

## Supporting Our Veterans: A Consultation

Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment on the Supporting Our Veterans Consultation. We have submitted our response as a single document below, following the Consultation chapters and questions where relevant.

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) was founded in 2011 to improve transition to civilian life for Service leavers and their families. Our mission is to enable successful and sustainable transition to civilian life, and the Trust's strategy is to provide an evidence base that will influence and underpin effective policy making and practice. Our responses are therefore informed by the research we have funded, and we have included links to the specific reports where applicable. If you would like to discuss any of our responses or find out more about the research referenced, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

### Part One: Transforming services for veterans

#### Chapter 1: Housing

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following studies.

- Roadmap to End Veterans' Homelessness, University of York, 2024 – awaiting publication. An embargoed copy has been provided to the OVA.
- [Working Together to Meet the Housing Needs of Ex-Service Personnel, University of Stirling, 2020](#)
- [A Decade of the Covenant, Shared Intelligence, 2022](#)

Whilst the number of veterans who experience homelessness is relatively small, the consequences on their health, wellbeing and life chances are significant. Having access to stable housing is a key factor in making a successful transition out of the Armed Forces.

Research on this topic has indicated that there are specific issues and barriers that can increase the risk of veteran homelessness. Below we have focused on the barriers to successful housing outcomes and the support needs of veterans at risk of homelessness.

#### Barriers

- **Complex systems of veteran support**
  - There is a general lack of awareness of the housing support available to veterans and there are challenges navigating complex civilian housing systems without receiving additional support. This is exacerbated by inconsistent processes and systems across local authorities and differing legal and service frameworks around homelessness and social housing systems in devolved nations.
  - The complexity of the housing system which includes statutory provision alongside charity support from large and small organisations, makes it difficult for veterans to know where to access support and the lack of coordination can lead to trauma with veterans having to repeat their experiences multiple times.
  - Whilst veteran-specific accommodation is available in most parts of the UK, there is a postcode lottery which can be detrimental to veterans trying to establish permanent and secure housing.

- **Local authority support and access to social housing.**
  - Whilst there are many examples of good practice by local authorities supporting veterans, advice services and housing option teams in local authorities can have little knowledge or understanding of the specific challenges facing veterans when they are seeking housing support.
  - There are differences in practices around the local connection rule and there have been cases where social housing staff do not apply the correct policies. Due to the high turnover of staff in social housing teams, it can be difficult to ensure that all staff are trained or made aware of the potential disadvantage and policies in place to address it.
  - There is a lack of understanding by veterans themselves about their rights and legitimate expectations of service providers.
  - The shortage of one bed social housing units creates a particular disadvantage for women veterans as many single housing accommodation units are for men.
  
- **Insufficient and inconsistent in-service information.**
  - MOD support and policy around transition and housing has improved but engagement with briefings and advice tends to come during resettlement which is too late for many. This can result in an 'information overload' with emphasis on attendance at briefings rather than making the information freely available in multiple formats.
  - In-Service advice is too generic and insufficiently tailored to the specific circumstances and best options for tenure and affordability.
  - Failings in policy implementation in-service has resulted in some personnel, particularly those discharged at speed, not receiving adequate housing information and advice.
  
- **Specific rules under the Forces Help to Buy Scheme (FHTB)**
  - Whilst the FHTB scheme is generally viewed as a positive initiative, the application of some rules can undermine home ownership and future planning which can impact housing outcomes for veterans.
  - The challenges experienced are often due to lack of flexibility during relocations with personnel having to sell properties to access military accommodation, having to ask permission to rent their property, and being unable to access military accommodation if their house is within 50 miles of a posting but it is already rented out.
  - Issues can also arise as a result of the repayment rules. Veterans who are medically discharged, for example, may have to pay the full outstanding loan in the form of a lump sum from their final settlement or pay and this can leave them in a precarious financial position.

### **Support needs**

There are specific demographics and support needs of veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These include:

- Veterans discharged at speed, such as early Service leavers and those medically discharged.
- Families are also increasingly vulnerable to housing precarity as costs rise and social housing continues to be unavailable.

- Veterans with complex needs such as substance misuse and mental health difficulties. Long waiting times for access to mental health services can exacerbate and reduce the chances of successful housing outcomes.
- Similar to the needs of civilians, veterans experiencing poverty, debt and long-term unemployment. Debt and money issues are often related to not knowing how to budget or pay bills and rent.
- Women veterans who have experienced interpersonal violence or military sexual trauma may be at a heightened risk of homelessness and housing exclusion.

