

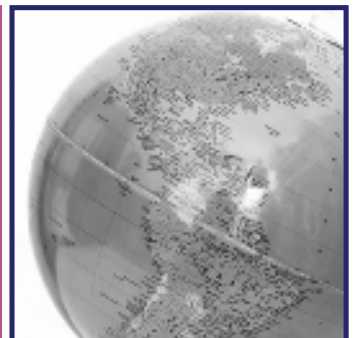
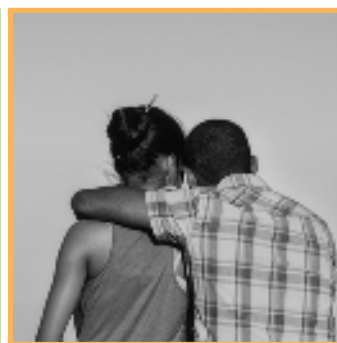
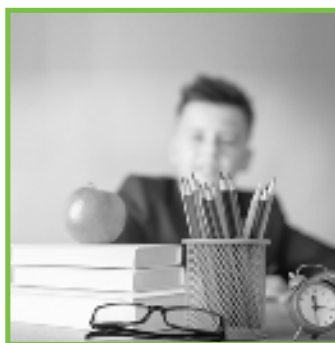
# aff

army families federation

## ARMY FAMILIES' CONCERNS

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Jan-Jun 2019





# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SARA BAADE

After a significant rise of 37% in 2018, we have seen the number of enquiries stabilise at 7,176, almost the same as this period in 2018. Housing continues to be the largest area of enquiries from families, but where issues with repairs and maintenance have slightly reduced, we continue to see more families contacting us with concerns around the Future Accommodation Model.

Education is a growing area, with families raising issues about the use of the Service Pupil Premium and increasing enquiries from schools. We have also received increasing enquiries from the Wiltshire area, following the rebasing programme.

Our Foreign and Commonwealth enquiries continue to be significant and we are aware that these may rise as the Army recruits increasing numbers of these personnel.

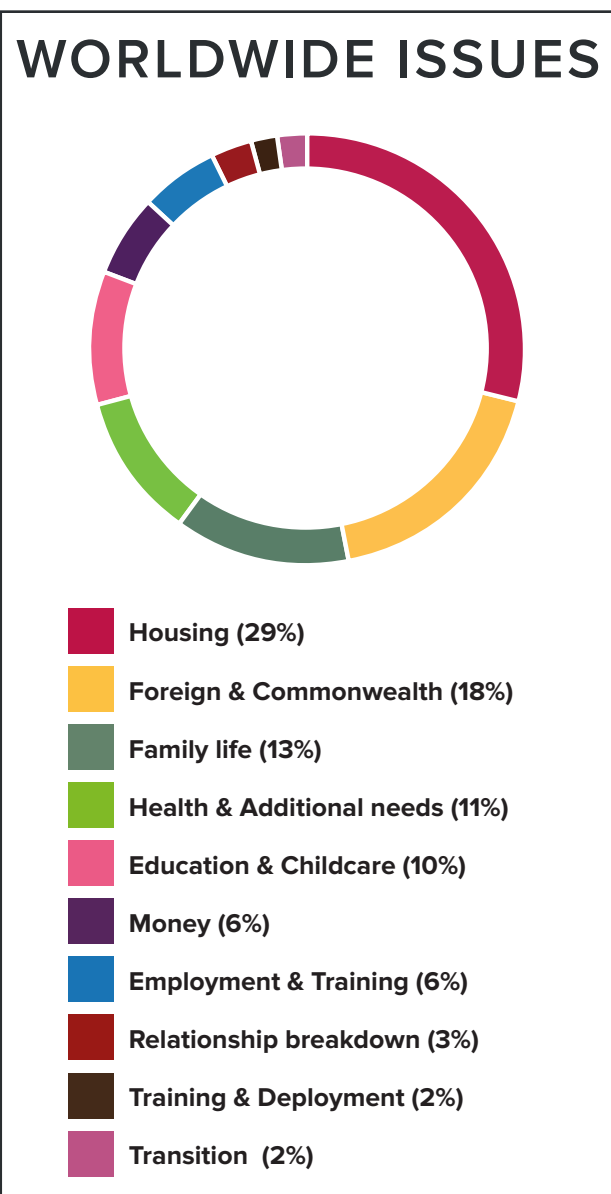
AFF remains alert to the impact of Service life on Army families, with a 21% increase in enquiries about the effect on the family of training and deployment, related to the impact of this absence and tempo on family and welfare support. Despite the small numbers involved, we have seen a rise in enquiries about domestic abuse linked to relationship breakdown, which has highlighted the need to look carefully at how our most vulnerable families are supported.

AFF will continue to work hard to support, inform and empower families during the rest of 2019.



## NUMBER OF ENQUIRIES

Subject	Jan-Jun 2018	Jan-Jun 2019	% change
Housing	2,169	2,083	-4%
Foreign & Commonwealth	1,260	1,301	+3%
Family life	902	941	+4%
Health & Additional needs	784	786	-
Education & Childcare	635	743	+17%
Money	495	410	-17%
Employment & Training	503	458	-9%
Relationship breakdown	227	224	-1%
Training & Deployment	104	126	+21%
Transition	72	104	+44%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,151</b>	<b>7,176</b>	<b>-</b>



This report outlines, statistically, the enquiries we have received in the first half of 2019. It breaks down the different areas of enquiry to show the scale of our families' concerns and how they compare to 2018. Together with our survey results, it will be used as evidence to support proposals for change to a range of key stakeholders including the MOD, politicians, civil servants and service providers. It will also give a representative picture of the concerns Army families are faced with for the remainder of 2019.

# HOUSING

## 2,083 enquiries

Housing continues to be our most significant area of enquiry from families, making up 29% of the total enquiries between January and June 2019. Whilst we have seen a slight decrease in enquiries so far this year compared to the same period in 2018, this follows a significant rise of 42% in 2018.

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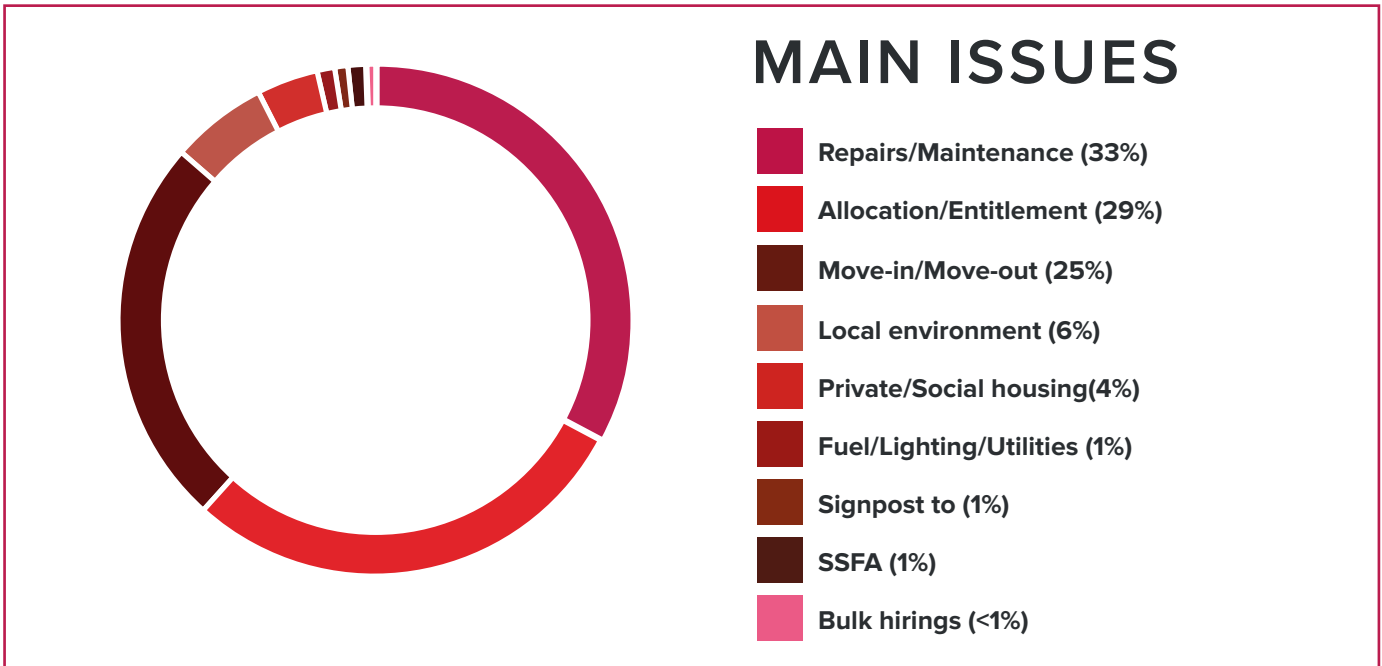
*The introduction of FAM does not take into account the realism of how the Army works and lives. The MOD is not listening to families and poor communication about FAM is one of the reasons I don't feel valued as an Army spouse.*

*Quote from family.*



## ALLOCATION AND ENTITLEMENT

We have seen a 7% increase in enquiries in this area, compared to the same period last year. Families have contacted us about the new cohabitation policy, as well as the Future Accommodation Model. Families are still highlighting their concerns about FAM, particularly prompted by the forthcoming pilot in Aldershot starting in early 2020.



