



Strategy for Veterans



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Why do we need a Strategy for Veterans?

1. The demands of Service life in terms of the operational environment, military discipline and self-sacrifice are unique and their implications may carry through into civilian life, on retirement. The Prime Minister's appointment of a Minister for Veterans in 2001 and the parallel launch of the Veterans Initiative (since evolved into the Veterans Programme) have demonstrated the Government's recognition of the special status of the ex-Service community and of the need to ensure that veterans' issues are approached in a systematic way. The Strategy for Veterans was launched in March 2003 to capture the results of initial planning work and has recently been reviewed to see if any change in direction is required. This review has confirmed that the thrust of the original Strategy remains valid but that there is scope for improvement in some areas.

2. Factors that continue to shape the direction of the Strategy include:

- the importance of recognising the contribution to society made by our Armed Forces in the past as well as in the present;
- the desire to educate the public, especially young people, about the value of this contribution and about the purpose of the Veterans Programme;
- the need to make sure that both those leaving the Armed Forces and ex-Service personnel are aware of the services available to them from the Government and the voluntary sector;
- the need to improve communication between the Government, veterans and the public in order to address the above matters;
- the need to take appropriate steps to ensure that Service personnel make a successful return to civilian life;
- the need to address any particular problems for veterans that arise from their service in the Armed Forces;
- the need to ensure that lessons from the veterans' community are fed back into in-Service arrangements as appropriate.

Who is a Veteran?

3. We use the term '**veteran**' to mean all those who have served in the UK Armed Forces (whether Regular or Reserve), but our mission also includes their widows/widowers and their dependants as part of the veterans' community. As well as all members of the Armed Forces the term veteran also, exceptionally, includes those members of the Merchant Navy who played a vital role in legally defined military operations. The veterans' community is therefore a wide and disparate population, estimated to be over 10 million people in the UK.¹

¹ On the basis of a survey of some 6200 people carried out in 2005, including some 1200 from the ex-Service community, the Royal British Legion estimates the Veterans Community to consist of around 10.5 million people (The Royal British Legion, *Profile of the Ex-Service Community in the UK* (November 2005)).

Specific aspects of the Strategy for Veterans will have greater relevance to individuals as their circumstances change over time. On this basis, it is possible to identify broad groups within the veterans' community. These groups include:

- the vast majority of veterans who, following a Service career, return successfully to civilian life;
- the small proportion of veterans who have suffered ill health or injury as a result of service – or, in cases of death, their widows and dependants – and who should receive proper support from the Government or community; and
- the small number of Service personnel who – for whatever reason – have been unable to make a successful transition to civilian life.

What do we want to achieve?

4. Through the Strategy for Veterans, we want to ensure a coherent Government policy towards veterans, including a structured plan of action supporting the effective delivery of services where veterans have needs that are distinct from those of UK citizens more generally. We also want to increase public awareness of the contribution made to society by those who have served in the Armed Forces, both through their part in defending the stability of this country and of the wider international order, and in terms of the benefits that many ex-Service men and women bring to society through the skills and experience that they have acquired during their service. And, finally, we want to underpin public confidence in Government policy towards Service personnel and veterans alike.

Who is the Strategy for?

5. The Strategy for Veterans has a number of target groups:
- **servicing Armed Forces personnel**, as future veterans, should be properly prepared by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) so as to maximise their chances of a successful transition to civilian life on leaving the Services;
 - **veterans** should feel confident that the value of their service is recognised by the Government and community and that the needs that they have as a result of their service will be effectively met. They and their families should also have a greater understanding of what assistance is available to them from the Government and voluntary sector, should they require it;
 - **the ex-Service organisations**, as representatives of veterans groups, should benefit from greater public awareness of the scope of their activities. They should also feel confident that the unique service required of members of the Armed Forces will be recognised properly and in particular that proper support will be provided to those affected by ill health, injury or death as a result of their service;

- **the public** (particularly young people) should have a greater understanding of the valuable contribution made to society by the Armed Forces. This is especially important against the background of declining public understanding of the achievements of the Armed Forces and of the nature of Service life that made these possible, due to the fact that a large proportion of the population no longer has contact with, or experience of, the Armed Forces through their own service or that of family or friends;
- **service providers** who need to identify veterans within the wider population, should understand that some of their needs are distinct and be aware of the many organisations that can provide assistance to them.

Who will deliver the Strategy?