### **What more could the Government do to enable veterans to secure housing?**

The Roadmap to End Veterans' Homelessness includes 86 recommendations. It is designed to provide an integrated strategy or 'roadmap' and prescribe an action plan to address veterans' homelessness in the UK. It is suggested that the OVA work with other government departments to take forward the recommendations. However, the overarching issues that need to be addressed include:

- Ensuring that there is a single UK homelessness strategy for veterans, drawing on best practice, with specialist delivery teams.
- Joint working across veteran charities, the OVA and MOD to deliver Covenant commitments, support best practice, shared learning, and shared risk.
- Longer-term funding to underpin veteran homelessness and prevention strategies.
- Addressing the inconsistent application of policy and guidance across units and chain of command.
- Ensuring that welfare and life skills are seen as part of the offer so that personnel receive the right support at the right time, delivered by the most appropriate people, including civilian specialists.

### **Chapter 2: Employment**

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following studies.

- [Longer-Term Employment Outcomes of Ex-Service Personnel, QinetiQ, 2021](#)
- [Benefit not Burden, Shared Intelligence, 2019](#)

The majority of veterans make a successful transition into civilian employment. However, some struggle and this can result in veterans' underemployment and businesses missing out on veterans' skills and experience.

In 2023, FiMT responded to the OVA's consultation on the Career Development fund and our response remains relevant to the questions set out in the Veterans' Consultation. In particular, the findings from our comprehensive study on the longer-term employment outcomes for ex-Service personnel provides useful insight. It found that, whilst most veterans maintain employment overtime, this can involve numerous jobs and periods of unemployment and not all were satisfied with their civilian job or careers. Less than half felt that they had found the 'right job' for them and 43% felt that their job did not meet their expectations in terms of maximising their potential.

### **Employment barriers**

There are several barriers that exist for veterans when trying to obtain successful employment which need to be addressed. These include:

- A lack of relevant qualifications and experiences and problems translating skills.
- Being at a disadvantage due to a civilian hiring process not inclined to recognise Service personnel skills and some employers' perceptions of veterans.
- A lack of more coordinated support from the Armed Forces and employers to ease the transition into the civilian labour market.
- Physical and mental health challenges.
- Poor cultural fit in civilian organisations.
- Discrimination by civilian employers due to age and military status.

### **In-service employment support**

In general, the Armed Forces equips personnel with a strong set of skills and there is a significant amount of employment support provided to personnel via the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP). However, current resettlement support is not meeting the needs of all and there are areas where personnel would benefit from further support. This includes:

- Support to develop business skills such as commercial, marketing and financial skills.
- Support tailored to individual circumstances and needs, as well as information on specific industries.
- Support to encourage realistic expectations of the civilian labour market and career opportunities.
- Information and advice delivered directly by civilian employers.

### **What more could be done to prepare veterans to secure employment?**

The longer-term employment report sets out several recommendations to improve employment outcomes for veterans during service, resettlement and longer-term support. These include:

- The OVA working with the MOD and professional membership bodies to produce a qualifications matrix to align civilian and military qualifications. Once created, initiatives should be implemented to encourage the Armed Forces and employers to utilise it.
- Making civilian work placements available to all personnel.
- Individual and tailored support during resettlement. This should include particular cohorts such as those medically discharged, women and ethnic minorities.
- Introductory modules on commercial, marketing and financial skills as part of the resettlement package.
- The OVA continuing to monitor employment rates in the longer term, including 'soft' employment outcomes such as satisfaction levels.

In addition, the government should mobilise trade associations, membership bodies, local government associations across the devolved nations, and local chambers of commerce to raise awareness of the value of veterans to businesses and organisations. The [Military Chamber Network](#)

is a good example of an initiative to promote the value of the veteran community and the Armed Forces Covenant to business.

### Chapter 3: Health

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following studies.

