

Families of Serving Personnel

Based on MOD personnel statistics, there were 192,160 serving members of the UK Armed Forces personnel as at 1 April 2019, with 15,111 Armed Forces Service leavers in 2017/2018. The MOD estimates that the number of former service personnel currently residing in Great Britain in 2019 at around 2.5 million. This figure is expected to decrease by around 1.6 million by 2028. Veterans are estimated to make up 5% of household residents ages 16+ in England and Scotland, and 6% of household residents aged 16+ in Wales.

The UK Armed Forces Family Strategy has been implemented to set out an approach to Service families and guidance for MOD policy officials. The intention of the Strategy is to encourage families to feel informed and engaged in Service life, using four principles of: fairness, choice, empowerment and resilience. The objective of the strategy is to produce an action plan for families, looking at partner employment, accommodation, children's education and childcare, community support, specialist support, health and wellbeing and transition.

Family Federations

Each Service has their own Families Federations to support Serving personnel. The Army Families Federation (AFF) exists to improve the quality of life for Army families around the world, on any aspect that is affected by the Army lifestyle. The AFF is independent of the Army and offers confidential advice. The AFF is involved in achieving improvements for Army families such as changes to government and military policy and provision for families. The AFF highlights issues to the chain of command or service providers and works with them and other agencies to improve the support they provide to Service families.

The RAF Families Federation (RAF-FF) provides all RAF personnel and their families, Regular and Reserve, single or married with professional support, assistance and an independent voice regarding issues or concerns that families may have. They capture evidence on specific issues through regular surveys and from individuals. Information is treated anonymously and shared with the RAF Senior Leadership Team, senior MOD staff, other government departments and often with government ministers. They provide a confidential signposting service for specific information, support and help.

The Naval Families Federation (NFF) support family members, whatever their link to the Naval Service and work constructively with stakeholders, recognising the importance of understanding the perspective of others and seeking to act as a 'critical friend' to the Naval Service and other organisations. It offers confidential service to people who contact them. The NFF want Naval Service families to have the best quality of life possible, and to have access to the resources they need to make good choices and to achieve positive outcomes.

Serving Families and Accommodation

At 31 March 2017, the MOD reported that there were 49,500 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties in the UK, which is a slight decrease compared to the previous year. The Forces Help to Buy scheme has also proved popular.

● Pilot schemes for the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) began in 2018. The model includes changes to the way that the MOD organises housing options for in-service personnel, such as: provision of housing based on need rather than rank and/or marital status; the increased use of the private rental market to house military personnel, and; the MOD shielding Service personnel from price variations in expensive locations.

● A report by the AFF on geographically dispersed living observed that participants moved out of Service Family Accommodation hoping to gain constancy in their children's education, familial stability, financial benefits and progression in their own careers. However, in doing so they made themselves vulnerable to a loss of identity as members of the military community.

Deployment

● Each of the single Services of the Armed Forces have 'harmony guidelines', which are designed to help to manage the competing demands on a Service person's life, and prevent excessive time spent away. Current harmony guidelines allow Naval Service people to spend 60% of their time deployed and 40% alongside in their base port during a three-year period. In the Army, soldiers can be deployed for six months, which should be followed by a 24 month break. During that 30 months period a soldier should not expect to be away from their normal place of work in the same three year period. The Royal Air Force guidelines determine that personnel should not spend more than 280 days in every 24 months away from their normal place of duty. The Naval Service experiences more family separation than the Army or RAF.

● Deployment and the wellbeing of children and siblings: Studies have concluded that children from military families were not found to have poorer wellbeing. However, older children with parents who have deployed were at greater risk of adjustment difficulties, including substance use and behavioural issues. Findings also suggested that having a deployed sibling in the military significantly increased the risks associated with substance use and depressive symptoms.

● Deployment and the wellbeing of spouses: Non-operational separations appeared to have a negative effect on spousal employment, family functioning and health and well-being. Non-operational separations affected employment and career progression through difficulties in balancing work and family life without the support of their partner. The needs of Service personnel and their families are atypical from the general UK population.

Families and Transition

● Familial support and early planning is central to successful transition. In 2017, 52% of Service personnel were married or in a civil partnership, demonstrating the importance of family in service life narrative. Conversely, very little recognition has been paid to 'non-traditional families', including re-married personnel, step families and bi-nuclear families (where two households are connected by one biological child).

● Key themes to be acknowledged as key to the engagement of families' in the process include: understanding the unique needs of the family during transition, the need for early involvement with transitional support, tailored support, including an understanding of the emotional impact of transition, acknowledging employment and accommodation needs, tracking following discharge and the need to encourage families through more positive narratives of successful transition.