



Childcare Report

2021

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Introduction

The challenge of finding affordable, quality childcare is a universal issue for working families in the UK. For Royal Navy (RN) families, this is an even more complex problem. They face additional challenges accessing suitable childcare, alongside more costs, compared with the general population. The focus of this report is on those aspects of childcare which place an extra burden on households as a direct result of RN Service life.

Childcare is an issue that affects retention. FAMCAS¹, the 'Living in our Shoes' report² and subsequently our latest findings, all demonstrate that childcare issues directly impact partner employment and the quality of family life, two key retention issues.

This report explores the nature of the childcare difficulties experienced by RN families. It explains why these need to be addressed and proposes a range of possible actions to mitigate them. It is our aspiration that this report will inform future MOD policy (including the wraparound childcare pilot and policy), as well as RN and wider charitable support. This report is based on the experiences reported to us.

¹Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (2020) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903296/Tri-Service_Families_Continuous_Attitude_Survey_2020_Main_Report.pdf

²Living in our Shoes: Understanding the need of UK Armed Forces Families' Andrew Selous https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895236/Living_in_our_shoes_Full_Report_1_embargoed_30_June.pdf



Background to this report

In recent years there has been much discussion around childcare issues facing the Armed Forces in the MOD.

The Naval Families Federation (NFF) first explored this issue in response to enquiries and conducted a childcare survey in 2016. In the ensuing four years, the NFF continuously championed the needs of families, as raised by respondents to that survey. We very much welcome the government's recognition and commitment to address childcare difficulties that Armed Forces families experience, with the introduction of the free wraparound childcare pilot³.

In response the NFF surveyed RN families to gather up-to-date information on the childcare issues that our families face today. The survey was launched in mid-February 2020 for two months, attracting 2,024 responses. This report includes information from that survey as well as evidence from other sources.

³Free 'wraparound' childcare for the Armed Forces (2020).
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-wraparound-childcare-for-the-armed-forces>



The RN need for childcare

The RN has always needed childcare for the children of sailors and Royal Marines. Its serving personnel need childcare for office hours, before and after school, overnight duties, short-notice changes, extended periods of absence on duty due to operational deployment or training, and 'weekending' scenarios.

The experience of Covid-19 has made it clear that it is possible to work productively in non-traditional ways that are more compatible with modern lifestyles. The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2020 states that 71% of sailors' and 78% of Royal Marines' civilian partners are in paid employment and that lone parents make up 6% of parents in the RN and 4% in the RM⁴.

Of these civilian spouses and partners many are highly qualified and employable, have higher earning potential

than their serving partners, and are employed in roles that place the national importance of their job as being at least equal to the role of the serving person (as evidenced during Covid-19).

This evidence supports the changing economic need that families require two incomes to maintain living standards in line with rising house prices, living costs, childcare costs and against relatively flat wage trends. In order to ensure that serving parents are able to share childcare responsibilities, they need to be able to work flexibly when they are not at sea or otherwise operationally deployed. There is a need for policy and action to support childcare sufficiency and affordability across all types of formal provision and to improve access to informal provision.



⁴Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey, 2020. Table B21. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/885863/Annex_B_to_AFCAS_Main_Report_2020_Reference_Tables_PDF.pdf

Key findings from our 2020 Survey

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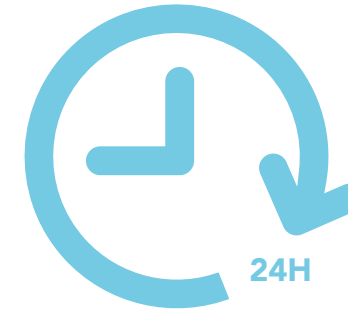
73% of all respondents said the main difficulty they face when trying to access suitable childcare is cost.



Factors, such as deployments, related to their military service increase the cost that RNRM families face, compared with what they would pay for childcare in a civilian household.



There is insufficient childcare availability in many parts of the UK, making it difficult to access and arrange childcare on assignment or when a child transitions between provisions because of age.



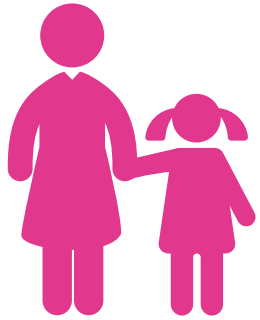
There is a lack of affordable and quality out-of-hours childcare (overnight, weekends, early mornings or late evenings, school holidays) and for children with disabilities.



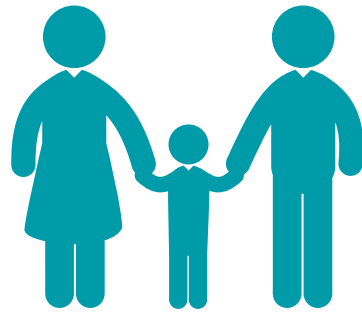
Childcare providers are unable to offer flexibility, short-notice changes or ad-hoc bookings to accommodate RN working patterns. This results in 'overbooking' and increased costs.

Key findings from our 2020 Survey

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There is a systemic assumption that a non-serving spouse has responsibility for childcare provision. This, alongside the challenges that RNRM life brings, negatively affects a non-serving partner's employment.



A change is needed in the RN working culture to ease childcare issues and to recognise the serving personnel's shared parental responsibilities.



Current policy on CEA eligibility and transfer of Individual Leave Allowance (ILA) could be updated to better support the childcare needs of some serving families (dual-serving couples, people in long-term relationships and serving couples who have divorced but are co-parenting).



There is insufficient childcare available during school holidays, particularly for preschool and older aged children.

Cost & Affordability

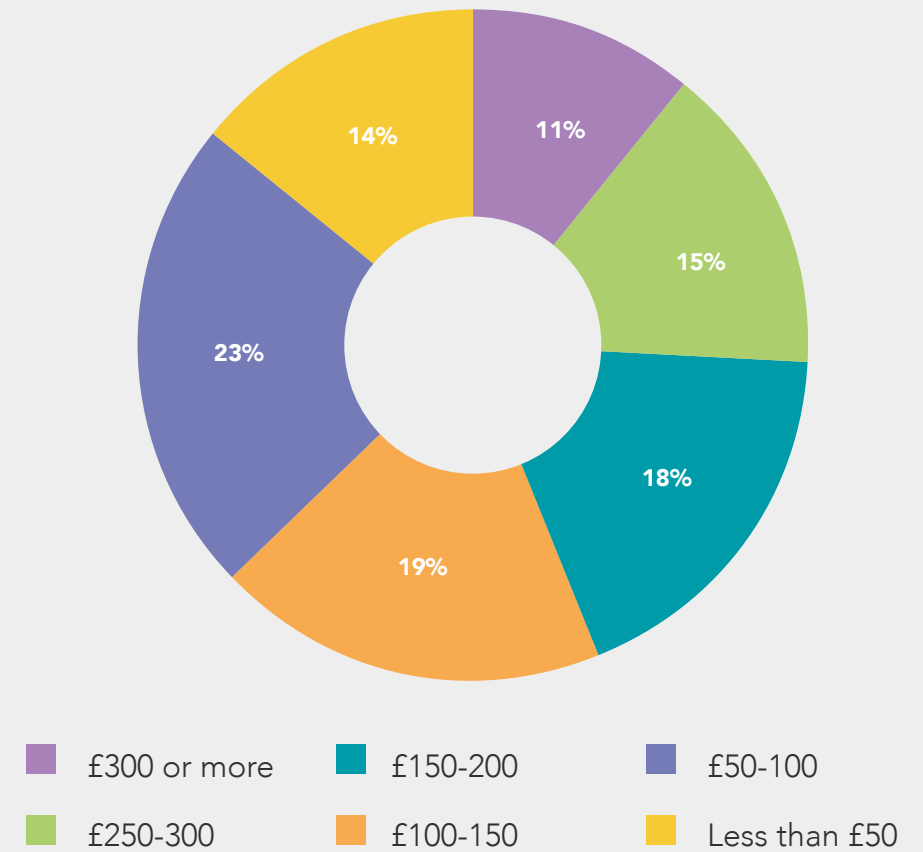
Average cost of RNRM childcare

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The average price of 50 hours (full time daily working hours including commuting time) of care a week for a child under two in nursery is £252.07 across Great Britain, or £13,100 a year¹. A Leading Hand earns £688.29 a week or £35,790 a year and could therefore be spending approaching half their income on nursery costs for just one child², not including any out-of-hours care, which is more expensive.

