



Ministry
of Defence

THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT 2013



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Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 2 of the Armed Forces Act 2011

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 the Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP,
Secretary of State for Defence**

This is the second annual report to be published since the provisions in the Armed Forces Act 2011 came into force, requiring me to report to Parliament each year. In last year's report, in December 2012, I noted that we had enshrined the key principles of the Covenant in law and established a Cabinet-level committee to keep up momentum. I am pleased with the progress that has been made since then and I believe that the Covenant is starting to make a real difference to members of the Armed Forces Community – those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families.

In preparing this report, I have considered the unique obligations and the sacrifices that our Armed Forces make, as well as the Covenant's key principles: that we should seek to remove disadvantages arising from membership or former membership of the Armed Forces; and that special treatment for Service people might be appropriate in some cases, especially for the injured or bereaved. There has been a degree of uncertainty for our Armed Forces this year as a result of further redundancies, base closures, and the return of personnel stationed in Germany. While I know this has been difficult, this period of uncertainty will shortly be coming to an end, meaning that personnel and their families will soon be able to plan for their futures with a greater certainty about their homes and employment.

Since May 2010, we have made good progress in rebuilding the Covenant and ensuring that it is upheld across Government, including doubling the operational allowance, establishing the Community Covenant, and committing funding from the LIBOR-fixing fines to Service charities.

This year, I am pleased that we have been able to announce permanent funding to continue the good work being done to support the Armed Forces Community, launch the Corporate Covenant to build on the excellent support our Armed Forces receive from



businesses and make a significant increase in the support available to Servicemen and women to buy their first home through the new Forces Help to Buy scheme, which will start in April.

Defence Secretary Philip Hammond and Barclays' Stewart Tootal sign the Corporate Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is an agreement between the Nation, the Government, and the Armed Forces Community to recognise the contribution that our Armed Forces make and to ensure that they are respected and supported. I am delighted that public support for the Armed Forces remains consistently strong, but I am conscious that support may not always be so high, especially as we look beyond the end of combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014 and the associated reduction in public profile. That is why it is so important that work to strengthen the Covenant continues. This work is now underpinned both by enduring legislation and a guaranteed funding stream to support the Covenant in the future.

The main chapters in this year's report concentrate on the issues which are specified in the legislation and which have the greatest impact on our people: healthcare, education, housing and the operation of inquests. We have sought to produce a report that is more accessible to the different audiences for whom it is intended, not least members of the Armed Forces themselves. In order to improve awareness of the annual report, for the first time I will be arranging for key extracts to be sent to every serving member of the Armed Forces.

The legislation requires me to consult the Devolved Administrations in preparing each annual report and to state whether they have contributed. I am pleased to say that we have received assistance from Scotland and Wales and Officials have been in touch with their opposite numbers in the Northern Ireland Executive.

As on previous occasions, and in keeping with the commitment that has been made to Parliament, this report includes the unedited comments that we have received from the external members of the Covenant Reference Group. I am grateful for all that they continue to do to support the Armed Forces Covenant.

I should also like to pay tribute to all the Service Charities and the work they do to support members of the Armed Forces Community. Much of this report is devoted to reporting on the actions of the Government and although some of the important work done by charities is mentioned, it has not been possible to highlight all that they do. The Prime Minister and I were able to thank some of them in person in October at the first annual reception at Number 10 to celebrate their work. They make an enormous contribution. In my view, the Service Charities have never been so generous – or so effective.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Philip Hammond". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a short horizontal line.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“A YEAR OF PROGRESS”

The Armed Forces Covenant is a big commitment in more ways than one. It is a Covenant between the Armed Forces Community, the Government and the Nation as a whole – everybody has a part to play. And its enduring nature means that honouring the Covenant is an ongoing process, not an event.

The Covenant is the mechanism by which we aim to reinforce the bond of trust and mutual respect between the Armed Forces and society. By working to ensure that no serving or former Armed Forces personnel, or their families, are disadvantaged for the enormous sacrifices they make for their country, we seek to ensure that they are recognised as valuable members of society and that they are able to go from strength to strength in the vital and often dangerous role they undertake on our behalf.

This means that honouring the Covenant is not just a matter for the Ministry of Defence. It is a genuinely cross-Government endeavour and, since the Armed Forces Act was passed in 2011 and the principles of the Covenant were enshrined in law, we have taken a huge range of steps – big and small – to honour the debt to our troops. The work is also being taken forward at a local level and through the excellent work of the Devolved Administrations.

In fact, there is a “family” of Covenants: as well as the main Armed Forces Covenant, there is the Community Covenant with its £30M grant scheme, which aims to develop closer ties between members of the Armed Forces Community and the civilian communities in which they are based; the Corporate Covenant, which allows employers and other organisations to declare their public support for the Armed Forces; and the Armed Forces Covenant LIBOR fund, £35M being spent in support of Service Charities and a range of other good causes, which is overseen by the Covenant Reference Group.

Given the scale of the undertaking, it is inevitable that much of this annual report is devoted to the big picture. But we understand that it is at the personal level that the benefits of the Covenant are felt. Not everybody’s experience will be the same. The spouse of a Royal Navy Petty Officer, for example, will have totally different perceptions and expectations of the Covenant than a World War Two Veteran living in a remote rural community. We don’t always get it right and we know that there are those whose experience falls short of the examples given in the report, but through a wide range of small steps and policy changes, we aim to build toward the removal of disadvantage across the whole diverse breadth of the Armed Forces Community. As such, it is important to highlight some of what is being achieved under the Covenant in order to raise awareness about just how much can be done to overcome disadvantage. That is why, throughout this report, we have included individual case studies of the impact the Covenant is having.

The main chapters of the report are based around the four areas we are obliged to report on by the Act. These are summarised in turn below. But there are some overarching achievements that should not be overlooked:

- The Chancellor has announced that funding for the Covenant will be enduring, with a further £10M per year, taken from fines levied for manipulating the LIBOR rates, to be made available from 2015-16, on top of the £35M from LIBOR already committed.
- In addition, the Chancellor announced in the Autumn Statement that another £100M of LIBOR fines is being made available to support a range of good causes including further funding for the Armed Forces Community and Service charities.
- 397 local authorities (some 98% of those in Great Britain) have now signed Community Covenants and are working to bring the Service and wider communities closer together. We are now concentrating on helping local authorities to deliver against the action plans they have produced.
- Community Covenants have now been signed in all 32 local authority areas in Scotland; and the Scottish and Welsh Governments are represented on the Community Covenant Grants Panel and the LIBOR Panel.
- The Corporate Covenant has been launched, enabling businesses and charities to make a tailored pledge to support the Armed Forces Community.
- The LIBOR Fund has been used to support 96 charitable projects that work with the Armed Forces Community, spending to date in the region of £35M.



Staff Sergeant Gareth 'Woody' Wood

and potentially traumatic Afghan tours. Previously we could only offer our therapeutic normalisation breaks to the four-man Explosive Ordnance Disposal team. We now have the funds to include the advanced searchers, dog handlers and forensic experts that make up the complete Brimstone counter-IED call sign. The LIBOR Fund's support is truly invaluable".

Staff Sergeant Gareth 'Woody' Wood was awarded the Military Cross after defusing five improvised explosive devices under fire with a severely injured hand. Two of his closest friends, Staff Sergeants Olaf Schmid and Brett Linley, had both been killed defusing bombs in Afghanistan and in the closing weeks of his tour, one member of his own bomb disposal team lost both his legs after triggering an IED. Woody's four-man Counter IED Disposal team were split up immediately on arrival back in the Britain following the end of their six month operational tour.

Case Study – how the LIBOR Fund is being spent

Holly Davies, who runs the charity Felix Fund, successfully bid twice for funding from the Armed Forces Covenant LIBOR Fund. Felix Fund supports bomb disposal experts and their families by funding therapeutic breaks for teams returning from Afghanistan.

"This second Libor grant means Felix Fund can help more Bomb Disposal experts readjust after their exhausting

"Infantry units deploy all together and return home together and carry on as one big team. But because 11 Regiment is spread over 16 UK locations, we said goodbye at RAF Brize Norton. So there was no real chance to talk about our experiences.

"I was affected by what happened in Helmand – I think it's the same for everyone who has deployed on the ground. Back home, you still subconsciously look around for bombs and you tend to avoid choke points – it's the sort of thing which is difficult to explain to people who haven't spent time there.

"I took part in a Felix Fund Normalisation Break a few weeks after returning from tour. It was fantastic to meet up with my old team. There was another team there who had also been in Helmand at the same time as us so we were able to talk about our different experiences. It was very therapeutic. During the days we would do some adventure sports and then in the evening we would chat over a few beers about what had happened. I was surprised how much it helped – it sort of brought the tour to a close."

Health

The report describes the treatment and support provided to Service personnel on the front line and subsequently back in the UK. It highlights the launch of the Defence Recovery Capability, with strong support from The Royal British Legion and Help For Heroes, and it also reflects the importance the Government attaches to mental health, reporting on the implementation of Dr Andrew Murrison MP's recommendations, additional support for the Big White Wall, and over £2M in new funding for Combat Stress. The Scottish Government has also funded specialist mental health services in partnership with NHS Scotland and Combat Stress. The chapter also illustrates how £17.5M additional support is enabling Headley Court and nine specialist NHS facilities to provide the most technologically advanced prosthetics, featuring as an example the story of Captain Dave Henson. And it commits the Government to further improving the transfer of information to civilian GPs when Service leavers register with them.

Education

Chapter two reflects the steps being taken to reduce disadvantage to Service children, with a further £3M for State Schools with Service children and an increase in the Service Pupil Premium to £300 this year. Changes to the Schools Admissions Code are making a difference for families trying to find a school place mid-term and we are now introducing a Pupil Information Profile to help with the transfer of key information when Service children move from one school to another. But the system isn't yet working everywhere as well as it could and the report commits the Government to do more to address the difficulties that remain.

Housing

Despite improvements in the standard of Service accommodation, the report acknowledges that satisfaction levels are unchanged from last year. As such, we continue to seek to make improvements to both the standard of housing and the service we offer. Improvements in the service offered are reflected in the experience of WO1 Carolyn Thompson who moved into a new home in Lincoln and "could not have asked

for a smoother transition". Our Capital Purchase Programme is providing £150M for the purchase of over 700 high quality properties in areas of high demand. We have extended the circumstances in which personnel may retain Service Family Accommodation (SFA). A notable improvement has been the introduction of an automated self-preference system, allowing Service personnel to see online 'estate agent' type details for available SFA, to register their top three preferences for their new home and to book their house moves. The report also describes forthcoming changes in the management of SFA and highlights the three-year trial of the new £200M Forces Help To Buy Scheme to encourage home-ownership among Service personnel.



New Service Family Accommodation at Canada Lines in Bulford

Coroners

The report reflects two important developments since last year's publication. The Chief Coroner has created a specialist cadre of coroners available to investigate the deaths of Service personnel on active service, or while training and preparing for active service. And the Government has implemented the commitment it made last year to double the Funeral Expenses Grant, which is now £1,000.

A Lifetime of Support

The final chapter of the report covers a range of subjects from deployment to Veterans, including development of the New Employment Model, the most thorough review of terms and conditions of service for a generation. There is a report on progress with the Partner Employment Programme, which is identifying how we can help overcome the disadvantages sometimes faced by the partners of Service personnel when it comes to maximising their employment potential. And there are details of two important new initiatives – the launch of additional resettlement support for Early Service Leavers and the launch of MoneyForce, in conjunction with The Royal British Legion and Standard Life Charitable Trust, to provide advice about financial issues.

This final chapter shows just how widely the Covenant reaches – it touches on Veterans, families, employment, business and a whole host of other issues. It also touches on the work of a great many Government departments. We remain committed to raising awareness of the Covenant, driving progress on issues and continuing to take the actions that are necessary to support the Armed Forces Community.

Since their launch, the Armed Forces and Families Continuous Attitude Surveys have provided much of the evidence we have about whether our Armed Forces and their families have the support they need and are treated with the dignity they deserve. Those surveys remain an important source of information. But they do not include the Veterans community and, in isolation, they do not enable us to compare the experience of the Armed Forces Community with that of other citizens. So the MOD is working with other Government departments and the Devolved Administrations to improve the evidence available to us to identify where disadvantage exists, and to measure our progress in removing it where we can. We have been working with the Office for National Statistics to add a Veterans identifier to their Integrated Household Survey. Once established, this will allow us to collate broad data relating to Veterans for the first time. We are prioritising the issues of health, housing, education and inquests, so that next year's report will be able to draw on much more hard evidence.

OBSERVATIONS

By external members of the Covenant Reference Group

Naval Families Federation, Army Families Federation, RAF Families Federation

Introduction

The three Service Families Federations have been actively involved in the production of this Annual Report. We have been consulted extensively on the content and are grateful for the opportunity to comment on those elements of the Report relevant to the families and military personnel we represent.

As with last year's Report, we would like again to emphasise that the vast majority of Service families are incredibly resilient and "just get on with" whatever is thrown at them, providing unstinting support to their military spouses and partners. At a time of great public affection for the Armed Forces, there is some media attention and publicity around particular issues, such as PTSD, the difficulties some Service Personnel face in making the transition to civilian life when they leave and around other significant issues such as alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Whilst acknowledging that these sort of problems do exist, and not for a moment trying to underplay them, we would emphasise and reinforce the point made in this Report that the great majority of Service personnel and their families are NOT affected by these issues and the great majority return from Operations and then later make the transition to civilian life without difficulty.

We would like to acknowledge the tremendous work to date that has been done to implement the AF Covenant, the AF Community Covenant and the AF Corporate Covenant. We are clear that many of the initiatives contained within it are beginning to make a difference for personnel and their families and these are to be welcomed. We wholeheartedly endorse and support the intent of the AF Covenant and we look forward to a continuing and growing involvement in helping to develop it. However, it is early days and there remains much to be done. There are a number of areas we think require specific effort.

Firstly, communicating the AF Covenant, its components and their benefits to Service personnel and their families. We remain disappointed that a sizeable proportion of our people continue to say that they have little or no knowledge of the existence of the AF Covenant and the principles that underpin it. We all, including each of the Armed Forces, have a part to play in improving the level of knowledge and understanding and we would urge everybody involved in delivering the AF Covenant to use every opportunity to spread the message about the aims of the Covenant and the initiatives within it amongst the widest possible Service community.

Secondly, we recognise that Central Government has asked local authorities to implement many aspects of the AF Covenant with little additional resources in terms of financial support, staff or guidance. We understand that local authorities face further cuts in their funding from government and are having to 'do much more with much less' but we are still asking them to do more to support their Service Community. We are concerned about the risk that the goodwill that currently exists to support the AF Covenant may run out, as local authorities have to focus on more pressing issues within their areas of responsibility. However, our evidence about how external agencies are progressing with implementation of the AF Covenant indicates that delivery is patchy. In some regions, the authorities are working collaboratively and to great effect to introduce initiatives that support the Covenant principle of removing disadvantage caused by the military lifestyle. However, we are aware that in other areas the process is much slower and less well organised, often depending on a handful of committed individuals to deliver only in part. The identification of regions that need further support to identify good practise and ideas is therefore crucial to maintaining the momentum of Covenant implementation across the UK. The Families Federation Regional AF Covenant staffs – funded by Libor - have begun to work very effectively with local authorities and other external agencies and are already making a difference in terms of levels of knowledge, both within and without the military community.

Generally, we have found that senior executives in organisations such as local government, DWP Job Centres, the NHS and DfE are fully behind and support Covenant implementation. Unfortunately, much of our evidence also demonstrates that the intent and support is not always being communicated effectively to the grass roots within their organisations, where all too often there is little or no knowledge of the Covenant itself and of the commitments that have been made within it. Examples range from the Armed Forces specialist in a Job Centre Plus who did not know they had the role, to a complete lack of awareness of the Covenant and its aims within the housing department of a local authority. We have also noted that the role of the Armed Forces Champion or lead officer within a local authority is usually taken on by an already busy but nevertheless enthusiastic and committed individual but that there is often no succession plan: When that individual moves on, no one steps up to take their place and momentum is lost.

Turning to the detail of the Report, we would like to record the following:

Healthcare

The Department of Health is to be applauded for being forward leaning and proactive in its approach. The advances that have been made in healthcare provision since the last Report have been significant and are genuinely appreciated by those Service personnel and their families that need them. We are sometimes worried by the sheer number of initiatives and the number of organisations involved in them: It may be there is a case for even more co-ordination and coherence in delivery in some areas.

The onset of mental health issues amongst some Service personnel and Veterans will often have a significant impact on families as well, who may struggle to cope with changes in behaviour at home. This can lead to mental health problems amongst family members. As the programme of mental health support continues to grow, we would like to see broader access to other specialist mental health support services, such as the Big White Wall, for families.

