

aff

army families federation

ARMY FAMILIES' CONCERNS

2019



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SARA BAADE

2019 was another year where we saw an increase in enquiries at AFF, with a rise of 8% from 2018, taking the total to just over 13,500. Mobility is a key theme in many of our enquiries, with families seeking information, advice or support on issues resulting from the impact of postings, such as access to additional needs or mental health support, the ability to find school places, and spousal employment.

Employment and training enquiries have grown significantly, up 72% from last year. This is primarily due to our launch of the tri-service Forces Families Jobs spousal employment and training platform in September 2019, which has placed a spotlight on the key issue of spousal employment.

Education continues to be an area of growing interest, with a particular rise in enquiries about the Service Pupil Premium, which are up by 78%.

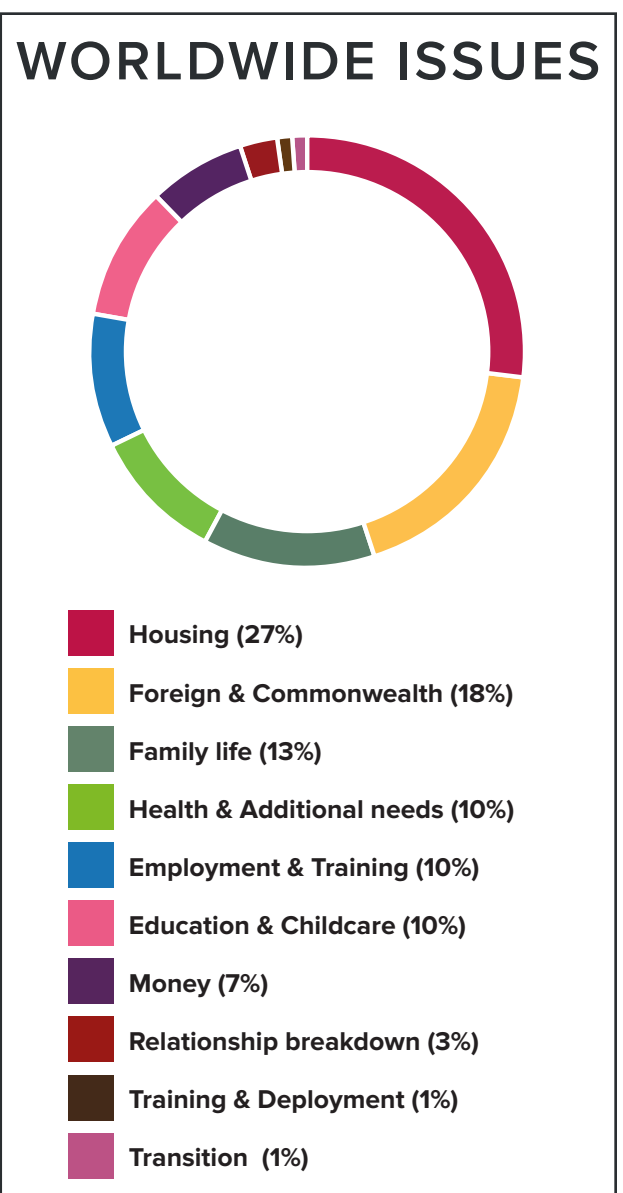
Following a significant increase in 2018, we are pleased to see a slight decrease in enquiries about relationship breakdown this year, which highlights that families have increased access to information and support at this challenging time.

As we move into a new decade, we will continue to support our families to ensure they can meet the challenges of modern army life.



NUMBER OF ENQUIRIES

Subject	2018	2019	% change
Housing	3,636	3,673	+1%
Foreign & Commonwealth	2,396	2,494	+4%
Family life	1,563	1,745	+12%
Health & Additional needs	1,343	1,363	+ 1%
Employment & Training	777	1,339	+72%
Education & Childcare	1,072	1,322	+23%
Money	998	929	-7%
Relationship breakdown	422	386	-9%
Training & Deployment	169	192	+14%
Transition	188	148	-21%
TOTAL	12,564	13,591	



This report outlines, statistically, the enquiries we have received during 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.

HOUSING

3,673 enquiries

Housing continues to be our most significant area of enquiry from families, making up 27% of the total in 2019.

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That's not much is it – it won't even touch the council tax!

Quote from a family regarding core allowance for home ownership under the FAM pilot.



ALLOCATION AND ENTITLEMENT

We have seen an 18% increase in enquiries in this area since 2018. The new policy allowing personnel in long-term relationships to apply to co-habit in surplus Service Family Accommodation (SFA) has prompted enquiries regarding eligibility and availability.

