

# INFORMATION FOR INDIVIDUALS FROM OVERSEAS CONSIDERING A CAREER IN THE ROYAL NAVY/ROYAL MARINES



## A GUIDE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH NATIONALS AND UNIT SUPPORT



## Foreword

Firstly, I am delighted that you are considering a career in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines and I am delighted to be able to introduce this inaugural version of the Royal Navy Guide for Foreign and Commonwealth Nationals looking to join.

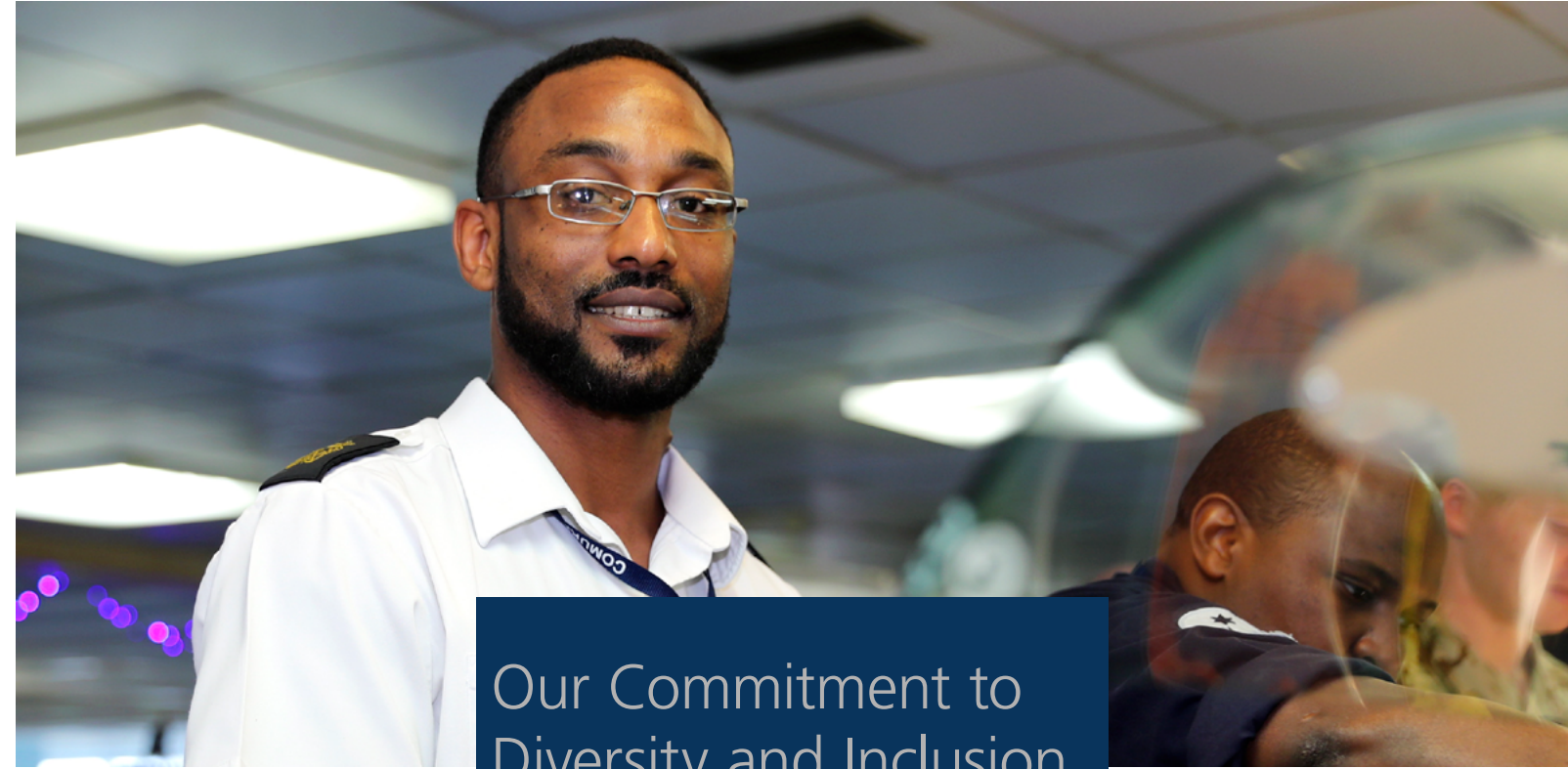
This guide recognises the additional challenges that personnel face when joining from outside the UK or when they are not UK-Nationals and it aims to give as much guidance as possible to make this process as uncomplicated and straightforward as it can.

