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# THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND VETERANS ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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# **The Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report 2022**

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 343A  
of the Armed Forces Act 2006 (as amended)

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**ARMED FORCES**

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**COVENANT**

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# The Armed Forces Covenant

An Enduring Covenant between  
The People of the United Kingdom  
His Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown  
and their Families.

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty.

Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families.

They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

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# Ministerial foreword

This year has thrown into sharper focus the importance of our Armed Forces as standard bearers for the values we hold dear as a nation. Whether they are supporting Ukraine to defend its sovereign territory against Russian aggression, paying final tributes to Her Late Majesty The Queen, or helping their local communities, more than ever our Armed Forces community is central to our national life and represents who we are as a country. We are therefore delighted to introduce this year's Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans.

Since 2011, the Armed Forces Covenant has been a promise by the nation that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated fairly. It is a promise that they should not be disadvantaged because of their service. And it is a recognition of the sacrifices they make on our behalf and the responsibilities we owe them in return. In support of veterans, the Government's commitment to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran by 2028 continues to hold true.

We are pleased that Armed Forces Covenant signings are rapidly approaching 10,000, as thousands of organisations, large and small, private and public, from across the UK, embed the Covenant in their interactions with their local Armed Forces community. Putting the Covenant Duty into law was a manifesto commitment we delivered on decisively and quickly to ensure that public bodies have due regard for the Covenant principles when delivering services or policies in healthcare, education, and housing. Alongside the Armed Forces Families Strategy and investment in Service Family Accommodation, we are pleased with the progress we have made. But there is still more to do to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community do not face disadvantage due to service life.

For veterans specifically, we have made great progress across Government since the publication in January of the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-24). This Action Plan has given greater focus to what else we can do, in partnership with charities and the private sector, to ensure veterans have the right support at the right time.

From appointing the first Veterans Commissioner for Wales, thus ensuring every nation has an independent voice championing veterans, to launching the £5m Veteran's Health Innovation Fund, which will spur advancements in treatments for veterans' health needs, to making great strides to better understand our veteran community through enhanced research and data, we are delivering for veterans and their families.

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Finally, we want to thank the organisations who have used the Covenant and the nation's commitment to veterans as a springboard to improve the lived experiences of our Armed Forces community.

The Covenant is unique on so many levels, not just in the practical delivery of services to our Armed Forces community, but it also demonstrates how central and local Government, with the third sector and devolved administrations pulling together, can achieve so much for those who have served their country in this way. We are therefore committed to ensuring that this incredible work continues to develop to make the next decade even better.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Wallace".

The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP  
– Secretary of State for Defence



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Mercer".

The Rt Hon Johnny Mercer MP  
– Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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# Introduction

This is the 11th Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant since its introduction as a statutory requirement in the Armed Forces Act 2011. It is also the second wholly joint and integrated report between the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) in the Cabinet Office. It covers the reporting period from 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022. It is the Government's annual update to Parliament on delivery against both the Covenant (as it applies to Service personnel, veterans, the families of both, and those who are bereaved) and the Strategy for our Veterans.

The report covers actions that the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations have taken during the reporting period to deliver the Covenant and the Strategy across the UK – in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It covers delivery in the following areas:

- Chapter 1: Governance
- Chapter 2: Health and healthcare
- Chapter 3: Education
- Chapter 4: Housing and accommodation
- Chapter 5: Inquests and judicial engagement
- Chapter 6: UK Armed Forces Families Strategy update
- Chapter 7: Business, employment, and the community
- Chapter 8: The Covenant in law

There are also three annexes, as follows:

- Annex A provides a range of data and metrics used to measure progress in delivery.
- Annex B provides an update on the progress against the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-24) commitments.
- Annex C provides further sources of reading and information.

Our approach to this report continues to evolve as the Covenant, and the Government's commitment to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran, both mature as Government policies. We have made the following updates in our approach to this year's report:

- We have emphasised more comparisons of the Armed Forces community with the UK general population, to establish where disadvantage may occur. As the Covenant has now been in effect since 2011, we are identifying fewer new issues requiring resolution, and instead are focussed on assessing where disadvantage still remains or special

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consideration is still needed. In making comparisons between the Armed Forces community and the general public, it is important to note that there are very different demographics at play, for example in age, disability and sex. Therefore, when a difference between populations is identified, it does not necessarily mean that one group is at a disadvantage.

- Updates from the OVA in the Cabinet Office, in line with the Government's commitment to make the UK the 'best place in the world to be a veteran', are included throughout these chapters.
- We have dedicated a chapter to providing a progress update on how the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy is being taken forward.
- Instead of having a chapter dedicated to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, we have included a shorter summary of the Trust's activities in the 'Business, employment, and the community' chapter. Fuller details can be found in the Trust's own annual report.

Throughout this report, the term 'Armed Forces community' is used to mean all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown, and their families. This includes all veterans and their families. Veterans are defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in the Armed Forces, and Merchant Mariners who have served on certain legally-defined operations. The terms 'Service families', 'Service partners' and 'Service children' mean the families, partners, and children of currently serving members of the Armed Forces.

## Highlights from the reporting period

### Health and healthcare

- Key improvements for serving personnel this year include the publication of the new MOD Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which promotes the importance of health and wellbeing across Defence, adopting a holistic approach to mental health, physical health and social health, and recognising the requirement to educate.
- A Servicewomen's Health Improvement Team worked on an eight-month sprint to address issues related to Servicewomen's health, resulting in ground-breaking new policies and guidance to support Servicewomen throughout the Armed Forces.
- An annual mental fitness briefing and a new care pathway for common mental health disorders have been introduced for the Armed Forces.
- The NHS has followed up its widespread consultation in 2020 with Service families, aimed at better understanding how to improve care and support, by conducting specific research on mobile families in 2021. The results of these have now informed a set of proposals being taken forward by NHS services across England, and shared via the Department of Health and Social Care across the UK.
- A further 528 GP surgeries have been accredited as 'veteran-friendly', taking the total to 1,578.

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- Veterans' health has been included in the GP training curriculum and national GP licensing assessment in England and Scotland.
  - A £5 million Veterans' Health Innovation Fund has been launched. This will support organisations looking to research and trial cutting-edge technology which could help veterans with complex healthcare needs.
  - The Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service has become fully operational across England.
  - Veterans NHS Wales has piloted an integrated care pathway for certain veterans in the criminal justice system with Service-related mental health problems.
  - The Scottish Government has continued to fund the Unforgotten Forces Consortium, a partnership that delivers a wide array of services to veterans in Scotland.
  - An independently led review into the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme is underway, and will produce a final report with recommendations in the spring of 2023.

## Education

- Funding of the Service Pupil Premium continues, with more than £25.6 million to be paid to schools in the financial year 2022-23, benefitting more than 80,000 Service pupils.
- The identification of Service children in Scotland is being improved, as they are now being identified in the Higher Education Statistics Agency student return.
- An online learning resource has been launched by Education Scotland to provide information about deployment, mobility, transition and the impacts these can have on children from Armed Forces families.
- The Armed Forces Friendly Schools Cymru status, which is given to schools in Wales to recognise their commitment to supporting Service children, as well as their achievements engaging with the Armed Forces community, has been launched.
- A Service child and a veteran 'flag' has been introduced on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application form, which allows universities and colleges to offer more bespoke advice and support to Service children and veterans applying to university or college.
- The MOD-supported Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance continues to make progress against all the Alliance's priorities, including significant improvements in the awareness of Armed Forces children's lives among professionals in schools, colleges, universities, and other stakeholders.

## Housing and accommodation

- There were record levels of investment in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in financial year 2021/22, with £179 million invested overall. In total, over 13,000 SFA – approximately one in four homes – received some type of upgrade during 2021/22. A further £176 million of improvement works are planned in 2022/23, which will improve around 9,800 homes. Additionally, £100 million has been allocated to build brand new homes. This will mean that



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almost 50% of all SFA in the UK will have received substantial investment over the course of financial years 2021/22 to 2022/23.

- New accommodation service contracts came into service this year. The new suppliers have committed to introducing significant changes to modernise and improve the services provided to Service families.
- The Forces Help to Buy scheme continues to help Armed Forces personnel get on the property ladder, with 28,102 Service personnel benefitting so far, with loans totalling £429 million. Work is underway to make this an enduring policy.
- Some of the changes that have been trialled in the Future Accommodation Model will be brought into current policy through our recently published Defence Accommodation Strategy. In addition to providing accommodation based on need rather than rank, entitlement to SFA will be widened to additional cohorts, including those Service personnel in established long-term relationships. Single Living Accommodation will also benefit from higher standards, published in the Strategy.
- Armed Forces personnel can continue to benefit from the Refund of Legal Expenses package that is available to any Service person who sells and buys a property because of a requirement to re-locate for Service reasons.
- In Scotland, the Veterans Homelessness Prevention Pathway has been published, and the Scottish Government has accepted all 24 recommendations in principle.

### **UK Armed Forces Families Strategy update**

- The MOD has published its new UK Armed Forces Families Strategy, which provides the framework for an ambitious ten-year programme. The Strategy is divided into eight workstreams focusing on different areas of family life within the Armed Forces: Family Life; Service Life; Family Home; Children's Education; Childcare; Non-UK Families; Supporting Partners; and Health and Wellbeing. Delivery of initiatives under each workstream has begun.

### **Business, employment and the community**

- The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, a charity classified as a non-departmental public body of the MOD, awarded a total of £26 million in grants towards projects across the UK in 2021/22, of which £25.3 million was received from the Government.
- Armed Forces Covenant signings are rapidly approaching 10,000, with 1,634 signing over the last 12 months alone. At the end of the reporting period the exact total figure stood at 9,122.
- The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme continues to encourage employers to support Defence and the Armed Forces community, and inspire others to do the same. The total number of Gold Award holders has increased to 642, and the total number of Silver Award holders has increased to 1,334.



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- The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) new model for providing support to the Armed Forces community, which has been in place since April 2021, continues to evolve to enhance the service DWP offers to veterans and others.
  - DWP has continued its work to identify Universal Credit claimants who are members of the Armed Forces community. This helps to ensure relevant claimants are signposted to the appropriate support.
  - The Welsh Government and partners worked together to provide a Service leaver and veterans' employment fair in Wales.
  - The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, Skills Development Scotland and MOD collaborated to create a tool for Service personnel and Service leavers that supports them in understanding the skills and qualifications they have gained in the Armed Forces.

### **The Covenant in law**

- The Government has fulfilled its 2019 manifesto commitment to 'further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law'. A new Armed Forces Covenant Duty has been created, that places a new legal obligation on specific public bodies to have due regard to the Covenant principles when delivering certain services, or deciding certain policies, in healthcare, education and housing, that could impact the Armed Forces community. The Covenant Duty will increase public bodies' awareness of the principles of the Covenant, the reasons for it, and in turn improve their decision-making in respect of the Armed Forces community.
- A Review will be conducted into whether the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should be brought within scope of this new Duty, and a report will be provided in the 2023 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report.

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# External observations

## Observations from the Families Federations

We welcome the renewed focus on the need to support Armed Forces families, highlighted by both the publication of the MOD's Armed Forces Families Strategy and the inclusion of Service families in the title of the Minister for Defence People.

In the context of the call on Armed Forces personnel to be ready to provide support to NATO and deter the threat of further conflict in Europe, it is a particularly crucial time to ensure that this strategy leads to meaningful support for our Service families.

### Governance

We warmly welcome the recent review of the governance of the Armed Forces Covenant, and we look forward to understanding its findings and recommendations. This is particularly welcome as we highlighted the need for significant development of the tracker in our observations in last year's report. It is key that the governance is robust and effective, across all three areas of work now referenced in the report, to ensure that disadvantage is identified and addressed.

We hope that this review will also lead to a greater understanding of the interdependency between the Armed Forces Covenant, the Armed Forces Families Strategy, and the Veterans Strategy Action Plan to avoid duplication and encourage coherence.

### Health & healthcare

Access to NHS dental care for Service families remains challenging, as highlighted in the Families Federations' Duty & Care Report, published in February 2022. We note with interest the comparisons made in this year's report to civilians accessing NHS dental care, but we have identified that Service families face unique challenges. These challenges are often due to their frequent mobility and the compound impact of multiple postings without access to NHS dental care, particularly those returning from overseas postings, and dual serving families face specific disadvantage when accessing NHS care for their children; these issues are not routinely encountered by their civilian neighbours. We therefore await with interest the recent changes to the NHS dental contracts in England and look forward to understanding the timeline for this reform and how this may better support Service families.

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## Education

Support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) remains a key issue. We were pleased to see that the Government undertook a specific consultation on support to SEND families and the Families Federations outlined the unique issues Service families face in submissions to the public consultation. We look forward to learning more about the findings of this consultation and to working with the government to develop a system which enables Service children to thrive.

Whilst the School Admissions Code provides welcome support for Service families, we are still seeing misunderstanding by local authorities and families on how it can be applied. Whilst guidance is provided for Crown Servants, the Department of Education has confirmed that this guidance does not apply to Service personnel, as they do not recognise them as Crown Servants. The Families Federations have called for specific guidance for Service families and are awaiting its creation.

We were delighted that non-UK personnel who were previously denied access to funding for higher education courses due to a lack of understanding of their settled status are now eligible for funding, as this has been a key issue that the Families Federations have raised during the last few years. We look forward to hearing in next year's report about how Service partners who encounter problems accessing funding for further and higher education courses are being supported.

## Childcare

The Families Federations were pleased to see the launch of the Wrap Around Childcare scheme in September 2022. However, we are aware of wider childcare challenges and concerns from families relating to early years and school holiday childcare, particularly given the impact of frequent postings and that serving family members often cannot provide regular support, due to frequent absence and the commitments of Service life. We would welcome further consideration of these wider childcare issues, including support for those overseas who are not eligible for the Wrap Around Childcare scheme, and to address the impact of the disparities across the devolved administrations with government childcare funding.

## Accommodation

There is no doubt that families have been extremely frustrated and disappointed with the service provided by the new Future Defence Infrastructure Service contract. Whilst we recognise that the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and contractors have been open and transparent about the problems from the start of the contract, and that significant work has been undertaken to try to resolve these, families understandably remain deeply dissatisfied with the service provided. We hope these continued efforts and engagement with key stakeholders will lead to a swift resolution of the problems experienced.

Cost of living is a challenge for all, but Service families see unique pressures, including the impact on utility bills of poorly insulated or maintained Service Family Accommodation. We would therefore welcome a recognition of the impacts of the cost of living crisis across all workstreams of the Families Strategy, including within accommodation.

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We welcome the widening of eligibility of Service Family Accommodation for those in established long term relationships under the recent Defence Accommodation Strategy but hope that clear guidance and information on the impact of the changes will be provided to families swiftly, including how they will address the challenge of very limited available housing in some key military areas. We now expect to see the other MOD reviews and projects considering how best to support the modern Service family and addressing the wider eligibility issues, including the related allowances issues that will arise because of widening accommodation support to those in long term relationships.

With the Future Accommodation Model pilots ending in 2023, we hope that any decisions on future accommodation provision for Service families fully recognise and understand the nature and impact of Service life, considering the support families require.

We remain disappointed that we have still not seen a resolution of the inability of separated spouses to claim the housing costs element of Universal Credit, due to mesne profits not being considered eligible housing costs. Given this is an issue we have raised since September 2019, we would seek reassurances that legal advice will be swiftly sought to allow the MOD to address this issue.

### **Partner employment**

Families are concerned about the challenges they face when assigned overseas. Evidence from surveys from the Naval Families Federation and Army Families Federation, as well as recent visits from the RAF Families Federation to families overseas, have highlighted a lack of clear, up-to-date, and realistic information regarding postings overseas.

This is particularly the case for spouses wishing to work remotely whilst accompanying their serving partner overseas, where there is a lack of clear information on the impacts on tax liability and their dependency status under SOFA or host nation agreements. Despite having raised this issue for some time, families are still awaiting clear information and guidance to enable them to make informed decision, and we will continue to urge the MOD to provide this. Evidence from families highlights not only the impact on the spouse's career and employment but also on their mental health and wellbeing.

### **Non-UK families**

Having called for a significant review of support for non-UK personnel and their families for a number of years, we were pleased to see the publication of the non-UK deep dive action plan earlier this year and we hope this results in meaningful improvements to address many of the long-standing issues faced by non-UK families.

We were disappointed to read that the Government regards any immigration issues addressed under the Armed Forces Covenant as providing advantage to non-UK service personnel and their families. Many of the non-UK personnel Covenant issues raised by the Families Federations relate to a lack of clear and correct guidance and advice for non-UK families and a lack of understanding of the Armed Forces rules within UKVI, resulting in many families paying more than civilians as their route to settlement is disrupted or incorrect applications are made. In addition, some non-UK personnel and their families feel they still lack parity of treatment with

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their military peers, due to their immigration status. We hope that the introduction of the dynamic action tracker will work to address many of these issues.

### **The new Covenant duty**

We note with interest that the Armed Forces Covenant legislation has defined the Armed Forces family for public bodies to ensure their due regard. However, we are concerned that the Ministry of Defence has chosen not to define the construct of a Service family with regards to their policies, which could potentially lead to challenge from local authorities and confusion for families. We are pleased to hear of the Ministry of Defence's Eligibility and Entitlement review, which is focusing the need of policies to reflect the realities of modern Armed Forces families and look forward to hearing its recommendations. We also welcome the review of the scope of the Covenant Duty and would support the MOD to be brought into the Duty, in particular the DIO as they are responsible for the provision of Service housing.

## **Observations from the Confederation of Service Charities**

### **Overall**

Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities, welcomes the opportunity to comment on this year's Covenant and Veterans' Annual Report. Overall, this is a comprehensive and detailed report setting out the key areas of activity in support of the Armed Forces Covenant, and of the Veterans' Strategy. To a seasoned observer, it would be obvious that significant progress has been made (particularly) in the delivery of the Covenant over the last eleven years, the historical focus of this publication. With growing coverage of the progress being made under the Veterans' Strategy in this report too, there is a clear sense of momentum and initiative across the board. Our comments are made noting this context of positive progress.

### **Collaboration**

Cobseo is a membership organisation which represents the breadth and depth of an eclectic Service charity sector. It recognises that the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans' Strategy both provide excellent mechanisms for collegiate working across the public, private and third sectors, to deliver much-needed and sustained support for the Armed Forces Community. Although the contribution of the third sector is not that obvious in this report, the benefits of mutual understanding, collaboration and alignment are self-evident, and the opportunity needs to be further embraced (and potentially more explicitly mentioned) as we go forward.

### **Governance**

Cobseo raised concerns over the governance arrangements between Government and the Service charity sector last year, particularly in terms of how they were being applied in practice. It is pleasing to note that a review has now taken place, the findings of which should be available early next year. We look forward to contributing in a positive and proactive fashion.

### **Strategic Objectives**

There is an apparent historical and enduring dichotomy in setting strategic objectives, not necessarily in terms of outcomes, but more in terms of the level of aspiration. On the one

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hand, the Ministry of Defence through the Armed Forces Covenant seeks to 'remove disadvantage'. On the other, the Office of Veterans' Affairs strategy seeks to create 'the best place in the world to be a veteran' – thereby creating a mix of transactional and transformational strategic aims.

This ambiguity of ambition is not currently a concern, but how this plays into the interface of the two governmental organisations, and between these actors and others in both Government and the third sector, might be. The coupling bridge between both organisations is, arguably, the relationship between causality and consequence - ensuring that there is proactive identification and resolution at the root cause of those Service-related matters, the negative impact of which manifests post-service. This organisational learning might need dedicated attention going forward.

## **Policy and Programmes**

As others have commented, the additional focus on Armed Forces families in this report is warmly welcomed, not least for those families who are bereaved, as specifically noted in the adjustment to the terminology used throughout this report. This is an important mind-set change, ensuring that this group is not unintentionally marginalised by language and terminology.

However, there are a number of topics that have surprisingly shallow or no coverage within this report. This includes description of the programmes activated to support non-UK families and to tackle homelessness. Moreover, a perennial concern is that there is again no mention of adult social care. The inference here being that there is no disadvantage or unmet needs within this arena – a departmental position which we presume has been appropriately evidenced, particularly as it appears to be contrary to the lived experience of many vulnerable members of the Armed Forces Community.

An annual reporting framework which lacks a historical reference point can unintentionally mask some changing timelines and specifications. To counter any concerns over drift and drag, some clarity and transparency in key project areas would be welcomed, certainly for perennial reporting against major and lengthy undertakings such as Programme CORTISONE.

## **Impact Assessment**

The greater use of data is commendable, the development of which should be progressed further; aided, not least, by the future availability of Census Data. We note that the bulk of data on this occasion concerns educational and housing provision. However, the current focus of concern within the veteran space is more on medical provision, centred specifically on the efficacy of routine and bespoke patient pathways. We need - collectively - to become more evidence-based in our support. Moreover, finding realistic solutions to sharing real-time data between the public and third sectors is an investment that would reap the biggest benefit in terms of coherent strategic planning and service delivery.

Additionally, capturing impact in outcome (rather than input) terms, such as the human scope and scale of the benefit added would, we believe, carry greater meaning for those in-need



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going forward. The monetary cost of such programmes is easy to capture, but the beneficiary value carries more illustrative weight.

## **Future Focus**

This report highlights some examples of the encouraging work happening across the UK by local authorities and service providers. From the experience of our members, whilst there have been excellent initiatives put in place under the Covenant, they do not all result in consistent and sustainable implementation. Indeed, as the new Covenant Duty now comes into force, focus will turn to monitoring delivery, and promoting understanding of what this means for the local authorities and other public bodies delivering services to serving personnel, veterans, their families, and those who are bereaved, across the regions. Mindful of potential future extensions in the Covenant Duty scope, there also needs to be detailed consideration as to whether this duty should also apply to national government and devolved administrations.

## **Observations from the Royal British Legion**

### **Introduction**

2022 saw the introduction of the Armed Forces Act which cemented elements of the Covenant into law. We welcome the Armed Forces Covenant and Veteran's Annual Report and believe it will be a vital tool to monitor progress made under the Covenant.

We note the commitment made in this report to review whether the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should be brought within the Armed Forces Act's legal scope. RBL looks forward to contributing to this review as we believe that as a promise made on behalf of the Nation to those that serve us, the Covenant should apply to all levels of Government in order to fully realise its ambition. The Covenant should be viewed as a whole Government endeavour and so we welcome the return of the Minister for Veterans Affairs to the Cabinet table to drive forward practical commitments from all departments to deliver for the Armed Forces community. We also look forward to working with the MoD and other bodies to further develop the guidance around the New Armed Forces Covenant Duty which requires organisations to pay due regard to the Covenant principles when exercising functions in the areas of housing, healthcare, and education.

The report focuses primarily on the policy themes within the scope of the Armed Forces Act. Whilst other areas of the Covenant are addressed, the same reporting and accountability frameworks used in these areas should be applied to all areas covered by the Covenant. RBL are pleased to see that the Families Strategy is making progress in workstreams with specific aims and actions. To continue progressing the strategy every workstream would benefit from this detailed approach.

We were pleased by the Government's response to RBL's Stop the Service Charge campaign which led to the removal of visa fees for Service personnel with over six years of service. This will make a meaningful difference to non-UK Service personnel. We maintain that visa fees should also be waived for family members who make considerable sacrifices to support our Armed Forces. The commitment in the report to review the impact of the Minimum Income

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Requirements on Non-UK Service personnel and their families is welcome; exemptions should be made for the families of Non-UK Service personnel to allow for parity with their UK Service colleagues' families.

As with previous years' reports we are concerned by the omission of some policy areas of importance to the Armed Forces community. Notably, there is no assessment of the disadvantage faced by veterans who sacrifice their military compensation in means tests for benefits such as Pension Credit. We urge the Government to ensure all military compensation is disregarded in full across all means tests for statutory support.

## **Governance and data collection**

We were pleased to welcome the appointment of the first Welsh, and the new Scottish Veterans Commissioner and look forward to working with them. RBL has also been pleased to engage with the MoD and OVA in the review of Governance structures which support the delivery of the Covenant. Accountability and transparency for the Armed Forces community should drive changes. The Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board is an effective forum for engagement, and we note that it has not met for the past year. It is important that senior ministerial engagement with the Covenant continues to ensure delivery of the Covenant across all Government departments.

The approach taken in this year's annual report is based on data comparison between the Armed Forces and civilian communities. RBL has long called for better data collection around the Covenant, the need for which is demonstrated in the education and housing sections of the report. To be certain of Service children's educational outcomes, better data and tracking of the Service child through their education journey would be valuable. Regarding housing, the report contains little information on veterans and their families which makes it difficult to develop an action plan to support homeless veterans. As with all areas of government, good clear data and metrics are vital to identifying where support for the Armed Forces community is working and where it is not. We hope that the publication of data in the Census as a result of the inclusion of a question on veterans will help facilitate more extensive and meaningful data analysis.

## **Health and access to healthcare**

The report highlights many of the valuable initiatives within the NHS which support the Armed Forces community such as Op Courage which aims to provide a complete mental health pathway for service leavers, reservists and veterans. However, key information is omitted: serving families access to NHS services; and access to social care. It is understood that families' access to NHS Services will be addressed through the families' strategy but we note that anecdotally the access to dental care is an issue we are consistently asked to address by the community. Access to affordable, high quality social care also strongly impacts the Armed Forces community. It is disappointing that this has received no mention in the report.

The delays in the delivery of Programme CORTISONE are concerning. The inability to transfer Service medical records to the NHS creates unnecessary distress and delay in the continuity of care at an important time in serving personnel's transition to civilian life. RBL looks forward to the deadlines set being adhered to over the next year to progress delivery of this programme.



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We welcome the inclusion within the Report of a distinct section on suicide and note with concern the rise in suicide amongst female veterans. RBL strongly supports the review of options to support veterans and their families affected by suicide and we look forward to additional strategies for suicide reduction being included in future Reports.

## **The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)**

RBL is pleased to see that the Quinquennial Review of AFCS is underway. We have been concerned by over two years of delay to the start of the Review and we look forward to its recommendations and a clear framework for action. The development of an online claim service for AFCS will simplify the application process, but the same service standard should be available to those with low digital literacy.

