

# Engage to Change Study

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A collaborative study on  
recruitment and retention of a  
number of specialist streams  
of the Defence Forces.

**Public  
Service Pay  
Commission**



Report on the findings from Module 2b

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## Section 1: Introduction

The Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) was established in 2016 to advise the government on public service remuneration policy across a range of sectors, including the Civil Service, local authorities, non-commercial state agencies, and the health, education, justice and defence sectors. In progressing its work, the PSPC uses and analyses existing datasets and reports, as prepared and published by existing state and other agencies, as appropriate. The first report<sup>1</sup> of the Commission identified particular recruitment and retention issues within the health sector, the Defence Forces, and specific grades and specialisms within the Civil Service and public service.

The Commission adopted a modular approach to the issues identified, and Module 1 examined recruitment and retention issues in respect of nurses, midwives, non-consultant hospital doctors and hospital consultants in the public health service. The report<sup>2</sup> of Module 1 contains the Commission's conclusions and recommendations in relation to those professional categories. The conclusions reached were based on the Commission's assessment of a very considerable body of evidence; Module 1 of the Engage to Change Study,<sup>3</sup> which has been published separately by the PSPC, was included as one element of this body of evidence. Module 2a of the Engage to Change Study focused on recruitment and retention of a range of allied health professionals including dental surgeons, paramedics, psychologists and radiographers.

This current report, Module 2b, is a continuation of the Engage to Change Study. It is focused on presenting the findings on issues arising in respect of recruitment and retention for a number of specialist streams in the Defence Forces. The overall aim of the study is to carry out:

*a nationally representative study on recruitment and retention of selected specialist streams within the Defence Forces.*

The key objectives of this study are to:

1. describe key issues arising in respect of recruitment and retention among specialist streams of the Defence Forces (namely air traffic controllers, communications and information services personnel, doctors, engineers, ordnance personnel, pilots and technicians)
2. take account of the wide range of potential drivers that influence retention and recruitment across a range of characteristics
3. provide a report to the PSPC on key findings emerging from the study to assist in the identification of key policy options to address any identified recruitment and/or retention difficulties for these personnel.

A detailed scoping review of the literature was conducted to inform the Engage to Change Module 1 study and is available in the published research report<sup>3</sup> on Module 1. The review highlighted a number of issues that recur in the literature and that are also relevant to this study, including the national and international context for retention and recruitment, the role of migration, and the impact of shortages of key personnel and turnover on the health and wellbeing of personnel and their clients. The review also highlighted and considered issues relating to recruitment.

A key purpose of the scoping review of the literature was to identify the ways in which issues relating to retention and recruitment are measured. It considered a number of studies, including national and cross-national surveys and systematic reviews of key areas, particularly in the context of the concepts measured. The review highlighted key issues relating to the work undertaken by personnel (e.g. the type of work, the workload); the work environment (e.g. the availability of supports); the organisational context and culture (e.g.

opportunities for development, interpersonal relationships); and individual characteristics (e.g. age, gender). Impacts and attitudes of personnel (e.g. burnout, engagement) were also identified as important, and these issues were considered particularly in respect of reasons given for staying in or leaving a job, an organisation or a profession.

A search of the literature identified recent studies, some both quantitative and qualitative<sup>4</sup> and some solely quantitative<sup>5</sup>, commissioned by and carried out with 11% of personnel in the Irish Defence Forces, and these studies provided rich understandings of the current context and situation for Irish Defence Forces personnel. The UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2017<sup>6</sup> also provided helpful insights into the lives of personnel in the UK and assisted in identifying relevant scales and indexes to measure key issues arising in this population. The content and focus of the Module 2b surveys were developed based on the scoping review of the literature, studies undertaken with relevant personnel in the Irish and UK context, and national policy and other documentation. In addition, a number of initial interviews with individuals from the various specialist streams were conducted and key issues identified. These, along with the Module 1 surveys and conceptual framework, were used as the starting point for the creation of a conceptual and analytic framework for Module 2b and for the development of relevant instrumentation.

## Conceptual and analytic framework for the study

The impetus for this study emerged from significant concerns and challenges arising with regard to retaining and recruiting personnel in the public services in Ireland; this report specifically focuses on parts of the Defence Forces. As set out in the terms of reference for the study, its focus is on carrying out a comprehensive examination and analysis of recruitment and retention issues among specialist streams of the Defence Forces (namely air traffic controllers, communications and information services personnel, doctors, engineers, ordnance personnel, pilots and technicians). The PSPC's terms of reference for the study identified a number of potential areas to be taken into account in the study – specifically:

- areas that can influence or have an impact on key aspects of work – for example, satisfaction with aspects of the job, features of the job's design (such as perceived levels of autonomy and impact), features of the work environment and culture (such as co-worker and manager support), levels of fit with the job's group and organisation, and how demanding the job is
- outcomes themselves – for example, organisational commitment, intentions to leave or search for another job, global job satisfaction, prior expectations and the reality of the role, levels of work engagement and/or burnout, perceptions of other employers, and other relevant HR practices and organisational issues.

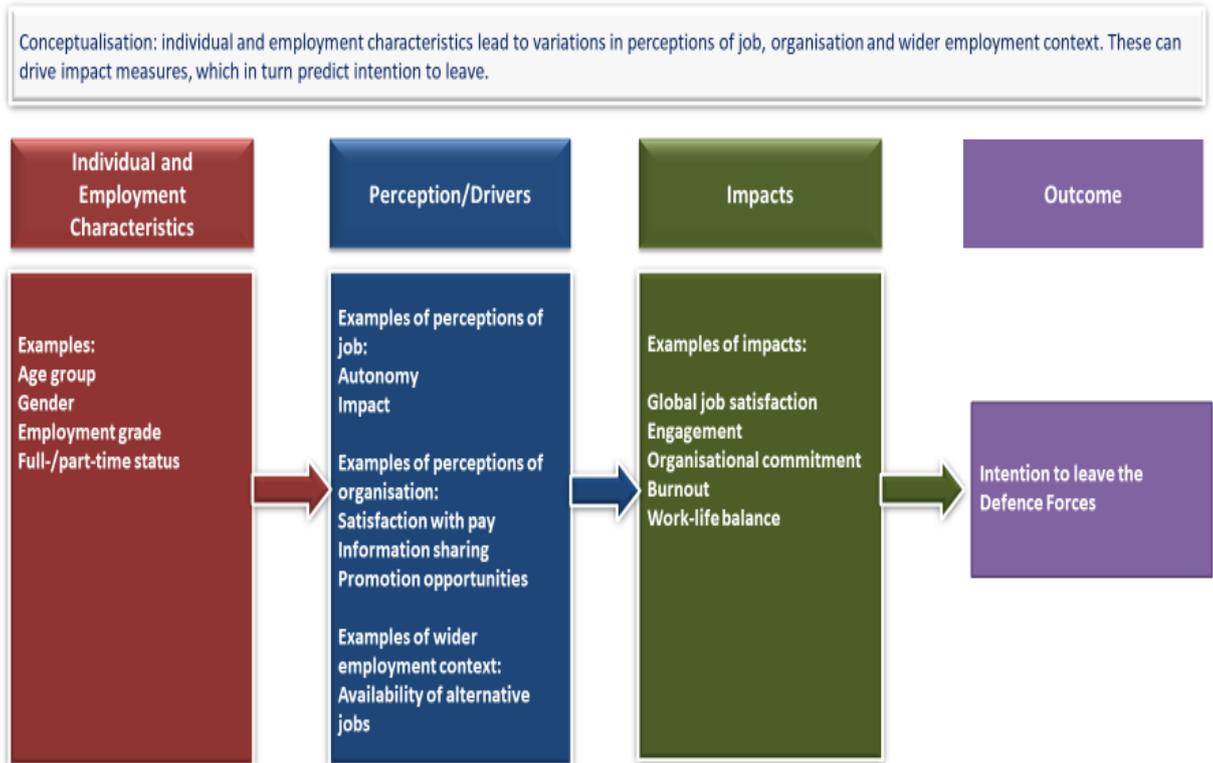
In agreement with the PSPC, the dependent variable, referred to as the 'outcome' in this study, is intention to stay in or leave the organisation.

The following conceptualisation was used to guide this study; it is based on the terms of reference, the scoping review of the literature conducted for Module 1, the interviews with personnel from each of the four professional groups and the conceptual framework developed for Module 1. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the study. Measures are categorised into individual and employment characteristics; perceptions of the job, the organisation and the wider employment context; impacts and outcome.

- **Individual and employment characteristics** capture demographic information (e.g. age, gender, highest level of qualification) and employment information (e.g. employment grade, area of work, year of entry to the Defence Forces).
- **Perceptions** of job, organisation and wider employment context capture respondents' perceptions of various aspects of their work, job and wider employment conditions (e.g. autonomy, impact, satisfaction with pay, perceptions of co-workers and of manager, job alternatives). These in turn may 'drive' impacts.
- **Impacts** are more global indicators of the quality of respondents' working lives. These include global job satisfaction, burnout and organisational commitment.
- **Outcomes** measure turnover intent (i.e. intention to leave the Defence Forces).

This framework guided the questionnaire design and the quantitative analyses, and the framework in Figure 1 provides examples of the measures included. This figure differentiates between the independent variables (block 1: individual, employment and structural characteristics; block 2: perceptions of the job and organisation; block 3: impacts) and the dependent variable of intention to stay in or leave the organisation.

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the study**



The theoretical framework underpinning the study is that:

*Individual and employment characteristics lead to variations in perceptions of the job and the organisation. These can drive impact measures, which in turn predict intention to leave.*

## Overview of structure of report

The following section, Section 2, presents the methodology relating to the quantitative and qualitative studies carried out in this module and includes the aim and objectives of the study, the overall approach, the research design and limitations of the study. Section 3 presents the findings. These are presented in eight parts:

- Part 1, based on the quantitative study, provides a profile of the respondents' characteristics, perceptions of the job and perceptions of the organisation.
- Part 2 describes recruitment issues arising and includes both quantitative and qualitative findings.
- Part 3 presents an overview of retention issues based on the quantitative findings, including the percentages of respondents who intended to stay in and leave the Defence Forces, their ratings of the relevance of a range of factors in influencing their intentions to stay or leave, and a comparison of the coded text responses.
- Part 4 presents an overall regression analysis of respondents' intention to leave the Defence Forces.
- Part 5 describes a regression analysis of the interrelationships between the perception measures and impact measures that are significantly associated with intention to leave the organisation.
- Part 6 describes the quantitative and qualitative findings arising in respect of officers.
- Part 7 describes the quantitative and qualitative findings arising in respect of non-commissioned officers.
- Part 8 describes the quantitative and qualitative findings arising in respect of privates.

Section 4 summarises the conclusions arising from this report.

As with all studies of this type, the findings presented are based on opinion and perceptions and these may not always accurately reflect the objective situation.

## **Section 2: Methodology**

This section presents the methodology relating to the quantitative and qualitative studies in this module. It includes the aim and objectives of the study, the overall approach adopted, information on the research design (including pilot testing and data collection) and some limitations arising.

## Aim and objectives of the study

The overall aim of the study is:

*To carry out a nationally representative study on recruitment and retention of selected specialist streams within the Defence Forces.*

The key objectives of this study are to:

1. describe key issues arising in respect of recruitment and retention among specialist streams of the Defence Forces (namely, air traffic Controllers, communications and information services personnel, doctors, engineers, ordnance personnel, pilots and technicians)
2. take account of the wide range of potential drivers that influence retention and recruitment across a range of characteristics
3. provide a report to the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) on key findings emerging from the study to assist in the identification of key policy options to address any identified recruitment and/or retention difficulties for these personnel.

## Overall approach adopted

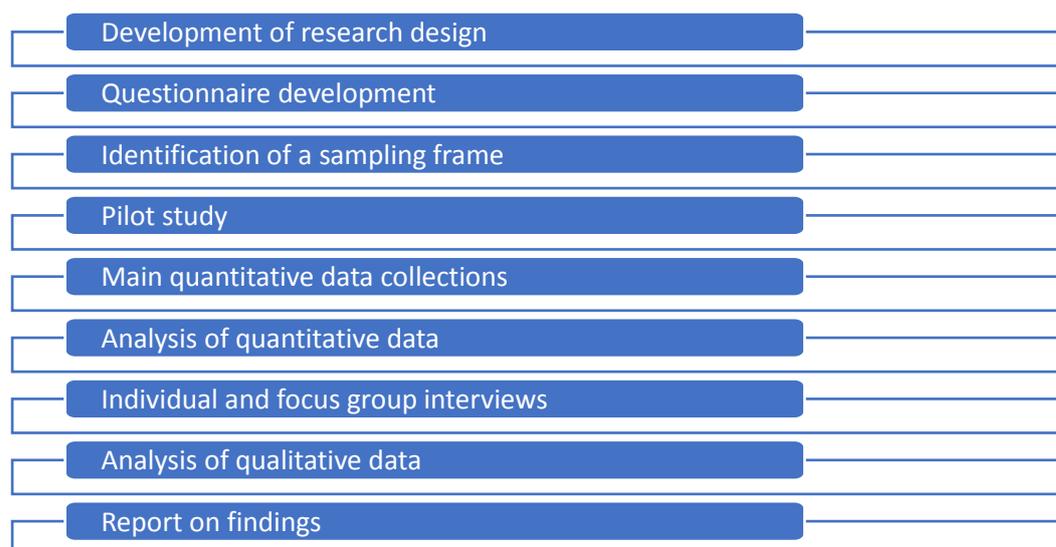
This study uses a mixed methods sequential explanatory design. An online survey methodology was used to collect quantitative data from each group. In addition, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with individuals from the range of specialist streams.

Several sources were used to develop the content and focus of the surveys: the scoping review of the literature presented in the findings of the Module 1 report, quantitative and qualitative studies with the Defence Forces in Ireland and the armed forces in the UK<sup>4,5,6</sup>, national policy and other documentation, and initial interviews with individuals from the Defence Forces. The Module 1 and 2a surveys and conceptual framework were used as a starting point for the work on Module 2b.

Additional issues, specific to the Defence Forces, considered in this module included satisfaction with pension, accommodation, scheduled and unscheduled time away from family due to service reasons and impact of commuting for work.

An overview of the process is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Key elements of the study process used for Module 2b**



## Research design

The research design was developed and agreed in consultation with, and with advice from, the PSPC and its advisors (Professor Edel Conway and Dr Yseult Freeney, Dublin City University Business School). Key elements included in the development of the research design were:

- key stakeholders to be included in the research
- sampling strategy
- topics to be addressed in the research
- recruitment of key stakeholders
- groups for sub-analysis.

## Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was developed through:

- review and adaptation of the content of the Module 1 and 2a surveys
- identification of relevant questions from the Irish and UK studies previously mentioned
- contact with the developers of previously validated scales and indexes
- advice from researchers with expertise in the area (including the PSPC's advisors on this study)
- pre-testing and interviews with individuals from the Defence Forces.

## Overview of questionnaires

The questionnaires were divided into four sections with an additional short fifth section for respondents who had been in their current job for two years or less ('new recruits'). This fifth section was positioned at the end of 'about your job':

- Section 1: about your job
- Section 2: about your workplace
- Section 3: job intentions
- Section 4: about you.

The questionnaires included, for the most part, previously tested and validated scales and/or indexes. A small number of open-ended (text) responses were also included. Key components of the questionnaires are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Overview of survey content for specialist streams of the Defence Forces**

Section	Content
	Total number of questions: 43
Your job	Employment characteristics, e.g. area of service, rank, year of joining the Defence Forces, managerial responsibility
Your job	Three most positive aspects of job and three aspects most in need of change (text response)
Your job	Engagement
Your job	Autonomy
Your job	Satisfaction with work–life planning
Your job	Impact
Your job	Job satisfaction (global)
Your job	Job satisfaction (specific)
Your job	Satisfaction with pay and allowances
Your job	Satisfaction with pension
Your job	Burnout
Your job	Information sharing and decision making
Your job	Effort–reward ratio
Your job	Satisfaction with accommodation
Your job	Working hours and schedule
Your job	Paid and unpaid overtime
Recruitment (new recruits only)	Job expectations
Recruitment (new recruits only)	Recruitment process
Your workplace	Organisational commitment
Your workplace	Training and promotion opportunities
Your workplace	Peer support and respect
Your workplace	Perceptions of manager
Your workplace	Job alternatives
Job intentions	Intention to leave Defence Forces
Job intentions	Relevance of factors to job intentions
About you	Years working in current specialism, Defence Forces and job
About you	Demographics: age group, gender, place of birth, highest educational qualification
About you	Usual time taken to get to work

The indexes, including brief descriptions and sources, are presented in Table 2. Index reliabilities for each group in the present study are presented in the Data Appendix. Among the indexes, 20 out of 22 display acceptable to very good reliability (.7 or higher).

The indexes with lower than desired reliability (less than .7) are satisfaction with accommodation (Cronbach’s alpha = .677) and job satisfaction (specific) (Cronbach’s alpha = .682). While these are near the acceptable range, findings relating to these two indexes should be interpreted with some degree of caution’.

While most of the scales are positive, meaning that higher scores indicate a positive outcome, some are negative, whereby higher scores indicate a less positive outcome. The four negative index measures in the present study are burnout, effort–reward ratio,

commuting pressure and intention to leave (see Table 2). The job alternative index may be interpreted as either positive or negative, depending on one’s point of view. This measure assesses the extent to which respondents perceive similar or more attractive employment to be available to them. Therefore, on the one hand the measure is positive in that higher scores indicate a positive employment market; on the other, it is negative in that higher scores may indicate a draw to employment elsewhere.

The effort–reward ratio is unique in that it is a ratio of two indexes: effort divided by reward. To calculate the effort–reward ratio, the sum of the three negatively scored effort items is multiplied by 2.333 (since there are 2.333 more reward items) and divided by the seven positively scored reward items. In this way, a ratio of 1.0 indicates that effort put in is equivalent to reward received, a ratio above 1.0 indicates that effort exceeds reward, and a ratio below 1.0 indicates that reward exceeds effort (Siegrist et al.<sup>7</sup> give a detailed description of how this measure is calculated).

The index measures can be classified as perceptions, impacts or outcomes, in line with the conceptual framework for the present study (described in the Introduction).

- **Perceptions** capture respondents’ perceptions of various aspects of their work, job and organisation (e.g. autonomy, impact, satisfaction with pay and allowances, peer support and respect, and perceptions of manager). The job alternatives index captures information about respondents’ perceptions of the wider employment context. These perceptions in turn may drive impacts.
- **Impacts** are more global indicators of the quality of respondents’ working lives. These include global job satisfaction, burnout and organisational commitment.
- The **outcome** consists of the index that measures intention to leave the Defence Forces.

This classification of indexes is relevant when considering the results of the regression analyses presented in Parts 4 and 5 of Section 3 (Findings).

**Table 2: Questionnaire index names, descriptions and sources**

Index name	Description	Direction	Perception/ impact	Source
Engagement	Feeling enthusiastic and inspired about job	Positive	Impact	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale <sup>8</sup>
Autonomy	Perception of freedom and independence in day-to-day work	Positive	Perception	Part of a multi-dimensional measure of psychological empowerment in the workplace <sup>9</sup>
Satisfaction with work–life planning	Extent to which work demands allow for non-work planning and activities	Positive	Impact	UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey <sup>6</sup>
Impact	Belief that job has a significant impact on others’ lives	Positive	Perception	Part of multi-dimensional measure of psychological empowerment in the workplace <sup>9</sup>
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	Level of satisfaction with pay and allowances	Positive	Perception	Irish Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) <sup>10</sup> ; two items specific to the Defence Forces added

Index name	Description	Direction	Perception/ impact	Source
Satisfaction with pension	Level of satisfaction with pension conditions and entitlements	Positive	Perception	Based on the work of de Bresser and van Soest <sup>11</sup>
Job satisfaction (specific)	Level of satisfaction with specific aspects of job	Positive	Impact	Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire <sup>12</sup> , with adaptations to match the specific work contexts of the survey group
Job satisfaction (global)	General/global level of job satisfaction	Positive	Impact	Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire <sup>12</sup>
Burnout	Feelings of work-related burnout	Negative	Impact	Oldenburg Burnout Inventory <sup>13</sup>
Information sharing and decision making	Perception of extent to which information is shared and decisions are communicated	Positive	Perception	CSEES <sup>10</sup>
Effort–reward ratio	Perceived level of effort put into work; perceived level of reward from work	Negative	Impact	Effort–Reward Imbalance Questionnaire <sup>7</sup>
Commuting pressure	Impact of work commute on overall quality of life	Positive	Perception	Turcotte <sup>14</sup>
Satisfaction with accommodation	Satisfaction with accommodation’s standard, cost and distance from work	Positive	Perception	Based on the UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey <sup>6</sup>
Recruitment process (new recruits only)	Perceptions of the efficiency and fairness of the recruitment process	Positive	Perception	New scale based on the recruitment lifecycle and the work of Larson et al. <sup>15</sup>
Job expectations (new recruits only)	Extent to which job expectations match job experiences	Positive	Perception	New scale based on the recruitment lifecycle and the work of Larson et al. <sup>15</sup>
Organisational commitment	Level of commitment to current organisation	Positive	Impact	Organisational Commitment Scale <sup>16,17</sup>
Training and promotional opportunities	Perceived opportunities for training and promotion	Positive	Perception	CSEES <sup>10</sup> with minor adaptations
Peer support and respect	Level of respect and support from peers at work	Positive	Perception	Based on scale used in the UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey <sup>6</sup>
Perceptions of manager	Perceptions of manager career support	Positive	Perception	Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire <sup>12</sup>
Job alternatives	Perceived level of availability of alternative employment	Positive	Perception	Treuren <sup>18</sup>
Intention to leave the Defence Forces	Level of intention to leave current organisation	Negative	Outcome	Turnover Intention Scale <sup>19</sup> with two additional items

## Research design

The study used both quantitative (online surveys) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) approaches. This combined approach aimed to capture nationally representative samples of the specialist streams included in the study using the surveys, with interviews providing a deeper and richer understanding of the key issues arising.

## Sampling frame

Based on current data from the Defence Forces (June 2018), 1,409 individuals were employed in the relevant specialist streams. Using these data, population fractions were calculated on the basis of (i) specialist streams and (ii) area of service (army, navy or air corps) and rank or grade.

The population and sample fractions are shown in Tables 3 and 4. The first component of the sampling weight (Table 3), computed as the population proportion divided by the proportion in the sample, corrects for differences in response rates on the basis of specialism.

The second component (Table 4) is computed to correct for differences in the distributions of personnel between the population and the sample across five grades/ranks and across the army, navy and air corps. This component is the population proportion divided by the proportion in the sample. Ten respondents missing data on area of service (1.8%) were assigned a second weight component of 1.

The sampling weight, then, is the first component multiplied by the second component, standardised to have a mean of 1.

**Table 3: Population and sampling fractions for computation of first component of weight: specialist streams in the Defence Forces**

Specialism	Proportion (sample)	Proportion (population)
Doctor	0.02679	0.01561
Pilot	0.10000	0.05607
Air traffic controller	0.02500	0.00994
Engineer	0.14821	0.24911
Technician	0.35000	0.23918
Communications and information systems staff	0.27892	0.14464
Ordnance staff	0.15117	0.20536

**Table 4: Population and sampling fractions for computation of second component of weight: service area (army, navy or air corps) and grade/rank in the Defence Forces**

Area of service	Grade/rank	Proportion (sample)	Proportion (population)
Army	Junior/senior officer	0.14156	0.09865
Army	Junior/senior NCO	0.20508	0.29950
Army	Private	0.08893	0.25763
Navy	Junior/senior officer	0.03811	0.02768
Navy	Junior/senior NCO	0.15064	0.08801
Navy	Private	0.03993	0.00213
Air corps	Junior/senior officer	0.13430	0.07239
Air corps	Junior/senior NCO	0.14882	0.10575
Air corps	Private	0.05263	0.04826

## Recruitment

All personnel working in the relevant streams of the Defence Forces were invited to take part in this study. This was facilitated by the Human Resources branch of the Defence Forces, which was asked to circulate the survey to all relevant personnel. This circulation was followed up with two reminders, and relevant stakeholder organisations were asked to promote engagement with the survey.

## Pilot testing (cognitive interviews)

Pilot testing took place using a cognitive interview process. This approach was agreed with the PSPC due to the small population size and because many of the scales and indexes included in the questionnaire had previously been tested for reliability and validity with the health professionals included in the Module 1 and Module 2a Engage to Change studies.

The cognitive interviewing process employs a specific technique that can be used during the development and testing of questionnaires to help identify whether survey items generate the information that the investigator intends and, thus, to inform revisions<sup>20</sup>. In this case, the purpose of the cognitive interviewing was to:

*identify issues with the draft survey that could potentially influence the validity and quality of responses.*

Participants were recruited to take part in the cognitive interviews through the Human Resources branch of the Defence Forces, which was asked to bring together a group ( $n = 10$ ) of participants from various technical streams across the army, navy and air corps and from officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO) ranks. This approach assisted in ensuring the questionnaire content could be tested with relevant personnel working in a variety of contexts.

The focus of the interviews was to identify sources of response error within the questionnaire, particularly concentrating on new items and questions. Both spontaneous and pre-planned probes were used and included:

- **Comprehension probes:** e.g. 'Does that make sense?' and 'How do you define the differences between the categories?'
- **Paraphrasing probes:** e.g. 'You're finding that hard, is that what I am hearing?'
- **Specific probes:** e.g. 'If there were another way of asking that question that could be more accurate but easier, would you rephrase it in another way? What would it be?'
- **General probes:** e.g. 'So, what are you thinking at the moment?'

Changes were made to each of the questionnaire surveys in response to issues arising from the cognitive interviewing. Examples of changes included an expansion of the categorisation of personnel, inclusion of question identifying year of entry to the Defence Forces, inclusion of question relating to time away from family due to Service responsibilities, revision of question on commuting and inclusion of scale on availability of alternative job opportunities.

## Main survey data collection

The main data-collection period ran from 13 August to 24 August 2018. All survey data were collected electronically using SurveyMonkey™.

## Responses received

Table 5 shows the total number of responses received. Prior to beginning the analysis, records with a completion rate of less than 50% were deleted. Duplicates were also identified and removed, and records from 17 apprentices who received and completed the survey in error were removed. The number of records in the final dataset for analysis is used as a basis for calculating the response rate. In all, 560 records were included in the final dataset.

**Table 5: Total responses, incomplete responses, duplicate records, records received in error, and responses included in the analysis for Module 2b**

Data group	N	%
Total responses	732	100.0
Incomplete (<50%) responses	152	20.8
Duplicates removed	3	0.4
Apprentices who received and completed the survey in error	17	2.3
Records in the final dataset for analysis	560	76.5

## Response rates and characteristics of the sample

As noted above, Defence Forces counts show that, as of June 2018, 1,409 personnel were working in the specialist streams that are the focus of Module 2b, and 560 of them responded to the survey (after removal of duplicates, <50% questionnaire completion rates, and 17 responses received in error). This gives a response rate of 39.7%.

Table 6 compares the characteristics of the population with the (weighted) characteristics of the sample (specialist area, rank and area of service). These comparisons indicate that the sample, in general, closely aligns with the population in the distribution of individuals across these categories. There are some fluctuations, however, by grade/rank. This is perhaps inevitable due to the two-stage weighting process and the small overall number of persons working in specialist streams in the Defence Forces. The fluctuations, in any case, are not very large; they do, however, result in slight over-representation of officers and slight under-representation of NCOs. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

**Table 6: Comparisons of population and (weighted) sample characteristics of specialist streams of the Defence Forces: specialist area, rank and area of service**

Specialist area	Population	Sample
Doctor	1.6	1.5
Pilot	5.6	5.7
Air traffic controller	1.0	0.9
Engineer	24.9	24.9
Technician	23.9	23.9
Communications and information systems staff	27.9	27.9
Ordnance staff	15.1	15.1
Total	100.0	99.9

Rank	Population	Sample
Junior/senior officer	19.8	25.8
Junior/senior NCO	49.4	45.2
Private	30.8	29.0
Total	100.0	100.0
Area of service	Population	Sample
Army	65.6	62.7
Navy	11.8	12.4
Air corps	22.6	24.9
Total	100.0	100.00

Table 7 provides additional information on the characteristics of the (weighted) sample, i.e. the percentages of respondents by year of joining the Defence Forces<sup>i</sup>, age group, highest level of educational qualification and new recruit status. Other than what is shown in Table 7, the sample is very homogenous in terms of gender and country of birth: 95% of respondents indicated that they were male and 98% had been born in Ireland.

**Table 7: Demographic and employment characteristics of the (weighted) Module 2b sample**

Year of joining the Defence Forces	%	Highest educational qualification	%
1994 or earlier	23.5	Up to advanced cert or diploma (below degree)	44.5
1995–2012	66.4	Primary degree	26.2
2013–2018	10.1	Postgraduate diploma	10.7
Total	100.0	Masters or PhD	18.6
Age group	%	Total	100.0
21–30	16.8	New recruit (in current job two years or less)	%
31–40	47.6	Yes	40.2
41–50	24.6	No	59.8
51 or older	11.0	Total	100.0
Total	100.0		

### Interview data collection

Participants who volunteered to take part in a telephone interview were provided with supplementary information and were requested to complete a consent form agreeing that they had read the information provided and had an opportunity to ask questions, were freely and voluntarily taking part in the study, could withdraw at any time, could be contacted again if necessary, and knew that the interviews were being audiotaped. These protocols are consistent with the research ethics guidelines.

In total, 49 participants took part in interviews. Of these, 39 were interviewed individually and 10 were included in one focus group. A breakdown of participants who took part in interviews, by rank and by division (army, navy or air corps), is presented in Table 8. Almost

<sup>i</sup> Due to important changes in working conditions associated with pensions and promotion, the years 1994 and 2012 were used to categorise when respondents entered the Defence Forces.

all those interview were male (n=45) and this is broadly in line with the proportion of women overall in the Defence Forces.

**Table 8: Number of participants and source of data**

Group	N
Army officers	7
Army NCOs	3
Army privates	3
Air corps officers	6
Air corps NCOs	4
Air corps privates	3
Navy officers	6
Navy NCOs	3
Navy privates	4
Mixed-personnel focus group representative of division and rank	10
Total	49

### Preparation and analysis of data

The data were exported from the internet survey provider (SurveyMonkey™) into IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences v24.0). Open-ended and unstructured question responses were coded separately and re-merged into the original datafiles.

Following usual and best practice in data processing, all items were checked for missingness. Rates of missingness that exceeded 5% are noted in the relevant tables and graphs. All analyses are weighted using the relevant sampling weight.

Questionnaire indexes were constructed using the same methodology as in the 2017 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey report<sup>10 pp.73–74</sup>. For each respondent, an index score was calculated for each of the themes or relevant question sets included in the survey.

For example, the global job satisfaction index has three items or statements. Each respondent received an initial score as the average score across the five response options, where ‘strongly disagree’ was equivalent to 0, ‘disagree’ was equivalent to 1, ‘neither agree nor disagree’ was equivalent to 2, ‘agree’ was equivalent to 3 and ‘strongly agree’ was equivalent to 4. This initial score was then converted to a percentage, where a respondent who selected ‘strongly agree’ for all three items received a score of 100%, while one who selected ‘strongly disagree’ for all three items received a score of 0%. An overall mean index score of 50% would indicate that the same proportion of respondents answered a question positively as the proportion who answered it negatively; an overall index mean of 100% would indicate that all respondents selected ‘strongly agree’ for all three questions; while an overall index mean of 0% would indicate that all respondents chose ‘strongly disagree’ in response to all three statements.

In some cases, items on the index had to be reverse coded. For example, the items on the index measuring burnout and their coding to produce the burnout index are shown in Table 9. In this example, higher scores on the burnout index indicate a more negative outcome. For a majority of the indexes used in this study, higher scores indicate a more positive outcome. Throughout the report and in the Data Appendices, the meanings of the index scores (i.e. higher scores being positive or negative) are noted.

**Table 9: Example of coding (including reverse coding) for the burnout index**

Burnout: coding of items	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Feel worn out at the end of the working day (RC)	4	3	2	1	0
Exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work (RC)	4	3	2	1	0
Feel that every working hour is tiring (RC)	4	3	2	1	0
Have enough energy for family and friends during leisure time	0	1	2	3	4

Note. Items with '(RC)' have been reverse coded to produce the index, meaning that low values are recoded to high and vice versa.

The results for items on the indexes that examine recruitment and retention (i.e. job expectations, recruitment process, intention to leave, job alternatives, and relevance of a range of factors for intending to leave the Defence Forces) are presented in graphs in this report. For ease of reporting and describing the results in graphs, responses have been 'collapsed' into fewer categories. For example, the original response options on the items that form the index measuring perceptions of the recruitment process were 'very dissatisfied', 'dissatisfied', 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied'. For the purposes of displaying graphs of responses, these five response options have been collapsed into three: 'dissatisfied', 'neutral' and 'satisfied'.

A Data Appendix is produced in Excel format and this contains five tabs, as follows:

- **demographic items:** frequency tables of organisational and demographic characteristics of respondents
- **Likert items:** frequency tables of the Likert items (i.e. those ranging from agree to disagree) organised according to the questionnaire indexes to which the items belong
- **index descriptives:** means and standard deviations for each of the questionnaire indexes (expressed as percentages) for the sample overall and by key sub-groups (e.g. age group, grade/rank)
- **scale reliabilities:** scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for the questionnaire indexes
- **scale intercorrelations:** Pearson correlations between index measures, including significance levels.

### Qualitative data analysis

All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The anonymisation of the interview data involved removing all personal information (e.g. names and locations) and the assignment of pseudonyms. Where necessary, the qualitative data have been edited to safeguard participants' anonymity, but it has been ensured that this has not distorted their data or changed the key messages that emerged.

### Process of qualitative data analysis

- Following all interviews, notes were written up within 24 hours, which provided an opportunity to reflect on the process of the interview.
- Each audiotape was listened to at least three times, which provided an opportunity to become familiar with the nuances and content of each tape.

- All tapes were transcribed, and memos were made as a means of capturing ideas, views and intuitions at all stages of the data process.
- Following transcription, each transcript was read through several times to get an overall sense of the data.
- The data were then imported into NVivo, where data coding took place. Open coding, where a provisional name is given to each category, was used, and compare and contrast were adopted as the two main tools to form categories, establish the boundaries of the categories and assign data segments.
- Following this, data related to each category were retrieved and a narrative around each segment created.

The analysis of the focus group interview took account of the interactions between participants in addition to the content expressed.

### Regression analysis

The regression analyses were guided by the conceptual and analytic framework of the study (see Section 1: Introduction). The *outcome measure* is the index of *intention to stay or leave the Defence Forces*.

The models were constructed using forward regression analysis with variables organised into three 'blocks':

- **Block 1**, the *control* block, includes employment and demographic characteristics that are relatively fixed, e.g. area of service and year of joining the Defence Forces.
- **Block 2** contains index measures that relate to *perceptions of the job and of the organisation*. Examples of these include peer support and respect, perceptions of manager, training and promotion opportunities, and impact.
- **Block 3** contains *impact measures* that are akin to the outcome measures that were examined in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey report. In that study, the outcomes considered were engagement, organisational commitment, wellbeing and coping with change. In the present study, these measures are termed 'impacts' to avoid confusion with the outcome or dependent variable of intention to stay or leave the organisation. Impact measures in the present study include engagement, organisational commitment, global job satisfaction and burnout.

These blocks are analysed in three models:

- **Model 1** consists of Block 1, and shows the extent to which intention to leave the organisation varies across individual and employment characteristics, before accounting for perceptions or impacts.
- **Model 2** consists of Blocks 1 and 2, and provides estimates of the direct effects of perceptions of the job and of the organisation on intention to leave the organisation, after controlling for individual and employment characteristics.
- **Model 3** consists of Blocks 1 and 3, and provides estimates of the direct effects of impact measures on intention to leave the organisation, after controlling for individual and employment characteristics.

Following on from the regression analysis, a driver-type regression analysis was carried out. This entailed taking the impact measures that were statistically significant from Model 3 and regressing the perceptions of job and organisation measures on them (using forward regression). In this second analysis, significant perception measures acted as 'drivers' of impacts. The rationale for the driver-type analysis was to identify perceptions of the job and

the organisation that 'drive' impacts, which in turn predict the outcome of intention to leave the organisation. These analyses, together with the descriptive quantitative results and the themes arising from the interviews, offer the beginnings of policy development.

## Limitations

All research has limitations. An online survey is both efficient and convenient. It allows a short time frame for data collection and it enables a substantial amount of information to be collected and easily prepared for analysis. However, the complex contexts in which recruitment and retention issues arise cannot be fully captured by survey data. This limitation was offset by (i) including some open-ended questions in the survey and (ii) conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with respondents working in a variety of roles.

The response rate, 39.7%, is somewhat lower than desired. However, as noted earlier, the data have been weighted to provide nationally representative estimates, on the basis of the characteristics used to compute the sampling weights.

Comparisons of the weighted sample with the population indicate a good match in terms of specialist stream and area of service (army, navy or air corps). However, there is slight over-representation of officer ranks and slight under-representation of NCOs, and this should be borne in mind when interpreting the overall results. These slight fluctuations are (perhaps inevitably) a function of the two-stage weighting process and overall small population size of about 1,400 personnel.

In addition to the limitations of the sample characteristics noted above, we have no way of empirically assessing the extent to which particularly enthusiastic or particularly dissatisfied individuals responded, and this potential bias should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

Finally, causality cannot be inferred from the survey results (as with any cross-sectional design). The results demonstrate associations and relationships but should not be used to conclude that characteristic X causes outcome Y.

The findings from the qualitative and quantitative parts of this study complement each other and show a strong relationship in the issues arising, which serves to strengthen the findings. As with all interview-based qualitative studies, however, the findings are based on opinion and perceptions and these may not always accurately reflect the situation.

## Section 3: Findings

## Overview

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings from Module 2b of the Engage to Change study, which was conducted with specialist streams in the Defence Forces. The section consists of eight parts.

### **Part 1 provides a profile of the respondents' sample characteristics, perceptions of the job and perceptions of the organisation.**

- The first section of this part describes the sample characteristics of respondents (e.g. normal working schedule, years in current role). Some comparisons between groups (such as specialism and grade/rank) are made.
- The second section provides a description of the coded themes from the text responses of respondents that show (i) the aspects of the job that they like most and (ii) the aspects of the job that they would most like to change.
- The third section describes respondents' perceptions of their job, organisation and wider employment context, as measured by the 16 themed index scores described in section 2 above.

### **Part 2 describes recruitment issues.**

- This part concerns only those respondents who had been in their current job for two years or less. Scores on two relevant indexes (perceptions of the recruitment process and job expectations) are examined, including responses to individual items making up the indexes. Relationships between these indexes and others are explored. A small number of participants in interviews identified issues in respect of recruitment and these are included in this part.

### **Part 3 describes retention issues.**

- Percentages of respondents who intended to stay in or leave the Defence Forces in the next two years are presented, along with their ratings of the relevance of a range of factors in their intentions to stay or leave. Some comparisons are made between groups (such as by specialism and grade/rank).
- The coded text responses (described in Part 1) of the 'stay' and 'leave' groups' are compared.
- Then, scores on two relevant indexes (job alternatives and intention to leave) are examined, including responses to individual items making up the indexes. Relationships between these indexes and others are explored.

### **Part 4 describes a regression analysis of respondents' intention to leave the Defence Forces.**

- The regression in Part 4 examines the extent to which three 'blocks' of characteristics (individual and employment characteristics; perceptions of job, organisation and wider employment context; and impacts) predict respondents' intention to leave the Defence Forces.