## MOVE-IN/MOVE-OUT

We have seen a significant rise in queries about this issue, up 188%, compared to January to June 2018. We are aware that some families are still experiencing problems with moving into dirty or unprepared accommodation. Part of this has been due to localised issues, with others linked to the volume of moves under rebasing.

## REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Whilst this remains our largest area of enquiries from families, we are pleased to see that the number of enquiries has dropped. AFF feels that there is still room for improvement in complex cases, including those requiring more than one trade or follow-on works, but we are seeing a definite reduction in simple issues. AFF will continue to encourage families to make official complaints to Amey and to inform AFF so that we can monitor the situation.

With the new Future Defence Infrastructure Services contract being developed, AFF is keen to ensure that the future contract delivers for families and that we do not see a rise in issues as the new contract is introduced.



### AFF IN ACTION

Following an AFF brief questioning accommodation charges in Kenya, a review is being undertaken into overseas charges.

### KEY PRIORITY FOR THE REST OF 2019

With the forthcoming Army pilot in Aldershot in early 2020, FAM remains a key issue for families and AFF. Clear and timely communication on FAM is needed to ensure families are fully informed and engaged.



# FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH

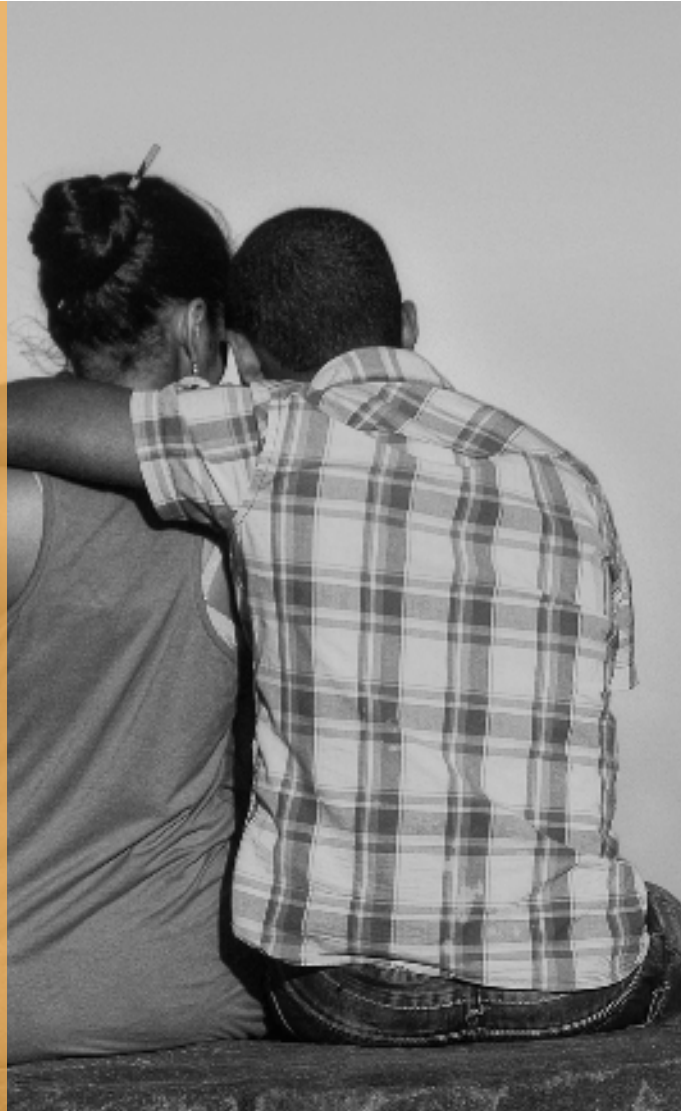
## 1,301 enquiries

We have seen an increase of 3% in enquiries, compared to the first six months of 2018. Supporting Foreign & Commonwealth families remains a key area of work for AFF, which is potentially going to increase following the recruitment of additional personnel over the next few years. Informing and supporting these families is crucial and AFF will continue to engage with the chain of command for this important community.

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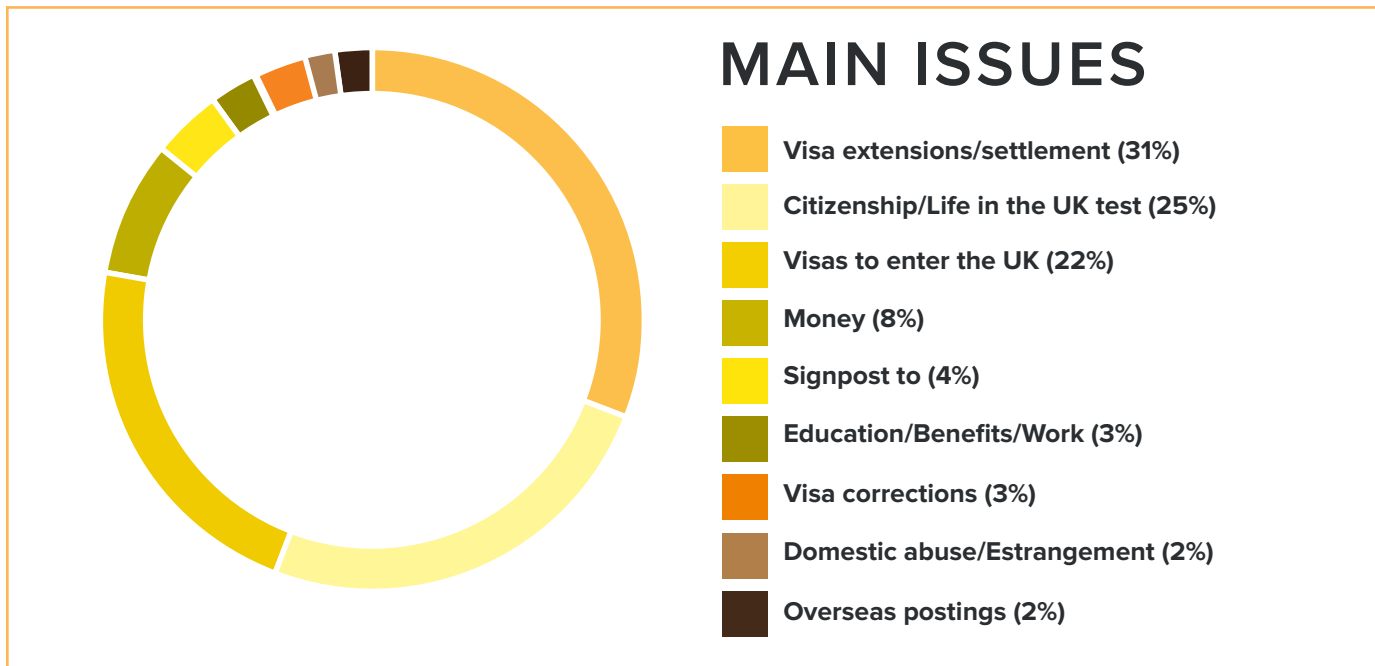
*When meeting my wife for the first time and eventually becoming married I never anticipated the harrowing, persecuting, traumatic procedure of what is now known as the route to settlement. It has been a truly disgusting experience. I have nearly died on three separate occasions in service of this country and I still have to pay to keep my family together.*

*Quote from family.*



## MINIMUM INCOME REQUIREMENT

We continue to raise the significant impact of this issue on Foreign & Commonwealth families with senior command and ministers. We have seen a rise in public interest in this issue, with it being raised in Prime Minister's Questions, at the Defence Select Committee and in the media. Following our successful representation of a soldier at an immigration tribunal on this issue, we have continued to use this judgement to support other similar applications.



## INFORMATION ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND VISAS ON RECRUITMENT

AFF has undertaken a significant amount of work in this area, liaising with Army recruiting and personnel teams, Army HQ, Regional Command, and also the MOD Armed Forces Covenant team. We are pleased to see that this issue of awareness, for both potential Foreign & Commonwealth recruits and unit administrative and welfare staff, has been included as a recommendation in the new tri-Service action plan.

## INFORMATION ON OVERSEAS ASSIGNMENTS

AFF has received a significant number of requests for assistance from units struggling to support families who need to renew visas overseas. We have worked closely with Regional Command and overseas units, as well as our contacts at the UK Visa & Immigration office, to assist those families whose visas have expired and to produce a guide to ensure that the relevant contacts have the correct and necessary information. We are working with command to produce a separate overseas section in the unit guide to support non-British nationals, ensuring that overseas units understand their responsibilities towards these families.

