



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND VETERANS ANNUAL REPORT 2023



The Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report 2023

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



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ARMED FORCES

COVENANT



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

The events of the last 12 months have continued to highlight the vital work our Armed Forces carry out. Around the world they work with our allies to defend the global community and support vital humanitarian work. At home they protect our borders, provide military aid to our national communities, and lead epoch-defining state ceremonial events including Their Majesties' Coronations. More than ever, our Armed Forces community is central to our national life and represents who we are as a country, and we are delighted that public support for our soldiers, sailors, aviators and their families remains consistently high.

We are honoured to introduce the 2023 Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Report. The report includes contributions from across MOD, the Office for Veterans' Affairs, wider Government departments, and the Devolved Administrations. This report is how the Government showcases the extraordinary work that is done throughout the UK to support our Armed Forces community and is the primary tool by which the Government is held to account in delivering the Covenant.

The Government continues to work to support the Armed Forces, with this year seeing a number of important reports and reviews including the Review of Armed Forces Incentivisation led by Rick Haythornthwaite, which will empower our people, improving their lived experience and make Defence a more attractive, modern employer. The MOD has widened entitlement to Service Family Accommodation under the New Accommodation Offer to help modernise how Defence supports its people. Lord Etherton's hard-hitting and compelling report into the treatment of LGBT veterans finally allowed LGBT veterans to be heard, and enabled a recognition of how the pre-2000 ban on gay Service personnel impacted them both personally and as a cohort.

The Ministry of Defence, Office for Veterans' Affairs and Government Digital Service continue to make significant progress to deliver the Government's commitment to provide Veterans Cards to all eligible UK Armed Forces veterans who want one, testing the required technology and beginning the rollout of the first Veterans Cards to those who left the Armed Forces prior to December 2018.

The Office for National Statistics has published its first findings from the inclusion of the veteran question in the 2021 census of England and Wales, which provides Government and the wider veterans sector with new, deeper insight into the whole veteran population, and their relative levels of disadvantage, than ever before. In recognition of how Government support to veterans has evolved, MOD and the Office for Veterans' Affairs jointly commissioned an independent review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans; to ensure that they

remain fit for purpose. This, and the second Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Quinquennial Review, make recommendations on how we can continue to ensure those who have served have the right support at the right time.

The Government continues to work to ensure that veterans are able to access the support they may need through clear pathways, including Op COURAGE, NHS England's Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, Op RESTORE, NHS England's physical healthcare pathway, and Op FORTITUDE, a pathway for veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness, delivered in partnership with stakeholders across government, public services and the charity sector.

87% of personnel leaving the Armed Forces find employment within six months. Awareness of the value that veterans, reservists and Service spouses and partners offer to the civilian sector was further evidenced by the recent 10,000th signing of the Armed Forces Covenant by the John Lewis Partnership. Nearly 900 Covenant signatories are members of the Gold Award Employer Recognition Scheme, further demonstrating the importance placed on attracting and employing members of the Armed Forces community across UK plc.

In fulfilment of the Government's Manifesto commitment to further incorporate the Covenant into law, the new legal Duty of due regard to the Covenant principles came into force in November 2022. And, in accordance with our commitment made in Parliament during the passage of that legislation, over the past year we have conducted a careful review as to whether the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should also be brought into scope of this new legal duty. But there is still more to do to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community do not face disadvantage due to service life. This Government will remain focused, with wider UK society, on ensuring that the UK becomes the best place in the world to be a veteran, and that the profound Covenant between our country and our Armed Forces is honoured forever.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps'.

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
– Secretary of State for Defence



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized 'JM'.

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

Introduction

This is the 12th Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant since its introduction as a statutory requirement in the Armed Forces Act 2011. It is also the third 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 2022 to 30 September 2023. It is the Government's annual update to Parliament on delivery against both the Covenant (as it applies to Service personnel and their families, the Bereaved Community, and veterans and their families) 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 Veterans' Strategy across the UK – in England, Scotland (full details of Scotland's support for the veterans and Armed Forces community throughout the past year are included in their own annual report), Wales and Northern Ireland. It covers delivery in the following areas:

- Chapter 1: The Armed Forces Covenant in Context
- 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
- Review into whether central departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should be brought into scope of the statutory Armed Forces Covenant Duty

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.

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, including the bereaved. This includes all veterans and their families. Veterans are defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in His Majesty’s Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on 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

- The Op COMMUNITY pilot is underway across England. Op COMMUNITY is a point of contact for the Armed Forces community to offer support and guidance as they navigate NHS services.
- Construction of the National Rehabilitation Centre started this year.
- Op NOVA was commissioned by NHS England and delivered by the Forces Employment Charity to deliver pre- and post-custody healthcare support for veterans in contact with the criminal justice system.
- Op RESTORE, the veterans’ physical health and wellbeing service, was launched in June 2023, replacing the Veterans Trauma Network.
- The OVA awarded £5 million to 22 projects as part of the Health Innovation Fund.
- The OVA, in partnership with the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, invested £3 million into the Veterans Mobility Fund.
- In June 2023, new guidance was issued to all Local Health Boards in Wales to support delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and uphold the new duty of due regard. A new GP friendly scheme was launched in Wales in June 2023 with 28 surgeries currently signed up.
- In England 77.4% of Primary Care Networks now include a veteran friendly practice.
- In Scotland, the pilot of the Armed Forces and Veterans General Practice Recognition pilot was launched in December 2022 and ran until April 2023.

Education

- The Welsh Government provided £350,000 in 2023/24 to the Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru project, working with the Welsh Local Government Association. The project delivers a range of support for service children living in Wales, delivered via schools and local authorities.
- The Scottish Government has changed guidance regarding further education (FE) funding for the children of Armed Forces personnel. This means that further education students from the Armed Forces community who were unable to access support can now apply for funding of eligible further education courses.

Housing and accommodation

- Improvements to Service accommodation - The Defence Command Paper Refresh, published in July 2023, announced an additional £400 million funding over two years for programmes to address damp and mould issues, improve thermal efficiency and to carry out refurbishment works to unoccupied homes.

-
- The MOD invested in new properties in several areas, from Lossiemouth in Scotland to Plymouth in England. These areas were heavily dependent on expensive accommodation rented from private landlords.
 - Modernisation of Service Families Accommodation policy - over 5,200 families in committed relationships (who are not married or civil partnered), are now able to live in Service Families Accommodation.
 - 97% of Service Families Accommodation now has access to wifi with speeds of 24Mbps meaning a vast improvement in previous areas of digital isolation.
 - Forces Help to Buy has become an enduring policy from January 2023.
 - A minimum standard for Single Living Accommodation has been agreed.
 - The OVA was awarded £8.55 million by HMT for the Reducing Veteran Homelessness Programme. This included £500,000 for a new, dedicated referral scheme. By the end of its thirteenth week Op FORTITUDE had supported 162 veterans into housing.
 - The OVA launched A Home in Civilian Society, guidance on the housing options and services available to Service Personnel, veterans and their families residing in England.

UK Armed Forces Families Strategy update

- Funding to support the Armed Forces Families Strategy continues under the Armed Forces Families Fund, with funding of £900,000 for early years projects, just under £500,000 for the new Supporting Partners programme, and £2 million for what was the Education Support Fund.
- Following the launch of the Wraparound Childcare scheme in September 2022, over 5,500 Service families are taking advantage of this funding toward their childcare costs.

Business, employment and the community

- The number of Armed Forces Covenant signatories has seen substantial growth as of 30 September 2023 with some 10,975 total signatories.
- The 2023 Partnering with Defence Conference saw over 300 organisations meet, including Armed Forces Covenant signatories and Employer Recognition Scheme award holders.
- In Scotland, NHS Scotland's the Supporting Armed Forces Employment (SAFE) Programme was established in October 2022.
- In October 2022, the Office for Veterans' Affairs established the Veteran Employers Group (VEG), bringing together leading employers from across the UK to identify, promote and share best practice in veteran employability while identifying opportunities and overcoming barriers to maximise veterans' employment.
- In Wales, an Armed Forces Employment Fair was held in November 2022 at the Celtic Manor Resort hotel attended by over 160 service leavers and veterans.

The Covenant in law

- The statutory Armed Forces Covenant Duty, which places a legal obligation on specific public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant when exercising certain functions, in healthcare, education and housing, that could impact the Armed Forces community, came into force on 22 November 2022.
 - Through 2023, MOD has been conducting a review into whether central departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should be within scope of this Duty.
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External observations

Observations from the Families Federations

Introduction

The Naval, Army and RAF Families Federations appreciate the opportunity to comment on the 2023 Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report. We have continued to work closely throughout the year with those policy staff tasked to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant and UK Armed Forces Families Strategy and note that progress has been made in several key areas.

Governance

The review of the Armed Forces Covenant Governance structure during this reporting year was timely and we look forward to contributing to the development of the new Covenant and Veterans Engagement Forum, to ensure that there is equal focus on the unique needs of the whole Armed Forces community.

All three Families Federations remain concerned about the decision taken by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to cease work on the Armed Forces Covenant Commitment Tracker. We agree that the Tracker was no longer fit for purpose and that a new mechanism is needed to manage those commitments that remain live and relevant. To date though, this has not come to fruition. We would appreciate further dialogue with the MoD during the next reporting period, to determine how progress on outstanding issues is monitored and how new issues can be raised and tracked as they are taken forward by the relevant government departments. We would also like to see formal action plans for both the Armed Forces Covenant and the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy included within the Annual Report, to accompany the Veterans Action Plan.

The Haythornthwaite Report noted: 'The impact of service on families is one of the factors, often the most important, influencing intentions to leave, especially where they are subject to the compound effect of capricious deployments, inconsiderate actions by a distant employer, and a lack of agency in their lives'¹. This reflects the comments made to us by our Service families and we particularly look forward to the MoD's formal response and the actions taken to deliver the Report recommendations.

¹ Agency and Agility: Incentivising people in a new era. A review of UK Armed Forces incentivisation. Rick Haythornthwaite, June 2023

Health and Healthcare

The development of the bespoke health services that are now available to the Armed Forces across the country is to be commended, as there is much demand for specialised care. We have been working closely with the NHS England Armed Forces team on the development of the OP Community pilot programme in the first eight regions and would like to extend that offer of support to other Integrated Care Board (ICB) regions as they begin to deliver similar services, especially in those areas with a larger military footprint. The continuity of support to our Service families, especially those who are mobile or living apart from their serving partner/parent, is essential to their wellbeing and we are keen to ensure that this programme does not get diluted, as it competes with the many other priorities that the NHS and ICBs are currently focused on.

The comparison data highlighted in the Report, particularly with regards to families having access to dental services was noted with interest, especially as the questions asked within the Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey did not specifically refer to access to NHS dental services. It is acknowledged that many of the issues reported by Service families, with regards to difficulties accessing NHS dental services, affect the wider civilian population too. However, serving mobile families who move frequently, both around the UK and in and out of overseas locations, face additional challenges, as in many cases they never reach the top of the waiting list for NHS dental services before they are reassigned to another area. We continue to highlight these issues within the appropriate fora to ensure that they are considered by the regional dental commissioning teams.

In addition to the general concerns raised about NHS dental services this year, we have also received numerous enquiries from families returning from overseas assignments who have a requirement to access continuing dental care, such as orthodontics, which cannot be fulfilled due to the lack of availability or understanding of the current procedures. There are additional challenges too, if our Service families return to live in different parts of the UK where there are different processes in place. We would like to engage with service providers to discuss how these inconsistent policies might be reviewed, to consider whether Service families are being disadvantaged and if the Covenant Duty of due regard has been applied.

Education

The Report offers a comprehensive overview of the wide range of programmes and projects that has been delivered by the MoD, the Department for Education and other key education agencies during this reporting period, especially within the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy. The Families Federations have welcomed the engagement with those developing policy and the delivery partners, clearly demonstrating the benefits of collaborative working. The publication of the non-statutory guidance for state-funded schools and local authorities in England and the document providing information about schools admissions for Service children are to be welcomed too, as they provide clarification and coherence to families and schools admissions teams. We look forward to observing the changes delivered to better support Service children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) during the coming year too, as part of the wider national changes to SEND provision in this country.

The Month of the Military Child is a valuable and important initiative from the MOD; its increased traction in 2023 within the wider community reflects the prioritisation of support for children and young people, as well as presenting an opportunity to celebrate their strengths. It is essential that this continues, and expands, in the future, to demonstrate to our younger Service family members that their contributions to the Armed Forces are valued.

We are aware of several research studies that are already underway, focused on the issue of Service children with SEND, and that further research will be conducted during the next reporting period, with the funding made available by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. Whilst further academic research into this subject is necessary, there is a risk that our families will become overwhelmed with requests to support these various studies in the forthcoming year, and it is hoped that there will be a coordinated programme put in place to manage this.

Childcare

The expansion of eligibility for the Wraparound Childcare Scheme has been welcomed by Service families and the targeted communications campaign has been effective in encouraging more personnel to sign up to the programme. However, many Service families who are living, or who have recently lived, abroad on assignment, have reported to the Families Federations that they continue to struggle with childcare issues, including availability and cost; they would welcome an equivalent scheme.

The recent announcement in England regarding early years childcare has been well received. However, this will increase the challenges for those Service families with young children who must move on assignments outside of England, in navigating the different provisions available to them. The news that the Scottish Government is now also looking into this subject as a wider issue, to help prevent child poverty, is of interest and we wait to discover how this is implemented and whether the Service community will be in scope.

We have highlighted our concerns in the past about the lack of support for the youngest members of our community and are therefore delighted to note the Armed Forces Families Fund: Early Years Programme. This should offer a boost to childcare settings and early years childhood education, and we look forward to learning how the evaluation of these funded projects will shape change.

Housing and Accommodation

We have seen improvements in the service received by serving families from the Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) industry partners, however there is still much work to be done. One of the biggest frustrations our families report is continued poor communication, especially how and when contractors deliver information to them. Their follow up actions also require improvement, as the 'what happens next' aspect of a repair is often either not communicated at all, or is partial or unclear, leading to frustration. The current complaints system is an area that many families find frustrating and complex, particularly when being asked to 'start again' when they have already waited some time for a resolution. We would ask that the feedback from a recent meeting of all stakeholders to review this system leads to some clear changes as swiftly as possible.

We continue to attend meetings with all the FDIS industry partners, to contribute to the sharing of statistics, examples of improvements or where work has stalled, and to identify ongoing and emerging priorities. The Service Family Accommodation (SFA) estate continues to have significant numbers of properties which require improvement; poor maintenance and insulation increases costs for many Service families occupying these SFA, as well as adversely impacting their daily lives.

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.

The New Accommodation Offer was formally launched at the end of the reporting period for this Report and the Service community are still considering the implications of the changes and how it will impact upon them personally. The Families Federations remain committed to gathering feedback and questions from all of those Service families affected and will share this evidence with the MoD over the coming months.

The Families Federations are keen to learn more about the findings of the recent consultation on the broadening of the Covenant to include Central Government, in particular the MoD, as there is currently no mechanism to hold the Department to account over the condition of SFA and Single Living Accommodation.

UK Armed Forces Families Strategy

There has clearly been progress made within some of the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy workstreams, especially with Service children's education, but it has been apparent that the turnover in staff within the MoD Families and Safeguarding Team has led to delays in some areas. Increasing and conflicting workloads in key policy areas within the MoD, and other government departments who are also partners in the delivery of the Strategy, are evident too. As the Families Strategy is a key aspect of the MoD's commitment to support Service families, alongside the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant, it is essential that the teams responsible for undertaking the key policy reviews, and delivering the recommendations made, are given the necessary resources to progress this ten-year commitment.

We have also noted during this reporting period that there seems to be a crossover between the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Families Strategy and there has, at times, been some confusion as to which team is leading on particular policy reviews. Our concern remains that there is a risk some of the key issues raised by families may be missed if we do not have a formal process in place, especially as we no longer have access to the Covenant Commitment Tracker. There is much focus on the delivery of the Veterans Strategy, which is supported by the Office of Veterans Affairs, and we need to ensure that the needs of the serving community are not forgotten or overlooked, especially as they are not able to be so vocal on social media and therefore have less of a platform.

Business, Employment and the Community

Service spouses frequently highlight their frustrations regarding the lack of opportunities to gain and maintain employment when they move overseas on assignment with their serving

partners. The Families Federations have continued to ask for more information to be made available over the last two years and we now await the 'Frequently Asked Questions' and Overseas Employment Guide, the latter of which has been funded by the Covenant Trust Fund. We feel that these are essential to enable Service families to make informed decisions about overseas assignments and the potential impact on the career options for the non-serving spouse, which can have a much wider effect on the whole family.

It has been noted in the Report that there is a plan for Defence Relationship Management (DRM) to deliver a targeted campaign to encourage more organisations to register with Forces Families Jobs. We look forward to collaborating with them on this programme, as the Families Federations own and manage this important employment and training portal for Service spouses/partners. It may also be helpful for DRM and the MoD to share more specific information with employers about the benefits of having Service spouses/partners working within their companies, and to highlight the 'lived experiences' of those family members who have had positive support from their employers, whilst they are advocating on behalf of veterans and reservists.

Non-UK Families

The Naval and Army Families Federation OISC-qualified Immigration Adviser teams have worked tirelessly to support serving personnel and their families across the single Services during the last 12 months. The teams have engaged directly with the Home Office and the COBSEO Cluster to ensure that all of those involved in reviewing and delivering visa and immigration policies, have a clear understanding of the impact on the serving community, including their families. The benefit of this collaborative approach is evident and has led to the current review of the Appendix Armed Forces (AF) of the Immigration Rules.

The increase to Home Office Immigration and Nationality fees was implemented just after the end of the reporting period for the 2023 Report, so we would welcome an update on the impact that this has had on Service personnel from the non-UK community in next year's Report. We anticipate that the charity sector may see a rise in the number of grant requests, as personnel struggle to find the additional funds required.

The Covenant in Law

Following the introduction of the new Covenant Duty legislation we have seen a range of information made available to Local Authorities, to ensure that they understand their due regard responsibilities. However, the Families Federations have observed that some of these councils are adhering rigidly to the examples provided in the Covenant Toolkit documents and are not fully recognising the uniqueness of Service life. This has been to the detriment of some Service families, and we therefore seek reassurance that more work is being done to inform and advise decision makers upon the direct impact to our communities. We want to see local authorities and other service providers becoming more informed and confident in their decision-making processes, as the Covenant Duty becomes more embedded and considered 'business as usual'.

Conclusion

At the time of completing our Formal Observations, it was disappointing to note that, whilst there has been mention of several major policy reviews highlighted in this year's report, many are still awaiting a formal Government response. This includes the consultation that took place earlier this year into the scope of the Armed Forces Covenant, to consider whether the Covenant Duty should be applied to other Government Departments, such as the MoD. The Families Federations remain convinced that the MoD should be included, especially as they have certain responsibilities, such as the delivery and oversight of the provision of accommodation for serving personnel and their families and should therefore be legally held to account in the same way that social housing providers are within the Armed Forces Covenant due regard process.

It is of note that yet again this year there is much focus within the Report on the developments within the veterans arena. We fully commend the progress that has been achieved by the Office for Veterans Affairs and other Government Departments, especially within the health sector, however, there is more work to be done to improve the lives of current serving personnel and their families. The Families Federations remain committed to ensuring that the needs of the whole serving community are considered too and that their voices are heard at all levels of Government.

Observations from Cobseo – The Confederation of Service Charities

Overall

Cobseo – the Confederation of Service Charities – is grateful for the opportunity to provide comment on the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report 2023. Cobseo's annual input is one of three elements from the military charity sector, each offering different, but often complementary, perspectives on the substance of the report. Cobseo seeks to ensure that the Confederation's response captures pan-sector, cross-cutting themes in particular, deconflicting on the duplication of detail. In formulating this response, we routinely consult our membership, the feedback from whom forms part of our ongoing dialogue with government where not specifically captured within this summary.

Cobseo welcomes the report and the progress that has been made in both the delivery of the Covenant, as well as the wider support available which goes beyond the Covenant requirements, not least with the many recent initiatives aimed at the veteran community. Whilst the activities set out in the report are substantial, we continue to see examples of disadvantage experienced by members of the Armed Forces Community. It is, therefore, imperative that the current momentum is maintained, and that the recommendations from recent independent reviews are taken forward constructively to ensure that the Covenant and Veterans Strategy are delivered consistently and effectively across the UK, empowering the Armed Forces Community to thrive both during and after military service.

In our commentary in last year's report, we reflected on the maturity of the Covenant after over a decade of operation, feeling that this was a sound foundation for further developmental work

- both in terms of routine coverage and of reporting impact. These are strategic pivot points and remain two of the key aspects for our commentary this year too.

Impact Assessment

The report details considerable and commendable activity, the inference being that delivery is a proxy for demonstrably beneficial outcomes. However, many third sector representatives and, presumably, parliamentarians, reading this fulsome report might be justified in asking for clearer evidence of impact. Last year we indicated that capturing impact in outcome terms - such as the human scope and scale of the benefit delivered - would carry greater meaning and illustrative weight for such an annual report. We believe that the evolution of this reporting mechanism should go beyond almanac statements of investment and implementation - necessary as they are - to record well-evidenced outcomes.

Critical to assessments such as these is the availability of credible data. The publication of data on veterans from the 2021 Census has been game-changing in this regard, and we recognise the progress being made by government departments to collect and share data and research on the Armed Forces Community. Further, we have been heartened by the collaborative approach taken by the OVA in this endeavour, which has increased dialogue between government, research institutions and the Armed Forces charity sector to establish an evidence-base for the formulation of future policy design and delivery planning.

Covenant Coverage

Following the standing-up of the Covenant Duty of Due Regard on 22 November 2022, the focus has shifted to the processes for implementation and the arrangements for considering future extensions to the scope of the Covenant. On the implementation, it is perhaps too early to judge whether the new Duty is making a profound difference. However, on future extensions to the scope, Cobseo, together with other charity sector stakeholders, participated in the consultation on MOD's proposals for monitoring implementation and considering whether it should be extended to include national government and devolved administrations. Our feedback emphasised the importance of clear messaging and transparent processes to encourage those encountering disadvantage to raise their concerns, whilst also ensuring that they would be kept informed of progress. However, at the time of writing, Cobseo has not had visibility of the recommendations submitted to the Secretary of State. We await further developments with interest and look forward to continuing to work with MOD and OVA to facilitate Covenant delivery in the year ahead.

Report Coverage

The continued attention on matters affecting Service children in this report is again welcomed. Conversely, a number of contributors are concerned that there is nothing specifically on older veterans, whose individual needs could get lost within a homogenous 'veterans' grouping. This concern also connects with a perennial observation that there is, again, no mention of adult social care within the report; social care being one of the largest public services in the country.

An observation also made last year, and repeated this year, is that there is scant coverage of the considerable contribution of the third sector in this report, even though the benefits of

cross-sector collaboration are obvious, and so should be made more explicit. In general terms, multi-dimensional problems need multi-dimensional solutions. At the operational level, testament to this is the breadth and depth of commentary from our membership on this report - a clear indication of their engagement and commitment to developing positive outcomes for the Armed Forces Community. Going forward, we need to establish a better mechanism for reflecting their collective contribution. At the strategic level, recent changes in governance - namely the establishment of the Covenant and Veterans Engagement Forum with representation from the military charity sector - should assist in ensuring that the benefits of shared understanding, strategic alignment and mutual support are further capitalised upon.

Broader Perspective

Another dimension which may need further consideration is that of the beneficial contribution of the Armed Forces Community members themselves. The original concept of 'a Covenant' was one of mutual obligation rather than the exclusive demarcation of the Armed Forces Community as customers or beneficiaries. Presenting one side of the obligation in isolation overlooks this reciprocal contribution, and is in danger of playing to a negative and needy narrative. Future reports might focus how the Armed Forces Community is successfully assimilated into the social fabric and human capital of the United Kingdom. Indeed, the employment section of this report points to some under-utilisation of the capabilities of veterans.

Future Focus

Against a background of positive perennial reporting, there is some wariness about being drawn into monitoring transactional activity. Reframing future reports to set out the beneficial outcomes for the various constituencies and communities covered by the Covenant and Veterans Strategy is one such mechanism. However, the next stage is probably to look beyond the current narrowed perspective of the Covenant, and the associated reporting mechanism, maintaining the momentum of positive development by embracing multi-dimensional inclusion and contribution, both strategically and operationally.

Observations from the Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion (RBL) is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this report, highlighting a range of activity underway to improve support and outcomes for the Armed Forces community.

RBL welcomes areas where progress has been made in the past year, including additional support for families through projects such as 'Op Community' and wraparound childcare, investment in research into practical healthcare solutions through the Health Innovation Fund, and coordinated support for homeless veterans and those in the justice system through Op Fortitude and Op Nova.

We appreciate the excellent work being done by many Armed Forces Champions and Armed Forces Liaison Officers to support delivery of the Covenant across the UK. We are also pleased to see recognition of ongoing challenges that need to be addressed, for example in

quality of service accommodation, support for families with children with SEND, and access to healthcare for families.

There remain other areas on which more work is needed. At the time of writing, we have yet to see a government response to recommendations of the Quinquennial Review or Review of Veterans' Welfare Services, and responses to the LGBT Veterans Independent Review are still in progress. RBL believes it is vital for government to implement the recommendations of these reviews, to improve support for veterans, including those in the greatest need and who are disadvantaged as a direct consequence of their experiences in service.

RBL believes that it is fundamentally important that the scope of the Covenant Duty should be broadened to include all levels of government across the UK, and all policy areas. Anything less would erode the principle and the impact of the Armed Forces Covenant. We have not yet been made aware of the conclusion of the review conducted this year, into expanding the scope of the Covenant Duty to include national and devolved administrations.

We maintain the view that it is vital UK and devolved administrations are held to the same standards as local governments and agencies. Members of the Armed Forces community are affected by decisions and access services from national, devolved, regional, and local organisations. Even where service delivery is local, central and devolved administrations are key sources of funding, policy and accountability. A common Duty across all levels of government will ensure consistency and clarity for the Armed Forces community in the commitments they can expect from public services at all levels.

There are persistent issues affecting the Armed Forces community that could be better addressed by a legal obligation extending to wider policy areas. Prominent examples of topics of where the Covenant Duty does not apply include employment, pensions, social care, criminal justice, and immigration. Data from Veterans' Gateway indicates that employment and finance feature prominently alongside health and housing queries, and these concerns are often closely linked. In immigration policy, removing visa fees for family members and the minimum income threshold could address additional disadvantage experiences by Non-UK personnel and support them to sustain family life.

Compensation payments and welfare benefits are a vital source of financial support for some veterans and their families who have experienced injury or bereavement due to service. However, as some means-tested benefits treat all or some of a military compensation award as 'income', rather than compensation, those entitled may lose that essential financial support. This particularly affects veterans and family members claiming Pension Credit. Some of the poorest members of the Armed Forces community are unable to access the same support their civilian counterparts receive, missing out on thousands of pounds a year. Widening the Covenant Duty to including benefits could help address this specific case of disadvantage and breach of the Covenant promise.

Social care is excluded from the Armed Forces Covenant Duty and entirely missing from comment in this report, despite the fact policy and delivery of health and social care support is often integrated and the needs of veterans and their families, including those directly related to service, cut-across these areas. Veterans are asked to identify themselves in healthcare and

can benefit from tailored support that recognises their unique experiences and needs. Including social care in the Covenant Duty could ensure the same consideration is given to their service in social care, and support consistent and holistic support to meet their needs.

At a local level, RBL welcomes the work the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has done in the past year to share information about the new Duty. The new online 'toolkit' with resources and updated e-learning, and webinars delivered in spring were well-received and are supporting implementation. We are aware of occasions when more informal, localised support has been given by MoD community engagement teams and the Covenant team when requested by local authorities. The annual MoD Armed Forces Covenant in the Community Conference continues to provide opportunities for attendees to discuss and learn more about the new Duty.

When we speak to local authorities, the most repeated comment about the impact of the new Covenant Duty is that it has raised awareness of the Armed Forces community and Covenant. Some lead council members and officers have said the Duty has given them more confidence and credibility when raising Armed Forces issues with colleagues in their authority. It is a mechanism they can point to which adds clout to their calls for action or resources.

In the best cases we have seen, the Duty has driven top-to-bottom reviews of support for the Armed Forces community and refreshes of commitments, including in policy areas beyond health, housing, and education. As part of developing new policy, some authorities have consulted on changes which include references to the Armed Forces for the first time.

Beyond Armed Forces Champions and senior leadership, it remains difficult to assess the extent to which this awareness has spread throughout an authority. Some council members and officers say that despite the changes being made to policies, most council staff do not know what the Covenant (and the Duty) means to them and their work.

Some local authorities have reported that they were already carrying out all the Duty's recommended actions and therefore little has changed in practice, while others express frustration that it is limited to health, housing, and education, with social care often noted as a priority concern.

There is a lack of clarity around exactly how authorities record the giving of Due Regard. There is no standard format, and it is left to each authority to do in their own way. More widely, while good work is underway, a lack of a coherent and robust method to measure change since implementation of the Duty makes it difficult to comment meaningfully on evidence of realised or potential impact. More must be done to define the change the Covenant and Duty are aiming to achieve, measures of change over time, and processes to track these at national and local levels.

Alongside this, government must do more to ensure public services are identifying members of the Armed Forces community, collating, and using this data to inform support and future service planning. Using the Census, Veterans' Survey and working with others in the sector, more can be done to increase availability of robust data about the needs of the Armed Forces community and outcomes of support they receive. On several occasions this report refers to data that is not comparable with the wider population, an issue that we believe must be addressed as work to improve data and research in the sector progresses.

Finally, there is currently only one known example of a complaint against the Duty, which has not been taken further. It is vital people are informed as to how to challenge where they believe the Duty is not being given due regard, and that routes to do so are accessible, easy to understand, and not dependent on incurring prohibitive legal costs.

Observations from the Independent Veterans Advisor

I welcome this latest Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report, which I believe illustrates well the extent of the work being undertaken to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community are not disadvantaged by their military service and that veterans in need have access to the right care and support. The report sets out clearly the demonstrable step-change in focus and attention now being given to this when compared with only a decade ago. This has driven considerable improvements in the services and support provided by statutory bodies and the 3rd sector, and in awareness of the values, skills, qualifications and experience service leavers bring to society and employers as they step back into civilian life at the end of their military careers.

I am concerned however that with the exceptions of education, healthcare and housing, the report focuses heavily on activity with an emphasis on money spent, programmes started and numbers of people supported but is very light on the outcomes and impacts achieved as a consequence. This highlights the lack of comprehensive data across the range of veterans' support and care that seriously hinders the ability to identify key areas of need, understand what works and what doesn't and design and develop well informed policies, systems of support and programmes. This lack of access to good quality data is a well-known gap; it must be addressed as a matter of priority and, crucially, with urgency, which will need clear political and senior official leadership and close collaboration with the 3rd sector to achieve.

Veterans UK has a touchpoint with every serving person and every UK Armed Forces veteran and plays a critical role in how they are all supported, yet it receives almost no mention in this report. I believe this omission exposes a wider challenge. For too many years Veterans UK (and its predecessor brands) have suffered from a chronic lack of financial, intellectual, leadership and infrastructure (including IT) investment. It is understaffed, has to manage complex welfare, AFCS/WPS and other matters with antiquated IT and is heavily process driven, with its correspondence often lacking empathy, leaving those accessing their support too often feeling frustrated and angry. The Government's response to the recommendations made in the relevant reviews will hopefully lead to some improvements but there is a wider, more important cultural shift to be made. Ministers and senior officials must recognise that Veterans UK is absolutely critical to the Government realising its vision to make the UK the best country in the world to be a veteran and invest in it accordingly. Too often it is omitted from key discussions regarding veteran support or is included almost as an afterthought; as an Arm's Length Body of the MOD, it struggles to secure resources and Ministers and senior officials' time and attention as their focus, perhaps unsurprisingly, is on ongoing operations and serving personnel, while the Minister for Veterans and the OVA in the Cabinet Office have no direct authority over it. These cultural and organisational challenges must be addressed concurrent with driving forward the reviews' recommendations if long-term, sustainable improvement is to be made.

The key role that effective transition services play in ensuring that service leavers have a good start as they return to civilian life is also a surprising omission. The CTP contract is currently being relet by the MOD and this will set the stage for the delivery of transition support over the coming years but there is a surprising lack of insight and data in this report that might highlight how effective CTP has been to date, those areas that require improvement and those that work well. And there is a well-known lack of data regarding those who have experienced difficult transitions which means that we do not know how many people this might include (i.e. how big a problem this might be) or what the causes of those challenges might be; without this, there is little chance of designing improved future transition and support programmes. This further amplifies my earlier point regarding the requirement for accurate, high quality and comprehensive data to inform decision making and also the need to keep a sharp Ministerial and senior official level focus on those services that play critical roles in helping service leavers into civilian life and in supporting them once there. These services must permanently be on senior 'radars' whatever pull the next new initiative or announcement may have.

I have previously mentioned the Government's vision to make the UK the best country in the world to be a veteran; I believe this to be the right vision, but it currently lacks substance because there is no description of what that actually means in practice to veterans and their families (note, crucially not from the perspective of service providers), and it isn't yet being used by existing services to help with alignment, coherence and unity of purpose. Time needs to be invested in understanding and articulating what this vision would mean and to help the variety of services, e.g. those in Vets UK, understand what this means to them and what their respective roles are in delivering it. It would then become a vehicle for the Government to set its level of ambition for supporting the nation's veterans. This work is necessary to take this excellent vision and turn it into something that will guide and inform future policies, service delivery and support and drive a continual pursuit of excellence.

I remain concerned about the relative disadvantage faced by veterans in NI when compared to their veteran peers in the rest of the UK. The political and security situation in NI presents myriad complex challenges to delivery of the Covenant and veterans services to those who live there but every effort must be made to ensure that those who live in NI who served in our Armed Forces in NI and around the world are not forgotten; and the MOD and OVA must resist the temptation to drop the standard UK support/ service template onto what are a unique set of challenges and requirements. Input from veterans must form a core part of any work on policy and service development but this is acutely the case if the availability, accessibility and quality of services for veterans in NI are to match those in the rest of the UK.

Wherever I have visited in the UK this year, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust is mentioned positively and, without exception, organisations are hugely grateful for the funding they receive. There is, however, a consistent concern that is, again, expressed everywhere and that is the short term nature of AFCFT (and other) funding and how this places what are effective and important services immediately into a 'hand to mouth' funding situation with a continual drive "...from London to fund new things". A plea I hear everywhere and with which I agree and amplify here is, to please continue to fund those things that work and which need to continue and to reduce the seemingly continual demands for something new. This will rely on the capture of pertinent, high quality and accurate data to inform decision making but will allow

many increasingly important services to place themselves on a more sustainable footing, while enabling the identification of those that are less effective.

I will conclude by emphasising that this report highlights most effectively the wonderful work being done to support the Armed Forces Community across the UK and the extraordinary progress that has been made over a number of years; and there is much work done in local communities by wonderful small organisations every day that isn't mentioned here. Leaders across the sector must ensure is that together, the government, the NHS, 3rd sector and others work increasingly collaboratively to sustain the trajectory of these improvements well into the future.

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

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 through eight work streams.

Progress in implementation

This year we have seen progress in a number of areas, many of which are highlighted in Chapter 6. We refer to a few of these.

