



House of Commons
Defence Committee

**Protecting those who
protect us: Women in
the Armed Forces from
Recruitment to Civilian Life**

Second Report of Session 2021–22

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 12 July 2021*

HC 154

Published on 25 July 2021
by authority of the House of Commons

The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP](#) (*Conservative, Bournemouth East*) (Chair)

[Stuart Anderson MP](#) (*Conservative, Wolverhampton South West*)

[Sarah Atherton MP](#) (*Conservative, Wrexham*)

[Martin Docherty-Hughes MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, West Dunbartonshire*)

[Richard Drax MP](#) (*Conservative, South Dorset*)

[Rt Hon Mr Mark Francois MP](#) (*Conservative, Rayleigh and Wickford*)

[Rt Hon Kevan Jones MP](#) (*Labour, North Durham*)

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck MP](#) (*Labour, South Shields*)

[Gavin Robinson MP](#) (*Democratic Unionist Party, Belfast East*)

[Rt Hon John Spellar MP](#) (*Labour, Warley*)

[Derek Twigg MP](#) (*Labour, Halton*)

Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2021. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright.

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/defcom and in print by Order of the House.

Committee staff

Lucy Arora (Committee Specialist), Matthew Congreve (Second Clerk), Mark Etherton (Clerk), Lucy Petrie (Committee Specialist), Sascha Sajjad (Committee Operations Officer), Eleanor Scarnell (Committee Specialist), Ian Thomson (Committee Specialist) and Sarah Williams (Committee Operations Manager).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6168 / 3113; the Committee's email address is defcom@parliament.uk. Media inquiries should be addressed to Joe Williams on 020 7219 8878 | 075 4651 7626 or Toni McAndrew-Noon on 075 6243 5286.

You can follow the Committee on Twitter using [@CommonsDefence](https://twitter.com/CommonsDefence).

Contents

Summary	3
The way forward	5
1 Introduction	7
Our inquiry	7
2 Joining the forces - recruitment and representation	9
Women's representation in the forces	9
Barriers to joining	10
Improving women's recruitment	12
3 Thriving and progressing in the Forces	16
Biases and change within the Forces	16
'Unacceptable behaviours' in the Forces	19
The prevalence and types of behaviours	19
Efforts by the MOD and Single Services to reduce these behaviours	26
Case studies: other challenges affecting female Service personnel	31
Uniforms and equipment	31
Health and facilities	35
Supporting those with family responsibilities	38
Progressing and moving up	41
4 Responding if things go wrong	45
The Service complaints system	45
Planned changes to the complaints system	53
Sexual offences within the Service Justice System	57
Specialist support in the complaints and justice systems	65
5 Transition and resettlement	70
Reasons for leaving the Armed Forces	70
The situation of female veterans	71
Available services and whether these meet female veterans' needs	74

6	Overall conclusions	78
	Conclusions and recommendations	79
	Annex 1: Survey results	88
	Appendix 1: Hierarchy of ranks in the Armed Forces	96
	Formal minutes	97
	Witnesses	98
	Published written evidence	99
	List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	101

Summary

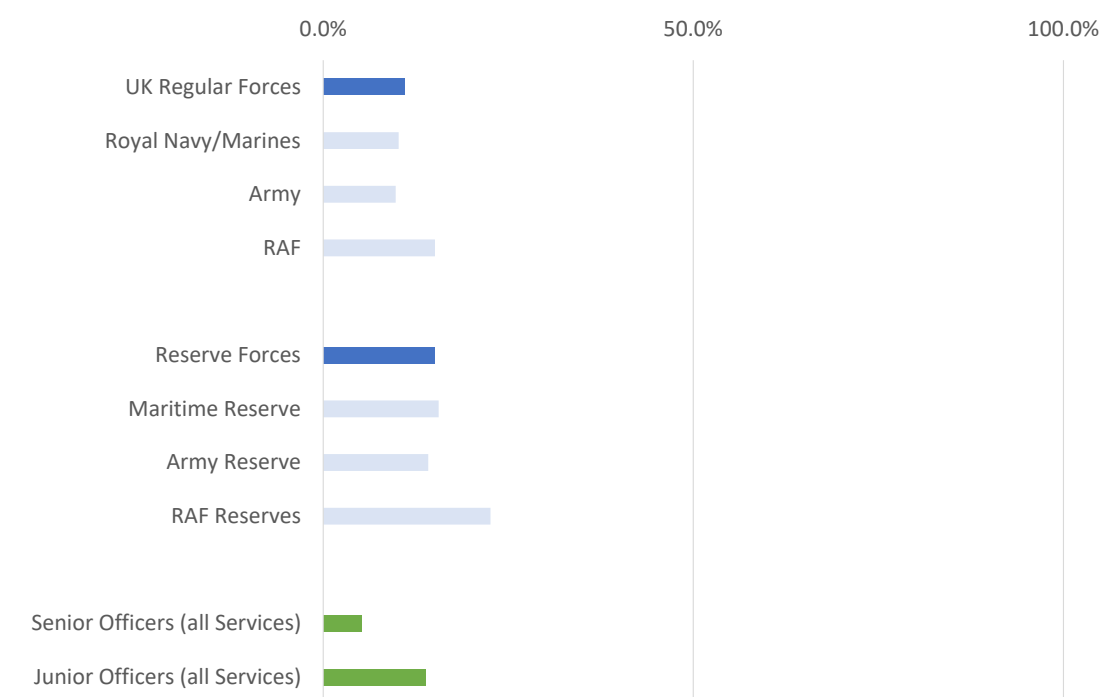
It is mission critical for defence, if we are to safeguard the security, stability and prosperity of our nation, that we recruit and retain the most able people drawn from the broadest diversity of thought, skills and background. [...] We are clear that if we are to improve the diversity and inclusion of our work force we must take urgent action to access and maximise all our talent.

Letter of 24 July 2020, signed by the Chiefs of Staff¹

Women have served in our Armed Forces for more than a century and can now apply for all the same roles as men. The Armed Forces can and do provide them with fulfilling careers and vast opportunities. Our bottom-up inquiry heard directly from more than 4,000 female Service personnel and female veterans, including around 9% of female personnel in the Regulars. Nearly 90% of these military women would recommend the Forces to other women.

However, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Services are failing to help female personnel achieve their full potential. More than 3,000 servicewomen and female veterans (~84% of respondents to our survey) reported that female Service personnel face additional challenges. There are now more than 20,000 servicewomen in our Armed Forces, but, for example, the MOD says it may take decades—possibly over 300 years—to improve women's presence among Senior Officers.

In all Services but a minority: Servicewomen in the Armed Forces (%), but, for example, the MOD says it may take decades—possibly over 300 years—to improve women's presence among Senior Officers.



¹ Ministry of Defence, [Maximising talent through diversity and inclusion](#) (24 July 2020). Signed by General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Tim Fraser, Vice Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Tony Radakin, First Sea Lord, General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, Chief of the General Staff, Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston, Chief of the Air Staff General Sir Patrick Sanders, Commander of Strategic Command.

Although the Forces generally welcome servicewomen today, it gravely concerns us that bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD)—already affecting too many Service personnel—was experienced by nearly 62% of female Service personnel and veterans who completed our survey. These behaviours include sexual assault and other criminal sexual offences. Our inquiry received truly shocking evidence from female Service personnel of bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape they experienced, some of which—even more disturbingly—involved senior officers acting as wrongdoers. The MOD’s representative statistics show that servicewomen were nearly twice as likely to experience BHD in 2020 as servicemen. In 2021, servicewomen were more than ten times as likely as servicemen to experience sexual harassment in the last 12 months.

When things go wrong, they go dramatically wrong. The systems for responding to unacceptable behaviour are failing our service personnel, both male and female. The Service Complaints Ombudsman has never judged the military’s internal complaints system, in which female Service personnel are overrepresented, as ‘efficient, effective and fair’. Nearly 40% of 993 military women told us their experiences of the complaints system were “extremely poor”. Too often, complaints are being brushed under the carpet and there is inadequate support. A lack of faith in the system contributes to 89% of both male and female personnel in the Regular Forces not making a formal complaint about BHD. In our survey, around six in 10 servicewomen and female veterans who had experienced BHD did not report it. The chain of command can be a direct barrier to reporting: a point of failure. There are also serious problems with how the Service Justice System handles criminal sexual offences—most of which (76% in 2020) involve female victims.

Other parts of the military culture of the Armed Forces show it is still a man’s world:

- More than three-quarters of the currently serving female personnel who engaged in this inquiry told us about inappropriate, ill-fitting uniform and body armour, which placed them at greater risk of harm in combat.
- Due to the difficulties of balancing Service life and family life, serving mothers, often the primary caregivers, make the greatest career sacrifices and sometimes leave the military altogether. Among mid-ranking Officers, 90% of men have children, compared to 10% of women.
- Servicewomen face other barriers to their career progression, and taboos about menstruation, the menopause and other aspects of their health.

Female veterans are living with the legacy of their Service. While most go on to lead satisfying lives and benefit from their Service, some have life-changing trauma in consequence. Many feel their Service is not recognised. Furthermore, ex-military women do not always access male-focused transition services and veterans’ services. In our survey, three-quarters of veteran respondents said the MOD was not helpful in their transition; over half said that their needs are not being met by current veteran services. Despite notable examples (such as the Salute Her service and the WRAC Association), there are very few specialised support services for female veterans in the UK.

The way forward

We must make progress on all of these issues both for the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces, and because our shared British values of fairness, equality and justice demand it. The MOD and Single Services have started to act, for instance, rolling out 'Flexible Service', childcare schemes and a new BHD helpline. These initiatives reflect an acknowledgement of the problems, but we are disappointed that progress is slow, with gaps between the many policy documents and practice on the ground. As it stands, the 2021 Armed Forces Bill may represent a missed opportunity to address critical issues. We want the MOD and the Armed Forces to go further, being bold and unequivocal, and urgently implementing all aspects of the Wigston Review. To handle unacceptable behaviours better, we recommend that the MOD and Single Services:

- Establish a central Defence Authority, to provide a reporting and investigation system for bullying, harassment and discrimination, outside the Chain of Command and outside the Single Services
- Remove the chain of command entirely from complaints of a sexual nature
- Adapt performance assessment systems to prevent the progression of Service personnel, particularly leaders, who have acted unacceptably
- Commit to tri-service sexual harassment surveys annually
- Amend the Armed Forces Bill 2021 to retain the 6-week time limit for complaint appeals
- Make recommendations by the Service Complaints Ombudsman binding
- Remove Rape and Sexual Assault with penetration in the UK from the Court Martial jurisdiction, unless the Attorney General gives consent
- Publish greater data on the pathway for victims of rape and sexual assault

The MOD and Single Services should also make other changes, for example:

- Urgently roll out female-appropriate uniform and equipment
- Consider female-specific needs in health policies
- Roll out wraparound childcare to all Services by the end of 2022.
- Carry out an equality analysis of the Integrated Review and Defence Command Paper
- Acknowledge and celebrate female veterans, through public memorials, blue plaques and support for female veterans' networks
- Ensure both women and men veterans can benefit fully from transition and veterans' services, by improving female representation and adapting them to the differing challenges of female veterans
- Recognise 'military sexual trauma' and fund specialist support services

All initiatives must have clear metrics and data for measuring success.

Female Service personnel are capable and resilient—as all Armed Forces personnel should be—but they want better outcomes for future generations. As the Armed Forces enter a new epoch and the Integrated Review brings new opportunities, now is the time to truly recognise and treat all Service personnel as our finest asset, protecting those who protect us.

We thank all the Service personnel and veterans, including thousands of military women, who contributed to this ground-breaking inquiry: the first of its kind that we know of. We also thank the Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, for his decision to provide special dispensation for Service personnel to contribute, lifting the Defence Instruction Notice that normally prohibits currently serving personnel from speaking to Parliament. Taking these voices seriously will help make Britain the best place to serve in the military and to be a veteran.

1 Introduction

1. Since late 2018, women have been able to apply for all roles in the Armed Forces, including ground close combat roles.² Because of this change—and because there were gaps in our understanding of the needs of female Service personnel and veterans—we launched a Sub-Committee inquiry into Women in the Armed Forces in December 2020.

Our inquiry

2. Our inquiry explores the situation of and challenges facing women in the Armed Forces today (both Regulars and Reserves), from recruitment through in-Service experiences through to transition.

3. This inquiry is a first-ever for the Defence Committee and, we believe, ground-breaking for its in-depth consideration of these issues.³ It represents one of the largest dedicated consultations of female Service personnel and female veterans in the UK. We heard from around 9% of all female personnel serving as Regulars.⁴ Currently serving personnel would not normally be able to give evidence to an inquiry like this, so we thank the Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, for permitting them to do so.

4. We took special steps to allow female Service personnel to participate in the inquiry more easily. For two weeks in December 2020, we ran an anonymous survey, in which 4,106 female Service personnel and female veterans participated (1,637 female Service personnel and 2,469 veterans) (see Annex 1). Additionally, we ran a private focus group with 11 female Service personnel in April 2021 and provided ways for female Service personnel to send written evidence without making their identities public.⁵ We thank all Service personnel and veterans who took part for their contribution and their service.

5. We accepted 75 pieces of written evidence. We also took oral evidence from 11 witnesses, including veterans, charities, families federations and the Ministry of Defence. As discussed later, some witnesses spoke on behalf of several servicewomen and female veterans with whom they have contact.

6. In this report, we examine:

- Women's recruitment to, and representation in, the Armed Forces (chapter 2)
- The in-Service experiences of female personnel, including unique or additional challenges (chapter 3)
- The systems in place for responding to unacceptable behaviours that occur (both the complaints system and the service justice system) (chapter 4)
- Reasons for leaving the forces and female veterans' experiences of transition and resettlement (chapter 5)

2 British Army, [All British Armed Forces roles now open to women](#) (25 October 2018)

3 On wider research gaps, see, for example, Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 1.2; Paula Edwards, [Q15](#)

4 1,421 female Service personnel who took part in the survey (December 2020) were in the Regulars. As of 1 October 2020, there were 16,110 female Service personnel in the UK Regular Forces.

5 Specifically, we allowed confidential submissions (which we see but do not publish) and the anonymous publication of written evidence. Some personnel may have contributed via more than one channel.

- Overall conclusions (chapter 6)

The inquiry focuses on the Armed Forces and does not consider challenges facing women in the MOD's civilian cohort or the Defence sector generally.⁶

⁶ We note women in the wider Defence sector may be affected by similar challenges to female Service personnel, as highlighted by Baroness Goldie, [Q149](#)

2 Joining the forces - recruitment and representation

Women's representation in the forces

7. Women's formal involvement in the UK's Armed Forces goes back more than 100 years, including the First and Second World Wars.⁷ However, the roles open to women have evolved over time, as have the conditions under which they serve.⁸ On 8 July 2016, the then Prime Minister David Cameron announced the progressive lifting of the exemption on women serving in ground close combat roles⁹ and, since late 2018, women have been able to apply for all roles in the Armed Forces, other than the Gurkhas.¹⁰ There has also been an end to official barriers shortening the length of women's Service—for instance, the bans requiring female Service personnel to resign if pregnant (dropped in 1990)¹¹ and preventing (openly) gay personnel (male and female) from serving (dropped in 2000).¹²

8. On 1 April 2021, there were 149,280 personnel in the UK Regular Forces and 37,410 personnel in the Reserves.¹³ More than 20,000 of these were servicewomen: women made up 11.0% of the UK Regular Forces (16,470 personnel) and 15.1% of the Reserves (5,650 personnel).¹⁴ For both the Regulars and the Reserves, female Service personnel are best represented in the Royal Air Force, where they form 15.1% and 22.6% of all personnel respectively.¹⁵

7 Royal Air Force, [100 Years of Women in the RAF](#) (13 August 2018); Association of WRENS and Women of the Royal Naval Services, [History – Association of Wrens](#) (n.d.), National Army Museum, [A timeline of women in the Army](#) (n.d.). Women's informal involvement in war goes back further.

8 From the 1990s, after the end of single-sex corps, women could join most cap-badges of the Forces, other than ground close combat roles. For a brief history, see Dr Beverly Bergman ([WAF0016](#)) paras 2(b), 2(c) and Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#)) para 2.

9 Ground close combat roles previously closed to women were the Royal Marines General Service, the Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps, the Infantry and the Royal Air Force Regiment.

10 The standards that recruits must meet to join the Forces are gender-free. Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 October 2020](#) (17 December 2020), p 15.

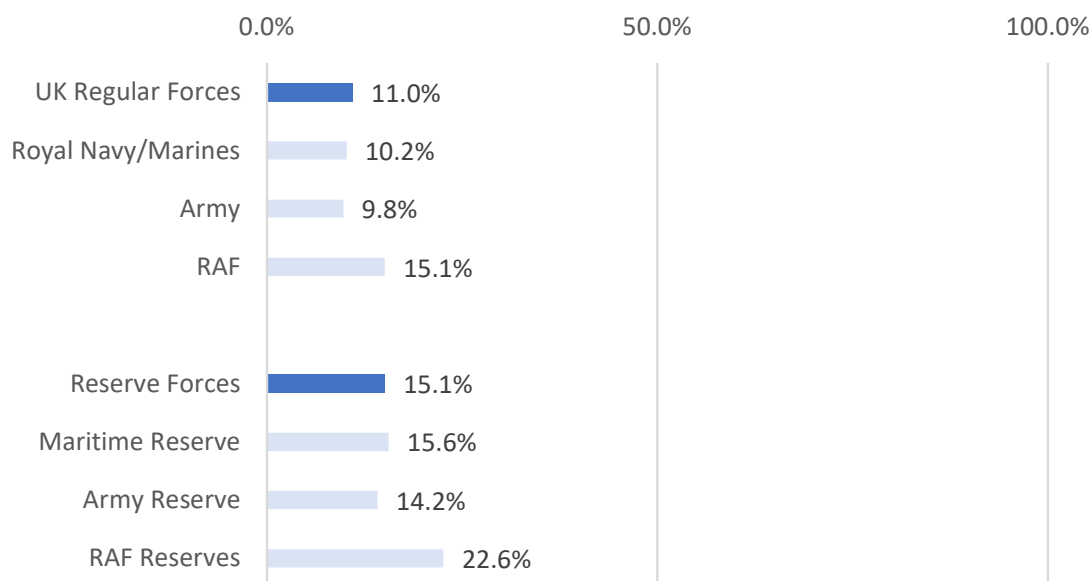
11 Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 October 2020](#) (17 December 2020), p 13.

12 BBC News, [Services gay ban lifted](#) (12 January 2000)

13 Excludes the Gurkhas and Other Personnel. Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics 1 April 2021](#) (27 May 2021).

14 Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2021](#) (10 June 2021)

15 This is also the Service where more roles have been open for longer. In 2014, women were able to apply for 78.1% of roles in the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, 70.6% in the Army and 93.7% in the RAF. Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 October 2020](#) (17 December 2020), p 3.

Share of female personnel in the Armed Forces, April 2021

Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2021](#) (10 June 2021)

9. Although the Ministry of Defence believes the Armed Forces have “changed enormously” in the last three decades,¹⁶ it has committed to ensuring the Defence sector “appropriately represents” society, by gender and by other characteristics.¹⁷ By 2030, the MOD wishes to see “significant improvements” in the share of women among recruits and personnel in the Single Services (Regular and Reserves),¹⁸ describing the drive for greater diversity as “mission critical”.¹⁹

10. Since 2000, the share of female Service personnel in the Regular Forces has grown overall and in most years, although at a slow rate. On 1 April 2000, female Service personnel made up 8% of the UK Regular Forces.²⁰ Due to reductions in the size of the Forces in the last decade, a higher proportion of women does not always mean more female Service personnel.²¹ Over the last 20 years, the Forces appear to have become more diverse generally.²²

Barriers to joining

11. The Forces face general recruitment challenges for all new personnel, but contributors to our inquiry identified particular barriers to women’s recruitment. Capita, which runs the recruitment contract for the Army, noted that women within the Main Target Audience

16 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 1

17 Strategic Goal 2 at Ministry of Defence, [A Force for Inclusion: Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018 to 2030](#) (October 2018), p 15.

18 The MOD also aims specifically to achieve improvements in the presence of minority ethnic and LGB personnel.

19 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 13

20 *UK Defence Personnel Statistics*, Briefing [CBP7930](#), House of Commons Library, June 2021, p 9

21 Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)) para 4.1

22 For instance, on 1 April 2000, 1% of personnel identified as belonging to a non-white group; by 1 April 2021, this had risen to 9.2%. It is not possible to know the exact share of LGBT personnel (reporting sexual orientation and gender identity is not mandatory), but the end of the ban on homosexuality and the existence of LGBT staff networks strongly suggests more openly gay and trans personnel are serving today. *UK Defence Personnel Statistics*, Briefing [CBP7930](#), House of Commons Library, June 2021, p 9; [Coming Out As LGBTQ+ In The Armed Forces](#), Forces Net, 18 June 2021

(17–24 years of age) are less open than men to considering a role in the Army (62% of men in this age range are open, compared to 41% of women). It explained that many women have a perception that the Army is a male-dominated organisation where they may find it more difficult to thrive, as well as assuming they must be ‘combat-fit’ from the first day of their application. Capita believes that media reports play a role in compounding the impression that the Army is a harder place for women to thrive.²³ Similarly, Amy Denton, who conducted interviews with Army Officers in 2019, found that most Officers considered that civilians to have a “very inaccurate view of what it takes to be a soldier/officer”, due to inaccurate depictions in films and videogames. Officers believed that this misrepresentation has ‘over-masculinised’ the Army.²⁴

12. The Chief of Defence People, Lieutenant General James Swift, told us that, while between 20% and 25% of applications come from women, only 11.2% of those joining the Regulars are women.²⁵

13. Reflecting on why women’s representation is higher in the RAF, Maria Lyle, the Director of the RAF Families Federation, told us that the Service’s culture may reflect that it is the “youngest of the three Services” and the RAF tends to have more technologically based roles (rather than physical ones), which may be more appealing to women.²⁶ Conversely, Anna Wright, CEO of the Naval Families Federation, told us the length of Naval tours of duty (compared to the Army and RAF) was “absolutely key” in explaining why more women were not in the Navy and why female (and male) personnel did not stay for longer.²⁷

14. Some contributors suggest that there is less overt hostility to female personnel serving than there once was. Small-scale interview research with Army Officers in 2019 indicated that there was “no longer a strong prevalence” of the idea that women are non-combatants.²⁸ Commander Andrew Loring, who served in the Navy Regulars for more than 35 years and is now in the Full Time Reserve Service, said there had been a “huge change in attitude” since 1980, and the presence of women is

not only [seen] as wholly normal by the vast majority of naval personnel, but there is an expectation that the vast majority of formations will include a mix of male and female personnel.²⁹

However, Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen told us that although “on paper” all roles are now open to all, the culture and attitudes in some parts of the military can still mean women experience a “sense of not being welcomed in”.³⁰ She gave the example of initiation ceremonies designed to embarrass women: this problem can be especially acute when a servicewoman is the first into post or is in a male-dominated role, like the Infantry.

23 Capita ([WAF0050](#))

24 Amy Victoria Denton ([WAF0068](#)) para 6(j)

25 James Swift, [Q129](#)

26 Maria Lyle, [Q46](#)

27 Anna Wright, [Q47](#)

28 Amy Victoria Denton ([WAF0068](#)) para 2(a)

29 Andrew Loring ([WAF0017](#))

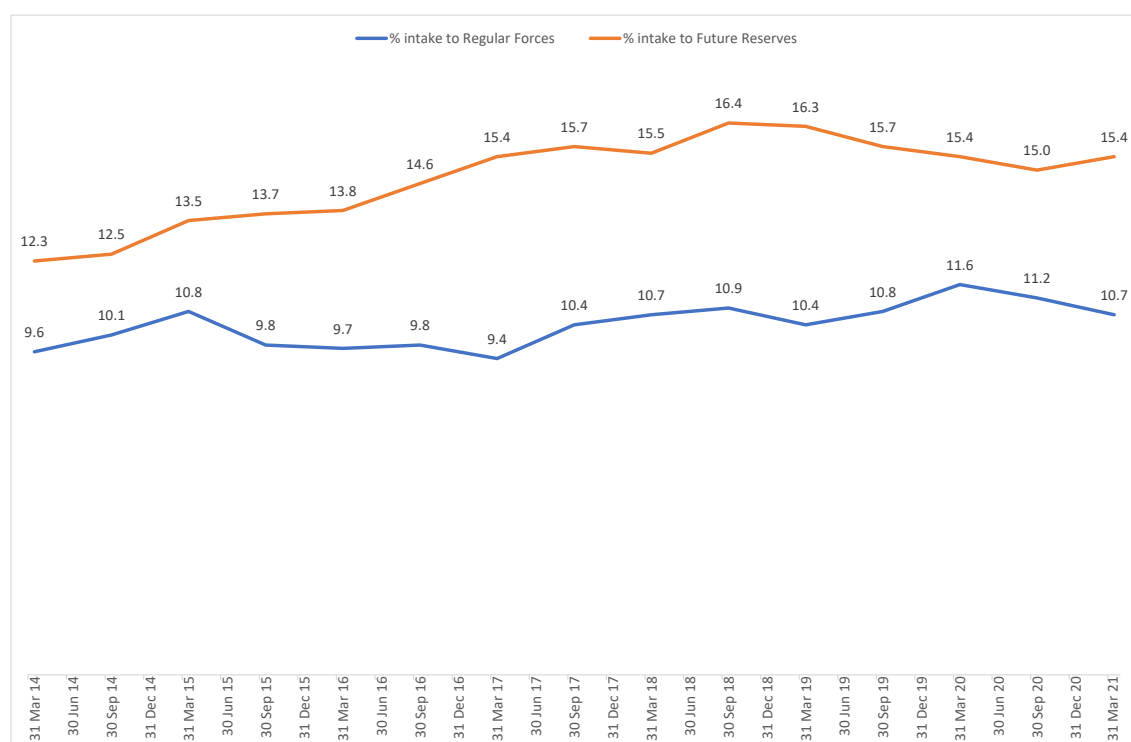
30 Diane Allen, [Q12](#)

Improving women's recruitment

15. There are no fixed quotas to increase the representation of women or other groups in the Armed Forces. The Single Services have non-binding targets ('levels of ambition') for diversity and women's representation.³¹ Additionally, in 2015, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces set the intake target that, by April 2020, women should make up at least 15.0% of all new recruits.³²

16. The recruitment target for women, set in 2015, was missed in April 2020; women formed 12.6% of new recruits (Regulars and Reserves) in the 12 months up to 31 March 2020.³³ The overall percentage of female recruits has further reduced since then, due to reductions in the share of the female intake in the Army and the RAF. As of April 2021, women still make up less than 15% of all new recruits to the Armed Forces (11.8% in the 12 months before 31 March 2021).³⁴ Baroness Goldie, Minister of State at the MOD, told us that, three to five years ago, progress on the female recruitment targets was "glacial",³⁵ but she did not address later failure to meet recruitment targets. The intake over time to the Regular Forces and Future Reserves is given below.

The share of women among recruits to the Regular Forces and to the Reserves, 2014–2020



Source: Tables 7 and 23 in accompanying Excel tables, at Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2021](#) (10 June 2021). Data covers recruits in the 12 months up to the date shown.

31 Samantha des Forges, [Q128](#); James Swift, [Q129](#); Ministry of Defence, [A Force for Inclusion: Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018 to 2030](#) (October 2018), pp 16, 23

32 Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics 1 April 2016](#) (Revised 21 June 2016), p 4

33 Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2020](#) (17 December 2020)

34 Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2021](#) (10 June 2021). Tables 7 and 23 in the accompanying Excel tables show the female intake is stronger in the Reserves (15.4%) than the UK Regular Forces (10.7%). The Forces fulfilled its target (10%) for minority ethnic personnel.

35 Baroness Goldie, [Q126](#)

17. The Single Services have pursued some specific initiatives to improve women's recruitment:

- The Army has redesigned the 'Army Fit App' to make it "appeal more equitably to men and women" and have more specific support for female fitness, according to Capita (the company running Army recruitment). Its marketing and "personalised career discussions" cover more than 100 Army roles.³⁶ Female soldiers are visible during the Army recruitment process, including via digital events, podcasts and social media. Capita added that candidates can speak directly with serving soldiers on its online platform, "choosing a female soldier if they wish". It said that 47% of the users of its online platform in the last 12 months were female and many had asked about 'life in the Army' topics, including hairstyles, family-friendly policy, and periods.³⁷
- The Royal Navy has doubled the amount of basic training accommodation for female other ranks.³⁸ It is also moving away from very long deployments in general by using 'double-crewing',³⁹ which the Chief of Defence People hopes will offer Navy personnel greater predictability and a shorter tour length.⁴⁰
- The Royal Air Force improved fitness support during and after pregnancy (see paragraph 101)

It is worth noting that the Army's Full Time Trained Strength will reduce from 76,000 to 72,500 by 2025,⁴¹ so it will recruit fewer people in future.

18. Servicewomen and female veterans gave several reasons in our survey for why they joined the Forces, including career opportunities, adventure, the opportunity to learn a new skill, duty and family tradition. Suggestions for improving the recruitment of other women included: highlighting the full scope of what the military can offer and the wide range of opportunities/trades available, as well as emphasising the high level of investment that the Armed Forces make in the education and training of personnel.

19. Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan, both veterans and academics in Northumbria University, identified factors that influence decisions to join the military, including role models and connections to the Forces via friends and family.⁴² They called it "imperative" to include female role models in recruitment strategies, believing they would inspire new recruits and offer:

an honest and realistic source of information so that informed choices can be made. [...] Modern exciting TV and internet adverts [...] offer a glimpse into the lifestyle of someone in the military, but not necessarily the reality of serving⁴³

36 Capita ([WAF0050](#))

37 Capita ([WAF0050](#))

38 This was previously an "artificial block" on female recruits in the other ranks. James Swift, [Q129](#)

39 This involves crew rotations while a ship is at sea, allowing sailors to go away for a set period of time (say, three months) then have a guaranteed period at home. Tobias Ellwood, [Q53](#); Anna Wright, [Q53](#)

40 James Swift, [Q129](#)

41 Ministry of Defence, [Defence in a competitive age: CP411](#) (March 2021), p 53

42 Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#))

43 Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)) para 4.6

The MOD has said it appreciates the impact role models can have on more diverse recruitment, including the female intake.⁴⁴

20. The Forces' fitness tests are gender-free, but differentiated depending on the role. The Chief of Defence People, Lieutenant General James Swift, told us that to overcome the higher rate of injury (including muscular-skeletal injury) among female recruits in basic training, the Forces have recruited physical training instructors who are "better informed about the physiology of the women".⁴⁵ He also said that the weight-carrying exercises in training have been adapted for all personnel (male and female), to avoid unnecessary muscular-skeletal injury.⁴⁶ The timeline and extent of the changes is not clear.

21. Contributors did not agree as to whether the tests should change to take into gender directly into account. Professor Anthony King, Chair of War Studies at Warwick University, argued that male and female soldiers must continue to meet the same standards in training and exercises, to ensure that women are seen as equals. He rejected the idea that physical standards have become less important in ground close combat roles, citing heavier body armour and advanced equipment in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁴⁷ A majority (79%) of female Service personnel and veterans who responded to our survey felt the current performance tests are appropriate for female personnel. In comments, some respondents were divided on tests and whether they should consider physiological differences and gender-specific conditions like pregnancy and the menopause. Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen made the case to us for adapted training regimes by gender, comparing military recruits to elite athletes.⁴⁸ Her evidence warned that training programmes designed for men had led to "greater risk of injury and reduced performance" among women.⁴⁹

22. In the Integrated Review, published in March 2021 the Government discussed how the roles of the Armed Forces will change in future: the Forces will be "more persistently engaged worldwide through forward deployment, training, capacity-building and education".⁵⁰ They will also embrace the domains of cyberspace and space and build up high-tech capabilities in other domains.⁵¹ Some confidential submissions suggested that more technical roles in future may offer more opportunities for women.