### **Part 5 describes a regression analysis of impact characteristics.**

- A set of 'driver-type' regression analyses are presented to examine the interrelationships between the perception measures and the impact measures that are significantly associated with intention to leave the organisation (from the analysis in Part 4).

**Part 6 describes the quantitative and qualitative findings arising in respect of officers' intention to leave the Defence Forces.**

- Regression analyses are presented that examine which perceptions and impacts predict intention to leave the organisation for officers.
- The results of driver-type analyses are presented for officers.
- Insights are provided into the key issues arising for officers in the Defence Forces, based on a thematic analysis of the interview data.

**Part 7 describes the quantitative and qualitative findings arising in respect of NCOs' intention to leave the Defence Forces.**

- Regression analyses are presented that examine which perceptions and impacts predict intention to leave the organisation for NCOs.
- The results of driver-type analyses are presented for NCOs.
- Insights are provided into the key issues arising for NCOs in the Defence Forces, based on a thematic analysis of the interview data.

**Part 8 describes the quantitative and qualitative findings arising in respect of privates' intention to leave the Defence Forces.**

- Regression analyses are presented that examine which perceptions and impacts predict intention to leave the organisation for privates.
- The results of driver-type analyses are presented for privates.
- Insights are provided into the key issues arising for privates in the Defence Forces, based on a thematic analysis of the interview data.

All analyses are weighted to provide nationally representative estimates on the basis of specialist area, grade/rank and area of service (army, navy or air corps) (see Tables 3 and 4, in Section 2: Methodology).

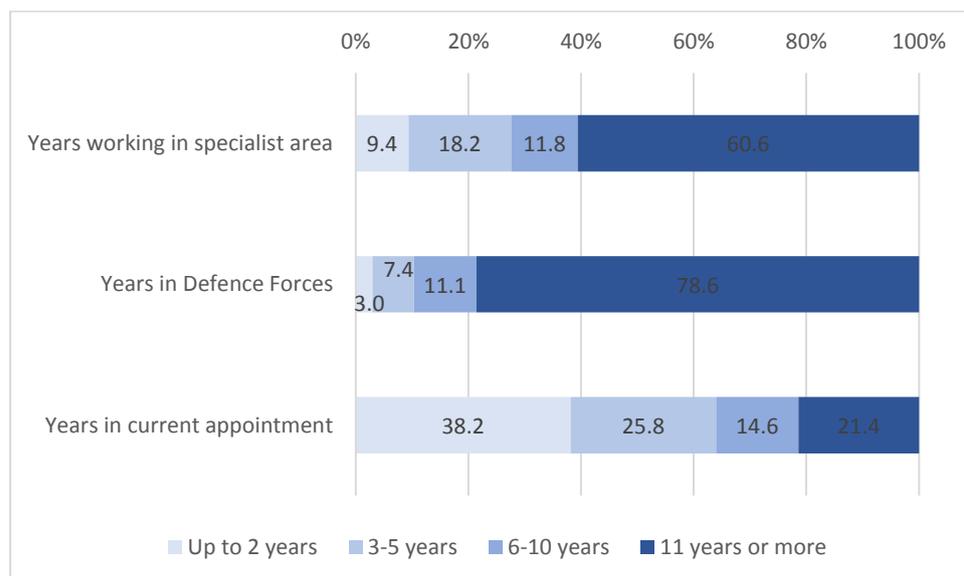
## Part 1: Sample characteristics and perceptions of job and organisation

### Sample characteristics

This part presents information on the working characteristics of the specialist streams in the Defence Forces. Section 2: Methodology provides additional demographic and employment information (e.g. age group, year of joining the Defence Forces, grade/rank).

A majority of respondents (60.6%) had been working in their specialist area for 11 years or more, 9.4% had been working in their specialist area for two years or less, and the remainder (30.0%) had been working in their specialist area for between 2 and 10 years (Figure 3). About four in five respondents (78.6%) had been in the Defence Forces for 11 or more years, and the differences between the first and second bars on the graph suggest that 28.0% of respondents obtained their specialist training while in the Defence Forces. The third bar in the graph indicates considerable movement between appointments within the Defence Forces: 38.2% had been in their current appointment for two years or less. Furthermore, just 3.0% had been in the Defence Forces for two years or less.

**Figure 3: Years working in specialist area, in current organisation and in current job**

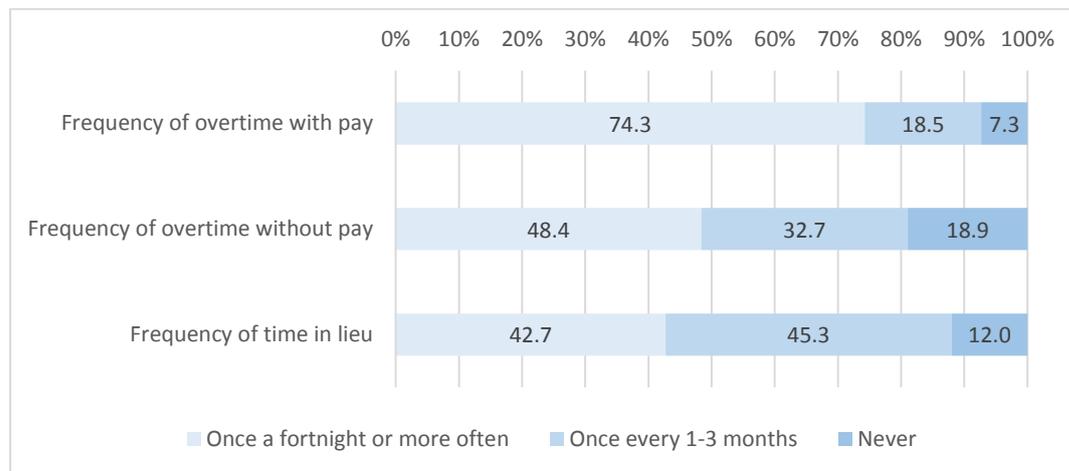


Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding

About two in five respondents (41%) reported working up to 40 hours per week, while 59% normally worked more than 40 hours per week.

Figure 4 shows the frequency with which respondents reported working overtime with pay, without pay and with time in lieu. In line with the nature of the work, working overtime with pay was common, with 74.3% of respondents doing this once per fortnight or more often. Working overtime without pay was also common – 48.4% reported doing this once per fortnight or more often. Working overtime with time in lieu was also quite common, with 42.7% doing this once per fortnight or more often.

**Figure 4: Frequency with which specialist streams in the Defence Forces reported working overtime with pay, without pay and with time in lieu**

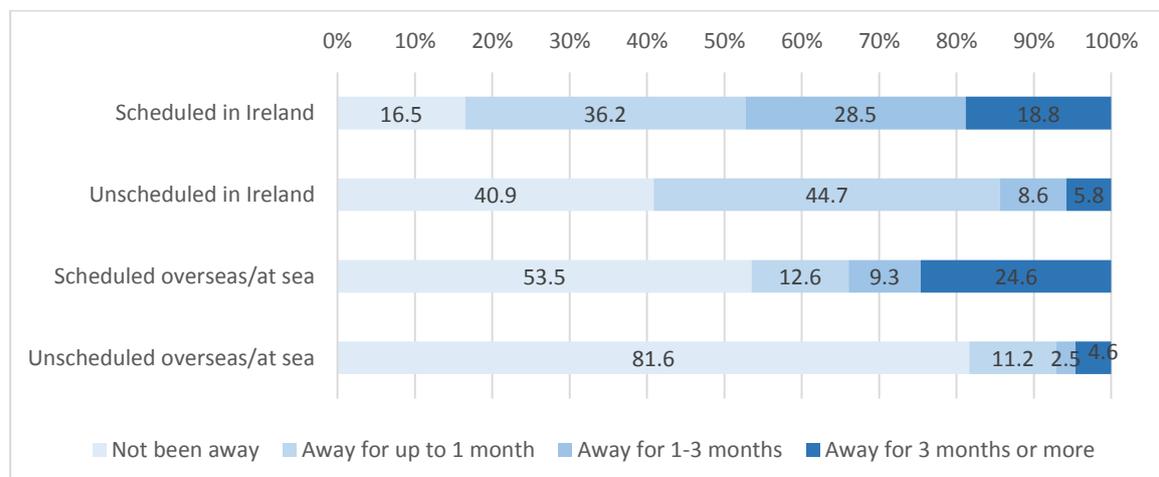


Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding

Respondents were asked how much time they had spent away from home over the past 12 months either in Ireland or overseas, and also whether this 'away' work had been scheduled (planned) or not. Figure 5 shows their responses. Scheduled work away from home in Ireland was common: 83.5% had done this over the past 12 months, and 47.3% had been away from home for one month or more. Unscheduled work away from home in Ireland was reported by 59.1% of respondents, and for most (44.7%) this was for up to one month; however, 14.4% had been on unscheduled work in Ireland for more than a month.

Among the respondents, 46.5% reported having been overseas or at sea in the past 12 months, and 24.6% had been overseas or at sea for three months or more. Unscheduled work overseas or at sea was less common: fewer than one in five respondents (18.3%) had been sent on unscheduled duties overseas or at sea in the past 12 months; nonetheless, 7.1% had been overseas or at sea on unscheduled duties for one month or more in the past 12 months.

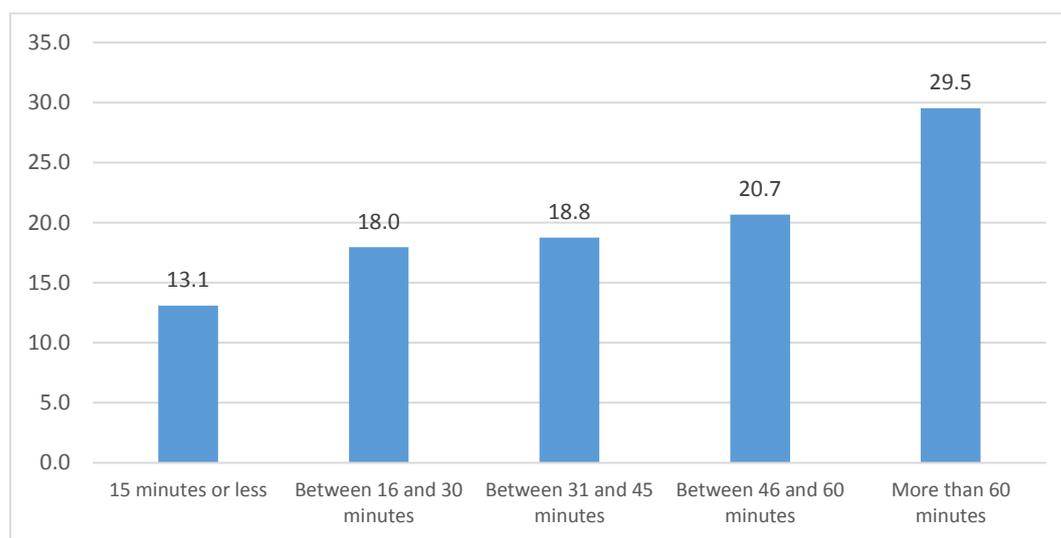
**Figure 5: Time working away from home in the past 12 months: Ireland or overseas, and scheduled or unscheduled**



Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding

Figure 6 shows the normal time taken to get to work reported by respondents. Commute times tended to be quite high: three in ten (29.5%) usually took an hour or more to get to work, while 20.7% took 46–60 minutes to get to work. These figures compare unfavourably with national commute times from the 2016 Census<sup>21</sup>. Census data indicate that 11% of all commuters had a journey time of an hour or more; the corresponding percentage for respondents in this study is almost trebled, at 29.5%.

**Figure 6: Normal time taken to get to work reported by specialist streams in the Defence Forces**



Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding

Table 10 compares the sample characteristics described above by specialism, grade/rank, area of service (army, navy or air corps) and year of joining the Defence Forces.<sup>ii</sup> It is worth bearing differences between the categories in these groups in mind when interpreting the results that follow in this part as well as in Parts 3 and 4. For example, the table shows that:

- Engineers had been working the longest in their specialist area, and communications and information systems (CIS) and ordnance staff had been in their current appointments for significantly longer than the other specialists.
- NCOs were the most experienced of the three grades/ranks, having spent significantly more time in their current specialism, in the Defence Forces and in their current job than both officers and privates.
- Ordnance staff, air traffic controllers (ATCs), doctors and pilots reported working more than 40 hours per week significantly more frequently than the other specialist groups. Officers were more likely to work more than 40 hours per week than NCOs and privates. Those who had joined the Defence Forces between 1995 and 2012 were more likely to work more than 40 hours per week than their counterparts who had joined in 1994 or earlier, or between 2013 and 2018. Additional analysis is required to explore this issue more fully.
- There were also differences across groups in terms of the amounts of overtime carried out with and without pay and with time in lieu. Most pertinent, perhaps, is

<sup>ii</sup> The categories for year of joining the Defence Forces are 1994 or earlier, 1995–2012 and 2013–2018 since the years 1994 and 2012 correspond to important changes in the working conditions of these employees.

that those who joined the Defence Forces between 1995 and 2012 had the highest rates of unpaid overtime.

- Commute times, already noted above as lengthy compared to the 2016 Census, were shorter for officers than for NCOs and privates. They were longer for individuals who joined the Defence Forces between 1995 and 2012 compared to 1994 or earlier, or between 2013 and 2018.
- Finally, the groups with the most scheduled and unscheduled time away were engineers, staff in the navy and staff who had joined the Defence Forces after 1994.

**Table 10: Comparisons of work-related characteristics by specialism, grade/rank, area of service (army, navy or air corps) and year of joining the Defence Forces**

Aspect of work	Groups compared by	Significant findings
Years in specialism, in Defence Forces and in current appointment*	Specialism	Engineers had worked in their field longer than the other groups. Engineers and CIS staff had worked in the Defence Forces for longer than ATCs, doctors and pilots. CIS and ordnance staff had been in their current appointments the longest.
	Grade/rank	Officers, NCOs and privates differed from one another on all three tenure indicators: NCOs had the most years, then officers, with privates having the least.
	Area of service	Individuals in the navy had been working in their specialist field longer than those in the army and air corps; otherwise, the three groups were similar.
	Year of joining Defence Forces	As expected, those who joined the Defence Forces in 1994 or earlier, 1995–2012 and 2013–2018 differed from one another on all three tenure indicators: 1994 or earlier had the most years, then 1995–2012, with 2013–2018 entrants having the least.
Working hours and working overtime*	Specialism	Ordnance staff, ATCs, doctors and pilots were more likely to work more than 40 hours per week than CIS staff and engineers. Engineers had the highest rates of overtime with pay; ATCs, doctors and pilots had the highest rates of overtime without pay; and technicians had the highest rates of time in lieu.
	Grade/rank	Officers were more likely to work more than 40 hours per week than NCOs and privates. NCOs had more overtime with pay than officers (but did not differ in overtime rates to privates); there were no differences in unpaid overtime; and privates had the highest rates of time in lieu, followed by NCOs, then officers.
	Area of service	Air corps staff worked more overtime with time in lieu than army and navy staff; otherwise the working schedules of these three groups did not differ.
	Year of joining Defence Forces	Those who joined the Defence Forces between 1995 and 2012 had the highest rates of paid overtime; those who joined the Defence Forces in 1994 or earlier had the lowest rates of unpaid overtime and they also had the lowest rates of time in lieu.
Commute times*	Specialism	Commute times did not differ by specialism.
	Grade/rank	Officers had shorter commute times than NCOs and privates.
	Area of service	Navy staff had shorter commute times than army and air corps staff.
	Year of joining Defence Forces	Those who joined the Defence Forces 1995–2012 had the longest commute times, followed by those joining in 2013–2018, with those who joined in or before 1994 having the shortest commute times.

Aspect of work	Groups compared by	Significant findings
Scheduled and unscheduled time away over the past 12 months*	Specialism	Engineers had the most scheduled and unscheduled time away from home.
	Grade/rank	Scheduled and unscheduled time away did not differ across grade/rank.
	Area of service	Staff in the navy had the most scheduled and unscheduled time away from home.
	Year of joining Defence Forces	Staff who joined the Defence Forces in 1994 or earlier had less scheduled and unscheduled time away than those who joined in 1995–2012 and 2013–2018.

\*Categories were recoded into numeric variables using category midpoint values and subjected to one-way ANOVA analysis with post-hoc comparisons with Bonferroni-adjusted significance levels.

### Commentary on positive aspects and aspects to change

The survey questionnaire included two open-ended (text response) questions:

- *Please describe the three most positive things about your current job.*
- *Please describe the three things that you would most like to change about your current job.*

The responses were coded into themes for quantitative analysis.

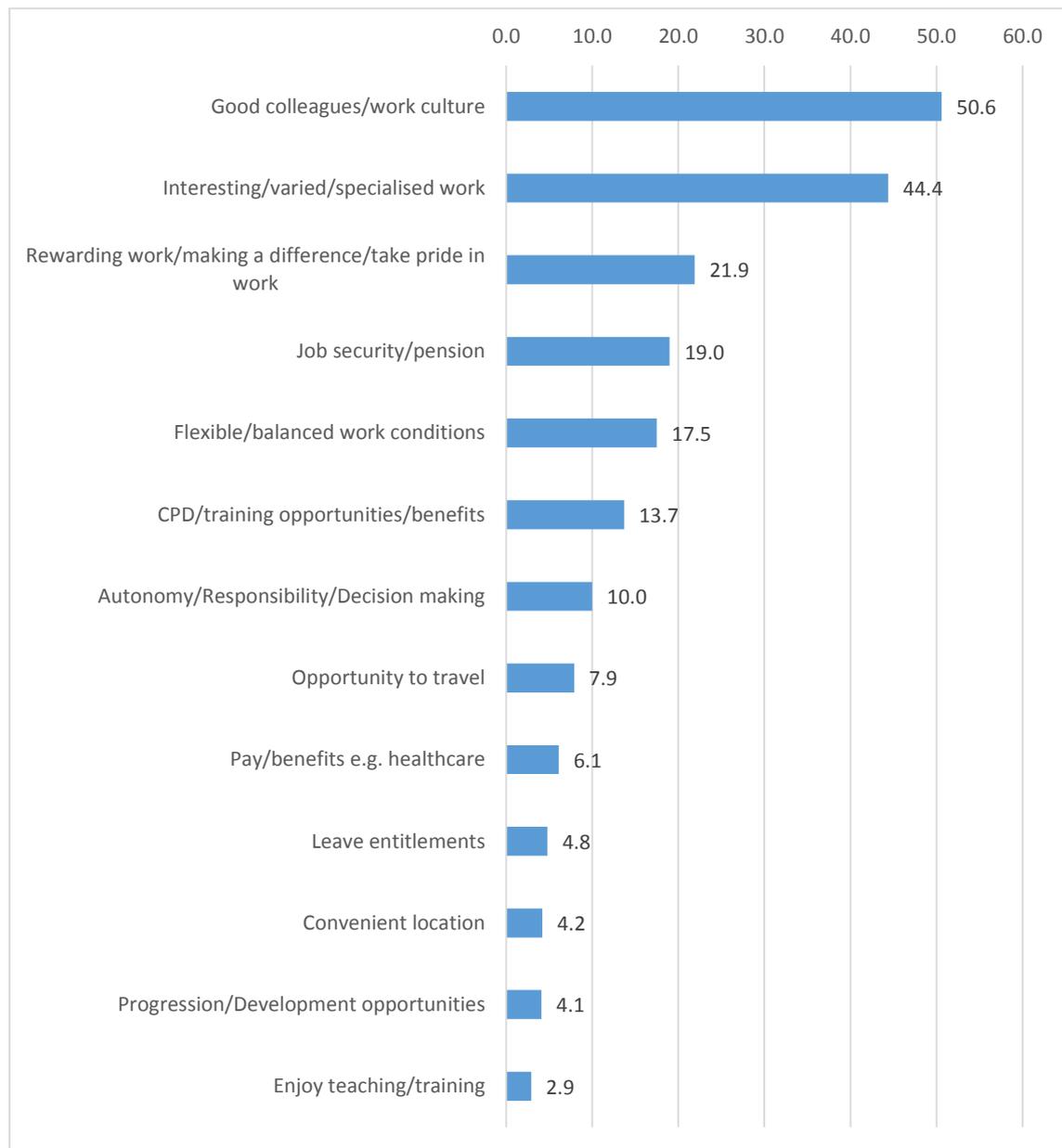
#### Positive aspects of the job

Figure 7 shows the percentages of respondents who provided a comment under each of 13 themes identified in response to the question 'Please describe the three most positive things about your current job'. About one in six respondents (18.2%) did not make any positive comment.

The most common theme related to having good colleagues and camaraderie, enjoying working with colleagues, and the professionalism of colleagues (50.6% of responses included this theme). The second most common theme was the interesting, varied and/or specialised nature of the work (44.4% of responses included this theme).

In addition, 21.9% commented on the reward and enjoyment they got from their work, taking pride in serving their country and/or helping others. About one in five (19.0%) commented positively on the security of the job and/or pension, and 17.5% mentioned flexible or balanced work conditions. About one in seven (13.7%) commented positively on the continuous professional development (CPD) or training that they could access, or the benefits of the CPD or training that they had received. One in ten (10%) liked the fact that they were in a position of responsibility, could work autonomously and/or could contribute to decision making in the organisation.

**Figure 7: Coded themes in response to the question ‘Please describe the three most positive things about your current job’**



Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding

Between 2.9% and 7.9% commented positively on the opportunities to travel provided by the job (7.9%), the pay and/or benefits (mainly access to free healthcare) (6.1%), leave entitlements (4.8%), the convenience of the work location in relation to their home (4.2%), opportunities for progression (4.1%) and/or the enjoyment they experienced in the teaching and training aspects of their work (2.9%).

While the numbers in some cells are small there are some statistically significant variations in the frequency with which these themes arose across respondents depending on specialism, grade/rank, area of service and year of entry. These are summarised in Table 11.

**Table 11: Variation in frequency of themes in response to the question ‘Please describe the three most positive things about your current job’: by specialism, grade/rank, area of service and year of entry**

Theme	More frequently mentioned by:
Good colleagues/work culture	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>
Interesting/varied/specialised work	Air corps staff; officers
Rewarding work/making a difference/take pride in work	ATCs, doctors, pilots; air corps staff; officers
Job security/pension	NCOs, privates
Flexible/balanced work conditions	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>
CPD/training opportunities/benefits	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>
Autonomy/responsibility/decision making	ATCs, doctors, pilots; navy staff; officers
Opportunity to travel	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>
Pay/benefits e.g. healthcare	Privates
Leave entitlements	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>
Convenient location	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>
Progression/development opportunities	CIS staff; army staff; privates; those who joined in 2013 or later
Enjoy teaching/training	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>

### Aspects of the job to change

Figure 8 shows the percentages of respondents who provided a comment under each of 15 themes identified in response to the question ‘Please describe the three things that you would most like to change about your current job’ (2.1% did not make any comment).

By far the most common theme related to pay and remuneration: this was mentioned by 81.3% of respondents. There were several aspects to respondents’ perceptions’ namely:

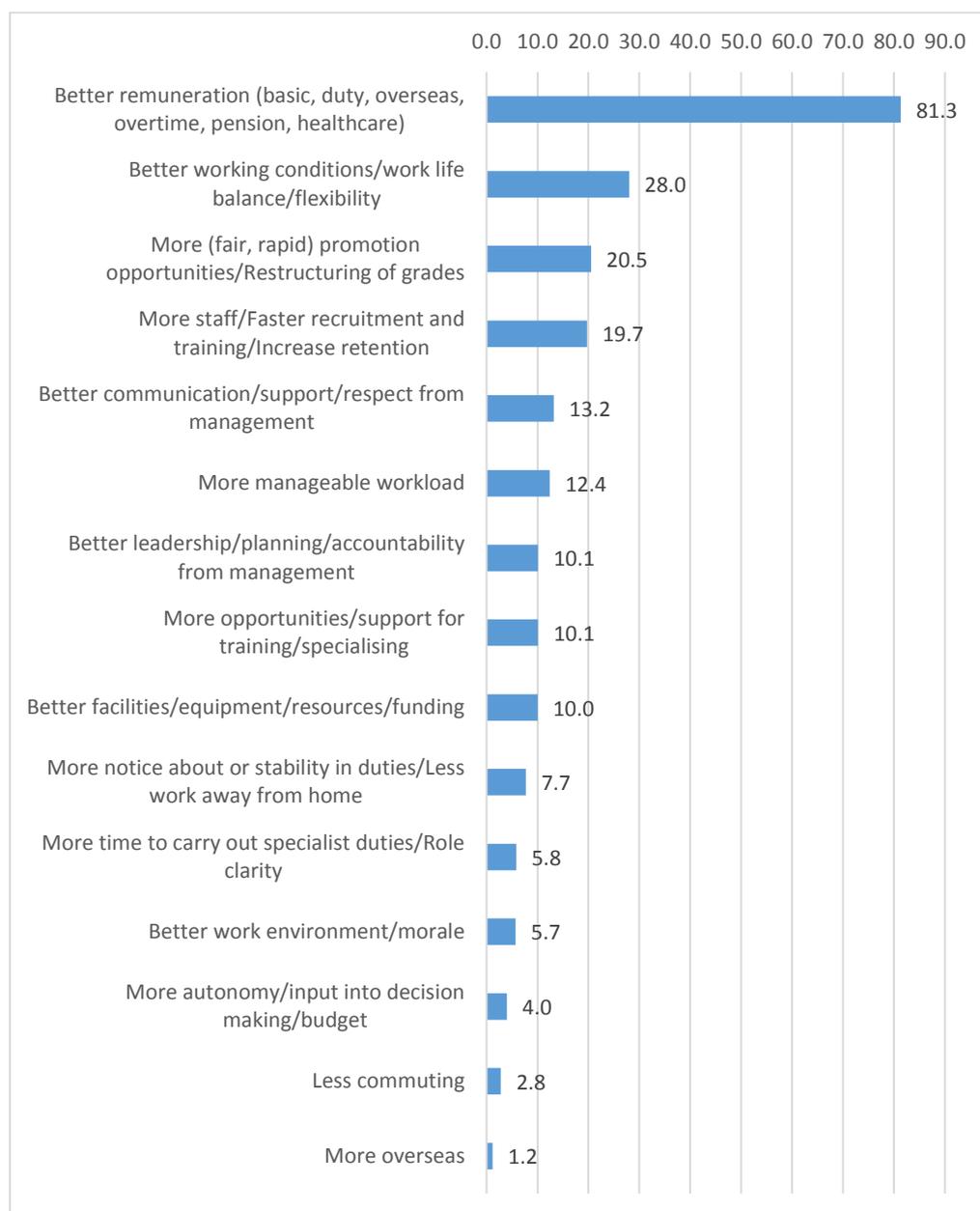
- Level of basic pay is perceived to be not in line with role, responsibilities, level of qualification or specialisation, or working conditions (comparisons were often drawn to pay in both the wider public and the private sectors).
- Duty pay, overtime pay and overseas pay are perceived to be much too low and should not be taxed. (Some respondents cited a figure of €25 after tax for 24-hour duties.)
- The pension package is perceived as poor, and entrants who have joined since 2013 cannot access the 21-year pension.
- Allowances are poor, difficult to claim due to administrative bureaucracy and unevenly applied.

- Additional duties and responsibilities (such as training roles) should be recognised through pay.
- There are some inequities in pay scales (e.g. between aircraft mechanics and aircraft inspectors).
- Pay should be restored to the levels seen prior to the post-2008 financial crisis.

About three in ten comments (28.0%) made reference to the need for better working conditions or better work–life balance. These perceptions included reference to:

- difficult or demanding working conditions and the high number of hours in general
- the view that the European Union’s Working Time Directive was not being implemented
- 24-hour duties and other extra duties being worked too frequently and without sufficient rest periods
- the need for the organisation to be more family friendly
- the negative impacts on long and/or unsociable hours on wellbeing and home life
- the need for commute times to be factored into working hours.

**Figure 8: Coded themes in response to the question ‘Please describe the three things that you would most like to change about your current job’**



One-fifth (20.5%) of respondents referred to the lack of promotion opportunities, the need for more rapid or fairer promotion structures and/or the perceived need to restructure grades. These perceptions were that:

- The promotion system in general is flawed and perceived to be unfair.
- The promotional prospects of NCOs are poor and this creates a divide between officers and NCOs.
- Promotions should be made on the basis of merit and ‘best fit’ to the requirements of the job.
- It takes too long to become eligible for promotion.

A further one-fifth of responses (19.7%) referred to shortages in staffing, the need for faster recruitment and training, and/or the need to address retention issues. Respondents’ perceived that:

- More staff are urgently needed to allow units to fulfil their duties.
- New staff need to have the required technical skills.
- Double- or triple-jobbing is causing significant difficulties in the context of chronic understaffing.
- Retention rates among specialist streams are poor due to more attractive pay and conditions outside the Defence Forces, and there should be incentives to retain experienced staff.

Between 10.0% and 13.2% of respondents perceived the need for:

- better communication, support and/or respect from management (including a better HR function) (13.2%)
- more manageable workloads (12.4%)
- better leadership, planning and/or accountability from management (10.1%)
- more opportunities and/or support for training and/or specialising (10.1%)
- better facilities, equipment, resources and/or funding (10.0%).

Finally, between 1.2% and 7.7% of comments mentioned the desire for:

- more notice about or stability in duties and/or less work away from home (7.7%)
- more time to carry out specialist duties and/or more role clarity (5.8%)
- a better work environment and/or morale (5.7%)
- more autonomy and/or input into decision making and/or budgets (4.0%)
- less commuting (2.8%)
- more work overseas (1.2%).

There are some statistically significant variations in the frequency with which these themes arose across respondents depending on specialism, grade/rank, area of service and year of entry. A small number of themes are excluded from this analysis as the numbers in individual cells are small. These are summarised in Table 12.

**Table 12: Variation in frequency of themes in response to the question ‘Please describe the three things that you would most like to change about your current job’: by specialism, grade/rank, area of service and year of entry**

Theme	More frequently mentioned by
Better remuneration (basic, duty, overseas, overtime, pension, healthcare)	NCOs, privates
More manageable workload	ATCs, doctors, pilots, engineers; officers; 1995–2012 entrants
More staff/faster recruitment and training/increase retention	ATCs, doctors, pilots, engineers, ordnance staff; officers
Better work environment/morale	<i>(No differences by specialism, grade/rank, area of service or year of entry)</i>
Better communication/support/respect from management	Navy staff
Better leadership/planning/accountability from management	Officers, NCOs
More autonomy/input into decision making/budget	Air corps staff
More time to carry out specialist duties/role clarity	ATCs, doctors, pilots; officers
Remaining issues are excluded from this analysis due to insufficient numbers in individual cells.	

### Perceptions of job and of organisation

Figure 9 presents the means for respondents on 16 index measures, described in more detail in section 2, that were included in the survey. Four additional indexes relating to recruitment and retention are examined in more detail in Parts 2 and 3. All indexes are expressed as percentages (see Section 2: Methodology for more information), and higher scores indicate more positive outcomes. Two ‘negative’ scales, burnout and commuting pressure, have been reverse scored for this part (to low burnout and low commuting pressure) in order to allow for comparisons with the ‘positive’ scales.

None of the indexes have particularly high scores. The two indexes with the highest scores (both 62%) are peer support and respect, and engagement.

Two of the 16 indexes have very low scores: satisfaction with pay and allowances (22%) and information sharing and decision making (21%).

Three further indexes have low scores, ranging from 31% to 32%: training and promotion opportunities, satisfaction with pension and satisfaction with work–life planning.

The remaining nine indexes have scores ranging from 42% to 52%:

- impact (52%)
- job satisfaction (global) (50%)
- autonomy (47%)
- satisfaction with accommodation (47%)
- job satisfaction (specific) (44%)
- low burnout (43%)
- low commuting pressure (43%)

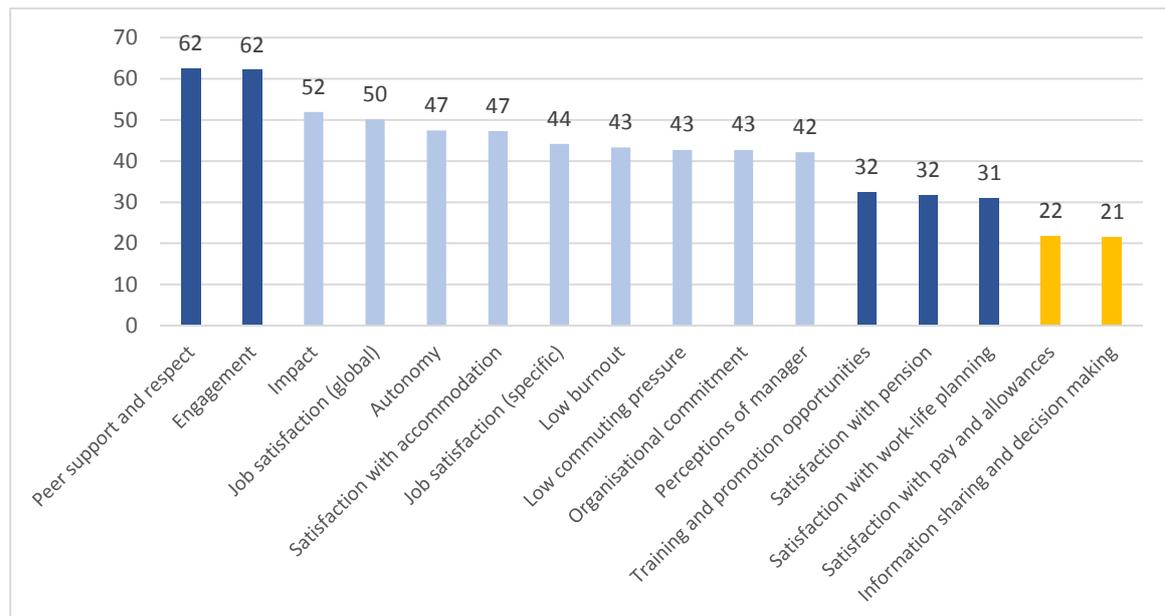
- organisational commitment (43%)
- perceptions of manager (42%).

Effort–reward ratio is an additional measure that is not included in Figure 9 since it is based on a different scaling metric to the 0–100 scale of the indexes: respondents had a mean effort–reward ratio of 1.78, meaning that they put in almost 1.8 times more effort than the reward experienced in their work.

This overall profile of individuals working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals are moderately to highly engaged in their work, put in high effort, and experience moderate to high levels of peer support and respect. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pensions, and a low sense of involvement in information sharing and decision making. A majority of these individuals are experiencing difficulties in work–life planning and perceive a lack of opportunities for training and promotion.

A number of these measures vary significantly by area of service, specialism, grade/rank and year of entering the Defence Forces. See the Data Appendix for the detailed results.

**Figure 9: Index scores (perceptions of job and of organisation) for specialist streams in the Defence Forces**



## Part 2: Recruitment issues for specialist streams in the Defence Forces

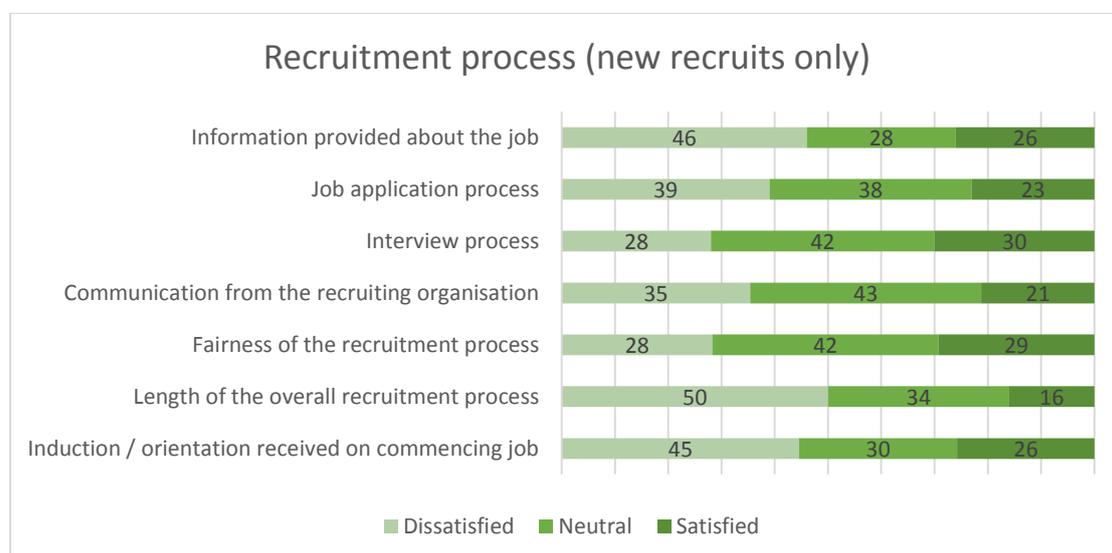
Two out of five respondents (40.2%) had been in their current job for two years or less. These 40.2% responded to questions about the recruitment process and their job expectations.

### Recruitment process

This index measures respondents' perceptions of the efficiency and fairness of the recruitment process of those who had been in their current job for two years or less. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions.

The overall score on the recruitment process index is 43%, indicating a low to moderate level of satisfaction. For example, 30% of respondents were satisfied with the interview process (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Responses to items on the recruitment process index**



Note. Percentages are based on respondents who had been in their current job for two years or less (40.2% of all respondents). Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding

Satisfaction with the recruitment process was most strongly related to:

- peer support and respect (.398)
- perceptions of manager (.401)
- satisfaction with pay and allowances (.419)
- satisfaction with accommodation (.430)
- training and promotion opportunities (.487).

(For further detail, see the Data Appendix, which shows intercorrelations between all index scores.)

- The recruitment process scores do not vary significantly by specialism or area of service (army, navy or air corps). However, NCOs (38%) and privates (40.5%) had significantly lower recruitment process scores than officers (50%). Also, the recruitment process scores were significantly lower among those who entered the Defence Forces between 2013 and 2018 (32%) compared with pre-1995 entrants (45%) and 1995–2012 entrants (45%)<sup>iii</sup>.

See the Data Appendix for more detail.

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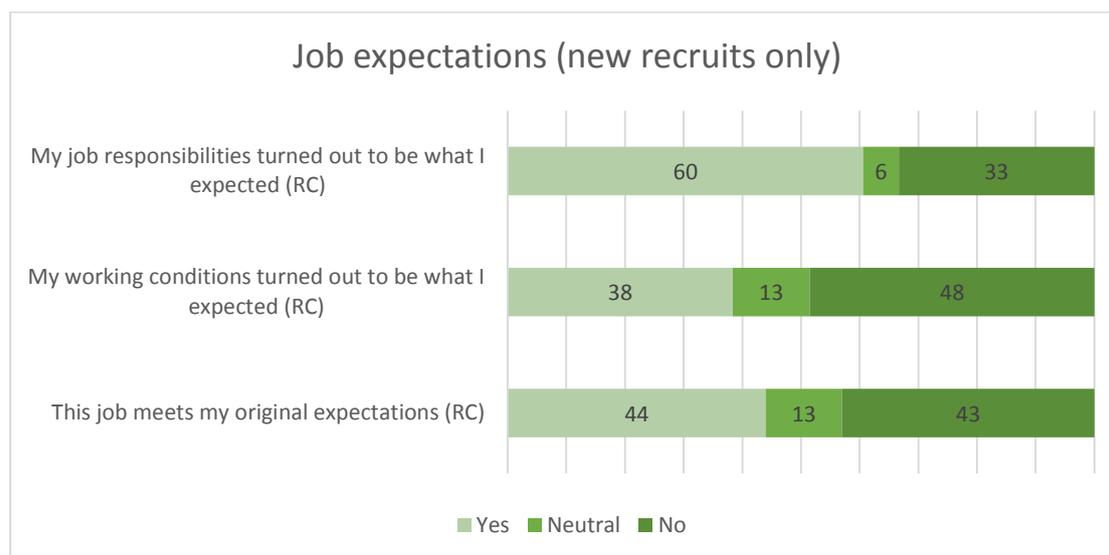
<sup>iii</sup> This scale was completed by all personnel who changed their job in the previous two years irrespective of when they joined the defence forces.

