



Office for
Veterans' Affairs

STRATEGY FOR OUR VETERANS

6 MONTHLY REPORT AUGUST 2022

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INTRODUCTION FROM THE MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) sits at the heart of government where it is responsible for delivering on the Prime Minister's commitment to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran by 2028.

Established in October 2019, the OVA works with all UK government departments, the devolved administrations, employers, academics and charities to deliver the **Strategy for Our Veterans** and the commitments in the **Veterans' Strategy Action Plan**.

Through regular reporting we will provide veterans with a transparent and comprehensive update of what support is available, what we have achieved so far, and what we are doing next.

I am clear that while the UK government has committed to a vision for her veterans, the success of this mission can only truly be measured by what it feels like to be a veteran in the UK today. I am personally committed to this mission, and am determined to see it through.



Johnny Mercer MP was appointed Minister for Veterans' Affairs at the Cabinet Office on 7 July 2022.

BACKGROUND

The **Veterans' Strategy Action Plan 2022-24** focused on three main areas:

1 Transforming services for veterans:
Improving services to make sure veterans and families have the support they need.



2 Understanding our veteran community:
Use data and research to ensure policy across government is rooted in robust evidence.



3 Recognising our veterans' contribution to society:
Fully recognising all veterans' contributions to society, including those who may not historically have felt their service was recognised, and challenging negative stereotypes.



This report will outline how we are working with departments across government, as well as with external stakeholders, to deliver in each of these areas. Particular focus will be given to progress made since the launch of the **Veterans' Strategy Action Plan** in January 2022 and to our plans for the future.

TRANSFORMING SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR VETERANS



HEALTH AND WELLBEING



The NHS Long Term Plan and Healthcare for the Armed Forces Community: A Forward View sets out NHS England's commitment to support and commission services for veterans, which include:

- access to the **Veterans Trauma Network (VTN)**, for veterans needing specialist treatment for physical health problems related to service
- access to **Op COURAGE**, for veterans and their families needing mental health support

VETERANS TRAUMA NETWORK (VTN)

The VTN can support you if you have a physical health problem of any type or severity, and

- if your physical health problem is a result of your time in service
- no matter when your physical health problem first appeared
- no matter when you left the Armed Forces

Since its launch in 2016 and up to the end of June 2022, there have been 397 referrals to the VTN.

You can ask your GP to refer you to the VTN. They can do this by emailing england.veteranstraumanetwork@nhs.net.



Shehan Hettiaratchy, National Clinical Lead, VTN, and formerly 144 Parachute Medical Squadron, RAMC

OP COURAGE

Op COURAGE is a mental health specialist service that supports those who have served in the UK Armed Forces who are experiencing complex trauma, or alcohol and substance misuse.

FIGURES

Over £17.7 million per year in investment, plus an additional £2.7 million to be invested over the next three years.

Over 20,000 referrals since it began in 2021 (up to the end of June 2022).

LOOKING AHEAD

From April 2023, NHSE will bring together the currently 3 separate veteran mental health services into a single service, under Op COURAGE. This will improve access and reduce the need for veterans to transfer between services.

CONTACT

You can contact the service in many ways, including:

- directly getting in touch yourself
- through referral from a family member or friend
- asking a GP to refer you
- asking a charity to refer you

Since January 2022

- The £5 million Veterans' Health Innovation Fund was launched to harness the best of British innovation and to accelerate the development of health and wellbeing treatments and interventions for veterans. Ministers will decide which projects to support in the autumn.
- The OVA hosted its first Research Summit in February 2022 to better understand the longer-term impacts of the Afghanistan withdrawal on veterans and their families.
- Over 100 NHS England trusts are now accredited as 'veteran aware' and 1,500 GP surgeries as 'veteran friendly'. Under the scheme surgeries have a dedicated clinician who has specialist knowledge of military-related health conditions and veteran-specific health services.
- In April 2022, NHS England commenced a pilot across three sites (Humber and North Yorkshire; Hertfordshire and West Essex; and Kent, Medway and Sussex) to help veterans and armed forces families access and navigate services more easily by creating a single point of contact. Its impact will be evaluated by Northumbria University.
- We have pledged over £1.2 million over 2 years to a **long-term health study** by the King's Centre for Military Health Research.

