

Journeys to Harmful Behaviour

Knowledge Exchange
and Implementation
Project Report



Colophon

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Contents

Directors' Foreword	4
Executive Summary	5
Project Timeline	6
A Collaborative Approach	7
Six Strands of Activity	7
Key Achievements	9
Recommendations	10
Part One: Understanding the Challenge	
Background and Research Context	13
The Implementation Challenge	14
The Implementation Team	17
Part Two: What We Did	
Strand One: Building Training Capacity Across the Justice Sector	19
Training Currently Available	20
Strand Two: Recognising and Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences	22
Strand Three: Supporting Families at Risk	21
Strand Four: Confronting Harmful Aspects of Military Culture	24
Protective Factors & Risk Factors	25
Strand Five: Strengthening Coordination Across Justice Agencies	26
Strand Six: Creating Pathways Beyond Military Detention	28
Part Three: Moving Forward	
Our Learning	31
Recommendations for Action	32
The Path Ahead	34
Acknowledgments	36

Foreword

Working with Liverpool John Moores University, the Probation Institute conducted a major research project between 2018 and 2022 funded by the Forces in Mind Trust. The project "Journeys to Harmful Behaviour" sought to understand the histories leading to very harmful offences committed by a small group of individual ex armed services personnel. In seeking to understand these histories we were looking for patterns that could help us to suggest how such incidents could be prevented going forward. It is important to emphasise that such serious offences are rare.

The research findings have been written into a very full report and are also summarised in this implementation report. Suffice therefore to say in this foreword that the common thread in the lives of the fourteen individuals who shared their histories for the research was adverse childhood experiences leading to abuse of self by harmful substances and to abuse of others.

Since 2022, the research team has been working on aspects of implementation of the nine recommendations of the research report. In Autumn 2024, the Forces in Mind Trust agreed to fund a 6-month implementation project taking forward six strands of activity distilled from the nine recommendations.

This report is the account of our implementation project much of which was carried out through a wide range of discussions, and our suggestions for further actions in key areas.

We point to six areas for further work:

- Greater awareness of the severe challenges that new recruits may have faced and be seeking to leave behind
- Need for access to counselling and wider support for those struggling with the impact of military life on their behaviour or relationships
- Culture of excessive use of alcohol
- Culture in which female colleagues are sexualised or subject to unreasonable expectations
- The need for funded, supported pathways for individuals required to leave military service due to behavioural issues
- Increased training for the justice sector and wider caring agencies

We would like to express our thanks particularly to Forces in Mind Trust, the Office for Veterans' Affairs, the Cobseo Criminal Justice Cluster, the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Uniformed Public Services (CEEUPS) Anglia Ruskin University and to key personnel in the justice system and the armed services charities.



Helen Schofield

Probation Institute

October 2025

Executive Summary

From Research to Action

This report documents a knowledge mobilisation and implementation project undertaken between November 2024 and June 2025, intended to build upon the findings and recommendations of Ex-Armed Services Personnel: Journeys to Harmful Behaviour[1] (Murray et al., 2022). The original research examined the life histories of 14-veterans who had been convicted of serious violence or sexual violence through in-depth narrative interviews conducted between 2019 and 2022.

Life course analysis demonstrated that all participants encountered substantial childhood adversity prior to military service. Whilst the military environment provided protective factors such as accommodation security, economic stability, structured purpose and social inclusion, it also embedded individuals within cultures that normalised violence, promoted hypermasculinity and encouraged an elevated use of alcohol. Subsequent transitions to civilian life proved particularly precarious, as the loss of institutional protections coincided with amplified risks, often creating conditions conducive to harmful behaviour.

The research led to nine through-life recommendations. Following publication, impact acceleration work in 2023, supported by Liverpool John Moores University, adapted these into six thematic strands for continued stakeholder conversation. In autumn 2024, Forces in Mind Trust provided further funding for this six-month knowledge mobilisation and implementation project.

Rather than assuming the landscape was unchanged since publication, and knowing that recommendations are often difficult to action, the project team wanted to spend more time with key stakeholders across military, justice and third sectors. The aim was to hear from those positioned to enact change about where we might gain traction together and what aspirations for change that we shared. This exchange between research evidence and frontline experience revealed current opportunities and persistent barriers, whilst identifying areas requiring further research and collaborative effort.

[1] This report was led and published by the Probation Institute in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University and funded by Forces in Mind Trust.

Project Timeline

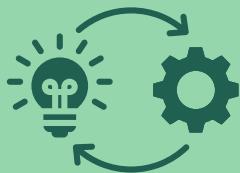
2019-2022



Research Phase

This stage explored how military service shaped the life course of justice-affected veterans convicted of serious offenses, examined the experiences of justice professionals supporting them, and incorporated stakeholder feedback to inform future priorities.

2023



First Implementation Phase

This next stage of the work involved the team working with cross-sector stakeholders to identify six priority areas based on research findings, which informed a funding proposal to FiMT for stage 2 knowledge mobilisation activities

2024-2025



Second Implementation Phase

Building on lessons from the first phase, the team engaged stakeholders from military, justice, and third sectors to identify actionable recommendations and shared priorities. This combined research evidence with frontline experience to reveal opportunities, barriers, and areas needing further research.

A Collaborative Approach

The team employed a knowledge exchange methodology premised on the principle that effective implementation demands genuine partnership between research, policy and practice and across sectors. Through action-learning workshops and targeted stakeholder meetings, collaborators and attendees were not recipients of research findings, but instead active co-creators of solutions. Engagement encompassed two structured action-learning workshops alongside strategic dialogue with the Office for Veterans' Affairs, HM Prison Service, Probation Service, Greater Manchester Police and relevant third sector organisations.

