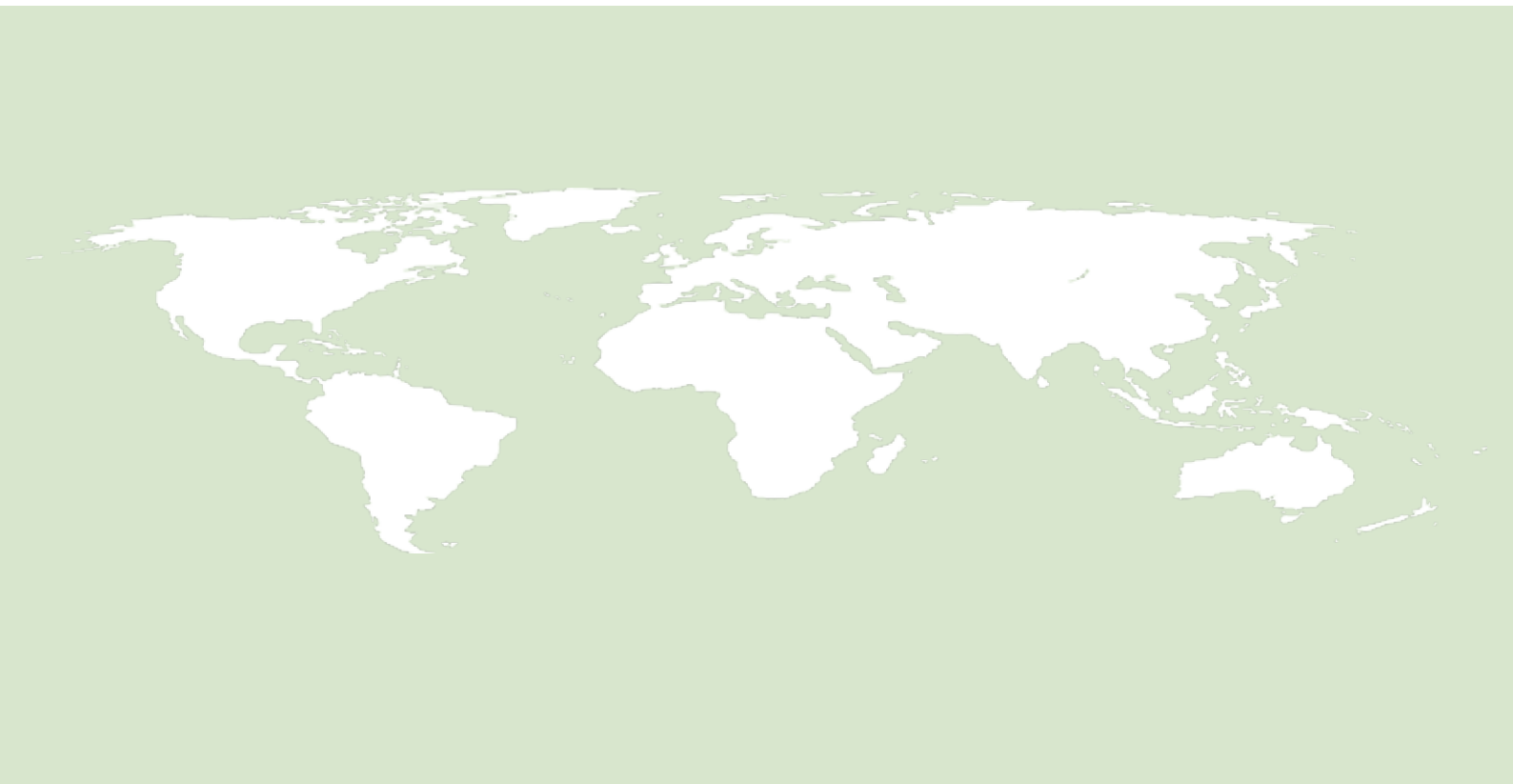


aff

army families federation

**ARMY FAMILIES'
CONCERNS 2020**



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE, COLLETTE MUSGRAVE

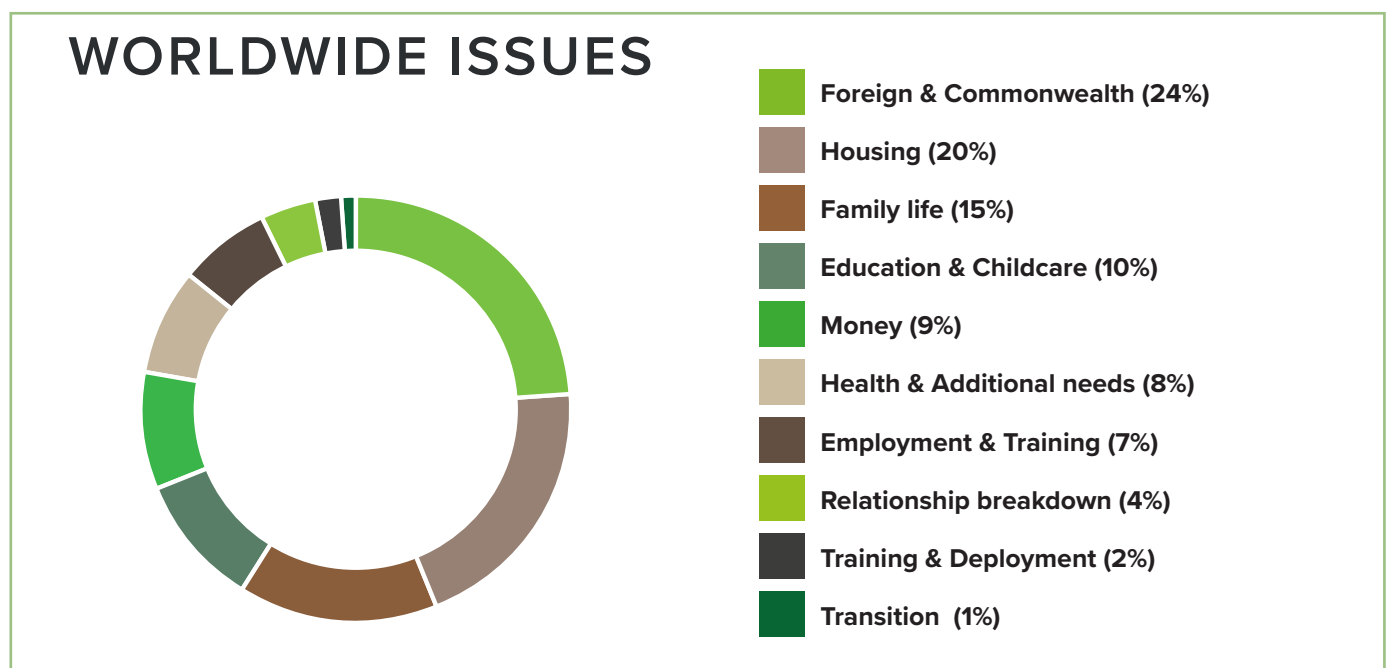
2020 was a very challenging year for all families, and for Army families, COVID-19 has brought unique issues. Whether juggling home schooling and managing in lockdown with their serving partner deployed overseas, having their move postponed due to the assignment freeze, or with their Service person away supporting the Army's contribution to the COVID-19 effort, Army families have dealt with much change and challenge.

This has also been a year of change for AFF. We have carefully considered how we can best support our families, leading to a restructure of our England team and an enhancement of our housing, education and health provision, as well as some additional virtual support to increase our availability to families via email, telephone and through social media. We have also seen a change in Chief Executive and I was delighted to take on the role in November 2020.



As you will see in this report, we have also seen a change to how we record and report the issues families raise with us. We have been able to introduce a new database, which allows us to more efficiently and effectively record enquiries from our families. This has led us to review the categories we report under, which will allow our evidence to be even more robust and insightful.

The final change is that of how families gain support from us. Although the number of enquiries has dropped since 2019 due to a reduction in local face-to-face engagement, we have seen families engage more through our social media and website to find the information and support they need, with an 8% rise in unique website views and a 14% rise in Facebook followers from 2019. AFF will continue to consider the changing needs of our families and how best we can support them, throughout the challenges posed by COVID-19 and beyond.



This report outlines, statistically, the enquiries we have received in 2020. It breaks down the different areas of enquiry to show the scale of our families' concerns. 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.

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH

Enquiries
in 2020:
2,723

Katherine Houlston,
Sarah Drapper, Amy Pearson
fcsupport@aff.org.uk

We have seen an increase of 9% in enquiries, following a 4% rise in 2019, with Foreign & Commonwealth enquiries making up nearly a quarter of AFF's enquiries in 2020. The increasing demand for support for Foreign & Commonwealth families comes from both families and the chain of command.



