

MOD Overseas Accompanied Service Assessments Policy

Introduction

This policy explains how the Ministry of Defence assesses whether Service families can safely and appropriately accompany a Service person on an overseas assignment.

It outlines the purpose of the assessment, who it applies to, the responsibilities involved, and the steps that must be completed before a family can move overseas.

The aim is to ensure that health, education, social care and welfare needs can be met at the proposed location, and that any risks to families and Defence outputs are understood and managed.

This version is written in plain English, follows GOV.UK content design principles, and complies with accessibility regulations.

Entitlement and Considerations

There is no automatic entitlement to an accompanied overseas assignment. Each case must be assessed to ensure the overseas location can safely support the family's needs.

If an assignment goes ahead without proper consideration of needs and location-based risks, it can negatively impact the operational effectiveness of Defence, as well as the safety, health, education and wellbeing of families.

Families must not make any arrangements for an overseas move until the assessment is complete and a formal decision has been issued.

This includes actions such as:

- Serving unaccompanied in advance of the family's assessment outcome
- Cancelling medical appointments or therapies in the UK
- Giving notice on spousal/partner employment or withdrawing children from school
- Arranging removals or marching into/out of Service Families Accommodation (SFA)

If information provided by families does not match information from external agencies, the Chain of Command may be informed.

Families choosing to live overseas without following this policy will lack legal status under host-nation legislation and relevant Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA). These legal constraints will prevent the MOD from recognising such family members or providing support in location. This limitation arises from SOFA and host-nation law, rather than any discretionary decision by the MOD.

Families will be informed of all assessment decisions and, where applicable, any meetings, giving them the opportunity to provide input and supporting evidence to ensure a fair evaluation. They are expected to actively engage in the processes outlined in this policy.

Service personnel in an Established Long-Term Relationship (LTR(E)) are advised to check their eligibility and entitlement under relevant policies prior to an overseas assignment. Entitlements may differ from those available in the UK, and it is the responsibility of the Service person to ensure that appropriate checks are made in advance.

The Families Policy Team

The Families Policy Team sits within Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding (AFFS) and is responsible for maintaining this policy.

They ensure fairness, reflect legislation, and work with organisations including DCS, GMSC, Commands and welfare services.

The team can be contacted via email People-AFFS-FamiliesTeam@mod.gov.uk

Risks and Consequences

The aim of this policy is to ensure that families receive appropriate support while overseas. Failure to comply with the policy may result in assignments being suspended and families potentially returning to the UK at their own expense. Disciplinary and/or administrative action may also be taken against Service personnel who fail to disclose relevant information or comply with the requirements of this policy. Failure to follow this policy may result in an overseas assignment being suspended or the family returning to the UK.

If overseas commands become aware that a family has arrived without a completed assessment, the overseas decision maker must escalate the issue to the individual's Chain of Command, Career Manager, GMSC, DCS, and Families Section (Fam Sec). The Service person must submit the required assessment documentation and any supporting evidence to demonstrate compliance.

Assessment Process

The MOD uses a four-stage process:

Planning: Initial preparation and gathering of information.

Assessing Needs: Identifying medical, educational, and social care requirements.

Decision-Making: Determining whether the overseas location presents risks for the accompanying family members and how the MOD can provide support.

Implementation: Proceeding with or halting the assignment based on the decision.

This process applies to moves from the UK to overseas or between different overseas locations. It also considers situations where circumstances change during an overseas assignment or when a family member is in one place and the Service person is in another.

The assessment process is not owned by AFFS; however, it must be followed to remain compliant with this policy.

Responsibilities

It is crucial to understand who is responsible for each part of the assessment process:

Career Managers issue assignment orders; they do not approve or influence the outcome of the assessment decision.

Service personnel must promptly declare their own needs and those of any family members who may accompany them overseas, including individuals enrolled in UK boarding schools or universities.

Notify all relevant parties of any emerging medical, educational, or social care needs during the assessment process or after arrival at the overseas location.

Service personnel must not proceed with any assignment arrangements until the assessment process is fully completed, and a decision has been confirmed.

