# Academic and others who work in the area

## Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research (VFI)

### Sources of information:

The evidence submitted in this response relates to two research projects undertaken by the CMWR and VFI. Both projects explored the experiences of women veterans, and therefore evidence submitted in this response relates to the experience of lesbian and bisexual women veterans only.

[We Also Served (2021)](https://www.centreformilitarywomensresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WeAlsoServed_Electronic.pdf)

In June 2020 the Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) Female Veteran Cluster Group, supported by NHS England and NHS Improvement, commissioned the Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research (VFI) to undertake a scoping study into the health and well-being needs of female veterans in the UK, identify gaps in research utilising international research, and to provide a framework for prioritising research and activities in the UK going forward. This scoping study, titled ‘We Also Served’, comprised a scoping review of relevant literature and interviews with 13 Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who were working with UK ex-service women in some capacity. Some of the SMEs were also female veterans themselves and sometimes spoke from personal experience.

### Findings from the literature

The scoping review found no published UK research directly investigating the impact of the homosexuality ban on female veterans at the time of the report’s publication in 2021. Since the report’s publication we are aware that a report titled: Exit Wounds; Lived Experience of LGBT+ Veterans, before, during and after Service by the charities Forward Assist and Salute Her has since been published and the charity Fighting with Pride and Northumbria University are continuing to undertake research in this area.

Whilst there is a lack of UK research focused on this issue, research from the US has been conducted on the impact of the ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy (repealed in 2010). Two research studies from the US have detailed the effects of this policy, and the associated ‘witch-hunts’, on the health and well-being of Service Personnel. Effects included stress due to hiding one’s identity out of fear of harassment and harm, increased PTSD and depression, low self-esteem and negative self-image .

### Qualitative findings from SMEs

Reflective of the findings from the US studies, some SMEs commented on the significant impact of the historic ban on homosexuality on Service Personnel and veterans in the UK, in terms of their experience of being discharged and their mental health post-discharge:

“Certainly, in the early eighties when I was serving, for the first 20 years of my career, I had to sit and witness some pretty unpleasant, really rather more interrogation than investigation of, gay women, because it was against the law, against military law… they were persecuted for being gay by their peers and the people investigating them. I think, if I’m honest, the attitude of male investigators to gay women was rather more lewd than investigative… I think that for homosexuals who were discharged from the military, there has been some pretty catastrophic impacts on people, men and women, because there was shame associated with it. There was sudden discharge, there wasn’t any time to appreciate it. So it was a traumatic event. And I think that has led to some pretty traumatic mental health issues across the piece” (P11)

SMEs suggested that LGBT women’s experiences during service were now much improved, however the importance of recognising and examining the experiences of women who served under these restrictive terms was emphasised, especially as these issues can affect individuals long into the future:

I think in terms of the LBGT community, it has completely transformed. It’s not there yet, but it has definitely transformed, compared to 20 years ago… But saying that… those restrictions have gone so there’s no problem, it’s just not right. Because the impact has already been felt by those individuals who served under those restrictive terms… This has impacted on people’s lives, their futures and everything else that goes with that. (P3)

Although some women had successfully acquired compensation due to historic discriminatory policies such as automatic discharge for marriage (phased out in the 1970s) and automatic discharge for pregnancy (phased out in 1992), compensation for being discharged as a result of the ban on homosexuality (repealed in 2000) was perceived as less prevalent by one SME, potentially due to stigma:

“Financial compensation did ameliorate some of the indignity and trauma of it… whereas that has not happened for, for the gay community. But I think the gay community were stigmatised and reticent as a community, which meant that they didn’t go down the route of compensation. I think that might change… I think that the landmark of 20 years since the ban was lifted has raised its head. I think there may be more movement in that direction” (P11)

Meeting the needs of women veterans in mental health services: Co-designing guidance for healthcare professionals (2022- ongoing)

This project is a collaboration between the VFI/CMWR at Anglia Ruskin University, the Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, and the charity Salute Her.

This research seeks to identify the mental health support needs of women veterans residing across England, and their experiences of mental health services via focus groups and interviews with women veterans and mental healthcare professionals. 48 women veterans and 12 mental healthcare professionals have been interviewed. 5 women, who served during the historic ban, choose to share that they identified as lesbian or bisexual.

It is important to note that this project did not focus primarily on the experience of LGBT+ service personnel, nor their experiences of serving during the historic ban. However, several lesbian or bisexual participants (5) shared their experiences of serving during the ban and the impact this has had on them after service. We did not ask participants their sexuality as part of our demographics collected in this project, therefore the evidence shared only represents the experiences of those who chose to share their sexuality with us during interviews, and who served during the ban.

This project’s primary focus was understanding the mental healthcare needs and experience of women veterans, and therefore this project only includes participants who have experienced a mental health challenge in the last 5 years, including self-identification and those formally diagnosed, as well as those who have sought treatment and those who have not. No questions were outlined in the protocol regarding serving during the ban, and as such participants were not routinely asked. However, where participants spoke about serving during this era and its impact, this line of conversation was followed. Therefore, this evidence should be considered in light of the primary focus of the project and any biases this may introduce. It does however provide insight into mental health impact of serving during the ban for some lesbian and bisexual women veterans.

Additionally, it is important to document that this study was open to any veteran who identifies as a woman and was advertised in groups known to support transgender veterans, such as Fighting with Pride. However, all participants were cisgender women and therefore we wish to highlight this here for clarity, as we anticipate that the experiences of transgender women could differ in important ways.

Thematic analysis of data is ongoing, and therefore our evidence reflects our preliminary findings. Outputs from this project will be published summer 2023.

This project is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) under its Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) Programme (Grant Reference Number NIHR202226). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

Preliminary analysis from this project evidences the negative impact of serving during the ban on mental health and wellbeing of lesbian and bisexual cis-gender women veterans in several ways, outlined below.

### Impact of interrogations by military police

Some participants discussed the traumatic experience of being subject to interrogations by the Royal Military Police and the impact of this on their mental health and wellbeing. They shared the negative impact of these interrogations at the time they occurred, describing them as traumatic and stressful.

“So yes, it did impact me massively because it was deeply, deeply traumatic and stressful. It was an investigation that basically led to my being sacked effectively and while the investigation was going on, I was under suspicion of having indecently assaulted two fellow officers, which I hadn't, but it was terrifying because two people were against me on my own and I was the one who was reputedly gay and ohh it was yeah, it was horrific.” (P43)

Participants shared the enduring impact of these interrogations over their years in service and post-service on their mental health and wellbeing. This highlights the importance of recognising that the impact of the ban is not a historic issue and continues affect the lives of veterans today.

“So yes, enormous stress at the time and then enormous stress for years afterwards as the legal battles went on and you're… just constant reminders of it [interrogation] and yeah. So yeah, definitely has impacted me massively.” (P43)

“I think the interrogations that they put me through and the, it's like the aftereffects of that dismissal which has caused the mental health issues to be honest with you, and it's probably affected me more in the last five years as I've got a bit older.

I'm jumping if somebody comes up behind me, even just talk to me in the office because of those interrogations. And so, like, the impacts further on, and so when I did try and sort of like connected all the veterans” (P50)

### Living “under the radar”

Due to the ban, it was necessary for homosexual service personnel to hide their sexuality in many if not all situations. Participants discussed the impact of hiding one’s sexuality on their mental health and wellbeing; including not being able to access help from within the Armed Forces infrastructure for mental health difficulties that occurred due to hiding aspects of identity.

“I had to live for 20 years of my 30-year career under the radar and that undoubtedly impacted my mental health. It led to a breakdown in service. Which I didn't report to the military authorities.” (P36)

“Don't let anyone know. Be quiet. Be careful. All of these things. And I was just like, ohh. So I realized very quickly that it wasn't, you know, allowed and you needed to be careful.” (P43)

Whilst evidence in our sample is limited on the topics, one participant described how “living under the radar” also impacted those who were questioning their sexuality.

“Participant: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, and those questions were there but again, it wasn't allowed. So uh, it wasn't a part of me that I could, you know, actively sort of explore with anybody or talk to.

Interviewer: Do you think that had an impact on your mental health?

Participant: Umm. [sighs] Sorry, it's hard for me to think about now. I just know that I was questioning a lot. You know in my head, but also knowing that it wasn’t allowed. It's sort of meant that I had to kind of like, go down a particular path of being straight, I guess… I'm sort of happy with that. I'm sort of … it feels more aligned, but the time it was, there was that questioning and not really allowing that, you know, being allowed to sort of consider it.” (P57)

One participant described how they were accepted by their fellow service personnel, despite the institutional ban. However, this quote should not be taken as endorsing there was no mistreatment of LGBT personnel, as here the participant is highlighting the difference between her daily interactions with her peers in contrast with the institution’s attitude and actions.

“Honestly… nobody cared. Nobody was worried. I had no homophobia. Nothing. Because they were all like [name] just be careful who you tell. Just watch out for yourself, because they all knew it wasn't allowed. But were any of them bothered about it? No, of course they weren't. Not at all. Because we were intelligent, articulate, compassionate people being told to think for ourselves.” (P43)

### The impact of unplanned discharge

Our preliminary findings highlight how the nature of being discharged on the basis of sexuality has a potentially unique negative impact on women veterans’ wellbeing.

For all veterans, the transition process involves finding new employment, a new home, as well as potential feelings of loss for military colleagues, often considered family. Participants described how their sudden discharge and a lack of support from the Armed Forces compounded the immediate challenges of this transition, allowing them little time to prepare for life in the civilian world.

“Yeah, I think, I mean the whole, the process of the discharge happened very quickly, so it was within about three or four weeks, so you kind of go from a career, a home, a family to sort of 3-4 weeks later, trying to find somewhere to live and find a job and you know your whole world sort of turned upside down”. (P29)

“Yeah, I think definitely the way I ended up in civilian life. You know, it was a very daunting experience. I didn't get… there was no time for any sort of support, you know, civilian integration support from the force’s resettlement sort of training for anything, it was just, ‘Here you go. Here’s your papers. See you later.’ So I was sofa surfing for a while, until I got myself a job. And then it was just, I was working in security because it was… quite an easy job to get when you've just come out the forces. But it was just absolutely… I hated it. But it probably took me, I would say, probably the whole year after my discharge was just extremely difficult. And I think that's, I think that's still with me today. Just the trauma of that there was, I was drinking a lot as well.” (P29)

One participant also discussed the stress of having to figure out how to explain their discharge to loved ones.

“Then I was just like thinking, what the hell? I'm gonna tell my mom and dad when I get home. You didn't have mobiles then. So like literally like just turned up. They thought it was [a] surprise visit and, and you know, it's just all that stress, all the way down. Think I was just hysterical by the time I got home, to be honest.” (P50)

Our preliminary findings also suggest that the challenges of a non-planned discharge may have been compounded in situations where a veteran was returning to a disadvantaged economic background and could not fall back into a safety net of family support. Our findings also highlight how experience post-discharge may vary for LGBT veterans depending on their family or support networks own attitudes towards the LGBT community, and capacity to emotionally support them.

“Like my mum didn't work. My dad was in, like, manual on sort of low skilled work. They didn't have the money to feed me. And so if… I reflect back now, you know. Did they just have the sense of panic? Like, where I'm going to sleep, how they gonna feed me? So I was just forced into taking any job. I do remember my dad saying, you know, ohh, join the prison service and or like let's go and get a solicitor, but realistically they wouldn't have had been able to even get the bus fare… they didn't really have the emotional skills to like support me and like sit me down tell me that you know it wasn't me. I mean they did say that they loved me but my dad being my dad you know when he was stressed out or tired he'd say to me like you know “can't you go and get aids and die like the rest of your friends”. P50

Participants discussion reveals the emotional and practical impacts of losing a career you loved, which for some was intended to be a long-term commitment. Participants shared the feelings of heartbreak and immense sadness of no longer being able to serve.

“I loved it. That’s what [was] so heart-breaking, they had an Army trained nurse … You know, so it was… It was awful. It was heartbreaking, cause I was very, very happy. I was having the best time of my life… I commissioned only 15 months after I qualified as a staff nurse. So, you know, I was. I was flying high. I was doing really well. I was doing my captaincy just a few months after I was thrown out. So it's awful.” (P43)

Participants spoke to the long-term impact of this loss. Several described how jobs or careers they have had since do not compare to their Service career, and the negative impact that this has had on their wellbeing.

“for example, if I'm doing a job. And hating the job and thinking, oh, God, you know what have I missed? Or like I say, I get invited to talk to people, and I'm talking to them and say how happy they are. And I'm thinking I wanted that. So there's an overlap in those terms in terms of like frustration that my career since and my jobs since have never really matched up. I've done a couple of really decent jobs, but a lot of them have not been that great and I've never really had the same sense of direction or purpose ever since. I've kind of lost any ambition. You know that that kind of went by the wayside.” P43

“I've been referred at one point or another to occupational health for counselling and I don't think over the years that I've been in various jobs, I've seen that actually this is grief that I'm experiencing not a general workplace issue. It's grief, because every day I go to work in a job I don't wanna do, no matter how good it might be at it or whatever, it isn't in my heart” P50

“watched the programs like, you know we are sailing and stuff like that. And I sit and I get choked up and it's about all the things that I missed… I never got my long service medal… I was never ever afforded because of who I chose, not because who I chose, but because of who I fell in love with. It’s just really sad.” P48

The impact of their unplanned discharge on their long-term financial stability was also discussed by a number of participants.

