

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Defence in Scotland, HC 611](#)

Monday 31 January 2022

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Deidre Brock; Wendy Chamberlain; John Lamont; Douglas Ross.

Questions 1 - 66

Witnesses

[I](#): Professor Trevor Taylor, Director of the Defence, Industries and Society Programme, Royal United Services Institute; and Professor Phillips O'Brien, Professor of Strategic Studies, University of St Andrews.

[II](#): Maria Lyle, Director, Royal Air Force Families Federation; Lieutenant General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory KBE CB DL, Chief Executive, SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity; Collette Musgrave, Chief Executive, Army Families Federation; and Sarah Clewes, Chief Executive Officer, Naval Families Federation.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Trevor Taylor and Professor Phillips O'Brien

Q1 Chair: Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee and to our ongoing inquiry into defence in Scotland. Today we are looking at military personnel and estate and we are fortunate to have a brace of professors with us. I will let them introduce themselves and talk about who they represent and anything they may wish to add by way of a short introductory statement if they feel that would be helpful.

Professor O'Brien: I am the chair of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews. I have lived in Scotland for 25 years of my life, first at the University of Glasgow, where I did international history and for the past six years I have been at St Andrews, where I have been doing defence policy and strategic studies in my role there.

My value to this Committee, if I have any value to you, is as someone who has looked at the history of politics, defence spending and the interrelationship of the two and also modern questions of strategy in the high north and other areas of defence and how they might relate to Scotland.

Professor Taylor: I am emeritus professor from Cranfield University. I worked at the Defence Academy of the UK for nearly 20 years and was head of the management department. Now I work as head of the defence, industries and society programme at the Royal United Services Institute, which is a think tank, normally in Whitehall but our building is being refurbished so we have moved out. I write about a lot of defence industrial and defence economic questions but my wider background is in defence across the piece, so sometimes I am drawn into bigger things than just the industrial part.

Q2 Chair: We may try to draw you in a little to some of the issues we are looking at today.

Thank you both very much. To get things kicked off and give us a general understanding, what is your view about the range and scale of the defence footprint in Scotland? Does Scotland do quite well out of military spend and resourcing? Could you tell us a little bit of what you feel about where we are and your views about what is happening in Scotland? We will start with Professor Taylor.

Professor Taylor: There is obviously a lot of debate about basing, and that is not a strong topic of mine but I did a little digging before this session.

You will be familiar with the Scottish regiments based in and around Scotland. My understanding from military colleagues is that one limitation is that Army bases tend to need to be located near large training areas where they can use mechanised vehicles, track vehicles and so on, and they are a little more scarce in Scotland. The big ones, and even they are



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not so big, are in England and they are quite difficult to create. I think that if you tried to create one, there would be quite a political fuss against that in Scotland. Leuchars has been moved from being an Air Force base into being an Army base and I think that is proceeding reasonably smoothly. The Air Force has decided to boost Lossiemouth with two aircraft types, so that footprint will increase. Generally, the picture is one of a somewhat increasing number of defence personnel.

My bigger point, and one where I feel more comfortable, is to emphasise to the Committee, and I will say it in a couple of words, that the defence industrial footprint in Scotland is very important. It is not just measured on size; it is measured on industrial capability that would be very difficult to reproduce elsewhere. It is very important for the UK's status. The idea that the UK is a major independent player on the world stage is very dependent on these defence industrial facilities in Scotland.

Q3 Chair: We will have some detailed questions on the issues that you bring up and most of them will be directed at you. Could you help us with some specifics? For example, does Scotland receive a proportionate share of the UK Government's spending and resources?

Professor O'Brien: It is very hard to find that figure. I have tried to do some research to find out the overall defence spending in Scotland and it is almost impossible to put it together. Intellectually, when I approached it when I was asked to do this by the Committee, I asked myself, "Can you say that Scotland plays a role in all or most of the key areas of national defence?" That is a better way to do it than trying to find a pound figure and I approached it more in that way: not only does Scotland have a significant facility in the major areas of defence procurement and operation, but will Scotland have a role going forward? Defence is changing and that is one of the very important things to consider. Looking at the most recent strategic defence review and many of the strategic changes that have been going on, certain elements of the Armed Forces are being slimmed down considerably and others, particularly cyber and space, are being built up from almost nothing, so to talk about one sort of status quo also is not entirely helpful either.

My overall impression—and this is an impression and not really based on hard numbers in all the areas—is that Scotland is relatively well represented at present in significant Navy and Air Force allocations and some significant Army allocations, although I am not quite sure of the spend on space—one would assume Scotland receives some collateral space investment. The area I am most intrigued by, and I have not seen anything specific on it, is cyber. I think the very intelligent choice of the UK Government, going back to 2015-16, to focus on cyber is probably the single best decision the UK Government have made on defence. There are some I am less happy but that was a very good one. There seem to be some very good resources going into cyber. I am not sure about what role, if any, Scotland is playing in that. It is not easy to find out.

Q4 Chair: Could you expand on that a little? What is your view about what



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the UK Government should be doing and how it impacts on investment in facilities?

Professor O'Brien: For cyber?

Chair: Yes, cyber.

Professor O'Brien: I think the decision to set up a separate cyber command early on was very prescient. Comparable countries, such as the United States, first had separate cyber groups—Army, Air Force, Navy—and then when they threw them together, they often gave it to one service. In the US, as a counterpoint, the US Army dominates right now and it may not be the best thing that the US Army does. I think the UK did very well to separate out its cyber command from the services, give it some independence and a real budget and it was, therefore, a leader and not a follower. It is a very important part of the UK's security today and will be an increasing element of UK security going forward. If, for instance, there is a war or something over Ukraine, it will start with cyber. It has already started with cyber. You probably get the briefings I don't get but the cyber war is going on.

What I don't know, and this is not a particularly Scottish angle, is to what degree Scotland is involved with that and it would not be perhaps a Scottish involvement but it would be with the high-tech sectors and the universities in Scotland. By ranking metrics, Scotland has some of the leading computer science departments anywhere in the country. It has a very thriving high-tech sector. However, I have not seen any evaluation work done on that. That doesn't mean it is not happening, but I don't know.

Q5 **Chair:** We have been through successive defence reviews in the past seven or eight years. Most have them have been primarily around the reduction of services, but of course there are commitments to Scotland. I think it was in 2014 that the MoD committed 12,500 extra Armed Forces by 2020 and we are now up to 10,430 regular Armed Forces personnel in Scotland. Are we on course to be able to meet the target of 12,500? What more is required for us to get there? Could you help us with that, Professor Taylor?

Professor Taylor: A little bit. The numbers are rising and heading towards 12,000. The only question I have in my mind is that, given the deterioration of the security situation in Europe—and you will be aware that the UK kept a lot of forces in Germany and some of those have come back to Leuchars—if there is a decision to station more forces in Germany again or to go back to stationing forces in Germany, that might affect the distribution in Scotland. I have not seen anything to suggest that the plans for the Armed Forces involve cutting back in Scotland. Of course, Leuchars is there but Lossiemouth has an increasing number of people.

Could I say a word on the cyber front? The lead cyber organisation in the UK is probably still GCHQ, supported by the private sector, and that will



work on the necessity of the best in class. As Phillips says, there are some very competent people in Scotland who could be expected to get more of that business but it will have to be done on a best in class basis. It is not something that you would want to compromise on.

Q6 Chair: One of the things we are keen to examine and explore is the impact of this constant diet of defence reviews on communities where bases change. You mentioned Leuchars and the increase in Lossiemouth, which we visited recently. What sort of impact does this have on communities? Is it disruptive? Is it helpful? Give us an idea of the flavour.

Professor Taylor: It varies enormously according to the number of people. It does have an impact on communities, obviously, whether the numbers are rising or falling. Of course it has been a major experience because of the number of people we pulled out of Germany. My understanding, and it is just an understanding, is that when it came to closing bases in Germany, the local governments that felt their economies were booming and that they could use the land that would be given up were very enthusiastic about the British going early while the local governments in less privileged areas wanted them to stay. The impact is very much about the intrinsic appeal of the area they are located in.

You will have read the evidence of BAE Systems, and one of the things that struck me is that they are making a great effort to revitalise Bishopton with the factory having been closed. It is another matter whether or not the MoD has the resources to make a great effort to revitalise an area it is giving up, particularly the defence infrastructure organisation. I don't know the answer to that question but it is a local question and it depends on the core appeal of the region in which the base is located.

Q7 Chair: Thank you. Could you help us with, Professor O'Brien?

Professor O'Brien: It is such a tricky question, as Trevor Taylor said. I don't like to look at military spending as a way to support a community. That does not mean it cannot do that but if you start saying that the role of military spending is to support a community, that is probably not very good for that community as it is not diversifying and it is not necessarily best for your defence because you will end up in a status quo. In the last 120 years—some interesting comparisons—the United States did that and ended up with a woefully distorted defence base structure because every state had its own facility, almost every locality had to have one. The amount that they spent on these facilities was massive and then, of course, they ended up pulling the plug on a lot of them and caused hardship. You can delay the hardship but at some point it will probably come.

The best thing is to help those communities transition away from the military: don't just pull the plug but have a strategy to try to help communities transition away. I would base your defence needs on your



defence needs. Then, if you don't need these facilities, try to help those communities move on from them.

Q8 Chair: Many communities have become dependent upon the military resources based in them. We saw a glimpse of that when we were in Moray and we will be speaking to some forces families after this session. It is an issue that we want to come back to.

We have two defence experts here today and an emerging situation on the Russia-Ukraine border. What are your views? Could the UK, in its current situation and condition, expect to be a major player in any developing or emerging crisis? What would you expect the UK to do, given the condition of our current Armed Forces? Professor Taylor?

Professor Taylor: Nobody knows what is in President Putin's mind. It is obvious that we must do all we can to deter and I think the UK's contribution is essentially in the category of doing enough militarily to demonstrate political support. It is not going to make a huge military difference but it is part of a political stance that could discourage Putin.

If we were optimistic and thought that Putin was thinking in some sense that he was in a rather deeper hole than he originally intended, one of the things that I hope western Governments are thinking about is how they can come to some kind of stance that will offer him a way out. In the Cuban missile crisis, as Phillips would know better than me, that was quite an important element of giving the Russians a way out. I hope somebody is thinking about that but it is a very serious situation for Ukrainians.

I do not deeply understand why President Putin has done what he has done but I think we have to remember that he has a very different political agenda for the things that he cares about compared with, say, the political agenda in a western country where the economy is so central.

Q9 Chair: I saw you nodding your head there, Professor O'Brien. I take it that you agree with much of that.

Professor O'Brien: I have taken a bit of a part in the public debate about this. I think it would be disastrous to take the line that some are saying, that in a sense you should sacrifice Ukraine for realist reasons. It would be devastating to Europe if you take the largest land-size democracy in Europe and in a sense end it because you say it is not that important to us. I think it is an area of strategic concern for Britain and Brexit probably more so as Britain needs to be able to work with non-EU countries and non-EU democracies.

