
THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Summary





FOREWORD BY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

This year, our Armed Forces have stepped forward to support our nation through the COVID-19 pandemic: from constructing NHS Nightingale Hospitals to delivering testing in our communities. Our veterans have been at the heart of the voluntary effort in many communities. As a result of this, the Armed Forces Covenant has never been more vital. Partners across the UK, in the public, private and charitable sectors, have continued to support those who serve or have served, and their families.

This booklet provides highlights of the full report and a high-level summary on what has been done in the following areas to support and uphold the principles of the Covenant:

- fair access to healthcare
- education
- accommodation
- inquests and judicial engagement
- family life
- transition and through-life support
- business and the community

Looking ahead to 2021, which is the 10th anniversary of the Covenant, the government will honour the commitment to our Armed Forces community made in the election manifesto and December 2019 Queen's Speech, and will legislate to further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law to help prevent disadvantage faced by the Armed Forces community due to the unique nature of their service.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Sella', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DELIVERY WITHIN THE REPORTING PERIOD

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust

The Trust ran a consultation to inform the future grant-making programmes and, as a result, programmes for the financial year 2020/21 will make small- and medium-sized grants to reduce isolation within Armed Forces communities and will give medium-sized projects support through mentor organisations to improve sustainability and improve collaboration.

Through the Removing Barriers to Family Life programme, £7.2 million was awarded to 60 projects across the UK that support Armed Forces families.

Through the Positive Pathways Programme in financial year 2019/20, 114 projects were funded across the UK to support the mental health and wellbeing of veterans.

Through the Veterans' Community Centres Fund, 67 grants were made, totalling £2.85 million, for repairs, refurbishment and accessibility alterations.

The Veterans Should Not be Forgotten programme awarded £2 million to 119 projects to provide immediate support to veterans with reduced social contact during COVID-19.

In response to COVID-19 the MOD and Office for Veterans' Affairs launched the COVID Impact Fund, totalling £6 million, to support Armed Forces charities and Community Interest Companies, with 102 being awarded funding.

Health and healthcare

Following a partnership with the Royal Foundation, the MOD co-developed HeadFIT, a website that hosts a suite of video, audio and text-based tools to support mental fitness and promote the good management of mental health within the Armed Forces community (<https://headfit.org>).

The Defence Recovery Capability Review concluded, making 42 recommendations about future Defence Recovery Pathways for wounded, injured and sick personnel.

The first Health Service Journal's Civilian and Military Health Partnership Award, celebrating excellence in healthcare and health improvement for the Armed Forces community, was bestowed to NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Department for Health and Social Care set up a UK-wide Service Families Working Group with representation from all nations, NHS England, NHS Improvement, MOD and the Families Federations to address long-term policy issues.



Royal Air Force personnel supporting Birmingham City Council in delivering and collecting COVID home testing kits in Selly Oak, Birmingham as part of a Military Aid to Civilian Authority (MACA) operation known as Op RESCRIPT.

The number of GP practices accredited as Veteran Friendly has more than tripled to over 800.

The Scottish Government is working with NHS Scotland to ensure declared veteran status on a patient's medical record, so that this is immediately visible to the GP during each consultation.

NHS England and NHS Improvement continued to deliver veteran-specific services during COVID-19 using digital means.

The Veterans Trauma Network Wales launched. This 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.

Education

The Service Children's Progression Alliance led the UK-wide Year of the Service Child Voice project, investigating how to put Service children's voices at the heart of policy and practice development, which culminated with the release of 'Listening to learn: the voices of Service children', which can be viewed at scipalliance.org/research/listening-to-learn-the-voices-of-service-children

State-funded schools in England continue to be allocated additional funding in the form of the Service Pupil Premium to help them provide pastoral and, where appropriate, academic support for current and former Service children. In the financial year 2020/21, over £24 million will be paid to schools, benefitting over 79,000 pupils.

A Service Children's UK Partnership Task and Finish group was created by MOD, Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru, the Royal Caledonian Education Trust, Service Children in State Schools and Service Children's Progression Alliance, to identify and share good practice across the UK.

