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RAF FF Evidence Report to the
Armed Forces' Pay Review Body



October 2011

**WE'RE IN YOUR
CORNER**

Introduction by the Chairman

In preparation for our evidence session with the AFPRB on 12 October 2011, we submit for your consideration evidence arising from the RAF Families Federation's workshops and associated activity this year.

Building on the evidence we provided to the AFPRB in previous years, and based on the increasingly robust evidence contained in our Issues database and arising from our dedicated workshops and surveys, we believe that RAF personnel and their families continue to feel undervalued.

The ability of the AFPRB to influence future pay awards is highly valued by the families we represent and we note and welcome the Government's commitment to continue to seek recommendations from an independent Pay Review Body as part of the Armed Forces Covenant.

We welcome the opportunity to represent the interests of RAF personnel and their families and hope that our evidence, alongside that provided by the chain of command, will strengthen the case for a decent and fair remuneration package for all who serve in the RAF.



D A McCAFFERTY
Chairman
RAF Families Federation

Themed Evidence Gathering

Continuing our programme of themed evidence-gathering, the RAF FF opted to run the following workshops/surveys in 2011, supplemented for the first time by online versions of the surveys in the hope of reaching more RAF family members:

The RAF Way of Life

Specifically designed to inform the AFPRB. Questions covered satisfaction with pay award and allowances package; causes and extent of debt; separation as a result of operations; work/life balance; quality of life in the RAF and new questions this year on pensions, reflecting concerns raised during 2010 and a view that personnel were beginning to take more notice of pensions issues.

A separate version of this survey was provided for Reservists and also covered feedback on the Future Reserves 2020 Report.

The Impact of the SDSR and Armed Forces Covenant

A brand new survey written in early 2011 to measure the impact of the SDSR Announcements; views on redundancy; the impact of the Allowances Review and personnel's motivation to serve. A few questions were included on the launch of the Armed Forces Covenant to test awareness levels but it is probably too soon to measure any impact of commitments made.

Future Accommodation

A continuation of the 2010 survey but updated to include questions provided by the Future Accommodation Project Team. This survey was shared with the other Families Federations so that data could be gathered from all three Services. As in 2010, the aim of this workshop was to explore aspects of home ownership and

accommodation issues. Questions covered whether or not the MoD should continue to provide SFA; should SFA allocations policies change; what motivates personnel to buy a house; what aspects of living in SFA/SLA personnel enjoy most/least, etc. This survey resulted in a bespoke report, which is enclosed separately.

Childcare

A continuation of the 2010 workshop, augmenting Air Cmd's work in this area. Questions covered preferences for childcare; cost; distance; choice; how much childcare is required, when, and for how many children.

Employment & Training Opportunities for Family Members

A continuation of the 2010 workshop. Questions covered impact of RAF mobility on employment and training; transfer of Civil Service employment; CRB clearances; transfer of training; barriers to employment.

Definition of Family

A continuation of the 2010 workshop aimed at informing MoD's future policy on what constitutes a modern family. Questions covered motivation towards marriage/civil partnership; management of lone parents; access to children of divorced parents; care of elderly parents; young adults still living with serving personnel; recognition of partners.

Youth

A continuation of the 2010 trial. This survey is aimed at 11-17 year old children of military parents and explores their attitudes to changing schools, deployment of parents, and their satisfaction levels with local facilities.

Methodology

During the period 1 Jun - 26 Sep, surveys were run at five RAF units as interactive workshops with audiences comprising serving and non-serving family members, as well as sessions with the RAF Community Support and Future Commanders Study Period courses at the Defence Academy. The team used the Turning Point voting system to collect all data and this was then downloaded onto the Federation system.

The surveys were also made available on the Federation website and promoted via press releases, Families Days and conferences, regular articles in Envoy, the Diaspora newsletter, Station magazines, RAF News, BFBS radio and AMP's Bulletin.

The surveys were drawn to the attention of many key contacts within the chain of command, with particular support from AMP's Briefing Team, who advised unit audiences they visited of the Federation's work in this area – we remain grateful for their enduring support. Social networking also worked well, with Facebook fans and Twitter and Blog followers cascading the survey, enabling the Federation to reach a far wider audience than otherwise would have been achieved.

Although live audience levels ranged, the decision to place the surveys online opened up our work to a much wider audience. For the first time, we were able to gather evidence from those living overseas, those living 'beyond the wire' and those living in their own communities but still part of the RAF family. As expected the majority of online voters came from UK RAF

bases, however, personnel based in Cyprus, South Africa, Belgium, Brunei, the USA, Germany, Italy, Kenya and New Zealand also responded.

Our original plan was to password protect the surveys but, having seen the AFF and NFF successfully run unprotected surveys on Future Accommodation, following consultation with the RAF, we agreed to lift the passwords from all but our Youth and Reservists surveys. This resulted in significantly higher numbers of votes and, whilst there was a risk that some votes might be spurious and the quality of our data therefore compromised to some degree, this risk was deemed acceptable, given the limited awareness of our website and the surveys beyond those within the RAF community.

In total, so far, we have gathered more than 2,700 votes across the eight surveys. Results were downloaded from the 'Kwik Survey' system onto the Federation system and combined with data collected from those who voted during workshops, creating a significant pool of evidence. Surveys will remain open until 31 October.

The full report of the Federation's evidence-gathering activity for this year will be available as comprehensive Evidence Reports, accompanying our 2011 Annual Report; AFPRB members will, of course, be included in the distribution.

What we can provide at this stage is an insight into the top-level findings emerging from our data so far which, we hope, will be of interest and value to the AFPRB.

Current Context

Morale post SDSR

We are conscious that our evidence session with the AFPRB this year is taking place at a time of serious challenge for all military personnel and their families. There is no doubt in our mind that morale has been badly affected by the cumulative impact of the SDSR announcements, some of which have taken far too long for the Ministers to confirm.

Our view of family morale is that they feel bruised and battered by a series of bad news announcements and that they don't feel valued by either the Service or the Government. The launch of the Armed Forces Covenant in June did little to assuage these feelings and many are both sceptical and cynical as to the value of the Covenant at a time of radical force reductions and massive budget cuts.

For most of 2011, families at RAF Lossiemouth, RAF Leuchars and RAF Marham lived under a 'Sword of Damocles', which was only lifted when the tri-Service basing announcements were made in mid-July. The impact of the closure of RAF Leuchars, on top of the closure of RAF Kinloss announced earlier in the year, will dramatically reduce the RAF's footprint in Scotland and have a significant impact on the thousands of families who have opted to settle there. Many bought homes in Moray or Fife, their partners have jobs, and their children are settled into the Scottish education system. For those who cannot be absorbed into the one remaining RAF base in Scotland, the need to relocate will cause significant disruption and stress.

Redundancy

On top of that uncertainty, many thousands of families have lived under the shadow of impending compulsory redundancy, with the RAF's first Phase announced on 1 Sep. The 1st Phase of redundancy failed to attract sufficient volunteers in the right ranks and trades/branches and therefore 53% of those selected were non-volunteers.

Phase 2, the fields for which will be announced in early 2012 (delayed from Sep 11), is likely to be a similar sized quota and will lead to even greater uncertainty as personnel and their families fear for their future. A 3rd and possibly 4th Phase still seems likely in order to reach the mandated manpower targets.

Cuts to Allowances

This significant restructuring of the Service takes place

against a backdrop of wider societal misery, with cuts to benefits, poor employment and a general feeling of economic gloom. This also has an impact on the morale of Service personnel and their families, with most half-way through the 2-year pay freeze and many seeing significant cuts to allowances, announced as part of the Allowances Review in Jan 11.

We have seen particular concerns raised by those serving overseas, who have seen massive cuts to Local Overseas Allowances and the loss of School Children's visits or flights home for students. Many make the valid case that they volunteered for an overseas tour based on a careful weighing up of the package of support available at the time. Many wives had given up well-paid jobs to accompany their husbands overseas, only to find they could not work in-theatre and the allowances that helped cushion the loss of the second income were now radically reduced.

Many told us they would not have volunteered if they'd known what was about to happen and several told us they were considering short-touring or serving unaccompanied for the remainder of their tour.

We wonder what impact this will have on people's willingness to volunteer for overseas service. There remains a high number of RAF posts in key NATO appointments, embassies, etc, and, the Service might find it increasingly difficult to encourage personnel to volunteer to serve accompanied if the families judge the costs to be too high.

Remuneration continues to be a subject of considerable interest to RAF family members, and our audiences were keen to ensure that, once the opportunity arises for future pay awards to be considered, you have the appropriate evidence to hand upon which to base your recommendations.

Pensions/Debt

As promised last year, we have updated our surveys to explore the pensions issue in a little more depth and we have continued our work exploring the extent and causes of debt in RAF families. As reported last year, a large proportion of the RAF has concerns about money and many are incurring significant levels of personal debt.

Generic Evidence from our Issues Database

Housing

In terms of generic evidence arising from our Issues database, (populated by issues brought to our attention by family members making direct contact via the website or hotline), Service Families Accommodation (SFA) continues to dominate the agenda. Indeed, such was the workload, we opted to establish a dedicated Evidence Assistant (Housing) in January 2011 to cope with the casework.

Since last year, we have again detected a reduction in complaints arising from the performance of maintenance contractors (although they still feature!) and an increase in issues relating to allocation policies and availability of appropriately sized accommodation for those who do not currently fit the MoD definition of an entitled family.

Extended families continue to feature, with elderly parents, children from previous relationships, and older children returning to the nest after university or college creating pressure on the families for whom extra bedrooms are not available.

Family members with Special Needs create additional challenges and, whilst DIO staffs are doing their best with limited stock and even more limited funding, some families are experiencing significant stress when required to relocate as the result of an assignment.

We have raised concerns with the Minister that, even if the Future Accommodation Project leads to a new model for the provision of military accommodation, this is likely to take years to implement, and we have stressed the need for continued investment in the SFA estate in the interim.

We were therefore bitterly disappointed to be advised by the Minister in July that there would be a 'pause' in the funding for years 3-5 of the planned SFA upgrade programme. We know that senior DIO staffs did their best to ring-fence the budget but this failure only adds to the feelings amongst SFA occupants that their housing needs are not deemed important enough to justify investment.

We have also raised concerns over increasing evidence of shortages of accommodation – many estates are full to bursting, with families being accommodated many miles from the parent unit, a situation exacerbated when the non-serving family member doesn't drive or they are on a patch with

limited or no community facilities.

We are also aware that changes to the 'Home to Duty' rules have left many angry that, despite having no choice over where they live, they now have to pay a personal contribution to get to work, when they are entitled to live on the parent base. Examples of areas where there are shortages of accommodation include RAF Brize Norton, RAF Benson, RAF Coningsby and MoD Abbeywood.

Partners' Employment

Another area highlighted via our database is the continuing difficulty non-serving family members experience in obtaining and maintaining employment and/or training. For many, a second income is vital and the assignment of the uniformed partner can completely undermine the non-serving partner's ability to pursue his or her own career. Childcare links to this aspect of family life, with the cost and availability of childcare varying across the country and having a direct impact on a partner's ability to work.

Our two workshops covering these areas will hopefully provide further evidence on the nature of family life in 2011 and the pressures created by dual careers. Of course, many of these are co-serving couples, and this comes with its own challenges.

Impact of Assignments

The RAF FF has continued to receive enquiries from family members for whom a proposed assignment, often linked with long-awaited promotion, creates significant family-related challenges.

We are aware that a number have turned down promotion to achieve family stability but when this is linked to further service and associated security of employment, such decisions are very difficult and can result in unwanted family separation for the duration of a tour or even consecutive tours.

