

Service Families Employment & Skills Taskforce

**Taskforce Report
March 2010**

Foreword



Foreword by Harriet Harman, Minister for Women & Equalities

The families of our Service personnel have always held things together at home, and their task has become even more demanding with the forces fighting in Afghanistan. We need to give service families every support. They must have the chance to get training, work and childcare. But, as I have seen first hand from my visits to military bases, that is hard if they have to move regularly and are located on a base miles away from parents and in-laws.

The Service Families Employment Taskforce initiatives will help to ensure that Service families do not lose out and have the same access to childcare, school places and transport as everyone else; and that employers recognise that moving from place to place is a part of life for service families, not a lack of commitment to work.



Foreword by Bob Ainsworth, Secretary of State for Defence

In Britain, we have a deep and enduring respect for our Armed Forces and, as a Government, we have a continuing obligation to ensure that the unique public service they fulfil does not lead Service personnel or their families to become disadvantaged as citizens.

Whenever I meet the families of military personnel, I am always struck by the exceptional support and commitment to the Services which they show in their daily lives. Without them, we would not have the military forces of which we are so proud. And in turn, we need to make sure that military life does not make it harder to access jobs, school places, or childcare. The work of the Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce, building on the principles and measures outlined in the 2008 cross-Government Service Personnel Command Paper, is therefore of great importance. I particularly welcome the wide spread of contributions, including from the public sector, private sector and the Service Family Federations, and look forward to this work making a real difference to those who give so much.



Foreword by Yvette Cooper, Secretary of State for Work & Pensions and Chair of Service Families Taskforce

As Chair of the Employment and Skills Taskforce, I am delighted that we have produced a number of very valuable new initiatives which build upon the measures outlined in the Service Personnel Command Paper. The gratitude that we owe to the Armed Forces and their families is immeasurable and it is vital that we continue to support Service families' in gaining access to the same employment, education and training opportunities as the civilian community.

Executive Summary

1. The exceptional demands of military life can often mean that Service personnel and their families can face significant difficulties and barriers in getting access to the same life opportunities – in areas such as health, housing, education and skills, transport, careers, benefits – that most of us take for granted. In response, in 2008 the Government published *'The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans'*, sometimes known as the Service Personnel Command Paper, which set out a number of commitments to uphold the Government's obligation to the Armed Forces and counter the difficulties that military families face.
2. In particular, military families often face considerable challenges and barriers in obtaining employment and in accessing adequate opportunities for education and training. These include:
 - regular postings to different locations, including overseas, which make it difficult to build up experience and skills, interrupt training/education, and lead to gaps in CVs;
 - difficulties for partners with young children accessing education and training opportunities as the frequent absence of their serving partner often leaves them as sole carers;
 - reluctance among some employers to employ applicants from military families, often as a result of negative perceptions about the level of commitment they can give and which, in turn, can lead to detrimental impacts upon their self-esteem and confidence.
3. The Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce, which met between Autumn 2009 and March 2010 – and included representatives from the Armed Forces families federations, public and private sectors – to examine ways in which additional help to enhance employment and training opportunities for Service families could be provided, and to trigger interventions and initiatives that will have a tangible impact in providing better support. It draws from evidence – both anecdotal and empirical¹ – gathered directly from Service families by the MoD and during visits by GEO and MOD Ministers, as well as the extensive experience of the Service Family Federations and the other Taskforce participants.

¹ Including: *Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey*, MoD, 2008, Ministerial visits to military bases at Swinton, Wittering and Faslane in 2009/2010, and a reception for Service families held in Downing Street on 19 November 2009.

4. The following actions are being progressed and/or have been initiated in line with the Taskforce's remit. They have all been reviewed and assessed by the Taskforce and agreed as appropriate actions that have the potential to make significant and positive impacts on the employment, career and training opportunities for Service families:

IT Based Employment and Training 'One-Stop Shop'

5. An IT based employment and training 'one-stop shop' that will provide information, support, advice and guidance on employment and training opportunities will be launched at the beginning of April, building on the experience of the Royal British Legion and Directgov.

Jobcentre Plus Armed Forces Champions

6. The establishment of a network of Armed Forces Champions in each Jobcentre Plus district to provide specialist employment and training support, advice and guidance to help the Armed Forces community.

Changes to Vocational Qualifications System

7. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) are implementing changes to the vocational qualifications system to provide flexible and 'portable' qualifications for all learners and this will help Service families to continue their learning and achieve qualifications when they move to a new geographical area.

Revised Guidance for Local Authorities on Childcare Sufficiency

8. The DCSF have consulted on, and are now revising guidance for local authorities highlighting key policy and delivery priorities for them to focus upon, including identifying and meeting the childcare needs of Service families.

Service Children and Fair Access to Schools

9. A late application for a school place is likely to result in a second or third choice school. This can mean children attending a school too far away from a potential job location, making employment difficult to co-ordinate with the school run. The Department for Schools, Children & Families is following up its existing guidance on school admissions and allocations to ensure local schools make full use of the flexibility to accommodate Service children.

Supporting Service Families through Children's Centres

10. A comprehensive joint DCSF and Together for Children assessment of how well Sure Start Children's Centres are currently serving the needs of military families is due to be completed by end March 2010. TFC will develop a plan to address issues and areas for improvement identified through the assessment by end June 2010.

Improving Flexible Career Opportunities in the Public Sector

11. The Cabinet Office will identify necessary adjustments that can be made to Civil Service recruitment processes to ensure that flexible career opportunities are opened up for Service partners who are civil servants.

Private Sector Support

12. A programme of private sector led work, involving the establishment of public and private sector employment and training partnerships, is being developed to identify ways in which employment and training opportunities for Service families can be further maximised.

