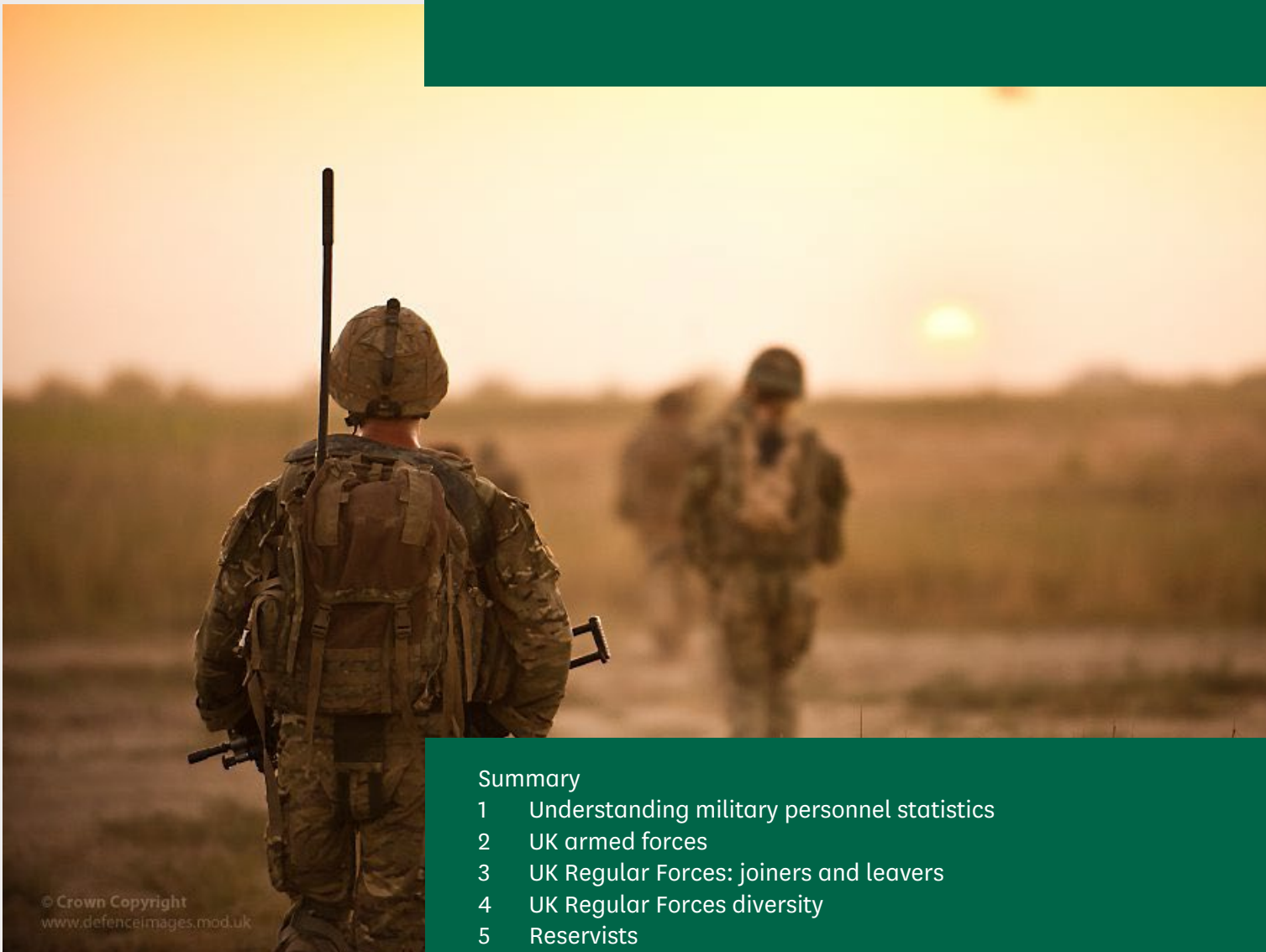


By Esme Kirk-Wade

13 August 2024

UK defence personnel statistics



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Summary

- 1 Understanding military personnel statistics
- 2 UK armed forces
- 3 UK Regular Forces: joiners and leavers
- 4 UK Regular Forces diversity
- 5 Reservists
- 6 Location of personnel

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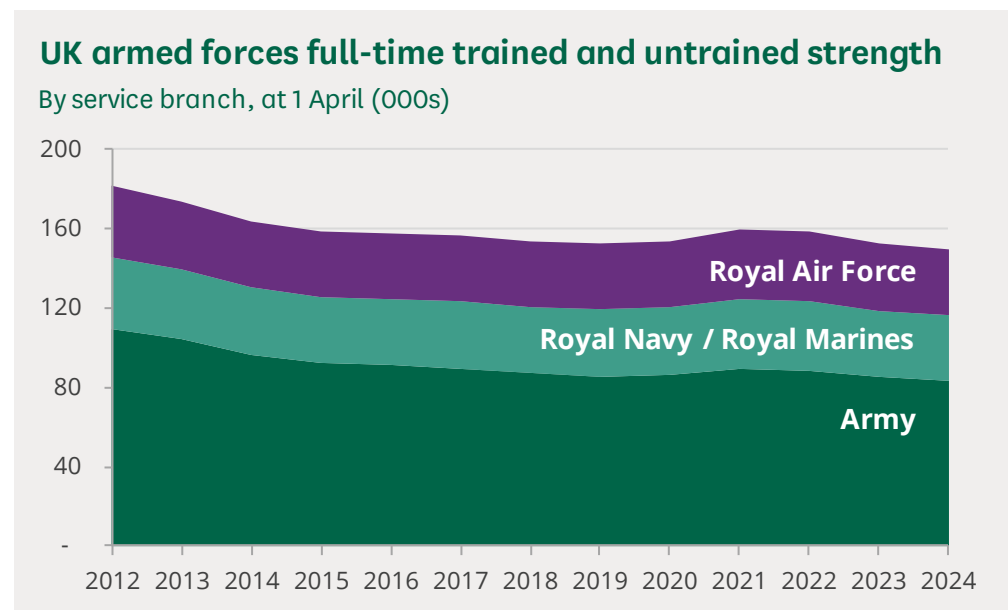
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Summary

On 1 April 2024 the total size of the full-time UK armed forces (trained and untrained) was around 148,230 personnel. Over half of personnel were within the Army (56%), with the remainder being equally split between the Royal Navy/Royal Marines (RN/RM) and the Royal Air Force (RAF).



Source: Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 3b

Trained strength

Personnel targets are based on the full-time trained strength of the RN/RM and the RAF, and the full-time trade-trained strength of the Army. The most recent targets were set in the [2021 Defence Command Paper](#).

In April 2024, the Army fell below its target size for the first time since it was set, meaning all three service branches are currently below target: the Army by 1%, the RN/RM by 5% and the RAF by 10%. Overall, the UK armed forces were 5,440 personnel (1%) below target.

Joiners and leavers

Between financial years 1999/00 and 2023/24, there have only been six years when the number of personnel joining the UK Regular Forces was higher than the number leaving.

In 2023/24 there was a fall in the overall number of personnel, [with 4,430 more personnel leaving the force than joining it](#). This compares with a net decrease of 5,420 personnel the previous year.

The rate of personnel voluntarily leaving the armed forces before the end of their agreed engagement or commission period is [currently at levels last seen in the 1990s](#).

Diversity

On 1 April 2024 there were [16,220 women in the UK Regular Forces, accounting for 11.7% of the total trained and untrained strength](#). The proportion of women in the Reserve Forces was higher at 15.9%.