Education

We welcome the increase in the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) to £300 per child. However, our evidence from parents suggests that many are unaware that, for the school to claim SPP, they must first declare their children as having Service parents. Furthermore, many parents are frustrated that they are not always made aware of how the SPP is spent and how parents can influence its use. While we recognise the overall intent to allow schools a degree of freedom in deciding how best to use the SPP given local circumstances, we would urge that more information is provided to Service parents and that they are consulted more widely on its use. The intent to recognise and spread best practise is therefore welcome.

We would like to see consideration given to expanding the scheme to include children of mobilised reservists and divorced parents, where perhaps the serving person does not have custody but the child nevertheless needs support during, for example, periods of deployment. And families would love to see the Premium expanded to cover Wales and Scotland. The Education Change Programme, looking at a new strategy to address the impacts of mobility on the education of Service children and young people, is hugely important and we will continue to work with the programme wherever we can to highlight families issues.

One of the key issues affecting Service children is that they may have to move schools more frequently than their peers. This can, and does, result in data relating to pupil progress being delayed or mislaid, which may lead to the needs of Service children not being recognised until some time after they have settled into their new schools. The trial of the Pupil Information Profile, which can be used when Service pupils move schools, represents a significant improvement in the care of Service children and is very welcome as potential mitigation of what is often a significant disadvantage. We hope that the trial is successful and that an appropriate scheme is applied throughout the UK as a result. This is especially important for those Service children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), where the delays in providing essential support often endured at present can cause great distress and frustration for our families; we hope that particular attention will be paid to this group.

Housing

We acknowledge the efforts made by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) to improve service delivery over the last year or so but quality of housing remains very much a mixed bag and, while we are delighted that some new houses have been brought on line, we must not forget that some accommodation, especially for single personnel, still has a way to go before being classed as good quality. And while we acknowledge that the FAMCAS survey reports that 57% were happy with the quality of their accommodation, that still leaves far too many that are not happy. Although delighted for her, we would not wish people to think that the experience of WO1 Thompson, reported at page 40 of the Report, is representative of the usual experience of many Service families! The comprehensive programme to improve this situation is incredibly important - both to married and single personnel - and we urge that this remains a properly funded, top priority for all concerned. However, some families will struggle to afford higher charges for new housing.

Where the MOD is purchasing new properties for use as Service Families Accommodation (SFA) in areas of high demand, it must ensure that sufficient the local infrastructure, such as schools and medical provision, are in place. We have been concerned to note instances where the local authority has either not been made aware of the arrival of numbers of military families into the area until late in the day, causing some consternation, especially in local schools already full to bursting, or has not put any mitigation in place.

Having just come to terms with a new housing allocation process, families now face further changes to the way the estate is managed and maintained through the Next Generation Estates Contract (NGEC). This will need to be managed carefully to avoid repeating the same problems previously experienced by families. We hope that at some point soon the whole accommodation piece will settle down for families and single personnel alike.

Employment

We very much welcome and support the Partner Employment Project (PEP), which is looking at the issues and barriers around employment of spouses and partners. We are heartened by the MOD's efforts to understand the culture, which is often a source of great frustration to spouse/partners who are often highly qualified but struggling either to maintain a career of their own or to simply find a job in the face of inaccurate assumptions made by employers as a result of regular postings and deployments. We would like the MoD to consider acknowledging within the PEP the older children of Service personnel, who may have seen their career and job options adversely affected by their family's mobility. Support for spouse/partner employment opportunities will become even more important as the New Employment Model (NEM) is introduced for Service personnel and people are encouraged to enter the private housing market: The need for a second income to help save for a deposit and then pay a mortgage will be vital for many of our people and it is crucial that the Partner Employment Project delivers effective, meaningful and achievable outcomes.

A further issue we are hearing more and more about from Service personnel and families is the availability and cost of childcare, which is a further factor in the ability of spouses and partners to gain meaningful employment. Acknowledging that this is an issue affecting the wider population and not just Service families, the need for more comprehensive, affordable childcare - the Service person's frequently unpredictable working hours are not conducive to achieving the two salaries - needs to be addressed.

Foreign and Commonwealth

The new Armed Forces immigration rules due to be introduced in December will address many of the inequalities that Foreign and Commonwealth families have been experiencing and the Army Families Federation in particular is working hard to ensure that the transition period is as painless as possible.

Conclusion

We'd like to conclude with a "Thank you" to everybody involved in delivering the AF Covenant and the Community and Corporate Covenant components within it. The provision of the Libor funds to support specific initiatives has also been very welcome and will be genuinely appreciated by those it is intended to support – as is the Government's decision to fund a further £10m a year for the next 25 years.

But in applauding the excellent work done to date we must not take the foot off the pedal: There remains much to be done, particularly to communicate the aims and intent of the AF Covenant to all Service personnel and their families and to those charged with its delivery at desk level

TRBL, SSAFA, War Widows Association, Professor Sir Hew Strachan and Cobseo - the Confederation of Service Charities

This second Annual Covenant Report demonstrates the considerable progress that continues to be made in delivering the goals of the Armed Forces Covenant. It also highlights the extent to which the Government and the Service Charitable Sector are working together to deliver a truly synergistic effect. We have been impressed with the way that Central Government, the Devolved Administrations and Local Government have all embraced the concept of the Covenant and are striving to give it meaning. We do note that some 98% of local authorities in Great Britain have now signed up to the Covenant and that is very encouraging. We believe that there would also be merit in encouraging individual local authorities to make public the reforms to their policies that will deliver their commitment to issues such as the allocation of social housing and school places to remove any disadvantage due to Service. We have also been impressed by the way that the Covenant has been embraced by the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales but note that there appears to be little activity in this regard in Northern Ireland. While we do not underestimate the special circumstances that prevail in the Province, it is, nonetheless, vital that the Armed Forces Community is treated in a similar fashion right across the United Kingdom. The extensive activity being undertaken in Scotland and Wales is described throughout the Report. While this is extremely encouraging it does highlight that different approaches are being taken to a whole raft of issues across the UK. Whilst there is absolutely no need for all issues to be dealt with in an identical way, it does rather beg the question as to whether it is possible to identify some best practice and harmonise the approaches. This would certainly make the delivery of service to the recipients much easier to understand and to access.

It is fully accepted that the Armed Forces Covenant is a UK National initiative. However, there may be merit in exploring the possibility of extending the Covenant to the Crown Dependencies of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. While the Crown Dependencies are Independent Jurisdictions, the UK Government remains responsible for their Defence and there are many Serving Servicemen and women and their families and a large number of Veterans living in the Islands. The Governments of the Crown Dependencies have always been hugely supportive of the British Armed Forces and we are sure would jump at the chance to support their Armed Forces in this way.

The previously described synergy achieved by the close working cooperation of the Government and the Service Charitable Sector is well documented throughout the Report.

This synergistic effect would be greatly enhanced by the greater inclusion of the Private Sector. We note the early positive responses to the launch of the Corporate Covenant and we would wish to record our readiness to be involved in any campaign to increase Private Sector involvement and to exploit any subsequent commercial opportunities.

The part played by the Service Charitable Sector is well described throughout the Report. We are keen to ensure that all members of the Sector are given the opportunity to participate in this important work and to this end we are actively recruiting to ensure that all suitable members of the Sector are recruited to the Confederation. We are also working to ensure that our efforts are as effective as possible through a programme of enhanced cooperation and collaboration. This should allow us to integrate our efforts more effectively with Government and the Private Sector. This may generate a need at some stage to articulate more clearly the boundary between the responsibilities of Government and the role of the Service Charitable Sector.

The Report provides an impressive account of the way that certain objectives set in last year's Report have been delivered. We particularly welcome the increased focus on Mental Health although it will be important to put together detailed factual information on the various conditions and outcomes to ensure that the data is not taken out of context. We also need to ensure that the support for those suffering from PTSD being provided by Combat Stress in England and Scotland is replicated in Wales and Northern Ireland, and it should be noted that we have not yet achieved joined-up working between the NHS and Combat Stress in the provision of in-patient treatment and Community teams. However, we were pleased to see that Libor funding will allow the continued provision of a Nationwide 24 hour Mental Health helpline.

The provision of advanced prosthetics in England and Scotland seems to be well covered; there is a plan for a similar service in Wales; but Northern Ireland is not mentioned. This remains a cause for concern. A further concern is that the table of objectives and achievements at the end of the paper does not provide an easy to follow review of progress to date. There are a number of objectives that have been delayed without explanation and several others that have been merged or amended. We believe that there would be merit in producing an enhanced tabular form of achievement reporting that allows easier assessment of progress.

One area of intense activity relates to the Defence Recovery Capability. This has been a classic case of cooperation between Government, the Private Sector and the Service Charitable Sector led by Help for Heroes and The Royal British Legion but also involving major commitments by ABF- The Soldiers' Charity, Walking with the Wounded, Regular Forces Employment Association and several others. If this major capability is to be exploited to the full there is an urgent need to establish a process whereby any perceived gaps in areas of provision of support can be identified and filled; areas of overlap of provision can be identified and coordinated; and best practice can be established and embraced. This will involve bringing together the involved Government Departments, relevant members of the Service Charitable Sector, and supporting Private Sector companies with the specific purpose of integrating activity to deliver the best possible level of support to our Wounded, Injured and Sick Servicemen and women. This would seem to be a classic opportunity for the establishment of some form of Cobseo project team dedicated to the Wounded, Injured and Sick and charged with identifying

opportunities for further cooperation and collaboration in this area. Throughout the process we need to remember that the object must be to help those who have been injured to move on to new stages in their lives when they are able to do so. We need also to recognise that many will wish to do so away from a Service environment, and indeed that readiness could be the hallmark of successful transition. We must ensure the best care for those wounded in action or injured in other ways during their service, but also recognise that we do not lose our focus on the Armed Forces Community as a whole and particularly not on those who served before 2002.

These services to the severely wounded and to those with mental health problems throw into stark relief the continuing challenges that Britain faces in knowing how best to help its Veteran community. The number of Veterans will fall very significantly as the Second World War generation dies, but it will remain artificially inflated by the deliberately broad definition as to who is a Veteran. The question of eligibility for help – particularly given the range and complexity of the charitable sector which supplements, and in some cases replaces, governmental provision – already presents challenges, and threatens to become more so as joint charitable and governmental initiatives multiply. The Covenant aims to ensure that those who serve are not disadvantaged by their service. However, it must not create expectations that it cannot meet – as well as those which in the interests of equity it should not meet, while at the same time ensuring that those with real needs as a result of their service are properly supported. The call for some form of coordination for the care of Veterans and for a champion to hear their grievances remains unaddressed. These functions cannot be performed within the Ministry of Defence or by the charitable sector as it is currently constructed.

There are some other issues that will require closer attention over the next year if the terms of the Covenant are to be delivered. Service Accommodation for both single Servicemen and women, and married personnel remains a major source of dissatisfaction. The provision of satisfactory accommodation is a basic responsibility of Government and is clearly not being met. It is significant that nearly half of those questioned were dissatisfied and that this figure is unchanged from last year. Delivering the necessary improvements to accommodation is obviously a major financial commitment but a long term, resourced plan is required to ensure that it is delivered. There is something odd in the Government's readiness to institute other initiatives to support the Covenant, including the establishment of the Libor fund, while not addressing its basic responsibilities in this respect or moving to end the three-year funding pause in the modernisation of SFA and SLAM which was announced in 2011 and began in 2013-14.

We welcome the Help to Buy scheme but suggest that it be carefully monitored. In particular there is a possibility that junior ranks will understandably buy houses where they can afford to do so rather than where their units are based. In that case a well-intentioned scheme could militate against family solidarity, as Service Personnel commute long distances on say a weekly basis. The whole question of satisfactory transition to civilian life remains a cause of some concern. Progress in the provision of education in 'life' skills, such as personal financial management, remains slow. The FIMT Transition Study provided some excellent data on which to base improvements and the Ashcroft Study is eagerly awaited and, together with other work already underway, may provide the catalyst to deliver a fully integrated Transition Strategy.

The New Employment Model clearly has the potential to make significant changes to the lives of Servicemen and women and their families. As the implications of the review begin to emerge it will be important to keep the Service Charitable Sector informed so that they can assist with the transition. The handling of communications to the Armed Forces will have to be done with care and in such a way as to stress the NEM's compatibility with the Covenant. The Covenant in general means less to those who serve than do the specific terms and details of their service. The NEM is designed as an integrated package, where changes in one area are balanced by changes in another. The need to explain the whole must not be lost sight of in the individual delivery of specific components.

In this regard the staffing of the Personnel side of the Ministry of Defence remains inadequate given the tasks it is expected to fulfil. Both the Covenant and the NEM are rightly common to all three Armed Services, but the reduction of the central Defence Staff and the rustication of the Single Service Staffs have further unbalanced the Ministry's capacity to deliver across the range of Personnel support. This not only jeopardises the Covenant, it also makes little financial sense, given that Personnel costs consume a third of the Defence budget and are rising disproportionately.

We are surprised that in light of the well publicised policy to significantly increase the number of Reservists employed across the Armed Forces, there does not appear to be any obvious strategy to address the somewhat different challenges that are faced by Reservists and their families. This particularly relates to those Reservists who are deployed on operations and whose families, by the very nature of Reservist service, do not enjoy the normal welfare support functions and structures that are associated with regular service. We look forward to future Government work in this area and an understanding of how the third sector may contribute to both the work and the solution.

In summary, we are encouraged by the progress described in this report. We applaud the developments made in many areas and we look for further engagement in the areas requiring more effort. We have welcomed the opportunity to work side by side with Central Government, the Devolved Administrations and Local Government as well as the Private Sector in delivering the best possible level of support to all members of the Armed Forces Community and we look forward to continuing our efforts to deliver the goals of the Armed Forces Covenant.



CHAPTER 1 – HEALTHCARE

When we published the Covenant in 2011, we set out the standards of care we and others should aspire to. These are that:

- Members of the Armed Forces Community should enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as received by any other UK citizen in the area where they live;
- Personnel injured on operations should be treated in conditions which recognise the specific needs of Service personnel;
- Family members should retain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the Service person being posted;
- Veterans should receive priority treatment (subject to the clinical needs of others) in respect of treatment relating to a condition resulting from their service in the Armed Forces; and
- Veterans should be able to access mental health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture.

Operational care

For many, the healthcare of the Service community is synonymous with the care provided by the Defence Medical Services on the front line. In practice, this care extends from the point of wounding, through treatment and return to service, and then into civilian life. The quality of healthcare throughout remains high and is recognised as such. Nevertheless, the MOD, the NHS and other civilian health providers have further improved the various stages over the last year, and remain focused on other ways to improve it.

Healthcare for those injured on the battlefield begins at the point of injury, so all Service personnel have basic first aid training. One in four deployed combat Service personnel is trained as a Team Medic and is equipped to sustain casualties until they can be evacuated or until medical personnel arrive, using equipment such as combat tourniquets and blood clotting bandages.

The next priority is evacuation. In Afghanistan, the Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT) – undertaken by Chinook helicopter, with Apache escort – takes the Emergency Department to the patient, reducing the time before the patient receives Damage Control Resuscitation. An average time from call to casualty is 30 minutes – and landing directly at Camp Bastion Hospital minimises transfer times.



Camp Bastion Hospital

The clinical care that seriously injured personnel receive from the Camp Bastion Hospital is second to none, with figures on trauma cases admitted to the hospital showing a survival rate of 97% for UK Armed Forces personnel. The hospital stabilises critically injured people to enable them to be transferred back to the UK at the earliest clinically appropriate opportunity.

Strategic evacuation is provided by the RAF and includes the Critical Care in the Air Support Team (CCAST). Seriously ill patients are normally flown back to the UK within 24 hours, usually directly to Birmingham International Airport. This is just ten miles from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the primary reception facility for all Service personnel injured overseas and on operations. If necessary, the CCAST can

deliver concurrent care to multiple, critically injured, unconscious casualties on life support machines for the duration of the flight.

Within the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, there is a designated military ward where a combined team of Service and NHS personnel provide care to the mainly military patients. The Royal Centre for Defence Medicine enables the “military bubble” of administrative and welfare support, and oversees patients’ medical management. The Centre’s close partnership with the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust is exemplified by the 400 uniformed personnel who work throughout the organisation, delivering leading-edge management of polytrauma injuries.

Prosthetics

The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at **Headley Court** is the MOD's principal medical rehabilitation centre. Taking referrals directly from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, it provides a seamless transfer into rehabilitation with consultant-led multidisciplinary care for all patients. In May, £5M of improvement works at Headley Court were completed, including the refurbishment of wards and accommodation.

Each patient is provided with high quality tailored prosthetics if they are required, with adaptations manufactured on site by a longstanding contractor. In February 2013, the UK Government made £17.5M available to ensure that Headley Court and nine specialist NHS facilities in England would be able to provide both injured personnel and Veterans with the most technologically advanced prosthetics available, where it is clinically appropriate. In addition, the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel in England continues to ensure that all Veterans who have lost a limb as a result of their service are able to access the best possible limbs, subject to their clinical needs.