The Implementation Team

Three members of the original research led this follow-on work: Helen Schofield (Probation Institute), Dr Emma Murray (Anglia Ruskin University), and Breda Leyne (Cogito Developments). A Community of Experts drawn from the Office for Veterans' Affairs, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, Op NOVA, and armed services charities provided strategic guidance throughout.

Six Strands of Activity

The project organised implementation activities around six thematic strands of strategic priority:

-  **1 Learning Opportunities in the Justice Sector:** This strand addressed fragmented training provision through a knowledge exchange workshop (January 2025) bringing together organisations offering or accessing veteran-specific training. This work led to the Probation Institute expanding its website to host a broader range of learning materials and a bid to the Office for Veterans' Affairs to support the development of comprehensive training. In this strand, sustainable funding for training products and time for practitioners to engage were identified as critical needs cross-sectors. Modular e-learning products that were freely accessible to all justice sector roles were considered important next steps.
-  **2 Support for Personnel with Adverse Childhood Experiences:** This strand engaged in strategic conversations about the support needed for those who enlist with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in their background. The team wove consideration of childhood adversity throughout all project activities, exploring how pre-service vulnerability intersects with military culture and post-service transitions. Workshop attendees recognised that veterans face a dual complexity as pre-existing childhood adversity is compounded by distinctive impacts of military service, and that there was

a need for this to be understood by all involved in the sentencing process. The team are now keen to re-engage with the Ministry of Defence to explore how this work can support their efforts to consider ACEs in recruitment activities.

-  **3 Family Support Initiatives:** This strand brought together armed services charities and other agencies through a roundtable (March 2025) exploring gaps in provision. Participants identified that families often fall through gaps in support, particularly first families or those estranged from veterans at the point of sentence. The breakdown in families typically occurs before custody begins, yet early intervention opportunities remain largely undeveloped. The Centre of Excellence for Equity in Uniformed Public services (CEEUPS) at Anglia Ruskin University committed to hosting follow-up activities to advance collaborative working in this area.
-  **4 Addressing Negative Military Culture:** Underpinning all engagement activities, this strand aimed to capture recent developments in this area. All stakeholders who engaged with us acknowledged the complexity of military culture - recognising the military's capacity to provide identity, belonging and discipline - whilst also embedding risks through hypermasculinity, alcohol culture and problematic attitudes towards women for some. The Ministry of Defence's 'Raising our Standards' programme, provided a potential avenue for influence, though direct engagement with military leadership remained a significant challenge.
-  **5 Enhancing Justice Sector Contributions:** This strand brought together the experiences of those leading from policing, prisons and probation in separate and joint meetings with a focus on exploring current practices and coordination challenges. Our exchange centred on persistent data-sharing issues, regional variations in practice despite demonstrated appetite for national coordination, and inadequate training provision across agencies. Greater Manchester Police's quarterly forum bringing together police, prison, probation and third sector organisations emerged as promising practice worthy of documentation and potential replication.
-  **6 Strengthening Rehabilitation Pathways:** Here the project team engaged with the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) to learn more about their current practice. Engagement led to a better understanding of both the exemplary work being done and significant gaps in provision post-discharge. Individuals leaving MCTC detention after being discharged from service often receive no statutory supervision, particularly concerning for those convicted of sexual or violent offences falling below MAPPA thresholds. MCTC's staff provide considerable support and referrals to armed services charities, but no feedback mechanisms exist to know whether individuals engage with recommended services.

Key Achievements

Training



The project led to the bolstering of the Probation Institute website as a space to host expanded learning materials for justice sector professionals working with veterans. This freely accessible resource provides a central hub to signpost training opportunities from multiple organisations.

The team submitted a funding proposal to the Office for Veterans' Affairs for development of a comprehensive training programme for justice sector professionals, particularly focusing on raising awareness of serving personnel and veteran contexts at the point of sentencing. The outcome of this proposal will determine the next phase of activities in this critical area.

Further Research



This project also facilitated the initial planning of a 12-month participatory research project (funded by, CEEUPS, Anglia Ruskin University) led by Dr Emma Murray and Carrie Rogers (Veteran Policy Lead, HMPPS). Between November 2025 and November 2026, a new research project will employ a co-researcher model engaging six Veterans in Custody Support Officers (VICSOs) as equal research partners to examine the wellbeing support and training requirements necessary for effective implementation of recent HMPPS guidance. By positioning VICSOs as primary experts, this approach centre professional knowledge and lived experience to identify both systemic challenges and practitioner-informed solutions.

These actions emerged not as prescriptive solutions but as areas where stakeholders expressed both concern and readiness to explore change. The project invites those positioned to influence policy and practice to consider which areas align with current priorities and where collaborative effort might prove most productive.

Recommendations

Based on this work we make the following recommendations:



Training & Development

Training and development represents a foundational priority. The current fragmentation of training provision across the justice sector must be addressed through the development of modular, open-access learning opportunities relevant to all justice sector roles. This should encompass comprehensive training for judges, magistrates, solicitors, probation staff, and police personnel on veteran-specific needs and circumstances.



Cross-sector Policy Integration

Cross-sector policy integration requires sustained commitment to embedding trauma-informed approaches within military recruitment processes and examining military cultural factors, including hypermasculinity, attitudes towards alcohol use, and gender dynamics, within military leadership training programmes. Development of specialised pathways addressing the root causes of veteran involvement in the justice system would facilitate early intervention and crisis prevention.



