

AFF CONFERENCE 2009: QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

1. Assignments

Q: *The Army 'Notice to Move' policy of giving not less than 4 months notice is not being met and consequently it is difficult to arrange education, health and housing needs. Are there plans to release appointment lists etc in a more timely manner?*

A: AG acknowledges that all soldiers, officers and their families seek as early notice as possible of their assignment. The aim is to provide a minimum of 65% of soldiers and officers with at least 4 months notice. 100% target is not realistic for the following reasons;

- It is impossible to predict who will be selected for promotion.
- The Boarding process takes time and seeks to give every soldier a fair and equal opportunity.
- Unforeseen injury, compassionate circumstances and disciplinary measures may result in short notice.
- The changing operational environment affects assignment notice.
- The need for some personnel to attend specific courses can affect notice times.

Military Secretary: *"The needs of the Army must come first: those of officers, soldiers and their families come a close second. But to be worthy of its pre-eminence the Army must be seen always to give due consideration to the best interests and preferences of each individual officer and soldier."*

Q: *What is the position on the retention of your quarter when the soldier is doing a 6 month deployment after completing a Germany tour before knowing where the next posting is?*

A: Regulations concerning retention of quarter are laid down in JSP 464 Pt 2 (Overseas) and the Standing Instruction for BAG 3219 . Your UWO or HCSO should be contacted for advice. The Guide To Living in SFA Booklet F for Germany (Guide to SFA – BFG Booklet) posted on the BFGNet website on the J1 Community Services Gateway also provides advice on most housing issues within Germany. It also has a link to the DE website for access to booklets A – E that explain the regulations in detail.

Q: *What allowances do the family retain if the soldier deploys on a 6 month tour after they have finished their Germany Posting?*

A: The soldier must apply for Retention of Dependent status which may be granted after retention of SFA is granted (which must also be applied for). Currently this results in the retention of residual MA rates of LOA being authorised by HQ UKSC (although this process is under review) along with the entitlement to work as a dependent employee through GLSU and the entitlement to shop duty free in NAAFI outlets **only** (the entitlement to purchase tax free items otherwise is removed due to the serviceperson no longer being considered on the strength of a BFG unit.)

Q: *Why aren't all postings over the school summer holidays so that children move school at the end of the school year ?*

A: Not everyone can move in the summer. It would be unfeasible to have 35 – 50% of all staff turnover in a 2 month period.

2. BFG Vehicle Licensing

Q: *Why can't a service exist in JHQ that can check all car documentation for when cars have to be changed in the UK?*

A: DVLA have advised that it is not possible to open a DVLA office in BFG as this would contravene the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act.

3. BFBS

Q: *Why can't all service personnel in Germany be given a satellite and free view box?*

A: It would not be cost-effective to supply everyone with a Freesat box.

Q: *Why can't you make Sky legal?*

A: This is really a question for Sky not BFBS; Sky, and all the channels on the Sky platform, only buy the rights for the programmes they show for the UK. Hence you have to have a UK address in order to get a Sky card

Q: *Why are adverts carried for Sky in Sixth Sense and the receivers sold in SSVC?*

A: The adverts in Sixth Sense are placed by a private satellite installation service and are paid for as such. It is not endorsed at any point by the MOD or Sky TV. SSVC retail outlets **do** sell satellite dishes and receivers but for Free to Air use, not Sky. The regulations regarding reception of UK Sky TV in Germany remain a matter for the German authorities.

Q: *I live in my own house. Why can't I access DTH TV?*

A: The individual is entitled to receive DTH, however because he is living in his own private accommodation he must pay for installation and costs for the satellite Set Top Box (STB). He should contact SO2 J1 Ops UKSC BFPO 140. On receipt of the request for installation and confirmation that costs will be met by the individual authorisation for the installation will be given and the SSVC shop will issue the STB.

Q: *What impact has the 50% reduction in local radio reporters and presenters in BFG had on BFBS's capability to support local events, local garrisons when troops are deployed and welfare agencies advertising their services?*

A: The general feeling amongst personnel involved in publicity and promotional work is that now BFBS are working with a drastically reduced staffing level, priority is given to more "Command" level tasks than local news. The biggest blow to Garrisons, however, has been the lack of a fixed 'BFG Reports'. There is also an inevitable lack of spontaneity regarding local coverage as reporters' diaries are now filled quicker and earlier. However, there is little evidence to suggest that issues and events surrounding deployment do not receive sufficient coverage. The Rhine and Paderborn Garrisons in particular cover large geographical areas and BFBS coverage of local events remains a concern.

4. BFPO

Q: *Why can't each BFPO number have a UK post code assigned to it so that we can more easily use the internet for shopping?*

A: Unfortunately, it is not as simple as changing the BFPO for a post code. BFPO are currently working on a technical solution to overcome the whole issue.

Q: *How can we adapt the BFPO system so that it is easier for dependents to set up small businesses instead of using the German net?*

A: BFPO is a concessionary postal service for private and official mail. It is designed so that service personnel and their families can have a postal service that mirrors that in UK. Trading using a BFPO address is not permitted as it is a government subsidized postal service. To use a BFPO address for a private business would contravene the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

Q: *Is there a liaison service between British business and the BFPO service?*

A: Yes BFPO has a customer Service Helpline on 00448457 697978 and details of which companies have agreements with commercial companies can be found at www.bfpo.mod.uk.

Q: *Is there a system in place to redirect post from one BFPO address to another?*

A: The re-direction of mail when personnel are posted is a unit responsibility (JSP 367), the Unit Post Orderly (UPO) or unit administration officer is responsible for keeping an accurate record of forwarding addresses and all mail requiring redirection should be forwarded by the UPO within 24 hrs of receipt.

