

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Women in the Armed Forces 08 11 22, HC 726

Tuesday 8 November 2022

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Robert Courts; Dave Doogan; Richard Drax; Mr Mark Francois; Mr Kevan Jones; Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck; Gavin Robinson; Derek Twigg.

Questions 1-126

Witnesses

I: Baroness Annabel Goldie, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence; Rear Admiral Jude Terry, Director People and Training and Naval Secretary, Royal Navy; Air Marshal Rich Knighton, Deputy Commander Capability and People, RAF; Major General Paul Griffiths, Director Personnel, Army; and Samantha des Forges, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Ministry of Defence.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Ministry of Defence \(WIF0046\)](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Annabel Goldie, Rear Admiral Jude Terry, Air Marshal Rich Knighton, Major General Paul Griffiths and Samantha des Forges.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this Defence Select Committee hearing on Tuesday 8 November 2022. This is a follow-up session on our study of women in the Armed Forces. I am delighted to welcome Baroness Annabel Goldie, who is a Minister of State for the Ministry of Defence in the House of Lords. Welcome to you. I also welcome Rear Admiral Jude Terry, who is Director People and Training and Naval Secretary; Air Marshal Rich Knighton, who is Deputy Commander Capability and People; Major General Paul Griffiths, Director Personnel in the Army; and Sam des Forges, who is the Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Ministry of Defence. Welcome to you all.

We like to think, on this Committee, that our inquiries have an impact, and that they are read beyond the Committee itself. I do believe that this particular report—which was led by Sarah Atherton, who has joined us today—has had a profound impact and continues to do so. It is important to stress that although we are grateful for the opportunity to update on where we are with this, some of the series of recommendations have been accepted, some have been partially accepted and some have been rejected. We are going to investigate that today.

We will not be leaving things here at this point; we do not close the folder. This is, as we know, very current and very pertinent. From a personal perspective, of all the studies we have done, when we did this study we interviewed or engaged with over 4,000 personnel, as you know, and I participated in one of the groups and it was quite stunning what was being revealed. It is so important that we keep on top of this. As we saw in the Chamber last week with the issues to do with behaviour in the submersible force, it has not gone away. These are not legacy issues that we are speaking about—this is very fresh indeed—so thank you for your time today.

Samantha, you have worked in the MoD for a long time and I think you have given evidence to us before. Do I understand that this role of Director of Diversity and Inclusion is a new one, though you have been doing it for a number of months? Can you share why the post was required and what your immediate reflections are, having worked there for a little while?

Samantha des Forges: It very much came from a period of reflection. I think that our senior leaders and our Defence executive committee had some time for self-reflection, looked round the room and said, “We don’t really have access to many diverse views within the room; how can we unlock that?” They were clear that diversity and inclusion can provide us with a real, competitive edge. It is the right thing to do. If we look at the uncertain times we are in at the moment, we need to access the broad

range of talent right across our nation. We need to access that diversity of thought.

If you look a little further back, at some of the lessons from Chilcot around challenge and the risks of group think—all those pieces came together and we had a conversation. At the time I was in a gender champion role for the civilian side of Defence. We reflected that there were some pockets of fantastic work going on, but they were in pockets and were not being approached in a programmatic way or with real governance; they were being done as extras. So we really needed to create the ability to put some governance, some wrapper, some direction around it. If we wanted to drive the change that our senior leaders—both military and civilian—wanted, we needed to invest in that. Hence the role and the directorate being enlarged and stood up, but also, similar investments across the services in different parts of our enabling organisations. A couple of years ago there was that real moment of reflection and an appetite to say, “Right, let’s stop talking; let’s start doing.”

Chair: That is really good to hear. Our study came on the back of the Wigston report, as well. It is worth stating up front that the absolute majority of females who serve in our Armed Forces do so—and they depart—with a favourable view of their experience. We need to recognise that as we delve into some of the challenges of the experiences that have been less positive, which need to be addressed. May I turn to Derek Twigg to kick us off?

Baroness Goldie: I just wanted to ask, Mr Chairman, whether you wanted a brief introduction from me? Your Clerks indicated that I should be prepared for that.

Chair: Yes please.

Baroness Goldie: Thank you very much. First, may I say what a genuine pleasure it is to appear before this Committee? You have acknowledged, Mr Chairman, the significance of our Armed Forces both in shaping the UK and being shaped by the UK. Specifically, I am here to look at the Committee’s report. I have described the report as pivotal, because that is what it was. It was an absolute game-changer in relation to Defence and how we looked at these challenging issues and, perhaps most importantly, how we up the pace of dealing with them.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the Committee’s former member, Sarah Atherton. We should all acknowledge the tremendous influence that Sarah has had in bringing these matters out into the open and being such a contributory factor in the Committee producing such an important report. I was delighted when she joined me briefly as a Minister; I thought it was going to be an important—

Chair: We are a little bit puzzled as to why she did not stay as a Minister, but that is another debate.



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Baroness Goldie: That is not for me to comment on, Mr Chairman, but I was very pleased to hear of her ministerial appointment. Obviously, she has now been superseded, but I would not want to miss the opportunity of putting on the record my profound appreciation—and, indeed, that of the Department—of all that Sarah has done. She has been a trailblazer for changing the direction of this liner and I want to be explicit about that.

You have already referred to my colleagues; I am delighted to be joined by them today. We recognise that servicewomen are an integral part of the Armed Forces. They play a vital role in protecting the nation. Rear Admiral Jude Terry is the emblematic example of that. I think Sharon Nesmith, our newly appointed deputy chief of the general staff, is in America at the moment, from what I can remember; otherwise, I think she would have wanted to be here.

We are facing an uncertain world. We are facing challenges, but we are only going to do that competently, effectively and professionally if we have the best people in our Armed Forces and they have the confidence to give of their best, and do not feel frightened, inhibited, or prejudiced or discriminated against.

As you said, Mr Chairman, important work was under way before the Committee's review. When I appeared before this Committee last summer, I was able to confirm that Defence was already working to improve the environment for serving women, with a range of initiatives that the Committee will be aware of. I used the phrase "up the pace", and there is no doubt that that is what the Committee's report did: it upped the pace on the work that we were doing. It increased the profile of that work within Defence and, indeed, the broader world. Like you say, it sharpened our MoD antennae. It honed them to a sharpness that was not there, so that we are constantly vigilant as to what we are doing and whether the changes we are making are working.

I asked for a summary of our response to the Committee's recommendations. I think I am correct in saying that we have accepted 46 of the recommendations and conclusions and four have been partially accepted. I hope that provides the Committee with a sense and assurance of how seriously the MoD has taken it.

Q2 **Chair:** Sorry, how many did you say you accepted?

Baroness Goldie: The Committee made 53 recommendations and conclusions, and I understand that 46 have been accepted, four have been partially accepted and the remaining three were issues of policy, principally about what the Service Justice System should deal with. We have made a whole range of improvements. The Committee will be aware of that. I know the Committee wants to ask questions, so I will not use this time to reiterate them, but they are in the responses that we have given to the Committee.

We are continuing to improve our data capture and analysis. The important thing is not just that we have made changes, but how we



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measure, assess and monitor the changes to ensure that they are delivering what we hope they will deliver. The big changes principally concern the introduction of a number of zero-tolerance policies. I was very pleased that the Secretary of State was insistent that we push to get them delivered. I was at his shoulder, insisting we get them delivered. I was very pleased at the reaction of the Armed Forces, which was one of receptiveness, co-operation and willingness.

These are important policies. They have consequences that bite, and that is getting to the nub of the problem. If there are senior members in the command chain who have been neglectful of their responsibilities, and have not responded professionally and appropriately to a complaint that has been made, they can expect their careers to be impacted. That can be recorded against their, if you like, work record.

We have also materially reformed the Service Complaints System. That was a worry, because it was very clear from the evidence you took that a lot of women were scared. I have just been given a clarifying note. Apparently, of the recommendations and conclusions, 33 were accepted, 13 were conclusions not recommendations, four were partial—I do not know what that means; apparently they are hybrid—and three were rejected. At the end of the day, I think we end up in the same place.

Chair: Yes, I think you were including the conclusions as well. You are absolutely right: we made 36 recommendations, of which 29 were accepted, four were partially accepted and three were rejected. We now need to move into those details. I am grateful for your opening comments. Of course, accepting a recommendation does not necessarily mean that it will be implemented, or that the mechanics are there to implement it. Let's move on with that.

Q3 **Derek Twigg:** Let's get into the detail. In July 2021, the Committee's inquiry concluded that the Ministry of Defence and the services were "failing to help female personnel achieve their full potential." I really want to know how much has actually changed on the ground since then? What practically has happened that you have clear evidence of to demonstrate to the Committee today? I would like to go through the three services individually. I am happy for anyone who wishes to start to do so.

Chair: Let's hear from the senior service first—that would be traditional.

Derek Twigg: We are looking for practical examples and evidence of how it has changed.

Rear Admiral Terry: The first thing to say is that we recognised before the report that we needed to do something to change our culture and career pathway. As the Navy's secretary and director for people and training, that is my job. It is one of the reasons I got this job. We have had a review of our career pathway. In a previous iteration, you would have had to spend approximately 20 years at sea in order to be promoted in the warfare branch. That is not necessarily compatible with having a family and so on, so we have broken down the career path and looked at



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the warfare branch in particular but at number of other branches as well. We have looked at how we might do that differently and give credit for people not in a war-fighting job to look at career fields and those types of activities.

That will benefit everybody but, of course, if you are a parent and are taking time to be with your children or need time to not be in deployment, that gives you much more access to the promotion opportunities you would see. We have also changed our promotion board structure and put independent members on the board, which provides a different perspective. We have also included women on the board. That is partly about diversity of thought, though perhaps not diversity of uniform.

Q4 Derek Twigg: In terms of promotion, particularly in respect of warfare, how many women have benefitted from that?

Rear Admiral Terry: Looking at the statistics on lieutenant commanders, I do not have the exact numbers—

Derek Twigg: You can write to us with them.

Rear Admiral Terry: Yes, I will do that. I can tell you that if we keep the women within that system, they have more chance of being promoted from lieutenant commander to commander, and we have a number at the senior rate level.

Q5 Derek Twigg: It is just a little worrying. What you have said to us is fine, but you don't have the information available. We are interested in what is happening on the ground—actual evidence. It is a bit concerning that you do not have the numbers.

Rear Admiral Terry: I will come back to you with the exact numbers and the exact examples.

Q6 Derek Twigg: Do you have anything else to add?

Rear Admiral Terry: We have done a number of things in terms of maximising talent. We have implemented wraparound childcare, which has gone across all the services. We have a take-up of approximately 20% from the naval perspective. It enables people to fund their childcare; in our line of work, that helps people to take on jobs and stay in a career pathway.