Looking ahead

- We will undertake a study into veteran suicide from September this year. It will look at the number of veteran suicides between 2011 and 2021 and compare the figure with the non-veteran population.
- As outlined in the July 2022 **Women's Health Strategy for England**, the government will work with NHS England through an already established multi-agency health improvement group to ensure that female service personnel and veterans receive targeted and appropriate health care throughout their lives.
- From April 2023, NHS England will have a single veteran support pathway in place across the criminal justice system in England, offering pre and post custodial support.



Susan Oliver, civil servant, and formerly Air Traffic Controller and Operations Officer, Royal Air Force

MAKING A HOME IN CIVILIAN SOCIETY



In 2012 the law was changed so that seriously injured, ill or disabled service personnel, and former members of the Armed Forces with urgent housing needs are always given high priority for social housing.

The local connection test for access to social housing has also been removed for all veterans for up to five years post discharge to ensure they are not disadvantaged as a result of their service.

Up-to-date information on available accommodation across the country specifically ringfenced for veterans can be found via the **Veterans' Gateway**.

Since January 2022

The government has continued to work closely with key stakeholders and has introduced a new Armed Forces Covenant duty in the Armed Forces Act 2021. This duty places a legal obligation on organisations that provide certain services in healthcare, education, and housing to pay due regard to the principles of the covenant. This means that decisions concerning the development and delivery of certain services need to be made with conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces community.

ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Armed Forces Covenant is about fairness – recognising the uniqueness of service, removing disadvantage caused by service, and enabling special provision for those who have given the most.

Looking ahead

- The government will review the operation of the new duty across the UK in its Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans annual report.
- By relocating the Joint Service Housing Advice Office within Defence Transition Services, the MOD will be able to provide more tailored and timely advice to service personnel and their families.
- A package of life-skills training and support is being developed by MOD with a pilot that tackles topics such as finance, housing, education and mental wellbeing, to be rolled out by the end of 2022.
- Measures on loneliness and social isolation will be included in the Veterans' Survey, to be launched later this year and which is the first of its kind. It will look to understand veterans' life experiences, as well as their view of the services available to them. Read more about the survey on page 17.

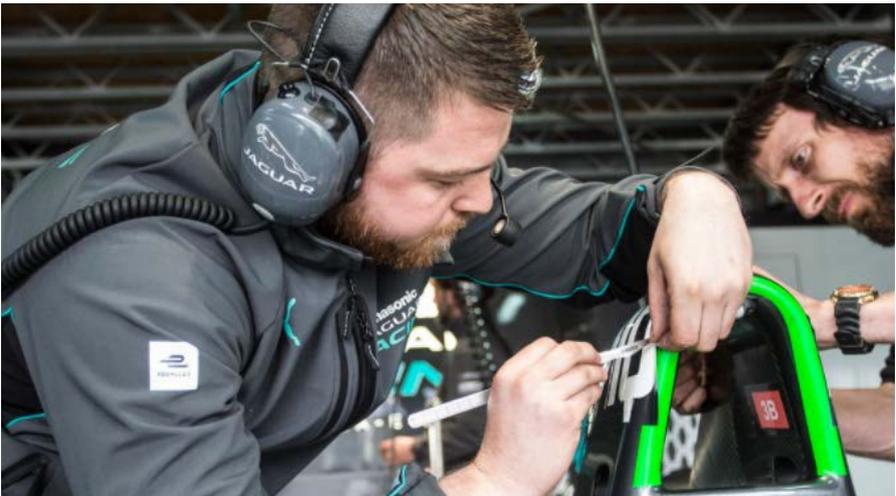
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND SKILLS



The **Career Transition Partnership** supports service leavers as they transition from the military into civilian life.

