

News story: New stats reveal veterans' contribution to society, as Ministerial Board steps up support to Armed Forces

The stats show that, contrary to common misconceptions, veterans are as likely to be in employment as the general population, with 78% of veterans in employment, compared to 79% in the general population.

The stats come on the day of the inaugural meeting of a new Ministerial Board, co-chaired by Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and First Secretary of State Damien Green, which discussed the Government's support to the Armed Forces, their families and veterans.

The new Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Board will drive forward and coordinate better Government support to the Armed Forces, their families and veterans.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Veterans and their families have given so much to this country to help keep us safe. We need all of Government working together to deliver a better deal for Veterans during and after their move to civilian life. We will examine new ways to repay our armed forces for the bravery, honour and sacrifice they demonstrate when defending this country.

A number of other statistics released today by the Office of National Statistics also outline how prevalent myths around the employment, education and health of veterans are untrue. The statistics found that:

- There were no differences between veterans' and non-veteran's self-reported general health and health conditions. 35% of veterans aged between 16-64 reported their general health as very good, compared to 36% of non-veterans. 18% of over 65 veterans also reported very good general health, compared to 19% of non-veterans.
- Working age veterans were as likely to have a qualification as non-veterans, (92% and 89% respectively) and more likely to have gained qualifications through work (63%) and leisure (17%) than non-veterans (45% and 10% respectively). This is likely a result of the training opportunities offered by the MOD to support service personnel in their military career and during transition out of the services.

- Veterans were as likely to have bought their own home (outright or with a mortgage) (75%) as non-veterans (77%). The MOD's Armed Forces Help to Buy scheme recently revealed that over 11,000 service personnel had been assisted in buying or renovating their own home through the scheme. Forces Help to Buy is just one of the initiatives under the Armed Forces Covenant to support Armed Forces personnel and veterans.

On Tuesday the Defence Secretary called on businesses to do more to promote the positive role veterans play in the workplace. Speaking at an Armed Forces charity dinner he said that veterans play an important part in the nation's economy, contrary to prevalent misconceptions surrounding those who have served.

Research published last week by Lord Ashcroft, the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Veterans' Transition, found that while people on the whole were positive about veterans, some 54% of the general public estimated that service leavers had some kind of physical, emotional or mental health problem as a result of their time in the military

Lord Ashcroft's report highlighted the pervasive nature of myths surrounding public perception of veterans, pointing towards research which debunks a number of these:

- The employment rate for veterans six months after leaving the military is higher than in the UK workforce as a whole
- The vast majority of former service personnel go on to lead normal, healthy, productive lives
- Suicide is less common among the military population than the general public
- Veterans are less likely to go to prison, not more.

The new Ministerial Board which met for the first time today will have a specific focus on the priority area of healthcare, including mental health, but will also look at housing, education, and employment opportunities.

The new Board comes just weeks after the MOD established a new partnership with the Royal Foundation, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry's charity, on improving mental fitness. The partnership delivers on a commitment made in the MOD's recently launched Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Press release: Eleven arrests from investigation into suspected international people smuggling

The UK element of the operation was led by officers from Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation and all the individuals were arrested on suspicion of assisting illegal immigration.

The individuals are believed to be part of an organised criminal network that transported individuals, predominantly from Afghanistan, across Europe and into the UK. The smuggling attempts often involved migrants being concealed in specially adapted vehicles.

Today's arrest operation, which forms part of a wider international law enforcement joint investigation, was supported by officers from the National Crime Agency (NCA) and international partners from Europol and Eurojust (the EU agency tasked with strengthening judicial co-ordination on serious cross-border organised crime).

A breakdown of the arrests is as follows:

Seven individuals in London, two in Birmingham and two in Gateshead on suspicion of assisting illegal immigration. A further individual was arrested in London for suspected immigration offences.

There were also 7 arrests in Bulgaria and 8 in Belgium on suspicion of assisting illegal immigration.

Steve Dann, Director, Criminal & Financial Investigation said:

This international investigation is targeting an organised network suspected of being involved in a systematic attempt to evade the UK's immigration controls.

People smuggling is a cruel and dangerous trade in which often vulnerable individuals are treated as commodities. Many are passed into the hands of other crime gangs who would seek to exploit them for modern slavery purposes – including labour exploitation and the illicit sex trade.