Justice System Coordination

Justice system coordination must be strengthened through the establishment of a national Police Lead for veterans' issues, ensuring strategic coherence whilst preserving local autonomy. Immediate opportunities exist to develop robust data-sharing protocols between agencies and continuous feedback mechanisms to support evidence-based improvements.



Charity-Statutory Partnerships

Charity-statutory partnerships require enhanced reporting mechanisms, formalised information-sharing agreements, and clearly defined collaboration protocols at both local and national levels. Systematic data collection on referral outcomes would enable rigorous evaluation of intervention effectiveness across the justice sector.



Rehabilitation and Support Gaps

Rehabilitation and support gaps necessitate community support provisions for individuals discharged from military custody without statutory supervision, strengthened coordination between military and civilian probation services, and targeted programmes addressing the currently unmet needs of women and young people within the military justice system.



Family Support

Family Support should be mainstreamed through engagement with HMPPS Families Teams and the development of coordinated information-sharing protocols across health, social care, education, and third-sector organisations, enabling integrated responses to family circumstances.

What's Next?

Several activities initiated during this project will continue beyond the funded period. The project established foundations for sustained knowledge mobilisation through strengthened relationships across sectors, documented promising practices available for adaptation and replication, and facilitated an infrastructure for dialogue to support ongoing policy influence. Success will ultimately be measured not by this report but by tangible improvements in outcomes for justice-involved veterans, their families and communities.

Part One

Understanding the Challenge

Background and Research Context

Between 2019 and 2022, Liverpool John Moores University and the Probation Institute conducted a qualitative research study examining the life trajectories of 14 veterans convicted of serious violence or sexual violence. Through in-depth narrative interviews the research found consistent patterns across the participant cohort. Whilst each individual's story was unique, these commonalities identified a recognisable pathway, beginning in childhood adversity, progressing through military service, and culminating in difficult transitions out of the military and subsequent justice system involvement. At each stage, distinct protective and risk factors shaped eventual outcomes. These consistent patterns pointed to potential opportunities for early intervention and prevention (see Murray et al. 2022).

Our Approach to Engagement

Rather than assuming the landscape was unchanged since publication, and knowing that recommendations are often difficult to action, the project team wanted to spend more time with key stakeholders across military, justice and third sectors. The aim was to hear from those positioned to enact change about where traction might be gained together and what aspirations for change we might share.

To translate research recommendations into practical action, this project brought together practitioners, policymakers, and researchers as equal partners over a six-month period. The exchange between research evidence and frontline experience identified current opportunities and persistent barriers, whilst highlighting areas requiring further research and collaborative effort. This approach recognised that those working at the frontline understand the constraints and possibilities within their organisations, and that combining this practical knowledge with research evidence would lead to more realistic and implementable solutions.

Action learning workshops and knowledge exchange and mobilisation activities provided the main mechanisms for this work. Rather than presenting research findings and expecting implementation, attendees engaged actively in dialogue to explore what the evidence suggested, why it mattered, and how it might work within their specific contexts. This created space for co-creating solutions grounded in both evidence and practice understanding.

See associated research and practice resources

www.probation-institute.org/journeys-to-harmful-behaviour



The Implementation Challenge

We know that research findings alone do not automatically lead to change. We also welcome further research which tests our life course mapping with larger cohorts. Addressing veterans' pathways into the justice system requires coordinated responses across multiple sectors. Military organisations, health and social care services, justice agencies, and armed services charities each have important roles to play, yet frequently work in isolation. This fragmentation limits the effectiveness of individual interventions.

Implementation Framework: Six Strands of Activity

1 Strand 1: Learning Opportunities in the Justice Sector

This strand addressed fragmented training provision through a knowledge exchange seminar bringing together organisations offering or accessing veteran-specific training. The team expanded the Probation Institute website to host a broader range of learning materials and submitted a funding proposal to the Office for Veterans' Affairs for comprehensive training development. Across this strand, sustainable funding for training products and time for practitioners to engage were identified as critical needs cross-sector. Modular learning products accessible to all justice sector roles were considered important next steps in building practitioner capacity to respond to veterans' distinctive needs.

2 Strand 2: Support for Personnel with Adverse Childhood Experiences

This strand engaged in strategic conversations about support needed for those who enlist with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in their background. The team wove consideration of childhood trauma throughout all project activities, exploring how pre-service vulnerability intersects with military culture and post-service transitions. Workshop participants recognised that veterans face dual complexity as pre-existing childhood adversity is compounded by distinctive impacts of military service. Critically, participants highlighted the need for this understanding to be reflected in the sentencing process and in all interactions with the justice system. The team are now keen to re-engage with the Ministry of Defence to explore how this work can support their efforts to consider ACEs in recruitment activities, potentially creating early intervention opportunities.

3 **Strand 3: Family Support Initiatives**

This strand brought together armed services charities and other agencies through a March 2025 roundtable exploring gaps in provision. Participants identified that families often fall through gaps in support, particularly first families or those estranged from veterans at the point of sentence. The breakdown in families typically occurs before custody begins, yet early intervention opportunities remain largely underdeveloped. This represents a significant opportunity for preventative work, as family relationships can be both protective factors and sources of vulnerability during transition periods. Anglia Ruskin University committed to hosting follow-up activities to advance collaborative working in this area and to strengthen family-focused interventions.