We have also looked at opportunities for improving health access for women. We previously had a maternity passport, but as part of the sexual health improvement team, which was run on a tri-service basis, we have looked at how we can improve access to sanitary products. Those types of things help people to stay in an environment for longer and develop as best they can within it.

We have also enrolled people on talent programmes, including the pipeline talent scheme, and we have had a number of people go through those. We have improved our leadership courses in order to get after our ethical and

cultural standards. There are a number of other activities, but those are the ones we have done.

Q7 Derek Twigg: What about providing a safe environment for females?

Rear Admiral Terry: A safe environment for females in order to serve and to be—

Derek Twigg: How have you done that?

Rear Admiral Terry: As part of the broader change to the system in terms of service complaints, which you will be aware of, we have set up an independent Service Complaints System. I can give you the numbers for that. This time last year we had approximately 114 service complaints within the system; we now have 131 within the system, which would indicate that people have more faith in the system. One of the effects of these changes is that we are going to see an increase in complaints. To me, that looks like success in terms of people feeling confident and comfortable in the system.

We also have reduced the length of time for resolving them. This time last year we had only 31 in the Navy that were resolved within 24 weeks; we now have 40 that have been resolved in that same time. This came in only in June this year, so we probably need another six months to give you a whole year's statistics, but I can show you that the system is definitely improving. People have more confidence in the system to deliver.

Q8 Derek Twigg: Major General?

Major General Griffiths: We have got a number of points and some of them echo exactly what the Navy is doing. We are obviously sharing our experiences so that we can get the best out of what we are all doing.

First, every promotion board has a female member, to make sure that we have diversity on the boards. We have a separate agenda on every promotion board for officers, where we discuss female talent, so that we can make sure that we have female runners for jobs, so that we do not overlook any of our female talent. That is at every board up to the No. 1 board, which is the board that chooses our generals and above.

We have removed the prerequisite for command at sub-unit level for promotion to lieutenant colonel, because for women when we see them as sub-unit commanders it is most likely when they are having their children and most likely when they are making some choices. We have removed that as a prerequisite for promotion to lieutenant colonel so we can pull through to lieutenant colonel. That is a really important point.

We have Programme Castle, which is about talent management. We are moving away from trades and cap badges to skills. Instead of gender being an important point, skills are now the language of choice. When we board, we board against a skills framework, instead of a demand for a combat officer or a combat service support officer. That changes the pool of people.



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We also have mentoring schemes—we use the Forward Institute, the 30% Club and Mission1st. Those are all female talent mentoring and coaching schemes that we invest in, so that talented women and those not on the executive stream can go and learn more and be coached and mentored. We also have individual mentoring within the organisations. Male senior officers mentor our females so that we can pull them through and help them with that.

We have also introduced a number of reporting mechanisms to try to drive out some of the behaviours that were perhaps prevalent, so 180 reporting is now a thing. That is anonymous 180 reporting on all our senior officers down to OF 5, so down to full colonel. We are about to drop that down to lieutenant colonel so that people in their organisations can have a voice. That changes the dynamic slightly about how we treat people.

We have also introduced a one-star selection process so that we can make sure we are choosing the right people for our most critical commands at brigade level—6,000 people. We need to have the right people, so we have introduced that. We piloted that this year and that was a really positive step forward and welcomed by everybody in the Army, not just our women.

Q9 **Derek Twigg:** How many women have benefited by progressing up the chain of command, since these changes were put in place?

Major General Griffiths: It would depend on which rank and position.

Q10 **Derek Twigg:** It could be NCOs or officers.

Major General Griffiths: We could provide you with written evidence on all the promotions, so that you could see.

Q11 **Chair:** Are you tracking? Do you have the facility to track?

Major General Griffiths: Yes, absolutely.

Q12 **Chair:** You could share.

Major General Griffiths: Yes.

Q13 **Derek Twigg:** Again, in terms of the first question, I am surprised you do not have that information to hand. That is the evidence of what is happening on the ground, so we would like to have that figure.

Major General Griffiths: I can say that the promotion opportunities for women at lieutenant colonel are better than for men.

Q14 **Derek Twigg:** If we could see the figures, it would be useful.

Major General Griffiths: We have a couple of other things I would not mind highlighting. There are service couples, as well. Some 57% of our females are married to another serving person. We have looked at all the serving couple policies to ensure that the choice does not have to be for the woman to take a back seat in her career. Now we have dual serving couple conversations at the APC, which is our Army Personnel Centre, so that the woman does not have to take the back seat.

Q15 Derek Twigg: Again, it would be interesting to see what the numbers are there, as well.

Major General Griffiths: Of course. We have also introduced an Army cultural framework, with a maturity matrix, so that we can measure at unit level, following unit climate assessments, the experience of our people in the organisations. That is not just about women, obviously. That is about the climate and culture of the whole Army.

Q16 Derek Twigg: Air Marshal?

Air Marshal Knighton: I am relatively new in this role. In that role, and preparing for today, the question you asked is exactly the one I asked of the team: how do we know what we are doing is working? Our aim is to deliver enduring positive change, but how will we know? The answer I have had back from my staff is that the network groups tell us that things are changing—the atmosphere is changing.

On the specific measures that we have undertaken in the Air Force, the answer is very similar to what you have heard from the Navy and the Army. We grew our diversity and inclusion team from five to 21, to enable us to support these networks much more effectively. We have built a climate assessment capability. We conducted a rolling two-year programme of climate assessments. We have got a facility to do six rapid interventions and we are doing some of those today following the reporting of what happened with the Red Arrows and focusing particularly on elite units.

We have worked very hard on the overall training package for our people, to help educate people about what is normal and acceptable. You might ask why that has not worked already, but the recognition from all the services is that we were doing those things, but it was not good enough. We have 331 trained facilitators and over 400 mentors. We have employed two full-time reserve servicepeople to help women returning from maternity leave to get back into work and deal with the pressures that come with that. We have enabled flexible working and seen an increase in its uptake.

On the specifics around promotions, as you have just heard there are nine sets of promotions for other ranks and another seven for officers—we would have to give you that detail.

Q17 Derek Twigg: Will you write to us with that?

Air Marshal Knighton: We will do that as part of a combined response.

At the Air Force, we have just appointed our second three-star woman and we have the first two-star woman as an officer commanding an operational group. There are examples of where we have seen positive changes during my career, but it is not good enough—in certain branches and trades, the representation of women is well below where we would want it to be. But if you look at our overall recruitment numbers, there was just over 17% women entry at officer grade five years ago; it is now over 31%.



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There has been really quite a marked shift. We know from research and practical experience that, as underrepresented groups become larger, that changes the atmosphere in an organisation and will help us drive through and deliver that enduring change that I describe.

- Q18 **Mr Jones:** Minister, you said that our report was pivotal and you highlighted the role of Sarah Atherton in that report. Replacing her with a retread Minister after a short period is not a good look, is it? If you are a woman in the Armed Forces, it is not a good look that someone who has been driving this agenda forward should be removed after a short period.

Baroness Goldie: I hesitate to comment on matters quite outwith my control. I am privileged to serve in the MoD as a Minister and I do prize the Ministers who are now my colleagues, as I prize the previous Ministers. We have a very good team.

- Q19 **Mr Jones:** Doesn't that decision say something about the judgment of the Prime Minister?

Baroness Goldie: The Prime Minister has to be free to make decisions about ministerial appointments. All I can say is that, as someone in Defence, I was strongly supported before the Prime Minister was appointed and I am still strongly supported, with his subsequent appointments.

- Q20 **Mr Jones:** It is a bad look, though, isn't it?

Baroness Goldie: I think the MoD is very highly regarded—not just across Government, but in outside perception—as one of the best Departments in Government. I cannot take the credit for that, but it is a perception I am happy to be part of.

- Q21 **Chair:** It is awkward, given that so much accolade has been given to this report and to Ms Atherton, that she should then be replaced as a Minister and not retained as part of the ministerial team. We will work with the new Minister and are ready to do so—indeed, Sarah is now coming back on to the Committee, and she is very welcome—but there is an underlying point about consistency. We are talking about the role of women as exemplars and role models. Putting party politics aside, it is a bit awkward.

Baroness Goldie: As I said, it is outwith my sphere of authority. It is outwith my jurisdiction, but what I can say—I think it is obvious from listening to the contributions that you have already heard—is that we are on a journey, and we accepted the report for the substantial piece of work it was. The responsibility now falling on the MoD is to make sure that we sustain the delivery. That is what I am keeping my eye on, because some excellent initiatives and changes have been undertaken, but they are meaningless if we cannot be sure that the momentum is continuing.

Chair: I simply make the point that every female in the Armed Forces would have realised that the person who has been passionate about this issue was in part of the team able to shape it, but now is not. We have made the point. Perhaps the optics do not look as good as they should do.



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Q22 **Gavin Robinson:** Major General, I want to pick up on your response to Mr Twigg, in which you indicated that you would share some of the statistics around promotion and you talked about lieutenant colonels and above. You said that the opportunities for promotion are now better for women than for men. Can you expand on that?

Major General Griffiths: There are greater opportunities for women, because the proportion of promotions by comparison with their size means that they have a better chance of promotion at lieutenant colonel—not above lieutenant colonel.

Q23 **Gavin Robinson:** Are targets in place now?

Major General Griffiths: No, there are no targets.

Q24 **Gavin Robinson:** What positive discrimination is there to ensure that the opportunities are better than they are for men?

Major General Griffiths: There is no positive discrimination.

Q25 **Gavin Robinson:** So why do you say the opportunities are better than they are for men?

Major General Griffiths: Because the women are better than the men on a merit-based approach to promotion.

Q26 **Gavin Robinson:** It is either on merits or on targets. You are talking about a proportionate opportunity, but if there are fewer females, there are better opportunities. Is it a merit-based appointment, or is it a target-based appointment?

Major General Griffiths: As I said, it is a merit-based appointment.

Q27 **Gavin Robinson:** So how is it better for women than for men? Surely it is better for the best person.

Major General Griffiths: The women are better than the men. Therefore, more of them are promoted in proportion to the number.

Q28 **Gavin Robinson:** The women are better than the men.

Major General Griffiths: Yes.

Gavin Robinson: Thank you. That is a helpful clarification.

Q29 **Dave Doogan:** Baroness Goldie, in recent months there have been allegations of persistent bullying and sexualised behaviour towards servicewomen in some parts of the forces—for example, in the submarine service and the Red Arrows. Why are such examples still persisting?

