



Ministry of Defence

Our Ref: FOI2019/07578

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12 July 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your e-mail of 1 July 2019 requesting the following information:

Please provide me with a copy of any and all reports, summaries and précis issued to you by YouGov on or after 1st July 2018 and relating to the findings of any and all surveys conducted with the intention of ascertaining the views of the public with regard to Armed Forces' Day.?

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that some information in scope of your request is held and can be found below at Annex A. Section 40(2) of the FOIA has been applied to some of the information as the names of those involved in conducting the research constitutes personal data as defined in section 3(2) of the Data Protection Act 2018. Section 40 is an absolute exemption and there is therefore no requirement to consider the public interest in making a decision to withhold the information.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for 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.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed.

Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website www.ico.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

DDC Secretariat Parliamentary



Ministry of Defence - Armed Forces Day

Top line summary - April 2019



Background and research objectives



The Ministry of Defence commissioned YouGov in March 2019 to conduct 2x online focus groups to understand public perceptions of Armed Forces Day. Group composition is shown in the adjacent table.

Overall, this research aimed to develop understanding in 3 key areas:

- What the perceived purpose of AFD is to those who have attended, or would consider attending;
- What attendees' /potential attendees' expectations are of AFD in terms of events and takeaways;
- What would encourage attendance at AFD in future.

The following top line report gives a summary of findings.

Group 1

- 10x participants
- Have attended AFD events
- Mix of age, gender, region, social grade

Group 2

- 9x participants
- Have not attended AFD events, but would be interested in attending
- Mix of age, gender, region, social grade

Initial reactions to Armed Forces Day are positive and focus on celebration

What comes to mind when you see the words 'UK Armed Forces Day'?

Spontaneous thoughts and feelings about AFD generally centre around feelings and actions of celebration, and are overwhelmingly positive. Within this, respondents see AFD as a way of showing support for the work of the UK Armed Forces, both present and past.

**size of the word indicates how often the word was said*



On the whole, Armed Forces Day is seen as an inclusive event, offering something for everyone

General public

Participants are clear that Armed Forces Day is aimed at everyone - it is not an exclusive event, as the overall purpose is to raise awareness of and celebrate the work of the Armed Forces. This is also reflected in comments about events bringing communities together.

People with positive impression

Some participants say Armed Forces Day is better suited to those who have a positive/neutral impression of the Armed Forces, rather than those with a more negative perception. Again, this is linked to the celebratory and supportive elements of these events and the belief that negative opinions will be hard to sway.

Children/young people

Participants who have, or know, children and young people say that Armed Forces Day is suitable for these age groups, especially where there are a variety of activities and opportunities for education/learning. For young adults, some also say Armed Forces Day is a chance to find out more about a military career path.



"I think it's aimed at anyone who wishes to support the armed forces or potentially have a career with them." - Group 1



"Definitely take kids/grandchildren to educate them and show them how important the armed forces are." - Group 2



The perceived purpose of AFD can be split into three main categories: celebration, support and education

Celebration

The majority of participants mention AFD as a way of celebrating the Armed Forces, and when discussing events associated with this purpose in particular, many talk about parades, fairs and showcase events such as the red arrows.

Participants say that celebrating AFD is a way of showing their appreciation and respect for the forces, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate their pride for the forces' achievements.

Similarly, participants believe that AFD should be about maintaining a positive impression of the Armed Forces and passing this on to future generations; for the majority, celebration is an appropriate way to do this.

"Celebration is mostly about showing respect, and showing those who have been part of the forces that they are appreciated and valued"
- Group 1

Supporting Armed Forces

The idea of remembrance / commemoration is linked closely to AFD for some participants; however, some, particularly those who have attended AFD events in the past, say that the main focus of the day should be on showing support for UK Armed Forces in the present rather than focussing too much on the past.

For a majority of participants, simply attending events and also interacting with veterans and service personnel, is a way of showing support.

Some mention that they would like to see charities at these events in order to learn more about the support available to service personnel, and donate if appropriate.

"Remembrance is part and parcel of armed forces day in my opinion. As the whole event is a show of support to all those who have served and are serving."
- Group 1

