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BRIEFING

# Motivations and Attitudes of New Recruits Regarding Remuneration Issues

Focus Group Investigation and  
Analysis

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Prepared for the UK Ministry of Defence

The research described in this report was prepared for the UK Ministry of Defence.

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# Preface

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This document, prepared for the Service Personnel (Policy) (SP(Pol)) directorate within the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD), presents key findings and trends from a series of focus groups with new recruits which RAND Europe conducted at a tri-Service level. The objective of this work was to better understand the attitudes and views of new recruits regarding the remuneration package provided by the MOD and to identify trends for further analysis. This study complements an earlier RAND study in which similar questions were asked to more experienced members of the Armed Forces; one conclusion of that work was a requirement to better understand the perceptions and motivations of Service personnel in their first year of service.

After analysing the responses of focus group participants in light of the project objectives, a number of key findings stand out. These are:

- Other factors than the remuneration package more directly impact recruitment
- New recruits are generally positive about their chosen occupation and opportunity of a career
- Most new recruits are still evaluating their remuneration package
- Pay is only one important factor (of many) in the decision to remain in the Armed Forces
- House purchase is important to new recruits, but the motivation behind this remains unclear
- The views of new recruits are similar to those of longer-serving Service personnel

This report does not purport to provide a statistical extrapolation of the views of the Armed Forces—in fact the use of focus groups is a qualitative research technique, and, thus, does not aim to draw statistically significant findings; however it does provide a strong evidence base and highlights key trends and areas for further analysis. This will assist SP(Pol) in identifying areas where deeper scientific approaches may be required and will be a useful input into ongoing defence remuneration work.

This report will be of interest to UK defence policymakers working in the Human Resources field. It may also be of wider interest to other parts of the MOD, other personnel professionals, and academics.

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# Summary

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This document, prepared for the Service Personnel (Policy) (SP(Pol)) Directorate within the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD), presents key findings and trends from a series of focus groups which RAND Europe conducted at a tri-Service level. The objective of this work is to better understand the views of new recruits of the pay and allowance package provided by the MOD and to identify trends for further analysis.

Within the context of this project, the MOD wished to examine six key issues relating to the overall remuneration scheme. They are:

- Recruitment drivers and motivations
- Comparison of training expectations with experience
- Advantages/drawbacks to being in the Armed Forces
- Career aspirations and the role of remuneration
- Satisfaction with the current remuneration package
- Motivational utility of operational pay package

## Key Perceptions/Findings

After analysing the responses of focus group participants in light of the project objectives, a number of key findings stand out. While we examine these in greater depth later in this report, a summary follows:

- **Other factors than the remuneration package more directly impact recruitment:** When examining why people joined their respective Service, the focus group participants rarely cited remuneration reasons as direct factors for joining the Armed Forces. Other factors, such as lifestyle and family/colleague experience, appeared to be more directly relevant. However, pay and allowances may *indirectly* impact recruitment through their influence on perceptions of Service life or experiences of former Service members (who, in turn, influence others to join the military).
- **New recruits are generally positive about their chosen occupation and opportunity of a career:** Factors such as service camaraderie, lifestyle, and pride in themselves and what they have undertaken combined to create a positive view of service life. Negative factors were focussed on the immediate training environment, with few recruits voicing significant concerns about their post-training situation. Remuneration issues were not explicitly mentioned. Additionally, the majority of our respondents expressed a desire to serve for significant periods of time, many through a full career.

- **Most new recruits are still evaluating their remuneration package:** Although there was no salient view, a slight majority of the respondents were more positive or ambivalent about the package and there was an expectation that it will improve once they leave initial training. Others responded that they had made a deliberate decision to join the Armed Forces for reasons unrelated to financial compensation. One area of the remuneration package which stood out as being positive was that of the benefits, although there seemed to be a variable understanding that these benefits made up a portion of the remuneration package.
- **Pay is only one important factor (of many) in the decision to remain in the Armed Forces:** Although pay and promotion prospects (to include its monetary benefits) are important factors to consider in the decision to stay in the military, there are a number of intangible non-remuneration issues, such as family concerns, career opportunities, and quality of life which appear to play at least as important a role as remuneration factors in this decision. Thus, a holistic approach toward retention incentives appears to be the most effective way to convince Service personnel to stay in the Armed Forces.
- **House purchase is important to new recruits, but the motivation behind this remains unclear:** Our respondents overwhelmingly commented on the value of purchasing a home, although the motivation behind this desire was less apparent. Many respondents both recognised the value of ‘getting on the property ladder’ and expressed a desire to ‘buy-to-let’, although the intersection of these two groups is uncertain. However, there was some concern about the salary-house cost disparity.
- **The views of new recruits are similar to those of longer-serving Service personnel:** As will be shown later in the report, we did not find significant divergence between the views of new recruits and longer-serving personnel. Although new recruits are more focussed on their immediate training environment, their views generally coincided with their longer serving peers regarding motivation to join the Forces, drivers of retention, dislike of disruption (particularly concerning families), and the positive impact of the introduction of operational pay.

## Focus Group Methodology, Conduct, and Composition

For this project, we used focus groups as the method to capture Service member perceptions about their remuneration package. Focus groups are a qualitative research method where multiple groups of individuals are asked to discuss a topic to gain insights into their perceptions and attitudes. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members.

During a four-week period at the end of November and beginning of December 2006, we conducted twenty-six focus groups with MOD Service personnel at seven locations in

the UK.<sup>1</sup> Within each site, groups were divided by rank structure,<sup>2</sup> in order to provide an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their candid comments. This structure also allowed them to focus on issues and areas that most affected them.

Overall, 220 new recruits participated in twenty-six groups. Each of the focus groups lasted between 70 and 90 minutes. The semi-structured protocol allowed the project team to guide the groups and so ensure that their discussion was consistent and also flexible and dynamic. A facilitator led the focus groups while another member of the project team took notes of the session. The note takers attempted to capture the essence of the discussion and used the participants' own words to the greatest extent possible. After completion of the groups, we summarised the sessions and entered the data into a software package designed to assist in data analysis. By being able to look at responses both across all sites, but also within rank or Service groups, we were able to determine which perceptions were *salient* to their respective groups. The salience of responses is the crucial factor when identifying key trends across the various focus groups. Salient responses are those that occur across a majority of the groups and, thus, can be taken to be more representative of the groups' views than those responses that only occurred in one or two groups.

The question protocol that we used can be found in Appendix A of this report; further focus group demographic information can be found in Appendix B.

## Focus Group Perceptions

When asked what made them interested in the Armed Forces, group participants provided two reasons that were salient across the groups. A family history or experience with the military as well as lifestyle opportunities (such as sport, adventure, exciting opportunities) were the reasons given across all groups. However, all groups also stated that a positive perception of Service life within the Armed Forces as well as the opportunities that it could provide were the factors which actually encouraged them to join the Forces. Many participants within the focus groups considered other Services when joining, and this was particularly true for officers.

When comparing their expectations of Service life to their current experience, there was no consensus regarding how well they had been prepared for life in the Armed Forces. Information provided by Armed Forces Career Officers was variable, and some new recruits seemed surprised by the structure and challenge of military training. There was great variation between those who felt training was more difficult than expected, about the same as expected, or easier than expected.

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<sup>1</sup> The sites visited were: RAF Cranwell, RAF Halton, RMA Sandhurst, Catterick Barracks, CTC Lympstone, HMS Raleigh, and BRNC Dartmouth.

<sup>2</sup> The rank groups were Officers and Other Ranks

When looking at positive aspects of being in the Armed Forces, three factors were salient across all groups: camaraderie within the Services, lifestyle (to include sport and adventure training), and the belief that they were undertaking a worthwhile occupation. Within the Services, the Army personnel looked forward to the excitement of their future jobs as well as the benefits provided by the Armed Forces, a sentiment shared by the Royal Marines.

Turning to negative aspects of the Armed Forces, the issues of concern centred around the training environment. Complaints were heard of poor pay during training, lack of time/freedom, and long working hours. There were also concerns regarding future disruption which may impact on families.

When looking at factors which provided the greatest influence in deciding to stay in the Armed Forces, focus group members provided four salient reasons: future family priorities (which had the greatest consensus), job satisfaction, remuneration (basic pay and pay upon promotion) and career prospects and promotion opportunities.

There was little consensus around the value and appropriateness of the overall remuneration package; most new recruits appear to be still evaluating it, particularly the basic pay. However, it was clear that the allowance package was very poorly understood, and, in general, focus group participants had a positive view of the Armed Forces benefits package (such as housing and medical benefits, travel warrants, advances of pay, etc.).

When asking focus groups about their views on the new MOD operational pay package, the response was generally positive. There was variability in awareness (and understanding) of the policy, but other ranks in particular saw the policy change as positive and encouraging. There was a vocal minority who were more cynical and felt that the policy was centred on publicity rather than Service member reward.

Finally, when discussing the importance of purchasing a home, two responses were salient—those who wanted to purchase a home as quickly as possible and those who wanted a home in order to let it out. However, the intersection in motivation between these two groups was not possible to measure. In addition, there were those who expressed concern about how disparities in salary levels and house prices could limit the ability to purchase.

## **Comparison to Previous Remuneration Focus Group Work**

In early 2006, RAND conducted a similar focus group investigation examining remuneration issues amongst serving Armed Forces personnel. The need to understand any potential differences between that demographic and new recruits led to the work summarised above. However, we also conducted a comparison between the findings of the two studies to identify areas of alignment and divergence of views.

Overall, there is considerable convergence between the analysis of new recruits and longer-service Armed Forces personnel. The greatest alignment is in the following six areas:

*Pay:* Overall, there does not appear to be a problem with individual Service member pay. Although some personnel expressed discontent with their levels of pay, this does not appear to be representative across all of the focus groups.

*Allowances:* In both studies, we found wide evidence of either a lack of understanding of the allowance package or elements of the package which drove unwanted behaviour. This argues for a simpler, more transparent package where it will be easier to assess its impact.

*Recruitment:* In both sets of focus groups, remuneration issues did not appear to be a direct influence in the decision to join the Armed Forces. Family connections and lifestyle opportunities appear to be the most directly relevant.

*Operational Pay:* Although the latest operational pay package did not exist when we conducted our initial focus group work, there was considerable desire for a monetary package to compensate Service members on deployment. Now that the package has been introduced, it appears to have been positively received amongst the new recruits to the Armed Forces.

*Retention:* There are a number of factors which impact on the decision of individual Service members to remain in the Armed Forces when their initial obligation is completed. Chief among these are family issues, career and promotion prospects, job satisfaction, and job security. Remuneration issues are represented through both career opportunities (both inside and outside of the Services) and promotion prospects.

*Disruption:* Both sets of study participants expressed concern about the degree of disruption that they and their families did (or were anticipated to) experience. This is an issue which is important to the group members, and it is important for the Armed Forces as too much disruption could impact on retention decisions, prompting personnel to leave the Services.

Although there is much similarity in the findings between the two related pieces of remuneration work, there are areas of divergence which largely reflect the short-term perspective which characterised the views of new recruits.

First, there is a heightened emphasis on immediate concerns. Many of the new recruits were very focussed on issues surrounding the training environment. Thus, quality of life factors (particularly those to do with training such as free time and dress codes) were often discussed. Additionally, there was less discussion and understanding around their allowance package; perhaps because few Service members experienced the fullness of the allowance scheme while in a training environment.

Second, there was less emphasis on issues which focussed on the future environment. There was little emphasis on issues associated with “stretch”—frequent deployments,

long working hours, etc., although some participants did discuss future “disruption” issues, such as time away from family and frequent moves.

We expect that as these new recruits exit their training phase and report to their first operational units, that such issues will take on a higher profile. However, in the training environment, they were either superseded by more immediate concerns or had not yet been experienced.

Finally, we identified a number of areas that require further study on the basis of questions raised during this series of focus groups and the resulting analysis. By examining these issues in greater detail, the MOD will be able to better formulate remuneration policy and improve its impact on the behaviour of Service personnel.

# Acknowledgments

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This work could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many individuals. Mrs. Sara Parry, Deputy Director SP(Pol) Audit, commissioned this study. Commander John Harbour served as the MOD project manager and provided direction, support, and advice throughout the project. Additionally, Wing Commander Vicky Gosling MBE, Commander Gareth Hughes, and Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Luckham MBE from the Ministry of Defence led the work streams for their particular Services and were invaluable in setting up the various focus groups and providing on-site support for each of the sessions. We are also grateful to Service personnel at each of the installations we visited for their excellent organisation and hospitality. Although they cannot be named in order to preserve their confidentiality, this project could not have been completed but for the participation and candid perceptions of the Service members during our focus group sessions.

Within RAND, we are again indebted to Meg Harrell for her advice, mentoring, and assistance in all phases of the work; her contributions have made the work considerably stronger. We also would like to thank Tom Ling and Greg Hannah for their insightful quality reviews of the project as well as Kaye Marshall for her administrative support throughout.

All of these individuals mentioned above assisted us with gathering information and provided helpful suggestions for this research. We, however, are solely responsible for the interpretation of data gathered during our focus groups and the judgements and conclusions drawn, and we alone are responsible for any errors.