Around [11.2% of personnel \(15,310\) self-identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group](#) (compared to an estimated 17.1% of the UK working-age population). The Army had the highest proportion of minority ethnic personnel (16.3%), followed by the RN/RM (5.6%) and the RAF (4.1%).

In December 2021, the [Government announced a new target for women to account for 30% of intake by 2030](#). In the year to 31 March 2024, women made up 10.9% of total intake to the UK Regular Forces.

There is currently [no specific armed forces recruitment target for ethnic minorities](#). In the same period, 17.9% of total intake to the UK Regular Forces were from minority ethnic groups. This is almost double the proportion recruited the previous year (9.7%).

Reserves

The Future Reserves 2020 programme started under the Coalition Government (2010–2015) set out plans to expand the size of the trained element of the armed forces reserves, increase the circumstances in which they might be deployed, and better integrate the Reserve Forces with the Regular Forces.

Between October 2013 and April 2024, the [trained strength of the armed forces reserve increased by 29%](#) (from 22,880 to 29,570). However, only the RAF Reserve has achieved its target size. The total number of trained reserve personnel has declined in recent years, from a peak of 33,010 in July 2020.

Location of personnel

On 1 April 2024, [most personnel in the UK Regular Forces were stationed in the United Kingdom \(around 96%\)](#).

Of the 5,700 personnel stationed overseas, around two thirds were in Europe (66%), while 14% were stationed in North America, 6% in North Africa and the Middle East, 6% in Asia and 5% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

1 Understanding military personnel statistics

There are a number of different ways to measure the size of the UK armed forces, which are set out in the glossary below.

Three different measures are used in this briefing: the full-time trained and untrained strength of the UK armed forces; the full-time trained (Royal Navy/Royal Marines and Royal Air Force) and trade-trained strength (Army) of the UK armed forces; and the UK Regular Forces.

Personnel targets for the UK armed forces are based on the full-time trained strength of the Royal Navy/Royal Marines and the Royal Air Force, and the full-time trade-trained strength of the Army. The full-time trade-trained strength (FTTTS) is therefore the most important measure to understand.

Current personnel targets set by the [2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) and more recently by the [Defence in a Competitive Age](#) command paper are based on this measure. These are discussed in further detail in section 1.1 of this briefing.

Glossary¹

UK Forces – this is the most comprehensive measure of the UK armed forces, comprising all military personnel employed by the MOD.

Full-time trained and untrained UK armed forces – this comprises all full-time trained and untrained members of the UK Regular Forces, Gurkhas, and full-time reserve service (FTRS) personnel.

Full-time trained strength (FTTS) – this comprises all trained elements of the full-time UK armed forces, including UK Regular Forces, Gurkhas and FTRS personnel. For the Royal Navy/Royal Marines and Royal Air Force, this includes personnel who have passed Phase 2 training. For the Army, this includes personnel who have passed Phase 1 (basic skills) training only.

Full-time trade-trained strength (FTTTS) – this relates to the Army only and includes full-time personnel who have passed Phase 2 training, including: UK Regular Forces, Gurkhas and FTRS personnel.

¹ Ministry of Defence, [Tri-service glossary of terms and abbreviations](#), 17 November 2016; Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Notes and definitions worksheet in downloadable data file

UK Regular Forces – the main body of permanent personnel in the UK armed forces (both trained and untrained). This measure excludes Gurkhas, reservists, and other personnel categories.

Gurkhas – personnel recruited and employed in the British and Indian Armies under the terms of the 1947 Tri-Partite Agreement. They remain Nepalese citizens but in all other respects are full members of the UK armed forces.

1.1

Current personnel targets

The [2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) (2015 SDSR) indicated that the required number of full-time trained UK armed forces personnel would increase to 144,200 by 2020. The 2015 SDSR also re-affirmed the Government’s commitment to increase the number of trained personnel in the reserve forces (Future Reserves 2020) to 35,060.²

The target of 82,000 trained Army personnel set by the 2015 SDSR was later scrapped when, in 2021, the Secretary of State for Defence, Ben Wallace, announced that the Army would instead be reduced to 72,500 personnel by 2025.³ This was set out in the 2021 defence command paper ‘[Defence in a competitive age](#)’ (DCP21).⁴

On 25 November 2021, the Secretary of State announced that these plans were being scaled back slightly and replaced with a new target of 73,000 trained Army personnel (an increase of 500 personnel).⁵

There was no change to the trained strength targets for the Royal Navy/Royal Marines or Royal Air Force. Nor has there been a change in the targeted size of the Reserve Forces.

It was confirmed in the refreshed Defence Command Paper published in July 2023 that personnel numbers would be maintained “broadly at the levels announced in DCP21”.⁶

² Ministry of Defence, [SDSR 2015 Defence Key Facts](#), 24 November 2015, p8

³ Ministry of Defence, [Defence Secretary oral statement on the Defence Command Paper](#), 22 March 2021

⁴ Ministry of Defence, [Defence in a Competitive Age](#), 22 March 2021, para 7.32, p53

⁵ Ben Wallace MP, [Defence Secretary announces Future Soldier for the British Army](#), 25 November 2021

⁶ Ministry of Defence, [Defence Command Paper 2023: Defence’s response to a more contested and volatile world](#), 18 July 2023, p19

2015 SDSR and 2021 DCP personnel targets

Trained/trade-trained strength targets of the full-time UK armed forces and Future Reserves 2020

	2015 SDSR		2021 DCP	
	Full-time	Reserve	Full-time	Reserve
Royal Navy / Marines	30,450	3,100	30,450	3,100
Army	82,000	30,100	* 73,000	30,100
Royal Air Force	31,750	1,860	31,750	1,860
Total	144,200	35,060	134,700	35,060

Note: Targets are based on the trained strength of the RN/RM and RAF and the trade-trained strength of the Army. *Army target was updated from 72,500 to 73,000 in Nov 2021.

Source: Ministry of Defence, [SDSR 2015 Defence Key Facts](#); Ministry of Defence, [Defence in a Competitive Age](#)

In July 2024, the incoming Labour government announced it had commissioned a new strategic defence review, which it said would “consider the threats Britain faces, the capabilities needed to meet them, the state of UK armed forces and the resources available.”⁷ Responding to a question from Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat leader, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said that the “low numbers of troops” will be looked at as part of the review.⁸

1.2 Trained and untrained

Historically, military personnel were considered untrained until they had completed two phases of training:

- Phase 1 includes all new entry training to provide basic military skills.
- Phase 2 includes initial individual specialisation, sub-specialisation and technical training following Phase 1 prior to joining the (trade) trained strength.

The Royal Navy, Royal Marines and the RAF continue to differentiate their strength into untrained and trained.

However, from October 2016 the Army began to use two definitions: trained and trade-trained. From this point onwards, personnel who had completed Phase 1 training were considered trained, while those who had completed both phases were considered trade-trained.

The reason for the change was to allow Phase 1 trained personnel to help in any response to crises in the UK, like flood assistance. Trade-trained Army

⁷ Ministry of Defence, [New era for defence: government launches root and branch review of UK Armed Forces](#), 16 July 2024

⁸ [HC Deb \[NATO and European Political Community Meetings\]](#), 22 July 2024, c373

personnel are equivalent to trained Royal Navy and RAF personnel for comparative purposes.

