

[News story: Broadband providers drop cancellation fees for Armed Forces personnel](#)

The commitment from the UK's biggest broadband providers representing 95 per cent of Britain's broadband market comes into force immediately, and will benefit tens of thousands of Forces households in the UK and abroad.

The change agreed to under the tenets of the Armed Forces Covenant includes BT, Sky, EE, Plusnet, Talk Talk and Virgin Media, who have all committed to treating military personnel fairly when cancelling their contracts.

Up until now, members of the Armed Forces who are deployed overseas or to different parts of the UK not covered by their provider could be forced to pay a cancellation fee. They will no longer have to face this cost and be disadvantaged due to the mobile nature of service life.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster, said:

Our Armed Forces are sent all over the world and across the country to help keep our country safe and they should never be at a disadvantage because of this. The removal of cancellation fees by leading broadband providers is yet another example of the Covenant in action, which is making sure our brave personnel are treated fairly. It's a welcome move and we're looking forward to seeing what more British businesses can do to support our military.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have previously served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly and not disadvantaged by their service. Delivery partners include businesses and trade bodies, charities and community organisations, local authorities and government departments.

BT Chief Executive Gavin Patterson, said:

Armed Forces personnel play a vital role protecting our country, whether serving overseas or stationed away from home in other parts of the UK. That's why we're committed to ensuring they don't have to pay for broadband or TV services they can't access, when they find themselves in this situation. Whether it's through today's announcement, our hiring of ex-armed forces personnel, or through our work with Reservists, BT, along with our fellow signatories are proud to support our country's military personnel.

TalkTalk Chief Executive, Dido Harding, added:

We recognise that service personnel and their families face unique challenges, not least due to the fact they are regularly posted to new locations all over the country and abroad, often at short notice. TalkTalk was the first ISP to recognise how tricky this can be and offer free disconnections for service personnel moving overseas, and we're delighted that the rest of the industry has followed suit.

Today's announcement follows previous Covenant pledges by UK businesses to support personnel when they are posted overseas.

Last year, the UK's largest insurers and brokers allowed personnel and their families posted abroad to keep their No Claims Bonus for up to three years, and also waived cancellation fees.

47 of the UK's high street banks and building societies also committed to letting personnel posted overseas and around the UK rent out their homes without facing higher mortgage costs or having to change to a buy-to-let mortgage.

[News story: UK's NATO Southern Air Policing Mission to begin in May](#)

Sir Michael also confirmed that four Typhoons from Royal Air Force 3 (Fighter) Squadron will lead the deployment.

The Defence Secretary agreed the UK's air policing contribution during NATO defence ministerial talks in the autumn and confirmed the timing of the deployment and squadron name at the International Parliamentary Conference on National Security in London today.

The Typhoons from RAF Coningsby will be based at Mihail Kogalniceanu Airbase in south east Romania for up to four months, working side-by-side with the Romanian Air Force to police the skies over the Black Sea.

Royal Air Force 3 (Fighter) Squadron has a long history. One hundred years ago it was a fighter scout unit assisting our forces in the trenches, in World War Two it was at the forefront of our air defences destroying nearly 300 V1 flying bomb. More recently it took tours of Sierra Leone and as part of Counter Daesh operations in Iraq and Syria.

The UK is the first nation to provide jets to this NATO mission, which forms part of the UK's increasing support to our Allies following the recent deployment of British troops to Estonia as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence.

Secretary of State for Defence Sir Michael Fallon said:

The UK is stepping up its support for NATO's collective defence from the north to the south of the alliance. With this deployment, RAF planes will be ready to secure NATO airspace and provide reassurance to our allies in the Black Sea region.

During his speech the Defence Secretary addressed a range of national security issues, including cyber where the UK is investing its growing Defence budget in new cyber capabilities.

This comes as the UK's cyber capabilities are tested in exercises, including Information Warrior 2017, the Royal Navy's first ever large-scale cyber war games, designed to test new Artificial Intelligence able to speed up complex decision making, which starts this week.

Sir Michael also confirmed that £1.9 billion will be invested in developing cyber capabilities and skills across all Government departments, in addition to establishing the new National Cyber Security Centre, the Defence Cyber School at Shrivenham, and a Cyber Operations Centre at Corsham.

Sir Michael added:

Our military is among the best prepared in the world to tackle cyber threats – with capabilities and skills integrated into the Army, Royal Navy, and the RAF. But in such a dynamic environment we must continually test and enhance our skills.