# Abbreviations

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AFCO	Armed Forces Career Office
BRNC	Britannia Royal Naval College
CEA	Continuity of Education Allowance
CTC	Commando Training Centre
DCDS(Pers)	Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Personnel)
ITC	Infantry Training Centre
JPA	Joint Personnel Administration
LSAP	Long-Service Advance of Pay
MOD	UK Ministry of Defence
Off	Officer
OR	Other Ranks
RAF	Royal Air Force
RM	Royal Marines
RMA	Royal Military Academy
RN	Royal Navy
SPB	Service Personnel Board
SP(Pol)	Service Personnel (Policy)
TACOS	Terms and Conditions of Service
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States



# Introduction

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EUROPE

## ***Motivations and Attitudes of New Recruits***

### **Focus Group Investigation and Analysis**

**UK Ministry of Defence  
Presentation by RAND Europe**

This RAND Europe project is presented in the form of an annotated briefing. The key messages of the report can be found in the slides at the top of each page, with text providing further details underneath. This style highlights the major thrusts of the project through the slides, but also allows the reader the option to delve deeper into the detail of the report as circumstances permit. Alternatively, this work could be presented as a stand-alone briefing with the underlying text guiding the presenter's explanation of each slide.

### ***Objective***

**To better understand the motivations and attitudes of new recruits (both officers and other ranks), particularly toward the pay and allowance package provided by the MOD and to identify trends for further analysis**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-2 0107

This document, prepared for the Service Personnel (Policy) (SP(Pol)) Directorate within the UK Ministry of Defence, presents key findings and trends from a series of focus groups which RAND Europe conducted at a tri-Service level. The objective of this work is to better understand the motivations and attitudes of new recruits, particularly toward their pay and allowance package provided by the MOD and to identify trends for further analysis.

## ***Report Structure***

- **Introduction**
- **Key Findings**
- **Project Methodology**
- **Focus Group Conduct and Composition**
- **Focus Group Perceptions**
- **Comparison to Earlier RAND Focus Group Work**
- **Areas for Further Study**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-3 0107

The work presented in this report is structured in six distinct sections. First, we introduce the study in order to provide background information to its focus and aims. Second, we highlight the key findings of the focus groups. These findings will be explored further in later sections of the report. Third, we present the focus group methodology used in this project, highlight advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups, and describe the focus group sessions in terms of both structure and content. Fourth, we then report on key perceptions that arose from the focus groups we conducted. Fifth, we compare those perceptions to those of earlier UK remuneration work to better understand areas of commonality and divergence. Finally, we explore areas of further work that the MOD may wish to pursue as a result of issues arising from these focus groups.

### ***The Investigation Was Part of Larger MOD Effort***

- **Contributes to wider MOD Strategic Remuneration Review**
- **Input to SP(Pol) Remuneration and TACOS Analysis**
- **Snapshot to capture views of new recruits**
- **Linked to target issues defined by SP(Pol)**
- **Involved both new officers and other ranks (ORs)**
  - **Individuals surveyed at training installations**
  - **Study excluded any individuals with prior service history**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-4 0107

This report is part of a larger MOD effort to better understand remuneration issues. At the highest level, it is part of a pan-MOD Strategic Remuneration Review. In particular, the report is a key input into SP(Pol) Audit's Concept Paper which will be presented to the Service Personnel Board (SPB) in Spring 2007 and lay out key issues which should be addressed in future phases of work. It also addresses issues of interest to an additional MOD team examining Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS).

RAND conducted an earlier study from January-March 2006 which examined the strategic rationale and effectiveness of the total financial reward package available to members of the Armed Forces (including pay, allowances, specialist pay, Financial Retention Incentives, and taking account of pensions). The results provided a better understanding of the attitudes perceptions, motivations, and aspirations regarding remuneration issues. However, this work was not wholly representative of all sections of personnel, and the results were more indicative of Service personnel at a more advanced stage of their careers.

This study fulfils the requirement to better understand the perceptions and motivations of Service personnel in their first year of service as well as their intentions to consider Military Service as a long-term career. Additionally, this work will draw upon the previous RAND study to help form a deeper qualitative understanding of the range and types of concerns that Service personnel consider when making career decisions.

This work only represents an initial test of the view of new recruits; it is not a full scientific research paper. Analysis of the focus groups allowed the project team to capture

a 'snapshot' of current views of serving personnel over a discrete number of issues defined by the MOD and formulated by RAND. However, within these constraints, we are satisfied that the evidence presented here is well substantiated.

### ***The Investigation Examined Issues of Interest to the MOD***

- **Recruitment drivers and motivations**
- **Comparison of training expectations with experience**
- **Advantages/drawbacks to being in the Armed Forces**
- **Career aspirations and the role of remuneration**
- **Satisfaction with remuneration package**
- **Motivational utility of operational pay package**
- **Impact and aspirations regarding home ownership**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-5 0107

Within the context of this project, the MOD wished to examine seven key issues relating to the overall remuneration scheme. They are:

- *Recruitment drivers and motivations:* Why do Service members decide to join the Armed Forces? Do they consider additional Service branches? How does the current pay, pension, and allowance package contribute to recruitment? Is it a key factor in encouraging prospective Service members to join the Armed Forces?
- *Comparison of training expectations with experience:* How well does the reality of Service life compare to what was expected? Do any particular factors stand out?
- *Advantages/drawbacks to being in the Armed Forces:* What do Service members particularly like or dislike about Service life? How prominent are comments regarding the remuneration package?
- *Career aspirations and the role of remuneration:* How does the remuneration package contribute to Service members' goals within the Armed Forces? What positive or negative impacts does the current package provide?
- *Satisfaction with the current remuneration package:* Are Service members content with the current pay, pension, and allowance scheme? Are there specific components of the package that are particularly valued or disliked?
- *Motivational utility of operational pay package:* Does this make operational deployments more attractive? Would operational pay influence Service members' decision to remain in the Armed Forces?

- *Impact and aspirations regarding home ownership:* What are Service members' views about the importance of home ownership? How does being in the Armed Forces and the current remuneration package impact on this?

## Key Findings

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### ***The Focus Groups Drew Out Many Key Perceptions About Pay and Allowances***

- **Other factors more directly impact recruitment and joining than the remuneration package**
- **New recruits generally positive about chosen occupation and possibility of a career**
- **Most new recruits are still evaluating remuneration**
- **Family priorities, job satisfaction, and career progression/promotion prospects are as important as pay in retention intentions**
- **House purchase is important but motivation remains unclear**
- **Views are similar to those with longer service-record (as measured in earlier RAND work)**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-6 0107

After analysing the responses of focus group participants in light of the project objectives, a number of key findings stand out. These we examine in greater depth later in this report. However, in summary they are:

- **Other factors more directly impact recruitment than the remuneration package:** When examining why people joined their respective Service, the focus group participants rarely cited remuneration reasons as direct factors for joining the Armed Forces. Other factors, such as lifestyle and family/colleague experience, appear to be more directly relevant. However, pay and allowances may *indirectly* impact recruitment through their influence on perceptions of Service life or experiences of former Service members (who, in turn, influence others to join the military).
- **New recruits are generally positive about their chosen occupation and opportunity of a career:** Factors such as service camaraderie, lifestyle, and pride in themselves and what they have undertaken combined to create a positive view of service life. Negative factors were focussed on the immediate training environment, with few recruits voicing significant concerns about their post-training situation. Remuneration issues were not explicitly mentioned. Additionally, the majority of our respondents expressed a desire to serve for significant periods of time, many through a full career.

- **Most new recruits are still evaluating their remuneration package:** Although there was no salient view, a slight majority of the respondents were more positive or ambivalent about the package and there was an expectation that it will improve once they leave initial training. Others responded that they had made a deliberate decision to join the Armed Forces for reasons unrelated to financial compensation. One area of the remuneration package which stood out as being positive was that of the benefits, although there seemed to be a variable understanding that these benefits made up a portion of the remuneration package.
- **Pay is only one important factor (of many) in the decision to remain in the Armed Forces:** Although pay and promotion prospects (to include its monetary benefits) are important factors to consider in the decision to stay in the military, there are a number of intangible non-remuneration issues, such as family concerns, career opportunities, quality of life which appear to play at least as important a role as remuneration factors in this decision. Thus, a holistic approach toward retention incentives appears to be the most effective way to convince Service personnel to stay in the Armed Forces.
- **House purchase is important to new recruits, but the motivation behind this remains unclear:** Our respondents overwhelmingly commented on the value of purchasing a home, although the motivation behind this desire was less apparent. Many respondents both recognised the value of ‘getting on the property ladder’ and expressed a desire to ‘buy-to-let’, although the intersection of these two groups is uncertain. However, there were some concerns about the salary-house cost disparity.
- **The views of new recruits are similar to those of longer-serving Service personnel:** As will be shown later in the report, we did not find significant divergence between the views of new recruits and longer-serving personnel. Although new recruits were more focussed on their immediate training environment, their views generally coincided with their longer serving peers regarding motivation to join the Forces, drivers of retention, dislike of disruption (particularly concerning families), and the positive impact of the introduction of operational pay.

## Project Methodology

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### *Report Structure*

- Introduction
- Key Findings
- **Project Methodology**
- Focus Group Conduct and Composition
- Focus Group Perceptions
- Comparison to Earlier RAND Focus Group Work
- Areas for Further Study

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-7 0107

In this section, we discuss our methodological approach to the project. We discuss the value of focus groups, their advantages and limitations, and why they are appropriate for this work. Additionally, we show how this method allows comparative analysis between Service groups and rank structures as well as discuss how we approach the post-focus group analysis phase of the project.

### ***Focus Groups Provide a Robust Methodology to Capture the Views of New Recruits***

- **Methodology similar to that used in comparable personnel studies conducted by RAND in the UK and US**
- **Process to preserve participant confidentiality and capture individual thoughts**
- **Rigorous and systematic analysis through structured, focused questions, data capture and software analysis**
- **Strict focus group guidelines:**
  - **~8 participants per focus group**
  - **8-10 questions per group session**
  - **Individuals given opportunity to respond to all questions**
  - **Answers recorded and entered into analysis software**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-8 0107

When determining how to best understand the views of serving military personnel toward their remuneration package, focus groups appear to be the most appropriate way to study the issues in the project timeframe.

Focus groups are a method used in qualitative research where a group of individuals are asked to discuss a topic to gain insights into their perceptions and attitudes. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members.

Related RAND military personnel research in both the United Kingdom and United States has successfully used focus groups to inform their research in a number of major studies.<sup>3</sup> Focus groups also provide a means to capture Service members' thoughts while preserving their confidentiality. This is important; for the study to be most useful, participants must feel able to freely express their opinions without fear of harm or retribution.

Using the focus group methodology also provided us with an opportunity to apply rigour and structured processes to the problem. By using a structured and focussed question protocol, a systematic data capture process, and software analysis tool (QSR N6), we were confident that focus groups would provide the rich, frank responses which would assist

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<sup>3</sup> For example, James Hosek, et al. *How Deployments Affect Service Members*. Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, MG-432-RC, 2006 and Hans Pung, et al. *Remuneration and Its Motivation of Service Personnel*. Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, RD-102-MOD, 2006.

the MOD in better understanding the motivations and impacts of their remuneration package.

The focus groups we ran were usually made up of approximately eight individuals discussing eight to ten questions per group session. The sessions were structured to allow each member of the group to express their opinions. The group discussion was then captured and made available for further analysis in order to detect trends in the discussion.

### ***Focus Groups Have a Number of Advantages...***

- **Participants able to react and build on each other's responses**
- **Facilitator can interact directly with the respondents**
- **Participants can express opinions in their own words**
- **Groups can provide large quantities of data in a short time period**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-9 0107

Focus groups provide a number of advantages as a technique to gather information and understand issues. Some of these benefits include:

- *Participants are able to react and build on each other's responses.* This can lead to comments and insights which otherwise may not have arisen during a one-to-one interview.
- *The facilitator can interact directly with respondents.* This allows for clarification of responses and follow-up questions with the participants. In this way, the facilitator can gain a deeper understanding of the issues discussed.
- *Participants have the freedom within the discussion to explain their opinions in their own words.* They are not limited to a series of choices (as one may find in a survey). This allows the richness of individual comments to shine through—a powerful tool when 'playing back' responses from a group.
- *Focus groups can provide large quantities of data in a short time period, given that the groups are properly organised.* Access to an abundance of rich data provides many opportunities for fertile analysis.

Additionally, through the discussion generated within groups, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the perceptions of the group participants. This would not be possible in a more static survey. The dynamic discussion also provides participants the opportunity to verify their own experiences with those of others, and this

interaction allows the group facilitator a better understanding of the individual and collective experiences of the wider group.

### ***...but Focus Groups also have Limitations***

- **Not a quantitative research method—and thus statistical significance cannot be drawn from results**
- **Interpretation is subjective and open to argument**
- **Provide preferences, but not reasons behind those preferences**
- **Opinions may not be representative of wider population**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-10 0107

However, it is also important to understand that focus groups have some limitations and are not appropriate for all situations.

One limitation of focus groups is that one cannot extrapolate focus group results to form statistically valid conclusions about the wider community from which the focus group is drawn. One should always remember this limitation when drawing conclusions from the findings of focus groups. Focus groups are a qualitative, and not a quantitative research method, and any attempt at statistical extrapolation is inappropriate to the method. As we will see later, it is the replicative nature of comparing multiple focus group results that provides the salience that is then used to draw out compelling results. Although not statistically valid in themselves, focus groups can also be used to draw out issues that can then be further tested in a quantitative large-scale statistical survey.

