

Forces Families – State of the Nation

Summary

The nation owes a duty of care to the men and women serving in our Armed Forces who are prepared to make great sacrifices for the security of our nation. Conservative research has shown that, despite the rhetoric, the Government is failing in this duty. From health to housing, the Government is providing inadequate care and support for our service personnel at their busiest time since the Korean War. This document sets out these failures and, drawing on Government and independent information, will form the basis for the work to be done on the separate Forces Families Manifesto that will lay out what the Conservative Government will do to put these failures right after the next election.

Overstretch

- The Armed Forces have been operating above and beyond planned levels for the past 5 years; over 20% of the Army is currently deployed on operations.

Housing

- The Ministry of Defence manages nearly 200,000 living spaces, but nearly 100,000 of these are in the bottom two grades.
- The Armed Forces Pay Review Body expects that “a significant number of Service personnel and their families are likely to be housed in poor quality accommodation for 20 years or more”.
- In the Army, three-quarters of personnel live in Army accommodation. In the ranks home ownership is just 9%.

Health

- The Conservatives have called for a dedicated military ward at Selly Oak in Birmingham, and the Defence Chiefs want one too. The Prime Minister does not.
- The MoD and NHS are failing in their promise to treat injured veterans as a priority.
- High rates of enforced mobility mean that families cannot get on the waiting lists for doctors or dentists. Some travel 300 miles to keep seeing the same dentist.

Education

- A report by OFSTED in 2002 stated that, “almost all schools with mobility above 15 per cent have average GCSE scores below the national average”.

- In the Service Education schools, mobility averages 58.9%, and can be as high as 131%.
- The MoD is cutting excellent school visit programmes which educate children about the role of the Armed Forces.

Career

- The prospects for promotion and the inability to plan a career and life outside work are key factors in the decision to leave the Armed Forces.

The Forces Families Manifesto will address these and other issues, and will be published in the coming months.

Introduction

In recent years the high tempo of operations has had an inevitable impact on our service personnel and their families. The result has been that the problems which families face in the Armed Forces have been highlighted in both letters to MPs and in the media. There are areas of welfare policy that are now in need of urgent attention and review.

There are two themes that run through this whole area. First is the concept of the Military Covenant and second the practical problems surrounding recruitment and retention. We expect a huge amount from our troops, even expecting them to lay down their lives. The Armed Forces act with professionalism and integrity in the face of the great demands that the nation puts on them. It should therefore be expected that they and their families are provided with the full support of the country and can be confident that their needs will be provided for, both in conflict and at home. This is what the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt meant when he told the Defence Secretary “the army will not let the nation down, but I don’t want the nation to let the army down.”¹ The Army Doctrine Publication extends this further (though this is true of all three services):

“This mutual obligation forms the Military Covenant between the Nation, the Army and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity, loyalty and responsibility which has sustained the Army throughout its history. It has perhaps its greatest manifestation in the annual commemoration of Armistice Day, when the Nation keeps covenant with those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in action.”²

The Military Covenant therefore is the obligation that the nation has towards its service personnel in return for the sacrifices that they make.

The Armed Forces must also ensure that they recruit and retain the people and skills necessary to enable them to carry out the tasks demanded of them. In February 2007 the Armed Forces stood at 178,580 personnel, more than five thousand under the strength required for planned operations³, and this is at a time when they are operating well above those planning assumptions. They are simply overstretched. If we are to encourage people to join and remain in the Armed Forces they need to know that they and their families will be properly cared for, especially if they are injured or killed. If they are unhappy with the way in which they are being treated by the services they will find another way to make a living.

¹ Chief of General Staff – Daily Mail interview, 13th October 2006, House of Commons Library, MGP 06/2509

² MoD, Army Doctrine Publication Volume 5 “The Military Covenant”

http://www.army.mod.uk/servingsoldier/usefulinfo/valuesgeneral/adp5milcov/ss_hrpers_values_adp5_1_w.html#milcov

³ Defence Analytical Services Agency, February 2007, TSP03,. www.dasa.mod.uk

This document will outline some of the major areas of policy where service personnel and their families face particular problems. These issues have been raised in the media and directly with members of the Shadow Defence Team. Where possible direct evidence has been cited. Even so, although many of these problems are widely recognised much of the evidence is anecdotal by its nature. Many people within the Armed Forces will recognise the issues raised. However, this will not be an exhaustive documentation of the problems; there are many other issues that need to be addressed. Some of these we will investigate in conjunction with this review, others will be addressed when we come into Government.

