

Engage to Change Study

A collaborative study on
recruitment and retention of a
number of specialist streams
of the Defence Forces.

**Public
Service Pay
Commission**



Summary Report on the findings from Module 2b, specialist streams of
the Defence Forces

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Aim and objectives

The overall aim of this study is:

to carry out a nationally representative study on recruitment and retention of selected specialist streams within the Defence Forces.

The key objectives of this study are to:

1. describe key issues arising in respect of recruitment and retention among specialist streams of the Defence Forces (namely air traffic controllers, communications and information services personnel, doctors, engineers, ordnance personnel, pilots and technicians)
2. take account of the wide range of potential drivers that influence retention and recruitment across a range of characteristics
3. provide a report to the PSPC on key findings emerging from the study to assist in the identification of key policy options to address any identified recruitment and/or retention difficulties for these personnel.

As with all studies of this type, the findings presented are based on opinion and perceptions of respondents and these may not always accurately reflect the objective situation.

Methodology

This study uses both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) methods. The online questionnaire was circulated to all 1,409 personnel working in specialist streams in the Defence Forces. In all, 560 responded to the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 39.7%. Sampling weights (computed on the basis of specialist stream, grade/rank and whether the person was in the army, navy or air corps) were applied to the survey data to provide nationally representative estimates.

Individuals from each of these groups took part in in-depth interviews; in total, 39 individual interviews took place with officers (19), non-commissioned officers (NCOs) (10) and privates (10). One focus group interview with 10 participants also took place.

The online survey questionnaires were divided into five sections:

- about your job
- about your recruitment (for respondents recruited within the past two years)
- about your workplace
- job intentions
- about you.

Each of the questionnaires contained sets of inter-related questions and these were used to form themed index scores. These scores are expressed as percentages. Most are positive, meaning that a higher score reflects more favourable views. However, some of the indexes, such as burnout, are negative, meaning that a higher score reflects less favourable views.

The effort–reward ratio is unique in that it is a ratio of two indexes, effort divided by reward. In this way, a ratio of 1.0 indicates that effort put in is equivalent to reward received, a ratio above 1.0 indicates that effort exceeds reward, and a ratio below 1.0 indicates that reward exceeds effort.

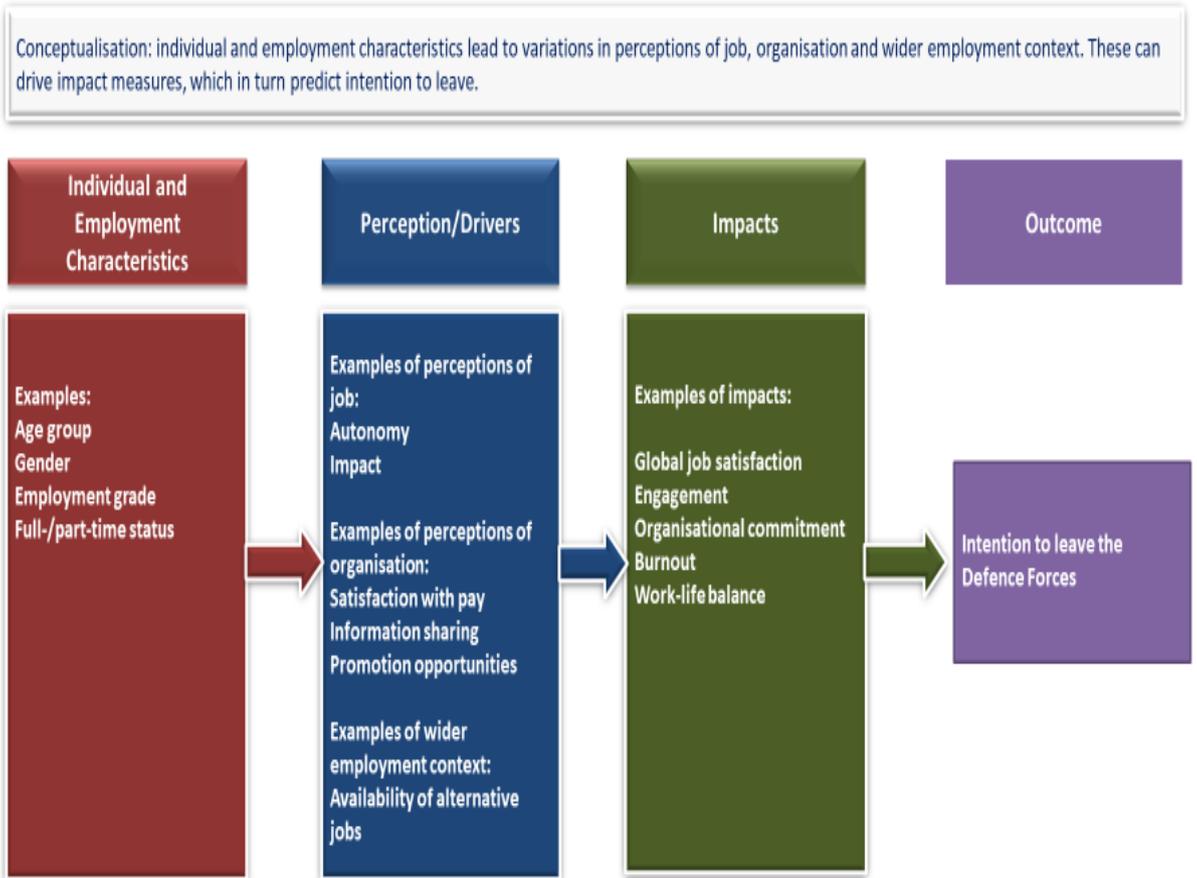
Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the study. Measures are categorised into individual and employment characteristics; perceptions of the job, the organisation and the wider employment context; and impacts.

- **Individual and employment characteristics** capture demographic information (e.g. age, gender, highest level of qualification) and employment information (e.g. employment grade, area of work, year of entry to the Defence Forces).
- **Perceptions** of job, organisation and wider employment context capture respondents' perceptions of various aspects of their work, job and wider employment conditions (e.g. autonomy, impact, satisfaction with pay, perceptions of co-workers and of manager, job alternatives). These in turn may 'drive' impacts.
- **Impacts** are more global indicators of the quality of respondents' working lives. These include global job satisfaction, burnout and organisational commitment.
- **Outcomes** measure turnover intent (i.e. intention to leave the Defence Forces).

The theoretical framework underpinning the study is that:

Individual and employment characteristics lead to variations in perceptions of the job and the organisation. These can drive impact measures, which in turn predict intention to leave.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the study



Limitations

The four main limitations of the study and the efforts made to address them are now presented.

First, the response rate (39.7%) is a little lower than desired. However, the data have been weighted to provide nationally representative estimates, on the basis of the characteristics used to compute the sampling weights.

Second, there is no means of empirically assessing the extent to which particularly enthusiastic or particularly dissatisfied individuals responded, and this potential bias should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

Third, causality cannot be inferred from the survey results (as with any cross-sectional design). The results demonstrate associations and relationships but should not be used to conclude that characteristic X causes outcome Y.

Fourth, the findings from the qualitative and quantitative parts of this study complement each other and show a strong relationship in the issues arising, which serves to strengthen the findings. As with all interview-based qualitative studies, however, the findings are based on opinion and perceptions and these may not always accurately reflect the objective situation.