The interpretation of focus group data can also be open to argument, since many of its findings are somewhat subjective. This provides a different type of evidence base than more objective (and usually statistically significant) data-gathering methods. However, there are questioning and data-capture methods that we utilised in this particular study to mitigate against this weakness.

Finally, focus groups will provide a wealth of information concerning preferences or opinions, but may not provide insight as to the reasons behind those preferences. Thus, although the groups may reveal specific feelings about issues, they do not always reveal why those feelings exist.

Since the purpose of this study was to capture Service member perceptions about pay and allowances and to identify areas for further study, a focus group approach was appropriate. Additionally, by properly designing the groups, they offer the opportunity for comparative analysis as well.

### ***The Focus Groups were Designed to Allow for Comparative Analysis***

- **Groups conducted within specific rank bands**
  - **Officer recruits**
  - **Other ranks (OR) recruits**
- **Groups conducted at Service-specific sites**
  - **RAF**
  - **Army**
  - **Royal Navy**
  - **Royal Marines**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-11 0107

The structure and set-up of the individual focus groups was specifically designed to allow the RAND team to not only understand general perceptions of remuneration issues, but also to allow for comparisons between groups. When designing the focus group composition, we divided the groups into two categories—by rank and by service.

Within the rank divisions, the participants divided neatly into two groups—Other Ranks (ORs) and officers. One advantage of this division was that it provided an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their candid comments. This structure also allowed them to focus on issues and areas that most affected them.

We were also able to categorise participants from the Service from which they came. This was relatively straightforward because each of the sites was Service specific, and it was easy to comply with the RAND team request that all members in a specific group belonged to a single service.

For the purposes of this study, we chose to characterise the Royal Marines as a separate Service. Although the Royal Marines are part of the Royal Navy, the Service has a distinct identity and performs a specific role within the Armed Forces. Recruiting activity for the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines differs as they each highlight their main Service roles; consequently those that join could be motivated by different reasons and have distinct career aspirations. That said, we did not hold any sessions with Royal Marine officers due to funding constraints.

***Post-Focus Group Analysis  
Identifies General Discussion Trends***

- **Following each session, notes are transcribed electronically**
- **Responses are coded to reflect general category trends**
- **Specialist software employed to review, sort, and analyse comments**
- **By analysing along multiple dimensions, wide range of analysis is possible**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-12 0107

Following the focus groups, we transcribed the notes into an electronic file, developed analytic codes, and organised the notes according to the scheme. We used QSR N6 software, a qualitative-coding program that allows users to organise and systematically analyse data such as focus group comments. The software allowed us to create a coded, electronic database that enabled us to review, sort, re-sort, re-code and analyse comments along a number of dimensions. The goal of this was to discover as wide a range of explanations as possible for why focus group questions may have been answered as they were.

We used our software package to handle the large amount of information we gathered, and from it identified responses, or groups of responses, that were salient to a majority (or even all) of the groups. The *salience* of responses is the crucial factor when identifying key trends across the various focus groups. Salient responses are those that occur across a majority of the groups and, thus, can be taken to be more representative of the groups' views than those responses that only occurred in one or two groups.

The software allowed us to look at the information across the rank bands and by Service. We also considered the strength of feeling of the answers, both by noting group concurrence, dissension, or equivocation, and by carefully assessing the number of comments noted for any one response. As we discussed earlier, there are dangers in attempting to derive too much from quantitative analysis of focus group responses. That is why assessing the salience of the group perceptions is so important.

## Focus Group Conduct and Composition

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### *Report Structure*

- Introduction
- Key Findings
- Project Methodology
- **Focus Group Conduct and Composition**
- Focus Group Perceptions
- Comparison to Earlier RAND Focus Group Work
- Areas for Further Study

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-13 0107

In this section, we discuss specific details about the focus groups we conducted in support of this project. We provide an overview of each of the sites visited and breakdown of our actual focus group demographics. Finally we detail the key questions used in the focus group sessions and show how they relate to the project target issues defined by the MOD at the beginning of the project.



During a four-week period at the end of November and beginning of December 2006, we conducted focus groups with MOD Service personnel at the seven locations shown in the slide above. The table below shows the location and timetable for each series of focus groups.

Date	Location	Service
22 November 2006	BRNC Dartmouth	Royal Navy
23 November 2006	CTC Lympstone	Royal Marines
28 November 2006	RAF Cranwell	Royal Air Force
29 November 2006	RAF Halton	Royal Air Force
6 December 2006	RMA Sandhurst	Army
7 December 2006	Catterick Barracks	Army
12 December 2006	HMS Raleigh	Royal Navy

The sites visited were selected by the MOD because they provided a wide variety of both Service type and rank training function. For example, RAF Halton and Catterick Barracks are training installations for new recruits whereas Dartmouth and Sandhurst train new officers. The paragraphs below provide a short description of each installation visited:

**CTC Lympstone** trains regular and reserve new entry personnel for service within units of 3 Commando Brigade and other operational units within the Royal Marines Command, as well as to support the structure of the Corps by providing an extensive package of continuation courses which enhance infantry and Commando skills. It is located just to the southeast of Exeter.

**BRNC Dartmouth:** Located in Dartmouth on the south coast of England, Britannia Royal Naval College has been training Royal Naval officers on the current site since 1905 in order "to train and educate Young Officers to meet the challenging standards of the front line."

**HMS Raleigh** is the Royal Navy's premier training establishment in the South West where all ratings joining the Service receive the first phase of their Naval training. It also provides professional courses in military training, seamanship, logistics and submarine operations. The establishment is located at the South East corner of Cornwall on the outskirts of the town of Torpoint.

**Catterick Barracks:** Located in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales, the Infantry Training Centre (ITC) Catterick conducts Phase 1 and 2 Infantry Training. It has a training output of almost 3000 soldiers per year.

**RMA Sandhurst** The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst was formed in 1947. Its commissioning course, introduced in 1992, is the first stage of officer training and education. Its main purpose is to develop an officer with the generic leadership qualities to lead soldiers both on and off operations. It is located in Surrey.

**RAF Cranwell**, located in Lincolnshire, was originally a Royal Naval Air Service training and airship base. It was taken over by the RAF in 1918 for officer cadet training, a role it fulfills to this day. The RAF College runs a 30-week initial training programme for all new RAF officers.

**RAF Halton** is responsible for the training of RAF personnel, including new recruits and those specialising in diverse roles such as policemen or administrators. Halton is located between Aylesbury and Tring.

***A cross-section of military personnel participated in the focus groups***

- **220 individuals participated in 26 focus groups broken down into:**

	Other Ranks (OR)	Officers
Army	39 (4 groups)	23 (3 groups)
Royal Navy	36 (4 groups)	26 (3 groups)
Royal Air Force	33 (4 groups)	29 (4 groups)
Royal Marines	34 (4 groups)	NA

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-15 0107

This slide shows the general demographic make-up of our total focus group population. Overall, 220 Service personnel participated in twenty-six groups. Further focus group demographic information can be found in Appendix B at the end of this report. Additionally, Appendix B provides the answers to the questionnaire which we distributed to each group prior to the focus group sessions.

Each of the sessions began with a short introduction to the project, to include its primary aim, background on RAND Europe, the project sponsors, how participants were selected to participate in the group, and the final produce of the focus groups. The groups were advised that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain confidential. The session facilitator also gave the participants an opportunity to ask questions concerning the project as well as providing contact information, should members of the group have any follow-up thoughts or questions. In addition, we provided each of the group participants with a short questionnaire which they completed prior to the group discussion. This questionnaire allowed us to capture some additional views of group participants which we did not have time to cover in the sessions.

Each of the focus groups we conducted lasted between 70 and 90 minutes. The semi-structured protocol allowed the project team to guide the groups and so ensure that their discussion was consistent and also flexible and dynamic. A facilitator led focus groups with another member of the project team taking notes of the session. The note takers attempted to capture the essence of the discussion and used the participants' own words to the greatest extent possible. Additionally, we recorded each session using a digital recorder.

### ***Investigation Questions Were Formulated to Identify Perceptions of Target Issues***

- **Reasons for recruitment**
  - **Initial interest in armed forces**
  - **Reason for joining armed forces**
  - **Consideration of other Services**
- **Comparison of expectations to experience of training environment**
- **Positive aspects of Service life**
- **Negative aspects of Service life**
- **Important factors which will influence retention**
- **Views of pay and allowance package**
- **Perceived impact of operational pay package**
- **Issues surrounding home ownership**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-16 0107

In order to ensure that all seven target issues (as articulated by the MOD) were covered in the focus groups, the RAND project team devised a number of investigative questions to capture Service member views of the target issues. Those questions topic areas are shown in the slide above.

We asked these questions in each of the focus group sessions using a structured protocol. The term protocol is used because the series of questions includes instructions to the moderator and note taker for each group. In this way, we attempted to limit any impact the delivery of the questions may have on the potential responses of the participants. Similarly, we wanted as much commonality in the style of the notes as possible. This aids objective analysis. The protocol was carefully designed to encourage participation from all of those present and ensure as far as possible that no one person could dominate a session. This provided additional rigour in the conduct of the focus groups, given the very short notice set-up of the group sessions and improved the quality of the responses.

Not all of these investigative questions directly addressed remuneration issues. By providing the focus groups with topics areas that are not explicitly pay and allowance related, the project team was then able to better understand the *relative* value of the remuneration package in the overall context of Service life. This was also the rationale for leading with questions only peripherally related to remuneration and then following-up with more explicit pay and allowance queries.

A copy of our question protocol can be found in Appendix A.

### ***Interviewing New Recruits Posed Unique Challenges***

- **Interaction was variable**
- **Respondents focused on immediate environment**
  - **Very focussed on short-term issues (training)**
  - **Less engagement in long-term questions**
- **Participants generally responsive and candid**
- **Little hesitancy in providing views**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-17 0107

This study focussed on the views of new recruits to the Armed Forces. Previous work had centred on the perceptions of service members with a longer record of service. Some important differences emerged between these groups which are worth commenting on.

First, we found the interaction between the participants in the focus groups to be variable in intensity and quality. Some groups bonded well together and fed off of each others' answers; others were much more subdued and the intra-group interaction was minimal. One explanation for this may be that we conducted focus groups with recruits who were at different stages in their training cycles. Recruits who were newer to the Armed Forces did not tend to interact with their peers as much as those who had been in training for longer.

Second and more significantly, we found that the new recruits—both officers and other ranks—tended to be very focussed on their immediate training environment. They had difficulty stepping out of their immediate surroundings and thinking about issues which would impact them in the longer-term. Instead, they were very fixed on the 'here and now' which may be attributable to the intensity of their training environment.

Finally and more positively, we found that the new recruits who participated in the focus groups were extremely candid and responsive to the questions we asked; although there may have been less interaction *between* participants in some groups, almost all of the recruits responded enthusiastically to the groups and were not shy in offering their opinion. There was little cynicism or suspicion of the MOD's motivations behind the study.

## Focus Group Perceptions

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***Report Structure***

- Introduction
- Key Findings
- Project Methodology
- Focus Group Conduct and Composition
- Focus Group Perceptions
  - General Findings
  - Variations by Service and Rank
- Comparison to Earlier RAND Focus Group Work
- Areas for Further Study

**RAND** SP(Pol)-18 0107

In the following section we discuss our findings and use the actual responses of the focus groups to explain the views of the participants. It is important in a study such as this to protect the confidentiality of those taking part. We made this undertaking to each focus group. Following any quote in this document are parentheses in which we show either the type of Service group or the type of rank group in which the response was made. We do this to show the breadth and depth of quotes. Unless we indicate otherwise in the text, we do not intend such attribution to highlight that the quote represents the views of only that Service or rank group. We are able to track every quote through our separate notes and the analysis software but we are not providing this ability to the MOD to ensure confidentiality of the group participants.

The quote abbreviations are:

Service Groups		Rank Groups	
Royal Navy	RN	Officer	Off
Army	Army	Other Ranks	OR
Royal Air Force	RAF		
Royal Marines	RM		

### ***What Made You Interested in the Armed Forces?***

- **All Groups:**
  - **Family History or Experience**
  - **Lifestyle (which includes excitement, sport, adventure)**
- **Specific Groups:**
  - **Best Option Available (Army/RM & ORs)**
  - **Opportunities (RN/RAF & Officers)**
  - **Travel (RN)**
  - **Childhood Ambition (Army)**
  - **Cadets or Similar (Officers)**
  - **Recruitment Activity (RM)**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-19 0107

After completing the “on arrival” survey and answering a question that collected age, rank and length of service data, we asked the participants to tell us how they became interested in the Armed Forces. The respondents answered this question with both background factors and immediate factors in mind. There were two factors which were salient across all of the focus groups—family history/experience and lifestyle factors.

For some, a prolonged exposure from family involvement in the Armed Forces piqued their interest; within this, we include any description of childhood ambition or activity in related cadets in this phrase as an indirect indicator of the impact of the family environment. Family factors were salient across rank and Service groups, though childhood ambition was salient particularly for Army groups whilst Officer groups offered experience of cadets or similar organisations.

