Armed Forces Charities Project Evaluation

July 2016

Tom Traynor
Head of Research
Directory of Social Change
352 Holloway Road
London
N7 6PA
ttraynor@dsc.org.uk

Stuart Cole
Senior Researcher
Directory of Social Change
352 Holloway Road
London
N7 6PA
scole@dsc.org.uk

Libby Cooper
Director
Amber Analysis
9 Celia Road
London
N19 5ET
libcooper@blueyonder.co.uk

Contents

1. Executive Summary

In late 2015 the Directory of Social Change was commissioned by the Forces in Mind Trust to undertake a mid-stream evaluation of the Armed Forces Charities Project. The project comprises the Sector Insight: UK Armed Forces Charities report and the associated website, www.armedforcescharities.org.uk and runs from November 2013 to November 2016. Both the report and the website were launched in November 2014 and the evaluation takes into consideration available data and feedback on usage and impact one year later. The evaluation also sought to determine the future research needs of the armed forces charities community and its beneficiaries and how the website could be redeveloped and improved.

The evaluation set out to answer the following questions:

- To what extent has the Sector Insight report met its original aims and objectives to date?
- To what degree has the report penetrated sector literature so far?
- How have stakeholders used the research?
- What are the future research needs of the armed forces charities sector?
- For what purposes has the Armed Forces Charities website been used and has it met its original aims and objectives?
- What are the needs of website users in terms of the site's functionality and content in order to inform future development?

Feedback during the evaluation will also be used to inform future promotion of the report and website.

The evaluation of the project took place through several stages between February and June 2016 and utilised semi-structured telephone interviews and focus groups, as well as metrics on website usage and other qualitative and quantitative data. In total, 45 individuals participated in the qualitative research for this evaluation.

Key findings

The following points summarise the key findings of the evaluation:

Sector Insight: UK Armed Forces Charities report
- The report was overwhelmingly well-received and admired – the summary and key findings were noted as being particularly useful and the data was referenced as being important
- Charities have found the information in the report useful to support funding bids and to provide evidence to inform services and strategy
- Many readers found the report 'hard to dip into', and ease of finding information scored the second lowest in overall ratings for the report – this may be a barrier to it being picked up by academics, policy-makers and the media
- There was an expectation from users and evaluation participants that the report would be 'kept alive' as a series so that it remained relevant and updated
- By the end of quarter 1 2016, the report had been downloaded a total of 2282 times
- The research has penetrated peer-reviewed academic literature, with one citation and another pending.

Armed Forces Charities website

- The highest proportion of enquiries made to the website were by individuals looking to connect with other organisations or individuals. The majority of these resulted in sign-posting to other organisations and 'superficial' engagement (single email and response)
- The highest level of engagement often resulted from enquiries where individuals required financial or other support from a welfare charity
- It is clear that the website cannot be 'all things to all people' and requires a clearer purpose, stated more explicitly for the user
- The design of the current website needs to be refreshed and improved (this has already been addressed and the new website is more contemporary)
- Improvements to the look and functionality of the website were suggested, particularly the search function (many of these have already been implemented in the new redeveloped website)
- 'up-to-dateness' of the data and information is a key issue for website users

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made to the Forces in Mind Trust as a result of the evaluation. In summary, these include:

- Decide if the original purpose on the project remains valid
- Consider if a stand-alone website is the best method of delivery for the project's aims and for disseminating information
- Consider refocusing and defining the target audience of the website if it is to be retained
- Develop a plan of direct, personal engagement with key influencers to discuss future research
- Investment in public relations expertise should be considered
- Closer engagement and deeper relationships with other organisations and research hubs to maximise the potential of the research and to signpost to the website (if it is to continue).

In terms of the content and presentation of future reports, data and research, the following recommendations are also made:

- If the website is to be retained, entries should only include welfare charities [edit: following a meeting with the AFC Project Advisory Group in July, it was agreed that the resource should continue to offer details of all Armed Forces Charities]
- The information categories and depth of data for website entries should be reviewed
- The website design should be refreshed and the functionality made easier to use
- The optimal level of up-to-dateness needs to be agreed
- Future Armed Forces Charities Project reports should be more data-driven, graphical and shorter
- Next stage research should focus on specific themes and topics relevant to the ex-service personnel community
- The original Sector Insight report is a baseline study that should be reproduced after five years
- Clearer metrics and defined objectives regarding impact should be built into future project phases.

2. Key Findings

The evaluation of the Armed Forces Charities Project involved detailed discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, some of whom had knowledge of the project and had used either the report or the website. Many of the evaluation participants were not yet aware of the project – raising the profile of both the website and the report became an add benefit to the exercise, and all participants reviewed the project to some extent before giving their feedback and thoughts on the future direction of the project.

Sector Insight: UK Armed Forces Charities report

To what extent has the report met its original objectives so far?

The original objectives of the report were to provide a comprehensive overview of the armed forces charities sector, providing an unbiased body of evidence to benefit and inform serving personnel, veterans and their families, donors and charities which support them and relevant policymakers, researchers and media. This objective has been largely met, however the evaluation found that the (potential) target audience for the report is charities (for example, to provide data and information for funding bids or to inform future strategies), policymakers (although the impact on policy is too early to assess and measure), and academics. To facilitate future usage in academia and the policy environment, future reports should be more accessible in terms of content and presentation.

To what degree has the report penetrated sector literature so far?

There have been a number of references and articles in related sources, although this was largely confined to the time when the project was launched. To date there has been one citation in a peer-reviewed journal article, with another pending at the time of writing (June 2016). Shorter, more frequent themed reports would encourage greater interest among the media and academia.

How have beneficiaries used the research and what are the main directions for future research?

As noted above, the research has been used to inform funding bids and strategies, but the research has also generated interest in the data by two other organisations in particular. The evaluation found that a number of different topics were suggested for future research, some of which may not be within the remit of FiMT, although specific topics for the benefit of ex-service personnel in transition include the provision of housing, mental health provision and education and employment services.

- The report was overwhelmingly well-received and admired – the summary and key findings were noted as being particularly useful and the data was referenced
- Many readers found the report 'hard to dip into', and ease of finding information scored the second lowest in overall ratings for the report – this may be a barrier to it being picked up by academics, policy-makers and the media
- There was an expectation that the report would be 'kept alive' as a series so that it remained relevant and updated
- The research has penetrated peer-reviewed academic literature, with one citation and another pending.

Armed Forces Charities Website

To what extent has the website met its aims and objectives?

The website provides users with information on all of the UK's armed forces charities to a greater or lesser extent – only sparse information is available for some charities and there is often a 'data-lag'. The evaluation found that those visiting the website did not have a clear understanding of the purpose of the

website or who it was aimed at. Much insight was gained about possible courses of action around the content and also suggested redevelopments and improvements to the website were implemented during the course of the evaluation.

How is the website used and to what extent does it meet user requirements?

The highest proportion of enquiries were from individuals wanting to make connections, followed by those from charities featured on the resource who wished to make amendments to their records, largely as a result of DSC reaching out to them and raising awareness of the resource. Analysis suggests that as a sign-posting service for individuals seeking financial support for themselves or someone else, the website has been useful to those in need.

What are website users' needs in terms of functionality and content?

The evaluation confirmed that a clearer purpose and audience for the website needs to be defined, perhaps with a distinct welfare focus. It became evident that cadet organisations and museums may be surplus to requirements. In terms of functionality, clearer design and simpler searching were standout requirements for fulfilling users' needs.

- The highest proportion of enquiries made to the website were by individuals looking to connect with other organisations or individuals. The majority of these resulted in sign-posting to other organisation and 'superficial' engagement (single email and response)
- The highest level of engagement often resulted from enquiries where individuals required financial or other support from a welfare charity
- It is clear that the website cannot be 'all things to all people' and requires a clearer purpose, stated more explicitly for the user
- The design of the current website needs to be refreshed and improved (this has already been addressed and the new website is more contemporary)
- Improvements to the look and functionality of the website were suggested, particularly the search function (many of these have already been implemented in the new redeveloped website)
- 'up-to-dateness' of the data and information is a key issue for website users.

How does the evaluation inform future marketing strategies to promote use and knowledge of the report, the website and related data?

A great deal was learned during the course of the evaluation about the need to proactively engage with key stakeholders and potential beneficiaries. This should be done through meetings with key individuals and groups to promote the research and ensure that it reaches the right people. A clearer focus for the website would enable better promotion, and the evaluation and discussions with the research community showed that more targeted, thematic reports would be more effective in reaching and influencing policymakers and academia.

3. About the Evaluation of the Armed Forces Charities Project

In November 2015, one year after the launch of the Sector Insight: UK Armed Forces Charities report and the www.armedforcescharities.org.uk website, FiMT asked DSC to conduct an interim impact study to assess how well the project was meeting FiMT's objectives, to ensure their funding is effective and to inform learning and improvement for the future. The evaluation of the Armed Forces Charities project to date had the following objectives:

- to explore the extent to which the report has met its original aims and objectives to date
- to establish the degree to which the report has penetrated sector literature so far
- to provide a detailed account of how beneficiaries have used the research and to propose directions for future research
- to explore the extent to which the website has met its original aims and objectives to date
- to determine the purposes for which the website is used and the extent to which the website meets user requirements
- to understand the needs of website users in terms of the site's functionality and content in order to inform future development
- to inform future marketing strategies to promote use and knowledge of the report, the website and related data.

A plan was agreed between DSC and FiMT to carry out the evaluation of both components of the project, which comprised multiple methods and approaches (see Appendix 1). The original plan followed a linear process moving from one stage to the next, however during the course of the evaluation researchers had to take a more flexible approach to recruiting participants and taking opportunities to engage with key stakeholders due to challenges outlined below.

Researchers successfully engaged a primary target audience for the evaluation, specifically high-profile policy-makers and other influential individuals with an interest in both the topics covered by the report and the content and potential purposes of the website. This is evidenced by the responses we received from many prominent individuals, even though some felt that they were unable to participate in the process due to other pressing commitments. Two of the main challenges were: maintaining engagement with those that initially expressed willingness to participate (where they responded positively to our request to participate but then proved difficult to connect with thereafter); and, finding a suitable time to discuss the report and website with a number of them – naturally, they have busy schedules and many demands on their time, so persistence was required. The process often called for direct contact with key individuals beyond postal mailings and email communications, numerous telephone calls additional to the interviews and also sending reports and preparing participants so that they were briefed and informed as to facilitate meaningful discussion and feedback.

A particular challenge was recruiting participants for the focus groups – although individuals were willing to commit time to discuss the Armed Forces Charities Project on the telephone, many of those were either difficult to contact at a later date or were unable to attend several dates that were proposed for the follow-up discussions. Despite this, we engaged with 18 people at several focus groups in Edinburgh, who represented not just Scottish organisations but also those operating UK-wide. Subsequent focus groups were more problematic to organise, so researchers adapted and arranged individual meetings at their offices or where they deliver their services to the Armed Forces Community – this happened in both

Liverpool and London, and gave the researchers the opportunity to have deeper conversations, make connections and see first-hand some of the many beneficiaries of the charities that have been studied and also to discuss their needs. Insights and feedback from these face-to-face meetings have been incorporated into this evaluation.

An added benefit of the evaluation process was the opportunity to further promote the Armed Forces Charities Project among key stakeholders and the wider community. Researchers were able to reinforce the purpose and value of the project to the many that were already aware of it and raise awareness among those that had not previously encountered either the report or the website.

4. Methodology

Telephone Interviews, Focus Groups and Face-to-Face Meetings

The evaluation of the project took place through several stages and utilised semi-structured telephone interviews and focus groups as well as metrics on website usage and other qualitative and quantitative data to gain an understanding of the impact of the report and the usefulness of the website at this mid-point in the life of the project.

To support DSC researchers in undertaking the evaluation of the project, an external consultant (Libby Cooper of Amber Analysis) was commissioned to conduct telephone interviews to explore the achievement of outcomes (benefits accrued to users of the project) as a result of their accessing the website and/or using the report. The consultant also had a number of face-to-face meetings with evaluation participants and provided facilitation during focus groups, and herein provided objective and independent analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data.

There were two main postal mailings to recruit participants for telephone interviews. DSC undertook the first mail-out in early February; this was sent to 178 individuals, including peers, MPs, high-profile military and charity personnel and academics. The list comprised individuals who had been invited to the launch of the Sector Insight report in November 2014 – care was taken to ensure that each individual, or post-holder, still had a relevant interest in the topics covered by the project; for example, MPs who may have lost their seats since the general election of May 2015 or new incumbents since then, individuals who may have retired or new members of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, civil servants or Ministry of Defence staff.

There were 32 responses at this stage, 22 of whom agreed to participate.

The second mail-out (early April) was sent to 172 individuals, including all those that did not respond to the first round and an additional 25 individuals from a broad range of armed forces charities. There were 10 further responses following this stage, six of whom agreed to participate.

Throughout both processes, some respondents nominated colleagues to participate as well as, or instead of themselves. These nominees included those that had been previously contacted but did not initially respond themselves, and individuals that had not been contacted but were deemed interested in the subject matter by their colleagues or superiors.

In total approximately 200 individuals were contacted; of these there were 42 respondents, 28 (14%) of whom agreed to participate in the evaluation of the project.

Further to the above, a range of individuals who have contacted and corresponded with DSC via the AFC website over the past year were also contacted with an invitation to participate in the evaluation. Almost 20 invitations were sent to this group, although the response was poor.

Researchers contacted all those that responded or were nominated to arrange phone interviews. All of the telephone interviewees were invited to participate in subsequent focus groups and most indicated a willingness to do so.

Some of the respondents willing to participate were connected to Scottish armed forces charities. As a result of this, Jim Wilson, General Secretary of Veterans Scotland (VS), agreed to help convene a series of focus groups at VS in Edinburgh with representatives from the Scottish Armed Forces Charities sector and others with a UK remit (some of whom had been contacted by us, others were invited by Jim Wilson). Researchers went to Edinburgh on 20-21 April. Three focus groups took place during the course of the day on 20 April, with 18 participants. During these discussions a series of topics and themes were introduced relating to both elements of the project – this generated specific feedback and opinions and also stimulated broader conversations about the challenges facing ex-service personnel and the organisations which exist to support them. Audio recordings were made of the discussions to facilitate reporting.

Following the telephone interviews researchers made further contact with participants to invite them to attend a focus group to be convened in London on two dates in early June. Despite indicating a willingness to participate many either did not respond to further communications or were unable to attend on the proposed dates. Due to this, the focus groups were re-scheduled and all telephone interviewees were again contacted with an invitation, along with a further 280 individuals from the armed forces charities community. Despite enlisting the support of Cobseo to promote the call for participants among their members, once again, the response was disappointing. Five individuals agreed to participate during this stage of the evaluation (with one participant having to drop out later due to work commitments); however, this did provide further opportunity to engage with these key stakeholders on a more personal level, and face-to-face meetings were arranged to discuss their views and feedback. This gave researchers the chance to further promote the Armed Forces Charities project and also to experience first-hand the valuable work of a front line charity working with ex-service personnel. Other interviews were also conducted at charity offices, all of which resulted in a higher level of fieldwork than was originally anticipated.

In total, 45 individuals participated in the qualitative research for this evaluation. Some individuals participated in both the telephone interviews and focus groups, while others gave their time either on the telephone, in group discussions or during face-to-face meetings – we are extremely grateful and thank them all for their valuable contributions to this project.

Website Enquiry Analysis
A content analysis was undertaken of all of the email enquiries received via the website; these enquiries were then grouped into themes for analysis. Multiple email exchanges with the same individual were counted as one enquiry for the purposes of analysis, which resulted in approximately 150 separate enquiries.

Website Analytics
Google Analytics and the metrics embedded in the website were the key tools for providing the data. The data included session activity and status of user (new or returning), item hits and number of reports downloaded. This data has been plotted and analysed in segments for each quarter, with an overall look at session activity spanning the duration of the period under review.

Twitter Analytics
Twitter Analytics provides data on every tweet from the @forcescharities account, engagement rates, impression, retweets etc. The information on its own provides little insight into the impact, usefulness or

popularity of the Armed Forces Charities website, although this data can be used to try to determine if social media activity and promotion helps to drive traffic to the website.

Twitter activity and website sessions have been plotted together to establish any patterns and to try to determine if there is any correlation between the two. We can also see other key activities and events on the graph which may also have had an impact on site usage.

Mid-Stream Survey

To gather information on the user experience of the website and also feedback on the content of the report, DSC conducted an online survey in Q4 of 2015 which was subsequently analysed for evaluation purposes. We contacted approximately 1,500 charities with email addresses on the database to request participation, as well as promoting the survey via Twitter, the Armed Forces Charities website and Cobseo's newsletter – there were 98 responses. This survey aimed to inform the future direction and potential redevelopments of the website and future direction of the armed forces research. In total there were 98 respondents to the survey, and the findings are presented in Section 7.

A later survey towards the end of the evaluation project was also conducted. Despite promotion the survey did not attract sufficient responses to make the data significant. To try and ensure that meaningful and useful data is gathered to inform future decision-making, DSC plans to return to this survey later in 2016, at which point the redeveloped and redesigned Armed Forces Charities website will have been running and this will be a useful focus.

Summary of the Armed Forces Charities Project So Far

Throughout Year 2 of the project (2015) and into Year 3 (2016) DSC has been monitoring and reporting on progress using a range of information. The following section presents a review of this data and a chronology of activities for each quarter during this period since the launch of the project.

5. Progress throughout 2015 and Beyond

Since the launch of the project DSC has monitored and recorded a range of activities which demonstrate levels of engagement and usage of both the report and the website, and the promotional activities which underpin them. Presented here is a report of this period up to the end of March 2016.