Q: *Please can someone justify and preferably STOP the closure of the 12 NATO HQ post offices?*

A: The recent decision to withdraw BFPOs from NATO support units drew a significant level of criticism from various levels particularly because of the effect it would have on maintaining 'life as a citizen' as well the physical issues of sending and receiving mail. These concerns have been considered sympathetically and work is being undertaken by the UKSC staff to find a workable alternative solution. We are very close to being able to submit a business case that makes the argument for the retention of BFPO numbers and a slightly reduced mail collection and delivery service. We feel confident that our proposal will be approved and that the majority of concerns raised will be overcome as a result. There will be some limitation to the service but these should not be too difficult to overcome and we feel almost every angle has been covered.

5. Childcare

Q: *Why are the buildings used for childcare in BFG not of a comparable standard to those in UK?*

A: In BFG a variety of buildings are used, located primarily to support local family childcare needs. The overall standards of care given to children are regularly inspected and all aspects of childcare are taken into account including the suitability of premises to ensure safety and security for children. The number of children permitted on the premises at any one time is guided by the space available for each child and the management of space and resources considered ensuring that children's learning, development and care are nurtured in a friendly and warm environment. Ideally, children should have daily access to outside play; where outdoor areas are not directly available, outings should be planned and taken on a daily basis (unless circumstances do not permit).

Q: *Why is there no comprehensive availability of full time childcare in Germany?*

A: In some garrisons there are settings providing all day care for children. However, there are a variety of reasons why it is not available everywhere. Every attempt is made to meet the community's needs and to this aim a Sufficiency Audit is soon to be undertaken. This will give people the opportunity to say what the need is within the garrison and we will be better able to plan future provision.

Q: *Why can't I use my Childcare vouchers in German nurseries?*

A: To be eligible, the childcare provision used by the parent must be registered with a recognized regulatory/approval body; in England, this is Ofsted. In order to support Crown servants and their families when serving overseas, legislation is in place that enables the registration/approval of childcare provision on military premises or in service families' accommodation. This does not extend to include host nation childcare facilities.

Q: *Why can't some free childcare be available when soldiers are deployed to give parents a break?*

A: We do not have resources to offer free placements for the 0-3 provision. Families do receive Early Years funding for 3-4 year olds for free places once they attend SCE foundation stage.

Q: *Why is there no before and after school care in Germany?*

A: There are some facilities for after school care. The Sufficiency Audit will address this question.

Q: *Why does childcare during the school holidays rely on the dependent?*

A: In many stations, though not all, full time nursery provision is available. During school holidays AWS arranges a package of activity that is designed to entertain and provide alternative

opportunities for school aged children. There are also a number of childminders around Germany who state they have current vacancies.

Q: *Why can't UKBCs be employed so that the crèches and nurseries have permanent managers who aren't likely to leave?*

A: Childcare is not core business of the MOD and employment of a UKBC (who would need payment, accommodation etc), would therefore not warrant the overheads associated with such employment; especially when the skills are available from within the dependent community.

Q: *How can a working mum take 14 weeks leave a year to fit in with nursery closures?*

A: AWS operates a mix of full time and term time setting, most stations have a full time nursery though manning restrictions and demand limit others to term time provision only. The service provided has been professionalized to protect our children and to make the profession more attractive to staff, however recruitment is still a problem. The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment which will quantify the true extent of the gaps in provision by individual station.

Q: *Why are nursery fees in BFG so high?*

A: AWS nursery charges were aligned with the average price for nursery provision in the UK in July 2009. This resulted in the hourly charge being reduced from €4.50 to €3.65.

6. Housing

Q: *The current system of upgrading all quarters to Grade 1 means that many soldiers are struggling to pay rent and save for a mortgage. We need to ensure that we are not upgrading quarters to an unaffordable level.*

A: DE has a remit to bring all SFA up to a standard of Grade 1 or 2 for condition across the estate. To lower that standard would open the MoD to criticism on its housing provision. The AFPRB set the SFA charges and do so in the knowledge and understanding that Service personnel can afford the charges, which are somewhat cheaper than that of property in the public sector. Furthermore, benefits such as Tax Credits are available to those in the lower wage bracket. The MoD provides an allowance to assist Service personnel who are attempting to purchase their own property; that being Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP). Details will be provided by Unit RAO staff.

Q: *Why are flats charged at the same rate as houses?*

A: Unfortunately SFA is based on living space and it is only licensee of flats (without lifts) on the third floor and above who receive any form of compensation in the form of deficiency points. DE(E) Lands have initiatives in place to reduce the number of flats and currently a review of the 4TG scheme is taking place.

Q: *Why are so few houses available in some areas of Germany and why can't flats be made considerably cheaper? This might make more house or ground floor flats available to families with young children.*

A: DE(E) Lands are working towards increasing the percentage of houses and decreasing the percentage of flats. The housing staff have minimal spare capacity SFA, therefore allocation of SFA is on the basis of 'one out one in'. The HCSO do what they can to meet the special requests by applicants but to dedicate ground floor flats to families only may result in some families without children being penalised. If families are prepared to wait for suitable accommodation to become available, the HCSOs would be prepared to put them on the waiting list.

Q: *Why are civilians and service personnel housed on the same patches?*

A: The MoD is an Equality and Diversity employer and whilst for Service reasons it allows Officers and Other Ranks to be separated there is no need for Service personnel to be separated from members of the civilian component.

Q: *Why is our rent taken directly from our salary? Why can't we withhold rent when repairs are not sufficiently carried out?*

A: The licensee agrees that all charges for occupation; furnishings and CILOT arising from their occupation in SFA may be deducted from their pay according to conditions set by the MoD. Under the same conditions accommodation charges cannot be withheld due to repairs not being carried out. The licensee, however, may apply for the property to be downgraded and be allocated deficiency points that may lower the current 4 Tier Grading Board's Grade for Charge if a deficiency or reduction in amenity services has occurred for 7 days or more. (Amenities means water, sewerage, gas, electricity, heating oil).

