

News story: Defence Secretary expands Army reserve numbers in Northern Ireland

Updated: update

The stepped up commitment underlines the military's strong ties with Northern Ireland, which currently hosts around 2000 reserves and nearly 2000 regular personnel.

Mr Williamson made the announcement while visiting Northern Ireland based reservists from 152 (North Irish) Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps and 2nd Battalion, the Royal Irish Regiment.

During the visit he also received an update on defence activities in Northern Ireland, including from 38 (Irish) Brigade, and met personnel helping keep the community safe by delivering niche explosive ordnance disposal and search support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

189 new reserve posts will be created, an increase of 9%, and will take overall Army reserve posts to 2100 by the end of the year.



Mr Williamson receives an update on defence activities in Northern Ireland from soldiers from 38 (Irish) Brigade.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our reserves programme is immensely popular in Northern Ireland, with more than twice as many people from Northern Ireland volunteering compared to the national average.

So I'm delighted to increase the Army's reserve numbers in Northern Ireland, underlining the military's commitment to the entire United Kingdom.

All three services have a presence in Northern Ireland, with reserve recruitment proving to be particularly popular. More than twice as many people from Northern Ireland volunteer for the reserves compared to the national average. As well as the 1850 Army reservists, there are 110 Royal Navy and Royal Marine reserves and 130 Royal Auxiliary Air Force personnel. The popularity of the reserves programme in Northern Ireland is underlined by the fact that 502 Royal Auxiliary Air Force Squadron, which was only founded in 2012, has grown rapidly to a strength of 130.

Northern Ireland also hosts 75 cadet units, the majority of which are Army Cadets. Three schools have also recently gain approval for combined cadet forces under the Government's Cadet Expansion Programme. A report by Northampton University last year found that cadet units increase social mobility and help children from disadvantaged backgrounds reach their potential. Cadet units in Northern Ireland have representation from children from across the community.

The Armed Forces Covenant is also being delivered across Northern Ireland and Mr Williamson received an update on the newly-formed Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office (NI VSO). The NI VSO acts on behalf of a group of service charities as a single point of contact to provide services for veterans who feel unable to access public bodies or service charities.

The MOD has also allocated £300,000 over five years to improve the capacity and capability of Local Authorities and other service providers in Northern Ireland to apply for Covenant Funding. £600,000 from the LIBOR Veterans Fund has also been allocated to the Somme Nursing Home in Belfast.

News story: £850m Sea Ceptor missile system enters service with Royal Navy

Sea Ceptor provides a powerful shield against airborne threats, including hostile combat jets, helicopters and other missiles, and has been developed and manufactured through Ministry of Defence contracts worth around £850m.

It will be carried by the Royal Navy's Type 23 frigates, and has been successfully demonstrated through a trials and test firing campaign that started last year. Most recently, Plymouth-based HMS Montrose became the third ship to test fire the system.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Sea Ceptor will protect our nation against the intensifying threats we face today and in the future, giving our ships a powerful shield against everything from supersonic missiles to enemy fighter jets.

Fitting our warships with this ground-breaking technology not only protects our Navy but shows we are world leaders at sea. HMS Argyll will be the first ship to deploy with this cutting-edge system when she heads to support peace and security in the Asia Pacific region later this year.

The announcement, made at the RUSI Sea Power Conference in London, follows detailed analysis of data gathered during the first of class firing trials by HMS Argyll, which took place last year. HMS Westminster and HMS Montrose, the second and third ships to be fitted with Sea Ceptor, have since also carried out successful firings.

Sea Ceptor has been designed and manufactured by MBDA and is directly supporting 600 jobs in Bristol, Stevenage and Bolton as part of the Team Complex Weapons partnering agreement between MOD and MBDA.

The first firings of Sea Ceptor were conducted from HMS Argyll at the Hebrides range off the coast of Scotland and saw the system tested against a range of complex scenarios – including engaging multiple targets at once.

Sea Ceptor is a major improvement on the existing Seawolf missile system which is being replaced. It offers improved performance against current and projected future threats, the ability to engage multiple targets, and allows the frigates to protect escorted vessels. The system is to be fitted to the Royal Navy's new Type 26 frigates.



