



THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND VETERANS ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Summary





A message from the Defence Secretary and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

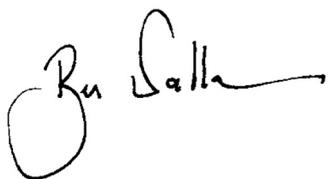
We are delighted to introduce this year's annual report on the Armed Forces Covenant. The full report is available on GOV.UK, but we hope that this shorter summary booklet gives you a flavour of some of the work the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations have done this year to support our Armed Forces Community. For us, this year's report is notable for four reasons.

1. This is the 10th annual report since the Covenant was introduced in its current form in 2011. 10 years of the Covenant represents an enormous achievement for us all. By working together, doing right by our Armed Forces Community is now seen as business as usual – and this is exactly as it should be. With more than 7,000 organisations now signed up to the Covenant, millions of pounds distributed by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust every year and the establishment of the Office for Veterans' Affairs in 2019, the progress we have made over the last 10 years has been formidable.

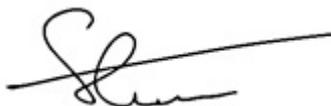
But there will always be more to do. That is why 2021 also marks the year in which we are further embedding the Covenant into law. We are introducing a new statutory duty on certain public bodies to ensure that they pay due regard to the Covenant and its principles when carrying out specific functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. The new duty will come into force in 2022.

2. This is the first report to be presented as the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report. The new name reflects that this report is a joint effort between our two departments. It sets out what the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations are doing to uphold the Covenant, remove disadvantage caused by service for our Armed Forces Community and deliver on the UK Government's pledge to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran. This year's report therefore gives readers an integrated update on all we have been doing over the last year to deliver against both the Covenant and the Strategy for our Veterans.
3. This report comes in the year that the UK and our NATO Allies concluded military operations in Afghanistan, 20 years after they began. Events over the summer reminded us once again of the sacrifices the Armed Forces Community has made, and continues to make, for us. Not only the courage with which those sacrifices are always made, but also the pain with which they often come. We owe the Armed Forces Community a profound debt of gratitude, and we hope that the work we do as part of the Covenant and the Strategy for our Veterans goes some way towards demonstrating our appreciation and support.
4. This year's reporting period (1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021) is the first in which the COVID-19 pandemic has been ever-present – not only as a challenge and a constraint, but also as a spur to innovation. We are immensely grateful to all members of the Armed Forces Community, and those who support them, for all that they have done and all that they continue to do in such challenging circumstances.

We look forward to celebrating the next 10 years of the Armed Forces Covenant and taking the next steps to deliver the Strategy for our Veterans.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Wallace', with a large, stylized initial 'B'.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Barclay', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay
MP – Chancellor of the Duchy
of Lancaster

Grant funding: the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust is an arm's length body of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), which has charitable status and acts as an independent grant-making body. It administers the Covenant Fund of £10 million per year, funding projects across the UK that support the Armed Forces Community. The Trust also administers funding from other Government sources that support the Armed Forces Community. Some of the highlights from the Trust's work during this year's reporting period are listed here (you can read more on the Trust's website – covenantfund.org.uk).

- The Trust awarded £9.1 million in 2020 to projects designed to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Armed Forces Community.
- In April 2021, the MOD and the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) secured funding for the Trust to launch a new £6 million programme – Sustaining Support to Armed Forces Communities – that helps existing charitable activities and services in need of short-term grant support due to the pandemic.
- The NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) Fund was launched in 2020, providing funding to projects focused on improving quality of life for Service personnel and their families. 65 awards, worth over £700,000 in total, were made during the first round of funding.

- In May 2021, the Trust launched its new Knowledge Network (covenantfund.org.uk/resources) to share impact, learning and resources from its projects. The resources will help future bidders for funding, as well as all those working to deliver the Covenant.
- The Tackling Loneliness Programme was launched in 2020, designed to address isolation within the Armed Forces Community. 60 projects received grants of £70,000 each.
- The Trust continues to deliver projects through HM Treasury's Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. The Treasury has provided an additional £10 million of funding for projects in the financial year 2021/22.
- The One is Too Many Programme awarded more than £2.1 million to organisations providing services that reduce the risk of suicide among veterans.

Health and healthcare

Looking after the health needs of Service personnel, family members and veterans is one of the first priorities of the Government when it comes to the welfare of the Armed Forces Community. The MOD provides some healthcare services to Service personnel, while the NHS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland provides services to family members, veterans and the bereaved, depending on their location.

