



# Forces in Mind Trust Impact Report 2023

# Chief Executive's Welcome

It has been a privilege to join Forces in Mind Trust in October 2023 and to contribute towards its mission to ensure former Service personnel and families make a successful return to civilian life.

I would like to thank the directors and team for their warm welcome to the organisation, particularly to Tom McBarnet for his generous handover.

Having worked closely with FiMT in my previous role, I was acutely aware of its importance in ensuring that policy and service delivery are developed with the foundation of robust and clear evidence. FiMT is unique in its ability to fund evidence generation for those areas or cohorts that are under researched.

As this report highlights, FiMT's strengths lie in its independence, collaborative approach, and drive for lasting impact. This is clearly demonstrated in some of the key impact outlined, from collaboration through St George's House to identify and prioritise the contemporary transition challenges faced by personnel and families; to the publication of the

report on life skills to ensure they are provided with a strong grounding in the key skills needed to return successfully to civilian life; to the significant strength of the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre to provide an authoritative evidence base on transition and to promote a better understanding on these issues for researchers, policy makers and service providers.

Of course, FiMT could not achieve this by ourselves and our impact is part of a vital network and community that works to support former Service personnel and families. We are grateful to these partners and allies who support us in our mission but also in creating a collegiate and effective knowledge base to achieve change.

The nature of the modern Service life and family is changing, and we need to ensure that decision makers and those organisations which support



the Armed Forces are equipped with the evidence, policies and service provision to meet their needs. It is therefore crucial we are future focused to play our part in ensuring a successful transition for our community.

**Michelle Alston**, Chief Executive

# Who are we?

Forces in Mind Trust is an independent charity, founded by an endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund in 2011 and dedicated to ensuring that all Service personnel and families make a successful transition to civilian life.

Whilst the vast majority of people who leave the Armed Forces transition successfully and go on to lead fulfilling lives outside of service, we recognise that some face additional challenges or need further support, and Forces in Mind Trust exists to improve their transition into civilian life.

## How do we achieve this?



By funding research and evidence generation to better understand the issues, and to identify and share what works.



By taking a collaborative approach to convening and catalysing change, working with decision makers across the United Kingdom.



By equipping those with the power to change policy and practice with the knowledge and understanding required to improve the experiences of Service leavers and families.

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Research papers such as *You're in Your Own Time Now*, led by Edinburgh Napier University, and funded by FIMT provide the high quality, credible evidence base on which to ground progress on making lives better for the whole of the ex-Service community in Scotland”

Susie Hamilton, Scottish Veterans Commissioner

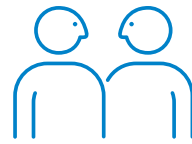
## What makes FiMT effective?



### Independence

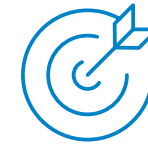
We are able to fund under-researched areas and consider projects of different sizes, forms and from a wide-range of institutions.

Some of the Forces in Mind Trust Staff and Board in January 2024 ▼



### Collaboration

We look to drive change by bringing together policy makers, service providers, academics and experts to gain insights, identify challenges and discuss solutions. Forces in Mind Trust works collaboratively with stakeholders in order to raise awareness of the importance of a successful transition and to improve the process for Service leavers and families.



### Drive for Impact

At Forces in Mind Trust, we want our work to have a lasting impact for future generations of the Armed Forces community. We focus our funding and activities on projects that can inform practice and policy to help our Service community in a changing future.



The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) works across government and the third sector to support and champion veterans in the UK. Forces in Mind Trust is a critical independent partner in this work. As a key funder of research they help us understand what issues require Government attention, and to what degree interventions are having impact."

**Sam Tillotson**, Deputy Director – Strategy, Research and Data at the Office for Veterans' Affairs



# 2023 at a glance



**£1.7 million**  
awarded

Our funding awarded in 2023 will generate evidence or pilot solutions to:

- Understand cohorts with specific needs within the Armed Forces community
- Support veterans' mental health
- Inform the effective delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant
- Examine the modern transition experiences of Service personnel and families



**11**  
reports published

Our reports have provided evidence to:

- Help develop better support for widows
- Improve transition support to veterans in Scotland
- Ensure families are supported with their financial stability
- Inform the development of the MOD's life skills programme
- Develop a potential new treatment for moral injury



# What we did in 2023

## Influencing the future of transition through convening

In October 2023, Forces in Mind Trust partnered with St George's House, Windsor Castle, to deliver a consultation to consider the contemporary transition challenges facing Service leavers and their families as they prepare for and move from the Armed Forces to civilian life.