£850m Sea Ceptor missile system enters service with Royal Navy. Crown copyright.

Richard Smart, Director Weapons for the MOD's procurement organisation Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S), said:

Sea Ceptor's entry into service with the Royal Navy is a significant milestone, a massive achievement for everyone involved and a proud moment for the team.

It's really exciting to be delivering a new capability that will form part of the protection for the new aircraft carriers and will help to keep our service personnel and our country safe.

Recently, HMS Montrose took part in the third test firing of the system and successfully intercepted a fast-moving drone target. Within seconds of the missile bursting from the ship's silo, the simulated threat was destroyed.



The Type 23 frigate HMS Montrose

Commander Conor O'Neill, the Commanding Officer of HMS Montrose, said:

The test firing we carried out represents the successful culmination of a great deal of hard work by many people from Babcock, the Short Range Air Defence team, DE&S, MBDA and the Royal Navy.

I am extremely proud of my ship's company for their professional attitude which enabled the test firing to go so smoothly. This missile system represents a vastly-improved capability for the Royal Navy, and puts us ahead of the game in being able to defend ourselves and our new aircraft carriers from threat.

[News story: Prime Minister praises Royal Air Force at Centenary Reception](#)

The Prime Minister hosted the Defence Secretary, three Service Chiefs and current and former service personnel at Downing Street today to recognise the

dedication of those who have served in the RAF over the last 100 years.

More than 150 guests attended the event, including personnel from the Navy and Army, in recognition of the contribution that all three services made in the formation of the RAF in 1918. Attendees were greeted with a ceremonial welcome guard at the entrance of Number 10, while inside the RAF Salon Orchestra played music from across the three services.

Commemorative items were displayed during the event, including memorabilia from World War One, marking the centenary of the Great War's conclusion this year. Guests also passed by a Red Arrow Hawk facsimile, noting the key role played in national events by the RAF Aerobatic team since their formation.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier, introduced the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson MP to cadets, new recruits and veterans, including the last surviving female pilot from World War Two, 101 year-old Mary Ellis, who were thanked for their contributions to the service at home and abroad.

Addressing the audience, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

For one hundred years, the RAF has proved it is not only the first independent air force in the world, but the finest. It stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines and the Army in defending our nation and promoting our values, and I am delighted that members of each Service are here this evening.

Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

It is an enormous privilege to be in Downing Street to commemorate the rich heritage and the legacy which the RAF of today is proud to inherit. We celebrate the successes of today's Force – still young and diverse, at the cutting edge of technology and innovation, attracting and inspiring people of outstanding talent who are the future of our Service.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

From the Battle of Britain to countering Daesh in Iraq and Syria, the RAF has played a proud and vital role in keeping Britain safe for a century. It is an honour to meet veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country, and to meet some of the RAF's inspired new generation who will continue to keep watch and protect our nation over the next 100 years.

News story: Wreaths laid to honour sacrifice of British peacekeepers

United Nations (UN) peacekeepers from 120 nations were recognised today, and tributes were paid to more than 3,700 personnel from those countries who have died while serving as UN peacekeepers.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We pay tribute to those who work tirelessly to protect families threatened by war and we're resolved to step up our efforts to prevent violence against women in places of conflict. We have played a leading role in this area but I am determined that we do more, by sharing crucial training and expertise to help those facing these terrible crimes.

Today, UN peacekeepers are actively engaged in 14 missions taking place in some of the world's most challenging environments. In the last two years there has been success in Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, and a transition to a police-led mission in Haiti.

The commemoration on International Peacekeeping Day marks the 70th anniversary of UN missions. Defence Minister for the Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster, marks this day by opening the conference at RUSI.



Minister for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster speaking at RUSI event. MOD Crown Copyright.

Defence Minister for the Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster said:

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of UN peacekeeping I pay tribute to invaluable contribution made by our forces who have served for the United Nations and their country in peacekeeping roles across the globe.

And I am immensely proud that the UK has nearly 700 British troops wearing the blue beret right now in South Sudan, Cyprus, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Libya, protecting communities from the violence and terror of warfare.

This month marks the UK's first anniversary of the deployment of engineers and medics to the UN Mission in South Sudan.