There are a lot of differing organisations that are able to give support and they are listed at the end of the document and we have provided links to these and also the Government Departments you will need to make applications to.

There will inevitably be changes to the processes and advice over time, but rest assured we are here to be able to offer as much assistance to you as we can.

### **Commander David Mahony**

Royal Navy  
Employment Policy SO1  
People Strategy & Policy

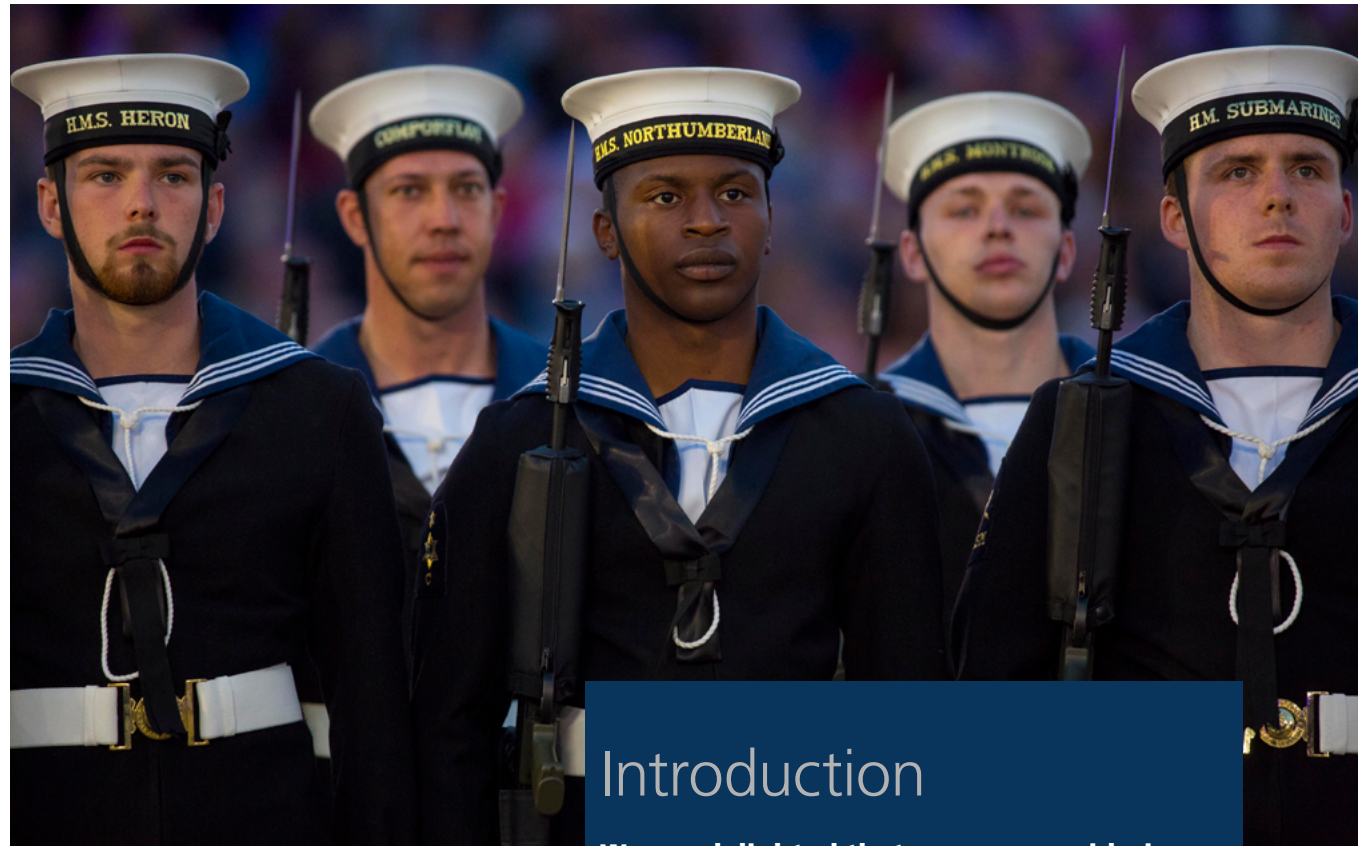


## Our Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

*"People matter! The Royal Navy only works because every individual who is part of our community comes to work wanting and able to give of their best, and in return be valued and respected for who they are and what they bring. I place huge importance on the Royal Navy being an organisation that people want to be part of, so that we can enjoy the full range of talent and perspectives necessary to make us thrive in who we are and what we do. Embracing D&I is something we should all want to do. I believe it is fundamental to building the professionally rewarding and personally empowering environment we all want to work in. It maximises our ability to attract and retain talented people, it supports mission success and it is what our people deserve. We must make the Service a place where these values form our foundations."* – **Admiral Sir Ben Key KCB CBE ADC First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff**

*"Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of everything we do, it involves everyone one of us on a daily basis. Each and every member of the Royal Navy creates our diversity, from where we were born, the cultures we grew up in, our parents and community influences and our lived experiences. Inclusion is accepting that we are all different, and creating an environment where we can all bring our diversities to the workplace and feel confident doing so."* – **Commander Helen Wright, SO1 Diversity and Inclusion**





## Introduction

**We are delighted that you are considering a career in the RNRM. There is a long and proud history of people who have come to the UK from overseas and had a significant and fulfilling career.**

The aim of this guide is to inform you of the steps you (and your family) will need to take in order to meet the immigration requirements of the UK during the selection process as a Sailor or Royal Marine and once you leave the Service at the end of your career. It is important to understand how immigration and visa requirements affect you as breaches are illegal and could jeopardise your naval career before it begins or impact on you being able to remain in the UK once you leave.

