

Snapshot

Education and Training bullets

The attached is a summary of the Education and Training Snapshot, accessible on the Veterans & Families Research Hub (<https://www.vfrhub.com/>). Information correct as at 18.05.21.

Serving personnel

● The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) offers serving personnel opportunities to gain civilian-recognised qualifications, including apprenticeship programmes; most of which come at no cost to the individual. In 2020, the Army was 1st in a list of the 'Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers', while the Royal Navy (RN) and Royal Air Force (RAF) were 3rd and 10th. Full apprenticeships are not offered to members of the Reserve Forces due to their differing terms of service, while other accreditation offers can also vary accordingly.

● Serving personnel can also receive 'functional skills' support as part of apprenticeships or other training support. Furthermore, fully or part-funded help with Specific Learning Difficulties is also available. According to the MOD, in 2019 the Army admitted 20 recruits with a reading age of between five and seven; 220 between seven and nine, and 760 between nine and 11. The RAF had none below 11 and the RN did not assess recruits' reading ages.

● Aside from mandatory military training, support is also offered for personnel to pursue other education and training course of their choice, with a proportion of the costs offset by the Standard (SLC) and Enhanced Learning Credits (ELC) schemes if applicable. Figures from 2014 indicated only a small number took advantage of these entitlements (except in the case of ELC take-up by those in their last two years of service, where the figure rose from 25% to 56%). Take-up appears to have increased slightly since then, but is still reportedly low. Research with Service Leavers over the age of 50 suggested that many struggle to undertake personal development activities due to demanding workloads, while another study indicated a lack of commanders' commitment can also restrict take-up.

Veterans

● Entitlement to SLC finishes when the individual leaves the Armed Forces (AF), unless 'deferred' beyond that point. ELCs can be used by a Regular veteran for up to five or 10 years after having left the AF (dependent on length of service and/or other conditions), and can be transferred to an 'eligible adult dependant' in certain circumstances. MOD statistics from 2020 indicated that almost 60% of AF personnel were satisfied with opportunities for personal and professional development, with 21% dissatisfied. Commissioned officers were more likely to be satisfied than other ranks (71% compared to 57%).

● Regular leavers who are registered under the ELC scheme can also access the Publicly Funded Further and Higher Education scheme. In terms of courses targeted specifically at veterans, the Further Forces Programme aims to retrain AF leavers to teach technical subjects, including science, engineering and technology. The Troops to Teachers programme offers a tax-free bursary to study for an undergraduate degree leading to secondary education level qualified teacher status (England only) in biology, physics, chemistry, computing, maths or modern foreign languages. Similar schemes exist in

Scotland, and the importance of encouraging Further and Higher Education (FE and HE) options for transitioning and veteran AF members is recognised by the Scottish Government. In addition, universities such as The Open University fund scholarships for disabled veterans.

Families

● In 2014, The Veterans' Transition Review recommended that families have greater access to MOD-provided transition training support, but a 2019 study indicated that the absence of AF members from the family home made accessing education and training difficult. 2018 research recommended that partners take advantage of HE institutions' efforts to offer distance learning opportunities.

● The MOD's Directorate Children and Young People seeks to ensure that children of AF members suffer no disadvantage due to their parents' AF status (in the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant). According to MOD statistics from 2020, around half of AF families have at least one child of school age, and 23% of families with school age children stated they experienced difficulties with their children's schooling in the last year. While a review reported that there were around 76,000 AF children in English schools in 2018, a previous study indicated it is difficult to estimate the number of AF children in education as it is not mandatory for AF members to 'declare' their children.

● The same report emphasised that multiple school moves (including overseas) and frequent parental absences due to deployment or working away from home (sometimes of more than one parent at the same time) can disrupt children's relationships and schooling. However, the report also stressed that the AF community can provide a sense of security, pride and identity among AF children, and that many develop effective coping strategies and display resilience.

● Despite that, a 2020 report recommended the MOD consider the impact of frequent moves and parental absence on AF children's schooling, as well as proposing a range of other measures aimed at addressing problems identified above. Research conducted in Wales indicated similar issues but highlighted that learning Welsh was an additional challenge for some pupils, while differences between the educational system in Scotland and the rest of the UK also present difficulties. A 2021 paper focused on special educational needs and disability among AF families reported that very few studies have been conducted into this 'forgotten sub-population'.

● A 2016 research report found that proportionally fewer AF children go to university when compared to the general population. A recent study indicated that the UK's Universities and Colleges Admission Service was beginning to track FE and HE applications among this community and the Scottish Government is exploring the barriers to FE and HE for children of AF members.

Charity support

● According to a 2017 study, 78 UK charities provided 'education support' to the AF community (amounting to 6.5% of all AF related charities), and 35,800 beneficiaries accessed education services in the year leading up to its publication, with 3,300 gaining qualifications. Veterans were the most common beneficiaries, but partners, children and serving personnel also received help.