



House of Commons

Committee of Public Accounts

Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces

**Thirty-fourth Report of Session
2006–07**

*Report, together with formal minutes, oral and
written evidence*

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 18 June 2007*

HC 43

Published on 3 July 2007
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Committee of Public Accounts

The Committee of Public Accounts is appointed by the House of Commons to examine “the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure, and of such other accounts laid before Parliament as the committee may think fit” (Standing Order No 148).

Current membership

Mr Edward Leigh MP (*Conservative, Gainsborough*) (Chairman)
Mr Richard Bacon MP (*Conservative, South Norfolk*)
Annette Brooke MP (*Liberal Democrat, Mid Dorset and Poole North*)
Chris Bryant MP (*Labour, Rhondda*)
Greg Clark MP (*Conservative, Tunbridge Wells*)
Rt Hon David Curry MP (*Conservative, Skipton and Ripon*)
Mr Ian Davidson MP (*Labour, Glasgow South West*)
Mr Philip Dunne MP (*Conservative, Ludlow*)
Mr John Healey MP (*Labour, Wentworth*)
Ian Lucas MP (*Labour, Wrexham*)
Mr Austin Mitchell MP (*Labour, Great Grimsby*)
Dr John Pugh MP (*Liberal Democrat, Southport*)
Rt Hon Don Touhig MP (*Labour, Islwyn*)
Rt Hon Alan Williams MP (*Labour, Swansea West*)
Mr Iain Wright MP (*Labour, Hartlepool*)
Derek Wyatt MP (*Labour, Sittingbourne and Sheppey*)

The following were also Members of the Committee during the period of the inquiry:

Helen Goodman MP (*Labour, Bishop Auckland*)
Mr Sadiq Khan MP (*Labour, Tooting*)
Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP (*Labour, Portsmouth North*)
Kitty Ussher MP (*Labour, Burnley*)

Powers

Powers of the Committee of Public Accounts are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 148. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/pac>. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Session is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee is Mark Etherton (Clerk), Philip Jones (Committee Assistant), Emma Sawyer (Committee Assistant), Pam Morris (Secretary), Anna Browning (Secretary), and Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk, Committee of Public Accounts, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5708; the Committee’s email address is pubacom@parliament.uk.

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
Conclusions and recommendations	5
1 Frequency of deployments and overstretch	7
2 Measures to improve recruitment and retention	11
3 Diversity of recruits and those promoted to senior ranks	14
Formal minutes	16
Witnesses	17
List of written evidence	17
List of Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts, Session 2006–07	18

Summary

The Armed Forces are short of Servicemen and women. At April 2007, the overall shortfall was 5,850 personnel, or 3.2%, and none of the three Services were within their targets, known as 'manning balance'. Pinch point trades, including many highly specialised areas, have larger shortfalls.

The impact of continuous downsizing, pressures and overstretch is affecting the Department's ability to retain and provide a satisfactory life for Armed Forces personnel. Numbers leaving early have risen in the last two years, and are now at a ten-year peak for Army and Royal Air Force Officers and for Royal Air Force Other Ranks. The frequency of deployments is creating pressure on some personnel, with large numbers exceeding the guidelines on time spent away from home.

The Department has operated above the most demanding level of operations under Defence Planning Assumptions since 2001, but has not adjusted its manning requirements. The Department accepts the Armed Forces are significantly stretched by the current level of commitments, but does not consider that they are overstretched.

The Department's short term financial measures to improve retention have had some success, but do not address the key drivers for leaving such as Servicemen and women's inability to plan ahead and the impact on their family life. The Department also lacks basic information on the costs of its measures which would enable it to make more informed judgements on incentives to improve recruitment and retention. The Department has introduced more fundamental changes for a small number of specialists, for example separating pay from rank.

Past cuts in recruitment activity have had a damaging longer-term effect on manning in some areas. Such cutbacks are almost impossible to recover as budget and capacity constraints prevent the Department from over-recruiting to make up for shortfalls in previous years.

The Department collects and monitors information on many aspects of diversity, but does not do so for social and educational background and cannot therefore be sure whether the Armed Forces are truly representative of the society they defend.

On the basis of a Report from the Comptroller and Auditor General,¹ we took evidence from the Department on three main issues: the level of commitment and whether the Armed Forces are overstretched, measures to improve recruitment and retention, and social and educational diversity.

¹ C&AG's Report, *Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces*, HC (2005–06) 1633

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1. There are shortfalls of personnel in all three Services. In April 2007 the shortfall was 5,850 and the Armed Forces as a whole were 3.2% under-strength.** The numbers leaving early are at a 10-year peak for Army and Royal Air Force Officers and for Royal Air Force Other Ranks. Overall, the numbers leaving early have increased slightly in the last two years. The Department should use a staffing model to analyse how it will achieve manning balance by 2008, calculating how the various measures it proposes to take will affect the model and reduce the shortfalls.
- 2. The increasing frequency of deployments on overseas operations and time away from home are factors causing people to leave the Armed Forces.** More than 15% of Army personnel are away from home more often than is planned for under the Department's 'harmony' guidelines which are being consistently broken. The Department has little scope to reduce the operational tempo which is impacting on personnel but in case of enduring operations, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, it needs to provide people with greater stability of work patterns. The Department should give longer notice of deployments and let serving personnel know their work patterns over a longer time horizon.
- 3. There are indicators of overstretch in specific areas, such as the severe shortfalls in personnel in some specialist trades, such as nurses, linguists and leading hands, and the routine breaking of harmony guidelines.** The longer this situation continues the more it will begin to affect operational capability. The Department maintains that the Armed Forces are stretched, but not overstretched, and would only be overstretched if there was a failure to meet military commitments. But the Department also needs to ascertain the 'tipping points' where the degree of stretch itself precipitates the loss of scarce skills, putting operational capability at risk.
- 4. Financial incentives have met with some success in retaining people in the short term, but several key factors for people leaving, such as workload, inability to plan ahead outside work and the impact on family life, have not been addressed sufficiently.** In addition to financial incentives the Department should extend non-financial retention measures to provide personnel with greater certainty, for example, revising manning requirements upwards for the most stretched trades and relieving specialists from general duties such as driving vehicles. Workloads for those deployed on operations and back in the United Kingdom should be evened out as far as possible.
- 5. The Department lacks information on the costs of its recruitment and retention measures and has performed limited investment appraisal on its range of financial incentives.** All business cases for future initiatives should be supported by a full investment appraisal including an assessment of the costs and the benefits expected. The Department should have robust cost information to support appraisals.
- 6. The Department does not have a long term strategy to ensure a steady supply of highly qualified specialist personnel especially where there are shortages.** The

Department has broken the link between pay and rank for doctors and pilots and is considering doing so for nurses, to facilitate their recruitment and retention. The Department should extend this approach by introducing more flexible pay structures for other specialist trades where there are personnel shortages, such as information technology engineers and linguists.

- 7. Short term cuts in recruitment have had long term impacts on manning levels which are almost impossible to recover from and appear to have cost more money to mitigate in the long run.** The Royal Navy is currently affected by cutbacks to recruitment activity made in the 1990s because manning shortages which started in the lower ranks are working their way up to Petty Officer Rank. The Department should use a staffing model to assess the likely longer-term impacts of cut backs in recruitment, including the costs of addressing future shortfalls in recruits, and restoring manning levels.
- 8. The Department sets annual targets for recruitment but they do not take account of the need to fill in some of the gaps resulting from previous recruiting shortfalls.** The Department should look at the scope to over-recruit in specific areas where there have been serious shortfalls in personnel. Although flexibility may be limited to some extent by the physical capacity of the training system, the Department should assess how such constraints can be overcome, for example by re-scheduling training and using temporary facilities. It should build in the necessary flexibility under the new arrangements implemented through the Defence Training Review programme.
- 9. Nine out of ten of the Army's top ten officers were educated at independent schools, whilst three-quarters of Army scholarships in 2006–07 went to students from independent schools.** The Department monitors and collects information on areas of diversity such as race and gender, but not on the socio-economic or educational background of new recruits and personnel who are promoted. Without such information, the Department cannot be sure it has a workforce that “is drawn from the breadth of the society which it defends”. The Department should collect and monitor information on the socio-economic and educational background of recruits; of those who are promoted; and on relative success rates for those from different educational backgrounds who are awarded bursaries. The Department should use this information help it draw on the best available talent from across the population.

1 Frequency of deployments and overstretch

1. In April 2007 the total strength of the Armed Forces was 3.2% below requirements which represented a shortfall of 5,850 people. The Department did not achieve its aim of manning balance² in all three Services by the end of 2005. Its confidence that it will achieve manning balance by its target date of 2008³ appears optimistic in the light of the most recent manning figures. In the year to April 2007 the overall personnel shortfall increased from 5,170 to 5,850 and none of the three Services was within manning balance.⁴ The overall figures also mask significant shortfalls in many of the operational pinch point trades, which will take longer to recover.⁵

2. Deployments on overseas operations and time away from home are factors causing people to leave the Armed Forces.⁶ Statistics of personnel leaving early for 2006–07 show that voluntary outflow rates for Army and Royal Air Force Officers, and for Royal Air Force Other Ranks are at a ten year peak. “Voluntary outflow” rates have remained at the same level or increased since April 2006.⁷ Overall, the numbers of Officers and Other Ranks leaving early have increased slightly in the last two years.

3. The Department accepts that current operations, especially those in Iraq and Afghanistan, are placing a strain on personnel, particularly in the pinch point trades, such as vehicle mechanics, armourers and nurses. However, it does not agree that this factor is leading to an increase in people leaving early. The numbers of personnel leaving early have gone up slightly over the last two years but the Department believes that voluntary outflow has remained remarkably steady over the last ten years and that the long-term trends are fairly stable.⁸

4. In a survey of pinch point trade personnel by the National Audit Office, frequency of deployments contributed to two of the top three reasons for people leaving. 70% of those intending to leave and 53% of those who had left said that their inability to plan ahead in life outside work was an important factor in their decision to leave. 64% and 49% of the same groups said that the impact of service life on family life was important.⁹ The Department acknowledges that inability to plan ahead is a key reason for personnel leaving. The frequency of deployments, with the subsequent impact on family life, also influence retention, although the Department pointed out that separation from families and the desire to pursue a career in civilian life have always been factors in decisions to

2 Manning balance is the prevailing trained strength requirement within a tolerance band of plus 1% or minus 2% to reflect structural and organisational change within the Services.

3 Q 6

4 Source: Ministry of Defence—Defence Analytical Services Agency TSP04 Quarterly Press Release, April 2007.

5 C&AG’s Report, paragraphs 1.13 to 1.18

6 Q 3

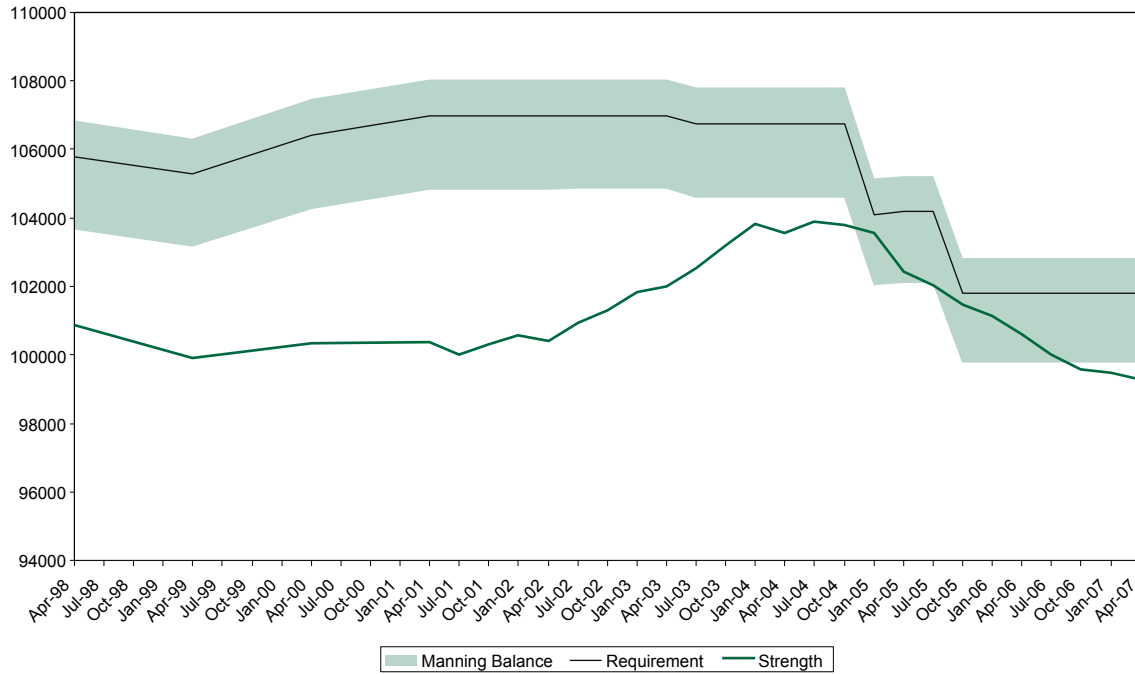
7 Source: Ministry of Defence: Defence Analytical Services Agency TSP05, April 2007