6. The Strategy for Veterans is owned by the Government's Minister for Veterans in the MOD but, as a Government-wide initiative, is delivered by a number of central Government departments, the Devolved Administrations and local authorities working in partnership and co-operation with the voluntary sector. It is crucial to the success of the Strategy that all deliverers of services and policies for veterans work together, share information and (where appropriate) develop proposals for action together. This partnership between Government and the voluntary sector will recognise the campaigning role of the veterans' organisations and ensure that jointly funded work in partnership does not detract from the Government's responsibilities or impinge on the charities' independence. Specific roles with respect to the Strategy are as follows:

- **MOD** - The primary role of the MOD is as the former employer of veterans. Its responsibilities to those leaving the Armed Forces include the provision of resettlement advice and training, and of pension and compensation benefits. Through the Veterans Agency, the MOD also provides an advice and information centre and, for war pensioners and war widow(er)s, a welfare service. The MOD's other main role is to provide secretariat support to the Minister for Veterans with a remit to ensure a coherent and integrated policy towards veterans across Government.
- **Other Government Departments and Agencies and the Devolved Administrations** - A number of other Government Departments and local authorities have responsibility for policies and services that affect veterans (e.g. provision of healthcare and social services). Veterans' issues must be addressed as an integral part of Government's wider initiatives and priorities, but will receive particular focus where there are special problems affecting veterans that need to be addressed in their own right. Examples of this include work with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to prevent ex-Service homelessness. Cross-Government working will include close cooperation with the Devolved Administrations to ensure consistency of response to veterans' issues across the UK. A primary task of the Veterans Programme, through the Ministerial Task Force and the Veterans Policy Unit, is to ensure that Government policy towards veterans is coherent, and effectively addresses the issues that are of concern through appropriate services.

- **Ex-Service organisations** - The ex-Service organisations have an advocacy and partnership role. They both represent the concerns of veterans to Government and have a key role in helping to ensure that the Government's response to these is understood by those affected. They play an essential part in helping to identify areas where work may be required to address particular veterans' needs and in formulating appropriate solutions. They also provide additional welfare support and a social environment for veterans. Their campaigning role is enhanced through their participation in the Veterans Programme, which provides an essential channel of communication between veterans, central Government Departments and Devolved Administrations.

What will the Strategy entail for Veterans?

7. The Strategy for Veterans involves three key pillars. These are to ensure that veterans receive:

- excellent preparation for a transition to civilian life following service;
- support from the Government and voluntary sector where needed;
- recognition of their contribution to society.

These three pillars are themselves underpinned by supporting communications, research and funding programmes.

8. Reflecting the three pillars, work under the Veterans' Programme is divided into three work streams:

- Transition
- Support
- Recognition

The work streams are a means of identifying key themes of the programme but work under the pillars can be arranged in whatever way will best meet the underlying objective.

9. Pages 9 to 12 contain details of what we have already achieved and are continuing to do in support of these themes. A summary of our intended activities is as follows:

- **Preparation for transition back to civilian life** - To maximise the beneficial effects of service on life beyond the Armed Forces, we plan to achieve or maintain:
 - Continual improvement in in-Service training regimes, healthcare and treatment and rehabilitation; where appropriate, lessons learned from studies of veterans' health will be applied in-Service;
 - Increased opportunities for education, personal development and qualifications in-Service and a high quality resettlement service;
 - High-quality pensions schemes;
 - High-quality, easily accessible no-fault compensation schemes for injury and illness due to Service;

- Improved identification of and response to the needs of vulnerable Service leavers.
- **Support where needed** - To provide advice and appropriate support if things do go wrong, we will:
 - Provide advice, information and practical assistance (to access appropriate services at key life events and other periods of acute welfare need) to war pensioners and war widow(er)s through the War Pensioners Welfare Service;
 - Work with other Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations to ensure that the particular needs of veterans are reflected in wider public policy and support arrangements;
 - Work in partnership with other Government Departments, Devolved Administrations, Government agencies and the voluntary and community sector to prevent homelessness and tackle unemployment and other social exclusion issues among a small percentage of veterans, where there are judged to be particular problems arising from service;
 - Work with civilian healthcare professionals to raise awareness of Armed Forces' and veterans' health issues, and consider any special needs of older and disabled veterans, recognising the declining numbers of people who have personal experience of, or contact with, the Armed Forces.
- **Recognition and status** - To ensure that service in the Armed Forces is valued by the Government and community, we will:
 - Promote public awareness of the contribution of the Armed Forces, including that of diverse groups within it;
 - Promote the potential of veterans for continued contribution to society by working with other organisations that wish to capitalise on the skills and values of ex-Service personnel, whether as a next career or in the voluntary sector;
 - Support events and projects that commemorate the contribution of our Armed Forces to the defence of this country and of the wider world order;
 - Work with other key stakeholders to organise and promote an annual Veterans Day.

