

Evaluation of the single-term model in the Swiss Armed Forces

Defence Group

Key facts

The introduction of the single-term model more than 15 years ago represented a significant expansion of the military service system of the Swiss Armed Forces. Traditionally, after recruit school (RS), the remaining service days are completed in short annual refresher courses. Single-term service personnel, in contrast, complete their entire period of service, currently 300 days, without interruption. Each year, this option is open to a maximum of 15% of those fit for military service, which corresponds to around 3,600 individuals. The single-term option is not available in all branches of service, nor in all functions.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined the costs and effectiveness of the single-term model from different perspectives (Armed Forces, those subject to military service, economy). In its audit, it concluded that it is a sensible addition to the annual refresher model. At the same time, it proposed adjustments with which the scope of the Armed Forces and the efficiency of the military service model could be increased in the longer term.

The single-term model itself has advantages for the Armed Forces, those subject to military service, the economy and taxpayers

For the Armed Forces, the single-term service personnel help to ensure short-term readiness (initial resources). For example, the approximately 200 members of the disaster relief standby battalion can be deployed within a few hours to support civilian authorities in the event of natural or technological disasters. However, such very short-term missions are rare. In addition, single-term service personnel in the Armed Forces play an important role in the training of refresher course units. Some of them also provide permanent services, e.g. the aviation standby company which relieves civilian personnel at military airfields.

According to an SFAO survey of around 2,400 of those fit for military service, slightly more than 20% have a preference for the single-term model, while a further 10% are open to both service models. Demand is therefore roughly in line with the 15% availability. It is currently dampened by the fact that, since 2018 and until the end of the implementation phase of the further development of the Armed Forces in 2023, those serving under the single-term model have 55 more days of service than members of the Armed Forces under the refresher course model; after 2023, the difference will still be 35 days. Reasons in favour of single-term service include better compatibility with studies and careers, as well as the motivation to be able to complete military service as quickly as possible. The SFAO also interviewed around 1,000 single-term service personnel and members of the Armed Forces under the refresher course model who were in process of performing their military service. Single-term service personnel were significantly more likely to choose the same model again. Furthermore, they rated their motivation and the relevance of their military service more positively, although the proportion of less motivated military personnel who see little relevance in their military service is also high among those completing the single-term ser-

vice. For various business associations, the single-term model is more suitable for the future, as it means all military obligations are completed early on. However, the model chosen is not a fundamental factor when filling vacancies.

The cost differences between the models are not particularly significant: according to calculations by the Defence Group, doubling the proportion of single-term service personnel leads to a reduction in operating costs of just over CHF 20 million. However, this figure is subject to uncertainties and does not take into account the investment costs, which are also expected to decrease if the proportion increases. Although their loss of earnings compensation (LEC) per day is lower than that of members of the Armed Forces under the refresher course model, single-term service personnel currently actually cost the LEC somewhat more due to the significantly longer period of service.

The long-standing 15% limit is not in question

About half of those who want to serve without interruption actually do so. According to the SFAO survey, there is a risk that a substantial proportion of those subject to military service will try to avoid military service if they are not conscripted as single-term service personnel. The SFAO sees a need for action in dealing with this group, as this exacerbates the Armed Forces' staffing problems.

For around ten years, the proportion of single-term service personnel has been within the maximum limit of 15%. Even the reduction to two RS starts as part of the further development of the Armed Forces (WEA) has done little to change this, although it has increased the number of those serving in the Armed Forces at any given time. In years with few people who are subject to military service, fewer single-term service personnel can be recruited than planned because of the 15% limit.

The audit does not allow an assessment to be made of the ideal ratio between single-term service personnel and members of the Armed Forces under the refresher course model. This issue concerns the overall architecture of the Armed Forces. Since single-term service personnel remain in the Armed Forces for a shorter period of time, any change has an impact on their numbers. At present, they are no longer included in personnel figures as soon as they complete their period of military service. In the SFAO's view, this makes little sense, as they can still be called up for deployments for another four years, as shown by the Armed Forces' Corona deployment in spring 2020.

The distribution of single-term service personnel across the Armed Forces should be more transparent

The proportion of single-term service personnel must be based on the needs of the Armed Forces. At present, this is still not sufficiently transparent. For example, the determination of quotas carried out with the further development of the Armed Forces is not documented, and in general, the distribution to the various branches of service to fulfil the performance profile remains unclear. In the SFAO's view, however, the Defence Group must clearly show where and to what extent it sees needs. Moreover, the SFAO considers it worthwhile to examine whether the maximum limit of 15% should be raised or lowered. This would give the Armed Forces greater flexibility.

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