23. Baroness Goldie said "we are not yet where we need to be" on female representation, but thought the MOD's current initiatives, policies and programmes would boost the presence of female Service personnel.⁵² Samantha des Forges, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the MOD, predicted "transformational changes" in 6–12 months' time.⁵³ The MOD did not directly address the suggestion that attitudes in some parts of the Forces

44 Ministry of Defence, [A Force for Inclusion: Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018 to 2030](#) (October 2018), p 22; Baroness Goldie, [Q125](#)

45 James Swift, [Q129](#)

46 James Swift, [Qq 129, 154](#)

47 Professor Anthony King ([WAF0066](#))

48 Diane Allen, [Q12](#)

49 Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)). See also Dr Bergman ([WAF0016](#)) para 2(c), who describes "an 'injury epidemic' of musculoskeletal injuries" for women loaders in the Royal Artillery from the 1990s.

50 UK Government, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#) (16 March 2021)

51 UK Government, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#) (16 March 2021)

52 Baroness Goldie, [Qq 125–126](#)

53 Samantha des Forges, [Q128](#)

may be putting women off from applying. However, during Summer 2021, it plans to release details of its “strengthened policy” on “zero tolerance of initiation ceremonies”, thereby acknowledging there is an issue.⁵⁴

24. The UK Armed Forces have become more diverse in recent decades. We do not doubt the tremendous opportunities that serving offers. Nonetheless, barriers still affect female recruitment, including an impression that it is harder for women to thrive there. The MOD and Single Services have already taken some welcome steps, including on training. While we accept change takes time, it worries us that the female intake target of 15% was missed in 2020 and the share of women among recruits has reduced in the year since then. In our view, change remains “glacial” and the impacts of the MOD’s latest initiatives are not being felt yet. The Single Services and MOD must increase their levels of ambition. In addition, we recommend further work to improve women’s in-Service experiences (see chapters 3 and 4), including stamping out unacceptable behaviours in some parts of the Forces. We believe improving servicewomen’s experiences after joining will positively affect recruitment.

25. *Recruitment strategies should adequately reflect the wide range of roles, trades and skills needed in the Forces of today and tomorrow, including those to arise from the Integrated Review. These strategies must challenge misperceptions, as well as flagging different entry routes and the wider Service ‘offer’ (such as education and training, Flexible Service and family support). Female role models from the military must be sufficiently involved in outreach for all Services, building on positive initiatives at single Service level.*

26. *Without compromising physical standards for ground close combat roles, the Department must ensure that fitness tests across all Services have due regard for temporary or arbitrary factors that can hinder performance, including hormonal changes linked to pregnancy and menopause and ill-fitting kit (see chapter 3).*

3 Thriving and progressing in the Forces

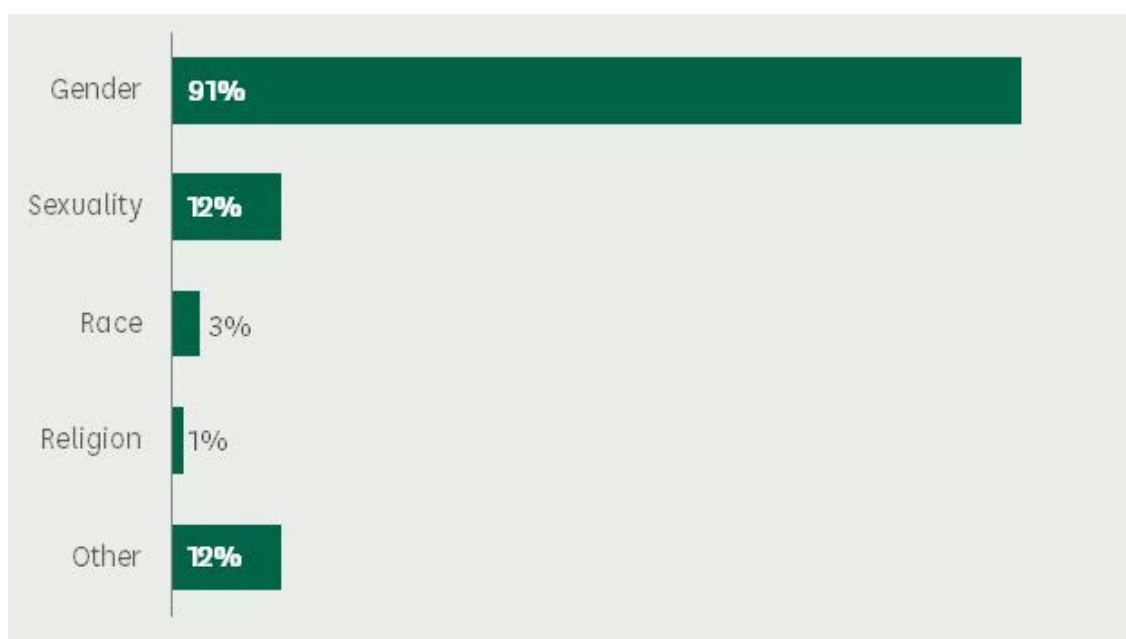
Since I joined the army homosexuality has been decriminalised, women who previously had been discharged for pregnancy were recognised as having been wronged, [...] and women are now allowed on the front line. This has turned centuries of tradition on its head and the ripple effects are still there [...] Things are changing at the policy level, but it still is not the norm in units.

—Female veteran survey respondent, who left the Forces in 2018

Biases and change within the Forces

27. A total of 4,106 female Service personnel and female veterans responded to our survey. Over half (2,157, ~53%) said that they had personally been treated differently to other Armed Forces personnel. This was overwhelmingly because of their gender (see chart below).

Reasons given by those who reported experiencing different treatment to other armed forces personnel (multiple answers possible)



Base: 2,128 of the respondents who said they had experienced different treatment and provided the reason[s] why. Not all who experienced different treatment provided the reason why.

28. Nearly 62% (2,527 respondents) said they had experienced some form of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination while serving (discussed in paragraph 38). 3450 (~84%) reported that female personnel face additional challenges in the Forces.⁵⁵ Yet, despite this, most respondents (3457, ~84%) said their *overall* experience of working in the Armed Forces was good or very good. Nearly 9 out of 10 (3,607) would recommend a career in the Forces to other women.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ There were no large differences in the responses of veterans and serving personnel.

⁵⁶ Some servicewomen spoke about how much they loved their experiences, for instance Cdr Suzy Conway ([WAF0032](#)); Anna Wright, [Q44](#); Maria Lyle, [Q45](#)

29. The MOD,⁵⁷ NGOs,⁵⁸ and Service personnel and veterans⁵⁹ praised gradual cultural changes in the Forces, particularly in the last few years. However, the vast majority of contributors also believe there are still unique and additional challenges affecting military women. Contributors raised general concerns about how inclusive the culture is,⁶⁰ identified specific biases that they believed affect women's experiences of serving,⁶¹ and/or argued that change had not been sufficient or fast enough.⁶² One servicewoman told us "as a woman you have to put up with a lot [...] you learn just to ignore it".⁶³ Contributors highlighted the cumulative effect of biases and experiences for an individual's sense of belonging,⁶⁴ with one servicewoman describing simply being "worn down".

30. Professor Anthony King, Chair of War Studies at Warwick University, wrote in April 2020 that women in the military are expected to be 'honorary blokes'.⁶⁵ Dr Sophy Antrobus and Hannah West, academics and veterans, recounted experiences that did not seem strange to them when serving, but which looked 'Deeply Odd' afterwards.⁶⁶ Christina Dodds, a veteran and academic at Northumbria University, said it was only after leaving the Forces that she understood how she had sometimes been "part of the problem".⁶⁷ The MOD's Lived Experience research in 2019 called for a "genuinely inclusive environment" rather than simply expecting personnel to "fit in".⁶⁸

31. The MOD and military leaders accept that aspects of culture in the Armed Forces can exclude or put off women. In July 2020, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter judged that there is still a "laddish" culture.⁶⁹ Johnny Mercer, former Minister for Defence People and Veterans, told us some servicewomen and LGBT personnel "want to get away from it as fast as they can".⁷⁰ The MOD believes there is a "long way to go" before the organisation is "truly diverse and inclusive".⁷¹ The MOD's commissioned 'Lived

57 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) paras 2, 14, 19.

58 Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)); RAF Families Federation ([WAF0038](#)); Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 2.5.1

59 In confidential evidence and open-text comments of our survey, female Service personnel and veterans praised the lifting of institutional barriers. Many felt that women are more accepted today, and that there is less tolerance of sexism or sexual harassment. See also Dr Beverly Bergman ([WAF0016](#)); Commander Andrew Loring ([WAF0017](#)); Diane Allen, [Q4](#).

60 For example, Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)); Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#)); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4(h); Agora ([WAF0059](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0076](#)); Dr Sophy Antrobus and Hannah West ([WAF0061](#)); confidential evidence submissions.

61 Published examples: Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0024](#)); Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#)); Justine Montgomery ([WAF0048](#)); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0052](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0054](#)); Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)); Professor Anthony King ([WAF0066](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0076](#)). In particular, the written evidence of Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)) groups together several examples from the 163 (mostly Army) servicewomen and female veterans who contacted her. The 'Anti-belonging' theme is most relevant.

62 Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)); Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)) para 2.3. In the latter, Christina Dodds, an Army veteran and academic, identified "significant similarities" between generations of female veterans, based on research with female veterans who served in World War II, Northern Ireland, Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan.

63 Anonymous ([WAF0052](#))

64 For example, Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#)); Elaine Dobson ([WAF0001](#)) para 17; Maria Lyle, [Q65](#)

65 [The Best Defense? How About More Women In The Military?](#), Forbes, 30 April 2020

66 Dr Sophy Antrobus and Hannah West ([WAF0061](#))

67 Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)) para 5.7.

68 MOD, [Lived Experience Summary](#) (April 2019), p 4.

69 Nick Carter, [Q75](#)

70 Johnny Mercer, [Q25](#)

71 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 1

experience’ research found that a “white male prototype, often characterised by alpha male traits” is seen as pervasive and can undermine inclusion for women, minority ethnic personnel and white men who do not conform to this norm.⁷²

32. The MOD noted there is evidence that being female and from a minority ethnic background can lead to more negative experiences of serving.⁷³ Many organisations warned of a gap in data and evidence on the situation of female minority ethnic personnel specifically, believing that they can face particular forms of discrimination.⁷⁴ There is also limited data on LGBT servicewomen.⁷⁵

33. The MOD agreed a strategy for Diversity and Inclusion in 2018, which makes commitments to improve the experiences of Defence People.⁷⁶ A new Directorate for Diversity and Inclusion was also created in 2019–2020,⁷⁷ with “significant investment”⁷⁸ in summer 2020. Since 2019, there appear to be more servicewomen joining the Forces each year than there are leaving (the reverse was true from 2012 to 2019).⁷⁹

34. **Within the military culture of the Armed Forces and the MOD, it is still a man’s world. Although many servicewomen are able to cope with this, we do not think they should have to. If the MOD is serious about making the Forces more representative of UK society, it needs to be proactive in making more space for under-represented groups, including servicewomen, and reforming the prevailing culture. The investment that it made to its Diversity and Inclusion team may help, although it is too soon to assess whether this is having the desired effects.**

35. The rest of Chapter 3 considers examples of unique/additional challenges affecting female Service personnel. This is an overview of points most commonly raised by contributors.⁸⁰ Due to the scope and volume of evidence we received on how the MOD and Single Services handle ‘unacceptable behaviours’ affecting servicewomen, Chapter 4 considers the systems in place to respond *after* unacceptable behaviours—including criminal offences—have occurred.

72 MOD, [Lived Experience Summary](#) (April 2019), p 1. This is also mentioned in Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) paras 4, 9.

73 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 9.

74 For example, Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#)); RAF Families Federation ([WAF0038](#)); Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)). The last of these also notes that the “in-service experiences of women of colour from Commonwealth backgrounds may be different to those of UK-born BAME female personnel”.

75 Due to low rates of sexual orientation declaration by personnel and limited gender identity data.

76 Ministry of Defence, [A Force for Inclusion: Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018 to 2030](#) (October 2018), pp 15–17. Relevant objectives under this goal are engaging and valuing Defence People, understanding the diversity of people (via personal diversity data) and eliminating Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination. Indicative (non-exhaustive) commitments are to i) reduce gaps in appraisal scores between groups, ii) ensure 95% of staff to have done updated mandatory Diversity and Inclusion training, iii) reduce the number of Service Complaints, employment tribunals and grievances upheld against the MOD that relate to discrimination, iv) use Equality Analysis in decisions.

77 Exact date unknown. The Directorate was established after the Wigston review (July 2019) and by the time of the progress review (December 2020).

78 Samantha des Forges, [Q147](#). 19 posts were added. Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 14

79 Figure 7, Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2021](#) (10 June 2021)

80 Other aspects that servicewomen found exclusive (not considered due to space constraints) include gender-specific language and unclear Mess etiquette for servicewomen.

'Unacceptable behaviours' in the Forces

The prevalence and types of behaviours

36. In 2019, unacceptable behaviours⁸¹ in the Armed Forces were found to be at an “unacceptable level”.⁸² This “spectrum” of behaviours encompasses

conduct that is unlawful to that which is inconsistent with Defence core values. It includes all criminal and disciplinary behaviour, for example sexual and violent offences, as well as bullying, harassment, discrimination (BHD).⁸³

37. Continuous Attitudes Surveys are one of the most reliable sources of data on the views and experiences of Service personnel.⁸⁴ In the latest Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey (AFCAS) (2021)—weighted to be representative—over one in ten (11%) of trained UK Regular Armed Forces personnel said they had experienced bullying, discrimination or harassment (BHD) in the last 12 months.⁸⁵ This figure is largely unchanged since 2018. The latest available Reserves Continuous Attitudes Survey (RESCAS) (2020) similarly found that one in ten (10%) reservists had been subject to bullying, harassment or discrimination in the last 12 months.⁸⁶

38. As presented earlier, of the 4,106 female Service personnel and veterans who completed our anonymous survey, over half (2,527; 62% of all respondents) said they had experienced some form of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination while serving. Most commonly, individuals said it was based on their gender, but sexuality, race, religion and ‘other’ characteristics also motivated these behaviours in some cases. Considering only respondents who were still serving (1,637), 954 individuals reported experiences of BHD (58%).⁸⁷ Considering all serving and veteran respondents, most (2,222, 54%) also said they had witnessed bullying, harassment or discrimination of other female personnel. It is not possible to distinguish between respondents who had these experiences once versus multiple times, nor is it possible to judge at what stage in their career the incident[s] occurred.

39. Although the victims (and perpetrators) of unacceptable behaviours may be of both genders, the Ministry of Defence and the Service Complaints Ombudsman’s statistical evidence suggests that such behaviours disproportionately affect servicewomen (as well as minority ethnic personnel⁸⁸):

81 Although the MOD used the term ‘inappropriate behaviours’ in 2019, it later updated its terminology to ‘unacceptable behaviours’, to reduce ambiguity in interpretation. Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), pp 7, 8. In this inquiry, we treat these terms as equivalent and make use of the MOD’s latest terminology (‘unacceptable behaviours’).

82 Ministry of Defence, [Report on inappropriate behaviours](#) (July 2019), p 3. This is widely known as the ‘Wigston review’ and is called this in later references.

83 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 4

84 It is difficult to get a “single comprehensive picture” of unacceptable behaviours, and it is necessary to use data from many sources, such as the continuous attitude surveys, Service surveys, the Service Complaints Ombudsman and the Service Justice System. MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), pp 3, 7

85 MOD, [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2021 Main Report](#) (20 May 2021), p 16

86 MOD, [Reserves Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#) (June 2020), p 8. For comparative purposes with RESCAS 2020, 12% of (trained) UK Regular Armed Forces personnel said they experienced bullying, discrimination or harassment (BHD) in the last 12 months in the AFCAS 2020.

87 A higher share of veteran respondents (64%, or 1,573) reported these experiences.

88 Ministry of Defence, [Annex B to AFCAS main report 2020 reference table](#) (May 2020), p 793.

- In 2020, servicewomen in the Regulars and in the Reserves were more likely than servicemen to report experiencing bullying, harassment or discrimination in the last 12 months. In the Regulars, one in five (20%) female respondents reported such experiences, compared to 11% of male respondents.⁸⁹ Among Reservists, the BHD reporting rates were 16% (female) versus 9% (male).⁹⁰
- The 2020 Report of the Service Complaints Ombudsman found that female Service personnel raised 32 BHD Service Complaints for every 10,000 female Service personnel: a rate around four times higher than that for male personnel. These rates have been similar since 2017,⁹¹ demonstrating a lack of change, despite the MOD's initiatives.

40. As well as BHD generally, servicewomen also appear more at risk of experiencing specifically sexualised behaviours:

- In 2021, 11% of female personnel in the Regulars (tri-services) said that they experienced sexual harassment in a Service environment in the last 12 months, as opposed to less than 1% of male personnel.⁹² In other words, servicewomen were more than ten times as likely as servicemen to state they experienced sexual harassment. This is the first time the AFCAS has directly measured sexual harassment.
- The Army's Sexual Harassment survey of 2018 (the latest available data) recorded that 8% of servicemen and 21% servicewomen had either experienced or witnessed sexual harassment at work in the previous 12 months. Servicewomen were more likely to report personally experiencing most types of 'targeted' sexual behaviour,⁹³ including unwelcome comments about their appearance, body or sexual activities (34% of women versus 21% men), being touched in a way that made them uncomfortable (13% versus 3%), being sexually touched without consent (7% versus 3%), sexual assault (2% versus 1%) and rape (1% versus 0%).⁹⁴ The Royal Navy/Marines survey of 2015 (latest available) also indicated Naval servicewomen were more likely to have experienced most types of targeted sexual behaviours.⁹⁵
- For criminal sexual offences, women were a majority (137, or 76%) of the 180 victims within the 161 investigations dealt with wholly by the Service Justice System in 2020.⁹⁶

41. Some evidence suggests that the methodology of the MOD statistics may undercount the actual level of sexual harassment and offending in the Forces.⁹⁷ Lieutenant

89 Ministry of Defence, [Annex B to AFCAS main report 2020 reference table](#) (May 2020), p 798. Sex-disaggregated results on BHD for the AFCAS 2021 are not readily available.

90 Ministry of Defence, [Reserves Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#) (June 2020), p 8

91 Tables 2.5e and Table 2.5f with SCOAF Statistics, Service Complaints Tables 2020, at [Annual Reports - Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces](#)

92 MOD, [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2021 Main Report](#) (20 May 2021), p 16

93 Generalised behaviours relate to the culture and working environment. Targeted behaviours are aimed at, and specific to, an individual. British Army, [Army sexual harassment report 2018](#) (2018), p 3

94 Servicemen were more likely than women to be sent sexually explicit material and as likely to report an attempted sexual assault. British Army, [Army sexual harassment report 2018](#) (2018), pp 22–23

95 Royal Navy and Royal Marines, [Royal Navy and Royal Marines sexual harassment survey 2015](#) (2015), pp 10–12

96 MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

97 Dr Rachel Fenton ([WAF0073](#)); Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) paras 19–21.

Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen said in March 2021 that it was time for the military to have its own #MeToo movement.⁹⁸ Ahmed Al-Nahhas, Partner and Head of Military Claims at Bolt Burdon Kemp, told us the MOD has only accepted the problem of sexual harassment “grudgingly”.⁹⁹

42. There is evidence that targeted sexualised behaviour is more likely to affect personnel in the junior ranks.¹⁰⁰ In relation to male victims of sexual offences, the solicitors Bolt Burdon Kemp noted that

Such cases are less common, in our experience, but no less disturbing.¹⁰¹

43. The Child Rights International Network argued that girls (16- and 17-year-olds) are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault in the military and that the risks for minors generally require “specific consideration”.¹⁰² On 29 March 2021, the Government released data showing that 16 allegations of sexual assault were reported to the Service Police forces by female Armed Forces personnel aged under 18 in the period from 1 January 2015 to 24 February 2021.¹⁰³

44. Many female Service personnel and veterans provided evidence to our inquiry in which they shared accounts of the unacceptable behaviours that they had experienced personally or witnessed.¹⁰⁴ Indirectly, we also heard stories from more than 150 female Service personnel within the combined evidence of Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen, the solicitors Bolt Burdon Kemp, and the campaigning organisations, the Centre for Military Justice and Justice4Troops.¹⁰⁵ We are not able to investigate individual cases. Examples of the stories are given in the box below. These encompass a range of ‘unacceptable behaviours’ that are criminal or otherwise unacceptable. Although perpetrators were mostly male, some were other servicewomen.

98 [Military has its MeToo moment as 4,000 women speak out](#), Times, 4 March 2021

99 Ahmed Al-Nahhas, [Q119](#)

100 British Army, [Army sexual harassment report 2018](#) (2018), p 4

101 Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#)). Relatedly, King’s Centre for Military Health Research ([WAF0049](#)) suggests it is wrong to see partner violence exclusively at an issue affecting women.

102 Child Rights International Network (CRIN) ([WAF0077](#)) paras 2, 4

103 Letter dated 29/03/2021 from Johnny Mercer MP to Carol Monaghan MP regarding the number of allegations of sexual assault reported to the Service Police forces by female Armed Forces personnel aged under 18, 1 Jan 2015 to 24 Feb 2021. [Deposited paper DEP2021-0306](#)

104 Most servicewomen provided stories via confidential evidence or in survey open-text comments. Published examples: Anonymous ([WAF0024](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0052](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0054](#))

105 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)); Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#)) and Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); Justice4Troops ([WAF0078](#)). In Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)), see the ‘Just Plain Wrong’ and ‘Operations and Overseas’ headings in particular.

Box 1: Stories of servicewomen (serving and veterans) of unacceptable behaviours they experienced, shared with our Committee directly and indirectly (non-exhaustive)

- Sexual assault and/or rape, including being drugged. Some contributors had experienced more than one of these offences during their careers
- Rape by multiple individuals (gang rape)
- Assault by senior officers or instructors
- Repeated sexual advances and unwanted attention from seniors
- Bullying, harassment or discrimination undertaken by seniors
- Sexual exploitation of under-18s
- Attempts (sometimes successful) by other personnel to get into their accommodation at night
- The presence of individuals in particular units, openly known to target junior ranks
- Unwelcome attention, especially at social events but also during the working day¹⁰⁶
- Ejaculation into their pocket
- Particular units where sexual harassment of women is openly tolerated
- Bullying for refusing sexual advances
- Witnessing friends being attacked by groups of men but being too afraid to report it
- Sex for promotion or advancement
- ‘Trophies’ or contests to ‘bag the women’ on camp or on ships
- Filming and sharing images, including while in the showers
- Being groped - particularly at functions
- On tour incidents—clothing being stolen, ‘excessive banter’, physical attacks.
- Persistent undermining of performance in front of chain of command
- Inappropriate sexual comments from other personnel, including in professional contexts (for instance, meetings)
- Overt hostility towards, and bullying of, women (often first into post)
- Bullying or downgraded performance assessment if servicewomen made attempts to report unacceptable behaviours
- Senior officers and other personnel witnessing behaviours but failing to intervene (sometimes referred to as the ‘bystander effect’¹⁰⁷) (see chapter 4)

106 Over 95% of the 163 women who contacted Lt Col (Retired) Allen reported this. Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

107 More on the bystander effect is at Elaine Dobson ([WAF0001](#))

- Racist and homophobic bullying
- A sense that sexual harassment is “still rife”¹⁰⁸
- Messes and mess accommodation being viewed as places of danger, with one servicewoman saying that they could be more dangerous for servicewomen than being deployed on overseas operations.

Related experiences

- Harsher punishment for servicewomen who are believed to have engaged in sexual relations, relative to servicemen¹⁰⁹
- Experiences of unwanted sexual comments that occurred over a sustained period then moved from verbal actions to physical assault
- Being expected to accept sexist comments because an individual is ‘old school’ (for example, ‘women should not be in the military’)
- Being encouraged to leave events early and not ‘dress too nicely’ to avoid unwanted attention
- Fears over saying no due to being seen as frigid

45. The MOD and other witnesses highlighted that leaders are crucial in driving forward cultural change in the Armed Forces.¹¹⁰ They also have a welfare function for those they command. However, stories we heard from female Service personnel reported senior individuals engaging in unacceptable behaviour themselves (including criminal sexual offences), failing to challenge these behaviours (for example, watching without commenting or breaching the confidentiality of those seeking advice) or interfering negatively in how a complaint is handled (see also paragraph 126 for individual examples). This type of behaviour is also reflected in many examples submitted by Lt Col (Retired) Diane Allen.¹¹¹ In confidential evidence, we also heard language from some senior leaders in the military that appeared to expect women to put up with unacceptable behaviours, including senior women who had personally experienced these behaviours and expected other servicewomen to be tough enough to handle it.

46. In July 2020, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter, told us the Forces would act to change the “leadership culture” because current forms of reporting (annual assessments) do not have “nearly enough emphasis on the sorts of behaviours that we want to encourage”. He added

108 Over 80% of the 163 women who contacted Lt Col (Retired) Allen reported this. Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

109 For example, Anonymous ([WAF0054](#)) and Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 60. Professor Anthony King argues that there is a problem of double standards in how sexual relations are treated within units. He notes that “if two soldiers are guilty of fraternization, the female is blamed and denigrated. This is unfair [...] both should be held equally accountable. Indeed, where male superiors have fraternized with their female subordinates, they should be deemed more responsible. In addition [...] offensive and derogatory terms are still routinely employed in the armed force to denigrate and exclude women; the abusive terms ‘bitch’ and ‘slut’ are very common.” Professor Anthony King ([WAF0066](#)) para 4

110 Ministry of Defence, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 4; Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4; Baroness Goldie, [Q140](#); Dr Fenton ([WAF0073](#)).

111 Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)). Especially ‘Just Plain Wrong’ and ‘Abuse of Power’ themes.

Too much of the time it is about people being upwardly-looking leaders and not being downwardly-looking leaders. What I am looking for is people being judged on their moral courage and their ability to look after the people that they have the privilege to command and to lead.¹¹²

Others have suggested to us that progression in the military is linked to commanding officers having a low number of complaints in their unit, meaning that they have an incentive to protect their unit's reputation and make complaints 'go away' (see paragraphs 122–127 in chapter 4).¹¹³ In confidential evidence, some Service personnel expressed the view that commitments to diversity and inclusion are rarely taken seriously in decisions over progression and promotion. Some also indicated it is very difficult to move 'toxic individuals' out of the military.

47. Many contributors described the negative health consequences for victims who had experienced bullying, harassment and discrimination (including those who faced sexualised behaviours) (see paragraphs 181–182 for more). Bolt Burdon Kemp were highly critical of how servicewomen it represented had been treated and the loss they represented to the Armed Forces, saying "they are all bright, able, and talented individuals, who chose to serve their country" and the MOD "should be ashamed of how their careers have ended". They also called it a "huge waste of public investment".¹¹⁴ Confidential evidence also discussed the damage to unit morale and operational effectiveness as a result of these behaviours. Research by academics at the University of Derby suggested it could undermine workplace performance.¹¹⁵ The former Service Complaints Ombudsman, Nicola Williams, believed it could have a "corrosive effect" on the wider work environment. She noted

As good as banter can be for building team cohesion and esprit de corps, it is often used as a way to bully people [...] that leads to that toxic environment. So both men and women can suffer from it, but some cohorts can suffer more than others.¹¹⁶

On 15 July 2019, the Ministry of Defence published its landmark Report on 'inappropriate behaviours', led by Air Chief Marshal Wigston. This noted that this behaviour harms the Forces' reputation for "courage, determination and professionalism", and that it "almost certainly has an impact" on "attracting, recruiting and retaining" talent in the Armed Forces.¹¹⁷

48. The Wigston Review highlighted factors that can make unacceptable behaviours more likely:

tight-knit units that perceive themselves as 'elite'; masculine cultures with low gender diversity; rank gradients; age gradients; weak or absent controls, especially after extensive operational periods; and alcohol¹¹⁸

112 Nick Carter, [Q75](#)

113 Diane Allen, [Qq 16, 18, 20](#); Graham House, [Q109](#)

114 Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#))

115 Dr Karin Spenser, Dr Carrie Childs, and Dr Joanna Adhikari ([WAF0042](#))

116 Nicola Williams, [Q69](#)

117 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 3

118 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 3

It added that military culture and a rigid hierarchy makes it harder for bystanders to intervene and for lower ranks to challenge the actions of senior ranks.¹¹⁹ The Centre for Military Justice commented on the overlap between the “work-space” and “life-space” in the military, particularly on deployments. It noted

Factors which are specific to the military, such as lifestyle (high mobility, shared-living accommodation, ritualised drinking of alcohol), culture (attitudes towards women, hyper-masculinity), and structure and policy (gender-typing of military occupations, top-down hierarchical structures) may in part explain the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault in military populations.¹²⁰

49. In our survey, some servicewomen and veterans pointed out that the culture in some individual units and cap badges could be more exclusive than others, and the challenges could be the result of the behaviour of individuals. For example

Within the Royal Navy the amount of sexist attitudes, from Officers mainly, is appalling. I have often felt the boys club mentality is still very much a thing of today. [...] This is to do more so with the individual than the policies which have been put in place.

50. Around 700 women (serving and veterans) provided comments in our survey that related to the male-dominated culture of the Armed Forces. Some called for more to be done to change ‘mess hall culture’ and sexualised behaviours in the working environment and social settings. They advocated more effective education of male and female personnel about what sexual harassment is and how to deal with it effectively (without focusing on women ‘avoiding’ sexual harassment and assault). They also wanted more action to enable all personnel to speak out if they witnessed derogatory treatment. A few stated that more should be done to ensure that women feel safe, including ensuring that rooms can be locked.

51. There is too much bullying, harassment and discrimination—including criminal behaviours like sexual assault and rape—affecting Service personnel (both male and female), and the MOD’s own statistics leave no room for doubt that female Service personnel suffer disproportionately. We were alarmed and appalled that the Army’s Sexual Harassment survey of 2018 found that 21% of servicewomen had either experienced or witnessed sexual harassment at work in the previous 12 months. Such a figure should have raised major concerns in the Army but appears not to have done so. The stories that we heard are truly shocking and they gravely concern us. They are also disappointing given the MOD’s commitment to ending unacceptable behaviours and the rollout of initiatives like bystander training (see paragraph 55). In particular, we are disturbed by repeated examples of senior ranks failing those they command, by not responding appropriately or even engaging in these behaviours themselves. Some of the language we heard from senior leaders also concerned us, as it appeared to imply servicewomen wanting to progress need to learn to put up with these behaviours. Let us be clear: this behaviour is harming the health, careers and operational effectiveness of our Service personnel and has no place in the military. It also damages the reputation of all Service personnel, the majority of whom conduct themselves with integrity and

119 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 13

120 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 18

professionalism. The Forces and the MOD must continue to root out these behaviours and must respond better when they occur. We make specific recommendations on this in both chapters 3 and 4 of this report.

Efforts by the MOD and Single Services to reduce these behaviours

52. In July 2019, the MOD's Report on 'inappropriate behaviours', led by Air Chief Marshal Wigston, made 36 recommendations, aimed at preventing such behaviour within the Armed Forces and dealing with it better when it occurs.¹²¹ The then Secretary of State for Defence said that the MOD accepted all the recommendations, which included the following:

- Conduct a Defence-wide harassment survey in 2021, building on the Army Sexual Harassment Survey 2018, informed by independent advisers
- Increase the resource and priority given to leadership training (to meet the levels of demand) and promote more "connected leadership" via greater use of feedback mechanisms¹²²
- Set up an inappropriate behaviours helpline for all Defence personnel.
- Strengthen training in several ways,¹²³ including developing and implementing bystander training across Defence

In addition, the Review made several recommendations to improve the handling of complaints of bullying, harassment and discrimination, which are discussed in chapter 4 (paragraph 136).