Q10 Chair: Does the UK have any kind of meaningful role in all of this, given that it is mainly going to be the Americans and NATO? I know we are members of NATO.



Professor O'Brien: It depends on your perspective. Compared to the US, no; compared to everyone else, yes. Is the UK going to match what the US can do? No. The UK is nowhere close to that but for a European power—clearly the Germans don't know what they are doing and the French also seem a little bit torn. Right now the UK is the leading European power that is willing to provide some support to the Ukrainians and I think that has certainly been recognised and will be noted. The question, as Trevor Taylor says, is that you have to play this delicate game of absolutely saying that you will try to deter Russia but on the other hand give Putin a way out. I think he has miscalculated and he is quite stuck right now. Maybe he expected everyone to abandon Ukraine and that he would have an easy win, but it is all about playing this very tricky game and the UK has a subsidiary role in that.

Chair: Thank you, given that you are both here and that there will be another statement in the House in the next couple of hours. Over to John Lamont now.

Q11 **John Lamont:** You have already dealt with my first question, or touched on it at least. It is about the benefit that Scotland gets from military investment. Notwithstanding what you said previously, do you think Scotland is proportionately better off than the rest of the UK in its share of defence investment?

Professor Taylor: Yes. As Phillips said, it is difficult to get the numbers but if you look at the policy statements and strategies and some of the commitments that are in place, you can see that Scotland is pretty central. At the end of 2020, we had the commitment to increase defence spending to make the equipment affordable. Following that, we had the defence and security industrial strategy, which is very beneficial. When you look at the sub-strategies in place, you have combat air strategy—Tempest—and Scotland is enormously important for Tempest because of Leonardo's activities in Edinburgh. I cannot overstate the importance of Leonardo's capability. It is a very long-standing thing. It was Ferranti back in the day. Combat air benefits Scotland.

The naval shipbuilding strategy will be widened, which has enormous implications, and that is linked to the commitment to the Type 26 and to the Type 31 and Type 32. Things could change but that does not look likely. It is setting the UK up to have two major warship-building yards, one in Rosyth and the other on the Clyde, two companies, Babcock and BAE, which is enormously beneficial.

The Government's space strategy implies doing things for some of the more remote areas of Scotland with a launch site. Defence spending on complex weapons—because we are not buying only imported weapons—is very important for sites in the Hebrides. The Hebrides range is a very special capability for testing our complex weapons.

Yes, I think Scotland does very well and there are important industrial aspects. I know the nuclear submarine piece is a very divisive issue in



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Scotland but we should not forget that Thales makes a very important part of submarines and they have a very big optics and wider electro-optics business based in Scotland. Overall, the Navy is very significant. Submarines are a permanent thing on the Clyde. I don't know if another committee will be looking at the impact on Devonport of moving submarines from there.

Overall, Scotland does come out pretty well in my view. We know that defence spending in the UK is not spread evenly per 100,000 people across different regions but Scotland does quite well.

Q12 **John Lamont:** Thank you, Professor Taylor. Professor O'Brien?

Professor O'Brien: I defer to Trevor Taylor on industrial spend. He knows that far better than I do. It is interesting to think about it with a Scottish-wide lens because it is not a Scottish-wide thing; it is very regional. The spending helps certain areas of Scotland disproportionately and seems to be almost non-existent in others. If you are looking at it from that point of view, certain areas would do far better than the national average—the Clyde, where the naval base is, Lossiemouth and parts of the north-east—and I think Edinburgh benefits quite well. Some areas benefit less; we have not seen too many facilities in Glasgow. I am not quite sure that it is a Scottish question. Different parts of Scotland seem to have a significant amount of investment and other parts do not.

Q13 **John Lamont:** I want to come back to that point about regional spread later, but back to you, Professor Taylor, on SMEs in Scotland and other contractors that the MoD uses. How extensive is the UK's spend and how does that filter into the wider economy?

Professor Taylor: The companies—Leonardo, BAE Systems and Babcock—are now releasing the percentages that they spend with SMEs and subcontractors. Defence manufacturers subcontract about the same proportion of their work as commercial industry does, say the car industry. They get north of 50% of their turnover from outside suppliers because they pursue a division of labour but focus on core competence and get others to do what they are expert at. They publish information that shows that they subcontract widely.

Often with defence the subcontractors the companies are subcontracting to are established firms because defence is a long-term business. You are looking at a system that takes maybe 10 years to develop and will be in service for another 25 years. If you are integrated into that system, if you are a large or small subcontractor, you will probably be in there for quite a while. I am not speaking about just Scotland here. Defence companies keep a very close eye on their subcontractors because sometimes they have special skills and if that particular little firm disappears, the large companies would be in trouble. They know more about their supply base than does the Ministry of Defence, let's put it that way.



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All the companies make a play of saying that they use SMEs quite extensively. This is a wider piece. The Government sometimes say they want to use SMEs, but you have to remember that whatever a small product from an SME is, it has to be integrated into a bigger system and often the cost of integrating that small thing into a bigger system is greater than buying the thing in the first place. In my view we have to find a better way, a sound way, of making sure that SMEs get access to the big contractors. They have access, but we recognise the integration costs of what they are offering because sometimes that is neglected. You come along with a piece of kit and say it is marvellous but don't think about how it will fit into the communications and surveillance and all the other stuff that is tied into a system. As I have looked at what the companies have said and listened to what they say to me, their case with SMEs is pretty reasonable.

- Q14 **John Lamont:** On Professor O'Brien's point about defence spending not being evenly spread and thinking of my own constituency near the Borders, I don't have a significant base or military plant in the way that some other parts of Scotland do but I do have businesses that are producing equipment that the MoD and other military establishments are using. They are very sensitive and quite secretive about it. To what extent is that information that you have? Do you quantify across each council area in Scotland how many businesses are in some way connected to the military?

Professor Taylor: A colleague of mine did a study, years and years ago, of the supply chain for Warrior, which is an old armoured vehicle now. He dug and delved and found that quite a few companies that were making components for Warrior did not know what the components were for because they had just been given a spec to build to, and that can happen. Of course there are regional distinctions because we challenge our defence companies to come in with equipment. We do not say we want so much of the value to come from each constituency.

I will point you to a report that BAE Systems have just had Oxford Economics do on BAE Systems' contribution to the economy. I apologise, I should have read it; I did read it but I didn't do the Scottish bit. It includes a reference to all the constituencies where they spend their money. That part is right at the back. I will supply a reference, Chair, if you struggle to find it. It will give you information but I don't think even that will necessarily capture some of the very small component manufacturers. They may be just making to a pattern and they do not know who the customer is. They know their immediate customer but they don't know beyond that.

- Q15 **John Lamont:** What can Scotland do to stimulate more MoD investment in Scotland, other than remaining part of the United Kingdom? What else could Scotland do to attract that investment?

Professor Taylor: Defence is a high-tech business, so it is having good technical people available across the piece. The companies all focus very



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much on developing their workforces, for instance with apprenticeship schemes, because they all know that they will need people in five, 10 years and they prepare for that. Having good people available is one thing.

The other thing is that we have some very important projects under way. The Type 26 and the Type 32 are pretty important, and if the companies deliver on those, that will be a great boost for their reputations and their futures. If we have the kinds of misfortune that we have had with another major land system in the UK, of course that would discourage the shipbuilding thing so there is pressure on these workforces to deliver.

I point to those two things. Defence is obliged to contribute to the strength of the union now, so they are thinking about these things. They are also having to think about Northern Ireland and Wales but the major projects keep Scotland's importance central.

Chair: Do you think strategic decisions are taken by MoD or those involved in how resources are applied across the UK with a view to keeping the Union together? Is that a factor in decision-making? Does it influence the allocation of resources across the UK, particularly in Scotland?

Professor Taylor: I am looking at the time because I don't really want go into it. Let's put it this way, I would say that—

Douglas Ross: Sorry, Chair, our witnesses don't make these decisions. I wonder if that is a more appropriate question for Ministry of Defence Ministers because we are asking people who are not involved in these decisions to get into the head of those who make decisions. I am not sure that is entirely fair on our witnesses.

Chair: I am just asking if he has a view about that. Answer the way you want, Professor Taylor.

Professor Taylor: I have found an answer that I am comfortable with, which is that the investment decisions that have been made in the last four or five years have been compatible with confidence in Scotland and confidence in the Union.

Q16 **Chair:** That was a very diplomatic answer. Do you want to hazard a contribution to that, Mr O'Brien?

Professor O'Brien: The only thing I will say is that it is not a case of—going back to the previous one—what Scotland will get from the MoD. You have to have something the MoD wants to take advantage of. It is more of having a base there, not a base but sort of a basis of something in Scotland from which the MoD can grow.

Chair: Thank you. Just in passing when it was commented on, I thought it would be as well to ask you, given that you are here.



Q17 Wendy Chamberlain: First of all, apologies to witnesses. Unfortunately trains not being north of Edinburgh this morning delayed my arrival, though of course, Professor O'Brien, you will have come from St Andrews.

Thank you both for your time today. In 2015 I was working at HMS Caledonia in military resettlement and I remember the impact the strategic defence and security review had on the CPT contract at that time. Clearly, as we have seen, particularly with the outcomes from the integrated review this year, the UK's defence priorities are changing. What are the main ways that those changes will affect Scotland in the years ahead? I will come to Professor Taylor first.

Professor Taylor: The defence priorities are changing, but they are changing in the sense they are growing. It is not that there is an obvious cutback area. I remember because of my great age, going back into the 1980s, that the defence White Papers then said there were no resources for out of area—it used to be called out-of-area activity—and forces were structured that way. Then you have the 1998 White Paper, which said, "Europe is okay. We are going out of area" and there were lots of commitments like global communications and transport aircraft and things like that to enable that. Now we are in a situation where we are global Britain so we are going all over the planet, certainly to east Asia, but we also have a return of a major problem within Europe and Russia's command.

The space business is another addition because, apart from SkyNet, the communications, we have not really gone into space activities. We relied on the Americans for surveillance and timing and all the other things that space is used for. We now have an ambition to change that.

The last thing of course is that the icecaps are melting and the Arctic is opening up. Of course we don't know what the political repercussions are of that and the political context in which that happens. You are quite right to talk to changing priorities, but what is happening is that the roles are getting bigger. Arguably a future Government will have to have a hard think about whether they cut back on some of these things, but that is not for now.

Q18 Wendy Chamberlain: Two things arise from that. Do you think that growing is part of the decision-making in that there have been some different decisions made on military establishments or has that been a failure of estate management?

Professor Taylor: I think that is largely estate management. You will be familiar with the size of the Army. For as long as I can remember, the Army has had a target size and not met it. When there is a review, it sizes it at the size it is currently at and then it does not meet that target, so it has gone down. There is a lot of argument and discussion about land forces, about the extent to which you need a certain volume, that numbers count, but it is getting quite small. The Navy also has shrunk



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quite a bit and I know that has been a bone of contention and some people would like more of the Navy stationed in Scotland.