We strongly recommend that you also read the information on the Royal Navy website which outlines the standards required to be accepted into the Service.

Travelling to the UK for selection tests can cost a lot of money. You should be sure that you are committed to joining the Royal Navy or Royal Marines, and that you have done all you can to prepare for the selection process before you travel to the UK.

You are reminded that links to government websites may change or be removed. We will update this booklet regularly but suggest the use of a search engine if any of the links in this booklet no longer works. Immigration laws are under constant review, so it is important you seek advice before making decisions which may affect you or your family.

# 1.0 The Selection Process and Visa Requirements

**The Royal Navy website provides a guide to the basic entry requirements and the selection process for both Ratings and Officers. You should become familiar with our dedicated resources for Commonwealth and Non UK personnel. You can access the key information [here](#).**

## Before you Join

You need to understand the requirements and restrictions laid down by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) that will apply to you until you join. If you require a visa, you should apply for a standard [visitor visa](#). You can usually stay in the UK for up to 6 months, and this will need to cover you for the entirety of the selection process and until you start training. You will need to meet all of the requirements to obtain the visitor visa, including notifying where you will be staying while in UK and that you have sufficient funds to support yourself for this period. The visa application and costs are your responsibility, and the Royal Navy is not able to influence the process, cost or length, and cannot obtain an extension. Advice on obtaining a visitor visa can be found [here](#).

Although you will have a letter inviting you to complete your assessments, which you should attach to your visa application, this will not guarantee the application will be successful. Whether you require a visa or you are coming from a non-visa national country, you will still need to convince the Entry Clearance Officer that you meet all of the requirements including the requirement of your intention to return home if you do not pass the assessment.

When booking your initial flight to come to the UK, you are required to book a return passage. If you overstay, the Royal Navy will not be responsible, and this could affect your application to join.

