

Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill

Oral evidence: Armed Forces Bill, HC 1281

Thursday 4 March 2021

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: James Sunderland (Chair); Stuart Anderson; Tonia Antoniazzi; Dan Carden; Leo Docherty; Martin Docherty-Hughes; Darren Henry; Mrs Sharon Hodgson; Mr Richard Holden; Mr Kevan Jones; Jack Lopresti; Johnny Mercer; Carol Monaghan; Stephen Morgan; Miss Sarah Dines; and Mrs Heather Wheeler.

Questions 1 to 51

Witnesses

[I](#): General (Ret'd) Sir John McColl, Chair at the Confederation of Service Charities; Laura Pett, Head of Public Affairs and Campaigns at The Royal British Legion; and Ted Arnold, Senior Public Affairs and Policy Manager at Help for Heroes.

[II](#): Anna Wright, Chief Executive Officer at the Naval Families Federation; Collette Musgrave, Executive Officer at the Army Families Federation; and Maria Lyle, Director at the Royal Air Force Families Federation.

[III](#): Colonel (Ret'd) John Rollins, Chief Executive Officer at the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association for Northern Ireland; and Canon Peter Bruinvels CC, Armed Forces Champion and Civilian-Military Liaison Adviser to both Surrey County Council and Kent County Council

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [AFB0001 - General \(Ret'd\) Sir John McColl \(Cobseo\)](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Maria Lyle, Collette Musgrave and Anna Wright.

Q21 **Chair:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the second witness session for the Armed Forces Bill Select Committee. My name is James Sunderland MP, and I am thrilled to welcome you to this important evidence-gathering session here in Westminster.

I will introduce the three witnesses for this next important session. We have a real purple flavour here—tri-service. Wonderful. First of all, we have Anna Wright, who is the chief executive officer of the Naval Families Federation. Secondly, we've got Collette Musgrave, who is the executive officer of the Army Families Federation. Thirdly, but by no means least, we've got Maria Lyle, who is director of the Royal Air Force Families Federation. I am really glad that that was in order of seniority.

Can I ask each of you in turn to introduce yourselves to the Committee and to say a few words about your background and why you are here today? Please can we start with Anna?

Anna Wright: Thank you very much, and thank you for this opportunity. I am Anna Wright. I have been CEO of the Naval Families Federation for nearly six years. We very much welcome this legislation, and we will probably echo much of what has been said.

Collette Musgrave: Hello. I'm Collette Musgrave. I am chief executive of the Army Families Federation, and I have been in post only for a few months. I have worked for the organisation for several years, and I am very familiar with the Armed Forces Covenant. I echo Anna's comments: of course, we welcome this legislation and the support that it will offer. But, like many of the other witnesses so far, we recognise the challenges in its limited nature.

Maria Lyle: Good afternoon everyone. I am the director of the RAF Families Federation. I have been in post for a couple of years. I am an ex-serving RAF officer, and I am in an RAF family still, as my husband is still serving. I have also worked in leadership positions, both in a central Government Department and in a local authority, so I have a feel for the challenges of putting legislation like this in place, which benefits the end users cohort that we really want to support, rather than creating additional bureaucracy without benefitting the people it was intended for.

Chair: Thank you very much, Maria. This session is due to last until about 4 o'clock, so I urge Members to rack their brains for some pertinent questions. We have two pre-submitted questions from Stuart Anderson and Martin Docherty-Hughes, but please put your hands up if you have a question.

Bearing in mind the nature of who we have with us for this session, I would hazard a guess that the relationship between the Covenant,



community and family is really important. Please do not feel restricted to ask only about clause 8. I am sure that there are aspects of the Bill in the round that may be of interest to you and our witnesses.

Q22 Stuart Anderson: I must say, it is a pleasure to speak to all three of you, but I also spoke with Anna and Maria on the Defence Sub-Committee this morning, and it was a fascinating session. Most people on here will not have heard what we spoke about, and there is a key topic that I would like to bring up around the Covenant, because I think it is very relevant.

I was born into a forces family, and I have raised children as a serviceman. Bringing up children in that environment is very hard. More often than not, we focus on the service personnel and miss some of the impact on families. Can you say what this Covenant is going to do for children within forces families?

Anna Wright: As it stands, it is very limited, and we would echo what was said in the first session: we would really like it to be the full scope of the Covenant, particularly employment and immigration. As it stands, it will impact children in terms of access to school places and access to SEND support, and it will support carers.

