



ARMED FORCES

COVENANT

**EMPLOYER
RECOGNITION
SCHEME**

SILVER AWARD

DEFENCE EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME - SILVER AWARD

ADVICE & GUIDANCE FOR NORTH WEST APPLICANTS

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NW RFCA

**RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATION FOR
THE NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND AND THE ISLE OF MAN**

DEFENCE EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME - SILVER AWARD

ADVICE & GUIDANCE FOR NORTH WEST APPLICANTS

1. **Background.** The Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) was launched in 2014, at the request of employers, to deliver a Future Reserves 2020 (FR20) White Paper commitment to recognise those employers who support Defence People objectives and encourage others to exhibit the same behaviours.

Whilst the scheme was initially focussed on support to the Reserve Forces, it has since been widened to include the full spectrum of Defence People issues and initiatives. This Scheme now encompasses Service Leavers, Veterans, Wounded Injured and Sick, Cadet Forces Adult Volunteers, commercial fairness and spousal employment - i.e. the wider principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The scheme is accessible online and uses a tiered approach for awards: at the Bronze Level employers state their intent to be supportive towards Defence People issues; the Silver Level recognises employers who actively demonstrate support; and the Gold Level recognises those very best employers who demonstrate and advocate support.

Experience has shown us that employers have limited time to allocate to completing the DERS Award submission process as the day job is all consuming. We have therefore produced this short guide to assist employers. We hope it explains the process in clear terms and give examples which will assist you in putting together your submission as quickly as possible.

2. **2020 applications.** The deadline for 2020 submissions in the NW has been extended to 18 Jun 20. Applications will be considered by the NW Regional Employer Engagement Board (REEB), with board members comprising senior military officers from all three services, the NW Employer Engagement team, and a representative from Defence Relationship Management (DRM). We expect that successful applicants will be notified in summer, around Jul/Aug.

3. **Silver award criteria.** For the first time in 2020 the ERS awards have essential and desirable criteria. The Silver criteria are below:

a. Essential criteria:

- *Organisations must have signed the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).*
- *The employer must have already stated their intent to be supportive by using the ERS website to register at the Bronze Level.*
- *The employer must proactively demonstrate that Service personnel/Armed Forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes.*
- *Employers must employ at least one individual from an AFC category (Reservist, Veteran, Military spouse/partner, Cadet Force Adult Volunteer (CFAV)).*
- *The employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards Defence People issues (e.g. an internally publicised and positive HR policy on Reserves, or, in the case where no HR policy exists, support should be*

demonstrated by specific references in job descriptions or on the organisation's website).

- *Within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place.*
- *The employer must demonstrate support to training by providing at least 5 days' additional leave.*
- *The employer must not have been the subject of any negative PR or media activity that could cause embarrassment to Defence.*

b. Desirable criteria:

- *The employer should provide additional paid leave for Cadet Forces Adult Volunteers.*

4. **The Armed Forces community/Defence People.** There is frequent reference within the ERS to “the Armed Forces community” (also known as Defence People). These are the individuals covered by the AFC, and that we ask employers to support – especially in the workplace - and for clarity are:

- Members of the regular Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Army, and Royal Air Force.
- Members of the Reserve Forces – i.e. the Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Marines Reserve, the Army Reserve, or Royal Auxiliary Air Force (known as Volunteer Reservists).
- Service Leavers (regulars or full-time reservists, up to two years before leaving).
- Veterans (regulars and reservists who have left service – including Wounded Injured, & Sick). Some Veterans may also have a reserve liability for a number of years after leaving regular service (these are known as Regular Reservists)
- Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (known as CFAVs – not regulars or reservists, but volunteers who are essential to the Cadet Forces for young people).
- The spouses and partners of all the above.

5. **Where to start?** We suggest that your starting point could be an internal survey or “trawl” to identify members of the Armed Forces community/Defence People in your workforce. This will help you to answer the “basic information” on the application form and will also give you a starting point for – perhaps - launching an Armed Forces community internal network/group within your organisation. First and foremost, knowing who the members of the Armed Forces community are within your organisation will allow you to support them appropriately.

