

New anti-bullying helpline to clamp down on poor behaviour in the military

The helpline, which will go live in September, will be staffed 24/7 by trained bullying, harassment and discrimination advisers and qualified counsellors, who will provide emotional support, information and guidance to callers.

Individuals will be able to report incidents anonymously to independent advisers and seek help on how to take issues forward, including through local support networks or the service complaints system, where necessary.

Establishing the bullying and harassment helpline was one of the key recommendations of Air Chief Marshal Wigston's review into behaviour across defence that was published last year. The report found that while the majority of personnel behave appropriately, there is still an unacceptable level of inappropriate behaviour in the military. Thirty-six recommendations were made as part of the report, all of which have been accepted by the Ministry of Defence.

To evaluate the success of current measures and ensure progress continues to be made at speed, an independent review of Ministry of Defence's (MOD) anti-bullying work will be led by Danuta Gray, a Non-Executive Board Member and Chair of the People Committee at the MOD. In this role she has overseen processes for managing the careers of senior military officers and senior civil servants, with a specific focus on behaviour and incentives across Defence. The review will commence on the first anniversary of the Wigston review (Wednesday 15 July 2020) and will run for approximately 3 months.

Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace said:

Our personnel selflessly serve our nation day in and day out, and they deserve to be treated equally, with dignity and respect, both on and off duty. I want everyone to feel proud to be part of this team.

There is simply no place for bullying or harassment in our armed forces and I'm determined to stamp this out. Our anti-bullying helpline is an important next step and I will continue to seek the change in behaviour we need to see across defence.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

This new anti-bullying helpline gets to the heart of the support I want for the men and women in our armed forces. Inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated and this new helpline will allow personnel to report incidents in a safe and secure environment. By

staffing the helpline with trained advisors and counsellors outside of the chain of command, we will ensure concerns are dealt with quickly and professionally.

Since the publication of the Wigston Review, a dedicated team has been established to oversee progress against the recommendations with an initial focus on updating policies and infrastructure for serving personnel to identify and report unacceptable behaviour at an earlier stage.

New 'active bystander' training will also now be made available to all personnel, from those in the lower ranks to those at the top, to ensure everyone has the skills and confidence to recognise and call out inappropriate behaviour. Developed by the Defence Academy, the training will encourage those witnessing unacceptable comments or actions to take a more active role in intervening, reporting or addressing it.

Updated guidance on sexual harassment will also be circulated around the forces, providing information to help personnel understand what sexual harassment can look like and what they can do if they are experiencing or witnessing it.

Each service has also taken decisive action since the review's publication to further promote an inclusive culture. The British Army has trained personnel as 'Allies' to the perspectives of minority groups, who're encouraged to stand up for others and call out unacceptable conduct. The Royal Navy has introduced new mandatory behaviour training, while the RAF has organised special mentoring programmes. Each service has also appointed a Senior responsible Officer to closely track progress.