Housing and accommodation

The Ministry of Defence currently manages 49,000 service family and 150,000 single living units, making it Britain's largest property manager⁴. The quality of this accommodation is graded on a four-point scale. Most of the Service Families Accommodation (SFA) is in the top two grades⁵. However, half of all Single Living Accommodation (SLA) is of the worst standard (see table 1). This problem has been highlighted recently by the media. In an interview, the Adjutant General, Lt Gen Viggers said “there is still too much accommodation which is of a poor standard, and is old and is not modern in terms of the way that is fitting for the families.”⁶ In the 2006 Continuous Attitudes Survey just 40% of soldiers were satisfied with their Army accommodation⁷.

It is not fair to expect our forces to come home from the many operations that they are being asked to undertake to accommodation that most people would find unacceptable. This problem is particularly acute in the Army, where a much higher proportion of personnel is housed in service accommodation (see table 2).

⁴ MoD Press release, 4th January 2007. “MOD resolves to continue improvements to Service Personnel accommodation”.
<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/ModResolvesToContinueImprovementsToServicePersonnelAccommodationvideo.htm>

⁵ It needs to be recognised that the quality of housing in grade2 is highly variable, and much of it is still unacceptable.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The most recent Continuous attitude surveys for the RAF and Royal Navy are unavailable at present.

Table 1: MoD Accommodation by grade⁸

Grade	<i>Service Families Accommodation (SFA)</i>	<i>Single Living Accommodation (SLA)</i>
1 (<i>good</i>)	27,687 (59%)	24,254 (18%)
2	16,916 (36%)	23,261 (17%)
3	2,089 (4%)	22,931 (17%)
4 (<i>bad</i>)	139 (1%)	66,836 (48%)
Total	46,831	137,282

To address this issue two things need to be done. First, and most simply, the quality of accommodation needs to be improved. To be fair to the Government, some progress is being made here. Project SLAM is modernising the SLA, costing some £480 million in the first five years; a further £335 million will be spent in the years 2008/09 to 2012/13⁹. This will upgrade a total of 13,000 single living spaces. The MoD currently intends to upgrade SFA accommodation at a rate of about 900 units a year. At that rate it will take decades to get the accommodation up to the standard that we would expect, and they must still be maintained at this standard. A recent NAO report noted that “a significant number of Service personnel and their families are likely to be housed in poor quality accommodation for 20 years or more”¹⁰. We will investigate whether the upgrading process can be accelerated, and at what cost.

The second option is to increase the proportion of service personnel who actually live in and own their own homes. At present only 9% of Army soldiers live in, and own, their home (compared to 18% of officers)¹¹; 64% of other ranks in the Army have never owned their own home (just 25% for officers)¹². Table 2 shows the proportion of each service occupying service accommodation

⁸ Hansard, 1 Feb 2007, Column 512W. The data for the two types of accommodation are not directly comparable. Conservatives will be working to get the full information.

⁹ Hansard, 22 January 2007. Columns 1558-9W

¹⁰ National Audit Office, 23rd March 2007 “Managing the Defence Estate: Quality and Sustainability” HC 154, paragraph 1.22

¹¹ Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey, Army, March-July 2006, Question 53, pg 26.

¹² Ibid. Question 50, pg 25

Table 2: Proportion of personnel living in Service accommodation¹³

Service	Number paying accommodation charges	Total strength of service	Percentage
Royal Navy	14,627	39,390	37
Army	78,902	107,703	73
RAF	27,908	48,730	57

The problem that personnel face is that it is very difficult to get onto the housing ladder. When accommodation is already provided, the incentive to buy a home, with all the risks that this involves, is not great. However, when a colour sergeant, for example, leaves the Army at the age of 40 he or she does not want to consider getting their first mortgage. In the Continuous Attitudes Survey 37% of responding officers were either fairly or very dissatisfied with the prospects for buying or even renting a house. This rose to 42% for other ranks¹⁴.

Some service families are leaving the forces and going into hostels. At present local authorities do not need to consider forces' families as having a 'local connection' for the purposes of social housing. The Conservative Party will investigate if this system can be developed in a way that will support service personnel, but not place an unacceptable burden on local communities.