Role of Service Families Employment & Skills Taskforce

13. The Service Families Employment & Skills Taskforce was established between Autumn 2009 and Spring 2010 to focus upon issues relating to employment and skills for Service families and to examine ways in which Service families across the UK could be given the same opportunities as those in the civilian community to access employment, further education and training. It drew its remit from evidence gathered by MoD and GEO ministers during consultations and visits with the families for serving personnel, evidence provided by the three Service Family Federations as well as attitudinal data showing continuing concerns from Service partners at the impact of military life on their employment and training prospects.²

Background

14. In July 2008, the Government published *'The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans'*, often referred to as the Service Personnel Command Paper. It describes the exceptional demands that are imposed upon Britain's Armed Forces and their families, particularly at this time of significant military commitment overseas. But it also makes clear the obligations that the nation owes to them and establishes the principle that they should not be disadvantaged as a result of the special work they do in serving and protecting our society.
15. The demands of military life can often mean that Service personnel and their families face significant difficulties and barriers in gaining access to the life opportunities – in areas such as health, housing, education and skills, transport, careers, or benefits – that most of us take for granted. These are magnified when families have to manage without the Service person being at home. The Command Paper made over 40 commitments to counter the difficulties that the Armed Forces community can face.



² Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey, MoD, 2008.

16. The Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce – which includes representatives from the Armed Forces families federations, public and private sectors – was established to examine ways in which extra help to enhance employment and training opportunities could be provided. The remit of the Taskforce has been to explore ways of supporting Service families to address many of the employment and training issues faced and to coordinate, develop and initiate work that will have a tangible and immediate impact in improving opportunities and providing better support. This remit supports the Command Paper’s commitments in the area of ‘*Support for Families*’, which included ensuring that the ongoing work on those commitments reflected the employment and skills needs of Service families.
17. The Government works closely with the Devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, recognising their particular and varying responsibilities. While many of the commitments within the report of the Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce are specific to England, the challenges are common across the four countries of the United Kingdom. Each will consider the most appropriate arrangements – in those areas for which they have devolved responsibility – to address the issues in ways that best meet their own circumstances and needs.
18. Examples of the challenges and barriers that Service families face in progressing their careers and accessing further education and training include:
 - gaps in CV histories (e.g. whilst stationed overseas)
 - frequent mobility, which makes it difficult to build up experience and skills and interrupts training/education;
 - pressures placed upon those with young children by their distance from family support networks;
 - pressures placed upon Service families with young children through the frequent absence of serving partners, often at short notice;
 - lack of supporting infrastructure – e.g. inadequate access to employment and services from remote bases and difficulties in accessing adequate and affordable childcare; and
 - reluctance among some employers to employ applicants from military families, often as a result of negative perceptions about the level of commitment that they can give to an employer and which, in turn, can lead to detrimental impacts upon peoples’ self-esteem and confidence.

19. The Taskforce, chaired by the Secretary of State for Work & Pensions, worked between Autumn 2009 and March 2010 to address some of these barriers.

What Service families told us:

"We recently moved due to my husband's posting and I gave up a good career with a wage almost equalling my husbands and on which we relied. I am now unemployed. I feel worthless not working. It is difficult to get a decent career as employers always think you will be leaving soon and this question of doubt has been raised so many times by future employers I have had interviews with. I feel this is very unfair on career minded wives who through no fault of their own move around the country to support their husbands."

(Service partner, 2009)



"I have only had one interview in five months since arriving in Scotland and have been told that I was overqualified and they expected me to move on quickly I feel like I am in a vicious circle – I want and need to work to contribute to household finances but feel that I will be unemployed for the duration of the posting."

(Service partner, 2009)

Specific Actions

20. The following actions are being progressed and/or initiated in line with the Taskforce's remit. All have been assessed by the Taskforce as offering significant potential to engender positive impacts for the employment, career and training opportunities for Service families:

IT Based Employment and Training 'One-Stop Shop'

21. The Government will sponsor an IT based employment and training 'one-stop shop' that will provide practical support to members of Service families seeking employment and training opportunities. They will be able to find details of what is available in the areas where Service families are concentrated and, if they wish, to apply for opportunities online. This service will be available in early April 2010.
22. To ensure both early delivery, and the best use of existing investment, the 'one-stop shop' will be available on two existing services which already have valuable experience of helping those looking for employment. These are the Jobcentre Plus vacancy search available on Directgov and 'Civvy Street' operated by the Royal British Legion. Directgov is a familiar brand which is increasingly becoming the route of choice for members of the public to access information about public services. During March a section of the Jobseekers channel will be developed to flag up specific opportunities for Service families. 'Civvy Street' already plays an important role in helping those with an Armed Forces background to look for training and employment, but it will expand the section which is dedicated to Service family members and this change will also be initiated in early April.
23. These developments will be linked. Irrespective of which of the two sites individuals enter first, they will be directed on to the appropriate pages which will give them the information and access they need. As the 'one-stop shop' is developed, it will include (or signpost towards) a range of other relevant material, such as childcare availability in areas with large military populations. Usage will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that it is meeting the needs of Service families. The Taskforce is extremely grateful to the Royal British Legion for its assistance in taking forward this proposal.
24. The 'one-stop shop' will also take advantage of work carried out jointly between the Ministry of Defence and many of its key private sector partners, under the Defence Career Partnering (DCP) initiative. DCP is a multi-faceted programme which aims to strengthen links between the MOD and defence industry in many different ways. But one early gain is that employers who recognise the particular value of recruiting Service family members into their workforce will be able to post the opportunities they can offer on to the 'one-stop shop', where Service families can find them much more easily. This facility will also become available in early April.

What difference will this make to Service families?

25. A dedicated site will offer the information of specific jobs available from DCP, a search facility for Jobcentre Plus advertised vacancies and details of the support available to Service families, which will make it easier to find and train for a job.