- [Lives in Transition, UCLAN, 2022](#)
- [Where are all the Veterans? Increasing Veteran Registration in Primary Healthcare, University of Chester 2022](#)
- [The mental health needs of serving and ex-serving personnel: A systematic review, NatCen, 2020](#)
- [Stigma and barriers to care in Service leavers with mental health problems, KCMHR, 2017](#)
- [Development of an intervention for moral injury-related mental health difficulties in UK military veterans, KCMHR, 2023](#)
- [Experiences of moral injury in UK military veterans, KCMHR, 2020](#)

#### Barriers to accessing and providing health support

- **Inconsistency, variability and uncertainty.** While significant support is available to Service personnel and veterans, there is variability, inconsistency and uncertainty in the support available. In this section we focus on the support available post-service but it is important to note that the inconsistencies during the medical discharge, recovery and resettlement process (covered in the Welfare section) can impact on the ability to prepare for civilian life and can have devastating consequences for veterans such as mental health difficulties and experiences of homelessness.
- **Confusing support landscape.** Veterans can struggle with what they perceive to be a confusing landscape of support organisations and have difficulty understanding which organisation is most suited to their needs or whether they are eligible.
- **Transfer of medical records.** Challenges remain with the transfer of medical records from the MOD to the NHS, GPs and dentists which can impact on the care provided to veterans. Whilst many experience a seamless process, there are difficulties experienced when the transfer of records are delayed and uncertainties as to who is responsible for providing care, and the cost of that care. It is unclear when Programme Cortisone will be fully developed.
- **Lack of knowledge or expertise of veterans' specific issues.** There is a lack of understanding among frontline NHS staff about the Covenant and health issues associated with service. This includes a lack of experience by health care professionals in treating conditions that arise from service.
- **Issues identifying veterans.** There are several challenges that prevent veterans from being identified as veterans within civilian healthcare systems. This includes a lack of knowledge on the importance and benefits of recording veteran status.
- **Lack of data on health care needs.** There is a lack of data on the health care needs of veterans which can impact on the awareness of their needs by civilian healthcare staff and the support available for veterans.

### Improvements to health support

- Longer-term support should be available for veterans who leave service with a physical injury or condition, providing a continuity of physical care received in the Armed Forces and cogniscent also of the mental health impact of physical injury, to ensure that they do not fall through the cracks or to support those whose condition may become more serious over time.
- The delays in the transfer of medical records needs to be addressed through the implementation of Programme Cortisone as soon as possible.
- Better identification of veterans in primary and secondary health care. A good example of how this could be done is provided by a team at the University of Chester who, via a targeted campaign, significantly improved veteran registration in primary healthcare. The subsequent report sets out a series of recommendations for GP practices to improve their own veteran registration and care.

### Mental health

There has been a significant amount of progress made in the understanding of the mental health needs of veterans and the support available, particularly via initiatives such as Op COURAGE. However, veterans can face disadvantage due to continuing mental health needs as a result of their service. Common mental disorders (CMDs) such as depressive and anxiety disorders continue to be the most prevalent mental health conditions, but veterans can also suffer from other mental health conditions such as PTSD and complex PTSD as well as alcohol and substance misuse and issues that can contribute to poorer mental health outcomes such as service-related [moral injury](#).

### Barriers to mental health support

- **Lack of effective treatment** for some veterans who have mental health difficulties due to service that are resistant to current treatment options.
- **Lack of acknowledgment of mental health problems.** The decision to seek support is primarily due to the perceived need for treatment. Those not seeking help often fail to identify problems as 'mental health disorders' as they have not yet reached crisis point.
- **Negative beliefs about the efficacy of treatment.** Once in treatment, positive beliefs about the efficacy of treatment can have a substantial impact on veterans continuing with treatment.
- **Eligibility concerns.**
- **Waiting lists.**
- **Stigma.** Stigma is not the most common barrier to seeking mental health support, but it is a barrier for some.

### Improving mental health support

- Investment is needed to continue funding innovative treatments for veterans, particularly for mental health difficulties related to their time in service. FiMT has funded several studies under our Mental Health Research Programme which seeks to understand more about the types of mental health challenges and how they impact on veterans, as well as funding pilot studies and evaluations of new treatments for veterans and interventions to help identify mental health concerns early on. This has included funding the first comprehensive study of

moral injury in the UK Armed Forces Community to understand more about the previously unknown concept and its impact on veterans' mental health and wellbeing. The research found that veterans suffering from moral injury or traumatic events are more likely to meet the criteria for PTSD, depression, and anxiety. We have therefore gone on to fund a new measure to help clinicians to assess moral injury and we are currently funding a phase two feasibility pilot to assess the feasibility and acceptability of a new clinical treatment for moral injury. If successful, this will provide a treatment option for veterans with service-related moral injury.