Quarter 1: 2015 (including approximately 6 weeks at the end of 2014 following the launch of the report and website)

Year 2: YTD results as of Q1	
Printed reports:	900
Downloads:	772
Site Visits:	2359
Searches:	1462
Press mentions:	7
Advertising value:	£11k

There were 900 copies of the project report printed during this period, with approximately half of these distributed by FiMT and DSC to representatives of armed forces charities and other interested parties:

- 100 hard copies of the interim report were distributed at the launch on 18 November (2014)
- 300 hard copies of the final report were printed and distributed in January (2015)
- 500 further hard copies of final report were delivered to FiMT in March for distribution
- As of March, there had been 772 reports downloaded from www.armedforcescharities.org.uk

Press coverage

During this period the project attracted the following press coverage:

- *UK Fundraising*, 'Amount donated to most UK armed forces welfare charities "down by 6% in five years"', 18 November 2014 (available at: http://fundraising.co.uk/2014/11/18/amount-donated-uk-armed-forces-charities-7-five-years/)
- *Third Force News*, 'Armed forces charities in decline', 18 November 2014 (available at: http://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/armed-forces-charities-in-decline)
- Charity Times, 'In depth study shows the real state of armed forces charities', 18 November 2014 (available at: http://www.charitytimes.com/ct/in-depth-study-shows-the-real-state-of-armed-forces-charities.php)
- Civil Society, 'Armed forces charity sector is in decline, but need for services is increasing, according to DSC', 19 November 2014 (available at: http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/finance/news/content/18591/armed_forces_charity_sector_is_in_decline_alongside_increasing_demand_according_to_dsc)
- Third Sector, 'Number of armed forces charities in decline, Directory of Social Change report says', 19 November 2014 (available at: http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/number-armed-forces-charities-decline-directory-social-change-report-says/communications/article/1322540)
- *British Forces News*, TV broadcast, 20 November 2014 (available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTnm67CqmB0)

- *Soldier*, 'Charities at Risk?', December 2014 issue, p11 (available at: http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/25af1aa2#/25af1aa2/10)

The advertising value equivalent for this coverage is calculated at approximately £11,000. The outlets are not mainstream media but did reach relevant audiences, in particular the broadcast on British Forces TV news.

Prior to the launch of the report and website (October 2014), there was some early promotion from Oliver Letwin MP with a reference to the website in the (previous) Government's response to Lord Ashcroft's review:

> *'The Veterans UK helpline, and its associated Veterans' Welfare Service, are the MoD's primary service provider for veterans. As the Veterans UK website moves to GOV.UK, DBS Vets UK will be comprehensively reviewing the content, including links to third sector partners, other government departments, as well as other parts of Defence such as Career Transition Partnership. It will also include a link to the Directory of Social Change's online guide to service charities, funded by Forces in Mind Trust, when this is available.'*

Researchers contacted David Johnson, who manages media at Veterans UK, which resulted in an article in *Veterans World* later in the year.

Quarter 2: 2015

Year 2: YTD results as of Q2	
Printed reports:	900
Downloads:	1280
Site visits:	5931
Searches:	2924

During this period the website was promoted by the Naval Families Federation Armed Forces Covenant Team via their Resources Toolkit.

Google analytics suggests that daily visits to the site during this period ranged between 20 and 50, an average of around 33, with fluctuations during the week (i.e. there are peaks of 40-50 and then periods of little activity, for example, at weekends).

Activity to promote the report and website accelerated during this period in order to reach beneficiaries in the Armed Forces Community, policymakers with an interest in their welfare, and armed forces charities.

Researchers sent email notifications to armed forces charities when their entry on the website was updated, to publicise the website and report and to ask for their feedback. An example of some feedback in response to an email of this kind came from a large armed forces charity::

> *"Thank you for notifying me of the availability of the directory. It is a great resource and must have been a huge undertaking - it will be very useful, thank you. Is it possible to make minor amendments to the content? Strictly speaking [the charity's] entry is accurate and drawn from sources we produced, but I would welcome the opportunity to make some small changes of emphasis in a couple of areas."*

Naturally the team worked to comply with this request.

We also increased Twitter activity, following and tweeting relevant charities, beneficiaries and policy/media contacts via @forcescharities. Some excellent feedback came via Twitter, for example from Steve Lowe (@SteveLowe7) who said:

"I would just like to pass on my praise for bringing together this web page, this has been a long time needed. I have a broad network of contacts promoting and developing the benefits of a joined up approach, I will be promoting your web link among these parties and wider social media contacts on Linkedin & Twitter. Again well done, Warmest Regards, Steve Lowe"

Promotion of the website and report through DSC's enews continued among other activities such as word-of-mouth promotion at events and via networks.

Quarter 3: 2015

Year 2: YTD results as of Q3	
Printed reports:	900
Downloads:	1544
Site visits:	8593
Searches:	3997

In Q2, Google analytics showed that daily visits to the website ranged from 20 to 50, averaging around 33, with fluctuations during the week. This profile continued in Q3, but with a few higher spikes of activity (above 60 at several points) as a result of promotional activity, ongoing contact with the armed forces charities community and other external events.

The press release announcing the Scottish Armed Forces Charities project prominently mentioned the website, although the effect of this on traffic to the website was minimal.

Email notifications to the armed forces charities on the website continued throughout this quarter, with around 200 charities being informed that their records had been updated. This activity continued to drive further traffic to the website and provided useful engagement opportunities with the armed forces charities community.

During Q2 researchers mapped out some potential technical changes to the website and content management system. Discussions took place with the developers to explore the options for improving the website and we also began planning an evaluative project to get user feedback, which fed into further conversations about redevelopments later in the year.

By Q3 there had been significant updates to many key and high-profiles records, with over 380, primarily welfare charities being fully updated, with numerous other amendments also being made.

Year 2: YTD results as of Q4	
Printed reports:	900
Downloads:	1905
Site visits:	12447
Searches:	5692
Press mentions:	9
Academic citations:	1

During this period the project attracted the following press coverage:

- *Spears Wealth Management*, 'Smaller charities can help veterans too', 4 November 2015 (available at: http://wma.spearswms.com/2015/11/04/smaller-charities-can-help-our-veterans-too/)
- *Veterans World*, 'Explore the Universe of Forces Charities', 15 November 2015 (available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/476700/VW_36_final_Version-print.pdf)

The *Spears Wealth Management* blog, by Andrew Weston of New Philanthropy Capital, was timed for Remembrance Sunday and cited the Sector Insight research, although there was no reference to the website and therefore no notable increase in traffic as a result.

Conversely, the article placed in Veterans World magazine showcased the website and had a target audience of potential users and interested parties which coincided with a peak in activity on the website over the next couple of weeks.

During Q4 of 2015 the report began to penetrate academic literature, with a citation in a journal article featured in *Environment and Planning A*, an open access journal described as 'an interdisciplinary journal focused on the interface of human geography, environmental studies, and urban and regional research'. The article, entitled 'From warfare to welfare: veterans, military charities and the blurred spatiality of post-service welfare in the United Kingdom' (Herman and Yarwood, 2015), makes several references to the report, which are reproduced with context below:

> *'Although military charities continued to play an important role [after World War Two], the duty of care shifted substantially towards the state. However, from the 1980s onwards there has been a rise in the formation of new military charities. According to the Charity Commission (2012), 10–20 new military charities are registered each year in England and Wales with registrations peaking in 2010 when 44 new charities were registered. This coincided with a high point in British causalities in Afghanistan and widespread public support for their plight. Military charities also witnessed a 14% increase in their income between 2008 and 2012 (Pozo and Walker, 2014), requiring many to register for the first time, according to the 2006 Charity Act, as their annual incomes topped £100,000. [Footnote:] The number of registered armed forces charities actually fell by 7% between 2009 and 2012 (Charity Commission, 2012). These reflected the disbandment of World War Two regimental associations as their active membership fell away and the merger of others. In 2012, the income of many military charities started to decline (Pozo and Walker, 2014) as operations in Afghanistan were scaled back and then ended in 2014.'*

(Herman and Yarwood, 2015, p2631)

'There are currently 2,050 charities associated with the armed forces in the UK (Ashcroft, 2014). These include cadets, heritage charities, regimental associations, grant-making benevolent trusts and a range of specialist service delivery charities. Of these 18% are welfare-related and have a growing role given current restructuring of the Services and the impacts of recent conflicts on Service leavers' needs (Pozo and Walker, 2014). Half of these are members of the Confederation of British Service and former service Organisations (COBSEO), an umbrella organisation that seeks to co-ordinate military charities, and accounts for over 90% of third sector income to armed forces charities (Ashcroft, 2014). Despite the number of military charities, most headquarters cluster in London and the South East suggesting that there are spatial gaps in the provision of care from the third sector (Pozo and Walker, 2014).'

(Herman and Yarwood, 2015, p2632)

'There may also be a delay between leaving the Services and attempting to access help, either through lack of knowledge or recognition that problems exist. Help for former service personnel is only provided 'up to a point' (Pozo and Walker, 2014) and the third sector has been of particular importance in addressing gaps during the recent recession and associated public sector cuts.'

(Herman and Yarwood, 2015, pp2632-2633)

'According to Pozo and Walker (2014) the military charity sector shows greater cooperation than other charitable sub-sectors. Despite this evidence of collaboration, organisations remained critical of each other's activities and, indeed, of the state agencies involved in welfare, particularly the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), the official route through which all former service personnel cross into civilian life […]'

(Hermand and Yarwood, 2015, p2637)

This is an excellent example of how the research has been used to provide evidence and it is encouraging that this has appeared relatively soon after the publication of the report in November 2014 – typically journal articles can take more than a year to write and publish, and further referencing and citations are anticipated in the future. Indeed, one such pending reference will be published in a forthcoming paper (see below). On a related note, FiMT and DSC were approached by a national bank with a request for data on armed forces charities to feed into a strategic review of their CSR and product offering to armed forces charities and personnel – data was prepared and provided, and a follow-up meeting was arranged for early 2016 (see page 40 for case study).

Quarter 1: 2016

Total project results at end Q1 2016 (1 March)	
Printed reports:	900
Downloads:	2282
Site visits:	15507
Searches:	7634
Press mentions:	9
Academic citations:	1

During the first quarter of the year the project continued to attract interest via reactive and proactive means.

In January 2016 the project was featured in the first issue of AFCC (Armed Forces Community Covenant) News - Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire (February 2016, p7) under 'Services and Support Agencies' (available at: http://apps.warwickshire.gov.uk/api/documents/WCCC-966-985). Several other organisations and websites picked up on and referenced AFCC news which increased exposure.

On 4 February DSC representatives met with a team from a national bank. The bankers described how they used the data DSC had provided and their plans to embed the Military Covenant within their business – specifically via their rebranding and redevelopment of the one of their businesses.

DSC has also spoken to Dr Linda Cooper, Research Fellow in the Veterans and Families Institute (VFI) at Anglia Ruskin University. She is currently working on an analysis of Project Nova, and has referenced our research in her new paper, but this is likely to be some months away from publication. Dr Cooper also agreed to participate in this Impact Evaluation study and took part in a telephone interview to discuss the project.

There is growing evidence that the report is reaching key individuals and DSC is beginning to be approached as experts in the field of armed forces charities research. Project data and findings are being used in a range of contexts and circumstances and researchers have developed networks and made valuable contacts. This is expected to continue and indeed increase going forward. For example, more recently, Combat Stress, approached DSC to produce a report on charitable provision for the mental health needs of ex-service personnel on the basis of our Sector Insight report and the valuable data and knowledge which that generated. This Combat Stress report was successfully delivered and will feed into their future strategy in providing timely, effective support for veterans with mental ill health issues.

6. Website Enquiries

Since the launch of the website and the associated dedicated email address (armedforcescharities@dsc.org.uk) researchers have been contacted by numerous individuals and organisations for a variety of reasons. In total there have been approximately 150 separate enquiries and email exchanges up to April 2016.

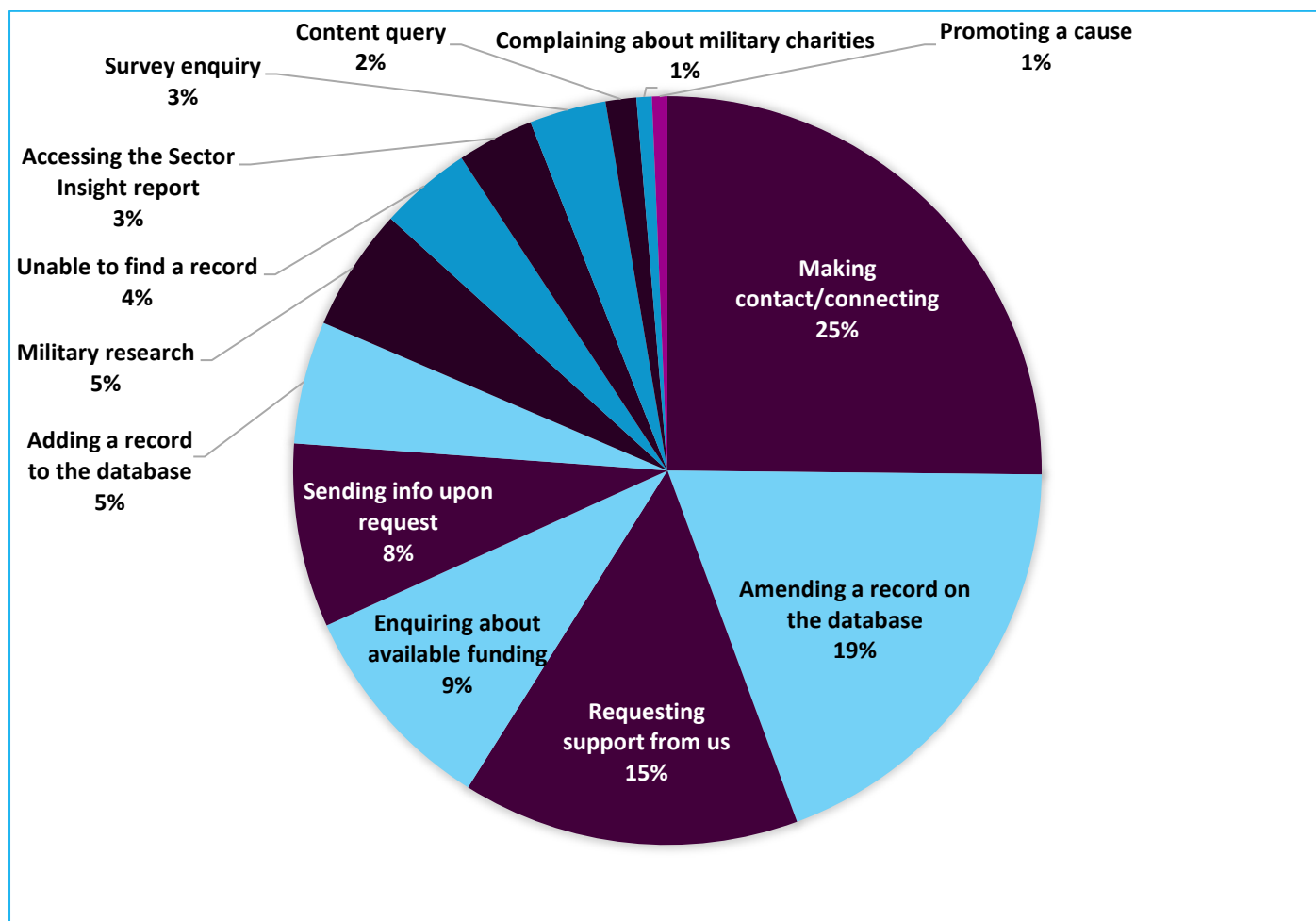*Figure 1: Enquiries Received Via Email, January 2015 – March 2016*

Figure 1 above shows that one quarter of the enquiries received were from people who were trying to make contact or connect with other individuals or organisations for a variety of reasons. Some were trying to locate individuals with whom they had served, others wanted to be put in touch with charities so they could donate goods or services to them or to make small cash donations as a result of a legacy or fundraising activity. The second highest proportion of correspondence (19%) were from representatives of charities held on the database who wished to make amendments to their records, with a further 15% of enquirers requesting support from 'Armed Forces Charities', in the form of a donation or sponsorship for an event in which ex-service personnel were taking part. 9% of enquirers wanted help and information about funding opportunities from the grant-makers featured on the website, and researchers assisted them by searching the database. Most of these enquiries were looking for small grants to purchase equipment for either themselves or on behalf of an ex-serviceman or woman, or towards funeral expenses. Enquiries of this nature tended to be more involved, resulting in multiple exchanges.

A further 8% of the individuals who contacted DSC were doing so as a result of requests for information and details about their charities, for research purposes and to amend and update their records. DSC was also contacted by a number of individuals who were either unable to locate a record on the website (and were then directed to it) or wished for their charity to be added to the database (these were usually not armed forces charities as we would define them, rather they provide or have provided services to veterans amongst a range of other beneficiaries). Other correspondents had general queries about the content of the website or individual records, wanted to access the report which can be downloaded from the website or were undertaking some research themselves and came to us for assistance in their endeavour. A small number had queries about the Q4 2015 feedback survey or wanted to promote a cause or event they were involved in, while one individual emailed to share his opinion on military charities and their prevalence.

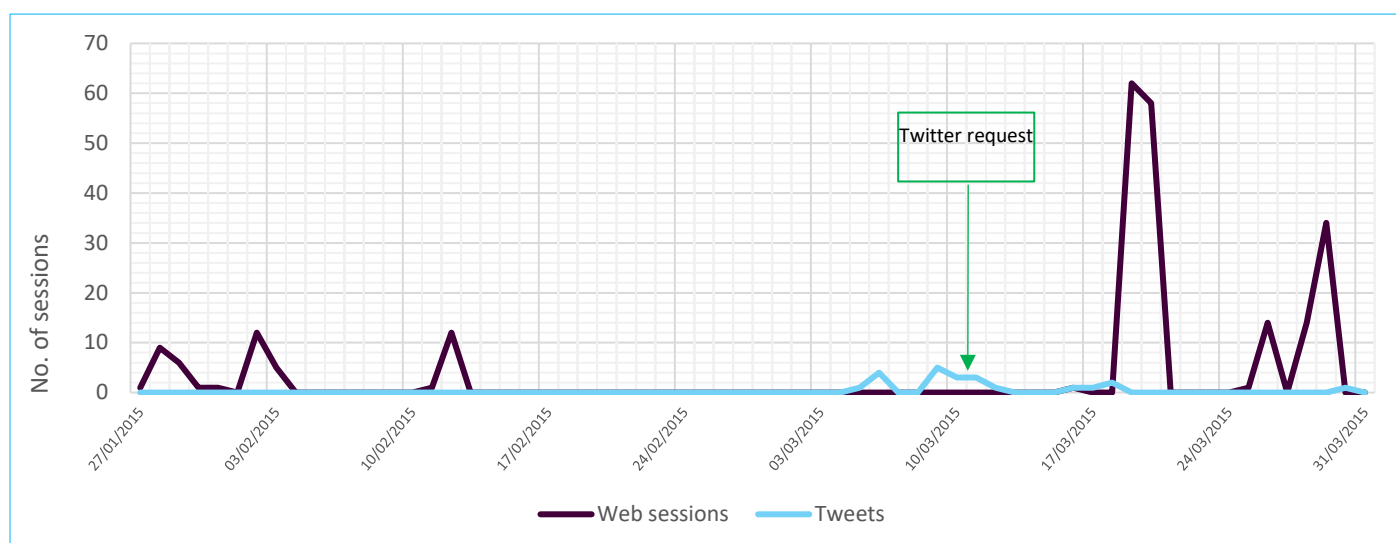In summary, the majority of enquiries fell into three broad groups:

- people wanting to make contact with individuals, organisations or associations, either themselves or on behalf of someone else
- people supplying information or queries as a result of initially being contacted by researchers
- people contacting DSC searching for support or funding from armed forces charities or directly from 'Armed Forces Charities', with the impression that this is a single organisation that can provide funding (a fairly common occurrence in our experience with other services and resources that we provide).

