

Snapshot t

Military Families

Snapshot *Noun* [c] (UNDERSTANDING)

A piece of information or short description that gives an understanding of a situation at a particular time

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A plain language summary of research and evidence relating to the UK Armed Forces and veteran community

Produced by the FiMT Research Centre



About Snapshots

Snapshots are designed primarily to aid understanding of the complex issues at play in relation to the Armed Forces family, and to support decision-making processes by bridging the gaps between academic research, government and charitable policy, Service provision and public opinion. Snapshots are aimed primarily at those working in policy-making and Service provision roles for the Armed Forces; they are also useful to those seeking facts, figures and informed comment to empower a more objective discussion among the wider population, including the Armed Forces community and the media. The purpose of Snapshots is to review and interpret research and policy and to set out concise, plain language summaries to facilitate understanding and perception. Hyperlinks are provided to relevant sources of information, including academic research and organisation websites. Hover over hyperlinks to see reference information for each source and click to access them.

The [Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre](#) is producing a range of Snapshots covering many of the main themes and topics relating to the Armed Forces and veteran community. Due to the constant process of research and policy changes, Snapshots will be updated regularly in order to maintain their relevance. They are hosted on the [Veterans & Families Research Hub](#). Contributions and comments are welcome via the [Veterans & Families Research Hub forum](#).

Disclaimer

Whilst Snapshots are produced using recognised research processes, they are written for a lay audience. They are a collation and summary of available academic and quality grey literature (unpublished or non-commercial literature), to provide an overview of information on a particular theme or topic. Snapshots are written to inform and to disseminate a large body of literature in an accessible way to as wide an audience as possible. They are not intended to be, and should not be regarded as, rigorous searches or systematic reviews.

About the authors of this Snapshot

Dr Linda Cooper and Kristina Fleuty are researchers at the [Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre](#). We would also like to thank the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force Families Federations and Dr Rachael Gribble at the King's Centre for Military Health Research for their valuable feedback.

About the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre

The [Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre](#) was established in October 2017 within [The Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research](#) (VFI) at Anglia Ruskin University. The Centre curates the [Veterans & Families Research Hub](#), which provides advice and guidance to stakeholders and produces targeted research and related outputs. The Centre is funded by the [Forces in Mind Trust](#), which commissions research to contribute to a solid evidence base from which to inform, influence and underpin policy making and service delivery.

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Introduction and definitions

This Snapshot summarises issues relating to literature surrounding the families of serving personnel and veterans. The Snapshot sets out policy responses and current structures of support, presenting research evidence where available. The following terms may be useful:

- **‘Resettlement’** describes the processes and procedures by which one leaves the Armed Forces, and the formal support provided. It starts from the notification of/election to discharge and routinely continues for two years after discharge.
- The term **‘transition’** is used to describe the period of (re)integration into civilian life from the Armed Forces. For the purposes of this report, it is taken to start with the point in-Service at which personnel start active consideration and preparation for leaving the Armed Forces, and continues for varied periods of time depending on personal circumstances.
- The terms **veteran** and **ex-Service personnel** are used interchangeably; the Ministry of Defence’s 2014 policy definition of a ‘veteran’ is an individual who has ‘served for at least a day in HM Armed Forces, whether as a Regular or a Reservist’. This includes Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy personnel who have served in support of the Armed Forces.

Methods

A review was undertaken of the available UK evidence relating to serving and veteran families, using standard reviewing techniques such as searching electronic databases, hand searching of references from relevant articles and reports and a review of websites from government and relevant organisations. Due to the use of hyperlinks in this report, the findings are restricted to online availability only. Discussion and comment on education issues and considerations for serving personnel and veterans can be found in a range of reviews and reports. The [Veterans & Families Research Hub](#) has been an invaluable source of relevant literature.

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.

Armed Forces Family Strategy

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 the following areas of support: partner employment, accommodation, children’s education and childcare, community support, specialist support, health and well-being and transition. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide direction to officials who are responsible for policy development in the areas that make up the ‘offer’ to the Service family. It will act as the starting point for the supporting Action

Plan, which will operationalise the Strategy's Vision and deliver associated change. The Action Plan will be created in consultation with the single Services and key stakeholders, and a Communications Plan will notify the intent and activity to Service families. The strategy recognises that some families will experience little impact on family life as a result of their association with the Armed Forces and others will experience relocation, separation, injury, illness or bereavement.

