

VALUES AND STANDARDS

OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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FOREWORD

By the Chief of the General Staff

The British Army has earned a worldwide reputation for excellence, a reflection of the quality of those who serve and have served. Values are about character and spirit; Standards define our actions and behaviour. Our operational effectiveness depends upon upholding them both.

Our war fighting doctrine is based on mission command, which is dependent on mutual trust between leaders and those they lead. When Values are declared and followed, they form the basis of that trust. Values are specific beliefs about what is important and unimportant, good and bad, right and wrong. Values form the basis of how we make judgements and decisions about all we do and do not do.

Our Standards guide the practical application of our Values, ensuring that everything we do is Appropriate, Lawful and Professional. Teamwork is essential for a strong military force. In combat we put our lives in the hands of our teammates; we depend on each other. Such trust is developed from strong bonds of mutual respect and confidence in each other to do the right thing. Our government, and the British public, entrust us with the application of lethal force; that sets us apart from the rest of society. It demands a higher standard of behaviour than that which is expected of those who are not soldiers - at all times whether on or off operations, on or off duty.

War is always violent, visceral and chaotic. But the character of conflict is changing and becoming more complex and dynamic with the boundary between war and peace increasingly blurred. Living our Values and Standards is ever more important, providing the moral compass against which to judge the most appropriate actions. They are at the very centre of what we do and define who we are. They are the bedrock, the guiding principles that remain constant, whatever the situation.

I expect every soldier to live by our Values and Standards, to approach every day with an open-minded attitude that sees the potential in everyone and refuses to allow unacceptable behaviour. This is how we seize the opportunities that mission command offers. Remember that the standard you walk past - without taking any action - is the standard that you accept.

VALUES AND STANDARDS

1. The British Army's Values are the moral principles which define who British soldiers are as individuals and what the British Army stands for as an organisation. Standards are the authoritative benchmarks against which we judge our conduct.

"Our purpose is clear: we protect the UK, fight the UK's enemies, prevent conflict and deal with disaster. This is underpinned by unlimited liability¹ and exemplary Values and Standards."²

2. Every individual has a value set but these Values and Standards form the basis upon which members of the British Army commit themselves unreservedly to the protection of the Nation. Our Values and Standards set us apart from other occupations and, often, from our enemies. Whilst they have been refined over time, they remain constant, non-discretionary principles that define the behaviours expected of all members of the British Army, whatever the circumstances.

3. The Values and Standards of the British Army are:

Values

Courage
Discipline
Respect for Others
Integrity
Loyalty
Selfless Commitment

Standards

Lawful
Appropriate
Professional

¹ Unlimited liability is the ultimate expression of selfless commitment: the willingness to sacrifice one's own life if required.

² General Sir Nicholas Carter, CGS at the Army Conference 2015.

THE ARMY AND SOCIETY

4. The concept that everyone has the natural right to life and liberty lies at the heart of British democratic society. These natural and absolute rights have been the basis of British laws and principles of government for over three hundred years. The British Army must conform with the principles of the right to life and liberty if it is to embrace the core values of the society from which it is drawn and on whose behalf it acts. These values comprise the ethical foundation on which the Values and Standards of the British Army are based.

5. The Army strives to be the best. It will be judged harshly if it fails to live up to its Values and Standards, either as an organisation or through the behaviour of an individual or group. Perceptions of the Army and individual behaviour are therefore inseparable; the actions of every soldier have the potential for collective consequence.

‘We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act, but a habit.’³

VALUES, STANDARDS AND THE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER

6. Professional officers and soldiers serve the legitimate political objectives of a nation; this distinguishes them from non-state actors, terrorists and mercenaries. The British Army, along with the other Services, exists to defend the Nation, its citizens and its national interests. The principle that every human possesses a right to life and liberty does not prohibit offensive action taken in defence of the Nation. It is an officer’s and soldier’s duty, when so required and lawfully directed, to close with and kill an enemy.