The Arctic might change that. If the Type 31 and Type 32, the LPV-type vessels prove affordable and effective, we might see a large number of warships getting up from the rather low number we have when they are £1 billion a time, basically. That is the big holdup. It is a good question but, as I say, the nub of the thing is the commitments are growing not shrinking.

- Q19 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Yes, the to-do list is getting longer. Professor O'Brien, the second point I was thinking about is the geopolitical aspects around the Arctic. That will probably be first accessibility to things like natural resources there, but I suppose the waterways are opening up in a way that previously we could only have imagined.

Professor O'Brien: To build on what Trevor was saying, I don't want to be a super-forecaster, but if you are thinking about Scotland and defence and its needs and what roles you would like to see played in Scotland, I wouldn't get hung up too much on global Britain as a phenomenon. I think global Britain is a short-term political reaction to a decision that has been taken. The truth is that as time goes by, Britain and most European countries are in relative economic decline. They will be playing less of a global role. In many ways, Britain is only playing this global role because of a disastrous decision to build aircraft carriers in the 1990s. In many ways, it would have been better had it not made that decision, but it is stuck with these aircraft carriers now and that distorts spending.

If you are saying, "What do you want to have in Scotland going forward?" and you want to base it on what the United Kingdom will actually care about in the future, it is European, it is regional European, and of course the north is probably the most important area for Scotland to look at itself as playing that role in European defence. I would say that is the regional aspect.

On investment—and we were talking about this before we came in—Army bases are fine and well and good, but the Army is being cut back. I would want to make sure that you take part in space and cyber. That is the area that will probably have the most new investment in coming times as the traditional services are slimmed down a bit and I think you would want to play a role in those. That is my own take. I am very sceptical about global Britain. If you are basing a long-term defence investment on that, you are more hopeful than I am.

- Q20 **Wendy Chamberlain:** My colleague Jamie Stone, the MP for Caithness, along with Mr Ross, will be very pleased to hear you say that about the space sector, but how do you think Scotland can best maximise the opportunity that space presents?

Professor O'Brien: How Scotland can? It can do what it has been doing—support an excellent university sector. I think Scotland punches



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above its weight in the university sector and from what we can tell, there is a significant spillover between excellent universities and excellent high-tech endeavours. That is one area.

I think it would have to provide a place that is conducive for space businesses to develop. They have been developing in satellite building. There is some real expertise in Scotland and build on the existing expertise in satellite building that is there, so it has a base. It probably has the best base in the UK for space at this point.

Q21 Wendy Chamberlain: The opportunities are there. I will come back to Professor Taylor. Thinking about the reports we have seen this year, particularly the integrated review and the “Defence in a Competitive Age” White Paper, what do you believe that will mean specifically for investment and employment in Scotland?

Professor Taylor: As I said, the chief thing is the DSIS, because that commits the UK Government to buying more from UK suppliers and there are significant UK suppliers in Scotland. Without that, if we are starting to think about getting more of our aircraft and things from overseas that would be quite a significant loss. I think the DSIS was very good news. The space part was good news for Scotland, as we said. Phillips is from a university, but I will add that the more the school system is turning out STEM people and people that are committed in that area, that also is terribly helpful and that is where Scotland has had a better than average reputation.

Those are the things that I would press. There is mention of the Arctic, so there is recognition and people are thinking about that. They don’t know quite what to do because they don’t know how the situation will pan out and what resources and the economy will look like, but all those things are pretty positive for Scotland.

The deterrent is rock solid, but that depends. We have to hope that the submarine construction, which is not in Scotland, goes well and that is an important variable. No, it is good news for Scotland. It certainly wasn’t bad news for Scotland—good news for Scotland

Wendy Chamberlain: Great, thank you very much. Thank you both.

Q22 Chair: Coming briefly to the high north and Arctic, is that an area that you think will become increasingly important for the United Kingdom, given that Scotland has the outward-facing views on all this? Is there a particular role for Scotland in forging relationships with other nations that are in that vicinity?

Professor Taylor: It will be big international politics. As you indicated, there are the resources in the Arctic and then there is the Arctic as a route and—let’s call them—west and Russian relations and west and Chinese relations will be quite big factors in that. In an ideal world, the opportunities would be shared and everybody would gain and freedom of the seas would operate, but you just wonder. One of the countries that



perhaps Scottish authorities should keep an eye on is Canada, because Canada is looking at this. This is a big change for Canada. The kind of problem or opportunity that this change might represent is very big for Canada. Keeping an eye on Canada and keeping an eye on Norway are obvious things that Scottish authorities might do, but because defence is a national thing, it will be driven mainly from London.

Q23 Chair: If you look at the threat that the Russians have presented in the course of the past few years, obviously the most convenient means for submarine activity will come around to the high north and the north Atlantic. Thinking about protection of fisheries vessels and whatever we will have as renewable technologies in the North Sea, is there a bigger role that Scotland particularly can get involved in in the defence issues there?

Professor O'Brien: I think it is almost a return to a Cold War mindset vis-à-vis Russian capabilities. The Russian capabilities declined drastically after 1990 and it has staged a significant comeback for submarine technology and other areas. As it improves its submarine technology significantly, the United Kingdom will have to improve its anti-submarine and detection technologies to keep pace with that. That will, by geography, have to be based in Scotland. It will be the area where this is mostly likely to be an issue. I think yes is the short answer.

I am not quite sure that there is anything Scotland can do. It will be in Scotland if the United Kingdom is smart about that. That is where it will be based because that is where the routes are. There will be a question about whether the United Kingdom wishes to invest in that area. That is where I am quite sceptical of the global Britain. I would rather invest in regional capabilities; so, the more regional capabilities you invest in, the better that is for Scotland. The more you invest as a global power, probably the less good it is, but that is a very broad brush.

Q24 Deidre Brock: Good afternoon to our witnesses. We have focused a little bit on MoD investment in certain parts of the MoD's operations in Scotland. You mentioned cyber investment and the technologies and frameworks that the MoD is starting to set up there and praised it. Clearly as a result—or presumably as a result—we will see the footprint of the estate in Scotland lessen quite dramatically. I am thinking about HMNB Clyde and RAF Lossiemouth and their importance in the future. Will they continue to be central to the MoD's operations in Scotland?

Professor Taylor: Yes. I think everything that we have said about shipbuilding, the role of Astute submarines, air patrol and understanding the airspace and what is under the sea will stay important. That is why I emphasise that they have a strategic importance for the UK and there would have to be a drastic change in international political circumstances for that to change. I don't think that is really much of an option for the UK.



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Cyber is not an MoD responsibility. It is a national security question and the MoD plays its part, so it is not just down to the MoD. The private sector will spend a lot on this, as well as the public sector, to protect its own information because in many ways the targets for cyber are not Government institutions. Sometimes they are, but it is the private sector. You shouldn't see cyber as just a defence thing. There are some interesting questions about defence and cyber but they are more to do with how the kind of people that are expert in cyber are fitted into the Armed Forces because of their personality types and the training that they need and so on.

Deidre Brock: Really? Do tell. Can you?

Professor Taylor: Cyber people tend to be very good mathematically. Some of them have personality attributes that are not normally fitted into the military framework. I am digging into my memory here, but reservists are not expected to do the same fitness and they don't have the restrictions on their haircuts and things like that if you are in the cyber field. In the US, they have become treated as kind of like experts. They are given a rank to attract them so you can pay them, but it is like medical staff. You might be called a colonel, but you are not treated as a colonel, you are treated as a doctor.

Q25 **Deidre Brock:** We will be seeing more of those sorts of folk then?

Professor Taylor: That is the kind of pressure that these new skills are putting on military structures, yes.

Q26 **Deidre Brock:** Are you agreeing, Professor O'Brien?

Professor O'Brien: I would pick either Clyde or Lossiemouth for a long-term stable base. They seem to me the ones that are by far the most stable and safest. If either of them changes significantly, something drastic has occurred. If Clyde changes, the UK has given up its Security Council seat and decided to reimagine itself completely as a country, and if Lossiemouth for some reason is downsized, I would think that they are not taking the northern patrol seriously. Every other facility is probably up for grabs to some degree, but those two I can't see.

Q27 **Deidre Brock:** I was going to ask you about that, because of course there are three bases due to close in Scotland—well, it was going to be this year—the Redford Infantry Barracks and then Fort George in 2032. How does that compare to closures in the rest of the UK? Are we better off or worse off than the rest of the UK?

Professor Taylor: The MoD has historically been under pressure to cut the size of the defence estate—so, cut places—and a lot of places have been cut, an enormous number of MoD facilities. I think the report in 2016 listed them; I am not carrying them in my head. It is not something that has particularly singled out Scotland. As I said earlier, the impact of this tends to depend on where they are. If they are in prosperous areas, they become much needed sites for housing because there are housing



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shortages and businesses come there, so it is not really noticed. Phillips made reference that you have the devil's own job closing a base in the US because Congress objects. That is usually because the base is in a remote part of the United States where there is very little sign of an alternative form of employment that could come in.

A huge number of locations have been closed and rationalised in the UK. Historically, the Army, Navy and Air Force had their own storage sites and transportation systems. Since 1998, those have been rationalised drastically so that a facility that used to be RAF Stafford is now a storage facility. Bicester has been closed, which was a very large entity. It is pretty much closed now, a big storage entity, because it has gone to one place that is run by an American company that stores all the non-lethal kit for UK Armed Forces and distributes it efficiently, rather than in a one-third full truck. There has been great rationalisation and that has been a necessary thing over the last 25 years.

Professor O'Brien: The comparative work seems to be almost impossible.

Deidre Brock: Really?

Professor O'Brien: Counting the number of facilities isn't that helpful because we don't know how big they are. You can say Scotland lost three facilities, England lost 20-odd, but how many people were at each one matters more than the number of facilities.

Deidre Brock: Or even the size of the estate, I suppose.

Professor O'Brien: Yes, or the size. I don't know really how you would go about calculating it, unless you wanted to give us a few PhD students and we could send them out to collect this data and do a study, but that would be the only way.

Professor Taylor: It is difficult to do it historically, but if you look 25 years ago, all of the defence estate was run by Government personnel who could be relocated or they were military personnel doing the cooking and all this kind of thing. These days everything is privatised, so whatever number of military personnel you have on a base, you probably have a similar number of contractors serving them. If you close that base, all those contractor jobs disappear, whereas 25 years ago it might have just been the military personnel relocated and the impact was much less.

I am sure that in the political discussions about which bases are kept and closed, there is a military thing about efficiency. Military bases are expensive things to run because you have to put a fence around it all and you have to protect it. A large base, is much cheaper than a lot of small bases because it is 24/7 protection and all that, so there is a preference for a few large bases.