## Job expectations

This index measures respondents' perceptions of the extent to which job expectations matched job experiences. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions.

The overall score on the job expectations index is 59%, indicating a moderate to high level of match between expectations and experience. For example, 44% of respondents felt that the job met their original expectations (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Responses to items on the job expectations index**



Note. Percentages are based on respondents who had been in their current job for two years or less (40.2% of all respondents). 'RC' indicates that the item has been reverse coded to produce the index score. See Section 2: Methodology for more detail.

The job expectations index scores were most strongly correlated with the following :

- job satisfaction (specific) (.452)\*
- job satisfaction (global) (.447)
- training and promotion opportunities (.442)
- burnout (-.423)
- engagement (.418)

\*Note: as highlighted section 2, this indicator showed a low level of reliability

(For further detail, see the Data Appendix, which shows intercorrelations between all index scores.)

The job expectations scores do not vary significantly by specialism, area of service (army, navy or air corps), grade/rank or year in which respondents entered the Defence Forces.

See the Data Appendix for more detail.

## Issues relating to recruitment arising from interviews

While the survey dealt with recruitment experiences for those hired in last two years, other interviewees shared views on recruitment and retention issues. Only a small number of privates and NCOs who took part in interviews identified issues relating to recruitment, and this issue did not feature as a key theme in the qualitative research.

Only one private spoke of the experience of being recruited. This person compared the experience unfavourably with their experience with a different security service outside the jurisdiction, noting that:

*It was like there was a lot of stages... You know it's not really working now, I think they expected [more than 60] to turn up for medicals and I think [less than 10] turned up! I mean like so, you know, people are just finding out what it is like and they are just not going there now.*

Some NCOs commented that they would not be in a position to speak about recruitment as they had not taken part in any recent processes. It was suggested that 'if people want to apply, they'll want to apply' but that 'at all levels, all ranks, we're not getting the calibre of person [we need]'. The latter statement was contradicted by another NCO, who, while acknowledging that 'there are a few that shouldn't be in here', identified that the 'standards that are coming in, from what I've seen, are actually very good'.

Another individual highlighted a lack of interest in joining the Defence Forces, noting that:

*I've been involved in trying to recruit guys over the years. [Previously] we would have had thousands applying for maybe less than 50 places in a stream. We were down last year where we had less than 500 applicants... We're not attracting those people to even apply, so we don't even talk about retention. We don't get the applicants coming in!*

One NCO highlighted the role played by changes in pension entitlement and suggested this had an impact on recruitment as follows:

*I definitely think pension conditions would need to be looked at but I don't think they are going to be, realistically. But I think it's definitely one of the things now that kind of has changed [about] getting into the army, you know what I mean. You know the pull of that kind of a fast pension is not there any more.*

Another NCO, who had been a member of the Defence Forces for several years, noted that entering at a commissioned or non-commissioned had different implications and this was an influencing factor in whether to recommend joining:

*I have a son who is [a teenager] [...] He has said it before, that he would like to work at the [name of location]. I don't think I'd let him join unless he was working or he had a commission. Or if he went to college and got a degree. I don't think I'd recommend him to join. I wouldn't recommend him to join. I wouldn't let him join at a non-commissioned level. No way. I don't think so.*

One private recommended that the Defence Forces should:

*Concentrate on retention not on recruitment as the fiasco that the recruitment drive has failed drastically. If you retain your soldiers, they will in turn say to people, join the military. Whereas at the moment, everybody's using their feet to protest that we're walking out the gates and leaving the army. And I know anybody that has asked [about joining] the army I'm doing my best to turn them away from it. It's just not there for anybody any more.*

In summary, the commentary relating to recruitment mainly focused on generic issues about the attractiveness of the Defence Forces rather than on the processes involved.

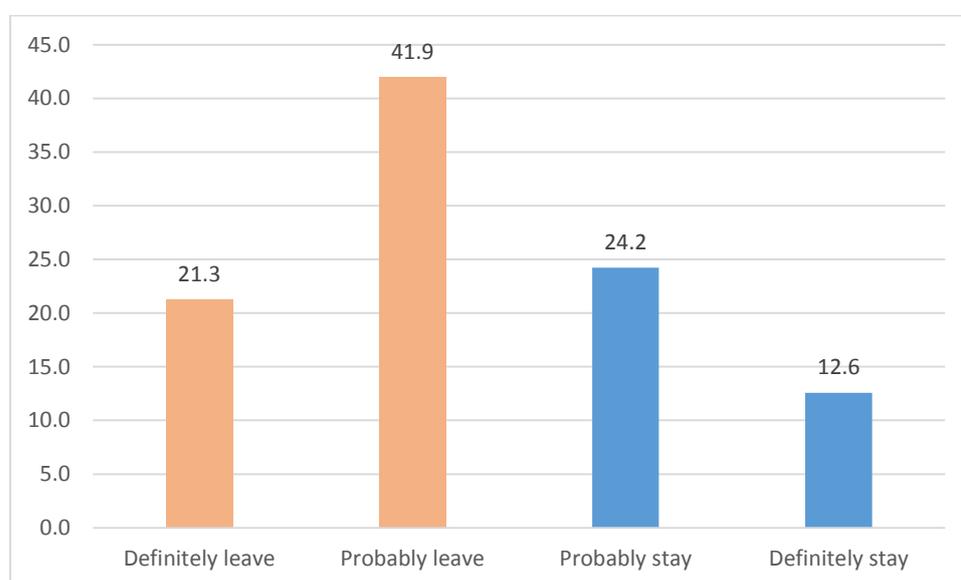
### Part 3: Retention issues for specialist streams in the Defence Forces

#### Percentages intending to stay in or leave the Defence Forces

Respondents were asked whether they intended to stay in or leave the Defence Forces over the next two years. The responses are shown in Figure 12. In order to form two groups (stay or leave), 'definitely leave' and 'probably leave' were recoded as 'leave', and 'definitely stay' and 'probably stay' were recoded as 'stay'.

Just over three in five respondents (63.2%) intended to leave the Defence Forces in two years or less, while 36.8% intended to stay.

**Figure 12: Responses to the question 'In the next two years, do you intend to leave the Defence Forces, or do you intend to stay?'**

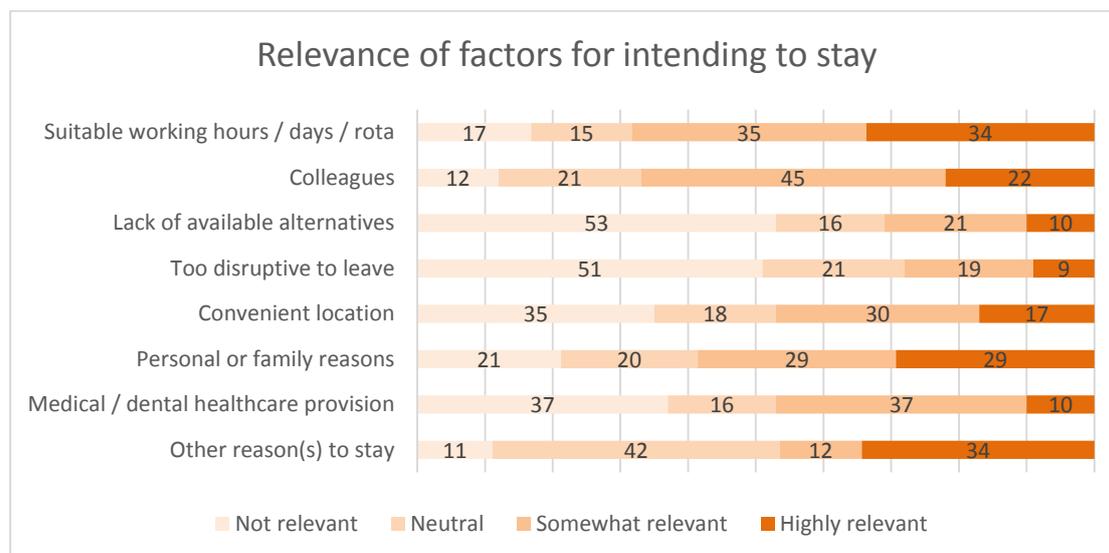


#### Relevance of factors for intending to stay in the Defence Forces

Respondents who expressed an intention to stay in the Defence Forces were asked to indicate the relevance of a range of factors to this intention. These are shown in Figure 13. The three most relevant reasons (i.e. with the highest frequencies of 'highly relevant' ratings) were suitable working hours/days/rota (34%), personal or family reasons (29%) and colleagues (22%).

In addition, 17% of respondents rated convenient location as highly relevant, 10% indicated that medical or dental care provision was highly relevant, the lack of available alternatives was identified by 10%, and 9% rated 'too disruptive to leave' as highly relevant.

**Figure 13: Ratings of the relevance of various factors for intending to stay in the Defence Forces for the next two years**



Note. This question was answered by the 36.8% of respondents who expressed an intention to stay in the Defence Forces for the next two years. Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding.

About one in five respondents (19%) provided written comments on their reasons for staying in the job. The two most common reasons were waiting until they became eligible for their pension (about 28%) and being unable to afford the financial penalty for breaking their contract (about 13%).

About one in ten respondents indicated that they took pride in their work, were committed to their work, felt responsible or enjoyed aspects of their work. Other reasons were mentioned less frequently; they included being on a training course, waiting in the hope of a promotion or improvements to pay and working conditions, financial obligations, and job security.

About three in ten of these comments were negative in tone, and in these instances, respondents appeared to be listing the reasons that they might leave their jobs. Some examples of these comments are shown below to illustrate the challenges that respondents are experiencing.

### Relevance of factors for intending to leave the Defence Forces

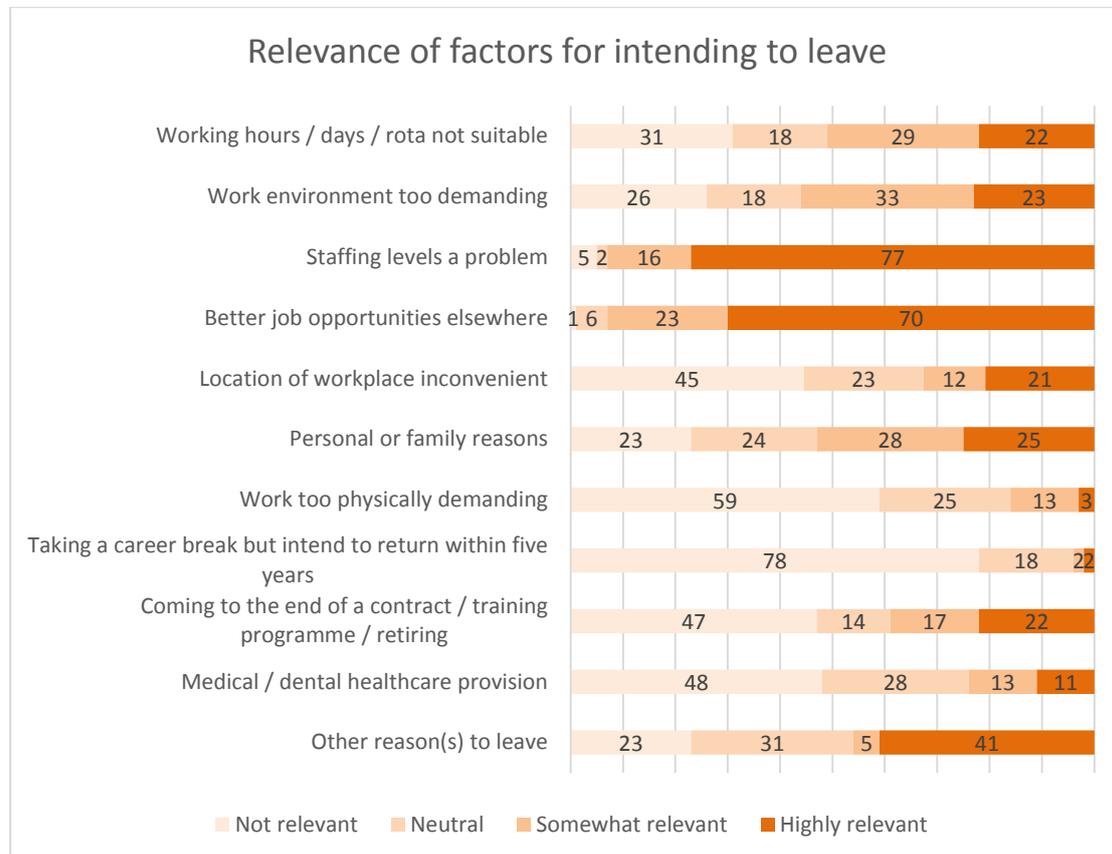
Respondents who expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces were asked to indicate the relevance of a range of factors to this intention. These are shown in Figure 14. Two of these reasons stand out as the most frequently rated as highly relevant: staffing levels are a problem (77%) and better opportunities elsewhere (70%).

In addition, between 21% and 25% rated the following reasons as highly relevant to their intention to leave the Defence Forces:

- personal or family reasons (25%)
- work environment too demanding (23%)
- working hours/days/rota not suitable (22%)
- coming to the end of a contract/training programme/retiring (22%)
- location of workplace inconvenient (21%).

Smaller percentages (2–11%) rated the following as highly relevant: medical/dental healthcare provision (11%), work is too physically demanding (3%) and taking a career break but intend to return within five years (2%).

**Figure 14: Ratings of the relevance of various factors for intending to leave the Defence Forces in the next two years**



Note. This question was answered by the 63.2% of respondents who expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces in the next two years. Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding.

About three in ten respondents (31%) provided written comments on their reasons for leaving the Defence Forces.

By far the most common reason was pay: this appeared in about three-fifths of responses. In half of these responses, pay was mentioned alongside other reasons, most commonly working conditions, lack of promotional prospects, and travel or commuting requirements. It was very common for these respondents to compare their pay and conditions to those of their peers in the wider public and private sectors. Smaller percentages of respondents (fewer than 5%) provided single reasons for their intention to leave the Defence Forces: these comprised the perceived unfairness of the promotion process, workload or work–life balance, health and safety concerns, lack of skills use, poor management, understaffing and high general turnover.

About one in six responses provided multiple reasons for intentions to leave; the issues raised reflect those provided in Figure 14 above.

## Commentary on positive and negative aspects of the job: ‘stay’ and ‘leave’ groups

The ‘stay’ and ‘leave’ groups were compared on their responses to the two questions described in Part 1 of the results above (i.e. aspects of the job that they liked the most, and aspects that they would like to see changed).

A series of chi-square tests (stay/leave by presence/absence of each specific theme) indicated that the stay and leave groups are largely the same with respect to these themes, with just two statistically significant differences:

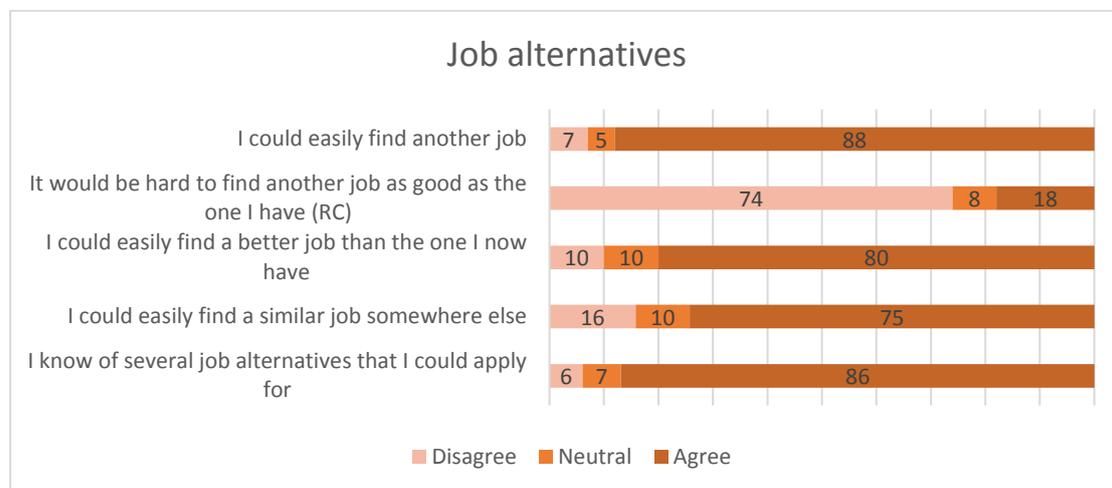
- (positive aspect) opportunities to travel (leave: 6%; stay: 11%;  $p$  (chi-square) = .044)
- (aspect to change) more facilities, equipment, resources or funding (leave: 8%; stay = 14%;  $p$  (chi-square) = .026).

These results indicate that the leave group were *less* likely than the stay group to comment on opportunities to travel or the need for more facilities, equipment etc. (possibly because these issues were superseded by others, such as pay and working conditions).

## Job alternatives

This index measures the perceived availability of alternative employment. The overall mean on the job alternatives index is 79%, indicating a high perceived level of availability of alternative employment (Figure 15). For example, 80% of respondents agreed that they could easily find a better job than the one they then had, and 75% agreed that they could easily find a similar job somewhere else.

**Figure 15: Responses to items on the job alternatives index**



Note. ‘RC’ indicates that the item has been reverse coded to produce the index score. See Section 2: Methodology for more detail. Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding.

The job alternatives index scores were most strongly related to:

- intention to leave (.542)
- effort–reward ratio (.390)
- satisfaction with pay and allowances (–.362)
- work–life planning (–.355)
- burnout (.312)

(For further detail, see the Data Appendix, which shows intercorrelations between all index scores.)

The job alternatives scores do not vary significantly by specialism, area of service (army, navy or air corps) or grade/rank. However, respondents who entered the Defence Forces between 1995 and 2012 had a significantly higher job alternatives score (80%) than those who entered in 1994 or earlier (73%) or between 2013 and 2018 (71%).

See the Data Appendix for more detail.

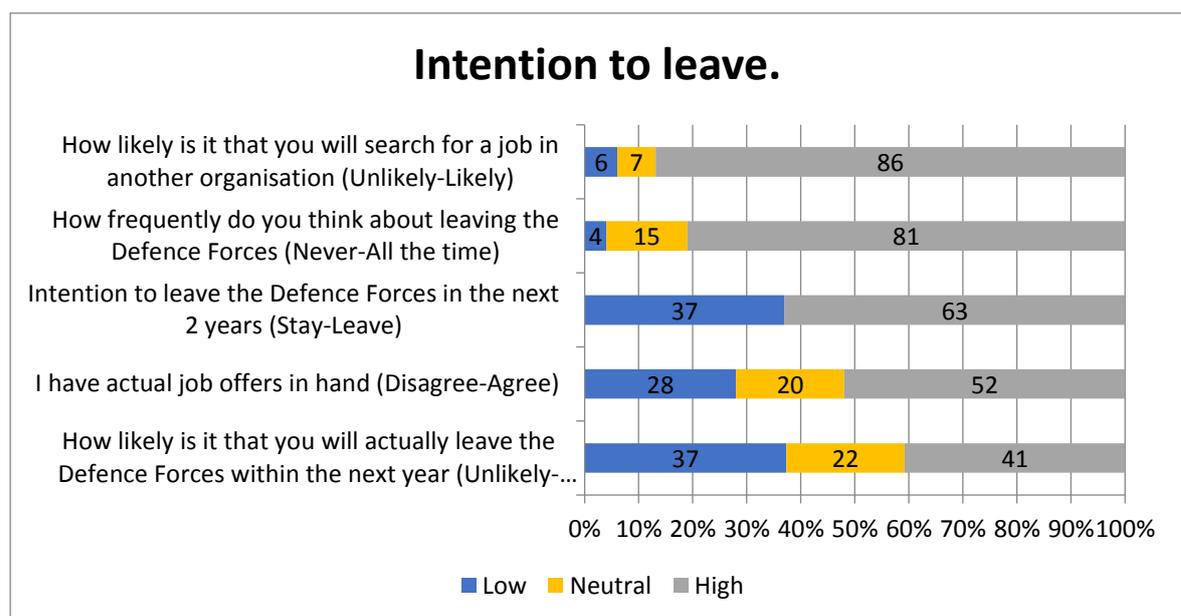
### Intention to leave

This index measures the level of intent expressed by respondents to leave their job in the Defence Forces (Figure 16). It is a combination of five items. The first asked about the frequency with which respondents thought about leaving the Defence Forces; the second and third asked about the likelihood that respondents would leave the Defence Forces and search for a job in another organisation, respectively; the fourth asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding whether or not they had job offers in hand; and the final item asked respondents whether they intended to stay in or leave the Defence Forces in the next two years (the same item that is shown in Figure 16). The index was computed in a method similar to all other indexes in this report (i.e. responses were combined to form a scale ranging from 0% to 100%).

The mean intention to leave index score is 64%, indicating moderate to high intention to leave the Defence Forces.

The responses show that 81% indicated that they thought about leaving the Defence Forces all of the time, 41% indicated that it was likely that they would leave the Defence Forces in the next year, 86% indicated that it was likely that they would search for a job in another organisation, 52% had actual job offers in hand, and 63% indicated that they would probably or definitely leave the Defence Forces in the next two years.

**Figure 16: Responses to items on the intention to leave index**



Note. The response options for items 1 and 5 were 'very unlikely', 'unlikely', 'neither likely nor unlikely', 'likely' and 'very likely'; The response options for item2 were 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and 'all of the time'; the response options for items 3 were 'definitely stay', 'probably stay', 'probably leave' and 'definitely leave'; and the response options for items 4 were 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'somewhat disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'somewhat agree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'; Note: Not all columns add to 100% due to rounding.

The intention to leave index scores were most strongly related to:

- job alternatives (.542)
- satisfaction with pay and allowances (-.386)
- burnout (.376)
- job satisfaction (global) (-.367)
- effort–reward ratio (.367)

- .

(For further detail, see the Data Appendix, which shows intercorrelations between all index scores.)

The intention to leave scores do not vary significantly by specialism or area of service (army, navy or air corps). However, NCOs had significantly higher intention to leave scores (67%) than officers (57%) or privates (60%). Also, respondents who entered the Defence Forces between 2013 and 2018 had significantly lower intention to leave scores (53%) than those who entered in 1994 or earlier (66%) or between 1995 and 2012 (63%).

See the Data Appendix for more detail.

## Part 4: Regression analysis of intention to leave the organisation

### Introduction

This part presents the results of a multiple regression analysis of respondents' intention to leave the organisation. The outcome is the intention to leave index described at the end of Part 3. An advantage of multiple regression is that it allows the examination of multiple respondent characteristics simultaneously, thereby providing an indication of which are the most important in predicting the outcome.

In line with the theoretical framework guiding this study, the variables are categorised into three blocks: *individual and employment characteristics* (or controls), *perceptions of job, organisation and wider employment context*, and *impacts* (Table 13).

**Table 13: Explanatory variables in the regression model of respondents' intention to leave the organisation**

Block	Measure	Description/comment
Block 1: individual and employment characteristics (controls)	Area of service	Army, navy, air corps: army is the reference group
	Grade/rank	Junior/senior officer, junior/senior NCO, private: junior/senior officer is the reference group
	Specialism	CIS staff, engineer, ordnance staff, technician, others (ATC, doctor, pilot): others is the reference group
	Year of joining the Defence Forces	1994 or earlier, 1995–2012, 2013–2018: 1994 or earlier is the reference group
Block 2: perceptions of job, organisation and wider employment context	Autonomy	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Impact	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Satisfaction with pay and allowances	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Satisfaction with pension	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Information sharing and decision making	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Commuting pressure	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Satisfaction with accommodation	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Training and promotion opportunities	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Peer support and respect	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome

Block	Measure	Description/comment
	Perceptions of manager	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Job alternatives	Index; higher scores indicate more alternatives for employment
Block 3: impacts	Engagement	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Work–life planning	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Job satisfaction (specific)	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Job satisfaction (global)	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome
	Burnout	Index; higher scores indicate a more negative outcome
	Effort–reward ratio	Ratio of effort–reward; higher scores indicate a more negative outcome
	Organisational commitment	Index; higher scores indicate a more positive outcome

To facilitate interpretation, a summary of findings is presented alongside the more detailed regression results. Section 2: Methodology provides a technical description of how the models were built.

## Results

Table 14 provides a summary of the regression analysis, while Table 15 shows the more detailed model output. Results indicate that:

- In Model 1, the only individual/employment characteristic associated with intention to leave the organisation is grade/rank. The results indicate that NCOs are significantly more likely to intend to leave than officers or privates. Specialism, area of service (army, navy or air corps) and year of entry to the Defence Forces are not significant. The effects of grade/rank are quite weak (as indicated by the *r*-square value of .040).
- In Model 2, which includes measures of perceptions of job, organisation and the wider employment context, four of the ten indexes examined are significant predictors of intention to leave: job alternatives, satisfaction with pay and allowances, satisfaction with accommodation, and training and promotion opportunities. The control variable, grade/rank, is still statistically significant in the presence of these perception measures. The magnitude of the standardised coefficient for job alternatives (.44) is quite large, indicating that this index has a strong effect on intention to leave.
- In Model 3, four of the seven impact measures are significant: burnout, effort–reward ratio, global job satisfaction and engagement. Again, the control variable, grade/rank, is still statistically significant in the presence of these perception measures. The driver-type analysis in Part 5 examines this finding further, i.e. it examines which of the perception measures serve to drive these four impacts. It is perhaps unexpected that engagement is positively related to intention to leave. This

scale measures the extent to which respondents felt enthusiastic, inspired and positively disposed to their work. Given that these are specialist areas of work, it is possible that respondents answered with respect to their specialism more so than the particular environment in which they work. Commentary presented in the qualitative findings also supports this viewpoint.

- Model 2 (perceptions) explains 36% of the variation in intention to leave the organisation, while Model 3 (impacts) explains 23% of the variation in intention to leave the organisation.

**Table 14: Summary of regression of respondents' intention to leave the organisation**

Characteristics <b>unrelated</b> to likelihood of leaving	Characteristics <b>related</b> to likelihood of leaving
<i>Individual and employment characteristics (controls)</i>	
Area of service (army, navy or air corps)	Rank (NCOs most likely to leave)
Specialism	
Year of entering the Defence Forces	
<i>Perceptions of job and organisation</i>	
Autonomy	More job alternatives
Impact	Lower satisfaction with pay and allowances
Information sharing and decision making	Lower satisfaction with accommodation
Commuting pressure	Fewer training and promotion opportunities
Support and respect from peers	
Perceptions of manager	
<i>Impacts</i>	
Work-life planning	Higher burnout
Job satisfaction (specific)	Higher effort-reward ratio
Organisational commitment	Lower global job satisfaction
	Higher engagement

**Table 15: Parameter estimates and significance tests for multiple linear regression models of respondents' intention to leave the organisation**

Specialist streams in the Defence Forces: intention to leave organisation	Model 1: individual and employment characteristics only ( <i>r</i> -square = .031)			Model 2: Model 1 with perceptions ( <i>r</i> -square = .362)			Model 3: Model 1 with impacts ( <i>r</i> -square = .233)		
	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Individual and employment characteristics (controls)</b>									
Grade/rank: junior/senior NCO vs junior/senior officer	.209	9.516	<.001	.110	6.444	.002	.122	4.416	.013
Grade/rank: private vs junior/senior officer	.050			-.063			.014		
<b>Perceptions of job, organisation and wider employment context</b>									
Job alternatives (higher scores indicate more alternative employment)				.444	11.735	<.001			
Satisfaction with pay and allowances (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome i.e. high satisfaction with pay predicts lower intention to leave the organisation)				-.148	-3.506	<.001			
Satisfaction with accommodation (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				-.094	-2.329	.020			
Training and promotion opportunities (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				-.087	-2.215	.027			
<b>Impacts</b>									
Burnout (higher scores indicate a more negative outcome)							.264	5.460	<.001
Effort–reward ratio (higher scores indicate a more negative outcome)							.172	3.734	<.001
Job satisfaction (global) (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)							-.254	-4.575	<.001
Engagement (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)							.171	3.011	.003

## Part 5: Regression analysis of impact measures

This part presents the results of multiple regression analysis of the four impact measures that were statistically significant in predicting respondents' intention to leave the organisation reported in Part 4: burnout, effort–reward ratio, global job satisfaction and engagement.

For each of these three impact measures, forward regression analyses take the impact as the outcome, and the perception measures (i.e. those included in Block 2 in Table 13) as predictors. The results are shown in Table 16.

The *r*-square statistic shows the amount of variation in the impact measure that is accounted for by the perception measures. The partial correlation coefficients indicate the relationship between the perceptions measure and the impact measure after adjusting for the relationships between the other perception measures and the impact.

Taking burnout first, the analysis indicates that 5 of the 11 perception measures explain 40% of the variation in burnout (*r*-square = .404). The absolute values of the partial correlation coefficients are weak to strong in magnitude,<sup>iv</sup> ranging from .088 to .515. The perception measures that may be considered 'drivers' of burnout are commuting pressure, information sharing and decision making, job alternatives, autonomy and impact. The strong partial correlation associated with the commuting pressure index (.515) indicates that it is a key driver of burnout.

For the effort–reward ratio, 5 of the 11 perception measures are significantly associated with this outcome, explaining 43% of the variation in organisational commitment (*r*-square = .428). The absolute values of the partial correlation coefficients are weak to weak-moderate in magnitude, ranging from .179 to .286. The perception measures that may be considered drivers of effort–reward ratios are satisfaction with pay and allowances, perceptions of manager, job alternatives, training and promotion opportunities, and commuting pressure.

For global job satisfaction, 7 of the 11 perception measures are significantly associated with this outcome, explaining 38% of the variation in global job satisfaction (*r*-square = .383). The absolute values of the partial correlation coefficients are weak in magnitude, ranging from .100 to .257. The perception measures that may be considered drivers of global job satisfaction are satisfaction with pay and allowances, autonomy, impact, training and promotion opportunities, commuting pressure, job alternatives and perceptions of manager.

Finally, for engagement, 5 of the 11 perception measures are significantly associated with this outcome, explaining 40% of the variation in engagement (*r*-square = .403). The absolute values of the partial correlation coefficients are weak to moderate in magnitude, ranging from .142 to .382. The perception measures that may be considered drivers of engagement are autonomy, impact, commuting pressure, perceptions of manager, and training and promotion opportunities.

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<sup>iv</sup> As a guide, we suggest these cut-offs for interpreting correlation coefficients: between  $\pm 0.50$  and  $\pm 1$  = strong; between  $\pm 0.30$  and  $\pm 0.49$  = moderate; below  $\pm 0.29$  = weak.

**Table 16: Results of a driver-type analysis of burnout, effort–reward ratio, global job satisfaction and engagement**

Burnout			Effort–reward ratio		
<i>Index</i>	<i>R-square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>	<i>Index</i>	<i>R-square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Commuting pressure	.346	.515	Satisfaction with pay and allowances	.225	–.179
Information sharing and decision making	.376	–.156	Perceptions of manager	.324	–.286
Job alternatives	.389	.165	Job alternatives	.373	.261
Autonomy	.400	–.131	Training and promotion opportunities	.402	–.218
Impact	.404	–.088	Commuting pressure	.428	.211
Global job satisfaction			Engagement		
<i>Index</i>	<i>R-square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>	<i>Index</i>	<i>R-square (cumulative nested models)*</i>	<i>Partial correlation coefficient**</i>
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	.164	.100	Autonomy	.185	.313
Autonomy	.245	.251	Impact	.321	.382
Impact	.301	.257	Commuting pressure	.362	–.212
Training and promotion opportunities	.339	.179	Perceptions of manager	.391	.159
Commuting pressure	.358	–.161	Training and promotion opportunities	.403	.142
Job alternatives	.373	–.158			
Perceptions of manager	.383	.137			

\*The *r*-square statistic is cumulative, i.e. denotes variance explained in the outcome for each measure on the list as well as all measures preceding it.

\*\*This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

As explained in Part 4, the regression of impact measures on intention to leave the organisation explained 23% of the variation, meaning that the four impact measures examined in more detail here, even considered jointly, still leave about 77% of the variation in intention to leave unaccounted for. Indeed, the regression of perceptions on intention to leave explained proportionately more of the variation (38%) in intention to leave, and the strong effects of job alternatives and satisfaction with pay and allowances were evident from that model.

Nevertheless, this driver-type analysis highlights the strong effects of commuting pressure on burnout. It also further underlines the role that job alternatives play, both in driving the intention to leave outcome and in driving burnout, effort–reward ratio and global job

satisfaction. Similarly, satisfaction with pay and allowances predict intention to leave as well as the two impact measures effort–reward ratio and global job satisfaction.

The results additionally show that, while the four impact measures have some drivers in common (e.g. commuting pressure drives all four impacts, and autonomy and impact drive all impacts except effort–reward ratio), there are also some differences. For example, training and promotion opportunities drive effort–reward ratio and engagement but not burnout and global job satisfaction, and perceptions of manager drive global job satisfaction and engagement but not effort–reward ratio or burnout.

Identifying ways to enhance these drivers (while taking other key findings from the quantitative results into account, such as the very low overall index scores for satisfaction with pay and allowances and for information sharing and decision making) may result in more positive outcomes on impact measures, which in turn may lead to lower intentions to leave.

**Part 6: Quantitative and qualitative findings emerging in respect of officers' intention to leave**

## Overview of officers' intention to leave

This part focuses on the quantitative and qualitative findings with regard to officers' intention to leave the Defence Forces. There are five sub-parts, as follows:

- Part 6a presents officers' perceptions of the job and the organisation.
- Part 6b describes the regression analyses of officers' intention to leave the organisation.
- Part 6c describes the regression analysis of impact measures.
- Part 6d presents the findings from interviews with officers.
- Part 6e provides a summary and conclusions regarding retention issues relating to officers.

**57.4% of officers expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces**

## Part 6a: Perceptions of the job and the organisation

Figure 17 presents the means for officers on the index measures that were included in the survey. All indexes are expressed as percentages (see Section 2: Methodology for more information), and higher scores indicate more positive outcomes. Two 'negative' scales, burnout and commuting pressure, have been reverse scored for this part (to low burnout and low commuting pressure) in order to allow for comparisons with the 'positive' scales. This means that for all scales presented in Figure 17, higher scores indicate a more positive outcome. For example, a high score on the 'low burnout' scale as presented in Figure 17 would indicate low to average levels of burnout.

The three indexes with the highest scores are job alternatives (75.7%), peer support and respect (71.3%) and engagement (69.8%).

Two of the 16 indexes have very low scores: information sharing and decision making (28.9%) and satisfaction with pay and allowances (28.3%)

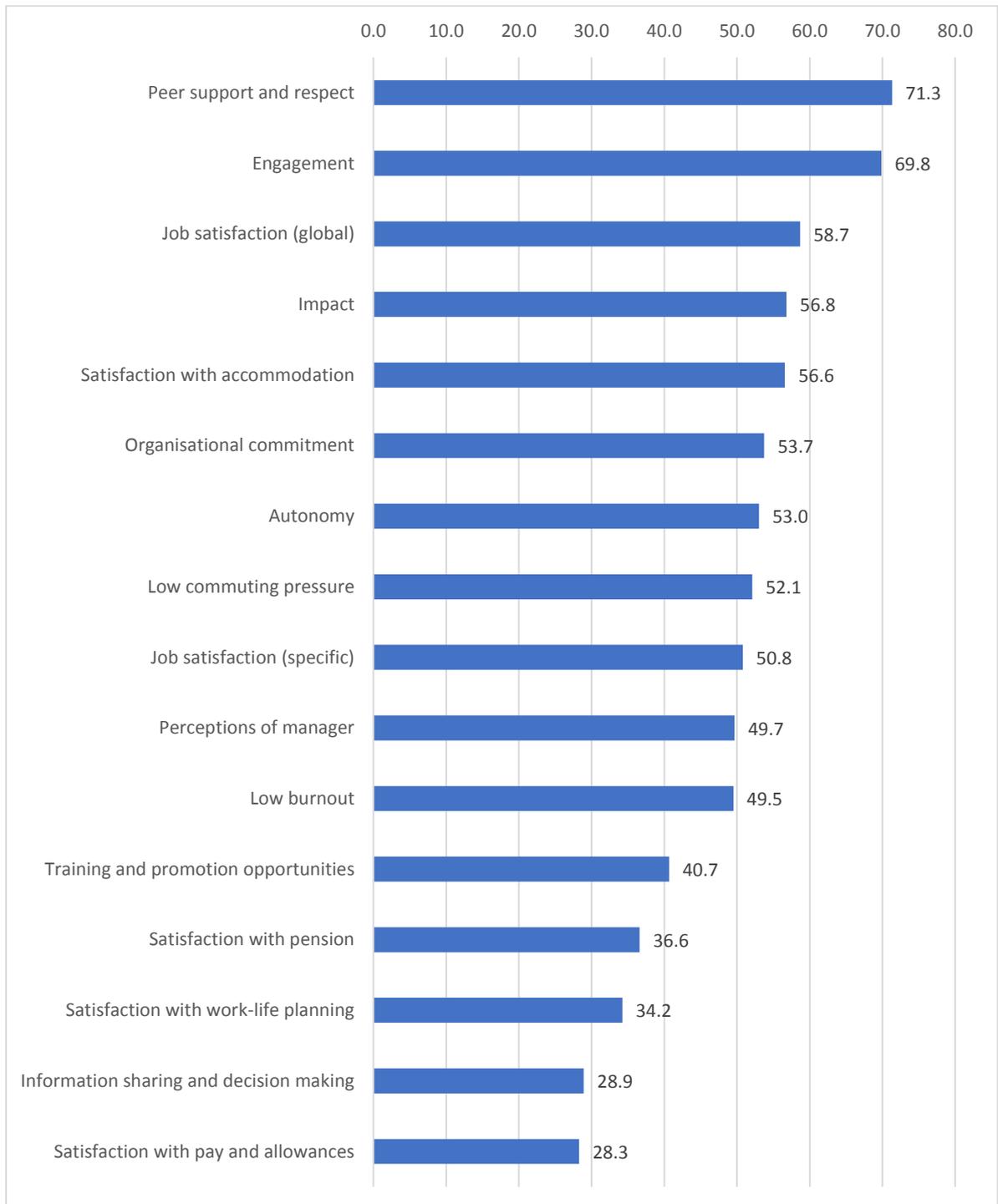
Two further indexes have low scores: satisfaction with pension (36.6%) and satisfaction with work–life planning (34.2%).

The remaining indexes have scores ranging from 40.7% to 58.7%:

- job satisfaction (global) (58.7%)
- impact (56.8%)
- satisfaction with accommodation (56.6%)
- organisational commitment (53.7%)
- autonomy (53.0%)
- job satisfaction (specific) (50.8%)
- low burnout (50.5%)
- perceptions of manager (49.7%)
- commuting pressure (47.9%)
- training and promotion opportunities (40.7%)

Effort–reward ratio is an additional measure that is not included in Figure 17 since it is on a different metric to the 0–100% scale of the indexes. Officer respondents had a mean effort–reward ratio of 1.78, meaning that they put in almost 1.8 times more effort than the reward experienced in their work.