OVERSEAS VISAS

Foreign & Commonwealth families based overseas have contacted AFF with regards to difficulties in renewing or applying for visas. The current Home Office procedures do not allow biometric residence permits to be sent to families assigned overseas, leaving them without a valid visa. In addition, we are aware of families overseas facing difficulties due to the requirement to undertake a Life in the UK test to be able to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain, which is only available in Cyprus and the UK. This means families in other overseas locations cannot apply or have to travel back to the UK at their own expense to take the test.

This has a number of significant impacts on the family member, including being unable to travel at short notice for medical or welfare emergencies, or assignments, and possible longer-term impacts on their route to settlement if the visa is allowed to expire. In some cases, this has led to some spouses choosing to return to the UK at their own expense to collect their permit. This has been particularly challenging during COVID-19, where a return to the UK has not been an option.

AFF has repeatedly raised this issue with the chain of command, MOD and Home Office but there remains a lack of guidance for families and units on how to apply for visas on an overseas assignment.

MINIMUM INCOME REQUIREMENT

AFF continues to receive a significant number of enquiries regarding the Minimum Income Requirement rules. These enquiries come not just from personnel and their families but also units and initial trade training establishments. AFF has continued to provide briefings to units to assist personnel in understanding these regulations and would like to see changes to the recruitment processes to ensure that new recruits sign to confirm they understand the implications of these Government-implemented rules.

"Why do they make it so hard, in the British Army doesn't family come first? Our men and women of the Commonwealth leave their families to come and join the British Army, they leave loved ones, wives, and children back home.... Families are meant to be together. Can't the military do something about it?"

Quote from a family about the Minimum Income Requirement

VISA ERRORS

We continue to support families with difficulties caused by visa errors, with families applying via civilian immigration rules, rather than the Armed Forces pathway. AFF has continued to urge UK Visas & Immigration to include a direct link to the Armed Forces application form on its website to ensure families follow the correct pathway.

AFF also continues to see issues with families incorrectly paying the immigration health surcharge, from which Armed Forces families are exempt. Correcting these inaccuracies and securing refunds for families has been a considerable source of work for AFF's Foreign & Commonwealth team.



AFF IMPACT

AFF was aware of a number of families who had incorrectly paid the immigration health surcharge. AFF's F&C team worked hard to find a contact at UK Visas & Immigration to assist these families and was able to gain back around £14,000 in refunds for a number of F&C families.



AFF EXTRA

Foreign & Commonwealth Assistants Sarah Drapper and Amy Pearson achieved their OISC Level 1 qualification, further enhancing the professional qualifications of the Foreign & Commonwealth team.

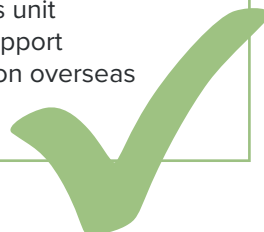


AFF EXTRA

Thanks to a grant from the Lloyd's Patriotic Fund, our Foreign & Commonwealth team will continue to offer a bespoke immigration service, across all three services, to support F&C spouses and partners who are leaving abusive relationships.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2021

Ensuring that a new overseas section of the Army's unit guide, which provides advice to units on how to support Foreign & Commonwealth personnel and families on overseas assignments, is produced as a priority.



HOUSING

Housing continues to be a significant source of enquiries for AFF, making up a fifth of AFF's enquiries in 2020.

Enquiries
in 2020:
2,259

Cat Calder, Becky Green
07901 778948
hosingsupport@aff.org.uk

ALLOCATION

Although there has been a reduction in allocations enquiries since 2019, this follows an 18% rise between 2018 and 2019. It was the most significant area of housing enquiries in 2020. This is predominantly due to the significant spike in enquiries during the first COVID-19 lockdown, where families sought advice and information from AFF following the impact of the assignment freeze on the allocation of Service Family Accommodation (SFA).

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

We are pleased to see a reduction in repairs and maintenance issues being brought to AFF. Whilst some families are still experiencing some significant issues, we are pleased that, generally, the repairs service was seen to cope well during the first lockdown, with arrangements in place to ensure the safety of both families and operatives, whilst helpdesk staff simultaneously moved to home working.

MOVE-IN, MOVE-OUT

Enquiries related to moving in and out of SFA were the third largest area of enquiry in 2020. We saw a particular rise during the assignment freeze with families seeking information on whether their move-in would go ahead, as well as needing support with the delay to moving out, which affected their finances and house purchases.



