

Flexible Service: Corporal Albert McDonald

Flexible Service's Restricted Separation allows me to continue to serve knowing that I won't be separated from home base for lengthy periods, so I know I'll be able to continue to give my son the support he needs for his disability. This removes the worry about who could do this while I'm not here, which was making me seriously consider leaving the RAF.

I've been in the RAF for over 18 years. I'm currently part of the Joint Communications Support Unit. My role involves creating and hosting video conferences, managing the video conferencing network and configuring equipment so it can be dispatched to operational areas.

I'm a single parent to my 4 sons. My eldest 2 are weapons technicians and are also in the RAF. Thomas, 23, has served for 4 years and Mark, 20, is about to start his trade training after passing out last year. My younger sons, Harry, 15, and Sean, 12, are both at school.

Shortly after Sean's second birthday, I received the life-changing news that he had a brain tumour. He received treatment and 5 years ago, he and I experienced life-changing relief when we were told that he was in remission. The tumour caused a left-sided Hemiparesis, which means he has limited use of the right-hand side of his body. It also led to scoliosis for which he wears a spinal brace and he had rods inserted in his back roughly a year ago. He's able to do all sorts of things one-handed and he's becoming increasingly independent, despite his decreased mobility. However, he still needs my support for certain things for now, such as travel to and from his regular medical appointments.

If I were to deploy, I'd need to ask my mother to support Sean for the length of my tour, as she's my only family support. She'd have to travel over 500 miles from her home and asking her to do this becomes less realistic each year. This was a real worry and I was seriously considering whether I'd have to leave the RAF for a job that doesn't have any kind of long-term separation from where we live.

Flexible Service's Restricted Separation has changed our lives by removing the possibility of long-term separation from my home base for 3 years. This is balanced by a fair reduction to my pay. I can still be separated for up to 35 days each year which means I can stay up to date with training and be deployed for short periods if my skills are needed away from home base. For example, I recently attended a week-long equipment course and whilst on the Flexible Duties Trial, which preceded Flexible Service, I was deployed overseas for a short period to install and configure video conferencing equipment.

My line manager, Sergeant Mitchell, has been very supportive. He says:

Having a duty of care towards my staff, the importance of finding a balance between work, welfare and wellness is imperative. In Corporal McDonalds case, Flexible Service couldn't be more apt applying benefit to both the RAF and himself.

Corporal McDonald shows loyalty to the Service and ensures that the impact on the section is kept to a minimum during hospital visits and care for his son. Flexible Service allows him to attend to his youngest son and provide care without the added stress of possibly being deployed at short notice.

By the time my arrangement ends, Sean will no doubt be even more independent, and I'll be able to assess my next steps. In the meantime, Defence gets to keep my skills and the military continues to provide me with a home and regular income, which is essential for me to support my family effectively.

[Flexible Service Case Study: Restricted Separation](#)