

## **Written evidence submitted by Capita**

We would like to warmly welcome the Defence Select Committee's launch of your enquiry. At Capita, we are committed to being a purpose-led, progressive, responsible business – in how we operate, serve society, respect our people and the environment.

### **Background**

Capita has worked in partnership with the Army as the Recruiting Partnering Project (RPP) to attract, source and select Officers and Soldiers since 2012. In December 2020, Capita secured a 2-year contract extension with the Ministry of Defence to continue to deliver the recruitment service for the British Army. The award of the extension is testament to the strong, partnering relationship that we have developed with the Army and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in the last three years. The turnaround of RPP means it is now seen as an exemplar of partnership working between the private sector and government. In 2019-2020, we filled the Regular Soldier and Regular Direct Entry Officer demand, and 95% of the Reserve Soldier demand.

Capita has partnered with the MOD to deliver critical services of national importance. In addition to delivering recruitment to the Army we are mobilising operations to deliver Defence Fire and Rescue Services capability, providing e-learning and support services to the UK Defence Centre for Languages & Culture, and technical support to the Astute-class submarine build programme. It has also recently been announced that we will be delivering the Selborne project as the leading member of a consortium of companies operating as Team Fisher.

We fully support the stated aims of the Army to recruit from all sections of society in line with MOD goals to harness the power of difference. Within RPP this includes supporting goals to increase the proportion of female recruits, given the well-known organisational, economic, and social benefits. Research and analysis have enabled us to better understand the stages of the recruitment journey from a gender perspective, and to adapt our approach accordingly – from attracting candidates to apply, through to Army assessment. A small snapshot of this is provided here.

## Understanding the Challenge

*“I was daunted by the Army before I came in but there are a lot more women here than you think. If I had known this beforehand, I would have known that I wouldn’t be isolated.”* A recent recruit.

The Army is an equal opportunities employer and all roles are now open to all, regardless of gender. Despite this, our research shows that there is still a trend that females within the Main Target Audience (MTA - 17-24 years of age) are less open to considering a role in the Army (62% of males compared to 41% of females).

	MTA - Male	MTA - Female
Active considerer	8%	3%
Strong considerer	17%	10%
Non rejecter	37%	28%
Rejecter	38%	59%
Total Open to Army Role	62%	41%

Below we have listed a few of the perceived barriers that we know through our research affect female recruitment.

### ‘Super Woman’ principle

*“I wasn’t fit enough for it. I would rather wait until I knew I was fit enough.”* A recruit.

Often female applicants or prospective applicants believe that they need to be combat-fit from the first day of application. While there are physical fitness standards to pass assessment, candidates do not need to be at peak physical fitness at the first point of contact with the application process.

To tackle this, we have tailored initiatives including the Army Fit App which specifically supports candidates throughout their application journey to reach the required physical fitness levels. We redesigned the site to appeal more equitably to men and women, and to support female fitness more specifically; we have removed some of the options when you first use the app – making it as simple as possible to get started without feeling like the user is over-committing. There is now also a new option to attempt a practice 2km run, record your progress and share the results with contacts for peer support. The recruiter also provides individualised support for fitness goals, thereby reducing any sense of isolation and mitigating fear of failure which can be higher for women. In addition, we have recently introduced more in-depth support via our Be Military Fit (BMF) programme which targets assessment preparation.

### Addressing Fears

*“I suppose I thought they spent their days sitting in a bunker somewhere with guns ready to attack as soon as the war starts “.* A recruit.

Joining the Army is a significant decision, bringing with it many considerations. Research helps us understand how these differ between men and women, and therefore to equip our recruiters and colleagues to be able to address concerns effectively.

For example, we understand the difference between being ‘risk averse’ and being ‘risk alert’. This can mean that fears are vocalised more by women. Our recruiters therefore ensure open discussions are undertaken with candidates as well as parents so that concerns can be voiced, and where appropriate allayed. To balance fear with fact we broaden understanding of the wide range of Army roles (more than 100), via marketing and personalised career discussions.

This year’s recruiting campaign messaging ‘Fail. Learn. Win’ is also borne from extensive research which shows the MTA increasingly fear failure. This is more pronounced in young women; testing of the campaign collateral proved it spoke well to women in the light of this. Research shows 81% of young people don’t achieve their goals because of fear of failure, and 76% of young people admit to feeling held back by fear of failure when taking on new challenges.

### A Sense of Belonging

Perceptions that the Army is a male-dominated organisation where women may find it more difficult to thrive are often compounded by media reports and publications. To counter this, we have ensured high visibility of women throughout the recruitment process, including contact with serving female soldiers via digital events, podcasts and social media. Candidates can also ask questions directly with serving soldiers via our online platform - choosing a female soldier if they wish. Of all the users of this site in the last 12 months, 47% have been female, asking questions on a variety of ‘life in the Army’ topics, including hairstyles, family-friendly policy, and periods. We have also continued to upskill our people in all aspects of inclusive recruitment, so that candidate experience matches the ‘Belonging’ ethos which our recruiting campaigns have effectively promoted.

### **Conclusion**

We thoroughly support the Defence Select Committee’s choice to launch this enquiry. We would like to think the above points provide a snapshot of the extensive work Capita is doing to ensure that recruitment into the Army is inclusive, and how the company fully supports the Defence ambition to increase the representation of women.

We would be delighted to follow up with you on any of these points and, if helpful, to provide further information.

*30th January 2021*