“I think actually I could be there retiring now with that money that you get for your golden handshake and your pension and you know… You could have bought it, you know, paid off your mortgage… your car, done all those things that you kind of expect … that you're promised when you sign on that dotted line. For me, it was a 22-year open engagement that I signed on to, you know, and all of a sudden it’s like… they found out who I was in a relationship with and I was no longer fit for purpose.” P48

“Having to move from city to city because I couldn't hold a job down because of the effects of those interrogations meant I couldn't integrate in the workplace. I'm jumping if somebody comes up behind me, even just talk to me in the office, because of those interrogations. And so, like, the impacts further on… because you know I've been at a food bank, I've been homeless. I've had to survive on my own.” (P50)

“But yeah, you know, hearing one of them, [name], who had a full career in the army, you know, has retired as a full colonel on a huge pension or gratuity pension, whatever. And you're just like, shit you know. I'm on just above minimum wage. I've got a mortgage until I'm 72. I'm on my own.” (P43)

### Mental health legacy of traumatic experiences

This section reports where women veterans spoke about their mental health in association with the impact of serving during ban, and post-discharge or transition. It was clear that for the women we spoke to that serving during the ban had a significant impact on their mental health. It is important to caution when reading this section, that in this project we only spoke to women who had experienced mental health difficulties in the last 5 years, both self-identified and formally diagnosed. We are conscious the evidence submitted in this section will not reflect the full impact of serving during this era on LGBT+ women’s mental health and believe that more research is needed to fully understand the impact of this era.

For some who had been discharged based on their sexuality, they shared the initial impact of this experience of their mental health was significant, with participants describing a loss of confidence related to the nature of their interrogation, as well as experiences of depression.

“And that really hit me. I basically I had a mental health breakdown then, which I didn't realize was happening. You know, I think it was called nervous breakdown. Then 30 years ago, you know, I stayed indoors for the six months… If I'm honest, I couldn't get out of bed”. P48

“Well, the first direct impact after I left. Was it shattered my confidence. Because although the allegations only ever stayed allegations, I was never charged… I was so lacking in in self-confidence anyway, but that was a devastating. It took me years to get over that and to not feel, like to eventually feel like no, you know, if I like someone and I think they like me, you know, we're in a nightclub or something. I'm gonna pluck up courage and would you like to dance or can I get your drink… but that took years. So that was a very negative impact. It's horrible.” P43

However, the impact of serving during this era, and of traumatic unplanned discharges, had a clear longer-term impact. Participants discussed enduring stress, unresolved emotions, grieving for a lost career (see 3, Nature of Discharge), and PSTD symptomology (i.e., strong emotional reactions to certain scenarios or vivid dreams related to their experience in service which seemingly related to unresolved emotions.)

“I think in terms of impact, I still have quite vivid dreams now about… it's clearly an unfinished business thing that I’ve got. Part of the dream is that I'm going back to finish my service or I've gone… since the ban, I've gone back in. Which obviously wouldn't happen, but it's just quite strange. So when it… because they’re so vivid, I think when I wake up from them, they're quite… I’m quite distressed… They can work out quite convoluted, but they always leave me feeling really quite upset the next day. So this this clearly some something unfinished and I've never really, even in the support I have had since, it's not something that's really been discussed much.” P29

“But you know, outside my house there's Sea Cadets and Air Cadets and whatever lining up for Remembrance Day parades. And it will bring on floods of tears that I couldn't make sense of. And this is as close to like, two years ago this was happening. So I don't think to be honest with you, I've even scratched the surface of where my mental health is, but I'm starting to see it and have access like counselling” P50

Several participants shared they struggled with PTSD and common mental health disorders which they related to their experiences serving during the ban, decades after the end to their service.

“I think my kind of world from that moment kind of imploded internally and since then, you know, my mental health has taken a real downward spiral over the last sort of 10 years, let's say. You know, diagnosis of PTSD, along with other things and I'm still currently seeing a psychiatrist.” P48

“So the good thing is that you know over the years through bits and bobs are counselling. I have made sense of this, but I still think I'm only scratching the surface at 51 and I feel like there is this sort of like anger and grief going on together that I can't put my finger… So yeah, you know, I've got the clinical diagnosis, whatever PTSD, which I had to fight for, depression, anxiety, all usuals. But I think it's not the service itself, it's what they did to me, terminating my service.” P50

One participant described how they related to what they had read about Post Traumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED) also.

“I read a very interesting article about a year or so ago about PTED and I was just like PTED. What the hell is that? And I read about it and I thought ohh wow and yeah, yeah. Embitterment, feeling frustrated. Feeling you haven't got a voice. You know, you're not being listened to, you're being, you know, I thought, yeah, I've got PTED for sure” P43

### Impact of MOD policy change regarding LGBT+ Service personnel and the independent review

Whilst participants acknowledge the positives of the progress the Ministry of Defence has made since the lifting on the ban in terms of the treatment and inclusion of LGBT+ Service personnel, some shared that the contrast between this and their experience can foster understandable negative emotions such as envy and resentment. Therefore, hearing about changes to policy via the news, social media or networks can be a conflicting experience:

“Looking on social media what's had quite a negative impact is how outspoken they are, about how diverse they are now and since the ban was lifted, and everything they're doing and all this sort of stuff. And they're really, you know, blowing their own trumpet. But there was no recognition about, you know, the lives that they've kind of left in tatters. And I think that kind of brewed quite a resentment with me that, you know, yeah, that’s been really hard. But I think now since Fighting With Pride are there and, you know, their sort of taking some action.” Participant 29

“We are marching in pride and we, you know, we marry our same sex partner and we get married quarters and we can do this and we can do that. And you're like it's great but it is a double-edged sword because there is that part of me I'm pleased for them and it's great and I know I played a part in it, but there is another that the embitterment part comes from. Why the fuck couldn't I have had that? It's not fair, you know. And there is. There is an envy which is not a nice emotion. And I don't like negative emotions. And I try not to feel them. But sometimes you can't help it.” Participant 43

Some participants discussed the impact of the LGBT Veteran Review itself, expressing feelings of mistrust and fears round the potential negative impact outcomes of the review may have on their well-being:

“Then I sort of like basically saw the little game that's being played by the government and potentially with this government review into our experiences and, you know, coming from the city that I come from, you know, you don't trust the Tory government. You know, you've had Hillsbourough. They lie and they covered up and the bullshit. And I'm afraid that's where they are with the review. So it's a veterans review, but it just seems to be very selective about how they're gonna go about doing it and who's gonna give evidence? Bloody blah.” Participant 50.

“And so there's always this little bit of me as like oh God, you know what if we get really disappointed or it comes to nothing, you know, we've had our hopes raised again. A door that we thought was shut has been opened and there's been a chink of light. Well, if we get disappointed again, that would be enormously stressful. And I think that would be that would be very bad for my mental health. So, I do worry a bit about it. You know, how will I feel if we get shat upon from a great height again, but the momentum is very different now and I think you know, I think the will is there. But there's always that back of my mind. Or you know, you just don't know. Especially with politics the state that it's in at the moment.” Participant 43

### 6.) Impact on veteran identity

As part of the project, participants were asked about their veteran identity, “How do you feel about your veteran status?”. These discussions revealed the complex relationship that some lesbian and bisexual women veterans have with their veteran identity, relating to feelings of shame, anger and betrayal, and comparison with peers.

One participant described a legacy of shame resulting from their discharge and how this impacted her ability to identify as a veteran:

“I guess being kicked out, kind of, there was quite a lot of shame around that so it was probably something that I just kind of… Not wanting to forget, but, you know, it's like the military didn't want me, they didn't want me as… My identity, my sexual identity, is part of me and you know, I understand it was a different time back then. But, to just… I guess actually that you know talking about it more now it's just… It did have a massive impact on, you know, that not being wanted. And it, and it did feel like, you know, on my discharge papers, it says ‘Reason for discharge: incompatible with service life’. And, that really hits actually, because that's almost putting it in writing on official military papers that actually, you know, ‘You're not the sort of person we want’. And so I think that I didn't want to call myself a veteran. I didn't feel like a veteran.” 29

However, feelings of shame relating to the intersection of their veteran status and sexuality were not the experience of all, with one veteran sharing:

“I didn't ask to be this, but I am, so for me I never ever felt a sense of shame or embarrassment. I always felt very proud to be an army trained nurse and very proud to be QA. And I never ever blamed the army or the QA's. I blame the Ministry of Defence. I blame the MP's and the prime ministers and the secretaries of state for defence. Those are the people I blame.” 43

A few veterans shared how comparisons with peers, or an ideal length of service played into their understanding of their veteran identity. Whilst this may not be necessarily unique to LGBT veterans of this era, it is important to consider how this experience may be different for those discharged based on their sexuality and unplanned discharge.

“I did [length of service]. You know, I see young PCs coming in to custody. Where I am with a chest full of medals. They're veterans, you know. I accept that I am a veteran. You know, as per the definition. I've had a few skewed looks at me when I receive a war pension because I was injured in the Navy and I went through the British Legion and receive a small pension every month for it. So any of my drugs relating to my disability, I get free. So, I click the war pension button on the back of a prescription, and they look at you as if to say, you know, are you sure? Rather overweight, you know, [age] year old [job role]. And it's kind of like, yeah, I am a veteran. But… I think I fall short of where I imagined myself to be upon becoming a veteran I after my 22 year service, you know, with the chest full of medals like, you know, Kenny Everett used to have, you know.” (P48)

In discussion with one participant the sense of anger and betrayal based on their discharge had a clear impact on their veteran identity.

“I'll go and be a veteran when I get everything back that was taken away from me… And I've said to me wife, even though I absolutely hate the queen, I absolutely hate this country. When I die. I said, you take the fucking piss and I'll have a flag over my coffin if I go before you and I'll have the guard. All that, and I've given it all the details for the armed forces organisations to sort it out. Because I basically wanna take the piss as much as I can for being a veteran, cause they taken the piss out of me, so that's me stands on it now. If I get an artifact at a discount and a pat on the back of the free glass of wine on the train somewhere because someone thinks of a veteran, I'll have it. But do you wanna be part of the military community and sit in the British Legion with a load of homophobic blokes or go to a charity that's staffed by homophobes? No. But you know, I mean, if I could upset the apple cart and turn up the British Legion, snog the face off me wife at the end and night. I don't mind doing it.” (P50).

These preliminary findings highlight a range of differing and complicated relationships with their veteran’s identity for lesbian and bisexual women veterans who served during the ban, which some sharing negative emotions relating to their veteran identity. Further research is needed to understand in more depth the relationship LGBT+ veterans who served during this era have to their veteran status and the impact this has on their mental health and wellbeing. It is also important to consider the impact that this may have on their willingness to engage with veteran badged and specific services, both NHS and 3rd sector.

### Summary of evidence submitted

Our research has highlighted a distinct lack of UK research exploring the impact of the historic ban on LGBT+ veterans. More research is needed to better understand the experiences of those veterans affected, and the impact that this has on their lives today.

Whilst neither of the research projects discussed in this submission focused specifically on the experience of LGBT+ women’s experience serving during the ban, both projects contribute to our understanding in this area given the limited research exploring UK LGBT+ veterans experiences during this era. Both projects evidence the negative impact of the ban on LGBT+ women veterans, including significant impact on their health and wellbeing.

Most importantly, both projects evidence the enduring impact that these experiences have on the lives of women veterans today and emphasise how issues related to the ban cannot be considered things of the past.

Meeting the needs of women veterans in mental health services: Co-designing guidance for healthcare professionals (2022- ongoing)

Some participants discussed the importance of mental healthcare professional having a good understanding of their military background, including how their experiences may have differed due to their sexuality. A lack of understanding of the adversity LGBT+ veterans may have faced during their service and transition during the ban by mental healthcare professional may act as a barrier to veterans accessing support or receiving quality support.

“He was very surprised, as was my therapist, that I had been discharged and spent six days in a jail cell and six months under investigation, and there was all those horrific headlines. There were very, very surprised. Both of them have been incredibly surprised at that and flabbergasted that it was, at the time, less than 30 years ago. But I think they I don't think they had a clue. I don't think they had a Scooby. As to how that would impact you? How if I told them you could no longer be a psychiatrist, or you could no longer be… therapist just because of the person you choose to go to bed with tonight. We're gonna. You're gonna lose, you know. Your job, your house, your family, your friends, your identity, your pension, you know, all of that's gone overnight. Because who you fell in love with?” P48

Some lesbian and bisexual women veterans in the sample discussed the positive impact of peer support on their wellbeing and veteran identity. Therefore, continuation of current positive peer support organisations, such as a fighting with pride, and the expansion of specific LGBT+ peer support into other services supporting veterans may help to make services more accessible and inclusive.

“But yeah, the shared experience of having all either you know, been thrown out or investigated, or lived a closeted and hidden life or whatever, you know that's what tied us together… It's a weird thing… And then I was very tied up with rank outsiders and the campaign and obviously yes, being surrounded by other people fighting for the same thing who'd suffered in similar ways, and we all knew what an injustice was. You know that kept me going for a very long time.” P43

Our research can only speak how veterans dismissed or otherwise required to leave service due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation would feel recognised, accepted, acknowledged and appreciated for their service in a very limited way as this question was not the focus of either project.

