

Research Briefing  
20 July 2023  
Number 9835

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# Armed Forces Pay 2023/24

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## Summary

Pay was capped at 1% between 2013/14 and 2017/18.

Pay rose by:

2.0% + 0.9% non-consolidated one-off payment in 2018/19

2.9% in 2019/20

2.0% in 2020/21

Paused in 2021/22

3.75% in 2022/23

5% + £1,000 consolidated increase in 2023/24

Armed forces personnel will receive a 5% pay rise plus a consolidated £1,000 increase for 2023/24. This is in line with the recommendation of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) and will be backdated to 1 April 2023.

## Pay award announcement

On 13 June 2023 the Government [announced pay awards for all public sector bodies](#). Armed forces personnel up to and including 1 star rank will be given a pay rise of 5% plus a consolidated payment of £1,000.

The Ministry of Defence said the [highest pay increase will be targeted towards junior service personnel](#), providing “effective pay increases” of between 9.7% for junior ranks and 5.8% for officers. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, John Glenn, said this means [the lowest paid in the armed forces will receive an increase of £2,000](#).

Senior military personnel (two-star rank and above) will receive a 5.5% consolidated increase to pay.

Forces News observed that [the armed forces are receiving a lower pay rise compared to some other public sector bodies](#). Police and prison officers will receive a 7% pay rise, teachers a 6.5% rise and junior doctors a 6% rise.

The pay award for the armed forces will be backdated to 1 April 2023. The AFPRB criticised the delay in implementing the award, saying that despite backdating, it has [“the potential to cause real cost of living challenges for some.”](#)

[Civil service recruitment will be cut back until March 2025](#) to help fund the pay increase for service personnel.

## How much do personnel earn?

The [starting salary for service personnel](#), after training, will be £23,496 from 1 April 2023 (backdated). In 2022/23 it was £21,425.

Service personnel receive an additional pensionable payment on top of basic pay known as X-Factor. This is intended to recognise the special conditions of service life compared to civilian life. The AFPRB reviews this rate every five years and in 2023 [recommended retaining the current rate of 14.5%](#).

The pay that an individual receives will depend on their personal circumstances and eligibility for specialist pay and allowances.

## How is armed forces pay decided?

Pay for members of the armed forces is decided by the Ministry of Defence based on the recommendations of the [Armed Forces' Pay Review Body](#). The basic principle is that pay should be broadly comparable with pay levels in civilian life. The AFPRB is expected to consider other factors, [such as the Government's inflation target](#), when forming recommendations.

## Satisfaction with pay has fallen

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51% of personnel do not think the pay and benefits they receive are fair for the work they do.

[Satisfaction with the rate of basic pay](#) has dropped by 13 percentage points in the last two years. In a survey published in June 2023, before the latest announcement, less than a third of personnel (31%) said they are satisfied with the rate of basic pay. A majority of personnel (51%) do not think the pay and benefits they receive are fair for the work they do.

## Future changes to pay?

An [independent review of pay and reward](#) led by Rick Haythornthwaite recommended the services move away from a uniform offer towards bespoke reward packages, tailored to reflect the changing needs of personnel as their life and career evolves. The [Ministry of Defence is reviewing the report's recommendations](#).

# 1 How is armed forces pay decided?

Pay for members of the armed forces is decided by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), based on the recommendations of the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body (AFPRB). There are similar processes for the police, teachers, senior civil servants and the NHS, who have their own pay review bodies.<sup>1</sup>

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The Armed Forces Pay Review Body provides independent advice on pay and charges for service personnel to the Ministry of Defence.

The AFPRB gives independent advice to the Government on pay, accommodation and food charges for the armed forces. The MOD is not obliged to accept these recommendations.

The basic principle is that pay should be broadly comparable with pay levels in civilian life. The AFPRB is obliged to consider other factors such as the funds available to the MOD and the need to recruit and retain suitably qualified people.<sup>2</sup> In his letter instructing the 2023/24 review, the Defence Secretary explicitly asked the AFPRB to “have regard to the Government’s inflation target when forming recommendations”.<sup>3</sup>

The AFPRB submitted its report to the MOD on 26 May 2023.<sup>4</sup> It was published on 13 July 2023 by the MOD alongside the announcement of the pay award.