Jobcentre Plus Armed Forces Champions

26. Jobcentre Plus has established a network of Armed Forces Champions in each Jobcentre Plus district. The 'Champions' will ensure the concerns and issues affecting Service families are integrated within the wider work of Jobcentres so that the support, advice and guidance offered reflects the needs of Service families. Specific actions for each Champion are to be drawn up in consultation with local bases. They will also work to increase awareness of the services available from the European Employment Service (EURES) and the network of EURES Advisers, who can provide advice and assistance on vacancies and living and working conditions to Service families in the UK preparing for a European overseas posting.
27. Working closely with MOD, Jobcentre Plus will produce a variety of communication material, including articles for Service Families Federations magazines, information for the Service Personnel Command Paper website and leaflets as appropriate to help publicise the support available.
28. At the local level, the Champions will work with military establishments, the Service Families Federations and HIVEs³ to raise awareness of the support available to Service families through Jobcentre Plus and other organisations, via presentations or other methods as agreed locally. They will also work with district colleagues, partners and employers to raise the profile of the Service community in terms of the skills, knowledge and experience they can offer, to try and break down some of the misconceptions held by employers about taking on Service family members. This is an extension of the work currently ongoing to identify employers keen to take on Service leavers. It will complement the improved IT facilities mentioned in the previous section and the private sector initiatives described later in this report.
29. This means that Service family members will have improved access to information on their local labour market, details of benefits they may be eligible for and how to claim them (such as New Deal for Partners), as well as help in finding and applying for jobs. Details about employment

³ *HIVE Information Services:* On-site advice and support facilities, usually located at military barracks, that provide a range of advice and support services concerning issues such as health, housing, childcare, benefits and so on.

and training opportunities, job fairs, job bulletins, and employer events in their area will be shared with the local bases and the HIVE Information Service⁴ to increase the prospects of finding employment.

30. The Champions will take information on barriers to work being faced by Service families and work with district colleagues to resolve them where appropriate. For example, a difficulty in finding appropriate childcare in the local area would be fed through to the Childcare Partnership Manager, who has a key role in helping unemployed parents to access appropriate childcare or overcoming childcare barriers to work.
31. Jobcentre Plus will monitor the Champions' progress through monthly updates, collecting examples of good practice and sharing as appropriate. Jobcentre Plus intends to hold an internal Champions event during the 1st quarter of the 2010-11 operational year, at which progress will be discussed. The three Service Families Federations will also be invited to this event so that the difference being made by the Champions can be evaluated and further steps discussed and agreed as necessary. Jobcentre Plus will also be maintaining their links to the Service Families Federations and the MoD to ensure focus on this activity is maintained.
32. Jobcentre Plus already has a great deal to offer members of Service families, whether it relates to local job vacancies, training opportunities, and transport information, softer skills such as confidence and communication, or the eligibility criteria for New Deal for Partners. However these new measures mark a step change in the way that Jobcentre plus can focus its services on helping the Armed Forces community, to the benefit of both Service families and the local economy.

What difference will this make to Service families?

33. The work of the Armed Forces Champions will mean the services offered by Jobcentre Plus will better reflect the specific problems faced by Service families when looking for work or training.
34. *Case Study:* The new Armed Forces Champions are delighted to have this opportunity to support Service personnel and their families. At a recent employment event in Oxfordshire, the Armed Forces champion for the Thames Valley District, Bianca Kerley said *"It is vital that we get help and support to everyone who needs it and make sure people are claiming the benefits they are entitled to, as well as finding people work."*

⁴ *HIVE Information Services:* On-site advice and support facilities, usually located at military barracks, that provide a range of advice and support services concerning issues such as health, housing, childcare, benefits, bereavement support and so on.

We have the largest jobs database in the country and our personal advisers provide help on many things including training opportunities, confidence building and advice on finding work. I'm amazed at the turn out, and hope to be able to hold similar events in the future"

35. The event aimed to provide current and ex-Service personnel and their families with information on the help and advice available to get them into work, and gave them a chance to discuss their careers with different organisations and support groups. One attendee at the event said *"I think this event has been fantastic, a real help. I didn't realise the extent of the support on offer."*



Changes to Vocational Qualifications System

36. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is working with delivery partners to implement a programme of changes to the vocational qualifications (VQ) system to provide flexible qualifications that meet the skills needs of employers and learners. This new flexibility is available to all learners and will be of particular benefit to Service families to enable them to continue learning and achieve qualifications when they move to a new geographical area.
37. The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is the new qualifications framework designed to hold new vocational qualifications. New vocational qualifications comprise chunks of learning called units, and these units can be studied at a time and pace to suit individual learners as they work towards achieving the overall qualification.
38. Over 15,000 QCF units are now available, including a range dealing with "softer" skills and competencies, and over 2,500 qualifications have been accredited on to the QCF with more being added each day. These changes are being evaluated to assess, for example, increases in the number of vocational qualifications gained, and innovative approaches to delivering the new vocational qualifications offer. The next evaluation report is due in September 2010.
39. By the end of 2010 all accredited vocational qualifications will be on the QCF and available in credit-based units of learning. Colleges and training providers are currently preparing to use the new flexibilities and

are expected to become increasingly able to offer innovative solutions to their learners.

40. From August 2010, all adults will be able to access the adult advancement and careers service, and open a skills account. This will allow them to assess their skills, explore career paths, find a suitable local training course, and access a personal learner record of the QCF units and qualifications they gain. Service families will be able to use these services to identify next steps for training and career development.
41. Sector Skills Councils will advise the Skills Funding Agency on vocational qualifications in the QCF which should be in receipt of public funding. This will be in line with skills and funding investment priorities. The Skills Funding Agency will publish a list of those QCF vocational qualifications that are confirmed for public funding. As now, learners who may start and end a qualification in different geographic locations, will be supported through public funding to achieve their learning aim, providing the qualification is offered by providers in the location they move to.

What difference will this make to Service families?

42. The implementation of the QCF will mean that for Service families, as for all learners, learning can be undertaken around the demands of everyday life and work commitments to a timescale that suits them. Learners from Service families will be able to start a training course in one location and then complete it in another.
43. Learners will receive credit for each unit of study completed and credits for learning achieved are portable; they can be accumulated and transferred so that no learning is lost. For example, colleges and learning providers will be able to offer units of training which can be added to at another training location and built up to a qualification over time. This will be helpful for the families of Service personnel who are posted to different locations.

Childcare for Service Families: Revised Guidance for Local Authorities on Childcare Sufficiency

44. Accessing good quality childcare and early years support can be difficult for Armed Forces families, with their unique circumstances, atypical working hours and often remote locations. Though close links have been established in many parts of the country between military communities and local childcare providers, such arrangements are by no means universal.