The MOD, the OVA, the Department of Health and Social Care, the NHS and the Devolved Administrations all continue to work closely together to ensure that needs are met and services are improved. Here is some of what we have been doing this year to deliver on this.

- An additional £94 million of funding has been released for Programme CORTISONE, which aims to deliver an up-to-date medical information system for Defence. The programme will ultimately link MOD medical information services with NHS services.
- The new Veterans' Mental Health High Intensity Service in England launched in October 2020. Seven regional 'pathfinders' are running until the end of March 2023, testing a more holistic service model.
- Op COURAGE was launched in England in March 2021, bringing together existing mental health services for veterans into one comprehensive pathway. The UK Government has since committed an additional £2.7 million to further expand Op COURAGE.
- In March 2021, NHS England published 'Healthcare for the Armed Forces Community: A Forward View', outlining its commitments to improving the health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces Community.

- 97 healthcare providers, such as hospital trusts, are now accredited as ‘veteran aware’ by the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance. More than 1,000 GP surgeries are now accredited as ‘veteran friendly’ by NHS England and the Royal College of GPs.
- The Scottish Veterans Care Network was formally launched in November 2020. The network’s new Mental Health Action Plan will be published in December 2021.
- The Scottish Government continues to contribute funding to Combat Stress, providing over £1.4 million in the financial year 2021/22.
- The Welsh Government announced a 35 percent increase in funding for Veterans NHS Wales in March 2021, increasing total annual funding to £920,000.



Soldiers from 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery assist Bolton City Council in distributing COVID-19 testing kits.



Armed Forces personnel help administer COVID-19 vaccinations in Scotland.

Education

Service children can face specific and additional challenges in comparison to their peers throughout their time in education. The following list outlines some of the things the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations have been doing this year to address those challenges, as well as what the MOD is doing to support the training and education of Service personnel themselves.

- The MOD's Education Support Fund provided £2 million worth of grants to 75 schools across the UK during the financial year 2020/21, to help them mitigate the impact of mobility and separation on Service children and their families. £3 million has been made available for the financial year 2021/22.
- The Service Children's Progression Alliance launched its Thriving Lives Toolkit in October 2020, which is a practical resource that helps schools to improve the quality of their support to Service children.
- A new School Admissions Code for England came into force in September 2021. It includes several provisions to ensure that Service families are not disadvantaged when applying for school places, such as requiring admission authorities to allocate a school place to a Service child before the family moves to the area.
- The Service Pupil Premium is additional funding for schools in England to help them provide pastoral and academic support to Service children. It is now worth £310 per eligible pupil annually. In the financial year 2021/22, more than £24.7 million will be paid to schools, benefiting almost 80,000 pupils.

- The Welsh Government has provided a further investment of £270,000 per year to support Service children in Wales. In addition, four Regional Schools Liaison Officers for Service children are now in post across Wales, funded by a grant from the Covenant Fund Trust.
- The Armed Forces Apprenticeship Programme is now offering apprenticeships from Level 2 to degree level to over 90 percent of non-commissioned Service personnel. There are 91 different apprenticeship programmes on offer.
- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership is continuing its work mapping military qualifications and transferable skills against those recognised by employers in Scotland.

Housing and accommodation

Access to decent accommodation underpins the wellbeing and effectiveness of our Armed Forces Community and supports operational effectiveness.

Listed here are some of the things the MOD has done this year to improve its accommodation offer to Service personnel and their families.

- There have been record levels of investment in Service Family Accommodation, with a total of £160 million invested in the financial year 2020/21 and another £188 million earmarked in 2021/22. This investment is enabling 775 long-term empty properties to be refurbished, and a further 10,200 properties have been significantly improved.
- The MOD has delivered key recommendations from recent reports into Single Living Accommodation. The Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force are developing their infrastructure delivery plans to improve the condition and quality of Single Living Accommodation across the estate through an ambitious 10-year programme. £66.1 million was invested in the financial year 2020/21, and the MOD plans to invest a further £1.5 billion over the next decade.
- The Forces Help to Buy Scheme enables Service personnel to borrow up to 50 percent of their annual salary to purchase their first property. As of June 2021, the scheme has helped more than 25,000 Service personnel and has been extended until the end of December 2022.