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There is also a preference for larger bases in England, and I suspect this is also the case in Scotland, because military personnel get fed up with moving home. I knew a brigadier's wife who retired to Scotland when her husband retired—he was Scottish regiment—and she said, "I'm not moving again". This was a woman who was a child of an Army officer, she had married an Army officer and she had moved home 43 times in her life. The Army basing plan at one point was to say, "Let's take some of this pressure off and try to keep people in a few large locations so that they can change job, they can change their role in the Army, but not have to move home". That is another consideration that you have to feed into the whole equation.

Deidre Brock: We saw some evidence of that when talking to the servicemen and women at Kinloss, didn't we?

Chair: We did, yes.

Q28 **Deidre Brock:** I have been interested in this for a while. There have been delays in the disposal of the estate from MoD. The Public Accounts Committee has been quite critical of that. I get concerned about contamination of the estate in parts due to the activities of the services and I wondered if that is slowing down any of the disposals. Are you aware of that happening at all? It will be costly, of course, to clear the land and make it suitable for housing or whatever.

Professor Taylor: I don't think that has been a major issue. I am more familiar with it in the US because in clearing the sites the DoD wanted contractual terms, but companies were unwilling to accept the risk. It said it wanted a guarantee that there would be no pollution of the sites, zero pollution, and "You have to carry the risk". The companies were unwilling to take that risk, so there is a specification instead that, "We will clear the top three metres". There has to be a way around it. Pollution during the war and since was a more casual thing than it is now and you get some of the aftermath of that. I am not aware that that has posed a significant problem for any of the base closures that we have been looking at.

Q29 **Deidre Brock:** That is interesting, thank you. You have spoken with Mr Lamont about the defence industry in Scotland and its importance, but the ORCUS arrangement presented—if you will pardon the pun—a bit of a bombshell to folk in the defence industry in the UK, given that we now have a model where I think the UK provides the plans or much of the plans and the agreements between the UK, the US and Australia, but Australia is building the submarines. Will this happen more and more frequently or is that a one-off? I am thinking of the impact on the defence industry in Scotland potentially.

Professor Taylor: I think if you look ahead, you know that defence programmes are costing more and more. We are trying to hold the cost down. The advent of digital engineering is the great hope for some of that, as well as going for some less demanding systems, like the Type 31.



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But as I look forward, I would see more international collaboration on the agenda and that collaboration, as far as the UK is concerned, will be wider than just European. I think Phillips was indicating that they will stay very important, but our potential collaborative partners are much wider and Australia is one of them. It will be good for industrial capability and employment because it means that projects are viable that would not be viable nationally.

Professor O'Brien: The F-35 is an even more profound example of that. The UK couldn't build anything like that and it is much better economically to be a small part of that creation than to try to build anything.

Deidre Brock: Okay, interesting. Thank you.

Q30 **Douglas Ross:** Good afternoon to our witnesses. I represent Moray, home to Kinloss Barracks and RAF Lossiemouth. Do you do any analysis or research into the difference of what force is in a local community? For example, is there more benefit locally for an airbase compared to an Army base?

Professor Taylor: No, I have not done that. I think you would have to look at it functionally—how many people are there and, therefore, what kind of support they get from local contractors. That is more people to be fed, more buildings to be maintained, more grass to be cut and all that kind of thing. Airfields have their own maintenance requirements that obviously Army bases don't have, but Army bases tend to have more people there because of the nature of the thing. No, I think you could check it out and you could go to Lossiemouth. It is not a question that my institute has asked so far and I am not sure that we would. It is a pretty parochial question.

Q31 **Douglas Ross:** It is, but rightly so because in Moray we used to have two airbases, RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth. We now have Kinloss Barracks and RAF Lossiemouth, so we have seen in a constituency the difference. Indeed, it came up at our visit to Kinloss: initial fears that going from an airbase to an Army barracks would impact the local community far greater than if the two airbases had remained. Yes, you might have more people but they may be squaddies rather than RAF personnel who move up with their family—the example you gave of the lady who had moved 43 times. You may think it is parochial. I don't. I think it is a really—

Professor Taylor: No, absolutely. I see your perspective. It is an interesting question.

Douglas Ross: It is not the only part of Scotland where we have seen an airbase move to an Army barracks.

Professor Taylor: Leuchars is the same, yes.



Professor O'Brien: Although I would argue there that is an interesting means of analysis because it depends not so much on the bases but what the alternatives are to say its real value. Leuchars is near a town that is beginning to boom and get almost too big, so a lot of my college are now living in Leuchars housing. There are alternative uses for some of the Leuchars facilities as St Andrews grows. In places in Moray there probably aren't alternative uses, so the value of the base in that kind of community is not equally comparative. It depends where the base is and whether you could do something else with it.

Professor Taylor: The more people you have, there tends to be more restaurants and businesses locally but, as you say, it is an interesting question. We have not really faced it before, to my memory.

Q32 **Douglas Ross:** Professor Taylor, you said you had looked into a few things before this meeting. Did you look into the investment that we have seen—and again, I am not getting at you here, being parochial—for example, in Lossiemouth? That has seen huge investment over recent years. Have you looked at that?

Professor Taylor: I have seen the numbers and carry the numbers from a different perspective. It makes you realise that one of the things that people like me take an interest in is that you see what we call the ticket price of an aeroplane but then you look at the wider costs that you incur from being able to use it. I think that the infrastructure costs that have been spent at Lossiemouth is in the hundreds of millions. The infrastructure costs of course are capital spending, that it is done and then the contractors move away, but it is still very beneficial.

Douglas Ross: Not in Lossie because we use Robertsons, who are a Moray firm, so they have stayed in Moray after building the Poseidon Peak facility, which is also very good.

Professor Taylor: Yes, but it needs further capital projects to keep it going. It is not like a recurrent spend. There will be some spend for the maintenance of the facilities, but not the initial capital cost.

Q33 **Douglas Ross:** That takes me on to Professor O'Brien's point. I don't want to paraphrase you, so maybe just answer again. You mentioned earlier on in the evidence session about the link between a local community and basing decisions or decisions of the MoD. How do you describe that again? I got the impression that you thought there should be no link at all and it could be counterproductive for some areas because they don't diversify.

Professor O'Brien: No link at all is impossible because it is always a political choice. The No. 1 principle has to be: is this facility needed for national defence? That has to be, when you look at a facility, why you have it. You can then add some ancillary ones below that once you have made that decision—maybe, therefore, where does it go, how is it structured, do we keep what we have, for how long do we keep it going?



I think if you are saying that the role of a military base is to keep a community going in and of itself even if that base isn't important, all you are doing is delaying a change. I would rather try to start making the change with investment. Personally, I would think that would be better for the community if indeed that base has no long-term future.

- Q34 **Douglas Ross:** Conversely, because when Kinloss was closed in 2010 there was also the threat of closing Lossiemouth at the time. The Nimrods were being scrapped. Lossie is now home to the P8s, which would have basically been at Kinloss. It is very important that some of these communities can be maintained while there are changes within the MoD. I think that both of you have said the strategic importance of Lossiemouth is almost incalculable because it is so important to the UK, whereas it wasn't in that position 12 years ago when it was under threat.

Professor Taylor: Correct. One of the difficulties of defence capability planning is the cost of reconstituting capabilities that you gave up because you thought they would no longer be needed. It is particularly true in the industrial area. It is now recognised that once you lose an industrial capability it is very expensive and risky to bring it back. You are absolutely right to point to that.

I think an aspect of the basing issue that we haven't mentioned, but you would be more expert than me, that the Army is worried about—and the services more generally—is because Army bases are getting bigger and more focused in their locations, it makes it harder for the Armed Forces and the general population to experience the Armed Forces in the way that they used to. The Northern Ireland thing made a great difference because it meant people no longer went on leave in uniform, so you don't even see soldiers and officers when they are on leave because they became targets because they were in uniform.

There is this question about how the Ministry of Defence reminds people that the Armed Forces are there and it is a national endeavour. That can be an argument for having rather more bases than you might otherwise have had and it becomes an argument for having more things like elements of the Territorial Army than you might think are absolutely militarily useful, but they remind people. They are a constant link with the community and that in itself is of value. I am not saying it is huge value, but it is a value and it is in this very complicated equation about how you use your defence resources.

Professor O'Brien: Trevor is right, but it is very difficult in all-volunteer small Armed Forces to figure out how you will do that. Certainly it has been unhealthy in the United States to develop a situation where the military is overwhelmingly Republican and overwhelmingly representing certain parts of that society. That is not healthy. It will never reflect society as a whole exactly, but having some kind of buy-in from across society would be, in my mind, a consideration in basing. As I said, it is important to national security and if a large city becomes completely



detached from the military, that is not positive and I would do something to bring that back, but it is a very tricky question.

- Q35 **Douglas Ross:** You also mentioned that parts of Scotland do well out of the military and other parts don't. I think you gave the example of Glasgow, but in some cases that is right because you couldn't have the P8s based in Glasgow. How much of it is correct strategic decisions and how much of it is that there is a mass of population in the central belt of Scotland that doesn't benefit from MoD investment, or maybe, because there is quite a lot done—you mentioned Thales earlier on—that doesn't benefit as significantly pro rata?

Professor O'Brien: It just seems to be that is the way it happens: that investment tends to be concentrated in certain areas that do well and certain areas that don't. I always was struck—and this is a general reflection on living in Scotland for 25, 30 years—how investment seemed to be going to Edinburgh more than Glasgow in a way that was not always thought out across governmental structures. Personally, I even think having the capital in Edinburgh is probably the wrong choice.

Douglas Ross: Ms Brock might want to come back in again on that.

Deidre Brock: I don't think I would agree with you there.

Professor O'Brien: But it seemed to me that the military footprint beyond the building of some of the ships in Glasgow wasn't terribly more—there is Kentigern House, but that never seemed to be more than a relatively small office, so the footprint didn't seem to be that large or Glasgow did not seem to have a buy-in to it in the way that there were many more facilities around Edinburgh, from Edinburgh Castle onwards.

- Q36 **Douglas Ross:** Professor Taylor, you mentioned Trident and how it is politically a divisive issue. There are those on this Committee who want to see Trident removed from Scotland and those of us who support its stationing at Faslane. What would it mean to Scotland and to the UK if there were no nuclear submarines allowed or based in Scotland?

Professor Taylor: There would have to be somewhere else to base it, if the UK was not to give up its deterrence. The alternative to a submarine-based deterrence is not really visible and it would be time consuming and expensive. I think everybody half-familiar with the issue knows all that. It goes back to the sort of scale of defence investment and often the history of defence investment.

Some of the industrial capabilities—the Clyde shipbuilding is one of them and to a certain extent submarine basing where they are now—is already 60 years old. The radar business that Leonardo now own was Ferranti. It goes back decades and decades and it represents an institutional capability that you can't just pick up and put somewhere else. What we know as Thales today was Barr & Stroud. I think that Barr & Stroud made the first periscope for a submarine and that is First World War-type time. In some of these things, airbases and stuff, to a certain extent you can



move, but some of the industrial facilities are more organic, are deeply rooted in the history of an area and are about employment patterns as well as the knowledge that they have.