- Greater awareness of the mental health needs of veterans by healthcare staff as well as the promotion of new interventions that may help to support veterans.
- Earlier identification of at-risk individuals and early intervention to prevent escalation of mental health problems.
- Greater connectivity and synergy between Armed Forces and civilian health services.

#### **Chapter 4: Finance and Welfare**

Our response to this chapter focuses on the current compensation schemes and benefits systems available to veterans who leave the Armed Forces with a medical illness or condition. We have included additional detail on the financial barriers experienced by personnel, veterans and their families in later chapters, in particular chapters 7 and 11, but it should be acknowledged that the issues discussed in this chapter can be exacerbated by the service-related financial challenges experienced by the Armed Forces community.

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following studies.

- [Lives in Transition, UCLAN, 2022](#)
- [Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers, University of Salford, 2019](#). A follow-on study is currently underway to examine the experiences of veterans and their families accessing the benefits system. It is due to report in early 2024.
- Roadmap to End Veterans' Homelessness, University of York, 2024 – awaiting publication

#### **Armed Forces compensation and pensions**

The financial support available to veterans who leave service with a physical injury or condition is often viewed positively. However, there are concerns regarding the complexity of the various Armed Forces payments and schemes, the waiting period, and the uncertainty in relation to the award amount. Many veterans find the processes stressful and often require support from charities to understand the technicalities for their compensation and/or pension. Issues include:

- Difficulties understanding eligibility and how to navigate aspects of the military compensation systems.
- Confusion by both veterans and organisations as to whether Armed Forces payments should be disregarded in means tests for civilian benefits and which payment and benefits the disregards relate to.
- Problems accessing final settlement payments which can impact on veterans' ability to secure civilian housing.

#### **Civilian benefits system**

Despite the recent commitments and initiatives introduced by the DWP to improve support to veterans who access the UK benefits system, a number of difficulties remain. These include:

- Veterans finding the system complex and difficult to navigate, struggling to comprehend the benefits that are available, their eligibility and how to apply or manage claims.
- Significant concerns around how service-related impairment is approached in welfare assessment processes, with service medical records and other relevant supporting medical information not routinely being included within the assessment process.
- Inconsistencies and variations in the support provided to veterans.

#### **What could be done to improve veterans' experiences of Armed Forces and civilian welfare schemes?**

- Reviewing the Armed Forces pension and compensation schemes to ensure that awards are determined in a timely manner and that decision making is transparent and clearly communications.
- Ensuring that information on eligibility and how to access benefits via the DWP are routinely and consistently provided to those leaving service and veterans and that they know how to access support from their local DWP Armed Forces Champion and Armed Forces Lead.
- Ensuring there is clear guidance on how Armed Forces compensation and payments are treated within Universal Credit and legacy benefits and that this is disseminated and understood by the relevant stakeholders.
- Reviewing the assessment process to ensure that DWP assessors are suitably qualified to assess mental and physical health issues related to service in the Armed Forces.
- Ensuring that Armed Forces background is consistently recorded by Jobcentre Plus to ensure appropriate tracking of the needs of individual veterans and their progress through the benefits system.

#### **Chapter 5: Justice**

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following studies.

- Ex-Service Personnel in the Criminal Justice System, Nacro, 2024 – awaiting publication
- [Ex-Armed Services Personnel: Journeys to Harmful Behaviour, Probation Institute, 2022](#)

The Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre has also recently published [research and policy summaries](#) on veterans in the justice system which may be useful.

A minority of Service leavers offend after leaving the Armed Forces and this can have significant and negative consequences for themselves and their families. It is important that veterans who may be at risk of offending or who have offended have access to support in order to prevent them from offending or reoffending. There are however multiple barriers to veterans accessing support in the justice system and opportunities for in-Service support, which could reduce the likelihood of offending in and after service, are being missed.

#### **Barriers to support in the justice system**

- Veterans are often reluctant to seek support before, during and after contact with the justice system. This is often due to pride, self-reliance and, to a lesser extent, shame.
- There are challenges identifying veterans in the system due to:



- A lack of information about why a veteran is being asked to disclose their veteran status and confusion over the implications of disclosing.
- The term 'veteran' is not commonly understood and some incorrectly believe it refers to long-term service or combat experience.
- There is a complex support landscape and a lack of awareness of the support available to veterans in the justice system. This is in part due to the considerable number of support pathways in prison and in the community.
- There are capacity issues for prison and probation staff which impact on their ability to routinely identify and support veterans.

