

Veterans' Office marks one year since establishment

To build on the OVA's work and create a regular dialogue with the sector, ministers are also launching today a new board, comprised of experienced and prominent individuals involved in veterans' issues.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove and Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer yesterday visited Portsmouth to meet charities in the city. Aboard HMS Westminster at HMNB Portsmouth, they also met service leavers and discussed the importance of providing support for serving personnel as they transition out of the armed forces into civilian society.

The new Veterans Advisory Board will provide advice, challenge and diversity of thought to the government on veterans issues, including supporting the delivery of the Strategy for Our Veterans.

Members of the board include TV presenter Nick Knowles, the founder of the charity Recruit for Spouses Heledd Kendrick, former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe and the current Chairman of COBSEO General Sir John McColl, and ex-Marine and sports presenter JJ Chalmers.

While in Portsmouth, the Veterans Minister also visited Queen Alexandra Hospital, a Veterans Aware Hospital. While there he met staff who provide specialist care to veterans. Veterans Aware Hospitals do a range of things to support the veterans in their community, including training relevant staff to be aware of veterans' needs and the commitments of the NHS under the Armed Forces Covenant and establishing processes to inform staff if a patient has served in the Armed Forces.

One year on from the OVA's establishment, the office has worked to drive the veterans agenda across government. Achievements in the first year include:

- A new railcard for veterans, launched this week, providing discounted travel for ex-military personnel
- Guaranteed interviews in the civil service for veterans
- Plans being brought forward for a National Insurance Holiday for employers who hire veterans
- Including a question on veterans in the 2021 census, which will provide better data on the veterans cohort
- Prioritising veterans for new homes

To help armed forces charities during the COVID pandemic, the government has also provided £6million in funding to organisations across the UK, delivering support to veterans, service personnel and their families.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove said:

We owe a debt of gratitude to those who have served and the Office

for Veterans' Affairs exists to make the case for ex-service personnel across government.

We have made huge strides on the veterans agenda since the OVA's establishment and we're determined to continue this work apace.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

I'm determined to make Britain the best country in the world to be a veteran.

This has been an important year for veterans, with the new railcards, guaranteed interviews in civil service and extra funding to support military charities through COVID.

We will continue to build on this work and further drive the veterans agenda across government.

The work of the OVA includes:

- Pulling together all functions of government, and better coordinating charity sector provision, in order to ensure this nation's life-long duty to those who have served
- Ensuring that every single veteran and their family knows where to turn to access support when required
- Helping to generate a 'single view of the veteran' by making better use of data to understand veterans' needs and where gaps in provision exist
- *Improving the perception of veterans

Veterans Advisory Board members

- Andrew Anderson – Andrew Anderson is an entrepreneur and business leader with over 30 years' experience in the software and AI industry, alongwith serving for 7 years with the Parachute Regiment.
- JJ Chalmers – JJ Chalmers served with the Royal Marine, in both the Regular and Reserve Forces. He was medically discharged in 2016 after sustaining injuries in a IED blast in Afghanistan, on Herrick 14. After years of rehabilitation, JJ went on to medal in the 2014 Invictus Games. As a spokesperson for this inaugural Games JJ got an insight into TV during the publicity rounds. Seeking a new and thrilling adventure led JJ to embark on a broadcasting career.
- Gary Ghale – Gary Ghale is the Head of Gurkha Welfare (UK) and head the Gurkha Welfare Advice Centre in the Gurkha Welfare Trust in Salisbury.. We work closely with other Service charities, Government departments and other organisations to meet the welfare needs of Gurkha veterans in the UK. Gary served in the Brigade of Gurkhas and the wider British army for 25 years and left the army as a captain.
- Heledd Kendrick – Heledd Kendrick is the founder and CEO of Recruit for Spouses, (CiC) which solely exists to help the partners of our Armed Forces into work.

- Nick Knowles – Nick Knowles is one of the UK's highest rated TV presenters and an RTS award-winning writer. Over the past twelve years he has hosted BBC1 prime time Saturday night quiz shows Break the Safe, Secret Fortune and Who Dares Wins, and he is the presenter of BBC1's most watched and longest running prime time factual series DIY SOS – The Big Build, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2019.
- Leon Lloyd – Leon had a successful rugby career representing Leicester Tigers and Gloucester which culminated in winning 6 Premiership titles, 2 Domestic Cups and back to back Heineken Cup trophies. Leon also represented the Barbarians on 5 international tours and has proudly represented England at every age group level making his full international debut against South Africa in 2000. Leon has published several academic articles on the subject of career transition and has also written a book, entitled Life after sport, on how he dealt with finishing his rugby career. He leads the charity Switch the Play, which works with elite athletes transitioning to their second career and it also working with members of the armed forces, helping them to prepare for transition.
- Martin Lucas – Martin Lucas is the CEO of Gap in the Matrix, a Psychological Engineering firm. His career has seen him found three businesses (Sales Psychology, Consulting, he built a Social Network), he has sat on the board of Charities (Addiction, Trauma), won awards for Leadership and received a commendation from The Home Secretary for the first Charity event at Westminster Abbey.
- Air Vice-Marshal The Hon David Murray CVO OBE – AVM David Murray served in the RAF for over 33 years. His final RAF role was in MOD as the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Personnel), responsible for UK government liaison with military charities and veterans' organisations, including bringing the Armed Forces Covenant into law in 2011.
- Nicky Murdoch MBE – Nicky Murdoch joined the Army in 1980 where she served in a variety of appointments as diverse as specialist intelligence in Northern Ireland to military music. On leaving the Army she became the Chief Executive of the St John and Red Cross Defence Medical Welfare Service.
- Peter Mountford FCA – Peter is a successful Chairman, Financier, and Entrepreneur. He has been on the Board of many businesses, is a specialist in strategic advice, and has floated 3 of the most successful companies on Aim. Peter is the Chairman of The Veterans' Foundation, a charity formed to establish a nationwide source of funding to help Armed Forces veterans in need mainly through smaller military charities.
- Dr Vanessa Moulton, CPsychol, AFBPsS – Dr Vanessa Moulton is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist. Her background incorporates a military mental health specialism which includes working at the MoD's Rehabilitation Centre 'Headley Court' during the peak of the Afghanistan conflict, and heading up the Psychological Wellbeing Department at 'Help For Heroes'. She also worked at 'Combat Stress' on the inaugural PTSD high intensity programme.
- General Sir John McColl KCB CBE DSO – General Sir John McColl KCB CBE DSO is the Chairman of Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities. Before joining Cobseo, General Sir John McColl was a career Army Officer with an infantry background. He has served in Northern Ireland, Bosnia,

Afghanistan and Iraq. His final serving appointment was as Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe which he relinquished in March 2011.

- Professor Sir Simon Wessely – Professor Sir Simon Wessely is Professor of Psychological Medicine and Regius Professor of Psychiatry at King's College London and a Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist at King's College and the Maudsley Hospitals.