## **Housing**

RBL welcomes the investment in improving Service Family Accommodation (SFA) over the past year. However RBL's beneficiaries report ongoing concerns about the standard of their SFA particularly the maintenance of their accommodation. As more serving families move into non-military housing, it is important that robust support is provided to ensure they have access to 'decent homes' standard housing options.

## **Observations from the Independent Veterans Advisor**

I welcome the progress made on delivering the Armed Forces Covenant over the past 12 months. I would focus my observations into 3 key areas: first is the role of Veterans UK in supporting the Armed Forces Veteran population. Veterans UK has a touchpoint with every veteran of the UK Armed Forces and their role and performance is central to the Government realising its bold vision to make the UK the best country in the world to be a veteran. Presently, Veterans UK is under-resourced by the MOD, has antiquated IT systems, has a role that is extraordinarily diverse and overly complex, operates within governance arrangements that have not been reviewed since the creation of the OVA in the Cabinet Office and the establishment of the Minister for Veterans role. In particular, their administration of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme has been particularly criticised by veterans and others and requires substantial change, including greater transparency of decision making and a review of the processes, procedures and rules that it is administered within. This Covenant Report fails to recognise these challenges and failings sufficiently. A review is required of Veterans UK's role and governance arrangements and the processes procedures and policies for the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and the allocation of £40m for digitisation must be protected from savings or the situation will simply deteriorate further. This should be a matter of close Ministerial interest.

The second issue I highlight is the recognition and support available to veterans who reside in Northern Ireland, who are unable to access veterans specific services, remain justifiably concerned about their security and, therefore, their ability to declare their veteran status. They hold a strong sense of being 'forgotten' by the UK Government with the principles and benefits of the Armed Forces Covenant not reaching them and, therefore, placing them at a clear disadvantage to their veteran peers who reside in the rest of the UK. There are also some

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stark comparisons to be made with the focus of successive governments on inquiries into historic incidents and their high associated costs and the level of investment made in supporting the veterans who served the nation during the hostilities. There is much to do to address these issues and while Northern Ireland politics makes this complicated, it must nonetheless, be done.

The third area I will highlight is transition. The Career Transition Partnership contract is being relet and provides a great opportunity to continue to improve the support provided to those leaving the services. It is an opportunity that must not be missed and must not be constrained by any predisposition to maintain the status quo with marginal improvements. In particular, the Defence Transition Service (DTS) which was created to support those who had the highest transition support needs, has been very well received but remains considerably under-resourced. The DTS is a success story, is being used because it works but is being overwhelmed because it lacks resource (and always has). The MOD must invest in it, build on its success and resist the temptation to resort to a 'review' that will simply delay decision making.

There have been considerable improvements made over a number of years to the support available to the Armed Forces community and areas of disadvantage have reduced accordingly. As we enter a period of economic uncertainty and pressure on departmental budgets, we must ensure that we continue to build on that work.

## **Observations from the Independent Advisers to the implementation of the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy**

We were delighted to be invited to act as Independent Advisers to the implementation of the Government's Armed Forces Families Strategy. Our role is to provide independent external scrutiny of progress with the implementation of the strategy. To this end, we: attend meetings of the Armed Forces Families Steering Group (AFFSG), which are held four times a year, to learn about progress and offer support; provide observations, suggestions and, where appropriate, direct challenge to the Head and Deputy Head of the AFFS Defence People Team; offer comments for insertion into the biannual report to the Defence Secretary; and provide an independent view on progress in the Covenant Annual Report. We took up our role as Independent Advisers to the implementation of the strategy in August 2022 and attended our first meeting of the AFFSG in September.

The Armed Forces ten year Families Strategy is both very ambitious and very important. It takes account of the evidence provided by Armed Forces personnel and their families about the challenges they face in combining family life with the demands of military life, and provides a comprehensive response to a wide range of issues. We have reviewed the initial action plans drawn up by the eight work streams, each focusing on an aspect of life within the Armed Forces which has a direct impact on families. These plans highlight the significant breadth of the policy areas to be covered within the strategy and the range of activities to be undertaken within each work stream to meet the ambitions of the strategy as a whole.

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Our initial observations are that in the relatively short time since the Families Strategy was launched early in 2022, a considerable amount of positive work has been undertaken and initiatives launched to meet some of the immediate goals. There is evidence that some progress has been made in all the work streams. Many of the early initiatives have taken account of the need to support, value and recognise the contributions and sacrifices made by Armed Forces families, and this is to be welcomed.

While some of the work is internal to the MOD, several work streams depend on the contributions and support of other government departments and the devolved administrations, as well as third sector providers. It is essential that there is commitment to and ownership of the Armed Forces Families Strategy at all levels within government and beyond if the objectives of the various action plans and the strategy as a whole are to be achieved in a timely manner.

We are currently reviewing the detail of comprehensive action plans that have been finessed over the autumn, and assisting with the development of Key Performance Indicators. These are essential to allow progress with the strategy to be tracked and reviewed regularly, and to hold to account those responsible for implementing it.

As the implementation proceeds we look forward to working with all those determined to ensure that Armed Forces personnel and their families are appropriately supported and that their vital contribution to the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces is acknowledged and valued.

Emeritus Professor Janet Walker OBE and Dr Gabriela Misca

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# Chapter 1: Governance

## Governance across the UK

The MOD and the OVA have jointly reviewed the governance structure of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Veterans' Strategy, as per the commitment in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-24). The review engaged Service charities, UK Government departments and Devolved Administrations to identify a more strategic and streamlined structure to better enable the Government and Devolved Administrations to support the Armed Forces and veteran community. Ministers' decision on a proposed revised structure will be taken forward in the next reporting period, and will continue to focus ministerial attention on the support for the Armed Forces community across the UK, on a set of agreed priorities.

The OVA has established a working group with Devolved Administration colleagues, which meets quarterly to discuss UK-wide commitments, and to share best practice. The Veterans' Advisory Board has also been reviewed, with a revised membership being appointed to capture independent voices representing different parts of the veteran community. Finally, a Veterans' Academic Advisory Board has been established, consisting of 11 subject matter experts from across the UK in areas including health and wellbeing, employment, finance, the criminal justice system, and historical veteran perceptions.

## Governance in Scotland

The Scottish Government continues to be an active member of the Armed Forces Covenant's governance structure and has been engaged with the MOD and others this year in the structure's ongoing review.

The Scottish Government publishes its own [annual update](#) to the Scottish Parliament on support for the Armed Forces and veteran community in Scotland. This is delivered by the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans, Keith Brown MSP.

## Scottish Veterans' Commissioner

The Scottish Government continues to fund the Scottish Veterans Commissioner role and team. During 2022, a new Commissioner was recruited, with the Cabinet Secretary appointing Susie Hamilton, who started in August. The Scottish Government continues to prioritise the delivery of the outstanding Commissioner recommendations, including those made by the

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previous Commissioner in his series of transition-focused papers, and the Scottish Government again contributed to and welcomed the Commissioner's 2022 progress report.

## **Governance in Wales**

The Welsh Government publishes its own [annual report](#) on Covenant activity in Wales.

### **Armed Forces Expert Group**

The Welsh Government's Deputy Minister for Social Partnership chaired the Armed Forces Expert Group in March and October 2022. All members were given an opportunity to participate and provide their views on items such as the UK Government's Armed Forces Families Strategy and the Veterans Scoping Exercise.

### **Welsh Veterans' Commissioner**

In the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-24), a commitment was made to appoint a Welsh Veterans' Commissioner by the end of 2022, to ensure that the particular needs and contributions of veterans in Wales are fully represented. The primary strategic objective of the Veterans' Commissioner for Wales is to improve outcomes for veterans, their families and Armed Forces families across Wales, building on the significant work already undertaken by the UK Government and in the Welsh Government's devolved responsibilities.

On 1 March 2022, the then Secretary of State for Wales and Minister for Defence People and Veterans jointly appointed Colonel James Phillips (Retd.) as the Veterans' Commissioner for Wales, following consultation with the Welsh Government. The new Welsh Veterans Commissioner will build on the success of counterpart roles in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and his appointment means that all devolved nations now have a Veterans' Commissioner. He will work to enhance the support for veterans in Wales and scrutinise and advise on government policy for veterans in Wales.

The Welsh Government has established good links with Commissioner Phillips. The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership has met the Commissioner to discuss collaborative working, and the Commissioner will be meeting with policy officials across the Welsh Government to discuss issues of relevance to the veteran community. The Commissioner has met UK Government ministers, and was also invited to address the Armed Forces Expert Group, attended by key charities, the Services and public sector bodies.

## **Governance in Northern Ireland**

Given Northern Ireland's unique context, bespoke arrangements for the delivery of Covenant, Armed Forces and veterans' issues remain in place.

The headquarters of the Army's 38 (Irish) Brigade oversees the needs of Service personnel and their families, offering support with MOD-provided facilities, particular remuneration packages and arrangements at a local level with school and health providers.

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The Reserve Forces and Cadets Association for Northern Ireland maintains oversight of broader Covenant delivery. This is achieved through:

- the Veterans Support Office, which builds capacity and co-ordinates the delivery of welfare to veterans across Northern Ireland;
- the Defence Relationship Management team, which engages with businesses in Northern Ireland in support of reservists, veterans and the wider Armed Forces community;
- the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association engagement team, which works closely with the single Services to facilitate engagement with civil society.

The elected Armed Forces Champions from Northern Ireland's local authorities and Health and Social Care Trusts are also important for the wider delivery of the Covenant. A programme of activity is being rolled out this autumn to increase the visibility and activity of the Veterans Champions embedded in all 11 Northern Ireland local authorities. This programme will be aimed particularly at hard-to-reach veterans who are not currently accessing available services.

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner continues to engage extensively with veterans and veteran support organisations and charities across Northern Ireland. As part of this outreach, the Commissioner's office has undertaken to host seven Veteran Information Roadshows in 2022, covering each county in Northern Ireland and Belfast. These roadshows have been met with a very positive response from the veteran community, and it is evident that they have provided veterans and their families with the necessary information about where they can access help and support when it is needed. Over 30 support organisations and charities have attended the roadshows, thus establishing good working relationships and networks.

Health (both mental and physical) support is probably the key issue that veterans raise with the NI Veterans Commissioner. As such, work is continuing to progress support for veterans around mental and physical health, and to ensure that funding for Service charities is sustainable and that it targets the right needs, at the right time. In order to assist in this important area, the Commissioner's office has recently launched a veterans' health questionnaire, that will run from November 2022 to January 2023, with the objective of obtaining accurate and detailed information on veterans' healthcare needs across Northern Ireland.

Addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past is an area that continues to take up a lot of the NI Veterans Commissioner's time, and he is committed to helping bring about a system that is fair, balanced and proportionate and that will command the support of the majority of veterans. Engagement on this sensitive issue continues at both the political and veteran level, and has intensified since the introduction of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill in May 2022.

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# Chapter 2: Health and healthcare

## Introduction

Looking after the health needs of Service personnel, family members, the bereaved and veterans – especially where military service has caused or exacerbated those needs – is one of the first priorities of the Government when it comes to the wellbeing of the Armed Forces community. The MOD provides some healthcare services to Service personnel, while the NHS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland provide services to family members, veterans and the bereaved, depending on their location. The MOD, the OVA, the Department for Health and Social Care, the relevant bodies of the NHS, and the Devolved Administrations all continue to work closely together to ensure needs are met and services are improved.

This chapter sets out the work that has been undertaken to meet these needs by the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations during the reporting period.

## The Armed Forces

### Healthcare services for the Armed Forces

The MOD conducts an [annual survey of Armed Forces personnel](#), which includes the question, ‘If you have received Service-provided medical treatment (including mental healthcare) in the last 2 years, how satisfied were you with: The medical treatment.’ This satisfaction rate has normally been in the range 76-80% since the question was first asked in 2015, though this decreased to 72% in 2022.

NatCen Social Research’s [British Social Attitudes Survey](#) asks the general public about their satisfaction with the NHS, with the question, ‘All in all, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays?’. Since the question was first asked in 1983, the overall satisfaction rate has normally been in the range 35-65%, and was 36% in 2021 (the most recent report).

While we therefore currently assess there has been no disadvantage for the Armed Forces compared to wider society in satisfaction with the healthcare services provided, healthcare provision for both has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Work to further improve the healthcare services provided to the Armed Forces has included the following:



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- *Programme CORTISONE*

Programme CORTISONE is the digital enabler for wider Defence Medical Services transformation. The Cabinet Office has approved £220 million of funding for the Programme to deliver an up-to-date medical information system that will help modernise future healthcare and medical services across the Armed Forces.

The rapid delivery of the MyHEALTH app has been a major success for the Programme. Developed as part of the MySERIES applications on the Defence Gateway, this initiative was completed to time and budget, and marked the first of the many patient-facing benefits from CORTISONE. This innovative approach has been well received by the end user community, particularly as it has made health information in respect to individual Service personnel more readily available on personal mobile devices. It provides access to vaccination data, fit for duty information, and deployability, as well as Medical Centre contact details and options to either call direct or to use eConsult to book an appointment online. This in turn has further reduced the burden on health administrators, and encouraged patients to feel more empowered to take control of their own health and fitness for role.

The programme will ultimately link MOD medical information services with the NHS services in all four home nations of the UK. This means that Service personnel will be able to have their medical records made available to NHS clinicians in case of injury or illness, wherever they are in the UK. It will also allow the seamless transition of medical histories to GPs at the end of someone's time in service, facilitating greater continuity of healthcare for veterans, particularly those who are wounded, injured or sick.

The programme has delivered a live connection to the NHS, which has been used successfully to transfer COVID-19 vaccination statuses for Service personnel. The next stage will be the roll-out of the primary medical care solution to pilot sites, as well as development of pre-hospital emergency care and deployed hospital care solutions for use on military operations overseas.

### **Wait times for cancer treatment**

UK Armed Forces personnel requiring treatment for cancer receive care through the NHS. The assessed wait times in England for cancer treatment have increased across the four measures since 2019/20 (Annex A, Table 13), mainly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For three of the four measures, in 2021/22, the proportion of Armed Forces personnel meeting the target waiting time was similar to the proportion of the general population in England. On one of the measures (two-week wait for symptomatic breast cancer patients), a lower proportion of Armed Forces personnel received treatment within the target time (48.8%) than the general population in England (64.0%), although this is based on a small population size (164 Service personnel requiring treatment). Work is ongoing to investigate the cause of this difference.

For both England as a whole and the Armed Forces as a specific cohort, almost all measures were below target. Cancer services are a priority in the restoration of NHS services in England.



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To support elective recovery, the Government plans to spend more than £8 billion from 2022/23 to 2024/25, in addition to the £2 billion Elective Recovery Fund and £700 million Targeted Investment Fund already made available last financial year (2021/22), to help drive up and protect elective activity.

## Health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces

### Health and wellbeing strategy

The [Defence People Health and Wellbeing Strategy - 2022 to 2027](#) was published in June 2022. It sets out the vision for all Defence People to be in a state of positive physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. It outlines how strategic progress will be demonstrated through improvement in the Defence subjective wellbeing metrics and objective employability trend data.

### Mental health

The MOD publishes [annual statistics on mental health in the UK Armed Forces](#). The most recent report (for 2021/22, page 4) found that, 'The overall rate of mental health in the UK Armed Forces was broadly comparable to that seen in the UK general population... The rate for those needing specialist mental health treatment was lower in the UK armed forces than that seen in the UK general population... Personnel from all age groups accessed military mental healthcare and females sought help more than males, as seen in the UK general population.' We therefore currently assess that mental health rates among serving personnel are broadly the same, or better, than in the UK general population. We are, however, continuing work to improve the mental health of Armed Forces personnel through the following initiatives:

- *Annual Mental Fitness Briefing*

The MOD has introduced the Annual Mental Fitness Briefing for all serving personnel, starting this year, which complements the through-career mental health and resilience management training programmes run by each of the single Services. A 24-hour mental health helpline is funded by the MOD and currently delivered by Combat Stress. It provides emotional support, a listening ear, and a signposting service. The MOD also funds safe, 24-hour staffed, digital forums where advice is given to improve mental health and wellbeing. This charitable support includes bespoke workplace training and guidance on how to talk to and assist colleagues struggling to cope with mental ill-health, including suicide prevention support.

- *New care pathway for common mental health disorders*

The MOD's Defence Medical Services has introduced a new care pathway for Armed Forces personnel with common mental health disorders to enhance the care provided by MOD GPs, in line with national best practice. (This change was first introduced in March 2019.) MOD accelerated the roll out of remote ways of working by introducing digital triage, eConsult, and remote video consultation using the AttendAnywhere platform to maintain access to mental health services during COVID-19. Patients can now access specialist mental health services across the UK using secure remote video consultation.

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## Servicewomen's health

The MOD's Servicewomen's Health Improvement Team (SHIFT) worked on an eight-month sprint from January to August 2022. This sprint was formed to address issues raised in the [Protecting those who protect us: Women in the Armed Forces: From Recruitment to Civilian Life](#) report.

SHIFT released the Tri-Service Menopause Policy in July 2022. This was developed to support Service personnel through their menopause, recognising the challenges that the operational environment has for Service personnel who experience menopausal symptoms, providing a solid framework that will support personnel to continue to deliver high levels of operational effectiveness, while raising awareness about the menopause across the Armed Forces. The Breastfeeding Policy was released in August 2022, supporting personnel who choose to breastfeed upon their return to work. Both policies also provide the chain of command and line managers with tools to effectively manage and support staff.

August 2022 also saw the procurement of new products to support health needs. The first product was the Urinary Support Device. Female urination management in austere conditions can be challenging, and research found that this often led to personnel purposefully dehydrating, which is known to affect performance and cause other subsequent health issues. In June 2021, sanitary and hygiene products were launched to support personnel to manage their menstruation while working in austere locations. This provision has been reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of our people, and it must now be provided in units to support those who experience an unexpected menstrual bleed when undertaking land-, sea- and air-based deployments and exercises, including phase 1 training.

A [Servicewomen's Health Handbook](#) was created for all Service personnel, regardless of sex. It is for servicewomen who are directly affected by female-specific health issues, for commanders and line managers who have a responsibility to enable their people to be their best, and for colleagues to better understand and provide support. The handbook's purpose is to improve understanding, assist with personal management, and normalise conversations regarding female-specific health issues.

## Service families

### Healthcare services for Service families

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Service families sometimes find it harder than the general population to access NHS services, due to a requirement to regularly re-locate around the country with the serving person. We are looking into whether there are suitable metrics by which to measure this.

For example, the [annual survey of Armed Forces families](#) asks Service families if they have been able to access dental treatment in the last 12 months, to which 57% answered yes in 2022. In NHS England's 2022 [Summary of the Dental Results from the GP Patient Survey](#), about 40% of GP patients in England were successful in getting an NHS dental appointment in the last two years (page 2). Of those Service families who required dental treatment in the last

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12 months, 66% were able to access it, while in NHS England's survey, 73% of GP patients in England who tried to get a dental appointment in the last two years were successful (page 4). We recognise that there are challenges in accessing NHS dental care nationally, which impacts both Service families and the wider civilian population. Work is ongoing to support NHS dentistry and patients in areas where they continue to struggle with access.

## Health and wellbeing of Service families

The MOD's 2022 [annual survey of Armed Forces families](#) reported that, 'The proportion of UK females scoring aspects of their wellbeing as 'very high' (a score of 9-10) ranges between 27-37%. These are considerably higher than corresponding results for female Service spouses (12-22%)' (page 11).

We therefore currently assess that female Service spouses are less likely to score their well-being 'very high' than females in the whole population. However, this may be caused, wholly or partially, by the demographic difference between the Armed Forces and the general population; 'National figures include a larger proportion of over 60s, who generally score their well-being higher than younger people' (page 11).

An update on the work being conducted to improve healthcare services for Service families, and the health and wellbeing of Service families, is provided in the 'Workstream 8: Health and Wellbeing' section of chapter 6.

## Veterans

### Healthcare services for veterans

Work to improve healthcare services provided to veterans has included the following:

- *Veteran Trauma Network*

The Veteran Trauma Network is a collection of 18 NHS veteran trauma centres and NHS specialist units, each with military and civilian medical experts. It provides an equivalent to Op COURAGE for veterans with Service-related physical healthcare problems. A multi-disciplinary team works to develop a holistic care package to ensure that all the needs of the individual and their family are addressed. The Veteran Trauma Network has received over 360 referrals (up to 30 September 2022), with a rapidly increasing number of referrals in the last six months (Annex A, Table 29).

- *Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA)*

The VCHA is an accreditation process for providers of NHS commissioned services. It aims to improve the care the Armed Forces community receives from the NHS, as well as raise standards across the NHS for all. 'Veteran-aware' Trusts showcase high-quality veterans' healthcare and demonstrate their commitment to the Covenant by meeting a set of agreed standards. 124 out of 211 Trusts (59%) have been accredited as 'veteran-aware', which includes acute hospitals, ambulance services, mental health and community trusts.

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Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), which provides NHS services to North Wales, as part of working toward gaining ‘veteran-aware’ accreditation from the VCHA, has developed the Poppy Programme. This will capture the Armed Forces status of patients who are admitted to acute hospital settings, allowing practitioners to review them holistically and make appropriate onward referrals to external veteran support organisations and Service charities. BCUHB has also appointed dedicated Clinical and Operational Leads across the three acute hospital sites to progress veteran support services. BCUHB plans to have all three Integrated Health Communities accredited as ‘veteran-aware’ by November 2023, and plans to support HMP Berwyn and North Wales Care Homes and Hospices to achieve VCHA accreditation by 2024.

- *‘Veteran-friendly’ GP accreditation*

In partnership with the Royal College of General Practitioners, NHS England continues to roll out the Armed Forces ‘veteran-friendly’ GP practice accreditation scheme across England. The scheme, which began in England in 2019, helps family doctors and their staff to better identify and treat veterans and other members of the Armed Forces community. By the end of the reporting period, 1,578 out of 6,549 GP surgeries (24%) had been accredited as ‘veteran-friendly’ (up from 1,050 in September 2021). 58% of Primary Care Networks have at least one veteran aware GP practice in their area.

- *GP training and licensing*

To build the next generation of NHS GPs’ competence in managing veterans’ health issues, Defence Medical Services secured inclusion of veterans’ health in the UK GP training curriculum and national GP licensing assessment. This is live in England and Scotland, and roll-out in Wales is under discussion.

- *Female veterans*

NHS England has established the Serving and Ex-Serving Women’s Health Improvement Group (SESWHIG), which comprises members from the Department of Health and Social Care, MOD, OVA, NHS and Armed Forces charities. The SESWHIG programme has a number of areas of focus to drive improvements for female Service personnel and veterans, which build on the ‘We Also Served’ report. As part of this, NHS England has commissioned work to understand the needs of female veterans in the criminal justice system, and as part of a joint research programme with Defence Medical Services plans to develop consensus statements on other areas of health need identified in the report.

In July 2022, the Government published England’s first Women’s Health Strategy. The strategy recognises that female members of the Armed Forces community – those that currently serve or those that have served – can face a unique set of challenges accessing healthcare that are separate from their male counterparts. Many of the ambitions set out in the Strategy will benefit all women across England including female veterans, but there are also ambitions to tackle disparities in access to services that some women face and to ensure health and care professionals feel able to handle the complexity of needs that specific groups of women may face. Criteria for the Veterans’ Health Innovation Fund (see

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below) in 2022 considered initiatives to help identify and/or provide solutions to disparities in female veterans' health and care.

- *Supporting Armed Forces in Acute Hospital Settings programme*

In 2021, NHS England and the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund jointly funded the [Supporting Armed Forces in Acute Hospital Settings programme](#). The programme is designed to provide support for increased staff awareness and increased support to veterans receiving inpatient care in NHS acute hospital settings, and builds on existing partnerships and programmes in the NHS in England.

- *Veterans' Health Innovation Fund and other OVA research initiatives*

A £5 million Veterans' Health Innovation Fund was launched in July 2022. The funding will support organisations looking to research and trial cutting-edge technology which could help veterans with complex healthcare needs. Organisations across the UK were able to bid for £2.7 million of the fund under four themes: digital, data and technology; surgical technology, bioengineering and rehabilitation with blast injuries; public health, pain management, hearing loss and visual impairment; and female veterans. For the other £2.3 million, the OVA invited select organisations to apply for funding across a broad range of veterans' health issues.

The OVA hosted its first research summit in February 2022 to better understand the longer-term impacts of the Afghanistan withdrawal on veterans and their families. It also pledged over £1.2 million over two years to a long-term health study by the King's Centre for Military Health Research.

- *Direct skeletal fixation*

Direct skeletal fixation surgery involves the insertion of a titanium implant into the bone, eliminating the need for traditional socket-based prosthetic technology. As the prosthetic is anchored directly to the bone, it offers greater freedom from the limitations and complications commonly associated with socket-based prosthetic systems. For clinically appropriate patients, it has the potential to give long term health benefits and reduced dependency, but requires the patient to have key skeletal and clinical conditions for applicability.

Due to the impacts of the national COVID-19 response, the LIBOR-funded review of clinical evidence for direct skeletal fixation as a treatment option for transfemoral amputation was suspended. As soon as NHS surgical capacity allowed, the pilot restarted with support from OVA, the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, Birmingham, and the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Stanford Hall. Surgeries on the remaining cohort commenced in early 2022.

- *Supporting amputee veterans in Wales*

The Covenant principle of 'special consideration' is applied in Wales for veterans with limb loss as a result of Service. This is delivered via the Veterans Prosthetics Policy. In 2021/22,

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a total of £258,559 was allocated to provide veterans with Service-attributable injuries with the prosthetics they require. There were 38 veterans with Service-attributable injuries registered across the three artificial limb centres in Wales in Wrexham, Cardiff and Swansea.

- *Unforgotten Forces consortium in Scotland*

The Scottish Government continues to fund the Unforgotten Forces consortium, a partnership of 16 civilian and ex-service charitable organisations with the purpose of delivering a wide array of services to veterans in Scotland. The Scottish Government has contributed £250,000 per year from 2020/21 until 2022/23 (for a total of £750,000) to support their work in improving the health, wellbeing and quality of life for older veterans in Scotland. In May 2022, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans spoke at the spring gathering of the consortium to thank them for their hard work and to give an overview of the Scottish Government's priorities for older veterans.