### **Support during recruitment to the Armed Forces**

There is a well-documented association between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and later anti-social behaviour, violence, offending, self-harm, mental health issues and substance misuse. The Armed Forces is often seen as a chance to escape adversity and seek security for those who experience ACEs. It is therefore important that the Armed Forces is aware and support recruits who come from challenging backgrounds. It is recommended that:

- Trauma informed interventions are applied where possible, particularly when working with young recruits.
- Staff involved in recruitment and training should be trained on ACEs and be aware of the long-term effects of trauma throughout a military career.
- Vulnerable individuals should be identified at recruitment and their wellbeing should be monitored. It may be necessary to provide additional support during key stages of risk such as deployment and attention should be paid to certain cultures and practices during basic training that may retraumatise individuals.

### **What more could be done to better support veterans in the justice system?**

- **Improve the identification of veterans:**
  - Ensuring that a rationale is including why asking someone if they have served in the Armed Forces.
  - Ensuring that justice social work and probation staff consistently ask and record whether someone is a veteran.
  - Automated processes for referral following identification.
- **Address the barriers to support:**
  - Engagement strategies to maintain contact with veterans who may be at risk of offending.
  - Veteran-specific training to all staff who work with veterans in the justice system.
  - Developing a database of information on third sector organisations that provide support to veterans in the justice system.
  - Continuing the work already underway to ensure representation of veterans such as Armed Forces Champions as well as expanding and ringfencing resources for VICSO, making them a full-time paid position.

### **Chapter 6: Veterans and the Armed Forces Covenant**

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following study.

- [A Decade of the Covenant, Shared Intelligence, 2022](#) – this report includes many examples of good practice in delivering the Covenant. This includes examples of reducing disadvantage as well as cases where special consideration was deemed appropriate. In addition, the report includes an updated core infrastructure and toolkit to help local authorities and service providers to improve and assess their delivery of the Covenant.

Through the delivery of the Covenant, steps have been taken to address many of the drivers of disadvantage experienced by the Armed Forces community. However, disadvantage remains for both the serving and veteran communities. Regarding veterans' experience of disadvantage, this is primarily due to a lack of awareness of the Covenant and the potential disadvantage experienced by veterans by civilian organisations such as front-line staff working for housing providers, local authorities and healthcare services.

There are also barriers to delivering the Covenant with local authorities being under increasing financial pressure and councils increasingly reporting that they are unable to afford a dedicated Covenant officer with posting dependent on securing external funding. Some councils are pooling resources and working together to deliver the Covenant.

#### **What can the government do to improve delivery of the Covenant?**

In order for the Covenant to be a useful tool to reduce disadvantage it is recommended that:

- Efforts are made to increase awareness of civilian organisations of the Armed Forces Covenant and the potential disadvantage faced by veterans.
- There is better communication of the Covenant to veterans to enable them to understand the Covenant and what it can and cannot do to address disadvantage in relation to public services.

Due to the nature of the Covenant, it has been difficult to assess its impact in reducing disadvantage. To help assess the impact across the UK, it is recommended that:

- The OVA to play a central role in setting and coordinating data collection and impact measurement approaches across government.
- The Government utilise independent assessments of Covenant delivery, such as those funded by FiMT, in order to drive continuous improvement in delivery.

#### **Equalities**

We are currently funding a number of projects to examine the experiences and needs of veterans who hold protected characteristics, as well as helping organisations to demonstrate their commitment to supporting LGBT+ veterans. This includes:

- [Identifying and examining the barriers to female veterans making a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life in the UK](#)
- [Understanding the impact of serving within the UK Armed Forces for the Indian and West Indian veteran populations](#)
- [Pride in Veterans Standard – Early Intervention for LGBT+ Veterans](#)

## Part two: Understanding our veteran community

### Chapter 7: Post Service Life Skills

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following studies.

- [Improving Life Skills in the UK Armed Forces, QinetiQ, 2023](#)
- [Understanding and supporting the financial stability of UK military families, RAND Europe, 2023](#)
- Roadmap to End Veterans' Homelessness, University of York, 2024 – awaiting publication.

