

Title: AFF Communications Survey
 Date of issue: April 2019
 Audience: Chain of command, MOD
 Issued by: Michelle Alston, AFF Researcher

Issue

AFF surveyed Army personnel and families to ask about their views on communication from the Army, MOD and AFF. There were 552 eligible responses to the survey¹.

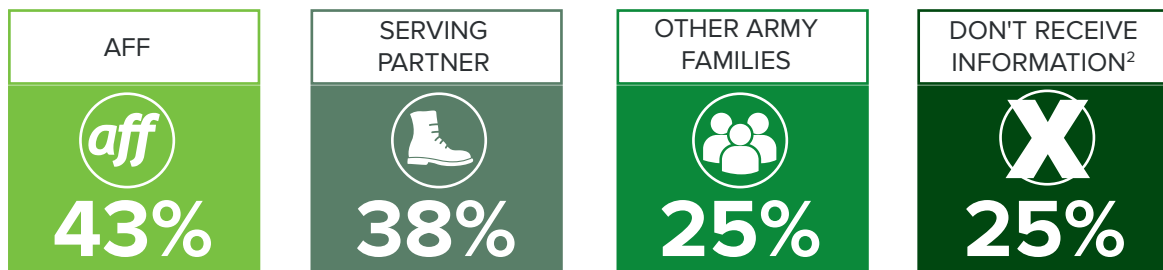
Key findings

1. Families receive their information about Army families' issues from AFF and their serving partner.
2. Families want to receive information via their unit welfare team.
3. Information needs to be clear and accessible.
4. Families want information direct to them, using a variety of methods.
5. Spouses/partners want to feel valued and included.

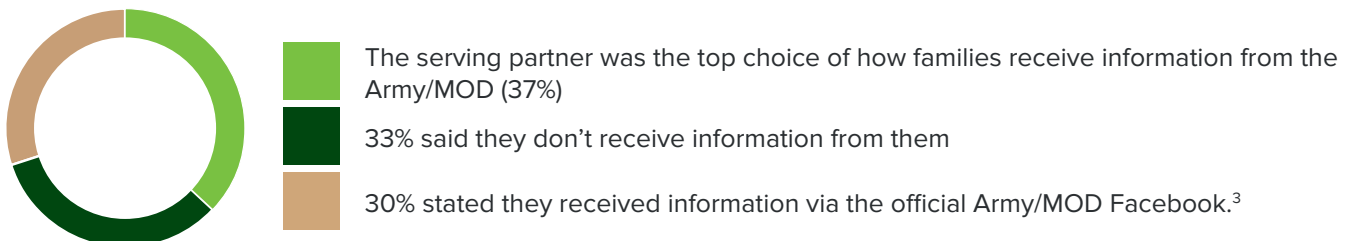
Background

1. Families receive their information about Army families' issues from AFF and their serving partner.

1.1. The top sources where families currently receive information about Army families' issues are:



1.2. How do you currently receive information from the **Army/MOD** about issues that affect Army families?



"I don't receive any information in relation to formal communication from the unit chain of command or welfare team. Even when my partner tells me information its very limited and if I have any queries, I feel I have no one to contact. To be honest I wouldn't even know where to start in regard to who to try and talk to!"

1. 590 people began the survey, with 552 being eligible to continue. Not all respondents answered all questions.

2. 512 respondents.

3. 494 respondents.

2. Families want to receive information via their unit welfare team.

How would you prefer to hear about the following?

Army/MOD results ⁴ <i>Respondents 454</i>	Unit CoC	Unit welfare team	Senior Army leadership/Army HQ	Central MOD	HIVE
Latest news on Army families' issues	37%	68%	26%	21%	26%
Policy updates that affect Army families	47%	61%	29%	26%	22%
Local unit/area news	44%	75%	10%	9%	33%

2.1. Families' would prefer to hear about news and issues that affect them through their unit welfare team.

2.2. However, comments indicated that some families felt there was a lack of support and information from their welfare team. Some families suggested there can be a lack of provision of welfare support when not part of a regiment (e.g. at a staff appointment) or posted overseas. Those families who are unmarried, living unaccompanied or not on the unit patch can feel isolated and ignored. Families commented that many of the events and working hours of unit welfare teams are not suitable for working spouses.

"As a married unaccompanied family, I am often the last to know any information, even though I make a point of trying to keep up to date with news. My husband is treated as single, so no information is shared with him. I doubt chain of command and welfare would even know how to get in touch with me if they needed to. Out of sight, out of mind!"

"Any of these! I currently get no information about anything. My husband doesn't seem to find out or know about things either. I'm isolated, lonely and miserable."

3. Information needs to be clear and accessible.

In general, how easy is it to understand the information you receive on Army families' issues?