A Command Brief from the AFF on 'the offer' suggests that Army families believe that they are being asked to do more for less, including the belief that the pay and pensions package has worsened. Army families also have concerns regarding the possibility of buying their own homes and the potential for longer postings, which impacts upon educational stability and spousal employment.

Accommodation and housing

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. 10,400 of these properties are currently vacant (21% of the total), a slight increase from the 10,000 properties (20%) as reported in 2016. The increase in the vacancy rate since 2011 can be explained partly by the Armed Forces Redundancy Programme, the Army Basing Programme and the development of the new MOD Footprint Strategy, which have resulted in some SFA being retained that were previously earmarked for disposal. The increase in vacancy rate could also be caused by retention issues, the new sub-letting programme, the property company that sells properties when the MOD judge them to be surplus to requirements and recent policy changes on eligibility to cohabit in surplus SFA. Annington Homes own the vast majority of the SFA estate, the only properties they do not own are restricted to housing for very senior officers. The MOD rent the properties from Annington and there is a recent agreement to hand back some properties to Annington Homes. In addition, the Forces Help to Buy scheme has proved popular, thereby reducing overall demand. 95% of UK SFA properties for which information is available are assessed as Decent Homes (good condition or requiring minor improvements) or Decent Homes+. This is in line with the commitment made in the Armed Forces Covenant not to allocate sub-standard properties.

In 2016, consultations started over how the MOD would provide for accommodation needs of serving personnel in future years. Pilot schemes for the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) will begin in 2019. 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 by the MOD shielding Service personnel from price variations in expensive locations by paying the difference in cost for privately rented accommodation. A study by the Army Families Federation (AFF), to find out families views on FAM found the following: that families do not feel that they have been communicated with about FAM; they do not understand why it is being implemented; they want to be more informed and listened to; they do not believe FAM is compatible with the mobile Army lifestyle, and they are concerned about FAM. A more in-depth understanding of housing and accommodation issues can be found by viewing the Veterans & Families Research Hub Housing Snapshot.

Dispersed Living

A 2013 report from the AFF on geographically dispersed living draws upon interviews with military spouses who, with their families, had made the decision to buy their own property and move away from Service Families Accommodation (SFA). It was observed that participants moved out of SFA hoping to gain continuity 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. Living off-base often meant that there was a temporary absence of the participant's Service spouse living at home, usually during the working week. This led to some participants feeling under-resourced as though they were single parents during this time. This scenario had problematic consequences on the family unit. It was observed that adaptive strategies were being adopted by the families, such as buying a house near where it was hoped the serving spouse might be posted, and enjoying the autonomy of the new home environment. The strain on the family unit was defended by the fact that participants recognised the choice they had made in leaving SFA. Participants felt excluded from the military community and reported that communication was poor and that they lacked key information during deployment. They felt that the unique stress of being military spouses was not something civilian friends could fully understand. As a consequence of both of these factors they experienced the weakened support of two vital social networks, the military and civilian communities.

The same report made the following recommendations:

- The MOD should consider developing a 'Contact Pack' which could routinely be sent to each newly housed military spouse/family. This pack would include a letter of acknowledgement from the serving spouse's Regiment, emergency contact details, signposts to local services, relevant military organisations and social networks (e.g. military parent and toddler groups).
- Every effort should be made by units to communicate information about the welfare of the deployed spouse. Participants also felt that they would like more communication with the unit and would like to be sent invitations for events on base.
- When accessing online resources for the purpose of keeping up to date with Regimental news and socialising, participants favoured informal mechanisms (e.g. Facebook). It could be of benefit to any services seeking to reach unaccompanied spouses via the internet to recognise the behavioural patterns and preferences of online help-seeking before commissioning new online support.

The Royal Air Force carried out a survey snapshot of the benefits and challenges of dispersed living for RAF personnel. 58% of serving personnel and 42% of non-serving spouses and partners took part. 70% of respondents were living in a privately owned home and 25% in SFA, either retained at a previous unit or located away from their current station, the remainder in privately rented property or social housing. Similar to the AFF study, the RAF survey found that the most common reasons given for moving into privately owned accommodation was to gain home ownership and to increase family stability. The stability of home ownership was found to have benefits in other areas of family life, such as spousal employment, children's education and the continuity of healthcare. 37% of families living in their own home had not moved for more than 5 years. 55% of respondents to the survey reported it was unlikely or very unlikely that they would move house for their next posting.