However, discussion with SMEs and lesbian and bisexual women veterans in the two projects outlined above lends support to appropriate compensation in recognition of the value of their service and the impact of their in-service and discharge experience on their lives.

One SME shared their belief, as part of the ‘We Also Served’ Report, that compensation for being discharged as a result of the ban was less prevalent than compensation acquired due to other historic discriminatory policies and suggested this may be related to stigma:

“Financial compensation did ameliorate some of the indignity and trauma of it… whereas that has not happened for, for the gay community. But I think the gay community were stigmatised and reticent as a community, which meant that they didn’t go down the route of compensation. I think that might change… I think that the landmark of 20 years since the ban was lifted has raised its head. I think there may be more movement in that direction” (P11)

One veteran shared, when discussing their veteran identity, “I'll go and be a veteran when I get everything back that was taken away from me”. (P50)

We direct the review to the Research with the UK LGBT+ Veteran Community Conference run by the Northern Hub for Veterans and Families Research on the 12th of January 2023.

We are aware the charity Fighting with Pride and Northumbria University are currently undertaking research in this area are undertaking research directly investigating the impact of the homosexuality ban on female veterans.

Wright, T., Honor, S., Edwards, P. (2022) Exit Wounds. Members of the LGBTQ+ community share their lived experiences of life before, during and after service in the UK military. Forward Assist and Salute Her UK Privileged Access Interview Report. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5829ccde2e69cf19589499ac/t/62b0be09d519264246126e9d/1655750158570/Exit+Wounds+LGBT+TW+6.pdf

‘We also Served’: Recommendations

We draw attention to Recommendation 14 of the ‘We Also Served’ report, published in 2021:

“that mixed methods research is undertaken to determine the impact of historic discriminatory policies on the health and well-being of UK female veterans, and the differential impact of Service era on help-seeking and support needs. This research will provide veteran support services with an understanding of whether female veterans’ support needs differ depending on the era in which they served and whether specific support is required for those who served under discriminatory policies”.

### Intersectionality

Caution was expressed by some of the SMEs in the ‘We Also Served’ report against treating people as one homogenous group based on one aspect of their identity, whether that be as a woman, veteran or female veteran. Doing so was seen to distract from the diversity that may exist within the group, how the individual prefers to be defined, as well as other aspects of a person’s experiences. Therefore, we would suggest an intersectional approach is taken by future research projects which accounts for comparisons across service branches, generations and rank/hierarchy, as well as other identities such as LGBTQ+ and parenthood given that within-group nuances may be lost when groups are viewed homogenously.

### Compensation

Based on our findings, we recommendation that research is undertaken to explore the experiences of pursuing compensation as a result of being discharged due to the Homosexuality ban, including barriers, awareness, prevalence, and impact of the process on the lives of those affected.

## The Northern Ireland Veterans Health and Wellbeing Study (NIVHWS)

The Northern Ireland Veterans Health and Wellbeing Study was a unique large-scale tri-service (Army, Navy, & RAF) research project funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) and the Big Lottery Fund. As part of this programme a survey was administered between 2017 and 2019 assessing several aspects of health and wellbeing in this group receiving 1,329 responses. The majority of these responses were from white, heterosexual males which is broadly indicative of this group.

Assessment of LGBTQ issues was not a core focus of this survey; however, some basic data was collected on gender and sexual identities. Of the total sample, two respondents reported a transgender identity (0.2%); one transgender male and one transgender female. In total 18 respondents reported a non-heterosexual orientation (1.4%); 11 homosexual, six bisexual, and one asexual. However, as this survey was not specifically indicated to include such issues, as such respondents may have chosen not to disclose their LGBT identiy.As part of the survey, respondents were also asked their reason(s) for leaving the military. It is worth noting that two responses cited that “being gay” or “coming out” was part of their decision to leave the armed forces.

The NIVHWS has conducted a broader programme of work and produced several reports (http://niveteranstudy.org/northern-ireland-veterans-study). Many recommendations have been made across these reports and although they were not specific to the LGBTQ population several of the these reports could also alleviate issues facing this group. For example, we have recommended that there are programs made available which focus on community integration and building of relationships between veterans and the community in a safe and meaningful way. Additional, we suggested a public awareness campaign promoting positive images of veteran mental health, and simultaneously increasing awareness about mental ill health and problematic alcohol usage for some Northern Ireland Veterans(but doing so in a sensitive and non-stigmatising way). These could mitigate against barriers to care for Northern Ireland Veterans when partnered with an increase in the availability of support services. Finally, raising awareness amongst NI Veterans on the specific provisions of the Armed Forces Covenant, ensuring appropriate service provision and engagement for the veteran community.

It might be suggested that increasing awareness of sub-populations among Northern Ireland Veterans may be beneficial and lead to better understanding of factors leading to differences in social and psychological wellbeing, including more proactive outreach to identify and engage hidden or hard to reach populations, such as LGBTQ+ Veterans. Improving resources for local organisation would allow for greater initiative planning, such as proactive strategies for providing services as Veterans age, including dementia-related care, and alternative services centring social and peer support to build positive mental health and wellbeing. Finally, increased support for transition would support the long-term needs of NI Veterans, including employment and family experiences of transition to civilian life.

There however is a critical lack of empirical information in this area, meaning that LGBTQ Veterans living in Northern Ireland remain a hidden group within an already hidden and often hard-to-reach community. There is a crucial need for further investigation specifically examining the experiences of this group to better understand and serve their needs.

## Individual who works in the area

Completed as an individual who is from a military family and has worked in the military-third sector (mental health & wellbeing arena) as a complex caseworker for over ten years across several charities and member of multiple civil-military partnership boards. The charitable questionnaire is aimed at the views of an organisation not case worker / advocate. These views are expressed as an individual and not as the views of any organisation I have worked for.

Through my job role I have spoken to, and provided holistic, wellbeing support to over 25 LGBT+ veterans who were impacted by the ‘ban’. I have also heard many accounts of individuals who served during the era of 1967-2000 and witnessed the mistreatment of LGBT+ veterans but were not LGBT+. I grew up with a parent who served in the British Army spanning 1970s/80s/90s.

As a caseworker, I have spoken to numerous people who felt they were bullied, interrogated, assaulted and either hounded out of their job roles within the British Military, dishonourably discharged, or simply felt they had to PVR due to the sheer pressure of fearing the catastrophic, life-changing repercussions they would face if they were discovered to be LGBT+. Many having witnessed the mistreatment of LGBT+ colleagues.

Many people I talked to did not feel able to give testimony to this review because of the legacy of shame and fear they feel. Many also reported feeling unable to complete this review because they could not bear to ‘open up old wounds’ and feared the impact on their mental health. Many spoke of ‘burying’ their experiences.

I have been astounded to hear six first-hand accounts from LGBT+ veterans who report that they were sexually assaulted by their superiors after their interrogation (both male and female veterans) for being LGBT+ service personnel. Every account I have heard has mentioned the ritual humiliation, degrading questioning and treatment they were subjected to. Some also forced to undertake psychological assessment and treatment. Most were ‘outed’ to their families. All of the individuals I have spoken to feel that the lengths that SIB / RMP went to, to question, detain, interrogate and humiliate, often based on little evidential proof of sexuality was disproportionate and inhumane.

One male veteran broke down in tears as he told me “You didn’t consider it rape at the time, you just accepted it as your fate. You couldn’t hide on a ship, there was no hiding, you just waited for your fate every night until you could be thrown off the ship…it ruined my life, I’m retired now and I’ve hidden myself away for my entire life”.

Another female veteran told me “he just kept telling me he would f\*\*\* the gay out of me, I lay so still, petrified. I still see him when I close my eyes”. Two other female veterans, unknown to one another have re-iterated an almost identical phrase.

I spoke to two veterans (separately) who were high-ranking police officers, they told me how they had hidden their military experiences for their entire police careers. One gentleman sobbed as he told me ‘I’ve hidden who I am for my entire career because of what the army did me and until this review I had not realised how angry I am and how it has impacted my mental health for my whole life’.

I have supported many veterans who have suffered enduring mental illness as a consequence of their experiences, many have a clinical diagnosis of C-PTSD. Despite some twenty or thirty years passing since they were discharged, these individuals are still involved with community mental health support, unable to move forward with their lives, including one individual I met who has been living under a ‘temporary’ community section order for over 15 years, unable to live independently due to the trauma of their discharge.

Sadly, I believe many mental health teams have little to no knowledge of the ban, let alone knowledge of the armed forces, and due to their experiences, the veterans state they do not feel safe when accessing ‘veteran-specific’ support, many simply ‘fall through the cracks’ compounding their difficulties over a long period of time.

A large proportion of the veterans I have supported have been profoundly impacted by the wider determinants of health including insecure housing, low income, unemployment, social isolation, involvement in the criminal justice system with poor health outcomes. Several have never worked since their discharge.

Having also dealt with ‘heterosexual’ veteran support for individuals who were not discharged, in contrast, I am struck by the embitterment of the LGBT+ veterans I meet, many are incredibly hard to engage in support services and have an extreme level of mistrust, they have a much smaller (if any) support network; mostly single and estranged from families due to their sexuality. From my personal experience, the individuals most profoundly impacted by the ‘ban’ have a propensity to also feel anger and hostility towards any organisation or body trying to support them, demonstrating what I can only explain as an extreme sense of ‘hopelessness’ and abandonment.

During my time working with veteran-supporting organisations, I have been told by veterans, who now express remorse, how ‘queer bashing’ was an acceptable practice, how it was a well-known activity during the era of the ban to ‘hunt down’ and physically assault LGBT+ veterans solely due to their sexuality.

I would also like to raise the impact of the ‘ban’ on the wider military family. As a civilian individual who identifies as LGBT+ with a parent who served a full service in the British Army during the era of the ban (in my formative years), I also feel that the historic policy has had a wider, detrimental impact on the LGBT+ children of serving personnel during the era of the ‘ban’. I grew up in a household that was hostile towards anyone from the LGBT+ community with extreme homophobic language, threats of violence and slurs being used openly. As a teen, I often overheard dehumanising conversations about people ‘perceived’ to be gay in the military. I believe that the British Military had a huge part to play in the ‘programming’ of extreme anti-lgbt views to individuals serving in the British Military (across all ranks) which enforced homophobic attitudes such as LGBT+ people being ‘illegal’, weak and immoral during a time where homosexuality was in fact legal in civil law. I believe growing up in military quarters, effectively growing up under military law not civil law, has also caused me to spend a great deal of my life hiding who I am and has ultimately impacted my relationship with family.

### Dismissal

I have spoken to people who have been dishonourably discharged, left under duress and those who completed full service.

### Medals & Compensation

I have spoken to people who have both claimed and not claimed both.

### Acceptance, Inclusion, Remedy.

Inclusion campaign, recognition by way of MoD Veterans Badge, replace discharge books, issue a full, government and Royal apology. Ensure education across the sector and zero tolerance of discrimination – some military charities still refuse to engage with those who have ‘dishonourable discharge’ on their books. A day of Armed Forces week could be dedicated to LGBT+ veterans / diversity & inclusion in the Military.

Funding for adequate and specific mental health pathways that is not short-term. Support services take time to be established.

Top-down education programmes, visible demonstration of commitment to inclusion to encourage individuals to feel safe when asking for support, zero policy on homophobia within organisations. Dedicated LGBT+ inclusion workers, specific Mental Health pathways not ‘generalist’. Ultimately, I feel in order to be able to engage in long-term support and recovery, these individuals need access to high-quality, tailored, ongoing, mental health support from professional psychiatry teams working alongside community level workers who support community level, asset-based inclusion / integration, wellbeing maintenance and support with the respect of wider determinants of health and wellbeing such as housing, finance and isolation.

END.

# Organisations

## Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

We are the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund and provide financial, practical and emotional support to all members of the RAF Family. The RAF Family currently is about 1.1M people in size, comprising those who are serving and their families, and all RAF veterans, their partners and widow/widowers. We also support other organisations who directly benefit the lives of the RAF Family In 2021, we helped about 44,600 and spent about £22m on our work.

In our work, we are blind to an individual's sexual orientation, colour, religious beliefs or any other characteristics. If they are eligible for our support, then they are eligible. We are only concerned with their needs and how we can help them within our agreed and inclusive policies.

We share the Government's view that the ban was wrong. Our primary concern is that members of the LGBT community who served in the RAF, might conflate the then Government's view with what the RAF Benevolent Fund's stance is and that might therefore in some way be a blocker to individuals asking us for support during difficult times. This is of course incorrect, but we recognise the hurdle that the ban could/would have put in the way to help and support. Our services are already inclusive. However, we do accept that some members of the LGBT community might be concerned about applying to us for help and support. To help in this, we are working with Fighting with Pride (FWP) and have agreed to fund 50% of a caseworker post for two years, to act as a trusted agent to our services. We continue to work with FWP and the funded caseworker to maximise the opportunities that exist. We are also awaiting details of FWP's kite mark, which we would look upon positively and would hope to be able to display.

We are not a campaigning organisation and will leave this for others to opine. I am aware that there is ongoing research in the Sector, mainly inspired by FWP who would seem to be the central point of contact in this work.

I am aware that there is ongoing research in the Sector, mainly inspired by FWP who would seem to be the central point of contact in this work.

I would only ask that part of any information sharing, post report announcement or subsequent campaigning, that it is emphasised that the RAF Benevolent Fund and (I am sure that I can speak for the other Services as well) their Royal Navy and Army equivalents actively welcome applications for support from all members of the veterans communities, no matter their sexual orientation. Our sole focus is supporting those who are eligible for support during tough times, and enhancing their life wherever possible within our organisation's policies.