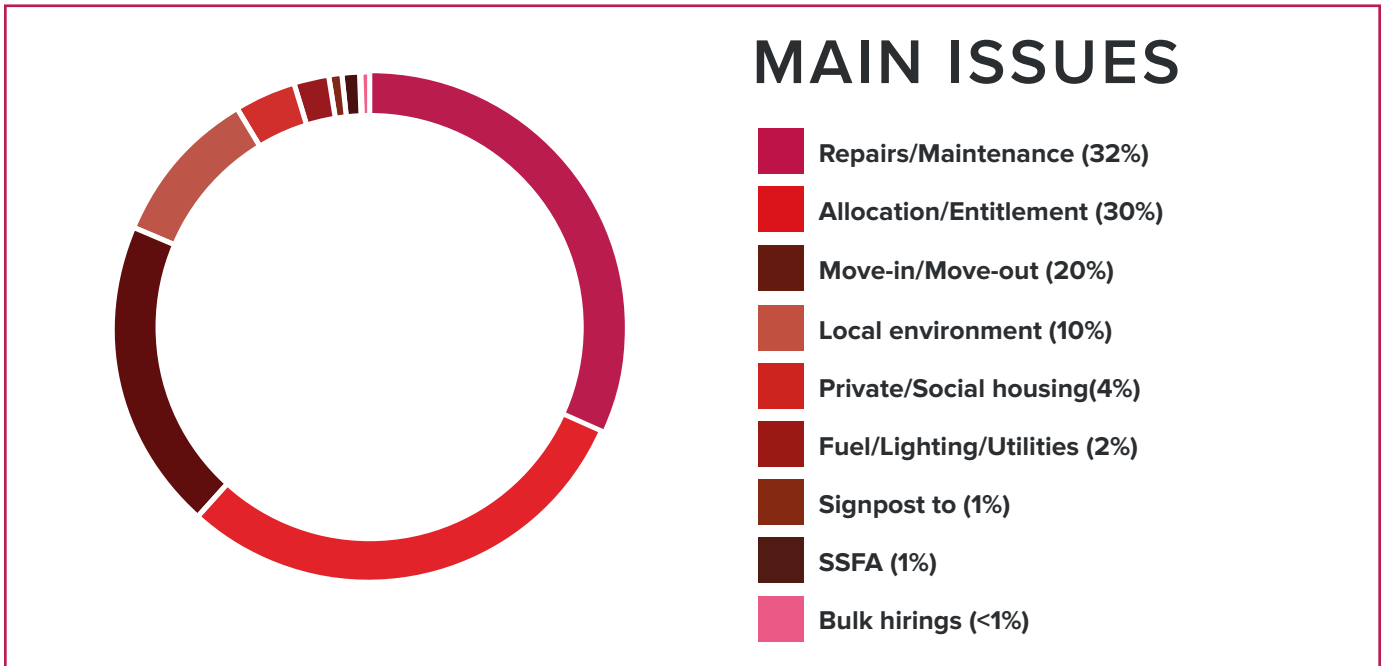
We continue to see more and more families contacting us about the Future Accommodation Model (FAM). Enquiries have ranged from questions about what FAM is, what support will be available for those living in their own homes, to how it will work with the mobile nature of army personnel.

MOVE-IN/MOVE-OUT

Move-in/move-out enquiries have increased 95% from last year and families are still reporting issues with cleanliness at move-in. This is partly due to localised issues, particularly connected to the significant amount of moves during rebasing.

There are two different views of cleanliness that emerge. Whilst Amey performance indicators consider the move-in a pass if any cleaning issues are resolved within 24 hours of move-in, the perception of families is that the move-in has failed if they have been given a dirty house on arrival.

This can be exacerbated if there are also minor repairs which have not been undertaken before the move-in appointment. These issues have been recognised by Amey, who are actively working to improve this service.



REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Although we are pleased to see a 9% drop in repairs and maintenance enquiries, this does remain the most significant area of our housing enquiries, with 1178 enquiries received. For families, a key source of frustration is where the issue cannot be resolved on the first appointment and we continue to see issues where there are complex cases, requiring multiple appointments or trades.



AFF IN ACTION

AFF has continued to raise concerns about poor cleanliness at move-in and complex cases and is pleased to see these are key priorities for Amey and being considered as part of the potential requirements for the new maintenance and repairs contract.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2020

Monitoring the impact of the FAM pilot in Aldershot on families.



FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH

2,494 enquiries

With the further recruitment of Foreign & Commonwealth personnel, we continue to see a significant demand for support from AFF for our Foreign & Commonwealth families, with AFF increasingly seen as the 'go-to' for any Foreign & Commonwealth issues or queries. We have seen an increase of 4% in enquiries since 2018 and this is our second largest area of enquiry this year.

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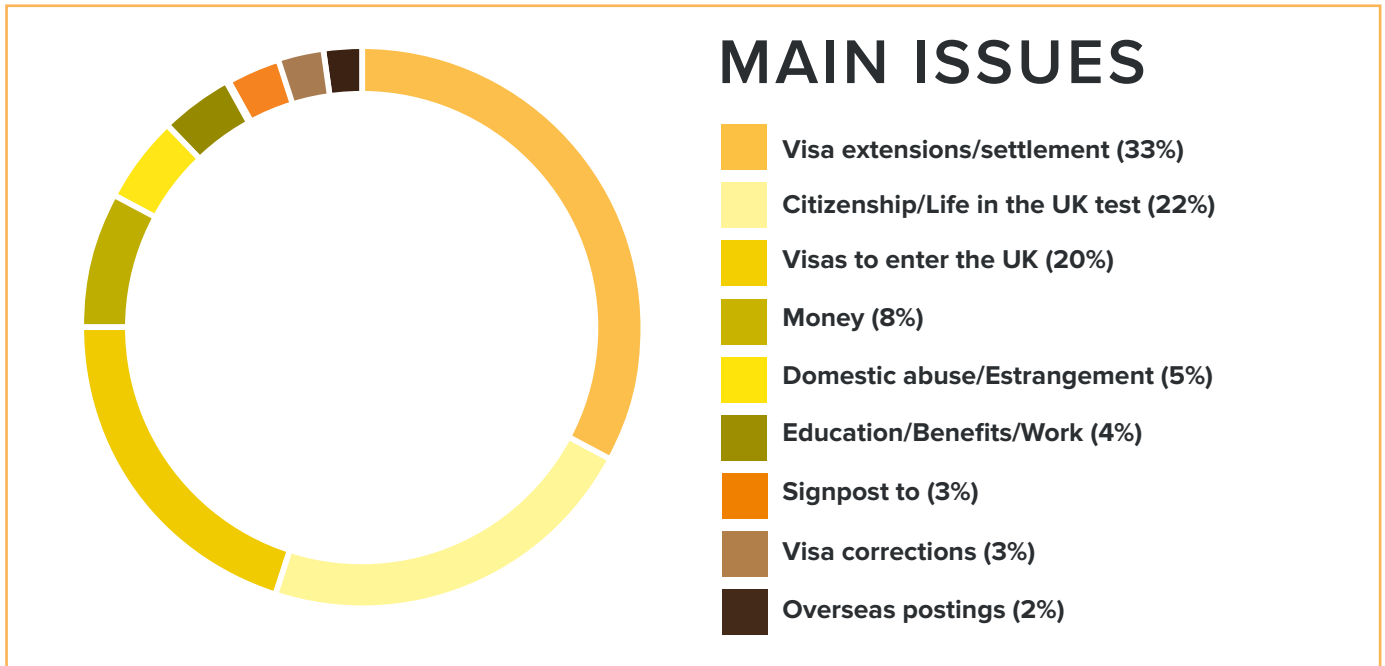
Honestly this whole process has really frustrated me to a point where I feel helpless. If I didn't have you fighting for me, I can't even imagine what would happen.