Bringing together key figures from government, the Armed Forces, charities and academia, it provided a unique opportunity to identify key challenges and opportunities with those involved in delivering transition support to Service personnel, veterans and families.

This essential piece of work continued to raise the importance of a successful transition, and allowed decision makers to discuss and agree a set of priorities to address the current and potential future issues that impact the transition journey.

### What was the consultation about?

#### The consultation asked three key questions

1. Can the transition experience of Service leavers and their families be further improved?
2. Is transition being approached in the right way in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?
3. What should be the priorities for change looking forwards, and who are the actors for each areas of change?



▲ Forces in Mind Trust's event at St George's House at Windsor Castle.

“

RBL welcomes engaging regularly with FiMT to ensure we're sharing the latest insights available to understand the Armed Forces community and their needs, and use these insights to inform and influence future policy in a coordinated way. Attending events, like FiMT's St George's House event, provide invaluable insight into challenges and help us work together to support our community as effectively as possible in policy, services, and research.”

**Ann Griffith**, Head of Policy and Research  
at Royal British Legion

## Generating new evidence

### Life Skills

Published in 2023, the FiMT-funded study *Improving Life Skills in the Armed Forces* addressed a lack of research on the current levels of life skills amongst the community and on how this could be improved.

The commissioned research carried out by QinetiQ and Cranfield School of Management examined the broad set of skills that underpin positive social, personal and work outcomes amongst Service personnel and partners of Service personnel. Having a good set of life skills is an essential part of making a successful transition from the military to civilian life and the research showed that Service personnel and partners have excellent skills, with most leaving the Armed Forces with the tools needed for a successful transition, benefiting both the individual and society.

