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Dear Families,

The festive season is often a time of reflection for the things we are most grateful for. For most, it's a time to be thankful for your family and friends and an opportunity to spend time and make memories together. For the Service families separated at this time of year it is especially tough and the personal sacrifices you make can feel all the more acute. Now more than ever you should be proud of the crucial role that you play in ensuring that our Armed Forces continue to be among the best in the world at what they do.

This year I am especially thankful for the incredible work that was done during the short-notice deployment of Service personnel to Afghanistan over the summer: a difficult and at times harrowing deployment which saved so many lives. This year our brave Service personnel have also continued to deliver critical support to communities up and down the UK as we continue to recover from the pandemic, from testing and vaccinations, to logistics and planning, there has been an incredible effort from all three Services.

I am keenly aware of what this has meant for you, and I know that without your support this vital contribution would not have been possible. At the Ministry of Defence, my Ministers and I are determined to ensure we keep modernising the Services so that a career in the Armed Forces doesn't mean accepting sacrifices for your family.

This is why we are launching a new Armed Forces Family Strategy which will set ambitious changes for the next ten years. The strategy will drive improved policies, bringing practical benefits which will help strike a better balance between home life and the demands of Service life. It focusses on the elements you have told us matter most to you including access to healthcare, improved housing, better educational outcomes for your children, and the ability for serving and non-serving partners to have fulfilling and successful careers.

Last week we also passed the Armed Forces Act 2021 in Parliament which in it, created a new duty that means public bodies must consider the unique nature of Service life when running healthcare, housing and education services. This means you and your family should never be disadvantaged when accessing these because of your role in the Armed Forces.

There is still more change to deliver and we will continue to listen to you. Your Ministry of Defence Team and I speak regularly with the Families Federations to ensure we give due attention to the issues you raise. It is encouraging to see an increase in family engagement through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, plus the use of other platforms such as the Royal Navy Forum and Army HIVE Blog and I urge you to continue to use the Families Federations and social media to get your voice heard.

[Naval Families Federation - Championing Royal Navy & Royal Marines families \(nff.org.uk\)](http://nff.org.uk)

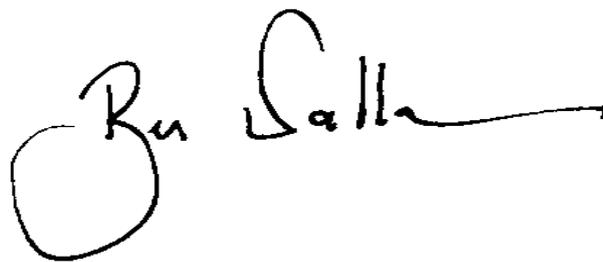
[Home - Army Families Federation \(aff.org.uk\)](http://aff.org.uk)

[Improving the life of RAF personnel and their families | RAF Families Federation \(raf-ff.org.uk\)](http://raf-ff.org.uk)

Once again, I would like to thank you personally for all that you continue to do in support of your loved ones. Whether Regular or Reserve, your support helps them to deliver in the professional manner for which they are renowned worldwide.

I wish you all a safe and happy Christmas.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Wallace', with a large, stylized initial 'B' on the left and a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

THE RT HON BEN WALLACE MP