Armed Forces Covenant

Guidance Notes - Ideas for Best Practice

What is the Armed Forces Covenant?

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation to those who serve or who have served, and their families, which says we will do all we can to ensure they are treated fairly and not disadvantaged in their day-to-day lives. The Armed Forces Covenant relies on the people, communities, and businesses of the UK to actively support it in order to make a difference.

The government is committed to supporting the Armed Forces community by working with a range of partners who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant brings together the government, businesses, local authorities, charities and the public in order to support those who serve.

What does the Armed Forces Covenant mean for businesses?

Businesses and charitable organisations who wish to demonstrate their support for the Armed Forces community[1] can sign the Covenant. Organisations can make a range of written and publicised promises to set out their support to members of the Armed Forces community who work in their business or access their products and services.

The level of support will depend on the size and nature of the organisation, but typically includes policies that: encourage reserve service; support employment of veterans and service spouses/partners; give the Armed Forces community a fair deal on commercial products and services. More than 800 businesses and charities have signed an Armed Forces Covenant, and that number continues to grow.

All Armed Forces Covenants are to be signed by a person in authority who can ensure that commitments are implemented and maintained. Depending on the size and structure of your organisation, this could mean the Chief Executive, Chair or HR Director of a large multinational; the Chief Executive or Chair of a medium-sized company; or the owner or manager of a small business. If you wish to have your pledge co-signed by a member of

[1] The Armed Forces community is defined, for the purposes of the Armed Forces Covenant, as including all those towards whom the Nation has a moral obligation due to service in HM Armed Forces ie serving Regular and Reserve personnel, veterans, and their families. Inclusion in the community is neither dependent on nor limited by strict criteria, nationality, or legal definitions, and it does not confer any legal rights.

the Armed Forces, please contact Defence Relationship Management who will make the necessary arrangements.

How can the MOD and the Armed Forces community support businesses?

The Armed Forces community can contribute real value to a business, both as employees, who bring a wealth of skills and experience, and as customers. The Armed Forces Covenant encourages the Armed Forces community to do their bit to nurture this two-way relationship. It is important that Defence seeks to foster an open and honest relationship with employers and that we ensure the needs of companies are considered alongside those of Defence and the Armed Forces community.

We ask that members of the Armed Forces community declare themselves as such and build an open relationship with their employer. To play its part, the MOD will continue to support business needs, including by providing training and support to those leaving the Armed Forces as they transition to employment in civilian life.

What should your Armed Forces Covenant pledge include?

The starting point for any organisation is deciding what measures your business can take forward, perhaps in consultation with employees or customers from the Armed Forces community, and setting these out in an Armed Forces Covenant pledge. A template can be downloaded from the Armed Forces Covenant webpage at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/corporate-covenant-pledge.

The template contains the core commitments (at 1.1 of pledge template) and a menu of potential additional commitments (at 2.1 of pledge template), from which you should select and customise to create your own Armed Forces Covenant. We are encouraging signatories to provide as much detail in their pledges as they feel they are able. For example, under '*promoting the fact that we are an armed forces-friendly organisation'* you could include '*by publicising our Armed Forces Covenant on our website and displaying the Armed Forces Covenant logo*'.

What the Armed Forces Covenant looks like varies from organisation to organisation. Once signed, you may want to consider some practical steps you could take to fulfil your pledge. You will no doubt have ideas for initiatives of your own, but the following notes are intended to provide ideas of suggested best practice.

How can we promote the fact that we are an 'Armed Forces-friendly' organisation?

You may wish to:

- Publicise your Armed Forces Covenant commitments through your website or by displaying a poster in your business.
- Display the Armed Forces Covenant logo to show that members of the Armed Forces community are welcome customers.
- Larger businesses may wish to support the creation of Armed Forces Community Groups and networks within their organisation.
- You may wish to celebrate Armed Forces Day as a business.

How can we support the employment of veterans?

You may wish to:

- Work with the Career Transition Partnership (www.ctp.org.uk), a high quality, no cost recruitment service for organisations seeking highly motivated and experienced veterans, who are leaving the Armed Forces.
- Offer guaranteed interviews to veterans, young and old, if they meet the selection criteria laid out in a job advert.
- Support the employment, where appropriate, of wounded, injured or sick veterans, perhaps by working with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP Assist) or through a guaranteed interview scheme.
- Recognise military skills and qualifications when interviewing for new positions.
- Hold briefing days specifically for those leaving the Armed Forces, as a way to raise awareness of the opportunities for employment in your business.

How can we support the employment of service spouses and partners?

You may wish to:

- Focus recruiting effort on the Armed Forces community, such as advertising through 'service-friendly' recruitment agencies and service charities.
- Offer guaranteed interviews to spouses/partners if they meet the selection criteria laid out in a job advert.
- If you have branches in multiple geographic areas, committing to attempt to find alternative employment within the business in another location, if they need to move to accompany their partner.

How can we endeavour to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner's deployment?

You may wish to:

- Look sympathetically on requests for holidays before, during or after a partner's overseas deployment, when the service person has leave to spend time with their family.
- Consider whether special paid leave is appropriate for employees who are bereaved or whose loved ones are injured.