8 Qq 3–5

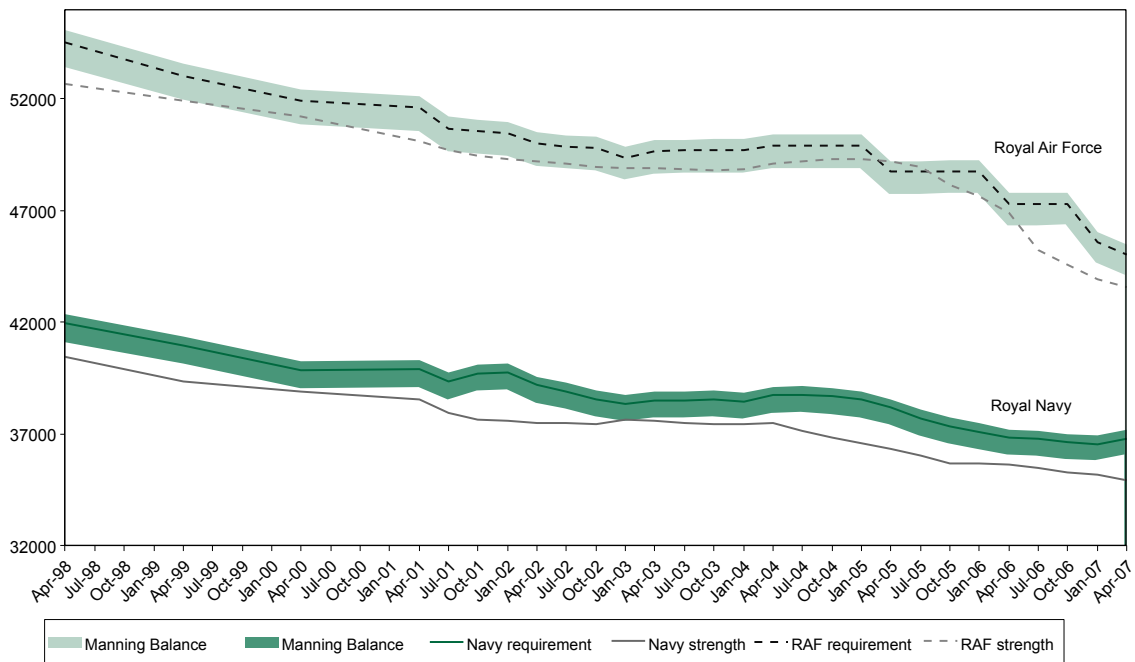
9 C&AG’s Report, Figure 6, para 2.13

leave. The Department agrees it needs to be alert to the possibility that there may be an upward trend in departures if current pressures continue.¹⁰

Army Manning



Navy and RAF Manning



5. More people leaving the Armed Forces in turn increases the pressures on those who stay. The Department's harmony guidelines¹¹ on the amount of time away from home are consistently being broken. Currently around 15% of the Army are away more than is planned for and for some trades the figure is a third or more. 4 to 6% of Royal Air Force personnel have exceeded the guidelines in every year since 1998, against a guideline of 2.5%. Although the Royal Navy is meeting its harmony guideline targets, ships have sailed with an average level of "gapped" frontline posts of 12%.¹²

6. The Department has achieved 98% of its recruitment targets for the Armed Forces over the last five years. In the first six months of 2006–07 the Department had already met 52% of its recruitment targets for the whole year compared to 47% at the equivalent point in 2005–06. In October 2005 there were significant recruitment shortfalls in the Infantry (17%) and Artillery (27%), and recruitment to these areas has improved in 2006–07 with applications up by 36 and 42% respectively.¹³ Although recruitment targets are linked to the overall size of the Armed Forces, which has fallen in recent years, the Department does not accept that the targets are easier to meet. Targets have not been met in the harder-to-recruit pinch point trades.

7. Deployments overseas have been more frequent because the Department has been operating above Defence Planning Assumptions for several years and manning levels have not kept pace with commitments.¹⁴ Defence Planning Assumptions are assumptions about operations which are made to build up the structure of the Armed Forces and used to assign forces to military tasks. Decisions about whether the Armed Forces can undertake operations above the Assumptions are matter of military judgement.¹⁵ The Department intends to review Defence Planning Assumptions and the funding of the Armed Forces in the light of the demands placed on them, as part of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

8. The Department's consistent stated position is that the Armed Forces are significantly stretched by the combination of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, but that they are not overstretched, as they are continuing to do all that is asked of them.¹⁶ The Armed Forces would be overstretched if they could not fulfil their current military commitments.¹⁷ There are nevertheless indications of overstretch for some areas, particularly some specialist trades, where there are severe shortages of personnel and harmony guidelines are being routinely broken. In some medical trades, for example, the

11 Each service has set harmony guidelines on the amount of time personnel spend away to ensure that Service personnel and their families have a sustainable balance between time away and time at home. Royal Navy: No individual should exceed 660 days of separated service in any three year period. Army: Individuals should not exceed 415 days of separated service in any period of 30 months. Royal Air Force: No more than 2.5% of personnel should serve more than 140 days of detached duty in any period of 12 months. There are separate guidelines for unit tour intervals for each Service.

12 C&AG's Report, para 2.16

13 Q 30, Q 33

14 C&AG's Report, para 1.5

15 Q 29, Q 39

16 Q 3, Q 29

17 Q 38

Department has to rely on significant numbers of Reserve Forces, as well as private sector contractors, to meet its commitments.¹⁸

18 C&AG's Report, para 1.21

2 Measures to improve recruitment and retention

9. Most of the Department's measures to improve recruitment and retention have been based on financial incentives. These incentives have been generally successful in the short term but have not addressed some of the key reasons for leaving, such as Service personnel's inability to plan ahead in life outside work, and the impact of operations on family life. The financial incentives were targeted at particular groups as this approach provided better value for money than paying increases to everyone. The Department believes that incentives have made a difference and has ceased payment after a few years to those trades where manning has improved, although the Department has not been able to avoid paying out some money to people who would probably have stayed anyway.¹⁹

10. In October 2006 the Department introduced a £2,240 tax-free allowance for everyone deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia in recognition of the challenging circumstances and pressures they face, and is confident this will have a positive effect on retention, as well as recruitment. The allowance needs to be seen alongside other financial measures but many personnel returning from operations have welcomed the payment. However, financial incentives alone may not keep people in the Forces given the strains on personnel and other key reasons for leaving. Measures to enable people to plan ahead and improve their family life and work/life balance, such as longer advance notice of deployments, are needed to improve retention.²⁰

11. Although many people were concerned about the impact of operations on their work/life balance and planning ahead, deployments are a positive factor for some. 9% of former personnel, or those who intended to leave, surveyed by the National Audit Office either left or were thinking of leaving because they were not deployed enough.²¹ The Department endeavours to take individual preferences on deployments into account but preferences must be balanced against the needs of the Service, the requirements for the particular operation and the need for individuals to complete their specialist training and gain the required experience to progress in their careers. Non-commissioned officers, officers and warrant officers undertake an increasing degree of participation in the management of their careers.²²

12. The Department has lacked information about the cost of incentive schemes when compared to the benefits and has not always carried out investment appraisals. The Department accepts that decisions might have been better with improved information, and that it should have carried out investment appraisals before the introduction of new financial incentives schemes. It intends to introduce them from now on.²³

19 Q 11

20 Q 57, Q 11

21 C&AG's Report, para 2.22

22 Qq 58–60

23 Qq 12–23

13. In assessing the costs of incentive schemes the Department has been hampered by the poor quality of financial information and inadequate IT systems. Information has not been easily accessible or disseminated to those people responsible for managing recruitment and retention. The Department believes the quality of information will improve with the implementation of its new Joint Personnel Administration system from 2007 onwards.²⁴

14. The Department has not maintained a consistent long term approach to recruitment and retention activity. Recruitment drives, for example, have been cut back by pressures to downsize or to make funding cuts.²⁵ Cutbacks can have significant consequences. The Royal Navy is currently affected by cutbacks to recruitment activity made in the 1990s because manning shortages which started in the lower ranks are working their way up to Petty Officer Rank.²⁶ The Army cancelled some Infantry training courses as recently as 2004–05, and consequently deferred recruits, in order to stay within its funded manpower limit, at a time when the Infantry were heavily committed to operations in Iraq.²⁷ The Department accepts that it made mistakes in the approach that was taken in the 1990s and is applying the lessons learnt in the current downsizing of the Royal Air Force, where the fall in strength of 8,000 personnel is being managed through a mix of reduced recruitment and voluntary departures.²⁸

15. The Department sets annual targets for recruitment but they do not take account of the need to fill in some of the gaps resulting from previous recruiting shortfalls. The Department explained that it had to live within its budget and there were a limited number of training places available which restricted the number of new recruits in any one year.²⁹ The Department, however, conceded that there was some training capacity available as a result of the Armed Forces reducing in size.

16. The Department faces a number of challenges to meeting its recruitment targets, such as an ageing population, changing attitudes to careers and increasing levels of obesity among young people.³⁰ The Department has not dropped its overall standards of entry to the Armed Forces;³¹ the standard of fitness required, for example, has remained unchanged. However, the Army has increased the maximum Body Mass Index limit for new male recruits from 28 to 32 and plans to increase the length of initial training from 12 to 14 weeks, partly to allow more time for recruits to reach the required fitness levels.³²

17. Many pinch points are in highly specialised trades such as medics, linguists and nuclear watchkeepers. The Armed Forces traditionally “grow their own” recruits which means that it takes a long time for them to acquire the high degree of skill, training and experience needed for these trades. If they leave they are very difficult to replace so the Department

24 *Ibid.*

25 Q 24

26 Q 10

27 C&AG's Report para 3.13

28 Q 10

29 Qq 105–106, Q 10

30 C&AG's Report, Appendix Five

31 Q 34

32 C&AG's Report, Appendix Five

needs a coherent long-term strategy for retaining them. The Department is looking at ways to encourage junior ranks to progress to the higher levels and providing incentives to encourage them to train and ultimately to stay in the Forces for a longer career.³³

18. In recognition of the strong pull from the external job market, medical and dental officers and professional aircrew benefit from separate pay arrangements. The arrangements are outside the main Armed Forces pay structure which is linked to rank. The Department's Strategic Service Personnel Plan contains a number of strands of work,³⁴ one of which is examining whether to extend this arrangement to other types of personnel. Nurses, where there are shortfalls of up to 70% in some specialisms,³⁵ could be one of the first groups to benefit, alongside the financial incentives which are already in place for this trade. The Department would consider looking at other groups if their work identified a need to adopt a more flexible, market-based approach to pay in order to retain highly skilled staff.³⁶

33 C&AG's Report, para 1.17, Q 61

34 C&AG's Report, para 2.41–2.42, Appendix Four

35 C&AG's Report, Figure 3, Volume 2, Case Study 11

36 Q 61

3 Diversity of recruits and those promoted to senior ranks

19. The Department's vision for the diversity of its staff is: "a workforce, uniformed and civilian, that is drawn from the breadth of the society we defend".³⁷ It monitors recruitment and promotion by race, as it has a target to increase the proportion of black and ethnic minority personnel in the Armed Forces to 8% of all personnel by 2013.³⁸ It does not monitor recruitment and promotion by socio-economic grouping or by educational background, but seeks to recruit people for their skills, aptitude and potential for the job.³⁹ It takes account of a potential recruit's educational achievements and qualifications but not the type of school attended.