Having a strong set of life skills is crucial for a successful transition out of the Armed Forces and most personnel and partners leave with a good level of life skills. However, some struggle and require additional support to help them to develop the skills needed to cope with the demands and challenges of civilian life. Those most at risk include those lower in rank, younger in age who have not had the chance to develop their skills or had less life skills when they joined the military. Whilst life skills support is available in-service, the provision of support and advice through-career is inconsistent and needs regular evaluation to ensure it evolves progressively and effectively.

#### Improving life skills support

The above life skills report provides a comprehensive overview of the current deficit of life skills in the Armed Forces Community. It also provides several frameworks on what life skills are as well as how to measure the maturity and effectiveness of life skills interventions. The report provides a series of recommendations to improve life skills including:

- Further support in the following areas: applying for jobs, work-life balance, the management of learning, networking and digital skills.
- Additional support with mental wellbeing and the emotional/psychological adjustment to civilian life.
- The adoption of a risk-based model to understand who is most likely to need life skills support and more explicit instruction, such as practical or classroom-based support, for those most in need.

#### Improving financial skills

There are concerns about the level of financial literacy and management knowledge amongst the Armed Forces community and poor financial management in service can manifest post service. This is often due to the unique aspects of service life such as subsidised housing and education which means that some are unprepared for the realities of civilian life such as paying bills, council tax and rent and they can struggle to assess how much disposal income they will have. There is a need to strengthen the upstream interventions to address financial literacy. This should include:

- Career-long financial information which is initiated early and embedded into existing training structures.
- Focusing education and training on financial management aspects that reflect the unique nature of service life.
- Helping to set realistic expectations of civilian costs and salaries.

## Chapter 8: Veteran Identity

We have covered the perceptions of veterans, discrimination, and disadvantage in our responses to other chapters including chapters on the recognition of veterans and the Armed Forces Covenant.

## Chapter 9: Non-UK Veterans

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following study.

- Understanding and improving Non-UK service and transition in the British Armed Forces – awaiting publication, expected early 2024

### Immigration

Immigration related issues are one of the most common challenges experienced by Non-UK veterans. Whilst information and support has improved, they can face several barriers and challenges which can leave them unprepared for the complex and expensive immigration process. These include:

- **Gaps in information from official channels.** This can leave Non-UK personnel feeling uninformed and supplementary advice is needed to be sought from informal networks and charities. Incorrect or partial information can also result in failed applications, unnecessary costs as well as being an additional stress and burden. It can also result in personnel being discharged without leave to remain which can lead to them becoming an 'over-stayer'.

### Support needs

- **Accessing healthcare.** Non-UK veterans who return to their country of origin can struggle to access adequate healthcare for service-related mental and physical health problems, which can leave them at a disadvantage.
- **Homelessness.** Non-UK veterans may be at an increased risk of homelessness due to the level of debt among this group.
- **Employment opportunities.** Not having UK nationality is perceived to be detrimental to career advancement in service by limiting deployment and promotion opportunities. A lack of career opportunities can also impact on the ability of Non-UK personnel to meet the Minimum Income Requirement (which is due to increase further) to bring family over to the UK and limit the ability to save for visa costs and civilian housing.

### Improving support for Non-UK personnel and veterans

It is recommended that:

- **More expertise is made available to Non-UK personnel and veterans.** This could be a role within welfare for someone with the specific experience and knowledge required or a neutral third party to which personnel or veterans could be signposted to.
- **Citizenship fees are waived or reduced.** Fees have disproportionately increased in relation to income. While the Government's consultation on the indefinite leave to remain (ILR) fee waiver was welcome in helping to recognise the contribution and sacrifice of Non-UK personnel, it has not benefited the majority of Non-UK personnel and veterans. Most Non-UK personnel tend to apply for citizenship and ILR is seen as irrelevant to many.

- **Fees for partners and dependants are waived or reduced.** Immigration fees are substantial and can include fees for visas, citizenships, English Language and Life in the UK tests, biometric cards and travel costs to and from testing and processing centres.

#### **Chapter 10: Groups within the veteran population**

Some groups remain under-represented in veteran research and in veteran services and so their needs are relatively unknown. We are currently funding a number of research projects to help increase the collective knowledge and to inform policy development. This includes:

- [Identifying and examining the barriers to female veterans making a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life in the UK](#)
- [Understanding the impact of serving within the UK Armed Forces for the Indian and West Indian veteran populations](#)

We have also submitted responses to the government's consultations on women in the Armed Forces. These can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#).

