

Scottish
Government
**Support for the
Veterans and
Armed Forces
Community**

2023



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Minister for Veterans Foreword



I am particularly delighted to present the Scottish Government's seventh annual update to Parliament on our support

throughout the past year for the Veterans and Armed Forces community in Scotland, given my recent return to the role as the Minister responsible for this important area.

I am really pleased to note the progress that has been made across a number of aspects of support for our veterans and their families. This has only been achieved through the dedication, commitment and teamwork of public, private and third sector organisations and we should be immensely proud of that collective endeavour.

On a personal note, I have been genuinely thrilled to return to this post. I have already visited a number of veterans charities and partners and spoken at several events. I also had the opportunity to attend this year's memorial gathering with the McCrae's Battalion Trust at the Contalmaison Cairn in Northern France to honour those who fell during the Battle of the Somme. That was a really special event and I was honoured to be invited.

This year of course marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War and I was privileged to lay a wreath at the commemoration at the Korean War Memorial near Bathgate. All Scottish Servicemen and all those serving with a Scottish Regiment who died during Service in the Korean War are remembered within the Rolls of Honour at the Scottish National War Memorial at Edinburgh Castle and we will never forget the ultimate sacrifice made by those, and all other, members of the Armed Forces.

These past months have reminded me of the outstanding charity sector we have here in Scotland and their dedicated and collaborative approach to improving the lives of veterans and their families across the country.

Collaboration is essential to ensuring that different organisations, each of whom can bring something unique to the table, can come together to deliver a joined-up, coherent approach to support and services. And that is all the more important in the current, financially challenging, circumstances.

The Scottish Government has sought to encourage collaboration through our annual £500,000 Scottish Veterans Fund and further demonstrated our commitment to this approach by agreeing to fund the Unforgotten Forces Consortium to support older veterans for a further three years, with £950,000 until 2026.

In addition to encouraging collaborative working across the veterans community, this year's Scottish Veterans Fund prioritised support in the face of the cost of living crisis and for Early Service Leavers.

I welcomed this year the publication of Lord Etherton's LGBT Veterans Independent Review which examined the effect that the pre-2000 ban on homosexuality in the UK Armed Forces has had on LGBT veterans. The review is an emotive, and at times extremely difficult, read but it is hugely important that people have had the opportunity to share their experiences. It is now imperative that action is taking on the report's recommendations and we are looking closely at how best to deliver on the two suggestions directed at Scotland.

Helping veterans and their families to move into meaningful, fulfilling employment after Service continues to be a top priority for us. This year saw the formal launch of the military skills discovery tool developed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, which is proving to be a vital instrument for Service leavers and employers to better recognise and articulate the range of outstanding skills which our veterans can bring to the work place. We are also committed to employing more veterans here in the Scottish Government and I am delighted that veterans can now get a guaranteed interview if they apply for a job in the Government, providing they meet the minimum criteria for the role. What's more, this year we also launched a campaign working with the business community to help employers further understand the benefits that veterans bring to the workforce.

Obtaining greater data on the veterans community also remains a priority. This year we have worked with stakeholders to develop proposals and define the outputs we need from the veterans Census question. In addition, the first veterans-related findings from the three Scottish Government major household surveys and the first UK-wide veterans survey are expected this year. Only a few years ago we had little-to-no data, but now we are on the cusp of having lots of really rich and useful information which we can use to better develop policy and understand how and where we can improve services and support for veterans and their families.

This report provides a more detailed summary of the range of work that has been done this year in support of the veterans and Armed Forces community in Scotland. It demonstrates our ongoing and unwavering commitment to ensuring that veterans and their families can get the right support, at the right time and in the right place and that they suffer no disadvantage as a result of their Service.

I would like to give my personal thanks to all the individuals and organisations who have contributed to these efforts during the past year and those who continue to work hard every day to support our veterans and Armed Forces community.



Graeme Dey
Minister for Veterans

Key Highlights



Collaboration and Co-ordination

We have agreed to fund the Unforgotten Forces Consortium for a further three years up to 2025-26, providing a total of £950,000, to continue supporting their work to improve the lives of veterans over the age of 60 across Scotland.

The £500,000 Scottish Veterans Fund launched a new, three year funding round from 2023-24. Seventeen projects have been funded for 2023-24, six of which offer support to veterans impacted by the cost of living crisis and two supporting Early Service Leavers.

We continue to fund the Scottish Veterans Commissioner (SVC) and remain fully supportive of her work and the priorities she has set in her new three-year Strategic Plan.

We remain committed to working with the UK Government (UKG) and other Devolved Governments, especially in support of the delivery of those UKG Veterans Strategy Action Plan commitments which affect veterans across the UK.



Data

We have worked with National Records of Scotland (NRS) to develop analytical proposals and outputs for the veterans Census question. NRS aims to begin publishing topic data from the Census from summer 2024.

The first veterans-related findings from the three Scottish Government major household surveys – Scottish Household Survey, Scottish Crime and Justice Survey and the Scottish Health Survey – will be available in late 2023.

We worked with the UK Government and the other Devolved Governments to develop and facilitate the first UK-wide Veterans' Survey. First findings are expected in 2023.



Perception and Recognition

This year we launched a campaign working with the business community to help employers understand the benefits that veterans bring to the workforce.