Inquests and judicial engagement

It is a legal requirement for the Covenant and Veterans Annual Report to provide an update on the activity of the Defence Inquests Unit (DIU) every year.

- The DIU is the MOD's single point of contact for coroners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit when investigating the causes of the deaths of Service personnel, veterans and MOD civilians.
- The DIU provides support and consultation to Service personnel, veterans and MOD civilians who are called to appear as witnesses at inquest. This support includes practical advice alongside legal, medical and pastoral guidance from experts.
- The DIU has recorded 57 inquests (in which investigations have been concluded) between 1 October 2020 and 30 September 2021. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, inquests are yet to be held into the deaths of 39 regular or reservist personnel, 11 veterans and four MOD civilians that occurred since 1 October 2020.
- In relation to Northern Ireland legacy inquests, the pandemic has also prevented inquests being heard as planned. Work is now continuing on delayed cases: of the 10 inquests listed for 2020, findings have been delivered in one and the hearings for another have been completed.

Family life

Families play a vital role as members of the Armed Forces Community. The support that families provide to the Service person helps to ensure they are ready to carry out their role to the best of their ability. It is therefore right that Service families are adequately supported through the unique experiences and challenges that Service life can bring.

- Building on the independent Selous report on the needs of Armed Forces families, the MOD has devised a new UK Armed Forces Families Strategy for 2022-2032. The strategy will provide a framework that reflects modern and diverse family needs and encourages recruitment to and retention in service. The strategy will be underpinned by an action plan organised around eight workstreams: family life, Service life, family home, children's education, childcare, non-UK families, supporting partners and health and wellbeing.
- A further two wraparound childcare pilot sites went live in January 2021 at Plymouth and Catterick Garrison, joining the initial pilot site centred at RAF High Wycombe and RAF Halton. The purpose is to test whether and how the wraparound childcare initiative can be rolled out fully across the UK. To date, almost 1,000 eligible Service children have had their childcare costs met across the three pilot sites.
- The new Early Learning Childcare Fund was launched in late 2020. During the reporting period, the fund provided £1.5 million of grants to 42 early learning and childcare settings across the UK, benefiting almost 1,000 Service children.
- The Partner Career Support Programme pilot ran from November 2020 to May 2021. It provided bespoke, professional career support to almost 600 Service partners and spouses across the UK and overseas. The MOD is currently evaluating the pilot with a view to next steps.

- The Military Co-Working Hubs project – a community of Service spouses and partners working together to create a network of co-working spaces on military bases – has been awarded funding from the Covenant Fund Trust to support its expansion.
- The Welsh and Scottish Governments, working with Business in the Community, have produced a Capitalising on Military Family Talent Toolkit. The Welsh Government has also updated its ‘Welcome to Wales’ guide for Service families.



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

Transition and through-life support

When the time comes, a successful transition out of the Armed Forces and back into civilian life can make all the difference to the life experiences of Service personnel and their families. The MOD provides an array of resettlement, transition and welfare services to Service leavers and their families.

- The Career Transition Partnership is offered to all regular Service leavers and continued to deliver its services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Defence Transition Services exists to support those Service leavers and family members who face the greatest barriers to a successful transition. To date, Defence Transition Services has received referrals for over 1,200 Service leavers, veterans and family members.
- The Joint Service Housing Advice Office is being moved from Army Regional Command into the Veterans UK organisation, reflecting its critical role in supporting transition.
- The Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans (IPC4V) Scheme was reviewed in summer 2021, with 20 recommendations made to reinforce the life-changing support it offers.

In addition, here is some of the work the Government has done this year to provide further support to veterans beyond transition.

- The Veterans Railcard went on sale in October 2020 and offers discounted rail fares to all ex-Service personnel. As of October 2021, over 32,000 railcards have been sold.

- A five-year grant worth £710,000 was given to Cobseo, the confederation of Service charities, to sustain its initiatives to improve collaboration across the Service charity sector.
- The MOD and the Home Office ran a joint consultation from May to July 2021 on the issue of waiving settlement fees for certain non-UK national members of the Armed Forces and their families. The Government will publish its response in due course.



Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Leo Docherty MP, at the unveiling of the Gurkha Memorial in Aldershot on 25 September 2021.

Business, employment and the community

The Armed Forces Covenant is one of Defence's key tools for supporting engagement between the Armed Forces Community and wider civilian society, and for encouraging organisations to support the Armed Forces Community.