It is reasonable to assume that many of the people that contacted us did so as a result of finding the contact details via a search engine – at the time of writing (May 2016), a Bing search for 'armed forces charities' puts the Armed Forces Charities website second only to a paid link for an insurance firm, while a Google search puts it sixth after four paid links and SSAFA.

Further details about enquiries throughout the year are given in the following section, along with an examination of website session activity and Twitter.
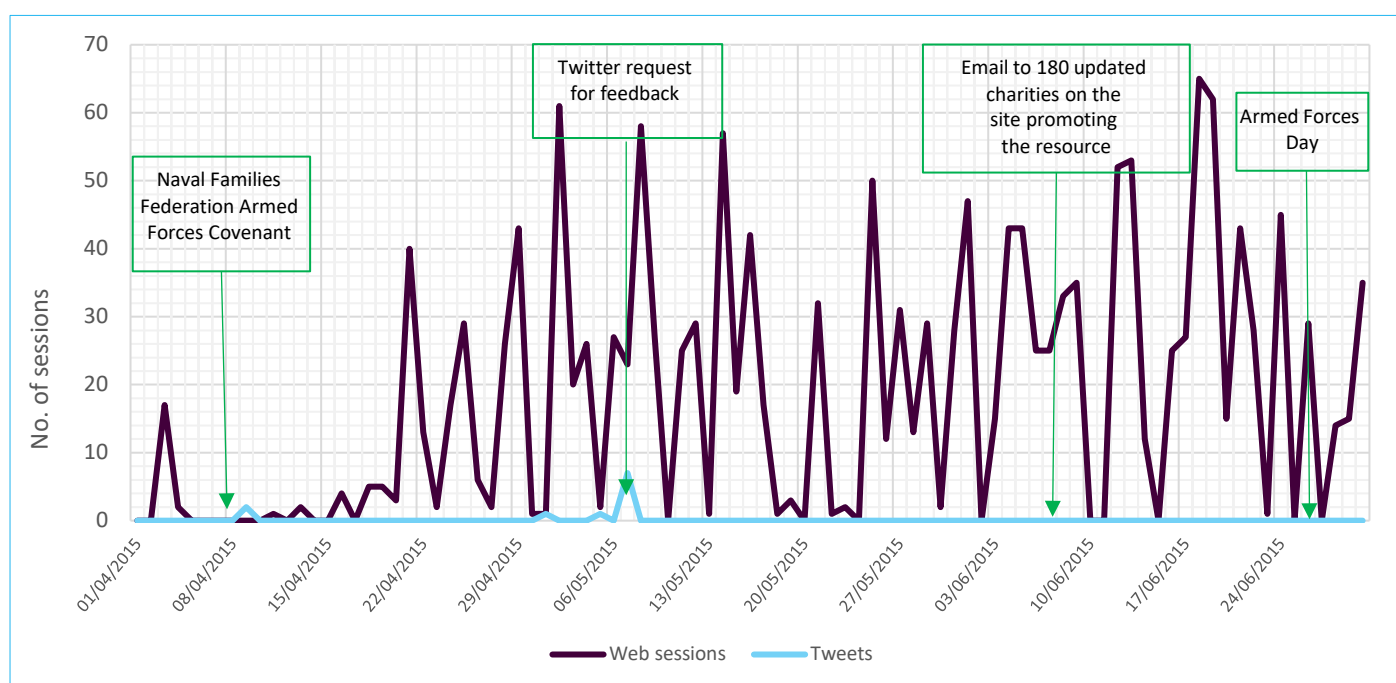
7. Website and Twitter Analysis

Figure 2: Session activity on www.armedforcescharities.org.uk - Q1 2015
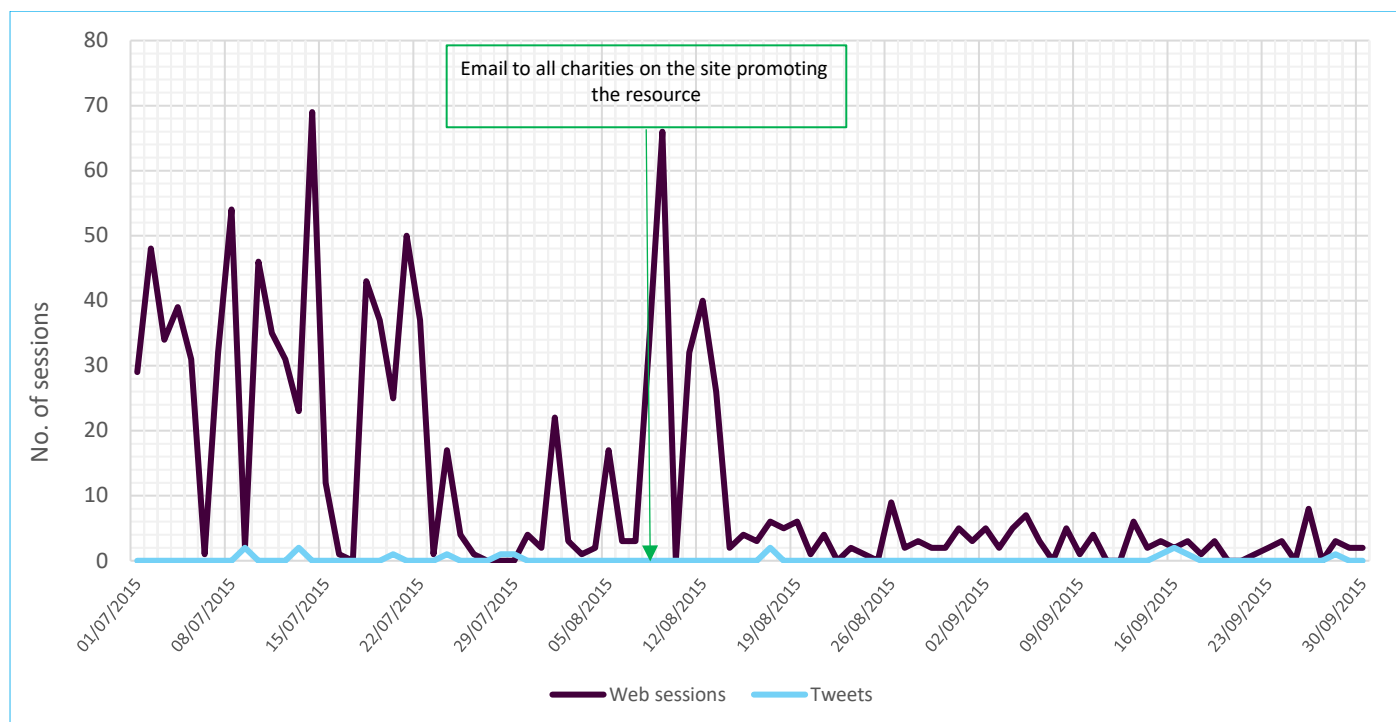

During the first quarter of 2015, further developments to the website took place and in early March promotion of the site on Twitter began via @forcescharities. Early tweets focused on promoting the report (and directing users to download it from the website), relevant armed forces news and a request for feedback on the website. During this period @forcescharities achieved 4,047 impressions (the number of times a tweet appeared in users' timelines or search results) and averaged an engagement rate of just over 1.8% (the percentage of tweets that were interacted with, for example through retweeting, replies or follows). During this early period enquiries through the website via email were largely about trying to make contact or connect with other individuals or organisations, or accessing the report.

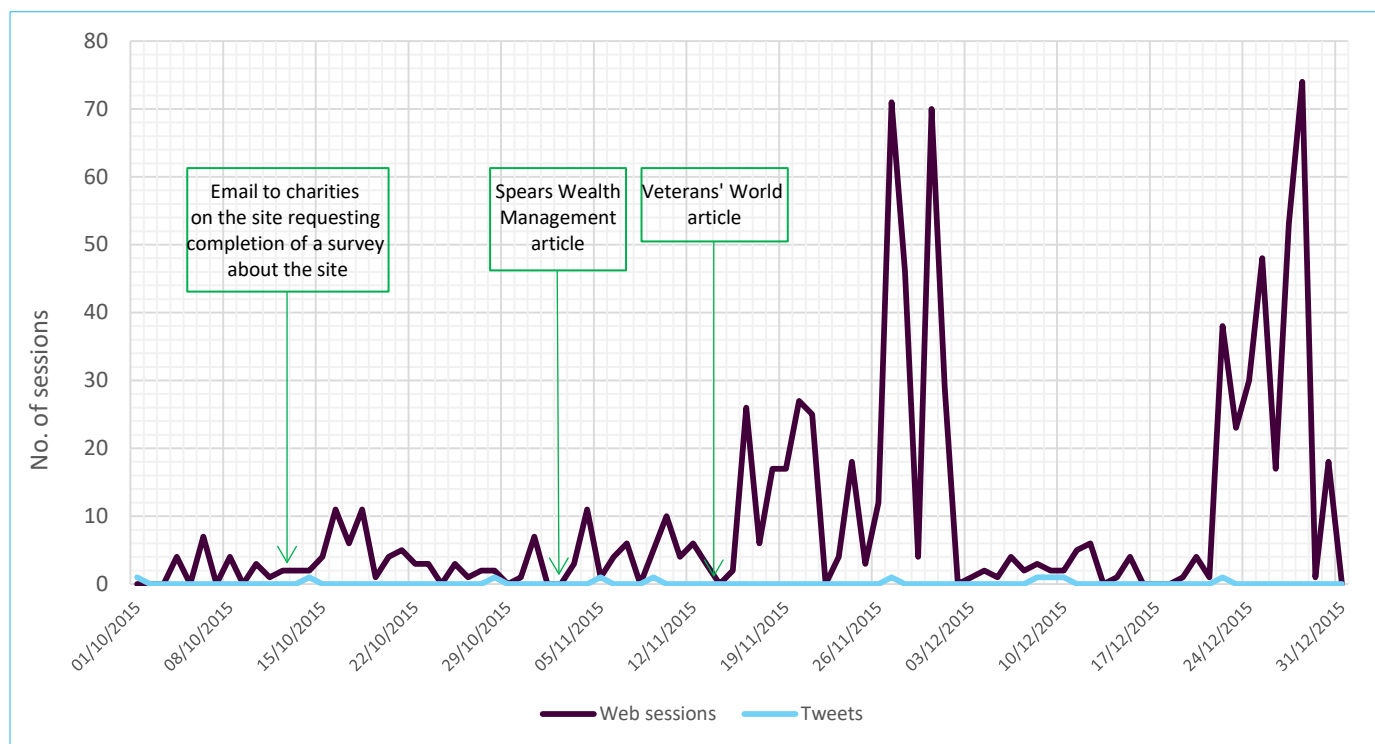*Figure 3: Session activity on www.armedforcescharities.org.uk - Q2 2015*

During the second quarter of 2015, activity on the website increased significantly, with an average of 33 visits per day. Twitter achieved 2,365 impressions and averaged an engagement rate of 1.15%, however other promotional activities such as DSC e-news coverage and contacting charities featured on the website appeared to drive more traffic to the site. We can also perhaps see that external events may play a role in increasing interest in the contents of the site as another upturn in activity occurred following Armed Forces Day in June. Almost all of the enquiries we received via email during this period were in response to us making contact with the charities on our database to inform them their records had been amended. Invariably they wanted to make changes or further amendments to their records which typically involved changing contact details.

Figure 4: Session activity on www.armedforcescharities.org.uk - Q3 2015

There were a number of peaks in activity during the third quarter of the year, followed by a period of low usage. By the end of this period @forcescharities had attained 344 followers on Twitter and had achieved 4,397 impressions and averaged an engagement rate of 1.5% during the quarter. Despite the period of relatively low traffic to the website seen above, during this period there were a relatively high number of enquiries and correspondence via email. As one would expect, many of these enquiries were in response to researcher emails, where changes and amendments to records were requested – it is worth noting that by this period there had been almost 400 records updated on the database and contact with representatives from these charities also took place via telephone conversations. There were a number of requests for assistance with research, and help with making contact and establishing connections with other organisations and individuals during this period. For example, DSC was contacted by a landlord in the North East who owns several properties that he wished to make available to ex-services personnel experiencing homelessness. Researchers made suggestions and directed him to the most appropriate agency to facilitate his proposal to benefit homeless veterans in the area. Another example of facilitating a connection is where researchers put a fundraiser in touch with an armed forces charity to whom she wished to make a donation.
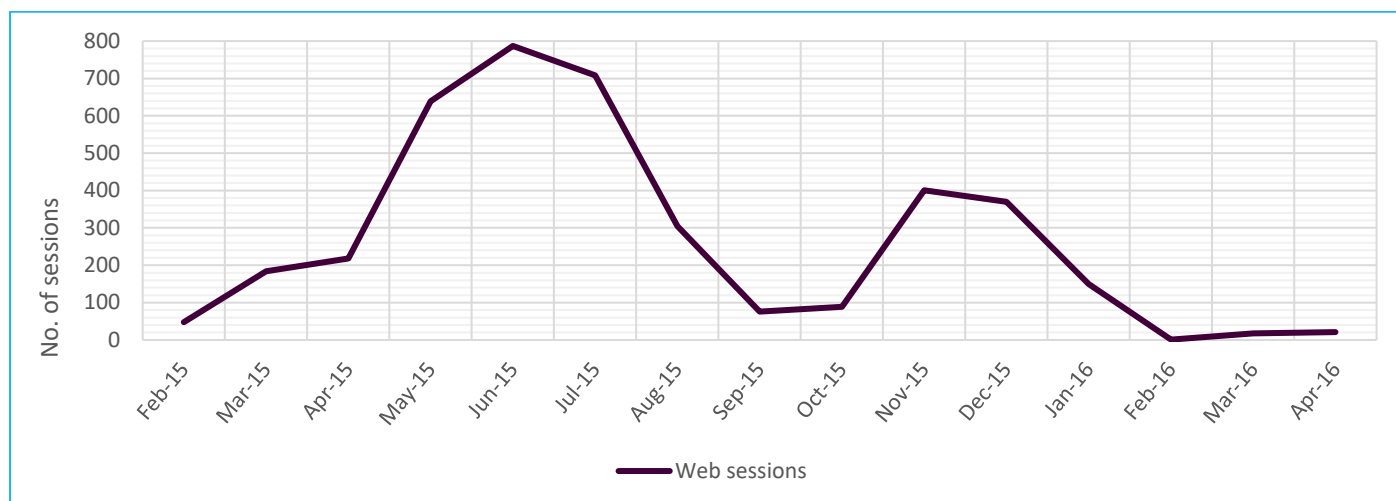
Figure 5: Session activity on www.armedforcescharities.org.uk - Q4 2015

Early on in quarter 4 researchers launched a survey to gather feedback on the Sector Insight report and the website (see section 7). Due to this there was a high level of engagement with the charities featured on the database and also other stakeholders, and the survey was publicised via social media and DSC e-news. This period also saw the publication of the Spears Wealth Management and Veterans' World articles, which may have had an effect on traffic to the website. By the end of this period @forcescharities had attained almost 500 followers on Twitter, had achieved 3,705 impressions and averaged an engagement rate of 1.6%. In the second half on November there was a significant spike in activity, which we think can be attributed to promotional and media work, and the percentage of returning visitors versus new visitors also increased substantially during this period, which indicates more interest or in-depth use of the website. Interestingly, the Christmas period saw significant activity on the website. Email enquiries during this period continued to increase, with the majority relating to either making connections with or trying to contact others, requests for financial support or sponsorship or amending information on the website.

The effects of social media activity, namely Twitter, on the impact of the website are difficult to determine. Whether Twitter activity even draws much attention to the resource is inconclusive – the data suggest that sometimes there is an effect while other times there is little effect. However, as with all social media activity aimed at promoting a resource or service, the key is growing and cultivating a following over time, which can in turn drive traffic.

Looking at the trend across the period under review the peak of activity (June 2015) coincided with the highest volume of notifications regarding updates, with the assumption that the charities whose records had been updated then checked the website and the information held about them. Data on enquiries via the website seems to support this, as during June 2015, 70% of the emails received were requests to make amendments to charity records.

Between February 2015 and April 2016 there were over 4,000 sessions on the website, with almost 96% of these being 'new' sessions, i.e. first-time visitors to the website. The average amount of time spent on the site per session was around 17 minutes, which means users spent over 1,130 hours using the site during this period. This would suggest that users have a specific, one-off issue, situation or requirement which draws them to the website, although assessing whether the information they find is of benefit to them going forward is extremely difficult.

Data shows that the most popular item on the website by far, with the most number of hits (over 9,000 as of May 2016), is the search page, with the second most popular being the 'download the report' link (2,500 hits: May 2016). It is evident from the number of times the report has been accessed that it was downloaded over 200 times between the end of the first quarter of 2016 and May (2,282 downloads by the end of March 2016, 2,500 by May). Although the interest in the report during this period may have been partially driven by the awareness-raising element of the evaluation process, it does highlight the usefulness of the website as a vehicle for providing easy access to the report and disseminating this research.