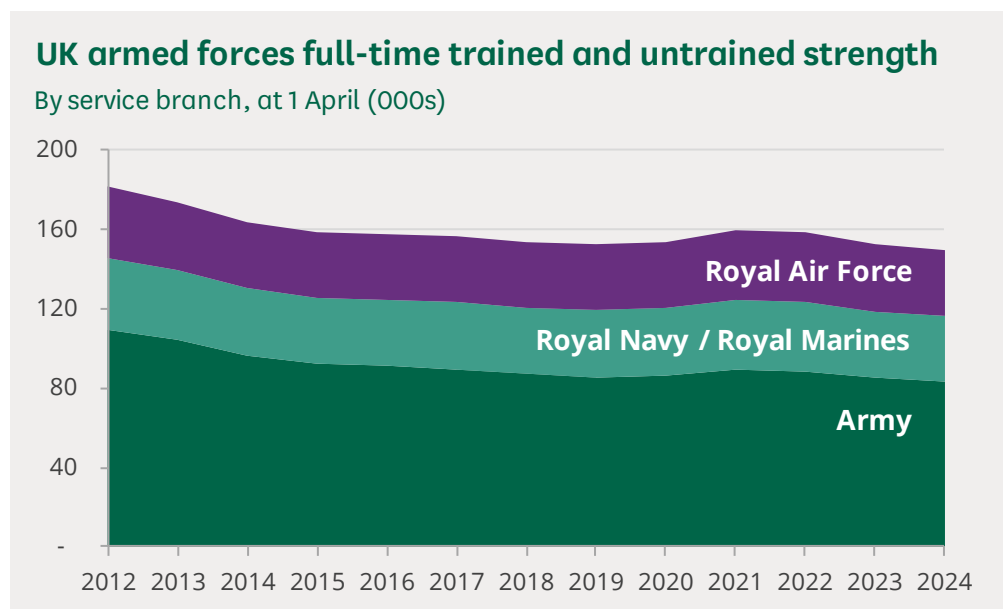
Trade-trained is the most important definition to understand as this is what current personnel targets are based on.

2

UK armed forces

On 1 April 2024, the total size of the full-time UK armed forces (trained and untrained) was around 148,230 personnel.⁹ Most personnel were in the Army (56%) with the remainder split equally between the Royal Navy/Marines (RN/RM) and the Royal Air Force (RAF).

The chart below shows the full-time trained and untrained strength by service branch from 1 April 2012 to 1 April 2024. The number of full-time personnel has reduced by 20% over this period, down from 185,690 in 2012. The Army has had the largest reduction (-24%), followed by the RAF (-20%) and the RN/RM (-8%).



Source: Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 3b

On 1 April 2024, there were 29,830 officers (making up 20% of full-time personnel) and 118,400 personnel with other ranks (80%) across all services. The distribution of officers to other ranks varied between services: just over a quarter of RAF personnel were officers (26%), compared to around one in six Army personnel (17%).¹⁰

An appendix to this briefing containing armed forces strength data used in full is available to download from the landing page on the Commons Library website. Appendix table A1a shows the trained and untrained strength of the

⁹ Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2023](#), Table 3b

UK armed forces by branch and rank from 1 April 2012. Table A1b shows the trained and untrained strength of the UK Regular Forces from 1 April 2000.

2.1 Trained strength

As discussed in section 1.1, targets to increase the trained strength of the UK armed forces were set by the [2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review](#). A new target to reduce the trained strength of the Army to 73,000 personnel was later set by the [2021 defence command paper](#) (DCP21).¹¹

All three branches of the UK armed forces are currently below their target size. In April 2024, the Army fell below its target for the first time since it was set. Overall, the full-time trained/trade-trained strength of the UK armed forces was 5,440 personnel (1%) below target. Compared with April 2023, the trained strength of the UK armed forces decreased by 3% (3,800 personnel).

Size of the UK armed forces				
Full-time trained/trade-trained strength against the DCA target: 1 April 2024				
	Army	RN / RM	RAF	Total
DCA target	* 73,000	30,450	31,750	135,200
Trained strength	72,510	28,840	28,420	129,760
Surplus / Deficit	-490	-1,610	-3,330	5,440
<i>% above / below target</i>	<i>-1%</i>	<i>-5%</i>	<i>-10%</i>	<i>-1%</i>

Note: Targets are based on the trained strength of the RN/RM and RAF and the trade-trained strength of the Army. *Army target was updated from 72,500 to 73,000 in Nov 2021.

Source: Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 3c

Trained strength against requirement

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) used to publish workforce requirement figures for each of the three service branches. These requirements represented the number of personnel needed each quarter to carry out military tasks, based on the Defence Planning Round.

The MOD has said that the main factors that affect decisions about the size of the armed forces required to achieve success in its military tasks include:

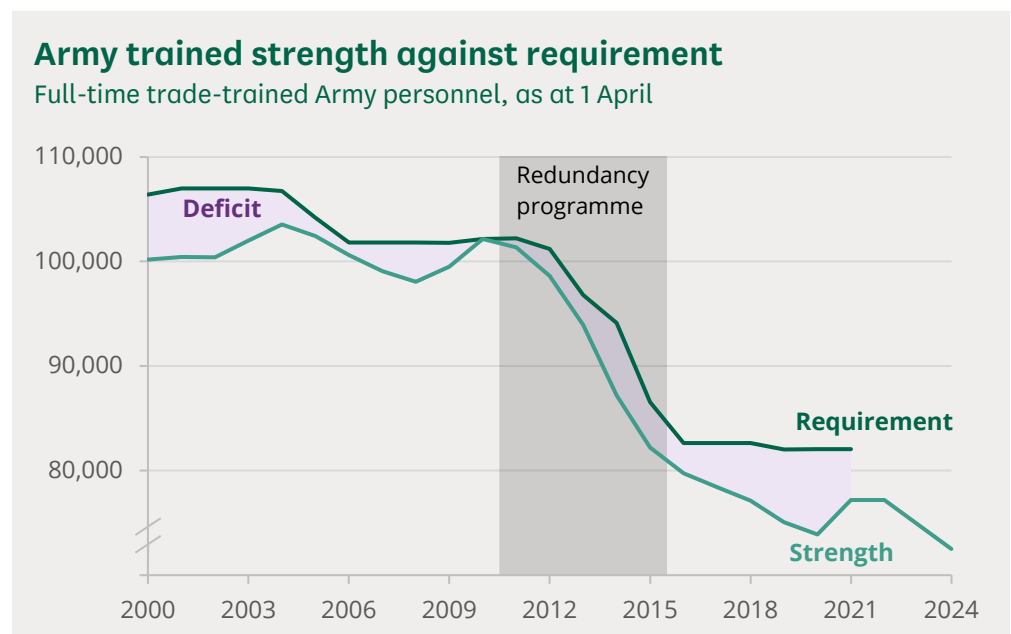
- An assessment of current and future threats to UK national security;

¹¹ The target was later increased from 72,500 to 73,000 (see section 1.1 for further detail).

- The need for contingent / reactive capability – the requirement to be able to respond immediately to domestic or international crisis;
- Current operational and international obligations (e.g. NATO, UN);
- Changes in technology, the introduction of new equipment and restructuring that leads to equipment becoming obsolete or surplus to requirements;
- The need to deliver against the military tasks as efficiently as possible, maintaining a balanced, affordable defence budget.¹²

Following the [Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#) and the [2020 Spending Review](#), the MOD stopped publicly releasing future workforce requirements. It said that the resulting changes in organisation structure had introduced greater flexibility in how it could employ its workforce, which had made the continued use of a fixed workforce requirement for individual components of the armed forces “less appropriate”.¹³ As a result, workforce requirements figures are not available after 1 April 2021.