Once a child reaches the age of three, all families in England are entitled to 15 hours of government-funded childcare a week, 16 hours in Scotland, 10 hours in Wales and 12.5 hours in Northern Ireland³. There is no support available for children under the age of three unless a family is in receipt of certain state benefits or if the child has special educational needs or a disability.

Average cost of childcare for RNRM families per week



¹ Coram Family and Childcare (2020). Childcare Survey 2020. https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Coram%20Childcare%20Survey%202020_240220.pdf

² Royal Navy (2020). Pay. <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/why-navy/pay>

³ Department for Education (2019). Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents in England, 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/853358/CEYSP_2019_Report.pdf

Average cost of RNRM childcare

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Families with two working parents can apply for up to 30 hours of government-funded childcare a week, once a child is three, if both working parents meet the criteria of salary thresholds and hours worked. Both parents need to have a job before they can apply to receive this funding. The mobility and lifestyle of the RN negatively affects the ability of RN families to apply for this funding. This happens because non-serving partners have to change job roles or adjust their working hours on a regular basis to accommodate changes brought about by Service life, for example when a serving person is absent through deployment. This drives up the overall cost of childcare and has a negative effect on the employment opportunities for RN spouses and partners.



🔍 What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Lack of informal childcare

In the general population in England, families are, on average, accessing 10 hours a week of informal childcare for children aged 0-4, 94% of which is unpaid⁷.

64% of respondents said they live too far from extended family and friends to access informal childcare. Families use informal childcare to reduce overall costs, especially for out-of-hours care and school holiday cover, which are expensive and difficult to access.

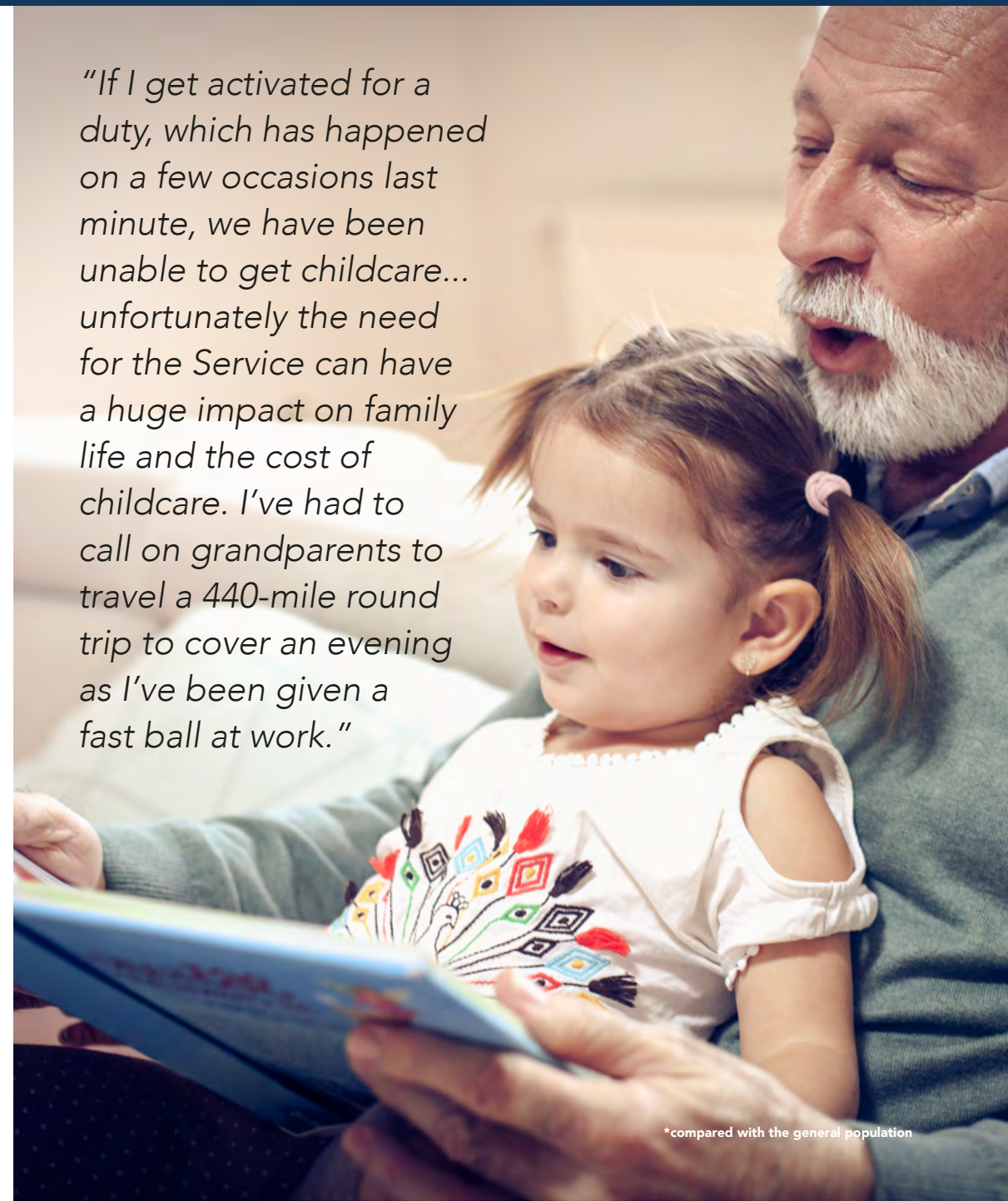
Among those RNRM households who were previously able to access informal childcare, Covid-19 has resulted in further childcare restrictions, for example where grandparents or clinically vulnerable individuals were providing the care.

“

We can manage to get some help if it is booked at least a few weeks in advance as BOTH our extended families live 3+ hours away from us.

”

“If I get activated for a duty, which has happened on a few occasions last minute, we have been unable to get childcare... unfortunately the need for the Service can have a huge impact on family life and the cost of childcare. I’ve had to call on grandparents to travel a 440-mile round trip to cover an evening as I’ve been given a fast ball at work.”



⁷ Department for Education (2019). Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents in England, 2019.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/853358/CEYSP_2019_Report.pdf

*compared with the general population

What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Variations in childcare costs

There is wide variation in the average cost of childcare between different geographical areas. Serving personnel are unable to choose an assignment area based on childcare cost. Short-notice moves and limited childcare availability in a new area can mean having to accept more expensive childcare options due to the length of waiting lists and fewer options.

Further to this, when a Service person is moving between the devolved nations, their entitlement to Government funded childcare hours and tax free childcare varies depending on where the family are assigned as each of the devolved nations have different rules⁸.



I can't afford childcare for [children] so I'm going to have to get a bank loan (if I stay in this area it will be approx £75k) and then pay it off in the future. I wish the Navy had never sent me here.

“

It was very difficult to find a nursery/pre-school which had availability (3 days) when we moved from Plymouth to Portsmouth. We ended up with 2 options, both of which required us to compromise e.g. location, cost. We ended up using the one which was in a more convenient location but cost a lot more.