Baroness Goldie: Let me say at once that the alleged behaviour is appalling. In relation to the incident to which you refer, the First Sea Lord took immediate action. He has expressed his concerns and ordered an inquiry, which is currently sitting and hopes to report shortly.

Going back to what I was saying to the Chair, the MoD is on a journey here. We have made significant changes in the last year, of which the



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Committee is aware, and these are deep, significant and enduring changes, which are to address culture and produce a framework that is substantial and capable of delivering improvement.

I defer to my service colleagues here, because they can tell you for themselves, but I am hearing anecdotally from the servicewomen's networks, and from servicewomen individually, that they are aware of a climate change. They are aware of a significant improvement in how we are trying to address these issues.

What I can say to the Committee is this: because of the changes, I expect more complaints to surface. That will not be comfortable for the MoD, but I would far rather that these areas of behaviour come out into the open, that women feel confident enough in the system to report them, and that they are robustly investigated. If the perpetrators are found culpable, they will be dealt with in a very blunt and effective manner.

Q30 Dave Doogan: With regard to those two examples, are you able to share with the Committee where we are with the two investigations?

Baroness Goldie: On the investigation, as I said, the First Sea Lord instructed a review. That is currently under way, so I cannot commit further on that. It is also going to be assisted by a completely independent observer, who will work alongside the review committee to make sure that there is reassurance about the independence of the committee. Rear Admiral Terry can say more about that.

On the Red Arrows, again, there was a far-reaching inquiry, but Richard Knighton is better placed than I am to give you more detail about that.

Rear Admiral Terry: The investigation into the submarine service was started before the newspaper headlines. We were aware of it, as someone had raised that there was an issue, and we started conducting an initial ships investigation, which is what we do in the event of any issue arising—not just allegations of abhorrent behaviour, which we have heard about today. That investigation is ongoing, with a team of people interviewing.

The intention is to issue some intermediate findings, if you will. There may then be other activity that comes after that. I cannot comment, because the investigation is still ongoing, but that is a system we use routinely in the Navy to deal with any incidents—those to do with safety, as well as bullying, harassment and discrimination-type activity. All of them are taken seriously.

The important thing for me is that we have a conduct and culture team who have been out. They had already been doing work for the past two years—since 2020—in individual areas. Command can ask for support and, more importantly, individuals can ask the team to come in and provide support. They can look at an organisation to improve its leadership climate, like the climate surveys that my two colleagues have described. We have those and people feel more confident to say, "This is an issue."



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I can tell you that such behaviour is not tolerated. This year, we have removed four senior personnel without any question once an investigation has been found. Added to that, a number of people have been removed from the service.

- Q31 **Dave Doogan:** To give the Committee clarity, what does “removed” mean? Does it mean redeployed or that they are no longer in the service?

Rear Admiral Terry: Some of them are no longer in the service.

Dave Doogan: But some of them are.

Chair: Sorry, Red Arrows pilots?

Dave Doogan: No, Royal Navy.

Rear Admiral Terry: I will talk about the Navy, rather than the Red Arrows.

Chair: These are submariners—

Rear Admiral Terry: With naval personnel—it is not just in the submarine service, although the most recent headlines have been from the submarine service—where people have experienced issues and expressed that there has been inappropriate behaviour, we have carried out independent investigations and followed through with the activity to remove those people either from the service or from their post while subsequent investigations go on. That is part of the zero-tolerance policy that you will have heard Baroness Goldie describe, in terms of people who are found—

- Q32 **Dave Doogan:** Surely under due process, you cannot remove them from the service until the investigation is concluded.

Rear Admiral Terry: Agreed, but while an investigation is ongoing, you can choose to remove one or other of them from the situation.

- Q33 **Dave Doogan:** Air Marshal?

Air Marshal Knighton: It is worth giving a small preamble about the change in policy that comes into force on 19 November, which has a presumption that people who are found to have committed sexual harassment will be removed from the service.

On the Red Arrows case, a non-statutory inquiry has concluded in respect of the interviews and is being finalised. Two cases will come to the Air Force Board. One of them has come to the Air Force Board and that individual will be discharged from the service on the basis of the evidence presented. The second individual is due to come to the Air Force Board soon, and we will consider the case against him and decide on his future.

- Q34 **Dave Doogan:** Baroness Goldie, what special steps in the policy are designed specifically to protect very young women—under 18—who have signed up and who appear, sadly, to be at particular risk? Notwithstanding the fact that this should not be happening anyway, in



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instances where it is manifested, it is a hugely unpleasant, frightening, degrading and isolating experience for somebody at the very start of their career in uniform, and so they may well leave. We have heard a lot about the priority of populating the senior ranks of each service with just as many women as there are men.

That comes at a serious opportunity cost if women are being put off right at the front gate because of the experience they find themselves subjected to. What steps are we taking to protect very young women from that type of behaviour, and also to protect the service from the loss of those women, who may well have had a very productive, successful and illustrious career?

Baroness Goldie: It is a very valid question. We have been talking about the policies of zero tolerance to those who have been convicted for sexual offences, and the presumption of dismissal for those who show below criminal, but unacceptable, sexual behaviour. These are the umbrella rules of replying. We take very seriously the grouping to which you referred because we have a duty of care, apart from anything else, to young women—we have a duty of care to the whole Armed Forces, but particularly for young women in that age group. I am going to defer to Sam des Forges in a moment.

We do two things. These young women could well be in Harrogate at the Army Foundation College. Now, I have visited Harrogate; it is clear to me that it has a very strong and responsible governance. There have been some unwelcome behaviour issues there, but the proposals are to make clear, within the first few days of arriving at Harrogate, that there is an education process. That is to say to young boys exactly what is not acceptable. They may come from very challenging backgrounds and may not know that there are boundaries, so there is an education process to explain to them what the boundaries of behaviour are and that, if there is any transgression of these boundaries, they will be out.

But it is also to educate and reassure the young women who are given points of reference, as I understand it; you may be able to help, Major General. My understanding is that when they go to Harrogate, they are given a clear point of contact. If they are worried about anything, they can make a complaint.

Chair: We need to make some progress. Dave, are you happy with that?

Q35 **Dave Doogan:** We are going to hear from Sam des Forges.

Samantha des Forges: I know the Major General was going to touch briefly on some of the specific examples in the Army. I will be clear because there is sometimes some confusion between the zero-tolerance policies. The first one is about whether someone is found guilty of a sexual offence. It is mandated that they leave the service. That also relates to relationships between those in a position of authority and trainees or recruits. That is mandated.



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For what one might describe as “below the criminal threshold” behaviours—those unacceptable on the balance of probability as opposed to beyond reasonable doubt—there is a presumption of discharge. If there is a particular argument for keeping them in the service, that has to be approved at a two-star level. In addition, there is the sexual exploitation and abuse policy. There is some confusion about how some of those work. I just want to hand over to the Major General to touch on the point about under-18s that you were making.

Major General Griffiths: We have an Army Foundation College in Harrogate, which takes 16-and-a-half to 18-year-olds. It takes them through an effective military, but also numeracy and literacy-based, course focusing on STEM skills. We take our duty of care for our under-18s very seriously. We have robust, effective and independent safeguards in place.

Ofsted goes to the college every two years and its last report was “outstanding”. It highlighted a couple of things that I think the Committee might like to hear about. It mentioned our strong “ethos of emotional and psychological safety”, which means that there is a speak-out culture and a challenge culture. That means that people immediately report things that are going wrong, whether they are male or female. They mentioned our dedicated safeguarding staff—you will remember the DHALI-Blake report from Deepcut—in the right ratio, so that people can report incidents. They highlighted our high standards of facilities and accommodation to support what is effectively a school under an Army premise.

A few things are worth highlighting. First, as the Minister in the Lords has highlighted, for the first 12 weeks, values and standards are absolutely central to the curriculum. On day one, the CO speaks to every single person. He then speaks to the females separately so that they understand that they can talk, and where they can go. Then the padre follows that. Then the RSM follows that. It is a 12-week inculcation of the Army’s values and standards.

We must remember that 30% of the people who attend Harrogate come from schools where they have been excluded, so we are actually making our people better by putting them through this system. The RMP also then deliver consent training on a six-monthly basis. That is a rolling consent training process that the RMP deliver.

In order that our women are looked after, we also have a programme called Programme Athena, which is focused just on female recruits and how they can cope with the strains and stresses of being in a military environment; there is a specific focus on females. Finally, we have an RMP detachment on site with three RMP soldiers who are there so that people can report and challenge inappropriate behaviours. In the round, we are doing all we can for our young people at Harrogate.

Dave Doogan: Thank you very much.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: In terms of some of the language used there, these



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are children—if they are under 18, legally, they are children, not young women or young men. I just wanted to clarify that.

Q36 Chair: That is an important point.

The Sub-Committee report that Sarah Atherton led found that six out of 10 people who are subject to this inappropriate behaviour did not come forward to report—six out of 10 did not have any faith in the system. You are right: you will get more people stepping forward now, but that is the impression they have—that they simply will not be looked after, and there will be no change.

In fact, in the Sub-Committee that I was involved with, we found that females in the Navy went to their superior female officers to say, “Please quietly give me some guidance on what I should do,” and the reply was, “Best not go there. It’s not worth it, and it’ll affect your career.”

Baroness Goldie: You are right, Chairman: that was utterly unacceptable. MoD has recognised that, and that is why we brought in the changes that we have, and we sense that these changes are already delivering an improved climate of confidence.

Chair: Okay. Let us move on.

Q37 Richard Drax: We have touched on the presumption that anyone who is found to have engaged in unacceptable sexual behaviour will be discharged. You have been running four months of training, and this policy becomes effective on 19 November, as we have heard. How did you develop this policy, and are the forces ready for it? Admiral, perhaps you could start.

Rear Admiral Terry: We developed the policy together, looking across other organisations, learning from organisations that already have a policy like this and learning from our allies and partners. Last week we had a Five Eyes conference, where we were discussing elements of this, and they were all part of how we built the policy and put it together.

Since June, the teams have known about this. From a Navy perspective—I will not speak on behalf of my colleagues, but I know we have all done the same—we have had an active communications package of that everywhere, from new entry training all the way up to courses that I have been privileged to attend in the last 12 months.

We have worked on a package of training across the services. It is not the full package forever, but it is enough for people to know what is right, what is wrong and, building on what Paul said, where the line is in behavioural terms—what is accepted and what is not—and how the system works to support you. It goes live on 19 November.

We have already had training at all the training establishments, and our networks report that when they speak to people and canvass people, they are fully aware of what is out there and what it means from 19 November. We have been applying it since June, to use examples to teach people



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about what, as Air Marshal Rich said, is completely inappropriate and will not be accepted.