If your visa application is successful, your visa should cover you until you start Basic Training at which point you will be given an exemption stamp in your passport. If you are from a non-visa national country, then you will be given an Entry Stamp that will enable you to remain in the UK for six months.

If you are close to your visa expiry date and have not started Basic Training, you may be required to return to your country of origin at your own expense, re-apply for a new visitor visa and re-enter the UK to continue your application.

You will need to also meet all accommodation and living costs prior to your start date for Basic Training. Prior to your intended travel to the UK, you are required to find a UK host and UK address, which should match your visa application to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). If at any point your host or UK address changes, you are required to notify both your Royal Navy / Royal Marines Careers Adviser and UKVI.

You will also need to meet any medical costs prior to your start date for Basic Training. You are strongly advised to take out insurance to cover any medical or other issues that may arise.

## Candidate awareness when selecting UK hosts

If you intend to stay with family or friends, they may be required to provide evidence that they are permitted to accommodate visitors and that they are financially stable before your visitor visa is approved.

Hosts may or may not permit you to use their residential address in the UK, therefore you should think carefully about who you choose as you will be required to provide a UK residential address for the duration of the recruitment process.

You need to choose a host where you can feel safe. Don't be afraid to change host, but you do need to inform both the recruiter handling your application and UKVI.

Hosts may offer to assist financially but you need to be happy that you can financially support yourself throughout the recruitment process. Host contact details must be provided so that your Careers Adviser can contact them in the event of any problems.

For candidates who stay with family/ friends who are already serving in the Armed Forces and living in Service Family Accommodation (SFA), the visit is to be no more than 28 days (aggregated or continuous) in any 93-day period unless the host has obtained the requisite permission.

If this is the case, you should check with your host that permission has been granted before travelling to the UK. It is important to keep your host informed should your visitor visa be close to expiry; they are encouraged to send a candidate home if the date for commencing initial training is after the visa expires.

## If you are already in UK

The RN will NOT be able to process you if you are on the following Visa/BRP: Student (formerly T4 Student), Skilled Worker (formerly T2 General) and T5 Charity. Anyone on these type of Visa/BRP must revalidate them before they can apply for the RN. You should ensure that your Careers Adviser is fully aware of the expiry date of your visa, and any concerns that you may have.

If you are successful in the RN/RM selection process and start Basic Training, your passport will be sent to the Home Office and you will become exempt from UK immigration control. If you are unsuccessful during training and are discharged from the RN/RM the Training Unit will inform the Home Office and you will have 28 days to regularise your stay in the UK or return to your country of origin.





## 2.0 Immigration and Citizenship as a Serving Sailor or Royal Marine

If you are accepted for service in the RN/RM as a Commonwealth citizen, you will be exempt from UK immigration control under Section 8(4) (a) of the Immigration Act 1971 during your service. A vignette would be placed in your passport to show this. This exemption ceases on discharge, and you must then either regularise your immigration status if you wish to remain in the UK or leave and return to your country of origin.

You are also required to ensure that your passport is in date, for both Service and private reasons, as UK nationals are also required to do. You may wish to check whether you are able to renew your passport in the UK, otherwise you will need to travel to your country of origin at your own expense.

If you choose to travel to countries outside the UK other than with the RN/RM, you will need to ensure that you comply with that country's requirements as a private citizen. The Government websites of both your own country and that of the country you intend to visit should have this information, which you should check in advance of travelling. It is also advisable that you connect with your Embassy or High Commission which provide advice on consulate matters and changes in your home country.

### British Citizenship

British Citizenship is not required for service reasons. If you choose to apply for citizenship, it would be at your own expense. A serving Commonwealth or Non-UK service person can apply to become a British citizen by naturalization, providing they meet the main requirements – you can find out more from the Naval Families Federation [website](#).