**Figure 17: Index scores: perceptions of job and of organisation for officers in the Defence Forces**



This overall profile of officers working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals report having very good job alternatives, experience high levels of peer support and respect, and are engaged in their work. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with pay and allowances, and a low sense of involvement in information sharing and decision making. A majority of these individuals report experiencing difficulties in work-life planning, a lack of opportunities for training and promotion and a low level of satisfaction with pension.

## Part 6b: Regression analyses of intention to leave the organisation

To examine whether different perceptions and impact measures were associated with intention to leave the organisation, regression analyses were carried out for officers.

Table 17 presents a summary of the regression analysis of intention to leave the organisation for officers and Table 18 presents the parameter estimates and significance tests.

The findings show that the explanatory power of the regression model (indicated by the *r*-square statistic) varied across perception measures and impact. Perception measures explained 36% of the variation in officers' intention to leave, and the explanatory power of the regression of impact measures was weaker, at 30%. The availability of job alternatives was strongly and positively associated with intention to leave. Training and promotion opportunities and satisfaction with pension also emerged as significant predictors of intention to leave among officers. While the finding relating to satisfaction with pension is counter-intuitive, it is noted that the two most common reasons given for staying were that individuals were waiting until they became eligible for their pension (about 28%) and being unable to afford the financial penalty for breaking their contract (about 13%).

Higher levels of burnout, lower levels of global and specific job satisfaction, and lower levels of organisational commitment were significant among officers' intention to leave. Higher engagement was associated with a higher likelihood of intention to leave among officers, and this relationship was also found in the regression analysis reported in Part 5. While this finding is counter-intuitive, it may be that while officers are highly engaged in their jobs, which are highly specialised, they are not committed to the Defence Forces and it is this low organisational commitment that is leading to higher intention to leave. This interpretation would be broadly consistent with what was reported in the regression for this group.

**Table 17: Summary of regression of respondents' intention to leave: officers**

Characteristics <b>unrelated</b> to likelihood of leaving	Characteristics <b>related</b> to likelihood of leaving
<i>Perceptions</i>	
Autonomy	More job alternatives
Impact	Fewer training and promotion opportunities
Information sharing and decision making	Higher satisfaction with pension
Commuting pressure	
Support and respect from peers	
Perceptions of manager	
Lower satisfaction with pay and allowances	
Lower satisfaction with accommodation	
<i>Impacts</i>	
Work-life planning	Higher burnout
	Lower global job satisfaction
	Higher engagement

	Lower organisational commitment
	Lower specific job satisfaction

**Table 18: Parameter estimates and significance tests for multiple linear regression models of respondents' intention to leave: officers**

Specialist streams in the Defence Forces (officers): intention to leave	Model 1: perceptions ( <i>r</i> -square = .359)			Model 2: impacts ( <i>r</i> -square = .303)		
	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Perceptions of job, organisation and wider employment context</b>						
Job alternatives (higher scores indicate more alternative employment)	.531	7.497	<.001			
Training and promotion opportunities (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	-.244	-3.443	.001			
Satisfaction with pension (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	.172	2.425	.017			
<b>Impacts</b>						
Burnout (higher scores indicate a more negative outcome)				.300	3.419	.001
Job satisfaction (global) (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				-.365	-3.579	<.001
Engagement (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				.396	3.881	<.001
Organisational commitment (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				-.183	-2.250	.026
Job satisfaction (specific) (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				-.187	-2.247	.026

## Part 6c: Regression analysis of impact measures

This part presents the results of a multiple regression analysis of the impact measures that were statistically significant in predicting officers' intention to leave the organisation.

Table 19 highlights those perception measures that have partial correlation coefficients<sup>v</sup> of around .3 or higher – that is, perceptions that have moderate and moderate to strong associations with the impact measures. These indexes may be regarded as the key drivers of impacts.

This analysis shows that, for officers, the key drivers of the impacts considered are job alternatives, training and promotion opportunities, autonomy, peer support and respect, and satisfaction with pay and allowances. Job alternatives and training and promotion opportunities act both as direct predictors of intention to leave the organisation and as drivers of the impact measures in this group.

The results should be interpreted in conjunction with the regression analysis presented in Part 6b; they indicate that, among officers, training and promotion opportunities and an examination of the factors underpinning job alternatives are important policy considerations.

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<sup>v</sup> This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

**Table 19: Results of driver-type analysis: officers**

Burnout	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	.208	-.064
Job alternatives	.281	.350
Commuting pressure	.350	.275
Autonomy	.409	-.276
Training and promotion opportunities	.433	-.198
Global job satisfaction	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Training and promotion opportunities	.199	.379
Autonomy	.259	.271
Job alternatives	.287	-.196
Engagement	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Training and promotion opportunities	.210	.383
Autonomy	.290	.333
Impact	.346	.281
Organisational commitment	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Peer support and respect	.258	.500
Job alternatives	.318	-.326
Impact	.377	.294
Specific job satisfaction	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	.183	.331
Information sharing and decision making	.255	.253
Autonomy	.288	.211

\*The *r*-square statistic is cumulative, i.e. denotes variance explained in the outcome for each measure on the list as well as all measures preceding it.

\*\*This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

## Part 6d: Issues arising from interviews with officers

This part focuses on key issues in respect of the retention of officers and considers the positive and the challenging aspects of the job and the organisation. Reasons why officers leave are summarised at the end of this part.

### Positive aspects

A number of officers identified positive aspects of their work. Comments included: 'the Defence Forces is a great place to work', 'I'm not going to say a bad thing about the Defence Forces' and 'It has its problems but the job you're doing, it is enjoyable, and it's worthwhile.' One officer said:

*We all love the organisation. We love the idea of what we do, and we're not brainwashed – we're all bright, intelligent people. And it's not a vocation. But we love what we do and we love the fact that we do it with others the same way.*

Another noted that:

*I suppose when you have a good bit of responsibility, when you go in and you have a busy job, there's a lot happening, you do get a good bit of satisfaction from it. So I do get a good bit of satisfaction from my job.*

It was suggested, however, that there is a lot of negativity around the Defence Forces and that this is, in itself, having an impact on how people feel. One officer said:

*I'm quite a positive person, but I think that, you know, I think it's a very Irish thing. I think there isn't a job in Ireland [where] everybody doesn't sit around whining constantly, but they just do it a lot more in [the] Defence Forces. And, you can end up just having quite negative opinions because people are constantly sharing their negative opinions.*

### Balance between positive and challenging elements

Throughout the interviews with officers, it was notable that much of the commentary relating to positive aspects of the work of officers was offset by comments relating to the challenges personnel face as well as distress and unhappiness at the way things have evolved over time. One officer said:

*That's the best way I can describe it, it's like being in an abusive relationship [...] It's a bit like somebody in an abusive relationship, where they keep going back to the person who is hammering them.*

Another officer said: 'Yeah, I love my job, and that's the harder part for me, I'm very proud to serve in the naval service'. This officer went on to say:

*I've given [more than 10] years of my life to the naval service [and] I love it, I love what we do, I believe in what we do, I believe in the people we have. It has been my life [and] I keep saying, I love the navy but I keep feeling like a fool for accepting it and I'm constantly being let down by the organisation.*

This balance between positive aspects of the service and the challenges arising is exemplified in the following quote:

*Military life is rewarding. I know it sounds a bit clichéd to say you're going in and every day is different. It is rewarding in that way. Careers are managed and there is professional development and you do receive good training [...] But you come in and you go home, some days you do go home deflated. Working way too hard but I'm not getting paid for what I'm doing so I don't want to make it sound like it's fabulous. But I do like my work. I do take pride in my work.*

Another officer highlighted the career and personal development opportunities, noting that these had been better in previous years:

*The first 10 years of my career were awesome [...] you were learning all the time. Everything was new. There was always something to aim for. There was opportunity. There was [the] possibility of personal growth and development. The past five years in particular, certainly up to 10 [years], that's just gone.*

One officer drew attention to the facilities available to them:

*The messes, there's some very nice clubs. There's gym facilities, I can use [them] for free. The gyms are generally good and they're available.*

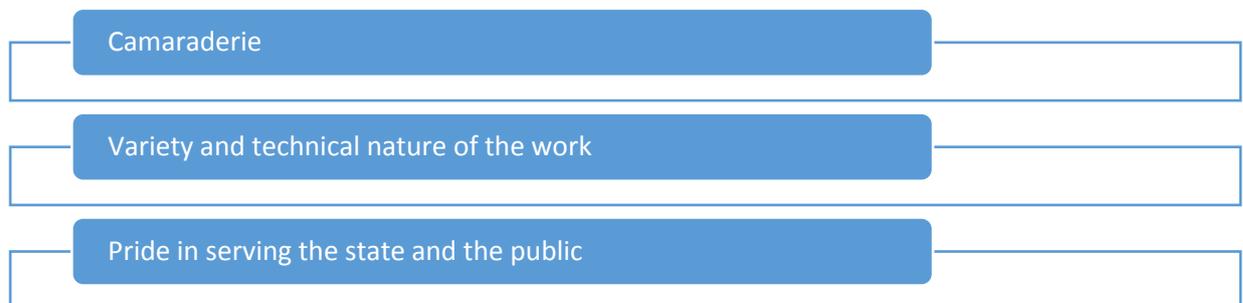
However, this same officer also noted:

*I haven't trained in months during the working day, because you're totally flat out.*

### Specific elements identified as positive

Three main elements of being an officer in the Defence Forces were identified as being positive. These are highlighted in Figure 18.

**Figure 18: Positive elements of being an officer in the Defence Forces**



#### ***Camaraderie***

Colleagues, camaraderie, friendship and a sense of belonging to a wider family were highlighted as positive aspects of the Defence Forces. Comments included: 'the Defence Forces in itself is a family', 'I work with great people, and I know I do', 'Yeah, I enjoy the camaraderie and the professionalism of a lot of the people that I work with' and 'the camaraderie, that definitely does exist to a certain level still in the organisation and that I do appreciate'. One officer said:

*So I joined at 18 and there are brilliant people in the army. My colleagues are exceptional, so it's like being part of a sports team. You're wearing a uniform every day, it's like wearing a jersey. So you really look after your colleagues, 95% of whom are absolutely excellent. Why am I in the army? Because of my colleagues.*

Another officer said:

*There's very little pride left but there is camaraderie. I have brilliant friends. We meet at weekends. Our friends are wonderful friends. I mean, you've been through everything with them, so your friends are a major stay factor. That'd be one of the few things you would miss. I wouldn't miss the commutes in the morning. I wouldn't miss not being able to put fuel in my car. I've been [broke]... I have no money now for the rest of the month.*

This was also highlighted in the following quote:

*My number one positive is the people... We have a few highly difficult people, and unfortunately they found a way up to higher ranks, as they tend to do [...] But 95% of the people you meet in the military are absolutely wonderful people. That's definitely the number one stay factor.*

*This was echoed by another officer, who said:*

*Morale is low but one thing I must say, I thoroughly enjoy the job. I do like being in the Defence Forces, but that's due to the people I work with. That's due to the jobs I can do.*

Others highlighted that they would miss their colleagues greatly if they left the Defence Forces with one officer saying:

*In general terms then, it's not just specific to the [role] but the co-workers, the camaraderie you have with other officers, and even all ranks really. It's second to none, you know? It's a truly unique thing I think about the job that, more than anything else, if I ever did leave it I'd miss it.*

It was suggested that things are not as good now as they have been. This is highlighted in the quote below from an officer:

*Look, although it's dissipating rapidly, comradeship and the sense of belonging to something [are important]. You're working together to achieve a goal [where] people have your back. You're part of a unit. You're part of a cohesive structure. You identify with something bigger or greater than yourself. That's just been falling apart.*

### ***Job variety and technical nature of the work***

Many officers drew attention to the diversity of the work they do, noting that 'every day is different, but it is rewarding in that way', 'there's good diversity of work' and 'you kind of get a great broad spectrum of work'. The importance of overseas work was also highlighted. One officer said:

*The positives are, as I said, the fact that you've such a wide variety of roles... So there's a massive amount of experience you can get from it... You never really get bored because there's always something new. The fact that you're overseas is great, the number of courses... you know you're doing something positive.*

Another officer said:

*Soldiers stay in the Defence Forces because of the versatility, the excitement of it, the overseas service. We have a lot of things going for us. We have top-quality gymnasiums, we have swimming pools. Guys like that we're an organisation that recognises lifelong learning. We give people tremendous opportunities. But it can only go so far.*

In response to why people are attracted to the Defence Forces, one officer said:

*The diversity, the complexity of what they're working on. There's some fantastic projects, whether it's force protection or cyber or deployment overseas. There's enough for them.*

This was also highlighted by another officer, who said:

*I was looking to do something that wasn't just an office job. [A job] that gave me more scope to do more than just paperwork – and I think the opportunities, I have served overseas. That was something I wanted to do as well. My background being [in] engineering, getting more into it, to work in an area where I'm doing something I find technically interesting [...] To try to expand my professional development at the same time.*

#### ***Pride in serving the state and the public***

A number of officers commented on serving the state, with one officer noting:

*I'm also [on] the side of working for the good of the state. That did appeal to me, and still does.*

One officer, working in the air corps, highlighted elements of the work they do in serving the state and the public, noting that:

*We ensure that the airspace is available to the government, that it's available to the state. We guarantee that the country can use the airspace so if there is any civil strike or there's any disruption and even volcanic ash, or even during really bad weather, we have got government away on business. We have got people away on air ambulances out of the country. We can send traffic out of [the] country on military airways. We deal directly with military units. So, and a lot of people don't really think about what we can do for the state, but we are responsible for the sovereign aspect and the security of the airspace.*

Another officer considered why he was still in the Defence Forces, saying:

*Why am I still here? That's the key question. I like being in the army. I like doing a good job for the state.*

This was also highlighted by another officer, who said:

*I like the fact that what we're doing, I feel, does the state some service. That what we are doing can and does make a difference in other people's lives [...] I do take pleasure in that.*

One officer suggested that it was a 'kind of an old thing to say, but I suppose there's an element of service, tending to your country'. This officer went on to say, however, that:

*[This sense of service is] waning hugely and it's been waning and it's been tested because of the pay cuts since the [post-2008 financial] crash. And, it's been waning because of what happened with the moratorium on promotion and other things within the organisation.*

### Summary of positive aspects of the Defence Forces

In summary, many officers identified their love of the Defence Forces, and three elements in particular were highlighted. These were camaraderie with colleagues, the diverse and technical nature of the job, and the pride felt from serving the state and the public. It was striking, however, that almost all positive comments were balanced with challenges arising and with the view that things are less positive now than they have been in the past.

### Challenges relating to the work

This section presents the findings in respect of challenges arising for officers.

#### Workload and staffing

In response to a question about what they found the most challenging aspect of the job, many officers identified a shortage of personnel, resulting in an increased workload. Comments such as 'we're under strength, overtasked, and underpaid', 'we have less time and people to do the same amount of work' and 'everyone is just too busy' were made throughout the interviews. Examples were given of officers being off-duty but receiving 'phone calls about real emergency sort of stuff that's going on'; of being supposed to have a standard working week but having to be 'on duty the whole weekend'; of 'being on call for seven days straight, 24/7'; and of 'having one person looking after an area that was previously manned by three people'.

It was also highlighted that personnel do duties that are often in addition to the normal working week. One person explained:

*Depending on the barracks, it could be 24 hours, like some duties are resting duties where you go to bed, but another [duty] that they do in [a barracks] is not [a resting duty], so you are expected to be awake for 24 hours, which means then your following day is a write-off as well, because you're going to have [to] rest afterwards.*

Officers identified challenges they faced as a result of workload and staffing issues, with one officer saying:

*The most challenging aspect of my job, really, is shortage of personnel. And we have an exponentially increasing workload. And we have the people, we're training the people up to the right standards, but as soon as we're training them, they're being offered jobs out [in] industry [...] We're gone beyond sinking ship. It's sinking ship and the pump failed as well, you know? And we're hand-bailing, and as people get tired, we're losing more.*

Several officers mentioned the impact of people leaving, noting that:

*Since 2012 it has gotten worse, actually, worse year after year. The biggest factor at the moment is lack of people [...] more and more people are leaving, because of that, there's more and more work to do, which is put onto people who are left behind.*

One officer drew attention to the European Union's Working Time Directive noting that:

*The [European Union's] Working Time Directive needs to be adopted into the Defence Forces, because people are working excessive hours, not due to duties, because duties is one thing, but due to the workload people are under. They're working excessive hours.*

However, it was also evident that not every officer experiences excessive workloads on an ongoing basis, and this is noted in the following quote:

*Working hours? It depends, when it's good it's very good, you've loads of flexibility [...] but then I suppose when you come to pinch points throughout the year, you're working way over the odds. Because of the flexibility of the job, like you're going to be asked to do unreasonable hours... but even then there's maybe the following week that there's a bit of flexibility there.*

### **Established numbers**

Many comments were made about the 'established' numbers – that is, the number of personnel who are supposed to be working in a particular area. One officer suggested that there is a legacy issue arising in some areas where the number of technical posts has never been at the level it should be. This is highlighted in the following quote:

*Back in the 1980s or 1990s or whenever it was, they had a certain number of technical appointments, say seven or say 100 technical officers. First, they prioritised the engineers, ordnance, air corps. And they had a couple left over. And they just gave a couple to [the] CIS corps. And that has never changed.*

An example was given of the established number of doctors ( $n = 27$ ) across the army, navy and air corps. It was noted that the service provided includes 'occupational medicine, primary care and pre-hospital medicine' and that this work has to be covered while also ensuring that the work ordinarily undertaken by doctors on training courses and serving overseas is covered. One officer noted that:

*Trying to get the work that I am meant to get done [...] it's just a constant threat to get all the work done and I think the more you look at it, it boils down to the number of personnel I have.*

One officer suggested that their corps was 'always too small' and that, even at full strength, 'we can just about do the jobs that we've been tasked to do'. This was also identified by another officer, who noted that, while they were almost at full establishment, the workload was still excessive. This officer said:

*What we are noticing is that while we're close to establishment, we're all severely overworked. So the establishment is incorrect – it cannot be correct for the workload that we're doing so something has to give.*

This issue was also raised by officers who spoke of being qualified to carry out technical work and actually carrying it out but, nevertheless, not receiving technician pay because there were not enough technical posts allocated to that particular area. This officer explained:

*I've been in continuous education pretty much for the last [more than 10 years]... I know from work that I do on the outside and various other projects and stuff that I partake in, that I would be seen as a technical person and I'm very capable [...] I'm*

*doing technical work [but] I'm not being paid technical pay, and I haven't been fortunate enough to be in the cohort of people who are awarded the technical pay. I just find that frustrating, in that we're doing the same job and you can't get paid. It's very frustrating when you're sitting beside somebody who's doing the same work as [you and], they're getting paid €10,000 more a year, or whatever it is.*

A more senior officer acknowledged that this does happen and drew attention to the broader impact on personnel, saying:

*So what I have now is I have some officers in my unit, all of them with equal qualifications. And they went for interview, and depending on the number of technical vacancies some of them are getting an extra ten grand a year, and the others are doing the exact same job and they're getting nothing... And that doesn't exactly make for [a] harmonious workplace, you know. And there's no badness there with anybody but it is very frustrating, and it's embarrassing for the guys who are getting it as well.*

Another example was given where non-commissioned personnel received technician pay but the officer in charge did not:

*The private soldiers, corporals and sergeants are getting an extra seven grand in tech pay, and the officers commanding them who often have much better qualifications are getting nothing.*

### **Non-technical work**

Several officers spoke of 'wearing many hats' and of doing a number of different jobs. One officer noted:

*I'm expected to do a lot of different roles within my job. It's nothing that I can't do, but it certainly adds a lot of stress to my job, in that the most difficult aspect is my workload. I have such a huge workload.*

A number of officers highlighted the challenges in the work they undertake and noted that an excessive workload combined with 'a very dangerous duty, where you have to be on the ball' or where personnel have responsibility for significant engineering works, has major implications for individuals.

In general, officers did not identify challenges relating to the technical aspects of their work. Instead, challenges were identified relating to areas they considered to be non-technical in nature and that were identified as taking away from the work they felt they should be doing. One officer said:

*I don't know, at the moment I just think the positives are massively outweighed by the negatives. [There are] crippling management issues that leave [the] likes of me not free to actually engage with the troops under my command.*

Another officer said:

*I have a very defined position, but I would say at least 40% of my work will be taken up with other things outside the remit of my job profile.*

Several officers drew attention to administrative duties they undertook. One officer suggested that, previously, there would have been administrative support to undertake jobs

of that kind but that, nowadays, 'they're not there'. Another challenge is the level of paperwork, with one officer saying:

*My current work, the most challenging aspect I've always had, is the volume of miscellaneous [requirements] and just [the] chaotic nature of [the] work. And just relentless bureaucracy and paperwork and little details here and there. So that's what I find myself swimming in all the time and that frustrates me.*

### **Type of work undertaken on overseas deployment**

A small number of comments were made about the type of work undertaken on overseas duties. It was highlighted that, while in the past 'there were deployments to Liberia, there were deployments to Chad, to the Balkans, to Kosovo' and it was noted that:

*[These] places were rigorous. You actually got to do your job properly, in a proper environment. It was a higher risk – you got higher reward for that risk.*

One person noted that, while one of the positives of being in the Defence Forces is representing Ireland overseas, UN duties can be a problem:

*The deployment to Lebanon is seen as an absolute farce, and people are avoiding it because they realise that boredom, due to the lack of anything happening out there, is a massive problem.*

It was also suggested that:

*It's had a fairly corrosive effect on morale [...] I think it's what you're working for and training for and culminates in going over and sitting in the camp and feeling that maybe what you're doing isn't time well spent over there. That will have a fairly negative effect on morale, and I think myself that that's something that needs to change.*

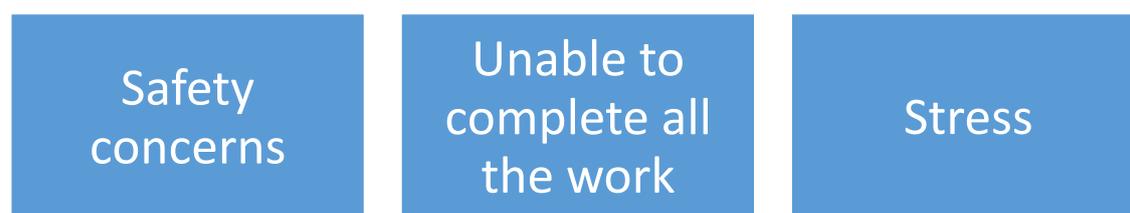
Another officer echoed this, saying:

*We've gone backwards, the organisation has taken 10 steps backwards. And soon we'll go back to the point of the Congo days, where we're ill-equipping people to go into an environment that is hazardous. And that is exactly the way I would describe what's happening. Ill-equipped people put into a hazardous environment – it's going to be a car crash!*

### **Impact of staffing levels and workload on officers**

As noted earlier, the increased workload was closely linked with difficulties in retaining personnel, and three main impacts on officers were identified (Figure 19).

**Figure 19: Impact of staffing levels and workload on officers**



### **Safety concerns**

Many officers spoke of the impact of the workload on the service and on themselves. It was noted that, given the specialist and technical areas of the work, 'there are huge consequences for us if we make a mistake' and 'you're culpable and liable in the event of something going wrong'. One officer drew attention to the safety issues, noting:

*There's a huge responsibility for the safety element and everything is huge all of the time. And you have to be having a good day every day when you're [carrying out the particular type of work]. There isn't any room for error. You have to operate at a very high level all the time. Mentally, physically, emotionally. You have to come into work ready to work, to a high level all the time.*

At an individual level, it was noted that officers, rather than the system, are often held responsible when failures occur:

*You're continually being loaded with extra responsibilities and extra work, and it's not possible [to] get everything done. Unfortunately... when something isn't done, it's not seen as a systematic failure, it's seen as a personal failure on your part. It's the same everywhere. It takes different forms everywhere. There just aren't enough people to do what needs to be done, and the system just isn't willing to take cognisance of that.*

It was also noted that there is 'no redundancy' in the system and that, when personnel move on, there is nobody 'trained up behind them waiting to take [that job] on' and there is no 'cross-training, any of that, that's a luxury that went out years ago', ~~which means that when an individual leaves there is nobody else to do the job.~~ This was highlighted by one officer, who said:

*[At a certain office] they're trying to cover a number of exits and even some of the new guys that have come in, have come in and they haven't had a handover because the person has left the job and they haven't been given a proper handover. The position might have been vacant for a number of months and they're trying to deal with legacy issues [...] without really knowing about them.*

This person went on to say:

*Yeah. I mean it's... You're talking about some money here, it's public money so it has to be done correctly, and with the staff level and turnover, and charges that's missed, you can't do that correctly.*

Another officer drew attention to not being able to supervise personnel, noting that this was because of the turnover of staff and the workload:

*From a senior point of view, there is just so much going on, you don't have time to supervise and lead your junior officers or your troops. That, in turn, creates massive problems [...] You don't even get a chance to get to know your troops, so you can't spot the problem [personnel]. You can't spot bad practices creeping in over time. You can't enforce standards, because even if you do at one occasion, there is no guarantee you will be there the next occasion.*

### **Unable to complete all the work**

A number of officers commented that their workload was such that it was impossible to get through it. One officer said:

*And this is another symptom of what's going on because people are completely overwhelmed at work. The numbers have dropped down so much. The amount of work has increased exponentially. And people are just incapable of getting through their workload every day and it's just accumulating [...] because it's just not physically possible to get through the workload.*

Another officer noted:

*The maintenance that is not being done, that's required to be done. The simple small jobs, because we're losing personnel who would perform the day-to-day maintenance before an engineer ever got near it because they're not there.*

One officer reported going to see a more senior member of the Defence Forces because they did not believe it would be possible to continue to provide a core service:

*A short while ago I actually looked for an interview with the [senior rank] myself to go in and tell him [...], 'The system is about to crash here.' And we are very close to a situation [where there will be a loss of a specific function] because we are at the stage now that I'm down to four or five key people, and if I lose any one of them that functional area is trimmed.*

Another officer noted that it was not possible to continue working at the level they had previously, saying:

*I guess I've stopped [...] I've stopped trying to get everything done. And staying till 7, 8 o'clock at night. On my own time, and no overtime and trying to get things done. And what I do now, just for my own sanity, is I just aim to get half of it done. I just try and identify what [the] most important half is, and try and get that done within the working time.*

### **Stress**

A number of officers said they found the situation relating to their workload stressful, and a number of concerns were raised. One officer noted that:

*You just can't do things to the standards that you would like to do them to, and you just have to [accept that]. You have to cut the cloth to measure more or less. And I suppose some things don't get the planning that they deserve, or they require [...] It can be stressful, and it can get frustrating, especially if there's something you're really interested in or... you want to do well and you know you can't give it the time it needs – and [it] can be quite frustrating.*

Another officer said:

*You're dealing with excessive hours of work and you're dealing with [a] knock-on effect of that then, which is excessive stress.*

Other officers spoke about personnel coming into work despite being unwell or entitled to leave. One officer said:

*Obviously if you're sick or if you're unwell, you come in, you let people know that you're not well but we're so short staffed that everybody comes in and works really hard. All of the time.*

Another officer noted:

*I'm getting it in the neck for taking my [leave] allowance, because I'm not producing as far as the system is concerned.*

This officer went on to explain that:

*Most officers don't even begin to touch their leave in meaningful amounts [...] They're getting time in lieu, but they can't really take it, and they're not getting anything in addition for their added responsibility.*

Ensuring the service can be provided can mean that officers have to ask other personnel to give up their time. One officer said:

*The challenges that arise from that [being short staffed] are really having to sit people down and talk to them and ask them either to work on late or to work through lunch break. Lunch breaks are just taken for granted now that people work through their lunch breaks. It's just a constant demand but, at the end of the day, I'm responsible [for ensuring the service can continue], and that would be the most stressful part of [my job].*

Another officer spoke about their own situation, saying:

*Oh I think [there are] stress-related [issues], yeah, there are times when I have trouble sleeping, and... there is always something, and it's just, it's a constant presence in your life.*

### **Summary of workload and staffing**

In summary, a number of issues were raised in respect of the workload and staffing levels and it was suggested that things are much worse now than they have been previously due to difficulties in retaining personnel. Attention was also drawn to the non-technical work personnel in specialist streams are expected to carry out in addition to their technical work, and it was noted that, in the past, there had been administrative support in place. A small number of comments were made about the type of work carried out on overseas deployment, and some people suggested that they did not find this kind of work rewarding.

Anomalies were identified in respect of carrying out a technical role and having technical qualifications but not being eligible for technician pay due to the established number of technical posts assigned to an area.

Three impacts arising from an extensive workload and low staffing levels were identified: safety issues, being unable to complete the work and stress.

### **Challenges relating to the organisational context**

Although a number of issues were raised in respect of challenges arising in the organisational context for officers, the issues raised were strongly focused on pay and terms and conditions of staff. This was followed by career progression, education and training. A small number of comments were made about the infrastructure and equipment available.

## Pay

Pay emerged as the single biggest challenge, and every interviewee identified this issue as having a significant impact on retention of personnel. Key issues arising are presented in Figure 20.

**Figure 20: Overview of issues arising from pay and allowances**

### Overall pay levels

- Basic pay levels
- Military Service Allowance
- Technical pay
- Duty allowances
- Impact of pay cuts and taxation
- Challenges arising for enlisted personnel
- Unpaid entitlements

### Comparisons with others

- Public sector
- Duty pay
- Private sector

There are four main components to pay for personnel in the technical grades:

- basic pay
- Military Service Allowance
- technician pay
- duty allowances.

While all military personnel in the Defence Forces receive basic pay and Military Service Allowance, only those in specialist streams are paid technician pay. Duty allowances are specific payments that depend on duties being carried out.

#### **Basic pay levels**

A small number of participants indicated that they were satisfied with their own pay (e.g. 'The pay won't concern me – I'm relatively happy with mine' and 'I don't think anyone really joins the job for money – you're not going to ever get rich doing the job').

Overwhelmingly, however, there was criticism about pay levels. While there was a reluctance to focus on pay ('I know the dirty word is money but it's what it boils down to'), personnel expressed both anger and distress about pay. Comments ranged from 'it's not great for the responsibility you have' and 'pay is the one [issue], the key one' to descriptions of the situation as 'disgraceful', 'abhorrent', 'terrible' and 'scandalous', and the observation that 'our families pay the cost for the job'. One officer said:

*I would say pay is the number one [issue]. If you get rid of all the frustrations in the job, you're only affecting the employee. But improving the employee's life will not improve the family's life, is what I'm saying.*

Another officer noted:

*There is a huge sense of frustration. And [personnel are] under pressure again from home as they get married and they have kids or whatever, and the expenses mount up.*

One naval officer said:

*I still do believe in the organisation, because I'm part of this organisation, [however] we really, really cannot continue to ignore the terms and conditions.*

This officer went on to say:

*In this day and age, that's [low pay] what we're paying people to sail for 24 hours, possibly armed, possibly beating out a fire or dealing with an emergency situation, that's what we're paying people. So, that part of this job is very disheartening.*

### **Military Service Allowance**

It has been suggested that the Military Service Allowance is designed to compensate Defence Forces personnel for the special disadvantages (i.e. hardship, danger and discipline) associated with military life<sup>22</sup>. From 1 January 1990, it was extended to all officers up to and including the rank of colonel following a recommendation of the Gleeson Commission. One person explained:

*So, as far as the [defence] minister is concerned, what you get on a month [and] year basis is always 24/7 [i.e. for 24 hours seven days per week]. [It's the same] whether you're utilised for 10 hours or 60 hours a week.*

Military Service Allowance is presented separately from basic pay rates on payslips provided to personnel. Despite this, however, it was suggested that 'for everybody, it [Military Service Allowance] is core pay'. There was also some consensus that this allowance is inadequate and it was noted that 'it has not been increased for years'.

### **Technician pay**

Technician pay is paid to permanent Defence Force officers and personnel in technical streams for specific appointments associated with their academic or technical qualifications. It was suggested that, over the past 30 years, 'the technical pay grades have not changed [and] they are not index linked'. The additional amounts paid range from €8.08 per week (Technician Pay 1) to €134.69 per week (Technician Pay 6). It was suggested that this payment be increased because it does not reflect the additional 'time and effort that goes into gaining the qualifications or trade'.

### **Duty allowances**

Other allowances include 'duty allowances', which were described as 'allowances that people get for doing specific things, at a specific time' and include, for example, patrol duty and security duty allowances. Duty allowances were identified as 'hopelessly inadequate' and it was strongly suggested that these allowances do not compensate personnel for the hours worked. Officers gave examples of when they had received small amounts after tax had been deducted. One officer said:

*Duty allowance? I did seven days of duty last week. Seven 24-hour duties. And it's come out at 30 quid a night, basically I get. And it just drove my [spouse] mad, drove me mad as well because the babysitter gets that after three hours.*

Another officer gave an example of spending seven days on 'immediate notice, which is basically [where] you can't get out of the uniform', and of receiving €72 a day, before tax, 'so it would come out about €34, €32, I think it is, for the 24 hours'. It was also highlighted that there is a financial impact on the family, with one officer mentioning the impact of being away doing 24-hour duties:

*My [spouse] can't do anything in that period, because if I have the children I can't essentially go on the call. So while I'm on duty, my [spouse] is also on duty. I think we get €35 after tax for that.*

Duty pay was also highlighted by another officer, who noted that it had a negative impact on morale. This officer said:

*So yeah, going back to the morale thing... That is a big problem for people having to do 24-hour duties, doing night shifts and doing everything, and it's not really the fact that they have to do them, it's the fact they don't get really paid enough for them. So you get this menial, almost insulting amount of money to stay in and do a 24-hour shift. I don't know what people get for them, but you hear people saying they end up with, I think it's about €20 in their pocket [that it's] worth, that's killing morale. And when you're doing it, you have to do it. You're just ordered to do it, and it's hugely problematic.*

#### **Impact of pay cuts and taxation**

A number of officers drew attention to the pay cuts and increased taxation that happened as a consequence of the post-2008 financial crisis, and it was noted that personnel are not receiving as much now as they did prior to that time. This was linked with the increase in workload by one officer, who said:

*The fact that I was being paid more in 2012 than now, you know? It's hard for me. I've more work now than I had in 2012, a lot more work. The army has been reorganised, there's fewer officers, fewer guys below me, to do the work they would've been doing before.*

The impact of taxation on take-home pay was highlighted a number of times. One officer said:

*There's a few things when you read headlines, let's say, and you read the spin on things on paper... and there's sort of things like MSA [Military Service Allowance]. Most of mine are gone on tax. They say, 'Oh, but they're paid this, and he gets paid his duty allowance,' but it's nullified by taxation.*

A number of individuals drew attention to the Lansdowne Road Agreement (relating to levels of pay and conditions for public servants). It was suggested that Defence Force personnel had been affected in every area of their pay and that many of these decreases have not been restored. One officer suggested that the Defence Forces had been 'the only public sector organisation to lose time-and-a-half on Sunday'. It was noted that:

*The reward for losing that [time-and-a-half pay on Sundays] was to be given more time off. More time off doesn't help, because we still have the same amount of work to do. The fact that lads aren't being remunerated as they were previously but are given more time off simply means we have less time and people to do the same amount of work.*

Another officer also highlighted this issue, saying:

*The Sunday duty was actually worth it? [doing prior to the cuts]. Now, the Sunday duty is being wiped the same as everything else. And the same with the Saturdays, if you work Monday through Friday, you do duty Saturday, you rest off [on] Sunday, and [you are] no good to anybody, back to work again on Monday. But, you've had to give up your entire weekend....When you look at your pay cheque for the month, or a week, you don't see [that reflected in it].*

A senior officer suggested that there are a number of 'outstanding adjudications about army allowances, accommodation [and] ration charges', among other things, and it was suggested that a lack of progress in resolving these issues 'is eating at people's sense of justice'.

### **Challenges arising for enlisted personnel**

A number of officers highlighted concerns about the pay scales for enlisted personnel and for privates in particular. It was suggested that privates' pay is fixed for the first two years at €27,445, which rises to €32,500 in the fourth year of service. It was noted, however, that at that point the private is liable to pay a pension-related deduction of €3,255 per annum, which results in 'a potential raise of only €89 net in weekly pay over nine years'. It was further noted that, because of this, and because of the contractual nature of their tenure, 'when they go into the bank, they can't get a mortgage, can't get a car loan, can't get married'. Privates' income was compared with that of the Gardaí and firemen, who, once they have reached maximum pay, are on €51,000 and €44,000 respectively.

Concerns about duty allowances for privates were also highlighted and it was suggested that, for a 24-hour duty, a private soldier gets €47.59 gross, which 'after tax works out at €20.71, equal to less than €2 per hour'. This was compared to overtime pay for Garda staff, which was estimated to be '€14.59 per hour for newly qualified Gardaí rising to €32 per hour for more experienced Gardaí'.

Other anomalies were also noted, such as air corps apprentices, who are in training for four or five years, being paid €18,000, which, it was noted, is less than a private receives. It was also suggested that these apprentices have to pay for accommodation and food at their base, which 'works out at about 20% of their salary'. One officer noted:

*The private soldiers are looking at this and saying, 'There's nothing in this for me.' That's why they're leaving in droves.*

It was also notable that, even where a small number of personnel indicated they were happy with their own pay, they raised concerns about the pay for those in enlisted ranks and new recruits. This was highlighted by one senior officer, who said:

*Like I say, I'm a [specialist grade] so I will consider myself relatively well paid, from talking to peers who are in the industry. I think by and large across the board, for the enlisted ranks, I think a lot of them really are struggling and I say, in particular the younger soldiers coming in these days as well have nothing like any of the pay or conditions that the older guys will have.*

### **Unpaid entitlements**

During the course of the interviews, two issues were raised about areas where personnel felt they were not given their correct allowances or entitlements. One person suggested that they had been awarded a 1% increase in basic pay 'which was supposed to be paid in January 2018' but that this had not been forthcoming. This officer said:

*You know, the staff in the DOD [Department of Defence] probably paid it to themselves. You know they didn't not get it. They were paid.*

A second issue related to the reimbursement of travel costs incurred in the course of duty. It was suggested that some officers in technical grades are required to travel significant distances in the course of their work and that, while military transport is supposed to be used for this travel, it is not always available. In those situations officers use their own transport, but they have difficulties in claiming back their mileage and subsistence pay. One officer explained:

*So what they say, the reason they won't give you mileage or PTR [the public transport rate] is, 'Oh, you're supposed to get a military vehicle and a driver to drive you to [name of place].' That's the official answer. Well, you go looking for a military vehicle, a military driver, you'll be told there's none available...so you have to use your own vehicle without any allowance.*

This was reiterated by another officer, who said:

*I'm sure if you ask the department, they will tell you that their policy is that if somebody has to travel for duty, they can have military transport made available. But, that's not always available... I know, as a senior officer, it's easy enough for me to get it. I also know that for other people, it's not always as easy to get.*

One officer gave the following example:

*I have just had one fairly negative experience of having done everything correctly, [where I got] all the signatures on the forms, permission to transport officers, permission from the [name of] office and... everything sent in. The claim was then, a third of it was just knocked off and the rest was paid. So just an arbitrary decision.*

It was also pointed out that, sometimes, an alternative approach of using public transport does not work because of the times people have to report for duty.

### **Comparisons with others**

Comparisons were made with many others, including those working in the private sector and the public sector.