This year we launched the Medals Replacement Scheme, under which we will fund the cost of replacing lost or stolen medals for eligible veterans resident in Scotland.



Community and Relationships

An updated version of **Welcome to Scotland** was published in April 2023 following extensive consultation with the Armed Forces and Forces Families Federations as well as third and public sector organisations.

We welcomed the publication of Lord Etherton's independent LGBT Veterans Review and its two suggestions for Scotland.

The Social Isolation and Loneliness Delivery Plan 'Recovering Our Connections' was published on 8 March 2023. Included in the plan is a commitment to "engage with veterans' organisations and make use of available data and outcomes to better identify how we can support the Armed Forces community to strengthen social connections".



Employment, Education and Skills

We provided additional funding in 2022-23 for the continued development of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership's military skills discovery tool which was formally launched at Edinburgh Castle in early 2023.

Through phase two delivery of No One Left Behind we continue to offer employment support services for those facing significant challenges when leaving the Armed Forces, providing tailored individual wrap-around support which some Service leavers may need.

We remain committed to increasing the number of veterans we employ and continue to explore a number of ways to achieve this including through the Going Forward into Employment programme and Guaranteed Interview Scheme, which was introduced this year. There are now over 100 self-declared veterans working within the Scottish Government.



Finance and Debt

During 2023, Social Security Scotland hosted two events with Veterans Welfare Rights Advisors. At these events we explained the benefits we deliver, including our disability benefits.

The application form for Adult Disability Payment asks clients about their possible entitlement to Armed Forces Independence Payment, War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement and War Pension Constant Attendance Allowance.



Health and Wellbeing

The Armed Forces and Veterans General Practice Recognition Scheme has been piloted and the principles and vision for the Scottish Veterans Treatment Pathway (SVTP) have been agreed.

In June, Public Health Scotland published 'Drug and Alcohol Information System: Overview of Initial Assessments for Specialist Drug and Alcohol Treatment 2021-22 and 2022-23'. This is an official statistics release which reported that in 2021-22, 3% of people starting treatment for substance use reported having ever served in the Armed Forces.



Making a Home in Civilian Society

Funding can be made available through our Affordable Housing Supply Programme to deliver homes specifically for veterans where Local Authorities identify this as a strategic priority.

Open Market Shared Equity Scheme continues to classify veterans as a priority access applicant group who do not need to be first time buyers to qualify for support.

We continue to support Housing Options Scotland, which includes the Military Matters project amongst the services it provides.



Veterans and the Law

We continue to engage with the network of VICSOs and have been invited to attend the annual VICSO meeting for the past two years.

This year we have re-engaged with SACRO as they consider how best to re-invigorate their Veterans Mentoring Service Strategic Oversight Group, of which we were previously a member.

Police Scotland's long standing internal programme of Veterans Champions continues and more have been appointed throughout Scotland this year. Their primary role continues to be promoting the bespoke referral mechanism with the Armed Services Advice Project.

Progress against Veterans Strategy Commitments

Cross-Cutting Factors and Themes

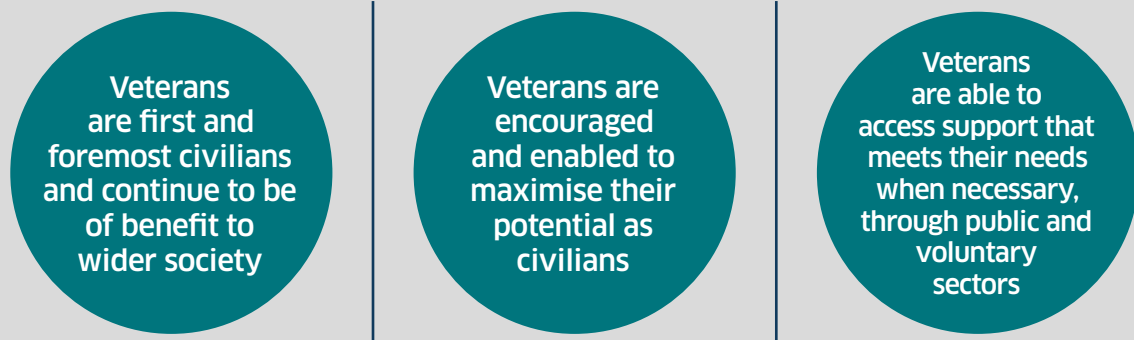
Vision

This Strategy has a 10-year scope. Through the 10-year timescale, the Strategy addresses the immediate needs of older veterans as well as setting the right conditions for society to empower – and support – the newer generation. Initiatives and proposals will work towards an enduring Vision articulated by three key principles.

Those who have served in the UK Armed Forces, and their families, transition smoothly back into civilian life and contribute fully to a society that understands and values what they have done and what they have to offer.

Principles

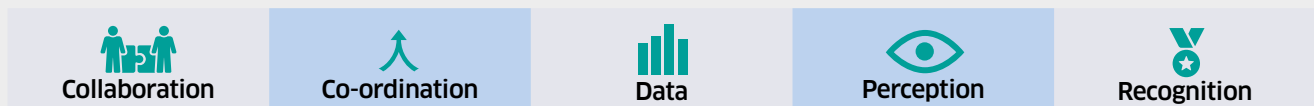
The Principles articulate in greater detail the strategic objectives of the Vision.