45. The current Department for Children, Schools & Families statutory sufficiency guidance, published in 2007, clarified the local authorities' Childcare Act 2006 duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the provision of childcare that is sufficient to meet the requirements of all parents in their area, to enable them to work or undertake education or training leading to work. It did not, however, include any specific reference to meeting the needs of Service families.
46. As part of their activities to support the Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce, the DCSF have reviewed the published 2008 Childcare Sufficiency Assessments⁵ of a sample of local authorities where there are high concentrations of Service families. Only a minority of the chosen local authorities – Hampshire, Plymouth, Somerset and Wiltshire – included specific reference to provision for Service families in their sufficiency assessment reports.
47. In December 2009, the DCSF launched a public consultation inviting local authorities, military communities, national early years and childcare organisations and other government departments to comment on Draft Revised Statutory Childcare Sufficiency and Assessment Guidance designed to support local authorities in meeting their childcare sufficiency duty. The Draft Guidance includes a new and specific section on access to childcare and early years support for Service families.
48. It stipulates that local authorities *should ensure that the needs of Service families in their area are identified and met within* their sufficiency assessment and action planning.
49. The Guidance also asks local authorities to consider how best to maximise the potential of Sure Start Children's Centres in supporting Service partners with young children to gain employment. Support would include promoting the services – which include help with CV writing, interview preparation and confidence building – that are offered at local centres.
50. In addition, the Guidance also suggests that local liaison between military establishments, local authorities and Children's Centres should take place to raise awareness of the needs of Service families located in the area. It also asks local authorities to consider how extended services (delivered by and through schools, and including childcare and study support activities) could be amended to ensure a better reach within military communities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these links work better in some communities than others, particularly where base

⁵ *Sufficiency of Childcare and the Childcare Act 2006*: The Childcare Act 2006 gave local authorities the legal responsibility for securing, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working parents; carrying out a childcare sufficiency assessment for their area at least every 3 years in line with statutory guidance; and providing information to parents.

managers have ensured that those who plan childcare and children's services have good access to Service families and are able to work with them in designing on-site or local provision.

51. Consultation on the Draft Guidance was completed in February and DCSF are aiming to publish the final version by end of March 2010. Local authorities are then due to complete the next full round of childcare sufficiency assessments by end March 2011 at the latest, which will enable them to identify any gaps in provision and develop plans to address them.

Childcare Sufficiency: Information for Families

52. Access to information is a critical aspect of childcare sufficiency in order to empower Service families so they can make confident choices on the childcare provision they need. The Draft Sufficiency Guidance also sets out local authorities' responsibilities in this area, including their duty under the Childcare Act to provide information to parents on childcare and other issues.
53. Every local authority has a *Family Information Service* (FIS) which acts as a central information and advice point for families and which can be accessed through channels such as Children's Centres, Jobcentre Plus, schools, Connexions, youth clubs and libraries. FISs provide comprehensive information, advice and guidance on a number of topics related to childcare and early years provision and also provide a brokerage service to help and support parents who cannot find childcare that readily meets their needs.
54. The *Family Information Directory* is an extensive online directory offering families the ability to search for information about childcare and family services both in their local community and nationally. The Directory is web-based and will be increasingly available on a wide range of websites that families – including Service families – use, greatly increasing access opportunities and offering a far greater choice of services, support and information than ever before. Organisations that have already implemented the Directory into their online services are:
Directgov Childcare – www.childcarefinder.direct.gov.uk/childcarefinder/
Directgov Family services – www.familyservices.direct.gov.uk/familyservicesfinder/
Directgov Jobseekers – www.jobseekers.direct.gov.uk/homepage.aspx?sessionId=bd87953f-65b2-4393-94a1-01083be4b4ef&pid=1
DadTalk online – <http://www.dadtalk.co.uk/>
Parentline Plus – www.parentlineplus.org.uk/
Becta/Home Access – www.ourhomeaccess.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/Settings/HomeSettings.aspx
Hampshire local authority – www.pkhd.hants.gov.uk/
Birmingham local authority – www.ined2know.org.uk/nsd/search/child/nsdBCC.aspx?&p=home&theme=0&fontsize=0&sid=&aud=0

York local authority – www.fsd.york.gov.uk/search.aspx

1bigdatabase – www.1bigdatabase.org.uk/

Information for Families – www.informationforfamilies.dcsf.gov.uk/

55. Although the Directory will be presented in different ways to fit with the look and feel of the host site, all information is sourced from one central publishing system which is populated by local authorities and the DCSF. The central system is continually updated and information is made immediately available. This means that wherever you access the Directory you will be searching against the same realtime information.
56. The Family Information Directory is available to Service families here in the UK and abroad via the Internet. DCSF is working to enable the Directory to be available on as many local authority, private and voluntary sector sites as wish to host it, including those sites that Service families visit most often.
57. Any organisation interested in offering the Family Information Directory online should contact the support team at:
www.familyinformationdirect.directory@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk



Childcare Sufficiency: Childcare during school holidays

58. Childcare during the school holidays can be a particular issue for some families and was one of the gaps identified in a number of local authorities' 2008 Sufficiency Assessments. In response, DCSF has announced a series of new pilots to explore ways of strengthening the quality and sustainability of this provision. Several of the areas selected to run pilots (which will be confirmed later in March 2010) have a significant Service family presence and these local authorities have been asked to give special consideration to the needs of Service families in carrying out their plans. The pilots are due to commence in April 2010 and will run until the end of March 2011. The pilots concerned will report on particular issues for Service families for this type of provision and will identify creative solutions.

Service Children and Fair Access to Schools

59. The frequent relocations required of Service families can have an impact on educational patterns for their children. Additional complications arise when moves are needed at short notice. Service families have made clear that difficulties in resolving school issues also have an impact, in turn, on their ability to seek employment. A late application for a school place is likely to result in a second or third choice school. This can mean children attending a school some distance away from a potential job location, making employment difficult to co-ordinate with the school run.
60. Guidance to local authorities and admission authorities is contained in the School Admissions Code and the School Admission Appeals Code, which are approved by Parliament after public consultation. They impose mandatory requirements on admission authorities to help ensure fair access to school places.
61. The 2009 School Admissions Code contains several improvements for Service families, including a requirement for state boarding schools to give higher priority to Service children. The Code also includes measures to help Service families to find a school place easily when they are subject to movement within a school year, and requires admission authorities to allocate a school place in advance and accept a Unit postal or "quartering area" address in the absence of a new home postal address.
62. The Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister for Women and Equality announced on 19 November 2009 that the Government would review the guidance given to local authorities on school allocations policy to ensure that it reflects the needs of Service families.

