

Anonymous Written Evidence Submission¹

Women in the Armed Forces: From Recruitment to Civilian Life

I am surprised that as a female officer serving in a [...] HQ, I was unaware of the existence of this Inquiry, I suspect the net hasn't been cast anywhere near wide enough and will not capture the true underlying issues there are for women in the Armed Forces.

Whilst I have many anecdotes about institutional sexism and misogyny that I have experienced from all ranks, in every role that I have served in since commissioning, I will write about the most troubling experience of my time so far and the one that has changed my future plan from a full career (ending in [...]) to one which will end as soon as I am at a pension point ([...]).

I am currently serving as [...], a demanding [...] job in an operational HQ. I am a qualified [...], I am Medically Fit, staff trained and assured, and hold myriad qualifications including vetting levels which are both expensive, and at a premium in defence. The organisation will lose these, just as I have lost the trust I need to continue my service.

As a result of trying to undertake performance management, directed by my Chain of Command, I became the co-respondent in a Service Complaint which was largely upheld against me, my co-respondent was persuaded by the Decision Body to remove himself from the complaint on the grounds of ill health. I now face potentially career limiting Major Administrative Action based on the conclusion of a partially conducted investigation.

It is quite right that the Armed Forces must have a complaints system, we must be able to address issues which affect the career or wellbeing of our personnel. It is not right that the system is heavily weighted in favour of the complainant and that respondents are doomed to sit on their hands with no right of appeal. As a respondent, I have explained my predicament to a number of people who have offered me assistance in making an appeal to the Ombudsman, none of these can believe or explain how an investigation can be conducted negligently, entirely disregarding extant policy, and still be used against me in administrative action.

As a respondent, I feel helpless, betrayed, humiliated and foolish. I feel foolish for trusting both my chain of command and the system. I feel foolish for assuming that my chain of command would understand the unique pressures that being the only female [...] in a brigade would put me under. That they would recognise that appointing a CO whose sexism, racism, and homophobia were well recognised and subsequently removing him from being a co-respondent in the complaint (against his wishes) would leave me stranded. I have no mechanism by which to make these concerns known, at no stage in the complaints process have I spoken to anyone, despite this being both promised, and policy.

I feel betrayed by a system that can conduct negligent investigations (which in this case includes lies from both the SO2 Discipline involved and a fee earning harassment investigation officer) and give me no right of reply and experience no consequences. This has absolutely broken my trust in the organisation and I no longer see my future in working under these terms of service.

¹ Minor redactions made to protect contributor's identity, marked with [...]

The fact that the complaint can be investigated negligently in order to satisfy SCOAF's timelines is perverse; any counter complaint is largely inadmissible which suggests to me that the organisation know they are failing their people however, they don't care enough to fix it.

I am now aware of CDP's foreword to the service complaint policy and I can confidently state that every line of that offer is failed by the service complaints system. My trust has not been retained, I have not been treated fairly, as a result my family have not been treated fairly and I have not been treated with dignity.

23 February 2021