### Quick Facts:

A Commonwealth serving member of the RN/RM:

- CAN apply for citizenship whilst serving as long as they have lived in UK (or on overseas assignments) for five years.
- CAN count any time spent legally in the UK prior to joining the RN/RM. This includes time spent on visit visas.
- DO have to have served for a minimum of 12 months prior to applying.
- DO have to include a unit letter to confirm date of enlistment and that time spent overseas was due to military Service.
- DO NOT need Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) first.
- DO have to meet the Knowledge of Language and Life in the UK requirement (KoLL), regardless of how long they may have served for.
- DO NOT have to meet the requirement to have been in the UK on the first day of the five-year residential qualifying period.
- DO have to meet the good character requirement.
- DO have to pay the fee.
- DO NOT have to send your passport in as a scan of your passport can be sent in along with the other supporting documents.



## 3.0 Family Joining you While Serving

If you intend to bring your spouse/partner and children to the UK once you join the RN/RM, you need to be aware of immigration rules and how they will affect you and your family. Some brief information is below. Further detail on the requirements for family members are given in UKVI [instructions](#), and you can find a simplified guide on the Naval Families Federation (NFF) [website](#). You can also contact NFF to discuss issues relating to families.

### Entering the UK (Entry Clearance)

All entitled family members should apply for a visa under the [Armed Forces rules](#) prior to entering the UK. If the main requirements are met, they will be granted a visa for 5 years. Some of the main requirements are listed below; for full information on all of the requirements, the supporting documents and the visa application process please refer to the NFF [website](#). You should be aware that this type of limited leave does not entitle successful applicants to any public funds during the length of the visa. You will be able to work, study and be treated on the National Health Service (NHS).

### Visit Visa

If entry to the UK is as a standard visitor or marriage visitor visa, these visas are issued on the principle that there is a genuine intention to return to the country of origin on completion of the visit. The holder will not be able to extend or switch visas while in the UK. The holder of these types of visas may not be entitled to be treated as a Service family. They will be required to return to their country of origin and apply for entry clearance as described above.

### Minimum Income Requirement (MIR)

If you intend to bring your spouse/partner and any children to the UK you must meet the minimum income requirement and English language requirements, as set by the UK Home Office.

The current Minimum Income Requirement for British and Foreign & Commonwealth HM Forces to sponsor a dependent into the UK under Appendix AF are as follows:

#### Applying with no child dependent

– an income before tax of at least £18,600 a year

#### Applying with one child dependent

– an income before tax of at least £22,400 a year

#### Applying with two child dependents

– an income before tax of at least £24,800 a year

#### Applying with three child dependents

– an income before tax of at least £27,200 a year

Once you have completed initial training you will be earning enough to bring your spouse or partner to the UK (subject to them meeting the qualification criteria). If you have children, please be aware that it will take you several more years' service before you earn enough to bring them to the UK as well.

In service financial incentive schemes such as 'golden hellos' and retention bonuses and sea pay can be considered as annual earnings under Category B earnings.

If you have savings or some other forms of financial holdings (such as property or cash savings) this could count towards the Minimum Income Requirement.

Further detailed information on the Minimum Income Requirement can be found [here](#).

### English Language Requirement

In order to enter the UK, family members aged 18 or over would need to have an acceptable standard of English so that they can be part of daily life. Proof of this can be obtained in one of three ways:

- Passing an approved English language test with at least level A1 in speaking and listening;
- Having an academic qualification that was taught in English and is recognised by UK National Information Centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills (UK ENIC) as being equivalent to a UK bachelor's degree – for further information see [here](#)
- Being a national of a country where English is the main language.
- For the purposes of paragraph 68(a) of the Immigration Rules a person is deemed a national of a majority English speaking country if they are a national of the following: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, New Zealand, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, or the United States of America.

### Visa and Immigration Costs for Family Members

It is your responsibility to meet the entry visa application costs for your family members and any future applications for naturalisation (citizenship) or settlement which can be considerable.

The Home Office publishes the [costs](#) annually. As an example, for 2020/21 these are:

- Visa to enter per person - £1,523
- Indefinite Leave to Remain per applicant - £2,389 (after 5 years )
- Citizenship £1,303

The MOD has made it possible for 3 of the UK's leading credit unions to join forces and make simple savings accounts and loans available to the armed forces and their families. These have a range immigration related products. Find out more about the Joining Forces website [here](#). **Important note** – You have to be signed up with the Credit Unions for three months prior to any loans being considered.

