Dear James,

Thank you for your letter of 9 July about Service voting in the Scottish Independence Referendum.

The franchise for the Referendum on Scottish Independence is not, of course, a matter for the UK Government. However, I understand that Service personnel registered at an address in Scotland at the time of the referendum will be able to vote. A very small number of Service personnel choose to register as overseas voters and they will not be able to vote in the referendum.

My officials work closely with the Electoral Commission: together they run an annual information campaign to encourage Service personnel and their families to register to vote. Recent campaigns have highlighted the need for Service personnel to keep their registration details up-to-date, particularly when their address for correspondence changes. All units in the UK and abroad must appoint a unit registration officer, responsible for making Service personnel and their families aware of the need to register and of how to vote. During these campaigns, posters, leaflets and presentational material are made available to help unit registration officers hold a registration day to brief personnel and to give face-to-face advice as necessary. The next annual campaign will be held early next year and it will certainly highlight the forthcoming referendum in Scotland, the arrangements for the franchise, and the importance of being registered. Information will also be provided for families to determine whether their children will be eligible to vote in the referendum and on the arrangements in place to enable those children to be registered. Material will be distributed to Service personnel through the chain of command for unit registration officers to use locally. We will also aim to work with the Service Families’ Federations, and use support networks such as HIVES to ensure we reach as many families as possible.

On the matter of postal votes, once details of the timetable for the referendum are known, my officials, again working with the Electoral Commission, will look...
at the implications for Service personnel overseas and, if necessary, whether there is scope to reduce delay in the postal arrangements. Operational priorities must always come first, but clearly, the more time that is made available for the issue and return of postal votes, the more confidence we can have that all those who are eligible and wish to vote will be able to do so. Service personnel and their families abroad are advised to vote by proxy but I respect the fact that some choose to register for a postal vote instead.

I hope this answers your questions.

THE Rt HON PHILIP HAMMOND MP
Dear Philip

Scottish Independence Referendum: voter registration

Thank you for giving oral evidence on 2 July as part of our inquiry into the defence implications of possible Scottish independence.

One issue which we didn’t have time to raise with you during the evidence session is registration and participation by service personnel in the referendum next year.

We understand that those serving overseas in HM Forces or with Her Majesty’s Government are entitled to vote at all elections in the UK, including referenda. Service voters or Crown Servants need to complete a service declaration, which is valid for up to five years.

I should be grateful if you could explain what steps the Ministry of Defence will be taking to encourage registration and participation in the referendum by service personnel who would ordinarily live in Scotland if they were not posted overseas. In particular:

What information will be made available by individual unit commanders?

What discussions have been held with the Electoral Commission to ensure that postal votes can be issued and returned by service personnel serving overseas at the time of the referendum?
A response by Friday 2 August would be appreciated.

Yours ever

James

CHAIR