63. As part of the review, the DCSF sent out three questions to its Fair Access Consultative Group; a group of local authorities with high concentrations of Service children; the MOD and its Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS); and the Service Families Federations:
- What level of flexibility do you offer locally for Service families in relation to removing disadvantage in the school admissions process?
 - Have the most recent changes to the School Admissions Code in relation to Service families done enough to help remove disadvantage?
 - If not, what further changes could usefully be consulted on at the next revision of the Code?
64. The consultation elicited a number of responses and proposals – including: 14 local authorities, one Diocese, the Catholic Education Service, the MOD/CEAS and the three Service Families' Federations – and most welcomed the provisions for Service families in the current Schools Admissions Code.
65. However, the consultation also demonstrated that there is still more that could be done to alleviate potential barriers with regard to schools admissions for Service families. DCSF will therefore use the next revision of the Schools Admissions Code to consult on further changes to allow greater flexibility for admission authorities to meet the needs of Service families.
66. DCSF will continue to review the admission system, and – through its partnership with Service Children in State Schools (SCISS), External Reference Group, MOD and CEAS – will aim to provide Service families with greater flexibility in the school admissions system.

What difference will this make to Service families?

67. As an illustration of the potential benefits: currently, if a Service family is posted after the closing date for applications to transfer to a secondary school (31 October each year) the local authority will accept an application for a start in the following September but the application will likely be treated as 'late'. Although not without a place the following September, this is likely to mean the parents getting a second or third choice school by virtue of this move. Subject to consultation process and Parliamentary approval, local authorities will be required to give such applications a priority that would put them back on an equal footing with all the others, either before the offers are made in March or requiring that an extra place is given at the chosen school had the application been received on time and the same criteria applied. As well as addressing the general issue of ensuring that Service

families are not disadvantaged by short-notice postings, the improved prospect of obtaining a first choice school will also make it easier to find employment (for example if the school is nearer).

Supporting Service Families through Sure Start Children's Centres

68. *Together for Children*, who were commissioned by the DCSF to support local authorities in the development of 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres by end of March 2010, undertook a desk based survey of the existing Children's Centre database to identify which Children's Centres were working with Service families in the Autumn of 2009. The desk research demonstrated that many local authorities with military bases in their area had identified opportunities for partnership working with Forces personnel in developing and delivering services for Service families. Such activity was particularly significant in local authority areas with the larger military bases, such as Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire and Tidworth in Wiltshire.

Key achievements so far

69. The initial research has shown some promising and proactive working between local authorities and Service families, some of the key indicators of success being:
- existing partnership working with local schools
 - the employment of Service partners in the delivery of Children's Centre services or volunteering/engagement with the local community
 - outward looking senior managers and leaders in both the local authorities and the Forces, together with committed and engaged Forces family advocates and community champions
70. The initial survey has shown that there are at least 30 Children's Centres actively working with the Forces and their families, and a further 20 being planned. The highest concentration of developments is in the southwest region involving the Naval Service, Army and Royal Air Force, but provision is taking place in all regions to a greater or lesser extent.

Future Activities

71. As a result of the establishment of the Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce, *Together for Children* has started a more comprehensive mapping exercise of Children's Centre services targeting forces families, with the intention of:

- Identifying effective practice worthy of sharing and promoting across the country
- Identifying gaps in potential partnership working and collaboration and offering proactive and practical advice on how to develop stronger links and service delivery in serving often isolated children and families
- Producing a number of case studies to demonstrate and showcase the value and impact of closer working between Children's Centres and military communities. These case studies can contribute to Forces families' newsletters, information bulletins and Children's Centre websites
- The report on the mapping exercise will be completed by end of March 2010 and will form the basis of ongoing support and challenge with local authorities in ensuring that Forces families are not excluded from the universal and targeted services of Children's Centres. In particular, *Together for Children* will continue to share emerging promising practice from the more established Children's Centres with the newly developing Centres in encouraging stronger partnership working with the military communities.

What difference will this make to Service families?

72. A fundamental principle behind the development of Children's Centres is to provide a range of services for children and their families in a personalised and inclusive way in order to remove barriers to access and participation. This approach will be of significant benefit to children and parents of some Service families in combating the impact of:
- Being away from close family and friends and help with establishing new contacts
 - lack of employment opportunities for family members and subsequent negative impacts on confidence in returning to learning or training
 - Coping with the impact of mobilisation, which leaves the remaining partner facing similar challenges to those often faced by lone parents
 - Isolated communities often ill-served by transport and other services
73. Case Study: Lucy has been attending the local garrison Children's Centre for over six months now, and loves the opportunities it offers her, her baby and two year old. *"At first I thought it was going to be like a baby clinic, and I didn't really want to go, but the health visitor took me along as she said it would help me to make new friends, as I had only been in the area a month before my husband was posted overseas; I suppose I was getting a bit depressed and my mum lived over 200 miles away, so I couldn't see her and my old friends that often.*

74. *Anyway I went along for a check up, and was really surprised at the range of things going on, and all aimed at people like me, with young children. I soon got chatting to someone I am now best mates with, and we go every other day to play with our babies, do an IT course and we have started yoga too. My two year old has started attending daycare sessions, and is really making great progress with his learning; his dad will be so amazed when he comes home next week!...the Centre is putting on a welcome home party for the dads and, and a football match is being arranged too, so he will feel as much part of the Centre as I do”.*
75. Further information about Sure Start Children’s Centres can be found at: www.childrens-centres.org.



Review of Accessibility Issues affecting Service Families

76. Accessibility has a direct impact on people’s lives, and this is particularly true for Service families who are often stationed in relatively remote rural locations. Poor accessibility to employment and services can impact on a person’s ability to obtain and hold a job, as well as everyday requirements such as attending hospital appointments or getting children to school. By the same token, improvements in accessibility, and the way that services are designed, delivered and located, can make a real difference. The use of ‘one stop shops’ is a good example of how this can be achieved.