Obviously, on the health side, if families are moving with complex health issues, there will be assistance to keep places on waiting lists and that sort of thing. I do not want to steal everybody's sandwiches, but it is only those three elements that are in scope.

Collette Musgrave: I would echo Anna's comments. It is a relatively limited community that will benefit directly from this. From our perspective, one of the key communities of children that we are interested in helping to support is the non-British family, particularly children who are born overseas who are not UK citizens, and supporting them in terms of reuniting them with their families and in terms of the process to get them indefinite leave to remain and citizenship.

I don't want to keep banging the non-British drum, but quite clearly that is a largish community within the Army, compared with the other two services, and this is a community that is quite disadvantaged in their ability to pursue and enjoy family life as we might expect it.

As Anna has already alluded to, there absolutely will be some families, and children within those families, whom this may benefit and add that additional layer of support for, in giving "due regard" to their circumstances. However, there are children who will fall very firmly outside of that, and there are other aspects of maintaining family life.

I will not move on to the importance of spousal employment and access to childcare, much of which is done through private providers, because I suspect that that might be Maria's comment.

Maria Lyle: I obviously support the points that my colleagues have made. We actually already have mechanisms through which we do our level best to support mobile families. There is some excellent partnership working



that goes on with local authorities and the NHS through the Families Federations in terms of educating them around the barriers. If people come across these barriers and can't get a school place, or they are put to the bottom of a waiting list, there are mechanisms already whereby we are able to change that. That does not mean to say that we do not welcome legislation to put that on a more robust footing—we do. In a way, it is replicating what we have already, rather than being a real step up, which is what we need—this broader duty that many have talked about in terms of including central Government.

For children and young people, yes, the childcare element that Collette mentioned is important, but what is important is, in some cases, living in fairly decent accommodation. Service family accommodation can be great, but it can also be of fairly poor quality. At the moment, that, as an example, would not be included in the scope of this Bill, so I think there is more work to do here.

Q23 Martin Docherty-Hughes: It is good to see those giving evidence—I missed you at the earlier sessions this morning, so it is good to see you all. As I said to earlier evidence givers, the Bill largely seems to apply to local government and some health and education bodies—*[Interruption.]* If you hear some rustling, it's two whippets running slightly crazy in the background. I apologise for that.

Do you think that the Government's intention in the consultation was not to include either themselves or the devolved Administrations? Anna, I will come to you first.

Anna Wright: To save some time, we would echo what was said in the first session: all of the relevant bodies and stakeholders should be included in this.

Collette Musgrave: Quite. I cannot speak to the detail of the consultation. We as a group of charities were not involved in the initial work, but I would echo Anna's comments and the comments that have gone before.

Maria Lyle: Yes, I agree.

Q24 Martin Docherty-Hughes: I am glad to hear that. The current service personnel have some primary healthcare and housing requirements provided directly by the MoD. Would you expect the Bill to impact more on services to veterans rather than the current service personnel? Maria first.

Maria Lyle: I suspect in some ways it could do. Your point around medical care, for example, is correct in that serving personnel and some families, although it is a minority of families, have their medical care looked after by the military. Most families use the civilian system. GPs working for NHS England have done a reasonable job in trying to roll out a veteran-friendly GP accreditation system. That is in play.

There is less knowledge of the impact of service on mobile families. We are a small cohort. There are far more veterans than there are serving



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personnel, so people are more likely to understand the challenges of veterans, even if they see it through the prism of an older gentleman with an injury, as opposed to a working-age veteran, than they are of a family. I think that is probably something that is worth bearing in mind.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Collette or Anna, would you like to come back in on that?

Collette Musgrave: Only to echo Maria's comments. That is exactly the point. I would not want anybody to overestimate, for families in particular, the amount of support for healthcare and education that is provided within the UK. There is often a misapprehension about the level of support that is given to families and about their access to things such as health and dental care and educational support.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Anna, anything to add?

Anna Wright: No, thank you.

Q25 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I am conscious of time. Do you think that the Bill will have a disproportionate impact on services in areas with large veteran or current service personnel? I think of the push to create large areas, new camps and so on, for armed forces personnel, which, for some of us, creates a kind of disconnect from the rest of society. Do you think there might be a disproportionate impact on those locations? Collette first.