AFF EXTRA

AFF ran our Big Survey in October and November 2020 with a focus on the Future Accommodation Model, seeking views both from families in Aldershot on their experiences within the FAM pilot area, as well as from all families on their wider views on FAM. This evidence is crucial to ensuring that Army families' views and evidence are heard by key decision makers.

AFF EXTRA

We have enhanced our housing support with the appointment of a housing assistant, Becky Green, in November 2020.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2021

To continue to work with the Future Defence Infrastructure Services team to ensure that the new maintenance contract is fit for purpose and will provide families with the support they need going forward.



"It does seem that FAM is heavily biased towards the unmarried, junior Service person, who would not have otherwise had access to SFA, rather than addressing the needs of the committed, ten-year-plus Service person who may have already faced significant locational turmoil throughout their career."

Quote from a family

EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

Enquiries
in 2020:
1,075

Anna Hutchinson, Alison
McLeish 07557 977290
educationsupport@aff.org.uk

CHILDCARE

AFF has seen a rise in enquiries regarding childcare, with our childcare survey highlighting many of the issues Army families face when accessing providers. These included the serving person not being able to regularly support with childcare, the lack of informal family support due to being posted away from family, and the impact of frequent postings on gaining a place at a new setting. Families have contacted us about difficulties accessing funded hours when moving between areas, often finding places limited. We have also seen enquiries regarding the options overseas, particularly with accessing MOD childcare allowances and funded hours.

SERVICE PUPIL PREMIUM

We continue to see both families and schools seeking advice about how the Service Pupil Premium can be best used to support their children in England, with concerns expressed by families about how their school is utilising the funding. This also presents an issue for those families moving between the devolved administrations. AFF is working closely with the Directorate Children and Young People and the other Families Federations to produce comprehensive and helpful advice for families and schools.

ADMISSIONS AND APPEALS

Securing a school place often places additional pressure on Army families, due to frequent moves and the requirement for in-year transfers, resulting in families seeking advice and support from AFF. Families experience difficulties when moving to an area where there are limited school places and they are allocated a school a considerable distance from their home or siblings are placed in different schools. In addition, families have sought support with understanding how to make a late application for the standard reception and secondary places due to posting decisions.



AFF EXTRA

We have enhanced our education support with the appointment of an education and health assistant, Alison McLeish, in November 2020.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2021

Following the results of our childcare survey in 2020, to continue to further investigate any gaps in or issues with provision, including monitoring of the Wraparound Childcare pilot.



“Childcare is not at the forefront of the military mindset. I feel that the military believe that, as the spouse of the military, we should be the ones looking after the child, sacrificing our careers, there is no provision from the military for the working spouse.”

Quote from a family

MONEY & ALLOWANCES

Enquiries
in 2020:
1,062

Claire Hallam
07593 130364
money@aff.org.uk



We have seen a 14% rise in money and allowances enquiries since 2019. The creation of the new Money & Allowances Specialist role has allowed AFF to better support families with these key issues in 2020.

CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION ALLOWANCE (CEA)

We saw a significant number of enquiries and work relating to the impact of COVID-19 on families with children at boarding school and boarding-related allowances. AFF worked closely with the Army and MOD to highlight the issues faced by these families and ensured that their concerns were considered. This was crucial in ensuring that families received timely and accessible information regarding policy changes.

LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS ALLOWANCES

With more Army families registering as being in established long-term relationships, we have seen enquiries from these families regarding their entitlement to allowances. AFF highlighted the conflict between differing policy on this issue and worked with the Army to clarify the guidance for families.

ACCESSING PRODUCTS AND INFORMATION OVERSEAS

Families posted overseas have contacted AFF outlining their difficulties with accessing financial products, such as mortgages, or information on financial issues such as whether they can claim state benefits. We will work to better understand these issues and identify whether these families face disadvantage which could be improved by the Armed Forces Covenant.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2021

To continue to highlight issues with long-term relationships allowance policy and ensure families are provided with clear information.



“When I contacted my bank for the closure of my Help to Buy ISA account to claim the bonus for purchasing the house, they told me that I need to be physically present at the bank to close the account. It is impossible for me to go to the branch as I am posted overseas.”

Quote from a family

HEALTH & ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Enquiries
in 2020:
927

Karen Ross, Alison McLeish
07557 977290
healthsupport@aff.org.uk



2020 has been an important year for health and additional needs, with AFF working closely with the NHS to highlight the unique health issues faced by Army families.