53. In December 2020, the MOD published a progress review led by Non-Executive Director Danuta Gray. This found that overall progress on the Wigston Review's recommendations had been "good", but that delivery had initially been "slower than desired", due to factors such as "complexity, resourcing, the requirement for further discovery work and wide engagement", as well as a temporary pause caused by Covid-19.¹²⁴ The evidence base for the review's conclusions is sometimes not provided or difficult to verify.

54. The progress review made a further 13 recommendations—accepted in full by the Defence Secretary—including:

- Better supporting inexperienced leaders, in particular access to guidance from trained individuals on dealing with more complex cases.
- Making active bystander training mandatory (rather than voluntary)
- Improving internal communications on unacceptable behaviours, including consequences of this behaviour and actions taken in response to complaints
- Embedding targets, commitments and milestones in the Defence Plan, senior leaders' objectives and the objectives of others

121 All recommendations listed in MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), pp 34–35

122 Also Recommendation 13 in MOD, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 27

123 Recommendations 1.11, 1.12, 1.15, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 in MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), pp 34–35

124 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 4

55. The Single Services and MOD have introduced changes since the Wigston Review in 2019 and the progress review in 2020. These include:

- The launch of an independent, whole-force helpline on bullying, harassment and discrimination from 1 September 2020, to offer support and advice to personnel (directly fulfilling a recommendation of the Wigston Review). In the period up to March 2021, it received a small number of calls (287), 77% concerning bullying, 10% around harassment, 2% around sexual harassment and 10% around discrimination.¹²⁵
- Updates to mandatory training for new recruits in the single Services to focus more on diversity and inclusion and/or behavioural change;¹²⁶
- Active bystander training online from July 2020, which has “routinely received positive feedback”.¹²⁷ Originally voluntary, this will now be mandatory across the whole force, as recommended by the progress review. Over 54,000 personnel have completed this¹²⁸ and the Chief of Defence People called it “absolutely leading”.¹²⁹
- Steps to increase the availability of in-depth and regular data on sexual harassment. In addition to adding a new question to the Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey (AFCAS), the RAF and Army have been undertaking in-depth surveys on this over the last year, which are “completing now”,¹³⁰ although it is unclear when results will be made public. In addition, the MOD Head Office will lead a pan-Defence sexual harassment survey in 2023¹³¹—although this is two years later than recommended by the Wigston Review.
- Changes to how BHD service complaints are handled (see paragraph 138)

In addition, there have been governance changes since 2019, specifically the creation of a ‘Directorate of Diversity and Inclusion’ in the Chief of Defence People’s area in the last year, and the appointment of its Director, Samantha des Forges, in February 2021. She explained that this “expanded” directorate brings together the Diversity and Inclusion Team with the unacceptable behaviours team (responsible for the Wigston and Gray reviews), the service complaints and service justice transformation teams and the defence serious crime capability team.¹³²

56. In confidential evidence, some female Service personnel warned that the Armed Forces are not making enough progress in practice in implementing the Wigston Review recommendations. In our survey, most respondents (2,565) believed that more could be done within the military to overcome bullying, harassment and discrimination. As shown in the chart below, female veterans were more negative in their assessments of the military’s efforts so far.

125 Air Vice Marshal Byford, [Q143](#)

126 Detail by Service at MOD, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 10

127 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 12

128 Samantha des Forges, [Q142](#)

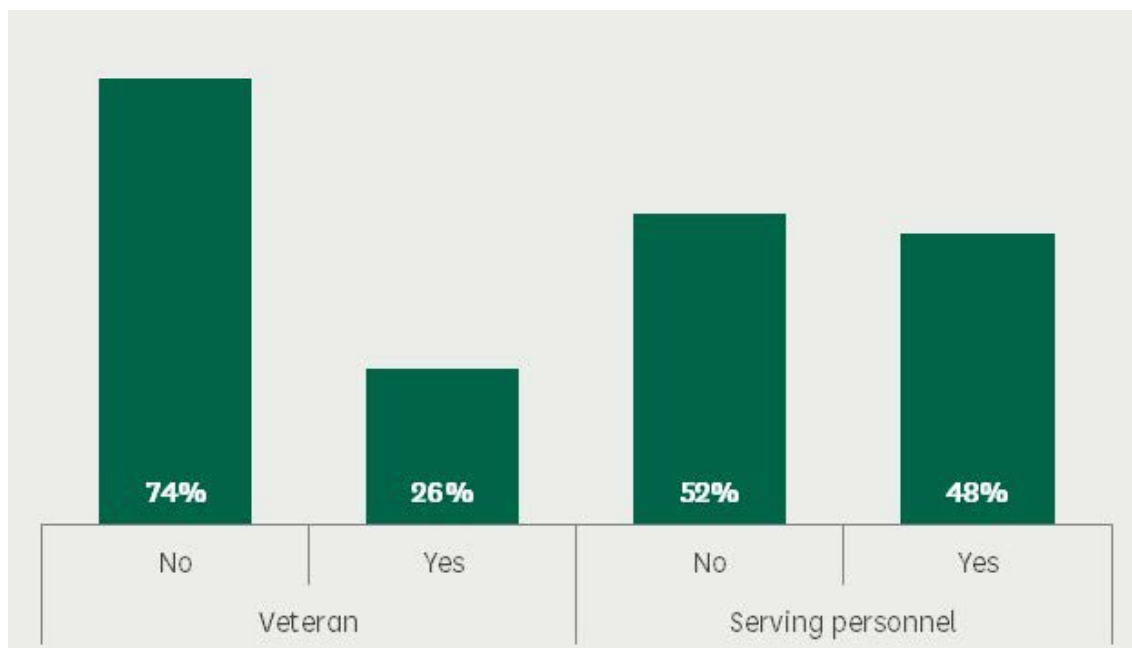
129 James Swift, [Q141](#)

130 James Swift, [Q145](#)

131 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 19

132 Samantha des Forges, [Q148](#)

Chart. Do you feel the military does/did enough to combat bullying, harassment and discrimination?



Source: Our survey of female Service personnel and female veterans. Base numbers: 2,344 for female veterans and 1,610 for serving personnel. 152 respondents, mostly veterans, did not answer this question and are excluded from this chart.

The reasons for the differences in opinion between Service personnel and veterans may reflect change in the Forces' culture over time, the fact that those who leave may be more likely to have had negative experiences, or other factors. Not all female veterans responding left the Forces a long time ago. More than 500 (i.e. more than one in five respondents) exited after 2010.

57. The Forces already have a wide range of training on Service values and culture, including specialised training for leaders.¹³³ Most female Service personnel in our survey believed that they currently receive sufficient training to identify, report and whistleblow with regards to bullying, harassment and/or discrimination.¹³⁴ However, several survey respondents warned that diversity and inclusion training will not achieve the desired results if it is a 'tickbox' exercise and does not focus on behavioural change in how bullying and harassment is handled. In other confidential evidence, female Service personnel thought that bystander training (and the new helpline) were a step in the right direction, but judged them more suited to the civilian context and lacking relatability to the military environment. It was also suggested in confidential evidence that training made little difference to wider fears of whistleblowing. The Wigston Review in July 2019 noted that mandated D&I and values training sometimes focuses on compliance (rather than behavioural change) and Senior Officer courses are not always well-attended.¹³⁵ The progress review added that the Covid-19 pandemic had delayed training delivery at the Defence Leadership Centre.¹³⁶

133 For example, mandated D&I and values training across all Services; extra training on behaviours, ethics, culture and inclusion on command courses; and targeted training for those who have roles such as D&I Advisers. There is active bystander training across the whole force. For more, see James Swift, [Q141](#); MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), pp 13–14.

134 Out of the 1,637 serving personnel who responded, 1,135 (~69%) said they receive sufficient training.

135 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), pp 13–14

136 The progress review singled out particularly D&I Adviser/Practitioner training and the Senior Leaders course. Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 21

58. The MOD's progress review in December 2020 explained that the new bullying, harassment and discrimination helpline is managed by an external provider with "professionally qualified advisers". The review judged that it would offer "expert advice and support which should foster increased confidence in the reporting system".¹³⁷ The review favoured greater promotion of the helpline on the single Services' public channels. Both the RAF Families Federation¹³⁸ and individual Service personnel echoed the need for better advertising to improve use, with one survey respondent stating:

The new initiatives such as the harassment helpline and networks are brilliant initiatives - but no one hears anything further. Perhaps adverts of how many people have used the facility / outcomes which came from using it, more people would think to utilise it.

Some female Service personnel told us in confidential evidence that they would not use the helpline because it seemed more suited to the civilian context. One mentioned a previous experience that had convinced her those staffing the helpline were not adequately specialised to understand the complexity of the military situation she was facing. There was a preference expressed for face-to-face contact when trying to explain complex situations. It was also suggested that personnel value the helpline, but it is not enough on its own to fix behavioural problems.

59. The Wigston Review noted that there was no pan-Defence process for assessing the impact of training on command courses for leaders.¹³⁹ It recommended that Defence "maximise" its use of "immersive values-based training" within leadership courses (recommendation 1.12) and develop a process for measuring the impact of cultures and behaviours training programmes (recommendation 1.14).¹⁴⁰ Dr Fenton, a Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Exeter who has researched bystander training, underlined the need to involve experts properly in the design of training courses.¹⁴¹

60. The MOD said the data it uses to judge whether all its interventions are working are the continuous attitudes surveys (which measure overall reported bullying, harassment and discrimination levels) and the sexual harassment surveys.¹⁴² The Chief of Defence People told us

Discrimination at work since 2018 has reduced from 15% to 11% and over the same period bullying and harassment from 14% to 10%. It is still too high, but it is trending in the right direction and we will continue to drive those further down.¹⁴³

137 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 21

138 RAF Families Federation ([WAF0038](#))

139 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 14

140 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 14

141 Dr Fenton ([WAF0073](#))

142 James Swift, [Q146](#); Baroness Goldie, [Q132](#)

143 James Swift, [Q146](#)

The progress review in 2020 said that the ‘Wigston Implementation Project Board’ had agreed metrics to measure progress within Performance and Risk Reviews. The review judged that these “will ultimately give an indication of the collective effect of interventions”.¹⁴⁴ However, it concluded that Defence still needed “a more sophisticated approach to understanding the effectiveness of programmes” (recommendation 12).¹⁴⁵

61. As discussed in paragraphs 121 and 126, several contributors were deeply critical of how unacceptable behaviours—including criminal offences—are dealt with in the military *after they occur*, and the capacity of the Service Complaints and Service Justice system to handle these cases effectively. Chapter 4 considers the systems in place to respond to unacceptable behaviours.

62. **The work set in motion to reduce unacceptable behaviours by the Wigston Review shows that the MOD acknowledges the problem of unacceptable behaviour. This work is positive.** However, progress is slow, and frequently there is a gap between the raft of policy documents in place and actual practice on the ground. We are not yet seeing the significant progress we need.

63. **We do not underestimate the extraordinary demands and pressures facing military leaders. They operate in a unique environment; training in the Forces is often for combat and is intended to create a fighting force that is able to kill. Nonetheless, this does not excuse unacceptable behaviour. Given the disturbing examples we heard of some leaders failing those under their command, we are concerned that Leaders’ courses are not always well-attended, have been disrupted by the pandemic and do not have a clear process for assessing impact. Command courses already cover behaviours, ethics, culture and inclusion, but this existing training does not seem always to be working. Training for leaders must be mandatory, with key performance indicators to assess its impact.**

64. *Adapt performance assessment systems to give greater reward to ‘downward-looking’ leaders and to prevent the progression of individuals who are found to have engaged in unacceptable behaviours or to have responded inappropriately.*

65. We support the MOD’s efforts to improve the availability of data on sexual harassment specifically, including via AFCAS and an in-depth survey. We note that the tri-service sexual harassment survey will not take place until 2023: two years later than recommended by the Wigston Review. *The 2023 Sexual Harassment Survey must proceed without disruption. Henceforth, the MOD should commit to holding in-depth surveys of this kind every year, to get a handle on whether this specific form of unacceptable behaviour is reducing and whether its initiatives are having the desired effect. It is necessary to involve independent experts in the design of these surveys to reduce the risk of under-counting. The surveys should be designed so as to capture the specific problem of sexual harassment affecting minors (under-18s).*

66. We have general concerns about how well the MOD and Single Services can measure the reach and impact of new initiatives like the anti-bullying helpline and bystander training. *The MoD and the Services must review, on an ongoing basis, the reach, awareness among personnel, and effectiveness of new initiatives to prevent and*

144 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 19

145 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 27

respond to unacceptable behaviours. These include the anti-bullying helpline and all forms of training being rolled out. In addition to BHD prevalence (AFCAS/RESCAS) and the sexual harassment surveys, there should be initiative-specific data and indicators to measure whether these are working. For example, questions could be added to the AFCAS and RESCAS on whether Service personnel have heard of the initiatives, on whether behaviours have changed as a result, and their overall satisfaction with each of them.

67. The MOD must demonstrate that cultural change is a priority by publishing at least every other year an in-depth review of implementation of the Wigston Review recommendations. As the first progress review was published in late 2020, the next review should be released no later than December 2022. For example, we do not believe enough progress has been made yet on Recommendation 2.9.¹⁴⁶

Case studies: other challenges affecting female Service personnel

Uniforms and equipment

68. Within all Services, female personnel frequently have to use uniform and equipment designed for men. Servicewomen reported that they have significant concerns over the suitability of these items, particularly uniforms. In our survey, 1,259 currently serving female personnel disagreed that the uniform is appropriate for their needs: more than three-quarters (77%) of all currently serving female personnel who participated.¹⁴⁷ The level of concern was high within each Service.¹⁴⁸ 977 servicewomen (~60% currently serving survey respondents) expressed concerns over their equipment.

69. Approximately 600 respondents to our survey provided further comments on uniform and equipment. Many noted that these had been designed for men and took this as a sign that the culture did not equally value women. Failure to design body armour and combat equipment for women was also widely reported as a safety issue. One servicewoman commented that while she “absolutely” agreed with gender-free fitness testing for ground close combat roles, this was “fundamentally different” to expecting women or any other personnel to be disadvantaged in combat due to a lack of planning and consideration of their equipment. Further examples are in the box below.

¹⁴⁶ Recommendation 2.9: Communication on behaviours must be consistent and persistent. How we deal with inappropriate behaviour must be transparent, including the appropriate publication of outcomes).

¹⁴⁷ Of interest, currently serving personnel were more likely to report problems with uniform and equipment than veterans. Veterans excluded from headline figures to reflect most current concerns.

¹⁴⁸ In each Service, over three-quarters of serving female personnel who responded.

Box 2: Quotes from female Service personnel about their uniform and equipment

“Feels like the Army can’t even get some of the basics right, female clothing for example [...] I’d be really keen to see the safety data on body armour and vehicle safety and see if the female form was appropriately represented in the design sample sizes.”

“The combat uniform is not designed around the female form and is uncomfortable, poorly fitting and restrictive. Body armour makes no provision for breasts [...] a much larger size has to be worn [...]. This is both less safe (arm holes leave more unprotected space) and impracticable for manoeuvres.”

“Equipment and clothing designed for men, especially combat equipment [...] more thought could be put into designing combat equipment (rucksacks/ webbing / body armour etc) that is a better fit for the female body.”

“Design and provide the correct equipment for female bodies. E.g. smaller body armour plates that aren’t ‘special measure’ and don’t require 6 months to order and deliver when the deployment is short notice [...] Provide PCS [Personal Clothing System] uniform & ballistic shorts etc design for a female physique [...].”

“Respect women firstly by supplying uniform that fits the female form. [...] Also providing white blouses that are not see through. We want to feel proud in the uniform we have to wear, not self-conscious.”

Source: Our survey

70. Concerns raised by servicewomen and others¹⁴⁹ included:

- **Lack of items designed to fit the female form**, for instance smaller body sizes. Examples of ill-fitting items include body armour (particularly plates), ballistic shorts, helmets, PCS [Personal Clothing System] uniform (including combat pyjamas/camouflage uniform), bergens/rucksacks and protective eye gear.
- **Additional costs** for female Service personnel who must buy non-issued kit. Examples of items that personnel had had to buy themselves included barrack shirts, gloves and tactical vests (body armour).
- **Inconvenience, but also increased danger and less combat effectiveness** when some items (such as body armour) are inappropriate. For example, we heard ill-fitting armour plates that do not sit correctly on a woman’s torso can restrict her movement and make it extremely difficult for her to get into a firing position whilst on operational tours. Ill-fitting armour can also leave some parts of a woman’s body unprotected. There were also stories of helmets falling over women’s eyes, so they could not see when firing.
- **Immediate injury risk or other health consequences**, for example, bruising or bleeding caused by ill-fitting armour or personnel intentionally dehydrating themselves due to limited systems for female urination (for instance, limited functionality of flight-suits/protective kit).

149 Diane Allen, [Q34](#); Anonymous ([WAF0052](#)); Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 2.7.1. These problems were also discussed in the survey and many pieces of confidential evidence our Committee has seen from currently serving female personnel.

- **Damaged credibility and distraction from their roles**, due to items fitting less well (looking less smart) or being see-through.

71. Salute Her, the gender-specific veterans' service of the charity Forward Assist, reported that many women it works with reported that ill-fitting body armour "left them vulnerable to serious life threatening injury".¹⁵⁰ The Royal British Legion stated equipment like bergens and webbing—designed for the male form—are normally too long for women "placing extra pressure on the spine and pelvis and causing musco-skeletal injuries".¹⁵¹ It also cited research from the US context on the injury risk for female Service personnel from ill-fitting equipment.¹⁵² Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster also referred to the potentially negative impact of poor-fitting uniform and equipment on women's long term health outcomes.¹⁵³

72. The MOD noted there was "evidence of structural discrimination" affecting women, and provided the example of:

unintended consequences such as cutbacks in resources meaning no uniform specifically designed for women.¹⁵⁴

It also stated that female Service personnel in the Army report an impression that "historically kit, equipment and Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS) have been designed around men".¹⁵⁵ It said that the RAF had introduced a change to its hairstyle regulations to "accommodate the different challenges faced" by minority ethnic personnel and added that:

Like the RAF, the Army continue to develop inclusive dress regulations. Equality Analysis for all policies, infrastructure and equipment will ensure all future developments consider women (and other minorities/protected characteristics).¹⁵⁶

This evidence on the RAF and the Army gives an example of the Single Services' differing dress regulations and standards. The MOD states that Navy servicewomen have higher satisfaction with equipment than servicemen, although does not provide the levels of satisfaction.¹⁵⁷

73. The MOD informed us of ongoing work to update the uniforms and equipment of female Service personnel. For example:

- The RAF is doing work to make crew equipment more appropriate for female personnel, including adapting ejection seat design, in-flight urination systems, breathing system design and protection systems (no timescale given)¹⁵⁸

150 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#))

151 Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 2.7.1

152 For instance, see United States Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, [2018 Annual Report](#) (2019), pp iii-iv, 24–28.

153 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))

154 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4(l)

155 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 7

156 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) paras 12, 19

157 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 5

158 Air Vice Marshal Byford, [Q134](#)

- The Army’s “capability ground manoeuvre team” is considering “female-specific combat requirements” within future procurement of combat clothing and equipment.¹⁵⁹ Its lines of work include combat body armour, ballistic hard armour plates and combat clothing.¹⁶⁰ As part of its procurement of the SA80 A3 (bullpup firearm), the Army will consider the needs of women.¹⁶¹ Baroness Goldie said in April that trials of a female-fit scalable tactical vest would happen in April and May of this year.¹⁶² The “interim solution” for ballistic hard armour plates will be a “smaller Osprey plate”, to be “introduced by the end of 2022” and “used in conjunction with the female fit scalable tactical vest”.¹⁶³ Additionally, it has been reported that female Army recruits will be supplied with specially designed sports bras for the first time.¹⁶⁴
- The Naval Command’s women’s clothing committee (set up in 2017) identified 12 areas of concern: the MOD says 10 have been addressed¹⁶⁵ (no further evidence available).

The Chief of Defence People stated it was “absolutely not” acceptable for ill-fitting items to compromise women’s safety and “we have to catch up”.¹⁶⁶

74. We support the MOD’s recent steps to provide more appropriate uniform and equipment to female Service personnel, including re-designing air crew equipment and trialling better-fitting body armour. However, women have been able to serve in all parts of the military since late 2018, and at least 7 out of 10 roles in each Service have been open for years longer (see paragraph 8). We find it extraordinary that uniforms and equipment are still a problem across all Services. Thousands of female Service personnel, already facing the dangers of military duty, are at greater risk of harm due to basic failures in their uniform and equipment, which can have consequences for their combat effectiveness and health. Fixing these problems is one of the simplest ways that the Forces can demonstrate they value servicewomen.

75. *The Department must continue as a priority to trial and fully roll out safer, more appropriate uniform and equipment for female Service personnel, with a view to reaching all servicewomen (in the Regulars and Reserves) by the end of 2022. The Services should confirm that all the items mentioned in our evidence will be covered by the changes underway. The MOD should also provide a timeline for this change in the response to our report. The trials and roll-out should involve continued consultation with female personnel and relevant Service networks. As far as possible, this procurement should use British manufacturers.*

76. In joint bases, the variations in single service regulations over dress may cause confusion and difficulty. Consider harmonising standards over dress and etiquette when multiple services are co-located, to avoid perceptions of unfairness.

159 Baroness Goldie, [Q133](#)

160 Baroness Goldie, [Q133](#)

161 Baroness Goldie, [Q133](#)

162 We do not have information to judge the progress of the trials.

163 Baroness Goldie, [Q134](#)

164 [Derby sports bras supporting British Army soldiers](#), Derbyshire Telegraph, 17 May 2021

165 Baroness Goldie, [Q133](#). We do not have access to this list.

166 James Swift, [Q136](#)

Health and facilities

Sanitary products

77. Evidence from female Service personnel suggests particular taboos in the military around menstruation and the menopause.¹⁶⁷ Around 4 in 10 female Service personnel (636 individuals) who responded to our survey did not think that facilities are appropriate for their needs. Many respondents noted in survey comments and in confidential evidence that they are often unable to access sanitary products and disposal facilities, on bases, deployment missions and in other settings. They often indicated that having greater access to these facilities could have a very positive impact in making women feel more valued and reducing unnecessary stress in their day-to-day activities. We similarly heard from charities and veterans that servicewomen face substantial difficulties in accessing sanitary products in austere environments and were often forced to rely on socks or bits of paper.¹⁶⁸ Salute Her, a female-specific veterans' service, noted that during exercises and operations

women reported a lack of privacy when carrying out bodily functions, the lack of access to sanitary wear resulted in women having to improvise with spare clothing (socks) which led in some cases to long term kidney damage and urinary tract infections.¹⁶⁹

78. On 4 March 2021, two days after our Committee took oral evidence on this issue, James Heappey MP, the Armed Forces Minister, stated publicly that tampons and sanitary products would now be provided to female personnel deployed abroad.¹⁷⁰ This announcement appeared to have been prompted by our evidence session.¹⁷¹ From Summer 2021, the MOD will offer a box of sanitary supplies in austere environments, on exercise and in Phase 1 training establishments. There will be enough items for around 10 personnel.¹⁷²

79. The Ministry said that the decision to provide products in this way (as opposed to making these products standard-issue) was based on views in a menstruation survey of Defence People. Here, respondents said that they generally preferred to manage their own menstruation, but there was a need for “backup supplies” when products are “not easily accessible”.¹⁷³ Free-text comments of the menstruation survey suggested that the supplies should be provided in toilets and washing facilities (like soap or toilet roll) and that

access should be via medics, medical centres, or a discrete supply to avoid potential embarrassment, such as an emergency box [...]¹⁷⁴

80. The Ministry says that it worked with “colleagues from D&I, Women’s Networks, defence equipment and logistic support” to decide the best form of provision and opted for discreet, small boxes.¹⁷⁵ It will continue to collaborate with the chain of command,

167 For example, Kelly Baker ([WAF0006](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0052](#)). This was also reflected in confidential evidence.

168 Paula Edwards, [Q36](#); Diane Allen, [Qq37–38](#); Maria Lyle, [Q65](#); Dr Bergman ([WAF0016](#))

169 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#))

170 [Female soldiers serving abroad will be given sanitary products](#), Telegraph, 6 March 2021

171 Prior to this, the MOD’s written evidence had said it was “assessing” making available sanitary products for personnel deployed on operations abroad. Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 8

172 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

173 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

174 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

175 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

Women's Networks and logistics supply chain on making boxes available in the "most appropriate manner".¹⁷⁶ It intends to review uptake of the products in June 2022. The Chief of Defence People told us the supplies are on the back of all troop-carrying vehicles on exercises, and all instructors and cadets "know it exists" and "all they need to do is ask for it". He added that

uptake and usage has been really low because most women have provided for their needs themselves, but when it is needed it is there, and they told me that it had made a real difference.¹⁷⁷

81. We thank the MoD for its decision to offer back-up sanitary products to female Service personnel in austere environments, on exercise and in Phase 1 training establishments, although we wonder what part media coverage of our evidence session played in the timing of the announcement. Given the 'taboo' around menstruation, some servicewomen, particularly in junior ranks, may be too embarrassed to request the supplies from a (often male) senior officer. *We encourage the MOD to continue its work with the chain of command, Women's Networks and the supply chain to provide sanitary products in all austere environments, exercises and training establishments, taking clear steps to ensure these are genuinely accessible to all who need them. There should be an alternative point of contact to access these, outside of the chain of command. Awareness of the effect of menstruation on servicewomen should be part of leadership training.*

Menopause, pregnancy and other health issues

82. Generally, some servicewomen voiced concerns in written evidence and our survey that the Armed Forces does not adequately consider gender-specific health issues affecting women, for instance biological changes linked to pregnancy and the menopause.¹⁷⁸ We heard that it can be very difficult to find a military GP who understands women's health, and that this can affect servicewomen's career choices over where to take a posting.¹⁷⁹ It has also been suggested that male trainers are not always able to advise women on hygiene in the field and may become embarrassed. There is evidence of some gender differences in the health effects of serving—for instance, men and women may have different health responses to trauma and combat exposure.¹⁸⁰ Some contributors suggested that further research is needed into these differences.¹⁸¹

83. Some contributors identified menopause as a discrete area that needs to be better catered for in the military.¹⁸² It was suggested that the Defence Medical Services do not appear to have defined policies on peri-menopause/menopause, for instance the permissible 'supplements' that Service personnel can take to relieve symptoms, as well as the impact of symptoms on an individual's Medical Deployment Standards. Specific

176 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

177 James Swift, [Q137](#)

178 Kelly Baker ([WAF0006](#)). This was also noted by servicewomen in confidential evidence.

179 A related example is a situation in which a servicewoman felt that gender stereotypes influenced the delivery of care she received. See Justine Montgomery ([WAF0048](#)).

180 King's Centre for Military Health Research ([WAF0049](#)); Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 2.7.2

181 King's Centre for Military Health Research ([WAF0049](#)); Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 8.3

182 Kelly Baker ([WAF0006](#)). This was also noted by servicewomen in confidential evidence.

policies that it was suggested do not sufficiently consider menopause are JSP 560 and JSP 950.¹⁸³ The co-lead of the MOD's menopause network believed more work was needed to ensure the Forces adequately consider menopause, noting:

- uniform can be over-hot/bulky during hot flushes
- CBD oil (which can be used to treat menopause systems) could lead individuals to fail drug tests
- osteoporosis triggered by menopause can lead women to fail fitness tests and result in dismissal (rather than being transferred to desk jobs)
- serious brain fog/anxiety may reduce ability to use a firearm¹⁸⁴

84. Others told us the Navy is considering its policies on menopause and the Army has done work in its Andover headquarters proactively to highlight support that exists for menopause.¹⁸⁵ The MOD Director of Diversity and Inclusion said work is ongoing to improve GP services' understanding of menopause.¹⁸⁶

85. As mentioned in paragraph 101, there are initiatives in the RAF to provide support in ante-natal and post-natal fitness for new mothers.¹⁸⁷ The RAF Families Federation told us this is not available in all UK units, but "quite a large number" of Physical Training Instructors took up this training.¹⁸⁸ The Royal Navy has also launched a (Pre/Peri Natal) mental Fitness programme.¹⁸⁹

86. The MOD is updating its women's health policy in 2021.¹⁹⁰ This will aim to "develop policies to better support women in the service", specifically considering "menopause, breastfeeding, access to sanitary provisions, assisted conception services and post-pregnancy rehabilitation".¹⁹¹ The Chief of Defence People said he expects findings of the review later this year.¹⁹²

87. We support the work being undertaken to give better consideration of female-specific health needs within Defence health policies, recognising that the evidence base is still growing in some areas. We especially applaud the work of the RAF and Royal Navy to provide more specialised support on ante-natal and post-natal fitness. *The MOD should continue this positive work, particularly when it comes to menopause (which may be less well catered to), and report to us annually on actions taken. The MOD should also consider the accessibility and training of military GPs, to ensure that female Service personnel can access doctors with the right knowledge and understanding to deal with a range of female health needs, regardless of the base location. This will support all Service personnel to access appropriate healthcare.*

183 MOD, [JSP 950 Medical Policy Leaflet 6–7–7: Joint Service Manual of Medical Fitness](#) (September 2018). JSP 560 is not published.

184 Kelly Baker ([WAF0006](#))

185 Anna Wright, [Q65](#); Maria Lyle, [Q65](#)

186 Samantha des Forges, [Q138](#)

187 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 23; Maria Lyle, [Qq62–63](#)

188 Maria Lyle, [Q63](#)

189 Ministry of Defence, [Living in our shoes understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families: government response](#) (29 March 2021), response to recommendation 77. Similar initiatives may be in place in the Army but we have not received evidence of these.

190 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 8

191 Baroness Goldie, [Q137](#)

192 James Swift, [Q139](#)

Supporting those with family responsibilities

88. Service life is demanding and often involves working long hours, away from home and frequently changing post or location. The latest Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) found the top factor influencing decisions to leave the Services (for all personnel) was (still) the impact on family and personal life.¹⁹³ This was also the most common reason why female veterans reported in our survey that they had left (see paragraph 196), with one saying servicewomen with a family are “regularly made to feel that they are a burden”.

89. The MOD’s ‘Lived experience’ research judges that women, often the primary caregivers, make the greatest career sacrifices to achieve a work-life balance,¹⁹⁴ including leaving the Armed Forces altogether. The ‘Living in our Shoes’ review team, led by Andrew Selous MP, found that decisions over whether to stay in the military were “often influenced by the availability, accessibility and the affordability of appropriate childcare”. It added that for Serving mothers without extended family members nearby to support with childcare, “the lack of wrap-around childcare” acted “as a barrier to sustaining a military career”.¹⁹⁵ In particular, Reservists with family responsibilities—who have greater flexibility of service—can face additional problems with accessing childcare (due to weekend/evening training) and maternity support (due to being provided on base).¹⁹⁶

90. The ‘Living in our Shoes’ report concluded that it is particularly difficult for single Serving mothers, and those in dual-serving households to balance military life with family life.¹⁹⁷ 56% of married servicewomen are in a service couple, compared to 5% of married servicemen¹⁹⁸ and it is most often the woman in a dual-serving couple who gives up her military career to support a family.¹⁹⁹

91. One in five female Service personnel who responded to our survey told us they had refused a posting due to consequences for their family.²⁰⁰ Their experiences often reflect limited consultation about important career decisions, with some feeling pressured to deploy against their wishes and others missing out on these opportunities because it was assumed that they would not want to, due to actual or potential family commitments.