20. Of the 10 most senior staff in each Service, nine out of 10 Army officers, six out of 10 Royal Navy officers, and three out of 10 Royal Air Force officers were educated in independent schools. The Department recognises the risk that some parts of the Armed Forces may be seen as only open to those from more privileged backgrounds. The Department sees the current officer intake to the Advanced Command and Staff Course as providing an indication of the likely composition of the future leadership of the Services: 58% of the intake of Army officers went to state schools; as did 70% of the Royal Navy officers; and 75% of the Royal Air Force officers.⁴⁰ In September 2005, 53% of Army Officer recruits to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst had been to independent schools, compared with only 7% in the general population. In the absence of any information on socio-economic or educational background of most recruits it is difficult to provide firm evidence to support the Department's view that people are not being disadvantaged because of their background.⁴¹ The Department could be missing out on a pool of potential talent as a result.⁴²

21. The Department accepts that there is a disparity in the award of Army Bursaries and Scholarships with a disproportionate number going to people from independent schools rather than state schools. In 2006–07, 27% (25 out of 94) Army scholarships were paid to pupils attending state schools compared with 60% (6 out of 10) in the Royal Navy.⁴³ Figures are not held centrally for the Royal Air Force. The Department does not hold information on unsuccessful applicants, so does not know what the comparative success rates are for those attending state and private schools. Following our hearing, the Department is looking at how awareness of the Army's scholarship schemes might be raised in state schools.

37 C&AG's Report, Appendix Six, para 2

38 Qq 63–64

39 Q 71, Qq 79–80

40 Ev 14

41 Q 99, Q 101

42 Qq 74–77, Q 86

43 Ev 14

22. A high percentage of recruits come from military families. The Department did not know whether they were more likely to stay longer in the Armed Forces than those with no military background. Neither could the Department say whether recruits who came from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those from broken homes, were more or less likely to stay longer. The Department's view that there is no significant difference in retention rates between socio-economic groups cannot be confirmed without appropriate information on the background of Service personnel.⁴⁴

23. In 2005–06 some 500 personnel were promoted from Other Ranks to the Officer stream.⁴⁵ In the Army and Royal Navy the numbers promoted from Other Ranks to Officers in 2005–06 were broadly in line with the historical trend but the number promoted in the Royal Air Force was half what it had been in 2003–04. The Department does not believe that there is a “steel ceiling” which prevents them from progressing beyond a certain rank. In the Army Late Entry Officers who have already served a 20 year career in the ranks are eligible for promotion to all ranks but only a small number reach the rank of Colonel because there would not be enough time left for most to gain the required experience for this rank or higher before they retire at the age of 55.⁴⁶ In addition, those with real potential in the ranks would be picked up early and encouraged to apply for selection to officer through a regular commission and if successful would become cadets at Dartmouth, Cranwell or Sandhurst, with no upper limit on the rank they can reach.⁴⁷ Younger late entry officers can transfer across to a regular commission and therefore compete for promotion to the most senior ranks.

Personnel promoted from Other Ranks to Officers, 2000-2006⁴⁸

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	TOTAL
Royal Navy	110	120	110	100	90	80	600
Army	330	340	360	330	320	340	2030
Royal Air Force	240	210	220	210	120	100	1100

44 Qq 90–98

45 C&AG's Report, Figure 21

46 Ev 14

47 Qq 115–131

48 Ev 14

Formal minutes

Monday 18 June 2007

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Annette Brooke
Mr Philip Dunne
Ian Lucas

Mr Don Touhig
Mr Iain Wright

Draft Report

Draft Report (Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 23 read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirty-fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 20 June at 3.30pm]

Witnesses

Wednesday 15 November 2006

Page

Mr Bill Jeffrey CB, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, **Mr Chris Baker OBE** Director General, Service Personnel Policy, and **Brigadier Stephen Andrews CBE**, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel), Ministry of Defence.

Ev 1

List of written evidence

Ministry of Defence

Ev 14

List of Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts, Session 2006–07

First Report	Tsunami: Provision of support for humanitarian assistance	HC 25 (Cm 7018)
Second Report	Improving literacy and numeracy in schools (Northern Ireland)	HC 108 (Cm 7035)
Third Report	Collections Management in the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland	HC 109 (Cm 7035)
Fourth Report	Gas distribution networks: Ofgem's role in their sale, restructuring and future regulation	HC 110 (Cm 7019)
Fifth Report	Postcomm and the quality of mail services	HC 111 (Cm 7018)
Sixth Report	Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions support for disabled people	HC 112 (Cm 7019)
Seventh Report	Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements	HC 133 (Cm 7020)
Eighth Report	Tackling Child Obesity—First Steps	HC 157 (Cm 7020)
Ninth Report	The Paddington Health Campus Scheme	HC 244 (Cm 7076)
Tenth Report	Fines Collection	HC 245 (Cm 7020)
Eleventh Report	Supporting Small Business	HC 262 (Cm 7076)
Twelfth Report	Excess Votes 2005–06	HC 346
Thirteenth Report	Smarter Food Procurement in the Public Sector	HC 357 (Cm 7077)
Fourteenth Report	Ministry of Defence: Delivering digital tactical communications through the Bowman CIP Programme	HC 358 (Cm 7077)
Fifteenth Report	The termination of the PFI contract for the National Physical Laboratory	HC 359 (Cm 7077)
Sixteenth Report	The Provision of Out-of-Hours Care in England	HC 360 (Cm 7077)
Seventeenth Report	Financial Management of the NHS	HC 361 (Cm 7077)
Eighteenth Report	DFID: Working with Non-Governmental and other Civil Society Organisations to promote development	HC 64 (Cm 7077)
Nineteenth Report	A Foot on the Ladder: Low Cost Home Ownership Assistance	HC 134 (Cm 7077)
Twentieth Report	Department of Health: The National Programme for IT in the NHS	HC 390
Twenty-first Report	Progress in Combat Identification	HC 486
Twenty-second Report	Tax credits	HC 487
Twenty-third Report	The office accommodation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its sponsored bodies	HC 488
Twenty-fourth Report	Ofwat: Meeting the demand for water	HC 286
Twenty-fifth Report	Update on PFI debt refinancing and the PFI equity market	HC 158
Twenty-sixth Report	Department for Work and Pensions: Progress in tackling pensioner poverty—encouraging take-up entitlements	HC 169
Twenty-seventh Report	Delivering successful IT-enabled business change	HC 113
Twenty-eighth Report	ASPIRE—the re-competition of outsourced IT services	HC 179
Twenty-ninth Report	Department of Health: Improving the use of temporary nursing staff in NHS acute and foundation trusts	HC 142
Thirtieth Report	The Modernisation of the West Coast Main Line	HC 189
Thirty-first Report	Central government's use of consultants	HC 309
Thirty-second Report	The right of access to open countryside	HC 91
Thirty-third Report	Assessing the value for money of OGC buying solutions	HC 275
Thirty-fourth Report	Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces	HC 43

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Oral evidence

Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Wednesday 15 November 2006

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Mr Ian Davidson

Helen Goodman
Mr Austin Mitchell

Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office, was in attendance.

Mr Marius Gallaher, Alternate Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, was in attendance.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN THE ARMED FORCES (HC 1633-I&II)

Witnesses: **Mr Bill Jeffrey CB**, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, **Mr Chris Baker OBE**, Director General, Service Personnel Policy, and **Brigadier Stephen Andrews CBE**, Director of Strategy, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel), Ministry of Defence, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Good afternoon and welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts. I apologise for the slightly late start, which we advertised, due to the debate on the Queen's Speech. We are considering the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on Recruitment and retention in the armed forces. We welcome back Mr Jeffrey, who is the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence. Would you introduce your two colleagues on the front bench?

Mr Jeffrey: On my right is Chris Baker who is the Director General, Service Personnel Policy in the MoD; and on my left is Brigadier Andrew Stephens, who is the Director of Strategy, Service Personnel Policy.

Q2 Chairman: Thank you. What impact is Iraq having on retention, recruitment and over-stretch in the Armed Forces?

Mr Jeffrey: I think, Chairman, that the recruitment question and the over-stretch question are probably best addressed separately—

Q3 Chairman: Alright, deal with them separately then.

Mr Jeffrey: The NAO's Report, which is a very fair account of the position we face at the moment, does bring out, by virtue of a survey they have done (and indeed it is consistent with our own attitude surveys within the Armed Forces) the fact that the frequency of deployments into theatre these days is one of the factors that influences our retention of people. It is by no means the only one, and what is striking over time is the extent to which there is a pattern, and quite a consistent pattern, and it is as much as anything to do with people's separation from their families and people's desire at some points in their lives to get back into civilian life and

pursue careers there. So I do not think it is a straightforward question. I certainly do not underestimate the great stresses and strains that our Armed Forces are facing in Iraq in particular, and in Afghanistan, but the polling and opinion surveying evidence does not suggest that it is quite as significant as it might appear. On stretch it is a truism, but it is certainly the Chief of Defence Staff's view and ministers' and mine that our Armed Forces are stretched quite significantly by the combination of the deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan with other things. I do not think we would say that they are over-stretched but we do not underestimate by any means, particularly in some of the specialist areas that we will be discussing this afternoon I suspect, the impact that the current level of operational deployment actually has.

Q4 Chairman: But if the Armed Forces are over-stretched—and just because it is a truism does not prevent it being true—does not this lead to more people leaving which in turn leads to more difficulties?

Mr Jeffrey: The figures do not suggest that. The last thing I want to do with this Committee is to sound complacent because we do not feel complacent, but if you look at the figures on what in the MoD's jargon is known as "voluntary outflow", what we are measuring is people who choose to go at a point when we are not forcing them to do so, including people who decide to go with notice at the end of a fixed term of engagement or a commission. That figure, as chart 4 of the NAO's Report shows, has actually been remarkably steady over the years. The 10-year average for people leaving in these circumstances is

 Ministry of Defence

just over 3% for officers, it is 5.4% for other ranks, and these are very similar to the figures that we have seen in the last couple of years.

Q5 Chairman: You mention voluntary outflow there. Would you like to look at paragraph 2.4 which you can find on page 17. You say that long-term trends in voluntary outflow are fairly stable, but the number of early departures has been increasing for the last two years, has it not?

Mr Jeffrey: Very slightly. It is running at just over 3% for officers last year and I think just about 5.4% for other ranks, so it is a little more than it was by point something of a percent a year earlier, but these are not figures that suggest that you can caricature it in the way that some of the media have that people are leaving in droves. I would, however, re-emphasise that we are not complacent about this because we know from talking to people and from our surveys that this degree of deployment does mean that families start to play a part and people's concern at being separated from their families increases, so we need to be very watchful and be aware of the possibility that there will be a trend upwards in early departures. So far there has not been.

Q6 Chairman: But you have got an aim, have you not, of a manning balance in all three Services and you have missed the target in 2005. Can you be sure of doing so by 2008?

Mr Jeffrey: We are pretty confident we can. Certainly the Army is at the moment within its manning balance. The Navy has for some years been short of it, but it has been closing the gap, and there is a good chance, we believe, that it will be within manning balance by 2008—more than a good chance in fact. The position of the RAF is more complicated. When the NAO took its snapshot picture in July 2006, there had just been some redundancies a couple of months earlier as part of a planned reduction in RAF numbers. The RAF is planning to reduce strength between now and 2008. What they have been doing, I think intelligently given the other points made in the Report, is not simply to rely on losing people but to have a judicious mix of recruitment and departures. However, there is every reason to believe that they too, although they are operating it seems in a more difficult recruitment climate, can be within manning balance by 2008.

Q7 Chairman: Do you agree that the ability to plan ahead is a key driver in keeping people in the Armed Forces and the lack of it is a key driver in encouraging them to leave?

Mr Jeffrey: Yes I do.

Q8 Chairman: So what are you doing about it? If you agree with that, what are you doing about it?

Mr Jeffrey: Many of the things that as a Department we are doing—if you look at the initiatives on a continuance and giving people, especially in the so-called pinch point areas, more confidence that they will be allowed to stay for

longer. I do not know whether either of my colleagues wants to come in on that, but it is certainly the case that part of the thrust of what we have been doing in an effort to retain people is to give them a more certain prospect further into the future.