In June, a new national prosthetics service was launched by the Scottish Government to meet the needs of Scottish Service amputees. This offers Veterans improved support and a dedicated point of access to healthcare services through the limb fitting and rehabilitation centres in Edinburgh and Glasgow; with telehealth links to centres in Aberdeen, Inverness and Dundee. The service was launched as the Scottish Government promised to offer a better deal for amputees by accepting all of the recommendations in Dr Murrison's report on NHS Prosthetics Services for Veterans, particularly those from recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The service is expected to be fully operational by April 2014.

As part of its Package of Support for the Armed Forces, the Welsh Government is committed to NHS Wales matching the standard of prosthetics provided to injured Service personnel at Headley Court, when personnel leave the Armed Forces and become the responsibility of the NHS. The Welsh Government Minister for Health and Social Services wrote to Local Health Boards on 25 October asking them to take forward the recommendations in the All Wales Military Prosthetics Working Group's Report entitled Improved Prosthetic Services for Military Veterans, which recommended a formal commissioning policy for enhanced prosthetic services for Veterans and a further phase of work on improvements to prosthetic services as a whole, for both civilians and Veterans. Local Health Boards, through their joint work on the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee, have adopted the commissioning policy and will complete the further phase of work by the end of 2014.



Captain Dave Henson from the Royal Engineers was injured whilst serving as a Search Adviser in Afghanistan. An explosion in February 2011 resulted in the loss of both of his legs.

In 2013, the Government announced £17.5 million would be made available to enable injured military personnel and Veterans to be fitted with the most technologically-advanced prosthetics available, including the Genium bionic prosthetic system, where clinically appropriate. One of the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant is that special treatment is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most. The Genium offers wearers increased stability and mobility compared to other prosthetics.

Previously fitted with C-Legs, Dave Henson was fitted with his Genium limbs during an

admission to the Complex Trauma High Activity Group at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Headley Court in September 2013. Despite having used his Genium limbs for a short time, he is already noticing a difference: the Genium is more energy efficient, responds faster to muscle commands and enables movement with greater control. In addition to providing Dave with a greater function the Genium gives an increased ability to clear obstacles, negotiate stairs and walk backwards. Dave is also experiencing a reduced level of back pain.

Dave has been inspired by the new Genium prosthetics and is set to start studying for an MSc in Biomechanical Engineering and hopes to help design future prostheses.

In-Service healthcare

The MOD continues its work to establish a unified **Defence Primary Healthcare Service**. The new service will replace the three single Service organisations and improve patient care through more coherent policy making and direction; reducing costs by eliminating duplication and making more efficient use of resources; and ensuring more effective links with the NHS. An interim organisation was launched in April 2013 and the new service will be fully operational from April 2014.

In June 2012, the **Care Quality Commission** made a number of recommendations to improve the care provided by the Defence Medical Services, primarily to the infrastructure of medical and dental centres, and the process for safeguarding vulnerable patients. The MOD accepted all the recommendations and quickly addressed most of them. Work has now shifted to focus on completing the infrastructure improvements, planned through a combination of refurbishment and new buildings. The Defence Primary Healthcare organisation will provide a single focus for ensuring delivery of prioritised infrastructure improvements, including those premises which prompted the Care Quality Commission to raise concerns.

The MOD continues to progress the **Midlands Medical Accommodation project**, which by April 2014 will create a new community of excellence – clinical, research and training – at Defence Medical Services Whittington and in Birmingham. This has already allowed the Surgeon General’s strategic headquarters to be collocated with those of the Joint Medical Command and the recently formed Defence Primary Healthcare. In September 2013, it also delivered new modern single living accommodation with 736 bed spaces for use by military medical staff and trainees. Additional accommodation, as well as further training and learning facilities, will be delivered by April 2014.

Since last year’s report, MOD and DWP have worked together to review the number of places provided at Residential Training Colleges for **Specialist Vocational Training** for Service personnel who have suffered serious brain injuries. The review found that existing provision was proving suitable for the relatively few – low single figures at any one time – serving personnel who become significantly physically and cognitively disabled and/or highly dependent as a result of traumatic brain injury.

The MOD published a White Paper in July 2013 setting out how we will grow and sustain our **Reserve Forces** in the future. We made a number of specific healthcare commitments to be delivered by March 2014, including extending the Defence Medical Service’s occupational health provision to non-mobilised Reservists, which to date has not been provided on a consistent basis; and extending rehabilitation services to those individuals injured during Reserve training, in addition to the support already provided to those injured on operations. We will continue to develop the mental health support that we provide for Veterans and Reservists who have deployed on operations, in partnership with the Department of Health, the Devolved Administrations and the Service charities.

In December 2012, the Government contributed £1M from the new Armed Forces Covenant LIBOR fund to the **Fisher House** project at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham. Fisher House was officially opened in April 2013 by HRH The Prince Of Wales and includes 18 rooms, communal facilities and a private garden to provide a “home away from home” for the families of Service patients who are being treated at the hospital.



The Prince of Wales opening Fisher House

In-Service Recovery

The **Defence Recovery Capability** is delivered in partnership with Help for Heroes and The Royal British Legion, with the charities contributing £140M and £50M respectively over ten years. This constitutes the largest charitable contribution in British military history. But the contribution made by the charities has been more than just financial: they have both committed considerable time and staff to enable the system to operate successfully. The Defence Recovery Capability has been created specifically to facilitate either the swiftest return to duty or the smoothest transition to an appropriate skilled and supported civilian life for all seriously wounded, injured or long term sick Service personnel. It was launched in February 2010, reached full operating capability in the summer of 2013 and now supports personnel on a daily basis with their individual recovery plans.

There are six **Personnel Recovery Centres (PRCs)** located in Edinburgh, Colchester, Tidworth, Catterick, Sennelager in Germany and Lilleshall, predominately staffed and operated by Help for Heroes and in the latter case by The Royal British Legion. Lilleshall concentrates on rehabilitation through sport, via the "Battleback" programme. The PRCs provide a residential service to wounded, injured and sick personnel from across the Armed Forces undergoing recovery, as well as providing facilities for day attendees. Together, they can accommodate more than 170 residential personnel and over 100 day attendees.

The unique structure of each Service, requires them to undertake the DRC process in a manner appropriate to their needs, while maintaining a common goal. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions visited Tedworth House Recovery Centre in June 2013. As a result, DWP officials will be working with Help For Heroes on a number of initiatives to support the employment ambitions of wounded, injured and sick Service personnel, Veterans and their families.



Prince Harry and Prince William at the opening of Tedworth House

Eleven Army **Personnel Recovery Units** (PRUs) have been established throughout the UK and in Sennelager. These PRUs provide command and care to wounded, injured and sick Army personnel throughout their recovery, and deliver an outcome-focused individual recovery plan to the point where an individual can return to duty or transition to civilian life.

The Naval Service delivers recovery support to personnel who are long-term medically downgraded through the Naval Service Recovery Pathway (NSRP). This encompasses individual Recovery Cells in each Naval Base; Career Management Cells in both Naval Air Stations; and Recovery Troops in 40, 42 and 45 Royal Marine Commando Units. Hunter Company is part of the Commando training Centre at Lympstone and is a state of the art rehabilitation facility, which has received funding of £3.6M from the Skills Funding Agency. Hasler Company is part of the NSRP and deals with some of the most seriously wounded, injured and sick personnel in the Naval Service. Following an agreement between Help for Heroes and the MOD, the capability is being enhanced with the provision of new facilities. The Naval Service Recovery Centre will include a 60-bed accommodation building (Parker VC) and a rehabilitation facility (Endeavour) incorporating a swimming pool, hydrotherapy pool, support hub and eight consultation rooms, at a capital cost of £21M. The Naval Service Recovery Centre is supported by a commitment from Help For Heroes to fund the utility costs of both buildings and will be staffed by both the charity and the MOD. Endeavour is due to open in February 2014, completing the project.

The RAF's Personnel Recovery Unit is intended to ensure that wounded, injured and sick personnel have access to all the key services and resources needed to help them to return to duty or make a smooth transition to civilian life. Depending on need, bespoke recovery arrangements are made by the individual's parent unit or the RAF's PRU at HQ Air Command. The PRU coordinates the recovery process, drawing as necessary on support from Service charities and facilities provided by the RN and the Army. The overriding aim of the RAF's PRU is to provide tailored and unique recovery pathways for each member of the Service assigned to it.

As part of a co-ordinated programme looking at the recuperation of injured Service personnel and Veterans in Scotland, **Scottish Disability Sport** has been working closely with the Armed Forces and Help For Heroes to formalise the delivery of sport to personnel in Scotland, including through the recovery centre in Edinburgh, to involve injured Service personnel in a range of sports and adaptive activities.

Mental health

Much has been achieved in the mental health and wellbeing arena in the last year, as the following paragraphs record. Recent figures show that an increasing number of serving personnel are coming forward to engage with Armed Forces mental health services. This is a good sign that anti-stigma campaigns are succeeding and the trend means that this will continue to be an area to which the MOD gives a high priority.

The Government has now addressed all of **Dr Murrison's recommendations** to improve the mental health of Service personnel and Veterans. For the MOD this has included the use of Structured Mental Health Assessments incorporating a mental health questionnaire as part of routine and discharge medicals. Service personnel who have mental health issues while they are serving – or have them identified at their release medical – are able to access the Department of Community Mental Health for up to six months after discharge.

The Veterans and Reserves Mental Health Programme has now been established at the Department of Community Mental Health at Chilwell. The Veterans Information Service is now in place, making contact with new Veterans 12 months after their discharge, to make them aware of the mental health and other support available in the community. It is planned to enhance this service by linking it with the Royal British Legion knowledge database in the coming months.

Concerns have been raised that **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** is the largest mental health problem facing Service personnel. Research¹ has shown that the prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is around 4% within UK Service personnel, which is broadly similar to its prevalence in the general population in England. Alcohol misuse and common mental disorders are more commonly reported among UK Service personnel: the prevalence of common mental disorders in the Armed Forces is comparable to that of other occupational groups, but we recognise that alcohol misuse in the Services is higher compared to the general population. Research has been commissioned to understand why the rates of harmful usage are higher, to better articulate the impacts of high alcohol use on the individual, associated peer groups and the organisation.

The MOD hosted the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) **Mental Health Conference** in July 2013. This provided the opportunity to debate recent research findings relating to the mental health of serving and former members of the Armed Forces. Every study conducted by the MOD has found that the risk of suicide amongst the Armed Forces Community is lower than among the general population. We publish information on suicide and open verdict deaths among the UK Regular Armed Forces, and the numbers and mortality rates for suicide and open verdicts among first Gulf War and Falkland Veterans². In addition, a study of the causes of death of Veterans of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is underway and will run for the lifetime of those on the study. We expect that the initial results of this study will be published in 2014. The Conference also provided a forum to discuss the launch of phase 4 of the KCMHR large-scale independent longitudinal study which began in 2003 and which looks at the experiences of Armed Forces personnel who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The results of the latest phase of the study should be available by the end of 2016.

Also in July 2013, the then Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans hosted a **Mental Health Summit** following on from the KCMHR Mental Health Conference. The Summit brought together key stakeholders from the Veterans mental health arena to discuss current and future provision for Veterans' mental health support. Following this summit, further work is ongoing to improve support for Veterans with mental health issues, including through closer collaboration with the NHS and Service charities.

In England, the NHS has now established ten **Veterans' mental health teams** across the country, providing mental health services that are focussed on the needs of Veterans. A National Veterans' Mental Health Network has been established to co-ordinate best practice and knowledge from the teams to help improve the wider delivery of mental health services to this community. One of the teams – Veterans First community mental health team from Colchester – won the National Care of Veterans Award on 21 May at the Military and Civilian Health Partnership Awards in Cardiff. Veterans First is provided by North Essex Partnership, the local mental health service, working with Combat Stress, Mind, Rethink, the MOD's Department of Community Mental Health at Colchester Garrison

¹ The King's Centre for Military Health Research 15 Year Report published in September 2010

² National Statistic published by Defence Statistics, MOD, on 28 March 2013

and Enable East. The success of this project reflects the excellent partnership working that has been put in place across the NHS, Service charities, other mental health charities and the MOD to ensure that Veterans receive the best possible health care.

Combat Stress has been commissioned by the NHS in England and Scotland to provide acute PTSD mental health services to Veterans. The Department of Health in England has also renewed funding of the mentoring service for Veterans with mental health problems – ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’ – that is provided by Timebank, a national volunteering charity.

Through LIBOR funding of £600K, **Mental Health First Aid** is providing training to the Armed Forces Community in the UK. This project is designed to provide the basis for increased mental health resilience among Veterans and the families of Veterans and serving personnel throughout the UK. SSAFA is delivering the project in a collaborative partnership between themselves, Mental Health First Aid England, Combat Stress and the Royal British Legion. The project will initially train approximately 180 instructors from across five target groups: health and social care professionals, voluntary and charitable services, friends and family, Veterans and serving personnel. Once trained, these individuals will deliver training in their own communities in order to train approximately 6,600 Armed Forces Community Mental Health First Aiders.

The Scottish Government’s new **mental health strategy** includes a number of commitments which will benefit Veterans, such as improved responses to trauma and better access to psychological therapies. A new strategy and action on prevention of suicide will be published by the end of 2013. Working with Veterans Scotland, Royal British Legion Scotland, Scottish Association for Mental Health and the Mental Health Foundation Scotland, the Scottish Government is also supporting the development of a network of support groups across Scotland to provide safe and effective support for Veterans with mental health problems.

In April 2013, the Government extended its support for the **Big White Wall** online intervention website, provided in partnership with the Tavistock and Portman Foundation Trust; and the Department of Health and the MOD have committed funding until 2015. Extra capacity on the website is also being funded by Help For Heroes. The Welsh Government also provides funding to the free 24-hour mental health Community Advice Listening Line which is available to Veterans and is accessible from anywhere in the world..

In July 2013, the MOD, the UK Departments of Health and the mental health charity **Combat Stress** held their first Strategic Relationship Working Group, to encourage joint working on the mental health of Veterans. The Government has supported the work of Combat Stress through the commitment of £2.2M from the LIBOR Fund. £2M of this will be used to add experienced community psychiatric nurses trained in addiction management to each of 14 Combat Stress Community Outreach teams for a period of three years; and £200K has been provided to continue provision of a 24-hour mental health telephone helpline providing a stigma-free first approach for help with mental health issues across the UK.

The Scottish Government continues to fund the provision of **specialist mental health services** in partnership with NHS Scotland and Combat Stress at £1.224M per year. These services have been enhanced by the introduction in September 2012 of a six-week intensive Post Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment programme for Veterans resident in Scotland. In addition, the Scottish Government currently funds the Combat Stress community outreach services across Scotland at £200K per year. Nearly 1,000 visits were

made by Community Outreach Teams over the last year, providing valuable treatment and welfare support to Veterans and their families.

The **Veterans First Point** service in Lothian continues to flourish with Lucy Abraham, service lead, winning Healthcare Civilian of the Year at the 2013 Military Civilian Health Partnership Awards. The Scottish Government, working with NHS Grampian, Highland and Tayside, is developing plans for the roll out of this model in those areas by 2015, building on existing local networks and expertise to improve access to mental health services.

The **All Wales Veterans Health and Wellbeing Service** in Wales provides dedicated Veteran therapists in each Health Board area and additional local access to specialist outpatient care for Veterans with mental health problems, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It can also help signpost Veterans and their families to other support that they might need. The Service has established a unified care pathway, joining up statutory and non-statutory sectors and acting as a single point of referral. Treatment options also include commissioning the services of Combat Stress, which the Welsh Government also funds, to provide community-based nurse-led support groups. The National Assembly for Wales Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee has recommended that prisoners in Welsh prisons who are Veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder should receive the full benefits of the new specialist Veterans' mental health service. A Pathway to Care for Veteran Prisoners will be published during the latter part of 2013.

Civilian healthcare

From April 2013, the new commissioning structures in the **National Health Service** in England created a team of Armed Forces healthcare commissioners. This means that a single organisation is commissioning secondary and community health services required by the Armed Forces in England and eligible families. To ensure a joined-up approach, the Veterans Minister and the Under Secretary of State for Health meet regularly to discuss relevant issues around Armed Forces healthcare. In addition, medical practitioners and officials in the MOD and UK Departments of Health have continued to work together – including through the MOD/UK Departments of Health Partnership Board, which brings together the relevant officials from across the whole of the UK – to ensure that the new arrangements maintain the world-class secondary care that is provided to Service personnel and that healthcare issues impacting on families, reservists and Veterans continue to be addressed.

Ministers in England, Scotland and Wales agreed that the recipients of compensation under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme for injuries which result in infertility should be entitled to appropriate treatment, including **IVF**. The recommended three cycles of IVF for this specific group is available in England and Scotland. In Wales, eligible Armed Forces personnel can access two free cycles of IVF treatment and can apply for further cycles as an Individual Patient Funding Request to the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee. Whilst basing decisions regarding the delivery of IVF treatment on clinical need, Welsh Ministers would expect clinicians in Health Boards to look at each individual case involving Armed Forces personnel. Welsh Ministers have asked for a review of the uptake to be undertaken in 12 months' time.