We have continued measuring the extent of this type of family separation by posing specific questions about those who commute from the family home to their place of work to try to establish what percentage of families are opting to stabilise the family rather than 'follow the flag'. It is clear from our evidence to date that the majority of our audiences seek

stability for their families, mainly for partner's employment or children's education reasons and we expect this trend to continue.

Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA)

This year the RAF FF saw a noticeable increase in casework arising from families whose entitlement to CEA had been reviewed.

Two trends emerged: one where the uniformed family member had previously been authorised to claim the allowance on an 'Involuntary Separated' basis, only to find the status reviewed and withdrawn, with retrospective recovery action taken against them for monies received.

The second was where uniformed family members had been declared non-mobile by the Manning Directorate, correctly working to a revised set of mobility criteria. This was resulting in children being withdrawn from boarding schools or the families facing significant costs in order to preserve the continuity of education they thought they had secured when first placing the child into the boarding environment.

Such cases inevitably led to protracted appeals and Service Complaints, with only a minority being upheld by the SPVA. The stress this has caused some families has been massive and there is a strong feeling amongst many parents that they have been let down by the system and that their children have suffered as a result. All acknowledge the need to scrutinise entitlement to this expensive allowance very closely, and many understand that a minority have abused the system and defrauded the public purse. However, the overriding sense is one of betrayal, with many angry that the goal posts were moved after they had made significant, life-changing decisions based on the extant rules. Whilst the AFPRB have no input into this particular allowance, we feel it is important that members understand the background to this particular issue as it may come up during your own unit visits.

Housing Market

Families also discuss the housing market and the impact of the 'credit crunch' on aspirations to own or move home. Home ownership remains a very high priority for many RAF families as evidenced by our Future Accommodation survey. Many face particular challenges as they are serving in areas with comparatively high property prices and where the non-serving partner is unable to secure employment.

We receive regular comments about the need for additional financial support for military families to achieve that first step on the housing ladder and complaints that existing allowances are woefully inadequate to recompense for the costs of buying or selling a home.

Pensions

For the first time this year, we included specific questions relating to pensions, and the top-level results are included in this report. Concerns about pensions have been exacerbated by the change in indexing of public sector pensions and the significant reduction in the tax relief thresholds. As reported last year, in our view, the military pension is highly valued by serving and non-serving family members and is certainly a factor that determines how long an individual is prepared to serve.

We believe the majority of junior personnel aspire to a pension-earning engagement/commission and work hard to achieve the promotion that delivers this security of employment.

Once serving on a pension-earning engagement, we believe the pension serves as a strong 'pull' factor, retaining personnel until the date they can earn immediate pension payments. However, once they have reached that stage in their careers, the pension serves as a strong 'push' factor as personnel compare the disadvantages of continuing with a military career to the advantages of a second career in civilian life, supplemented by a Service pension.

The RAF Way of Life

To date, this survey has been completed by 630 personnel, although many more visited the website only to opt out of completing the survey for some reason. These casual visits or incomplete surveys were not recorded as part of the total.

The breakdown of serving versus non-serving family members was 86% serving and 14% non-serving, a higher proportion of non-serving than we have achieved before. The gender breakdown was 71% male and 29% female, which is perhaps not surprising, given that the more than a third of the votes were gathered during interactive workshops held on stations such as RAF Honington, where personnel are predominantly male.

In terms of their relationship to the serving person, 23% of participants classed themselves as serving and single, 49% were serving with a non-serving partner and 12% were serving with a partner also serving in the Armed Forces. 13% were non-serving spouses and 1% said they were non-serving partners, ie. unmarried. The remaining 2% were either parents, siblings or children of serving personnel.

Votes came from across the rank structure, with every rank represented apart from Master Aircrew. The most represented ranks were AC- Cpl, Sgt, Flt Lt and Sqn Ldr. The split between commissioned and non-commissioned voters was 27% commissioned and 73% non-commissioned.

Pay and Pensions

As anticipated, voters told us that the Government-imposed two year pay freeze has had a definite impact upon their family income. When this is combined with increases in SFA charges, utility bills, food prices, petrol and the general cost of living, many felt that they had in fact taken a pay cut.

Perhaps not surprisingly, when asked whether the government was right to impose a pay freeze on the Armed Forces, only 36% felt that they should take their

Voters ranged in age from under 21 to over 56, with the majority of votes (34%) coming from the 21-30 year olds, with a further 32% aged 31-40 and 28% aged 41-55. The higher proportion of younger respondents reflects the audience dynamic, particularly at RAF Honington, where this particular workshop was run with several squadrons.

In terms of personal status, respondents classified themselves as follows: 12% single with no current partner; 16% single but in a long-term relationship; 56% married or in a civil partnership for the first time; 10% married or in a civil partnership for a second or subsequent time and the remainder were either separated, divorced or widowed. These figures reflect the ratios from previous survey activity and we believe they represent a fair breakdown of marital status, albeit we suspect the proportion of divorced personnel is distorted by those now considering themselves as in an alternative category.

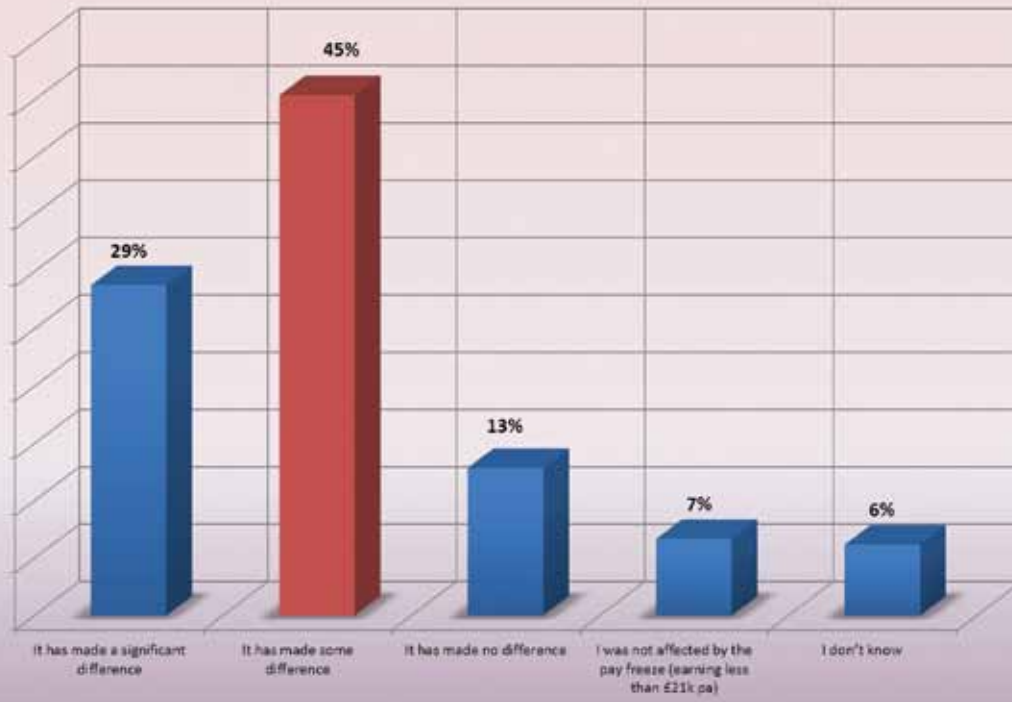
Finally, of our respondents, 43% stated they lived for the majority of the week in Service Family Accommodation (SFA), with 3% in Substitute Service Family Accommodation (SSFA); 29% lived in Single Living Accommodation (SLA), with 1% in Substitute Single Living Accommodation (SSLA); 19% lived in their own home and 4% lived in privately rented accommodation. The remaining voters either lived with their parents, in housing association properties or in other type of accommodation.

share of public sector pay restraint.

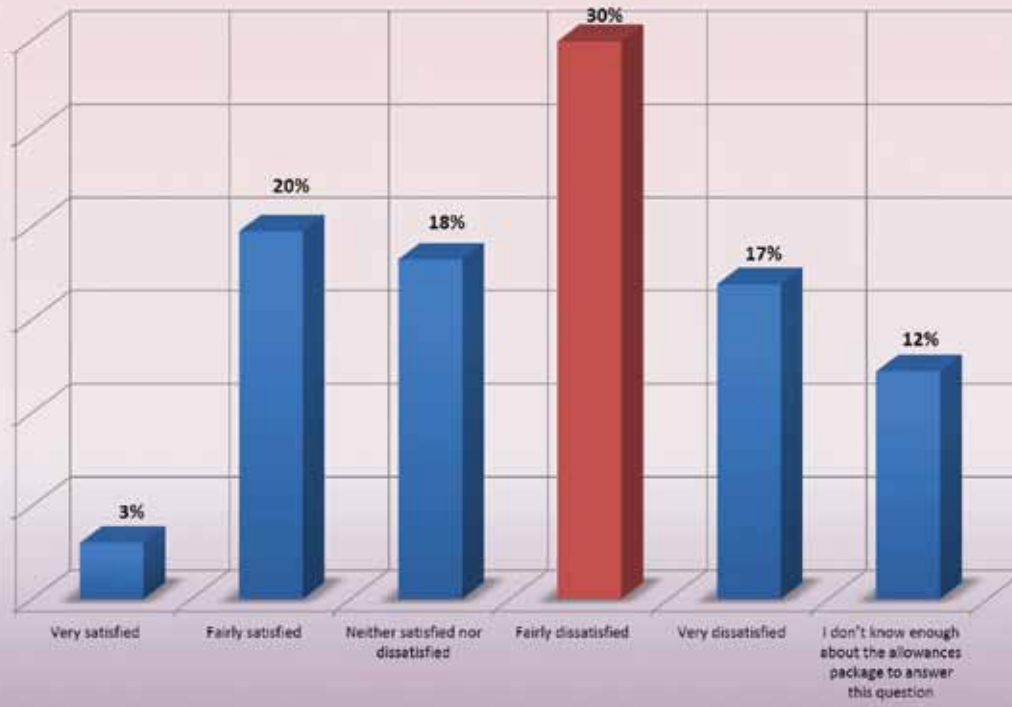
With regards to levels of satisfaction with basic pay, 50% of voters told us that they were 'fairly satisfied', whilst a quarter were dissatisfied.

This contrasts sharply with the responses given when asked about the benefits (allowances) package currently available, which drew many negative comments when it was announced earlier this year.

To what extent has the Armed Forces 2-year pay freeze impacted on your family income?