77. The Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport are working together to identify good practice examples of improving accessibility for Service families. These will be incorporated within updated rural transport guidance and accessibility planning guidance for local authorities to help them prepare their next Local Transport Plans. Small changes – such as diverting a bus route – can make a big difference. The key will be an effective dialogue between local authorities, local communities, transport operators and military commanders, to reach imaginative, cost effective solutions. The updated guidance will be available in May 2010.

Improving Flexible Career Opportunities in the Public Sector

78. The Civil Service is a major employer with locations across the country. The Cabinet Office will identify necessary adjustments that can be made to Civil Service recruitment processes to open up career opportunities for Service partners who are civil servants.

Preferential access to Civil Servant vacancies

79. Together with the Civil Service Capability Group, the Cabinet Office has made an assessment of steps needed in order to provide a degree of preferential access to employment opportunities within the Civil Service to partners of Service personnel who are already civil servants.
80. In addition, work is currently underway to progress the vacancy filling aspect of the Civil Service in the Regions programme. The premise is that vacancies will be advertised within regions, giving early access to all civil servants living and working in the region, regardless of grade, but possessing the appropriate competencies.
81. In summary, the current position is as follows:
- *First:* departments consider internal managed moves prior to any wider exposure to vacancies
 - *Second:* all vacancies are then advertised for a minimum of ten working days giving surplus staff across all government departments' exclusive access. This has received ministerial endorsement and helps minimise the recourse to compulsory redundancy
 - *Third:* vacancies are advertised to the wider Civil Service
 - *Fourth:* vacancies are advertised externally (to applicants both inside and outside the Civil Service)⁶.

⁶ As at March 2010, the precise sequencing of CSER vacancy filling is still being considered.

82. Some individual departments have designed their own processes for considering further preferential access to vacancies for civil servant partners on a case by case basis.
83. The Cabinet Office are examining the scope for offering preferential access to Service personnel partners who are already in the Civil Service to be invited to apply for vacancies in other government departments after the second stage (when surplus staff are exclusively given access). If Service partners are deemed to be surplus they can of course apply at the second stage. For intra departmental transfers partners can be considered at the first stage.
84. In appraising the viability of this option the Cabinet Office will be:
 - assessing the potential demand from this group of applicants in order to assess the impact on the recruitment process
 - assessing the extent to which individual departments local protocols currently consider partners of Service personnel between the second and third stages outlined above
 - consulting with trades unions and seeking agreement for any required amendments to Civil Service recruitment processes
 - examining how best to communicate any changes which widen access to vacancies for the partners of Service personnel.
85. The Cabinet Office Review will report by 30 April 2010 and revised guidance will then be issued to all government departments thereafter. Our intention is that this wider access be made available to Service families in Summer 2010.

Promoting access to public sector employment opportunities

86. Cabinet Office will also be promoting greater awareness of the public sector employment and training opportunities that are currently available for partners and families of Service personnel.
87. The Public Services Workforce Reform Team has well-established links with government departments, public and private sector employers, the third sector and national trades unions. This is principally managed through the Public Services Forum (the PSF) and the Public Sector Employers Forum (PSEF). Together these two forums bring together, in dialogue and joint action, employers, trades unions and government in:
 - the NHS and social care
 - education

- local government
 - central and regional government, including Government Skills
 - the police service
 - prison and wider national offender management services
88. By Summer 2010, the Cabinet Office, working with these partners, will report on how career advisory services for the public services, and other measures, can improve what they offer to Service personnel and their families. These measures will include increasing access to public service vacancies and training opportunities, and ensuring that organisations that support Service families (such as the Service Families Federation for example) are consulted on, and made aware of, the help available.

Private Sector Support

89. Just as the public sector has an important role to play as a significant employer, the private sector can make an enormous contribution to improving employment and training opportunities for Service families. In response to the work of the Taskforce, private sector involvement will be taken forward initially by a core team of Defence Career Partners (DCP) coordinated by the MOD via the DCP Programme Office.
90. The key target group for the private sector led initiatives will be Service partners, and dependants aged sixteen or over. Under the DCP framework, companies including Sodexo, Carillion, Capita and Enterprise will pilot initiatives over the next 12 months:
- *Better visibility of opportunities* – starting in early April, employment and training opportunities which DCP Partners can offer to Service families will be loaded direct on to the Royal British Legion ‘Civvy Street’ website. This will increase visibility and enhance potential uptake.
 - *Pilot schemes* – Two new proposals will be piloted, led by Enterprise plc but co-ordinated by MOD via the DCP Programme Office:
 - A trial for Call Centre activity to be located on a base/quarters and staffed by Service families. This will probably be linked to one of the Regional Prime Contracts to maintain the defence estate. It could allow flexibility of hours/ job sharing and be very family friendly. The trial will be led by Enterprise staff with a representative from Carillion, and they will work closely with the Army/Navy/RAF Families Federations and HIVEs in the area.
 - A pilot transitional employment programme for dependants aged sixteen or over (not continuing in education) linked to future job opportunities with DCP Partners or other local businesses. These six

or twelve month programmes would provide employment and skills training. The trial will be led by Careers Enterprise, a joint venture involving Enterprise and Vosper Thorneycroft, who would look to source funding from national programmes such as the Future Jobs Fund. On similar types of programme run by Enterprise over 75% of the trainees go on to find employment within the industry (either with Enterprise or its competitors). Again Enterprise will work closely with the Families Federations and HIVES in the area and involve Jobcentre plus champions in these locations.



91. Interim evaluation of these initiatives will take place in October, with Deloitte helping to analyse the benefits and risks. Subject to the results of the evaluation a wider roll out, to cover companies both within and outside the Defence sector, will then be developed.
92. There are clear benefits for businesses of accessing the skills and experience within military communities. These include:
 - access to a largely untapped resource;
 - a workforce which may be particularly interested in flexible, part time and 'seasonal' work – a flexibility which will become ever more valuable in the domestic and global economic environment of the future;
 - interesting and diverse skill sets including language skills;
 - recruiting people who can be reached relatively easily in terms of targeted advertising.