Results: findings from the quantitative analysis

The following sections present the quantitative findings for all respondents, with certain comparisons between categories of respondents also noted where available.

Sample characteristics

- A majority of all respondents (61%) had been working in their specialist area for 11 years or more, 9% had been working in their specialist area for two years or less, and the remainder (30%) had been working in their specialist area for between 2 and 10 years.
- About four in five respondents (79%) had been in the Defence Forces for 11 or more years, and up to 28% of respondents had obtained their specialist training while in the Defence Forces.
- There is considerable movement between appointments within the Defence Forces: 38% had been in their current appointment for two years or less, while just 3% had been in the Defence Forces for two years or less.
- Working hours are high: about two in five respondents (41%) reported working up to 40 hours per week, while 59% normally worked more than 40 hours per week.
- Around 74% of respondents worked overtime with pay once per fortnight or more often, 48% worked overtime without pay once per fortnight or more often, and 43% worked overtime with time in lieu once per fortnight or more often.
- Scheduled work away from home in Ireland was common: 83.5% had done this over the past 12 months, and 47% had been away from home for one month or more. Unscheduled (unplanned) work away from home in Ireland was reported by 59% of respondents, and for most (45%) this was for up to one month; however, 14% had been on unscheduled work in Ireland for more than a month.
- About 46.5% of respondents reported having been overseas or at sea in the past 12 months, and 25% had been overseas or at sea for three months or more. Unscheduled work overseas or at sea was less common than unscheduled work in Ireland: fewer than one in five respondents (18%) had been sent on unscheduled duties overseas or at sea in the past 12 months; nonetheless, 7% had been overseas or at sea on unscheduled duties for one month or more in the past 12 months.
- Commute times tended to be quite high: three in ten (29.5%) usually took an hour or more to get to work, while 21% took 46–60 minutes to get to work. These figures compare unfavourably with national commute times from the 2016 Censusⁱ, in which only 11% of all commuters had a journey time of an hour or more.
- There are some differences between specialisms and grades in terms of these work characteristics. For example:
 - NCOs were the most experienced of the three grades/ranks (officers, NCOs and privates), having spent significantly more time in their current specialism, in the Defence Forces and in their current job than either officers or privates.
 - Personnel joining the Defence Forces between 1995 and 2012 had the highest rates of unpaid overtime.
 - Communications and information systems (CIS) and ordnance staff had been in their current appointments for significantly longer than the other specialists.

ⁱ Central Statistics Office, Ireland. *Census of population 2016: Profile 6 Commuting in Ireland*. 2016. Available from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp6ci/p6cii/p6td>.

- Ordnance staff, air traffic controllers, doctors and pilots reported working more than 40 hours per week significantly more frequently than the other specialist groups. Additional analysis is required to explore this issue more fully.
- Officers were more likely to work more than 40 hours per week than NCOs and privates.

Views on the job

The survey questionnaire included two open-ended (text response) questions:

- *Please describe the three most positive things about your current job.*
- *Please describe the three things that you would most like to change about your current job.*

The responses were coded into themes for quantitative analysis.

Positive aspects of the job

- The most common theme for the combined sample related to having good colleagues and camaraderie, enjoying working with colleagues, and the professionalism of colleagues (51% of responses included this theme).
- The second most common theme was the interesting, varied and/or specialised nature of the work (44% of responses included this theme).
- In addition, 22% commented on the reward and enjoyment they got from their work, taking pride in serving their country and/or helping others.
- About one in five (19%) commented positively about the security of the job and/or pension, and 17.5% mentioned flexible or balanced work conditions.
- About one in seven (13%) commented positively on the continuous professional development (CPD) or training that they could access, or the benefits of the CPD or training that they had received.
- One in ten (10%) liked the fact that they were in a position of responsibility, could work autonomously and/or could contribute to decision making in the organisation.

Aspects of the job to change

By far the most common theme across all respondents related to pay and remuneration: this was mentioned by 81% of respondents. There were several aspects to these comments, namely:

- Level of basic pay is not in line with role, responsibilities, level of qualification or specialisation, or working conditions (comparisons were often drawn to pay in the public and private sectors).
- Duty pay, overtime pay and overseas pay are much too low and should not be taxed.
- The pension package is poor, and entrants who have joined since 2013 cannot access the pension within the same time-frame as previous entrants.
- Allowances are poor, unevenly applied, and difficult to claim due to administrative bureaucracy.
- Additional duties and responsibilities (such as training roles) should be recognised through pay.
- There are some inequities in pay scales (e.g. between aircraft mechanics and aircraft inspectors).
- Pay should be restored to the levels seen prior to the post-2008 financial crisis.

About three in ten comments (28%) made reference to the need for better working conditions or better work–life balance. These comments included reference to:

- difficult or demanding working conditions and the high number of hours in general
- the view that the European Union’s Working Time Directive was not being implemented
- 24-hour duties and other extra duties being worked too frequently and without sufficient rest periods
- the negative impacts of long and/or unsociable hours on wellbeing and home life
- the need for commute times to be factored into working hours.

One-fifth (20.5%) of respondents referred to the lack of promotion opportunities, the need for more rapid or fairer promotion structures and/or the perceived need to restructure grades. These comments noted that:

- The promotion system in general is flawed and perceived to be unfair.
- The promotional prospects of NCOs are poor and this creates a divide between officers and NCOs.

A further one-fifth of responses (20%) referred to shortages in staffing, the need for faster recruitment and training, and/or the need to address retention issues. These responses noted that:

- More staff are urgently needed to allow units to fulfil their duties.
- New staff need to have the required technical skills.
- Double- or triple-jobbing is causing significant difficulties in the context of chronic understaffing.
- Retention rates among specialist streams are poor due to more attractive pay and conditions outside the Defence Forces and there should be incentives to retain experienced staff.

Between 10% and 13% of comments included reference to the need for:

- Better communication, support and/or respect from management (including a better HR function) (13%)
- More manageable workloads (12%)
- Better leadership, planning and/or accountability from management (10%)
- More opportunities and/or support for training and/or specialising (10%)
- Better facilities, equipment, resources and/or funding (10%).