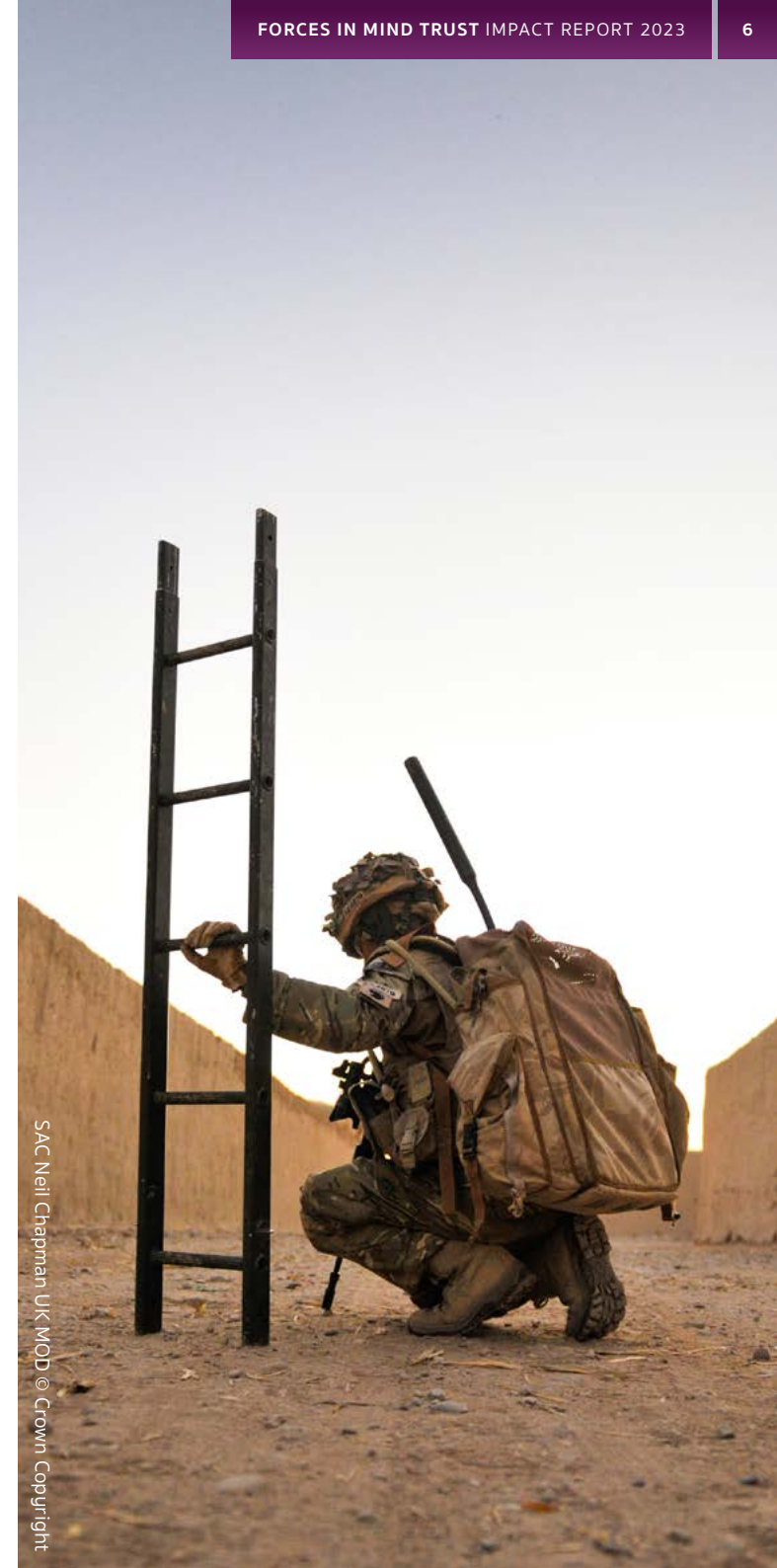
The report also provided recommendations on how the Ministry of Defence can improve their life skills offer and identify those at risk of leaving the Armed Forces without the means to live successfully outside of the Armed Forces community. This supported our ongoing engagement with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the research informed the current development of their life skills policy.

### Informing new treatments

We continue to press for better treatments and outcomes for ex-Service personnel with mental health issues.

We were pleased to publish promising results for a treatment for ex-Service personnel living with moral injury – where someone takes part in, or fails to intervene to stop an act that strongly conflict with their own deeply held moral and ethical beliefs – in research carried out by Combat Stress and the King's Centre for Military Health Research.

Our work on moral injury has not just been impactful for the Armed Forces community but the findings have been used for others working in civilian occupations who may also be at an increased risk of experiencing morally injurious events, such as the police. The Gloucestershire Constabulary recently began using the animated videos from our moral injury project as part of its staff guidance.



## Putting Research into Practice

Central to FiMT's goal of improving transition is ensuring that there is sufficient awareness, expertise and understanding of the Armed Forces community in the design and delivery of service provision. Through our work on the Armed Forces Covenant, and in working closely with local government, national government and devolved nations, and the charity sector, we continue to inform the work being undertaken in this area.

With the completion of our report on *A Decade of the Covenant*, by Shared Intelligence, RAND Europe and Meri Mayhew Consulting, we hosted events

in each of the four UK nations to showcase the challenges and opportunities involved in delivering the Covenant, bringing together those involved in the delivery, to share best practice. The report offers practical guidance and an updated toolkit to help councils review their approach to the Covenant and better deliver on the nation's promise that those who are serving or have served in the Armed Forces and their families are not disadvantaged by service. Local authorities have used our toolkit to build the core infrastructure for upholding the Covenant such as clear communications and dedicated elected Armed Forces Champions.

We presented the *Decade of the Covenant* report to the Local Government Association Conference in Bournemouth in July and co-hosted the Wales Armed Forces Community Conference with the Welsh Government in Cardiff, whilst also working with Veterans Scotland and the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office to increase awareness of the Covenant across the UK. The report has also been recognised as a key resource by the MOD Armed Forces Covenant team.



Director of Programmes Tom McBarnet speaking at our panel at the Local Government Association Conference.