#### **Chapter 11: Veterans' Families**

The evidence in this section has been generated by the following studies:

- [Living in Our Shoes, MOD, 2020](#)
- [You're in Your Own Time Now: Understanding Current Experiences of Transition to Civilian Life in Scotland, University of Edinburgh, 2023](#)
- [Lifting the lid on transition, Naval, Army and RAF Families Federations, 2018](#)
- UK Veteran Families Study – awaiting publication, due early 2024.

#### **Impact of service on families**

While there are some benefits to service life for families, there are unique challenges that can stem from service and can result in veteran families being at a disadvantage. The Living in Our Shoes report comprehensively sets out the disadvantage experienced by Armed Forces families and other research has also found issues that can be detrimental to families including:

- **The inability to financially plan** for the future due to the unpredictability of service life.
- **Barriers to spousal employment** due to frequent moves in service, the serving partner working long and unpredictable hours, qualifications not being recognised across the devolved nations, high childcare costs and separation from family members who could provide childcare support, and the reluctance of some employers to hire military partners.
- **Additional financial costs** such as out of pocket expenses for relocation, additional costs of overseas postings and the cost of running two households if couples are separated.
- **Negatively impacting children** through disruptions to education and access to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support during in-service relocations as well as having an impact on children's wellbeing during parental deployment.

#### **Barriers to support for families**

The transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life can be significant for families. Although the majority of families make a successful transition, the most common transition problems reported by partners during transition are mental health difficulties, financial difficulties, and family problems. However, barriers remain to accessing support. These include:

- A lack of awareness of the support that is available for families.
- Confusion over the scope and eligibility of the support available.
- Structural barriers to support such as security issues in Northern Ireland and a lack of services for Armed Forces families in Scotland.
- Stigma associated with help-seeking.

### **What more could be done to support families during and after transition?**

There remains a lack of engagement with, acknowledgement for, and support provided to families during and after service.

The issues highlighted in the Living in Our Shoes report regarding families returning to civilian life remain and the recommendations for the MOD transition and resettlement pathways to always include family members and for a joined-up, consistent and seamless transition and resettlement process for Service leavers *and* their partners should be taken forward. This should be alongside action to take forward the other recommendations in the report that have been accepted by government, but no progress made.

In addition, it is recommended that:

- The military offer and transition support should be viewed from a holistic family perspective.
- Families are not viewed as an add on or after thought to veteran support and there is direct communication of support to families rather than via the veteran or serving family member.
- Consideration should be given to how best to engage with families.
- There is a recognition of partners qualifications when moving between the devolved nations.
- There is an increased awareness and identification of the needs of families to providers such as NHS Trusts and local authorities.
- There is increased support for families at risk of poorer outcomes on transition. This includes those whose partners are discharged at speed, single partners and those working in lower skilled occupations or who are economically inactive.
- There is support to improve the financial literacy of military personnel and families.

## **Chapter 13: Data collection and statistics**

### **Census**

FiMT welcomes the inclusion of a veteran question in the ONS census and the subsequent analyses of census data on veterans. We believe that better data on ex-Service personnel and their families is one of the key requirements for identifying, understanding and meeting the needs of the ex-Service community.

### **How can the government improve the collection or recording of data?**

We welcome the Government's commitment, expressed in the Strategy for our Veterans and in the OVA's Data and Research Strategy, to ensuring that improvements are made in the collection and recording of data. The recognition that collaboration and coordination is required across all the organisations, in government, the charity sector and beyond is central to this. We know that it is not easy to achieve and will require time, commitment and financial resource to deliver the changes needed in the collection and sharing of data.

While there are no quick answers to the question of how to improve data integration to help reduce the burden for veterans, we encourage the OVA to use its position within the Cabinet Office to:

- Help leverage changes in other Government departments so that the use of a veteran marker is introduced more widely in public service provision.
- Ensure that there is dedicated investment in IT infrastructure to enable better data sharing within the Armed Forces charity sector and reduce the number of times individuals have to repeat their stories.

