

# Snapshot



## criminal justice system

### **Snapshot Noun [c] (UNDERSTANDING)**

A piece of information or short description that gives an understanding of a situation at a particular time

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**A plain language summary of research and evidence  
relating to the UK Armed Forces and veteran  
community**

(Updated December 2020)

Produced by the



## About the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre

The Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre was established in October 2017 within [The Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research](#) at Anglia Ruskin University. The Centre curates the [Veterans & Families Research Hub](#), provides advice and guidance to research-involved stakeholders and produces targeted research and related outputs. The Centre is funded by the [Forces in Mind Trust](#) (FiMT), which commissions research to contribute to a solid evidence base from which to inform, influence and underpin policy-making and service delivery.

## About Snapshots

Snapshots are designed to aid understanding of complex issues in relation to the Armed Forces (AF), and to support decision-making processes by bridging gaps between academic research, government and charitable policy, service provision and public opinion. Snapshots are aimed primarily at those working in policy-making and service provision roles for the AF, and might also be useful to those seeking facts, figures, and informed comment to empower a more objective discussion among the wider population, including the AF community and the media. The purpose of these Snapshots is to review and interpret research and policy, and to set out brief, plain language summaries to ease understanding and perception.

The [Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre](#) has produced a range of Snapshots covering many of the main themes and topics relating to the AF, veteran, and families community. Due to the constant process of research and policy changes, Snapshots will be updated regularly to maintain their relevance. Contributions and [comment](#) are welcome via the [Veterans & Families Research Hub](#), where the Snapshots are hosted.

While these summaries are produced using recognised research processes, they are written for a lay audience and cover only academic and [grey](#) (unpublished or non-commercial) literature relating to UK AF issues. Searches have been conducted by reviewing electronic databases and references from relevant articles and reports, as well as a review of websites provided by government and other appropriate organisations.

## Version and authors

Based on an original version published by Drs Linda Cooper and Michelle Jones in 2018, this current version was updated in December 2020 by Dr Graham Cable, Kristina Fleuty, Alex Cooper and Professor Michael Almond from the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre, with the help of Dr Lauren Godier-McBard of Anglia Ruskin University's [Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research](#).

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## 1 Introduction and definitions

This Snapshot summarises research into issues surrounding veterans in the Criminal Justice System (hereafter known as 'CJS') and sets out policy responses and current structures of support, presenting information sources where available online.

The following terms may be useful when reading this document:

- The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) definition of a 'veteran' is anyone who has 'served for at least a day in HM Armed Forces, whether as a Regular or a Reservist'
- The term '**transition**' is used to describe the period of (re)integration into civilian life from the AF. For the purposes of this Snapshot, it starts from the point during a period of military engagement at which AF personnel begin their resettlement process, which can continue for several years from discharge
- '**Resettlement**' is used in two contexts in this Snapshot:
  - The first describes the formal processes and procedures by which military-to-civilian transition is managed, and the formal support provided to AF leavers during this transition. It starts with the activation of the Resettlement process and continues until the end of Resettlement support provision
  - The second context is the transition process from a period of imprisonment, and refers to anyone experiencing a prison term, not just the AF community.
- '**Probation**' period is the time an offender leaves prison but can be returned if they breach their terms of release
- **Veterans in Custody Support Officers (VICSOs)**, according to the 2020 Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report, 'provide training, information sharing, focus groups, online news boards and specific communications' to support veterans in custody

## 2 What's new in this 2020 update

### 2.1 The Armed Forces and CJS policy and support landscape in 2020

Veterans and their families have gained increased recognition in the UK through the establishment of the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) in October 2019. The OVA is responsible for championing veterans and coordinating the efforts of the UK Government in ensuring the right support is available during the transition back to civilian life. The OVA is also responsible for the action plan to deliver the recent Strategy for Our Veterans, published jointly by the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments in November 2018. This strategy includes 'Veterans and the Law' as a key theme and acknowledges that whilst most veterans remain law-abiding citizens, a small minority of vulnerable veterans encounter the CJS. One of the outcomes the Strategy plans for 2028 is that 'Veterans leave the Armed Forces with the resilience and awareness to remain law-abiding civilians' (p. 19). The UK Government's Consultation Response to the strategy acknowledged the need to improve data collection and research on veterans in the CJS, but also highlighted the need to address other socio-economic issues (e.g. housing, finances, employment) to reduce the risk of reoffending.