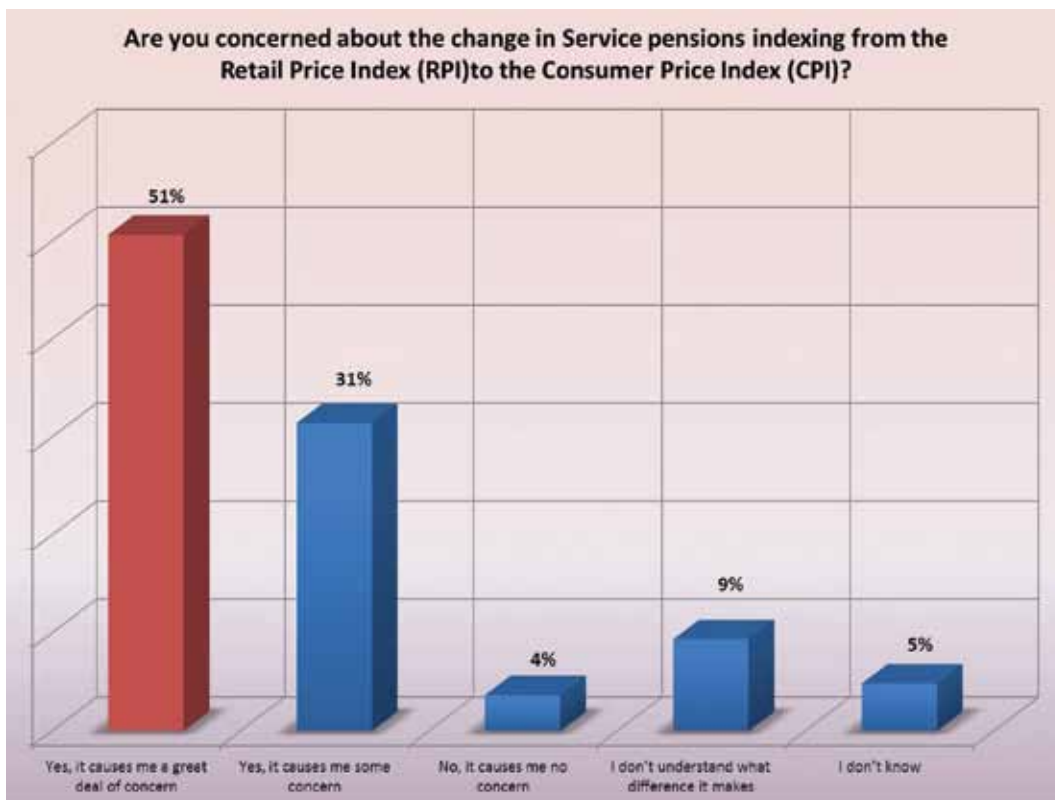
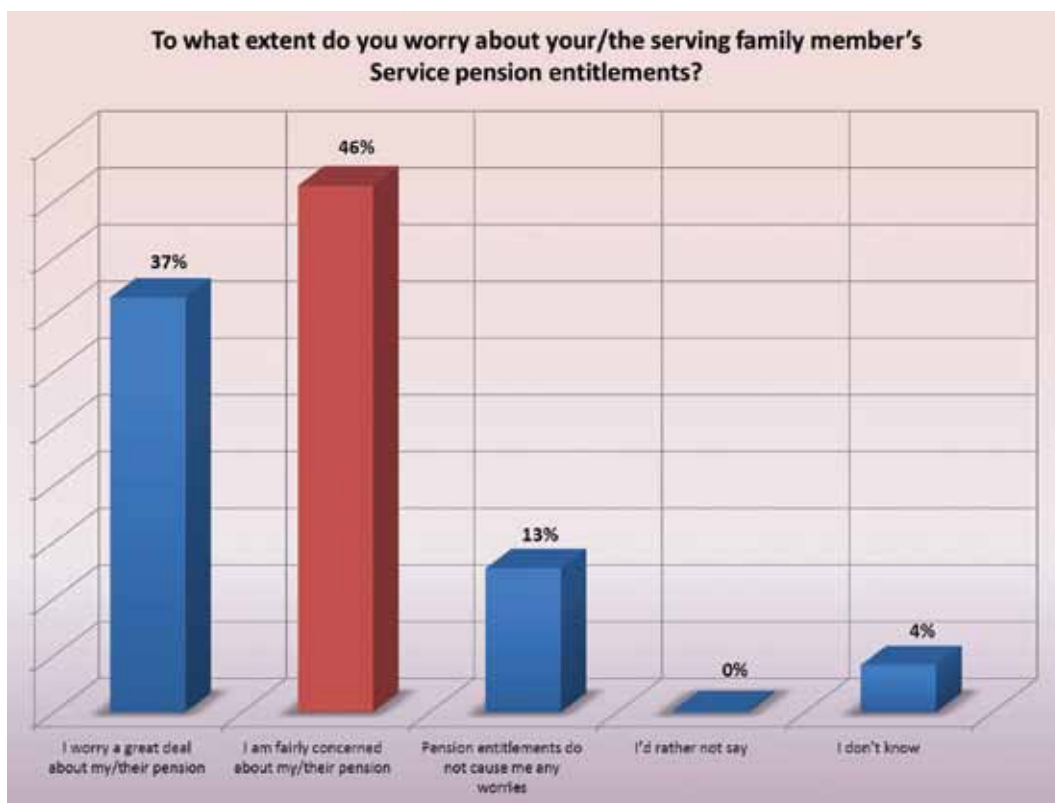


How satisfied are you with your/the Serviceperson's benefits (allowances) package?

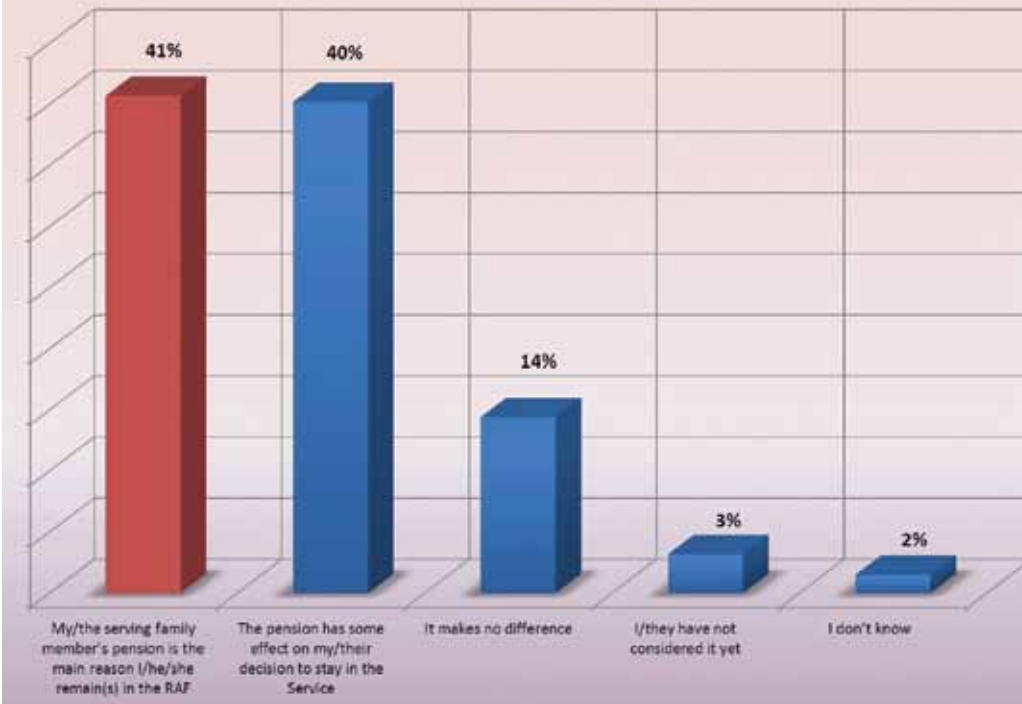


This year, for the first time, we asked questions relating specifically to Service pensions and the proposed

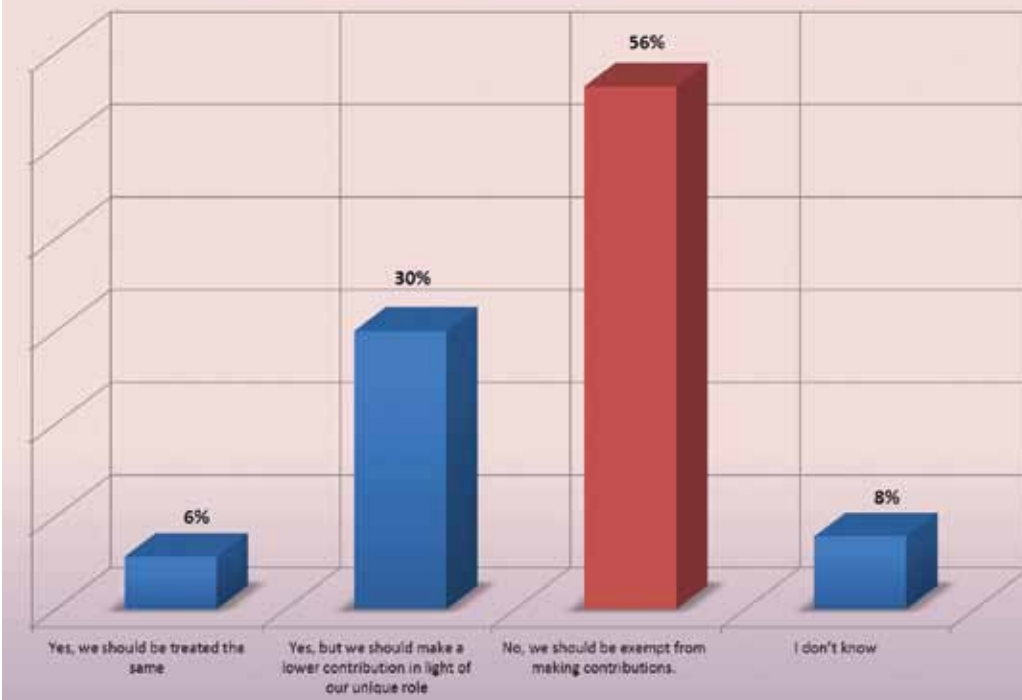
changes, to determine whether this was an area of concern for RAF families.



To what extent is a future military pension retaining you/your serving family member in the Service today?



Do you believe that Service personnel should make a direct contribution to their pensions, in line with other public sector employees?



We believe the evidence speaks for itself. A number of rumours about the Review of the Armed Forces pension schemes are circulating within the Service, which are causing unrest and worry. As a result, many voters told us that any changes would provide them with the impetus needed to leave the Service – a frequent comment was “What’s the point in staying in for the long-term if I’m going to lose out with my pension?”

Experienced SNCOs have already calculated the potential financial loss they face if proposed changes are enforced in addition to the move from RPI to CPI indexing, and have indicated that they will ‘vote with their feet’ and start another career in civvy street, to offset any impact on their anticipated long-term financial positions.

It was widely felt that the MoD and government do not appreciate how important pensions are to Service personnel – one young JNCO commented that ‘It was

one of the main reasons he signed up’ and he was now considering his long-term future with the RAF.

Impact of Service life on the RAF family

As in previous years, we asked voters to tell us about how their family lives were impacted because they are part of the Armed Forces.

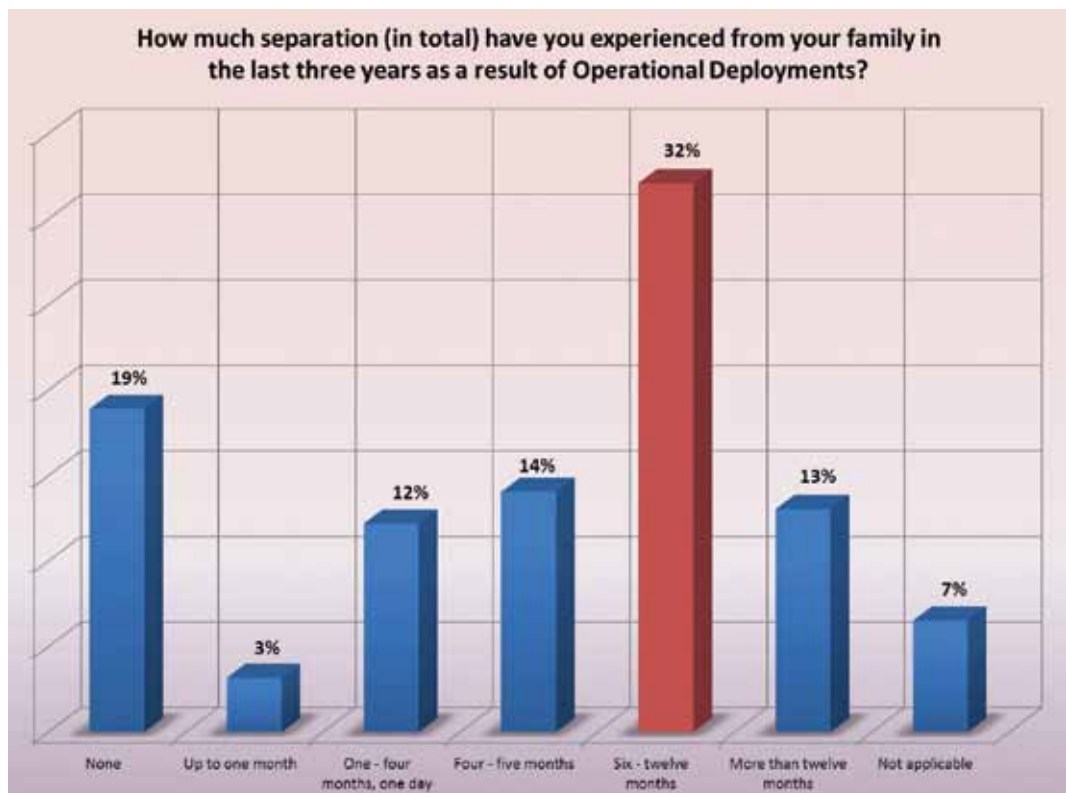
We continue to receive evidence from families who are spending considerable time apart because of their military commitments. In addition to the separations owing to operational deployments, 22% of voters told us that the serving member of their family also spent between six-twelve months away because of ‘non-operational deployments’, such as pre-deployment training, exercises and courses. This has a major impact on the family at home, with many spouses/partners unable to work or establish regular childcare routines because of the uncertain nature and short-notice of many deployments.