## **Health and wellbeing of veterans**

### **Mental health**

Work to support veterans' mental health has included the following:

- *Op COURAGE: The Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Service*

Op COURAGE continues to bring together all three veterans' mental health services – the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), the Complex Treatment Service (CTS), and the High Intensity Service. Together, these services provide a complete mental health care pathway for Service leavers, reservists and veterans, with service users benefitting from personalised care plans to ensure that they can access support and treatment. To date, across its three services, Op COURAGE has received over 24,000 referrals. In 2022, NHS England provided £22 million for veteran-specific mental health services, which was an increase from £16.5 million in 2021. Following the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, an additional £2.7 million was pledged to expand Op COURAGE services to support those experiencing complex mental and/or physical trauma or alcohol and substance misuse.

- *Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service*

NHS England commissioned the Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service, which launched as part of a phased roll-out from October 2020. By March 2022 the service was fully operational across England. The High Intensity Service comprises seven regional 'pathfinders' that are testing support models for veterans accessing crisis care or therapeutic inpatient support. It is also co-ordinating care across organisations, and supporting family members and carers where appropriate. To date, the High Intensity Service has received approximately 1,500 referrals. The pathfinders will run until the end of March 2023, and their learning and insight will inform the Integrated Service which will be in place by April 2023.



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- *Veterans NHS Wales*

Veterans NHS Wales (VNHSW) is a specialised priority service for those who have served in the Armed Forces and are experiencing mental health difficulties related to that service. The Welsh Government provided VNHSW with £920,000 to deliver mental health treatment to veterans across Wales. This has allowed VNHSW to create Highly Specialist Veterans Clinical Lead posts in the service and maintain the provision of therapy across Wales.

In collaboration with the Welsh Government and the prison health care estate, VNHSW is piloting an integrated care pathway for veterans with Service-related mental health problems who are currently detained in a Welsh prison. The pathway will be reviewed in 2023. In essence this will allow health care staff to have a consultation with VNHSW staff regarding suitability before a referral to VNHSW. Veterans in prisons will be offered an assessment by video conference call with a VNHSW therapist in the health board they are returning to upon release. Once released into the community the veteran will be able to commence therapy or will start once they come to the top of the health board's waiting list. If the veteran is still serving their sentence in prison, they will be offered remote therapy in prison.

- *Veteran Mental Health & Wellbeing Action Plan in Scotland*

The Veteran Mental Health & Wellbeing Action Plan was published in December 2021. It identified three core principles for future services: equal access to service; clear and timely pathways to correct help; and improved support to providers. At the debate held in the Scottish Parliament on 1 March 2022, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans and the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care agreed these core principles. The Scottish Government has now established an implementation board for the Plan, chaired by Dr Charles Winstanley. The board will report to the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care on a quarterly basis.

The Action Plan identified the need to establish systems and structures that deliver on the core principles across Scotland. These will provide consistency of service quality, effective communication, and clear data on needs and trends. Progress to date is as follows: discussions are taking place with each NHS Health Board to identify need and potential local contribution to the new service; the post of 'Navigator' in each Health Board is being developed, which will be able to triage veterans to the appropriate service; See Me is developing a campaign to address the barriers veterans have in accessing mental health help; and a name and a brand identity for the new service is in development.

Funding for Combat Stress is continuing in 2022/23 to deliver veteran mental health services across Scotland. Combat Stress has successfully opened new premises in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Additionally, funding for the six Veteran First Point (V1P) centres is continuing in 2022/23, and the local Health Boards have agreed to match fund this award. Both Combat Stress and V1P will play an important role in the implementation of the Veteran Mental Health & Wellbeing Action Plan.

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- *Veterans Places, Pathways and People Programme in Northern Ireland*

Across Northern Ireland, the £800,000 [Veterans' Places, Pathways and People programme](#) is overseeing a major programme of complex mental health support, supported by guided pathways of peer support services and volunteer training, to ensure a wrap-around service of mental health support for all NI-based veterans.

- *Mental health forum in Northern Ireland*

A mental health forum, co-chaired by the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association Northern Ireland, brings together all NI's specialist mental health providers with a view to improving the targeting of mental health support. This has led to a campaign, with leaflets bespoke to each local authority area, to ensure that veterans know who is best to approach for help. In the last year, links have been established with all the mental health-related groups overseen by regimental associations and other community groups. Initial anecdotal evidence suggests that, as a result, more individuals who have struggled on their own are being identified and helped, and individuals with specific, usually complex conditions, are being sign-posted to more effective support.

## **Loneliness**

A National Assembly for Wales' Health, Social Care and Sport Committee [inquiry into loneliness and isolation](#) previously highlighted veterans as an at-risk group for loneliness and social isolation. In 2018, a [Royal British Legion report](#) found that one in four of research respondents indicated they feel lonely and socially isolated 'always' or 'often', with almost 70% agreeing that loneliness and social isolation are issues in the Armed Forces community.

Work to alleviate the loneliness of veterans has included the following:

- Measures on loneliness and social isolation will be included in the OVA's survey of veterans and their families, which will have been launched by the time this report is published, and which is the first of its kind. It will look to understand veterans' life experiences, as well as their view of the services available to them.
- This year, the Welsh Government delivered a small grants scheme to support the delivery of the veterans scoping exercise, to support families and to engage with previously under-represented groups of veterans. Through this grant scheme, support groups and hubs have received targeted funding to deliver activities and support that is helping veterans socialise and engage with one another and access any support they may need.

## **The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme**

The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) compensates for any injury, illness or death which was caused by Service on or after 6 April 2005.



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The Independent Medical Expert Group (an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the MOD, that advises on medical and scientific aspects of the AFCS) published its sixth report. This report includes the following topics: an audit of mental health awards; suicide; non-freezing cold injury; mild traumatic brain injury; COVID-19; and nuclear test veterans.

The Quinquennial Review of the AFCS is underway. This will consider to what extent the AFCS remains fit for purpose and consistent with wider best practice in providing appropriate recognition and financial support to those members of the Armed Forces who are injured, become ill, or die as a result of service, and provide an opportunity for policy improvements.

The Veterans UK team continues to make good progress on developing a new online claim service for those seeking compensation from the Armed Forces Compensation and War Pension schemes. The service is now available to all Service personnel and veterans on a 'volunteer' basis for those happy to help with user testing, and so far over 1,100 claims have been received via the service, with an overall satisfaction rate of 96%. Work with the Veterans Welfare Service and voluntary organisations is now underway to fully test the 'assisted claims' approach, with claims being taken over the phone or during an 'in the home' welfare visit for those users who need some extra help. A full analytics package is also being developed to monitor the service and how people are using it so we can ensure it continues to meet the needs of users. The team now expects to launch fully on GOV.UK later this year.

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# Chapter 3: Education

## Introduction

Due to the mobility of Service families, Service children can face specific and additional challenges in comparison with their peers throughout their time in education. This chapter sets out the work that has been undertaken during the reporting period to address these challenges through funding, research, guidance and support.

This chapter also addresses the education of Service personnel themselves, which can be key to making a successful transition out of the Armed Forces, such as through the Armed Forces Apprenticeship Programme.

## The Armed Forces

### Armed Forces Apprenticeship Programme

The Armed Forces Apprenticeship Programme offers apprenticeships from Level 2 to degree-level to over 95% of all non-commissioned Service personnel. There are over 90 different apprenticeship programmes on offer with most being completed in the first two years of Service. The apprenticeship underpins a recruit's trade training as well as providing them with an industry-recognised qualification. They are the bedrock on which future careers are developed. MOD is working closely with the Department for Education and the Devolved Administrations to expand the accreditation options currently on offer and to increase opportunities for transferable and recognised qualifications.

### Student finance for non-UK personnel

Following engagement with the Department for Education, non-UK personnel in the Armed Forces who had previously been denied access to funding for higher education courses due to their UK immigration status are now considered to be settled and eligible for funding from the Student Loan Company.

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## Service families

### Educational outcomes for Service children

The Department for Education has provided updated statistics on how Service children and non-Service, non-free school meals (FSM) children<sup>1</sup> in state schools in England perform across key measures of academic attainment. The statistics show that:

- the proportions of Service children gaining grades 9-4, and grades 9-5, in GCSE English and maths, are very similar to the proportions of non-Service, non-FSM children gaining these grades (Annex A, Table 1)
- there remains a small disparity in relation to the English Baccalaureate measure – a slightly smaller proportion of Service children were entered for the qualification, and a slightly lower percentage achieved a grade 4 or higher in all pillars (Annex A, Table 2)
- the average Attainment 8 scores for Service children and non-Service, non-FSM children are also very similar (Annex A, Table 3)

We therefore currently assess that the GCSE attainment of Service children in England is about the same as non-Service, non-FSM children in England.

The proportion of Service children in state-funded schools in England attending a school rated as Outstanding or Good by Ofsted (83.0%), is about the same as non-Service, non-FSM children (85.6%) (Annex A, Table 4). Service children are more likely than non-Service children to move school at times outside of the normal admissions round (Annex A, Table 5).

An update on the work being conducted to improve Service children's education is provided in the 'Workstream 4: Children's Education' section of chapter 6. In addition:

- *Service Pupil Premium*

The Department for Education continues to allocate additional funding in the form of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) to state-funded schools in England with Service children among their pupils. SPP funding helps schools to provide pastoral and academic support to current and former Service children. Schools receive SPP funding for each pupil aged 5 to 16 who is currently recorded as a Service child, who has held this status in the last six years, or who receives a child pension from the MOD. The SPP is now worth £320 per eligible pupil annually, and more than £25.6 million will be paid to schools in the financial year 2022/23, benefitting more than 80,000 pupils. In order to help strengthen school accountability for their use of pupil premium funding, the Department for Education requires schools to complete and publish a template setting out their overall pupil premium strategy. The template includes an optional field on how the SPP was spent in the previous academic year and what impact this had on eligible pupils.

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<sup>1</sup> Service children are compared with non-Service, non-FSM children to ensure that the comparison is fair, in terms of level of family income.

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- *Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme*

The Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme was established in 2011. It gives the children of Service personnel whose death is attributable to Service since 1990 a scholarship to support their post-16 education. In the financial year 2021/22, the scheme paid for 90 students, at a total cost of £800,940.

- *The School Admissions Code*

The [School Admissions Code for England](#) sets out the requirements on admission authorities when allocating school places. The Code includes provisions to ensure that Service families are not disadvantaged by their mobility requirement when applying for school places. It requires publicly funded boarding schools to give second-highest priority for boarding places to the children of Service personnel who qualify for MOD financial assistance with the cost of boarding fees. Admission authorities can also give priority to children eligible for the SPP, and can admit a Service child as an exception to the infant class-size limit, if the child is moving outside the normal admissions round. The Code also requires admission authorities to allocate a school place to a Service child before the family moves to the area, provided the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date. Admission authorities can also use a private address or a unit or quartering address as the child's home address if requested by a parent.

The Department for Education has confirmed that 43 pupils were recorded as meeting exception F to the infant class-size limit (children of UK Service personnel admitted outside the normal admissions round) across 26 schools, as at January 2022. However, of those 26 schools, three did not have class sizes over 30, despite having these pupils recorded as exceptions.

- *Data analysis*

The MOD is currently analysing local authority-level data, to identify target local authority areas where Service children's outcomes appear worse than non-Service, non-FSM children (initially this is focusing on Key Stages 1 and 2 data). From this, the MOD will be able to work with individual authorities and academy trusts to understand apparent gaps in outcomes and identify how Service children can be further supported.

- *Identifying Service pupils in Scotland*

Students from Service families in Scotland are now being identified in the Higher Education Statistics Agency Student return and data will likely be available in 2023. The data on Service children or families will in future enable the Scottish Funding Council and other public bodies to plan and make informed decisions about students from Service families.

- *The Scottish Armed Forces Education Support Group*

The Scottish Armed Forces Education Support Group continues to take a lead in developing and supporting best practice for Armed Forces children and young people in Scotland. The Scottish Government has provided £50,000 to support the continuation of the

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National Transitions Officer (NTO) role. As part of this, the NTO will work with local authorities to gather and collate data on children from Service families in Scotland. This will be used to inform both national and local policy as well as providing a useful dataset for research on these learners. The first report is due at the end of December 2022. Working closely with the Centre for Military Research, Education and Public Engagement at Edinburgh Napier University, the NTO will identify and support relevant research into barriers to learning.

## Destinations for Service children after Key Stages 4 and 5

The Department for Education has provided updated statistics on the destinations of Service children and non-Service, non-FSM children in state-funded schools in England after Key Stages 4 and 5. The statistics show that:

- the proportion of Service children in England going on to any sustained education or employment after Key Stage 4 (95%) is the same as the proportion of non-Service, non-FSM children in England (95%) (Annex A, Table 6)
- the proportion of Service children in England going on to any sustained education or employment after Key Stage 5 (90%) is slightly higher than the proportion of non-Service, non-FSM children in England (88%) (Annex A, Table 7)

We therefore currently assess that Service children in England are at least as likely to continue in sustained education or employment after Key Stages 4 and 5 as non-Service, non-FSM children in England.

## Wellbeing of Service children

Work to improve Service child wellbeing has included the following:

- [SSCE Cymru](#), funded by the Welsh Government, works with schools, children and young people, local authorities, education professionals, Armed Forces families and support organisations to gather their views and experiences, build networks across Wales, and raise awareness and understanding of the experiences of Service children. In 2022/23, the Welsh Government provided £270,000 to support this project. In April 2022, SSCE Cymru launched Armed Forces Friendly Schools (AFFS) Cymru, a status given to schools to recognise their commitment to supporting Service children, as well as their achievements engaging with the Armed Forces community. Mount Street Junior school in Brecon was the first school to achieve AFFS Cymru bronze status. “AFFS Cymru status reaffirms that support, care and guidance in the school is particularly strong in improving / maintaining the mental health and wellbeing of pupils. This status confirms that the ethos and vision of the school is recognised in the community.” – Headteacher.
- Education Scotland, working collaboratively with the Association of Directors of Education Scotland, National Transitions Officer and Forces Children Scotland, developed a [professional learning resource](#). This resource provides information about deployment, mobility, transition and the impacts these can have on children from Armed Forces families.

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## **Non-UK families**

Work is ongoing to address the issue of non-UK families who have spent time overseas on accompanied assignments in the three years prior to the start of a further education or higher education course being charged the higher overseas student fee rate.

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# Chapter 4: Housing and accommodation

## Introduction

Access to decent accommodation underpins the wellbeing of our Armed Forces community and is key to the operational effectiveness of serving personnel. This chapter sets out the work undertaken during the reporting period to improve the accommodation offer to Service personnel and their families, including through further investment in Service Family Accommodation (SFA).

This chapter also looks at the experience of the Armed Forces community in the private accommodation sector, whether in the private or social rented sectors or through home ownership.

## Service accommodation

### Standard of Service Family Accommodation

The MOD publishes [annual Service Family Accommodation statistics](#). The 2022 report found that, '97.3% of UK SFA properties, for which information is available, are assessed as Decent Homes (good condition or requiring minor improvements) or Decent Homes+'. In comparison, the [English Housing Survey 2020 to 2021: headline report](#) found that, in 2020, 21% of privately rented homes (in England) failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard, along with 13% in the social housing sector (paragraph 2.18).

We therefore currently assess that UK Service Family Accommodation is much more likely to meet the Decent Homes Standard than rented homes of the general population in England. All Service families live in accommodation assessed as meeting the Decent Homes Standard (or better), unlike the general renting population in England. Work to further improve the standard of SFA has included the following:

- There were record levels of investment in SFA in financial year 2021/22, with £179 million invested overall, including funds provided as part of the Government's fiscal stimulus programme. This increased investment enabled the full refurbishment of 775 long-term empty properties in areas of high demand. These properties were previously damaged or deemed structurally unsound, but they have been repaired and modernised and are now ready to be allocated to Service families.

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- In total, over 13,000 SFA – approximately one in four homes – received some type of upgrade during the financial year 2021/22, with the aim of giving Service families more modern and energy-efficient places to live. In addition, 100 play areas have been built or upgraded across the UK, providing families with safe, communal places for children to play.
  - A further £176 million of improvement works are planned in 2022/23 which will improve around 9,800 homes, which is about 20% of the total housing stock. 1,600 homes will be provided with new kitchens, 1,200 with new bathrooms, and 379 will benefit from full refurbishment. Additionally, £100 million has been allocated to build brand new homes. This will mean that almost 50% of all SFA in the UK will have received substantial investment over the course of financial years 2021/22 to 2022/23.
  - The MOD also invested in new properties in several areas previously heavily dependent on expensive substitute accommodation. This will improve the quality of accommodation and increase domestic stability for families in those locations. Such capital purchase of new properties will be accelerated in financial year 2022/23, with plans being developed to purchase more than 300 homes.
  - In addition, 121 properties were recently purchased from Bannockburn Homes following the expiry of the Central Scotland Private Finance Initiative, all of which will be retained as core stock, and enabling a number of older houses to be disposed of. A similar approach will be adopted on completion of the remaining five housing Private Finance Initiatives, expiring between 2025 and 2032. This strategy of improving, modernising and purchasing SFA has enabled the MOD to continue to meet its commitment to only allocate properties at Decent Homes Standard or above.

## **Maintenance of Service accommodation**

According to the MOD's 2022 [annual survey of Armed Forces personnel](#), the Armed Forces' satisfaction with responses to requests for maintenance and repair work to their current Service accommodation, and with the quality of maintenance and repair work, both reduced to 30% in 2022, from 35% and from 34%, respectively, in 2021 (page 18).

There is no direct comparison in maintenance services in the civilian sectors to which the Armed Forces community living in Service accommodation can be legitimately compared. Also, consultancy work commissioned by MOD recently concluded that it was not feasible to directly benchmark the maintenance services delivered by Defence to the Armed Forces with services delivered by housing associations to the general population. This is due to the large differences between them, for example in the terms under which their housing is occupied, and in their maintenance responsibilities. However, as stated below, ensuring the highest levels of support continues to be a priority for the new contracts going forward.

Work to improve SFA accommodation services has included the following:

- New accommodation service contracts came into service on 1 April 2022 replacing the National Housing Prime contract. Each contract will last for seven years, with options to extend for up to a further three years, subject to satisfactory performance and other



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considerations. The new suppliers have committed to introducing significant changes to modernise and improve the services provided to Service families. They include:

- a target to fix at least 85% of repairs on the first visit
- an enhanced 'Move In' standard
- enhanced standards of planned and preventative maintenance
- the collection and maintenance of significantly improved data on the condition of individual homes

A key focus of the new contracts is changing the culture of delivery by agreeing a 'Family First' approach with our industry partners, placing the needs of Service families at the heart of what we do. Where delivery problems have emerged, the Family First approach has noticeably shaped the response from our partners. Any change in culture will take time to embed, but feedback from accommodation stakeholders and families has noted that they are already seeing the difference this is making.

## Council Tax rebates

In February 2022, the Government announced that qualifying households in the general population would receive a £150 Council Tax rebate. To ensure that Service personnel are not disadvantaged, the MOD introduced a scheme to mirror this. Service personnel paying a Contribution in Lieu of Council Tax (CILOCT) for Types A – 5 Service Family Accommodation, as at 1 April 2022, qualified as eligible, and about 31,000 Service personnel received a £150 rebate in August 2022.

## Private accommodation

### Home ownership

According to the MOD's 2022 [annual survey of Armed Forces personnel](#) (page 19), 'Just over half (51%) of personnel own their own home, unchanged since 2017'. Also, the 2022 [annual survey of Armed Forces families](#) (page 21), found that 60% of Service families own their own home, and it indirectly compared this to 'the latest [English Housing Survey](#) reports that 65% of households in England were owner occupied in 2020-2021'.

We therefore currently assess that Service families are slightly less likely to own their own home than households in the whole population in England. However, this may be caused, wholly or partially, by the demographic difference between the Armed Forces and the general population; Service personnel are younger, on average, than the general population, and younger people are less likely to own their own home. It should also be noted that there are differences in the home ownership rates for Royal Navy, Army, and RAF personnel, and between Officers and Other Ranks. More information is provided in the above surveys. Work to assist members of the Armed Forces community own their own home has included the following:

- The [Forces Help to Buy Scheme](#) is a scheme to help Armed Forces personnel get on the property ladder. Introduced in 2014, it enables Service personnel to borrow up to 50% of

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their annual salary (up to a maximum of £25,000) to purchase their first property. In certain circumstances, the scheme may also be used by Service personnel to move to another property, either because they are assigned elsewhere or because of certain family or medical circumstances. Similarly, where such family or medical circumstances exist, the scheme may also be used to extend or modify a currently owned property. The MOD publishes [Forces Help to Buy Scheme quarterly statistics](#). They reveal that, as of 30 September 2022, loans have been made to around 28,102 Service personnel, totalling over £429 million, an average of approximately £15,290 per claim. The Forces Help to Buy Scheme is currently due to end in December 2022, with work ongoing to make this an enduring policy.

The 2022 [annual survey of Armed Forces personnel](#) (page 19) found that, ‘Since 2015 (the year after the introduction of the Forces Help to Buy Scheme) home ownership amongst Other Ranks has risen from 39% to 44%, largely driven by Army and Royal Marine Other Ranks. There has been no change for Officers over the same period... Awareness of Forces Help to Buy is high, with the majority (83%) of personnel knowing at least a little about it. Nearly one in ten (9%) personnel have used FHTB in the last year. This proportion is similar between Officers and Other Ranks, and the Services.’

- Armed Forces personnel can continue to benefit from the Refund of Legal Expenses (RLE) package that is available to any Service person who sells and buys a property because of a requirement to re-locate for Service reasons. The [Future Accommodation Model](#) is currently piloting a revised accommodation model, as per the Defence Accommodation Strategy vision. One of the four core accommodation types include ‘Maintain Own Home’. The Future Accommodation Model looks to address the issue of affordability by introducing RLE New Buyer. This can be used in conjunction with Forces Help to Buy and is a one-off payment capped at £1500.
- Delivery of the First Homes scheme commenced in 2021, offering homes with a discount of at least 30% to first-time buyers in England. In recognition of the unique nature of their circumstances, members of the Armed Forces, the divorced or separated spouse or civil partner of a member of the Armed Forces, the spouse or civil partner of a deceased member of the Armed Forces (if their death was caused wholly or partly by their Service), or veterans within five years of leaving the Armed Forces, are exempt from any local connection testing restrictions required to be eligible for the First Homes scheme.

## **Experience of the private rental sector**

The [English Housing Survey](#) is a continuous national survey commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. It collects information about people’s housing circumstances and the condition and energy efficiency of housing in England. The sample of addresses is drawn at random from a list of private addresses held by the Royal Mail. It asks, ‘Has anyone in the household served in the UK Armed Forces or in the UK Reserve Forces?’

There is mixed evidence from this survey over recent years as to whether those members of the Armed Forces community that live in privately rented accommodation in England have higher or lower satisfaction with the accommodation, tenure, area and repairs/maintenance, than the general population. For example, the proportion satisfied with the repairs/maintenance

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has been higher than the general population in one of the last three years, but lower in the other two years (Annex A, Table 12). We therefore currently assess there is no evidence that satisfaction levels of the Armed Forces community who live in private rental accommodation in England are any different to the general population.

## Experience of social housing

All full-time Service personnel are offered accommodation by the Armed Forces, so do not normally require social housing. However, if families of Service personnel do not accompany them on their posting, they might remain living in social housing away from the Service person. Reservists might also live with their family in social housing, as might veterans.

There is mixed evidence from the English Housing Survey over recent years as to whether those members of the Armed Forces community that apply for social housing in England wait for more or less time than the general population. For example, the proportion waiting no more than six months has been higher than the general population in three of the last five years, but lower in the other two years. Similarly, the proportion waiting more than five years has been higher than the general population in two of the last four years, and lower in the other two years (Annex A, Table 10). We therefore currently assess there is no evidence that the waiting time for Armed Forces community members who apply for social housing in England is any different to the general population.

For the past three years, members of the Armed Forces community that have been allocated social housing in England have been more likely than the general population to be allocated social housing in an area they have not previously lived. This is likely partially due to the 2012 [regulations](#) and 2020 [statutory guidance](#) that set out criteria under which members of the Armed Forces community in England cannot be disqualified from social housing because of a local connection requirement. Those who are still serving, or who left in the last five years, are less likely than the general population to be allocated social housing in an area they have lived in for more than five years (Annex A, Table 9). We therefore currently assess that those members of the Armed Forces community that are allocated social housing in England are likely to have lived in the local area for less time than the general population that are allocated social housing.

Among those members of the Armed Forces community living in social housing in England, satisfaction with accommodation, tenure, area, and repairs and maintenance have, over the last few years, been consistently higher for the Armed Forces community than the general population (Annex A, Table 11). We therefore currently assess that the Armed Forces community in England is more satisfied with the standard of social housing than the general population.

This data enables the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to monitor the package of measures introduced in 2012 to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community have the same access to social housing as the general population, and are not disadvantaged by the requirement for mobility while in Service. The package includes ensuring that veterans with urgent housing needs and Service personnel with serious illnesses or disabilities are always given appropriate priority for social housing, and that councils do not

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apply a local connection test to disqualify serving personnel and those within five years of having left the Armed Forces.

## Homelessness

As part of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017's 'duty to refer', the Secretary of State for Defence is required to refer members of the regular Armed Forces in England to a local housing authority if the Secretary of State believes that they may be made homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Homelessness statistics for England during the period January to March 2022<sup>2</sup> show that 510 (less than 1%) of the 74,230 households owed a homelessness duty had a support need due to service in the Armed Forces.

In April 2021, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities changed the guidelines for the reporting of quarterly homelessness statistics. Local authorities are now asked to include any support need or life experience, irrespective of whether assistance for it is required. This new approach will capture the characteristics of a homeless applicant more accurately, including whether they previously served in the Armed Forces.

In September 2022, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published the [Ending rough sleeping for good](#) cross-government strategy, which sets out how the Government and its partners will end rough sleeping. This included commitments for veterans to maintain high priority for social housing, waivers for local connection and specialist housing support.

In Scotland, the Veterans Homelessness Prevention Pathway was published on 25 January 2022 and the Scottish Government has accepted all 24 recommendations in principle. Official national homelessness statistics in Scotland, published on 18 August 2022, show that during 2021-22, 639 (out of 28,882) households assessed as homeless had a household member that was formerly a member of the Armed Forces (2% of all households assessed as homeless). These statistics show a decrease of 7% compared to 2020-21 (685 out of 28,042) of households assessed as homeless were formerly in the Armed Forces.