434 respondents	Very easy-I can easily understand	Somewhat difficult-I have trouble understanding it	Difficult-I cannot understand it	Don't receive any info
Army	31%	30%	4%	36%
MOD	23%	29%	6%	43%
AFF	72%	13%	1%	13%

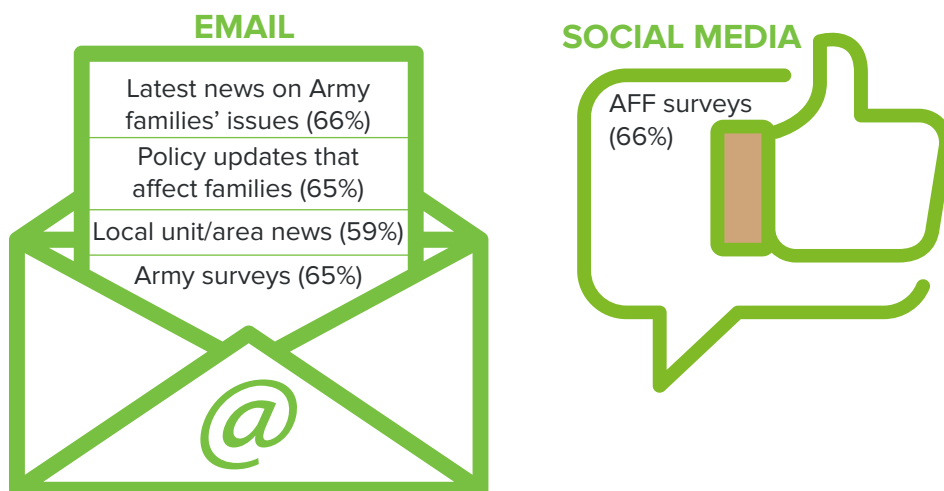
3.1. Comments suggested that information from the Army and MOD can often be written in 'civil service/ Army language', which uses language and acronyms that are difficult to understand; particularly for those whose first language is not English or whose reading skills are poor. Families want the language used to be aimed at families.

3.2. Comments suggested that families rely on AFF to explain Army/MOD information.

"Army & MOD info tends to be the same bland and difficult to understand announcements, they seem to be written by civil servants, for civil servants, not the target audience (Service personnel and their families)."

4. Families want information direct to them, using a variety of methods. *407 respondents.*

In general, how would you prefer to hear about the following from all sources (Army, MOD and AFF)?



4. Other non-Army/MOD answer options were: AFF (65% latest news, 60% policy updates, 32% local news), Other Army families (6% latest news, 4% policy updates, 9% local news).

How important is face-to-face communication with the Army and MOD?

358 respondents	High – definitely needed	Somewhat – happy to have it but other methods more important	Low – not needed
Unit welfare team	53%	40%	6%
Immediate unit CoC (e.g. Sgt Majs, CO)	33%	53%	13%
Senior CoC (e.g. Brigade Commander)	16%	49%	35%
Senior Army personnel involved with policies that affect families	33%	49%	18%

4.1. Email was the top choice of how families would prefer to hear from the Army, MOD and AFF.

4.2. Although social media, particularly Facebook, is a popular method of communicating with families, comments indicated that some are concerned with the security of social media; with others highlighting that those who choose not to use social media could feel excluded.

4.3. Whilst face-to-face communication may not be the most important method of communication, families indicated it was an important element, with comments suggesting that this would help families to ask questions and engage with those making policy decisions that affect families.

4.4. 77% of respondents would welcome the creation of an online Army portal to allow families to access information.

5. Spouses want to feel valued and included.

From the comments sections of the survey, we have identified the following trends.

5.1. Families want the Army to show they value families by communicating effectively with them. They don't want the Army to rely on the serving person to pass on information, but to engage with spouses/partners direct.

5.2. They want the information to be clear and accurate with no spin, addressing the issues directly.

5.3. A lack of communication can be perceived as disrespectful and as though the spouse/partner is not important. Communication will help them feel valued and included.

5.4. Families highlighted concern of a perception that senior personnel are disconnected from the lives of ordinary Army families. They felt that face-to-face contact from senior personnel who are making decisions that affect them would be beneficial, as it would allow them to better understand the impact of their decisions on families.

5.5. Families want the Army to make more effort communicating with families wider than the traditional married family living on the unit patch – unmarried families, married unaccompanied, living in their own home, FTRS.

“Clear accessible language, aimed direct to families. Please keep us informed on things like FAM. Don't treat us like idiots - these are decisions that affect our lives and we need to know about them and understand what's happening.”

“It is also helpful for decision makers to be shown the people they are impacting as people not numbers and answer to them directly. People want reassurance that they are heard.”

“I'd like the Army to communicate with families like we matter. Not as an afterthought. I feel like we have to actively search through a minefield of information to get what we want or need, and it could be so much easier. It needs to be accessible and communicated to all.”