



Big Survey - The Results

September 2014

AFF recently conducted our annual Big Survey - collating the facts about life as experienced by Army families.

This year there were 2,643 participants; the main outcomes are outlined below.

Rebasing

64% of families were fully or somewhat aware of rebasing; this figure was higher (80%) amongst families living in Germany.

The top three rebasing issues were:

- Housing
- Schools
- Spousal employment

Although spousal employment is hard for the military to plan for, it must be recognised as a key factor in retention.

Money

The cost of living against prolonged pay freezes has created fiscal challenges for families. 46% are worse off than they were two years ago.

The top three perceived reasons were:

- Increase in cost of living
- Pay freeze
- Inability for spouse to gain or retain employment

Spouse employment is perceived as a key mechanism for managing this - the future Army can't be shaped on a single income.

Cost of commute

Super garrisons bring stability but also hidden costs which the more junior ranks struggle to absorb. 31% of families have had to fund alternative methods of transport to get to work, and 69% have had to buy a second vehicle to accommodate a work commute (up from 45% in our 2012 survey). Get you home allowance (GYH) doesn't cover the cost of a vehicle and the high insurance rates experienced by our under 30s.

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Employment

64% of families experienced financial issues without a second income; if the aspiration of buying a house is to become a reality, in most circumstances, a reliable second income is required.

FAMCAS 2014 stated that only 20% of spouses found it difficult to gain employment because their partner was in the Army; however, our statistics show that spouse employment is a trending issue.

The top three factors affecting the spouse's ability to secure employment were:

- Soldier's lengthy or unpredictable working hours (75%)
- Their frequent moves (66%)
- Soldier being away so much (65%)

“The Army lifestyle makes it exceedingly difficult to sustain a career. This was perhaps acceptable when the Army provided secure employment, but with the recent threats of redundancy and reduced promotion prospects, we could be left high and dry”

Living in their own home

47% of families are considering purchasing a home in the next 3 years; however, 72% of those in their own home didn't feel they received adequate welfare support from the Army.

The lack of welfare support for geographically dispersed families must be redressed and costed realistically if the Army is to positively promote 'living in your own home' as part of the NEM.

Education

FAMCAS 2014 revealed that 11% of families reported difficulties in obtaining a place at a school of their choice; however, our survey showed that only 54% of Service children generally were allocated a place in a chosen school.

Our survey of families also discovered that:

- 64% were not at all aware of CEAS
- 59% were not at all aware of Service Pupil Premium
- 39% stated that multiple moves had negative effects on their child's education

32% of families send or are planning to send their children to boarding school to mitigate against the impact of mobility - an increase of 12% since 2012. This indicates that stability is yet to be a reality for many Army families.

Summary

It is important to acknowledge that the latest round of redundancies has changed the ethos of the Army indefinitely. The needs of the Army must be balanced against a sustainable family unit if retention is to be achieved.

Provision of heavily subsidised accommodation is an essential part of the remuneration package for many. The Army must recognise that its junior ranks do not receive a wage sufficient to realise 'independent living' with a significant proportion entitled to tax credits and other state benefits.