Collette Musgrave: I would echo the comments that were made in the first session, in that our experience in the Army Families Federation is that those areas where there are high concentrations of Army families, whether we are talking the Aldershot, Catterick or Salisbury plain areas in particular, actually have local authorities who are very engaged and very supportive, who have quite robust systems already in place to support those families and who generally—I speak anecdotally, obviously—seem to have a very good knowledge of the challenges that Army families face with their high levels of mobility and an understanding of the service way of life.

In all honesty, in some of these areas many of the people working in local government are themselves in service families. So, in those areas of particularly high concentration, it wouldn't immediately become apparent to us that the burden would suddenly explode for local authorities.

Q26 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Maybe I will rephrase that slightly: would the investment be targeted specifically at those who are already doing very well? I am not saying that they don't require that, or don't need it, but might the additional investment go specifically to those larger—let me say, super-barracks—locations?

Anna Wright: I would echo what Collette has said: where there is a large footprint, there is really excellent practice. So, for the Navy, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Argyll and Bute—fantastic work. They really understand the



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community. It is a large proportion of that community. So that provision is already there, actually.

What surprises me more is some of the areas where there isn't a big naval footprint—Liverpool, Rutland, Shropshire—where, as Collette said, because they happen to have service spouses and veterans working in the local authority who are really enthusiastic and want to look after those people, this legislation will give them more of a mandate to do that across the country. I think that will be helpful.

I don't know if I have answered your question, but I think those that are doing well will keep doing well, and for those that need a little bit of help, this may just be the help we need.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Thank you. Maria, did you have anything to add?

Maria Lyle: Nothing further to add.

Q27 **Darren Henry:** I did many years in the Royal Air Force, so when I ask each of the witnesses, I shall buck the traditional seniority and ask Maria from the RAF Families Federation to answer first, and then we will go from there.

The Government hasn't specified any particular outcomes from this Bill, so I am very keen to know, first of all, how is it going to be enforced, and how can we measure it? How can we know we have a baseline and what success looks like? Have you got any ideas about how we measure this?

Maria Lyle: I am in two minds about this one, if I am honest. Having been caught up in the past in an absolute thicket of Government trying to measure local authorities and NHS providers, and it becoming an industry in itself, I am slightly wary of how the measurement is applied and whether it will be of actual benefit to the personnel and families we support. Having said that, I think if you don't set yourself a target and there is no baseline, it is very difficult to know if it is worth while at all, so I agree that some measurement is needed.

Having said that, there is measurement already in the Covenant annual report, and I would fully echo General Sir John's point that what is needed and could be done with willpower—not even additional funding, but with political will—is getting the current cross-Government mechanisms working effectively to put more emphasis on the measurements, on the metrics. They are quite powerful ones that are reported on in that Covenant report. Currently that is, I would say, not a particular piece of emphasis, but it tells quite a picture on things like quality of accommodation, difficulty in getting healthcare for mobile families, and numerous veteran indicators as well.

So I think the question around how we measure and enforce this is, unfortunately, a slightly grey one. The question is more around, where is the political will and focus to deliver on the key outcomes? If we are just legislating for the point of putting measurements in that might never be



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achieved and will generate lots of effort in reporting on them, then I would be wary of that as a solution.

Q28 Darren Henry: Thank you very much for that. I go to Collette with the same question, but also, if you feel that the annual report does have some merit as it exists at the moment, in terms of measurement, could you comment on that as well, please?

Collette Musgrave: Absolutely. I am a former MoD civil servant, I have worked in central Government, and so could not echo more Maria's comments on all that. Measurement needs to be very carefully calibrated to ensure that it becomes something meaningful.

The processes that we have in place—as Sir John alluded to in his evidence, the structures to monitor the performance of the Covenant, including the annual report, which can be quite a punchy document at times—need, as Maria says, the political will and the support to ensure that those structures, those governance processes that are already in place for the Covenant, are actually working well.

I would be very wary of placing yet another layer of measurement and comment; we at the Army Families Federation spend a considerable amount of our time every year commenting and providing evidence, for it to be completely lost in the noise of the governance process for the Armed Forces Covenant as it is currently.

Q29 Darren Henry: Thank you very much for that. The same question to Anna.

