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Evaluation of the Ex-Service Personnel in the Criminal Justice System Programme

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Summary

This evaluation focuses on the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's Ex-Service Personnel in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) Programme

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (henceforth referred to as the Trust) provides grants across a number of different programmes, including the Ex-Service Personnel in the CJS Programme (henceforth referred to as the Programme). Through this Programme, the Trust awarded £4.6 million in 2015 to 14 projects that support ex-Service personnel who have come into contact with the CJS, followed by a further £1.1 million of continuation grants in 2018 to seven of the 14 projects.¹ RAND Europe was commissioned to evaluate this Programme.

The aim of the Programme is to reduce reoffending and provide support to ex-Service personnel who have come into contact with the CJS. The projects and services funded under the Programme are dedicated to helping identify and support ex-Service personnel throughout the various stages of the CJS, including custody, pre-sentencing, the point of sentence and post-release from custody. This includes specialised projects to prevent reoffending, address substance abuse and mental health issues, and enable employment opportunities. The evaluation is guided by 11 evaluation questions (EQs), nine of which focus on the individual projects, and two of which are programme-level questions, as presented in Table S.1.

¹ The seven projects that obtained continuation funding are Project Nova – Supporting Veterans in the Criminal Justice System (Walking with the Wounded), Network for Ex-Service Personnel (National Offender Management Service Co-financing Organisation), Veterans in the Criminal Justice System (SSAFA), Positive Futures (Venture Trust), Integrated Offender Management Cymru: Veterans Pathfinder (National Probation Service in Wales), Remember Veterans (West Mercia Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner), and London Veterans' Prison In-Reach Service (Camden and Islington NHS Trust). The seven projects that obtained Phase I funding only are LifeWorks in Custody (RBLI), Cobseo Directory of Veterans' CJS Support Services (RBLI), Military-Veterans Achieving & Realising Continued Health (Lifeline, then Change Grow Live), National Veterans Community Recovery (Mersey Care NHS Trust), Serving Those Who Have Served (Cheshire and Greater Manchester Rehabilitation Company), Active Plus WorkForce (Active Plus), and Veterans' Family Support Service (Barnardo's).

Table S.1 Evaluation questions

N°	Evaluation question	Scope
1	What are the needs of ex-Service Personnel, what are their complexities, and are the projects aligned with these needs?	
2	<i>How do the projects support the beneficiaries?² (This includes a consideration of coherence with wider services, and nature of pathways and outcomes of the support.)</i>	
3	To what extent do beneficiaries (i.e. ex-Service personnel who have come into contact with the CJS) perceive that they have been supported to reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices?	
4	To what extent do professionals perceive that (i) beneficiaries have been supported to reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices, and (ii) where applicable, the support professionals have been offered helps beneficiaries reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices?	
5	To what extent do carers and family members perceive that (i) beneficiaries have been supported to reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices, and (ii) where applicable, the support carers and family members have been offered helps beneficiaries reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices?	Project-level
6	How likely are projects awarded a continuation and sustainability grant to be sustainable? ³	
7	What are the risks and barriers to the future sustainability of the projects?	
8	How have the projects used data to inform and show the impact of their work?	
9	What is (i) the number, and (ii) the complexity of wider referral pathways ⁴ with which funded projects engage to support beneficiaries?	
10	What lessons and areas of good practice from the Programme with relevance for wider public policy can be identified from the answers to EQ1–9?	
11	What lessons and areas of good practice from the Programme with applicability for other relevant services and projects can be identified from the answers to EQ1–9?	Programme-level

A logic-model-based approach was used to conduct this evaluation. This evaluation is based on a mix of primary and secondary data collection and analysis, with primary data forming the majority of the analysis. A structured literature review was undertaken to develop a wider understanding of the context, while primary data collection was undertaken with the projects via pre-interview questionnaires followed by semi-structured interviews. The research team also conducted interviews with three sets of beneficiaries: (i) ex-

² In the context of this evaluation, ‘beneficiary’ refers to ex-Service personnel.

³ ‘Sustainable’ in this context is defined as the ability of a project to ensure the same level of delivery of services and support upon conclusion of the grant funding.

⁴ The ‘complexity of referral pathways’ refers to the offering of the projects to beneficiaries, i.e. whether the projects offer a variety of help or support options to beneficiaries.

Service personnel who have come into contact with the CJS and received support from one or more of the 14 projects funded by the Trust (11 interviewees from two projects); (ii) carers and family members of the latter (three interviewees from one project); and (iii) professionals (e.g. police and probation officers, medical staff) working with ex-Service personnel who have come into contact with the CJS (11 interviewees from five projects).