## National Secular Society

The NSS is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 1866, funded by its members and by donations. We advocate for separation of religion and state and promote secularism as the best means of creating a society in which people of all religions and none can live together fairly and cohesively. We seek a diverse society where all are free to practise their faith, change it, or to have no faith at all. We uphold the universality of individual human rights, which should never be overridden on the grounds of religion, tradition or culture. Our campaigns to reform of army chaplaincy and ensure same-sex marriage ceremonies are available on military bases are relevant to both LGBT serving members of the forces and veterans.

No one should be prevented from serving their country on the basis of their sexuality. The ban on LGBT personnel in the armed forces community was misguided and discriminatory and no doubt inflicted immense harm upon those LGBT individuals who felt unable to join the forces; those discharged from the forces; and those individuals who felt coerced into concealing their sexuality.

Significant reforms to the chaplaincy system and accessibility of military chapels for same-sex marriages are necessary to make the army more inclusive for all LGBT people.

Only ministers of a select group of eight 'sending churches', all Christian, may be chaplains (or 'padres') of regular army units. The 'sending churches' include denominations well-known for their anti-LGBT views, including the Free Church of Scotland, Elim Pentecostal Church and the Salvation Army.

There is no equivalent 'chaplain' specifically for the nonreligious. The Armed Forces guidance on religion or belief says: "Should non-religious personnel in the Armed Forces wish to discuss their beliefs or problems with someone other than chaplains, there are a wide range of non-religious organisations which provide support and advice, including social workers, doctors and other professionals.”

As military chaplains are required to "set forth God's word at all times" according to the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, gay soldiers may be less willing to approach a chaplain, particularly with issues relating to relationships. They may reasonably doubt the chaplain’s ability to provide impartial and non-judgmental counselling if the chaplain belongs to an institution and belief system that views their lifestyles as sinful. The armed forces must therefore ensure there is a nonreligious equivalent to the chaplain available to all those whose pastoral needs are not met by the Christian chaplains.

There are still virtually no options for those who desire a same-sex marriage on military premises. Those who wish to marry on barracks can only marry in a military chapel – which is largely under the control of the sending churches, most of which object to same-sex marriage.

As a result, while there are 190 military chapels in England and Wales registered for marriages, there has only been one gay wedding in a military chapel since same-sex marriage was legalised in 2014. Because there are no secular provisions for weddings on military sites, gay personnel have no meaningful options but to marry on a civilian site.

The MoD must take meaningful action to ensure that access to same-sex marriage on military sites is a practical and effective rather than theoretical and illusory.

Both of these issues, which affect serving soldiers, necessarily affect LGBT veterans too. Any soldiers who were unable to access non-judgemental counselling while serving may experience ongoing mental health issues because of this. Similarly, there may be ongoing difficulties for those who were unable to have a same-sex marriage ceremony on base.

It would give many LGBT veterans validation and reassurance that they are being listened to if chaplaincy and marriage in the armed forces were reformed to be genuinely inclusive of LGBT people.

The government should research LGBT soldiers’ satisfaction rates with current chaplaincy provisions.

The government should research LGBT soldiers’ satisfaction rates with current provision of same-sex marriage ceremonies on military bases.

## Fighting With Pride response 1

I am a Veterans Community Worker for Fighting With Pride. I cover the London area.

We provide specific support and signposting for LGBT+ Veterans, serving personnel and their families, with a specific focus on LGBT+ Veterans affected by the ban.

We deliver Face to Face emotional support, community events, signposting on to other organisations, and general help with wellbeing after being isolated for so long from their military and LGBT+ communities. That it was a shameful event in the MoD’s past that should never had happened, and that we are readily seeing how ‘The Ban’ destroyed and continues to destroy and disrupt people’s lives.

I am coming into contact with Veterans who had a wide range of experiences – from those who were indeed investigated by the SIB, pulled in front of senior ranks, interrogated as if they were involved in espionage, and thrown in military prison, to those who were questioning themselves as young people, wanted advice and found themselves thrown in a psychiatric ward to be ‘treated’, or thrown out of the forces completely. There was a huge range of experiences – the next is never the same as the last, but they are all as equally traumatic and staggering as the next.

I work with Veterans who still, despite being out for 30 or so years, are not financially stable, have never been in steady work and who certainly are feeling the affects psychologically and physically of the trauma they went through totally alone. I have seen the devastating affect this has had and has seeped into the everyday life of those I support. Relationships are affected – there are huge trust issues. There’s always a threat of a knock at the door. They can’t be open and live authentically for a fear of the bullying. They can’t embrace who they are and live freely because they were once so brutally punished for it.

Most of all, the most surprising thing I have come across, is the desperate want to be involved again in the military community. Most veterans so desperately longed for the military lifestyle when joining – the camaraderie, the tradition, the structure, and crucially the pride. Most had spotless records, and had great friends. They were an asset to the Forces of our country, and they were the individuals in society who stepped forward to commit to making that sacrifice for the country when called. To think that the veterans I support were then treated with such vitriol and violence for simply who they loved is unfathomable.

The emotion when I accompanied 30 Veterans past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday – 20 of which had not just never marched past but had not worn their berets since being discharged – was palpable, and it was just a privilege to host them.

The impact of what happened reaches far and wide into each Veteran’s life and varies just as much as each individual experience of the ban. But the isolation, distrust, disengagement with communities , and above all the extraordinary injustice that these individuals had to endure makes you realise how abandoned and betrayed these people were. The country owes it’s freedom to these people and we have abandoned them and left them to deal with this incredible hurt and betrayal alone. Better mandatory training for anybody working or volunteering with the services regarding inclusivity and diversity, and a zero tolerance approach to discrimination or hateful behaviour.

There needs to be a huge amount of education – most will exclude veterans based on the conditions of their discharge, and so with a dishonourable discharge on their records (If they even still exist), this excludes LGBT+ Veterans from support and help. A deeper understanding that this was totally immoral and is no longer recognised, will be a huge step into making sure there is equal access.

There needs to also be a zero tolerance approach to how other veterans treat LGBT+ Veterans. Just because you have served in the military during a certain period of time with certain views, does not inherently give you a free pass to be homophobic, transphobic, racist or misogynistic. Some Veterans spaces can be completely intolerable and hostile because behaviour is not challenged. This is up to the charities and organisations to uphold, and there needs to be real life consequences if these standards are not met.

The landscape of Veterans is changing and organisations need to update themselves or hand over duties to those far better equipped for the veterans of today. There needs to be some sort of validation and consultancy process.

* A public, full apology made by MoD, His Majesty’s Government and individuals representing the tri-forces. This cannot be hidden away in some barely attended debate in the commons or Lords, or just simply recorded or a written statement put online. This needs to be public, open and attended by those who need to hear it.
* Stories shared (With permission). The MoD need to stop hiding from their shameful past and confront it. These stories need to be saved and archived for the education of the public, for the LGBT+ Rights Movement and for civil history. This cannot be repeated.
* An official retraction and/or correction for the reason of discharge. I no longer want to come across the hurdles of not being able to get a Veteran the support they so desperately need and deserve because their discharge reason hasn’t been modified.
* Financial compensation for the loss of pensions. Any sort of financial compensation to support these veterans with years and years of dedicated service who have lost everything.
* Specific medical and mental health support.
* Education on the subject and the ban – for young people, for recruits, for senior ranks, for the public. To not be repeated, this must be known. Northumbria University in conjunction with Fighting With Pride are looking into the affects of the ban on LGBT+ Veterans. Talk to as many people who experienced it as possible

Talk to those who enforced it, and served alongside those who got discharged.

A public record/archive of what happened and the stories surrounding it. Please bare in mind how varied experiences were. MAny veterans are concerned that they may be excluded from reparations because they were never investigated, or put in prison etc. There is real concern that because of the varying methods used to hunt down LGBT+ personnel and exclude them, that depending on how their individual story went, they will be excluded again. Please remember how differently everyone, but yet still validly, experienced the ban.

## Fighting With Pride response 2

Reparations and LGBT+ Veterans – Fighting With Pride’s Interim Position

In July the LGBT Veterans Independent Review asked Fighting With Pride for an interim position on reparations. In this letter we have provided our views, which were formed over a period of years and with the benefit of listening to hundreds of hours of accounts of the impact of the ban. We are still learning of the consequences of the ban and this list will be updated before the Call for Evidence is ended:

* Financial Reparations. It is FWPs informed conclusion that the ban has had serious and enduring impact upon the lives of LGBT+ veterans and a deep sense of injustice is felt today. Reparations payment, for hurt and the lifetime financial impact of the ban should be awarded on the scale set by the European Court of Human Rights (2000), with appropriate indexing retrospectively applied to those who lost their way of life as a result of the illegal ban upon their service. The manner in which careers ended is not relevant and reparations payments should also be paid to those affected by the ban who survived it.
* Effective Date of Reparations. In the years following the lifting of the ban, the Armed Forces remained an unwelcoming environment for LGBT+ serving personnel and many left the Aremd Forces in these years because insufficient positive action was taken to enable inclusion. FWP considers that the Armed Forces finally accepted the LGBT+ diversity and inclusion business case when the British Army became the last of our Armed Forces to allow uniform to be worn at Pride in London, on Saturday 5th July 2008. After this date, Commanders-in-Chief universally supported positive action.
* Pensions. Financial arrangements should be put in place to remedy the loss of pensions, or failure to accrue pensions or the diminution of pensions as a result of criminal convictions, or dismissal or constructive dismissal, particularly in cases where retirement income will lead to impoverished lives or lifestyles below the standard desired for all veterans. In addition where gratuities were missed owing to discahage ahead of qualify dates, these should be index linked and paid.
* Resettlement. The manner in which LGBT+ members of the Armed Forces ended their careers afforded little or no opportunity to prepare for 2nd careers. Education and training should be provided for those denied these opportunities at the point of resettlement (or as now called ‘transition’).
* Community Building. Funding should be provided to enable community building for isolated, lonely and hard to reach LGBT+ Veterans in all organisations with a proven ability to support this community. In particular this should include opportunities for veterans to take part in regional and national events which from to time become available to veteran communities by individual invitation. Examples are attendance at Royal Garden Parties, tattoos, national ceremonial events, open days and other such occasions where the participation of veterans is invited.
* Formal Revoking of Historic Prohibitions. The wearing of uniform (such as berets) by LGBT+ Veterans, and the use of military ranks, should be formally reinstated, whether such prohibitions were backed by service policy or not. Where these letters of prohibition exist, they are observed. Where officers were struck from service Retired Lists simply for being LGBT+, they should also be reinstated. These conditions reinforce the shame and unworthiness felt by many individuals and prevent them from revealing their service and status as a veteran.
* Recognition. Visible recognition of LGBT+ service during the ban would, for some, help restore a sense of achievement of being part of a community which together faced hardship. This might be achieved with a pin badge, or perhaps a medal (community input would be needed). A suitable memorial that acknowledges those lost should also be provided. This record should be at the National Memorial Arboretum, recognising that our Armed Forces communities face a future in which we will all stand together to remember those we have lost). It would also be appropriate to have a commemorative plaque which celebrates those who fought for the ban to be lifted, the site of this should be decided through community consultation.
* Apology. The ban impacted every single person who served who was LGBT+, whether identified or not, and the simplest form of reparation for the consequences, regardless of their severity, is meaningful apology. Armed Forces veterans and serving personnel recognise that they serve the Sovereign and any apology should be made by the Sovereign. Provision should also be made for individual letters of apology from either the Ministry of Defence or the Armed Forces Commanders-in-Chief, depending upon the circumstances of each case.
* Historical Record. Support should be given to initiatives that will record the history of the ban and that celebrate the service of LGBT+ Veterans. Giving them their rightful place in the history of the Armed Forces, one that was earned, but taken away and hidden is of particularly importance.
* Medals. A check upon rejected applications for the return of medals that takes into account mitigation for the impact of lived experience of LGBT+ Veterans during the years of the ban. The current medal return process is not attractive due to the application process, it is seen as a system that suggests medals were lost, not removed. The return of medals also needs investment in outreach, no impactful action has been taken to bring this scheme to the attention of the general public.
* Disregard of Offences/Royal Pardons. A check upon rejected applications for the Disregard of Offences/Royal Pardons that takes into account mitigation for the impact of lived experience of LGBT+ Veterans during the years of the ban.
* Better Health and Wellbeing Support. Many LGBT+ veterans do not take up available health or wellbeing support or see themselves as qualifying for available support. Similarly, many support organisations don’t understand why they are not of interest to LGBT+ veterans. Resources that enable effective outreach will be needed and effort made to demonstrate the warm welcome that exists.
* Investment in connection to military family. (community Building) Veterans should be valued as members of the military family though invites to military events or other events that would help make them feel proud of their service and respected as veterans. We swathe value of this on mental health, confidence and self-respect at Wellington Barracks pre Pride, National Remembrance, visit to BRNC etc.
* Sustainability of the Armed Forces LGBT+ Charity. FWP is a unique charity because it serves no other purpose than the support of LGBT+ veterans, serving personnel and families. Beyond the LGBT Veterans Independent Review, FWP will evolve and have strong similarities to the many long founded, service charities whose work is funded by trust fund income and reserves generated by the benevolence of past generations. At variance to most other veterans charities, FWP is hampered by a constant need for our primary focus to be fundraising, which is a substantial distraction from FWPs important work, and leaves the future of our community building work unsure. It is vital that FWP is provided with sufficient funding to guarantee its future.