- Q38 **Richard Drax:** Admiral, you said you had looked at allies of ours and what they have done. Where do we stand in this whole question compared with other countries?

Rear Admiral Terry: Sam is a much better expert than me, but I am privileged to have worked with a number of female colleagues from across the world in the last two years, and there are some things we are better at that we have actively done more of, and there are others where we are very quickly learning from them.

- Q39 **Richard Drax:** Sam, I will come to you in a second. Air Marshal, what is your answer to this question?

Air Marshal Knighton: Sam is definitely best placed to talk about the development of the policy and the Secretary of State's agreement and direction on what that policy is. In terms of whether we are ready for it, I think yes. There is a range of education packages that have been put together and are being rolled out across the Air Force.

I talked about the complete revamp of our training. We have a programme called "Everybody, Everyday". That is a facilitated training session that contextualises the training and puts it in the context of how victims have felt and the circumstances in which they have felt harassed, and helps people to understand why that behaviour might be considered unacceptable, recognise it when they see it and know how to challenge it.

There is then specific training being rolled out to our Commanders—every Commander at Wing Command and Group Captain is given specific training as they go through their course, before they take up their appointment, on unacceptable behaviours and the rules, policy and processes, and their responsibilities as the person in charge of that chain of command.

As we get closer to 19 November, we will continue to roll out the information notices and the material to help people understand it. I've recorded a piece to camera that will go out more broadly, which informs people of the key issues and points them in the direction of the material for training and the information. So yes, I think we are ready for it, and it is already starting to impact people. It is a regular topic of conversation when I go out and visit units.

- Q40 **Richard Drax:** Sam, I will come to you in a minute on developing the policy. General, can you just talk about whether you are ready?

Major General Griffiths: We started a conversation last year about what behaviours we tolerate. We started with a general officers' awayday, where we got the senior leaders of the Army together to have a really, deep conversation about what is acceptable, what is not and how we were going to deal with the circumstances in front of us. We started effectively a zero-tolerance approach from that moment on.



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In terms of whether we are ready, we have worked with our colleagues. The pack that has gone out is a tri-service pack to everybody in every location, whether that is in the Army, Navy or Air Force. It is absolutely clear on what is expected of them. It is in very simple terms. It is very easy for our junior soldiers to understand.

I think the proof will be in the pudding, when we see, post 19 November, how the chain of command reacts to the incidents and then the data that will suggest whether we have got the zero-tolerance policy right.

I can say that since March, 18 people have had their service terminated, and that is before we have implemented the zero-tolerance approach; we are already doing it. This just reaffirms an approach that we are already all taking towards the behaviours that we find unacceptable in our service.

- Q41 **Richard Drax:** I am going to be a slight devil's advocate, if I may, having served for nine years in the Army. No one is going to question zero tolerance, but where do you draw the line on banter? Let's face it, the Armed Forces is full of banter, black humour and so forth. It is part of it. How do you draw the line?

Major General Griffiths: Where the line is drawn is very clear in the policy. Examples are provided. We could read it out.

Richard Drax: Sam can tell us in a minute.

Major General Griffiths: It is absolutely clear. Banter is not acceptable in this policy. It is a very clear zero-tolerance line: "If you do the following things, there is a presumption of termination of service."

- Q42 **Richard Drax:** Sam, can you clarify?

Samantha des Forges: Yes. Absolutely; the policy is really clear. The Secretary of State and Ministers were really clear in their direction here. I would also acknowledge the support of the servicewomen's networks and their representatives in all this work. Their voices have been absolutely key to this work, whether sitting with the Secretary of State and Ministers and sharing their experiences or sitting opposite the Chiefs and challenging them. They have been really fantastic and have demonstrated tremendous—if we want to look for leaders in our organisation, some of our network representatives are true leaders.

They talk to us about how those little, low-level sorts of examples that might otherwise be dismissed can result in what one might describe as the death by 1,000 cuts. They are just those regular points. Actually, if we are really clear and committed, which we are and Ministers and the Secretary of State are and which Chiefs and senior leaders are, then we have to tackle this. These are things that would not be accepted in any other professional workforce, and the Armed Forces are a professional organisation and we have to reflect that professionalism.

The examples used within the policy are really clear. They are in the training. It will be a bit of a culture shock for some. It will undoubtedly,



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without wanting to use a naval reference, put a shot across the bow in terms of what is and isn't acceptable. One of the other things we are inculcating into this process is a feedback process. Every six months we get a report from all the services about how they have used this process, what they have done and what they have delivered.

That way we can understand, after we have rolled the initial training out, what more we need, where we need to turn the dial up or down, where we need to bring clarity, and whether there is something we can improve. Absolutely, this report is key, but we really need to ensure that we have continuous improvement, are hearing the voices of our people and are making changes. We are really clear and explicit in the policy, and that is reflected in the training.

Q43 Richard Drax: I was going to ask you what evidence you have of the cultural change. I think you were saying you get reports from the three Armed Services saying things are changing. Is that right?

Samantha des Forges: Measuring cultural change is a challenge; it is not a case of there being a simple number that one can just reach. That goes not just for the Armed Forces, but also across wider society with how one measures culture change. We are improving our data across a whole range of data sources. When we bring that together, we can start to see the movement. Talking to Five Eyes colleagues, they are all struggling with this challenge. One of the things we took away as a group was that we will share what we are doing. There are things Australia or Canada are doing that are good pieces of work we can use.

If I focus on where we are right now and the data we are using, climate assessments are really important. I know the Army are doing a wider piece looking at climate assessments. Those are mandated at two-star level. I have run one within my own directorate and they are a really useful source of information and evidence.

The AFCAS, the RAF AFCAS and people surveys and so on are really helpful, as is information from the bullying and harassment helpline. We have a system that allows us to capture informed reporting and insights from our D&I advisers. That goes back to the point about encouraging folk to want to raise issues so that we can use the additional levers of zero tolerance to get after them.

Sometimes there are folk who might not want to raise issues, but we still want to draw learnings from that. There is the sexual harassment survey and the sexual offences bulletins, and there is a whole range of data, plus just engaging with our personnel, that allows us to bring that together. As I say, there is no one answer. It is about pulling that all together. There will be further sources of data coming online.

Q44 Richard Drax: Sam, where do we sit with our allies? You were talking about the Canadians and Australians. Are we doing very well? Are we in the middle or way behind?



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Samantha des Forges: Some of our Five Eyes allies started this journey a little bit sooner than us. We have been on this journey for a while, but this particular report has really put the foot on the accelerator. What was really interesting was that on some of the things we, or perhaps external bodies, thought were a good idea, our colleagues were feeding back and saying that actually they can have unintended consequences. We have to think really clearly about it.

If you are changing culture, you not only need to get after what is unacceptable, but you also have to celebrate what is good. You may or may not want to touch on this, but there has been some really positive stuff that has come out from this report recognising the work that is going into that.

What I took away from it was that there is lots of really good insight where we can learn from our colleagues, but they were also really keen to learn from us in a number of areas. One of those areas in particular was how we work with industry in a whole defence enterprise approach. That includes things like the Women in Defence awards and Women in Defence UK. That collaboration of the whole defence enterprise was really valuable. They also took away our engagement with networks and how we were really amplifying the voices of our people and putting them centrally into it.

The other piece that colleagues were keen to borrow or steal was the work in the servicewomen's health space, be it our menopause or breastfeeding policies. I think it is varied. If you look at pure stats, our representation of women in the Armed Forces is the lowest of the Five Eyes, but because of the foot on the accelerator we are now doing more innovative things, and we are now pushing the change. Some of Five Eyes were saying, "We are going to have to make sure we are keeping up."

- Q45 **Richard Drax:** Briefly, because there is a lot more to get through, the MoD is about to launch some communications. When is that going to happen, and how will you judge how important it is going to be?

Samantha des Forges: By communications, you mean—

Richard Drax: There is a communications campaign, apparently.

Samantha des Forges: Yes. We are working closely with our communications colleagues. I am not the expert, but they have a whole process for measuring the impact of it. I will probably have to defer to them in terms of the correct ways, whether those are hits, responses or feedback, but there is a communications approach to measuring that.

- Q46 **Gavin Robinson:** I will probe this a little further. Mr Drax asked a question about banter, and I think you closed it down pretty quickly.

Samantha des Forges: My apologies if—

Gavin Robinson: No more banter.

Samantha des Forges: Oh, sorry. I thought you meant the question.



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Gavin Robinson: You closed down the banter, as it were. I see you have a document there that talks about unacceptable sexual behaviours. I hope you will be able to share that document with the Committee. Is banter associated with unacceptable sexual behaviours, or does this policy attach to a range of other what might be considered protected classes, including gender, race, sexual orientation and everything else?

Samantha des Forges: That is a live question that we are discussing at the moment. We are clear that there is no place for any form of hate crime or offensive and unacceptable behaviour. Actually, a colleague has just reminded me that the term “banter” is covered in our JSP 763, which talks about anything that is upsetting or discriminatory in addition to the zero tolerance. You are right: while what we are talking about here is very much gender-focused, we also have to recognise that our population of servicewomen is not homogeneous in nature. We have a great deal of intersectionality, whether servicewomen are from different faith and belief groups, different ethnicities, the LGBT+ group, neurodiverse groups and so on. You are quite right: we are clear that it is unacceptable for all. This is for the purposes of responding to this particular piece.

Q47 **Gavin Robinson:** The broader point is probably worthy of further exploration at another time. People like me would regularly have been referred to as “Paddy” in the British Army. I have no doubt that you know many “Paddies”, because they come from Northern Ireland. For some, that is racially offensive. They do not consider themselves “wee Paddy Irishmen”; they are Brits. It is worthy of further exploration on a broader scope than just this important aspect.

Samantha des Forges: Absolutely. We have a great deal of work. We have a fantastic race champion and race networks, and we have rolled out the race action plan, phase 1, which is mainly civilian-focused. We are working on phase 2 with our single service colleagues, who are also designing their own race action plans. We particularly recognise the intersectionality of faith and belief in that work. I apologise if I am being quite focused on my response around gender, but—

Gavin Robinson: No, that’s fine. Thank you.

Q48 **Chair:** Okay. I want to turn to the Service Complaints System, because that is where most of the recommendations that you rejected come from. Before I do, can I just confirm that the removal of people for any form of sexual harassment includes phase 1 training? Is that correct for all three services—that there is no distinction between behaviour in phase 1 training and behaviour when you have completed it and are fully signed up.

Air Marshal Knighton: There is a specific element in the policy about relationships between instructors and trainees, which would have a presumption of discharge in those circumstances. The defence information notice is very good at explaining that the behaviours and the response should be seen in context. There is no question that, if somebody is found guilty of sexual assault, they should be discharged. There is absolutely no question about that policy.