Q: *If you have to accept an unsatisfactory quarter, why can't you get a rent reduction?*

A: After taking over a quarter the licensee has 3 months to challenge the grading of the quarter (according to 4 Tier Grading Board's Grade to Charge). If the quarter is deemed by the licensee to be unsatisfactory for reasons of cleanliness the Housing Estate Manager (HEM) should be contacted immediately. If repairs are deemed necessary the HEM will notify DE(E)FM.

Q: *Why are so many SFA being built in remote locations?*

A: It is BFG policy that ALL new acquisitions meet the UK requirement to be located within 10 miles of the place of work.

Q: *Will there be a shortfall of suitable accommodation available at Innsworth resulting in some personnel being housed many miles away?*

A: There is currently insufficient SFA in Innsworth to meet the needs of the HQ ARRC Group and as such suitable properties are to be purchased from the local housing market by Annington Homes and rented to the MOD. Two sites have been chosen, they are Coopers Edge just 3-4 miles from Innsworth and Kingsway which is approximately 7 miles or a 20 minute drive from the barracks. DE Ops Housing has a remit to the MoD to provide SFA as close as possible to the Serviceperson's Duty Station and within a radius of 10 miles.

Q: *Why are civil servants and teachers who pay no rent being offered new houses when I continue to live in a high rise?*

A: Under the Terms and Conditions for employment overseas UK based civil servants and UK based teachers do not pay accommodation charges and are granted an allowance on their utilities usage for a period of 5 years from the commencement of their appointment contract. Thereafter they pay entitled charges. Why civil servants and teachers are being allocated or offered new houses is a matter of housing management by the Garrison. Enquiries tell us that new properties command a higher rental charge and therefore are turned down by Service personnel.

Q: *How is it that a Catholic Priest has the same basic removals allowance as a family of 4 or that a newly married couple with no children has the same allowance as a couple with no children? Why can't allowances work on a sliding scale?*

A: The basic removals allowance is laid down in JSP 752: "...this is currently 40 CuM. However, as the standard size of a removal lorry is 67.92 CuM, this is the rate set for FMS and UKRS." This is likely to be renegotiated after September 2010. The Cu M will be reviewed at that time but is highly unlikely to go above 67.92 CuM. If an individual wishes to challenge the allowance he/she should do so through the chain of command.

Q: *Why are residents of married quarters being told to pay for painting costs to walls that only have fair 'wear & tear' to them, when previously this was included in the pre-paid cleaning scheme?*

A: The 'Move In' and 'Move Out' standards are set by SP Pol. At the time of the Pre Move Out Advisory Visit (PMOAV) carried out by the Housing Estate Manager the licensee will be advised on matters that need his/her attention to prepare the SFA for Move Out. Fair wear and tear is taken into consideration as is the length of time since the SFA was last painted. See also the Guide To Living in SFA Booklet F for Germany (Guide to SFA – BFG Booklet) posted on the BFGNet website

on the J1 Community Services Gateway that provides advice on most housing issues within Germany.

Q: *We are posted back to the UK this summer. At present we have our 18 year old daughter and 10 year old son living with us. On application of our housing papers we were told that we were only entitled to a B type(2 bed quarter) as our daughter is not classed as a dependent in the UK. How can this be?*

A: JSP 464 Pt 1 (UK) explains that the MoD has acknowledged the situation that children continue to remain with their parents after they no longer qualify as a dependant. Although the children are no longer entitled to be accounted for under the rules on entitlement to SFA type the HIC will, subject to availability, seek to provide the family with the same sized SFA as they had previously occupied to avoid downsizing.

Q: *It is unfair that those in flats pay the same as those in houses. What is being done to address this matter?*

A: Under the current 4 Tier Grading policy, no distinction is made between flats and houses. It is acknowledged that this needs to change and CRF is engaged. The 4 Tier Grading policy is being completely re-written and considerable changes are expected. In both Paderborn and Gütersloh Garrisons the ratio of houses to flats is approx 62% to 38% and it is unlikely that we will be able to reduce the percentage of flats to below 30%. In Bergen-Hohne the ratio of houses to flats is in the order of 30% to 70%. A programme for 677 new houses to be acquired over the next 3 to 5 years is now underway which should see the percentage of flats in Bergen-Hohne drop to just below 40%.

7. Education

Q: *Why does the Continuity of Education Allowance not cover enough of school fees to allow parents to choose schools which have a high percentage of boarders? The schools offering low fees tend to have very few boarders and are therefore deserted at weekend.*

A: The CEA rate is set by taking the fees of all schools on the Accredited Schools' Database (ASD) that have 30 or more Service children attending as boarders (currently in excess of 40 schools). The highest and lowest of those fees are discarded then an average is taken of the remaining fees. The rate is then set at 75% of that average figure. There are over 500 schools on the ASD which gives parents plenty of choice in the school they select for their child.

Q: *What is the bullying policy for SCE schools?*

A: SCE and individual schools have strong anti-bullying policies; It is a priority within the BFG Children and Young People's Plan and a strategic priority for SCE. SCE is committed to ensuring that all children have equal rights to achieve the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes, in particular to stay safe and to enjoy and achieve. SCE's approach to bullying is one of 'zero tolerance' and in many cases it finds education is more effective than punishment; a multi agency steering group oversees work in this area.

Q: *Why are there such a limited number of after-school activities? The activities available on the 'German Net' start before our schools finish and present language difficulties.*

A: The SCE Strategic Plan identifies 'Extended Schools' as a priority and we will work with other agencies to extend the provision. An 'Extended School' is one which works in partnership with other schools and other providers, such as AWS, to offer a varied menu of activities. Currently the number and variety of after-school activities in BFG varies from garrison to garrison.

Q: *Why is there so little for children aged 16-18 to do if they are not doing A Levels? Why can't BFG have a sixth form college?*

A: Currently the on-line Joint Area Prospectus (JAP) 'You Choose 2 Learn' offers nearly 700 courses including certificate, NVQ, BTEC, Apprenticeships, GCSE, A levels and Diplomas across a range of disciplines, organised in garrison areas. A centrally based sixth-form college will be considered as part of the scoping study into delivering the 14-19 Agenda overseas.

