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NEW EMPLOYMENT MODEL (NEM) – CONSULTATION – PHASE 1 QUESTIONNAIRE

An essential part of getting our work on the New Employment Model right is giving those who will be affected by changes to the employment package the opportunity to have their say, to share concerns and views, and importantly to give us fresh ideas.

In Jun 13 we launched consultation with Service personnel and families which ran until Jan 14. This included qualitative research in the form of focus groups and interviews (Phase 1), and quantitative research in the form of a sample survey (Phase 2), which sought to draw out the views of Service personnel on NEM policy areas such as home ownership and Service provided accommodation, overseas service, retention, etc.

To support this formal research during Phase 1, and to gain some broader feedback on NEM proposals that extended beyond the specific evidence requirements to support policy design, we wanted to give all Service personnel the opportunity to give us their feedback on the NEM. An online questionnaire was made available for all Service personnel to anonymously provide their views on the aims of the NEM programme. It was framed around some broad themes rather than specific questions and all responses were free text.

This document summarises the responses we received to the questionnaire only. We've condensed the 3.5 million words we read into common themes, paying particular attention to the major issues we heard expressed. The attitudes we've captured are those expressed by the 12,000 people who responded, so this doesn't necessarily represent the views of the Service population as a whole. Therefore, the data contained within this report cannot be considered 'statistically valid' and should not be quoted as representative, however, the information did usefully allow us to 'test the temperature' of opinions.

Lisa Harper

Attachment:

NEM Consultation Phase 1 Questionnaire



July 2014

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Introduction

The New Employment Model (NEM) programme is developing an updated package of terms and conditions of service that will offer greater choice to Service personnel about how they live their lives; support Operational Capability; and remain affordable to Defence.

It is the most wide-ranging review of the employment package in over 40 years. Certain aspects of the current package have become outdated and have not kept pace with the way in which people choose to live in the 21st century.

The programme is operating in four key areas of work: Terms of Service (including engagement structures and career paths); Value and Reward; Accommodation; and Training and Education. Crucially the NEM programme works across these four areas in a joined up way and is examining the impact on making changes in one area to the broader package, for example looking closely at the potential (or required) impact on pay and allowances when levers are pulled in other areas, such as accommodation, or the need to underpin changes to career paths with tailored training and education.

In addition the programme is being conducted within the context of the existing package to ensure those aspects that are particularly effective – such as a strong package of welfare support – continue to be retained and supported.

Consultation

An essential part of getting this work right is giving those who will be affected by changes to the employment package the opportunity to have their say, to share concerns and views, and, importantly, to give us fresh ideas. So, in June 2013 the Chief of Defence Personnel, Lieutenant General Andrew Gregory, launched an intensive programme of consultation with Regular Service personnel and their families. Over the summer a consultation team (made up of Service personnel from across the three Services and Joint Forces Command; MOD civil servants and external professional researchers) delivered road-show presentations about the NEM and talked to Service personnel and their families in focus groups and interviews.

Alongside the presentations, between June and October 2013, an online questionnaire was available for all Service personnel to anonymously provide



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their views on the aims of the NEM programme. We were delighted with the response – over 12,000 Service personnel replied to the questionnaire – and we are very grateful to all of those who took the time to give us their thoughts and ideas in their own words.

This document summarises the responses we received to the questionnaire only. We've condensed the 3.5 million words we read into common themes, paying particular attention to the major issues we heard expressed. The attitudes we've captured are those expressed by those 12,000 people who responded, so this don't necessarily represent the views of the Service population as a whole. However, the information did usefully allow us to 'test the temperature' of your opinions.

This analysis, and the full text of all responses received to the questionnaire has been shared with the NEM design teams, who are using this feedback, alongside that gathered from other consultation activities, to influence key decisions about the future employment package. The same data has also been shared with the single Services to inform their personnel strategies.



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Who Responded?

The most responses, nearly 45%, came from the RAF – the Army had approx 30%, and RN/RM were about 25% combined. As a proportion of the Service population as a whole this equated to 1 in 10 for the RN/RM, 1 in 25 for the Army and 1 in 7 for the RAF.

The breakdown of responses between Officers and Other Ranks was 44% and 56% respectively. This equated to roughly 1 in 5 Officers and 1 in 20 Other Ranks.

The gender of the respondents was a similar breakdown to the Service as a whole.

We asked respondents to indicate whether they had more or less than 10 years of experience. Over 80% of the respondents had greater than 10 years experience in the Services, which indicated to us that senior personnel were more inclined to give us their opinions.

Question 1 - How much did you already know about NEM?