It seems apparent that some usage of the website is driven by promotion via other mediums like Twitter or contacting featured charities directly which in turn increases traffic to the site. Promotion of the website in highly relevant places which are aimed at our target audience is much more effective in driving traffic to the website than coverage in more general outlets (Spears Wealth Management versus Veterans' World, for example). Future promotion of the website should take this into account, and target specific resources, outlets and publications with relevant content.
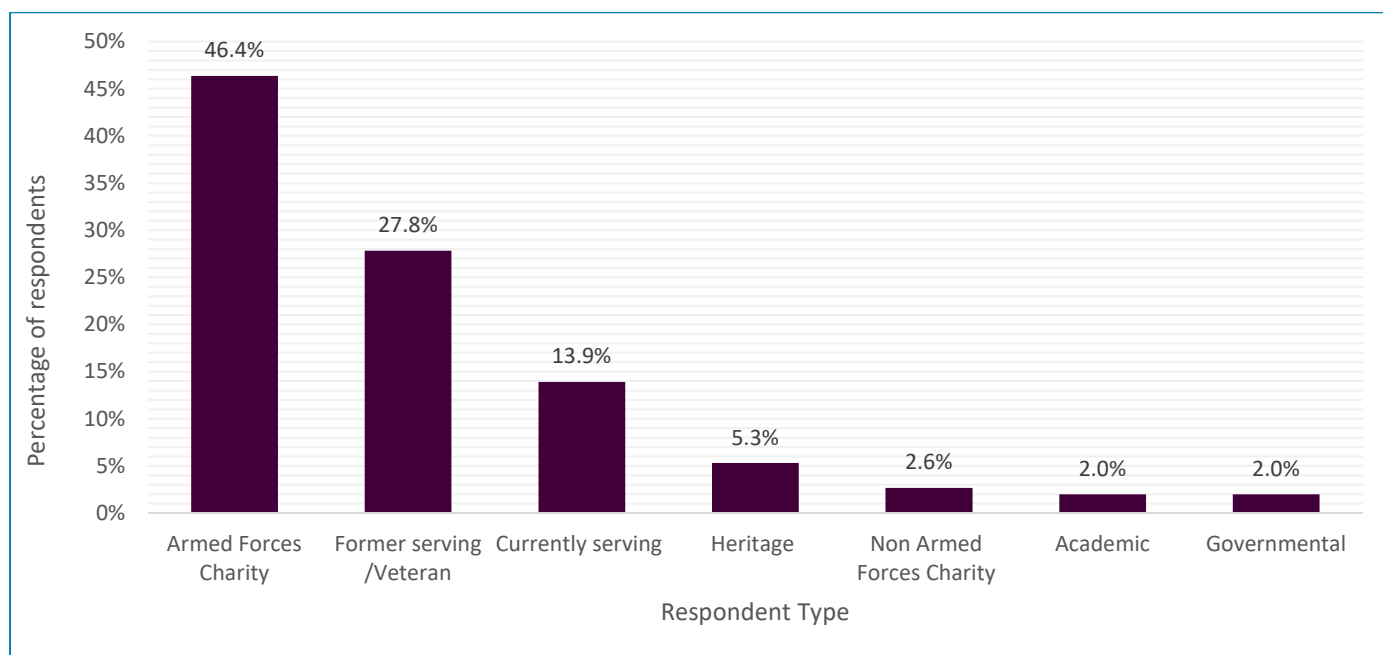
8. Mid-Stream Survey

The following analysis derives from data gathered via an online survey asking questions regarding usage of the website and report. In total there were 98 responses – not all respondents answered all of the questions and some selected more than one option within particular questions as appropriate.

Who uses the website?

Figure 7 shows how respondents identified themselves in the survey - 46.3% identified themselves or their organisation as begin a charity. More than one-quarter (27.8%) identified themselves as a veteran and 13.9% identified themselves as currently serving members of the armed forces.

Figure 7: How respondents describe themselves and/or their organisations (n=98)

NB: a number of respondents gave multiple answers, for example identifying themselves as a veteran who also represents an armed forces charity. For Figure 8 and Table 2, the feedback of charity representatives only is analysed.

How charities use the website

Figure 8 shows the how those who identified themselves as representatives of a charity (n=70) used the site. In total, more than 50% use the website.

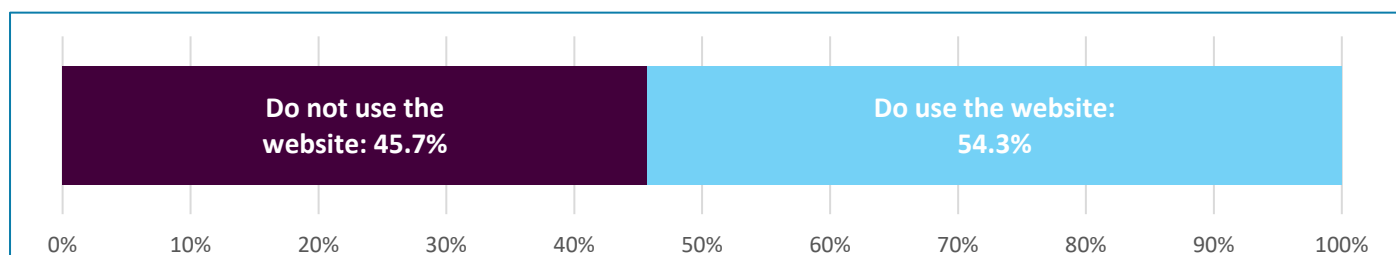*Figure 8: Usage of the website by charity respondents*

Table 2 shows the information of interest on the website for those who identified themselves or their organisation as a charity and do use the website (54.3%). In total, 25.3% of these used the website for 'Information / guidance on Armed Forces Charities sector'; 20.2% used the site to find 'Charity contact details' and 19.2% used the site to find assistance for their charity. It should be noted that respondents may use the site to access more than one type of information.

Table 1: Information on the website used by charities (n=38)[1]

Website Information Use	%
Information / guidance on the Armed Forces Charities sector	25.3%
Charity contact details	20.2%
Assistance for your charity	19.2%
Assistance for yourself / another individual	8.1%
Academic research	8.1%
Policy purposes	7.1%
Charity income / expenditure details	7.1%
Information on memorials	3.0%
Information on heritage or museums	1.0%
Information on Cadet groups	1.0%

[1] Respondents can enter multiple answers

Figure 9 shows the how those who identified themselves as ex-service personnel (n=8) used the site. In total, more than two-fifths (45.7%) do not use the website.

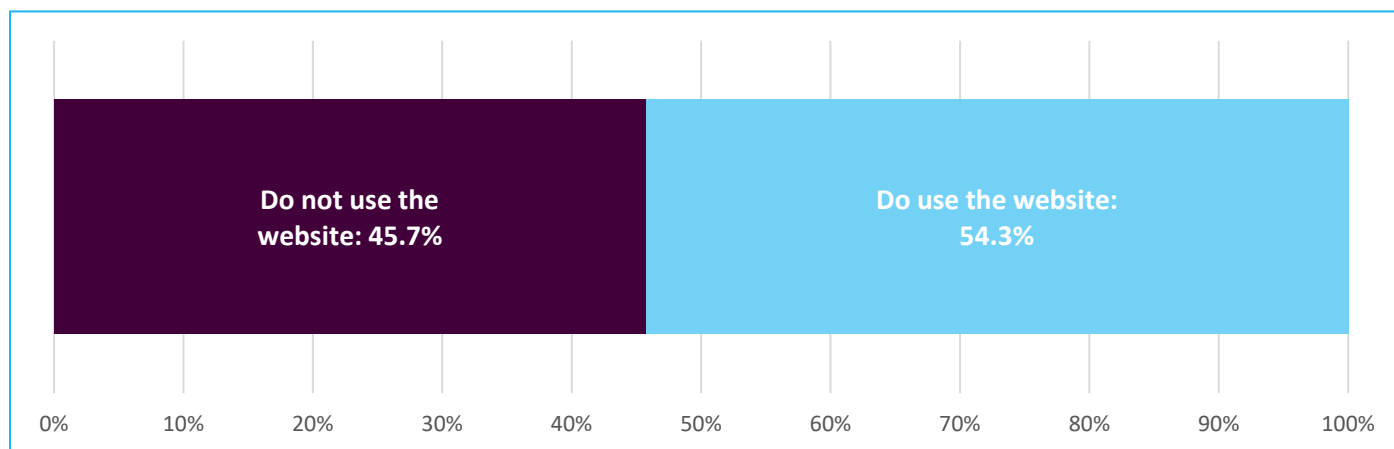*Figure 9: Usage of the website by ex-service personnel (n=8)*

Table 3 shows how ex-service personnel who do use the website interact with it to find information. In total, only two respondents used the site to find 'Charity contact details' and similarly, only two respondents used the site to find assistance for themselves or another individual.

Table 2: Information on the website used by ex-service personnel (n=5)

Website Information Use	Total	%
Charity contact details	2	40%
Assistance for yourself / another individual	2	40%
Information / guidance on Armed Forces Charities sector	1	20%
Total responses	**5**	**100%**

Discovering and visiting the website

Table 4 shows how respondents discovered the website. The survey was largely promoted through Cobseo, partially explaining the 35.2% of those who discovered the website that way.
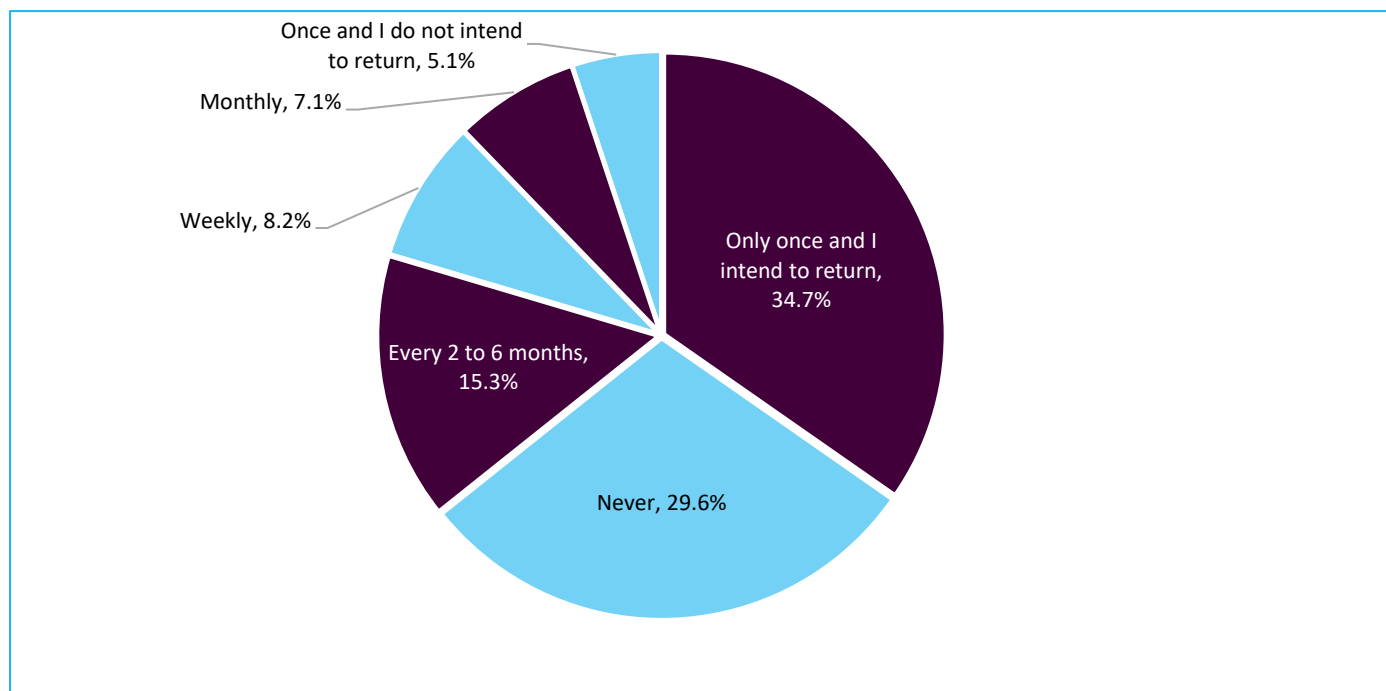
Only 9.5% of respondents discovered the website 'through a charity member', and fewer still 'via an internet search e.g. Google' (5.7%) or via DSC's main website (4.8%). This pattern was also mirrored when the data was analysed for ex-service personnel.

Table 3: How respondents discovered the website

How respondents discovered the website	%
Via Cobseo	35.2%
Via email invite to survey	16.2%
Via Forces in Mind Trust	14.3%
Through a charity member	9.5%
Other	6.7%
Via an internet search e.g. Google	5.7%
Through ex-service person/ Veteran	4.8%
On the DSC website	4.8%
Through a currently serving armed forces member	2.9%

Figure 10 shows how often respondents visit the website. In total, over one-third (34.7%) of respondents had only visited the site once, but intended to return, with close to that amount (29.6%) having never seen the site. In total, 15.3% used it 'every 2 to 6 months', 8.2% weekly, and 7.1% monthly. In contrast to this, 5.1% had no intention of returning to the site.

Figure 10: How often respondents visit the website

Website content

Figure 11 (below) shows respondents' answers when asked to rate the quality of information on the website on a scale of 1 (low) - 5 (high). A combined response of 79% scored the website as 3 or 4 on its quality of information.

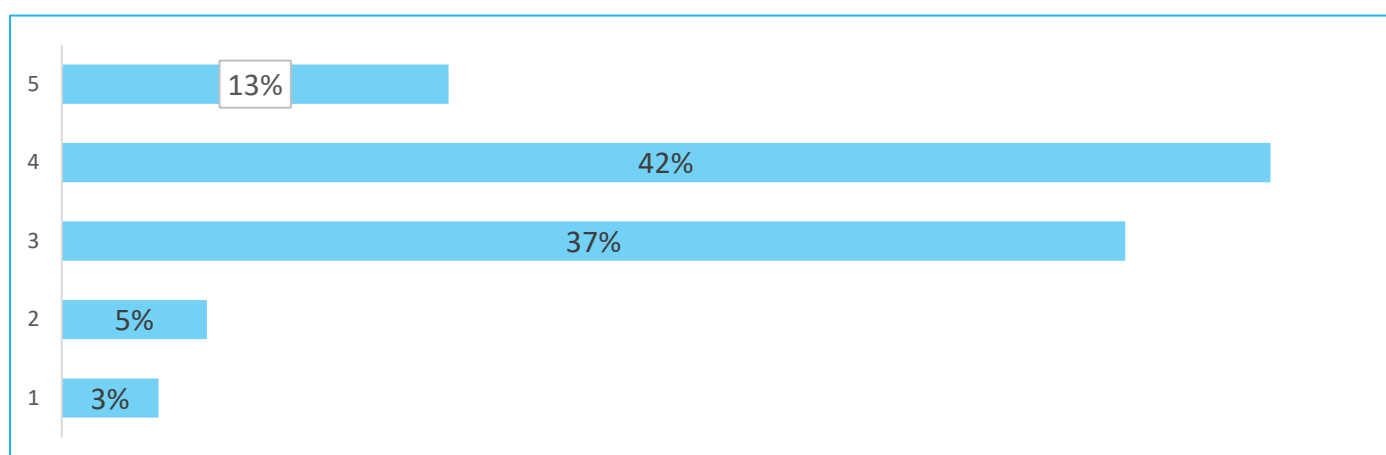*Figure 11: Quality of information on the website*

Table 5 shows respondents' answers when asked to state what they search for on the website. Over one-third (35.2%) reported that they searched for 'General information on Armed Forces Charities'.

One-fifth (19%) made searches for welfare provision, while 15.2% searched for 'both welfare and service funds' provision.

Table 4: Information that respondents search for on the website

Search Topics	%
General information on Armed Forces Charities	35.2%
Welfare	19.0%
Both welfare and service funds	15.2%
Associations	8.6%
Service funds	7.6%
Heritage organisations	5.7%
Information about museums	3.8%
Information about memorials	3.8%
Information on Cadet organisations	1.0%

Information on individual charities

Respondents were asked to score the importance of the information on individual charities on a scale of 1 (low) - 5 (high). Respondents scored the following information in a largely favourable light.

Figure 12 shows that details of charities' financial information is regarded as being from medium to high importance by most respondents. This information appears on the new website and has been made more clearly visible for site users.

Figure 12: Financial information on charities

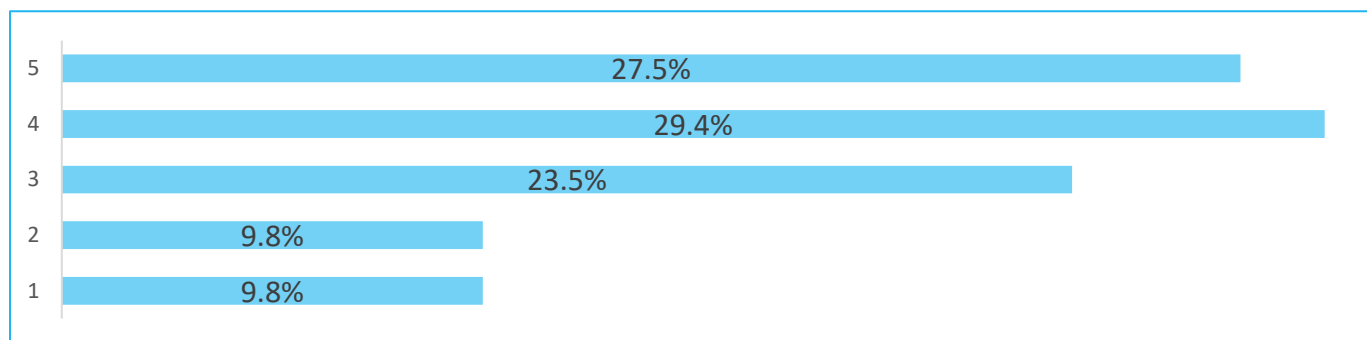|	
5	27.5%
4	29.4%
3	23.5%
2	9.8%
1	9.8%

Figure 13 shows that information on who the charity can benefit is also regarded as being from medium to high importance by most respondents. This information remains on the redeveloped website.

Figure 13: Details of who the charity can benefit

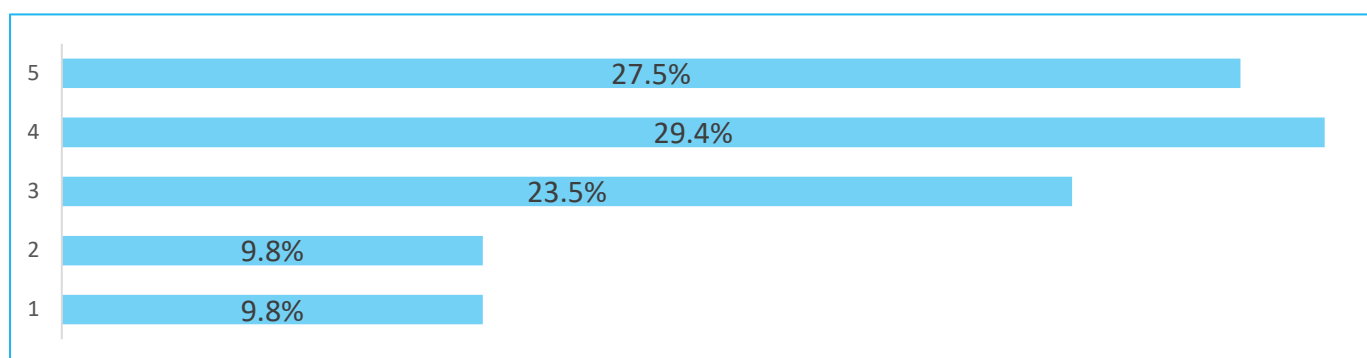|	
5	27.5%
4	29.4%
3	23.5%
2	9.8%
1	9.8%

Figure 14 shows that details of what each charity does is regarded as being of high importance by most respondents. This information appears on the new website and is made more accessible through the site's new and easy to operate 'advanced search' function.