92. The Ministry of Defence must put in place a clear Tri-Service policy on foreign deployment for personnel with pre-school aged children, to give serving parents (male and female) more say over their career paths when they have young children and provide them with flexible working options, whilst not disadvantaging their prospects for promotion. There should be an emphasis on easing the situation of dual-serving couples.

193 Ministry of Defence, [Armed forces continuous attitude survey: 2021](#) (20 May 2021), p 13

194 MOD, [Defence Inclusivity Phase 2: The Lived Experience Final Summary Report](#) (April 2019), pp 2–3

195 ‘Living in our Shoes’ review team ([WAF0041](#))

196 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) paras 24–25

197 ‘Living in our Shoes’ review team ([WAF0041](#))

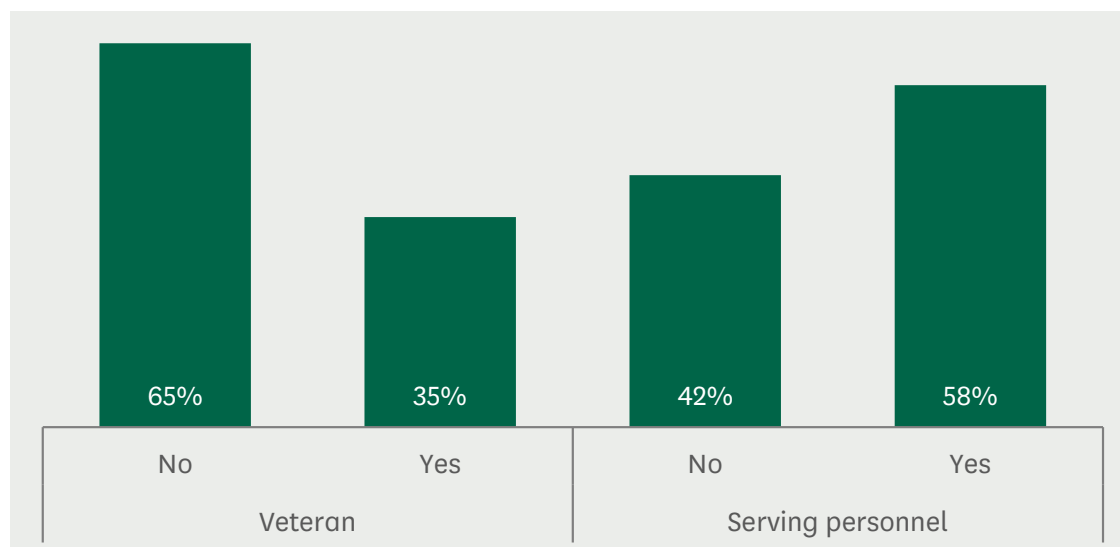
198 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4(c)

199 ‘Living in our Shoes’ review team ([WAF0041](#))

200 329 respondents, out of 1,637 currently serving female personnel who participated.

93. There was a strong impression in our survey that flexibility at work is already improving (see chart below).

Do/did you have the flexibility at work [in the military] to ensure a balanced family and working life?



Base number: 2,407 veterans and 1,624 Service personnel (75 non-respondents not included in this figure). Veterans commented on their experiences while serving.

94. AFCAS 2021 highlighted that changes to working arrangements linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, including an “increase in personnel working from home”, may have affected “attitudes to working flexibly and work/life balance”.²⁰¹

95. The MoD’s wraparound childcare pilot scheme started in September 2020 and funds up to 20 hours per week of free before- and after-school childcare for 4 to 11-year-old children of Service personnel assigned to RAF High Wycombe, RAF Halton, Catterick Garrison and Plymouth Naval area.²⁰² In March, the MOD also announced £1.4 billion over the next decade for wraparound childcare.²⁰³ Maria Lyle from the RAF Families Federation said the wraparound childcare pilot is “really welcome” and that more than 250 families had taken it up. However, she added that “it is a pilot and we need to see more of it”.²⁰⁴

96. *The Ministry of Defence should roll out the wraparound childcare scheme to all bases and to all Services by the end of 2022, following the pilots. In the roll-out, the MOD should work closely with the Department for Education and equivalent in the Devolved Nations, and local authorities.*

97. Flexible Service was introduced in February 2018 and allows some military personnel to serve part-time for defined periods or restrict the amount of time they spend away from

201 Ministry of Defence, [Armed forces continuous attitude survey: 2021](#) (20 May 2021), p 14

202 Ministry of Defence, [Free ‘wraparound’ childcare for the armed forces](#) (7 July 2020)

203 Ministry of Defence, [Defence in a competitive age](#) (March 2021), p 36

204 Maria Lyle, [Q51](#)

their home base and their families.²⁰⁵ As part of the Armed Forces Bill, Flexible Service will be extended to Reservists.²⁰⁶ James Swift, Chief of Defence People said that over the last two years, 309 service personnel have taken up flexible service;²⁰⁷

it is not a huge number, but nor am I aware of evidence that people are being denied this and being frustrated by being denied it. The important thing is to make this available²⁰⁸

98. The MOD told us the RAF has so far been most successful in driving the uptake in Flexible Working Arrangements. However, women are overall ten times more likely than men to take Flexible Service.²⁰⁹ In confidential evidence, some servicewomen suggested it can be very hard to have flexible working approved, even if personnel try and get it.

99. *The Ministry of Defence should undertake a targeted and measurable initiative to improve the uptake and use of Flexible Service, including by men, and report its progress to us by the end of 2022.*

100. *The costs and benefits of home working should be assessed, with a view to introducing home working options wherever possible.*

101. The RAF and the Navy have introduced parental support programmes to provide guidance to women during maternity and graduated return to work schemes. The RAF now funds pre- and post-natal fitness training and has won a best practice award from the Working Families charity.²¹⁰ RAF charities have also done work to build and manage childcare facilities.²¹¹

102. The MOD told us the Army has “begun to consider the implications” of the Integrated Review’s commitment to more deployments worldwide, but has “currently made no assessment of the impact of longer and more frequent deployments on the retention on servicewomen”.²¹² The Naval Families Federation has expressed concern that RN personnel already spend a disproportionate amount of time away from home, compared to the other two Services and that this has impacted on retention and career progression for women.²¹³ The Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018–2030 committed to “rigorous equality analysis” for Defence decisions that affect people.²¹⁴

103. *The Ministry of Defence should carry out the promised equality analysis of longer or more frequent deployments, as set out in the Integrated Review, and publish these by March 2022, a year after publication of the Review. This should consider opportunities as well as risks.*

205 Ministry of Defence, [Flexible Service in the armed forces](#) (28 January 2021). Part-time means reducing work routines by 20% or 40% equating to one or two days in a five-day working week and restricting time away from base means no more than 35 days a year.

206 Ministry of Defence, [Armed Forces Bill 2021](#) (12 February 2021)

207 James Swift, [Q130](#)

208 James Swift, [Q131](#)

209 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) paras 4, 21

210 Maria Lyle, [Qq62–63](#)

211 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 23

212 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

213 Anna Wright, [Q47](#); RAF Families Federation ([WAF0038](#))

214 Ministry of Defence, [A Force for Inclusion: Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018 to 2030](#) (October 2018), p 19

104. **Juggling Service life and family life can be hard for all Service personnel, but especially for military women, who are more often the main care-giver for children and part of a dual-serving couple. We welcome improvements to the ‘offer’ for Service families in recent years and the indications that flexibility of Service may be improving. However, we note that the decision over whether to accommodate requests for flexible working sits with the chain of command; key aspects of a serviceperson’s career pivot around this one relationship. It is a priority to enable all Service personnel to access these entitlements (when appropriate) and to normalise their use.**

Progressing and moving up

105. Women are in a minority within the military leadership: 5.2% of Senior Officers and 13.9% of Junior Officers in April 2021.²¹⁵ The highest-ranking women in each Service are Rear Admiral (2*) in the Navy; Major General in the Army (2*) and Air Marshal in the RAF (3*) (see Appendix 1 for ranks²¹⁶). There are no servicewomen at 4* or above. The share of female Officers is higher in the RAF than in the other Services. For all Services, the proportion of female Officers is higher in the Future Reserves 2020 than the UK Regular Forces.²¹⁷ The MOD stated that, on the “current trajectory”, improving women’s presence among Senior Officers “will take decades” and that “some assessments forecast over 300 years”.²¹⁸ However, there have been some notable ‘firsts’ for senior women in the last year.²¹⁹

106. Female military leaders are less likely to have children than male leaders; 90% of men at OF-5 rank have children, compared to 10% of OF-5 women (Captain RN, Colonel, Group Captain).²²⁰ Having dependent children has been identified as an important reason why female Service personnel leave the Armed Forces (see paragraph 196). There can also be particular challenges for the career progression of female Reservists, due to the “sporadic nature” of the role and because annual appraisal reports are banned from mentioning maternity leave.²²¹

107. In our survey and written evidence, female Service personnel reported feeling constantly required to ‘prove themselves’ against a male norm and discussed barriers to their progression.²²² These included:

- Needing to conform to ‘typically masculine’ ways of working to succeed
- Senior officers’ favouritism towards males at times of progression
- Being judged more harshly than men for performance and decisions, and needing to be better and work harder to have the same success

215 MOD, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2021](#) (10 June 2021). Senior Officers are those in the OF-6 to OF-9 ranks; Junior Officers are those in the OF(D)/OF-1 to OF-5 ranks. See Appendix 1.

216 2* is equivalent to OF-7; 3* is equivalent to OF-8. See Appendix 1.

217 MOD, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2021](#) (10 June 2021)

218 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4

219 British Army, [First female officer to lead Division-level Command of the British Army](#) (5 January 2021); Royal Navy, [Jude makes history as first woman admiral](#) (26 May 2021)

220 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4

221 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 26

222 Published examples: Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#)); Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#)); Justine Montgomery ([WAF0048](#)); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0052](#)); Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)) In particular, the evidence of Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)) groups together relevant examples from the 163 (mostly Army) servicewomen and female veterans who contacted her. The ‘Glass Ceiling’ theme in this evidence is most relevant.

- Being passed over multiple times, even when they are the most qualified candidate
- Less acknowledgement of female Service and achievement
- All-male panels selecting all-male appointments
- Greater difficulties for women than men when trade-transferring
- Increasing bias against women as they get higher in rank
- Facing hostility as the first woman into a post
- Additional challenges for minority ethnic servicewomen, due to limited role models²²³
- Negative impacts of maternity leave and/or having children, such as:
 - finding it impossible to gain the deployment experience to command a ship or promote in the Army while also taking maternity leave or having care responsibilities
 - being questioned over their commitment due to taking maternity leave or fulfilling care responsibilities (for instance, the school run)
 - being told that, after maternity leave, it is impossible to go past 1* level
 - hearing that there was no point in them being recommended for promotion, due to the expectation they would leave to have children

108. Lt Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen suggested that women are adversely affected by a lack of transparency in boarding and promotion systems. She also judged that job descriptions can impose requirements women cannot fulfil. In her view, military women may find that career breaks harm their progression.²²⁴

109. In contrast, the MOD stated that its research shows women do better at promotion boards and that women and minority ethnic personnel can benefit from “being visible and recognisable/memorable”.²²⁵ However, these groups are “less likely to get there [boards] due to a number of artificial barriers”.²²⁶ In acknowledging these problems, in July 2020, General Sir Nick Carter told us the Armed Forces’ career structure is still “designed predominantly for men”.²²⁷ As a specific barrier, he said that individuals are “massively disadvantaged” if they take time to start a family.²²⁸

110. The MOD and Single Services signed the voluntary ‘Women in Defence’ Charter.²²⁹ Additionally, the MOD set up a ‘Gender Balance Working Group’ around one year ago, which is aiming towards a leadership target of 30% representation of women at OF7/2*

223 For example, Anonymous ([WAF0005](#)). This point was also made in confidential evidence.

224 Diane Allen, [Q28](#)

225 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4

226 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4

227 Nick Carter, [Q75](#)

228 Nick Carter, [Q75](#)

229 Among other things, this involves setting internal targets to improve gender diversity among senior leaders. UK Government, [Women in defence charter](#) (January 2020)

and above by 2030.²³⁰ The MOD states that the Working Group understands there is “no silver bullet” and many interventions will be necessary to boost women’s representation in Forces.²³¹ The Working Group focuses on five areas: promotion/reporting; cultures and behaviours; families; lateral entry and re-joiners; and talent management/mentoring and sponsorship.²³² The Working Group is an additional role undertaken by individuals with other portfolios.²³³ The Chief of Defence People explained that one of the areas (lateral entry and re-joiners) is about allowing individuals to “join at a slightly higher level” and “accelerate the progress” in improving women’s representation throughout the Armed Forces.²³⁴ There will also be a move towards a ‘pan-defence skills framework’, which will value external experience more.²³⁵ The Army is also adapting its system for managing talent via Programme CASTLE, including trials of lateral entry.²³⁶

111. In Summer 2020, the Chiefs of Staff committed to modernising the promotion system to consider emotional intelligence, integrity and behaviours more, and to an “independent review of promotion boards”—to report in early 2021—which would “refresh our current appraisals process”, and “review all job specifications” to get rid of “arbitrary barriers to progression”. (This review of boards is not available at the time of writing.) They also said that they would make the career structure more flexible, as well as the terms and conditions of service. They believed “lateral entry” schemes would help with “specialist career streams”. Finally, they committed to “positive action pathways” and pointed to a Women’s Development Programme.²³⁷

112. We have no information on the current status of the initiatives envisaged by the Chiefs. The report into the review of promotion boards (foreseen in early 2021) is not available. The MOD told us that the Working Group is “entering the delivery stage” and that it will be necessary to wait “some time” before measuring the effectiveness of its first initiatives.²³⁸ Senior leaders we consulted had not heard of it. However, some female Service personnel believed that the pathway for progression was becoming clearer for women joining now and the Women’s Networks had had a positive impact.

113. Female Service personnel—particularly those with children—are under-represented among military leaders in the Regulars and the Reserves. The imbalance is most severe among Senior Officers (OF7/2* and above), where the MOD says it may take over 300 years to improve. We endorse the recent commitments by the Chiefs of Staff and the Gender Balance Working Group. The MOD obviously recognise there are concerns. However, we want to see progress in practice. We struggle to assess the scope, reach and impact of these from the evidence provided. We doubt the Gender Balance Working Group has the resource and status to meet its stated aims. There needs to be a plan to deliver the targets for female personnel in leadership roles. Without these, the Chiefs of Staff’s statement is in danger of lacking teeth.

230 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 4

231 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 17

232 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 16

233 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 17

234 James Swift, [Q124](#)

235 James Swift, [Q131](#)

236 British Army, [Army People Strategy](#) (2019), p 4

237 Further information is not available.

238 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 17

114. Using measurable Key Performance Indicators, the MOD's new Diversity and Inclusion Directorate must oversee the Working Group, holding it to account on the speed, reach and impact of its work and the Service-specific levels of ambition. It may be necessary for staff from the Directorate directly to take over parts of its work, given that Group members perform this role on top of their day jobs. The workstreams of the Group should encompass all the areas that the Chiefs of Staff committed to. The Department should report progress to us annually.

4 Responding if things go wrong

The Service complaints system

115. All Serving and former Service personnel can raise a grievance about their Service life. A ‘complaint’ can cover a service complaint (about any topic linked to Service) or a complaint made directly to the Police about unlawful behaviour. (Service) complaints that involve a criminal offence must be referred to the civil or Service police, to be handled in the civilian or Service Justice System (see paragraphs 155–157).²³⁹

116. The chain of command normally handles formal and informal complaints in the first instance, with a view to referring criminal cases to the police and managing non-criminal cases in-house. However, Service personnel have the right to report unlawful behaviours directly to the police, if they do not wish to tell a commanding officer.

117. Servicewomen (and minority ethnic personnel) are overrepresented in the overall service complaints system, as documented by the Ombudsman in successive annual reports since 2016.²⁴⁰ During 2020, women were 12% of personnel but made 21% of admissible complaints.²⁴¹ Servicewomen are overrepresented in all complaint categories, but especially bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD).²⁴² Nearly half (47%) of servicewomen’s complaints related to BHD, compared to 22% of those of men.²⁴³ The Centre for Military Justice argued that this overrepresentation means that general failings in the complaints system—and specific problems linked to the handling of BHD complaints—affect female Service personnel in particular.²⁴⁴ The MOD acknowledges that women are still overrepresented in the system, but says that the share of complaints by women has fallen over time.²⁴⁵ However, we note that 21% of complainants were servicewomen in 2016 (the same share as today).²⁴⁶

118. In successive annual reports from 2016 to 2020, the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces²⁴⁷ (SCOAF or SCO) has never judged the internal service complaints system to be efficient, effective and fair.²⁴⁸ It noted “poor performance” in the timeframes for complaint-handling and in people’s confidence in the system. Most Service personnel who submitted a formal complaint (of all types) were dissatisfied with the outcome, the information received on progress, and the time taken (see chart below).

239 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 32

240 SCOAF, [Annual Reports - Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces](#)

241 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p xiv. The latest data from the MOD suggests female personnel are 11% of the armed forces, rather than 12%.

242 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 24

243 SCOAF, [Summary of the 2020 Annual Report](#) (2020), p 3

244 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) paras 3, 10, 83(b)

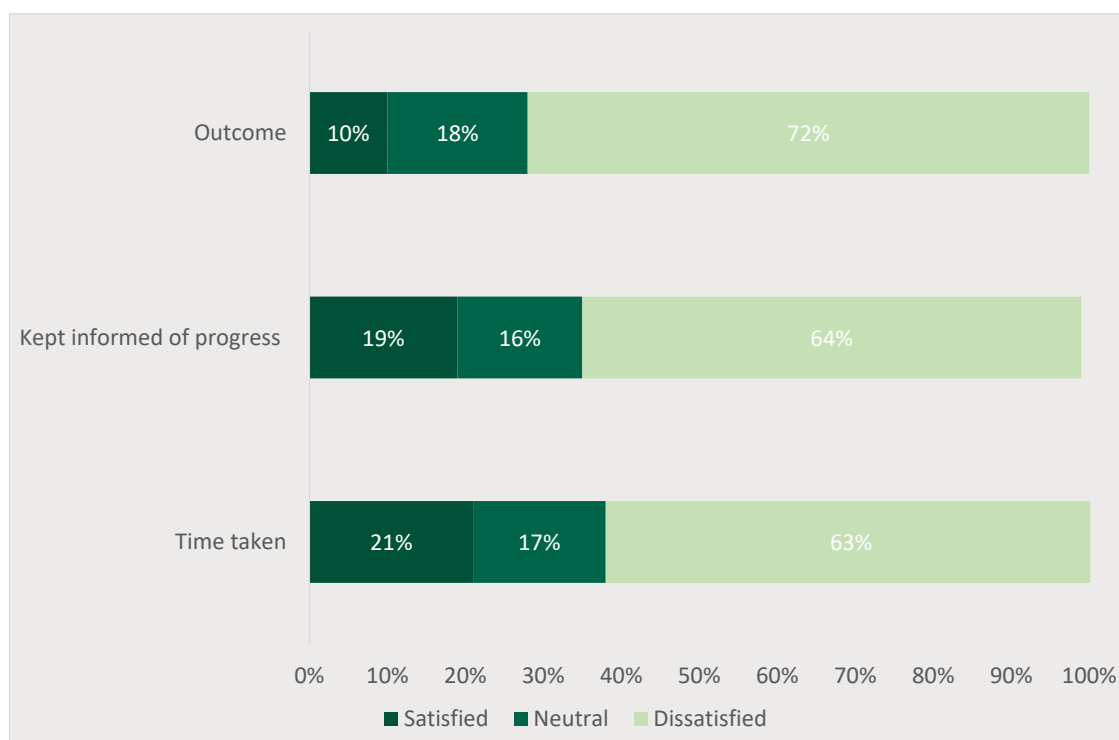
245 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 10.

246 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2016](#), p 18

247 The Ombudsman is responsible for the independent and impartial oversight of the Service Complaints system. The Ombudsman’s office’s main activities are referring complaints by serving personnel back to the chain of command, known as ‘referrals’, and carrying out investigations into admissibility decisions, undue delay, substance (merits) and maladministration.

248 SCOAF, [Annual Reports - Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces](#)

Views on aspects of the formal complaints process, considering those who made a formal complaint



Source: Lifted from MOD, UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude [Survey Results](#) 2020 [21 May 2020]

119. The Army's Sexual Harassment survey of 2018 reported that 70% of those who had made a formal complaint about behaviour of a sexual nature were dissatisfied with how the outcome was communicated, the follow-up action against those responsible and the time taken to resolve it. Additionally:

Three-quarters (75%) of those who made a formal complaint said that they had suffered negative consequences as a result; the most common was feeling uncomfortable at work (98%) however, nine in ten (93%) Service personnel had thought about leaving the Army, lost respect for the people involved (92%), or felt humiliated (91%)²⁴⁹

120. Under-reporting of unacceptable behaviours is widespread. In 2021, 89% of Service personnel in the Regular Forces who had been subject to bullying, harassment or discrimination did not go on to make a complaint.²⁵⁰ Most commonly, they did not make a formal complaint due to not believing anything would be done (55%) or believing that it might adversely affect their career (49%). The Ombudsman has repeatedly expressed concerns over Service personnel's lack of confidence in the system,²⁵¹ as did other contributors to our inquiry.²⁵² The former Ombudsman, Nicola Williams, warned that people in the lower ranks

249 British Army, [Army sexual harassment report 2018](#) (2018), p 5

250 Ministry of Defence, [Armed forces continuous attitude survey: 2021](#) (20 May 2021), p 16

251 For example, Nicola Williams, [Qq 70, 77](#); oral evidence taken on 13 October 2020, HC (2019–2021) 881, [Qq 3, 15](#) [Nicola Williams]

252 Military War Security Research Group ([WAF0036](#)); Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#)); Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

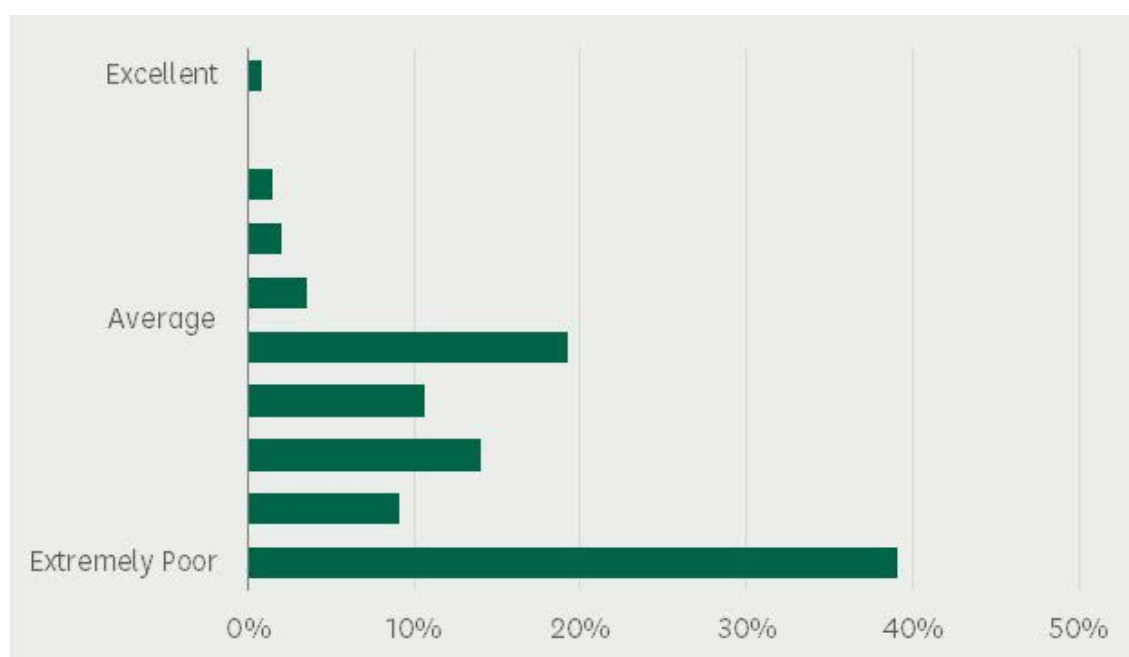
still worry about being victimised for making a complaint. [...] people are worried about being career-fouled—that suddenly their careers will come to a screeching halt.²⁵³

Around six in 10 respondents to our survey had not reported incidents of BHD that they experienced.²⁵⁴ Rates of reporting were slightly, but not significantly, higher among serving personnel.²⁵⁵ Servicewomen told us in confidential evidence that they feared retribution if they spoke up about their experiences and did not have faith in the system, with one saying she had been “terrified” to report sexual harassment. The academic and lecturer in law, Dr Fenton, believed that

Effective prevention goes hand in hand with effective reporting systems in which women are supported and believed²⁵⁶

121. In our survey, former and current servicewomen who had used the complaints system were extremely negative about their experiences (see chart below); more than one in three rated their experience as “extremely poor”.

Rating of the complaints system by those who had made a complaint (1 being extremely poor; 10 being excellent)



Source: Survey of our inquiry. Base number: 993 respondents

Many criticised the current complaints system as not fit for purpose, providing the following comments.

253 Nicola Williams, [Q77](#)

254 2,524 respondents who had experienced BHD answered this question; 1,538 had not reported it.

255 In this survey, the incident-reporting rate was around 41% among serving personnel, versus 38% among veterans.

256 Dr Rachel Fenton ([WAF0073](#))

Box 3: Quotes from servicewomen who participated in our inquiry

“I have experienced an overwhelming culture of covering up/ denying incidents of harassment as well as a wholly inadequate infrastructure for females within the submarine service. Many of the women I have served with have opted to leave/become medically downgraded as a consequence of their treatment.”

“I did not submit a complaint [about harassment] because [I] did not want it to be used against me, especially given the stigma women experience with regards to reputation [...]”

“In Regiments there is still a huge ‘club’ issue where problems are swept under the carpet [...] The female - if attached arms - will be assigned out, potentially adversely affecting her career.”

“It is well known among service personnel that if you make a complaint there is likely to be ramifications”

Source: Survey of our inquiry

122. The chain of command establishes lines of authority and accountability in the Armed Forces. It is integral to operational effectiveness and systems of discipline. The chain of command resolves individual complaints in the first instance.

123. The Wigston Review noted that the complaints system is “perceived to lack independence from the chain of command at every level”.²⁵⁷ Solicitors Bolt Burdon Kemp noted, for their clients

In many instances the chain of command has deliberately sought to belittle complaints and/or encouraged complainants to resolve issues informally, even where the issues [...] might amount to a Service and/or criminal offence and should rightly be investigated. In more serious cases, our clients have complained that their chain of command actively sought to undermine their complaints by cajoling witnesses and/or suppressing evidence.²⁵⁸

In confidential evidence, female Service personnel and veterans concurred and referred to experiences where their commanding officers coerced them to not to pursue a complaint.

124. As discussed in chapter 3 (paragraph 46), some former military leaders argue that there are not enough incentives for commanding officers to deal with complaints appropriately.²⁵⁹ For instance, Wing Commander (Retired) Graham House told us there is an “embedded conflict of interest” for commanding officers.²⁶⁰ He provided his own story.

257 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 13

258 Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#))

259 Diane Allen, [Qq 16, 18, 20](#); Graham House, [Qq 109, 112](#)

260 Graham House, [Q112](#)

Box 4: The story of a former military leader²⁶¹

Wing Commander (Retired) Graham House served for 30 years. In 2011, he was made aware of a rape allegation in his unit. While he struggled initially to accept the allegation, he ultimately decided to take it to more senior officers, saying that “that is exactly why I’m here”. Instead of receiving assistance to progress the case, he told us the chain of command encouraged him to suppress the complaint to protect the organisation’s reputation: “I was told that the allegation was not only inconvenient, but that it was, at the end of the day, only an allegation and allegations are common-place. I strongly disagreed.” He noted: “As a result of my actions, in March 2012 the RAF Instructor central to the rape allegation was investigated, convicted and imprisoned on 3 charges of sexual assault against a minor. I was, shortly after that, then removed from Command, without proper explanation, and was later labelled as ‘high maintenance.’” These experiences contributed to him leaving the military and setting up the campaigning organisation, Justice4Troops. He judged that, when personnel lose trust in the military, “you are on a dark road to ruin, possibly suicide”.

125. In 2020, a majority of Ombudsman’s investigations into complaints due to undue delay, maladministration or substance were upheld partially or wholly in favour of the complainant.²⁶²

126. The Ombudsman’s most recent annual report identified recurring problems in investigations.²⁶³ In confidential evidence, former and current Service personnel identified specific aspects of the investigations process that went wrong for them after they made a complaint. Examples are in the box below. Although criminal offences are supposed to be referred to the police, some examples suggest this did not happen. Some veterans in our survey said that the poor handling of their complaints of sexual offences led them to leave.

261 Graham House, [Qq 102, 108](#); Justice4Troops ([WAF0078](#)) paras 1, 2, 7, 9

262 A maladministration investigation looks at how the Service Complaint was handled to determine if the correct process was followed. A substance (merits) investigation looks at the original Service Complaint to determine whether the allegation that the individual was wronged is well-founded. SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), pp 6–8

263 For example, Specified Officers not considering just and equitable reasons for the late submission of a Service Complaint; failure to consider admissibility guidance; welfare support not being offered to complainants or respondents on delayed investigations; time limits being placed on harassment investigating officers’ meetings with complainants. See SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), pp 10–11

Box 5: Stories that servicewomen (serving and veterans) shared of a problematic response when they made a service complaint of BHD, shared with our Committee directly and indirectly (non-exhaustive)

- Failure to investigate incidents properly
- Involvement of senior officers as perpetrators (see also paragraphs 44 and 45)
- Witness statements not being taken or not being fact-checked
- Recurring suggestion of the manipulation of the work of Fee Earning Harassment Investigation Officers and who they can interview
- Intimidation or obstruction of witnesses, and failure to respect confidentiality
- Evidence getting lost or withholding of audio recordings
- An alleged assailant being sent the civil address of a complainant
- Not being believed when reporting incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape
- Finding complaints ‘hushed up’ and collusion to give false statements
- Being actively discouraged from pursuing a complaint of sexual harassment, assault and rape (i.e. referral to police not taking place)
- Victimisation or harassment for making a complaint
- Annual reports being ‘doctored’ as a result of making a complaint
- Being bullied and harassed for supporting subordinates on complaints
- Counter-complaints by harassers or those implicated by a complaint
- Never finding out the outcome of their complaint (even if successful)
- Ombudsman being provided with false information or not being permitted to look at the Services’ own legal advice
- Complaints taking 3–10 years and “amateurs” responsible
- Slate being wiped clean after a perpetrator is posted or leaves post, meaning complaints can simply outlast the period until next posting (normally 3 years)
- Concealment to save the reputation of the unit
- Complainant rather than perpetrator moved even for an upheld complaint
- Officers unwilling to take forward a complaint as it will ‘harm his career’

- Rejection of a complaint due to being submitted past the deadline, with no action to address the underlying behaviour that caused it
- Being made to feel like they were standing against their Service rather than the perpetrator

Source: Survey of our inquiry (open-text comments), written evidence²⁶⁴ and confidential evidence (focus group and written submissions).

The accounts received suggest that many Service personnel (male and female)—including senior officers—feel betrayed by what they see as a lack of fairness in the system.

