

Armed forces committee report

Written report to the ARM 2023

This session the committee has been chaired by Colonel Mark Weir and deputy chaired by Major Sandy Wood who will continue to support the committee for the 2023-2024 session. Dr Grant Dex has provided representation on civilian matters and will continue to do so for the coming session.

Pay

The armed forces committee submitted written evidence to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) in January this year, followed in February by the in-person evidence session. DMS consultants and GPs have seen a real term decrease in their basic pay of 27.8% (RPI) between April 2009 and April 2022 and we know from our 2022 BMA survey that 92% of regular and reservist respondents said they were concerned with pay erosion.

Our recommendations to the AFPRB focused on; the pay review process, basic pay, junior pay, reservist pay, CEAs and trainer pay, fees and pensions. The evidence provided makes the case for recognition of a group of service personnel who increasingly feel taken for granted.

It will not be enough for the AFPRB to recommend a token pay award in 2023. It will not even be enough for them to match (for the first time in years) the offer made to NHS doctors, unless this offer, like the times, is extraordinary. We await AFPRB Report which is expected in the summer.

Pensions

Over the last session, pensions and pension taxation have remained priority areas for the committee. In recent months, following the BMA's intense engagement with the Treasury, the Chancellor, and others, an increase to the annual allowance and the abolition of the lifetime allowance was announced. However, the problem has not been fixed completely, and it is imperative that the new £60k level of the annual allowance retains its value in real terms, keeping pace with inflation. Other issues related to the tapered annual allowance and tiering of employee contribution rates remain and the BMA continues to lobby on these points.

McCloud is the other big pension issue. We have been working closely with the Forces Pension Society to develop a response to the consultation on changes to the scheme regulations needed to implement the remedy. We have shared our response with our members and encouraged individuals to submit their own response to the consultation in the light of what we have said. Our response is also available on the BMA [website](#).

For more information about pensions and upcoming pension events please visit our [website](#).

Junior doctor strike action

Since junior doctor strike action commenced in April, the AFC have worked to support armed forces junior members who cannot partake in industrial action. We have reiterated that it is important, particularly for trainees, to ensure their employer prioritises patient safety if members are due to work on strike days. We have reminded members to be mindful of the medico-legal implications of their actions and to ensure that they continue to work within the limits of their competence and job role to always maintain patient safety.

We have developed guidance on for [armed forces junior doctors](#) as well for [DMS consultants](#) during periods of junior doctor industrial action and continue to respond to individual issues on a case by case basis.

Engagement

Work to increase BMA engagement with armed forces doctors has continued this session. We have committed to circulating a newsletter to our members three times a year to update them on recent work of the committee and support available for armed forces members. We have attended a number of armed forces events such as The Association of Service Physicians' conference and the Defence Deanery inductions to broaden our engagements with armed forces doctors and promote the support available to them. We continue to look for ways we can better engage with doctors across the services, for example we plan to hold a webinar in the autumn to support our junior members navigating their pay and contractual concerns.

Annual armed forces conference

In March, we held the annual armed forces conference at BMA House, our first in person conference since 2019. The conference was a tremendous success and was well attended by regular, reservists and civilians, as well as medical students. The conference provides a crucial opportunity to bring delegates together to consider and discuss matters impacting them. It was fantastic to see so many delegates engaged in the various sessions throughout the day. As we approach a new session, we are starting to plan next year's conference which we hope will bring even more armed forces doctors together.

Working with the MOD

We continue to hold regular meetings between representatives from the BMA, the BDA and the Defences Medical Services (DMS), including the Director General. These discussions allow us a space to raise concerns on the issues facing armed forces doctors and to seek opportunities for collaboration between the employer and the trade unions. Our lead on CMP matters Dr Grant Dex regularly represents civilian doctors at MOD meetings and consultations, providing the BMA perspective to a range of issues, including supporting occupational health medicine CMPs' job with concerns over pay and finalising the collective bargaining agreement between MOD and BMA after 5 years of discussion.

Final words

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for their hard work and valuable input over the last session. I'd also like to thank the secretariat for their continued support. I look forward to the coming session where I hope we can continue to drive forward important work on behalf of armed forces doctors.

Colonel Mark Weir

Chair, AFC

[Armed forces committee overview](#)