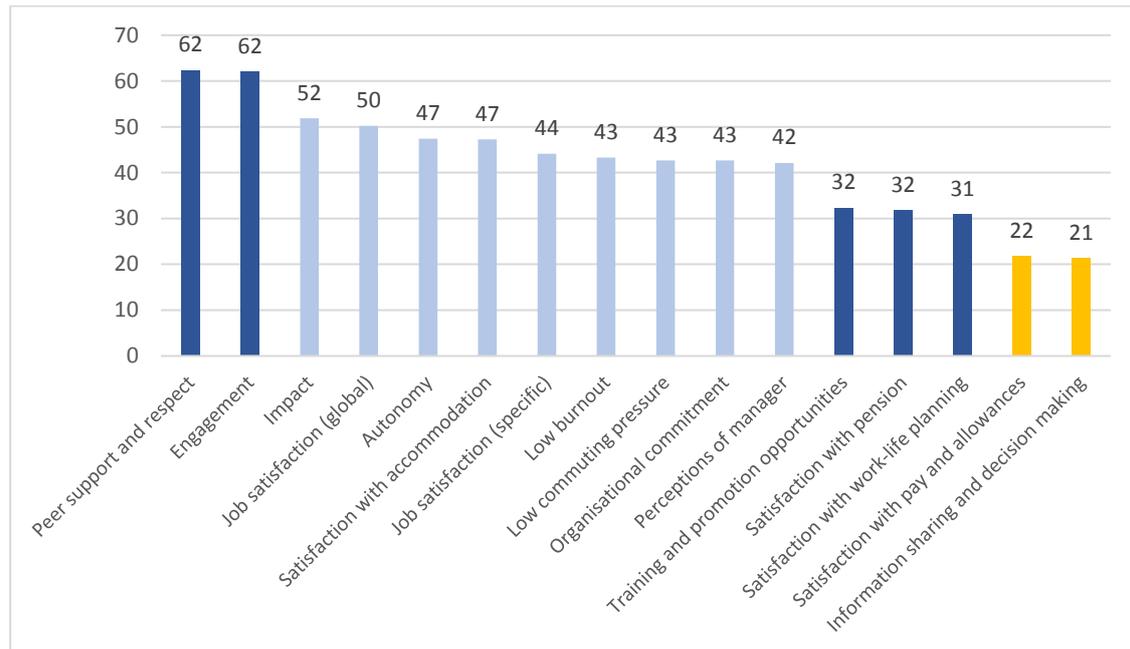
Perceptions of job and of organisation

Figure 2 presents the means for all respondents on the index measures that were included in the survey. Two ‘negative’ scales, burnout and commuting pressure, have been reverse scored to allow comparisons with the ‘positive’ scales.

- None of the indexes have particularly high scores. The two indexes with the highest scores (both 62%) are peer support and respect, and engagement.
- Two of the 16 indexes have very low scores: satisfaction with pay and allowances (22%), and information sharing and decision making (21%).
- Three further indexes have low scores, ranging from 31% to 32%: training and promotion opportunities, satisfaction with pension and satisfaction with work–life planning.

This overall profile of individuals working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals are moderately to highly engaged in their work, put in high effort, and experience moderate to high levels of peer support and respect. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pensions, and a low sense of involvement in information sharing and decision making. A majority of these individuals are experiencing difficulties in work–life planning and perceive a lack of opportunities for training and promotion.

Figure 2: Index scores (perceptions of job and of organisation) for specialist streams in the Defence Forces



Recruitment

Two out of five of all respondents (40%) had been in their current job for two years or less. These 40% responded to questions about the recruitment process and their job expectations and the findings are presented below.

- The overall score on the recruitment process index is 43%, indicating a low to moderate level of satisfaction with the efficiency and fairness of the recruitment process.
- The recruitment process scores do not vary significantly by specialism or area of service (army, navy or air corps). However, NCOs (38%) and privates (40.5%) had significantly lower recruitment process scores than officers (50%).
- Also, the recruitment process scores were significantly lower among those who entered the Defence Forces between 2013 and 2018 (32%) compared with pre-1995 entrants (45%) and 1995–2012 entrants (45%)ⁱⁱ.
- The overall score on the job expectations index is 59%, indicating a moderate to high level of match between expectations and experience.

ⁱⁱ This scale was completed by all personnel who changed their job in the previous two years irrespective of when they joined the defence forces.

- The job expectations scores do not vary significantly by specialism, area of service (army, navy or air corps), grade/rank or year in which respondents entered the Defence Forces.
- Only limited commentary emerged in the interviews in respect of recruitment and this generally focused on the unattractiveness of the Defence Forces at this time rather than on the processes adopted.

Retention

Just over three in five of all respondents (63%) intended to leave the Defence Forces in two years or less, while 37% intended to stay.

Reasons for staying in the job

Respondents who expressed an intention to stay in the Defence Forces were asked to indicate the relevance of a range of factors to this intention.

- The three most relevant reasons (i.e. with the highest frequencies of 'highly relevant' ratings) were suitable working hours/days/rota (34%), personal or family reasons (29%) and colleagues (22%).
- In addition, 17% of respondents rated convenient location as highly relevant, 10% indicated that medical or dental care provision and lack of available job alternatives were highly relevant and, and 9% rated 'too disruptive to leave' as highly relevant.
- About one in five respondents (19%) provided written comments on their reasons for staying in the job. The two most common reasons were waiting until they became eligible for their pension (about 28%) and being unable to afford the financial penalty for breaking their contract (about 13%). About one in ten respondents indicated that they took pride in their work, were committed to their work, felt responsible or enjoyed aspects of their work. Other reasons were mentioned less frequently; they included being on a training course, remaining in the hope of a promotion or improvements to pay and working conditions, financial obligations, and job security.

Reasons for leaving the job

Respondents who expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces were asked to indicate the relevance of a range of factors to this intention.

- Two of these reasons stand out as the most frequently rated as highly relevant: staffing levels are a problem (77%) and better opportunities elsewhere (70%).
- About three in ten respondents (31%) provided written comments on their reasons for leaving the Defence Forces. By far the most common reason was pay: this appeared in about three-fifths of responses. In half of these responses, pay was mentioned alongside other reasons, most commonly working conditions, lack of promotional prospects, and travel or commuting requirements. It was very common for these respondents to compare their pay and conditions to those of their peers in the civilian and private sectors. Smaller percentages of respondents (fewer than 5%) provided single reasons for their intention to leave the Defence Forces: these comprised the perceived unfairness of the promotion process, workload or work-life balance, health and safety concerns, lack of skills use, poor management, understaffing and high general turnover.
- In addition, between 21% and 25% rated the following reasons as highly relevant to their intention to leave the Defence Forces:

- personal or family reasons (25%)
- work environment is too demanding (23%)
- working hours/days/rota not suitable (22%)
- coming to the end of a contract/training programme/retiring (22%)
- location of workplace inconvenient (21%).

Job alternatives

- This index measures the perceived availability of alternative employment. The overall mean on the job alternatives index is 79%, indicating a high perceived level of availability of alternative employment.
- The job alternatives scores do not vary significantly by specialism, area of service (army, navy or air corps) or grade/rank. However, respondents who entered the Defence Forces between 1995 and 2012 had a significantly higher job alternatives score (80%) than either those who entered in 1994 or earlier (73%) or between 2013 and 2018 (71%).

Intention to leave the Defence Forces

- The overall mean on the intention to leave index is 64%, indicating a moderate to high overall intention to leave the Defence Forces.
- The intention to leave scores do not vary significantly by specialism or area of service (army, navy or air corps). However, NCOs had significantly higher intention to leave scores (67%) compared to officers (57%) or privates (60%). Also, respondents who entered the Defence Forces between 2013 and 2018 had significantly lower intention to leave scores (53%) than those who entered in 1994 or earlier (66%) or between 1995 and 2012 (63%).

Regression analysis of intention to leave the organisation

Combined sample

The regression analysis showed that intention to leave the Defence Forces is associated with:

- more job alternatives (external to the organisation)
- lower satisfaction with pay and allowances
- lower satisfaction with accommodation
- fewer training and promotion opportunities
- higher burnout
- higher effort–reward ratio
- lower global job satisfaction
- lower engagement.

