

 **ROYAL  
AIR FORCE  
Families  
Federation**

# **SURVEY SUMMARY**

# **Access to bases**

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**2019**

The RAF Families Federation ran an online survey between September and October 2019, looking into the lived experience of RAF personnel and families when trying to access facilities on bases.

The survey followed a wider piece of work on the experiences of RAF Dispersed Families, where access to bases was highlighted as an issue for families. In addition, several issues and complaints about access to bases had been raised separately to the RAF Families Federation over the last 2 to 3 years.

As well as this online survey, the RAF Families Federation contacted 12 stations to understand an indicative range of Control of Entry policies in use.

This Summary Report intends to highlight some of the key findings, and make recommendations for next steps.

# Who took part?

## Responses



**54** (15%) **314** (85%)

■ Serving ■ Spouse/partners

## Relationship status



**353** (96%) **14** (4%) **1** (0%)

■ Married or in a civil partnership ■ In a long-term relationship ■ Other

# Where did they live?

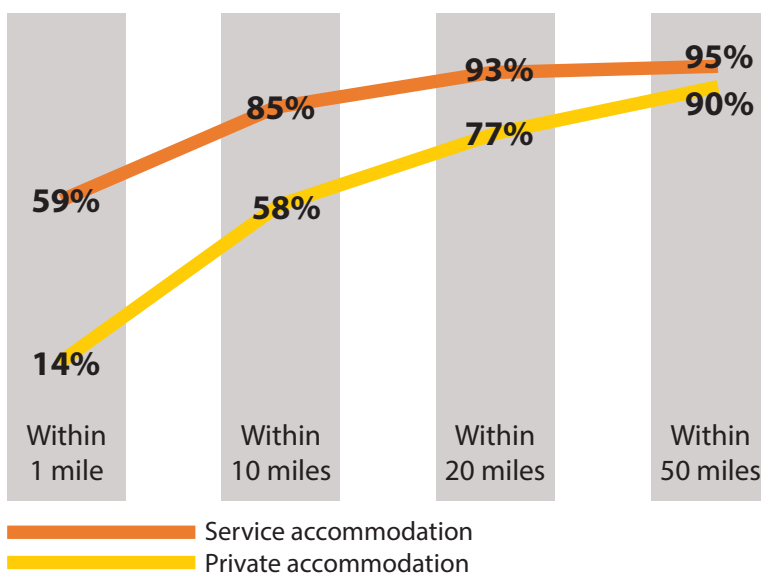
## Accommodation type

- 244 in SFA (66%), 6 in SSFA (2%), 1 in SLA
- 112 in privately owned accommodation (31%), 4 in privately rented accommodation (1%)
- 1 'other' [surplus SFA, partner living with parents]

## Distance from nearest military unit

- 88% of respondents live within 20 miles of an RAF station or other military unit.
- 77% of those in private accommodation live within 20 miles of a unit.

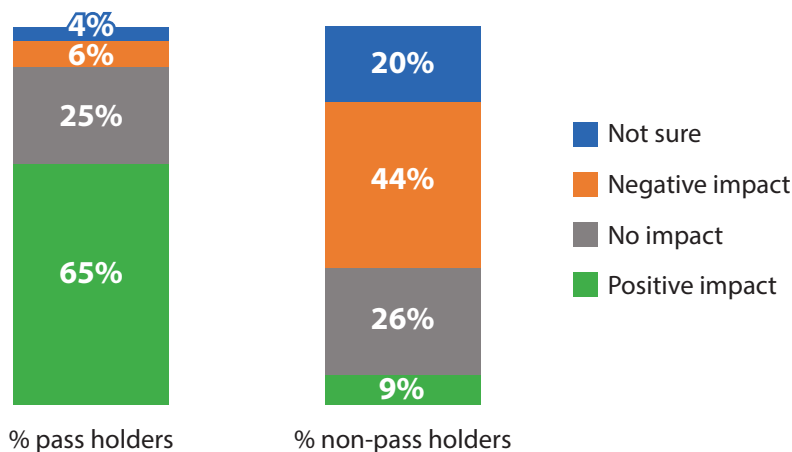
### Distance from home to nearest military unit



# What were the benefits of accessing a base?

65% of those who were able to access facilities said that this had a positive impact on their family (compared to just 9% of non-pass holders).

