

Press release: Defence Secretary launches first ever Veterans Strategy and new cross-Government Veterans Unit

The ground-breaking strategy has been commissioned by the Defence Secretary and today it will be confirmed that a new Veterans Unit with input from across Whitehall will be created.

The Veterans Unit will champion the changing needs of the ex-service community and ensure action is taken to meet these.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We have a golden opportunity to ensure our veterans get a fair deal for their service and sacrifice to our country.

The vast majority of those leaving the Armed Forces go on to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives, which is a testament to their professionalism and resilience. However, for those who need help it is right that we step forward, create new opportunities, and remind them that they are not alone.

Everybody across our society has a responsibility to make sure we protect those who protected us.

Mr Williamson today urged other departments and the devolved administrations to meet the evolving needs of former service personnel from across the UK.

The Defence Secretary announced his new initiatives during a meeting of the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board, which was established last year to get the whole of Government behind the Armed Forces Covenant.

Over the next decade, the veterans population will experience a dramatic generational shift from the Second World War and conscripted generation to the younger, all professional cohort both with vastly differing needs. A dedicated team will now begin engaging with stakeholders and the veterans' community ahead of releasing the strategy in the autumn.

The Defence Secretary has identified several key pinch-points that affect a small but significant number of veterans and asked the new team and Ministerial Board to prioritise these issues:

- Debt – How we can best help veterans meet the financial demands of civilian life. This issue represents the highest percentage of calls to

the Veterans Gateway.

- Housing- How to offer the best advice for those leaving the Armed Forces. Whilst the Covenant already puts an obligation on local authorities to ensure they provide fair access to housing for veterans there are still a small number of individuals that require further support.
- Social Isolation – Supporting community integration for those who feel a loss of camaraderie upon leaving the Armed Forces. Younger veterans can struggle with a disassociation from civilian life so the new strategy will focus on connecting with the Loneliness Strategy to help address this.
- Mental and Physical Wellbeing – Ensuring this is maximised, especially for those with lasting physical or mental health issues as a result of their service.
- Public Perception – Improving how veterans are viewed, perceptions are often inaccurate, outdated or clichéd and do not recognise that most veterans are proud members of our society with a huge amount to offer.

At the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Board last autumn each Department represented was asked to nominate a Minister to lead on veterans issues and the Armed Forces Covenant. These were announced at today's meeting and will help to ensure the new Veterans Strategy is implemented across Government.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Tobias Ellwood said:

I am pleased to have seen real progress made since the last meeting of the Ministerial Board, including a significant cross-government effort to ensure our veterans are in no way disadvantaged by their previous career.

Recent initiatives, such as the troops to teachers bursary, the new veterans ID cards and the growing popularity of the Veterans Gateway are all making a practical difference and I look forward to seeing how this new strategy can help build on the Armed Forces Covenant to show that our commitment to our brave men and women lasts long after they have left service.