Intention to leave the organisation was associated with grade/rank, with NCOs significantly more likely to intend to leave than officers or privates. Intention to leave did not differ across specialism, year of entry to the Defence Forces, or area of service (army, navy or air corps).

Further analyses of the impact measures (effort–reward ratio, global job satisfaction and engagement) further underline the role that job alternatives play, both in driving the intention to leave outcome and in driving burnout, effort–reward ratio and global job satisfaction. Similarly, satisfaction with pay and allowances predicted both intention to leave

and the two impact measures (effort–reward ratio and global job satisfaction). Further, pressures related to commuting emerged as a strong and significant driver of burnout.

Comparisons by rank

To examine whether different perceptions and impact measures were associated with intention to leave the organisation across grades/ranks, three additional sets of regression analyses were carried out (for officers, NCOs and privates). The results of these analyses are summarised in Table 1.

Several observations may be made:

- The explanatory power of the models (indicated by the *r*-square statistic) varies across the three groups. Perception measures explained 56% of the variation in privates' intention to leave, compared with 36% for officers and 28.5% for NCOs.
- Across all three groups, the explanatory power of the regression of impact measures on intention to leave was weaker than that of the model of perceptions. The models of impacts explained between 14% and 30% of the variation in intention to leave.
- In all three groups, the availability of job alternatives was strongly and positively associated with intention to leave. Aside from this index, the perceptions models differed across the groups. Training and promotion opportunities emerged as a significant predictor of intention to leave among officers and NCOs but not among privates. Likewise, satisfaction with accommodation was significant in the models for NCOs and privates but not officers, and satisfaction with pension was significant for officers and privates but not NCOs. Three perception measures (satisfaction with pay and allowances, level of autonomy, and perceptions of manager) were significant for privates only.
- One impact measure, burnout, was significant across all three groups. Global job satisfaction and engagement were significant among officers and privates but not NCOs. Two impact measures (organisational commitment and specific job satisfaction) were significant among officers only, while two further impact measures (effort–reward ratio and work–life planning) were significant among NCOs only.
- Some of the results are counter-intuitive. For example, it is unclear why higher satisfaction with pension is positively associated with intention to leave among officers and privates. It is possible that this finding is related to respondents' year of joining the Defence Forces, additional analysis is required to explore this. Also, higher engagement was associated with a higher likelihood of intention to leave among officers and privates (but not NCOs). This relationship was also found in the regression analyses reported in the previous section and could be due to respondents focusing on the specialist nature of their work as opposed to the working environment in which they did this specialist work. Commentary arising from the qualitative data suggests this may be the case. Furthermore, it is unclear why, among privates, there are positive associations between perceptions of manager and intention to leave and between level of autonomy and intention to leave and additional analysis is required to explore this more fully.
- Notwithstanding these somewhat unexpected findings, the three sets of regressions provide an indication of issues and areas that are challenging for all three groups, as well as other aspects of the job and the organisation that are specific to particular ranks. For example, the results suggest that, while the availability of job alternatives and levels of burnout are issues that cut across all three groups, issues relating to pay and allowances among privates in particular may merit a more specific policy response. Similarly, issues with training and promotion are specific to officers and

NCOs, while issues with accommodation are specific to NCOs and privates, and issues with work–life balance are particularly challenging among NCOs.

Table 1: Summary table of regressions of perceptions and impacts measures on intention to leave among officers, NCOs and privates

Perceptions		
Officers (<i>r</i> -square = .359)	NCOs (<i>r</i> -square = .285)	Privates (<i>r</i> -square = .558)
More job alternatives	More job alternatives	More job alternatives
Fewer training and promotion opportunities	Fewer training and promotion opportunities	Lower satisfaction with pay and allowances
Higher satisfaction with pension	Lower satisfaction with accommodation	Higher level of autonomy
		More positive perceptions of manager
		Lower satisfaction with accommodation
		Higher satisfaction with pension
Impacts		
Officers (<i>r</i> -square = .303)	NCOs (<i>r</i> -square = .139)	Privates (<i>r</i> -square = .246)
Higher burnout	Higher burnout	Lower global job satisfaction
Lower global job satisfaction	Higher effort–reward ratio	Higher burnout
Higher engagement	Lower work–life planning	Higher engagement
Lower organisational commitment		
Lower specific job satisfaction		

Regression analysis of impact measures by rank

The results of multiple regression analyses of the impact measures that were statistically significant in predicting respondents’ intention to leave the organisation are summarised here and in Table 2.

The summary table highlights those perception measures that have partial correlation coefficientsⁱⁱⁱ of around .3 or higher – that is, perceptions that have moderate and moderate to strong associations with the impact measures. These indexes may be regarded as the key drivers of impacts. Perception measures that are significantly associated with *both* intention to leave the organisation (i.e. directly associated with the outcome) *and* one or more impacts (i.e. indirectly associated with the outcome) are marked in bold in the table.

This analysis shows that:

- For **officers**, the key drivers of the impacts considered are job alternatives, training and promotion opportunities, autonomy, peer support and respect, and satisfaction with pay and allowances. Job alternatives and training and promotion opportunities

ⁱⁱⁱ This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

act both as direct predictors of intention to leave the organisation and as drivers of the impact measures in this group.

- For **NCOs**, the key drivers of the impacts considered are commuting pressure, training and promotion opportunities, and satisfaction with pay and allowances. Training and promotion opportunities acts both as a direct predictor of intention to leave the organisation and as a driver of the impact measures in this group.
- For **privates**, the key drivers of the impacts considered are commuting pressure, job alternatives, perceptions of manager and impact of their job on the lives of others. Job alternatives and perceptions of manager act both as direct predictors of intention to leave the organisation and as drivers of the impact measures in this group.

The results should be interpreted in conjunction with the regression analysis and further confirm that different factors are predicting intention to leave the organisation, depending on the rank of the respondent.

The results indicate that, among officers, training and promotion opportunities and an examination of the factors underpinning job alternatives should be a focus of policy; among NCOs, training and promotion opportunities should be a focus; and among privates, job alternatives and perceptions of manager should be a focus.

Table 2: Key drivers of impact measures that predict intention to leave the organisation (partial correlations in the region of .30–.50): officers, NCOs and privates

<i>Officers</i>
Job alternatives
Training and promotion opportunities
Autonomy
Peer support and respect
Satisfaction with pay and allowances
<i>NCOs</i>
Commuting pressure
Training and promotion opportunities
Satisfaction with pay and allowances
<i>Privates</i>
Commuting pressure
Job alternatives
Perceptions of manager (positive)
Impact of job on the lives of others

Notes. See the Data Appendix for detailed tables of these results.

Indexes in bold are perceptions that are significantly associated with *both* intention to leave the organisation (i.e. directly associated with the outcome) *and* one or more impacts (i.e. indirectly associated with the outcome).

The results of the driver-type analysis for each of the three groups, officers, NCOs and privates are presented in Tables 3-5.