The first question enabled us to test general awareness and understanding of NEM amongst Service personnel. By analysing how people responded to this question over time we were able to judge how effective our communications activities on NEM were during the road-show programme and where we needed to push out additional information. Anecdotally we were aware, through discussions with the single Services and representative groups such as the Families Federations, that Service personnel held a number of concerns about what would change as a result of NEM and we wanted to draw out those concerns in more detail in order to be able to address them.

Most of those who responded knew little or nothing about NEM and, understandably, were eager to know more. Those who were able to summarise what NEM meant were broadly aware of the areas of work being considered but often the main focus was just on one or two topics – the most common being Accommodation, and Pay and Allowances. Often the perception around these areas of work was negative and a source of worry.

The increase in those responding to say they knew something and, in some cases, a lot about NEM could be linked to where our communication activity was fairly busy. Indeed we noticed a spike in responses from the Army in particular during a time when the team were visiting areas such as Salisbury Plain.



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The feedback provided helped us to identify a number of commonly held misunderstandings about the NEM – this included concerns that the programme is a cost savings exercise that would result in further drastic cuts which would impact on the lifestyles of Service personnel and their families, that subsidised accommodation was going to be removed and that Service personnel were going to be forced into home ownership. We responded to those misunderstandings by running a ‘mythbuster’ week on the Defence and single Service intranets in August 2013.

Feedback to this question has underlined the need to communicate regularly with Service personnel and families. We will continue our dialogue with you throughout 2014; we are introducing a monthly NEM newsletter which will provide an opportunity to provide not only an update on progress across the NEM programme but also more information on individual areas of our work. We will continue to update our [Defence Intranet](#) pages as well as exploring other innovative methods for keeping you updated on NEM. This includes engaging regularly with Service and Families organisations such as the Families Federations and the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.



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Question 2 – Domestic Stability and Support to Partners

We asked:

The NEM aims to increase domestic stability (i.e. reducing the frequency of posting, longer tours etc.) and support the partners of Service personnel in finding employment. What are your views on this?

We asked for your thoughts on greater domestic stability and providing support to partner employment because these are two important principles that are guiding our work on NEM.

Overall Attitude:

There were 7,979 responses where we could confidently assess your attitude. The results are summarised (rounded to the nearest 5%) below.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
60%	25%	15%

Your overall attitude to this question was consistent with the findings from the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS); these are regularly the top causes of dissatisfaction with Service life.

You said:

The variety of your responses to this question reaffirmed that domestic stability means different things to different people, and is not necessarily the opposite of mobility. Domestic stability was normally described by you as either locating your family in a single location, or having stability in your children's education. In the case of the former, you primarily spoke about your decisions on choice of location and the factors that influenced it such as proximity to wider family and affordability of housing. In the case of the latter, your decisions were usually influenced by the stage of education your children were at, and the availability of Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA).

You expressed a range of views on the impact on you of reducing the frequency of postings, and having longer assignments. Some thought that longer tours might prevent them gaining the breadth of experience necessary for promotion, or that there might be unfairness with a minority taking the best jobs and staying there for a long time, whilst others were 'stuck' in less popular posts or locations. Many said the current unpredictability of posting, with individuals being posted, or having their tours reduced at short notice, made it difficult to achieve domestic stability. Another concern raised was about the impact domestic stability could have on their ability to claim CEA.



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Others were against being less mobile because having a wide variety of postings was a key reason why they had joined the Services in the first place.

Ideas from you on how to improve domestic stability included posting individuals to the same geographic area and considering postings for married Service couples. You recognised that working with career managers was key to supporting these changes, but were sceptical about whether the goals could be achieved. Greater support to partners was valued, and you often described your difficulties with obtaining affordable childcare.

Those respondents who were single offered their views on how their lifestyle choices also needed to be considered in policy making. Continuing to support mobility was often a key priority for them.

There were some differences observed in the opinions of each Service. For example, RN personnel were more likely to comment on reducing the time they were separated from family, because they were at sea.



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Question 3 – Flexible Working

We asked:

The NEM aims to offer greater opportunities for Service personnel to move between different levels of commitment during their careers. For example, the ability to move to reserve service for 2 or 3 years and then back to regular service or a 6 month period of part-time working within regular service. How do you feel about this proposal?

We asked this question so that we could better understand the appetite for a change in working practices. We wanted to hear your views on what might be barriers to making this work, and conversely how this could be of benefit to the Services. Also, we were keen to hear of the experiences of those who had already considered or tried an alternative working pattern.

