



Ministry
of Defence

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Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 30 April in which you requested the following information:

"I understand that some units are not adhering to social distancing rules. Can you explain why members of 32 Engineer Regiment are being put in harms ways by living in cramped conditions with up to 10 soldiers sharing small rooms whilst on training in April 2020.

What is the policy within MoD and what exceptions exist?"

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that the information is held and is below. I apologise that it has taken slightly longer to reply than it would normally have done, but hope you will understand this is because of the unusual circumstances in which we are currently working.

In response to your request, please note that the Government has been very clear that people should work from home wherever possible and where home-working is not feasible, employers should deliver appropriate social distancing measures wherever possible. The Ministry of Defence has enacted that direction in full. Many of our people – both civilian and military – are working from home and where we've needed them to come into work, we have adjusted their working environment as much as possible to meet Public Health England guidelines.

Wherever military activity continues, we are aware of our responsibilities to the contractors that support us and to the communities that host us. Service personnel who experience symptoms will be isolated and the chain of command will ensure that training and operational activity is done in a way that reduces the exposure of the outside community to an absolute minimum.

A complete cessation of training would bring an unacceptable impact to military operations and national security tasks later in the year. It is important therefore that we continue our training not only for units and individuals who are to be deployed on operations in the immediate future but also for those who will be operational six months or a year from now. Personnel from 32 Engineering Regiment took part in a training exercise in April 2020 in preparation for current and future operations. Training personnel were alive to the risk of accommodation utilising multi-occupancy rooms and had numerous control measures in place in strict adherence to Force Health Protection guidance to minimise the risk of infection to the training audience and the staff conducting the exercise. Of note, any Service Personnel feeling unwell or shielding a vulnerable person at home were stood down from the exercise. All Service Personnel were grouped into 'households', relating to shared accommodation in adherence to extant Force Health Protection guidance, and marked with coloured wrist bands. These "households" were mandated to stay at least 2m apart. Similarly,

2m spacing was marked out in communal areas such as the dining facility. On entering the dining facility contactless, infra-red thermometers were used to check the temperature of all Service Personnel.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance. Following this, if you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

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