

Anonymous written evidence submission¹

HCDC Inquiry: Women in Armed Forces

Dispensation to contribute evidence

As I am currently away on a [...] overseas tour in [...] with no rest and relaxation leave which would normally provide a 14 day break in the middle to return to the UK I have been unable to get evidence to support this submission or exact dates and further information. I will return to the UK in April at which point I could look for evidence to support this submission if required.

Summary

In my evidence I have covered a number of times I was subjected to harassment and discrimination in different posts.

I have also set out areas which are unconsciously bias, including clothing and accommodation charges.

[...] RAF [...]

[...] post at RAF [...] was my first permanent posting after completing my training.

In my end of tour OJAR (annual report) interview I was accused of having relations with a junior rank. I said I was not but the Sqn Cdr insisted that as a (male) WO had told him that I was it must be true. The Wg Cdr [...] (in his 40s) then demanded in a one to one interview with myself [...] 'have you had sex with him I need to know, I need details'. I was told by him as it was a day before Christmas leave that he could make me stay at the RAF Station over Christmas if I did not tell him what he wanted to know. He said he would prevent me going home for Christmas and I would remain in the Mess over Christmas on my own. I would not be allowed to see my family. I was a very junior officer and I did not know who to go to for help. This was all documented in a Service Complaint which eventually after being dragged out for years found that there was not sufficient evidence to prove he had done this. I applied to employment tribunal and it was settled out of court. I had to take the small out of court settlement as I could not afford to take it to full ET. The Wg Cdr had written on my annual report that I had been involved with a junior rank, even though I had not and there was nothing to prove I had, it was all based on hearsay and gossip, which as a woman you have to put up with a lot of military and you learn just to ignore it. I asked for this report to be removed from my permanent career file and be rewritten as part of the out of court settlement. The reports were removed but the RAF refused to rewrite them claiming it was too far in the future by that time rewritten. These reports prevented me from getting signed on after my Short Service Commission ended and permanently damaged my career beyond repair.

[...] [Another RAF posting]

The male OC RAF [...] asked to have a man to do the job I was posted into prior to my arrival in post [...], this was recorded in the notes on my career management file. He said he had previously had a woman in the post and did not want another woman.

¹ Some details removed to protect contributor's identity and identity of others. These are marked with [...]

As he was told by my career manager, desk officer as they were called then, that he had to have a woman posted in as that was who was available for the post. When I arrived in post he made my life miserable.

One time when he was having a go at me telling me a man could do the job better than me I stood up to him and told him that I was doing a good job he then booked me a flight back to [...] and ordered me to see the Mental Health team. I did not have an appointment and he did not have medical permission to send me back as a medical case. I had to insist the doctor saw me as it would take months to get an appointment, the doctor spent about 2 hours talking to me and said I was fine and I went back to [...] on the next flight. The Doctor emailed my chain of command telling him the process he had put me through was not acceptable. This made my line manager really cross and my life was made unbearable by him until I left I spent nearly a year in this post. He managed to insist on me ending my tour there early and I returned to the UK prior to the end of my tour. I got the impression he hated women in the RAF, as he was RAF Regt which was a trade in the RAF that did not accept women at that time he did not usually have to deal with women.

[...] [Another RAF posting] – 2008 to 2014

During my time on [...] Sqn, [...] I encountered a culture of discrimination and sexual harassment towards women. It was made clear from when I joined the Sqn that certain older men who had been on the sqn for some 20 years ran the Sqn with a culture of harassment and bullying and if you did not submit to their sexual requirements then you would be bullied out of the Sqn.

Incidences:

After a Wednesday Evening Meeting, as I was a reserve at this time I had to drive nearly 100 miles to attend the meeting after finishing my civilian day job so I would stay overnight and drive back in the morning very early to avoid driving home tired, Sgt [...] (Male) got very drunk in the bar and tried to accost me several times, eventually I left the bar and went to my accommodation. At Approx. 0300 there was a banging on my accommodation room door. I opened the door and Sgt [...] demanded to know if I wanted sex with him. I declined. To which he replied I would not be flattered I ask you for sex Ma'am I am that drunk I would have sex with anyone. I shut the door, locked it and put a chair against it. I decided not to take action as he had a wife and family and I knew how difficult it is to put in a complaint in and I know it would have had more of an effect on me than him.