What about Communication?

10. Communication is an essential element of the Strategy for Veterans. It is fundamental to the success of the Veterans Programme that we should improve and maintain communications with the veterans' community as well as raise awareness of veterans' achievements and of the issues affecting them. The main aims for this element of the Strategy are:

- To understand fully the concerns of the veterans community;
- To develop strategies and initiatives for raising veterans' awareness (particularly that of 'hard to reach' veterans) of the benefits, help and support available to them;

- To continue to work to ensure that veterans' issues are understood and addressed, whether within Government or more widely; and
- To promote greater public awareness of the contribution of veterans to society.

What about Research?

11. It is a requirement of Government that, wherever possible, policy should be evidence-based. Having a sound understanding of the issues that affect the veterans' community is essential if the Government is to develop policies that address their needs effectively. MOD has developed a separate Veterans Research Strategy for this purpose. It recognises:

- The Government's wish for policy to be evidence-based, with supporting research where appropriate;
- The importance of co-operation on research between Government and the voluntary sector, and with other countries addressing similar veterans' issues; also the support that independent expert bodies such as the Research Councils can give to this;
- The rationale for Government funding of specific research activities;
- The areas, such as post-operational health monitoring, mentoring of Service leavers, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, suicide and homelessness, where we are currently taking forward essential research.

How will it be Funded?

12. There are a number of sources of funding for work under the Veterans Programme.

- Work on veterans' issues may be funded as part of an existing Government programme where there is a distinct veterans aspect that merits being addressed in its own right as part of that programme.
- MOD provides a number of Grants in Aid including to veterans-related organisations such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, which provides a focus for commemoration.
- MOD established a 3-year Challenge Fund in 2003 to support new veterans-related projects initiated by the MOD, other areas of Government or voluntary organisations. The Fund has since supported many varied and worthwhile causes which have in turn benefited the veterans' community as a whole. In view of its success, the life of the Fund has now been extended.
- Funding for specific veterans-related programmes which do not fall into an existing Government programme can come from any Government Department with an interest.

Conclusion

13. The Strategy for Veterans will be evolutionary, with periodic updating as the nature, size and requirements of the veterans' population and our understanding of them change. The

circumstances of future veterans will also be very different from those of many of today's veterans. For example, there will be fewer veterans of the conscription era and a greater proportion of veterans will be former reservists. These changed circumstances will bring with them different opportunities, expectations and requirements that will need to be reflected in our approach to veterans' issues. It is likely that changes in society and evolving attitudes will also alter the public perception of the rights and responsibilities of veterans and these changes will also need to be reflected in the Strategy for Veterans. For example, demographic changes, with an increasing percentage of the population falling into the older age groups, will have implications for veterans as well as wider society in terms of the way in which support services will be provided. Likewise, the nature of conflict is evolving as a result of changing technology, different sorts of threats and the increased emphasis on peace-keeping and similar operations.

14. Some things, however, will remain constant. In particular, service in the Armed Forces is likely to remain a unique experience with challenges and opportunities that have no parallel in civilian life, and which may impact on personnel well after they return to civilian life. There will therefore need to be a continued emphasis on the MOD's through-life approach, recognising that today's Service personnel are tomorrow's veterans.

15. On this basis, we plan to move to a biennial review cycle for the Strategy, reflecting the pace at which veterans issues can generally be expected to evolve. Every second year we will undertake a substantial updating of our understanding of the issues affecting veterans, taking stock of strategic priorities and reviewing the effectiveness of the Veterans Programme against this revised assessment. For alternate years, we will conduct a lower level of review to accommodate any major developments and to allow for any fine tuning that might be required. This latter exercise would not be subject to the wide, formal consultation that will be a feature of the biennial review.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE

Set out below are some practical examples of actions taken so far. They are intended to be illustrative and do not cover the full range of activity.

Assist ex-Service personnel and their families to make a successful transition back into civilian life

The MOD is committed to ensuring that ex-Service personnel and their families make a successful transition to civilian life and that the small minority at risk of social exclusion receive assistance.