Q9 Chairman: If you look at this figure on page 21 it states “Reasons for leaving”; does that worry you? “Inability to plan life outside work; better employment prospects in civilian life; impact of Service life on family life; feeling that the work of the Services is no longer valued; uncertainty over the future given the current changes in the Forces?”

Mr Jeffrey: It is a factual statement of the factors which cause people to leave. This is a survey of those who have either left or are contemplating leaving, but I think what I would say is that it is fairly constant over time. These are the considerations that to some extent, although not immutably, are an aspect of Service life, and it is the case that many young men and women join the Services for relatively short periods and always have done, it is a young person's occupation, so to some extent when they do get to the point when they decide to leave, it is not very surprising that the work/life balance issue which features in other aspects of society features here in the Armed Forces.

Q10 Chairman: Why are you still making short-term cuts in recruitment? We saw the damage this has caused to the Navy, for instance, because of short-term cuts in recruitment years ago where there is now a black hole at petty officer level. Why are you still doing this? This is dealt with, incidentally, in paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13.

Mr Jeffrey: We are certainly doing nothing like the gap in Navy recruitment in the mid-1990s. We accept unreservedly the NAO's analysis that, with the benefit of hindsight, during that period it would have been better to do what the RAF are doing now and to refresh the pool as well as letting people go, in order to have a flatter profile when we get five, 10, 15 years further on. So we have learned the lesson of that and I do not think there is any question of us doing anything like that. It is certainly the case that we will occasionally be limited by budgetary reasons or reasons of space on training courses in just how much we can undertake in any particular year. I do not see us gapping now in the way that the Report describes as having happened in the past. However, what we cannot do, other than very much at the margins, is to over-recruit at a time when the market happens to be buoyant beyond our ability to pay for it short term or to train people within the capacity of the training systems.

Q11 Chairman: Do you accept that many of your incentives are short term and only result in small changes? For instance, some of your financial measures actually go to people who never intended to leave anyway. Would you not be better advised to look at more fundamental reform so that people

 Ministry of Defence

can plan ahead, for instance for their family life or having proper long term accommodation and these sorts of measures that might actually keep them in the Armed Forces, rather than short term financial measures which seem to go to everybody and make very little difference?

Mr Jeffrey: I think I would contest, Chairman, the assertion that they do not make much difference. It varies and some have been more successful than others, but I certainly feel where we have applied them they have, generally speaking, made some difference, and in a few cases it has been possible to phase them out after a few years their having achieved their objective because we do have sufficient people in that particular specialism. You could argue it either way. Compared with other parts of government with which I am familiar, one thing that I think is admirable about the way the Ministry of Defence has tackled this over the last few years is that we have responded flexibly to the market and to the particular requirements that we face rather than just paying everybody the same irrespective. The measures we have taken have been targeted and I think that does actually mean that we have probably got better value for money. There is a bit in the NAO Report to suggest that it is more cost effective to target resources in this way. I do not think we can ever avoid on this model paying some people who would have stayed anyway because if you tried to target those who would have left then you would have discovered quite quickly that—

Q12 Chairman: You say all this, Mr Jeffrey, but if you look at paragraph 3.23 you will see that: “The Department has not routinely performed robust cost benefit analyses on the range of financial incentives on offer ...” so how can you tell me that you are achieving results when you do not do basic cost benefit analyses?

Mr Jeffrey: We certainly accept the burden of the criticism in the NAO’s Report that we need better financial and other information on which to base the judgments that we make.

Q13 Chairman: I would have thought it was fairly basic, is it not? You do not need the NAO to tell you this, do you? You agreed this Report. It is actually laid out here that you do not perform robust cost benefit analyses but you tell me that these short-term financial incentives actually made a difference.

Mr Jeffrey: They made a difference in the sense—

Q14 Chairman: Why do you not do robust cost benefit analyses then?

Mr Jeffrey: We will.

Q15 Chairman: Why have you not done it up to now?

Mr Jeffrey: To a certain extent, the financial retention incentives that we have decided on in the past have in some cases been the subject of an analysis of their cost and their potential impact.

Q16 Chairman: “. . . nor has it conducted”—this is you—“until recently balance of investment appraisals assessing where best to focus efforts in terms of recruitment or retention.” Why have you not done this up to now? Why does it need the National Audit Office to advise you what to do?

Mr Jeffrey: As I say, we do accept the burden of the criticism.

Q17 Chairman: You do accept what? “Such costing information as is available is neither readily accessible nor disseminated to those people who are responsible for managing recruitment . . .” Why not, Mr Jeffrey? Why do you have to wait for the National Audit Office to tell you what to do in your own job?

Mr Jeffrey: To some extent it reflects, Chairman, the accessibility of such information within the Department. I think we would accept that that has been difficult in the past. One of the main purposes of our Joint Personnel Administration IT system which is being introduced at the moment—

Q18 Chairman: That is waffle, Mr Jeffrey. It goes on: “In making the case for any new recruitment or retention scheme, therefore, the Department does not always justify the investment proposed . . .” Why not?

Mr Jeffrey: For the reasons I have given. We have not had as much information as possibly—

Q19 Chairman: Well, why not?

Mr Jeffrey: Because the information systems have not been—

Q20 Chairman: Why not?

Mr Jeffrey: We are rectifying it, Chairman.

Q21 Chairman: Why have you not rectified them up to now?

Mr Jeffrey: Because this is a large, complex administrative system.

Q22 Chairman: Is it not absolutely central to what you are supposed to do that you actually retain your own people?

Mr Jeffrey: It is, yes.

Q23 Chairman: Why have you not done any robust cost benefit analyses on how to do so then up to now? It is all here in this Report which you have agreed to, Mr Jeffrey.

Mr Jeffrey: I am not disagreeing with the Report at all, Chairman. The burden of the NAO criticism is not that we have made bad decisions on financial retention incentives but that we have had insufficient information to make as good decisions as we might. We have often done financial analysis of these before we have introduced them. We certainly accept that we could be much, much better at this and that is the reason—

Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr Jeffrey. Mr Austin Mitchell?

 Ministry of Defence

Q24 Mr Mitchell: I get the impression as an outside observer of the Ministry of Defence that many of these problems are because you have been living hand to mouth or almost hand to boot for so many years, you have been under short term imperatives to cut spending, downsizing has been going on, you have abandoned recruitment drives, there has not been a continuity of recruitment policy, and these short term pressures are the real cause of the problems.

Mr Jeffrey: It is certainly the case—

Q25 Mr Mitchell: Come on, you have a chance to blame it on the politicians!

Mr Jeffrey: I would certainly never dream of doing that, Mr Mitchell.

Q26 Mr Davidson: Go on!

Mr Jeffrey: It is certainly the case that the overall size of the Armed Forces since the late 1980s has been reduced. The RAF is still reducing, the Army is now pretty well settled where it is planned to be, and the Department itself has been reducing in size. It has been doing so to some extent in pursuit of quite significant efficiency measures that I think this Committee may well—

Q27 Mr Mitchell: It has also been done in a series of lurches which has not been stabilising.

Mr Jeffrey: It does not feel like that to me. I have only been in my own post for about a year but I do not recognise the description of a department that has lurched from funding cut to funding cut, as you put it. It is certainly the case that the background to this Report—and in some ways it has made our task a little easier than it otherwise would have been—has been a period in which the actual size of the Armed Forces themselves has been reducing and that has been brought about principally through a major restructuring and through a series of measures that reduced the size of headquarters, for example, and redeployed people from the front-line.

Q28 Mr Mitchell: You can come up with all sorts of reasons and you have given all sorts of excuses as to why there are these problems with retention, but is not the basic problem simply one of money? If there is a problem why not throw money at it?

Mr Jeffrey: There are problems in the pinch point areas that the Report identifies, but if you look at the recruitment performance more widely, the fact is that over the last few years we have achieved something like 98% of the recruitment targets that we have been set. To the extent that we have not hit 100% it has had something to do with the pinch points. So I do not recognise that we are failing on recruitment. There is an argument about how large the Armed Forces might be, but against the projected size of the Armed Forces and the recruitment targets the Department has been set, it has come remarkably close.

Q29 Mr Mitchell: The story has been one of under-recruitment, under-manning and over-stretch and that is at a time when the Government has been throwing more wars your way than at any other period. As I remember, Harold Wilson only had Anguilla whilst we have managed a whole series of wars. Do you say to the politicians, “We can’t do this job on the money we are getting”?

Mr Jeffrey: There are two questions caught up in that. One is the question the Chairman began with which is are we over-stretched now because of the degree of deployment. The clear advice is that we are stretched but we are not over-stretched. It is certainly very difficult for those who are experiencing it first hand, but when we come to look at the funding of the Armed Forces in next year’s spending round, obviously there will be a discussion to be had about what recent experience tells us and what financial provision needs to be made for the future, but I do not think it is a question of over-stretch now. Your second question I confess has slightly slipped my mind, Mr Mitchell.

Q30 Mr Mitchell: Is it your job to manage on the money available or to tell the politicians you have not got enough available?

Mr Jeffrey: Our job is to support ministers by giving them the best information and advice on both the requirements that the Armed Forces are likely to have to meet and the ways in which we can provide value for money for the taxpayer within the allocations of money that we are provided with. If I could just revert to the recruitment performance issue, which was, I now remember, the second part of your question. As I said a little earlier, we have recruited 98% of the target intake of civilians over the years since 2001.

Q31 Mr Mitchell: You are saying that you will make the targets with the Army and Navy next year but you will only make them because you are downsizing at the same time.

Mr Jeffrey: I am not sure that it is true we will “only make” them, but it is certainly the case that the recruitment targets we were set reflect the projected size of the Armed Forces.

Q32 Mr Mitchell: I just wonder if we have not got a whole syndrome here because you have not got the money you are over-stretched, and it affects retention and recruitment because the job becomes less attractive. It is interesting in these detailed survey results and case studies that the main dissatisfaction factors on page 10 of this Report, that the first one is inability to plan ahead in life. That is understandable. The second one is having adequate resources to do your job. That is far bigger than anything else apart from planning ahead. Then there is the effect on family life and fourth comes the quality of equipment. In other words, the continuous downsizing, pressure, over-stretch is affecting your ability to retain and provide a satisfactory life for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.

Ministry of Defence

Mr Jeffrey: I come back to what I said earlier to the Chairman, I do not think the figures bear out the contention that we are less successful at retention than we have been over the last few years. It is a pretty steady picture, in fact. We cannot take satisfaction from high scores of the kind you describe for having adequate resources or the quality of equipment, I agree with that, but again without having the figures in front of me I would be surprised if earlier surveys did not produce similar issues among those who have chosen to leave. Other aspects of our polling of staff do show a different picture and again it comes out in the Report. The percentage of soldiers in the Army who recorded morale as “high” or “very high” increased from 42% last year to 49% this year, 6.6% up. Obviously one would wish these were even higher but the trend does not suggest that there is a severe and substantial impact on morale.

Q33 Mr Mitchell: I would have thought the over-stretch produces early exits, I think there must be a correlation there, and makes it more difficult to retain people, and it produces the pinch points which seem amazingly numerous. Then on top of the pinch points you have got paragraph 3.4 where under-achievement in recruitment in the Infantry is 17% and the Royal Artillery 27%. These are huge shortfalls.

Mr Jeffrey: I think the recent picture, certainly for the Artillery, is better. I do not know if Mr Baker has some figures on that.

Mr Baker: It is. For the current year, the recruitment target is significantly larger than it was the previous year, some 10% larger. Recruitment performance overall is better at the six-month point compared to the equivalent period last year. We have recruited 52% of the requirement this year compared to 47% of a smaller requirement for the same period last year. In those areas you mention, the Infantry and Royal Artillery, the position is substantially stronger than it was last year. Applications for the Infantry were up 36% and for the Royal Artillery up 42% so the picture is looking better.

Q34 Mr Mitchell: Because of these pressures and these short term difficulties in recruitment, are you taking people now that you would have deemed unsuitable in previous periods? Are you lowering your standards?

Mr Jeffrey: I do not believe so. Do you want to comment?