We have been working closely with law enforcement colleagues across Europe and that vital co-operation will continue as the investigation proceeds with the evidence we have seized today.

The NCA's Chris Hogben, deputy head of the Invigor taskforce, said:

Criminal gangs often facilitate the arrival of illegal migrants into the UK by exploiting their desperation without thought for safety and with the sole motive of profit.

We see this through migrants being sent across the channel in unseaworthy small boats or stuffed into the back of cramped lorries, vans and cars.

This operation is a good example of how we can bring together law enforcement from across Europe to work together to take on that threat and disrupt the organised networks involved in people smuggling.

This investigation falls under Project Invigor, the UK's Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce that targets the criminal networks behind people smuggling. Partners include the National Crime Agency, Immigration Enforcement, Border Force and the Crown Prosecution Service, working in the UK and internationally.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit <http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org>.

[Speech: John Glen's speech on the launch of the Society of Chief Librarian's Culture Offer](#)

I'm sorry I can't join you in person for the launch of the SCL's Culture Offer today in Hull, the UK's City of Culture 2017.

At the end of September I marked 100 days in this post as Libraries Minister – and in this time I have visited a number of libraries across England, including Manchester and Salisbury, to find out about the challenges, successes and possibilities that exist in the sector.

The range of services delivered by public libraries is impressive, as is the contribution the sector makes to local communities and the positive impact it has on so many people's lives.

Libraries bring people together. They provide practical support and guidance. This includes health and social care, digital literacy, jobs and business support, or the enjoyment and wellbeing that literature and cultural activities bring. Libraries offer support at every stage of a person's life.

They are places of aspiration and inspiration as people come to learn, study, write, and research. And many are destinations in their own right, like the amazing library you are in today.

But what role do libraries play in culture? Well, I believe they are uniquely placed to act as hubs of exploration and inspiration. They are able to reach people in rural communities and areas of deprivation where there are few other easily accessible cultural opportunities.

I'll just mention two out of the many brilliant cultural partnerships libraries are forming across England.

The first is the Cultural Hubs project delivered by St. Helens library service. This project is engaging local young people, supporting neighbourhood development and community cohesion, investing in skills and learning opportunities and promoting an environment that supports health and wellbeing. It did this by being creative with its resources and challenging the boundaries of how library spaces can be used.

Then there's Create Gloucestershire's Art of Libraries programme run in partnership with Gloucestershire Libraries, introducing arts and culture to children and young people – particularly those who currently don't take part in this sort of activity. Artists, cultural organisations, library staff, schools and communities are working together in new ways to achieve this. Events so far include a new lego club, illustration and graffiti workshops and a skate film competition.

So these examples show how libraries are using arts and culture to introduce people to new ideas and offer enriching experiences because, as we know, culture takes many diverse forms.

And as well as traditional events held in libraries, such as book talks and reading groups, there is also a rapidly expanding range of digital activities that provide a great option for libraries to engage with new and existing users. This builds on the rich history of libraries championing important programmes and events including World Book Day and the Summer Reading Challenge.

So what's the role of the Cultural Offer?

It complements and builds on the positive work already taking place in libraries. It underlines the importance of libraries as cultural hubs and gateways to wider cultural activities.

And it should help people to develop and express their creativity through cultural experiences and events.

So I look forward to seeing and hearing more about how the Culture Offer will boost all this positive activity through libraries and to seeing the offer being put into practice. Thank you.

Note: John Glen was unable to attend the launch in person, so a video of him giving this speech was shown at the event.

Press release: Stoneferry students face the facts of flooding

Pupils at a primary school in Hull are a step closer to understanding what to do in a flood following a visit from the Environment Agency.

Year five students at Stoneferry Primary School took part in an interactive workshop where they engaged in a range of flood-related activities where they were taught which household objects can be the most useful in a flood and saw them using a geographic model to better understand how rivers flow.

The sessions were led by staff from the Environment Agency, which provides Hull with flood warnings and alerts when the risk of flooding from rivers and the Humber Estuary is high.

Ninety-five per cent of Hull stands on a flood plain and it has the highest number of properties at risk of flooding in a single urban area outside London.