The Scottish Government has confirmed that Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and Glasgow Southern General Hospital will operate **RAMP** (Reception Arrangements for Military Patients) centres as and when this is required.

The Welsh Government's Department for Health and Social Services continues to implement the recommendations in the **Health Inspectorate Wales** report entitled Healthcare and the Armed Forces Community in Wales. As an example, Veterans Mental Health clinical Networks and local fora have been established in each Local Health Board. The report commissioned by the Welsh Government on the utility of establishing a residential centre in Wales was published in September and Welsh Ministers will consider the recommendations and their formal response.

The **e-learning package** produced in partnership between the Department of Health in England and the Royal College of General Practitioners has been refreshed and the training can be accessed by all GPs and others who need to know about the delivery of health services to the Armed Forces, their families and Veterans.

The Scottish Government has developed a **Veterans Health Zone** on the NHS Inform website, which provides information on specific NHS support for Veterans in Scotland. The site also provides Health professionals with helpful information on how best to signpost and treat Veterans in need of primary and secondary healthcare. Work is underway to improve awareness of and access to the website.

Through the Welsh Government's **Substance Misuse Delivery Plan**, guidance has been developed for commissioners and treatment agencies to improve Veterans' access to substance misuse treatment services. The document was subject to a twelve week consultation period throughout the summer and the final guidance document is scheduled to be published in December following consideration of the responses. The Welsh National Database for Substance Misuse collects information on Veterans attending substance misuse treatment services (where they self identify). This information will inform commissioners of the prevalence of substance misuse amongst Veterans and the future planning and commissioning of substance misuse services.

The MOD is looking at ways to improve the **medical records** available to practitioners treating new Veterans. By the end of 2013, once an individual has registered with a civilian GP, their NHS record will be sent to the GP with a letter explaining that they have been under the care of the Defence Medical Services. The letter will also give details of how the GP can obtain the individual's Service medical record if it is required. We are working to develop our systems further, so that a summary of the individual's Service medical care will be included with their NHS record when a former Service person registers with the civilian GP.

In June, a new GP **Registration Form** was issued for new registrants to record previous service in the Armed Forces – including Reserve service – which will enable ex-Service personnel to benefit from the Scottish Government's commitment to priority treatment for Veterans for conditions directly related to their Service.

The Scottish Government is providing **Community Health Index** numbers to all serving personnel based in Scotland, to enable equal access to NHS medical care and appropriate screening services. This will further improve the effectiveness and efficiencies in information sharing between NHS Scotland and the MOD, and vice versa, to enable safe, person-centred healthcare. Development of IT links with NHS England for commissioning purposes will prove to be beneficial and complementary to the ongoing work between the Defence Medical Services and NHS Scotland.



CHAPTER 2 – EDUCATION

The Covenant sets the following goals with respect to education:

- 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 in which they live;
- There should 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; and
- Service personnel should expect to receive appropriate training and education for both personal and professional development.

Removing the disadvantage that Service children may face in terms of their education continues to be a key element of the Covenant. During the past twelve months, the Department for Education (DfE) has widened access to the Service Pupil Premium to include any child in England who was eligible in 2011 but whose serving parent has for whatever reason since left the Service; and the MOD's Support Fund for State Schools with Service Children has issued a further £3M to schools throughout the UK.

Increasing the eligibility to the **Service Pupil Premium** has meant that around 7,000 maintained schools in England have had the opportunity to develop their overall provision, to the benefit of some 58,000 Service children on their rolls. The value of the Service Pupil Premium has increased to £300 this year. It is available to support Service children in state-maintained schools, Academies and Free Schools in England by meeting more effectively, from reception to year 11, the pastoral needs of Service children which arise from Service-induced mobility and deployments. DfE has made a significant financial contribution to Service families through the Service Pupil Premium: it provided funding of £13M for the Service Pupil Premium in 2012-13 and is on track to provide £17M in 2013-14. Since April 2013, provision has been made for pupils who were eligible for the Service Pupil Premium since 2011 to continue to be eligible if their parents are no longer members of the Armed Forces, have died in Service or have divorced.

The Service Pupil Premium does not apply in Scotland because the local authority education system there arranges and finances additional support needs for vulnerable children differently and the Scottish Government considers that schools are therefore already resourced to meet the needs of Service children. Schools in England are also already highly resourced to meet the needs of Service children through the DfE high-needs funding block. This helps pupils who, for whatever reason, face issues at school including social or emotional needs.

We have begun to gather and share evidence of best practice in the use of the Service Pupil Premium with information sharing days being held in North Yorkshire and Wiltshire. Examples of how the Service Pupil Premium is being used are also shown on the DfE website. There is more work to be done on communicating the existence of the Service Pupil Premium and in providing evidence of how effectively it has been used in some areas. Ofsted is being asked to report on the use of Service Pupil Premium in schools.



Graham Cutter, the Deputy Headteacher of Alverstoke Church of England (Aided) Junior School in Hampshire, has used the Service Pupil Premium and funding from two successful bids to the MOD's State School Support Fund to provide support to pupils and families.

"At both Alverstoke Infant and Junior Schools, deployment is a major factor in the lives of our Service children. We decided to use the SPP to mitigate the emotional effects of a parent being away on deployment, in

order to minimise the impact on our pupils' educational attainment.

"Our Emotional Literacy Support Assistant has a morning once a week solely for working with our Service children, and we have a dedicated email account which allows Service families to notify us of upcoming deployments. We also have recently appointed a 'Service Link Worker', who will act as the first port of call for Service families and coordinate all of our Armed Forces projects. We hold a one-to-one with the child prior to the deployment and work with them to communicate with their parent while they are away. Putting up a "Services display" in the school entrance, including photos of children with parents currently on operations, has given them an identity within the school community. This is making a real difference. We recently had a little girl who was struggling to cope with her father's deployment, which led to a

number of behavioural issues. Together we emailed her dad to celebrate successes at school and this has really helped her to handle his absence.

“Supporting the whole family is important to both schools. As many families live off base, we find that some parents feel isolated. By setting up coffee mornings for Service parents they have been able to build up friendships in the local area. These events also give us a great opportunity to find out what we can do for our families. It is also important for us to ensure that the whole school community understands and celebrates the role of the Services and the job that they do. The parent of a Year 6 pupil recently gave a talk to our school assembly on day-to-day life in Afghanistan, which offered the children a very different perspective on the images that they may have seen in the media.

“We are really proud of the work we are doing with our Service community and feel it is so important for schools to be aware of the times our pupils, and their families, need that bit of extra support.”

A further £3M was released in the past twelve months from the MOD's **Support Fund** to schools throughout the UK to help them mitigate issues caused by exceptional mobility and deployment. This brings funds distributed to schools across the UK to a total of £9M. Since 2011, a total of 397 applications have been supported by the Fund. The MOD's Directorate of Children and Young People is currently undertaking an audit of the successful applicants from the 2012 funding round. Their report is likely to be concluded by February 2014 and the results will be shared with various partners throughout the UK.

The Directorate of Children and Young People leads on the Education of Service Children Change Programme, which includes projects focussing on the move of Service children from Service Children's Education **schools in Germany** back to the UK, as well as those affected by unit moves within the UK. The team is building on the strong links that have already been established with education providers, local authorities, DfE and the Devolved Administrations, as well as with the MOD team that is leading on matters relating to the return of the Armed Forces from Germany, to help ensure a smooth transition for Service children moving back to UK schools. DfE is working closely with the MOD and the local authorities most likely to see an increase in pupil population from children returning from Service schools in Germany. DfE is one of the key stakeholders in the work of the Education of Service Children Change Programme, along with the Education Departments of the Devolved Administrations.

A **joint conference** was held this year between the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Scottish Government and the MOD at which one of the main objectives was to consider the needs of Service children. The conference gave schools and councils an opportunity to share best practice, including examples of recent re-basing activity and successful schemes using grants from the Support Fund. Further conferences are planned during the coming year to continue to share best practice from across the UK.

On the issue of Service induced mobility, the MOD has worked with North Yorkshire Council, local authorities, schools, Service Children's Education and UK education departments to design a standardised **Pupil Information Profile** that can be used when Service pupils move schools. The Profile was introduced in September 2013 and is now being trialled in a number of schools in the UK. One of the key issues affecting Service children is that they may move schools more frequently than their peers. This can result in data relating to pupil progress being delayed or mislaid, which may lead to the needs of Service children not being recognised until some time after they have settled into their

new schools. The use of the Profile will help to mitigate this disadvantage and, where appropriate, will also include information on Special Educational Needs.



Montgomery School at Hohne Station in Germany

The MOD continues to work with the DfE on the new **Special Educational Needs (SEN)** Code of Practice. It is hoped this will result in a greater understanding and appreciation of the specific needs of Service children with SEN by all those with statutory responsibilities towards them. Between July 2012 and July 2013, the MOD's Children's Education Advisory Service received 1,225 requests for advice, information and support on SEN matters, 178 of which resulted in extensive casework. In response to concerns raised by Service families, the new SEN Code of Practice, which is due to be published next year, is expected to include for the first time a section, agreed with the MOD, aimed specifically at addressing the needs of Service children, along with a number of broader improvements which will also benefit Service children. The section focusses on the difficulties faced by children with SEN because of Service family mobility and includes: reducing the timeframe for putting in place a plan to meet a child's needs and sharing information; a new duty on local authorities and clinical commissioning groups to commission services jointly to reflect local needs; and a duty on local authorities to publish their local offer. Schools and local authorities will be under a duty to take account of the guidance in the Code when making provision for Service children with SEN.

Revisions have been made to the **Schools Admissions Code** in England, regarding admissions to infant classes. As a result of the changes, admission authorities are now permitted to admit children of UK Service personnel, even when the class into which the child will be admitted would exceed the statutory maximum of 30 pupils. As well as the exception to the infant class size limit, DfE has made changes to help tackle other issues raised by Service families. These include provision for Service families to be able to apply for school places outside the normal admissions round and, for families of Service personnel with a confirmed posting to an area, admission authorities must allocate a place in advance of the family arriving. DfE has placed a duty on admission authorities to ensure that arrangements in their area support the removing of disadvantage for Service

children. Arrangements must be appropriate for the area and be described in the local authority's composite prospectus. This is welcome news but there is still more work to be done – MOD and DfE officials continue to work together to ensure a greater understanding of how the Code can mitigate the possible disadvantages faced by Service children. A number of issues in England need to be clarified, including matching school catchment areas to assignment orders. With more schools in England becoming their own admission authorities, we will continue to monitor and engage early to ensure more positive outcomes for Service children. Between July 2012 and July 2013, there were 1,093 enquiries from Service parents about admissions appeals, 320 of which were supported at appeal. In Wales, a new School Admissions Code came into force in July 2013. Under this, admission authorities continue to be required to treat a Service family as meeting the residency criteria for a school catchment area if they can provide evidence that they will shortly be posted there. In addition, from 2014-15, children from Service families will be treated as exceptions for infant class size legislation purposes, where admission to school is sought outside the normal admissions round.



Grahame Shepherd is the headteacher at Le Cateau Community Primary School at Catterick in North Yorkshire. The school has a large Service population with around 66% of the children coming from Service families and is a local authority Leading School for Inclusion. The Le Cateau motto of "Equally Important, Equally Different" recognises the diversity of the children attending the school who come from a range of cultural backgrounds with up to 16 different nationalities represented.

Last year the school's two reception classes were both at their maximum pupil admission number of 30 when Grahame was approached to accept another Service child whose family had just been posted to the area.

As a result of changes made in the 2012 Schools Admissions Code, the school was able to accept this additional child as an "excepted pupil" bringing one of the reception class sizes to 31. With the moves that are expected to take place in the Catterick area, Grahame anticipates that this will not be the only example of this taking place.

The Scottish Government chairs the **Scottish Service Children Strategic Working Group** which supports the educational needs of Service Children in Scotland, particularly around the impact of MOD rebasing on local authorities in Scotland. The group's activities include: promoting applications to the MOD's Support Fund for Schools – resulting in successful Scottish bids for around £635K being awarded; and supporting the post of National Transitions Officer, which enables a Scotland-wide perspective to be shared across local authorities. The post has helped in establishing support networks to assist those authorities most affected by the Strategic Defence and Security Review; providing a Scottish perspective on the development of a Pupil Information Profile for children from Armed Forces Families who need to move schools as a consequence of posting or major rebasing. Trials are underway which include using the Pupil Information Profile for children moving schools within Scotland and across education systems in England, Northern Ireland and Germany. Advice has also been given on the Scottish context at transition points in education stages: nursery to primary; primary to secondary; and secondary to higher or further education.

The Welsh Government established a **Standing Committee for Service Children in Schools in Wales** in November 2012. The Committee brings together educationalists, Local Authority officers, Welsh Government officials, MOD personnel and welfare officers. The Welsh Government is committed to working closely with the Committee to identify and better understand issues connected to the education of Service children in Wales. A forward work programme to support the Committee has been developed. This involves activities which will help to obtain a greater understanding of the issues facing Service children in education; improve information on the number of school children from Service families in Wales; address challenges around school admissions; improve dialogue between bases and local communities; alleviate the concerns of families moving to Wales; and maximise Welsh interest in the MOD's Support Fund.

Proposed **curricular changes** throughout the UK may also impact on Service children due to their Service induced mobility. Increasing the variation in the educational system is likely to result in greater discontinuity for Service children when they move. We will continue to work with relevant partners to monitor this developing situation. In Wales, the Standing Committee for Service Children work programme will produce an overview document on education in Wales which will contain information about the curricular differences between England and Wales.

The Scottish Government has provided guidance for the MOD to issue on the support available for **Scottish domiciled students studying elsewhere in the UK**. All students who are family members of Service personnel who were living in Scotland when they joined up but wish to study elsewhere in the UK continue to be able to access the standard package of tuition fee loans to cover higher rate fees up to £9K and student support from the Students Award Agency for Scotland.

It is yet to be seen how **Raising the Participation Age** in England will impact on Service children and young people, particularly those who are subject to Service induced mobility. We will work with the DfE to monitor this to ensure Service children and young people are not disadvantaged.

The MOD commitment to recognising the needs of Service children has been cemented by the formation of the Education of Service Children **Change Programme**. This consists of a series of projects, led by the Directorate of Children and Young People, aimed at engaging with the relevant authorities throughout the UK to manage the changing footprint of the Armed Forces in the UK and the impact this will have on educational services for Service children. The programme will look at Service children's educational needs and issues from Early Years Foundation Stage right through to Further Education, both in the UK and overseas, and is due to report in late 2014.

We are implementing **Military Ethos Alternative Provision** programmes for schools in England. Our ambition is for pupils to use the benefits of a military ethos, such as self-discipline, teamwork, and leadership to achieve a good education. Our providers employ Service leavers as instructors and mentors to help the most disengaged and disadvantaged pupils. This provides valuable employment opportunities for Service leavers, and also helps schools understand the issues faced by Service families and their children.

One of the priorities for the **Children and Young People's Trust Board** is to ensure that the voice of young people is taken into account. The Tri-Service Youth Forum held at Baden Powell House in London in November 2012 was an initial step in developing an effective means for young people to be involved in influencing decisions affecting them.

The culmination of the event gave participants the opportunity to present their views to a panel including representatives from the Directorate of Children and Young People, the three Services, the Families Federations, the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund and The Royal British Legion. The messages were very effectively delivered and the panel members undertook to take the issues back to their respective organisations. Many of the points raised are already forming the basis of further work.

In June 2012, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister announced the **cadet expansion programme** to increase the number of cadet units in state-funded schools in England. The DfE and the MOD have provided £10.85M for the equipment and training of staff.



The Minister for the Armed Forces visiting the new cadet unit at Westcliff High School

In offering challenging and constructive education and employment opportunities, the Armed Forces enable young people, to whom the duty to participate applies under Raising the Participation Age legislation, to meet their obligation by undertaking an apprenticeship as part of their military training. The Armed Forces are one of the largest providers of **apprenticeships** in the UK. Between 2011 and 2012, around 7,500 apprenticeships and 2,700 advanced apprenticeships were completed by Armed Forces personnel. The Army apprenticeship provision was inspected by Ofsted in February and March 2013 and the overall effectiveness was judged to be 'good'.

We recognise that the ability to gain **nationally accredited qualifications** throughout a career in the Armed Forces benefits the individual during their service and enhances their future employment prospects, ready for resettlement into civilian life. Excluding apprenticeships, during 2011 and 2012, over 27,000 qualifications, ranging from NVQ level 2 to Postgraduate Degrees and Higher Degrees were gained by members of the Armed Forces through their Service training. Efforts continue to explore new training and accreditation opportunities for Armed Forces personnel.

Collaborative investigative work is ongoing between the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the MOD on **accrediting military skills**, so that those leaving the Armed Forces can best set out their skills to potential employers.