4 **Strand 4: Addressing Negative Military Culture**

Underpinning all engagement activities, this strand captured recent developments in addressing organisational culture within the armed forces. All stakeholders acknowledged the complexity of military culture, recognising its capacity to provide identity, belonging and discipline whilst also embedding risks through hypermasculinity, alcohol culture and attitudes towards women for some individuals. These cultural elements can reinforce risk factors associated with harmful behaviour and create barriers to help-seeking. The Ministry of Defence's Raising our Standards programme, responding to formal complaints about organisational culture, provided a potential avenue for influence. However, direct engagement with military leadership remained a significant challenge throughout the implementation period.

5 **Strand 5: Enhancing Justice Sector Contributions**

This strand brought together leads from policing, prisons and probation in a joint meeting exploring current practices and coordination challenges. The meeting revealed persistent data-sharing issues limiting the ability to identify and track veterans systematically, regional variations in practice despite demonstrated appetite for national coordination, and inadequate training provision across agencies. These findings underscored the systemic fragmentation that hampers coordinated responses. Greater Manchester Police's quarterly forum bringing together police, prison, probation and third sector organisations emerged as promising practice worthy of documentation and potential replication across other regions.

6 Strand 6: Strengthening Rehabilitation Pathways

This strand engaged with the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC), where the team learned about both the impressive work being done and significant gaps in provision post-discharge. Individuals leaving MCTC detention after being discharged from service often receive no statutory supervision, a particularly concerning gap for those convicted of sexual or violent offences falling below MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) thresholds. MCTC staff provide considerable support and referrals to armed services charities, but no feedback mechanisms exist to determine whether individuals subsequently engage with recommended services. This represents a critical juncture in the rehabilitation pathway where coordinated post-release support could substantially improve outcomes.

Visual Overview of Strands



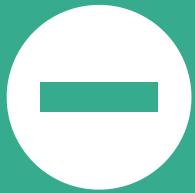
Strand One:
Learning
Opportunities in the
Justice Sector



Strand 2:
Support for
Personnel with
Adverse Childhood
Experiences



Strand 3:
Family Support
Initiatives



Strand 4:
Addressing
Negative Military
Culture



Strand 5:
Enhancing Justice
Sector Contributions



Strand 6:
Strengthening
Rehabilitation
Pathways

The Implementation Team

The project was led by three core team members with complementary expertise: Helen Schofield (Chief Executive Officer, Probation Institute), bringing extensive experience across probation, community justice and policing sectors; Dr Emma Murray (Associate Professor of Criminal and Social Justice, Anglia Ruskin University), with 15 years' experience in veterans and justice research; and Breda Leyne (Associate Consultant, Probation Institute), specialising in vocational learning and navigating complex multi-agency environments.

The project team invited a Community of Expertise to provide strategic guidance throughout from Op NOVA, Care After Combat, the Office for Veterans' Affairs, the Women's Royal Army Corps Association, and HM Prisons and Probation Service, ensuring the work remained grounded in policy, practice, and the diverse experiences of veterans and their families (see acknowledgements).

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Part Two

What We Did



Strand One: Building Training Capacity Across the Justice Sector

Activities

In January 2025, we convened a knowledge exchange workshop bringing together training providers and justice sector practitioners to map existing provision, identify gaps, and establish a central hub of resources through the Probation Institute website.

Partners and existing strengths

The workshop pointed to several strong initiatives: Op NOVA's national rollout of veteran support infrastructure, the University of York's Military Human training programme, and Thrive Together – a collaborative initiative between Op NOVA, NHS, Cobseo and Care After Combat to develop training for prisons and wider justice, health and welfare sectors.

Critical gaps identified

Participants highlighted significant inconsistencies: pastoral support providers lacked veteran-specific training; longer-service personnel faced similar transition challenges as early service leavers but received less support; sentencers and parole boards had limited understanding of veterans' distinctive needs; and regional variation meant veterans received vastly different provision depending on location. Crucially, the seminar identified two distinct pathways into the justice system: a) those experiencing difficulties during or shortly after service, and b) those facing challenges years later. It was suggested that each pathway required tailored approaches.

Shared aspirations

Practitioners emphasised the need for standardised, nationally consistent training; enhanced understanding of veteran-specific risk assessment; and tailored community sentences reflecting veterans' particular needs. The Office for Veterans' Affairs and National Police Chiefs Council emerged as key levers for systemic change.

Outcomes

The project led to the bolstering of the Probation Institute website as a space to host expanded learning materials for justice sector professionals working with veterans. This freely accessible resource provides a central hub to signposting training opportunities from multiple organisations. Additionally, the team submitted a funding application to the Office for Veterans' Affairs to deliver a targeted learning programme for sentencers and professionals to directly address gaps identified through the workshop.

Training currently hosted



Working with Ex-Armed Services Personnel under Supervision

This free e-learning programme enables Probation Staff to better identify and support ex-Service personnel under supervision.



The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on children's development

This online learning course has been funded by the Home Office Early Intervention Fund and is aimed at Practitioners, professionals and volunteers.



The Military Human

These training resources were created as pre-reading for the Military Human courses. They are made available here to help you find out more about support for veterans and their families.



Key Insight

Workshop attendees identified The Military Human training as important for professionals working with veterans. This CPD training programme was developed by Nick Wood, a Royal Navy veteran and 2010 Butler Trust Award recipient, at York St John University.



Strand Two: Recognising and Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences

What we did

Rather than creating a separate strand of activity, we wove consideration of childhood trauma through both workshops and all stakeholder meetings. This approach reflected the reality that adverse childhood experiences do not exist in isolation but interact with military experiences and post-service challenges to shape trajectories towards harmful behaviour.