6. **Meeting the award criteria – some suggestions.** The following are offered as examples of activities that could be undertaken to meet the criteria. These examples are not exhaustive, and it is not necessary to do them all (indeed some organisations may be unable to do what is suggested. It is understood that meeting the criteria will look different for different employers based on size and sector. It is also “taken as read” that the AFC will have been signed, and that the employer will either be registered for – or have been awarded – ERS Bronze before submitting a Silver EOI:

“The employer must proactively demonstrate that Service personnel/Armed Forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of their recruiting and selection processes.”

- Appoint an Armed Forces Champion (ideally someone with service experience) who can advise HR on issues relating to applications from the Armed Forces community/Defence People. For example, this individual might sit on interview boards to help “translate” transferable military experience and qualifications. This is particularly important where competency-based or values-based interviewing is used; as it must be appreciated that many Service Leavers and some Veterans will lack experience when applying and interviewing for civilian roles.
- Consider a guaranteed interview scheme for members of the Armed Forces community, even if they do not appear to meet the essential criteria for a role. It may be that when interviewed, transferable military skills, experience, and qualifications become visible which were not clearly articulated in an application.
- Use AFC and ERS Bronze branding on your recruitment media and collateral (e.g. web pages, application forms, posters, flyers, etc.) to show your “forces friendly” credentials (this will also give you a head-start on meeting on the Gold criteria).

“Employers must employ at least one individual from an AFC category (Reservist, Veteran, Military spouse/partner, Cadet Force Adult Volunteer (CFAV)).”

- As long as you employ at least one member of the Armed Forces community, irrespective of the size of your organisation, you are eligible to apply for the Silver award.

“The employer must actively ensure that their workforce is aware of their positive policies towards Defence People issues (e.g. an internally publicised and positive HR policy on Reserves, or, in the case where no HR policy exists, support should be demonstrated by specific references in job descriptions or on the organisation’s website).”

- Identify members of the Armed Forces community/Defence People on application to/ on joining your organisation.
- Highlight that you are a “forces friendly” organisation during HR induction for new staff, including your AFC pledges and ERS Bronze status. Also use this as an opportunity to publicise your supportive policies in relation to Reservists, CFAVs, spouses & partners etc. – you can also publicise any links you have with local Reserve or Cadet units, and any opportunities for your staff to become Reservists or CFAVs. Any annual training activities/staff conferences could be used to raise awareness within the current workforce.
- Conduct a survey/trawl to identify members of the Armed Forces community/Defence People within your workforce (this will help you complete the basic information in your application). Using positive messaging is very important Highlight that your organisation has signed the AFC, is ERS Bronze – aspiring for Silver – use AFC and ERS branding
- Start an “internal network” for your Armed Forces community; to allow members of that community to interact with each other, share good practice, and provide mutual

support. It is suggested that the network meetings regularly (at least quarterly); and the network can provide the basis and focal point for supporting activities such as Armed Forces Day (AFD), Reserves Day (RD), and Remembrance events within your organisation. As an aspiring Silver award, this can be a “work in progress”, but your network should be functioning by the time you come to apply for Gold. Clearly, this advice is only aimed at organisations that are sufficiently large to support an internal network, and those that have a sufficiently large Armed Forces community.

- Where you have an intranet, consider a dedicated page as a central touchpoint for your Armed Forces community; linking all your supportive policies and external online contacts (e.g. web links signposting to local and national Veterans organisations, or other forms of support) and with contact details for your Armed Forces Champion(s) etc.

“Within the context of Reserves the employer must have demonstrated support to mobilisations or have a framework in place.”

- If you do employ a reservist, and they have been mobilised or have requested to be mobilised, you should have supported this.
- If you don't employ a reservist, a supportive Reserve Forces policy provides a framework to support mobilisation (see below).

“The employer must demonstrate support to training by providing at least 5 days' additional leave.”

- Even if you don't currently employ a Reservist, you should have a supportive Reserve Forces policy; ideally based on the MOD template which can be found in the online Reservist Employers Toolkit (which also includes full details in relation to employing reservists) on the .Gov website, link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reservist-employers-toolkit/reservist-employer-toolkit>