Quote from a family.



VISA EXTENSIONS/SETTLEMENT

We have seen a 45% increase in enquiries in this area. This is partly due to a general increase in enquiries about applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), as the cohort who were given a five-year visa under the new rules in 2014 become eligible to apply. We have also received enquiries on visa corrections from families not being issued five-year visas. This may be due to a lack of understanding from visa and immigration officials about the unique rules for the armed forces. AFF has also seen increasing referrals from other organisations regarding settlement on discharge and transition, particularly with regards to complex cases.



MONEY

We have seen a 50% reduction in money enquiries. This is partly due to a drop in enquiries about refunds for the immigration health surcharge, as the online application form to enter the UK has now been amended for armed forces families.

VISAS TO ENTER THE UK

Although we have had a 17% decrease in enquiries in this area, we believe that this may be temporary and that next year's enquiries will reflect the increase in recruitment. A number of our visa to enter enquiries are from personnel whose family members have been refused visa visits to the UK, as there is a presumption that their intention is to come to the UK to remain. This can result in wider family missing out on opportunities to see their children pass out from the army or visit after the birth of grandchildren, and is an issue that AFF continues to monitor.



AFF IN ACTION

AFF raised the issue of spouses based overseas having to return to the UK to collect their Biometric Residence Permits if they required corrections. A new system is now in place to allow the permits to be sent to Regional Command and then posted to their overseas locations.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2020

To continue to push for both greater information provision for Foreign & Commonwealth families at all stages – as recruits, personnel and on transition – and to ensure that units are able to support this cohort.



EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

1,322 enquiries

2019 has seen a significant 23% rise in enquiries about education and childcare from last year, following a 43% rise from 2017 to 2018.

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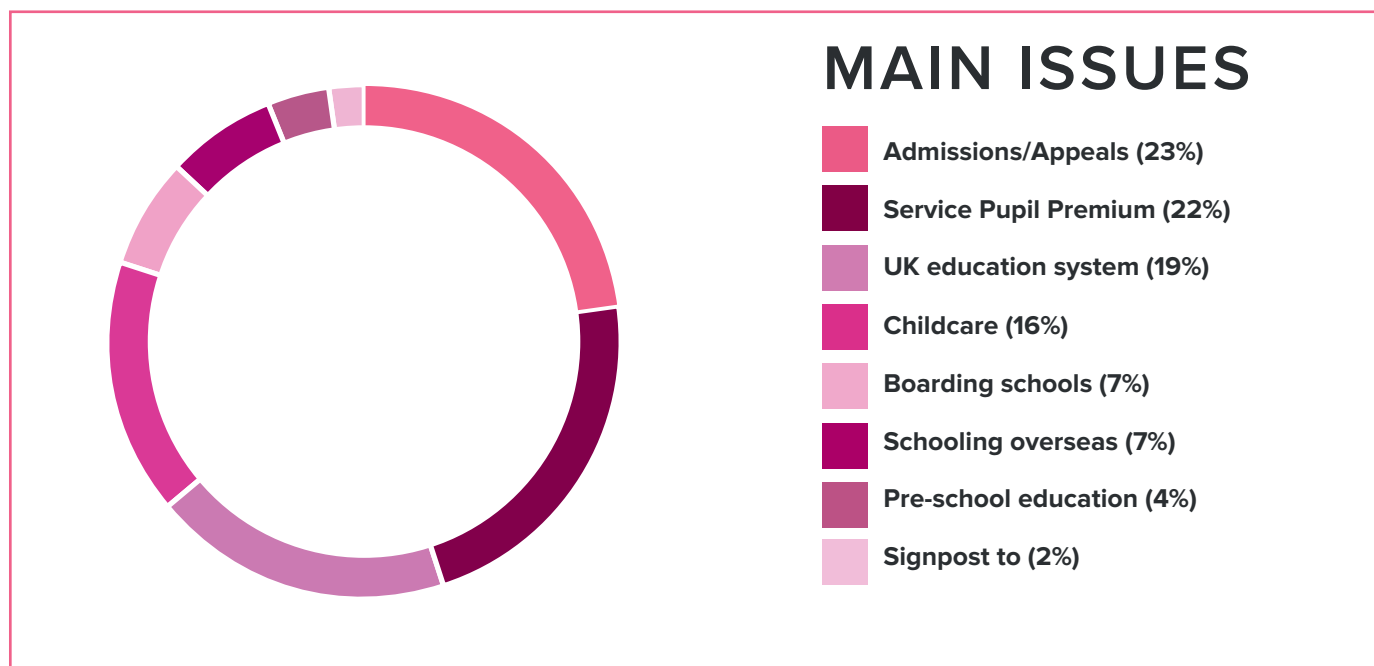
I am angry. I can't stop being angry. My children cry several times a week still. Our family is separated. We cannot get school places together, in the same county, let alone the same school.

Quote from a family.



SERVICE PUPIL PREMIUM

Enquiries about Service Pupil Premium rose 78% from 2018, and we received enquiries from both families and schools asking for support and guidance on how the premium should be spent. Families continue to express concern that the funding is not being used effectively to support service children, citing a lack of clarity in reporting from their school on how the funding is spent.



BOARDING SCHOOLS

We saw a rise in general enquiries about boarding schools in 2019. We received enquiries, not just from families, but also from education providers, who asked AFF about military families, including requesting advice on supporting military children whose serving parents are deployed.

Around a third of our military allowances enquiries concerned the Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA). Families continue to contact us about their eligibility for CEA, particularly when using the Forces Help to Buy scheme. We also saw a number of requests for clarification about the impact of separation and divorce on the eligibility for CEA.

AFF is increasingly asked for support on individual and complex CEA casework, particularly with families appealing against the removal of CEA. We continue to engage with the MOD and the army on this issue.

UK EDUCATION SYSTEM

We have seen a 59% rise in enquiries in this area, with families asking about school transport, home schooling and unauthorised absence.