Pay for senior military personnel is decided as part of the separate [Senior Salaries Review Body](#) (SSRB), which submits its own report to the Cabinet Office.

# 2 How much do personnel earn?

Incorporating the new pay award, the starting salary for service personnel, after training, is £23,496 from 1 April 2023. This is the equivalent of a private in the army, air specialist in the RAF, and able rate in the Royal Navy. Initial pay on training is £18,687.<sup>5</sup>

The starting salary for an officer is £31,305 after training. Initial pay on training is £18,555.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on pay bodies and recent trends in public sector pay, see Commons Library research briefing CBP-8037, [Public Sector Pay](#)

<sup>2</sup> The AFPRB’s terms of reference can be found in its reports via Gov.uk: [Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body](#)

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Defence, [AFPRB remit letter from the Defence Secretary: 2023 to 2023](#), 16 November 2022

<sup>4</sup> [PQ905610 \[Armed Forces: Pay\]](#), 26 June 2023

<sup>5</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023 appendix.

<sup>6</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023 appendix.

The pay package for armed forces personnel includes basic pay, an additional payment called the X-Factor, trade or specialist pay, plus any recruitment and retention payments (where applicable), and other allowances. The AFPRB can also recommend retention payments or incentives for specific roles.

## 3 2023/24 pay award

### 5% pay rise plus a £1,000 consolidated increase in 2023/24.

Armed forces personnel will receive a 5% pay rise, plus a further £1,000 consolidated increase, in 2023/24. This will be backdated to 1 April 2023.

In a written statement, the Defence Secretary said the highest pay increase will be targeted towards junior Service personnel: “providing effective pay increases of between 9.7% for the most junior ranks and 5.8% for officers at one-star rank.”<sup>7</sup> This is in line with the AFPRB’s recommendations. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, John Glenn, said this means the lowest paid will receive an increase of £2,000.<sup>8</sup> The rate of X-Factor will remain at 14.5%.<sup>9</sup>

Senior military personnel (two-star rank and above) will receive a 5.5% consolidated increase in pay.<sup>10</sup>

Civil service recruitment in the MOD will be cut back until March 2025 to help fund the pay rise for the armed forces.<sup>11</sup>

Forces News observed that the armed forces are receiving a lower pay rise compared to some other public sector bodies. Police and prison officers will receive a 7% pay rise, teachers a 6.5% rise and junior doctors a 6% rise.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.1 AFPRB report and commentary

The AFPRB recommended an award of 5% plus £1,000, with both being fully consolidated. The MOD has accepted this recommendation, having previously indicated to the AFPRB that the uplift should be non-consolidated. The AFPRB disagreed with the MOD on this point, arguing that relying on a non-consolidated element “would have adverse pension consequences for

<sup>7</sup> [HLWS928](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>8</sup> [HC Deb 13 July 2023](#)

<sup>9</sup> [HLWS928](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>10</sup> [HLWS928](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>11</sup> [HC Deb 13 July 2023](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Armed forces personnel to get 5% pay rise – police to get 7%](#), Forces News, 13 July 2023

the lowest paid” and “fail adequately to reflect the value of the armed forces.”<sup>13</sup>

Recognising the value of the armed forces was one of the factors influencing the AFPRB’s conclusions. The review body said there is evidence that the morale of the armed forces has become “more fragile”. The body also recognised the inability of the armed forces to participate in collective bargaining or industrial action.

The AFPRB says the pay increase will be targeted towards the less well paid, recognising “the greater impact food and energy price inflation has on the lowest paid.”<sup>14</sup>

## 4 Recent pay awards

Pay was frozen between 2011 and 2013.

Pay was capped at 1% between 2013 and 2018.

Pay rose by:

2.0% + 0.9% non-consolidated one-off payment in 2018/19

2.9% in 2019/20

2.0% in 2020/21

Paused in 2021/22

3.75% in 2022/23

The Government imposed a two-year public sector pay freeze from **2011/12 to 2012/13**, which meant only those earning less than £21,000 received an increase in base pay during that time.