Overall Attitude:

There were 7,979 responses where we could confidently assess your attitude. The results are summarised (rounded to the nearest 5%) below.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
45%	20%	35%

There was a broad and mixed range of views expressed in answer to this question. This topic brought out the most extreme and opposing opinions. There was also a significant proportion of respondents who were either unsure of the merits of this proposal or didn't believe there needed to be any change.

You said:

Opinion on whether offering more flexible working arrangements in the Services was a good thing or a bad thing was finely balanced. Generally, respondents considered the topic only as an option between full-time/part-time service, or as a choice between Regular and Reserve service to allow reduced hours and commitments. Attitudes ranged from those who said that the inflexibility of Service life was precisely the reason they were leaving, to those who said they would consider leaving if 'civilian practices were forced upon them'. The strongest view was that there would be practical difficulties making anything work.

The practical concerns raised with part-time working were largely to do with how a unit would continue to meet its commitments, and what impact it would have on those who remained working full-time. People wanted to know how this would affect manpower levels, and/or how career managers would handle



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the flexibility. A minority of respondents questioned the commitment of those who would chose to change their working arrangements, and some felt that it might be used as a means of avoiding operational tours. It was recognised that giving people more choice in their working practices would help to retain those who had skills which are valuable to the Service but who might otherwise leave because of family or other commitments.

Making it easier to move between regular and reserve service was supported in principle, but individuals had concerns about the impact it would have on their career and/or pension. Those who were positive about moving to the reserves saw it as an opportunity for a career break, or to learn new skills to bring back into the Services, but they didn't wish that decision to limit their careers on their return. Those who didn't support this flexibility generally had reservations about the extra training burden it would create.

Very few people shared their personal experiences of utilising the existing opportunities for flexible working, as defined in JSP 760 (Regulations for Leave and Other Types of Absence). Some respondents offered alternative ideas to giving individuals flexibility in their careers, for example shorter-term engagements. There was interest expressed in working longer, i.e. to the age of 60, but there were reservations about the impact that it could have on promotion flows.



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Question 4 – Home Purchase Incentive

We asked:

The NEM aims to make the option of home purchase more realistic for more personnel. A key component will be ensuring better access to information. We will also look at increasing the amount we can make available as an interest-free loan to support a deposit. How do you feel about this idea?

As part of our review of the overall accommodation strategy, an important area of work is considering ways in which we can give further assistance to Service personnel who would like to get into home ownership. With this in mind, we wanted to explore thoughts about home ownership particularly whether or not this is something that the majority of Service personnel are interested in, experiences of the existing Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP) scheme as well as experiences of going through the process of buying a home and what was felt was missing or particularly needed in order for getting on to the property ladder to be a more realistic and appealing option for Service personnel.

Overall Attitude:

There were 7,652 responses where we could confidently assess your attitude. The results are summarised (rounded to the nearest 5%) below.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
85%	5%	10%

There was a strong positive reaction to this question. However, the responses were invariably well-balanced; for example, issues with the current system of LSAP were articulated and financial risks were also raised.

You said:

The vast majority of those who responded to this question were in favour of an interest free loan for home purchase. It was clear in the feedback that the sum of money offered through the LSAP scheme fell far short of what you believed was needed in order to buy a home in today's market. Many spoke about their experiences of the LSAP process and highlighted what they saw as restrictions that would be unwelcome if included as part of a new scheme. A number of comments focused on concerns for existing home owners and suggestions that financial support would be better directed towards helping existing home owners meet their mobility obligations. Similar views were shared by those who didn't yet own a home but were concerned about the practical and financial impacts of being posted after buying a home.



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There were mixed views about how much or how little Service personnel should or could be guided through the process of buying a home. Some felt that a lot of support, information and guidance was needed but there were also those who commented that support and information could already be accessed, particularly via the internet, and that the responsibility should lie with the individual to seek guidance on such an important decision.

There was an interesting difference of views expressed depending on your experience. Those respondents who have served longer voiced concerns about the readiness of some junior ranks to purchase a home and avoid the potential for financial difficulty. This was often countered by an enthusiastic and measured interest in becoming a home owner being expressed by those in the early stages of their Service careers.

There was a degree of cynicism as to the reasoning behind introducing such a scheme. Some expressed concern that the introduction of such a scheme was purely to drive people out of Service accommodation (single and family) and they thought that subsidised accommodation would no longer be available.



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Question 5 – Subsidised Service Accommodation

We asked:

Service accommodation will continue to be subsidised but the intention is to benchmark SFA and SLA charges against rents for similar accommodation in the national civilian housing market and then apply a discount to them. What are your views on this idea?