On the nuclear submarine basing issue, I don't think it would be impossible, I just think it would be very expensive and very difficult. The very difficult bit is the storage of the weapons when they are off the submarine.

Douglas Ross: Professor O'Brien, you don't have to come in if you don't—

Professor O'Brien: My own view is that there is no situation under devo-max where I think the Scotland part of the United Kingdom would ban those. I can't see the scenario happening, as long as Scotland remains part of the United Kingdom, where you would close that facility based on a Scottish decision. If Scotland had the right to close it, the union would be over.

Q37 **Douglas Ross:** You mentioned STEM and how Scotland does well with people coming through STEM subjects. I started parochially and I will finish parochially. One of our Moray Growth Deal projects is the MAATIC project, which is trying to encourage more people into aviation studies. There will be a real-life aircraft, a college built just for this, because in some parts of Scotland we still struggle to encourage people into the defence industry. Indeed, many of the people who join come from outwith the local area, outwith Scotland and even outwith the UK. I think you said, Professor Taylor, that we do quite well with it. We can surely do better. Is that an area we should be concerned about or do you think Scotland is doing fine in our output of young people with qualifications in STEM subjects?

Professor Taylor: It is the same in the US, but if you look at all the corporate literature about what they are trying to do and when they are trying to impress, they emphasise their need and their ambition to have more apprentices up various levels, all levels, from craftsmen right through to PhD apprentices. The staffing issue is a real major issue for all the major defence companies, so the more that schools and colleges throw out the kind of people that are useful to high-tech companies—and defence is a high-tech business—the more the defence companies are likely to be drawn there.

It is a core theme of all the major defence businesses. They have to devote enormous effort to getting the staff they know they will need in the future. They know they will need them in the future because they have these orders and projects that they know they have to deliver on. I absolutely stand up for that and I would say that is an excellent way to go.

The situation in Barr became so deprived. Standards in schools dropped because there were children from a generation of people who never



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worked, so it was a very bad family background of school performance. People were not motivated for school, so the company has gone in and actively promoted STEM activities and technical attributes in schools. Some people have objected to this. They say that it is a defence company getting involved in education, but it is doing it for its own sake because it needed these people to do the work that it knew was coming in the future.

Douglas Ross: Thank you both.

Professor O'Brien: You need to provide that if you want to take part in the procurement.

Chair: Thank you both from all the Committee. It was a fascinating session and we have certainly learned an awful lot about this particular inquiry. There are a couple of things you are going to supply to us and I think the Clerk has been taking notes of the report on the systems and constituencies, which we will be more than interested in. Thank you for bringing that to our attention. If there is anything else that you feel that you could usefully contribute to our inquiry, please feel free to do so because we would like to hear from you in the future. But for now I will suspend proceedings for our virtual guests to come online.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Maria Lyle, Lieutenant General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory KBE CB DL, Collette Musgrave and Sarah Clewes.

Q38 Chair: We resume this session, looking at the defence estate in Scotland. We have some other guests with us, who are all virtual today. I will let them introduce themselves and tell us who they represent, and if you want to do a short introductory statement that is all right. We will start with Ms Clewes.

Sarah Clewes: Good afternoon. I am interim chief executive of the Naval Families Federation. I represent both Royal Naval and Royal Marines families in the same community.

Chair: Lieutenant General Sir Andrew Gregory. We will call you Andrew for short, if that is all right?

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: Andrew is just fine, thank you very much. I am the chief executive of SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, a post I took over five and a half years ago after 35 years in the Army, including two years based in Glasgow running the Army Personnel Centre in Kentigern House and, many years before that, being born in Glasgow.

Maria Lyle: Good afternoon. I am director of the RAF Families Federation. We represent serving RAF personnel and their family members overseas and in the UK. I was delighted to be called to give evidence today. I was brought up in Scotland, educated in Scotland and come from a military family who also served in Scotland, not in the RAF though, interestingly. Having had the full experience, it was interesting to listen to the previous session and comments and developments. I am very happy to contribute both personally and professionally to this debate.

Collette Musgrave: I am the chief executive of the Army Families Federation, a job that I have been doing for the last 14 months or so. The Army Families Federation is similar to the other two Families Federations, in that we support the families of Army personnel, regular and reserve. We do not, however, extend our remit to the serving person in aspects that do not relate directly to their family life. Single living accommodation, for example, is outwith our remit compared to the other two. But our aim is to provide advice and guidance on the policies and processes that affect Army families in their day-to-day lives. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Q39 Chair: No, it is us thanking you for coming along. Hopefully the questions that we have for you will help us design and shape up this inquiry.

Can I start with the Armed Forces Covenant, which is about 11 years old? In your view, what sort of difference has it made in looking after some of the more personal issues of those that served in the Armed Forces? Has it made the difference you thought it would make? Where do you see this



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developing and progressing now? We will start with you, Lieutenant General, or Andrew to us, as you are now.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: Absolutely Andrew. I echo Collette's thanks to you for investing in the Armed Forces through these sessions.

I think the covenant, in principle, is a very good tool. It has definitely helped. We have some tangible examples of where it has helped service personnel and families when they have moved up north of the border to address some of the disadvantages that movement brings, particularly to get themselves on to waiting lists for appropriate schools and things like that.

Certainly the evidence in SSAFA—as you may or may not know, we support serving personnel, veterans and families of both—is that the covenant helps. It is inevitably, to a degree, dependent upon the local authority and how enthusiastically they embrace it. But I have no evidence to suggest it has not been properly embraced in Scotland by local authorities, so from our perspective, it is a good thing and it is helping in part.

Q40 **Chair:** Ms Musgrave, I think every local authority in the UK has now signed up to the covenant, as has NHS Scotland and all the Scottish health boards. What difference do you think it has made for the people you represent? Is there anything more that you think could be done with the covenant to make it either more widely known among the community and the public or just for the betterment of the people you represent?

Collette Musgrave: As Andrew said, it is a very positive move and structure upon which to hang engagement. We found it very useful at local authority level—as he has highlighted—but also at Scottish Government level. It is helpful to be able to raise issues with the Veteran and Armed Forces Personnel Unit, who can itself use the covenant, and it invokes the covenant to unlock some of those issues.

Where could it go further? In our view, there is sometimes a little bit of frustration at a local level—this is very much more with the charity and volunteer sector—that it has become quite focused upon the veterans element of the covenant and that sometimes the needs of serving personnel and their families are a little lost in that. That is natural. It is probably largely—I would suggest, having sat on many of the very productive meetings that are run by the charities sector in Scotland—that it is dominated by veteran-focused charities.

If there were something that either the Scottish Government or local authorities could do, it is to focus in some of those meetings on how they are addressing things and making sure that families' voices are heard a little bit more clearly and follow some of the very good practice—I am thinking here of the Highlands, for example. They have a fantastic military liaison group that works very well to bring these organisations



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together and ensure that there is an equal voice given to all of the elements of the defence community in Scotland.

May I give a shout-out at this point, because I think it is the most appropriate point, to the Scottish Government for signing up to Forces Families Jobs, which is an employment and training platform that the three families federations have done? You have to be an Armed Forces Covenant signatory to sign up to Forces Families Jobs. Promoting the benefits of Forces Families Jobs has a beneficial effect in promoting the Armed Forces Covenant and the benefits that that can bring to employers and the public sector across Scotland.

- Q41 **Chair:** I am grateful. I see you nodding your head, Ms Clewes, to most of all that. For most of us the Armed Forces Covenant seems to be much more associated with veterans. Do you agree with this call to us that the charities volunteers should be given a bigger role and a bigger prominence and is there anything practical you can suggest that we could do for that to happen?

Sarah Clewes: Consistent messages. Some of the initiatives that are rolled out may not be badged as relating to the covenant, so the constant drip feed of this is a new thing. It can be a little bit complicated but it comes from the covenant. You have that constant drip feed and consistent messaging and people understand that it has come from somewhere within evidence with a policy base rather than another new idea initiative that can cause some confusion. The consistency and relating it back to the covenant would help with understanding with our families.

- Q42 **Chair:** What about the RAF, Ms Lyle? Is there anything you want to contribute about the operation of the covenant and what it could possibly do for the RAF?

Maria Lyle: I will add to the ones my colleagues have made is that how the covenant operates for the serving community is typically quite different to how it might support the veteran community for a very good reason. The means of a serving community, when we use the covenant to support them are often—not always but often—around mobility. They are a far more mobile community than the veteran community are. As a result, things like continuity of care in health or education, spousal employment are all areas where the covenant can be of huge use, and it is.

It has been beneficial, but it is the local authorities, NHS trusts or NHS Scotland and its areas being aware of the covenant used as a tool. That is tricky because that can involve front-line workers who are very busy and Armed Forces families are happy to support their cohorts they have to look after. Part of our role is helping educate them and working with all those different stakeholders so that they understand it as well. It is down to us as well as them, and we know they are busy people.



Q43 **Chair:** I remember being in Parliament when the Armed Forces Act 2011 introduced the covenant and the fanfare that was associated with that. I think everybody saw this as a huge innovation and development and something that would benefit all Armed Forces and services. I see Andrew has his hand up and then I will come to Douglas Ross.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: One of the big challenges facing service personnel and service families is the realities of geography and distance when they are moved to Scotland and potentially the separation from the support network they would normally have. Obviously if we have recruited people in Scotland, that does not apply, but the challenge is when they move north to Lossiemouth, Faslane or Leuchars and other big locations. That is where the covenant can kick in to try to help them. The geography is a theme we might come back to during our discussion with you.

Q44 **Douglas Ross:** I will come in with my substantive questions later on, but I want to pick up on the covenant because I represent Moray, so probably have more serving personnel and veterans living in Moray than almost every other Scottish constituency. I am a big supporter of the covenant but sometimes I wonder whether we celebrate too much that we have this in place. There are positive newspaper articles, but does it have the cut-through? Do serving personnel and veterans fully understand what the covenant means for them and their families? Do local stakeholders understand what it means for them? For example, I have had constituency cases where veterans say the covenant states that they should have a code on their GP database but then call the GP and the GP does not know what that is about or the receptionist is unaware.

What I want to try to get across is that I am supportive, but are we doing enough to implement what is in the covenant rather than just celebrating that we have the covenant? I saw some nods there, so I do not know who wants to start off.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: I will have a first go. You have put your finger on a significant issue. You can brief a service person and quite often the service person does not then go back and brief his or her partner. Without being too generalist, young servicemen are probably worse at this—my wife would definitely say that. You can brief the system, but how often does it get down to the far corners—to the person, the doctor's receptionist and things like that?

Quite a lot of service personnel will not understand the covenant but when it goes wrong, that is when we need to step in, just like we do not understand how military charities work but when the need is there, we need to be there for them. For many of them, if you quiz them about it, they would hardly know anything. But what we want is for them to receive no disadvantage, which is the key tenet.