Former requirements set for the Army between April 2000 and April 2021 are shown in the chart below. See section 3.1 of this briefing for information on the armed forces redundancy programme.



Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK Defence Statistics Compendium](#) (various editions); Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 3a

¹² Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#)

¹³ PQ HL4127 [on [Armed Forces: Vacancies](#)], 30 November 2021

The MOD had previously said it was preparing to announce the introduction of a new Indicative Planned Strength figure that better reflects current workforce planning, although the reference to this was removed from the latest service personnel statistics publication.¹⁴

Appendix Table A2 (available to download from the website landing page) shows trained strength and requirement figures for the three branches of the UK armed forces (Army, RM/RN, RAF) from 2000 to 2021.

2.2

Operational pinch points

The surplus or shortfall in the size of the full-time trained UK armed forces against the workforce requirement is one indicator of the armed forces' ability to carry out military tasks. Other indicators include the surplus or shortfall in key trades or ranks. These are known as operational pinch points, and are also often referred to as 'skills gaps'.

An operational pinch point is when "shortfalls in the trained strength of a branch specialisation, sub-specialisation or area of expertise need to be mitigated to prevent a measurable, detrimental impact on current, planned or contingent operations".¹⁵

In 2015 the MOD stopped releasing detailed information on pinch points into the public domain on national security grounds.¹⁶

Broad information on skills gaps is published in the MOD's Annual Report and Accounts. The [latest Annual Report \(for 2023 to 2024\)](#) stated that 116 skills pinch points had been assessed as significant across the armed forces at March 2024.¹⁷ Priority areas where workforce challenges have been identified include nuclear, digital/cyber, commercial, engineering, medical/health, and programme and project delivery.¹⁸

In previous years' annual reports, the MOD has provided a breakdown of the number of pinch points for each service branch.¹⁹

A new approach to describing pinch points

Recent reports from the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) provide information on a new approach to describing pinch points, based on the following categories:

¹⁴ Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#)

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence, [Annual Report and Accounts 2018 to 2019](#), 25 July 2019, p74

¹⁶ PQ 62605 [on [Armed Forces](#)], 3 February 2017

¹⁷ Ministry of Defence, [Annual Report and Accounts 2023 to 2024](#), 30 July 2024, p14

¹⁸ As above, p93

¹⁹ For example, Ministry of Defence, [Annual Report and Accounts 2019 to 2020](#), 22 October 2020, p35-36

- Delivery Pinch Points (DPP): DPPs are declared when current “people issues” impact on the delivery of a defence output.
- Sustainability Pinch Points (SPP): SPPs are declared when people shortfalls present a risk to the delivery of a defence output in the future.²⁰

The [AFPRB's 2024 Report](#) includes an assessment of the number of pinch points for each service branch by the MOD according to these new definitions:

On 30 September 2023 there were 183 Pinch Points at different levels of criticality:

- there were 73 DPPs: the Royal Navy had 26 DPPs, the Army had 25 DPPs, the RAF had 15 DPPs. UK Strat Comm had 7 DPPs; and
- there were 110 SPPs: Army had 47 SPPs, Royal Navy had 35 SPPs, RAF had 25 SPPs and UK Strat Comm had 3 SPPs.²¹

The AFPRB said the number of sustainability and delivery pinch points had increased. However, it had been told by the MOD that these figures could not be directly compared with the previous years because the department had “increased the specificity of reporting pinch points in some areas”.²²

The MOD said that “pinch points also reflected shortfalls in recruitment more generally, difficulties attracting the key skills required by the armed forces and higher than expected outflow [people leaving the armed forces]”.²³

²⁰ AFPRB, [Fifty-Third Report 2024](#), July 2024, CP 1116, para 2.43

²¹ As above, para 2.44

²² As above, para 2.112

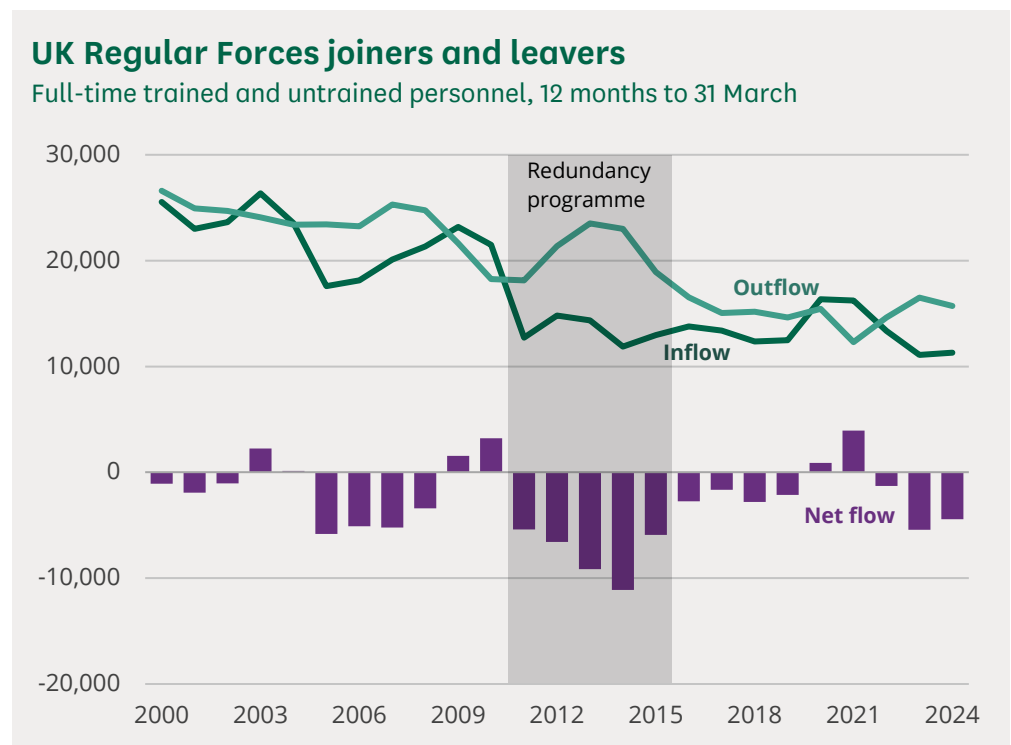
²³ As above, para 2.45

3

UK Regular Forces: joiners and leavers

The chart below shows the total flow of personnel into and out of the UK Regular Forces for each financial year between 1999/00 and 2023/24.

Inflow comprises entrants, re-entrants, direct trained entrants (including professionally qualified officers) and transfers to the Army from the Gurkhas and from the reserves. Outflow includes trained and untrained personnel leaving the service, deaths, and recalled reservists on release. It does not include promotions (from other ranks to officers) or flows between services.



Source: 2000 and 2001: Ministry of Defence, [UK Defence statistics Compendium 2001](#), Tables 2.10 and 2.11; 2002-2007: Ministry of Defence, [UK Defence Statistics Compendium 2007](#), Tables 2.18 and 2.20; 2007-2013: Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report 2013](#), Table 9; 2013-2022: Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 4

The total number of people both joining and leaving the UK Regular Forces has decreased over the period shown. The number of people joining to the UK Regular Forces fell from 25,550 in 1990/00 to 11,300 in 2023/24 (a 56% reduction), while the number leaving fell from 26,620 to 15,730 (a 41% reduction).

In the 12 months to 31 March 2024 there was a fall in the overall number of personnel, with 4,430 more personnel leaving the force than joining it. This compares with a net decrease of 5,420 personnel the previous year.