Whilst Service personnel can achieve recognised qualifications by undertaking relevant Service related training, elective learning is supported through the use of the **Standard Learning Credit** scheme which is designed to support small scale learning activities to enhance educational or vocational achievement up to a maximum of £175 per financial year. This funding can be used towards the cost of course fees, examinations or support. Between 2011 and 2012, around 14,000 Service personnel claimed some £1.95M of scheme funding. The scheme currently provides funding support for Armed Forces personnel in full-time service but, from April 2014, we will extend access to the Standard Learning Credit scheme to all reservists.

Across the UK, the **Enhanced Learning Credit** scheme gives financial help to Service leavers (who meet the specified criteria) towards the cost of achieving a qualification at level 3 or above. In addition, the Further and Higher Education Commitment scheme pays the tuition fees of those Service leavers living in England, Scotland or Wales when they study for a first full level 3 qualification, a first undergraduate or foundation degree, or a first HNC or HND. Both schemes came into force in September 2012 and apply from academic year 2012-13 onwards.



CHAPTER 3 – HOUSING

The Covenant sets the following goals with respect to housing:

- Where Serving personnel are entitled to publicly-provided accommodation, it should be of good quality, affordable and suitably located;
- Service personnel should have priority status in applying for Government-sponsored affordable housing schemes and Service leavers should retain this status for a period after discharge;
- 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; and
- 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.

The 2012 Report highlighted the continuing importance of housing for Service personnel and their families. Since then, the MOD has made further, significant progress to improve both the overall condition of the estate and the level of support provided to Service families. During the course of the year, we have taken steps to improve the management of Service Family Accommodation (SFA) and the oversight of Single Living Accommodation (SLA). Both are now vested within the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) to provide a more holistic approach.

The results of the 2013 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey recorded that **satisfaction with the overall standard of Service accommodation** is unchanged compared to 2012 and 2011, with 57% satisfied with the standard of their Service accommodation. Compared with 2007, the increase in satisfaction had improved by 9%. And 68% of respondents were satisfied with the value for money of Service accommodation. Because occupants had not been asked their views on the breadth of SFA delivery issues for some time and in order for the Department to get a better understanding, it was decided to introduce a new, regular, customer satisfaction survey. This began in June 2013, and the early results have been encouraging. The survey, which is being carried out by an independent company, seeks the views of 200 randomly selected occupants each month to eleven key questions covering SFA policy and service delivery issues. The results from the first three surveys were released in September and the key measurement question indicated that, taking everything into account, 74% of those contacted were satisfied with the service provided by DIO and its industry partners. With that benchmark figure in place, the survey results are now being used to instigate changes to further improve SFA services and the occupant experience, as well as alerting key stakeholders to issues which are uppermost in the minds of Service personnel and their families.

There has been sustained progress made on improvements to SFA over the past five years through targeted programmes of **upgrades and improvements**, with nearly 98% of UK SFA now in good condition (Standard 1 or 2 for Condition). During financial year 2012-13, £63M was spent upgrading 850 SFA to the top standard, with a further 3,250 benefitting from improvements such as new kitchens, bathrooms, boilers and double glazing. In addition, as part of the Government's contribution to the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target, more than 12,000 properties received improved loft insulation during 2012-13, providing more energy efficient homes. Current and past holdings of SFA are shown in the following table:

Surveyed condition of SFA in the United Kingdom at 31 March each year						
	Total stock (thousands of dwellings)					
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
UK Total	48.8	49.9	49.1	49.1	49.0	49.4
Standard 1 for condition	28.4	15.8	23.4	22.1	21.1	23.0
Standard 2 for condition	17.4	25.6	21.3	23.8	24.8	23.9
Standard 3 for condition	2.0	2.4	1.2	1.2	1.0	0.6
Standard 4 for condition	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1
Not recorded	0.8	5.8	3.0	1.7	1.9	1.8

Overseas housing is not generally in as good condition as in the UK. In Germany, some 59% of the 10,746 units are in good condition. There are smaller holdings in both Gibraltar (250) and the South Atlantic Islands (84), of which some 29% and 11% respectively are in good condition. But in Cyprus some 96% of the 1,904 units are in good condition.

The **Capital Purchase Programme** continued apace during 2012-13, with £150M being committed to allow the purchase of more than 700 additional high quality properties for use as SFA in areas of high demand such as Birmingham, Cornwall, Hereford, Lincolnshire, Oxford and Salisbury Plain. Many of the properties are part of new developments and are progressively becoming available for allocation to Service families. All of them are due to be delivered by March 2014.



Warrant Officer Class 1, Yeoman of Signals (Electronic Warfare) Carolyn Thompson and her family have recently moved into a new SFA property in North Hykeham, Lincoln. The houses at North Hykeham are part of a capital house purchase programme, which enables the MOD to buy new properties direct from housing developers in areas of high demand – thereby creating new SFA ‘patches’ of high quality modern Service homes.

“Moving house in the military is never an easy task. Having only moved a year earlier before being offered an assignment back at RAF Waddington, this left me with a

certain amount of trepidation. During my Service career I have lived in four different military properties and some have been worse than others. My apprehension was magnified given that I had only submitted an application in the January for SFA which I required in the April. I was not hopeful!

“After a few weeks of tentatively waiting for an offer to come through via the easy to follow online process, I finally had an answer. I was over the moon after being offered a brand new David Wilson Home, detached and with a garage.

“On the first day of the move in, taking over the new SFA, I was bowled over, as my front door had a huge blue ribbon on it, there were cones laid out on the street awaiting my removals van, and the DIO Housing Officer arrived on time and, bearing a bottle of champagne. I could not believe my eyes when he opened the front door to see the interior, it was pristine and nothing like my previous SFA.

“After about an hour of being in the house and the removals unloading, I got a knock at my door to be greeted by the HIVE ladies, Station Commander of RAF Waddington, a David Wilson Home representative and WO Siddens, the Service Community Support Officer. I received a bouquet of flowers and yet another bottle of champagne from the HIVE. I subsequently found out I was the first occupant of these quarters, hence the amazing reception that I received. The David Wilson Home Site Manager, Richard, greeted me and told me if I needed anything at all to let him know.

“The whole experience for my family was second to none – I could not have asked for a smoother transition, everyone was extremely helpful and reassuring. I have one more move before my tenure in the Army ends. I suspect that this one will be the most memorable.”

As far as **Single Living Accommodation** is concerned, just over 2,000 bedspaces were modernised as part of the SLA Modernisation programme in 2012-13; and a further 1,914 will be delivered in 2013-14. All of these are single rooms with en-suite facilities. The overall percentage of SLA in good condition (defined as Standard for Condition and Scale 1 and 2) has increased from 36% to 41% over the last five years. More work will follow in this area under the Army basing plan.

The MOD owns some 145,000 SLA bed-spaces, of which 126,000 are in the UK and 19,000 are overseas as at March 2012. The condition of these properties as at 1 April 2012 is set out in the following table:

	Standard 1 for condition	Standard 2 for condition	Standard 3 for condition	Standard 4 for condition
UK	31%	13%	19%	37%
Overseas	18%	8%	10%	64%
Total	29%	13%	18%	40%

Financial year 2013-14 is the first year of the three-year funding pause announced in August 2011, which removed £47M from the SFA Upgrade and £56M from the SLA Modernisation Programmes. These reductions have been offset by the provision of **£100M of additional funding** in this financial year – £60M to be spent on SFA and £40M to be spent on SLA – which was announced in the 2012 Budget. The MOD will continue to look for opportunities to mitigate the impact of years two and three of the funding pause.

The additional funding will allow for the purchase of new SFA properties and for around 650 existing SFA properties to be upgraded to Standard 1 for Condition. To demonstrate our commitment to providing high quality SFA, properties below Standard for Condition 2 are normally no longer allocated in the UK.

The **Army Basing Plan** was announced in March 2013 and sets out the future laydown of the Army as it moves back to the UK from Germany and reorganises into its Army 2020 structure. The Footprint Strategy will configure the estate to match the Future Force 2020 laydown through the delivery of additional high quality accommodation under the Army Basing Plan, Royal Navy Centres of Specialisation laydown, Defence change programmes and other Ministerially announced commitments. Through a combination of the Army Basing Plan, the Defence Change Programme and programmed projects, some £1.85 billion will be spent on accommodation by 2020-21, in order to deliver 18,500 SLA bedspaces and 3,000 SFA, with a further £500M committed to be spent on living accommodation over the next ten years.

In last year's report, the MOD undertook to change when personnel may **retain Service Family Accommodation**. This action was completed in January 2013, when the relevant MOD regulations were amended to extend the circumstances in which personnel may retain SFA to include when the spouse or partner of a Service person has to give a specified period of notice to an employer or is in higher education.

The introduction of an **automated self-preference system** has made improvements to the SFA allocation process by allowing Service personnel to see online 'estate agent' type details for available SFA, to register their top three preferences for their new home and to book their house moves. More than 97% of applications are now made electronically.

The introduction of a second offer process in May 2013 was a further enhancement. Significant increases in the number of moves during the 2012 Christmas holiday period and during this year's summer surge were handled smoothly. The Housing Allocations Service Centre is providing a higher, and more consistent, standard of delivery than previously. Building on these successes, and following consultation with key stakeholders, a number of enhancements have recently been made to the electronic system aimed at further improving the chances of applicants being offered one of their preferences, while respecting local chain of command agreements.

The MOD has recently completed a programme to improve local customer support through the provision of 17 **Customer Assistance Points** across England. Through a trained coordinator with close links to Unit Welfare and HIVE staff, each Customer Assistance Point provides advice directly to Service families in support of both the Maintenance Contractor and Defence Infrastructure Organisation Helpdesks. Early indications are that the new arrangements are working well.

The annual life-cycle improvement programme has been funded to historical norms of £15M and new funding of £27M has been earmarked to support the SFA **Service Delivery Improvement Plan** which was developed in consultation with key stakeholders. This plan will introduce a series of initiatives over the next few months, including total patch management, under which designated local housing officers will be empowered for all aspects of service delivery on the SFA "patch" for which they are responsible. Two areas of particular concern to Service families – dissatisfaction with the standard of their new home on occupation and effectively tackling mould – will also be addressed as part of the plan.

A **Steering Group** to the Defence Infrastructure Board is being established to improve the management and governance of SFA. The Steering Group will be chaired at Ministerial level and will focus on improving the delivery of Service accommodation and oversee progress against the Service Delivery Improvement Plan.

At present, **Crown tenancies** of housing are excluded from the assured tenancy regime under the Housing Act 1988. Crown tenants, including Service personnel occupying SFA, do not at present have the benefit of statutory protection and thus have no security of tenure. This means that they can be asked to move out of SFA having had tenure for less than six months. In July 2013, the Government signalled its intent to remove Crown exemption so that Crown tenants – in the case of the MOD, Service personnel – are afforded the same statutory rights as tenants in the private rental sector. This change means that security of tenure would be guaranteed in the first six months of tenancy and occupants would need to be given at least two months notice to vacate. This change will require a change to the legislation, which will be done as soon as the Parliamentary timetable allows.

The provision of accommodation is an integral part of the **New Employment Model (NEM)** programme to deliver an updated employment offer to Service personnel that provides greater lifestyle choices; better balances the demands placed on Service personnel and their families; and provides greater stability, while continuing to support mobility. The revised offer includes a commitment to the continued provision of high quality subsidised accommodation for those who want or need it throughout their careers, improved support for home ownership and, for many, the choice of maintaining greater geographical stability during their career.

As part of the NEM, the MOD has developed an improved **Home Purchase Incentive** scheme to support those Service personnel who wish to buy their own home but are not in a position to do so in today's market conditions.

As a result of this work, in September, the Defence Secretary announced a trial scheme which will offer members of the Armed Forces interest-free loans to help them raise a deposit to get on the property ladder. Under **Forces Help to Buy** Armed Forces personnel will be able to borrow up to half their salary, capped at a maximum of £25K, which will be repayable over ten years. Around £200M has been earmarked for the scheme, which will start on 1 April 2014 and is due to run for three years. The Home Purchase Incentive will also improve the availability of advice on housing issues and home ownership. This is currently offered primarily to those leaving the Services, but under the new model there will be through-career access to such information and support. Priority has also been given to Armed Forces personnel for the Government's Equity Loan schemes. Under FirstBuy, which ended in March, more than 460 members of the Armed Forces have bought a home; and a number have already reserved a property since the Help to Buy: Equity Loan was introduced in April.

The Government has changed the law so that seriously injured serving personnel and former members of the Armed Forces with urgent housing needs are always given **high priority for social housing**; and so that Service personnel and those who have recently been discharged do not lose their qualification rights because of the requirement to move from location to location. Guidance on social housing allocations, which DCLG published last year, goes further and strongly encourages councils to take into account the needs of all serving or former Service personnel and their families when framing their allocation schemes, and provides detailed advice on how this can be achieved.

DCLG provides funding known as the **Disabled Facilities Grant** to all 326 local housing authorities in England for the provision of adaptations such as stairlifts, ramps and winches to the homes of disabled people to help them live independent lives. As part of DCLG's commitment to the Covenant, some Disabled Facilities Grant funding is set aside specifically for adaptations to the homes of former serving personnel.

The role of the MOD's **Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO)** is to provide specialist housing information and advice to encourage Service personnel and their dependants across the UK to consider their civilian housing options and to assist them in their transition to civilian life. The Scottish Government has been working with the JSHAO to ensure that information on accessing suitable housing in Scotland is embedded in its housing options guide. This is to assist Service leavers in considering their housing options for their transition to civilian life by providing information on the range of housing options in Scotland, including accessing social housing, private rented housing and home ownership.

The Scottish Government continues to promote good practice in supporting ex-Service personnel when they apply for **social housing in Scotland**. In March 2013, additional practice examples were published in the Social Housing Allocation Practice Guide for local authorities and Registered Social Landlords. Scottish Ministers wrote to all social landlords in Scotland highlighting these practice examples, encouraging them to treat applications for housing from ex-Service personnel fairly and sympathetically and to use the flexibility they have in allocating their properties.

The Welsh Government has allocated £2M in the current financial year to support housing for personnel leaving the Armed Forces. Welsh Government officials have met representatives from the Armed Forces, the Welsh Local Government Association and CHC as part of a task and finish group, and have developed an approach for the allocation of the funding. This has resulted in liaison with the JSHAO, which has advertised the scheme through its various Armed Forces channels as part of its existing MOD referral scheme, and expressions of interest are already being submitted. The Welsh Government is on course to fully allocate and spend the funding in this financial year.

Following changes introduced by the DWP on **housing benefit regulations**, it is for local authorities to determine whether they consider an adult child serving in the Armed Forces to be living permanently in MOD-provided subsidised accommodation or whether they are living permanently at home with their parents, and apply the spare room subsidy policy accordingly. In cases where the adult child is deemed by the local authority to be living permanently with their parents, the parents are allowed to retain the adult child's bedroom without any financial penalty when he or she is deployed on operations.

In January 2013, the then Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans met Mark Nightall and Hugh Owen of the Riverside English Churches Housing Group, a Housing Association registered provider which manages Mike Jackson House and The Beacon supported housing projects – at Aldershot and Catterick respectively – for **Veterans at risk of homelessness**. Riverside also runs the Single Person's Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services, which provides practical help with finding accommodation, housing and placement assistance for single people leaving the Armed Forces.



The Beacon supported housing project at Catterick

The Combined Homelessness and Information Network's 2012-13 annual report stated that 3% of the people seen **rough sleeping** in London who are from the UK claimed to have an Armed Forces background. This represents a 1% decrease from last year. Veterans Aid is the nation's one-stop shop for ex-Servicemen and women in crisis, taking 3,000 calls and providing around 20,000 nights of accommodation each year. The charity has been operating in London for more than 80 years but takes calls for help from UK Veterans worldwide. It operates a drop-in centre and hostel, provides accommodation, outreach services, a helpline and a range of solutions to those in need. It gives individuals bespoke help with education, skills training, mental health and homelessness issues. A key aim is to prevent homelessness among Veterans by a policy of swift intervention. Apart from providing emergency and hostel accommodation for an average of 55-70 Veterans per night, in the last 12 months it has placed 60 Veterans in specialist treatment facilities. This group had primary problems like addiction and gambling. Nearly all are now on the road to getting straight and leading sustainable, independent lives. Veterans Aid aims to rebuild the Veteran's strength and self-esteem, give them skills through access to adult education, training, NVQ and employment skills and, finally, reintegrate them into society and break their dependency on the government, the public and Service charities. This is achieved by means of a 'holistic' strategy – the Personal Empowerment Programme – which is based on four main projects which combine to enable these ex-Servicemen and women to live without the need for further intervention.