- If you do employ a reservist, they should have completed an annual process known as Employer Notification (EN). The reservist is required to notify their unit that you are their employer, and the unit then writes to you to notify you that the individual in question is a reservist with that unit (they may also include details of the annual training commitment and annual camp/Annual Deployment Exercise – see below). Someone in your organisation should have this EN letter. The recipient is nominated by the reservist and is often their line manager, but we recommend that EN letters should be sent to your HR department so that you can identify how many active reservists you have in any given year (you could perhaps make this part of your Reserve Forces policy).
- For Silver you must provide *at least* an additional 5 days leave for any reservists you employ (you can choose to give more); and ideally this should be paid leave or at no financial disadvantage to the reservist(s). For example, if their military wage is lower than the wage paid by yourself, you could “top up” the difference. You may choose to mix and match paid and unpaid leave, e.g. 5 days paid and 5 days unpaid.
- The majority of reservists have an annual training commitment of up to 27 days, and most reserve units hold an Annual Camp or Annual Deployment Exercise for 10-17 working days (i.e. two working weeks including the middle weekend) in addition to

weekend and evening training throughout the year. Your additional leave is essential to allow reservists to meet their training commitments without having to use their own annual leave/holiday entitlement; which in turn makes it easier for them to balance their reserve service with their employment and family commitments.

- If you don't currently employ a reservist, in addition to producing a policy based on the MOD template, outline what you would do to support them should you employ one in future.

“The employer should provide additional paid leave for Cadet Forces Adult Volunteers.” (Note that this is a Desirable criteria – but it is strongly encouraged)

- The Cadet Forces are an important Defence output, providing personal development, awareness of Defence issues, and potentially careers for tens of thousands of young people aged 12-18/20 throughout the UK. Annual Camps of usually 1-2 weeks duration are a key element of the “cadet experience”.
- Although CFAVs are not reservists and as such do not have a mandatory annual training commitment, without CFAVs being available to take their cadets on Annual Camp, the cadets will miss out on valuable personal development opportunities. As with reservists, it also makes it easier for them to balance their Cadet Force commitment with their employment and family commitments.
- CFAVs are volunteers in the truest sense, and although remunerated expenses through various allowances – unlike reservists - they are not employed and paid a wage by MoD, which is why you are requested to extend an additional 5 days paid leave to CFAVs as a desirable criteria of the Silver award.
- Since CFAVs are not reservists - for clarity - you may wish to include supportive policies for them in your Special Leave policy, rather than in your Reserve Forces policy. CFAVs could be identified as a special category of employee attracting additional support such as Magistrates or Special Constables.
- If you don't currently employ a CFAV, outline what you would do to support them should you employ one in future.

“The employer must not have been the subject of any negative PR or media activity that could cause embarrassment to Defence.”

- This does not refer to “run of the mill” negative PR/media such as bad reviews online or general complaints from the public; unless on a matter which could embarrass Defence.

7. **The Silver award application form.** Once you have submitted your online EOI, you will be sent your application form, the format of which differs from the essential and desirable award criteria. The form asks for some basic information (numbers of Armed Forces community/Defence People employed), but then asks you to present your evidence as “essay style” answers to several key questions, with a limited word count of 250 words for each:

- a. Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports Reservists.

- b. Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports CFAVs.
- c. Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports Veterans or WIS.
- d. Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports Military spouses/partners.
- e. Provide any further examples of how this organisation supports Defence and the Armed Forces community.
- f. Add any comments or testimonies that you feel would help strengthen your nomination.

8. **Answering the key questions.** You should try and translate how you meet the criteria into answers to the questions within the 250 word limit, for example:

“Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports Reservists.”

We employ two reservists who serve with Duchess of Anyshire’s Regiment, and support them through a variety of measures. We have a Reserve Forces policy based on the MOD template which supports mobilisation and demobilisation, and grant 5 days paid leave with a further 5 days unpaid leave if required. We enjoy good links with the Regiment at Anytown Army Reserve Centre, and invite them to have a recruitment stand at our annual staff conference; and all new staff are briefed on the opportunities and our support for becoming a reservists at their HR induction. Membership of our Armed Forces community network is open to reservists, and all our supportive policies and information relevant to our reservists is all in one place on our Armed Forces community intranet page. Last year we allowed both our reservists to deploy to Kerplakistan for six months as part of a British Army Short Term Training Team, helping to train the Kerplakistan National Police to protect the Lesser Spotted Mid-Asian Honey Badger from poaching. On their return to work we identified how their experience could benefit our business through better staff training based on the Defence Systems Approach to Training (DSAT), and both have since been promoted and been given a well-deserved pay rise.

(210 words)

“Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports CFAVs.”

