

# **Report pursuant to section 3(15) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 - the Armed Forces Covenant**

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 3(15) of the  
Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019



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**Report pursuant to section 3(15) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 - the Armed Forces Covenant**

This report is based on information provided by the Northern Ireland Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Section 3 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 requires the Secretary of State to publish and lay before both Houses of Parliament a report on progress made towards forming an Executive and other matters.

This report is made in accordance with section 3 (15) of that Act which states:

Before making a report under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must publish a report on or before 4 September 2019 on progress made towards preparing legislation confirming the application of the Armed Forces Covenant in the provision of public services in Northern Ireland.

The Armed Forces Covenant is set out below:

**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.

### **Armed Forces Covenant - statutory footing in NI**

The Armed Forces Covenant was given statutory recognition across the UK by the Armed Forces Act 2011. That Act amended the Armed Forces Act 2006 to place a legal responsibility on the Secretary of State for Defence to report to Parliament each calendar year about the effects of membership or former membership of the Armed Forces. In preparing that report, the Secretary of State must have regard in particular to the desirability of removing disadvantages for current and former service people arising from that membership and that special provision may be justified for those individuals.

The reporting duty extends to the whole of the UK. The annual report therefore already covers the commitment to the covenant in all four nations of the UK. In preparing the report, the Secretary of State must “obtain the views of any relevant government department, and seek the views of any relevant devolved administration, in relation to the effects to be covered by the report”. Those views must be set out or summarised in the report. This ensures that both the UK Government and Devolved Administrations take their responsibilities seriously and are accountable to the UK Parliament to ensure the Covenant is honoured. Many of the public services provided to veterans and members of the armed forces are devolved matters in Northern Ireland, and responsibility for them falls to Northern Ireland departments.

The Government remains open, as it has always been, to considering whether any further legislation is required at any point to help deliver any aspect of the Covenant, what this would achieve, and how this could be enacted. Because the existing covenant legislation is UK-wide, any changes to it would also be made on a UK-wide basis.

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