Anna Wright: I agree with what has been said. I think there has been an aspiration for several years now to beef up the metrics for the Covenant Reference Group, so I think if this was part of this legislation, that would be the impetus to have some really useful metrics to look at. Each year, we look at them and there are some notable gaps, so that is not really a useful piece of information. I absolutely agree that we do not want to burden the local authorities; we want to make it as straightforward as possible for them.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I cannot see the hands up on my screen, but I am reliably informed that we have three hands up at the moment, so I am going to come to the following: Sharon, Kevin, and then Tonia. Can I ask Sharon to come in first, please?

Q30 Mrs Hodgson: Thank you so much, Chair. Good afternoon, Anna, Collette and Maria. Following on, if I may, from Stuart Anderson's question about children's education, what is your understanding of how the provisions of the Bill on education will address the challenges faced by students of service families with special educational needs? That is to whoever would like to go first. A volunteer—Maria, Collette or Anna?

Collette Musgrave: I am happy to make a comment, but I am not sure it will be a terribly useful answer, in that I think that until we can understand the statutory guidance and the provisions within that, it is actually very difficult. I might read the legislation one way and have an aspiration, and



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think, “Oh my goodness, that is going to be marvellous”, but until I can actually see the statutory guidance, it is very difficult to make a sensible comment, I am afraid.

- Q31 **Mrs Hodgson:** As a point of reference, we were also very concerned about the lack of the statutory guidance, and the Chair has written to the Minister today—that letter will be made public—asking for the statutory guidance to be made available as soon as possible.

We have a framework, I think, that has been made public that we saw today around that, but we have not actually seen the full guidance yet, so you might be able to see the framework and that might give you a start, but I think that is all we have to go on ourselves at the moment. I am assured that we have been promised it by, I think, the end of this month, but most of the work on the Bill Committee will have been done by the end of this month, so I share your frustration in that.

Anna or Maria—anything to add on that point, or is it the same for both of you?

Maria Lyle: I will just re-emphasise the importance of that guidance, because there is some fairly simple steps that could be put in place that would really benefit families that have, particularly, children with special educational needs. Sometimes there are adults with special needs of some sort as well, but without the statutory guidance it is difficult to know whether the Bill will help. That detail will not be in the Bill, but a request to local authorities to ensure that educational and healthcare plans are portable should be enforceable, and could be included. It would be of huge benefit to many families.

Anna Wright: I would like to see education for local authorities—the key people on the ground who are delivering—about the military lifestyle so they understand what the implications are and the fact that, when a child arrives, they may have been in several different schools in the last five years—the importance of giving them the right support. Without that understanding, it is going to be difficult to meet the needs of the child. It is going to be really important that the background understanding of the lifestyle is part of the guidance.

- Q32 **Mrs Hodgson:** Absolutely. I am a parent of a child who was statemented for severe dyslexia. I am not from a service family, but I can imagine the added stress. Being the parent of a child with SEND is already very stressful without the added complication and stress of them moving around and having to change schools.

There must be a huge tendency to try to keep the children in the same school, and therefore maybe separating. That brings me on to my next question: do you feel the Bill will address the challenges of dispersed families and transient families?

Anna Wright: I would like to come in, if I may. We are the most dispersed of the three services. I hope I am not being over-optimistic, but I really hope that this will be helpful to dispersed families. I think I have shared our map with you of families in every county in the UK. If they



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could reach into their local authorities and the health service wherever they are in the UK and get the support they need, that would be fantastic, particularly when transitioning. I might be over-optimistic, but I am hopeful that this is really going to help that community.

Maria Lyle: I echo Anna's point. No more to add.

Collette Musgrave: Absolutely. Exactly the same point. I absolutely hope that it will benefit mobile families.

Q33 **Mrs Hodgson:** Can I just say to Maria that I hope you are going to look after my son when he starts his basic training on 12 April? He is not part of a family yet—he is a single male, obviously—but I am sure that at some point in the future, there might be—

Maria Lyle: We represent single serving personnel as well. We are just in the process of sending a whole load of nice gifts down to RAF Halton for the trainees. Absolutely—we've got his back.

Mrs Hodgson: Well, I'll tell him where to come if he has any problems. I'm hoping he is going to do very well, but I am going to miss him hugely. Over the last year, we have all been working from home—he works in that room there—so I am going to miss him massively. Those are my questions, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, Sharon. Had your son joined the Army and gone to Sandhurst, I would have been able to look after him in my constituency. Thank you very much indeed for those answers. I come now to Kevan Jones.