7. Officers and soldiers in the British Army must always be ready to serve; voluntarily placing their personal freedoms behind that of service to the Nation. Officers and soldiers must be willing to place themselves in positions of great danger, difficulty and stress; this includes mortal danger. Service in the Army, and the other Services, has the potential to demand personal sacrifices not expected of any other profession in our society. Those who join the British Army must be prepared to knowingly risk their lives to save and preserve the lives of others, including in combat. The British Army’s Values and Standards embody this code of behaviour.

8. The principles of the right to life and liberty reflect some of the obligations on officers and soldiers detailed in the Geneva Conventions and which are part of the broader Laws of Armed Conflict. These require officers and soldiers to protect those who cannot defend themselves, such as non-combatants, which includes any enemy, wounded or prisoner, once the threat to life has been removed. British officers and soldiers are required to uphold the rights of others before their own as a matter of duty.

³ Will Durrant, *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives of Opinions of the World’s Greatest Philosophers*. p76.



VALUES, STANDARDS AND OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

9. The Nation requires that the Army will prevail and succeed on operations. This demands the absolute commitment of individual Service Personnel to collective purpose. Generating this commitment, and ultimately getting people to fight, is embodied in the moral component of fighting power. It is the pre-eminent of the three components of fighting power⁴ and underpins operational capability.

10. The capability of individual Service Personnel is multiplied when they are formed into teams. Effective and cohesive teams are the building blocks of operational success; when correctly formed, they can withstand considerable hardship and succeed. Foremost among the factors that makes teams effective is trust, both within the team and in the team's capability. Trust of this sort can only truly be secured if every team member is confident in the commitment and resolve of all other members of the team. The Army's Values and Standards provide an accepted and clearly defined code of behaviour which generates the strong bonds necessary to foster the trust among and within teams that is so critical to success.

11. In an environment of increased scrutiny and complexity, our adversaries may seek to generate, or take advantage of, scenarios that result in considerable presentational harm and which, by their nature, place operational success in jeopardy. Adherence to the Army's Values and Standards, in person and online, protects Service Personnel from this threat and thereby enhances the chances of success on operations.

⁴ Moral, conceptual and physical

THE ARMY AND SOCIETY

12. The application of Values and Standards is an unavoidable and enduring duty of leaders to preserve both our legitimacy and the moral component. Army leadership is, and must remain, values based and the example set by all those in leadership positions defines the Army's Values and Standards every day. Leadership is a fundamental duty of all Officers, Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers; leadership of peers is a responsibility of all.

13. Commanders must understand the importance of Values and Standards, set the right example and demand the same of their subordinates and peers. Those in a position of rank or responsibility have an enduring duty to lead and represent their Service. Failure, however, is a human trait. Whilst it is the role of commanders to ensure that behaviour which falls short of our Values and Standards is corrected and that lessons are learnt from the experience, encouraging subordinates to take reasonable and measured risk is an important leadership quality.

The Leadership Super-skill - Lead by Example!
There are no shortcuts or easy fixes in leadership. However, leading by example has the greatest immediate impact on followers. Leaders are role models; their behaviour and values are judged and assimilated by those they lead. There is therefore a requirement to 'live' the Values and Standards, and always provide a reference point for moral leadership. The enduring nature of this requirement must not be underestimated."⁵

⁵ The British Army Leader Competency Framework, AC 72279, 2024.



14. The British Army's Leadership Framework, which all leaders should be familiar with, provides the structure for understanding the skill of leadership and what is expected of all Army leaders. To do this it uses the three components of: what leaders are (their character); what leaders know (their knowledge); and what leaders do (their actions).

How leaders do this to inspire others to succeed is exhibited in the form of leadership competencies - a skills-based framework situated around this structure.