Beyond the offer provided by Career Transition Partnership, there are initiatives such as **Troops to Teachers**, **Step into Health**, the **Defence Employer Recognition Scheme**, and the **National Insurance Contributions Holiday**. These recognise the skills and expertise that veterans possess and that add value to civilian professions.

For veterans who find themselves without employment, a network of 50 Armed Forces Champions and 11 Armed Forces Champions Group Leads exist within Jobcentre Plus to support them in finding work.



Veteran **Alex Fogg** receiving training and vocational support delivered through Mission Automotive.

Since January 2022

- The Civil Service developed the Great Place to Work for Veterans scheme which guarantees progression to the next stage of recruitment for veterans provided they meet the minimum standard for a role. This year it was rolled out across 23 departments, leading to over 800 offers made to veterans so far.
- **Advance into Justice**, a fast-track scheme to support service leavers and veterans who want to become prison officers, was launched. Successful candidates accepted their offers in May.
- The **NHS career booklet for service leavers and veterans** was published, encouraging even more service leavers and veterans to apply for roles in the NHS.

Looking ahead

- The first meeting of the OVA Veteran Employers Group will be held in autumn. This group will help identify best practice and opportunities that could inform future veterans' employment policy.
- Further rollout of the Great Place to Work initiative will take place.
- Opportunities for veterans and service leavers to join the police will continue to be promoted, including through support to Nottinghamshire Police, which will be piloting a Military Service Leavers Pathway into Policing scheme. Co-designed with the University of Derby, this bespoke 12-week course will see the first cohort starting in September 2022.

MAKING SERVICES WORK BETTER FOR VETERANS



When veterans are unclear on where to go for support in a specific area, they should contact the **Veterans' Gateway** service as a first point of contact. Part-funded by the government and in partnership with a consortium led by the Royal British Legion, the website has been accessed 3.1 million times since it launched, and the contact centre has been contacted 101,000 times.

Since January 2022

- In April 2022 the Royal British Legion was awarded £380,000 from the £5 million Afghanistan Veterans Fund to further enhance the online offering of the Veterans Gateway. Completion of this work is due March 2023.
- A study looking into whether a service offering the digital verification of veteran status is possible has been completed. With a further £1 million in government investment, we are another step closer to producing a veteran ID card.



Representatives from the services and veterans' organisations saluting before laying wreaths at the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial, Victoria Embankment Gardens, London, on 7th October 2021.

AFGHANISTAN VETERANS FUND

More than 50 projects across the UK have received grants administered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. A full list of projects is available on its [website](#).

Examples include:

- Samaritans Veterans Support Hub

Funding of £600,000 for a new veterans' support helpline to provide peer-to-peer emotional support to veterans.

- Scotty's Little Soldiers

Specialist bereavement support funding of £35,000 for children and young people who have experienced the death of a serving parent.

- RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity

£150,000 funding to improve the wellbeing of veterans through volunteering with Afghans who now live in the UK, including those who worked with the UK military and were evacuated during Op PITTING.



A soldier from the Queen's Royal Lancers, 2nd Troop jokes with local children, whilst operating in the area of Patrol Base Bolan, Afghanistan, in June 2010.

Looking ahead

- The quinquennial review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme will consider the current processes and service and make recommendations for the scheme's future.

UNDERSTANDING OUR VETERAN COMMUNITY



The England and Wales Census 2021 asked for the first time whether respondents had served in the UK Armed Forces. The same question was asked by Scotland's Census in 2022. The initial results from the England and Wales Census 2021 are due this autumn and will provide us with more robust data to act on.

In the meantime we will continue to build our evidence base by introducing veteran markers into government data systems. Changes to the universal credit application provides an example of what this looks like in practice, with both new and existing applicants now able to register their veteran status.

THE VETERANS' SURVEY

Hearing from our veteran community is vital and that is why we are launching a regular veterans' survey. Expected to go live towards the end of this year, it will give veterans and their families living in the UK the opportunity to provide direct feedback to the government. It is important we hear the diversity of views and will therefore be working hard with our partners within the government, charity and academic research sectors to raise awareness of the survey to receive as much engagement as possible.