The Scottish Government [published a document](#) outlining how they would take the Strategy forward. Regarding veterans in the CJS, the Scottish Government committed to engage with Veterans in Custody Support Officers (VICSOs) to provide support and increased understanding through research. Additionally, they pledged their support for the veterans' 'breakfast club' approach being piloted at Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Glenochil, and the introduction of a Veterans Champion role in the CJS.

The Welsh Government carried out [a scoping exercise](#), published in 2020, to reflect the key themes of the Strategy for Our Veterans. Consultations and surveys carried out with veterans and their families identified several areas that require action. Regarding the CJS, inconsistent identification of veterans in custody suites was identified as a key issue. Actions to remedy this concern included improving the identification of veterans in the CJS, and raising awareness of local support available to veterans leaving custody (as also identified in a 2020 [RAND report](#)). In 2017, the Welsh government published '[A Framework to support positive change for those at risk of offending in Wales 2018-2023](#)'. This framework set out how organisations should work together to provide support to those at risk of offending/reoffending. Ex-AF personnel are one of the six priority groups highlighted by this framework.

The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Reports in [2020](#) and [2019](#) identified support services recently launched for veterans in the CJS across the devolved nations of the UK, including a £1.3 million continuation fund for CJS related projects funded by [The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust](#). New support services highlighted included:

- The 'Regroup Programme', a collaboration between NHS England and a number of charities, to support the physical and mental health of veterans in the CJS including peer support and mentoring after release from custody. A regional approach will be extended nationwide after evaluation according to the [2020 Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report](#).
- [The Supporting the Transition of Military Personnel \(SToMP\) project](#), set up in 2016, which forms part of the support provided to veterans in Wales. SToMP aims to provide consistent support to veterans through the entire CJS, and this has been implemented in five Welsh prisons. More detail follows later in this research summary.
- The University of South Wales ran an intervention in 2019 in HMP Parc, using weekly one-to-one sessions and family workshops to promote coping and resilience for veterans in custody. Positive results were seen in veterans' emotional well-being. The 2020 [RAND report](#) also noted that a 'whole-of-family approach' when supporting veterans in the CJS ensures that those veterans do not have to worry about family members, while it also takes into account the impact veteran involvement in the CJS has on families.

## 2.2 New research findings in 2020

Since the original CJS Snapshot was published in November 2018, several new research findings have been published. A [review of surveys and polls](#) in the UK highlighted the public tend to overestimate the number of veterans in the CJS, despite evidence to the contrary.

Findings providing additional understanding of mental health needs of veterans in the [Scottish Prison System](#), and in [six prisons across England](#), were published, suggesting that veterans have similar needs to the civilian prison population. These findings also supported previous research

suggesting veterans are most likely to commit violent and sexual offences, although this assertion has been challenged by [alternative research](#).

Two research papers commissioned by STOMP were published. The [first](#) provided important insights into the barriers for identification of veterans at different stages of the CJS, while the [second](#) highlighted how difficulties forming healthy relationships post-discharge may lead to incidents of domestic abuse being carried out by veterans.

Important findings regarding causes of offending in veterans have also been published, including the [identification of risk and protective factors](#) to offending using the King's Centre for Military Health Research cohort study, and [qualitative research](#) with veterans in prison. Research identifying the barriers experienced by veterans in accessing support in prison has additionally been [published](#).

The Directory of Social Change published [a comprehensive review](#) of the support provided to veterans in the CJS by the AF charity sector. A case-management approach to supporting veterans in prison was launched by Combat Stress and evaluated in [two publications](#). More detail follows later in this summary.

[RAND](#) published its review of [Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust](#) financed programmes of support to veterans in the CJS in late 2020. Its main findings are highlighted later in this review and support many of those previously found, but it is of note that the report suggested that 'relatively low' numbers of veterans in the CJS means that there is limited focus on their needs, and that they 'compete with the weight given to other vulnerable populations' as a consequence (p. 49). This lack of attention to veterans and their needs in the CJS is exacerbated, the report additionally claimed, by low levels of 'underpaid and overworked' staff, who experience high turnover in the prison environment (p. 49). Furthermore, the same review found an inconsistent approach to veterans' support in the prison environment, which can be positively or negatively affected by prison governors' attitudes to supporting ex-AF inmates. In some cases, this can lead to an inability for support staff to enter a prison to visit veterans it is reported, along with concern that some staff who had been supportive are often replaced by others who were less so, or who take time to develop an understanding of veterans' needs. Linked to this was the observation that such inconsistencies can affect veterans' support experiences when they are transferred between prisons, especially if that crosses UK national boundaries due to differing approaches among devolved nations.