Education/information

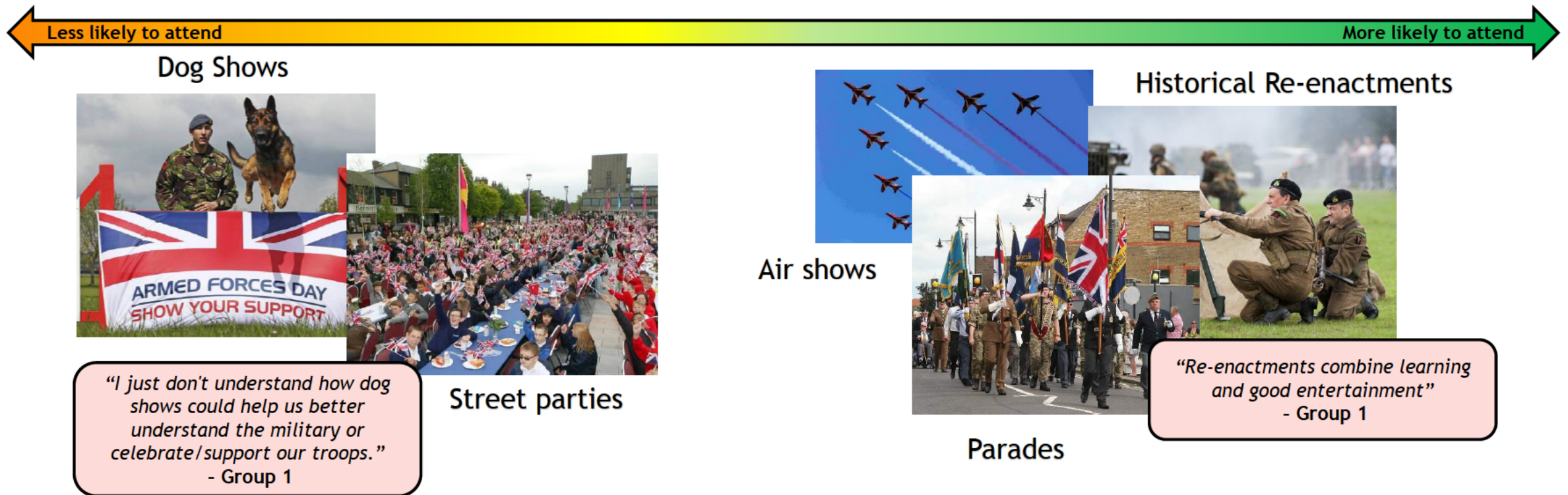
AFD is also seen as a way to find out more about the Armed Forces and raise public awareness, outside of traditional media, which some say is biased. Direct interaction with service personnel is seen as an appropriate way to do this, alongside information stalls/displays, and holding events with educational value, such as military re-enactments and tours.

For some, esp. in Group 2, AFD is also seen as a recruitment opportunity. While some participants are positive about this, others feel AFD is not the most appropriate setting to be receiving career information and express concern that events focussing too much on this aspect could be perceived as 'propaganda'.

"I think it's [recruitment] fine but if it feels too dominant it'll feel propaganda-y"
- Group 2

Participants want to see interactive events demonstrating the skill and value of the Armed Forces

A majority of participants across groups say they favour events which provide entertainment value combined with the opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding. For many, it is important that the events available have a clear relevance and link to the Armed Forces, to set the day apart from other celebrations. Some participants also note that wreath-laying is a commemorative act, and therefore do not see this as something that fits well with the more celebratory atmosphere of Armed Forces Day.



Participants expect a balance between entertainment and information, with an overall positive and celebratory atmosphere

What they want to see...

A focal event: Participants generally like the idea of having a main event as part of AFD; this contributes to the celebratory atmosphere and encourages more people to attend. Many like the idea of this revolving around something unique to the forces, such as air shows and showcasing the skills of the forces.

Family friendly activities: Many see AFD as a family day out and an opportunity to pass down the practice of respect and gratitude to younger generations. It is therefore important that there are age-appropriate activities and events available for children to get involved in.

What they want to gain...

Positivity: For a majority of participants, it is important that they come away from AFD events feeling uplifted and being proud of the contribution of the UK Armed Forces. For some, a sense of community spirit is important here, with local events having more of an appeal.

Improved understanding of the Armed Forces: A key take away for many participants is a better understanding of the role of the Armed Forces in modern society. Many participants like the idea of being able to interact with service personnel to gain first hand insight, rather than relying on (sometimes biased) media reporting for their information.

“I think in general, there has to be attendees from various armed forces, both veterans and cadets. To show both progression and show how everyone can be involved.”
- Group 1

“A feeling of knowledge of the military and also some pride of the show our military put on”
- Group 2

“It's important to give back, but also to gain insight and enjoy the day”
- Group 2

“Ideal would be a parade, wreath laying, showcasing of artillery and aircraft, marches etc.”
- Group 1

“Greater and more nuanced / intimate understanding of the experience of service from an internal perspective.”
- Group 1

Those who have attended AFD in the past have a positive impression, but want more comprehensive information available in future

What were the highlights



Participants who have attended AFD in the past say that their experience has been positive - they came away feeling a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the forces.



Many comment on the inclusivity of the events they have attended, for example the variety of activities, suitability for all age groups, and the overall community spirit created by people coming together for a common purpose.



Greater awareness and understanding of the work of the Armed Forces is a key motivator for attending AFD events, and a majority of participants in Group 1 say that this expectation was met.