Over the years the city has been affected by numerous significant river and coastal flood events and on 25 June, 2007, Hull City Council reported more than 9,000 homes and businesses were flooded when heavy rains covered the city. The floods resulting from this caused many millions of pounds of damage and 95 of the city's 98 schools were closed.

Jo Harrison, head teacher at Stoneferry Primary School said:

We're very grateful to the Environment Agency for coming to see us. The children thought it was great fun and it taught them valuable lessons that they'll hopefully pass onto their parents.

Thankfully ours was one of the luckier schools to have escaped the floods of 2007, however, we couldn't overlook the damage it caused.

We believe it is important for our students to fully appreciate their environment and understand that nature has the potential to be both beautiful and dangerous.

Through government funding and partnership contributions, the Environment

Agency is investing more than £200million in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire to help reduce the likelihood of flooding for thousands of properties by 2021. Part of this investment includes £35.5million of remedial works on the River Hull's flood defences, which will see the repair and replacement of 39 sections of river defence identified as being at the greatest risk of failure.

Brendan Sharkey, Environment Agency project manager on the River Hull Defences Scheme said:

Over the years we have seen how destructive flooding in Hull can be. While we are investing a lot into the city, much of the devastation caused by flooding can be prevented by making sure people are prepared.

We're working closely with schools in the area as we believe the next generation will be key to making Hull one of the world's most flood resilient cities and we have loved the enthusiasm shown by the students of Stoneferry Primary School.

Work on the River Hull Defences Scheme started in April this year and is being delivered by contractor BMM JV – a joint venture between BAM Nuttall and Mott MacDonald.

Varying levels of improvements to the River Hull defences are needed across the sites and work at different locations across the city is likely to progress at the same time.

Brendan continued:

While we are progressing the work along the river as smoothly and efficiently as we can, due to limited access at some of the sites, traffic from some roads and public pathways may need to be re-directed for short periods of time.

Any road closures will not happen until the New Year and we are doing our utmost to reduce the level of inconvenience caused to the public.

A quarter of the total length of works is now complete, and the Environment Agency expects a substantial amount of the work to be underway by the end of the year.

[News story: UK leads the way on crackdown of illicit financing](#)

The UK is making it harder for terrorists and criminals to move money through its banks and businesses by today (26 October 2017) [publishing new information](#) on the best way for organisations to protect themselves against illicit financing.

The [second 'National risk assessment'](#) into money laundering and terrorist financing builds on successful government action in this area over recent years. It uses the lessons learnt from these actions to create a comprehensive risk assessment, which can be used by government, law enforcement and the private sector, to bolster their protections.

Key findings identified by [the report include](#):

- the criminal exploitation of banks, professional and financial services and cash remain the greatest areas of money laundering risk to the UK
- cash remains the favoured method for terrorists to move funds through and out of the country
- a wide-ranging set of reforms by government, like introducing the ability to investigate suspicious asset trails, to crack down on illicit finance over recent years are starting to take effect

By examining how criminals attempt to move illicit funds through the UK, this report underlines the risks and pinpoints areas where businesses may be currently vulnerable. It informs the government, businesses and law enforcement agencies on how best to plug these gaps.

It advises on which services or products criminal groups are currently exploiting, enabling organisations to strengthen their efforts to shut this activity down. It will also help law enforcement allocate resources to the most significant threats.

The vast majority of firms are already vigilant but this information will shape future risk assessments so they can continue to better protect themselves against threats.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Stephen Barclay, said:

This country has done more to put a stop to money laundering and terrorist financing than any other in the world, but we are not complacent as there is always more we can do.

Our record is strong and we are already seeing threats foiled due to the action we've taken.

Today's report makes it clear to criminal groups that the UK will never be an easy target and won't tolerate this activity.

Security Minister, Ben Wallace MP said:

We will not stand by and allow criminals and the corrupt to use the UK to launder and hide their dirty money.

It is essential that we know what the risks to the UK are, which is why we are publishing the second national risk assessment of money laundering and terrorist financing which names a number of jurisdictions whose financial systems are linked to the UK and are at risk of abuse by criminals.

This assessment will help law enforcement agencies and industry take the necessary action against those threats.

Serious and organised crime costs Britain tens of billions of pounds every year and working with the private sector by sharing information and best practice remains vital to addressing this abuse, making it harder for criminals to operate in the UK.