

Fact Sheet 12: The Armed Forces Covenant

The Government recognises the need do more to ensure our Armed Forces, veterans and their families have the support they need and are treated with the dignity they deserve

The military covenant was conceived as an expression of the mutual obligations which exist between the nation, the Army and each individual soldier. It made clear that those who serve should expect to be treated fairly, to be valued and to be respected, in recognition of the extraordinary commitment and sacrifices which they were called upon to make.

The Government is rewriting the covenant as a new tri-service document – the Armed Forces Covenant – which expresses the enduring, general principles that should govern the relationship between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces community. This will set the tone for Government policy aimed at improving the support available for serving and former members of the Armed Forces, and the families which carry so much of the burden, especially in the event of injury or death.

Concrete measures

We have already doubled the operational allowance for those serving in Afghanistan and ensured that their opportunities for rest and recuperation are maximised. We have also taken steps to ensure that those injured, either physically or mentally, receive the best possible care.

In the last month we have announced that we will provide further or higher education scholarships for children of Service personnel who have died in the service of their country; enhancements to the scheme to enable Service leavers to gain a first higher education qualification. This includes a 24-hour helpline which will provide counselling and support to veterans. In addition, the provision of healthcare to Service personnel will be enhanced by an extra £20 million per year. This will pay for additional medical staff to deliver better mental healthcare facilities.

Earlier this year we also set up the independent Armed Forces Covenant Task Force led by Professor Hew Strachan to identify innovative answers to the most difficult problems facing serving and former service personnel and their families. The Task Force has examined identified and assessed fresh ways of thinking about how the Government and society as a whole can fulfil its obligations to rebuild the military covenant and will report by mid-November.

COMMITMENTS AND PRIORITIES (some of which have already been put into action):

- ensuring that Service personnel's rest and recuperation leave can be maximised
- changing the rules so that Service personnel only have to register once on the Service voters' register
- exploring the potential for including Service children as part of our proposals for a pupil premium
- providing university and further education scholarships for the children of Servicemen and women who have been killed on active service since 1990
- providing support for ex-Service personnel to study at university
- creating a new programme, 'Troops for Teachers', to recruit ex-Service personnel into the teaching profession
- providing extra support for veteran mental health needs
- reviewing the rules governing the awarding of medals
- doubling the Operational Allowance
- including Armed Forces pay in our plans for a fair pay review
- ensuring that injured personnel are treated in dedicated military wards
- looking at whether there is scope to refurbish Armed Forces' accommodation from efficiencies within the Ministry of Defence.