

From Commander Simon J Cox Royal Navy



**The Commander
Mine Warfare Battle Staff (White)**

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Dear (Insert School Name) Headteacher,

At the beginning of May the United Kingdom Mine Counter Measures Force will begin a 7 month deployment – away from family and friends for a significant amount of time. As ever this is a challenging time for families and especially children. For many of my team this is another lengthy deployment in short succession from their last one and compounds the pressures and demands we as a nation put on Forces families.

We will be departing the UK for the Middle East from RAF Brize Norton in early May and for many children this time of year is very adjacent to important exams or milestones in their schooling. For this reason, coupled with the fact that many of my staff will spend consecutive summer holidays away from their children, I write to ask that you continue your excellent support to my team's families and maximise the levers available to you in this endeavour. These include, but are not limited to supporting any requests for exceptional leave during school time (should it be requested) and optimisation of the Service Support Premium (should individuals qualify).

Clearly this is not only important to the service children, but the wider family network as they all cope with the realities and significance of enforced absence. In my experience, the proactive engagement of schools and teachers has greatly assisted service children's resilience and ability to cope. If any school is specifically interested in tracking what the child's parent/s are upto, I would be delighted to include you on our social media page and termly updates. I know that some even run a deployment wall to help children keep track of where Mummy or Daddy are.

Unfortunately due to security protocol I cannot give an exact date for our return to the UK, but it is likely to be around late-November and will likely upset again what has become 'normal' for our families. I request that appropriate requests for exceptional leave to reunite families be considered in the broader context and as we make our final preparations to deploy, I highlight one of the most consistent factors in the operational success of UK forces has been the support of friends, families and schools specifically. Please do not underestimate the difficulties and personal test that repeated long separations bring to each and every family unit – your support is vital.

I can only thank you in advance and ask that you do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions. There may be times when I have to restrict communications for Operational reasons, so I ask that you please remain patient if making contact is difficult.

Yours sincerely,

**Cdr Simon J Cox RN
Commander of the UKs Mine Counter Measures Force**