Another aspect of our review of the accommodation strategy is looking at the provision of subsidised Service accommodation, specifically in terms of how we can best ensure it is fit for the needs of Service personnel and their families and remains affordable for Defence in the long-term. We wanted to explore your views about the current provision of subsidised Service accommodation and whether you felt it represents value for money for both Service personnel and the tax payer.

Overall Attitude:

There were 7,058 responses where we could confidently assess your attitude. The results are summarised (rounded to the nearest 5%) below.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
30%	10%	60%

This question provoked the strongest and most negative reaction from respondents. Some of the negative responses were based upon misunderstandings about the proposal, for example many assuming that subsidised accommodation would no longer be provided. Conversely, the positive comments were predominately focused on the system itself, i.e. fairness of how the charge is calculated. Because of the complexity of this topic, we recognise that it would be unfair to draw firm conclusions based on the above results without further explanation about how this system might work in practice.

You said:

This question drew out some particularly emotive responses; your comments were often focused on what these proposals would mean in terms of cost to you. You told us why you felt that Service accommodation is different to the civilian housing market, the main points being: lack of choice; poorer standard; difficulties with maintenance; and lack of tenant rights. Many of you who responded to the question recognised that because you had little choice in your location (you received an Assignment Order), any system of charging could only be fair if it was based on national rates.



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Understandably, most were against any increase in charges, citing a number of reasons why charges should remain as they are or, in some cases, reduce. Many felt that subsidised accommodation was part of the overall package and that an increase in accommodation charges would amount to a 'pay cut by stealth'. However, many respondents recognised that accommodation charges had not kept pace, but would only accept increases if standard and maintenance was improved accordingly. Similarly, some of those that had already purchased their own property felt that the heavily subsidised accommodation charges created a less than realistic impression of accommodation costs which could present problems for Service personnel later on in their lives. This was balanced against those who felt that any increases in charges would reduce their ability to save to buy their own house in the future.

You also presented some interesting comments on the essential support mechanisms provided to those who live in Service accommodation. You raised concerns that by promoting home ownership there is a risk that the wider military family could become more disparate and that this would reduce the vital community spirit which supports unit cohesion and families when the Service person is deployed. This, when considered with observations on the difficulty of drawing comparison with privately owned or rented accommodation has given us a valuable insight into your thinking in this area.



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Question 6 – Allowances

We asked:

The NEM aims to simplify the allowance system for Service personnel to reduce the cost of administering and make it easier to understand. What do you think of this idea?

The purpose of this question was to gather your views on the process of claiming allowances, rather than the allowances themselves.

Overall Attitude:

There were 7,358 responses where we could confidently assess your attitude. The results are summarised (rounded to the nearest 5%) below.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
80%	10%	10%

A significant majority positively supported the principle of simplifying the allowances system and making it easier to understand. The opposing view (or neutral opinion) was invariably that the introduction of Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) was supposed to have achieved that same intent.

You said:

Don't reduce the level of allowances was the loudest message we heard. You generally supported the principle of simplification, but not if it was being used to reduce the budget for allowances and leave you worse off. Examples of previous cuts in allowances were used to illustrate the point, and there was a significant level of scepticism about the objective of this work.

Your opinions about the fairness of the current allowances system were expressed in a number of different ways. Unfavourable comparisons with MPs' allowances were often mentioned. In some instances, the difference between the rules/entitlements for civil servants and military was highlighted; two examples were taxation of operational allowances and relocation expenses. Another concern expressed by individuals was not being fairly recompensed for costs incurred in the course of doing their duty.

Many respondents stated that they didn't claim allowances. Some of the barriers or reasons included: didn't understand the rules or what their entitlement was; the admin support they received was poor; the fear/risk of scrutiny and being accused of fraud. A minority said that they thought the allowances system was deliberately complicated in order to reduce the level



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of claims, and queried how the cost of allowances had reduced since JPA had been introduced.

Views on specific allowances were usually expressed in answer to other questions. For example, Continuity of Education, and Get You Home allowances were discussed in the context of domestic stability (question 2), and opinions on Disturbance Allowance were given in answer to the accommodation question.

The biggest things you wanted changed can be summarised as follows: (1) make the JPA process/experience easier; and (2) the level of allowances generally should reflect the cost of living.

We didn't observe any significant differences in attitudes, i.e. the views expressed were consistent across all Services and all ranks.



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Question 7 – Pay Model

We asked:

The NEM aims to address key areas of unhappiness with the current pay model. Tell us your views of the current model (excluding views on the amount of pay you receive).