Table 3: Results of driver-type analysis: Officers

<i>Burnout</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	0.208	-0.064
Job alternatives	0.281	0.350
Commuting pressure	0.350	0.275
Autonomy	0.409	-0.276
Training and promotion opportunities	0.433	-0.198
<i>Global job satisfaction</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Training and promotion opportunities	0.199	0.379
Autonomy	0.259	0.271
Job alternatives	0.287	-0.196
<i>Engagement</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Training and promotion opportunities	0.210	0.383
Autonomy	0.290	0.333
Impact	0.346	0.281
<i>Organisational commitment</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Peer support and respect	0.258	0.500
Job alternatives	0.318	-0.326
Impact	0.377	0.294
<i>Specific job satisfaction</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	0.183	0.331
Information sharing and decision making	0.255	0.253
Autonomy	0.288	0.211

*The r-square statistic is cumulative, i.e. denotes variance explained in the outcome for each measure on the list as well as all measures preceding it.

**This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

Table 4: Results of driver-type analysis: Non-Commissioned Officers

<i>Burnout</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Commuting pressure	0.403	0.594
Support and respect from peers	0.421	-0.163
Information sharing and decision making	0.431	-0.133
<i>Effort-reward ratio</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Training and promotion opportunities	0.220	-0.295
Commuting pressure	0.312	0.211
Information sharing and decision making	0.361	-0.192
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	0.390	-0.161
Perceptions of manager	0.415	-0.178
Job alternatives	0.436	0.207
Autonomy	0.446	-0.136
<i>Work-life planning</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	0.256	0.281
Commuting pressure	0.323	-0.260
Perceptions of manager	0.362	0.202
Satisfaction with pension	0.388	0.217
Job alternatives	0.412	-0.204
Impact	0.435	0.218
Information sharing and decision making	0.451	0.171

*The r-square statistic is cumulative, i.e. denotes variance explained in the outcome for each measure on the list as well as all measures preceding it.

**This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

Table 5: Results of driver-type analysis: Privates

<i>Global job satisfaction</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Commuting pressure	0.208	-0.405
Perceptions of manager	0.328	0.341
Job alternatives	0.419	-0.379
Impact	0.443	0.245
Peer support and respect	0.468	-0.216
<i>Burnout</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Commuting pressure	0.328	0.599
Training and promotion opportunities	0.360	-0.264
Peer support and respect	0.384	0.242
Impact	0.414	-0.224
<i>Engagement</i>	<i>R square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Impact	0.289	0.470
Commuting pressure	0.417	-0.396
Perceptions of manager	0.444	0.218

*The r-square statistic is cumulative, i.e. denotes variance explained in the outcome for each measure on the list as well as all measures preceding it.

**This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

Results: findings from the qualitative analysis by rank

The following sections present the qualitative findings for officers, NCOs and privates.

Summary of findings arising from the qualitative data in respect of officers

Positive aspects

Many officers identified their love of the Defence Forces, and three elements in particular were highlighted. These were camaraderie with colleagues, the diverse and technical nature of the job, and the pride felt from serving the state and the public. It was striking, however, that almost all positive comments were balanced with challenges arising and the view that things are less positive now than they have been in the past.

Challenges relating to the work

The most extensive commentary in respect of the work of officers referred to workload and staffing levels. It was suggested that things are much worse now than they have been previously due to difficulties retaining personnel. Attention was also drawn to the non-technical work those in specialist streams are expected to carry out in addition to their technical work and it was noted that, in the past, there had been administrative support in place. A small number of comments were made about the type of work carried out on overseas deployment and it was suggested that overseas assignment is not rewarding for some of those involved due to the absence of opportunities to carry out appropriate work while abroad.

Anomalies were identified in respect of carrying out a technical role and having the technical qualifications but not being eligible for technician pay due to the 'established' number of technical posts assigned to an area (i.e. the number of personnel who are supposed to be working in a particular area).

Three impacts arising from an extensive workload and low staffing levels were identified: safety issues, being unable to complete the work and stress.

Challenges relating to the organisational context

Although a number of issues were raised in respect of challenges arising in the organisational context for officers, pay emerged as the single biggest challenge and every interviewee identified this issue as having a significant impact on retention of personnel. Other issues identified included education and training, and career progression. A small number of comments were made about the infrastructure and equipment available.

Pay

Overall pay levels (including basic pay, Military Service Allowance and technician pay) were considered to be inadequate, and the pay relating to duties (e.g. security duty and weekend duty) was identified as particularly low and problematic. It was highlighted that the problems relating to inadequate pay have been compounded by the cuts and increased taxation implemented following the financial crisis that began in 2008, and it was noted that Defence Forces personnel are on lower levels of pay in 2018 than they were 10 years earlier. Even in situations where officers indicated that they were satisfied with their own pay, they noted the low pay that new recruits and those in the enlisted ranks receive.

Comparisons were particularly drawn with others in the Civil Service and public sector, and it was suggested that Defence Forces personnel are expected to make many sacrifices but are treated comparatively unfavourably. Again, the pay in respect of duties was highlighted as

considerably lower than the pay received by others carrying out similar work in the public sector.

In addition to pay, four main issues were identified in respect of the organisational context, and these relate to skills, training and education; career progression; equipment and infrastructure; and the role of the Department of Defence.

Skills, training and education

There was agreement that the training and education received through the Defence Forces are of a high standard and that they are welcomed by those who take part in them, although it was also noted that many officers have already undertaken considerable education and training prior to entry to the Defence Forces. It was highlighted that training technical personnel to the standard required in the Defence Forces takes time and that, consequently, when personnel leave, they cannot be easily replaced. There was some negative commentary in respect of new recruits, and it was suggested they are at a lower level of competency compared with previous entrants to the technical streams.

Career progression

There was some agreement that officers working in specialist streams have poorer career progression opportunities than non-technical grades, and promotional opportunities may not arise for several years due to the small number of posts available. It was also suggested that the requirement to undertake long commutes following promotion can be a disincentive to career progression.

Equipment and infrastructure

A small number of officers drew attention to a lack of appropriate equipment and poor facilities. The impact of these issues on safety was highlighted.

Role of the Department of Defence

A surprising number of officers expressed frustration in respect of the Department of Defence. It was suggested that the Defence Forces are constrained, and at times treated unfairly by the Department of Defence. Examples given included the Department of Defence failing to pay appropriate allowances and 'crippling' the Defence Forces with audits and micro-management, thus creating a culture of constraint.

Reasons officers stay in or leave the Defence Forces

Three main reasons were identified for officers intending to leave: pay, work–life balance and pension entitlements.

Pay

Many officers spoke of wishing to stay in the Defence Forces but recognised that they would have significantly better pay opportunities as civilians. This created a dilemma for them, particularly in the context of supporting their families

Work–life balance

The second issue arising relates to work–life balance. Officers spoke about the impact of working in the Defence Forces on their own and their families' lives, particularly in the context of not being paid sufficiently well to negate these difficulties. The uncertainty associated with being called in at short notice, or of having to step in for others due to increasing numbers of personnel leaving, was highlighted along with the negative impact this has on their relationships with their children and partners. It was noted that the fabric of Irish society has changed and that, while in the past partners would have been able to be

flexible, they are now also likely to be in employment, and this creates challenges around childcare.

While there were positive aspects associated with overseas duties, many challenges were identified in terms of family life and the lack of choice, again due to falling numbers of personnel, in whether people go overseas or not. The requirement to do overseas duties was identified as impacting disproportionately on technical streams because they are substantially fewer in number compared with other line ranks.