These Principles encompass Regular and Reservist veterans and, where appropriate, their families and the bereaved. The focus is on those veterans of the UK Armed Forces resident in the UK. In due course, we will consider encompassing veterans who return to or choose to live overseas. These Principles are consistent with, and underpinned by, the Armed Forces Covenant.

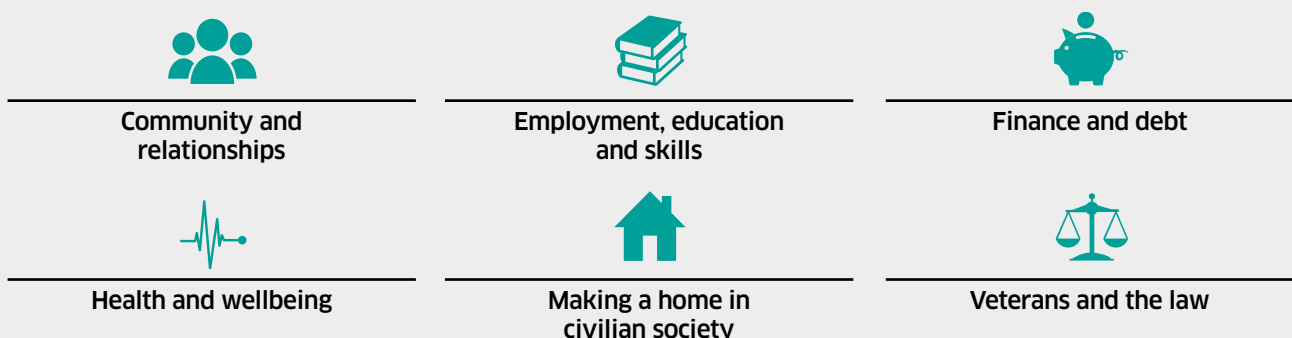
Cross-cutting factors

That affect service provision for veterans across all Key Themes



Key themes

That emerged as affecting veterans' lives



Summary of 10 Year Outcomes

Cross-Cutting Factors

1	Collaboration between organisations	Improved collaboration between organisations offers veterans coherent support.
2	Coordination of veterans' services	The coordination of veterans' provision delivers consistent aims and principles over time and throughout the UK, ensuring veterans, their families and the bereaved are treated fairly compared to the local population.
3	Data on the veteran community	Enhanced collection, use and analysis of data across the public, private and charitable sectors to build an evidence base to effectively identify and address the needs of veterans.
4	Public perception and understanding	The UK population value veterans and understand their diverse experiences and culture.
5	Recognition of veterans	Veterans feel that their service and experience is recognised and valued by society.

Key Themes

1	Community and relationships	Veterans are able to build healthy relationships and integrate into their communities.
2	Employment, education and skills	Veterans enter appropriate employment and can continue to enhance their careers throughout their working lives.
3	Finance and debt	Veterans leave the Armed Forces with sufficient financial education, awareness and skills to be financially self-supporting and resilient.
4	Health and wellbeing	All veterans enjoy a state of positive physical and mental health and wellbeing, enabling them to contribute to wider aspects of society.
5	Making a home in civilian society	Veterans have a secure place to live either through buying, renting or social housing.
6	Veterans and the law	Veterans leave the Armed Forces with the resilience and awareness to remain law-abiding civilians.

Cross-Cutting Factors





Collaboration and Co-ordination

Unforgotten Forces Consortium

We have agreed to fund the Unforgotten Forces Consortium for a further three years up to 2025-26, providing a total of £950,000, to continue supporting their work to improve the lives of veterans over the age of 60 across Scotland and working to improve collaboration, sharing of best practice and cross referrals across its 18 partner organisations.

Cross-Government Working

We remain an active member of the Armed Forces Covenant's governance structure and continue to engage with the MOD and the Office for Veterans' Affairs. Additionally, we continue to contribute to the Covenant and Veterans Annual Report and will signpost to our own annual report.

Scottish Veterans Fund

The £500,000 Scottish Veterans Fund launched a new, three-year funding round from 2023-24, for projects supporting veterans and their families across Scotland. The priorities for the Fund this year were support in the face of the cost of living crisis, Early Service Leavers and projects encouraging collaborative working across the veterans community. Seventeen projects have been funded for 2023-24, six of which offer support to veterans impacted by the cost of living crisis and two supporting Early Service Leavers.

Veterans and Armed Forces Champions

The previous Cabinet Secretary for Veterans met with the network of Local Authority Armed Forces and Veterans Champions in early 2023 after which the Champions' Role Description was refined and updated. The current Veterans Minister again met with the Local Authority Champions in the summer with a focus on improved collaboration between the various networks of Champions. To this end, we promoted and shared with the Champions resources available on the Veterans Assist website to encourage improved collaboration between the networks across Scotland.

Relationships with the Services and Families Federations

We are committed to maintaining our excellent relationships with the Armed Forces and Families Federations in Scotland. We continue to hold regular discussions with the Federations across the three Services to ensure a joined up approach to supporting Service families in Scotland.

We also attended, and presented at, the Firm Base Conference in November 2022 and continue to have regular scheduled discussions with the three Services to ensure a collaborative approach to supporting them and the veterans community in Scotland.

Scottish Veterans Commissioner

We continue to fund the Scottish Veterans Commissioner (SVC) and remain fully supportive of her work and the priorities she has set in her new three-year Strategic Plan. We continue to work towards the delivery of the outstanding Commissioner recommendations and we again contributed to and welcome the SVC's 2023 Progress Report.