#### **Public sector**

An example was given of the payments received by a member of the Defence Forces compared with an executive officer in the Civil Service, as follows:

*A sergeant earns between €29,000 and €42,000. An executive officer starts at €27,000 and works to €48,000. If you take the sergeant, he can't strike, he's on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days on call, he could be killed in the course of his duty, he can be detailed to move barracks at a whim, and he can be detailed for overseas service. And he has a responsibility for far more people, with arms and the ability to be involved in kinetic action.*

Comparisons in terms of pay were also made in terms of a lieutenant colonel being 'equated with an assistant principal officer'. It was noted, however, that:

*The lieutenant colonel has about 500 armed people... he has about €250 million worth of equipment. He can deploy his full battalion overseas. [In contrast, assistant*

*principal officers] don't have to deploy, they don't work weekends, and they're not likely to be killed in the course of their duty.*

Another officer said:

*And I don't believe for a second we can compare ourselves to the private sector at all. We cannot and nobody expects that. Comparing ourselves to other aspects of the public and civil services, there's a massive gap and it's a disgrace.*

This was also highlighted by another individual, who said:

*It's not a secret. We are the poorest paid public sector and we will be the first people asked if there is an emergency. That's not debatable.*

There is a strong view that, because members of the Defence Forces do not have a right to strike, they are taken advantage of in terms of pay and conditions. One officer said:

*Military people forgo many of the privileges that civilians are entitled to. We do not have the right to strike, we do not have the right to representation, there are rights that people have provided to civilians that we don't have. And we ask that in return we're given priority with other public servants and we're not.*

This was also mentioned by another officer, who suggested that Defence Forces personnel are not looking for preferential treatment but pointed out that their lack of a right to strike and their limited access to pay negotiations have resulted in them receiving poorer pay than others. This officer said:

*We're just looking for fair play like everybody else... So the prison officers, the guards and the fire brigades got improvements because they had (a) access to machinery and (b) they had the right to strike. And the people who are obedient and loyal and decent and good, didn't even get into the room.*

### **Duty pay**

As outlined earlier, payment for duties undertaken by Defence Forces personnel was identified as a very substantial problem. It was noted that, first, the pay is very low for the sacrifices made and, second, it compares poorly with the pay received by other public sector workers for similar types of work. A number of officers highlighted the level of responsibility required, the ongoing sacrifices made in terms of work–life balance, and poor working conditions, and compared these with the level of pay. One officer said:

*And I suppose I think a big thing that rankles people at the moment is that you're not remunerated at all well. Very, very little, I can't think what's the allowance, I think it's something like €24 or something for a 24-hour shift, which would be unheard of in any other job... and particularly when it's your weekend as well, so if you get a Saturday duty, that's one weekend gone out of the month then, that you don't get any real compensation for, and that's something I think frustrates a lot of people.*

Another officer said:

*My own self, for example, I do duties, week-round duties, I take over on [day of week] and I come back on [day of week seven days later], and I'm missing for a full week from home. It would be nice to have an extra bit of money that actually*

*compensates for the loss of being in the household. The actual take-home pay that I get for a duty is a disgrace really – it's less than €50 a day, and I'm away from home for seven days straight.*

Another officer drew attention to the impact of this on morale, and it was suggested that, if it were better paid, personnel would be happy to do the duty rather than seeing it as something very negative:

*So duties is a big thing. I think we should definitely be a bit better paid for duties, and that would have a massive effect on morale as well. So instead of people seeing it as a punishment having to do a weekend, there'd be a bit of financial incentive, like maybe you wanted to make a bit of money, or [you're] under pressure at home, that [you] can put [your] hand up and do these things, and there's an opportunity there to be compensated for doing it.*

This study took place at the time of the Pope's visit to Ireland and it was highlighted that personnel from the Defence Forces were required to carry out a range of duties in support of this. Several interviewees compared the Gardaí's pay and conditions with those of the Defence Forces, with one person noting: 'And you'll be standing at a checkpoint next to a guard who has massive allowances and you are on zero.' Another officer noted that:

*If you look at overtime, the Garda Síochána are getting it, and they are working overtime. When you look at duty allowances for personnel at the Pope's visit, it's non-existent.*

This was also highlighted in the following quote:

*I think it was around the Queen's visit, the gardai and the army were heavily involved. The Defence Forces pay us from the Department of Finance for our [contribution], it was in or around €2 million. I think the guards' [pay] was near €40 million.*

### **Private sector**

It was suggested that the level of experience, skills, competency and qualifications held by technical personnel mean they could 'earn maybe twice the pay [they] earn in [the] Defence Forces at the moment'. One person noted that they were receiving the same pay as 'someone who's leaving work at four o'clock in the day'. An air corps officer said:

*I'm earning about half [what] I would be earning if I was working with the civilian side. That's a fact.*

Another officer gave an example, saying:

*Just to put it into perspective, my [relative] is working in a pharmaceutical company. And s/he'll do two, three days overtime. S/he gets €900 for two, three days' overtime. For me to do say, three days overtime, I'll get approximately €33 for three days.*

It was suggested that this is particularly problematic in the context of the specialised nature of the work being carried out. The same officer continued:

*Yeah, parity is a difficulty. ...you get paid the military wage, but you're not doing a military job. You're doing a particularly... I don't say particularly specialised, but it is specialised and there's a lot of training, it's a lot of responsibility. You know, without sounding too dramatic, you would end up in prison if you don't do your job properly.*

### **Summary of issues arising in relation to pay**

In summary, the commentary in respect of pay was extensive, and every participant who took part in an interview spoke about the importance of some aspect of this issue. Overall pay levels (including basic pay, Military Service Allowance and technician pay) were considered to be inadequate, and the pay relating to duties (e.g. security duty and weekend duty) was identified as particularly low and problematic. It was highlighted that the problems relating to inadequate pay have been compounded by the cuts and increased taxation following the financial crisis in 2008, and it was noted that Defence Forces personnel are on a lower level of pay in 2018 than they were 10 years earlier. Even in situations where officers indicated that they were satisfied with their own pay, they noted the low pay new recruits and those in the enlisted ranks receive.

Comparisons were particularly drawn with others in the Civil Service and public sector, and it was suggested that military personnel are expected to make many sacrifices but are treated comparatively unfavourably. Again, the pay in respect of duties was highlighted as considerably lower than the pay received by others carrying out similar work in the public sector.

### **Further issues relating to the organisational context**

In addition to pay, four other main issues were identified in respect of the organisational context. These are presented in Figure 21.

**Figure 21: Further issues identified in respect of the organisational context for officers**



#### ***Skills, training and education***

There was some agreement that the training and education received through the Defence Forces are of a high standard and that they are welcomed by those who take part in them. One officer said:

*I do feel, professionally, that I receive good training. And I do feel professionally supported by the organisation.*

It was also highlighted that, on entry to the Defence Forces, many officers have already undertaken a primary degree and they gain experience and expertise over time. One officer said 'the talent that we have, it's incredible talent that we have'.

It was noted that recruits into the technical streams are selected from the reserve of school leavers or graduates and 'then about the top 1% of the applicants make it through to cadet school'. Following that, 'they are trained as military officers and then they're appointed to a core [division]'. It was noted that these personnel may then be supported to undertake a primary degree, and some will continue on to do a master's degree in their particular area.

As a consequence, while the level of technical ability among personnel is very high, one senior officer mentioned that 'it could be seven years or so before I have an effective [technical] officer in my unit'.

Many technical personnel highlighted the investment of time and money associated with training personnel to become competent in their role. This was often balanced with the challenges of retaining these personnel because of low pay and the disruptive aspects of the job. One officer said:

*It is only after five years [that] we start to see the benefit of those people, and all the way through that time we have people dedicated to training, monitoring, and supervising while they go through their training. We can't afford to be losing these people, you know – [they] get five years of training, [so] you need to get at least 10 years out of that person to make it worth it.*

Another officer said:

*It's huge in terms of time and in terms of expenditure [...] If they were better paid, that would be such a huge factor [in] keeping people in. And again it's a... I see it anyway as a no-brainer in terms of resources because you're keeping people who... it's taken a while to get them there, you're keeping that experience.*

Many examples were given of Irish Defence Forces personnel who had gone on military exercises in other countries and for international organisations and been identified as leaders and directors of exercises being undertaken because of their very high technical knowledge and skills.

It was further suggested that the solution is not to train more personnel but rather to 'hold on to the experience we have'. One officer mentioned, however, that the current level of operations means that some skills are being lost. This officer said:

*The level of operations we're conducting are very low technology, very low tempo, very low occurrence, to the point we have a massive issue of skill fade. The high level of skills that we have as an organisation due to the Troubles [the conflict in Northern Ireland], [meant] we were able to act as one of the international forefronts of this industry, and we were seen as one of the best nations in the world doing this. And we have a massive skill fade problem [...] and the only way to stop that is overseas deployments to more rigorous and robust environments, but it's not happening.*

### **New recruits**

Some comments were made in respect of new recruits, mainly those coming into the enlisted ranks, and it was suggested that these people are being brought in below the previous standard. One person suggested that 'in the past they wouldn't have passed the basic entrance test to get in' while another person mentioned that some 'weren't capable of absorbing relatively straight-forward skills that were being imparted'. It was also suggested that a small number of others had 'prior convictions'. One officer said:

*There's too many junior people coming in. They're not up to standard. They're not getting the training or not being held up to standards that were expected in the past.*

Because of a shortage of staff, it was suggested that there was insufficient training, mentoring and supervision of these recruits, resulting in potential safety issues. This is highlighted in the following quote:

*People aren't being mentored. They're not getting oversight when they're doing jobs. They're not being given the time to get good at a specific role or a specific skill. They're being pulled and dragged too much. There's that lack of personal development and personal oversight in the organisation. I think everything's dropping [i.e. standards are falling].*

It was also suggested that previously the training period had lasted two years but that this has now been reduced to under a year and a half. It was noted that 'once these guys get out, we still have to nurse them through a lot of things'. It was also highlighted that this places an additional responsibility on the supervising officers and requires additional effort from them. One person noted:

*And the effort that it takes for the qualified guys – we have to stand over these [new] guys and certify them. They go through intensive training and we have to be present when they're training because if a guy shows a weakness, or a lack of skill, or if they train in a way that we don't like, we have to highlight it. You can't go off for two hours, do it, and come back – you have to be standing next to the person while he's doing his test.*

### **Career progression**

It was generally suggested that personnel working in specialist streams have poorer career opportunities than non-technical personnel. It was also noted that 'promotion prospects are very poor for the technical streams in the Defence Forces' and 'they're looking down a very dark hole of career and prospects'.

It was highlighted that, previously, there was fixed-term promotion for officers (i.e. where an officer would be unconditionally promoted after a certain period of time) and that:

*Once they had fulfilled certain requirements and they had a level of competence, they would be promoted as their turn came around.*

In contrast, attention was drawn to the system now in place, where for promotional purposes personnel are awarded additional points for completing courses or for going overseas. One senior officer said:

*People are going around trying to gather points [from] their various courses or whatever, and you cannot run efficiently or effectively a unit when people are trying to con the game of promotions.*

It was also noted that:

*We are very hampered within the [specialist area] from that point of view in that we do a lot of legitimate maintenance work and we don't have the time or ability to let people go on courses. No, of course they're important, education is important, but we don't have the time or ability or manpower.*

It was also noted that, for some personnel, there is no possibility of vacancies arising, and consequently:

*If they want to be an engineer they have to leave the Defence Forces in five years' time, or less. If they want to stay in the Defence Forces, they have to go into a different [non-technical] stream, and throw away their degree, basically.*

It was suggested, however, that while ‘a technical officer doing a technical role becomes very experienced and competent’, they are sometimes not considered sufficiently rounded for promotion and, consequently, are disadvantaged. This is highlighted in the following quote:

*What’s happening is that we’re getting told that we can’t spare him [...] we can’t put them into that job because we need them here at [name of specialist area] [...] and then when they go in for interviews they’re told, ‘Well, you spent too long in the specialist area.’*

It was also highlighted that it can be difficult for some technical personnel to get deployed overseas:

*I want to go overseas, but there’s no deployment that I can go on. ...there are [deployments I can go on] but I’m not productive [when there because there is limited need for my specialist skills].*

Another officer said that the majority of technical officers and direct-entry officers have not done basic army training but rather have done a very short induction course of ‘maybe a month’. This has also led to some difficulties in personnel being eligible for promotion, with one person noting:

*They felt that the direct-entry officers needed more time to develop, so I’m now watching my peers getting promoted years in front of me.*

It was also noted that in some areas the promotional structure is ‘very steep’ and ‘the next available promotion’ may not arise for more than 10 years because there are so few technical posts at a senior officer level. One officer who had moved into a specialist stream said:

*I’m not seeing a future for myself within the organisation. Crunching the numbers, I’m never going to get promoted [...] Yeah, I’m not seeing any future prospects.*

### **Impact of barracks closures on promotions and centralised appointments**

It was suggested that, prior to a restructuring of the organisation a number of years ago, officers were required to go to the Barracks in (name of a major military location) for a period of time and that this was ‘a tool for people for career progression, for people in the West Country’. However, it was noted that now:

*For career progression they have to come to Dublin, or Newbridge and essentially everything has become Eastern seaboard focused... because they know they commute to Dublin, commute to the Curragh, [while if they do not go for promotion] they can do their whole entire career within a couple of miles of where they are.*

It was noted that this Eastern seaboard focus is also problematic because:

*People working in Dublin cannot afford to live in or near where they work. And [this means added pressures relating] to congestion, careers, commuting times, etc.*

It was also highlighted that ‘centralisation’ is a significant issue in this because ‘the freedom, the latitude for officers to help people is gone’.

Others noted that personnel do not take up promotions because the cost of driving to a location away from where they live would make it unviable financially. One officer said:

*And it is tied into the finance of money because people often say that they're supposed to go to [name of place] and get promoted. Then they go up in rank, but the cost of driving would be so much, it's not worth it. So it has huge implications. And it is tied into finance as well.*

Another officer said:

*So you would find that you're working and living in the [name of place], and your offer for promotion to the next rank would be in [name of another place about 200 km away]. So, if you want that promotion, you have to go to [the second place]. And then your family would still be living in [the place 200 km away].*

This situation was compared unfavourably with the US, British and French defence forces, where, if personnel are promoted, the Military service makes arrangements for them to have accommodation with their families. It was noted that in Ireland:

*We will not be funded [...] and because of that the families end up being left behind 90% of the time... They [the officers] get promoted, and they move in the hope that they would try and get back to their original base. And that's why the family never follows because the facilities aren't there, funding isn't there, and people are unwilling to move their families.*

It was also highlighted that pension on retirement is an incentive to go for promotion but that:

*Some [people], [a] very small minority, will elect not to go forward because maybe they don't want to move, or there's personal reasons. But generally speaking, the vast majority try to advance.*

### **Equipment and infrastructure**

It was suggested that the physical infrastructure in some areas is 'pretty poor' and that 'we're always trying to do more with less [...] with fewer resources, and making do'. One person from the air corps said regarding their base's air traffic control tower that:

*The tower... was built 60, 70, 80 years ago. And it's poured concrete. It's leaking [...] there's damp and mould at times, growing on the inside of the wall, with the water leaking in around equipment at times. It has been addressed in terms of having minor maintenance done. We are on a list, a very long list, of projects to build a new tower in the future.*

Another officer noted that even trying to get small pieces of equipment can be difficult:

*It's really hard to get anything that costs money [...] and not like, not trying to put an extra wing on the building, you're trying to get even small things. It just takes forever.*

Another officer noted:

*You have to ask for it again, and again, and again. You've to ring people, you're chasing things up, you're writing out justifications for it. And for €100, you could... [There's] just this ridiculous inability to get even small things.*

One person gave an example of an item of equipment that they needed, saying:

*But I've been looking [to obtain] that for over a year now, and it's just so slow. And then the processes of getting anything done are, they're just archaic. There's lots of people in different departments but not necessarily – it's not their priority really to get that thing for you, even though there's very little money involved. So, it sort of happens really to the point of, you're just not bothering. You're just like, 'I'm never going to get this.'*

Another officer suggested that the safety culture within the Defence Forces is not at an appropriate level, saying:

*I think it is only a matter of time before we have a major incident where somebody is hurt, if not killed or [...] we lose a vessel or we lose an aircraft or somebody is killed in an army training exercise. I think they pay lip service to safety... I would say we have a culture of paying lip service to safety issues and if we were to apply the letter of the law, then we would have to stop the ships sailing and we would have to wait until all the maintenance is carried out and until equipment was in proper condition.*

### **Role of the Department of Defence**

While there was a small amount of commentary on the internal management structure of the Defence Forces, in general the focus was on the wider structures and, in particular, on the role of the Department of Defence. A number of officers expressed frustration in respect of the Department of Defence, and it was suggested that:

*The Department of Defence are blocking everything [...] because they have no responsibility for the operational output.*

One officer highlighted that there had been a number of changes since 2006 and that since that time:

*There's been a continuous, pretty much, downward slow trajectory of the morale within the [Defence] Forces. Due to like ongoing cutbacks all the time really, in relation to barrack closures, the redesign of the Defence Forces [from] three brigades down to two brigades. The continuing, probably worsening of conditions for new entrants coming into the Defence Forces.*

This officer went on to say:

*It feels like the Department of Defence is [what] is ultimately responsible for all of this. They've shaped this environment and created this environment and have no interest in us at all. They treat us like we're the enemy almost. And the generals are powerless or unwilling to exploit the limited power they have. The department are happy to run us into the ground to promote some long-term agenda that I'm not privy to what that is.*

One officer questioned

*how you can run a military organisation when the Department [of Defence] has pretty much the final say on everything.*

It was also suggested that this filters down to people on the ground because they know 'their commanding officer has not got the power or ability to make decisions because they're restricted'.

It was also pointed out that allowances due to be paid to Defence Forces personnel were not being paid and that labour court and other adjudications 'that [had gone] for conciliation', resulted in the Department of Defence losing the last nine cases. It was also noted that the Department of Defence had pursued this approach against military advice. An example of this was given in respect of 'a special pay rise awarded in 2010 to one group of personnel' that had not been paid.

It was also suggested that, while auditing is important and public money must be protected, the level of scrutiny, particularly over very small amounts, makes it appear as if 'the Department [of Defence] operates as a straitjacket on the organisation'. One officer said that 'management get crippled with audits, [...] which are important, but just relentless paperwork and inaction, essentially'. Another noted:

*It's regarded as being almost disloyal by putting in a subsistence form [...] and it's now a stigma to even apply for subsistence. And the reason being is that a military manager is afraid [and thinking], 'Oh God am I in trouble over losing €2?' So the safe thing is to say 'No'. [The Department of Defence has] paralysed the military management into fear [of] approving [subsistence payments]. [Management is thinking], 'Oh, we're missing the receipt for [name of item] for €10. Oh god, where's the receipt?' You know, 'Am I in trouble over it?'*

Another person spoke about there being a

*poisonous, toxic culture [...] And it's a real power trip that the civilians have the purse strings and they just treat the military with absolute contempt.*

Another officer said:

*Nobody is going out to create better systems, and somebody needs to stand up to... And I'm all for efficiencies and all of that, but it's gotten to the stage now where we are, I hate to use the term, but emasculated. In that we don't have control over what we're doing so we're working within the tremendous constraints, financial constraints. And we have the Department of Defence now dipping down into operational constraints as well.*

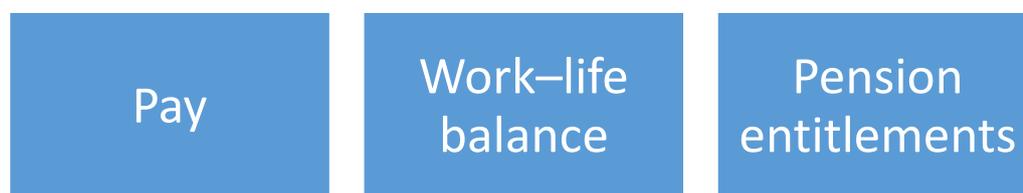
### **Reasons officers stay in or leave the Defence Forces**

As noted earlier, many officers who participated in the interviews highlighted their love of the Defence Forces and particularly camaraderie with colleagues, the variety and technical nature of the job, and the pride they felt from serving the state and the public. It was noted, however, that almost all positive comments were balanced with challenges arising and the view that things are less positive now than they have been in the past. In terms of retention of personnel, it was suggested that the Defence Forces have

*already gone over the tipping point [...] we are going to implode very quickly unless we focus on the way that we're treating our people, because it is appalling.*

Officers raised three main issues in their deliberations over whether they were likely to stay in or leave the Defence Forces (Figure 22).

**Figure 22: Reasons why officers leave the Defence Forces**



### Pay

As highlighted earlier, there are challenges arising in relation to the overall levels of pay of officers, particularly in terms of duty allowances and how officers' pay compares to that of others in the public and private sectors. Many officers in technical streams mentioned their significant skills, experience and expertise, and it was noted many times that their earnings on leaving the Defence Forces could be considerably higher than their current pay. One officer noted:

*The morale is low... and it's nearly a fight to stay in, [whereas] it's very easy to leave... We're spending a fortune training people through time, equipment, etc. like that, and it's quite easy for them to say, 'You know what? This is too much grief, I can go and earn the same money stacking shelves.'*

This was reiterated by another officer, who said:

*And we have the people, we're training the people up to the right standards, but as soon as we're training them, they're being offered jobs out [in] industry.*

One senior officer noted that 'my officers are being headhunted all over the place', and there was evidence of this in a number of interviews where individuals spoke of specific job offers they had received. One person, for example, reported having two job offers at the time of the interview with the research team – one from a multinational company that had 'looked at my kind of leadership management experience' and another one from a company in the specialist area this person was working in.

Others noted that they did not have a specific job offer but that they were not 'overly concerned about getting a job outside' the Defence Forces (i.e. they thought it would be relatively easy to do so) because of their qualifications and experience. It was highlighted that many Defence Forces personnel in the specialist streams hold

*undergraduate and master's degrees, and by the time they come into us, and they do a few years, they are extremely attractive to industry.*

### **Impact of pay on retention**

The impact of pay was mentioned many times in terms of the civilian opportunities available to technical personnel. One officer summarised the issue by saying:

*Retention is a huge problem of course, and it all boils down to [the fact that] we need to pay [personnel] what they're being paid outside.*

The salaries of personnel who had left the Defence Forces to join private industry were specified and noted to be considerably higher than those of personnel in the Defence Forces. Increases in salary within a short period of time were also identified for those who had left, and this was compared with the limited increases awarded to those who remain and the long period of time over which these increases are given. Some interviewees noted that individuals had received bonus payments outside the Defence Forces; one officer spoke about an ex-colleague who had recently left the Defence Forces:

*He was saying he has a job with the [name]. His salary is bigger. They have a sliding scale of [€70,000–90,000] and then they get annual bonuses. So, they get an annual bonus, they get a three-year bonus and a five-year bonus. The annual bonus is so much, the three-year is bigger and the five-year is the biggest, and [then] the cycle starts again. So, you always have your annual and three- and five-[year bonuses]... and it goes in that cycle as [an incentive] for retention to keep people.*

Another example was given of a former colleague who had earned less than €50,000 in the Defence Forces but received €70,000 immediately on commencing a new job in the private sector. This person had also brought a pension of more than €20,000 with them, which meant they were on more than €90,000, which was noted to be substantially higher than the pay of this person's ex-manager in the Defence Forces. Others gave examples of marine engineers being able to make €150,000 for six-month contracts because:

*[The private sector is] recognising that if they want people, and if they want to retain people, they have to pay for it.*

Interviewees named a range of key senior positions that officers had been recruited into, both in Ireland and internationally. One officer said:

*And a lot of technical officers in particular are wanted by the likes of the UN, or by the private sector for very specific niche jobs, because you've [a] very specific niche skill. I've been offered jobs, verbally, not in writing, but I've been offered jobs in the likes of [places in Africa and the Middle East]. I know I could go there and earn tax-free money.*

## **Work–life balance**

The second key issue in respect of retention of personnel relates to work–life balance. Again, this was identified as very problematic for some, although not all, personnel taking part in the interviews. One senior officer linked the level of work with the pay, noting:

*[Personnel are] only here because of the love of the job and because they want to do something different. It's not for a salary, but when you... when you start overtaking them, and start really pushing them, pushing them into things that they don't want to do, then they're going to look... they're looking outside and say, 'Well, I can get paid this much more.'*

A small number of officers noted that they personally did not have any work–life balance problems. One officer, for example, said they were able to draw 'a very clear distinction between my home life and my work life', while another stated that in their current assignment:

*There's no expectation for staying in late, and in general you're in at nine and you're gone by half-four or five, so yes, it's really nice and you get home at a decent hour.*

Another officer noted that:

*The work–life balance is fine, personally, for me. I’m unmarried and I don’t have any children.*

Examples were also given of where it was possible to make some changes to accommodate work–life balance for individuals at particular times, for example following the birth of a new baby or when there was a specific issue arising. One officer highlighted ways in which staff were accommodated, noting that:

*We try and ensure that people feel appreciated and valued here as well. We look after them as well. When I can I give the guys spare time off or whatever [or] instead [let them] take a day off. But it’s not the way I should be running this. If I wasn’t running it that way, the whole place would have fallen apart.*

There was recognition, however, that many other people are not as fortunate:

*There are people in the organisation who have those issues all the time [missing important family occasions], and you have no choice whether you go [on duty] or not, you have to go.*

One officer highlighted the impact of being away from home, noting that:

*The frequency of duty is quite high [...] You’re doing quite a lot of duties, and you find yourself away from home because you have a particular task, and you’re in another country, or you’re away, and the workload is high duty, frequent duties, and [there’s limited] time off to spend with your family and things like that – [it] can be quite frustrating.*

Another officer summarised the issue as follows:

*But in some ways, it is still an excellent job. And when I say excellent I just mean like with excellent colleagues. What they’re asking us to do is they’re asking us basically to choose between your family and your job. And [for] anybody, there’s only one answer to that question if you’re a responsible person. You’ll say, actually while I do love the army, I don’t want to be going home to an empty house and I kind of like my family as well. And the family will always win.*

### ***Specific challenges relating to work–life balance***

While it was noted that people don’t join the army to stay at home, it was nevertheless highlighted that considerable challenges arise due to the nature of the Defence Forces, including requirements to do overseas duties, security duties and courses. Three main issues were identified, and these are set out in Figure 23.

**Figure 23: Specific work–life challenges arising for officers**



### **Uncertainty**

One person suggested that ‘in the military they say leave is a privilege, it’s not an entitlement’, and the impact of this is that leave can be cancelled or time off changed at short notice. Many officers gave examples of being called away from their bases at short notice, and this was identified as having a significant impact on family life, particularly where there are children, due to difficulties in making both short- and long-term plans. One officer pointed out that there is always uncertainty:

*[You can never say], ‘I will be at that wedding’ [or] ‘I will be able to make that birthday party’ because the phone call could come and the next day you’re on cash escort, or you have to go to a meeting.*

Another officer spoke about ‘peer jump release’, which it was noted can particularly affect officers with specialist qualifications, as follows:

*Basically, you get a phone call on Friday afternoon, and this guy is out there after breaking his leg and you have to fill in at sea for the next two weeks [...] And that could happen quite regularly. And it does happen quite regularly and there’s nobody who hasn’t talked about this one way or the other.*

Changes in the social fabric of Irish life were also highlighted, and it was noted that:

*The social aspect of Irish life has changed. You talk to all the [older personnel] in the navy and the army, [and] they’ll say, ‘My wife was at home with the kids.’ That’s not the reality now. The reality is the majority of people are two-income families. Mortgages are 25 years, 40 years in length.*

This was exemplified by another officer, who said:

*You need to have reactive childcare there. So you know that you must have somebody at the end of the phone if you have children when it’s five o’clock in the morning that you can ring them, tell them... you’re in at five o’clock in the morning.*

It was also highlighted that, due to staffing shortages, being able to plan is becoming more and more difficult. One officer explained:

*Now you’re just being pulled and dragged, and you don’t get that time either to go do your job or to do the job properly. Secondly, you can’t plan. So when I moved from [one area] to [another area] I get a phone call to be up there by Monday! That’s not at all uncommon.*

While it was acknowledged that these issues ‘apply to all ranks, and all areas regardless of whether you’re technical’, the problem is most pronounced for technical personnel officers, because the pool is shallower and, therefore, there are greater pressures.

### **Overseas deployment**

Positive and negative aspects of overseas duties were identified. Positive aspects identified included getting good experience, getting an additional allowance, representing your country and dealing with the UN. These, however, need to be balanced with the disruption to family life. One officer said:

*I really wanted to go on those trips. I pushed to get onto them. It was great. But, later in life, I now have kids, and the young kids don't take too well to me being away.*

Another officer, however, highlighted a requirement to undertake more overseas duties than they wanted to do because of a shortage of personnel with the particular technical expertise:

*[I] mightn't have the choice the next time around [...] I'm kind of in line to go next year. It doesn't really suit me. I don't know if I will have that choice, whether to go or not [...] We can't get the volunteers.*

This was reiterated by another officer, who linked retention difficulties with being ordered to go overseas despite not wanting to do so:

*There's still the constant threat of having to go overseas. And most people are digging their heels in about not going [...] and so the big problem is that [...] if they don't back down and the [manager] doesn't back down, what will probably happen is they'll leave. If they leave, then at the last minute one of the rest of us will just get grabbed and told 'You're going there' and there is no way around it – this is a case of, this is your job, so you go there or you've no choice.*

Another officer said:

*[Many personnel] don't want to serve overseas. It doesn't suit them, they've been over so many times before... but you've no choice.*

### **Commuting**

The third issue that strongly affects work–life balance relates to commuting. It was suggested that in the past ‘people had security as to where they were located’ but this is no longer the case. It was highlighted that closures of barracks combined with the centralisation of promotions means that many officers are now commuting long distances, and this has a very negative impact on their family and also on their family income. One officer said:

*And the reason a lot of people commute is because of barracks closing. They had bought a house next to the barracks, thinking they would be around, but there were a raft of barracks closed. Basically, as a result, a lot of people are on their own now.*

It was also suggested that commuting has become the norm for many officers ‘because officers tend to get moved. We get moved every two years.’ While interviewees suggested that personnel expect to move when they are younger, in later years ‘you’d be hoping you could settle down a bit more’. It was also noted that people working in Dublin cannot afford

to live in, or near, where they work and as a consequence incur significant commuting challenges. Two main issues arise in respect of commuting: the financial costs associated with it and the impact on family life.

The costs of commuting for some were likened to a 'second mortgage' and it was noted that, in addition to there being significant fuel costs, it is costly to eat when away from home. In the course of interviews, it was highlighted that personnel are 'travelling extreme distances across the country to go to work', and interviewees spoke of commuting times of two hours or more. One example given was of a colleague who that morning, in respect of an unplanned duty, had needed 'to leave his/her house at 4.30 a.m.'. In addition to the disruption:

*It's the cost. S/he had to have someone at his/her house to mind [number of] children [...] S/he's at the expense for himself/herself to get to here. S/he got less duty money for his/her time than it cost him/her to get here.*

The situation for NCOs was identified as particularly problematic. One officer said:

*This week I had two out of my three technicians, so the most junior technicians that work under me, left, and two of them came to me and said they love the place, but they would make more money [elsewhere]. Both of them are from [name of place more than 150 km away] and they would make more money staying at home and not have to pay petrol to come down for two weeks [...] and it costs them €40 in petrol or diesel and they're getting €20 for the duty, for a 24-hour duty they're getting €20 in exchange.*

The impact of having to drive long distances when personnel are tired was also noted:

*You feel that you're not doing your job fully because come four or five o'clock I'll be looking at a two-hour drive home, and that will be more on my mind than trying to sort out [issues arising at work], which is not what you want to be doing.*

### **Impact of work–life balance on retention**

A number of participants highlighted the impact of work–life balance on retention, and there was some agreement that poor work–life balance is a key feature in decision making around staying in or leaving the Defence Forces. One officer explained:

*But I would have to say, my [teenage child] has never known me to live at home. Never. I'm on the road commuting since before s/he was born. Because the only jobs for [specialist area] are in [a county a considerable distance from where this officer lived]... So as long as I stay, I will be working in [name of location]. And that's the life we have now, and that's what would drive me out eventually.*

Another officer noted that:

*At the moment I live very close to where my family are, and my day-to-day work is very close, it makes my life so much easier. There was a period there, even for the previous two years, I was commuting. I was getting no remuneration for the commute and, if that was put on me again, it would accelerate my exit. I've told my managers that, not as a threat, or anything like that, it's just a reality of my fiscal situation.*

Another officer said:

*We're seeing an awful lot of young fellows going to the medical device industry... He's travelling to the [name of location], he's done three or four regimental duties... three regiment duties of 24 hours a week and he'd sleep on the base, and then he'd [be] better off packing a shelf in Tesco stores if he's from [a named town] rather than what he's spending on diesel driving down and having to go back, and [he'd] see more of his girlfriend or his family or his kids.*

This was also highlighted by another officer who was commuting significant distances every day:

*And the reason people are going is not because they're selfish and they want the pay rise. People are looking for work-life balance, and that's why they're leaving. The reason people are going is that they want their family not to be disbanded [...] I'd get a job in three hours' time and I could work happily down there [where the officer's family lived] for better pay. And I could be home in the evening and there'd be no snags. And there'd be less friction at home, and I wouldn't have to tip toe out of the house like crazy, trying not to wake up the kids.*

### **Pension entitlements**

Many officers drew attention to changes in their terms and conditions in recent years. Of these, changes in respect of retirement entitlements were identified as having a particularly negative impact on retention. It was explained that, for enlisted personnel, '[you] do your core training and then you're stuck for five years'. Following that, there is an extension of service from five years to nine years and then personnel can sign up for a further three years (i.e. to reach a total of 12 years). Following that, they can sign up for a further nine years (i.e. to reach a total of 21 years), and after that 'every two years you would apply for continuance of service'. It was highlighted that at 'each of those natural breaks, you can leave'.

Officers 'generally have a commission for life', although it was noted that, in some technical services, an officer comes in 'on short-term commissions for maybe 12 years, or 18 years and that can be air, or in the navy'. It was also noted that, unless there is a state of emergency, 'anybody can leave at any given time, but you may have to pay money'. This is particularly the case for technical staff, where the 'cost of the training may need to be factored in'.

In terms of retention, it was suggested that the organisation does not 'get a net gain until [a person has been] in the Defence Forces for more than five years' because of the amount of time it takes to train them. It was noted:

*You're keeping them for five years and you are going to train them up. And the companies are loving it from the point of view that that takes them [i.e. Defence Forces personnel whom private sector companies may later recruit] out of the baby stage. [There's] no risk, [as] they're disciplined and everything. No, we lose them. We're the ones not getting the benefit of it. We're losing them when we just have them at the right stage.*

While it was suggested that many officers are not aware of the implications of their pension, it was clear from the interviews that the age at which an individual becomes eligible to leave the Defence Forces with a pension was important and was seen as having both positive and negative impacts on retention.

### **Changes in pension entitlements**

In line with other public sectors, since 1994 there have been a number of changes in the timings relating to when Defence Forces personnel become eligible to draw down their pension. The most recent changes took place in 2013, and these have resulted in an extension of the length of time, from 20 years to 30 years, Defence Forces personnel have to work before they can draw down a pension. Prior to the changes, officers could leave the service after 12 years with some pension and after 20 years of service with a full pension. One officer said:

*[Someone on a 20-year pension] would have done their training, they would have got to ten years, or eight or nine years, and said, 'I only have three years to go and I'll hang on until I've gotten to the half pension [at 12 years], and see where I'm going then at that stage...' So, that pension is a massive retention tool. People will say, 'Oh, but it costs this and that.' But what it did was [to] retain people specifically, nearly for 21, 22 years.*

Another officer said:

*I still have the pension that I can draw down in [less than five] years' time. So, I'm in a very privileged position. But the people coming after me will have served 30 years for a significantly reduced pension and they can't draw it down until they're 65.*

It was noted that now:

*People are joining the Defence Forces looking at having to do 30 years in order to get any form of pension, and after about five or six [they're] going, 'You know what? I've qualified up now, I've a good range of experience, and I can go out and work anywhere else essentially and earn enough money to be able to put my own pension aside that I'll have after 10 or 15 years. I'm not having to wait 30 years to get a basic pension.'*

### **Impact of changes to the pension**

It was highlighted that many individuals, particularly those who joined the Defence Forces directly from school, are still young enough (generally in their early forties) to change careers and obtain new employment at the end of 20 years in the Defence Forces. However, the change in pension eligibility from 20 years to 30 years means that personnel are not eligible for a pension until they are in their fifties; it was suggested that, while an individual of this age will get a job, they are unlikely to have a new career. There were comments such as 'when people are 50, then it can be a stigma' and 'it's very hard to get a job at 50'. One officer said:

*So, you need to have something else in the ready, but really, if you're thinking along those lines, and you're in your forties, you need to build a second career, that's kinda what people are looking at [doing].*

Further, it was noted that, at that stage in their lives, personnel are likely to have children attending college, the costs of which may be prohibitive. This was highlighted by one officer, who said:

*I suppose, in my father's time or previously, they had all their kids, married, everything by about 26, 27. You're now looking at people at 45 with kids, with*

*infants. So now at 58, 59, 60 when they're retiring, their kids could only just be starting college.*

This was reiterated by another officer, who said:

*They would like to stay in the organisation, but they need to have some kind of strategy to get out, and go on to something else because we know the long term... Looking at if I stayed in, retiring in my mid-fifties and with an okay pension but on a pension that I can live on, I would be OK if it were only me but at that stage all my children [will be] going to college.*

The value of a full pension for enlisted personnel, which previously was available following 21 years' service, was also identified as a retention mechanism. One officer said:

*The idea behind the 21-year and 30-year pensions for the other ranks was in a sense to entice them to stay. Not to give them an out after 21 years, because they would have done 21 and said, 'Grand, I have a pension now, it's worth X, but if I stay another nine years it'll be worth Y, which is much more beneficial to me. So therefore I'll stay the other nine years.'*

The changes that have taken place mean that 'what we have now is the 30-year pension', which means that 'they [enlisted personnel] can leave at any stage in that period of years' and 'it becomes very hard to predict with any kind of certainty when people are gonna be going or staying'.

It was also noted that, after 30 years, the pension for an enlisted individual is just over €12,000 per annum and consequently 'there's no enticement for them to stay'.

A small number of people drew attention to the lack of understanding about pension entitlement, which stems from the fact that people 'are all on so many different contracts'. This led one officer to say that 'a lot of people don't understand the implications of the change in the conditions set out in the new contracts – they haven't a clue'. Another officer noted that, for personnel in technical streams, this is compounded by 'people getting a new army number when they commence training for a technical position'. This means that the number of years they have accrued towards their pension entitlement is reset to zero.

In summary, pensions were identified as important, and it was highlighted that the recent changes to when personnel become eligible to draw down their pension have had a negative impact on retention, not least because of the age at which personnel are now likely to leave the Defence Forces. It was noted that, while it is possible to build a new career after the age of 40 (based on leaving the Defence Forces with a full pension after 21 years), that is not the case when people are in their fifties.

### **Summary of reasons why officers intend to stay in or leave the Defence Forces**

In summary, three main reasons were identified for officers intending to leave: pay, work–life balance and pension entitlements. Many officers spoke of wishing to stay in the Defence Forces but recognising that they would have significantly better pay opportunities as civilians. This created a dilemma for them, particularly in the context of supporting their families.

The second issue arising relates to work–life balance. Officers spoke about the impact of working in the Defence Forces on their own and their families' lives, particularly in the context of not being paid sufficiently well to negate these difficulties. The uncertainty associated with being called in at short notice, or of having to step in for others due to

increasing numbers of personnel leaving, was highlighted along with the negative impacts this causes for officers' relationships with their children and partners. It was noted that the fabric of Irish society has changed and that, while in the past partners would have been able to be flexible, now they are also likely to be in employment, and this creates challenges around childcare.