The MOD changed the policy for tuition fee payments under the Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme, so that students will now receive the same amount to study in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The MOD's Directorate Children and Young People has worked closely with the Department for Education and HM Revenue and Customs to ensure parents returning to England from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and overseas can apply for a unique, manual 30-hours childcare code before they arrive back in England.



Minister for Defence People and Veterans talks to children at the Sandhurst Primary school in London to mark 100 days until VE Day 75 commemorations.

The MOD extended the Education Support Fund to the 2020/21 financial year.

Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru launched a suite of new resources aimed at supporting schools, families and Service children to raise awareness and understanding of the experiences Service children face as a result of parental deployment.

Accommodation

In addition to MOD investing £123 million in-year to Service Families Accommodation, the government committed £200 million to improve MOD accommodation (including £122 million for Service Family Accommodation) to support the regeneration of the UK economy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The MOD amended the accommodation policy to remove the requirement for Service personnel to have completed more than four years' service before being able to apply to cohabit in surplus Service Families Accommodation.

Future Accommodation Model pilots were launched at Aldershot Garrison and RAF Wittering, following the initial pilot at Her Majesty's Naval Base Faslane in September 2019.

The Forces Help to Buy scheme was extended until December 2022. The scheme has helped over 22,000 Service personnel to get on the property ladder since it started in 2014.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government published new statutory guidance to improve access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces, veterans and their families.

The First Homes consultation response confirmed that the local connection restrictions for the First Homes scheme will be waived for members of the Armed Forces and veterans within five years of leaving service. This waiver will also be extended to bereaved spouses or civil partners of deceased members of the Armed Forces, if their deaths are wholly or partly caused by their service.



Junior Doctor Officer Cadet (OCdt) Rhiannon Austin from the Army Medical Services Support Unit, was the first to receive the keys for her new room in Burma House, a new annex at the Wavell Officers' and Warrant Officers' Mess in Wavell Barracks.

Inquests and judicial engagement

The Defence Inquests Unit has recorded 67 inquests having taken place in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Presiding Coroner in Northern Ireland gave a statement that set out her plan to deal with the 52 listed inquests within a five-year period.

The MOD public consultation on proposed legal protections measures for Armed Forces personnel and veterans who served in operations outside the UK concluded. The responses to the consultation informed the development of the measures taken forward in the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill, which was introduced in Parliament.

Family life

The MOD's Wraparound Childcare pilot programme began making payments to families at the first pilot sites, RAF High Wycombe and RAF Halton.

The **Living in Our Shoes** report was published. This is an independent review of the support provided to Service families, commissioned by MOD and led by Andrew Selous MP.



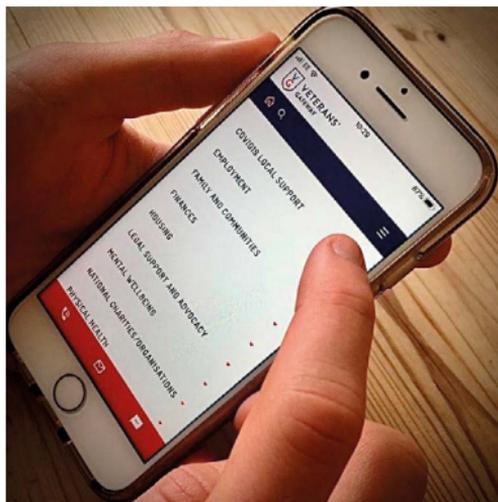
2020 saw a focus on families, including the launch of the Wraparound Childcare pilot.

Transition and through-life support

The Defence Holistic Transition Policy, Joint Service Publication 100, to support Service leavers and their families to adjust to all aspects of the transition to civilian life, was published.

Alongside the Defence Holistic Transition Policy, the Defence Transition Services organisation was established to assist those facing the greatest challenges to making a successful transition on their discharge.

The Veterans Gateway app was launched, developed by Northumbria University's Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research and funded the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.



The MOD launched SERVE (Service for Experienced, Rejoiner and Volunteer Engagements), a new digital platform to advertise reserve, rejoiner and wider opportunities across the Armed Forces which also enables veterans to stay connected with Defence.

