

Defence Instructions and Notices (Not to be communicated to anyone outside HM Service without authority)	
Title:	Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public
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Content:	The authorisation procedures that all members of the Armed Forces and MOD civilians must follow before making or responding to contact with the media or communicating in public.
Sponsor:	Directorate of Defence Communications
Contact:	DDC-SecretariatClearances@mod.uk Tel: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]
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Purpose

1. This instruction sets out the arrangements that all MOD personnel – military and civilian – must follow if they wish to have contact with the media, or write or speak publicly on Defence or Government matters. These procedures have been put in place to ensure that national operational and personal security is upheld, and that standards of political impartiality and public accountability are met at all times. They are consistent with the Civil Service Code and Civil Service Management Code, and the relevant Queen’s Regulations for the Armed Forces.

Applicability

2. This Instruction applies to the following:

- All members of the regular Armed Forces;
- All members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces;
- Members of the Regular Reserves undertaking Service duties;
- Cadets and civilian volunteers when on duty;
- Crown servants within the Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations and their council;
- MOD civil servants and other civilian employees;
- Contractor personnel working in MOD or Armed Forces posts.

Introduction

3. Within the obvious security constraints, the MOD and the Armed Forces operate a policy of openness about their activities. It is important that the Armed Forces and MOD are able to explain their roles and Government policies and decisions relating to Defence and personnel are encouraged to engage with the public about what they do. However, such contact must be properly authorised to ensure that it is appropriate and worthwhile, as well as to protect individuals against possible misreporting. Personnel must exercise honesty and not undertake any activity which might call into question their political impartiality or Service or Departmental reputation.

4. All contact with the media or communication in public by members of the Armed Forces and MOD civilians where this relates to Defence or Government business must be authorised in advance. Unauthorised disclosure or leaking of information may cause damage to the Department and the single Services and corrodes the trust between Ministers, the Armed Forces and the Civil Service. It may lead to disciplinary or administrative action being taken in accordance with JSP 440. Security breaches have the potential to cost lives and seriously undermine our operational military capability.

5. Directorate of Defence Communications (DDC) staff are the Department's professional advisers on communicating with news and non-news media representatives and organisations and are the officially sanctioned channel for dealing with them. DDC Director has ultimate official authority for internal and external communication including all matters related to contact with the news media and communicating in public.

6. This DIN covers:

- engagement with the media;
- the publication of material either print or online (for example books, articles, academic papers, or any other text, audio, still images, video or other content), in any medium available outside Government;
- speeches and presentations at conferences or other events where the public or media may be present;
- communicating online and social media;
- all other forms of public engagement.

7. Before considering contact with the news media or communicating in public the following factors should be taken into consideration:

- Is there a risk to operational security or of disclosure of sensitive or protectively marked Crown capabilities or information or personal details?
- Would the Service or Departmental reputation be compromised?
- Are there any national security (of the UK or allies) or international relations implications?
- Would this call into question political impartiality?
- Are there any commercial implications, including ensuring that neither MOD nor its staff endorse or appear to endorse any particular company, product of service?
- Are there any patent or copyright implications, for example has Defence Intellectual Property Rights (DIPR) been consulted before research work is made public, or is MOD originated Crown copyright work intended to be used or distributed?

8. All personnel are reminded of the paramount requirement to protect operational security. Members of the Armed Forces or MOD civilians wishing to speak or write about their experience in an operational theatre must consult PJHQ Media Operations staff. There are inherent personal security risks to communicating in public. Personnel should follow security guidance. It is an individual's responsibility to comply with the Department's policy on unauthorised disclosures, the Official Secrets Act, to protect intellectual property rights (IPR) and to comply with any other applicable laws.

Authorisation procedures

Senior Personnel (1* and above and civilian equivalents)

9. All personnel of 1* rank and above and civilian equivalents must seek approval via DDC Secretariat before accepting any invitation to speak or write publicly on Defence or wider Government matters – whether through the media or another channel, including social media. Requests must be submitted no later than Thursday 12pm in the week before the intended communications activity via the online form. If you do not have access to DII, please contact DDC-SecretariatClearances. It is advisable to give more notice where the request relates to high profile or potentially contentious issues as these may take longer to consider. DDC may request advance sight of the proposed text or speaking notes. Where there is proposed contact with the national news media DDC-PR-News must be notified.

10. Requests are considered at a weekly Friday planning meeting, chaired by DDC Head of Public Relations. 4* requests may also require approval from SofS, which will be arranged by DDC as part of this process.

11. Personnel should ensure that any hospitality received is recorded and reported in accordance with Departmental or Service arrangements. Personnel of 3* rank and above and civilian equivalents are reminded that records of their contact with the media including any hospitality accepted will be published on a regular basis in line with Cabinet Office procedures.

