



army families federation

*the voice of army families*

# Briefing

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## Cost of citizenship for children born on an overseas posting

Children born to a soldier who is on an overseas posting are not automatically born British unless one of their parents is British. Families have to spend £673 to register the child as a British citizen. Children of Foreign & Commonwealth (F&C) parents born in the UK are automatically born British; therefore this expense is not incurred.

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## Background

On 13 January 2010 the Home Office granted discretion to allow children born to F&C citizens, on an accompanied posting overseas, to be entitled to apply for British citizenship. This came about as a result of a commitment within the Service Personnel Command Paper to remove the disadvantages faced by those serving overseas. Prior to this discretion it was not possible for a child born during an overseas posting to become eligible for citizenship until both parents had become British citizens. Whilst the change was a step in the right direction it quickly became clear that soldiers and spouses were aggrieved that in order to get citizenship for their child, they would have to pay for it.

## What was the result of this rule?

Enquiries about this issue increased dramatically. Many families and welfare staff were confused by the new rule. Many families made incorrect applications for passports, believing that their child was already British; these incorrect applications still happen and result in the family losing their application fees. The confusion and additional cost also means that families delay applying for a passport for their children and are then unable to travel when a posting order comes through. Many postings have had to be delayed as a result and, in some cases, families have been left behind in an overseas location whilst awaiting a passport for the child. It is also understood that a number of pregnant spouses choose to return to the UK near their due date in order to have their child and AFF is aware that some welfare staff recommend this approach. This is not a safe practice for mother or child.

## What has AFF done about it?

The issue was raised at the F&C Taskforce meeting in April 2011; the Land Forces Secretariat said that this wasn't something that the Army was prepared to pay for but that they would raise it to the Home Office. It was also raised at the AFF Germany Conference in June 2011 and again at the F&C Taskforce meeting in October 2011. As a result of these representations, senior military personnel and ministers were contacted. Unfortunately the response again was that it boiled down to a cost issue, UKBA would not pay for the cost of citizenship and neither would the MOD. The decision was that it was a personal choice to get British citizenship for the child because in most instances the child would be eligible for a passport from their parents' country of origin.

## Is this cost effective to the MOD?

No -if a child is born during an overseas posting and the family chooses to apply for a passport from their home country for the child, instead of paying for British citizenship, the Army is then required to apply for a visa for that child in order that they can enter the UK on posting with the soldier. The cost of a visa is £810. This is more than the cost of the citizenship application.

*'We recently applied for our newborn son's passport but the application was refused. I've been told to fill in a naturalization form for my son who was born in Germany. I'm trying to sort things out now because I haven't got a lot of time. I'm due to start at my new unit soon. It's a burden really, knowing that all the doors have been shut in front of you'*

## AFF VIEW:

There should be parity between the rules for those serving overseas and those serving in the UK. The discretion was introduced in order to remove the disadvantage faced by families on overseas postings but this has not happened. As a result the Government's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant is not being met.