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Remuneration and its motivation of UK military personnel

The contemporary security environment has resulted in heavy operational commitments for the UK military. Personnel from all branches of service—the Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines—find themselves deployed more frequently than at any time in recent history in a variety of global theaters. The pressures borne by the Armed Forces in meeting its operational requirements are directly felt by its personnel, many of whom spend large amounts of time away from home on back-to-back deployments. These increasing demands make it particularly important for the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to offer a remuneration package that succeeds in attracting into employment and then retaining the people that it requires.

A heavy schedule of operational demands is by no means the sole challenge facing the management of military personnel—downsizing after the Cold War reduced the size of the Armed Forces, thus accentuating pressures felt by those currently serving. These factors and more have resulted in the Armed Forces operating below planned strength. In April 2007 they suffered from a 3.2 percent shortfall in overall personnel levels. In certain specific trades or roles there was judged to be a noticeably high outflow of personnel who were leaving at an intermediate stage in their careers.¹

To what extent, and in what ways, can remuneration assist in managing challenges in recruitment and retention? The peculiarities of a career in the Armed Forces mean that motivation of personnel is far more than exclusively an issue of pay. The job is likely to determine such factors as where individuals live, how often they must relocate their families, the amount of time spent abroad, and the level of personal risk they are exposed to. While levels of pay are the bedrock of the package, remuneration also includes additional financial benefits intended to counteract these demands. Moreover, intangible factors such as pride in the service and enjoyment

Abstract

A military force is nothing if not the sum of the people serving under its banner. With the UK Armed Forces facing a heavy burden of military commitments in multiple global conflicts, the pressures are being felt by the men and women of the Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines. Recruitment and retention are important policy concerns for the UK Ministry of Defence. RAND research into the attitudes of military personnel towards their remuneration package highlights the extent to which it motivates them to join and stay in the Armed Forces.

of a lifestyle that involves adventurous training and activities make remuneration one of many factors that motivate personnel. As a way for the MOD to motivate its personnel and encourage recruitment and retention, remuneration must be understood accordingly.

RAND Europe research in this area, conducted on behalf of the MOD, engaged directly with members of the Armed Forces to understand their attitudes towards remuneration and to place this in context by understanding their wider motivations for joining and staying in the services. Investigating the relative motivational utility of the remuneration package would better inform the MOD when reviewing its remuneration policy.

Capturing the attitudes of military personnel

Surveying group attitudes is itself a challenge since opinions are unlikely to be uniform across those being surveyed. Previous RAND studies identified focus groups to be an especially useful qualitative survey tool in understanding group attitudes.² A focus group is a structured discussion in which questions are asked in an

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RAND Europe
 Westbrook Centre
 Milton Road
 Cambridge CB4 1YG
 United Kingdom
 TEL +44.1223.353.329
 FAX +44.1223.358.845

Hans Pung
 hpung@rand.org

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¹ National Audit Office, (November 2006) *Recruitment and Retention in Armed Force*, HC 1633-I; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, (June 2007) *Recruitment and Retention in Armed Forces*, HC 43.

² For example: Margaret C. Harrell, (1999) *Barriers to Minority Participation in Special Operations Forces*. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1042.

interactive group setting. These interactions—both between moderator and participant, but also between participants themselves—are recorded over the course of multiple groups. The accumulated data are subjected to rigorous qualitative analysis in order to determine which views were salient across the majority of groups sampled.

It was important to ensure that the focus groups took place in an environment that was permissive to the airing of honest attitudes held by the military personnel involved. To that end, participants in each focus group were randomly generated and the confidentiality of their remarks was carefully guarded. In order to create a comfortable environment, the groups were divided according to rank between enlisted personnel and officers. With no senior ranking personnel present, and surrounded by their peers, the participants felt comfortable enough to voice their honest opinions.

The opinions of military personnel

RAND Europe conducted two separate studies. One focused on the motivations and attitudes towards remuneration held by new recruits (personnel in their first year of service). The other sought to understand the attitudes of serving personnel who had served for a number of years. The questions and discussion topics were adjusted between these two groups to reflect their contrasting concerns.

There was an expected degree of contrast between the concerns of new recruits and those of more experienced personnel. Some views were salient only within certain subsets, such as within particular ranks or services. For example, branches of service that are guaranteed to face very regular foreign deployments, such as the Royal Marines, were more strenuous in discussing the effects of disruption to family life. That said, some perceptions on remuneration were common to the majority of personnel sampled across both studies:

- *Basic pay and the pension scheme are satisfactory:* Overall, there did not appear to be a problem with individual pay, while the pension was favorably viewed as a reason to stay in the Armed Forces.
- *The remuneration package is complex and difficult to understand:* In both studies we found wide evidence of a lack of understanding of the allowance package.

Among experienced personnel, elements of the package had the consequence of driving their behaviour—for example, choosing to marry in order to earn allowances only entitled to married couples.

- *Other factors more directly impact recruitment than remuneration:* Pay and allowances did not appear to be a direct reason to join the Armed Forces. Previous family service and the promised lifestyle appeared to more directly motivate individuals to join, as did the promise of job security and deriving a feeling of pride from service life.
- *Pay is only one factor (of many) in the decision to remain in the Armed Forces:* Numerous factors impact on the decision of individuals to remain in the Armed Forces when their initial obligation is completed. Chief among these are family issues, career and promotion prospects. There was an overwhelming desire for less stretch (the pressure of serving on frequent deployments) and disruption (loss of family stability).

RAND Europe's research indicated that remuneration constitutes a variable—but important—portion of the motivational drive to enlist in and then remain employed by the Armed Forces. Among experienced personnel, key reasons for considering leaving the services were nonfinancial—the impact of frequent operational deployments on family life and the inability to plan their life outside of work. However, the research did highlight areas of specific concern that could be addressed through remuneration policy, such as a desire by personnel to be better compensated financially when deployed on operations and concerns regarding home ownership (involving property affordability versus pay and the likelihood of having to frequently move house due to the demands of service life).

Managing the expectations of those who are employed in a voluntary Armed Force is an important policy challenge. In times of ongoing conflict, the challenge is magnified significantly. In this context, remuneration may be no panacea, but as highlighted by RAND Europe's research, it is an important component in easing the strains that can come with service life. ■

Further RAND reading (available on www.rand.org/randeurope/publications/defence.html):

Pung, Smallman, Hallsworth, Puri and Rubin (2007). *Motivations and Attitudes of New Recruits Regarding Remuneration Issues: Focus Group Investigation and Analysis*. DB-551-MOD.

Pung, Smallman, Ling, Hallsworth and Puri (2006). *Remuneration and its Motivation of Service Personnel: Focus Group Investigation and Analysis*. DB-549-MOD.



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