WO [...].

WO [...] bullied me on many occasions and was rude about me behind my back. I was on the Sqn from 2008 to 2014.

One evening early on in my time on [...] Sqn after having a drink in the bar I was invited back to WO [...] own private room. He was not supposed to have a permanent room on the Sqn but he had taken one over and used it for entertaining. I declined after this time the bullying and discrimination started. WO [...] would take any opportunity to bully me, run me down to my chain of command and generally make my life a misery on the Sqn.

On one occasion I was in a briefing in with all the personnel who worked for me, which would have been about 30 other ranks. WO [...] burst into the briefing and demanded that I came out of the briefing. The way he was carrying on I thought someone had died, so I left the briefing. When I got out the briefing room, WO [...] ushered me into another classroom. Once in the classroom he shut the door and started to shout at me. He shouted that I had been walking about outside without my

hat on. I told him that I had not and he was to stop going on like this. He would not stop the more I said it was not me the more he shouted and waved his figure in my face in a threatening way. I was aware that a girl similar to me had had to walk outside with out her hat as she had left it behind somewhere. I told him I knew who it was and I had dealt with this but he just kept shouting. I was not going to discuss with him who it was as I did not want to subject another female to his awful behavior. I was aware he was not going to stop shouting so I had to get passed him and out the door. He was so cross that I had walked out that he followed me and kept shouting. I walked outside and he caught up with me in the roadway outside and he kept shouting and pointing in my face with his finger in a threatening way.

This was the final straw, I put in a service complaint.

I had only been on the Sqn a little over a year when this happened. WO [...] either persued women in a sexual way and if he saw he was not going to be able to or if a woman stood up to him he bullied them until they left.

I documented the other times he had bullied me and I got statements from other women he had bullied and harassed. The service complaint when through all the stages and was decided there was no evidence to show discrimination and harassment.

I then moved to take the case to an employment tribunal. The employment tribunal found WO [...] guilty of harassment against me and the 4 other women who had made statements for me.

The discrimination was based on my being female. My main concern is that I went through the internal complaints process and my complaint was not upheld so I was forced to go to the Employment tribunal service to get it recognised. The ET found 5 counts of discrimination by WO [...] against 4 women but the RAF would not take action as they stated they had not found this and so no action was taken to address the discrimination within the RAF and thus the individual is still working in the same post, 10 years later, with nothing done to address the problem and the way he treats women. During the ET the RAF supported the WO [...] who was accused of discrimination, they provided him with a Wg Cdr from the Sqn to sit with him throughout the ET and in contrast I was not provided any support during the ET from the RAF or after the ET to address what I had been through because of the discrimination or the effect having to take this to an ET had had on me. I was told after I had won the ET that I was not allowed to talk about it to any of my work colleagues. I only got a letter recognising the discrimination and apologising because the ET directed the RAF to send me a letter, the letter lacked serenity and was extremely short, I can provide a copy of the letter if you require it or if it would be useful for you to see it in line with this enquiry. I feel this has had a detriment effect on my career both due to the stress caused, the work load put on be to pursue a complaint and an ET and the fact I am seen as having made an issue of this and put in a complain and an ET. I was made to feel I was making a stand against the RAF not just the individual which is detrimental to my career.

I would ask for a change in policy and that going forward if discrimination is recognised at an ET then that is upheld and recognised by the MOD and the Service involved.

Sadly, this is not the only time I have seen discrimination against women in the military.

There will be records of the complaint and employment tribunal but as I am currently away on Military operations I cannot get supporting evidence.

The full apology letter I received from the RAF is as follows:

'In accordance with the decision of the Employment Tribunal Judgement [...] on [...], case numbers [...] and [...], I write on behalf of the ministry of defence to apologise for Warrant Officer [...] discrimination and harassment of you [...].'