The [RAND review](#) also noted that COVID-19 had adversely impacted support to veterans in the CJS in 2020, particularly as lockdowns prevented support staff from assisting veterans involved in the CJS, which left ex-AF inmates experiencing isolation. Despite that, it was noted that most support projects had been able to adapt to an extent, especially by using email, written letters, social media and voice and video calls to keep in touch with their beneficiaries, while [WhatsApp](#) and [Zoom](#) have been used to create peer support networks. The report also indicated that support offered to veterans in the CJS varied according to type of offence involved, highlighting sex offenders who often attract less support than others despite perhaps needing most support to prevent reoffending.

### 3 Methods

For the original Snapshot a review was undertaken of the available UK evidence relating to veterans in the CJS using standard reviewing techniques such as searching electronic databases, hand searching of references from relevant articles and reports, and a review of websites from government and relevant organisations. This revealed a significant number of peer-reviewed articles

from the USA, but these principally referred to the [Veterans Affairs programme](#) and were therefore discounted.

For the 2020 update the same methods were undertaken and 14 new academic papers and research reports were identified. Additionally, the [2019](#) and [2020](#) Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report and the [Veterans' Strategy](#) were used to identify up-to-date policy relating to veterans in the CJS. New research findings and policy are outlined in the What's New Section above, as well as within relevant sections throughout the remainder of this document.

Due to the use of hyperlinks in this report, all references cited are restricted to those openly available online.

## 4 Overview of veterans in the CJS

### 4.1 Key findings

- Estimates suggest that between 3.5-4% of the prison population are veterans
- Veterans are less likely to become involved in the CJS compared to the civilian population
- The mental health support needs of veterans serving custodial sentences is similar to that of the civilian prison population

### 4.2 Estimating the number of veterans in the CJS

Towards the end of 2009, it was [estimated](#) 3.4% of people on probation were ex-AF personnel, while a 2018 report indicated [4%](#) of the prison population in England and Wales were veterans. However, these figures did not take into account [reservists](#), were limited by the fact that it is only since 2015 that attempts to identify veterans in the CJS have been formalised, did not cover all UK nations, and excluded those veterans who chose not to identify their veteran status (or did not have their status disclosed by authorities) — a point taken up in Section 5. Further complicating any estimates, the time gap between leaving the AF and being detained in custody for many of those who do offend makes it difficult to associate any direct link between service in the AF and imprisonment.

While no evidence has been found to suggest that veterans are over-represented in the CJS, [research examining a number of UK polls and surveys](#) carried out between 2011 and 2017 revealed veterans were 30% less likely to be in prison compared to civilians. In contrast, it determined that most of the British public thought that veterans are just as likely (35%) or more likely (19%) to be in prison compared to the general population at that time.

### 4.3 Characteristics of veterans in the CJS

A [2011 report](#) suggested the ex-AF population in custody is diverse in terms of profile and need, ranging from young men and women who have served in recent conflicts to elderly and infirm veterans of the Second World War. In 2014, the [Phillips Review](#) acknowledged that those who have served in the AF are less likely to become involved in the CJS in comparison to the wider population, but some did have a history of antisocial behaviour. Key recommendations included the need for veteran-specific programmes, transitional support at the end of a prison sentence, as well as a targeted approach to reducing reoffending, including help for offenders' families.

The Phillips study also acknowledged the findings of Lord Ashcroft's [Veterans' Transition Review](#), noting that those most vulnerable at the point of leaving the military included: young early service leavers (less than four years' service); veterans discharged for disciplinary reasons; those with low educational attainment; those who are single and/or lacking positive relationships and those with a history of antisocial behaviour prior to joining the AF. While these findings were consistent with those reported in the [Howard League](#) study of former AF personnel in prison, they were also [questioned](#) in 2015, particularly concerning a lack of evidence upon which to base policy recommendations and interventions to improve support to veterans in the CJS.