Although there is a long way to go significant progress has occurred in recent years which demonstrates the value of concerted efforts. One such example is the outcome of FiMT's funding of research by the University of Salford on 'Sanctions, Support and Service leavers, social security benefits and transition from military to civilian life' which resulted in the introduction of a new Armed Forces 'marker' to identify veterans accessing Universal Credit. This allows those veterans claiming benefits to have access to staff in Job Centres who are aware of what it means to have served in the Armed Forces and able to provide tailored support.

We would also like to highlight the work being carried out by Northumbria University's Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families. This year we made a grant award to improve the collection of data on veterans who use charity health and care services to better understand their unique needs and support. The Map of Need Aggregated Research (MONARCH) study is also co-funded by Northumbria University and the Armed Forces Covenant Trust fund and will bring together data from multiple sources to develop a strategic public observation tool of veterans need. We refer to this now because it provides an example of the potential that exists for developing more integrated data that can be used to understand and meet need and to assist resource planning. It also demonstrates the scale of time and resource that will be required if the commitments set out in the Strategy for Our Veterans are to be met.

## **Chapter 14: Veterans government and advocacy**

### **Section 1: Government and Veterans**

We welcome the specific Governmental and Ministerial responsibilities that aim to ensure the interests of the ex-Forces community are represented. We are aware of, and have contributed to, the Government's annual report on the Armed Forces Covenant. We recognise its value, but also its limitations as it is more of a report on Covenant-related activities than an annual update on impact and the difference the Covenant has made in practice.

### **Section 2: Veterans Commissioners**

Our view is that the independent status of the three Veterans Commissioners and the Independent Veterans Advisor to HM Government, provides an important mechanism for holding Government to account, most especially in the delivery of the Strategy for our Veterans, 2018-28 and associated action plans. The Commissioners have also helped to amplify the voices of the veteran community in the devolved nations and built trust in Northern Ireland, alongside the Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office. For this reason, we believe that the Veterans Commissioners should be independent, credible, and impartial individuals who are properly resourced and able to hold the Government to account when improvements are needed.

## Part Three: Recognising our veterans' contribution to society

### Chapter 16: Recognition of Veterans

#### Section 1: Promoting Positive Perceptions

On the question of whether veterans are valued by society, it is difficult to generalise about societal value across the whole of the UK because views vary across audiences and geography. The research on Perceptions of UK armed forces ex-service personnel conducted by You Gov in 2022 on behalf of the OVA shows that 'on the whole people do think that UK Armed Forces ex-Service personnel make valuable contributions to society', but they believe that they do not receive enough recognition from the Government.

FiMT welcomes the report conclusion that the findings from this research demonstrate a role for the OVA and wider government, together with the charity sector in countering public (mis)perceptions and inaccurate stereotypes. Tackling misperceptions is one of the ways of helping to ensure that ex-Service personnel and their families make a successful and sustainable transition from military to civilian life.

Our funding of the generation of knowledge and evidence on the issues that Service leavers and their families experience is integral to the work required to help address inaccurate and often outdated stereotypes. We therefore look forward to working with the OVA to help inform delivery of its strategy in this respect.

#### Chapter 17: The value Veterans bring to the workplace

Accurate awareness and understanding among employers of the value that veterans bring to society, and specifically to the workplace, is a critical aspect of improving the experience of transition from military to civilian life for ex-Service personnel and their families. Our vision is for all Service leavers seeking employment to be able to secure a satisfying job role which meets realistic expectations, provides fulfilment, and generates a sufficient source of income. We have provided information on how to improve employment outcomes in chapter two and [FiMT's Policy Statement on Employment](#) expands on our vision and highlights the issues and evidence that relate to veteran employment.

We have also published a set of Suggested Goals for 2030 which are based on consideration of the strategic outcomes included under each theme of the Strategy for Our Veterans. These are based on the foresights identified in the futures research report, [Lifting Our Sights: Beyond 2030 –the impact of future trends on the transition of our Armed Forces Community from military to civilian life](#) that we funded and published in 2021. We believe that the value that veterans bring to the workplace would be better understood and lead to more positive employment outcomes if the following goals were to be adopted and achieved:

- The MOD provides all Service leavers with comprehensive transition and life skills training.
- The MOD ensures all Armed Forces personnel have a minimum (set) standard level of STEM, technological and digital skills.
- The MOD (working with charities) offers every Service leaver and their spouse, access to a mentor through transition.



- The MOD offers members of the Armed Forces the ability to access civilian internships/placements.
- Career transition training and preparation takes a more localised approach reflecting local economy and business opportunities.