127. The Centre for Military Justice also reported that commanding officers investigating a complaint (the ‘Deciding Body’) faced serious problems in accessing suitably qualified harassment investigations officers with the necessary experience and expertise, including female harassment investigations officers. Emma Norton, Director at the Centre, also warned that there is an “ingrained unwillingness” in the complaints system to see discrimination-related events as part of a pattern.²⁶⁵

128. The Child Rights International Network warned that both the service complaints and service justice system can be “intimidating” and “confusing” for minors (16-year-olds and 17-year-olds) in the Armed Forces who experience harassment or maltreatment.²⁶⁶

129. Last October, Nicola Williams, the then SCO, underlined the difficulty of maintaining confidentiality when complaints involve sexual harassment or discrimination.²⁶⁷ The Royal British Legion held a focus group with female veterans, who suggested the military process was a “significant barrier” to reporting rape and sexual assault, due to most senior personnel knowing about the allegation.²⁶⁸

130. Lt Col (Retired) Diane Allen warned that there is sometimes greater harm as a result of “leaders and the complaints system telling [women] it didn’t happen or delaying and mismanaging their grievances” than there was from an incident itself.²⁶⁹ Wing Commander (Retired) Graham House concurred. He described his own experiences of the complaints system as “brutal”, saying “God help” women, minority ethnic personnel and junior ranks who might not have his level of senior experience and resilience to draw upon.²⁷⁰

131. Many respondents to our survey said that a more effective system is needed to report unacceptable behaviours (including sexual offences), which is independent and offers more formal support for people raising a complaint. They felt this should introduce clearer ramifications for senior figures who do not follow the correct processes. They stated that the system should clearly define disciplinary actions and that outcomes should be reported on.

264 Published examples: Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)); Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#)); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0052](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0067](#)); Anonymous ([WAF0076](#)); Justice4Troops ([WAF0078](#)). See ‘Brushed under carpet’ theme especially in Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

265 Emma Norton, [Q78](#)

266 Child Rights International Network ([WAF0077](#)) paras 10–13

267 Oral evidence taken on 13 October 2020, HC (2019–2021) 881, [Q19](#) [Nicola Williams]

268 Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 2.5.2

269 Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

270 Graham House, [Q103](#)

Delays

132. The Ombudsman has reported on the long delays that affect the complaints system. The Armed Forces have a performance target that 90% of service complaints should be resolved within 24 weeks. This target has not been met by any of the services in recent years, and the pandemic has increased delays in the system.²⁷¹

Table. Percentage of Service Complaints received and closed within 24 weeks by Service, 2016–2020

Year	Royal Navy	Army	RAF	Tri-Service
2016	57%	25%	50%	39%
2017	56%	37%	75%	52%
2018	68%	40%	65%	50%
2019	74%	32%	52%	46%
2020	24%	42%	49%	40%

Source: Data lifted from SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 40

Of all complaints categories, BHD complaints were those least likely to be received and closed within 24 weeks in 2020.²⁷² The Ombudsman noted parts of the process that appear particularly slow, such as admissibility decisions (which took an average of 60 days) and Appeals Body decisions (which last an average of 1 year and two months).²⁷³ In the most extreme instances, an admissibility decision (the first stage) took 535 days (Royal Navy), 314 days (RAF) and 269 days (Army). The Ombudsman warned that the Service Complaints Secretariats are small and the system is “not sufficiently resourced”.²⁷⁴ Service personnel cannot withdraw complaints without losing access to employment tribunal rights.²⁷⁵ This year, the MOD accepted a new Performance Indicator to make admissibility decisions within 14 days.²⁷⁶

133. The MOD’s progress review in 2020 found that the consequences of unacceptable behaviours are not always clear:

Multiple stories reflect a reality of perpetrators being moved on, or promoted, as opposed to being disciplined or dismissed.

The MOD told us it will soon start to publish anonymous service complaints outcomes, particularly for unacceptable behaviour.²⁷⁷ The timeline for this change is not clear.

134. Two years since our predecessors’ report on the work of the Service Complaints Ombudsman, we still have concerns about the functioning of the Service Complaints System and the lack of confidence in it. Our concerns are most acute for bullying, harassment and discrimination complaints, which servicewomen and minority ethnic personnel more commonly make. We understand the importance of the chain of command in the Armed Forces, but it is not always appropriate for Commander

271 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 40

272 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 41

273 The SCOAF only sees admissibility reviews and allegations of undue delay in a complaint if a complainant applies to the SCOAF for investigation. SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), pp 39, 52

274 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), pp 39, 42

275 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 83

276 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 40

277 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 36

Officers to handle these complex cases, nor are they all properly equipped to do so. In some cases, their role appears to be a direct barrier to reporting. We even heard stories of senior ranks closing ranks and brushing complaints under the carpet rather than addressing them. When things go wrong for servicewomen, they go dramatically wrong.

135. We make further recommendations on service complaints in the next section.

Planned changes to the complaints system

136. In 2019, the Wigston Review identified a “pressing need to reform the Service Complaints system”.²⁷⁸ It recommended:

- Establish a central ‘Defence Authority’ responsible for cultures and inappropriate behaviours.
- Allocate responsibility for the reporting and handling of all serious behavioural complaints—including BHD cases—to the Defence Authority, based on an agreed threshold and allowing for anonymous and bystander reporting.
- Implement a two-tier complaints system, using a ‘fast-track unit’ for more straightforward cases (for example, pay and allowances), and reserving the full scope of the current system for the most complex cases.
- Urgently update the Joint Service Publication (JSP) 763 (MOD Bullying and Harassment Complaints Procedures)
- Improve support for all parties involved in the complaints process, including appropriate training for Assisting Officers (see paragraph 184).

137. The Wigston Review recommended the Defence Authority due to similar, successful models in the Canadian Armed Forces, Australian Defence Force and United States military.²⁷⁹

138. Despite saying it accepted all recommendations from the Wigston Review, the MOD has not established a central Defence Authority with responsibility for the reporting and handling of all serious behavioural complaints, including BHD complaints. Instead, the progress review in December 2020 states that the Ministry intends to set up “centralised functions within each of the single Services to look at admissibility decisions”, as well as “standing Decision Bodies which contain subject matter experts relevant to the type of complaint” and “empowering Commanding Officers to resolve minor awards”.²⁸⁰ It said that the new central Directorate of Diversity and Inclusion “will, in effect, also fulfil the function of a central Authority”.²⁸¹ However, the Directorate’s mandate differs in key ways from the Authority recommended by the Wigston Review. For instance, the Directorate will not handle the most serious behavioural complaints outside of the Single Services, centrally.²⁸²

278 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 16

279 MOD, [Wigston review](#) (July 2019), p 26

280 MOD, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 13

281 MOD, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 14

282 The Authority has a limited role in the handling of individual complaints. Samantha des Forges, [Q161](#)

139. Several witnesses told us that they support the creation of a Defence Authority to handle the most serious behavioural complaints, outside the single Services.²⁸³ Some suggested that the Authority should not only be central but also totally independent of the MOD.²⁸⁴ Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen said that the independent defence authority (IDA) should be similar to an “OFSTED for defence”, to represent those who serve and who have served, and to track culture and behaviours.²⁸⁵ To her, the “biggest issue” is that the Defence “marks its own homework”.²⁸⁶

140. The MOD noted that, if a servicewoman does not want to make a complaint to her Commanding Officer, it is possible for her to ask the Ombudsman to refer her intention to make a complaint to the Chain of Command, using the SCO website.²⁸⁷ However, the Ombudsman cannot investigate complaints until the internal process has been exhausted. The Gray review (December 2020) suggests the new helpline, launched in 2020, provides a means of more anonymised reporting outside the chain of command.²⁸⁸ It is not clear where these callers will be referred to by the helpline.

141. The Director of Diversity and Inclusion suggested that it is not the role of the Directorate to provide independence within the complaints system, but rather the Ombudsman.²⁸⁹ Many contributors have criticised what they see as the limited mandate of the Ombudsman. For example, Wing Commander (Retired) Graham House told us it was a “disaster” that the SCO’s recommendations are not binding on the MOD.²⁹⁰ Justice4Troops gives quotes from female Service personnel from the Army and Navy on this issue:

I need to expose the failings of SCOAF. This is because many including lawyers, MPs and notable heads of service continue to believe that SCOAF is able to offer independent arbitration and therefore negating the requirement for an alternative body.

I’ve no independent representation nor assistance—even my Assisting Officer is conflicted by loyalty to the Chain of Command [...]²⁹¹

The latest annual report of the SCO showed that there are still 11 outstanding recommendations from the 2016–2019 annual reports. There are also some for which the SCO wants the Services to reassess the actions or decisions they have taken.²⁹² Nicola Williams, the former SCOAF, told us:

the ombudsman is as independent as the person holding the office, and also as the legislation that underpins it²⁹³

283 Nicola Williams, [Qq85–86](#); Ahmed Al-Nahhas, [Qq115, 122](#); Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 103(4)

284 Graham House, [Q122](#); Justice4Troops ([WAF0078](#)) para 26; Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

285 Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

286 Diane Allen, [Q18](#)

287 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 35

288 MOD, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 21

289 Samantha des Forges, [Q161](#)

290 Graham House, [Q105](#)

291 Justice4Troops ([WAF0078](#)); see also Anonymous ([WAF0067](#))

292 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), pp 53, 59, 60, 62

293 Nicola Williams, [Q93](#)

142. Joint Service Publication (JSP) 763 is the MOD Bullying and Harassment Complaints Procedures, which outlines the steps for making, responding to, advising on, investigating and deciding on bullying and harassment complaints. The Wigston Review recommended in July 2019 that it be urgently updated, but we have been told it will be published in “summer 2021”, along with an updated version of the policy governing service complaints, JSP 831.²⁹⁴ At the time of writing, neither document has been published yet. Commenting on the delays, the MOD told us updating JSP 763 required “pan-Defence engagement” and has “necessarily taken time”.²⁹⁵ The expanded JSP 763 will include, clearer policy on online behaviours, a stronger policy of zero tolerance of initiation ceremonies and more examples/definitions from the Equality Act 2010.²⁹⁶ The MOD says that the new JSP 763 also reflects “improvements to the informal grievance resolution process”, which it hopes to allow for faster resolution of issues “at the lowest possible level”.²⁹⁷ All information on Service Complaints currently in JSP 763 will now be in a revised JSP 831.²⁹⁸ The Ombudsman has said that more informal modes of resolution, such as mediation, can be suitable, but should not be mandated if a complainant is not comfortable with them.²⁹⁹

143. The progress review in December 2020 reported ongoing improvements to the investigations process for BHD complaints. Investigators will now be “professionally trained to industry standards” and there will no longer be a freelance fee-earning model. The review says this will mean a “maximum 12-week turnaround period”. It added that performance will be benchmarked against the Home Office’s investigations process.³⁰⁰

144. Several contributors were negative about the MOD’s willingness to implement the Wigston Review, believing it did not truly accept the recommendations.³⁰¹ Wing Commander (Retired) Graham House was damning, stating:

We cannot even implement our own review of ourselves.³⁰²

145. The Ombudsman reported in 2020 that the Single Services are undertaking internal reforms to speed up the complaints process, although the exact reforms are not always clear, especially in the Navy. Specifically, the report noted the RAF has a new team that is working to streamline the admissibility process by “empowering Commanding Officers as Specified Officers to make decisions on whether a complaint should proceed promptly and fairly” (in effect, strengthening the role of the commanding officer in the process). The Army has provided more resource for complaint-handling, updated guidance, “revised their Standing Operating Procedure” and “amended appointment letters to Decision Bodies”. The Royal Navy is working to “address the sources of dissatisfaction which gave rise to Service Complaints”.³⁰³

294 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#)). The Wigston Review stated this work was originally due by September 2019 and the review in December 2020 estimated that the new JSP 763 would be public in April 2021.

295 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

296 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

297 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

298 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

299 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 38

300 MOD, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), pp 13–14

301 Emma Norton, [Q86](#); Nicola Williams, [Q86](#); Ahmed Al-Nahhas, [Q123](#); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#))

302 Graham House, [Q123](#)

303 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), pp 48–49

146. Additionally, the Armed Forces Bill 2021 will reduce the time limit for appeals from six weeks to two, for appeals against the first instance decision of the Decision Body, and for appeals to the Ombudsman. Emma Norton, Director of the Centre for Military Justice, and Nicola Williams, former SCO, were highly critical of reforming the appeals time limit, saying it would disproportionately affect servicewomen; the latter called it “disastrous”.³⁰⁴ Emma Norton noted that it will undermine personnel’s access to the employment tribunal, as they have to have appealed a complaint to be eligible to go to the tribunal. Nicola Williams doubted that the appeals stage is where the gravest delays in the system are, pointing to delayed admissibility decisions.³⁰⁵ The MOD says this will make the complaints system more efficient³⁰⁶ and that those requiring more time to appeal “due to the unique elements of service life” will be allowed this when “just and equitable”.³⁰⁷ We do not know how the MOD plans to judge what is ‘just’ and ‘equitable’.

147. **Although the Wigston Review identified a pressing need to reform the complaints process, the MOD has not fulfilled the recommendation for a Defence Authority, to handle complex BHD complaints outside the chain of command. The new Diversity and Inclusion Directorate does not fulfil this function, due to its limited role in complaint handling. Nor are we convinced that the new standing Decision Bodies and “centralised functions” do either, because they are still in the Single Services. Due to a limited mandate, the Ombudsman does not offer an alternative reporting system in the first instance.**

148. **We heard consistent evidence suggesting the chain of command is a point of failure in the complaints system.**

149. *The MOD must establish a central Defence Authority, fulfilling the functions as foreseen in the Wigston Review. This should provide a reporting and investigation system, outside of the Chain of Command and outside the Single Services, for bullying, harassment and discrimination complaints. In particular, it should be comprised of specialised staff and remove the chain of command entirely from any complaint of a sexual nature (criminal and non-criminal).* We make further recommendations later, in paragraphs 176–180, on the handling of criminal sexual behaviours.

150. *The MOD must make the recommendations of the Service Complaints Ombudsman binding on the Armed Forces and the MOD itself, with a timescale and action plan for implementation of changes where they are recommended.*

151. **It sends entirely the wrong signal that the update to Joint Service Publication 763 (Bullying and Harassment Complaints Procedures), urgently recommended by the Wigston Review in July 2019, still does not have a clear publication date. The MOD must update the relevant Joint Service Publications (763 and 831) as a matter of urgency, and certainly by the time the Government responds to this report.**

152. **We are not opposed to local, informal resolution of grievances, but there are risks, as our evidence indicates, in using these processes for complex BHD complaints. The updated Joint Service Publications on Bullying and Harassment Complaints**

304 Emma Norton, [Q96](#); Nicola Williams, [Q96](#)

305 Emma Norton, [Q96](#); Nicola Williams, [Q96](#)

306 MOD, [Armed Forces Bill 2021](#) (12 February 2021)

307 [Statement UIN HCWS109](#) on Report of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, Minister for Defence People and Veterans, 22 June 2021

Procedures and on Service Complaints should each clearly refer to the other, so that personnel who experience bullying, harassment or discrimination are aware that the Service Complaints process is available to them if they do not wish to use an informal process or if the informal process does not successfully resolve the issue.

153. While we support reducing delay within the overall service complaints process, we seriously doubt that reducing the appeals time limit from 6 weeks to 2 weeks is the best way to achieve this. This is not where severe delays occur and will work against complainants. We struggle to understand why the MOD chose a step that may further reduce the already low level of confidence that Service Personnel have in the complaints system. *The MOD should amend the Armed Forces Bill 2021 at the earliest opportunity, to retain the 6-week time limits for appeals against the first instance decision of the Decision Body, and for appeals to the Ombudsman.*

154. *The MOD should resource Service Complaints teams better to reduce significant delays in the system.*

Sexual offences within the Service Justice System

155. The Service Justice System (SJS) acts as a legal framework to guarantee Service personnel face the same disciplinary code wherever they serve (both in the UK and abroad).³⁰⁸ It is mainly delivered by Commanding Officers, the Service Police,³⁰⁹ the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) and the Military Court Service (MCS) (Court Martial).³¹⁰

156. Before 2006, service personnel who committed the crimes of murder, manslaughter and rape in the UK had their cases dealt with solely in the civilian Criminal Justice System.³¹¹ Since then, when members of the Armed Forces commit an offence in the UK, both the civilian Criminal Justice System and the Service Justice System can have jurisdiction ('concurrent jurisdiction'). Currently, decisions over where cases are heard are taken on a case-by-case basis.³¹² In the UK, when both the perpetrator and victim of a sexual offence are serving personnel, the case is normally heard in the SJS.³¹³

157. The SJS purposefully "place[s] the CO [Commanding Officer] in a central position", given the CO's role in maintaining their unit's "morale, training and discipline".³¹⁴ Consequently, Commanding Officers are empowered to resolve some minor offences by Service personnel via a 'Summary Hearing', without involving the Service police.³¹⁵ COs have a duty to refer rape, sexual assault and other categories of sexual offence to the police,³¹⁶ although the Centre for Military Justice (CMJ) has suggested this does not have to be to

308 House of Commons Library, [The review of the service justice system](#) (20 January 2021)

309 The Royal Navy Police (RNP), Royal Military Police (RMP) and Royal Air Force Police (RAFP)

310 MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

311 Oral evidence taken before the Armed Forces Bill Committee on 11 March 2021, HC (2019–2021) 1281, [Q105](#) [His Honour Shaun Lyons]

312 MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

313 Emma Norton, [Q90](#); His Honour Shaun Lyons, [Service Justice System Review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) para 7.2

314 Shaun Lyons, [Service Justice System Review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) para 4.5

315 During Summary Hearings, "Commanding Officers (COs) are obliged to cause an investigation into all suspected offending and this is achieved either by a reference to the Service Police (SP) or, on other occasions, the investigation will be conducted by unit personnel." [emphasis added]. His Honour Shaun Lyons, [Service Justice System Review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) para 2.9

316 COs are specifically obliged to refer offences contrary to the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) 2003. MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020 - GOV.UK](#) (25 March 2021).

the civilian police.³¹⁷ However, there are some related offences that COs are not obliged to refer to the police, even though many do.³¹⁸ The Centre for Military Justice warned that some sexual offences may be downgraded to non-sexual offences to enable a CO to deal with them via a Summary hearing (for instance, the downgrading of a sexual assault to a ‘battery’).³¹⁹ It is not possible for us to verify this claim.

158. If a Serviceperson does not wish to tell a Commanding Officer about a crime in the UK, he or she has the right to report it directly to the Service Police or the civilian police.³²⁰ Both the Service Police and SPA officially carry out their roles independently of the chain of command.³²¹

159. Over successive years, the majority of victims of sexual offences dealt with by the Service Justice System are women.³²² In 2020, there were 161 investigations by the Service Police into sexual offences; 137 of the 180 victims were female.³²³ Of the 150 suspects involved, 140 were male, 4 were female and 6 were unknown. Victims were most commonly in the lower ranks, aged 30 or under.³²⁴ The MOD’s sexual offences bulletins do not cover offences involving members of the Armed Forces dealt with in the civilian system.

160. The Service Justice System Review by His Honour Shaun Lyons (‘Lyons review’) recommended in 2018 and 2019 that rape and sexual assault with penetration³²⁵ committed in the UK should no longer be heard in the Court Martial at all, except when the consent of the Attorney General is given.³²⁶ The Review also recommended that cases involving domestic violence and child abuse in the UK should always be dealt with in the civil system.³²⁷ The rationale for these recommendations was partly that

Service personnel remain citizens and in these serious cases when the civil courts are available [...] they should be tried in that forum.³²⁸

317 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 51

318 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) paras 89–90. The Centre for Military Justice recommends that these offences be added to Schedule 2 of the Armed Forces Act, so that COs are always under obligation to refer them to a police force: Common assault where there is a domestic abuse context; ABH where there is a domestic abuse context; Disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress (‘revenge porn’) (s. 33(1) Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015); Possession of extreme pornographic images (s.63(1) Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008); Controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship (s.76 Serious Crime Act 2015); and Voyeurism: additional offences (‘up skirting’) (s.67(A) Sexual Offences Act 2003).

319 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 22(a). The Centre notes that the MOD bulletins of sexual offences statistics “consistently advise that investigations that were reported to the service police as sexual offences but then reclassified to a non-sexual offence are not included in the published data.” The Centre questions why this caveat would be necessary if this practice does not occur.

320 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 39

321 MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021); His Honour Shaun Lyons, [Service Justice System Review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) para 2.9

322 Table 3 within Supplementary Tables (MS Excel), available at MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

323 36 were male and 7 were unknown. MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

324 Table 3 within the Supplementary Tables (MS Excel), available for download at MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

325 Specifically, Section 2 offences under the 2003 Sexual Offences act.

326 Additionally, the recommendation covered murder and manslaughter in the UK. The rape recommendation is in His Honour Shaun Lyons, [Service Justice System Review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018), p 3; the sexual assault with penetration recommendation is in His Honour Shaun Lyons and Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Review \(Part 2\)](#), p 43

327 His Honour Shaun Lyons, [Service Justice System Review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018), p 3

328 His Honour Shaun Lyons, [Service Justice System Review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) para 7.3

161. The Government's Armed Forces Bill 2021 does not directly implement the recommendations to move these sexual offences, domestic violence and child abuse outside the SJS, if perpetrated in the UK. Instead the Government is introducing "clearer guidance for prosecutors" on how serious crimes should be handled, with a Duty on the Director of Service Prosecutions and the Director of Public Prosecutions in England and Wales to agree a protocol on where cases will be heard if there is concurrent jurisdiction.³²⁹ If the prosecutors are unable to resolve a dispute over where a case should be heard, the civilian prosecutors will "have the final say".³³⁰

162. The MOD justified its approach on the basis that some cases might involve linked service offences, that there might be cross or multiple jurisdictions involved in the offending (i.e. offending in more than one country), and also that there might be particular needs of a service victim that are better met by the SJS. It also said that the system must be "flexible enough to cope with witnesses in various locations at various times".³³¹ The Centre for Military Justice is highly critical of the Government's decision to allow sexual offences by service personnel perpetrated in the UK to progress through the Service Justice System. It believes "there is nothing about sexual assault in the military that requires military expertise to investigate and prosecute it".³³²

163. The Service Justice System policing review found that, despite some satisfactory investigations, the Service Police "do not investigate enough serious crime to be considered proficient"³³³ and that there were also shortcomings in the experience of the SPA.³³⁴ As part of an audit into how the Service police handle sexual offences and domestic abuse cases (Appendix H of that audit), the Service Justice System Review made several recommendations, including the mandatory referral of domestic abuse incidents to the Service Police by the Chain of Command, the training of medics from across the Services to the standards needed for Forensic Medical Examination Accreditation, and changes to data systems to comply with National Crime Reporting Standards.³³⁵ These recommendations applied to the handling of crimes committed abroad only, and did not replace the central recommendation that certain crimes in the UK should be taken out of the SJS altogether.

164. The Centre for Military Justice noted that its clients—servicewomen who are victims of offences—have

serious concerns about the service police's ability to investigate their case and/or the quality of Service Prosecuting Authority's (SPA) decision making and performance at court martial and/or other negative experiences at court martial.³³⁶

329 Ministry of Defence, [Armed Forces Bill 2021](#) (12 February 2021). There are equivalent provisions for Scotland and Northern Ireland. MOD, MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

330 Baroness Goldie, [Q180](#)

331 Baroness Goldie, [Q180](#)

332 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 4

333 Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Policing review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) para 71

334 Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Policing review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) para 72

335 Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Policing review \(part 1\)](#) (March 2018) pp 126–127

336 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 8

In confidential and public evidence, servicewomen shared stories of procedural failures in their cases, including concerns over the tone and quality of letters from the SPA, disclosure of sensitive details by the service police to the chain of command, the sending of SPA letters to irrelevant parties and the reluctance of the chain of command to report a sexual assault to the service police (despite the obligation to do so)...³³⁷

165. In the United States, in March, at President Biden's direction, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III ordered an Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military.³³⁸ In July 2021, the Commission published its recommendations to end sexual harassment and assault in the military, focusing on the four areas of accountability, prevention, climate and culture and victim support.³³⁹ In a memorandum on 2 July, the Secretary of Defense stated he would accept the recommendations "wherever possible". He specifically committed to working with Congress to amend the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ): removing the prosecution of sexual assaults, domestic violence, child abuse from the chain of command, adding sexual harassment as an offence under the UCMJ and establishing new offices within the Secretariat of each Military Department to handle these crimes. He stated an implementation roadmap will be published within 60 days.³⁴⁰

166. The MOD told us it follows a pathway when handling rape cases.³⁴¹ This pathway includes immediate actions to support a victim's safety, a forensic medical examination (if the victim consents) and referral to specialist support. As in the civilian justice system, the Service Police undertakes wider investigatory work and a decision will ultimately be taken as to whether there is sufficient evidence to take the case to court. In the UK, the Service Police have arrangements for sharing facilities with those in the civilian justice system, specifically Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs). SARCs have specialist facilities for forensic medical examination (FME) and a victim support service. Service Police also have "generic sexual offence examination kits (Early Evidence Kits)" and FME Kits, but these are used only in emergencies, such as deployments, where SARC facilities cannot be accessed.³⁴²

167. The MOD also told us that that for penetrative sexual offences, a Forensic Medical Examination "will always take place immediately if the victim consents to this" and the Service Police aim to gather this forensic evidence as soon as possible because "it degrades over time".³⁴³ It added that complainants may not consent to an FME or may need time to consider. Furthermore

not all live sexual assaults would require an FME as no evidence could be obtained, for example for a sexual touching over clothing, [...] no FME would take place as it is invasive [...] in some circumstances the geographical location of a victim is such that there may be a delay in obtaining an FME.³⁴⁴

337 Published examples at Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 83

338 US Department of Defense, [Commission Begins 90-Day Look Into Sexual Assault in Military](#) (24 March 2021)

339 IRC on Sexual Assault in the Military, [Hard Truths and the Duty to Change: Recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military](#) (July 2021).

340 Secretary of Defense, [Department of Defense Actions and Implementation Guidance to Address Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military](#) (2 July 2021). Memorandum for Senior Pentagon Leadership Commanders of the Combatant Commands Defense Agency and DOD Field Activity Directors.

341 The four phases of the pathway are at Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

342 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

343 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

344 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

168. Given the time-sensitivity of forensic medical examination for sexual offence investigations, we asked the MOD to provide us data on the proportion of Service personnel who make a rape or sexual assault allegation and who are then referred for forensic medical examination within 24 hours.³⁴⁵ The MOD responded that, although the 24-hour window is especially important for considering the impacts of drugs and alcohol, victims can be examined for sample collection at any point within a 14-day window.³⁴⁶ We also asked the MOD about referral to specialist support within 24 hours. The Ministry provided the following information, distinguishing between penetrative and non-penetrative offences.³⁴⁷ These statistics refer to the calendar year 2020:

- 36 Service Police investigations occurred into non-historical (live) sexual offences (rape/penetrative) and, of these, there made 9 referrals for FME within 24 hours and a further 1 made an FME referral within the 14-day window (but after 24 hours). 10 FMEs were ultimately conducted: less than a third of the investigations. The reason why the remaining 26 investigations did not involve an FME referral is not clear, but may involve one or more of the reasons given by the MOD above (for instance, a lack of consent from the victim).
- Of these 36 investigations into non-historical sexual offences (rape/penetrative), 15 referrals were made to specialist support and 27 complainants were signposted to specialist support or given a victims' leaflet. The timeframe for referral is ambiguous.
- A further 83 investigations occurred into non-historical sexual offences that were non-penetrative.³⁴⁸ No information was given on the referral of these cases for forensic medical examination or for specialist support. The MOD noted generally that not all live sexual assault investigations require an FME, as "it is invasive and would not yield forensic evidence".³⁴⁹

These are not official statistics and the MOD cautioned that the data have been counted manually and may involve errors.³⁵⁰ Nonetheless, we note that:

- The MOD's official statistics show a total of 161 service police investigations into sexual offences took place in 2020, of which 15 were into historical offences and would not require forensic medical examination.³⁵¹ We asked about the remaining 146 investigations (non-historical), but the MOD originally provided us with information only about 107.³⁵² Following further questions by our Committee, we now have information for 119 of these 146 investigations (83 non-penetrative offences and 36 penetrative offences).³⁵³ For various reasons, we have not received evidence for the remaining 27 investigations.³⁵⁴

345 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#)); Ministry of Defence ([WAF0080](#))

346 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#)); Ministry of Defence ([WAF0080](#))

347 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

348 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0080](#))

349 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

350 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

351 Table 1 within Supplementary Tables (MS Excel), available at MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

352 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

353 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0080](#))

354 The MOD excluded 21 investigations for voyeurism, exposure and 'other' offences under the Sexual Offences Act, and 4 joint investigations (which it said were overly difficult to trace). It also said it was unable to clarify the situation with the remaining 2 investigations without doing a full review of all its investigations.

- Under the category ‘non-penetrative offences’, the MOD excluded investigations for voyeurism, exposure and ‘other’ sexual offences, stating that these do not normally require FME or specialist support.³⁵⁵ It is our understanding that the data we received on non-penetrative offences covers Sexual Assault (No Penetration).
- Although the MOD states that “*all* victims of sexual offences” receive a victim Support Leaflet and information about specialist support services when they make their complaint (emphasis added), it did not provide us with information on the actual number of complainants who received this information after non-penetrative offences.

169. Service Police receive training on sexual offence investigations at the Defence School of Policing and Guarding. Specialist investigators also have access to training certified by the College of Policing, provided by civilian police forces.³⁵⁶ The MOD has stated that, building on the Service Justice System Review, work is also ongoing to develop the Defence Serious Crime Capability, including “delivering a central capability to support the investigation of sexual and violent offences”.³⁵⁷ The exact steps are unclear, although the MOD expects that this work will finish “by the summer”.³⁵⁸ In October 2020 the Defence Secretary announced a review into military investigations overseas, led by Sir Richard Henriques.³⁵⁹ Further information on this is limited, particularly the ways this review will differ from the Service Justice System policing review already published in 2018. As a new form of oversight, the Armed Forces Bill 2021 will introduce a new Service Police Complaints Commissioner, with the power to investigate serious and sensitive matters involving the service police.