The MoD does currently provide a Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP) worth up to £8,500. This does not go very far in the current housing market and it has failed to keep up with the rise in house prices. This is further compounded by the fact that the LSAP cannot be used to buy properties that are then rented out. This rule is, reasonably, in place to stop personnel using the allowance for their own profit, but it also means that personnel with a high mobility can never take advantage of the scheme and make it onto the housing ladder. These rules need to be reviewed.

We will look at ways in which we can encourage and support personnel to get onto the housing ladder while still serving so that, when they do leave, they have a home and base from which they can start their new life.

¹³ Hansard, 19th February 2007, Column 203-4W. These figures exclude personnel who are entitled to occupy MOD accommodation but are not subject to accommodation charges, so these numbers could be higher.

¹⁴ Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey, Army, March-July 2006, Question 21g. pg15

The resettlement package and transition to civilian life

It is first worth noting that the vast majority of service personnel who leave the forces are extremely successful in the civilian world. Conversely, there will always be some who cannot adjust for any number of reasons. We need to do all we can to ensure that as many people as possible fall into the first group and that those who fall into the second group get all the help they need. Some service personnel may have spent twenty years in the forces and the transfer to civilian life can be challenging. The individual has to adjust to a new life without the regularity and structure of forces life. He or she will have to find a new job and, in many cases, a new home. All these things take time, yet in the UK the resettlement package might only start a few days or weeks before discharge. Traditionally, Britain has not had a particularly good reputation for managing the individual's transition from service life to civilian life. This has often been summed up by the phrase 'goodbye and good luck'. Today, personnel get at least some degree of support.

The amount of preparation and training a service leaver gets is usually dependent on how long he or she serves in the Armed Forces, although it is also dependent on the circumstances of discharge. Personnel with five or more years of service before September 2002, and six or more years of service after September 2002, are entitled to the full resettlement programme, which entitles personnel to an employment support programme and also includes an interview with a personal consultant, and further job coaching. Those with less service will get less support. We will consider whether this is appropriate, given that they may well have faced the same risks and made the same sacrifices. Those who have a medical discharge also receive some degree of specialist support. In addition, support is also provided by charities and support groups.

However, work still needs to be done with regard to early service leavers. This group totals 8,400 people annually.¹⁵ Whilst early service leavers are entitled to a resettlement brief and an interview which includes an assessment of a person's vulnerability to social exclusion, little is known about what happens to this group once discharged, particularly regarding employment – although it is understood that the Government is working to provide statistics on this. This information is vital, as among this group remain some of the most vulnerable to social exclusion. A study by King's College, London into the veterans of past conflicts stated that, although the majority of service leavers manage to get employment soon after discharge, the most vulnerable suffer badly. The report highlights that "servicemen whose mental health

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence, Annual Report and Accounts 2005-6, HC 1394, 14 July 2006, paragraph 92.

is poor are likely to be the most vulnerable to social exclusion or hardship such as unemployment".¹⁶

In the US, military personnel are encouraged to begin their transition process at least six months before separating from the military¹⁷ and are required to start their transition no later than 120 days prior to the date of separation.¹⁸ In fact, U.S. service members retiring from the Armed Forces are entitled to up to 30 days of free leave in order to provide a proper amount of time to look for a new home and conduct job interviews.¹⁹ To help ensure that separating military personnel are prepared for life after the military, the U.S. military provides mandatory courses on tips for job searching, CV writing, job interview tips, and a course on the all benefits each service member is entitled to as a veteran.²⁰ This appears to be an effective model and package for resettlement.

Whilst figures indicate that the majority of service leavers do well, the fact that some are still left behind remains of concern. We need to do more work to identify where exactly the problems occur and how we can better prepare service personnel for civilian life before, and not when, they leave the forces. The government, the military, and society all have a responsibility to help get this right, particularly for potentially vulnerable veterans with a mental health problem or disabling injury.