Critical gaps identified

Whilst adverse childhood experiences are commonplace amongst many justice-involved populations, workshop participants recognised that veterans face additional layers of complexity. Pre-existing childhood trauma becomes compounded by military service impacts and challenging transitions to civilian life. This dual burden creates distinctive needs requiring tailored interventions that address both shared experiences with other justice-involved individuals and unique military-related factors.

Shared aspirations

Understanding this complexity proved essential for sentencers and other decision-makers. Participants emphasised the need to prevent inappropriate up-tariffing of sentences based on misunderstanding of veterans' circumstances and recognised the importance of interventions tailored to the distinctive intersection of childhood adversity and military service experiences.

Outcomes

Through integrated exploration across all project activities, stakeholders developed enhanced understanding of how childhood trauma interacts with military service to shape veteran pathways into the justice system. This shared understanding created a foundation for improved decision-making and more contextually appropriate responses across the justice sector.



Key Insight

Workshop participants recognised that adverse childhood experiences are commonplace among justice-involved populations, but are compounded for veterans by the additional impacts of military service and difficult transitions to civilian life.



Strand Three: Supporting Families at Risk

What we did

In March 2025, we facilitated an online roundtable bringing together Cobseo members and representatives from CEEUPS who had conducted research with military families. The roundtable explored services currently provided and in development for families, carers and close supporters of veterans or serving personnel at risk of causing harm. Attendees shared best practice, identified areas for development, and determined next steps for research and training.

Partners and existing strengths

The roundtable pointed to generic strategies to promote family links that exist in each prison as a space where veteran specific support could be incorporated. SSAFA work with victims and survivors in some regions was highlighted as good practice. Those who attended were keen to note research conducted by Barnardo's Veterans in Custody and their Families (Harvey-Rolfe and Rattenbury, 2020) had identified that family breakdown typically occurs before the custody period begins, recommending more holistic early intervention family services.

Critical gaps identified

Attendees identified several interconnected gaps in family support. Family breakdown typically occurs before custody begins, yet early intervention family services remain underdeveloped. Military terminology and masculine imagery in resource materials may discourage engagement, particularly amongst female service users and partners. Former partners are often excluded from support despite potentially being victims or survivors of harm. Service coordination emerged as a significant barrier which includes a lack of information-sharing agreements between agencies prevents coordinated responses, and general support services do not understand military contexts or the distinctive experiences of shame, loss of identity and loss of support networks affecting veterans' families. Upstream services, including teachers, police and voluntary sector agencies frequently encounter adolescents exhibiting learned behaviours from abusive homes, yet rarely connect with military family support structures. This represents a missed opportunity for early intervention before harmful patterns become entrenched.

Shared aspirations

Attendees emphasised the need for more holistic early intervention family services, better recognition of military family experiences, and strengthened connections between community-based behaviour change services and military family support structures. Recognition of transition's impact on families emerged as critical.

Outcomes

Anglia Ruskin University committed to hosting a follow-up in-person event. Potential exists for ongoing work through ARU with the Family Liaison project and emerging partnerships with the College of Paramedics, who are developing pathways and referrals presenting opportunities to intervene earlier before situations escalate.



Key Insight

Attendees emphasised that supporting veterans effectively requires a fundamentally family-centred approach. They highlighted three critical gaps: the absence of holistic early intervention services for military families, limited recognition of how military service shapes family experiences and dynamics, and fragmented connections between community-based services and dedicated military family support structures.

Strand Four: Confronting Harmful Aspects of Military Culture.



What we did

Military culture formed a thread running throughout all implementation project work rather than constituting a separate strand of activity. Discussions in both seminars and all bilateral or group meetings touched on cultural aspects contributing to both positive outcomes and harmful behaviours.

Partners and existing strengths

There was universal acceptance within discussions that a discernible military culture exists. Positively, this reflects a sense of identity, family and cooperation which in some cases compensates for difficult life histories, providing discipline, order, punctuality, self-control, obedience, belonging, camaraderie and mutual support. The Ministry of Defence initiated the Raising our Standards programme in 2024 responding to formal complaints about organisational culture, building on extensive work including the 2019 Wigston Review into inappropriate behaviours, the 2020 unacceptable behaviours progress review, and the 2021 Women in the Armed Forces Report.

