



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

# THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT





# THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

**An Enduring Covenant Between  
The People of the United Kingdom  
Her Majesty's Government**

**– and –**

**All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of  
the Crown**

**And their Families**

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

# GUIDANCE ON THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Figure 1: The Covenant Diagram



This document accompanies the Armed Forces Covenant and provides guidance on how it is to be put into effect, by describing:

- A. The parties to the Covenant.
- B. A definition of the Armed Forces Community.
- C. The scope of the Covenant, by outlining the areas in which it can be expected to apply.
- D. Obligations and principles which flow from the Covenant.

This guidance note is available for the use of any organisation – Government Departments, the Armed Forces, local authorities, charitable bodies etc – which wishes to apply the Covenant to its particular circumstances. It will be updated as necessary.

The guidance note does not describe the actions being taken by the UK Government to support the Armed Forces Covenant. These are set out in a separate document, entitled **“The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow”**.

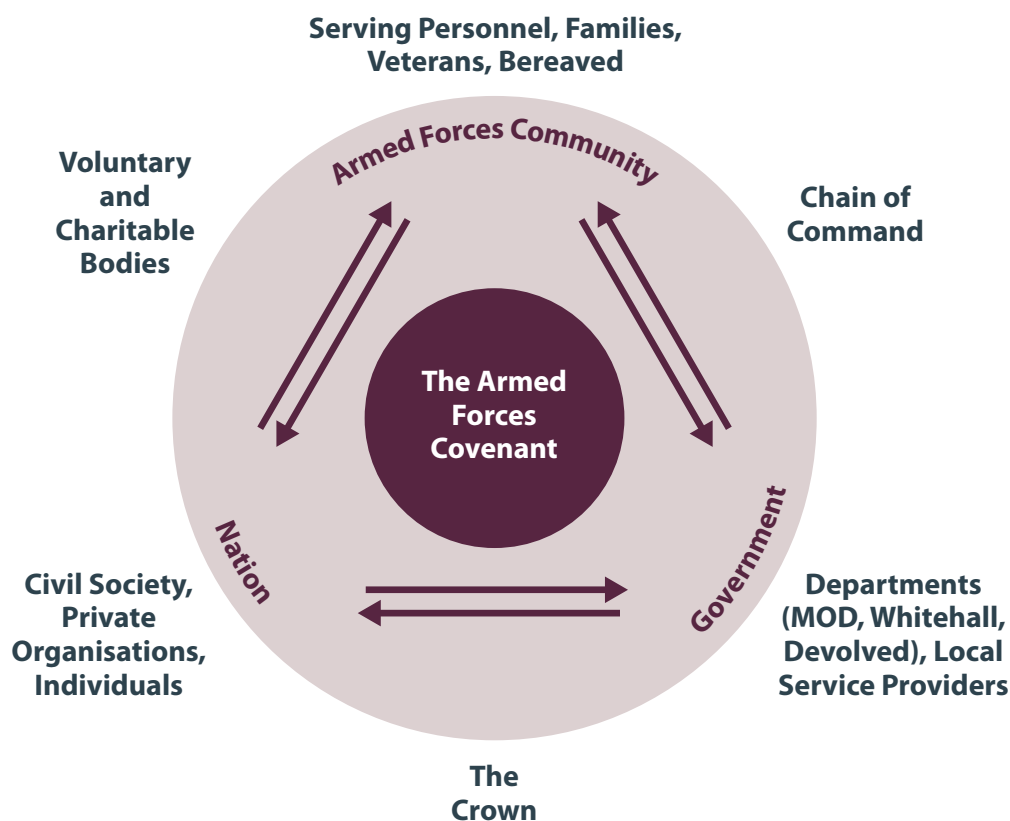
## A. PARTIES TO THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Armed Forces Covenant is a covenant between the Armed Forces Community, the Nation and the Government.

Figure 2, building on the core Covenant diagram, shows the place occupied by different groups in this context. It illustrates that some bodies and individuals are associated mainly with one role, but others have more than one role. The dual role of the Chain of Command, as both a part of the machinery of government and at the heart of each of the Services, is especially important to the effective operation of the Covenant. Voluntary and charitable bodies are part of civil society, but also embody the Armed Forces Community at commemorative events.