According to the 2011 Howard League [report](#), veteran offenders tended to be older, possibly due to observations that there can be a lengthy gap between a veteran leaving the AF and involvement with the CJS as an offender (or suspected offender). While this gap made establishing a link between military service and offending more difficult (despite [suggestions](#) that it may be due to delayed onset of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD]), it was also observed that the relatively older age of veteran offenders may have been due to limited opportunity for offending during military service, and thus the individual's time in service acted as a 'break' from a trajectory of offending that occurred later.

Given the 29 Liaison & Diversion (L&D) services across England provide one of the first points of contact following arrest, data was collected from them between 2015-16. Of the 49,793 cases recorded in the L&D database from April 2015 to April 2016, 1,215 (2.4%) reported previous or current service in the UK AF in response to a requirement for L&D services to ask about such service. Compared to non-veterans, veterans were predominantly male (96% vs 76%), white British (91% vs 84%), and aged over 30 (74% vs 55%). Offences classed as violence against the person were the most prevalent among veterans and non-veterans, as more veterans than non-veterans (37% vs 32%) were accused of having committed this type of offence. A larger proportion of veterans than non-veterans were also accused of motoring offences (8% vs 4%) and sex offences (8% vs 5%). Conversely, a smaller proportion of veterans than non-veterans were accused of acquisitive offences (e.g. theft, burglary, fraud: 10% vs 16%) or non-interpersonal violence (e.g. criminal damage, arson: 8% vs 10%). More [recent research](#) suggested that poor social, health and economic conditions — exacerbated by the recent emergence of COVID-19 — were strong risk factors for offending among veterans and that the [reversal of these risks](#) (e.g. financial stability, stable accommodation, relationship stability) can reduce the risk of offending among veterans and help decrease the likelihood of mental health problems.

These findings are supported when looking at the offending characteristics of veterans in custody. [Research in six English prisons](#) found that veterans were most likely to be convicted for violence against a person (32%) or sexual offences (28%) (although [recent research](#) counters the last finding). Similarly, [research](#) from Northern Ireland found that Northern Irish veterans were more likely to go to prison for serious sexual offences than other offending types. A 2018 [study](#) showed that the majority of veterans (974, 91%) and non-veterans (40,981, 84%) in English prisons identified as white; and a lower proportion of veterans than non-veterans identified as black and minority ethnic (BME).

A [large survey of prisoners](#) in Scotland by the Scottish Prison Service in 2017 suggested little difference between veteran and non-veterans on any measures of mental health, while veterans were less likely to report substance misuse at the time of their offence, during their time in prison, or as a concern on release. This was reinforced by a [2018 study](#) with a small sample of veterans in prisons in England, which concluded that the mental health of this group was similar to that of the general prison population. Just over a third of veterans (38%) reported common mental health

disorders, and just over half of these individuals also had a substance misuse problem. However, the type of mental health diagnoses recorded differed between veteran prisoners and the general prison population; with PTSD and depression most common in veterans, as opposed to depression and anxiety in the general prison population.

However, there is reportedly an on-going lack of a standardised mental health assessment from which to make robust recommendations for future provision for veterans in the CJS.

## 5 Identification of veterans in the CJS

### 5.1 Key findings

- Identification of AF background on entry to the CJS is essential to enable signposting and access to support services
- All prisoners should be asked if they have served in the AF on entry to prison, however identification is still uneven in custody suites
- Barriers to self-identification by veterans include stigma, fear of discrimination and consequences for post-service welfare benefits, and lack of identification with the 'veteran' label

### 5.2 Identifying veterans in the CJS

The Phillips Review highlighted the need to properly identify the reasons for ex-AF personnel entering the CJS, to consider the support provided to them, and how that support can be improved. Since January 2015, every prisoner entering the custody process should be asked if they have ever served the AF.

In Wales, veterans are identified as a priority group within a Welsh Government Framework, which was launched in April 2017. Key objectives within the strategy include the identification and recording of veterans in the CJS and ensuring veterans are signposted to appropriate rehabilitation and resettlement services. The Welsh Government has also provided a guide to the formal identification and verification process in the document 'Veteran Informed Prisons' for veterans who find themselves with a custodial sentence in Wales. The introduction of the Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services in custody suites in England, acknowledges the necessity for health-screening in the early stages of custody.