The Scottish Government has provided a grant of £2.3M to the **Scottish Veterans Housing Association** to build a facility at Cranhill, in the East End of Glasgow, comprised of 51 housing units with access to outreach support, including healthcare, skills development and employability opportunities, for Veterans. 21 of the units will be available for social rent, while 30 will provide supported, transitional accommodation. The scheme will be available to Veterans from 12 local authority areas in the west of Scotland and is due for completion in summer 2014. The Scottish Government has awarded a grant of £1.3M to the Scottish Veterans Garden City Association to build at least 38 units for physically and psychologically disabled ex-Service personnel in a number of areas across Scotland, with projects in Inverness and Carnoustie expected soon.

The Welsh Government is funding work by Cymorth Cymru to maintain their database for organisations working with **Veterans at risk of homelessness**, which provides a vital resource for voluntary and statutory organisations. The Welsh Government will be bringing forward proposals in its forthcoming Housing Bill, which will strengthen the duties on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness. It will develop guidance to ensure local authorities work with the Armed Forces and Veterans' welfare services to provide help before Veterans become homeless.

The Welsh Government and its partners will also collaborate with the research project led by the **Stoll Foundation**, looking into the housing needs of Veterans across the UK, to ensure it reflects the needs of Welsh Veterans. We expect a number of other agencies to contribute to this work, including relevant partners in England.



CHAPTER 4 – CORONERS: THE OPERATION OF INQUESTS

The Covenant sets the following goals with respect to coroners and the operation of inquests:

- Bereaved families should receive assistance commensurate with the loss that they have suffered, including help during the vital, but difficult, inquest process.

The **Coroners and Justice Act 2009** aims to put the needs of bereaved people, including bereaved Service families, at the heart of the coroner system; allow coroner services to be delivered locally but within a new framework of national standards; and enable a more efficient system of investigations and inquests.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) consulted on its approach to implementing the **coroner reforms** in the 2009 Act – including proposed rules and regulations and statutory guidance

– in March and April 2013. The bulk of the reforms went live in July 2013, including putting a duty on the Chief Coroner – who took up post in September 2012 – to monitor investigations into deaths of Service personnel and to ensure that coroners conducting such inquests are suitably trained.



The Wiltshire and Swindon Coroner's Court

In July 2013, the Chief Coroner, His Honour Judge Peter Thornton QC, announced that he would be creating a **specialist cadre of coroners** that will be available to investigate deaths of Service personnel on active service. The purpose of the cadre is to provide a specialist, well-trained and experienced group of coroners who can be used to conduct, where necessary, investigations and inquests into Service deaths while on active service or while training and preparing for active service. Having consulted the Coroners' Society of England and Wales, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence Inquests Unit, the Royal Military Police, the Royal British Legion, INQUEST, individual serving personnel and others, the Chief Coroner announced the names of the eleven coroners who were nominated to be the first members of the Chief Coroner's Service Deaths Cadre in July 2013. He also issued a guidance note setting out the purpose of the cadre and how it will work.

In the new year, the MOJ plans to issue new statutory guidance on how the coroner system should operate in relation to all **bereaved relatives**. This guidance will build on the current national Guide to Coroners and Inquests and Charter for Coroner Services which sets out the level of service that bereaved people can expect in respect of information about, and involvement in, a coroner investigation.

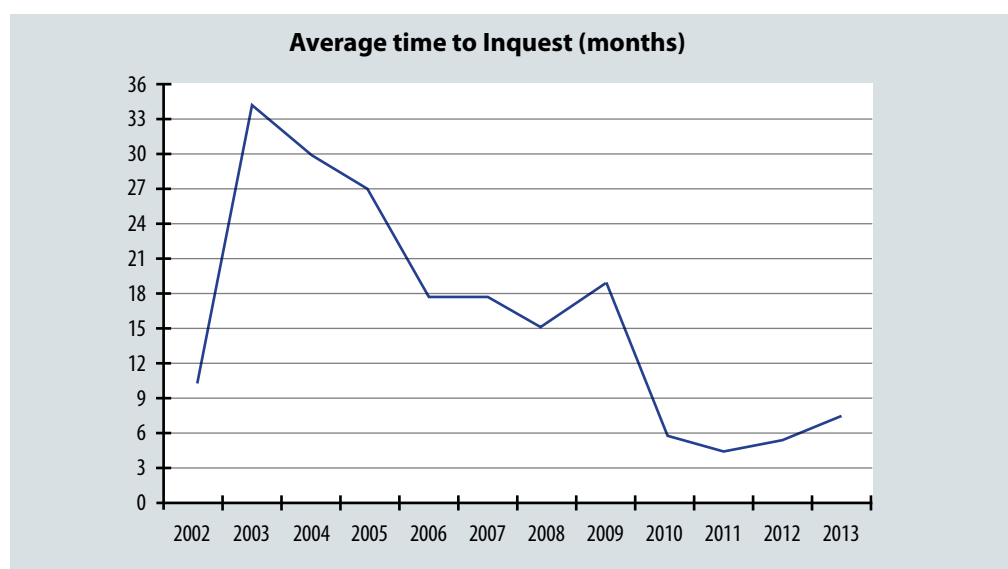
The 2009 Act removed the rigid geographical **boundary restrictions** so that investigations can be transferred between coroners more easily – either to comply with family wishes or to tackle or avoid delays. Under the Act, the Chief Coroner will also publish details of all

inquests (not just Service personnel inquests) that take more than 12 months to complete; and he will report annually to the Lord Chancellor on these and other issues.

The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 created a new mechanism to transfer the investigation of deaths of Service personnel who have known links to Scotland as Fatal Accident Inquiries. The new arrangement came into force in September 2012, following agreement between the Chief Coroner and the Lord Advocate, together with the MOJ and the MOD. The provision applies to those who die on active service abroad, particularly where the next of kin of the deceased wish the transfer to take place. The new arrangements mean that, in such cases, bereaved Service families in Scotland will have the choice as to whether they wish to travel to attend an inquest in England or attend a Fatal Accident Inquiry in Scotland.

Inquests

Support is available to **bereaved Service families** before, during and after an inquest. Families are kept fully informed of preparations through dedicated single Service teams. The MOD provides funding for up to three family members to attend inquests into deaths that are deemed attributable to Service and considers additional family members on application. We also provide practical support for bereaved families and coroners in a number of ways, including: a booklet for families explaining the Service Inquiry and inquest process; increasing the number of family members who can, at public expense, attend repatriation ceremonies; support to pre-inquest hearings and inquests; and improving the selection and training of visiting officers. The most complex cases involving deaths of Service personnel are dealt with by the Defence Inquests Unit. The following graph shows the average time taken between 2002 and 31 October 2013 for Service deaths to reach an inquest, including those dealt with by the Defence Inquests Unit since it was established in 2008. The information includes both operational and non-operational deaths, and cases where a Service Inquiry was held and where a Service Inquiry was not convened.



The MOD has also produced a **DVD** which is sent to the family of the bereaved and any MOD witnesses to help them understand what happens during an inquest and what to expect from the process.



Michelle Tocknell pictured second from the right at a reception at 10 Downing Street in October

Michelle Tocknell's husband died in 2012. The support she received from the Padre; her RAF Visiting Officer, Judith; and her SSAFA Family Support Worker, Julie Jones, was invaluable.

"There are some things in life I wish I simply hadn't had to experience but sadly I have and it will remain with me for the rest of my life. However, I was one of the very lucky few in that my husband worked for the RAF, which was the saving grace for myself and my boys. We would not be where we are today if it were not for all the support and help that I received in the days and months

after his death. I will be eternally grateful to the RAF, my Visiting Officer, our Padre and my SSAFA family support worker, Julie.

"When I was told a Visiting Officer and a Padre would be coming to see me, my initial reaction was "what do they want, what do they think they're going to do?". Less than 24 hours after his death, both were gentle and respectful in their approach. They also supported my sister, who had the task of identifying my husband. In those first two weeks connections were made between us and, during what was a trying time, we managed to laugh so much and for that I will be so grateful.

"A week in, my sister made contact with SSAFA and a family support worker called Julie came to visit. My first impressions were of a smart lady with a lovely smile and an addictive laugh, immediately putting everyone at ease. We knew we would be OK.

"Every day in the run up to the funeral these people either visited or called. They took great care of me, being gentle and patient. The funeral was, as funerals go, beautiful. I stood with Julie and Judith on either side of me as I followed my husband's coffin.

"After the funeral I thought that was that, they would all step down. I was so surprised to learn that they were with me for as long as I wished. I was so relieved. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have these people around. The Padre brought me comfort and I looked forward to our meetings. Nothing was too much for Judith. It was Judith who made arrangements for a fly past of a Hawk over the funeral, a gesture that meant so much to me. Julie helped me on every scale but more on a personal level. She contacted the schools for my children, health visitors, Winston's Wish and even social services.

"These people were an amazing team and set me in a far better position than others in my situation. They were a wall of protection around me and my boys at a time when life had failed us. If we had been left to fend for ourselves in Civilian Street we would have simply been left to cope alone. I truly believe they aided my recovery and that of my two eldest children. To know that the RAF Benevolent Fund were also behind us, should we need them, gave me peace of mind and it still does. The Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre team has also been there, helping me with all the financial side too.

"I've been so impressed with all the support that I want to give back, I want to get out there and help others too".

Where there is a **Service Inquiry**, some coroners await completion of the report to aid their understanding of the circumstances. Service Inquiries are held to examine the facts and circumstances surrounding an incident, to learn lessons and to make recommendations to senior officers for the improvement of working practices, procedures or equipment, which could help to reduce the likelihood of a similar incident happening again. Not every death is subject to a Service Inquiry because in some cases an initial review of the incident is sufficient to identify the lessons to be learned or actions that could be taken to help prevent a similar incident. No two Service Inquiries are the same and the time taken to conclude each inquiry can be affected by a range of factors, including: the complexity of the circumstances surrounding the incident; a need to adjourn pending a police investigation; and the availability of witnesses, particularly while on operations. The Services continue to aim to complete each inquiry as soon as practicable, while supporting the family throughout the process.

In September 2011 a **new repatriation facility** was opened at RAF Brize Norton, where repatriation flights for Service personnel who die in operational theatres arrive. The centre, on the south side of the airfield, has a quiet area where families can gather to watch the repatriation aircraft land and where the formal element of the repatriation ceremony takes place. This facility offers the families a private place to welcome the return of loved ones who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Following the repatriation ceremony and a private period of reflection for the families, the cortège leaves the airfield via Britannia Gate en route to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. Oxfordshire County Council commissioned a memorial garden on Norton Way, close to Carterton and RAF Brize Norton, where families and members of the general public can congregate to pay their respects to the passing cortège.



The repatriation centre at RAF Brize Norton

Last year's report included a commitment that we would increase the **Funeral Expenses Grant** from £500 to £1,000 in order to help bereaved families with the cost of incidental expenses associated with a funeral and as a contribution towards the cost of attending an event such as a memorial service at the National Memorial Arboretum. The change was brought into effect in December 2012.

SSAFA has been engaged on behalf of the MOD to undertake a study of the support given to bereaved families. The aim of the study is to discuss with bereaved families the support that they received and identify any areas for development. The purpose of the work is to establish best practice; shape future policy; and refine current training where this is needed. The study findings are due to be published in the coming months.

The **Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme** has continued to give the children of those who have died in the service of their country a head start in life by providing a scholarship. To date, 95 children across the UK have benefited from the scheme, which provides further education scholarships to enable a bereaved child to stay in further education for up to three years in order to obtain the qualifications necessary to secure a place at university; and university scholarships to provide a contribution towards both the tuition fees and maintenance cost of a first undergraduate course at a publicly-funded UK higher education institution, regardless of course length. The further education scholarship is currently set at a flat rate of £1,500 for all students; while the university scholarship rates are made up of an element that matches the actual university fees, up to a maximum of £9,000, and a maintenance element of £4,950.

Under the MOD Bereavement Scholarship Scheme for 2012-13, the **Students Award Agency for Scotland** has funded a total of eight students attending a Higher Education course of study or who were still at school. The Agency has also funded three students under the Enhanced Learning Credits Scheme.



CHAPTER 5 – A LIFETIME OF SUPPORT

Terms and Conditions of Service

The **New Employment Model (NEM)** is the most thorough review of Service personnel terms and conditions of service in a generation. It covers four broad areas of policy: terms of service; accommodation; training and education; and value and reward. The NEM is focusing on meeting the needs of the Services and the aspirations of Service personnel, especially in the areas of supporting lifestyle choice and improving domestic stability. It is an opportunity to take a detailed look at the many aspects of personnel policy and to reshape and reinvest to help achieve the required levels of recruitment and retention that support operational capability. It is also an opportunity to update elements of the package of terms and conditions that have failed to keep pace with the way in which Service people live their lives in the 21st century. It will focus on the impact of Service life on families and

on the careers of spouses and civil partners, which are regularly listed in the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey as the top two factors in increasing intention to leave, and at the top of concerns raised in this year's Families Continuous Attitude Survey.

Since last year's report was published, work on the NEM has identified a preferred pay model where rank will continue to be the main factor in determining how much an individual will be paid; we have further developed proposals for a Home Purchase Incentive scheme to assist Service personnel to buy a home; a generic framework has been developed for Regular careers and the three Services are mapping their engagement structures to this with the aim of achieving commonality of approach to the way in which conditions of service are applied; a Partner Employment Programme has been established to explore how we can address the existing barriers to spousal employment (and is discussed in more detail later in this chapter); and work has continued on Training and Education initiatives, including the Personal Development Pathway which aims to equip personnel early on and through their career with skills that can be used within Service and which have a career focus to help prepare for a second career in civilian life.

We launched a large scale consultation programme with Service personnel and their families in June 2013. This consisted of roadshows, focus groups, interviews and surveys. The feedback is being used to shape the detailed policy development of the various components of the NEM, crucially contributing to the design of this modernised and rebalanced 'offer' for the Armed Forces. We will conduct further consultation later in the NEM programme.

The Strategic Defence and Security Review announced a reduction of 17,000 posts from the regular Armed Forces – 5,000 each from the Royal Navy and RAF; and 7,000 from the Army. While reduced recruiting and fewer extensions of service will account for some of the reductions, **Armed Forces Redundancy Schemes** were needed to ensure that the right balance of skills is maintained across the rank structures. A further reduction of 12,000 to the Army was announced as a result of the Three-Month Exercise.

We ensure that personnel selected for redundancy qualify for the full resettlement package to which they would have been entitled had they completed the commission or engagement on which they were serving when they were made redundant.

In order to ensure the greatest fairness, clear selection criteria have been published by each of the Services. These criteria are based on the future needs of the Armed Forces – exempting personnel from selection on the basis of their proximity to pension point would be contrary to this principle and would mean selecting other individuals in their stead. The Armed Forces Redundancy Schemes recognise those who miss out on immediate incomes by paying them significantly enhanced tax-free redundancy compensation lump sums – the average tax free compensation for Service personnel leaving the Armed Forces with less than one year to their Immediate Pension Point is around £73K. Where people leave before the qualification point, any pension rights that have been earned will also give them preserved pensions and further tax-free lump sums which they will receive at age 60 or 65.

We have worked hard to ensure that many more individuals have received an immediate income for which they would not otherwise have qualified. For other ranks on Armed Forces Pension Scheme 75, the normal requirement to serve for 22 years before receiving an immediate income is reduced to 18 years on redundancy. Officers on Armed Forces Pension Scheme 75 will still qualify for an immediate income after 16 years. Personnel on Armed Forces Pension Scheme 05 will continue to receive Early Departure Payments after serving for 18 years, provided that they have reached the age of 40.

All Service personnel, less those within ten years of their normal pension age, will transfer automatically to the new **Armed Forces Pension Scheme** in April 2015. A major consultation took place before the Defence Secretary announced the final agreement in October 2012. Rights to pension benefits accrued by Service personnel as a result of their membership of current pension schemes are protected. For the first time from April 2015, Part Time Volunteer Reserves will also have an entitlement to pension benefits when training as well as on operations. An upgrade to the online pension calculator was launched in June 2013 to reflect the transition to the new Armed Forces Pension Scheme. Since the launch, the calculator has produced more than 200,000 benefit forecasts for Service personnel. The upgrade allows Service personnel to forecast their accrued rights under current pension schemes and future benefits under the new scheme. Work is on track to complete detailed rules and legislation, and to update IT systems, in preparation to launch the new Armed Forces Pension Scheme on 1 April 2015. The most recent Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey shows a drop in satisfaction level with pensions. The Government's public service pension reforms have brought pension provision into sharp focus and have inevitably given rise to concern among Service personnel. Rightly or wrongly, the reforms are seen as part of a cost-cutting exercise and it is therefore not surprising that many Service personnel have a negative view of the changes. Nevertheless, the current Armed Forces pension schemes, and the one that is being introduced in 2015, will remain among the very best available schemes.