“My dad and granddad had served in the Paras, and I’d been thinking about it – especially after I’d left school.” (Army)

“Father was in both the RN and RAF, and my grandfather was a pilot during WW2. This was the job that I always wanted to do.” (Off)

“My cousin is in the forces and he just came up to me and talked about the Marines and I thought yeah, that’s what I want to do.” (RM)

The more immediate factors that stood out across many of the groups were those related to the expected lifestyle of the Forces, including the excitement to be expected from being in a Service. “I wanted to see action” (Army) was typical of many responses, as were aspirations for “a change of pace” (RAF), a desire to face “challenge” (RM), or “to do

something different” (Off). Others were influenced as they investigated the Forces as a potential career and described the opportunities available as a particularly positive influence; this aspect resonated more for the RN and RAF groups than either of the others. The Army and RM groups conversely described their choice as the “Best Option”; this represented their belief that the Forces represented the best opportunity available to them at the time. A stand out comment for the RM groups (who were all ORs) is the trigger from Recruitment Activity – the phrase “99.9% need not apply” (RM) was repeated often by participants in answers to this question and was seen in other answers later. *For those that joined*, this slogan appears to have been a strong influencing factor.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Although post-study discussions with other Service members suggest that this recruiting theme may have also dissuaded others from considering the Royal Marines as a career option; however, we were not able to verify this through the course of our work.

### ***And What Made You Join?***

- **All Groups:**
  - **Perception of Service Life and Opportunities**
- **Specific Groups:**
  - **Job security of Career and Associated Remuneration (ORs)**
  - **Recruitment Activity (RM)**
  - **“Now or Never” (ORs)**
  - **Worthwhile Occupation (Officers)**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-20 0107

We next asked the group participants what factors actually caused them to join the Armed Forces (as contrasted to factors of initial interest). One reason stood out; Service Life and Opportunities was salient within and across almost all of the groups.

We use the phrase Service Life to bring together the disparate responses used by participants to describe being in the Armed Forces—the lifestyle (which includes the expectation of excitement, the ability to enjoy sports or other adventurous training activities); the challenge presented as part of the job of Service men and women; the attraction of travel and working in different parts of the world. In a nutshell, all those things that the respondents describe that one cannot get from the “9-5 civvie job” (RN). We group with Service Life too those responses that describe opportunity, whether within the context of lifestyle, challenge etc. or in relation to the structured nature of professional opportunity that the Armed Forces offer—piloting aircraft or commanding a ship for example.

“I just couldn’t see myself behind a desk every day – you know, just the same old stuff. I needed to get outdoors ... and the military does provide a really good platform once you pass out – there are so many opportunities – specialisations, travelling abroad, meeting people, getting contacts, it just gets bigger and bigger.”  
(RM)

“I was in a law firm, sitting with £3m of completions on my desk, but I just didn’t get a buzz from that at all ... it was time to leave – while I was still young and fit.” (Off)

“The motivation and the ‘tick-over’. Fitness and hobbies rolled into one. You get pushed to do things – it makes you motivated.” (OR)

The attraction of the Forces as a career with job security (and with regular pay) was salient for OR participants. This group spoke more often than officers, too, about the impact of Recruitment Activity; we include in this description the presence of an Armed Forces Careers Office as well as proactive steps such as school visits. The “99.9% need not apply” or such comments as being the best of the best, all clearly Recruitment Activity type statements, was mentioned often in all of the Royal Marine groups.

Additionally, Other Ranks offered many comments across the Service groups that explained their decision to join as one that they had to make—perhaps they were approaching age limits, or they felt that if they didn’t join now, they never would. We characterised this as “Now or Never.”

“I was getting into trouble ... I’ve got a wife and a house and I really didn’t want to end up going back to those bad ways ... .” (OR)

“It can change your life, and I think if I’ve got no children and no ties I’m going to do something for me for a change, before anything like that starts to happen. I want to enjoy my life for a bit first.” (OR)

Officers commented in many of their groups that they saw the Armed Forces as being a worthwhile activity in which they could take pride.

“I wanted to do something useful and serve my country, protect my family and friends.” (Off)

“I was fed up working in a business that simply involved chasing money.” (Off)

### ***Were Other Services Considered?***

- **All groups considered other Services as alternatives**
  - **Officers tended to consider all other services**
  - **RM considered Army more strongly**
  - **RM were not considered as strongly by others**
- **RAF and RM groups responded most that they did not consider another Service**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-21 0107

In addition to understanding why group members joined their particular Service, we also wanted to understand if other Services were considered when making the decision to join the Armed Forces. Many participants in each of the groups commented that they had considered the other Services before joining their current Service. There was a wide range of reasons given for the final choice.

“Marines first of all. I seriously considered the Paras but they told me there would be a four-month wait.” (Army)

“I applied to all the Armed Forces but the RAF offered me [a job] first.” (RAF)

“I considered the Navy but I didn’t really fancy being at sea for a particularly long period of time; and the same for the Army: didn’t fancy being shot at quite so much.” (RAF)

“I did my RCB for the army, but to be honest, I hate camping! So I didn’t join.” (Off)

“I considered the Army and the RAF. But the Marines attracted me because they are an independent fighting force. This was really attractive, as was the promise of a serious physical challenge.” (RM)

There was a tendency for the officers to consider all of the Armed Forces before making a final decision. Those ORs now in the Royal Marines who did consider another Service, looked mainly at options in the Army, particularly infantry or associated combat forces.

Conversely, joining the Royal Marines was the least popular alternative for those that joined another Service.

There was a sizeable number of respondents that said they did not consider another Service before joining. Amongst these, this view was more often expressed in the RM and RAF groups. As not every participant responded to this question, it would be dangerous to draw too much from the frequency of the “did not consider” other Services response. It is a useful insight in that it seems to indicate that, for some new recruits, all of the Armed Forces are seen as attractive, even if they eventually commit passionately to one. For others, it is an individual Service from the very beginning that is attractive.

### ***Has Your Training Met Your Expectations?***

- **No consensus within responses**
- **Many in Army and RAF formed expectations outside of AFCO**
- **AFCO information was generally thought to be:**
  - **Accurate by Officers**
  - **Inaccurate by ORs**
- **For officers, training generally worse than expected**
- **For ORs, no consensus but more positive comments than negative**
  - **Negative perceptions include problems with “too much” discipline as well as “too easy”**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-22 0107

Having gained a better understanding of why individuals joined the Armed Forces and whether they considered other Services before joining, we turned to the question of understanding how closely their expectations regarding Service life accorded with the reality of their experiences. There was no consensus within responses to this issue, and a number of participants stated that they had yet to experience Service life, drawing a distinction between initial training and operational service.

For some respondents the Armed Forces Careers Offices (AFCOs) had painted a clear picture of what to expect in early training, even to the extent of attempting to differentiate between the training environment and that in the “real” Service.

“So far, everything is pretty much how the AFCO said it would be with regards to the training. Apart from pay issues, they were quite good about detailing what would be in the training.” (RAF)

“I was told that this place was infuriating, and it is, because it’s not the real Army.” (Army)

“I’ve found in the literature that they give you, they paint quite a rosy picture by making a big deal about the history of the service .... Everything they say in that respect is true. (Navy)

The more widely held view was that AFCOs had not done this well; the more common view of the groups was that they had learnt more elsewhere by talking to friends or relatives with service experience or from their own experience gained in cadet organisations. These latter reasons were salient for Army and RAF respondents

respectively and more so than for the other Services. Officers appeared to have gained more from the AFCOs than Other Ranks, however, though there was as strong an opposite perception. Other Ranks felt much more misled by AFCOs.

“They paint this big colourful picture, but it really isn’t that colourful.” (OR)

“The AFCO makes you think it’s kind of an adventure – you go through the course and everyone is happy and smiling. You never see the waking up at half five and the pack inspections. Everyone’s smiling and it’s all very nice. So it’s a shock when you get here, but you settle in after the first couple of days.” (RAF)

“I had more insight because of growing up around the Army.” (Army)

“OTC gave me a real heads-up as what to expect.” (Army)

“I learnt most ... from the University Air Squadron.” (RAF)

Across Service groups, respondents were divided as to whether their training was better or worse than expected. The predominant view was that training was worse, but this captures diverse views such as “mentally more demanding” (RM), to “too easy” (OR). The comment that training was better than expected was far more salient for Other Ranks than Officers.

“The AFCO made being in the RAF sound like hell. I expected it to be a lot harder than it has been.” (RAF)

“I expected to be shouted at a lot more. In fact the instructors talk to you and tell you what to do. A positive surprise.” (OR)

“You don’t realise just how much you will gel with these people. Because you are living with them so much you get to know them so well. If this was emphasised, people would be much less worried about the isolation factor.” (OR)

The range of responses may indicate either an inability of the participants to process the question and so answer in a way that allows purposeful analysis, or it could indicate, more likely, that there are strong variations in the performance of AFCOs and the other parts of the services responsible for preparing potential recruits for training.

### ***New Recruits See Several Positive Aspects to Military Service ...***

- **All Groups:**
  - **Camaraderie**
  - **Lifestyle**
  - **Worthwhile Occupation**
- **Specific Groups:**
  - **Benefits (Army/RM)**
  - **Excitement (Army)**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-23 0107

In the next set of discussion questions, we tried to understand what the new recruits saw as both positive and negative aspects to their chosen Military Service occupation. We started by asking about the positive benefits of the Armed Forces.

At this early stage in their careers, respondents showed that they already held common and strong views of the positive aspects of being in the Armed Forces. For Officers and Other Ranks in all of the Service groups the following were particularly salient across and within groups:

- Camaraderie – strength of “friendship” (OR), importance of “being part of a team” (OR), bonding in adversity, quality of colleagues, sense of common purpose (“have the same goals” (Army))
- Lifestyle – opportunities for sport, adventurous training, maintaining fitness, social aspects, “work hard, play hard” (RAF)
  - “It’s the lifestyle I enjoy” (Off)
  - “The travel outside of Europe is a major positive. All the sports, activities and training they offer [are] top class. I’ve heard people say, and I’ve said it myself: I can’t believe we’re getting paid to do this.” (OR)
- Worthwhile – “real sense of achievement” (RAF), pride in overcoming challenges, pride in being part of forces, recognition of self-development
  - “I’ve become proud of myself becoming more disciplined.” (Navy)

“My family [is] really proud of me.” (OR)

Those in the Army and RM spoke of the importance they attach to the benefits of being in their Service. Here benefits included such things as food & accommodation, medical support, etc.

“... better life for my kids as they now go to a school with other Army kids. Most of my friends at home have been arrested ...” (Army)

Army groups in particular described the excitement of their training or what they hope to do next in their unit as an important positive aspect: “jumping out of a warrior APC” (Army), “firing my rifle for real” (Army), “risk of the job” (Army) are all examples.

“Attacking buildings during training was just one of those awesome moments that makes the job worthwhile – and that’s not even doing it for real!” (Army)

**... and Offered Fewer Negative Aspects**

- **All Groups:**
  - **Training Environment**
    - **Discipline**
    - **Long hours and constraints on free time during week**
    - **Loss of weekends**
  - **Future Separation**
- **Specific Groups:**
  - **Poor pay (Army/RM)**
  - **Future Disruption (RAF)**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-24 0107

We then moved on to ask about aspects of Service life which the group participants did not like.

Not surprisingly, their present training circumstances were at the forefront of their minds for the majority of respondents. Even so, this question generated fewer responses overall than the preceding which asked about positive aspects. The heading “Training Environment” brings together the many comments that criticised the training in one way or another. It includes those remarks that indicate how (mostly) young men and women are reacting to the demands of a training regime designed to produce military personnel ready for the next stages of their careers:

“Some aspects of discipline and formality are hard to get used to.” (Off)

“It’s the long hours.” (RAF)

“There are lots of restrictions – dress code, no choices about what you can wear ...” (Off)

“There is a different mentality here in the military. You cannot plan your weekends off.” (Army)

“Absolutely pointless, time wasting activities that don’t need to be done at all” (Army)

We separated from the Training Environment those comments that talked about the impact of separation from home, families or friends. This was because, for a proportion

of respondents, their comments appeared to be related to the nature of Service rather than just a reaction to the strictures of the Training Environment.

“I want to have a family. When I go out on ops I’ll really enjoy it because I get to do what I’m trained for. But when I come back home things will have changed. Kids grow up quick...” (Army)

“Even going away for six weeks on exercise is difficult. The thing about the going away is that you can’t say you can handle it until you’ve done it.” (OR)

“I have a close family and I’m gutted that I can’t plan to go on holidays with them and see them more often because my job is so unpredictable and consuming.” (Off)

“The first week I was here my girlfriend ... had a bad accident and when I’m 200 miles away I can’t help her. That was a real shock. It was really tough but you have to accept that’s what will happen throughout your career and not just during training.” (RN)

Noticeably, Army and Royal Marine respondents commented often about both problems with pay (unexplained variations from week to week or large deductions for different things) and about the low level of their pay during training. These views were not salient to the other Service groups and were expressed equally by Officers and Other Ranks.