Q34 **Mr Jones:** I thank the panel for their evidence this afternoon. We have already covered the issue of the limited scope of the Bill, which there is quite a lot of consensus on, but the other issue is about redress. There is nothing in the Bill about what an individual will do if they don't get what is laid out—I accept that it comes down to what is in the statutory guidance. It has already been said that a judicial review could be a possibility.

Just to disabuse Stuart Anderson, who said that the Covenant started a few years ago, it didn't: it was something that I was very involved with in the last Labour Government. One of the issues that was covered in the 2009 Green Paper was that a way of redress would be for the ombudsman, whether nationally or locally, to act as a person who could take forward complaints. Do you see a weakness in the Bill in that there is no redress issue? Would the ombudsman possibly be a way of doing that?

Maria Lyle: I am happy to start. The idea of judicial review is one that I would massively body-swerve at any chance. It is a hammer to crack a nut, and most are not successful anyway. For most people, that is the very worst possibility. The statutory guidance is going to be key in laying out what steps they feel people should take if they feel that they have been disadvantaged and not supported.



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In terms of an independent ombudsman, I have heard this before. Actually, it is something that, personally—the other families federations may not share my view—I think there is some merit in. But at the moment, people in that position will come either to a veterans' organisation—sometimes a veterans' gateway—or to a families federation. We form that body, but it is a bit of a thicket.

It is rather confusing for people, and there is a question mark about whether it is more confusing to change things and put a new body in, or whether it is more effective to beef up the arrangements currently in place. But I would agree that statutory guidance will be absolutely key in this, as will be making it clear how people progress problems that they encounter.

Q35 Mr Jones: I think the suggestion in the Green Paper in 2010 was not to create a separate ombudsman but to have a route of redress to the existing local government ombudsman or national ombudsman. There is a lot of hope being placed on this Bill, and people's expectations are going to be raised. If they don't get what they are entitled to, where do they go to next?

Personally, I think a route of redress to the ombudsman would do two things: it would solve individual problems, but it would also highlight where things go wrong, which could then be acted on later.

Collette Musgrave: I would not want to place emphasis on one particular route or another; rather, we should look at the outcome of it. In the judicial guidance, whatever is chosen needs to be able to be quite agile and fast moving.

Army families are very highly mobile; they can be moving every 18 months in some cases. To have a redress process whereby you could be two postings down the line before you get the redress that you were looking for, will be of little use to families. Although I do not want say it should be one thing or the other, it should have the characteristics of being agile, easy to access, easy to understand and able to resolve things in a timely fashion for families.

Q36 Mr Jones: Collette, do you think that, if it is not the ombudsman route, it needs some mechanism at the end of it, so that people can get some type of redress?

Collette Musgrave: There absolutely needs to be a form of redress within it, or else it really has no teeth. My slight concern—it is a very parochial concern—is that if there is not a form of redress within it, we as the Fam Feds will be the first line, and we will find our workload expanding exponentially.

Anna Wright: Communication with families is going to be absolutely critical to this, to make sure that they get to the right place. I suspect that it may be necessary to have more than one ombudsman, depending on the service. Maybe there will be a health route and a local authority route,



but we certainly need a much lower-level route to being heard than going to judicial review.

- Q37 **Mr Jones:** Can I ask one final question? It is related to Sharon Hodgson's question about education. The reference in the Bill is to local authorities, but we know that we have a very mixed landscape of education provision—in terms of academies, for example, and others that fall outside the control of local authorities. How can they be brought into the scope of this legislation? They are, in effect, independent from local government. I would suggest that one way of doing that would be to include the regional schools commissioner in the scope of the Bill. Does anyone have any thoughts on that?

Maria Lyle: You have put me on the spot slightly in terms of what the best route to get there is, but I would agree that, given the percentage of secondary schools that are academies—it is growing all the time—they are an important cohort in terms of school places and overall outcomes for some service children. Yes, we should be looking at how they can be included in the scope of this Bill. It is just the route that I would question—I'm not sure about the answer to that.

Mr Jones: Anyone else?

Anna Wright: I agree with Maria.

Chair: We have about 10 minutes left, so I will come now to Tonia Antoniazzi, please.

- Q38 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Anna, it is a question for you, which is really a follow-up from what seems like a few hours ago. You talked about non-British families being a large-ish community. I just wondered what data you have on them and how many people they represent within the Army community. If you don't have that data, would you be able to share it with us, and also for the Royal Navy and for the Air Force, please?