Between 1999/00 and 2023/24 there have only been six years when inflow was higher than outflow, meaning more people joined than left.

Voluntary outflow was the most common exit reason for full-time trained and trade-trained regulars, accounting for 61% of total outflow.²⁴ In the 12 months to 31 March 2024, 6.4% of trained personnel voluntary left the UK Regular Forces before the end of their agreed engagement or commission period. This is up from 5.7% in the 12 months to 31 March 2020 (before the covid-19 pandemic).²⁵ The MOD says that those leaving the armed forces often cite the impact of Service life on their family and personal life, as well as leaving to take up opportunities outside the Armed Forces.²⁶

Current levels of voluntary outflow are historically high, at levels last reached in the 1990s, which the Armed Forces Pay Review Body has described as “unsustainable”. At the same time, recruitment targets are not being met.²⁷

In a [recent report on the readiness of the armed forces](#), the Defence Select Committee raised concerns about issues with recruitment and retention in the UK armed forces.²⁸

3.1 Redundancy Programme

The Armed Forces Redundancy Programme (AFRP) 2010 was implemented to meet the reduced personnel levels determined by the [2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) (SDSR). The reductions were also achieved through natural wastage and reduced intake.

During the AFRP’s four tranches, 12,130 personnel were selected for redundancy.²⁹

The first personnel to be made redundant under the scheme were notified in September 2011. The fourth and final tranche of the AFRP was announced in January 2014 when it was concluded that there was no further requirement for a redundancy programme to meet the personnel levels set by the SDRS. Those made redundant in this fourth tranche were notified on 12 June 2014.³⁰

Those selected for redundancy served up to six months’ notice if they were applicant to the scheme and 12 months’ notice if they were non-applicants.

²⁴ Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 5d

²⁵ As above, Table 5e

²⁶ Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#) (based on responses to the [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey](#))

²⁷ Armed Forces Pay Review Body, [Fifty-Third Report 2024](#), July 2024, CP 1116, p1 and para 3.17

²⁸ Defence Committee, [Ready for War2](#), 4 February 2024

²⁹ This figure may not match the number of personnel actually leaving the services under the AFRP due to appeals, movements of personnel into different roles not affected by AFRP and outflow for other reasons in the intervening time. Ministry of Defence, [Armed Forces Redundancy Programme statistics](#)

³⁰ Ministry of Defence, [Armed Forces Redundancy Programme Statistics: tranche 4](#), p1

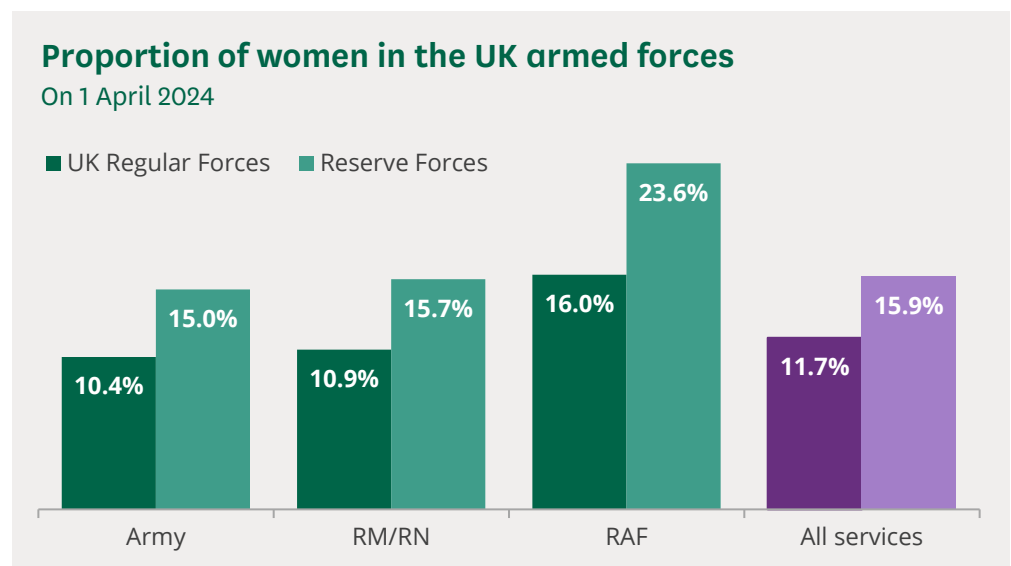
4 UK Regular Forces diversity

Diversity data for military personnel is published twice a year. This focuses on the diversity of the UK Regular Forces rather than the wider UK armed forces. [Data included in the latest publication](#) is as of 1 April 2024.

4.1 Gender

On 1 April 2024 there were 16,220 women in the UK Regular Forces, who accounted for 11.7% of the total trained and untrained strength. The proportion of women in the Reserve Forces was higher at 15.9%.

Women are best represented in the RAF, where they form 16.0% of regular personnel and 23.6% of reserve personnel.

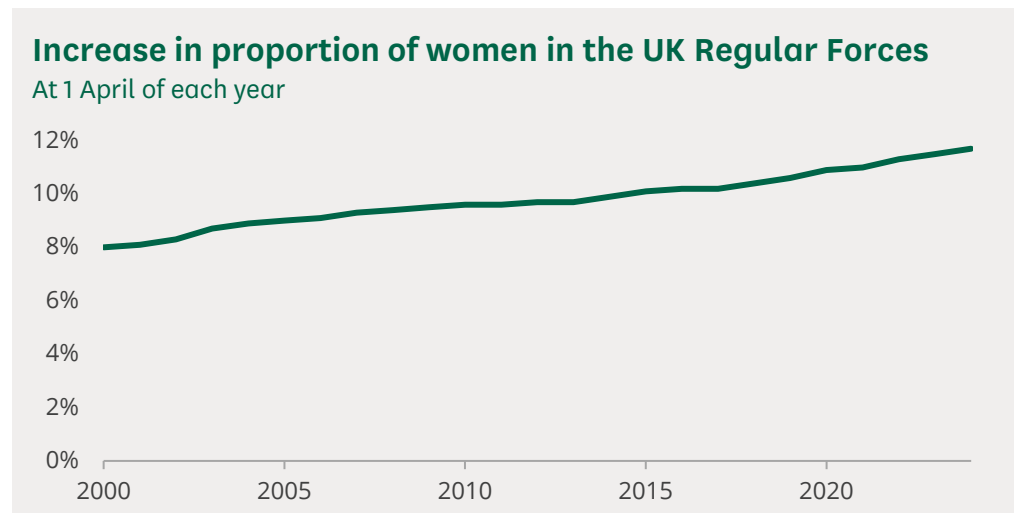


Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Tables 1 and 15

14.7% of officer positions were held by women on 1 April 2024. However, women accounted for just 8.1% of top senior officer positions (rank OF-6 and above).

The share of women in the UK Regular Forces has increased in almost every year over the last three decades. On 1 April 1990, women accounted for around 6% of the total UK Regular Forces; by 1 April 2000 this proportion was around 8%, and by 1 April 2010 around 10%.³¹

³¹ Ministry of Defence, [UK Defence Statistics Compendium 2005](#) [Archived], Table 2.13 and [UK Defence Statistics Compendium 2012](#) [Archived], Table 2.6



Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK Defence Statistics Compendium](#) [Archived] (various editions) and [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 1

On 8 July 2016, David Cameron (the then Prime Minister) announced that women would be allowed to serve in close combat roles by 2018. This was achieved on 25 October 2018 when Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson announced that all roles in the military would be open to women.³²

In December 2021, the Government announced a new target for women to make up 30% of intake by 2030.³³ In the year to 31 March 2024, women made up 10.9% of intake to the UK Regulars.³⁴ The Library Insight on [Representation of women in the Armed Forces](#) covers this target in further detail.

