



Ministry
of Defence

SECRETARY OF STATE
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5, ZONE D, MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 020 7218 9000
Fax: 020 721 87140
E-mail: defencesecretary-group@mod.gov.uk

PQO/17-19/2018/14797

29th November 2018

In Oral Questions on 26 November 2018, I undertook to write to you regarding your concerns on Officer recruitment.

The figures you referred to in the House are from Quarter 1 (April-June) of this Financial Year 2018-19 and it is important for them to be put into context.

For Officer inflow, current performance is very positive. There are three intakes onto the Regular Commissioning Course at Sandhurst per annum and therefore intake over 12 months is not linear. As at 1 October, 463 officers have been recruited into the Army in 2018-19 and the Army projects that it will recruit 100% of its target, 604, this year. This follows a similarly successful performance last year and I am therefore confident that Army Officer recruitment is adequately funded.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

THE RT HON GAVIN WILLIAMSON CBE MP

Louise Haigh MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Departmental Funding

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab)

9. What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of funding for his Department. [907806]

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)

16. What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of funding for his Department. [907813]

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)

19. What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of funding for his Department. [907817]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson)

I hold regular discussions with the Chancellor. The additional £1.8 billion being invested in the defence budget reaffirms our commitment to protecting national security.

Phil Wilson

There is an additional £200 million for the Ministry of Defence this year, and £800 million the following year, but there is still a massive black hole to fill in the MOD budget. When will the Secretary of State stop asking for an inadequate bail-out and secure the finances that the MOD requires?

Gavin Williamson

Last year we saw £36 billion spent on defence, and next year we will see £39 billion, and we are investing £186 billion in defence procurement. We recognise that we have to look at how we make savings, which is why we have made £9.5 billion of efficiencies within our programme, to ensure that all three services get the equipment they need to safeguard the security of this nation.

Louise Haigh

The latest statistics show that Capita has managed to recruit only 10% of the officers and 7% of all other ranks that the Ministry requires for 2018-19. Is the Secretary of State satisfied with the adequacy of funding for recruiting the officers that the Ministry needs and with the performance of this failing provider?

Gavin Williamson

My understanding is that we are fully recruited for the officers. However, if the hon. Lady will allow me, I will write to her and confirm that that is the case.

Wes Streeting

The £1 billion from the Chancellor does not nearly make up for the £10 billion of real-terms cuts to the defence budget between 2010 and 2017. What more does the Secretary of State plan to do to ensure that his Department, and by extension our armed forces, are adequately resourced to tackle the emerging and changing threats facing our country?

Gavin Williamson

If we look at the choice between where Labour would take our defence policy and where we would take it, I know which would give Britain the greatest security. I think that all Government Members recognise the important role that our armed forces play, which is why we will keep investing in them.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)

The Government's calamitous failure to manage the defence budget means that the MOD's equipment plan is now completely unaffordable. The funding gap is somewhere between £7 billion and £15 billion. We all welcome the £1 billion that was earmarked for defence in the Budget, but the Secretary of State must realise that the sums just do not add up—unless, of course, he has been taking numeracy lessons from the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). Can he tell the House what urgent plans he has to deal with this particular funding shortfall?

Gavin Williamson

We recognise that we must always drive efficiency within our departmental budget, but we have the benefit of a rising budget and we are continuing to strive to make efficiencies within that, which is why we have made efficiencies of £9.5 billion.

Nia Griffith

I really do not think that the efficiencies argument washes anymore—it is just not good enough. We have known for years that the plan is unaffordable. Ministers must accept their responsibility for failing to balance the books. The National Audit Office has said that the Government must decide which programmes to defer, de-scope or delete as soon as possible, in order to bring the plan back into the black. One of the programmes that could be at risk is the Warrior capability sustainment programme, which is now 13 months behind schedule and £62 million over budget. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that this programme will not be cut in the Modernising Defence Programme?

Gavin Williamson

What we actually see is the National Audit Office painting a worst-case scenario in terms of our equipment plan. What we continue to do, though, is to focus on driving efficiency. We are looking at investing in Warrior to make sure we can extend it out to 2040.