”

⁸Money Saving Expert (2020). [Tax-Free Childcare](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/family/tax-free-childcare/). <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/family/tax-free-childcare/>

*compared with the general population

Deployment and 'weekending'

What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

39%

had to pay for extra
external childcare

33%

cared for by the
other parent

29%

spouse had to change
working pattern/
arrangements

22%

cared for by other
family members

19%

spouse adjusted working
hours to part-time

11%

spouse had to leave
their job

Deployment and 'weekending' have a negative impact on the cost and extra hours needed for childcare and/or on a non-serving partner's employment.

During deployment, 39% of households surveyed paid for additional childcare, 19% reduced the working hours (and thereby income) of a civilian partner, and 11% of respondents had to give up paid employment altogether. If a civilian partner needs to reduce their working hours to a point where they earn less than around £140 per week during their serving partner's deployment, they lose their entitlement to tax-free childcare (for 3-4 year olds in England)⁹.

“

It's hard for me (mum, civilian) to work when husband is deployed and it's half term – I don't have enough annual leave to cover the school holidays.

”

⁹Tax Free Childcare (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/tax-free-childcare>

*compared with the general population

“

I was on board a ship that was supposed to deploy for 4 months, however 2 weeks into the deployment it was announced that we would need to deploy for 9.5 months. This related [sic] in me have to take a loan out to cover costs over the periods I would have been home to care for my twins.

”



What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Impact on partner employment

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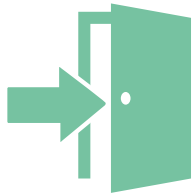
The childcare challenges associated with being an RN family, coupled with childcare responsibilities falling solely on a non-serving partner, negatively affect the non-serving partner's employment.

54% of respondents said that childcare was a barrier to a non-serving spouse's employment because of cost and the ability to access suitable childcare.

Changes to employment status since having children



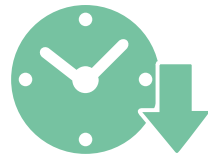
16% moved to flexitime



29% left paid employment



30% moved to a less demanding role



63% reduced working hours

"I have faced losing my job because I could not get after-school childcare when my husband's availability changed."



*compared with the general population

What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Impact on partner employment

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Many respondents said that their employment took second place to the RN and that the non-serving partner can only work three days/part-time in order to make it worth-while/cost effective.

78% (987) of respondents said that they or their partner had changed their employment status or working hours since having children.

“

It's tough to be the only person who can do pick-ups and drop-offs due to the nature of serving persons job not allowing/understanding that sometimes I also have a career but have to be the main carer too and just fit in alongside serving person's commitments.

”

Reasons for change in employment



57% deployments
/demands of RN life



52% difficulties organising
suitable childcare



48% to meet the
cost of childcare



45% to spend more
time with children



*compared with the general population

What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

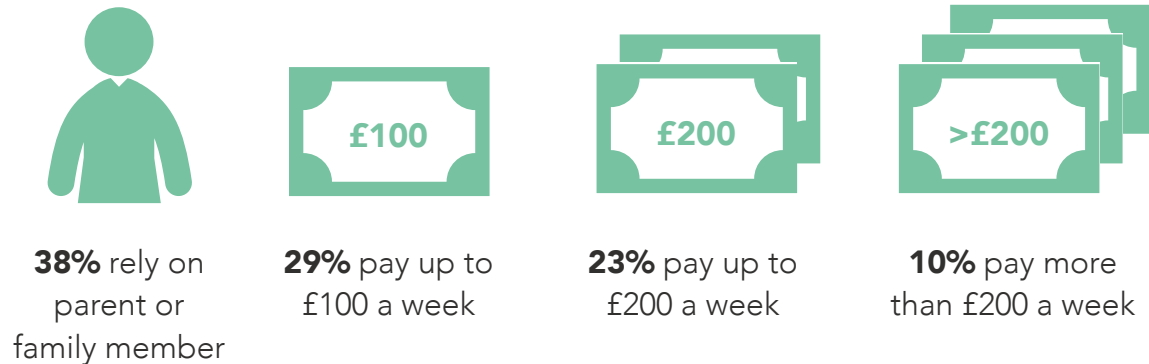
Reduced ability to 'shift-parent'

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52% of the RN are away from home for more than three months a year¹⁰, which drives up overall household childcare costs as parents cannot rely on a 'shift-parenting' approach (for example splitting their annual leave or dividing responsibility for picking up and dropping off their children at childcare).

RN families are also often not able to share the burden of childcare during the school holidays due to deployment, being away or the mismatch of block leave which leads to higher childcare costs or it impacting the non-serving spouse's employment.

School holiday provision and costs



"The full cost of childcare over the summer ran to several thousands of pounds for 2 children."

¹⁰Armed Forces Pay Review Body Forty-Ninth Report 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907507/CCS207_CCS0520587976-007_00_AFPB_2020_Aug_Amend_E-Laying.pdf

*compared with the general population

What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Reduced ability to 'shift-parent'

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For dual-serving couples, the ability to apply to transfer up to 10 days annual leave, to their serving spouse or serving civil partner during a leave year is welcomed. This provision does not, however, apply to established, unmarried/non-civil partnered dual-serving couples, or divorced former couples with shared parental responsibility, and it can only be used once in a 2-year leave cycle .

"My childminder required major surgery and was unable to work for 4-6 weeks. I had to use my ILA [Individual Leave Allowance] to cover most of this which left me not enough to cover my own Christmas leave. Their father was deployed so I did ask for some of his ILA (also in RN, but as divorced this was not allowed, again this was for his children's [sic] childcare also which in modern times I do find unfair)."

"Cost of childcare whilst serving parent is on deployments has impacted our family hugely. Especially when deployed over school holidays as most settings are closed and those open charge a huge fee. Also flexibility and cost early/late pick-ups and drop-off whilst he is away."

¹¹JSP 760 Tri-Service Regulations for Leave and Other Types of Absence Part 1 Version 37 8.2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/775654/JSP_760_Part_1_Issue_37_Jan_2019.pdf

*compared with the general population

“

School holidays are the hardest. Cannot afford to have full-time childcare for 2 children. I try to take my work holidays at the same time but I don't get enough holiday. My partner tries to get time off when the kids are off, however they always seem to be away when this happens and we end up paying for the childcare and end up struggling for the next month.

”

Q What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Variable working patterns

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Childcare providers' business models do not support changeable working practices and routines. RN families tell us that they need to book and pay for childcare sessions over and above their actual requirement to accommodate variable working patterns. This is often compounded by last minute changes to work patterns or shifts that can result in not being able to find suitable childcare.

"Last-minute work trip Scotland, forcing my wife to cancel her works shifts for the next week. They gave her an official warning for lack of notice. Work trip wasn't needed or essential for myself to go."

Regrettably, for households with a deploying serving member, childcare costs will not be alleviated by the new crewing model being trialled in HMS Montrose, for example, as spaces will have to be paid for to be retained, even when the serving person is at home and able to provide some of the childcare.

"My husband's unreliability to pick up on certain days (where he has originally been available and then not at the last minute) leaves us having to arrange last-minute childcare and cost more."



What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Variable working patterns

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“

...the unpredictability and odd working hours of my job have meant that my son has to go to nursery from 0730-1800 every day. We viewed 4-5 local nurseries and none were sympathetic to the flexibility of hours that we required, therefore we pay whether we need to put [child's name] in on a particular day or not.

”

“Childcare providers prefer fixed days/sessions, so do not have the flexibility to adapt to a variable shift pattern... My working locations and patterns meant we could not reliably identify when I could be able to collect my children.”

“My main issue is that I have to pay for more hours than I need most of the time, because it is difficult to increase the hours for short periods when my spouse is away.”



“

Flexibility of childcare offered... for example, no flexibility to take child out of care when a deployed parent returns so you want to take them out of care for a bit - but still expected to pay. Or flexibility with duties – its [sic] frustrating having to continuously pay for a set time when it's not constantly needed, for example on call duty or having to work an extra hour sometimes.