A more detailed definition of how the Armed Forces Community is made up is contained in the next section.

**Figure 2: Parties to the Covenant**



## B. DEFINITION OF THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

The Armed Forces Community is defined, for the purposes of the Armed Forces Covenant, as including all those towards whom the Nation has a moral obligation due to Service in HM Armed Forces. Inclusion in the community is neither dependent on nor limited by strict criteria, nationality, or legal definitions, and it does not confer any legal rights.

The whole of this community is covered by the Covenant and the obligations and principles which flow from it. The obligations are owed to the Armed Forces Community as individuals, as well as collectively. Being part of this community, of some 10 million people, entitles an individual to recognition and sometimes to support. However the level of support made available will vary. It will take into account the need for assistance, and may also reflect what an individual has contributed through Service. Inclusion in the community does not, therefore, mean identical entitlement to support.

The Armed Forces Community includes:

**Regular Personnel** – Individuals currently serving as members of the Naval Service (including the Royal Navy and Royal Marines), Army or Royal Air Force.

**Reservists** – Volunteer Reservists, who form the Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Marine Reserve, Territorial Army and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and Regular Reservists, who comprise the Royal Fleet Reserve, Army Reserve and Royal Air Force Reserve.

**Veterans** – Those who have served for at least a day in HM Armed Forces, whether as a Regular or as a Reservist.

**Families of Regular Personnel, Reservists and Veterans** – The immediate family of those in the categories listed above. This is defined as spouses, civil partners, and children for whom they are responsible, but can where appropriate extend to parents, unmarried partners and other family members.

**Bereaved** – The immediate family of Service Personnel and veterans who have died, whether or not that death has any connection with Service.