A summary of the evaluation findings is presented below

EQ1: What are the needs of ex-Service personnel, what are their complexities, and are the projects aligned with these needs?

The 11 interviewed ex-Service personnel identified areas of support offered by the projects as relevant to addressing their needs, including assistance with legal processes, finances, housing, employment, obtaining medical help, mental health and substance abuse issues, as well as general emotional support needs, such as companionship. These were in broad agreement with the needs identified in the literature review. However, there is limited knowledge, in both academic and grey literature, with regard to ex-Service personnel needs, constraining our ability to assess whether the projects are aligned with these needs.

Overall, the findings showed that ex-Service personnel have complex needs (e.g. mental and/or health issues, unemployment, substance abuse), many of which co-occur; as a result, several projects attempt to address more than one need, with six projects addressing five or more needs. Some of the needs of ex-Service personnel increased as a result of COVID-19, with projects observing an increasing number of ex-Service personnel requiring assistance with finding accommodation upon leaving prison and with mental health.

Based on these findings, the RAND evaluation team suggested that more research and systematic data collection related to the identification of ex-Service personnel in the CJS is needed in order to uncover (i) the needs of ex-Service personnel; (ii) whether serving in the Armed Forces creates specific needs and how, if at all, these needs differ from the needs of other vulnerable cohorts in the CJS; and (iii) where these needs stem from, how they interact, and which tend to co-occur.

EQ2: How do the projects support the beneficiaries (i.e. ex-Service personnel who have come into contact with the CJS)?

Most projects target ex-Service personnel as primary beneficiaries and family members and/or carers as secondary beneficiaries. Taken as a whole, the projects provide support across the entire CJS pathway. However, most projects focus on providing support in prison (11), as well as post-custody/post-sentencing (11). Only four projects provide support at the pre-offending stage. This raises the questions of whether: (i) projects are overlooking beneficiaries that do not enter the prison system; (ii) there is a need for an increased focus on awareness-raising and on training CJS professionals to recognise and address the needs of ex-Service personnel earlier in the CJS pathway; and (iii) more direct support to ex-Service personnel provided at the pre-offending stage could help reduce the number of ex-Service personnel that enter the CJS.

Projects provide varied, wide-ranging support, aiming both to address immediate needs and to enact system-wide changes within the CJS. While there exists a level of overlap between the projects, in terms of the needs addressed and the services provided, differences in the ways the projects have been set up (such as geographic scope, beneficiary focus, types of activities carried out and types of outcomes sought) lead to

broad coherence, as well as areas of coordination and cooperation, between the projects sponsored by the Trust.

The projects identified several challenges in terms of the delivery of activities, including: (i) challenges specific to ex-Service personnel, most commonly, difficulties in identifying ex-Service personnel within the CJS; and (ii) challenges specific to the custodial set-up, the main issue being that the specific needs of ex-Service personnel are not considered as part of core organisational resource allocations. The projects also identified several gaps in the support provided to ex-Service personnel in the CJS, including: (i) consistent and continuous support; (ii) the provision of complex services on mental health and substance abuse; and (iii) cohesion, collaboration and communication in the wider landscape of support to the cohort.

EQ3: To what extent do beneficiaries perceive that they have been supported to reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices?

Based on feedback from 11 beneficiaries across two projects, the ex-Service personnel interviewed for the evaluation perceive the support provided by the projects to have been very beneficial, in particular with regards to the support provided by their caseworker, the extent of the support and the length of the support provided. None of the ex-Service personnel interviewed explicitly stated that projects helped reduce their offending behaviour, but rather focused on the fact that the support enables them to have a more stable life.

Anecdotal evidence indicates areas where ex-Service personnel identified some gaps in the type of support provided and the lack of continuous support. However, given the small number of interviewees, this data has limitations and the findings cannot be generalised across the wider beneficiary population; and despite the positive feedback from the interviewed beneficiaries, we are unable to provide an assessment as to the wider extent to which beneficiaries across all projects have been supported to reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices. Projects themselves noted difficulties in obtaining accurate, formal, and long-term feedback from beneficiaries that would allow them to understand the longer term effects of the support they provide.

EQ4: To what extent do professionals perceive that (i) beneficiaries have been supported to reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices, and (ii) where applicable, the support professionals have been offered helps beneficiaries reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices?

Professionals interviewed appear to have limited awareness as to the support provided by the projects for ex-Service personnel, although anecdotal changes in the behaviour of ex-Service personnel were perceived among the interviewees, such as improved confidence.