Families have also contacted us about the impact of moving on their child's learning and also about the impact of a change of curriculum when moving between England and the devolved administrations or overseas. With the unique nature of army life resulting in frequent moves, this also affects our families with schools' admissions.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2020

Understanding more about families' views on the unique pressures of service life when accessing childcare.



EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

1,339 enquiries

The successful launch of AFF's spousal employment and training platform, Forces Families Jobs, with the other families' federations, has further ensured that spousal employment has been one of our key issues in 2019, with employment queries rising 72% from 2018.

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Brilliant website, full of information, not only for vacancies, but also training and support! It will be invaluable in the months leading up to our return to the UK!

Quote from a spouse.



FORCES FAMILIES JOBS

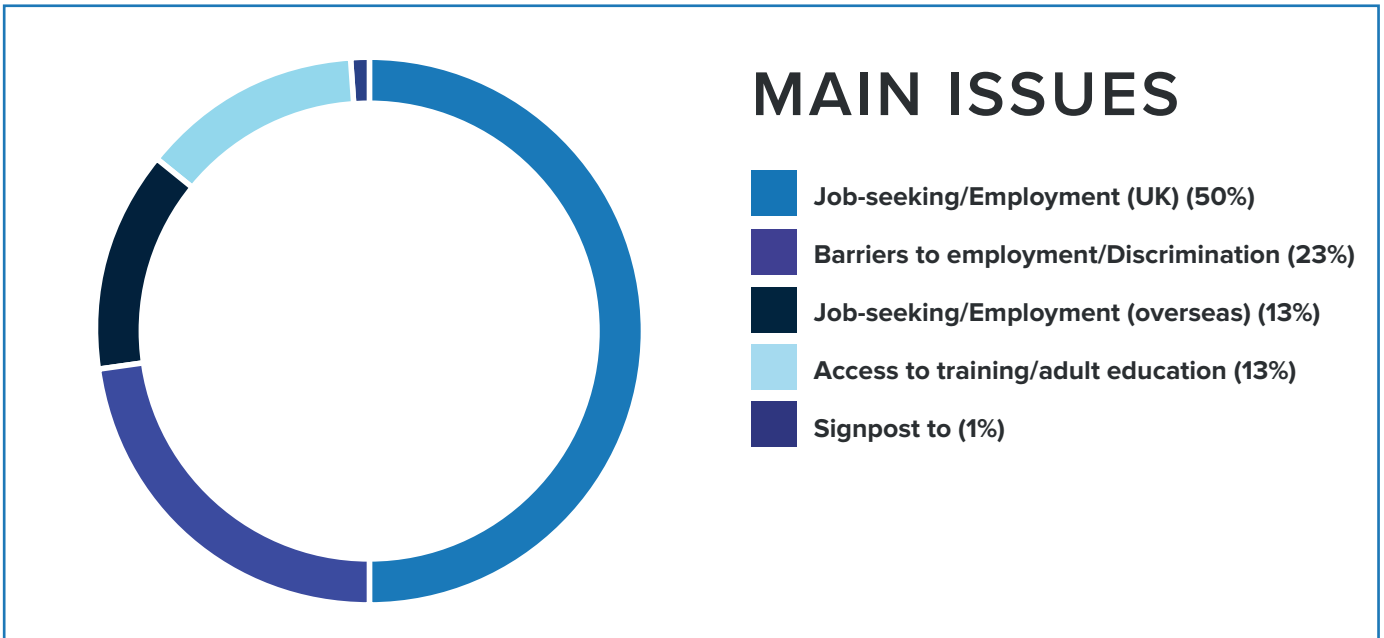
Forces Families Jobs successfully launched in September 2019. The tri-service employment and training platform now has more than 3,500 jobs listed, with more than 450 employers and 1,150 candidates signed up.

SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

We have seen a huge rise of 336% in enquiries about seeking employment in the UK and 77% overseas. This is predominantly linked to the establishment of Forces Families Jobs.

Families looked for support with preparing to seek employment, such as advice about CVs, applications, and confidence to return to work. They sought advice on gaining employment overseas, particularly with understanding the rules and limitations in some host countries. Families again raised the impact of frequent mobility on their careers.

The launch of Forces Families Jobs has also meant more employers have contacted us about signing the Armed Forces Covenant – a requirement to advertise jobs on the site.



BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Army spouses can face unique barriers to employment. This year, they have spoken to AFF about the difficulties of living in remote posting locations with few job opportunities and lack of transport, and the impact of deployment and training, which can limit the working hours and patterns they can undertake.

Maternity leave has been a significant issue raised to AFF this year, including spouses experiencing issues negotiating suitable working patterns when returning to work, as their serving partner is often away training or deployed. In addition, spouses have come to us with issues of having to pay back maternity pay, due to being posted away from their employer and being unable to return to work, despite intending to. AFF will continue to monitor this issue.



AFF IN ACTION

Forces Families Jobs was launched at the House of Lords in September 2019. The website provides employers, who are dedicated to supporting the serving community, with a platform to advertise jobs and training opportunities for our spouses. AFF is delighted to have been able to not just set up and deliver this on behalf of the community but also to have established funding partners and stakeholders to back the project.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2020

Monitor issues with maternity leave and pay to ensure that army spouses are not disadvantaged by service life.