Figure 14: Details of what the charity does

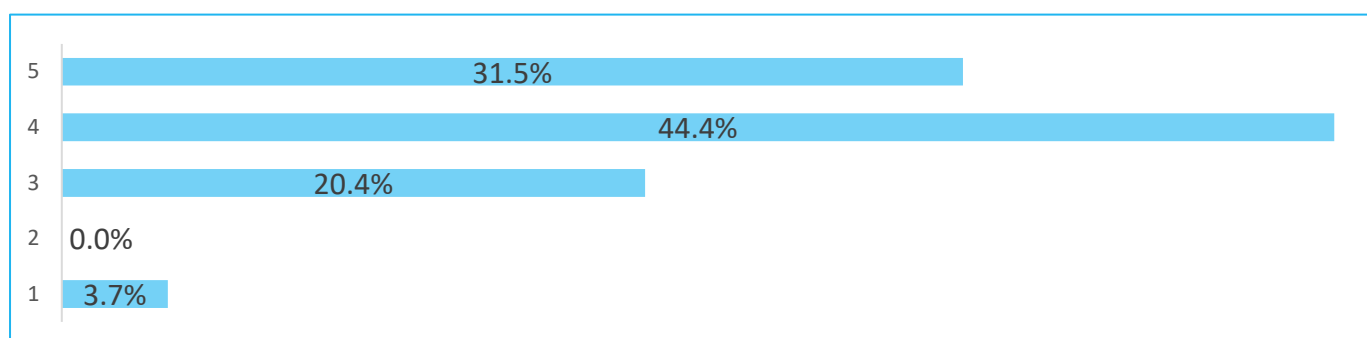|	
5	31.5%
4	44.4%
3	20.4%
2	0.0%
1	3.7%

Figure 15 shows that details of how to apply for charitable support is regarded as being from medium to high importance by most respondents. It remains clear to see on the website for each charity listed.

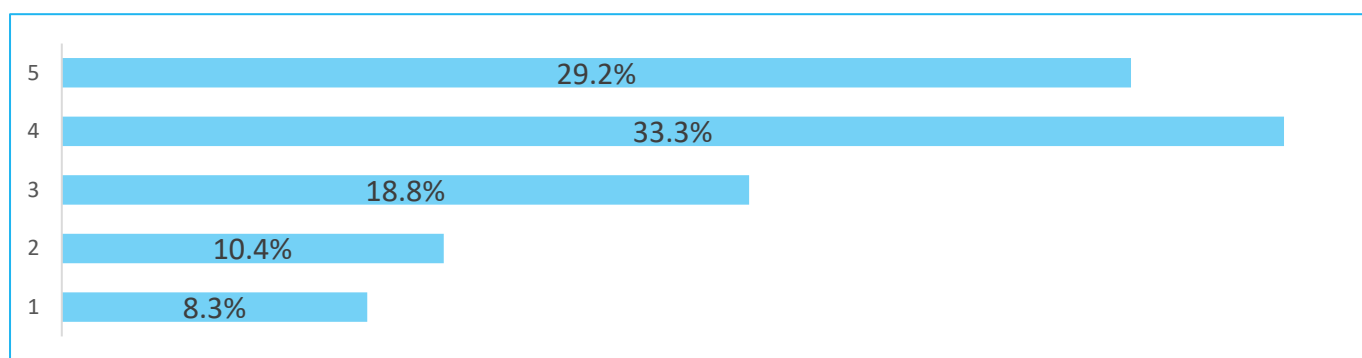*Figure 15: Details of how to apply for charitable support*

Figure 16 shows that charity contact information is regarded as being of high importance for a vast majority of respondents. This information is now much clearer on the redeveloped website and is continually maintained.

Figure 16: Charity contact information

User experience

At the beginning of this section respondents were asked the open question, 'what information currently not on the website would be beneficial to you?' Responses included:

"Means testing for individuals"

"Medical and Disability help availability"

"Mostly the old age people are suffering from multiple diseases. They needs all kind of help. For eye site problem, diabetes, blood pressure, needs wheelchair to move. These type of information I need to communicate with them."

"Not sure, need to be clearer about how the website functions first."

"Standard reference by region/county of numbers of veterans, families in an area"

"Statistics about grants available and how to apply"

"That's the great unknown - which charities are NOT represented"

"Timings for the application process"

"To show how much of the resources the charitable organisations spend on admin, PR, etc. and on actual support of individuals and other organisations."

Figure 17 shows respondents' answers when asked about the website's ease of navigation on a scale of 1 (low) - 5 (high). Responses largely centred on the middle of the scale.
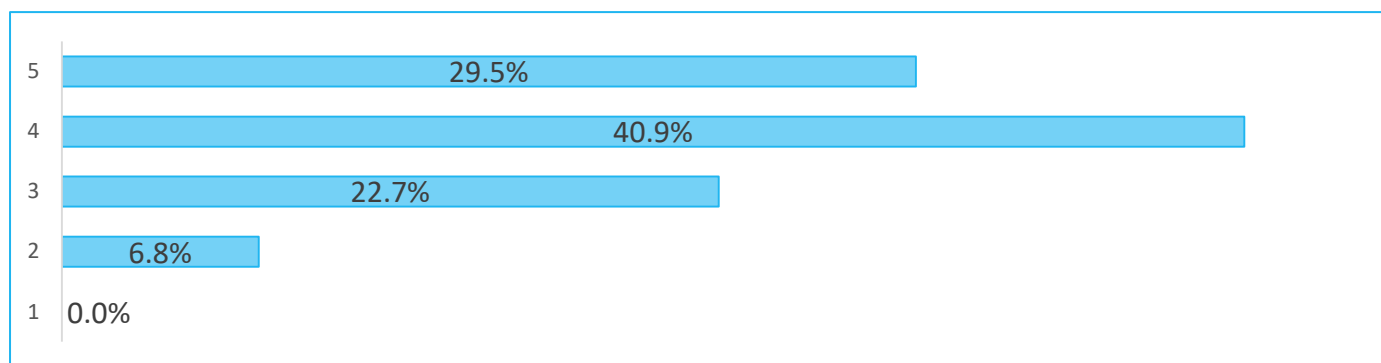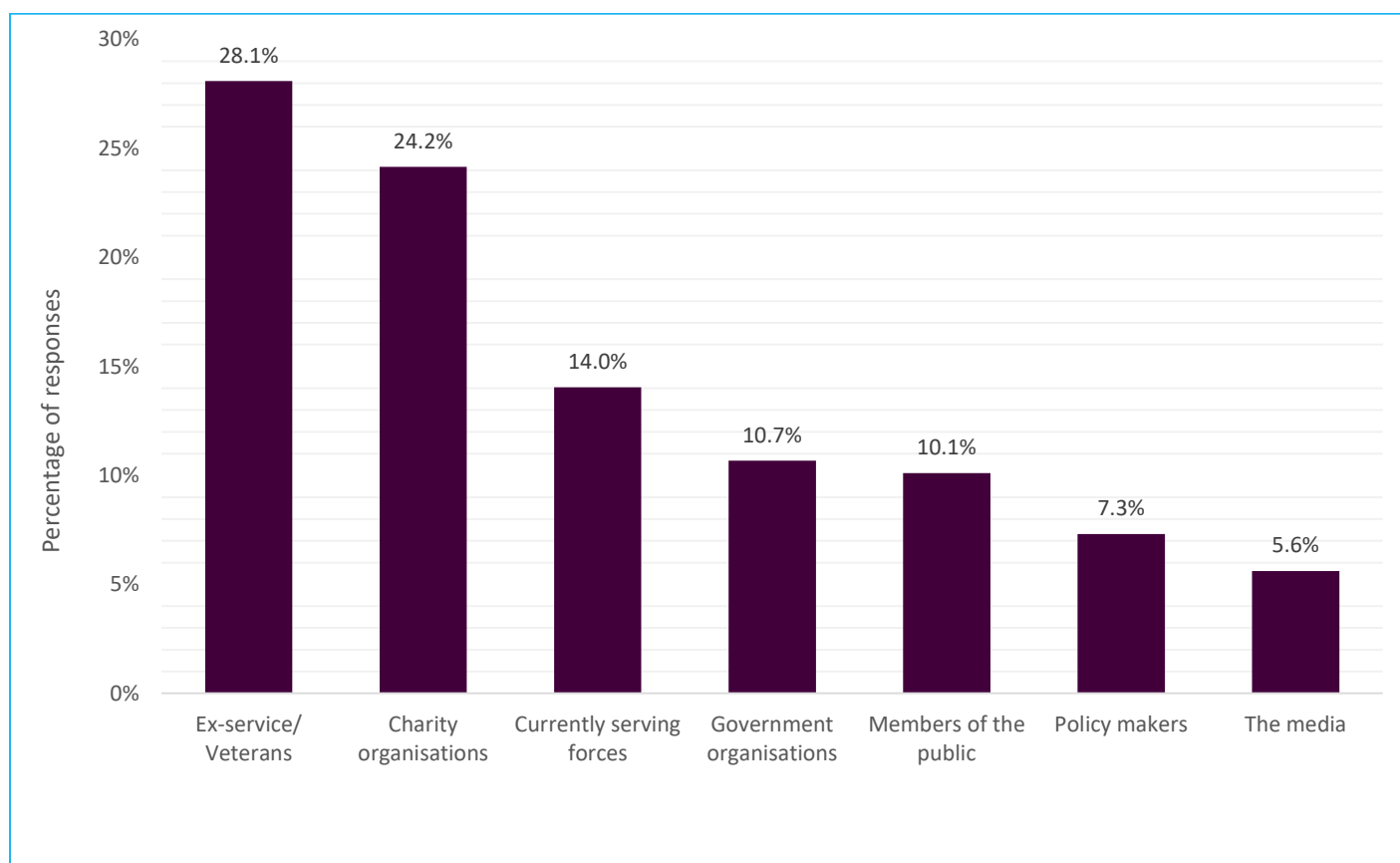
Figure 18 shows respondents' answers when asked who they thought would find the Armed Forces Charities website most useful.

Figure 18: Who would find the website most useful?

28% reported they believed ex-service personnel/veterans would find the website most useful. Further analysis revealed that those who had previously identified themselves as veterans shared this sentiment

(43% of those provided the same answer). Just under one-quarter of respondents believed that charities would find the website to be useful (conversely, of those who identified themselves as representing a charity, only 23% said that this would be beneficial for charities, with 26% reporting that it would be beneficial to ex-service personnel/veterans.

Other comments about the website

The following comments from some respondents show that the overall feel of the website needed improvement, and although users liked the search function as a concept, in practice the resource needed development.

> *"Found the search experience pretty poor"*

> *"Having searched for my charity, The Officers' Association, nothing appeared. 'Officers' Association' also had no result. It came up third under Officers Association."*

"I don't have sufficient experience to be able to usefully comment but I was surprised to find that if you search for our charity LOL-Foundation without the hyphen in the charities' name section, it couldn't find it."

> *"It's a very functional, impersonal site. The excessive use of capital letters makes it hard to read and looks 'shouty'. The colour scheme, grey, is cold and unfriendly. Overall not an inspiring visual impact."*

> *"Mostly I do a Google search."*

Significant redevelopments have been implemented on a new version of the website, which is to be relaunched during the third quarter of 2016. Among these redevelopments, the new website for example delivers a more easy to use search functionality, with a more lenient search engine, which will allow for approximate searches to return possible results. It is also a more pleasing website experience in regard to presentation and data.

9. Findings from the Telephone Interviews (incorporating feedback from face-to-face meetings and discussions)

Telephone interviews were conducted with 27 people who responded positively to the invitation, as shown in Appendix 2 (with other interviewees). A breakdown of their designation is shown in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Sample of individuals interviewed

Charity representative	Politician	Academic (e.g. think tank)	Government / policy-maker	Serving personnel	Other agencies
15	3	3	2	2	2

Knowledge and use of the website

Of the 27 telephone interviewees, seven of them said that before receiving the letter they had not previously heard of the Armed Forces Charities Project and 21 of them had not used the website. Some of these individuals reviewed the website during the telephone interview in order to provide some feedback.

Of the five who had used the site, four of them were from charities and one was a University researcher who had looked at the website when she received the invitation letter and had then realised that it, and the report, would be of use in research they were about to embark upon. She had found the site very useful because her main interest at the time was to gain a birds-eye view of the sector and the services offered to veterans. Two of the charities used the website to search for potential partners:

> "When I finally got to the site, the information was exactly what I wanted. We are looking for organisations to send referrals to and for organisations to work with on housing and homelessness. Yes, we found some contacts and I did write to them but I can't remember how successful that was."

> "We have been doing work on partnership building and want to set up something in Yorkshire and we are looking at the site to see what charities to approach. We know a lot of them already and I usually pick up the phone and speak to Cobseo for a final check. So the website becomes the first contact and then I go to somebody for verification. I did not realise the website and the report work together. I welcome a single interface so that everything is in one place but I am not sure of the status of DSC in terms of Cobseo, who provide more reassurance."

Another had stumbled upon the website and explored the contents for general interest, which he described as not offering him anything more than he already knew. He described it as having the usual players mentioned but it didn't provide any new information. One other interviewee had 'simply dipped into it' for general interest.

> "I don't personally need it but knowing it is there when I engage in discussion is useful so I am able to recommend it to others."

Many of the interviewees raised the question *'who is the site for?'* and there were conflicting views and opinions as well as some criticism that it was trying to be all things for all people.

> "Who are the main beneficiaries? Veterans so they can do a bit of research? Or charities so they can do some sign-posting – case workers could use it to look for other organisations who provide advice. Or maybe it is for researchers. At the moment it is trying to be all things to all people."

> "I think it could be helpful for welfare workers. The eyes of the veteran would glaze over – it is not for them."

> "It is great for finding information about other charities but I don't think a service user would be able to use it. Service leavers would go to the British Legion first. The charity world may know about the site but the people looking for advice need something practical and easy."

"It needs to be looked at from the perspective of the end beneficiary more closely. I think it could be a useful sign post for the community support team and it could be put together with the armed forces attitude survey."

"It is not obvious who the market is for the website. For veterans and serving personnel - then maybe – but for academics like me it needs some serious work."

One particular issue regarding the website related to the reliability and quality of the data. Although there was a general feeling that when the information had first been posted it may have been correct, there was a concern from several people that the data was not necessarily current.

"A bit of a state of the nation. Our own charity was out of date and it raises the question about the status of the rest of the data. There is nothing anywhere on the site to tell you about the standing of the information – dates etc."

"It did not represent us properly and so we do not know how accurate it is for others. Accuracy is important."

"This data is extracted from other sources and the data on our organisation is not added although it is available. Therefore, there is a reliability problem. If I googled 'armed forces charities' this site comes 6th and so it would never be accessed."

"It could be useful. Cobseo have a similar thing for members and so I can flit between the two. But Cobseo has the stamp of approval. The organisations are validated as military charities and so you know that you are connecting with a bona fide organisation but I am not so sure about the DSC one."

"How current is the information? Keeping these databases up to date is notoriously difficult and that undermines the confidence of the user. It needs some kind of quality standard."

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good, interviewees were asked how they would rate different aspects of the website. Sixteen people felt able to complete this question (this includes the five who had used the site and 11 who looked at the site during the interview). Their average scores are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Overall rating for the Armed Forces Charities Website

Relevance of content	3.5
Quality of the content	3.4
Ease of finding information	3.3
Usefulness of information	3.2
Speed of accessing content	3.0
Frequency of updating information	2.4

These figures show above average ratings for most of the dimensions. Overall, they reflect the statements given by interviewees: there was not a strong sense that the website was something 'needed' by the

sector, although it was described as 'possibly coming in handy now and again'. The lowest figure is that given to 'frequency of updating information' since this relates to the whole quality issue and the levels of confidence that people have in using the data. The issue of 'data lag' is one that needs to be communicated more effectively – some information can appear out of date although it is the latest data available. In other cases more recent information may not be available.

Interviewees also had a variety of things to say about the workings of the website:

> *"There are some nice short-cuts so you can look at individual charities but it is out of date. Searching was easy – it brought the right ones up but the search categories are awful. In broad terms it does what is on the tin. But it is very utilitarian and not attractive compared to millions of others."*

> *"It is very simplistic; I am not sure whether that is deliberate but it is a little bit too simplistic for me. I like the links on the main page but it does not tell me what the whole thing is about – there is no real home page of what to do, what is available, when the data was uploaded and who owns the site."*

> *"I googled it and three different websites popped up. It is not clear who runs the site."*

> *"I would say: is the message clear about who the site is for? When I searched for our organisation I got five pages of results. Most people would have given up. It is less approachable than other charity websites. Veterans are now much younger but the image on the site is old."*

> *"There is a lot on there but it is a bit clunky. The search function is not very flexible and you have to apply brain power. Cross tabbing would be fantastic. It needs more of an idiot's guide. We don't know whether this charity sector is expanding or shrinking."*

> *"Well it is fine but ten years out of date. It is not taking account of the way people use technology nowadays. It needs to be accessible on tablets and phones. It has not provided any added value – I know you have to be careful about giving ratings but I think something like a Trip Advisor function would be helpful."*

There were also mixed views about the amount of information on the database. Some interviewees thought there was a need for personnel information; names of CEOs, managers etc., so that contact could be made directly to the person running services. Two people thought the site should focus more on the outcomes of the work of charities – they felt there was a general lack of information about what charities actually achieve. Others said that there was already too much information and that some of it was unnecessary. An interviewee from a Scottish organisation, who had developed a central site for veterans, reported that they had struggled with the issue of maintaining the quality of their data. They recently found a way to update their information on a regular basis through the use of hyper-links to other places where the data has to be updated regularly.

Nine of the telephone interviewees were from the Scottish sector and they expressed dissatisfaction that Scotland was under-represented in the UK programme of work. For this reason, it was decided to hold focus groups in Edinburgh in order to stimulate further thinking about the usefulness of the project for Scotland. These results are reported upon below in Section 9.

Knowledge and use of the Sector Insight Report

Eight of the 27 telephone interviewees had not accessed the report. Of the 19 who had read the report, two of them had simply skipped through the summary and had little more to say than 'it chimed with their views but it didn't provide additional information to take them forward'.