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Q49 **Chair:** Maybe this is something for you to come back on, but we should make it very clear that, whether it is phase 1 training or not, the same rules should apply.

Baroness Goldie: If anyone in training is abused by an instructor, the instructor will face mandatory discharge.

Q50 **Chair:** Sorry, the instructor is not in phase 1 training. The instructor has completed his phase 1 training. That is not what I am talking about; I am talking about those participating in phase 1 training.

Baroness Goldie: The participants.

Air Marshal Knighton: It is presumption of discharge.

Chair: You are saying that there is zero tolerance. I am just saying that that includes phase 1; that is all I needed to check. Let's move on to the Service Complaints System.

Q51 **Robert Courts:** I would like to ask you about the Service Complaints System. Of course, this was one of the major recommendations in the report that was submitted. In the response, I think I am right in saying that the Ministry said that the direct chain of command is not to be involved in the handling of complaints of a sexual nature. I would like to explore that. How confident are you that the chain of command is not involved in deciding these cases at all?

Baroness Goldie: Well, we know what the policy is. It will be for the individual services, in the context of their structures, to ensure that the policy is being applied. That is partially done, as far as I understand, by an education process, but my three service counterparts will be able to give you a more specific answer.

Q52 **Robert Courts:** Okay. Let us unpick it from a policy perspective first. It may be that there are different answers from the services, which might be something that we should look at. For example, who decides what the determination of an offence of a sexual nature is?

Baroness Goldie: That will now be decided by an independent body—the central admissibility team.

Major General Griffiths: If it is criminal, it will obviously be investigated by the RMP. If it is administrative, it is investigated separately.

Q53 **Robert Courts:** My question is about the determination of whether the offence is of a sexual nature, and therefore whether it goes outside of the chain of command or not.

Major General Griffiths: An individual can submit a service complaint that is centrally admissible outside the chain of command.

Q54 **Robert Courts:** For an offence of a sexual nature? So they can submit one if they feel that it is one, and it stays outside the chain of command?

Major General Griffiths: Yes, it is 100% centrally admissible from June.



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Q55 **Robert Courts:** What if the chain of command disagrees that that is a complaint of a sexual nature?

Major General Griffiths: They do not have a choice, because it has been centrally “admitted”. Somebody else determines whether there is a case to be answered to.

Q56 **Robert Courts:** So it is a subjective test? If the servicewoman in question thinks that that is a complaint of a sexual nature and it is submitted, it remains outside the chain of command even if the chain of command thinks, “Actually, this isn’t one”?

Major General Griffiths: It is nothing to do with the chain of command.

Q57 **Robert Courts:** What about the policy perspective? How is this tracked? We will hear from the services in due course, but I am interested in understanding how the Department tracks what the services are doing..

Baroness Goldie: That is an important question, which gets to the heart of the change that we are trying to deliver in the MoD. All of this is worthy and necessary, but it has got to deliver. We have a variety of ways of checking. Sam des Forges has set up monitoring processes in her unit; I am sure she can give more detail on them, and on how they liaise with the three single services. At the end of the day, because of improved data retention, now if a complaint is made we will know where it started and where it has gone. As Major General Griffiths said, the complainant can feel free to decide to say, whatever the nature of the complaint—it does not need to be of a sexual nature—that, “This is going to go independently through the central admissibility team.”

Samantha des Forges: It is absolutely right that we work closely with our single service colleagues. We also manage the outsourced investigations service, which is the external company that we refer those cases to. We have information on and feedback through that. One of the things that we are in the process of introducing, again working closely with single service colleagues, is a new IT system. The RAF led the way in developing a new IT system, which will be a single IT system. In developing it, what we want to do is ensure that it takes our management information up another notch so that we have real clarity and are better at capturing, for example, the protected characteristics of those folks, so that we can better monitor, understand and analyse those sorts of impacts. It is using a single system.

We are also really conscious of not just the management information that we want to draw from it, but the front-end user experience, and making that as clear, straightforward and articulated as we can. We have information that we are monitoring and feeding into our various risk and performance appraisals, but we want to get better at it. That goes back to the whole point of continuous improvement. With all due respect, we do not want to have another inquiry because we want to make sure that we are improving and continuing. That IT system, which we will be talking about in a meeting with colleagues next week, will help unlock another layer of accountability and analysis.



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- Q58 **Robert Courts:** That is very helpful, thank you. Can you help me a bit further in exactly what this IT system is going to track? If you were back in front of us in a year's time, would you be able to show me a list of complaints, what they were and where they were dealt with? That is what I am particularly interested in.

Samantha des Forges: Absolutely, and the other thing we want to do is to enable people to manage the cases—the case handlers and the central admissibility teams managing them. It will enable the input of evidence—

- Q59 **Robert Courts:** The team and not the complainers. Do you mean the team who administer that?

Samantha des Forges: Yes, absolutely—the central admissibility teams, the outsourced investigation service etc. Equally, the user will have that access.

One of the other areas where this will play an important role is in reference to some of the work we have been doing with the Service Complaints Ombudsman about the KPIs in the service complaints space and making them smarter. There are certain complaints that we should be handling within a matter of weeks and certain complaints that, by their very nature, will take some time longer. We are taking advice from our Service Complaints Ombudsman about what other ombuds-organisations do and how we can recognise the different nature of different types of complaints, in order to have more effective management of the KPIs and better understand that, "Okay, this is the bit where we are having blockages. Do we put more resource there? Is there is a policy piece that we need to underpin that?" So we also feed into that work as well.

- Q60 **Robert Courts:** I can see that the best of intentions are there, but once this system starts to be deployed, I am conscious that it will start to be operated in three different ways by three different services. It is that check that I want to press you on. How will you ensure that the chain of command does not become involved, even tangentially, in any offences of this nature?

Samantha des Forges: Part of this is pulling together and moving away from having three different processes. It is about cohering those processes and being really clear. There is an interesting piece here in that we have some commanding officers who are absolutely wanting to do the right thing here, who get the need for this cultural evolution and want to be able to make a positive difference, but we have had a very clear message—the Secretary of State and Ministers have been really clear—that for us to build that trust and competence in the system, we need to take them out. That evidence will allow us to more robustly audit, assess and challenge, and build the assurance into the system, as you describe.

- Q61 **Robert Courts:** So there is much relying on the fact that people want to do the right thing within the services. Is it as much an education and good intentions piece as anything?

Samantha des Forges: Education is absolutely key, but it is not a case of relying on writing the policy and hoping. It is about how we audit and



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check that, and how we are really clear. It is also the carrot and the stick, so how we recognise the folk who are doing the right thing and delivering positive change, but also, as mentioned, if there are folk who are causing challenges in some way around that delivery, that that is recorded on their records and we take action. Again, it goes back to that wider suite of information and data, so if we are getting assessments that are telling us that there are a whole bunch of issues in this area, but actually you have got not service complaints coming through, our analysis tells us that there is something that we need to focus on.

- Q62 Robert Courts:** You are going to have data that you have not had before, which is the raw source material that you can then operate from. You have mentioned an audit process, which is key. What will that look like? Are you going to be having regular quarterly meetings at ministerial level or what?

Samantha des Forges: We have very regular meetings at ministerial level. We also have the holding to account process. We are still developing some of this because we need to get the systems set in place. I am conscious that we not only have your recommendations that we are working on—I am sure we will come to the Service Justice System and the 220-plus recommendations that we are working through. Risk and assurance is a thread throughout that, which we are evolving.

- Q63 Robert Courts:** That is very helpful. I would like to come back to that in due course, Chair, as to what is the system and protocol for the data and audit trail. If you just have a mass of data and no ability to interrogate it, that does not help anybody.

Samantha des Forges: Absolutely. Throughout this, holding to account is key, and it will be facilitated by having more data that has not been as readily accessible as it could have been.

- Q64 Robert Courts:** But the systems for auditing, holding to account and ensuring the chain of command is removed are still a work in progress?

Samantha des Forges: Yes.

- Q65 Robert Courts:** Okay, thanks. Can you talk me through what the process will be in future? If somebody wished to make a complaint of unacceptable sexual behaviour, what do they do from now?

Samantha des Forges: My colleague, Air Marshal Knighton, might want to talk through that from the RAF perspective.

Robert Courts: Well, perhaps we should hear from everyone, but let us start with you, Air Marshal Knighton.

Air Marshal Knighton: The system is as Sam has described. An individual who wants to make a complaint can do so independently of the chain of command if they so wish. They can also report it to the chain of command, which can then treat it as a complaint of a sexual nature and ensure that it is managed in an appropriate way.



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To build on what Sam told you about assurance of the process, the case-management system that she described is being developed in the Air Force and will be rolled out across defence; it will give us access to the granular detail that you describe. Currently in the Air Force, we publish the results of the service complaints situation quarterly for the chain of command, and where it appears that a commander is falling short of expectations in managing their people or that there are particular hotspots, that will be investigated and, if necessary, people will be adversely reported on.

Q66 Robert Courts: At what level is that?

Air Marshal Knighton: That goes right the way up to air officer commanding.

Q67 Robert Courts: So for those who manage people, it could be at any level from senior to junior.

Air Marshal Knighton: Yes, the most senior people get to see that data. For a station commander or a squadron commander, the data enables them to understand a bit more about what is going on. Then, as Sam said, there are climate assessments for which we are conducting a two-year rolling programme across the Air Force.

Q68 Robert Courts: Thank you. Let us hear from the Navy as well.

Rear Admiral Terry: It is very similar for us. We report quarterly up into the head office and are held to account for how that is worked. The case-management system will allow us to have much more ready access to that information; at the moment, it is a typed-in process based on numbers within the system, so it is not automated, and you cannot get down into a really good level. It involves the PACCCs, which is great, and that is how we do it, but this will make it much simpler.

We used to publicise those figures but stopped a while ago as we tried to work out GDPR. We are now back up and looking at how we manage them. That is command from every level—from lieutenant all the way up, we go back and have a look—and the First Sea Lord, Second Sea Lord and Fleet Commander hold to account their individual people who work to them for that activity.

The process is the same. You have always been able to raise a complaint independently and send it straight to the ombudsman. The difference now is that sexual harassment will go separately from your chain of command as a matter of course, whereas before, you could put it in either system. The process is now much clearer that you can choose to do that, but you have always been able to.

Q69 Robert Courts: What about from a comms and assurance perspective? I am conscious that there is an element of isolation for all your personnel, but particularly for parts of the Navy. So how do you make sure that they are aware of it and give them the assurance that it will be treated as such?