Since January 2022

- The first Veterans' Commissioner for Wales has been appointed, adding to the commissioners already in place in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- We have established a working group with devolved administration colleagues, which meets quarterly to discuss UK-wide commitments, and to share best practice.
- The Veterans' Advisory Board has been reviewed, with a revised membership being appointed in order to capture independent voices representing different parts of the veteran community.
- £300,000 has been invested in research looking into the experiences and support needs of ethnic minority, non-UK, and female veterans.
- A further £130,000 has been provided to charities to assist them in overcoming barriers and improving access for female veterans.
- Research into the experiences of veterans in the criminal justice system has been commissioned, to explore what preventative interventions can be put in place.
- An Academic Advisory Board has been established, consisting of 11 subject matter experts from across the UK in areas including health and wellbeing, employment, finance, the criminal justice system, and historical veteran perceptions.

Looking ahead

- Within government we will continue to review the structures overseeing veterans' issues, ensuring there is clear and effective decision making at all levels, as well as constructive collaboration across government with the devolved administrations and the third sector.
- The OVA will publish a dedicated data and research strategy, setting out how it will help shape the work across government and the veterans sector, so that policy can be implemented and measured using robust evidence.



Sergeant Shevonne Bramley, Lieutenant Kidane Cousland, and Able Seaman Rodyl Charlery at the unveiling of the first memorial to African and Caribbean servicemen and women in Windrush Square, Brixton, June 2017.

RECOGNISING VETERANS' CONTRIBUTIONS



RECOGNISING THE CONTRIBUTION ALL VETERANS HAVE MADE

We support and champion those organisations that participate in the **Defence Employer Recognition Scheme** and have signed the Armed Forces Covenant.

Events such as Armed Forces Day and commemorative activity such as the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War are supported by the government.

Since January 2022

- Visa fees for foreign and commonwealth veterans who have served for six years or more have been waived.¹
- The **LGBT Veterans Independent Review** has been launched, with Lord Etherton as Chair.
- The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill has been laid in Parliament, which looks to address the legacy of the Northern Ireland Troubles and promote reconciliation.
- In collaboration with Sport England, the OVA hosted a roundtable meeting between veterans' adaptive sport organisations and disabled people's organisations, sharing best practice on how adaptive sport can be used to help increase activity levels and participate in communities.

1 See www.gov.uk/government/news/visa-fees-scrapped-for-non-uk-service-personnel, accessed 02/08/2022.

Looking ahead

- Once the extension to the disregard and pardons scheme comes into force, individuals convicted or cautioned for same-sex sexual activity under any now abolished or repealed offence will be able to apply to the Home Office to have these disregarded.
- Following the publication of the LGBT Veterans Independent Review, ministers will consider the recommendations in detail.



14th June 2022 marked the 40th anniversary of the ending of The Falklands War. Pictured: HMS Invincible's gun crew.

PROMOTING A POSITIVE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF VETERANS

The government has committed to celebrating our veterans and their contribution to society and the economy. We want veterans to know that their service is valued by the nation and that we will tackle damaging misconceptions and stereotypes.

Since January 2022

- Research was commissioned to better understand the public and employer perceptions of veterans.
- We partnered with specific media outlets to promote the benefits of employing veterans, and showcased their positive contribution to their community, including during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- A government veteran communications coordination group was established to ensure the contribution of veterans to society is celebrated, wherever veterans choose to settle in the UK.



Lee Bushby, civil servant, and formerly Royal Logistic Corps, British Army

Looking ahead

- The OVA will work across government and with external partners to dispel false narratives about veterans and champion their attributes.

VETERANS' STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

2022-24 UPDATES

The Veterans' Strategy Action Plan contains over 60 cross-government commitments which the OVA tracks as 84 measurable tasks. As at August 2022, 21 (or 25%) of these have been completed, with many of them going further than their original commitment. Many of them are captured in this report.

We will provide a full update on all of the plan's commitments in the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans annual report, which is due later this year.