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<sup>2</sup> [Live tables on homelessness](#), Table A3 – Number of households owed a homelessness duty by support needs of household.

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# Chapter 5: Inquests and judicial engagement

## Introduction

This chapter provides an update on the activity of the Defence Inquests Unit (DIU) during the reporting period, and related matters.

## The Defence Inquests Unit

The DIU is the MOD's single point of contact for coroners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit when investigating the causes of the deaths of Service personnel, veterans and MOD civilians. The DIU is responsible for managing MOD's participation in an inquest, which includes:

- ensuring that any relevant material has been provided to coroners or the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit
- providing support and consultation to Service personnel, veterans and MOD civilians who are called to appear as witnesses at inquest
- offering briefings to next of kin to help them better understand the inquest process and the role of the DIU
- ensuring that the MOD meets its obligations to provide the appropriate level of support to coroners, the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit, bereaved families and MOD Service and civilian personnel involved in investigations
- giving practical guidance and advice alongside an established support network of experts who deliver legal, medical and pastoral support – this network includes lawyers, medical and mental health experts, Service chaplaincy, welfare support practitioners and Service charities

The DIU has recorded 68 inquests (13 of which concern the death of a veteran) in which investigations have been concluded, between 1 October 2021 and 30 September 2022.

During the reporting period, the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit has confirmed that it has concluded investigations into the deaths of two serving personnel (one Regular, one Reservist) and three Army veterans. The Coroners Service of Northern Ireland has confirmed the conclusion of one investigation into the death of an Army veteran. These Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit and Coroners Service of Northern Ireland investigations were sufficient to

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understand the causes of death, thus precluding a need to take them forward to either an inquest or a fatal accident inquiry (Scotland's equivalent of an inquest).

Inquests are yet to be held into 72 military, veteran and MOD civilian deaths that have occurred since 1 October 2021. While the backlog of inquests caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is being actioned, considerable pressures do remain on the court system.

## Safety-related fatalities among the Armed Forces

The MOD publishes an [annual safety and environmental protection assurance report](#). This includes a comparison of the safety-related fatality rate for the full-time Armed Forces with other UK industrial sectors. The most recent report (for 2020/21, page 2-3) found that, 'While the rate for the full-time Armed Forces was higher than that in most industries, recent figures indicate that the rate is decreasing and approaching a rate comparable with the construction industry.' We therefore currently assess that when the risk of full-time Armed Forces personnel suffering a safety-related fatality is benchmarked against other industry sectors, it is commensurate to the civilian construction industry in the UK.

The MOD's work to improve safety-related fatality rates, and its work in other health and safety areas, such as reducing work-place injuries, are outlined in the annual safety assurance report. Further health and safety statistics, covering both military and civilian personnel, can be found in the MOD's [annual health and safety statistics report](#).

## Suicide prevention

The MOD publishes [annual statistics on suicides among the regular UK Armed Forces](#). The most recent report (to 31 December 2021, page 1), found that, 'The UK regular Armed Forces have seen a declining trend in male suicide rates since the 1990s and were consistently lower than the UK general population over the last 35 years. However, in the last five years the number of Army male suicides have been increasing and since 2017, the risk of suicide among Army males was the same as the UK general population for the first time since the mid 1990's... Historically, the number of suicides among UK Armed Forces females was low, with on average one death per year in the latest twenty-year period. However, the number of coroner confirmed and suspected suicides among females has risen in the last two years.'

The OVA has been working with the Office for National Statistics to develop a ten-year retrospective study looking at suicides in the veteran community. This analysis will look at the frequency of suicide within the veteran community and how this rate has changed, thereby informing better interventions in future.

Every death by suicide is a tragedy that has wide impact across the Armed Forces community. Suicide is multifactorial and complex, affected by factors beyond an individual's Service.

Work to reduce suicides among the Armed Forces community, and support bereaved families, has included the following:



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- The MOD takes a holistic, multi-agency approach to activities to reduce suicide. Across the Armed Forces there are extensive medical and welfare systems that offer support for those in need, provided by the chain of command, medical staff, welfare support staff, and chaplaincy. Individuals continue to have access to 24/7 support if they need it, provided through a package of online and telephone services.
  - The Defence Suicide Register project continues to mature, with the purpose of supporting decision-making through provision of evidence specific to the serving population. The first time Defence has undertaken such an extensive review, it draws together information from multiple data sources to better understand circumstances related to the death of a serving person. An initial report, using data from deaths that occurred between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2020, acted as a proof of concept to establish the methodology and data collection tools that were compliant with data handling legislation. The Defence Suicide Register will evolve in response to feedback and evaluation.
  - The Welsh Government and organisations across Wales have been supporting the One is Too Many suicide prevention research being delivered by Northumbria University alongside The Baton Charity and For the Fallen. In June 2022, a co-production workshop was held in Llandudno, North Wales, where stakeholders including veterans and families could contribute experiences and evidence to the research work. In August 2022, a virtual workshop was held with additional Welsh stakeholders including charities and Armed Forces Liaison Officers.
  - NHS England and MOD are jointly funding a full review of work done by Manchester University on suicide, which will inform further options that could be implemented to prevent suicide.
  - NHS England is funding two studies related to postventions (interventions to support bereaved families following a suicide). It is expected that this research will make the case for better postvention by conducting:
    - a review of the potential benefits of an Armed Forces supplement to national suicide bereavement guides
    - an independent assessment of the response to a recent serving personnel suicide cluster to learn lessons
  - Op COURAGE provides additional enhanced support for veterans with suicidal ideation through its High Intensity Service.
  - Spouses suffering domestic abuse, which could drive suicidal ideation, can now access Sexual Assault Referral Centres in England to get help.

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## Northern Ireland legacy

In May 2022, the Government introduced the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, and it is continuing its Parliamentary passage.

It makes provision for an Independent Information Recovery Body, which can carry out European Convention on Human Rights-compliant investigations into deaths and serious injuries that occurred during the Troubles, for the primary purpose of information recovery. It will also be able to grant immunity to those who co-operate with its inquiries. The Bill also places a bar on future inquests and civil cases. Certain existing inquests and all ongoing civil cases can continue.

This legislation will address the legacy of Northern Ireland's past by implementing an effective information recovery process that will provide answers for families, delivering on our commitments to those who served in Northern Ireland, and helping society to look forward.



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# Chapter 6: UK Armed Forces Families Strategy update

## Introduction

The MOD published its new [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy](#) at the start of 2022. This document, which provides the framework for an ambitious ten-year programme, was drafted after extensive consultation, and guided by the recommendations made in the independent review, led by Andrew Selous MP, of the support needs of Armed Forces families: [Living in our Shoes: Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families](#). The Armed Forces Covenant, and Defence and wider society's commitment to honour it, are specifically cited in the Strategy document, and Covenant principles are now guiding the implementation of the Strategy.

The Strategy is divided into eight workstreams focusing on different areas of family life in the Armed Forces. Stakeholders from across Government, the Devolved Administrations and the charitable sector are delivering action plan priorities under each workstream. Details of some of the initiatives underway to support families are outlined below.

The Strategy is endorsed by representatives of the Scottish and Welsh Devolved Administrations and the Northern Ireland Office. At the heart of the Strategy is a commitment to listen to and respond to the voices of all the diverse families that make up the modern Armed Forces community.

The co-authors of the Living in our Shoes report, Prof Janet Walker and Dr Gabriela Misca, have accepted invitations to act as independent advisers to the implementation of the Strategy, and have provided their comments in the External Observations chapter of this report.

## The Armed Forces Families Fund

A dedicated fund has been created to support the delivery of the Families Strategy. This has been achieved by combining two existing funds, the Education Support Fund and the Early Learning and Childcare Fund. As the name implies, these funds only focused on education and early learning, and combining and refocusing them enables the funds' scope to be broadened in support of all eight of the Families Strategy's workstreams. The new fund is called the Armed Forces Families Fund (AF3), and is currently valued at £4 million per year.

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The AF3 will be administered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust whose purpose it is to support the Covenant. As such, they have considerable experience of working with partners across Government and the third sector to identify and assure effective grant funded schemes, including for Armed Forces families.

The AF3 launched in September 2022. Under the new scheme every bid will be considered in support of the delivery of the Armed Forces Families Strategy in its entirety.

## **Workstream 1: Family Life**

A policy stocktake paper, summarising inconsistencies across Defence People policies with regards to eligibility and entitlement to allowances and benefits, has made proposals for how to begin addressing this, including by looking at how the Defence defines a long-term relationship and the Personnel Status Categories. The stocktake also identified a wide range of terminology used to describe families, some of which is outdated and potentially offensive. The next stage of the review will consider alternative, more inclusive terminology aligned to the Strategy. Families were consulted through focus groups in September 2022.

Consultation has also begun on the development of further policy intended to better support those with caring responsibilities – especially young carers.

Other Family Life workstream priorities include improving community integration and encouraging peer-to-peer support. Some of this work includes financial awareness information intended to support families in the ‘cost of living crisis’, engagement with young people to make their voices and concerns heard, support for social isolation and loneliness, awareness raising for those in abusive relationships regarding available support, and practical support for those travelling between different countries in the UK to help them navigate subtle differences in process and provision.

Community development teams within the single Services continue to adapt to the changes brought about through the COVID-19 pandemic. A range of digital engagement is utilised to support families in connecting with each other, their local communities, and important information, including Facebook ‘Live Chats’ and Zoom coffee mornings offer socialising opportunities. The Royal Navy has launched a dedicated ‘Forum’ through which Service families can find a range of information in one dedicated space.

Some other projects being delivered include:

- Summer fun days and youth/play groups. These successful groups and activity days are aimed across family demographics beginning with parent and toddler groups, continuing with family orientated art and craft events, as well as a successful national teddy bears picnic, and progressing into a range of health and wellbeing activities including sports and team events. Art activities also provide the opportunity for children to engage with the workers and volunteers to discuss issues which are important to them.
- Volunteer projects. Volunteers are recruited for a range of physical and mental health related support. One such example is the Culdrose Patchwork Community Garden, a

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community project designed to help to build community and reduce social isolation, while building skills around gardening and green issues.

- The Families Together Project. After results from a Defence 'Community Needs Analysis' identified the 0-5 age group as a large cohort in one particular area, funds were secured from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund providing local parents/carers and their children a range of opportunities that support child development, and a space for parents to build support networks and access further services where required. The opportunities comprised a range of activities such as weekly creative activities, accessible movement and dance, promoted parent/carer and child interaction and bonding and promoted mental and emotional wellbeing with parents/carers.
- The H.E.R.O.S. ice hockey residential camp. The aim of this programme was to give 50 young people from different community backgrounds, North and South of the border in Ireland and from Scotland, the opportunity to participate and learn together through a special personal and social development programme. The four H.E.R.O.S. behaviours of respect, discipline, listening and fun were used to develop self-awareness, healthier life choices, confidence and goals for the future.

## **Workstream 2: Service Life**

The Service Life workstream will consider how the welfare of Service personnel can be improved through improving the accessibility of welfare support. The policy for welfare support currently sits in the Defence People policy documents structure, which includes numerous key policy documents which support or impact a Serviceperson's welfare. The aim is to improve coherence of all policy with a welfare impact, by improving the policy structure, simplifying content to make it more understandable, and ensuring it can be easily found. The workstream will specifically review the content of the welfare support policy to ensure that the policy is fit for purpose.

Work to improve JSP 770 (Tri-Service Welfare Support Policy) has already commenced by: updating policy for overseas supportability (medical, educational and social welfare support); refreshing medical eligibility policy; updating the Deployed Welfare Package policy; and transferring elements to a better policy home in the JSP 661 (Health and Wellbeing) policy document. The aim is to provide accessible welfare support policy which can be easily used, leading to Service personnel leading a Service life in a state of wellbeing, maximising their contribution to operational effect.

This work will focus on areas of friction between the Service person, the Service family, and the demands of Service life, and look for ways to mitigate this friction where possible and without detracting from operational effect. The review will consider various cohorts including, but not restricted to, dual serving couples and single parents. The workstream will also review what is available to Service personnel and Service families during the transition process, to ensure that they are prepared for civilian life. The aim is to maintain a positive image of the Services for anyone associated with the Service leaver, to support the Armed Forces' efforts to recruit and retain personnel, and encourage people to re-join.

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## Workstream 3: Family Home

Some of the changes that have been trialled in the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) will be brought into current policy as announced in the Defence Accommodation Strategy. In addition to providing accommodation based on need rather than rank, entitlement to Service Family Accommodation (SFA) will be widened to additional cohorts, including those Service personnel in established long-term relationships. Currently, such Service personnel have been able to request surplus SFA since 2019, and to date in excess of 4,000 have taken the opportunity to do so. Upon the implementation of FAM in 2023, it is anticipated that take-up will continue to increase as such cohorts become entitled to SFA, rather than rely on surplus stock.

As other aspects of Defence work and reviews mature, the concept of 'The Family Home' will remain core to any new or changing accommodation policy.

## Workstream 4: Children's Education

April 2022 was the MOD's first UK-wide Month of the Military Child. This consisted of events and activities throughout April to celebrate Service children and the positive impact they have on their families and local communities. Events included school assemblies and welfare support team activities with schools and military bases across the UK. The charity Never Such Innocence, in partnership with the MOD, also ran an art and poetry competition with the theme of the dandelion, the symbol of the Service child. A poem a day was published on Twitter from 'Across the Oceans', a collection of poems from Service children in MOD schools. Some of the key objectives for this project were to:

- promote the positive image of Service children
- raise awareness of the educational challenges that they can face
- demonstrate to Service families and the wider civilian community that the MOD values the contribution Service children make
- reflect on the publication of the new UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32
- provide continuous professional development for schools, local authorities, and charities to understand Service children's lives
- bring together the charities supporting Service children to reduce duplication and develop collaboration
- unite stakeholders that support Service children under one project

The MOD Local Authority Partnership (MODLAP) continues in its role to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children from military families. During the course of this reporting year, MODLAP has co-produced for the Department for Education an exemplar Service pupil role description (as recommended in the Living in our Shoes report), supported the Department for Education in regard to Service children content within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Review Green Paper, and has submitted a joint response to its consultation. The MOD and Welsh local authorities continue sharing good practice and the planning of projects through the MODLAP Cymru group. Particularly positive is the ongoing development of tracking Service pupils in Welsh schools to ensure they are suitably supported.

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The purpose-built Scots Corner Early Learning and Childcare Centre is formed from a unique partnership between the MOD, Midlothian Council and 2 SCOTS. The centre offers Service children, aged between two and school entry, with free high-quality early learning and childcare delivered by Midlothian Council staff. The centre is co-located with 2 SCOTS welfare support team, who work in partnership with the early learning practitioners. This provides a coordinated and seamless welfare support service for families with young children. The centre recently received its first inspection outcome, achieving the highest possible inspection grade for a first inspection.

May 2022 saw the introduction of a Service child and a veteran 'flag' on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application form. Collaboration between the MOD, UCAS and the SCiP Alliance led to this welcomed addition, allowing universities and colleges to offer more bespoke advice and support to Service children and veterans applying to university or college.

The MOD-supported Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance continues to make progress against all the Alliance's priorities, including significant improvements in the awareness of Armed Forces children's lives among professionals in schools, colleges, universities, and other stakeholders. The UK-wide research-to-practice Higher Education Hub Network has grown steadily since its inception in 2018. It now consists of 71 university partners and over 600 network members from diverse organisations supporting Service children's education, wellbeing and progression. In addition, a new SCiP Alliance Funders' Forum, led by the Naval Children's Charity, has also commissioned research to understand the landscape of funding for Service children, to help funders enhance the alignment of resource with needs. Following on from last year's successful launch of the Thriving Lives Toolkit in schools, new research in tertiary education – commissioned by the SCiP Alliance and funded by a partnership of nine Uni Connect Partnerships and the University of Winchester – identified both the potential strengths and complex challenges that can result from life in a military family in this key education phase, and a draft framework of effective practice is now being tested in colleges.

Following the easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions, MOD's Education Policy Team recommenced their programme of educational suitability reviews for overseas commands. This has included the completion of review activity in Turkey, Gibraltar, Saudi Arabia and the USA.

## **Workstream 5: Childcare**

The Early Learning Childcare Fund has provided £1 million of grants to 34 early childhood learning and childcare settings across the UK, during this reporting period. These projects have benefited over 800 Service children, and demonstrate how investment into the early childhood learning and childcare sector has tangible impact on the lives of young Service children.

Focus on very young Service children is beginning to gain momentum with the Families Strategy, which focuses on supporting Service children in achieving positive outcomes throughout their educational journey (from early years through to further and higher education).

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The MOD is working with several key stakeholders to raise the awareness and develop a deeper understanding of the diverse range of experiences and needs of young Service children. The recently established MODLAP Early Years Group works with early years teams in local authorities to identify and implement strategies to support young Service children and their families.

## **Wraparound childcare**

In recognition of the difficulty that Service families can sometimes face in accessing appropriate childcare, the 2019 Conservative Manifesto committed to funding wraparound childcare outside school hours for eligible Service children aged 4–11. The scheme also recognises the importance of the family in supporting Service personnel to carry out their roles and is part of the Families Strategy.

Since September 2020, pilots have been running to gather data on how the scheme could be successfully managed with each iteration of pilot sites further refining the operating model. By January 2022 there were six pilot sites operating: RAF High Wycombe and RAF Halton, Catterick Garrison and the Plymouth area as well as Woolwich Barracks, a cluster of RAF sites in Lincolnshire and their supporting units, and Hamworthy Barracks and Hereford Garrison. The scheme supported in total just over 2,000 Service children.

The launch of the full UK rollout of the scheme was announced on 29 July 2022, and started from the beginning of the 2022 autumn term. In the first full month of the scheme's operation (that is, up to 30 September 2022), 2,500 requests to register individual Service children had been received, and 1,200 children had been successfully enrolled. This number has continued to rise steadily since. The scheme funds the wraparound childcare costs for up to 20 hours a week for up to 39 weeks of the year, during term time only.

## **Workstream 6: Non-UK Families**

The MOD conducted a 'deep-dive' review of the issues faced by non-UK personnel and non-UK service families in consultation with, and with support from, key stakeholders. A report was published on 10 November 2021 summarising the issues faced by non-UK personnel and non-UK service families. The purpose of the report was not to provide solutions to the issues. Instead, it offered a range of recommendations to address or mitigate the issues. Using the recommendations proposed through the deep-dive review, an Action Plan has been developed to turn the recommendations into actions and activities that can be implemented to resolve or mitigate non-UK issues. The Action Plan has been developed by the MOD, with engagement with the Home Office and the OVA. The actions and activities will be co-ordinated by the MOD with support from the Home Office and the OVA, using additional support from other Government departments as required. The Action Plan has been developed within the construct of the Armed Forces Families Strategy. The actions and activities to resolve or mitigate non-UK issues are detailed as a list in the Action Plan, however, to enable ongoing management of these actions and activities, a dynamic action tracker will be routinely shared with stakeholders and updated regularly. Activity to resolve or mitigate non-UK issues has continued throughout the development of the Action Plan.



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## Workstream 7: Supporting Partners

The primary focus of this workstream is on working with third sector providers to help Service partners navigate existing sources of support. This includes using Forces Families Jobs website, an employment and training platform provided and funded by the Families Federations, as a focal point for information. The platform goes from strength to strength with latest data (as at 30 September 2022) showing 1,339 registered employers, 80 training providers, 13,716 registered candidates, 13,905 job responses, and a total of 11,175 live jobs advertised on the site. Work is also being done with the Families Federations to produce some urgent guidance that can help prepare partners and spouses ahead of accompanied overseas deployment.

A proportion of the Armed Forces Families Fund will be devoted annually to helping deliver the aims of this workstream. The focus of this grant programme will be to encourage innovative, new solutions which support partners' careers alongside home life, both at home and overseas, with an emphasis on family and community cohesion.

A cross-sector group of partner organisations is driving forward initiatives in support of partner and spousal employment pathways, as well as sharing ideas and understanding of mutual benefit. The members are drawn nationally from representatives of Armed Forces organisations/charities and supporting businesses, to ensure cross-cutting ideas from sector partners as well as those from the Services.

One of the first priority areas reflected in the 'Living in our shoes' review was the formal lack of recognition for Armed Forces Families. To address this, work began on the creation of the Celebrating Forces Families Awards which successfully held its inaugural event on 22 April 2022 at the Victory Services Club in London. The event, unlike others across the network of awards evenings, focused purely on celebrating the valued support of serving military families. The event acknowledged and celebrated the amazing projects families have undertaken, triumph over adversity, and resilience and inspiring career paths taken whilst being part of the whole community. Preparations are underway for the 2023 event.

## Workstream 8: Health and Wellbeing

Under the Health and Wellbeing Workstream, the MOD and the Department for Health and Social Care have conducted extensive analysis of all research and health-related recommendations for Armed Forces families. This has been distilled into workable actions for the MOD, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and the NHS in England and the Devolved Administrations.

Access to [www.kooth.com/mod](http://www.kooth.com/mod) has been available from August 2022 for those aged 11 to 18 (up to their 19th birthday) with a serving parent in the Army, Royal Navy or Royal Air Force, as well as those living overseas with parents working for the MOD or the Government. This safe and confidential digital mental health platform offers children and young people an easily accessible and welcoming space to seek non-judgemental professional mental health support. Kooth was selected as it is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Anonymous by



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default, the service has been designed to provide choice and encourage users to engage and seek support on their terms. In addition, it is the only digital mental health provider to hold a UK-wide accreditation from the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

In 2020, the NHS conducted a widespread consultation with Service families to better understand how to improve care and support for them, and this was backed up by specific research on mobile families in 2021. The results of these have now informed a set of proposals being taken forward by NHS services across England, and shared via DHSC across the UK. Through the engagement process families identified the need for support in navigating the healthcare system when moving around the UK. To address this, pilots have been launched through the new Integrated Care Systems, and is being delivered in Phase 1 through three Integrated Care System areas (Humber and North Yorkshire; Hertfordshire and West Essex; Kent and Medway and Sussex), and by 2023 in the remaining regional areas in England. The aim is to provide a single point of contact for Service families, and a care coordination framework for Integrated Care Systems. Communications will also be provided to professionals and families. This will help Service families gain advice and support from those who understand the military context and the unique issues of Service family life.

The MOD continues to provide the eRedbook to families deploying overseas. The eRedbook is a digital version of the physical Redbook used by parents and health professionals to record immunisation data as well as other physical data that helps monitor development and progress, or identify potential concerns. The electronic version enables military families to access and store medical documents/information with the additional benefits that come from the tool being in a digital format. For example, data cannot be 'misplaced', and information can be quickly transferred to health professionals in advance of a family arriving in a location. It also gives health professionals the ability to access, input and review data themselves, and the scope to tailor content to users which can highlight specific local services or important messages.

## **The Armed Forces Families Strategy in Wales**

To support the delivery of the MOD's Armed Forces Families Strategy, the Welsh Government staged a workshop with the three Families Federations and stakeholders to look at how the aims of the Strategy will be delivered in Wales. Supported by the MOD, attendees included Defence Transition Services, the King's Centre for Military Health Research, charities and SSCE Cymru. The Welsh Government is now working with MOD to ensure feedback and experiences from Wales continue to be heard as Strategy delivery takes shape.

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# Chapter 7: Business, employment, and the community

## Introduction

The Armed Forces Covenant is one of Defence's key tools for supporting engagement between the Armed Forces community and wider civilian society, and for encouraging organisations to support the Armed Forces community.

This chapter provides an update on Covenant engagement with the private and public sectors and society more generally during the reporting period. It also covers initiatives to support employment of the Armed Forces community, especially Service leavers and veterans, through the work of the MOD, the Department for Work and Pensions, the OVA and other Government departments.

## Covenant action

### The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust is a charity and classified as a non-departmental public body of the MOD. It supports the Armed Forces Covenant through funding projects that deliver change to the Armed Forces community. Between April 2021 and March 2022, the Trust awarded a total of £26 million in grants towards projects across the UK, of which £25.3 million was received from the Government.

These included £4.9 million through 66 significant grants through the Covenant Fund to enable charities to keep delivering activities and services that people from the Armed Forces community use and value, where the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had created additional challenges. Other Covenant Fund programmes of funding included the popular and oversubscribed 'Force for Change' small grants programme, which awarded more than £1.6 million to 175 projects over three rounds of funding. £500,000 was awarded in 2021/22 to 20 clusters of local authorities for projects that will improve wider understanding of the needs of their local Armed Forces community, and help ensure that veterans, Armed Forces families and serving personnel can access local services easily. Funding was also awarded to projects across the UK to improve support for veterans when they are accessing acute hospital care. The Trust worked in partnership with NHS England and NHS Improvement to enhance this programme in England.

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The Trust was able to respond swiftly to the needs of some veterans of recent conflicts for additional support due to the impact of the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan. Targeted support through the Sustaining Support programme awarded nearly £1 million to 30 existing projects to upscale quickly to support more veterans and their families.

In addition to the Covenant Fund, the Trust distributes other substantial funds that benefit the Armed Forces community. The Trust worked with the OVA to deliver the £5 million [Afghanistan Veterans' Fund](#), awarding the funding to significant projects to support veterans with mental health needs, to understand more about the experiences of those who served in Afghanistan, and to offer more opportunities to take part in local projects that meet veterans' needs. Awards were granted in April 2022, and included:

- £600,000 to Samaritans for a new peer support helpline
- £380,000 to the Royal British Legion to upgrade the Veterans Gateway website to further enhance the online offering of the Veterans Gateway
- £150,000 to the Forces Employment Charity to improve wellbeing through volunteering with Afghans who now live in the UK

A full list of projects is available on the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust [website](#).

With funding from HM Treasury, the Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund awarded £9 million to 14 major multi-year projects through the Veterans' Places, Pathways and People programme to create better, more connected and sustainable support for veterans in the communities where they live.

The Trust has continued working with the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) to deliver the NAAFI Fund, which makes grants to projects that improve the lives of serving personnel and their families on Armed Forces bases both in the UK and overseas. In the first two years of delivery, the NAAFI Fund has already distributed over £1.9 million to Armed Forces units to fund projects that improve the quality of life for the Armed Forces community all over the world.