”

 What factors increase childcare costs for RNRM households*?

Need for out-of-hours care

61% of all respondents said that out-of-hours cover (early mornings, evenings, overnight and weekends) was the biggest childcare issue that they faced.

"The main difficulties are the extended opening required to support the demands of the service, we mostly have to drop off at 7am then collect between 5-6pm."

Out-of-hours care is expensive and difficult to access. RN families are not always able to rely on informal childcare to cover these times consequently the costs associated with this type of childcare are not conducive to serving personnel staying in the RN.

"We face weekly challenges arranging childcare, particularly early mornings, late nights and overnight... cost is significant; approx. £1800 per month. That equates to over half of my monthly salary (including sea going allowances) as a relatively senior Lt Cdr."



"Average nursery fees in Hampshire £1100 for two weekends a month and two evenings, childcare totals £1500-£1700 therefore for a junior rate there is no reason to stay in work."

*compared with the general population

Availability & Access

Irrespective of whether RN families choose to settle in one place or choose to be mobile and move regularly, they will face increased childcare challenges. The nature of the RN lifestyle is that the situation is constantly changing, whether this be through starting a new job every two years, moving more frequently, short-notice changes, or working unsocial hours, the key thing to remember is that this is not through choice but for Service.

RN families also face extended periods of separation and 'weekending' as well as variable working patterns that are associated with RN life that the general population do not have to consider. All of these factors impact an RN family's ability to access suitable and available childcare provision for their children.



Difficulties experienced when accessing suitable childcare

64%

Too far from
extended family
or friends

18%

Distance from
home/workplace

31%

Operational
deployments

50%

Childcare during
school holidays

61%

Out of hours
care

71%

Cost

16%

Quality of
childcare
available

30%

Availability of
childcare during
normal working
hours

🔍 Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Lack of availability

30% of respondents said that they had problems with availability of childcare during normal working hours which in some cases has resulted in parents settling for childcare that they were not happy with or a parent having to give up/not return to work.

"Almost had to quit my job as there were NO available places for both of my children."

“

Short notice move within the Southwest, no full time childcare spaces available until Sept 2020, meaning that I, as the military spouse, cannot return to work as soon as we move this April.

”

"Due to availability, I have to split my children through a number of settings as opposed to one... and I have had to put my children in a setting that I would not choose for them... but it was the only way I could work."



🔍 Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Lack of affordable out of hours care

49% of families found it difficult to access quality out-of-hours childcare (early morning, evening, overnight and weekends). Families who were able to access suitable childcare during these periods said that the cost was not conducive to them staying in the RN.

Could find suitable overnight/weekend care when needed



Yes - 19%



No - 49%

“

It's the overnight care that I'll need and there just isn't a suitable way to provide for this. As soon as the child is 11, the RN no longer cares. In the words of my career manager, 'It's just not my problem'.

”

“



I had to delay my return to work after maternity leave as we were unable to find enough suitable childcare to cover extended/ out-of-hours/weekends that was affordable... Even to cover early starts and late finishes is a juggle using several methods of childcare.

”

Q Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Short notice changes

Short notice changes to working patterns, programme changes or shifts impose a significant challenge to families as there is little to no option to find suitable, affordable childcare at the last minute. Greater recognition is needed in understanding the challenges that short-notice changes to plans have on the serving person.

"I can find an expensive overnight baby-sitting service but this takes time to plan and therefore short-notice changes are really difficult to cope with (and often I do not receive any empathy but made to feel inadequate)."



"Having my husband call me and say 'I'm not coming home, see you in 2 weeks' when I was working that evening, therefore finding someone to cover my shifts at stupidly short notice... because I refuse to dump my 3 young children on anyone."

Q Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

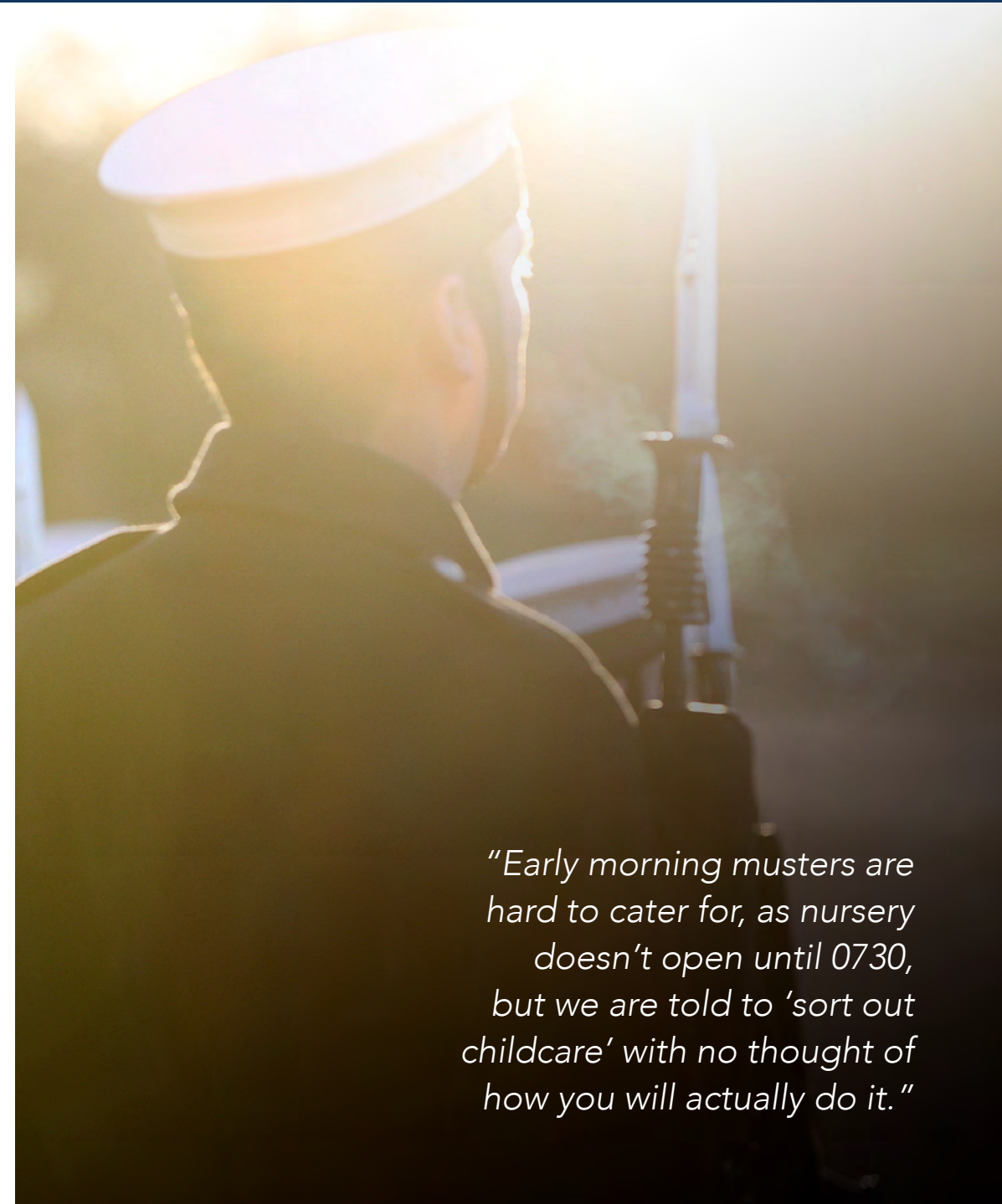
Need for greater flexible working

Whilst we recognise that there has been huge progress on and welcome Flexible Service for the Armed Forces, there is still a need for a culture shift and increased opportunities for flexible working hours where possible. Please see Appendix 6 for further information.