## Royal British Legion

### About Us

The Royal British Legion (RBL) is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring that their unique contribution is never forgotten. We were created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of the First World War and remain one of the UK’s largest membership organisations. RBL is the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, helping veterans young and old transition into civilian life. We help with employment, financial issues, respite, and recovery, through to lifelong care and independent living. In 2019 the RBL launched its first ever LGBTQ+ & Allies branch. For further information, please visit www.britishlegion.org.uk

### General Comments

RBL is pleased to have the opportunity to provide evidence to the LGBT Veterans Independent Review (the Review). As the largest provider of welfare support within the Armed Forces charity sector, we are keen to promote and support this endeavour. To our knowledge the Review is the first of its kind within the UK, and one that was warmly welcomed by RBL upon its inclusion within the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) Veterans’ Strategy Action Plan in early 2022. This Review has been launched 20 years after the lifting of the Ban, finally providing those veterans who were affected with an appropriate and thorough means to have their experiences heard, and the impact of the Ban on their lives addressed. It would be an understatement to say that this Review is long overdue.

Our response is based on a review of existing literature, RBL’s experience and knowledge, and a series of interviews and focus groups held with LGBT veterans who served within the timeframe of the Ban. Where appropriate quotes are included in our evidence from these interviews, however we have sought to remove any identifying information to protect the anonymity of those who shared their story with us.

The dearth of literature within this field means that we cannot claim that our evidence should be seen as a comprehensive or representative account of the experiences of LGBT veterans within the era of the Ban. RBL would support the exploration of any further research gaps that the Review highlights.

RBL urges that the Review places the lived experience of those individuals who engage with it front and foremost beyond the evidence submitted by representative organisations, especially in deciding on recommendations.

For both the Government and the wider civil and charitable sector, the Review represents an opportunity to improve services and address past decisions which failed to meet the needs of LGBT veterans in the UK. RBL believes that this will not only enable us to meet the needs of those who served under the Ban and failed to receive the dignity, respect, and avenues of support that they should have expected, but also to ensure that we meet the needs of LGBT veterans who have served over the past two decades, are still serving or may serve in the future. RBL will reflect upon the Review’s recommendations when they are published in 2023 and consider whether RBL could change and improve our own services and engagement with the LGBT community.

Within this response, RBL will use the abbreviation LGBT for those groups affected to align with the Review’s own terminology.

RBL is extremely grateful to all those LGBT veterans who generously shared their stories and reflections with us to aid in the preparation of this submission.

### Summary of Recommendations

* Despite the work of the Review, knowledge and understanding of the outstanding needs of this cohort and the impact of the Ban remain under-researched, the need for further research to understand the experience and impact of this Ban on LGBT veterans remains. RBL recommends that further research is carried out into the mental health profile of LGBT veterans who served under the Ban, particularly exploring the attributability of mental health conditions and trajectories to their experience in Service and discharge.
* Armed Forces charities should attend to the recommendations of the Review and lead by example in adopting and promoting inclusive policies for LGBT veterans. The leading Armed Forces casework charities should set the standard for effective and proactive casework and promoting best practice in working with LGBT veterans to build trust, and work with LGBT veterans to identify how they want to be involved and engaged.
* Support and funding should be made available through the Armed Forces charity sector to enable community building for isolated, lonely, and hard to reach LGBT veterans to involve them in the military family, events, and commemorative services.
* RBL and membership-based Service charities should work with LGBT veterans to educate the wider Armed Forces community on the experiences of those who served under the Ban and promote their contribution to HM Armed Forces.
* RBL and other Service charities should reflect on our practices to ensure they are LGBT inclusive and consider where we need to redesign services to better provide for all those in the Armed Forces community.
* The Government should contact those that it can identify to proactively seek to reinstate medallic recognition lost as a result of discharge, and in doing so it actively distributes the veterans badge to promote a sense of inclusion, and includes a personal and direct apology for past treatment at an individual level. A full and frank apology from the most senior level of Government, whilst not a universal request, is something many of the veterans RBL spoke to believed would be an important part of reparation.
* The Ministry of Defence should identify those veterans who may be lost from the system through a combination of data analysis of Service records, seeking out documentation and testimony of the Special Investigations Branch, and develop an advertising campaign encouraging veterans or surviving dependents to come forward.

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* We recommend the Review works with RBL and the Government to establish appropriate funding and sponsorship to erect a memorial to the LGBT Armed Forces community at the National Memorial Arboretum.
* We urge the Review to consider the calls for compensation for trauma, loss of earnings, and the loss of pension right accrual.

### Context – the LGBT Ban

In 1967 the Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexual behaviour within the UK between men aged over 21. However, it would take another 33 years for the UK military to amend their exemption to this rule and allow LGBT personnel to serve in the Armed Forces, repealing the Ban. On the 12th January 2000, following a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, the Government introduced a new code of service conduct which would allow LGBT personnel to serve, and for the first time, not face dismissal as a result of their sexuality.

In the intervening years, it is not known how many personnel left Service, either through disciplinary procedures, through medical discharge or through their own choice as a result of the Ban. Quantities are masked through incomplete records which for many simply recorded the phrase, ‘Services no longer required’ as their grounds for dismissal. However, it is estimated that several thousand personnel may have been affected and forced into early retirement or discharge, sacrificing pensions, career aspirations and, for many, having their medals and honours stripped from them.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Steps towards addressing the treatment of veterans who served under the Ban have begun. A month after the High Court ordered medals to be returned to those who had had them stripped, and to mark the 20th anniversary of the lifting of the Ban, in 2020 Johnny Mercer, the Minister for Defence People and Veterans apologised for the Ban saying, "it was unacceptable then and it is unacceptable now… and I wanted to personally apologise to you today for those experiences."[[2]](#footnote-2)

**However, knowledge and understanding of the outstanding needs of this cohort remain under-researched and despite the work of the Review the need for further research to understand the experience and impact of this Ban on LGBT veterans remains.**

### LGBT Service personnel experience of the Ban

There is no doubt within both UK and international literature, and within the testimonies of those who lived through the era of the Ban within the UK Armed Forces who were lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, that the Ban has had serious and long-lasting detrimental impact on lives. Within testimony provided to RBL, instances of sexual and physical assault, bullying, hounding and psychological trauma were recounted, and we have no doubt the Review is aware of many more. Even within those who were not investigated and left the Forces under their own volition, the scars of the Ban are still evident within their narratives.

### In Service

Both international and domestic literature highlight the increased risk of sexual assault faced by LGBT personnel in the Armed Forces. Within the US military where the ‘Don’t ask, Don’t tell’ policy was in place until 2010, research found LGBT Service members “to be at an elevated risk of sexual and stalking victimisation”[[3]](#footnote-3), something that is borne out through narrative testimony to be mirrored within the UK Armed Forces who served under the time of the Ban. The Exit Wounds report compiled through the UK charity Forward Assist contains the accounts of 20 former LGBT personnel all of whom report having been sexually assaulted whilst serving.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Veterans whom RBL spoke to have told of the both sexual and physical assault that they were subjected to in Service. In the experience of those veterans who have allowed us to share their stories, the culture that existed within Service at the time enabled the assault and provided little retribution for those who carried it out.

“The last year that I was in Service, I was in Germany in ’80, I was sexually assaulted by a senior officer who basically said all I need is a good man to sort me out. You know that sort of attitude. I complained about it. You know, put in a complaint to my office and then found that a month later, I was being sent back to the UK.”

Army Veteran

“I was at work on night shift, one night I was, I can only say, attacked by three male Sappers. They didn't, you know, hit me or anything like that. But they took me out the back door dragged me out back, tied me to a fence. The slop bucket from the cookhouse was put over my head. So it was like all just food from people’s scrapings. This was like three o'clock in the morning, three/four o'clock in the morning. They then proceeded to jet wash me down with freezing cold water. Once they finished, you know, got fed up with that. They then put the hose pipe down the back of my jumper left it on full and just left me there. And I was tied to that fence for two hours before somebody came.

Yeah, I've been there about 2 hours and then a couple of the girls come looking for me. They obviously untie me from the fence. We went and the only person I could complain to was this Sergeant. He just told me to go back up to the accommodation block, get changed. And they would deal with it. Nothing was ever done about it. Nothing.”

Army Veteran

The narratives of assault emerge from a culture where suspected homosexual identity was grounds for investigatory behaviours by peers, seniors, and the military police’s Special Investigations Branch (SIB), that were described by an RBL interviewee as akin to “psychological torture” (Naval Veteran).

“They put [you through] a serious psychological torture, basically and… it lives with you for the rest of your days”

Navy Veteran

“I was just treated absolutely terrible. There was one guy, Sergeant from Royal Engineers. He, every night he would get me in his office … Tell me, you know … all the time, there's no place for people like you in the Army. And I want a letter from you admitting to being queer, they were his words, queer. In fact, he used different derogatory terms every time.”

Army Veteran

“They destroyed you as a human being, they’d say you were vile and disgusting to make you feel you were betraying everything.”

Navy Veteran

“They would come into your room. They would search through your personal belongings. They would read your letters. They would just accuse you of stuff you know, to try and catch you out with stuff. My eldest sister was killed in a car accident in 1975 and I had a picture of me and my sister on my bedside table. They took that, saying it was my girlfriend. And I never, ever got that picture back”

Army Veteran

“I went into this room and there was this Sergeant and Corporal, two women, SIB, and she almost spat in my face, basically saying you were lesbian and we're gonna prove it, and took me with their black plastic bags to my room. … it was turned upside down, I stood there watching it while they did. They took letters and photographs…and they took my pyjamas because they were said they were like men's and must be a lesbian. They even commented about my washing. They looked in my dirty washing basket and said because it was full I couldn't have had very good cleanliness, just they were just trying to humiliate me to my very being.”

Army Veteran

In efforts to maintain an ‘acceptable’ presence in this culture and not arouse suspicion, self-identity frequently conflicted with the external appearance that Service personnel felt obliged to portray for acceptance or to avoid investigation and harassment. The result for multiple veterans was a significant decline in mental health.

“Because my orientation was fundamental to my sense of self, I couldn’t live a fulfilled life whilst I was in the Service. In terms of relationships that was a no-no, that was a complete dead end. There was a part of me that felt that I couldn’t be completely fulfilled. The criminality element – It was 6 months in the nick if you got caught, in Colchester, they equated it with the equivalent of a spy trying to steal nuclear secrets. If someone got caught they would be tortured they would have their rooms turned over, stuff chucked out the windows and the general harassment that went on when someone got nicked. A big element of being there didn’t fit, I suffered from depression and I attempted suicide.”

Army Veteran

“You live a lie. You couldn't be the person you wanted to be… You had to hide everything; it was like you were living two lives.”

Army Veteran

“As a matter of trust amongst people, you had to be careful who you spoke to and divulged your sexuality. And because they could report you… you were on edge the whole time I suppose and looking over your shoulder and knowing that the SIB were investigating in different camps and worried that they would then come to your camp and the surveillances that they did. Even going to discos off-camp, we had to use pseudonyms because if we signed a book as we went in, you know the SIB could have come in and then read our names and written them down.”

Army Veteran

“Total fake life. Going out with men again, even nearly got engaged to one squaddie because I was trying so hard to keep my straight credentials, you know, believable. And it was heart-breaking because I was playing with people's feelings. You know, I was going out with some really lovely guys who were very sweet. They were nice guys, but it wasn't what I wanted. And I knew that. And it's heart-breaking. And, yeah, it was devastating.”

Army Veteran

“You can never be completely yourself. And so, if I was to have continued, if I hadn't been caught out, then basically I would have spent years spending mental energy hiding the aspect of my personality rather than being free to bring my whole authentic self to a workplace that I absolutely loved.”

Navy Veteran

Similarly, RBL spoke to one transgender veteran who began to experience gender identity issues under the time of the Ban. In line with published research, the consequence of experiencing a ‘banned’ personality trait, both legally and culturally, led to significant mental health difficulties and crisis for the individual.

“The RAF had a culture of machismo which I didn't fit into. I was self-harming…I also was having difficulty with sleeping and drinking far more than was good for me… One day it just got too much for me, so I had a little private party with some paracetamols and some cans of beer and it didn't work, thank goodness.”

RAF Veteran

The impact of concealing LGBT status within the military under the Ban should not be underestimated and is likely to have affected many LGBT personnel. McNamara et al (2019) describes that, “minority stress theory explains that the higher prevalence of mental health disorders among sexual minorities is related to the stigmatized status of LGBT identity.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Similarly in their 2020 paper, the same researchers outline in greater depth the impact of social identity theory on LGBT personnel in the US Armed Forces:

“Social identity theory refers to individuals’ definition of sense of self and their place in society on the basis of group memberships and inter-group comparisons. Individuals self categorize in terms of social groups and, depending on the context, will behave according to how a group member is expected to act by adopting group values, behaviours, and characteristics. Individuals gain and maintain self-esteem and status via the desire to be seen as a member of the in-group versus the out-group. In-group and out-group membership is typically based on multiple characteristics, including demographic factors such as race, gender, religious beliefs, political affiliations, and education level. Membership influences an individual’s social identity.