For more information, please visit the [Covenant Fund's website](#) or read the [Trust's Annual Reports](#).

## **Armed Forces Covenant signatories**

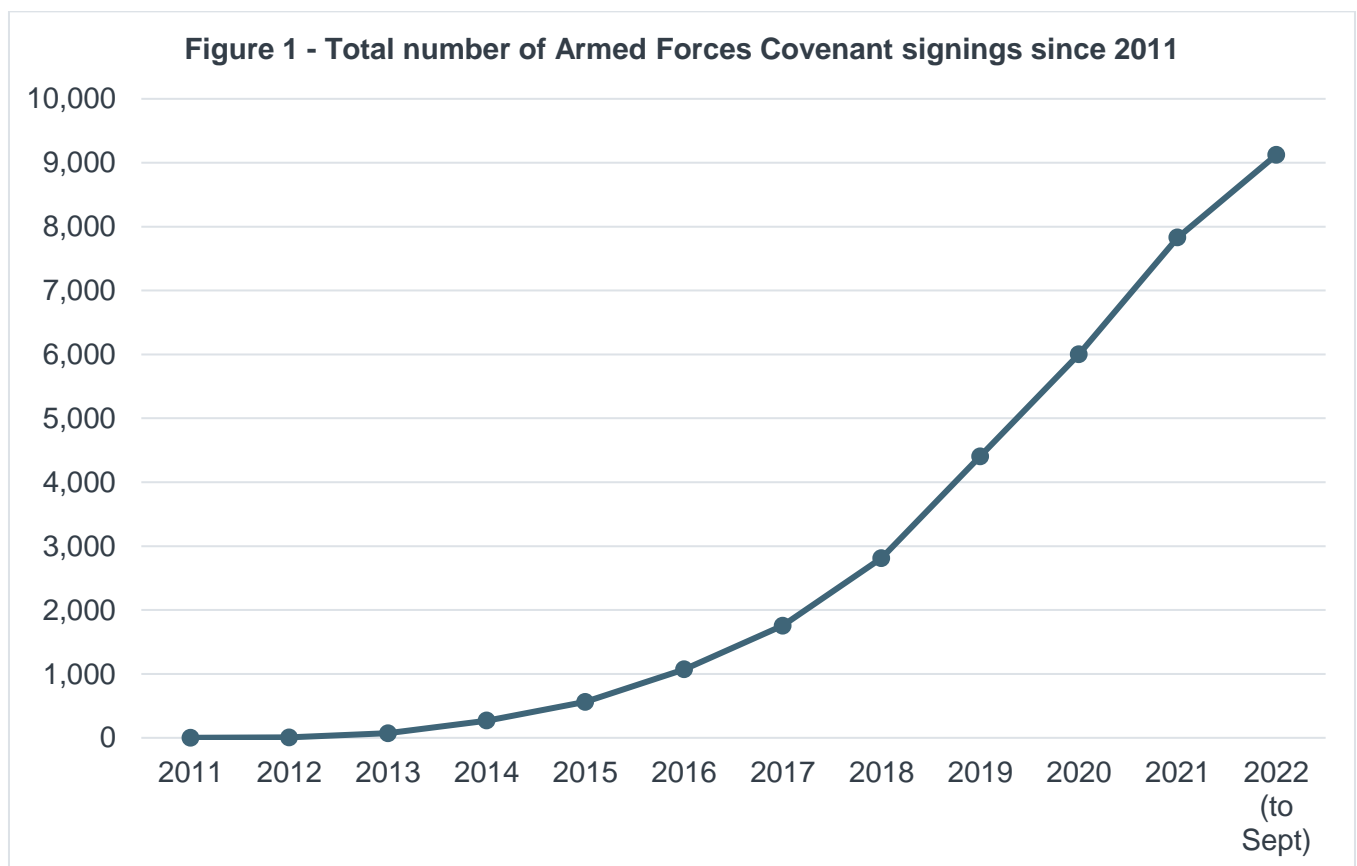
[Defence Relationship Management](#) (DRM) partners with organisations throughout the UK, helping them understand the value of signing the Armed Forces Covenant and building mutually beneficial partnerships with Defence. It provides support on employing Reservists, veterans, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and military spouses and improving fairness for the Armed Forces community in the consumer market.

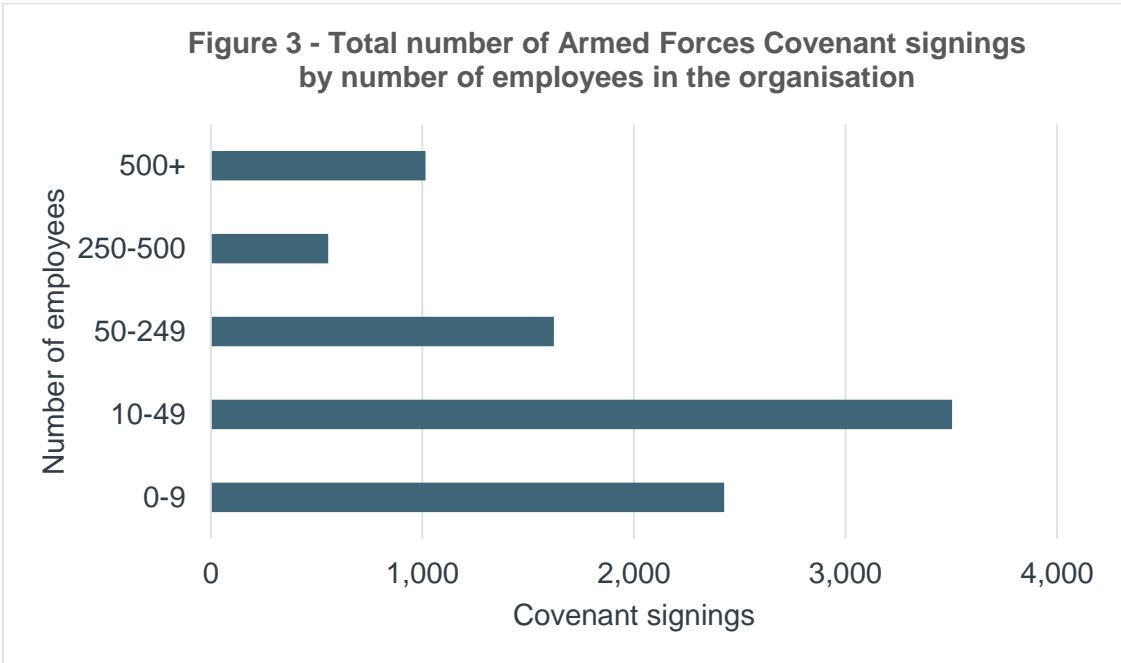
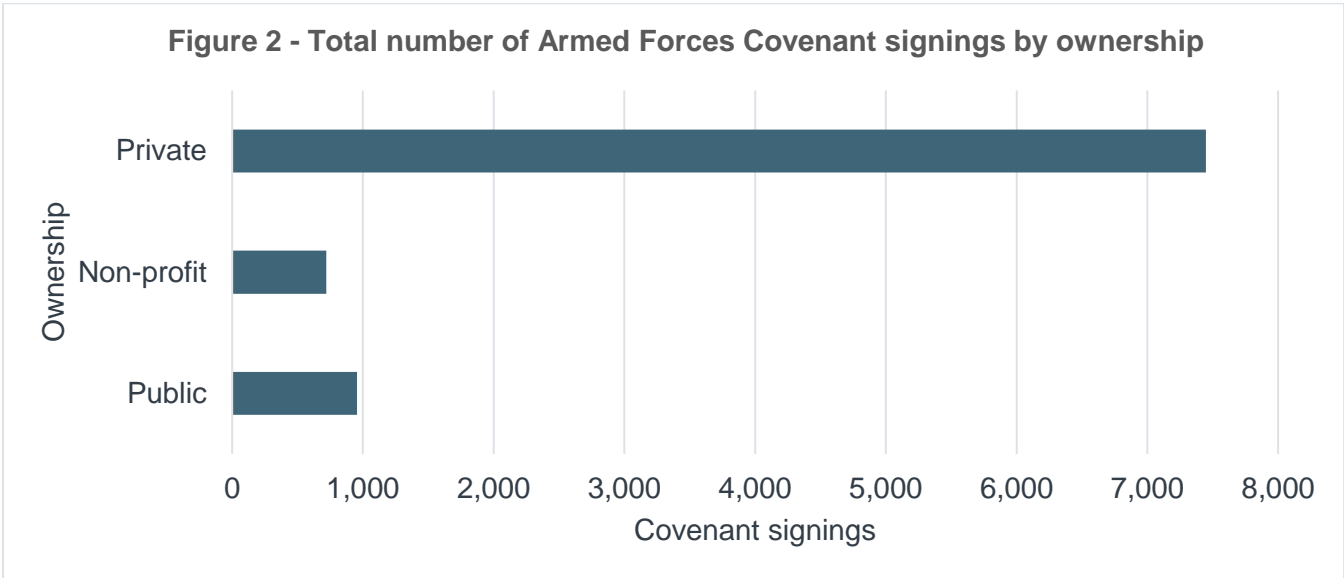
By choosing to partner with Defence by signing the Covenant, an organisation demonstrates its intention to support the Armed Forces community, and it provides the signatory with the opportunity to be recognised by the Employer Recognition Scheme award (more information on the Employer Recognition Scheme is given in the Employment section below). Signing the Covenant can happen in multiple ways. For example, some organisations decide to sign the

template on GOV.UK, while others work with DRM account managers who help the organisation work up bespoke pledges.

Armed Forces Covenant signings are rapidly approaching 10,000, with 1,634 signing over the last 12 months alone. At the end of the reporting period (30 September 2022) the exact total figure stood at 9,122. Signatories were yet again from right across the UK and spanned all sectors and sizes of employers – public, private and third sector.

Organisations that signed include the Ocado Group, Leeds United Football Club, Fife College, Knight Frank LLP, National Museum of the Royal Navy and Northern Trains Ltd. There were also a number of organisations that took the opportunity to re-sign their original Covenant and refresh their Covenant pledges, including EDF Energy and Boeing. Bespoke pledges routinely made include: providing paid leave for Reservists to meet their annual training commitments; creating an internal network for all members of staff belonging to the Armed Forces community; and recognising military skills and qualifications in recruitment and selection processes. This includes a number of Guaranteed Interview Schemes relevant to members of the Armed Forces community.





**Insight and Analysis of Armed Forces Covenant signatories**

DRM conducts a number of insight surveys to understand why organisations sign the Covenant and how they effectively deliver benefits to the Armed Forces community. There are two key surveys conducted annually: the Annual Survey and the Employer Awareness and Attitudes Monitor.

The DRM Annual Survey is conducted internally and represents all Gold and Silver Employer Recognition Scheme Award holders as well as all DRM national accounts and a sample of regional accounts. Analysis of the survey results covering this reporting period show the top reasons organisations sign the Covenant are:

1. veteran support (15%)
2. right thing to do (14.5%)
3. Reservist support (14%)

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The Employer Awareness and Attitudes Monitor is an independent research series that has been conducted annually since 2014. It functions as a source of evidence to inform policy on Reserves and other Defence People policy areas. The Monitor is based on interviews with 1,000 employers, split evenly between Reservist and non-Reservist employers. Participants are selected to provide a meaningful spread across organisational sectors, sizes and UK regions.

Percentages remain high for the majority of attitudinal and awareness questions. On the whole, these results are very positive, and demonstrate continuing progress and development in the relationship the MOD has with employers. Analysis shows that 2022 is in line with previous surveys between 2014 and 2020. 2021 appears to have been something of a 'one-off' with heightened awareness and support for Reservists. This is unsurprising given that at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, some 2,300 Reservists were deployed on Op RESCRIPT<sup>3</sup> and were therefore highly visible to their employers and the public at large.

Key takeaways are as follows:

#### *Relationship with Defence*

- 63% of employers surveyed said they were satisfied with their relationship with Defence, down from 72% in 2021 and 65% in 2020. Among Reservist employers, the figure is 67% (down from 78% in 2021 and 69% in 2020).

#### *Covenant awareness*

Top reasons organisations don't sign the Armed Forces Covenant are:

1. never heard of it / don't know enough about it (30% of those who have not signed it)
  2. don't have the time / resources (21%)
  3. don't feel the need / see any business benefit (19%)
- 53% of employers surveyed said they were aware of the Armed Forces Covenant, down from 59% in 2021 but up from 52% in 2020
  - among Reservist employers, the figure rises to 70% (down from 78% in 2021 but up from 68% in 2020)
  - 29% of employers surveyed said they had signed the Armed Forces Covenant (down from 31% in 2022, up from 26% in 2021), rising to 43% for Reservist employers (down from 48% in 2022, up from 40% in 2021)
  - both Reservist (74%, down from 77% in 2021) and non-Reservist employers (66%, down from 67% in 2021) believe that signing the Armed Forces Covenant is of value to employers

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<sup>3</sup> Op RESCRIPT is the name for the Armed Forces' contribution to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK.

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### *Recruitment and retention*

- Recruitment and finding people with the right skills has returned to being the most important and spontaneously mentioned issue facing businesses, while rising costs has also grown as an issue since 2021.

### *Attitude towards the Armed Forces community*

- 91% of employers surveyed said Reserves were a necessary element of the UK's Armed Forces (down from 95% in 2021 and 92% in 2020).
- 92% said Reservists were an asset to the UK's workforce (down from 94% in 2021).
- 95% said they could benefit from the skills and experiences that Reservists bring (up from 93%).
- 92% said Reservists should be supported by their employers as a matter of principle (down from 93%).
- 85% of employers surveyed agreed that veterans were an asset to the workforce, the same as in 2021. Among Reservist employers, the figure rises to 89% (down from 90%).
- 91% of employers surveyed believed they could benefit from the skills and experience that Veterans bring, this has not changed since 2021. Among Reservist employers, the figure rises to 93% (down from 94%).

The key barrier to organisations signing the Armed Forces Covenant continues to be a lack of knowledge (30%) followed by lack of time or resource (21%) and not feeling the need (19%).

### **How employers effectively deliver benefits to the Armed Forces community**

The effectiveness of activities delivered by those Armed Forces Covenant signatories that do most to benefit the Armed Forces community are recorded and measured. This analysis is used to inform good practice guidance, and enables the MOD to promote and share these practices among Covenant signatories. The most effective activities recorded during the reporting period were: having bespoke HR policies, especially positive recruitment aimed at the Armed Forces community and flexible or remote working for partners and spouses; and registration with the Career Transition Partnership which supports Service leavers into employment, education or training.

In addition to identifying the most effective activities, analysis of activity shows that fewer organisations engaged in Defence discussion forums and workplace employer engagement sessions during this reporting period. Targeted campaigns will be focused on these areas and DRM will explore the reasons for lower uptake than other areas.

The analysis also shows that during this reporting period there has been an increase in support from organisations in the public sector, the defence industry, health and social work activities, not-for-profits and trade bodies. Slower growth was recorded in financial and insurance sectors as well as the utilities sector, the latter for the second year running. The reasons why this is the case will be explored in the coming year, and an action plan will be implemented to address any areas where opportunities are available.



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## Employment

The MOD publishes [annual statistics on ex-service personnel employment outcomes](#). The most recent report (for 2020/21, page 5) found that, of those who left the Armed Forces during 2020/21 and used MOD's Career Transition Partnership services, 83% were employed, 6% were unemployed, and the rest were economically inactive, six months after leaving Service. It also found that these employment and unemployment rates were higher than the UK population during the same period (75% and 5% respectively, and the rest economically inactive).

The MOD's 2022 [annual survey of Armed Forces families](#) (page 17) found that 81% of Service partners are in employment (either full-time, part-time, or self-employed), and it compared this to a UK employment rate for all those aged 16-64 of 76%.

We therefore currently assess that veterans and Service partners are more likely to be in employment than the UK's working-age general population. Obviously, all full-time Service personnel are also in employment. Work to further support the employment of members of the Armed Forces community has included the following:

- *The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme*

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), launched in 2014, encourages employers to support Defence and the Armed Forces community, and inspires others to do the same. The Scheme provides for bronze, silver and gold awards for employers that advocate, pledge and demonstrate support for Defence and the Armed Forces community, and align their values and practices with the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. Organisations that make such commitments are said to have 'signed the Covenant'.

Gold ERS awards are given to employers that are considered as exemplars within their sector, advocating on Covenant issues to partner organisations, suppliers and customers with tangible results in uplifts to Covenant signatories. In July 2022, a further 156 organisations – across a range of sectors and sizes – were given a gold ERS award, bringing the total number of gold ERS award holders to 642. In August 2022, a further 328 organisations were given a silver ERS award, bringing the total number to 1,334.

The growth in Covenant signatories, and recognition of companies through the Employer Recognition Scheme, directly contributes to enhanced positive sentiment, meaning veterans feel that their transferable skills from Service are recognised by civilian employers. To further deliver against the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan, DRM has undertaken bespoke campaigns, including:

- ongoing work to raise awareness of the National Insurance contribution holiday for hiring veterans
- Armed Forces Week 2022 content promoting veteran employability, including women in engineering

Engagement between the 642 gold award holders and the OVA provides expert insight into the experiences of employing veterans and the impact of policies effecting veterans in their employment.

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- *Empowering Armed Forces Champions and other DWP staff*

The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) new model for providing support to the Armed Forces community, which has been in place since April 2021, continues to evolve to enhance the service DWP offers to veterans and others.

Under this model, the Armed Forces Champions have some frontline responsibilities where they may personally handle some claims, including supporting veterans into work and getting involved in resolving some of the more complex cases.

As well as their frontline role, the work of a Champion is also to support colleagues throughout the jobcentre network who are also working regularly with veterans and serving personnel. They will assist and coach Work Coaches to promote a better understanding of the needs some claimants with a military background may have. They will also support colleagues working in other parts of the department, for example in local Service Centres, raising awareness of issues facing the Armed Forces community with staff handling claims for a range of benefits.

The new model introduced 11 new lead roles who operate as a virtual network to ensure there is Armed Forces Champion support across the country. There is a Champion Lead in each DWP Group area, and at least 1 Champion in each Jobcentre Plus district. Some of the Champions, Work Coaches and other DWP staff will have served in the Armed Forces or know people who have and will draw on their experiences to support customers across the department.

- *Promotion of the Covenant among national employers*

DWP's National Employer and Partnership Team continues to promote the signing of the Covenant by the national employers and partner organisations with which it works. Additionally, and in co-ordination with the MOD, the Partnership Team has worked with employers already signed up to the Covenant to assist them deliver against, and extend, their promise to the Armed Forces community. Examples include logistics firm GXO Logistics, commercial cleaning and facilities management firm SBFM, and a campaign to promote the Covenant to members of the National Skill Academy for Rail.

- *Supporting veterans into specific employment sectors*

DWP's National Employer and Partnership Team has also engaged with organisations across Government, such as the Department for Transport, to encourage veterans into the logistics sector, and the Ministry of Justice on employment opportunities for veterans who have served custodial sentences. In addition, the Partnership Team has worked in partnership with X-Forces Enterprise to promote self-employment amongst Service leavers, veterans, Reservists and family members.

Introduced in January 2022, Advance into Justice is a bespoke recruitment scheme that provides an opportunity for ex-Service personnel to fast-track into a second career in the HM Prison and Probation Service. This programme is shorter than the standard prison officer recruitment process, and fast-tracks Service leavers or veterans from application to

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employment and prison officer paid training. The Ministry of Justice has strongly promoted Advance into Justice, including through detailed webinar sessions, social media awareness, and a dedicated microsite to host campaign information and details on the assessment process. The campaign team worked closely with the Career Transition Partnership to ensure veterans' specific needs were met and reached a wide audience.

The Great Place to Work for Veterans Initiative has progressed from pilot to being rolled out across Government. This aims to encourage more veterans to join the Civil Service when they leave the Armed Forces. So far, over 7,700 applications have been received, with 811 job offers made, where 636 veterans took the offers and passed onboarding checks.

The OVA has committed to increase the number and diversity of veterans entering the digital workforce, by providing £80,000 of funding to support the Technology Veterans Foundation, to increase the number of veterans going into cyber careers. The OVA also granted £100,000 to Veterans Into Logistics, to support veterans becoming HGV drivers.

NHS England commissioned the [Step into Health programme](#) to support members of the Armed Forces community seeking employment in the NHS in England and Wales. Since March 2019, over 41,000 members of the Armed Forces community have applied for roles in the NHS, with nearly 1,800 individuals securing roles. The programme supports candidates through the application process and helps employers understand the valuable transferable skills and benefits to their organisation's workforce, through intelligent recruitment processes, work placements and insight days. 120 NHS organisations are currently part of the programme, with many more preparing to sign up.

A five-year project is currently being organised that will specifically focus on attracting veterans to employment in the NHS in Scotland. This work is being led by National Education for Scotland, and the Scottish Government will continue to engage with this project as it develops.

This year, the Scottish Government has added a field on veteran status as part of the employee data voluntarily provided by its staff. This is helping the Scottish Government to monitor the progress of activities aimed at increasing the number of veterans employed by the Scottish Government.

- *National Insurance contribution holiday*

From April 2022, organisations employing Service leavers in their first civilian job are able to benefit from a 12-month National Insurance contribution holiday.

- *Researching perceptions of veterans*

Research was commissioned to better understand the public and employer perceptions of veterans. The OVA partnered with specific media outlets to promote the benefits of employing veterans, and showcased their positive contribution to their community, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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- *Service leaver and veterans' employment fair in Wales*

The Welsh Government and partners worked together to provide a Service leaver and veterans' employment fair in Wales. This was driven by the Welsh Government's 'Veterans scoping exercise' – part of the delivery of the UK Strategy for Our Veterans. That work, published in 2020, received feedback calling for more courses to take place in Wales alongside regular Career Transition Partnership events. Plans were developed for an event where Service leavers, veterans and families could have direct access to employers and jobs all under one roof, with an additional information session provided where employers could learn more about the value and skills of the ex-Service community. The event took place in November 2021 at the Celtic Manor Resort, and was opened by the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn. Over 45 employers attended the event, with over 150 Service leavers and veterans engaging directly with employers. Veterans secured jobs on the day of the event, and following introductions made at the event. The event is due to take place again in November 2022.

- *Support to serving Reservists in North Wales*

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), which provides NHS services to North Wales, employs a significant number of serving Reservists, and supports giving them time off work to attend annual deployment exercises with the Armed Forces. In addition, BCUHB supports the Armed Forces community in accessing career opportunities in the NHS by pledging support to the 'Step into Health' recruitment programme, and offering guaranteed interviews for all Armed Forces community personnel seeking employment.

BCUHB has recently collaborated with 203 Field Hospital, in Bodelwyddan, to deliver vital undergraduate nurse training recruitment events in order to secure a future nursing and midwifery workforce for BCUHB and potential future recruitment into the medical and nursing Reserve Services.

- *Mapping skills to civilian equivalents in Scotland*

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, Skills Development Scotland and MOD collaborated to create a [tool](#) for Service personnel and Service leavers that supports them in understanding the skills and qualifications they have gained in the Armed Forces. Using the online tool, skills and qualifications gained in Service are translated into language easily understood by civilian employers or institutions in order to gain a job or move into further learning. The tool also benchmarks to the Regulated Qualifications Framework and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework the qualifications gained during Service.

- *Employability initiatives in Scotland*

The Scottish Government, through phase 2 delivery of No One Left Behind, continues to offer employment support services for those facing significant challenges when leaving the Armed Forces. No One Left Behind provides tailored individual wrap-around support which some Service leavers may need. This can be holistic support as well as employability services support. Through employability support, the key aim of the work is to ensure that

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veterans and those leaving Service can access the full and extensive range of employability support in Scotland, much of which is delivered through Local Employability Partnerships at local authority level. The Scottish Government have been liaising with Local Employability Partnerships to ensure veterans remain a priority group as they were within the previous Community Jobs Scotland and Employability Fund programmes, and remain so under phase 2 of No One Left Behind. The Local Authority Armed Forces and Veterans Champions network will play a role in supporting Local Employability Partnerships, ensuring veterans remain a priority grouping in their local employability support offers.

Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between MOD and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in March 2022, an action plan has been developed and agreed and is now being implemented to facilitate closer working between MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) services and SDS. SDS has now met with the new early Service leaver adviser and is looking to deliver a continuing professional development (CPD) package to raise awareness of SDS services and areas where they can support delivery. Actions agreed include: developing a joint customer journey; a joint referral process; service development and product promotion; and joint CPD sessions for CTP/SDS colleagues.

- *Families Employment Support Officer in Northern Ireland*

While the Families Employment Support Officer in Northern Ireland continues to provide support, there has been a decrease in the number of clients, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Education, training and volunteering opportunities remain available, with many training courses, including basic skills, available at no cost. In the last 12 months, the Support Officer has had 61 clients. Of these, 31 have secured employment, six have left due to posting, and six have disengaged due to personal circumstances, with a further seven ceasing to engage without reason. Of the remaining 11 active clients, five are already in employment, but seeking better or new opportunities, leaving six spouses actively seeking employment.

## **Universal Credit identifier**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has continued its work to identify Universal Credit (UC) claimants who are members of the Armed Forces community. This helps to ensure relevant claimants are signposted to the appropriate support.

DWP started collecting data on the Armed Forces status of UC claimants in Great Britain in April 2021<sup>4</sup>. At first only new claimants were asked about their Armed Forces status but, from June 2021, other UC claimants reporting changes in their work and earnings have also been able to report their status. From July 2021, UC agents have also been able to record claimants' Armed Forces status if they are told about this via other means such as journal messages, face-to-face meetings or by telephone.

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<sup>4</sup> Data is not collected on the Armed Forces status of UC claimants in Northern Ireland.



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Coverage continues to improve over time and by August 2022 data was held on the Armed Forces status<sup>5</sup> of approximately 53% of the UC caseload in Great Britain<sup>6</sup>. Of those, 3,200 claimants had a status recorded as “currently serving” and 40,100 had a status of “served in the past”.

The way the data is collected means the claimants for whom data is held are not representative of the UC caseload as a whole. This means it is not yet possible to produce reliable estimates of the overall number and proportion of UC claimants who are members of the Armed Forces community. However, data coverage is expected to continue to improve over time and this will help the Government develop a better understanding of claimants’ experiences and outcomes.