It was explained that there have been a number of barracks closed in recent times and that this, along with the centralisation of promotions, means that many officers are now commuting long distances from where their families live. The physical and financial costs of commuting as well as the time away from families were identified as key issues in deciding whether to stay in or leave the service.

Pension entitlements

Finally, the number of years after which individuals can receive a pension was identified as a reason for leaving. Under the new pension scheme, where entitlement to a full pension is earned after 30 years, personnel are now required to work until they are in their fifties. It was noted that, at this age, it is often too late to start a new career. Additionally, at this age, many people will have children going to college, which it was suggested is a particularly expensive time.

Conclusions arising in respect of officers

Conclusions: positive aspects of the work and the organisation

Officers working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces are engaged in their work; report having high levels of peer support, respect and camaraderie with colleagues; and enjoy the diversity and technical nature of their work. They also report being proud of working in the Defence Forces.

These findings are reflected in both the quantitative data, where peer support and respect (71.3%) and engagement (69.8%) were two of the three highest indexes, and in the qualitative data, where commentary in respect of the positive aspects of their work reflected these issues.

Strikingly, however, in the qualitative data, many positive comments were counterbalanced with regard to the various challenges that exist and views were consistent that things are less positive now than they have been in the past.

Conclusions: dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension

There is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pensions, and this finding is strongly reflected in both the quantitative and the qualitative findings. The commentary around these areas, particularly regarding pay and allowances, exceeded the commentary on each other issue. The pay and allowances index had the lowest mean index score (28.3%) of all indexes included in the study, and satisfaction with pension (34.3%) had the fourth lowest score.

Officers believe their overall pay levels (including basic pay, Military Service Allowance and technician pay) are inadequate, and the pay relating to duties (e.g. security duty and weekend duty) was highlighted as particularly low and problematic. It was also suggested that take-home pay is currently lower than that received in 2008, prior to the financial crisis, and that Defence Forces personnel are more poorly paid than others in the public and private sectors. While satisfaction with pay was not statistically significantly associated with

intention to leave the Defence Forces, it was associated with lower levels of job satisfaction, an impact measure that predicts this outcome.

It is of note that, as for privates, higher satisfaction with pension is a predictor of intention to leave. The qualitative interviews highlight the complex role played by access to a pension in decision making about staying in or leaving the Defence Forces. Further analysis, particularly in respect of the year of entry to the service, may provide a clearer explanation for this.

Conclusions: alternative job opportunities

Officers report having job alternatives that are better than working in the Defence Forces. This is particularly so for those with extensive technical expertise and experience.

The job alternatives scale accounted for the highest index score (75.7%) of all indexes included in the study, and throughout the qualitative data many alternatives in the public and private sectors were identified. Better job alternatives were identified in the regression analysis as a predictor of intention to leave and, in addition, as a key driver of burnout, global job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Conclusions: excessive workload and inadequate staffing levels

Officers reported having an excessive workload, and it was highlighted that the situation is considerably worse now than previously. It was also reported that continuing difficulties in retaining personnel are having a direct impact on safety and on the extent to which work can be completed. This has resulted in increased stress for those working in this situation.

Higher levels of burnout and lower levels of global job satisfaction are significant predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces, and satisfaction with pay and allowances is a key driver of both these impacts.

Attention was drawn to the non-technical work that personnel in specialist streams are expected to carry out in addition to their technical work, and the lack of administrative support was also highlighted. A small number of comments were made about the type of work carried out on overseas deployment, and it was suggested that this was not rewarding for some of the people involved. Some anomalies were also identified in respect of carrying out a technical role and having technical qualifications but not being eligible for technician pay due to the established number of technical posts assigned to an area.

Conclusions: dissatisfaction with work–life balance and planning

Working in the Defence Forces has a negative impact on work–life balance for officers and their families due to the uncertainty of their work schedule, overseas duties and commuting pressures. This negative impact is compounded by a view that officers are not paid sufficiently well to negate these difficulties.

The findings from the work–life planning index highlight widespread dissatisfaction with this area, and at 34.2% it accounted for the third lowest index in this study. The uncertainty associated with being called in at short notice, or of having to step in for others due to increasing numbers of personnel leaving, was highlighted as negatively impacting on officers' lives, particularly on their relationships with their children and partners. It was noted that the fabric of Irish society has changed and, while in the past partners would have been able to be flexible, now they are also likely to be in employment, and this creates challenges around childcare.

While there were positive aspects associated with overseas duties, many challenges were identified in terms of family life and the lack of choice in whether people go overseas or not,

again due to falling numbers of personnel. The requirement to do overseas duties was identified as impacting disproportionately on technical streams because they are substantially fewer in number compared with other line ranks.

The commuting index (49.7%) highlights a moderate level of difficulty in this area. It was explained that, because of barracks closures and the centralisation of promotions, many officers are now commuting long distances from where their families live. The physical and financial costs of commuting as well as the time away from families were identified in the qualitative research as key issues in deciding whether to stay in or leave the Defence Forces.

Conclusions: organisational context and culture

The organisational context within which officers work was identified as problematic in two areas. First, poor career progression is a problem for officers, and it was suggested that those working in a technical stream have considerably fewer opportunities compared with those working in more general services. Second, low levels of satisfaction with information sharing and decision making (28.9%) were reported.

With a score of 40.7%, the training and promotion opportunities scale suggests a moderate level of satisfaction with this area. The regression analysis identified training and promotion opportunities as a predictor of intention to leave, and further analysis shows that this issue is also a negative driver of two impacts: burnout and lower levels of global job satisfaction.

There is some agreement that officers working in specialist streams have poorer career progression opportunities than non-technical grades, and promotional opportunities may not arise for several years due to the small number of posts available. It was also suggested that the requirement to undertake long commutes following promotion can be a disincentive to career progression.

Low levels of satisfaction with information sharing and decision making were identified as predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces, and additional analysis showed that this is a key driver of lower levels of job satisfaction (specific).

Conclusions: findings in respect of engagement

It is of note that higher levels of engagement were associated with a higher likelihood of intention to leave among officers, as this finding is counter-intuitive. It may be that while officers are highly engaged in their jobs, which are highly specialised, they are not committed to the Defence Forces and it is this low organisational commitment that is leading to higher intention to leave. This interpretation would be broadly consistent with what was reported in the regression for this group.

Summary of findings arising from the qualitative data in respect of NCOs

Positive aspects

A small number of comments highlighted positive aspects of working as an NCO in the Defence Forces. It was suggested that it is an exciting place to work, that it is a way of life that works for them, that there are good opportunities for promotion and that there is a sense of pride in serving one's country. It was also suggested, however, that it is becoming more difficult to work in the Defence Forces due to the challenges relating to the work and organisation.

Challenges relating to the work

Many NCOs drew attention to the increased workload resulting from challenges in retaining personnel, and it was suggested that there is now a staffing crisis. It was also highlighted that personnel have a high level of responsibility due to the technical nature of the work, and this combined with an increased workload and shortage of personnel has resulted in a number of negative impacts. These impacts include:

- responsibility overload
- providing a reduced service
- not being able to take lunch breaks
- working long hours
- being unable to maintain levels of fitness
- challenges in supporting newer staff
- being unable to undertake additional training.

