

News story: British soldiers arrive in Estonia

British soldiers from 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh have deployed to Estonia, renewing the UK's commitment to our NATO allies in Europe and providing reassurance in the face of any potential aggression.

Taking over from 5th Battalion The Rifles, which has been in the country since March, 800 soldiers from the Royal Welsh battlegroup arrived this week.

Following an official ceremony earlier today, The Royal Welsh will now lead the multinational enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup, supported by elements from the King's Royal Hussars, the Royal Engineers and the Royal Artillery as well as soldiers from France and Denmark. The battlegroup will be part of the 1st Estonian Infantry Brigade.

The arrival of the Royal Welsh coincides with the second in a series of visits from four RAF Typhoons to Estonia, ready to train and work with UK personnel on the ground as well as our NATO allies.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Nobody should be in any doubt of our unwavering commitment to the security of Europe through NATO in the face of Russian belligerence.

In the face of intensifying threats, the UK has stepped up across Europe, with soldiers, tanks and Typhoons deployed from Estonia to Romania.

Our enhanced Forward Presence is a strategic tripwire that we will maintain on an enduring footing.

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Owain Luke added:

Having completed a demanding period of training in the UK and Canada earlier this year, we are delighted to have finally arrived in Estonia.

We now look forward to training and operating with the 1st Estonian Infantry Brigade and our French and Danish allies as part of NATO's wider defensive posture across the Baltic states and Poland.

The UK's battlegroup forms part of the wider NATO enhanced Forward Presence, with multinational forces deployed across the Baltic States and Poland, led by the US, Canada and Germany. The UK has a further 150 soldiers based in

Poland, part of the US led battlegroup and RAF Typhoons have recently completed a four month deployment to Romania, patrolling the Black Sea skies.

[News story: New plans for Armed Forces flexible working reach the Commons](#)

The proposed legislation, announced as part of the Queen's Speech in June, will allow Armed Forces personnel to work part time for short periods of time, as long as operational effectiveness of the military is maintained.

The plans are part of a range of measures that the MOD is currently undertaking to improve service conditions for everyone, including attracting and retaining more women in the military. The Armed Forces are currently working towards a target of having 15% of the military being made up of women by 2020.

Currently 10.2% of the military are women, with expanding career opportunities as the military opens up its ground close combat roles to females. The RAF became the first service to recruit women into all of its trades when it opened up the RAF Regiment to women in September of this year. The Army and Marines will follow suit by the end of 2018.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Keeping Britain safe means investing in our personnel as well as in new equipment. More flexible working is essential to a modern military, allowing us to recruit the best talent and retain those already serving, while always being ready to deploy as commanders require.

The military must offer conditions of service that keep up with those available in other lines of work. This change will significantly make it easier for women with children.

The flexible working measures, which are due to come into effect in 2019, will also allow personnel to limit the amount of time that they need to spend away from their home base and their families.

The need to maintain operational capability lies at the heart of these arrangements, and applications for part-time working will predominantly be assessed against the need of the Armed Forces. Personnel would still be required to deploy on operations should the need arise, such as in cases of national emergency.

Consultation within the Armed Forces has found that personnel want more

choice over the way they serve when their personal circumstances change, such as having young children or needing to care for elderly relatives. Internal MOD surveys have consistently reported that the impact of service life on family and personal life is the most important factor that might influence them to leave (62% in this year's Attitude Survey).

Flexible working will help retain personnel, and a recent survey found that 70% of respondents were supportive of more opportunities for flexible working, with 71% interested in taking up such opportunities in the future.

The measures are part of military modernisation, aiming to retain personnel who have been trained and have gained important experience, particularly on operations, rather than having them leave for civilian life. 96% of UK employers already offer flexible working for some of their employees and research has found that offering flexible working encourages people to stay with their current employer.

These reforms are part of the modern offer to personnel and the government's commitment to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant, which was enshrined in law in 2011 to ensure Service personnel are not disadvantaged through their work.

