



## ARMED FORCES PARLIAMENTARY SCHEME

### MoD Ministers Briefing

The main purpose of the scheme is to let members experience service life at a junior level. As the most senior officer dealing with the private soldier, sailor or airman on a day to day basis is usually a Major, Lt Cdr or Squadron Leader it is in that rank that Members are shown service life from within as part of the service family and therefore are expected to abide by the ethos of Queens Regulations.

Considerable service resources are used to arrange visits and if Members then fail to participate these are wasted at the tax payers expense. For this reason we try to make each group politically balanced in order to encourage the respective Whips Offices to give as much help as possible to the scheme, or hold events in the recess.

Travel within the UK is claimable for MPs through the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority in the usual way or Finance Department for Peers but conditional on the visit being included on a programme submitted to them in advance. This also applies to the insurance cover currently provided by the House, as the AFPS is considered to be an official duty, but subject to the rules laid down under that policy. MEPs are responsible for notifying the European Parliament of their involvement for insurance and travel cost purposes.

For messing and overseas travel I have a limited budget obtained through the generosity of our sponsors AgustaWestland, BAE Systems, Capgemini, Rolls-Royce and myself, which I distribute between participants as fairly as possible. It is therefore essential that expenditure is cleared with me before it is incurred in order to ensure that it will be met. Moreover the Parliamentary Commission now lay down a limit namely 1% of a members salary above which the expenditure must be listed on the list of members interests. Claims will only be considered from individual participants, excluding beverages, and must not be signed for collectively as there may be "strangers" in the party who are not eligible for expenses from the scheme.

An essential feature is the opportunity for Members to become an integral part of a unit for a minimum of five consecutive days during which time they become absorbed into the fabric and learn most about what service life is like. They are also expected to attend a two and a half day all arms course at Shrivenham.

Those completing the course consisting of 22 days within one calendar year selected from the 30 day programme offered will receive a framed certificate and the exclusive AFPS tie or cravat. These are presented at the Annual Dinner which is usually held on a Monday in March of the following year.

Every second year a new brochure is produced and previous participants are invited to contribute articles of about 500 words relating their experiences on the scheme and to supply colour action photographs taken during their attachment which are also used for their graduation certificate.

Any approach from the press to accompany members on any part of the scheme must be referred to The Chairman for further enquiry and clearance by both the MoD and those colleagues also participating in a visit. A minimum notice of four weeks is therefore required.

Participants should consider entertaining personally those service personnel who have been particularly helpful to them during their attachments.

Anyone who has graduated at least a year before is eligible to apply for a Post-Graduate place. This is based on the rank of Commander, Lt Colonel or Wing Commander.

This element of the scheme includes a twenty day commitment. Half the days are revision, taken from the same programme as the basic course, and the other half in a more senior role. The latter should include a five day continuous attachment to a unit in order to understudy a person in that rank and the remaining five days should include two days at Shrivenham if not done during level 1. Those who are successful receive an even more exclusive tie or cravat. It is possible to switch arm at this stage but a 22 day commitment is then necessary with twelve days on the basic programme.

An Advanced Post Graduate Course has been set up to give experience of joint operations with the other arms at Captain RN, Colonel and Group Captain level.

A Further Advanced Post-Graduate Course is now available. Members are eligible after at least one year following completion of the Advanced Post-Graduate Scheme. They will attend and participate in not less than twenty half-day sessions at the Royal College of Defence Studies followed by a total of ten days of which at least five must be continuous and attached to a headquarters in the rank of Commodore, Brigadier or Air Commodore.

Arrangements have been made for a basic medical check through the House Medical Services to advise a Member on their fitness for role. MEPs can obtain their usual health check for this kind of activity.

In the event of any query about the operation of the Scheme the appropriate service liaison officer at the MoD can be contacted. The RN/RM Secretariat can be reached on 020 7218 4408, the Army on 020 7218 3289 and the RAF on 020 7218 2239. Advice can also be obtained from the office of the Chairman of the Scheme on either 020 7222 0480 or 020 8501 1673.

The services hope that Members will use the knowledge they have gained on the scheme to good effect in debates on defence issues on the usual Chatham House rules basis. A substantial commitment has been made by the military in the resources they deploy on behalf of participants and it therefore gives them much pleasure when they hear that Members have taken the trouble to ask questions, make comments during statements and to speak in debates.