Challenges relating to the organisational context

Four main issues relating to the organisational context were identified as problematic:

- pay
- education, training and skills
- career progression
- management.

The issue raised most commonly in interviews with NCOs was pay, and each interviewee raised this as a problem. Overall pay levels and allowances, including technician pay and duty allowances, were considered to be inadequate, and a number of NCOs spoke about difficulties in meeting financial commitments. Attention was drawn to the pay cuts that were implemented during the financial crisis in Ireland, and it was suggested that pay has not yet returned to pre-2008 levels. It was also suggested that, relative to others carrying out similar types of work in the public and private sectors, NCOs are poorly remunerated.

A number of NCOs were positive about the training they had received through the Defence Forces and it was highlighted as 'the upside' of being in the Defence Forces. It was mentioned, however, that there is a long lead-in period before personnel are fully competent to carry out some of the technical work required, and this leads to challenges in ensuring that the appropriate level of skill is available. Both positive and negative commentary was identified in respect of the new promotion process, which is based on the number of points an individual accrues through courses, overseas duties and other mechanisms. There was some commentary in respect of management and it was highlighted that, in some situations, personnel are promoted without having the necessary level of competence.

Reasons NCOs stay in or leave the Defence Forces

It was suggested that there is a crisis relating to retention of personnel, and five main reasons were identified for why NCOs leave. Pay issues underpinned each of these and were identified as the main reason why NCOs leave. It was noted that basic pay levels are inadequate and that allowances are insufficient to compensate for the requirement to do 24-hour and weekend duties. Work-life imbalance was also highlighted and, with that, workload, overseas duties and commuting were identified as problematic. The age at which NCOs become eligible for a pension was identified as an issue, and changes in the age at which an NCO can retire on a full pension (from 21 to 31 years) were noted as having a

negative impact. This was particularly the case in the context of opportunities available to personnel when in their forties compared with their fifties.

Opportunities outside the Defence Forces were considered to be particularly attractive in terms of pay and working conditions. A number of participants highlighted preparations they were making for leaving, including undertaking additional studies, and some identified specific job offers they had received. Finally, a small number of NCOs drew attention to the requirement for certain personnel to leave the service if they have not achieved specific goals leading to promotion within a period of time.

Conclusions arising in respect of NCOs

Conclusions: positive aspects of the work and the organisation

NCOs are engaged with their work (62.2%) and enjoy moderate to high levels of peer support and respect (61.2%).

A small number of comments highlighted positive aspects of working as an NCO in the Defence Forces. It was suggested that it is an exciting place to work, that it is a way of life, that there are good opportunities for promotion and that there is a sense of pride in serving one's country. It was also suggested, however, that it is becoming more difficult to work in the Defence Forces.

Conclusions: dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension

There is considerable dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pensions. This finding is strongly reflected in both the quantitative and the qualitative findings, and commentary around these areas, particularly with regard to pay and allowances, exceeded each other issue. The pay and allowances index had the second lowest mean index (20.1%) of all indexes included in the study, and satisfaction with pension (36.3%) was also low.

Overall pay levels and allowances, including technician pay and duty allowances, were considered to be inadequate, and a number of NCOs spoke about difficulties in meeting financial commitments. Attention was drawn to the pay cuts that were implemented during the financial crisis in Ireland, and it was suggested that pay has not yet returned to pre-2008 levels. It was also suggested that, relative to others carrying out similar types of work, NCOs are poorly remunerated.

Changes that have taken place in relation to pension entitlements were identified as particularly problematic because entitlement to a full pension does not arise until after 30 years. At this stage, it was suggested, it is too late for a person to start a new career, and family expenses may also be particularly high if children are attending college.

Conclusions: work–life imbalance

Working in the Defence Forces as an NCO has a negative impact on work–life balance. This is evidenced by the work–life planning index, which at 28.4% has the third lowest index score for this group. Work–life planning was identified as a predictor of intention to leave in the regression analysis.

Three main issues were identified as impacting on work–life balance: workload, overseas duties and commuting. It was suggested that NCOs' workload has increased considerably due to the decreasing numbers of personnel, and this has created difficulties for the remaining personnel across many areas, including increased working hours and responsibility overload. It was also highlighted that technical personnel are expected to cover some more general duties and this detracts from the time available to them. It was

reported that going overseas can be problematic, especially if there is no choice in whether individuals go. This was noted to be particularly difficult where there are family commitments.

Commuting was also identified as impacting on work–life balance, and the commuting pressure index (58.1%) was high for this group. Although commuting pressure was not identified as a predictor of intention to leave in the regression model, it was identified as a factor that drives burnout, work–life planning and effort–reward ratio.

Conclusions: organisational context

NCOs report low levels of satisfaction across a number of aspects of the organisational context, and particularly low levels were recorded in respect of information sharing and decision making (18.0%). Low levels of satisfaction were also identified in respect of training and promotion opportunities (30.8%) and perceptions of managers (36.9%).

Fewer training and promotion opportunities and lower levels of satisfaction with accommodation were also identified as predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces. Additional analysis shows that lower levels of information sharing and decision making are significant drivers of burnout and work–life planning, both of which predict intention to leave, while poorer training and promotion opportunities drive a high effort–reward ratio.

Summary of findings arising from the qualitative data in respect of privates

Positive aspects

Four positive aspects of being in the Defence Forces were identified: the variety of the work undertaken, friendships with colleagues, opportunities to go overseas and access to healthcare.

Challenges relating to the work

Privates focused mainly on workload and staffing as the key challenges arising in respect of their work. It was highlighted that there is an increasing workload for those remaining in the Defence Forces because of the ongoing retention issues among this group. It was also noted that this increasing workload has implications for privates in terms of additional stress and an inability to complete their work properly. Many examples were given of having to carry out extra 24-hour duties on top of what is usually required, and this was identified as problematic.

Challenges relating to the organisational context

Five main issues relating to the organisation were highlighted in the course of the interviews. Of these, pay was identified as the most problematic. Low pay overall and particularly duty pay was noted to present significant difficulties for privates, and there was a strong view that the pay does not reflect the work carried out. It was also suggested that there are many alternative opportunities available outside the Defence Forces where the pay would be better for similar types of work.

Some privates identified management as an important element of the overall structure within which they work, and in general the commentary relating to immediate managers was positive. However, there was some negative commentary about officers, particularly in the navy, and also about the broader management structure, where it was suggested privates are not valued.

Commentary in respect of education and training acknowledged the opportunities provided by the Defence Forces to develop skills. However, some privates do not seek support (e.g. reimbursement of fees) because it would mean they would have to commit to staying in the Defence Forces for a period of time. Additionally, some privates noted that, due to the busyness of their role, they did not have time to undertake all the requisite training.

Challenges in career progression were identified by a small number of privates. It was noted that technical personnel may not have the same opportunities as others (e.g. overseas duties, undertaking courses) to build up the number of points required for promotion. There was also some criticism of the length and focus of the 'promotion course' and it was suggested that it is not relevant for technical personnel.

Finally, a small number of privates noted that barracks accommodation is 'not nice', and one private highlighted that, because of low pay, privates in the navy may have to live on their ship, which can lead to many problems.