93. The private sector strategy will be further developed in 2011, and will incorporate critical elements such as:
- development of business cases to promote the benefits that Service families can bring to business growth and development;
 - suitable plans for evaluation, tracking and assessment;
 - the identification of appropriate private sector champions to sponsor the strategy;
 - analysis of the extent of skills needs and the scope of employment opportunities that will be available – both for businesses and Service families;
 - the development of effective communication mechanisms to build interest across the private sector and engage military families.

What difference will this make to Service families?

94. The private sector led work to facilitate and open up employment and training opportunities for Service families will not only bring benefits to the families which take them up. It will also contribute to the improving employer perceptions of the wider business benefits and transferable skills which the Armed Forces community can provide.

Tax Credits

95. The Government is considering how Tax Credits support Service families, and exploring what more could be done to ensure they receive the support they are entitled to. HMRC have made links with some of the voluntary organisations who represent Service families' interests and are exploring with DWP the opportunity to better signpost the availability of Tax Credits through the Directgov portal.

The Local Dimension

96. Most of this report has focused on what can be achieved through changes instigated by central Government, although in many cases this will take the form of guidance to local authorities or other local providers. It is at the regional or local level that most of the improvements will be made that make a real difference to the lives of Service families.
97. Collaborative working between agencies at regional and local level is therefore crucial, both between service providers, and with local military commanders. A good example of what can be achieved is provided by the North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration Project, which is centred on Catterick Garrison and the RAF stations in North Yorkshire. The

North Yorkshire MCI Project has developed a range of initiatives within many of the strategic priorities – such as health, housing, and economic impact – outlined in the Service Personnel Command Paper.

98. Case Study.

“I moved to Catterick Garrison when my husband was posted from Wiltshire. After a period of unemployment, I found work with the local MOD contractor that fitted around my childcare needs. This work is considered to be standard fare for military spouses, who have historically moved away again with the next posting. However I was keen to do something more challenging for my mind, so I visited the HIVE Information Service frequently and with support from them and the Armed Forces Families Employment Advice Service I was able to work on my CV. I received information about a number of job opportunities websites such as the County Council and MOD Civilian sites. The end result was a Civil Service position with the Army Welfare Service.”

(Ginny Lewis, an Army spouse currently working for the Army Welfare Service).

99. The Taskforce is grateful to the project for its ideas about how partnership working can help to maximise opportunities for those who live and work in the vicinity of military establishments. See **Annexe A** for a full description of the partnership work undertaken by the North Yorkshire Project.



100. Similar arrangements are at various stages of development in other areas, such as Wiltshire for example. Through the opening up of greater employment and training opportunities for military communities at the local level, the replication and wider rollout of these models has the potential to add considerable economic value to regional economies. The Taskforce recognises and welcomes the enthusiasm shown by many local service providers to help Service families, and – equally important – the way in which local military commanders are engaging with them.

Devolved Services

101. The Government works closely with the Devolved Administrations within a set of statutory structures that differ markedly for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Though many of the actions and initiatives outlined in the Report are particular to England, the issues and challenges facing Service families are common across the UK as a whole. It will be the prerogative of each of the Administrations to consider the arrangements that are most suitable within their own areas of responsibility and to address the issues facing Service families in ways that are most appropriate for their own needs and circumstances.
102. To illustrate the kinds of actions that will be progressed within the Devolved Administrations, the Welsh Assembly Government is progressing significant actions in the areas of employment and training support, childcare sufficiency, school allocations and Integrated Children's Centres.
103. In the context of employment and training support, the Welsh Assembly Government works closely with Jobcentre Plus on the development of pre-employment training to prepare job-seekers for entering new sectors of the labour market. This support is particularly useful for those who have acquired skills in other areas, such as the Services, but who need insight into a different sector before taking up employment.
104. The Welsh Assembly Government has reviewed all published 2008/9 Childcare Sufficiency Assessments and identified where local authorities included specific reference to provision for Service families. In light of this review, the Assembly Government is designing a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment toolkit which will provide a step-by-step guide for Welsh authorities when undertaking the next audit in April 2011.
105. The School Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes for Wales have also recently been updated to reflect existing regulations and good practice. One of the changes requires that admission authorities must treat a Forces family as meeting the residency criteria for a school catchment area so long as they can provide evidence that they will shortly be posted there. The Welsh Assembly Government remains alert to the needs of Service families and will consider further changes to the Codes if they appear necessary.
106. There are, at present, 47 Integrated Children's Centres in Wales. As a minimum, each must provide high quality childcare, early years education, community training and open-access play, within a strong integrated framework. They are open to all members of the local

community, including Armed Forces families. Whilst not all Service bases currently have a centre nearby, good links have been developed between the Western Vale ICC and Wales's largest military site at St Athan.

Next Steps:

107. The Taskforce believes it is most important that, once its own work is complete, the measures it has agreed will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that they achieve the desired effect. The spotlight which it has been able to turn on the employment opportunities open to Service families should remain in place.
108. This is best ensured by using the machinery already set up to oversee the implementation of the Service Personnel Command Paper, including the publication of an annual report by an External Reference Group. The Taskforce accordingly invites the External Reference Group to extend its future reviews to include the measures listed in this report.
109. An equally important next step is to make sure that those who stand to gain from the measures in this report are aware of them. Good communications and use of the channels provided both by service providers and the military community will be central to achieving the Taskforce's objectives. The actions and initiatives outlined in this Report will go some way towards ensuring that Service families benefit from the improved employment, career and training opportunities that they so richly deserve.

ANNEX A

North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration Project

The North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration (MCI) Project is an MOD-led exercise in Regional Engagement by the Commander 15 (North East) Brigade on behalf of the General Officer Commanding 2nd Division. Its focus is a Governance Board for senior stakeholders from both military and civilian agencies in North Yorkshire and the wider Yorkshire and the Humber region which meets to share information and co-ordinate strategies in areas of mutual benefit. It works to deliver government policies by effective joint working between military and civilian authorities.