170. The Centre for Military Justice warned that the Service Police do not have the same powers as the civil police for protecting against domestic violence. For instance, the Service Police cannot issue a Domestic Violence Protection Notice, Domestic Violence Protection Order or Stalking Protection Order, nor can they disclose a partner’s background under Clare’s Law.³⁶⁰

171. In each of the last three years, a majority of Service Police investigations into sexual offences have been in the UK.³⁶¹ There has also been some increase to the number of such investigations in the UK.³⁶² The Centre of Military Justice said that the fact that most sexual offences investigations occur in the UK matters because arguments for retaining the service police investigative capability are normally focused on jurisdictions outside the UK.³⁶³

355 The ‘Other’ offences are those contrary to the following Sections of the SOA 03: s4 to 65, s69, 70, 71 and 91.

356 MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

357 Written evidence taken by the Armed Forces Bill Committee, HC (2019–2021), MOD ([AFB0033](#)) para 6(f)

358 Written evidence taken by the Armed Forces Bill Committee, HC (2019–2021), MOD ([AFB0033](#)) para 8

359 HC Deb, 2 November 2000, [col 17](#) [Commons chamber]

360 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 92

361 Table 1 within Supplementary Tables (MS Excel), available at MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

362 According to the latest sexual offence statistics, there were 94 UK-based investigations into sexual offences in 2018, relative to 119 in 2020. Table 1 within Supplementary Tables (MS Excel), available at MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

363 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 22

172. In 2019, the Lyons Review noted that sexual offending at the Court Martial appears to have lower conviction rates than in the civilian justice system, especially when it comes to rape conviction rates.³⁶⁴ Comparing the two systems:

- Between 2015 and 2020, the 5-year average conviction rate for rape in the criminal justice system, according to Ministry of Justice data, was approximately **34%**.³⁶⁵
- Between 2015 and 2020, the average conviction rate for rape at the Court Martial (Service Justice System) was around **16%**.³⁶⁶

However, the Lyons Review emphasised the difficulty of making reliable comparisons, due to the higher volume of cases in the civilian justice system, as well as the profile of these cases (for instance, the ages of defendants). It also pointed out that a higher share of rape cases get referred to the SPA than in the civilian system.³⁶⁷ It said that, when comparing all offending (as opposed to sexual offending only), the conviction outcomes from the two systems are ‘markedly’ similar.³⁶⁸ The Centre for Military Justice (CMJ) accepted the data limitations but emphasised that there is evidence of worse outcomes of rape and sexual assault cases heard at court martial than those at the Crown Court. Emma Norton, CMJ Director, told the Armed Forces Bill Committee that

It is no good referring high numbers to prosecutors if the quality of those service police investigations is not good enough. [...] It is very hard to grasp the explanation for why outcomes at court martial are so low [...] With the number of cases that actually start at court martial and end in a conviction, it is a 10% conviction rate,³⁶⁹ and nobody seems to be taking issue with that.³⁷⁰

Legal witnesses before the Armed Forces Bill Committee defended the integrity of the Service Justice System and its ability to handle sexual offences appropriately. Jonathan Rees QC, Director of Service Prosecutions, said that the prosecuting officers at the court martial “are the equivalents of their counterparts in the civilian system”, with the same training, meaning that the prosecution is “fit for purpose”.³⁷¹ His Honour Jeff Blackett, former Judge Advocate General, said that the prosecution rate for sexual assault cases

364 His Honour Shaun Lyons and Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Review \(Part 2\)](#) paras 127–146

365 In this time period, 8,746 people were charged and prosecuted for rape (against male and females over the age of 16) and 2,949 were found guilty. See Outcomes by offence data tool at MOJ, [Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: December 2020](#) (May 2021). The MOJ and CPS have different definitions of a rape conviction. Further explanation at His Honour Shaun Lyons and Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Review \(Part 2\)](#) para 128

366 In this time, 73 individuals were charged and prosecuted by military authorities for rape against men and women. Of these, 12 were found guilty, making the conviction rate of defendants 16.4%. MOD, MOD, [Sexual offences in the Service Justice System: 2020](#) (25 March 2021)

367 His Honour Shaun Lyons and Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Review \(Part 2\)](#) paras 134–135

368 His Honour Shaun Lyons and Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Review \(Part 2\)](#) paras 144–145

369 The conviction rate differs each year. In 2017, the conviction rate for rape at the Court Martial was 9% (by defendant). The average conviction rate for rape (if using number of charges rather than number of defendants), was 10% from 2015–2019 inclusive.

370 Oral evidence taken before the Armed Forces Bill Committee on 17 March 2021, HC (2019–2021) 1281, [Q194](#) [Emma Norton]

371 Oral evidence taken before the Armed Forces Bill Committee on 11 March 2021, HC (2019–2021) 1281, [Q162](#) [Jonathan Rees QC]

was higher in the service justice system, even if the conviction rate is lower.³⁷² However, he accepted that the role of the chain of command may act as an added disincentive on women to report sexual offences in the first place.³⁷³

173. Other contributors supported moving criminal investigations to the civilian justice system.³⁷⁴ Paula Edwards of the Salute Her female veterans' service said this would give servicewomen greater confidence, as

if that investigation was taken up by civilian police, those women would feel more supported, and civilian police have more training to deal with traumatic incidents, whereas Military Police do not³⁷⁵

The Child Rights International Network (CRIN) wanted to see a protocol whereby violence against under-18s (including sexual violence) be heard in the civilian justice system.³⁷⁶

174. The Centre for Military Justice and the solicitors Bolt Burdon Kemp doubted whether personnel are made aware of their right to report allegations to the civilian police and have their case heard in the civil justice system, with the former stating that its clients appear to have “little knowledge” of this.³⁷⁷ Many servicewomen also told us they were not aware of this option. The MOD rejected the suggestion that personnel do not have access to information about this. It noted that it republished guidance in June 2020 explaining the Armed Forces Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and that this reminded personnel of their right to report serious crimes in the UK, including rape and sexual assault, to the civilian police or Service police.³⁷⁸

175. We do not believe that the problems highlighted by the Lyons Review in the handling of sexual offences in the Service Justice System have been fully resolved. While we accept there is a limited set of circumstances where it may be appropriate for the Service Justice System to be used for UK-based sexual offences (for example when there are offences both in the UK and overseas), this must require the Attorney General's consent. There may be other compelling reasons, such as the young age and vulnerability of the victim, when it is more appropriate for the civilian justice system to hear these cases. In our view, the fact that a UK case may involve a victim and a perpetrator who are both Service personnel is not a sufficient reason for the Service Justice System to be used.

176. *The MOD must implement the recommendation of the Lyons Review, that the Court Martial jurisdiction should no longer include Rape and Sexual Assault with penetration, except when the consent of the Attorney General is given. The Government should also consider the Lyons Review recommendations to place all Domestic Violence*

372 Oral evidence taken before the Armed Forces Bill Committee on 11 March 2021, HC (2019–2021) 1281, [Q147](#) [His Honour Jeff Blackett]

373 Oral evidence taken before the Armed Forces Bill Committee on 11 March 2021, HC (2019–2021) 1281, [Q151](#) [His Honour Jeff Blackett]

374 Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); Paula Edwards, [Q24](#); Child Rights International Network (CRIN) ([WAF0077](#)); Service personnel in confidential evidence.

375 Paula Edwards, [Q24](#)

376 Child Rights International Network ([WAF0077](#)) para 17

377 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 83(a); Ahmed Al-Nahhas, [Q117](#)

378 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 39

and Child Abuse cases in the civil jurisdiction when committed in the UK. This does not prevent cases with cross-jurisdictional elements (i.e. offending both in the UK and overseas) being heard in the Service Justice System.

177. *The MOD must update their guidance so that the new Defence Authority (see paragraph 149) refers all sexual offences and domestic violence involving service personnel in the UK to the civilian police.*

178. *Using the data provided by the MOD, we struggled to account for the pathway followed in the Service Justice System's handling of sexual offences and had to follow up to receive further information. We appreciate this data was provided in a short timeframe, but it gives the impression that centralised data collection is poor. The MOD must ensure that it follows its own Sexual Assault Pathway with specialist services (such as Rape Trauma Kits, timeframe for action on collecting forensic evidence need to be adhered to, and specialist training for commanding officers) for all victims who have faced sexual assault.*

179. *The MOD's sexual offences bulletin should be expanded to include new data on the pathway followed, for example the share of allegations that resulted in a Forensic Medical Examination, the share of FMEs conducted within 24 hours of a report and the share of referrals to crisis counselling.*

180. *For the limited investigations into sexual offences still conducted by the Service Police, the Government should implement urgently the recommendations within Appendix H of the Service Justice System Policing Review (Part 1), which focus on improving how the Service Police investigate Domestic Abuse and Serious Sexual Offences.*

Specialist support in the complaints and justice systems

181. A range of witnesses described negative health consequences for victims who had experienced bullying, harassment and discrimination, including being medically discharged.³⁷⁹ One veteran described the rape she experienced as “career ending and life changing”.³⁸⁰ The Salute Her service and the Centre for Military Justice noted the trauma for servicewomen as a result of sexual offences.³⁸¹

182. As mentioned above (paragraph 130), the mishandling of BHD and sexual assault investigations can sometimes lead to greater harm than the incident itself.³⁸² Additionally, the Service Complaints Ombudsman underlined the significant impacts on wellbeing of the current service complaints process, both on those making complaints and those named.³⁸³ In 2020, the SCO's investigations led it to identify a recurring failure to offer welfare support to complainants on delayed investigations.³⁸⁴ The Centre for Military Justice stated that all of its clients have a “form of re-traumatisation” due to the complaints process.³⁸⁵ Bolt Burdon Kemp provided case studies of service personnel they supported

379 For instance, Anonymous ([WAF0054](#)); Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#)); Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)); Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#)); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); confidential evidence.

380 Anonymous ([WAF0054](#))

381 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)); Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#))

382 Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)). This was also implied by several confidential testimonies we received.

383 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2019](#) (2019), p 2

384 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 10

385 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 83(g)

in the service justice system, including Clara, a private from the Army, who was medically discharged with PTSD following 18 months of sexual harassment—and ultimately, assault—by a serviceman senior to her:

She felt let down by her chain of command during the police investigation and through the court martial process, namely by being placed in situations where she came into contact with the individual concerned [...], and by a general lack of support [...] She has been unable to return to any sort of employment.³⁸⁶

The Salute Her veterans' service of Forward Assist is critical of the lack of independent mental health support to assist victims with complaints.³⁸⁷ Many servicewomen who provided us confidential evidence felt unsupported and alone.

183. The chain of command has responsibility to support those in their command and for letting them know where they can seek and get support.³⁸⁸ The MOD states that it makes available advice and guidance to personnel on submitting a service complaint. Additional advice and support is available via Diversity and Inclusion Advisers,³⁸⁹ chaplains, “unit welfare channels” and external organisations like the SCO and charities.³⁹⁰

184. For Service Complaints, complainants can also access an Assisting Officer (AO). The MOD is planning to increase early access to AOs, so that individuals can speak with one even before making a complaint. The Chief of Defence People told us Assisting Officers can be a “really good support mechanism” in helping personnel understand the process and progress through it.³⁹¹ The Ombudsman noted that most individuals choose to accept the offer of an Assisting Officer, suggesting they are “responsive and supportive”.³⁹² However, the SCO Annual Report also gave AFCAS data that suggested that around half of Regular personnel who submitted a written BHD complaint are dissatisfied with the support provided by Assisting Officers.³⁹³ Paula Edwards of the Salute Her female veterans' service said that a lot of the women she works with find that “things aren't done properly” when they get an Assisting Officer.³⁹⁴ The CMJ praised the role of Assisting Officers but said that they were not a substitute for access to appropriate external support.³⁹⁵

185. In December 2020, the progress review into unacceptable behaviours said further training for Assisting Officers was being reviewed and should be fully resourced.³⁹⁶ The Chief of Defence People told us the chain of command is responsible for selecting AOs,³⁹⁷ but the SCO said in 2020 that personnel can

386 Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#))

387 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#))

388 Baroness Goldie, [Q173](#)

389 Baroness Goldie told us these practitioners are in place across the whole force and are trained to provide “impartial advice to all parties on unacceptable behaviours”. Baroness Goldie, [Q173](#)

390 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 35; Baroness Goldie, [Q173](#)

391 James Swift, [Q174](#)

392 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 51

393 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 45

394 Paula Edwards, [Q25](#)

395 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 83(e). Wing Commander (Retired) Graham House also emphasised the need for external support for those in the system; Graham House, [Q113](#).

396 Ministry of Defence, [Unacceptable behaviours: progress review 2020](#) (December 2020), p 14

397 James Swift, [Q175](#)

nominate or assign an individual themselves to take on the role [of AO] provided that the proposed individual is an Officer, Warrant Officer or Senior Non Commissioned Officer.³⁹⁸

186. For criminal offences, Ministry of Defence told us that guidance is “widely available” for victims and Commanding Officers when responding to allegations.³⁹⁹ There is a Victims’ Services policy document (JSP 839), which outlines required services as part of the Armed Forces Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. This includes guidance on support for victims of rape and “other serious offences”, including

adaptation of working patterns, temporary changes to locations, consideration of additional leave request or even change of career.⁴⁰⁰

187. During criminal investigations, the Chief of Defence People told us there are Victim Support Liaison Officers that provide initial support and assist individuals to access additional support. He also said the Victims’ Commissioner for England and Wales is now on the Service Justice Executive Group and Service Justice Board, which will help “keep the victims at the centre”.⁴⁰¹ The MOD committed to take forward recommendations of the Service Justice System Review, such as a witness care unit and training for commanding officers to offer the right support.⁴⁰²

188. The former Service Complaints Ombudsman, the Director of the Centre for Military Justice and Bolt Burdon Kemp told us there is also not enough specialist training to those who are party to resolving BHD complaints, including unlawful offences that may require referral to the police.⁴⁰³ The latter noted that, for many of its clients, the chain of command, Assisting Officers and Harassment Investigating Officers were “simply not prepared” to handle the sensitivity of complaints and victims’ needs, and that the quality of Harassment Investigating Officers “varied greatly”.⁴⁰⁴ The Centre for Military Justice stated:

With the best will in the world, commanding officers are not trained to handle serious sexual harassment complaints or the needs of victims of a sexual assault.⁴⁰⁵

The Centre told us that all its clients had experienced “what appears to be systemic ignorance” in the chain of command about the Defence Instruction Notice (DIN) on offering “appropriate care and support to the victim”. It said that this “appears to be honoured more in the breach than in the observance” and “needs updating”.⁴⁰⁶ In confidential evidence, some servicewomen told us their Assisting Officers (Service complaints) and Victim Liaison Officers (complaints involving a criminal offence) had been placed under pressure not to fulfil their role appropriately. Further examples of inadequate support being offered to victims of criminal offences were an individual not being aware that they could access a Victim Liaison Officer, and limited care for those

398 SCOAF, [Annual Report 2020](#) (2020), p 51

399 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 38

400 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 38

401 James Swift, [Q176](#)

402 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 39

403 Nicola Williams, [Q85](#); Emma Norton, [Q86](#); Ahmed Al-Nahhas, [Q114](#)

404 Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#))

405 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)), para 83 (g)

406 Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)), para 83 (i)

making statements.⁴⁰⁷ Ahmed Al-Nahhas of Bolt Burdon Kemp told us that that none out of their hundreds of clients had seen the MOD's victim charter.⁴⁰⁸ The Chief of Defence People told us that communicating the policies further is "one of the changes that has been rolled out this spring".⁴⁰⁹

189. The former Ombudsman told us all those party to resolving a complaint—"assisting officers and investigation officers in particular, as well as deciders"—may benefit from "specialist training to deal with these particularly sensitive subjects".⁴¹⁰ The Lyons Review recommended formal training for Victim Liaison Officers.⁴¹¹ In our survey, respondents suggested a specialist support unit offering advice to the chain of command, as well as access to female confidantes or support outside of the chain of command. One called these issues "too serious to be left to amateurs".

190. The MOD states that it understands that women who make complaints about unlawful behaviour, especially sexual offences, may have concerns about their "level of support" and the "actual process of dealing with their case". It said that it handles these types of complaints "with the utmost seriousness" and recognises that "enhanced support" is necessary for "victims of the most serious crimes, persistently targeted victims and vulnerable or intimidated victims".⁴¹²

191. When personnel experience BHD, including criminal offences, their experiences of receiving support vary too much. For instance, it is not acceptable that victims of crime have not heard of the MOD's Victims' Charter. We have doubts about the quality and consistency of support offered by key individuals in both the complaints and the justice system, including the chain of command, Assisting Officers, Harassment Investment Officers and Victim Liaison Officers. We also heard stories of these individuals coming under immense pressure themselves when trying to fulfil their role. We support the MOD's commitment to improving training for commanding officers to offer the right support.

192. *The MOD's specialist support must reach those who need it in practice. It must also advertise forms of external support to personnel, in case they do not wish to use that offered by the MOD.*

193. *All individuals—chain of command, Assisting Officers, Harassment Investment Officers and Victim Liaison Officers—with a key role in handling complaints must receive structured training to allow them to complete this role and to refer personnel to appropriate support. Should the MOD accept our recommendation to create a central Defence Authority (paragraph 149), the workload of these individuals should also reduce.*

407 Anonymised examples at Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#)) para 57–82

408 Ahmed Al-Nahhas, [Q117](#)

409 James Swift, [Q178](#)

410 Nicola Williams, [Q85](#)

411 Recommendation 9 in His Honour Shaun Lyons and Professor Sir Jon Murphy, [Service Justice System Review \(Part 2\)](#), p 4

412 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 36

194. It is not completely clear from the evidence whether personnel are able to self-select an Assisting Officer or whether this individual is always assigned by the chain of command. *Provided the officer is of appropriate seniority, we support offering an option for personnel to self-select an Assisting Officer, so that it can be an individual in whom they have greater trust.*

5 Transition and resettlement

Reasons for leaving the Armed Forces

195. It is more common for women to leave the Armed Forces early than men, although it is unclear why.⁴¹³

196. The AFCAS 2021 indicates that the top factor influencing all Service personnel's intention to leave is the impact of Service on their family and personal life.⁴¹⁴ This was also the most common reason why female veterans in our survey had left the Forces, affecting more than 700 female veterans. Many other contributors cited the impact of parenthood and family-related challenges on servicewomen's decisions to leave.⁴¹⁵ A cohort study by the King's Centre for Military Health Research (2003–2016) found servicewomen with dependent children were more likely to leave than servicemen.⁴¹⁶ Similarly, the MOD's statistics suggest that, while most servicewomen return to the Forces after maternity leave,⁴¹⁷ the *long-term* retention of servicewomen with young children may be a challenge: as of 1 October 2020, 42.1% of servicewomen who took maternity leave in 2014 and initially returned, have now left the service.⁴¹⁸ The MOD accepts that servicewomen are more likely to leave due to starting a family than servicemen⁴¹⁹ and is doing work to improve support for all personnel with family responsibilities.⁴²⁰

197. The other reasons for leaving the Forces given by female veterans in our survey are similar to the factors raised in AFCAS 2021 by all Service personnel.⁴²¹ Female veterans in our survey commonly cited, from more to less common:⁴²² a spouse or partner's career; being 'discharged on family grounds' (for example, the pregnancy ban); service morale; 'my morale'; and opportunities outside the service and promotion prospects.⁴²³ However, servicewomen, veterans and other witnesses also told us some servicewomen leave as a consequence of feeling "worn down" by exclusive aspects of the culture or, in more

413 RAF Families Federation ([WAF0038](#))

414 Ministry of Defence, [Armed forces continuous attitude survey: 2021](#) (20 May 2021), p 13

415 For example, Dr Beverly Bergman ([WAF0016](#)); James Swift, [Q129](#); King's Centre for Military Health Research ([WAF0049](#)); 'Living in our Shoes' review team ([WAF0041](#))

416 Summarised in King's Centre for Military Health Research ([WAF0049](#))

417 There are very high rates of servicewomen returning to work after maternity leave (98.5% of those who went on maternity leave in 2019). Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 October 2020](#) (17 December 2020).

418 Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 October 2020](#) (17 December 2020). It is not possible to know whether having young children was the main factor influencing their exit.

419 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 29

420 James Swift, [Q129](#)

421 It is not possible to do a direct comparison of AFCAS results with those of our survey. The survey of our inquiry is not a representative sample. There are also limits to its direct comparability with the AFCAS, because our survey asks veterans retrospectively about their reasons for leaving (as opposed to AFCAS, which asks about factors influencing serving personnel who are considering leaving).

422 Between 226 (9%) and 365 (15%) respondents selected each of these options (2,469 veteran respondents in total).

423 In addition, limited promotion prospects and poor management were mentioned by, for example, Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)); Ms Claire Booker (Formerly RAF) ([WAF0055](#)); Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)) para 5.11.

extreme cases, the bullying, harassment and discrimination they experienced and the way in which it was handled.⁴²⁴ Some contributors suggested women are also more likely to be medically discharged due to physical injury and muscular-skeletal problems.⁴²⁵

198. Research on Female Service Leaver suggests the reasons for leaving may differ by an individual's age, rank, Service and other factors.⁴²⁶ For instance, female veterans in Other Ranks (tri-service) were more likely to refer to bullying and harassment as a reason for leaving than Officers. Among female cohorts, Royal Navy personnel were more likely to leave as a result of work-life balance and deployments and RAF personnel due to management issues. As discussed above, the Naval Families Federation told us the Harmony guidelines—which set out the duration of tours of duty—were leading Naval personnel to leave early, because they require longer deployments in the Navy than other Services.⁴²⁷

199. According to the MOD's HR systems, the reasons for servicewomen leaving “closely mirror” those of servicemen and include lack of job satisfaction; desire to settle/live in a single area; opportunities outside Service; seeking fresh challenges and dissatisfaction with overall career/promotion.⁴²⁸

The situation of female veterans

200. Transitioning to civilian life can be difficult for all veterans, due to the “huge changes in their identity and sense of purpose”.⁴²⁹ The MOD, charities and research groups highlighted the need for further research into the needs and situation of female veterans in the UK.⁴³⁰ During the last two years, more research has been published on the employment situation⁴³¹ and health and well-being needs of female veterans.⁴³² Nonetheless, Salute Her, the female veterans' service, stated that ‘Five Eyes’ and European partners are “years ahead of the UK” in terms of the level of academic research into female veterans.⁴³³ The Royal British Legion said it is especially important to understand better the situation of female Commonwealth veterans, female veterans in resettlement and female veterans who try to get compensation.⁴³⁴ The MOD paid for some questions for ex-service personnel in the ONS Annual Population Survey from 2014 to 2017, but noted that due to the small sample size of female veterans, there is uncertainty about these results.⁴³⁵

424 Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)); Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#)) para 5.11; Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#)); Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#)); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); survey of our inquiry.

425 Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#)); Christina Dodds and Dr Matthew Kiernan ([WAF0065](#))

426 Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#)). Also cites: Cranfield School of Management, Forces in Mind Trust and Institute of Employment Studies, [Female Service Leavers and Employment](#) (September 2019).

427 Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#)); Anna Wright, [Q47](#)

428 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 30

429 Dr Karin Spenser, Dr Carrie Childs, and Dr Joanna Adhikari ([WAF0042](#))

430 For example, Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#)), Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) paras 48, 49; Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#)); Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)); Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#))

431 Cranfield School of Management, Forces in Mind Trust and Institute of Employment Studies, [Female Service Leavers and Employment](#) (September 2019)

432 The Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster and ARU undertook an NHS-funded review of research into the health and well-being of female veterans. This is summarised in Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#)) and available in full here: Cobseo and Anglia Ruskin University, [We Also Served: The Health and Well-being of Female Veterans in the UK](#) (May 2021).

433 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#))

434 Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#))

435 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 51

201. **The evidence base is improving, but large-scale quantitative research is still needed on the situation and needs of female veterans, as is further academic research. The MOD should commission large-scale research in 2022 on the situation of all veterans, with dedicated analysis of differences by sex and gender, ethnicity, housing situation and other characteristics. This can use the 2021 Census, the consultation of the Department of Health and Social Care on the Women's Health Strategy and other sources.**

202. 2,469 female veterans participated in our survey: one of the largest research exercises involving the UK's female veterans that we know of. A large proportion (1,041, ~42%) reported positive experiences of transitioning to civilian life. However, a significant share (544, ~22%) also had bad or very bad experiences.⁴³⁶ Participants reported difficulties since leaving the military—most commonly, physical or mental health issues (each cited by more than 650 veterans: around one in four respondents). They also indicated relationship problems, debt, unemployment, housing, pensions and benefits and others.⁴³⁷

203. The Ministry of Defence is ambivalent as to whether female veterans face unique or additional challenges when transitioning. It does not “consider that servicewomen face specific or additional challenges during their transition” to civilian life, but it acknowledges some female veterans face challenges in transitioning “including those particular to women veterans”.⁴³⁸

204. The Salute Her female veterans' service, the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster⁴³⁹ and female veterans themselves reported that female veterans often feel invisible and that their service was not recognised, with the former calling them “highly visible when serving - invisible afterwards”. It noted that female veterans who are minority ethnic or LGBTQ+ may experience this more acutely.⁴⁴⁰ Maria Lyle from the RAF Families Federation concurred with the idea of visibility, saying there is “female veterans are not perceived at all”.⁴⁴¹

205. Witnesses underlined that challenges facing female veterans may reflect the legacy of their Service. As discussed above, the Salute Her veterans' service and Centre for Military Justice argued that in-service experiences of sexual assault and rape can result in lasting trauma.⁴⁴² Cobseo cited the impact of bans on pregnancy and homosexuality, saying that there are “increased suicide rates found in older women veterans” who experienced these.⁴⁴³ The media has reported that historic bans negatively affected some female veterans' pensions entitlements.⁴⁴⁴ The Mesothelioma UK Research Centre said

436 A further 884 had neutral experiences or did not answer.

437 Each cited by between 262 (11%) and 390 (16%) veteran respondents.

438 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) paras 43, 48

439 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#)); Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#)).

440 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#))

441 Maria Lyle [Q51](#)

442 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#)). The Centre for Military Justice said it had received “many examples” from female veterans of the “life-long impacts of their experiences of sexual assault”. Centre for Military Justice ([WAF0056](#))

443 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))

444 [Female army veterans pushed into homelessness and destitution by 'abysmal' pensions rules](#), Independent, 9 November 2019

the effects of occupational hazards (such as asbestos exposure) are under-appreciated in female veterans.⁴⁴⁵ Poorly fitting uniform and equipment may also affect women's health outcomes.⁴⁴⁶

Employment

206. The Forces in Mind Trust provided evidence of higher levels of economic inactivity amongst women veterans than men.⁴⁴⁷ The Royal British Legion also pointed out:

UK female veterans are less likely to be employed (76%) than male service leavers (87%) and, more likely to be economically inactive (18%) compared with males (7%). 2019 research found that almost a quarter (22%) of female Service leavers surveyed were not employed, but the majority (68%) stated that they would like to be in work.⁴⁴⁸

Cobseo said that, despite lower employment amongst female veterans, they are 25% less likely to claim unemployment benefits than male veterans and that research suggests that “resettlement packages are heavily focused on male-dominated occupations and are not sufficiently tailored to meet women's needs”.⁴⁴⁹ But the MOD said that its analysis of ONS population data found that “women veterans of working age were no more likely to be unemployed compared to male veterans”.⁴⁵⁰ However, the MOD admitted that there is some uncertainty around these results, due to the small sample size of female veterans.⁴⁵¹ Lieutenant General James Swift emphasised that female veterans have higher rates of economic inactivity than unemployment and argued that female veterans are better represented in professional occupations and associate professional and technical qualifications than their male peers.⁴⁵²

207. In our survey, 1,710 female veterans (~69% of veteran respondents) felt their skills and experience from the Armed Forces were not understood by civilian employers. One in five said it took them 9 months or longer to find employment after leaving the Forces.⁴⁵³ Cobseo and the Royal British Legion both stated that women veterans are often less confident in their skills and more likely to underestimate their suitability for civilian roles.⁴⁵⁴ Female veterans can also be affected by wider gender gaps in the labour market.⁴⁵⁵

445 The Mesothelioma UK Research Centre – Sheffield ([WAF0013](#))

446 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))

447 Cranfield School of Management, Forces in Mind Trust and Institute of Employment Studies, [Female Service Leavers and Employment](#) (September 2019), p 5

448 Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 2.4.1

449 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))

450 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 53

451 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 51

452 James Swift, [Q181](#). Both individuals who are economically inactive and those who are unemployed are not officially working. The main difference is that unemployed people have actively looked for work in the immediate past, whereas economically inactive people have not. Fuller information at ONS, [A guide to labour market statistics](#) (June 2020)

453 493 (~20%) veteran respondents stated this, of a total of 2,469 who did the survey.

454 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#)); Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#)) para 2.4.1

455 Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#)) discusses a ‘double whammy’ of being female and a service leaver.

208. The Naval Families Federation stated that, in transitioning to civilian life, women with young children may have more difficulty in taking advantage of resettlement opportunities, especially if their partners are away serving.⁴⁵⁶ Dr Bergman, a female veteran who runs the Scottish Veterans Health Research Group, recommended access to a ‘delayed’ support package for female service leavers in this situation, so that they can return to work when appropriate (either in the Regular or Reserve force).⁴⁵⁷

Health

209. There is some evidence of poor health outcomes among female veterans. Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster identified a greater risk of certain physical and mental health conditions among female veterans, relative to female civilians (although not necessarily relative to male veterans).⁴⁵⁸ They said female veterans “self-report higher mental health symptoms than male veterans, but this is not reflected in mental health diagnoses”.⁴⁵⁹ The Women’s Royal Army Corp Association collaborated with Combat Stress to survey those female veterans it supports. Its initial results suggested higher levels of PTSD, anxiety and depression among the WRAC cohort, relative to the general veteran cohort.⁴⁶⁰

210. **Male and female veterans face common challenges in transitioning, but there are differences, which veterans’ services should take into account. We are also concerned that many ex-military women feel their Service is not recognised. Female veterans’ situation is directly affected by the legacy of their Service. *The MOD and Forces should do more to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of female veterans, including servicewomen who go on to work in the defence industry. Specific initiatives could be public memorials and blue plaques, support for female veterans’ networks and initiatives in Women’s History Month.***

Available services and whether these meet female veterans’ needs

211. In our survey, 1,850 female veterans (~75% of the 2,469 veteran respondents) said MoD was not helpful in their transition and 1,305 (~53%) said that their needs are not being met by veteran services.

212. The MOD says that it applies its policies and services in an “equitable and consistent” way for all veterans.⁴⁶¹ These policies/services include:

- The **Holistic Transition policy** (introduced October 2019), to coordinate Service personnel and their families’ transition to civilian life.
- The **Career Transition Partnership** (CTP), which offers employment support and job finding services.

456 Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#))

457 Dr Beverly Bergman ([WAF0016](#)) para 3(b)

458 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))

459 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))

460 Women’s Royal Army Corps Association ([WAF0019](#))

461 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 43

- **Defence Transition Services**—also set up in October 2019, to support those facing the greatest challenges.⁴⁶²
- A **Life Skills package**, which supports veterans with basic and complex needs (for example, GP registration, housing support, budgeting).