Critical gaps identified

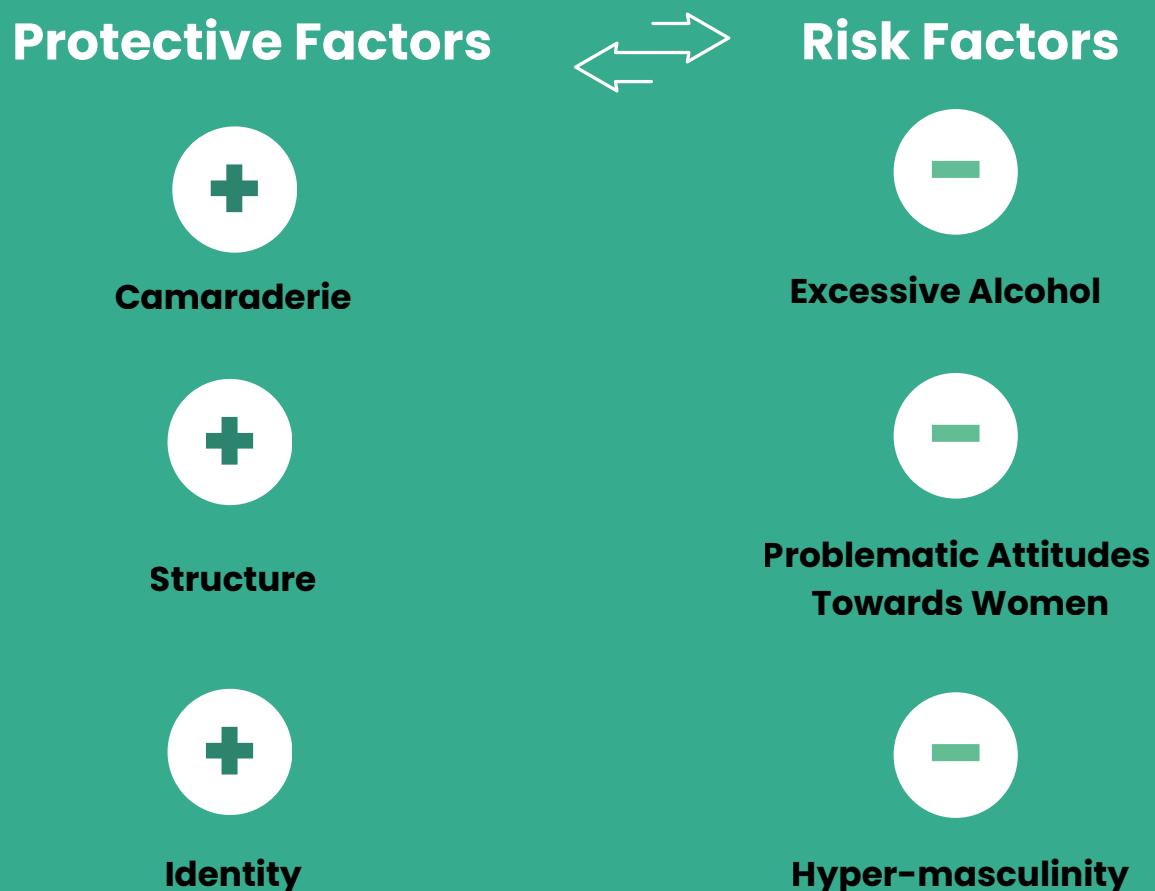
Military culture can lead to aggression, heightened masculinity, bullying and sexual behaviour often fuelled by excessive alcohol use. The original research identified this negative culture as prevalent where offences of serious harm occurred either during or after military service, particularly amongst individuals who experienced adverse childhood experiences prior to joining and found themselves vulnerable to cultural pressures they lacked resources to resist. Significantly, despite support from the Office for Veterans' Affairs and other Ministry of Defence personnel, the team was unable to secure direct engagement with military leadership to share research findings. Engagement with military leadership remains a persistent challenge limiting capacity to influence where change most needs to occur.

Shared aspirations

There was widespread recognition amongst collaborators that change in military culture must be driven by leadership and supported by training. Those who engaged shared an understanding that addressing the cultural aspects of military experience and how they might contribute to harmful behaviours is essential to preventing trajectories into the justice system.

Outcomes

An opportunity exists post-project for the team to connect with the lead civil servant for Raising our Standards, representing valuable follow-up activity enabling research evidence to inform ongoing cultural change initiatives within the military.



Key Insight

In the original research, participants shared that they had experienced the protective factors and risk factors associated with their service as interconnected. Effective support requires acknowledging these tensions, rather than treating protective and risk factors as distinct elements of military culture.

Strand Five: Strengthening Coordination Across Justice Agencies.



What we did

The team engaged separately and jointly with agency representatives through meetings exploring existing collaboration models, information-sharing protocols, knowledge gaps and successful interventions. In May 2025, a joint meeting brought together representatives from policing, prisons, and probation to understand current practices and identify systemic barriers to effective coordination.

Partners and existing strengths

Each agency had made significant progress in recent years in both identifying and supporting veterans. The Veterans in Custody Support Officers national meeting demonstrates strong engagement with expanding participation including probation staff, suggesting growing recognition of multi-agency coordination needs. Notable developments included the Probation Service's launch of a staff network supporting military-connected personnel and Greater Manchester Police's establishment of an armed forces network for their staff, recognising dual benefits of supporting veteran employees whilst enhancing service delivery. Greater Manchester Police's quarterly forum brought together staff from policing, prisons, probation and groups such as Op NOVA, allowing space for updates from each organisation and stimulating discussions to build improvement.

Critical gaps identified

Whilst each constabulary maintains a tactical lead for veterans' issues, no overarching national Police Lead exists despite demonstrated appetite for such a role. Coordination between agencies remains inconsistent and data sharing poses persistent challenges, impeding effective case management. The absence of cohesive national models has resulted in disparate regional approaches with pockets of best practice emerging organically but inconsistently. Training provision for those supporting veterans remains inadequate, potentially compromising service quality and consistency. Third sector reporting mechanisms require improvement; most charities provide no feedback to referring agencies, undermining coordination potential and reducing motivation for referrals. Evidence regarding veterans and sentencing practices remains largely anecdotal, indicating need for more rigorous data collection and analysis.

Shared aspirations

Justice sector leads recognised that whilst systemic change seems impossible given broader pressures on the criminal justice system, substantial potential exists to leverage capacity of staff with military experience and activate lived-experience networks as drivers of improvement. Transformational change should build upon existing local innovations whilst establishing national frameworks for consistency and quality assurance, recognising that sustainable change emerges more readily from practitioner-led initiatives supported by strategic oversight than from top-down reorganisation.

Outcomes

The joint meeting proved invaluable in understanding current practices and identifying systemic barriers to effective coordination. Greater Manchester Police's quarterly forum represents promising practice in experience-sharing, though specific outcomes require further documentation and evaluation. Anticipated Office for Veterans' Affairs research on working with veterans in custody will provide a valuable evidence base to inform ongoing coordination efforts.