This is one of the statements that was provided to me and I provided to the employment tribunal from a female member of the Sqn, the judges at the ET recognised this as discrimination in their summing up as one of the counts of discrimination by WO [...]

Accommodation Charges – This still applies to this day

Housing charges for accommodation in the mess are based on the out dated style of marriage, with a man being the bread winner and a woman staying at home and not working. Currently a person has to be married in order to receive free accommodation in the mess if you also own your own house and are unable to live in it due to distance. I have a house but have to pay for my mess accommodation as I am not married. Marriage is a male biased process. Nearly 3000 men benefit from the ability to get free accommodation were against only a couple of hundred women who are able to claim this. This is based on a time when men were the main earner and a woman would stay at the house and not earn. Now this makes married my better off as if they own a house it can be in both theirs and their wife's name and the wife can pay towards it to as opposed to a single woman who owns a house and has to pay the full mortgage on her own and pay for mess accommodation. This should be changed and a repayment of accommodation fees should be provided to personnel with their own house. I believe this is unconsciously bias.

Clothing in Theatre

This week my zip on my uniform trousers broke and due to 2 pairs already going missing in the laundry during my out of area here I had no trousers to wear. I asked to wear my uniform shorts, but I was told I was not allowed. I was forced to continue to wear trousers with a broken zip that I had to hold together with weak safety pins. This was both embarrassing and made my personal sanitation difficult due to my period. There is no understanding of women's issues in the military. I am currently over seas and therefore it is difficult to get any clothing.

Clothing

This is I believe unconsciously bias. Some items of RAF clothing are only provided in men's sizes. The camouflage green uniform is only provided in men's sizes. Men's body sizes are different proportions to women's bodies. This means the uniforms are do not fit women well or and they do not look as smart on women as they do on men. The Blue number 2 RAF jacket is also only available in men's sizes.

Women are forced to wear male style clothing but men in the military are never forced to wear female style clothing. The RAF number 5 uniform used to be worn with a female style blouse for women to wear but this was replaced with a male style dinner shirt and bow tie. This would never happen the other way around, the men would never have had their dress shirt replaced with a women's style blouse.

In 2005 I attended a briefing by [...]. At the end of his presentation he asked if any one had any questions about any aspect of the RAF and RAF life in general. I put up my hand and asked if there

could be consideration for all clothing to be produced in women's sizes as well as men's sizes. [...] [He] replied this is not a fashion parade. I tried to explain that it was not about fashion but about being provided with clothing that fitted properly but he did not understand and just made a further joke of my question. I was made to feel embarrassed for asking. To this day we wear clothing made to men's sizes which means as men's hips, waist and chest are a different ratio to women's they will never fit well. Furthermore the women's uniform could have a more female look as more uniforms are very masculine. It is not a reflection on the job we do that is masculine, it would be possible to better design the uniform. The uniform has always grown from what men wear with there never being a piece of uniform that has been designed for a woman first.

Air Force Board

An individual call [...] sat on the Air Force Board for a time. I was unfortunate in that I had to contact him in my civilian job whilst I was a RAF Reserve. I had to arrange a meeting with him which I arrange as a lunch, which I took to be a professional arrangement. Once the meeting was arranged I received an email from him asking me to describe the content of my knicker draw so he could tell me what pants to wear, he then went on to tell me he believed in a believe called 'Taken In Hand' in which women should not be allowed to work, have finance or control of their own money and that believed that rape was a gift to women. I cancelled the meeting and never met with him at that time. I was however unlucky enough to have to put him on an aircraft a few years later at which time I made sure I always had another person with me, during this time me made a point of looking me up and down very slowly which was noted by the person who was with me. He took out a super injunction which makes me think I was not the only woman who he acted in this way towards. The issue is he sat on the Air Force Board which is a board which presides over discrimination cases and cases bought by women, attitude to women does not appear to be that of someone who would give a case bought by a woman for discrimination a fair hearing.

January 2021