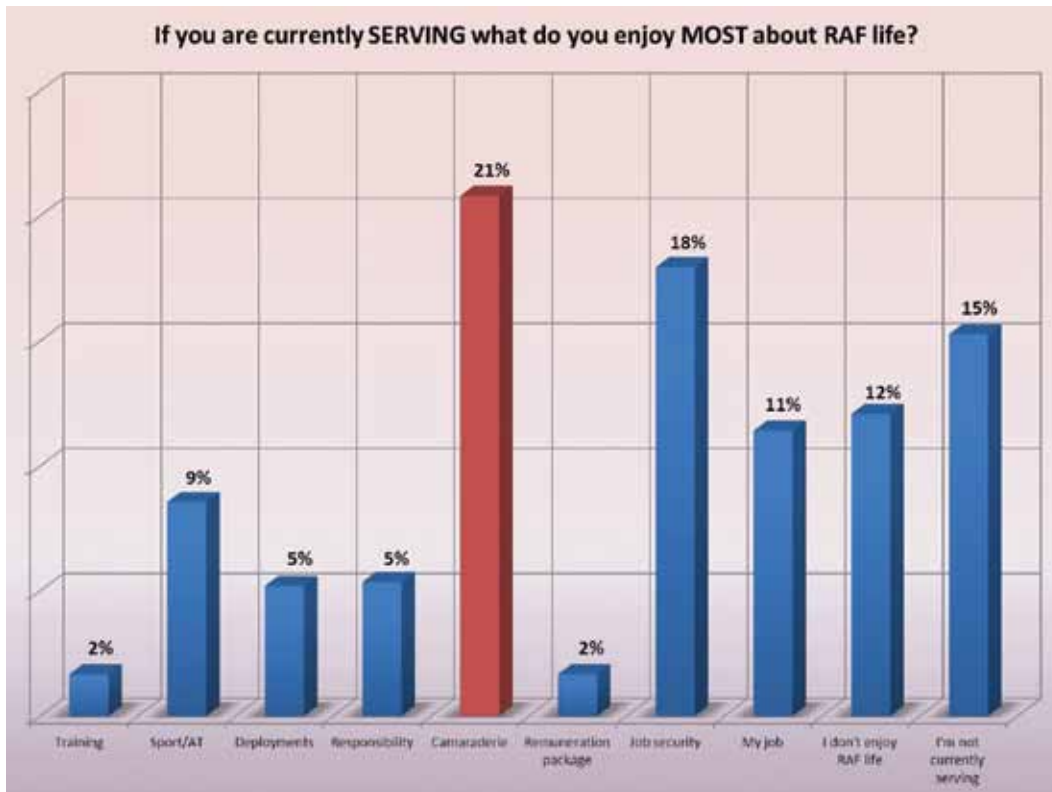
Comments made to the team at some units highlighted that, even though the serving member of the family may only be away for 2-3 weeks at a time, usually this was at very short-notice and occurred on a regular basis. Families raised concerns that they were unable to access the usual deployed welfare package on station because their partners were not away for continuous lengthy

periods. They asked the Federation to highlight that they still faced the same worries and problems as other spouses/partners whose serving family members might be deployed for 4-6+ months.

It is acknowledged that, within the military, there are a growing number of families who opt to live apart during the week, primarily so that the family can establish their own home and ensure continuity for their children’s’ education and/or spouse employment opportunities. 42% of voters told us that this type of separation has had an impact on their family life and relationships, with many families facing problems adjusting to the serving person returning home for relatively short periods of time each week.

With the on-going review of Future Accommodation within the Armed Forces, and options for home ownership being promoted by the MoD, we can only anticipate that this type of separation may lead to additional stress on relationships, especially if more families are encouraged to settle in one particular area of the country, which may be away from the RAF community support network.





We noted a dramatic decrease in the number of serving voters opting for the 'remuneration package' in comparison to the responses we have received to this particular question in previous years. Our last two annual reports indicate that this option (previously entitled 'pay/pensions') appeared as one of the 'top 3' responses but this year it attracted the fewest number of votes.

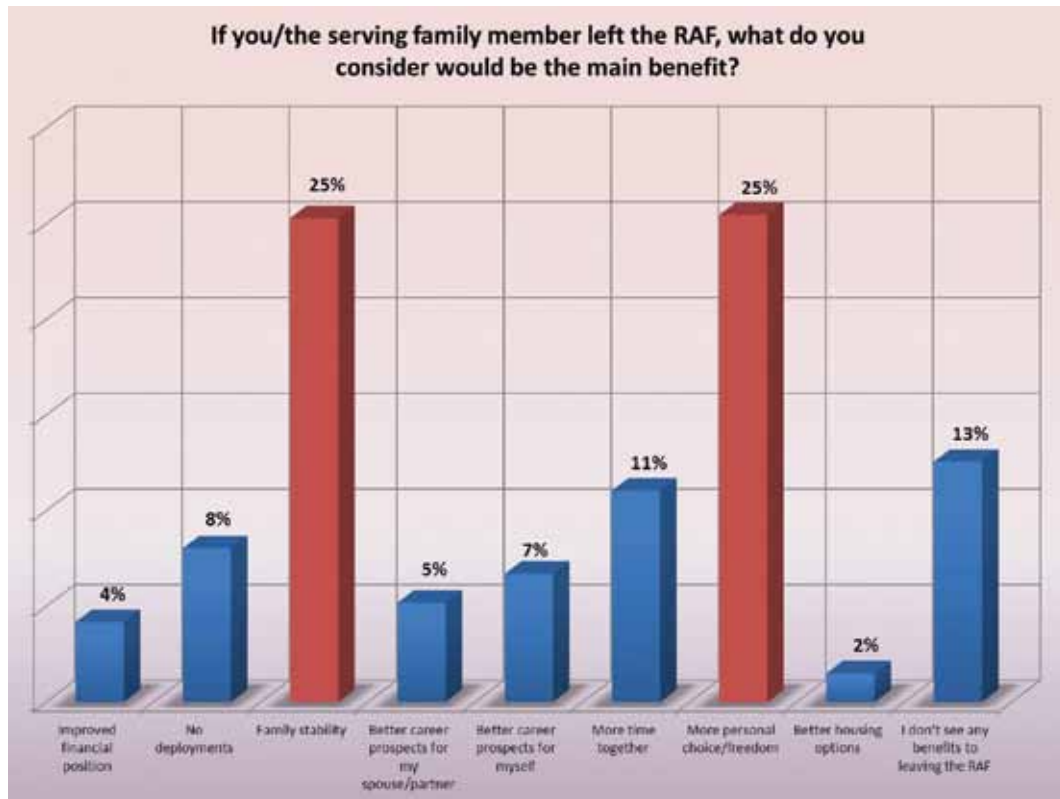
We can only surmise that this change of heart is due in some respects to the impact of the pay freeze and the review of the allowances package. For the first time, we were asked to include the option of 'I don't enjoy RAF Life' as a result of feedback from last year's evidence gathering activities. Perhaps not surprisingly, given recent announcements regarding redundancy, increased operational tempo and the aforementioned pay concerns, 12% of our voters opted for this.

We also asked our non-serving audiences to tell us what they enjoyed about RAF life. Whilst the top vote was 'secure employment for my partner'

the next highest response was 'I don't enjoy RAF life', which mirrors the serving family members' responses.

When asked whether families would consider a permanent overseas assignment, in light of the SDSR and Allowances Review, a quarter responded that they were less motivated to apply. This supports evidence received from families on overseas postings, who have complained bitterly about the changes to the Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) and loss of School Children's/University students' Visits, announced earlier this year.

Many commented that they had made an informed decision to take up the posting, based upon their pay and allowances package, accepting that the non-serving spouse/partner would probably be unable to find paid employment whilst they were overseas. They felt that the MoD had 'moved the goalposts' while they were mid-tour and some felt that they could no longer afford to stay in an accompanied overseas post.



Overall, 53% of voters felt that the serving family member did not have a good work/life balance, with many telling us that there is now so much pressure on Service personnel, with a dramatic increase in operational deployments for some Units and a real sense of uncertainty given the recent base closure and redundancy announcements.

Less than half of our voters would now readily recommend the RAF way of life to others, which is a telling indictment of the current strength of feeling within the Service. Last year, the majority voted to recommend the RAF way of life.

Impact of the SDSR and Armed Forces Covenant

To date, this survey has been completed by 332 personnel, although more visited the website only to opt out of completing the survey for some reason. These casual visits or incomplete surveys were not recorded as part of the totals.

The breakdown of family members indicates that 91% were serving and 9% were non-serving. The gender breakdown was 74% male and 26% female.

In terms of their relationship to the serving person, 16% of our participants classed themselves as serving and single, 60% were serving with a non-serving partner, and 13% were serving and also had a partner serving in the Armed Forces. 9% were non-serving spouses while the remaining voters were either partners or siblings of serving personnel or had categorised themselves as 'other'.

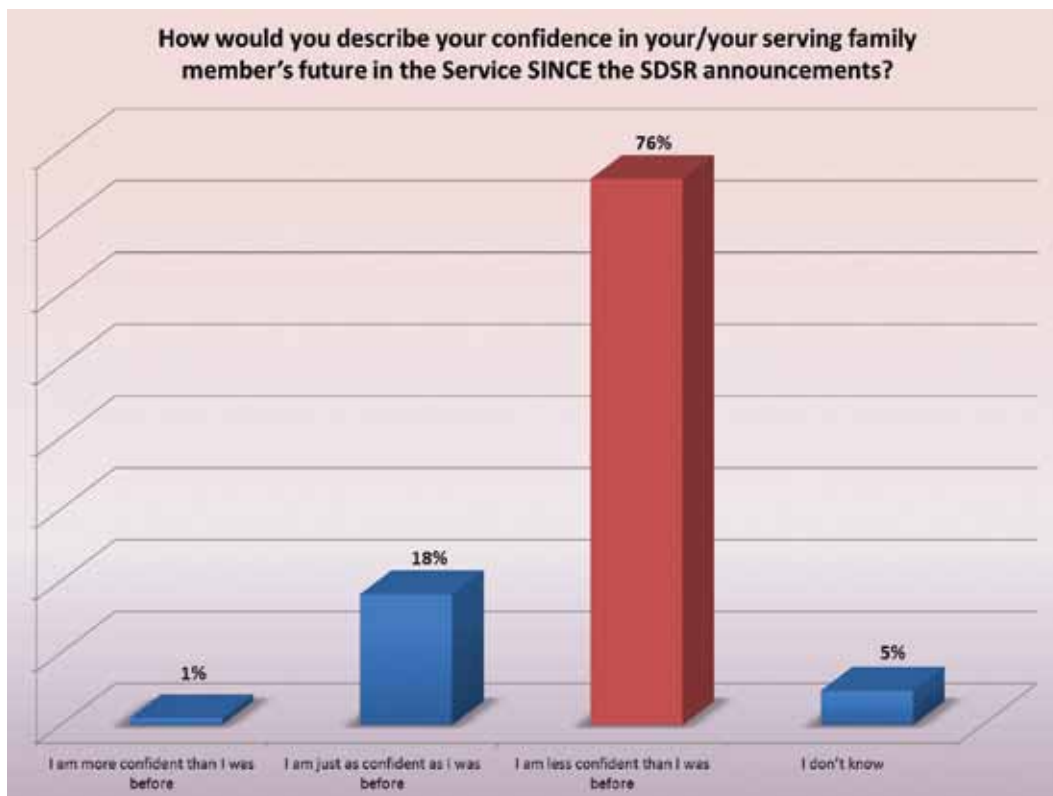
Votes came from across the rank structure, with every rank represented apart from J/T and Plt Off. The most represented ranks were Cpl, Sgt, Flt Lt and Sqd Ldr. The split between commissioned and non-commissioned voters was 36% commissioned and 64% non-commissioned.