The White Paper entitled **Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued** was published in July 2013. The White Paper stressed the importance we attach to the Reserve Forces and made it clear that in future they would continue to be recruited from volunteers across the whole of society. These Reserves will be organised and trained as part of an integrated force. They will gain work, life and leadership skills which will benefit them, their employer and society as a whole. They will be rewarded fairly and on a comparable basis to their regular colleagues. They will attract a leave entitlement for training days completed; and from 1 April 2015 we will provide a defined contribution for all paid service to the future Armed Forces Pension Scheme. We will support reservists and their families with extended occupational health provision, rehabilitation for those injured during training, and a more consistent and accessible level of direct welfare support.

Work has been underway for some time to support **Foreign and Commonwealth Service personnel** and their families who wish to settle in the UK after serving in the Armed Forces. We acknowledged in last year's report that progress had been slow on some of the disadvantages we identified. Since then, some good progress has been made, in concert with the Home Office. This includes the awarding of settlement on the day after discharge through the use of a dedicated mailbox for settlement applications. Obtaining settlement quickly eases transition to civilian life and allows personnel to work; to have access to public funds such as Jobseeker's Allowance; and to access local authority housing.

The Home Office is creating a single set of immigration rules for the families of all Service personnel, which will be aligned with the **family migration rules** introduced in 2012. These arrangements will allow the time families have spent on accompanied overseas assignments to be counted as time spent in the UK, and the transitional arrangements will help to ease their future return to the UK. It has also been agreed that time spent by Foreign and Commonwealth reservists on overseas deployments will be counted as time spent in the UK.

A new Armed Forces Families visa became available on 1 December 2013. This is a five-year visa, in contrast to the 30-month visa available for non Armed Forces families. The new five-year visa will remove the need for costly renewals, and at the five-year point families will be able to apply for settlement.

Legislation is needed to change the requirement that the first day of the five-year **qualifying period for citizenship** must be spent in the UK. This is being pursued through the Citizenship (Armed Forces) Bill – a Private Member’s Bill sponsored by Jonathan Lord MP – which aims to provide that if the first day of the five-year qualifying period is spent on an overseas assignment it will be treated as if it had been spent in the UK. The Bill was introduced to Parliament in June 2013 and had a successful second reading in September.

We are committed to continuously improving the operation of the **Service complaints** system to make it more effective, more efficient and fairer. The Service Complaints Commissioner’s (SCC) annual reports are a rich source of lessons, in which she has identified that delay can too often be a feature of our process. In last year’s Covenant Annual Report, we committed to implement new ways of working with the SCC, aimed at giving her greater insight into the causes of delay and into the effectiveness of the Services’ monitoring of cases. Those changes came into effect in January 2013, and have resulted in action being taken in individual cases and more generally. Our assessment of the extent to which benefits are being achieved has coincided with further work into the SCC’s role prompted by a Defence Committee report published in February 2013 and the Commissioner’s annual report published in March 2013. The SCC’s subsequent proposals for changing her role are being considered in detail and the Government plans to respond shortly after the publication of this report.

From time to time, the issue of **discrimination against members of the Armed Forces** is raised and the question is asked whether there is a need for legislation to deal with such behaviour. An example might be where members of the Armed Forces are refused service in a pub. In 2008, the then Government looked at whether sufficient legal measures were in place to give Service personnel the protection they are entitled to expect from discrimination and other forms of hostility. In 2012, Lord Ashcroft produced an important study which highlighted that far too many Service personnel had been subjected to unacceptable behaviour. However, the Government do not believe that it would be straightforward or necessary to legislate in this area. Our view is that, in the last year or so, the extent of public knowledge and sympathy for the Armed Forces has continued to grow – aided by the Community Covenant and the new Corporate Covenant. We therefore continue to believe that education, rather than legislation, is the key to eradicating the kind of behaviour that we all abhor.

Family Life

There are unique barriers that spouses and partners face as a result of Service life that can hinder their employment, including frequent moves and associated delays in re-entering employment after a move and the additional pressures during a partner’s operational deployment. The MOD is running a **Partner Employment Programme** to explore how it can help. This programme is looking at addressing the existing barriers that hinder spousal employment, such as access to childcare and education. We are working with the Royal British Legion Industries to roll out their Lifeworks for Families Programme to provide vocational assessment and employability training to interested spouses. We are also working with employers and charities to look at ways to create opportunities for spouses and options for better signposting to existing help and advice. The wider nation

has an important role in helping to address these disadvantages, through the Corporate and Community Covenants as well as more widely. An example of this is the University of Wolverhampton, whose successful LIBOR bid has enabled them to provide a Business Start Up Programme for spouses and dependants of serving personnel, reservists and Veterans who wish to set up their own business.



Fiona Hilton pictured earlier this year

Fiona Hilton worked in a number of jobs before she met her husband, was posted to a number of locations, had children and has been busy being a stay-at-home-mum for five years. Earlier this year, Fiona heard about the Lifeworks Families Course and saw this as a chance to get back into the job market. She attended the course in February and as a result is employed at the Poppins Nursery in Chatham, where she can combine her wish to work with looking after her children and at the same time studying for an NVQ in childcare.

Fiona gave us her thoughts shortly after finishing the course: “The Lifeworks Families course has made me realise that the skills that I have to do my day to day life are priceless to employers. My confidence has increased to the point where I can go back out into the job market again. I’ve become myself again, not just the wife of or the mother of somebody, which is something I haven’t been since I got married six years ago.

“I’m finding who I am from the course, but with that is the confidence to go back out into the employment market. The hardest thing, not just being a mum but being a military wife as well, is that I’m never known as or introduced as Fiona, I’m always introduced as Amelia’s or Annabelle’s mum or Sgt Hilton’s wife. So you lose your identity.

“Coming on the course has helped me realise that I’m this confident person who has got a great set of skills, that I can up and move my family at a moment’s notice, that I can organise a house at the other end, who I’m going to have my gas and electric with and who’s going to pay the bills.

“Doing the course with other military wives has been good because I’ve met other people that I’ve seen walking around the barracks before but not necessarily met. It also helps because we’re all going through the same things. We’ve all helped each other on the course to identify each other’s strengths and skills, and helped identify the skills that being a military wife brings”.

RBLI is working with the Ministry of Defence to roll out Lifeworks Families Courses, paid for by the LIBOR fund, at Service locations all over the UK over the next two years. Details of forthcoming courses are available at: http://www.rbli.co.uk/employment_solutions/lifeworks/107/

The DWP and the MOD continue to work together to ensure that the special rules in place for spouses and civil partners in relation to **Jobseeker’s Allowance** are widely known and understood. Jobcentre Plus held their first conference for Armed Forces Champions in October 2012, which was a good opportunity to advertise their work and to gain a better understanding of the Service context. Briefings were given by the Families Federations and the Career Transition Partnership.

The MOD and the DWP also issued a joint leaflet to highlight the role of the Jobcentre Plus **Armed Forces Champions** and the numerous policy exceptions that DWP have made to support Service personnel and families. The leaflet has been passed down the Service chains of command and to the Families Federations, who have run articles on it in their magazines. The leaflet will be updated in the coming months and DWP will make the information available on the external gov.uk website.

The DWP will use the results from the 2013 Families Continuous Attitude Survey to gauge the experiences of Navy, Army and RAF personnel, Family Federations and HIVEs in accessing **Jobcentre services and Armed Forces Champions**. This will give tangible information on whether steps to enhance the understanding of the special rules in place for spouses and civil partners in relation to Jobseeker's Allowance have had the desired effect.

The Department for Transport brought the Disabled Persons' Parking Badges Act 2013 into force in October. The new legislation will enable the MOD to issue **Disabled Parking Blue Badges** to eligible Service personnel and their families serving overseas. This applies where the individual no longer has a UK residency and at the same time is not considered to be a resident of the country in which they are based by virtue of their Armed Forces status. While the number of people who will benefit from this change is expected to be relatively low, the importance of addressing this disadvantage for those concerned was significant.

Deployment

The MOD provides Service personnel – both regular and reservist – with the fullest possible **deployment welfare package** to safeguard their psychological and physiological well-being, set against, and consistent with, the deployment environment and the availability of resources. However, deployed welfare should not be viewed in isolation: it is among a host of mutually supporting enablers in the delivery of operational capability, including allowances and the wider real life support. The policy aims to set the framework and principles to enable the planning and consistent delivery of welfare, which will optimise and sustain operational effectiveness, irrespective of the nature of the deployment. This seeks to achieve effects of: enabling deployed personnel to keep in contact with family and friends; providing for their leisure, relaxation and physiological needs; supporting the family; and facilitating the reintegration of Service personnel into the family unit. Fundamental to this approach is the understanding that Service needs will change according to location and the stage of an operation, and there must be a management of expectations. The deployed welfare policy is being revised to take account of changes in society and technology.

We know that the delivery of welfare to **reservists and their families** has not been applied uniformly and has often been determined by resources and outdated perceptions of entitlement. Specifically, many Army reservists were unable to access Service welfare support unless they were mobilised. Welfare concerns can arise at any time, however, and it is important to ensure that reservists have appropriate access to welfare services to ensure their readiness for deployment and to recognise the contribution and sacrifices that continue to be made by their families. The MOD is therefore revising its policy and guidance to better reflect the particular welfare needs of reservists and their families, and to provide support equivalent to that provided for regulars. There will be no barriers to reservists and their families accessing the normal range of support provided by welfare

officers, whether or not they are mobilised. To enable this improved welfare provision, the Army will provide welfare officers at unit level to enable a higher level of direct welfare support to reservists and their families. This will provide a level of welfare support that, particularly for non-mobilised Army reservists, has not been previously possible. Royal Navy and RAF reservists, and their families, are also able to access specialist welfare services via their unit personnel and community support staffs, including SSAFA, in the same way as their regular counterparts.

TRANSITION



National Express was one of the first companies to sign up to the Corporate Covenant, including pledging support for the employment of Service leavers. National Express driver Simon Jay has been with the coach firm for nearly 20 months. Previously, Simon served nearly 22 years in the Armed Forces, travelling to destinations all over the world including Japan, the Falklands, Africa and many parts of the Far East. When his tour ended in 2008, he got work as a contractor for a defence company. Unfortunately the

recent recession meant contracts became shorter and harder to come by so he decided to look at another line of work.

"I am a former Naval Officer and have always enjoyed driving large vehicles in the forces and when I saw driver vacancies advertised at a local recruitment fair I decided to sign up.

"I was given full training and support to become a driver and I now drive the 030 and A3 services to London Victoria and Gatwick Airport. Since then, I have been selected to front a National Express campaign to support ex-Service personnel, which offers guaranteed interviews for driving jobs for those with a PCV licence.

"National Express gave me all the training and support I needed to establish myself as a driver. It's a great job: I like driving and I love the camaraderie there is between drivers. I particularly like working with the customers and it's rewarding to give them a smooth ride and get them to their destinations happy. I find the National Express support staff are very helpful and professional too".

The majority of personnel who leave the Armed Forces – around 23,830 people in financial year 2012-13 – are entitled to some form of **resettlement provision**. The amount of time, funding and training they receive depends on length of service. Those medically discharged are entitled to the full range of resettlement provision, no matter how long they have served or the nature and cause of their injuries.

Employment outcomes are good: the vast majority – around 85% – of Service leavers who use the **Career Transition Partnership** (a partnering arrangement between the MOD and Right Management Limited, which offers a range of employment support services) are employed within six months of leaving the Armed Forces, compared to an employment rate of 70% in the general UK population.

Following a successful pilot scheme funded by the Forces in Mind Trust and delivered by a charitable consortium led by the Regular Forces Employment Association, we have introduced, in conjunction with the Career Transition Partnership, a bespoke package of resettlement support for individuals who leave having **served less than four years** in order to help them successfully transition back into civilian life. Previous studies have indicated that individuals who leave the Armed Forces early tend to require particular transition support and that is why we are offering our early Service leavers interventions that will help them re-enter civilian employment, training or further education.

The **Recovery Career Services** became operational in January 2013 and offer an employment service for wounded, injured and sick Service personnel. The services are based on need, with higher levels of support given to those personnel who face the largest barriers to future civilian employment. Support is delivered and funded by leading Service charities working in cooperation with the MOD and the single Services. The organisations working together to provide these services include: ABF The Soldiers' Charity, Help for Heroes, Oxfordshire County Council, the RAF Association, the RAF Benevolent Fund, the Regular Forces Employment Association, The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity, Right Management and Walking with the Wounded.

The Scottish Government, through Skills Development Scotland, launched the **Energy Skills Challenge Fund** in 2012 to help address skills shortages in the energy sector. Building on best practice from a small pilot course supporting Armed Forces Personnel leaving RAF Kinloss, this programme delivers short, intensive training to those with relevant transferable skills and experience allowing them to move into current vacancies across the energy sector in Scotland. Some 900 transitional training places were delivered in 2012-13, with those leaving the Armed Forces being a key target group for the programme. In May, the First Minister committed to delivering at least a further 1,000 transitional training places through the Energy Skills Challenge Fund in 2013-14 and those leaving the Armed Forces will remain a key target group.

The **Corporate Covenant**, which was launched in June 2013, is a public written pledge from organisations that wish to demonstrate their concrete support for the Armed Forces Community. All organisations that sign the Corporate Covenant confirm their support for the Covenant's two key principles of removing disadvantage and giving special consideration in some cases. Each organisation is then encouraged to offer support in a way most appropriate to their situation and capacity, with the pledge document including a 'menu' of options for them to sign up to. This menu covers employment support for Veterans, reservists, spouses and partners; as well as support for Armed Forces Day and discounts for members of the Armed Forces Community. There is also an opportunity for organisations to add their own commitments, depending on their circumstances.

The Corporate Covenant is already producing a number of tangible benefits for the Armed Forces Community, including Service leavers transitioning out of the Armed Forces. National Express are offering a guaranteed interview scheme for Service leavers who hold a valid Passenger Carrying Vehicle licence. Barclays have committed to make work placements available for Veterans within Barclays and their participating service providers alongside their AFTER employment support programme for wounded, injured and sick personnel. Deloitte have established the Military Transition and Talent Programme to provide transition coaching and mentoring for those leaving the Services; and the company is supporting the employment of Veterans through insight days, one to one advice and work placements for ex-Service personnel.

Ex-Service personnel will be some of the first to benefit from removing the age limit on **start-up loans**. Currently around 4% of Service leavers go on to set up their own businesses and it is hoped these numbers will increase following the changes announced in July 2013 to help people start up their own businesses. Loans were historically only open to those under the age of 30, but Lord Young recommended that they should be open to everyone who aspires to start up their own business. Now ex-Servicemen and women, including those aged over 30, will be in the first wave to receive targeted support. X-Forces have become the first specialist start-up loans delivery partner for ex-Service personnel and the wider Forces' community. In Wales, access to start-up loans is available via the Welsh Government's Business Start Up programme, which can also offer free workshops and business advice to individuals looking to start a business in Wales.

Also aiming to improve the transition of personnel and families at the end of a period of service in the Armed Forces back into the civilian world where they will face many challenges including employment; housing; health and wellbeing is the **Forces in Mind Trust**. The Trust was founded in 2012 through an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund. Working with partner charities, it has commissioned research into mental health, supported housing, employment and the transition process. In 2013, it published reports on the transition process and mental health. In the future, the Trust is planning to commission further research and award more grants. The MOD looks forward to continuing to collaborate with the Trust to improve the transition process and support ex-Service personnel.

An updated **Welsh Government Package of Support** for the Armed Forces Community in Wales was produced and published in June 2013. The new Package of Support is more user-friendly and includes signposting to other, more detailed advice and guidance on access, eligibility and application to public services.

Lord Ashcroft has been appointed by the Prime Minister to carry out a review of the policies, legislation, regulations, guidelines and provisions in place for the Government to meet its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant with respect to Veterans' transition to civilian life, with a view to making recommendations that will ensure it is complete and successful. The review will consider a timeframe out to at least two years after personnel are discharged from the Armed Forces but if necessary it will have no time limit, if some aspect such as healthcare has longer-term implications. In the first instance, Lord Ashcroft will report to the Defence Secretary. The formal part of the review began in January and Lord Ashcroft is expected to report with his recommendations during the course of 2014.

Veterans

Around 1 in 10 of all adults in the UK are Veterans. After personnel leave the Armed Forces, their needs are met in the same way as those of the wider community: by local authorities in the case of housing; and by different Government departments and agencies for matters for which they are responsible, such as the NHS looking after healthcare needs. The MOD retains responsibility in some areas – such as the War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Schemes, vocational pensions, medals, Service records and welfare support – and is therefore responsible for organisations such as the Service Personnel and Veterans' Agency and the Veterans' Welfare Service.

The Veterans Minister chaired a **Charities Summit** on 14 October 2013, with the aim of achieving greater effect by coordinating the wide array of support that is available to Veterans from the MOD, other Government Departments and the Service charities sector. The MOD explained the support that it provides ranging from: training, education and resettlement; pensions and compensation payments; commemoration and remembrance; to its Veterans Welfare Service reaching across the country and its helpline. The Service charities outlined their provision and all parties shared views on the likely challenges and opportunities for supporting Veterans' needs, which led to an agreement that greater coordination of planning and support effort should be undertaken. The Minister plans to repeat the Summit next year.

