

Written evidence submitted by the Army Families Federation (DIS0016)

Pete Wishart MP
Chair of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee

Dear Pete,

DEFENCE IN SCOTLAND – MILITARY PERSONNEL AND ESTATE (31 January 2022)

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide evidence on to your committee this on behalf of Army families. I was grateful for the thoughtful and informed questioning, and appreciate the Committee's time. As requested, I am writing with additional information on some of the questions raised during the recent oral evidence session on Defence in Scotland – Military Personnel and Estates held on 31 January 2022.

Closure or consolidation of bases

1. We do not have any evidence from families regarding the changes in bases, whether base closures or consolidations, and the effects they have on Service personnel and their families. This is likely because the Army – as both individuals and units – is highly mobile. There is a culture of units and sub-units moving locations and Service personnel are posted on regular postings to different locations. Therefore, the closure of a specific base may not be a significant concern to a family as they are likely to move away from the area at some point.

2. Families may have a few concerns about services being run down as bases close, but our experience is that units are generally good at identifying which families need to be 'early movers' – generally to support new school entry or special housing requirements. There can be some concern from individual families who have decided to permanently settle in a particular location, on the basis that there are a number of possible work locations for their soldier within a certain radius – and now find those odds reduced. However, these concerns are few, and the lead time on base closures is generally several years, which almost always gives sufficient time to adjust after any initial shock.

Moving bases between England and Scotland (and vice versa)

3. Between January 2019 and December 2021, AFF received around 900 enquiries where the family identified themselves as living in Scotland. Please note that we do not explicitly ask families where they are currently living unless we need the information to resolve their query. Many of the enquiries relate more broadly to either generic issues arising during postings in Scotland or issues unspecific to being in Scotland (e.g. queries about entitlement to housing any family in the UK may ask).

4. In 2021, we received around 64 enquiries relating to the issues faced specifically related to Army families moving between England and Scotland bases. The key themes were:

Education

- **Different education systems:** adverse impact of transferring between differing year groups and qualifications (e.g. A-Levels/Highers).
- **Post 16 funding:** due to differing funding models in England and Scotland, funding cannot be transferred between nations. A mid-year move can then result in a student having to restart their course and studies from the beginning.

Employment & Training

- **Qualifications & training:** Some professions have different qualification requirements in each country, e.g. teachers, lawyers, social workers. This can result in spouses facing difficulties gaining or transferring employment when moving to and from Scotland as they may not be fully qualified in that nation. This is not widely understood within the Army family community, and families' financial plans are therefore frustrated.
- **Student finance:** there is complexity due to entitlement to student finance being linked to where the Service person signs up or attests. This can lead to spouses needing to access student funding from a different nation to that where they are currently based and undertaking a course. This presents not just an administrative complexity but also can result in the funding not meeting the costs of study, as the finance levels are different in different nations.

Financial

- **Tax:** whilst the MOD has introduced an allowance to address the differences between the Scottish Rate of Income Tax for Service personnel based in Scotland, and the rate in the rest of the UK, this does not apply to spouses/partners. Again, this is not widely understood, and can prompt frustration. While some families can benefit from lower tax rates, free prescriptions and wider childcare provision, this does not apply to all.

5. AFF's long held view – drawing on our evidence of families concerns when moving around the UK, and to and from overseas locations – is that accessible and accurate information should be made available to families to ensure that they can make informed decisions and prepare for a successful posting. Given the high levels of mobility demanded by the Army, signposting to location specific information is a Defence responsibility.

6. In addition, we would also welcome the MOD liaising with the Scottish Government regarding the wider issues regarding differing qualifications and the inability to move further education funding streams between nations.

Collette Musgrave,
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Executive

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