Brigadier Andrews: I do not think that that is the case, no, because we have set a standard which clearly supports the training that we deliver within a reasonable time to deliver it, so no we have not dropped our standards. We have to be sure of course all the time that the training matches the sort of people who we recruit, but that is a continuous process, as you would expect.

Q35 Mr Mitchell: I hope the training does match the sort of people but the question is about the sort of people. Senator Kerry got into some difficulties

over a joke about if you pass your exams you go on to a top job; if you do not you go to Iraq. You cannot tell me that there has not been a fall in the standard of recruitment because you do not collect the socio-economic data and you do not collect the information on educational background that would tell us that standards are being maintained.

Mr Jeffrey: It is true that we do not but those who are responsible for recruitment are, I believe, pretty clear that they are applying the same standards as they were in the past.

Brigadier Andrews: They are, and of course what they are testing is the potential and the aptitude to be trained in that particular skill, and one’s background is not necessarily a terribly important factor in that. So we do not collect that data, no, we are looking at somebody’s aptitude and potential for whatever role or post that they are going to be trained to take up in the Armed Forces.

Q36 Mr Mitchell: Senator Kerry’s joke would not be appropriate here.

Brigadier Andrews: I beg your pardon, Mr Mitchell, I did not hear what you said.

Q37 Mr Mitchell: He said if you work hard and pass your exams you get a top job, if you do not, you get stuck in Iraq.

Brigadier Andrews: No, I do not think that is what I said.

Mr Jeffrey: I think what Mr Mitchell is saying is that is what Senator Kerry said. I do not think that is the way the issue is seen in this country at all, and we feel, as I think our ministers are saying and I would heartily endorse, very proud of those going to Iraq and Afghanistan. Certainly as I begin to get around the Department and the Armed Forces I do not detect any lack of quality.

Mr Mitchell: Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you Mr Mitchell. Richard Bacon?

Q38 Mr Bacon: Mr Jeffrey, could you say what is over-stretch?

Mr Jeffrey: I think the Armed Forces would be over-stretched if they could not fulfil the tasks that are being allocated to them.

Q39 Mr Bacon: In paragraph 1.5 it states that: “Since 2001, the Armed Forces have consistently operated at or above the most demanding combination of operations envisaged by the Defence Planning Assumptions,” but it goes on to say that the manning requirements have not been adjusted to reflect the levels of activity; why not?

Mr Jeffrey: The manning requirements will be looked at in the next spending review along with other aspects of our expenditure. Just to get back to the bit of the Report you are quoting from, Mr Bacon, it is worth bearing in mind that the planning assumptions are just that; they are assumptions about, in this case, concurrent, long-lasting operations which are made in building up the structure of the Armed Forces and assigning force elements to the full set of military tasks, for

 Ministry of Defence

example. No two operations are the same. They engage different aspects of military capability and different aspects of military capability, as we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, are stretched to different degrees. It is not such a completely scientific process that one leads directly from planning assumptions to a judgment that over-stretch has taken place. Whether over-stretch is there is essentially a matter of military judgment and the Chief of Defence Staff himself I think is on record as saying, as I said earlier, that he does believe that the Armed Forces are stretched by the quantity of current deployments but he does not believe that they are over-stretched.

Q40 Mr Bacon: How many Armed Forces personnel was it originally planned at the beginning of 2005, when it was known we would take over the leadership of the NATO role there, to send to Afghanistan?

Mr Jeffrey: I do not have that figure immediately to hand.

Q41 Mr Bacon: Is there somebody in the room who does?

Mr Jeffrey: My recollection is that it was of the order of 4,000 or 5,000.

Q42 Mr Bacon: That was my recollection as well. I remember talking to an Army officer who told me at the beginning of last year, in January 2005, that it would be 5,000. That was the number that he quoted to me. We did not send 5,000 originally, did we?

Mr Jeffrey: We sent pretty close to that. That is my recollection.

Q43 Mr Bacon: When we first sent them how many did we send?

Mr Jeffrey: Again, Mr Bacon, I do not have that figure immediately to my fingertips. The safest thing for us to do—

Q44 Mr Bacon: Was it not just over 3,000, Mr Jeffrey? 3,300 is the number that sticks in my memory. It may have been as high as 3,500. Is there anybody in this room who knows the answer to this question. How many troops and Armed Forces personnel did we send to Afghanistan when we first undertook this operation?

Mr Jeffrey: My recollection is that you are right, Mr Bacon, it was about 3,500.

Q45 Mr Bacon: Is there anybody in the room who has anything stronger than a recollection? Anybody? We are sending people over to Afghanistan but nobody seems to know how many we have sent.

Mr Jeffrey: I can certainly supply the Committee with that figure.¹

Q46 Mr Bacon: You are sending people into the line of fire and you do not even know how many you are sending. Why not? Why not, Mr Jeffrey? These are people who are dying for this country.

Mr Jeffrey: I simply am reflecting the fact that I do not have the figure in my brief in front of me to be able to give you a confident, absolute figure, but my recollection is the same as yours.

Q47 Mr Bacon: We said originally that we were going to send 5,000 but we ended up sending considerably less than that. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Jeffrey: The number we sent was based on the best military advice—

Chairman: I think you had better find out quickly.

Mr Bacon: I just cannot believe this.

Chairman: Mr Jeffrey, you had better find out quickly what is the number otherwise I will adjourn this Committee while we are sitting.

Q48 Mr Bacon: It is just outrageous. At the beginning of last year, in January 2005, the number that I was quoted in a private conversation with somebody I know who is in the Army was 5,000 and last autumn when they were sent near Christmas, I cannot remember the date of the deployment—and I am not a defence specialist, I do not run the Ministry of Defence; you do—the number that was quoted was considerably less than 5,000. It was from my memory slightly over 3,000. I want to know what the exact and accurate figures are and what it was that caused the advice to change because I also remember that quite quickly further troops were sent, so we are now at considerably more than 3,500 or 3,300, are we not?

Mr Jeffrey: The first point to make is that I was not myself in the Department in early 2005 so I have no recollection of this—

Q49 Chairman: I am afraid in this Committee that is no excuse.

Mr Jeffrey: I understand that, Chairman, but it is nonetheless a fact. I was around in the latter part of last year and I think you are right, Mr Bacon, the figure that was originally deployed was about 3,500. I can recall the discussions at that time and ministers receiving advice from senior military officers on what would meet the requirement that had at that stage been identified, and that is the best of my recollection.

Q50 Mr Bacon: Is it possible you could write to this Committee with a note?

Mr Jeffrey: We can certainly do that.

Q51 Chairman: Why can you not just get one of the members of staff sitting behind you to find out this information now?

Mr Jeffrey: We will do that.

Chairman: Well, do it now while we are sitting. Send them out now and get the information. We want to hear it now. We do not want a note; we want to hear the information orally in front of this Committee.

¹ Ev 14

Ministry of Defence

Q52 Mr Bacon: What I would actually like to know is this: what was said at the beginning of last year about how many troops would be sent; how many troops were then sent; on each occasion that subsequent troops have been sent how many were sent on each of those subsequent occasions; and also any rotations, who has been sent and who has come back, with the numbers attached to each transportation. That cannot be too difficult, can it?

Mr Jeffrey: We will certainly obtain that.

Chairman: We expect to have that information before we rise this evening. Any further questions?

Mr Bacon: No.

Chairman: Mrs Goodman?

Q53 Helen Goodman: Mr Jeffrey, if we turn to page 33 and look at the Royal Navy black hole, would I be right in assuming that these are really problems from the early 1990s which you still have not been able to overcome, and that is the major difficulty that you have in the Royal Navy?

Mr Jeffrey: It is certainly the case that because there was that period of several years when the Navy did not recruit nearly as many as it had done before or did subsequently.

Q54 Helen Goodman: That period is about 1992 to 1996 according to the Report.

Mr Jeffrey: That is right, there was a gap of that sort, and we are still suffering from it and it is working its way through and impacts, as the material on pinch points brings out, on the petty officer levels, for example, and the leading hands, and that is one of the issues that we are still dealing with.

Q55 Helen Goodman: Of necessity, the Report was written some time ago and it does not take account of the latest changes. Could you just remind the Committee of the announcements that were made a few weeks ago? I cannot remember whether they were about pay or about tax or tax-free allowances. Could you just remind the Committee of that announcement.

Mr Jeffrey: Our ministers announced a few weeks ago the bringing in of payment of a tax-free allowance for those deployed on operations. I do not know whether one of my colleagues would like to give the details.

Mr Baker: That is a tax-free allowance of £2,240 for a six-month deployment, payable to those on operations, essentially in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Balkans.

Q56 Helen Goodman: So there is another £2,240 tax free to everybody in Afghanistan and Iraq at the moment?

Mr Baker: And the Balkans.

Q57 Helen Goodman: What impact do you think that will have on recruitment and retention?

Mr Baker: A positive one. We have spoken to personnel who have returned from operational deployment and they have welcomed that payment. It is £60 million of new money that has been put

into that initiative. I think that can only have a positive effect in terms of the perceptions that those deployed on operations have about their remuneration and their compensation.

Q58 Helen Goodman: If we look at page 21, chart 6, I must admit I was rather taken aback to see that 45% of current personnel say that the work is not exciting or challenging enough, which does not seem to quite fit with what the Forces are being asked to do at the moment. Then if we turn over a couple of pages we can see in chart 9 a small number of people for whom there are too few deployments, which is saying a similar sort of thing, is it not, that it is not exciting or challenging enough if you have too few deployments, and I wondered when you are managing people at a disaggregated level whether you take account of their individual preferences to get to take on more deployments, whether you take that into account at all in taking decisions?

Brigadier Andrews: The answer is of course that in a perfect world we would want to balance the needs of the Service and the needs of the operation and the aspirations of every individual. As people become more senior and more experienced and require more training, that becomes a more and more complicated equation.

Q59 Helen Goodman: Yes, I can see that.

Brigadier Andrews: But certainly senior NCOs, officers and warrant officers in the Armed Forces undertake an increasing degree of stakeholding participation in the management of their own careers, and even the most junior soldiers, sailors and airmen are asked about their individual preferences about what sort of appointment they would like to go to next. However, a wish to undertake another operational tour—there are lots of young people who enjoy the experience of going on operations. Of course, that has to be balanced with the need for them to progress in the Service to undertake further either specialist or technical training so that it fits them in due course for promotion to take their place perhaps not just as a private soldier but as a junior commander, so it is quite a complex issue.

Q60 Helen Goodman: I know this is incredibly crude and over-simple, but if the people who had too few deployments had enough deployments then some other people might be satisfied too because they would not have to have too many deployments, so it all adds up, does it not? You are telling me that in fact you do ask people. It is not just that everybody in this battalion goes now they all go off together and that is that; it is not as crude as that?

Brigadier Andrews: No, I would not want to give the impression that every posting is an absolute matter of individual choice because of course if you are in a particular regiment or ship then when the word is given, that is what you do. You are, after all, in the Armed Forces. However, once your posting comes to an end, your divisional officer or

 Ministry of Defence

platoon commander is going to be very interested in what you want to do next. That is clearly in the interests of the Service to meet with good and challenging training and good and demanding appointments the aspirations of its people.

Q61 Helen Goodman: One of the things that comes out of the second Report with all the case studies is that problems are concentrated in areas where people are most highly educated and most highly skilled, the linguists and the medics and so forth. Obviously when you are dealing with people like that, that is not something that you can tackle in the space of two or three months, so could you just say something about what your long-term strategies are for building these highly specialised groups of people?

Mr Baker: Yes, we do look carefully at the challenges that are posed by groups like that where there is a particularly strong external pull from the job market. The Committee will know that we already have separate pay arrangements for medical and dental officers and for professional aircrew which lie outside the main pay spine for the Armed Forces and one of the issues that we are looking at in our longer-term strategic work is whether it is appropriate to extend that sort of arrangement for a wider group of people. Nurses are one of the groups in MoD that are under particular pressure, and where the NHS Agenda for Change is causing the landscape from which we recruit to alter significantly, and it may well be that we complement financial retention incentives for nurses in due course with a move to remunerate them separately away from the main Armed Forces pay arrangements, so, yes, it is certainly under consideration. Other groups could certainly be looked at in the same context if we felt there was a strong external market and we had to be more market facing in our approach to pay.