Voters ranged in age from under 21 to over 56, with the

majority of votes (45%) coming from the 31-40 year olds, with a further 34% aged 41-55 and 18% aged 21-30. The higher proportion of older respondents perhaps reflects that interest in this subject matter primarily came from those who had been in the Service for longer and had been personally impacted by the SDSR announcements.

In terms of personal status, our respondents classified themselves as follows: 7% single with no current partner; 11% single but in a long-term relationship; 62% married or in a civil partnership for the first time; 12% married or in a civil partnership for a second or subsequent time and the remainder were either separated, divorced or widowed. These figures reflect the ratios arising from previous survey activity and we believe they represent a fair breakdown of marital status albeit we suspect the proportion of divorced personnel is distorted by those now in a subsequent long-term relationship.

Finally, of our respondents, 45% stated they lived for the majority of the week in SFA, with 4% in SSFA; 17% lived in SLA, with 3% in SSLA; 27% lived in their own home. The remainder lived in either privately rented accommodation or with their parents.

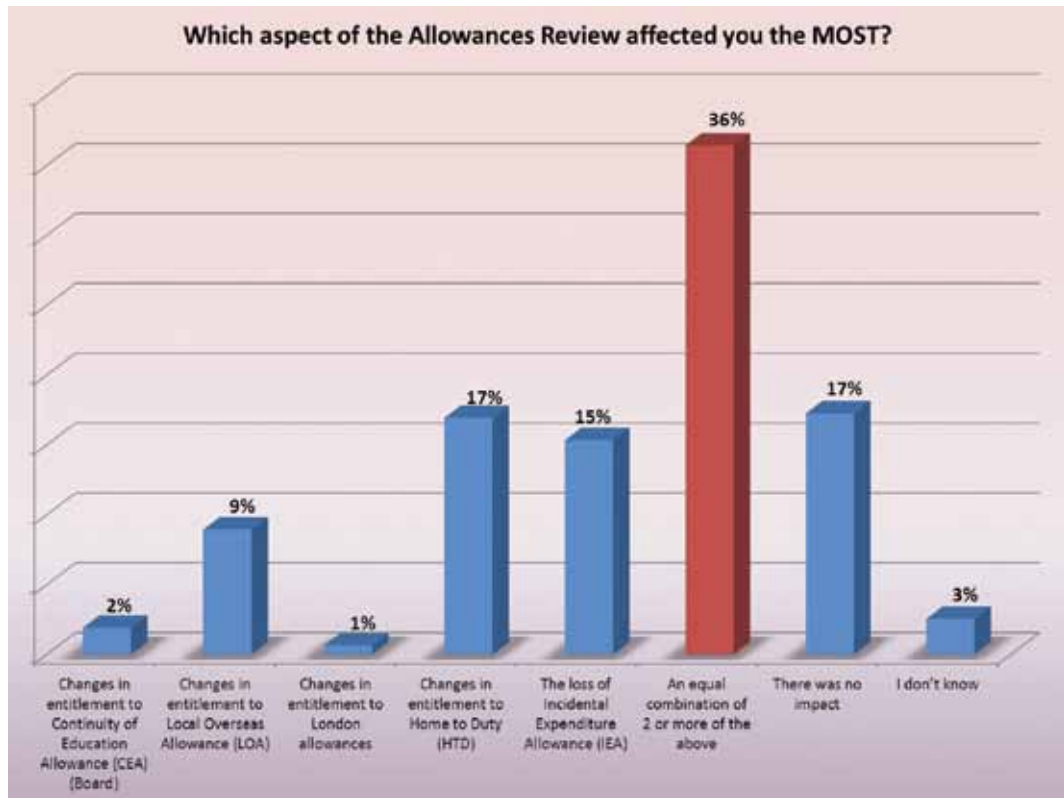


It is apparent that the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) has affected morale within the RAF. Three quarters of our voters told us that they are now less confident in their, or their serving family member's, future in the RAF since the SDSR announcements. 76% of respondents also told us that the Allowances Review had had an impact on their family to some extent.

Responses indicate that many families were affected by changes to more than one allowance. The Federation received much feedback separately from families who

have stated that they will face financial hardship as a result of the changes to the Home to Duty (HTD) and Local Overseas Allowances (LOA).

Families who have been moved into SFA which is away from their duty station, in some cases up to 20 miles, feel that they are being discriminated against, in comparison to those families who have been allocated properties which are either on, or close to their units, as they will soon have to pay more to travel to work.



Financial concerns

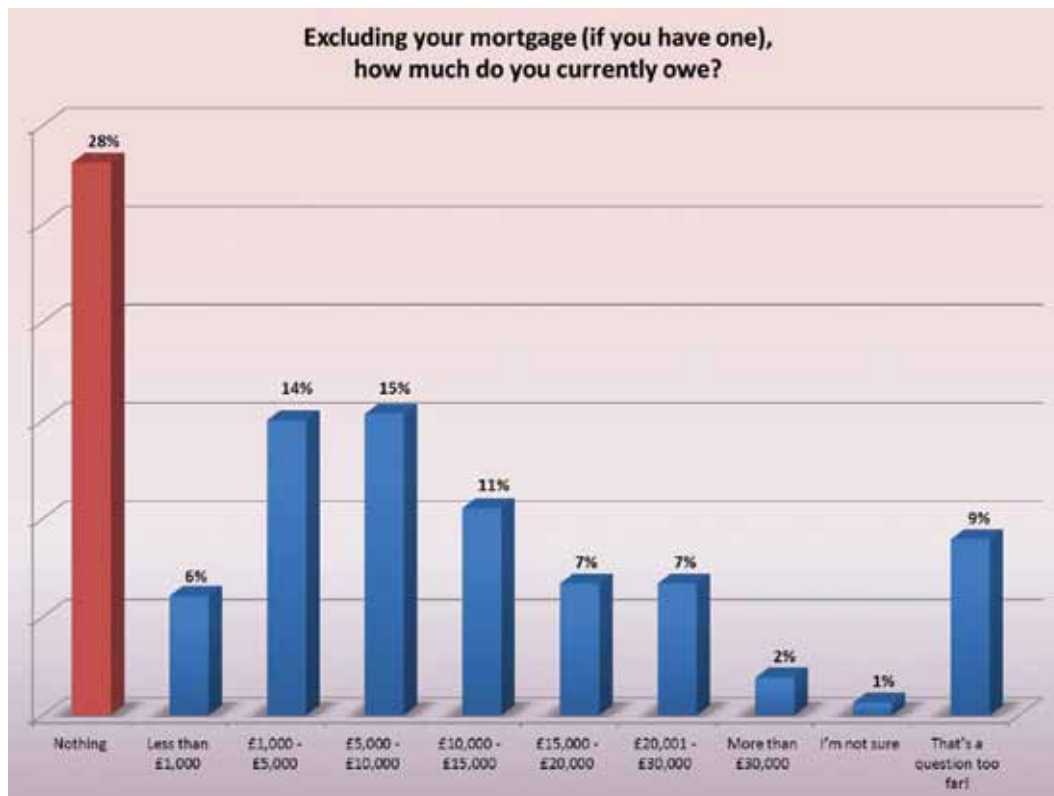
It is of some concern that 82% of voters told us that they worry about money to some extent and that 14% of that group had a lot of financial worries.

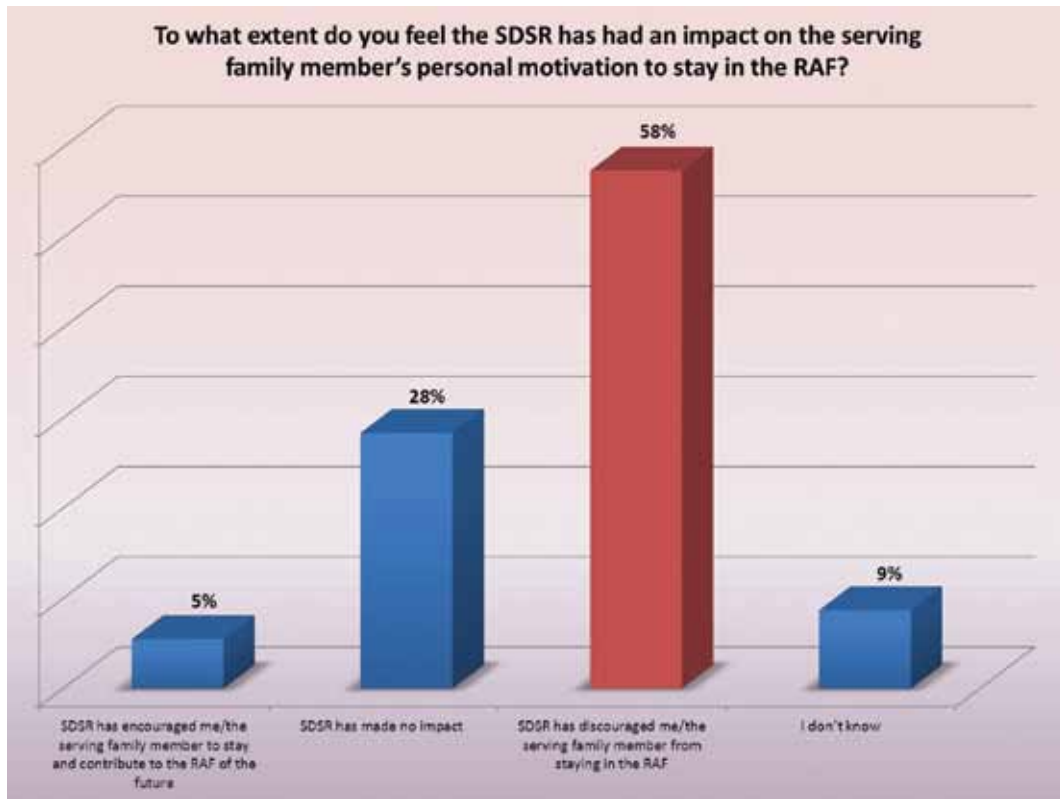
Whilst it was reassuring to note that more than a quarter of respondents had no debts, other than a mortgage, 27% owe more than £10,000 which is quite alarming. The main types of debt include car loans/HP, credit cards, student loans or a combination of several.

Given the level of financial worries that audiences had, it was disappointing to note that only 14%

of voters had sought debt management advice, primarily from an external debt advisor or their bank/building society.