Here is an update on Covenant engagement with the private and public sectors and society this year, as well as on initiatives aimed at supporting the employment of the Armed Forces Community.

- More than 7,000 organisations have now signed the Armed Forces Covenant.
- In July 2021, a further 140 organisations were awarded gold in the Defence Employers Recognition Scheme, bringing the total number of gold award holders to 493.
- The Department for Work and Pensions has introduced 11 new Armed Forces Champion Leads to oversee the 50 Armed Forces Champions working across the Jobcentre Plus network.
- The Department for Work and Pensions has introduced a question on the Universal Credit system, asking people whether they have served, or are currently serving, in the UK Armed Forces.
- The UK Government has introduced a National Insurance holiday for employers of veterans in their first year of civilian employment.
- The MOD and the OVA have developed an industry sector guide showcasing the Civil Service as a 'great place to work' for Service leavers. The Civil Service 'veterans confident employment initiative' pilot scheme has also been introduced.

- The Scottish Government has made £1 million available to create the Armed Forces Third Sector Resilience Fund, which provides direct financial relief to third sector organisations that support the Armed Forces Community in Scotland.
- The Welsh Government continues to fund eight Armed Forces Liaison Officer posts working on a regional basis across Wales with local authorities and organisations. £275,000 of funding per year will enable the officers to continue in their roles until 2023.



Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Leo Docherty MP, signing the Armed Forces Covenant alongside a representative from L3Harris at the Defence and Security Equipment International Exhibition in London on 14 September 2021.

Research and data

Underpinning effective policymaking, research and data are key to improving our understanding of the needs of the Armed Forces Community, how effectively those needs are being met at present and where any gaps in provision might exist.

- For the first time, the 2021 Census in England and Wales asked respondents whether they had previously served in the UK Armed Forces. The OVA has been working with the Office for National Statistics to look at how the anonymised data provided by the Census can be used to better understand the nature and needs of the veteran population in England and Wales.
- The 2022 Census in Scotland will also ask respondents whether they have previously served in the UK Armed Forces. The Scottish Government intends to include the same veteran question from the Census in other relevant surveys in the future.
- In September 2021, the OVA and the Office for National Statistics announced a new method for monitoring health conditions and the frequency of suicide in the veteran community in England and Wales.
- The Treasury is providing up to £475,000 to Service charities in 2021/22 to support the development of a digital and data strategy for the sector.

Next year

Looking ahead, the next reporting period (October 2021 to September 2022) will see three key actions.

- The new Covenant Duty, contained in the Armed Forces Act 2021, will come into force. The duty will require certain public bodies to pay due regard to the principles of the Covenant when exercising specific functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. This will help to raise awareness of the issues the Armed Forces Community can face and lead to better outcomes for Service personnel, veterans and their families.
- The delivery and initial implementation of the new Armed Forces Families Strategy will provide a framework that reflects modern and diverse family needs and encourages recruitment to and retention in service.
- The initial implementation of the OVA's new 2022-24 Action Plan for delivering the Strategy for our Veterans sets out the ambitious commitments that the Government will deliver to support veterans over the coming years. These include bolstering research and data work, adapting and modernising services for veterans, and working to ensure that veterans feel supported and celebrated for their service.

Useful information

To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant and what it means for you, please visit armedforcescovenant.gov.uk

To find out more about the Strategy for our Veterans, please visit gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-veterans-affairs

If you believe you are being disadvantaged for being a member of the Armed Forces Community, please contact your Families Federation (details below) or the MOD Covenant team by emailing covenant-mailbox@mod.gov.uk

If you want to contact the Office for Veterans' Affairs, please email veterans@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Armed Forces healthcare in England:
nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare

Veteran-friendly GP practices:
elearning.rcgp.org.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=12533&chapterid=285

Veterans NHS Wales: veteranswales.co.uk

Forces Help to Buy Scheme:
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 Service personnel overseas:
gov.uk/guidance/national-insurance-credits-for-partners-of-armed-forces-personnel-overseas

The Service Children's Progression Alliance:
<https://www.scipalliance.org/>

Veterans' Gateway: veteransgateway.org.uk

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

Veterans Work: veteranswork.org.uk

Veteran support in Scotland:
gov.scot/policies/veterans-and-armed-forces/

Veteran support in Wales: gov.wales/armed-forces-and-veterans

Financial top tips: 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

The Confederation of Service Charities: cobseo.org.uk

The 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