“The pay – you’re getting all sorts taken off you for no reason.” (Army)

“They could state a bit better what they are taking out and why they’re taking it out.” (OR)

“It’s the hidden costs of being here. I’ve spent more than I’ve been paid because of having to buy all sorts of bits and pieces like commemorative photos and things that maybe I don’t have to have, but are nice and offered to us. Plus the mess dress grant was actually exceeded by the actual costs of getting everything I needed.” (Off)

“In general pay is not very good, salary-wise. I had to sell my flat before I came here because I had a mortgage and stuff. I knew when I went to the careers centre and I got given a piece of paper that said what I’d be on when I was a recruit, I just knew that I wasn’t going to be able to cope with paying the mortgage off.” (RM)

“It’s not just the pay – its not being issued the stuff that you need. You end up spending you’re money in essential stuff. That’s annoying.” (RM)

Looking further into these comments about pay, it is difficult to distinguish whether the actual amount of monthly pay was considered to be too low, or that if respondents felt that they were having to spend their pay on items (such as equipment) which they felt should have been provided as a matter of course (which then left them with less funds to be spent on other discretionary items).

Salient for the RAF groups was the possible impact of future disruption. For many, there appeared to be an expectation that on joining, and after initial training, they would remain at the same base for an extended period of time. Many respondents expressed concern that current challenges facing the RAF, both in terms of operations and budgetary pressure, would increase the need for personnel to change work locations more frequently.

“It’s ridiculous. I believe the answer we get is that tomorrow’s officer needs to be able to handle ambiguity – that’s fine. Tomorrow’s wife doesn’t. (Off)

“Stability is a problem – I have no idea where I’ll be in one year’s time. I can’t plan for the future and this impacts on planning to buy a house and start a family.” (RAF)

***Four Factors Appear to be Important Now  
for Future Retention***

- **Future Family Priorities (overwhelming saliency)**
- **Job Satisfaction**
- **Future Remuneration**
  - **Basic pay**
  - **Pay on promotion**
- **Career prospects and promotion**
  - **Particularly across RN**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-25 0107

We next asked each group what would influence their decision to remain in the Armed Forces. In all likelihood they were answering with the positive and negative aspects in mind, but their responses indicate that they thought beyond their current training environment when describing what will influence a decision to stay in. There were four salient themes within the group responses.

Across all groups, the main concern centred on the priorities that a future family might demand (and here we include those responses from participants that were already married or in a similar, committed relationship). Comments included the importance of a stable upbringing for children (schooling, consistent friends), wishes of the spouse (her work/career, her social network perhaps), and a sense that at some point they themselves might wish to settle (sense of the military as a “young man’s” occupation).

“I wouldn’t want to raise a family in this environment. It would have to be one or the other.” (Army)

“At the moment this is the classic single man’s job.” (OR)

“It all comes down to family at the end of the day - that is the only thing that would possibly sway me. But right now that’s not an issue, and I can’t really see it being an issue insofar as making me leave the Forces. But that’s the only thing that’s really big enough to make me reconsider my position in the Air Force. The worse the support for families is, and the harder it is, the more you’re going to get people questioning that.” (RAF)

The next most salient answer can be described as the importance of job satisfaction, with many respondents disagreeing with those that mentioned pay as important (“not in it for the money” (Army) etc).

“I think it’s a good lifestyle with the job security and as long as the job remains enjoyable I’ll still do it.” (OR)

“I would ask myself two questions: am I still enjoying myself and am I still learning? If the answer was no then I would consider leaving.” (Off)

“If things started getting boring, if you were getting stationed in the same places all the time and there wasn’t enough variety, I couldn’t do it.” (RN)

Remuneration was important to a sizeable number of participants in most of the groups, with little reference to allowances or pension. Basic pay or the take-home pay was the phrase often used as well as the role of promotion in improving pay. This latter point was separate to that of promotion as part of career progression.

The final salient factor was a response which highlighted the individual ambition to improve and do well in their career and for this to be recognised within the hierarchy of their chosen Service.

“It depends on the money, that’s the main thing. I know this is training and I’ve been told that we get paid more later on. Fair enough that we get free food. But I find it hard to make ends meet. I think the pay is good if your 18 years old, but if you’d been working for a few years before you came here then you have a different view.” (OR)

“The money is okay but it’s not enough to keep you away from your family for six months. The balance between going away and doing the job you enjoy, and keeping your family life okay is a fine line for most people.” (Off)

“The pension is excellent and will encourage me to stay to receive the full benefit.” (OR)

### ***Most Recruits Still Evaluating Remuneration***

- **No consensus about pay**
  - **Slight majority perceive it as good or okay**
  - **Strong view that it is poor (especially Army)**
- **Allowances not understood**
  - **JPA/allowances confusing and seen negatively by many respondents (RAF/RN/RM)**
  - **Allowance explanations failed to provide necessary information**
- **Positive view of other benefits (especially RM & ORs)**
  - **Medical, housing (LSAP), travel warrants**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-26 0107

After gaining a better understanding of wider factors (including remuneration) impacting on the perceptions, aspirations, and understanding of new recruits, we then moved to a series of questions which directly addressed remuneration issues. The first was how new recruits perceived their overall remuneration package.

There was confirmation from within the Army groups that they saw basic pay as poor – a thread that ran through from other questions. This was balanced, however, by a similar number of Army respondents that thought their pay was good. This lack of consensus was typical in all of the groups, although there was less direct disagreement in other Service groups. Overall, the slight majority view was that pay was good or okay.

“Money in the Army is quite good. At the moment, or when we get to battalion we won’t be on much but it will be alright. But promotion ... big pay rise there. You can’t complain about that, that’s good money.” (Army)

“Infantry don’t get paid enough for what we do ...” (Army)

“You’ve got an alright amount of money to look after yourself and do what you want to do at the weekend, it ties you over.” (Army)

“I think it’s a reasonable pay but I think that if you compare it, it’s completely disproportionate to what you would get in civilian life. If you think that when we leave here some of us will be commanding 30 people...if you were 23 years old and responsible for the lives of 30 people you wouldn’t be getting £26,000 [in a civilian job].” (Off)

Some participants made the point that “it is not about the pay” (Army) and that they “joined for other reasons” (OR).

“If you join the RAF for the money you are missing the point.” (RAF)

The Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) programme attracted negative responses from the majority of those that claimed to have used it – many of such comments coming from the RAF groups. Respondents in other Service groups expressed concern about JPA from what they had heard and read about the system.

“I wasn’t told how to use JPA at all which is shocking.” (Off)

“The Armed Forces are such a structured, disciplined system. Yet they can’t get the pay right, which is stupid.” (Off)

“I didn’t expect to have to become a pay clerk as well.” (RAF)

“What I will say is the way it’s paid, although we’ve only been paid once, seems to be a farce.” (OR)

Allowances as a whole were described as complicated or not understood. In part this might have been because many of the available allowances were not relevant to the majority of participants, though some described presentations during training that they found confusing.

“Personally, I think the pay [system] is bad. People are paid different things and pay more for food, and so on. I’m not sure if it’s just a mess or whether it’s intended. I’m not sure if next month will be OK. There is a lack of clarity as to how pay is put together.” (RN)

“We had a lecture on pay. I find it really hard [to understand the payslip]. You do get a lecture on pay but the guy didn’t really know what he was talking about. He showed us a picture of a pay slip that was out of date, but they say it’s not relevant to you because you’ve got a new pay slip now. It’s useless. Basically he walked in and said I think I know, no, but I don’t. We got a couple of booklets as well. I don’t think anyone has read those. You need a degree to understand the payslip.” (OR)

Perhaps to reinforce this point, many respondents articulated allowances as benefits, with the salient view that there are positive benefits of military service. This view was particularly strong amongst OR and RM groups. Travel warrants and the equivalent allowances to compensate for getting home fell in to this category. Other benefits described positively included those of medical support and military housing; either on base, the Messes, or off base, the Married Quarters.

“We do get benefits like free dental care and our living overheads are covered.” (OR)

“There are lots of positives as well. You get free health care and dental. There is cheap accommodation and food. The travel warrants are good.” (Off)

“As you go through your time here, you get different allowances, like overseas allowance, and it all bundles up together.” (RN)

### ***Recent Announcement About Operational Pay Seen as Generally Positive***

- **Varying degrees of awareness of policy**
- **ORs overwhelming positive or ambivalent toward policy**
- **No consensus among officer or RN groups**
  - **Sizeable minority of officers cynical**
- **RAF and RM groups were not negative**
- **“Urban myths” already circulating about the payments**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-27 0107

Having asked the participants about pay and allowances in general, we next asked specifically about the recently announced improved payments for personnel deployed on operations. For the majority of respondents, the improved pay was a positive step that was “about time” (RAF, RM).

“Makes you feel a lot more appreciated as well. You’ve done your job and you’ve earned your money.” (OR)

“I don’t know whether I find deployment appealing or unappealing, but it would certainly make it more appealing to do if I got the bonus as well.” (RAF)

Of equal weight was a reaction of indifference.

“We all signed up, we all knew what we were getting into. With everything that’s going on in the world, we should be expecting to fly out to Iraq or Afghanistan at some point. I couldn’t say whether the money will make it more attractive without having been there.” (OR)

“It’s not going to change my opinion of going out into an area of conflict. If the Service needs it, you’re going to go and do your job. It’s just a benefit having a bit of extra cash.” (Off)

There were negative comments too across the groups too.

“I think it misses the point really. The perception is that the Armed Forces are overstretched, and depending on which way you look at it, we probably are. It’s not really getting better, and there are guys that have been out there for six

months, are given three weeks leave and then are straight off again. And the fact that they've got more money sitting in the bank is great when they get back but it's not going to save their marriage. It's not going to save their life. (Off)

Amongst a number of Officers there was a very cynical or critical view of the improvement, with a sizeable minority seeing it a palliative to an otherwise disinterested public or to benefit politicians, portraying them as caring towards the Services. It was seen by some respondents equally as no more than a gesture.

"I think it's a very good headline, but that's all it is. It's very easy for the government to say 'we'll do this', it goes straight on the front of the papers, and people roll over and say, "Oh, that's nice, they're doing something for the military." More for public consumption." (Off)

"It's a morale booster for politicians and the electorate." (Off)

Running across all groups, though not with sufficient strength to report as salient, a number of "urban myths" appeared to be circulating as to the value and conditions of the improvement.

"Apparently the calculations are that you actually end up about £300 poorer off than you were before." (Army)

"I heard that we are getting one less Type 45 Destroyer to help fund this package." (RN)

Although these charges may be inaccurate, they are circulating amongst the Armed Forces, and the MOD needs to be aware of this in order to counter these misperceptions.

***Majority Want to Purchase a House but  
Motivation Remains Unclear***

- **Groups favour buying sooner rather than later**
  - **Sizeable number with counter-view that frequent moves preclude purchase**
  - **Some concern that salary-house cost disparity will prevent purchase (especially Army/RM)**
- **Separately, strong view of financial advantage to buy-to-let**
- **ORs more content to rely on military accommodation (Mess or MQs)**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-28 0107

The final topic we addressed which focussed on remuneration issues was that of home ownership. We wanted to understand attitudes and motivations surrounding the decision of whether and when to purchase a home.

Across all the groups, a salient view of the participants was that they either wanted to buy a house as soon as possible or that they wanted to buy-to-let. Although both of these responses indicated a willingness to purchase a home, we were not able to fully understand the intersection of these motivations; thus, we do not know if all those stating they wanted to buy as soon as possible, wished to do so to live in their property or let it out. Only a small number of respondents specified that their reason for purchase would be to house their family.

“I really want to get onto the property ladder, even if it’s just a flat.” (RAF)

“House is an asset I’ll want once I complete my training. But I can’t make a decision yet because there are three main places in the UK I could end up with the Navy. (RN)

“To live in the same place as you work is a bit of a downer. I’d like to live away from work.” (RM)

“I bought a house, but I have it for my dad to look after. I rent it out because at this stage in my career I have no idea where I’ll settle down in 6-7 years. I’ll probably never ever set foot in it.” (Off)

“I’ve already got my own home, which I rent out. That will be my retirement fund. Or, if things don’t work out ..., I’ve got that to go back to.” (OR)

Across the groups there were some dissenting views with a sizeable number of participants believing that frequent moves would work against any aspiration to purchase. Not as strongly expressed, but still a view across a significant number of groups, some respondents expressed concern about the disparity between their salaries and house prices, particularly in the South. This view was especially strong amongst the Army groups.

“It’s too early to worry yet.” (Off)

“There is no point buying if you are moving around.” (OR)

“I am trying to buy, but I don’t get enough money in and therefore will struggle.” (OR)

“I won’t try to take out a mortgage while I’m in the Marines because we don’t get paid enough. I don’t want to have that commitment and be scraping through.” (RM)

Living in a Mess or making use of Married Quarters was attractive across a significant number of groups, thought more often expressed in Other Rank groups than Officers.

“At the school my kids are at its all Army kids. When the regiment moves the whole school will move so the kids get their friends going with them.” (Army)

“[The] Mess is fantastic and I am happy living here.” (RAF)

This was the only question in the protocol about housing or that sought to establish the house purchase intentions of participants. Whilst the responses are sufficient to describe the collective views above, it appears that there are a range of complex, intertwined decision processes at play. This is especially striking when taking in to account the age and experience of the participants in these groups. A number of issues appear to be flagged up that would benefit from further investigation, almost certainly at least by tailored focus group work prior to a statistically relevant survey.

### ***Summary of Salient Factors Related to Remuneration***

- **Most recruits still evaluating remuneration**
- **Other factors more directly impact recruitment and joining than the remuneration package**
- **Future family priorities and future pay are factors in retention decision making**
- **House purchase is important but motivation remains unclear**
- **Recent announcement about operational pay seen as generally positive but some cynicism**
- **The allowance package is poorly understood and communicated**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-29 0107

We can now bring together the salient responses that resonate in the majority of the focus groups.