The 16 people who had used the report did so for a variety of reasons: general interest (6); gaining a better understanding of the sector (3); securing or applying for funding (3); making a business case for new services (2); using its arguments for informing the sector (3); influencing organisational strategy (2); and, academic literature review (1). Most of the interviewees praised the quality of the report and they felt that it had covered the right issues:

> *"Extremely valuable - and if they did another one it would be excellent to see how the sector is changing."*

> *"There is a lot of helpful, rich information - very clearly set out and well referenced with huge amounts of detail. DSC has compared the military sector to the wider voluntary sector and that is great because it is so often lost. We will use it and I will recommend it to colleagues, particularly the communications team. The methodology sections are off-putting but the Summary is excellent. Better than many other reports in the sector which are very flimsy. Researchers will lap up the data section."*

> *"There aren't any gaps, it covered the right issues – it is enough of a challenge to have done this."*

> *"Both of the introductions made me want to read on. Yes, it covered the right issues but I could not work out which section we are in – I didn't think the categories were correct but tricky for someone like me who is new to this world. I will keep it on my desk because it is a really useful reference tool."*

> *"The executive summary and back end in terms of myth-busting and statistics has given us a lot of information. We have been using both sections."*

> *"I think it is very useful for charities but I certainly don't think veterans would be interested."*

Inevitably, there were some criticisms but they were minimal compared to those of the website and they did not undermine the overall ambition of the research. In fact, comments tended to relate to individuals' criticisms of the sector itself and a view that the report could have reflected the sector's contradictions more effectively. There was a sense that the armed forces charities landscape is complex, perhaps too large, with particular difficulties between national and local initiatives, between large and small charities and that as a consequence there was much duplication of services. Although interviewees referred to 'well intentioned' smaller ones that are emerging, there was a feeling that clearer pathways are required in order to reduce duplication. Mechanisms should be established for new charities to research into real need before setting up new services and for larger ones to extend what they already deliver.

> *"I think the report is incredibly valuable. But the type of language is a bit too clean and tidy – it makes it sound as if everyone loves each other! Organisations in the sector do not like each other. It needs to be a bit 'more messy' – uncovering some of those so called myths."*

"I thought the report made a good job of gathering what is known but it is let down by its introduction by General Ridgeway, where the assumption is that there is nothing wrong with the charity sector – myth breaking that they are all getting on famously. So it doesn't give the impression of being objective but of being clubby. There is room for expressing opinion and this detracts from its usefulness. There should be more amalgamations and efficiency in the sector."

"I wanted a better understanding of the sector and its challenges. It is useful to have an independent review of some of the myths but there are questions around some of the new entrants into the sector and whether they have created competition – I am not sure that was dealt with well. My experience is that I have not seen much positivity from having new organisations."

"It is only useful if it is kept up to date. But it has limited use as a snap shot in time. It has to be alive to be really helpful. It would be helpful to know the year of the data. It could also have another level stratified by region and sub sectors."

"It is very useful in general terms explaining what the service sector is like - myth busting etc. And I have used it to argue responses to the general public. But our research is specialist and we need practical data with a strong focus on collecting our own stats for policy change or for changing delivery. The report is a bit too general for that – I am not convinced about the accuracy of some of its detail either."

"Having a more detailed index would be helpful and colour coding some of the sections so that it is easier to dip in and out would be great."

Among the charities there was a view that the report 'might come in handy' when applying for grants or for informing the general public or other charities during meetings or seminars:

"It can be used for statistics and funding bids but I don't know how often the information is updated. I think it covers the big ones but the small ones don't seem to be in the report. I wonder whether this is a duplication of Cobseo?"

"I dipped in and out to varying degrees of success to try and find statements for reports and for funding bids but it is hard to dip into."

"I have found it useful for funding bids and for building a case for specific services. I will use it more and more for this."

"I have tapped into it for reference and used little bits of information when I have written papers to make a business case. It is possible to do very simple benchmarking. It is limited with regard to high level analysis such as segmentation and not good on country by country analysis which is going to be very important in the future."

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good, interviewees were asked how they would rate different aspects of the Sector Insight report. Fifteen people were able to complete this question. Their average scores are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Overall ratings for the Sector Insight Report

Relevance of content	4.1
Language used in the report	4.1
Usefulness of information	4.1
Quality of the content	4.0
Design of the report	3.8
Ease of finding information	3.6
Depth of the content	3.4

These figures show higher satisfaction rates than for the website and reflect the qualitative findings from the interviews. Interviewees tend to feel that the report has relevance to them (in particular the charities), that it can be useful for their work and that the quality of the report is high.

Outcomes and Impact

The interview schedule held a section to gather data about the specific outcomes that beneficiaries felt they had accrued as a result of reading the report and using the website. The most predominant uses of the report and website were for providing general information about the sector during meetings, seminars and in research papers or for building a business case for funding, extending or establishing new services. One organisation had used the report to build a case for providing services to a new target group:

Case study 1

Developing new services for a new client group – a charity

A *Scottish charity (part of a UK wide charity) that works to build the confidence, skills and personal social development of young people and adults facing difficult problems, found that a number of their users had previously been in the military. They recognised a significant need and decided to design a programme specifically for this target group. They learnt about the Insight Report during the early stages of their research from a Scottish charity and from FIMT. They read the report and honed into its themes, identifying charities and potential collaborators with whom they could consult. The report helped them in their gap analysis to understand the general context facing veterans in transition and the institutional landscape supporting them, particularly in Scotland. They identified and cross checked contacts to make sure they had not missed people during their consultations and market research. "The clustering of the charities was very important because I have not been involved with military charities before. We also looked at the grant giving practices of the sector for two reasons: we wanted to see if we could generate grants for individuals who come on our programme and we needed to think about the long term sustainability of our programme." The organisation is now delivering the new programme in Scotland. "The report was one of a number of sources such as web based searching and other sectoral reports and academic research papers that we used. But in the end a lot of it was about 'feet on the ground' just getting out there and consulting – we are now connected to at least ten other organisations and this will continue to grow". The interviewee reported that the Insight report was helpful rather than a corner-stone in their work but that it had definitely saved them time because it synthesised the sector very effectively and enabled them to drill down.*

A listing of potential outcomes was devised for the interview schedule with a rating scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very little and 5 is very much, against each outcome. Results show that 16 of the 27 interviewees believed that neither the website nor the report had an impact upon the way they work. Five interviewees thought they now had a better understanding of their sector, particularly with regard to the myths that exist and the relationship between their sector and the rest of the voluntary sector (two or three others felt that they already had a very good understanding of the sector and so the report did not add too much to their knowledge base).

As yet, interviewees have not provided much evidence that the website or report has been used to sign-post or provide advice to beneficiaries. Neither is there much evidence that the project has been used to influence policy or lobby government, but this is a difficult area to measure since it takes much longer than one or two years to affect policy. Results from this part of the interview survey are shown in Table 9 below:

Table 9: Armed Forces Charities Project – mid-stream impact rating from interviewees

Outcome	No. of respondents	Rating
Sign-post/provide advice to individuals	n/a	n/a
A better understanding of the armed forces charity sector	5	4.6
Used the report for reference about the sector	5	4.2
Provided an evidence base for research/business case/funding	6	3.8
Used it for organisational strategy	2	5
Policy development work has been influenced	n/a	n/a
Organisation has developed new services	1	n/a
Organisation has used data for lobbying government	n/a	n/a
Collaborative working with the sector has increased	1	3
No impact	16	n/a

Two organisations, however, did find the report so useful that their organisational strategy is likely to be heavily influenced by reading and using its contents. One of these organisations is also likely to engage in new collaborative relationships, as shown in the following case studies:

Case study 2

Influencing organisational strategy – a charity

A large national charity has been looking hard into the future. The Insight Report was seen as a stimulus to their thinking and their desire to establish a new strategy to respond to the changing needs of their beneficiaries. The CEO commissioned a researcher to test out the themes contained within the report (together with the British Legion Household Survey). The two documents were seen as the most authoritative on the sector.

The researcher developed a research instrument from the report, using the issues and arguments contained within it as the conceptual framework for testing out the perspectives of stakeholders such as academics, beneficiaries and other charities about the changing needs of beneficiaries through the next 15 years. They found a remarkable similarity between the views of the report and those of stakeholders. At the time of writing, this work was still at its nascent stage. The CEO had received a PPT with more than 200 slides which will be used by the charity to identify the issues they will respond to; the new strategic direction the organisation will take; the services it will either cut or expand; and the new services it will establish.

Case study 3

Influencing organisational strategy – A National Bank

The national bank has used the report to provide its relationship managers with background information of the operating model of armed forces charities. They appreciated the high level view of the report, including its ability to inform readers of the way in which armed forces charities fitted into the wider landscape of the charity sector, and used its statistical data in their own paper on the number of charities, the spread of the sector, its finances, how much has been spent on the sector by the MoD etc. The Insight report also helped them to convey to their managers an understanding of the status of public awareness around armed forces charities.

DSC were then asked to provide additional meta and granular data so that the differences between the income and expenditure of the charities could be exposed. The data was re-arranged by the bank's data informatics team so that they could run their internal banking systems to see which organisations banked with them. At the time of the interview, the resulting report was still in draft form and waiting for presentation to the steering committee but the intention was to identify which products were being demanded by the sector and, therefore, which products their bank could offer.

Two additional outcomes of this process resulted in the bank supporting the Royal British Legion on its poppy day with contactless donations (although there was no certainty about whether that had resulted in an increase in donations); and in the establishment of a new partnership with a bank that provides services to the armed forces charities sector.

The Future

Interviewees were asked a set of questions regarding the future, including: their organisation's three most important information needs; their views about the three most important emerging issues that future research on the sector should take account of; and, their ideas for promoting the project effectively.

Organisations' most important current information needs

Naturally, almost all interviewees had much to say on this topic. Their most important information needs are categorised under the following headings:

Beneficiaries

A number of interviewees reported that they had significant challenges in scanning the horizon and accessing good data on their beneficiary groups. Although there was a general feeling from some of the interviewees that the Royal British Legion has a 'brilliant' household survey, updated every five years, which maps gaps and identifies where service personnel are, they said that there is otherwise a dearth of available information that they could draw upon. A number of their information needs revolved around numbers: where are the veterans; where are the reservists; how many ex-service personnel do we have and what are their changing needs; how many have disabilities; how many are offenders; are they living in isolation or do they feel part of the community; how can we understand the customer better – for instance who is Tommy Atkins (the common soldier); how have their socio–economic dimensions changed over time?

Interviewees reported that they had good systems for recording the numbers of beneficiaries they supported – maybe 10,000 per year, for instance – but they had no idea what percentage of the total that represented and, therefore, how many people they were not supporting. Two interviewees called for more information and evidence of best practice around the transition into civilian life: what is the role of the military in this process; what are the pathways that families go through in the process of transitioning from the armed forces into civilian life; and, what is the role of the charity sector in helping the transition process?

The issue of pathways through services seemed to dominate the minds of a few interviewees. They wanted to find systems to map the pathways of their clients. What pathways do clients have to go through when seeking housing, for instance; which other organisations are offering advice, information, and support? They also wanted to know what happens to people when they do not follow through with the level of contact and advice given to them.

Some interviewees were concerned about issues associated with measuring impact - how do they know when their services are effective and how could they gain an understanding of the impact of military life upon individuals? There was a general call for more case studies to reveal the answers to some of these questions.

Organisational development

In many ways the issues identified in this section are no different to those in other parts of the voluntary sector. The professionalism of charities preoccupied the minds of a number of the interviewees. People are looking for case studies on ways in which organisations have developed new strategies for delivering their welfare services, ways in which new strategic partnerships have been established and examples of collaborations and evidence of how they have helped to achieve 'better things' as a consequence. Several of them mentioned that it was difficult to get hold of contact names of individuals in other organisations and the idea of benchmarking was put forward. Quality assurance – which is an issue that the voluntary sector struggles with generally – was also being addressed by some of the interviewees, and there is a need for more information from other organisations in the armed forces charities sector on the methods they have chosen and ways in which they have helped them. Reference was made to portals that have been established within the Housing and Independent Living sector where shared case studies have been used to drive forward best practice. According to interviewees, something like this for the armed forces charities sector could be useful.

There seems to be a desire on the part of a few individuals for a central registry of information and sign-posting to help clients understand what help is available and where and how they can access services. There is also a need to know who is operating in the same field and who can be recommended for partnerships. However, issues of quality assurance, sustainability and the need to be confident that the recommended organisations are the most effective in their particular specialisms is believed to be too difficult to carry out. The interviewees who referred to this topic felt that this was particularly difficult to accomplish across the UK but that smaller regional websites were best suited to meeting individual needs.

Inevitably, information about what kind of funding streams are available to organisations working in the armed forces charities sector was mentioned several times. There was a reasonably strong view that some of the new organisations had come in with new methods for raising money which had impacted upon the ability of other mainstream organisations to raise funds. The issue of the existence of a 'plethora' of armed forces charities and the consequent competition was referred to by quite a large number of people. Several interviewees argued that armed forces charities should be encouraged to work together and to merge but there is a dearth of information about charities in the sector that have achieved that successfully.

Sector trends

Several interviewees were keen to have more information on how the armed forces charities sector is developing. They are interested in knowing whether organisations are merging or whether many of them are having to close down due to the lack of resources, which sections of the sector are feeling the pressure and whether organisations are robust or vulnerable, since a belief remains that many of the smaller armed forces charities are parochial and/or weak. There was also a question as to how savvy the sector really is with regard to helping their clients to access mainstream services. What are the real outcomes delivered by these organisations and what is the impact of the sector as a whole? One donor thought it would be a good idea to identify which organisations and agencies are providing finance for the armed forces charities sector and the relative contributions of specific donors such as the Lottery or government.

Welfare services and Government policy

Only a few interviewees expressed the need for information on delivery of public welfare services and the development of government policy. One interviewee spoke of the need to understand what processes were being used by government to stimulate discussions about where the health service is going and what the responsibilities of government should be in supporting veterans. Another wanted information on the Care Act and questioned why there seemed to be little evidence of consultations between government and organisations in the sector. The need for information around mental health issues, in particular post-traumatic stress disorder and related services and provision, was another topic of conversation. Two interviewees were interested in the fields of education and housing respectively and the need to raise general awareness of the specific needs of their beneficiaries. Getting messages out about the needs of user groups was perceived by several interviewees as being very difficult.

The Covenant

The Covenant was mentioned by several interviewees. There was an appetite for good case studies and identification of best practice on the ways in which this is being implemented. There was a belief that the Covenant at the national level may be fairly good but most armed forces charities are working at the local level and where it is signed locally with local authorities and the NHS, there is less conviction that it is working well. There was also a need for education of Covenant activity and its purpose for families because ex-service personnel seemed to be unaware of how it can help them.

Emerging issues and ideas for new research

Interviewees were asked what they thought were the most important emerging issues affecting their beneficiary group that future research should take account of and which ones might affect the armed forces charities sector as a whole.

Changing lives

Very few charity interviewees believed there to be any significant changes going on in the armed forces during the next few years which would mean a consequent need to change the way in which they delivered their own services. The politicians, an academic and a head of policy in a major charity, on the other hand, foresaw substantial changes ahead:

> *"To some extent armed forces charities have been regarded as dealing with the effects of WW1 and WW2 – the British Legion etc. But this is no longer regarded as relevant. We are now looking at a completely different cadre of people. Fewer people but probably more damaged. The difference is that now all sorts of people are living who would not have lived previously and this poses a whole different set of challenges. There is the relevance of things like PTSD because of what people go through and survive. And this is very significant. Another area to think about is finding work. This will become more difficult."*

> *"There is already a reduction in the number of people in the armed forces living overseas. Overseas platforms have been massively reduced. A new employment model is kicking in and affecting families. Military families won't follow their loved ones each year because they will be much more sedentary in*

the UK and then personnel will go off on short trips. This will make a massive difference for families and they will want to buy their own home. Some services will be available when personnel are on deployment but families will be communicated with to a lesser degree."

"There are huge changes ahead: people will be more static. There will be a complete change of lifestyle. Personnel won't get to know their colleagues in the same way. How this will pan out for charities in terms of reaching out and providing welfare will be challenging for organisations. We need to know more about it."

"When you think about providing welfare and support, the issues will be different. Although the drinking culture has always been there, there will be more substance abuse and understanding the issue of drug addiction is very difficult. On the other hand, providing employment services could become easier since youth unemployment is going down generally and employment is going up."

Transition was considered by others to continue to be the main issue. Interviewees thought there would be a continuing need to provide more assistance to service families to help build their resilience for transition before they found themselves in the civilian community so that they would not need help later. It was agreed that there is a paucity of research on the topic in the UK and that most of the useful research was coming from the US.

"Much of the best thinking in the sector is not about what to do with personnel at the end of their last six months in the services but to think almost from the beginning of their employment in the forces so that it is not such a huge shock when they return to civilian life."

Health issues – most notably mental health issues – were again described by several people as being of greatest concern. Interviewees said that armed forces personnel were under considerable stress and that they were now subject to new chemical products that were causing significant health issues, including cancer. Many discussed PTSD – some said there would be higher levels of PTSD but others were less certain. Some believed the reality is that the problem is not properly understood and there is little evidence of the extent of the problem.

"We need to be clearer in terms of articulating to the general public the real issue. For instance, PTSD occurs as a result of trauma but there is a lot of confusion about this and the numbers are probably not as high as people keep stating."

"Mental health is likely to change – there were some hair-raising conflicts but there are no major conflicts at the moment with British boots on the ground. Military personnel are not going through what they did ten years ago. What does that mean for the future? Probably fewer dramatic issues but transition issues will still exist."

"Those who suffered from Iraq and Afghanistan I think have had good treatment of their physical injuries through the Recovery Centre programme of the MoD but recent research by Greenberg has shown that since the Gulf War we are now dealing with 65,000 to 70,000 casualties of which the main group have mental health problems. Many of them do not realise they have a problem. It is left to the NHS and Combat Stress, which is very small, to deal with these problems. Help for Heroes has been

trying to get to the lower level. But mental health is the big issue that we all know is coming down the track and services have not been fully developed yet."

According to one interviewee, two governments have missed a trick in not having established a Veterans Commissioner in England and Wales, whose main task should be to bring charities together to get them to reduce duplication, to work better together and to merge when benefits of efficiency can be achieved. Interviews seemed to reveal that the armed forces charities sector is not strong in lobbying government, but one high level interviewee argued that there should be more debates about where the Chancellor and the public purse should deliver and what they need to put in place to do so and where charities should fill the gaps. At the moment he felt that, in fact, charities are having to do what the state should deliver.

New research

Two main areas were identified by respondents: (i) further research into armed forces personnel; and (ii) research associated with organisations delivering services for this client group. However, a few respondents argued that there is already too much research and that before embarking upon new studies it was wise to accurately analyse and distil what is already out there. Others stated that much of the best research in this field is coming from the US and that there is a lack of research in the UK, particularly around the issue of the impact of service life and transition upon families. One interviewee did cite the FiMT-funded 'Military Families and Transition' report by the Centre for Social Justice. In their view the report provided scope to take this issue forward because it was 'full of ideas'.