Anna Wright: Collette will correct me, but obviously the Army has the biggest number of non-British servicepeople; I think it is about 6,500, although I might be wrong. In the Navy, I think we have just over 900. I don't know about the RAF; I don't think they recruit in the same way. Maria, you'd be able to help me.

Maria Lyle: Yes, less than half a per cent of the RAF are non-British—non-UK citizens—and obviously not all of them have families. So you can extrapolate those numbers with the RAF, which is about 31,000 at the moment.

Collette Musgrave: If I may just add to that, I think Maria has made a good point; it's not just the service personnel. That data can be measured and it is available from the single services. But regarding information about the number of spouses and children within that who may be non-British—particularly European as we have large numbers of families who have come back from Germany in the not-too-distant past—I am afraid



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that I don't have that data readily to hand. To the best of my knowledge, there is no way of actually collating data on spouses and children.

What I can say, though, in terms of the number of inquiries that we have into the Army Families Federation is that they are a significant percentage— up to a third of the inquiries sometimes can be in relation to issues around families, because we in the Army Families Federation do not, unlike the other two federations, cover service personnel issues; we just look after families. It forms a very high percentage of the number of inquiries that we receive every year.

- Q39 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Thank you, Collette, and sorry for my confusion there. My next question is this: the Families Continuous Attitude Survey, or FAMCAS, shows that a quarter of service spouses found it hard to get a job. Given the strain that can place on families, do you think it should be addressed through the Bill?

Anna Wright: Yes, absolutely. We—FAMCAS—would be really thrilled if employment was part of the scope of this. We jointly have Forces Families' Jobs, which is a mechanism to help spouses to get into work. We are very supportive of spouses and recognise the challenges that they have. Lots has been done in the last few years, but including the issue in the Bill would be a really positive step.

- Q40 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Okay, thanks. Maria, have you got any comments?

Maria Lyle: I support Anna on this. I think it is an interesting conundrum as to how this would be done, because I assume that the only way it can be done meaningfully is if the Bill required perhaps private sector employers to have due regard in some way. The impact of that is potentially significant and huge in our community. However, even if it asked the public sector bodies that were in scope to have "due regard", that would be a massive first step.

- Q41 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Thank you. If there are no more replies, thank you, Chair.

Collette Musgrave: Absolutely—I echo those comments, yes.

- Q42 **Chair:** We have five minutes left for this session, so I want to come to Carol Monaghan, please, for the final question. Are you with us, Carol? I think she has dropped off the line.

In Carol's absence, can I please ask the final question myself? My experience of Army life for a long time was that the Army tends to have more mobile families, both on the trickle posting system and on arms plot.

Of course, there are also lots of bases overseas to which Army families tend to move. Can I ask, therefore, about the relative impact of the Armed Forces Covenant on the three services? In particular, I see that the Covenant would have a really decisive impact upon families who were moving, noting that Navy and RAF families would tend to be more static and live much more into the community. With respect to the Navy and



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RAF in particular, how would the Covenant affect families who were more static?

Anna Wright: I agree with you that the Army stands to really benefit a lot from this because they are so mobile. Families that are embedded in the community around the country possibly have less need of the Covenant. However, that is not to say that they will not need it. Long periods of separation could mean that support was needed in terms of mental health or children. It is about accessing that and about local providers understanding the context of those families. I do absolutely agree that the Army will benefit from this the most, but it will undoubtedly be important for our families and, of course, we do move as well.

Maria Lyle: What I would say is that RAF families and personnel—I do not have the statistics to hand, but they are readily available through FAMCAS—are only slightly less mobile than the Army. A significant proportion are still on SFA and a significant proportion are still moving fairly frequently. In that regard, anything that supports those mobile families will be of benefit to that community.

Chair: Anything to add?

Collette Musgrave: Nothing other than to say, yes, quite clearly, as the largest cohort and the most mobile, your suggestion is correct. However, many of the challenges that our families do face or communicate to us as priorities still sit outwith this legislation as currently drafted.

Chair: Thank you. I am really pleased to have you ladies on today. For me personally, this is not just about service personnel or veterans; it is also about the families. We tend to forget the families and that they are part of that wider community. It is really important that, as we start planning for the future, the legislation that we pass in Westminster does take families into consideration. I know that your organisations are perfectly placed to represent them and do a fantastic job.

Thank you to Anna Wright, Collette Musgrave and Maria Lyle for your expertise and insights this afternoon. I found it a fascinating session. We wish you well for the future.