Personnel below 1* level and civilian equivalents

12. Communication in public or contact with the media on high-profile topics and contentious issues must be referred to DDC Secretariat. A list of contentious topics is at paragraph 34, though the list is not exhaustive. If you feel a subject may attract media or public interest and require advice on this please consult your media team or DDC Secretariat. In the first instance personnel below 1* and civilian equivalents wishing to have contact with the media or communicate in public on contentious topics should seek permission through the chain of command/line management and TLB/ALB or Service media team. The latter, if they are supportive of the request, must refer it to DDC-SecretariatClearances. If it is approved by DDC the requestor may record the activity on the communications tracker for information using the online form.

13. For communication on non contentious subjects, personnel below 1* and civilian equivalents must seek the permission of their Commanding Officer or Head of Department or Division, and consult local TLB/ALB or Service media staff. The activity may be recorded on the communications tracker for information using the online form.

Communications channels and processes

Contact with news media

14. DDC News team is responsible for all contact with the national news media, including both proactive and reactive media handling. They will seek advice, as necessary, from the single Service Assistant Heads in DDC and will judge whether Ministers need to be consulted before engagement with the news media takes place.

15. Military COs below 1* rank may speak to regional or local media on routine matters relating specifically to their own area of responsibility. They should not comment on other Government or Defence issues. A record should be kept of this contact, and either local Service or TLB/ALB media staff kept informed. Contact with regional/local media on issues outside the scope of an individual's own responsibilities or on any issue which may be considered novel and contentious or relate to the topics such as those outlined in paragraph 34 requires prior authorisation from DDC Secretariat.

16. For all other regional or local news media cases below 1*, except for topics such as those listed in paragraph 34, Service and TLB/ALB media staff have delegated powers of authorisation from DDC. Service or TLB/ALB media staff must refer contentious issues to DDC-Secretariat. 1* and above requests must be made through the formal process set out in paragraph 9. Where there is a risk of a regional/local issue becoming a national issue this must be referred to DDC-PR-News who will take over the lead.

17. DDC-PR-News, in conjunction with PJHQ, is responsible for authorising contact with foreign media in operational theatres. In locations where there are accredited UK Defence Advisers/Attachés (DAs), they can engage with the host nation's national or local media subject to instructions or guidance the British Ambassador/High Commissioner might issue to accredited staff. DAs must use their judgement and if the topic or the profile it will get in-country is likely to be picked up in UK media, or if the contact is with correspondents of UK or international media, they must inform DDC-PR-News in advance. If the presence of UK or international media was not known in advance DDC-PR-News must be informed as soon as practicable.

18. Outside operational theatres, there are a number of events in other nations which might include interaction between other members of the Armed Forces and MOD civilians and the media. Where this occurs or is expected at a local or regional media level, it is normally sufficient for permission to be granted by the relevant Service Command media staff or accredited DA. Where UK Defence issues are to be discussed, 1* and above authorisation must be sought through the process set out in paragraph 9. Where there is the potential for UK or foreign national or international media contact, DDC-PR-News must be informed. The procedures for authorising contact with foreign media in the UK are the same as for contact with the UK media.

19. Any member of the Armed Forces or MOD civilian approached by a journalist or a third party with known links to the news media (including former military or civilian personnel) on any Defence matter should refer the matter to the relevant Service, TLB or ALB media staff, or DDC-PR-News team, as soon as possible. Under no circumstance should they divulge information about or express an opinion on a Defence or Government matter without prior permission, regardless of whether it seems non-contentious or might be thought to be already in the public domain.

Speaking in Public

20. Public speaking at conferences, events, lectures and in the community offer opportunity for members of the Armed Forces and MOD civilians to engage with important audiences. Careful consideration should be given to the value of speaking in public and any associated risks. Personnel below 1* must refer to DDC Secretariat where the speaking opportunity risks discussion of the contentious subjects at paragraph 34. 1* and above requests must be made through the formal process set out in paragraph 9.

21. Where there is a significant cost to MOD or a significant number of MOD personnel are being asked to speak at a specific external event it is likely that Ministerial approval will be required regardless of the rank/grade of those involved. In such cases, the appropriate MOD policy lead must justify the proposed overall level of attendance in view of the cost to the taxpayer in terms of time, effort and money.

22. Where members of the Armed Forces or MOD civilians are invited to speak or participate in an event, conference or seminar in an official Defence capacity and that event is being run as a commercial activity, the individual concerned should seek advice from their relevant Director of Resources about whether the MOD should request a payment for their participation. [JSP 462](#) – The Financial Management and Charging Policy Manual outlines the procedures that should be followed.

23. Authorisation to speak in public or publish written material will only apply to the material submitted and cleared. Further permission is required if alterations of fact or opinion are made. The granting of permission to communicate does not confer official endorsement of the material (either of its factual content or the opinions or views expressed) and this should be made clear when communicating.