A number of topics already discussed under the section 'organisations information needs' were obviously repeated in this section of the interview. Research to gather statistics was recommended: head counts of the numbers of veterans in the community; numbers of children of armed forces personnel and veterans; the long term effects of multiple education transfers for children; and levels, types and locations of services being delivered for veterans. Other themes included: the role of the armed forces in contemporary society; the role of the media in the public's reaction to conflict; loneliness and the health and wellbeing agenda; research around the question of whether the lifestyle of serving personnel makes them more likely to acquire dementia (such as the levels of drinking, smoking and pushing the body to its limits) and whether that leads to chronic mental health problems; veterans in the criminal justice system; and 'what is being done by the National Health Service' given the mental health problems that are emerging, particularly since the Chief Medical Officer said that ex-service personnel should take priority.

Again, best practice in collaboration was an issue, as were best practices in governance, in costing, in improving efficiency, in measuring outcomes and in quality assurance:

> *"Our sector is very immature in this - they could help to demystify and demonstrate its importance."*

> *"Having a benchmarking programme would be very valuable – the military sector is very insular. And learning more about fundraising practices and making them more public is something we would all learn from."*

Two further issues were further reinforced: around the Covenant and also getting government on board to join up with the armed forces charities sector, particularly since there was a belief that the Community Covenant was not really delivering and local authorities were not reinforcing the requirements of the

Covenant; and, Libor funding, the sense that much of the money was being wasted and there should be more research on its impact.

Future use of the website and Sector Insight report

Interviewees were asked whether the Armed Forces Charities Project could be helpful with filling some of the gaps revealed above. Some were not convinced that the Sector Insight report and website as it stands at the moment would help them with the issues that they had identified during the interview. Interviewees argued that the website needed to improve its functionality, provide clarity on the quality of its data and link up with other resources or organisations before they could rely on using the service more regularly. A few of the respondents felt that the report, if it is 'kept alive', would be useful as a series to refer to. One organisation had just received funding for a new project and they did believe that the report and website would be very important for implementing their new project, depending upon the currency of the information. The interviewee felt it would give them ground knowledge to win participation from others and help with planning for the future. One other interviewee suggested that the report might be more useful for strategy and the website for meeting the needs of individual ex-service personnel.

Promotion

A few interviewees claimed that if it is a good product [either the report or the website] it will market itself, although this is highly debatable. The first things that should happen is to take account of feedback and improve the search function on the website, be clear about its main users and to make it 'more user friendly'. The website was thought to be a key promotional tool of the Armed Forces Charities project and advertising the resource more widely was very important, particularly through the websites of key organisations like Cobseo.

Obviously many people mentioned all forms of social media, which they argued should be 'done properly' if it is to be used at all; however, nobody was specific about what that actually meant. The already established communication channels should be used to greater effect, using major organisations to promote the services of the project. Interviewees thought it was vital to send links to all of the organisations mentioned in the report so that they could in turn push it out to their membership and thus to a wider audience.

Sharing it with MPs and local authorities because they have a commitment to the Covenant was thought to be useful. Two of our interviewees said that most MPs try to answer letters and often they can offer receptions at the House. They said that because it is easy to drop in and out of these functions, they are popular with MPs. There are a variety of government committees such as the All Party Armed Forces Group that should be sent copies of the report and DSC and FiMT should offer to speak at meetings.

"Go to where people are; connect with the Forces' community events; tap into their networks."

"Hold workshops on different topics in the report."

In Scotland evaluation participants said that there was an appetite for more information. They consider it necessary to link the Armed Forces Charities website into Veterans Scotland's website, which is generally well regarded, and there is a good opportunity for reports to be linked within the Scottish parliament,

connecting with Working Groups on health, housing, mental health and employment etc. There are also Hives, where families go to on every military base, and Resettlement Centres, that would be good to connect with as well as the armed forces champions located in local authorities.

Finally, one interviewee mentioned that all those leaving the armed forces should be given information about the Armed Forces Charities project in their pack when they leave their service:

> *"Since there are more than 2,000 charities serving the needs of this target group, they themselves should be given more information about where they can go to for support."*

Alternative sources of information

Unsurprisingly, interviewees used a variety of sources when they researched and investigated the issues that concerned them. Most people start with Google and similar search engines. Some start with university academic databases, catalogues and journals, and they might then move to relevant sector specific websites such as the NHS or specific research institutes, about which there was a reasonably good knowledge. The MoD and FIMT's research hub were seen as potential vital sources of information. Lord Ashcroft's review was quoted by a number of people as being very important. However, one or two people complained that there was too much research going on – some of it based upon very small samples and spurious statistics. Information from the Scottish government, from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and from Public Health England, with their multiple deprivation indicators are seen as very helpful. Other charities, particularly The Royal British Legion, were quoted. Information from the latter seems to be used quite heavily and their socio-economic and demographic population data is often used when planning new services. The case study below demonstrates that it is not a simple process even for a very small local organisation.

Case study 4

A small organisation located in a remote part of the country has collaborative arrangements with a number of universities in the US because they find the Americans easier to work with and because there tends to be more reliable research evidence published there. When researching issues associated with their user group they start with a scan of the US literature and studies from UK research institutes. They also find that they have to access information from their local authorities, from local enterprise partnerships and local charity networks. It is not a linear process – "sometimes we start from the International and work down and other times we do the opposite – bottom up."

---

10. Findings from the Focus Groups

Overall, the findings from the focus groups in Edinburgh are similar to those described above. The responses were, however, tempered by the fact that some criticism had been expressed by the Scottish armed forces charities sector that the Sector Insight report had not focused sufficiently well upon Scotland – it was noted that the report had been described as covering the UK but that it had not incorporated enough data on Scotland[2].

Knowledge and use of the website

Although most of the interviewees had been encouraged to look at the website before arriving, only one organisation had made significant use of it at that point – those that had looked at it in detail or had actually used it were in the minority.

> *"We used it as a research tool to help understand the landscape and individual agencies so that we could set up new services for veterans. It was very helpful."*

> *"There is lots of good information in this but if I wanted to find out about an organisation in Scotland why not just go into its website – it is just making it more complicated."*

> *"The very fact that I have only just looked at it ten minutes ago means that it is clearly not that important to us. It is just creating a duplication of effort and this information could be contained inside the Veterans Scotland website. We can get the information we need from Veterans Assist. Trying to create another website about other organisations when the end user needs support – I am not sold on this."*

> *"Is there a danger that you are duplicating the information of Veterans Assist which is clearly targeted at veterans as its main user? It seems to me logical that the data you can provide should be aimed at a different audience."*

> *"I looked at it. Some of the information about us was not correct and so I sent an email to have some changes made. The information needs to be concise – there is too much information on there."*

The participants were asked if they thought they might use the website in the future, their responses are shown in Table 10:

Table 10: Would you use the website?

Yes	No	Perhaps
7	6	5

Currently, no more than 40% of participants anticipate using the website. Those who said they might use it did so only 'if the information is correct, if search functions works properly, if it can keep up-to-date with new services, if certain organisations are legitimate, if it does not replicate Veterans Assist, and if the information could be quality assured with frequent updating.'

---

[2] Information on charities registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator is not as readily available as for others registered in England and Wales, however FiMT has addressed this with further funding to DSC to explore Scottish Armed Forces Charities in greater depth

"Veterans Assist would use it to make sure their own information is correct. That would be real value."

"From time to time we canvas other organisations providing housing information for veterans. We could have used the DSC site to be more efficient. We like to get in touch with other potential partners and sometimes it is tricky to track them down. But if the site is to be useful for us we would need information on Scottish branches and contacts - that would be helpful."

"We would use it for a quick reference to see if an organisation exists so we can refer people on."

"We already have well established connections and partnerships so we have a default but when you are getting in new staff who don't have those practices in place it is a good reference for them and a good resource for veterans but there are challenges about advertising services that don't have credibility. It could become a sign-posting service but there are dangers on the basis of whose criteria is being used?"

"What is the added value of using the Armed Forces Charities website instead of using OSCR or the Charity Commission?"

"I'm not sure we would use it because this might be a fantastic snapshot of what is happening today and people can be signposted to museums etc. – but in terms of where we sit we don't have a need for it."

Similar issues raised in the one-to-one interviews about who is the main target audience were also mentioned during the focus groups. There was a belief that essentially the database is merely a directory but there was a need to define and focus on who will use it because users will have three questions when they access the site which will determine its first pages: who will benefit from it; why am I looking at this page; and, what am I looking for? Some thought it might be useful for people conducting a bit of background research and others thought that it might be useful for project workers who could search for day-to-day service issues. Overall, they considered the database to be so diverse that it was difficult to think of one end beneficiary but there was a dominating belief that the end user was not the veteran because it was too complex. Indeed, many of the participants said that most of the information they require for their clients is associated with general services such as health or housing, which they believed the Armed Forces Charities website could not help with. It was noted that one of the advantages of being in Scotland is that they already have good local connections and national relationships and so these questions can be answered through existing networks.

"It would help if you clearly defined the purpose and so designed it for that particular group of people."

"Knowing the user is important so that you know whether to go for breadth or depth. Service providers would use it as an aide memoire looking for different support for clients. You need to separate the needs of the end beneficiaries and those of the service provider because they are completely different structures."

"Forgive me for saying so – but surely it is a strange approach to put lots of data in one place and not be sure from the outset who the intended audience is."

Following general discussion on the subject of the end user it was suggested that the website would work very well for providing information to public bodies such as local authorities, housing associations and job centres.

Participants were introduced to the way in which a new version of the website is being redesigned and redeveloped, and they were able to provide ideas for improvement to DSC. Again, there were criticisms of the current website with regard to its search functions as well as some of the content. It was agreed that it needed to be searchable through easily understood search filters in order to find things quickly. It was also argued that people nowadays do not read large pieces of information and that the content needs to be brief so that you can easily follow up on links.

"If it is purely a directory it would be easier to go the other way: identify the organisations through the Charity Commission and OSCR - asking each charity, when it enters its information whether they dealt with ex-services people so it becomes easily searchable rather than have another website with a list of charities."

The need for more scrutiny of data and charity information was, however, recognised:

"When is a military charity a military charity? Who would have thought that Horseback UK is a military charity, who would have thought Venture Trust was too and if you search OSCR you would never come across Poppy Scotland."

"There is always a problem about what charities actually deliver - they say they do everything but so often they don't and don't always have the right specialisation. There are many organisations without houses that say they deliver housing – how?"

Questions were raised about whether there was duplication with the Veterans Assist website and others, and how much the DSC site should be tied into Cobseo and Veterans Scotland.

"Wouldn't it be better to link in with these? It should also be part of the MoD's 'single point of contact' because what is the point of creating a raft of initiatives that are doing the same thing?"

It was argued that if multiple websites are to exist they need to talk to each other to save transaction costs or there needs to be a clear remit for one and a quite different remit for another. Questions were also raised about the manner in which information would be kept up-to-date.

Knowledge and use of the Sector Insight Report

Again, there was some criticism of the report because it did not hold sufficient data about the Armed Forces Charities sector covering Scotland. The point was made that the report did not cover social enterprises, which play an important role today, and also religious organisations. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland, for instance, are involved in the Armed Forces Covenant but the role of the church is not properly picked up. A large number of churches are very important for members of the

community and ex-service personnel do not need to be members of a religion to enjoy their support. It was noted by one participant that churches are probably the largest part of the charity sector in the UK.

"Some of the analytics from the raw data of the report was quite interesting. So it is holding up a flag for it being interesting to policy makers. In Scotland we have lots of support from the veterans' network but there is certainly a case for making the sector more visible in terms of some of the analytics."

"As an agency that is not solely associated with military related groups, I would certainly want to be visible in the report although we are not specifically a charity for veterans."

"I have looked at the executive summary, and taken a quick look at the whole thing. It is a helpful one stop shop for relevant charities. It is packed with useful information, well written and very welcome. It would be interesting from an end user point of view to see information which clarifies the veterans' community in greater detail. We have numerous charities but nobody can stand up and say how many people there are in the user community. Where is the evidence? We need more than anecdotal information and we need to be smarter."

"It is nice to have in the background but it isn't going to improve what I do. There is a plethora of well-meaning organisations and that causes confusion and we should focus on the main players and direct their activities. There is too much duplication."

Emerging issues and ideas for new research

Not everybody thought that the issues for veterans and ex-service personnel were significantly different to those for other members of the community. According to this thesis, for most of the people coming out of the services recently, if they have had good briefings, their transition can be easy. Charities should keep their eyes on people who they suspect might have problems and provide appropriate support. There are others who have coped for a while and they suddenly have problems and the question has to be raised about whether charities are providing them with appropriate support. And then there are those who have been in the community for some years before problems emerge. The safety net is developing and spreading and people can drop into these networks. However, some believed the main services that they require are no different to those required by the general population: access to good social, health, housing, welfare and employment services.

There were similar discussions to those of the one-to-one interviews about the future of the Armed Forces and the eventuality that charities will have to change as a result of service personnel being more integrated into society. However, there was not total agreement about this. Although Royal Navy and Royal Air Force units have been making changes to fit more closely into the community based environment, the Army has traditionally moved around and participants were unsure that the right structures were being put in place for the new ideas to be implemented.

There was more agreement with regard to the structures in Scotland. The nature of its devolved government, with its cross-party working groups, was described as being 'vital' since this creates fundamental differences to those in England and Wales. It was broadly agreed that there is a general lack of understanding of the differences in the devolved countries, which was also described as being present

among London-based charities. Scottish charities were described as being more coherent, working together as a group in relationship to the Scottish Veterans' Commissioner.

The population of Scotland being half that of the Manchester metropolitan area means that the local authority infrastructure is also tight. They talk to each other but the information they have is not always helpful and they need something that has authority and teeth. It was thought that DSC's Armed Forces Charities project could be helpful to local authorities across the UK in sign-posting veterans, particularly since it was believed by some of the interviewees that the charity market has become saturated, with more charities providing mental health support than there are people leaving the Armed Forces with mental health problems. According to participants, veterans have become consumers and they have a wide variety of choices because not all charities are credible and safe and some can do harm since they are not regulated.

> *"'Hubs' are being established and agencies are getting together to share information. They need to be more proactive to help make pathways. It is a matter of luck when four problems are solved at the same time – we should be making that happen more often. It is not helped when the sector is not working together but working in silos and forgetting the very people for whom they exist. A holistic approach is required."*

When asked about what kinds of research they would like to see, similar issues were raised as in the face-to-face interviews. More research on transition and research into the social needs of veterans and their dependants was suggested. Discussion took place about the need for comradeship and that organisations should not simply try to replicate the service environment within their projects. Staff members often have difficulties engaging veterans in some of their activities and there is now a school of thought about creating 'good citizenship' as opposed to the 'good veteran'. One participant said:

> *"If there were a chapter on this in the Sector Insight report I would be all over it! It is a very good point because many of our residents who are transitioning have only been in the Armed Forces a few years and we are trying to help them become civilians again. They just merge into civilian life and we are constantly trying to drag them back [to the military way of life]. They do enjoy it – but it is a difficult one. We have placed too much emphasis on recreating this environment and it is time for serious change. The focus should be on making them good citizens. But they still need a level of comradeship. Occasional remembrance parades...not everyone is turning up to them and don't feel the need. But maybe that is the kind of comradeship activity that fulfils much of that need."*

One or two participants thought it would be helpful to hear about organisations receiving UK funding but not delivering in Scotland – they suspected this happened a lot.

Another distinctive difference from the Scottish perspective relates to the criminal justice landscape and the different policy environment, with its consequent shift from custodial to non-custodial sentencing, which was complicated and opaque but worth unpicking in relation to that of England and Wales.

Research on the levels of partnerships within the Armed Forces Charities sector needs more testing so that examples of good practice can be published. There was agreement on the need for more cross-sector initiatives between private, public and charity organisations, particularly the need to work with more non-veteran charities than ever before if they want to work with the idea of the good citizen rather than the

good civilian. Finally, it was suggested that clients and beneficiaries are looking for local solutions not national ones – this should not be forgotten.

Promotion

It was thought that information about the Sector Insight report and future research should be sent to the strategic director of communities in local authorities, to housing associations and to all Armed Forces charities. Forces in Mind Trust, Cobseo and Veterans Scotland should be a focal point and should be heavily involved in helping to promote the Armed Forces Charities Project.

11. Conclusions

The process of evaluating the Sector Insight: UK Armed Forces Charities report and the Armed Forces Charities website has been an extremely useful, if at times challenging exercise and learning process. A key objective was reaching high-profile individuals and policy-makers as well as a broad range of other key stakeholders including charity representatives and academics, and although achieving maximum engagement was a challenge this was largely achieved. It became apparent that the main reason for this was that general awareness of the project among our constituency with an interest in armed forces charities and the issues facing ex-services personnel was not high enough to engage the majority of those we contacted.

Despite this, we were still able to draw in participation from many individuals and organisations with a range of experiences and expertise in the field, to give us sufficient feedback and insight to make an informed assessment of the quality and usefulness of both elements of the Armed Forces Charities Project at this mid-point. We have also been able to gain useful insights into how the project can continue to evolve in the future to meet the needs of our target audiences. The process was an invaluable learning exercise for DSC and the Forces in Mind Trust moving forward.

Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation of the Armed Forces Charities Project has met the following objectives:

- to explore the extent to which the 2014 Sector Insight report has met its original aims and objectives to date
- to establish the degree to which the report has penetrated sector literature so far
- to provide a detailed account of how beneficiaries have used the research and to propose directions for future research
- to explore the extent to which the website has met its original aims and objectives to date
- to determine the purposes for which the website is used and the extent to which the website meets user requirements
- to understand the needs of website users in terms of the site's functionality and content in order to inform future development
- to inform future marketing strategies to promote use and knowledge of the report, the website and related data

It should also be noted that as well as substantial feedback on the project and its potential future direction, interviews also revealed broader themes, insights and suggestions which may be of wider interest beyond the scope of the evaluation – these have been incorporated within this report.

Armed Forces Charities Project – Aims and Objectives

The aims of the Armed Forces Charities Project were to:

- provide robust, evidenced, quantitative and qualitative data about armed forces charities, which can be used by veterans, policy-makers, the media, the public and of course armed forces charities themselves, to inform givers, donors and funders
- inform commentators
- give robust evidence to politicians and policy-makers

The first objective has been met – robust evidence has been gathered, analysed, presented (in online and printed form) and received. In general terms, this is the primary project outcome or output.

The second and third objectives concern the impact that the website and report have had – i.e. how have the outputs from the project been used by the various constituencies it was produced for, and how it has (or hasn't) changed their behaviour or thinking.