- A **new pension scheme** has been introduced offering major improvements to benefits paid on death in service and to the value of widows' pensions, while retaining pensions based on final salary and an early full career retirement age (age 55).
- A **new compensation scheme** has been introduced that gives a better focus of compensation on the more seriously injured, that is simpler to understand and administer, that provides for the first time in-service compensation and that provides lump sum awards (of very significant value for the more seriously injured) that can assist with adaptation costs, in addition to an income scheme based on salary.
- **Improvements to War Pension provisions**, including allowing war widows to retain their pensions on remarriage from April 2005, and an improvement to the pre-1973 war widows' supplementary pension.
- The **Armed Forces' Resettlement Programme** is considered to be among the best available to employees anywhere. Statistics show that over 95% of Service leavers who use the services of the Career Transition Partnership find employment within six months of leaving the Armed Forces. However, until 2004, some personnel left the Armed Forces each year without entitlement to formal resettlement. This changed from April 2004 with the introduction of the '**Early Service Leavers Scheme**.' This ensures that all early Service leavers receive a mandatory brief and interview, with an assessment of vulnerability and referral as necessary for specialist help. Thus, everyone leaving the Services now receives structured help in resettling in civilian life.
- We are taking steps to reduce the risks of homelessness and tackle this and associated problems where they arise among Service leavers and veterans. The projects and initiatives put in place include the **Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services** (SPACES), which provides housing advice and placement assistance for single people who are leaving the Armed Forces.

Provide support where needed

MOD is working in partnership with the voluntary sector, national and local authorities and business on a number of individual projects to reduce the risk of social exclusion. These include:

- The **Prison In-Reach** project to provide support to veterans who are serving prison sentences and to their families, with the aim of aiding rehabilitation and reducing the risks of re-offending;
- **Project Compass**, a London-based pilot project, which provides help to homeless veterans to return to employment;
- The **Galleries Project**, based in Richmond, North Yorkshire, which provides move-on housing and support to Service leavers at risk of homelessness;
- Using the resources of the **Challenge Fund** to provide initial funding for key workers in veterans' housing and mental health areas.

Ensure proper recognition in society

MOD is working with the ex-Service organisations and others on a number of projects to ensure that veterans receive proper recognition in society.

- MOD continues to contribute to the planning of commemorative events. Major successful events were launched to commemorate the end of the Second World War in July 2005, culminating in the first ever '**Veterans Awareness Week**', a week of events across the United Kingdom that promoted, explained and celebrated the achievements of veterans.
- MOD is working with other public sector organisations wishing to make the most of the **skills and experience of veterans**. There is increasing awareness that veterans have much to offer in the education and youth sector, for example, either as teachers or in providing vocational tuition, assisting with behaviour improvement, mentoring or as volunteer instructors in the Cadet Forces.
- MOD launched the **Veterans Badge** in May 2004. The badge, developed in consultation with veterans' organisations, is intended to reinforce the veterans' identity and to help the wider public recognise veterans. The badge was initially made available only to veterans of the First and Second World Wars; however, in order to mark the contribution made by all those who have served the country as members of the Armed Forces, eligibility is being progressively extended to veterans of later periods.
- MOD continues to produce a series of **commemorative/educational** booklets to describe some of the significant Second World War actions. The purpose is both to mark the contribution of veterans and to inform and educate the public (particularly the younger generation).
- There is an initiative to construct the **Armed Forces Memorial**, a new national

memorial dedicated to members of the Armed Forces (Regular and Reserve) killed on duty or as a result of terrorist action since the end of the Second World War.

Communication

- As part of its role as the principal MOD deliverer of services to veterans, the **Veterans Agency** has established a range of measures to ensure that veterans are fully aware of their entitlements and the support available to them including a comprehensive **telephone help-line and website** on the wide range of support available to veterans from both official and voluntary sources.
- A **Veterans World Newsletter** is produced three times a year that highlights issues affecting the veterans' community. The target audience for the newsletter is growing and one of the aims of the newsletter is to raise awareness amongst voluntary and statutory organisations of the support available to veterans.
- A **series of conferences** has been held throughout the United Kingdom to raise awareness amongst voluntary and statutory organisations of the support that is available to those who have served in the Armed Forces. These have been extremely popular and it is planned to take the conference to different areas of the country.
- A **DVD** has been produced that contains case studies that show the type of support that veterans in need have received. This will be distributed to organisations that provide support to members of the public.
- In partnership with the Legal Services Commission, a **Community Legal Services Direct Information Leaflet** has been produced that focuses solely on the rights of former Servicemen and women and their families. This is the first time that a leaflet in the series has focused on a specific client group.
- The Veterans Policy Unit is **working with Citizens Advice** to improve the delivery of information and advice to the veterans' community through Citizens Advice Bureaux. A resource guide for advisors has been produced along with a poster to raise awareness amongst visitors to Bureaux of the sources of assistance available to veterans, and the Citizens Advice Electronic Information System has been updated.