## Impact on family vs. access



Respondents listed a wide range of positive benefits, including:

**Welfare and support from the RAF** included access to HIVE, community support and welfare staff, deployment support and medical care

*"Being able to access the station means we have access to the welfare support team, SSAFA and the padre. All which have come in use for my family in the past 3 years of living here."*

**Social and leisure benefits** included opportunities to attend groups and events (for both adults and children), meet others and use sporting facilities

*"Being able to access a station is key for us as a family, most HIVEs and community support centres are behind the wire which are essential when your spouse is deployed."*

*"Being able to go on to the station is really good as there are community events happening in the cafe and church so my children and myself get to meet people and it can be very lonely otherwise."*

**Practical benefits** included collecting Serving spouse following deployment, car sharing, and independence (seeking information or making arrangements through stn without need for escort).

*"I drop my husband off at work on a morning as we only have 1 car."*

*"...picking husband up after deployment."*



**Psychological benefits** included a sense of belonging, being part of a community, and feeling valued.

*"It makes such a massive difference to how I feel about the RAF and how I am valued by the MOD."*

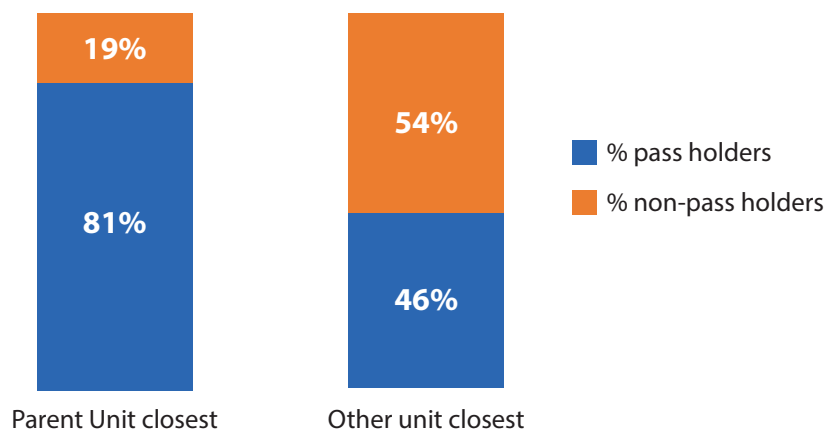
*"Mostly psychological - makes you feel part of it, rather than just an outsider... Without I think I would have asked him to leave the RAF earlier."*

*"My husband and children's lives would be very very different if they didn't have access to the domestic sites as it helps them to value my role in the RAF and feel involved."*

## Who could access facilities?

- 71% said that they/their partner could access a station
- 29% said that they could not
- 81% of those in Service accommodation had passes compared to just 50% of those in private accommodation
- Those living closest to their parent unit were more likely to have access than those living close to another unit.

