merit, or otherwise, of the operation and to ensure the decisions are taken by those that best understand the situation as it occurs.

Individual conduct is recognised by means of State honours, national gallantry awards and Long Service and Good Conduct medals. Rigorous processes are in place to ensure that nominations for all such awards are given proper consideration.

The Coalition stated its intention in the Programme for Government, published in May 2010, to review the rules governing the award of medals as a part of its commitment to rebuilding the Military Covenant. This commitment was driven by a desire to ensure that personnel serving in today's Armed Forces are receiving proper medallic recognition by the nation for the service that they give. The outcome of the review will be announced later this year.

In addition to medals awarded to those who have served, the Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll are granted to the Next of Kin of UK Armed Forces personnel who have died on operations or as a result of an act of terrorism in national recognition of their loss and sacrifice. The Elizabeth Cross is not a posthumous medal for the fallen but an emblem demonstrating tangible national recognition for Service families in respect of their loss.

The British public regularly demonstrate and voice their strong support for the men and women of the Armed Forces and their families. There has been no clearer demonstration of this than the regular efforts shown by the people of Royal Wootton Bassett to pay their respects to Armed Forces personnel killed in Service; the admiration and gratitude of the nation for the selfless actions of the people of Wootton Bassett was recently recognised by the agreement of Her Majesty The Queen to add the title 'Royal' to the town's name.

Future Actions

Rules governing the award of medals

The Government will announce later this year the result of its review of the rules governing the award of medals. The review is considering the long-standing rules and principles which guide decisions on when medals are awarded. It also considers how these rules apply to medals awarded to current Armed Forces Personnel and cases where some veterans believe their calls for medals for past service, as far back as World War Two, have been overlooked.

PARTICIPATION AS CITIZENS



Covenant Guidance

The Armed Forces Community should be able to participate as citizens to the same extent as any UK citizen, subject to the necessary constraints on the activities of public servants. This includes taking a full part in the electoral process. Members of the Armed Forces Community who are not UK citizens should be able to access routes to citizenship as easily as others seeking citizenship, unaffected by any Service overseas.

What this means for Service personnel...

Current situation

The government are committed to ensuring that Service personnel can participate fully in elections. To vote in UK and European Elections, Service personnel must first be registered. The MOD and the Electoral Commission, the independent elections watchdog, encourage all Service personnel to register to vote. Overseas posting and operational demands can affect the ability of Service personnel to register and to vote easily, therefore steps have been taken to ensure Service personnel are able to participate in the voting process:

- As a **Service Voter**: open to all personnel (including spouses or civil partners) and particularly suitable for personnel posted overseas or likely to be posted abroad. Following the introduction of The Service Voters' Registration Period Order 2010, Service Registration now lasts for five years.
- As an **Ordinary Voter**: Personnel based in the UK can register in the same way as ordinary electors by filling in and returning the annual canvass registration form. Re-registration is required annually.
- As an **Overseas Voter**: for those posted abroad who do not wish to register as Service Voters. This option is open to all British Citizens who currently live abroad, and have been registered as electors in Britain within the last 15 years. However Overseas Voters can only vote in UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections, not local elections in the UK, and the facility is time limited (it expires after a period of 15 years from the time the person was last registered in the UK).

Service personnel and their spouses/civil partners who are overseas or away from their UK residence during an election may elect to vote either by post or proxy, whether they have chosen to register as Ordinary, Service or Overseas Voters.

Another aspect of this topic is the ability of Foreign and Commonwealth (F&C) personnel and their ability to participate as UK citizens. Nearly 12,000 of today's Service personnel, including Gurkhas, are from Foreign and Commonwealth countries. We recognise their unique circumstances. The UK Border Agency (UKBA), an agency of the Home Office, has agreed to a general principle that F&C Service personnel should not be disadvantaged in comparison with non-military individuals permitted to enter or remain in the UK and gain employment through the Points Based System. They will continue to work closely with MOD to resolve immigration and nationality issues affecting F&C Service personnel and their families so that they suffer no disadvantage in comparison to their civilian counterparts, even when serving overseas.