From **2013/14 to 2017/18**, [public sector pay](#) was capped at an average of 1%. The AFPRB recommended the same across all ranks in line with this.<sup>15</sup>

The Government lifted the public sector pay cap for the **2018/19** pay round, payable from 1 April 2018. The AFPRB [recommended a 2.9% increase in base pay for the forces](#).<sup>16</sup> The Government accepted “[the spirit of this recommendation](#),” with a 2.0% increase in pay (in September salaries, backdated to 1 April 2018) and a 0.9% non-consolidated one-off payment.<sup>17</sup> However, the AFPRB reported negative feedback from personnel about the decision, saying it “showed disrespect for the unique role that they perform.”<sup>18</sup> The AFPRB has also said that, because of incremental pay progression, more than half of personnel (56.2%) had no pay increase in 2018/19.<sup>19</sup>

In **2019/20** personnel received a 2.9% increase in line with the AFPRB’s recommendation.<sup>20</sup>

The Government also accepted in full the AFPRB’s recommended 2% increase in base rate of pay for **2020/21**.

<sup>13</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>14</sup> As above

<sup>15</sup> Commons Library paper, [Public sector pay](#), CBP-8037

<sup>16</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body forty-seventh report: 2018](#), 24 July 2018

<sup>17</sup> [HCWS909, 24 July 2018](#).

<sup>18</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body forty-eighth report: 2019](#), 22 July 2019

<sup>19</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body forty-ninth report: 2020](#), 6 August 2020

<sup>20</sup> [HCWS1770, 22 July 2019](#)

For **2021/22**, following the Chancellor’s announcement of a public sector pay pause, only those earning less than £24,000 received a £250 increase. The MOD and AFPRB differed over the inclusion of X-Factor for this calculation. The AFPRB said X-Factor should be excluded from the salary calculation: “in our view, Service personnel would be justified in feeling aggrieved if the lowest paid did not access the minimum payment being offered across all other public sector employees simply because of their X-Factor.”<sup>21</sup>

The MOD disagreed. The Defence Secretary said X-Factor is a component of the overall military salary, and therefore the £250 uplift will be paid to “those earning less than the equivalent of £24,000 per year inclusive of X-Factor.”<sup>22</sup>

In **2022/23** the Government accepted the [AFPRB’s recommendation of a 3.75% increase](#).<sup>23</sup>

Announcing the award on 19 July 2022, the Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, described it as “[the biggest percentage uplift in 20 years](#).”<sup>24</sup>

The separate Senior Salaries Review Body [recommended an increase of 3.5%](#) to base pay for senior officers (2 star and above).<sup>25</sup>

## 5 Criticism of delays to pay awards

The AFPRB has repeatedly criticised the MOD for failing to announce pay awards in time for the start of the financial year (1 April).

In its 2021 report, the body criticised the “[significant](#)” delays in receiving evidence from the MOD for the 2021/22 pay award.<sup>26</sup> The AFPRB submitted its report on 21 July and the award was not announced until October 2021.<sup>27</sup>

In its 2022 report, the body said it was “[disappointed](#)” that delays in the provision of evidence meant it could not deliver its recommendations to the Government in time for them to be implemented on 1 April 2022.<sup>28</sup> It said it hoped there will be a return to the usual timetable for 2023/24.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body: Fiftieth report 2021](#), 19 October 2021, para 13

<sup>22</sup> [HCWS329 \[Armed Forces Pay\]](#), 19 October 2021

<sup>23</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body: Fifty-first report 2022](#), 19 July 2022

<sup>24</sup> [HCWS237 \[Ministry of Defence Update\]](#), 19 July 2022

<sup>25</sup> MOD, [Senior Salaries Review Body Report: 2022](#), 19 July 2022

<sup>26</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body: Fiftieth report 2021](#), 19 October 2021, paras 1.8, 3.4 and 6.28

<sup>27</sup> [HCWS329, 19 October 2021](#)

<sup>28</sup> In his remit letter, the Defence Secretary asked the AFPRB submit its report in May 2022: [AFPRB remit letter from the Defence Secretary: 2022 to 2023](#), 15 December 2