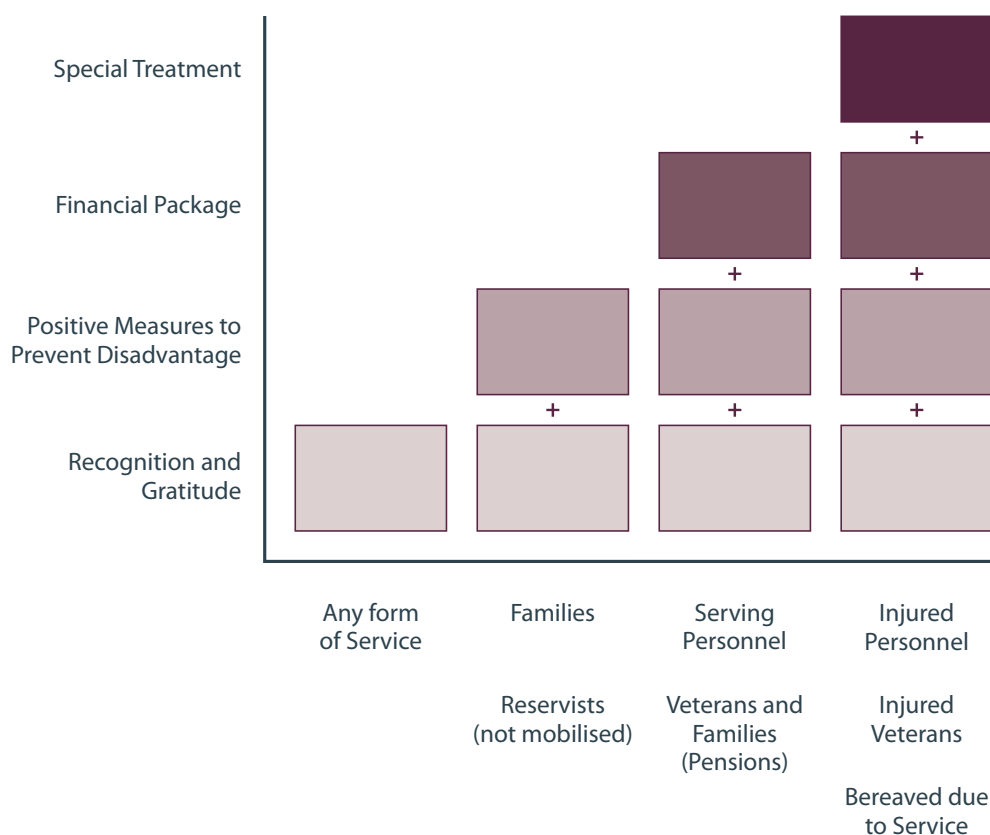
### Levels of Support

As noted above, support to the Armed Forces Community will reflect the needs and commitment of individuals within that community and the moral obligation of society towards them. However it will generally be cumulative in nature, with members of certain groups receiving more levels of support than others. This is illustrated in Figure 3. Although a broad representation of this type can only be indicative, it shows for example that the support available to serving personnel would normally be in three areas – recognition and gratitude, positive measures to prevent disadvantage, and a financial package.

Reservists are in a special position, as although they receive the same level of support as their Regular counterparts when mobilised, the commitment they are making when not mobilised must be recognised. The Reservist has a greater liability than the wider civilian

population and they should be fully supported in meeting the additional challenges they face.

**Figure 3: Levels of Support Available**



### The Supporting Civilian Community

Beyond the Armed Forces Community, and outside the scope of the Armed Forces Covenant, are other groups which play an important role in meeting defence objectives. These groups carry out an extremely wide range of functions, and include (but are not limited to) members of the Merchant Navy, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, other defence civilians and contractor staff; cadets and the adult volunteers who support them; and the extended families of Serving personnel.

All supporting civilians, in very different ways, make valuable contributions for which they deserve recognition and in some cases support. Some groups support the Armed Forces directly, consistent with the Whole Force Concept. When members of these groups are deployed alongside members of the Armed Forces, they are entitled to increased levels of care and support, including in the event of injury or death, and often on a comparable basis to their Armed Forces colleagues.

## C. SCOPE OF THE COVENANT

The Armed Forces Covenant sets a framework for how the Armed Forces Community can expect to be treated, but it is not possible to specify in detail how it should be applied in every case and at every time. The demands of Service and other constraints may prevent these expectations and aspirations being met in some circumstances. However the Covenant should influence policy, service delivery and standards in the areas and ways set out below. In many cases these will be a responsibility of Central Government Departments and Devolved Administrations but, in other cases, responsibility will lie with local service providers or organisations within the voluntary or commercial sectors. Particular attention will be required when public services are subject to reform or to greater local control.

This section describes the expectations and aspirations implicit in the Armed Forces Covenant, but not the specific actions being taken to achieve them. For the UK Government, these actions are being published separately in “**The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow**”.

### 1. Terms and Conditions of Service

Service personnel should be sustained and rewarded by Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS) which recognise the freedoms and choices that they have voluntarily given up. These TACOS should be fair to personnel and wherever possible give flexibility to match family circumstances, whilst meeting the needs of the MOD and conforming to wider Government policy. They will be kept under regular review by the MOD.

The terms under which individuals serve, such as enlistment and engagements, are binding in every sense. The conditions offered, in return for the commitments and risks to which Service personnel are subject, should be fair in terms of both the financial and non-financial package. The recommendations of an independent body should constitute an integral part of the process used to determine pay.

### 2. Healthcare

The Armed Forces Community should enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as that received by any other UK citizen in the area they live. For Serving personnel, including mobilised Reservists, primary healthcare is provided by the MOD, whilst secondary care is provided by the local healthcare provider. Personnel injured on operations should be treated in conditions which recognise the specific needs of Service personnel, normally involving a dedicated military ward, where this is appropriate for them, and medical rehabilitation in MOD facilities. For family members, primary healthcare may be provided by the MOD in some cases (eg when accompanying Service personnel posted overseas). They should retain their relative position on any NHS waiting list, if moved around the UK due to the Service person being posted.