Q45 **Douglas Ross:** Anyone else, or do you feel Sir Andrew has done it?



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Maria Lyle: I am happy to add to that. The surveys of Armed Forces personnel and families over time show that the awareness of the covenant is growing. FamCAS and AFCAS, which are the big surveys that are done annually, show that awareness is growing.

I agree that, for something as monolithic and, not well-staffed—I think we could argue that point—but with a huge staff role like the NHS, that challenge is key for us. How do you get a front-line worker to understand what the Armed Forces Covenant is? It is hard because, as I say, running training courses sometimes is inappropriate when they may only meet that military person a couple of times a year. That is the key bit: where can we insert those points in the system that make it relevant without trying to sheep-dip everyone with some sort of course of awareness of military affairs, which may not be relevant for their role?

I have also come across those instances, as you have raised, about people not having their records appropriately marked. We are working on and are in the middle of finishing a report about healthcare for mobile military families, which mentions that as being one of the challenges of the system, but there has been NHS involvement in that report, with recommendations of how to improve it. We are very hopeful that the trajectory is going the right way.

Douglas Ross: Hopefully we can see a copy of that report when it is done as well.

Q46 **Wendy Chamberlain:** It is good to see you all this afternoon. I want to understand what you think the UK Government are currently doing well in support of military communities in Scotland and elsewhere and what can they be doing better. How encouraged are you all with recent UK Government reviews, such as the UK Armed Forces Family Strategy?

Sarah Clewes: I was interested to read the strategy and, in particular, the workstreams, to see where the energy is being focused. The number of issues is tricky. The workstreams are useful to keep us focused and to ensure that the action plan reflects the workstreams so that we stay on track. The strategy is great. We have already had comments about, "What will that look like to me in 10 years' time and I want childcare sorted now and not in 10 years' time". But to be able to say that there is an action plan, it will be prioritised, it will be delivered, I think is what the families want to hear. I definitely welcome the strategy to give us the framework, the consistency and the workstream to keep us focused.

Q47 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Ms Musgrave, do you share the view that it is a good strategy and you want to see more?

Collette Musgrave: It is a very good step forward. It is very helpful to see the commitment by having a family strategy, and it has not been in place now for the best part of 10 years since we had the last one. Certainly for those of us who are working on behalf of families it allows us to better have a structure to engage with defence and to have some clarity over where responsibilities and aspirations lie, to an extent. But I



think that Sarah put her finger on it slightly, that there is plenty of business-as-usual stuff to be delivered. My colleague Maria spoke very eloquently on this when it was launched. There is still a lot that needs resolving right now for families and the test will be very much in how we see these workstreams, which Sarah alluded to, developing over time, whether they are properly resourced and properly supported.

We very much welcome the investment in childcare, which has been a key part of the launch of the strategy and the emphasis on the wraparound childcare package that has been put in place, which is hugely important for many of our families, particularly for dual-serving personnel. There are lots of different types of families in the Armed Forces. Not all families have small children. They are at different points in their lives, have different aspirations and different ways of living, and they want greater choice in those ways of living.

If you come back to us in 12 months' time I may have a slightly more comprehensive answer for you about whether this will answer Armed Forces families' needs and requirements in the longer term.

Q48 Wendy Chamberlain: Sir Andrew, it sounds like the strategy has identified some of the key issues but obviously, as was just pointed out, we need to see some action. I saw you nodding. Is that your own view?

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: Governments are often very good at producing strategies, and that is a start. Better we have a strategy than we do not and better we have a covenant than we do not. But it is exactly as Collette said: has the experience of a young service person or a young service family on the ground changed as a result? That is what we have to see now. Family strategy, yes; second one a refresh. The first one we produced when I was still in uniform and doing the chief of defence people job. It has built on that and I am delighted to see it. It is strong but we now need action.

Going back to the covenant, we have a covenant tracker, and I completely agree with Collette that there are still a lot of things that need to be resolved and that is the key. No more bright ideas, let's get on with the basics and deliver.

Q49 Wendy Chamberlain: I see Ms Lyle has dropped off again, I do not know if there is an issue with her wi-fi, so I will move on. This is a straightforward question. These are all fantastic organisations here, but are there things that you are currently doing that you believe either UK Government or Scottish Government should be doing instead? Sir Andrew, can I come to you on that first?

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: Once again it is a very good question. Where this cursor lies is an interesting point. In some cases the interventions of charities is important because it shows to service people and families and veterans that the public cares. They do care and that is a very powerful message.



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We understand that money across Government is tight and there needs to be a balance but the key, without giving you direct examples, is as long as we are working together. I think that we are working pretty well together with the Westminster Government and the Holyrood Government, and we are well engaged with them. I think Collette said the system in Scotland with the Minister—in our case the Veterans Commissioner—works well. There are always bits where you say, “Yes, that should be Government” but, by and large, I do not think the balance is too bad.

- Q50 **Wendy Chamberlain:** That is an interesting point about the charity aspect showing the Armed Forces that people care. When I worked for CTP at HMS Caledonia you had rank management delivering the initial part of the resettlement provision but working with the RFEA was able to demonstrate that care but also provide the continuity of job finding support throughout a veteran’s post-military life. That is a very good point.

Can I open it up to the others? Ms Lyle, can I come to you now that you are back online? Are there things that you feel that your organisation is doing that you would reasonably expect the UK Government or Scottish Government to provide instead?

Maria Lyle: There are some areas that I would like to see more leaning in from Governments. One of those I would flag is spousal employment. We are doing a lot in this space that we are happy to do because we think we are well placed to do it. I say “we”; I mean the three families federations—we work cross-sector on this. The bit that I think is down to capacity resources, it can be tricky for Government to engage, is that more direction and support on this would be welcomed.

There is always more that we would like to see in things like housing and ensuring that everyone is in warm, safe and comfortable accommodation, and more to come on that when new contracts are issued. We are not directly responsible for delivering that. We are just responsible for supporting families and monitoring how that accommodation is maintained.

Spousal employment is something that we could benefit from additional Government time on.

- Q51 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Covid permitting, I hope to get to see the spousal hub at Leuchars in my constituency soon, so it is good to hear that. Ms Musgrave or Ms Clewes, do you want to add anything to that?

Collette Musgrave: Maria’s point about leaning in is pertinent. We do a significant amount in helping families navigate Government policies and processes, defence policies and processes, but there are some things that only defence or Government are able to do. There are some things that only Government can do, such as pieces of information and documents in support of spousal employment or changes in the way that student finance is allocated.



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We are in a stage now of using the covenant, in particular, to get at some of these gritty complex issues and our frustration at the moment is sometimes that these can affect only a small number of people, and therefore fall very much down on Government's priority list, understandably so. But for them to fall into the charity basket we simply cannot do it without elements of Government leaning in. This is where, reflecting back on some of the initial questions about the covenant, I would very much like to see the covenant being utilised more strongly in a cross-Government way—across Whitehall and the devolved at Holyrood—to resolve some of these quite knotty issues that cause a huge amount of concern to the admittedly small number of people that they apply to, but it is a huge amount of concern that can damage their lives.

Wendy Chamberlain: It is understanding those interdependencies.

Collette Musgrave: Absolutely, and being willing to engage in those interdependencies. I appreciate that everybody is stretched at the moment and we remain in extraordinary times. But the low-hanging fruit of a lot of policies, a lot of the challenges that Armed Forces families have faced over the last 10 or 20 years have been very rightly resolved through the efforts of various Governments in the UK. We are now into some quite complex and difficult policy areas to resolve. There is perhaps not always the willingness to lean into resolving them.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: Did you want to go to Sarah first who has not had a chance to comment on it?

Wendy Chamberlain: You wanted to comment and then I have an expanded question that I will carry on to ask Ms Clewes.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: You asked for a specific example as to where Government could do more, and I was going to follow up your comments around the career transition partnership. Every service person will leave the military at some stage and this is broader than just Scotland. Making sure that they are ready and the family is ready to transition is an area of weakness.

What more could Government do? They could do more to give military people the life skills to allow them to succeed. When they go out with their technical skills and the values and standards, they are ready to take their place in society—better skills around financial management and understanding the environment they are going into, which I think is equally applicable to families. While they are serving I would love to see Governments doing more to prepare our service personnel and their families for the day when all of us leave the military.

Q52 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Not potentially just simply making sure that qualifications that they have within the military are badged to be recognised from a civilian perspective.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: It is much broader than that because we find that most people who leave the military do extremely



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well. They are not scarred by their service, they are better for it. But some struggle and almost always it is because they do not have the life skills, they do not know how to live their lives, they do not know how to budget. What more could the military do? It could work on that.

- Q53 Wendy Chamberlain:** Absolutely. They are certainly some things I recognise from my own time. Ms Clewes, the other area that I wanted to ask about is differences between England, Scotland, other parts of the UK, and the impact that has on military personnel and families. Please feel free to come in on my previous questions, but are there any changes that you would like to see in some of those differing levels of support between the different parts of the UK? Maybe it is back to the interdependencies. Are there any areas that you would pick up from that geographic perspective?

Sarah Clewes: The thing that we come up with quite a lot is the difference in school years and the impact of education therefore. If people know the impact and they are prepared for that, and they understand that it is different, they can make informed choices, but without that information they do not feel empowered. We end up picking up the pieces to try to make things fit that, frankly, do not fit because the system is very different, particularly pertaining to education. Making sure there is an understanding is one thing but the impact is another. We talk a lot in the Naval Families Federation about the school years and missing years, and therefore the knock-on effect with further education.

Yes, there are differences and that is absolutely fine, but what is the impact for people? I guess it goes back to the education piece and managing expectation.

- Q54 Wendy Chamberlain:** Absolutely. On our visit to Lossiemouth we spoke to personnel whose families were in other parts of the UK and one of the factors in that decision was schooling. To the rest of the panel, are there any areas from devolved competencies that you would pick up?

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: I absolutely agree with what Sarah said about the education. That is obviously key, the difference in the curriculum and things like that. There are two other areas that cause challenges when people and families are posted to Scotland.

First, the benefit system is different and that can cause some confusion because people have to understand a new way of working. I entirely understand that is devolved but that is difficult. Secondly, for some of the professional people who we employ in SSAFA, social workers and things, the qualification system is different. What may apply south of the border does not necessarily apply in Scotland and vice versa. You need a different way of proving qualification.

Those are two other practical problems that service families particularly have to deal with when they are posted to Scotland.

- Q55 Wendy Chamberlain:** I certainly remember that discussion around



ELCs. There is one last question I wanted to ask and it is not in the briefing. I read an article in *The Sunday Times* yesterday that struck with me because I have a constituent who is in those similar circumstances. It is about reports of domestic abuse within the military and I have a constituent who, as a result of a relationship breakdown, has been evicted from military accommodation, and my team and I are supporting her. You are all representing charities with the word “families” in them. I would like to be interested to hear from you how big an issue this is within the military and whether you are seeing an increase in people coming to you for support as a result of that. I will come to Ms Clewes first.