"The flexible work scheme does not work for parents that both serve in the Armed forces, as well as parents that do not live in close proximity to family. Believe the Navy could facilitate more funded nurseries for service children that do no cost more than a junior rates average wage. Therefore I believe parents leave the forces due to the huge cost of childcare in military areas."

Parents tell us that they typically try to keep their childcare challenges separate from their work, to avoid appearing unreliable or less than fully committed to their work roles, unless they are fortunate enough to have an understanding line manager.

"The main difficulties are the extended opening required to support the demands of the service, we mostly have to drop off at 7 then collect between 5-6pm."



"Early morning musters are hard to cater for, as nursery doesn't open until 0730, but we are told to 'sort out childcare' with no thought of how you will actually do it."

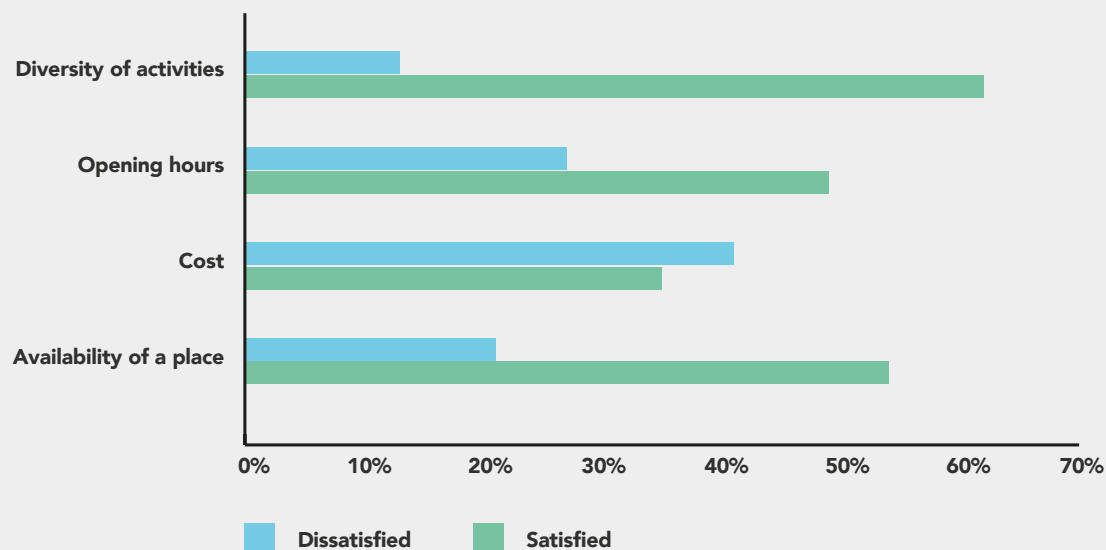
Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Lack of school holiday provision

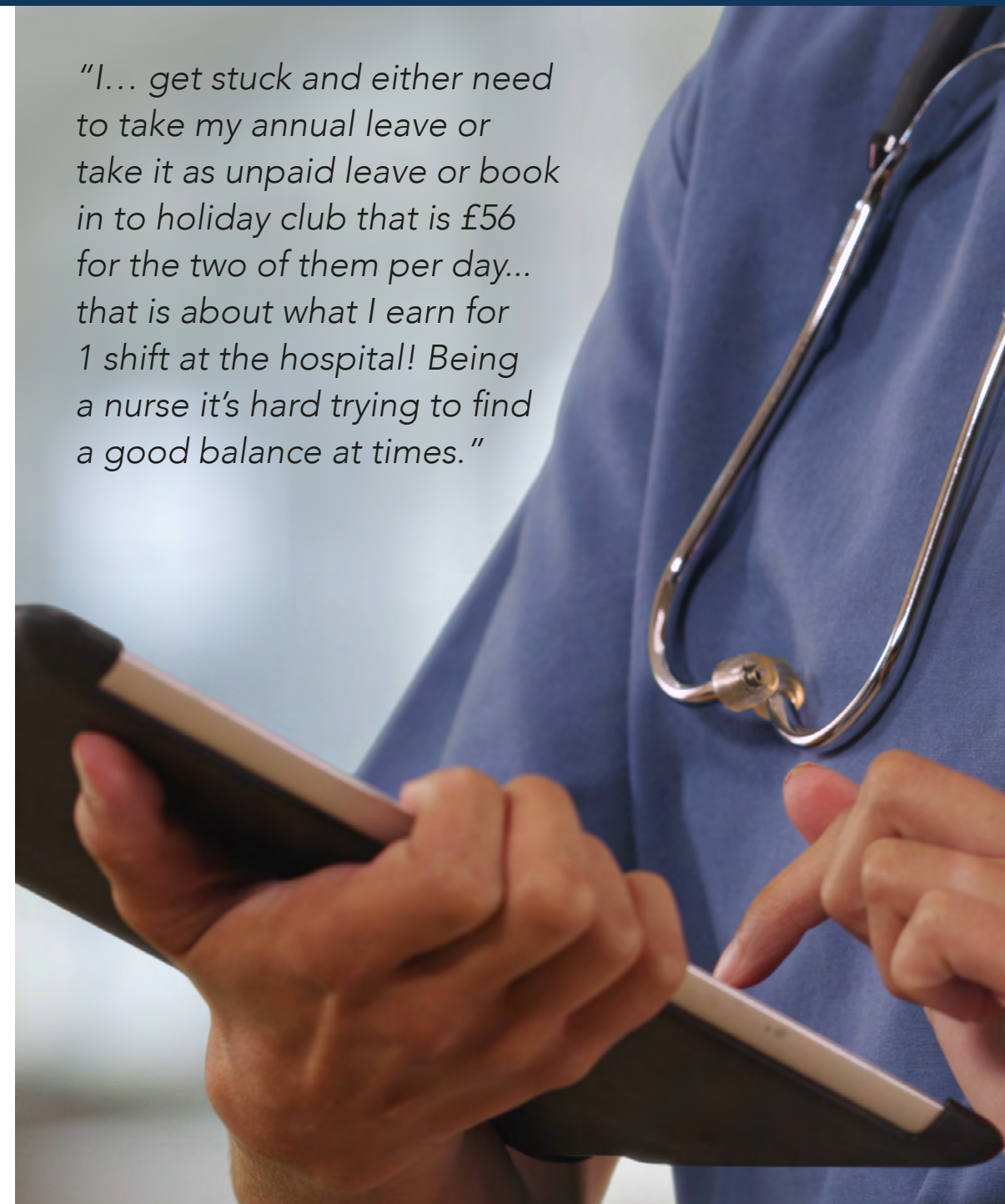
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51% of respondents need to use holiday clubs and external childcare for school holidays, of which many experienced problems when accessing this provision.

Satisfaction levels associated with holiday childcare provision



"I... get stuck and either need to take my annual leave or take it as unpaid leave or book in to holiday club that is £56 for the two of them per day... that is about what I earn for 1 shift at the hospital! Being a nurse it's hard trying to find a good balance at times."



🔍 Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Lack of school holiday provision

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Kings Camp provision during the summer holidays is very popular and many respondents asked for more weeks to be made available. Many respondents also noted that there is insufficient childcare available for secondary school-aged children during the school holidays.