### KEY PRIORITY FOR THE REST OF 2019

To continue to strengthen our relationship with Regional Command to ensure that both families and units are receiving the support they need to better deal with immigration-related issues at all different stages.



# EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

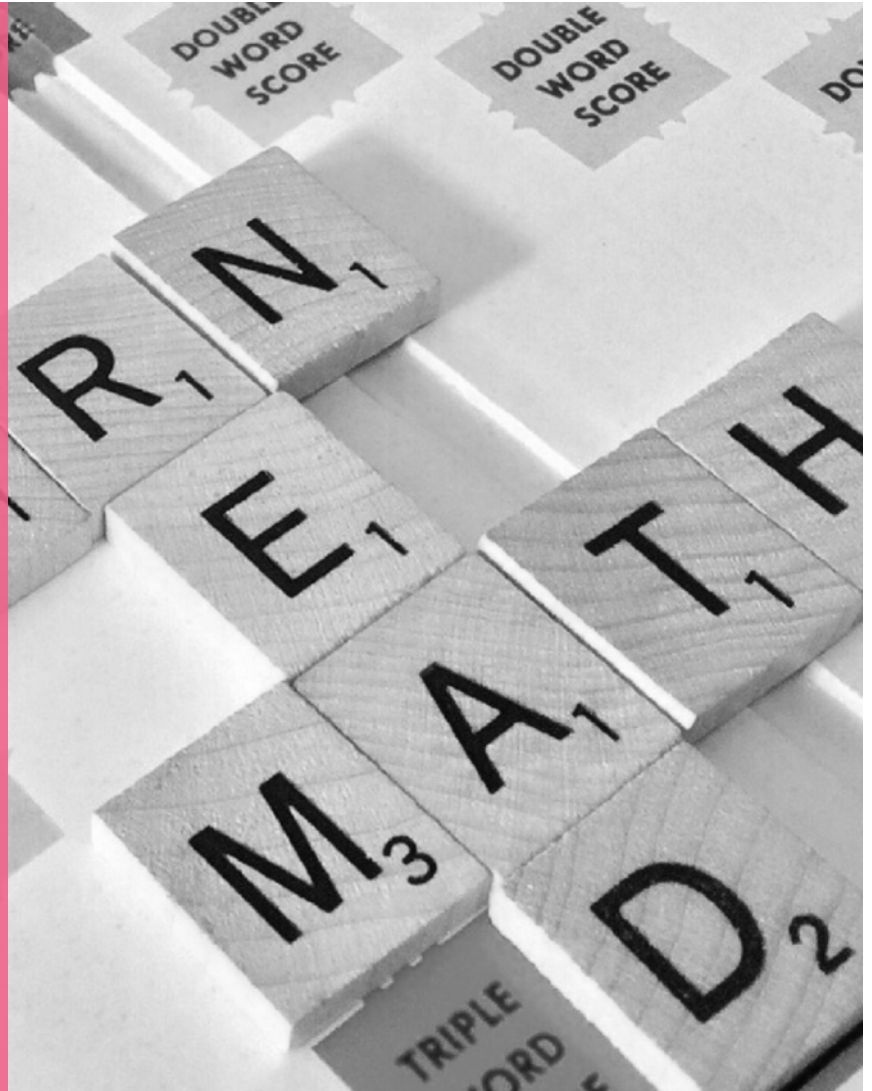
## 743 enquiries

We have seen a significant 17% rise in enquiries about education and childcare during the first half of the year, which follows a 41% increase during this period in 2018.

“

*I think having gaps in knowledge has damaged my son's self-esteem and self-belief. Instead of thinking 'I don't understand this maths, because I've never learnt it' he thinks 'I'm stupid/I'm terrible at maths' and it has had a long-term negative effect.*

*Quote from family.*



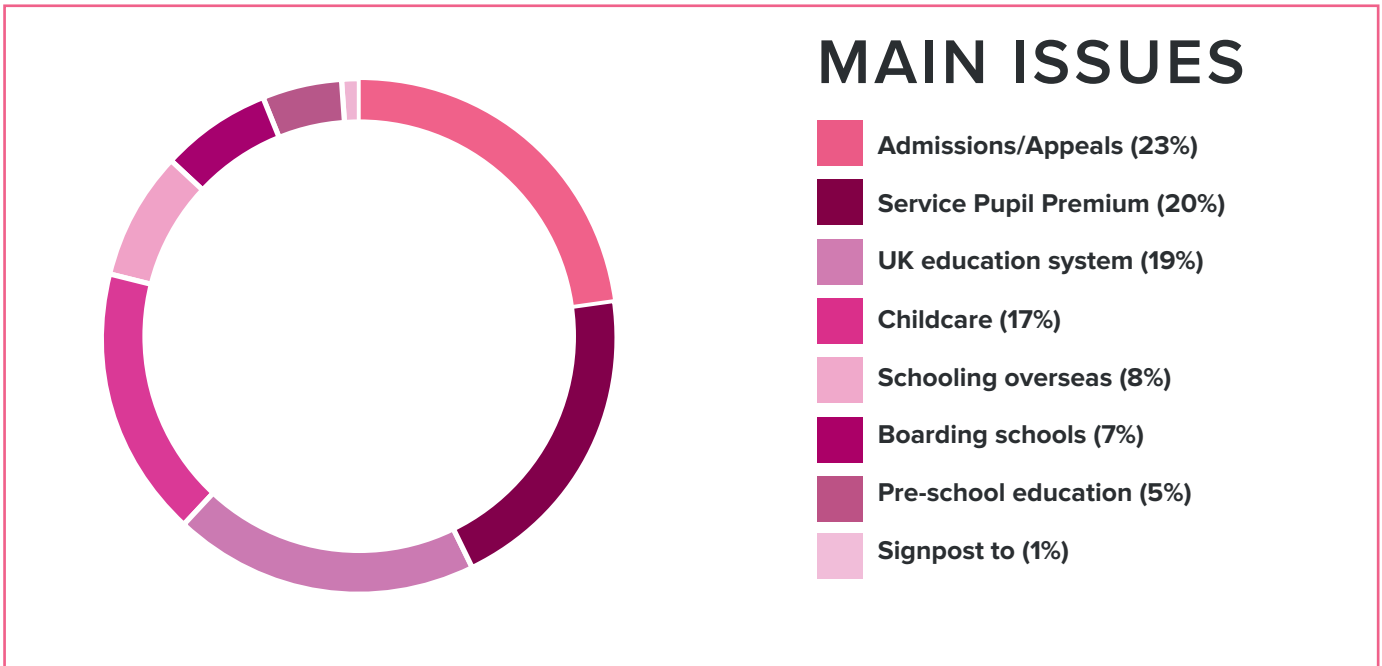
## SERVICE PUPIL PREMIUM

The rise of 86% highlights that this was a core area of our education enquiries during the first half of this year. We are advising both families and schools on how the premium should be spent. We are seeing significant concern that the funding is not being used effectively to improve pastoral outcomes for each individual Service child, as well as concern that schools are not fully accounting for their spend and that the funding is being subsumed into the general pupil premium pot.

## UK EDUCATION SYSTEM

We have seen a rise of 59% in this area, with rebasing families requesting information about school places and enquiries from schools asking how they can best support Service children. AFF has been working with local authorities to highlight local issues.





## BOARDING SCHOOLS

We have seen a significant rise of 69% in enquiries about boarding schools, compared to January to June 2018, encompassing an increase in enquiries from both families and education providers.

Around a third of our military allowances enquiries related to the Continuity of Education Allowance. Families queried their entitlement where they lived in their own home or used the Forces Help to Buy scheme, sought clarification on the rules if going through a relationship breakdown and highlighted issues with the change of eligibility rules for sixth form.

In our results from our Listening to our Service Children survey, families referred to the sense of unfairness that they had been mobile and met the Service need but that the change in policy resulted in 'changing the goal posts' (please see page 22 for more details).

Families have also contacted us about decisions on individual casework. Families have contacted us with concerns about how appeals and difficult cases are being dealt with and we are investigating this further.

## KEY PRIORITY FOR THE REST OF 2019

AFF is collaborating with the Service Children's Progression Alliance and the University of Winchester on a year-long programme of research activities, briefings and other events to capture and disseminate the voice of Service children in education – 'Year of the Service Child Voice'.



# EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

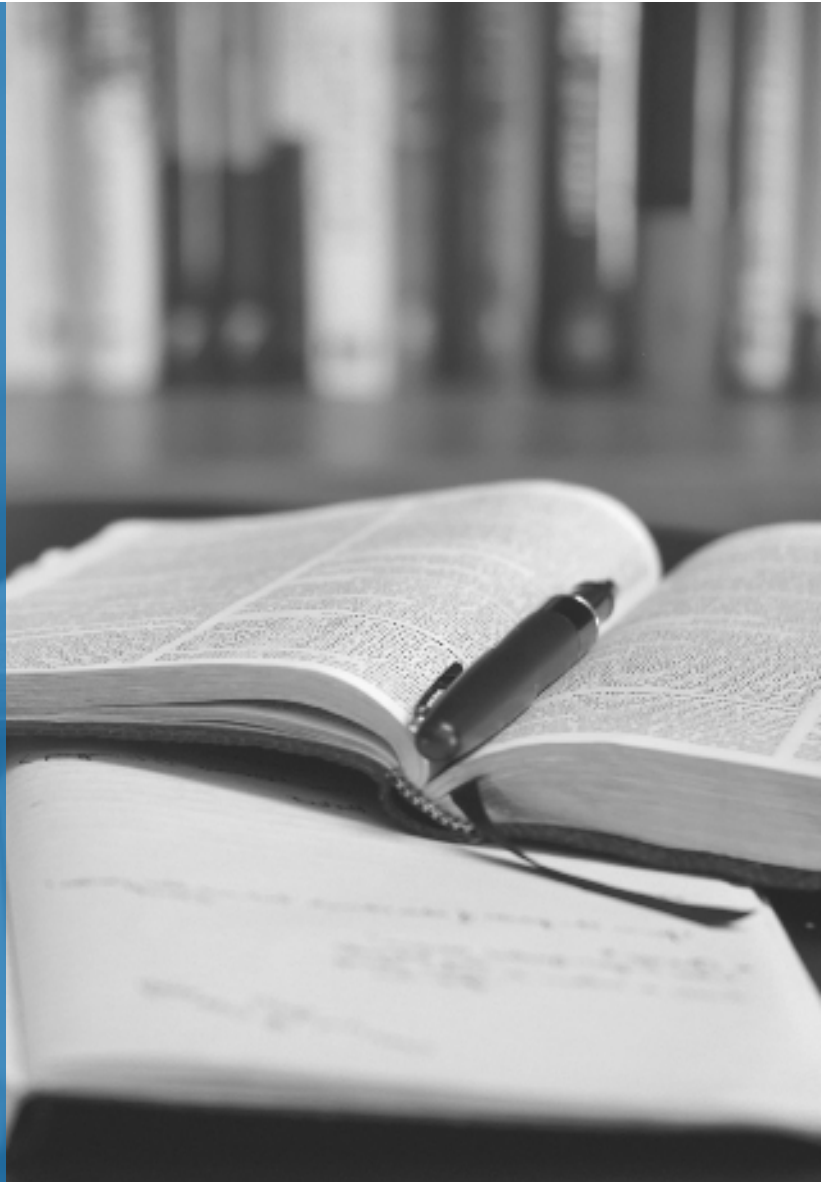
## 458 enquiries

Spousal employment remains a key topic for families. We have seen a decrease in this area during the first six months of 2019 but this follows our enquiries doubling in 2018. 2019 is an exciting time as we launch our Forces Families Jobs employment and training platform.

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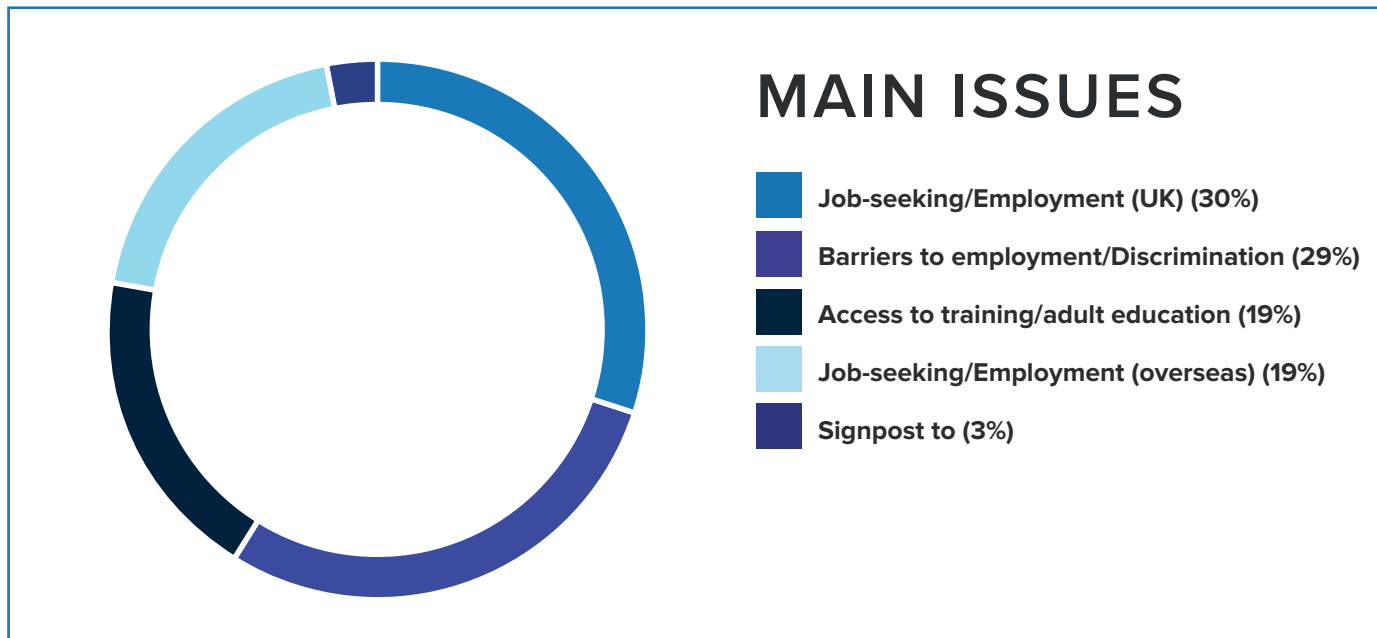
*I've spent three years studying at university in Germany to qualify for my field of work and, upon arriving in the UK, find that my qualification cannot be accepted and is not recognised.....I have followed my serving husband to support him and this is how I am repaid!*

*Quote from family.*



## FORCES FAMILIES JOBS

Following the recommendation from the spousal employment research commissioned by AFF in 2018, one of our key priorities this year has been the establishment of the Forces Families Jobs employment and training site. This tri-Service employment and training platform is specifically designed to support Service families into meaningful employment and provide opportunities for training and development. The site, [forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk](https://forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk), will be launched on 17 September 2019.



## LACK OF RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

AFF has been made aware of difficulties for some German spouses in having their German qualifications recognised or being able to convert them to the equivalent level in the UK. This is potentially costly and time-consuming but could also result in German spouses not being able to work at the level they are qualified for. With families rebasing from Germany, AFF has raised this with the Armed Forces Covenant team to investigate the extent of this issue.

## SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

We have seen a rise of 25% in enquiries about seeking employment in the UK and 89% overseas, compared to the same period last year. Spouses have asked us for advice about how to prepare to seek employment and raised concerns about the impact of the serving person’s career demands and mobility on their employment. We have also seen enquiries from families in Germany who are concerned about accessing employment when rebased to the UK and enquiries from spouses overseas asking for more guidance on the practicalities and regulations of working in their host country.

### KEY PRIORITY FOR THE REST OF 2019

The launch of the Forces Families Jobs platform in September.



# HEALTH & ADDITIONAL NEEDS

## 786 enquiries

We have seen a rise of 9% in health enquiries during the first six months of 2019, with a drop of 9% in enquiries into additional needs, compared to 2018. However, this is still nearly double the number of enquiries we received in 2017 about health and additional needs.

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*I often just wanted to give up on trying to get my son an assessment. I don't think that healthcare professionals fully understand the complexities of military life because there isn't a system in place that supports my son.*