Social identity theory highlights the foundation for in-group membership among [Service Members] because of the requirements to be psychologically or socially interdependent on one another to meet specific needs, achieve goals, or validate attitudes and values. In-group status for [Service Members] is also necessary to complete tasks, accomplish missions, and achieve promotion. Military identity allows for cohesion to occur and is grounded in in-group acceptance. The known barriers (e.g., stigma, being seen as weak) and facilitators (e.g., confidentiality) are clear indicators of wanting to stay in the in-group and not cause any reason to be viewed in a negative way or perceived as a member of the out-group.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The additional pressure to subdue behaviours comes on top of evidence of stigma and reluctance about help-seeking for mental health in the Armed Forces community in general. In previous RBL research, over half of the ex-Service community reported keeping concerns about their health to themselves so as not to ‘make a fuss’, and four in ten reported ignoring health problems on the assumption that they will get better without treatment.[[7]](#footnote-7) In relation to mental health problems, common reasons given by ex-Service personnel for not seeking help include the belief that their emotional problem is not sufficiently serious to warrant support, wanting to deal with the problem themselves, and doubt over the quality of mental health services.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Some help-seeking only occurred at points where a life-threatening crisis arose, yet even then seeking support had its own dangers for those serving under the Ban, reinforcing the original stigma experienced by individuals. As an Army veteran recounted to us; following her own crisis the interaction with the in-Service mental health services then attracted the attention of the investigatory powers who represented the culture of threat and intolerance that had driven her to a point of despair. She explained “I tried to kill myself. Slashed both my wrists and that was the first time I came in contact with SIB asking me if I was gay.” For those living in Service under the Ban who were gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, the threat of discharge and investigation was permanently felt.

Some personnel were unable to fulfil their potential in Service, through increased barriers and stigma. One Army veteran told us of how, as a result of the impact on their mental health of living within a conflicted state of identity, they felt unable to complete a training course which would have provided career enhancement and instead of the training they requested a return to unit.

### The nature of discharge

RBL heard from veterans who were investigated or confessed to their sexuality and were discharged as a result, for whom the enforcement of the Ban has had long-term impact on their lives. For many, the military represented a career and lifestyle that they were eager to be a part of. For some RBL spoke to, the nature of the sudden discharge caused further significant distress on top of the loss of their military identity.

“I signed on for 22 years. I wanted to serve 22 years. I didn't want to be treated like a common criminal, which is, how the majority feel, you know.”

Army Veteran

“Being suddenly cut off from it leaves a big emotional scar on your life.”

Navy Veteran

“The thing was, you lost all your self-esteem when they did that as well. Really did lose your self-esteem. And I think in my case I probably never recovered it.”

RAF Veteran

“There was no support within the Armed Forces, there was no support to help with transition, and post transition follow up. Guys who got caught would have their military conduct downgraded to the lowest level and have their medals taken off them and then military would ‘out’ them to their family and friends.”

Army Veteran

“You have sacked me. A bloody good career Army nurse, for what? For something over which I have absolutely no control and that I was born this way. I could no more change the colour of my eyes than I can change my sexual orientation or what floats my boat. I didn't ask for it. I didn't want it. Now I have it, I love it and I'm happy. And I'm proud. And I'm not at all ashamed and nor should any of us be. And the way we were treated was absolutely reprehensible and despicable beyond belief.”

Army Veteran

One Army veteran relayed in a focus group held by RBL how she had been so desperate to stay within the Services that she sought extreme measures to delay her discharge so that she could appeal the verdict, only to find a determination from the Services to expel her that could not be stopped:

“We went to a civilian solicitor to try and sort of appeal this decision and he said he didn't know much about military laws, so he needed a bit more time. Anyway, I thought, well, how can I delay it, my discharge date? So, I decided that I would actually have to try and fail my medical. So basically, what I did was I got this girl, we got drunk one night and I just said, ‘look, break my arm.’ You know, if I have a broken arm, then they can't, they can't discharge me and so I'm not fit to be discharged. So, she put her Doc Martins on and I put my arm against skirting board and she back-kicked it. So, the next morning I was pretty bruised and swollen, went to the medical doctor and I said I've fallen over. I went to get an X-ray at the hospital, and they said my wrist wasn't broken and I got discharged and, well, a one-way ticket home like everyone with no support. I went to the Naval Hospital because I was in Plymouth and had an X-ray – [I] had a fractured a bone in my wrist.”

Army Veteran

Not all personnel underwent disciplinaries and suffered summary discharge as a result. An RAF veteran RBL spoke with explained how her suicidal ideation led to her being referred to a Service psychiatrist to seek help, only to find a system unable to support her and instead being subjected to an alternative but equally expedited route; being cut off from the military support structures and career she had embarked on:

“I was interrogated by a naval psychiatrist. Who during the course of the interrogations told me that whatever I said to him would be confidential, wouldn’t go outside the room. So by then, I knew that I had gender identity issues, so I told him that and his face just dropped…it became quite clear to me that [the naval psychiatrist] was not versed in the process of dealing with people with gender identity.

…When I returned, he said, we’re going to arrange for you to be medically discharged on grounds that you’re suffering from a permanent, untreatable, nonspecific depressive related condition…the consequences were actually life threatening for the way it was carried out and the fact that there was no support afterwards.”

RAF Veteran

For many, the impact of the nature of their discharge had a long lasting and profound impact on their post-Service lives.

### Post Service impact

There is a substantial field of literature on the impact of a poor transition from military to civilian life, with 2017’s Transition Mapping Study by Kantar Futures finding that, “the costs of poor transition…are £105m in 2017, climbing slightly to £110m in 2020,” and “the four largest areas of cost are as follows: family breakdown accounts for 27%; common mental health disorders and PTSD, taken together, account for 23%; harmful drinking accounts for 19%; and unemployment accounts for 15%.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

However, there is little to no academic research on the cost to the individual of all these factors from the lasting impact of discharge as a result of the Ban on LGBT personnel in Service. What international literature there is on LGBT Armed Forces experience focusses on life in Service, yet the interviews and focus groups that informed this submission only serve to highlight the importance of the Review and need for further investigation into the longer-term mental, physical and economic impact of the Ban on those adversely affected. It was repeatedly expressed how there was little to no support in place from the military or the civilian world that personnel were transitioning into. Many felt abandoned by the structure and family they had sacrificed and loved, and found themselves with nowhere to turn and in vulnerable situations:

“Once they threw you out they didn’t give a damn.”

Navy Veteran

“The NHS at that time had no facility for dealing with people with my background. Neither did the British Legion, the British Legion clearly wasn’t interested. I don’t think any of your other Service veterans’ services organisations would have been. We were out there and they made us incredibly vulnerable.”

RAF Veteran

“I mean, no, there's nothing at all. I mean, just basically one-way ticket.”

Army Veteran

“And once I’d answered all these questions, I was dismissed within two days. No job, no home, no nothing.”

Army Veteran

“[I] only had a couple of contacts outside, just a couple of numbers in my diaries. I had no money. No outside help. I spent four days homeless in a park. I couldn’t even see my friends. I had friends in the Army, I never saw any of them again.”

Navy Veteran

“I think it was only like three, three to four weeks, between writing that letter and then being discharged, I had nowhere to go. I sofa surfed for a while, I was homeless for a little while. But I was sofa surfing for a good few months until I could get a job and you know, get somewhere to live. I mean, thankfully, I've never ever been since then. I've never ever been out of work, but I've done some shit jobs. None of it was what I ever wanted to do. All I wanted to do was be in the Army.”

Army Veteran

“I got a leaflet on benefits, that's all the help I got from the Navy.”

Navy Veteran

For some, family provided respite and support where the statutory services and the charitable sector did not. However, this wasn’t the case for all, a situation that was exacerbated as a product of the Ban. The nature of discharge ensured that those who hadn’t informed their family of their sexuality were forced to do to without preparation or nuance, which for some spelt the end of relationships:

“I was basically kicked out of the Air Force. I had no friends, no contacts. Because I was being kicked out of the Air Force I had to tell my family about what was going on and they cut me off altogether. It was completely unacceptable to them…

…I was put in a situation where I was forced to confront my parents and tell them why I was being prematurely discharged from the Air Force. So, they were faced with the thought of not only me losing my career and everything, and they had to cope with me being trans, which was something back in the late 80s, early 90s, the people hadn't really heard of… And I remember a conversation with my father and he said he couldn't possibly support me like that and I said to him, “You are thinking more about the opinions of strangers who you've never even met before… than you are about the welfare of your own children.” He said “Yes, I am.” And since then, relations with him have been deeply estranged, shall we say.”

RAF Veteran

“The night before my trial, I phoned my parents. Basically, trying to save their feelings because I'd rather they heard from me rather than heard from the Navy. I didn’t know if I was going to get three years in jail just for being gay. So I phoned them to tell them what's happening and my mother's response was, ‘What are we going to tell the police, what are we going to tell the neighbours’ and that was that.”

Navy Veteran

One veteran we spoke to described how even though she was able to hide the reason for her discharge, it left her feeling compelled to hide a secret for decades, as she, “never, ever told my parents, that I'd been kicked out, ever… its only, last year that I told the rest of my family that I had been kicked out because I didn't tell any of them.” For this Army veteran, this has subsequently driven apart her and her sibling, the criminalisation of her sexuality continuing to deliver repercussions many years after leaving Service life.

In a similar manner, other relationships also suffered through the years for those we spoke to, who linked the effect of their experience of living under the threat of the Ban, and their subsequent investigation and discharge, with an inability to seek or maintain a romantic relationship. An Army veteran stated, how having been discharged for being gay, she hid her sexuality for the following 30 years, “because that’s what the Army taught you to do”. Others were left distrustful or feeling like their sexuality had been stolen from them:

“I can't hold a relationship with anybody now.”

Army Veteran

“Inside I desperately wanted a relationship, but I couldn't and even so I didn't get my first relationship, I got discharged at 24, so I had my first relationship when I was 33, but that wasn't even really a relationship, because I couldn't be physical with that person because I was so ashamed of being gay. So they took my whole sexuality, all my good feelings about my sexuality away.”

Army Veteran

“Even if I was attracted to someone and felt it was reciprocated, I would never, ever make a move. And I was just terrified just because I've been accused in that way. It sticks with you. And I was just so afraid that if I ever showed anybody that I was interested or attracted that, you know, I'd be perceived as some kind of letch or that, my, you know, my interest would be unwanted because my accusers had made out that what had happened was completely unwanted, that I'd kind of thrown myself at them, which was absolutely not true.”

Army Veteran

“It’s definitely affected my mental health, I don't trust anybody. Same with relationships, you know, like I can't do long relationships. It's just because I don't trust anybody. You just never know how they're going to be, you know. And I think a lot of that, you know, I'll put down to, you know, the treatment in the forces.”

Army Veteran

The last quote hints at further lasting trauma for veterans’ mental health, something that was evident throughout our interviews. Although those we spoke to were keen and able to share their stories, many reflected on their own subsequent mental health and risky behaviours that they partook in post Service. As in the words of one veteran, “I saw the Army didn't care. I've been thrown out of the Army, so my country doesn't want me. I feel so shit about myself. I hated myself so much and yeah, I just didn't care.” However, more frequent was a view that there were others who have had more adverse health outcomes as a result of their discharge who have not, or will never, be able to have their story told.

“It makes me wonder when you get kicked out. How many of them just didn't survive?”

RAF Veteran

“I mean, I know a few of us, you know, people have committed suicide after they're dismissed. And we wonder how many people commit suicide will never know about.”

Army Veteran

“You're being investigated for being gay in a Service where you have joined up to serve your country. And then you just can't cope with the fact that that's happening to you. So, the better alternative is to take your own life. It's just horrendous.”

Navy Veteran

Without a sufficient evidence base, we would caution the Review in drawing any blanket conclusion on mental health and suicidal ideation as a result of the Ban, however there is enough anecdotal evidence that we would recommend that mental health issues within this community are explored in greater depth so that support structures can now be put in place.

**We recommend further research is carried out into the mental health profile of LGBT veterans who served under the Ban, particularly exploring the attributability of mental health conditions and trajectories to their experience in Service and discharge.**

### RBL and LGBT veterans

The Royal British Legion is the largest provider of both welfare support and comradeship for the Armed Forces community within the Armed Forces charitable sector. Any person who has served for a day in HM Armed Forces, or their dependents are eligible for a wide offering of support from recovery pathways for those with injury, debt and money advice, representation appealing a compensation claim, to significant interventions and support for those who are hardest to reach such as those suffering from substance misuse issues, homelessness or immigration issues. In addition, RBL is built on a worldwide branch network of around 180,000 members, and champions remembrance for the Armed Forces community, including via the National Memorial Arboretum and coordinating flagship national events such as the Festival of Remembrance and the veterans march past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday each year. In these ways, RBL can support any LGBT member of the Armed Forces who served under the Ban. However, this has not always been the case and there is still more that RBL can do.

Stephen Bourne’s 2017 book, Fighting Proud, recalls the efforts of the prominent veteran gay rights advocate Dudley Cave, who “for 20 years, battled against the Royal British Legion’s refusal to acknowledge that lesbians and gay men had served and died in wars defending Britain.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Bourne’s narrative goes on to quote from Peter Tatchell’s 1999 obituary of Cave alleging further instances of RBL’s refusal to acknowledge LGBT veterans within remebrance activity:

“He was incensed in the early 1980s when the Legion's Assistant Secretary, Gp Capt D.J. Mountford, condemned moves to promote the acceptance of gay people as an attempt to "weaken our society", and declared that homosexuals had no right to complain about being ostracised by Legion members.

