Supporting the Armed Forces in the NHS
Guide
This guide provides all of the necessary information to guide leads on the Armed Forces agenda within the NHS. Taking a step by step model to offer an effective approach for your trust on how to advocate and demonstrate support to the Armed Forces community.
Champions role

As you are leading on the Armed Forces agenda within your NHS organisation, we know that you recognise how important it is that your Armed Forces colleagues are supported within your organisation.

The first step to advocating the Armed Forces agenda is to join our NHS Employers Armed Forces Network, providing an opportunity to connect with fellow leads, share and learn best practice and be kept up to date with relevant information. To join the network, register as your organisation’s NHS Reserve Forces Champion.

Your role as a champion is to be the main point of contact between your organisation, local units and Defence Relationship Management (DRM). The responsibility of the champion is to support reservist employees, to assist managers with NHS Employers’ guidance and to influence your organisation as a whole.

“It’s not about doing great things but about doing small things in a great way”
Influence

The essential first step to leading on the reservist agenda is influencing the whole organisation and ensuring that support for the Armed Forces runs throughout. To do this, NHS Employers has a number of informative resources that will enable everyone in your organisation to influence, including:

- A set of five scenario-based managers' guides providing useful guidance in specific scenarios, ranging from a colleague expressing interest in joining the Reserve Forces, to supporting reservists who have been mobilised.

- Our key factsheet is a useful tool that can be used by anyone in the workforce to increase understanding and bust common myths around employing reservists.

- A variety of blogs from reservists demonstrating the skills and training that are included in their military career, exposing individuals to the role of a reservist and how this can positively impact on their NHS career.

- Introduction to the Reserve Forces video shares experiences of reservists from the NHS and how an NHS organisation has benefited from their additional skills.

Getting support from your board is crucial in influencing your organisation. Dean Fathers, chair of Nottinghamshire Healthcare, acknowledges the benefits that reservists bring to the trust:

“Reservists bring with them a wealth of experience and skills. As an organisation we are required to be safe, effective, caring, responsive and well lead. The training that reservists receive aligns strongly with these defining principles and also provides them with real resilience and an ability to work in, and lead, teams. All this helps to support us in delivering outstanding care and great outcomes for our patients and service users”
Identification

Reservists are more likely to come forward and declare their status if they can see that their employer recognises the additional skills gained from their military service. Having a positive culture that supports reservists makes your organisation an employer of choice, using positive communications to publicly display support is the most important factor in building a relationship between you as a champion and your reservists.

There are a few steps you can take to display support, such as:

- Signing the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Circulating blogs and news stories from your reservists in staff communications.
- Working your way through the Employer Recognition Scheme and display the scheme’s logo.
- Making reservists visible during national events including Reserves Day and Armed Forces week.

To find out if there are reservists in your workforce check to see if their status has been recorded on the electronic staff record (ESR). You could also:

- discuss the reservist agenda with line managers and see if they have any reservists in their teams
- circulate surveys on the intranet or via pay slips.

Check out our case study from South Central Ambulance Service NHS Trust to learn how they used these methods.
Retention

All NHS organisations are encouraged to become an employer of choice, to receive the benefits of recruiting and retaining members of the Reserve Forces and the wider Armed Forces community.

Having a policy for your reservist employees, either as a standalone policy or as part of a special leave agreement, is a way to ensure that they are supported throughout their military and NHS career. Look at our [model policy example](#) to create a policy or review a current version.

The NHS Employers model policy sets out the gold standard, which includes two weeks additional paid annual leave allowance. However, we would advise that any additional leave granted, paid or unpaid, allows reservist employees to meet their annual training commitments.

NHS Employers has contact with the majority of NHS organisations in England. From the data that we have collected from those that offer their reservist employees additional leave, the majority offer paid additional leave of at least one week.

“We are very fortunate to employ a number of professionals who are also reservists and the skills and experience they bring to their NHS role as a result of being a reservist is invaluable. Every year, reservists receive regular world-class training that helps develop their teamwork and leadership skills. They are taught to think on their feet, have exceptional organisational abilities and are able to cope under pressure... training of this quality would cost a civilian employer thousands of pounds a year to provide.”