The support provided by the projects directly to professionals such as prison officers appears to be beneficial, in particular with regards to making staff in the CJS more aware of veteran-specific issues, however this finding is based on feedback provided by only six professionals involved in four of the projects, so we cannot comment on whether this positive view is widely held among professionals. Additionally, there is no data to ascertain the extent to which the support to professionals has an effect on the ex-Service personnel within the CJS. Overall, the interview data indicates that professionals – both external to the project and project staff – have limited knowledge as to the actual impact of project support on the reduction of offending behaviour and the ability of ex-Service personnel to make positive life choices.

EQ5: To what extent do carers and family members perceive that (i) beneficiaries have been supported to reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices, and (ii) where applicable, the support carers and family members have been offered helps beneficiaries reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices?

Only three family members – all of whom were supported by one project – were interviewed for this evaluation. They were all very positive about the impact of the support provided. We found that the need for holistic support that encompasses both the ex-Service person and their family has become more apparent to projects themselves over their lifetime. However, reaching out to family members – whether it be to obtain feedback on the impact of the support or to offer them support – is challenging for some projects as most are not able to easily achieve contact. Overall, given the small number of family members consulted as part of the evaluation, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which family members more generally perceive project support to help beneficiaries reduce offending behaviour and make positive life choices.

EQ6: How likely are projects awarded a continuation and sustainability grant to be sustainable?

Projects aim to achieve primarily two types of sustainability: (i) sustainability of the projects as organisations; and (ii) sustainability of the projects' impact. The two types of sustainability are interrelated, as achieving continued impact is often dependent on the projects' continued existence, especially in the case of those that aim to provide on-the-ground support.

Projects reported that they aim to achieve project sustainability by embedding ex-Service personnel support activities as a core service of their parent organisation; synchronising activities on a national level so as to fill the aforementioned gap of continuous and consistent support; ensuring continued awareness among stakeholders about the support offered; developing a wider strategy to guide support provision; and using diverse funding sources. Projects reported that they aim to achieve impact sustainability by developing e-learning tools that can be used even once the project finishes, generating self-sustaining awareness of the needs and issues specific to ex-Service personnel in the CJS. These actions have the potential to ensure sustainability in the short-term, but could be hampered by external risks and barriers.

Based on the findings, the RAND evaluation team's assessment is that projects that focus on enacting system-wide changes within the CJS are the most promising in terms of impact sustainability, as they are less dependent on funding in the long-term. By contrast, projects that provide immediate, on-the-ground support (be it financial, material, job-related or social in nature) will continue to be dependent on the renewal of funding.

EQ7: What are the risks and barriers to the future sustainability of the projects?

The most frequently mentioned potential challenge to sustainability is that of obtaining funding and dealing with running costs. Most of the factors posing challenges to both project and impact sustainability are the same factors posing challenges to the projects' abilities to conduct their activities. This is because if projects are hindered from providing the support that they have been set up to provide, they will be unable to achieve the desired outcomes and to demonstrate expected impact and corresponding value for money. Interviewed professionals and projects have claimed that funding needs to be awarded on a longer term basis in order to ensure that the projects can create a positive impact, especially when it comes to addressing recurring on-

the-ground needs. Issues around funding also mean that some projects rely on volunteers, and a potential reduction in the numbers of volunteers can also be a future barrier to sustainability.

EQ8: How have the projects used data to inform and show the impact of their work?

Overall, the evaluation finds that there is no consistency in the type of data that is collected, the ways in which it is collected, or the ways in which it is used to inform project delivery and demonstrate project impact. Projects collect a variety of data that is meant to inform project delivery and measure project impact. Most often, projects collect the data through formal and informal feedback from beneficiaries and partners, with some projects also using specific data-collection and evaluation tools.

Projects use the data internally to assess initial needs; measure behavioural change and outcomes; and demonstrate progress and project impact to beneficiaries, partners and sponsors. Projects also use the data to increase internal awareness and understanding around the needs of ex-Service personnel and the activities that best address those needs, allowing them to adapt project delivery accordingly. Projects use the data externally to increase awareness of the available support; enact system-wide change by highlighting progress and gaps; and improve the delivery of landscape-wide support by disseminating lessons learned.

The RAND evaluation team suggests that more coordination, direction and guidance surrounding the collection and use of data would be needed to ensure that project delivery is based on and closely aligned with the needs of the cohort. In particular, encouraging the collection and sharing of data on the needs of ex-Service personnel in the CJS – and the activities that the projects have assessed as appropriate in addressing these needs – could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of this cohort and the activities that have the most positive impact.