HEALTH & ADDITIONAL NEEDS

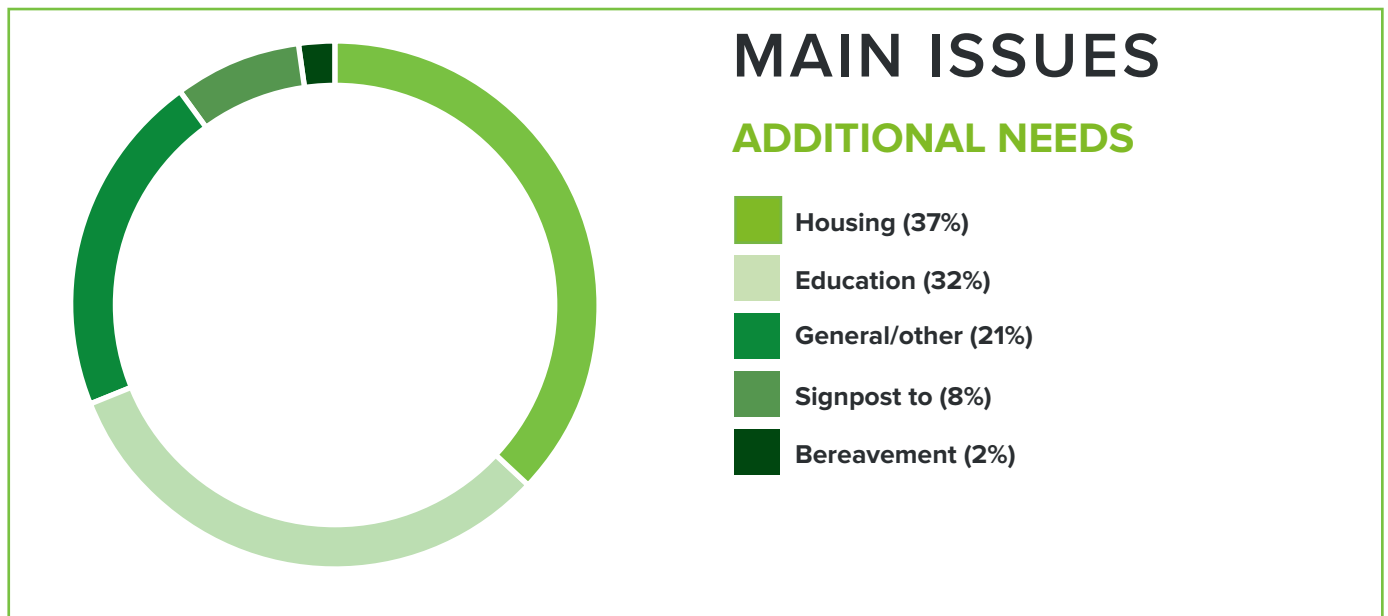
1,363 enquiries

We have seen a rise of 4% in health enquiries in 2019, and a drop of 1% in enquiries into additional needs.

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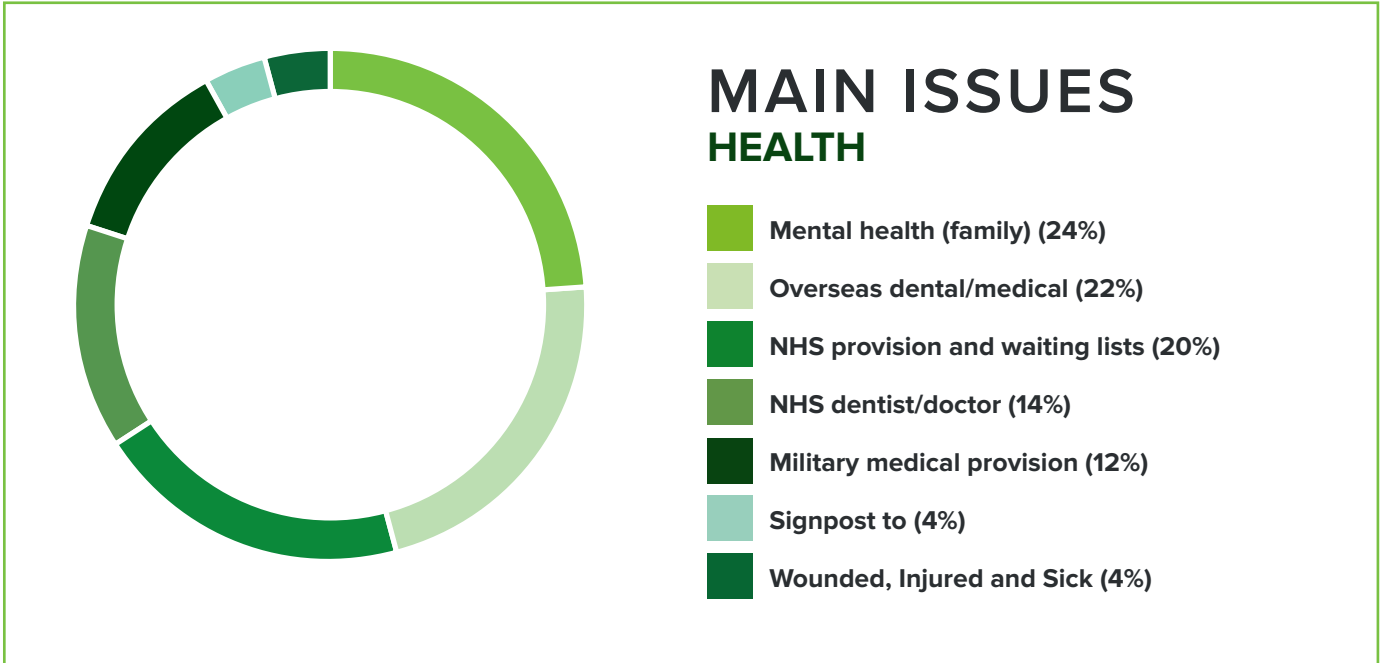
I have chased up doctors, GPs, GP assistants, health visitors, paediatric secretary, been transferred from one person to the next ..all to no avail. I feel I have exhausted all routes and spoken to everyone I could possibly speak to. Which is why I've now come to you hoping that you could direct me somewhere, help me in some way.”

Quote from a family.



HOUSING FOR FAMILIES WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Housing was our top issue for families with additional needs, with 255 enquiries received, making up 37% of additional needs enquiries. Families have contacted AFF about retaining SFA on medical grounds, as well as delays in suitable properties being available and necessary works being completed. This has led to a small rise in enquiries since last year.



EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR ADDITIONAL NEEDS

More than 200 families have sought advice about obtaining support for their child with additional needs, often highlighting the difficulties in doing so. For army families, postings (particularly short-notice ones) and mobility can exacerbate these difficulties, with families raising concerns about delays in receiving their Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP), transferring support and accessing transport.

FAMILIES' MENTAL HEALTH

AFF has seen a 40% increase in enquiries about mental health, with families continuing to raise issues about the impact of postings on transferring mental health support and significant delays in accessing Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support for their children. Families also raised wider issues of feeling isolated and the impact of separation and deployment on their health.