Q: *Which 14-19 diplomas will be introduced?*

A: SCE will lead a study into mapping out future provision of the 14-19 Agenda. At the moment, two 14-19 Local Area Partnerships have been successful in their application to provide Diplomas in Engineering (Cyprus) and Society, Health and Development (Rhine).

Q: *School Children's Visits (SCVs) flights are only available for three flights a year. Surely we should at least have flights to cover the half term holidays as well?*

A: School children under the age of 19 years are eligible to 3 return SCVs at public expense. Alternatively, the Service parent may choose to claim public expense travel for the eligible child(ren) for 6 single journeys. This entitlement is increased to 5 and 6 flights when a parent is deployed for 9 and 12 months respectively. In addition, a child aged 19 to 25 years (who is unmarried or not in a civil partnership) and attending full-time education, is eligible for one return SCV at public expense during each complete academic year. To further increase this entitlement, in addition to the cost of CEA, is simply not affordable in the current financial climate.

Q: *Wiltshire County Council would not give us a school address on the basis of our Wilton work address and we have since been given a quarter 11 miles away. The government policy stating that a school may be allocated on the basis of a service person's work address is inoperable and ineffective.*

A: If a local authority (LA) will not accept a work address ahead of a residence address, they are in breach of the Code on Admissions and the family should be advised to send CEAS details so that it can be raised with the LA. The Schools Adjudicator has been investigating the issues faced by Service families' 'late applications' and is due to report as part of the response to the Service Personnel Command Paper.

Q: *Wiltshire County Council would not give my Reception child a place at the school behind my house and stated that Army quarters come under the catchment of the school that is further away. Why do Army children come so far down the priority list?*

A: Catchment areas are a matter for the Admissions Authority to determine. Provisions made in the Code on Admissions for Service families are designed so that Army children are not put at a disadvantage. Service families should contact the LA or CEAS as soon as they know they are moving to find out what is available. A parent has the right of appeal if they are not allocated a place in their preferred school and CEAS can support them in this.

Q: *I am delighted to have found my three children a good school rather than one of the poorest schools offered by my local council, but it means a 9 mile round trip each day. Will the Army pay me MMA to get my children to school and are they happy with the environmental impact too?*

A: If a parent chooses a school which is different from the one offered by the LA, the LA is not required to reimburse the cost of travel because it is deemed to be parental choice. It is not MOD policy to pay MMA in this instance and neither does it have the resources.

Q: *Why aren't modern apprenticeships available to school leavers in BFG?*

A: The study into provision of the 14-19 Agenda overseas will look into Apprenticeships, Diplomas and the concept of collectively delivering post-16 education and training on 1 or 2 sites across BFG. However, Diplomas and Apprenticeships can only be delivered in partnership with other training organisations and employers. Being overseas places constraints on what can realistically be offered.

Q: *The bus escort on my daughter's bus is rude and abusive. Why isn't there a proper charter of acceptable behaviour for bus escorts?*

A: The policy for training and induction of Bus Escorts has just been revised and includes basic first aid training and working with AWS and SCE to deal with behavioural issues. If a parent or pupil is unhappy with the service, they should make a complaint about the individual and the Garrison will take the appropriate action.

Q: *Why are children forced to travel distances to school which would be unacceptable for soldiers to travel to work?*

A: JSP 342 allows 90 minutes travelling time per day for pupils. The stark answer is that it is simply not financially possible to provide schools in every area.

Q: *Why do SCE schools all use different exam boards?*

A: HQ SCE is aware of this and is looking into co-ordinating academic timetables across Germany. This should make inter-SCE school moves less problematic.

Q: *Due to the re-drawing of the catchment area, pupils of King's School living in Detmold will no longer be entitled to transport to and from school. This means that some students will either have to change schools midway through their A level courses or re choose their options from a different set of subject groups on transferring to Prince Rupert School. Neither option is satisfactory. Have you any advice?*

A: Each Garrison decides how the BVO contract is delivered so it is a Paderborn Garrison decision to withdraw this transport service. Clearly it's not advisable to change schools half way through GCSE/A levels. However, SCE is looking into better co-ordination of syllabuses so that it might be possible to switch SCE schools and follow the same syllabus without having to repeat/miss elements. BUT, the subjects offered in each school is demand led so there is of course the possibility that the subject may not be offered in the second school. I would suggest that it would be better for the pupil to attend PRS from the outset.

8. Employment

Q: *Why are the GLSU T&C for the bereavement of parents and children only 2 days? Is two days considered sufficient for workers to deal with the death of a parent or child?*

A: Of course it is not – no amount of leave can ever mitigate such events. However, with the latest amendment to SIBA(G) 6200 (to be issued imminently) the number of special paid leave days granted in the event of the death of a parent or child will increase from 2 to 3 days. In addition, in cases when additional leave is required and annual leave has been exhausted, the GLSU will grant unpaid leave. It should be noted that, in line with UK employment law, there is no legal entitlement to paid time off, and many UK public sector employers provide only unpaid leave.

Q: *Why does the clearance procedure at GLSU take so long?*

A: All GLSU's endeavour to gain the relevant clearance as quickly as possible, and have attempted to reduce the amount of forms to be completed in order to speed up the process. The average time for completion of pre-employment vetting checks is 6-8 weeks. The actual vetting requirements are not determined by the GLSU. The rules and criteria for the vetting policy of all government employees are set by the Cabinet Office. It should be noted that we make every effort to get people working quickly, yet meet the mandatory clearance criteria. The reality is that there must be a checking process for the protection of our community and defence assets – and it takes time. In positions requiring a CRB check to be completed, this process may take even longer. The MOD's agent for obtaining CRB checks is the Defence Vetting Agency (DVA), Employment Assurance (Disclosures) Section (EA(D)S) and is also used by AWS. This Section checks applications before submitting them to the 3 separate disclosure organisations (DO). There are 2 levels of CRB check and an additional check for those working with children.