Key Insight

Justice sector leaders face fragmented coordination, inadequate training, and inconsistent data sharing. In this context it is important to activate military and lived-experience networks already embedded in the workforce.



Strand Six: Creating Pathways Beyond Military Detention

What we did

The team engaged with Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) staff through meetings and briefings to understand current rehabilitation approaches, risk assessment practices, and support provided to individuals leaving military detention.

Partners and existing strengths

Our engagement led to a fuller understanding MCTC and the significant changes to its operations. Key strengths include previous collaborative work between MCTC and HMPPS; recognition of adverse childhood experiences and trauma impact; understanding of neurodiversity amongst the population; and acknowledgement of challenges surrounding military recruitment and negative military culture aspects. Of particular note for our purposes were programmes delivered by the Probation Service including consequential thinking and peer challenges and provides considerable efforts to support individuals leaving military detention including information and referrals to armed services charities. MCTC's work with Essex Probation Service to develop programme adaptations accommodating temporal limitations, including adaptation of the Choices programme for the military context was identified as good practice.

Critical gaps identified

In conversation with MCTC critical gaps were identified. Individuals discharged following MCTC detention frequently leave custody without statutory supervision, particularly those convicted of sexual or violent offences falling below Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements thresholds. For this cohort, no systematic risk assessment occurs, routine monitoring does not happen, and child contact restrictions are not considered in cases where potential risk exists.

Short military detentions create significant constraints on what interventions can be delivered. Those at MCTC often do not remain long enough to fully benefit from programmes, limiting the potential impact of rehabilitative work.

Feedback mechanisms between MCTC and armed services charities do not exist routinely, meaning staff never learn whether individuals engaged with recommended services post-release. This prevents evaluation of intervention effectiveness and undermines motivation to maintain referral practices.

No specialised programmes have been developed specifically for women or young people within the military justice system, with perceived lack of support for young women who have experienced in-service abuse.

Shared aspirations

The importance of addressing the supervision gap for those released without formal licence was recognised by all. There was shared concern about ensuring appropriate risk assessment and safeguarding is in place for those whose behaviours fall outside of standard oversight mechanisms, and acknowledgement of the need for specialised provision addressing the distinctive experiences of women and young people in military detention.

Outcomes

MCTC staff provide considerable support and referrals to armed services charities on release. Opportunities exist to establish feedback mechanisms between MCTC and charitable organisations to monitor referral effectiveness and evaluate intervention outcomes, strengthening multi-agency working and sustaining referral practices.



Key Insight

Establishing feedback mechanisms between MCTC and charitable organisations would monitor referral effectiveness, strengthen multi-agency working, and enable systematic risk assessment and safeguarding for those released without formal licence.

Part Three

Moving Forward

Our Learning

This six-month implementation project created space for dialogue between researchers, practitioners, policymakers and service leaders across military, justice and third sectors. Through knowledge exchange and action learning activities the following problem statements and recommendations have been crafted.

Problems Identified

1 **Problem 1: Limited influence on military systems and culture**

Despite support from various Ministry of Defence personnel, direct engagement with military leadership proved difficult. This severely constrained our ability to influence recruitment practices and support for vulnerable personnel during service. The military represents a critical intervention point yet remains difficult to access from outside systems.

2 **Problem 2: Fragmented and inconsistent training provision**

Training provision across the justice sector remains inadequate and inconsistently accessed. Sentencers, report writers and parole boards lack sufficient understanding of veterans' distinctive needs, risking inappropriate sentencing. Regional variation means veterans receive vastly different support depending on where they live rather than the standardised provision their needs demand.

3 **Problem 3: Barriers to effective information sharing**

Information sharing between agencies supporting veterans continues to pose challenges. Unclear protocols, absent feedback mechanisms, and lack of systematic data collection undermine coordination efforts and prevent evaluation of intervention effectiveness.

4 **Problem 4: Underdeveloped family support provision**

Family support provision contains substantial gaps, particularly for first families or those estranged from justice-affected veterans. Community-based services, which demonstrate valuable early intervention models, remain underutilised within military family support contexts. Work with families in each prison need further veteran specific training.

5 Problem 5: Gaps in post-release supervision

Post-release supervision for individuals leaving Military Corrective Training Centre detention without Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements oversight remains inadequate, creating public protection concerns especially for those convicted of sexual or violent offences.

Recommendations for Action²

Strengthening training and professional development

Development of modular learning relevant to all justice sector roles would address current fragmented provision. Training should be open access and free of charge. Comprehensive training for judges, magistrates, solicitors and parole board members on veteran-specific needs requires development, underpinned by systematic research into sentencing practices (see forthcoming work from the University of Nottingham). Training modules for probation staff writing pre-sentence reports would enable better identification of veteran circumstances. Embedding veteran-specific training into probation professional development programmes and early intervention training for police forces would build ongoing capacity.

Integrating policy across military and justice contexts

Expansion of trauma-informed practices in military recruitment would enable appropriate support for recruits with pre-service vulnerabilities. Integration of critical examination of military culture into leadership training programmes, specifically addressing hypermasculinity, excessive alcohol use and attitudes towards women, requires continued and sustained commitment from military leadership. Development of specialised pathways addressing root causes of veteran involvement in the justice system would enable earlier intervention before crises develop.

