

Free 'wraparound' childcare for the armed forces

Service personnel based in Buckinghamshire will be the first to trial the new offer of free 'wraparound' childcare as pilots are rolled out in September to coincide with the beginning of the academic year. Following the trials, it is anticipated the offer will be rolled out widely in autumn 2021.

The manifesto commitment of paying for childcare for service families, covering before and after-school during term time for children aged 4 to 11, will ease the burden for service parents who're often held at readiness to be deployed on operations at short notice.

It is the latest in a series of Ministry of Defence (MOD) measures to continue improving its offering as a modern and inclusive employer, introducing maximum flexibility and support to attract and retain the talent required by modern armed forces, particularly women and single parents, by providing additional support to help them accommodate the unique demands of juggling service commitments with family life.

The MOD recently introduced new flexible working arrangements, expanded offerings to co-habiting couples and extended Help to Buy until the end of 2022, giving our armed forces the chance to get a foot on the housing ladder. This has allowed military personnel to borrow a deposit of up to half of their annual salary, interest free, to contribute towards buying a home, moving house, or building an extension.

The launch of the wraparound childcare pilot comes amidst the nation's wider return to education, following the disruption of the coronavirus pandemic. Service personnel from all of our armed forces have provided critical support to their colleagues in health and social care, often deployed away from home at short notice. It is due to precisely such disruptions that the MOD is seeking to provide service families with the best possible childcare.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Service families are at the very heart of the armed forces community and it is vital that we provide them with the appropriate flexibility and freedom to bring up their children while they serve.

I am determined to make the armed forces a more modern, inclusive and family friendly employer, in order to improve the working environment for retention of all personnel but also to encourage more talented women to pursue long, and fulfilling careers in uniform.

Defence People and Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer said:

I know from first-hand experience that while Service life is hugely rewarding, it isn't without its challenges when it comes to juggling the demands of family life.

It is only right that those who continue to do extraordinary work on behalf of the country are recognised and rewarded, and I'm pleased we're continuing to honour our commitment to our hard-working personnel so they receive the right support to care for loved ones.

RAF High Wycombe and RAF Halton in Buckinghamshire will be the first bases to offer the scheme, with service personnel based in Catterick and Plymouth able to access the pilot scheme from January 2021. Personnel at High Wycombe and Halton will be notified shortly on further details of the service and how to sign up and will be engaged throughout the process.