HEALTHCARE

AFF continues to receive enquiries from families who experience issues transferring their waiting list places on posting, affecting their continuity of healthcare. Families have also contacted us regarding the significant waiting time to receive an assessment for children who may have additional needs.

We worked closely with the NHS as they undertook an engagement project with Armed Forces families, exploring how they can improve health and wellbeing support for them. We look forward to collaborating on how best to support families in the future once the findings are confirmed.

HOUSING

Housing remains our top issue for families with additional needs. Families continue to contact us regarding retaining SFA on medical grounds and adaptations to housing. We have also received enquiries asking for support in requesting mid-tour moves on educational and medical grounds, as well as housing entitlement for families considering fostering.

EDUCATION

Families continue to experience issues with obtaining educational support for their children with additional needs, particularly when moving postings and educational settings. AFF is concerned at the lack of special educational needs school places, resulting in Army children being out of school for long periods when moving to a new local authority.



AFF IMPACT

AFF's Health and Additional Needs Specialist successfully assisted a spouse who is an essential wheelchair user to get the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to fund the dropping of some of the kerbs on her camp, to allow her access to key venues.



AFF EXTRA

We have enhanced our health support with the appointment of an education and health assistant, Alison McLeish, in November 2020.

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2021

To identify the key issues that families face in accessing healthcare due to frequent mobility.



"We don't want to come across as if we feel entitled. We honestly don't. I think it's the case of when you have additional needs, we just want to make things as easy for our family as possible. We aren't very good at asking for things because it always seems that we are focusing on the problems and honestly, I feel like we become THE PROBLEM family. It's not a nice way to feel."

Quote from a family

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

Spousal employment remains a key issue for Army families, particularly as we continue to develop our Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) employment and training platform.

Enquiries
in 2020:
731

Jenna Richardson
07799 045955
employment@aff.org.uk



MATERNITY LEAVE

Spouses have reported that they are missing out on additional maternity pay packages, due to their Service person being posted out of their current area and the spouse therefore being unable to return to work after maternity leave.

AFF has established that this often affects teachers and nurses. We have therefore been actively working with NHS trusts and have secured some positive outcomes for NHS staff in this position. However, as many schools are now academies, this has meant that the relevant local authority has been unable to assist spouses who are teachers and highlighted that each school operates as a business, which is often not a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant. AFF will continue to work with the MOD Covenant team to identify and address this issue.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

We are aware of ongoing enquiries from spouses and adult children struggling to access student finance, due to the location of their Service person when they joined the Army. This is particularly complex when a spouse or child wishes to undertake a course in one nation or devolved administration, when the Service person joined the Army in another. AFF has highlighted this issue to the devolved administrations and we are working closely to better understand the issues.

LACK OF FUNDING SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OVERSEAS

AFF has received enquiries from spouses who have found it difficult to access funding for courses when posted overseas, which would be free to them if they lived in the UK. Given that employment opportunities are limited in many overseas locations, an overseas posting often offers an ideal opportunity for these spouses to engage in personal development opportunities but they are only eligible for funding if the course is studied in the UK. AFF has raised this issue with the MOD Covenant Team and we are working to ensure spouses do not have their opportunities limited due to overseas postings.



AFF IMPACT

Our Employment & Training Specialist highlighted the difficulties spouses had when applying for university places and how these challenges are different from Service children. She liaised with UCAS about the lack of clear information on its website and has worked with UCAS to amend its website to include clearer information for Armed Forces spouses.



AFF EXTRA

In July 2020, AFF was awarded Gold level in the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme, highlighting AFF's role as an employer in going the extra mile to support Army families with their employment.

"When I returned from an overseas posting with my family, I assumed that being returned to the bottom of the pay scale was a negative thing about being a military wife that I would just have to accept. AFF helped me to contact people in my organisation who successfully challenged that policy, and I was placed back at my rightful pay grade."

Quote from a family

KEY PRIORITY FOR 2021

To work with the MOD Covenant team, devolved administrations, student finance teams and universities to establish and provide clarity to students from the Armed Forces community about the nuances of student funding across the devolved administrations.



FAMILY LIFE

Enquiries
in 2020:
1,631

POSTINGS

The highest number of enquiries we received in this area was about postings, with families seeking advice and support from our local teams on their forthcoming or potential posting. Families moving overseas often require additional information and support and we would welcome continued improvement of availability of information for families posted overseas.