### **Motor finance protocol**

Service personnel seek, and are eligible for, motor finance in the same way as the rest of the UK population. However, unlike much of the general population, they are liable to be redeployed mandatorily, including overseas, on a regular basis. Unless this is taken into account in how motor finance agreements are operated, this can have costly consequences for both Service personnel and motor finance providers.

With effect from 1 June 2022, serving personnel now benefit from a [new protocol](#) that ensures motor financing works better for them when deploying overseas. Its purpose is to ensure that Service personnel face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the sale and operation of motor finance agreements. Lenders who participate in the protocol will allow a financed vehicle to be taken overseas for the remainder of the finance agreement, so long as the vehicle is comprehensively insured while there. If Service personnel do not want, or are unable, to take the vehicle with them on deployment, the motor finance provider will use their best endeavours to find a solution that is acceptable to the customer. It will ensure that serving personnel deployed overseas should no longer have to face the distress of returning a lease-hire vehicle unexpectedly or repaying the loan in full prior to deployment. While the protocol itself is new, it also applies to existing motor finance agreements.

### **Blue Badge scheme**

The Blue Badge scheme is primarily about helping those with mobility issues park near to the places they wish to visit. Eligibility for a Blue Badge is not based on the type of disability, and people with physical, mental and cognitive conditions could receive a badge if their walking is sufficiently affected. People who have served in the Armed Forces qualify automatically for a badge if they receive a War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement, or if they have been both awarded a lump sum benefit at tariffs 1-8 of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and certified as having a permanent and substantial disability which causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking. People who do not qualify automatically may be eligible via the local authority further assessment route.

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<sup>5</sup> Armed Forces status is self-reported by claimants and is not verified by the Ministry of Defence or Office for Veterans' Affairs. A claimant's status can be recorded as “currently serving”, “served in the past”, “not served” or “prefer not to say”.

<sup>6</sup> Percentages are rounded to the nearest percent and numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures may be subject to retrospective changes as more up-to-date data becomes available or if methodological improvements are made.

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## **Gurkha spouse naturalisation**

Some Gurkha spouses had previously been refused naturalisation if they have spent time in Brunei on an accompanied assignment during the qualifying period. The Home Office has clarified its guidance. Family members of Gurkhas or former Gurkha personnel who have transferred out of the Brigade of Gurkhas to serve in the Royal Navy/Marines, Army or Royal Air Force, who apply to the Home Office to naturalise as British citizens and meet the eligibility criteria, will normally have any absences outside the UK on accompanied assignments counted towards the five-year UK residency criteria (in the same way as other non-UK spouses).

## **Veterans' activity hubs**

A second veterans' hub was opened at HMP Risley in July 2022. This was developed based on the HMP/YOI Holme House model, that opened in June 2021, but bespoke to HMP Risley and the population of veterans in that prison. Activity hubs are designed to provide safe and supportive spaces for offenders, which will complement existing resettlement arrangements. Veterans can volunteer to locate on to this wing, and are offered a structured and individually tailored package of support, provided by Ingeus and their partner RFEA The Forces Employment Charity. The activities have been selected based on focus groups held with veterans at the prison. Veterans will co-locate with other cohorts such as people in custody for the first time, self-isolators, and elderly offenders with medical issues. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service will be evaluating the veterans' activity hub in November 2023.

## **Mapping of services for veterans in the criminal justice system**

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service regularly updates the veteran online support map and maintains its content on an ongoing basis. The map details services available to veterans in the criminal justice system and enables veterans to access tailored support with or without a case worker. The online map can also be used by anyone who is looking to find support for friends or family.

## **Scottish Veterans Fund**

The 2022/23 funding round saw the Scottish Veterans Fund grant pot increase to £500,000 per year. The priorities this year were projects offering support to early Service leavers and projects encouraging collaborative working in the veteran community. Six of the projects funded this year fell into one of these categories. Of the £500,000 total funding available for 2022/23, £136,070 was set aside to continue funding for projects which had been approved for multi-year funding in previous years; leaving £363,930 available for new bids. In total, 14 new projects received funding, allowing a range of organisations to be supported including employment support from Walking with the Wounded and outdoor counselling from the Venture Trust. Support for small local projects includes football matches for veterans at Elgin City FC, and funding for FirstLight trust to establish a new café hub for veterans and their families in Falkirk.

## **Research**

£300,000 has been invested in research looking into the experiences and support needs of ethnic minority, non-UK, and female veterans. A further £130,000 has been provided to



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charities to assist them in overcoming barriers and improving access for female veterans. In addition, research into the experiences of veterans in the criminal justice system has been commissioned, to explore what preventative interventions can be put in place.

## **LGBT Veterans Independent Review**

The LGBT Veterans Independent Review was announced in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-24), and formally began on 22 June. The purpose of the Review is to make evidence-based recommendations as to how the Government can meet its commitment in the Veterans Strategy to ensure the experience of LGBT veterans who were affected by the ban is understood, and their Service valued. The Independent Review is being chaired by the Lord Etherton PC KC, and it will conclude with a final report being presented to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretary of State for Defence no later than 25 May 2023.

## **Beyond the Covenant**

This section outlines some business, employment and community matters that are 'beyond the Covenant'. These are not considered 'Covenant action' as they confer advantage on Service populations, rather than remedying or preventing disadvantage due to Service, or making special provision for those who have given most. However, they are important for delivering against the Government's commitment to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran, and for ensuring that all Service personnel and families feel supported by the Armed Forces.

### **Veterans railcard**

The veterans railcard went on sale in October 2020 and provides reduced-price rail travel to veterans of the UK Armed Forces. Anyone who has served (Regular or Reserve), regardless of age or disability, can purchase a railcard and save one third on most rail fares. When travelling with the railcard holder, a named companion and children can also benefit from a discount. The railcard costs £30 a year, and a three-year railcard is also available costing £70. Since last year's report, over 32,000 more railcards have been sold, taking the total to over 64,000 sales, as of September 2022.

### **Digital verification of veteran status**

The OVA has undertaken a scoping study and development work for a service that will digitally verify an individual's veteran status. This has the potential to offer a step-change in provision for veterans, allowing veterans to speed up their access to a wide range of services.

As announced during Armed Forces Week, more than £1 million has been committed to exploring how this new digital service will best meet the needs of veterans. This service will include options for the creation and distribution of a digital, and/or a physical, veterans' recognition card.

### **Immigration and citizenship**

The Government's actions on immigration are not considered 'Covenant actions' as they give all non-UK Service personnel, and their families, advantage compared to the civilian non-UK

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population resident in the UK. However, they are important as they ensure that non-UK Service personnel and families experience parity of treatment with their Service peers, and are a mark of the appreciation and respect that the Government has for its non-UK Service personnel and family members.

Following an MOD and Home Office meeting with the Families Federations in December 2020, and a further meeting in July 2021, the Home Office agreed to consider a number of actions to simplify and update the [Immigration Rules Appendix Armed Forces](#). This will form part of a wholesale review of the Appendix along with its associated guidance and application forms, commencing in autumn 2022. Any proposed changes will then be implemented at the earliest opportunity, subject to ministerial agreement. The MOD and the Home Office also agreed to further ongoing improvement of communications to non-UK families posted overseas, and guidance products for non-UK Service personnel.

Non-UK Service personnel and their families already benefit from a number of immigration concessions:

- Non-UK personnel are exempt from immigration control for the duration of their Service, which allows them to come and go without restriction. They are therefore free from any requirements to make visa applications or pay any fees while they serve, unlike almost every other category of migrant coming to work in the UK.
- Non-UK personnel applying for indefinite leave themselves do not have to meet an income requirement, be sponsored by an employer, or meet any requirements regarding their skills, knowledge of the English language or of life in the UK, unlike others.
- Eligible non-UK family members of non-UK personnel enter the UK on a Limited Leave to Enter visa, valid for up to five years, whereas their civilian counterparts are granted a 30-month visa which they must then renew. This visa puts them on their own route to settlement which they can apply for at the end of the five years, and unlike their civilian counterparts, can count time overseas on accompanied assignments towards the five-year UK residency criteria.
- Non-UK personnel and their families are exempt from the Immigration Health Surcharge which is paid by most other migrants who are in the UK for more than six months to access the NHS.

The family Immigration Rules include a Minimum Income Requirement (MIR) to ensure financial independence and encourage integration. The salary for Armed Forces personnel on completion of Basic Training is enough to meet the MIR to bring a spouse/partner to the UK, but it is acknowledged that it can take several years for junior personnel to meet the MIR to bring a child or children to the UK. However, the vast majority of personnel, regardless of their nationality, are single when they enlist. The Home Secretary has, however, committed to a medium-term review of the impact of the MIR on Armed Forces families which is likely to form part of a wider review of the policy.

Following a public [consultation](#) in 2021 regarding the waiver of settlement fees for non-UK Service personnel, the Defence Secretary and the Home Secretary made a [joint](#)

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[announcement](#) on 23 February 2022 that, providing all other Home Office requirements are met, non-UK Service personnel who apply to remain in the UK will not have to pay the fee if they meet one of the following criteria:

- have served at least six years at their point of discharge from Service
- are discharged on medical grounds with a condition attributable to Service, irrespective of their length of Service
- are a veteran who has served for at least six years or was discharged on medical grounds with a condition attributable to Service and are currently living in the UK and have not yet regularised their immigration status

The fee waiver was implemented on 6 April 2022.

The fees and policies that apply to the dependants of non-UK members of the Armed Forces are aligned with those that apply to British citizens and settled persons under the standard family migration rules. It is important to maintain equity between UK and non-UK personnel, each of which may have non-UK family members.

There is no change to the support available to family members such as planning for the cost of visa fees through the Joining Forces Credit Union Service. Children born in the UK, or a qualifying territory, to members of the Armed Forces automatically acquire British citizenship, and children born outside the UK whose mother or father is a member of the Armed Forces at the time of their birth can register as a British citizen. Those with citizenship do not have to make any applications or pay any fees to remain in the UK.

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# Chapter 8: The Covenant in law

## The new Covenant Duty

The Government has fulfilled its 2019 manifesto commitment to ‘further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law’. A new Armed Forces Covenant Duty has been created, that places a new legal obligation on specific public bodies to have due regard to the Covenant principles when delivering certain services, or deciding certain policies, in healthcare, education and housing, that could impact the Armed Forces community.

The Covenant Duty will increase public bodies’ awareness of the principles of the Covenant, the reasons for it, and in turn improve their decision-making in respect of the Armed Forces community. It requires that decisions about the development and delivery of specific services are made with conscious thought to the needs of members of the Armed Forces community. It will therefore further reduce the disadvantages faced by the Armed Forces community arising from Service life, in the provision of public services, and encourage special provision to be applied where appropriate.

How an organisation meets the Covenant Duty, and how the Duty is reflected in relevant policies or procedures, are matters for the organisation in question. It is about informed decision-making, and means that they should think about and place an appropriate amount of weight on the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when considering all the factors relating to how they carry out relevant activities. For example, it means that:

- when deciding if a Service child can take a term-time holiday when their serving parent is back home, a school is now legally obliged to consider the principle that it is desirable to remove the disadvantage the child might face of being unable to take holiday with the serving parent during normal holiday periods
- when allocating a Service partner a position on a waiting list in their new home area, an NHS Trust is now legally obliged to consider the principle that it is desirable to remove the disadvantage the partner might face of waiting longer for treatment, due to their re-location for Service reasons
- when determining a veteran’s access to social housing, a local authority is now legally obliged to consider the principle that it is desirable to remove the disadvantage the veteran might face of not having built up sufficient ‘local connection’ in accordance with the local authority’s allocation scheme, due to re-locations while in Service for Service reasons

The Armed Forces Act 2021, which created the Duty, gained Royal Assent in December 2021. The Duty came into force on 22 November 2022. A fuller explanation of the new Duty can be found in the [Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance](#).

### How will the Covenant Duty be reviewed?

The Government will continue to keep the Duty under review, so that it can be adapted to meet the changing needs of the Armed Forces community. It has committed to conducting a review into whether the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should be brought within scope of the Duty. The results of this review will be provided in the 2023 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report. An outline of the scope of this review is provided later in this chapter.

The Government has also committed to reviewing the effectiveness and impact of the Duty. This will be within five years of the Duty coming into force, which will allow time for the impacts to emerge. Reports from this review will be included in future Covenant and Veterans Annual Reports.

### Which organisations and services are in scope of the new Covenant Duty?

The organisations in scope are summarised in Table 1, taken from the Statutory Guidance.

England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local authorities</li> <li>• Governing bodies of maintained schools and further education institutions</li> <li>• Proprietors of Academies</li> <li>• Non-maintained special schools and special post-16 institutions</li> <li>• NHS England, integrated care boards, NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts</li> </ul>
Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local authorities</li> <li>• Governing bodies of maintained schools</li> <li>• Local Health Boards, Special Health Authorities, and NHS Trusts</li> </ul>
Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local authorities and local authority landlords</li> <li>• Integration authorities, Health Boards, Special Health Boards, and the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service</li> <li>• Persons or bodies whose help is requested under section 23 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004</li> </ul>
Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Northern Ireland Housing Executive</li> <li>• The Education Authority and the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school</li> <li>• The Department of Health (Northern Ireland), but only when exercising the relevant healthcare functions in scope of the Duty that were exercised by the former Regional Health and Social Care Board prior to its dissolution</li> <li>• Local Commissioning Groups, and Health and Social Care Trusts</li> </ul>

Table 1. Summary of organisations subject to the Covenant Duty

The Duty applies to these organisations when, and only when, they deliver, or make decisions about, the services in scope (called ‘relevant functions’). These are summarised in Table 2 below, also taken from the Statutory Guidance.

Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of services</li> <li>• Planning and funding</li> <li>• Co-operation between bodies and professionals</li> </ul> <p>These healthcare functions are within scope of the Duty in the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NHS Primary Care services, including general practice, community pharmacies, NHS dental, NHS optometry services and public health screening services.</li> <li>• NHS Secondary Care services, including urgent and emergency care, hospital and community services, specialist care, mental health services, and additional needs services (as applicable).</li> <li>• Local authority-delivered healthcare services, including sexual health services and drug and alcohol misuse services.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions</li> <li>• Educational attainment and curriculum</li> <li>• Child wellbeing</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Additional needs support</li> <li>• Use of Service Pupil Premium funding (England only)</li> </ul> <p>These education functions are within scope of the Duty in compulsory education settings, that is, primary, secondary, and, for England only, compulsory further education. The Duty does not cover nursery (early years education), higher education, or other voluntary adult education settings.</p>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocations policy for social housing</li> <li>• Tenancy strategies (England only)</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Disabled Facilities Grants</li> </ul>

Table 2. Summary of relevant functions in scope of the Covenant Duty

## The Covenant Duty in Wales

The Welsh Government-funded Armed Forces Liaison Officers have provided training to support local authorities in building awareness of the Armed Forces community and the implications of the Armed Forces Act and the Duty to have due regard. This has included sessions for frontline staff, adapting policies in local authorities including updating equality impact assessments, and increasing the identification of the Armed Forces community to improve data and evidence.

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The Welsh Government has contributed to the development of the draft Statutory Guidance accompanying the new Duty. A focus group was held in November 2021 with Welsh Government policy teams across health, housing and education to inform the Guidance and ensure it reflects devolved delivery in Wales. Partners across Wales, including the Armed Forces Liaison Officers and local health boards, have also provided input to the process.

## **The Covenant Duty in Scotland**

The Scottish Government and other Scottish stakeholders provided substantial comments on the Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance as it was being developed. This was primarily to ensure the Guidance is clear and relevant to public bodies in Scotland, and that it includes language and descriptions which will be familiar to the Scottish public bodies within scope.

## **Outline of the scope of the Review into whether central departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should be brought within scope of the Covenant Duty**

### **Introduction**

As the Duty currently stands, the organisations in scope (summarised in Table 1 above) are concerned with local service delivery. The Duty was designed this way as it is often the variation of service delivery at the local level that can inadvertently cause disadvantage to the Armed Forces community. Such variation in service delivery is often caused by a lack of awareness among local service providers of the nature of Service life, and how it can impact the Armed Forces community when accessing public services. The Duty aims to increase local awareness of the Covenant, to improve the consistency of its application across the UK.

During the passage of the Armed Forces Act 2021, Parliamentarians and key stakeholders proposed that the legal Duty should also be placed on the UK Government. The Government did not accept this argument, as while central Government departments are responsible for setting overall strategic direction and national policy, they do not directly deliver the relevant healthcare, education and housing services to citizens. However, it agreed to conduct a Review into this matter, and to provide a report in the 2023 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report. The Devolved Administrations are included in the scope of this Review as they have similar national responsibilities to the UK Government in these policy areas.

Additions to the scope of the Duty can be made by secondary legislation, as the 2021 Act grants the Secretary of State powers to broaden the scope of the Duty to include other organisations and functions in future, subject to consultation. These powers would be exercised when there is evidence to suggest it would be beneficial.

### **Scope of the Review**

The Review will consider three questions:



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1. Should the UK Government and Devolved Administrations be brought within scope of the Duty when conducting the functions already in scope?
  2. Should the Secretary of State for Defence, and the functions they provide to the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the functions already in scope, be brought within scope of the Duty?
  3. Should other functions of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations be brought within scope of the Duty?

These options are not mutually exclusive. The justification for the selection of these questions, and the methodology that will be used to answer them, are outlined below.

### **Question 1: Should the UK Government and Devolved Administrations be brought within scope of the Duty when conducting the functions already in scope?**

#### **Why explore this question?**

The healthcare, education and housing functions currently in scope are key to the foundation of successful lives, and are among the most commonly cited areas of concern when it comes to disadvantage experienced by the Armed Forces community. Therefore, it is important to ensure the UK Government and Devolved Administrations are considering the Covenant principles when delivering their responsibilities in these policy areas. Question 1 will therefore explore whether bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope will improve their Covenant consideration in these key areas for which they are responsible.

Examining this question addresses stakeholder concerns, raised during the passage of the Armed Forces Act 2021, that the same legal requirement that is imposed on local organisations should also be taken on by the UK Government.

It is not possible to add to the scope of the Duty a blanket inclusion of everything done by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations, without first re-writing the Act to change the way the Duty works. This is because the Act requires that all functions in scope must be specific functions precisely defined. In any case, it would not be prudent to do so, as Covenant-related activity (that is, delivery of services to, and support of, the Armed Forces community) represents only a minority of the broad range of activities conducted by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations.

#### **What methodology will be used to explore this question?**

The following will be considered:

- The role of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations in conducting the functions already in scope.
- The extent to which the UK Government and Devolved Administrations currently consider the Covenant principles.
- The benefits and costs of bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope across these areas.

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Based on this evaluation, a conclusion will be drawn as to whether the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should be brought within scope when conducting the functions already in scope.

## **Question 2: Should the Secretary of State for Defence, and the functions they provide to the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the functions already in scope, be brought within scope of the Duty?**

### **Why explore this question?**

The functions currently in scope (summarised in Table 2 above) are all services provided to the general population, among which sometimes are members of the Armed Forces community. Services delivered by Defence to the Armed Forces community are not currently within scope, so this question will explore whether Defence's comparable services should also be included in the Duty.

As above, it is not possible to add to the scope of the Duty a blanket inclusion of everything done by the MOD on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence, without first re-writing the Act to change the way the Duty works. This is because the Act requires that all functions in scope must be specific functions precisely defined. It would also not be prudent to do so, as Covenant-related activity (that is, delivery of services to, and support of, the Armed Forces community) represents only a minority of Defence's broad range of activities. Therefore, Question 2 will consider adding Defence's comparable healthcare, education and housing functions.

### **What methodology will be used to explore this question?**

The following will be considered:

- The extent to which the Secretary of State for Defence delivers healthcare, education and housing functions to the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the functions already in scope.
- Whether the comparable functions are routed in legislation. (This is necessary because the Act requires that all functions in scope must be under, or by virtue of, primary legislation or retained EU law.)
- The extent to which the Secretary of State for Defence currently considers the Covenant principles.
- The benefits and costs of bringing within scope the Secretary of State for Defence, and the functions they provide to the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the functions already in scope.

Based on this evaluation, a conclusion will be drawn as to whether the Secretary of State for Defence, and the functions they provide to the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the functions already in scope, should be brought within scope of the Duty.

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### **Question 3: Should other functions of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations be brought within scope of the Duty?**

#### **Why explore this question?**

It is important to review whether there is benefit in extending the scope of the Duty to include centrally-delivered functions in other policy areas, such as immigration, social care, and employment.

#### **What methodology will be used to explore this question?**

The Government has been working with stakeholders from Service charities, Local Government Associations, and the UK Government and Devolved Administrations, to establish an open and transparent evaluation process by which to investigate the evidence as to whether new policy areas should be added to the scope of the Duty. Potential additional new functions will be assessed against clear and robust criteria that have been established and agreed with Covenant stakeholders, in order to provide advice to the Secretary of State, with whom the final decision rests.

The Government has committed to working with Covenant stakeholders in using this evaluation process over the next few years. This will include the consideration of adding functions delivered by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations.

While this Review will focus on questions 1 and 2 above, it will include an outline of this new evaluation process, and how it is expected to be used. All outcomes of this evaluation process in the next few years will be publicly available and reported in future annual reports and on the Covenant website.

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# Annex A: Metrics

**Table 1: Percentage<sup>1</sup> of Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England, achieving key grades in GCSE English and mathematics**

Year	Group	% of pupils achieving grades 9-4 in English and maths <sup>2</sup>	% of pupils achieving grades 9-5 in English and maths <sup>3</sup>
2017	Service children	68.7	45.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	67.5	45.9
2018	Service children	68.7	45.3
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	67.7	46.4
2019	Service children	69.2	44.3
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	68.4	46.7
2020 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	76.6	53.3
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	75.4	54.1
2021 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	77.5	54.1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	77.1	57.1

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Includes pupils at state-funded schools in England with a valid school census record and eligible pupils at the end of KS4. Excludes pupils in alternative provision, pupil referral units and international schools.

<sup>2</sup> The 9-4 pass shows pupils who achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths, and is provided alongside the headline measure for transparency and comparability to the old measure.

<sup>3</sup> From 2017, headline threshold attainment measures use grade 5 for reformed English and maths.

<sup>4</sup> The pupil attainment data for 2020 and 2021 is based on Centre Assessment Grades rather than exams. Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the 2019/20 and 2020/21 data should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in pupil performance.

**Table 2: Percentage<sup>1</sup> of Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England, entering the English Baccalaureate and achieving key grades**

Year	Group	Number of pupils at the end of KS4	% of pupils entered for all EBacc components	% of pupils who achieved EBacc for all components (grades A*-C/9-4 pass) <sup>2</sup>	% of pupils who achieved all EBacc components (grades 9-5 pass in English and maths) <sup>3</sup>
2017	Service children	3,773	38.0	22.4	20.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	453,777	40.6	25.9	23.3
2018	Service children	3,805	36.6	23.3	15.6
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	453,559	40.6	26.1	18.3
2019	Service children	4,136	38.1	24.5	15.9
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	462,292	42.5	27.2	18.9
2020 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	4,347	37.9	29.5	20.8
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	468,989	42.5	32.7	23.6
2021 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	4,570	37.7	28.6	20.3
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	463,488	41.7	32.9	24.4

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Includes pupils at state-funded schools in England with a valid school census record and eligible pupils at the end of KS4. Excludes pupils in alternative provision, pupil referral units and international schools.

<sup>2</sup> The 9-4 pass shows pupils who achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths, and is provided alongside the headline measure for transparency and comparability to the old measure.

<sup>3</sup> From 2017, headline threshold attainment measures use grade 5 for reformed English and maths.

<sup>4</sup>The pupil attainment data for 2020 and 2021 is based on Centre Assessment Grades rather than exams. Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the 2019/20 and 2020/21 data should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance.

**Table 3: Average Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores, for Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England<sup>1</sup>**

Year	Group	Average Attainment 8 score per pupil	Average Progress 8 score	Lower confidence interval for Progress 8	Upper confidence interval for Progress 8
2017 <sup>2</sup>	Service children	47.8	0.03	0.00	0.07
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	48.0	0.04	0.03	0.04
2018	Service children	48.0	0.00	-0.03	0.04
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	48.3	0.05	0.05	0.06
2019	Service children	48.0	0.00	-0.04	0.04
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	48.6	0.06	0.05	0.06
2020 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	52.0	-	-	-
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	52.4	-	-	-
2021 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	52.5	-	-	-
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	53.6	-	-	-

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Includes pupils at state-funded schools in England with a valid school census record and eligible pupils at the end of KS4. Excludes pupils in alternative provision, pupil referral units and international schools.

<sup>2</sup> Figures have been revised to include confidence intervals for Progress 8 scores.

<sup>3</sup> The pupil attainment data for 2020 and 2021 is based on Centre Assessment Grades rather than exams. Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the 2019/20 and 2020/21 data should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance. In addition, in response to the changes in grade awarding process the DfE announced it was not publishing school accountability statistics using 2020 or 2021 data. Hence, the absence of 2020 and 2021 Progress 8 data.

**Table 4: Ofsted rating<sup>1</sup> of schools attended by Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England**

Region	Group	% of pupils by their school's Ofsted rating <sup>1</sup>					
		Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Unavailable <sup>2</sup>	Total
England	Service children	16.4	66.6	10.4	3.0	3.5	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	21.3	64.3	9.8	3.4	1.1	100.0
East Midlands	Service children	26.4	63.1	7.7	2.5	0.4	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	16.7	64.8	12.3	5.2	1.0	100.0
East of England	Service children	13.6	70.4	9.6	4.0	2.4	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	18.4	66.6	10.8	2.9	1.3	100.0
London	Service children	36.5	59.0	3.7	0.4	0.5	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	33.8	58.9	4.5	1.5	1.3	100.0
North-East	Service children	18.8	64.5	10.8	5.0	0.9	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	21.8	61.5	10.2	5.7	0.8	100.0
North-West	Service children	19.8	63.9	13.2	2.6	0.6	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	21.0	62.2	12.0	3.6	1.2	100.0
South-East	Service children	17.9	71.5	8.4	0.8	1.3	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	21.1	69.4	6.4	1.6	1.4	100.0
South-West	Service children	11.7	67.9	14.3	4.3	1.8	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	16.8	64.4	13.0	4.7	1.1	100.0



Region	Group	% of pupils by their school's Ofsted rating <sup>1</sup>					
		Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Unavailable <sup>2</sup>	Total
West Midlands	Service children	15.1	73.8	8.8	2.0	0.4	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	17.8	66.1	11.5	3.8	0.8	100.0
Yorkshire & The Humber	Service children	16.7	66.1	10.6	5.9	0.6	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	19.1	62.5	11.9	5.8	0.7	100.0

Source: National Pupil Database, Ofsted December 2021

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> School attended as recorded in Spring Census 2021/22, Ofsted rating as of 31 December 2021 reported in Get Information About Schools. This data may need to be revised, as Ofsted inspection ratings in Get Information About Schools have not yet been updated with changes to the Ofsted methodology published in June 2018 [here](#) and [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Includes pupils at schools that are new and have not been inspected. Does not include pupils at MOD overseas schools, which are not subject to Ofsted inspection.