The purpose of this question was not to understand how satisfied you were with your level of pay (AFCAS results give us that information), but instead explore the areas where you were unhappy, and therefore would wish us to address in NEM.

Overall Attitude:

There were 6,788 responses where we could confidently assess your attitude. The results are summarised (rounded to the nearest 5%) below.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
35%	30%	35%

There was some ambiguity between positive statements, e.g. "I am happy", and neutral statements, e.g. "it is OK". However, the main conclusion we took from these results was that approximately a third of you had some complaint about the current model. You may not have experienced the problem yourself, but you still wanted to tell us about it. In this instance the negative comments were generally from Other Ranks across all Services, but more likely from the RN.

You said:

Generally speaking respondents were more likely to provide comments on issues that concerned them.

The single most quoted issue was the unfairness with the assignment of Other Ranks to either High or Low pay bands by trade. Specific examples were often quoted, the most common being technical and HR trades. The reason for your dissatisfaction was normally justified by comparing the level of training and different responsibilities for each trade.

Another notable view expressed by Other Ranks was the disparity between Services. This was expressed in the context of working, in joint environments, alongside colleagues at different ranks. The issue was not the Pay Model as such, but the fact that two people doing the same job were being paid differently because of the different ways that each Service delegated responsibility.



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Basing your pay on either performance or skills was a view expressed by a significant number of respondents. Whether it was Senior Ranks comparing their pay with Junior Officers, or Officers explaining the professional qualifications they were required to hold, or anyone comparing themselves with civilian equivalents, the message was the same – you believed the Pay Model didn't take proper account of your 'market value'. The result was that many of you wanted Recruitment and Retention Pay to be reviewed.

Another theme was the difference in pay upon promotion; Officers were more likely to say that the jump in pay did not sufficiently recognise the greater responsibility and/or workload. Extending the number of pay increments was an issue for those who were either close to the top of their pay scale or who had already 'topped-out'. Some of the respondents recognised that the Armed Forces were one of the few public sector organisations that retained the principle of incremental progression. However, increments in pay were seen as a strong motivating factor, and you were concerned if there was a risk of them being removed.

Whilst most comments we read were about the Pay Model or your level of pay, a minority of respondents did make observations on the administrative processes, for example the long time it took to correct pay queries, or the complexity of pay statements etc.



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Question 8 – Voluntary Education

We asked:

The NEM aims to increase the value gained from Service personnel using the Standard Learning Credit (SLC)/Enhanced Learning Credit (ELC) scheme to access voluntary training and education courses. Skills gained early on and throughout a career can be of benefit to the Service as well as helping to prepare personnel for civilian life. What are your views on this proposal?

Reviewing the use of Standard and Enhanced Learning Credits is just one part of the wider training and education programme NEM is looking at. However, we wanted to use this question to understand your general views on self-improvement and what some of the barriers might be.

Overall Attitude:

There were 6,655 responses where we could confidently assess your attitude. The results are summarised (rounded to the nearest 5%) below.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
80%	15%	5%

We recognise that this was a bit of an obvious question, and that we would expect most of you to be positive about voluntary education paid for by the employer. However, the individual views do help us align our work on NEM, and we got a better understanding of how Learning Credits are, or are not, being used from your individual responses.

You said:

Most of you valued the opportunity for voluntary education during your career, and recognised that it was part of the overall package for Service personnel. Many of you explained how you had personally used the scheme. Not having enough time to study, often because of workload or lack of management support, was the biggest single reason you quoted for not using your SLC/ELC entitlement.

Your biggest concern with the scheme was the restrictions on how the Learning Credits could be used. You thought that the rules were inflexible, and that the choice of courses on offer was weighted towards topics/skills that benefited the Service, as opposed to benefiting the individual. This opinion was often reinforced with either a positive statement– “the Services would ultimately benefit from more educated/trained individuals” – or a negative statement – “the rules were deliberately restrictive because the Services didn’t want individuals to take their skills and leave”.



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Having Service qualifications accredited by civilian institutions was another popular change you wanted. Other changes you proposed included: paying for professional subscriptions; increasing the value of SLC/ELCs to reflect the higher cost of education; incentivising people to study; extending entitlement to spouses and civil partners; and advertising the voluntary education opportunities better.

Accessibility of the schemes was also an issue raised. Problems ranged from accessing JPA, through to getting advances of pay. Invariably, the length of time it took to action a request either dissuaded an individual from applying, or potentially narrowed the window for successfully enrolling in a course (the difference between a financial year and an academic year).

A small number of responses recognised the importance of through-career learning, and made direct observations on the current resettlement process which is focused at the end of service.