

The 2021 Census - Initial view on content for England and Wales

Joint consultation response from members of the Armed Forces charity sector



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About us

1. The UK armed forces charity sector comprises 1,818 registered charities in England and Wales, alongside a further 444 in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Between us we generated an income of £872m in 2012. Of these charities 409 provide welfare support via provision of services, grants to individuals or grants to other organisations. The organisations that have signed up to this consultation response represent some of the leading charities in the sector.
2. This submission to *The 2021 Census - Initial view on content for England and Wales* is supported by: ABF The Soldiers Charity; Blesma The Limbless Veterans; Forces in Mind Trust; Help for Heroes; RAF Benevolent Fund; the Royal British Legion; and SSAFA. For further information about the individual charities involved please see Appendix 1.

General comments

3. We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the ONS's consultation, *The 2021 Census - Initial view on content for England and Wales*.
4. Please read this consultation response in conjunction with others that the individual organisations named may have submitted. This consultation response is intended to cover the principle of including the topic of the ex-Service community in the 2021 census but not the detail which is provided through individual responses.

The Charity sector's need for good data

5. The 2011 census contained just two questions related to the Armed Forces. It asked the respondent whether a member of the Armed Forces usually lived at the address and whether the respondent usually lived at an Armed Forces base for over 30 days a year. Whilst this is useful as it helps us to build up a picture of where serving personnel are located, it failed to tell us anything about veterans and only indirectly told us a small amount about the dependents of those currently serving (if they also live at that same address). This was a missed opportunity by the census, and one that we hope can be avoided in 2021.
6. The Royal British Legion's 2014 Household Survey of the ex-Service community, estimates that the UK ex-Service community (Veterans, dependent adults and dependent children) comprises around 6.2million members. Of these 2.8m are veterans, 2.1m are dependent adults (including spouses and widows) and 1m are dependent children. The remaining 190,000 to 290,000 represent an estimated "hidden" ex-Service community, for example those who reside in communal establishments such as care homes. We believe therefore that the UK ex-Service community is equivalent to nearly 1 in 10 of the UK population (9.2%).

7. The 6.2million members of the ex-Service community are currently served by a large UK armed forces charity sector comprising 1,818 registered charities in England and Wales, alongside a further 444 in Scotland and Northern Ireland with a combined income in 2012 of £872m. It is our duty as a sector to ensure that this income, much of it generously donated by the public, is spent judiciously and efficiently to maximise positive impact on our beneficiaries and ensure that we are meeting the needs of the community. However we can only achieve this aim with reliable and accurate data.
8. In addition to providing welfare support, we have a further duty as a sector, one which we share with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and local government: to counter negative and harmful myths that permeate the ex-Service narrative in the UK. There is a pervading myth that serving and ex-Service personnel are mad, bad and sad i.e. that most suffer from mental health problems, are sleeping rough or in prison. Media reports of “tsunamis” of PTSD and high rates of suicide contribute to a public narrative that creates damaging misconceptions veterans have to overcome in their transition to “civvy street” and actively harms future employment prospects. In reality, with exception for a few specific groups, rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are broadly similar to within the UK population as a whole, it is estimated that only between 3.5 percent and 7 percent of the prison population in England and Wales are veterans¹ and the 2012/13 CHAIN report of rough sleepers in London found that only 3% had ever served in the UK military. For many a career in the UK armed forces brings with it sought after transferrable skills for subsequent employment. Having accurate data that can draw a wider picture of the ex-Service community member profile in England and Wales will be a positive step in ensuring that negative stereotypes do not disadvantage those moving on from a Service Career.

A current lack of data

9. The ONS will be aware that there are currently some data sources in existence produced on an ongoing basis that provide much needed evidence on the (ex-)Service community. However it is our firm belief that, whilst these are useful, even in conjunction they provide an incomplete picture to enable the charities to develop their priorities for activities and support for the (ex-)Service community.
10. The 2014 Royal British Legion Household Survey, which is the most comprehensive survey of the ex-Service community to date, was a once-a-decade major project of the Royal British Legion and was part funded by a generous grant from the Forces in Mind Trust. However, even with significant investment, the survey relied on an eligible survey sample of 2,203 participants. This meant that further analysis of regional trends proves statistically insecure due to ever decreasing sample sizes for comparison to objective national datasets. The cost of increasing the sample size would surpass feasible charitable funding.
11. The Ministry of Defence and the ONS both produce ongoing statistics looking at samples of the serving and veteran community. However, no one survey covers the complete veteran population and there are significant areas where population data falls between statistical topics. That may be because an individual is not of working age (and therefore not in the labour force survey), not claim a compensation payment or MOD pension (and therefore not in the MOD yearly pension statistics) or have left the forces over 2 years previously (and are therefore no-longer tracked by the Career Transition Partnership).