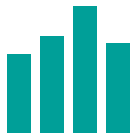
Armed Forces Covenant Legislation

We have been engaging with the MOD as they consider the UK Government's and the Devolved Governments' role with respect to the functions already within scope of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty in the areas of education, healthcare and housing and to what extent they currently consider the Covenant principles. We have provided evidence of existing, extensive Covenant consideration and will continue to work with the MOD during this review, which is expected to be published by the end of 2023.

Cross-UK Veterans Strategy Commitments

We remain committed to working with the UK Government (UKG) and other Devolved Governments, especially in support of the delivery of those UKG Veterans Strategy Action Plan commitments which affect veterans across the UK.

We continue to regularly meet partners across UKG through various fora including the Devolved Governments and Data Working Groups. In particular, this year we worked closely with the UK Government and the independent review team leading the LGBT veterans review to discuss the report's findings and determine how Scotland could support the review. We welcomed the review's publication in July and we are committed to supporting LGBT veterans and determining how to deliver on the report's two suggestions for Scotland.



Data

Scotland's Census

We have worked with National Records of Scotland (NRS) to develop analytical proposals and outputs for the veterans Census question, reflecting evidence priorities and stakeholder preferences. We will continue to work with NRS and stakeholders to meet user needs as NRS progress with their publication schedule. NRS aims to begin publishing topic data from the Census from summer 2024. This will include data on the size of the veteran population across Scotland. More detailed data on the characteristics of the veteran population are scheduled for release later in 2024.

Through regular engagements with counterparts in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA), we have continued to seek opportunities to learn from the analysis and outputs delivered for the England and Wales 2021 Census.

Scottish Household Surveys

The first veterans-related findings from the three Scottish Government major household surveys – Scottish Household Survey, Scottish Crime and Justice Survey and the Scottish Health Survey – will be available in late 2023. Having the same veterans question from the Census in each of these national surveys will help us to improve our understanding of the profile, circumstances and needs of veterans in Scotland which in turn will help inform policy and services.

We are in the latter stages of developing a monitoring framework for the Veterans Strategy in Scotland. This work has helped identify a number of new evidence sources and improved usage of existing sources. When complete the framework will allow us to see how outcomes are changing over time.



Additional Data Sources

We worked with ONS, OVA and the other Devolved Governments to develop and facilitate the first UK-wide Veterans' Survey. The survey, funded by the OVA and delivered by ONS, collected information from veterans on a range of topics to understand current access to and perception of services in addition to veterans' experiences and circumstances. We liaised with the Scottish Prison Service to help enable the inclusion of veterans in prison. The survey ran from November 2022 to February 2023, with over 2000 responses received from veterans in Scotland. First findings are expected in 2023 and we have submitted analysis proposals to ONS, and will continue to work with them to develop findings and outputs for Scotland.

We have worked with NRS and kept the feasibility of using data linkage to analyse veteran suicides in Scotland under review. This includes consideration of the report by the Office for National Statistics in August 2023, which found severe limitations to the linkage of Service leavers and 2011 Census data in England and Wales, with an impact on the quality of analytical findings. This may suggest analysis of veteran suicide in Scotland through data linkage would be better based on the 2022 Census, which specifically identifies veterans within the population, and the years that follow. We will continue to engage with counterparts in the UK Government on developments with the previously announced new statistics on veteran suicide in England and Wales, and how this may inform similar work in Scotland.

We continue to progress the data-sharing agreement between the MOD and the Scottish Government. The agreement, which is pending final sign-off by the MOD, will enable the MOD to provide us with annual updates of the Service Leaver Database. Once acquired, the data will be held in the Administrative Data Research Scotland secure infrastructure and made available to researchers wishing to undertake projects to generate policy insight in this field.





Perception and Recognition

Promoting Veterans as Assets

This year we launched a campaign working with the business community to help employers understand the benefits that veterans bring to the workforce. The campaign promoted and discussed the benefits of employing veterans, and helped businesses to understand how they can bring veterans into their organisation, with a particular focus on reaching the small and medium enterprise sector. Additionally, a new website, www.recruitveterans.scot, was launched to provide employers with information on the benefits of recruiting veterans, tips on how to integrate them into the workforce via employer case studies, and signposting employers to the organisations who can help them reach the veterans workforce.

Employers, stakeholders and industry experts were welcomed to Hampden Park in Glasgow on 15 March to hear from a wide range of speakers and discuss the benefits of hiring veterans. At least four veterans were recruited following the event by employers who had attended.

Commemorations

We continue to work with Legion Scotland and Poppyscotland, amongst other key stakeholders, to support a wide range of commemorative events and ensure that we are represented at them, demonstrating our commitment to recognising the contributions made by veterans and serving personnel. For example, in July the Veterans Minister attended the memorial event with the McCrae's Battalion Trust at the Contalmaison Cairn in Northern France to honour those who fell during the Battle of the Somme. This year also marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War and the Veterans Minister laid a wreath at a commemorative event at the Scottish Korean War Memorial in Bathgate.

This year we also launched the Medals Replacement Scheme, under which we will fund the cost of replacing lost or stolen medals for eligible veterans resident in Scotland.