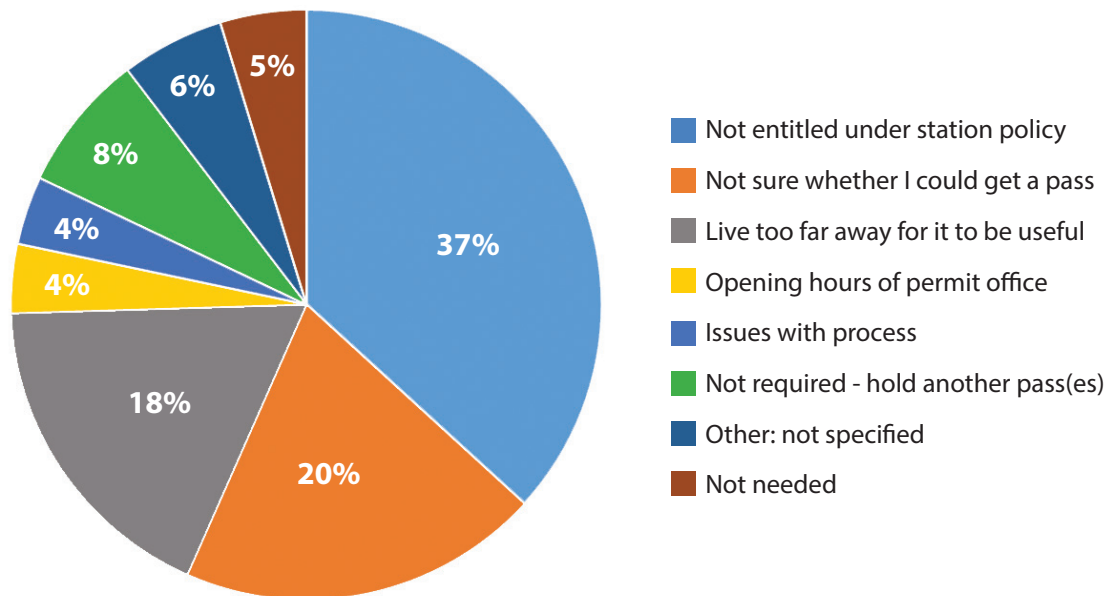
### Closest unit vs. access



- Responses indicate that current local policies do not encompass those living in private accommodation, or those located closest to a unit other than their parent station.

# What were the barriers to access?

## Reasons provided for not holding a pass



## Entitlement - specific groups

Current policy appears to exclude certain groups from access to stns, although this varies between units. Survey responses identified the following:

Currently broadly entitled:

- Families in privately arranged accommodation
- Those living closest to another unit (including families in retained or outlying SFA).

Not currently entitled:

- Those in long term relationships (NB despite change in entitlement to SFA)
- Children over the age of 18.

## Other barriers

- Uncertainty of entitlement meant that some respondents had not attempted to get a pass for their closest unit (20% of non-pass holders).
- Administration and processes for issuing passes was also described as an issue for some of those who were otherwise entitled to hold them. For example;
  - Opening hours of passes and permits offices
  - Delays/problems with application process
  - Inconsistent application of Stn policy
  - Confusion over which Stn should issue the pass (e.g. Cranwell and Coningsby).
- Distance from home to closest unit was another common reason provided for not holding a pass (18%). It was identified that draw-down of RAF stations in Scotland has left some families more geographically isolated.

## Access issues for those living on station

Some stations have SFA 'behind the wire', leading to frustration where difficulties were encountered for visitor access (including deliveries).

*"...it's really difficult for partners who are not your dependents or parents who provide childcare to obtain passes"*

## Why access may not be required

A small number of respondents identified that they would not benefit from access to their closest unit. Details included:

- Lack of facilities or activities offered
- Offer on station not suited to needs (e.g. no children, only in working hours)
- Ability to access equivalent support and/or facilities in civilian community
- Distance to unit (see above).

## Differing policies

Respondents noted that policies towards access differ significantly between units, causing confusion, and a sense of inequality of treatment.

*"It is frustrating that different units have different rules"*

*"Other camps allow over 18s living at home passes, why is their (sic) no consistency and consideration for our children still-living at home in full time education"*



# What impact did lack of access have?

## Lack of support

An inability to independently access welfare and community facilities was identified as contributing to a sense that families were not being supported by the RAF.

*"They are unable to access any dependents activities. Especially important for children's activities as I am only home at weekends, and this puts a significant strain in the whole family."*

*"During my husband's 6-month deployment we were unable to access and support or deployed activities. I asked if due to the deployment my 6-year-old son could attend the local Christmas party at Leuchars and was told no. Surely we are there to support each other."*

Some families equate a loss of entitlement to access as a loss of entitlement to support, meaning that they do not establish contact in other ways.

*"It's the lack of contact during deployments that need to be addressed for those not living on camp. My husband... would deploy every year for about 5 years. I never had any contact from the station."*

*"If the unit has a HIVE, I would like to access it, as I have had zero contact from the HIVE covering my spouse's unit (which is at the other end of the country)."*

Others raised a lack of awareness as to who should be supporting them, especially when living closer to another unit.

*"Being stuck between 2 stations hundreds of miles apart, whose duty does our welfare etc rest with? It's almost like we don't exist to either."*

*"I'm concerned about my husband being posted elsewhere if we decide to stay in our own house. What support will my nearest RAF base give me? How will deployment support work? Can we choose which base we belong to for mess functions and support etc? I assume with the push for home ownership/FAM this is being considered? But are the bases prepared to give support to families that don't have a direct connection to them?"*

## Feeling undervalued

Lack of access was in some cases aligned with loss of the psychological benefits outlined above. There was a possible loss of the sense of being valued as an RAF family, and belonging to that community.