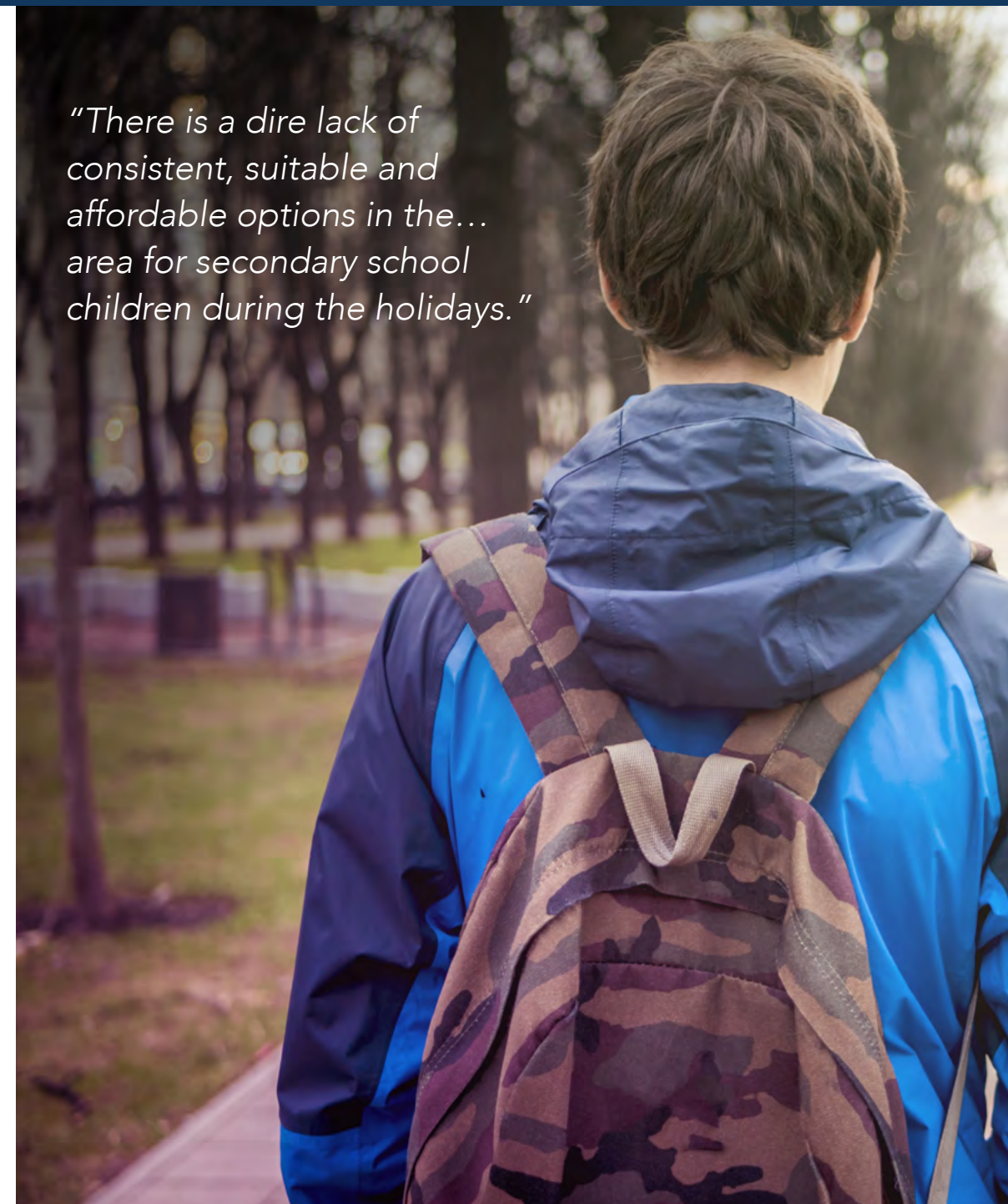
"Kings Camp is fantastic but they do not operate during all of the term holidays and they are only open sporadically."

“

There are no summer holiday childcare provisions for secondary school age children. Therefore we have to try and share a period between us or drop off with family to provide cover.

”

"There is a dire lack of consistent, suitable and affordable options in the... area for secondary school children during the holidays."



Q Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Impact of deployment

The need for childcare provision increases when a Service Person deploys, impacting not only the hours needed but the cost impact that this has on families. However childcare providers are not always able to accommodate the increase in hours needed, resulting in an impact on the non-serving spouse's employment.

58% of respondents had to adjust their working hours due to a lack of childcare options during operational deployment.

Deployment for serving, lone parents adds further complications to childcare arrangements who at times have stated that there is no suitable childcare provision available and are therefore unable to deploy. This is often the case for dual serving couples who are both deployed or working away from the family home at the same time. This, in several cases of respondents, has led to the/a Service person choosing to leave the Royal Navy.



“Both my husband and I are strongly considering our Service because of the repeated difficulties we are encountering in accessing childcare which is suitable to support our service.”

“When I am on duty and my husband is deployed I have struggled with holding overnight and weekend duties and often have had to drive across the country to drop the kids off with family.”

“I have had to adjust my working hours and often have to work late at home due to being solely responsible for pick up and drop off.”

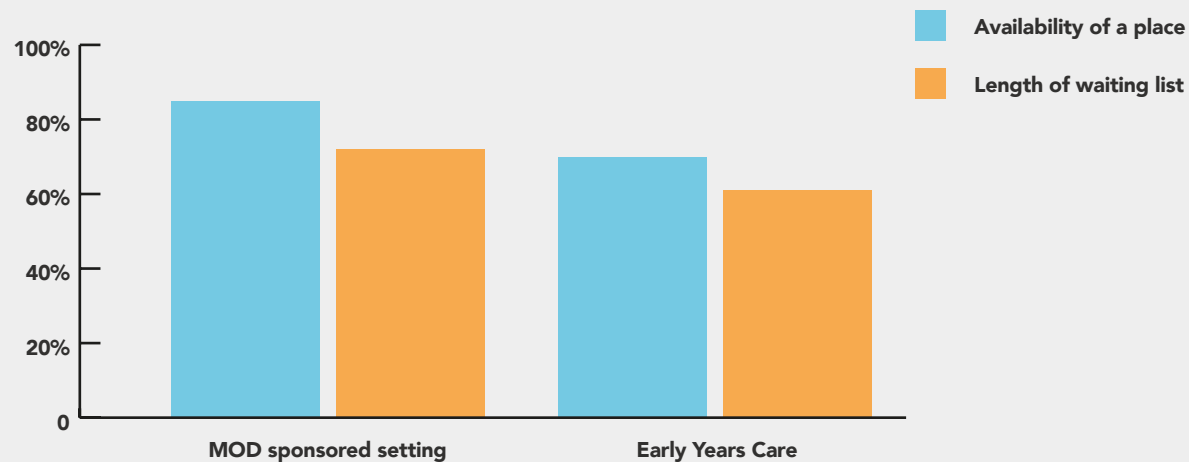
Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Lack of provision when moving

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Families have found that there is a lack of provision available and they have difficulty in accessing suitable childcare places when they move to a new area.

Satisfaction rates when accessing childcare when moving



"Significant difficulties both in accessing childcare and the frequency of location moves requiring re-establishment in a new area and establishing a new routine with the necessary childcare support."

"I have had to give up employment due to a posting where there was no childcare available."

"Changing schools in year can make it hard to find spaces in childcare. Schools without after school clubs make it difficult as childminders in the area are often booked up."