Sarah Clewes: Yes, it definitely is an issue, but almost always attached to something else. Gambling at the moment seems to be a high-level issue. As a result of gambling, the financial implications and all the rest of it comes with the domestic abuse that we are seeing. It is a stand-alone issue but when you start to dig a bit deeper and get to understand why and you pick family life for some of our families, there are other issues as well. It is absolutely in the mix, not stand-alone as an issue but probably in the mix with all sorts of others. The cases that we see and the people who we are dealing with are complex. Obviously Covid and isolation has not helped some of those issues.

We are certainly seeing gambling becoming more prevalent, but more than that, the “So what?” and “What’s the impact on the family?”, and unfortunately domestic abuse is one of those things in the mix.

Maria Lyle: I can say that over the past 18 months that we have not seen a rise in cases. That does not mean that there has not been a rise in cases in the RAF, though, because they would not necessarily come to us anyway. In RAF units there are SSAFA social workers who are the first port of call if people wish to declare that they are in a situation of domestic violence.

The interesting challenge, particularly if I think of Scotland, for example, is that in some circumstances there is a very good setup in England where families can make use of the Cotswold centre to remove them from accommodation, particularly if they are potentially going to be evicted, and to put them somewhere as an interim measure so that they are away from a partner who might have been violent, and have some support there. Of course, that is long distance if a family has settled in Scotland in accommodation. There are some challenges there about how that best happened within the military system that should be looking after them if they are in those circumstances.

It is a fascinating article. I read it as well and I am doing some more digging around what the RAF figures are at the moment, given that it is not something that we saw a particular spike in recently. I hope to find out more over the next few days.

Q56 **Wendy Chamberlain:** I am very encouraged to hear that you read it.



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Any final comments from our Army charities? From my perspective, my constituent very much feels that her ex-partner has been supported and she is now in homeless accommodation with the council and separated from her children. I would like to hear that that kind of narrative is potentially going to change.

Collette Musgrave: Do you want a view from the Army Families Federation?

Wendy Chamberlain: Yes, if you have anything further to add.

Collette Musgrave: I was going to follow the views on my colleagues in that we have not seen evidence of a particular spike. But, yes, your final point about entitlement and who is entitled to service families accommodation is an issue that we grapple with regularly in both family breakdown and family breakdown with domestic abuse associated with it. We find that the current policies and processes that are in place do not cover every eventuality. That is a real challenge.

There have been great strides and in many locations a very sensible application of the policy and interpretation of it, but it goes back to a wider point that we are often in conversation with the Army and defence about, in that many of these policies and processes are not written from a modern family point of view. They are written very much from the point of view of a soldier and the unwritten assumption that that soldier is male. It does take a bit of unpicking of these to often make sensible decisions around circumstances that do not neatly fit into those circumstances. It affects every part of life.

As an aside, we provide specific support to non-British family members for whom a relationship breakdown—and a relationship breakdown unfortunately accompanied by domestic abuse—can result not only in them losing their accommodation but also their right to remain in the UK, and cause significant family breakdown. We have a team that is specifically dedicated to supporting those families, providing the interpretation of the rules and regulations that are not widely understood, going back to another point that was made.

From our perspective, the frustration arises and the frustration of families when they come to us arises from an assumption about the way in which those original policies and processes were written.

Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you very much. I am aware that I have taken a lot of time. Sir Andrew, do you have any last comments?

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, runs a refuge in London for women and children, or serving dependants, victims of relationship breakdown and domestic violence. It has 20 family units. During 2020 it ran at 95% occupancy throughout; at the moment it is about 85% occupancy.



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I absolutely agree with Sarah that the problem of domestic violence, which is a societal problem, is linked to many other things. I do not know how to fit gambling in. Often it is one or more of the Ds that has gone wrong in their lives: drink, debt, drugs, divorce, depression, domestic violence, a dependency culture, digs—housing, particularly related to veterans—and disease. It is not simple.

The pandemic has not helped because people have been locked in together. The victim so often has not had the chance to ask for help and is locked in a most unpleasant relationship, either coercive control or physical. I do not know whether that is starting to come out now. It is a problem in the Armed Forces but it is a problem in wider society too that somehow needs to be addressed.

Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you all very much.

Q57 **Deidre Brock:** Thank you so much to our witnesses for coming along and sharing your knowledge with us this afternoon. It is appreciated.

Further to what we are discussing now, there was some written evidence to the Committee from Forces in Mind Trust that suggested that one of the impacts of the 2021 integrated review was that with fewer troops on the ground and a focus on new forms of engagement, that there may be fewer physical casualties but “lasting psychological impacts” on personnel and that “health services should be prepared to adapt” to the changing needs of personnel. Sir Andrew, how prepared do you think healthcare institutions in Scotland are for potentially increasing numbers of mental health referrals from the military rather than physical referrals? Is this sometimes that is discussed regularly? Can you give us some insight into that?

Lt General (ret'd) Sir Andrew Gregory: It is an important subject and it is a pan-UK challenge. Making sure that there is sufficient capacity to deal with mental health issues in society for people in the military and for veterans is a challenge. Are we as ready as we should be in all these areas? Probably not.

There are some encouraging signs. The Armed Forces are doing their best to remove the stigma about saying, “I’ve got an issue” and talking about it. I think that is a really important step. Service personnel are starting to do that but it is not as good as it should be. Is the system behind it ready to provide them with the assistance; is there the capacity? I am not sure that I know the answer but we need to monitor it very closely. Charities like ours, sitting behind, as Maria said, we have social workers on Royal Air Force bases in Scotland and more widely who are looking very closely at this to see. When single people and service families come to us we are analysing the figures. It is not a tsunami yet but it is worrying.

Q58 **Deidre Brock:** Would one of our other witnesses, or all of them, like to comment on this as well? Is it something that you have come across yourselves?



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Sarah Clewes: The length of deployment with the Royal Navy surface ships as well as submarines is for longer periods with uncertainty around their programme. For example, at Christmas we were expecting a submarine to come back and it did not. Families missed Christmas and then it came back in January. The length of deployment and the uncertainty around programme changes is potentially having an impact on the mental health, on the families, and the stigma of not wanting to raise their hand to say that they need help, because of their own pride but also maybe the effect on the careers of their partners. It is a really tricky area. Again I do not have statistics or numbers but with the uncertainty and the lengths of deployments, the extra stress on our families is becoming a mental health issue.

Maria Lyle: I have one final add-on point. There is an excellent piece of work by Beverly Bergman at Glasgow University about the long-term mental health needs of veterans, the cohort that she is studying. It is the largest one that has been done across the UK although it is focused in Scotland. Using that data to understand who will be the most vulnerable and in need of support in the future is a helpful way of trying to focus our services. That is not families, that is people who have served. It helped move perhaps some of the worry that everyone might be affected and allows us to think who is most likely to be and therefore where we have to put support in and where health services might be able to plan. I have seen a couple of presentations of that work and it is illuminating.

We only deal with people in the couple of years after they have left and then other charities are taking over, but things like early service leavers, people leaving from training unexpectedly, for a variety of reasons, are at risk of future mental health issues, as are people who have experienced very specific events in their service life.

There are things that all the services can be doing, and I know are doing, under the research that people like FiMT and Beverly Bergman are doing to structure services for the future. There is never going to be enough money to provide the services that potentially everyone might want, so how do we structure it so that those in most need have a safety net there to catch them?

Q59 **Deidre Brock:** Do you think the UK Government are sufficiently aware of their responsibilities to service personnel in this matter? Do you feel that they are making the effort to introduce the sorts of programmes that would enable service personnel to open up about their feelings and feel able to present to a medical professional if they were concerned about their mental health? Is that something that you feel the UK Government are playing a part in?

Maria Lyle: I will hand over to Andrew in a moment. There is a huge and growing awareness of the need for more support. There is a lot of awareness in the press and in the single services about mental health, trying to support people to be more open about those discussions, but a lot of the statistics tell us that culturally people still only feel comfortable



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opening up to those who they feel understand their circumstances. That might not be a local GP, it might be a specialist service. That is where the focus needs to be, I think, for people who are potentially in a dangerous situation because of their mental health. I will leave it there because I am not a specialist in this particular area.

Deidre Brock: Sir Andrew or Ms Musgrove?

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: Shall I start, Collette, and then you come in? The Government have taken steps. They have put in place the TILS and HILS service and they are good initiatives. Capacity remains a challenge. There is not enough slots to get people in so we have serving personnel, family members and veterans waiting a long time for support. That is worrying because these issues only get worse.

Another challenge that particularly pertains to Scotland is the level of people who are now living unaccompanied from their family because the partner or spouse has settled somewhere and they perhaps got on to the housing market. Particularly if they are posted to a base up in Scotland, that worsens the issues that they are facing because of the geography, coming back to that. I spoke to the chair of our SSAFA's service committee in Faslane. Her husband is currently working down in Devonport and gets back once a month. That does not help either of them and that is the practicalities. What could be done to help that? Some more allowances to recognise the geographical separation. That would play back into the mental health space.

Collette Musgrave: Andrew has rather stolen my point. It is not just related to the integrated review and what might come along in the variation in operational postings overseas but there are other policies online at the moment in the personnel, in particular the future accommodation model. While of course that might widen entitlement for people, it is predicated on the basis that people will increasingly buy their own homes, settle in their own homes or will, as Andrew said, serve unaccompanied.

Having visited Lossiemouth—and you have been up there as well—I am concerned by some of the problems that already face our families who are geographically distanced across the UK, not just in Scotland. You could be living in Wales and your soldier is serving in East Anglia. That is a very difficult journey to make. There are not necessarily the allowances of the policies or the processes in place to support families in those sorts of situations. We very much hope that they will start to come online in support of FAM, the future accommodation model, but they are quite complex.

When you overlay the implications of the integrated review on top that, it presents a very complex picture for families and presents them with quite a challenge in making their own family decisions over the next three, four, five, even 10 years about where they might base themselves and



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how they might live as a family unit, when it is unclear to them what support will be available to them.

Q60 Deidre Brock: It was announced recently that the MoD was seeking to take full ownership again of the properties that they sold to a private company, the service family accommodation specifically, in 1996, but the Scottish MoD residential estate was not part of that deal. I was on the Public Accounts Committee when this was discussed in late 2016 and I could not get any answers from the MoD personnel who were in front of us as to why that was not included and who they reported to on Scottish residences for serving personnel. Could you give us a flavour of what things are like currently for service personnel in the residential estate that is offered to them on bases and so on? We saw, I think at Kinloss, that some of the accommodation was being done up.

Chair: It was Lossie.

Deidre Brock: Lossie, was it? Sorry. We saw it from the outside but they looked like decent houses and people seemed to be quite comfortable there. I am interested in hearing some personal accounts that you get from service personnel across Scotland and where you see the improvements being needed.

Collette Musgrave: Shall I take that? As the Army is the greatest user of service families accommodation in Scotland, I will take that one to pitch off.