Veterans receive their healthcare from the NHS, and should receive priority treatment where it relates to a condition which results from their service in the Armed Forces, subject to clinical need. Those injured in Service, whether physically or mentally, should be cared for in a way which reflects the Nation’s moral obligation to them whilst respecting the individual’s wishes. For those with concerns about their mental health, where symptoms may not present for some time after leaving Service, they should be able to access services with health professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture.



### **3. Education**

Children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education (including early years services) as any other UK citizen in the area in which they live. The Services should aim to facilitate this in the way they manage personnel, but there should also be special arrangements to support access to schools if a place is required part way through an academic year as a consequence of a posting. For personnel posted overseas, the MOD provides early years and educational facilities where the numbers support it, although the range of provision and choice may not be as great as in the UK. In certain cases assistance will be available to support Service children's continuity of education, given the requirement for mobility.

Service personnel should expect to receive appropriate training and education for both personal and professional development, including the opportunity to gain nationally recognised civilian qualifications, in order to support them throughout their Service career and to prepare them for life after leaving the Service.

### **4. Housing**

In addressing the accommodation requirements of Service personnel, the MOD seeks to promote choice, recognising the benefits of stability and home ownership amongst members of the Armed Forces where this is practicable and compatible with Service requirements, and also that their needs alter as they progress through Service and ultimately return to civilian life. Where Serving personnel are entitled to publicly-provided accommodation, it should be of good quality, affordable, and suitably located. They should have priority status in applying for Government-sponsored affordable housing schemes, and Service leavers should retain this status for a period after discharge. Personnel may have access to tailored Armed Forces housing schemes or financial arrangements, depending on their circumstances, to help them in purchasing their own property. Those injured in Service should also have preferential access to appropriate housing schemes, as well as assistance with necessary adaptations to private housing or Service accommodation whilst serving. Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to social housing and other housing schemes as any other citizen, and not be disadvantaged in that respect by the requirement for mobility whilst in Service.

### **5. Benefits and Tax**

Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to benefits as any UK citizen, except where tailored alternative schemes are in place. They will also contribute through taxation, but the taxation system may be adapted to reflect their particular circumstances (a current example would be the Contribution in Lieu of Council Tax arrangements).

### **6. Responsibility of Care**

The Government, working with the Chain of Command, has a particular responsibility of care towards members of the Armed Forces. This includes a responsibility to maintain an organisation which treats every individual fairly, with dignity and respect, and an environment which is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. Special account must be taken of the needs of those under 18 years of age. The Government has a responsibility to promote the health, safety and resilience of Servicemen and women; and to ensure that they are appropriately prepared, in the judgement of the Chain of

Command, for the requirements of any training activities or operations on which they are to be engaged. However operational matters, including training and equipment, fall outside the scope of the Armed Forces Covenant.

## **7. Deployment**

The special impact of operational deployment on both personal and family life should be recognised. Depending on the nature of the operation, this may include financial support to deployed personnel, welfare support to individuals and family members, and where possible facilities to enable good communications with home.

## **8. Family Life**

Service families give up certain freedoms and choices in order to support the Service. To sustain family life, family members should have the same access to childcare, training and employment opportunities as any other citizen. Support should be available to minimise the impact of mobility caused by Service, drawing on active monitoring by the Chain of Command. Support should also take into account the effects of postings to remote locations, often away from family connections, for example in promoting transport and accessibility measures.

## **9. Commercial Products and Services**

It is for the commercial sector to determine its approach to members of the Armed Forces Community. The Government should work with the commercial sector towards a situation where they have as good access to commercial products and services, including financial services, as any other citizen. Providers of products and services should be encouraged to understand and mitigate the circumstances faced by this community, such as mobility and deployment, and to welcome and cater for its members as good and valuable customers.

## **10. Transition**

Support should be available for all Service personnel in order to assist their transition from Service to civilian life. Provision should include training, education, appropriate healthcare referral and job-finding preparation and assistance. It should also include information, advice and guidance on such matters as housing and financial management, and the availability of support from Government Departments and the Voluntary and Community sector. The level of support will be dependent upon individual circumstances.