Key performance indicators

- Each work stream has developed action plans and 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.

Recognising modern family life

- The modernisation of policy to extend entitlement to Service Family Accommodation (SFA) to those in long-term partnerships is being taken forward. While, so far, over 5,000 such couples have been able to access SFA, we urge that the shape of family life today is reflected as soon as possible in all policies that impact military families. Reviewing the Personal Category Status to increase equality in a number of areas is an important next step.
- The enduring policy of the Forces Help to Buy Scheme, the building of new houses and the promise of a new 10-year Investment Strategy to give families more choice about where and how they live are all welcome developments, but there needs to be positive transformation in housing matters in the next year.
- We welcome efforts to remove terminology that is demeaning and disempowering. Changing language to remove the term 'dependent' to describe non-military partners is key to recognising their agency and the vital role they play in supporting Serving personnel. Not using the term 'legitimate' when referring to Service children is a welcome shift.

Access to NHS services

- The Op Community pathfinders are an important step in seeking to provide a single point of contact for families navigating NHS services. The ambition must be to ensure that all primary care providers understand the needs of spouses/partners and children of Serving personnel and the challenges they face, and to establish Armed Forces family-friendly health care practices across the UK as quickly as possible.

Enhancing support for children in Armed Forces families

Significant work has been undertaken in partnership with the Department of Education (DFE), the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, local authorities in England, and the devolved administrations.

- We welcome the focus on ensuring that Service pupils with additional needs are not disadvantaged by the military lifestyle and the transition challenges experienced by those with Education, Health and Care Plans in England. The DFE commitment to greater standardisation is an important step forward.
- We note the work being undertaken across the UK to promote best practice in supporting Service pupils to thrive in education. Enabling schools to provide appropriate and targeted support for Service pupils and extending the knowledge base about what works are initiatives which are increasingly possible as a result of new education-focused funding streams. It is essential that new programmes are robustly evaluated and the learning is coordinated.
- The creation of Armed Forces family-friendly schools in Wales should encourage greater understanding and awareness of Service life in local communities. Ensuring that schools across the UK are Armed Forces family-friendly would not only address lingering concerns about the educational attainment of Armed Forces children but also address the loneliness Service families can experience when living in communities away from military bases. A better understanding of military life in all schools would aid the integration of Armed Forces families in every community.

Progress in other areas

Progress with implementing the Families Strategy has also been observed in other work streams although there is still much to be achieved. Of particular importance is the need for support and guidance for non-UK Armed Forces personnel and their families. This requires cross-departmental cooperation and commitment and a shared sense of urgency. Work is ongoing to support spouses and partners with funding from the Armed Forces Family Fund; as is the development of Wraparound Childcare (WAC) capacity in early years' settings on or near Defence sites. Two surveys have been undertaken, the results from which should inform policy developments relating to Armed Forces personnel with caring responsibilities, and families living overseas.

Areas of concern

There are some areas where more progress is urgently needed:

Communication with families

- Improving communication with family members remains a top priority. We are pleased to see that recognising the critical importance of clear and effective two-way communication with families will be taken forward as a discrete piece of work with clear objectives, a delivery plan and performance measurement. We look forward to this work being completed as quickly as possible. Family members continue to be vocal about their dependence on the Serving person to receive information, and the lack of direct communication has been raised as a significant frustration for many years. A major challenge for the Families Strategy is how progress in the implementation of the Families Strategy is and should be communicated to families.

Service Family Accommodation

- Although significant efforts have been made to address some of the contentious issues including the provision of additional funding for refurbishing kitchens, bathrooms and boilers and remedying the perennial problems of damp and mould, it is clear that significant dissatisfaction remains with the quality of some SFA and the inadequate response to repairs and maintenance issues. The poor maintenance of SFA has been reflected in repeated Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Surveys (AfCAS and FamCAS). The *Haythornthwaite Review* and *Living in Our Shoes* both highlighted how the delays to repairs and poor maintenance of SFA have negative impacts on family life and on retention. It is disappointing that the continuous attitude surveys show a decline in satisfaction year on year. Indeed, the proportion of families dissatisfied with the quality of maintenance/repair work increased from 54% in 2022 to 65% in 2023. These are the highest levels of dissatisfaction reported since these questions were first asked in 2015, and satisfaction with the overall standard of SFA has fallen seven percentage points this year to 44%. These issues need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Satisfaction with Service life and feeling valued

- The ambitions embodied in the Families Strategy are all the more relevant and important given that the continuous attitude surveys indicate that satisfaction with Service life has fallen for a second year in a row, and very many families report that they do not feel valued by the Armed Forces despite their pride in the work they do. This is disappointing. More work is needed to address the tensions between family life and the expectations of military service.
- Activities such as the Month of the Military Child and the Celebrating Forces Families event are to be applauded, but more needs to be done to demonstrate that families are valued. Actively valuing Serving personnel and especially their families for their contribution to operational effectiveness can increase morale, wellbeing and retention.

Overall observations

Considerable effort is being made to implement the Families Strategy to the benefit of all Service families, although progress in some areas has been slower than was hoped. 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. Moreover, sufficient resources need to be available to ensure progress in each work stream.

As the Families Strategy reaches its two-year milestone there is an important opportunity in 2024 to take stock, review and reflect on the progress so far, assess the extent to which key performance indicators are being met, consider whether the strategy is sufficiently integrated across all elements of Defence and government as a whole, and question whether some modifications and a refreshed approach might enhance implementation. The Families Strategy must take account of the views expressed in the continuous attitude annual surveys since they provide a benchmark for assessing progress with implementation, yet response rates remain disappointingly low, especially from family members. We welcome the current review of these surveys to modify the questions and scope which should encourage greater participation, and we look forward to contributing to this.

The Armed Forces Families Fund is providing significant levels of funding to improve the lives of Armed Forces families. This generous investment needs to be spent wisely, the activities funded must be carefully monitored and the findings reflected in the implementation of the strategy going forward. Effective implementation requires good practice to be shared and policy decisions to be based on strong evidence.

Chapter 1: The Armed Forces Covenant in context

Governance across the UK

Armed Forces Covenant Governance 2023

The MOD and the OVA 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's objective was to engage with relevant stakeholders to identify a more strategic and streamlined structure to better enable the government and Devolved Administrations to support the Armed Forces community.

This review has concluded and is moving forward with implementing an agreed, revised structure which includes: an annual Cabinet agenda item to agree government priorities across the Covenant and Veterans' Strategy portfolios; Ministerial bilateral meetings with other UK Government Ministers and the Devolved Administrations to maintain commitment to both the Covenant and Veterans' Strategy; and sustained engagement between Ministers and Service Charities to better understand issues affecting the veteran community.

The revised structure is supported by a new external engagement group co-chaired by MOD and OVA Directors, known as the Covenant and Veterans Engagement Forum (CaVE); and attended by representatives of the Service Charities, Families Federations, Bereaved community, and other organisations who support and have insight into the Armed Forces community. The Forum is strategic and provides the opportunity for each member to act as a critical friend in the development of policy and priorities. Delivery of the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan is driven by the OVA Director-led Veterans' Strategy Delivery Group.

Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees 2023

The Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPCs) are an advisory non-departmental Public Body made up of volunteers in 12 regional committees across the UK. Their current statutory function is to engage with those veterans entitled to war pensions or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme benefits. However, in recent years, the VAPCs have taken on broader, non-statutory roles in raising awareness of MOD initiatives of potential interest to all veterans and their families, such as the Armed Forces Covenant. Their current Terms of Reference guide their activities at regional level and their statutory functions are covered in The War Pensions Committees Regulations 2000.

With this development, and the changes that have been brought about in veterans' support in the last number of years, it was considered important to take a fresh look at the current support systems in place for veterans. As a non-departmental public body, the VAPCs were recently reviewed in line with Cabinet Office direction that such bodies should be reviewed every five years. An independent reviewer was appointed to look at the function, form, efficacy, and governance of this body. The review concluded and reported to the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs in March 2023. This VAPC independent review was also considered as part of the Quinquennial Review and the Independent Review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans, which were published in July 2023. The Government's response to both reviews will be published later in the year. These reviews will assist in clarifying the future role of the VAPCs within the wider veterans' ecosystem.

In parallel, a Government-sponsored Private Members' Bill was brought forward to Parliament in 2022, sought to reform the statutory basis of the VAPCs by bringing the committees more into line with how they have operated in practice in recent years. This Bill has now passed through Parliament and received Royal Assent in September 2023. The future role of the VAPCs within the wider veterans' ecosystem will now be considered in line with the recently published reviews.

LGBT Veterans Independent Review

The LGBT Veterans Independent Review was co-commissioned by the MOD and the OVA to better understand the impacts and implications of the pre-2000 policy that homosexuality was incompatible with life in HM Armed Forces. The report is very detailed and contains shocking and emotive testimonies of lived experiences during the ban, with key themes including institutional homophobia and intrusive and invasive investigation techniques. It contains 49 recommendations for the Government, covering issues such as enhanced NHS care requirements for LGBT veterans and a financial award. The recommendations primarily concern the MOD, but also affect the Home Office, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Cabinet Office, and the Treasury. The Government has accepted in principle the vast majority of the report's recommendations, and while agreeing with the intent behind them, there are a number that will be delivered in a slightly different way to that described in the report. These differences will be set out in the Government's full response to the review, in the autumn. The first recommendation in the Independent Review was for a Prime Ministerial apology, and this was delivered in the House of Commons in July.

Scotland's Minister for Veterans, Graeme Dey MSP, welcomed the publication of Lord Etherton's LGBT Veterans Independent Review. Mr Dey said that the review is an emotive, and at times extremely difficult read, but it is hugely important that people have had the opportunity to share their experiences. The Minister said that it is now imperative that action is taken on the report's recommendations and the Scottish Government is looking closely at how best to deliver on the two suggestions directed at Scotland. Mr Dey reiterated these views when he spoke at a Fighting with Pride reception in Edinburgh in October.

Deputy Minister for Social Partnership Hannah Blythyn MS has continued to demonstrate support for diversity in veteran community in Wales as part of the Welsh Government's

LGBTQ+ Action Plan. In January 2023, the Deputy Minister addressed the Fighting with Pride conference in Cardiff paying tribute to those veterans who gave evidence to the UK Government LGBT Veterans Independent Review into the service and experience of veterans who served prior to 2000 amend who were affected by the ban on homosexuality which existed then. In July 2023, the Deputy Minister also visited the Served and Proud LGBTQ+ veterans' hub in Pontypridd, the first in Wales and established with Welsh Government funding by Cwm Taf and Cardiff and Vale Armed Forces Liaison Officers, in conjunction with Fighting with Pride. On 20 July, Ms Blythyn issued a written statement on behalf of the Welsh Government, welcoming the publication of the LGBT Veterans Independent Review and paying tribute to the bravery of all those who provided evidence to the review. The Welsh Government has publicised support that is in place for those affected. The Welsh Government will be working with organisations in Wales to follow up on the suggestions for action made in the Review.

Support to LGBT veterans in Northern Ireland following the publication of Lord Etherton's LGBT Veterans Independent Review is provided by NIVSO in collaboration with Veterans Places, Pathways and People partners Fighting with Pride and has been enhanced by the OVA's LGBT Support Fund.

Defence Command Paper Refresh 2023

The Defence Command Paper Refresh was published in July 2023. It clearly sets out how important people are to Defence – highlighting that people come first, in both in the Defence Command Paper itself and in all of MOD's thinking as a department – because they are “inescapably the foundation on which our strategic advantage is built...regular, reservist or civil servant, they are the most important asset we have”.

The Defence Command Paper Refresh 2023 recognises that the Armed Forces Covenant is the contract between the nation and its Service personnel and pledges to continue to work with all Government departments to guarantee that our Service people, their families and veterans remain looked after. Building on that pledge is the understanding that transforming the workforce to meet the change in threat, means upskilling current Service personnel and enhancing training, education and apprenticeship offer. This in turns means that Service personnel are better qualified than ever when they choose to leave the Armed Forces and return to civilian life.

The Haythornthwaite Review

The Haythornthwaite Review of Armed Forces Incentivisation was an independent review on how we retain our current people and attract new and next generations out to 2035 and beyond; it was published in June 2023 and its 67 recommendations were acknowledged. We have focused on taking forward its recommendation in the summer 2023 Defence Command Paper refresh.

The last Integrated Review in 2021 identified a changing world, a changing security environment, and endorsed an 'Integrated Operating Concept' for our Armed Forces so they could continue to defend the nation against new and emerging threats. To do this, the Armed Forces require a different size, shape, skills mix and approach to the workforce; balancing their

needs with the needs of the service. The current system has evolved in a piecemeal way over time and is arguably a complex, rigid, and predominantly a 'one size fits all' culture.

What became clear from the comprehensive research undertaken to inform the Report is that new and emerging generations are moving away from the Armed Forces in terms of understanding and appeal as a potential career choice. The outflow has recently been significantly higher than the inflow on many occasions.

The reasons for this situation are many but predominantly centre around an outdated and universally rigid reward system which bears little flexibility and offers limited choice to match personal requirements. This is in the face of stiff competition in the labour market and the increasing power shift between individuals and organisations.

There is good work being undertaken in the veteran space, but it has much greater potential to provide benefits to Defence and broader society. We can do more to benefit from the talent and potential of those serving in the regular, reserve and cadet space; developing new skills as they are needed, both in the long and short-term. We also need to engage more and for longer with service-leavers to ensure that if they do leave, they leave well and offer ambassadorship into society. Mapping latent and newly developed skills within the veteran community will also allow us to target incentivisation for returning in some way. New ways of working with and within the Armed Forces could offer individuals the chance to move in and out of military and civilian employment without the traditional administrative burden and without penalising the individual's career development. We would like to move away from the idea that the transition to 'veteran' is seen as a one-way street.

Independent Review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans

The way that government supports the Armed Forces community has changed markedly over the last decade. On 2 March 2023, the MOD and OVA jointly commissioned an independent review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans, which was led by a senior civil servant.

The review investigated the role, scope and breadth of UK Government welfare provision for veterans with the view to ensure that what is being provided remains fit for purpose. Services in scope of the review include:

- Veterans Welfare Service (VWS)
- Defence Transition Services (DTS)
- Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans (IPC4V)
- Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office (NIVSO)
- Veterans' Gateway
- Veterans Advisory Pensions Committees (VAPCs)
- Ilford Park Polish Home

The final report was published on 17 July 2023, at the same time as the Quinquennial Review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (QQR). The Government welcomes the report, and the full response to the recommendations will be published by the end of the year.

Governance in Scotland

The Scottish Government publishes an annual report detailing its support throughout the past year for the Veterans and Armed Forces community in Scotland. This is accompanied by a Ministerial debate in the Scottish Parliament. This year's debate took place on 5 October and was led by Minister for Veterans, Graeme Dey MSP. The accompanying report was published on the same day and details fully the Scottish Government's support for the veterans and Armed Forces community. It can be found at [Support for the Veterans and Armed Forces Community 2023](#)

The Scottish Government continues to fund the Scottish Veterans Commissioner (SVC), Susie Hamilton, and remain fully supportive of her work and the priorities she has set in her new three-year Strategic Plan. The Scottish Government continues to work towards the delivery of the outstanding Commissioner recommendations and again contributed to and welcomed the Scottish Veterans Commissioner's 2023 Progress Report.

Governance in Wales

Armed Forces Expert Group

The Welsh Government's Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn MS, chaired the Armed Forces Expert Group in October 2022 and March 2023. Members have considered key topics such as delivery of the Covenant due regard duty, the work of the Welsh Armed Forces Liaison Officers, and the cost of living crisis and its impact on the Armed Forces community. The Group will now embark on a series of 'deep dives' to examine key issues in detail and suggest actions for Welsh Government and partners to inform policy delivery over the next 12 months.

Veterans' Commissioner for Wales

The Veterans' Commissioner for Wales, James Phillips, has engaged with veterans, families and support organisations across Wales and presented his first report to the Secretary of State for Wales and Minister for Veterans' Affairs in January 2023. The report was also shared with the Welsh Government, given the devolved nature of many of the services that veterans access. The OVA and the Welsh Government has provided a response to the Commissioner welcoming the valuable feedback from the veteran community in Wales. The OVA and the Welsh Government continues to work closely with the Commissioner, who has met with several Cabinet Ministers to discuss key areas, including housing and education.

All Wales Armed Forces Charities Group

The Group, chaired by the Royal British Legion, has continued to meet throughout 2022/23, bringing together key UK and Wales-based charities to share best practice and receive updates regarding the delivery of support for the Armed Forces community. In March 2023, the Group held a written exercise to collate examples of the impact of the cost of living crisis on the Armed Forces community in Wales and this was presented to the Armed Forces Expert Group. As a result, cost of living support provided by Welsh and UK Governments has been promoted

across the sector to help ensure members of the Armed Forces community in Wales have access to information on the help to which they may be entitled.

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 based in Northern Ireland, offering support with MOD-provided facilities, particular remuneration packages and arrangements at a local level with school and health providers.

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

- the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office (NI VSO), 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 and Veterans Champions from Northern Ireland's local authorities are also important for the wider delivery of the Covenant and the council elections in May 2023 saw 11 new Champions elected. Three councils also nominated Deputy Champions. The system of support through Veterans Champions was formalised in January 2023; supported through a £200,000 two-year project grant by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. Part of this funding has enabled a support post within Northern Ireland Veteran Support Office, created to bring increased profile, outreach and coherence to the role of the Veterans Champions. For the first time Veterans Champions from Northern Ireland have attended Covenant Duty webinars and the annual Armed Forces Covenant in the Community conference led by the MOD and held this year in Newcastle.

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, Danny Kinahan, has been extended by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for a second three-year term and continues to engage extensively with veterans and veteran support organisations and charities across Northern Ireland, including on the sensitive issue of addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past, since the introduction of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act in May 2022. The Act received Royal Assent in September 2023. The Commissioner's programme of outreach has continued, with Veteran Information Roadshows throughout 2022/23 and these roadshows are now hosted in each local authority area by the Veterans Champion, which is a positive endorsement of the roadshow initiative and the outreach role and profile of the Veterans Champions locally.

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 two 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 and 2023.

Work to further improve the healthcare services provided to the Armed Forces has included the following:

- Serving and Ex-Serving Women’s Health Improvement Group

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 drives improvements for female Service personnel and veterans, which build on the ‘We Also Served’ report. Particular areas SESWHIG has been working on with Defence Medical Services and the NHS is to develop a maternity pathway for Service women, building on the Military Maternity Voices pilot in Lincolnshire and also developing and implementing a

sexual assault pathway for Service personnel including referral to any of the 49 sexual assault referral centres across England (SARC).

- Programme CORTISONE

Programme CORTISONE is the digital enabler for wider Defence Medical Services transformation. The long-term aim is to enable the digital transfer of medical records from the Defence Medical Services to the NHS. In some overseas bases, the MOD provides medical support for the families. The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust awarded a grant of £199,647 to SSAFA for a project supporting Armed Forces based overseas to have access to better electronic child health records.

- Defence Catering Strategy

Development of findings initiated in the Delivery Defence Dining Quality Review (2021) through the Army EATS study and subsequent pilot have led to the publication of the Defence Catering Strategy. The strategy puts the needs of personnel at the heart of provision, with healthier dining choices available, at a subsidised rate and delivered in a manner aligned to modern-day living.

Waiting times for cancer treatment

UK Armed Forces personnel requiring treatment for cancer receive care through the NHS. Although performance has improved since 2021/22, the assessed waiting times in England for cancer treatment have not returned to the levels seen before the COVID-19 pandemic (Annex A, Table 13), with more Armed Forces personnel being referred than in previous years.

The table shows performance in England against the following cancer standards:

- Two week wait from GP urgent referral to first consultant appointment.
- Two week wait breast symptomatic (where cancer not initially suspected) from GP urgent referral to first consultant appointment.
- One month (31 day) wait from a decision to treat to a first treatment for cancer.
- Four week (28 day) wait from urgent referral to patient told they have cancer, or cancer is definitively excluded.
- Two month (62 day) wait from GP urgent referral to a first treatment for cancer.

During 2022/23, for both England as a whole and the Armed Forces as a specific cohort, all measures were below target. No single factor has been identified as the cause of the under-performance against target.

Cancer services remain a priority in the restoration of NHS services in England. NHS England announced in August 2023 that cancer standards would be changed, in line with the recommendations of clinicians within the 'Clinically led review of NHS cancer standards', published in March 2022. This will see the current 10 cancer standards reduced to 3, including the Faster Diagnosis Standard, 31-day treatment standard, and the 62-day diagnosis and treatment standard. It was necessary to consolidate cancer waiting times standards as the old standards, some which were introduced 20 years ago and have evolved over that period, were

increasingly at odds with what is best for patients with the advent of straight to test pathways, the modern reality and convenience of remote consultations, and the impending technological revolution offered by artificial intelligence. Both the 2015 Independent Cancer Taskforce and the 2019 interim report of the Clinical Review of Access Standards recommended the two-week wait standard should be removed in favour of the Faster Diagnosis Standard.

The Faster Diagnosis Standard ensures patients will be diagnosed or have cancer ruled out within 28 days of being referred urgently by their GP for suspected cancer. For patients who are diagnosed with cancer, it means their treatment can begin as soon as possible. For those who are not, they can have their minds put at rest more quickly. For Armed Forces personnel, performance was better than standard and better than the general population at 77%.

Personnel Recovery Centres

These centres are in the process of transferring from charity ownership to being fully owned and operated by MOD. The centres currently operate for Serving personnel in support of their recovery goals. The MOD has not ruled out their continued use by the veteran community and engagement is ongoing to enable this.

Mental health

The MOD publishes [annual statistics on mental health in the UK Armed Forces](#). The most recent report (for 2022/23, page 2) 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.

The MOD continues to work to improve the mental health of Armed Forces personnel through the following initiatives:

Annual Mental Fitness Brief

- The Annual Mental Fitness Brief was launched in October 2021 and as of December 2022, is mandated for all Armed Forces personnel and civil servants. It delivers an understanding of mental fitness and wellbeing, stress management, how to transform stress into mental resilience and signposting where personnel can seek appropriate help. The brief is currently being updated with new ‘lived experience’ vignettes and the inclusion of a sleep module.

Mental Health helpline

- On behalf of MOD, Combat Stress continues to deliver 24-hour free at the point of use mental health support helpline. The service is supported by funding from NHS England and provides continual support to Service personnel and their families. Emotional support is available, along with a listening ear and signposting to support service. The digital platform, operated by Togetherall, continues to provide an anonymous digital forum where advice is given to improve mental wellbeing and offer guidance and signposting.

The Samaritans

- The Samaritans work with the MOD and other charities to support Serving personnel in the Armed Forces, veterans and their families. This support for the Armed Forces community includes an online chat service to compliment the phone number and also includes practical information on how to support colleagues.

Suicide prevention

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.

The MOD publishes [annual statistics on suicides among the regular UK Armed Forces](#). The latest statistics were published on 30 March 2023. They show 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-1990s. This increase was driven by deaths among young Army males; suicide rates among Army males aged 20 to 24 years were significantly higher than the UK general population. This is different to trends seen in the UK general population where males aged 45 to 54 years had the highest rates of suicide.”

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

- The [Armed Forces Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan](#) was published in April 2023. The strategy is the result of an ongoing commitment to reduce suicide within the Armed Forces and better support those affected by it. The strategy will enable the improved coherence across Defence to save lives, by setting a strategic framework of eight Focus Areas that will be the lynchpin for all activity in this area. Within the strategy, the accompanying Action Plan sets out some initial high-level activities through which to deliver the strategy. The single Services and organisations within Defence will deliver activities specific to the circumstance of their populations.
- 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 and pastoral 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 is an evolving Defence-led project to provide an evidence base specific to Service personnel by better understanding the circumstances surrounding individual deaths. This is 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 next phase of the Defence Suicide Register project is focused on embedding a sustainable, digital tool that can be internally exploited to inform evidence-based prevention, intervention and postvention activity across defence.

- On 11 September 2023, DHSC published a new five-year suicide prevention strategy for England, setting out the Government’s ambition for suicide prevention, together with over 100 actions that we think will deliver this. The strategy sets a target to reduce suicides within five years, with initial reductions observed within half this time. It is a multi-sector and cross-Government suicide strategy, with actions from multiple organisations to make progress in preventing suicides over the next few years.
- NHS England has funded a study related to postvention, and for this research to make the case for better postvention.
- A review of the potential benefits of an Armed Forces supplement to national suicide bereavement guides.

Service families

Health and wellbeing of Service families

MOD’s 2023 [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 24-35%. These are considerably higher than corresponding results for female Service partners (11-22%)” (page 14).

We therefore currently assess that female Service partners are less likely to score their wellbeing ‘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 wellbeing higher than younger people” (page 14).

Healthcare services for Service families

Anecdotal evidence suggests that those Service families who are mobile due to a requirement to regularly re-locate with the serving person, sometimes find it harder than the general population to access NHS services.

- Op COMMUNITY

Op COMMUNITY is a pathfinder programme which is being delivered by NHS Integrated Care Boards in eight areas in England. The pathfinder was developed in response to evidence and engagement with families as part of Commitment two - Supporting families, carers, children and young people in the Armed Forces community in *‘Healthcare for the Armed Forces: a Forward View’*.

The pathfinders act as a point of contact for families in the area who need to access the health systems locally, or who have recently moved into the area and need to transfer their care. The pathfinders have links to local social prescribing services which can provide further support to families. The pathfinders are developing a patient and professional-informed framework and guidance to assist Integrated Care Systems delivery of 'family and Armed Forces community' support locally. The pathfinders will be externally evaluated and learning shared to inform future developments.

- Service Families accessing dentists

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 62% answered yes in 2023. In NHS England's 2023 [Summary of the Dental Results from the GP Patient Survey](#), 73% of GP patients in England who tried to get a dental appointment in the last two years were successful (page 3). Of those Service families who required dental treatment in the last 12 months, 70% were able to access it. We recognise that there are challenges in accessing NHS dental care nationally, which impacts both Service families and the wider civilian population. However, some mobile Service families are impacted more severely due to the need to change dentists more frequently. Work is ongoing to support NHS dentistry and patients in areas where they continue to struggle with access, including reforms to dental contracts in 2022 which make NHS dentistry more attractive, and increasing the funding practices receive for high needs patients to encourage dentists to provide more NHS treatments. The recent NHS Long Term Workforce Plan has also announced increases in dentists, dental therapists and hygienists, including increasing dentistry places by 40% by 2031/32.

The Bereaved community

It is recognised that those who experience the death of a loved one when that person was serving in the Armed Forces or those who have experienced the death of a veteran, have specific needs which differ from those of the veteran community. Work is underway to ensure that where support is available to the Bereaved Community, it is clearly signposted. Initiatives include:

- Covenant and Veterans Engagement Forum

In order to ensure that the Bereaved Community have a voice in Government, a representative for the bereaved is now a permanent member of the new Covenant and Veterans Engagement Forum (CaVE).

- Forces Employment Charity (FEC)

Like many other Service charities, the FEC has always supported the bereaved alongside service leavers and veterans but this was not always explicit. In order to ensure the best support, specific initiatives are now underway to deliver support exclusively to the Bereaved community. A bespoke, introductory webinar for the bereaved to support them back into employment took place in September and this is planned to be regular event.

-
- Covenant website

Recognition of the sacrifice of those who have lost a loved one in service and those who have lost a loved one after service is a key tenet of the Covenant. A dedicated section on the Covenant website has now been introduced to highlight the services and support available to the Bereaved Community and ensure clearer signposting.

- Cobseo

Discussions with Cobseo leadership to promote all members understanding the importance of using the right language so the bereaved are clear when support is available to them.

- 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 2022/23, the scheme paid for 99 students, at a total cost of £965,485.

War Widows Recognition Payment Scheme

In May 2023, the Government announced the War Widows Recognition Payment Scheme, with those eligible to receive a payment of £87,500. This scheme provides resolution to eligible widow(er)s who forfeited their service attributable pensions prior to 2015. The Covenant principle that special consideration should be given to those who have given the most (such as the injured or bereaved) due to service is the basis of the payment.

Veterans

Health and wellbeing of veterans

In February 2023, the Office for National Statistics published an [analysis of the levels of self-reported general health for the veteran and non-veteran populations in England and Wales](#). This was based on data from the 2021 census of England and Wales, which was the first census to ask people if they had previously served in the UK Armed Forces. They wrote that, *“Of all UK armed forces veterans in England and Wales, 27.5% (509,645) said that their general health was very good and 36.9% (682,995) said that their general health was good. A quarter of veterans in England and Wales said their health was “fair” (24.2% or 448,720). The proportion who said they had bad health was 8.6% (160,190) and 2.8% or 51,660 veterans said they had very bad health. This pattern was very similar across England and Wales.*

‘The non-veteran population showed a different pattern, with non-veterans much more likely to say they have very good health and less likely to say they have very bad health. However, the veteran population is much older than the non-veteran population and is mostly male. Since health is typically strongly related to age and, in some cases sex, we provide adjusted estimates for the self-reported health of the non-veteran population to understand what the estimates would be if the non-veteran population had the same age, sex and regional profile as

that of the veteran population. When we make this adjustment, all differences in self-reported general health between the two populations substantially decrease. This suggests that while veterans are less likely to say they have very good health than non-veterans, this difference is a result of age, sex or geographic factors and not a result of previous service."

We therefore currently assess that the self-reported general health of veterans in England and Wales is overall about the same as non-veterans, once demographic and geographic factors are taken into account, although this is not to minimise the lasting effects of service-related issues for an important cohort of individuals, who deserve lasting support.

Loneliness

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's 'Tackling Loneliness programme' was designed following a consultation run by the Trust in early 2020, whereby it sought to understand how important it was to reduce social isolation and improve integration and engagement with provision from within the Armed Forces community. 90% of respondents believed the Trust should focus on social isolation in its future grant making.

In February 2021, the Covenant Fund awarded 60 grants through the Tackling Loneliness programme. These were fixed grants of £70,000 for a two-year period, that sought to reduce social isolation in Armed Forces communities. The projects were all working with traditionally 'harder to reach' groups of beneficiaries, to encourage more people to engage in their community, access services and provision and build stronger networks with peers, support organisations and service providers.

The Tackling Loneliness programme awards focused on at least one of the following key themes:

- building stronger social networks and friendships.
- improving access to local activities and provision.
- building emotional resilience to overcome the causes of loneliness.
- empowering Armed Forces communities to become more independent.

The Trust commissioned an evaluation of the 60 funded projects with Neighbourly Lab, Campaign to End Loneliness, and The King's Centre for Military Health Research, King's College London. This focused on 'reach' and 'service design' in the creation of services to support Armed Forces individuals experiencing loneliness.

The in-depth evaluation looked at the success of the programme, including identification of best practices while also exploring loneliness and its effect of the Armed Forces community. The evaluation report identified key themes and good practice throughout the Tackling Loneliness programme that helped to tackle loneliness in Armed Forces communities.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs hosted a roundtable meeting on loneliness in the veteran community in June. This brought together charities and experts to discuss loneliness, and consider how to reduce and prevent this.

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.

Healthcare services for veterans in England

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

- Op RESTORE

The Veterans Physical Health and Wellbeing Service is the new name for the Veterans Trauma Network, an NHS service that supports individuals who have served in, or are leaving, the UK Armed Forces and have continuing, physical health injuries and related medical problems attributed to their time in the Armed Forces. Op RESTORE works across a collection of 18 acute hospital providers and specialist major trauma units, with military and civilian medical professionals, together with Armed Forces charities, to support veterans to see a clinician with the right skills and experience to help with their continuing physical health injuries and related medical problems attributed to their time in the Armed Forces.

Since its initial establishment as the Veterans' Trauma Network and now as Op RESTORE, the service has received over 690 referrals, with over 260 referrals in 2022/23, and a further 184 in the first six months of 2023/24 (Annex A, Table 18).

- Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance

The Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance 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. 161 out of 211 Trusts (76%) have been accredited as 'veteran-aware', which includes acute hospitals, ambulance services, mental health and community trusts. The Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance is piloting accreditation schemes with providers outside of the NHS, including 19 independent providers, care homes and hospices. Most recently the Royal Hospital Chelsea was accredited.

The Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance, NHS England, Royal Star & Garter, the Royal British Legion and the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund have been working in collaboration to ensure that veterans in residential care settings are able to receive more

tailored support. The veteran friendly aware framework will initially apply to residential settings for older people; since the programme began in May 2023 five Royal British Legion care homes have gained Veteran Friendly Framework status.

- 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. As at the end of September 2023, 77.5% of Primary Care Networks have at least one veteran-aware GP practice in their area. Of the accredited practices, 84% state they have a better understanding of veterans' needs. These accredited practices ensure that the NHS is positioned to help veterans by not only providing the best care for them, but also by providing the NHS with empirical data on this portion of the population. Using the medical expertise contained within the Army, civilian NHS GP trainees in many areas of the UK have now been exposed to Veterans Health training through a network of specialist training that takes place in Army Reserve Centres.

- Veterans Prosthetics Panel

The NHS Veterans Prosthetics Panel provides funding on a named veteran basis to NHS Disablement Service Centres to ensure that veterans who have service attributable limb loss can access high quality prosthetics regardless of where they live.

- Armed Forces personnel in transition: Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans Framework (IPC4V)

IPC4V is part of the national NHS Personalised Care Programme. For the Armed Forces community, it provides a personalised care approach for serving personnel who have complex and enduring healthcare needs as a result of Service-attributable physical, neurological or mental health conditions. It provides a framework and multi-disciplinary team support approach for planning and delivering personalised care to support an improved discharge planning process from the military. This means that all organisations involved in supporting the individual are brought together during the care pathway, ensuring the appropriate arrangements are in place as they transition to civilian life. During the reporting period, NHS England and the MOD have continued to strengthen the delivery of the IPC4V programme, by increasing the welfare manager team by 50%, and by introducing a new, more robust decision-making process, which includes the use of a multi-disciplinary panel that reviews new IPC4V applications. The panel includes representatives from NHS England, MOD policy, MOD delivery and a MOD clinician to ensure a holistic assessment is made in order to make the right decision. Those who do not meet the eligibility criteria for IPC4V are fully supported through their recovery or transition to civilian life by Defence Business Services Veterans Welfare Service instead.

- The Health Innovation Fund

In February 2023, the OVA awarded £5 million to 22 projects as part of the Health Innovation Fund. This investment demonstrates the Government's commitment to delivering the most innovative and effective approaches in veterans' physical and mental healthcare. Core areas of focus include digital, surgery and rehabilitation, pain management and impairments, and women veterans' health. These grants have funded innovative research, including e-plasters, orthopaedic implants to treat pain and ulceration, and the UK's first digital app to support ex-Servicewomen with common mental health issues.

- Op NOVA

In April 2023 NHS England launched Op NOVA, an England wide non-clinical service for veterans who come in to contact with the justice system. Op NOVA is delivered by the Forces Employment Charity in collaboration with Care After Combat and works with NHS services, health and justice services and other organisations and charities, to assess veterans in the pre-custody and post-custody phases of their interaction with the justice system. The assessment enables the development of comprehensive support plan which is then overseen by a care and support co-ordinator. To date, Op NOVA has received more than 1,350 referrals for support for veterans in contact with the justice system.