WELFARE SUPPORT

Families contacted AFF with their concerns about welfare support during the initial lockdown, particularly with queries regarding some of the unique elements of Army life during COVID-19, such as whether they could form a support bubble with other military families with their serving partner deployed.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

AFF saw a rise in enquiries during the initial lockdown from families expressing concern about neighbours not socially distancing or maintaining the lockdown rules.

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

Enquiries
in 2020:
437

We have seen a 13% rise in relationship breakdown enquiries since 2019.

AFF ran a themed month in January 2020 to help support Army families with the navigation of the Army system when separating, including information on how long a spouse could remain in SFA and entitlements to removals.

TRAINING & DEPLOYMENT

Enquiries
in 2020:
247

We have seen a 29% increase in enquiries about training and deployment.

Families contacted us during the initial lockdown with queries about the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions with their serving partner deployed. This included queries about whether deployments would go ahead, whether R&R was permitted, and support for families; such as seeking advice on who could care for their other children whilst the pregnant spouse gave birth in hospital, as the lockdown prevented different households mixing.

SPOTLIGHT ON OVERSEAS FAMILIES



Esther Thomas & the overseas team

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 an isolated location.

AFF provides virtual support to Army families on defence engagement assignments across the globe in addition to having Regional Leads covering specifically Kenya, Cyprus, Canada, Germany and EJSU-supported locations.

POSTING OVERSEAS DURING COVID-19

With COVID-19-related enquiries starting in the overseas space earlier than in the UK, it has been an extremely challenging year for families overseas and continues to remain so. AFF has seen enquiries due to life in host nations being severely restricted, and issues with the travel to and from the UK to support dependents at school or university in the UK.

Families have indicated that, for many of them, the attractions of an overseas postings have diminished dramatically during the pandemic.

AFF continues to push for timely and appropriate communication to families regarding the challenges they face as a direct result of COVID-19.



AFF EXTRA

When families were evacuated at short notice from Kenya to the UK during the first lockdown, AFF worked closely with the chain of command to help secure a much-needed package of welfare support for these families.

BREXIT

Throughout the EU transition period, AFF continued to receive enquiries relating to many different aspects of being assigned to an EU country post-Brexit. As a result, we have established an informative webpage and actively pushed for improved communication from local commands as to how new rules will impact on those assigned to EU countries. These include issues relating to new employment regulations in host nations and ongoing entitlement to what reciprocal EU state benefits remain.

EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCES

AFF has seen a rise in the number of spouses and partners looking to become self-employed or work overseas for a UK firm, whilst accompanying their serving partner on an overseas posting. We continue to work with other employment support organisations to aid the growth of self-employment overseas and will continue to publicise FFJ vacancies and online training overseas.

Families have contacted AFF regarding their entitlements if their child is over 18 but not in full-time education or training. They have sought advice on the implications of volunteering for an overseas assignment if their child does not qualify as a full dependent, with a suggestion that more families are opting to serve unaccompanied overseas, which could create a shift in community dynamics.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS



Emma Perrin &
the devolved
administration team

AFF continues to support families in the devolved administrations, with Regional Leads based in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. AFF engages regularly with a variety of organisations, including the devolved governments, ensuring that Army families' views are represented.

Families have highlighted to AFF the impact of moving between, and in and out of, the devolved administrations. We continue to gather and present evidence to ensure appropriate support for all families.

WALES

AFF was aware of an emerging issue of families living in Wales feeling isolated and lonely. We therefore secured funding from the Welsh Government to identify the issues faced by these families and to increase support.

This included holding events in different Army locations across Wales to bring families together and help form links within isolated communities. We also conducted a survey to gather evidence, with families highlighting the difficulties in accessing healthcare in Wales. AFF continues to work with a range of health providers in Wales to ensure that families can access suitable and timely healthcare.

SCOTLAND

Families have contacted AFF regarding the challenges of transferring education between Scotland and England, particularly given that children start secondary school earlier in England. AFF is working closely with local authorities and other organisations, such as the Royal Caledonian Education Trust, to ensure Army children receive suitable support before, during and after a posting.

We were also pleased to see that protection from the higher Scottish rate of income tax for Armed Forces personnel has been made permanent. This is an issue that AFF raised with both the Scottish and UK Governments.

NORTHERN IRELAND

In April, our enquiries showed that families were unable to use travel warrants due to COVID-19 restrictions. AFF highlighted this to the chain of command, who extended the timeframe in which they could be used, which meant that families would not lose the unused warrants.



KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2021

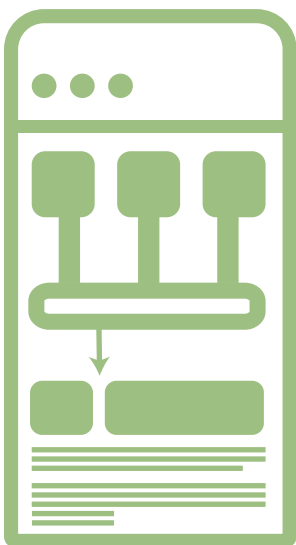
- **F&C:** Ensuring that a new overseas section of the Army's unit guide, which provides advice to units on supporting Foreign & Commonwealth personnel and families, is produced as a priority.
- **Housing:** To continue to work with the Future Defence Infrastructure Services team to ensure that the new maintenance contract is fit for purpose and will provide families with the support they need going forward.
- **Education & Childcare:** Following the results of our childcare survey in 2020, continuing to further investigate any gaps in or issues with provision, including monitoring of the Wraparound Childcare pilot.
- **Money & Allowances:** To continue to highlight issues with long-term relationships allowance policy and ensure families are provided with clear information.
- **Employment & Training:** Work with the MOD Covenant team, devolved administrations, student finance teams and universities to establish and provide clarity to students from the Armed Forces community about the nuances of student funding across the devolved administrations.
- **Health & Additional Needs:** To identify the key issues that families face in accessing healthcare due to frequent mobility.



NEW CATEGORIES

AFF introduced a new database in October 2020, which has allowed us to refine the categories under which we record our enquiries and provide more detailed and effective analysis of families' issues.

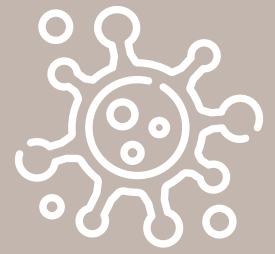
Some of the areas we have worked to improve are:



- Ensuring that our education statistics address the funding support across the devolved administrations, rather than just England's Service Pupil Premium.
- Including self-employment as an employment category to help us better understand the issues of our spouses and partners choosing this route of employment.
- Introducing a Brexit category to capture the unique issues our overseas families in particular faced as we moved through the European Union transition period and new arrangements came into force.
- Including a bereavement category to ensure that we are better able to signpost families after the loss of a Service person.
- Ensuring that issues related to the Combined Accommodation Assessment System (CAAS) are highlighted.
- We have made significant changes to our Foreign & Commonwealth categories to allow us to fully record the complexities of the issues these families face and to allow us to report even more effectively to the chain of command.

These new categories mean that we cannot provide a detailed comparison with 2019 or breakdown by categories in 2020 but will result in AFF being able to provide a more comprehensive overview in 2021.

COVID-19



INFORMING FAMILIES

COVID-19 has resulted in significant and unique impacts for Army families, with families seeking support from AFF. We worked closely with the chain of command and MOD to highlight these issues and to ensure that Army families were supported.

We identified early in the initial lockdown the importance of clear communication to families on these key issues and highlighted this to the Army and MOD. We created a bespoke set of pages on our website to address COVID-19-related issues to ensure that families were able to easily access the information they required.

IMPACT ON OUR ENGAGEMENT

COVID-19 also had a significant impact on AFF's work during 2020. Prior to the initial lockdown, we had seen a 21% increase in enquiries between January and March 2020. However, COVID-19 impacted the ability of our staff to engage with families face to face, as family events were cancelled.

However, we have seen a rise in families' engagement with AFF through our website and social media, with an 8% rise in unique website views, a 14% rise in Facebook followers and 21% rise in Instagram followers from 2019.

IMPACT ON OUR ISSUES

A total of 34% of our enquiries between March and June were COVID-19 related. Some of the key topics of enquiry included:

- Impact of the assignment freeze on moves being cancelled, including moves being cancelled at the last minute, the inability of families moving into their own home to hand back their SFA, and issues with removals.
- Added impact of assignment freeze on children due to move schools and spouses/partners due to start new employment.
- Potential difficulties when the Service person has a non-serving spouse/partner who is a key worker, with families seeking clarification on who had priority to attend work and who was responsible for childcare.
- Impact of COVID-19 on deployments with queries about whether the planned deployment would go ahead, impact on R&R/ Post-Operational Tour Leave and concern about support for the family whilst the Service person was away, with lockdown preventing direct support from family and friends.
- Queries from Foreign & Commonwealth potential recruits needing to extend visas due to the suspension of basic training.
- Concerns regarding families with children at boarding school, including CEA regulations, and travel to and from boarding school with differing lockdown regulations across countries.
- Issues with accessing the internet with multiple house members working from home and home schooling.
- Issues with neighbours not adhering to social distancing regulations and anti-social behaviour.