One of Dudley Cave's final public acts was last November, when he was the keynote speaker at OutRage!'s Queer Remembrance Day vigil at the Cenotaph. After laying a pink triangle wreath honouring gay people who died fighting Nazism and in the concentration camps, Cave deplored the fact that gay ceremonies of remembrance are still – in the late 1990s – being condemned by the British Legion as "distasteful" and "offensive".[[11]](#footnote-11)

In the past, provision of welfare support from the military charity sector was often not available to those who were discharged as a result of the Ban. In the words of one veteran we spoke to, RBL refused them support following their discharge, consequently further cementing a feeling of abandonment and isolation.

For others, first-hand experience of being refused support was not needed to provide a barrier to seeking support from a military charity such as RBL. The nature of their discharge caused veterans to self-exclude form what avenues of support the military charity sector could have presented; being rejected from the military not only disassociating them from Service life, but their veteran status.

“I would never have approached a military charity anyway, because I didn't feel I was worthy enough, because I've been kicked out.”

Army Veteran

“Once they discharge you, you weren't part of the family anymore. You were on your own. That's how I felt anyway.”

Army Veteran

“RBL, none of the military charities made us feel that we would have been welcomed. We felt like we were pariahs.”

Army Veteran

“Because I was, you know, kicked out the Army, I didn't even think to go to Royal British Legion.”

Army Veteran

“I had nothing to do with anything to do with the military…you just feel rejected, not wanted…You've already been thrown out of military environment once you don't want to take the risk of it happening again.”

Army Veteran

“Yes, I feel like I'm a veteran because I served. But then some days I don't feel like a veteran ‘cause I was kicked out.”

Army Veteran

Until 2003, RBL’s Royal Charter stated that eligibility for support would be open to "any man or woman who has previously received 7 days' pay as a regular, reserve or auxiliary member of the Royal Navy, Army or Royal Air Force, who has obtained an honourable discharge and is aged 16 years or over."[[12]](#footnote-12) In 2003 the wording was amended to remove the words “who has received an honourable discharge”, officially allowing those who had been dismissed in an alternative manner due to their LGBT status eligible for RBL services and support.

In 2019 RBL launched its first ever LGBTQ+ & Allies branch within its membership, an avenue to veteran comradeship that had been denied to LGBT veterans for many years. The initiatives it has undertaken since its launch include Branch Community Support in the form of a buddying service (comprising of weekly calls to vulnerable or lonely LGBTQ+ veterans and currently serving individuals), and signposting to RBL’s welfare services. In 2020 RBL appointed its first Head of Diversity and Inclusion and worked with the advocacy group Fighting with Pride to include a cohort of LGBT veterans within the march past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. In 2021 RBL set up an LGBT Staff network providing a forum for LGBT staff to share experiences and challenge and support the organisation to ensure all staff are comfortable to be their true selves in every Legion environment and progress the Legion's stance on diversity and inclusion. In October 2022 in response to the Review RBL established an LGBT Veterans Review Helpline to support individuals providing evidence to the Review.

In April 2022, RBL wrote a letter of apology to gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell for the ill treatment of LGBT veterans within RBL’s history, firmly restating RBL’s commitment to LGBT veterans:

“RBL has very much changed as an organisation since your original correspondence with us…The behaviour you outline of the RBL of the past is not tolerated in today’s organisation. The corrective action of more recent years has led to an organisation where differences are celebrated…RBL has formed a positive relationship with Fighting with Pride, including the provision of a helpline to LGBT veterans, serving personal and their families…and support to LGBT veterans who were unfairly discharged and stripped of their medals prior to the Ban being lifted in January 2000.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

In response Peter Tatchell offered, “praise and thanks to the Legion for turning away from its homophobic past with this forthright and fulsome apology.” Stating that the Peter Tatchell Foundation “are delighted by [RBL’s] commitment to support LGBT+ veterans and work with the LGBT+ community. This draws a line under the pain of the RBL’s previous prejudice and discrimination. LGBT+ people can now confidently collaborate with the RBL, knowing that they are on our side.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

However, we are aware that despite improvements, there is more that can be done both within RBL and the wider Armed Forces charity sector. The sector must commit to learning from LGBT veterans to understand their unique experiences. We therefore commit to taking into account the recommendations of the Review and seeking to improve our policy and practice where necessary.

There can be no doubt from the veterans that RBL has spoken to that there is a strong role for RBL, the activities of Remembrance, and the wider Armed Forces charity sector in supporting those veterans who served under the Ban.

“[Services should] be more accessible and inclusive – all charities in receipt of government funding should have a named, dedicated LGBTQ+ representative, and larger charities should have LGBTQ+ sections.”

Navy Veteran

“Since being involved in RBL I’ve become more attuned to being a veteran. I used to watch veterans parading past the cenotaph and felt I couldn’t be accepted by that group of people, but have now been more and more that way of thinking.”

Army Veteran

“I’m not particularly interested in marching up and down and waving standards or anything like that, but I am very interested in making sure that people who are in difficulties get the sort of support that was denied to me.”

RAF Veteran

“what's being done already is a good step in the right direction… the fact that they have opened a [LGBT] branch, the fact that they have officially invited Fighting with Pride and, you know, allowed them to march at the cenotaph.”

Army Veteran

“So, if you've got people at the higher levels who are completely on board and making sure that you're saying the right things at the right time and it not being lip service. So not just putting the flags out when it's June but all year round, making sure that that is supported and the branch gets supported so that they can do the kind of outreach that has been missing for LGBTQ.”

Navy Veteran

Whilst it may have been a result of selection bias for the interviews, RBL’s LGBTQ+ & Allies Branch and Fighting with Pride stood out alone as good practice within the sector, with one veteran commenting that “apart from RBL and Fighting with Pride I’ve not seen anything happen. I haven’t seen the Army reaching out and being proactive.” It is clear that barriers to inclusion and a fear of a lack of acceptance within the Armed Forces community still remain and are reflected within views of those very organisations set up to support and represent veterans.

“I think things are beginning to change. I think the rate of change is not as fast as it could be. I think it's much slower than it could be and I think it's not helped by the fact that LGBT people still feel unable to adopt a terribly high profile… But I do fear that the British Legion still has a long way to go down at the membership level, no matter how much [head office are] trying to push matters.”

RAF Veteran

The fear of a persisting attitude of intolerance amongst the wider veteran community was echoed within other interviews carried out for this evidence submission. One Army veteran attributed his perception that homophobic or discriminatory attitudes persist to “putting people off joining RBL. I wouldn’t go on my own. I’d be looking over my shoulder all the time. [Members] won’t say anything because they’d be chucked out, not that they are on board with the attitudes.”

Those who raised this concern also believed that there was a role for RBL to take in carrying out education initiatives amongst RBL’s membership on the impact of the Ban and the role of LGBT veterans in the UK Armed Forces community.

**All Armed Forces charities should heed the recommendations of the Review and lead by example in adopting and promoting inclusive policies for LGBT veterans. The leading Armed Forces casework charities should set the standard for effective and proactive casework and promoting best practice in working with LGBT veterans to build trust, and work with LGBT veterans to identify how they want to be involved and engaged.**

**Support and funding should be made available through the Armed Forces charity sector to enable community building for isolated, lonely and hard to reach LGBT Veterans to involve them in the military family, events and commemorative services.**

**RBL and membership-based Service charities should work with LGBT veterans to educate the wider Armed Forces community on the experiences of those LGBT veterans who served under the Ban and promote their contribution to HM Armed Forces.**

**RBL and other Service charities should reflect on our own practices to ensure they are LGBT inclusive and consider where we need to redesign our services to better serve all those in our community.**

### Recognition and recompense

Over the course of our interviews and focus groups in preparation for this submission, it was clear that the impact of the Ban on the lives of individuals affected was severe and unquantifiable. When asked what they wanted from the Government in response to the review, one Army veteran summed it up for many in simply stating that she wants “the 30 years back I've lost.”

The apology from the Veterans Minister in 2020 was recognised for its status as a milestone, but there were mixed feelings about it. Some felt it was small recompense for the trauma they underwent as a result of a policy enacted by the same body that is now trying to reach out:

“I was there in the Houses of Parliament in in 2020 when Johnny Mercer gave the official apology. Which is very nice, but relatively empty in in in practical terms”

Navy Veteran

“It meant nothing. Nothing will get rid of that pain. Yeah, no apology will get rid of the pain of what happened.”

Army Veteran

“For me personally, I completely understand why some people feel a sincere high level, very public apology is deeply important. I do understand that for me personally to be crude, I couldn't give a shit. I don't believe anything that most of the people in high government say. I don't believe anything that the Ministry of Defence say.”

Army Veteran

Others sought an apology but felt it needed to go further:

“The idea of issuing a pardon gets people’s back up. It implies you did something wrong. It should be stricken from the record. Some were treated so badly that they should have a written apology from the MoD from what they experienced. People were made to feel like they were traitors. The degree to which they were badly treated was really, really, awful.”

Army Veteran

“We want an official public apology.”

Army Veteran

Beyond an apology, there were calls for further steps the UK Government and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) could take, including further measures on medals and recognition:

“If they were going to get [medals] awarded and didn’t or had them stripped they should be given back to them.”

Army Veteran

“Oh yeah, everybody can have their medals back. But you have to apply for it… I don't know what, but the fact that you actually have to apply for it rather than you simply being contacted by the military and going ‘right we're sorry, hear are your medals back’. That's what should happen. Not you have to apply for it and go through a whole bunch of red tape hoops to be able to get something.”

Navy Veteran

“There's a veterans badge you can get these days if you write to the MoD… It would be nice to have an official MoD badge which says you were of an LGBT nature in the Armed Forces.”

RAF Veteran

RBL understands that the Government does not know how many veterans were discharged as a result of the Ban due to inaccurate and missing records, and we are aware in some situations of direct orders to destroy records. However, where possible we would recommend that **not only does the Government contact those that it can identify to proactively seek to reinstate medallic recognition lost as a result of discharge, but whilst doing so it actively distributes the veterans badge to promote a sense of inclusion, and includes a personal and direct apology for past treatment at an individual level. A full and frank apology from the most senior level of Government whilst not being a universal request is something many of the veterans we spoke to believed would be an important part of reparation.**

**The Ministry of Defence should identify those veterans who may be lost from the system through a combination of data analysis of Service records, seeking out documentation and testimony of the Special Investigations Branch, and develop an advertising campaign encouraging veterans or surviving dependents to come forward.**

The importance of a veteran badge or recognition of Service, speaks to an overwhelming desire by some within the LGBT veterans community to feel a sense of belonging to a veteran community they may involuntarily no longer feel a part of:

“Always proud to have served, I was proud to have served, and I told people that I was former RAF.”

RAF Veteran

“I've never classed myself as a veteran ever. Up until I got involved with Fighting with Pride.”

Army Veteran

A Naval veteran we spoke to outlined how he wanted to be treated, “the same as anybody else, we aren’t asking for anything special, anything different. I think it's the same as in the veteran community. We just want to be treated as everybody else. We don't want to be made a special case. But we'd also don't want to be rejected.” That sense of rejection permeated conversations and is referenced throughout this evidence. As referenced in relation to RBL and membership organisations, there was a feeling that the contribution of LGBT veterans was misunderstood or not recognised on an equal footing with other veteran cohorts.

“Let them know that there was people that were served as military personnel… literally let them know that there was gay women that served. And this is what happened to them. But now the Ban’s lifted, because even a lot of serving members today don't realize what happened to us, and they've got this fantastic career we can't have.”

Army Veteran

“I can only speak for myself, not for others, but for me, if I’d gone through my naval career and then retired being a veteran would be a natural progress. But for me, because of it being 40 years ago, suddenly being told you are a veteran is very important.”

Navy Veteran

“It’s important that we should be integrated rather than being set aside as people who are distinctive. We’re the same as everyone else.”

RAF Veteran

“Could there be a memorial, or something to acknowledge what LGBTQ+ people have done for the Armed Forces, prior to the Ban and afterwards? It goes back further than the recent Ban, it goes all the way back. During the second world war the MoD turned a blind eye because they needed the bods. If there was some sort of memorial to what LGBTQ+ people have done for this country it would cover first world war and second world war.”

Army Veteran

The National Memorial Arboretum, which welcomes over 300,000 visitors a year, is part of the RBL group of charities and exists to ensure that the unique contribution of those who have served and sacrificed is never forgotten, the baton of Remembrance is passed on through the generations, there is a year-round space to celebrate lives lived and commemorate lives lost.[[15]](#footnote-15) The Arboretum holds over 400 memorials to groups and cohorts that have served and sacrificed. Each memorial requires external sponsorship and endowment to maintain, however if this could be provided, RBL would welcome the opportunity to explore the provision of a lasting memorial to those LGBT Service personnel who have served and sacrificed on behalf of the country’s Armed Forces.