- Veterans' Mobility Fund

In partnership with the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, the OVA announced plans to make available £2.5 million for a single charitable project that helps veterans with physical disabilities to access mobility equipment that meets their needs. The project will also evaluate the success of the scheme to inform future healthcare provision.

- Veterans' Rehabilitation

The National Rehabilitation Centre is part of the Government's New Hospital programme. The Government remains committed to building 40 new NHS hospitals by 2030 as part of the New Hospital Programme, which includes the new National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) and construction started earlier this year. The NRC, located on the Stanford Hall rehabilitation estate between Nottingham and Loughborough, 400 metres away from the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre², will bring together patient care, research, training and education under one roof. The programme is being led by the Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust. It will work with partners, including the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, to share best practice. Together, all of these individual areas of work will combine to transform the provision of clinical rehabilitation. Eligible civilians who are referred to the centre by a clinician, including veterans, will be able to access it.

Mental health

Services to support veterans' mental health includes the following:

² A state-of-the-art Ministry of Defence clinical rehabilitation facility, provides expert care and support for wounded, injured and sick Armed Forces personnel.

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

In April 2023, NHS England consolidated three existing services providing mental health support for veterans, service leavers, reservists, families and carers, to ensure care is more effective. Prior to consolidation, the three services were the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), the Complex Treatment Service (CTS) and the High Intensity Service (HIS), and by the end of March 2023, had received over 29,000 referrals.

The new NHS-led Op COURAGE service, which is delivered by NHS Trusts and third sector partners, is fully integrated with increased support for those needing help with alcohol or substance use and has better links to mainstream mental health services to increase the range of support available for veterans. The service started on 1 April 23 and by the end of August 2023 has received over 2,730 referrals, an increase of over 10% on the comparable services in the previous year. The new Op COURAGE service will report using the national Mental Health Services Dataset which will enable greater analysis of service utilisation to be done.

- In March 2023, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust held a webinar which provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the key learning and progress made in their 'One is Too Many' programme – funded by HM Treasury as part of the Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. One is Too Many awarded £2.1million to nine projects providing specialist and coordinated services that reduce suicide risks in veterans.
- The Office for Veterans' Affairs has been working with the Office for National Statistics to develop a 10-year retrospective study looking at suicides within the veteran community. This analysis will look at the frequency of suicide and how this rate has changed, thereby informing better interventions in future.
- The OVA is working with the Samaritans on a new Veterans Support Hub. Funded through the Afghanistan Veterans Fund, this two-year pilot creates a dedicated helpline for veterans and the wider military community, staffed with volunteer listeners who are trained in veteran specific issues. An evaluation of phase 1 will be complete early next year, with a full national launch planned for later in 2024.
- A study by Manchester University, jointly funded by MOD and NHS England, to investigate the factors in the year leading up to the suicide of an Armed Forces veteran, has found that veterans who served between 1996 and 2018 were not at an increased risk of suicide compared to the UK general population. Risk factors for veteran suicide include those aged under 35 years, early service leavers and those who left on involuntary discharge. The next phase of the study is to undertake qualitative analysis of coroners' inquests and investigate the factors in the year leading up to the suicide.
- Veterans Places, Pathways and People

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. It will provide grants for the sustainable provision of places of safety and pathways of support across the UK.

- Common mental health data set for veteran mental health services providers

Building on initial work to develop a common assessment framework tool for use by providers of veterans mental services, NHS England has worked with the Contact Group to develop and refine a common dataset, based on national NHS datasets that can be used by third sector providers providing mental health services. The aim being that comparable data can be used in this field.

Healthcare services for veterans in Scotland

Armed Forces and Veterans General Practice Recognition Scheme

The Armed Forces and Veterans General Practice Recognition scheme aims to raise the awareness of General Practice staff of issues that may impact the health of and the access to healthcare for veterans and Service families. The pilot phase concluded in April and following a successful launch in November, the scheme is now available across all Health Board areas.

Social Isolation

The Social Isolation and Loneliness Delivery Plan '[Recovering Our Connections](#)' was published on 8 March 2023. It outlines a range of actions across Scottish Government which will help tackle social isolation and loneliness. Included in the plan is a commitment to “engage with veterans’ organisations and make use of available data and outcomes to better identify how we can support the Armed Forces community to strengthen social connections”. Actions in the plan will be taken forward with the support of the Social Isolation and Loneliness Advisory Group over the life of the plan until 2026.

Healthcare services for veterans in Wales

Veterans NHS Wales (VNHSW) is a specialised bespoke 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 an enduring £920,000 annually to deliver physical and 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.

Tackling 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 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.

The Welsh Government loneliness and social isolation strategy ‘Connected Communities’ highlighted veterans as a group who may potentially be more susceptible to feelings of

loneliness and social isolation. The Welsh Government works with Armed Forces Liaison Officers, charities and public bodies to promote support available to the Armed Forces community including support groups, hubs and drop ins.

Wales Veteran GP scheme

In May 2023, a new veteran-friendly GP scheme was launched in Wales. The scheme, developed by Health Education and Improvement Wales with the Welsh Government and NHS Wales, enables GP practices to sign up voluntarily to undertake specialist training on veterans' health and wellbeing and promoting fair treatment and respect for people who have served with the Armed Forces, and their families. GP surgeries joining the scheme will routinely ask new patients if they or their family members have served, or are currently serving, with the UK Armed Forces.

Practices will need to stay up to date with the latest training and guidance on veterans' health, so they may support their patients' health most effectively. The accreditation certificate is time-limited; therefore GP surgeries will need to reapply and meet the latest guidance and training available to secure their new accreditation. Local Health Boards are also updated via the Welsh Government Armed Forces Champions network. So far, 24 GP surgeries are fully accredited.

Guidance for Local Health Boards (LHBs)

In June 2023, new guidance was issued to all Local Health Boards in Wales to support delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and uphold the statutory new Covenant Duty of due regard. The 'Welsh Health Circular: Armed Forces Covenant', produced by Welsh Government, outlines to NHS staff the key policies that apply to former members of the Armed Forces and includes information to ensure service families are not disadvantaged when accessing health support. The circular has been updated to include key data on support for female and LGBTQ+ veterans, along with Welsh and UK support available for the whole Armed Forces community.

Supporting amputee veterans in Wales

In Wales, there is a Veterans Prosthetics Policy, which ensures that veterans with service attributable conditions can access the prosthetics they need to support them over the course of their lifetime. During 2022/23 spending on prosthetic support for veterans in Wales totalled £332,535 with 42 veteran patients registered across the artificial limb centres in Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham.

The Welsh Government Armed Forces Prosthetics forum, that brings together the NHS Wales, BLESMA, the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee and artificial limb centres met twice this year. The forum, established in 2020, brings together key partners including the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee which ensures that the population of Wales has fair and equitable access to the full range of specialised services. The Specialised Services Committee commissions enhanced prosthetic limbs for veterans, working with the local health boards and artificial limb centres. This forum ensures that there is clear communication between BLESMA, who represent veterans with limb loss, the limb centres and the key funders of specialist support. In July, the Wales Veterans Commissioner joined the group to provide an update on the key issues he has identified in the Armed Forces support sector. Priorities for

the group include promotion of the next iteration of the Veterans Mobility Fund and monitoring support for limbless veterans in Wales.

Suicide prevention

Last year the Welsh Government established the cross-Government Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Group. The Group's aim is to strengthen and drive cross-Government working, including across health, housing, transport, education, social services, policing and custodial settings, welfare and employment. The Group will also ensure integration across multi-agency sectors.

Officials across Welsh Government, including the Armed Forces Branch, will continue to work collaboratively with the Armed Forces sector in Wales in support of the UK Government's Armed Forces Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan published this year.

Substance Misuse Services

Substance misuse services in Wales have supported 254 veterans during 2022/23 and 50 veterans in the first three months of 2023/24.

Healthcare services for veterans in Northern Ireland

The pursuit of veteran-specific programmes such as Op COURAGE being implemented elsewhere in the UK, remain challenging in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the Northern Ireland Department of Health's Armed Forces Liaison Forum continues to be a mechanism for addressing specific health issues experienced by the serving or veteran community. The Veterans Commissioner for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Veteran Support Office have begun dialogue with the Chief Executives of the five Northern Ireland Health Trusts to further highlight the needs of the veteran community. The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust - funded Northern Ireland Veterans Adviceline for Statutory Professionals, which launched in October 2022 and runs for two years, continues to offer advice, guidance and signposting to a wide range of frontline professionals seeking information on the support available to veterans in Northern Ireland. The service had received 600 calls as of 31 July 2023 where 828 queries were raised by the callers, leading to 1,108 signposting pathways being provided by the service.

Veterans' support

The former Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service) Aftercare Service has expanded its remit to link up with the veteran services offered by Defence Business Services to create a new organisation, titled Veterans Welfare Service (Northern Ireland). The new service stood up on 1 April 23 with an initial operating capability and over the summer training has been undertaken to allow a launch with full operating capability in late October. The new service allows all veterans in Northern Ireland, irrespective of service or 'cap badge' to be supported by one organisation. This means that one team can deliver the benefit and expertise of both former organisations in a new streamlined process and take advantage of access to facilities both within and outside the Defence estate throughout Northern Ireland.

Under the guidance of NIVSO, a Serving and Ex-Serving Women's network has been developed. The group meets monthly with quarterly events.

Veterans' mental health

The Treasury-funded Veterans Places, Pathways and People Portfolio Programme of complex mental health support, peer support services and volunteer training which delivers a wrap-around service of mental health support for all Northern Ireland-based veterans, has successfully entered its second year of delivery. All projects within the portfolio are on track to meet or exceed funded targets. A great strength of this programme is the collaborative health and wellbeing alliance created between Combat Stress, Inspire Wellbeing and Brooke House.

The two-year 'You Matter' programme, part of the Treasury-funded Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Fund, that aimed to reduce suicide risk in vulnerable veterans ended in March 2023. It is currently being evaluated by the University of Chester. Inspire Wellbeing, who delivered the programme, are continuing to support vulnerable veterans through a range of Mutual Aid Partnership groups funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.

The Northern Ireland Department of Health-funded Regional Trauma Network is a specialist psychological trauma service for victims and survivors of the Troubles/conflict. Initial operations began in autumn 2022.

The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme pays compensation for injury, illness or death which was caused by Service on or after 6 April 2005.

Conducted every five years, the Quinquennial Review ensures the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme remains fit for purpose, 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 identifies opportunity for policy improvement. The second Quinquennial Review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme was published on 17 July 2023 and has identified a number of recommendations to improve the scheme.

Pensions Appeals Tribunals

From 5 April 2023, amended late appeals rules came into force for Service personnel and veterans in Scotland and Northern Ireland lodging an appeal to the Pensions Appeal Tribunals, bringing them in line with those in England and Wales. These are the tribunals that hear the appeals for the Armed Forces Compensation and War Pension Schemes, and therefore are an essential part of these respective schemes. The change corrected an anomaly where the rules regarding late appeals were different, and more restrictive, in Scotland and Northern Ireland than the corresponding rules in England and Wales as a result of this change, the rules on late appeals are aligned across the United Kingdom.

Chapter 3: Education

Introduction

Due to the mobility of some 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, providing a bedrock upon which future careers are developed after Service and can be key to making a successful transition out of the Armed Forces.

Service families

Educational outcomes for Service children in England

The Department for Education has provided updated statistics on how Service children and non-Service, non-free school meals (FSM) children³ 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 (85.7%), is about the same as non-Service, non-FSM children (87.1%) (Annex A, Table 4). In recent years there has been a substantial improvement

³ Service children are compared with non-Service, non-FSM children to ensure that the comparison is fair, in terms of level of family income.

in the proportion of Service children in England in years 7-11 that move school at times outside of the normal admissions round, reducing from 30.5% in 2018/19 to 3.5% in 2021/22. This remains slightly ahead of the proportion of non-Service children (1.8% in 2021/22) (Annex A, Table 5).

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

- **Service Pupil Premium in England**

The Department for Education continues to allocate additional funding in the form of the Service Pupil Premium to state-funded schools in England with Service children among their pupils. Service Pupil Premium funding helps schools to provide pastoral and academic support to current and former Service children. Schools receive Service Pupil Premium 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 Service Pupil Premium is now worth £355 per eligible pupil annually, and more than £28 million will be paid to schools in the financial year 2023/24, 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 Service Pupil Premium was spent in the previous academic year, and what impact this had on eligible pupils.

- **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 Service Pupil Premium 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.

Destinations of 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 (96%) is similar to 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 (89%) is similar to the proportion of non-Service, non-FSM children in England (86%) (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

Scotland

The Scottish Armed Forces Education Support Group (SAFESG) continues to take a lead in developing and supporting best practice for Armed Forces Children and Young People. The group has expanded its membership to include the Forces Families Federations. The Scottish Government has provided short-term funding to continue the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) National Education Officer (NEO) Role which is responsible for children and young people of Armed Forces families in Scottish schools and other settings.

Wales

The Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru project delivers a range of support for service children living in Wales. It is hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association and funded by the Welsh Government with £350,000 in 2023/24. A key objective is to raise awareness and understanding amongst education professionals of the experiences of children from Armed Forces families, and how schools can support Service Children's needs.

The project team works closely with Welsh Government officials, local authorities, schools, children and young people, education professionals, Armed Forces families and support organisations, as well as the Ministry of Defence.

The experienced project officers provide direct assistance, information resources and toolkits for schools, including awareness training for teachers, and manage the application process for school and local authority project funding. The team's website provides information resources for the public and Armed Forces families.

Project staff have also been supporting schools celebrate the Month of the Military Child in 2023, a wide range of locally organised events, and schools seeking the Armed Forces Friendly Schools Cymru (AFFSC) award. Last year Mount Street School in Brecon, Powys, reached the AFSSC Bronze level award. This year the school successfully reached and received the AFSSC Gold Award, the first school in Wales to achieve the top level of accreditation.

Northern Ireland

On 29 November 2022, the Northern Ireland Department of Education issued the recently published Armed Forces Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance to all Northern Ireland schools,

Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) centres and relevant arms-length bodies, including the Education Authority.

The Army Welfare Service continues to provide bespoke advice to families on education in Northern Ireland through the medium of a Children's Education Support Officer who regularly engages with schools, the Education Authority and Department of Education to resolve issues relating to Service Families' education. Advice is provided to families on school placements and the local devolved legislation governing education, and advice is given to schools on funding available through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust in support of Service Families Children. Of particular benefit is liaison work carried out with the Education Authority Educational Psychology team.

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.

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.

The Armed Forces and Service families

Standard of Service Family Accommodation (SFA)

It is clear from the [Tri service continuous attitude surveys: 2023's](#) satisfaction rates that the Decent Home and Decent Home Plus standards do not meet the expectations of Service personnel. In the Defence Accommodation Strategy, the MOD committed to review its target standard and an Enhanced Target Standard is being developed over the next 10 years. Working in parallel with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in respect of the Decent Home Standard, MOD's Defence Infrastructure Organisation Accommodation team has produced a revised set of proposed MOD housing standards, baselined against a new Enhanced Target Standard that will relate to SFA.

MOD has routinely used comparisons for the standard of its housing with the DLUHC Decent Homes Standard, as reported in the [Service Family Accommodation statistics](#). The benchmark was adopted with the intent of ensuring at least a minimum standard of housing. Since 2017, the proportion of SFA that meets or exceeds the Decent Home Standard has risen from 95% to 97%. Homes below this standard should not be allocated to families, and, if they fall below the standard during occupation, works will be undertaken to restore them to at least the minimum Decent Home Standard. In 2015, the MOD introduced additions to the Decent Home Standard to create its own Decent Home Plus rating, which focuses on a higher level of thermal efficiency and slightly enhanced levels of modernity. The proportion of SFA meeting this higher standard has risen from 83% to 88% since 2017. MOD intends for all SFA to meet the

proposed Enhanced Target Standard within 10 years; however, this is dependent upon funding.

As at 31 March 2023 97% of UK SFA properties, for which information is available, were assessed as Decent Home or Decent Home Plus^[1]. In comparison, DLUHC's English Housing Survey 2021/22 headline report found that 14% or 3.4 million occupied dwellings failed to meet the Decent Home Standard. The private rented sector had the highest proportion of non-decent homes at 23% while 10% of the social rented sector were non-decent 10%. Among owner occupied homes, 13% failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard. We therefore currently assess that UK SFA is more likely to meet the Decent Home Standard than rented homes of the general population in England.

Investment to further improve the standard of SFA offered

Investment to improve the quality of SFA has increased significantly in recent years, with £337 million invested over the FYs 2020/21 and 2021/22 combined (including £122 million of Government Fiscal Stimulus funding) and a further £163 million in FY 2022/23, doubling the rate of investment since the middle of the last decade. The latter focused on modernising homes, tackling damp and mould, replacing kitchens and bathrooms, and improving thermal efficiency for around 9,780 SFA, which is around 20% of the housing stock. The MOD also invested a further £140 million of funding in FY 2022/23 for capital purchases, enabling the acquisition of around 235 new build houses and 113 modern, but not brand new, bulk-lease hire homes.

As part of the Defence Command Refresh Paper, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) received an additional funding of £400 million over the next two financial years; £220 million of this has been received for FY23/24 and £180 million for FY 24/25. This increases DIO Accommodation's Financial Year 23/24 budget for maintenance and improvements from £160.2 million to £380.2 million, which will allow DIO to deliver improvements including:

- the replacement of kitchen and bathrooms which will benefit around 1,061 homes
- boiler and heating upgrades for around 1,500 homes
- providing increased funding for the routine preparation of homes for move in to ensure homes are prepared to a high standard (around 12,000 move-ins are conducted per year)
- 4,672 homes receiving damp and mould remediation packages and over 4,000 homes receiving more substantial damp and mould prevention works encompassing everything from replacement doors and windows to full thermal upgrades including new doors, windows, roofs and the installation of external wall insulation.
- extensive, high-quality refurbishments of around 1,000 long-term void homes to make a greater number of high-quality homes available to Service families in areas where need is greatest.

^[1] Where information is not available, it is generally because SFA have been sub-let, circa 1900 (e.g., to a local authority for Afghan refugee housing) and the sub-leaseholder is responsible for maintenance; or where SFA have been converted to non-accommodation use, circa 370 (e.g., offices for housing staff so that they can be easily accessible on the estate).

Next financial year's funding will focus on similar areas, but with a greater emphasis on substantial damp and mould prevention works and on the refurbishment of long-term empty properties. A 10-Year Investment Strategy is being developed by MOD.

Maintenance of Service accommodation

The DIO is responsible for the provision of SFA and managing its maintenance through contractors. The Future Defence Infrastructure Services Accommodation contracts for SFA went live on 1 April 2022. There are five contracts that make up the suite of Future Defence Infrastructure Services accommodation contracts: one National Accommodation Management Services contract, awarded to Pinnacle Group to run the National Service Centre which families use to access housing services; and four Regional Accommodation Maintenance Services contracts which maintain homes and the community spaces around them. Two out of the four regional contracts were awarded to Amey Defence Services for the Northern and Central regions, which cover around 39% of SFA; and two to VIVO Defence Services for the South-West and South-East regions, which cover around 61% of SFA.

Since the new contracts came into service, there have been a range of performance issues, which have resulted in a lower-than-expected level of service delivery. This has had an associated impact on the lived experience of some Service personnel and their families and is reflected in customer satisfaction data.

The MOD's annual survey of Armed Forces personnel, the [Tri- service families continuous attitude survey: 2023](#), measures satisfaction with Service Accommodation, as well as factors influencing the intentions of Service personnel whether to leave or stay. According to the latest survey, satisfaction with the overall standard of SFA decreased significantly to 46%, down from 52% in 2022. This is despite the high proportions of SFA that meet the Decent Home and Decent Home Plus standards. Satisfaction with responses to, and quality of, maintenance or repair work of SFA has fallen by 13 and 8 percentage points respectively since 2022, to lows of 19%.

MOD has implemented robust measures to address the issues and is working hard with its contractors to bring performance up to acceptable levels. Failure to deliver the required level of performance in the early months of the Future Defence Infrastructure Services contracts led to a formal rectification notice being issued to suppliers in September 2022. The notice directed suppliers to submit Rectification Plans endorsed by their respective Management Boards. MOD officials have held regular scrutiny meetings with supplier Chief Executives to continue to hold them to account, to drive performance improvements and deliver the best possible service to Service Personnel and their families. Ministers have also met with contractor Chief Executives to direct action and have received and acted on frequent updates on performance progress. These measures have seen performance steadily improve in many areas. Providing good-quality homes that are safe and well maintained is a top priority for the MOD.

The Future Defence Infrastructure Services contracts set significantly higher standards in many areas when compared with the previous National Housing Prime contract and have clear mechanisms in place to incentivise high standards and address poor performance. The Future Defence Infrastructure Services accommodation contracts are designed to be very different from the NHP contract they replaced. They were developed with the needs of Service

personnel and their families firmly in mind (the “Family First” approach), and MOD collaborated closely with the Service Families Federations to ensure that their needs were fully considered. The Families Federations played a particularly important part in helping shape the new contracts before they were tendered, testing MOD processes as it approached the contract start date, and communicating key messages to families. They continue to do so in providing feedback on how the services are being delivered and identifying areas for continuous improvement. This is the first time in MOD housing contracts where there are clear customer satisfaction targets for contractors to meet. These are backed by incentives to go beyond the minimum standards and financial consequences for falling short.

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. 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.

Broadband

97% of Service Families Accommodation now have access to a high-quality wifi network, with speeds of 24MBps, meaning a vast improvement in previous areas of digital isolation for service families. In comparison, the English Housing Survey 2021/2022: found that, in 2021/22 93% of households had internet access at home. Within this, 95% of private renters had internet access at home, higher than social renters who at 83% were the least likely tenure to have access to internet at home.

Standard of Single Living Accommodation

In 2021 the [Public Accounts Committee and National Audit Office](#) recommended that the MOD should develop a minimum standard for Single Living Accommodation (SLA). The Defence Minimum Standard for SLA, in addition to mandatory safety and legal compliance measures, must offer individuals: appropriately private, quiet, secure, dry, appropriately ventilated, and heated space with access to hot water.

Assessments are still underway and each service has been tasked to complete their assessments by the end of this year, however of those that have been assessed, early analysis shows that around 75% of the estate has achieved the standard. While there is no direct comparison in civilian sectors to which Armed Forces Single Living Accommodation can be directly compared against, industry standards for university accommodation and boarding schools have been used to identify essential requirements.

Home ownership

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?’

According to the MOD's 2023 [annual survey of Armed Forces personnel](#) (page 19), "Just under half (48%) of personnel own their own home, unchanged since last year". The 2023 [annual survey of Armed Forces families](#) (page 26), found that 60% of Service families own their own home, and it indirectly compared this to "the latest [English Housing Survey](#) reports that 64% of households in England were owner occupied in 2021-2022".

It is therefore currently assessed 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 buying their own homes has continued, including:

- From January 2023, Forces Help to Buy became an enduring policy to help Armed Forces personnel get on the property ladder. Introduced as a pilot in 2014, it enables Service personnel to borrow up to 50% of their annual salary (up to a maximum of £25,000) to purchase their first property. In certain limited circumstances, the scheme may also be used 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 June 2023, loans have been made to around 29,439 Service personnel, totalling over £452 million, an average of approximately £15,363 per claim.
- The 2023 [annual survey of Armed Forces personnel](#) found that, since 2015 (the year after the introduction of the Forces Help to Buy Scheme) home ownership among Other Ranks has risen from 39% to 42%, 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 remains high, with the majority (85%) of personnel knowing at least a little about it. Nearly one in ten (9%) personnel have used Forces Help To Buy in the last year. This proportion is similar between Officers and Other Ranks, and the Services.
- Armed Forces personnel also 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.
- Affordability remains the most reported reason as to why service personnel do not own their own home according to the 2023 [annual survey of Armed Forces personnel](#). The New Accommodation Offer, which will be introduced in March 2024 will also look to address this issue as it looks to improve the accommodation offer.

Experience of the private rental sector

There is mixed evidence from the English Housing 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 accommodation 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 or bereaved families.

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

Support moving on from subsidised Service accommodation

Online briefings to inform and support serving personnel with their civilian housing options throughout their career are regularly offered online. These are delivered by Defence Transition Services as part of MOD's Defence Business Services. In addition, all three single Services are delivering a programme to support Service personnel and their families to transition smoothly, tailored to the individual requirements of each service. All three focus on supporting through-career life skills, which include understanding the civilian experience of housing, finance, education and mental wellbeing. This brings efficiency to the co-ordination and delivery of the through-career transition information and support services, meeting the needs of the Service community now and in the future.

Veterans

In June 2023, the Office for National Statistics published an [analysis of the living arrangements of UK Armed Forces veterans in England and Wales](#). This was based on data from the 2021 census of England and Wales, which was the first census to ask people if they had previously served in the UK Armed Forces. Its main points were:

- Of the just over 1.85 million UK armed forces veterans in England and Wales, 36,200 were residents of communal establishments (excluding owners, employees or their relatives); after adjusting the data to account for differences in age, sex and region between the veteran and non-veteran population, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans were residents of communal establishments (1.95% compared with 3.13%).
- Of the 340,355 care home residents, 7.79% were veterans; among all usual residents, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans lived in care homes (1.43% compared with 2.65%), after adjustments.
- Of the 66,645 residents of prisons, detention centres and approved bail and probation premises, 4.86% were veterans; among all usual residents a larger proportion of veterans than non-veterans were recorded in this type of establishment (0.17% compared with 0.13%), after adjustments.
- A higher proportion of the household veteran population (74.68%) than household non-veteran population (64.54%) owned their accommodation outright or with a mortgage; after adjustments, the percentage of veterans in this category was slightly lower than for non-veterans (74.68% compared with 75.53%).
- A smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans lived in a household that was either not self-contained, overcrowded or had no central heating, after adjustments; the opposite was true for those identifying within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" and "Other" ethnic groups.

We therefore currently assess that the living arrangements of veterans in England and Wales are overall very similar to the living arrangements of non-veterans, once demographic and geographic factors are taken into account, with only small differences in each category.

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 2023 show that 10 (0.15%) of the 6,530 households referred were referred by the Secretary of State for Defence. During the same time-period 560 (0.7%) of the 79,840 households owed a homelessness duty had a support need due to service in the Armed Forces.

Homelessness

In order for the Government to deliver its pledge to end veteran rough sleeping, HM Treasury provided the OVA with £8.55 million for the Reducing Veteran Homelessness Programme awarded to projects that contribute to the aims of the government's ambition to reduce veteran homelessness and end rough sleeping. This has included the provision of specialist help to more than 1,300 veterans across over 900 supported housing units, including wraparound support for employment, education and healthcare service and the new dedicated referral scheme, Op FORTITUDE - a UK-wide referral pathway to support homeless veterans or veterans at risk of homelessness into housing. Riverside, a housing association, works in partnership with charities, housing providers, local authorities and other organisations to support veterans into housing. By the end of its thirteenth week, Op FORTITUDE had supported a total of 162 veterans into housing.

In the Spring Budget 2023, the OVA was awarded an additional £33 million over the next 3 years to increase the service provided to veterans, which included a £20 million capital fund to increase the availability of veteran housing through refurbishment or new developments. The first £2 million of this programme launched in September 2023, to fund refurbishment and development grants.

Veterans' homelessness in Scotland

The Scottish Government continues to develop existing initiatives to prevent veteran homelessness in Scotland including supporting Housing Options Scotland which includes the Military Matters project amongst the services it provides. Military Matters focuses on housing issues affecting people serving in the Armed Forces in Scotland, UK Service personnel transitioning into civilian life in Scotland and veterans. The Scottish Government continues to work with the OVA on cross UK veterans homelessness projects including Op FORTITUDE and the Veterans Capital Housing Fund to ensure that Scotland's interests are represented.

Veterans' Homelessness in Wales

The Welsh Government is committed to reforming housing law and is currently undertaking a review of existing legislation in order to achieve the systematic transformation necessary to address the needs and circumstances of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Wales, including members of the Armed Forces community. An Expert Review Panel has been

established to consider how legislative change can help to end homelessness in Wales. As part of this work, the panel reached out to a range of stakeholders to help inform its work and sought the views of Armed Forces support organisations in Wales. In June, the panel collated views from the All Wales Armed Forces charity group, which includes key providers such as Alabaré and the Welsh Veterans Partnership. These views were put to the panel to help inform its discussions and, ultimately, its recommendations to the Welsh Government. The panel is expected to report back to the Welsh Government in the autumn.

Representatives from Welsh Government housing and Welsh local government sit on the Op FORTITUDE governance board and are working with the OVA and housing partners to ensure the programme links with Wales' housing policies. Alabaré, a charity that supports homeless, vulnerable and marginalised people in England and Wales, is one Op FORTITUDE partner, working to tackle veteran homelessness in the UK. In Wales, Alabaré is developing services to provide further support for vulnerable veterans who have complex needs. This will include giving veterans access to additional mental and physical wellbeing programmes and help getting back into employment.

Veterans' homelessness in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office (NI VSO) and the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner are working with the OVA and Riverside to ensure that Op FORTITUDE extends fully to Northern Ireland. The NI VSO has built relationships with housing providers and relevant stakeholders from across the wider local housing sector and has facilitated a Northern Ireland housing committee focused on building an appropriate and sustainable housing strategy for the veterans' community in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 5: Inquests and judicial engagement

Introduction

This chapter provides an update on the activity of the Defence Inquests Unit during the reporting period, and related matters. It also updates on the support provided by the Government for the Bereaved community, whether those families who have lost loved ones during their service, or after it.

The Defence Inquests Unit (DIU)

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 89 inquests (34 of which concern the death of a veteran) being concluded between 1 October 2022 and 30 September 2023.

During the reporting period, the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit confirmed to the DIU that they had concluded investigations into six Service-personnel deaths; this included two veteran deaths in Scotland. In all six deaths, the investigations were sufficient to understand the

causes of death, thus precluding a need to take them forward to a fatal accident inquiry (Scotland's equivalent of an inquest). There were no veteran deaths recorded in Northern Ireland.

Inquests are yet to be held into 52 military and veteran deaths that occurred since 1 October 2022.

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 DSA annual assurance report (for 2021/22, 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."

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](#).

Northern Ireland legacy

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act-received Royal Assent on 18 September 2023. The Act makes provision for a new independent body, the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) to be established, which can carry out reviews into deaths and serious injuries that occurred during the Troubles, for the primary purpose of information recovery. From May 2024, ongoing criminal investigations, inquests and prosecution decisions relating to cases between 1 January 1966 and 10 April 1998 will cease; and any civil claims filed after May 2022 will be barred. Certain existing inquests and all ongoing civil cases can continue. A judge-led panel within the ICRIR will grant immunity to individuals where it considers that a truthful account has been provided of their involvement in Troubles related deaths and serious injuries. 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.

Chapter 6: UK Armed Forces Families Strategy update

Introduction

The UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32, launched in January 2022, provides a framework for Government, service providers, and other sectors to improve outcomes for families, and strengthen operational effectiveness. It was developed with the involvement of a pan-Government Stakeholder Group and reflects, but is not exclusively driven by, the commitments in the [Government's response](#) to the 2020 Report by Andrew Selous MP ([Living In Our Shoes](#)).

The strategy is made up of eight interdependent workstreams and is owned by the MOD's Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding team. At the heart of the strategy is a commitment to listen and respond to the voices of all the diverse families that make up the modern Armed Forces community.

The [2023 Haythornthwaite Review of Armed Forces Incentivisation](#) states that, "given the significant impact of Service life on families, and the fact this is the most cited reason for considering leaving the Service, there should be more explicit consideration of the family unit within the overall offer" which is exactly what the strategy seeks to do. It does this by recognising the friction that can develop between the demands of Service life, the requirements of the Service person and the needs of their families.

The Armed Forces Families Fund

Funding to support the Armed Forces Families Strategy is provided as part of the Armed Forces Families Fund, with funding of just over £900,000 for early years projects, just under £500,000 for the Supporting Partners programme and just over £2 million for what was the Education Support Fund during this reporting year.

Examples of funding include:

- A project that will create an outdoor learning space for Service children to boost both their physical and mental well-being. The created spaces will provide learning opportunities and new sensory experiences, resulting in improved social skills, self-esteem, physical skills, communication and language, and help Service children reach their full potential.

-
- In Wales, the 'Spouses and Partners Support Project will provide a wide range of needs-led support activities targeted at spouses and partners of Service personnel at RAF Valley. The project will reduce isolation, help develop key employability skills, increase confidence and create opportunities for self and personnel development skills, while fostering positive peer support networks.
 - In Scotland, the Service Families Transition Project will improve the key transitions for service children and young people in the Firrhill cluster as they join school; move between primary and secondary education; and into post-16 education.

The £4 million Fund for FY2023/24 is administered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, on behalf of MOD – from FY2024/25 this fund increases to £6 million per year. For FY2023/24, the Fund has also received a one-off £4 million uplift to assist childcare settings supporting Armed Forces families to increase capacity and meet the demand created by the Government's recent Budget announcement that expands free childcare for preschool children. This money is putting in place support structures to help assist childcare settings on the UK Defence estate.

Workstream 1: Family and Service life

Addressing the friction points between the needs of the Service and the demands of family life are fundamental to the implementation of the Strategy. Linked to this, we have embarked on a fundamental review of the Personal Status Categories – the first of its kind for at least 30 years. These categories provide a key building block to ascertain eligibility and entitlement. This work will now be taken forward in close conjunction with the implementation of the Haythornthwaite recommendations.

Workstream 2: Service life

The MOD has implemented key policies to help alleviate some of the pressures on mobility, deployment and separation. One of these examples is the introduction of a policy regarding the separation of single- or dual-serving parents with dependent children. This allows Service personnel in this category more protection and consideration for deployments or training over a two-week time period, to allow the implementation of a childcare plan, or to not deploy at all.

Workstream 3: Family home

Over 5,200 families in long-term relationships (but not married or in civil partnerships) are now living in surplus Service Families Accommodation. Widening entitlement to this cohort remains a keystone of both the New Accommodation Offer and the [Defence Accommodation Strategy](#).

Workstream 4: Children's education

Work has continued with the Department for Education on strengthening policies such as the [Schools Admissions Code of Practice](#) and [the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities](#)

[Code of Practice](#) to support the needs of Service children. We continue to support Department for Education efforts to improve the support that local authorities and school settings are providing to Service children when they move into and out of the English educational system. The Service Pupil Support Programme was launched early April 2023. The programme supports projects which focus on pupils from serving families and aims to close the gap in attainment between Service and non-Service pupils and address the needs of Service pupils with additional needs.

Guidance and policy development across Government

During 2022/23, MOD has been working with the Department for Education to generate two key guidance documents. The first document is non-statutory guidance to assist state-funded schools and local authorities in England to understand and address the needs of Service pupils in their schools. The second document focuses on the provision of explanatory information regarding school admissions for Service pupils and has been developed for the benefit of both Serving parents and school admissions authorities themselves. The school admissions 'explanatory note' will sit alongside the statutory School Admissions Code of Practice for England.

Investing to add value to Service pupils' educational experiences

Through its partnership with the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, MOD has developed and issued three UK-wide education-focused funding rounds during this reporting period. These included the final round of the MOD's Education Support Fund and the new Armed Forces Families Fund (AF3). The AF3 includes the new Service Pupil Support Programme and the Early Years Programme.