Forty five per cent of respondents spent time apart from their spouse or partner during the working week compared with the RAF average (18%). Sixty three per cent of families who were regularly separated for at least one night per week through RAF duties said that the serving Person weekly commuted (lived away during the working week). Families in the study suggested that regular separation could have a negative impact on their children and family relationships. Forty three per cent of non-serving respondents said they could not access facilities on any RAF station. Separation from the parent unit (or RAF station) was described as a barrier to accessing available support, due to local policy or a lack of identification as a military family.

Travel from home to RAF base was found by many to exceed travel allowances, as families bought affordable property a distance away from the RAF base and increased commuting times. The distance

also incurred extended time away from the family, impacting on quality family time together. Higher costs with house ownership and maintenance were also identified. Families not living on base were unable to benefit from subsidised services, such as childcare.

Living away from the military community brought advantages and disadvantages. Advantages cited by spouses include: the separation of home and work lives, being able to live near friends and family, forming friendships with the civilian community and living in a 'normal' environment. Disadvantages cited included: civilian friends not understanding the military lifestyle (especially deployment), taking a long time to establish civilian friendships, feeling cut off from the RAF community and events, and a sense of not belonging in either community.

Deployment

A study by the [Naval Families Federation](#) acknowledges the amount, patterns and types of parental absence faced by families of Naval Service personnel present additional challenges that are not routinely experienced by most civilian families, due to their long deployments of 9 months at a time.

Each of the single Services of the Armed Forces has what are known as '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. The maximum individual threshold for separated service is 660 days away from the Service person's normal place of work in the same three-year period. Since most Naval Service families live away from base ports, many do not see their serving person during the working week, even when they are not away on operational deployment. [Harmony guidelines](#) further suggest that for 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.

[A study](#) by the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) found that military personnel who reported being in danger of injury or death during deployment, were more likely to report a perceived negative effect of deployment on their intimate relationships. Reservists were less likely to report a perceived negative impact of deployment on their children compared with Regulars. Military personnel planning to separate from their partner were at increased risk of suffering with mental health problems while deployed. Perceived insufficient support from the Ministry of Defence, and holding a junior rank, were both associated with poor mental health. Deployed UK military personnel with symptoms of psychological distress, who experienced stressors at home, were especially likely to perceive that their family were inadequately supported by the military.

Children, their well-being and the impact of deployment

A UK study was undertaken to examine the emotional and behavioural well-being of children whose fathers were in the UK Armed Forces during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (between 2003 and 2009), particularly the [effects of deployment to these conflicts and probable paternal PTSD](#). Findings showed that the majority of children with parents in the UK Armed Forces do not report adverse emotional or behavioural difficulties. The most common difficulty reported was hyperactivity, notably among boys and children under 11 years of age, associated with probable paternal PTSD. No associations were observed between childhood difficulties and probable paternal PTSD among girls or those children aged 11 or older. These findings from a UK cohort differ from those previously shown

through US studies, as outlined below. The study showed that adverse childhood emotional and behavioural well-being was not associated with paternal deployment, but was associated with probable paternal PTSD.

A review by Williamson and colleagues explored the relationship between [children who have parents in the military and their well-being](#), compared to children in non-military families. Nine studies were identified for inclusion, which used self-report measures in US schools. This quantitative study concluded that children from military families were not found to have poorer well-being. 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.

A further review of US studies on [the impact of deployment on military children](#) when a parent was deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan suggests that there is the risk of an increase in emotional and behavioural problems in these children. An increase in these risk factors was related to the number and duration of parental deployments. Different stressors at various stages in the deployment cycle, including the maternal mental health, were shown to be in line with previous findings.

Children's and young peoples' educational trajectory and attainment

A study outlining [educational progression for Service Children](#) suggests that there are over 82,000 children in compulsory schooling, with 36,640 in Reception classes to Year 11 (first year primary to end of GCSEs).