We recognise that there are areas where we can do more and the following are steps that will be taken forward.

Future Actions

Improving the ability of Service Personnel to vote

The Government is committed to ensuring that Service personnel can take part in elections. In the short term, MOD and the Cabinet Office have worked with the Electoral Commission, BFPO and Royal Mail to fast track registration forms and ballot papers to and from Service personnel serving in Afghanistan wanting to vote by post in the 2010 general election and in the May 2011 referendum and elections. For other overseas locations BFPO also aimed to identify and fast track ballot papers when under their control. For the longer term, the Cabinet Office is looking at how changes to the timetable for elections would better support voters based overseas, including Service personnel and their families. As part of the Government's Electoral Registration Transformation Programme, MOD is participating in a data-matching pilot during 2011 to help identify whether the required levels of accuracy and completeness can be achieved on the Electoral Register. This work will help identify how we take forward the Government's commitment to ensure that Service personnel only have to register once on the Service register.

Life in the UK Test will be made available overseas

UKBA will make the paper based 'Life in the UK' test available for delivery via MOD education centres overseas for those seeking naturalisation as a British citizen whilst in service (or their spouses/civil partners). Locations and start dates have yet to be confirmed.

Foreign and Commonwealth Citizens – Time spent in service outside the UK

New legislation will be brought forward to enable Foreign and Commonwealth Service personnel to be exempted from the requirement to be in the UK at the start of the residential period for naturalisation as a British citizen, if in service on that date.

UK Border Agency Review of fees for Armed Forces Dependents

The UK Border Agency has recognised that there is a case for a review of the fees for Armed Forces dependants that would seek to address a number of anomalies and inconsistencies. This will form part of the annual fee review due to take place in late 2011.

What this means for families....

Current situation

A number of steps have been taken to support the families of Foreign and Commonwealth Service personnel. Spouses, civil partners, and children under the age of 18 of Foreign and Commonwealth personnel, including Gurkhas, are able to apply for settlement providing their serving spouse, civil partner, or parent has completed at least five years continuous service and the relationship akin to marriage is of at least two years duration. Unmarried and same-sex partners may also be granted limited leave to enter or remain, in common with provisions for unmarried and same-sex partners elsewhere in the Immigration Rules. The provision to enable children of Foreign and Commonwealth personnel under the age of 18 who are born overseas when a parent is serving outside the UK to register as a British citizen came into force in 2010. The changes outlined above have also resulted in family members being eligible for 'Home Fee Status', and financial student support. This means that they are not required to pay overseas fees to study in the UK. No further measures are currently planned under this heading we will keep the matter under review and take action where necessary.

What this means for veterans...

Current situation

Gurkhas who served after July 1997 and who were discharged with more than four years service have had the ability to settle in the UK since 2004. This brought them in line with all other discharged Foreign and Commonwealth Service personnel

Since May 2009, Gurkhas who retired before 1 Jul 1997 with more than four years service have also been eligible to apply for settlement in the UK. MOD set up a Gurkha Settlement Office in Kathmandu to advise ex-Gurkhas on the practical issues concerning settlement in the UK and to assist them with applications for visas. Gurkhas who served after July 1997 and who retire with more than four years service have had the ability to settle in the UK since 2004.

CHANGES IN DEFENCE



Covenant Guidance

The Armed Forces will always need to evolve to meet the challenges they face. That will inevitably lead, from time to time, to turbulence and uncertainty in the lives of Serving personnel and their families. Such changes should be managed in a way which treats individuals fairly and minimises uncertainty wherever possible.

What this means for Service personnel, families and veterans...

Current situation

The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and the National Security Strategy (NSS) published in October 2010 set the overall policy objectives and future force structures and capabilities (up to 2020). The National Security Strategy defined Britain's place in the world and identified our two core objectives as ensuring a secure and resilient United Kingdom; and shaping a stable world. For the first time it prioritised the risks we face and the tasks we must undertake to tackle them.

The NSS and SDSR together presented, for the first time, a whole of Government approach to the full range of our security challenges we face. They will ensure we maintain the

capability to act well beyond our shores and work with our allies to have a strategic presence wherever we need it. Changes to force structures and reforming the way we do business have however led to reductions in manpower requirements.

