



Ministry
of Defence

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Thank you for your email of 5 January 2022 in which you requested the following information:

The question is quite simple please tell me what the strategic policies to prevent suicide were in place during the last 5 years, are currently in place, what plans are there to change policies in the near future and what aspects of suicide prevention research has been commissioned in recent years.

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that the information in scope of your request is held and is attached at Annex A.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance. Following this, if you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

Army Policy & Secretariat

Q1. What the strategic policies to prevent suicide were in place during the last 5 years, are currently in place, what plans are there to change policies in the near future.

MOD Strategy.

In July 2017, the Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy was launched. The Strategy set out the overall MOD vision as: "All Defence People to enjoy a state of positive physical and mental health and wellbeing, feeling connected with, and supported by, the military and wider community, enabling them to contribute to the delivery of Defence outputs, including operational capability, as part of the Whole Force". Published July 2017:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-people-mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy>

A new Defence Health, Performance and Wellbeing Strategy is awaiting publication (expected April 2022).

Army Policy.

The Army has had dedicated Suicide and Self-harm policy and risk management procedures in place since 2006, all of which are regularly reviewed and updated.

For the Army, policy is Army General Administrative Instruction (AGAI): Vulnerability Risk Management (VRM) which is a key part of the Army's preventative strategy to minimise the vulnerability to, and incidence of, suicide and self harm behaviours.

The use of the AGAI policy and the inherent VRM process is mandated for all Army personnel (Officers and Soldiers, both Regular and Reserve and regardless of whether they are sat in a Tri-Service, Naval or RAF unit/establishment), including all Soldiers under Training (SuT) and on "Holdover", University Officers' Training Corps Cadets and RMAS Officer Cadets, and for all Naval Service or RAF Service personnel in Tri-Service units where the Army is the Service Lead who have been assessed at risk of suicide or self-harm behaviours. The process is also to be used overseas (beyond operations) for all who come under Service law in accordance with JSP 770 where practicable.

The AGAI was updated in August 2020 and includes updates linked to research in the area of suicide and self harm, a comprehensive guide to suicide risk factors and specific improvements included the inclusion of the creation of Safety Plans for those individuals assessed as being at risk, and more focused individual case management reviews.

The policy is due its next review in August 2022.

Linked to and within the AGAI is the requirement for all Units to convene regular Unit Health Committees which provide the forum for these risks to be discussed and management strategies put in place, and where changes to policy briefed. In addition, other policies exist that support our people such as health, healthcare, training and education and welfare policies that link in with the multifactorial aspects of suicide.

Vulnerability Risk Management process.

As per the AGAI, once key suicide risk factors are identified in a serviceperson, a positive risk reduction strategy is delivered through the Vulnerability Risk Management process. The document also includes further guidance on potential service specific risk factors and other contributory factors which may be considered. The Army also recognises the findings of the Royal Society of Psychiatrists report 'CR229' which advises that an over-focus on risk factors can be misleading

and falsely reassuring. Some who attempt suicide may not demonstrate high risk warning signs and many exhibiting risk factors do not complete suicide.

Training on the AGAI and the VRM process is provided on mandated career and pre-employment courses, such as but not limited to, the Army Leadership Development Programme (LCpl – WO2), the All Arms Adjutant's Course, the Sub Unit Commanders Management Course and the Unit Welfare Officers Course.

Training on the AGAI and the VRM process is also provided to units when requested by the Unit to educate the Chain of Command on risk factors, protective measures, creation of safety plans, creation of the CAP.

Q2. what aspects of suicide prevention research has been commissioned in recent years.

Defence Safety Authority Review

In February 2018 the Director General (DG) of the Defence Safety Authority (DSA) recommended a focused review of suicides in Service Personnel (SP) to identify additional measures for preventing suicide. The primary aim of the review was to identify (additional) measures and mechanisms of preventing suicide in Service Personnel through an examination of service inquiries, learning accounts and the application of best practice.

The Report is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dsa-focused-review-of-suicides-among-armed-forces-personnel>

Academic Department of Military Mental Health (ADMMH).

Research is provided primarily but not exclusively in this area (suicide and self-harm) by KCL / ADMMH who also conduct an annual literature review of suicide and self-harm research which informs Army (and Defence and the other single services) in terms of policy and suicide prevention, intervention and postvention processes.

The ADMMH are currently conducting a review of training and education in the area of suicide prevention. This is expected to be completed in early 2022 and will be one of the work strands being taken forward by the reinvigorated Defence Suicide Prevention Working Group.

NATO Task Group into Suicide.

The Army have representatives on the NATO Task Groups looking at Military Suicide Prevention. The aims of the original group were to disseminate knowledge about current military suicide surveillance across NATO countries; promote a global strategy for systematic, standardized, and continuing military suicide surveillance efforts; and to contribute to the understanding, further examination, development, and dissemination of best practices in military suicide prevention. This multinational collaboration was an important first step towards promoting a global public health strategy for combating military suicide. Following on from this work, which reported in 2018, a new task group, Leadership Tools for Suicide Prevention, was formed to continue this international effort.

Other Ongoing Research.

A veteran-focused study by Manchester University, jointly commissioned by MOD and NHS England and NHS Improvement, is investigating the antecedents of veteran suicides for veterans who served between 1996 and 2018. The study will be using MOD data on military service, the confidential inquiry into suicides and coroners reports to understand the factors which may lead a former Service person to commit suicide. The study started in September 2020 and is due to complete in August 2022.

The MOD is a member of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Delivery Group, led by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), working with partners across Government to identify ways to reduce the risk of suicide. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2012 did not highlight the Serving community as a high-risk group. However, it did include veterans as a group requiring tailored approaches to meet their mental health needs to reduce their risk of suicide. The fifth progress report was published in March 2021 and can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973935/fifth-suicide-prevention-strategy-progress-report.pdf

The MOD and each of the Single Services are also members of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance. This is a coalition of public, private, voluntary and community organisations in England, funded jointly by UK Government (NHS/PHE) and the Samaritans, who have a focus on suicide prevention and are willing to act to reduce suicide and support those affected by suicide.

Work with the Samaritans.

The Army Health team has led Defence engagement with the Samaritans since 2018 to shape the development of their military community programme (after they were awarded £3.5M of LIBOR funding) so that it was aligned with Service requirements. As part of this partnership a pocket guide was developed to help all members of the Armed Forces spot and support those who may be struggling with their mental health and considering suicide. "Peer Support in the Armed Forces" (<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/military/Support-in-the-Armed-Forces-Guide/>) is available for all Armed Forces personnel and the card includes details on a free confidential helpline.