SURVEYS



For further details about our surveys, please go to aff.org.uk/about-aff/surveys

CHILDCARE SURVEY

Following the Government's commitment to childcare support for the Armed Forces, AFF surveyed families in February 2020 to determine the unique childcare challenges they experience.

There were 1,664 eligible responses to the survey. Whilst AFF acknowledges that childcare can also present a significant challenge for civilian families, Army families face unique pressures, primarily due to the mobile nature of Army life.

The key findings were:

- Cost is a significant barrier to childcare.
- The nature of Army life provides unique challenges for families.
- Army families are unable to rely on unpaid childcare support from family and friends.
- Childcare provision has a significantly negative impact on spousal ability to gain and maintain employment and to have career progression.
- Assistance with costs and more flexible hours would help Army families to access childcare.

Whilst civilian families face difficulties with childcare, the nature and culture of Service life places additional pressures on Army families, impacting childcare provision and spousal employment.

"I feel as a working mum who is married to someone in the Army, it's always down to me to find suitable childcare which gives me so much stress and anxiety. There's no warning from the Army when they go away so last-minute childcare is always an issue. I feel we are punished for working and being mums."

"Unlike civilian families, we don't choose the timing or location of our moves and do not have the benefit of local knowledge when we are 'parachuted' into new places. If I were a civilian, it is unlikely I would choose to deliberately base myself miles from any pre-existing support network. Unlike civilians, we do not enjoy the privilege of being able to settle in an area with the childcare provision that meets our needs."

BIG SURVEY

Our Big Survey in October 2020 was focused on the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) and sought both the views of families in the Aldershot FAM pilot area on their experiences with the pilot, as well as more general views from all families on FAM. There were 2,592 eligible responses to the survey.

The key findings were:

- SFA remains an important housing source for Army families.
- FAM should not offer greater choice to some cohorts at the expense of others.
- Families do not feel communicated with about FAM.
- Families are concerned about why FAM is being introduced.
- There were mixed views on the basis for entitlement.
- Living unaccompanied can negatively affect families.

Whilst FAM offers welcome greater entitlement to housing for unmarried families, AFF remains concerned that FAM is not compatible with the mobile nature of Army life. The Army's mobile nature requires accommodation that is easy to access on posting and that provides a community of informal welfare support. This is not available with private rental and, whilst support for those who wish to own their own home is beneficial, this could lead to more families living apart, with resulting pressures on relationships and retention.

"I don't want to have to look for a house AND a new job every single time we move at the drop of a hat to an area we had never considered living in or perhaps hadn't even heard of. Moving is made so much easier by contacting people on the patch in advance as it is."

"Complete lack of understanding as to why SFA/SLA exists. It is not for cheaper accommodation. It exists because moving around the country every two years is genuinely tough on families. Having a house that is in good condition and appropriate for your needs close to your work with a ready-made community ready to welcome you removes so much stress from the assignment process."

OUR ONLINE PRESENCE

aff.org.uk | armyandyou.co.uk

AFF website unique views: 397,529 (up 8% on 2019)
 AFF Facebook followers: 9,999 (increase of 1,190)
 AFF Twitter followers: 9,546 (increase of 405)
 AFF Instagram followers: 2,038 (increase of 358)

Top 3 most popular AFF Facebook posts:

- FAM Big Survey launch post : 54,100 (Sept)
- FAM Live Q&A: 25,300 (Mar)
- Childcare Survey launch post: 25,200 (Feb)

Top 3 most popular AFF website articles:

- 25 March: COVID-19 - Chief of Defence People's letter to families – 5,015 unique views.
- 2 April: New cohabitation rules for those in a long-term relationship – 2,235 unique views.
- 12 March: Housing and coronavirus – 1,542 unique views.



Army&You website hits up 8%. Top story: Women's wellbeing – maternal mental health study.

Army&You most popular tweet: #ThrowbackThursday - Russell Watson cover (link to I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here).

Army&You most popular Facebook post: Announcement of partnership with POSH Original Art for community champion prize.

Army&You most popular Instagram post: BATUS International Women's Day.



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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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