The Service Pupil Support Programme focused on three key priorities, which have been informed by the emerging evidence base being developed by MOD and its partners.

- Where identified, closing the gap in attainment between Service and non-Service pupils, using data-led evidence.
- Addressing the needs of Service pupils with additional needs through early identification and intervention using a collaborative and coordinated approach.
- Identifying and addressing the needs of small cohorts of Service pupils within educational settings

In 2022/23, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust awarded the following grants under the AF3:

- £2 million was awarded to 54 projects specifically for Service pupils across the UK to deliver real change for Armed Forces communities.
- The Early Years Programme delivered grants totalling over £900,000 for 18 projects during the reporting period, targeting bids which focused upon improvements in quality and capacity in nurseries on or near Armed Forces bases and units.

These programmes have supported over 100 schools, early years settings and local authorities, across the United Kingdom.

Month of the Military child

MOD co-ordinated the second successful Month of the Military Child in April 2023. As in 2022, an ever-widening range of activities were delivered by early years settings, schools and local authorities across the United Kingdom and worldwide. Activities focused on celebrating our Service pupils and their unique contribution to the MOD and wider community. The month also raised the awareness of stakeholders and service providers about the varying needs and the challenges they may face. The Month of the Military Child 2023 culminated with an exhibition of Service children's artwork within MOD Main Building.

Special educational needs and disability (SEND)

Significant work has been completed by MOD and its partners to support the Department for Education in ensuring its ongoing review of support for special educational needs and disabilities considers and appropriately responds to the needs of Service pupils in this cohort. MOD's Local Authority Partners held several briefing sessions with Department for Education colleagues over the course of the reporting period, culminating with a formal response to the Review's Green Paper consultation. In response to the evidence of transition challenges experienced by some Service pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans in England, the Department for Education has committed to developing greater standardisation via National Standards. These will give clarity to children, young people and families about what evidence-based support should be in place for their child, wherever they are in England. Additionally, it will provide clarity to education settings and providers about the provision they will need to make available for different needs, alongside providing local authorities and health and care partners clarity about the support that should be available to families locally. These developments are intended to reduce the differences in provision between different areas, improving consistency in offers for those children with special educational needs and disabilities impacted by Service-related transitions. Alongside these developments, the Department for Education will develop a standardised Education Health and Care Plan process, with increased use of digital technology, making it easier for parents to navigate and enable greater engagement with co-production. The standardisation and digitisation of Education Health and Care Plans, combined with greater consistency of offer between local authority areas, will be highly supportive in the transfer of children's plans between different English local authorities.

Localised projects, focussing on Service children with special educational needs and disabilities, have also commenced during 2022/23. Key amongst these is the locally delivered Garrison Assist Project in Catterick Garrison. This is a collaborative project, delivered across several schools serving the Garrison. Its intention is to deliver a more consistent approach across schools, to maximise support to pupils moving between schools, through a dedicated team of highly trained and knowledgeable staff.

Further education and higher education

Collaborative work has continued to support developments in the post-16 and higher education spaces across the UK. For example, partnership work saw the Service Children's Progression Alliance and Centre for Education and Youth publish research entitled '[Diversity meets complexity: Supporting Armed Forces young people to thrive in post-16 education](#)'. The Armed

Forces Covenant Fund Trust has also awarded funding to the Naval Children's Charity and Service Children's Progression Alliance in order to extend the latter's 'Thriving Lives Toolkit' into early childhood and post-18 education.

Engagement across the UK has focused on review activity regarding the availability and consistency of access to further education and higher education funding for Service children. Within this activity, contributions were made by the MOD and its partners to the Scottish Government's 2023 consultation on '[Further and Higher education - residency criteria for access to financial support](#)'. The Scottish Government's response to this consultation, acknowledged that the common policy for determining ordinary residence for higher education funding for armed forces families, does not apply to further education. This was an important statement, as previous eligibility practice by some further education institutions in Scotland had maintained the higher education approach of referring those (whose parents enlisted outside of Scotland) to their 'home' nation for funding. In response to this, the Scottish Government has changed guidance regarding further education funding for the children of armed forces personnel. This means that further education students from the Armed Forces community who were unable to access support can now apply for funding of eligible further education courses.

Research activity and developing an evidence base

July 2023 saw the launch of the **Armed Forces Families Fund (AF3): Research Grants Programme**. This programme will award grants of up to £60,000 for research projects that explore particular challenges faced by Armed Forces families. Key education related themes were highlighted, with eligible research organisations invited to bid for research funding covering:

- the impact of Service life for children with special educational needs and disabilities, additional support needs and additional learning needs;
- the impact of separation of Service personnel from their children in the latter's key early years phases of development;
- whether Service children achieve the highest possible GCSE grades at a comparable rate to their civilian counterparts;
- the key educational risks and benefits associated with transitions between education systems for Service children.

In 2022/23, MOD, in partnership with the DfE, developed a data set, which enables comparison of Service pupil's educational outcomes against that of their non-Armed Forces peers. This data is now available at a local authority level and includes all English National Curriculum Key Stages and phases. Data availability has informed the targeting of funding programme themes, as well as targeted engagement with specific local authorities, where Service pupils' outcomes demonstrate a deficit or where they outperform. Examples of the impact of this data availability includes the recent inclusion of a Service pupil focus within a particular local authority's year of mathematics programme.

Early childhood learning and childcare

Early childhood learning and childcare is an area of growing interest, particularly with the announcement in the 2023 Budget to increase funded childcare places for eligible 2-year-olds.

MOD has been working with stakeholders from across the UK, to influence their policies and practices in support of children from Service families. This has included activity with single service stakeholders, local authorities, and the devolved administrations. MOD has continued to provide a challenge and support function to early learning and childcare providers across the UK through a network of early childhood education and childcare providers. This growing network of providers has created a platform for engagement, discussion and dissemination of information and good practice. MOD has also provided subject matter expertise to the early years sector, via a series of articles published in a national industry publication, *Early Years Educator*. These have focused on seeking to build the knowledge and skills of early years professionals in their support of children from Service families.

The Service Children's Progression Alliance

The MOD continues to provide core funding to the Service Children's Progression Alliance as a means to help improve the scale and quality of support for Service children from birth to age 25. Through sector-wide collaboration in advancing research and its application of evidence-based practice and policy, the Alliance has continued to progress towards its vision of 'Thriving lives for Service children'.

Independent research in 2023 demonstrated the considerable impact of the Service Children's Progression Alliance on the network of professionals and organisations working together to improve Service children's lives. Through the UK-wide network of 12 Hubs hosted by 21 partners, almost 900 members collaborated on regional programmes of support for Service children and 82% cited the value of the Alliance in enhancing their work. This was done through improvements in: collaboration and sharing best practice; access to high quality resources and support; and the consistency and quality of outreach that results, underpinned by coordinated national-scale evaluation. To date, the Service Children's Progression Alliance has supported these improvements through 178 network events, a resource bank accessed by 23,750 users and 1,800 downloads from the online research repository.

The Service Children's Progression Alliance's [Thriving Lives Toolkit](#) - a free continuous improvement tool for schools - is now established on an online platform and it is rated highly by 84% of users. Within a suite of allied development projects, the Annington Trust⁴ is funding the creation of an e-learning platform and training for schools aligned to the Thriving Lives Toolkit's seven principles of effective practice, due to be online mid-2024.

The SCiP Alliance has also lead projects driving whole-system improvements, including research (funded by the Forces in Mind Trust and the Naval Children's Charity) capturing the current state of the funding landscape for Service children and how to improve it; a systems-thinking project working to enhance sector-wide structures and policy, and research informing higher education policy improvement in England, funded by the University of Winchester.

⁴ The Annington Trust funds projects for the recreation and general needs of serving members of the Armed Forces and their families.

Workstream 5: Childcare

Following the successful launch of the Wraparound Childcare in September 2022⁵, there are over 5,500 Service families taking advantage of funding toward their childcare costs. In recent months, the MOD has held live question and answer sessions with Service families to talk through how to apply and the benefits in doing so which has seen a steady increase in numbers taking up the offer.

To exploit the opportunity created by the recent budget announcement on the expansion of free childcare places, MOD is focusing on supporting the development of childcare capacity in the early years setting (0-3 years) on, or near, Defence locations. This investment will assist childcare settings supporting Service families to make the capital investment required to meet the demand created by the Government's plans.

Overseas, we are gathering evidence from the lived experience on what is required overseas and have launched the first Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding overseas survey, which is gathering and analysing evidence of those areas of impact particular to an assignment overseas. Key stakeholders of the Continuous Attitude Surveys will also be consulted over the next year to confirm their needs from the surveys and this will include discussing Service Family policy development.

Workstream 6: Non-UK families

MOD is working closely with stakeholders to address issues affecting non-UK families of Serving personnel, especially valuing the ongoing partnership with key charitable partners. MOD policy has been updated to be clearer and more accessible to promote greater uptake.

The Army remains consistently engaged with the Army Families Federation and also the HIVE network⁶, to give Service personnel the best advice. The Army has reintroduced the Army HQ-led forum known as the Non-UK Working Group, which will seek to address the issues within these communities. The Army has also organised and run an 'Ask the Expert' panels on a wide range of issues experienced by non-UK Service personnel and their families.

Workstream 7: Supporting partners

The first Armed Forces Families Fund funding panel with a specific focus on supporting partners took place in February 2023, with around £500,000 being allocated to 12 successful applicants. Of particular interest was the commissioning of a project, 'The Overseas Employment Guide', developing overseas employment guidance for partners and spouses, as this is an area where the Families Federations have expressed concern. This project will help Armed Forces families being posted overseas gain access to, and an understanding of, the requirements of being able to work in their new location. This could include working for

⁵ Eligible Service personnel (Tri-Service) can register for up to 20 hours per week, per child, term time only (39 weeks per year) of wraparound childcare funding for 4- to 11-year-old children attending before and after school childcare in the UK.

⁶ Information centres provided by the Army to offer information and support to the Service families community.

themselves, their current UK employer, or for a host nation company. The MOD expects their report/guide towards the end of the year.

Workstream 8: Health and wellbeing

The MOD continues to collaborate with NHS England to inform their policies and ongoing work on the Service Families' [Single Point of Contact](#). NHS England has commissioned eight Op COMMUNITY pilots within NHS Integrated Care Systems, the pathfinders are based in Humber and North Yorkshire; Hertfordshire and West Essex; Kent and Medway and Sussex, London; Dorset; Bath, North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland; and Cheshire and Merseyside. The aim of the eight NHS England Op COMMUNITY pathfinders is to provide a single point of contact based in local Integrated care systems for Armed Forces community families and help support those who have recently moved into the area who need to transfer their care. This will provide Armed Forces community families with support and advice from those who understand the military context and the unique issues of Service family life. Within Defence, work has been focused on understanding what additional support MOD can provide to those within the Armed Forces who have caring responsibilities.

The Armed Forces Families Strategy in Scotland

The Scottish Government remains committed to maintaining their excellent relationships with the Armed Forces and Families Federations in Scotland. They continue to hold regular discussions with the federations across the three Services to ensure a joined up approach to supporting Service families in Scotland. As part of the cross-UK Service Families Working Group, a guide for Armed Forces families is currently being developed, which will cover access to health and wellbeing services across England, Scotland and Wales.

The Armed Forces Families Strategy in Wales

The Welsh Government has continued to work with MOD and stakeholders to meet the aims of the Armed Forces Families Strategy. The Navy, Army, and RAF Families Federations are part of the Armed Forces Expert Group, which advises how public services can meet the needs of current and former members of the Armed Forces community, and they have continued to meet with the Welsh Government to discuss issues that impact Service families in Wales. Regular engagement with the Tri-Service leads has also highlighted key issues for Service families. As a result of this engagement, important changes to the education curriculum in Wales are now being communicated via the chain of command, ensuring Service families to have the best available information ahead of their time in Wales.

The Families Federations and Welsh Government are working to promote the use of Forces Families Jobs⁷ across the Welsh public sector, with an aim of increasing the number of Welsh

⁷ Forces Families Jobs is the go-to place for training, employment and volunteer roles for family members of currently serving UK military personnel.

jobs posted on the site and available to the Armed Forces community in Wales. This will be monitored by the Welsh Government's Employment Action group which was established to take forward the UK Veterans' strategy in Wales.

The Armed Forces Families Strategy in Northern Ireland

38 (Irish) Brigade Welfare Support to Families.

In line with wider MOD policy, the Army Welfare Service in Northern Ireland continues to engage with external service providers in relation to its work in countering domestic abuse, under the Northern Ireland Safe Place scheme.⁸ This demonstrates commitment to countering all forms of domestic abuse and making the workplace a safe place for abuse survivors to seek support. Army Welfare Service Personal Support staff are currently engaged in a domestic abuse specialist response team pilot (Project LIBERTAS), the aim of which is to respond specifically to complex domestic abuse casework. The pilot began in December 2022 and is ongoing. On completion the project will evaluate and establish the feasibility of resourcing a permanent specialist team.

⁸ Safe Place is an initiative which provides support in a range of settings for people requiring information on domestic violence.

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. The Covenant itself refers to the mutual understanding between the Armed Forces Community and society as a whole, and it is through the Covenant lens that wider UK society is encouraged to demonstrate its support and gratitude to the Armed Forces community for the sacrifices they make on behalf of us all.

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 Office for Veterans Affairs 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, and is funded by HM Treasury. It supports the Armed Forces Covenant by delivering funding programmes that create real change for Armed Forces communities across the UK. The Trust looks after the £10 million per year Covenant Fund, and distributes additional funds from the Office for Veterans Affairs and the Armed Forces Families Fund; which support delivery of the Veterans Strategy Action Plan and the MOD Families Strategy respectively.

Over £14 million was awarded to support the Armed Forces community in FY2022/23 and this included 10 high-impact grants to address significant challenges awarded through the £3 million Transformational Grants Programme. A further £500,000 was awarded for 12 projects that will make a difference for the partners of Serving personnel, seeking to provide support for their particular challenges. Some examples of these grants include 'The Big Brize Partner Project' which will bring together existing projects supporting military partners at the UK's largest RAF Station. The project will improve existing services and develop new, innovative

activities to meet unmet needs and foster peer support. 'Home Force', run by the Army Welfare Service, aims to provide targeted support to military personnel's spouses and partners. The project will provide skills, confidence, and knowledge to set up and run home-based businesses.

The Covenant Fund

With the twin challenges of emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living pressures impacting on Armed Forces communities; the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust engaged with the wider community to help shape their funding programmes for the year; delivering three major funding programmes that have continued into 2023/2024.

Under the Force for Change programme⁹, the Trust supported over 100 projects with grants of up to £10,000 to support ideas that need small amounts of funding to deliver improvements for Armed Forces communities. These projects ranged from gardening and woodworking projects, to sporting and community wellbeing projects, offering opportunities for members of the Armed Forces community to come together and connect with others.

Under the Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces communities programme, the Trust awarded £6 million to 65 projects that address hidden or complex needs within Armed Forces communities. Where evidence has highlighted gaps in support and provision, grants of up to £100,000 over a period of up to three years were made.

The Trust also made 10 awards under the Transformational Grants programme to deliver systemic change through long-term transformation, following consultation work they undertook with the Armed Forces charity sector. The projects being supported by this programme vary widely, from reducing barriers faced by female veterans, to supporting veterans with addiction and mental health problems. Some projects target service children and young people, seeking to improve educational outcomes, while others are taking forward collaborative work to reduce suicide risks within veteran communities.

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. The Trust is delighted to have helped develop the NAAFI Fund, which from April 2023 is being delivered directly by our colleagues at Royal NAAFI. This year the NAAFI Fund has awarded 80 grants, with 30 awarded to overseas projects, which have had a focus on being healthier and active off-duty and during time with families. More than ever, there is an increased desire for sociable outside spaces with Armed Forces bases and units wanting to create, refurbish and improve them.

The Trust is also delivering grant programmes, in partnership with the OVA, to reduce veterans' homelessness, to enable veterans with mobility needs to access specialist equipment and to refurbish and develop housing for veterans.

⁹ Under this programme, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust will fund projects that make a big difference to Armed Forces communities that are facing particular challenges.

Health and wellbeing

The Trust launched a major consultation in summer of 2023 to shape how the Covenant Fund will be spent from 2024 to 2027; and will publish a framework for the programmes for delivery through the Covenant Fund for 2024 to 27 in early 2024.

For more information, including a full list of projects, please visit the [Covenant Fund's website](#) or read the [Trust's Annual Reports](#)

Scottish Veterans Fund

The £500,000 Scottish Veterans Fund launched a new, three-year funding round from 2023/24. Seventeen projects have been funded for 2023/24, six of which offer support to veterans impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and two supporting Early Service Leavers.

The Unforgotten Forces Consortium

The Scottish Government has agreed to fund the Unforgotten Forces Consortium for a further three years up to 2025/26, providing a total of £950,000, to continue supporting their work to improve the lives of veterans over the age of 60 across Scotland.

Support for non-UK personnel and overseas service

Immigration Rule Changes

Work is underway to review and simplify all immigration rules and introduce a standardised format across the Home Office. This includes the Appendix pertaining to the Armed Forces. Discussions are ongoing about policy changes, including those raised through various forums such as the MOD and Home Office Joint Working Group and the non-UK cluster of the Confederation of Service Organisations. The intention is that the Appendix Armed Forces will be fully reviewed and simplified by spring 2024, incorporating any agreed policy changes.

European Union Settlement Scheme Sovereign Base Area Amendment

When the EU Settlement Scheme was introduced, it did not include the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus as a 'European Economic Area host country' as they are British Overseas Territories and therefore not part of the European Economic Area. This created a disadvantage for European Economic Area family members of British Citizens in the UK Armed Forces posted to the Sovereign Base Areas, who would otherwise have qualified for the EU Settlement Scheme had they instead been accompanying the Service person in an European Economic Area country. Appendix EU to the Immigration Rules was therefore amended in autumn 2022 to allow the Sovereign Base Areas to be treated as part of an European Economic Area host country. This enabled eligible Service families posted to the Sovereign Base Areas before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 to apply under the EU Settlement Scheme when returning to the UK, if they met all other requirements as a 'family member of a qualifying British citizen'. The amendment also included eligible family members who had already returned to the UK from the Sovereign Base Areas and been granted entry via another immigration route.

Registration of children for British Citizenship

Home Office guidance for the registration of children born overseas to Serving personnel has been updated to make clear that children born in the Sovereign Base Areas to non-UK Service personnel do not acquire automatic British citizenship and need to be registered as British citizens first.

Hong Kong veterans

Until now, veterans of the Hong Kong Military Service Corps of the British Army and the Hong Kong Squadron of the Royal Navy who served before 1 July 1997 had no route to settle in the UK. However, following work between the Home Office and the MOD it was announced in March 2023 that these Hong Kong veterans would now be able to apply to settle in the UK under the same bespoke rules which apply to Gurkhas who served before 1 July 1997. The route is due to be opened following the autumn [immigration rules](#) changes.

Armed Forces Covenant signatories

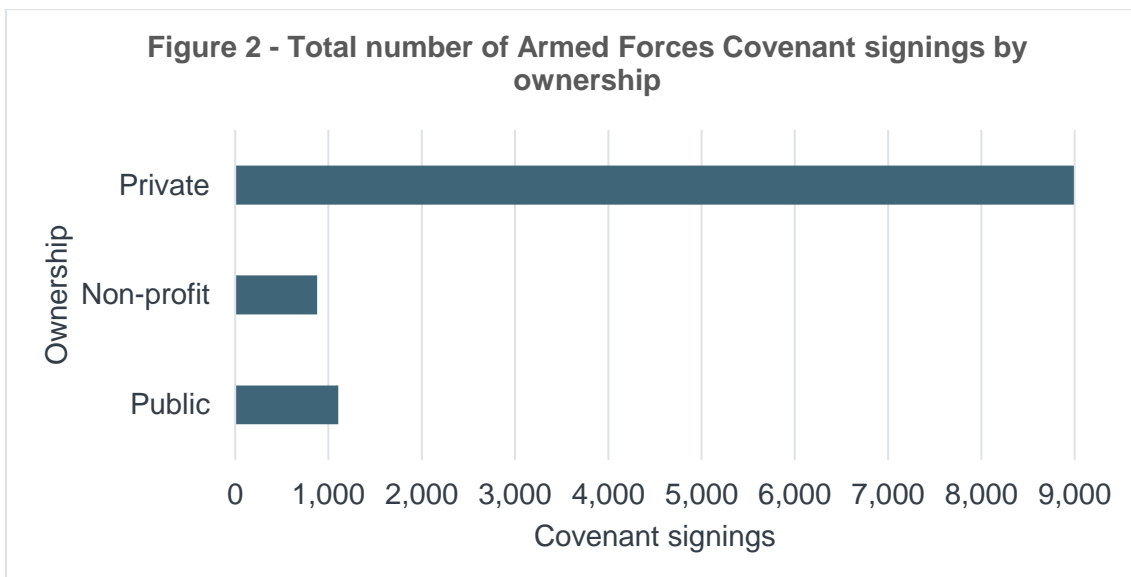
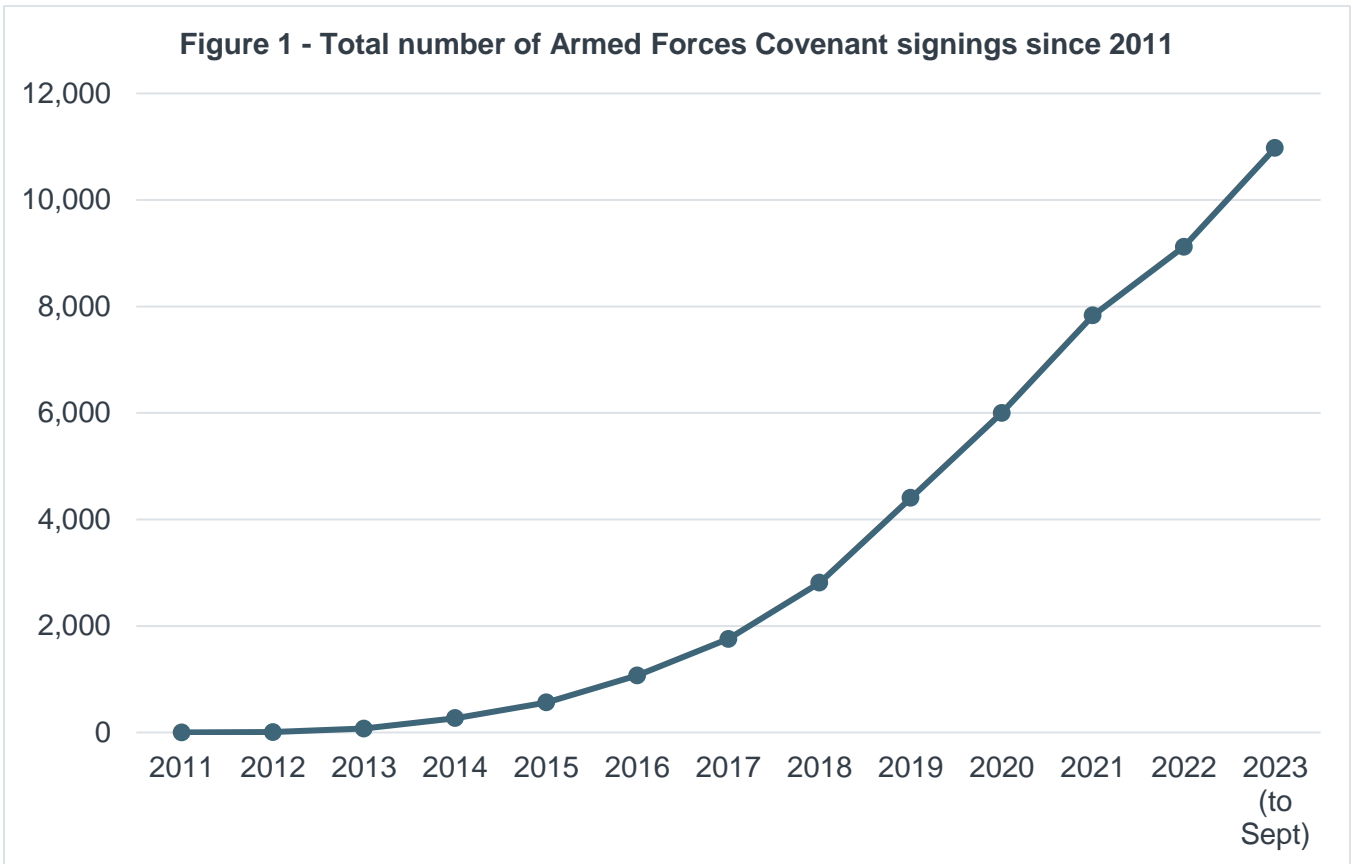
Defence Relationship Management continues to deepen connections with employers across the United Kingdom, emphasising to organisations of all sizes and across all sectors, the strategic importance of signing the Armed Forces Covenant to them, to Defence and to the Nation. These mutually beneficial partnerships demonstrate the high levels of commitment from employers for supporting the Armed Forces community. The relationship also affords them the unique opportunity to earn nationally recognised recognition awards through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. This hugely successful scheme, 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. 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:

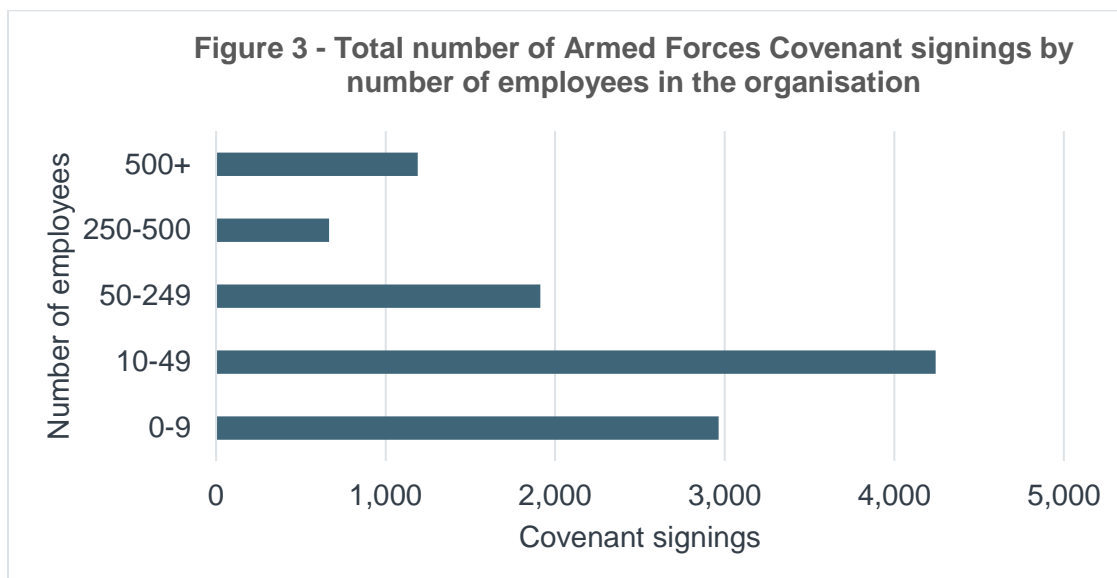
- greater support to members of the Armed Forces community in their workforces
- increased numbers of organisations wishing to sign the Armed Forces Covenant
- increased numbers of organisations moving between the levels of the Employer Recognition Scheme, from Bronze to Silver or Gold

The sustained growth in the numbers of Armed Forces Covenant signatories and Employer Recognition Scheme award holders are a testament to the value that society places in our Armed Forces. Defence Relationship Management are continuously working to drive greater awareness and support for these essential initiatives.

The number of Armed Forces Covenant signatories has seen substantial growth, with 10,975 signatories as of 30 September 2023. Signatories were yet again from right across the UK and spanned all sectors and sizes of employers, across key UK industries; including public, private and third sector.

The current numbers of Employer Recognition Scheme award holders are: 834 Gold, 1,384 Silver and 4,423 Bronze.





Employer Awareness and Attitudes Monitor results

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.

A growing number of employers in the UK are becoming aware of the unique value that veterans have to offer their business, as a result of their personal capability along with the skills and experiences they have developed during their time in service. The majority of employers (66%) would be interested in having more UK ex-Service personnel in their organisation, according to a recent [YouGov perceptions report](#).

The number employers who are keen to employ and who are supporting Reservists can be shown against those companies and organisations who have already signed the Covenant and have made specific pledges that support our Reservists such as providing them with 10 days special paid leave. As at 30th Sept 2023 there were 10,975 companies and organisations who have signed the Covenant. Between 30th Sept 2022 and 30th Sept 2023, the number signed increased, on average, by 154 per month which is evidence that support continues to grow across both Public and Private sectors.

The results for 2023 remain consistent with or improve on 2022 across all areas measured as follows:

Figure 4 – Employer Awareness & Attitudes Monitor Results

Employer Awareness & Attitudes Monitor Results

The results for 2023 remain consistent with or improve on 2022 across all areas measured as follows:

Awareness, knowledge of and perceived benefits of belonging to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) are all higher than 2022.



Awareness of all Defence organisations remains consistent with 2022, with an increase in awareness of Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAV).



Attitudes towards Reservists remain positive, with an increase in those believing they are both a necessary element of UK Forces, and an asset to the workforce.



Employers continue to offer a good range of employment opportunities to members of the wider Defence family, and these have increased in the past year.



Veterans continue to receive high levels of support from employers.



Supportiveness for mobilised Reservists remains stable.



The proportion of Reservist employers agreeing that Reservists learn transferable skills increased in 2023.



Employer awareness of their rights and financial support options during periods of mobilisation for their employees has increased this year.



Recruitment was the most important issue facing businesses in 2023, consistent with 2022 findings. The importance placed on staff retention has increased, and dealing with unexpected staff absence was slightly de-prioritised.

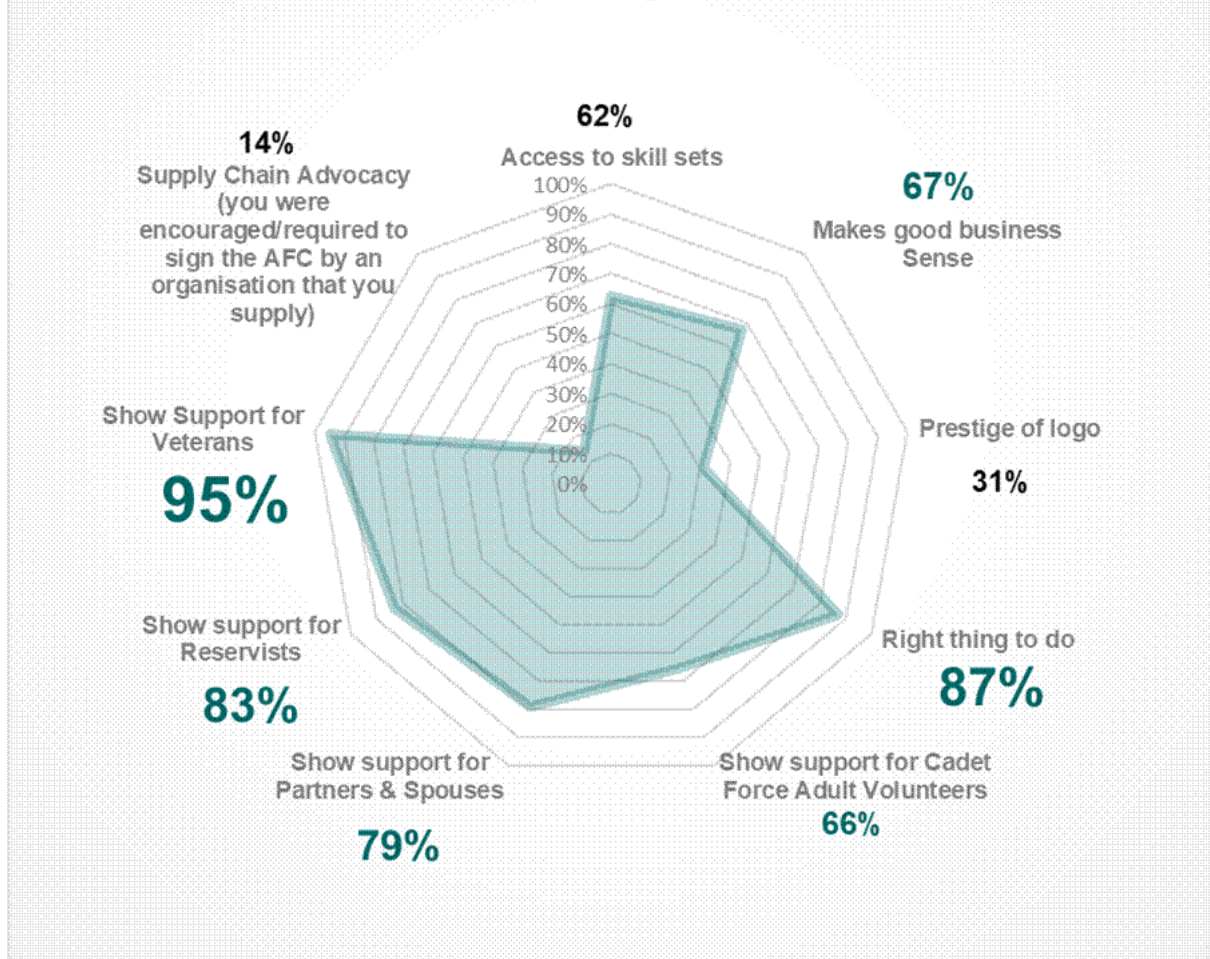


Our surveys and monitoring efforts show that the primary motivations for signing the Covenant continue to revolve around the principle of support. Specifically, the highest-ranked reasons include:

- Showing support for Veterans (95%)
- Reservist Support (83%)
- Showing support for partners and spouses (83%).

Furthermore, 67% of signatories believe that aligning their business with the Covenant is a smart commercial decision. The infographic here outlines this data:

% of Accounts in the Account Satisfaction Survey that selected each of the following as a reason that contributed to the decision to sign the AFC



However, we still need to overcome some obstacles. Many organisations choose not to sign the Covenant due to a lack of awareness or knowledge (42%), a perceived absence of business benefit (26.5%), and insufficient time or resources (9.5%).

Activities Benefiting the Armed Forces Community

A range of activities launched this year have significantly increased awareness and support for the Armed Forces Community. Armed Forces Week and Reserves Day were particularly successful events, garnering considerable attention.