<sup>29</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body: Fifty-first report 2022](#), 19 July 2022, para 36

The body again criticised the delays in the provision of evidence to them by the Government for the 2023/24 round.<sup>30</sup> Personnel have told them that late receipt of a pay award “cause considerable frustration”. The body also said a delay in implementation, despite backdating, has “the potential to cause real cost of living challenges for some.”<sup>31</sup>

John Healey, the Shadow Defence Secretary, has criticised the delay to the 2023/24 pay award. Speaking in April 2023, he said the delay was a “kick in the teeth for service communities” who will be concerned about the “impact this delay will have on household budgets during the cost-of-living crisis.”<sup>32</sup>

## 6 Are personnel happy with pay?

The views of personnel on their pay are captured in the annual [Armed Forces' Continuous Attitudes Survey](#) (AFCAS). The 2023 survey, published in June 2023, shows:

- Less than a third (31%) are satisfied with the rate of basic pay, a decrease of 13 percentage points in the last two years.
- A majority of personnel (51%) do not think the pay and benefits they receive are fair for the work they do.
- A majority (55%) do not think the X-Factor payment is enough compensation for Service lifestyle, with only 27% agreeing it was.
- The proportion of personnel citing pay as a factor impacting their intentions to leave (47%) has risen considerably in the last two years, to its highest level since 2018.<sup>33</sup>

The AFPRB has previously said that for many personnel, the ability to maintain their living standards is a key issue around pay.<sup>34</sup> In its report for 2023, the body said that pay had become the focal point of conversation with personnel, with people reportedly feeling they were being asked to do more with less, and that their pay did not recognise the additional workload. Their inability to undertake industrial action, compared to other public sector workers, was also raised as a disadvantage.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>31</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>32</sup> [Government delays announcement on military pay rise despite soaring cost of living](#), Sky News, 1 April 2023

<sup>33</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey](#), 1 June 2023

<sup>34</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces' Pay Review Body: Fifty-first report 2022](#), 19 July 2022

<sup>35</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023



In June 2023 Sky News reported on cost-of-living pressures on personnel, including reports that personnel at RAF Coningsby were using an unofficial food bank set up on the base to support the local community.<sup>36</sup> This issue has been raised by MPs in Parliament, including by John Healey and the SNP's armed forces and veterans spokesperson, Owen Thompson.<sup>37</sup>

The AFPRB also reports hearing about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on personnel, with personnel stationed away from families not being able to afford to travel home as often as they wanted to, putting additional strains on family relationships. Personnel felt the MOD had not responded in a timely fashion to the economic situation, for example by not increasing quickly enough the Get You Home allowance when fuel prices spiked in June 2022. They felt this "exacerbated a sense that MOD didn't value them."<sup>38</sup>

## 7 How much does the MOD spend on pay?

The MOD spent around £11.3 billion on pay, pensions and allowances for armed forces personnel in financial year 2021/22. Over half of this (£6.7 billion) is on salaries and wages, with £4 billion on pensions.<sup>39</sup>

At the time of writing, the MOD has not published the annual report for 2022/23.

### 7.1 Planned spend for 2023/24

Details of the MOD's spending plans for 2023/24 are set out in the [Main Estimates](#), published by the Treasury in May 2023, with additional detail provided in the [MOD's Memorandum to the Estimate](#) (PDF).

This shows that £10.8 billion has been allocated to cover service personnel costs in 2023/24. This includes pay and other allowances, pensions and National Insurance contributions. This accounts for 21% of total planned MOD expenditure for 2023/24.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> [Revealed: The military personnel turning to food banks as cost of living crisis hits](#), Sky News, 12 June 2023

<sup>37</sup> [HC Deb 14 June 2023 c338](#)

<sup>38</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>39</sup> MOD, [Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2021 to 2022](#), 14 July 2023

<sup>40</sup> Defence Committee, [Memorandum for the Ministry of Defence Main Estimate 2023-24](#) (PDF) and [link to original source](#), 23 May 2023

