Dear Sajid,

The Defence Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant, during which we have heard significant concerns about the treatment of Commonwealth Armed Forces personnel and their families. We understand that since December 2013 recruits from across the Commonwealth have been subject to the Government's Minimum Income Threshold (MIT) if they wish to bring their family with them to the UK. However, the current starting wage for such personnel is far below what is required for a family to join their loved one and can result in families being separated for several years. For instance, the average starting wage is around £19,000 whilst the MIT for a family of four (spouse and two children) is £24,800. The Naval Families Federation inform us that current pay scales mean that serving personnel would have to wait five to six years before they can be reunited with their family.

Once the MIT has been reached they must then pay for visas that allow family members to enter the UK and stay for five years at £1,523 per applicant. After five years family members can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) which is £2,389 per applicant. The Service Families Federations have told us that these cumulative costs are beyond the means of many serving personnel. Further, Commonwealth personnel can only apply for ILR once they have been discharged, and as the cost increases every year personnel pay more the longer they serve in the Armed Forces, a clear disadvantage contrary to the message of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Ministry of Defence has recognised the importance of the wider family network in their 2016 Families Strategy which states, "our personnel can only fully deliver their Defence task if they have the support of their families as well as the confidence that their loved ones will be able to access the right support when required".
At a time when the Armed Forces are looking to recruit additional Commonwealth personnel the Committee is concerned that a lack of coordination across Government is making retention more difficult and discouraging potential recruits. For example, the number of enquiries received by the Service Families Federations appears clearly to demonstrate a failure on the part of the Ministry of Defence in communicating to Commonwealth recruits the costs of bringing family members to the UK. But the root causes of the problem, such as MIT, visa costs and ILR, are Home Office responsibilities.

We would therefore be grateful if you could respond to these concerns and set out what plans you have to review these policies to ensure that the unique contribution these personnel and their families make to the defence and security of the UK is fully recognised.

It would be helpful to receive your response by 25 April.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

[Handwritten name]