In the dim and distant past as an MoD civil servant who went through, while seconded to the Treasury, the sale of Annington to Annington Homes—yes, indeed, the sale of what was called at that point the married quarters estate to Annington Homes—did not include the property in Scotland. That was retained as part of the defence infrastructure organisation. I understand—although please do not quote me on this; it was a long time ago—that that was due to the various different types of property laws in place in Scotland and it was not possible to do that. Sir Andrew might have a bit more information on that one. I can see he is quickly denying that.

The second part of the question was the standard of accommodation in Scotland. We keep very careful track of all the inquiries from families. In general, the satisfaction with accommodation in Scotland has always historically been a little higher than that in England or elsewhere in the UK. The satisfaction in Northern Ireland is also very high, but I think that is due to the fact that you get an awful lot of house for very little money in Northern Ireland by and large.

In Scotland we see a relatively high level of satisfaction, as I say, with the accommodation, the range of accommodation and the quality of accommodation that is on offer. The frustration from our families often comes with the location of the accommodation. I believe some of the evidence that your previous witnesses gave around the isolation of units,



the location of units, the transport links that are in place to where the accommodation is, the impact on being able to get work, to find employment, to get your children into the childcare or the schools that you might want to get them into, is something more of a challenge. When we get concerns and inquiries about service families accommodation in Scotland, it is more related to that element than to their quality or their availability.

Deidre Brock: Thank you. Very quickly anyone else? I need to hand back to the Chair.

Maria Lyle: I have one short point to add. I know you have been to Lossie recently, as have I, and the actual service family accommodation there is of reasonable quality. It is varied but people accept that, and so are the costs that they are paying, so the feedback was quite positive. More of a challenge for Lossie, as you know, is it is rapidly expanding. There are buildings going up right, left and centre. It is single living accommodation so some of the quality of the single living accommodation at Lossie is hugely questionable. You are sending recruits a long way from family, sometimes on their first tour, and you want it to be a positive experience. They are very keen and able young people and unfortunately they are going into accommodation that is not going to make them feel warmly disposed to that first tour. That is my takeaway on that element.

Q61 **Deidre Brock:** That is very interesting because the Public Accounts Committee also reported last year on single living accommodation. It described the accommodation as neglected—but that is their words—and was a risk to retention of service personnel and was potentially even undermining operational capability. It is interesting to hear you say that, Ms Lyle.

Chair: I have just been told we have to have wings by 5.15 pm, which leaves plenty of time for Douglas Ross.

Q62 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses. To pick up on that final point from Ms Lyle, the station commander group captain, Chris Layden, at Lossiemouth told us on our tour around the base that that was one of his biggest priorities. He did not think that there should be any difference in the accommodation from a brand new recruit to—well, not quite the station commander, because obviously he gets his own house, but that almost everyone should have a similar standard. That was the point that Ms Brock was making. We are seeing these units being built and it is encouraging that the MoD and the local personnel there see that as a priority.

A few other points that I want to pick up on. Again, do not feel you all have to answer, or if you do, please feel free as well. How do basing reviews affect your members? When we had the visit to Lossie and Kinloss the week before the most recent basing review came out that secured the future for both bases, there had been one anonymous



comment in one Sunday paper that Kinloss was going to close, and that set hares running. It led to an awful lot of uncertainty. We raised that at Kinloss Barracks. How do your members feel in the lead-up to these basing reviews and what that could mean where some of them have put down roots and some of them are currently based and what it could mean for their future?

Maria Lyle: Shall I kick off? It is live for the moment in Lossie in that Lossie is clearly not going anywhere, given the investment that is going in at the moment, but an announcement that was made relatively recently was the move of a squadron from Lincolnshire up to Lossiemouth. They are consolidating some of the fleet up there. That is the equivalent impact of rebasing because there is a significant group of families and personnel who thought that they would be serving a long time in Lincolnshire who now have to move up there.

That caused a lot of uncertainties and disquiet, I will be honest. Having said that, what I would like to emphasise that there are positive lessons that we can take out of this in some of the ways that it has been handled. Moray Council, working in partnership with the NHS in Scotland, the education specialists and the unit did a fantastic roadshow where a whole load of them went down to Doddington in Lincolnshire and met all these families and personnel and explained what life was like, what it feels like. We went along as well to answer questions. There is no doubt that it causes uncertainty.

It is difficult to get away from that happening occasionally because of the nature of defence and those changes, but that is quite a good example of how it can be well handled and you can build resilience and get people to see the positives of some of the change and allow them to ask questions freely. But that transparency and engagement with families and personnel—and being honest that there will be some differences but that there are some great opportunities as well—is vital.

Q63 Douglas Ross: In fairness to Moray, we have had a lot of practice with this, which may be why we are so good. I think Sarah Riley-Evans from the base had gone down to meet families and others. One of the issues that comes up is the different education system. How big an issue is that when you have personnel moving from England to Scotland and the change for children's education? Does it in many cases prevent a family moving?

Maria Lyle: I will hand over to my other colleagues in a moment and just finish off my piece on this. Sometimes it does prevent people from moving, yes. It depends whether they are at a crucial stage of education. Families are more likely to want to make the change if there are no exams coming up. We get that not just moving out of Scotland. People will choose to stay in Scotland and not come to England for the same reasons or they will decide not to go to Cyprus for similar reasons.



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It means that sometimes families choose to stay in one place and differences in education can be key to that. I do not think that speaks to the quality either way, it is just the difference and I am not sure we will entirely remove that. As Sarah said, it is down to information and being clear with families what the differences are and what the implications could be.

Sarah Clewes: I was thinking about MoD Caledonia in Rosyth. I have been based there three times myself and it has always been a transit accommodation when the ships are in refit or the QE classes of ships being built, so it has always felt like transit accommodation. The families that choose to live there, particularly those serving in maybe the Royal Marines band who have been there for a while, have enjoyed living in that area and making homes around Rosyth and Dunfermline, due to the proximity to Edinburgh. They love living in that area and they have learnt to make the opportunity of going up there as a service family and deciding to settle there.

I do not think that there will be a huge impact in numbers when we are thinking about when MoD Caledonia may close, because it has always been a transit base anywhere. Lots of people were mindful that the aircraft carriers would be based in Portsmouth so they stayed in Portsmouth. They did not move up to Scotland. But the ones that have been around the Rosyth area have enjoyed living there and have made it home, due to the proximity of Edinburgh. They have viewed it as a great opportunity to taste that life.

Q64 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. Anyone else? No. What dialogue do you have with the local authorities that have a big number of Army or RAF or Navy personnel about the extra support that they get from either the UK or Scottish Governments to help families to settle down and in particular with education? Again I go back to my own examples. I have been dealing with schools in Moray that previously had a bit of extra money so that the head teacher could put in additional support for classes that had a large number of service personnel children. Some of that money has now been removed and all councils are facing difficult decisions. What is the picture across Scotland for local authority funding and support where there are large volumes of military personnel? Sir Andrew, you were nodding your head there.

Lt General (ret'd) Sir Andrew Gregory: I was nodding at a previous point, but I will come in on that. When there is a supplement, particularly in education, it is very welcome. It is two-way because it also helps the schools, which are quite often reluctant to take service children because they see it as disruptive with pupils coming in halfway through academic years and potentially leaving at unusual times. I cannot answer your specific question about what the provision is like in local authorities in Scotland, and colleagues may be better placed to say that.

Going back to your previous point, I think that the Committee should urge Government to be as open as possible as early as possible when



decisions are looming, either basing decisions or restructuring. Uncertainty is corrosive and the earlier you can tell service personnel and families that there is a change or you tell them, "We can't tell you this until date x" helps enormously because at least they know the score. Then they can plan their lives and can start to move forward. If the decisions come out with sufficient notice, that is the greatest help. Anything the Committee can do to push defence to be early in, "We can't tell you until date x, you will then have this much notice", would be helpful.

- Q65 **Douglas Ross:** I agree with that point to an extent in that I believe that that was the case this time. The MoD said that it could not comment until the final review was published to Parliament and yet we still had one individual who went to the newspapers and said, "Kinloss is going to close or it is under threat". Then you have weeks, maybe months, of local media stories saying it is all up in the air. The MoD is between a rock and a hard place. It either says, "No, it is definitely staying open" but then it has pre-empted the review, or they say nothing at all, which extends the uncertainty.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: It is a perennial problem. Trying to tell people not to listen to rumour control is very difficult, but that is what leadership—and the families federations are crucial in this because they are trusted as independent organisations that do not have the same axe to grind as the chain of command. They are absolutely fundamental, so I think it is a point for them to pick up.

- Q66 **Douglas Ross:** Finally from me, because we have a finish time for the Committee, where are we on spouses coming up with their military partners and struggling, because of qualifications elsewhere, to get employment in Scotland? A number of years ago, again in Moray, it was a big issue that we had a shortage of teachers but the qualifications from England did not allow them to immediately become teachers in Scotland. A lot of work was done and a lot of that has been largely resolved. Is there still a lingering issue about qualifications or otherwise that people have gained outside Scotland that stops them being able to immediately gain work and, therefore, presents a bit of a barrier for spouses joining their partners when they are based in Scotland?

Collette Musgrave: This is the top area of concern for Army families. It relates to the fact that spousal employment generally is moving up the agenda for all of our families. Dual incomes are required almost wherever you are in the UK, and increasingly overseas, so spousal employment, as Maria said earlier, is a key issue for us.

I dragged through all of our statistics on our inquiries about Scotland and this is the area that continues to grow. There are other areas where we can identify that we have engaged, whether it is with the Scottish Government or the local authorities, and we have managed to resolve some issues, but this remains a real source of frustration.



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It also relates to the fact that the Army moves more frequently in and out of Scotland than the other two services, so we may well be seeing much more than the other two services—I strongly suspect that we are—and we already have a family population that is already highly mobile. They are used to moving around frequently so they tend to have jobs such as teaching or nursing where they have qualifications that they feel should be easily and fairly quickly transferrable into areas of need. There is a degree of frustration when it becomes apparent that that is not the case. It does remain a problem in some areas for our families, absolutely.

Douglas Ross: Thank you very much. Before I bring in Sir Andrew, if you have figures on that, could you share it with the Committee in how that has remained your number one issue?

Collette Musgrave: I will see what we can do without breaking our confidentiality.

Douglas Ross: Thank you.

Lt General (retd) Sir Andrew Gregory: Very specific examples—nursing, social work and legal qualifications—all require additional work if they have been gained in England to make them applicable in Scotland. That remains the case.

Chair: Thank you, that was a fascinating session and we are grateful to all of you for that. We got a real insight on what the issues are for forces families across all the bases in Scotland. That was very helpful for us in this inquiry. There are a couple of things that we have asked you for that you will be able to supply to us. If there is anything further that you feel that you could usefully contribute to this inquiry, please get in touch any time. That was really good and it flew past for us. I know that we were not strong in number today but I hope you found that a useful session too. If there is anything else you could give to the Committee, please do.