Research

- A feasibility study on the methodology for **ex-Service homelessness research**, and a pilot study into **mentoring of early Service leavers** have been carried out and will be taken into account in determining future work.
- In the light of our post-Gulf War research programme and other work, we have developed a **structured, evidence-based research strategy** to address a range of concerns about veterans' ill-health. Lessons learned will be fed back to inform existing in-Service policies and policy across Government.
- Our current programme of research into **Gulf veterans' illnesses** is largely

complete. The programme has so far found no evidence that a discrete medical condition Gulf War Syndrome exists. We expect findings from our vaccines interaction research to be published shortly. We will undertake further research as necessary should there be substantial evidence of new areas of concern that have not been investigated.

- We have provided facilities for testing Gulf (1991) and Balkans veterans who believe that they may have been exposed to the **depleted uranium** used principally in anti-tank rounds. Hundreds of veterans have participated in the testing programme. Reassuringly, none of the samples analysed has been found to contain depleted uranium.
- Adopting the lessons from earlier campaigns, the first stage of a large cohort study into **the physical and psychological well-being** of Op TELIC (UK military operations in Iraq) personnel is now nearing completion, as is a detailed exposures study.

WHAT WE INTEND TO DO

Many of the activities alluded to on pages 9-12 are, by their nature, continuous. Set out below are examples of particular activities which are new or represent significant developments from the work we have done so far.

Assist ex-Service personnel and their families to make a successful transition back into civilian life

- Further improvements will be made to the already highly effective **resettlement service**.
- **We will work with the Department for Work and Pensions** to establish the number of Early Service Leavers who fail to find employment on leaving the Services.
- MOD will consider how best to address the findings of a study which examined whether **mentoring** might have a role in facilitating successful resettlement of vulnerable Service leavers in the future.
- We will continue to work with the **ex-Service organisations** to develop a co-ordinated approach to Service leavers and are currently co-operating on a programme to encourage recent/future Service leavers to keep in contact with ex-Service organisations.

Provide support where needed

- We will continue to **promote dialogue** with health professionals and the Royal Colleges, especially GPs and psychiatrists, in order to raise awareness of the needs of veterans.
- We will work with other Government Departments to promote **smooth transfer of medical care** between in-Service MOD funded in-patient care and NHS provisions for those severely disabled, medically discharged personnel.
- We will continue to work with the UK health departments and ex-Service partners to achieve **effective delivery of appropriate mental health services** for veterans.
- Together with ex-Service charities and other Government Departments, we will **continue to investigate the health and social care needs of older and disabled veterans** and contribute to the development of overall Government policy in the area (for example, by taking part in consultation and pilots).
- Work is underway on **'Galleries 2'**, which will provide housing and support in Aldershot to Service leavers at risk of homelessness.
- Options for extending **Project Compass** as a nationwide project will continue to be explored.

- We will continue to work with local authorities and a range of other organisations to ensure **consistency in the treatment of War Pensions in means testing for housing benefit and council tax purposes.**

Ensure proper recognition in society

- We plan to build on the success of the 2005 'Veterans Awareness Week' with an **annual celebration of veterans' service** in future years, in order to raise public awareness about the veterans' community, including its diversity.
- We will carry forward our **Education Programme** beyond the World War II commemorations.
- We will continue to support as appropriate the work of the Fundraising Appeal for the **Armed Forces Memorial** at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

Communication

- MOD will work with the **three Services** in order to involve them more closely in the Veterans Programme and to raise awareness of veterans' issues within the Services.
- We will consider, through the **Communications Action Team** and other related fora, matters which affect veterans, and develop initiatives and publicity using all available channels to raise awareness and understanding.
- We will ensure that tomorrow's veterans are fully aware of their **entitlements and the support available on leaving the Services** by continuing to develop in-Service advice and information.
- We will develop **targeted publicity campaigns** for vulnerable and/or hard-to-reach groups such as the homeless and Reservist personnel.
- We will develop **regional publicity campaigns** to sustain the momentum created by Veterans Awareness Week, and ensure maximum awareness through local media, leaflets and posters.
- We will build on the success of **conferences for non ex-Service charities** by extending the coverage to other cities across the UK.

Research

- We will pursue targeted research on **ex-Service homelessness** in partnership with the Ex-Service Action Group charities.
- We will continue our support to the independent epidemiological study on **Porton Down test veterans.**
- We will study **suicide rates and associated characteristics** in the veterans' population.

- We will carry out research on the concept of **delayed-onset Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** based on war pensioners and clients of Combat Stress.

For more information visit website:
www.mod.uk
and
www.veteransagency.mod.uk
or call Veterans Agency Freeline 0800 169 2277