213. Academics at the University of Derby drew on their research with eight women military service leavers to suggest that existing support for veterans is both limited and male-focused.⁴⁶³ The Salute Her service and the Military War Security Research Group made a similar case.⁴⁶⁴ Many female veterans in our survey reported veteran support focused on the needs of men and could be off-putting. One veteran, commenting on attending a British Legion event, said she was the only female veteran and they “didn’t quite know what to make of me”. Dr Bergman gave data from Veterans First Point centres in Scotland in 2018, which showed that 6% of their clients were female, despite women forming around 10% of the Regular Forces.⁴⁶⁵

214. The Forces in Mind Trust believes that there are “strong indications” that female veterans’ needs are not being met by available services, due to, for example, less engagement with the MOD’s Career Transition Partnership and other services.⁴⁶⁶ Research by the Salute Her service suggested that female veterans can find the courses offered by the CTP too focused on male-dominated sectors (such as construction or security).⁴⁶⁷ The MOD believes further research is needed to know if existing services meet women veterans’ needs.⁴⁶⁸

Health

215. Although it is “difficult to know” the number of female veterans accessing statutory or voluntary health or mental health provision, the Forces in Mind Trust cited the Call to Mind report,⁴⁶⁹ which found few female veterans appeared to access veterans’ services and some employees at these services “had never seen a female veteran in their service”.⁴⁷⁰ Data from the Department of Health and Social Care appear to show women veterans are more likely to use NHS mental health services for the wider population than those specifically for veterans. Although around 11% of veterans are estimated to be female, only around 5% of those referred to the CTS and Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS) mental health services for veterans are female. Conversely, women make up 18.7% of those veterans referred to the wider population service, Improving Access to the Psychological Services (IAPT).⁴⁷¹

462 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 43

463 Dr Karin Spenser, Dr Carrie Childs, and Dr Joanna Adhikari ([WAF0042](#))

464 Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University ([WAF0036](#)); Paula Edwards, [Q39](#)

465 Dr Beverly Bergman ([WAF0016](#)) para 5(b)

466 Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#)); see also Maria Lyle, [Q67](#)

467 Salute Her, Forward Assist, [No Man’s Land](#) (2019). Based on interviews with 100 female veterans.

468 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 55

469 Forces in Mind Trust, [Call to Mind: United Kingdom](#) (June 2017)

470 Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#))

471 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 56

216. The Forces in Mind Trust thought it could “make a real difference” if statutory and voluntary health providers considered making their service more user-friendly for women and which services would be “most appropriate” to meet female veterans’ needs. It wanted local and national needs assessments to consider female veterans as an under-represented group.⁴⁷²

217. We received some evidence suggesting challenges with the administration of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. In particular, some contributors recommended greater consideration of whether the Scheme provides suitable compensation for female injury.⁴⁷³

Gender-specific provision and military sexual trauma (MST)

218. Both Paula Edwards, who leads the Salute Her service, and Dr Bergman, who runs the Scottish Veterans Health Research group, said there are few female-specific veterans’ services in the UK, compared to the United States, where there are many.⁴⁷⁴ Dr Bergman noted that many women prefer gender-specific services “especially if they have been the victim of sexual or domestic abuse or harassment”.⁴⁷⁵ The Salute Her service offers a Military Sexual Trauma support service for female veterans, but warned that there are not enough specialist support services like this, meaning “many are on a pathway of despair with multiple complex unmet needs”, including poor mental health and physical health, broken relationships, unemployment and limited prospects.⁴⁷⁶ The Military War Security Research Group at Newcastle University also identified a need for more specialised and targeted provision of support for female veterans, especially those who experienced sexual harassment or abuse in the Armed Forces.⁴⁷⁷

219. The Salute Her female veterans’ service said it would be a “game-changer” of the MOD were to recognise the specific problem of ‘military sexual trauma’ (MST), because it would support veterans to “understand what had happened to them” and “be able to seek help”.⁴⁷⁸ The service’s more detailed research⁴⁷⁹ explained that MST can be defined as sexual assault or sexual harassment experienced during military service, regardless of location, gender of victim, or the relationship to the perpetrator. It explained that MST can vary from non-military sexual assault, bringing about more severe health impacts. For example, personnel cannot always leave their duty stations freely and may come into frequent contact with their perpetrator. The nature of military roles also means that personnel may not always have time to seek help and may be facing other stress.⁴⁸⁰

472 Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#))

473 Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#)); Diane Allen ([WAF0051](#)); Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#))

474 Paula Edwards, [Q40](#); Dr Beverly Bergman ([WAF0016](#)) para 7(a)

475 Dr Beverly Bergman ([WAF0016](#)) Executive Summary

476 Salute Her, Forward Assist ([WAF0012](#))

477 Military War Security Research Group ([WAF0036](#))

478 Paula Edwards, [Q9](#)

479 Salute Her, Forward Assist, [No Man’s Land](#) (2019), para 2.5

480 Salute Her, Forward Assist, [No Man’s Land](#) (2019), p 15

220. The MOD told us it has not formally decided to use the term of military sexual trauma. It noted that the Service Police do not recognise this term and use the terminology in the Sexual Offences Act in 2003.⁴⁸¹ The term military sexual trauma is accepted in other countries, including the United States and Canada.⁴⁸² Cobseo's recent research review identified a stronger evidence base on military sexual trauma in the United States.⁴⁸³

Maternity

221. Regarding support for servicewomen who leave following maternity leave, the MOD suggested that women on maternity leave have "early, or delayed, access to resettlement as appropriate to an individual's circumstances and preferences".⁴⁸⁴ It noted the Defence Transition Services assess individual needs using a "holistic framework" and offer support for 2 years. It also stated CTP offers an individualised "programme of activity" which is available for up to 2 years post-discharge.⁴⁸⁵ However, the MOD has also told us that servicewomen may "inadvertently" face challenges with transition if they take Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML) then decide or need to leave afterwards. This may lead to them being unable to prepare for resettlement early enough, or to miss out on available resettlement entitlements. The MOD said that they should be "encouraged to start their transition to civilian life prior to going on OML" if they plan to leave after OML.⁴⁸⁶

222. We fully support the Government's efforts to improve support for all veterans, but there remain gaps in specialised services. The Government must ensure available services are more accessible to women, including, where necessary, via female-specific services. It is also necessary to acknowledge the legacy of veterans' Service in affecting their situation in later life.

223. Both transition services and veterans' services should ensure that both women and men can benefit fully from them, as the female veteran population will only grow. This may require greater female representation in the day-to-day running of the services, gender-specific points of access and better adaptation to the differing health, employment and other challenges of female veterans. This recommendation applies to both statutory services and those in the voluntary sector.

224. Building on the work of the 'Salute Her' service, the Ministry of Defence should recognise 'military sexual trauma' and fund greater provision of female-specific, specialist support services for veterans with in-service experiences of sexual harassment, assault and rape.

225. There should be a recognition of gender-specific needs and services in the Armed Forces Covenant. We endorse the recommendation (not yet accepted) of the 2021 Armed Forces Bill Committee to add a metric to the Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant on the experiences of veterans by sex or gender and by other protected characteristics. This should be part of the reporting on every chapter.

481 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

482 Paula Edwards, [Qq 9, 40](#); Veterans Affairs Canada, [Military Sexual Trauma](#) (n.d.)

483 Anglia Ruskin University and the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))

484 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

485 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#))

486 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#)) para 44

6 Overall conclusions

226. The Armed Forces can and do provide a fulfilling career for servicewomen, with vast opportunities. But the Services are failing to help women achieve their full potential.

227. We welcome some steps by the Services in recent years—particularly, more support for (male and female) personnel with family responsibilities and the rollout of Flexible Service to Regulars and (soon) Reservists. However, there are gaps between the many policy documents and practice on the ground. Moreover, the MOD's actions often give the impression that it is not a priority to make the necessary cultural changes, especially to the complaints system. When things go wrong, they go dramatically wrong—making it all the more worrying that this is not being focused on.

228. The legacy of serving affects female veterans for years to come, sometimes negatively. We want all our veterans to feel proud of their Service. Ex-military women need better recognition and support within transition and veterans' services. Senior leadership in the Armed Forces and the MOD should be bold and unequivocal in solving these challenges, both for the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces, and because our shared British values of fairness, equality and justice demand it.

229. Senior leadership in the Armed Forces and the MOD should be bold and unequivocal in solving these challenges, both for the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces, and because our shared British values of fairness, equality and justice demand it.

Conclusions and recommendations

Joining the forces - recruitment and representation

1. The UK Armed Forces have become more diverse in recent decades. We do not doubt the tremendous opportunities that serving offers. Nonetheless, barriers still affect female recruitment, including an impression that it is harder for women to thrive there. The MOD and Single Services have already taken some welcome steps, including on training. While we accept change takes time, it worries us that the female intake target of 15% was missed in 2020 and the share of women among recruits has reduced in the year since then. In our view, change remains “glacial” and the impacts of the MOD’s latest initiatives are not being felt yet. The Single Services and MOD must increase their levels of ambition. In addition, we recommend further work to improve women’s in-Service experiences (see chapters 3 and 4), including stamping out unacceptable behaviours in some parts of the Forces. We believe improving servicewomen’s experiences after joining will positively affect recruitment. (Paragraph 24)
2. *Recruitment strategies should adequately reflect the wide range of roles, trades and skills needed in the Forces of today and tomorrow, including those to arise from the Integrated Review. These strategies must challenge misperceptions, as well as flagging different entry routes and the wider Service ‘offer’ (such as education and training, Flexible Service and family support). Female role models from the military must be sufficiently involved in outreach for all Services, building on positive initiatives at single Service level.* (Paragraph 25)
3. *Without compromising physical standards for ground close combat roles, the Department must ensure that fitness tests across all Services have due regard for temporary or arbitrary factors that can hinder performance, including hormonal changes linked to pregnancy and menopause and ill-fitting kit (see chapter 3).* (Paragraph 26)

Thriving and progressing in the Forces

4. Within the military culture of the Armed Forces and the MOD, it is still a man’s world. Although many servicewomen are able to cope with this, we do not think they should have to. If the MOD is serious about making the Forces more representative of UK society, it needs to be proactive in making more space for under-represented groups, including servicewomen, and reforming the prevailing culture. The investment that it made to its Diversity and Inclusion team may help, although it is too soon to assess whether this is having the desired effects. (Paragraph 34)
5. There is too much bullying, harassment and discrimination – including criminal behaviours like sexual assault and rape – affecting Service personnel (both male and female), and the MOD’s own statistics leave no room for doubt that female Service personnel suffer disproportionately. We were alarmed and appalled that the Army’s Sexual Harassment survey of 2018 found that 21% of servicewomen had either experienced or witnessed sexual harassment at work in the previous 12 months. Such a figure should have raised major concerns in the Army but appears

not to have done so. The stories that we heard are truly shocking and they gravely concern us. They are also disappointing given the MOD's commitment to ending unacceptable behaviours and the rollout of initiatives like bystander training (see paragraph 55). In particular, we are disturbed by repeated examples of senior ranks failing those they command, by not responding appropriately or even engaging in these behaviours themselves. Some of the language we heard from senior leaders also concerned us, as it appeared to imply servicewomen wanting to progress need to learn to put up with these behaviours. Let us be clear: this behaviour is harming the health, careers and operational effectiveness of our Service personnel and has no place in the military. It also damages the reputation of all Service personnel, the majority of whom conduct themselves with integrity and professionalism. The Forces and the MOD must continue to root out these behaviours and must respond better when they occur. We make specific recommendations on this in both chapters 3 and 4 of this report. (Paragraph 51)

6. The work set in motion to reduce unacceptable behaviours by the Wigston Review shows that the MOD acknowledges the problem of unacceptable behaviour. This work is positive. However, progress is slow, and frequently there is a gap between the raft of policy documents in place and actual practice on the ground. We are not yet seeing the significant progress we need. (Paragraph 62)
7. We do not underestimate the extraordinary demands and pressures facing military leaders. They operate in a unique environment; training in the Forces is often for combat and is intended to create a fighting force that is able to kill. Nonetheless, this does not excuse unacceptable behaviour. Given the disturbing examples we heard of some leaders failing those under their command, we are concerned that Leaders' courses are not always well-attended, have been disrupted by the pandemic and do not have a clear process for assessing impact. Command courses already cover behaviours, ethics, culture and inclusion, but this existing training does not seem always to be working. *Training for leaders must be mandatory, with key performance indicators to assess its impact.* (Paragraph 63)
8. *Adapt performance assessment systems to give greater reward to 'downwardly-looking' leaders and to prevent the progression of individuals who are found to have engaged in unacceptable behaviours or to have responded inappropriately.* (Paragraph 64)
9. We support the MOD's efforts to improve the availability of data on sexual harassment specifically, including via AFCAS and an in-depth survey. We note that the tri-service sexual harassment survey will not take place until 2023: two years later than recommended by the Wigston Review. *The 2023 Sexual Harassment Survey must proceed without disruption. Henceforth, the MOD should commit to holding in-depth surveys of this kind every year, to get a handle on whether this specific form of unacceptable behaviour is reducing and whether its initiatives are having the desired effect. It is necessary to involve independent experts in the design of these surveys to reduce the risk of under-counting. The surveys should be designed so as to capture the specific problem of sexual harassment affecting minors (under-18s).* (Paragraph 65)
10. We have general concerns about how well the MOD and Single Services can measure the reach and impact of new initiatives like the anti-bullying helpline and bystander training. *The MoD and the Services must review, on an ongoing basis,*

the reach, awareness among personnel, and effectiveness of new initiatives to prevent and respond to unacceptable behaviours. These include the anti-bullying helpline and all forms of training being rolled out. In addition to BHD prevalence (AFCAS/ RESCAS) and the sexual harassment surveys, there should be initiative-specific data and indicators to measure whether these are working. For example, questions could be added to the AFCAS and RESCAS on whether Service personnel have heard of the initiatives, on whether behaviours have changed as a result, and their overall satisfaction with each of them. (Paragraph 66)

11. *The MOD must demonstrate that cultural change is a priority by publishing at least every other year an in-depth review of implementation of the Wigston Review recommendations. As the first progress review was published in late 2020, the next review should be released no later than December 2022. For example, we do not believe enough progress has been made yet on Recommendation 2.9. (Paragraph 67)*
12. *We support the MOD's recent steps to provide more appropriate uniform and equipment to female Service personnel, including re-designing air crew equipment and trialling better-fitting body armour. However, women have been able to serve in all parts of the military since late 2018, and at least 7 out of 10 roles in each Service have been open for years longer (see paragraph 8). We find it extraordinary that uniforms and equipment are still a problem across all Services. Thousands of female Service personnel, already facing the dangers of military duty, are at greater risk of harm due to basic failures in their uniform and equipment, which can have consequences for their combat effectiveness and health. Fixing these problems is one of the simplest ways that the Forces can demonstrate they value servicewomen. (Paragraph 74)*
13. *The Department must continue as a priority to trial and fully roll out safer, more appropriate uniform and equipment for female Service personnel, with a view to reaching all servicewomen (in the Regulars and Reserves) by the end of 2022. The Services should confirm that all the items mentioned in our evidence will be covered by the changes underway. The MOD should also provide a timeline for this change in the response to our report. The trials and roll-out should involve continued consultation with female personnel and relevant Service networks. As far as possible, this procurement should use British manufacturers. (Paragraph 75)*
14. *In joint bases, the variations in single service regulations over dress may cause confusion and difficulty. Consider harmonising standards over dress and etiquette when multiple services are co-located, to avoid perceptions of unfairness. (Paragraph 76)*
15. *We thank the MoD for its decision to offer back-up sanitary products to female Service personnel in austere environments, on exercise and in Phase 1 training establishments, although we wonder what part media coverage of our evidence session played in the timing of the announcement. Given the 'taboo' around menstruation, some servicewomen, particularly in junior ranks, may be too embarrassed to request the supplies from a (often male) senior officer. We encourage the MOD to continue its work with the chain of command, Women's Networks and the supply chain to provide sanitary products in all austere environments, exercises and training establishments, taking clear steps to ensure these are genuinely accessible to all who*

need them. There should be an alternative point of contact to access these, outside of the chain of command. Awareness of the effect of menstruation on servicewomen should be part of leadership training. (Paragraph 81)

16. We support the work being undertaken to give better consideration of female-specific health needs within Defence health policies, recognising that the evidence base is still growing in some areas. We especially applaud the work of the RAF and Royal Navy to provide more specialised support on ante-natal and post-natal fitness. *The MOD should continue this positive work, particularly when it comes to menopause (which may be less well catered to), and report to us annually on actions taken. The MOD should also consider the accessibility and training of military GPs, to ensure that female Service personnel can access doctors with the right knowledge and understanding to deal with a range of female health needs, regardless of the base location. This will support all Service personnel to access appropriate healthcare. (Paragraph 87)*
17. *The Ministry of Defence must put in place a clear Tri-Service policy on foreign deployment for personnel with pre-school aged children, to give serving parents (male and female) more say over their career paths when they have young children and provide them with flexible working options, whilst not disadvantaging their prospects for promotion. There should be an emphasis on easing the situation of dual-serving couples. (Paragraph 92)*
18. *The Ministry of Defence should roll out the wraparound childcare scheme to all bases and to all Services by the end of 2022, following the pilots. In the roll-out, the MOD should work closely with the Department for Education and equivalent in the Devolved Nations, and local authorities. (Paragraph 96)*
19. *The Ministry of Defence should undertake a targeted and measurable initiative to improve the uptake and use of Flexible Service, including by men, and report its progress to us by the end of 2022. (Paragraph 99)*
20. *The costs and benefits of home working should be assessed, with a view to introducing home working options wherever possible. (Paragraph 100)*
21. *The Ministry of Defence should carry out the promised equality analysis of longer or more frequent deployments, as set out in the Integrated Review, and publish these by March 2022, a year after publication of the Review. This should consider opportunities as well as risks. (Paragraph 103)*
22. Juggling Service life and family life can be hard for all Service personnel, but especially for military women, who are more often the main care-giver for children and part of a dual-serving couple. We welcome improvements to the 'offer' for Service families in recent years and the indications that flexibility of Service may be improving. However, we note that the decision over whether to accommodate requests for flexible working sits with the chain of command; key aspects of a serviceperson's career pivot around this one relationship. It is a priority to enable all Service personnel to access these entitlements (when appropriate) and to normalise their use. (Paragraph 104)

23. Female Service personnel – particularly those with children – are under-represented among military leaders in the Regulars and the Reserves. The imbalance is most severe among Senior Officers (OF7/2* and above), where the MOD says it may take over 300 years to improve. We endorse the recent commitments by the Chiefs of Staff and the Gender Balance Working Group. The MOD obviously recognise there are concerns. However, we want to see progress in practice. We struggle to assess the scope, reach and impact of these from the evidence provided. We doubt the Gender Balance Working Group has the resource and status to meet its stated aims. There needs to be a plan to deliver the targets for female personnel in leadership roles. Without these, the Chiefs of Staff’s statement is in danger of lacking teeth. (Paragraph 113)
24. *Using measurable Key Performance Indicators, the MOD’s new Diversity and Inclusion Directorate must oversee the Working Group, holding it to account on the speed, reach and impact of its work and the Service-specific levels of ambition. It may be necessary for staff from the Directorate directly to take over parts of its work, given that Group members perform this role on top of their day jobs. The workstreams of the Group should encompass all the areas that the Chiefs of Staff committed to. The Department should report progress to us annually.* (Paragraph 114)

Responding if things go wrong

25. Two years since our predecessors’ report on the work of the Service Complaints Ombudsman, we still have concerns about the functioning of the Service Complaints System and the lack of confidence in it. Our concerns are most acute for bullying, harassment and discrimination complaints, which servicewomen and minority ethnic personnel more commonly make. We understand the importance of the chain of command in the Armed Forces, but it is not always appropriate for Commander Officers to handle these complex cases, nor are they all properly equipped to do so. In some cases, their role appears to be a direct barrier to reporting. We even heard stories of senior ranks closing ranks and brushing complaints under the carpet rather than addressing them. When things go wrong for servicewomen, they go dramatically wrong. (Paragraph 134)
26. Although the Wigston Review identified a pressing need to reform the complaints process, the MOD has not fulfilled the recommendation for a Defence Authority, to handle complex BHD complaints outside the chain of command. The new Diversity and Inclusion Directorate does not fulfil this function, due to its limited role in complaint handling. Nor are we convinced that the new standing Decision Bodies and “centralised functions” do either, because they are still in the Single Services. Due to a limited mandate, the Ombudsman does not offer an alternative reporting system in the first instance. (Paragraph 147)
27. We heard consistent evidence suggesting the chain of command is a point of failure in the complaints system. (Paragraph 148)
28. *The MOD must establish a central Defence Authority, fulfilling the functions as foreseen in the Wigston Review. This should provide a reporting and investigation system, outside of the Chain of Command and outside the Single Services, for bullying,*

harassment and discrimination complaints. In particular, it should be comprised of specialised staff and remove the chain of command entirely from any complaint of a sexual nature (criminal and non-criminal). (Paragraph 149)

29. The MOD must make the recommendations of the Service Complaints Ombudsman binding on the Armed Forces and the MOD itself, with a timescale and action plan for implementation of changes where they are recommended. (Paragraph 150)
30. It sends entirely the wrong signal that the update to Joint Service Publication 763 (Bullying and Harassment Complaints Procedures), urgently recommended by the Wigston Review in July 2019, still does not have a clear publication date. *The MOD must update the relevant Joint Service Publications (763 and 831) as a matter of urgency, and certainly by the time the Government responds to this report.* (Paragraph 151)
31. We are not opposed to local, informal resolution of grievances, but there are risks, as our evidence indicates, in using these processes for complex BHD complaints. *The updated Joint Service Publications on Bullying and Harassment Complaints Procedures and on Service Complaints should each clearly refer to the other, so that personnel who experience bullying, harassment or discrimination are aware that the Service Complaints process is available to them if they do not wish to use an informal process or if the informal process does not successfully resolve the issue.* (Paragraph 152)
32. While we support reducing delay within the overall service complaints process, we seriously doubt that reducing the appeals time limit from 6 weeks to 2 weeks is the best way to achieve this. This is not where severe delays occur and will work against complainants. We struggle to understand why the MOD chose a step that may further reduce the already low level of confidence that Service Personnel have in the complaints system. *The MOD should amend the Armed Forces Bill 2021 at the earliest opportunity, to retain the 6-week time limits for appeals against the first instance decision of the Decision Body, and for appeals to the Ombudsman.* (Paragraph 153)
33. *The MOD should resource Service Complaints teams better to reduce significant delays in the system.* (Paragraph 154)
34. We do not believe that the problems highlighted by the Lyons Review in the handling of sexual offences in the Service Justice System have been fully resolved. While we accept there is a limited set of circumstances where it may be appropriate for the Service Justice System to be used for UK-based sexual offences (for example when there are offences both in the UK and overseas), this must require the Attorney General's consent. There may be other compelling reasons, such as the young age and vulnerability of the victim, when it is more appropriate for the civilian justice system to hear these cases. In our view, the fact that a UK case may involve a victim and a perpetrator who are both Service personnel is not a sufficient reason for the Service Justice System to be used. (Paragraph 175)
35. *The MOD must implement the recommendation of the Lyons Review, that the Court Martial jurisdiction should no longer include Rape and Sexual Assault with penetration, except when the consent of the Attorney General is given. The Government should also consider the Lyons Review recommendations to place all Domestic Violence and*

Child Abuse cases in the civil jurisdiction when committed in the UK. This does not prevent cases with cross-jurisdictional elements (i.e. offending both in the UK and overseas) being heard in the Service Justice System. (Paragraph 176)

36. *The MOD must update their guidance so that the new Defence Authority (see paragraph 149) refers all sexual offences and domestic violence involving service personnel in the UK to the civilian police. (Paragraph 177)*
37. *Using the data provided by the MOD, we struggled to account for the pathway followed in the Service Justice System's handling of sexual offences and had to follow up to receive further information. We appreciate this data was provided in a short timeframe, but it gives the impression that centralised data collection is poor. The MOD must ensure that it follows its own Sexual Assault Pathway with specialist services (such as Rape Trauma Kits, timeframe for action on collecting forensic evidence need to be adhered to, and specialist training for commanding officers) for all victims who have faced sexual assault. (Paragraph 178)*
38. *The MOD's sexual offences bulletin should be expanded to include new data on the pathway followed, for example the share of allegations that resulted in a Forensic Medical Examination, the share of FMEs conducted within 24 hours of a report and the share of referrals to crisis counselling. (Paragraph 179)*
39. *For the limited investigations into sexual offences still conducted by the Service Police, the Government should implement urgently the recommendations within Appendix H of the Service Justice System Policing Review (Part 1), which focus on improving how the Service Police investigate Domestic Abuse and Serious Sexual Offences. (Paragraph 180)*
40. *When personnel experience BHD, including criminal offences, their experiences of receiving support vary too much. For instance, it is not acceptable that victims of crime have not heard of the MOD's Victims' Charter. We have doubts about the quality and consistency of support offered by key individuals in both the complaints and the justice system, including the chain of command, Assisting Officers, Harassment Investment Officers and Victim Liaison Officers. We also heard stories of these individuals coming under immense pressure themselves when trying to fulfil their role. We support the MOD's commitment to improving training for commanding officers to offer the right support. (Paragraph 191)*
41. *The MOD's specialist support must reach those who need it in practice. It must also advertise forms of external support to personnel, in case they do not wish to use that offered by the MOD. (Paragraph 192)*
42. *All individuals—chain of command, Assisting Officers, Harassment Investment Officers and Victim Liaison Officers—with a key role in handling complaints must receive structured training to allow them to complete this role and to refer personnel to appropriate support. Should the MOD accept our recommendation to create a central Defence Authority (paragraph 149), the workload of these individuals should also reduce. (Paragraph 193)*
43. *It is not completely clear from the evidence whether personnel are able to self-select an Assisting Officer or whether this individual is always assigned by the chain of*

command. *Provided the officer is of appropriate seniority, we support offering an option for personnel to self-select an Assisting Officer, so that it can be an individual in whom they have greater trust.* (Paragraph 194)

Transition and resettlement

44. The evidence base is improving, but large-scale quantitative research is still needed on the situation and needs of female veterans, as is further academic research. *The MOD should commission large-scale research in 2022 on the situation of all veterans, with dedicated analysis of differences by sex and gender, ethnicity, housing situation and other characteristics. This can use the 2021 Census, the consultation of the Department of Health and Social Care on the Women's Health Strategy and other sources.* (Paragraph 201)
45. Male and female veterans face common challenges in transitioning, but there are differences, which veterans' services should take into account. We are also concerned that many ex-military women feel their Service is not recognised. Female veterans' situation is directly affected by the legacy of their Service. *The MOD and Forces should do more to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of female veterans, including servicewomen who go on to work in the defence industry. Specific initiatives could be public memorials and blue plaques, support for female veterans' networks and initiatives in Women's History Month.* (Paragraph 210)
46. We fully support the Government's efforts to improve support for all veterans, but there remain gaps in specialised services. The Government must ensure available services are more accessible to women, including, where necessary, via female-specific services. It is also necessary to acknowledge the legacy of veterans' Service in affecting their situation in later life. (Paragraph 222)
47. *Both transition services and veterans' services should ensure that both women and men can benefit fully from them, as the female veteran population will only grow. This may require greater female representation in the day-to-day running of the services, gender-specific points of access and better adaptation to the differing health, employment and other challenges of female veterans. This recommendation applies to both statutory services and those in the voluntary sector.* (Paragraph 223)
48. *Building on the work of the 'Salute Her' service, the Ministry of Defence should recognise 'military sexual trauma' and fund greater provision of female-specific, specialist support services for veterans with in-service experiences of sexual harassment, assault and rape.* (Paragraph 224)
49. There should be a recognition of gender-specific needs and services in the Armed Forces Covenant. *We endorse the recommendation (not yet accepted) of the 2021 Armed Forces Bill Committee to add a metric to the Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant on the experiences of veterans by sex or gender and by other protected characteristics. This should be part of the reporting on every chapter.* (Paragraph 225)

Overall conclusions

50. The Armed Forces can and do provide a fulfilling career for servicewomen, with vast opportunities. But the Services are failing to help women achieve their full potential. (Paragraph 226)
51. We welcome some steps by the Services in recent years—particularly, more support for (male and female) personnel with family responsibilities and the rollout of Flexible Service to Regulars and (soon) Reservists. However, there are gaps between the many policy documents and practice on the ground. Moreover, the MOD's actions often give the impression that it is not a priority to make the necessary cultural changes, especially to the complaints system. When things go wrong, they go dramatically wrong—making it all the more worrying that this is not being focused on. (Paragraph 227)
52. The legacy of serving affects female veterans for years to come, sometimes negatively. We want all our veterans to feel proud of their Service. Ex-military women need better recognition and support within transition and veterans' services. (Paragraph 228)
53. Senior leadership in the Armed Forces and the MOD should be bold and unequivocal in solving these challenges, (Paragraph 229)

Annex 1: Survey results

Methodological information

The survey for the Women in the Armed Forces inquiry ran for two weeks, from 1 to 14 December 2020. It was completed by 4,106 women, of whom 1,637 were serving personnel and 2,469 were veterans. This is one of the largest research samples of current and ex-military women in the UK. However, the results should not be interpreted as representative of *all* women who serve, or have served, in the Armed Forces. The responses may demonstrate ‘self-selection’ or ‘volunteer’ bias, whereby they overrepresent individuals who have strong opinions or interests.

Around 9 out of 10 respondents are/were in the Regulars, with the rest drawn from the Reserves or not providing this information.⁴⁸⁷ At least 1,421 *currently serving personnel* in the survey were in the Regulars.⁴⁸⁸ This equates to approximately 9% of all women in the UK Regular Forces.⁴⁸⁹ All three Services were represented in the survey, although the British Army was best represented, followed by the RAF. Over half (2,778) of all responses came from serving Army personnel or veterans, 892 were from the RAF and 426 from the Royal Navy.⁴⁹⁰ Mixed ranks were represented, with respondents largely from these ranks (from junior to more senior):

- OR-1 to OR-3: Ranks below Corporal (more than 1,200 responses)
- OR-4 to OR-9: Leading rate/Corporal/Sergeant/Staff up to Warrant Officer (more than 1,500 responses)
- OF-1 to OF-3: Commissioned Officer up to Lt Commander/Major/Squadron Leader (more than 1,000 responses)
- OF-4 to OF-6: Commissioned Officer from Commander/Lieutenant-Colonel/Wing Commander up to Commodore/Brigadier/Air Commodore (more than 200 responses).

There was less representation of the most senior women in the survey (OF-7 and above) and the ranks of some respondents were unclear or not given. To some extent, this is expected, as women make up a lower share of the most senior ranks. Appendix 1 presents a comparative table of ranks across the three Services.

Most survey respondents (3907, ~95%) were White, with the remainder from minority ethnic backgrounds (135, ~3%), or not answering this question (64, ~2%).⁴⁹¹ Women of all ages responded to the survey, with the highest number of responses received from women aged between 35 and 54.

487 Out of 4,106 survey respondents, 4070 answered this question. Of these, 3777 are/were Regulars and 293 are/were Reservists.

488 Some serving personnel chose not to say whether they were in the Regulars or the Reserves.

489 As of 1 October 2020, women constituted 11.0% of the UK Regular Forces (16,110 personnel). MOD, [UK Armed Forces: Biannual Diversity Statistics 1 October 2020](#) (Published 17 December 2020), p 15

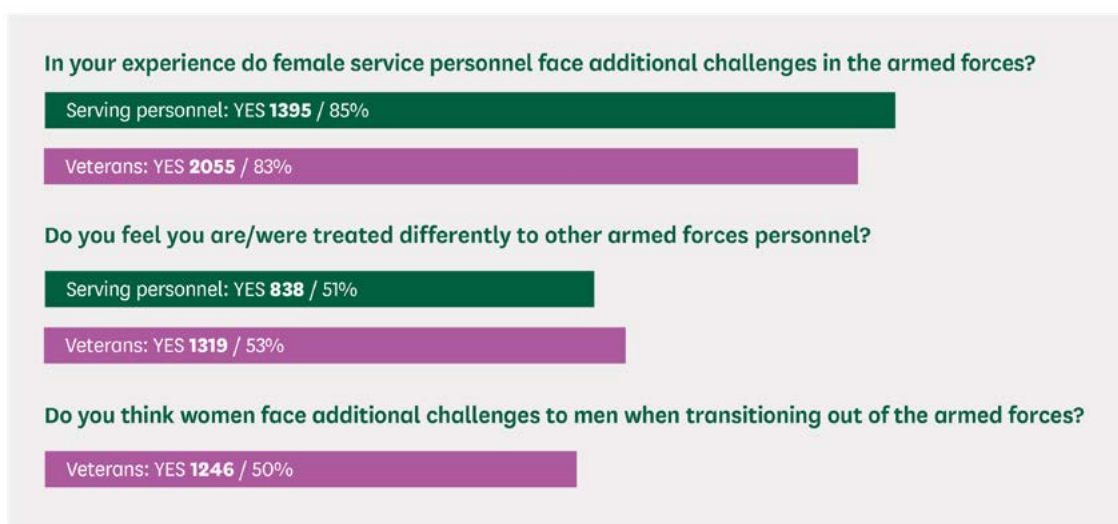
490 10 respondents did not provide these details.

491 Minority ethnic personnel of both genders made up 9.1% of the UK Regular Forces in October 2020, although it is not possible to access data on the share of BAME women specifically in the Armed Forces, nor to consider how this compares to their representation among the survey's respondents.