Mr Jeffrey: It is certainly noticeable as one looks at the second volume, as you say, that quite a lot of these shortage areas are ones where in order to get into the job people have to be within the Armed Forces for quite a long time because we essentially grow our own, and in these cases we are looking more and more at ways of encouraging the feeder grades in the first place and then giving them incentives to get themselves trained and get themselves promoted and stay in.

Helen Goodman: Thank you, I do not have any further questions.

Chairman: Ian Davidson?

Q62 Mr Davidson: I wonder if I could look at the question of recruitment. I was looking at the diversity policy of the Department's Diversity Division which is a workforce that is "drawn from the breadth of the society we defend". The Library fished me out something from the Navy's website which is: "The Naval Service is fully committed to the application of equality of opportunity for all its employees, within the framework of the law,

irrespective of gender, race, ethnic origin, religion or social background." You monitor recruitment and promotion by race, do you not?

Mr Jeffrey: Yes.

Q63 Mr Davidson: Why do you do that?

Mr Jeffrey: Because we have a target to increase the proportion of black and ethnic minority people in the Armed Forces to 8% by 2013.

Q64 Mr Davidson: Who gave you the target?

Mr Jeffrey: It was undoubtedly authorised by ministers; whether it was set by them I am not sure but it is certainly a departmental target.

Q65 Mr Davidson: It is a departmental target. So the departmental target is to have a quota, a target to make sure that, in the words of the Diversity Division, you are drawn from the breadth of the society that you defend. Can I ask then about social background; what monitoring do you have about the recruitment of both officers and other ranks by social background?

Mr Jeffrey: We do not and—

Q66 Mr Davidson: You do not, right. Can I ask why you do not for social background but you do for race?

Mr Jeffrey: It simply has not been set as a target because—

Q67 Mr Davidson: You set the targets though. I specifically asked you that; you set the targets.

Mr Jeffrey: I do not disagree with that, Mr Davidson. My sense is that it is implicit in our recruitment processes and the way in which people operate them.

Q68 Mr Davidson: It is implicit, is it? Presumably then you do not need a target because you get an Armed Forces which is drawn from the breadth of society you defend without having targets. That is your assumption, is it?

Mr Jeffrey: We are approaching it on the basis of the skills that they will bring, irrespective of their social background.

Q69 Mr Davidson: Right, you do not do that for race though?

Mr Jeffrey: We are colour blind in that sense, of course we are, but we have got a particular task.

Q70 Mr Davidson: Okay. When I asked the Library if they could clarify for me the social background of what they described as Army "top brass" they were unable to find anybody who had not been to private school. Do you think that is drawn from the breadth of the society that we defend?

Mr Jeffrey: I am a little surprised that the Library reacted as they did.

Q71 Mr Davidson: Why, is it not true?

Mr Jeffrey: I only operate on the basis of the questions but I noticed when similar questions came up when the Secretary of State of Defence

Ministry of Defence

appeared before the Defence Select Committee on 11 July, he said: “What we are interested in in the context of selection and promotion is to take account of educational achievements and qualifications, not what school a person went to. That is entirely as it should be unless there is evidence to suggest that people are being disadvantaged because of their educational background, and I have to say that as I interact increasingly with the Armed Forces I do not myself see any sign of that.” I must say, Mr Davidson, that is my own impression. Like the Secretary of State I am relatively new to the Department but—

Q72 Mr Davidson: You monitor by race but you do not monitor by social origin. Can you just clarify whether you have any statistics, say, for the top ten in each Service and whether it would be reasonable to expect somebody there not to be from public school. Is that correct?

Mr Jeffrey: I would have thought so.²

Q73 Mr Davidson: Do you know what the figures are?

Mr Jeffrey: I do not.

Q74 Mr Davidson: I am sure you will be able to gather those for us, the top ten in each Service and let us know. I wanted to ask just about recruitment. In the latest set of figures I have for Sandhurst, which I think is a reasonable way of looking at figures, in September 2005, 49% of the recruits to Sandhurst came from state schools and 51% from independent schools. Do you think that reflects the society you defend?

Mr Jeffrey: It is not exactly representative by any means, of course not.

Q75 Mr Davidson: What do you think the percentage of youngsters who attend private schools in the UK is?

Mr Jeffrey: I do not know it offhand but—

Q76 Mr Davidson: It is 7%. Do you think it is appropriate then that 49% of recruits to Sandhurst come from 93% of the population and 51% come from 7%?

Mr Jeffrey: I can only repeat, the processes—

Q77 Mr Davidson: Right, you can only repeat. It does not seem to me to be fair and balanced. It seems to me that potentially you are missing out on a great deal of talent there. What is the purpose of Army bursaries and scholarships?

Mr Jeffrey: It is to encourage people to join the Armed Forces having had the benefit of the bursary or scholarship.

Q78 Mr Davidson: But which people? Is it just indiscriminate? Are there any criteria applied?

Mr Jeffrey: There are criteria applied.

Brigadier Andrews: I do not know what the detailed criteria are.

Q79 Mr Davidson: You do not know, right. When we have bursaries for people staying on at school or going to university they are usually designed to try and help people from poorer backgrounds who might not otherwise be able to stay on. The last set of statistics that I have for the sixth form scholarship scheme to Sandhurst shows there were 44 awarded of which nine were to people from state schools and 35 to people from independent schools. Now if these are being done on the basis of need, I have never been under the impression that those who went to private school were the most needy. Does that seem a fair way of dealing with this?

Brigadier Andrews: I do not know the precise criteria, but what I do know is that the Services select and recruit people on the basis of the aptitude that they show. That seems to me—

Q80 Mr Davidson: The aptitude that they show. We do not have time to go into a number of ways in which the Forces present themselves which lead people from a background in my constituency to exclude themselves, but surely there must be something wrong with a scholarship scheme which has more youngsters being given money by the Army to go to Sandhurst from Gordonstoun than from the whole of Glasgow. That does seem to me to be somewhat of an imbalance. Again you are missing out on talent, surely.

Brigadier Andrews: Everybody has the opportunity to go forward and present themselves for selection, whether it is as an officer or as a soldier, sailor or airman to join the Armed Forces. We are interested in the aptitude that they show and that is what we measure.

Q81 Mr Davidson: You would accept that there would appear on the face of it to be somewhat of a discrepancy there, with 9% and 35%, when the reverse proportion in the population is 7% and 93%? What steps do you take to ensure that normal people get to apply for these scholarships?

Brigadier Andrews: I am not sure what the basis of your assertion is, but I can only tell you absolutely from 31 years' experience in the Army that lots of entirely normal people—and that is not to trivialise your question—do join the Armed Forces.

Q82 Mr Davidson: Okay, I will accept that, but would you accept that if you are seeking to recruit people: “drawn from the breadth of the society we defend”, and if bursaries and scholarships are designed to be an incentive to help people who might not otherwise take a particular step, it would appear bizarre that financial support goes so enormously disproportionately to those from independent schools rather than to those from state schools?

Mr Jeffrey: There is a disparity that you have drawn attention to, Mr Davidson.

Q83 Mr Davidson: I am glad you have accepted there is a disparity; what are you going to do about it?

² Ev 15

 Ministry of Defence

Mr Jeffrey: There is a numerical disparity between the population at large and the impact of the—

Q84 Mr Davidson: That is right, I have just said that.

Mr Jeffrey: Of course I accept that. To an extent it undoubtedly, I am sure, reflects the population of people that are coming forward to be considered.

Q85 Mr Davidson: Exactly.

Mr Jeffrey: It is up to us to make sure that we attract as wide a range of people as we can.

Q86 Mr Davidson: That is a very good point. It possibly reflects the people that are coming forward. Why do you think that people from state schools do not believe that a scholarship to Sandhurst is for them?

Mr Jeffrey: There may well be an issue of perception, and I would not question that.

Q87 Mr Davidson: There may be an issue of perception. It sounds as if this is a new issue to you and it has never crossed your path before. Do you know how many people actually apply for scholarships and are unsuccessful and therefore is the ratio of applications in line with the ratio of acceptances or is there a wide divergence?

Mr Jeffrey: I would need to give you a written reply on that, Mr Davidson.³

Q88 Mr Davidson: It just strikes me that all this is somewhat medieval. I have got British Aerospace in my constituency who will consult regularly with schools that are unsuccessful in having apprentices placed with them to give them advice on how the youngsters who are applying can be helped to meet the criteria that are required, but you seem to do none of that. I will let you read the note and then maybe you can give me further information.

Mr Jeffrey: I think we ought to give the Committee some information about how the bursary scheme is managed because I confess I am not—

Q89 Mr Davidson: Maybe with figures then. Maybe you could clarify for me whether or not the figures of success relate fairly accurately to the numbers that apply and if there is a disproportionately small number of people from state schools who apply, why you believe that is and what steps you intend to try and take to remedy it. Does that seem reasonable to you?

Mr Jeffrey: It is entirely reasonable.

Q90 Mr Davidson: Can I ask in terms of recruitment both to officer and other ranks what sort of percentage you have from military families?

Mr Jeffrey: It is quite a high percentage. Again, I would not be able to give you a precise figure for it but it is certainly something I have noticed.

Q91 Mr Davidson: I know it is fairly high. I was asking whether or not you had any figures and whether or not therefore there is greater “stickability” in terms of people not leaving early from military families as distinct from others.

Mr Jeffrey: There may be. It is certainly the case—

Q92 Mr Davidson: I know there may be; I am asking whether or not you know.

Mr Jeffrey: We do not have figures on that.

Q93 Mr Davidson: Right. It just seems to me that if you are targeting recruitment towards people who you want to stay, that is a fairly primitive piece of information that you would previously have sought; but evidently not. In terms of other ranks’ recruitment, the Defence Select Committee in one of its reports said: “It is a generally accepted truth that the Army recruits most of its soldiers from the lowest socio-economic groups in the country.” Do you accept that as being fair?

Mr Jeffrey: It probably is but, consistent with what I have been saying earlier, we do not analyse by socio-economic background.

Q94 Mr Davidson: You do not know. So you have a situation where you do not know whether or not it is true. Are you aware of the research that was undertaken in the Cardiff catchment area in 1999-2000?

Mr Jeffrey: No, I am not.

Q95 Mr Davidson: Would it surprise you to find that 69% of recruits were found to have come from a broken home?

Mr Jeffrey: It would not, no.

Q96 Mr Davidson: And 40% were joining the Army as a last resort?

Mr Jeffrey: These are higher figures than I would expect, but I am not greatly surprised.

Q97 Mr Davidson: I do not feel that I should have to tell you these actually. In terms of if there was a thorough-going professional recruitment effort, I would have thought you would have known these things. In your experience, do youngsters who are coming in joining the Army as a last resort, stay longer once they have been there a while than those who joined from other socio-economic groups, and similarly youngsters from broken homes? I do admire much of what I have seen the military do with youngsters from difficult backgrounds. I have seen a number of youngsters who have clearly had their lives turned around by being in the military and the military life and so on. What I am not sure about is whether or not the ones I am seeing are exceptional or whether or not that is a standard pattern. I am not sure whether, therefore, in those circumstances I would encourage youngsters from, say, broken homes to consider the military as a means of turning their life around. If it is only 1% of those from that background that are saved, so to speak, then that is different from 99%.

³ Ev 15

 Ministry of Defence

Mr Jeffrey: I do not think it is our impression, unless either of my colleagues contradicts me, that the stickability of those from that sort of background is significantly different from the norm. Like you, I very much admire what the Armed Forces sometimes do to turn people with that sort of history into very good and capable officers.

Q98 Mr Davidson: Can you understand why I am surprised that you do not know any of this?

Mr Jeffrey: I can, Mr Davidson, but on the other hand I come back to the fact that (as the Secretary of State is) I am new to this Department, and I came in with many of the same perceptions that you have just described—

Q99 Mr Davidson: I have had this discussion with the Secretary of State. That is the official line and I understand that.

Mr Jeffrey: It does not feel like that. As I move about the place I meet many quite senior officers and some very senior officers with educational and other backgrounds that are in your word normal. I come from such a background myself and I would notice it if it was not like that. I just do not think that somewhere in our psyche we regard it as an issue. We feel we are looking for people who can do the job as capably as they can.