The Scottish Armed Forces and Veterans Champion scheme has developed a referral service where every individual presenting at a police station in Scotland, whether as victim of a crime, a witness or an alleged perpetrator of a criminal act is asked if they are a veteran. If an individual confirms veteran status, and it is appropriate, they are referred to the Armed Services Advice Project for support and signposting to other agencies that provide additional advice and assistance to veterans.

### 5.3 Barriers to identification

Many of those interviewed in the Howard League report did not relate to the term 'veteran' and did not identify with being a veteran, in addition to indicating a lack of knowledge of AF charity support available to them. Projects supporting veterans in the CJS, such as Project Nova, suggest that prison

is too late a stage to identify ex-AF personnel and to address their needs, yet it is assessed to be the place in the CJS where attention has traditionally been focused.

The [SToMP project](#), set up in 2016, focused on the identification of veterans in the CJS in Wales to promote access to specialist support services. SToMP commissioned a research [report](#), carried out by in 2018, which found that while the aim was to identify veterans in the Welsh CJS, this was not always fully implemented. According to the same report, just one in four Welsh police forces reported routinely asking whether an individual had served in the AF during the booking process. Similarly, prisons in Wales varied in whether an AF background was recorded when a veteran entered prison, even when the question was asked. Barriers to self-disclosure of veteran status during a custodial sentence reportedly included concern about the implications for war pensions, fear of religious extremism, and uncertainty around the benefits of disclosure. Additionally, mentioned was that following release from custody, probation offices in Wales did not appear to ask routinely about an AF background, and poor communication between the prison and probation services meant this information was often not passed on. Directly asking this question at all points of the CJS was associated in the same study with increased self-disclosure and access to support for veterans.

The 2020 [RAND report](#) further indicated that authorities' concerns over General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) can also act as a barrier to disclosure of veteran status to support organisations, while offenders falsely claiming they are veterans can also undermine attempts to identify those who genuinely are. Additionally, the same report found that some veterans are unwilling to admit their AF connections due to concerns over their offending bringing shame on their former military organisations, or that an admission might provoke a confrontation with non-veterans, particularly if former AF individuals served in Iraq and Afghanistan. To mitigate these concerns, the review advocates repeatedly asking the question across the entire CJS, along with an explanation as to why the question is being asked (so that support can be offered).

## 6 Pathways to offending

### 6.1 Key findings

- A complex interplay of factors before, during and after military service contribute to an increase in offending among veterans
- Childhood adversity, pre-service antisocial and offending behaviour, and social and economic deprivation are associated with post-service offending
- Combat exposure during service and mental health disorders, such as PTSD and alcohol misuse, can also be associated with post-service violent offending
- Returning to civilian life and work after a period of AF service can be a stressful transition for some veterans, which can result in criminal behaviour
- Financial problems, unemployment, social isolation and mental health problems can additionally be linked to post-service offending

## 6.2 Indicators

[Research](#) published in 2007 focused on the link between military service and future aggressive and/or violent behaviour, providing several potential explanations for this association, including that violence following military service can be associated with pre-enlistment antisocial behaviour.

Explanations for this include that some recruits (e.g. Army infantry) come from areas of higher social deprivation and higher crime, and thus the violence may simply reflect pre-existing exposure to such behaviour. However, combat experience was also associated with increased risk of future violence among veterans, even after adjusting for pre-military offending behaviour. The same [research](#) showed that mental disorders such as PTSD, and alcohol misuse were risk factors for violence and more general offending behaviour among serving military personnel, as well as civilians. This is supported by [a recent study](#) looking at offending post-service, which revealed that self-reported probable PTSD, common mental health disorders, alcohol misuse and problems with aggression were strong predictors of offending after leaving the AF.

Heralding some of these recent findings, the 2011 [Howard League](#) study indicated that ex-AF personnel in the CJS appeared to be drawn from one or more of the following groups: those who had experienced or witnessed trauma or violence at some point in their lives; those who had spent periods in local authority care and/or displayed criminal behaviour prior to joining the military; and those with drug or alcohol issues prior to enlisting. The study also showed that many who committed crime tended to be young, male and often from socially and economically deprived areas. Consistent with these and the above findings, a 2014 [Royal British Legion Household Survey](#) made a link between veterans who experience adversity in early life, indicating that pre-service difficulties should be considered as factors that might lead to problems during or after a period of military service.