AFF IN ACTION



1. AFF has received funding from Aspire to support families' additional needs groups in Aldershot and the Salisbury Plain area in 2020. Following our successful inaugural additional needs study day in 2018, Aspire has also funded a study day for professionals and policy makers to discuss how army families with additional needs can best be supported.
2. AFF has consistently raised issues of the impact of mobility on continuity of healthcare for families, which are now being considered by the NHS England improvement and engagement project.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2020

To ensure families' evidence is fed into the NHS England improvement and engagement project.



Karen Ross | 07552 861 983 | additionalneeds@aff.org.uk



MONEY & ALLOWANCES

929 enquiries

We saw a small drop in money and allowances enquiries in 2019. However, we did not run a dedicated money issues awareness month last year.

“

I contacted DWP to ask if I could now claim Jobseeker's Allowance until I get a job. I have been told I am not entitled as I have moved to British Forces Cyprus. I am left flabbergasted that I can work my absolute socks off for Defence in Germany, pay all my contributions as I would if I was in UK for 9 years, and now I can't apply for financial help whilst I am out of work.

Quote from a family.



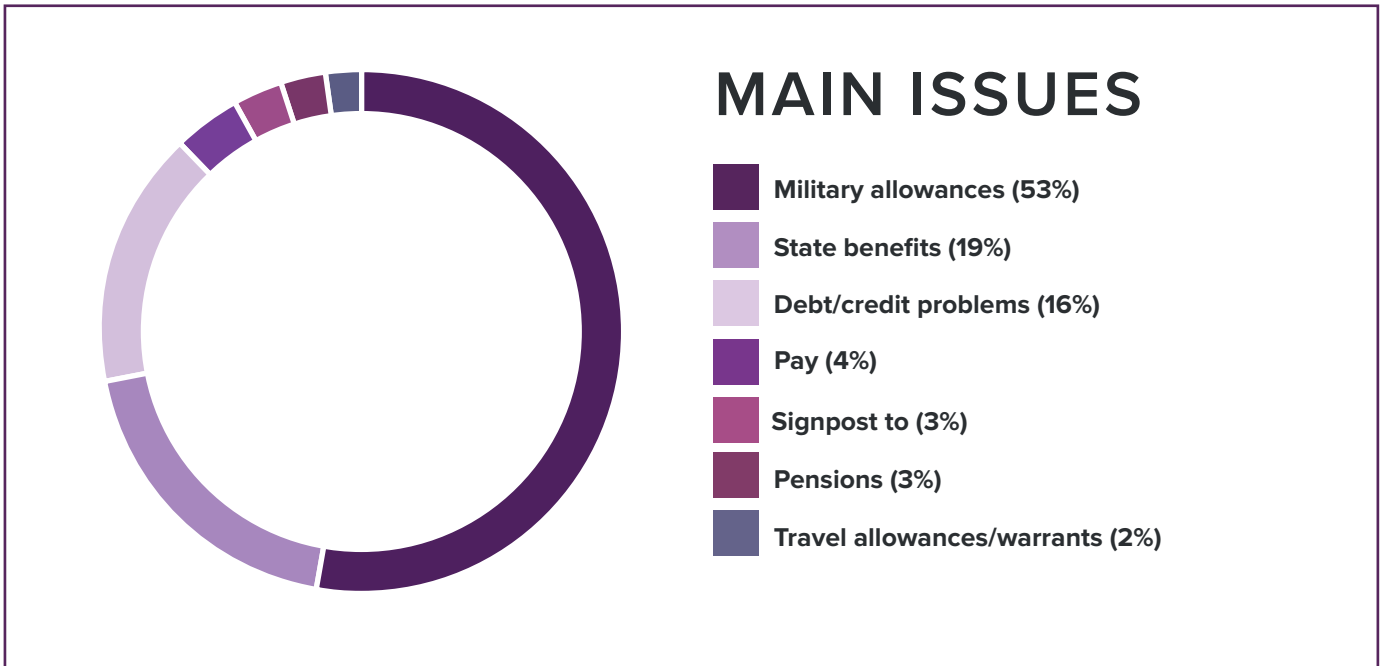
MILITARY ALLOWANCES

Military allowances remained the top area for money and allowances enquiries in 2019. Forces Help to Buy was a key area of enquiry, prompted by the announcement of the extension of the scheme until 2022. Other housing-related issues, such as removals and disturbance expense, were also raised.

As indicated in the education and childcare section, around a third of our enquiries concerned the Continuity of Education Allowance.

STATE BENEFITS

AFF has seen a rise in enquiries about state benefits, from 89 in 2018 to 172 in 2019. Issues raised by families include the impact of Universal Credit when claiming help with housing costs, difficulties with claiming benefits when moving to and from overseas, and information on claiming National Insurance credits for spouses.



DEBT/CREDIT PROBLEMS

We have seen a small decrease in these enquiries from the previous year. Enquiries connected to owning a property are recorded under this category and we continue to receive queries concerning mortgages, higher rate stamp duty, and buy-to-let tax regulations. Families have also sought advice about child maintenance issues.



AFF IN ACTION

When Barclays announced that it had decided to no longer allow its customers to withdraw cash from post offices, we were concerned about the impact on our families who are posted overseas who often rely on this facility. AFF met Barclays and outlined the issues and impact for army families and were delighted when Barclays subsequently reversed its decision, allowing our families to access their accounts when living overseas.



AFF IN ACTION

We appointed a dedicated Money & Allowances Specialist in 2019, which will allow AFF to provide greater support to families on financial issues.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2020

Ensuring that families are fully informed of the changes to the benefits system and the arrangements that are in place for military families.



