

Report recommends key changes to Armed Forces Lived Experience

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Research by leading food and facilities management services provider, [Sodexo](#), has sought to address growing concerns regarding the Lived Experience of members of the Armed Forces based in the UK. The report, titled *'The Future Lived Experience: Supporting the UK's Armed Forces in the 2030s'*, is the latest step in Sodexo's ongoing research and solution development in the defence industry.

The report's purpose is to support the ongoing work of the Armed Forces in their recruitment and retention drives, ensuring that those living and working on military bases have the best possible Lived Experience. It comes at a time when the combined full-time trained strength of the UK Armed Forces is rapidly decreasing.

Overall figures released by the Ministry of Defence show the combined full-time trained strength of the UK's Armed Forces decreased by 3,620 personnel to a total of 127,040 between January 2024 and January 2025¹. Meanwhile, 41% of personnel are now actively looking for a new role outside the Forces².

Research instigated by Sodexo has drawn up a series of ten recommendations³ to improve the Lived Experience, covering areas of Armed Forces life from accommodation and food to internet access and the provision of childcare.

A major theme to emerge is the need for policy change to account for the evolution of modern family life and personal relationships. A key recommendation in the report is the creation of so-called *'family passports'*. These would combine existing data on health needs, the education stage of children, and housing requirements to ensure continuity and a seamless transition between defence sites as families are transferred.

Recommendations also look at the role of food and accommodation as the essentials of a “modern, stable” Lived Experience within the Armed Forces. The report advocates a minimum, universal measure of the quality of the Lived Experience to ensure consistency across the Defence estate.

A further recommendation covers the role of military establishments in local communities and makes clear the need to better engage with those ‘outside the wire’ to improve the image of the Armed Forces and encourage more young people to consider defence careers.

Commenting on the report’s findings Paul Anstey, CEO of Sodexo Government UK & Ireland, said: “As a facilities management company with deep links to the Armed Forces community, we see it as our duty to work with partners and colleagues to deliver a Lived Experience standard that a modern military population expects, and of which we can be proud.

“In response to this, and in line with the government’s ‘One Defence’ strategy, we have embarked on this ambitious programme of research as we look ahead to the 2030s and beyond and consider the changing nature of Defence people and their needs.

“This forms part of our wider body of research and solution development in the defence space which clearly shows that the Lived Experience is critical to the happiness and success of our Armed Forces.”

Mark Baker, Chief Operating Officer of Sodexo Defence, added: “The recommendations of this report speak to the candid nature of the conversations we were able to have with people from across the military rank structure and the Civil Service, as well as academics, those in the third sector, and peers in the facilities management industry.

“Combined with our Annual Defence Survey, this valuable insight into the views of a wide range of stakeholders sheds new light on what is expected of the Lived Experience, and how we can best anticipate the needs of our Armed Forces into the 2030s and beyond. Many of our findings will not be new news to those in Armed Forces leadership. However, we feel the detail of this report represents not just the evidence but a constructive discussion of options that will address issues with the Lived Experience.

“At a time when recruitment and retention pose a significant challenge, the Lived Experience of those in our Armed Forces is under more scrutiny than ever. We look forward to working with the Armed Forces and our other partners to further influence this discussion and play our part in creating the Lived Experience that our Armed Forces deserve.”

Sodexo’s report - ‘The Future Lived Experience: Supporting the UK’s Armed Forces in the 2030s’ - can be accessed here: <https://sodexouki.info/FutureLivedExperience>