



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND VETERANS ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Summary





Ministerial foreword to the Annual Report

The Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs

This year has thrown into sharper focus the importance of our Armed Forces as standard bearers for the values we hold dear as a nation. Whether they are supporting Ukraine to defend its sovereign territory against Russian aggression, paying final tributes to Her Late Majesty The Queen, or helping their local communities, more than ever our Armed Forces community is central to our national life and represents who we are as a country. We are therefore delighted to introduce this year's Annual Report on the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans.

Since 2011, the Armed Forces Covenant has been a promise by the nation that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, should be treated fairly. It is a promise that they should not be disadvantaged because of their service. And it is a recognition of the sacrifices they make on our behalf and the responsibilities we owe them in return. In support of veterans, the Government's commitment to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran by 2028 continues to hold true.

We are pleased that Armed Forces Covenant signings are rapidly approaching 10,000, as thousands of organisations, large and small, private and public, from across the UK, embed the Covenant in their interactions with their local Armed Forces community. Putting the Covenant Duty into law was a manifesto commitment we delivered

on decisively and quickly to ensure that public bodies have due regard for the Covenant principles when delivering services or policies in healthcare, education, and housing. Alongside the Armed Forces Families Strategy and investment in Service Family Accommodation, we are pleased with the progress we have made. But there is still more to do to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community do not face disadvantage due to service life.

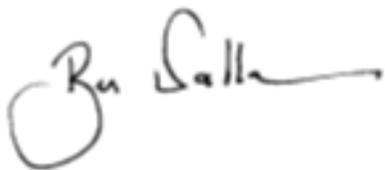
For veterans specifically, we have made great progress across Government since the publication in January of the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-24). This Action Plan has given greater focus to what else we can do, in partnership with charities and the private sector, to ensure veterans have the right support at the right time.

From appointing the first Veterans Commissioner for Wales, thus ensuring every nation has an independent voice championing veterans, to launching the £5m Veteran's Health Innovation Fund, which will spur advancements in treatments for veterans' health needs, to making great strides to better understand our veteran community through enhanced research and data, we are delivering for veterans and their families.

Finally, we want to thank the organisations who have used the Covenant and the nation's commitment to veterans as a springboard to improve the lived experiences of our Armed Forces community.

The Covenant is unique on so many levels, not just in the practical delivery of services to our Armed Forces community, but it also demonstrates how central and local Government, with the third sector and devolved administrations pulling together, can achieve so much for those who have served their country in this way. We are

therefore committed to ensuring that this incredible work continues to develop to make the next decade even better.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Wallace". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP –
Secretary of State for Defence

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Mercer". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

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



A member of 16 Medical Regiment gives trauma medical training to Ukrainian medics.

Health and healthcare

Key improvements for serving personnel this year stem from the publication of the new **MOD Health and Wellbeing Strategy**, which promotes the importance of health and wellbeing across Defence, adopting a holistic approach to mental, physical and social health. There has been **additional focus on Servicewomen**, resulting in new health policies, guidance, and equipment to support Servicewomen to thrive. These measures help ensure that the Armed Forces' satisfaction with the healthcare services provided continues to at least match wider society. Improvements in the mental health services for our Armed Forces have continued, with an **annual mental fitness briefing** and a **new care pathway for common mental health disorders**, helping ensure that mental health rates among serving personnel are broadly the same, or better, than in the UK general population.

Work to improve healthcare services provided to veterans includes:

- accreditation of **a further 528 GP surgeries as 'veteran-friendly'**, taking the total to 1,578
- the inclusion of veterans' health in the **GP training curriculum and national GP licensing assessment** in England and Scotland
- the launch of a **£5 million Veterans' Health Innovation Fund**, that will support organisations looking to research and trial cutting-edge technology which could help veterans with complex healthcare needs
- the **Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service** becoming fully operational across England

- Veterans NHS Wales piloting an **integrated care pathway** for certain veterans in the criminal justice system with Service-related mental health problems
- continued funding by the Scottish Government of the **Unforgotten Forces Consortium**, a partnership that delivers a wide array of services to veterans in Scotland.



A Royal Air Force medic cares for a patient.

Education

Work to improve the education and wellbeing of Service children includes:

- continued funding of the **Service Pupil Premium**
- provisions in the **School Admissions Code for England**, including class-size exemptions, to ensure that Service families are not disadvantaged by their mobility requirement when applying for school places
- improved **identification of Service children in Scotland** via the Higher Education Statistics Agency Student return
- the launch of **Armed Forces Friendly Schools Cymru**, a status given to schools in Wales to recognise their commitment to supporting Service children, as well as their achievements engaging with the Armed Forces Community.

We currently assess that the GCSE attainment of Service children in England is level with comparable non-Service children in England, as is the proportion of Service children in state-funded schools in England attending a school rated as Outstanding or Good by Ofsted. Service children are more likely to move school at times outside of the normal admissions round, but Service children in England are at least as likely to continue in sustained education or employment after Key Stages 4 and 5 as comparable non-Service children.

The Ministry of Defence is currently working to identify local authority areas where Service children's outcomes appear worse than comparable non-Service children, to understand apparent gaps in outcomes and identify how Service children can be further supported.

Housing and accommodation

There were record levels of **investment in Service Family Accommodation** in 2021/22, with £179 million invested overall. In total, over 13,000 family homes – one in four – were improved during 2021/22. A further £176 million of improvement works are planned in 2022/23, to improve about 9,800 homes. UK Service Family Accommodation is more likely to meet the Decent Homes Standard than rented homes of the general population in England.

The Armed Forces' satisfaction with maintenance and repair work to their current Service accommodation reduced in 2022, but **new accommodation service contracts** came into service this year. The new suppliers have committed to introducing significant changes to modernise and improve the services provided to Service families.