🔍 Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Lack of provision when moving

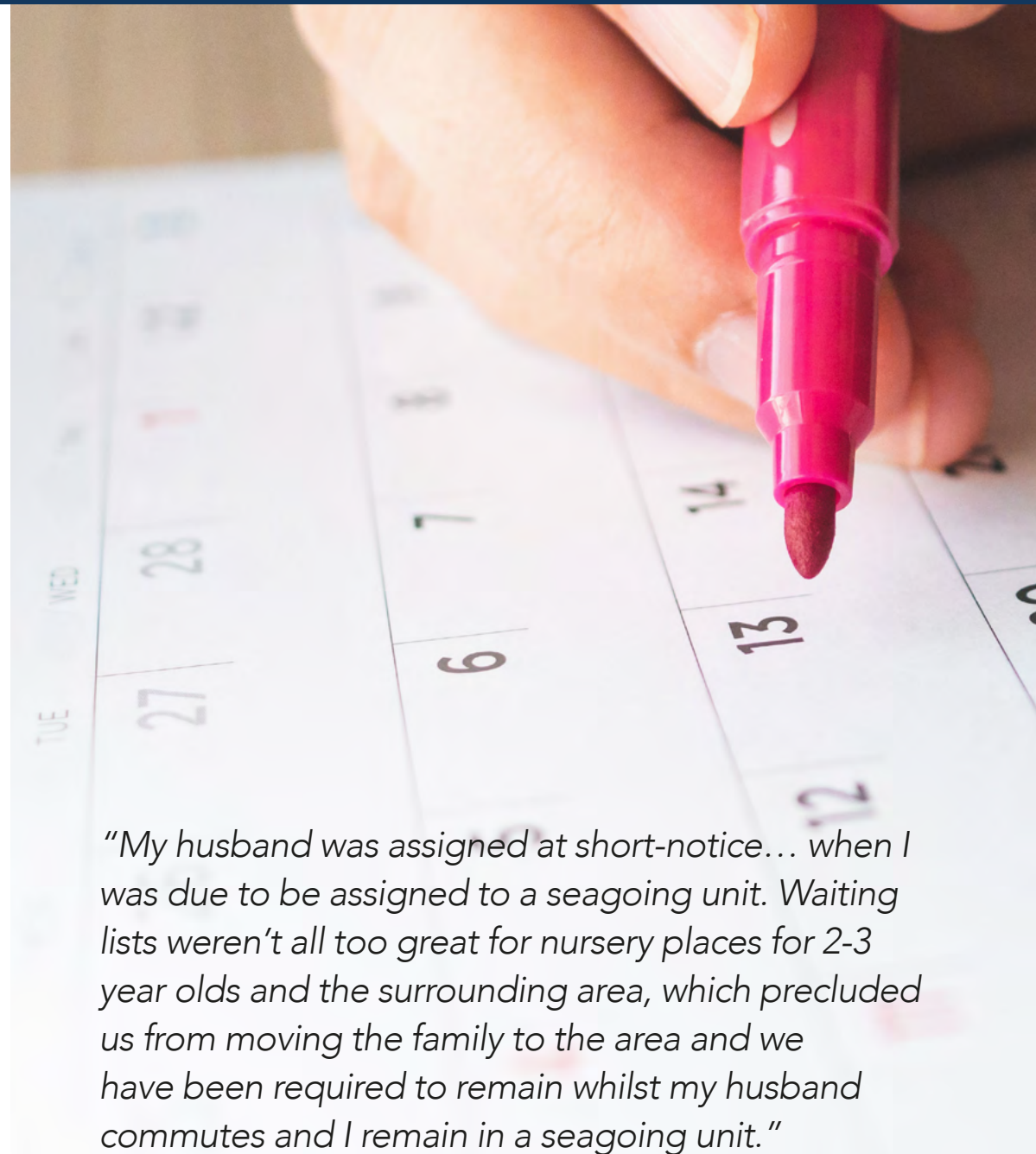
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Families can face long waiting lists when moving to a new area without sufficient notice. 14% were unable to get a place when they needed it in childcare provision on a MOD site.

“

Yes, moved at short notice, no places available, ended up going to a childminder. Childminder was closed by Ofsted and then no nursery places. MOD nursery was very over-subscribed and civil servants seem to have monopoly over places as they stay in one place. MOD nursery has an 18-month waiting list, not ideal when you are posted at short notice and aren't in post for more than 2 years. All other local nurseries have similar waiting lists.

”



🔍 Difficulties RN families have when accessing different types of childcare.

Lack of provision for SEND children

A number of respondents commented that they experienced great difficulty finding childcare for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND).

"My son has low functioning autism and a few other issues. We moved house again last October and luckily found childcare for him for the holidays, but most nursery settings don't want a child with additional needs in their setting."

"[difficulty finding]... Childcare providers who will accept a child with additional needs (ASD)."

"Son is diabetic, finding help looking after him is challenging."

"[difficulty with]... Trust knowing where to go who to use when just moved to an area and with more complex needs for the children."



Recommendations

Short term recommendations

- 1 The outcomes of Community Needs Assessments (CNA) in base ports and around RN establishments should be shared in the public domain to allow local businesses, community groups and the third sector to understand and respond to demand. The CNA on childcare sufficiency needs to mirror best practice in the Local Authorities' sufficiency assessment process, in order that a joined-up approach can be taken.
- 2 Consideration is given by local commands to whether they have a requirement for expansion of provision for holiday clubs (such as Kings Camps) or the reinstatement of previously existing holiday childcare provision (such as RNFPS's Playdayz in Portsmouth), in order to inform provision and to evidence need to assist third sector organisations.
- 3 Consideration is given by local commands and the third sector to funding extra capacity in MOD settings where there is demand so that serving personnel moving on assignment can have priority access to childcare places.
- 4 Consideration is given by local commands supporting childcare provision in MOD and the third sector to subsidising 'payment holidays' when a serving person is taking a child out of a childcare setting during their leave after deployment.
- 5 Where CNA demonstrate a lack of affordable options for out-of-hours care including for children with SEND, innovative solutions are considered to create increased local capacity.
- 6 Where possible the RN should provide more notice of drafts, deployments and courses with more understanding of family needs/challenges with acknowledgement that last-minute changes are often unworkable from a childcare perspective.
- 7 Where possible local command could allow service personnel to adopt flexible working hours whilst in shore-based roles.

Long term recommendations

- 1 A review of Service Person with Dependent Children policy to cover children up to the age of 16 years and 18 years for those with additional needs.
- 2 A review of annual leave transfer policy to consider allowing couples in long-term relationships and divorced couples (when both are serving and share responsibility for children) to be able to transfer annual leave in the same way as married and civil-partnered couples.
- 3 A review of the X-Factor by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body to consider the impact of increased childcare costs as a result of military service (securing suitable provision on assignment, additional costs of out-of-hours cover and childcare during deployment). *Please see Appendix 4.*
- 4 The publication of uptake and progress with Flexible Service to provide greater transparency in order to help serving personnel make informed choices about their career plans and priorities. *Please see Appendix 5.*
- 5 Changes to the working culture to enable more informal and agile flexible and home-working arrangements to support a more diverse workforce where shared parental care responsibilities are recognised.
- 6 A review of CEA eligibility policy to provide better support to RN working patterns, dual-serving couples and lone parents, with an approach focused on the needs of the child in the context of the Service requirement.

Appendices

Appendix 1:

Recommendations for Childcare contained in the recent report 'Living in Our Shoes' by Andrew Selous MP that the NFF endorses:

Short term recommendations:

(55) The Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to:

- a. undertake an assessment of the demand for childcare by military families living on or in the vicinity of each UK military establishment
- b. encourage the establishment of affordable nursery and child care facilities at every military establishment wherever the demand is shown, and where it would enable continuity of childcare provision and facilitate non-serving partners to seek and take up employment
- c. work closely with local schools in the provision of before-and after-school clubs
- d. support families with 'right to request' applications, and provide evidence that articulates to schools the needs of the local military community
- e. provide local authorities with the evidence to incorporate childcare needs of Service children within their statutory sufficiency assessment processes and action plans

Medium term recommendations:

“(56) The Ministry of Defence to consider ways in which the variations in childcare costs in different bases and localities can be addressed so that families who are moved around the UK are not disadvantaged and spousal/partner employment is facilitated.”

- a. “(57) The Department for Education and Devolved Governments to ensure that child care professionals are provided with information/training to enhance understanding of the needs of Service children and the specific challenges of the military lifestyle.”
- b. enforce mandatory completion of the Community Needs Assessments by Commanding Officers.”

¹²A Selous, 2020. Living in Our Shoes, p123.