To amplify employer participation during Armed Forces Week and Reserves Day, Defence Relationship Management developed a comprehensive Reserves Day Employer Toolkit this year. This invaluable resource guides employers in initiating workplace activities and in effectively communicating both internally and externally. The toolkit includes elements such as recommended wording, social media hashtags, logos, and imagery, all designed to encourage broader engagement and celebration of these pivotal events. The results of the campaign were as follows:

Figure 5 – Result of Armed Forces Week campaign

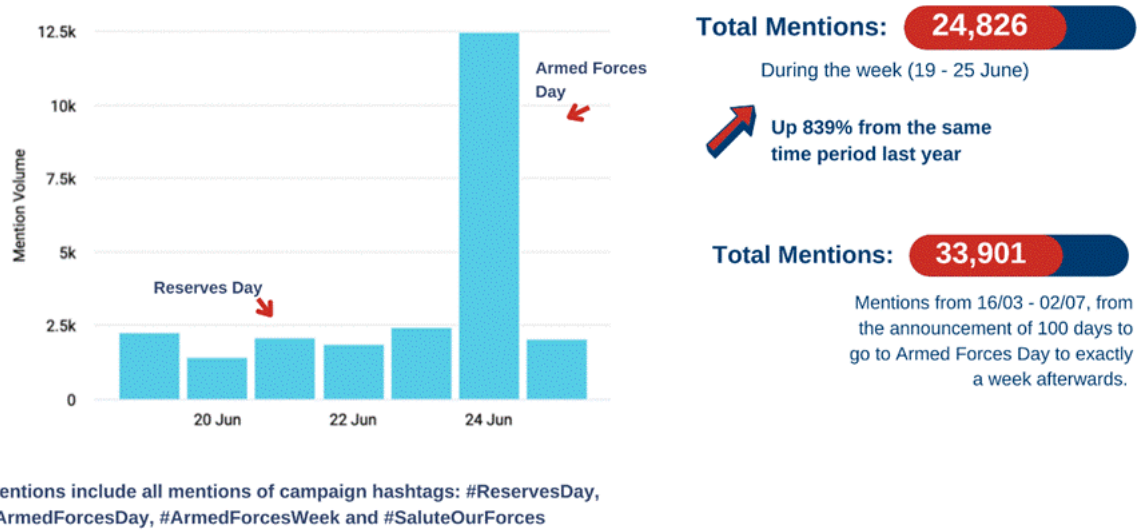
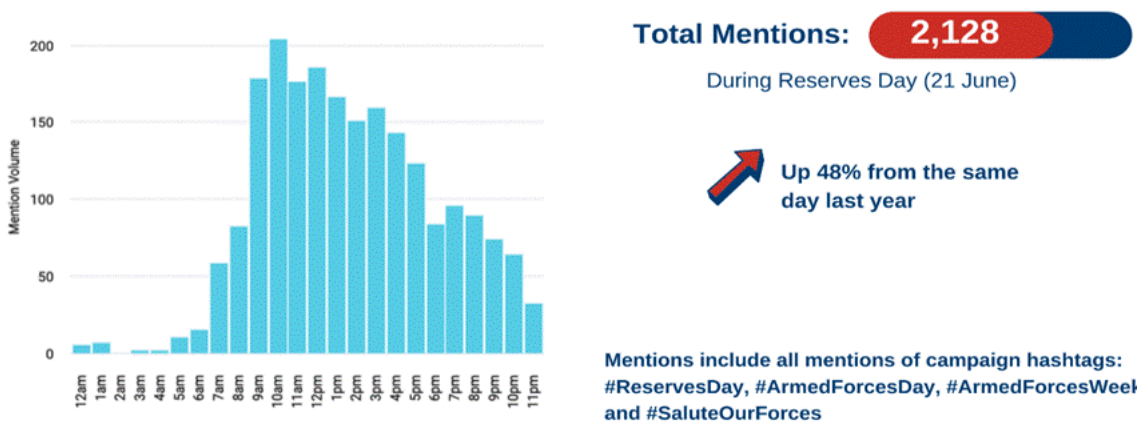


Figure 6 – Result of Reserves Day campaign



Partnering with Defence Conference

The 2023 Partnering with Defence Conference held at London's Queen Elizabeth II Centre was a vibrant gathering of over 300 organisations, including Armed Forces Covenant signatories and Employer Recognition Scheme award holders. In-depth sessions and panel discussions helmed by top Defence officials centred around future plans for the Reserves, the importance of talent in Defence, and the relevance of the Armed Forces Covenant to employers. Key themes included digitisation, the Reserves' continuum of service, and the role of specialist capabilities, while substantial discussions on how businesses can better support veterans and cadet forces also featured prominently.

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 Ministry of Defence to promote and share these practices among Covenant signatories. The most effective activities recorded during the reporting period continue to be having bespoke HR policies, especially positive recruitment aimed at the Armed Forces Community; and flexible or remote working for partners and spouses. Highly effective is support for defence charities and supply chain advocacy (promulgating the benefits of signing the Covenant among suppliers).

In addition to identifying the most effective activities, analysis of activity shows that fewer organisations were engaged than previously in hosting, facilitating or sponsoring a Defence recruitment or Defence insight event, and fewer new organisations were registering with Forces Family Jobs. Targeted campaigns will be focussed on these areas and Defence Relationship Management will explore the reasons for lower take-up than other areas.

Veterans in Employment

The MOD publishes [annual statistics on ex-service personnel employment outcomes](#). The most recent report (for 2021/22, page 5) found that, of those who left the Armed Forces during 2021/22 and used MOD's Career Transition Partnership services, and provided their employment outcome at their six-month follow up. 87% were employed, 4% were unemployed, and the rest were economically inactive, six months after leaving Service. It also found that this employment rate was higher than the employment rate for the UK general population during the same period (75%), and it remains higher than the general population employment rate after adjusting for gender differences between the veteran population and the general population.

The MOD's 2023 [annual survey of Armed Forces families](#) (page 22) found that 82% of Service spouses/civil 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 to 64 of 76%.

We therefore currently assess that ex-Service personnel and Service partners are more likely to be in employment than the UK's working-age general population. However, anecdotal evidence provided to the Government by veterans, Reservists, their families and leading employers, including leading Covenant signatories, is that some veterans, reservists and Service spouses/civil partners continue to experience economic 'underutilisation' at some point in their careers. This is defined as being in employment, but in a specific position or type of employment that does not make full use of the skills, strengths, behaviours, capability, productivity and experience that the individual has to offer. The Ministry of Defence Career Transition Partnership team is working closely with the Office for Veterans' Affairs, the Department for Work and Pensions, other Government departments, leading UK employers and third sector organisations to make improvement in this area, and encourage employers to make fuller use of the value that members of the Armed Forces community have to offer in civilian careers.

Work to further support the employment of members of the Armed Forces community has included the following:

Department for Work and Pensions

- Armed Forces Champions in the JobCentre Plus network

The Department for Work and Pensions remains committed to provide vital access to benefit and employment support to veterans and other members of the Armed Forces community. The Department for Work and Pensions has established a national network of Armed Forces champions and Armed Forces leads who provide a personalised and tailored service to this community.

In 2023/24, the Department for Work and Pensions will continue to deploy dedicated, full time Armed Forces Champions across the 37 Jobcentre Plus Districts. This team will continue to have around 11 Armed Forces Champions Leads, supported by a network of around 50 Armed Forces Champions, who will provide help and support to veterans, supporting Service personnel (Regular and Reserve) and their families across the country.

- Armed Forces Covenant - promotion among national employers

The Department of Work and Pensions' National Employer and Partnership Team promotes signing the Armed Forces Covenant to employers and partner organisations who engage with the department's national portfolio. In co-ordination with the MOD's Defence Relationship Management, the National Employer and Partnership Team have worked with Covenant-committed employers to assist them deliver against and extend their promise to the Armed Forces community. Examples include GXO Logistics, Wincanton, REED and St John Ambulance, where the National Employer and Partnership Team have helped them understand the value of signing and progressing the Armed Forces Covenant and have built mutually beneficial partnerships through sector representative bodies such as Generation Logistics.

- Supporting veterans into specific employment sectors

The Department of Work and Pensions' National Employer and Partnership Team have actively encouraged employers operating in the logistics industry to target service leavers as part of a campaign to attract this cohort into the workplace. The National Employer and Partnership Team have again taken the lead in chairing a monthly meeting of DWP Armed Forces Leads and District Champions. These meetings have included presentations from the Royal Air Force, Defence Relationship Management and a variety of employers and partners who wish to support service leavers, veterans and their families. Across Government the team have engaged with the Ministry of Justice, in particular the New Futures Network, on employment opportunities for veterans who have served custodial sentences. In addition, NEPT continue to work in partnership with X-Forces Enterprise CIC to promote self-employment among service leavers, veterans, reservists and family members, and are building on their working relationship with the Careers Transition Partnership to assist the redeployment of service leavers and veterans (especially those medically discharged), reservists, and family members.

- Universal Credit identifier

The Department for Work and Pensions (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 department started collecting data on the Armed Forces status of Universal Credit claimants in Great Britain in April 2021¹⁰. At first, only new claimants were asked about their Armed Forces status but, from June 2021, other Universal Credit claimants reporting changes in their work and earnings have also been able to report their status. From July 2021, Universal Credit 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. Coverage continues to improve over time and by May 2023 data was held on the Armed Forces status¹¹ of approximately 66% of the Universal Credit caseload in Great Britain. Of those, 4,000 claimants had a status recorded as 'currently serving' and 52,000 had a status of 'served in the past'. Compared to the 2022 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report, the number of claimants with a recorded status of 'currently serving' or 'served in the past'¹² has increased. This does not necessarily mean the overall number of claimants who are currently serving or have served in the past have increased. Rather it may reflect increases in the number of claimants for whom data is held as data coverage improves over time. The way the data is collected means the claimants for whom data is held are not representative of the Universal Credit caseload as a whole. This means it is not yet possible to produce reliable estimates of the overall number and proportion of Universal Credit 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.

- Service Leavers' Adjustment Passport

The MOD and the Department for Work and Pensions launched the Service Leavers' Adjustments Passport in June 2023. It is hosted by DWP on GOV.UK, as well as being signposted to service leavers by Defence Transition Services, the Career Transition Partnership, Veterans Welfare Services and the third sector. The Service Leaver Passport follows the success of the Health Adjustment Passport, enabling Service leavers to communicate any reasonable adjustments or specific requirements they may have to employers, in a way which empowers and is confidential to the individual. The adjustment passport pilots have shown that the passport can support the user by providing:

¹⁰ Data is not collected on the Armed Forces status of Universal Credit claimants in Northern Ireland.

¹¹ 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". Data is not collected on the specific branch of the Armed Forces that claimants are serving in or have served in in the past.

¹² The "currently serving" figure is rounded to the nearest hundred. The "served in the past" figure is rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are rounded to the nearest 1 percent. Figures may be subject to retrospective changes as more up-to-date data becomes available or if methodological improvements are made.

-
- a clear gateway of adjustment support, and raise the visibility of support available for each stage of the transitions journey
 - provide the user with an up-to-date transferable record of their adjustments to support the adjustments journey
 - a communication tool to empower the user to have more structured discussions with employers
 - raise the visibility of in-work support with the user and their employer
 - help to build the confidence of the user and provide assurance that support is available if they need it to progress in work
 - support the user with their Access to Work applications by reducing the need for an assessment if the needs are known

HM Treasury and HM Revenue & Customs

In April 2021 the Government introduced a National Insurance relief for up to 12 months, for UK employers recruiting veterans and service leavers in their first civilian role after service. The Veteran National Insurance Upper Secondary Threshold will stay fixed at £50,270 per year until April 2028, to remain aligned with the Upper Earnings Limit and Upper Profits Limit.

Resettlement support for Service leavers

The resettlement service offered to all Regular Service leavers is delivered through the Career Transition Partnership, which is a contracted service between MOD and Right Management Limited that currently runs until October 2023. A new contract will be in place to provide resettlement services from this date.

The majority of veterans find employment after leaving service, with recent statistics from the MOD's Career Transition Partnership indicating that 87% of veterans were in employment within six months of leaving service.

Civil Service employment for Service leavers

The MOD continues to work with the Career Transition Partnership to promote the Civil Service as a 'great place to work' for Service leavers. Government departments advertise vacancies through Rightjob (the Career Transition Partnership Jobs board), to directly tap into the pipeline of 14,000 Service leavers leaving the Armed Forces each year including Justice, Home Office, Revenue and Customs, Work and Pensions, Education and Defence. Recent Career Transition Partnership contractual Key Performance Indicator reporting stated that the Public Sector and Civil Service had showed an increase in Service leaver recruitment. The Civil Service in Quarter 1 reporting was in the top five known industries for Service leaver placements.

The Civil Service itself aspires to be an exemplar employer of veterans, service leavers, reservists and their families. The Civil Service Armed Forces Network has also recently been established to provide a source of support for those employed within the Civil Service. It is co-

chaired by the MOD and Office for Veterans' Affairs, with senior support and membership from departments right across Government.

The UK's Civil Service and many public sector partners are taking steps to recruit veterans and their families directly into their organisations through these initiatives:

- Great Place to Work – this Civil Service scheme has made over 840 job offers to veterans since 2020.
- Going Forward into Employment – this Civil Service scheme has recruited over 150 veterans since 2017.
- Advance into Justice - supporting Service leavers, veterans and their spouses/partners into careers in the prisons and probation service. This Ministry of Justice scheme recruited 15 veterans through its pilot in 2022, returning in June 2023. It has since expanded its eligibility criteria to include spouses and legal partners.
- Step into Health - this NHS scheme has recruited over 2,670 veterans since 2018 and offers opportunities for the Armed Forces from transition and into civilian life.
- The Department for Education supports veterans into teaching in primary, secondary, and further education through broader support services and bursaries. We have tailored support and communications for the veteran community including dedicated teacher training advisers, [webpages](#), [case study blog](#), [Civvy street publications](#), [The Times](#), as well as webinars, web presence and regional employer fairs with the [Career Transition Partnership](#) and [British Forces Resettlement Service](#).

Transition and through-life support in Scotland

The Census

The Scottish Government has been working with National Records of Scotland (NRS) to develop analytical proposals and outputs for the veterans Census question, reflecting evidence priorities and stakeholder preferences. We will continue to work with NRS and stakeholders to meet user needs as NRS progress with their publication schedule. NRS aims to begin publishing topic data from the Census from summer 2024. This will include data on the size of the veteran population across Scotland. More detailed data on the characteristics of the veteran population are scheduled for release later in 2024.

Promoting veterans as assets

The Scottish Government launched a campaign working with the business community to help employers understand the benefits that veterans bring to the workforce. The campaign promoted and discussed the benefits of employing veterans, and helped businesses to understand how they can bring veterans into their organisation, with a particular focus on reaching the small and medium enterprise sector. The campaign's website, [Recruit Veterans](#) has more details.

NHS employment

The [Supporting Armed Forces Employment \(SAFE\) Programme](#) was established in October 2022. The programme will unite and enhance NHS Scotland's efforts to attract, engage and nurture the Armed Forces community in gaining employment across health and social care

roles. The programme's audience includes those still Serving, reservists, veterans, spouses and dependants of Serving personnel.

Resettlement in Scotland

Mindful of the geographic complexity of Scotland, the Career Transition Partnership ensures all regions are covered to ensure the provision of face-to-face support, delivered from the key locations of Rosyth, Faslane, Leuchars, Kinloss, and Lossiemouth. Virtual transition workshops are also routinely delivered, along with virtual vocational training and employment events, which improve accessibility for Service leavers in remote regions, based overseas or unable to travel. Additionally, monthly Drop-In Resettlement Clinics have been introduced across various first-line units in Scotland, further extending the reach and accessibility of Career Transition Partnership support beyond the Regional Resettlement Centre in Rosyth.

The Career Transition Partnership delivered a highly successful Scottish Employment Fair at Murrayfield stadium on 20 April 2023, attracting over 90 exhibitors and 300 Service leavers. Furthermore, following a successful pilot in October 2022 which recognised the need for a more bespoke regional offering, this was joined by an expanded North of Scotland Employment Fair in August 2023 in Elgin. This event showcased 40 exhibitors and served approximately 150 Service leavers and welcomed the wider veteran and Service family communities to engage in the networking and the job opportunities available in the Highlands.

The Career Transition Partnership continues to play a pivotal role as a member of several influential groups, including the Regional Employer Engagement Board in partnership with the Scottish Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, the Scottish Government Veterans Employability Strategic Group, and the Veterans Scotland Employability Working Group. These associations align with the recommendations of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner reports and foster increased networking and employment prospects for both Service leavers and the broader veteran community in Scotland.

Transition and through-life support in Wales

Employers

The Your SKILLS Your FUTURE programme is a brand-new initiative tailored to the recruitment of veterans, service leavers and their families into Civil Service and public sector careers in Wales. It is facilitated through close collaboration between UK Government departments, the Welsh Government, public sector, academia and charities. Although currently focused in Wales, the future plan is to run the through the UK Resettlement Centres. This is as a result of building a strong relationship with the Career Transition Partnership and MOD, Local Authority Armed Forces Liaison Officers and the Forces Employment Charity who in turn promoted the program across their networks.

Resettlement in Wales

The Career Transition Partnership's comprehensive coverage across Wales seamlessly integrates with the broader partnerships framework. The successful performance of the Career Transition Partnership in Wales is unmistakably demonstrated by a 97% placement rate of Service leavers into gainful employment post their Armed Forces discharge. While the majority of Service leavers opt to resettle in prominent southern regions such as Cardiff, Swansea and

Newport, it's noteworthy that a considerable cohort of Service leavers find their professional footing in areas like Wrexham and Llandrindod Wells. Career Transition Partnership employment support is delivered through three dedicated Employment Relationship Managers who are located in South and North Wales. Evidently, the surge in Welsh enterprises and the Career Transition Partnership has resulted in a record number of employment placements within Wales and along the border areas well within commutable distance.

The Career Transition Partnership Employment Fairs are integral to MOD's resettlement offer and serve as a prime meeting ground for local and national employers to connect with Service leavers. The Newport Service Leavers and Veterans Employment Fair in November 2022 run in partnership between the Career Transition Partnership and the Welsh Government, Reserve Forces and Cadets Association and 160th (Welsh Brigade) was a resounding success, and set the stage for the upcoming employment fairs scheduled for November 2023 in Cardiff Stadium and a planned event in 2024 in North Wales respectively. The event featured a keynote address by the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership Hannah Blythyn MS. During the day, Service leavers and veterans could engage directly with almost 50 employers in a dedicated jobs fair along with other support organisations. Over 160 Service leavers and veterans were in attendance and at least 21 offers of employment were directly made as a result of the event. There has also been a record number of placements across Wales via the Career Transition Partnership since the event. In addition, employers and organisations took part in a conference session which promoted the value and skills of the Armed Forces community. This session featured the Welsh Government and Defence Relationship Management alongside public and private sector employers.

These invaluable platforms are used by Wales-based employers to underpin their recruitment campaigns and strategies and indeed a testament of these employment events is the registration of 54 new companies from across Wales with the Career Transition Partnership since January 2023 alone, further reinforcing the profound impact of these engagement initiatives.

Transition and through-life support in Northern Ireland

Employers

Defence Relationship Management continues to work with industry partners and the Careers Transition Partnership in Northern Ireland aimed specifically at improving employment of spouses and veterans as well as the sharing of skills between civilian employers and Reserve units. In particular, supporting the delivery of pledges of those national and local employers who have signed the AFC.

Many of the 10,000 companies who have signed the AFC have a presence in Northern Ireland. Although the AFC is not actively advertised locally, there has been an increase to 33 'home grown' organisations who have signed. In all, 55% (of those Northern Ireland-based Reservists classified as employed) have notified their employers of their Reserve status. Over 470 employers who employ Reservists across NI have declared themselves to Defence Relationship Management as 'supportive employers', defined as being positively supportive of the concept of Reserve service.

Employment for families of serving personnel

The Families Employment Support Officer in Northern Ireland continues to provide support to the families of Service personnel. Education, training and volunteering opportunities remain available, with many training courses, including basic skills, available at no cost. The Support Officer has 65 clients. Of these, the majority have secured employment but remain in contact to avail themselves of further employment opportunities that may be of interest to them. There are currently less than three unemployed clients who are actively seeking job opportunities, with most clients in the last 12 months gaining employment within a month of first registering. Outreach work continues with employers making them aware of the availability of the potential for employing Service spouses and partners, and work to engage employers with the Northern Ireland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association is ongoing.

Resettlement in Northern Ireland

The Career Transition Partnership in Northern Ireland stands out due to its distinctive combination of factors: employment law considerations, historical context, and security conditions. This uniqueness is rooted in its comprehensive approach, as it consolidates all three core components of the Career Transition Partnership services – Transition, Training and Employment and delivers against the various Service leaver pathways. This integrated approach is facilitated within a single Resettlement Centre that is home to transition, course bookings, employment, and veterans.

Through 2023, the employment market in Northern Ireland has been particularly strong with vacancies across all sectors with high demand around the STEM areas, ICT, FinTech, engineering and food processing. In April 2023, the Career Transition Partnership were pleased to host the first ever the Career Transition Partnership Employment Fair in Belfast City. This platform was an excellent opportunity for Northern Ireland employers to meet with around 200 Service leavers who were presently resettling in Northern Ireland after their varied careers and the event was a clear success. It was also attended by the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner who stated: “We know that veterans have not just the highly technical skills but also the hard work ethic and discipline. There's a whole plethora of skills that come with being military and today has given us a chance to show that to our businesses of Northern Ireland, and I hope our veterans get jobs.”

HM Prisons and Probation Service Veterans' Activity Hubs

In June 2021 a veteran's activity hub was opened at HM Prison / Young Offender Institution Holme House. 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 FEC. The activities have been selected based on focus groups held with veterans at the prison. Veterans will co-locate with other vulnerable cohorts such as people in custody for the first time, self-isolators, and elderly offenders with medical issues.

While current funding will see the existing HMPPS Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) delivery cease in April 2024. However, under the new recompleted programs, the two models

have been included in HMPPS CFO Evolution post April 2024 and will continue to support veterans and other cohorts.

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.

Invictus

Following a thorough process of identifying those who would benefit most from a recovery perspective, the MOD in partnership with the RBL delivered a team to this year’s Invictus Games in Dusseldorf in September 2023.

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 36,000 more railcards have been sold, taking the total to over 100,000 sales, as of October 2023.

Digital verification of veteran status

The MOD has been working closely with the OVA and the Government Digital Service (GDS) to begin the rollout of veteran cards to those who left the Armed Forces prior to 2018. Since December 2018, all service leavers automatically receive a veteran’s card upon discharge and the MOD has issued over 74,000 cards to this cohort as of September 2023. MOD has started testing the required technology to begin the wider rollout with veterans and other stakeholders, and during the latest testing phase, started to issue the first cards to those who left service prior to 2018. This long-standing commitment has required significant investment and technical expertise to deliver; to build the technology to manage tens of thousands of applications per month, verify an individual’s identity and confirm previous service in the Armed Forces before issuing a card. The MOD aim to produce hundreds of cards for pre-2018 veterans before the end of 2023 and, depending on the volume of applications received, for production to increase over the course of 2024 towards a maximum output capacity of approximately 50,000 cards per month. An offline method of application will also be made available for those unable to apply online. Details of when all veterans will be able to apply for a card will be announced in due course.

Each year, many veterans ask MOD to confirm their status, and for the first time ever, we can prove the identity of a user using GOV.UK One Login and match this to an MOD service record. Veteran cards have two primary functions; to provide both a recognition of service and to ensure that veterans can more quickly verify their status to access public and charitable sector support as efficiently as possible. However, there are several ways that Service can be verified, and the lack of a veteran card should not act as a barrier to access the appropriate support.

Chapter 8: The Covenant in law

The new Covenant Duty

The statutory Armed Forces Covenant Duty in the Armed Forces Act 2021 places a legal obligation on specific public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising certain functions, in healthcare, education and housing, that could impact the Armed Forces community. The Duty came into force on 22 November 2022. A brief outline of the new Duty, including which bodies and functions are in scope, can be found in the ‘Covenant in law’ chapter of the [2022 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report](#), and other resources to understand the Duty can be found in the [Armed Forces Covenant Duty toolkit](#).

Through 2023, the MOD has been working with organisation in scope of the legislation and other stakeholders to increase their awareness of the Duty and provide training in how it works. Online webinars have been attended by hundreds of stakeholders from across all parts of the UK; MOD officials have led sessions on the Duty at regional and national conferences and meetings across the UK; and myriad organisations have used the online resources available through the toolkit.

Through 2023, the MOD has also been conducting a review into whether central departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should be brought into scope of this Duty. A report from this review is provided in the next chapter, and Ministers are now considering the next steps.

NHS England

NHS England has written to NHS Integrated Care Boards to remind them of the Covenant Duty and has provided them with a tool which ICBs can use as part of a developmental approach to supporting the Armed Forces community. The NHS standard contract, which is mandated by NHS England for use by commissioners for all contracts for healthcare services other than primary care (general medical practice, dentistry, optometry and pharmaceutical services) has been updated to reflect the Armed Forces Covenant Duty.

The Covenant Duty in Wales

In Wales, partners across the sector have worked collaboratively to support the implementation of the Covenant Duty. The Wales Armed Forces Liaison Officers have worked closely with local authorities to provide briefings and training prior to the Duty being stood up in law, and this has continued across Wales throughout 2023.

The Welsh Government worked with Warwickshire County Council to translate the latter's Covenant e-learning module so it is available in both Welsh and English, and this was promoted as part of Armed Forces Week 2023.

In May, the Welsh Government dedicated its annual Armed Forces Community Conference to 'The Covenant and due regard', which brought together public bodies, charities and statutory agencies to explore delivery of the Duty and share best practice and experiences. Contributors included the MOD Covenant team, the Forces in Mind Trust and Wales Veterans' Commissioner.

Armed Forces Liaison Officers – supporting delivery of the due regard Duty

Since the due regard Duty went live in November 2022, the Armed Forces Liaison Officers' in Wales have worked closely with local authority partners to support them in ensuring processes and procedures take account of the Armed Forces Covenant. AFLOs have been publicising the Duty to elected members and staff across local government along with third sector bodies.

In North Wales, training has been delivered to 345 staff from across the six local authority areas since October 2022. Following the training, 86% of those trained stated that following the session they would be 'asking the question' and seeking to identify the Armed Forces community.

In the Gwent area (Caerphilly, Torfaen, Newport, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent) since October, 222 staff had accessed the AFLO training across housing, education, elected members, senior leadership, customer services and social services. Sessions are held on a monthly basis and also include external agencies such as Citizens Advice.

All AFLOs are replicating this work across Wales, helping to increase awareness and delivery of the Duty across the country as a whole.

The Covenant Duty in Scotland

The Scottish Government continues to engage with the MOD as they consider the UK Government's and the Devolved Administrations role with respect to the functions already within scope of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty in the areas of education, healthcare and housing and to what extent they currently consider the Covenant principles.

The Covenant Duty in Northern Ireland

The Duty of due regard to the Covenant applies across the UK, including in Northern Ireland, and is carefully phrased to ensure that it in no way conflicts with the requirements of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1997. Representatives from bodies in scope of the new Duty attended an NI-specific Covenant Duty webinar covering health, housing and education to understand how the legal Duty can be applied in Northern Ireland.

Review into whether central departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should be brought into scope of the statutory Armed Forces Covenant Duty

Executive summary

The Armed Forces Act 2021 created the statutory Armed Forces Covenant Duty as a new legal obligation on certain local bodies. During this Bill's passage through Parliament, the UK Government committed to conducting a review within a year of the Duty coming into force, into whether central departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should also be brought into scope of this Duty. This report provides the results of this review.

The two main questions considered in this review are as follows. First, whether the relevant central departments of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should be in scope of the Duty when exercising their role in relation to the healthcare, education, and housing functions already in scope. Second, whether the Ministry of Defence (MOD) should be in scope when it exercises its comparable functions for the Armed Forces community.

This review has identified the following potential benefits of bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope of the Duty in either (or both) of these ways: it could improve awareness and consideration of the Covenant among the relevant decision-makers, with subsequent impact on Covenant implementation; it could further demonstrate the UK Government's and Devolved Administrations' commitment to the Covenant, and their willingness to take on the same legal responsibilities as the local bodies in scope; and it could help ensure the Covenant's longevity into the future as an obligation on the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations. However, while these benefits are potentially high when bringing local bodies into scope, we judge that they would be comparatively low when bringing national government bodies into scope, as the evidence indicates that these departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations largely already do what they would be required to do if they were in scope of the Duty, by considering the Covenant principles when conducting their role in the Duty areas. Therefore, in comparison to the local level, at the national level the potential gain is small.

The principal cost of bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope is that it would place an additional administrative and legal burden on decision makers. It is likely to take up the time of those staff who are already working to find solutions to deliver meaningful change for the Armed Forces community, and reduce the time they can spend

doing this, because of the likely additional requirements to document consideration of the Covenant principles during decision making and policy development processes. As the UK Government and Devolved Administrations are already required to implement the Covenant in these Duty areas, as a matter of policy, and are already largely doing so, we assess the additional burden is largely unnecessary.

On balance, we consider the current costs and benefits do not produce any clear net benefit from bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope when they exercise their role in relation to the healthcare, education, and housing functions already in scope, or from bringing MOD into scope when it exercises its comparable healthcare, education, and housing functions for the Armed Forces community. Therefore, we conclude that these extensions to the legal Duty should not be taken forward at this time.

An open and transparent evaluation process has been developed by which to assess the evidence as to whether new bodies and functions should be brought into scope of the Duty. These could include functions of central UK Government or the Devolved Administrations. Potential bodies and functions for inclusion will be assessed against the established criteria. This will enable the best advice to be put forward for the Secretary of State's decision as to whether the proposal should be implemented. All outcomes of this process will be published.

Recommendations

1. The MOD Covenant team should continue to work with the relevant departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations to further increase their awareness and understanding of the Covenant, and reduce any remaining inconsistencies in Covenant consideration. They should take a similar approach to the approach they are taking with local bodies in scope of the Duty, including, for example, issuing a guidance document to raise Covenant awareness, and help officials make informed decisions.
2. Using the evaluation process outlined in this report, the MOD Covenant team (working with external Covenant stakeholders) should continue to monitor the benefits and costs of bringing central departments of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope of the Duty when exercising the functions already in scope. Should a clear net benefit emerge in the future, this extension to the Duty should be considered again.
3. The MOD Covenant team and external Covenant stakeholders should continue to monitor the benefits and costs of bringing MOD into scope when it exercises its comparable healthcare, education, and housing functions for the Armed Forces community. Should a clear net benefit emerge in the future, the best way of taking this forward through the necessary primary legislation should be considered.
4. The evaluation process that MOD has developed over the past year with external Covenant stakeholders should be taken forward as soon as practicable, so that the evidence as to whether new bodies and functions should be brought into scope can be investigated, and advice submitted to the Secretary of State for a final decision. Once the process is live, action should be taken to publicise this, and seek initial views from members of the Armed Forces community and the general public.

Introduction

Why the Covenant Duty was established

The [Armed Forces Covenant](#) is a promise by the nation, founded on the unique obligations and sacrifices of those who serve, or have served, in the Armed Forces, that they 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.' It has existed in this form since 2011, and each year since then, the UK Government has been statutorily required to present to Parliament a Covenant Annual Report, covering all parts of the UK, and the UK Government and Devolved Administrations have taken forward the Covenant as a matter of policy. More than 10,000 organisations across the UK have also pledged their support to the Covenant. Service provision to the Armed Forces community has significantly improved as a result.

The statutory Covenant Duty was introduced in 2021 because awareness of the Covenant remains inconsistent at the local level, and some members of the Armed Forces community can still find themselves disadvantaged as a result. From cases brought to the attention of officials, it appears a major factor in some incidents of disadvantage can be a lack of awareness at the local level. This led to the creation of the Duty as an obligation on local bodies, rather than central Government bodies, because its purpose is to help improve awareness of the Covenant at the local level across the UK.

How the Covenant Duty works

The Covenant Duty was created by the Armed Forces Act 2021, which inserted the Duty into the Armed Forces Act 2006 ('the Act'). It is the following legal obligation: Whenever certain local bodies, set out in the Act as 'specified persons and bodies', exercise what the Act calls 'relevant functions', they must have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant. 'Relevant functions' are any activities conducted under, or by virtue of, certain legislative provisions¹³ listed in the Act. For example, 'a local authority in England' is one type of 'specified person and body' listed in the Act, and 'Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996' is one legislative provision listed in the Act. Therefore, whenever any local authority in England conducts any activity under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, such as developing, implementing, or reviewing a relevant policy, or making decisions about delivery of relevant services, this legal obligation applies.

Full lists of the specified persons and bodies and the legislative provisions listed in the Act are provided in the Statutory Guidance, accessible via the [Armed Forces Covenant Duty toolkit](#). The specified persons and bodies include local authorities, governing bodies of certain schools, various NHS bodies, and other organisations. Some of these specified persons and bodies exercise relevant functions under only one of the listed legislative provisions, while others exercise relevant functions under several.

It is important to note that, under the Act as currently written, **an organisation cannot be subject to this legal obligation to have due regard in every area of its activity, but only when it exercises a 'relevant function'**. Organisations are not 'in scope' in and of themselves, but only in conjunction with those 'relevant functions' they exercise. The Duty has to be set up this way, as Covenant-related activity represents only a minority of these organisations' broad range of activities, so requiring them to have due regard to the Covenant

¹³ That is, certain sections of primary legislation or retained direct EU legislation. The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 shall amend references to retained direct EU legislation to 'assimilated direct legislation'.

in every area of their activity would not be proportionate. For example, it would not be sensible to require local authorities to have due regard to the Covenant when making decisions about libraries, parks, or waste disposal. This is also true for the UK Government, including MOD, and the Devolved Administrations.

It should also be noted that, under the Act as currently written, **these ‘relevant functions’ are tightly bounded**. Organisations cannot be in scope generally for all policy areas affecting the Armed Forces community, or simply whenever they make any decision that affects the Armed Forces, but can only be in scope for activities under the legislative provisions listed in the Act.

Therefore, this review does not examine whether central Government should be in scope in every area of its activity, or in loosely defined circumstances, such as whenever making any decision affecting the Armed Forces community. These are not possible under the current Act, and would require significantly changing how the Duty works, by amending the Act, so is beyond the scope of this review. This review has to proceed by identifying key functions, and examining whether central Government should be in scope when exercising them.

The Act gives the Secretary of State the power to extend, by regulations, the scope of the Duty to include additional bodies and functions. Before doing so, there is a requirement to conduct a statutory consultation with the Devolved Administrations if the proposed changes affect services within their competence, and with other stakeholders he considers appropriate. The Public Sector Equality Duty would also need to be considered, and a Public Sector Equality Duty impact assessment conducted. Revised Statutory Guidance might need to be laid before Parliament. It should be noted that this review has not replaced any of these steps. The aim of this review has been to consider the impacts of bringing the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations into scope, including the benefits and costs, and conclude whether the statutory consultation, and other steps, should therefore be taken forward.

This review

This review is divided into three sections, with supporting appendices¹⁴: Section 1 considers whether the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should be in scope of the Duty when exercising the current functions in scope. These functions relate to the provision of certain services to the general population, so Section 2 considers whether MOD should be in scope when it exercises comparable functions for the Armed Forces community. Finally, Section 3 sets out the evaluation process that has been developed by which to assess the evidence as to whether any other bodies or functions should be brought into scope of the Duty.

The planned scope of this review was outlined in the ‘Covenant in law’ chapter of the [2022 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report](#).

¹⁴ Appendix 1 outlines further the scope of this review, Appendix 2 provides a summary of the responses to the stakeholder engagement programme, and Appendices 3 and 4 provide evidence relating to Sections 1 and 2.

Section 1: Should the UK Government and Devolved Administrations be in scope of the Duty when exercising the functions already in scope?

What are the functions currently in scope?

The functions currently in scope relate to certain healthcare, education, and housing services that are provided **to the general population**, some users of which are members of the Armed Forces community. The specific healthcare, education, and housing functions are as follows.