Global Medical Supportability Cell (GMSC) assesses whether appropriate medical support can be provided in the overseas location and acts as the process owner for the medical element of the assessment. For health and medical information, contact GMSC at: UKStratCom-DMS-DPHC-GMSC-Grp@mod.gov.uk.

British Forces Social Work Services (BFSWS) provide social work support to families already overseas and contribute to the assessment process where required. For more information, visit: [About Us | British Forces Social Work Service](#).

Defence Children Services (DCS) gather information about children's support needs and evaluate the educational requirements, as well as any safeguarding risks to, children. As part of a Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessment panel, they also contribute to the identification of social care support needs (particularly for locations not covered by BFSWS). Visit [Educate the Child, Support the Family, Defend the Nation](#) or contact DCS at rc-dcs-hq-oes@mod.gov.uk.

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) contribute to the Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessment process by providing key services such as health visitors, community health, and speech and language therapy in some overseas locations. <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/get-help/ssafa-community-health-overseas/>

Strategic Command's - Families Section (Fam Sec) is responsible for gathering and reviewing information related to the medical, educational, and social care needs of accompanying service family members. Fam Sec work closely with Service personnel, assessors, and Chain of Command. They also communicate assessment outcomes and provide guidance on next steps. Contact Fam Sec at UKSTRATCOM-DefSp-DSCOM-FamSec@mod.gov.uk

Decision Maker is the designated Commander overseas who is responsible for the health, safety, and wellbeing support of Service personnel and their families. They make the final decision on whether the overseas location can meet the family's needs and what support can be provided.

The term "Decision Maker" refers to the person responsible for determining whether the overseas location can meet the family's needs and what support can be provided. The Decision Maker must have no personal or professional conflict of interest that could compromise, or appear to compromise, impartial decision-making. Commanders may delegate this responsibility, but only to an officer who meets the independence requirements set out in this policy. For the purposes of this policy, "independent" means that the Decision Maker must not be in the Service person's direct Chain of Command and must not hold any supervisory, managerial, or reporting relationship with them. Where a suitably independent officer cannot be identified within the overseas command due to its size or structure, the matter must be escalated to the next higher formation so that an appropriately independent Decision Maker can be appointed.

The Decision Maker must refer to the ***Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessment Terms of Reference Annex C*** for guidance on conducting and chairing Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessment meetings. Decision Makers should not lead assessment meetings for staff they directly manage or report on. Impartiality is essential for fair and effective decision-making processes that safeguard the health, safety, and wellbeing of Service personnel and their families.

Top Level Budget (TLB) Responsibility: *TLB's with responsibility for overseas locations will explicitly identify the individual/job role who will hold this responsibility, whether it be the Commanding Officer or their delegated authority and will make this information available and accessible to all.* **Annex B - Overseas Decision Maker List.**

Timeframes: The time required to complete assessments varies depending on their complexity and on the time taken to gather information from other agencies. Service personnel should engage with the relevant parties as early as possible, as the information gathering stage can often take months and is outside the direct control of GMSC or DCS. Current practice is that single-agency assessments are normally completed within one month, once all relevant information has been received. Multi-agency Overseas Impact Assessments can take significantly longer, particularly where responses are dependent on Statutory Agency Return (SAR) times (for example, SAR processes may add an additional 28 days to information gathering, with further extensions of up to nine weeks). As GMSC and DCS are delivery organisations, timeframes are set by policy rather than internally; therefore, **Service personnel should factor sufficient lead time into their planning to ensure assessments are finalised well in advance of any assignment.**

Assessment Initiation

The assessment process begins when Service personnel submit the required assessment documentation and any supporting evidence. If a Service person cannot complete the assessment, their spouse or partner may do so with prior notification to the relevant parties. This must be recorded in the submitted documentation. In addition, Army personnel must also complete the [Overseas Location Compatibility Checklist](#).

Service personnel must declare all existing, emerging, or planned health, medical, social care, and children's educational needs as well as any ongoing or anticipated specialist treatment or support at the start of the assessment

process. This includes complex and long-term processes such as assisted conception, adoption, and surrogacy.