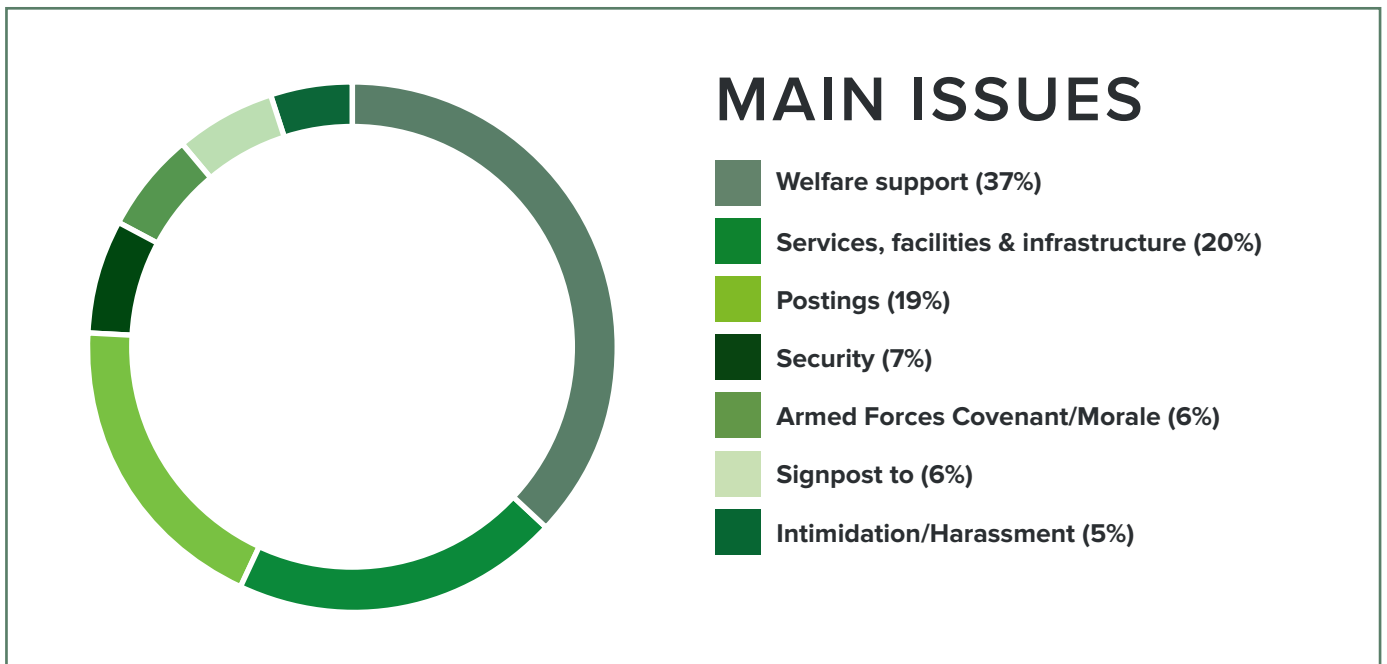
Claire Hallam | 07593 130 364 | moneyspecialist@aff.org.uk



FAMILY LIFE

1,745 enquiries

Family life enquiries have risen 12% since 2018. This covers more general issues of family life, such as impact of postings, security issues, morale and welfare support.



WELFARE SUPPORT

Welfare support enquiries have increased by 79% since last year. This is partly due to AFF's engagement with families about welfare provision, as part of the army's welfare review where we sought families' views on the positives and challenges of their welfare support. Families also raised issues with us about the lack of provision of activities and events, especially when some roles are gapped; as well as concerns about confidentiality and approachability of welfare staff.

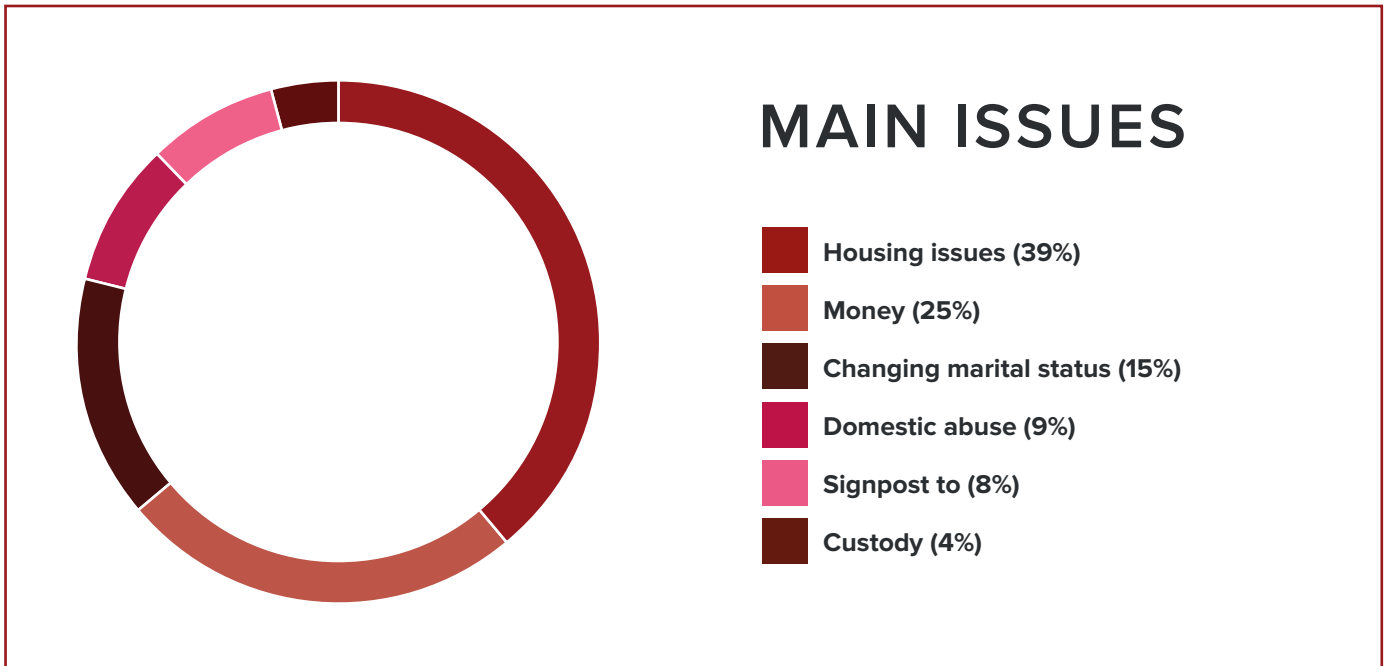
SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

This remains our second largest area of family life enquiry. The recent general election led to queries about voting overseas, and we also received enquiries about the difficulty of accessing transport in remote locations, and issues with the BFPO service.