Welsh Government utilises a wide range of research and evidence to inform policy in relation to support for the Armed Forces community. Research delivered by FiMT, including *Our Community, Our Covenant* and *A Roadmap to End Homelessness Amongst Veterans (Jan 24)*, represents an important element of evidence the Welsh Government continues to use.”

Peter Kellam, Armed Forces Branch, Welsh Government





## And more

■ In June 2023, our report *Examining the financial stability of UK military families*, produced by RAND Europe in partnership with the Army Families Federation, highlighted the unique financial issues faced by families, and this evidence was raised with the MOD remuneration and families teams at a workshop with key stakeholders, ensuring our evidence can drive future change in support to families.

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Our collaboration with FiMT provided key evidence on the unique challenges Service families face, allowing us to effectively engage with policy makers to raise their issues and ensure they have the right support.”

**Collette Musgrave**, Chief Executive of Army Families Federation

■ We have worked with the James Lind Alliance’s Veterans’ Health Priority Setting Partnership and shared our knowledge and evidence to help directly shape the Office for Veterans’ Affairs priorities for health research.

■ We partnered with X-Forces to promote employment opportunities for veterans through increasing engagement with trade association and membership bodies. This engagement and collaboration project articulated best practice on hiring ex-Service leavers business groups, reducing friction for employers and improving job outcomes for ex-Service personnel.

■ The development of policies and services in Scotland have been driven by our evidence from the *You’re in your own time now* report by Edinburgh Napier University with Edinburgh University, which outlined the steps required to enhance support for veterans and their families adapting to civilian life in Scotland.

■ In March, we called for trauma-informed benefits system through our *Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers* report, led by the University of Salford. Evidence from the report was presented by Professor Lisa Scullion at the Work and Pensions Select Committee’s inquiry into safeguarding vulnerable claimants and has supported the development of the Armed Forces champions role within job centres who can provide specific support to veterans.

■ Our sponsorship of the Working Together award at the Soldiering On Awards resulted in the promotion of best practice of how organisations or individuals can work together to drive change for the Armed Forces community.



▲ Soldiering on Awards FiMT Chair Jim Macleod with winner of the Working Together Award Stephen Johnson from RE:ACT

## One Year On – Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre

In September 2022, the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre launched in its new format as a partnership run by King's College London and RAND Europe, funded by Forces in Mind Trust.

Since then, the Centre has been busy putting research evidence at the heart of policy and practice in order to support transition from military to civilian life. The Centre aims to provide the most accessible and authoritative evidence base on transition. This is delivered via multiple mechanisms, including an invaluable repository of research papers and policy documents, regular news articles reporting on new evidence and research activity, and the production of summaries of evidence and policy across the thematic areas of transition that organise the centre.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the Centre works to help researchers, policy makers, and service providers connect and encourages collaboration across the sector.

The Research Centre repository compiles an ever-growing directory of over 4,000 articles

on transition and the website has provided an authoritative portal to over 40,000 unique visitors to date. This continues to grow with the expansion of the website into providing a directory of UK researchers specialising in Armed Forces research via their research community page, and a directory of current research being undertaken via their ongoing research page. Their news articles have highlighted leading scholars and their work on transition, further encouraging collaboration across the sector.

The value of the Research Centre is increasingly recognised both nationally and internationally. Staff from the Centre have met with the Australian Veterans Minister Matt Keogh; participated in the Canadian Institute for Veteran Mental Health annual conference; and undertaken regular engagement with the Ministry of Defence, the Office for Veterans' Affairs and other government departments to help to broaden awareness and use of the evidence base and research expertise that the Research Centre provides.

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It is a privilege to co-lead the FiMT Research Centre alongside colleagues from RAND Europe. Since the launch of the Research Centre in September 2022, the team have been busy establishing the Centre and delivering on our ambition of providing an accessible and authoritative evidence base on transition. We are looking forward to developing the Research Centre further and working with others in the sector to ensure evidence underpins policy and practice.”

**Professor Nicola Fear**, Co-director of the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre

<sup>1</sup> Nine transition themes that organise the Centre: Education/training, Employment, Family/Relationships, Finance, Housing, Justice System, Mental Health, Physical Health, and Well-being.

## Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre Conference – March 2023

In March, the Centre held its annual research conference, hosting over 200 attendees from service provision, research, and government at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Amongst the speakers were The Rt Hon. Lord Etherton KC, member of the House of Lords and Chair of the LGBT Veterans Independent Review and Sam Tillotson, Deputy Director of Strategy, Research and Data at the Office for Veterans' Affairs.

## What is the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre?

**The Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre is an independent centre funded by Forces in Mind Trust and run by a consortium of King's College London and RAND Europe with two main aims:**

1. Provide an accessible and authoritative evidence base on transition from military to civilian life.
2. Connect researchers, policymakers and service providers, to forge joined up working and collaboration, and build pathways to impact.

Research was presented on a range of key topics impacting the ex-Service community and their families. This included updates on the LGBT Veterans Independent Review, an exploration of the impact of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) on female veterans, military widows' experiences of social isolation and loneliness, and insights on the transition to civilian life for veterans injured in service in Afghanistan.

## Research and Policy Summaries

In November 2023, the Centre launched the first of a series of research and policy summaries which will cover each of the nine thematic areas of the Centre, with the first set of summaries focusing on *Ex-Service personnel and the Justice System*. The summaries provide a robust and easy to digest synthesis of evidence and existing policy and

practice that can be used by policymakers, service providers, and researchers to ensure evidence-based decisions are made on policy and practice and to guide future research priorities.



Staff of the FiMT Research Centre and King's Centre for Military Health with Australian Veterans' Minister Matt Keogh.



It's been a fantastic first year at the Centre for us, getting set up and established with the new website, publishing regular news articles, releasing the first in our series of evidence and policy summaries, and our successful first conference. It's been great to grow our connections across the sector and raise awareness of how we work to ensure that evidence is being used for the benefit of ex-Service personnel and families."

**Dr Mary Keeling**, Research Manager – FiMT Research Centre

# A message from the Chair

At the end of my first full year as Chair of Forces in Mind Trust, I am proud of the impact and influence the organisation has achieved throughout 2023.

The Trust continues to demonstrate its importance and I have enjoyed getting to see this firsthand, meeting our stakeholders, and hearing about the impact our work is having.

Whilst the activities of the Armed Forces community may not always be visible to the civilian community, our Service personnel continue to be highly active, and they and Service families make an enormous contribution to our nation and our society. It is therefore right that we continue to ensure that when they make their transition back into civilian life, it is successful and fulfilling.

Since 2011, FiMT has provided an independent, forward-thinking, and collaborative voice that has helped the many great champions of ex-Service personnel and families to make lasting change to the transition experience. We will continue to

provide that impact on the sector as we look ahead to the end of our 20-year endowment. Ensuring that research is informing policy, improving service provision, and helping to make life better as individuals and their families transition from the military remains at the heart of our work.

Amongst a range of successes this year, I would like to highlight the FiMT Research Centre. The team at RAND: Europe and King's College London supported by FiMT have delivered an impressive series of outputs since they began running the Research Centre in September 2022. The Centre is already delivering lasting impact, from bringing together tens of thousands of research articles into a single free searchable database, to publishing policy and research summaries that collapse thousands of pages of research into expertly curated summaries that can be used by policy writers and service deliverers. I am keen to see how the service the FiMT Research Centre provides develops over the next few years.

This year has also seen personnel changes within the Board of Directors and the Executive. We have made a smooth transition from the interim Chief

Executive Tom McBarnet, to our new Chief Executive Michelle Alston. Michelle is already having a positive impact on the direction of FiMT, and I am looking forward to seeing how the Trust will continue to evolve under her leadership. I would like to publicly thank all those Directors and members of the Executive team whose hard work is delivering the impact you have read in this report, and to thank those who have left FiMT in the last 12 months for their work, humour, and friendship.

Finally, thank you for your engagement in this important community and work. FiMT exists to help Service Personnel and their families during their transition from the military to civilian life, a transition which for some can be stressful and difficult. Without your support we would be unable to have the impact we so proudly cover in this report. Thank you and I look forward to what I am hoping will be another successful year for FiMT.

**Jim Macleod CB CVO**, Chair



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 the-forces-in-mind-trust

## Contact Us

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