Photo credit PoppyScotland

Key Themes





Community and Relationships

Integration into local communities

The Scottish Veterans Fund continues to provide funding to a number of projects which support veterans to integrate into the local community, such as On Course Foundation's project of networking and employment skills through golf events or Thistle Health and Wellbeing's Meaningful Connections project for veterans severely impacted by long term conditions.

Welcome to Scotland

An updated version of **Welcome to Scotland** was published in April 2023 following extensive consultation with the Armed Forces and Families Federations as well as third and public sector organisations to ensure that the guide is both up to date and contains the most important information for personnel and their families ahead of relocation to Scotland.

Social Isolation

The Social Isolation and Loneliness Delivery Plan 'Recovering Our Connections' was published on 8 March 2023. It outlines a range of actions across Scottish Government which will help tackle social isolation and loneliness. Included in the plan is a commitment to "engage with veterans' organisations and make use of available data and outcomes to better identify how we can support the Armed Forces community to strengthen social connections". Actions in the Plan will be taken forward with the support of the Social Isolation and Loneliness Advisory Group over the life of the Plan until 2026.

Underrepresented Groups

Fighting with Pride have been funded through the Scottish Veterans Fund to support LGBT+ veterans in accessing services and to develop organisations' understanding of the needs of the LGBT+ veterans community. Future grant awards to veterans organisations will require LGBT+ kitemarking to ensure that they have appropriate policies in place to support them.

We welcomed the publication of the independent LGBT Veterans Review and its two suggestions for Scotland.



Employment, Education and Skills

Employability Initiatives

We, through phase two delivery of No One Left Behind (NOLB), continue to offer employment support services for those facing significant challenges when leaving the Armed Forces, providing tailored individual wrap-around support which some Service leavers may need. This can be holistic support as well as employability services support.

Through employability support, the key aim of the work is to ensure that veterans and those leaving the Armed Forces are able to access the full and extensive range of support in Scotland, much of which is delivered through Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) at local authority level. We continue to work with LEPs to ensure that veterans remain a priority group.

Veterans Employability Strategic Group

During 2022 and into 2023 we conducted a light-touch review of the Veterans Employability Strategic Group to determine the most appropriate areas of focus and its membership. This work continues and we are working closely with partners and stakeholders to ensure a coordinated, collaborative approach which reduces duplication of effort and, ultimately, results in the best possible employment and skills-related outcomes for veterans and their families.

Skills and Qualifications Mapping

We provided additional funding in 2022-23 for the continued development of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership's (SCQFP) military skills discovery tool which was formally launched at Edinburgh Castle in early 2023 with stakeholders from across the veterans community in attendance.

The tool was further developed to include over 40 new military job roles ensuring a wider range across all three of the Services. The SCQFP is also training personnel from organisations supporting veterans and those in the Armed Forces in understanding the tool so they can better support those individuals in identifying their skills. SCQFP and Skills Development Scotland are also working on a joint plan to promote and use the tool more widely.

Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) continues to work with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to build on the existing Memorandum of Understanding and refer new employers to them, for example Allied Vehicles, which is now advertising their opportunities on the CTP job board. Furthermore, SDS is working with employers to promote the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (DERS) and the Capitalising on Military Talent toolkit.

SDS also continues to engage closely with veterans organisations, for example through their involvement in Poppyscotland's Advance to Work course, which has helped participants with their career management skills, employability and to identify their meta-skills. Furthermore, SDS has introduced Career Information Advice and Guidance services into the Drumfork Community Centre in Helensburgh and, although available to the whole community, is utilised heavily by the spouses, partners and families of Serving personnel at nearby HMNB Clyde.

SDS' [My World of Work](#) landing page for veterans and the Armed Forces community continues to be promoted widely and during Scotland's Careers Week in 2022, SDS showcased the page to veterans and their families. The website has also been promoted with partners including at the Poppyscotland Advance to Work course.

Armed Forces and Veterans Community Group

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC)-led Armed Forces and Veterans Community Group (AFVCG) continues to meet three times per academic year to discuss educational support for the Armed Forces community in Scotland. The group includes representation from Higher and Further Education, Student Awards Agency for Scotland, MOD, veterans charities, Skills Development Scotland, the Families Federations and the Scottish Government. The Group continues to work closely with the MOD and CTP to improve the Enhanced Learning Credits offering and has improved its understanding of the needs and views of institutions and Service personnel.

Scottish Armed Forces Evidence-Research

A proposal to establish a Scottish Military Research Hub was approved in October 2022 and two gatherings have since taken place this year to determine the hub's membership (including Scottish universities, MOD, NHS, Charities, Association of Directors of Education Scotland and the Scottish Veterans Commissioner's office) and agree its priorities. The hub is now called Scottish Armed Forces Evidence-Research (SAFER).

ADVANCE

The HE:FE Veterans Champions Network has been rebranded ADVANCE with a small working group established to ensure it is able to offer briefing sessions to the right people to promote HE and FE as a viable option for veterans. Three

presentations have been delivered this academic year with strong links developed with the three Family Federations and Association of Directors of Education Scotland to deliver further presentations in academic year 2023-24.