The healthcare functions in scope involve decisions and policies relating to: (1) provision of NHS Primary Care, NHS Secondary Care, and local authority-delivered healthcare services to the general population; (2) planning and funding of these services; and (3) co-operation between bodies and professionals providing these services.

The education functions in scope involve decisions and policies in the context of the compulsory education of children in the general population, relating to: (1) school admissions; (2) educational attainment and curriculum; (3) child wellbeing; (4) transport to/from school; (5) attendance at school; (6) additional needs support; and (7) the Service Pupil Premium (the Service Pupil Premium is England-only).

The housing functions in scope involve decisions and policies relating to: (1) allocations policies and tenancy strategies for social housing for the general population; (2) homelessness in the general population; and (3) Disabled Facilities Grants for the general population.

Which Ministers would be affected by this change?

If the UK Government and Devolved Administrations were brought into scope when they conduct their role in relation to these functions, the Ministers primarily affected would be those responsible for the delivery of these healthcare, education, and housing services to the general population. As these services are largely devolved, this would be:

- With respect to the exercise of these functions in England, the UK Government's:
 - Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
 - Secretary of State for Education, and
 - Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- With respect to the exercise of these functions in Wales, the Welsh Government's:
 - Minister for Health and Social Services
 - Minister for Education and Welsh Language, and
 - Minister for Climate Change (who is responsible for housing).
- With respect to the exercise of these functions in Scotland, the Scottish Government's:
 - Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care
 - Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and
 - Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (who is responsible for housing).
- With respect to the exercise of these functions in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive's:
 - Minister of Health
 - Minister of Education, and
 - Minister for Communities (who is responsible for housing).

Or, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if there is no Northern Ireland Executive.

Note that Ministers in other parts of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations could also potentially be brought into scope if they have a role in the delivery of these healthcare,

education, and housing services to the general population, but the Secretary of State for Defence would not be significantly affected by this change, as MOD does not generally exercise any of the functions already in scope¹⁵ – MOD does not provide healthcare, education, or housing services to the general population. MOD does exercise some comparable functions for the Armed Forces community, but these are not generally among the functions currently in scope. Whether they should be added is considered in Section 2 of this review.

How would this change be achieved?

This change would be achieved by passing secondary legislation to amend the Act by adding:

- ‘The Secretary of State’ to the list of specified persons and bodies for England,
- ‘The Welsh ministers’ to the list of specified persons and bodies for Wales,
- ‘The Scottish ministers’ to the list of specified persons and bodies for Scotland, and
- ‘The relevant Northern Ireland department’ to the list of specified persons and bodies for Northern Ireland.

Note that adding these Ministers to the Duty would not bring them into scope when exercising any other functions, as this amendment does not add to the functions in scope.

What is the role of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations in relation to the functions already in scope?

The UK Government departments that have a role in relation to the functions in scope are the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), the Department for Education (DfE), and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The role of these UK Government departments and the Devolved Administrations in relation to the functions in scope is to:

- determine their national policy
- enact the required legislation (whether primary or secondary legislation)
- set the national standards to be followed by local bodies, such as local authorities, schools and colleges
- issue guidance to these bodies about the requirements on them and how to meet them
- provide the framework by which these bodies can be held to account
- provide funding, as required
- collect and publish data to measure progress, such as the school performance tables, and
- be accountable to their respective Parliament or Assembly.

It should be noted that within healthcare this role is more limited, compared to education and housing, as the NHS also provides leadership and direction. For example, in England, NHS England provides leadership to the NHS on veterans matters and has a substantial programme of dedicated work to commission bespoke services for veterans. Therefore, bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope would have a more limited impact in terms of healthcare.

¹⁵ Note there is one exception. Functions exercised in England under section 213B of the Housing Act 1996 are in scope, and MOD exercises one homelessness prevention function under this Act. This is discussed in Section 2 of this review, under the heading ‘What legislation governs MOD’s comparable functions?’.

To what extent do the UK Government and Devolved Administrations currently implement the Duty when exercising the functions in scope?

As part of this review, we ascertained what evidence existed that would demonstrate the extent to which the UK Government and Devolved Administrations currently implement the Duty when exercising the functions in scope. Appendix 3 outlines many examples of actions taken by DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, the Welsh Government, and the Scottish Government, where they have applied the Covenant principles in practice over the past decade, by aiming to remove disadvantage or make special provision when conducting their role, described above. This covers the full range of functions already in scope. Good progress is also being made in delivery of the Covenant in Northern Ireland, though its unique historical and political circumstances mean that delivery of the Covenant has to be approached in a different way to the rest of the UK. The volume of actions outlined in Appendix 3, over this extended period of time, and the fact they have structures in place to focus on the Covenant, suggests the relevant teams have a good awareness and understanding of the Duty, and we conclude they are already largely implementing the Duty.

However, some inconsistencies have been identified, and there are some instances when it would appear the Covenant has not been considered. For example, documents have sometimes been published, covering an area of healthcare, education, or housing in scope of the Duty, that do not reference the Armed Forces community or discuss their unique circumstances. Although this might mean the Armed Forces were considered and no specific provision was deemed necessary, it might also mean the Armed Forces were not considered as a specific cohort during the development of the document. This was one of the points raised by stakeholders during the stakeholder engagement programme (see Appendix 2).

It should be noted this issue is not about positive outcomes, or that some disadvantages still exist for the Armed Forces, but whether the Covenant was consciously considered when developing, delivering, and reviewing policies and decisions that may impact the Armed Forces community, and whether appropriate weight was placed on the Covenant principles. This is what 'due regard' means, and what bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope would require them to do. It does not mean that they would have to achieve any specific public service delivery outcomes, only demonstrate that 'due regard' has occurred.

On balance, we therefore conclude that the UK Government and Devolved Administrations are already largely implementing the Duty when exercising the functions already in scope, by usually having due regard to Covenant principles, although some inconsistencies in approach have been identified. These will be addressed by Recommendation 1:

Recommendation 1

The MOD Covenant team should continue to work with the relevant departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations to further increase their awareness and understanding of the Covenant, and reduce any remaining inconsistencies in Covenant consideration. They should take a similar approach to the approach they are taking with local bodies in scope of the Duty, including, for example, issuing a guidance document to raise Covenant awareness, and help officials make informed decisions.

Challenging central Government's implementation of the Covenant

Parliamentary scrutiny

The UK Government and Devolved Administrations are held to account in their implementation of the Covenant by their respective Parliament or Assembly. The Secretary of State prepares a Covenant report each calendar year and lays it before Parliament. The Welsh and Scottish Governments also publish their own annual report each year that outlines their support for the Armed Forces community. Parliamentary debates are held to scrutinise Covenant delivery.

Ombudsmen

Members of the public can make complaints about the UK Government or a Devolved Administration to the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](#) (in England), [Public Service Ombudsman for Wales](#), [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#), or [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman](#). Ombudsmen can ask Government departments to review decisions where mistakes may have been made, or where they may have acted unfairly or not followed process. They have powers to ask organisations to make apologies and improve services. They can also ask departments to review policies, procedures, guidance, or standards, though they do not have the power to compel the payment of compensation or compel changes to policy, procedures or decisions.

Insofar as central Government has committed to the principles of the Covenant, ombudsmen could currently possibly consider complaints where it is alleged that the UK Government or Devolved Administrations have not met their commitment to seek to remove disadvantage for the Armed Forces community compared to other citizens in the provision of public services, or apply special provision. Ombudsmen cannot typically investigate a complaint where there is a possible legal route available for an individual to address a complaint via legal action, such as judicial review. However, ombudsmen may still investigate if they consider it would be unreasonable for the individual to resort to court proceedings.

Bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope of the Duty would enable ombudsmen to consider complaints with respect to central Government's acts or omissions to have due regard to the Covenant principles when exercising the relevant housing, education and healthcare functions that require statutory due regard. Possible grounds of complaint could be sought for breach of the Duty by failing to have adequate due regard to the Covenant principles when making decisions, or drafting and implementing policy, in the exercise of relevant functions, or on the basis that the policy was unlawful or irrational due to the omission of having due regard to the mandatory consideration of the Covenant principles and the statutory guidance.

Judicial review

Similarly, insofar as central Government has committed to the principles of the Covenant, an application for judicial review (JR) could currently possibly be made where it is alleged that the UK Government or Devolved Administrations have not met their commitment to seek to remove disadvantage for the Armed Forces community compared to other citizens in the provision of public services, or apply special provision.

Bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope of the Duty would enable challenge by way of JR of their actions or omissions when exercising the relevant housing, education or healthcare functions that require due regard to the Covenant principles, on similar possible grounds to those above. The purpose of JR is to review the lawfulness of the way in which a decision was made, rather than the rights and wrongs of the conclusion reached. Therefore, JR in the context of the Duty would consider whether due regard to the Covenant principles had occurred, not whether the decision or outcome itself was right or

wrong. In order to rebut a JR, the UK Government or Devolved Administration would therefore need to evidence its compliance with the Duty when making decisions or policy.

What are the benefits and costs of bringing the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope of the Duty when exercising the functions in scope?

Benefits

We have identified the following potential benefits:

- 1. It could increase the consistency of Covenant consideration in DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, and the Devolved Administrations.**

As discussed above, it would appear there have been some inconsistencies in approach at the national government level. Bringing them into the Duty has the potential to increase the consistency of their Covenant consideration, as placing this legal obligation on them could result in more internal Covenant activity. For example, they might make extra Covenant training mandatory for staff, or ensure they have an appointed Armed Forces Champion, or introduce processes, perhaps similar to equality impact assessments, that formally require the Covenant principles to be considered when decisions are made, or policies are developed. This could ensure, for example, that the Armed Forces community is referenced in all relevant documents. This extra activity is, in turn, likely to lead to increased consideration of the Covenant and how disadvantages can be removed, or special consideration applied. This was one of the points raised by stakeholders during the stakeholder engagement programme (see Appendix 2).

At the local level, this type of legal obligation has the potential to produce substantial Covenant gains. First, because the thousands of relevant local bodies across the UK are widely dispersed and can be difficult to reach, and a legal obligation can be the most effective way of ensuring their engagement. Second, because a major factor in some incidents of disadvantage can be a lack of awareness of the Covenant, so making the Duty about due regard ensures that many local bodies will be required to take steps to improve their awareness of it, in turn leading to increased Covenant implementation.

However, neither of these factors applies at the national level. The number of relevant teams in the UK Government and Devolved Administrations is very small, so engagement with them is more straightforward, and a legal obligation is therefore not required. Also, their Covenant awareness and implementation are already well-established. As discussed, the evidence indicates they do already normally do what the Duty requires, by considering the Covenant principles when conducting their role in the Duty areas. Bringing them into scope would, to a large degree, put a legal requirement on them to do what they are already doing, and the potential gain is small. If instances are identified where further due regard may be required, the evidence indicates they have the willingness and resource to do so, without being legally obliged to.

For these reasons, should they be brought into scope, we judge that **the likelihood of this benefit being realised is medium**,¹⁶ as some of these organisations might decide to increase their Covenant consideration, but others may well consider they already meet the due regard threshold, and see no additional action as necessary. We also judge that, if this benefit is realised, **its impact would be low**. That is, the level of Covenant consideration in DHSC, DfE, DLUHC and the Devolved Administrations would

¹⁶ The costs and benefits are each assessed by their likelihood and impact, qualitatively judged as 'low', 'medium' or 'high'. The likelihood is whether the cost or benefit is likely to materialise, given the UK Government and Devolved Administrations are brought into scope. The impact is the size of the effect the cost or benefit would have, given it materialises.

be unlikely to increase significantly, given the amount of Covenant work already being undertaken by these organisations.

2. **It could demonstrate the UK Government's and Devolved Administrations' commitment to the Covenant, and their willingness to take on the same legal responsibilities that are on the local bodies.**

Not being in scope of the Duty could suggest that the UK Government and Devolved Administrations are not committed to the Covenant in the same way as the local bodies, with the overall potential to undermine confidence in the UK Government's and Devolved Administrations' commitment to the Covenant. Bringing them into scope could crystallise their public commitment to the Covenant and the Duty. It could remove any doubt about their commitment, and would ensure there is parity between them and the local bodies. This was one of the points raised by stakeholders during the stakeholder engagement programme (see Appendix 2). Should they be brought into scope, we judge that **the likelihood of this benefit being realised is high**, as opting to come into scope would undoubtedly demonstrate commitment to the Covenant.

It could also send a positive message to the Armed Forces community about the commitment to the Covenant, which in turn could improve morale in the Armed Forces, and give them confidence that they will be looked after. This in turn could help improve recruitment and retention of Armed Forces personnel. However, this should be tempered by the fact that those members of the Armed Forces community with awareness of the Covenant already consider it to be a Government obligation. Additionally, it is likely that any such benefit would centre on the perceptions of stakeholder groups representing the Armed Forces community, such as Service charities, rather than the Armed Forces community itself. The UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments publish an annual report each year (which the local bodies are not required to do), which demonstrates their commitment to the Covenant. Therefore, these stakeholder groups already have good awareness of the wide range of activities and initiatives being undertaken by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations that demonstrate their commitment to the Covenant. For these reasons, we judge that if this benefit is realised, **its impact would be low**. That is, the positive perceptions of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations among the Armed Forces community and stakeholder groups are not likely to increase significantly.

3. **It could help ensure the Covenant's longevity into the future as an obligation on DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, and the Devolved Administrations.**

Including these departments in the Duty when exercising the functions already in scope would put a legal Covenant obligation on them for the first time. It could help ensure the Covenant will endure as part of their work for the long-term. Should they be brought into scope, we judge that **the likelihood of this benefit being realised is high**, as coming into scope would certainly help ensure the Covenant endures as a long-term obligation.

However, the Act already requires each year's Covenant Annual Report to include information about these departments' areas of healthcare, education, and housing. As evidenced in Appendix 3, these organisations have been working to implement the Covenant since it was brought into existence in its current form. These organisations' support to the Covenant is continuing, and the evidence indicates that they are committed to the Covenant, so we judge that if this benefit is realised, **its impact would be low**. That is, the level of assurance that the Covenant will endure into the future as an obligation on DHSC, DfE, DLUHC and the Devolved Administrations is not likely to increase significantly, as it is already high.

Costs

We have identified the following principal cost:

It could create an additional administrative and legal burden on DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, and the Devolved Administrations.

If DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, and the Devolved Administrations were brought into scope of the statutory Duty, it is likely that they would need to build additional steps into policy-making and decision-making processes to evidence compliance with it. It is also likely that legal advice would need to be sought as part of this process, therefore creating an additional administrative and legal burden. Should they be brought into scope, we judge that **the likelihood of this cost being realised is high**, as this additional burden is very likely to materialise.

This additional burden is likely to consist of activities such as recording evidence of the due regard that has occurred, managing the formal administrative processes that might be set up to ensure this, and gaining advice on the legal requirement. These activities are likely to take up the time of those staff who are already building networks, identifying problems, and working collaboratively and flexibly to find innovative solutions to deliver meaningful change for the Armed Forces community, and therefore reduce the time they can spend doing this. Moreover, it is the policy of the UK Government, Welsh Government and Scottish Government to adhere to the Covenant. Therefore, their healthcare, education, and housing departments are already required, as a matter of policy, to consider the Covenant when exercising the Duty functions, and already largely doing so, so this additional burden is largely unnecessary. Any challenges to omissions of central government in failing to adhere to the statutory due regard Duty would also accrue legal costs. We therefore judge that **the impact of this cost is high**. That is, the resource available to work on delivering improvements for the Armed Forces community is likely to reduce.

Conclusion

While the potential benefits of bringing local bodies into scope are high, given that the UK Government and Devolved Administrations are already largely implementing the Duty when exercising the functions already in scope, and publicly reporting each year on their Covenant delivery, we judge that the benefits of bringing them into scope of the Duty would be comparatively low. Given the administrative and legal burden that would result, we consider the current costs and benefits from bringing them into scope do not produce any clear net benefit at the national level, and so is unnecessary.

Recommendation 2

Using the evaluation process outlined in this report, the MOD Covenant team (working with external Covenant stakeholders) should continue to monitor the benefits and costs of bringing central departments of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations into scope of the Duty when exercising the functions already in scope. Should a clear net benefit emerge in the future, this extension to the Duty should be considered again.

Section 2: Should MOD be in scope of the Duty when exercising functions that are comparable to the functions already in scope?

What functions does MOD exercise that are comparable to the functions already in scope?

Healthcare

The healthcare functions in scope involve the provision of NHS primary care, NHS secondary care, and local authority-delivered healthcare services to the UK general population.

MOD does deliver comparable healthcare services to the Armed Forces community, through MOD's Defence Medical Services (DMS), which provides a range of healthcare services in the UK and overseas. All Regular Service personnel, whether in the UK or overseas, normally receive primary care, such as general practice and dentistry, from DMS. Secondary care, such as specialist referrals, hospital admissions and emergency care, is normally provided by the NHS to personnel in the UK. Secondary healthcare to personnel and dependents overseas is provided by MOD through a range of different arrangements including contracted provision, memorandums of understanding, and reciprocal agreements. Volunteer Reservists that are mobilised into a period of full-time Service receive occupational health advice and care from DMS. Service families in the UK usually receive care from the NHS, although in places, Service families in the UK can register with DMS for primary medical care where there is capacity. Service families overseas are supported by DMS in the same manner as Regular Service personnel. The NHS delivers all primary care and secondary care to veterans.

Education

The education functions in scope involve the provision of children's compulsory education to the general population in the UK, that is, primary, secondary, and, for England only, compulsory further education.

Children of Service personnel ('Service children') are normally educated in state-funded schools in the UK alongside non-Service children. However, MOD does deliver comparable education services to some children. MOD runs 22 schools, almost all overseas in locations to which Service personnel are posted, such as Cyprus, Germany, the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar. One MOD school is in the UK (Queen Victoria School in Scotland). MOD schools provide education to the children of Service personnel, MOD civilians, entitled contractors and fee payers. In total, about 1,870 children are currently being educated in MOD schools.

Also in scope of the Duty is the education or training of those aged 16 or 17 in England, who are under a statutory duty to participate in education or training until they are 18. Some Service personnel fall into this category.

Note that MOD also provides some other education services, in that it trains its adult Service personnel. However, adult education for the general population is not in scope of the Duty, so this review does not consider including MOD's adult education in the Duty.

Housing

Social housing is in scope of the Duty. Service accommodation is not social housing, but it is similar to some degree, for example, in the level of control the provider (MOD) has over who lives where, and that it is publicly funded and offered at a reduced charge. However, there are significant differences, including the terms under which it is occupied, the demographics of the population being housed, the security and flexibility of tenure, eligibility rules, maintenance responsibilities, and charges.

Homelessness is in scope of the Duty. MOD does conduct some homelessness prevention work as part of its support to those in the process of leaving Service, including the statutory duty on the Secretary of State for Defence to refer in suspected cases of homelessness (explained further below), and through its support to victims of domestic violence. However, MOD is not generally required to conduct homelessness prevention work for its Regular serving personnel, as all are offered accommodation.

Disabled Facilities Grants are in scope, and MOD does fund disability adaptations to Service and private accommodation. However, there are substantial differences. For example, MOD does not conduct a means test or require a personal contribution, there are different eligibility rules, and MOD can use its allocations policy to reduce the need for disability adaptations.

Therefore, while some healthcare and education services provided by MOD to the Armed Forces community are directly comparable to the healthcare and education services provided by civilian public bodies to the general population, the comparison is much more limited when it comes to housing. This review will, however, consider including in the Duty MOD's services relating to Service accommodation, homelessness, and disability adaptations.

How would this change be achieved?

To bring MOD and its comparable functions into scope, the Act would need to be amended by passing secondary legislation to add 'The Secretary of State for Defence' to the four lists of specified persons and bodies for England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

In addition, the legislative provisions (that is, the sections of primary legislation or assimilated direct legislation) under which MOD exercises its comparable functions would need to be added to the Act's list of provisions for each home country, using secondary legislation. Therefore, this review needs to examine what such provisions exist. This is the subject of the next section.

What legislation governs MOD's comparable functions?

As explained in the Introduction, the Act bounds which functions are in scope by stating that functions are in scope if they are exercised under a legislative provision listed in the Act. It provides for the Secretary of State to add to the Act's lists of legislative provisions, using secondary legislation, thereby bringing other functions into scope. Therefore, for MOD's comparable functions to be added to the Duty, they must be exercised under some legislative provisions. However, **MOD's comparable functions are not generally delivered under any primary legislation or assimilated direct legislation**. This is explained below for each of healthcare, education, and housing. This means that there are no suitable legislative provisions available for adding to the Act's lists, so **MOD's comparable functions cannot be brought into scope of the Duty without passing primary legislation**. How this could be done is discussed in the benefits and costs section below.

Healthcare

MOD's provision of healthcare services to the Armed Forces community is not established under, or by virtue of, any primary legislation or assimilated direct legislation. The National Health Service Act 2006 sets out the duty of bodies such as NHS England and local authorities to provide a comprehensive health service to the general population in England. This is the legislation, along with Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and comparable legislation in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, that is listed in the Act and therefore provides the healthcare functions in scope of the Duty. However, these Acts do not extend to MOD, and there is no equivalent legislation for MOD. MOD's provision of healthcare services derives from King's Regulations, and MOD also issues internal [healthcare regulations and guidance](#), where

healthcare legislation does not apply to MOD, through which it regulates the safety of its healthcare activity in the UK and overseas.

Some legislation governing specific healthcare issues, such as doctor registration, that applies to all public and private healthcare providers in the UK, does apply to MOD, so MOD could potentially be brought into scope in relation to these issues. However, this would not bring MOD into scope in a comparable way to the NHS and local authorities, and, in any case, would not comprehensively bring into scope MOD's provision of healthcare services to the Armed Forces community.

Education

MOD's provision of children's education is not delivered under, or by virtue of, any primary legislation or assimilated direct legislation. Education legislation governing local public bodies, such as local authorities and schools, extends only to the UK (whether England, Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland), but all MOD's schools are overseas (except one, see next paragraph), and therefore outwith this legislation. MOD instead delivers its children's education services under its internal policy document [Joint Service Publication 342](#).

One MOD school is in the UK, Queen Victoria School in Scotland. The Scottish education legislative provisions listed in the Act do not apply to this school, as they generally apply to education authorities (local authorities), but Queen Victoria School was instead established under a Royal Warrant to be run by its Board of Commissioners, which is responsible to the Secretary of State for Defence.

Housing

Service accommodation is provided to members of the Armed Forces in the course of their employment, to facilitate their inherently mobile lifestyles. It is not provided under primary legislation or assimilated direct legislation, but under MOD's internal policy document [Joint Service Publication 464](#). JSP 464 is the policy for the provision of Service Family Accommodation, Single Living Accommodation, and the substitute equivalents. It also provides the policy for disability adaptations to Service accommodation.

Similarly, MOD's homelessness prevention work is not generally rooted in legislation. There is one exception: in England, section 213B of the Housing Act 1996 includes a requirement on the Secretary of State for Defence to refer members of the Regular Armed Forces, who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days and who consent to being referred, to a local housing authority. Therefore, MOD could be brought into scope when it conducts this statutory function. This would mean that the Secretary of State would have to have due regard to the Covenant when conducting this homelessness duty. However, given that this homelessness duty is itself a way of fulfilling the Covenant (for example, it aims to remove the potential disadvantage of veterans being reluctant to seek early help to avoid homelessness), and it is already a legal obligation, being legally obliged to have regard to the Covenant when conducting this homelessness duty would have limited additional value.

To what extent does MOD currently implement the Duty when exercising functions that are comparable to the functions already in scope?

Appendix 4 outlines the ways that MOD considers the Covenant when it exercises functions that are comparable to the functions already in scope of the Duty.

MOD's provision of healthcare services to the Armed Forces community is modelled on the NHS. The levels of service offered by MOD, and the health outcomes for the Armed Forces community, are often as good, or better, than for the general population, though this is not always the case, and examples can be identified of lower levels of service or inferior health

outcomes. However, the Duty of due regard does not mandate that any specific service delivery outcomes have to be achieved, its purpose in this area would be to ensure there is regular benchmarking of MOD and the Armed Forces against the NHS and the general population, and this generally happens already.

The foundational principle for MOD's overseas schools is that they should deliver, so far as is reasonably practicable, education that is comparable to the education that would be provided in the state-funded sector in England. Also, there is good awareness of the Covenant among staff working in these areas, and the Covenant's principles are regularly referenced. It is exactly the same for Queen Victoria School in Scotland, in that it aims to provide education comparable to that provided by the Scottish state sector.

When it comes to housing, while it can be harder to identify fair housing comparisons between the Service population and the general population, and harder to identify ways to remove housing disadvantages, MOD does regularly seek to benchmark its housing services against civilian standards and implement solutions that reflect civilian norms.

Therefore, while it is not always possible to replicate the services provided to the general population, civilian standards already provide the key benchmark against which MOD compares its services in all three Duty areas. This aim to be as nearly comparable to the civilian sector as possible reflects the aims of the Duty and is exactly what coming in scope of the Duty would require.

Further, it is in MOD's interests to ensure it implements the Covenant, as this will promote the best outcomes for its people, and therefore improve recruitment and retention.

We therefore conclude that MOD is already largely implementing the Duty when exercising its functions comparable to the functions already in scope, by having due regard to Covenant principles, although the services provided to the general population cannot always be replicated.

What are the benefits and costs of bringing MOD into scope of the Duty when exercising functions that are comparable to the functions already in scope?

The benefits and costs described in Section 1, which relate to bringing DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, and the Devolved Administrations into scope, largely also apply to bringing MOD into scope. We have identified an additional cost:

Primary legislation would have to be passed to bring MOD's comparable functions into scope.

As explained above, bringing MOD's comparable functions into scope could not be achieved through secondary legislation, but would require primary legislation. There are several ways by which this could be done. These include passing primary legislation governing MOD's provision of its comparable services, which could then be added to the Act. Alternatively, primary legislation could amend the Act's definition of 'relevant function'. This could allow functions other than those exercised under primary legislation or assimilated direct legislation to be brought into scope, such as functions exercised under secondary legislation or MOD's internal policies. Another option is to create a separate due regard Duty for MOD. We judge that **the likelihood of this cost being realised is high**, as primary legislation would be necessary.

Passing primary legislation governing MOD's comparable services would be a significant undertaking, given it would need to cover these three major policy areas, across all parts of the UK and abroad. For example, the National Health Service Act 2006 alone is a major piece of legislation, stretching to over 250 pages. The alternative of amending the definition of 'relevant function' to encompass functions exercised under secondary legislation or MOD's internal

policies, could result in lower Parliamentary oversight of the functions in scope than for the local bodies. These options could also reduce the responsiveness and flexibility with which MOD can provide its services, as all policy changes would require amendments to the underlying legislation. We therefore judge that **the impact of this cost is high**, as each option has significant drawbacks.

Conclusion

As the lead department for the UK Government's commitment to the Covenant, MOD is already largely implementing the Duty when exercising its functions comparable to the functions already in scope, by having due regard to Covenant principles. The costs and benefits of bringing MOD into scope are largely similar to the costs and benefits of bringing DHSC, DfE, DLUHC and the Devolved Administrations into scope, discussed in Section 1. In addition, MOD's comparable functions cannot be brought into scope of the Duty without passing primary legislation.

Therefore, while there are potential benefits from bringing MOD into scope of the Duty when exercising functions comparable to the functions already in scope, we judge the impact of these benefits would be low, and, given the awareness of the Covenant that already exists in the relevant teams, and the administrative, legal, and Parliamentary burden that would result, we consider the current costs and benefits from bringing MOD into scope do not produce any clear net benefit, and so is unnecessary.

Recommendation 3

The MOD Covenant team and external Covenant stakeholders should continue to monitor the benefits and costs of bringing MOD into scope when it exercises its comparable healthcare, education, and housing functions for the Armed Forces community. Should a clear net benefit emerge in the future, the best way of taking this forward through the necessary primary legislation should be considered.

Section 3: How will other bodies and functions be assessed for inclusion in the Duty?

MOD has been working over the past year with stakeholders including Service charities, Local Government Associations, and departments of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations, to establish an open and transparent evaluation process by which to investigate the evidence as to whether new bodies and functions (which could be functions of central UK Government or the Devolved Administrations) should be brought into scope of the Duty. This section of this report describes how this evaluation process will work.

Method of raising potential bodies and functions for inclusion in the Duty

The MOD Covenant team will use its existing stakeholder networks to help identify potential bodies and functions for inclusion, while a section of the website will also invite suggestions from members of the public and the Armed Forces community. The process will be live by the end of 2023. Issues will be considered as they arise, to allow for the changing or emerging needs of the Armed Forces community.

Criteria for assessment

The following key information will first be identified to provide context and background:

- the relevant bodies and functions
- an outline of what work has been done previously to mitigate issues in the area, and any work currently underway to achieve a resolution, with consideration of the timescales and impact of any existing resolutions, and
- whether the proposed function is already covered by existing statute or regulation; whether resolution could alternatively be made through this route, and consideration of how additions to the scope of the Duty could impact this existing statute or regulation.¹⁷

The proposed function will be assessed against the following essential criteria:

- it must pertain to an issue of disadvantage caused by the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces, and/or where special provision may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces, as set out in statute
- there must be evidence to suggest that any issue is systemic, and that inclusion in the Duty will significantly and positively impact Covenant delivery in the proposed area¹⁸
- the issue must be related to a lack of Covenant consideration, and would therefore be mitigated by inclusion in the Covenant Duty.

The assessment process

The MOD Covenant Team, in consultation with stakeholders, will conduct the assessment of potential bodies and functions for inclusion against the established criteria. MOD will engage with the following stakeholders, as a minimum: other Government departments, Service charities, subject matter experts, and the single Services.

¹⁷ This includes whether the relevant legislation applies across the UK or is only applicable to certain nations/regions of the UK.

¹⁸ 'Systemic' refers to interactions and processes that occur regularly as an inherent part of the administrative system, and which cause disadvantage to the Armed Forces community, due to Service life. It does not include isolated examples of where existing policies are not being adhered to, which are best resolved through policy reinforcement.

The MOD Covenant Team has the resource, knowledge, and contacts to conduct the assessment thoroughly, given their detailed knowledge of the Duty, and their experience exploring similar considerations in the creation of the initial legislation. This will allow for an efficient use of resources, as the MOD Covenant Team is already established and funded to explore Covenant issues. The MOD Covenant Team works across MOD, the single Services, central Government, Devolved Administrations, local government bodies, Service charity sectors, and others, allowing them access to a wide range of beneficial information to inform the assessment.

This will enable the best advice to be put forward for the Secretary of State's decision as to whether the proposal should be implemented.

Reporting the assessment outcomes and decisions

All outcomes of this evaluation process will be publicly available and reported in future [Covenant Annual Reports](#) and on the [Covenant website](#). This will include the final decision on whether the body and function will be included in the Duty, and the rationale for this decision. MOD will also write to the individual or organisation that raised the area for inclusion, and provide a copy of this report.

Publication in the Covenant Annual Report ensures that outcomes will be published on a regular basis, within an established and long-standing process, and will enable Parliamentary scrutiny of assessment outcomes, as the Annual Report is laid before Parliament. Publication on the Covenant website allows for the publication of assessment outcomes as and when they are made, and allows for more direct scrutiny of the outcomes by Covenant stakeholders.

Recommendation 4

The evaluation process that MOD has developed over the past year with external Covenant stakeholders should be taken forward as soon as practicable, so that the evidence as to whether new bodies and functions should be brought into scope can be investigated, and advice submitted to the Secretary of State for a final decision. Once the process is live, action should be taken to publicise this, and seek initial views from members of the Armed Forces community and the general public.

Appendix 1: The scope of this review

As explained in the Introduction, the two main questions considered in this review are whether central UK Government and the Devolved Administrations should be in scope of the Duty when they exercise their role in relation to the functions already in scope, and whether MOD should be in scope when it delivers its comparable services to the Armed Forces community.

Since the Covenant was first put on a statutory footing in 2011, the statutory requirement has been for the UK Government to report each year on Covenant work in the areas of healthcare, education, housing, and inquests. Healthcare, education, and housing have historically been three of the main areas of concern that stakeholders have sought to address, as they are key in providing the foundation for a successful life, and are the areas in which inadvertent disadvantage is most likely to be faced if the local providers are not aware of the unique obligations of service in the Armed Forces – in particular due to the mobility requirement.

When the Government strengthened the statutory Covenant in 2021, by creating the Duty, it made sense for the new Duty to focus on the same areas. Therefore, the functions already in scope are also in the areas of healthcare, education, and housing.

Stakeholders have proposed that other policy areas should also be brought into scope of the Duty, such as employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice, and immigration. While the work to support the Armed Forces community has always included other areas such as these, they have not generally been among the most commonly raised issues, and the Government is not statutorily required to report annually on Covenant work in any of these other areas (although it has often done so). The Act does provide for additional areas to be brought into the Duty through secondary legislation, should this be necessary in the future.

Given the aim of the Duty was to be an effective, yet administratively light, obligation, that did not impose any unnecessary burden on service deliverers, no new enforcement mechanism was written into the legislation. It was considered the existing recourse to judicial review, supported by ombudsmen and service providers' complaints processes, was robust enough to ensure the compliance of bodies in scope. As judicial review lies within the public sector, other areas such as employment, which also falls into the private sector, were not included.

Therefore, extending the Duty to any of these other areas needs to proceed cautiously. The short timescales for this review, published only one year after the Duty came into force, has not provided sufficient time to give consideration to additional policy areas that could be brought into scope, given the priority has been to undertake a comprehensive review of the three policy areas already in scope, and to establish a robust evaluation process.

Appendix 2: The stakeholder engagement programme

The stakeholders and the questions asked

During the passage through Parliament of the Bill that created the Covenant Duty, the Government committed to ensuring that parliamentarians from both Houses could contribute and give their views as part of the review process. MOD was not required to undertake a formal consultation as part of this review, but has sought the views of relevant stakeholders to assist this review process. If the decision was taken to seek to extend the scope of the Duty now, or in the future, there would be a separate requirement to conduct a statutory consultation.

Therefore, as part of the evidence-gathering phase of this review, the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families wrote to members of the House of Commons Defence Committee, the three relevant All-Party Parliamentary Groups (the APPGs for the Armed Forces; Covenant; and Veterans), and those members of the House of Lords who tabled, or spoke in favour of, amendments to the Bill during its passage through Parliament. The Minister also wrote to key Service charities, including the Royal British Legion and SSAFA, as well as Cobseo, the Service Families Federations, and the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees. Other groups such as local authorities were also invited to contribute.

Stakeholders were invited to provide contributions in response to four questions:

1. What is your perception of the UK Government's and Devolved Administrations' existing levels of implementation of the Covenant principles?
2. What do you see as (a) the benefits and (b) the costs of extending the Duty of due regard to central UK Government and Devolved Administration departments (not including the Ministry of Defence – see Q3)?
3. What do you see as (a) the benefits and (b) the costs of extending the Duty of due regard to the Ministry of Defence when delivering comparable services to the Armed Forces community?
4. Are you aware of any examples of individuals who would have obtained a better outcome if the UK Government or Devolved Administration had been legally required to have regard to the Covenant principles?