We took the opportunity, whenever possible, to promote the work of the specialist debt counsellors within local Citizens Advice Bureaux, which are jointly funded by the Royal British Legion and the RAF Benevolent Fund, and encouraged audiences to contact them should they need confidential advice, which could be provided away from the military environment.





Perhaps not surprisingly, more than half of our voters told us that the SDSR has had a negative impact on their motivation to stay in the RAF. Many felt that the benefits of being part of the Armed Forces are slowly being eroded away. The announcements regarding base closures, the decision to scrap some high profile, and much

loved, aircraft and the prospect of at least two more redundancy announcements in the coming months mean that many are now questioning their long-term careers within the Service. Many cite a feeling of not being valued and question the meaning of the Covenant in this context.

RAF Reserves

To date, this survey has been completed by 95 personnel, although some visited the website only to opt out of completing the survey for some reason. These casual visits or incomplete surveys were not recorded as part of the totals.

The breakdown of serving versus non-serving family members was 96% serving and 4% non-serving. The gender breakdown was 82% male and 18% female.

Votes came from across the rank structure, with every rank up to Wg Cdr represented apart from Master Aircrew. The most represented ranks were AC- Cpl, and Flt Lt. The split between commissioned and non-commissioned voters was 24% commissioned and 76% non-commissioned.

Voters ranged in age from 21 to over 56, with the majority of votes (51%) coming from the 41-55 year

olds, with a further 24% aged 21-30 and 20% aged 31-40. The higher proportion of older respondents reflects the dynamic of our Reserve forces, which typically attract more mature recruits.

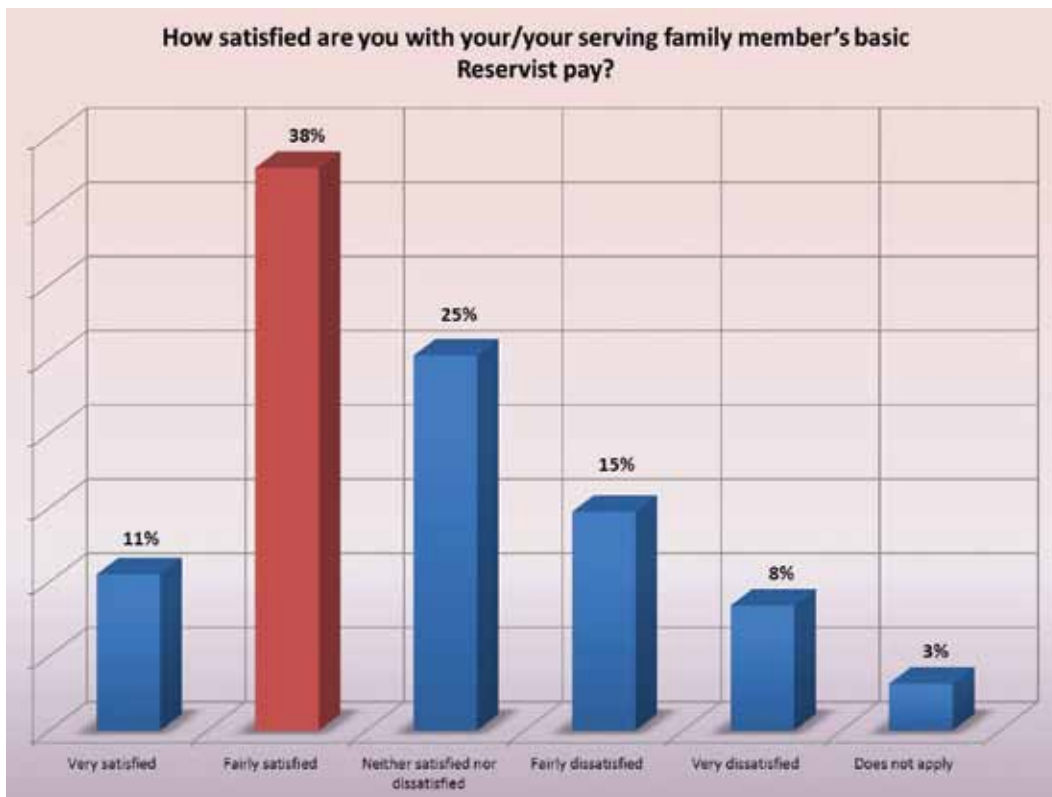
In terms of personal status, our respondents classified themselves as follows: 22% single with no current partner; 20% single but in a long-term relationship; 37% married or in a civil partnership for the first time; 12% married or in a civil partnership for a second or subsequent time and the remainder were either separated or divorced.

Finally, of our respondents, 71% stated that they lived in their own homes for the majority of the week, while 19% lived in rented accommodation. The remaining voters either lived with their parents, in council house or housing association properties or in other types of accommodation.

Pay and Allowances and Financial concerns

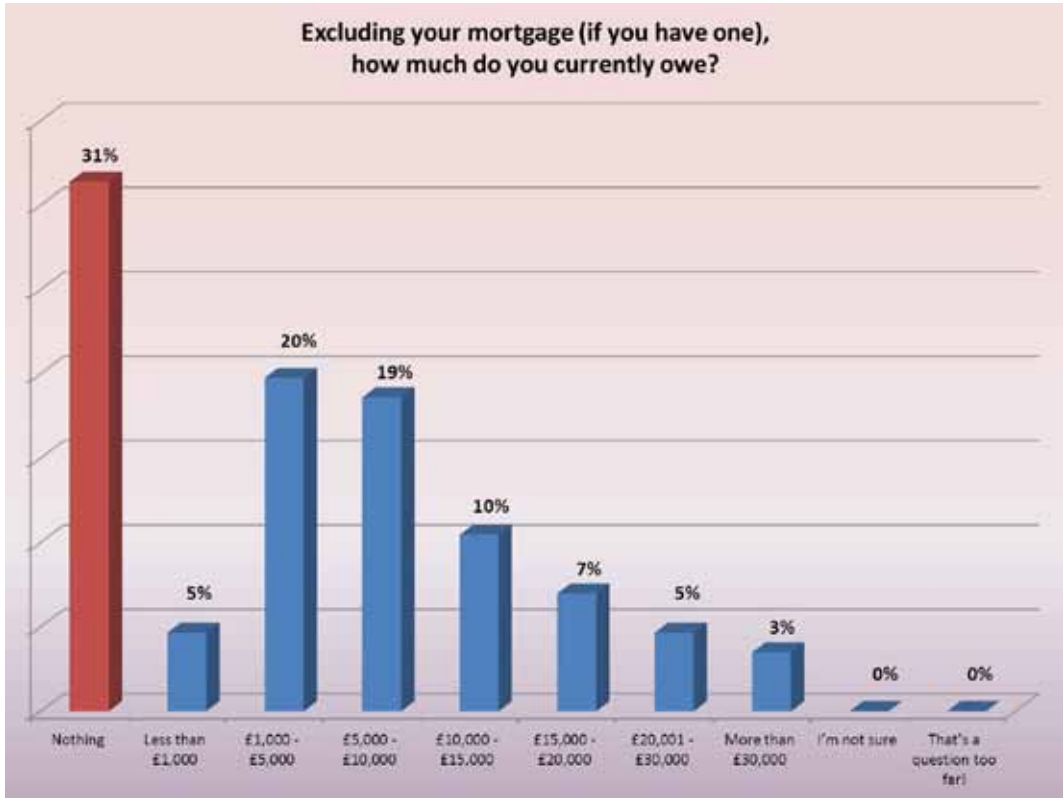
We asked members of the Reserve forces if they felt it was right for the Government to impose a pay freeze on the military. 57% of voters felt the Armed Forces should be protected given the unique nature of their employment.

Nearly half of our voters were satisfied with their basic Reservist pay while only 11% were dissatisfied with the allowances they receive on mobilisation. It should be noted though that 17% felt they did not know enough about the allowances package to comment.



Two thirds of Reserve voters worry about money to some extent, which mirrors the responses received from other Regular audiences. Again, we found that the majority had not sought advice about their debts, despite the fact that 25% of voters owed more than £10,000 (excluding mortgage).

Debt accrued by Reservists match those of their Regular colleagues, with car loans/HP, credit cards, student debts or a combination attracting the most votes. Again, very few respondents had sought financial advice from external debt advisors.

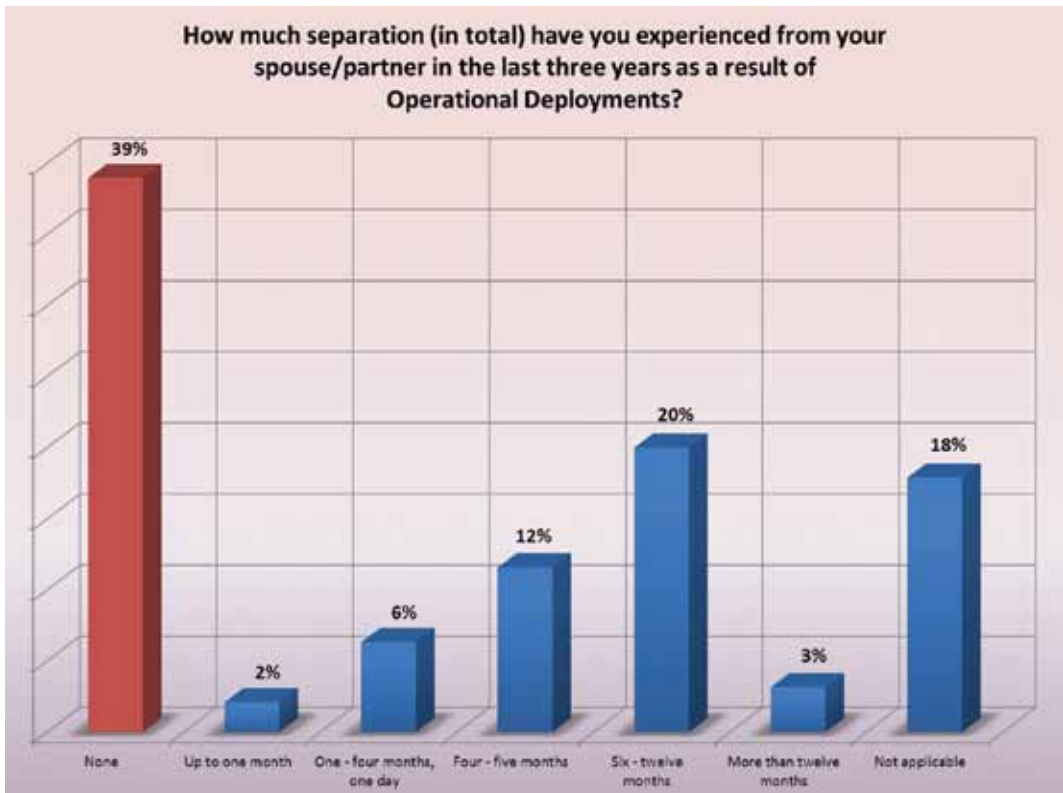


Impact of Service life on the RAF Reserve family

Whilst it is acknowledged that our Reserve voters may not have spent as long away from their families as their Regular colleagues, it should be noted that nearly a quarter of respondents have spent more than six months on deployments. When we combine this with the number of personnel who spend time away as a result of non-operational deployments, which applied to 71% of voters, it becomes apparent that there are a number of Reservist families who also have to deal with the impact

of separations due to military commitments.

Although we did not ask any specific questions about the impact that these separations might have on civilian employment, both for the Reservist and their non-serving spouse/partner, it is clear from the anecdotal comments included within the completed surveys that many respondents are finding it difficult to get the support they need from their employers.