15. Operations may be characterised by complex and stressful circumstances with a greater possibility that officers and soldiers may deviate from our Values and Standards. Commanders must insist on the same professional conduct on operations as they would in barracks. They are required to have the strength and courage to correct any behaviour which carries the potential to undermine our Values and Standards, whatever the circumstances. The pressures or achievements of operations are not an excuse to tolerate poor discipline, low professional standards or unacceptable behaviour. To do so courts failure.

16. Officers, Warrant Officers, and Non-Commissioned Officers have a responsibility to ensure that the Army's Values and Standards are observed by those under their command at all times. The King's Commission makes it clear that commissioned Officers have a particular responsibility for the application of the Values and Standards:

"We, reposing especial trust and confidence in your loyalty, courage and good conduct, do by these presents constitute and appoint you to be an Officer.... You are, in such manner and on such occasions as may be prescribed by Us, to exercise and well discipline in their duties such officers, men and women as may be placed under your orders from time to time and use your best endeavours to keep them in good order and discipline ... in pursuance of the trust hereby reposed in you."⁶

⁶ Extract from The King's Commission.

VALUES, STANDARDS AND OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

17. Courage, both moral and physical, creates the strength upon which fighting spirit and success on operations depends. It is a quality needed by every soldier, but is especially important for those placed in positions of authority because others will depend on their lead and respond to it.


18. Moral courage is the characteristic on which the other Values and Standards depend. It provides the resolve to do what is right even when it may be unpopular, risk ridicule or appear dangerous by insisting on the maintenance of the highest standards of decency and behaviour at all times. Every soldier and officer must have the moral courage to challenge any behaviour which threatens our Values and Standards, irrespective of rank, environment or circumstance.

19. Physical courage is the readiness to confront and overcome fear and fatigue. Physical courage on the battlefield must be complemented by moral courage if we are to maintain the highest standards of behaviour and therein our ability to deliver operational success.

20. Every soldier must be able to depend on the absolute physical and moral courage of their colleagues, even in the face of adversity. A lack of courage has the potential to expose individuals and teams to needless risk. Similarly, misplaced courage amounts to recklessness, which also puts others at risk unnecessarily and may undermine trust.

COURAGE





21. Discipline is a defining characteristic of the professional soldier and is an essential quality in combat. It is built through education, training and practice until instinctive. For officers and soldiers, discipline instils self-control, fosters self-confidence, helps overcome fear and enables trust. The profession of arms demands the highest levels of discipline on and off duty. It requires that officers and soldiers adhere to military conventions and act in compliance with legal orders, even under the worst conditions of war.

22. The administration of discipline requires clearly understood rules and a universal system of enforcement, applied without delay, fear or favour. The best discipline is self-discipline, which is innate rather than imposed. Discipline that is over-zealous, imposed selectively or ignored by those in authority will constrain initiative and undermine trust. In contrast, a commander who exercises just discipline sets the conditions for success on operations.

DISCIPLINE



RESPECT FOR OTHERS

23. The British Army provides opportunity for all. Respect for Others reflects our belief that everyone is born free and equal in dignity. It follows that everyone must be treated fairly and with dignity and respect regardless of: gender; ethnicity (including nationality); sexual orientation; age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; religion; belief or non-belief; rank and position. There is no place in the British Army for prejudice or discrimination, whether in person or online. Only by treating each other fairly and with respect, can we ensure that every officer and soldier in the Army fulfils their potential.

24. Respect for Others applies equally to all individuals: victims of conflict; the dead; the wounded; prisoners and civilians. We will not succeed on operations, maintain the respect of the Nation or get the best from those we encounter, be they individuals, partners or allies, unless we demonstrate Respect for Others in all that we do.

25. Respect for Others also underpins the concept of mutual respect; understanding and appreciating the innate worth of every other soldier in the Army is an essential component of teamwork and trust. Respect for each individual requires an understanding of perspective, tolerance and sometimes patience. Any soldier who fails to demonstrate Respect for Others undermines the collective strength of the group and their own credibility as a professional soldier.