Summary of responses received

We received 13 responses, from Parliamentarians, Service charities, Service Families Federations, and Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees. The main themes in the responses were:

- The point raised by the most responders (9 of the 13) was that the Government's application of the Covenant has been inconsistent, both across policy areas and across different levels of Government, and bringing Government into scope would improve consistency, increase awareness, expand good practice, and encourage collaboration.
- The other main point raised by responders (8 of the 13) was that not being in scope would contribute to negative perceptions of the Government's commitment to the Covenant. For example, they stated that Government should be 'seen to be an exemplar', and there was a 'moral imperative' to them being in scope. It was suggested that doing so would 'dispel suspicion and improve public perceptions', 'reduce the cynicism held by many across the Armed Forces and veteran community', and not doing so 'raised questions about the Government's commitment to the Covenant', 'would risk damage to the veteran community's perceptions of Government commitment to the Covenant', and would be 'illogical', 'difficult to understand', and 'iniquitous'.

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- Many responders (9 of the 13) acknowledged that progress has been made over the past 10 years, in helping to improve understanding of the Armed Forces community and the unique conditions of Service life among wider society and service deliverers, resulting in tangible improvements and benefits for the Armed Forces community.
 - Some responders (3 of the 13) made the point that a range of robust key performance indicators should be established to ensure effective monitoring of delivery of the Covenant and assess the impact of the Duty. MOD will be conducting an evaluation of the impact of the new Duty, and will be looking for further stakeholder engagement to help identify appropriate measures.
 - Some responders (2 of the 13) articulated concerns that including only some issues within the legal Duty risks creating a ‘two-tier’ Covenant, and therefore the Duty should be extended to a broader range of areas than healthcare, education, and housing. For reasons outlined in Appendix 1, broader areas were not considered in this review.
 - Many of the suggested benefits identified by responders have not been included in our overall assessment, for the following reasons:
 - Some responders (8 of the 13) assumed that particular improved outcomes would have to result if the Government was in scope. For example, ‘We would welcome the application of the Duty to the DfE to ensure that the [School Admissions] Code’s language is better framed to allow families to apply for a school when an assignment is confirmed’, and MOD ‘could be required to provide additional resources, such as counselling or therapy services, to support the mental health of personnel who have served in the military’. However, the Duty does not mandate that any particular public service delivery outcomes have to be achieved. It is a requirement to consciously consider the Covenant principles. In these two cases, this has already occurred; the underlying disadvantages arising from Service have been acknowledged, and solutions have been implemented. Being in scope of the Duty would not require these solutions to be any different.
 - Some responders (6 of the 13) cited benefits that would be obtained if central UK Government departments were all generally in scope, or in scope whenever making any decision affecting the Armed Forces community. Examples of such suggestions include: ‘If all government departments were required to abide by the Armed Forces Covenant, it could potentially create a more consistent level of support available to the armed forces community across the UK’, and ‘We recommend that the Covenant Duty be extended to cover all areas of central government services... Any additional administrative burden would, all things being equal, be more than outweighed by securing comprehensive coverage across the public sector in these key areas.’ As explained in the introduction, this is not possible under the Act as it is currently written; bodies can only be in scope when conducting tightly bounded functions.
 - Some responders (4 of the 13) cited benefits related to issues that are not Covenant issues, and therefore would not be covered by the Duty. For example, ‘If the MOD was legally required to have due regard to the Covenant principles, the Chain of Command may well have been more inclined to ensure that appropriate support was provided to all their personnel.’ The Covenant is generally about removing disadvantages compared to the general population, in the provision of goods and services, and applying special provision. It is not an umbrella term covering all aspects of life for the Armed Forces community.
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Appendix 3: Evidence of Covenant implementation by DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, and the Devolved Administrations

Given below is a sample of some of the work undertaken by DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, the Welsh Government, and the Scottish Government over the past decade in relation to the healthcare, education, and housing functions already in scope of the Duty. This is followed by wider evidence of their Covenant implementation.

Good progress is also being made in delivery of the Covenant in Northern Ireland, though its unique historical and political circumstances mean that delivery of the Covenant has to be approached in a different way to the rest of the UK. Covenant delivery in Northern Ireland is most effective when it has a low profile, so details of Covenant activity here is not included, as highlighting specific Covenant delivery actions could be counterproductive. Initiatives to support Covenant delivery include, for example, the establishment of the [Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office](#) – the leading support and signposting service for veterans in Northern Ireland.

Healthcare

The UK Government

Covenant activity by the UK Government's DHSC, in relation to the healthcare functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2010, Dr Andrew Murrison MP's report [Fighting Fit – A mental health plan for servicemen and veterans](#) was published to improve mental health services for veterans. The Government accepted all the recommendations made in this report.
- In 2011, the department's Director of Performance [wrote to Strategic Health Authority chief executives](#), to draw their attention to the actions required to meet the Military and Veterans Health Requirements contained in the Operating Framework for the NHS in England 2011/12.
- In 2011, the department commissioned Dr Andrew Murrison MP to undertake [a review into prosthetics provision for veterans](#).
- In 2015, the department published an updated [NHS Constitution for England](#), and accompanying [Handbook](#), with the Covenant principles now embedded in them.
- In 2018, DHSC and DfE published the UK Government response to the consultation on [Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps](#), and it includes a section on Service children.
- In 2019, DHSC published the [Suicide prevention: cross-government plan](#), and it includes a section on improving mental health in veterans.
- In 2020, DHSC set up a UK-wide Service Families Working Group with representation from the NHS, MOD and the Families Federations, to address long-term policy issues, support implementation of the [MOD Families Strategy](#), and respond to the [Living in Our Shoes report](#) led by Andrew Selous MP.
- In 2022, DHSC published a [Women's Health Strategy for England](#), and it has a section dedicated to the bespoke needs of female veterans.
- DHSC is part of the steering group to assess bids to the [Veterans' Health Innovation Fund](#) competition.
- DHSC and MOD regularly convene a Partnership Board to provide strategic oversight and address health issues affecting veterans and Service personnel across the UK.

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- Work is underway in DHSC to produce a national suicide prevention plan. Whether veterans should be identified as an at-risk cohort is being actively considered, and potential protective measures are being considered for inclusion in the plan.
 - DHSC has an Armed Forces and Veterans' health policy team, responsible for engagement with policy teams across DHSC to ensure the needs of veterans (and where appropriate Service families) are considered and reflected in policy development. The team also works closely with NHS England's Armed Forces Commissioning team, to ensure the needs of the Armed Forces community are raised in appropriate forums, and policy development and decisions are influenced at the appropriate level.

The Welsh Government

Covenant activity by the Welsh Government, in relation to the healthcare functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2012, the Welsh Government published its [mental health strategy](#), that includes a section on veterans.
- In 2013, the Welsh Government published its Veterans in Prison Pathway to Care, to ensure that veterans in prisons receive access to the same mental health services as those who are not in prison.
- In 2014, the Welsh Government published the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework module 'Improving Access to substance misuse treatment services for Veterans'.
- In 2015-16, the Welsh Government worked with the MOD to develop a referral pathway for injured/ill personnel leaving Service and being discharged into Wales.
- In 2016, the Welsh Government launched a scheme offering free swimming, to support the health of veterans and Service personnel, and it continues to fund this scheme.
- In 2017, the Welsh Government issued new guidance titled [Armed Forces Covenant – Healthcare Priority for Veterans](#). It gives GPs, consultants, allied health professionals and administrative staff more information on the process of identifying, recording and referring veterans eligible for priority healthcare. This Welsh Health Circular is currently being updated to reflect the Duty.
- In 2019, the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government launched the Veterans Trauma Network Wales, which is a collaboration of specialists in the Welsh tertiary centres with relevant expertise, who are interested in veterans' care and can deal with problems related to a veteran's time in Service.
- In 2019, during Armed Forces Week, the Welsh Government and NHS Wales launched a campaign to encourage veterans to inform their GPs about their veteran status. Statements by the Welsh Health Minister and the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government coincided with the launch of a bilingual poster in GP surgeries highlighting the importance of this.
- In 2020, the Welsh Government established a new forum with BLESMA (the Limbless Veterans), artificial limb centres, and the NHS, to ensure issues for amputee veterans are raised and discussed by the appropriate services.
- In 2021, the Welsh Government announced a [new package](#) of more than £500,000 Welsh Government support for veterans.
- The Welsh Government continues to fund Veterans NHS Wales, enabling the service to deliver treatment for Service-related mental health conditions.
- The Welsh Government has worked with Health Education and Improvement Wales to launch a new veteran-friendly GP accreditation scheme in Wales. The scheme is now live for GP practices, and formally launched on 24 May 2023.

The Scottish Government

Covenant activity by the Scottish Government, in relation to the healthcare functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2013, the Scottish Government launched a new national prosthetics service to meet the needs of Scottish Service amputees, offering veterans improved support and a dedicated point of access to healthcare services through the limb fitting and rehabilitation centres.
- The Scottish Government provides [Community Health Index numbers](#) to all serving personnel based in Scotland. This is to enable equal access to NHS medical care and appropriate screening services, and further improve the effectiveness and efficiencies in information sharing between NHS Scotland and MOD.
- The Scottish Government continues to provide funding to [Veterans First Point](#), part of NHS Scotland, which provides health and wellbeing support services to Service leavers and veterans in Scotland. The Scottish Government also continues to provide funding to Combat Stress, which is a charity that provides mental health services to veterans, and to Unforgotten Forces, which is a consortium of charities that work together to improve the health, wellbeing, and quality of life for older veterans in Scotland.
- In 2019, the Scottish Government worked with [Scottish War Blinded](#) to update the certificate of vision impairment form and related guidance, so it now asks if they have ever served in the Armed Forces, so they can be referred to veteran-specific services.
- In 2020, the Scottish Government published its [Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan](#), and committed to identifying suicide prevention opportunities for veterans.
- In 2020, the Scottish Government's National Clinical Director and Healthcare Science National Lead wrote to all audiology departments across Scotland, setting out the expectation that veterans should receive like-for-like replacements of hearing aids. Hitherto, some personnel transitioning out of Service had been given less effective hearing aids than those given during their Service.
- In 2020, the Scottish Government's National Clinical Director wrote to NHS specialist services across Scotland requesting that Wheelchair and Seating Services maintain and replace Defence-issued wheelchairs used by veterans to at least a level commensurate with that issued to them at the time of their discharge, provided it is safe to do so and continues to meet their clinical and wheeled mobility needs.
- In 2022, the Scottish Government published its [Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022 to 2032](#) and [Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2022 to 2025](#), both of which reference veterans. The Action 7 Delivery Leads of the Action Plan commissioned the report [Interventions to mitigate suicide risk among veterans and military personnel: A rapid review of the latest evidence](#).
- The Scottish Government continues to arrange quarterly network events to provide Armed Forces and Veterans Champions within NHS boards with information on areas of mutual interest, and provide opportunities to share good practice, and build connections.
- The Scottish Government continues to chair the [Armed Forces Personnel and Veterans Health Joint Group](#), which drives progress of commitments relating to the health of the Armed Forces and veterans community.
- The Scottish Government is currently co-ordinating the development of the [General Practice Armed Forces and Veterans' Recognition Scheme](#), which aims to increase awareness in Scottish General Practices of the health and wellbeing implications of serving and transitioning from the Armed Forces. The scheme was launched as a pilot in 2022, and will be launched nationally in 2023.

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- The Scottish Government is developing the Scottish Veterans' Treatment Pathway. This is for the comprehensive treatment of veterans who have suffered injury as a result of their Service, where standard service provision has not been able to provide full support, or where the need may exceed provision offered by mainstream services.
 - In 2022, the Scottish Government's National Clinical Director wrote to GPs with some recommendations on how practices can identify veterans within their patient population.
 - An anti-stigma campaign has been developed with [See Me](#), to encourage veterans to seek help for their mental health.
 - Following the publication of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan in 2021, Scottish Ministers agreed the principles of the plan and have endorsed the development of services that ensure equity of access for veterans and their families to mental health and wellbeing services, regardless of where they live in Scotland.

Education

The UK Government

Covenant activity by the UK Government's DfE, in relation to the education functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2011, DfE introduced the [Service Pupil Premium](#) (SPP) in recognition of the specific challenges Service children face, and as part of their commitment to delivering the Covenant. SPP is additional funding for state-funded schools in England, to help them provide Service children with pastoral and academic support. Each year, DfE provides tens of millions of pounds under this scheme, benefitting tens of thousands of Service children.
- Since 2011, DfE has continuously monitored the uptake of the SPP. It has gradually increased its cash value, and has widened the eligibility criteria. Due to this, and the growing awareness about it by schools and parents, far more Service children are now recorded as eligible, which in turn improves the monitoring of Service children.
- In 2013, 2014 and 2021, DfE updated the [School Admissions Code for England](#), to include a number of requirements to ensure that Service children are not disadvantaged by their mobility requirement when applying for school places.
- In 2014, DfE updated the [code of practice](#) on the Special Educational Needs and Disability system in England, with a section to help Service children with special educational needs manage the difficulties faced because of Service family mobility.
- In 2015, DfE published the statutory guidance for England on [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), and it includes a section on Service children.
- In 2018, DfE added the Service child flag to all three termly school censuses, to help improve the identification and tracking of Service children. Previously, the flag had only appeared on the spring census.
- Also in 2018, changes were implemented to the Common Transfer File, which is how state schools and local authorities transfer pupil data when a pupil moves school. A 'Service Child' section was added, which asks additional questions, and an alert is now raised when a school receives a File with the Service Child flag indicator set to 'Yes'.
- In 2019, due to the planned return of a number of Field Army Units from Germany to Salisbury Plain, DfE provided an additional £2.8 million to help the local authority absorb the estimated 1,100 additional pupils joining primary and secondary schools in Wiltshire.
- DfE has co-funded (with MOD), and has had a role in administering, the [Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme](#) since it was established in 2011.

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- Each year, DfE provides statistics for publication in the Covenant annual report covering the exam results, Ofsted school ratings, number of school moves, and destinations after leaving school, for Service and non-Service children in England. This enables assessments to be made as to whether Service children in England are disadvantaged, and facilitates scrutiny by Parliamentarians and other groups.

The Welsh Government

Covenant activity by the Welsh Government, in relation to the education functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2012, the Welsh Government established a Standing Committee for Service Children in Schools in Wales. It brought together educationalists, local authority officers, Welsh Government officials, MOD personnel and welfare officers, to identify and better understand issues connected to the education of Service children in Wales. (This Committee has now been overtaken by MODLAP, led by SSCE Cymru and MOD.)
- In 2013, the Welsh Government published the [School Admissions Code for Wales](#), and it includes a number of requirements to ensure that, when applying for school places, Service children are not disadvantaged by their mobility requirement. Service children who are admitted outside the normal admission round are exempt from infant class size limits in Wales. In addition, recognising that Service families are subject to frequent movement within the UK and from abroad at relatively short notice, service admission authorities must allocate a school place in advance, if the applicant meets the criteria when the Service family moves to their new home.
- In 2018, the Welsh Government established the Supporting Service Children in Wales Fund, and each year since then, it has provided a total of £250,000 to schools to fund projects to support Service children.
- Since 2019, the Welsh Government has funded the [Supporting Service Children in Education \(SSCE\) Cymru](#) programme, which has, since 2014, worked with schools, children and young people, local authorities, Welsh Government, 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 children of Armed Forces personnel.
- In 2021, the Welsh Government published the [Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales](#), and it includes guidance relating to educational provision for Service children with additional learning needs. It also sets out specific duties for maintained schools, colleges and local authorities when deciding on additional learning needs and when preparing or reviewing an individual development plan for a Service child or young person.
- In 2023/24, the Welsh Government increased funding for Service children to £350,000, providing one year's funding for the network of Regional School Liaison Officers, who work to support Service children and schools, and uphold the principles of the Covenant in education.
- The Welsh Government supports the Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance Hub Cymru. To date there are over 50 partners and stakeholders attending the twice-yearly meetings to explore how best to support Service families throughout their educational life course.
- The Welsh Government continues to provide funding to the Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme.

The Scottish Government

Covenant activity by the Scottish Government, in relation to the education functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2017, the Scottish Government published [statutory guidance](#) to accompany the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, and it makes specific reference to Armed Forces families and to transitions.
- In 2021, the Scottish Government published the [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021](#), and this includes a section on Service children.
- In 2021, the Scottish Government provided funding to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership to develop a web-based resource in the 'My World of Work' portal, to help veterans articulate their skills clearly when seeking employment or education.
- The Scottish Government funds a range of services which seek to support families to access advice and support on additional support for learning. This includes [Enquire](#), the national advice and information service for parents on additional support for learning, and [My Rights, My Say](#), which provides support to children who are seeking to exercise their rights under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.
- The Scottish Government chairs the [Scottish Armed Forces Education Support Group](#), (previously known as the Scottish Service Children Strategy Group). This is a broad stakeholder group that provides a Scotland-wide perspective in identifying the challenges that children from Armed Forces families may face, and collaborating on a number of projects each year to address these challenges.
- In May 2022, the Scottish Government provided £50,000 to ensure continuity of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland's National Education Officer (NEO) role. The NEO plays a key role in supporting local authorities as they plan for and support children from Armed Forces and veterans families. In collaboration with the Scottish Government, the NEO developed specific guidance and delivered training on the Duty for local authorities across Scotland. This was welcomed, and helped ensure a smooth adoption of the new Duty. The NEO also manages the Forces Children's Education website, which is a key source of information for both families and the professionals who support them. In 2023, the Scottish Government provided additional funding so the NEO role could continue, and in particular supporting the implementation of the [Selous recommendations](#).
- In November 2022, the Scottish Government published an updated additional support for learning action plan and progress report highlighting that 24 actions have been fully completed to date. This builds on the eight actions that were fully completed in its update in 2021. This work will help improve the support offered to children with additional support needs, which can include children from Armed Forces families.

Housing

The UK Government

Covenant activity by the UK Government's DLUHC, in relation to the housing functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2012, the department introduced a package of measures to ensure the Armed Forces community in England are not disadvantaged in accessing social housing because of the requirements of Service life. This included [regulations](#) setting out criteria under which the Armed Forces community cannot be disqualified from social housing because of a local connection requirement. The department also changed the law to ensure that

'additional preference' (high priority) for social housing is always given to certain groups in the Armed Forces community.

- In 2014/15, the department added questions to their annual [English Housing Survey](#), so it now asks respondents if they are veterans. This data enables DLUHC to monitor the comparative housing experiences of the veteran and civilian populations, and assess if veterans are disadvantaged. DLUHC provides these statistics for inclusion in each year's Covenant annual report, to enable scrutiny by Parliamentarians and other groups.
- In 2017, the department introduced a new data tool to capture the support needs of households who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, including where a household includes a member with a support need due to service in the Armed Forces.
- In 2019, the department allocated an additional £1 million of bespoke funding to local authorities to support veterans who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless. The funding was used to develop new services and produce or improve procedural guidance on supporting homeless veterans. For example, the West Midlands Combined Authority used their funds to recruit a full-time homelessness veteran staff member.
- In 2019/20, DLUHC consulted on and then published further [statutory guidance](#) for local authorities in England, titled 'Improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces', including veterans and their families.
- In 2021, delivery commenced of the [First Homes scheme](#), offering homes with a discount of at least 30% to first-time buyers in England. In recognition of the unique nature of their circumstances, certain members of the Armed Forces community are exempt from any local connection testing restrictions required to be eligible.
- In 2021, DLUHC changed the guidelines for the reporting of quarterly homelessness statistics by local authorities, to capture the characteristics of homeless applicants more accurately, including whether they had previously served in the Armed Forces.
- In 2022, [guidance](#) was published for local authorities in England on the effective delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grant, and it includes a section on the Armed Forces.
- Also in 2022, DLUHC published the [Ending rough sleeping for good](#) cross-Government strategy, and it includes commitments for veterans to maintain high priority for social housing, waivers for local connection and specialist housing support.

The Welsh Government

Covenant activity by the Welsh Government, in relation to the housing functions already in scope, includes the following:

- In 2013-14, the Welsh Government made available £2 million of capital funding to support housing for personnel leaving the Armed Forces. From 2014, this funding has now been allocated to local authorities in Wales.
- In 2014, the Housing (Wales) Act was a significant strengthening of homelessness legislation in Wales, ensuring that veterans are helped whenever they are at risk of homelessness, not just when they leave Service.
- In 2015, the Welsh Government published [guidance](#) that explains the exemptions to local connection criteria that exist for members of the Armed Forces posted to an area in Wales during their time in the Armed Forces, and highlights other ways that local authorities can best support their local Armed Forces community.
- In 2016, the Welsh Government issued [statutory guidance](#) on the allocation of accommodation in Wales, to ensure that 'additional preference' (high priority) for social housing is given to certain groups in the Armed Forces community.
- In 2016, the Welsh Government worked with Armed Forces stakeholders to develop a [National housing pathway for veterans](#), to provide clarity and support for veterans and

their families into either home ownership, or renting in the private or social sectors. The Welsh Government also developed advice cards for veterans sleeping rough, along with leaflets and posters.

- The Welsh Government has delivered awareness-raising sessions on the Covenant due regard Duty with local authority housing/homelessness officers, including a network of homelessness/housing support officers across all 22 local authorities.

The Scottish Government

Covenant activity by the Scottish Government, in relation to the housing functions already in scope, includes the following:

- Over the period 2014/15 and 2015/16, the Scottish Government issued grant funding of about £684,000 to the Scottish Veterans Garden City Association to deliver 20 homes across four locations to support physically and psychologically impaired veterans.
- The Scottish Government continues to support Housing Options Scotland to provide its Military Matters project. This service, which began in 2012, focuses on housing issues affecting: people serving in the Armed Forces in Scotland; all UK Service personnel transitioning into civilian life in Scotland; and veterans, helping them to find the right home in the right place. Since its inception, it has supported over 1,000 people.
- In 2018, the Scottish Government published the [Scottish housing guide for people leaving the Armed Forces and ex-service personnel](#).
- In 2019, in response to the Scottish Veterans' Commissioner's recommendations, the Scottish Government published a [practice guide](#) for social landlords on allocations for people leaving the Armed Forces. It includes guidance on giving priority to Service leavers and on ensuring that veterans are not at a disadvantage when applying for social housing.
- In 2019, the Scottish Government published refreshed [Local Housing Strategy guidance](#) to improve awareness of the Armed Forces community's housing needs. It encourages local authorities to consider fully the housing requirements of the Armed Forces community, and engage with relevant organisations to understand better the needs of this Community when developing the strategies.
- In 2020, the Scottish Government published an update to the [Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan](#). This sets out actions to end homelessness and transform temporary accommodation. It includes an action to develop preventative pathways for particular groups, and veterans are one such group.
- In 2021, the Scottish Government provided £1.8 million in funding to support the construction of new homes for veterans, across sites in Ayrshire and Edinburgh.
- In 2021, following consultation, the Scottish Government published a [ministerial statement](#) which sets out the circumstances and general criteria which would act as the reference for exercising the power to modify local connection rules for social housing.
- In 2022, the [Veterans Homelessness Prevention Pathway](#) was published, and the Scottish Government accepted in principle all 24 recommendations.
- The Scottish Government continues to give members of the Armed Forces community priority access to the Low-Cost Initiative for First Time Buyers schemes.
- Funding also continues to be available through the Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Supply Programme to deliver homes specifically for veterans where local authorities identify this as a strategic priority.

Wider evidence of Covenant implementation by DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, the Welsh Government, and the Scottish Government

Government departments and connected groups

All UK Government departments work with the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA), which was launched in 2019, to lead the UK Government's efforts to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran. The OVA is located at the heart of Government as part of Cabinet Office.

During the development of the Duty legislation and accompanying statutory guidance, DHSC, DfE, DLUHC and the Devolved Administrations worked closely with MOD to ensure the Duty worked appropriately, and reflected circumstances in their areas.

The Welsh and Scottish Governments each have a Minister responsible for ensuring that their Government's work to support the Armed Forces community continues, respectively the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership and the Minister for Veterans.

The Welsh Government has officials who focus solely on Armed Forces issues, and also officials responsible for Covenant policy within each of healthcare, education, and housing. The Welsh Government has an Armed Forces Advocate at Senior Civil Servant level. Currently the advocate is Director Risk Resilience and Community Safety. The Advocate is responsible for overseeing official-level support for the Armed Forces community.

The Welsh Government also holds a biannual [Armed Forces Expert Group](#), chaired by the Minister responsible for Covenant issues. It has cross-Government representation, along with external partners. This provides biannual updates and scrutiny of Welsh Government delivery.

The Welsh Government funds Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs), who distribute key Covenant-related material and resources across local Armed Forces networks, co-ordinate local activities in support of the Armed Forces community, and promote awareness of issues relevant to the Armed Forces.

The Scottish Government has a permanent Veterans Unit, consisting of six posts, whose core objective is to ensure disadvantages are removed for Scotland's Armed Forces community (not just veterans). It works to make sure there is awareness and recognition of Armed Forces issues across the Scottish Government, and co-ordinates the Scottish Government's work for the Armed Forces. Within the Scottish Government's different Directorates, some teams have official(s) who include the Armed Forces as one aspect of their work, and other teams have official(s) who are focussed solely on the Armed Forces.

The Scottish Government also has a Veterans and Armed Forces Staff Network. Its champion is a Senior Civil Servant, who provides a focal point through which the Scottish Government's own internal Armed Forces community can raise issues.

Since its creation in 2008, over £2.8 million has been allocated through the Scottish Government's Scottish Veterans Fund, supporting over 220 projects across Scotland. The Scottish Government also funds the Unforgotten Forces Consortium, a partnership of 17 civilian and ex-Service charitable organisations with the purpose of delivering a wide array of services to veterans in Scotland aged 60 and over. They were funded over the period 2021 to 2023, and funding will continue over the next three years.

Annual reports and other publications

Each year since 2011, when the Covenant came into existence in its current form, DHSC, DfE, DLUHC, and the Devolved Administrations have provided contributions to that year's UK Government's [Covenant annual report](#), evidencing their work that year to support the Armed Forces community and apply the Covenant principles. This has proven to be a very effective

mechanism of ensuring that Covenant consideration remains a high priority. In addition to formal contributions to the UK Government's Covenant annual report, the Welsh and Scottish Governments each publish their own annual report each year that outlines their support for the Armed Forces community in greater detail. In Scotland, this report accompanies a Government debate in the Scottish Parliament on support for the Armed Forces community.

These three annual reports contain a lot of evidence and examples of how UK Government departments and Devolved Administrations have supported the Armed Forces and applied the Covenant principles in a wide range of areas. This includes the Duty areas of healthcare, education and housing, as well as non-Duty areas such as family life and childcare, employment and training, financial services, immigration and citizenship, transition from military to civilian life, justice, and pensions. (Note that some of these areas are not devolved, so only appear in the UK Government's report.)

In 2018, the UK Government, Welsh Government and Scottish Government published the [Strategy for our Veterans](#), which sets out principles and aims to continue to empower and support veterans. This was followed by the publication of the [Veterans' Strategy Action Plan \(2022-24\)](#) in 2022. This is an ambitious portfolio of commitments agreed across Government to improve understanding of and services for veterans. DHSC, DfE and DLUHC have each accepted responsibility for delivery of some of the commitments in the Action Plan.

In 2012, the Scottish Government commissioned 'Our Commitments', setting out its strategic direction to support Scotland's Armed Forces community, complementing the values of the Armed Forces Covenant. In 2016, the Scottish Government updated this with the publication of [Renewing Our Commitments](#), a summary of major achievements to support Scotland's Armed Forces community and future priorities for action. In 2020, the Scottish Government launched its [Veterans Strategy Action Plan](#) setting out how it would take forward the UK-wide Strategy for our Veterans, and this was refreshed in 2022. It also published the [Welcome to Scotland](#) guide providing practical information to Service personnel and their families who are moving to, or already living in, Scotland, on topics such as housing, education, healthcare and employment; and toolkits aimed at encouraging businesses to proactively recruit and benefit from employing veterans and Service family members.

In 2016, the Welsh Government published [Welcome to Wales](#), a guide for serving personnel and their families on help for them, including health, education and employment, and updated it in 2020. In 2018, the Welsh Government and Business in the Community Cymru published the [Employers' Toolkit](#), which provides advice to help employers recruit and develop veterans and reservists. In 2020, the Welsh Government, Scottish Government, and Business in the Community published the [Capitalising on Military Family Talent toolkit](#), to help businesses extend support to family members of Service personnel.

Veterans Commissioners and Advisor

In 2014, the Scottish First Minister appointed the first ever Scottish Veterans Commissioner, and the third Commissioner was appointed to the role in 2022. The Scottish Government has accepted all recommendations made to it so far by the Commissioners in their regular thematic reports, and reports progress on these annually. While completely independent of Government, the position is fully funded by the Scottish Government.

The Veterans Commissioner for Northern Ireland was first appointed in 2020, and [reappointed in 2023](#), and the first Veterans Commissioner for Wales was appointed in 2022. The role of the three Commissioners is to enhance the support and improve outcomes for veterans, scrutinise and advise on Government policy for veterans, be an ambassador representing the particular needs and contributions of veterans, and help direct veterans and their families to appropriate sources of local support. In 2021, David Richmond was appointed to be the first Independent Veterans Advisor to UK Government Ministers at the Cabinet Office.

Appendix 4: Evidence of Covenant implementation by MOD

Given below is a sample of some of the work undertaken by MOD in relation to the healthcare, education, and housing functions it exercises for the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the healthcare, education, and housing functions already in scope of the Duty. This is followed by wider evidence of Covenant implementation by MOD.

Healthcare

Covenant activity by MOD, in relation to the healthcare functions it exercises for the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the healthcare functions already in scope, includes the following:

- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England. While there is no statutory requirement for MOD to be registered with the CQC, MOD commissions the CQC to undertake a comprehensive programme of independent inspections of Defence medical treatment facilities, in order to ensure that Armed Forces personnel and (where eligible) their families have access to the same high-quality care as the rest of society. These inspection reports are used by MOD to monitor the current standards of care and to drive improvements in safety.
- MOD's regulated healthcare professionals follow the same training and educational pathways as their civilian counterparts, often training alongside them, and statutory regulation applies in exactly the same way to MOD's Service and civilian clinicians as it does to the NHS. Non-regulated healthcare professionals in the Armed Forces follow a structured training and development pathway leading to recognised civilian qualifications, and fitness to practice arrangements for non-regulated healthcare professionals mirror NHS practices.
- MOD's secondary healthcare professionals work a proportion of their time in NHS facilities, alongside NHS professionals providing care to the general population, to maintain their skills at the same level.
- Access to primary care appointments in Defence medical treatment facilities compares favourably with the access provided in NHS primary care, with the majority of Defence GP facilities offering same, or next day, face-to-face appointments. However, Defence patients might not be able to access evening and weekend primary care appointments, which might be available to some NHS patients.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MOD accelerated the roll-out of digital triage (eConsult) and remote video consultation (AttendAnywhere), both used in the NHS. Digital triage allows Defence personnel to seek advice from the medical centre, or help managing their own condition, at all hours of the day, from any location. Remote video consultation allows patients to attend consultations online via a video call. These make access easier, and brings MOD into line with successful NHS practices.
- MOD 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.
- MOD has secured inclusion of veterans' health in the UK GP training curriculum and national GP licensing assessment.
- MOD regularly publishes [statistical analyses](#) that compare outcomes for the Armed Forces with the general population. Topics including this assessment of disadvantage have included: deaths in service, suicides, safety-related fatalities, Falklands deaths, mental health rates, deliberate self-harm, and wellbeing scores.

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- MOD is working with DHSC, NHS England, and the Devolved Administrations to provide Service personnel with NHS prescriptions rather than DMS prescriptions. This would enable Defence patients to use all the pharmacies available to the general population, rather than only being able to use MOD-operated dispensaries.

MOD's provision of healthcare services to the Armed Forces community is modelled on the NHS, noting it sometimes needs to provide different healthcare services than the NHS, as the health needs of the Armed Forces community are sometimes significantly different to the general population, and MOD's healthcare provision has an occupational focus in a way the NHS does not. The levels of service offered by MOD, and the health outcomes for the Armed Forces community, are often as good, or better, than for the general population, though this is not always the case, and examples can be identified of lower levels of service or inferior health outcomes. However, the Duty of due regard does not mandate that any specific service delivery outcomes have to be achieved, its purpose in this area would be to ensure there is regular benchmarking of MOD and the Armed Forces against the NHS and the general population, and this generally happens already.

Education

Covenant activity by MOD, in relation to the education functions it exercises for the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the education functions already in scope, includes the following:

- MOD seeks whenever possible to align its policy and practices for its overseas schools with DfE policy and practices. For example, MOD's overseas schools use DfE-recognised phonics schemes.
- MOD's overseas schools follow the National Curriculum for England and the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework.
- Children at MOD's overseas schools undertake all the exams they would if they attended a state-funded school in England.
- MOD's overseas schools are inspected by Ofsted in the same way as state-funded schools in England.
- MOD's overseas schools employ teachers whose qualifications are recognised in the UK. Terms and conditions for teachers at MOD's overseas schools match terms and conditions for teachers in England, including pay, non-contact hours, and their time for learning and development.
- To mitigate issues caused by their frequent re-locations, MOD's overseas schools often have smaller class sizes and a lower child to adult ratio than in state-funded schools in England.
- MOD's overseas schools submit data to DfE in line with DfE's requirements on state-funded schools in England.
- While MOD's overseas schools are not included in school performance tables produced by DfE for schools in England, DfE does produce performance analysis documents for MOD schools in the same way as it does for state-funded schools in England.
- MOD's overseas schools provide for children aged 16-17 to participate in education until they are 18, mirroring the statutory duty on children aged 16-17 in England.

The foundational principle for MOD's overseas schools is that they should deliver, so far as is reasonably practicable, education that is comparable to the education that would be provided in the state-funded sector in England. This aim to be as comparable to the civilian sector as possible is precisely what the Duty is about. Also, there is good awareness of the Covenant among staff working in these areas, and the Covenant's principles are regularly referenced. It is exactly the same for Queen Victoria School in Scotland, in that it aims to provide education

comparable to that provided by the Scottish state sector. We therefore conclude that MOD does fulfil the Duty's aims in this area.