The Scottish Government has funded roadshows across Scotland run by **Veterans Scotland** to showcase the role of, and support available from, the ex-Service charity sector; and to promote and improve collaborative working between key stakeholders at a local level. The Welsh Government brought Armed Forces Champions from Local Authorities, Local Health Boards, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Probation Service together in November to encourage closer collaboration and joint working locally. Further events will be held in 2014.

Following joint working between the MOD and the DWP, a new benefit called the **Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP)** was introduced in April 2013 to provide specific financial support for Service and ex-Service personnel who have been seriously injured as a result of service since April 2005 to cover the extra costs they may have as a result of their injury. It is payable to Service and ex-Service personnel who have an Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Guaranteed Income Payment of 50% or higher. The non-taxable amount paid for AFIP is currently £134.40 per week, which is the same as the enhanced rates of both the daily living and mobility components of Personal Independence Payment. Recipients of the AFIP will also be eligible for additional benefits known as 'passport benefits' in a similar way to recipients of the Personal Independence Payment. Arrangements have been put in place to enable access to passport benefits for AFIP recipients in England, Wales and Scotland. On current planning, these arrangements will apply to AFIP recipients in Northern Ireland early next year. As at 26 November, 806 AFIP claim forms had been issued to eligible personnel and 695 completed forms had been passed to DWP for payment. Guaranteed Income Payment awards are payable at different levels depending on the overall impact of the injury on the individual's future ability to earn. The levels are 100%, 75%, 50% and 30%. Members of the Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation will be able to provide feedback on AFIP at a meeting chaired by the Veterans Minister towards the end of the year.

In Wales, the difficulties faced by some people with **cognitive impairments** is recognised and recent legislation has linked eligibility for a Blue Badge to receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The Welsh Government will be consulting on extending eligibility to people who face similar barriers but cannot apply for PIP. The proposals include allowing Veterans and personnel who are in receipt of Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payment at Level 6 – permanent mental disorder, causing severe functional limitation or restriction – to be included under the automatic eligibility criteria for a Blue Badge. The consultation will be undertaken in 2013 with regulations due to come into force in April 2014.

Under the auspices of the Community Covenant Grant Scheme and the LIBOR Fund, some £16.9M has been allocated to more than 70 projects in the last calendar year that, at least in part, offer support to Veterans across the UK. The **Scottish Veterans Fund** has been in place for five years and is designed to assist charities and other bodies concerned with the welfare of Veterans. Specifically, it funds or part-funds projects directed at Scotland's ex-Service community, their families and dependents to improve or facilitate access to public services. Grants are small, ranging from as little as £1,000 to a maximum of £10,000 per annum. To date, almost £500K has been distributed to 70 projects across Scotland. The Fund has been widely acknowledged as a successful and innovative funding stream for activities in support of the Veterans' community in Scotland and Scottish government funding has been increased by 50% to £120K per annum from 2014-15.

Periodically, concerns are raised that former Service personnel might enter the **Criminal Justice System** whilst facing difficulties transitioning to civilian life, though as the Howard League for Penal reform stated in its report – assessed from evidence taken in 2009 – some 3.5% of those in the Criminal Justice System are Veterans, which compares favourably to estimates that around 10% of the adult population are Veterans. Service in the Armed Forces is believed to be a preventative factor for some. The MOD's resettlement programme for Service leavers already offers far more than most employers and continues to be developed with the primary aim of seeing personnel move seamlessly into civilian employment, which in itself is a preventative factor against crime. Nevertheless, there is a widespread desire to reduce the offending rate and to support Veterans in the Criminal Justice System and to this end the National Offenders Management Service chairs the Ex-Service Offenders' Working Group, which continues to seek opportunities to support ex-Service offenders and signpost them to the additional help that is available from Service charities. In Wales, Veterans have been identified as a potential priority group within the All Wales Reducing Reoffending Strategy. The Strategy is currently being refreshed with a view to establishing a Wales Veteran Offenders Pathway.

A Veteran in Custody Support Officer operates in each prison in Scotland and is supplemented by the **Scottish Veterans Prison In-Reach Group**. Both work with Veterans' Groups to support Veterans in prison and advise them of the services and assistance that can be provided to them and their families while serving a custodial sentence and also on release back into the community.

The provision of support through the **Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Irish Aftercare Service** will continue under existing arrangements until 2016, with a review to be conducted not before March 2015. Until then, a pilot programme has been included under the auspices of the Aftercare Service which incorporates wounded, injured and sick Service personnel who would otherwise have fallen outside its scope. Work will continue to improve the Ministerial and Veterans' fora to address current issues of support for the Service and ex-Service community in Northern Ireland. These fora complement existing working level liaison groups with some Northern Ireland Executive departments. This work was recognised in the oral evidence sessions held by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee during its inquiry into the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland, which reported on 17 July. Of note, the Committee concluded that, compared to those located elsewhere, there is no serious material disadvantage to members of the Armed Forces Community in Northern Ireland, while recognising that there was scope for improvement in some areas.

Recognition

Sir John Holmes published the initial report of his **Independent Medal Review** in July 2012. Following on from this work, the Prime Minister asked Sir John to look at some of the long-standing public campaigns that there had been over many years for medallic recognition by Veterans who felt that their service had not been properly recognised.

The Prime Minister announced in December 2012 that he had agreed recommendations by Sir John for the introduction of a new **Arctic Star Medal** and a **Bomber Command Clasp** and this had been approved by Her Majesty The Queen. The new awards were to be presented to Veterans or their next of kin. The first medals and clasps were presented by the Prime Minister in March 2013 to around 70 Veterans at a Downing Street reception. There has been a fantastic response to these new awards with over 25,000 applications being received so far from Veterans and families. Priority was given to issuing the awards to Veterans and, by the end of August, medals had been sent to all of the Veterans who applied – more than 4,000. Priority is now being given to widows, while the issue of medals to next of kin will take several more months. Sir John's review remains ongoing in relation to a number of other medal campaigns and policy issues.



The Prime Minister presenting the Arctic Star medal to Geoffrey Holmes in a ceremony at 10 Downing Street

Commercial Products and Services

In addition to the usual problems that we all face in managing our personal finances, there are often additional challenges for members of the Armed Forces Community that come from increased mobility, overseas service and operational deployments. To help improve financial understanding among members of the Armed Forces Community, the MOD worked with The Royal British Legion and the Standard Life Charitable Trust to launch the **MoneyForce** programme in March 2013. This is a significant project in which

the three organisations have worked together to develop and design a bespoke website that provides education and advice to Service personnel and their families about money matters. The website has received positive feedback and the MOD has commenced the associated training for new recruits. Site access levels and usage continue to grow.

During the **Cyprus banking crisis** in March, the Government made clear from the very beginning that Armed Forces personnel serving their country on the island, and their families, would be protected from losses on their personal deposits in Cyprus-based banks. In the event, no such losses were reported because the final outcome protected all deposits under €100K, but the clear commitment provided reassurance at a worrying time. We also gave all serving personnel, and Veterans living in Cyprus, the opportunity to receive salary, pension and other payments from the MOD into a UK bank account. And we flew additional cash to RAF Akrotiri to ensure that business continued and that our people could readily obtain funds for their daily needs through the British Forces Post Office or MOD Cash Offices while banks remained closed.

Moving around the UK and overseas creates challenges for Service personnel and their families in accessing certain commercial products and services, though it also creates certain opportunities. One particular area of concern is the impact of a mobile lifestyle on an individual's **credit rating**, which in turn limits access to affordable credit. Last year's Covenant Annual Report explained how the MOD had worked with the Post Office to introduce shadow postcodes in March 2012 for British Forces locations overseas, in order to help improve access to UK products from overseas as well as to provide personnel with an address that UK credit referencing systems can recognise. Given that credit referencing systems rely on a personal history, it will take some years for the UK postcodes to take full effect. But many companies are now using the new shadow postcodes to provide goods and services to personnel overseas.

The MOD also worked with the representative organisations for the financial services industry who have made a commitment to avoid disadvantaging members of the Armed Forces community in the provision of products and services. These commitments, together with advice on securing credit and loans, are contained in guidance notes for personnel which are available from the Armed Forces Covenant website.

It is becoming apparent that Service personnel may face disadvantages around **insurance**, both in terms of access to insurance and the greater cost of insurance as a result of Service life. The loss of no-claims discounts on motor insurance as a result of service overseas is one example. This is an area that needs further work in order to determine whether there are particular disadvantages for Service personnel. As a first step, we will work with the Families Federations to ask their members whether they have experienced similar problems. If they have, this will provide us with an evidence base from which we will be able to consider approaching representative industry bodies to seek their assistance in overcoming any instances of disadvantage.

The **Defence Discount Service** was launched in October 2012 and is open to members of the Armed Forces Community, including serving regular and reserve personnel, Veterans, spouses/partners of Service personnel, MOD Civil Servants and bereaved spouses and civil partners. The Defence Discount Service recognises the special role that Service personnel, their families and Veterans have in the community. It is an opportunity for national companies and local communities to embrace the Armed Forces and show that they value the great work that they have done for our country. It provides discounts both online and on the high street for the Armed Forces Community. Around 92,000 members

of the Armed Forces Community are currently members of the Defence Discount Service, with more signing up every day. There are some excellent deals available for families across a whole spectrum of categories. The Armed Forces Community can visit the website and sign up for free.

The **Defence Privilege Card** was launched by the Prime Minister: it is a key part of the Defence Discount Service and is available to members for £4.99 for a five-year membership. So far, around 88,000 cards have been issued. The card ensures that those signed up to the Defence Discount Service can claim their discounts and privileges in participating stores across the country. To view the wide range of discounts and privileges and for more information on how to sign up visit www.defencediscountservice.co.uk.

In addition, **Transport for London** announced in June 2013 that Service personnel travelling in uniform and with an identity card will be given free transport on its network. The Scottish Government is undertaking a mapping exercise across all 32 local authority areas in Scotland to identify discounted admission charges to leisure and sport facilities for the Armed Forces Community.

ANNEX A COMMITMENTS

This table shows the commitments that were made for the first time in the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report that was published in December 2012 and those that were recorded in the table at the back of that report as “to be completed”.

Key to progress status

Completed since December 2012	
To be completed before 2014 annual report	
To be completed post 2014 annual report	

Terms and Conditions of Service

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Development of a New Employment Model	UK	
The MOD will publish a White Paper in spring 2013 setting out its detailed proposals for the future Reserves.	UK	

Healthcare

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Midlands Medical Accommodation Project	UK	
NHS Reform England – plans take account of Service families	ENG	
Launching a Veterans’ Information Service	UK	
The Scottish Government is considering the potential to extend the Lothian-based Veterans First Point model to other regions	SCO	
Review of Reserve Forces’ mental health issues to identify ways to improve their reintegration after demobilisation	UK	
New arrangements for members of the Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Marines Reserve and Territorial Army to receive a common standard of occupational healthcare	UK	
Work to implement all the recommendations in the Care Quality Commission review of the Defence Medical Services	UK	
Review the requirement for and provision of specialist vocational training for those with brain injuries	ENG	
Establish a unified Defence Primary Healthcare Service, with the interim organisation in place from April 2013	UK	
Seek to obtain funding for a study into support for the bereaved and the families of those who have been injured	UK	
Establish a longer-term solution for prosthetics provision, including a network of multi-disciplinary prosthetic and rehabilitation centres, in line with the recommendations in Dr Murrison’s report	ENG	

Education

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Expansion of training opportunities for Service personnel aged under 18	ENG and WAL	
Improvements to the Army's education programme: establishing a single personal development fund	UK	
Improvements to the Army's education programme: senior soldiers to gain teaching qualifications	UK	
Development of a new strategy to address the impact of mobility on the education of Service children and young people	UK	
Allow training in Service Children's Education schools overseas to count towards Qualified Teaching Status for Service partners	ENG	
Joint MOD and DfE review of the revised admissions guidance to ensure it is removing disadvantage, where possible, to Service personnel in achieving their school of choice in England	ENG	
DfE and MOD will continue to review the use of Service Pupil Premium and publish examples of best practice to ensure that it is addressing disadvantage to Service children's education	ENG	
Review of the Support Fund for State Schools with Service children to ensure that it continues to be used to mitigate the effects of exceptional mobility and deployment on schools, academies and free schools within the UK	UK	
MOD will monitor any changes to the Residential Support Scheme to ensure that Service children are not disadvantaged.	OVERSEAS	
MOD will continue to work with the relevant education departments to ensure that the specific needs of Service children are recognised in particular with the new academies and free schools in England	UK	
MOD will work with the relevant education departments to seek clarification on how higher education will be funded, identify if this will disadvantage Service children posted to them and seek to address disadvantage if it does exist.	UK	

Housing

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Develop an alternative approach to the provision of accommodation for Service personnel and their families	UK	
Next Generation Estates Contract programme	UK	
Continued support to the Armed Forces Home Ownership Scheme	UK	
Improvements to Defence Infrastructure Organisation Customer Care	UK	
The Scottish Government will consider whether giving local authorities more flexibility and responsibility to determine their own approach to meeting need would help social landlords to address the housing needs of former Service personnel and ensure they are not disadvantaged	SCO	
Establish a Single Living Accommodation management information system to provide critical information on the condition of the estate and inform key investment decisions	UK	

Housing cont.

Commitment	Applies to	Status
MOD has made a further £5M available to upgrade Service Family Accommodation by 31 Mar 2013	UK	
MOD will extend the circumstances in which personnel may retain Service Family Accommodation to include when the spouse or partner of a Service person has to give a specified period of notice to an employer or is in higher education	UK	
MOD will continue to look for opportunities to mitigate further the impact of years two and three of the planned pause on improvements to Service Family Accommodation	UK	
MOD has made available a further £131M to purchase new properties from developers for use as SFA in areas of high demand or where we believe significantly more SFA will be required in the future	ENG	

Benefits and Tax

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Take account of Veterans' needs in the development of the Universal Credit	UK	
Resolve issue of access to benefits for dependants of serving Foreign and Commonwealth personnel	UK	
DWP and MOD will work together to see what more can be done to enhance the understanding of the special rules in place for spouses and civil partners in relation to Jobseeker's Allowance	UK	

Responsibility of Care

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Introduction in 2013 of a new alcohol and drugs testing regime for Service personnel carrying out safety-critical tasks in the course of their employment	UK	

Family Life

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Balance demands on Service personnel and their families through a New Employment Model	UK	
Improving portability of Criminal Records Bureau checks to improve Armed Forces families employability	ENG, SCO, WAL	
Removing residency requirements for Blue Badges for disabled Service personnel and their families who are posted overseas	ENG	
Review of public transport issues affecting Service families living in remote areas	ENG	
Childcare Sufficiency Assessments: MOD will gather evidence of the needs of Service personnel in relation to childcare provision in the UK	UK	

Commercial Products and Services

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Develop web-based financial capability training through the creation of the MoneyForce website, in conjunction with the RBL and the Standard Life Charitable Trust	WORLD	

Transition

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Improving resettlement support for Early Service Leavers	UK	
Work with the Forces in Mind Trust to support Veterans and their families	UK	
Take forward research into the transition of those leaving the Armed Forces	UK	
Depending on the evidence provided, the Government will review the need for halfway housing for former Service personnel	UK	

Support after Service

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Implement changes to Service pensions reflecting unique role that Service personnel fill	UK	
AFCS Compensation payments and link to other benefits	UK	
MOD will engage with bereaved families' groups to identify where the Government can provide new or enhanced means of support to bereaved families	UK	
MOD will increase the Funeral Expenses Grant to £1000 to help families with the incidental expenses associated with a funeral	UK	

Recognition

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Rules governing the award of medals	UK	

Participation as Citizens

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Improving the ability of Service personnel to vote	UK	
Foreign and Commonwealth Citizens – Time spent in service outside the UK	UK	
UK Border Agency Review of fees for Armed Forces Dependents	UK	
Shortening journey time to settlement for Reservists	UK	
Resolve the issue that foreign spouses of British citizens serving in the Armed Forces are not able to submit an application from overseas to settle in the UK	UK	

Participation as Citizens Cont.

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Resolve the issue of the English language test for all Armed Forces dependants who require a visa	UK	
Ensure that special arrangements are made to allow Foreign and Commonwealth Service personnel to be granted settlement on the day or the day immediately after they leave the Armed Forces.	UK	
Make new guidance available to case officers considering applications for settlement and naturalisation to clarify for both case officers and applicants how military convictions will affect an application	UK	

Changes in Defence

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Managing the return from Germany to the United Kingdom	UK	

Recourse

Commitment	Applies to	Status
Implement new way of working with the Service Complaints Commissioner, aimed at giving her greater insight into the causes of undue delay and the effectiveness of the Services' monitoring of cases	UK	

The Covenant and Wider Society

Commitment	Applies to	Status
A Veterans' card – access to commercial discounts and privileges	UK	
Sharing Service facilities with civilians	UK	