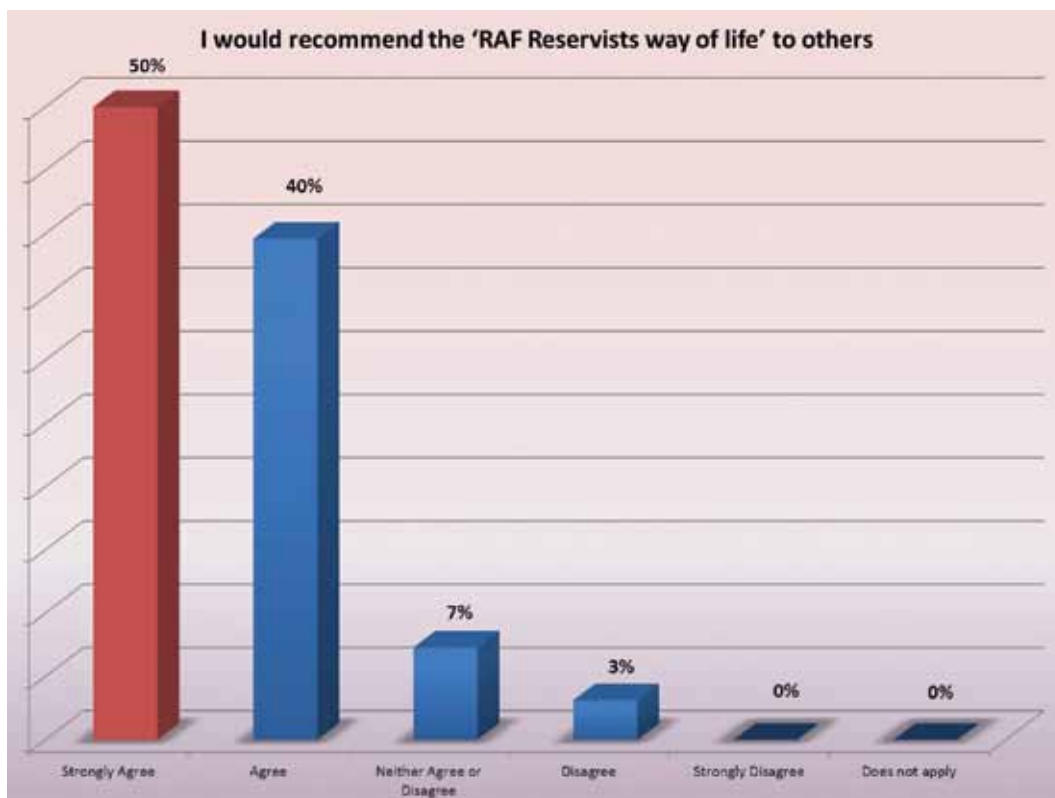
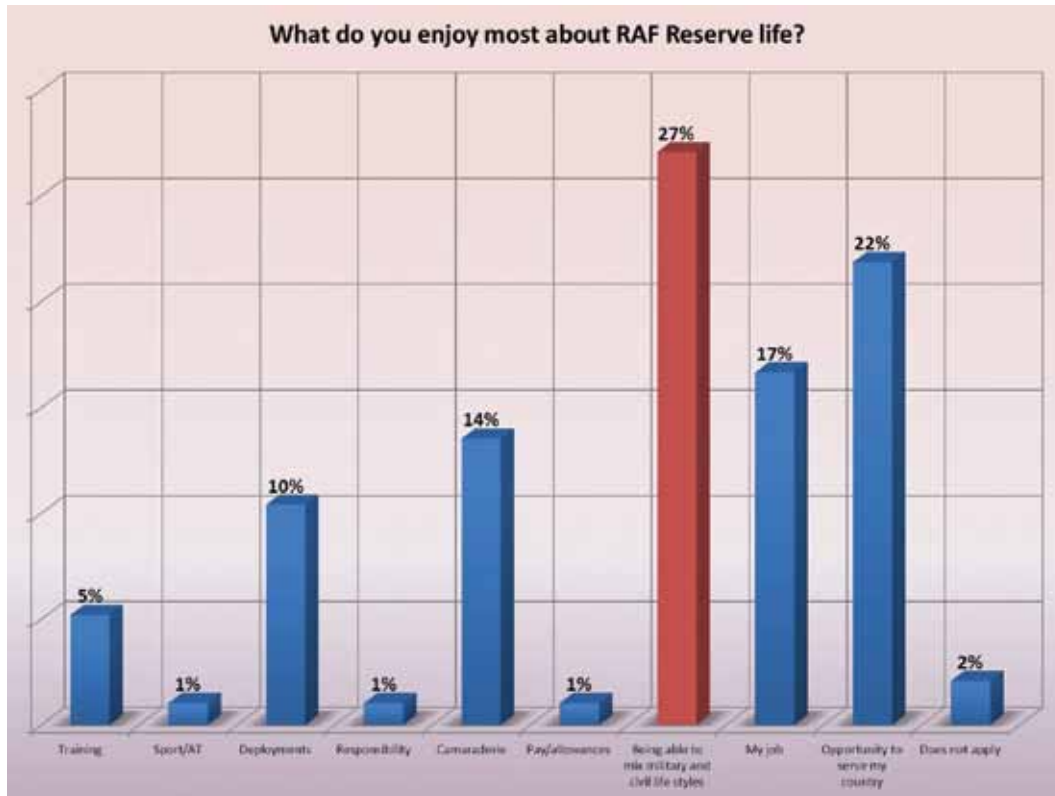


It is also a concern that many of our Reservist families may not be able to access the RAF community support network during periods of separation, perhaps because of their location or lack of awareness of what it available to them. The Federation believes that more could be done to support these key members of our community.

It was heartening to note that 27% of our Reserve colleagues felt that they most enjoyed being able to combine a military and civilian lifestyle, while nearly a quarter felt that the opportunity to serve their country

was the most appealing aspect of RAF Reserve life. On a continuing positive note, 81% of voters told us that they had a good Reservist/civilian work/life balance, which is a stark contrast to the response we received from our Regular voters when we asked for their perspective of their work/life balance.

In stark contrast to their Regular colleagues, 90% of voters told us that they would recommend the 'RAF Reservist way of life' to others, which is a positive note to end on.



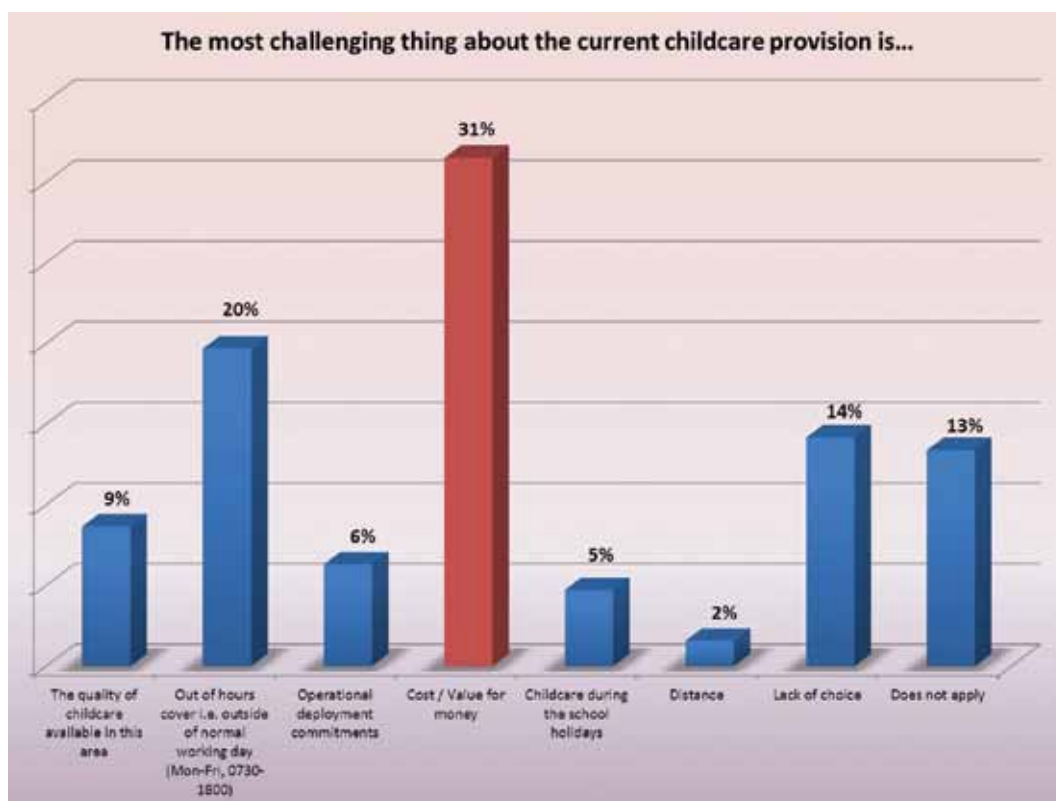
Childcare

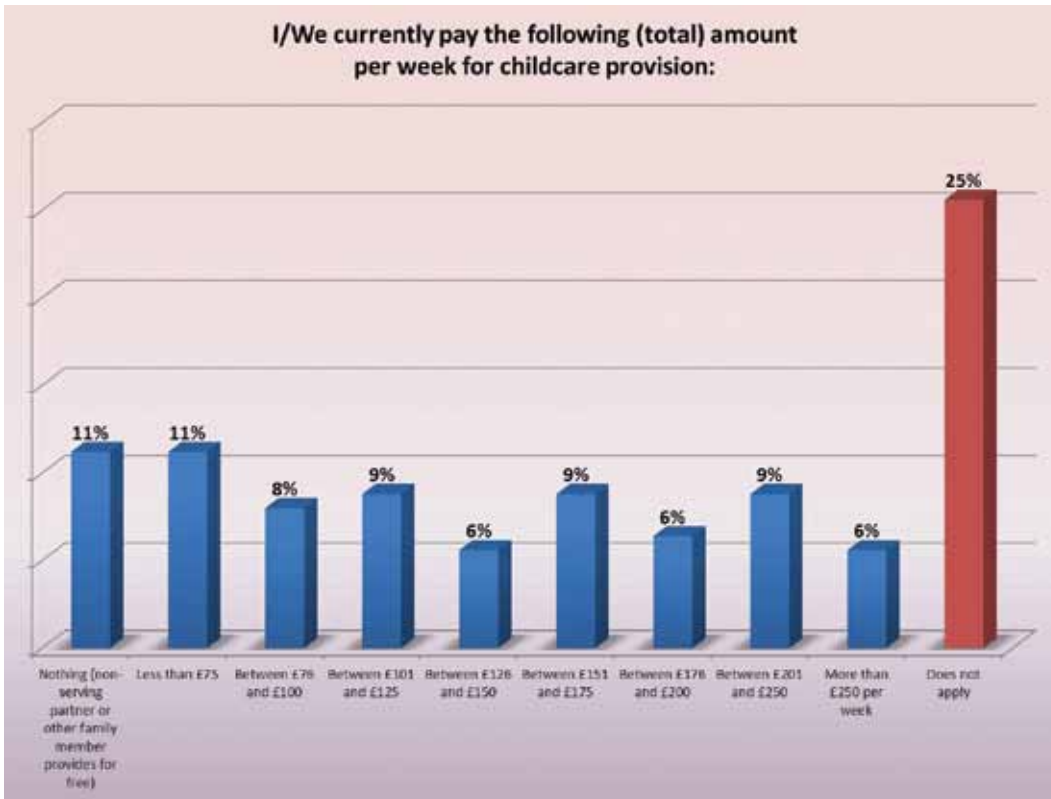
To date, we have received 127 votes for this on-line survey, 69% came from serving and 31% from non-serving family members. 86% of voters were married and came from across the rank structure and age range. Two thirds of respondents lived in SFA, while a further 21% lived in their own homes.

The responses we received were consistent with the evidence we gathered in 2010. The main worry for parents remains the cost and availability of childcare,

while the lack of choice for those posted to various locations around the UK, often at the behest of the RAF, causes frustration for many.