Q: *At present there are a number of highly qualified dependents who are forced to take jobs which are not relevant to their qualifications. This system is outdated and unfair. When are the job opportunities going to be looked at and graded properly?*

A: Unfortunately the GLSU do not have the authority to create jobs, nor do they have a budget to pay for them. The kind of jobs on offer to Dependants (or DEL) are those which the employer requires – job availability cannot be based upon the qualifications of those seeking work. However, the GLSU will always try and match the most suitably qualified person to a post. All LEC jobs (DEL

& Dep) are graded according to the Collective Tariff Agreement II - for employees of the Sending States' Forces based within Germany. In order to ensure parity across all budgetary areas within BFG all new jobs have a grade allocated by a central grading panel.

Q: *Why can't any of the jobs available to retired officers (MSF) be made available to dependents?*

A: The decision as to which posts are designated as Civil Service is made by the employing organisation. For UKSC units, this is the Civil secretary. However, all UK Dependents are entitled to apply for externally recruited Civil Service posts (ie MSF). Indeed a number of Dependents have successfully applied for such posts recently.

Q: *Why are jobs so low paid in Germany?*

A: Dep jobs are paid on a par with their DEL counterparts of a similar grade. The pay level for each grade is set out in the Tariff Agreement relating to the Sending States Forces.

Q: *When will German spouses be afforded the same status as other nations?*

A: The SOFA restricts the employment of German Dependents to DEL posts only. However, SOFA does not preclude any of the other benefits of accompanied service in Germany, such as tax free entitlements. Many of our German spouses are employed as DEL, which make up the majority of BFG's local civilian workforce.

9. Foreign and Commonwealth

Q: *Why can't dependents travel directly to Germany from their country of origin on first move?*

A: Travel arrangements to Germany for all non E-U citizens is currently being addressed by AG & BA CE. Until then, to ensure that all dependants are bona fide and legitimately able to enter the UK, UK Border Agency (UKBA) checks are required. This protects both the individual, by ensuring that they can enter the UK on future assignment, and the Command.

Q: *Following UKSCs decision to no longer allow F&C families to enter Germany from their Country of Origin (if they don't have a valid UK visa), what is UKSC doing to ensure that those F&C families not requiring a visitors visa to enter the UK are still able to join their serving soldier?*

A: Guidance has been sought through LF and UKBA. This HQ is awaiting a response. Once received, details will be issued via the Garrisons. Until then individual cases should be directed to J1 CS (casework) via the unit.

Q: *Why can't my child (non E-U) travel to the UK for a work placement?*

A: Due to the new Work Place Points System, non E-U children can no longer travel to the UK for a work placement. This has been addressed with LF who state that numbers are too low to address. J1 has asked SCE to provide more details of numbers affected.

Q: *My spouse is banned from entering the UK for 10 years. I am posted to the UK. Why can I not remain in BFG?*

A: Bans imposed are in effect whilst the serving soldier remains a Commonwealth Citizen. If the soldier chooses to naturalize to a British Citizen then the ban is negated although the reason for the original ban may still result in future refused entry to the UK. As a member of the Armed Forces, you are expected to serve wherever you are assigned and you will have to make alternative arrangements for your dependants if an assignment takes you out of BFG.

Q: *I am a BNO and my spouse is a Nepalese Citizen. Why can we not get a passport for our child born in Germany?*

A: Neither the British or the Nepalese will issue a passport to the child. There are now some possible solutions which will be promulgated in the near future.

Q: *Why is my DRP (Declaratory Resident Permit) only valid for 3 months when my friend's is valid for 3 years?*

A: The DPR was introduced as an alternative to the Schengen Visa to allow travel throughout the Schengen Countries for non E-U citizens. Each Stadt has their own rulings on how they apply DRP's. Work continues in trying to ensure consistency between Stadts.

Q: *As a non E-U citizen, can I be discharged in Germany?*

A: Yes, providing you have met the conditions laid out in F&C guides and **Queen's Regulations** regarding discharge procedures. This includes agreement by the host nation for you to reside and the removal of the Exemption stamp from your passport.

Q: *As a non British Citizen, can I work in BFG?*

A: The SOFA states that Nationals of non-NATO countries cannot work as part of the civilian component to the Force i.e. as a Dependant. And, although it would be technically possible to gain employment as a DEL (either with BFG or in a German commercial enterprise), as a non-EU citizen this would require you to apply to the German authorities for a work permit.

Q: *Why is there not more information available to F&C families living in Germany?*

A: A guide for F&C citizens in BFG is an aspiration of J1 however it is not viable until clear policy has been agreed by UKBA. J1 would welcome input and detailed guidance from the AFF F&C Specialist.

10. Financial Matters

Q: *Why is life insurance a maximum of 150k for Service Personnel who take out PAX?*

A: This limit is a matter for PAX. However, an individual is able to take out more than one policy, a list of companies recognized by the Service Insurance and Investment Advisory Panel is available at: <http://www.siap.org/life.html>.

Q: *Will the LOA rate be increased to compensate the falling pound/exchange rate?*

A: The increase in the strength of the Euro resulted in decreases to the Euro/Sterling FFR on 3 occasions within the past 15 months which resulted in automatic adjustments to LOA. The LOA Team conducted their annual update during the period 27 June – 3 July 09, using the direct price comparisons between the UK and Germany. Any differentials will have been identified and any changes to LOA as a result will be published in due course.

Q: *Why don't children get free school lunches when soldiers are deployed?*

A: Free school meals are provided in the UK for families who are receiving some form of income support. It would be unlikely that a Service family in Germany would require free school meals on financial grounds. In the future children aged between 5-7 years in Scotland will also receive free school meals as will children in England within the chosen 'pilot area' (at an estimated cost to the government of over £1 billion per year).

Q: *Why do the Armed Forces have to pay capital gains on properties that they have bought but not lived in if it is the only property they own?*

A: All tax matters are personal and advice must be sorted out by your tax office. Advice can also be sourced from the Internet at: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/cgt/property/sell-own-home.htm>.