## Family Joining You Overseas from Country of Origin

If you are serving overseas at the time your family first come to join you, they will need to come to the UK first on the correct UK limited leave to enter visa in order to be able have the correct immigration status as a Service family.

### Service Family Accommodation (SFA)

SFA is the title given to housing for families of Service Personnel. To be entitled to

SFA, you need to be married, in a civil partnership or meet the qualifying criteria for a Long-Term Relationship (LTR). For you and your family to be able to occupy SFA, they must enter the UK on the correct Armed Forces visa. Families entering the UK on a visit visa will not be able to occupy SFA, and you will be unable to claim other allowances connected with having a family with you. Further information can be found [here](#).

### Single Parents

If you are a single parent, please be aware that you may have to spend lengthy periods away from your home on training/exercises and operations. You will have to ensure that adequate arrangements for your child(ren) to be looked after are in place during these absences. The UK has strict rules relating to the care of children and in some situations, there may be a requirement to inform the local authority of the care arrangements in place during a deployment or absence which exceeds 28 days. For further information on this subject contact RN FPS or the Naval Families Federation.





## 4.0 You and Your Family Settling in the UK

**As a Service person, you will be unable to apply for settlement – Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the UK or Indefinite Leave to Enter (ILE) the UK while you are serving. This is because you will already be exempt from immigration control at the border.**

### Settlement for Entitled Family Members

After 5 years limited leave to remain in the UK, your family members will be entitled to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) which is also known as 'settlement'. ILR, when granted is the last visa required for you and your family members to remain in the UK permanently. Serving personnel and family members are entitled to apply under Appendix Armed Forces of the Immigration Rules for up to two years beyond the serving persons discharge and providing that the serving person has served a minimum of 4 years reckonable service. The SP can apply for ILR 18 weeks prior to discharge from the service.



### Naturalisation as a British Citizen SP

You are able to apply for citizenship without the need to apply for settlement once all of the requirements are met which includes five years in the UK. Time spent in the UK on visit visas prior to joining also counts towards this. Unlike settlement, you can apply for Citizenship while serving, providing you meet the criteria, and without requiring ILR. The reason that ILR is not required for the SP is that as a part of your service you are exempt from immigration control and therefore 'free from immigration time restrictions'. It is important to note that if you are considering applying for citizenship prior to discharge, the application needs to be submitted at least 6 months prior to the discharge date. The Home Office stated time for these applications is 6 months and could leave you with no immigration status in the UK if timed incorrectly.

### Naturalisation for Spouse/Partners

Spouse/partners of Commonwealth Armed Forces Personnel in the UK are required to hold ILR (settlement) for at least one year before they can apply for Citizenship – 'free from immigration time restrictions'. If a spouse/partner's sponsor is British, whether by birth or by naturalisation, they can apply for naturalisation as soon as they are granted ILR. Spouse/partners must also ensure they were physically in the UK on the first day of the residential qualifying period before applying. Different rules apply to applications from spouses on overseas assignments.

The rules relating to children are complex. Please refer to the Gov.UK advice, NFF Citizenship page or contact NFF before making an application.

### Application Fees

Immigration and naturalisation fees normally change annually in April. Care must be taken when submitting any application because if the application fails you will lose the fee, which can be substantial. If family members have any doubts about their application they should to contact NFF who have OISC- accredited immigration specialists or consult an immigration lawyer.

### Family Members' Employment

Family members entering the UK on a limited leave visa are eligible to seek employment in the UK. They will then be liable to pay UK Income Tax and National Insurance in the same way as British citizens. There are Service Charities that can assist you with looking for employment in the UK. These are;

- Forces Families Jobs
- RFEA Families Program

### Access to UK State Benefits

Where eligible, a serving sailor's UK immigration status normally enables your family to claim some state benefits such as Child Benefit and Tax Credits.