Highlights from the survey

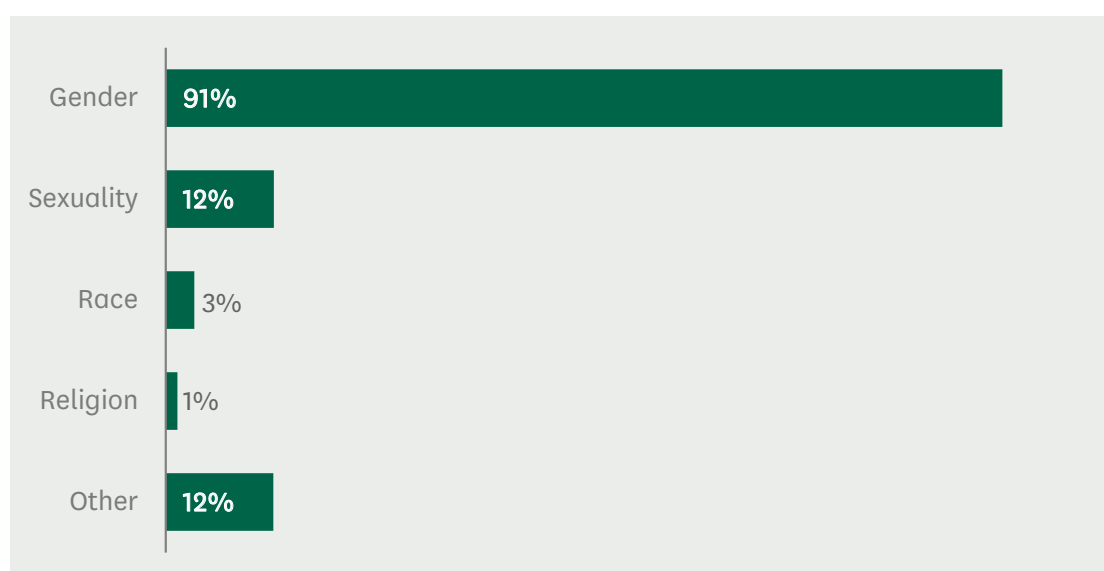
Highlights from the survey are below. In addition, 1,842 respondents provided open-text comments. The body of this report contains the analysis of open-text comments, as well as further quantitative results.

Respondents' agreement that female serving personnel and veterans face additional challenges



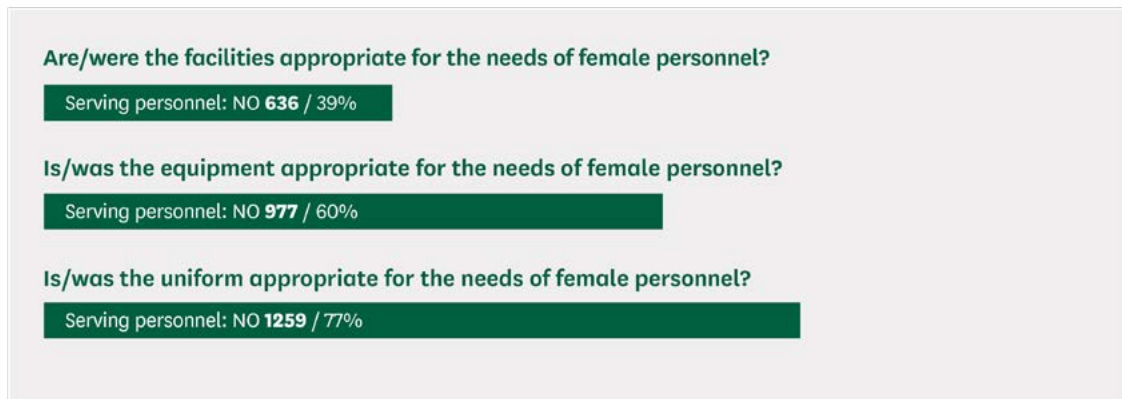
Notes: Shows share of respondents who answered 'Yes' to the questions in the graphic, split by serving personnel and veterans. Serving personnel were not asked the question on transitioning. Base numbers for percentage calculation: 1,637 currently serving personnel and 2,469 veterans.

Reasons given by those who reported experiencing different treatment to other Armed Forces personnel (multiple answers possible)



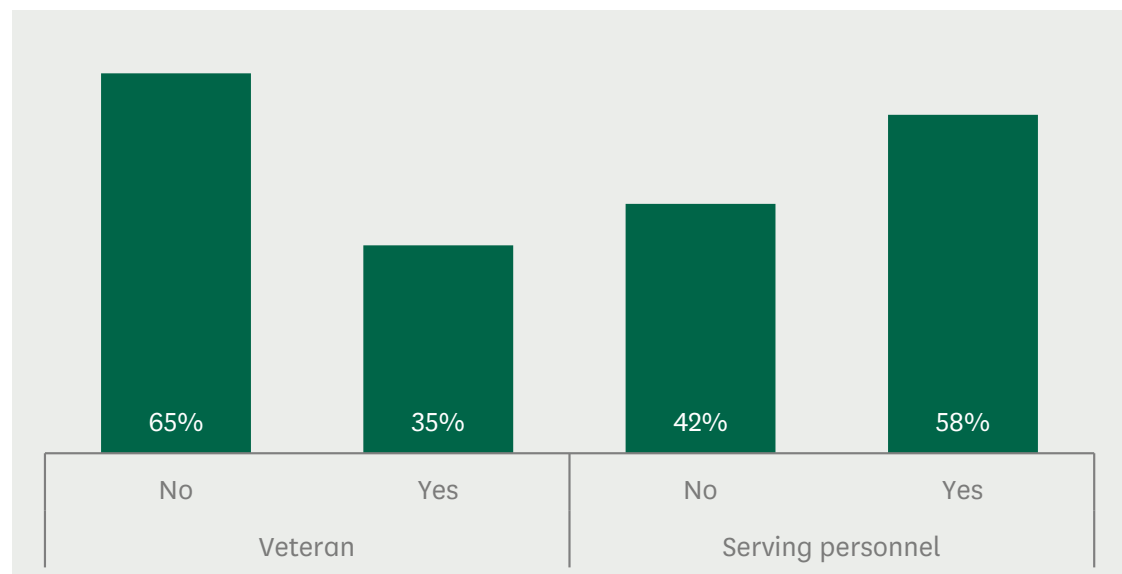
Notes: Multiple answers possible. Shows the share of respondents who selected each reason, out of the 2,128 respondents who stated that they had been treated differently and who answered this question.

Share of currently serving personnel who think that facilities/equipment/uniform are inappropriate for the needs of female personnel



Notes: Covers the share of female serving personnel who answered 'no' when asked each of these questions: 'Are/were the facilities appropriate for the needs of female personnel?'; 'Is/was the equipment appropriate for the needs of female personnel?'; 'Is/was the uniform appropriate for the needs of female personnel?'. Base number for percentage calculation: 1,637 currently serving personnel.

Whether respondents believe they have/had the flexibility at work to ensure a balanced family and working life



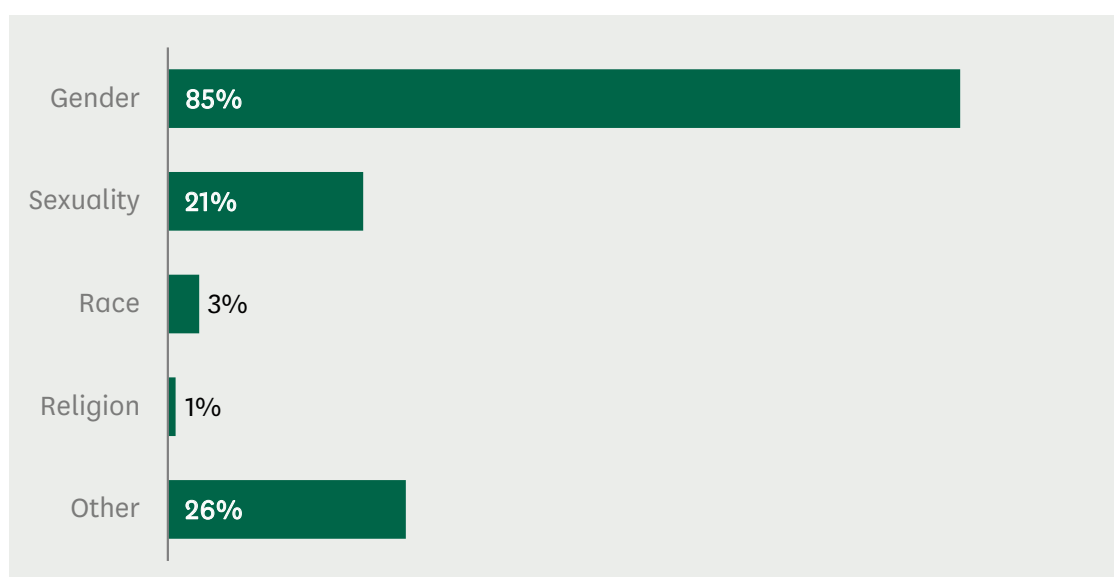
Notes: Shows share of respondents who answered 'Yes' and 'No' to this question: 'Do/did you have the flexibility at work to ensure a balanced family and working life?' Covers 2,407 veteran respondents and 1,624 currently serving respondents. 75 non-respondents excluded from the graphic and percentages.

Experiences of bullying, harassment and discrimination among survey respondents



Notes: Shows the share of respondents who answered 'Yes' to each of these questions, split by Serving personnel and veterans. Base numbers for percentage calculation: 1,637 currently serving personnel and 2,469 veterans.

Reported basis for bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, among those who reported experiencing an incident



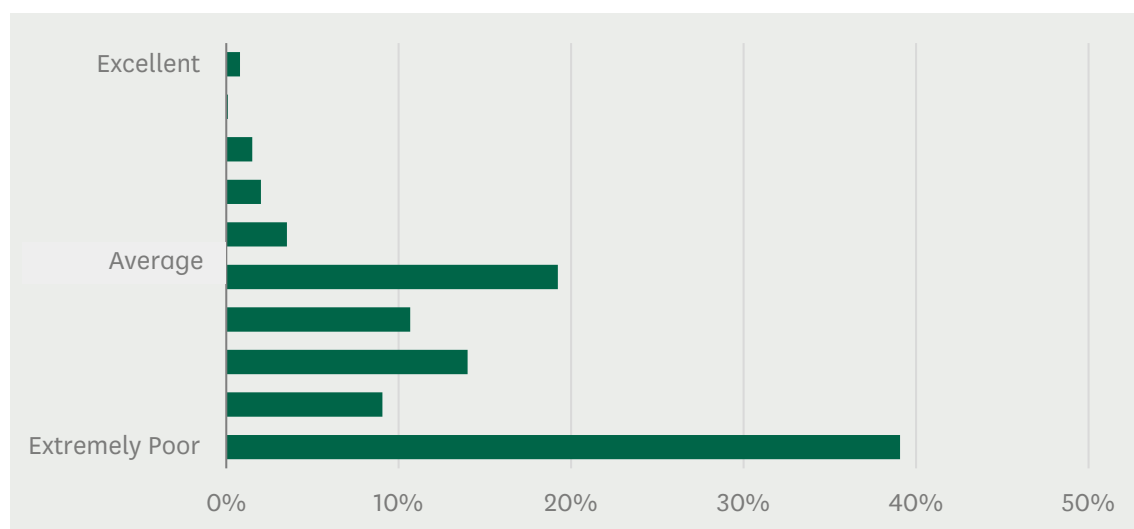
Notes: Multiple answers possible. Shows the share of respondents who selected each reason, out of the 2,139 respondents (serving and veteran) who stated that they had experienced BHD and who answered this question.

Around six in 10 respondents who personally experienced bullying, harassment and discrimination did not report these incidents.⁴⁹² Rates of reporting were only slightly higher amongst serving personnel than veterans.⁴⁹³

492 2,524 respondents answered this question. 1,538 (61%) had not reported the bullying, harassment and discrimination they experienced.

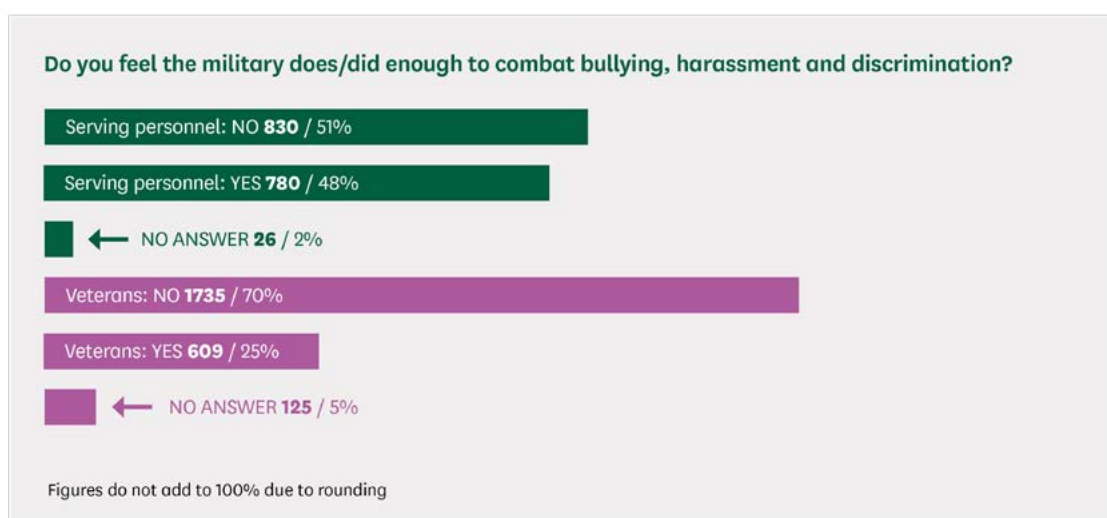
493 The incident-reporting rate was around 41% among serving personnel, versus 38% among veterans. Base numbers: 954 for serving personnel and 1570 for veterans.

Rating of the complaints system by those who had made a complaint

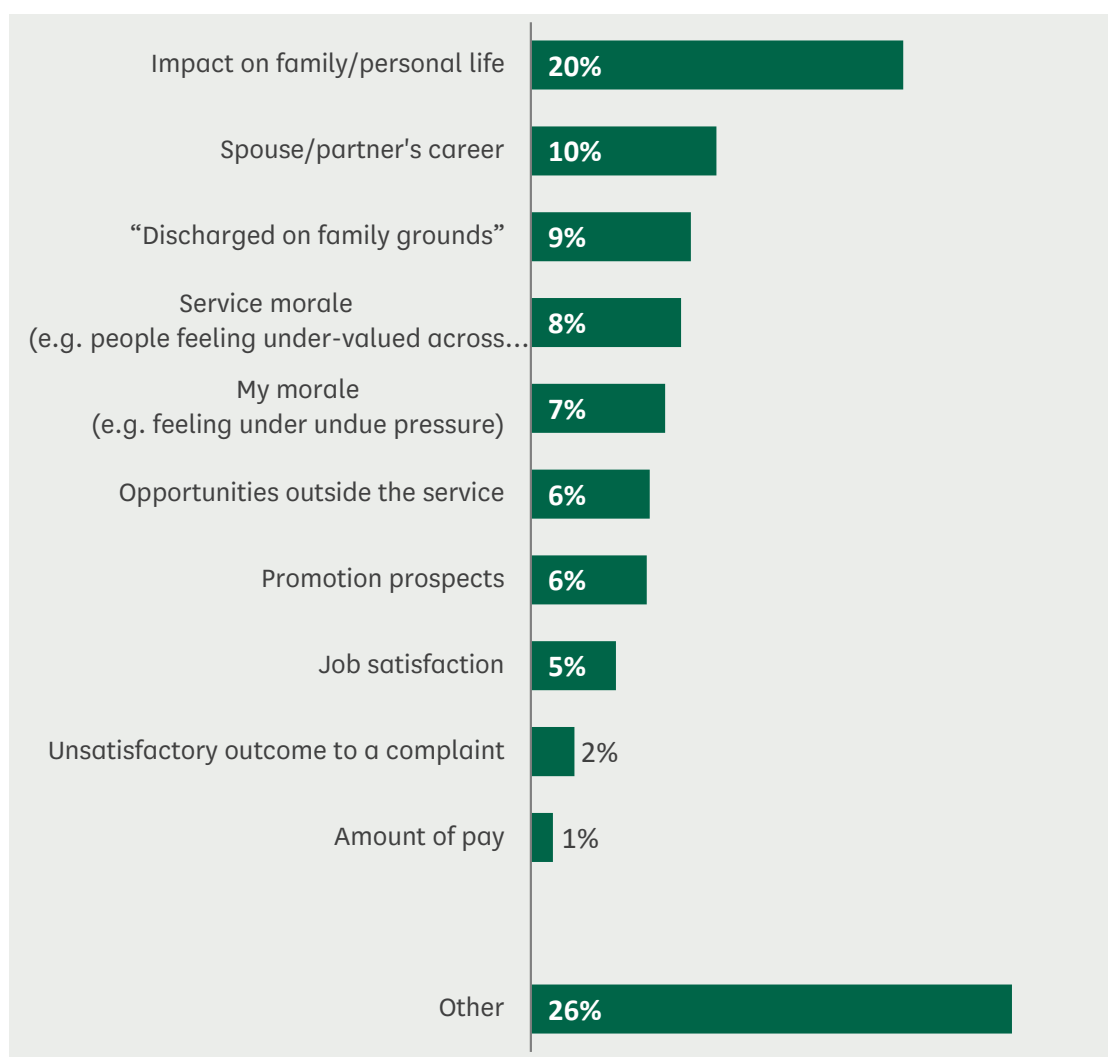


Notes: Covers 993 servicewomen and female veterans with experience of using the complaints system. May also cover individuals who used the complaints system for non-BHD complaints.

Views on the military's actions to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination

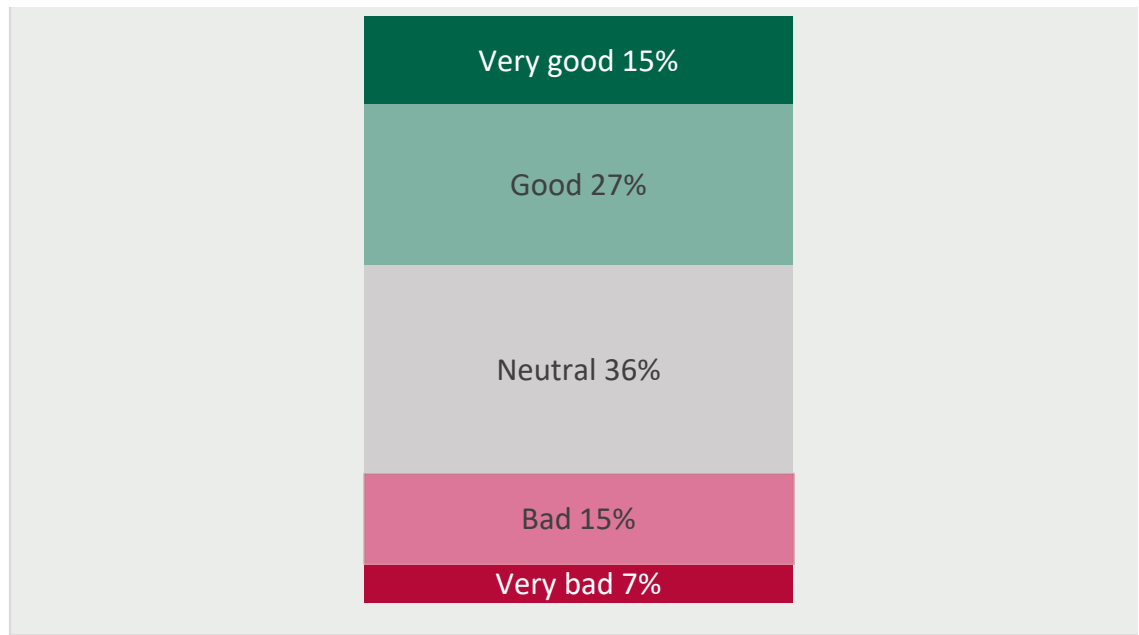


Notes: Shows answers to two questions on actions to tackle BHD, split by serving personnel and veterans. Rounding of percentages to nearest whole number means some do not equal 100%. Covers all respondents: 1,637 female serving personnel and 2,469 female veterans

Reasons for leaving the Armed Forces (multiple answers possible)

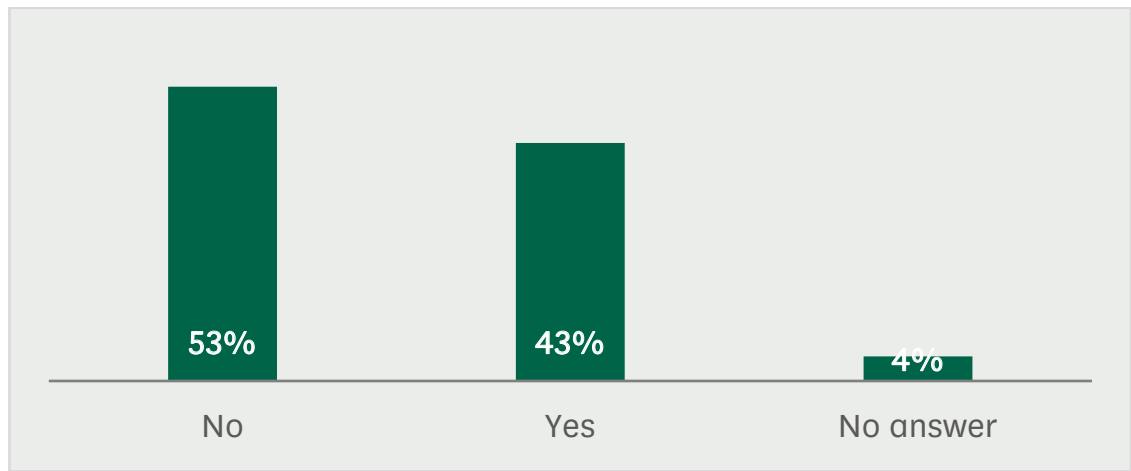
Notes: Veterans only. Multiple answers possible per respondent. Includes 2,545 veterans who answered this question.

Veterans’ assessment of their transition to civilian life

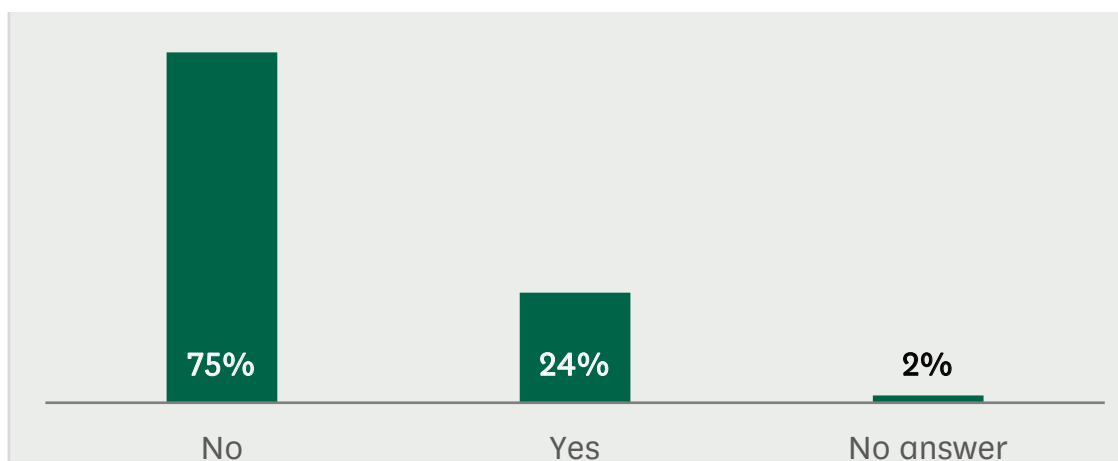


Notes: Covers 2,459 veteran respondents. 10 did not answer this question and are excluded from this graphic.

Are your needs currently being met by the veteran services?



Notes: 2,469 veteran respondents (all).

Was the Ministry of Defence helpful in your transition?

Notes: 2,469 veteran respondents (all).

Appendix 1: Hierarchy of ranks in the Armed Forces

NATO Code	Royal Navy	Army and Royal Marines	AIR FORCE
OF-10	Admiral of the Fleet	Field Marshal	Marshal of the Royal Air Force
OF-9	Admiral	General	Air Chief Marshal
OF-8	Vice-Admiral	Lieutenant-General	Air Marshal
OF-7	Rear Admiral	Major-General	Air Vice-Marshal
OF-6	Commodore	Brigadier	Air Commodore
OF-5	Captain	Colonel	Group Captain
OF-4	Commander	Lieutenant-Colonel	Wing Commander
OF-3	Lieutenant-Commander	Major	Squadron Leader
OF-2	Lieutenant	Captain	Flight Lieutenant
OF-1	Sub-Lieutenant (but junior to military and air force ranks)	Lieutenant	Flying Officer
	Midshipman (but junior to army and air force ranks)	Second Lieutenant	Pilot Officer
			Acting Pilot Officer (but junior to Second-Lieutenant)
OR-9	Warrant Officer	Warrant Officer Class I	Warrant Officer
			Master Aircrew
OR-8		Warrant Officer Class 2	
OR-7	Chief Petty Officer	{ Staff Sergeant { Colour Sergeant, RM	Flight Sergeant Chief Technician
OR-6	Petty Officer	Sergeant	Sergeant
OR-5			
OR-4	Leading Rate (but junior to army ranks of corporal and bombardier)	Corporal	Corporal
		Bombardier	
OR-3		Lance Corporal	
		Lance Bombardier	
OR-2	Able Rate	Marine	Junior Technician
OR-1		Private	Senior aircraftman
			Leading aircraftman
			Aircraftman

Source: Annex B at [Armed Forces Act 2006 - Explanatory Notes \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Formal minutes

Monday 12 July 2021

Virtual meeting

Members present

John Spellar, in the Chair

Stuart Anderson

Sarah Atherton

Martin Docherty-Hughes

Kevan Jones

Derek Twigg

Protecting those who protect us: Women in the Armed Forces from recruitment to civilian life

Draft Report from the Sub-Committee (*Protecting those who protect us: Women in the Armed Forces from recruitment to civilian life*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 229 read and agreed to.

Annex and Summary agreed to.

A paper be appended to the Report as an appendix.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Sub-Committee to the Committee in this session.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 13 July 2021 at 2.00pm.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Thursday 04 March 2021

Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Diane Allen; Paula Edwards, Project Lead & Mental Health Therapist, Salute Her

[Q1–42](#)

Maria Lyle, Director, RAF Families Federation; **Anna Wright**, CEO, Naval Families Federation

[Q43–67](#)

Thursday 18 March 2021

Emma Norton, Director and Solicitor, Centre for Military Justice (CMJ); **Nicola Williams**, former Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces

[Q68–99](#)

Ahmed Al-Nahhas, Partner and Head of Military Claims, Bolt Burdon Kemp; **Wing Commander (Ret'd) Graham House**, Principal, Justice4Troops

[Q100–123](#)

Tuesday 27 April 2021

Lieutenant General James Swift OBE, Chief of Defence People, Ministry of Defence; **Samantha des Forges**, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Ministry of Defence; **Air Vice Marshal Maria Byford QHDS**, Chief of Staff Personnel and Air Secretary, Ministry of Defence; **Baroness Goldie**, Minister of State

[Q124–191](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

WAF numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Agora ([WAF0059](#))
- 2 Allen, Diane, Lieutenant-Colonel, (Retired) ([WAF0051](#))
- 3 Anonymous, ([WAF0067](#))
- 4 Anonymous, ([WAF0037](#))
- 5 Anonymous, ([WAF0076](#))
- 6 Anonymous, ([WAF0054](#))
- 7 Anonymous, ([WAF0052](#))
- 8 Anonymous, ([WAF0024](#))
- 9 Anonymous, ([WAF0002](#))
- 10 Anonymous, ([WAF0005](#))
- 11 Antrobus, Dr Sophy (Research Associate, Freeman Air and Space Institute, King's College London); and West, Hannah (Postgraduate Researcher, University of Bath) ([WAF0061](#))
- 12 Baker, Mrs Kelly (CivHR Policy Exits, MOD) and (Menopause Network Group, MOD) ([WAF0006](#))
- 13 Bergman, Dr Beverly (Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Scottish Veterans Health Research Group, Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow) ([WAF0016](#))
- 14 Bolt Burdon Kemp ([WAF0043](#))
- 15 Booker, Ms Claire (Retired, Formerly RAF) ([WAF0055](#))
- 16 Capita ([WAF0050](#))
- 17 Centre for Military Justice (CMJ) ([WAF0056](#))
- 18 Child Rights International Network (CRIN) ([WAF0077](#))
- 19 Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) Female Veterans Cluster ([WAF0020](#))
- 20 Conway, Cdr Suzy (N9 Remuneration SO1, Royal Navy) ([WAF0032](#))
- 21 Denton, Miss Amy Victoria (Analytical Consultant, TP Group) ([WAF0068](#))
- 22 Dobson, Elaine ([WAF0001](#))
- 23 Fenton, Dr Rachel (Senior Lecturer in Law and Speak Out Guardian, The University of Exeter) ([WAF0073](#))
- 24 Forces in Mind Trust ([WAF0039](#))
- 25 Forward Assist; and Salute Her ([WAF0012](#))
- 26 Justice4Troops ([WAF0078](#))
- 27 King's Centre for Military Health Research, King's College London; and Academic Department of Military Mental Health, MoD ([WAF0049](#))
- 28 King, Professor Anthony (Chair of War Studies, University of Warwick) ([WAF0066](#))

- 29 Loring, Commander Andrew (SO1 Maritime - Defence Force Development, Director General Joint Force Development (UK Strategic Command)) ([WAF0017](#))
- 30 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0079](#)), ([WAF0080](#))
- 31 Ministry of Defence ([WAF0057](#))
- 32 Montgomery, Justine ([WAF0048](#))
- 33 Naval Families Federation ([WAF0040](#))
- 34 Northumbria University ([WAF0065](#))
- 35 RAF Families Federation ([WAF0038](#))
- 36 Royal British Legion ([WAF0064](#))
- 37 Spenser, Dr Karin (Discipline Lead: Head of Forensic Psychology, University of Derby); Childs, Dr Carrie (Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Derby); and Adhikari, Dr Joanna (Lecturer in Criminal Psychology, University of Derby) ([WAF0042](#))
- 38 The Mesothelioma UK Research Centre – Sheffield ([WAF0013](#))
- 39 Walker OBE, Professor Janet (Emeritus Professor of Family Policy, Newcastle University, Newcastle University); Selous MP, Andrew (Member of Parliament, UK Government); and Misca, Dr Gabriela (Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Worcester) ([WAF0041](#))
- 40 Women’s Royal Army Corps Association ([WAF0019](#))
- 41 Wright, Dr Katharine A. M. (Senior Lecturer in International Politics, Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University); Cree, Dr Alice (Research Fellow in Human Geography, Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University); Jude, Dr Sorana (British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University); and Woodward, Professor Rachel (Professor of Human Geography, Military War Security Research Group, Newcastle University) ([WAF0036](#))
- 42 WRNS, Anonymous Veteran ([WAF0010](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Russia and Ukraine border tensions	HC 167
1st Special	Obsolescent and outgunned: the British Army's armoured vehicle capability: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 221
2nd Special	Manpower or mindset: Defence's contribution to the UK's pandemic response: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 552

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	In Search of Strategy—The 2020 Integrated Review	HC 165
2nd	The Security of 5G	HC 201
3rd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Service Complaints Ombudsman	HC 989
4th	Foreign Involvement in the Defence Supply Chain	HC 699
5th	Obsolescent and outgunned: the British Army's armoured vehicle capability	HC 659
6th	Manpower or mindset: Defence's contribution to the UK's pandemic response	HC 357
1st Special	Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2018: Government Response to the Committee's Eighteenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 162
2nd Special	Drawing a Line: Protecting Veterans by a Statute of Limitations: Government Response to the Defence Committee's Seventeenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 325
3rd Special	In Search of Strategy—The 2020 Integrated Review: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 910
4th Special	The Security of 5G: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 1091
5th Special	Foreign Involvement in the Defence Supply Chain: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1380