Q: *Why can't a family claim full MMA from a UK destination to the assignment destination in BFG, if they travel the whole journey in their own car?*

A: A sizable element of your LOA covers the cost of selling a car when assigned (regardless of destination) and purchasing a new car in your new location. Cost analysis has shown that families are financially better off keeping their existing LOA rather than changing the regulations to enable claims for cars/ferries etc on assignment.

Q: *Why are serving soldiers married to each other unable to receive Kindergeld for their children living in Germany?*

A: One of the criteria to be met by the Kindergeld claimant (as laid down in SIBA(G) 313 GERMAN CHILD BENEFIT(KINDERGELD) states that the claimant should not be a member of the military force. Any decision on eligibility to Kindergeld rests with the German authorities and is not a matter that can be influenced by the BFG authorities.

Q: *Why does the cost of procuring a tax free form vary so much according to where we live?*

A: Charges are decided locally by the Commander of the Official Procurement Agency (OPA) to offset the cost of employing personnel to process all the documentation.

Q: *Why isn't the tax free shopping system more proactive? – more shops would participate if they were asked.*

A: It is worth mentioning that there is no individual entitlement to tax free purchases, it is the MoD as an organisation which has the entitlement. The Official Procurement Agency (OPA) that makes the purchase 'considers' the individual as the 'organisation' to obtain the goods. It should be understood that the OPA does have the right to refuse to make any purchase they do not believe is appropriate. OPAs do not have the staff to visit every supplier although each area does have a wide base of suppliers that are willing to provide tax free purchases through an OPA. Of course, in reality it is up to the individual who wants to make a purchase from a supplier to ask if tax can be relieved, obtain an offer (not an invoice), produce it to the OPA and request processing of the purchase.

Q: *Could a letter in German be produced for retailers not yet part of the system explaining what it is and how to process it?*

A: Annex C to SO BA(G) 5203 is an introductory letter to suppliers in both English and German.

11. NAAFI

Q: *Do NAAFI have any plans to introduce an internet home shopping or home delivery service? This would really assist families when their soldier is deployed.*

A: This has been investigated on numerous occasions but unfortunately the costs are prohibitive.

Q: *Why can't some of the money that NAAFI give back to the forces be put into reducing prices further?*

A: Our welfare return payment is calculated based on our service level agreement (SLA).

Q: *Why is baby milk so expensive? Why can't it be subsidized?*

A: Due to NAAFI's buying power and transportation costs this does prove challenging, however prices have recently been reduced on over 100 'Basic British Essentials' which includes products such as bread, milk, eggs, butter and baby milk.

Q: *Why were prices in the NAAFI so exorbitant over Christmas? Will the products in store this Christmas be more affordable and more in line with UK prices?*

A: NAAFI doesn't pretend to always be the cheapest, however we did have over 12,000 products within 3 for 2 deals which we believe did offer our consumers an excellent deal.

Q: *I have three children under 4, please can you provide double trolleys?*

A: This sounds like a good idea and the request has been passed on to NAAFI's property department.

Q: *Why are products that could be sourced locally so expensive?*

A: A key part of NAAFI's consumer offering is that we offer 'convenience' and a 'taste of home' to service personnel and their families who are posted overseas. By offering well-known brands, English labelling and British staff, NAAFI hopes to give it's consumers the 'home comforts' that they associate with home, thus ensuring they are not disadvantaged by being overseas.

13: Leave

Q: *Why are leave dates so inflexible?*

A: It is a commander's responsibility to ensure that Service personnel take their full leave entitlement. The advice is that the Serviceperson approaches his/her immediate commander with proposed leave dates allowing for restricted leave periods and giving as much notice as possible.

Q: *Why isn't all lost leave recorded on JPA? My husband has been unable to take all his leave due to the pressure of constant deployments and exercise. Why can't leave be accumulated and used added to Gardening Leave?*

A: Up to 15 days' Annual Leave that remains untaken at the end of each leave year will be carried forward automatically to the next leave year. Periods in excess of 15 days' untaken Annual Leave may be carried forward to the next leave year, subject to the approval of the CO. After 3 years or at the end of a tour, whichever is sooner, personnel are to take all untaken leave. The leave is to be taken whilst on the strength of the losing unit. If individuals are in doubt as to their entitlement, they should in the first instance seek advice from their Cbt HR Spec and the authoritative document is the JSP 760.

14: Health

Q: *Swine Flu has reached pandemic proportions – what is the Army doing to protect all members of BFG? Can you assure us that everybody will be able to receive a vaccine if necessary?*

A: Provisions to deal with Swine Flu in BFG match those in the UK. We have access to antivirals and will receive vaccines when they become available. The response across BFG is coordinated by the Pandemic Response Cell in HQ UKSC which has met six times to review preparatory measures. The BFG Health Service Outbreak Control Team has also met twice to check that medical arrangements are satisfactory.

Q: *Why are cigarettes so cheap in BFG? Surely people would be more likely to quit if you charged a BFG tax which would make them more expensive and would provide more funds.*

A: BFGHS has no role in determining the price of products supplied through retail outlets. This is an issue for HQ UKSC. Smoking is a major cause of ill health and we would support measures to make cigarettes less available, particularly to young people.

Q: *Why do families who have started IVF treatment in the UK have to pay for their own accommodation when they return for treatment?*

A: Families who have embarked upon NHS IVF treatment in the UK are entitled to travel and subsistence from Germany in order to continue NHS treatment in the UK (ie treated as if they were attending a routine UK hospital appt). Families who have embarked upon private treatment in the UK are entitled to Air Trooper travel only due to geographical distance.

Q: *There is a shortage of female doctors in BFG – why can't fortnightly clinics be available with a female doctor in all locations?*

A: BFGHS endeavour to ensure that female doctors are available in all stations. Whilst we cannot recruit female staff preferentially, we have recruited some female doctors in the recent round of appointments which will help to alleviate the situation. We also try to fill gaps by placing female military medical officers where there are no female CMPs. In doing so, we hope to avoid the need for peripatetic clinics which are unsatisfactory for both patients and staff.