Reasons privates stay in or leave the Defence Forces

Four main issues were identified as reasons for privates leaving the Defence Forces. The first and most commonly mentioned was pay, and many examples were given of the negative impacts of low pay on privates' lives. These included being unable to afford commuting costs, being unable to rent a house near where they work, having to take on a second job, having to access Family Income Supplement payments and being unable to get a mortgage.

Second, changes to the age at which privates are entitled to a pension were highlighted. It was noted that, previously, being able to access a pension after 21 years operated as an incentive to remain in the Defence Forces. The age of retirement is now considered to be too late and, as a consequence, privates are leaving so that they have sufficient time to develop careers elsewhere.

Third, many opportunities are currently available to privates, and attention was particularly drawn to the skills and knowledge they have, which make them very employable. In the course of interviews, examples were given of privates having already applied for or obtained civilian jobs in the public or private sectors.

Finally, work-life balance was highlighted as problematic. This was often linked with pay and the consequences of low pay as well as the requirement for privates to be away from their families for periods of time.

Conclusions arising in respect of privates

Conclusions: positive aspects

Positive elements of being in the Defence Forces were identified. These included variation in the work carried out, opportunities to go overseas, access to healthcare and friendships with colleagues.

In general, the indexes relevant to these aspects showed only moderate levels of satisfaction as follows: peer support and respect (56.0%), engagement (54.9%), job satisfaction (global) (48.4%) and job satisfaction (specific) (41.4%). It is of note that more positive perceptions of managers were identified as a predictor of intention to leave the Defence Forces, and it is not clear why this might be the case.

Conclusions: dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension

There is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and the current pension arrangements, and the indexes relating to pay (18.5%) and pension (20.6%) showed very low

levels of satisfaction. Lower satisfaction with pay and allowances and more job alternatives were both identified as predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces in the regression analysis.

Low pay overall, including duty pay, was noted to cause significant difficulties for privates, and there was a strong view that the pay does not reflect the work carried out. Many examples of the negative impact of low pay on privates' lives were identified. These included being unable to afford either to rent or purchase a home near to where they work and being unable to afford the cost of commuting long distances. Findings from the interviews suggest that the low pay may partially explain the high index score for commuting pressure (64.4%). It was also suggested that there are many alternative opportunities available outside the Defence Forces where the pay would be better for similar types of work, and this is reflected in the index score for job alternatives (77.3%).

It is of note that, as for officers, higher satisfaction with pension is a predictor of intention to leave. While the finding relating to satisfaction with pension is counter-intuitive, it is noted that the two most common reasons given for staying were that individuals were waiting until they became eligible for their pension (about 28%) and being unable to afford the financial penalty for breaking their contract (about 13%). The qualitative interviews highlight the complex role played by access to a pension in decision making about staying in or leaving the Defence Forces.

Conclusions: work–life imbalance

Working in the Defence Forces as a private has a negative impact on work–life balance. This is evidenced by the low to moderate work–life planning index score (31.8%) and by high levels of burnout (60.2%).

Twenty-four-hour duties were particularly highlighted as having a negative impact on work–life balance, especially in terms of tiredness. Privates in the navy drew attention to the long periods of time they are at sea, and this was identified as having a negative impact on their family life. Commuting was also identified as having an impact on work–life balance, and the commuting pressure index (64.4%) was the second highest index for this group. Although commuting pressure was not identified as a predictor of intention to leave in the regression model, it was identified as a factor driving burnout and lower levels of global job satisfaction, both of which are predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces.

Conclusions: organisational context

Low levels of satisfaction were identified via the information sharing and decision-making index (19.9%), the training and promotion opportunities index (27.2%) and the satisfaction with accommodation index (37.7%). These issues were also identified in the findings from the interviews.

Challenges in career progression were highlighted by a small number of privates, and it was suggested that the current system (where points are accrued through overseas duties and undertaking courses) is more difficult for technical personnel to access compared to other personnel. It was also suggested that the focus of the 'promotion course' is not relevant for technical personnel. These findings are reflected in the driver analysis, where lower levels of satisfaction with training and promotion opportunities were identified as a factor driving burnout.

Some privates identified management support as an important element of the overall structure within which they work, and in general the commentary relating to immediate managers was positive. However, there was some negative commentary about officers, particularly in the navy, and also about the broader management structure, where it was

suggested that privates are not valued. It is of note, however, that more positive perceptions of managers are a predictor of intention to leave, and the reason for this warrants further consideration. This is also the case in respect of autonomy, where higher levels of autonomy are predictors of intention to leave; again, this is contrary to what might be expected.

Overall Conclusion

Each of the three ranks – officers, NCOs and privates – reported positive aspects of working in the Defence Forces. These positive features are the camaraderie and peer support they receive from each other, the variability and the excitement of the work they do, and the pride with which they serve their country. Across each of the three groups, however, it is clear that, despite these positive elements, personnel feel undervalued and let down by the way in which they believe they are treated. Despite many personnel wanting to remain in the Defence Forces, the challenges are increasingly outweighing the positive features.

Across each of the three ranks, there is dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and the pension arrangements. Two main issues emerged that directly affect individuals' decisions about whether to stay in or leave the Defence Forces. First, the expertise and experience personnel hold in a specific technical area means there are currently many job opportunities available to them outside the Defence Forces. Second, these alternatives are viewed as being better remunerated and consequently are very attractive to Defence Forces personnel.

While the impact of pay and allowances on work–life balance was evidenced across each of the three ranks, the issue is particularly acute for privates, where it was suggested that the sacrifices made in terms of duties undertaken far outweigh the level of remuneration. Personnel (particularly privates) may also have significant costs relating to commuting and/or house rental associated with the distance between their home and their workplace. These costs may make it unviable for personnel to continue in the Defence Forces.

For all three groups, the changes in the number of years of service required to receive a full pension have created an impetus to leave. Those who join the Defence Forces on finishing school will become eligible for a full pension in their late forties or early fifties, and it was suggested that at this stage it would be almost impossible to start a new career, although it may be possible to get a job. This combined with societal changes, including having children at a later age (with those children likely to be at college when their parents are in their fifties), means that, on balance, it could be preferable to leave the Defence Forces at an earlier age.

Working in the Defence Forces has a negative impact on work–life balance. This arises from a lack of choice surrounding working long hours (particularly where there are excessive workloads), having to undertake 24-hour duties and having to be available to the Defence Forces 24/7. These factors create uncertainties relating to work–life planning. It was suggested that shortages of technical staff mean that those who remain in the Defence Forces may be required to provide cover more often than general grades, and this is particularly the case for overseas duties. Poor work–life balance also arises as a result of barracks closures, which for some personnel result in long commutes from home to work.

The organisational context – particularly the findings in respect of the information sharing and decision-making index (19.9%), which for each of the three groups was either the lowest-scoring index or almost the lowest – does need some consideration, particularly in the context of the role of the Department of Defence. Eligibility for promotion (especially for privates) and promotional opportunities also have challenging aspects for technical personnel. In this regard, it was suggested that they are disadvantaged relative to non-technical personnel because of the points system and the number of posts available. Finally, accommodation for privates and NCOs is also regarded as problematic.