26. Integrity is, quite simply, doing the right thing. A person of integrity is enduringly honest and driven by ethical principle. Openness and honesty are essential to trust and the functioning of the chain of command. Officers and soldiers must have complete trust in each other; their lives may ultimately depend on it. Any lapse in integrity calls into question whether an individual can be relied upon and thus trusted.

27. Integrity also sets the tone of relationships beyond the Army. It is a significant factor in our relationship with other armies and beyond the immediate military environment including with civil society and family members. Integrity, and the public trust that comes with it, is a hard-won quality which is easily lost.

INTEGRITY





LOYALTY

28. Loyalty binds individuals into teams, creating and strengthening bonds within formations, units and sub-units. Personal loyalty to the Army is essential to develop these bonds; underpinning relationships between peers, subordinates and superiors. Loyalty is earned through commitment, professionalism, humility, decency and integrity. These are enduring characteristics that cannot be turned on and off at will.

29. Those in authority have a duty to be loyal to their subordinates: to represent their interests faithfully, deal with complaints thoroughly and develop their abilities through progressive training. Subordinates must be loyal to their leaders, their peers and their team. Being loyal to leaders or subordinates does not mean that wrong-doing should be condoned or covered up; this is misplaced loyalty which may amount to a serious criminal offence and cost lives. Misplaced loyalty undermines trust, challenges our Values and Standards and compromises the integrity of the perpetrator.

30. Selfless Commitment is the foundation of service in the British Army, embedded in the Oath of Allegiance taken on attestation. It binds the loyalty of every soldier to the Sovereign as Head of State thus accepting that individual needs are subordinate to those of the Army and Nation as articulated through the Oath of Allegiance:

“I swear by almighty God that I will be faithful, and bear true allegiance to his Majesty King Charles III, his heirs and successors, and that I will as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend his Majesty, his heirs and successors in person, crown and dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, his heirs and successors and the generals and officers set over me.”⁷

31. Selfless Commitment means putting the needs of the mission and the team before personal interests; it may ultimately require soldiers to lay down their lives. Genuine selfless commitment is irrespective of private beliefs or prejudices and it is equally valid in barracks as when deployed on operations.

SELFLESS COMMITMENT

⁷ Those who do not believe in God ‘Solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm’.



THE STANDARDS OF THE BRITISH ARMY

32. The British Army's Standards define the manner in which all officers and soldiers are required to behave in every aspect of their life, professional and private. They have been formulated to ensure that the behaviour of all officers and soldiers is lawful, appropriate and professional.

33. The Army takes a more demanding approach to behaviours and relationships that might be regarded as a matter of individual choice or morality in wider society. This is because of the unique circumstances and requirements of military service. Behaviour that risks degrading our professional ability or undermining morale by damaging trust and respect between individuals cannot be tolerated as it compromises our ability to succeed.





LAWFUL

34. All officers and soldiers are subject to the criminal law of England and Wales and are required to abide by it wherever they serve and at all times. All civilian criminal offences have been incorporated into Service Law⁸, and Service Law creates additional offences⁹ that reflect the unique nature of military service and the higher standards that are required of officers and soldiers. Additionally, and notably on operations or when overseas, officers and soldiers are subject to international law, international humanitarian law (the law of armed conflict) and, in some cases, local civil and criminal law. Officers and soldiers are required to operate within the law that applies to their particular operational or overseas context at all times.

35. Rules of Engagement set out when, and how, force may be used against an enemy. In some circumstances, they limit a soldier's ability to use force and demand greater restraint than the law would permit. This requires self-discipline and judgement, often in circumstances of danger.

36. Those in authority must ensure that orders are lawful and clear. The abuse of authority to intimidate or victimise others, or to give unlawful punishments and orders, is illegal and unacceptable.

⁸ s42 of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

⁹ Including: Desertion, Disgraceful conduct of a cruel or indecent kind, AWOL, Disobedience to a lawful command.