Q: *Why do I have to travel to the Gilead for pre-natal scans when there are more local hospitals which would save my husband taking so much time off work?*

A: There are only 2 routine Pre-natal scans in the 9 month period. These are done at the DGP where there is the British support team, and where the mother to be has an opportunity to meet the staff who are responsible for the care during delivery.

Q: *Why don't medical centres have to offer all their appointments on the day the patient calls? Why do I sometimes have to wait a 4 days?*

A: Some patients do need to be seen the same day, if their condition is urgent. If all appointments are filled 'in advance' these patients will suffer. If your requirement is less urgent, then accepting 3 working days will ensure that next time you need an urgent appointment it will be given.

Q: *Why can't I have a coil fitted at my local Medical Centre?*

A: It is not possible for all doctors to have sufficient exposure to IUD fitting to maintain the required level of expertise therefore it is better that they are fitted by a smaller number of individual practitioners. There has been a local problem in one station but it is the intent of BFGHS that one doctor in each practice will be able to fit coils so that patients will not be required to travel.

Q: *What effort is made to increase awareness of contraceptive services to avoid the post-tour birth rate spike?*

A: The BFG Community is of a high child bearing age group and all Med Centres provide contraceptive advice. Everyone is entitled to attend the clinics. Preventing a post tour spike has not been deemed a problem (discounting those individuals who may have a health risk).

Q: *What rights do dependents have to medical information regarding their soldier if the soldier has contracted an STD whilst on exercise in Kenya or Canada?*

A: There is no right of access to information in relation to another individual unless this is with patient consent. Where there is an issue relating to spread of a life threatening infection there is a precedent that suggests disclosure may be in the public interest.

Q: *When will a positive decision be made regarding families dental treatment in the UK? Those of us that have husbands in corps not regiments and who move every 2 or 3 years just about to get to the top of the NHS waiting list and it is time to move again.*

A: The issue of poor access to NHS dental services has been reported by some Service families to military welfare organizations and in some cases their MPs. The MOD/DoH Partnership Board tasked the respective welfare organizations to investigate this concern. Subsequent research has not identified significant problems with access to NHS dentistry specifically for Service families although access can vary depending on the overall local situation for NHS dental patients. Better liaison between military and local Primary Care Trusts (PCT) has been put in place and improved information for families about accessing NHS dentistry is available. There is no funding or capacity for DDS to provide treatment for Service families in the UK. The most sensible approach is to inform patients of PCT services and ensure continued good liaison between military medical and dental personnel and local PCTs. Good relations with PCTs have been witnessed in areas of significant military population e.g. Wiltshire, North Yorkshire. Dental practices are independent providers who have contracts with the PCT. Commissioning of services – UDA provision - is responsive to reported need. Mechanisms exist within Service welfare organizations to address particular cases. There is also a mechanism to pick up and report trends to the DH through the MOD/DoH Partnership Board.

Q: *Are there any plans to review the staffing levels to prevent over stretch of many of the health providers in BFG?*

A: BFGHS are reviewing how resources are used locally so that the best use is made of them and also has put in a bid for funding for additional staff as appropriate.

Q: *How many medical breaches of confidentiality or misuses of personal information have been reported, investigated and substantiated in BFG? What, if any, have any consequences or outcomes?*

A: BFGHS takes all medical confidentiality and data protection breaches seriously. Information governance has been placed on the BFG Health Service Risk Register and BGFHS has sought advice from the Surgeon General's Department regarding a number of areas where they wish to review their practice.

Q: *When visiting consultants refer BFG patients to a UK hospital for treatment, the patient can find that they must remain in the UK during a recuperation period during which they must fend for themselves until they are declared fit to return to Germany. Is it a sensible option when it can be the cause of stress and anxiety to both the patient and his family?*

A: We endeavour to provide treatment for our patients in Germany which is why we recently negotiated the reimbursement of tertiary care costs with the Department of Health. This arrangement is working well. Occasionally consultants may feel that treatment would be better provided in the UK and, in the patient's interest, we facilitate this. In the event that we are unable to provide appropriate care in Germany, usually because community services are not as available as in the UK, we recommend that patients are posted back to the UK so that they may receive the care that they need.

15: Welfare

Q: *When you are posted on attachment the welfare network is not sufficient – it does not compare with when you are with a regiment. The Services Command Paper issued last year mentioned ‘...A perceived lack of welfare support for families when a serving partner is deployed on operations, compounded by a lack of information about how to access support mechanisms’. Why can no-one fund an information pack as part of the Conflict Prevention Fund centrally, which will cover situations such as deployment, relationships, homecoming, children etc.. It will be issued to all families and only updated as a deployment is imminent. The ‘Quick Series’ guide on housing is one such publication.*

A: (Reply by SO2 Families Land Forces): The Army's aim is to use the Chain of Command as our principle source of trusted information complemented by Internet, ArmyNET, HIVE etc.. In addition to this all units should run induction briefings for families and single soldiers on arrival within a new unit in order to ensure individuals know who to turn to for support. A broad range of information channels are available to Service Personnel and their families: ArmyNET, HIVE, BFBS, SSVc, Periodicals such as Sixth-Sense, Service and Families Federation magazines and Community guides. Also the feasibility of producing a talking book version of the Regular Army Families Deployment Guide is being examined. Both are funded by CPF and are available through units in hardcopy and on the internet, ArmyNET and intranet. Funding is being sought for producing a families' guide to deployment DVD. The very old 1998 guide for Army Families is also being updated to produce something more useful which covers a wide range of topical family information. The Quick series guide didn't completely meet our needs. A quarterly Army *WelfareMatters* newsletter was started in Apr 07 for the Chain of Command and thus Army Families should be better informed. The central role of HIVE in providing information services to the Service community is acknowledged. A review of the role, structure, management and outputs of HIVE is underway lead by Col AWS to ensure that it is best configured to provide this support.