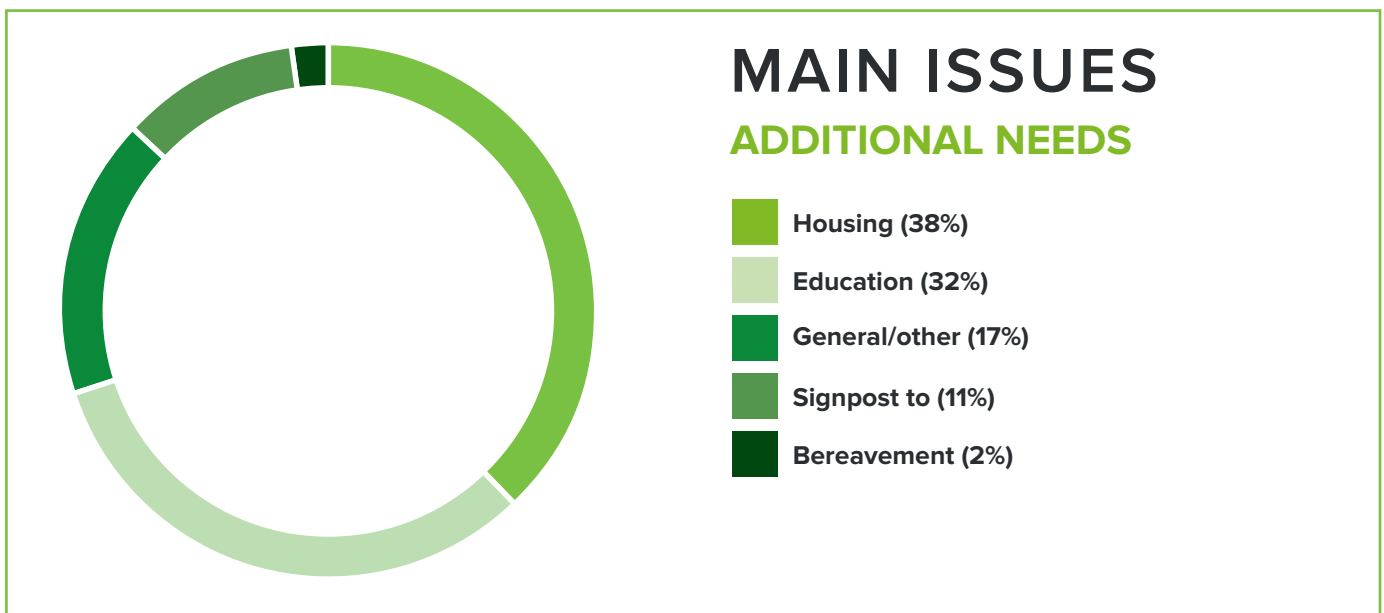
*Quote from family.*

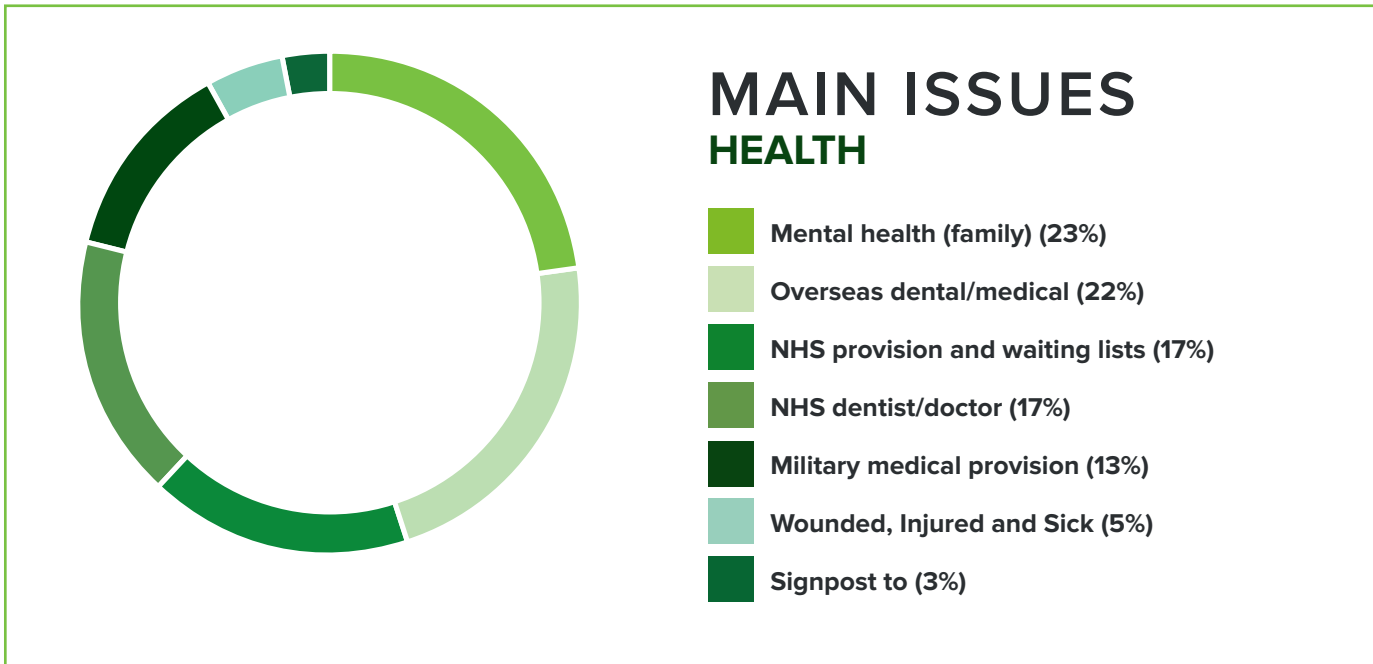


## FAMILIES' MENTAL HEALTH

AFF is aware of the importance of ensuring that families are supported in regards to their mental health. We provided a briefing paper about mental health support for Service children who are under 16 in February, which has promoted a discussion with the NHS England National Mental Health Director.

An increase of 91% in the first six months of 2019, compared to this period in 2018, is concerning and we will continue to consider why these enquiries are rising. We are aware of concerns from families due to a delay in accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services provision and the impact of postings on re-establishing treatment and support in the new location. AFF would welcome the exploration of options for a better transfer of ongoing care on moving.





## MILITARY MEDICAL PROVISION

AFF has seen a significant rise in enquiries about military medical provision. We have seen a number of enquiries from families based overseas who are rebasing to the UK, who are often used to the provision of medical support through the military system and have queries about their provision on return to the UK and NHS.

## PRE-SCREENING AND SUPPORTABILITY

AFF has worked closely with the chain of command to alert command to the difficulties experienced by some families when posted overseas and requiring medical clearance. This engagement has led to our Health & Additional Needs specialist sitting on the Medical Supportability Working Group, which allows AFF to highlight families' issues direct to key decision makers.

## HOUSING FOR FAMILIES WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

We have seen a 25% increase in housing enquiries, compared to January to June 2018, where families have an additional need. Families have highlighted issues with delays in adaptations or with suitable properties becoming available. Rebasing has also created additional enquiries, with some families feeling that the housing in their new location is not suitable for their family.

### KEY PRIORITY FOR THE REST OF 2019

To continue our collaborative working with the NHS, both in England and in the devolved administrations, as well as with the Department of Health and Social Care, to explore options for improving continuity of healthcare.



# MONEY & ALLOWANCES

## 410 enquiries

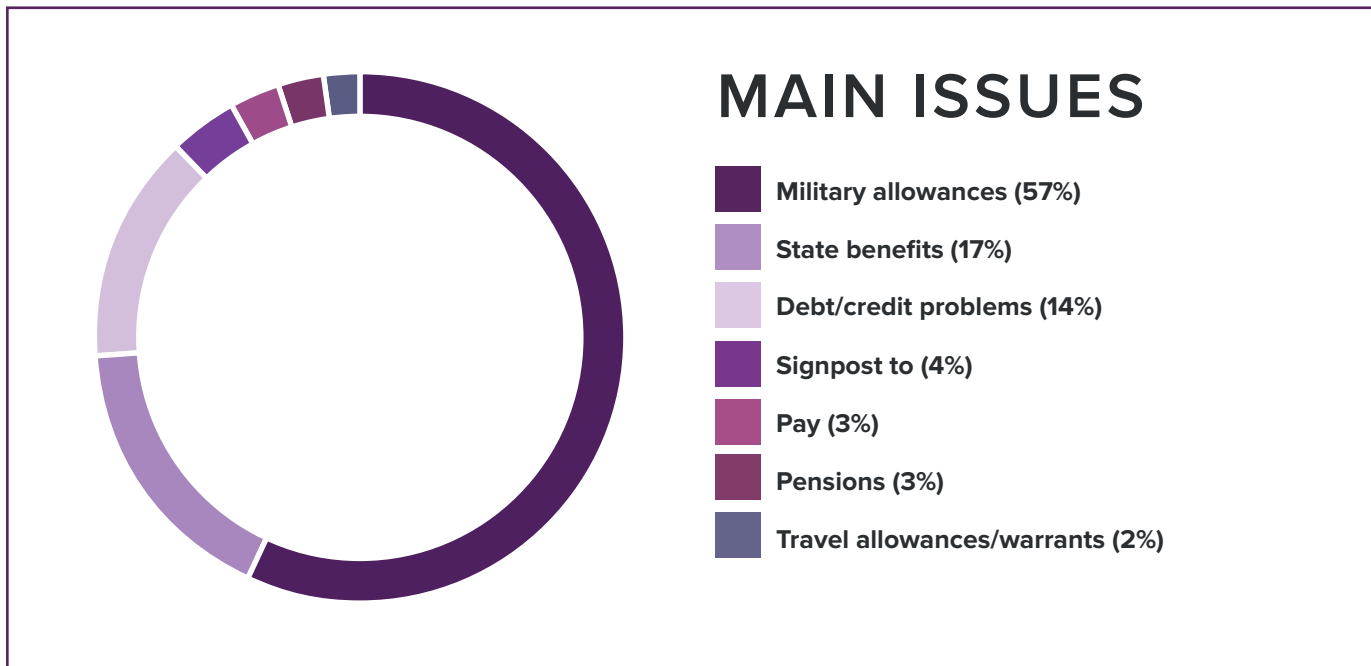
We have seen a drop of 17% in money and allowances enquiries, compared to the same period in 2018, but we have not run a dedicated money issues awareness month this year.