Q100 Mr Davidson: You surprise me because I have been on placement with the Armed Forces through the Armed Forces scheme and I have been struck by the number of people who are not from backgrounds I would describe as normal. Some sections rather than others are full of toffs and “Ruperts”, which is not typical of society outside. They might be quite competent in many ways but they do not reflect society as a whole. I am coming back to what was said by the Department’s Diversity Division and that was “forces drawn from the breadth of the society we defend”. I think there are strengths in having forces which reflect the diversity of society, which clearly, unless you can convince me otherwise, you do not.

Mr Jeffrey: It is the intention and my sense is that in large measure it is the effect. If I could just be allowed to rise to your “toffs” point, Mr Davidson, I also have come across—

Q101 Mr Davidson: I was excluding you from that, actually.

Mr Jeffrey: I have also come across some senior Armed Forces officers from very privileged backgrounds who are extraordinarily capable people, and it ought not to need saying, but I think the quality is high all the way through and the attitude of mind that is brought to the task of recruitment and promotion is one that is not biased towards one social class or another.

Q102 Chairman: By the way, what sort of school was Allan Glen’s School in Glasgow?

Mr Jeffrey: It was a state school but in those days it was a selective state school.

Q103 Mr Mitchell: Arising from that, it struck me, turning to an earlier tactic with the Navy, that a sizeable proportion of people in the Navy, and the proportion rose as you went up the ranks, were there because they came from a naval background.

Mr Jeffrey: Yes.

Q104 Mr Mitchell: Do you have figures on that, recruitment from people leaving the Services, families?

Mr Jeffrey: I think we can obtain figures of that sort. I do not think we have them with us today, Mr Mitchell, but we will certainly try to provide them.⁴

Q105 Mr Mitchell: The real question I wanted to ask was, would life not be easier if you built some slack into the figures? Why do you publish annual figures and targets for recruitment? Why not have more flexibility and build in some slack so that you can recruit more when times are good and recruits are coming forward and fill in the gaps from previous shortfalls, and then you could ride out the times when things are tougher? Why does it have to be an annual target strictly attained?

Mr Jeffrey: I tried to deal with that question earlier. We have certainly learned the lesson of the Navy black hole and we are trying to manage this process in such a way as to produce an even profile over time and not the sort of discontinuity that practice in the mid nineties created. It is nonetheless the case that, though we have some flexibility, in the end we have got to live within the budget that we have been allocated each year and we have also got to live within the capacity of our training establishments to train people.

Q106 Mr Mitchell: Yes, but if numbers are reducing that capacity is available, is it not?

Mr Jeffrey: It is. I was given some figures earlier today which suggested that if you look at our performance this year we are six months in at the beginning of October with 52% of the target we have set ourselves, so we are slightly ahead and we have recruited about a couple of thousand more than we had at the same point last year. The opportunities are being taken but I did not want to leave the Committee with the impression that in times of plenty we can recruit unlimited numbers because we cannot.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr Mitchell. I shall now ask Mr Bacon to put to you the question he asked earlier, to which I hope you now have a reply.

Q107 Mr Bacon: Thank you, Chairman. Essentially what I wanted to know was how many Armed Forces personnel was it originally planned to send to Afghanistan at the beginning of last year. The number that I was told was 5,000. How many were sent initially, when the deployment actually happened, and how many have been deployed since in however many ways?

⁴ *Note by witness:* None of the Services record details on the employment details of the parents of recruits.

 Ministry of Defence

Mr Jeffrey: The main deployment was in January 2006 and the advice I have had in the time since you asked the question earlier, Mr Bacon, is that it was 3,300 people.

Q108 Mr Bacon: So 3,300—that was the number I mentioned earlier. I was right. And then what?

Mr Jeffrey: In June 2006 an additional 1,000 were added. Then, with the creation of the headquarters of ISAF, that brought in another 1,050, so the peak figure in Afghanistan is now standing at around 5,700.

Q109 Mr Bacon: I make that 5,350. Am I missing something? How did you get to 5,700? It was 3,300, plus 1,000 makes 4,300, plus 1,050 makes 5,350, does it not?

Mr Jeffrey: There were some there already.

Q110 Mr Bacon: Oh, I see. What was originally said at the beginning of last year, 2005, about how many would be sent?

Mr Jeffrey: If you were hearing from your sources that 5,000 was being bandied around as a figure at that time, I cannot confirm that. We have not been able to check that out.

Q111 Mr Bacon: But were public statements made by ministers or by anybody else in the MoD about that?

Mr Jeffrey: I am not aware of any public statements.

Q112 Mr Bacon: The funny thing is, you ended up getting 5,000, did you not?

Mr Jeffrey: We did, yes, but I reiterate what I said earlier on the initial deployment beyond what was already there in January 2006, which I remember very well because I was just in the department in the latter part of 2005, that there were detailed discussions involving the then Secretary of State and the Chiefs of Staff, and the advice John Reid received was that a deployment of that number was what was required to meet the tasks that were then being contemplated. Obviously, things have moved on since then and the current Secretary of State made the announcement he made some months ago.

Q113 Mr Bacon: Is it not part of the truth that it was pretty difficult to deploy the required numbers of staffing because Iraq was not then where it was supposed to be? They were supposed to be sweeping up in Iraq with a couple of guys behind to turn the lights off but there were still many thousands in Iraq. Is that not the basic truth?

Mr Jeffrey: I do not believe it to be so. In fact, you could argue the opposite, that at the point when the additional deployment was made the position in Iraq was not substantially different in terms of numbers from what it had been. I can only repeat that at the time when Mr Reid took the initial decision that was the advice he was receiving from

the military on the basis of their assessment of what the requirement on the ground would be in southern Afghanistan.

Q114 Mr Bacon: Thank you for that information and thank your staff please for obtaining it. Perhaps you could write to us with further details about that, and also what, if any, public statements were made earlier, particularly in early 2005 or even before that.

Mr Jeffrey: And I do apologise to the Committee for not having the figure at my fingertips but we were in the same ball park and one thing that I am always conscious of is that at no stage should I give this Committee a figure that I am not entirely confident of.

Mr Bacon: I do appreciate that, Mr Jeffrey. I ought also to say that I always feel I give your Department, and particularly you, a hard time although I feel a bit bad about that because you do seem to make more effort to answer the questions directly than many of your contemporaries and colleagues, so thank you very much for that.

Chairman: There is no need to start sucking up like that.

Q115 Mr Davidson: If we are giving you a hard time it is for your own good, as I am sure you appreciate, having been to Allan Glen's. I wanted just to pick up one particular point and that is the promotion from the ranks to the officer grade. We have got the figures there in table 21 on page 57. Can I just seek clarification as to the trend, whether or not these figures have been relatively static for some time, whether or not this is an upward trend or anything else?

Mr Baker: I do not know the answer to that, I am afraid.

Q116 Mr Davidson: Maybe you had better come back to us on that.

Mr Jeffrey: We will give you a note on that. Again, my sense is that it has not changed that much but we will get some figures.⁵

Q117 Mr Davidson: The second point related to that is, is there a glass or steel ceiling beyond which someone coming up from the ranks cannot progress? I remember some time ago, when I was doing the Armed Forces scheme with the Royal Marines, that there was promotion from the ranks only in a couple of specialisms and people were then stuck in those. I understand that the Royal Marines have now changed that. Is that the case right across the Services?

Brigadier Andrews: Because I happen to be an Army officer I can tell you what the policy is in the Army. Those officers who are commissioned from the ranks, who will be late entry officers, generally are eligible for promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel but not beyond, and those who do reach that rank have generally been promoted in their last years of service and that appointment would take

⁵ Ev 16–18

 Ministry of Defence

them to 55. Let me be clear: there are two groups of people. There are late entry officers who take a late entry commission having served in the ranks, and they are generally speaking at least senior NCOs or warrant officers. It is possible, of course, for younger soldiers, sailors and airmen to compete for a place by going to a selection board and taking their place as regular officers in the mainstream of their Service. It is also possible for some younger late entry officers to transfer across from a late entry commission to a regular commission, so they do have the chance to serve for the full career and to compete for promotion to the most senior ranks.⁶

Q118 Mr Davidson: Sorry; I am not quite sure I understood all of that.

Mr Jeffrey: Okay, I beg your pardon.

Q119 Mr Davidson: No, no. The point that I was concerned about was this blockage at lieutenant colonel for people who were late entry applicants. Can you clarify for me why they cannot progress beyond that?

Brigadier Andrews: Perhaps I could do a worked example for you. In the case of a soldier, somebody who has served a career of perhaps 20 years, they have reached the rank of warrant officer class 2 or warrant officer class 1, and at that stage they would probably be in their late thirties or early forties, depending at what age they joined the Army. They would get a late entry commission and they would be commissioned as a captain straightaway, and their rate of pay reflects their military experience so they go onto a particular rate. It would be possible for somebody who was perhaps commissioned as a captain at the age of 40 to go on to be chosen, if he has shown the right aptitude and potential and has the right appraisal reports, for selection to the rank of lieutenant colonel when he was in his early fifties. That reflects 12 years' commissioned service to hold the rank of lieutenant colonel. That seems to me to be entirely reasonable.

Q120 Mr Davidson: But if he was good why should he not move to full colonel?

Brigadier Andrews: In that situation he would not then have enough service left to be promoted to colonel.

Q121 Mr Davidson: He would be too old by then. If you are saying to me that by the time they go through all that they are then too old to progress I

can understand that, but if someone was promoted extremely quickly and reached the rank of lieutenant colonel while they still, as it were, had some age left, it would seem inappropriate that they were then blocked simply because they had come in by a different route, would it not?

Brigadier Andrews: This, of course, is a policy based upon experience and judgment.

Q122 Mr Davidson: I did not ask you what the policy was. I asked you whether or not you thought it was reasonable.

Brigadier Andrews: I do think it is reasonable, yes. I think it reflects the knowledge and experience of our people, and I absolutely agree with you: those late entry officers who reach the rank of lieutenant colonel are high quality individuals, but they are at the end of their career.

Q123 Mr Davidson: No, no, I understand the point about if they get to a certain age and had not come through the normal route they would not have been able to get any further, but that would have been at the conclusion of their service, but if they have reached that level before reaching that age surely there should not be an artificial barrier for their further progression.

Brigadier Andrews: As I said to you, I am not sure that it is an artificial barrier. I think it is a limit which reflects age and experience and promotion in a particular—

Q124 Mr Davidson: Okay. We are not getting any further. Mr Jeffrey, do you have a comment on that?

Mr Jeffrey: No, I have nothing to add to that.

Q125 Mr Bacon: Brigadier, I just do not understand the purpose of this blockage. I can see from what you said that there are warrant officers who have late entry into the officer corps, and that most of them will not make it beyond a certain rank and are unlikely to get beyond lieutenant colonel simply because of the passage of their careers and the length of their service, and, having served myself in the Territorial Army and having met warrant officers, both sergeant majors and regimental sergeant majors, most people in the Army seemed absolutely terrified of them, and I can quite see how, once they become officers, they can progress very rapidly, but, to take up Mr Davidson's point, it must be the case that it could occur that one of that cadre who was made into an officer could by his mid forties have qualified in terms of capability and aptitude to be a commander of a battalion, a lieutenant colonel, and perhaps then go on. If it is the case that a person is not suitable for that and is not able successfully to compete for promotions beyond that, plainly they will not get it, but, if they are, what is the purpose of depleting the pool from which you can select by saying: "You are not even able to apply because of some arbitrary hat that we have put on you or tag

⁶ *Note by witness:* I would like to clarify a point which was discussed at some length at the hearing—the suggestion that there was an artificial ceiling preventing those who gain promotion to officer after a full career in the ranks from progressing beyond lieutenant colonel. I can confirm that there is nothing in regulation that prevents such officers from gaining promotion beyond lieutenant colonel, and I understand there is in fact a small number of serving colonels who have done exactly that. As Brigadier Andrews brought out in his oral evidence (Q17), it is also possible for those serving in the ranks to become officers earlier in their careers by competing at a selection board in the normal way, in which case they would have more time to progress as officers.

 Ministry of Defence

that we have hung round your neck”? What is the purpose of this arbitrary blockage that you cannot go beyond lieutenant colonel?

Brigadier Andrews: You have presented an arbitrary blockage. Let me—

Q126 Mr Bacon: No, you have. You are the one who has presented it. I am questioning it.