Any issues that could affect the success of an assignment must also be highlighted. However, self-declaration alone cannot be relied upon. To ensure all relevant information informs the assessment, GMSC and DCS should make every effort to gather information from schools, local authorities, and social care services. This includes seeking formal social care information, which may involve obtaining relevant historical data from local authorities and social care services for children. Immediate updates are required for any changes, notifying GMSC, DCS, the losing and gaining organisations, and the Career Manager.

Conducting the Assessment

Advice and Decision Support: GMSC and DCS must use the assessment results to determine whether the identified needs can be met and whether there are any risks to operational output and/or the long-term health, safety, wellbeing or education of family members. For Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessments, GMSC and DCS must advise the overseas Decision Maker, ensuring all relevant information is gathered including any formal social care needs and involving contracted social work professionals early if necessary. For single-agency cases, advice to the Decision Maker is not required.

Individual Needs: Assessments must be specific to each individual. If one family member's needs cannot be met, it does not automatically mean all family members cannot be supported.

Young Carers Identification and Support: As part of the assessment process, it is essential to identify any child undertaking significant caring responsibilities within the home. This includes:

Pre-existing Young Carers: Children who have previously received a Young Carers Assessment in the UK or are known to be in receipt of support.

Young Carers Emerging Overseas: Children who require a Young Carers Assessment and/or equivalent support to UK standards.

Health and education professionals should consider caring responsibilities during the assessment process. Any confirmed Young Carer should trigger a Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessment to explore needs comprehensively and ensure appropriate support is in place.

Separate and Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessments: Single-need cases are handled separately by GMSC and DCS. However, a Multi-Agency

Overseas Impact Assessment is required where there are safeguarding concerns, multiple low-level needs, or cases involving several agencies.

The overseas Decision Maker must convene and lead the panel, ensuring contributions from GMSC, DCS, and written input from parents. Additional input may also be required from supporting agencies such as SSAFA or BFSWS.

All meeting notes, together with written advice from DCS, GMSC, and BFSWS, must be recorded and retained as part of the assessment process.

Where appropriate and where it does not pose safeguarding risks (e.g., in cases of domestic abuse), a summary of the panel's considerations should be shared with the Service person alongside the formal decision letter, ensuring sensitive information is protected.

Special Considerations: Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessments apply to situations such as those involving an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), Service Children's Assessment of Need (SCAN) or Devolved Nation equivalent and significant needs impacting other areas of life.

Decision Making in the Assessment Process

The Decision Maker is responsible for determining whether the overseas location can meet the family's needs and what support can be provided. This decision is based on the outcomes of the assessment process and considers the following factors:

Assignment duration and location.

Family needs, including medical, educational, and social care requirements.

Availability of support services at the overseas location.

Consultation Requirements: The Decision Maker must consult the Service person, losing and gaining Commanders (if applicable), and the Career Manager. Early and timely completion of this process is essential to allow for alternative planning or reassignment if required.

Assessment-Based Decisions: Decisions must be based on assessment outcomes and expert advice, with risks to operational output and family well-being carefully considered. Operational needs must never override expert advice, indicating that the overseas location cannot safely meet the identified needs.

Exploring Alternatives: If services cannot meet specific needs, alternative solutions or organizations should be explored. Commissioned services must not exceed what is freely available in England (e.g., NHS, state schools, or

local authority SEND/social care services). The sustainability of any support for the duration of the assignment must also be evaluated.

Notification of the Decision

Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessments: Where a Multi-Agency Overseas Impact Assessment meeting has been held, the Decision Maker must inform the Service person, Career Manager, GMSC, DCS, and Families Section of the final decision. A formal decision letter must also be provided to the parents, outlining the reasons for the outcome. This letter contains official-sensitive personal information and must not be shared more widely with other parties.

Single-Agency Assessments: The Decision Maker is not involved. Instead, DCS will issue a 'DCS Confirmation Letter' and GMSC will issue a 'Medical Support Letter' directly to the Service person.

Revised Support Decisions: If support is withdrawn during an assignment, the family may return to the UK at public expense. However, if essential information was withheld during the initial assessment, the family may be required to cover their own travel costs. In such cases, disciplinary and/or administrative action may also be taken against the Service person.

