

Parliament approves veterans question in next Census

The move will allow central and local government to better understand the profiles and needs of the ex-military community.

This in turn will allow for stepped up services for veterans, with better data and understanding allowing for more targeted and efficient support.

Data from the Census will be an important part of ensuring that mental health support for former service personnel is as effective as possible.

The inclusion of the question in next year's Census has been welcomed by veterans groups and charities and builds on the government's first ever veterans strategy, which was launched in 2018.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

Allowing veterans to identify themselves in the next Census is a key step in ensuring that all of government provides the best support possible.

Better information means better support and today is a positive step forward in providing that.

Minister for the Constitution and Devolution Chloe Smith said:

The Census is an unparalleled source of information on how the UK population lives and works.

It provides a detailed picture of the nation, helping us deliver tailored public services that meet the needs of citizens of all walks of life. Ultimately it will ensure that taxpayers money is invested where it is most needed.

It is estimated that there are currently around 2.2million veterans in the UK. The rich diversity of this community underlines the importance of improving data, so that policies and support can be better targeted.

We know from previous research around the Veterans Strategy that often people are reluctant to ask, and sometimes veterans themselves are reluctant to say that they are a veteran. The process of developing the census question has therefore helped the government to develop a common way of asking if someone has served in the Armed Forces.

Charles Byrne, Director General of The Royal British Legion, said:

This is an extremely proud moment for the Legion. After leading a successful campaign, the fact that a military question will be in the 2021 Census will significantly improve our understanding of the Armed Forces community which up until now has been very limited. It will ensure that we, along with other charities and service providers, can deliver the best service possible to them when and where it is needed most.

This is something we have been striving towards for many years, it will have a huge impact on service personnel, veterans and their families well into the future, as the outcome will allow us to provide more effective care and support to those who are in need. We are delighted and are extremely grateful to everyone who has supported the campaign and helped us to achieve this historical success.

The next census is due to be held on 21st March 2021 and results will be available the following year. People will be able complete the census online on any device, with help and paper questionnaires for those that need them. The data collected will provide crucial and up-to-date insight on the diversity of society.

The Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA), which was created last year, is ensuring that the whole of government is delivering better outcomes for veterans, particularly in areas such as mental health, employment and housing. It is working in partnership with local authorities and the Devolved Administrations to coordinate activity across the United Kingdom.

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

Census 2021

- The 2021 Census will provide decision-makers and citizens with comprehensive data on our society. Getting the best information is essential for informing policy, planning and funding decisions, across national and local public services.
- The Office for National Statistics is working to deliver the Census in England and Wales as planned and is continuing to be guided by the

evidence and latest advice from Government and experts on COVID-19.