

CHANGES TO SETTLEMENT FEES FOR NON-UK SERVICE PERSONNEL

Currently non-UK Service Personnel (Commonwealth citizens, Gurkhas, Nepalese citizens who have transferred out of the Brigade of Gurkhas to serve in the wider Armed Forces, British Overseas Citizens, British Overseas Territory Citizens and British National (Overseas) citizens), must pay a settlement fee of £2,389 (FY21/22) when they apply to remain (settle) in the UK following their discharge from the UK Armed Forces.

Last year the Defence Secretary and the Home Secretary jointly launched a public consultation seeking views on a policy proposal to remove the charge for the settlement fee.

The policy proposal was to remove the charge for non-UK Service Personnel who had served in the Regular Armed Forces or the Brigade of Gurkhas for at least 12 years at their point of discharge and who had applied to settle in the UK after their Service or who had been discharged due to an attributable to Service illness or injury. Views were also sought on how the Government could support non-UK veterans who were living in the UK but who had not regularised their immigration status.

Over 6,000 responses to the consultation were received which reflected the significance many attach to this issue. After considering the consultation feedback, the Defence Secretary and Home Secretary have agreed to revise the policy. They are pleased to announce that the following policy will be implemented:

Providing all other Home Office requirements are met, non-UK Service Personnel who apply to remain in the UK will **not** have to pay the fee if they meet one of the following criteria:

- have served at least six years at their point of discharge from service or
- are discharged on medical grounds with a condition attributable to service irrespective of their length of service
- or
- are a veteran who has served for at least six years, or was discharged on medical grounds with a condition attributable to service and is currently living in the UK and has not yet regularised their immigration status

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

“Last year we sought views from non-UK personnel about how we can best support and recognise their incredible contribution to the UK Armed Forces. I am delighted to announce that eligible personnel and veterans who have served for a period of six years or more, and wish to settle in the UK, will no longer have to pay the visa fee.

“It is only right that we have taken this important step to express our sincere gratitude to the brave men and women from outside of the UK who have made such a valuable contribution to the defence of this country.

“Today, it was a pleasure to meet personnel who will benefit from this change. I wish them all the best for the future.”

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

“There are thousands of brave men and women across the Commonwealth who have served our country with distinction in the military over the years.

“Waiving the visa fee for those Commonwealth veterans and Gurkhas with six years’ service who want to settle here is a suitable way of acknowledging their personal contribution and service to our nation”.

The fee waiver is planned to come into effect this Spring once the necessary legislation has gone through the Houses of Parliament. Information relating to the application process will be published shortly.

Other options remain open to non-UK Service Personnel such as being able to make a paid application for Settlement in the UK upon discharge if they have served a minimum of four years. There is also no intention to amend the Citizenship Rules or fund the fees for Armed Forces personnel who choose to apply for naturalisation while serving or as veterans after they have had settled status for at least 12 months.

The Ministry of Defence and the Home Office work closely with non-UK citizens who serve in the UK Armed Forces to ensure they are fully aware of the support available for them and their families to settle in the UK. The new policy will improve this support even further.

Current support includes working with the Joining Forces Credit Union to offer financial advice, savings packages and loans to help personnel pay for visa costs.

A copy of the Government response to the public consultation can be found on the Gov.uk website <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/immigration-fees-public-consultation>