“

*I had a deduction of earnings request set up for my child's father who is in the Army to pay his child maintenance money. Child maintenance have told me that the money has not been taken from his salary this month because the deduction has expired which has left me without any money. I don't know where to go to resolve this.*

*Quote from family.*





## UNIVERSAL CREDIT

AFF has seen a 19% rise in enquiries about state benefits, compared to the first six months of 2018. We are aware of issues experienced by separating spouses living in Service Family Accommodation who are unable to qualify for the housing element of Universal Credit. AFF is engaging with the Department for Work and Pensions and the MOD Armed Forces Covenant team on this issue.

## CHILD MAINTENANCE

We have received a range of child maintenance enquiries, including queries about trying to establish a deduction of earnings from a Service person through the military, to errors in maintenance claims.

### KEY PRIORITY FOR THE REST OF 2019

AFF is aware of changes to the tax allowance for the Armed Forces Pension Scheme and the impact it is having on some families. We will continue to ensure families are informed to be able to plan effectively.

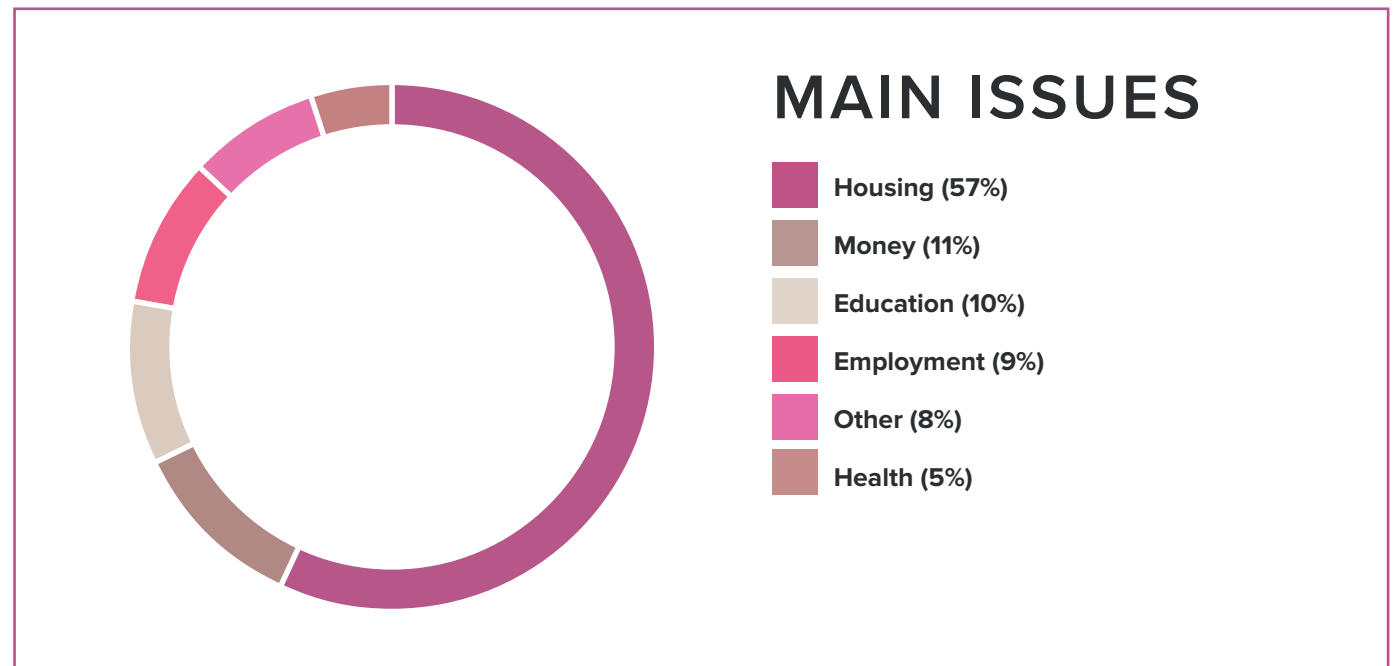


# TRANSITION

## 104 enquiries

Following the publication of the Families Federations and Forces in Mind Trust report, *'Lifting the Lid on Transition – the families' experience and the support they need'*, in November 2018, we have continued to see a rise in transition enquiries, with a 44% increase since the same period in 2018.

AFF continues to engage with the chain of command and key decision makers to ensure that families are at the heart of transition support and policies

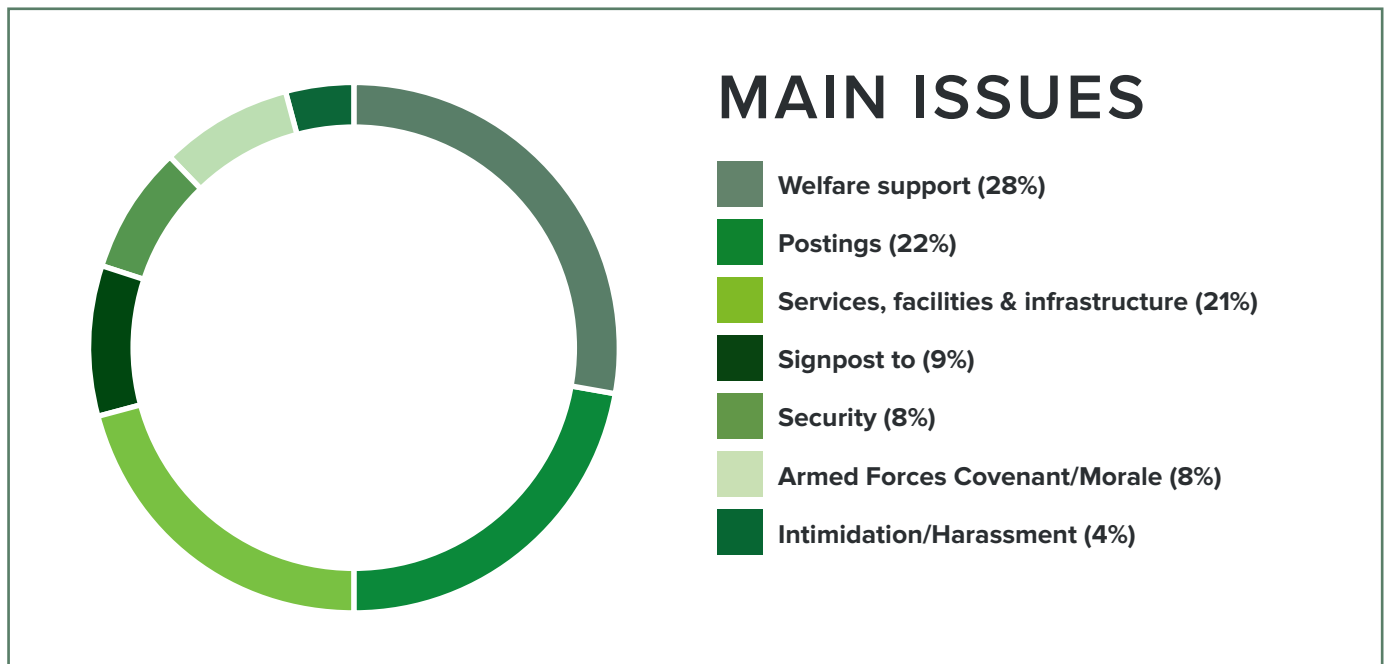




# FAMILY LIFE

## 941 enquiries

We have continued to see a rise in family life enquiries, with a 4% rise from this period in 2018, following a 31% increase in 2018.



### WELFARE SUPPORT

We've seen a 35% increase in enquiries about welfare support, compared to the first six months of 2018, which includes families concerned about the lack of support groups and activities, and spouses feeling isolated.



### AFF IN ACTION

AFF raised the concern about consistent and suitable welfare support, which has resulted in significant work undertaken by command to ensure the provision is right.