Scottish Government Employment

We remain committed to increasing the number of veterans we employ and continue to explore a number of ways to achieve this including through the Going Forward into Employment (GFIE) programme and Guaranteed Interview Scheme, which was introduced this year and gives veterans the best possible chance of securing an interview when applying for Scottish Government jobs, provided they meet the minimum criteria. There are now over 100 self-declared veterans working within the Scottish Government

We had a stand at the CTP Careers Fair at Murrayfield in April 2023 where we had the opportunity to engage with Armed Forces personnel, Service leavers, veterans and families to discuss the type of roles within the Scottish Government, where to find them and how to apply. Feedback on the day and afterwards highlighted the popularity of our jobs and a desire to work in the Civil Service.

Additionally, links to our jobs and information on Skills Development Scotland continues to be made available on the Forces Families Jobs website. This was also promoted in this year's Welcome to Scotland publication.

NHS Employment

The Supporting Armed Forces Employment (SAFE) Programme was established in October 2022 and has recruited a small team, defined its function and is building relationships and networks. The programme will unite and enhance NHS Scotland's efforts to attract, engage and nurture the Armed Forces Community in gaining employment across health and social care roles. The programme's audience includes those still Serving, reservists, veterans, spouses and dependants of Serving personnel. It will be delivered through a range of activities including: enhancing the Armed Forces pages on the NHSCareers website; delivering a national engagement programme; insight events delivered by health boards; and increased communications and engagement between health boards and the Armed Forces community. SAFE will seek to design bespoke pathways for those holding medical qualifications and those looking to upskill. The work undertaken by SAFE will amplify wider NHS Scotland messaging around the attraction of working in health and social care and presenting NHS Scotland as an employer of choice for the Armed Forces.

Police Scotland Employment

To commemorate Armistice Day 2022, Police Scotland's Annual National Forum of Veterans Champions took place at the Scottish Police College, which included 36 of Police Scotland's Veterans Champions from across the country, the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, and a number of Armed Forces charity organisations.

In support of the Armed Forces Covenant, Police Scotland's Positive Action Team has continued to actively support veterans and Service leavers going through the Police Officer recruitment process. Each veteran that registers their interest for the role of Police Officer is contacted by a current Officer to offer support. Information on the recruitment process is shared with the veteran/Service leaver and they are offered the opportunity to attend an online information session, hosted by the Positive Action Team. In the last year, eight online events have taken place for 140 attendees. Members of the Positive Action Team have also attended national career events hosted by the Career Transition Partnership.

Scottish Armed Forces Education Support Group (SAFESG)

The Scottish Armed Forces Education Support Group (SAFESG) continues to take a lead in developing and supporting best practice for Armed Forces Children and Young People. The group has expanded its membership to include the Forces Families Federations.

The SAFESG has also contributed to the ongoing discussions around HE/FE funding policy and has provided case studies illustrating the issues affecting Armed Forces Children and Young People. The group has also considered progress against the Selous recommendations and has highlighted some areas for further development, including the use of data.

National Education Officer

We have provided short-term funding to continue the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) National Education Officer (NEO) Role which is responsible for children and young people of Armed Forces families in Scottish schools and other settings. The NEO provided local authorities with comprehensive guidance and support on the introduction of the Armed Forces Covenant legislation to improve understanding of the new duty. We will work with the NEO and local authorities to consider the impact of the Covenant duty in 2024.

We will consider opportunities to develop the use of data gathering on Armed Forces Children and Young People, building on the work done by the ADES NEO. The 2022 ADES dataset indicated a spread of Armed Forces Children and Young People across Scotland and additional work will be undertaken to consider how this data can be utilised to improve the support offered to these learners.



Finance and Debt

Signposting and Entitlement to Devolved Benefits

As we reported last year, the application form for Adult Disability Payment asks clients about their possible entitlement to Armed Forces Independence Payment, War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement and War Pension Constant Attendance Allowance. Where appropriate clients are then directed to Veterans UK for further advice. We also continue to work with Veterans UK to develop an information sharing process between the organisation and Social Security Scotland. This is intended to ensure that veterans can efficiently access the support they are entitled to. We hold regular discussions with the Ministry of Defence to ensure there is consistency in the messaging provided to veterans. Furthermore we continue to ensure that third party organisations, including those that support veterans, understand the overlaps and are in a position to adequately advise and assist veterans during their interactions with Social Security Scotland or the UK Government agencies administering reserved benefits.

Social Security Scotland (SSS)

During 2023, Social Security Scotland hosted two events with Veterans Welfare Rights Advisors. At these events we explained the benefits we deliver, including our disability benefits. We provided contact details of Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery Relationship Leads; we have local delivery staff in every local authority area who provide support to clients in completing forms and providing information about our benefits.

Social Security Scotland also ran over 60 online roadshows to promote our new Adult Disability Payment and invited representatives from organisations supporting veterans to attend, ask questions and provide feedback. British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association (BLESMA) participate in Social Security Scotland's internal groups and have provided advice and feedback on processes and services to ensure our services are inclusive and remove any barriers veterans may experience.

Our local delivery teams have met with key groups in local areas including the use of community bases shared with the Soldiers', Sailors', and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA), visiting Scottish Veterans Residencies in Edinburgh and Sight Scotland Veterans at Linburn. We also regularly engage with Sight Scotland Veterans and other veterans organisations in the Highlands and Islands, who have also attended our information events.

Our local delivery teams in Aberdeen and Moray have met with veteran support groups in shared outreach spaces where they have shared information about Scottish benefits and local delivery support. Fife's local delivery team is also based at Leuchars Station Community Centre on a fortnightly basis, providing a venue for people to receive face-to-face support to apply for our payments.