¹ The Royal British Legion (2014), *Review of veterans within the criminal justice system: submission from the Royal British Legion*

12. Furthermore, the recording of a person's service history on a GP Read code has proved to be unreliable and insufficient to base any strategic planning upon and academic research based on cohort studies can only identify universal patterns of need that are rarely able to reflect localised data or comparisons.
13. The 2011 Census allowed us to know more about the geographical distribution of Jedis in the UK than it did the distribution of those who have served in our Armed Forces. The 2021 Census cannot repeat this disparity, and must fill the gap that current methods of data collection are not able to meet.

The need for good data outside of the Charity sector

14. As outlined above, as charities supporting the armed forces community we rely on having good and comprehensive data to fulfil our charitable missions. However the inclusion of an armed forces question set in the 2021 Census will have benefits that reach wider than just the charity sector:

Central Government and national statutory bodies

15. In 2011, the Government enshrined the Armed Forces Covenant in legislation. The Covenant is the nation's recognition of its moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces and their families, and establishes how they should be treated, stating that the Armed Forces and their families "deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment". The two key principles underlying the Covenant are:
 - 'No disadvantage': the Covenant commits the Government to removing, where possible, disadvantage experienced as a result of Service. For example, when Service personnel and their families are posted somewhere new, they should not experience difficulty in getting their children into local schools.
 - 'Special treatment': for personnel and veterans who are injured as a result of their Service, or for families bereaved by Service, it is sometimes appropriate for the principle of 'special treatment' to be applied e.g. the provision of higher grade prosthetics for those who lose limbs as a direct result of their Service.
16. The Government's obligation to ensure that no member of the serving or veteran armed forces community is disadvantaged as a result of their Service is reliant on an ability to compare uniform data collections between regions and demographics. Data that can be aggregated to national, regional and local authority level and provides comparable statistics between the (ex-)Service community and the general population is therefore not only helpful, but paramount if the Government are to monitor and address inequality.
17. An example of this is NHS England's ability to commission enhanced mental health services for members of the Armed Forces community who may benefit from specialised treatment. This is a commitment under the Armed Forces Covenant, yet for mental health services to be both relevant and timely they must also be geographically accessible. Allocating enhanced resources to a geographic area of low need is an inefficient use of NHS funding and fails the members of the Armed Forces community who need the critical support: The NHS currently has ten centres of excellence in Armed Forces mental health around the country, whether

these centres are located in the right areas is crucial as to whether they are effective and a credible intervention into tackling need.

Local Government

18. The commitments of the Armed Forces covenant have been further enshrined into local authorities through Community Covenants. We are delighted that every council in England and Wales has now signed up to a Community Covenant and that, on paper, the principles of the Covenant are being brought into local service provision and decision making. However, as with National Government commissioning, in order to determine whether or not a disadvantage exists, and to ensure that statutory services meet the needs of the serving personnel and veterans, good data on the population is again vital.
19. Since 1 April 2008, local government and health authorities and have been under a statutory duty to prepare Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs). We are aware that the quality of ex-Service needs analysis in JSNAs varies dramatically across the country, with some councils failing to include any reference to it at all and many based purely on approximations of need. Royal British Legion analysis of the ex-Service community in 2014 showed that working age veterans are significantly more likely than their contemporaries in the UK general population to suffer from a range of long term illnesses, including being three times more likely to have hearing problems (6% vs 2%) and nearly twice as likely to have depression (10% vs 6%). Rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) amongst the veteran community remain roughly comparable with the general population at around 4%, however there is an increased risk amongst sub sets of the population such as reservists and those who have seen active combat. It is vital that effective commissioning recognises the unique scale and nature of the local ex-Service community's profile. The accurate population data that the 2021 Census can provide will therefore be invaluable in strategic planning and assessments.

Academic research

20. The armed forces academic research field is rich in the UK, with sector leading work being performed by many including Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans research hub and the Kings Centre for Military Health Research. This research defines how we see the (ex-)Service community and informs our strategic planning to ensure as a Sector we remain relevant. However accurate census data on the (ex-)Service community will provide greatly improved comparison statistics and highlight areas where further research is needed.

Questions we would like to see included

21. We would be pleased to meet with officials from the ONS to discuss and refine these further, but we recommend that the following question subsets are included in the 2021 census:
 - Have individuals served in the UK Armed Forces for at least one day?
 - Are individuals currently an Army/Royal Air Force/Royal Navy/Royal Marine Regular or Reservist in the UK Armed Forces?
 - What is the length of the individual's Service?
 - Did the individual serve in the Army/Air Force/Navy?
 - What is the length of time since discharge?

- Are individuals a widow(er) of someone who has previously served in the UK armed forces?
- Are you now or have you ever suffered from any enduring condition or illness or medical problem which you believe or know to be a result of your time in the British Armed Forces?

Conclusion

22. As charities seeking to ensure that all veterans and their families in England and Wales aren't disadvantaged or fall through gaps in support, we currently have to rely on estimations and incomplete pictures of the population we seek to support. Expensive surveying undertaken by ourselves, data releases from the MOD and ONS and external academic research are useful but it is only through the comprehensive surveying of the population that the 2021 Census could provide that we will be able to ensure that all sectors of society are able to meet their ongoing commitments to our Serving and Veteran population.