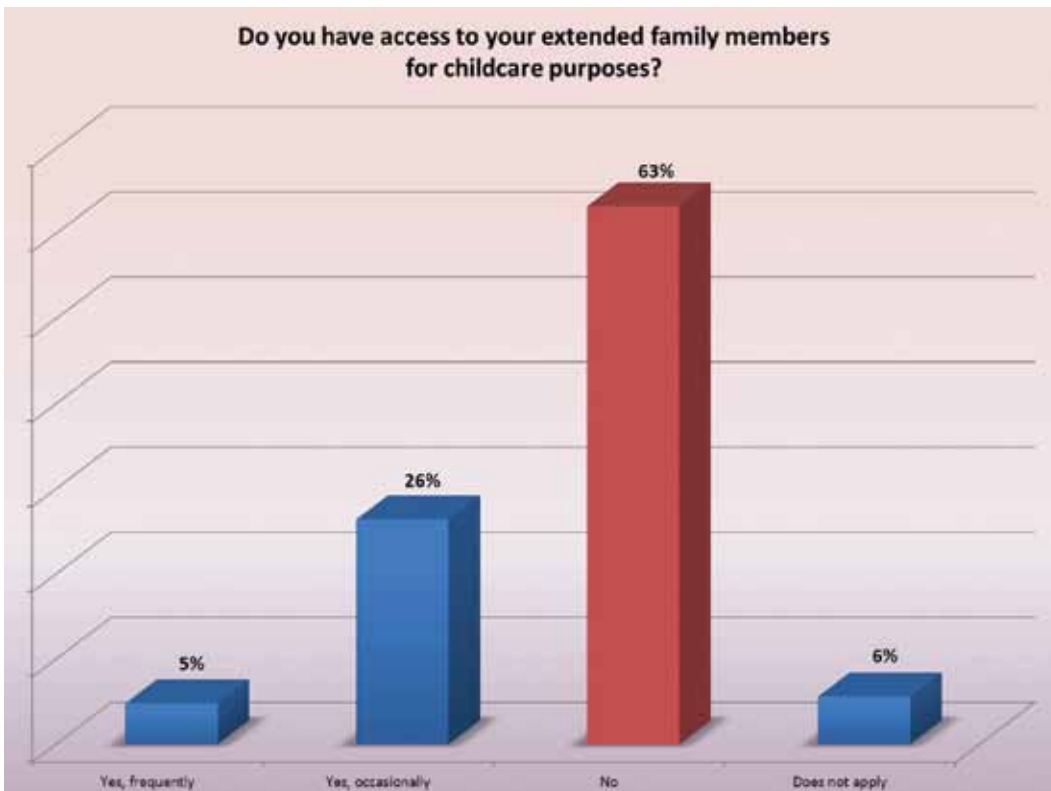
Comments, included within the completed surveys, indicate that parents are constantly battling to access suitable, affordable childcare when they are posted and that many often face problems locating a childcare facility which offers appropriate start/finish times to match the shift patterns being worked on the Unit.





It is of great concern that 30% of parents who voted in this survey paid more than £150 per week for childcare, with 6% of that total paying more than £250 per week. This year, we also asked parents if they had incurred any additional costs for childcare during school holidays. 15% of parents have to pay an extra £100-150 per week while 11% are paying between £150-250 per week. We note with concern that 2% of our voters have to find more than £250 per week during school holidays, which must have a huge impact on family finances.

Anecdotal evidence from the on-line surveys suggests that many families have now decided that the second parent cannot go out to work as they are simply unable to afford the cost of childcare. This difficult situation for many families is exacerbated by the fact that the majority do not have access to their extended families for childcare support due to the mobile nature of the RAF lifestyle.



Employment & Training Opportunities for Service Family Members

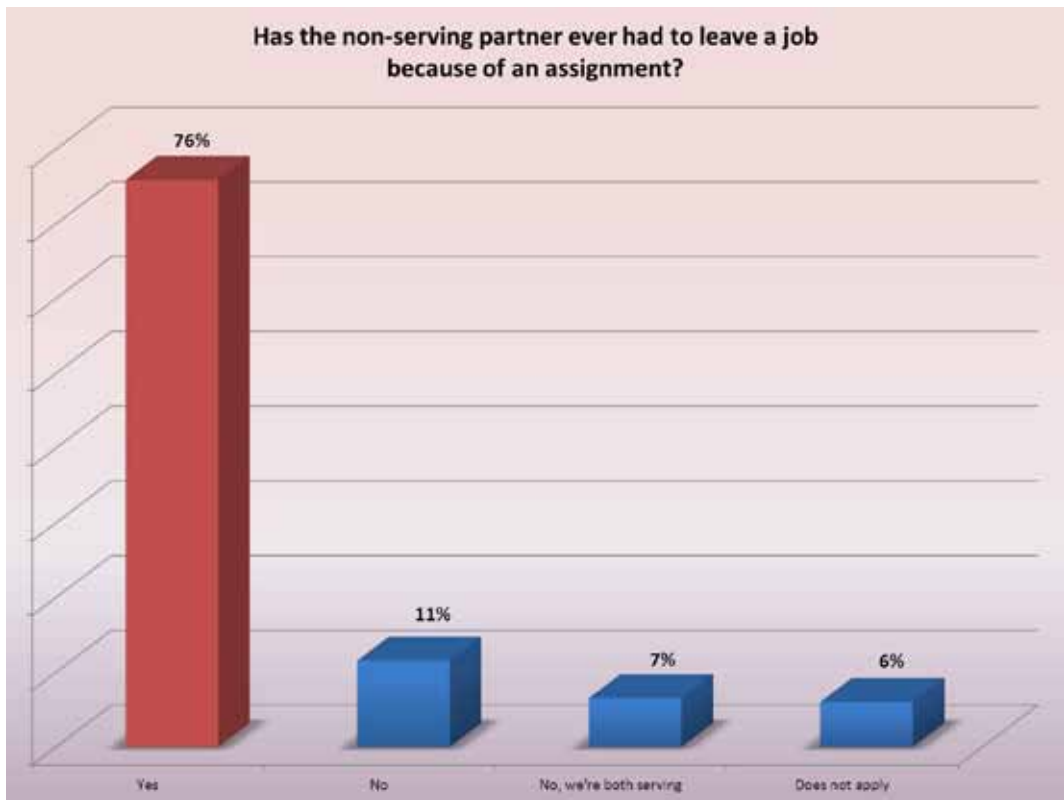
To date, we have received 204 votes for this survey which were gathered from workshops and on-line activities. 68% of respondents were serving while 32% were non-serving family members. 87% of voters were married and those who completed the survey came from across the rank structure and age range. 65% of respondents lived in SFA or SSFA, while a further 21% lived in their own homes and 9% resided in Single Living Accommodation (SLA).

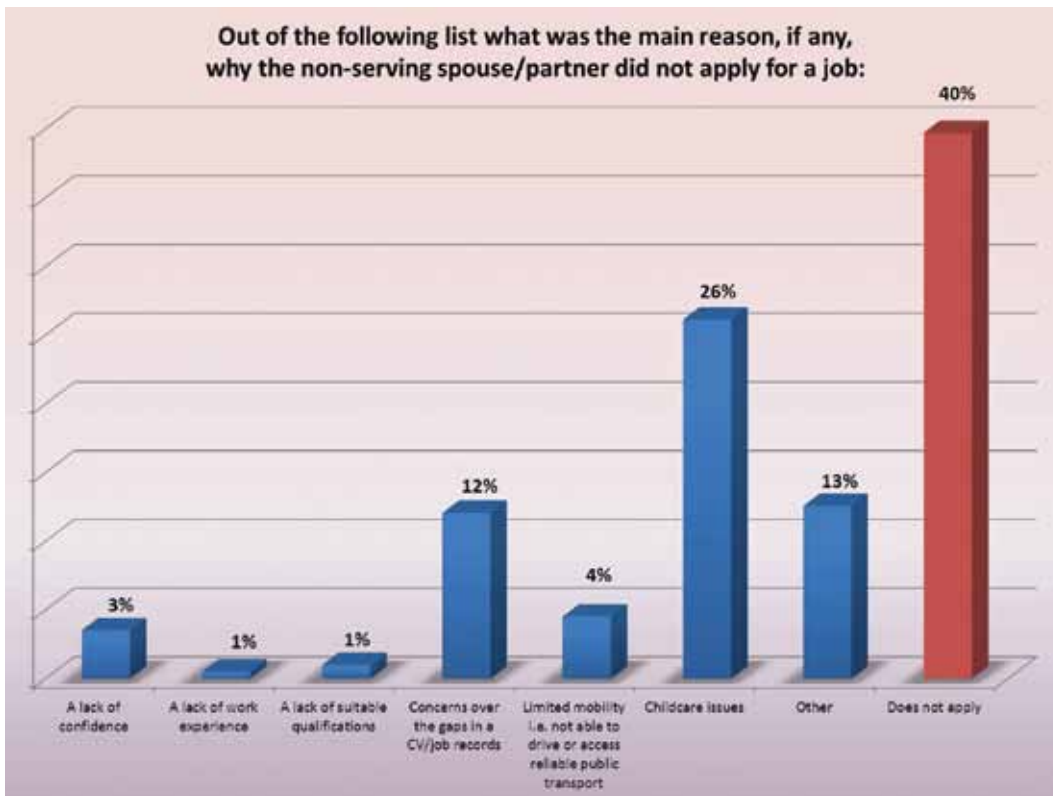
The nature of RAF life meant that three quarters of non-serving spouse/partners had had to leave a job because the serving family member had been posted. This frequent disruption to the career paths of our non-serving family members has a direct impact on their ability to find and retain meaningful employment and it

also undermines their confidence as gaps in CVs are hard to explain and many employers are deeply suspicious of the length of time a military partner will commit to the job.

Families have also faced problems when applying for work-related state benefits, with many telling us that they felt that staffs in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) still do not understand how difficult it can often be when you are a military spouse/partner.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some respondents felt that they were not receiving the right support from the DWP, despite the introduction of the Armed Forces Champions in JobCentre Plus offices some time ago, as a result of the Service Personnel Command Paper in 2008.





Many non-serving spouses/partners now feel the sacrifices they have made with their careers in order to support their partners may have been in vain. Comments received include:

“I have not been able to pursue a career because of my husband’s RAF career - I accepted this because of the benefits that his career could provide our family (CEA, good pension, earlier retirement) however these are being systematically removed, leaving us feeling let-down and wondering if it is worth staying in the military.”

“My wife has moved six times in the past nine years with me. She holds a degree and although she had a well-paid job on leaving university, she has since been reduced to accepting poorly paid jobs to fill a year or two before we move on. She begrudges the military for preventing her from having a career for which she was trained and feels she has been reduced to a ‘wife-of’ and second class citizen in the eyes of the military.

“Her CV has multiple short term jobs listed, which employers see as a commitment issue and prevent them from training or employing my wife in the knowledge that she will quickly move on again.

This has prevented her from fulfilling the career prospects that she thought she once had, and accepts that she is now a Forces wife with all the issues that this creates.”

“Our unit is particularly remote and makes job-seeking incredibly difficult. I left my previous role because we moved from our previous station. I had a senior position earning nearly £10k more than I am earning now. The childcare arrangements were difficult, I can’t rely on my serving spouse being able to collect my son or drop him off as his working hours vary so much, so it all falls to me to find a job that is flexible enough to allow me to fit around childcare arrangements.

“Being away from our families means we have no regular support network to call on at short notice should our son be ill or need to stay home for some reason. Thankfully I have found a fantastic employer who is extremely accommodating of my needs in this respect; however I think that I am the exception to the rule in this regard. It is incredibly difficult for wives to find work for so many reasons, childcare and the constant relocation being the main ones”



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