We're interested not just in defensive but also in offensive cyber – those who threaten cyber-attacks against us need to know the risk they're running.

During the speech at Church House the Defence Secretary also paid tribute to those who lost their lives during last week's attack in Westminster.

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[Press release: PM announces major counter-terrorism training exercise in Scotland](#)

The Prime Minister has today announced a major counter-terrorism training exercise will take place in Scotland later this year to test multi-agency response that would come into force in the event of a terror attack.

During a [visit today](#) to [Police Scotland](#), which will act as the lead force throughout the operation, she met a range of officers involved in counter-terrorism, including some who were involved in Police Scotland's response to last week's [attacks in Westminster](#).

The training is part of the UK government's National Counter-Terrorism Exercise Programme and brings together partners from policing and security, the armed forces, UK government departments and the devolved administrations to test responses to a major terrorist attack.

The Prime Minister Theresa May said:

The UK government considers national security across the whole of the UK as a top priority.

Training operations such as this one play a significant part in making sure police forces and other response agencies are able to fully draw on the latest intelligence and resources from the UK's security forces to protect against terrorism anywhere on our soil.

As the second largest force in the country, Police Scotland are a key player in our fight against terrorism. I'm grateful to them for the exceptional work they have been delivering so far to prepare for this very important counter-terrorism exercise.

Lessons learnt from these operations are fed back to the full range of operational partners, government departments and devolved administrations to further strengthen the UK's response to a terrorist attack on UK soil.

Only second in size to the [Metropolitan Police Service](#), Police Scotland works closely with other forces across the UK and has an important role to play in the development of UK-wide policing practices.

This system of agencies allows an effective joint response to tackle terrorism and serious and organised crime throughout the UK.

Police Scotland has automatic access to the UK's [National Crime Agency](#) and its international networks, as well as the UK security agencies' resources and their interception and surveillance abilities.

Equally, it can draw on intelligence from the [National Cyber Security Centre](#), which does crucial work in protecting the UK's infrastructure and keeping us safe online.

The training exercise, which will take place in October, will also involve areas in the north of England.

Cross-agency counter-terrorism responses take place regularly, with exercises ranging from low capability testing to full scale national operations, and this latest event is part of a routine run.

[News story: National Apprenticeship Awards 2017](#)

In its fourteenth year, the National Apprenticeship Awards 2017 will search for England's top apprenticeship employers and apprentices; whilst recognising those individuals that make a significant contribution to apprenticeships.

The awards are open for entries for apprentices and apprentice employers to be named 'the best of the best' on a regional and national level, in 10 categories:

Employer Categories

- Small Employer of the Year (1 to 24 employees)
- Medium Employer of the Year (25 to 249 employees)
- Large Employer of the Year (250 to 4,999 employees)
- Macro Employer of the Year (5,000+ employees)
- Newcomer SME of the Year (up to 249 employees)
- Newcomer Large Employer of the Year (250+ employees)

Apprentice Categories

- Intermediate Apprentice of the Year
- Advanced Apprentice of the Year

- Higher or Degree Apprentice of the Year

Apprenticeship Champion

- Apprenticeship Champion of the Year

The Apprenticeship Champion of the Year is open to individuals who go above and beyond to champion Apprenticeships, this category includes apprentices themselves but is also open to those who have made a significant contribution to apprenticeships, for example, those individuals providing careers guidance and working in schools, colleges and other organisations.

Once again the very best employer category entries will also have the additional bonus of featuring in the prestigious annual Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers list.

Sue Husband, director of the National Apprenticeship Service said:

“These awards are a top accolade for all the hard work apprentices and employers are putting into apprenticeships. They are real examples of the many benefits apprenticeships bring to apprentices themselves and their employer. As winners ‘the best of the best’ gain public recognition for their achievements and really are inspiring ambassadors of apprenticeships.

“The 2016 National Apprenticeship Awards final, once again, showcased fantastic talent, commitment and determination from everyone dedicated to improving skills through apprenticeships. We are looking forward to sharing and celebrating further successes for 2017.”

The application site has opened today (27 March 2017); apply online at apprenticeawards.co.uk. Guidance documents for employers and apprentices making applications are available to download from the awards application site. Only entries submitted through the online system will be accepted.

For those considering entering the 2017 awards – a series of webinars to find out more about the process will be announced shortly.