While there were positive aspects associated with overseas duties, many challenges were identified in terms of family life and the lack of choice, again due to falling numbers of personnel, in whether people go overseas or not. The requirement to do overseas duties was identified as impacting disproportionately on technical streams because they are substantially fewer in number compared with other line ranks.

It was explained that there have been a number of barracks closed in recent times and that this, along with the centralisation of promotions, means that many officers are now commuting long distances from where their families live. The physical and financial costs of commuting, as well as the time away from families, were identified as key issues in deciding whether to stay in or leave the service.

Finally, the number of years after which individuals can receive a pension was identified as a reason for leaving. Under the new pension scheme, where entitlement to a full pension is earned after 30 years, personnel are now required to work until they are in their fifties. It was noted that, at this age, it is often too late to start a new career. Additionally, at this age, many people will have children going to college, which it was suggested is a particularly expensive time.

## Part 6e: Summary and conclusions relating to officers

Qualitative and quantitative data drawn from a survey completed by 145 officers and interviews completed with 19 officers based in the army, air corps and navy identified a number of issues relevant to career and job intentions.

57.4% of officers expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces

The three indexes with the highest scores are job alternatives (75.7%), peer support and respect (71.3%) and engagement (69.8%). The indexes with the lowest scores are:

- satisfaction with pension (36.6%)
- satisfaction with work–life planning (34.2%)
- information sharing and decision making (28.9%)
- satisfaction with pay and allowances (28.3%)

The overall profile of officers working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals are engaged in their work, experience high levels of peer support and respect, and report having very good job alternatives. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pensions, and a low sense of involvement in information sharing and decision making. A majority of these individuals report experiencing difficulties in work–life planning and a lack of opportunities for training and promotion.

Conclusions, based on the findings, are now presented.

### Conclusions: positive aspects of the work and the organisation

*Officers working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces are engaged in their work; report having high levels of peer support, respect and camaraderie with colleagues; and enjoy the diversity and technical nature of their work. They also report being proud of working in the Defence Forces.*

These findings are reflected in both the quantitative data, where peer support and respect (71.3%) and engagement (69.8%) were two of the three highest indexes, and in the qualitative data, where commentary in respect of the positive aspects of their work reflected these issues.

Strikingly, however, in the qualitative data, almost all positive comments were balanced with challenges arising and the view that things are less positive now than they have been in the past.

### Conclusions: dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension

*There is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pensions, and this finding is strongly reflected in both the quantitative and the qualitative findings. The commentary around these areas, particularly pay and allowances, exceeded the commentary on each other issue. The pay and allowances index had the lowest mean index score (28.3%) of all indexes included in the study, and satisfaction with pension (34.3%) had the fourth lowest score.*

Officers believe their overall pay levels (including basic pay, Military Service Allowance and technician pay) are inadequate, and the pay relating to duties (e.g. security duty and weekend duty) was highlighted as particularly low and problematic. It was also suggested that take-home pay is currently lower than that received in 2008, prior to the financial crisis, and that Defence Forces personnel are more poorly paid than others in the public and private sectors. While satisfaction with pay was not statistically significantly associated with intention to leave the Defence Forces, it was associated with job satisfaction, an impact measure that predicts this outcome.

It is of note that, as for privates, higher satisfaction with pension is a predictor of intention to leave. The qualitative interviews highlight the complex role played by access to a pension in decision making about staying in or leaving the Defence Forces. Additional analysis, particularly in respect of the year of entry to the service, may provide a clearer explanation for this.

### **Conclusions: alternative job opportunities**

*Officers report having job alternatives that are better than working in the Defence Forces. This is particularly so for those with extensive technical expertise and experience.*

The job alternatives scale accounted for the highest index score (75.7%) of all indexes included in the study, and throughout the qualitative data many alternatives in the public and private sectors were identified. Better job alternatives were identified in the regression analysis as a predictor of intention to leave and, in addition, as a key driver of burnout, global job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

### **Conclusions: excessive workload and inadequate staffing levels**

*Officers reported having an excessive workload, and it was highlighted that the situation is considerably worse now than previously. It was also reported that continuing difficulties in retaining personnel are having a direct impact on safety and on the extent to which work can be completed. This has resulted in increased stress for those working in this situation.*

Higher levels of burnout and lower levels of global job satisfaction are significant predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces, and satisfaction with pay and allowances is a key driver of both these impacts.

Attention was drawn to the non-technical work personnel in specialist streams are expected to carry out in addition to their technical work, and the lack of administrative support was also highlighted. A small number of comments were made about the type of work carried out on overseas deployment, and it was suggested that this was not rewarding for some of the people involved. Some anomalies were also identified in respect of carrying out a technical role and having technical qualifications but not being eligible for technician pay due to the established number of technical posts assigned to an area.

### **Conclusions: dissatisfaction with work–life balance and planning**

*Working in the Defence Forces has a negative impact on work–life balance for officers and their families due to the uncertainty of their work schedule, overseas duties and commuting pressures. The negative impact is compounded by a view that officers are not paid sufficiently well to negate these difficulties.*

The findings from the work–life planning index highlight widespread dissatisfaction with this area, and at 34.2% it accounted for the third lowest index in this study. The uncertainty associated with being called in at short notice, or of having to step in for others due to increasing numbers of personnel leaving, was highlighted as negatively impacting on

officers' lives, particularly on their relationships with their children and partners. It was noted that the fabric of Irish society has changed and, while in the past partners would have been able to be flexible, now they are also likely to be in employment, and this creates challenges around childcare.

While there were positive aspects associated with overseas duties, many challenges were identified in terms of family life and the lack of choice, again due to falling numbers of personnel, in whether people go overseas or not. The requirement to do overseas duties was identified as impacting disproportionately on technical streams because they are substantially fewer in number compared with other line ranks.

The commuting index (49.7%) highlights a moderate level of difficulty in this area. It was explained that, because of barracks closures and the centralisation of promotions, many officers are now commuting long distances from where their families live. The physical and financial costs of commuting as well as the time away from families were identified in the qualitative research as key issues in deciding whether to stay in or leave the service.

### **Conclusions: organisational context and culture**

*The organisational context within which officers work was identified as problematic in two areas. First, poor career progression is a problem for officers, and it was suggested that those working in a technical stream have considerably fewer opportunities compared with those working in more general services. Second, low levels of satisfaction with information sharing and decision making (28.9%) were reported.*

With a score of 40.7%, the training and promotion opportunities scale suggests a moderate level of satisfaction with this area. The regression analysis identified training and promotion opportunities as a predictor of intention to leave, and further analysis shows that this issue also drives two impacts: burnout and lower levels of global job satisfaction.

There is some agreement that officers working in specialist streams have poorer career progression than non-technical grades, and promotional opportunities may not arise for several years due to the small number of posts available. It was also suggested that the requirement to undertake long commutes following promotion can be a disincentive to career progression.

Low levels of satisfaction with information sharing and decision making were identified as a predictor of intention to leave the Defence Forces, and additional analysis showed that this is a key driver of job satisfaction (specific).

### **Conclusions: findings in respect of engagement**

It is of note that higher levels of engagement were associated with a higher likelihood of intention to leave among officers, as this finding is counter-intuitive. One possible explanation may be that respondents focused on the specialist nature of their work as opposed to the environment in which they did this specialist work.

**Part 7: Quantitative and qualitative findings emerging in respect of  
NCOs' intention to leave**

## Overview of findings emerging in respect of NCOs' intention to leave

This part focuses on the quantitative and qualitative findings with regard to NCOs' intention to leave the Defence Forces. There are five sub-parts, as follows:

- Part 7a presents NCOs' perceptions of the job and the organisation.
- Part 7b describes the regression analyses of NCOs' intention to leave the organisation.
- Part 7c describes the regression analysis of impact measures.
- Part 7d presents the findings from interviews with NCOs.
- Part 7e provides a summary and conclusions regarding retention issues relating to NCOs.

**67.3% of NCOs expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces**

## Part 7a: Perceptions of the job and the organisation

Figure 24 presents the means for NCOs on the index measures that were included in the survey. All indexes are expressed as percentages (see Section 2: Methodology for more information), and higher scores indicate more positive outcomes. Two 'negative' scales, burnout and commuting pressure, have been reverse scored for this part (to low burnout and low commuting pressure) in order to allow for comparisons with the 'positive' scales. This means that higher scores on all scales shown in Figure 24 indicate a more positive outcome. For example, high scores on 'low burnout' indicate low average rates of burnout.

The index with the highest score is job alternatives (78.4%) and this is the only index to exceed 75%. Two additional indexes are higher than 60%: engagement (62.2%) and peer support and respect (61.2%).

Three of the indexes have very low scores: information sharing and decision making (18.0%), satisfaction with pay and allowances (20.1%) and satisfaction with work–life planning (28.4%).

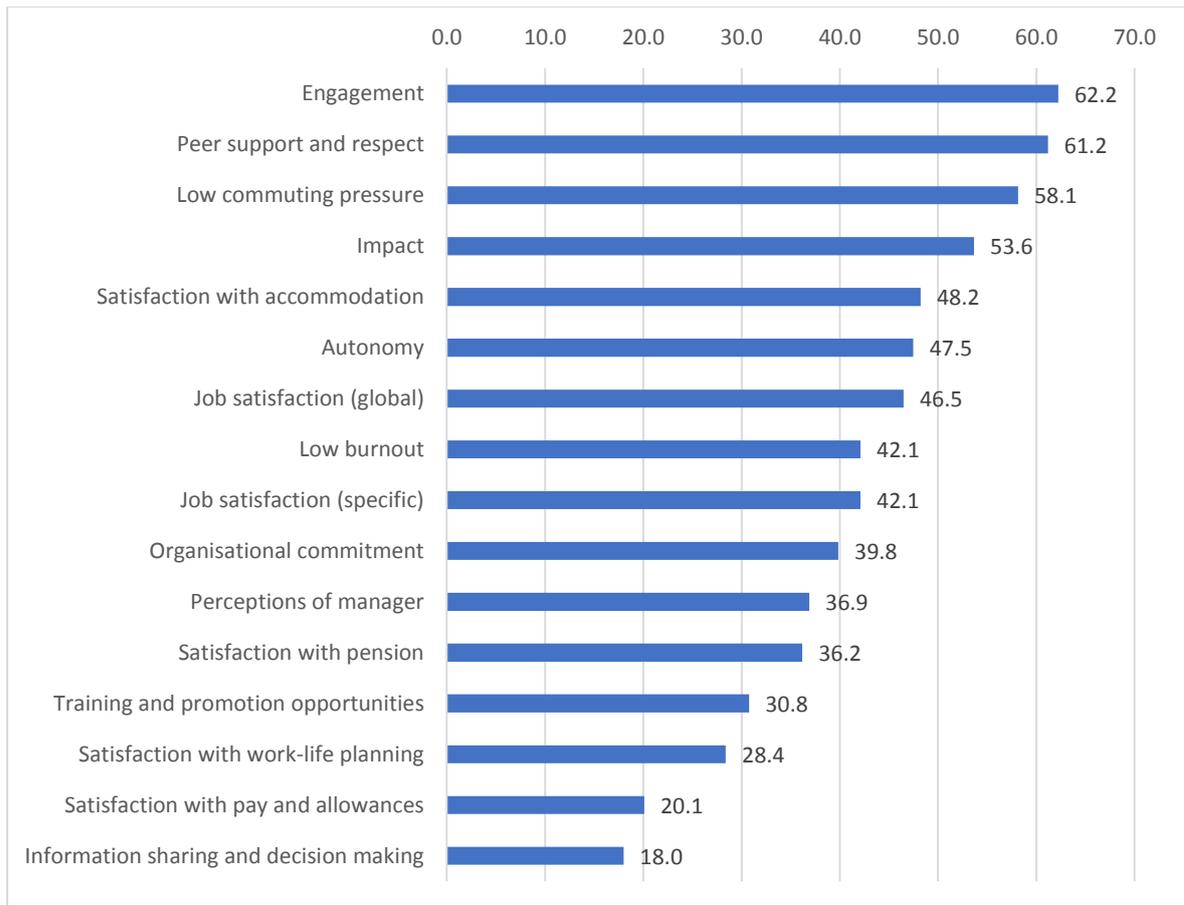
Four further indexes have low scores: training and promotion opportunities (30.8%), satisfaction with pension (36.2%), perceptions of manager (36.9%) and organisational commitment (39.8%).

The remaining indexes have scores ranging from 42.1% to 58.1%:

- low commuting pressure (58.1%)
- low burnout (57.9%)
- impact (53.6%)
- satisfaction with accommodation (48.2%)
- autonomy (47.5%)
- job satisfaction (global) (46.5%)
- job satisfaction (specific) (42.1%)
- 

Effort–reward ratio is an additional measure that is not included in Figure 4 since it is on a different metric to the 0–100% scale of the indexes. NCO respondents had a mean effort–reward ratio of 1.86, meaning that they put in almost 1.9 times more effort than the reward experienced in their work.

**Figure 24: Index scores: perceptions of job and of organisation for NCOs in the Defence Forces**



This overall profile of NCOs working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals are moderately to highly engaged in their work and experience moderate to high levels of peer support and respect. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with involvement in information sharing and decision making, pay and allowances, work-life planning and training and promotion opportunities. A majority of these individuals are experiencing difficulties in commuting pressures and report high levels of burnout.

## Part 7b: Regression analyses of intention to leave the organisation

To examine whether different perceptions and impact measures were associated with intention to leave the organisation, regression analyses were carried out for NCOs.

Table 20 presents a summary of the regression analysis of intention to leave the organisation for NCOs and Table 21 presents the parameter estimates and significance tests.

The findings show that the explanatory power of the model (indicated by the *r*-square statistic) varied across perception measures and impacts measures. Perception measures explained 28.5% of the variation in NCOs' intention to leave, and the explanatory power of the regression of impacts measures was considerably weaker, at 14%. The availability of job alternatives was positively associated with intention to leave. Training and promotion opportunities and lower satisfaction with accommodation also emerged as significant predictors of intention to leave among NCOs.

Higher levels of burnout, higher effort–reward ratio and lower work–life planning were associated with a higher likelihood of intention to leave among NCOs.

**Table 20: Summary of regression of respondents intention to leave: NCOs**

Characteristics <b>unrelated</b> to likelihood of leaving	Characteristics <b>related</b> to likelihood of leaving
<i>Perceptions</i>	
Autonomy	More job alternatives
Impact	Fewer training and promotion opportunities
Information sharing and decision making	Lower satisfaction with accommodation
Commuting pressure	
Support and respect from peers	
Perceptions of manager	
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	
<i>Impacts</i>	
Job satisfaction (specific)	Higher burnout
Organisational commitment	Higher effort–reward ratio
Lower global job satisfaction	Lower work–life planning
Lower engagement	

**Table 21: Parameter estimates and significance tests for multiple linear regression models of respondents' intention to leave: NCOs**

Specialist streams in the Defence Forces (NCOs): intention to leave	Model 1: perceptions ( <i>r</i> -square = .285)			Model 2: impacts ( <i>r</i> -square = .139)		
	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Perceptions of job, organisation and wider employment context</b>						
Job alternatives (higher scores indicate more alternative employment)	.434	7.745	<.001			
Training and promotion opportunities (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	-.207	-3.759	<.001			
Satisfaction with accommodation (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	-.142	-2.531	.012			
<b>Impacts</b>						
Burnout (higher scores indicate a more negative outcome)				.204	2.990	.003
Effort–reward ratio (higher scores indicate a more negative outcome)				.147	2.142	.033
Work–life planning (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				-.143	-2.019	.045

## Part 7c: Regression analysis of impact measures

This part presents the results of a multiple regression analysis of the impact measures that were statistically significant in predicting NCOs' intention to leave the organisation.

Table 22 highlights those perception measures that have partial correlation coefficients<sup>vi</sup> of around .3 or higher – that is, perceptions that have moderate and moderate to strong associations with the impact measures.

This analysis shows that, for NCOs, the key drivers of the impacts considered are commuting pressure, training and promotion opportunities, and satisfaction with pay and allowances. Training and promotion opportunities acts both as a direct predictor of intention to leave the organisation and as a driver of the impact measures in this group.

The results should be interpreted in conjunction with the regression analysis presented in Part 7b; they suggest that, among NCOs, training and promotion opportunities are important policy considerations.

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<sup>vi</sup> This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

**Table 22: Results of driver-type analysis: NCOs**

Burnout	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Commuting pressure	.403	.594
Support and respect from peers	.421	-.163
Information sharing and decision making	.431	-.133
Effort–reward ratio	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
<b>Training and promotion opportunities</b>	<b>.220</b>	<b>-.295</b>
Commuting pressure	.312	.211
Information sharing and decision making	.361	-.192
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	.390	-.161
Perceptions of manager	.415	-.178
Job alternatives	.436	.207
Autonomy	.446	-.136
Work–life planning	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Satisfaction with pay and allowances	.256	.281
Commuting pressure	.323	-.260
Perceptions of manager	.362	.202
Satisfaction with pension	.388	.217
Job alternatives	.412	-.204
Impact	.435	.218
Information sharing and decision making	.451	.171

\*The *r*-square statistic is cumulative, i.e. denotes variance explained in the outcome for each measure on the list as well as all measures preceding it.

\*\*This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

## Part 7d: Issues arising from interviews with NCOs

This part focuses on key issues arising from interviews with NCOs. Both the positive and the challenging aspects of the job and the organisation are presented, and the final section presents findings relating to intention to stay or leave.

### Positive aspects

A number of interviewees drew attention to positive aspects of being in the Defence Forces with comments such as ‘Yes, I love it, obviously, I’ve been there [more than 20 years]’, ‘Yeah, I love working at [name of area] – it’s not an ordinary job’ and ‘to me it’s exciting’. One person noted that the reason they joined was:

*Literally at the time I needed a good job, I needed to be able to support my [child], so I joined. And after that then it kind of became, well, we’re doing all of this – and I went overseas and I wanted to help people. I suppose that was the only thing I wanted to do so I went and I needed a few bob as well so I volunteered for overseas and I got it.*

Some participants referred to being in the Defence Forces as being a ‘way of life’ rather than a job. This is highlighted in the following quote:

*The Naval Service, in general, it engenders a strange kind of loyalty for us. We’re all servicemen for the service, but we love what we do. This is a way of life. This is – we love our colleagues, we love going to sea, we love the fact that we do something beneficial. And every day is different. This is – we want to do this. And we can do it to an incredibly high level. And if we’re supported and we can continue to do it and not just be mediocre, [...] we’ll excel. But, without support, [...] we won’t be able to.*

Others drew attention to specific elements of the work, such as the variety. It was noted that:

*[Personnel often have] different things all going on all the time, you know, different aircraft come in, there’s different jobs to do, or we [go] away to [an area].*

Another NCO drew attention to being able to get promoted quite quickly and to the rewarding nature of the work:

*Well the positive aspects would be the work itself is rewarding work. I suppose the career rewards would be if... you make your goals and achieve what you need to achieve, the potential for promotion is there, all that sort of thing. So you could have quite young guys getting to quite advanced rank[s] I suppose, in the Defence Forces, quite quickly, if they make it a goal to put the work in and stand the test of time.*

One senior NCO drew attention to the fact that:

*While [personnel are] here, they’re getting fed and clothed... I know it’s a military uniform but it’s a saving not having to clothe yourself as you would in most other operations, so we’re housing them, we’re feeding them, we’re clothing them, which is... an indirect saving, and they’re just gone as soon as they can.*

## Challenges relating to the work

Many challenges were identified by NCOs in terms of their work, including staffing shortages and the consequent workload. Findings relating to these are now presented.

### Type of work

Many examples of the type of work undertaken by NCOs were given, and the technical nature of this work was emphasised. NCOs working in the air corps, for example, undertake daily inspections, maintenance and servicing of aircraft and ensure aircraft are safe to fly. It was noted that personnel need to be 'extremely diligent in how [they] operate', and one NCO said:

*We have to operate with strict rules. The maintenance manuals we have to comply with at all times. Obviously then, sometimes we'd be under a lot of stress and pressure to get aircraft serviceable.*

This was also highlighted by an NCO working in communications and information systems (CIS), who said:

*The army, it needs communications or it can't operate. Every element of technology now that we buy in – transport, ordinance, engineering – it all has an element, a module of communications, and that needs technicians to maintain and service and provide that, and IT experts to integrate it into the digital world.*

Similar levels of responsibility operate across the specialist streams in the navy and the army, and it was noted that:

*So the lads are working harder. The ships are staying at sea longer compared to what they did 20 years ago. Work has doubled.*

It was also mentioned that Defence Forces personnel are happy to help out when there are civil disasters, with one person noting:

*We're more than willing to go out and help wherever [we're needed], whether it's a storm or a flood or anything like that, whatever they need. Like plenty of times over the years naval personnel have been called in to help create pumps and stuff to help pump roads and city blocks [to clear away] water. I mean all that stuff, we'll do absolutely no bother.*

There was some criticism, however, of the wider use of the Defence Forces for non-defence duties. An example of using the Defence Forces 'as ticket collectors for the papal visit' and as 'cheap labour' was deemed 'ridiculous'.

### Staffing crisis

Many interviewees drew attention to having fewer staff than previously, and it was suggested that:

*Everyone is being asked to work harder, be more productive every day with less personnel.*

This was reiterated by another NCO, who said:

*The workload that's been placed on each individual is an awful lot higher. Every year we've been asked to work more and more. We're losing more lads than we're taking on at the moment, unfortunately.*

Others highlighted that the amount of work to be carried out had not changed, with one NCO saying:

*We still have the same amount of aircraft... operating in the air corps. We don't have the amount of personnel that we used to have, [or] technicians to maintain the aircraft. Yet we're flying more hours every year.*

An example was given of a situation where the number of staff is now less than half of the 'established' number (i.e. the number of personnel who are supposed to be working in a particular area):

*So, the area that I work in at the minute like, we're massively understaffed. We should potentially have [more than 10 staff] and we have [less than four] at the minute. So, you're in and you're doing the workload of 10, we'll say, but there's only [less than four].*

Another example was given by an NCO in the navy, who said:

*There are staff members who have been on the ship for coming on close [to] three years. They're due to rotate to shore and there is no indication of who is going to replace these personnel [...] And that's what places harder pressure on the staff [left]. They get nervous. They get – there's no surety in their future. They don't know what's happening to them. And that, again, precipitates them to think that, 'Maybe, maybe I could be somewhere else.'*

One NCO in a managerial position gave an example of personnel of lower ranks being asked to work additional on-call duties because of shortages. This manager said:

*I feel terrible doing it. I mean, really genuinely terrible doing this to them, but I have absolutely no other choice. And that's my challenge as a manager to fulfil my professional role, try and bring a balance to it, and also you're caught up in the system yourself.*

Another NCO suggested they were 'the squeezed middle' because 'the top end are going and the bottom end are not coming in'.

A further NCO said:

*You feel like you're fighting a battle every day when you go in to do things.*

### **Impact of extensive workload and low staffing levels on NCOs**

Excessive workload coupled with inadequate numbers of personnel were identified as having a direct impact on the day-to-day work of NCOs. This is highlighted in Figure 25.

Figure 25: Operational issues arising for NCOs from workload and staffing



### Challenges relating to the organisational context

The main issues identified in respect of the organisational context are shown in Figure 26.

**Figure 26: Main issues in respect of the organisational context for NCOs**



### **Pay**

The issue raised most commonly in interviews with NCOs was pay; each interviewee raised this as a problem. Comments were made such as ‘pay is the number one issue’, ‘give us back what we lost in the bad times’ and ‘the biggest challenge is the pay gap [compared with the responsibility]’.

#### **Overall pay levels**

Overall pay levels were considered to be inadequate, and a number of NCOs spoke about difficulties in meeting financial commitments. One NCO said:

*To be honest, I’m in two different minds as to what I want when I leave, but we get paid every Wednesday [...] and by Monday, you’re waiting for Wednesday to arrive again. In order for me to stay, that would be something that would have to change.*

Another NCO said:

*Remuneration is key. If we were getting paid more and you were providing a good standard of living for your family left at home, then it would be easier to take the longer patrols, the worsening weather, the higher operational tempo.*

One NCO compared the ratio of pay to purchasing power now compared with previous decades and noted that:

*When I was growing up I could afford to, if you like, get a deposit for a house, get a house. I was guaranteed a job for life, so if I needed a loan the bank would give me a loan on the strength of, ‘Oh, you’re in the army. You’re guaranteed to be in the army for 21 years...’ But now a young guy coming in, he has no guarantees, the cost of life outside, all the extra bills, he has no chance really of buying his own house, and then he has no guarantee that he has a pension after 21 years. That’s gone.*

#### **Impact of cuts**

A number of NCOs drew attention to the impact of the cuts in pay that were implemented during the financial crisis in Ireland. One person noted that:

*My main gripe is the financial thing to be honest. They just kept taking from us after this recession and they never brought it back [...] Other people are getting it and*

*we're not getting anything. The Gardai got their little bit, you know the rent allowance even, and we got nothing. Just got a pat on the head and told 'Carry on.'*

It was also highlighted that Defence Forces personnel 'were docked 10%' during the 'hard times' and 'this pay has not been reinstated'. One NCO said:

*Over the last number of years, it's been very, very difficult. We've taken our cuts, quite significant. We've gained very, very little back. Anything that we've gained back has been pushed through from long negotiations by our representative association. And it is too slow. It's not coming back rapidly enough.*

Another NCO suggested that:

*We used to get paid a Sunday rate. I think before tax [it] was up around €90, but now that's back around I think to €40 before tax... So, a lot of people complain that when they're doing duty, that it actually costs them money, [because of having to commute long distances]. The money before tax doesn't really pay for a whole lot.*

An NCO working in the navy noted that:

*You're paid, I guess after taxes, about €16 for 24 hours of work [...] so you're spending four weeks at sea and the best you can hope for is €100 a week.*

This was also mentioned by another NCO, who said:

*And that's just what's very frustrating in the last couple of years. That's the most frustrating aspect, I suppose. Part of the issue is the remuneration, you know we were docked 10% whatever it was. That is also feeding into the young generation, who are particularly at the lower grades. They are running to whatever job pays the most and [...] they don't see any job as cradle to grave as most of us did, and they have no qualms about saying, 'I'm going to get a couple of grand a year more here, so I'm gone,' whereas most of us stuck with it, you know.*

### **Comparisons with others**

Individuals calculated the additional pay they would receive if they worked outside the Defence Forces, and one person said:

*It's a lot better. It's not even a small bit, it's a hell of a lot better outside. So, I think, as a [rank], I think my basic pay is about €35,000, and then I get Tech 6 [technician pay] on top of that, because I'm a [type of] technician, which works out at approximately €7,500, I think maybe, or €7,000. Puts me on about forty-something [euros per year]. I would double that outside [the Defence Forces].*

Another NCO drew attention to the 'pay disparities between other sides of the public sector'. The disparity between the pay of the Garda Síochána and the pay of members of the Defence Forces was noted to be 'massive', despite it often being 'the same work'. It was suggested:

*That definitely makes people feel undervalued as well. Where they're away from their family the whole weekend and they're getting, you know, I don't know. I'm getting absolutely nothing for it, but some people will get duty allowance for it, and*

*they'll get €40 before tax for every 24-hour [shift] or €44 or something pre-tax for a 24-hour shift.*

### **Technician pay**

It was also suggested that technical staff should be 'properly benchmarked against their private sector peers' and that:

*There is definitely space there, I think, for the introduction of either an increase in that technical pay or another bracket in that technical pay.*

A number of anomalies in the amount of technician pay were identified, including differences in the rates paid between the army and navy. For example, it was suggested that electricians in the army are on Technician Pay 3 while electricians in the navy are on Technician Pay 5 (a higher rate).

It was also suggested that some personnel in receipt of technician pay are 'FAS [Foras Áiseanna Saothair, or the Training and Employment Authority] trained technicians – we're all carpenters, electricians, plumbers' but that technician pay only 'equates to maybe €20 extra week into your hand'. It was suggested that:

*For us to do a four-year apprenticeship and then several other skill courses, our tech pay doesn't build up and go in line with the level of training we do.*

It was also highlighted that, when some of those on technician pay are promoted, the level of technician pay they receive (but not their overall pay) remains the same. This means that, for these people, even if they are 'in charge' of other technical personnel, 'so [their] technical responsibility is increasing', there is no acknowledgement of that in their pay. This was mentioned by another NCO, who said:

*None of that is taken into account in pay so there's no incentive to go and do training.*

### **Allowances**

It was noted that there is no overtime pay in the Defence Forces, and it was explained that the Military Service Allowance means that:

*We're always on call. We're always available. We can be staffed [at] short notice. And yet, more and more and more, our goodwill, which [is] tied to the military service, kind of covers, I suppose, is used against us. We have to come in. We have to be available. We have to adjust ourselves around the service.*

There was some agreement, however, that:

*[The Military Service Allowance] is really just making our wages comparable to a normal living wage. If we didn't have that allowance, the basic wage would be very low. I would say it would be lower than basic, you know the minimum wage.*

It was noted that:

*While I'm here, over this period [on 24-hour call], I will be earning not a single cent more. I did a 24-hour duty on [day of the week], for which I'll earn approximately €21 after tax.*

Others mentioned that the Military Service Allowance 'doesn't kick in until after three years'.

While it was noted that there is no overtime in the Defence Forces, many instances were highlighted of personnel working '12, 13, 14 hours a day'. Further, it was noted that:

*So the lads are working harder. The ships are staying at sea longer compared to what they did 20 years ago. Work has doubled...*

Another NCO said:

*[Sometimes] you have to tell [personnel] that, 'You're here and that's it. You're just going to have to ring home. You're not getting any extra pay. There's nothing down the line.'*

One NCO spoke about the number of hours:

*It's hard, it's very hard. I mean, I'm in tomorrow morning now again [Friday]. So, I'm in tomorrow, for seven o'clock and I'm working till... I don't even know what time I'm working till, Sunday. Maybe nine o'clock Sunday I'm working till, Sunday morning. So, I'll be working for 26, 27 hours now, through from tomorrow till Sunday morning, as part of support for the business of the Pope.*

This NCO went on to say:

*Now, I get absolutely nothing for that. I get zero compensation for that. There's no system in place to pay me for working tomorrow. So, I'm going to be down money, because I have to drive to work tomorrow morning and I have to drive back Sunday morning after I finish.*

Another individual, working in the navy, said:

*The sea-going pay, that's an extra allowance that we get from the days we are at sea [but it] is not commensurate to the challenges we face, the environment we work in, the work rate that we put out while we're out there... And it and the extra pressure that it places on your home life, it doesn't compensate you adequately for it, in my opinion.*

It was also highlighted that, while the work has become increasingly technical and sophisticated and higher levels of responsibility have been taken on, personnel who have acquired significant skills 'still only get the grade two pay' that was paid in the 1980s to individuals with much fewer and less complex skills.

Further, it was suggested that personnel have the facility to get time off in lieu but it is sometimes not possible to do this because of the shortages of staff. One NCO explained this as follows:

*[It's] because you need them to be here [...] It can be just an absolute ball of madness.*

Another NCO said that in some areas:

*We do get days in lieu, but as the saying goes, days in lieu can't pay the mortgage.*

## Education, training and skills

A number of NCOs were positive about the training they had received through the Defence Forces and it was highlighted as 'the upside' of being in the Defence Forces. This was particularly noted in respect of being able to take education and training leading to accreditation, which was identified as 'a very valuable item [that's] highly transferrable'. Others noted that 'we're not too bad at training', 'when it comes to technical training, they're very good', 'the training is quite comprehensive' and 'the training is second to none'.

### **Specialised and lengthy training period**

The level of support for training, and the specialised nature of it, was highlighted throughout interviews with participants. This support commences on entry to the Defence Forces. An interviewee gave an example of one group, where cadets are:

- provided with some training prior to taking a college course
- supported while undertaking a degree programme
- given projects to work on during the summer months
- awarded accreditation on completion of their programme
- given opportunities to gain experience, including overseas duty.

It was noted by a number of NCOs that there is a long lead-in period before personnel are fully competent to carry out some of the technical work required and further:

*I don't think you really can be able to function properly without that level of education and other professional development.*

One NCO noted that even after individuals have completed their academic training:

*It's a minimum of two years to get them up to speed [on a certain type of machine]. Obviously they're extremely complicated machines, and to even learn the basic stuff takes a long time. That isn't covered in the apprenticeship side of things. The apprenticeship is a very generalised [...] It doesn't go type specific.*

This was reiterated by another NCO, who pointed out that:

*The nature of the work and the equipment that we're working on isn't industry norm or standard. People just wouldn't know what to do. You would have to train somebody up and this is one of the issues, you see, is that it takes so long to train people in this equipment because it's so specialised.*

### **Challenges in acquiring the appropriate level of skill**

Another NCO noted that increasing the number of trainees does not solve the immediate problem of low numbers of staff:

*But the problem with taking people in like that is that it just massages figures. So, you have bums on seats, but the guys don't know what they're doing. It takes, I think, maybe eight years for a technician to be fully qualified in all the equipment and to get up to the standard where he or she is actually useful. So, if 10 people leave and they replace them with 10 people, it looks good on the books, but in reality, on the ground, it's quite different because those 10 people don't know what they're doing. And even though you might have 20 technicians on the books, it's 10 technicians doing the job of 20 technicians.*

However, it was noted that in some specialist areas the opportunities for students to acquire skills may be limited and, consequently, they may not be exposed to some technical aspects of the role until they are two or three years into their training, at which time ‘things might not work out and they get what we call an “RTU”’, which is return to their home unit. It was suggested that, in such cases, they have then:

*Just wasted possibly three years of their career, sitting around doing nothing, so there is a frustration I’d say.*

It was also highlighted that in some areas the ‘skew is wrong’ and there are too many personnel with a particular type of qualification and too few with the type that is most needed. It was also suggested that having ‘extra courses’ would mean personnel are more likely to get promotion, but it was further noted that doing additional courses could result in additional responsibility ‘but there is no extra financial reward’.

One NCO mentioned the additional workload in mentoring and training newer and less experienced staff, noting that because people are so busy, they do not have time to give to trainees. This was explained by the following NCO comment:

*And, trying to mentor and train those other 10 junior technicians at the same time... Sometimes guys come to you and they say, ‘Look, I don’t have a clue what I’m doing here. Can you show me what you’re doing?’ and I just don’t have the time to show them. I say, ‘Look, I just have to fix this and some other time I’ll actually explain what I’m doing. Because I literally just need to get this job done because there’s a hundred more other jobs.’ But you’re saying, ‘I’ll try and get back and explain it to you.’ And then you don’t. So, you have like a scenario where [...] you’re working with guys that are, on paper, they’re qualified as such, but they just don’t know how to do their actual jobs, on a day-to-day basis. And that’s not fair on them and it’s not fair on the other people as well.*

### Career progression

One participant suggested that ‘the promotion system would need to be looked at’ although a more recent change in the promotion process was highlighted as being both a positive and a negative feature of the system. One NCO said:

*The new system has many flaws – however, I’m delighted with some aspects of it. And, the good aspects of it [include that] it has broken the age barrier. The senior man is not the person automatically promoted, like it was in years past. So, people don’t [...] just have to hang around and wait, and just basically do nothing, nothing good or nothing bad to get promoted. So, now you’re promoted on merit.*

Another person, however, suggested that:

*But you really have to predict whether you will get promoted or not in the army, because we’ve such a small [number]. It’s like a pyramid, it goes into one point, so you know who you’re competing with and you know [that] if they’ve better points than you, you’re not going to get promoted sort of thing. So people can weigh that off too and decide then, well I’m not going to get promoted. I’ve earned this in my gratuity and this is my pension. And maybe it’s time to go, you see.*

The points system was also highlighted as having an unintended consequence for air corps personnel, and one person noted:

*But now, the army have a system which is competency based, and basically you get so many points if you are overseas. The air corps guys are now all going overseas to get points, and we have no aircraft overseas. We have no function overseas, so [they're] going over in infantry uniforms, one, for the extra money they get, and two, for the promotional points.*

This person went on to say, however, that because of the shortages and the overloading of the officers:

*People aren't getting the proper career guidance. Not getting any sort of mentoring. Rarely do they get any guidance. [...] There is no support, there's no one guiding you. And there's no one saying, 'If you do X, you can get by.' You have to do it yourself. You have to look at yourself, you have to educate yourself.*

One NCO said:

*So, at the minute, you're kind of rewarded for going on courses, going overseas, moving to other units and instructing in other units and everything. Everything bar working in your own unit. So it's the guys that are doing all the work are getting disadvantaged, over the guys that are going off and doing fancy courses and going overseas and stuff like that. And the guys that are actually at home putting the slog in, then go for promotion and they're passed over for promotion because well, because [other people have] left and [gone] overseas for nine months or [have] left the unit for nine months, [whereas] the guys that actually stay and do the work [are passed over for promotion].*

One person suggested that the promotional process does not always result in the right person being appointed:

*So you've a guy now that's been, through no fault of his own of course, propelled to quite a high position of management, with very little experience of personnel management and this, that and the other. Again, no fault of the individual and the guy that's doing the job at the moment is quite a good guy, but that won't always be the case. You're going to get a case of where they'll push someone up the chain too quick and you know it's not a good thing. You end up with a guy leading a technical sub-unit that isn't that technically experienced in the work himself, and you know yourself, you know what falls out of that.*

## **Management**

One NCO commented that, in terms of the overall management of the Defence Forces, the navy are in a better position than the air corps because:

*They broke that link with the army and are managing their own budgets, managing their own personnel and their own training.*

In general, there was little comment on the management of the specialist streams; the focus was on officers who had been promoted without having a sufficient understanding of the issues arising, and on officers' excessive workload. One person did suggest that:

*They [the officers] are so busy firefighting they can't even plan. They can't even plan for tomorrow as they have to clean up yesterday's mess, you know?*

It was suggested that, because of the retention problem, 'we're losing a huge amount of very senior people' and this means that 'younger guys are not getting experience at command all the way up'. One person noted that:

*They may be very good [at the technical skills], but they're shocking at management skills, and even their organisational skills, their skills at... the finances, the people, the forward planning, the succession planning, all the management skills at that level. These guys [aren't good at those aspects of the job], because they're being promoted too quickly.*

Another individual noted that:

*That's another issue, but it's frustrating to see that happening and to see the poor management resulting from all the loads of [promotions].*

It was suggested that:

*It's worrying for the future [...] From an organisational, business continuity point of view, we are in a shocking position right now.*

One NCO suggested that their current manager is 'not accommodating. All s/he [cares] about is that people are in for duty and s/he doesn't take anything else into account.' This person suggested that:

*S/he's actually, to be honest, accelerated my decision process on everything that's going on at the moment. You just get people like that, it kind of reinforces how you're feeling, you know?*

It was also suggested that there is a mismatch where people who are in charge do not have the knowledge of those involved with maintenance:

*There's young graduates with no place in a maintenance organisation. They're kind of calling the shots or trying to call the shots, and don't have the necessary knowledge to be able to call the shots. That's contributing to the retention problem.*

### **Summary of challenges relating to the organisational context**

Four main issues relating to the organisational context were identified as problematic: pay; education, training and skills; career progression; and management.

The issue raised most commonly in interviews with NCOs was pay, and each interviewee raised this as a problem. Overall pay levels and allowances, including technician pay and duty allowances, were considered to be inadequate, and a number of NCOs spoke about difficulties in meeting financial commitments. Attention was drawn to the pay cuts that were implemented during the financial crisis in Ireland, and it was suggested that pay has not yet returned to pre-2008 levels. It was also suggested that, relative to others carrying out similar types of work, NCOs are poorly remunerated.

