

Factsheet 3: Mobility

What is Mobility?

Almost all Armed Forces personnel regularly move between assignments/postings for career development and to meet the MOD's requirements, typically every 2 – 3 years, but also sometimes at short notice. The MOD makes provision for accompanied service for married personnel in the Armed Forces. This means that when the serving member of the family moves home because of his/her job, the spouse and any children have the option to move too. Army families are typically more mobile, and are more likely to move their family home. Naval Service families tend to be more stable, and are more geographically dispersed outside base ports. Naval Service personnel are more likely to be weekly commuters when not deployed. RAF mobility patterns vary between roles.

The main two types of mobility include:

Unit moves - This term is used when a whole unit of personnel (often Army) moves from one location to another. Sometimes the moves are to and from stations abroad, sometimes the moves take place between one UK garrison and another. The term may also apply to a ship changing her base port.

Trickle postings/assignments - This term is used when Forces personnel move as individuals from one location to another. This is the most common type of move for Naval Service personnel, and for the RAF.

Implications of mobility

(i) For children

Like all children, children of Service personnel are individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds. Consequently, their responses to a mobile lifestyle will vary.

Mobility brings both benefits and problems in different proportions for each child. Children may be affected significantly by the attitudes and approaches they encounter both at home and at the schools they attend.

This handbook seeks to highlight ways in which many of the benefits may be harnessed and the problems minimised.

The possible benefits for mobile children include:

- strengthened resilience
- adaptability
- the ability to socialise and make new friends quickly
- experience of travel
- experience of foreign languages and cultures
- independence/confidence
- a sense of perspective gained from a wider range of experiences than their 'civilian' peers

The possible issues for mobile children include:

- a sense of loss at each move
- extrovert or introvert behaviour, especially if a parent is on active service insecurity
- a dependence on adults and/or other children of service personnel (including siblings)
- identifying special educational needs, and lack of continuity of provision for SEND.
- language difficulties (for children who have been learning in languages other than English)
- difficulties in making commitments to relationships with peers, adults and schools as a whole, the danger of disaffection
- curricular discontinuity
complications with public examinations courses
poor school transfer of information leading, for example, to lack of challenge
- emotional and social development difficulties

(ii) For families

From a family perspective, a mobile lifestyle can throw up a range of issues. These include:

- selection of schools/obtaining useful information/making school visits
- admissions to schools/admissions appeals
- the transfer and transit of useful information to new schools
- SEND - continuity of provision
- term-time holidays
- the consideration of a boarding option
- significant differences between areas, with variations between different countries, together with differences between the quality of accommodation, lifestyle, standards of education, accessibility of schools, access to extended family support, attitudes of schools towards children of service personnel and communities
- unrealistic expectations regarding school standards and/or support in moving from one local authority to another
- notice of postings/availability of advance information about accommodation addresses
- choices between meeting individual children's needs (e.g. re the continuation of chosen public examination courses) and keeping the family as a whole intact
- remaining focused on meeting children's needs when there are many other issues competing for attention when family moves occur

(iii) For schools

For schools, SCISS head teachers have identified the following as potential issues which face them in respect of pupil mobility:

- the swiftness and accuracy of transfer and transit of useful information about pupils, including prior learning data
- different approaches to the curriculum and assessment in different UK countries
- meeting SEND quickly and effectively
- meeting children of service personnel's pastoral needs effectively and recognizing that many of them may have only one parent at home for long periods of time
- the availability of funding within the context of School Funding, specifically for a mobile service pupil population
- the timing of the release of AWPU funding, together with the implications of funding for staffing and curriculum planning
- the impact of mobility on the availability of material resources

- the administrative costs of mobility •curricular discontinuity
- term-time holidays
- the fairness and accuracy of Ofsted judgements on schools with mobile pupil populations
- stability of the parental community and availability of parent governors (more frequent induction and training may be required)
- effective liaison with the military community
- threats to the viability of small schools both because of the changing geographical profile of the military in the UK and because of changes to or delays in the planned movements of groups of service personnel
- an increased likelihood of pupils of service personnel engaging in a variety of risky behaviours and having behavioural, social or emotional difficulties

iv) For local authorities, academies and trusts

For local authorities and academy chains, the implications of service mobility include:

- marrying their planning for school places with the shorter term, changeable MOD planning for the location of service personnel, together with the possible expansion of academies and free schools in their areas
- ensuring the smooth transitions, in and out of the schools within their boundaries, of children with completed EHCPs
- considering how best to support schools, including those serving military communities which are affected by large unit moves, and those adversely affected by changes in school funding
- ensuring, if necessary through representations to the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator , that the admissions arrangements of all the admissions authorities in their area meet the needs of Service families, in accordance with the recommendations and requirements set out in the 'School Admissions Code'
- ensuring that there are effective channels of communication between military and educational communities within the boundaries of each authority

Patterns of mobility are changing

Service mobility is changing with the government's long term plans for the Armed Forces.

As a result of the 2010 Strategic Defence Review, the MOD introduced the 'New Employment Model'. This programme aims to mitigate the impact of service life on families and on the careers of spouses and partners. Ultimately, over a period of decades, it aims to allow families to be more geographically stable, but it will take time to embed, and Service mobility will not disappear completely. The MOD will encourage more Service families to buy their own homes. Most Service personnel will continue to be deployed away from home for days, weeks or months at a time, depending on the needs of the Services and the requirements of the government.

Service mobility will change rather than disappear altogether, and may result in increased commuting and family separation.

Greater turbulence than normal may be experienced as bases are closed or amalgamated. Armed Forces from all garrisons in Germany will be withdrawn by 2020. In the cases of whole unit moves, it is essential that the military units involved, local authorities and schools plan effectively together to ensure that there is sufficient school capacity in the areas affected by the moves.