EQ9: What is (i) the number, and (ii) the complexity of wider referral pathways with which funded projects engage to support beneficiaries?

The varied landscape of support – which contains a range of different actors acting as referral sources, signposting services, and general partners in the delivery of activities – is mainly determined by the complexity of the needs of ex-Service personnel involved in the CJS. Projects' referral sources are varied, with most projects receiving referrals from charities (7) and prison officers (7), followed by probation officers (4). Rich referral pathways allow projects to complement the support they are offering and can lead to beneficiaries being provided with holistic support.

Projects continue to raise awareness and conduct organisational outreach for the project, and form partnerships on the basis of identified needs or gaps. Partnerships, for example with Magistrates and Crown Courts, provide projects with a clearer view and more comprehensive understanding of the inner working processes of the CJS agencies, as well as the landscape of support in general. The projects reported that in the long run, this could help them (i) better pinpoint and understand the needs of ex-Service personnel in the CJS and to adapt project delivery accordingly; (ii) provide more responsive and more accurate referrals; and (iii) learn from other organisations' experiences.

The most significant challenges when working with CJS agencies are competing organisational priorities and inadequate resource allocation for ex-Service personnel. The most significant challenges when working

with organisations outside of the CJS include ensuring quality of services and preventing the beneficiaries from being overwhelmed by the complex landscape of support.

EQ10: What lessons and areas of good practice from the Programme with relevance for wider public policy can be identified from the answers to EQ1–9?

A number of lessons and areas of good practice were identified by the projects when undertaking their activities in order to reach their outcomes and by interviewees. These include the benefits of collaborative working with other agencies, including other charities, referral sources and CJS agencies, provided collaboration works well; productive engagement with Veterans in Custody Support Officers (ViCSOs), given their focus on ex-Service personnel; fostering an increasing awareness of ex-Service personnel and the Covenant; encouraging ex-Service personnel to work with those in the CJS, to increase the engagement of this cohort with the support that is available; and educating CJS professionals on veteran-specific issues to improve project delivery.

EQ11: What lessons and areas of good practice from the Programme with applicability for other relevant services and projects can be identified from the answers to EQ1–9?

Lessons and areas of good practice identified by the projects and interviewees include the fact that the Trust allows projects a degree of flexibility to best adapt their activities, enabling them to be reactive to evolving circumstances and need; the provision of tailored support by projects to beneficiaries; the positive awareness-raising of ex-Service personnel who have come into contact with the CJS away from the ‘mad, bad and sad’ stereotype; and the move towards the provision of increasingly holistic support that includes the family as well as the ex-Service personnel undertaken by projects regarding ex-Service personnel in the CJS.

This report presents a set of recommendations and advocacy areas based on the evaluation findings

A set of recommendations was developed for the Trust and other stakeholders – including government bodies such as the various government ministries including the Ministry of Justice, police forces, non-governmental organisations – in order to improve the wider CJS with regard to ex-Service personnel. The recommendations have applicability for the Trust, and we also suggest a wider set of topics and issues in which the Trust could undertake advocacy to change national policy and practice. These are summarised in Table S.2.

Table S.2 Advocacy areas and recommendations

Stakeholder type	Advocacy areas/recommendations
Advocacy areas	
Cross-government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the identification of ex-Service personnel. • Enhance data collection on ex-Service personnel. • Increase the availability of complex services and accessibility by ex-Service personnel. • Design interventions targeted towards the earlier stages of the CJS pathway.
Ministry of Justice and associated agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the ViCSOs role by making it permanent as well as ensuring that there is a ViCSO equivalent in police forces, courts and tribunals. • Encourage CJS agencies to be Covenant signatories. • Establish a primary contact point for all organisations working with ex-Service personnel in the CJS, to help manage relationships and information effectively. • Define a support pathway for ex-Service personnel in the CJS so as to streamline the support that is provided. • Establish an automated referral system between the police and projects offering support. • Conduct further research on ex-Service personnel in the CJS, to reduce the gap in knowledge around this cohort and their needs.
Non-governmental organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase communication among projects and organisations that provide support to ex-Service personnel in the CJS.
Recommendations	
The Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed evaluation approaches within Programmes by developing a theory of change and logic model for the Programme prior to its launch. • Ensure the capture of data from projects in a systematic way. • Increase collaborative working and communication between projects that have obtained funding from the Trust. • Raise the profile and sustainability of the Programme. • Identify regional areas that are underserved and consider expanding existing projects in these areas. • Provide more flexible funding options to enhance sustainability.