Q: *Please could we have an update with regards to the number of full-time social workers and locum social workers in BFG with more than three years UK Local Authority experience?*

A: Fulltime = 12, Team-Managers (FT) = 4 JHQ Managers = 2 and Locums = 5 Gaps = 0. The contract does demand 3 years Local Authority experience but does not stipulate with UK. While turnover in Social Work staff in BFG is an issue, arguably BFSWS does well to keep staffing near or at full. In comparison with the social work service in UK, BFSWS is in a fair position.

Q: *What quality assurances are in place to monitor the performance of individual social workers and their line managers and which UK Local Authority does our social work service follow in terms of best practice?*

A: Social Workers are supervised and have regular Supervision/Training sessions with appointed Senior Welfare Workers. BFSWS, as a Contractor, is liable to Ofsted inspection. The Command, as a quasi-local authority and as the customer paying for the service also has links to quality assurance. There are also links through appointed desk officers where trends and developments are processed, as well as the desk officers fulfilling the role of 'intelligent customer' on issues as they arise. The individual is able to raise points direct to the Chain of Command for investigation through the 'Complaints and Compliments' procedure.

Lengthy research over a period of years considered a number of UK LAs to identify a single one as the BFG benchmark, but with no success. Government Office (GO) East is the focus for professional advice and comparison.

Q: *What more could be done to ensure UWOs comprehend the complexities of domestic violence abuse? How better could their actions be managed / supervised?*

A: All UWO's have TOR's and a charter which they must follow. UWO training includes Domestic Violence issues and how to manage them. The management and supervision of a UWO is a Commanding Officers responsibility. This HQ will include Domestic Abuse training on UWO and relevant J1 welfare training courses held in Germany. We would welcome the relevant expertise for input into this training.

Q: *£20 000 of public money was ring fenced last year for the delivery of free Relate counselling to all army personnel in the UK? Please can we have an update on this sum?*

A: Monies were secured by AWS but not the authority to spend it.

Q: *Following on the back of the Baby P case, how is the safeguarding performance of individual health and welfare agencies in BFG being monitored and/or updated?*

A: UKSC have a Safeguarding Children Board with a number of operational groups that is responsible for the monitoring of all agencies in how they discharge their duties in the safeguarding arena. Since the tragic death of Baby P, we need a development day to ensure UKSC process etc adherence to the Lord Lamings recommendations.

16: Miscellaneous

Q: *How do personnel in BFG apply for a disabled sticker for their car?*

A: This varies from one German authority to another; they often need evidence of the applicant's Disabled Persons Allowance before they will award the sticker. Applicants from the UK who have already had a sticker from their UK local authority are encouraged to re-apply to them, but again there is no guaranteed response. J1 PS HQ UKSC is collecting data to provide evidence that may allow BFG to issue stickers in the future

Q: *I want to play the UK lottery whilst I am living here. Why can't Camelot be made to change their regulations so that I can play legally?*

A: In order to be eligible to play the National Lottery the player must meet 3 distinct criteria – A residential address in the UK or Isle of Man from which to claim, be 16 years of age or over and have a UK/IOM Sterling bank account. Serving personnel overseas fail to meet the first, and despite PS4(A) liaising with Camelot, Camelot are unwilling to change their stance. Individuals are eligible to play to the Euro Millions Lottery which usually produces much larger Jackpots. Armed Forces personnel serving abroad who are not currently resident in the UK or IOM can still play The National Lottery with friends and colleagues by forming a syndicate with a Syndicate Manager who is based in the UK.

Q: *The current voting system available to overseas personnel and families is out-of-date, unreliable and disenfranchises the Forces Population – what moves are being made to find a workable solution which ensures that service personnel can vote in person?*

A: The issue of overseas voting is recognized by the MoD, the Ministry of Justice and the Electoral Commission (EC), the latter of which meet every 6 weeks to discuss voting for the services community. The EC is receptive to amending the UK voting system and is aware of other countries more flexible methods; however UK cannot simply adopt another countries system for various reasons; principally primary government legislation and potential fraud issues. It is recognised that Postal Ballot voting whilst serving overseas is not a guaranteed method of voting however, CGSs Briefing Team Report stated that whilst for many, proxy voting may not be the voting method of choice, it does support the right to vote whilst serving overseas. The Electoral Commission own

the legislation despite the MoD strongly representing the views of many. Perhaps the AFF may wish to write to the EC to support the MoD.

Q: *Why are the soldiers returning from operations being sent on lengthy exercises and adventure training?*

A: The Chain of Command is working very hard to reduce Nights out of Bed. However, there still are events where we consider it important in the development of soldiers, and the needs of units, to train. Some of this has to be where the appropriate facilities exist, resulting in time spent away from home.

Q: *Sometime ago a 3,4,5 system was introduced (and disappeared) to reduce the length of the working day. No meetings after 3, no phone calls after 4 and no emails after 5. Is there any scope to re-introduce this?*

A: The staff answer is that the CoC needs to examine how they work, and make a decision as to what is considered appropriate both for the organisation and the individual. Commanders at all times must not neglect their responsibility regarding Good Man Management. We must encourage all to work hard, but give time for down time too.

Q: *According to SI BA(G) 3217, grown up children, and possibly their own children are not classed as close relatives for visiting purposes. Visiting relatives are defined as those not medically or financially dependent upon a member of the force/civilian component. Where does this leave those of us who have grown up children who are financially dependent?*

A: This depends whether we are talking about Close Relative Status or Close Relative Visitor. Dependent Children and Spouse's are not mentioned in the SIBA(G), intentionally, as they are obviously direct relatives of the Head of House or his/her Spouse, and this **would** include grandchildren. If a head of house is living unaccompanied in Germany, he/she would have to sponsor visits of their spouse as a 'close relative' - they have limited status, and do not get ID Cards, med provision or entitlements to buy tax goods.