*Remuneration Package:* Our respondents were divided about the impact on them of the remuneration package with no salient views prevailing. A slight majority were more positive or ambivalent about the package and there was an expectation that it will improve once they leave initial training, as many comments were received regarding the poor initial pay. Others responded that they had made a deliberate decision to join the Armed Forces for reasons unrelated to financial compensation. For some, one area of the remuneration package which stood out as being positive was that of the benefits such as travel warrants and allowances such as Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP), although there seemed to be patchy understanding that these benefits made up a portion of the remuneration package.

*Recruitment Drivers:* Remuneration does not appear to be an important driver for new recruits to join the Armed Forces. Other factors, such as family history and the expected service lifestyle play a more direct role in encouraging new recruits to join. However, remuneration may influence this decision indirectly, as family views of the Armed Forces will be shaped by their experiences within it—to include remuneration factors.

*Retention Drivers:* The overwhelming concern of the participants for the future was the impact of their career on future family priorities. Some saw separation as the main issue, others the need to move home frequently, whilst others were more concerned about the demands of service and how they might be reconciled with the needs of a family. The

pervading feeling was that being in the Armed Forces was a young person's occupation. The second salient factor for respondents was the importance to them of Job Satisfaction, Pay and promotion were the final factors that were offered by a sizeable number of respondents.

*House Purchase:* Our respondents overwhelmingly commented on the value of purchasing a home, although the motivation behind this desire was less apparent. This was one notable area where new recruits were able to look beyond their immediate training environment and comment on their future desires. Many respondents both recognise the value of 'getting on the property ladder' and express a desire to 'buy-to-let', although the intersection of these two groups is uncertain. Some, particularly those in the Army and RM, were concerned about the salary-house cost disparity.

*Operational Pay:* In general, the recent announcements regarding the introduction of an operational pay package were favourably received by focus group participants, particularly amongst Army and Royal Marine recruits.<sup>5</sup> Others were ambivalent and saw it as a bonus for a commitment that they had already accepted by joining. There was a significant minority, particularly amongst officers who are more cynical and see the policy as adopted for popular benefit. Still, on balance it seems that the introduction of the package has been welcomed by new recruits, and they see it as a positive introduction and reward for their service.

*Allowances:* The majority of focus groups say that allowances appear to be complex, they do not fully understand them, and additionally they feel that they are communicated poorly. However, it is important to note that many recruits do not receive the full suite of allowances as they are not yet at their operational units; thus, this lack of understanding does not appear to negatively impact their view of the allowance package. Although the Armed Forces do attempt to explain the allowance package during new recruit training, they should consider doing this toward the end of the training cycle when new recruits will be more interested—as they will soon be joining their units. The services should also consider conducting 'refresher' training of the allowance package once new recruits join their units.

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<sup>5</sup> Who, incidentally, will be more likely to benefit from the new policy.

**...And Those not Related to Remuneration**

- **Many consider other services when joining**
- **New recruits generally positive about chosen occupation and possibility of a career**
- **Job satisfaction, and career progression/promotion prospects are as important as pay in retention intentions**
- **Recruits focused on their immediate environment**
- **Demands/commitment of training remains surprise to some**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-30 0107

The design of the protocol allows us to compare the salient perceptions of the respondents to remuneration factors with those that have no direct pay, pension, or allowance link. The most important of those perceptions are shown below:

*Consideration of Other Services:* Many of the respondents considered other services when they made their decision to join the Armed Forces. With one notable exception (Royal Marines), most service members considered at least one other Service, in particular, officers did not tend to discriminate between services. This is a complex area, however, and focus groups do not capture null responses well. From this work, we feel able to suggest that for some the Armed Forces as a whole are attractive, whilst for others, individual and specific Services provide the motivation to join. A better understanding, supported by further qualitative and quantitative information, may be important to those responsible for recruitment policy and funding.

*Career View and Expectations:* Our respondents tended to be very positive about their chosen careers. Factors such as service camaraderie, lifestyle, and pride in themselves and what they have undertaken combined to create a positive view of Service life. Negative factors were focussed on the immediate training environment, with few recruits voicing significant concerns about their post-training situation. Although a significant minority were uncertain about the length of their service stint or anticipated it being under five years, the majority expressed a desire to serve for significant longer periods of time. This predisposition to serve a full career represents an opportunity for the Armed Forces to build upon this goodwill within its new recruits.

*Non-Remuneration Retention Drivers:* Somewhat intangible quality of life factors, encompassing the perceived peculiarities of Service life and the opportunities it provides, together with a sense of doing the right thing for some, are of great importance and salient to all of the focus groups.

*Immediacy of Training Environment:* New recruits were very focussed on their immediate training environment and those factors which influenced it. Particularly when discussing what they did not like about Service life, the most salient comments centred around training and various components of it. The only two exceptions to this immediate focus came when new recruits discussed retention drivers and the importance of home ownership.

*Training Expectations:* Although there was not a consensus view about whether Service life met the expectations of new recruits, there were many who expressed surprise at the demands and commitment required by the military lifestyle. Some recruits found training to be easier than expected, but for many, they were not expecting the demands of training, particularly the mental stress.

### ***The Focus Groups Drew Out Many Key Perceptions About Pay and Allowances***

- **Other factors more directly impact recruitment and joining than the remuneration package**
- **New recruits generally positive about chosen occupation and possibility of a career**
- **Most new recruits are still evaluating remuneration**
- **Family priorities, job satisfaction, and career progression/promotion prospects are as important as pay in retention intentions**
- **House purchase is important but motivation remains unclear**

RAND

SP(Pol)-31 0107

After analysing the responses of focus group participants in light of the project objectives, a number of key findings stand out:

- **Other factors more directly impact recruitment than the remuneration package:** When examining why people joined their respective Service, the focus group participants rarely cited remuneration reasons as direct factors for joining the Armed Forces. Other factors, such as lifestyle and family/colleague experience, appear to be more directly relevant. However, pay and allowances may *indirectly* impact recruitment through their influence on perceptions of Service life or experiences of former Service members (who, in turn, influence others to join the military).
- **New recruits are generally positive about their chosen occupation and opportunity of a career:** Factors such as service camaraderie, lifestyle, and pride in themselves and what they have undertaken combined to create a positive view of service life. Negative factors were focussed on the immediate training environment, with few recruits voicing significant concerns about their post-training situation. Remuneration issues were not explicitly mentioned. Additionally, the majority of our respondents expressed a desire to serve for significant periods of time, many through a full career.
- **Most new recruits are still evaluating their remuneration package:** Although there was no salient view, a slight majority of the respondents were more positive or ambivalent about the package and there was an expectation that it will improve once they leave initial training. Others responded that they had made a deliberate decision

to join the Armed Forces for reasons unrelated to financial compensation. One area of the remuneration package which stood out as being positive was that of the benefits, although there seemed to be a variable understanding that these benefits made up a portion of the remuneration package.

- **Pay is only one important factor (of many) in the decision to remain in the Armed Forces:** Although pay and promotion prospects (to include its monetary benefits) are important factors to consider in the decision to stay in the military, there are a number of intangible non-remuneration issues, such as family concerns, career opportunities, quality of life which appear to play at least as important a role as remuneration factors in this decision. Thus, a holistic approach toward retention incentives appears to be the most effective way to convince Service personnel to stay in the Armed Forces.
- **House purchase is important to new recruits, but the motivation behind this remains unclear:** Our respondents overwhelmingly commented on the value of purchasing a home, although the motivation behind this desire was less apparent. Many respondents both recognised the value of ‘getting on the property ladder’ and expressed a desire to ‘buy-to-let’, although the intersection of these two groups is uncertain. However, there were some concerns about the salary-house cost disparity.

## Comparison to Earlier RAND Focus Group Work

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### *Report Structure*

- Introduction
- Key Findings
- Project Methodology
- Focus Group Conduct and Composition
- Focus Group Perceptions
- **Comparison to Earlier RAND Focus Group Work**
- Areas for Further Study

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-32 0107

In this section, we compare our findings in this study to similar focus group work which RAND conducted on behalf of the MOD in early 2006. In that case, members of the Armed Forces with a longer Service-record discussed a set of similar (but not identical) remuneration issues. First, we summarise the results of that work and then compare the findings of the two studies to see if there are any similarities between the two pieces of work.

***Findings of Previous RAND  
Analysis on Remuneration Perceptions***

- **The remuneration package was complex and difficult to understand**
- **The current basic pay package and pension scheme were satisfactory**
- **Aspects of the remuneration package drove unwanted behaviour**
- **Other factors more directly impacted recruitment than the remuneration package**
- **There was an overwhelming desire for less stretch and disruption in service life**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-33 0107

In early 2006, RAND facilitated and analysed a series of focus groups comprised of serving military personnel in an attempt to better understand their views toward their remuneration package. In summary, these were the key findings:<sup>6</sup>

- **The remuneration package was complex and difficult to understand:** Nearly all of our focus groups described the current pay and allowance package, particularly allowances, as complex, difficult to understand, and difficult to determine eligibility and entitlement. Service members did not know what allowances they are entitled to, nor do they find it easy to claim allowances—either through, from their perception, ill-informed clerks or because of little direct information from the MOD.
- **The current basic pay package and pension scheme were satisfactory:** Focus group members were largely satisfied with their basic pay and pension arrangements. Individual participants had some specific negative comments regarding pay and promotion banding introduced in Pay2000 and the lack of additional pay for operational deployments; however, these concerns were not as salient across all focus groups, as the positive view of the pay and pension.
- **Aspects of the remuneration package drove unwanted behaviour:** There were many cases where eligibility requirements concerning certain allowances were an incentive for Service personnel to act in ways contrary to MOD aims or expectations. Three particular examples stood out; in some cases, the benefits of promotion

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<sup>6</sup> A copy of this analysis is available from Mrs. Sara Parry, Deputy Director, SP(Pol) Audit.

(particularly to the non-commissioned officer ranks) were sometimes mitigated through insignificant pay increases coupled with increased responsibility and expense (mess bills, for example). This lessened the attraction of promotion to certain Service personnel. Likewise, some Service members felt pressure to get married because of the increased benefits that brings (eligibility for a married quarter, increased displacement allowance, etc.). Finally, the eligibility requirements surrounding allowances, such as CEA, encouraged Service members to contort their mobility behaviour in order to continue sending their children to boarding school.

- **Other factors more directly impact recruitment than the remuneration package:** When examining why people joined their respective Service, the focus group participants rarely cited remuneration reasons as direct factors for joining the Armed Forces. Other factors, such as lifestyle and family/colleague experience, appeared to have been more directly relevant. However, pay and allowances may have *indirectly* impacted recruitment through their influence on perceptions of Service life or experiences of former Service members (who, in turn, influence others to join the military).
- **There is an overwhelming desire for less stretch and disruption in Service life:** Although not directly related to remuneration, the focus groups revealed a desire for reduced stretch and disruption in their careers. Stretch was seen as causing more frequent deployments and operational tours, or increasing the hours and intensity of work. Disruption often occurred in two forms—short-term disruption caused by Service requirements such as postings or operations or longer-term disruption which impacts on family stability, education, spousal career, etc. The salient view of the focus groups was that the remuneration package should mitigate the effects of stretch and disruption.

### ***Alignment to previous work***

- **Doesn't appear to be a problem with pay**
- **Confusion about allowances**
- **Similar reasons for joining, impact of remuneration**
- **Positive reaction to introduction of operational pay**
- **Career, promotion, job security and satisfaction are still important for retention**
- **Family disruption issues remain important (for retention)**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-33 0107

The previous slide showed the main findings of our analysis; however, there are considerable additional trends and key points which can be drawn from the study. We now compare the wider findings from our earlier work and contrast it to the findings presented earlier in the study to see where there is alignment within the findings.

Overall, there is considerable convergence between the analysis between new recruits and longer-service Armed Forces personnel. The greatest alignment is in the following six areas:

*Pay:* Overall, there does not appear to be a problem with individual Service member pay. Although some Service members expressed discontent with their levels of pay, this does not appear to be representative across all of the focus groups.

*Allowances:* In both studies, we found wide evidence of either a lack of understanding of the allowance package or elements of the package which drove unwanted behaviour. This argues for a simpler, more transparent package where it will be easier to assess its impact.

*Recruitment:* In both sets of focus groups, remuneration issues did not appear to be a direct influence in the decision to join the Armed Forces. Family connections and lifestyle opportunities appear to be the most directly relevant.

*Operational Pay:* Although the latest operational pay package did not exist when we conducted our initial focus group work, there was considerable desire for a monetary package to compensate Service members on deployment. Now that the package has been

introduced, it appears to have been positively received support amongst the new recruits to the Armed Forces.

*Retention:* There are a number of factors which impact on the decision of individual Service members to remain in the Armed Forces when their initial obligation is completed. Chief among these are family issues, career and promotion prospects, job satisfaction, and job security. Remuneration issues are represented through both career opportunities (both inside and outside of the Services) and promotion prospects.

*Disruption:* Both sets of study participants expressed concern about the degree of disruption that they and their families did (or were anticipated to) experience. This is an issue which is important to the group members, and it is important for the Armed Forces as too much disruption could impact on retention decisions, prompting personnel to leave the Services.