In South Sudan, the UK's largest UN deployment globally, UK engineers have completed infrastructure tasks to improve the physical security of UN sites and improved air access to remote UN camps. Alongside this effort, UK medics have run a field hospital, to provide medical care for more than 1,800 UN Peacekeepers and UN staff.

Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of UNA-UK, said,

The United Kingdom has a commendable track record on UN peacekeeping: financially, historically and through its renewed commitments in Somalia and South Sudan. UNA-UK hopes that peacekeeping will continue to play an important role in the UK's future defence plans well beyond 2020.

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers was first observed in 2003 to recognise and appreciate the efforts and sacrifice of UN peacekeepers. The Cenotaph commemoration is believed to be one of the largest worldwide where the Band of the Irish Guards performed at the wreath-laying at the Cenotaph.



The Irish Bands marching towards the Cenotaph. MOD Crown Copyright.

This year's commemoration was organised by the UN Association-UK (UNA-UK), with its Westminster branch, in partnership with the Royal United Services Institute. The commemoration, and a related conference on the challenges of modern peacekeeping, was held in conjunction with the High Commission of Canada and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Lord Ahmad and Air Vice-Marshal Alison Mardell laid wreaths on behalf of the UK government and defence. MP Harriet Baldwin, Minister for Africa, also attended the event.

Lord Ahmad, the Foreign Office Minister for the UN, said:

As we mark 70 years of UN Peacekeeping, it is right that we pause – and reflect on – the many lives saved, and on the regions and

countries stabilised. Millions of people, living in some of the most challenging places on earth, have been given hope and opportunity.

This is the proud legacy of the toil and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of men and women who have put their lives at risk to protect the most vulnerable. On this UN Peacekeeper Day, we recognise the dedication and efforts of all UN Peacekeepers, and, remember those that have sacrificed their lives for the cause of international peace and security.”

[Press release: UK Royal Air Force marks 100th anniversary by inspiring Canadian youth](#)

To celebrate 100 years of the Royal Air Force (RAF), school and cadet groups across Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec are getting an exclusive opportunity to learn about how pilots from the British and Canadian armed forces continue to work together to support peace and security around the world.

With inspiring future generations being such a big theme of [RAF100 celebrations](#), the UK's Naval and Air Attaché to Canada, Commander Neil Marriott (Royal Navy), called on Ottawa based RAF Exchange Officers, Squadron Leader Drew Anderson and Squadron Leader Andy Wilson, to offer a series of informative and exciting visits for school and youth groups, in partnership with volunteer group Vintage Wings of Canada.

During each session, 30 teenagers are invited to visit Vintage Wings impressive aircraft collection at the Gatineau Airport where they receive an informal presentation on the history of the RAF by current Air Force service members. They also learn about Canada's role in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan during the Second World War and how the RAF and RCAF continue to cooperate today.

So far, school groups from Carleton Place and Ottawa have taken part and at least five further school and cadet groups have trips planned for the coming weeks.

RAF Squadron Leader Drew Anderson, who is currently on exchange with the RCAF, said:

We've got a fantastic opportunity here to help the next generation learn a little bit of our shared history while at the same time

maybe inspiring some of them to consider a career in aerospace.

The volunteer staff at Vintage Wings of Canada have been fantastic and everyone is fully supportive of our RAF100 outreach activities. It's also important to remember that this is not a museum – these aircraft actually fly – and these youth are really excited to get so close to such beautiful and functioning classic aircraft.

Don Buchan from Vintage Wings of Canada said:

As an organization we are all about inspiring young people, so the RAF100 commemoration gave us the catalyst we were looking for to put together an interesting and informative program that we could use to reach a lot of local youths.

The RAF has capitalised on its centenary year to: Commemorate 100 years of extraordinary success, achievement and sacrifice; Celebrate the professionalism and dedication of today's RAF, which is airborne 24/7 supporting UK and allied interests around the world; and Inspire future generations by telling its unique story.

Commander Marriott said:

The focus of these events is to celebrate the history of the RAF and demonstrate its close relationship with the RCAF over the last century and today, at home and overseas.

We will inform you of the significant scientific leaps in aeronautics that were required to form the modern Air Forces of today, hopefully inspiring you to be Canada's future scientists, engineers, medical professionals or even pilots.