



Ministry  
of Defence

31 March 2020

## **USE OF RESERVISTS TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

Dear Employer,

I am writing, as the senior reservist in Defence, to thank you for your on-going support as an employer of reservists and explain how we propose to use our reserve forces in support of the nation's response to COVID-19.

As both a reservist and an employer – in a medium-sized, privately-owned business – I know the everyday realities of employing reservists and the great contribution you make to our national defence. Furthermore, mobilisation of reservists at any time, let alone one of such national uncertainty and significance, has a significant impact on civilian employers and I want to assure you that Defence understands this and will aim to do all that we can to ensure this remains manageable.

We are working hard to understand an evolving situation and the contribution that Government requires of Defence's newly established COVID Support Force. It is now clear that reserves will be a critical part of that contribution.

Many of you will be aware that we have commenced a detailed scoping exercise with our reservists to assess who is available to us, whilst at the same time protecting the front-line agencies such as the NHS and other key workers. At the moment, we intend only to call out those reservists who can help us to meet specific requests for help from other government departments, and we expect this tranche to include limited numbers of specialist personnel.

As you know, reserve personnel represent a key element of our Defence capability, and they will be essential for sustaining the nation's response to the unfolding situation. We expect reservists to help deliver a range of Defence outputs, including support to the NHS and other key tasks: liaison officer roles; the provision of specialist skills; reinforcement of Regional Points of Command, to enable their 24/7 operation and resilience; and to support the implementation of contingency plans developed by other departments.

At the moment, with the exception of the mobilisation of these few specialists, all we are seeking is information. Information on who would be willing to volunteer, what skills these reservists have and, most importantly, whether their employers would release them if needed. This will follow our normal processes, but I appreciate that the context is unique and would like to reassure you on four further points.

First, this is just the initial stage of the tried and tested 'intelligent mobilisation' process. It is intended to fill specific gaps by carefully selecting the right reservists available. As and when those reservists are selected, they should inform their employers and ensure there are no compelling reasons why they cannot be released, before confirming their availability for mobilisation.

Second, we are conscious some reservists (medics, police, fire, ambulance, some local government officers and some civil servants) are already involved in the COVID-19 response. Defence has no intention of mobilising reservists employed in medical, welfare or other key worker roles, or those key to a role that is not included in the definition of key worker, and where the role is key to the nation's response.

Third, any use of compulsory mobilisation would remain limited and driven solely by operational necessity. However, you will still have the ability to appeal against any mobilisation of your employee and this process will be fully explained in the call-out notice, which reservists and their employers receive at the start of process.

Fourth, employers of mobilised reservists will be able to claim financial compensation, and details of how to do this will be set out in employers' call-out notices, including the arrangements for furloughed employees. There will also be legal employment protection for reservists. The situation is dynamic and we are not yet able to say how long individual call-outs may last but you should plan for at least six months and under current legislation this would be for no longer than 12 months.

Further details are available online and due to the evolving nature of the situation, will be updated and expanded as required, so if you have further questions I encourage you to visit: <https://www.gov.uk/employee-reservist/mobilisation>.

This is a difficult time for everyone and especially so for employers. Defence values your support to reservist employees and the indirect contribution you make to our own efforts. We appreciate our positive relationships with employers across the country and I will do everything I can to ensure you are kept informed as this situation develops.

We are confident, at this time of national emergency, that employers will do everything they can to support us in combatting this dreadful virus. The sooner we can do this, the sooner you and I can focus on recovering our businesses to something verging on normality. The reservists – your employees – who are mobilised for the COVID-19 Support Force will be working for the benefit of everyone in the country, including their local communities and civilian employers. Thank you again for your help making that possible.

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