Medical care

The quality of medical care provided to service personnel is highly variable. The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court is an excellent facility for injured personnel. At the other extreme there have been reports of personnel literally being left on the side of the road and told to make their own way to hospital. *The Sunday Times* reported on one injured soldier's experience:

"Scott Garthley served in Iraq as a corporal in the 3rd Military Intelligence Battalion. On the first day of the war, March 20, 2003, he was wounded in a Scud attack on the Iraq-Kuwait border. He was flown back to England with spinal injuries and in his words to [the reporter]: 'dumped at the front desk of the accident and emergency unit of Birmingham's Selly Oak hospital. A nurse told me to take my uniform off because I might offend somebody -these were her words. Forty-eight hours earlier I'd been fighting for my country and she had

¹⁶ Amy Iverson et al, 'What happens to British Veterans when they leave the Armed Forces?', *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 183.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Defence TransPortal, Department of Defence Web Portal for Military Transitioners. <http://www.dodtransportal.dod.mil/dav/lsnmedia/LSN/dodtransportal/> (Retrieved 7 February 2007)

¹⁸ U.S. Army Regulation 635-10. Processing Personnel for Separation, 10 June 1987, p.2

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Defence Preseparation Guide, October 2001, Ch.4, p. 35

²⁰ Ibid., Ch.1,3 and 5

*the bloody cheek to say my uniform might offend! Then a doctor took a quick look, told me they had no spare beds, gave me a walking stick and told me to see my GP. And that's how I came home. Walking wounded and nobody giving a damn'.*²¹

During an interview on *Newsnight* recently, General Sir Mike Jackson noted that the military hospitals were closed due to the lack of throughput after the Cold War. But he also noted that “it shouldn't be beyond the wit of man to devise a set of arrangements whereby so far as is possible not only wounded soldiers but soldiers who become ill in the normal course of events can be given medical attention within the military environment.”²²

The Conservative Party has made a commitment to dedicated military wards for personnel injured on operations. In his speech to the Conservative Party Conference in 2006, the Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox MP, said “For those who have been traumatised in combat, healing of the mind is as important as healing of the body. The best place for this to happen is in a ward which is exclusively military, where they can recover along side their comrades who understand what they have gone through. We owe it to those who have risked their lives on our behalf to treat them with dignity.”²³

Inevitably, personnel will leave the forces with injuries. We need to look at what should be provided for veterans who have been injured in service. There is a memorandum of understanding between the MoD and Department of Health²⁴, but this is not always delivered, as the *Newsnight* report highlighted. The system of through life care needs to be implemented working with both GPs and the MoD. It is clear personnel are falling through the gap between the MoD and the NHS despite the policy of “priority treatment for war pensioners.” In a brief from the NHS to the MoD, the Care Services Directorate admitted “eligibility and entitlement to NHS services are on the basis of clinical judgement.”²⁵

The Conservative Party will investigate how the existing arrangements for soldiers injured on duty can be properly implemented. We will also investigate how we can properly provide care for veterans.

It is not only serving personnel who face problems, but also their families. Forces' families are often required to move – in a 25-year career, 15 moves are possible. This is most common in the Army and naturally with this come all the challenges than anyone experiences

²¹ The Sunday Times, 21st May 2006, “The heroes deserted by the army”.

²² General Sir Mike Jackson, *Newsnight*, BBC 2, 22nd January 2007

²³ Dr Liam Fox, 3rd October 2006, http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=132628

²⁴ Department of Health HSG(97)3, 18th June 1997, “Priority Treatment For War Pensioners”.

²⁵ Department of Health, Care Services Directorate, 11th November 2005, “Briefing for the MoD”.

when moving home. The difficulty that forces' families face is that they have little or no choice over the timing or destination of their move.

This means that moves can occur while family members are on waiting lists for operations or other treatment on the NHS. Yet as soon as they move, they find themselves at the bottom of the waiting list in their new Trust. This can occur again and again, as moves can be frequent. It is not fair that these families, who give so much to the country, are disadvantaged in this way. A similar problem is that medical records can be lost between moves causing further difficulties. As a result these people have either no access to a doctor or dentist, or have to travel hundreds of miles to keep seeing the same one.

The area where this problem is greatest is in dental care. Civilian families often have to wait many months to get onto a local dentist's list. This is the same for serving personnel, but often the waiting time for dentists is actually longer than the posting, making access to an NHS dentist all but impossible. A recent MoD report noted that there has been "a significant increase... in the proportion of spouses who have said they have had to purchase private dental insurance... to compensate for the lack of NHS provision." It also notes that this is not the responsibility of the MoD.²⁶ We will work with our Health Team to look at how the MoD and the NHS can work more effectively together to ensure that service personnel and their families are better catered for when they move, on this and other health issues.

Service Children's Education

The welfare of the children of serving personnel should be a priority, yet it is so often overlooked. Service children can be unsettled by constantly moving from one location to another. They also endure periods of uncertainty where one parent is far away and in mortal danger. At the same time, they are trying to progress with their education.