**Table 5: Percentage of pupils with English and maths grades 5-9, and by number of school moves from years 7 to 11, for Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England**

		% of pupils reported in spring census				% of pupils achieving English and maths grades 9-5			
		0	1	2	3+ <sup>3</sup>	0	1	2	3+ <sup>3</sup>
Number of moves from year 7 to year 11 <sup>1</sup> :		0	1	2	3+ <sup>3</sup>	0	1	2	3+ <sup>3</sup>
2017/18 (revised) <sup>2</sup>	Service children	71.2	22.5	5.2	1.1	49.0	35.3	25.7	16.7
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	82.5	14.6	2.4	0.6	48.9	36.3	23.2	14.0
2018/19 <sup>2</sup>	Service children	69.5	24.9	4.3	1.3	47.0	37.8	30.5	13.9
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	82.4	14.7	2.3	0.6	49.3	36.1	23.9	13.8
2019/20 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	90.9	7.9	1.0	0.2	51.1	32.2	24.4	50.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	94.9	4.7	0.4	0.0	53.2	32.0	16.9	13.2
2020/21 <sup>5</sup>	Service children	93.0	6.4	0.6	0.0	52.2	28.3	26.9	0.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	96.4	3.4	0.2	0.0	55.9	33.6	22.7	11.1

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Number of school moves between years 7 and 11 for pupils finishing year 11 in the academic year stated.

<sup>2</sup> Based on revised figures in the National Pupil Database, which may differ slightly from finalised published figures.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages for moves of 3+ are volatile, based on very small numbers of pupils and conclusions should be treated with caution.

<sup>4</sup> The pupil attainment data for 2019/20 is based on Centre Assessment Grades rather than exams. Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the 2019/20 data should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance.

<sup>5</sup> The pupil attainment data for 2021 is based on teacher assessment grades submitted by their school rather than exams. This is a different process to 2020 where centre assessment grades were awarded. Due to the changed awarding process for GCSE grades it is recommended that year on year comparisons are not made to 2020 or other years.

**Table 6: Pupil destinations after completing Key Stage 4, for Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England (state-funded schools<sup>1</sup>)**

Destination year <sup>2</sup>	Group	Number of eligible pupils	% of eligible pupils					
			Any sustained education or employment	Any sustained education destination	Sustained apprenticeships	Sustained employment destination	Destination not sustained	Activity not captured in the data
2016/17	Service children	3,662	96	88	5	3	3	1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	464,827	95	87	5	3	4	1
2017/18	Service children	3,761	95	88	4	3	3	1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	455,022	95	88	5	3	4	1
2018/19	Service children	3,782	95	87	4	4	4	1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	453,803	95	88	4	3	4	1
2019/20 <sup>3</sup>	Service children	3,971	95	87	4	4	4	1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	462,731	95	88	4	3	4	1

Source: Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> State-funded schools include local authority-maintained schools, academies, free schools, city technology colleges, further education colleges with provision for 14- to 16-year-olds, state-funded special schools and non-maintained special schools.

<sup>2</sup> Employment and benefits data from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs and Department for Work and Pensions from the LEO dataset was included for the first time in 2014/15 and accounted for a one percentage point increase in employment destinations. Direct comparison with previous years' employment estimates should be treated with caution. Education destinations are not affected.

<sup>3</sup> As the latest publication is looking at activity in the first two terms of the 2019/20 academic year it is mostly unaffected by the COVID-19 disruption. The only exception to this is data for students progressing to apprenticeships, this is because the methodology takes into account whether students have sustained an apprenticeship for six months at any time in the 2019/20 academic year (between August 2019 and July 2020), rather than the first two terms for other destinations.

**Table 7: Student destinations after 16-18 study, for Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England<sup>1</sup> (mainstream schools and colleges)<sup>2</sup>**

Destination year	Group	Number of eligible pupils	Percentage of eligible pupils								
			Any sustained education or employment	Any sustained education destination	Further education (level 3 and below)	Higher education (level 4 and above)	Other education destinations	Sustained apprenticeships	Sustained employment destination	Destination not sustained	Activity not captured in the data
2017/18 <sup>3,4</sup>	Service children	2,500	90	54	7	46	2	8	27	8	3
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	345,791	88	57	6	49	2	7	24	8	4
2018/19 <sup>4</sup>	Service children	2,409	91	55	5	48	3	6	30	7	2
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	321,006	89	58	5	51	2	7	24	8	4
2019/20 <sup>4,5</sup>	Service children	2,668	90	52	5	45	2	6	32	7	2
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	333,725	88	58	6	50	2	6	24	8	4

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Service child status was determined by looking across three years before students reached the end of 16 to 18 study. The majority of them would have been at the end of Key Stage 4 study two years prior.

<sup>2</sup> Employment and benefits data from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs and Department for Work and Pensions from the LEO dataset have increased coverage and estimates of employment substantially from 2014/15. This time series for the years 2010/11 to 2013/14 has been updated to include LEO data. These revised statistics were first published in the statistical working paper on improvements to destination measures in August 2016.

<sup>3</sup> In 2017/18 there were further changes to the 16 to 18 cohort of level 3 students. From this year, the cohort includes students who left their institutions up to two years before being deemed to have reached the end of 16 to 18 study. Development analysis has shown that this group of students is much less likely to continue in education than those who stayed in education up to the end of 16 to 18 study. Partially due to these changes, the overall rate of progression to education for the level 3 group has decreased.

<sup>4</sup> The data shows how many students took any level 3 qualification in the destination years 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20. As a result the value for destination year 2017/18 will be slightly different to what was presented in 2020. The value presented in 2020 was based only on students who completed an approved level 3 qualification. The data has now examined how many students have taken any level 3 qualification and due to changes in which qualifications are counted as approved or unapproved presenting all level 3 for the past two years makes the data more comparable. Data prior to 2016/17 covers just students who completed mainly level 3 approved qualifications, as such comparisons across years should be treated with caution.

<sup>5</sup> As the latest publication is looking at activity in the first two terms of the 2019/20 academic year it is mostly unaffected by the COVID-19 disruption. The only exception to this is data for students progressing to apprenticeships, this is because the methodology takes into account whether students have sustained an apprenticeship for six months at any time in the 2019/20 academic year (between August 2019 and July 2020), rather than the first two terms for other destinations.

**Table 8: Pupil destinations after completing secondary level education, for Service children and non-Service children, in Northern Ireland**

Year	Group	Number of eligible pupils	% of eligible pupils	
			Higher or further education <sup>1</sup>	Employment, training, unemployed, or destination unknown <sup>1</sup>
2018/19	Service children	20	75	25
	Non-Service children	21,601	75	25
2019/20	Service children	33	73	27
	Non-Service children	20,689	77	23
2020/21	Service children	..	..	..
	Non-Service children	..	..	..

Source: Department of Education, Northern Ireland

Coverage: Northern Ireland

1. Categories have been combined to reduce the risk of disclosure

.. Represents data unavailable

**Table 9: New social housing lettings in England and length of time in local authority area immediately prior to this letting, for households containing a member/veteran of the UK regular Armed Forces and non-Service households**

Length of time household had lived in the local authority area immediately prior to this letting	2018/19			2019/20			2020/21		
	% of those still serving or that left within the last 5 years	% of those that left more than 5 years ago	% of the non-Service population	% of those still serving or that left within the last 5 years	% of those that left more than 5 years ago	% of the non-Service population	% of those still serving or that left within the last 5 years	% of those that left more than 5 years ago	% of the non-Service population
New to local authority area	20.3	13.8	9.8	16.6	12.4	8.5	18.5	13.3	9.3
Less than 1 year	9.1	4.9	5.7	9.5	5.4	6.4	7.3	6.5	6.3
1 – 2 years	8.0	6.2	7.6	6.9	4.0	5.7	8.1	4.2	5.0
2 – 3 years	5.2	2.4	3.5	5.1	2.7	3.5	5.0	3.1	3.7
3 – 4 years	3.6	2.5	2.8	3.2	2.6	3.2	4.0	2.2	2.8
4 – 5 years	5.2	3.9	4.8	4.2	2.9	4.1	8.7	3.4	3.8
More than 5 years	48.5	66.3	65.8	54.4	70.1	68.5	48.4	67.3	69.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	820	3,490	221,040	770	3,030	214,070	481	1,875	166,608

Source: CORE Social Housing Lettings 2018/19, 2019/20, and 2020/21 DLUHC

(Note: Any discrepancies in totals are due to rounding.)

**Table 10: Length of time on waiting list for current social housing/accommodation, estimated percentages, for Service population and non-Service population in England**

Length of time on waiting list prior to allocation	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	% of the Service population and families	% of the non-Service population	% of the Service population and families	% of the non-Service population	% of the Service population and families	% of the non-Service population	% of the Service population and families	% of the non-Service population
Less than 6 months	69.1	57.2	54.6	59.8	68.2	55.4	52.5	58.0
6 months – 1 year	8.5	15.2	17.4	12.5	16.7	14.9	12.4	9.2
1–2 years	6.1	9.5	7.7	9.6	7.6	8.7	21.8	11.5
2–3 years	3.2	5.4	4.7	5.4	u	6.4	u	6.2
3–5 years	4.3	6.2	5.0	6.1	3.5	5.9	u	7.6
5 years or more	8.7	6.5	10.7	6.6	2.4	8.7	u	7.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	271	4,485	289	4,288	199	4,394	46	940

Source: English Housing Survey 2017/18, 2018/19, and 2020/21 full household sample

To safeguard against data disclosure, findings derived from unweighted cell counts of less than 5 and more than 0 are replaced with a “u”. The 2020/21 EHS survey sample was much smaller than previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Table 11: Satisfaction with social rented sector, estimated percentages, for Service population and non-Service population in England**

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
		Service population and families	Non-Service population	Service population and families	Non-Service population	Service population and families	Non-Service population
Satisfaction with accommodation	Satisfied (%)	81.2	78.8	81.3	73.1	74.4	71.3
	Sample size	457	5,808	319	5,411	79	1,112
Satisfaction with tenure	Satisfied (%)	83.0	80.9	85.7	76.8	79.8	77.1
	Sample size	482	5,983	330	5,676	86	1,188
Satisfaction with area	Satisfied (%)	83.2	80.3	84.4	75.9	80.1	78.4
	Sample size	470	5,919	320	5,626	84	1,230
Satisfaction with repairs/maintenance	Satisfied (%)	70.9	63.8	69.8	61.8	77.4	61.7
	Sample size	399	4,706	259	4,530	76	968

Source: English Housing Survey 2018/19, 2019/20, and 2020/21, full household sample

Note: The 2020/21 EHS survey sample was much smaller than previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 12: Satisfaction with private rented sector, estimated percentages, for Service population and non-Service population in England**

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
		Service population and families	Non-Service population	Service population and families	Non-Service population	Service population and families	Non-Service population
Satisfaction with accommodation	Satisfied (%)	78.0	82.8	78.0	81.7	63.5	78.7
	Sample size	299	4,682	233	4,478	83	1,408
Satisfaction with tenure	Satisfied (%)	61.6	66.6	67.4	69.0	72.3	62.5
	Sample size	228	3,807	218	3,723	95	1,102
Satisfaction with area	Satisfied (%)	90.8	86.3	81.9	83.5	97.5	85.4
	Sample size	322	4,866	251	4,594	126	1,549
Satisfaction with repairs/maintenance	Satisfied (%)	73.8	71.4	64.8	74.5	64.3	75.2
	Sample size	273	3,966	204	3,958	85	1,291

Source: English Housing Survey 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21, full household sample

Note: The 2020/21 EHS survey sample was much smaller than previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 13: Number of cancer patients, and percentage meeting waiting time target for treatment, in England**

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Two-week wait for all cancers <sup>2</sup>	Service personnel <sup>1</sup>	1,886	91.7	2,192	91.6	2,027	86.7	2,643	80.5
	England	2,066,264	92.0	2,386,815	90.8	2,080,673	88.7	2,684,899	82.1
	Target		93		93		93		93
Two-week wait for symptomatic breast patients (where cancer was not initially suspected) <sup>2</sup>	Service personnel <sup>1</sup>	230	85.8	217	81.6	141	63.1	164	48.8
	England	164,485	85.8	176,807	83.9	128,364	76.0	155,135	64.0
	Target		93		93		93		93
One-month (31-day) diagnosis to first treatment wait for all cancers <sup>3</sup>	Service personnel <sup>1</sup>	123	97.6	111	97.3	115	95.7	105	97.1
	England	303,569	96.8	316,588	96.0	275,553	95.0	321,755	93.5
	Target		96		96		96		96
62-day wait for first treatment following an urgent GP referral for all cancers <sup>4</sup>	Service personnel <sup>1</sup>	57	87.7	47	87.2	59	71.2	49	69.4
	England	129,724	79.1	167,101	77.2	148,280	74.3	171,395	69.0
	Target		85		85		85		85

Source: [Cancer Waiting Times Database \(CWT-Db\), NHS England](#)

1. 'Service personnel' refers to all Defence Medical Services-registered patients; will include Service families who are Defence Medical Services registered.

2. Patients seen within 14 days of referral.

3. Patients treated within 31 days of the decision to treat date.

4. Patients received a first definitive anti-cancer treatment within 62 days of the urgent referral date.

5. Operational Standard: expected level of performance based on case mix, clinical requirements, potential numbers of patients unfit for treatment or electing to delay treatment (patient choice).

**Table 14: UK regular Armed Forces personnel satisfied with Service-provided medical treatment received over the past two years, estimated percentage**

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Medical treatment	..	..	77	76	76	76	80	80	77	72
Dental treatment	85	86	87	86	86	87	89	89	84	81

Source: [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)

1. Minor wording and format change in 2015.
2. Excludes N/A responses.
- .. represents data unavailable.

**Table 15: UK Armed Forces families able to access medical care in the past 12 months, estimated percentage**

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
GP (including nurse/ midwife)	96	96	98	98	98	98	98	97	98	96
Dentist	89	90	91	90	90	90	89	87	68	66
Hospital or specialist services	..	..	98	96	97	97	96	95	94	91

Source: [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2014 and 2022](#)

1. 2013 to 2014 – excludes N/A.
2. 2015 to 2019 – Includes ‘Yes, without difficulties’ and ‘Yes, but with some difficulties’; Excludes missing and ‘No, I did not need to’ responses.
3. Responses are filtered for those who required access to respective medical care [GP: 90%, Dentist: 86% and Hospital: 57% for 2022]
- Break in time series between 2014 and 2015 due to change in response options and population reported on.
- .. represents data unavailable.

**Table 16: UK Armed Forces families able to continue medical treatment<sup>1</sup> following a move<sup>2</sup> in the past 12 months, estimated percentage**

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
GP (including nurse/ midwife)	90	92	96	95	93	95	92	91	91	86
Dentist	70	74	75	82	81	82	78	77	54	55
Hospital or specialist services	..	..	91	90	85	84	83	80	78	76

Source: [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2014 and 2022](#)

1. Refers to whether spouses/dependants were able to continue treatment in new location if moved.
  2. Includes: if moved for own reasons and if due to Service.
  3. 2013 to 2014 – excludes N/A.
  4. 2015 to 2019 – Includes ‘Yes, without difficulties’ and ‘Yes, but with some difficulties’; Excludes missing and ‘No, I did not need to’ responses
  5. Respondents are filtered for those who moved in the last 12 months whilst undergoing treatment [GP: 11% Dental: 8% Hospital: 8% for 2022]
  6. Numbers based on a small subset: people who have moved and needed to continue treatment.
- Break in time series between 2014 and 2015 due to change in population reported on.  
 .. represents data unavailable.

**Table 17: UK Armed Forces personnel satisfied with opportunities to gain civilian accreditation<sup>1</sup>, estimated percentage**

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Satisfied	43	42	47	48	46	47	48	48	49	47

Source: [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)

1. Relates only to Service training courses and not training received prior to leaving the Services (Resettlement training).
2. Minor wording change in 2011.

**Table 18: UK Armed Forces personnel satisfied with opportunities for personal development, estimated percentage**

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Satisfied	52	52	57	57	54	55	57	58	59	56

Source: [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)

1. Minor wording change in 2011.

**Table 19: UK Armed Forces personnel who used Career Transition Partnership and were employed within six months of leaving the Armed Forces, estimated percentage**

Year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Employment rate	85	83	83	85	80	82	84	86	84	83

Source: [ADAPT \(Career Transition Partnership ex-Service personnel employment outcomes\)](#)

1. 2011/12 to 2014/15 – estimated from a 20% sample of those who used billable Career Transition Partnership services.

---- Break in time series between 2014/15 and 2015/16 – Service leavers prior to 1 October 2015 who used the Career Transition Partnership Future Horizons programme were excluded from analysis. Since 1 October 2015 all Service leavers who have used a billable Career Transition Partnership service have been included.

---- Break in time series between 2015/16 and 2016/17 – 2016/17 is the first year in which all Service leavers who used a billable Career Transition Partnership service have been followed up. This, coupled with methodology changes, has resulted in comparisons with previous years being invalid.

**Table 20: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with the standard of Service accommodation, estimated percentage**

Year		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Armed Forces personnel	Service Family Accommodation	57	60	57	50	46	51	51	51	53	52
	Single Living Accommodation	56	56	58	55	50	49	52	49	51	44
Service families	Service Family Accommodation	..	..	63	53	57	57	57	56	54	50

Source: [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#) and [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)

1. AFCAS: Service Family Accommodation: minor wording change 2013 and 2015.
  2. AFCAS: Single Living Accommodation: minor wording change 2012, 2013 and 2015; comparative analysis has indicated that a change to the wording of the response options in 2011 has resulted in some respondents ticking 'SFA - inside the base/camp' when they should have ticked 'SLA of any type'. Therefore, no reliable figures can be given for 2011.
  3. AFCAS: Excludes N/A and 'Don't know'.
  4. AFCAS: Relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Single Living Accommodation; excludes those living in Substitute Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Single Living Accommodation
  5. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service Family Accommodation or Substitute Service Family Accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [54% in 2022]
  6. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This question was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS.
  7. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation.
- .. represents data unavailable.



**Table 21: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with response to maintenance request (Service accommodation), estimated percentage**

Year		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Armed Forces personnel	Service Family Accommodation	46	46	42	32	28	29	33	37	38	32
	Single Living Accommodation	35	36	38	33	28	26	30	30	33	28
Service families	Service Family Accommodation	..	..	45	32	34	35	41	37	38	29

Source: [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#) and [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)

1. AFCAS: New questions in 2011.
  2. AFCAS: Minor wording change in 2012, 2013 and 2015.
  3. AFCAS: Excludes N/A and 'Don't know'.
  4. AFCAS: Relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Single Living Accommodation; excludes those living in Substitute Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Single Living Accommodation.
  5. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service Family Accommodation or Substitute Service Family Accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [54% in 2022]
  6. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This question was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS.
  7. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation.
- .. represents data unavailable.

**Table 22: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with quality of maintenance service (Service accommodation), estimated percentage**

Year		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Armed Forces personnel	Service Family Accommodation	39	40	37	29	26	27	30	31	32	28
	Single Living Accommodation	38	38	41	35	30	28	33	30	35	30
Service families	Service Family Accommodation	..	..	42	29	29	30	36	33	31	26

Source: [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#) and [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)

1. AFCAS: New questions in 2011.
  2. AFCAS: Minor wording change in 2012, 2013 and 2015.
  3. AFCAS: Excludes N/A and 'Don't know'.
  4. AFCAS: Relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Single Living Accommodation; excludes those living in Substitute Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Single Living Accommodation.
  5. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service Family Accommodation or Substitute Service Family Accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [54% in 2022]
  6. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This question was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS.
  7. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation.
- .. represents data unavailable.

**Table 23: UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with value for money of Service accommodation, estimated percentage**

Year		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Armed Forces personnel	Service Family Accommodation	71	74	71	63	63	60	60	60	64	64
	Single Living Accommodation	66	63	64	59	57	56	58	56	62	57
Service families	Service Family Accommodation	..	..	75	64	70	68	67	68	66	62

Source: [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#) and [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)

1. AFCAS: Minor wording change in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2015.
  2. AFCAS: Excludes N/A and 'Don't know'.
  3. AFCAS: Relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Single Living Accommodation; excludes those living in Substitute Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Single Living Accommodation.
  4. FAMCAS: Responses are filtered for those respondents who live in Service Family Accommodation or Substitute Service Family Accommodation, and answered the questions, and did not answer 'Don't know'. [54% in 2022]
  5. FAMCAS: Comparisons with years prior to 2015 are not possible. This questions was introduced in 2015 to bring it in line with AFCAS.
  6. FAMCAS: Only relates to those living in Service Family Accommodation and Substitute Service Family Accommodation.
- .. represents data unavailable.

**Table 24: UK Armed Forces veterans, TILS<sup>1</sup> referrals receiving assessment, treatment and discharging, numbers and percentages**

	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Number of referrals	2,879 <sup>r</sup>		3,913		4,660		3,967		4,695	
Appropriate for assessment	2,414 <sup>r</sup>	83.9 <sup>r</sup>	2,684	69	3,496	75	3,194	81	3,995	85
Assessment attended <sup>3</sup>	1,649 <sup>r</sup>	68.3 <sup>r</sup>	2,120	79	2,569	74	2,391	75	3,258	82
Of assessed, received treatment in TILS <sup>4</sup>	581 <sup>r</sup>	35.2 <sup>r</sup>	613	29	585	23	722	30	1,253	38

Source: NHS England & NHS Improvement

1. TILS - Transition, Intervention and Liaison Services – Op COURAGE.

2. Clinical assessment.

3. Seen in TILS service/clinical appointment.

4. Assessment may result in appropriate referrals to other external Mental Health services such as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT), Complex Treatment Service (CTS) or Community Mental Health Trust (CMHT).

r. "Appropriate for assessment" data not available for all regions prior to Sept-17; figures are estimated for this time period.

NB: Calendar days were used for the calculations.

**Table 25: UK Armed Forces veterans, TILS<sup>1</sup> average waiting times<sup>2</sup> for assessment and treatment<sup>3</sup>, days**

Year		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Assessment	Offered <sup>4</sup>	39	37	13	14
	Attended	47	39	16	17
Treatment	Offered	55	68	16	23
	Attended	57	70	17	26

Source: NHS England & NHS Improvement

1. TILS - Transition, Intervention and Liaison Services – Op COURAGE.
  2. Wait time from referral to assessment and from referral to treatment.
  3. Seen in TILS service / clinical appointment.
  4. Target: 14 days.
- NB: Calendar days were used for the calculations.

**Table 26: UK Armed Forces Veterans Op Courage, CTS<sup>1</sup> average waiting times<sup>2</sup> for initial appointment<sup>3</sup>, working days**

Year		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Initial clinical appointment	Offered <sup>4</sup>	18	33	24	16
	Attended	24	36	34	21

Source: NHS England & NHS Improvement

1. TILS - Transition, Intervention and Liaison Services - Op COURAGE.
  2. Wait time from referral from TILS to initial appointment.
  3. Seen in clinical appointment.
  4. Target: 10 working days from referral from TILS.
- NB: Working days were used for the calculations.

**Table 27: UK Armed Forces veterans, CTS<sup>1</sup> referrals accepted and appointments delivered, numbers and percentage**

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Number of referrals		648		714		631		517	
Referrals accepted		617	95.2	691	96.7	578	91.6	476	92.1
Appointment delivered in pathway <sup>2</sup>	Total	15,881		19,480		10,350		2,906	
By year delivered <sup>3</sup>	2018/19	5,739							
	2019/20	5,485		7,546					
	2020/21	3,557		8,881		4,895			
	2021/22	1,100		3,053		5,455		2,906	

Source: NHS England & NHS Improvement

1. CTS - Complex Treatment Services – Op COURAGE.

2. Appointments delivered for referrals received in that financial year.

3. The appointments have been split by the year delivered.

NB: Calendar days were used for the calculations.

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**Table 28: UK Armed Forces Veterans Op Courage, HIS<sup>1</sup> referrals and key activity**

Year	2020/21	2021/22
Referrals	304	761
First contacts	272	619
Referrals seen in Service (%)	89.5	81.3
Follow-up appointments	2,638	11,307
Average number of follow-ups	9.7	18.3
Family and carer contacts	77	370
Average wait from referral to first contact with patient (days)	5	4
Average length of care (days)	72	84

Source: NHS England

1. HIS - High Intensity Service – Op COURAGE.
  2. First regional service launched in October 2020.
- NB: Calendar days were used for the calculations.



**Table 29: UK Armed Forces Veterans, Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) referrals and enquiry source**

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23 (partial)	Total or average
Referrals received	50	41	149	121	361
<b>Specialities</b>					
Musculoskeletal and pain	66%	78%	79%	84%	79%
Neurology	12%	5%	8%	7%	8%
Mental health (no physical health issues)	8%	5%	0%	0%	2%
Other	14%	12%	13%	9%	12%
<b>Enquiry source</b>					
GP	66%	51%	40%	64%	53%
Self/spouse	22%	12%	14%	4%	12%
Mental health provider	4%	7%	33%	25%	23%
Third sector	2%	22%	13%	7%	10%
Other	6%	7%			2%

Source: NHS England

1. 2021/22 figures updated.
2. 2022/23 numbers are from the start of October only, not full year effect.

**Table 30: UK Armed Forces Veterans, VNHSW<sup>1</sup> referrals receiving an assessment and treatment in Wales, numbers and percentages**

Year	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of referrals <sup>2,3,7</sup>	329	390	542	607	633	614	808	831	517	..
% referrals receiving assessment <sup>3,4,7</sup>			60-70	73	57	67	66	56	60	..
% referrals receiving treatment <sup>5,6</sup>			30-50	58	39	..	37	36	..	..

