LEARNING FROM THE RESERVIST SUPPORT INITIATIVE AWARD

The award

In 2019, NHS Employers sponsored the HSJ Reservist Support Initiative award. This award was launched to recognise organisations who are excelling in retaining and developing the careers of reservists in the NHS.

Nine organisations were shortlisted, and their submissions contain good practice that demonstrate what it means to be a supportive employer of reservists in the NHS and can help you support the Armed Forces agenda within your trust.

Encouraging internal support

The shortlisted entries all showed the importance of encouraging the support of reservist staff internally. Submissions showed that awareness of your Armed Forces community can be promoted in a variety of ways, such as:

- through your internal communications
- in a staff magazine
- by having dedicated space on your intranet.

Hosting events such as reservist breakfasts and afternoon tea networking sessions also proved a positive way to show your ongoing support. Developing an internal network provides opportunity for staff to meet other members of the Armed Forces community and is a space to:

- share experience
- seek support
- improve the feeling of inclusion among Armed Forces staff.
The entries also emphasised the importance of having an Armed Forces champion to lead on the agenda for the whole organisation. The role varies between organisations but typically includes:

- supporting military colleagues
- organising internal networking events
- engaging with other organisations and military colleagues to raise the profile of the NHS as a supportive Armed Forces employer.

Most submissions showcased their dedicated policy for employing members of the Armed Forces. Having a policy in place will advocate paid leave for reservists to attend training commitments, either as part of a special leave or separately. The NHS Employers model policy can be tailored to the individual needs of your organisation.

**Shortlisted trusts**

East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust  
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust  
North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust  
South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust  
St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust  
The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust  
West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust  
York Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

**Promoting public support**

All shortlisted trusts had increased their visibility publicly as a forces-friendly employer. Each submission emphasised the importance of having a strong online presence in terms of engaging with and recruiting members of the Armed Forces into the organisation. Social media also played a key role in promoting the trusts as supportive Armed Forces employers.

Several shortlisted trusts had created a dedicated web page to advertise themselves as forces-friendly. In some cases, this was accompanied by case studies that focused on reservist employees, their experience and the value they bring to the NHS.

The entries also saw the inclusion of advertising within external media, such as features in magazines and public advertising. Award winners The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust also advertised their support on billboards within their local community.
“Our reservist policy has been widely welcomed since its introduction, with staff telling us it is now easier for them to fulfil their training requirements while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.”

East of England Ambulance Service

**Developing connections externally**

Making connections with external organisations such as local units and military charities was a common theme, particularly seen through engagement with Regional Employer Engagement Directors (REEDs). REEDs are employed by the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association to offer tailored support and advice relating to the employment of the Armed Forces community. This support includes:

- Help with making local military connections.
- Putting forward a nomination for an Employer Recognition Scheme award.
- Guidance in signing the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust gave details of a local forum for Armed Forces support that they are part of, which enables them to share good practice and network with other non-NHS organisations.

Several of the shortlisted organisations gave detail about the value of military-organised events that they found value in participating in. By making connections with local units, employers described the benefits of developing an understanding of military values which helps them become a more effective Armed Forces employer. Events included:

- South Central Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust, who accompanied the Royal Marines reserves on a winter training exercise in Norway.
- York Teaching Hospitals collaboration with 2nd Medical Brigade for their simulation mass casualty live exercise, which tested the trust’s incident response plan and provided a suitable training environment for the staff who would have to respond in a mass casualty incident.

**Top tips**

1. Nominate an Armed Forces champion to lead on delivering the agenda.
2. Know who your reservists are and have a policy in place to support them with their annual training commitments.
3. Publicly advertise your organisation as forces-friendly.
4. Connect with local and national organisations for support, guidance and ideas.
5. Get in touch with us at armedforces@nhsemployers.org to see how we can help you.