The AFPRB says the net cost of its recommendations on pay, allowances, targeted payments for regular and reserve forces, national insurance contributions and pensions, will total £867 million.<sup>41</sup>

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that pay awards for public sector employees will not be funded by additional borrowing or spending: “departments will be reprioritising within existing budgets and driving further efficiencies to focus spending where it delivers the greatest value.”<sup>42</sup>

In its written statement, the MOD said that “whilst both pay awards are above the MOD’s original levels of affordability, this pay award has been made affordable by reprioritising spending within the existing Defence budget.”<sup>43</sup>

Civil service recruitment in the MOD will be cut back until March 2025 to help fund the pay rise for the armed forces.<sup>44</sup> Pat McFadden, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, questioned the Chief Secretary on the estimated impact of these civil service cutbacks.<sup>45</sup> The General Secretary of Prospect Union said freezing civil service recruitment to the MOD “is a disastrous error that risks putting our nation’s security at risk.”<sup>46</sup>

## 8

## Quinquennial review of X-Factor

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X-Factor is a pensionable addition to basic pay.

It is set at 14.5%.

Armed forces personnel receive additional remuneration called the “X-Factor”. This is intended to recognise the special conditions of military life as compared with civilian employment.

When it was introduced in 1970 the level of X-Factor was set to compensate for the overall net disadvantage of military life over normal civilian employment.<sup>47</sup>

X-Factor is reassessed every five years by the AFPRB. They do so by assessing a number of “components”, and compare the military experience with civilian life. These components include turbulence (the dislocation to service life by the type and geographic location of work), effect of service life on spousal/partner employment, separation from home because of working

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<sup>41</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023, table 3.2

<sup>42</sup> [HC Deb 13 July 2023](#)

<sup>43</sup> [HL928 13 July 2023](#)

<sup>44</sup> [HC Deb 13 July 2023](#)

<sup>45</sup> [HC Deb 13 July 2023](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Freezing MoD recruitment is a disastrous error – Prospect responds to govt announcement on public sector pay](#), Prospect, 13 July 2023

<sup>47</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fiftieth Report 2021](#), 19 October 2021, para 3.31

commitments, job security, hours of work and stress, amongst others. These are assessed as having improved, deteriorated or unchanged over the five years between reviews.<sup>48</sup>

## 8.1 Outcome of the 2018 review

At the 2018 review, the AFPRB recommended retaining the existing rate of 14.5%. In anticipation of the 2023 review, the AFPRB reviewed the current 13 components, concluding they should be reduced to 12 by removing the travel to work component, because the MOD provides a travel allowance. It also recommended amending some of the definitions, for example with danger explicitly stating physical and mental health.<sup>49</sup> A [full list of the components and definitions](#) can be found in appendix 2 of the AFBPR's 2021 report.

## 8.2 Outcome of the 2023 review

In its 2023 report, the AFPRB recommended retaining the existing rate of 14.5%. They felt that while there appeared to have been a modest improvement for Service personnel compared to civilians over the review period, any reduction in X-Factor in the current cost of living crisis would have a “significantly deleterious impact on morale”, and potentially on recruitment and retention.<sup>50</sup>

Personnel told the body that they felt X-Factor was no longer being used for its intended purpose, and instead used “to compensate for armed forces pay falling behind wider pay.” Many felt it was insufficient for all the additional tasks that were not part of their normal role.<sup>51</sup>

The AFPRB suggested the MOD should assess, through the Haythornthwaite review of armed forces incentivisation (see section 9), whether the current mechanism remains right for the way the MOD wishes to compensate Service personnel in the future. Their report was submitted to the MOD before Rick Haythornthwaite's review was published (in June 2023).