Appendix table A3 (available to download from the website landing page) shows the number and proportion of women across the three branches of the UK Regular Forces on 1 April for each year from 2000 to 2024.

4.2

Ethnicity

The MOD uses the term “ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)” to refer to all ethnic groups except for the White group. In this section, the term “minority ethnic groups” is used to mean the same.

On 1 April 2024, 11.2% of UK Regular Forces personnel (15,310) self-identified as being from a minority ethnic background, compared with an estimated 17.1% of the UK’s working age population.³⁵

The Army had the highest proportion of minority ethnic personnel (16.3%), followed by the RN/RM (5.6%) and the RAF (4.1%).

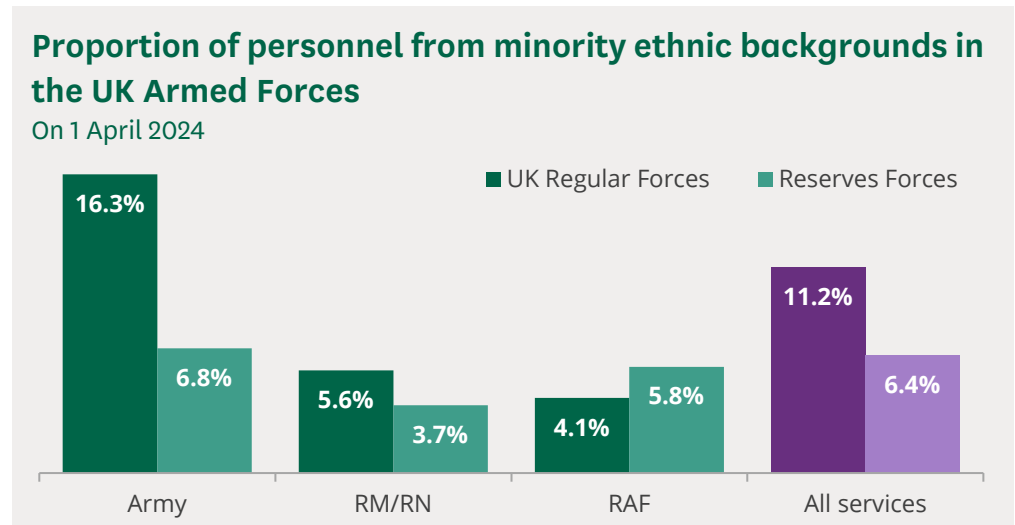
³² Ministry of Defence [Historic day for the military as all roles are opened to women](#), 25 October 2018

³³ Defence Committee, [Protecting those who protect us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report](#), 2 December 2021

³⁴ Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 7

³⁵ Annual Population Survey, April 2023 to March 2024 dataset, accessed [via Nomis](#)

Approximately half (48%) of the 15,310 UK Regular Forces personnel from a minority ethnic group were Black. The second-largest minority ethnic group was Asian (26%), followed by Mixed (17%) and Other (8%).

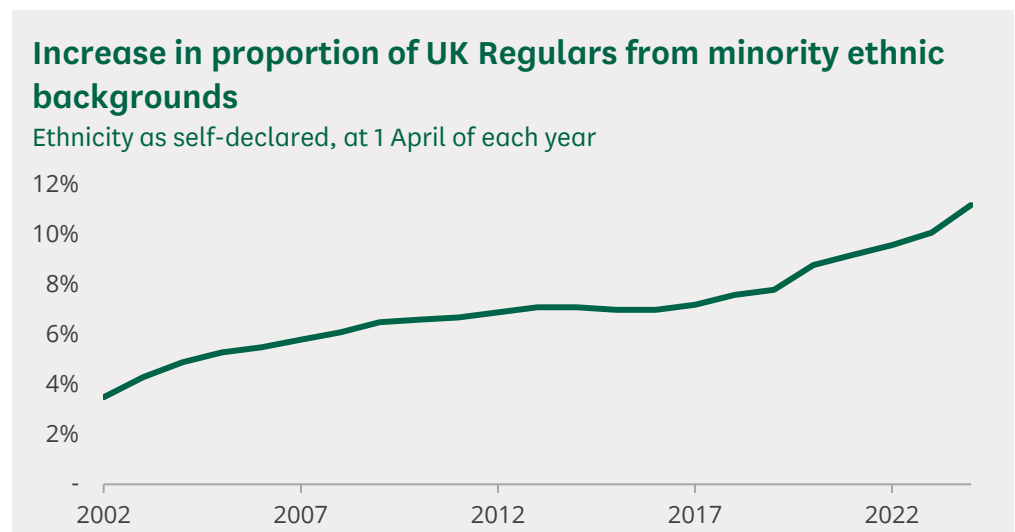


Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Tables 2 and 16

There were proportionally fewer personnel from minority ethnic groups in the reserves: 6.4% of all reserve personnel as of 1 April 2024.

Fewer held an officer rank: 3.3% of officers in the UK Regulars self-identified as part of a minority ethnic group. This proportion was even smaller for personnel at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (OF-4) or above (2.2%).³⁶

As with women, the total proportion of personnel from minority ethnic groups across the UK Regular Forces has increased over recent years: on 1 April 2002 3.5% of personnel identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group.³⁷



Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK Defence Statistics Compendium](#) [Archived] (various editions) and [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 2

³⁶ Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 2

³⁷ Ethnicity data cannot be compared back prior to 2002 due to changes in the way it is classified.

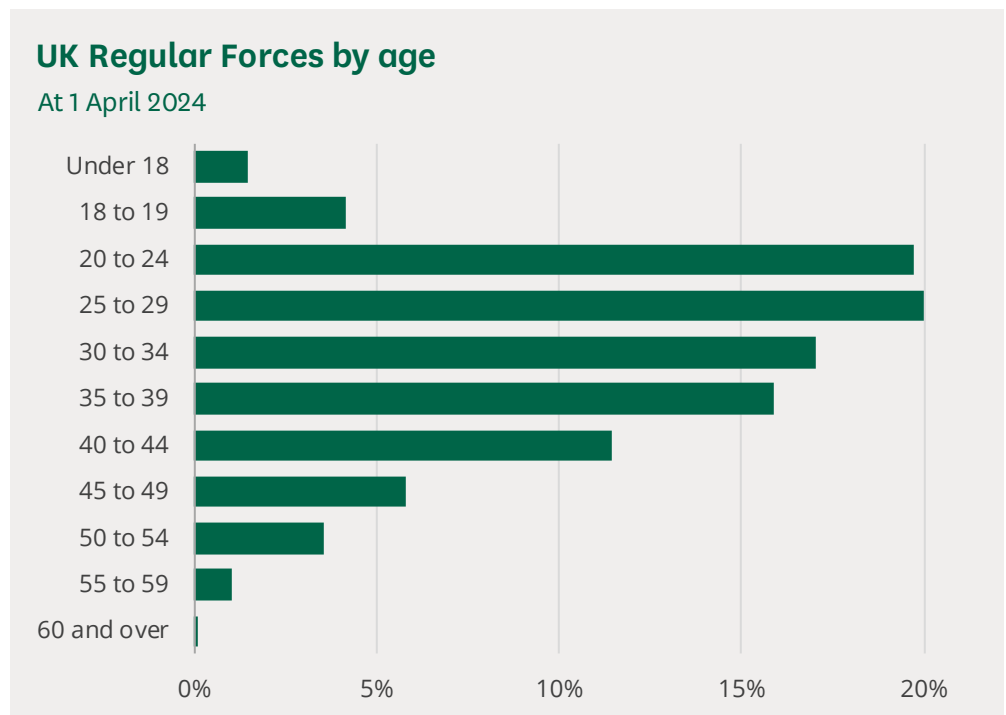
There is currently no specific armed forces recruitment target for ethnic minorities.³⁸ In the year to 31 March 2024, 17.9% of total intake to the UK Regular Forces were from minority ethnic groups. This is almost double the proportion recruited the previous year (9.7%).³⁹

Appendix table A4 (available to download from the website landing page) provides data on the self-declared ethnicity of UK Regular Forces personnel from 1 April 2012 to 1 April 2024.