How can we seek to support our employees who choose to be members of the reserve forces?

You may wish to:

- Accommodate your reservists' training commitments wherever possible. This is normally a number of weekends and a two-week training camp each year. You may simply choose to allow them to take normal leave for this two week camp - or

perhaps consider offering additional unpaid or, where practicable, even paid leave.

- Accommodate mobilisation of your reservists if they are required to deploy. This would generally be for a six month deployed period as well as pre-deployment training and post-deployment recuperation, although some may be shorter (such as the 2012 Olympics, which was for one month). Forces are structured to sustain one deployment every five years - if required - apart from the Royal Auxiliary Air Force which might entail one every three years.
- Encourage any reservists in your business to participate in Reserves Day.
- Work with Defence Relationship Management and/or your regional Employer Engagement Director to find out more about how employing a reservist can be mutually beneficial.

In return, we expect that reservists declare themselves as such and Defence will seek to build an open relationship with employers, including giving good notice of when a reservist is needed for training or operations, in order to help employers plan ahead. We will aim to manage this to meet the reasonable requirements of the employer, the reservist and Defence.

Defence will also seek to accredit reserve training, skills and experience with civilian qualifications and to provide advice to employers as required. You can find further information on rights and responsibilities for reservists and employers, including financial assistance, on GOV.UK: https://www.gov.uk/employee-reservist/introduction.

How can we offer support to our local cadet units, either in our local community or in local schools?

You may wish to:

- Encourage your employees to be cadet helpers or instructors.
- Make company facilities and premises available for the use of the cadets.
- Offer support or sponsorship, either in cash or kind, to local cadet units.
- Contact your local Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for more information on opportunities for sponsorship.

How can we aim to actively participate in Armed Forces Day?

You may wish to:

- Become an Armed Forces Day Corporate Partner and use the logo on bags, posters and websites, or even fly the Armed Forces Day flag.
- Hold an Armed Forces themed week in your store or office or support the events in your local community.
- Follow Armed Forces Day on Facebook or Twitter, post messages of support on social media sites and link to the Armed Forces Day website.

How can we offer a discount to members of the Armed Forces community?

A number of organisations already offer discounts through the Defence Discount Service, which is the only official discount service for the Armed Forces. It is free for businesses to appear on their website and offer members of the Armed Forces community a discount. Members of the Defence Discount Service are issued with the Defence Privilege Card that can identify them as a member of the Armed Forces community. We encourage businesses, large and small, to sign up via www.defencediscountservice.co.uk/ or by emailing corporate@defencediscountservice.co.uk. Businesses may choose to join this existing service or make their own local arrangements.

How do we give the Armed Forces a fair deal on commercial products and services?

Life in the Armed Forces often means that personnel and their families have to move frequently, at short notice, and with no choice over where they are sent. This can cause difficulties accessing or using commercial products and services. Your business can make this easier by being sensitive to the Armed Forces community's unique needs and pledging to:

- Give them fair access to products and services, for example allowing them to pause or cancel contracts or policies at no cost when they are posted overseas
- Make products available for delivery to British Forces Post Office (BFPO) addresses overseas (e.g. military bases) where appropriate at the lowest commercial rate
- As a financial services provider, access and integrate current postal address file data from Royal Mail for BFPO addresses, and share this data with credit reference agencies every month

How can we support self-employment or business ownership of veterans, spouses or reservists?

Self-employment is quite often a viable alternative to employed positions for many members of the ex-armed forces community. Indeed a recent ONS survey suggests 1 in 7 of the national UK labour force are self-employed. The place where small businesses grow and prosper is in the supply chain of larger companies. They bring their talents, skills and knowledge on a contract basis to add value to your business.

Therefore you may wish to:

- Focus some procurement effort on the Armed Forces community, such as advertising contracts through reputable 'service-friendly' agencies or building procurement sourcing lists through reputable 'service-friendly' related directories.
- Compliment an existing Supply Chain diversity agenda with appropriately talented and skilled veteran, spouse or reservist owned SME businesses.
- Offer guaranteed procurement process assessment to veteran, spouse or reservist owned businesses if they meet the minimum selection criteria laid out in the tendering process.

You can work with Defence Relationship Management, your regional Employer Engagement Director or The Veterans Gateway to find out more about how engaging with military owned businesses can be mutually beneficial.

How will you monitor the Armed Forces Covenant Scheme?

Once you have signed your pledge document setting out what your Armed Forces Covenant seeks to achieve, we would like you to email a copy to the Covenant Team (AFCovenant@rfca.mod.uk), so we can register your commitment and provide you with a letter giving permission for use of our logo for the next five years. The MOD reserves the right, in exceptional circumstances, not to register an organisation or to remove permission to use the Armed Forces Covenant logo.

Any questions or concerns should be addressed to the Covenant Team at AFCovenant@rfca.mod.uk.

The Employer Recognition Scheme

The Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) publically recognises employers' efforts to support Defence personnel issues, such as employing reservists and veterans, while encouraging others to do the same. The scheme encompasses bronze, silver and gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to Defence and the Armed Forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.