It is the Government's firm intention to ensure that all those leaving the Armed Forces are recognised and receive appropriate support as part of their transition. All three Services will handle the significant reductions which lie ahead with sensitivity and care. They are committed to ensuring that those affected by current and future changes in Defence are provided with as much information and support as they might need and regular communication will be key. We will continue to engage with other stakeholders who play an important part in supporting the Armed Forces and their families through periods of change, including the three Families Federations.

The shape of Defence will be subject to change over the coming years. The Government recognises that this will have an impact on Service personnel and their families and in some cases our veterans. The impact on our people will remain at the forefront of our thinking although it is important that we balance aspirations with the realities of the economic situation we face. Whilst there are still many decisions to be made, the following measure will be taken forward.

Future actions

Managing the return from Germany to the United Kingdom

While early planning for the withdrawal from Germany is underway it is appreciated that the prospect of change for those affected is particularly unsettling. It is expected that confirmation of major unit moves back to UK will be announced later in 2011. Lessons from returning the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps highlight the need to engage early with Local Authorities to ensure the inflow of Service personnel and families to UK is matched by an appropriate uplift in the delivery of public services (such as education, welfare, medical and dental facilities) to accommodate their needs. The support of Service personnel and families during the return will be a key consideration.

RECOURSE



Covenant Guidance

Members of the Armed Forces community should have means of recourse open to them, if they believe that they are not being treated in a fair and appropriate way. Established routes of recourse such as complaints processes or Ombudsmen should be sensitive to the particular circumstances of the Armed Forces community. In addition, for Serving personnel and those that have recently left service, there should be a responsive system for handling complaints relating to their service in the Armed Forces, overseen by the Service Complaints Commissioner.

What this means for Service personnel, families and veterans...

Current situation

The post of Service Complaints Commissioner was created by the Armed Forces Act 2006 with a remit which covers any complaint made after 1 January 2008. It follows recommendations made by Nicholas Blake QC in his Review into the deaths of four soldiers at Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut. The Act introduced a number of significant changes to the Service complaints system to make it fairer, more independent and more transparent. As well as the Service Complaints Commissioner, these included new joint standards for

the three Services and a new Service Complaints Panel, with an independent member to consider some complaints on behalf of the Defence Council.

The Commissioner's role is to provide a rigorous and independent oversight of how the complaints system is working and to report back to Ministers and to Parliament. The Commissioner also provides an alternative point of contact for Service personnel, or someone acting on their behalf, such as a member of their family, a friend or MP to raise concerns. She has recently published her third Annual Report and the Government is carefully considering its response to the proposals she has made for further change.

Outside MOD, Armed Forces Advocates have been established at a senior level in major Whitehall departments and they serve a vital function in being able to influence policy decisions within their departments which may otherwise adversely affect the Armed Forces community. In addition a number of Local Authorities have established Armed Forces Champions to perform a similar function at a local level.

However for most complaints, the first action for most Service personnel is likely to be through their Chain of Command. Family members also have this option, including the use of Welfare Officers. Other avenues such as HIVES or the Families Federations provide advice and support on how to resolve issues, including using more formal complaints mechanisms. The Service Personnel and Veterans Agency and Service charities such as the Royal British Legion can provide similar advice for veterans.

Should they need to elevate complaints further, members of the Armed Forces community can make use of established public service complaints processes if they feel that they have received poor treatment. Usually the first step would be to complain to the local service provider (using the Local Authority or local hospital's complaints procedure). If this still does not resolve the complaint they can access the support services offered by the various Ombudsman services in the UK, including:

The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints about local councils in England, and some other authorities, including education admissions appeal panels. Council services which can be investigated include housing, planning, education, social services, council tax, housing benefit and highways.

The Office of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman carries out independent investigations into complaints about UK Government departments and their agencies, and the NHS in England.

The Housing Ombudsman Service deals with complaints against landlords and agents in England, and other housing disputes. All residents in homes managed by a landlord or agent who belongs to the service can make a complaint. All registered social landlords (Housing Associations) in England are included, as are some private landlords and management agents. Complaints about public housing have to be made to the Local Government Ombudsman.