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Rear Admiral Terry: One thing that we have been working on quite a lot in the last 18 months is our comms plan. We have an 18-month plan, which was approved at the beginning of October, to look at what we mean by “modern Navy”, including the culture, the ethos and the values. All that is routinely done via a set of divisional briefing notes that I send out, saying, “These are the things you need to be doing.” We actively go around and talk to people. We have a people liaison team who go around, and the climate survey, as we have just discussed. It is an active process rather than, “I’ve issued a note and I assume everybody has read it and understood what it means.” I have been on trips to Culdrose and Abbey Wood in the last week to really check that that is what is happening.

Major General Griffiths: I do not have much more to add, to be honest. The only thing I would point out is that the deciding bodies and the appeal bodies are independent of the chain of command—that is really important, too. Not only can you submit your claim through the central admissibility team, but it is then decided by somebody outside the chain of command. If you do not agree with the outcome, it goes to an appeal body, which is also outside the direct chain of command. That is just a little more detail.

- Q70 **Robert Courts:** We have talked about complaints of a sexual nature. May I spend a few moments talking about complaints of a non-sexual nature, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination? The Ministry has said that the chain of command will still handle a small number of those complaints, “where appropriate”. That is one of the points, Minister, that I would like to pick up: what is appropriate?

Baroness Goldie: I think that the starting point is probably the wish of the complainer, but, again, I will defer to my service colleagues who are actually delivering these policies within their single services. However, due regard will be had for the complainer’s wishes.

It may very well be, and we sometimes find, that complainers are content to deal with the chain of command and to say, “This happened and I am letting you know.” I think I am correct in saying that sometimes the complainer will want to make the chain of command aware but not take it to a formal complaint. That is quite an important area to remember.

- Q71 **Robert Courts:** Before we move on, may I explore that a little more? What the Ministry has said is that the “Chain of Command will only be decision makers on complaints in a small number of cases, where appropriate”. If I have understood you correctly—put me right if I have not—“where appropriate” is where the complainant is happy for that to be the case. Have I understood that correctly?

Baroness Goldie: That is my understanding, but I defer to my colleagues.

- Q72 **Robert Courts:** In that case, you do not know whether it is a small or large number, do you? It is just those cases where the complainant is happy with that. Could you just answer that question first, before I ask Sam?

Samantha des Forges: Can I—

Robert Courts: I wanted the Minister to just clarify that point before I come to you—small or large number?

Baroness Goldie: I am speaking from a limited area of knowledge, because I am not actually on the ground delivering that policy.

Samantha des Forges: There is a whole range of types of complaints; it is not just bullying and harassment. For example, there are complaints about pensions. What we recognise is that, for a commanding officer to become an expert in pensions, for example, is not always the best use of time. A lot of those sorts of matters, which might historically have gone to the commanding officer, are now more likely to go to subject matter specialists. Hence there is a big chunk of service complaints that are going to specialist folk, as opposed to the chain of command.

Equally, if the commanding officer is implicated, they are obviously not involved in the matter. I think that, when we are talking about a small number, we are talking about it in the round, not just on bullying and harassment or sexual matters. Those sorts of specific, specialised cases are not necessarily being dealt with by commanding officers as well.

Q73 **Robert Courts:** Okay, so we have different categories then, haven't we?

Samantha des Forges: Yes.

Q74 **Robert Courts:** We have the sexual nature offences, which are dealt with outside the chain of command, then bullying, harassment and discrimination cases, which might be, in some cases, but that depends on the views of the complainant.

Samantha des Forges: We are really conscious—again, there is a bit of a differential here between matters of a sexual nature and bullying and harassment—of the importance of seeking to resolve matters at the earliest possible stage. For example, opportunities such as mediation could make a really positive impact. I know that some of my service colleagues who have been using mediation recently have had some really positive feedback on actually being able to resolve those matters at an early stage.

For the non-sexual bullying and harassment cases, we have brought in mediators who have really helped us in that space. Of course, for certain cases—I suspect colleagues may touch on this—we still have access to things such as the outsourced investigation service and other opportunities. But yes, we are talking about a really broad range of service complaints, so there will only be relatively few that might be dealt with by commanding officers.

Q75 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** On the back of my colleague's question, would it be possible for you to send the Committee a copy of the flowchart that you use for complaints?

Robert Courts: It is the matrix on which these decisions are made that I am interested in, if we could follow that up.



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Samantha des Forges indicated assent.

- Q76 **Chair:** Minister, I think you may have touched on this, but may I confirm for the record that the essential administration teams in each of the three services that you, having read our report, have committed to establish are now up and running? Is that correct in all three services?

Air Marshal Knighton: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. Okay, let's move on. Kevan, over to you.

- Q77 **Mr Jones:** Going back to when the Committee did its inquiry into Deepcut, I have been on every single Armed Forces Bill Committee over the past 20 years in this place, and the argument is always that the chain of command is sacrosanct. That has been overcome now, because you have taken it out of the chain of command.

Would it not be simpler to just hand complaints over to the Armed Forces ombudsman? What confidence can people have that this is definitely out of the chain of command? That is the test for me. When we had the Service Complaints Commission, for example, which this Committee recommended be implemented in the early 2000s, I could not understand why—apart from the idea that the chain of command is sacrosanct—that could not be done. How much confidence can people have that the complaints system is independent from various services?

Samantha des Forges: It is important that we have that feedback loop. I acknowledge that you have had various external pieces of evidence, but when I talk to our folk, they tell me that they are feeling more confident to bring things forward. The new service complaints process came in in June, so it is new. We have to make sure we are looking at it and learning the lessons, but we are also seeing an increase in people coming forward, which is indicative of that confidence.

- Q78 **Mr Jones:** I accept that, but it is still in the MoD. It is not independent from the Ministry of Defence, is it?

Samantha des Forges: The feedback we were getting was that concerns were about the direct chain of command, and we therefore made those changes to remove that. There are types of complaint that are appropriate for the commanding officer—they might be the best person to resolve those.

- Q79 **Mr Jones:** I accept that in some straightforward cases. I will tell you where we will get to eventually: a completely independent process. It might take 20 years to get there, but I think that is where we will get to.

Rear Admiral Terry: Because of the vulnerability that people feel in raising cases of a sexual nature, it was very clear that it needed to be removed. As a serviceperson, there are lots of times when I want the chain of command to know what my complaint is, in order to have an effect in a swifter manner than if I put it in front of an ombudsman and it is seen by people in the ombudsman who perhaps do not understand where I am.



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We have been told by our serving people that it is the vulnerability particularly associated with sexual harassment complaints that makes them feel that independence of the chain of command is really useful. Some people would not necessarily choose that, but they absolutely understand why we have made that a policy. A number of other people want their complaints to be dealt with in an organisation that understands it, because they still have the opportunity to send it to an independent body.

- Q80 Mr Jones:** I am one of the few people who supports the Service Justice System and the reasons for it, and I understand why certain complaints are best dealt with in the three services, because of the contextualisation of what goes on. But we have had complaints, for example, that people who gave evidence to our inquiry have been victimised for giving evidence. There is also evidence that people have been asked or coerced not to put complaints in. We then add to that the length of time it takes to deal with some of these complaints—I think the average is 53 weeks—which you raised earlier, Admiral. I have dealt with this in private industry, and if you had that type of process, you would have sacked your human resources department years ago. That adds to the problem. Why is it taking so long to deal with these problems? Industry does not do it that way, or it certainly did not when I used to deal with it.

Baroness Goldie: You make very valid observations, but they encompass an environment before the changes were introduced. You are quite right: there were unacceptable delays that absolutely would not have been tolerated outside of MoD. Sam made the important point that, in terms of monitoring and measuring, we are in fairly early days. The system has not been up and running for more than three or four months, but we will be looking at that vigilantly to try to understand if the improvements are being delivered. The Service Complaints Ombudswoman has a vital role to play in holding our feet to the fire. I was interested to read the evidence she submitted and I thought it was fair and objective. She has an important role to play to haul us up if she thinks we are falling short of what we are trying to deliver.

- Q81 Mr Jones:** We have had complaints in the last month that if people give evidence to this Committee they will be victimised. We have also had women complaining that they are being encouraged not to complain. Does that not worry you?

Baroness Goldie: Was that in the body of evidence produced to the Committee in your call for further evidence? I read through it, Mr Jones, and it is interesting. I am not in any way diminishing the appalling experiences that many of these women suffered, and I pay tribute to the charities that came forward with the evidence because they have provided vital support. Some of it does predate the changes we have made—

- Q82 Mr Jones:** No—I am sorry, but it does not. We have had one particular complaint about victimisation of an individual reported to this Committee. I know that the individual service heads did not want to co-operate with our inquiry, but that concerns me. You can set up the best complaints



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system in the world, but if people are encouraged to bypass it and not put complaints forward, that is quite worrying, is it not?

Baroness Goldie: It would worry you justly and I would take that very seriously. If there is any recent evidence of someone being prejudiced or discriminated against either because they gave evidence to this Committee or because they have made a complaint and pressure has been put on them to withdraw it, I regard that as completely unprofessional. We would want to know about that. Action would be taken under the policies that are there.

Samantha des Forges: Things like the central admissibility team allow you to go direct to those folk. We recognise that there is a risk, and any risk of any sort of retaliation is taken hugely seriously. I would encourage those folk to reach out directly to the central admissibility teams with those complaints to enable us to get after them—

Q83 **Mr Jones:** I accept that but, look, you are dealing with a situation where there is a power relationship—a very strong one, perhaps stronger than that in most workplaces—aren't you? Your commanding officer and people further up the chain dictate what your career will be, more so than in some other organisations. Time will tell about the number of complaints raised, but can I come back to that point about time? It is unacceptable how long it is taking to deal with these complaints, isn't it?

Samantha des Forges: Again, I will say that we are in the early stages of this, but the central admissibility teams have a tri-service median rough figure. I acknowledge that these are not official stats, but our internal monitoring is showing that we are reducing that admissibility decision from five weeks to three weeks. We want to improve that. We are already seeing immediate effects on timeliness. The IT system will help unlock some of those issues and identify where there are other issues. We are seeing things start to improve, but we need to work through those cases.

Q84 **Mr Jones:** Do you have a target to meet?

Samantha des Forges: We are working closely with the Service Complaints Ombudsman to develop new KPIs and we hope to have those up and running if not before the new year then early next year. I would not want to speak for the ombudsman, but the insight she has provided has made sure that those KPIs are smart and specific, recognising, as we said earlier, the difference between certain sorts of cases we should be able to work through and certain cases where there are some complexities and where we need to make sure that we have additional support for folk. We want to make sure that we bring those into place. Colleagues have just reminded me that we have a two-week target for that central admissibility team decision. We have gone from five to three and we are still working on it, but it is new and there will be bugs in the system.