Haythornthwaite recommended varying elements of the X-Factor to reflect the review's view that, compared to when it was introduced, personnel are not exposed to similar levels of risk and rigour over the course of their

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<sup>48</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: 47<sup>th</sup> Report 2018](#), 24 July 2018, para 6 and table 6.1

<sup>49</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: 50<sup>th</sup> report 2021](#), 19 October 2021

<sup>50</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>51</sup> MOD, [Armed Forces Pay Review Body: Fifty-Second Report 2023](#), 13 July 2023

career. The review suggested varying elements of X-Factor would reward those “engaged in risky, rigorous activity outside operational theatres”.<sup>52</sup>

## 9 Future changes to pay and reward?

The MOD published Rick Haythornthwaite’s report in June 2023 as [Agency and Agility: Incentivising people in a new era](#), but it is better known as the Haythornthwaite review.<sup>53</sup>

Haythornthwaite recommended the services move away from a uniform offer towards bespoke reward packages, tailored to reflect the changing needs of personnel as their life and career evolves. This, he argued, would improve engagement and retention. He said by adopting a more agile approach, such as proactively adjusting rewards, the armed forces can “drive desired behaviours such as mobility, readiness, and the delivery of operational effect.”<sup>54</sup>

In the written statement announcing the pay award, the Defence Secretary said that while the MOD is still studying the report’s recommendations “it provides a compelling vision for improving the proposition to those who may consider serving in the future.”<sup>55</sup>

The MOD incorporated its response to the review in its refreshed Defence Command Paper, published on 18 July 2023. This [announces a new employment model and skills framework for the armed forces](#).<sup>56</sup> A forthcoming Library paper will discuss the Haythornthwaite review and the new employment model.

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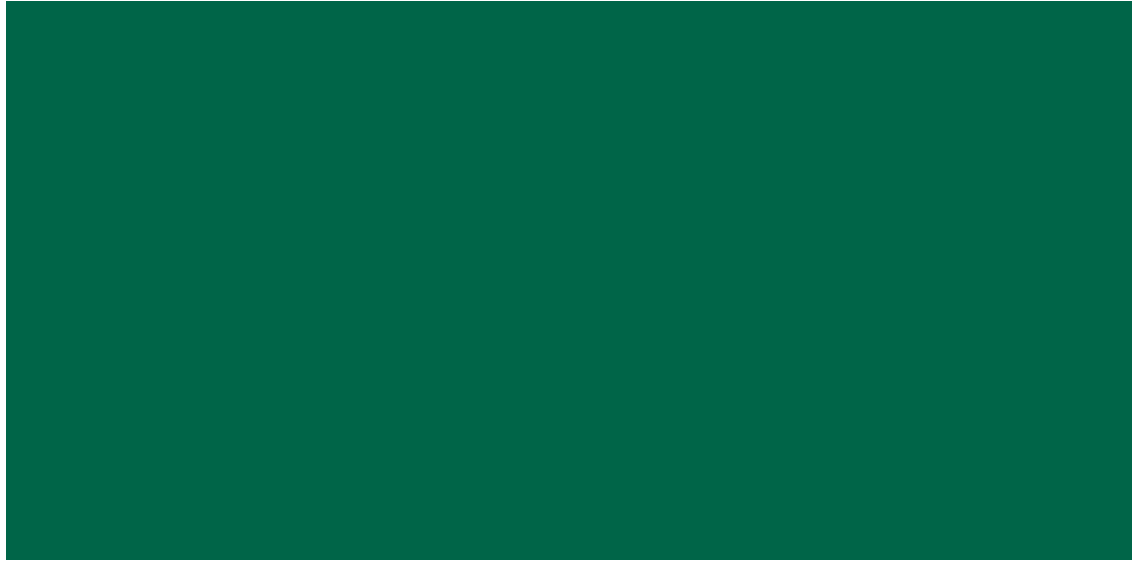
<sup>52</sup> MOD, [Agency and Agility: Incentivising people in a new era - a review of UK Armed Forces incentivisation](#), 19 June 2023, recommendation 20

<sup>53</sup> MOD, [Agency and Agility: Incentivising people in a new era - a review of UK Armed Forces incentivisation](#), 19 June 2023

<sup>54</sup> MOD, [Agency and Agility: Incentivising people in a new era - a review of UK Armed Forces incentivisation](#), 19 June 2023, paras B.xxxii-B.xxiv

<sup>55</sup> [HLWS928 13 July 2023](#)

<sup>56</sup> MOD, [Defence Command Paper 2023: Defence’s response to a more contested and volatile world](#), CP 901, 18 July 2023



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