4.3

Age

On 1 April 2024, 25.3% of UK Regular Forces personnel were under the age of 25. The average age of officers was 37, while the average age of all other ranks was 30. The overall average age was 31.⁴⁰



Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 3

4.4

Religion

On 1 April 2024, 55.4% of UK Regular Forces personnel declared a Christian religion (compared to an estimated 39.9% of the total working-age population). This represents a 2-percentage point decrease compared to the

³⁸ PQ 28478 [on [Armed Forces: Recruitment](#)], 13 October 2023

³⁹ Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 8

⁴⁰ Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 3

previous in year when 57.4% of regulars declared a Christian religion, which is in line with a long-term decreasing trend.⁴¹

A further 39.4% of personnel declared no religion. This figure has increased steadily over the past decade, from 14.7% of personnel in April 2012. This compares to an estimated 49.3% of the working-age population who report having no religion, up from 32.8% in 2012.⁴²

The next largest religion declared was Hindu (1.1%, compared to 1.8% of the working age population), followed by Buddhist (0.9%, compared to 0.5%) and Muslim (0.6%, compared to 5.6%).⁴³

0.2% of personnel declared a 'Christian Tradition'⁴⁴ religion, the same proportion identified as Kirati, and 0.1% as either Jewish or Sikh. Other faiths (including Druid, Pagan, Rastafarian, Spiritualist, Zoroastrian, Wicca, Baha'i, and others) were declared by 2.1% of personnel.

⁴¹ Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 4; Commons Library analysis of the Annual Population Survey, January to December 2012 and 2023 datasets

⁴² As above

⁴³ As above

⁴⁴ Includes personnel declaring the following: Christian Tradition, Christian Scientist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon), Jehovah's Witness, Unitarian and Other Christian Tradition.

5 Reservists

Each of the three services has a reserve element: the [Army Reserve](#), [Maritime Reserve](#) (comprising the [Royal Navy Reserve](#) and [Royal Marines Reserve](#)) and [RAF Reserve](#).

Volunteer Reserves are civilians who commit to train a set number of days per year and may be mobilised/called into permanent service for a set period (usually no more than 12 months). They may train and deploy alongside Regular Forces on operations in the UK or overseas. Reservists are paid while training and deployed.

In addition to the Volunteer Reserves are the **Regular Reserves**, who are former members of the UK Regular Forces that retain a liability (obligation) to be called up for service in times of need.

On 1 April 2024, there were 32,420 Volunteer Reserves and 3,730 serving Regular Reserves across the three branches of the UK armed forces.⁴⁵

There are several different categories of reservists within this structure, most notably:

- **Mobilised Reservists** – Volunteer or Regular Reserves who have been called up for full-time service under the [Reserve Forces Act 1996](#) (typically for no longer than 12 months). There were 930 Mobilised Reservists on 1 April 2024.⁴⁶
- **Full-Time Reserve Service (FTRS) personnel** – a separate category of reservists (either Volunteer or Regular) who fill full-time service posts for a set period. They are used differently by each service and may have different commitments. There were 5,810 FTRS personnel on 1 April 2024.

Reservists may also serve in Joint Forces Command, for example in the [Joint Cyber Reserve Force](#).

A [glossary of terms used for reservists](#) is available in the quarterly personnel statistical bulletins published by the Ministry of Defence.

Further information on Reserve Forces, including commentary on government policy since 2010, can be found in the [House of Lords Library's briefing paper on Armed Forces Reserves](#).

⁴⁵ Ministry of Defence, [Tri-service glossary of terms and abbreviations](#), 17 November 2016

⁴⁶ As above

5.1 Future Reserves 2020

The Future Reserves 2020 (FR20) programme started under the Coalition Government (2010–2015) set out plans to expand the size of the trained element of the armed forces reserves, increase the circumstances in which they might be deployed, and better integrate the Reserve Forces with the Regular Forces.⁴⁷

This policy was driven by the findings of an [independent review of the Reserve Forces](#) in 2011, and set out in the 2013 White Paper '[Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued](#)'.⁴⁸

The [Defence Reform Act 2014](#) removed limitations on how the reserves could be used and changed the name of the Territorial Army to Army Reserve.

FR20 set personnel targets for the trained strength of the Volunteer Reserves. The targets were then revised in 2016 to account for changes to the definition of the Army trained strength (discussed in section 1.2), to be achieved by 31 March 2019.⁴⁹ These targets are shown in the table below along with the current strength of each reserve service.

Size of UK armed forces reserves against FR20 target				
Trained strength of UK armed forces reserves at 1 April 2024				
	Army	Martime	RAF	Total
2019 target	30,100	3,100	1,860	35,060
2024 trained strength	24,068	2,682	2,822	29,572
Surplus / Deficit	-6,032	-418	+962	-5,488
% off target	-20%	-13%	+52%	-16%

Note: Target set by MoD in November 2016, to be achieved by 31 March 2019.

Source: Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 6a

Neither [Defence in a Competitive Age](#) nor the [Reserve Forces Review 2030](#) specifically mentioned any change to the targeted size of the reserves.

⁴⁷ FR20 includes Volunteer Reserves who are mobilised, High Readiness Reserves, and Volunteer Reserves serving on Additional Duties Commitment or FTRS contracts. Sponsored Reserves are also included in the Army Reserve. FR20 excludes Regular Reserves, Non Regular Permanent Staff, Expeditionary Forces Institute and University Officer Cadets.