Health and Wellbeing

Armed Forces Personnel & Veterans Health Joint Group

The Armed Forces Personnel & Veterans Health Joint Group includes stakeholders from across the public and third sector and continuously seeks to expand this network and form new connections.

During the Strategic Oversight Group meeting in May 2023, it was agreed that the Joint Group has delivered positive impact to the veterans and Armed Forces community and the Group's programme of work for 2023 will build on this progress. For example, the Armed Forces and Veterans General Practice Recognition Scheme has been piloted with a view to launching it nationally in Autumn. Building on this, the Group will explore the requirements to expand this to secondary care settings. Similarly, the Group is considering how the work on identifying veterans within Primary Care records, as outlined in the letter issued by the National Clinical Director, can follow through in other healthcare settings.

The principles and vision for the Scottish Veterans Treatment Pathway (SVTP) have been agreed by the working group, which brought together a range of individuals involved with veterans' health, including NHS Armed Forces Champions and the Third Sector. The Group will work on the implementation of the SVTP throughout 2023.

NHS Champions

We continue to host quarterly NHS Champions meetings which are an effective forum for Champions to discuss local activity and consider any commonality of approach to national initiatives. We shared the statutory guidance on the Covenant Duty with our Champions network, who discussed how, as individual Boards, they might take this forward and implement the guidance and share best practice. The formal Champions meetings also enable guest speakers to provide an update on activity that may be of interest and contributes to the health of veterans and Armed Forces families, this has included the lead for the NHS Supporting Armed Forces Employment Programme.

Health Data

A letter from the National Clinical Director was issued to all General Practice leads recommending some basic steps which General Practices can undertake to help identify their veteran and Armed Forces community patients. As part of the Armed Forces and Veterans General Practice Recognition Scheme, the registration form includes some questions around the experience and understanding of providing healthcare to the veterans and Armed Forces community. This information will help shape future scheme content and feed into other initiatives. Representatives from the Scottish Government are members of the Steering Board from the James Lind Alliance, which is exploring

where health and wellbeing research should be focussed to make the biggest impact on the lives of the veterans and Armed Forces community.

Drug and Alcohol Information System (DAISy)

On 27 June 2023 Public Health Scotland published 'Drug and Alcohol Information System: Overview of Initial Assessments for Specialist Drug and Alcohol Treatment 2021-22 and 2022-23'. This is an official statistics release which reported that in 2021-22, 3% of people starting treatment for substance use reported having ever served in the Armed Forces, with a further 3% not wishing to answer. For those that reported serving, 40% of veterans reported a length of service between one and four years, and 48% reporting serving five years or more.

The data from the DAISy will be incorporated into our Veterans Strategy monitoring framework and help us to better understand the impact of alcohol and drug use on veterans and how we, and other stakeholders, might better support veterans who have an alcohol or drug problem.

Veteran Mental Health & Wellbeing Action Plan

We are working with the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Implementation Board and the Implementation Team, hosted by Combat Stress, on developing a new Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Scotland pathway. The aim of this work is to implement the principles of the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan and to improve access to mental health services for veterans across Scotland. The Implementation Team is currently developing a plan for the new pathway.

The veterans mental health anti-stigma campaign, developed by See Me, was launched on 29 November 2022, at Edinburgh Waverley Station. The campaign, titled The Guard, included recordings of veterans' stories of dealing with mental health problems, pictures of veterans displayed in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and a short podcast series. To date, See Me recorded 609 listens to veterans' stories and almost 3000 visits to the campaign's website.

Raising awareness of veterans' health issues

The pilot version of the Armed Forces and Veterans General Practice Recognition Scheme was launched in December 2022 and ran until April 2023. The pilot scheme was trialled in practices across nine Health Board areas. The pilot included a learning programme aimed at both clinical and non-clinical staff working in General Practices, and a registration form that provided some insight into current levels of awareness.

A report was produced and shared with members of the Joint Group, the NHS Armed Forces Champions and participating General Practices. We have gathered feedback from the Practices that took part and are using this to further shape the content and approach to the scheme ahead of the national launch, anticipated for Autumn 2023. We have shared initial analysis of the pilot with the Implementation Group, NHS Armed Forces Champions and participating practices and are exploring how this scheme can be further developed to support staff in secondary care.

Combat Stress and Veterans First Point

We are providing £1.4m of funding to Combat Stress to deliver veterans mental health services across Scotland in 2023-24. Combat Stress has recently opened new premises in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Additionally, we are providing £658,633 worth of funding to the six Veteran First Point centres in 2023-24. The local health boards have agreed to match fund this award.

Collaborative Working

We have ongoing engagement with our partners across the UK including with the UK Departments of Health and Ministry of Defence Partnership Board, OVA, Health of our Service Families Working Group and the other Devolved Governments. These meetings not only help to facilitate wider stakeholder engagement and opportunities for collaborative working but enable us to more effectively direct to appropriate specific policy areas within Scottish

Government. For example, we have been involved in supporting the development of a UK-wide health and wellbeing guide for Armed Forces families and have assisted MOD to connect with the appropriate Pharmacy policy leads to facilitate a piece of work in relation to prescriptions for serving personnel. The November Partnership Board meeting is being hosted in Scotland, which will further strengthen these connections.