For further information or clarifications please contact Andy Pike, Policy Adviser, The Royal British Legion on apike@britishlegion.org.uk or 0203 207 2124

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Appendix 1. Further information about the organisations behind this submission

ABF The Soldiers' Charity

ABF The Soldiers' Charity is the National Charity of the British Army, helping soldiers, veterans and their families, from every conflict. We were established in 1944, and over the last 70 years we have helped countless people from the Army family, defining our work through the Army's own values of courage, loyalty and selflessness. We spent more than £4.5million on individuals who needed our help last year, and gave grants to 72 charities which deliver specialist support on our behalf - touching the lives of around 70,000 people. We often help with the everyday things which may not be exciting, but are life-changing to our beneficiaries; support with care home fees, training courses or home adaptations. To provide independence and dignity for every soldier and veteran is something we are incredibly proud to do. For more information visit: www.soldierscharity.org

Blesma The Limbless Veterans

The First World War led to the birth of nearly 18,000 charities, of which around 10 still exist today. Blesma is one.

Blesma, The Limbless Veterans, is a national charity for those who lose limbs or the use of limbs or one or both eyes in service or as result of service in Her Majesty's Forces, and for ex-Service men and women who lose limbs or eyes after service. While the majority of its Members are ex-Service men and women, there are a number who are still serving. Blesma also accepts responsibility for the dependents of its Members and in particular their Widow(er)s.

We support these men and women in their communities throughout the UK. Blesma exists to assist its people lead independent and fulfilling lives. We work tirelessly for our Members when the conflicts that have affected their lives are no longer a focal point in the nation's media. Since 1932, we have been the only national Service charity that supports limbless veterans for the duration of their lives. Our Members range from the youngest amputee veterans to those who fought in WWII, some having lived with limb loss for more than half a century. Modern medicine transforms the physical injury, but it is a complicated process to treat the emotional trauma and related lifelong health issues. For more information visit: www.blesma.org.

Forces in Mind Trust

The aim of the Forces in Mind Trust is to provide an evidence base that will influence and underpin policy making and service delivery in order to enable ex-Service personnel and their families to lead successful civilian lives. Each year approximately 20,000 people leave the UK Armed Forces and for the vast majority they transition successfully into the civilian world, their lives having been enormously enriched by their time in service. However, some need additional support, and it is these most vulnerable people that Forces in Mind Trust exists to help. Founded in January 2012 by a £35 million Big Lottery Fund 20-year endowment, Forces in Mind Trust awards grants and commissions research, coordinates the efforts of others, and supports projects that deliver long-term solutions to the challenges faced. For more information please see: <http://www.fim-trust.org/>

Help for Heroes

Help for Heroes offers comprehensive support to those who have suffered life-changing injuries and illnesses while serving our country. This support is provided through grants direct to our Heroes and their families, grants to other charities, and through four Recovery Centres across the UK. For more information visit: <http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/>

RAF Benevolent Fund

The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund was formed nearly 100 years ago and is the RAF's leading welfare charity, providing financial, practical and emotional support to all members of the RAF family, estimated to be over 1.5 million people. We are here for serving and former members of the RAF, regular and reservists alike, as well as their partners and dependants, whenever the need us. We help members of the RAF family deal with a wide range of issues: from childcare and relationship difficulties to injury and disability, and from financial hardship and debt to illness and bereavement, including social isolation, mobility and self care issues. In 2014, we spent over £18 million helping nearly 40,000 members of the RAF Family. We continue to change and evolve to match the current needs of the RAF Family. For more information visit: www.rafbf.org.

The Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion was created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of WWI, and still remains one of the UK's largest membership organisations. We are the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, providing financial, social and emotional support, information, advice, advocacy and comradeship to hundreds of thousands of Service personnel, veterans and their dependants every year. In 2014, we responded to over 450,000 requests for help – more than ever before – and spent £1.4m every week on welfare support. In addition, the Legion provides long- and short-term care to older people from the ex-service community across the UK in our six registered care homes, a number of community-based support services, including a handy van service and a community dementia support service through our Admiral Nurses. For more information visit: www.britishlegion.org.uk.

SSAFA

SSAFA provides lifelong support to anyone who is serving, or has ever served, in the Royal Navy, the British Army or the Royal Air Force, and their families. Since our foundation in 1885, we have provided a diverse range of practical, financial and emotional help. In 2014 our charitable services supported over 57,000 people, 2,000 more than the year before. We offer welfare advice and support for serving personnel on military establishments and veterans and their families in the community. Our volunteer network enables us to deliver support tailored to the individual at a local level across the UK and overseas. We deliver specialist services, such as bereavement support and mentoring for service personnel in transition, and a selection of housing for specific needs. In addition we provide health and social care services for the Armed Forces in fourteen countries around the world on contract to MOD. For more information visit: www.ssafa.org.uk