Given that this is a mid-stream impact report there is sufficient evidence to say that it is on track to deliver on its potential – provided the recommendations are implemented effectively by all the relevant parties. It is important to note that it is too soon to measure the full impact of the Sector Insight report as research of this nature takes a longer period of time to achieve its full potential. Overall the report has been extremely well received by those who have read it – some people have used it to inform their organisation's future strategies, some have used key findings and other information to provide evidence for funding applications or academic papers, others have simply scanned it for reference or curiosity. Criticisms of the report were largely confined to personal circumstances or expectations. Some of the wider criticisms of the armed forces charities sector were actually addressed in the report and its key findings. From the interviews, focus groups, formal and informal meetings and conversations, DSC learned that there was a general opinion that the report was dense (although perhaps necessarily so) and that future reports should be easier to digest and draw statistics and evidence from. Discussions with the wider research community show that this is the general direction of travel to maximise the potential for research to be noticed and used effectively, particularly if the primary audience is policy-makers outside of academia.

The evaluation also showed that influencing policy and practice at a high level takes time; however, engaging with policy-makers and raising greater awareness of the report has helped to accelerate this process. The key issue here is that deeper and more personal engagement with stakeholders is required in the future to maximise the project's impact

Perception of the website was more varied and generally less favourable in its current incarnation. Although the website has been useful to a small number of people – as evidenced, for example, through the enquiries received and the help, advice and sign-posting that we have provided to those individuals – many of the individuals who took part in the focus groups and interviews were unclear about the key purpose of the site and who it was for. Despite this, there is clear evidence that some users find the website

meets a need, be they individuals searching for support or other organisations sign-posting beneficiaries to the site.

A number of issues have arisen, which DSC is already addressing: the content of the website in terms of the type and range of charities should be more focused; the branding and ownership of the site should be more clearly defined; the look and feel of the site needs to be more contemporary; the functionality of the site, specifically the search function, needs to be more intuitive and user-friendly. The frequency of updates is also being explored, particularly around focusing on the core data and developing technical capabilities which make maintaining that data more efficient. There are also several suggested improvements, such as indicating when information has been updated within a charity record.

Measuring the impact of the website is a bigger challenge. We can quantify visits and usage and are satisfied that they are within the expected and acceptable range; however, the difficulty is in establishing what happens or changes as a *result* of the website being used – evaluations of this nature are extremely expensive to carry out. However, it may be worth considering developing a way of gathering feedback from beneficiaries, even if this is anecdotal.

The website has been useful to individuals in a range of circumstances looking for help and support from armed forces charities – there is clear evidence of this from the enquiries received via the site. However, more detailed information on demographics and usage is needed, which are part of the redevelopment plan for the site. This will further inform the content, although research suggests that cadet associations and museum and heritage organisations are not key content, whereas welfare charities are.

How has the Armed Forces Charities Project met the measures of success?

The following measures of success were established, to be assessed after one year of the project:

Table 11: Measures of Success after Year One

Measure of success	Outcome	Status
The existence of the database and related reports	A well-established database accessible to the public, with a substantial related report, is available. On-going related research reports, such as the Scottish Armed Forces Charities report, further contributes to this body of work	Achieved
Mentions of the website and reports in sector and national press by commentators, funders, beneficiaries and other interested parties	There have been a number of mentions for the project in sector press and also a non-sector outlet with a broader focus, however national, non-sector coverage may be dependent on external events which perhaps generate wider interest in ex-service personnel.	Achieved

Better access to sources of support for potential beneficiaries. Improved knowledge about the armed forces charities sector, including potential collaborations / partnerships between armed forces charities. Consideration of project information and research in government policy	Both the report and website make a notable contribution to the accessibility of information for potential beneficiaries and for charities looking for collaborations and partnerships. The research has connected organisations and individuals, provided evidence for several purposes and informed the wider armed forces community. As noted elsewhere, it is perhaps too soon to see significant influence on government policy	Substantially achieved

12. Recommendations

This evaluation has provided a huge amount of learning and information which will inform and improve future work for the benefit of the Armed Forces Charities community and its beneficiaries. It should be borne in mind that it was commissioned and took place mid-stream, before the project was completed (commencing at the beginning of Year 3 (of 3), and hence any conclusions about the longer-term impact are provisional at this stage.

In any case, the research process and findings of this evaluation provide some clear directions for the future, which are immensely valuable. The following recommendations for the project as a whole (including both the website and report) can be grouped into 'four Ps':

Purpose

From the outset, the stated purpose of the Armed Forces Charities project has been to:

'provide robust, evidenced, quantitative and qualitative data about armed forces charities, which can be used by veterans, policy-makers, government, the media, the public and the charities themselves to improve services to beneficiaries, to inform givers, donors, funders and commentators.'

This is a wide-ranging purpose, potentially serving multiple constituencies with very different needs, expectations and levels of knowledge. The presumption has been that there is an existing or potential need for robust data on Armed Forces Charities, and this has been provided in several formats. For participants in this evaluation, the project's purpose is evidently clearer in relation to the research that has been produced. However it is less clear, and potentially conflicted, where the website is concerned.

Some recommendations for FiMT moving forward in this area are to:

Decide or confirm whether this purpose remains valid, or whether it needs to be adjusted and refined. Along with that, whether there is a primary audience (for example policymakers, or AF charities).

Consider whether a stand-alone website is the right vehicle to achieve the project's aims. For example, if supplying information directly to ex-service personnel is not a primary aim, then data on Armed Forces Charities could be supplied by DSC to other partners (such as Veterans Scotland or Cobseo) without a separate website. FiMT, Cobseo, and the Veterans Hub (for example) could host the reports which are produced from the data.

If the website is retained, FiMT need to decide whether in future it should serve multiple needs and audiences, or whether it should narrow its focus. For example, should it be equally accessible and useful for both ex-service personnel and government policymakers? There are implications for the type of data gathered, how it is presented, and the resource required to manage it.

Devote more resource to developing and exploiting the database, and the research produced from it. Significant investment and effort has gone into constructing this database, and there is huge potential to use it to further inform the operating environment for Armed Forces Charities in the future. The website is mainly a communications channel, not the primary product.

Promotion

In an unanticipated way, the evaluation process itself yielded important learning and insights about how to effectively promote work of this type. Reaching out to key influencers and seeking their views directly, using a range of methods, was in itself promotional activity.

The results of this evaluation suggest that the activities undertaken to promote the project so far have not on their own been sufficient to achieve lasting impact (for example, creating a website, publishing, launching and distributing a single report, issuing a press release, hosting links on websites, DSC/FiMT marketing etc.).

FiMT should adopt an 'outreach' approach in the future to achieve a wider and more lasting impact for this work. 'Passive' promotion (i.e. finding a website on a google search) remains important, but more 'active' promotion is needed. Future strategy and subsequent project activity should include the following:

A plan of direct, personal engagement with key influencers in politics, government, academia and the media (for example, a sequence of 1-1 meetings or roundtables on key topics, as opposed to a single 'big-bang' launch)

Investment in public relations expertise to maximise the promotion of new developments, findings and research (including social media strategy)

Developing and deepening relationships with key infrastructure organisations and other networks to promote and disseminate findings, to signpost to the website and related research, and potentially to share and collaborate on data (for example Veterans Scotland, Cobseo, Royal British Legion)

Closer engagement with research centres of excellence and academic networks like the Veterans Research Hub and in the academic community more widely.

Presentation

This evaluation shows that there is a need for clear and accessible information about Armed Forces Charities in the UK, for greater research into the sector and more widely for the armed forces community (for example, about beneficiary demographics and their changing profile of need).

There may be disagreement about how this information should be presented, what the priorities should be, who should do the work, whether that work is within the scope of this project, and how any research is subsequently used. That is to be expected and will normally be an issue when any diverse constituency (with varying knowledge, expertise and objectives) is asked for a view.

For the purposes informing future work and achieving impact for this project in the future, the question of presentation is key:

If the website remains part of the project in future, entries should only include welfare charities – this concentrates on where the need and public interest is greatest, and will help to more clearly define the website's purpose and audience. The site can still signpost to research reports and facilitate enquiries.

The information categories and depth of data for website entries should be reviewed, and modified based on feedback from users and this evaluation, to focus on what is most important to website users.

The website design should be refreshed and functionality made easier to use (this is already in development and will be reviewed again after a refreshed site is launched).

The optimal and reasonable level of 'up-to-dateness' with the data needs to be agreed. This is primarily a function of the relationship between the amount of work (research) to be done and the resources available to do it (researchers) – it is a cost/benefit question. Any database is a snapshot in time, where content starts becoming 'out-of-date' immediately until the next time it is examined. Much also depends on how data is retrieved and how accessible data is in the first place (which has been an issue in Scotland).

Future reports should be more data-driven, graphical and shorter, with less narrative, and structured to easily draw out relevant findings and key statistics.

Project structure and priorities

The original Armed Forces Charities project bid was front-loaded with a great deal of activity in Year 1 (compiling and analysing the data, developing the website, and producing the report), with Years 2 and 3 primarily focussed (and resourced) on maintaining the data.

Achieving a longer-term impact is likely to require a greater investment over a more sustained period of time than has been the case for Years 2 and 3, for example in project management and research capacity.

Some priorities are:

A dedicated project management function is needed. To some extent this depends on the distinction between FiMT's and DSC's roles in the project moving forward, as well as how the recommendations and activities described above are undertaken.

A full dataset of all armed forces charities, including cadets, should be maintained to support a 'data request service' as part of the website offering. The evaluation shows a need for responsive, bespoke information and data provided on request. This will require investment in research capacity, skills and potentially technology.

Next stage research should focus on specific themes and topics relevant to provision by Armed Forces Charities for the armed forces community – such as welfare, mental health, housing and employment. This will enhance the project's impact within the research literature, and with policy-makers and practitioners.

The original *Sector Insight: Armed Forces Charities* report is a baseline study that should be reproduced after five years, with shorter, topical reports described above produced more regularly in the interim.

Clearer metrics and defined objectives regarding impact should be built into future project phases, if clearly establishing impact is a priority for FiMT moving forward. This will also require investment in capacity and skills.

References

Armed Forces Community Covenant News - Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire (February 2016, p7) (available at: http://apps.warwickshire.gov.uk/api/documents/WCCC-966-985).

British Forces News, TV broadcast, 20 November 2014 (available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTnm67CqmB0)

Charity Times, 'In depth study shows the real state of armed forces charities', 18 November 2014 (available at: http://www.charitytimes.com/ct/in-depth-study-shows-the-real-state-of-armed-forces-charities.php)

Civil Society, 'Armed forces charity sector is in decline, but need for services is increasing, according to DSC', 19 November 2014 (available at: http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/finance/news/content/18591/armed_forces_charity_sector_is_in_decline_alongside_increasing_demand_according_to_dsc)

Herman, A and Yarwood, R (2015) 'From warfare to welfare: veterans, military charities and the blurred spatiality of post-service welfare in the United Kingdom', Environmental Planning A (47), pp 2628-2644.

Soldier, 'Charities at Risk?', December 2014 issue, p11 (available at: http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/25af1aa2#/25af1aa2/10)

Spears Wealth Management, 'Smaller charities can help veterans too', 4 November 2015 (available at: http://wma.spearswms.com/2015/11/04/smaller-charities-can-help-our-veterans-too/)

Third Force News, 'Armed forces charities in decline', 18 November 2014 (available at: http://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/armed-forces-charities-in-decline)

Third Sector, 'Number of armed forces charities in decline, Directory of Social Change report says', 19 November 2014 (available at: http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/number-armed-forces-charities-decline-directory-social-change-report-says/communications/article/1322540)

UK Fundraising, 'Amount donated to most UK armed forces welfare charities "down by 6% in five years"', 18 November 2014 (available at: http://fundraising.co.uk/2014/11/18/amount-donated-uk-armed-forces-charities-7-five-years/)

Veterans World, 'Explore the Universe of Forces Charities', 15 November 2015 (available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/476700/VW_36_final_Version-print.pdf)

Appendix 1: About the Armed Forces Charities Project

In early 2013 DSC submitted a proposal to the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) to research and deliver a detailed report on the UK's armed forces charities. The purpose of this research was to provide robust, evidenced, quantitative and qualitative data about armed forces charities which can be used by veterans, policy-makers, government, the media, the public and the charities themselves to improve services to beneficiaries, to inform givers, donors, funders and commentators and to provide robust evidence wherever it is need on the size, constituency, challenges and constraints and the operational activities of armed forces charities in the UK. Work began in October 2013 to develop a comprehensive research database of armed forces charities.

The project also included the development and delivery of an online resource. This searchable website was initially to include the top 500 armed forces welfare charities although this was subsequently expanded to feature a total of 2,200 charities that were used in the analysis for the report.

The *Sector Insight: UK Armed Forces Charities – An Overview and Analysis* report was successfully launched at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London in November 2014. The report includes: an extensive review of the available evidence regarding specialist needs of past and present members of the UK armed forces and their dependants; an in-depth analysis of the role and different types of armed forces charities; analysis of armed forces charities' financial models and trends over the period from 2008 to 2012; analysis of the geographical spread of support provided by armed forces charities; and, analysis of collaboration and coordination practices in the armed forces charity sector (particularly in the area of benevolent grant-making practices).

Key findings of the report

- Claims about there being too many armed forces charities are partly driven by a lack of understanding of the huge diversity of armed forces charities operating in the sector. Contrary to received wisdom, the sector has actually contracted recently
- Armed forces charities cater for the needs of a potential beneficiary population of over 6 million serving personnel, ex-Service personnel and their dependants
- The armed forces charity sector in the UK generated an income of £872 million (2012), much of which is concentrated in a relatively small number of organisations. The top 122 armed forces charities command 84% of total sector income
- During the recession, and contrary to the rest of the UK voluntary sector, armed forces charities overall experienced an increase in their income. However, income for the majority of armed forces charities fell over subsequent years
- Armed forces welfare charities raise £4.37 for every £1 spent on fundraising and publicity, compared to an average of £4.86 for the UK voluntary sector as a whole
- The level of free reserves held by armed forces welfare charities equates to 10.9 months' expenditure, compared to 15.4 months' expenditure for the UK voluntary sector as a whole
- The armed forces charity sector shows a high degree of collaboration and cooperation relative to other charitable sub-sectors. In particular, the benevolent grant-making process appears to be highly coordinated and flexible in responding to the needs of beneficiaries

- New entrants into the sector have a generally positive effect, creating new income growth which benefits the sector as a whole, as well as by addressing new needs in innovative ways
- Data on armed forces charities registered in Scotland and Northern Ireland was limited by the lack of comparable regulatory systems and standards to England and Wales, particularly access to information in charity reports and accounts. Further data was required to help to complete the funding picture across the UK
- Data on the location and needs of the Armed Forces Community (serving personnel, ex-Service personnel and their dependants) needs to be improved. Statutory bodies such as the MoD and NHS should work with the sector to introduce better systems to identify beneficiaries and their needs.

As a companion to the report, the searchable database and online resource centre was also launched in November 2014. The Armed Forces Charities website, (www.armedforcescharities.org.uk) contains details of all armed forces charities registered in the UK, including charities that cater for the needs of serving and ex-serving personnel and their families, armed forces museums and heritage organisations, cadet units, associations and other organisations.

Outputs and Outcomes

The following outputs and outcomes were set out for Year 2 of the project (this covers the second year of funding from FiMT to update and maintain the database and website and also spans the period subject to evaluation in this present report):

Table 5: Outputs and Outcomes for Year 2

Project outcome	Measure of success	Timescale
A comprehensive overview of the armed forces charities sector, providing an unbiased body of evidence to benefit and inform: - serving personnel, veterans and their families - donors and charities which support them - relevant policymakers, researchers and media	The existence of the database and related reports (can also be measured by demand – i.e. number of downloads, site visits, searches carried out)	November 2015
	Mentions of the website and reports in sector and national press by commentators, funders, beneficiaries and other interested parties (measured by number and estimated value of coverage)	November 2015
	Better access to sources of support for potential beneficiaries. Improved knowledge about the armed forces charities sector, including potential collaborations / partnerships between armed forces charities. Consideration of project information and research in government policy (measured using surveys and additional data analysis.)	November 2015

Appendix 2: Original Project Plan for the Evaluation

2016 — January | February | March | April | May | June

Week commencing (w/c): 04-Jan, 11-Jan, 18-Jan, 25-Jan, 01-Feb, 08-Feb, 15-Feb, 22-Feb, 29-Feb, 07-Mar, 14-Mar, 21-Mar, 28-Mar, 04-Apr, 11-Apr, 18-Apr, 25-Apr, 02-May, 09-May, 16-May, 23-May, 30-May, 06-Jun, 13-Jun, 20-Jun, 27-Jun

Who	Task
	Planning
DSC	Identify external consultant
DSC/EC	Agree terms and conditions (external consultant)
	Telephone interviews (report)
DSC/EC	Design
DSC/EC	Organisation
EC	Interviews
EC	Transcription
EC	Analysis
	Focus group (report)
DSC/EC	Design
DSC/EC	Arrange facilities
EC	Hold focus groups
EC	Transcription
EC	Analysis
	Focus group (website)
DSC/EC	Design
EC	Arrange facilities
EC	Hold focus groups
EC	Transcription
EC	Analysis
	Literature review
DSC	Analysis of literature review
	Retro web analysis (web analytics)
DSC/Dnet	Collect and analyse user data
DSC	Analyse enquiries
DSC	Assess user experience (pilot study)
	Concluding questionnaire
DSC	Identify participants
DSC	Design
DSC	Distribution
DSC	Data collection
DSC	Data analysis
	Writing report and recommendations
DSC/EC	Data analysis and assessment
DSC/EC	Drafting chapters
	Report production
DSC	Editing and proofreading
DSC	Typesetting
DSC	Print
	Implementation of recommendations (website)

Appendix 3: Organisations participating in the Telephone Interviews

- Anglia Ruskin University/Veterans Research Hub
- Association of Royal Naval Officers
- Big Lottery Fund
- BLESMA
- Blind Veterans UK
- Cobseo
- Combat Stress
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Houses for Heroes Scotland
- Military Matters Associate: Housing Options Scotland
- Ministry of Defence
- Royal British Legion Institute
- Royal Caledonian Education Trust
- Scottish Veterans Commissioner
- Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation
- SSAFA
- Surf Action
- The Not Forgotten Association
- Venture Trust
- Veterans Contact Point: Armed Forces Centre
- Veterans Scotland

- Members of the House of Commons, House of Lords and All-Party Parliamentary Groups

Appendix 4: Organisations participating in the Focus Groups

- ABF The Soldiers Charity
- Black Watch Association
- Blind Veterans UK
- Combat Stress
- Glasgow's Helping Heroes
- Houses for Heroes Scotland
- Legion Scotland
- Lothian Veterans Centre
- Military Matters Associate: Housing Options Scotland
- Poppy Factory
- Poppyscotland
- Royal Caledonian Education Trust
- Scottish Veterans Residences
- Venture Trust
- Veterans Scotland
- War Widows Association