What could be improved



Some participants in Group 1 suggest that greater opportunity to hear from service personnel directly would increase the educational value of AFD events. Areas of particular interest include hearing about day to day life in the forces and what the Armed Forces are currently involved in across the world.



Some say that, while the day has been enjoyable for them in the past, they would like to see AFD events becoming bigger and more impressive in future, with more variety available to turn activities into an 'all day' event - this may also encourage more people to attend.

*"I think they could have been better promoted and there could have been more going on to keep people there a bit longer."
- Group 1*

*"It does provide a parade, but in my experience there is not enough interaction between the public and the service personnel."
- Group 1*

Barriers to attending



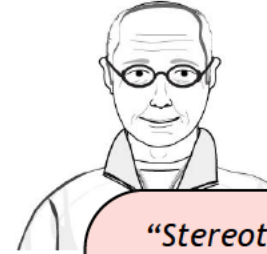
Stereotypes of AFD do exist to a small extent, but are quickly discredited once an event is attended

A small minority of participants say that, without further information, AFD may be seen as an event more suited to right wing groups. This could deter some people from attending for fear of feeling unwelcome.

Some say that Armed Forces Day could be stereotyped as an event for those who already have a connection to the Armed Forces - those who have served, families of military personnel etc.

Safety was mentioned by a minority of participants. As a celebratory event, Armed Forces Day could be seen as an easy target for those with a negative impression of the Armed Forces, in the form of protests, for example.

Access to information about events, and experience of attending, can quickly dispel these stereotypes, so communications outlining what to expect could help to reassure those feeling nervous about attending.



“Stereotypes do exist.. people supporting the forces are sometimes seems as right wing. Awful websites/pages like Britain First have a lot of responsibility when it comes to this type of misconception.”
[M, Group 1]



“Mainly I think it reaches people who've either served themselves, had relatives in the armed forces or lost people in war or conflict.”
[F, Group 2]

Participants are looking for an inclusive and affordable day out; high costs and poor access put people off attending

What would encourage attendance

✓ Key for many participants is the community spirit of Armed Forces Day events. This, coupled with time and cost factors, means local events hold greater appeal for the majority.

✓ It is important that a range of events are on offer in order to appeal to a wide audience - many participants are keen to see military skill and equipment showcased, such as air shows/the Red Arrows.

✓ Many participants say they would be attracted to events with interactive activities and opportunities to hear from military personnel first hand, esp. if attending with children/young people.

What would deter attendance

✗ Accessibility is mentioned across groups as a potential barrier to attendance - for example, venues being difficult to access and navigate for people in wheelchairs or using mobility aids.

✗ A key barrier for many participants is time. Many are limited by working hours and other commitments. Weekday events or locations that are harder to get to can therefore put people off attending.

✗ Expensive event entry and additional costs once inside the event are mentioned as a barrier, esp. to those who may be attending with children/young people, as combined costs can soon mount up.

“A lot of the ‘vintage’ style events, commemorations, displays, etc., are really hard to actually access. In the middle of a muddy field for example so chairs can’t get to it and people with walking aids are wiped out.”
(Group 1)

“I just think people have busy lives and not much spare cash to spare.”
(Group 2)

Respondents say diverse forms of advertising are needed in order to reach all generations

Limited awareness: Many participants say that information about Armed Forces Day events is not always readily available and, if you are not inclined to search for it, you are unlikely to know about the events on offer. Participants want to know when and where events are, as well as what the day entails, especially if they have not attended before.

Lack of motivation: Participants say that attending an Armed Forces Day event is not a priority, especially for those who have not previously attended. Highlighting the value of attending may help to draw people in and encourage them to find out more.

“I think just generally raising interest, most people would happily go along on the day out but it'd have to stick in their minds for long enough for plans to be made” - Group 2

Traditional media: For older generations especially, traditional media is the best way to spread the word about Armed Forces Day and associated events.

Social media/networks: Some say that utilising social media would be a more effective way of reaching younger generations. Similarly, many suggest that word of mouth/encouragement to attend by friends or family is key in promoting attendance.

“Social media is more useful than TV/news/newspapers if you want a younger audience to attend.” - Group 1

Conclusions

- 1 Celebrating the work of the UK Armed Forces and gaining information/awareness about their role are seen as the primary purposes of Armed Forces Day.
- 2 Although commemoration and recruitment fit into the overall theme of Armed Forces Day, many say that these should be minimal elements, preferring to focus on the Armed Forces at present and the work that they do currently.
- 3 For those who have attended, Armed Forces Day could be improved by increasing information provision, and offering greater opportunity to speak to members of the Armed Forces.
- 4 Participants want to find out more about the current role of the Armed Forces and how they are supported in this (e.g. by charities, government)
- 5 Participants are interested in a wide range of events/activities, but these need to link back to the work of the Armed Forces in some way to fit with the celebratory purpose of the day.
- 6 Cost, travel time and accessibility are key barriers to overcome in order to encourage new and returning attendees.



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