A number of NCOs were positive about the training they had received through the Defence Forces and it was highlighted as 'the upside' of being in the Defence Forces. It was mentioned, however, that there is a long lead-in period before personnel are fully competent to carry out some of the technical work required, and this leads to challenges in ensuring the appropriate level of skill is available. Both positive and negative commentary was identified in respect of the new promotion process, which is based on the number of

points an individual accrues through courses, overseas duties and other mechanisms. There was some commentary in respect of management and it was highlighted that, in some situations, personnel are promoted without having the necessary level of competence.

### **Reasons NCOs stay in or leave the Defence Forces**

There was some agreement among participants that the impact of personnel leaving the technical grades in the Defence Forces is at a critical stage:

*I would say [...] that we are at crisis point and we need movement now. December is too late, January is far too late. Next summer is far too late. We are at crisis. Move now. Get something in place now [...] Just solve this problem. Don't put a band-aid on it. And [management needs to] really look at it and [see that] actually, this is going to get worse. Be radical. Come up with something that puts a stop on the free flow of personnel out.*

This was reiterated by another NCO, who said:

*It's snowballing at this stage because people are leaving and then you get new people in and they're not being trained up [...] then [when] people leave there is this skills vacuum that's left with people. It can be quite difficult... It's hard, it's very hard.*

It was strongly suggested that the retention of experienced personnel is vital because of the lengthy training period, with one person noting that:

*The major thing [is that] we need to keep experience... If we're losing our experienced personnel and [are left with] inexperienced it becomes a safety issue. That's the main thing. Flight safety and the safety of not only our pilots and aircrew but all the personnel that fly on it. It's not as simple as me saying, 'We have to keep experience.' We need the experience for a reason and the reason is flight safety. For the air corps, that's what needs to be paramount... We need to keep experience.*

An overview of key reasons why NCOs leave the Defence Forces is presented in Figure 27.

**Figure 27: Reasons why NCOs leave the Defence Forces**



### Pay

Issues arising in respect of pay have been set out earlier in this part with a number of negative impacts highlighted. There were comments such as ‘Just give us a bit of the money and you might retain an awful lot more’, ‘I am leaving mainly because of money, it’s not worth the sacrifice any more’ and ‘If you have skilled people and you want to keep them, you know you have to pay them.’ One person said:

*But the reason they’re leaving is because they can get more money outside. You know, for doing the same work, probably even less responsibility.*

The impact of pay on the family was mentioned a number of times, and one NCO said:

*The hours can be so bad that when you do get time off, you maybe want to go away or something. Or bring your child on a holiday. Just to kind of nearly make up for the fact that you’re not seeing them as much as you’d like to see them. And then you can’t afford it. It’s like, ‘Why am I doing this? Why?’ You’re torn between it.*

This was reiterated by another NCO, who recalled a conversation with their spouse:

*My [spouse] was asking me, s/he said, ‘What pay are you going to get for working this weekend?’ and I said, ‘Absolutely nothing.’ I get absolutely nothing and then when I come home Sunday morning, obviously I have to go to bed and then I’m back in work Monday morning again. So, it’s hard to stay motivated.*

Another NCO said:

*The bottom line, really, is pay! We're losing guys and girls to all sorts of jobs around Ireland [e.g. to IT and pharmaceuticals]. They're all taking guys who are [name of specialist area], who have a skill set that is transferable.*

The possibility of improvements in pay was identified as an issue to be taken into account in decisions made about staying or leaving the Defence Forces, with one person noting:

*In the future for me, in the next three years or so, I think if the paying conditions were improved it might persuade me to stay. It depends on what's on the horizon when it's my time to look at that.*

One NCO recommended 'retention pay', which it was suggested was 'something that would be welcomed'. It was suggested that:

*Years ago, when you signed on from 12 to 21 years, you got 60 days' extension of service, which was 60 days' extra leave for signing on. That's all gone.*

Many participants in this study linked their pay with the quality of their lives and the impact of this on their decision to stay in or leave the Defence Forces. These viewpoints are highlighted in the commentary in the following section, which is focused on work–life balance and on opportunities in civilian life.

### **Work–life balance**

There was acknowledgement that, in some areas of the Defence Forces, the type of work and the routine require personnel to be away from home for periods of time. This is particularly the case in respect of the navy, where there is a two-year on-ship rotation and a two-year on-shore rotation. When an individual is on ship for two years, they may be away from their family for long periods of time, and this is accepted as part of the posting. One individual said:

*When you're at sea you really, you're deployed for four weeks at a time or four months of training. So you really don't have a life outside of that four months. You're away from home. You're missing. Unfortunately, I've missed loads of birthdays. I've missed the first day of school, primary, secondary.*

This individual went on to note that:

*But I make up for it in another way and when you come home you have quality time with the kids.*

Another person highlighted, however, that it can be difficult to adjust when you have returned after a period of time away:

*I want to be at home. I have a [child] [...] You're living with your work, literally and then you're coming home and you're not really able to focus on – like what I find that's happening now is [it is] one or the other. My personal life or my professional life suffers because of the other so if I put more attention into one, the other one loses out.*

It was also noted that, in more recent times, it has become increasingly difficult to balance work and home life because of shortages of personnel. One participant said:

*Some would be saying they don't have a life because younger, lower ranks who are tired of getting shafted by going to sea, they may be operating on [the basis of doing] two years in [i.e. on shore] and two years at sea. The lads that are [entitled to] the two years in aren't getting their two years in. They are being pulled in for release on different ships and they're kind of ship bouncing as well. They don't have a life. They're getting pushed and pulled and I think that's unfair.*

It was also suggested that some areas of the Defence Forces provide a better work–life balance than others. One NCO working in the air corps said:

*But at the moment I don't think there's undue demand placed on anyone. In general, the air corps will be very pro-family and I don't think that would be an issue.*

A number of participants drew attention to the 24-hour nature of the work of personnel in the Defence Forces. It was highlighted that:

*There's no regular hours. It's not like we have shift work and we know exactly when we're working. The problem with the Defence Forces is, something can happen and you can be sent anywhere at the drop of a hat [...] We work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That's what you're on.*

While it was noted that the 'the army facilitates people as much as they can', if something happens, such as 'floods or gorse fires... you have to go'. This was mentioned as having an impact on work–life balance, with one person noting:

*So, that's another thing. People can't plan to pick up the kids. If you come in and you're told there's a gorse fire in Bray Hill and you've [got] to go out and put out the flames, you know what I mean?*

One participant noted that 'you get time back, but that week when you had commitments [...] you can't make them up the following week'.

### **Workload**

A number of personnel drew attention to the impact of working long hours and shifts on their work–life balance. One participant said:

*There is a very poor work–life balance here. The reason I'm speaking to you today is an example of how bad this work–life balance is. I returned [from an] overseas deployment. And because of the shortage of staff and... I have to be here for a week and a half, having been away for [more than 10] weeks.*

One participant highlighted that, while the amount of time they spent at work had decreased as a result of changing to a different assignment, previously it had been very difficult to manage, and during that time:

*My kids didn't actually know whether I was coming or going. They were surprised if I was at home. Most times I didn't eat dinner at home from Monday to Friday. That was back then. [Since I changed assignment], it has eased an awful lot. It has made life a lot easier. I'm home most days.*

### **Overseas duties**

It was explained that, while the length of an overseas deployment is usually six months,

*You also have warm-up and [there's] training pre-deployment. So, the whole thing is nearly nine months altogether.*

Going overseas was identified as problematic for some, and it was noted that sometimes there is no choice for personnel in terms of whether they do this. One NCO highlighted that the army tries to be as fair as possible:

*If you're just after having a child or something and it's your turn up, the army try to accommodate you as much as they can, but somebody has to go at the end of the day [...] If nobody is volunteering, it could be your turn and that's it [...] it's a big stress around people.*

It was noted, however, that because of their technical competence, some personnel have to do more overseas duties than they want to. It was suggested that:

*It could come around every 18 months for some people, depending on what rank you are. So some people just can't commit to that with family life and stuff.*

It was also highlighted that, previously 'most soldiers were just the main breadwinner and more often than not, the wife would have stayed at home'. However, it was noted that this has changed:

*Both parents work in the family so they share child-caring responsibilities. So, that will all fall back to the parent that's left at home [...] and they have to take up all that slack, and use the grandparents.*

One NCO who had been overseas with the UN, noted that:

*I came home disillusioned because I thought the UN was stronger than what it actually is. To be honest it was just a show, there wasn't anything that felt any good. So I got a little bit disillusioned with that.*

### **Commuting**

One person noted that they had been doing a long commute for a number of years. The cost of commuting was highlighted by another person, who said:

*Look it's 10 hours a week [I spend commuting], a lot more generally, you know and you've fuel costs and everything else. That's a consideration when deciding whether to take my pension.*

If personnel are on standby, they are supposed to be back at work within two hours of being called. It was noted that, as a result of long commute times, this can mean 'they're technically not allowed go home' as they may not be able to get back in time.

Finally, one NCO said:

*We joined the service. We want to be here. We joined the naval service to be in uniform, to be sailors, and life comes along afterwards. And you have to be able to maintain a life outside in order for us to be able to function in here. And we are churning through people that want to be sailors, that taught themselves huge amounts of training, massive amounts of physical and mental stress, to be here. And we're churning through these men. And we're losing a generation of sailors for no other reason but they can't sustain a life balance and that's just wrong.*

## Opportunities elsewhere

It was highlighted that personnel in the Defence Forces, particularly those with technical qualifications, are very employable and have many opportunities available to them. One NCO said:

*The opportunities outside, given my qualifications, yeah, I'm very tempted [to leave].*

It was suggested that it is difficult for the Defence Forces to retain personnel, and this was identified as being particularly problematic in relation to attempting to attract new personnel:

*[With] the new guys coming in... because I suppose, to be perfectly honest with you, I think there's better jobs out there, you know for young guys.*

It was also noted that:

*What's happening at the moment with the upturn in the economy, a lot of people [are] seeing they have better opportunities outside. Also, we can't serve until we're pension age, so everybody in the Defence Forces will have to get a second job to get them to retirement. So, you're looking at the privates coming in now, the technical ones, they can serve until they're 50. But at 50, they still have at least probably 18, 19 [years], and by the time they retire, maybe 20 years until they get their pension.*

It was also noted that recruitment of technical personnel into the Defence Forces is in competition with applications being made to the CAO (Central Applications Office) for third level college courses and this reduces the pool of individuals available. Furthermore, organisations such as DIT, Carlow IT and Lufthansa Technik Shannon are competitors to the Defence Forces in the sense that they are looking for the same types of person.

### **Employability of personnel in the Defence Forces**

Particular characteristics associated with being in the Defence Forces mean that personnel are highly sought after when they leave. One NCO said:

*We have good health and safety training, a person who is used to change and very adaptable, and generally multi-skilled, and no one wears a single hat here. We all wear two or three hats.*

It was highlighted that personnel who have left the Defence Forces:

*Are generally quickly progressed through the system and many are doing things that are quite unusual from where they started because they discovered that their skills were highly transferrable [...] So, it's kind of a poisoned chalice, I suppose, for the naval service that we do train very, very well and the personnel that are here are highly motivated. They're mostly very, very intelligent, very adaptable, and they don't feel that they're getting it back. They do tend to walk as well.*

This was highlighted by another NCO, who gave an example of a person who had left two years previously and had been put in charge of a very large contract for the company they had joined. In contrast:

*Here at [the person's old work base] at his/her grade, s/he wouldn't even be allowed to sign out on a daily basis one single [name of very expensive item]!*

Many examples were given of personnel who had left the Defence Forces and had received a higher level of pay elsewhere for a lower level of responsibility. One NCO said:

*One of my colleagues left recently enough, s/he had done [more than 10 years]. S/he was probably earning about €40,000 a year here. S/he moved into [a job outside the Defence Forces] and the base salary started [at] more than [a] 13-year rank NCO would [receive] in the air corps [...] S/he walked into a junior position within this company on just under €60,000 a year. The most senior NCO in the Defence Forces wouldn't earn that.*

### **Preparation for leaving the Defence Forces**

A number of NCOs explained that they were already making provision for leaving the Defence Forces by engaging in further education. One NCO said:

*And, again, it's not me alone that's like this. Many, many of my colleagues do the same thing [undertake further education]. They're making the best of themselves so that when the time comes, if stuff doesn't improve, we're in a position where we will be valuable out in the marketplace.*

It was also suggested that it is a waste for people to receive 'brilliant training' from the Defence Forces but then:

*They don't keep them after the contract – they won't give them enough pay to keep them at the end of their nine years.*

It was suggested that, while personnel are expected to stay for a minimum period of time, some are prepared to pay back the cost of their education and leave because 'they are golden nuggets in companies when they go out'. One NCO explained:

*[The Defence Forces are] losing good trained soldiers, and in my world, in the comms world and the technicians. We're sending young lads to [name of institution], investing in them, and what I'm finding is [that] we're really training them to leave the army... So in the new world that we are going into in technology, these guys are oven ready for picking, that's what's happened, and they see that, and that's where the attraction is.*

### **Receipt of job offers**

One person who was hoping to get a promotion in the near future said:

*Even if I do get promoted, I might even go anyway. You do get offers, a lot of us have left. Actually I got a phone call from one who left this morning, who got a job in [large multinational] in [name of city]. He's happy out.*

Others noted that they could get jobs in the UK and the Middle East without too much difficulty, and some gave examples of jobs they had already been offered. It was suggested that the skills of personnel in some technical areas are very marketable and transferrable. This was highlighted by one NCO as follows:

*I've been offered jobs in the private sector already. So, the thing about the CIS Corps is that we're very marketable outside, in the private sector.*

Another NCO reported:

*I got offered €80,000 last year to leave. I was told that I'd be on €100,000 within a year. And that probably will be the case for me, unless [something changes in the Defence Forces]. And it's hard because I actually, I enjoy serving in the Defence Forces. I'm proud to serve in the Defence Forces. I love it. I absolutely love it, but it's such a bitter pill because the organisation treats us so poorly.*

Other examples were given of personnel who had already left and who had gone to private companies where their 'basic pay has increased by €15,000 a year' but, in addition, there are many perks, including health care and more family friendly working conditions.

## Pension

A number of references were made to the importance of the age at which NCOs can get access to their pension. This was explained by one NCO, who said:

*There are three classes of people in the air corps at the moment. Those guys that have got to their 21-year pension, now they're staying to get to their 31 to max out their gratuity in their pension. There's people... who are waiting to get to 21 years. Then there's the people who are on the new contracts who don't get a pension at 21 years. A lot of those guys are already starting to leave now because they don't see the benefits of staying to 21 years.*

It was noted that this change in when personnel get access to their pension is having an impact, and it was suggested that, under the previous rules, 'at least that [the old pension provisions] kept people serving until they were in their forties'. One NCO said:

*But now the younger guys don't have the incentive. So, a lot of them are leaving because the wages are so poor.*

Others appeared to be counting down the days to when they could leave the Defence Forces with some of their pension, and one person knew the exact number of days they were 'away from [their] pension', noting that then 'I have an option to leave.' This was also highlighted by other NCOs, one of whom said:

*No [I won't be staying in the Defence Forces long term]. In [less than three years'] time I'll hit my pension age. So I'm on one of the older pension schemes where I can finish up in [number of] years, so no. Look at this point in time I don't see myself staying past that and I don't think things are going to get greatly improved in the organisation. I think they're probably going to get worse, you know.*

Another NCO said:

*I'm one of the lucky ones [in] that I have a pension. So I have [a specific number of months until] I qualify for my 21-year pension. It's safe to say that that is probably the only thing that is keeping me in the Defence Forces, is that carrot on that stick.*

It was also highlighted that:

*[Personnel] who joined after 2004 that don't have the pension, you see a lot of them leaving quicker than the older guys, because they don't have that anchor.*

### **Opportunities on retirement**

While it was noted that being able to draw down some pension after 21 years is positive, it was also highlighted that 'you would still have to work' and that it wouldn't be possible to survive on the amount of money an individual would receive because 'it's less than half your wages'. This creates a dilemma for those who leave without receiving a full pension because:

*They don't have that pension to look forward to, they're saying, 'Well look, I might as well leave because I can get more money outside.' So there's no anchor to keep them in the Defence Forces and that's what I see now with a lot of the younger guys. They come in, they do their degree in college. They get qualified, get a couple of years' experience under their belt, and then they're out. They're out to the private sector. And the money outside is better.*

It was also noted that:

*So, what's happening is, people are looking and they're thinking [age] 50 is... a hard time to start a second career. You might get a job but you're not going to get a career. So they're going to leave younger to start their second career. So that's what's happening. People are looking now in their thirties, thinking, 'If I leave now, this job, I'll have a job until I get my old-age pension.'*

### **Having to leave**

It was highlighted that changes in contracts mean that new recruits have to 'achieve certain goals' within five years in order to be eligible for a second five-year contract. Goals include:

- getting to the rank of corporal
- going overseas
- passing the fitness test each year.

It was also noted that in some cases:

*[Personnel] have to meet certain criteria or they won't get their contract renewed after 21 years. So, they could be leaving in their late thirties.*

It was suggested that:

*[The Defence Forces are] trying to change the rules to hold on to the good guys that they have, rather than... getting rid of them.*

One NCO highlighted that:

*The guys who are coming in to be aircraft maintenance engineers, they come to us as apprentices, and their contract is for nine years, and if we could get them to stay for the nine years, we [would] get our money back on our training investment.*

### **Summary of reasons why NCOs intend to stay in or leave the Defence Forces**

Five main reasons were identified as reasons why NCOs leave the Defence Forces, although the issue of pay underpinned each of these. Pay was identified as the main reason why NCOs leave, and it was noted that basic pay levels are inadequate and that allowances are insufficient to compensate for the requirement to do 24-hour and weekend duties. Work-life imbalance was also highlighted and, with that, workload, overseas duties and commuting

were identified as problematic. The age at which NCOs become eligible for a pension was identified as an issue, and changes in the age at which an NCO can retire on a full pension (from 21 to 31 years) were noted as having a negative impact. This was particularly the case in the context of opportunities available to personnel when in their forties compared with their fifties.

Opportunities outside the Defence Forces were considered to be particularly attractive in terms of pay and working conditions. A number of participants highlighted preparations they were making for leaving, including undertaking additional studies, and some identified specific job offers they had received. Finally, a small number of NCOs drew attention to the requirement for certain personnel to leave the service if they have not achieved specific goals leading to promotion within a period of time.

## Part 7e: Summary and conclusions relating to NCOs

Qualitative and quantitative data drawn from a survey completed by 252 NCOs and interviews completed with 10 NCOs based in the army, air corps and navy identified a number of issues relevant to career and job intentions.

67.3% of NCOs expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces

The three indexes with the highest scores are job alternatives (78.4%), engagement (62.2%) and peer support and respect (61.2%).

Three of the indexes have very low scores:

- information sharing and decision making (18.0%)
- satisfaction with pay and allowances (20.1%)
- satisfaction with work–life planning (28.4%).

The overall profile of NCOs working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals are moderately to highly engaged in their work and experience moderate to high levels of peer support and respect. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with involvement in information sharing and decision making, pay and allowances, work-life planning and training and promotion opportunities. A majority of these individuals are experiencing difficulties in commuting pressures and report moderate to high levels of burnout (i.e only 42.1 report low levels of burnout and the remainder report moderate to high levels).

Conclusions, based on the findings, are now presented.

### **Conclusions: positive aspects of the work and the organisation**

*NCOs are engaged with their work (62.2%) and enjoy moderate to high levels of peer support and respect (61.2%).*

A small number of comments highlighted positive aspects of working as an NCO in the Defence Forces. It was suggested that it is an exciting place to work, that it is a way of life, that there are good opportunities for promotion and that there is a sense of pride in serving one's country. It was also suggested, however, that it is becoming more difficult to work in the Defence Forces.

### **Conclusions: dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension**

*There is considerable dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pensions. This finding is strongly reflected in both the quantitative and the qualitative findings, and commentary around these areas, particularly pay and allowances, exceeded the commentary on each other issue. The pay and allowances index had the second lowest mean index (20.1%) of all indexes included in the study, and satisfaction with pension (36.3%) was also low.*

Overall pay levels and allowances, including technician pay and duty allowances, were considered to be inadequate, and a number of NCOs spoke about difficulties in meeting financial commitments. Attention was drawn to the pay cuts that were implemented during the financial crisis in Ireland, and it was suggested that pay has not yet returned to pre-2008

levels. It was also suggested that, relative to others carrying out similar types of work, NCOs are poorly remunerated.

Changes that have taken place in relation to pension entitlements were identified as particularly problematic because entitlement to a full pension does not arise until after 30 years. At this stage, it was suggested, it is too late for a person to start a new career, and family expenses may also be particularly high at this stage.

### **Conclusions: work–life imbalance**

*Working in the Defence Forces as an NCO has a negative impact on work–life balance. This is evidenced by the work–life planning index, which at 28.4% has the third lowest index score for this group. Work–life planning was identified as a predictor of intention to leave in the regression analysis.*

Three main issues were identified as impacting on work–life balance: workload, overseas duties and commuting. It was suggested that NCOs' workload has increased considerably due to the decreasing numbers of personnel, and this has created difficulties for the remaining personnel across many areas, including increased working hours and responsibility overload. It was also highlighted that technical personnel are expected to cover some more general duties and this detracts from the time available to them. It was reported that going overseas can be problematic, especially if there is no choice in whether individuals go. This was noted to be particularly difficult where there are family commitments.

Commuting was also identified as impacting on work–life balance, and the commuting pressure index (58.1%) was high for this group. Although commuting pressure was not identified as a predictor of intention to leave in the regression model, it was identified as a factor that drives burnout, work–life planning and effort–reward ratio.

### **Conclusions: dissatisfaction with organisational context**

*NCOs report low levels of satisfaction across a number of aspects of the organisational context, and particularly low levels were recorded in respect of information sharing and decision making (18.0%). Low levels of satisfaction were also identified in respect of training and promotion opportunities (30.8%) and perceptions of managers (36.9%).*

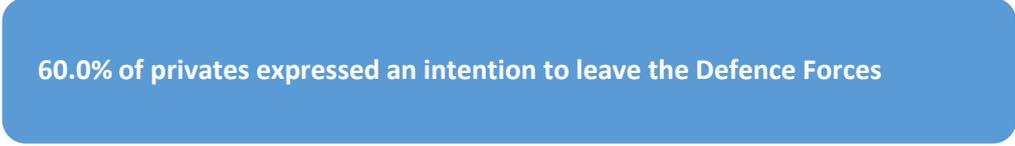
Fewer training and promotion opportunities and lower levels of satisfaction with accommodation were also identified as predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces. Additional analysis shows that lower levels of information sharing and decision making are significant drivers of burnout and work–life planning, both of which predict intention to leave, while poorer training and promotion opportunities drive a high effort–reward ratio.

**Part 8: Quantitative and qualitative findings emerging in respect of  
privates' intention to leave**

## Overview of findings emerging in respect of privates' intention to leave

This part focuses on the quantitative and qualitative findings with regard to privates' intention to leave the Defence Forces. There are five sub-parts, as follows:

- Part 8a presents privates' perceptions of the job and the organisation.
- Part 8b describes the regression analyses of privates' intention to leave the organisation.
- Part 8c describes the regression analysis of impact measures.
- Part 8d presents the findings from interviews with privates.
- Part 8e provides a summary and conclusions regarding retention issues relating to privates.



**60.0% of privates expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces**

## Part 8a: Perceptions of the job and the organisation

Figure 28 presents the means for privates on the index measures that were included in the survey. All indexes are expressed as percentages (see Section 2: Methodology for more information), and higher scores indicate more positive outcomes. Two 'negative' scales, burnout and commuting pressure, have been reverse scored for this part (to low burnout and low commuting pressure) in order to allow for comparisons with the 'positive' scales.

The index with the highest score is job alternatives (77.3%) and this is the only index to exceed 70%. Two additional indexes are higher than 60%: commuting pressure (64.4%) and burnout (60.2%) which give reverse scores of 35.6% and 39.8% respectively for low commuting pressure and low burnout.

Four of the indexes have very low scores: satisfaction with pay and allowances (18.5%), information sharing and decision making (19.9%), satisfaction with pension (20.6%) and training and promotion opportunities (27.2%).

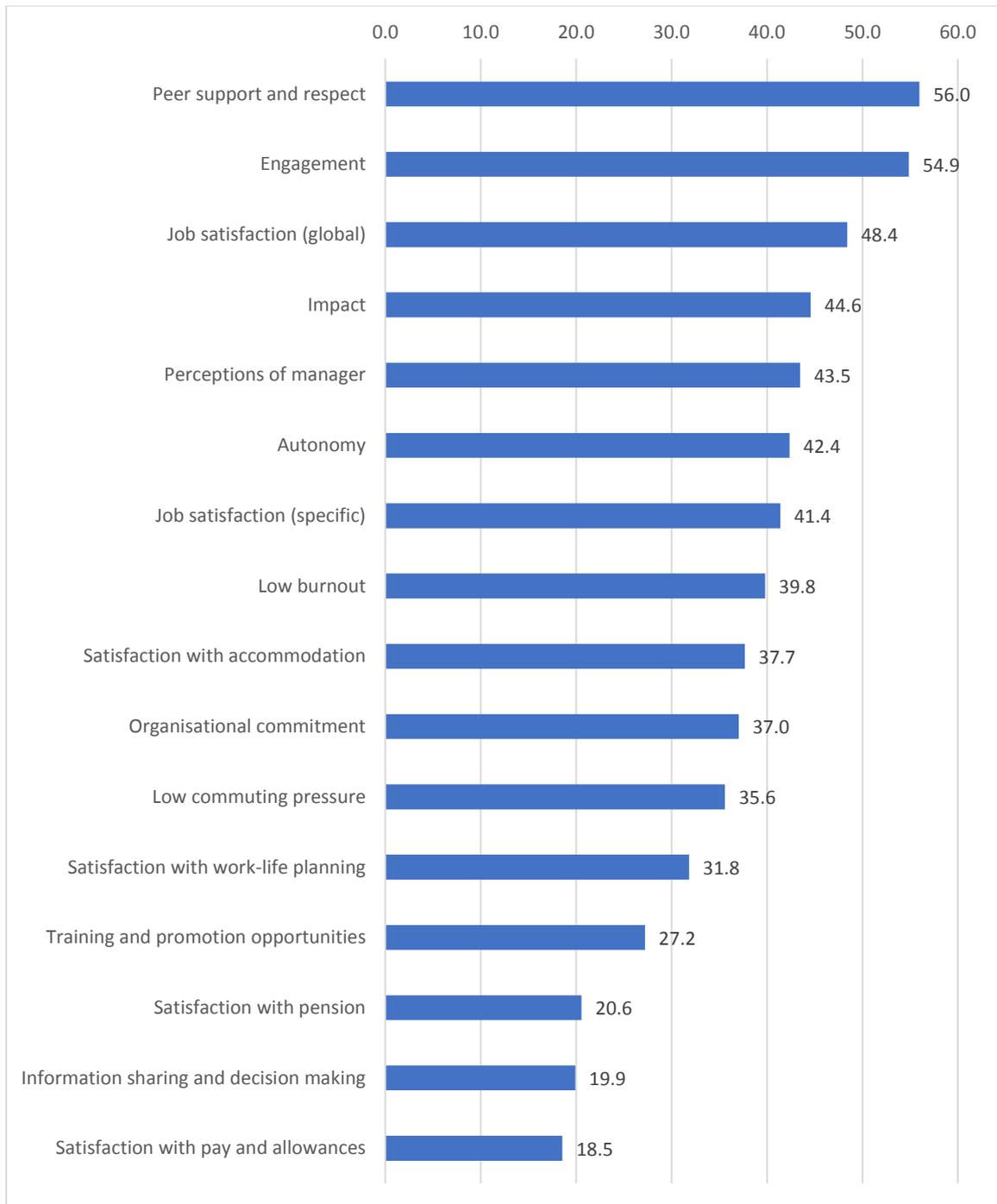
Three indexes have low scores: satisfaction with work–life planning (31.8%), organisational commitment (37.0%) and satisfaction with accommodation (37.7%).

The remaining indexes have scores ranging from 41.4% to 56.0%:

- peer support and respect (56.0%)
- engagement (54.9%)
- job satisfaction (global) (48.4%)
- impact (44.6%)
- perceptions of manager (43.5%)
- autonomy (42.4%)
- job satisfaction (specific) (41.4%)

Effort–reward ratio is an additional measure that is not included in Figure 28 since it is on a different metric to the 0–100% scale of the indexes. Privates had a mean effort–reward ratio of 1.69, meaning that they put in almost 1.7 times more effort than the reward experienced in their work.

**Figure 28: Index scores: perceptions of job and of organisation for privates in the Defence Forces**



This overall profile of privates working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals are moderately engaged in their work and experience moderate to high levels of peer support and respect. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension, and sense of involvement in information sharing and decision making. A majority of these individuals are experiencing difficulties in commuting pressures, work-life planning, report high levels of burnout and low levels of satisfaction with accommodation. Privates also perceive a lack of opportunities for training and promotion.

## Part 8b: Regression analyses of intention to leave the organisation

To examine whether different perceptions and impact measures were associated with intention to leave the organisation, regression analyses were carried out for privates.

Table 23 presents a summary of the regression analysis of intention to leave the organisation for privates and Table 24 presents the parameter estimates and significance tests.

The findings show that the explanatory power of the model (indicated by the *r*-square statistic) varied across perception measures and impacts. Perception measures explained 56% of the variation in privates' intention to leave, and the explanatory power of the regression of impact measures was weaker, at 25%. The availability of job alternatives was positively associated with intention to leave. Lower satisfaction with pay and allowances, higher levels of autonomy, more positive perceptions of manager, lower satisfaction with accommodation and higher satisfaction with pension all emerged as significant predictors of intention to leave among privates. The findings in respect of autonomy and perceptions of manager are counter-intuitive and may warrant further examination.

Impacts that were associated with a higher likelihood of intention to leave among privates included lower global job satisfaction, higher burnout and higher engagement. The findings in respect of higher engagement are counter-intuitive. One possible explanation for this is that while privates are engaged in their jobs, which are highly specialised, they are not committed to the Defence Forces and this low organisational commitment is leading to higher intention to leave. It may also be influenced by the measure of engagement where the focus is on the role rather than the organisation. This interpretation would be broadly consistent with what was reported in the regression for this group. Secondary analysis of the data is required to explore this relationship more fully. Secondary analysis exploring the length of time to retirement or length of tenure may also be helpful in understanding the finding relating to engagement.

Table 23: Summary of regression of respondents intention to leave: privates

Characteristics <b>unrelated</b> to likelihood of leaving	Characteristics <b>related</b> to likelihood of leaving
<i>Perceptions</i>	
Impact	More job alternatives
Information sharing and decision making	Lower satisfaction with pay and allowances
Commuting pressure	Higher level of autonomy
Support and respect from peers	More positive perceptions of manager
	Lower satisfaction with accommodation
	Higher satisfaction with pension
<i>Impacts</i>	
Work-life planning	Lower global job satisfaction
Job satisfaction (specific)	Higher burnout
Organisational commitment	Higher engagement

Effort–reward ratio

**Table 24: Parameter estimates and significance tests for multiple linear regression models of respondents' intention to leave: privates**

Specialist streams in the Defence Forces (privates): intention to leave	Model 1: perceptions ( <i>r</i> -square = .558)			Model 2: impacts ( <i>r</i> -square = .246)		
	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Expected change in outcome	<i>f</i> or <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Perceptions of job, organisation and wider employment context</b>						
Job alternatives (higher scores indicate more alternative employment)	.392	5.939	<.001			
Satisfaction with pay and allowances (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	-.432	-5.934	<.001			
Autonomy (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	.189	3.240	.001			
Perceptions of manager (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	.183	3.116	.002			
Satisfaction with accommodation (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	-.214	-3.207	.002			
Satisfaction with pension (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)	.152	2.213	.028			
<b>Impacts</b>						
Job satisfaction (global) (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				-.390	-4.287	<.001
Burnout (higher scores indicate a more negative outcome)				.369	3.886	<.001
Engagement (higher scores indicate a more positive outcome)				.226	2.150	.033

## Part 8c: Regression analysis of impact measures

This part presents the results of a multiple regression analysis of the impact measures that were statistically significant in predicting privates' intention to leave the organisation.

Table 25 highlights those perception measures that have partial correlation coefficients<sup>vii</sup> of around .3 or higher – that is, perceptions that have moderate and moderate to strong associations with the impact measures. These indexes may be regarded as the key drivers of impacts.

This analysis shows that, for privates, the key drivers of the impacts considered are commuting pressure, job alternatives, perceptions of manager and impact. Job alternatives and perceptions of manager act both as direct predictors of intention to leave the organisation and as drivers of the impact measures in this group.

The results should be interpreted in conjunction with the regression analysis presented in Part 8b; they indicate that, among privates, job alternatives and perceptions of manager are important policy considerations.

**Table 25: Results of driver-type analysis: Key drivers of privates intention to leave**

Global job satisfaction	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Commuting pressure	.208	-.405
Perceptions of manager	.328	.341
Job alternatives	.419	-.379
Impact	.443	.245
Peer support and respect	.468	-.216
Burnout	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Commuting pressure	.328	.599
Training and promotion opportunities	.360	-.264
Peer support and respect	.384	.242
Impact	.414	-.224
Engagement	<i>r</i> -square (cumulative nested models)*	Partial correlation coefficient**
Impact	.289	.470
Commuting pressure	.417	-.396
Perceptions of manager	.444	.218

\*The *r*-square statistic is cumulative, i.e. denotes variance explained in the outcome for each measure on the list as well as all measures preceding it.

\*\*This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

<sup>vii</sup> This is the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable after the linear effects of the other variables have been removed from both the independent variable and the dependent variable.

## Part 8d: Issues arising from interviews with privates

This part focuses on key issues arising from interviews with privates. Both the positive and the challenging aspects of the job and the organisation are presented.

### Positive aspects

In response to being asked whether there were positive aspects to working in the Defence Forces, one private said:

*Yeah. There is positives. There's positives to every job. One positive would be that there is a wage every Wednesday, regardless. That is one positive. You're not thinking, 'Oh, am I getting paid this week or am I getting paid next week?' There's a positive that you will have a wage in every week, regardless if that wage is good or not. It's there every week.*

Four positive aspects of being in the Defence Forces were identified: the variety of the work undertaken, friendships with colleagues, opportunities to go overseas and access to healthcare.

### Variety of the work

The variety of the work was identified as a positive aspect, with one private noting, 'I'm getting to do great work, I love it.' One private working in communications and information systems (CIS) said:

*I like IT [information technology]. I enjoy doing my job and there's always something really different to be done. It's not mundane, you have different kinds of tasks to be done, you know, little projects to be run, working with the application side of our systems, you know upgrades, I find it quite rewarding.*

This was also highlighted by a private working in the air corps, who said:

*We have a variety, a wide variety of aircraft. So, I like working on the different ones [and] getting experience on a number of different types of aircraft. It's good to get that.*

This was also noted by another private, who said:

*There's a great variety of work and say as a carpenter in [name of place], you could be fixing doors one day, doing hatches. You could be making a set of drawers the next day. There is that opportunity to do those jobs. You're not stuck in the same thing every day.*

### Colleagues

A number of privates drew attention to the 'comradeship' they experience, and one private said:

*The only thing that really keeps us going through the day is just the people we work with.*

Another said:

*I suppose the only reason the navy has any real retention is because the people do have very strong bonds. It's like people who get on very well.*

This was reiterated by another private, who noted that:

*Yeah, my unit's very small, so we all work together. We all know each other inside and out. So that's kind of what keeps us going. It's just coming in and seeing the lads at work like, it's no longer the organisation or the uniform.*

Another private highlighted:

*With my colleagues? I do [get on with them], yes and... we had a good camaraderie, and [I] work pretty well with my colleagues*

Another private said:

*My own friends, people in my own rank, you get along really well with them. They're the positives of the job. You get to work with some really great people at your own ranks. They're great people. But yes my friends are the highlight of my job.*

Another private highlighted that, in the Defence Forces, 'you will make friends for life. I have made friends for life.'

Attention was drawn to the impact of friends leaving the Defence Forces:

*It's hard to see as well, because when your friends and your mates have decided they've had enough like, you're out there, maybe [for] two or three years with them, like this... And it's hard not to get caught up in thinking that maybe I should leave too.*

### **Being able to go overseas**

A number of privates identified being able to go overseas as a positive aspect of their job, noting that they were proud of doing so and that they were able to do different things overseas. One private said:

*There's sometimes when I'm proud... Just to be able to wear a tri-colour on your shoulder... I went overseas recently. I'm just back [after a number of] weeks. I was really proud to represent Ireland overseas.*

Satisfaction about going overseas was also highlighted by another private, who said:

*I went overseas to the Mediterranean, things like that, and it is good life experiences, and it is different in a way that's not the same thing every day.*

### **Healthcare**

One person highlighted recently having had to access healthcare services and noted that the medical officer had been very supportive. Another person noted, however, that:

*Where an enlisted person has to [access medical care it's] not private medical care. You have to pay for your own medical care whereas an officer has private medical care.*

## Challenges relating to the work

The most commonly cited challenges related to excessive workloads and low staffing levels, and these were identified as having a negative impact on privates.

### Workload and staffing

Workload and staffing were identified as the most challenging aspects of the work undertaken by privates, and it is clear that this creates some stress for the personnel involved. This is highlighted in the following quote, which is one response to the question 'What are the challenges in your work?'

*I'd say stress and I guess a bit of work-related tasks. You know every day that there's more and more stuff for you to do. And you just don't have the time to do them. And I don't know. I don't really get it all done. It's kind of just building under me. I don't know. I just... It's worrying me. There's no coping method at the minute. I'm struggling to get [things] done.*

It was suggested that, over the years, the situation has got worse in terms of staffing levels. An example was given by one private, who explained that the number of personnel in their place of work had reduced by about two-thirds in recent years. This person also highlighted that an overseas duty by a colleague meant that their numbers were now going to be reduced even further.

Another private noted that projects have to be completed but that, because of the lack of staff, they are being 'dragged out':

*So you're having to fill in for staff that are not here [...] we usually are understaffed most of the time so [...] you wouldn't leave until the work is done, you remain back to check up the [specialist area].*

Another private drew attention to 'the lack of bodies that we have' as the most challenging aspect of the work and spoke of the impact in terms of having to move from one job to another without being able to finish anything properly. This individual went on to explain:

*There's no fluency in the job [...] I could be assigned to a task but then [...] I might be needed elsewhere to undertake a different task. Then you could come back in, and you might have to take back over the job that you have started, and that job would have been left maybe a couple of days [while you completed the other job].*

One private who was intending to leave said:

*I'm going to something completely different because, to be honest with you, it pretty much ruined what I enjoyed doing by piling on the work because there's nobody there to take up slack. We have to take on all the extra work now as well. So I don't want to do it to be completely honest... When [personnel] leave I would say they're all going to different fields. Maybe two will stay in [a] similar field, but as far as I know, the rest will be all going into different fields as well.*

Another private noted that:

*They encourage you to play football and do sports and stuff, but you simply don't have the time with the amount of work that you're actually doing.*

## **24-hour duty**

A number of privates drew attention to the amount of duty they undertake, and many gave examples of specific issues arising for them in their particular role. One example given related to working from 9am until 4pm and then having to work from 7pm to midnight. This person noted:

*And I was going on duty the next day at eight o'clock. So I got home at half 12 on the [day of week] night and I was in work again for quarter to eight on the [following] morning to take over a 24-hour duty. That's two days straight gone for social hours that I could have used with my friends. But since we're being asked, or detailed, to extra hours you can't exactly say no.*

Others drew attention to the watch system on naval duties, which can also be extensive.