Service Assignments: Career Managers are responsible for issuing assignment orders but do not approve overseas assessment decisions and do not participate in the assessment process.

Army: Assignment orders are typically issued around one month after board results are published and are necessary to initiate the administrative process for an overseas move.

RAF: Assignment orders are issued only after confirmation that the assessment process is complete, and a decision has been made.

Navy: Do not complete checks before issuing an assignment order; however, all assignments remain subject to pre-screening checks.

Assignment Extensions

Service Extensions: Career managers should direct Service personnel to contact Families section by emailing UKSTRATCOM-DefSp-DSCOM-FamSec@mod.gov.uk

Extensions Under Three Months: Service personnel must contact the relevant local authority (e.g., HQ BFC J1 in Cyprus).

Extensions Beyond Three Months: Local medical screening by Defence Medical Services (DMS) is required for all family members. Additionally, DCS

must complete an assessment for all children to identify educational needs and any associated risks.

Appeals

An appeal process exists for decisions regarding overseas assignment assessments, requiring swift action and allowing for evidence submission.

The following principles apply to appeals:

Independent Review: The appeal panel must be chaired by a different Decision Maker than the one who made the original decision. A more senior officer within the overseas command should take on this responsibility.

Expert Involvement: The appeal panel should include experts relevant to the specific needs of the case, such as safeguarding leads, unit welfare officers, and other professionals.

Conflict of Interest and Evidence Handling: Appeal panel members should confirm that they have no conflict of interest before participating. Families should be provided with the evidence considered by the panel, where appropriate and subject to safeguarding restrictions, to support transparency and procedural fairness.

Fully Informed Decision Making: The appeal panel must consider all relevant educational, medical, social-care and location-specific information before making a decision.

Assignment Hold: Service personnel cannot move forward with their assignment until the appeal is complete.

Notification: The Decision Maker must inform the Career Manager of the appeal outcome.

Evidence Submission: Service personnel may submit additional evidence for consideration by the appeal panel within 20 days. They may also choose to be represented or supported by an Assisting Officer, Unit Welfare Officer, or a member of their Chain of Command.

For more information on the responsibilities of the Decision Maker, refer to **Section 2.6 Decision Making in the Assessment Process**.

If you are unhappy with the appeal decision, you may wish to consider whether to pursue a Service Complaint.

Information Sharing

Collaboration and information sharing are critical to the success of the assessment process. The following principles apply:

Collaboration and Record Keeping: All parties involved in the assessment process must work together to ensure a smooth and effective outcome.
Assessment

records will be managed in accordance with JSP 441. The data controller for each element of the assessment will be the organisation responsible for collecting and holding that information (for example, DCS for education information, GMSC for medical information, and the Overseas Command for decision-making records). All records must be retained in line with the relevant MOD personal data retention schedules.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing: Health, education, and social care information is protected by data protection laws. However, consent is not required if sharing is necessary to prevent serious harm or to fulfil a public task. Agencies such as DCS, GMSC, SSAFA, and BFSWS will share information as part of their assessments to ensure all relevant factors are considered. Information may also be shared with the Decision Maker to enable them to make an informed decision.

Prompt Updates: Service personnel must promptly inform GMSC, DCS, the overseas Decision Maker, and their current Commander of any relevant changes to educational, medical or social care needs during the assessment process and throughout the overseas assignment. Timely updates are essential to reassess location risks and confirm whether support options remain appropriate.

Review Delays: Decisions on location risks and support options must be reviewed if there is a significant delay (defined as six months or more) between the original assessment outcome and the family's move overseas. This ensures that any changes in the individual's needs or overseas location are considered before assignment.

Planning and Preparation

Families considering an overseas assignment should plan and prepare in advance to ensure a smooth transition. Key considerations include:

Evaluate Needs Early: Service personnel and their families should assess whether their health, educational, and social care needs in relation to the prospective overseas location as early as possible. Early communication with relevant organisations is essential at this stage. While only general guidance can

be provided initially, confirmation of whether the location can accommodate your family's needs will follow completion of the formal assessment process.