The Board has met twice yearly since October 2008 and draws representation from more than 30 different organisations. In addition to Comd 15 (NE) Bde, military stakeholders include the commanders of Catterick Garrison, 4 RAF Bases, Defence Estates, Defence School of Transport, Army Primary Healthcare Service and the Infantry Training Centre. Civil Stakeholders include Chief Executives of eight local authorities (county, district, and unitary) and local strategic partnerships, the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber (GOYH), Learning and Skills Council, Health, Police, Fire Service, National Park Authority, and the regional Development Agency Yorkshire Forward.

The Board has agreed to work in six broad areas that cover many of the strategic issues featured in the Service Personnel Command Paper (SPCP).

- a. Health
- b. Housing
- c. Children & Young People
- d. Economic Impact
- e. Safety and Security
- f. Transport

When considering the objective to give Service families the same opportunities as those in the civilian community to access employment, further education and training, the following paragraphs give a North Yorkshire perspective on Access to Employment, Skills, Training and Further Education, Childcare, and Other Support for Service Families.

Access To Employment

Service Partners. The (soon to be published) study into the Economic Impact of Current and Future Military Activity in North Yorkshire estimates that there are approx 6000 military dependents of working age in North Yorkshire (partners or spouses). The survey suggests that up to 3500 partners/spouses may already be employed in the local labour market.

Historically, Army dependents in the Catterick Garrison area have worked in low wage, relatively temporary jobs. This is largely because of the frequent mobility of units. With the intent that units will remain based in one place for longer, there is an opportunity for dependents to migrate to more permanent jobs (a career rather than a job). Greater permanence will encourage training and a move to higher quality jobs.

Employment for Veterans. The MoD's Resettlement Service, working with the Career Transition Partnership makes huge efforts to help Service Leavers find employment. With the aim of promoting greater awareness of, and to showcase the quality of, the employment resource represented by the near 800 Service Leavers available for employment in the region each year, Commander 15 (NE) Brigade will host two evening events (funded by Yorkshire Forward) for business leaders in January and February 2010. This local effort is underway through contact between the Tri-Service Resettlement Centre, York England Inward Investment Agency and Yorkshire Forward to look at ways of bringing prospective employers and Service Leavers together.

Development Land. Where Defence Estates can make MoD land available then this can be valuable for employment purposes. The Town Centre scheme at Catterick Garrison will create a range of retail and leisure jobs when it is complete.

Skills, Training and Further Education

Skills North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) Assistant Chief Executive (HR and OD) has highlighted that former Service personnel could be better prepared to apply for employment in the public sector and is happy to discuss this further with a relevant agency (The Resettlement Service)

Darlington College at Catterick provides basic skills courses for Service personnel as well as offering dedicated learning facilities for part time courses for the wider North Yorkshire community and also a childcare centre.

Childcare

At Catterick Garrison there is access to a variety of pre-school childcare, with some availability all year round. In addition, there is out of school availability before and after school all year round. All local schools offer extended hours before and after school.

At RAF Leeming there is dedicated childcare provision through a full day care facility on site, for children aged from 6 weeks to pre-school. In addition, it operates a before and after school club for children up to the age of 11 years. There are also 4 registered childminders on the base.

Children in the Catterick Garrison area have been identified as having poor outcomes when compared to other parts of North Yorkshire. This is being addressed by a joint MOD/NYCC/PCT working group that has initially identified improvement of MMR Vaccination rates and gathering of data on major indicators of maternal and child health as priorities.

Military members of the board are supporting the successful Education authority led efforts to turn round Risedale College, and the Garrison Commander has joined the Board of Governors. The arrival of a number of Gurkha families, who have a strong desire to learn, has encouraged these efforts.

Other Support for Service Families

Housing- Veterans Supported Training and Housing. Building work began at Catterick in Jan 2010 on a supported housing scheme for ex-Service personnel. This will provide on-site training facilities for veterans and 31 housing units. The project is being progressed by English Churches Housing Group (part of the Riverside Group) with support from DCLG, HCA, MOD and the local authority. As part of this project, we expect to build 12 affordable rented homes. Capital funding is now secured and the turf-turning ceremony was carried out by Veterans Minister Kevan Jones in January.

Housing- Kick Start Funding – Designed to help stalled housing schemes (as a result of the recession) get back on track and thus deliver additional units of affordable housing is being investigated by Richmondshire District Council as possibly of help in progressing a scheme close to Catterick Garrison. If successful, the housing scheme will provide 31 units, 100% of which will be affordable. Seventeen units will be shared equity and reserved for Armed Forces personnel. The HCA will make a final decision in Spring 2010.

Homelessness – Local Connections – Homeless figures are being monitored closely as a result of the changes in Regulations last December to give “local connection” to Service Personnel and their dependents that are in need of social housing.

School Place Allocation – There is no evidence of problems locally. However, there are examples of personnel having difficulties when leaving the area, particularly if the move is mid-school year.

Conclusion

The MCI Project in North Yorkshire works effectively to join up military and civil stakeholders. Staffing support from 15 (NE) Bde, the visible support of the Government Office for Yorkshire and The Humber, and the active interest of the Regional Minister for Yorkshire and The Humber all contribute a great deal to its success.

ANNEX B

Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce Members

Adam Micklethwaite – Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Chris Mason – BT

David Fraser – Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber

David Skinner – HM Revenue and Customs

David Webb – Welsh Assembly Government

Dawn McCafferty – RAF Families Federation

Ian Morrison – Department for Children, Schools and Families

Julie McCarthy – Army Families Federation

Kevan Jones MP, Minister for Veterans – Ministry of Defence

Kevin Webster – Enterprise plc

Kim Richardson – Naval Families Federation

Liz Hunter- Scotland Parliament

Lord McKenzie of Luton (Deputy Chair) – Department for Work & Pensions

Martin Howarth – Department for Children, Schools and Families

Michael Foster MP – Government Equalities Office

Nick Owen – Jobcentre Plus

Pat Gale – Together for Children

Paula McDonald – Cabinet Office

Roland Crooke – North Yorkshire Military Civil Integration Board

Sam Weller – SERCO

Sarah Baxter – SaBRE

Yvette Cooper MP (Chair) – Secretary of State, Department for Work & Pensions



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