Brigadier Andrews: You presented an arbitrary blockage. That is your—

Q127 Mr Bacon: You are saying it is a blockage but not an arbitrary one?

Brigadier Andrews: No. I am saying that that is the career structure that late entry officers are offered.

Q128 Mr Davidson: It is the rules.

Brigadier Andrews: I did say to you earlier that those who show the right aptitude and potential generally speaking are picked up early enough not to go through the late entry scheme. They will be picked up as young people serving in the Forces and they then will join the scheme from the ranks and they can end up as cadets at Dartmouth, Cranwell or Sandhurst. They join as officers, then they are commissioned and they have a full career.

Q129 Mr Davidson: How many of those are there?

Brigadier Andrews: I would have to get you—

Q130 Mr Davidson: Could we have the figures for that as well then?

Brigadier Andrews: There are significant numbers of those.⁷

Mr Jeffrey: I think that is the nub of the point, that there are two ways of moving across from the other ranks into the officer ranks. One is quite late in

service at a point when realistically you are not going to go any further than the level that the Brigadier mentioned, but the other is to be identified much earlier as a rising star and have your chance to go through the cadet school at Sandhurst or whatever.

Q131 Mr Davidson: I think it would be helpful if we could get figures for both of them, and indeed the socio-economic backgrounds of those from each category.

Mr Jeffrey: We will do our best.

Mr Bacon: And, just for Mr Davidson, how many of them are dukes as well.

Q132 Chairman: This is a last question for the Royal Navy. I see that one of your advisers is a captain in the Royal Navy. We have not focused a lot on the Royal Navy. When I have been visiting ships often I have been told in the petty officer mess that it is a real problem with people spending too much time at sea and that affects your potential. What is the latest situation on the potential in the Royal Navy, particularly at that skill level? And if your captain in the Royal Navy wants to answer the question he can.

Mr Jeffrey: That is a dangerous precedent, I think, Chairman. The high level answer to the question is that the Navy is the one service that comes very close indeed to meeting the harmony guidelines, and from that one can deduce that separated service to individuals above the level in these guidelines is unusual. It is not to say that when you encounter people they have not got comments to make of the kind that you have heard, but the area we are most concerned about on harmony is obviously the Army because it is there where the percentage figures could be higher.

Chairman: Thank you very much. As Mr Davidson said, it is our job to give you a hard time, but that does not underestimate our immense admiration for the work that your servicemen and women do in very difficult circumstances. Thank you very much indeed.

⁷ Ev 16–18

 Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Defence

Question 45 (Mr Richard Bacon): Force levels in Afghanistan

On 26 January 2006 the then Secretary of State announced the deployment of the Helmand Task Force (3,300 strong) and also confirmed that the Headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps would deploy as the Headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with over 1,000 (actually about 1,050) personnel. Since then, the Secretary of State has announced the deployment of a 130 strong RAF Regiment Squadron to help protect Khandahar Airfield, and the increase to the Helmand Task Force of about 900 personnel which he announced in July. Overall, therefore, this year we have announced the commitment of about 5,380 personnel. These are in addition to deployments announced in earlier years, such as the Harrier GR7 force based at Kandahar and the residual presence in Kabul.

The major formations we have deployed to Afghanistan are the Headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in May 2006 to command the International Security Assistance Force and first, elements of 16 Air Assault Brigade and then, from around 3 October, Commando Brigade, Royal Marines, to provide the core of the Helmand Task Force. Before the Spring, of course, our effort was concentrated in Kabul and the North, the last significant unit deployed in this role being the 1st Battalion, The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Light Infantry.

Today, our overall force in Afghanistan is about 6,150 personnel strong. I should explain that this figure fluctuates month-by-month, and sometimes significantly so. Reasons for this include reliefs in place, whether of entire units or of specialist personnel, and the reconnaissance visits that units make prior to deployment.

Question 72—74 (Mr Ian Davidson): Educational background of the top 10 individuals in each service

The current educational background of the top 10 officers in each Service is as follows:

<i>Service</i>	<i>State School</i>	<i>Private School</i>
Royal Navy	4	6
Army	1	9
Royal Air Force	7	3

It may be worth noting that the current senior group reflects the officer intake 30 or more years ago. It is also the case that, particularly in the Army, there is a tradition of service in the Armed Forces in the families of officers whose children are often privately educated while they serve overseas.

An indication of the educational background of the likely future leadership of the Services can be taken from the breakdown in the table below of the school background of this year's intake to the advanced Command and Staff Course. This is a highly selective, year-long course attended by members of each of the three Services and comprises 330 students, of whom about 90 are from overseas. It is designed to provide selected officers with a broad understanding of the full range of Defence operational and management issues. Only the top 10% of OF3 and 4s (equivalent to Major or Lt Col in the Army) are selected, and they are seen as those most likely to go on to achieve the highest ranks.

<i>Service</i>	<i>State School</i>	<i>Private School</i>
Royal Navy	70%	30%
Army	58%	42%
Royal Air Force	75%	25%

Questions 87—90 (Mr Ian Davidson) Numbers applying for Sixth Form Scholarships and Bursaries, and school background of applicants and successful candidates¹

The following information relates to those awarded scholarships or bursaries in 2006–07.

Royal Navy: There were 37 applications for scholarships and 60 applications for bursaries. Of those, 10 scholarships and 21 bursaries were awarded.

Army: 94 scholarships and 265 bursaries were awarded.

RAF: There were 242 applications for scholarships and 374 applications for bursaries. Of those 72 scholarships and 73 bursaries were awarded.

Information on unsuccessful applicants is not available, but the educational background of those successful applicants for scholarships in the Army and Royal Navy are as follows:

<i>Type of School</i>	<i>Royal Navy</i>		<i>Army</i>	
	<i>Private</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>State</i>
No of Scholarships	4	6	69	25

Information for the Royal Air Force is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Nor has it been possible to collate the corresponding information relating to the award of bursaries.

¹ *Note by witness:* On the information that has been assembled in response to Mr Davidson's questions about sixth form scholarships, I am myself struck by the fact that the majority of Army scholarships were awarded to pupils of private schools. I suspect that part of the explanation may be that private schools, especially those with Combined Cadet Forces, are more aware of the scholarship scheme. I have asked the Army to look at ways in which awareness of the scheme could be raised in state schools.

Questions 115—116 and 129—130 (Mr Ian Davidson) *Historical data on Commissioning from the Ranks*

ROYAL AIR FORCE

OUTFLOW FROM THE RANKS TO OFFICERS 2000–06

Table 1
TOTAL OUTFLOW

Table 1 shows all other ranks who have either commissioned straight from the ranks on Late Entry Terms of Service; straight from the ranks on Direct Entry Terms; and other ranks who undergo the full Officer Commissioning Course at Cranwell, before entering the Officer Ranks on Direct Entry Terms.

Sex	Age	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	Total
Male	Total	240	210	220	210	120	100	1,100
	Total	210	200	210	170	100	80	970
	18–19	30	30	30	30	20	20	150
	20–24	40	40	60	40	20	20	200
	25–29	40	20	20	20	10	10	120
	30–34	50	60	40	30	30	10	220
	35–39	40	40	40	30	20	20	180
	40–44	10	10	10	10	10	—	50
	45–49	10	10	10	10	—	10	40
50–54	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Female	Total	30	20	20	40	20	10	130
	18–19	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
	20–24	10	—	—	10	10	—	40
	25–29	10	10	10	10	—	—	40
	30–34	10	—	—	10	—	—	30
	35–39	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
	40–44	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	45–49	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. Total and sub-totals have been rounded separately and so may not equal the sums of their rounded parts. Numbers ending in “5” have been rounded to the nearest multiple of 20 to prevent systemic bias. —Denotes zero or rounded to zero.

Figures are given for trained regular RAF personnel only and therefore exclude untrained personnel, full time reserves Service and mobilised reservists.

ROYAL NAVY

OUTFLOW FROM THE RANKS TO OFFICERS 2000–06

Table 1
TOTAL OUTFLOW

Table 1 shows all Naval Service personnel who have left the Ratings/Ranks on promotion in order to join the Officer strength.

Sex	Age	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	Total
Male	Total	110	120	110	100	90	80	600
	Total	110	110	100	90	80	560	600
	18–19	30	30	30	30	20	20	150
	20–24	10	—	—	10	—	—	30
	25–29	20	20	—	10	10	—	60
	30–34	40	40	40	20	20	20	190
	35–39	40	40	40	40	40	30	220
	40–44	10	10	20	10	10	10	70
	45 and above	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female	Total	—	10	—	10	10	10	40
	20–24	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	25–29	—	10	—	—	—	—	10
	30–34	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
	35–39	—	—	—	—	—	—	10

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. Total and sub-totals have been rounded separately and so may not equal the sums of their rounded parts. Numbers ending in “5” have been rounded to the nearest multiple of 20 to prevent systemic bias. —Denotes zero or rounded to zero.

Figures are given for Trained Regular RN Ratings/RM Ranks only and therefore exclude full time reserves service, naval activated reserves and volunteer reserves.

OUTFLOW FROM THE RANKS TO OFFICERS 2001–06
Table 1**TOTAL OUTFLOW TO COMMISSION**

Table 1 shows all Soldiers who have either commissioned straight from the ranks on Late Entry Terms of Service; straight from the ranks on Direct Entry Terms; and Soldiers who undergo the full Officer Commissioning Course at Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst before entering the Officer Ranks on Direct Entry Terms.

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>2000–01</i>	<i>2001–02</i>	<i>2002–03</i>	<i>2003–04</i>	<i>2004–05</i>	<i>2005–06</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	Total	330	340	360	330	320	340	2,030
	Total	320	320	340	320	310	320	1,940
	18–19	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	20–24	20	20	10	10	20	20	100
	25–29	10	10	10	20	20	20	100
	30–34	10	10	10	10	10	10	70
	35–39	200	180	210	180	180	170	1,120
	40–44	70	100	100	100	80	100	550
45–49	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	
Female	Total	20	20	20	10	10	20	100
	20–24	—	—	10	—	—	—	20
	25–29	—	—	10	—	—	10	30
	30–34	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
	35–39	—	10	10	—	—	—	30
	40–44	—	—	—	—	—	10	10

Table 2**OUTFLOW AS COMMISSIONED OFFICERS (included in Table 1)**

Soldiers who commissioned straight from the ranks on either Late or Direct Entry Terms.

The majority of Soldiers who become commissioned do so on Late Entry Terms, however there are occasions, particularly in the Army Medical Services, when a Direct Entry Commission is granted.

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>2000–01</i>	<i>2001–02</i>	<i>2002–03</i>	<i>2003–04</i>	<i>2004–05</i>	<i>2005–06</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	Total	300	310	340	300	280	310	1,820
	Total	290	300	330	290	270	290	1,760
	20–24	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	25–29	—	—	—	—	—	10	10
	30–34	10	10	10	10	10	10	70
	35–39	200	180	210	180	180	170	1,120
	40–44	70	100	100	100	80	100	550
	45–49	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
Female	Total	10	10	10	10	10	20	70
	20–24	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	25–29	—	—	—	—	—	—	20
	30–34	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
	35–39	—	10	10	—	—	—	30
	40–44	—	—	—	—	—	10	10

Table 3

OUTFLOW TO OFFICERS DESIGNATE (included in Table 1)

Some Soldiers (Officers Designate) undergo training as Officer Cadets at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst before becoming commissioned on Direct Entry Terms.

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>2000-01</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2003-04</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>Total</i>
	Total	40	30	20	40	40	40	210
Male	Total	30	30	20	30	40	30	180
	18-19	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	20-24	20	20	10	10	20	20	90
	25-29	10	10	10	20	20	20	80
Female	Total	—	—	10	10	10	10	30
	20-24	—	—	—	—	—	—	20
	25-29	—	—	—	—	—	—	20

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. Totals and sub-totals have been rounded separately and so may not equal the sums of their rounded parts. Numbers ending in "5" have been rounded to the nearest multiple of 20 to prevent systematic bias. —Denotes zero or rounded to zero.

Figures are given for Trained Regular Army Soldiers only and therefore exclude Gurkhas, Home Service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, Full Time Reserve Service, Mobilised Reserves, TA and all other Reserves.