*"Either we look after families properly as we did 30 years ago, or we stop doing it completely and pay people properly for the inconvenience of being relocated. The forces are doing neither, badly."*

*"Used to have a dependent pass which was taken away about 4 years ago, even though I'm still married to the same serving member. It made me feel that I wasn't part of the military family anymore!"*



## Isolation and loss of community

Similarly, some respondents felt isolated from the RAF community – and hence the RAF – through their inability to access it independently.

*“There are problems with access to the base once the serving member of the family is posted to a different location and the rest of the family stays in the SFA. They are immediately stripped off passes and medical care from the station level. This way the family remaining in the SFA feels very isolated and abandoned.”*

*“Not having a dependent pass for my nearest station makes life inconvenient and frustrating, especially as my husband who serves in the RAF is away during the week... It makes me feel that I am not welcome there.”*

## Disengagement

In some cases, families described how they had actively disengaged with the unit or RAF as a result.

*“As spouse does not require daily access was informed SP had to her sign her on unit as required. Spouse now does not bother to use any of the facilities or agencies the unit has to offer.”*

## Sense of inequality

Groups excluded through MOD or local policy (see above) expressed frustration at perceived inequality of treatment.

*“Why because we live in a private house are we not treated the same as families who opt to use SFA?”*

*“The introduction of cohabitation has taken place, yet long term partners are not entitled to a pass onto station causing exclusion.”*

*“Partner says she feels like an immigrant, even though we have a child together, our long-term relationship status hasn’t been accepted.”*

*“Our 18 yr old daughter who lives at home cannot get a pass, she is a full-time student. Yet local residents can get passes to access facilities on camp.”*



# Summary and Recommendations

An inability to access a unit can clearly impact how well supported families feel. Not all families will wish to access military units, but it is important that those who wish to can do so. Figures from FAMCAS 2019 tell us that of the four services surveyed, RAF spouses had the lowest positive record (9%) and highest negative record (59%) around feeling valued by the service. It is self-evident that feeling part of a wider RAF community will positively impact how spouses and partners feel about the service. Understanding what support and facilities are available - and being able to access them - are key. The Future Accommodation Model will be piloted next year at RAF Wittering. This project along with the confirmed extension of Forces Help to Buy are likely to bolster the growth in SP and families living in properties other than SFA. This is a timely point to take action, and an opportunity to make proactive and positive changes to support families.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- Currently local commanders set security policies around Control of Entry. There are good reasons for this, and we would not necessarily recommend that this changes, as specific security arrangements may be needed for local reasons. What is important is that the Control of Entry policies are reviewed, and written with due consideration to allowing families to access facilities where possible – the starting point should be ‘how can we welcome families to this unit’, rather than ‘how can we minimise access to military families’.

- There are several future options that the RAF should consider, given the growth in dispersed families and the likely impact of FAM:

- Option One: As a starting point we would recommend that all families living in SFA attached to a unit should be able to access that unit – even if the SP has been posted to a different one. We have had cases raised to us where access has been removed in those circumstances.
- Option Two: Those living in their own properties are far less likely to have access to the base where their SP is working. Some of this is due to distance, but not always. It is unclear to families whether they are allowed access if they are not in SFA, and often the opening hours of Passes and Permits mean they struggle to engage with them if the spouse is working. A second option would be a review of Control of Entry for each stn, actively seeking to include those not in SFA, with clear policies communicated out to all. To be most effective, this review should also detail how those in Long Term Relationships registered on JPA are able to access the stn, and how those children over 18 but in full time education (and therefore able to live in SFA) are able to access the stn. To make this option more extensive, the RAF may wish to consider giving families living further from a unit the opportunity to nominate an alternative unit to access instead. We recommend that option one and option two are carried out together.
- Option Three: The third option would be for families to be able to access any RAF stn (subject to each stn’s Control of Entry policy.) We understand the challenges in measuring the possible impact on units and ensuring funding to units reflects potential future usage by families, however this approach would ensure equitable treatment and access to facilities for a wide range of families.
- Option Four: The final option is to allow families to access support and facilities from their nearest military unit regardless whether it is Naval, Army or RAF. This is a desirable end point, but we do not underestimate the challenges in agreeing an MOD wide approach on this. In our view this should be a long-term aim to future proof welfare policy and offers the widest possible range of geographical support for dispersed families.







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The charity that supports the RAF family

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