Source: Veterans NHS Wales

1. Veterans NHS Wales

2. 2017/18: There were gaps in administration cover in 2017/18 which may have resulted in some referrals not being recorded until after the end of the reporting period. Consequently, the true figure is likely to be higher.

3. 2017/18: 67 % of referrals were offered an assessment. This figure is an estimate based on the first 11 months of the year. March 2018 was excluded as assessments were less likely to have taken place and recorded in the reporting period.

4. 2018/19: 66 % of referrals were offered an assessment. In 2018/19 the reporting period was extended so this figure is based on all 12 months of the year.

5. 2017/18: The method of data collection combined with the gaps in administration cover in the 2017/18 year resulted in too few data points to provide a confident estimate of the number of referrals who received treatment.

6. 2018/19: 37 % of referrals were offered treatment and subsequently booked in for treatment. This figure is estimated on the first nine months of the year

7. The total referrals and assessments completed for 2020/21 were reported on the Monthly Summaries and are therefore provisional until confirmation by the Minimum Data Set.

.. Represents data unavailable

**Table 31: UK Armed Forces Veterans, VNHSW<sup>1</sup> waiting times for assessment and treatment in Wales**

Year		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Referral to assessment <sup>2</sup>	4 weeks or less	29%	30%	74%	77%	56%	88%	..
	10 weeks or less	80%	80%	..	..	97%	..	..
Assessment to treatment <sup>3</sup>	4 weeks or less	28%	19%	..	..	9%	..	..
	24 weeks or less	80%	..	90%	95%	81%	80%	..

Source: Veterans NHS Wales

1. Veterans NHS Wales.

2. Welsh Government target for assessment is 4 weeks. Clock starts at opt-in and not referral. Therefore, the measurement here is opt-in to assessment.

3. Welsh Government target for treatment is 26 weeks.

.. Represents data unavailable.

**Table 32: UK Armed Forces Veterans, VNHSW<sup>1</sup> reliable improvement<sup>2,3</sup> in Wales**

Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Reliable improvement	88%	74%	94%	89%	81%	..	..

Source: Veterans NHS Wales

1. Veterans NHS Wales.

2. Demonstrated reliable improvement on at least one of the three core measures for post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety.

3. Pre- and post-therapy measure available for: 48 veterans in 2015/16, 31 veterans in 2016/17, 34 veterans in 2017/18, 126 veterans in 2018/19 and 78 veterans in 2019/20.

.. Represents data unavailable.

**Table 33: UK Armed Forces Veterans in Wales receiving treatment for substance misuse<sup>1</sup>, numbers**

Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Reliable improvement	362 <sup>r</sup>	305 <sup>r</sup>	306 <sup>r</sup>	364 <sup>r</sup>	346 <sup>r</sup>	279 <sup>r</sup>	390 <sup>r</sup>

Source: [Digital Health & Care Wales](#) (DHCW) Information Services Division (ISD)

1. alcohol or drug misuse.

r – numbers adjusted for data reconciliation.

**Table 34: Former Armed Forces status for households in Scotland assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness**

Year	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number	894	795	772	741	690	742	828	808 <sup>r</sup>	685 <sup>r</sup>	639
Percentage	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.7	3.0 <sup>r</sup>	2.0	2.0

Source: [Scottish Government](#)

Coverage: Scotland.

r – Figure revised from last year's report.

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# Annex B: Veterans' Strategy Action Plan commitments

The [Veterans' Strategy Action Plan \(2022-24\)](#) set out an ambitious portfolio of commitments agreed across Government to improve understanding of and services for veterans. Published in January 2022 by the OVA, the Strategy Action Plan is one of the mechanisms used by Government to deliver the Strategy for our Veterans. Like the Strategy for our Veterans, it focuses on six areas identified as significant to veterans' lives: community and relationships; employment, education and skills; finance and debt; health and wellbeing; making a home in civilian society; and veterans and the law. The Plan includes over 60 commitments by Government departments and others to deliver for our veterans.

Progress against the Plan is monitored by the OVA, and Government departments are required to provide regular updates on progress, emerging risks and additional opportunities. In the interests of transparency, the Government published a [six-monthly update](#) on its progress earlier this year, demonstrating strong progress.

It is important to note that the commitments in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan are just one part of the Government's efforts to deliver for veterans. Work is ongoing on a whole range of other areas that are not reflected in the update below.

Categorised by 'completed', 'in progress' and 'in progress with revised timeline', given below are the commitments published in the Strategy Action Plan, some of which have been broken down further to enable meaningful measurement of progress. Please note that this information was accurate as at September 2022 (the end date of the period covered by this report), and it is likely that a number of commitments shown as in progress will have been completed by the time this report is published.

## Completed

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
Establish an advisory group of academics and researchers. This new grouping will allow researchers to share their work, knowledge and understanding in their area(s) of expertise. It will also allow the sharing of the latest government research, policy and programmes, ensuring a robust academic contribution to the work of the OVA.	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	January 2022
Establish a working group with Devolved Administration colleagues, which meets quarterly during SAP implementation to discuss UK-wide commitments, and to share best practice on devolved matters.	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	January 2022
Establish an advisory group of organisations employing veterans. This new grouping will focus on members' experiences employing those who have served. It will also provide a forum for discussion around the range of policies and programmes impacting veterans in this area.	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	January 2022
Convene expert stakeholders from academia and the charity sector to a summit on the effect of the withdrawal from Afghanistan on veterans and their families, to inform the longer term government understanding of and response to the impact.	OVA	Better Data	February 2022
Undertake a bespoke campaign on employability to promote to the business audience the skills veterans have, and the schemes that are on offer to increase veteran employment and assist their transition into the civilian workplace. This will include raising awareness of the National Insurance contribution holiday for employers who hire veterans which, from April 2022, can be claimed back in real time and retrospectively for the 2021 financial year.	OVA	Public Perception of Veterans	March 2022
Provide £150k in grant funding to charities to aid the development of best practice to ensure that veteran charities are inclusive and promote accessibility to female veterans.	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	March 2022
Conduct comprehensive research to create a baseline insight and understanding of the UK public and employers' perception of veterans, to inform communications and policy	OVA	Public Perception of Veterans	May 2022

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
interventions which show we value and support veterans.			
Readvertise the membership of the Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB) as part of regular processes to ensure we continue to capture independent voices representing all parts of the veteran community	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	Spring 2022
Roll out the Great Place to Work for veterans initiative across the whole Civil Service for roles at all levels including the Senior Civil Servant (SCS) level.	OVA	Employment, Education and Skills	April 2022
Continue to support phase 4 of the King's Centre for Military Health Research longitudinal study looking at the health and wellbeing of UK Armed Forces Personnel. For the first time, this will also look at topics including social mobility, taking the insights beyond health and wellbeing.	OVA	Better Data	Late 2022
Support initiatives for veterans with disabilities and better understanding their needs and lived experience in collaboration with the Disability Unit. This will include: improving the evidence across-government of veterans who self report a disability. sharing best practice with Disabled Persons Organisations about how veterans use adaptive sport to help increase activity levels and participate in communities, in collaboration with Sport England	OVA, CO Disability Unit, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	March 2022
Establish a UK Government veteran communications coordination group, to ensure Territorial Offices and the OVA collaborate effectively to celebrate the contribution of veterans to society, wherever they choose to settle in the UK.	OVA, Wales Office, Scotland Office, NIO	Public Perception of Veterans	April 2022
Undertake a scoping study to design/roll out, for the first time ever, a service offering the digital verification of veteran status. This has the potential to offer a 'step change' in digital provision for veterans, allowing veterans to potentially access a wide range of government services. Further work post-project will allow us to start developing delivery options for Phase 2 of the rollout of Veterans' ID cards.	OVA, MOD	Public Perception of Veterans	Q2 2022
Work across departments to promote and amplify positive messages about veterans volunteering in their communities, by	OVA, DCMS	Community and Relationships	September 2022



Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
promoting the contribution veterans are making through volunteering as part of the 2022 Volunteers' Week and highlighting veteran winners of Points of Light awards.			
Appoint a Welsh Veterans Commissioner.	OVA, Wales Office	Recognition of veterans and supporting their needs	End of 2022
Engage quarterly with Local Authorities through the existing MOD Community Action Group, to discuss key policy issues affecting veterans and their families and to enable information and best practice sharing between central and local government.	OVA, MOD	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	Ongoing
Follow up on the findings from the Probation Institute's upcoming research publication into ex armed service personnel journeys into harmful behaviour.	MOJ	Veterans and the Law	January 2022
Develop a fast-track recruitment scheme for Service leavers and veterans to become prison officers and engage in active outreach at ex-Armed Forces recruitment fairs.	MOJ, HMPPS, MOD	Employment, Education and Skills	January 2022
Formalise a working partnership between FCDO and RBL to support UK AF veterans living overseas who need consular assistance.	FCDO	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	January 2022
Ensure LAs are recording all veterans approaching LAs who are owed a homelessness duty, rather than only those who require more assistance directly as a result of them having served.	DLUHC	Making a home in civilian society	End of 2022
Implement the new model for Armed Forces Champions and Leads in the Jobcentre Plus network, including monitoring and evaluation of their role.	DWP	Employment, Education and Skills	April 2023
Expand the Armed Forces 'marker' (including veterans) for new universal credit applicants to include existing claimants.	DWP	Finance and Debt	Ongoing
Bring together all Service leaver & veteran life chances schemes in the Civil Service under the central management of Going Forward Into Employment, to improve efficiencies and provide a clear pathway for Service leavers, veterans and military partners/spouses who need extra support by removing barriers to finding employment.	CS Commission, HMRC	Employment, Education and Skills	January 2022

## In progress

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
Introduce new terms of reference for Veterans Advisory Pensions Committees (VAPCs) empowering them to bring together a community of veterans from their region to form coordinated responses to government and communicate initiatives occurring in their region. Review the new terms of reference during 2022.	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	Winter 2022
Add new Covid-19 questions to the King's College London cohort study to check whether the results of the Vets-Check survey, which examined the impact of Covid-19 on Veterans, are enduring.	OVA	Better Data	Late 2022
Add ONS measures on loneliness and social isolation to the regular Veterans Survey, in order to understand the extent to which veterans are experiencing feelings of loneliness and social isolation	OVA	Community and Relationships	End of 2022
Develop a single set of veterans' KPIs and metrics, to measure UK Government progress made against the 2028 Strategy for our Veterans outcomes.	OVA	Better Data	End of 2022
Establish a network of veterans champions across the Civil Service to share best practice on veterans issues and champion veterans within their departments and ALBs.	OVA	Employment, Education and Skills	End of 2022
In partnership with the MOD and the relevant Armed Forces charities the OVA will undertake additional work and consultation to ensure the Veteran's Gateway service has effective investment, governance and awareness amongst the veterans community in order to connect people with the right support.	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	End of 2022
Commission and publish new qualitative research specifically looking at the experiences and support needs of non-UK veterans.	OVA	Better Data	March 2023
Commission and publish new qualitative research specifically looking at the experiences and support needs of ethnic minority veterans.	OVA	Better Data	March 2023
Commission and publish new qualitative research seeking to understand how female	OVA	Better Data	March 2023

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
veterans access support, and any barriers to female veterans feeling they can seek help			
Deliver a drumbeat of communications and engagement activity to increase awareness of the range of government funded support services available to veterans and their families when they leave the Armed Forces.	OVA	Public Perception of Veterans	Ongoing
Include new veteran markers in UK Government datasets and work regularly across UK Government departments to look at where veteran markers can/should be added to new or existing datasets.	OVA	Better Data	Ongoing
Conduct regional engagement with local authorities to understand the data they collect and hold on the veteran community.	OVA	Better Data	Ongoing
Publish analysis on the veteran community from the 2021 Census in England and Wales (multivariate and further analyses)	OVA, ONS	Better Data	Autumn 2022
Conducting research to better understand historic hurt and the experience of underrepresented groups within the whole veterans community. The first stage of this work will be to commission an independent review into the historic treatment of LGBT veterans (pre 2000). Further work may investigate the disparities felt by, amongst others, women, disabled and ethnic minority veterans.	OVA, GEO, MOD	Recognition of veterans and supporting their needs	End of 2022
Develop a veterans dataset based on the 2021 England and Wales census data, which will be kept up to date to enable future analysis and insights.	OVA, ONS, MOD	Better Data	March 2023
Create a regular veterans survey, to collect insights into their experiences and needs, in collaboration across UK Government and consulting with the service charity sector.	OVA, ONS	Better Data	End of 2023
Publish official annual statistics of the frequency of suicide within the veteran cohort in England and Wales / GB.	OVA, ONS	Better Data	End of 2023
End rough sleeping for Armed Forces veterans by the end of the Parliament.	OVA, DLUHC	Making a home in civilian society	End of 2024
Explore options for the introduction of veteran-aware training for social work teams in every Local Authority in England.	OVA, DHSC, DLUHC	Health and Wellbeing	End of 2024

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
Ensure the needs of veterans and their families are taken into account during development of national health strategies, to make sure veterans and their families are not disadvantaged.	OVA, DHSC, NHSE	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing
Support initiatives for veterans with disabilities and better understanding their needs and lived experience in collaboration with the Disability Unit. This will include: improving the evidence across-government of veterans who self report a disability. sharing best practice with Disabled Persons Organisations about how veterans use adaptive sport to help increase activity levels and participate in communities, in collaboration with Sport England.	OVA, CO Disability Unit, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing
Share the Service Leavers Data (SLD) with the Scottish Government to support their evidence base on veterans living in Scotland. Through the Administrative Data Research Scotland (ADR Scotland) partnership with the Scottish Government, researchers from the Scottish Centre for Administrative Research (SCADR) will link the SLD to the National Records of Scotland (NRS) population spine to produce a de-identified dataset of veterans living in Scotland. SCADR researchers will then link this to other datasets, including the Scottish census, and undertake the analysis of the de-identified linked data. Use of the SLD will be restricted to this single, pre-agreed project and MOD retain final decision-making control over how the data is used.	MOD	Better Data	End of 2022
Develop a package of life skills training and support to service personnel to aid transition, with a pilot within 2022.	MOD	Finance and Debt	End of 2022
Review and improve the accessibility of the Enhanced Learning Credit Scheme to Learning Providers and Veterans. Thus, making it easier for veterans to access a wider range of academic and vocational opportunities and support their development or chosen career post-Service.	MOD	Employment, Education and Skills	End of 2022
Relet the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) contract to ensure that service enhancements and improvements are made to meet the needs of stakeholders.	MOD	Employment, Education and Skills	October 2023

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
<p>Design, as part of a £44 million funding commitment, a single Veterans UK portal allowing access to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS), the War Pensions Scheme (WPS) and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS). This will be an 'end-to-end' digital solution, including a digital correspondence and case management system. The new service will significantly reduce the time taken to respond to veterans' enquiries.</p>	MOD	Digital Transformation	Partial launch in 2023, with additional services added over coming years
<p>Deliver a health improvement programme aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of women who are serving and who have served (veterans) through the a national multi departmental, multi-agency, steering group established in July 2021. This will draw upon relevant academic research, government policy and other relevant research, and will build upon the commitments that the NHS and the MOD has made to improve service provision in this area.</p>	MOD, DHSC, NHSE	Recognition of veterans and supporting their needs	End of 2023/24
<p>Continue to provide support and care for Service leavers through the Integrated Personal Commission for Veterans (IPC4V) framework phase 1. This initiative supports eligible veterans with complex and enduring physical, neurological and mental health conditions, attributable to injury whilst in service, to multi-disciplinary team support.</p>	MOD	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing
<p>Promote opportunities for Service leavers and veterans to go into careers with the Uniformed and Health Services, and associated support staff, in England through collaboration across DWP, the CTP, NHS England, Home Office and MOJ. This will include: Sharing of resources and messaging to ensure consistency for Service leavers receiving support and advice through the MOD and veterans living in the community. This will also recognise and support veterans who wish to move between the uniformed and health services.</p> <p>Creation of a formal network of leads at a regional and central level across the DWP, MOD and uniformed and health services, to encourage collaboration and sharing of best practice.</p>	MOD, DWP, Home Office, NHS Employers, MOJ	Education, Employment and Skills	Ongoing

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
We will look to collaborate with the devolved administrations wherever possible and appropriate.			
<p>Promote opportunities for veterans to go into teaching careers through collaboration between the CTP and DfE. This will include: CTP to ensure Service leavers interested in teaching are encouraged to utilise Get School Experience and Adviser services.</p> <p>DfE to offer dedicated signposting for Service leavers on the Get Into Teaching website.</p> <p>CTP and DfE to link up more consistently at a regional level regarding respective careers fairs and promoting them to Service leavers interested in teaching.</p> <p>CTP to promote Troops to Teachers in collaboration with DfE</p>	MOD, DfE	Education, Employment and Skills	Ongoing
Consider the findings of Forces in Mind Trust's research into identifying veterans within the criminal justice system, and explore what more can be done to improve identification and recording of veterans in the prison and probation system (final publication)	MOJ	Veterans and the Law	December 2022
Consider the findings of Forces in Mind Trust's research into identifying veterans within the criminal justice system, and explore what more can be done to improve identification and recording of veterans in the prison and probation system (Action Plan published)	MOJ	Veterans and the Law	June 2023
Conduct an evaluation and assessment of the HMP Holme House veterans' wing pilot where ex-armed service personnel will volunteer to locate on this wing and be offered tailored veteran support. An in-depth evaluation of the veterans activity hub will be carried out, with any outcomes and recommendations to be shared with key stakeholders with the view to support recommendations across the wider custodial estate (evaluation complete)	MOJ, HMPPS	Veterans and the Law	November 2023
Conduct an evaluation and assessment of the HMP Holme House veterans' wing pilot where ex-armed service personnel will volunteer to locate on this wing and be offered tailored veteran support. An in-depth evaluation of the	MOJ, HMPPS	Veterans and the Law	May 2024

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
veterans activity hub will be carried out, with any outcomes and recommendations to be shared with key stakeholders with the view to support recommendations across the wider custodial estate (report recommendations considered)			
Work collaboratively to implement commitments made in the Armed Forces Forward View in support of veterans in the criminal justice system. This will include a single pathway and additional complex care provision for veterans in the criminal justice system.	MOJ, NHSE	Veterans and the Law	End of 2024
Update and maintain the veterans support map. The map details all available services to veterans in the criminal justice system and will enable ex armed service personnel to access tailored support quickly and seamlessly, with or without the support of a case worker. The map can also be used by anyone who is looking to find support for friends or family	MOJ, HMPSS	Veterans and the Law	Ongoing
Ensure through the Integrated Care Board framework, that every Integrated Care System has an Armed Forces lead and an agreed framework to support the Armed Forces community, and every Primary Care Network has a veteran-friendly accredited GP.	NHSE	Health and Wellbeing	March 2023
Roll out Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance accreditation further across Trusts with all trusts being accredited by March 2023.	NHSE, VCHA, RCGP	Health and Wellbeing	March 2023
Ensure that accreditations are being renewed in line with VCHA/RCGP requirements, and continue to monitor impact and effectiveness to best support veterans Increase the numbers of overall RCGP accreditations of veteran friendly GP practices to achieve 100 coverage by 2025.	NHSE, VCHA, RCGP	Health and Wellbeing	March 2023
Increase the numbers of overall RCGP accreditations to focus so that every PCN to have a veteran friendly GP practice	NHSE, VCHA, RCGP	Health and Wellbeing	March 2023
Develop the Veterans Trauma Network to create an integrated plan for the physical health of veterans. This includes offering support to work with devolved administrations to foster alignment in provision.	NHSE, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	Spring 2023



Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)
Begin to pilot Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance accreditation roll-out to independent hospitals and hospices.	NHSE, VCHA	Health and Wellbeing	March 2024
Develop clear pathways to support improved access to sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) for serving personnel and veterans	NHSE	Health and Wellbeing	End of 2024
NHSE will work with ICBs to promote and increase the uptake of personalised care for veterans with complex and enduring need including LTC under the IPC4V framework phase 2 framework.	NHSE	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing
Continue to commission, co-ordinate and integrate the three bespoke veterans' mental health services under the Op COURAGE umbrella through bringing the services together into one long-term integrated plan.	NHSE, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing
Fully integrated Veterans Mental Health Service in place to deliver a bespoke veterans mental health service as Op Courage	NHSE, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing
Establish a common mental health assessment framework (CAF) in collaboration with non-statutory providers, including the charity sector.	NHSE, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing
Undertake rolling evaluation of the Adjustments Passport pilot, which provides disabled Service leavers with a transferable record of their required workplace adjustments, to inform decisions on further roll out of the scheme. Further evaluation of the pilot will commence in May 2022 (through to mid-2023) to provide additional evidence of the scheme's impact.	DWP	Employment, Education and Skills	Mid- 2023
Provide direct placement opportunities for jobs in the Civil Service for veterans and military spouses/partners who face challenges finding employment through the Going Forward into Employment scheme, with a target of 50 for 2022/23 and 100 for 2023/24.	CS Commission	Employment, Education and Skills	End of 2023
Provide direct placement opportunities for jobs in the Civil Service for veterans and military spouses/partners who face challenges finding employment through the Going Forward into Employment scheme, with a target of 50 for 2022/23 and 100 for 2023/24.	CS Commission	Employment, Education and Skills	End of 2024



## In progress with revised timeline

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)	Comments regarding revised timeline
Publish UK Government data and research strategy, outlining the further steps to better understanding the UK's veteran community.	OVA	Better Data	Mid- 2022	Delivery of this commitment is expected by the end of the year.
Create a UK Government communications strategy to promote positive images of veterans; build understanding and awareness of the diversity of their experiences, skills, and contribution to society.	OVA	Public Perception of Veterans	September 2022	Delivery of this commitment is expected by the end of the year.
Conduct a review of the governance of veterans issues across government, to ensure clear and effective cross-government, DA and third sector collaboration, and decision making at the working, senior official and ministerial levels.	OVA, MOD	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	Spring 2022	Full delivery of this commitment is expected in Autumn.
Publish analysis on the veteran community from the 2021 Census in England and Wales (topic summaries)	OVA, ONS	Better Data	Summer 2022	Delivery of this commitment is expected in Autumn.
Explore how the existing disregards scheme can be extended to enable a greater number of veterans, with convictions for services offences for consensual same-sex sexual activity under laws that have been repealed or abolished, to apply to the Home Office for a disregard.	OVA, Home Office, MOD	Recognition of veterans and supporting their needs	December 2022	The new provisions are expected to come into force in early 2023.
The MoJ will consider the findings from this research and explore what preventative interventions could be put in place to lower risk.	MOJ	Veterans and the Law	June 2022	Delivery of this commitment is expected in Autumn.
Conduct research to understand the supply of supported housing, including that which meets the needs of the veteran community, and to provide an understanding of any needs gap.	DLUHC	Making a home in Civilian Society	End of 2022	This commitment is expected to be delayed by around a year.

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# Annex C: Further information

To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means for you, please visit [armedforcescovenant.gov.uk](https://armedforcescovenant.gov.uk)

If you believe you are being disadvantaged because of your membership of the Armed Forces community, please contact your Families Federation (details below) or the MOD Covenant team by e-mailing [covenant-mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:covenant-mailbox@mod.gov.uk)

Documents published by the UK Government:

- [Previous Armed Forces Covenant Annual Reports](#)
- [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022 to 2032](#)
- [Veterans' Strategy Action Plan: 2022 to 2024](#)
- [Strategy for our Veterans – six-monthly report](#)
- [Statutory Guidance on the Covenant Duty](#)
- [Living in our Shoes: Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families](#)

Documents published by other organisations:

- [Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's Annual Reports](#)
- [Veterans and Armed Forces community: Scottish Government support 2021](#)
- [Welsh Government's Armed Forces Covenant: annual report 2021](#)

Other sources of information and support:

- Armed Forces healthcare in England: [nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare](https://nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare)
- Veteran-friendly GP practices: [rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/a-to-z-clinical-resources/veteran-friendly-gp-practices](https://rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/a-to-z-clinical-resources/veteran-friendly-gp-practices)
- Veterans NHS Wales: [veteranswales.co.uk](https://veteranswales.co.uk)
- Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust: [covenantfund.org.uk](https://covenantfund.org.uk)
- Defence Discount Service: [defencediscountservice.co.uk](https://defencediscountservice.co.uk)
- Forces Families Jobs: [forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk](https://forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk)

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- National Insurance credits for partners of Service personnel overseas: [gov.uk/guidance/national-insurance-credits-for-partners-of-armed-forces-personnel-overseas](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-insurance-credits-for-partners-of-armed-forces-personnel-overseas)
  - The SCiP Alliance: [scipalliance.org](https://scipalliance.org)
  - Veterans' Gateway: [veteransgateway.org.uk](https://veteransgateway.org.uk)
  - Veterans UK: [gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)
  - Veterans Work: [veteranswork.org.uk](https://veteranswork.org.uk)
  - Veteran support in Scotland: [mygov.scot/veterans](https://mygov.scot/veterans)
  - Veteran support in Wales: [gov.wales/armed-forces-and-veterans](https://gov.wales/armed-forces-and-veterans)
  - Financial top tips for Service personnel: [gov.uk/government/publications/financial-top-tips-for-service-personnel](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-top-tips-for-service-personnel)
  - Forces-friendly insurers: [biba.org.uk/armed-forces-biba-members-can-help](https://biba.org.uk/armed-forces-biba-members-can-help)
  - Joining Forces credit union: [joiningforcescu.co.uk](https://joiningforcescu.co.uk)
  - The Confederation of Service Charities: [cobseo.org.uk](https://cobseo.org.uk)
  - The Royal British Legion: [britishlegion.org.uk](https://britishlegion.org.uk)
  - SSAFA: [ssafa.org.uk](https://ssafa.org.uk)
  - Naval Families Federation: [nff.org.uk](https://nff.org.uk)
  - Army Families Federation: [aff.org.uk](https://aff.org.uk)
  - RAF Families Federation: [raf-ff.org.uk](https://raf-ff.org.uk)
  - The War Widows' Association: [warwidows.org.uk](https://warwidows.org.uk)
  - HeadFIT: [headfit.org](https://headfit.org)



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