Assess Local Information: The receiving Command is responsible for ensuring that accurate and accessible local area information is available to Service personnel and their families prior to an overseas assignment. This information supports the assessment process by helping families understand potential challenges and available resources and services.

Family Discussions: Families should proactively discuss potential considerations such as pregnancy, assisted conception, adoption, surrogacy, and critical educational stages (e.g., GCSEs/A-levels) before accepting an overseas assignment. These discussions help identify needs early and inform engagement with relevant organisations. Service personnel should also consult their Unit Welfare Officer for guidance.

Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA): Families should understand the implications of SOFA agreements, which govern the legal status of UK Service personnel and their families in the host nation. These agreements set out rights and restrictions on employment, healthcare access, and residency. SOFA provisions can affect partners' ability to work, access local services, and secure support for children with additional needs. Awareness of these limitations is essential to avoid unexpected challenges that could impact family life and well-being. [NATO Status of Forces Agreement - identification of status - GOV.UK](#)

Financial and Care Considerations: Changes to partners' employment and household income can significantly influence family life and care arrangements. Reduced earning potential or work restrictions may affect the ability to access private support services or maintain the level of care a child requires. These financial and practical factors should be weighed alongside educational considerations when deciding on an overseas posting.

Medical Registration: Families should register promptly with a Defence Medical Practice to ensure continuity of care and enable effective planning for health and medical needs throughout the assignment.

Education Planning: Parents should consult **JSP 342: Education of Service Children Overseas** before deciding on their children's education abroad. Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) may not receive the same support as in the UK. Parents must declare their children's needs to DCS and the Service person's Career Manager. Supporting transitions across the UK Nations and Overseas information can be located here: [Discover My Benefits - Families](#)

Elective Home Education (EHE): Families considering EHE abroad should refer to **JSP 342: Education of Service Children Overseas**.

Safeguarding Concerns: Should safeguarding concerns arise, processes outlined in **JSP 834 Volume 1 – Safeguarding Children** should be followed.

SEND Limitations: UK local authorities have discretion over whether to maintain an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) once they are no longer responsible for the child or young person for example, when a family moves overseas. While there is no requirement for a local authority to cease the plan, they are not obliged to maintain it either, and in practice most do not continue EHCPs or equivalent provision while a family is overseas. As a result, children may lose their legal entitlement to the support outlined in these plans during their time abroad and on return to the UK, which may have a significant impact on their long-term education and wellbeing and should be carefully considered before accepting an overseas assignment. Families should be aware that Local Authorities retain responsibility for formally deciding whether to maintain or cease an EHCP. Families may engage with their Local Authority before moving overseas to understand this process and, where appropriate, exercise any statutory rights of representation or challenge before a decision is finalised.

DCS schools can complete a Service Children's Assessment of Need (SCAN) and provide a SCAN Support Plan if required. While this can help inform future assessments when returning to the UK, it does not carry legal status.

In Gibraltar, the Government of Gibraltar (GoG) SEND Assessment Panel determines educational placements for children with SEND, and its decisions are final. These factors must be taken into account during the assessment process to ensure families understand potential limitations and available support.

Safeguarding & Cultural Attitudes: Standards of safeguarding and cultural attitudes toward childhood vary significantly across the world, influencing how children are raised, disciplined, and protected from harm. Some cultural norms may conflict with established child rights principles such as the right to health, protection, and participation including practices like corporal punishment or Female Genital Mutilation. It is essential not to assume that overseas locations mirror UK standards, legislation, or safeguarding practices. For example, individuals working with children may not undergo the same rigorous safer recruitment checks as in the UK. Service personnel should actively seek information about the location they are moving to and understand how these factors may affect their family's needs and the available support options.

If Service personnel have any questions or concerns regarding safeguarding (child or adult) during their time overseas they should contact:

BFSWS (for locations covered by their service)

DCS Welfare Social Work Team (for all other locations) RC-DCS-HQ-WSW@mod.gov.uk

Career Manager Guidance: Career Managers must direct Service personnel to **JSP 755, Centre Determined Policy for Career Management and Admin of Tri-Service Positions and Assignments** and advise them to contact the overseas Chain of Command and current incumbent to understand any potential risks and available support options in the proposed location. They must provide contact details for the overseas Decision Maker and Families Section via UKSTRATCOM-DefSp-DSCOM-FamSec@mod.gov.uk for assessment forms.