Sir Andrew Cash, Chief Executive, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Public Commitment

Your role is to encourage your organisation to show their public commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community through the following means:

– By signing the Armed Forces Covenant, organisations build their reputation as an Armed Forces friendly employer, including agreeing to the two main principles of support, being showcased on the public signatory document and receiving logos to be used publicly.

– Work your way through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. There are three levels of award; bronze, silver and gold for employers that pledge, demonstrate and advocate support to the Armed Forces community.

– Holding events where your reservists are visible lets them know that they are both valued and welcome in your organisation. National events you can get involved in and share through social media, include:

  • Reserves Day
  • Armed Forces Week
  • Military March
  • You can also arrange annual dinners for NHS reservists within your organisation.

– Use the NHS Reserve Forces footprint map, which allows employers to view local contact details of organisations that can help your trust increase support to reservists.
Recruitment

Employing reservists can help your organisation to recruit some of the most trained and highly skilled individuals across the NHS. There are many ways to be recognised as an employer of choice during recruitment. Key things to remember are:

- Publicly use Armed Forces Covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme award logos.
- Welcome applications from Armed Forces personnel.
- NHS Jobs are providing a way to mark an organisation as an Armed Forces friendly employer on job adverts by displaying covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme award logos.
- Use local military job boards to share vacancies in your workplace.
- Get involved with Step into Health, a programme which taps into the recruitment talent pool from the Armed Forces community, as an access pathway for service leavers from the military into the NHS.
- Make yourself known as an NHS Reserve Forces Champion using our poster to display in your organisation.

Take a look at a case study from Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust who support the Armed Forces community and openly welcome reservists during recruitment drives.
Partnerships

Working in partnership with other organisations is crucial if you are to successfully identify, retain and support reservists in your workforce. It is important that you understand what each organisation does, their role and how you can access information.

Our support organisations directory can help you understand the many different organisations involved with the Armed Forces community, including:

- **Defence Relationship Management (DRM)** sits within the Ministry of Defence (MoD), it’s purpose is to be a single point of contact between employers and the MoD. DRM exists to support employers with queries relating to deployment, mobilisation, training and financial options that are available to employers of reservists.

- **Reserve Forces’ & Cadets’ Association (RFCA)** work very closely with DRM, each region has an employer engagement director that sits within the RFCA. You can find your regional director on our footprint map.

- Reservists belong to local units, starting a relationship with your local unit means you will find out when a deployment is likely and also key training dates well in advance, as it is the role of the commanding officer to notify employers. You can also use the footprint map to identify local units that are closest to your organisation.

- Our network events and webinars offer a place to share best practice between NHS Employers and other NHS organisations and to network with other champions from across the country.
Communications

Communications, internally and externally, is an important aspect of showing your commitment to supporting members of the Reserve Forces.

As part of our communications tools, we provide editable example articles that can be tailored to your individual support, available for your trusts internet and intranet.

Social media is a useful communications channel, remember to:

- Use your organisations social networks to share support for the Armed Forces community, demonstrate advocacy by getting involved with national and local events and make your reservist colleagues visible.

- Follow NHS Employers’ social media channels to keep up to date with the employing reservists in the NHS programme, the support we offer and what is happening nationally.

@NHSE_Gemma

Supporting the Armed Forces in the NHS page
Checklist

- Have you nominated a dedicated champion?
- Do you have board support?
- Do you offer additional leave?
- Do you influence your organisation?
- Do you support the Armed Forces community?
- Do you encourage your reservists to declare their status?
- Have you signed the Armed Forces covenant?
- Have you applied for the Employer Recognition Scheme award?
- Have you displayed your champion poster?
- Do you employ members of the Armed Forces Community and have you met with them?
- Do you have a specific policy for reservists?
- Do you get involved with national and local events?
- Do you welcome applications from reservists or the wider Armed Forces community?
- Do you mark yourself as an Armed Forces friendly employer on NHS jobs?
- Do you have a partnership with local military units?
- Have you attended any of NHS Employers network events?
- Do you use social media to share support?
- Do you follow @NHSE_Gemma?
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Visit our webpages [www.nhsemployers.org/reservists](http://www.nhsemployers.org/reservists)

Contact us at [armedforces@nhsemployers.org](mailto:armedforces@nhsemployers.org)

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