[News story: Defence Secretary visits Tyneside shipyard as industry develops plans for new frigates](#)

The MOD spent £400 million with UK industry in the North East last year, £150 per person, supporting over 2,600 jobs in the region. A&P Tyne have played a crucial role in major defence programmes, such as building blocks for the UK's new aircraft carriers and key parts for nuclear submarines. The company also maintains support ships, including Mounts Bay that was instrumental in the relief effort following Hurricane Irma.

Following the launch of the Government's National Shipbuilding Strategy last month, industry has developed over 20 different proposals for new Type 31e frigates. A&P are involved in one of the early plans with Cammell Laird and BAE Systems to deliver the new class of ships.

Shipyards across the country were invited to provide initial high-level proposals to build the initial order of five ships at a maximum average price of £250 million each. The Defence Secretary has personally committed to attend every major UK shipyard in the run up to the start of the formal competition to procure the new class of Type 31e in the New Year.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

It is very encouraging to witness the renaissance of shipbuilding around the UK first hand. Having helped build our new aircraft carriers and the Astute Class submarines, A&P Tyne have the skills and expertise to bid for our brand new class of frigates.

The whole industry is clearly excited about the opportunity to build cutting-edge ships for our growing Royal Navy, which will protect our nation and interests across the world.



The UK's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, part of which was built by A&P Tyne.

From building blocks for the innovative modular construction of the Royal Navy's new Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers, which were assembled in Rosyth, to providing key parts for the Astute nuclear submarine programme, sustaining jobs and bringing work worth some £7 million to the region, A&P Tyne have been pivotal to UK defence.

The Defence Secretary was given a guided tour of the Hebburn-based yard which employs 300 workers including 11 new apprentices and boasts the largest dry dock on the north-east coast of England. With the commitment to build the Type 31e warships in the UK, A&P have the opportunity to compete for this latest programme to build ships for the Royal Navy.

The frigates will be designed to meet the needs of the Royal Navy, but also

with the export market in mind. The Government will work with industry to provide support to become internationally competitive, boosting the UK economy and jobs, while also helping to create a more stable and well-protected world.

Having already paid visits to Cammell Laird in Merseyside, Harland and Wolff in Belfast and Ferguson Marine on the Clyde, the Defence Secretary has carried out extensive engagement with industry in recent weeks. Sir Michael also visited BAE Systems' Scotstoun yard in Glasgow for the naming of the latest Offshore Patrol Vessel, HMS Medway, and Babcock in Rosyth for the naming of the second aircraft carrier, HMS Prince of Wales, in further engagement with UK shipyards.

[News story: New stats reveal veterans' contribution to society, as Ministerial Board steps up support to Armed Forces](#)

The stats show that, contrary to common misconceptions, veterans are as likely to be in employment as the general population, with 78% of veterans in employment, compared to 79% in the general population.

The stats come on the day of the inaugural meeting of a new Ministerial Board, co-chaired by Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and First Secretary of State Damien Green, which discussed the Government's support to the Armed Forces, their families and veterans.

The new Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Board will drive forward and coordinate better Government support to the Armed Forces, their families and veterans.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Veterans and their families have given so much to this country to help keep us safe. We need all of Government working together to deliver a better deal for Veterans during and after their move to civilian life. We will examine new ways to repay our armed forces for the bravery, honour and sacrifice they demonstrate when defending this country.