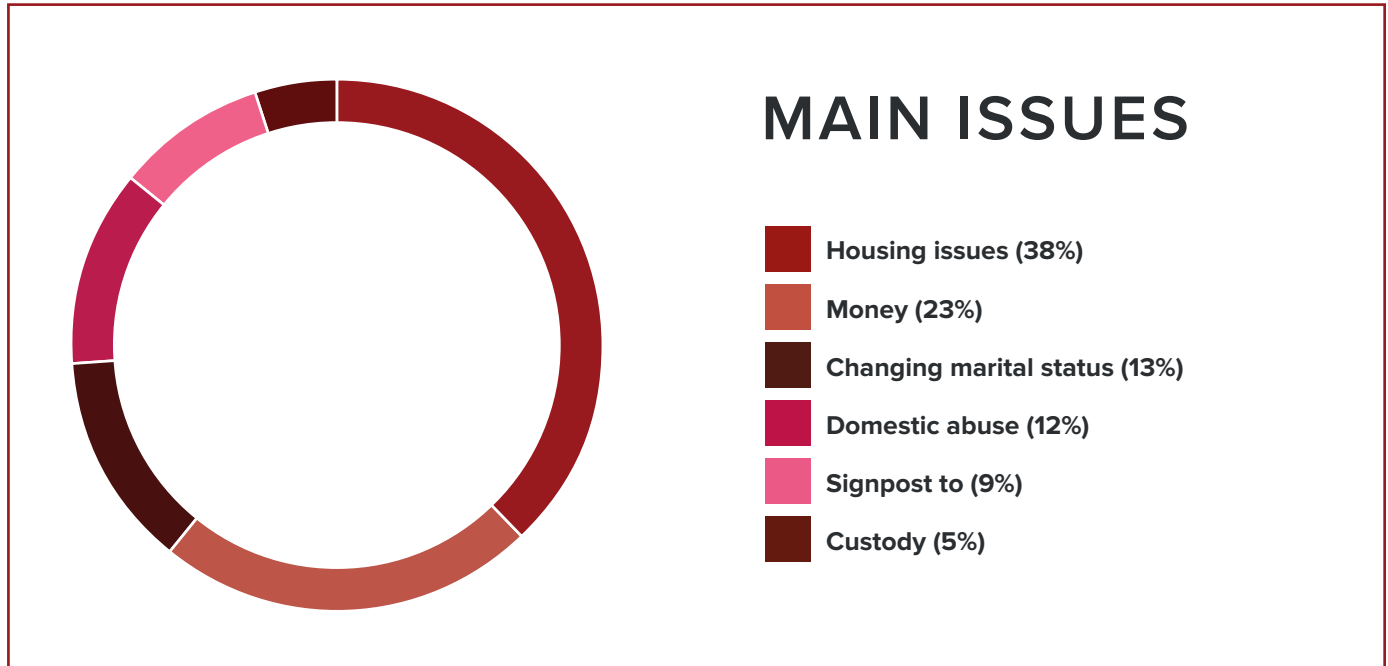
### SECURITY

We have also seen a rise of 30% in security enquiries, compared to the same period last year, with families highlighting break-ins and anti-social behaviour. We will continue to monitor this, as we are aware of the impact this concern will have on families, especially if their serving partner is deployed.

# RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

## 224 enquiries

Following a rise of 56% in enquiries about relationship breakdown between 2017 and 2018, we are pleased to see a 1% decrease in the first half of 2019. There has been a worrying increase in enquiries about domestic abuse; rising from 6 to 26 from 2018.

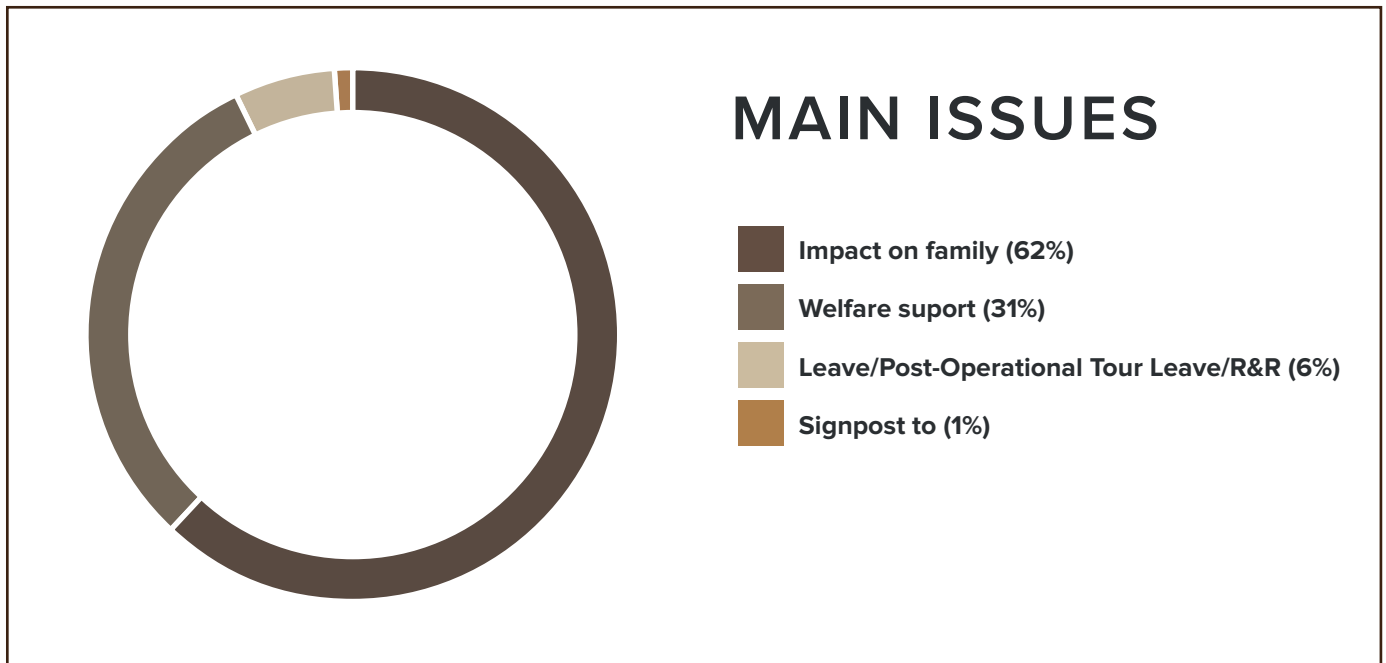


AFF is concerned about this rise in domestic abuse enquiries, particularly when spouses may feel additionally vulnerable as they are potentially posted away from family and close friends. AFF ensures that families are referred to support organisations to assist them in receiving the support they need.

# TRAINING & DEPLOYMENT

## 126 enquiries

We have seen a 21% increase in enquiries about training and deployment, compared to the first six months of 2018.



### IMPACT ON FAMILY

There has been a 24% rise in enquiries about impact on the family due to training and deployment, compared to January to June 2018. Families cited issues such as families having to adjust when the serving person returns from exercise or deployment, the high tempo of the training and deployment cycle, and the impact on the bond between the absent Service person and their children. These issues can be exacerbated when spouses/partners have additional concerns, such as medical issues or extended family members who are unwell.

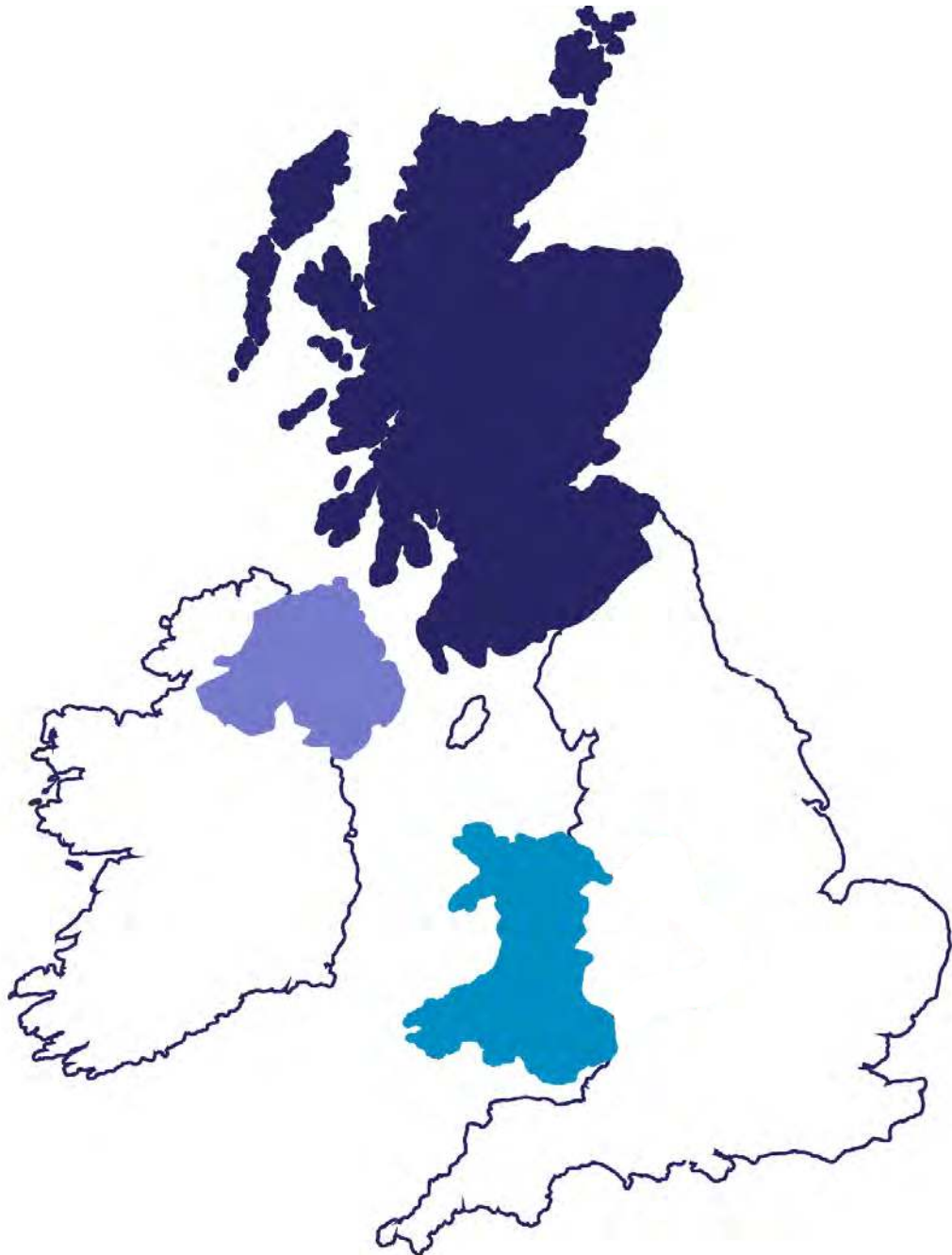
### WELFARE SUPPORT

AFF has seen a 39% rise in this area, in comparison to the same period last year, with a mix of families, welfare teams and schools contacting us. Families highlighted how school holidays can be a difficult time if there are no trips or groups organised, welfare teams raised the challenges of funding being focused on deployments rather than training, and schools were looking to find out about impending deployments to provide support during the tour.