The children of service personnel who are based in the UK attend local education authority schools. Children of service personnel based overseas are educated through the MoD's agency, Service Children's Education (SCE). SCE educates around 13,000 children in 44 schools. There are also 41 pre-schools or 'foundation stage-settings for three year-olds linked to first or junior schools.²⁷ In addition, the MoD manages the running of 2 boarding schools – the Queen Victoria School in Dunblane and the Duke of York's Royal Military School in Dover.

²⁶ Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Summer 2006 Report, p. 18.

²⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, 6th September 2006, "Educating Service Children" HC1054, paragraph 54.

The performance of SCE schools is generally better than state schools, which is good given the turbulence experienced by SCE schools. However, the Defence Select Committee's report did a lot to highlight the problems with current Government policy regarding service children. Much is still unknown about the subject, particularly regarding service children based in the UK. As the Committee recognised, more information could be obtained if there was a clear definition of a service child, and if service children were identified in the Pupil Annual Level School Census (PLASC).²⁸ The Government lacks any clear statistics on the numbers of service children currently being educated in the state system. The estimates range from 185,000 in 1999²⁹ to between 80,000 and 100,000 in 2004³⁰. If the problems faced by service children are to be adequately addressed then the Government needs to produce the relevant facts.

Inevitably, mobility indices (percentage of students leaving at 'non-standard' times) are extremely high in SCE schools. The mobility rate in SCE primary schools is at 82 per cent, and for SCE secondary schools at 58.9 per cent.³¹ The rate is also high among UK garrison communities. The median for English primary schools is 11% and for English secondary schools 5.6%.³² The Defence Select Committee's recent report on service children's education includes examples where students currently attending secondary school have moved at least 11 times in their lifetime.³³ The Government does not hold information on the mobility indices of state schools that have a high proportion of service children.

There is some evidence to suggest that such mobility can affect educational attainment. A report by OFSTED in 2002 stated that, 'almost all schools with mobility above 15 per cent have average GCSE scores below the national average'.³⁴

It is possible for children to arrive and leave within the year. Numbers can rise unexpectedly from one year to the next but no extra funding or support is provided. As David Cameron noted in 2004, for one school in Oxfordshire,

"10 pupils arrived after 16 January 2003 and left before 16 January 2004. As far as the funding is concerned, they never existed. That represented £15,000 of lost funding, yet all those children had to be integrated into the school, plans had to be written for them, reports compiled, and teaching and marking undertaken, to say nothing of everything else that a school does."³⁵

²⁸ Ibid, paragraphs 88-96.

²⁹ Hansard, 25th October 1999, Column 787

³⁰ Hansard, 7th January 2004, Column 99WH

³¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, 6th September 2006, "Educating Service Children" HC1054, paragraph 14.

³² Ministry of Defence Memorandum, Defence Select Committee Report, *Educating Service Children*, 2006, Ev 60

³³ *ibid*, paragraph 14.

³⁴ OFSTED, March 2002, 'Managing Pupil Mobility', page 7.

³⁵ Hansard, 7th January 2004, Column 80WH

Children migrating from one school to another, including SCE schools, will have to get to grips with a new school and curriculum, make new friends, usually in isolation as around two-thirds of service moves are as individuals, rather than units. These moves may also be at a time when a parent is deployed on operations and this can potentially have a negative impact on a child's emotional well-being and educational attainment. Yet little support or counselling is provided for the child, even in schools which have a high proportion of service children.

The high mobility of service families and children will inevitably have an impact on the quality of their education and care. Yet the Government does not seem to have any idea of the scale or degree of the problem. We will be working to identify how we can best address the particular difficulties that service children face.

Parents also face a problem. When one of them is deployed on operations, the parent left at home is, to all intents and purposes, a single parent and yet they get little or no extra support to care for, and educate, their children. We will be looking further at what support is available and can be provided to these effectively single parents to help them manage when spouses are away for long periods.

University funding

The Armed Forces do support students at university prior to their employment in the forces. Students are sponsored through their university careers and enrol after graduation. If the individual decides not to take up their place in the forces they are required to pay back any money received. In the United States, a similar scheme is run, as well as defence academies where officer training and a higher education are conducted simultaneously. The United States also runs a programme where personnel who have served five years in the forces then have their college fees paid by the Department of Defense.