[More recent research](#) indicated that offending prior to joining the military can also be a strong predictor of offending after leaving. This is supported by a [study](#) with a small sample of veterans in six English prisons, in which 50% of participants reported pre-enlistment antisocial behaviour (including physical fights at school, playing truant, suspension or expulsion from school and getting into trouble with the police). When compared to veterans without pre-enlistment antisocial behaviour, these veterans were more likely to have left school with no qualifications, to have been convicted of an offence during their military service, and to have misused drugs in the year prior to commencing their custodial sentence (although the authors acknowledged these findings needed to be replicated in a larger sample to demonstrate greater reliability).

As with other reports outlined above, a paper entitled '[pathways to offending](#)' for veterans serving sentences in prisons in England suggested a complicated interplay of factors. These included traumatic experiences and adversity prior to service, as well as other circumstances which led them to the decision to join the AF to avoid a life of crime. While a period spent in the military offered many veterans in this study a sense of belonging, this experience was also linked to difficulties in the subsequent adjustment to civilian life and later offending. The previously mentioned [Howard League](#) report suggested there are no simple explanations as to why individuals who have served in the AF commit offences after they have left. However, it indicated three factors which occurred frequently in the accounts of offending of those interviewed: 1) social isolation and exclusion, including unemployment, low income, sub-standard housing, a high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown; 2) alcohol - particularly when associated with violent offences; and, 3) financial problems after leaving the AF.

[Research](#) published in the UK in 2017 found increased levels of family violence in veterans compared to currently serving personnel; additionally, it reported that family violence was related to deployment in a combat role and post-deployment mental health problems. Furthermore, [a report for SToMP](#) highlighted the potential for the development of attitudes that support family violence among veteran prisoners in Wales (of which 9 out of 12 reported DVA within a relationship). To mitigate this, the ability to find work during transition was identified as an important factor in the maintenance of healthy family relationships. Additionally, a preference for routine and structure developed during military service were related to relationship difficulties for respondents. Despite this, [a large survey of Scottish prisoners](#) found no differences in self-reported domestic violence against a spouse or domestic abuse convictions between veteran and non-veteran prisoners.

A further study on [veteran offending behaviour](#) suggested that veterans in the CJS were more likely to be diagnosed with mental disorders than non-veterans (69% of veterans as compared to 59% of non-veterans). Anxiety and depression were the most common mental health issues recorded among veterans in the CJS and these were more prevalent than among non-veteran offenders (37% of veterans as compared to 12% of non-veterans reported anxiety; and 32% of veterans compared to 27% of non-veterans reported depression). A larger proportion of veterans than non-veterans in the CJS reported adjustment disorder (7% of veterans compared to 5% of non-veterans) and dementia (1% of veterans compared to 0.2% of non-veterans). Age, employment status and accommodation status were all identified as risk factors for offending in the veteran sample: being aged over 60 was a risk factor for sexual offending; being unemployed was a risk factor for repeat offending, while being employed was a risk factor for sexual and motoring offending. Lastly, being homeless was a risk factor for theft and other offences involving property.

A recent [study](#) also found that certain social and financial post-service factors, such as the absence of debt, and stable housing and family relationships, can help reduce the risk of offending among veterans experiencing mental health difficulties, emphasising the importance of social care and support for such veterans in transition.

## 7 Supporting veterans in the CJS

### 7.1 Key findings

- Charities providing support to veterans in the CJS and their families represent just 1.6% of the AF charity sector, and certain veteran groups (i.e., women, those serving very short or long sentences) are disadvantaged when attempting to access to CJS support
- Arrest and police custody represents a key point at which to intervene and provide tailored support to veterans
- Support provided by military aware CJS staff, along with peer mentoring, may provide an effective way to increase self-disclosure and access to support for veterans in prison
- Liaison and coordination between prison and community services are required to support effective resettlement and reduce the risk of reoffending for ex-AF personnel on release

## 7.2 General veterans' CJS support

The Directory of Social Change [reported](#) in 2019 that only 1.6% or 31 of the 1,888 AF charities in the UK delivered support to veterans in the CJS and their families. This was much less than the number of charities delivering support for physical health, mental health, housing, education and employment to veterans and their families respectively. Furthermore, UK AF charities spent significantly less on criminal justice support in the 2018-19 financial year (£4.5million), in comparison to these other sectors (£103million on physical health support; £40million on housing support; £28million on mental health support; £26million on education and employment support). These charities supported at least 3200 veterans in the CJS and their families during this time. However, the report also noted that this figure represented beneficiaries accessing support, rather than those in need of support, and highlighted the requirement for reliable statistics on the number of veterans in all stages of the CJS to determine need.