## **11. Support After Service**

The Covenant involves an obligation for life, and the commitment and sacrifices made by veterans in the past, as well as their continuing value to society, should be properly recognised in the support they receive. In accessing services, former members of the Armed Forces should expect the same level of support as any other citizen in society. Pension schemes should be fair and appropriate to the particular circumstances of Service personnel. All veterans will be able to access advice and in some cases additional support, from the MOD (Service Personnel and Veterans Agency), elsewhere in Government, and the charitable sector, although their access may be affected if they do not live in the UK.

Those who have been injured in Service, or have a health condition relating to Service, should receive additional support which may include a financial element depending on

their circumstances (eg through the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme or War Pension Scheme). Bereaved families should receive assistance commensurate with the loss that they have suffered, including help during the vital, but difficult, Inquest process.

## **12. Recognition**

The Armed Forces Community is entitled to appropriate recognition for the unique Service which it has given, and continues to give, to the Nation, and the unlimited liability which the Service person assumes. This recognition will include national commemorations and celebrations such as Remembrance Sunday and Armed Forces Day. The award of campaign medals and individual gallantry awards will continue to be used in recognition of individual sacrifice and meritorious service. The HM Armed Force Veterans Badge is available to all veterans in recognition of their service.

## **13. Participation as Citizens**

The Armed Forces Community should be able to participate as citizens to the same extent as any UK citizen, subject to the necessary constraints on the activities of public servants. This includes taking a full part in the electoral process. Members of the Armed Forces Community who are not UK citizens should be able to access routes to citizenship as easily as others seeking citizenship, unaffected by any Service overseas.

## **14. Changes in Defence**

The Armed Forces will always need to evolve to meet the challenges they face. That will inevitably lead, from time to time, to turbulence and uncertainty in the lives of Serving personnel and their families. Such changes should be managed in a way which treats individuals fairly and minimises uncertainty wherever possible.

## **15. Recourse**

Members of the Armed Forces Community should have means of recourse open to them, if they believe that they are not being treated in a fair and appropriate way. Established routes of recourse such as complaints processes or Ombudsmen should be sensitive to the particular circumstances of the Armed Forces Community. In addition, for Serving personnel and those who have recently left service, there should be a responsive system for handling complaints relating to their service in the Armed Forces, overseen by the Service Complaints Commissioner.

## D. OBLIGATIONS AND PRINCIPLES

Figure 4 superimposes on the core Covenant diagram a summary of the obligations which the different parties to the Armed Forces Covenant owe to each other. It also illustrates that all these obligations must, to be effective, be underpinned by trust and goodwill on all sides. However the obligations are not conditional; the duty of a member of the Armed Forces to serve is never dependent on other considerations.

**Figure 4: Obligations**



These obligations do not require detailed explanation, but it is possible to derive from them a number of additional principles, which should similarly govern the actions of the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces Community.

The Nation should:

1. Honour the commitment and sacrifice of the Armed Forces Community.
2. Celebrate the work of those charitable and voluntary bodies which help to support that community.
3. Strive to keep close the links between the Armed Forces and the society they defend.

The Government's aspiration for the Armed Forces Community should be:

4. No disadvantage due to Service in the provision and continuity of public services.
5. No disadvantage in dealings with wider society, eg in accessing commercial services, or in pursuing careers outside the Armed Forces (as spouses, Reservists, or veterans).

To achieve this, the Government should consider:

6. Measures to minimise the social and economic impact of military life for those currently serving and their families.
7. Positive measures to enable equality of outcome with other citizens.
8. Special treatment for the injured and bereaved, as proper return for their sacrifice.

Reflecting the Nation's respect, serving members of the Armed Forces should seek to:

9. Uphold the standards and values of their respective Services.
10. Not bring the Armed Forces into disrepute in any of their actions.
11. Engage with society, and understand their relationship with it.
12. Use their time in Service to build resilience and the skills needed in civilian life.

And the whole Armed Forces Community should:

13. Take pride in their status.
14. Identify themselves as members of the Armed Forces Community when appropriate.
15. Help themselves, including by understanding their rights and obligations.





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