A study undertaken for the AFF investigated [the comparison of educational attainment](#) between Army and non-Army children. Five key recommendations emerge from the project: to continue to examine differences in attainment between Army and Non-Army pupils, particularly with regard to English as a subject; for future research to explore the issue of Special Educational Needs in greater detail; to increase awareness of the additional needs of Army Pupils in School; to increase the number of activities to support children and young people's integration into schools and to develop greater support for schools to find out more about an Army pupil's previous educational experience.

Little attention has been paid to [Service children's progression through education](#). Incomplete data for service children suggests moving between schools can have an impact both academically and pastorally, including a discontinuity of educational provision, a negative impact on emotional well-being, disrupted friendships and an increased potential for service children being bullied. These issues can create emotional and behavioural problems for the child, as well as a higher incidence of distress for parents. Schools admissions and for those children with special educational needs or disability (SEND) is a growing area of focus for the MOD and the Department for Education. The [Royal British Legion](#) have produced a useful, best practice guide for supporting service children in school in England.

A report for the Children's Commissioner on [growing up as an Armed Forces child](#) suggest that a number of changes could support Service children, including: the MOD raising awareness of policies among parents and school staff to minimise school disruption; more action needed when moving support for children between local authorities; the need to place siblings in the same school where appropriate; Service children's voice should be heard when making deployment decisions; to avoid deployment of both parents when both are Serving personnel; to provide a strategy for emotional support, particularly for teenagers and the on-going need for better data collection and identification of Service children.

For older Service children, [statistics suggest](#) that children from military service families are under-represented in the higher education population. It is in the realm of 4 out of 10 children who, if in the general population would go to university, do not go if they are from a military family. The report suggests that a coherent, systematic approach to monitoring and supporting the educational progression of children from military Service families is required. To do the latter, there needs to be better record keeping and communication between educational institutions.

Health and well-being

Findings from [a report on Royal Naval spouses and partners](#) found that non-operational separations appeared to have a negative effect on employment, family functioning and health and well-being. Spouses in the study reported how non-operational separations affected their employment and career progression through difficulties in balancing work and family life without the support of their partner. Most spouses reported no major difficulties communicating with personnel. However, the physical absence of Naval Service personnel from the family home during the week was described by spouses as limiting the time families and couples had to spend together and was compounded by short notice changes to working rosters and poor-quality communication. Family roles altered across the week to account for the absence of personnel, with older children taking on additional responsibilities to assist the stay-at-home parent and, in some cases, assuming the role of another adult within the household.

Further findings also [reveal](#) how non-operational family separations can influence family functioning and well-being among Naval Service families. Many of the benefits and challenges reported are similar to those described by families experiencing deployment-related separations. Spouse employment, family roles, relationships, spouse and child health and well-being could all be affected, but access to family resources could alleviate adaptation to separations. With an increasing trend towards a greater number of military families settling in civilian communities, it is possible that non-operational separations may increase across all three Services. The report of the [RAF Benevolent Fund](#) concurrently found that isolation and partner employment are key concerns of RAF spouses.

A study for the [Royal British Legion](#) (RBL) investigated the health, welfare and social needs of 150 participants, comprised of six groups within the Armed Forces community – those seriously injured by Service or their family members, veterans with a health condition or disability not caused by Service or their family members, serving Armed Forces family members, estranged spouses and partners of Service personnel, family members or Service personnel who have died and Gurkhas and Commonwealth soldiers discharged from the Armed Forces within the last five years. The study recognised that the needs of Service personnel and their families are atypical from the general UK population.

All of the participants in the [RBL research](#) had experienced some health, welfare and social needs. The most common health problems included depression, anxiety, stress, physical limitations, cognitive impairment and pain. People in all groups faced financial hardships including lack of employment and difficulties accessing benefits. Common social problems included loneliness, adjusting to civilian life, social isolation and difficulties with new or existing relationships. Issues faced by all groups included: gaps in provision of support services, barriers to seeking assistance and social exclusion or injustice.

Psychological needs and Mental Health of families

A [systematic review](#) has been undertaken to understand the effects that traumatic events might have on significant others of UK Armed Forces veterans. Partners of help-seeking veterans with PTSD were more at risk of vicarious, or secondary traumatic stress (STS). Adult children of serving personnel were at some risk of STS, but parents of serving personnel were not found to be affected by their children's

service. The perception of negative events in the home environment and poor military support for the family was shown in [a survey of deployed British personnel](#) to increase the reporting of adverse mental health effects in serving personnel.