### No Access to UK State Benefits

Family members who have limited leave visas with an endorsement stating 'no recourse to public funds' (e.g. spousal visas) are not eligible to claim state benefits or allowances.



## 5.0 Immigration Requirements after your Navy Career

**Non-UK Service Person cannot apply for settlement in the UK whilst serving. If you wish to settle in the UK once you have left the RN/RM, you can apply if you have at least four years' service or if you have been medically discharged as a result of your service. This will be at your own cost, and applications should be submitted up to 18 weeks prior to discharge to enable a faster decision. The UK Home Office considers whether an application for settlement can be granted.**

### Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)

SP can only apply for ILR on discharge after four years of service or if medically discharged, and it can only be granted to those discharged who are already in the UK on the date of application. Applications can be submitted 18 weeks prior to discharge.

### Changes to settlement fees for non-UK Service Personnel

Currently non-UK Service Personnel must pay a settlement fee of £2,389 (FY21/22) when they apply to remain (settle) in the UK following their discharge from the UK Armed Forces. The government in response to a public consultation has recently announced plans to waive the settlement fees for service personnel under certain conditions.

Providing all other Home Office requirements are met, non-UK Service Personnel who apply to remain in the UK will **not** have to pay the fee if they meet one of the following criteria:

- have served at least six years at their point of discharge from service or
- are discharged on medical grounds with a condition attributable to service irrespective of their length of service.

or

- are a veteran who has served for at least six years, or was discharged on medical grounds with a condition attributable to service and is currently living in the UK and has not yet regularised their immigration status.

### Indefinite Leave to Enter (ILE)

SP can only apply for ILE on discharge after four years of service, and applicants must meet the relevant settlement rules. ILE can be granted to those living outside the UK on the date of application, which may be up to two years following discharge.

### Further Leave to Remain (FLR)

Non-UK SP may be able to apply for FLR if they are medically discharged with less than four years' service, or if they are discharge with a criminal conviction.

Those that naturalised in service do not need to complete or pay for any further applications on discharge.



### Returning to Country of Origin on completion of Service

Should you choose not to settle in UK following your Naval or Royal Marines career, you will have 28 days from discharge to return to your country of origin or another country. You will need to be prepared to pay the cost of your passage, together with the costs of transporting any possessions that you wish to take.

If you wish to return to the UK later and you wish to be considered for settlement in the UK, you and your family are eligible to apply under Appendix Armed Forces of the Immigration rules for a period of two years beyond your discharge. Beyond this date, you and your family will have to rely on meeting the criteria and requirements of other immigration routes.



## Useful Sources of Advice

### Naval Families Federation (NFF).

The Naval Families Federation is the independent voice of Navy families; see the NFF UK Visas and Citizenship [page](#). The NFF have OISC-trained staff who can advise on a wide range of immigration issues at no cost and have experience in dealing with issues raised by Armed Forces personnel and families.

Gov.UK is the website for all elements of national government. Some other specific pages of interest are below:

Immigration Rules [Appendix Armed Forces](#)

Citizenship [application forms](#)

UK Visa and Immigration [application forms](#)

Visa [Fees](#)

Support Services for military and defence [personnel and families](#)

### Home Office (HO).

The HO is the UK Government Ministry with overall responsibility for Immigration and Nationality matters. [UK Visas and Immigration \(UKVI\)](#) deals with Armed Forces applications. UKVI will not deal with general immigration enquiries.

### The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).

The [Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner \(OISC\)](#) regulates immigration advisers, ensuring they are fit and competent and act in the best interest of their clients. Advisers do not make immigration decisions and can only give advice. Applicants who require qualified immigration advice can access the [OISC guidance](#).

### The Solicitors Regulation Authority.

The [Solicitors Regulation Authority](#) maintains a list of solicitors who deal in immigration matters.

### Royal Navy website

<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/>

Cobseo is the confederation of service charities, bringing together all the main charities involved in assisting Service Personnel and their families - <https://www.cobseo.org.uk/>

### Citizens Advice.

Provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities  
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>.