### ***Divergence from previous work***

- **More emphasis on immediate concerns**
  - **Current quality of life factors/training environment**
- **Less emphasis on future concerns**
  - **With exception of house buying**
  - **Lower emphasis on stretch**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-34 0107

Although there is much similarity in the findings between the two related pieces of remuneration work, there are two areas of divergence which largely reflect the short-term perspective which new recruits appear to have—either due to their youth, lack of experience, or immersion in an intense training environment.

First, there is a noticeable degree of increased emphasis on immediate concerns. Many of the new recruits whom we spoke to were very focussed on issues surrounding the training environment. Thus, quality of life factors (particularly those to do with training—such as free time and dress codes) were often discussed. Many of the drawbacks of Service life dealt with these points. Additionally, there was less discussion and understanding around their allowance package; perhaps this was because few Service members experienced the fullness of the allowance scheme while in a training environment.

Second, there was less emphasis on issues which focussed on the future environment. There was little emphasis on issues associated with “stretch”—frequent deployments, long working hours, etc., although some participants did discuss future “disruption” issues, such as time away from family and frequent moves.

We expect that as these new recruits exit their training phase and report to their first operational units, that these issues will take on a higher profile. However, in the training environment, they were either superseded by more immediate concerns or had not yet been experienced.

## Areas for Further Study

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### *Areas for Further Study*

- **Baseline perceptions of remuneration (survey, etc.) issues and test new ideas**
- **Impact/implementation of JPA**
- **Impact of disruption on family and individual**
- **Home ownership impact/benefits**
- **Role of AFCO, adequacy of preparation for training**
- **Issues regarding choice of service**
- **Valuation of remuneration package**

**RAND**

SP(Pol)-36 0107

This investigation has been limited in scope in order to meet the wider-requirements of the MOD's Strategic Remuneration Review. However, it highlights a number of areas that will benefit from further study, and we describe these below.

- *Baseline perceptions of remuneration and test new ideas:* At the beginning of this report we put our investigation in context with other remuneration work being undertaken by the MOD. This suggests that there is an expectation of introducing change once all such work is completed and decisions can be made. Thus, a short period exists in which to understand what Service personnel think of their current remuneration and any other factors that affect their decisions to join, remain and perform. The work we report here is a statistically unrepresentative snapshot that may indicate to MOD decision-makers that Service personnel view remuneration differently to the decisions of previous policy makers. However, a statistically significant survey, which draws on our findings and others that may be available, will provide a known starting point for the MOD; it may influence policy formation and subsequent decisions, it could be used as a baseline against which to test new ideas, and it will allow measurement of any change.

- *Impact/Implementation of JPA:* JPA has now been introduced in the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy and will be introduced to the Army in the near future. Our focus group work suggested that even with a system that is intended to be simpler, transparent, and consistent, issues still remain regarding the understanding and application of the allowance system. An audit or evaluation of the implementation of JPA may help policy makers better understand some of these issues and provide lessons learned either for the introduction of JPA into the Army or for any eventual review of the allowance package.
- *Impact of Disruption on Family and Individual:* Although the new recruits who participated in our focus groups were very focussed on near-term issues, they did recognise the impact of potential disruptions to their lives by serving in the Armed Forces—whether they were married with a family or not. Understanding how to be mitigate against these disruption effects, either through remuneration means or other policy levers, could provide the MOD with policy options to increase retention and Service member morale.
- *Home Ownership:* Owning a home appears to be an important aspiration for the majority joining the Armed Forces. A sizeable minority also feels that house purchase is either beyond their reach or not worth undertaking until they understand more about the demands of their career. The motivating factors behind these decisions seem much more complex, however, with perhaps some intersection between the two groups. If house purchase is intended to allow a person (and his or her family) to settle, this will have different implications than if the purchase was, for example, buy-to-let. This course of action might be undertaken for purely financial gain, as a prudent step to hedge against further house price rises, or it may be that the house is being bought as home for future occupation when career conditions allow. The challenge is to understand these differences (and the relative sizes of the affected groups) before attempting to formulate a policy for the allowances that will assist in delivering the wider aims of MOD's remuneration policy.
- *Valuation of remuneration package:* Although specific aspects of the Service remuneration package can be costed to understand absolute cost to the MOD, individual Service members appear to place a perceived value on these aspects as well. By using tested contingent valuation techniques,<sup>7</sup> the MOD will be able to better to understand perceived value of its remuneration package and may be better able to offer a package that better accounts for Service members' preferences while still meeting MOD requirements.
- *Choice of Service:* There was wide agreement amongst focus group participants that many of them considered other Services in addition to their chosen one.

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<sup>7</sup> Such as stated preference and revealed preference choice modelling.

There was also evidence that Army and Royal Marine personnel tended to consider each others' services more prominently and that officers of all Services considered the others more widely (except in the case of specialties such as pilots).

- *Role of the AFCO – success at the Armed Forces level or at the Service level?* This is an area that appears complex and our investigation and analysis has only scratched the surface of what might be thought a very important area for further work. Depending upon how recruitment activity is funded, and how responsibility is either allocated or assumed by the individual services, understanding what makes a potential recruit consider military service and then decide on the Service, or vice versa, would have important implications for effectiveness of recruitment activity and how limited resources are spent.

## **APPENDICES**

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# Appendix A: Focus Group Protocols

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## RAND PROTOCOLS USED IN FOCUS GROUPS<sup>8</sup>

### Oral Informed Consent for Focus Groups

Good morning (afternoon). My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_\_\_. We're researchers from RAND Europe, a non-profit research institution that looks to improve policy making through research and analysis. As part of RAND's work for the Ministry of Defence, we have been asked by the office of the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff for Personnel to conduct a series of focus groups to understand the impact of the pay and allowance package upon new recruits in the Armed Forces. This is part of a larger MoD effort to review the pay and allowance issues.

You were selected to participate in this focus group because of your unit type and scheduling availability. During this discussion we will be asking questions about how and why you decided upon your current career, your opinions about it, and your plans about remaining in or leaving this career field.

Your participation in this discussion is entirely voluntary. You may decline to participate or to not answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with. We will be taking notes today, but we will not insert your name into the notes, and we will not show the notes to anyone outside of RAND, except as required by law. Our notes will help us to identify general patterns within and across different military communities. We will also be recording the sessions, but the recording will only be used as back-up—in case we need to verify something that was said. When our investigation is complete, we will give a report to the MoD that summarises the results of our focus group sessions. This report may include quotes, but we will ensure that any such comments cannot be attributed back to specific individuals. Also, we ask that each of you commit to keeping today's discussion confidential by not revealing the names of other participants or their comments to anyone. What each of you says should remain in this room. However, you should be careful not to say anything today that would cause you harm if another participant were to repeat it outside the group.

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<sup>8</sup> This protocol is based on one developed by RAND US colleagues which used focus groups in support of an on-going study looking at understanding and retaining US Special Operations Forces; we would like to thank Margaret C. Harrell and Laura Werber Castaneda for their assistance and approval to use their protocol as a blueprint for the one used in this project.

Since some of you may not have participated in focus groups before, I would like to say a few words about how we will operate today. We expect that this session will last approximately 90 minutes, which will conclude your participation in our investigations. During this session, we will be asking you a series of questions about service life—some of which will directly address your pay and allowance package. Once a question is asked, we would like each of you, in turn, to respond. If you prefer not to answer a question or don't have anything extra to add, you don't have to answer. Because we are trying to record your answers, please do not respond until I call on you. Also, please don't speak for a second time until everyone has had a chance to speak. Due to time restrictions, we anticipate having around 10 minutes per question, so please try to limit your individual answers to between 30 and 60 seconds each.

Before we begin, do you have any questions about this discussion?

I will give out my business cards now so you will have my contact information on hand. If you have any questions about the study later on, don't hesitate to contact me.

*If applicable:* You will also notice that \_\_\_\_\_ from the Ministry of Defence is also in the room. He/she is here to evaluate our facilitation of these focus groups, and he/she is not part of our investigations.

## RAND PROTOCOL

*[Moderator: Collect completed “on arrival” question sheets and assess quickly how the answers will influence some of the questions below.]*

1. Please take a turn and tell us briefly your age, rank, and how long you’ve been in the service? *[Moderator and Notetaker. Record left participant as 1 and number participants clockwise.]*
2. How did you become interested in a career in the Armed Forces? *Probe to clarify the most important reasons. Prompt if necessary:*  
“In a previous study we were told that travel, friends & family influence, or job security were factors. Which of these were important to you, or was there another reason?” *[Moderator, if necessary, attempt to differentiate between childhood aspirations and the more deliberate step of considering employment.]*
3. What made you finally decide to join the Armed Forces? *Probe to clarify the most important reason. [Moderator and Notetaker: In this and subsequent questions record, when appropriate, whether participants individually or collectively show concurrence (C), dissension (D), or argument (A) with any noted comments].*
4. Did you consider any of the other services? If so, which ones and why?
5. Thinking about what you were told during the application process, perhaps by recruiters, how does the reality of Service life compare? Does anything stand out as being particularly different to that which you were expecting?  
*Probe(if necessary):*
  - a. Were you prepared for the discipline expected in basic training?
  - b. Did you receive enough information about the physical demands of Service life?
6. Some of you mentioned [FEEDBACK] as reasons for joining. “Now that you have been in for a short while, what do you see as the positive aspects to being in the Armed Forces?” Are there other benefits or rewards?
7. What are the negative aspects to being in the Armed Forces?
8. “What factors are influencing or will influence your decision on whether to stay in the Armed Forces?”

*Prompt(if necessary):*

- a. Perhaps you have always intended to leave at your first break point?
- b. Or you want reach specific professional goals that will take time?
- c. Are finances a consideration?
- d. Career options outside the military?
- e. Family issues/dependents?

*[Notetaker record particularly any participants who specifically mention child education allowances (possibly as CEA or BSA) and the context of their comments.]*

9. “As I mentioned at the beginning, this is review of the impact of pay and allowances. With that in mind what do you think about the levels of your current pay, future pay and your allowance package?”

[Preamble from SP(Pol) regarding the recent operational pay announcement – a sentence up to a short paragraph to set the scene e.g. “It has recently been announced that members of the Armed Forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq will be paid additional money”]

10. Does this make operational deployments more attractive? How will it affect you if you are not deployed? *Probe:*
  - a. Would deployment pay influence your decision to stay in the Armed Forces?
  - b. Would you accept more frequent deployments so long as you received the additional deployment pay?
11. “How do you think being in the Armed Forces will affect your decision to buy a home?” [Moderator: consider the oral answers to previous questions to challenge answers. For example look for contradictions between intended time in service, purchase aspirations and the answers offered to this question.]
 

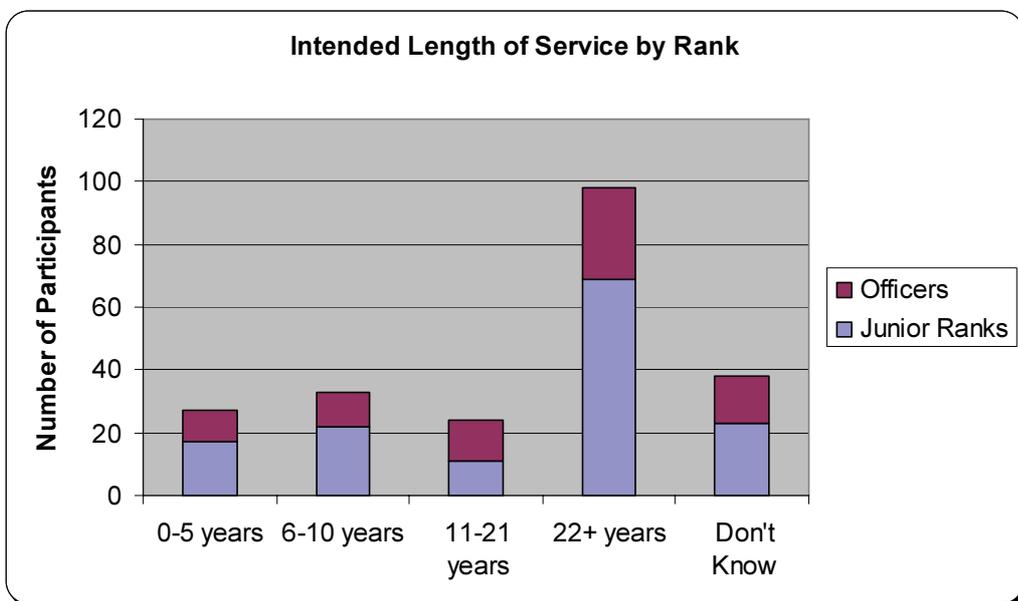
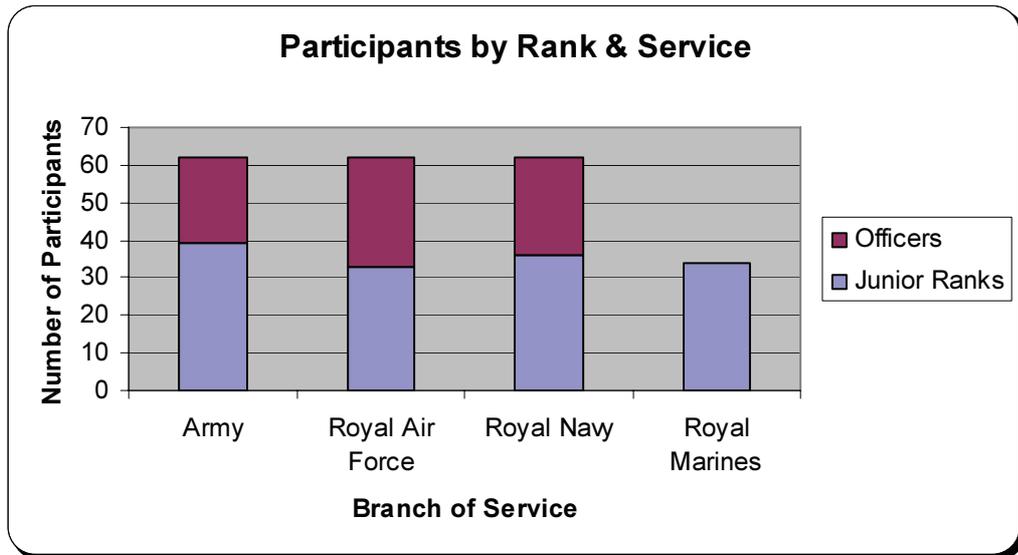
*Prompt:*