A number of other statistics released today by the Office of National Statistics also outline how prevalent myths around the employment, education

and health of veterans are untrue. The statistics found that:

- There were no differences between veterans' and non-veteran's self-reported general health and health conditions. 35% of veterans aged between 16-64 reported their general health as very good, compared to 36% of non-veterans. 18% of over 65 veterans also reported very good general health, compared to 19% of non-veterans.
- Working age veterans were as likely to have a qualification as non-veterans, (92% and 89% respectively) and more likely to have gained qualifications through work (63%) and leisure (17%) than non-veterans (45% and 10% respectively). This is likely a result of the training opportunities offered by the MOD to support service personnel in their military career and during transition out of the services.
- Veterans were as likely to have bought their own home (outright or with a mortgage) (75%) as non-veterans (77%). The MOD's Armed Forces Help to Buy scheme recently revealed that over 11,000 service personnel had been assisted in buying or renovating their own home through the scheme. Forces Help to Buy is just one of the initiatives under the Armed Forces Covenant to support Armed Forces personnel and veterans.

On Tuesday the Defence Secretary called on businesses to do more to promote the positive role veterans play in the workplace. Speaking at an Armed Forces charity dinner he said that veterans play an important part in the nation's economy, contrary to prevalent misconceptions surrounding those who have served.

Research published last week by Lord Ashcroft, the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Veterans' Transition, found that while people on the whole were positive about veterans, some 54% of the general public estimated that service leavers had some kind of physical, emotional or mental health problem as a result of their time in the military

Lord Ashcroft's report highlighted the pervasive nature of myths surrounding public perception of veterans, pointing towards research which debunks a number of these:

- The employment rate for veterans six months after leaving the military is higher than in the UK workforce as a whole
- The vast majority of former service personnel go on to lead normal, healthy, productive lives
- Suicide is less common among the military population than the general public

- Veterans are less likely to go to prison, not more.

The new Ministerial Board which met for the first time today will have a specific focus on the priority area of healthcare, including mental health, but will also look at housing, education, and employment opportunities.

The new Board comes just weeks after the MOD established a new partnership with the Royal Foundation, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry's charity, on improving mental fitness. The partnership delivers on a commitment made in the MOD's recently launched Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

[News story: Defence Secretary commits to boost diversity in the Armed Forces](#)

The visit took place during Black History Month, a nationwide celebration of black history, arts and culture held every October.

Sir Michael Fallon met the unit's engagement team, who have been specifically set up to build links with minority communities across London, and congratulated the Royal Navy's longest serving female reservist [Chief Petty Officer Evadne Gordon](#) who joined 40 years ago and whose family moved from Jamaica to the UK in the 1950s.

The visit included a meeting with Commander Richmal Hardinge, HMS President's second ever female Commanding Officer, and a chance to speak to a group of Sea Cadets, following this month's approval of 31 new cadet units in state schools, five of which are in London and the South East.

The Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon, said:

We are working hard to ensure the Armed Forces, like our cadets, better represent the society they serve but there is still much more to do. We want more sailors, soldiers and airmen to come from minority and ethnic communities. More diverse armed forces are a stronger armed forces; that has to start amongst the junior ranks and work all the way up to chief of the defence staff.



Sir Michael Fallon congratulated Chief Petty Officer Evadne Gordon for becoming the longest serving female member of the Royal Naval Reserves.

The Armed Forces have committed to ensuring that at least 10 per cent of all new recruits come from minority and ethnic communities by 2020, with intake levels currently at 7.2 per cent.

To achieve this a set of networks have been established within the Armed Forces, which is part of the diversity and inclusion strategy.



The Defence Secretary spoke to members of the Sea Cadets at HMS President

In June the Defence Secretary attended the unveiling of the first ever memorial to African and Caribbean servicemen and women during the First and Second World Wars.

15,000 soldiers from the West Indies Regiment saw action in France, Palestine, Egypt and Italy during the First World War – 2,500 of them were killed or wounded. These brave men from the West Indies won 81 medals for bravery, whilst 49 were mentioned in despatches.

55,000 men from Africa fought for the British during the First World War and hundreds of thousands of others carried out vital roles. They came from Nigeria, the Gambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Malawi, Kenya and Ghana. It is estimated that 10,000 Africans were killed. African troops were awarded 166 decorations for bravery.