A further study in the USA , to investigate [the prevalence of secondary trauma of children](#) of serving personnel with PTSD suggested a potential negative impact on children's mental health and relationships; however, the literature reviewed for this latter study were outside of the UK and therefore the findings may not be compatible with UK Armed Forces. It should be noted that, although there is a lack of UK research in this area and most findings are based on US studies, we should be cautious when applying US findings to a UK context.

A study on [subclinical trauma symptoms in serving members' civilian partners](#) suggest that partners reporting greater subclinical trauma (symptoms not severe enough to warrant full diagnosis) used fewer problem focused coping techniques, resulting in predicted increased psychological distress. The study suggested the need for early intervention for partners of trauma affected Service members to mitigate against possible secondary psychological distress.

A scoping review on [perinatal mental health in military spouses](#) and partners suggests a strong focus on spousal deployment as a risk factor for depressive symptoms and psychological stress during the perinatal period. Other risk factors included a lack of social and/or emotional support and increased family-related stressors. Interventions for pregnant military spouses included those that help them develop internal coping strategies and external social support.

Spouse Employment in-Service

A [report for the AFF on spouse employment](#) recommended the introduction of an online jobs platform to do several things: provide information to employers on the benefits of military spouses; to demonstrate evidence by employers of adherence to the Armed Forces Covenant; provide priority recruitment of military spouses for military-related jobs; introduce university training partnerships to spouses for (re)training, and to target the advertisement of employment support programmes to specific groups of spouses. Longer term recommendations include: challenging the military culture, providing paid or subsidised childcare for military families, challenging employer stereotypes of spouses, introducing tailored training programmes for different groups of spouses or partners, and to target overseas spouses or partners for support. The [RAF Benevolent Fund report](#) shared similar findings, where isolation and partner employment were key concerns.

Issues for families with spouses who are Wounded, Injured and Sick (WIS) or with limb loss

A [review](#) on the level of support available and the needs of families who provide unpaid care for wounded, injured or sick (WIS) personnel in the UK discovered that support services are provided by government-led initiatives, third sector organisations and the Service Family Federations. A minority of interventions for families of WIS personnel in the UK were available. Overall the highlighted [the need for service evaluation](#) on the support offered to families.

Following on from this finding, research was undertaken on [the support needs and experiences of family members of WIS UK Service personnel](#), who provide care in an unpaid capacity. 'Family member involvement' was the main theme under which four subthemes were situated: 'continuity of support', 'proactive signposting and initiating contact', 'psychoeducation and counselling' and 'higher risk

groups'. Family members felt they might benefit from direct, consistent and continuous care regardless of the WIS person's injury or engagement type, and whether the WIS person was being treated in a hospital, rehabilitative centre or at home. The findings of this study suggest that family members of WIS personnel value proactive, direct and sustained communication from support service providers.

Further research within the same study examined [the relationship experiences of non-military partners caring for WIS UK military personnel](#) and identified six key themes: communication between couples; adverse family environment; reintegration; intimacy; financial uncertainty; and transition from partner to caregiver. Partners caring for injured/ill military personnel appear to be at risk of experiencing personal distress caused by impaired relationship functioning, which may lead to diminished physical and mental well-being. Partners of WIS military personnel experience significant levels of distress and burden associated with caregiving in the form of arguments with the military partner, problems in reintegration and a lack of physical and emotional intimacy.

A report in 2014 for Blesma, the limbless veterans' charity, found a paucity in research around the needs of veterans with limb loss and their families, finding at the time, only six research papers written on the subject, all of which were non-UK based studies. The recommendations of the report suggested that it was imperative that the needs of the family be taken into consideration at policy level, with the need to encourage a cultural shift towards family-centred care and rehabilitation.

In 2018, a comprehensive report for Blesma examines [the family perspective on living with limb loss](#). Findings indicate that the central concern of veterans and their families, is coping and living with the limb loss. The veteran with limb loss and their carer/s may experience differing levels of coping during any specific time period. Each coping level is characterised by behaviours or characteristics to which appropriate support can be aligned. There are distinct time periods where certain types of organisational support, such as Blesma, are more likely to effectively support coping ability. The report findings are developed into a practical Living with Limb Loss Support Model (LLSM). The LLSM identifies specific periods where timely support is more likely to be relevant and effective in supporting individual needs and coping levels. This research was carried out with veterans and their family members, however, the recommendations are intended to be transferable to other persons with limb loss (PWLL) and their families.