Housing

Covenant activity by MOD, in relation to the housing functions it exercises for the Armed Forces community that are comparable to the housing functions already in scope, includes the following:

- The quality of MOD's UK Service Family Accommodation is assessed against the same Decent Homes Standard criteria as homes for the general population in England. This ensures that Service families are not disadvantaged by being assessed against different criteria. In fact, all Service families are allocated accommodation assessed as meeting the Decent Homes Standard (or better), unlike the general renting population in England.
- The charge that Service personnel pay to MOD for their Service accommodation is heavily discounted compared to rent costs in the general population.
- Most personnel in UK Service Family Accommodation receive and pay for their gas and electricity directly from a civilian energy provider, in the same way as the general population. Those that pay MOD for gas and electricity, including personnel in Single Living Accommodation and some in Service Family Accommodation, benefit from a cheaper rate than that available through domestic tariffs, as MOD procures gas and electricity for these homes via the commercial market rather than the domestic market. An assessment was made of whether the 2022-23 [Energy Bills Support Scheme](#) for the general population would disadvantage personnel who were ineligible as they pay MOD for gas and electricity. It was found it would not, as they already save more than this.
- Service accommodation is exempt from Council Tax, and MOD instead pays a Contribution in Lieu of Council Tax (CILOCT) to local authorities, broadly equivalent to the amount of Council Tax that would otherwise be due. MOD's average UK-wide contribution for each type of property is found, and is then charged to Service personnel, ensuring their experience is broadly similar to that of the general population, while reducing disparity due to assignment location.
- 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 were not disadvantaged, MOD introduced a scheme to mirror this. Service personnel paying 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.
- MOD identified that 2,700 Service Family Accommodation properties could not access 24Mbps download speeds. This was identified as the minimum requirement for Superfast broadband for a typical household in the general population. MOD launched a project to upgrade these properties. Also, the Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families wrote to Openreach's CEO to ensure that Service properties are properly considered within the roll-out plans for gigabit fibre connections. Broadband speeds are considered when determining the band for charge, with reductions in charge applied to properties unable to access the stated speed.
- The Government white paper [A fairer private rented sector](#) includes a commitment to ensure landlords do not unreasonably withhold consent when a tenant requests to have a pet in their home. Following publication of this paper, MOD reflected this change for the general population by amending its policies to allow Service personnel in Single Living Accommodation to keep pets where appropriate.
- MOD's policy for adaptations to accommodation seeks to mirror the intent of the civilian Disabled Facilities Grant by providing, at no expense to Service personnel, home

adaptations for Service personnel or eligible family members. Larger accommodation will be allocated if required, at no additional cost to the Service person, to enable appropriate adaptations to be made.

- MOD's [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 their annual salary (up to a maximum of £25,000) to purchase their first property. This removes a potential disadvantage for Service families who might find it harder to get a mortgage due to their frequent re-locations, and reflects the fact that Help to Buy schemes are available to the general population.
- To prevent homelessness among those leaving Service, Service leavers are able to request Service Family Accommodation for 12 months after discharge (subject to availability), to allow them additional time to secure alternative housing. Additionally, the [Services Cotswold Centre](#) provides temporary accommodation at reduced cost.
- In 2017, the UK Government supported the Homelessness Reduction Act, that requires the Secretary of State for Defence to refer members of the Regular Armed Forces in England, who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, to a local housing authority.

As discussed in the main body of this report, while civilian public bodies' provision of healthcare and education services to the general population has a direct comparison with MOD's provision of similar healthcare and education services to the Armed Forces community, when it comes to housing, this comparison is much more limited. Therefore, it can be harder to identify fair housing comparisons between the Service population and the general population, and harder to identify ways to remove housing disadvantages. However, as evidenced by these bullet points, MOD does regularly seek to benchmark its housing services against civilian standards, and implement solutions that reflect civilian norms, so it does seek to fulfil the Duty in this area when possible.

Wider evidence of Covenant implementation by MOD

Following the 2010 General Election, MOD took forward the Conservative Party's manifesto commitment to 'repair the Military Covenant' by developing this updated version of the Armed Forces Covenant. This included commissioning an independent taskforce on the Covenant, led by Prof. Hew Strachan, which published its [report](#) in September 2010. This new version of the Covenant was published by the Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, on 16 May 2011.

The subsequent Armed Forces Act 2011 set out the principles of the Covenant in statute for the first time. It also contained a requirement for the UK Government to lay before Parliament each year a [Covenant annual report](#). MOD has led the Government's work on this. This ensures that the Covenant remains a high priority in MOD. These annual reports contain a lot of evidence and examples of MOD applying the Covenant principles in a wide range of areas. This includes the Duty areas of healthcare, education, and housing, as well as non-Duty areas such as family life and childcare, employment and training, financial services, immigration and citizenship, transition from military to civilian life, justice, and pensions.

An MOD Minister, the [Minister for Defence People and Families](#), has the Covenant specifically listed as one of their responsibilities.

MOD owns the wording of the Covenant, and is the organisation with primary responsibility for promoting the Covenant across the UK. MOD has an established, permanent Covenant team, whose core job is to promote and support delivery of the Covenant across MOD, across wider UK Government, in the Devolved Administrations, in local public bodies, in private organisations, and through the third sector, in a broad range of Duty and non-Duty areas. The team comprises a mixture of currently serving Armed Forces personnel and civil servants,

some of whom are veterans or Service partners, or grew up as Service children, so it has a broad mixture of experiences of how the Covenant is delivered in practice. The team consists of 11 posts, which is a considerable level of resource, demonstrating MOD's ongoing commitment to Covenant implementation.

In addition, [Defence Relationship Management](#) (DRM) partners with organisations throughout the UK, helping them understand the value of signing the Covenant and building mutually beneficial partnerships with Defence. It provides support on employing reservists, veterans, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and Service partners, and improving fairness for the Armed Forces community in the consumer market. DRM conducts a number of regular surveys to understand why organisations sign the Covenant, and how they effectively deliver benefits to the Armed Forces community.

MOD's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, 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 Covenant principles. Organisations that make such commitments are said to have 'signed the Covenant'. A significant milestone was reached in March 2023, with the [10,000th signing of the Covenant](#).

The Covenant Fund was launched in 2015, and based within MOD. In April 2018, following a decision that it should become independent, it became the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, a charity and classified as a non-departmental public body of the MOD. It supports the Covenant through funding projects that deliver change to the Armed Forces community.

MOD published its new [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy](#) at the start of 2022. This document, which provides the framework for an ambitious 10-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.

MOD has accepted responsibility for delivery of some of the commitments in the [Veterans' Strategy Action Plan \(2022-24\)](#).

In 2022, the Secretary of State for Defence commissioned Rick Haythornthwaite to chair an independent review of Service personnel's terms and conditions. The [published report](#) discusses the role of the Covenant, and one of its recommendations (number 41) is about how the Covenant should be taken forward for the future.

MOD maintains regular, structured liaison, at a senior level, with representatives of the Service charities, Families Federations, and other organisations who support and have insight into the Armed Forces community, and how the Covenant is being delivered in practice.

MOD sponsors the [Veterans Advisory & Pensions Committees](#) (VAPCs), which are advisory, non-departmental public bodies that currently provide statutory independent support to veterans and their families on the Armed Forces Compensation and War Pension Schemes. In recent years, VAPCs have taken on broader, non-statutory roles in raising awareness of MOD initiatives of potential interest to all veterans and their families, such as MOD's veterans' welfare services and the Armed Forces Covenant. MOD supported the passage through Parliament of the [VAPC Private Members' Bill](#), which captures the breadth of the VAPC activities within statute, and ensures that the VAPCs' statutory basis continues to reflect the on-the-ground reality of the important regional work they deliver in support of the wider Armed Forces community.

MOD organises an annual conference for the Covenant community across the UK, usually with several hundred attendees, who represent national and local government, NHS bodies, Service charities, private businesses, and others. This provides a regular opportunity for everyone involved in Covenant delivery to build networks, share best practice, and learn about the latest developments.

MOD led the creation of this new legal Duty, after it became clear that Covenant delivery remains inconsistent at a local level. It devised the form the Duty should take, what exactly the legal requirement would be, and which bodies and functions would best be in scope, after engaging in extensive policy research and development work. It consulted with hundreds of local stakeholders while developing the Duty and its accompanying statutory guidance, to achieve their buy-in and thereby increase the Covenant's impact at the local level. It guided the Duty's progress through Parliament, to its coming into force on 22 November 2022. It has conducted communications campaigns aimed at bodies in scope, the Armed Forces community, and other stakeholders, to increase their knowledge of the Duty and how it can be implemented, and has answered many questions from stakeholders about the Duty. It has been leading work to establish an evaluation process to assess the evidence for bringing new bodies or functions into scope (as described in this review's Section 3). It will also be leading work to measure the impact of the Duty. MOD has expert knowledge about the Duty, and is fully cognisant of the Duty requirements, and the need to implement the Covenant principles.



Annex A: Metrics

Table 1: Percentage¹ 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 ²	% of pupils achieving grades 9-5 in English and maths ³
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 ⁴	Service children	76.6	53.3
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	75.4	54.1
2021 ⁴	Service children	77.5	54.1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	77.1	57.1
2022	Service children	73.6	50.9
	Non-FSM, non-service children	74.3	55.2

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closures, the summer 2021 exam series was cancelled (as it was in 2020). Pupils scheduled to sit GCSE exams in 2021 were awarded a teacher assessment grade submitted by their school. This was 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. For further information: [//www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2021](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2021)

Table 2: Percentage¹ 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) ²	% of pupils who achieved all EBacc components (grades 9-5 pass in English and maths) 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 ⁴	Service children	4,347	37.9	29.5	20.8
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	468,989	42.5	32.7	23.6
2021 ⁴	Service children	4,570	37.7	28.6	20.3
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	463,488	41.7	32.9	24.4
2022	Service children	4,687	36.9	25.7	19.2
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	461,146	42.0	30.2	23.2

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ 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 England¹

Year	Group	Average Attainment 8 score per pupil	Average Progress 8 score	Lower confidence interval for Progress 8	Upper confidence interval for Progress 8
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 ²	Service children	52.0	-	-	-
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	52.4	-	-	-
2021 ²	Service children	52.5	-	-	-
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	53.6	-	-	-
2022	Service children	50.5	0.04	0.00	0.08
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	51.8	0.11	0.11	0.12

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

¹ 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.

² 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 rating¹ 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 ¹					
		Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Unavailable ²	Total
England	Service children	15.2	70.5	9.8	3.4	1.1	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	18.8	68.3	8.6	3.2	1.1	100.0
East Midlands	Service children	20.6	65.9	8.4	4.8	0.4	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	13.2	68.2	12.2	5.3	1.1	100.0
East of England	Service children	13.0	69.1	12.1	3.1	2.7	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	17.5	68.9	9.3	3.0	1.3	100.0
London	Service children	29.3	63.8	5.4	0.6	0.9	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	30.1	63.7	3.5	1.0	1.6	100.0
North-East	Service children	16.4	70.0	8.7	4.3	0.6	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	18.9	67.2	8.9	4.2	0.8	100.0
North-West	Service children	14.6	70.8	11.4	2.6	0.6	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	17.5	67.4	10.6	3.5	1.0	100.0
South-East	Service children	17.0	72.2	9.1	1.2	0.4	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	18.7	72.0	6.2	2.2	0.9	100.0
South-West	Service children	11.7	72.2	10.6	3.9	1.8	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	15.4	69.6	10.0	3.9	1.1	100.0

Region	Group	% of pupils by their school's Ofsted rating ¹					
		Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Unavailable ²	Total
West Midlands	Service children	12.6	72.5	8.5	6.0	0.4	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	15.7	69.4	10.3	3.6	0.9	100.0
Yorkshire & The Humber	Service children	16.8	67.6	10.0	4.8	0.9	100.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	17.5	67.4	10.0	4.5	0.7	100.0

Source: National Pupil Database, Ofsted December 2021

¹ School attended as recorded in Spring Census 2022/23, Ofsted rating as of 31 December 2022 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](#)

² 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+ ³	0	1	2	3+ ³
Number of moves from year 7 to year 11 ¹ :		0	1	2	3+ ³	0	1	2	3+ ³
2018/19 ²	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 ⁴	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 ⁵	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
2021/22	Service children ³	96.5	3.3	0.2	0.0	48.2	20.5	0.0	0.0
	Non-FSM, non-service children	98.2	1.7	0.1	0.0	54.0	20.8	11.2	6.1

Source: National Pupil Database, KS4 results data

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

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

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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 schools¹)

Destination year ²	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
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 ³	Service children	3,971	95	87	4	4	4	1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	462,731	95	88	4	3	4	1
2020/21	Service children	4,345	96	90	3	3	3	1
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	469,281	95	90	3	2	4	1

Source: Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset

¹ 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.

² Employment and benefits data from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) from the LEO dataset was included for the first time in 2014-15 and accounted for a 1 percentage point increase in employment destinations. Direct comparison with previous years' employment estimates should be treated with caution. Education destinations are not affected.

³ Self-employment information from HMRC has been included in 2015-16. It accounted for an increase of less than 0.5 percentage point nationally.

Table 7: Student destinations after 16-18 study, for Service children and non-Service, non-free school meal children, in England¹ (mainstream schools and colleges)²

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	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 ⁴	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 ^{4,5}	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
2020/21	Service children	2,692	89	58	7	49	3	4	26	9	2
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	335,225	86	62	7	53	2	4	20	10	4

¹ 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.

² 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 as a result of these changes, the overall rate of progression to education for the level 3 group has decreased.

³ The data shows how many students took any level 3 qualification in the destination years 2017/18 and 2018/19. As a result, the value for destination year 2017/18 will be slightly different to what was presented in the previous year. Previous year's value was based only on students who completed an approved level 3 qualification. From 2017/18, data examined how many students have taken any level 3 qualification, which makes the data more comparable due to changes in the qualifications that are counted as approved or unapproved. 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.

⁴ The first two terms of the 2020/21 academic year are affected by the COVID-19 disruption. Many employers and apprenticeship providers took on fewer individuals during the pandemic and so it is anticipated that sustained employment and apprenticeship destinations will be lower than for previous years.

Table 8: 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	2019/20			2020/21			2021/22		
	% 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	16.6	12.4	8.5	18.5	13.3	9.3	20.6	13.3	8.5
Less than 1 year	9.5	5.4	6.4	7.3	6.5	6.3	9	5.4	5.7
1 – 2 years	6.9	4.0	5.7	8.1	4.2	5.0	5.4	3.5	4.8
2 – 3 years	5.1	2.7	3.5	5.0	3.1	3.7	4.3	2.8	3.7
3 – 4 years	3.2	2.6	3.2	4.0	2.2	2.8	5.2	1.7	3
4 – 5 years	4.2	2.9	4.1	8.7	3.4	3.8	3.8	2.8	3.8
More than 5 years	54.4	70.1	68.5	48.4	67.3	69.1	51.9	70.4	70.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	770	3,030	214,070	481	1,875	166,608	447	1,672	177,588

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

Note: Any discrepancies in totals are due to rounding.

Table 9: 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	2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
	% 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	54.6	59.8	68.2	55.4	52.5	58.0	67.2	52.5
6 months – 1 year	17.4	12.5	16.7	14.9	12.4	9.2	10.3	16.2
1–2 years	7.7	9.6	7.6	8.7	21.8	11.5	5.2	11.1
2–3 years	4.7	5.4	u	6.4	u	6.2	4.1	5.9
3–5 years	5.0	6.1	3.5	5.9	u	7.6	7.2	5.7
5 years or more	10.7	6.6	2.4	8.7	u	7.6	6	8.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100	100
Sample size	289	4,288	199	4,394	46	940	88	2,767

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

		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
		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 (%)	81.3	73.1	74.4	71.3	76.3%	74%
	Sample size	319	5,411	79	1,112	222	3,746
Satisfaction with tenure	Satisfied (%)	85.7	76.8	79.8	77.1	85.9%	78.3%
	Sample size	330	5,676	86	1,188	230	4020
Satisfaction with area	Satisfied (%)	84.4	75.9	80.1	78.4	83.8%	78.7%
	Sample size	320	5,626	84	1,230	233	3,955
Satisfaction with repairs/maintenance	Satisfied (%)	69.8	61.8	77.4	61.7	67.9%	59%
	Sample size	259	4,530	76	968	200	3,042

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

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
		Service population and families	Non-Service population	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	80.9%	79.1%
	Sample size	299	4,682	233	4,478	83	1,408	222	2,837
Satisfaction with tenure	Satisfied (%)	61.6	66.6	67.4	69.0	72.3	62.5	58.2%	66.2%
	Sample size	228	3,807	218	3,723	95	1,102	175	2,464
Satisfaction with area	Satisfied (%)	90.8	86.3	81.9	83.5	97.5	85.4	90.7%	85.9%
	Sample size	322	4,866	251	4,594	126	1,549	217	3,061
Satisfaction with repairs/maintenance	Satisfied (%)	73.8	71.4	64.8	74.5	64.3	75.2	68.7%	74.1%
	Sample size	273	3,966	204	3,958	85	1,291	145	2,635

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

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Two-week wait for all cancers ²	Service personnel ¹	1,886	91.7	2,192	91.6	2,027	86.7	2,643	80.5	2,777	74.8
	England	2,066,264	92.0	2,386,815	90.8	2,080,673	88.7	2,684,899	82.1	2,889,406	79.3
	Target		93		93		93		93		93
Two-week wait for symptomatic breast patients (where cancer was not initially suspected) ²	Service personnel ¹	230	85.8	217	81.6	141	63.1	164	48.8	113	64.6
	England	164,485	85.8	176,807	83.9	128,364	76.0	155,135	64.0	126,337	71.8
	Target		93		93		93		93		93
Four week (28 days) wait from urgent referral to patient told they have cancer, or cancer is definitively excluded	Service personnel ¹							1,354	79.8	2,785	77.2
	England							1,365,360	71.1	2,862,261	70.3
	Target								75		75

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
One-month (31-day) diagnosis to first treatment wait for all cancers ³	Service personnel ¹	123	97.6	111	97.3	115	95.7	105	97.1	132	91.7
	England	303,569	96.8	316,588	96.0	275,553	95.0	321,755	93.5	333,590	91.7
	Target		96		96		96		96		96
62-day wait for first treatment following an urgent GP referral for all cancers ⁴	Service personnel ¹	57	87.7	47	87.2	59	71.2	49	69.4	74	62.2
	England	129,724	79.1	167,101	77.2	148,280	74.3	171,395	69.0	182,454	61.1
	Target		85		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 13: UK Armed Forces veterans, TILS¹ referrals receiving assessment, treatment and discharging, numbers and percentages

	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Number of referrals	2,879 ^r		3,913		4,660		3,967		4,695		4,847	
Appropriate for assessment	2,414 ^r	83.9 ^r	2,684	69	3,496	75	3,194	81	3,995	85	4,098	85
Assessment attended ³	1,649 ^r	68.3 ^r	2,120	79	2,569	74	2,391	75	3,341	84	2,708	66
Of assessed, received treatment in TILS ⁴	581 ^r	35.2 ^r	613	29	585	23	722	30	1,308	39	1,234	46

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 September -2017; figures are estimated for this time period.

Note: Calendar days were used for the calculations.

Table 14: UK Armed Forces veterans, TILS¹ average waiting times² for assessment and treatment³, days

Year		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Assessment	Offered ⁴	39	37	13	14	23
	Attended	47	39	16	17	26
Treatment	Offered	55	68	16	23	37
	Attended	57	70	17	26	39

Source: NHS England

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.

Note: Calendar days were used for the calculations.

2022/23 data from the clinical registry

Table 15: UK Armed Forces Veterans Op Courage, CTS¹ average waiting times² for initial appointment³, working days

Year		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Initial clinical appointment	Offered ⁴	18	33	24	16	17
	Attended	24	36	34	21	19

Source: NHS England

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.

Note: Working days were used for the calculations.

Table 16: UK Armed Forces veterans, CTS¹ referrals accepted and appointments delivered, numbers and percentage

		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Number of referrals		648		714		631		514		456	
Referrals accepted		617	95.2	691	96.7	578	91.6	472	92.1	415	91
Appointment delivered in pathway ²	Total	9,678		12,678		10,570		8,006		2,063	
	2018/19	2,392		0							
By year delivered ³	2019/20	3,438		2,442							
	2020/21	2,189		6,129		2,548					
	2021/22	1,120		3,120		5,685		3,067			
	2022/23	539		987		2,337		4,939		2,063	

Source: NHS England

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.

4. 2021/22 onwards – clinical registry which has resulted in a refresh of prior year data removing duplicates and data quality issues

Note: Calendar days were used for the calculations.

Table 17: UK Armed Forces Veterans Op Courage, HIS¹ referrals and key activity

Year	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Referrals	305	761	969
First contacts	269	618	762
Referrals seen in Service (%)	88.2	81.2	78.6
Follow-up appointments	2,721	12,047	11.7
Average number of follow-ups	10.1	19.5	15.4
Family and carer contacts	144	369	263
Average wait from referral to first contact with patient (days)	5	4	7
Average length of care (days)	111	88	66

Source: NHS England

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

Table 18: UK Armed Forces Veterans, Veterans Trauma Network referrals and enquiry source

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 (partial)	Total or average
Referrals received	50	41	149	265	184	689
Specialities						
Musculoskeletal and pain	66%	78%	80%	93%	81%	79%
Neurology	12%	5%	6%	4%	4%	8%
Mental health (no physical health issues)	8%	5%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Other	14%	12%	14%	3%	15%	12%
Enquiry source						
GP	66%	51%	37%	74%	92%	53%
Self/spouse	22%	12%	14%	3%	2%	12%
Mental health provider	4%	7%	33%	21%	3%	23%
Third sector	2%	22%	8%	5%	3%	10%
Other	6%	7%	8%	4%	0%	2%

Source: NHS England

1. 2021/22 figures updated.
2. 2023/24 to end September 2023

Table 19: UK Armed Forces Veterans, VNHSW¹ 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	2022/23
Number of referrals ^{2,3,7}	329	390	542	607	633	614	808	831	517	574	615
% referrals receiving assessment ^{3,4,7}			60-70	73	57	67	66	56	60	66	71
% referrals receiving treatment ^{5,6}			30-50	58	39	..	37	36	..	78	..

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 20: UK Armed Forces Veterans, VNHSW¹ waiting times for assessment and treatment in Wales

Year		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Referral to assessment ²	4 weeks or less	29%	30%	74%	77%	56%	88%	80%	79%
	10 weeks or less	80%	80%	..	..	97%	..	..
Assessment to treatment ³	4 weeks or less	28%	19%	..	..	9%	..	..
	24 weeks or less	80%	..	90%	95%	81%	80%	82%	91%

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 21: UK Armed Forces Veterans, VNHSW¹ reliable improvement^{2,3} in Wales

Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Reliable improvement	88%	74%	94%	89%	81%	..	73%	..

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 22: UK Armed Forces Veterans in Wales receiving treatment for substance misuse¹, numbers

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Reliable improvement	305 ^r	306 ^r	364 ^r	346 ^r	279 ^r	390 ^r	254

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

1. alcohol or drug misuse.

r – numbers adjusted for data reconciliation.

Table 23: 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	2022/23
Number	894	795	772	741	690	742	828	808 ^r	685 ^r	639	691
Percentage	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.7	3.0 ^r	2.0	2.0	2.0

Source: [Scottish Government](#)

Coverage: Scotland.

r – Figure revised from last year's report.

Ten data tables in Annex A of the 2022 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report consisted of data that MOD had already published elsewhere. This year, rather than publish this data in this annual report, the table below provides links to where it can be found in its original sources, so that the results can be understood in their full context.

Table number in 2022 Annual Report	Table title in 2022 Annual Report	Source
24	UK regular Armed Forces personnel satisfied with Service-provided medical treatment received over the past two years, estimated percentage	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey , Tables B16.2 (medical treatment) and B16.4 (dental treatment)
25	UK Armed Forces families able to access medical care in the past 12 months, estimated percentage	Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey , Tables B6.9 (dental treatment), B6.10 (GP services), and B6.12 (hospital and specialist services)
26	UK Armed Forces families able to continue medical treatment following a move in the past 12 months, estimated percentage	Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey , Tables B6.21 (dental treatment), B6.22 (GP services), and B6.24 (hospital and specialist services)
27	UK Armed Forces personnel satisfied with opportunities to gain civilian accreditation, estimated percentage	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B11.5
28	UK Armed Forces personnel satisfied with opportunities for personal development, estimated percentage	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B11.2
29	UK Armed Forces personnel who used Career Transition Partnership and were employed within six months of leaving the Armed Forces, estimated percentage	Career Transition Partnership ex-service personnel employment outcomes statistics , Table 2
30	UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with the standard of Service accommodation, estimated percentage	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B19.3 (for Armed Forces personnel in SFA) and Table B19.4 (for Armed Forces personnel in SLA). Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B7.16 (for Service families in SFA)

Table number in 2022 Annual Report	Table title in 2022 Annual Report	Source
31	UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with response to maintenance request (Service accommodation), estimated percentage	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B19.9 (for Armed Forces personnel in SFA) and Table B19.10 (for Armed Forces personnel in SLA). Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B7.18 (for Service families in SFA)
32	UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with quality of maintenance service (Service accommodation), estimated percentage	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B19.12 (for Armed Forces personnel in SFA) and Table B19.13 (for Armed Forces personnel in SLA). Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B7.19 (for Service families in SFA)
33	UK Armed Forces personnel and families satisfied with value for money of Service accommodation, estimated percentage	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B19.6 (for Armed Forces personnel in SFA) and Table B19.7 (for Armed Forces personnel in SLA). Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey , Table B7.17 (for Service families in SFA)

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 Action Plan includes over 60 commitments by Government departments and others to deliver for our veterans.

Progress against the Action 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 subject to some delay/undelivered, are the commitments published in the Strategy Action Plan 2022-24, some of which have been broken down further in order to robustly measure progress. It is important to note that while some commitments have been completed, this does not mean there is no further departmental work ongoing to ensure further improvements are made. Some of these commitments have also been allocated a new deadline since the Strategy Action Plan's publication in January 2022, to reflect a change in circumstances and therefore the need to be more pragmatic with delivery expectations. The rationale for re-baselining is provided for each of the commitments in question. Please note that this information was accurate as of September 2023.

Completed

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)	Re-baselined deadline (where relevant) and rationale
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 co-ordination of veterans' services	January 2022	
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 co-ordination of veterans' services	January 2022	
Establish a working group with Devolved Administration colleagues, which meets quarterly during SAP	OVA	Collaboration and co-ordination of	January 2022	

implementation to discuss UK-wide commitments, and to share best practice on devolved matters.		veterans' services		
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 co-ordination of veterans' services	January 2022	
Bring together all Service leaver and 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	
Follow up on the findings from the Probation Institute's upcoming research publication into veterans' journeys into harmful behaviour.	MOJ	Veterans and the Law	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	OVA	Public Perception of Veterans	March 2022	

back in real time and retrospectively for the 2021 financial year.				
Provide £150,000 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 co-ordination of veterans' services	March 2022	
Support initiatives for veterans with disabilities and better understanding their needs and lived experience in collaboration with the Disability Unit. This will include: 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 co-ordination 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	
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	
Conduct comprehensive research to create a baseline insight and understanding of the UK public and employers' perception of veterans, to inform communications and policy interventions which show we value and support veterans.	OVA	Public Perception of Veterans	May 2022	

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 co-ordination of veterans' services	Spring 2022	
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 co-ordination of veterans' services	Spring 2022	
Publish UK Government data and research strategy, outlining the further steps to better understanding the UK's veteran community.	OVA	Better Data	Mid- 2022	
The MOJ will consider the findings from the Probation Institute's research and explore what preventative interventions could be put in place to lower risk.	MOJ	Veterans and the Law	June 2022	
Publish analysis on the veteran community from the 2021 Census in England and Wales (topic summaries)	OVA, ONS	Better Data	Summer 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	

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	
Work across departments to promote and amplify positive messages about veterans volunteering in their communities, by promoting the contribution veterans are making through volunteering as part of the 2022 Volunteers' Week and highlighting veteran winners of Points of Light awards.	OVA, DCMS	Community and Relationships	September 2022	
Publish analysis on the veteran community from the 2021 Census in England and Wales (multivariate and further analyses)	OVA, ONS	Better Data	Autumn 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	
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	

Establish a network of veterans champions across the Civil Service to share best practice on veterans issues and champion veterans within their departments and arm's length bodies.	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 among the veterans community in order to connect people with the right support.	OVA	Collaboration and coordination of veterans' services	End of 2022	
Develop a package of life skills training and support to service personnel to aid transition, with a pilot in 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	
Appoint a Welsh Veterans Commissioner.	OVA, Wales Office	Recognition of veterans and supporting their needs	End of 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,	OVA, GEO, MOD	Recognition of veterans and supporting their needs	End of 2022	

among others, women, disabled and ethnic minority veterans.				
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	
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	
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	
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	OVA	Collaboration and co-ordination of veterans' services	Winter 2022	

communicate initiatives occurring in their region. Review the new terms of reference during 2022.				
Commission and publish new qualitative research seeking to understand how female veterans access support, and any barriers to female veterans feeling they can seek help.	OVA	Better Data	March 2023	
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	
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	
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	
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 rollout 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, MOD	Employment, Education and Skills	Mid- 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	

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 veterans 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, HMPPS	Veterans and the Law	Ongoing	
Expand the Armed Forces 'marker' (including veterans) for new universal credit applicants to include existing claimants.	DWP	Finance and Debt	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 in collaboration with non-statutory providers, including the charity sector.	NHSE, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing	
NHSE will work with ICBs to promote and increase the uptake of personalised care for veterans with complex	NHSE	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing	

and enduring need including LTC under the IPC4V framework phase 2 framework.				
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	
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	
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.	NHSE	Health and Wellbeing	Unspecified	
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.	NHSE	Health and Wellbeing	Unspecified	NHSE does not have the legal powers to enforce that each Integrated Care Board (ICB) has an Armed Forces lead. It has however encouraged ICBs to go further when taking the Armed Forces community into consideration through the delivery of an Armed Forces Assurance Framework, which has been shared with them, along with other materials, including checklists for providing better support, including the appointment of Armed Forces Leads. Furthermore, the Armed Forces Covenant requests that ICBs explicitly mention the Armed Forces population in

				their joint strategic needs assessment and NHSE encourage ICBs to do so.
Ensure that accreditations are being renewed in line with Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA)/RCGP requirements, and continue to monitor impact and effectiveness to best support veterans	NHSE, VCHA, RGCP	Health and Wellbeing	Unspecified	There is a system in place for monitoring and pursuing accreditation renewal. With regards to monitoring impact, an evaluation by the University of Chester, published April 2022, reported that 84% of accredited practices believed their awareness of veterans' needs had increased as a result of the training required to achieve accreditation. NHS England has also shared an evaluation specification with VCHA to inform their approach to a future evaluation, which will be carried out in 2024. Furthermore, feedback from the trusts is used to improve and add new areas and standards.

In progress

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)	Re-baselined deadline (where relevant) and rationale
Every Primary Care Network has a veteran-friendly accredited GP practice.	NHSE, VCHA, RGCP	Health and Wellbeing	Unspecified	End of 2024
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	End of 2023 - the original funding agreement for this research dictated that the funding secured had to be spent in financial year 2021/22. It was unable to be used due to capacity issues created by the pandemic. Therefore, the process had to be re-started, causing a delay.
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.	MOD	Digital Transformation	Partial launch in 2023, with additional services added over coming years	

Deliver a health improvement programme aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of women who are serving and who have served (veterans) through the 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.	MOD, DHSC, NHSE	Recognition of veterans and supporting their needs	End of 2023/24	
Begin to pilot Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance accreditation rollout to independent hospitals and hospices.	NHSE, VCHA	Health and Wellbeing	March 2024	
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.	Cabinet Office (GFIE)	Employment, Education and Skills	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	
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	
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	
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	

<p>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.</p>	<p>OVA, CO Disability Unit</p>	<p>Health and Wellbeing</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	
<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> <p>We will look to collaborate with the devolved administrations wherever possible and appropriate.</p>	<p>MOD, DWP, Home Office, NHS Employers, MOJ</p>	<p>Education, Employment and Skills</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Please note Step into Health with NHS England and Advance into Justice with the Ministry of Justice have been created, providing dedicated recruitment for veterans and their families into health and criminal justice roles.</p>
<p>Promote opportunities for veterans to go into teaching careers through collaboration between the Career Transition Partnership (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>	<p>MOD, DfE</p>	<p>Education, Employment and Skills</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Please note Troops to Teachers was replaced by the Undergraduate Veterans Teaching Bursary.</p>

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	OVA, CO Disability Unit, DHSC	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing	
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 while in service, to multi-disciplinary team support.	MOD	Health and Wellbeing	Ongoing	

Some delay/undelivered

Narrative	Responsible organisations	Theme	Deadline (as published in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan)	Comments regarding delay
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	Delivery of this commitment aligns to the development of the second iteration of the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2025-28). The OVA is therefore prioritising robust engagement with stakeholders to identify relevant KPIs and metrics, which may mean this commitment is not delivered until 2024.

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	Delivery of this commitment is expected in November 2023.
Commission and publish new qualitative research specifically looking at the experiences and support needs of non-UK veterans.	OVA	Better Data	March 2023	Challenges in recruiting participants resulted in a short delay. Publication of the report is expected by late 2023.
Commission and publish new qualitative research specifically looking at the experiences and support needs of ethnic minority veterans.	OVA	Better Data	March 2023	Challenges in recruiting participants resulted in a short delay. Publication of the report is expected by late 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.	Cabinet Office (GFIE)	Employment, Education and Skills	March 2023	While good progress was made against the March 2023 target, we were four placements short of meeting the published target. Work continues to deliver against the target of 100 placements by the end of March 2024.
Roll out Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance accreditation further across Trusts with all trusts being accredited by March 2023.	NHSE, VCHA, RGCP	Health and Wellbeing	March 2023	Since the publication of the Strategy Action Plan, unforeseen circumstances, such as increased demand on the NHS, industrial action, and efforts to reduce the elective recovery backlogs, in addition to recovery from the pandemic, has meant that NHS England and its partners has needed to re-prioritise to meet operational demands. As of July 2023 75% of NHS trusts in England had been accredited as 'veteran aware'. This is an exceptional achievement given the context and work continues at pace to deliver this commitment before the end of 2024.

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	Delivery of this commitment is expected in Spring 2024, as a result of the publication of the report being delayed.
Relet the CTP contract to ensure that service enhancements and improvements are made to meet the needs of stakeholders.	MOD	Employment, Education and Skills	October 2023	Delivery of this commitment is expected by the end of 2023.
Conduct an evaluation and assessment of the HMP Holme House veterans' wing pilot where veterans 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	An extension of the Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) provision has in turn extended the delivery of the Holme House wing. The delivery of the commitment is therefore expected in May 2024, so that these changes can be taken into account.
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	Delivery of this commitment is expected in 2024.
Conduct an evaluation and assessment of the HMP Holme House veterans' wing pilot where veterans 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 (report recommendations considered).	MOJ, HMPPS	Veterans and the Law	May 2024	An extension of the CFO provision has in turn extended the delivery of the Holme House wing. The delivery of the commitment is therefore expected in the second half of 2024, once the evaluation has been complete (which has been delayed until May 2024).

Annex C: Further information

To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means for you, please visit 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 emailing 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 2023](#)
- [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
- Veteran friendly GP practices: rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/a-to-z-clinical-resources/veteran-friendly-gp-practices
- Veterans NHS Wales: veteranswales.co.uk
- Fighting with Pride: fightingwithpride.org.uk
- Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust: covenantfund.org.uk
- Defence Discount Service: defencediscountservice.co.uk
- Forces Families Jobs: 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-BFPO](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-insurance-credits-for-partners-of-armed-forces-personnel-BFPO)
 - The SCiP Alliance: scipalliance.org
 - Veterans' Gateway: veteransgateway.org.uk
 - Veterans UK: [gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)
 - Veterans Work: veteranswork.org.uk
 - Veteran support in Scotland: mygov.scot/veterans
 - Veteran support in Wales: 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
 - Joining Forces credit union: joiningforcescu.co.uk
 - The Confederation of Service Charities: cobseo.org.uk
 - The Royal British Legion: britishlegion.org.uk
 - SSAFA: ssafa.org.uk
 - Naval Families Federation: nff.org.uk
 - Army Families Federation: aff.org.uk
 - RAF Families Federation: raf-ff.org.uk
 - The War Widows' Association: warwidows.org.uk
 - HeadFIT: headfit.org

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