37. Appropriate behaviour is that which fosters team spirit and cohesion. The Army's Values establish a baseline of what is appropriate, which sustains our position in society. This enables the Army to recruit and retain the best talent in the Nation, preserve the respect of our partners and allies and gives the best chance of success on operations. It is the duty of every member of the British Army to exhibit and promote appropriate behaviour, at all times and in all contexts.

38. It is not practical to list every form of unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour, but it includes: bullying; harassment; discrimination; abuse; dishonesty; intimidation; victimisation; social misconduct or conduct which runs counter to common decency that might, by its nature, bring the Army into disrepute, whether in person or online. This also includes unwanted or unguarded comments about another person's sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, ethnicity or religion.

39. Misconduct involving abuse of position, trust or rank, or taking advantage of an individual's circumstances will be viewed as particularly serious and dealt with accordingly. Social misconduct encompasses: unwelcome sexual attention and behaviours, including unwanted touching; over-familiarity with the spouses or partners of other Service personnel; displays of affection that may cause offence to others; behaviour which damages or hazards the personal relationships of Service personnel or civilian colleagues; and taking sexual advantage of others.



APPROPRIATE

40. A defining characteristic of a profession is the requirement to set clear standards for the conduct of its members.

The Army is no different. Professional behaviour is to do with how you act or react, intentionally or unintentionally and whether on or off duty. To be a professional British Army soldier means abiding by the Army's policies and regulations on, among other issues, the handling of official information; alcohol and substance misuse; control of public and non-public funds and management of personal affairs. Values and Standards apply to all officers and soldiers of every rank and at all times, without exception.

A full-page background image showing a soldier in a ghillie suit aiming a sniper rifle. The soldier is positioned on the right side of the frame, facing left. The rifle is pointed towards the left, with the sun visible in the background, creating a strong silhouette and lens flare effect. The scene is set in a field with tall grass and trees in the distance under a warm, orange-hued sky.

PROFESSIONAL

THE ARMY AND SOCIETY

41. Every breach of Values and Standards requires prompt and unambiguous action to be taken. In determining whether the Army has a right to intervene in the personal lives of its officers and soldiers, commanders must do so in the context of the Army's Values and Standards. Acceptance of any breach of these Values and Standards, however minor, undermines the operational effectiveness of the British Army and puts our ability to succeed at risk. Every individual who fails to uphold our Values and Standards must have their failings made clear to them.

42. The Service Test is the mechanism by which breaches in the Army Values and Standards are judged. It applies to everyone in the Army at all times, both on and off duty, irrespective of rank and context:

“Have the actions or behaviour of an individual adversely impacted or are they likely to impact on the efficiency or operational effectiveness of the Service?”

43. Where appropriate, failings must result in adverse comments in an annual appraisal, or administrative or disciplinary action. A decision on what action is to be taken, and the extent of that action, will depend on the circumstances of each case measured against the Service Test. In assessing what action to take, commanders must establish the seriousness of the misconduct and its impact, or potential impact, on the efficiency, operational effectiveness or reputation of their unit and the Army. Where an individual is found to have committed gross misconduct or has been persistent in misconduct or inefficiency, commanders are required to consider the termination of service.

CONCLUSION

44. The British Army has a unique and trusted standing in the Nation and more widely. Founded on principles that underpin our society, the Army's Values and Standards contribute directly to preserving this position and delivering operational effectiveness. They are what the Nation reasonably expects from its Army. The demands of military service require a commitment from all officers and soldiers, beyond that normally expected from other citizens. Our Values and Standards sustain the British Army's ethos, provide structure to our organisational culture and govern our interactions with fellow officers, soldiers, allies, other combatants and civilians. It is a fundamental duty of all commanders to ensure that these Values and Standards are given the highest and overriding priority, that they are understood and that they are applied in all they do by themselves and those under their command.