Improving justice system coordination

Establishment of a national Police Lead for veterans' issues would provide strategic coordination whilst preserving local autonomy. Influencing Sentencing Review implementation to ensure veteran-specific considerations are embedded in guidance represents immediate opportunity. Creation of

[2] We acknowledge this area of work moves at pace and involves a dynamic and complex eco-system of professionals, academics and sectors. Our comments are based on those we have spoken to and will no doubt have missed some developments from others. We would love to hear from you if you don't feel represented here.

feedback mechanisms to continuously improve veteran support based on outcomes data would enable learning from successes and failures. Development of robust data-sharing protocols between agencies would clarify legal frameworks and provide practical implementation guidance.

Strengthening partnerships between armed services charities and statutory services

Improved reporting mechanisms providing feedback on referrals, enhanced information-sharing agreements, and clear protocols for collaboration at local and national levels would strengthen effectiveness. Systematic collection and sharing of data on referral outcomes across justice agencies would enable evaluation of intervention effectiveness.

Addressing rehabilitation and support gaps

Introduction of community support periods for individuals discharged from MCTC without statutory supervision would address identified public protection gaps, particularly for those convicted of sexual or violent offences falling below MAPPA thresholds. Strengthening links between MCTC and civilian probation services would enhance continuity of support. Development of programmes specifically designed for women and young people within the military justice system would address current absence of tailored provision.

Prioritising family support

Engagement with HMPPS Families Team to ensure prison family strategies reflect veterans' family needs would mainstream consideration currently absent. Development of protocols for information sharing amongst agencies supporting families including health, social care, education and third sector organisations would enable coordinated responses.

The Path Ahead

Several activities initiated during this project will continue generating impact beyond the funded period. The VICSO participatory research at Anglia Ruskin University will run through 2025–2026, generating evidence to support training and wellbeing interventions whilst building research capacity amongst practitioners. Anglia Ruskin University's commitment to hosting an in-person workshop on family support will advance collaborative approaches. The Probation Institute website will continue developing as a hub for learning resources with ongoing additions as new materials become available.

Awaiting outcome of the Office for Veterans' Affairs funding proposal represents a critical juncture. Success would enable comprehensive training development addressing documented gaps. If unsuccessful, the clearly articulated need and identified stakeholders provide foundation for alternative funding approaches.

Post-project, the team will seek to connect with the lead civil servant for Raising our Standards, enabling research evidence to inform ongoing military cultural change initiatives. The project established infrastructure supporting ongoing knowledge mobilisation through strengthened relationships across sectors, documented promising practices available for adaptation and replication, and created pathways for policy influence. Case studies of effective practice including the Greater Manchester Police forum and Essex Probation Service's work with MCTC provide templates for replication elsewhere.

Success will ultimately be measured not by this report but by tangible improvements in outcomes for justice-involved veterans, their families and communities. Reduced recidivism, fewer preventable serious offences, enhanced family wellbeing, more effective transitions, and reduced harm represent the ultimate goals. These outcomes require sustained commitment across multiple organisations over extended timeframes.

Veterans' Specific Needs

Justice-involved veterans present with both shared vulnerabilities common to many justice-involved people and distinct military-related needs demanding tailored approaches. Childhood adversity, limited opportunities, socioeconomic deprivation, family separation and early violence exposure connect veterans to other justice-involved populations. Military service, whilst providing protective factors for some, simultaneously exposes individuals to specific risk factors embedded in military culture. Transition to civilian life removes protective factors whilst often amplifying risks.

This complexity demands sophisticated responses drawing on expertise from multiple sectors. Approaches treating harmful behaviour in isolation have proven insufficient.

Investment in early intervention at critical points such as recruitment, training, deployment, transition and first justice contact would be more effective than responding to serious harm after it occurs.

Yet within this complexity lies hope. The research identified multiple intervention points where appropriate support could prevent harmful outcomes. Each represents an opportunity to change trajectories. Current gaps in provision reflect choices about priorities and resource allocation rather than inevitability. Local innovations like the Greater Manchester Police forum demonstrate that practitioners already possess capacity to develop effective responses. The task is to recognise, support and scale these practices whilst addressing systemic barriers.

Acknowledgements

This implementation project benefitted from the generous contributions from many individuals and organisations.

Most importantly, we acknowledge the 14 veterans who participated in the original research, sharing difficult experiences in the hope of preventing others following similar pathways. We remain committed to ensuring their stories continue to inform dialogues, policy and practice improvements.

Forces in Mind Trust provided funding enabling this phase of knowledge mobilisation and has sustained commitment to understanding and improving outcomes for the armed forces community. The Office for Veterans' Affairs provided crucial engagement and support throughout, facilitating connections and providing strategic guidance.

Our Community of Experts, Colin Back, Dr Jane Jones, Peter Fletcher, Paula Rogers and Carrie Rogers gave generously of their time and expertise, ensuring the project remained grounded in current policy and practice realities. The many attendees in our action learning workshops, knowledge exchanges activities roundtable events strategic meetings brought openness, thoughtfulness and commitment to collaborative problem-solving that enriched the work immeasurably.

Greater Manchester Police, HM Prison Service, the Probation Service, Cobseo member organisations, and numerous armed services charities demonstrated willingness to engage critically with research findings and co-create solutions. The Veterans in Custody Support Officers who will serve as co-researchers in the ongoing CEEUPS project exemplify the lived experience expertise essential to developing truly effective interventions.

This work would not have been possible without the work of the wider research team who worked with us to conduct the original research. It is therefore with thanks to Dr Justin Moorhead (LJMU), Ester Ragonese (LJMU) and Hilary Currin (ARU, formally, LJMU), and Professor Shadd Maruna (who provided academic consultancy) for laying the groundwork for this project.