This has two advantages. First, it addresses the problems of recruitment and retention. Second, it provides further skills and qualifications to young men and women who might find it difficult to find something to do in the civilian sector after leaving the forces. It also has the advantage of bringing a wider range of people into direct contact with those who have served in the Armed Forces, hopefully giving them a better understanding of what they do for the country and our society as a whole. We will be looking at the possibility of a similar scheme for the UK and how this might be implemented.

The Army has run a Gap Year Commission for students the year prior to starting university, of which around 40% go on to join with a short service commission. This year they have taken the decision to cancel funding for this programme.³⁶

Schools programme

There is an increasing gap between the military and civilian worlds. The general public are becoming less aware of the role that the Armed Forces play in society and the world. The Armed Forces do try and make visits to schools, not only to aid recruitment, but simply to educate pupils about what they actually do. At present such visits are purely dependent on the decision of the headteacher and, in Wales, the Welsh nationalists want to stop them altogether.³⁷

We are in danger of losing the link between the civilian sector and the Armed Forces, who have given so much to this nation. This is in danger of being compounded by the cancellation of the Defence Schools Presentation Scheme³⁸. We will investigate whether some sort of national programme of school visits needs to be introduced to engage communities with the Armed Forces so the public appreciates what the Armed Forces do for our nation.

Career structure and Pay

Career structure is an important part of any service person's decision-making process throughout their career. The underlying purpose of a career structure is to sustain the Services' operational effectiveness. Providing service personnel with clear and concise options and opportunities for career advancement will help to ensure a higher rate of retention. 43% of service personnel cited promotion opportunities as an incentive that might persuade them to stay in the forces. In fact, 63% of personnel said that better ability to plan life/career would make them likely to consider staying in the Services³⁹. In addition, 49% of serving service personnel who were asked their reason for wanting to leave the Services said it was due to their inability to plan their career.⁴⁰ Table 3 demonstrates how important the career structure is for those in the Armed Forces. We will look more closely at the way in which the career structure in the Armed Forces is managed.

³⁶ Hansard, 5th February 2007, Column c686-7W

³⁷ The Western Mail, 4th December 2006 "Army targeting deprived areas for recruits, says Plaid Shadow Minister"

³⁸ Hansard, 7th February 2007, Column 922-3W

³⁹ National Audit Office, 13th November 2006, "Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces: Detailed Survey Results and Case Studies" HC1633-II, pg 14

⁴⁰ Ibid, pg 13

Table 3: Reasons for Leaving – Percentages of those who rated factors as either ‘important’ or ‘very important’ in influencing decision to leave⁴¹

	Royal Navy	Royal Marines	Royal Air Force	Army	All	Former personnel
Inability to plan life outside work	69%	70%	74%	67%	70%	53%
Better employment prospects in civilian life	57%	70%	68%	67%	65%	42%
Uncertainty over the future given the current changes in the Forces	57%	38%	38%	66%	54%	31%
Quality of equipment	50%	55%	46%	48%	49%	32%
Inability to plan career	43%	55%	54%	48%	49%	31%
Lack of promotion prospects	43%	30%	37%	57%	46%	31%
Dissatisfaction with level of pay	43%	63%	31%	49%	43%	23%
I want to have more than one career	31%	33%	36%	31%	32%	23%

⁴¹ Ibid, Pg 13

In conclusion

All these issues are clearly linked.

High mobility in particular has a significant impact on the lives of service families, from the chance to buy a house to the opportunity to get dental treatment. In fact, the National Audit Office found that the inability to plan life outside work was the most important factor in the decision to leave the forces.⁴² Mobility is a factor of forces' life, and serving personnel and their families accept this with good grace. But this does not mean that we should not do more to address the challenges and difficulties that confront them. It is unfair to expect service personnel and their families to put up with the problems they face in housing, medical care and children's education when they give so much to this country.

Between now and the next election, the Conservative Party will be working on policies relating to all these aspects of service life to ensure that the Military Covenant is kept and that we continue to be able to recruit and retain dedicated soldiers, sailors and airmen to defend our nation. Inevitably, money is tight but the Government has its priorities wrong - spending vast sums on such projects as refurbishing the Ministry of Defence, for example, that would be better spent on our forces. We can do more to repay the debt of gratitude we owe our Armed Forces and their families.

⁴² National Audit Office, 3rd November 2006 "Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces" table 6, page 21.