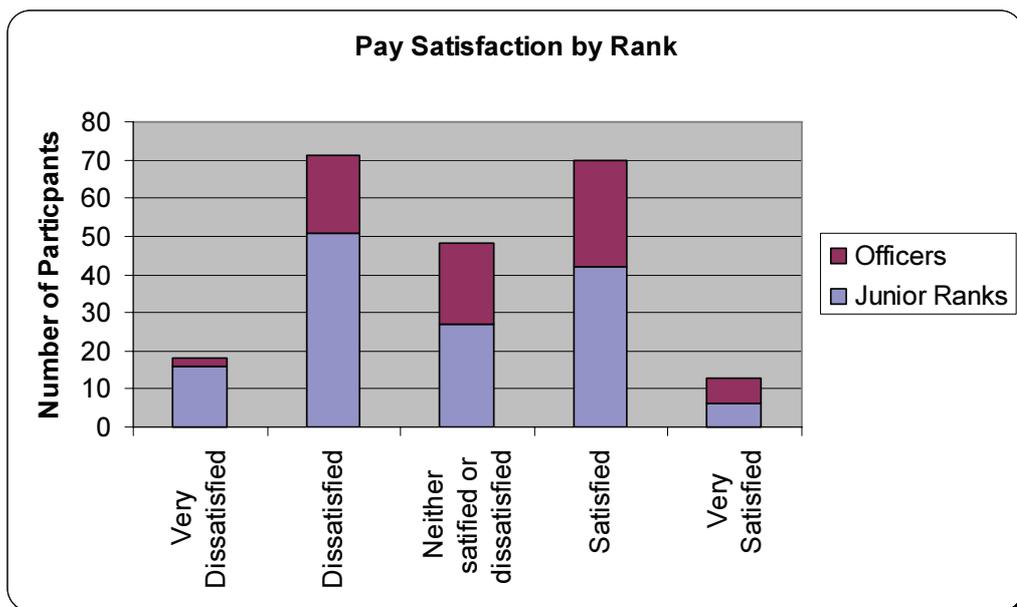
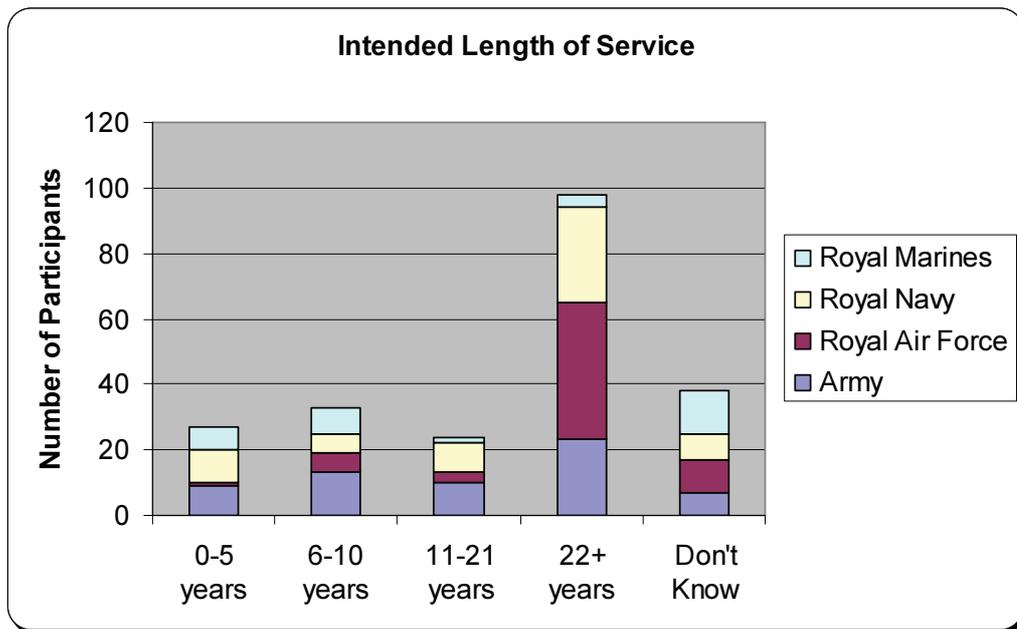
  - a. Do you think job security will help with your house purchase?
  - b. Would you want to live in your new home?
  - c. How do you think the demands of service life will affect home ownership?
12. What message would you like to convey to the leaders and policymakers in the Armed Forces?

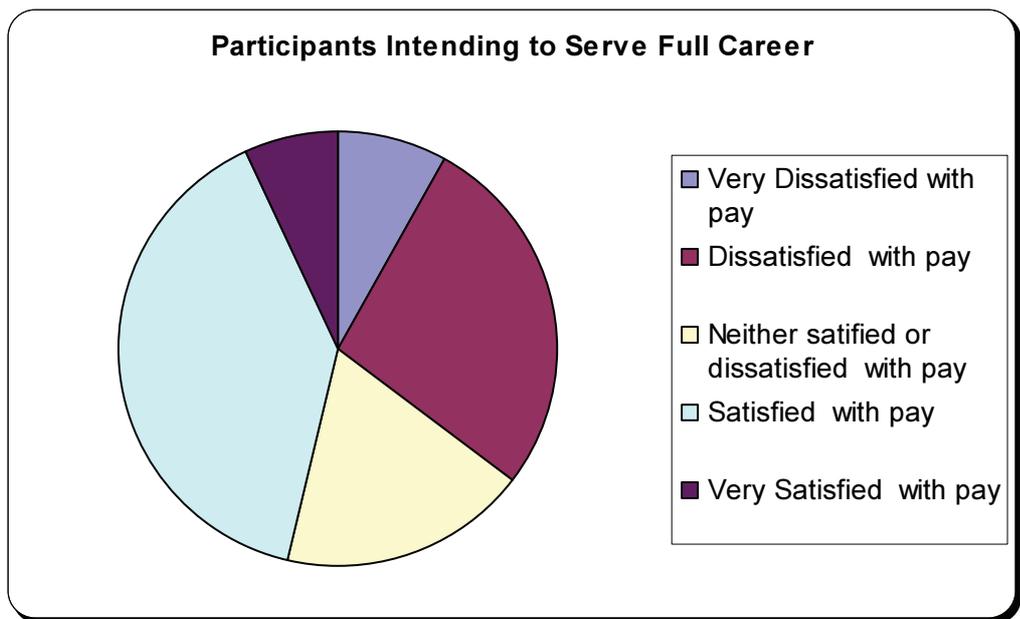
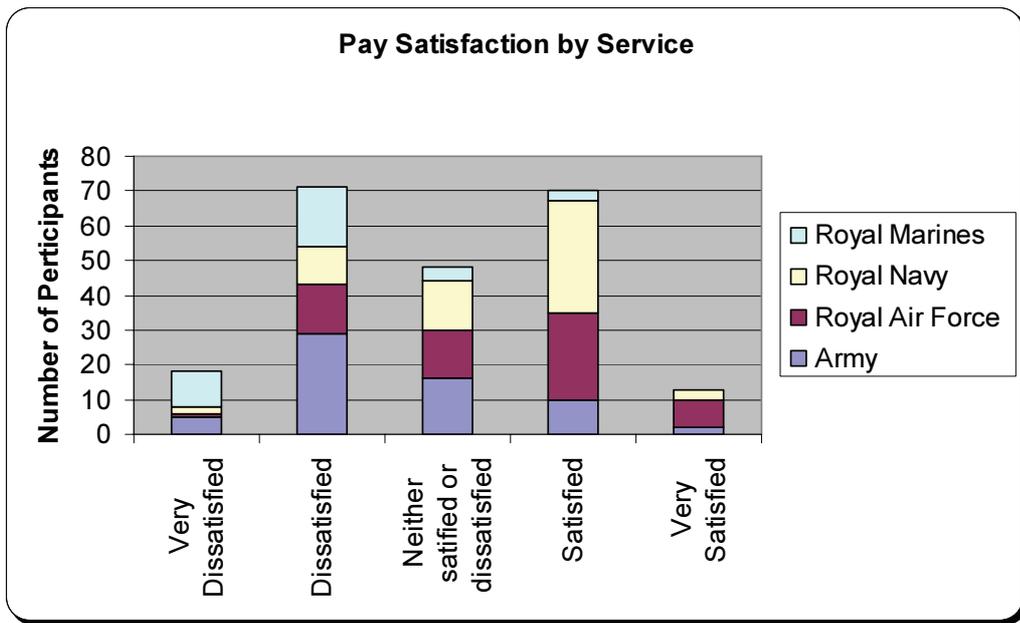


## Appendix B: Focus Group Demographics and Responses

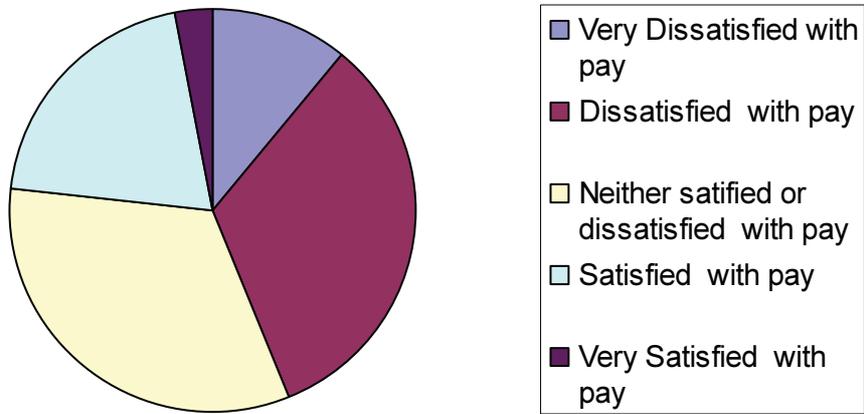
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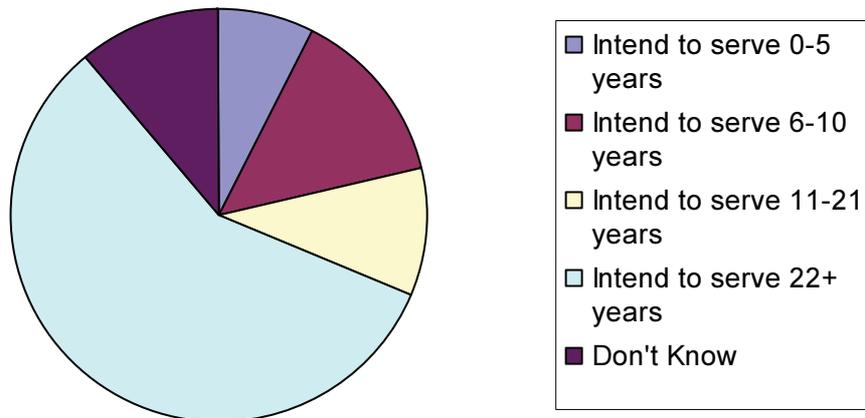




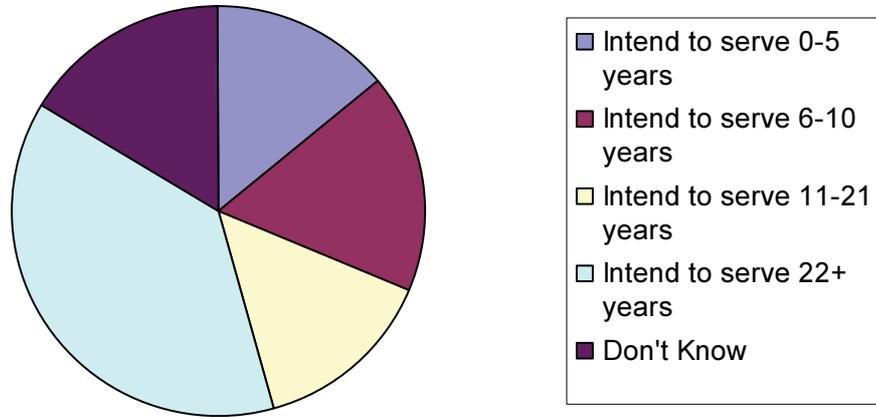
**Participants Intending to Serve Under 5 Years or Don't Know How Long They Will Serve**



**Partipants Satsified / Very Satisfied with Pay**



### Participants Dissatisfied / Very Dissatisfied with Pay



### Aspirations for Home Ownership by Rank