In addition to the public sector Ombudsmen mentioned above, there are Ombudsmen services within the Devolved Administrations, a Financial Ombudsman and a Legal Ombudsman.

We recognise the need to ensure members of the Armed Forces community are able to access the services that the civilian population does without disadvantage and to the same

standard and that where this does not happen the routes to address this should cater for the Service community appropriately. To this end we are committed to the measure set out below.

Future Actions

Programme of Ombudsmen Familiarisation

We will continue with our programme of familiarisation relating to the Ombudsmen. This seeks to help the Ombudsmen to become aware of the issues affecting members of the Armed Forces community and build a greater understanding of Service life in order to be better equipped to deal with problems brought to their attention by members of the Armed Forces community. It also aims to raise awareness of the Ombudsmen services amongst those members of the Armed Forces community who may have a need to seek recourse and ensure that they are aware of how to access these services.

THE COVENANT AND WIDER SOCIETY



The Covenant recognises the important role not only of Government, but also the Nation in supporting the Armed Forces community. The measures described in this section are those which have underpinned work to date, and it describes future actions where this Government judges more must be done to strengthen the mechanisms to ensure such support is delivered. The measures in this section also recognise the important role of the Nation and set out how Government plans to encourage and support future work by civil society.

Current situation

In 2008 Armed Forces Advocates were appointed in the major UK Government departments and within the devolved administrations of Wales and Scotland, with a remit to support the interests of this community in their areas of responsibility. This network has grown since then, with some departments choosing to roll this model out to lower levels, for example within the NHS. These department level advocates have been brought together with stakeholders outside Government to form an External Reference Group. This body has produced two annual reports on progress, and will continue to support the future work on the Covenant.

These two mechanisms were set up as a result of the Service Personnel Command Paper⁴, and this Government is committed to taking forward the specific commitments that were made in that Paper and those made in the report of the Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce⁵ which followed in 2010. Another important aspect of carrying forward this work, is in continuing to monitor how Service personnel and their families are faring in some of the areas which have been discussed in previous sections, such as access to healthcare, dentistry provision, educational attainment of Service children and their access to school places, childcare provision, and supporting spouses into employment. This underlines the value of having high quality data on the different areas of Service life. Surveys of family members will continue to contribute to our knowledge of these issues, which remain key areas of concern to the Armed Forces, and further measures will be considered as necessary.

As highlighted in the introduction, there has been an increasing number of public displays of support for the Armed Forces in recent years. Whether it be generous donations to charities such as Help for Heroes or the Royal British Legion, or active participation in homecoming parades or Armed Forces Day, this Government recognises the importance of what wider society can bring to our work to rebuild the Covenant. We need to sustain this support into the future, long after Service personnel have returned from operational deployments when the media interest may diminish. We will continue to work with wider society and in particular, the charitable sector, to improve the support available to the Armed Forces community. A number of successful projects have been taken forward in partnership with key Service charities such as the improvements at Headley Court, the Army Recovery Capability, which has significantly enhanced the command and care afforded to our wounded, injured and sick personnel, the new rehabilitation centre which opened at HMNB Devonport, and the launch of the 24 hour helpline for veterans with mental health problems. We want to build on this work, and also recognise those who provide this invaluable support. This Government has identified a number of further measures to support this aim.

Another important aspect of the Armed Forces in the community is the role that the Reserves and Cadet Forces play. Quite apart from their vital contribution to our operational capability, Reservists fill a unique position in society, being a member of both the Armed Forces and civilian community. Much work has already been done on the 'Reservist Proposition' whereby the Volunteer Reservist is appropriately challenged, rewarded, trained and supported. Significant support has also been achieved with Reservist employers through the Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers (SaBRE) campaign that delivers effective employer support on behalf of Defence to employers and reservists of all three Services. This work seeks to engage with employers in order to develop the Employer/Reservists relationship. The SaBRE vision is that UK employers have a positive predisposition to Reservists employment. The Strategic Review of Reserves and Future Reserves 2020 are examples of the Government's commitment to this particular community.