Work Restrictions: Research the employment rules in your destination country, as some may not allow spouses/partners to work or may restrict the types of jobs they can take. Local laws, qualification requirements, and licencing rules may also prevent them from working in their trained profession.

Limited Opportunities: Job options may be limited and pay may be significantly lower than the UK. Consider these factors carefully, as they can impact your family's finances, and include them in your planning before accepting an overseas assignment.

Returning to the UK

Service personnel and their families returning to the UK should plan their health and education needs at least three months before their return.

Medical: This includes checking medication supplies and addressing any health concerns. Families should register with a DMS General Practitioner (GP) or a National Health Service (NHS) GP, making sure Systematised Nomenclature of Medicine (SNOMED) codes are used for Armed Forces Covenant status (the practice applies these codes when the family inform the GP practice that the family are an Armed Forces family).

In order to support moving and mobile families across England and those returning to England from abroad, the NHS in England has a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) armedforceshealth@nhs.net to support families where there may be health related issues that the family cannot sort through routine means. Most families returning will be able to (re)register with an NHS GP for primary

care and continuity of care, but there may occasionally be requirements to seek additional support for family members.

The SPOC works closely with the MOD/DMS, Global Health Team in Strategic Command and with key stakeholders such as the Families Federations.

Army Families Federation (AFF): [Army Families Federation - Supporting Army personnel and families worldwide.](#)

Naval Families Federation (NFF): [Support For Royal Naval & Marines Families | NFF](#)

Royal Air Force Families Federation (RAFF): [Support for RAF personnel and families < RAF Families Federation](#)

Early identification and awareness of issues by a family prior to a move will help mutual support to be delivered.

The SPOC can support and advise on 'navigation' and access to health-related issues where e.g. continuity of care, access to treatments and changes in health systems are proving to be an issue.

Additionally, the SPOC will be able to advise on issues that may result from family members moving around the UK – noting that Devolved Governments have responsibility for health in their national areas.

All parts of England and UK health systems will work to the Armed Forces Covenant principle of ensuring 'due regard' is upheld and will work with the family to help interpret the differing health arrangements that are inevitable across locally determined health delivery systems.

Education: Before returning to the UK, Service personnel and their families can contact the Education Advisory Team (EAT) UK for help and advice on applying for school placements and ensuring a smooth transition back into the UK education system. Email them at RC-DCS-HQ-EAT@mod.gov.uk or visit: [Educate the Child, Support the Family, Defend the Nation](#). Supporting transitions across the UK Nations and Overseas information can be located here: [Discover My Benefits - Families](#)

ANNEX A – Assessment Checklist PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name

Date of Birth

Overseas Assignment Location

Contact Details

FAMILY MEMBERS ACCOMPANYING YOU (add rows if needed)

Full Name	Date of Birth	Relationship to Service Person
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PLANNING ACTIVITIES

Raised support needs with Career Manager, Medical Centre, and on JPA.

Name of Career Manager / Discussed issues with Unit Welfare Officer.
Research overseas location.

Can the location support needs for the duration?

Health/Medical Needs?

Children's Education?

ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Contacted DSCOM for Medical and Children's Education Assessment Forms

GMSC Assessment Completed

DCS Assessment

Completed

Multi-Agency Overseas
Impact Assessment
Completed (if applicable)

Appeal Process Initiated
(if applicable)

Received notification of
assessment decision

Informed Career
Manager and Chain of
Command of decision

Received notification:
Assignment
Proceed/Continue/End

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

DSCOM informed of
assessment outcome

COMMAND DETAILS – LOSING COMMANDER

Name

Email

Telephone

COMMAND DETAILS – DECISION MAKER OVERSEAS

Name

Email

Telephone

Name of overseas organisation

RETENTION AND SUBMISSION

Retain this checklist as a record of your engagement with the assessment process. Email copies to:

- - Current Commander
- - Decision Maker Overseas
- - Receiving Commander Overseas
- - Your Career Manager