¹³A Selous, 2020. Living in Our Shoes, p123. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895236/Living_in_our_shoes_Full_Report_1_embargoed_30_June.pdf

Appendix 2:

UK-wide childcare insufficiency

Each nation in the UK has different legal duties with regard to assessing childcare sufficiency. There is huge variation across the UK in provision, and in the amount of provision available for different types of childcare and age groups. Across the UK, overall there were insufficient childcare places to meet demand even prior to Covid-19.

Only 56% of local authorities in England have enough childcare for parents working full time. Fewer than one in five local authorities in England have enough childcare available for children aged 12 to 14 who need after-school care, for parents working outside normal office hours, or for disabled children. Statutory reporting requirements in Scotland are different and the picture outside of funded childcare is less clear, with between 38% and 65% of authorities reporting 'data not held or cannot tell'¹⁴.

Least provision for atypical hours and disabled children

Some of the least provision is for parents working atypical hours, a working pattern which is common for the RN (18% sufficiency in all areas of England, 12% in all areas of Scotland and 0% in all areas of Wales)¹⁵. There is also a lack of provision for disabled children (19% England all areas, 4% Scotland all areas and 8% Wales all areas). There is a real need for increased capacity for out-of-hours care, and for it to be provided at a cost that makes it affordable for junior rates.

Competition with civilian community for places

The RN is susceptible to childcare insufficiency, which affects retention and potentially operational capability. RN households are in competition with civilian families for childcare places. This issue is exacerbated by mobility and short notice changes, which prevent serving personnel from signing up to waiting lists for places far enough in advance of assignment.

Impact of Covid-19 on childcare sufficiency

Childcare provision is an integral part of the employment infrastructure in all sectors, but is key in the RN where roughly half of serving personnel have children. Post Covid-19, there is a risk that childcare sufficiency will become an increasing issue. Not all childcare provision which existed before Covid-19 will re-open. Nurseries and other childcare settings that were operating with small margins prior to Covid-19 are struggling to stay in business. A survey of more than 3,000 childcare providers carried out in April 2020 by the Early Years Alliance found that quarter of settings thought that it was 'somewhat unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that they would be operating in 12 months' time¹⁶.

¹⁴Coram Family and Childcare (2020). Childcare Survey 2020 pp19-23. https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Coram%20Childcare%20Survey%202020_240220.pdf

¹⁵Coram Family and Childcare (2020). Childcare Survey 2020. https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Coram%20Childcare%20Survey%202020_240220.pdf

¹⁶Early Years Alliance (2020) A quarter of childcare providers fear permanent closure within the year. <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/coronavirus-quarter-childcare-providers-fear-permanent-closure-within-year-new-alliance-survey>

Appendix 3:

The gender aspects of childcare

Childcare is an issue for all parents and their employers. Yet, women still predominantly take on the main responsibility for raising children in our society. In order to increase the proportion of serving women within the RN and to see an improvement in retention rates, consideration needs to be given as to how the children of the RN are cared for.

The need, and/or desire, to care for children affects all parents, but the evidence shows that it disproportionately affects women's ability to return to paid employment after maternity leave. Mothers with young children have the lowest employment levels of all parents with dependent children at 65.1%. In comparison, the employment rate of fathers with children aged three or four is 93.2%¹⁷. The retention figures for Servicewomen after pregnancy have not been published since the last UK Armed Forces Maternity report in 2012, and are not included in the UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics¹⁸.

Access to high-quality, flexible, affordable childcare is not the only issue holding back women in the RN, but it makes a huge difference to their ability to take on challenging roles and to progress to higher rate/rank. Understandably, many women within the RN are reluctant to champion the cause of childcare, in case this reinforces the notion that it is a 'womens' issue'.

"Becoming a lone father with full care of children and then getting told that I may have to leave the Service as the Navy doesn't supply childcare, however lots of single mothers are able to keep a career in the RN. I feel that [the RN think] it was unexpected for a father to look after/live alone with children"

The RN has failed to increase the proportion of serving women and those able to reach higher ranks, with minimal progress being made in this area in the last 30 years, especially among women with parental responsibilities. The AFPRB noted in 2020 that the Chief of the Defence Staff expressed concern about the lack of women joining, being retained, and, subsequently filling senior positions across Defence. On 1 October 2019, only 4.5 per cent of all OF6 to OF9 roles were filled by women¹⁹. Combining hands-on parenthood with military service needs to be an option for both women and men to address the paucity of female representation at the top levels, and access to adequate childcare is a key building block to providing equality of opportunity.

Both serving men and women expect to be able to take an active role in their children's lives. They are increasingly unlikely to be able to draw on childcare provided by a spouse or partner in order to carry out demanding roles in the Armed Forces. Spouses and partners (where they exist) have their own aspirations and are often not available to provide more than their share of the childcare. Mothers with young children are more likely to go back to or begin full-time work now than 20 years ago²⁰. A variety of factors contribute to the pay gap faced by those mothers who pick up an unequal share of childcare responsibilities and, for dual-serving couples in particular, the aspiration for a more diverse workforce will depend on men's ability to lean in to their parental role on an equal footing.

Parents who are separated or divorced can face additional challenges to keeping contact and spending time with their children.

¹⁷Office for National Statistics (2017). More mothers with young children working full-time. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/moremotherswithyoungchildrenworkingfulltime/2017-09-26>

¹⁸UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-2020/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-1-april-2020#gender-1>

¹⁹Armed Forces Pay Review Body 49th Report 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907507/CCS207_CCS0520587976-007_00_AFPRB_2020_Aug_Amend_E-Laying.pdf

²⁰Office for National Statistics (2017). More mothers with young children working full-time. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/moremotherswithyoungchildrenworkingfulltime/2017-09-26>

Appendix 4:

The X-Factor and Childcare

The X-Factor is a pensionable addition to the serving person's pay, currently set at 14.5% of salary²². It is intended to recognise the special conditions of military life, as compared with civilian employment. The X-Factor is made up of 13 components but contains no element related to the additional difficulties and costs of childcare faced by serving households.

The components which acknowledge the impact of the absence of a serving person on the other members of their household ('spouse/partner employment' and 'separation from home') recognise factors such as limited employment, promotion opportunities and salaries, and quality of family life, but make no mention of the additional burden of childcare which has to be borne by a partner or outsourced for a price. The 'Hours of Work' component is intended to cover for unsocial hours and constant availability for duty, but it does not account for the increased childcare costs that result. The 'Leave' component refers to compensating for loss of leave, not being able to choose the timing of leave, weekend duties and difficulties planning ahead. It does not take the increased childcare costs from these elements into account.

The X-Factor definitions need to capture effectively the differences between military and civilian life. The need to be able to source round-the-clock, short-notice childcare, the inability of households to shift-parent to reduce costs, difficulties accessing informal free childcare from relatives, the lack of choice on moving on assignment resulting in paying for more expensive care, and the requirement to 'overbook' to cover atypical hours, all combine to drive up costs for Armed Forces parents.

While it is recognised that not all Armed Forces personnel have children, not all Armed Forces personnel have spouses or long-term partners either, but these are acknowledged by the X-Factor.

²²Office of Manpower Economics, 2014. A review of the X-Factor components. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293512/A_review_of_the_X-Factor_components_IDS_FINAL_.pdf

Appendix 5:

Flexible Service

It is acknowledged that significant progress has been made with the recent introduction of Flexible Service²³. It would be helpful to see the rates of application and approval for these arrangements published across all three Armed Forces, along with their impact. It would also be helpful to the serving person to understand more about whether applying for such measures has any impact on their career progression and promotion prospects to enable them to have confidence in their choices. Publishing data on the uptake and success of Flexible Service would also assist potential applicants to the Royal Navy, who need to have a realistic understanding of what this provision can offer in practice.

²³Flexible Service in the Armed Forces (2020). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-engagements-system-what-you-need-to-know/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-flexible-engagements-system>