Baroness Goldie: Once we have agreed the KPIs, there is no reason why we cannot write to the Committee, Mr Chairman, with that information.

Q85 **Mr Jones:** There are outliers, and I accept there will be outliers, because



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some cases are more complex than others and will need more time. The important thing there is that the person who is complaining is kept informed about what is happening, because that has been a criticism in the past. People have just been left while the system goes on.

Samantha des Forges: I think you are quite right. Going back to the IT system, we really have a view towards what the front-end user experience is in that and what they can see in terms of progress. That will help us to unlock it and this is the challenge we face: we are making a huge amount of changes and you will see from annex B the huge amount of work that is going on across defence. Some of these things will come online a little further down the line.

Air Marshal Knighton: Might I add a little colour to the situation and some of the things we are doing to try to get after two things that were not good enough? One is the time, as you described, and the second is making sure the process is victim-centric. Even using the terminology “victim-centric” is helping us. We have seen quite a considerable reduction in the time taken to close service complaints. On the number of service complaints that are closed, maybe it is simply about applying more resource so we have more people doing it.

One of the innovations we have put in place is single-day oral hearings, which allow the case to be heard in front of the decision-making body, which is independent of the chain of command. With that, we have seen much more rapid decisions, but also a much greater reduction in the level of appeals, because people recognise that they have been heard and that they have had an opportunity to put their case. They can see that the system has worked systematically and formally. There are a number of things that all three services are doing to try to get after that, but we are not complacent at all. We need to keep it victim-centric, and we need to keep going after the time it takes.

Q86 **Mr Jones:** As a commanding officer who is working on policy, where are you at with looking at where commanding officers get decisions wrong and holding them to account?

Samantha des Forges: We expect that note to be available hopefully before the end of the year. This is noting where the Service Complaints Ombudsman has made a finding against a particular commanding officer, but we have made really clear— The Secretary of State and Ministers were clear in their intent. We have highlighted that intent already to the services, and I know they have taken that forward. We are just formalising it in a particular note.

Q87 **Mr Jones:** Is that across the three services?

Samantha des Forges: Yes.

Q88 **Mr Jones:** Could you keep us informed of that development, please?

Samantha des Forges: Yes.

Q89 **Richard Drax:** Bearing in mind that someone is innocent until proven



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guilty, and bearing in mind that for a senior officer of any rank this could be a career-damaging allegation against them, which might be malicious, potentially, what, practically, do you do when, for example, a commanding officer of a battalion is accused by a junior rank of sexual misconduct? What actually happens to the commanding officer or the squadron commander or anybody else instantly? Do you just say, "Right, go home," or what happens and how is it managed?

Major General Griffiths: It does depend on the circumstances, but suspension in post is the most likely option if it is a senior officer in command of a unit—

Q90 **Richard Drax:** Automatically they are suspended?

Major General Griffiths: Obviously, looking at the evidence that is initially presented, but yes. That would be the way that—

Q91 **Richard Drax:** While the investigation is carried out?

Major General Griffiths: While the investigation is carried out, yes. It depends on the seriousness of the allegations. For some allegations, this might not be appropriate. For others, the immediate reaction of the chain of command might be to remove the individual from command to reset the climate and put somebody else in play. Then the investigation would continue. Obviously, if guilty, we move on to presumption of termination.

Q92 **Derek Twigg:** I will be very quick, and perhaps we could have quick answers given that time is moving on.

Against the Committee's recommendation, you shortened the time limit for the complaints appeal from six weeks to two weeks. So, two questions, and hopefully short answers. Can you confirm that extensions can still be granted to meet individual circumstances?

Samantha des Forges: Absolutely.

Q93 **Derek Twigg:** How common is that in practice and how many have been extended?

Samantha des Forges: I would probably have to come back to you with a number on that, because, again, this is all quite new.

Q94 **Derek Twigg:** You will write to us?

Samantha des Forges: Yes, absolutely. What we changed was a minimum, which is different. It is also about highlighting; it is not necessarily about writing the entire appeal.

Q95 **Derek Twigg:** You will give us a note?

Samantha des Forges: Yes, we can give you further info on that.

Q96 **Derek Twigg:** Quickly, how do people know how to apply for an extension?

Samantha des Forges: We have provided a range of more detailed information—a sort of simple guide to the systems. Some of the services,



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as well, have redeveloped comms around a simple guide to the system. One of the things we are doing, which is not quite ready for launch yet but hopefully will be soon, is a portal. If something happens that is unacceptable, you will be able to access that and work out the best ways to deal with things. Once we get the wider IT system up and running, that clarity of process will also work through for the front-end user.

- Q97 **Derek Twigg:** So if someone makes a complaint, who tells them they can ask for an extension? What actually happens?

Samantha des Forges: It is clear throughout the process, and it is clear throughout the easy-read guide. They also have access to—my mind has gone blank about the name of the supporting person they have with them.

Rear Admiral Terry: It is written in a letter. When they get the decision, it says at the bottom of the letter, "You have this amount of time to appeal. Please let us know if you can't do it in that time."

- Q98 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I will direct my question to Baroness Goldie first, if that is okay. As you know, there remains deep disappointment that our recommendation regarding removing sexual offences from the Service Justice System was rejected. You will also know, as we do, that convictions for sexual offences in the Service Justice System remain low, especially convictions for rape. Can you explain why that is?

Baroness Goldie: There is some interesting background to this. It is quite technical, but I hope the Committee will bear with me. I am going to give some examples of percentages in the civilian system, as opposed to the Service Justice System.

In 2021, Home Office police forces referrals were 5.6% of all adult rape reports to the Crown Prosecution Service. In the year 2021, service police referred 49% of rape referrals to the service police authorities. In the civilian criminal justice system—again, in the year 2021—4.7% of reported rapes resulted in a charge or summons for rape. In the same year, in the Service Justice System, 46% of referrals for rapes resulted in a direction for charge for rape. All I am pointing out to the Committee is that a significantly higher number of cases are referred to the service police and referred by the service police to the Service Prosecuting Authority. The significance of that is that the Committee can be reassured that these are being investigated.

What may be the case is that if the referrals going forward for prosecution in the Service Justice System have less evidence or weaker evidence available to them, it is predictable that convictions will not follow. But it is very important to point out to the Committee the high percentage of referrals that go to the Service Prosecuting Authority, and the high number that then result in a direction for charge. That is a helpful background. As to whether or not a civilian criminal court or a court martial in the Service Justice System reaches a conviction, that is for them to decide on the basis of the evidence presented to them.

- Q99 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Thanks for that, but the figures that we have here are



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24% for court martial convictions and 60% for Crown court convictions. That is quite a large difference. Does that not indicate that there is something different about how this is approached by the service courts and the civilian courts?

Baroness Goldie: I gave that background information to explain that anyone assessing a case going before a court—whether it is a civilian civil case or a civilian prosecution case—will make a judgment about the likelihood of success, and it may very well be that the Crown Prosecution Service has criteria that it applies. It may very well be that it dismisses certain cases because it does not think they will proceed to a certain conviction. What we are pointing out is that, in the Service Justice System, a high number of cases are being referred. That means that the police and the service prosecutor are not making a judgment on the likelihood of conviction; they are just trying to make sure that these cases go before a court martial. Evidence is examined and, at the end of the day, the court martial will have to come to its decision.

Q100 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Just to unpick that a little, you mentioned the criteria applied. Is there a difference in the criteria applied?

Baroness Goldie: I do not know what criteria the Home Office police forces apply, but I thought it quite interesting that they refer 5.6% of all adult rape reports to the Crown Prosecution Service. Why they do that, I don't know. All I am pointing out is that, in the Service Justice System, we refer 49% of rape referrals to the Service Prosecuting Authority.

Q101 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** How confident are you that, since our inquiry, at least one woman has been on every court martial dealing with sexual offences?

Baroness Goldie: I am pleased to confirm to the Committee that on the back of what the inquiry report recommended, recently we put through subordinate legislation to make sure that there is one woman on every court martial board. We have taken it further: the Committee suggested that that only happen with charges of a sexual nature; we have said that there should be one woman on every court martial—

Q102 **Chair:** And that was not the case before.

Baroness Goldie: It was not the case before.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: It is happening now, as a result of the inquiry—

Baroness Goldie: That statutory instrument has gone through—or certainly it has gone through the Lords; I do not know whether it has gone through the Commons yet.

Samantha des Forges: I believe it has.

Baroness Goldie: So it will be law.

Samantha des Forges: To add to that, part of the process is also lowering the rank at which folk sit on a court martial, so that we have a greater pool of people. That brings more diversity to the folk that sit on



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the courts martial. That was something that the Secretary of State and Ministers were laser-focused on.

Q103 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I will move on quickly, because of time. As far back as about 2020, I think, the MoD promised that it would develop a new protocol between the Director of Service Prosecutions and the Director of Public Prosecutions to improve the handling of sexual offences where there is concurrent jurisdiction. The consultation has not begun on that yet. Does the draft even exist? What stage are we at?

Baroness Goldie: Yes, the discussions have taken place. My understanding is that we hope to produce something in January of next year. Sam, you might have more up-to-date information.

Samantha des Forges: Those draft protocols are nearing finalisation. We are hopeful of a joint launch of the consultation, recognising the devolved nations and so on, in January '23.

Q104 **Chair:** May I ask about the Victim and Witness Care Unit? Will you update us on when that is to be established?

Samantha des Forges: The Defence Serious Crime Command Unit will be launched in December. Victim and witness care support is already provided. However, we are working with internal and external colleagues to stand the victim care unit up. We are looking at, I suspect, the spring or summer time. We have the crime unit up and running using the existing protocols and access, so that will come.

Q105 **Gavin Robinson:** Baroness Goldie, you were sharing with my colleague Emma Lewell-Buck the distinct differences between the civilian investigating authorities passing information to prosecutors and their equivalent in the military sphere. There is obviously a step missing before getting to the prosecutorial outcome, because a decision will be made as to whether to prosecute. In the civilian sector, the 5.6% referred to prosecutors is not a decision to prosecute; prosecutors will then make the decision whether the evidence before them is sufficient for a prosecution. Do you have that figure in the military sphere? Of the 46% or 49% of cases that you say are referred to the prosecuting authorities, how many do they then proceed with to prosecution?

Baroness Goldie: The figure I gave for the Service Justice System is that 46% of referrals resulted in direction for charge for rape—so, they would be prosecuted.

Q106 **Gavin Robinson:** How many allegations come to them? I thought that was the figure you were giving—that 46% of the allegations made go to prosecuting authorities for consideration.