One private who had worked in the Defence Forces for a number of years highlighted that 24-hour duty was the biggest challenge in terms of the work. This person said:

*I'm a technician, so technical work is not that challenging because I've been doing it for a good many years. The most challenging problems nowadays [are] the duties, 24-hour duties are difficult. We're also doing 24-hour stints. That's one of the things that's mainly challenging about my job now.*

This issue was also mentioned by another private, who said:

*You take tomorrow, I'm doing a 24-hour shift tomorrow, I'll only get €20 for it [...] I do at least two a month. I think next month we're gonna start doing four a month. There's a lack of personnel [...] and it's just really started taking its toll now [...] literally one person [is] doing the job of three or four people.*

This person went on to say:

*Everybody's just looking forward to finishing up now and getting out, to be honest with you [...] quitting, nobody's staying, everybody's gone.*

Finally it was noted that:

*It is taking a toll, because the numbers just... Especially the younger lads... They're just leaving really. To look for work that reflects the pay and conditions and that, because you do live two years at sea and then you're meant to be back in base and do two years. But people aren't getting their time back on base. So they're doing two years at sea, you might get back on the base but then you're told you are going back out to another ship because they're not prepared there.*

## **Summary**

In summary, privates focused on workload and staffing as the key challenge arising in respect of their work, and it was highlighted that there is an increasing workload for those remaining in the Defence Forces because of the retention challenges with this group. It was also noted that this increasing workload has implications for privates in terms of additional stress and an inability to complete their work properly. Many examples were given of having to carry out extra 24-hour duties on top of what is usually required, and this was identified as challenging.

## Challenges relating to the organisational context

Five main challenges were identified in respect of the organisation (Figure 29).

**Figure 29: Organisational challenges for privates**



### Pay

While one private said that ‘the money is reasonably good for the work I do’, in general there was agreement that the overall pay levels are too low. One private suggested that:

*[Personnel] are not asking for the same [pay] as private industry [but] there has to be a balance there, where somebody has to say like, yeah we are significantly underpaying these men.*

Examples were given of personnel who had left the Defence Forces and were now earning ‘literally three times what my payslip was’.

There were many comments along the following lines: ‘pay is rubbish’, ‘you couldn’t survive on that money basically’, ‘the pay is just not what it used to be’, ‘the pay is not very good at all’ and ‘people are making do but they are struggling’. One person said that the most difficult thing about their job was ‘probably dealing with money’.

One private said:

*Our pay needs to go up massively... The pay doesn’t reflect the work that’s done there at all. Pay is significantly way too low for what we do... we’re all going and within two years my officers will have nobody left.*

The view was expressed that the pay and conditions of privates are poor because they can never go on strike, and it was suggested that this was being ‘used against them’.

### Impact of pay cuts

The difference in pay between new recruits and those who have been in the service longer was highlighted. One participant (who had been in the service for some time) noted that, while they were ‘relatively happy’ with their wages, the newer recruits are taking home about €320 per week, which it was suggested is ‘about €150 less than it was 10 years ago’. It was further suggested that:

*That is very, very low wages, I think. You're never going to get anybody with that type of money.*

One private said:

*I think the biggest thing was when the financial crash happened in the country. From then on, because [of] the penny pinching, [we are not paid properly] [...] We were never the richest out of all the public sectors, but people were happy, people had enough in their pockets.*

This private also noted that, while Defence Forces personnel have never received the same pay and conditions as others in the public sector, including the Gardaí, they used to receive better duty pay and could also have time off in lieu.

Tax was also highlighted as a significant problem. One person noted:

*I think tax [is a problem] as well. Because when you come back, like from a four-week patrol, you're actually paying more in tax, so it suits you better to do two-week patrols than four weeks because you're losing more money in tax... And even like your rations and your holiday pay, you know they are taxed as well, so it can look like a good wage, before tax, but then after you know, the bulk of it is taken away. You just feel despondent.*

Another person noted:

*Yeah it just all comes back to pay and just being rewarded for I suppose a fair day's work... Because if there is no incentive there, like I could work to death or whatever, giving 110 hours a week out at sea and someone could do nothing for 40 hours and we're getting the same thing.*

### **Duty pay**

It was suggested that 'the duty money is a big, big thing', and many privates highlighted the amount of money received for 24-hour and Sunday duties. It was stated that:

*You're getting €20 for a 24-hour duty. In the last two weeks I've done four or five 24-hour duties. You only get €20 for the 24 hours.*

This was reiterated by others. One private said that duty pay for working on Sunday amounts to only €44 and this is taxable. This was also asserted by another private, who said:

*If you have [a] 24-hour duty on the weekend, you're getting paid €24 after taxes, that hasn't changed. That should have been changed. In other words, it's an actual disgrace [...] If you do an extra Saturday, €24 after taxes, it works out to just over a euro an hour. You wouldn't get it in [the] Third World, never mind this country.*

It was also highlighted that pay levels have still not returned to the levels prior to the downturn:

*With the pay cuts we had over the years, the downturn, we still haven't recovered from that at all. It does personally, it impacts about €90 to €95 a week when they were introduced. We have clawed back a small bit of that but it's more down to changes in taxes here as well.*

Another private working in the navy noted:

*And with my work, the hardest [aspect] I think is [the] hours that you actually put in. Afterward, you probably don't see it reflected in the pay. Sometimes I could be doing 60 hours a week, like at sea per week, probably just racking up the hours maybe, 110 hours and still get paid the same as you would for a normal 40 hours a week or something like that.*

### **Other pay issues**

Two other issues were raised, the first relating to apprentices and the second relating to particular issues arising for privates working in the navy.

It was noted that the apprenticeship pay for those entering technical grades in the air corps is €166 a weekly. It was strongly suggested that this should be 'scrapped' and that apprentices should be paid more because otherwise they are going to 'go where they can get a lot more than that'. It was also suggested that:

*Originally, when apprentices came into the air corps, they were 16 or less, and they were treated kind of like children. I suppose when we came in, we were all 18 or 19, [and] mainly lived in the barracks for two years, which is [...] like, you have no freedom [...] In [our] apprenticeship, the only evening we got out was a Wednesday evening for a couple of hours, and you had to stay in the barracks all week and it just drives you demented. Like, any lads coming in now [are] a lot more older, they're a lot more mature than what was there before so there needs [...] to be more freedom there for lads.*

A small number of privates working in the navy drew attention to some difficulties in terms of getting their pay, noting that 'a lot of times duty payments are late'. It was also suggested that the food on board the ships can be 'below standard', meaning that some privates 'don't even eat the food on the ship' and thus feel that they have to spend some of their wages on food.

### **Management**

Immediate and broader management structures were highlighted by privates in the course of the interviews, and there were a number of positive comments about immediate superiors and managers. One person noted:

*To be honest, we were really lucky with our boss. Our officer [...] he's a really nice guy, like, he's very accommodating. If you need time off, and you have a valid reason for it, [...] he'll give you the time off.*

Another private noted that, despite the military being a hierarchical organisation, their relationships with their 'immediate superiors' were good:

*There are no issues there at all, even though I work for a military organisation. From our perspective [...] everyone that comes in is always treated equal. If you have something to say or issues that you've seen, you can speak your mind. That's not stopped at all. Yeah, it's always been the case, I've found over the years working there in the technical side of the Defence Forces, the support and that camaraderie. [...] You know [when you're] asked to [give] your opinion, that's never been an issue.*

Another private said:

*I feel like I could talk to senior enlisted ranks and they would try and guide you and often have. You know if they find out you're interested in a certain area, they would help you like, research a photo or look up routine orders, or you know if you wanted to study something in that regard, yeah, yeah, they're very good.*

This was reiterated by another private, who said:

*Some above us, NCOs, would go out of their way to help us if we needed help, which is good.*

There was some recognition that those in charge are:

*Probably run ragged as well and their unit is low on officers as well. Our CO [commanding officer], my boss's boss, the big boss, I know s/he's trying to do a lot for us, but his/her hands are tied in what s/he can do. S/he can't increase wages. S/he can give us time off, but time off doesn't pay the bills.*

### **Challenges with managers**

While there was much positive commentary, there was also some negative commentary about managers. Although the following comment refers to the NCO ranks, this kind of negative commentary was more often voiced about officers and the overall management of the Defence Forces. One private said:

*Some of our sergeants are a bit – not the nicest, in a way [...] When we came in, we were a bunch of youngsters with degrees, and most of them didn't have a degree. They only had a leaving cert, and they're not the [...] they can be a bit argumentative with us at times.*

### **Not feeling valued**

One private highlighted that 'my boss is very encouraging'. However, this private went on to say that:

*At a management level, it's just your name is read, your number is read and your service, and that's it, you're out the door. The only concern was, 'Well, what does this guy know' or 'How much corporate knowledge are we losing with [this] guy or woman, whomever it is.'*

This was reiterated by another private, who said:

*I'm not saying what they are thinking, but it seems, as long as they have bums in seats, they don't care. It's like the management moves through so quickly, as long as they have bums in seats, well they would presume that we get another guy out of college, let's sit his bum in that seat and he can take his place, or her place. That's the impression I get.*

Others also differentiated between their immediate manager and the broader managerial structure within the Defence Forces. One person said:

*I feel as [if] there is a breakdown in communication [...] They don't pay any heed to the [privates]. The decisions they're making are above us, they don't see what effect it actually has on us down on the lower levels, and they don't really care either, to be*

*honest with you... It's just the higher [levels] [...] sometimes you just don't feel valued as far as [the] work you're putting in.*

An example of this was given in terms of a proposal that personnel would be on call for a considerable period of time for very small remuneration.

### **Officers vs privates**

A small number of privates were very critical of the interaction between officers and more junior staff. One private in the navy said:

*There's one officer who is decent. He's nice, he's respectful, but of the [number of] officers [...] on board, he's the only person that is nice.*

This person also went on to say:

*They're really, really horrible to us. Especially in the navy [...] The officers have no respect for us at all. And they do nothing. They have their bunks made for them, their cabin done for them, their dinner served to them. Gold cutlery, and gold whatnot. They have no respect and look down towards us.*

Another private gave examples of homophobic and sexist comments that had been overheard and that had caused some distress. This private said:

*There was one day the ( named) people were giving out about gay people and saying if their daughters came home and they were gay and they would be furious. They were saying that gay people make them sick. It's disgusting. It really just ... Me and another [person] were listening to it and it was horrible to hear.*

A small number of privates drew attention to the 'divide' and 'split' between personnel, and this was particularly the case in respect of the navy. One person said:

*Stop having such a divide between officers and rankings. At the end of the day we are the same people and they shouldn't be treated like gods and us like slaves... We've all told our friends what this place is like. And it is not worth the bullying. It's not worth the harassment. It's not worth the bad pay, bad conditions. So I would say, 'Don't join.'*

### **Impact on morale**

Attention was drawn to the impact of management on the morale of staff, and one person said:

*Morale is extremely low. [Privates] feel like no one cares about the workers' load, it's not recognised at all. They feel that... not appreciated that's how they feel. It's a general feeling [...] just no one cares.*

Another private said:

*There's very little care shown towards us and I feel that the attitude is that our personal circumstances are immaterial once the overall thing ends, once there's aircraft out flying. That's my feeling on it. Nothing else matters, once the aircraft goes flying, who cares?*

A further private suggested that:

*Morale is just, I don't know, at an all-time low. There's no motivation in the terms [i.e. people are not motivated by the terms and conditions of their contracts], like people don't want to volunteer for things.*

### Education, training and skills

There was some commentary regarding education, training and skills among privates, and it was noted that some privates working in technical streams have formal third-level qualifications when they come into the Defence Forces. It was also highlighted that all privates receive training in being part of a military force, and one person noted:

*And then we did grad training, where you are studying communications so things like Morse code, dealing with signals.*

It is clear that the Defence Forces support the development of career pathways in technical streams. One private spoke about factors that would encourage them to stay:

*If I get a trade through the navy I'll stay, because they pay for everything, which would be a huge benefit for me. I'm looking at either electrician, engineer or woodwork as in carpentry.*

Another private highlighted the level of skill acquired and the training received as positive features of the Defence Forces:

*Computer programming, applications development and keeping up to date on your skills [are positive aspects].*

Attention was also drawn to the personal development that takes place, and one private noted:

*Yeah, I've definitely got confidence. I've got a lot more confidence. I've grown up a lot more. In order to handle things you need to grow faster. Confidence. Working with other people it sort of became this team working. You work with people all the time in the ship, it came with the job.*

It was also highlighted that, if a private wants to leave the Defence Forces, they have to repay the money that has been spent on their training. One person said:

*But if I wanted to leave tomorrow, I'd have to buy myself out, because you were paid... they invested in you for training. So, our training, our specific fees would cost [more than €2,000]. So if I wanted to leave I'd have to pay that back.*

It was also highlighted that personnel can apply for a reimbursement of fees they have spent on their own training but that, if they leave within a certain period of time, they must 'pay that money back'. One private mentioned that, while they could apply for fees to undertake a course, they wouldn't do that because:

*If you do take the money out then you're just signing a commitment for an extra couple of years, and I don't want to sign that.*

One person suggested that, because of the busyness of their role, they were unable to undertake the type of training they needed. This person said:

*So, the other challenge would be upskilling. I can't remember the last time I've done training... I find that challenging.*

It was also highlighted that there are many challenges arising due to experienced people leaving, meaning their knowledge is also gone.

### **Career progression**

A small number of privates mentioned challenges relating to career progression. Personnel noted the recent changes in the promotion process and issues relating to the specific promotion course undertaken prior to promotion.

#### ***Changes in the promotion process***

Recent changes in promotion structures were identified as having had an impact on technical personnel, and it was suggested that education and experience were not always rewarded within the system. One person said:

*Because of the way the system has changed, they are not getting their reward for the experience they have and the knowledge. Personally I think it's wrong. I've seen a good few highly qualified personnel that are highly educated being passed over, and in a lot of cases the education and courses and qualifications are at their own expense, and including myself.*

This was also highlighted by another private, who said:

*The worst part of it is, because of the way the promotion system was designed, I've seen friends of mine who [...] have left because of the way the structure is designed. Because they're overseas, promoted over, not on their technical ability but on the fact that they have met the criteria for the promotion system but [are] not actually technically qualified or experienced enough for the job that they get promoted to!*

#### ***Promotional courses for technical personnel***

Participants made reference to the promotion system, where in order to get a promotion personnel have to undertake certain courses. There was some criticism of these courses in terms of their length and focus, and whether they meet the training and education needs of technical personnel. One person drew attention to a promotion course implemented in the navy and the air corps, saying that it was viewed positively by personnel working in army settings.

It was suggested that 'up to about six or seven years ago' personnel did a 12-week course whereas now it is a '26-week course' and it is 'not family friendly'. One private noted that they were not in a position to do the course because of family commitments and, consequently, they could not be promoted. Another private said:

*One [of the] biggest things I think that would retain me personally, and I reckon it would retain other soldiers in my position – technicians, [is] if they made promotion courses more specific to the technical job, and you didn't have to go off for six months doing stuff that doesn't relate to your job.*

This was also highlighted by another private, who said:

*But yes, you're expected to go off and do all military-based training. If you want to do a course for promotion, the current course to go to is a military-oriented course [...] there's no training on the course that will enhance your skill set for when you are promoted to the next rank up.*

One private suggested that having to do a course for six months could result in a private being less competent at their job, saying:

*So, I have to go away from the technical aspect for six months, which will make me worse at my job.*

This private also suggested that the system is now inequitable because:

*There's a lot of technicians that are two ranks above me, and they got promoted off the back of a course that was only 12 weeks long. So I don't have the same opportunity as them, and on top of that, in the air corps, they run courses for their technicians that are 12 weeks long to get them promoted, but in the army you have to do a 26-week-long course to get promoted. It's just, I think it's just silliness, for want of a better word. So, my best promotion prospects would be to leave the army, transfer to the air corps, and try and get promoted there.*

It was suggested that this approach of doing a course that does not have a technical element to it means that 'you get the promotion regardless of whether you are technically competent to do the job or not'.

#### **Impact of work commitments on promotion**

It was highlighted that there are a number of ways in which personnel can accrue points that count towards promotions. However, it was also noted that, in situations where people are very busy, they are unable to undertake the courses or go overseas. As a consequence:

*It's a big loss to me because you kind of feel like it's taken away career progress as well. Like our goals and our achievements [...] kind of have to be put on the back burner, or postponed for the moment.*

#### **Accommodation**

A small number of comments were raised about the accommodation available to privates. The following two quotes identify areas that were regarded as particularly problematic.

One private who was staying in barracks accommodation said:

*They're dreadful, to be honest. The rooms are [very poor]. When we were there, there was [more than one] lads in every room, cramped, all living conditions... Well, they were supposed to be done when we were there but it never happened. They're not nice at all. They're not good.*

A person who was living on a ship highlighted that:

*There is always alarms going off, no matter if you're on a day off, you'll be waking up at half seven, there's people constantly coming in drunk. You just don't have your own space. When you're off patrol, most people from the living quarter go home to their families... But I can't. I don't. I have to live on the ship. So it means that every night I've been interrupted by drunk... Like this morning. I was on 24-hour duty today,*

*but I was woken up this morning by drunk people shouting and roaring and waking people up. You know it's just not great.*

### Summary of challenges relating to the organisational context

In summary, five main issues relating to the organisation were highlighted in the course of the interviews. Of these, pay was identified as the most problematic of all. Low pay overall and particularly duty pay were noted to present significant difficulties for privates. Some privates identified management as an important element of the overall structure within which they work, and in general the commentary relating to immediate managers was positive. There was some negative commentary about officers, particularly in the navy, and also about the broader management structure, where it was suggested privates are not valued. Finally, a small number of privates noted that barracks accommodation is 'not nice', and one private highlighted the problems that can arise when living on a ship.

### Reasons privates stay in or leave the Defence Forces

Many of those interviewed, including both new recruits and those with a lot of experience, spoke of intending to leave the Defence Forces. Privates spoke of having already put in 'applications for other jobs', of already having 'a job lined up' and of having only a few years left, after which 'unless there's massive changes in pay and conditions I'll be gone'.

One person highlighted that 'there's so much negativity in the press at the moment about the Defence Forces – and I personally think rightly so'. This person went on to say that that is discouraging young people from coming into, and staying in, the Defence Forces.

Four main reasons were given for leaving the Defence Forces: pay, pension, work-life balance and better opportunities elsewhere. These reasons were often interlinked by participants in interviews, and this is shown in the quote below, where one private drew attention to pay, working conditions and management:

*[A relative] was in the naval service... Now times have changed [between] when he was there and when I was there. He was saying that it was good. So I did give it a try. I enjoyed it at first. I enjoyed going to sea and stuff. But then the working conditions, and the way we're treated, and the pay, it's just not worth it. I've been trying to get out of there, as I said, since [name of month].*

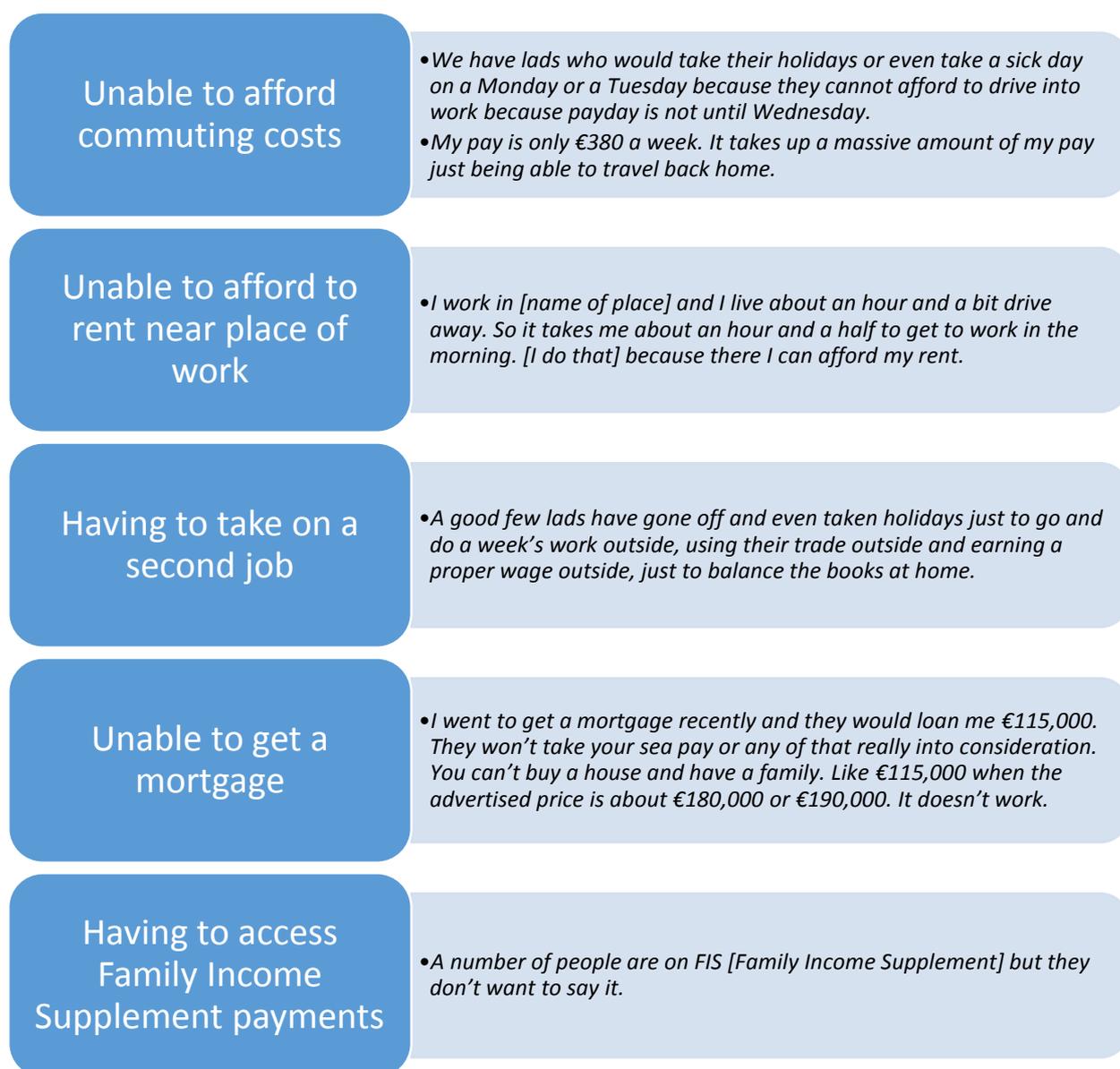


The impacts of the main areas arising in respect of retention are now presented.

### Pay

Pay was identified as the most significant issue for privates in terms of staying in or leaving the Defence Forces, and many examples were given of the impact of low pay on their own and their families' lives (Figure 30).

**Figure 30: Impact of low pay**



A number of privates made a direct link between their pay and their intention to stay in the Defence Forces. One private assigned to the navy said:

*People are leaving, and people are having problems at home. When you're talking about money especially with partners and family saying, 'Look, you can get the same money working in SuperValu and you wouldn't be leaving us,' and that's certainly become a factor. People are saying, 'Well, I get the exact same money, or better working at Tesco. I don't have to listen to my family when I come home giving out saying, "You're not here."'" It's not a great reality.*

This was reiterated by another private, who said:

*A relative was in the Defence Forces. I grew up around it and it was something that I wanted to be a part of all my life, but that's why I joined. I always wanted to be a soldier. It's all I ever wanted to do. So for me, getting in was where I wanted to be and [I'm] doing what I wanted to do [but] I've had a niece come up to me and say*

*she wanted to join the military. I talked her out of it. I really don't want her to be scrimping and saving all her life.*

One experienced private said:

*So I really want to stay in the army, like really, really strong. I want to stay in the army, but I have a feeling that I'm going to have to leave [because of the low pay].*

Another private in the navy said:

*The younger lads especially [are leaving]. They're just leaving really to look for work that reflects the pay and conditions.*

## Pension

Several comments were made about the pension, and it was identified as having an important impact on decision making around retention. One private said:

*If they changed the retirement age, me personally, I told you the reasons why I want to go, before I turn 40, so if the retirement age is pushed to 60, I'd definitely stay, I'd ask somebody – where could I sign!*

Another private said:

*I joined in [before 2013], so I had a pension, but looking at it now and what you're going to have to give up to get that pension, and the amount of time you're going to lose isn't worth [it]... It's not worth it for anyone past 2013 with a pension or not. It's not even remotely. It's a waste of time really. To be honest, I spoke to many people and they said if they got a pension after 25 years or 21 years, then they'd stay, but when it gets to 30, 31, no, people won't. It's not worth it.*

Another private highlighted the challenges of trying to get a job at age 60:

*I'd be supposed to retire at 60, and I imagine a 60-year-old trying to get a job! I think it's time to move on, for my own personal perspective, because I want to continue employment beyond 60.*

It was highlighted that there is no incentive to stay in the Defence Forces for a specified period of time because of the changes to pension entitlements. One person noted:

*But a lot of my colleagues want to leave. A lot of the older guys are on a contract [where] they'll get a pension after 21 years, no matter what, but we, we won't get a pension till we're 50. If, if we stay till we're 50, but if we leave, we don't get the pension till we're 60. The older guys are going to stay for the 21 years, 'cause they're guaranteed that pension. But there's nothing keeping the younger guys here so they're going to maybe get two or three years' experience, and then close the door. There's nothing keeping them there really.*

Another private noted that the expectation that they would have a good pension had been removed, making the Defence Forces a much less attractive place to work:

*It looked exciting. It looked adventurous. You know, at the time, it was advertised as a good place to work. It seemed like it was okay. A lot of people just think the*

*military is the type of place that once you're in it, you're in it for life. So you'll have a good pension. You'll have a good, stable career. It just isn't what it was made out to be. Nobody is bothered any more. Nobody cares. Nobody wants to be here.*

Another private said:

*The biggest thing I noticed people, especially people that want to stay, [is when] they start [a] family, and they want to get on with life. If there was some kind of opportunity or help for people to buy a house, as in to get a start in life and maybe some sort of benefit in that regard, that if there were even some sort of introduction to constant mortgages for people in the Defence Forces or something like that, where they felt like they were getting the balance back. Maybe they're not getting more money, but they're getting a better rate on a mortgage and able to buy a house and these kind of things, I think people will be happier.*

Another private said:

*My contract finishes in [less than five] years and I definitely won't be in the Defence Forces then... I like my work, and if the money was there I'd consider staying... and if your pension was still there, I might consider staying.*

Others noted that they were coming up to a time when they would be able to retire on a partial or full pension, which would be an incentive to leave at that time:

*In five years, I'll be retired. That's it. There's no change in plans. In five years I will have 21 years done so for me, my next five years is my planning my next move, in terms of like my life outside [the] Defence Forces.*

### **Opportunities elsewhere**

A number of privates highlighted opportunities they were either actively seeking or that they had been offered. One private from the CIS sector noted that they were planning to 'continue working within IT, probably in the private sector'. Another private said:

*Honestly, if an opportunity came up, you'd be very hard pressed to find someone that wouldn't take it. If opportunities do come up people will take them... like you're working... You're away from home for 12 days straight for an extra €160. It's not financially worth it.*

Attention was also drawn to opportunities that could be available in other public services, such as the Gardaí, the prison service or the fire service:

*The way I'm looking at it is I'd be looking for something like the fire service or the guards, [where] my pension would continue on, and it's the same benefits with much better pay and much better conditions. You're preparing yourself. Most people's attitude now is why not go to the guards or the prison service as you would be better looked after.*

It was also highlighted that the differences in how the Gardaí were treated compared to how the Defence Forces were treated during the Pope's visit were stark. One person noted that this 'really kind of summed up the way the reality is'.

Others mentioned preparations they were already making, including undertaking additional study. One private said:

*At the moment I'm going to college every evening. I'm doing [name of] degree in the evening... So, long term, I see myself [outside the Defence Forces] because there's good money in that.*

Another private went on to say:

*I work very hard on the skills I learned, so in three to five years I believe that I'll have plenty of experience and skills to get a job outside, but I don't want to, as I said, for the big reasons, I'm out the door at 50 no matter.*

Another private said:

*I'm going into business for myself hopefully. My [family member] has a business and wants to expand it through me. So that's what we're looking at [at] the moment.*

One person suggested that they would advise others that:

*If you don't have a trade within the first two years, leave... If you don't have the opportunity to get an education, I'd tell them to leave [the Defence Forces]. I'd say if you have no leaving cert maybe, do it to get a training cert out of it and go.*

### **Work–life balance**

A small number of privates noted that their NCOs can be very supportive and facilitate flexible working hours, although it was also highlighted that:

*It's not part of our contract, it's just that you're looked after by your NCOs. If you really need that time, you will be given that time off.*

Another person noted that the amount of annual leave is a positive:

*We get 28 days a year, guaranteed a year. But then if you don't use 24 of them, you can carry them over to the next year. So that's always a plus as well.*

In general, however, poor work–life balance, was closely linked with pay and it was suggested that where work has a negative impact on life balance, personnel should be compensated.

A number of privates highlighted the long hours they worked, the 24-hour duties and the consequent impact on their family life. One private gave the following example:

*It's tough, like I said. I was off today so it was grand and I was actually able to be at home with my [child], but after like a 24-hour shift tomorrow [I will need to rest]. Wednesday was like exhausting. So I won't really be in much of [a good] humour because I'm so tired. And then Thursday, Friday I probably won't go home until seven or eight at night.*

Another private spoke of not being able to afford accommodation near where they worked and of the dangers this causes when commuting at the end of a long day or a night shift:

*It's a long day, especially if you have to do a night duty, whatever, and you've been busy that night. The next morning you could be very tired driving home like that. It's kind of dangerous driving.*

Another private working in the navy highlighted the same problem, saying:

*It's awful. There is no life–work [balance]. When you go and you do four weeks at sea, and you have two weeks on base. You're given three days' R&R [rest and recreation] [but] that doesn't really give me enough time to get [...] back home. I have to live in on the ship because my pay isn't good enough to live ashore. So I'm constantly military, military, military. There's no getting away from it. [During one period of time], it was four months before I even got home. Just because there isn't the time and you don't get the amount of time off.*

The situation for personnel working in the navy appears to be particularly problematic. One private gave the following explanation:

*Basically, you go to sea for... Let's say you go to sea on a Monday. You go to sea from that Monday and you won't be back until the following Friday. You probably do your duty within the Friday, Saturday and Sunday. You're back to sea on that Monday, generally for another 12 days. I think it works out to about 28 days or something. You'd be in for two weeks back in [name of city], but you'd be working. You'd be doing duties and all the rest within that period. If you're gone for a duty or two there, you're doing 24-hour duty, you're more or less asleep until the next day. You're not really in humour for doing much, and you have to be in work the day after, so you've no real time for family, or the partner only. You really are very limited.*

Another private working in the navy highlighted poor work–life balance resulting from having to be away for long periods of time. This private said:

*I would have to say the most challenging part of our job in the navy is definitely being away from home so much. There's a lot of strain on relationships, families, you miss birthdays, generally these kind of things.*

This issue was also linked with low pay. One private said:

*The money is a big factor. You can't afford... Even if you do get time off [...] with your partner for a couple of days, it turns out you probably don't have the money to go away at short notice. You know what I mean? You wouldn't have that opportunity.*

### **Summary of reasons why privates intend to stay in or leave the Defence Forces**

Four main issues were identified as reasons for privates leaving the Defence Forces. The first (and most commonly mentioned) factor was pay, and many examples were given of the negative impacts of low pay on privates' lives. These included being unable to afford commuting costs, being unable to rent a house near where they work, having to take on a second job, having to access Family Income Supplement payments and being unable to get a mortgage.

The second factor was the changes that have been made to the age at which privates are entitled to a pension. It was noted that, previously, being able to access a pension after 21 years operated as an incentive to remain in the Defence Forces. The age of retirement is now considered to be too late and, as a consequence, privates are leaving so that they have sufficient time to develop careers in civilian life

Third, many opportunities are currently available to privates, and attention was particularly drawn to the skills and knowledge they have, which make them very employable. In the

course of interviews, examples were given of privates having already applied for or obtained civilian jobs in the public or private sectors.

Finally, work–life balance was highlighted as problematic. This was often linked with pay and the consequences of low pay as well as the requirement for privates to be away from their families for periods of time.

## Part 8e: Summary and conclusions relating to privates

Qualitative and quantitative data drawn from a survey completed by 163 privates and interviews completed with 10 privates based in the army, air corps and navy identified a number of issues relevant to career and job intentions.

60.0% of privates expressed an intention to leave the Defence Forces

The index with the highest score is job alternatives (77.3%), and this was the only index to exceed 70%. Two additional indexes were higher than 60%: commuting pressure (64.4%) and burnout (60.2%).

Four indexes have very low scores:

- satisfaction with pay and allowances (18.5%),
- information sharing and decision making (19.9%),
- satisfaction with pension (20.6%) and
- training and promotion opportunities (27.2%).

The overall profile of privates working in specialist streams of the Defence Forces indicates that these individuals are moderately engaged in their work and experience moderate to high levels of peer support and respect. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension, a low sense of involvement in information sharing and decision making. A majority of these individuals are experiencing difficulties in commuting pressures, work-life planning, report high levels of burnout and low levels of satisfaction with accommodation. They also perceive a lack of opportunities for training and promotion.

Conclusions, based on the findings, are now presented.

### **Conclusions: positive aspects of the work and the organisation**

*Positive elements of being in the Defence Forces were identified. These included variation in the work carried out, opportunities to go overseas, access to healthcare and friendships with colleagues.*

In general, the indexes relevant to these aspects showed only moderate levels of satisfaction, as follows: peer support and respect (56.0%), engagement (54.9%), job satisfaction (global) (48.4%) and job satisfaction (specific) (41.4%). It is of note that more positive perceptions of managers was identified as a predictor of intention to leave the Defence Forces, and it is not clear why this might be the case.

### **Conclusions: dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension**

*There is widespread dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and the current pension arrangements, and the indexes relating to pay (18.5%) and pension (20.6%) showed very low levels of satisfaction. Lower satisfaction with pay and allowances and more job alternatives were both identified as predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces in the regression analysis.*

Low pay overall, including duty pay, was noted to cause significant difficulties for privates, and there was a strong view that the pay does not reflect the work carried out. Many examples of the negative impact of low pay on privates' lives were identified. These included

being unable to afford either to rent or purchase a home near to where they work, and being unable to afford the cost of commuting long distances. Findings from the interviews suggest that the low pay may partially explain the high index score for commuting pressure (64.4%). It was also suggested that there are many alternative opportunities available outside the Defence Forces where the pay would be better for similar types of work, and this is reflected in the index score for job alternatives (77.3%).

It is of note that, as for officers, higher satisfaction with pension is a predictor of intention to leave. As noted earlier, the two most common reasons were waiting until they became eligible for their pension (about 28%) and being unable to afford the financial penalty for breaking their contract (about 13%).

The qualitative interviews support these findings and highlighted the importance of access to a pension in decision making about staying in or leaving the Defence Forces.

### **Conclusions: work–life imbalance**

*Working in the Defence Forces as a private has a negative impact on work–life balance. This is evidenced by the low to moderate work–life planning index score (31.8%) and by high levels of burnout (60.2%).*

Twenty-four-hour duties were particularly highlighted as having a negative impact on work–life balance, especially in terms of tiredness. Privates in the navy drew attention to the long periods of time they are at sea, and this was identified as having a negative impact on their family life. Commuting was also identified as having an impact on work–life balance, and the commuting pressure index (64.4%) was the second highest index for this group. Although commuting pressure was not identified as a predictor of intention to leave in the regression model, it was identified as a factor driving burnout and lower levels of global job satisfaction, both of which are predictors of intention to leave the Defence Forces.

### **Conclusions: organisational context**

*Low levels of satisfaction were identified via the information sharing and decision making index (19.9%), the training and promotion opportunities index (27.2%) and the satisfaction with accommodation index (37.7%). These issues were also identified in the findings from the interviews.*

Challenges in career progression were highlighted by a small number of privates, and it was suggested that the current system (where points are accrued through overseas duties and undertaking courses) is more difficult for technical personnel to access compared to other personnel. It was also suggested that the focus of the ‘promotion course’ is not relevant for technical personnel. These findings are reflected in the driver-type analysis, where lower levels of satisfaction with training and promotion opportunities were identified as a factor driving burnout.

Some privates identified management as an important element of the overall structure within which they work, and in general the commentary relating to immediate managers was positive. However, there was some negative commentary about officers, particularly in the navy, and also about the broader management structure, where it was suggested privates are not valued. It is of note, however, that more positive perceptions of managers are a predictor of intention to leave, and the reason for this warrants further consideration. This is also the case in respect of autonomy, where higher levels of autonomy are predictors of intention to leave; again, this is contrary to what might be expected.

## Section 4: Conclusion

Each of the three ranks – officers, NCOs and privates – reported positive aspects of working in the Defence Forces. These positive features are the camaraderie and peer support they receive from each other, the variability and the excitement of the work they do, and the pride with which they serve their country. Across each of the three groups, however, it is clear that, despite these positive elements, personnel feel undervalued and let down by the way in which they are believe they are treated. Despite many personnel wanting to remain in the Defence Forces, the challenges are increasingly outweighing the positive features.

Across each of the three ranks, there is dissatisfaction with pay, allowances and pension arrangements. Two main issues emerged that directly affect individuals' decisions about whether to stay in or leave the Defence Forces. First, the expertise and experience personnel hold in a specific technical area means there are currently many job opportunities available to them outside the Defence Forces. Second, these alternatives are viewed as being better remunerated and consequently are very attractive to Defence Forces personnel.

While an impact of pay and allowances on work–life balance was identified across each of the three ranks, the issue is particularly acute for privates, where it was suggested that the sacrifices made in terms of duties undertaken far outweigh the level of remuneration. Personnel (particularly privates) may also have significant costs relating to commuting and/or house rental associated with the distance between their home and their workplace. These costs may make it unviable for personnel to continue in the Defence Forces.

For all three groups, the changes in the number of years of service required to receive a full pension have created an impetus to leave. Those who join the Defence Forces on finishing school will become eligible for a full pension in their late forties or early fifties, and it was suggested that at this stage it would be almost impossible to start a new career, although it may be possible to get a job. This combined with societal changes, including having children at a later age (with those children likely to be at university when their parents are in their fifties), means that, on balance, it could be preferable to leave the Defence Forces at an earlier age.

Working in the Defence Forces has a negative impact on work–life balance. This arises from a lack of choice surrounding working long hours (particularly where there are excessive workloads), having to undertake 24-hour duties and having to be available to the Defence Forces 24/7. These factors create uncertainties relating to work–life planning. It was suggested that shortages of technical staff mean that those who remain in the Defence Forces may be required to provide cover more often than general grades, and this is particularly the case for overseas duties. Poor work–life balance also arises as a result of barracks closures, which for some personnel result in long commutes from home to work. These issues with commuting are compounded by the issues regarding pay.

The organisational context – particularly the findings in respect of the information sharing and decision-making index (19.9%), which for each of the three groups was either the lowest-scoring index or almost the lowest – does need some consideration, particularly in the context of the role of the Department of Defence. Eligibility for promotion (especially for privates) and promotional opportunities also have challenging aspects for technical personnel. In this regard, it was suggested that they are disadvantaged relative to non-technical personnel because of the points system and the number of posts available. Accommodation for privates and NCOs is problematic.

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