In 2018, the [Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research \(VFI\) at Anglia Ruskin University \(ARU\)](#) was commissioned to produce [a directory of statutory, charitable and service provision for veterans in the CJS](#). This resulted in an [organisational delivery map](#) providing links to support across the CJS, from the point of arrest in police custody, through to courts, prisons and probation.

[Research findings in Wales](#) suggested that groups of veterans may be disadvantaged in their access to specialist support in the CJS. This included women, who were unlikely to be asked if they have an AF background at any point of contact with the CJS, and for whom there was little veteran-specific support available in prison. Additionally, veterans serving long sentences, serving community orders or short sentences, veterans with mental health difficulties, and veterans convicted of a sexual offence were reported to be less likely to have access to specialist support that meets their needs.

## 7.3 Custody/point of arrest

[Phillips](#) noted that contact with the police creates an opportunity for timely intervention and assistance by an appropriate AF charity. An [evaluation of the Project Nova pilot study](#) found that such provision appears to be effective as it provides personally tailored support and is delivered by a dedicated team with an intimate understanding of military culture and the military-to-civilian transition experience. Reduction in offending behaviour is a key metric for police services, but the evaluation indicated that other factors such as improvements in quality of life or social circumstances may be better measures of success for programmes delivering similar types of support.

## 7.4 Veterans' courts

Despite their existence in the [US](#), the [Phillips Review](#) did not advocate the use of veteran specific courts in the UK, citing the difficulty of maintaining fairness and equity if veterans are treated differently to the public. The Review supported the appropriateness of statutory civilian provision through UK courts to manage veteran cases instead.

## 7.5 Veterans in prison

A [summary paper](#) on behalf of the Ministry of Justice informed the [Phillips](#) Review and reported findings on the number and needs of ex-AF personnel from a survey of 4,898 prisoners from 74

different prisons, 232 of whom identified themselves as having served in the AF (2001–2004) and 2,595 offenders subject to probation supervision, 151 of whom identified themselves as ex-AF personnel (2009–2010). Across the 141 prisons in the UK, two Welsh prisons have dedicated veteran wings (HMP Parc and HMP Berwyn), with the Endeavour Unit, [opened in 2015](#) in HMP Parc, providing specialist support and peer mentoring (e.g., through CJS staff who are also ex-service personnel) to help rehabilitate veterans during their sentence. [HMP Berwyn](#) operates communities to support the rehabilitative needs of prisoners, one of which is the Shaun Stocker community for military veterans. These veteran-specific wings [are reported](#) to promote access to resources and specialist support services for veterans and are regarded to positively by inmates and staff. These findings were reinforced by the outcomes of the [Project Nova evaluation](#), which concluded that [peer support](#) and peer interventions were an invaluable source of support to veterans in the CJS. Research by [Swansea University](#) also highlighted the beneficial use of peer mentors in prisons, including prison officers with an AF background, to encourage disclosure of veteran status and access to specialist support.

The Directory of Social change [reported in 2019](#) that 13 of the UK AF charities providing CJS support did so during a custodial sentence. This translated into 54 prisons across the UK in which charities provided support to veterans; 32 of which were in England, 15 in Scotland, 4 in Wales, and 3 in Northern Ireland. No charities reported providing support to veterans in the North East of England. Support was most commonly in the form of education and employment support (23%), followed by peer mentoring (10%). A significant gap in the provision of legal advice to veterans serving prison sentences was also identified.

According to a [2018 study](#), veterans can often be reluctant to ask for help when in prison. [Veterans felt that](#) this could be improved by ensuring that prison staff have an awareness and understanding of military issues; a factor that a [2020 report](#) also indicated might more broadly help CJS professionals address veterans' needs. However, veterans reported in the same study that they felt comfortable talking to VICO, a support model that the same report indicated ought to be made permanent and expanded across the police and courts service.