Baroness Goldie: The information I have is that in 2021 service police referred 49% of rape referrals to the Service Prosecuting Authority—

Q107 **Gavin Robinson:** Of which 46%—

Baroness Goldie: Yes, resulted in a direction for charge.



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Samantha des Forges: If it helps, to give other information, the Service Justice System has already finished its covid backlog—there is not a covid backlog anymore—so our victims of rape, sexual serious crime and sexual offending do not have to wait years; often, the cases might be within six months or less, so my Service Prosecuting Authority colleagues tell me.

Q108 **Robert Courts:** I just want to ask about female veterans' support services. In some evidence we have had, more than half of those responding to a survey by us have said that their needs were not met by current veterans services. I think we can probably all accept that there are very few specialised support services for female veterans in the UK. First, how confident are you that those needs are being met? Does that vary across the UK? The second question is about census data and whether you are going to be using that to improve the care that is available.

Baroness Goldie: Again, I read the evidence. I was concerned. I pay tribute to the charities who have been playing such a supportive role. As the Committee will be aware, we now have an Office for Veterans' Affairs and a Minister for Veterans, in Mr Johnny Mercer, who also has a seat at Cabinet. A lot of what is happening on the veterans front is now within the Cabinet Office; indeed, the Committee might want to call Mr Mercer before them to get further information.

I can say that, within MoD, we take a keen interest. We have transition arrangements, as you are probably aware, so when someone indicates that they want to leave the services, we put in a system of support. It doesn't just fall off a cliff when a person leaves; there is continuing support.

The Committee will be aware that, in the Armed Forces Act, we gave statutory import to the Armed Forces Covenant in relation to the delivery of health services, housing provision and education services right across the UK. There is now a legal duty of due regard. We consulted with the veterans charities, and we were told that these were the three areas that most frequently presented a problem, so the Armed Forces Act introduced this new duty.

Again, it is very early days, but that does mean that providers across the UK—whether they are the UK Government, quangos on behalf of the UK Government, local authorities, devolved Governments, health boards or whoever—now have to look at this. If someone presents with veteran status, they are entitled to expect a fair and proper service and recognition of the particular circumstances that surround the veteran, which is very important.

Q109 **Robert Courts:** I don't think we got an answer on census data.

Samantha des Forges: This is one of the points that came up in our discussions with the Five Eyes. We are learning some lessons from Five Eyes colleagues about the value of those questions. I am conscious that, although the census was a little while ago, the analysis is still ongoing, but we are very alive to that opportunity and how we can look at both our



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internal data and that census data. That is something that we have taken away and are working on with our research and analysis colleagues.

Q110 **Chair:** I have a few short questions to summarise where we are. On the recommendations, three were rejected and a number were partially accepted. Were there any recommendations that the Committee made where Ministers chose to override or reject the recommendation to go one way or another? Or did you accept everything that the civil service slid across the table to you?

Baroness Goldie: What the Committee will realise is that the main point of divergence was on the issue of the Service Justice System, and whether to place murder, rape and manslaughter outwith the Service Justice System and into the civilian prosecution service. That surrounded the main area where we diverged—

Q111 **Chair:** Sorry, Minister, that wasn't my question. My question was whether you overrode any of the recommendations that were made to you in the response, confidentially, before you formally responded to our report.

Baroness Goldie: I can't remember personally overriding anything. I looked at the report with advice from officials. The data is there as to how much of the report we agree with and what we have accepted, so I don't quite understand the question.

Q112 **Chair:** There are a number of ex-Ministers here. You get slid across the table advice to take, and you can either take that advice or you can choose to do something else. There were 36 recommendations made to you, and you accepted 29 of them and took different positions on others. I am simply asking whether or not, using ministerial capability, you chose to override, agree or disagree, push back or reconsider.

Baroness Goldie: I am not aware—I mean, I can't remember in detail; I'm not being evasive. I was very positive about the report, and my wish was to see how much of this we could implement. As I say, the fundamental area of difference between the Committee and the Department was on the Service Justice System.

Q113 **Chair:** Okay; we have gone through that. On the Defence holistic transition policy, do you plan to update that and provide more support to female veterans?

Samantha des Forges: We may write to you separately because some other colleagues will be able to give you more of an update on that.

Q114 **Chair:** Okay. The Armed Forces Covenant annual report is due out at the end of this year. Is that correct?

Baroness Goldie: It is an annual report. It has to be laid before Parliament.

Q115 **Chair:** That does not mean to say that it will be. Will it be laid before Parliament by the end of this year?

Samantha des Forges: We will confirm that and come back to you.

Q116 **Chair:** Okay, thank you. Is wraparound childcare now available for young children of service personnel in all UK bases?

Samantha des Forges: I believe it is now being rolled out across the board.

Air Marshal Knighton: It is available, in that anybody can apply for it.

Q117 **Chair:** Are you committed to maintaining annual sexual harassment surveys after 2023?

Samantha des Forges: Absolutely. We are working with academics to see how we can improve that—again, continuous improvement.

Q118 **Chair:** We touched on this before, but just to confirm, on the equipment and so forth, and the support for females, which came up again and again in the survey, will you complete the full roll-out of female-appropriate kit and equipment in 2023?

Baroness Goldie: The response to the Committee details what we have done, and we have done it. We will continue to review with the servicewomen's network if there is more that can be done, but there is a—

Q119 **Chair:** I am sorry, but not all females in the Armed Forces have the necessary female-appropriate equipment to date, so I am asking you whether that roll-out will be complete.

Baroness Goldie: We have rolled out what we said we would roll out, and there is an ongoing review to see whether there is more that we can do. Within the single services, we have women's teams that now regularly report to us on whether there is more that we can do with equipment. I do not know whether my colleagues want to add more to that.

Major General Griffiths: It is on contract, with Leidos to deliver. The only area of—

Q120 **Chair:** So it is a process. We are not there yet. Sorry to push back on you, Minister, but you are making it sound like everybody has all the kit that they need. They haven't. I think you still have to order the stuff and get it to the frontline.

Major General Griffiths: By the middle of 2023. We have gone beyond the recommendations of the report, which include other pieces of equipment that are female-appropriate.

Q121 **Chair:** Fine. Likewise, will the contracts on sanitary and hygiene supplies reach all female service personnel—not just here in the UK but when they are in other environments, operations, exercises and training establishments?

Samantha des Forges: *indicated assent.*

Baroness Goldie: *indicated assent.*

Q122 **Mr Francois:** Apologies for having arrived so late; I have been at a remembrance service elsewhere—no disrespect was intended. Air Marshal



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Knighton, to come back to your earlier point about wraparound childcare, this is something that I have done a report on in the past, as you know. You said that all personnel could apply for it. That does not necessarily mean that it is available, as 10 people could apply for only one space, in simple terms. What actually is the status? Is wraparound childcare available in sufficient quantity at every MoD facility?

Air Marshal Knighton: I can only speak for the Royal Air Force now, given my new role. The short answer is yes, but it is a dynamic situation because the number of children and the number of places changes on a regular basis. To give it some colour, I was at RAF Cranwell a couple of weeks ago. A young air specialist 1 was telling me how effective that wraparound childcare had been for him and his wife in enabling them both to work, and his wife to return to work, so it is making a real difference. Where there are challenges around availability of nursery care, we are seeing charities like the Royal Air Forces Association stepping in and helping us, so it is a really very positive initiative that is making a real difference to the lives of our servicemen and women.

Q123 **Chair:** Following on from Mark's question, I have an additional question. Please write to me if you can. One of the most disruptive careers that you can have is a career in the Armed Forces, simply because you move around a lot. Everybody understands that. That is part and parcel of what you join, but it can affect children, and one of the benefits that has been offered to children is that they can be put into boarding schools and have other academic support in that sense. There have been rumours that that may be cut. Can you confirm that that critical support for families will continue?

Air Marshal Knighton: As far as I am aware, there is no plan to cut continuity of education allowance.

Chair: I was trying to remember the formal name for it.

Air Marshal Knighton: There are a set of rules that determine people's admissibility, but there is an absolute recognition that the demands of service life create demands on the children of servicepeople.

Q124 **Chair:** My penultimate question is on paragraph 224 of our report. There was a recommendation to recognise military sexual trauma and to fund greater provision of female-specific specialist support services. You partially accepted that. Can I ask you to reconsider that?

Samantha des Forges: We absolutely recognise the issue—hence the talk about zero tolerance of unacceptable behaviour. The challenge is that the terms "military sexual assault" and "military sexual trauma" are not recognised legal concepts. They are not a medical condition or a clinical diagnosis. They are not used by the national health service or the World Health Organisation's international classification of diseases or related health problems. We are not using the terms, but we absolutely recognise the point behind them—hence you will have heard a huge amount about the support that we are providing in this space.



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Q125 Chair: My final question is pertinent to myself in Bournemouth. The deputy Mayor of Bournemouth is just one of many people who was dishonourably discharged from the Armed Forces, and had his medals removed, because of his sexual orientation. I know that work is being done to look back at those legacy issues. Are you able to quickly update us on where we are with that?

Baroness Goldie: Lord Etherton is carrying out an extensive review that will report back next year. He has a wide-ranging remit, which is quite simply to look at the historic hurt, but there is a provision now afoot to restore medals. People who were dismissed and had their medals forfeited can apply to the Department for restoration. Restoration will be possible in some cases, but not all.

Samantha des Forges: One of my other hats is the LGBT+ champion in Defence. It is worth recognising that, in the summer, in Pride in London, for the first time we invited Fighting With Pride to march with us. The Minister in the Lords was there, and I think Rich was there as well. Being able to complete that family by having our service personnel, our civilians and our LGBT+ veterans marching through the streets of London together was really important.

Q126 Chair: There has been an astonishing change, which is absolutely welcome, but this is still a legacy issue. For some of us, another review is unnecessary to work out what is very straightforward: that the policy was wrong and needs to be rectified. If it takes a year to get there—

Baroness Goldie: The policy was wrong. We have apologised for it, and Lord Etherton has now been commissioned to guide us on where we go.

Samantha des Forges: But we continue to take actions that recognise that they are an important part of our family, of whom we are proud.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. This has been a thorough and very helpful session. As Kevan Jones reminded us in our private session, we want to come back to this. Finally, I pay tribute again to Sarah Atherton, who has done such a fantastic job. She may not be wanted in the MoD, but she is certainly welcome back on our Committee.

I thank Baroness Annabel Goldie, Air Marshal Richard Knighton, Rear Admiral Jude Terry, Major General Paul Griffiths and of course Samantha des Forges. It is really great to see you again. Thank you for your support.