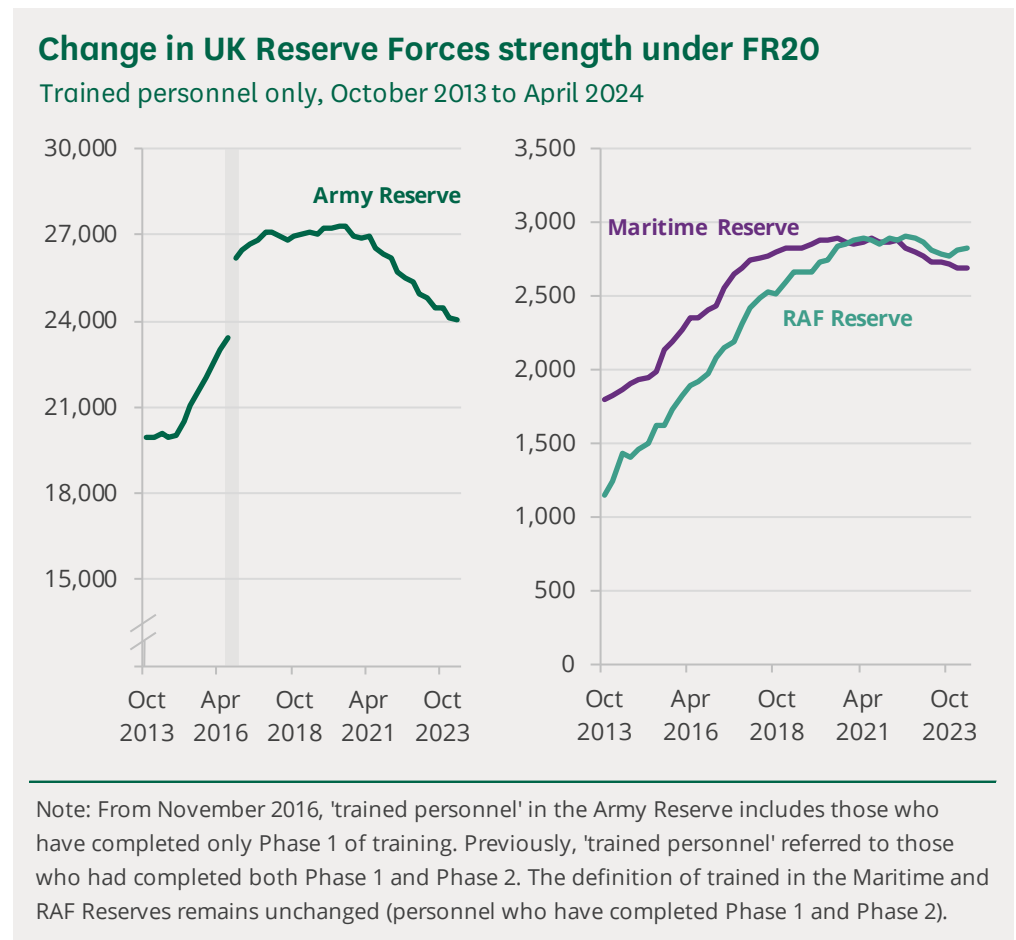
⁴⁸ Ministry of Defence, [Future Reserves 2020: the Independent Commission to Review the United Kingdom's Reserve Forces](#), July 2011; Ministry of Defence, [Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued](#), November 2012

⁴⁹ The original December 2013 target was based on the number of trained personnel (those who have passed Phase 1 and Phase 2 training). Following the change in definition of the trained strength for the UK Regular Army and Army Reserve in 2016, the measurement/target for the Army Reserve is based on those who have passed Phase 1 only. The Maritime and RAF Reserves targets were unchanged [[Written Question HCSW248](#), 8 November 2016].

The RAF Reserve is the only element of FR20 to have achieved its targeted size and has had the highest proportional increase in size over the duration of the FR20 programme out of the three branches. In April 2024 the RAF Reserve was around 2.5 times larger than in October 2013.

The chart below shows the change in size of the reserve services under the FR20 programme. Between October 2013 and April 2024, the trained strength of the armed forces reserve increased by 29% (from 22,880 to 29,570).

The total number of trained reserve personnel has declined in recent years, from a peak of 33,010 in July 2020.



Source: Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 6a

6 Location of personnel

The Ministry of Defence publishes [annual data on the stationed location of UK Regular Forces personnel](#), and on intake to the UK Regular Forces by parliamentary constituency.

6.1 Stationed location

The stationed location of armed forces personnel is where an individual is permanently based.⁵⁰ Personnel deployed on operations and temporary assignments are recorded against their most recent stationed location, rather than their deployed location.

On 1 April 2024 most UK Regular Forces personnel were stationed in the United Kingdom (96%).⁵¹

Of the 5,700 personnel stationed overseas, around two thirds were in Europe (66%), while 14% were stationed in North America, 6% in North Africa and the Middle East, 6% in Asia and 5% in Sub-Saharan Africa. Around 3% of personnel were stationed elsewhere in the world.

Within Europe (excluding the UK) most personnel were in Cyprus (2,220) and Germany (520). Around 1,060 personnel were stationed elsewhere across Europe in Belgium, Italy, Gibraltar, the Netherlands, France, Norway, Spain, the Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal and Ukraine.

The UK previously had a large permanent military presence in Germany – in April 2010 around 19,000 UK Regulars were stationed there.⁵² As part of the [2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) the Government announced that it would withdraw all UK service personnel from Germany by 2020.⁵³

In 2018, Gavin Williamson, then Defence Secretary, announced that the UK would continue to have a small military presence in Germany past the 2020 deadline, in line with government policy to increase “British points of presence” across the world.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ The stationed location for personnel in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines who are on sea service is recorded as the location containing the home port of their ship. RAF personnel serving in the South Atlantic are recorded against the location of their home base.

⁵¹ Ministry of Defence, [Annual location statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 1.1a

⁵² Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly location statistics – 1 April 2010](#), Table 1.1

⁵³ Ministry of Defence, [2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), 19 October 2010, p28

⁵⁴ Ministry of Defence, [UK to maintain military presence in Germany](#), 30 September 2018

The [Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#) published in 2021 laid out plans to increase the UK's global presence by deploying the armed forces overseas more often and for longer periods.⁵⁵ As a result, there is expected to be a sizeable change in the basing of personnel overseas, which the MOD plans to report in future annual location statistics publications.⁵⁶

Personnel stationed in the UK

On 1 April 2024, most UK Regular Forces personnel stationed in the UK were in England (90%). Meanwhile 8% were stationed in Scotland, 1% in Wales and 1% in Northern Ireland.⁵⁷

As shown in the table below, the majority of personnel stationed in England were located in the South East and South West regions (61%). Whereas only 2% were stationed in the North East and North West regions.

Stationed location of service personnel by region, England					
Trained and untrained UK Regulars: 1 April 2024					
	Army	RN/RM	RAF	Total	%
South East	16,750	11,200	9,550	37,500	32%
South West	20,600	12,940	1,380	34,920	29%
East of England	7,660	1,110	4,090	12,860	11%
Yorkshire and The Humber	10,790	50	1,550	12,390	10%
East Midlands	2,370	140	5,780	8,290	7%
West Midlands	4,380	470	2,240	7,090	6%
London	2,540	430	1,020	3,990	3%
North East	500	10	520	1,030	1%
North West	620	180	100	900	1%
England	66,220	26,600	26,220	119,040	100%

Source: Ministry of Defence, [Annual location statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Tables 2.1a and 2.1b

6.2

Intake by location

In the 12 months to 31 March 2024, 78% of the untrained personnel who joined the UK Regular Forces were recruited from England, while 6% were from Scotland, 5% from Wales and 1% from Northern Ireland. The location of 10%

⁵⁵ Cabinet Office, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#), CP 403, 16 March 2021, p73

⁵⁶ Ministry of Defence, [Annual location statistics: 1 April 2024](#)

⁵⁷ Ministry of Defence, [Annual location statistics: 1 April 2024](#), Table 2.1b

of the untrained intake was not known (this includes personnel who entered from outside the UK).⁵⁸

14% of personnel were recruited from the South East region and 12% from the South West, whereas only 5% were recruited from London.⁵⁹

Data on intake into the UK Regular Forces is also available by parliamentary constituency. However, this relates to former constituencies, rather than the current parliamentary constituencies which have been in operation since the 2024 general election.

The five former constituencies with the largest number of intake to the UK Regular Forces in the 12 months to 31 March 2024 were Devizes (with 120 personnel); Aldershot (110); Gosport (80); Richmond (Yorkshire) (80); and Sleaford and North Hykeham (70).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ As above, Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3

⁵⁹ As above

⁶⁰ As above

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