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

386 enquiries

AFF has seen a small drop in enquiries on relationship breakdown. Housing remains the top area of enquiry. Families contacted AFF to better understand the process of separation when married to someone in the army, issues with custody arrangements, and for support with domestic abuse issues.



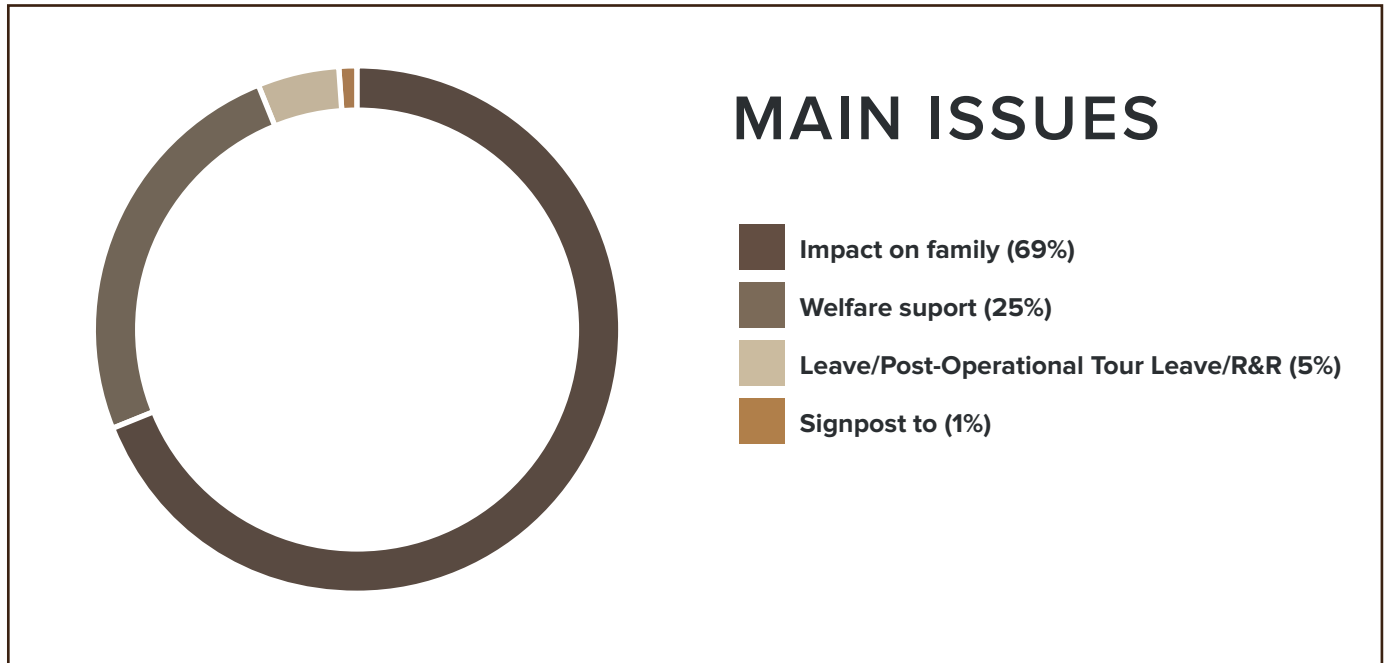
AFF IN ACTION

AFF remains concerned that the service person is able to change their personal status category without notifying their spouse. This can lead to the spouse only discovering that their partner has decided to leave them by receiving the three months' notice to vacate their SFA. We have raised this with the army who are investigating how spouses can be better supported at this difficult time.

TRAINING & DEPLOYMENT

192 enquiries

Our training and deployment enquiries remain broadly unchanged from 2018.



IMPACT ON FAMILY

Impact on the family remains the top area of concern for families contacting us about training and deployment. Issues include feeling isolated and lonely, with families talking about their lives being on hold whilst their serving partner is away. They also spoke about the difficulties of dealing with the uncertainty of a deployment and the impact on their children of the separation.



AFF IN ACTION

In response to our enquiries about separation, whether through training and deployment or through living unaccompanied, the Army&You spring edition is focused on the support available during separation.

FORCES FAMILIES JOBS

“

This is a fantastic resource, especially for those of us who are facing another relocation to an area we know nothing about or even where to start looking for jobs. The site is a great addition to the support currently provided by the Armed Forces Covenant.

Quote from a spouse



The tri-service 'one-stop-shop' website, Forces Families Jobs (FFJ), launched in September 2019, providing free access to employment and training opportunities to families in the UK's armed forces.

The platform is a result of tri-service research, commissioned by the Army Families Federation and conducted by Warwick Institute for Employment Research. This resulted in a key recommendation to create a central portal for employment and training opportunities for military spouses and family members.

Families can apply for jobs with organisations who are forces family friendly.

Employers who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant are able to use FFJ to promote their job vacancies for free. Training providers who offer discounted or free courses for the military community can also advertise on the site.

ONLINE PRESENCE

AFF

aff.org.uk



Website unique views: 366,973
(unique visitors up 39% on 2018)



Facebook followers: 8,809
(increase of 984)



Twitter followers: 9,141
(increase of 496)



Instagram followers: 1,680
(increase of 653)

TOP THREE MOST POPULAR WEBSITE ARTICLES:

1. **2 Apr:** New cohabitation rules - 2,869 unique views
2. **25 Jan:** Someday, your soldier will leave the Forces - 1,449 unique views
3. **3 Apr:** FAM pilot area announced - 1,180 unique views.

MOST POPULAR FACEBOOK POSTS

- Forces Families Jobs launch video: 23,509 (Sept)
- FFJ teaser video: 18,305 (Aug)
- Social Media Spouses applications open: 14,581 (May)
- Children's Voice Survey post 2: 13,447 (March)

ARMY&YOU

armyandyou.co.uk



Top story: Harry & Meghan's visit to Windsor



Average of 29,813 impressions per month



Facebook reach total 346,413



Instagram followers: up 28%



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army families federation

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