A further piece of research carried out with Blind Veterans UK highlighted the substantial impact on various [aspects of life for those with a visual impairment](#), including work, interpersonal relations, mobility and social and mental well-being. The report noted that coping with a visual impairment is a continuous struggle, even after a significant amount of time has passed, with an on-going need for emotional, social, practical and physical support by family, friends and support workers.

Families Federations by Service

Royal Navy and Royal Marines

The [Naval Families Federation \(NFF\)](#) provides support to Serving personnel and family members in the areas of Accommodation, Education, Employment, Finance, Overseas matters, Relationships and Wellbeing. The NFF captures evidence about life as part of a serving family by carrying out anonymous surveys. They take feedback to those in positions of power – the Chain of Command, government Ministers, other government departments, local authorities and civilian service providers.

The NFF supports family members, whatever their link to the Naval Service and works 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 a 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.

Army

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 AFF also provides a signposting service to help guide families to necessary support, as well as providing useful information for Army families through its website and magazine, [Army & You](#). The AFF works at a local level directly with families and local command, including Unit Welfare Officers, specialists and service providers. The AFF collects evidence from families about issues that are of concern, and collates this information in a database. They use the data to inform the chain of command regarding families' worries and produce a quarterly report called Families Concerns. Some of the main areas the AFF address are: housing, health and additional needs, education and childcare, Army Reserve, deployments, money matters, employment and training and family life. The AFF has representatives worldwide, so there is always a point of contact for families who are posted.

A Command Brief for the Army Families Federation (AFF), undertaken by Army spouses and partners on [the work/life balance of soldiers](#) suggests that families perceive that the workload for soldiers has increased, with barriers to a work/life balance including short notice tasks and the amount of time away from the family. The use of 'WhatsApp' was a concern for soldiers not being able to disconnect from work. Families were concerned about the impact on the well-being of the spouse/partner, children and the overall cohesion of the family unit. Two thirds (66%) of spouses/partners responded that their partner regularly or occasionally works from home out of hours and this is a particular issue for officers. Further, spouses/partners felt that Army personnel are constantly accessible and their partners feel obligated to respond whilst at home. Three areas were identified as areas where the Army could do more to improve the work/life balance, including more tolerance of unforeseen family emergencies, the ability to take time off in lieu for extra time worked and the opportunity to work more flexibly.

Royal Air Force

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 RAF-FF work with other organisations and agencies to ensure that families do not face disadvantage because of the unique nature of service life. The RAF-FF is funded by the RAF but is not part of the Service and is independent of the chain of command. The RAF-FF's contract is held by the Royal Air Forces Association, as part of its wide ranging support to the RAF family. The RAF Association also supports those who are currently serving through various welfare services and grants. The Association is supported by the RAF Benevolent Fund in the delivery of the contract. The RAF-FF have their own quarterly magazine, '[Envoy](#)', a weekly online e-bulletin and various social media forums and groups for which families can register for free.

Foreign and Commonwealth Families

A report to consider if the current service provision is meeting [the needs of Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel](#), veterans and their families focuses on data collected from the military charity sector and experts in the field of service provision. The report analysis identified that information gathering and recording, in relation to Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel, veterans and families, is limited across the charitable sector and prevents forward planning for service provision. Issues of immigration, settlement and visas have a considerable impact on Foreign and Commonwealth Personnel and families especially due to recent increases in the costs of the application process. The financial pressures this process creates can in turn lead to additional burdens in terms of debt, employment, housing and marital issues, which make transition to civilian life for Foreign and Commonwealth Service Personnel and their families exceptionally difficult. The services provided by the military charity sector are wide-ranging and open to Foreign and Commonwealth recipients, but take up of these services amongst the Foreign and Commonwealth cohort is indicated to be low.