A [case management approach](#) to supporting veterans in prison has been proposed by the military charity, Combat Stress; an approach that involves developing a support package for each veteran, based on their individual needs, delivered by staff with an understanding and awareness of military issues. A case management approach to substance misuse treatment for veterans, the Veterans Forensic Substance Misuse Service (VFSMS), was established in 11 prisons in the UK by Combat Stress in 2017, following a pilot of these services in 2014. [An evaluation](#) of this service found that tailoring support towards veterans' specific needs was associated with improvements in their substance misuse. Furthermore, [a review of the efficacy of this service](#) found improvements in several areas, including managing mental and physical health, addictive behaviours, responsibilities, work and social networks.

## 7.6 Probation and resettlement

[Phillips](#) noted that both the police and [Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service](#) (HMPPS) were well placed to identify ex-AF personnel and to ensure that veterans were aware of the help available to them as they are the only organisations potentially involved at every stage of the CJS process. [Phillips](#) also encouraged the identification of any ex-AF person at the probation stage so that, regardless of whether the sentence received for offending results in custody, the offender can be made aware of the availability of the charitable services.

HMPPS also work with AF charities to identify ex-AF personnel in prison, have their needs assessed and effective support provided, both in custody and on release, to help them resettle in the community and reduce the risk of re-offending.

[Information collected in 2018](#) regarding the number of VICSOS operating in prisons across the UK suggested that 100% of prisons in Wales, 78% of prisons in England, and 60% of prisons in Scotland have a VICO present. There was no VICO presence reported in Northern Ireland.

In Scotland the VICO scheme is supplemented by the [Scottish Veterans Prison In-Reach Group](#). Both work with the veteran charity sector in Scotland to support veterans in prison and advise them of the services and assistance that can be provided to them and their families while serving a custodial sentence and also on release back into the community.

The [Directory of Social Change](#) found 25 AF charities providing support to veterans following release from prison, most commonly providing education/employment support, or substance misuse and mental health support. Furthermore, the 2020 [RAND report](#) highlighted one support programme that liaises with prisoners 12 weeks before their release to support them in arranging accommodation, training courses, job interviews, and in some cases, a job ready for them immediately after release. However, this level of support can reportedly be hampered by lack of contact with veterans once they are released from prison.

## 8 Military Corrective Training Centre

The Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC), according to its [website](#), is 'an establishment that provides corrective training for those servicemen and women sentenced to periods of detention; it is not a prison'. According to the same [website](#), its principal function is to detain personnel of all three AF, both male and female, as well as civilians subject to the [Armed Forces Act](#), in accordance with the provisions of the [Service Custody and Service of Relevant Sentences Rules 2009](#). There are three categories of detainees: those who are to remain in the AF at the end of their detention, those who are to be discharged after serving their sentence and are released as civilians from there, and those held in military custody either awaiting the outcome of an investigation or awaiting placement at a prison or [Young Offenders Institution](#). The categories of detainees defined above are kept separate throughout their detention, and up to 264 can be held at any one time.

## 9 Conclusion

In 2016, it was [reported](#) that veterans in the CJS remain a significant minority of ex-AF personnel, and were generally those who had experienced difficulties prior to service and following transition from the AF. According to the same report, much work needed to be done before the [Phillips Review](#) recommendations were implemented. The [study](#) also indicated that the development of services remained patchy and there was some way to go before consistent co-ordination was achieved, a finding echoed by a [2020 review](#) of programmes established to support veterans in the CJS. Some services, particularly around mental health provision, were reportedly in need of a national strategy. Additionally, it was recommended that significant gain could be achieved through future collaboration among probation, health services and the AF charities.

Since the original Snapshot was published in 2018, there has been a growth in research considering pathways to offending for veterans, including increased understanding of the complex interplay of

risk factors from pre-enlistment to transition out of the AF. Additionally, more research has been carried out looking at the experiences and characteristics of veterans in prison. However, it appears there remains very little support for families of veterans in the CJS, and certain groups appear to be at a disadvantage in accessing support for veterans in the CJS (e.g., women).

Recent reports from the [Directory of Social Change](#) and [Swansea University](#) continued to recommend greater collaboration and partnership between AF charities and the wider CJS, along with better communication between different areas within the CJS, in order to share resources and better identify those veterans in need of support. Furthermore, the 2020 [RAND](#) review recommended: that CJS agencies be encouraged to sign the [Armed Forces Covenant](#) to raise awareness both inside and across CJS organisations; that an automated referral system be instituted between police services and projects offering support to veterans in the CJS; and that further research be conducted to determine the numbers and needs of these veterans. It also highlighted the lack of support offered to the families of veteran offenders.

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