We employ a CFAV who is a Sergeant with Anyshire Wing of the Air Cadets. We offer her the same additional paid and unpaid leave entitlement as our reservists through our supportive Special Leave Policy, as we recognise the essential role that CFAVs have in ensuring the young people who are cadets in our local community are able to attend their Annual Camp. Last year she used her additional leave to attend camp at RAF Much-Snoozing In-The Marsh, and to attend a course to gain a Range Conducting Officer’s qualification to support cadet target shooting. She is also a member of our Armed Forces community network, and has been able to recommend a few older cadets to us whom we have taken on as Apprentices. We encourage all our employees to consider becoming CFAVs with the Sea, Army, or Air Cadets; especially if they are unable to commit to being (or are unfit to become) a reservist, and this opportunity is highlighted at HR induction alongside reservist opportunities. In essence, we treat our CFAV in exactly the same way as our reservists - although she obviously does not need mobilisation/demobilisation support – and we value her voluntary commitment to the Cadet Forces.

(201 words)

“Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports Veterans or WIS.”

We employ two Veterans, one of whom is our Armed Forces Champion, and who sits on interview panels with HR where it is known that a member of the Armed Forces community is to be interviewed. We also offer a guaranteed interview scheme for Service Leavers and Veterans, as we recognise that some lack experience in the civilian job market and may need such an opportunity to properly articulate their transferrable skills and experience. Our other Veteran is a recent Service Leaver who was employed after we advertised a job with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) via their online Job Board. Our Armed Forces community network links in with local Veterans organisations, the Royal British Legion, and other service charities for support where that is required; and we have also partnered with a local Veterans employability project run by a local service charity, and will begin to offer work placements later this year. We recognise the business benefits that Veterans can bring, and we are very keen to offer employment opportunities to Service Leavers and Veterans as our business expands. We will advertise all future vacancies with CTP and with the Veterans organisations and service charities with whom we have connections, in addition to hopefully employing suitable Veterans who complete work placements via the employability project. Neither of our current Veterans are WIS, but were we to employ a WIS Veteran in future we would make all reasonable adjustments to accommodate them.

(242 words)

“Where relevant, please provide examples of how this organisation supports Military spouses/partners.”

We do not currently employ and spouses or partners, but have recently registered with Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) to advertise vacancies. Were we to employ a spouse/partner in future we would look to support them where required with Special Paid Leave for periods around pre-deployment/post-deployment or mobilisation/demobilisation, and when their serving spouse/partner was home on leave.

(56 words)

“Provide any further examples of how this organisation supports Defence and the Armed Forces community.”

We support the local Armed Forces Day celebrations and activities led by Anytown Borough Council, and encourage our reservists to wear their uniform to work on Reserves Day. We also do some PR around this via our social media to promote the fact that we employ reservists and other members of the Armed Forces community, and support the Armed Forces Covenant. We also participate as a company in Remembrance events, and hold a company-wide two minute silence on Armistice Day. We are also linked into Anytown Borough Council’s Armed Forces Covenant group and send our Armed Forces Champion to attend their quarterly meetings. This allows us to stay up to date with what’s happening in the local and county Armed Forces community, and gives us a link into the local Reserve and Cadet units; especially the Duchess of Anyshire’s Regiment as they are the Army’s county Community Engagement Task Force (CETF). We would look favourably on any requests to support Defence or our local Reserve and Cadet units, wherever and whenever we could; bearing in mind the needs of the business.

(181 words)

9. **Questions or further support.** If you have any questions or need any further support in preparing your Silver award application, please contact your Regional Employer Engagement Director (REED):

- REED for Merseyside, Cheshire, and the Isle of Man
Jan Cox nw-reeds@rfca.mod.uk 07929 362180
- REED for Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Cumbria
Chris Ashworth nw-reedn@rfca.mod.uk 07816 602591

10. **Online resources.** The following links may be useful to you, both in preparing your Silver award application, and more generally in supporting your Armed Forces community:

- Armed Forces Covenant <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>
- Defence Employer Recognition Scheme
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>
- Reservist Employers Toolkit
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reservist-employers-toolkit/reservist-employer-toolkit>
- Service Leavers Guide
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-leavers-pack>
- Career Transition Partnership (CTP) <https://www.ctp.org.uk/>
- Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) <https://www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk/>
- Veterans Gateway <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>
- Veterans UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk>
- Help and welfare for Veteran and those leaving the Armed Forces
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/help-and-welfare-for-veterans-and-those-leaving-the-armed-forces>