Improving Accessibility

We regularly review the content of the NHS Inform pages for veterans and recognise that veterans, their families and health and social care staff all access the website. We therefore anticipate additional updates to the webpages to include information about the General Practice scheme and, when launched, information on Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Scotland.

As part of the Health of our Services Families Working Group, a guide for Armed Forces families is currently being developed, which will cover access to health and wellbeing services across England, Scotland and Wales. Furthermore, we are currently considering the use of digital signposting and self-help tools to further support members of the veterans and Armed Forces community and healthcare professionals to access relevant local services.



Making a Home in Civilian Society

Affordable Housing Supply Programme

Funding can be made available through our Affordable Housing Supply Programme to deliver homes specifically for veterans where Local Authorities identify this as a strategic priority.

Open Market Shared Equity Scheme

Open Market Shared Equity Scheme continues to classify veterans as a priority access applicant group who do not need to be first time buyers to qualify for support. In August 2022 changes were made to the scheme to reflect market conditions, permitting offers over valuation and also an interim uplift of scheme thresholds by 9% to reflect the sharp increase in house prices. It is hoped a full review of thresholds will go ahead in late 2023 to identify if there are any changes required at that point.



Housing Options Scotland

We continue to support Housing Options Scotland which includes the Military Matters project amongst the services it provides. Military Matters focuses on housing issues affecting people serving in the Armed Forces in Scotland, UK service personnel transitioning into civilian life in Scotland and veterans. The service offers help to find the right home in the right place. Since it began in 2012, Military Matters has helped almost 1,300 people. In 2022-23 the project received 271 new referrals.

Veterans Homelessness

We know that the best way to end homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. As stated in Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership – A fresh start (published 18 April 2023), by 2026 we will have delivered legislation on the new prevention of homelessness duties, subject to the agreement of parliament.

We remain committed to developing and implementing prevention pathways for groups at particular risk of homelessness, in line with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group recommendations. To date, five prevention pathways have been developed, including one for veterans.

We are continuing to raise the profile of veterans housing and homelessness with organisations including SFHA and CoSLA, encouraging partners to consider veterans housing issues and raise them as appropriate. We have also published a Scottish Government housing options guide which provides information on the range of options available to veterans and service leavers including when applying for social housing in Scotland and revised the social housing allocations practice guidance, to include a specific section on Armed Forces and veterans to help landlords consider their needs in their allocations policies. In addition we have worked with the OVA on cross-UK veterans homelessness projects including Op Fortitude and the Veterans Capital Housing Fund to ensure Scotland's interests are represented.

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In addition, we have worked with the OVA on cross-UK veterans homelessness projects including Op Fortitude and the Veterans Capital Housing Fund to ensure Scotland's interests are represented.

Cross-UK Working

Since the announcement of the UK Government's Op FORTITUDE in December 2022, which will enable veterans at risk of homelessness to access supported housing and wrap-around specialist care in health, housing and education, we have been liaising with the Office for Veterans' Affairs to better understand how the programme will impact on Scotland, how it will utilise data from Scotland and how it will ensure projects navigate the different policy and legislative landscapes across each of the nations.

We have also contributed to the development of a UK-wide Veterans Housing Capital Fund. £20 million in capital funding was announced in the Spring UK Budget for veterans housing and accommodation over three years. This is a UK-wide fund and will be administered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust on behalf of the Office for Veterans' Affairs. Development of the fund is still in its infancy and we will continue to work with the UK Government and other partners as the work progresses.



Veterans and the Law

Veterans in Custody Support Officers (VICSOs) and Scottish Prison Service

We continue to engage with the network of VICSOs and have been invited to attend the annual VICSO meeting for the past two years. In addition, we continue to have good relationships with the Scottish Prison Service and discuss regularly how we can better understand and support research into the veterans population in Scottish prisons.

We have analysed the Scottish Prison Population Statistics dataset, which includes a veteran marker (derived from prisoners self-declaring on arrival), in order to improve our understanding of the number and characteristics of veterans in prison. With the introduction of a veterans question to Scotland's 2022 Census, this analysis will be refreshed and enhanced following release of the Census veteran results in Summer 2024. We are also in contact with relevant stakeholders, including the Scottish Prison Service, academics and the UK Government (including Ministry of Justice, Office for Veterans' Affairs, Ministry of Defence and academics in Kings College London and Northampton) to keep abreast of research developments on veterans and the justice system, including issues such as the identification of veterans and sexual offending.

The Veterans Minister visited HMP Shotts in September where he met with a number of veterans in custody to hear about their experiences. In addition, the Minister unveiled a new painting at the entrance to the prison's Remembrance area.

SACRO

This year we have re-engaged with SACRO as they consider how best to re-invigorate their Veterans Mentoring Service Strategic Oversight Group, of which we were previously a member.

Police Scotland

Police Scotland's long standing internal programme of Veterans Champions continues and more have been appointed throughout Scotland this year. Their primary role continues to be promoting the bespoke referral mechanism with the Armed Services Advice Project. In addition, several policing divisions have developed close working relationships with third sector organisations. For example, Who Dares Cares have delivered PTSD awareness sessions throughout Lanarkshire to police officers of all ranks. These sessions have since been extended to City of Edinburgh. The sessions are delivered by a mental health nurse and offers police officers and staff valuable tools to assist those with PTSD.



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