# SPOTLIGHT ON THE DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS

AFF supports families in the devolved administrations, with co-ordinators in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. AFF engages with the devolved governments to represent families living in these areas.

Families have highlighted to AFF the impact of moving between, and in and out of, the devolved administrations; due to the different policies in place on key issues, such as healthcare and education.



## SCOTLAND

**Family life** - Due to some units' summer leave not correlating with the Scottish school holidays, families are reporting that this has had a negative impact on family life and morale.

**Additional needs** - Families have reported frustration with obtaining diagnoses and/or support for their children with additional needs, expressing concern about moving without a diagnosis or having to start the process again.



### AFF IN ACTION

Our AFF Scotland co-ordinator identified a need for, and organised, an additional needs group in the Edinburgh area, resulting in positive support for these families.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

**Training & deployment** - the 24-month training and deployment cycle of some units is having a negative impact on family life, including the happiness and wellbeing of children.

**Additional needs** - families feel they need more support for dealing with issues relating to the additional needs of their children and are concerned at the lack of continuity between the devolved administrations.



### AFF IN ACTION

The huge success of the additional needs groups that are running across three stations has enabled AFF to provide support to the serving community.

## WALES

**Service Pupil Premium** - the lack of the Service Pupil Premium has resulted in some families saying that they feel they lack sustained and targeted support. AFF has continued to raise this issue at the highest level in Wales and we will be monitoring the impact of the introduction of the recently introduced Welsh Government fund specifically for Service children.

**Council tax** - we are disappointed that some local authorities are not recognising council tax discounts for the serving community.



### AFF IN ACTION

AFF's close working relationship with the Welsh government allows for the specific issues affecting families posted to Wales to be discussed at the highest level.

# SPOTLIGHT ON OVERSEAS FAMILIES

Overseas families face the same issues as our families based in the UK but can experience unique challenges and opportunities, due to being supported by host nation provision or living in a culturally different or isolated location. AFF provides support to these families in locations as diverse as Kenya, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus and Germany, with support for the European Joint Support Unit locations across Europe and families assigned on defence engagement across the globe.



## EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

Our overseas co-ordinators have received queries relating to the entitlement and access to the 30 hours' free childcare when posted overseas. Some families may be eligible but are unable to access it due to the limitations of local provision or the inflexibility of eligibility rules set against the overseas context.

### CYPRUS

Families are concerned about lack of sufficient wraparound childcare provision to support spousal employment and dual serving families.

### SHAPE (BELGIUM)

There is limited provision, with priority given to full-time job holders. As much of the employment available for spouses accompanying their serving partner is part-time, this makes it difficult to gain and maintain spousal employment.

## EMPLOYMENT

AFF has seen an 89% increase in enquiries relating to seeking employment overseas. AFF supports families to be proactive in seeking advice before postings on issues such as registering for job opportunities, employment status stamps and host nation restrictions.

### REBASING

Rebasing has also affected our enquiries from families, who are looking for information on what to expect from a UK property and the move-in/move-out in the UK. We have also experienced issues with families feeling that their UK housing allocation does not match their needs but this may be due to them not providing adequate information on their medical or additional needs.

## FAMILY LIFE

Small local factors can have a negative impact on the morale of families.

### BFPO

Families are frustrated with poor BFPO services and fewer companies willing to send parcels to overseas locations via BFPO.

### BREXIT

We have received queries from families about how to prepare for the impact of Brexit, including access to health care with the European Health Identity Card, international driving permits, and the timely issue of SOFA stamps for dependents' passports prior to the exit from the EU.

## RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

Our overseas team is increasingly struggling to signpost families to legal support services which understand the Armed Forces restrictions and nuisances of overseas jurisdictions. Many families indicated to us that they feel that the MOD's focus is in supporting the Service person, with the spouse and family's needs not fully considered.

# SURVEYS

For details and briefing papers, please go to [aff.org.uk/about-aff/surveys](http://aff.org.uk/about-aff/surveys)

## COMMS SURVEY

A total of 552 people responded to our survey, which asked Army personnel and families about their views on communication from the Army, MOD and AFF.

The key findings were:

- Families receive their information about Army families' issues from AFF and their serving partner
- Families want to receive information via their unit welfare team
- Information needs to be clear and accessible
- Families want information direct to them, using a variety of methods
- Spouses want to feel valued and included

The top three sources of information about Army families' issues were:

- 1) AFF (43%) 2) Serving partner (38%) 3) Other Army families (25%)**

Comments suggested that information from the Army and MOD can often be written in 'civil service/Army language', which uses language and acronyms that are difficult to understand; particularly for those whose first language is not English or whose reading skills are poor. Families want the language used to be aimed at families.

Whilst email was the top choice of how families would prefer to hear from the Army, MOD and AFF, social media was also a popular method of communication. However, some commented that they were concerned about the security of social media, with others highlighting that those who choose not to use social media could feel excluded.

Whilst face-to-face communication may not be the most important method of communication, families indicated it was an important element, with comments suggesting that this would help families to ask questions and engage with those making policy decisions that affect families.

## LISTENING TO OUR SERVICE CHILDREN SURVEY

In total 752 people responded to our survey, which asked Army personnel and their families about their views on the impact of Service life on Army children. The survey focused primarily on the experiences of parents and their perceptions of their children's experiences.

The results of the survey will contribute to the Service Children's Progression Alliance's wider programme which is investigating how to ensure that Service children's voices are heard, and that listening leads to action which helps them to succeed.

Key findings included:

- Army children are experiencing gaps in learning with a lack of consistent support, with nearly half (47%) of respondents stating that their child had experienced a gap in their learning, due to changing schools.
- Impact of Service life on children can result in significant difficulties with their wellbeing, with 69% of families reporting difficulties in making close friendships at a new posting and 78% saying their child had felt lonely or isolated due to a posting move.
- Effective use of the Service Pupil Premium is inconsistent, with 52% feeling that their school's use of the premium did not provide any effective support. Families reported that some schools used it well but there was a significant amount of concern that the funding was often absorbed into the main school budget with no targeted use for Service children.
- Service children can develop unique strengths as a result of Service life, including resilience, confidence, empathy for others, tolerance, adaptability and tenacity.
- Boarding and the provision of the Continuity of Education Allowance provides necessary mitigation to the impact of Service life on children.



# ONLINE PRESENCE

## AFF



Unique page views 195,028



Facebook followers: 8,212  
(increase of 274)



Twitter followers: 8,935  
(increase of 232)



Instagram followers: 1,238  
(increase of 209)

[aff.org.uk](http://aff.org.uk)

### TOP THREE MOST POPULAR WEBSITE ARTICLES:

1. **2 Apr:** New cohabitation rules - 1,654 unique views
2. **25 Jan:** Someday, your soldier will leave the Forces - 1,153 unique views
3. **14 Jan:** Brexit update for families - 1,059 unique views.

### MOST POPULAR FACEBOOK POSTS

- Social Media Spouses course applications open – 14,365 (May)
- Children’s Voice Survey post 1 – 12,849 (March)
- Children’s Voice Survey post 2 – 12,166 (March)
- New Co-habitation rules – 10,048 (April)

## ARMY&YOU



Top story: ‘Army kids’ a poem by 12-year-old Reece Stillie



Average monthly reach: 35,542



Top tweet - A&Y spring flyer promo on mental health featuring Kelly Holmes’ quote: 10,600 impressions



Instagram followers: up 13%

[armyandyou.co.uk](http://armyandyou.co.uk)



# CONTACTS

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army families federation

Army Families Federation is a charitable incorporated organisation registered in England and Wales with registered charity number 1176393 and a charity registered in Scotland with registered charity number SC048282 having its principal office at IDL 414, Floor 1, Zone 6, Ramillies Building, Marlborough Lines, Monxton Road, Andover SP11 8HJ

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