Personnel leaving the Armed Forces, veterans and their families

Transition

The [Ashcroft Review](#) and the [FiMT Transition Mapping Study](#) in 2013 acknowledge the importance of making families a greater part of the transition process. The Ashcroft Review and TMS 2013 suggest knowledge, education and preparation around transition is the most important factor in integrating families during transition. Families are recognised as a central part of the transition process and the Ashcroft Review and TMS 2013 recommended better access to, and provision of, workshops and education modules (life skills such as housing and financial management) and access to CTP for veterans and their families. [The Tri-Service Families' Transition Report](#) on the families' experience of transition found that families want to be involved in their families' transition and believe early planning is essential to its success. The report found that in 2017, 52% of Service personnel were married or in a civil partnership, demonstrating the importance of family in service life narrative. Additionally, [a review of evidence](#) on family support during transition highlighted that very little recognition and research has been paid to 'non-traditional families', including remarried personnel, step-families and bi-nuclear families (where two households are connected by one biological child).

[The St George's Consultation](#) on transition acknowledged that service personnel and their families can be cocooned from the realities of civilian life while in the military. Recommendations of the group included the need for Service personnel leaving the Armed Forces, and their families, receive a structured transition plan, with access to easily identifiable support. [The Tri-Service Families' Transition Report](#) suggests a shift in culture is needed by all stakeholders in the transition of Service personnel, including policy makers, service providers, Service Leavers and their families to appreciate

the breadth of changes to be acknowledged during the transition period. 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; on-going support and tracking following discharge, and the need to encourage families through more positive narratives of successful transition.

Transition and accommodation

A significant minority of personnel and families enter their transitional period without having made provision for a home, either rented or owned. The [Ashcroft Review](#) recognises the absence of planning, combined with a lack of awareness about civilian housing matters, is the biggest cause of accommodation problems among Service Leavers. Several charities offer significant support to the process of securing long-term sustainable accommodation, not only to the minority in need of charitable support, but also through advice and guidance to the routine Service Leaver (such as that provided by the Forces Families Federations). Priority for housing is given to the most apparently vulnerable groups, such as families with children. [A report by Stoll](#) suggests the need for more housing for homeless veterans and their families.

Findings from the [Ashcroft Review](#) in 2014 revealed that the Armed Forces Welfare Services Help and Information Volunteers Exchanges (HIVEs) received a significant number of calls from families regarding transition. Housing was the most common topic requested for support, followed by employment and welfare matters.

Transition and spouse employment

Finding a job in civilian life is a main concern of both veterans and their spouses through the transition process. The extension of job-finding services to be made available for the spouses of veterans was a key recommendation in the [Ashcroft Review](#) in 2014. The [RAF-FF made a submission to the Defence Select Committee Covenant inquiry 2018](#). The RAF-FF report found that 'managing their own career' was the hardest aspect of RAF life for partners. The Army Families Federation's (AFF) survey [How to Make 'Work' Work](#) gained the responses of 657 spouses or partners in employment. Respondents identified that the key to staying in employment was determination to find and maintain employment, positivity and having a flexible skill set. Childcare has been found to be a significant barrier to employment for spouses, as outlined in the [AFF survey](#), the [Naval Families Federation Childcare Report](#) and [RAF Families Federation Childcare Survey](#). The top four challenges for spouses in maintaining employment were identified in the [AFF survey](#) as: the cost of childcare (55%), lack of appropriate childcare (49%), frequent postings (48%) and lack of family support (47%). The top field of employment for spouses were listed as: administration and secretarial (15%), 'other' (unknown) (14%), teaching and education (11%), health (8%) and charity (7%). The main reason spouses or partners work included financial reasons, enjoyment, fitting in with family life, for career aspirations, but also cited difficulties in finding work, including limited opportunities and 'other' unknown reasons.

A study undertaken with [spouses of British Army and RAF personnel](#) suggests that for military spouses, employment contributed to the women's independent identity, enabled social connectedness, provided a sense of self-confidence and value, but with limited scope to make employment decisions. It was suggested that well-being could be improved by the provision of better childcare access and additional support in finding employment and training opportunities.

An evaluation of the [MoD Spouse Employment Support Trial](#) suggests that the Trial had a positive impact on meeting the needs of military spouses. The recommendations from the evaluation include: recognising military spouses as individuals in their own right; the importance of a relation

nship between the spouse and the military; the need for childcare and transport provision; the importance of the provision of a training grant to spouses; the consideration of joint training provision for spouses and partners; clearer signposting to organisations offering employment support; the need for flexible employment for spouses due to the military lifestyle, and the positive influence of the Trial to improve the confidence of spouses in the job market.

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