The Veterans Gateway app launched in May 2020, giving veterans and their families access to up-to-date information about services in their local communities.

Business and the community

The total number of Armed Forces Covenant signings rose to over 5,800 by the end of September.

127 organisations were awarded Gold under the Employer Recognition Scheme from a wide range of sectors. This included companies of all up to FTSE100 as well as councils and NHS Trusts.

Armed Forces Covenant business and community networks enabled support of the Armed Forces community during the COVID-19 pandemic, including supporting employers of mobilised reservists by promoting services and disseminating information.

During Armed Forces Week, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) National Employer and Partnership Team delivered a campaign across DWP to promote opportunities in the Regular and Reserve Armed Forces.

As part of the Veterans Scoping Exercise, the Welsh Government established a new employment action group to help improve employment support for the Armed Forces.

The Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA)

The OVA was established in the Cabinet Office in October 2019 to champion veterans and their families at the very heart of government. It was created to ensure the delivery of life-long support to veterans by providing enhanced leadership, improved use of data and better co-ordination of policies and services across government, as well as driving forward the realisation of the **Strategy for Our Veterans** and its ambition to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran.

It does this by working with stakeholders across the veterans support landscape, including government departments, devolved administrations, local government, the private sector, academia and the charity sector.



The launch of the Office for Veterans Affairs puts decision-making for veterans at the heart of the UK government.

SUMMARY OF COMMITMENTS MADE IN THIS REPORT FOR DELIVERY BEYOND THE REPORTING PERIOD

Health and healthcare

In autumn 2020, NHS England will launch engagement to further explore how best it can support health and wellbeing needs of Armed Forces families, regardless of where they live in England.

In autumn 2020, the Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service will launch regional pathfinders to test the proposed service model.

In autumn 2020, the Veterans' Mental Health Accreditation pilot will start, involving 10 veterans' mental health teams from organisations across both the statutory and non-statutory (including charity) sectors.

Education

In October 2020, the Service Children's Progression Alliance will launch the Thriving Lives Toolkit, a practical resource that helps schools improve the quality of their support for Service children.

By the end of 2020, the Service Children's UK Partnership Task and Finish Group will write a report signposting good practice across the UK and recommending potential collaboration projects in the future.

The Department for Education will respond to the consultation on proposed amendments to the Schools Admission Code, which included specific reference to Service children.

Accommodation

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government is currently undertaking a review of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, including the duty to refer.

Family life

In October 2020, the MOD will launch the pilot Partner Career Support programme.

In January 2021, the MOD's Wraparound Childcare pilot programme will launch further pilots for the Plymouth naval area and Catterick Garrison in January 2021.

Business and the community

In autumn 2020, the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme will be reviewed, to identify measures to support long-term sustainability and with implementation of agreed changes in time for the 2021 awards.

USEFUL INFORMATION

The full report which is available at GOV.UK includes contributions from relevant government departments, the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Office on how they have delivered on the Covenant.

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, please contact your Families Federations (details below) or the MOD Covenant team by emailing covenant-mailbox@mod.gov.uk

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

Forces Help to Buy: gov.uk/government/publications/joint-service-housing-advice-office-leaflet-index/forces-help-to-buy-scheme

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust: covenantfund.org.uk

Defence Discount Service: defencediscountservice.co.uk

Forces Families Jobs: forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk

National Insurance credits for partners of Armed Forces personnel overseas: gov.uk/guidance/national-insurance-credits-for-partners-of-armed-forces-personnel-overseas

The SCiP Alliance: scipalliance.org/about/information-page

Veterans Gateway: veteransgateway.org.uk

Veterans UK: gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk

Veterans Work: veteranswork.org.uk

Veteran support in Scotland: mygov.scot/veterans

Veteran support in Wales: gov.wales

Financial top tips for service personnel: gov.uk/government/publications/financial-top-tips-for-service-personnel

Forces friendly insurers: biba.org.uk/armed-forces-biba-members-can-help

Financial and employment support: britishlegion.org.uk/get-support/financial-and-employment-support

Joining Forces credit union: joiningforcescu.co.uk

Confederation of Service Charities: cobseo.org.uk

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