4 Published as Cm 7424 in July 2008

5 Published by Government Equalities Office, March 2010

Future Actions

Legislate for the production of an annual Armed Forces Covenant report

Legislation has been brought forward within the Armed Forces Bill that was introduced to Parliament in December 2010, requiring the Defence Secretary to present an Armed Forces Covenant report to Parliament every year. The report will describe how we are supporting our Armed Forces, their families and veterans in key areas such as healthcare, housing and education. This will ensure progress is made and reported on, year on year.

Develop and support a new Community Covenant Scheme

Government is launching an Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme which will encourage public service providers at Local and Unitary Authority level, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors to volunteer targeted support for their local Armed Forces community. This could take the form of, for example, additional support in accessing local service delivery such as social housing or free access to leisure facilities, discounts in shops and restaurants. The Community Covenant is intended to be a two way arrangement so we will actively encourage the local Service population to provide support to their local community. We believe that the scheme will be relevant to all parts of the UK, as areas which do not have a large operating Service presence will still have a significant number of veterans within the community.

Community Covenant Grant

MOD will introduce, later this year, a Community Covenant Grant scheme allocating up to £30m over four years. The aim of the Grant will be to support projects, at the local level, which strengthen the ties or the mutual understanding between members of the Armed Forces Community and the wider community in which they live. The Scheme will consider applications from local groups for practical projects which delivered rapid results in support of the Armed Forces Community.

Easing access to concessionary travel for seriously injured service personnel and veterans

We will introduce new guidance in England so that seriously injured veterans and service personnel who fall within the categories of disability set out in the Transport Act 2000 will automatically be eligible, without further assessment, to concessionary bus travel. This is due to be implemented in Spring 2011..

A Veterans' card

The MOD will launch a Veterans' card which can be used to access commercial discounts or privileges both locally and nationally, including through the Armed Forces Community Covenant scheme. We will also consider how this could be expanded to include Service families.

Launch a CDS Commendation Scheme

The Government will launch a CDS Commendation Scheme later this year to allow the head of the UK's Armed Forces to publicly thank and applaud individuals or bodies who give exceptional support to the Service community.

Working with Service Charities to identify how they can best use their resources

Most Service charities have a clear view of how and where they wish to spend their funds. However the MOD along with other central Government Departments is ready to work with charities who would like us to prioritise key projects, with which charitable help could then be matched. As independent charities, they are free to work to their own agenda. The Government recognises and respects the independence of these organisations, but we will help if asked.

Sharing Service facilities with civilians

Government is supportive of sharing Service facilities with the civilian community although it is clear that the primary purpose of these facilities is to support Defence needs. Community Covenants may well consider mechanisms by which such facilities can be shared. This issue has been highlighted in the revised Compact with civil society organisations which commits the Government to "consider a range of ways to support civil society organisations, such as enabling greater access to state owned premises and resources". The MOD will address this issue with the Treasury as work on the Compact is taken forward.

Encourage Olympic involvement

The MOD will support Armed Forces personnel seeking to represent their countries at the Games as competitors, coaches or officials. Through the Defence Career Partnering Return to Work initiative, the MOD is exploring opportunities for seconding injured Service personnel to the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), should posts be available that would help with their rehabilitation programmes. As the Games get closer, we expect there to be opportunities for local units to become involved in regional activities and events in support of the Olympics and we will strongly encourage them to do so.

Build on links between Reserve Forces and Cadet Associations and youth groups

The MOD is currently conducting a comprehensive Review of Youth Engagement which is due to report in late 2011. It will seek to determine its youth engagement requirement and methods to deliver it. As part of its current engagement policy, MOD has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Prince's Trust and around 120 Service Personnel and Civil Servants are taking part in Prince's Trust schemes at various levels.

Conduct a Future Reserves 2020 Study

The Future Reserves 2020 Study was launched last year to look at the future role and structures of the Reserve Forces and is due to report to the Prime Minister by July 2011.

The Study is taking place in three phases and will ensure that we make the most efficient use of Reservists' skills, experiences and capabilities to meet the UK's operational requirements for future conflict.

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