Communicating online and on social media

24. DDC encourages personnel to engage with the public and their colleagues using social media. If they wish to set up a public account talking about their role or work, they must engage with the DDC or their Service's digital team, having discussed the proposition with their Line Manager or 1st Reporting Officer. Full instruction is set out in the DDC Guide for Personnel Using Social Media. Personnel of 1* and above must also submit a request through the formal process set out in paragraph 9 using the online form after having gained approval from the relevant digital team. DDC or the Service digital team will provide any support or training required to senior personnel who wish to run an account. All personnel communicating online should familiarise themselves with the MOD Online Engagement Guidelines.

25. Personnel do not need to seek permission when communicating online about non-Defence matters but must do so before communicating about Defence matters. This applies regardless of whether an individual posts online in their own name or under a pseudonym; any such pseudonym must be declared when seeking approval.

Non-news media projects

26. DDC Head of Public Relations is ultimately responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for handling non-news media projects as described in JSP 579. DDC-PR-Campaigns teams will seek advice as necessary from DDC-PR-News and Service or TLB/ALB Command staff and will judge whether Ministers need to be consulted before initiating contact with or responding to approaches from the non-news media. All personnel should bear in mind that what could appear to be a single Service or a local establishment issue can have implications for the reputation of all three Services and the wider MOD. Authorisation processes for contact with non-news media are the same as for other external communication.

In-house publications

27. Editors of and those providing content to internal publications with an external readership (e.g. if they are available on subscription or on the internet) must follow the authorisation procedures for external clearance and must ensure that no sensitive or contentious material is inadvertently released.

Payments to Service Personnel and Civilians

28. The overarching principle regarding payments to serving members of the Armed Forces and MOD civilians is that they are paid once by the Crown for their work. When required, it is a normal part of the duties of serving personnel and civil servants to explain their work in public and this should not attract additional personal payment. Serving military and civilian personnel must not accept payment, royalty or fee for any activity which would, or could be perceived to, involve the disclosure of official information or draw on official experience. This includes all contact with the media such as interviews, articles or briefings, and any other public disclosure (e.g. books, public speaking, conferences etc) relating to the person's work. Where an organisation offering payment insists on making a donation to charity, the choice of charity must lie with the organisation offering the payment to avoid any potential or perceived conflict of interest.

29. Payment to an individual for information or speaking engagement or interview may only be authorised if the subject matter falls entirely outside their MOD work or experience, does not use official information and has been prepared in an individual's own time, without using any MOD resources. Commanding Officers/Heads of Department or Division should be consulted to ensure this is the case.

Contact with Parliamentarians

30. The rules and authorisation procedures governing contact between members of the Armed Forces and Defence civilians and Parliamentarians (including select committees) are detailed in 2012DIN05-012 Contact with Parliamentarians. All contact between members of the Armed Forces and MOD civilians and Parliamentarians must be authorised in advance through Ministers, their offices or the Parliamentary Branch. These rules do not apply to members of the Armed Forces or MOD civilians contacting their constituency MP on a personal matter.

31. Any invitation to speak to parliamentarians, including All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) must be treated in the same way as any other piece of public communication. An invitation cannot be accepted until endorsed by Ministers under the terms of 2012DIN05-012 Contact with Parliamentarians. Individuals must then seek formal authorisation as set out in paragraphs 9-13.

Requests for comment from suppliers

32. MOD's policy in respect of suppliers is that as an impartial central government department, staff may make factual statements in respect of contractual positions only. Staff must not express a preference for, or give or appear to give an endorsement of any company, product or service, for example if asked by suppliers to give input to their press releases or PR material.

33. Staff have no delegation to permit third parties to make use of MOD logos (for example in conjunction with suppliers' press releases), even to indicate companies are suppliers to, or are under contract to MOD. The policy on badge usage by third parties and DIPR contact details is set out in both the internal MOD Names, Logos and Insignia DIN 2009DIN05-052 and reinforced in the following documents: 2011DIN05-044 Copyright and Crown Copyright material: Policy, Responsibilities and Procedure for use.

Contentious issues

34. All contact with the media and communication in public on contentious topics requires prior approval from DDC. Service and TLB/ALB media staff must direct media enquiries on these topics to DDC-PR-News and personnel of any rank or grade must seek authorisation before communication on them. The list below provides an indication of such topics, though this is not exhaustive and judgement should be applied. If there is any doubt about whether communications are potentially contentious please talk to Service/TLB/ALB communications teams or DDC Secretariat prior to engagement.

- EU Negotiation
- Annual Budget Cycle (ABC)
- Spending Reviews
- SDSR
- Reductions in Service and civilian personnel
- Estates/Basing Strategy
- Future Reserves 2020
- Trident/Successor
- Carrier Strike/F35 Lightning
- Materiel Strategy
- Scotland and Defence