Forces Help to Buy is a scheme to help Armed Forces personnel get on the property ladder, with 28,102 Service personnel benefitting so far, with loans totalling £429 million. Other schemes to help serving personnel to buy their own home include the **Refund of Legal Expenses** package and **exemption from any local connection testing restrictions** to be eligible for a First Home. Service families are slightly less likely to own their own home than the civilian population in England, but this may be because Service families tend to be younger than the wider population, and younger people are less likely to own their own home.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities continues 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. We

currently assess that 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, and the Armed Forces Community in England is more satisfied with the standard of social housing than the general population.

In Scotland, the **Veterans Homelessness Prevention Pathway** has been published, and the Scottish Government has accepted all 24 recommendations in principle.



A member of the Royal Navy and his family at a playground near their Service Family Accommodation.

Inquests and judicial engagement

The Defence Inquests Unit has recorded 68 inquests (13 of which concern the death of a veteran) in which investigations have been concluded during the reporting period.

When the risk of full-time Armed Forces personnel suffering a safety-related fatality is benchmarked against other industry sectors, it is commensurate to the civilian construction industry in the UK.

The Office for Veterans' Affairs has been working with the Office for National Statistics to develop a ten-year retrospective **study looking at suicides in the veteran community**. Work to reduce suicides among the Armed Forces Community, and support bereaved families, includes:

- **The Defence Suicide Register project**, which continues to mature
- supporting the **One is Too Many** suicide prevention research
- NHS England funding for two studies related to interventions **to support bereaved families** following a suicide.

UK Armed Forces Families Strategy update

The Ministry of Defence has published its new **UK Armed Forces Families Strategy**, which provides the framework for an ambitious ten-year programme. The Strategy is divided into eight workstreams focusing on different areas of family life in the Armed Forces: Family Life; Service Life; Family Home; Children's Education; Childcare; Non-UK Families; Supporting Partners; and Health and Wellbeing. Delivery of initiatives under each workstream has begun.

Some of the changes that have been trialled in the Future Accommodation Model will be brought into current policy as announced in the **Defence Accommodation Strategy**. In addition to providing accommodation based on need rather than rank, **entitlement to Service Family Accommodation will be widened**



Families play a vital role as members of the Armed Forces Community.

to additional cohorts, including those Service personnel in established long-term relationships.

April 2022 was the MOD's first UK-wide **Month of the Military Child**. This consisted of events and activities throughout April to celebrate Service children and the positive impact they have on their families and local communities. Events included school assemblies and welfare support team activities with schools and military bases across the UK.

May 2022 saw the introduction of a **Service child and a veteran 'flag' on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application form**. This allows universities and colleges to offer more bespoke advice and support to Service children and veterans applying to university or college.

The MOD-supported **Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance** continues to make progress against all the Alliance's priorities, including significant improvements in the awareness of Armed Forces children's lives among professionals in schools, colleges, universities, and other stakeholders.

Since September 2020, pilots have been running to gather data on how the **wraparound childcare scheme** could be successfully managed. By January 2022 there were six pilot sites operating. The scheme supported in total just over 2,000 Service children.

The Ministry of Defence conducted a **'deep-dive' review of the issues faced by non-UK personnel and non-UK service families** in consultation with, and with support from, key stakeholders. A report was published on 10 November 2021 summarising the issues faced, and an Action Plan has been developed. The actions and activities will be coordinated by the MOD with support from the Home Office and the Office for Veterans' Affairs, using additional support from other Government departments as required.

The **Celebrating Forces Families Awards** successfully held its inaugural event on 22 April 2022 at the Victory Services Club in London. The event focused purely on celebrating the valued support of serving military families. The event acknowledged and celebrated the amazing projects families have undertaken, triumph over adversity, and resilience and inspiring career paths taken.

To help Service families gain support in navigating the healthcare system when moving around the UK, pilots have been launched through the new Integrated Care Systems, to provide a **single point of contact for Service families**, and a care coordination framework for Integrated Care Systems.



A dual-serving couple and their children.

Business, employment, and the community

The **Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust** awarded a total of **£26 million** in grants towards projects across the UK in 2021/22, of which £25.3 million was received from the Government.

Armed Forces Covenant signings by companies, public sector organisations and charities are rapidly approaching 10,000, with **1,634 signings over the last 12 months alone**. At the end of the reporting period the total figure stood at 9,122 signatories.

Support to the employment of members of the Armed Forces Community has included:

- continued use of the **Defence Employer Recognition Scheme**, to give bronze, silver and gold awards to 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
- **empowering Armed Forces Champions** and other JobCentre staff to best support reservists, veterans and Service spouses
- **supporting veterans into specific employment sectors**
- **employment fairs** in Wales
- **mapping skills to civilian equivalents** in Scotland.

We currently assess that veterans and Service partners are more likely to be in employment than the UK's working-age general population.

The Covenant in law

The Government has fulfilled its 2019 manifesto commitment to ‘further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law’. A **new Armed Forces Covenant Duty has been created**, that places a new legal obligation on specific public bodies to have due regard to the Covenant principles when delivering certain services, or deciding certain policies, in healthcare, education and housing, that could impact the Armed Forces Community. The Covenant Duty will increase public bodies’ awareness of the principles of the Covenant, the reasons for it, and in turn improve their decision-making in respect of the Armed Forces Community.

A Review will be conducted into whether the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should be brought within scope of this new Duty, and a report will be provided in the 2023 Covenant and Veterans Annual Report.



Two generations of Army veterans talk together before a commemoration service.



Serving members of the Royal Air Force talk to a veteran.