**We recommend that the Review works with RBL and the Government to establish appropriate funding and sponsorship to erect a memorial to the LGBT Armed Forces community at the National Memorial Arboretum.**

Beyond the above instances of recognition, the review will be aware, of calls for financial recompense for those who had their Armed Forces careers cut short. This evidence has already outlined the testimony of some veterans who stated that they would have served a full career and had no intention of leaving Service if it were not for the Ban. There can be no way of knowing whether personnel would have stayed for a career, we also note that the Social Security Act 1973 requires all pension schemes to preserve pension rights. From April 1975, the Armed Forces Pension Scheme introduced preserved pensions payable from age 60 (now age 65 for Service after 6 April 2006) for those who left having:

* completed at least 5 years’ qualifying Service (reduced to 2 years in April 1988), and
* attained the age of 26 (age limit removed in April 1978).[[16]](#footnote-16)

The often immediate grounds for discharge, or the pressure to leave Service early, not only will have impacted on an ability to accrue pension rights over subsequent years and affected the future earning potential of many individuals affected by the Ban but has also caused significant trauma that has been left uncompensated.

“I would like some sort of monetary payment… I lost a job with a good income and a good pension. I’d like to have some recompense.”

RAF Veteran

“The fact that I left at 5 [years] rather than 9 as constructive dismissal. I’d have got an Army pension. Those with pensionable rights [removed] should have those pensions paid. People would have to agree how, that could be agreed on. Could follow the example of the private sector, but some people would want it backdated.”

Army Veteran

“I want compensation. I'm making no bones about it. I don't want a fucking apology. I, you know, I just want the money. I want to pay my mortgage, buy out my car and be able to say, stick your bloody job and retire and spend time in my garden. And seeing my friends and travelling. That's all I want.”

Army Veteran

“I'm 60. I'm 61 next month and I'm gonna be 70 before I can retire… I'd have done five years if I'd have stayed to the November, but I got kicked out in the beginning of November and I didn't join till the 23rd of November, so I'm not entitled for military pension.”

Army Veteran

“If I had been able to serve the 22 years I wanted, I would probably been retired by now.”

Army Veteran

Furthermore, in some cases the grounds for dismissal will have impacted on the ability for veterans to secure and maintain careers in the civilian world alongside future earning potential.

“I would like to have some form of financial recompense… I went through hell afterwards, absolute hell… They threw me out. Six months to go on my course to have a professional qualification that would have set me up for life, but they did not care.”

Navy Veteran

“I had a full career ahead of me, I've had more than 20 jobs since I've left because nothing matches up.”

Army Veteran

“I desperately needed it or wanted a career in the Army, but because it was taken away through the force of having to leave and I desperately wanted to belong to a family of some kind of Service… I was just desperate for finding something that that was that community and that self sort of worth of having a good career and I just thought I went from pillar to post like [other focus group attendee]. And like others, I went from job to job.”

Army Veteran

“It was difficult to find employment because I didn't get a reference. Anybody who is medically discharged does not get a reference and in a time of national recession that meant the chance of me finding work were practically zero, especially when my training was in RAF administration and there isn't much call for that”

RAF Veteran

“I have met people whose medals were literally ripped off them and who don't have a pension, who have, who were unable to join the police, for example, which was their next step and have not, you know, have not been able to have the careers afterwards that they wanted to do simply because they got thrown out because they were gay.”

Navy Veteran

“I got a job as a transport manager… [I] had to put in a CV and I put that I had been in the forces and then they asked for references. Well, the only reference you've got is your red book, and they kept asking to see it, asking to see. And I kept putting it off, putting it off, and I thought I'll be all right, they'll not know what ‘service is no longer required’ means and obviously they did. And they never renewed the contract after three months. I was on a 3 months’ probation and it never got renewed. And I know that's why. So then after that I just never, I never put on that had been in the Army. I just never put it on any job applications.” Army Veteran

**We urge the Review to consider the calls for compensation for trauma, loss of earnings, and the loss of pension right accrual in deciding on recommendations for the Government.**

RBL is not in a position to deliver calculations for what any financial compensatory package could be. However, we would encourage consideration of the average terms of Service during the years the Ban was in place to assess the loss of pension rights.

We would also encourage the review to consider current compensatory packages available through civil courts for employees who are subject to unfair dismissal which currently sit at £93,878 or 52 weeks gross salary, whichever is the lower in addition to the basic award of up to a maximum of £17,130.[[17]](#footnote-17)

## Stonewall

### What does your organisation do, and does it deliver services to LGBT veterans?

At Stonewall, we stand for all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning, and ace (LGBTQ+) people.

We imagine a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere are free to be themselves and can live their lives to the full.

Over the last 30 years, we have helped create transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people across communities in the UK. We have travelled a path from Section 28, and the total suppression of LGBTQ+ identities in schools, to every child learning about our lives, families, and relationships as part of the national curriculum in most of the UK. That same path has taken us from a world where our relationships were criminalised to one where we have equal rights to love. And, for those of us who want to, equal rights to marry, or to have children. We’re proud of the legal rights we’ve helped win.

We’re also proud of our work to fight to make communities a place where LGBTQ+ people can thrive. Since 2000, we’ve worked with thousands of the UK and the world’s leading employers through our Diversity Champions programme and our Workplace Empowerment programme to celebrate and support LGBTQ+ people at work. We’ve also worked with tens of thousands of teachers and their schools through our School and College Champions programme to put the freedom, equity and potential of LGBTQ+ children and young people at the heart of our education system. Through the Rainbow Laces campaign, more than a million LGBTQ+ people and allies have laced up to make sport more inclusive. We see the impact of our programmes in the LGBTQ+ people who are proud and assured in who they are; who feel valued, included, and able to thrive; and champion the rights of others in our community.

An important milestone in British LGBTQ+ history was overturning the ban on – and decriminalising – LGBTQ+ military personnel serving in His Majesty’s Armed Forces. Stonewall is proud to have contributed to this historic campaign. It was one of our organisation’s first and longest-running campaigns.

Four military personnel who had been discharged from the Armed Forces for being “homosexuals” fronted the campaign: Duncan Lustig-Prean, a supply officer on HMS Newcastle; Jeanette Smith, a RAF nurse; John Beckett, a weapons engineer mechanic; and Graeme Grady, a RAF serviceman about to deployed for diplomatic duties in Washington D.C. Between the four, all services and a range of ranks were represented to ensure that when the ban was overturned, it would be overturned for all military personnel.

In partnership with Rank Outsiders and the human rights organisation Liberty, Stonewall helped the four fund their legal appeals through the British courts and eventually all the way to the European Court of Human Rights in the case Lustig-Prean and Beckett v United Kingdom. In September 1999, four years after the campaign began, the Ministry of Defence was found to be in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention – the right to privacy.

Following the ruling, in January 2000, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon made a statement to the House of Commons announcing the ban was not “legally sustainable”. He outlined a new code of conduct covering all personal relationships – heterosexual and homosexual alike.

In the years after the ban, Stonewall worked with LGBTQ+ military personnel and the Armed Forces to improve inclusivity in their ranks. In 2007, Armed Forces personnel marched in uniform at Pride for the first time. In 2010, Second Sea Lord Sir Alan Massey gave a keynote speech at Stonewall’s workplace conference. By 2015, all three services featured in Stonewall’s Top 100 Employers for LGBTQ+ people.

Stonewall warmly welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. This is an important step to ensuring the Government and Armed Forces are effectively supporting LGBTQ+ veterans and acknowledging the pain and trauma caused by the ban. However, acknowledgment is not enough to undo the lifelong harm this policy caused. We urge the UK Government to take material steps to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ veterans, which we outline further below.

### What is your organisation’s view on the impact of the 1967 to 2000 ban on LGBT personnel in the armed forces community?

Between 1967 and 2000, the UK Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence enforced a ban on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people serving in the Armed Forces, dismissing and forcing the immediate retirement of thousands of military personnel.

We do not know exactly how many service careers were ended because of the LGBTQ+ ban. Records held by the Ministry of Defence were incomplete and unspecific. Some personnel were dismissed under the military criminal offence of homosexuality, while others received less specific charges through mechanisms such as “services no longer required” or “conduct prejudicial (to the services)”. Records were not kept in a uniform and consistent way. Moreover, media reports have recently revealed that the records of personnel dismissed for being LGBTQ+ between 1955-2000, held by military police, were destroyed in 2010. This is a significant blow to understanding how many veterans were affected by the ban and ensuring all those affected receive appropriate compensation. It is therefore incumbent on the Government to consider a different mechanism through which affected personnel can evidence compensation claims.

The consequences for those dismissed were severe and enduring. Those who faced a criminal court martial for “homosexuality” had to declare a criminal record in civilian life when applying for jobs. Many of those dismissed for being LGBTQ+ will not be entitled to their full military pensions. Both of these factors have contributed to many LGBTQ+ veterans suffering significant financial hardship to this day. However, the lack of data available to campaigners and veterans alike makes the extent of these issues difficult to quantify.

The emotional and psychological toll that the ban and criminalisation took on LGBTQ+ veterans is significant. Soldiers serving their country were arrested, searched, and questioned by officers trained for wartime interrogation – simply for being LGBTQ+. Some were subjected to shameful and degrading medical inspections. Others had their medals, rightfully won in the line of duty, ripped off their uniforms by military police. Many veterans have spoken about the atmosphere of fear the ban created and the enduring toll this has taken on their lives.

Anecdotal evidence gathered by the Veterans and Military Families Research Hub at Northumbria University suggests many LGBTQ+ veterans still endure “consequential hardship”, mental health struggles, and remain “isolated from the military family and traditional support services”. They note many LGBTQ+ veterans feel shamed and isolated by their experiences and unable to participate in military community to this day.

### How can services for veterans today be made more accessible and inclusive for LGBT veterans?

The trauma and shame inflicted by the ban means many LGBTQ+ veterans do not participate in military community, and therefore may not hear about the resources and services available. This means LGBTQ+ veterans are missing out on health and wellbeing support. Moreover, veterans affected by the ban have said they feel unworthy of accessing the support available because they did not serve their whole term of service, or do not see themselves as qualifying for available support. Therefore, the Government needs to undertake more ambitious outreach to LGBTQ+ veterans to ensure they know what services are available.

The Government should provide funding to organisations with a proven ability to reach and support LGBTQ+ veterans. There is a charity specifically focused on improving quality of life for LGBTQ+ veterans and their families: Fighting with Pride. Fighting with Pride works with the Office of Veteran Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the NHS, and other military and LGBTQ+ charities to build capacity for LGBTQ+ veteran support, recognise their service, and help resolve the challenges they face in their lives beyond military service.

Stonewall urges the Government to give Fighting with Pride a secure form of funding to support their outreach and support work. Their work is currently hampered by their need to constantly fundraise, which is a distraction from their important work and leaves the future of their community building unsure.

### How can government ensure that veterans dismissed or otherwise required to leave Her Majesty’s Armed Forces because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation: i) are recognised and accepted as full members of the Armed Forces community; and ii) that HMG acknowledges and appreciates their service?

The ban impacted every single LGBTQ+ person who served between 1967-2000, whether identified and censured or not. The steps to make amends to those affected have been insufficient, which is why this Review is so welcome.

Stonewall suggests there are two central issues the Government needs to address following this Review:

The need to make amends for the historical injustice of the ban and the trauma inflicted between 1967 and 2000.

The need to address current hardship faced by LGBTQ+ veterans as a direct result of the ban.

An apology: The initial compensation for this incredibly damaging policy must be a meaningful apology. Whilst Stonewall acknowledges and thanks the Government for the apology given by Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer in 2020, we understand that many LGBTQ+ veterans do not see it as sufficient. It is the Sovereign who leads the Armed Forces, so therefore the apology should come from His Majesty the King or one of his representatives. Additionally, we believe veterans should be offered an individual apology – either in writing or in person – by the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces Commanders-in-Chief.

Reparations: Reparations payments, for the hurt caused and the lifetime financial impact of the ban, should be awarded on the scale set by the European Court of Human Rights. There should be an appropriate indexing retrospectively applied to those who lost their livelihood because of the ban, including for veterans whose civilian life was hindered by a criminal conviction. We would also argue that reparations should be paid to all those affected – including those who remained in the Armed Forces – due to the pain and fear the ban caused for LGBTQ+ military personnel.

Pensions: Where a veteran was wrongly dismissed because of their sexual or gender identity, financial arrangements should be put in place to remedy their loss or diminution of pensions, particularly in cases where current diminished retirement income has led to impoverished lives or lifestyles below the standard desired for all veterans. Where gratuities were missed because of discharge ahead of qualifying dates, these pensions should be index linked and paid.

Recognition: The Armed Forces should publicly recognise LGBTQ+ personnel’s service during the ban to restore a sense of honour and belonging in the military community. This could be achieved by a pin badge or even a medal. A suitable memorial to LGBTQ+ veterans should also be erected. This should be built at the National Memorial Arboretum so LGBTQ+ veterans may stand with the wider Armed Forces to remember those we have lost. A commemorative plaque to celebrate those who fought for the ban to be lifted would also be a welcome recognition of their bravery and service.

Disregard of Offences/Royal Pardons: The Armed Forces should check on rejected applications for the Disregard of Offences/Royal Pardons to ensure all those impacted by the ban have received the pardon they deserve and have been appropriately compensated.

Formal revocation of historic prohibitions and inclusion in the military community: Many LGBTQ+ personnel wrongfully dismissed under the ban have been barred from certain honours. These prohibitions reinforce the shame and unworthiness felt by many individuals and prevent LGBTQ+ veterans from celebrating their service and honouring their status as veterans.

The Armed Forces should improve the process for reviewing, and potentially appealing, rejected applications for the return of medals which were stripped during the ban. The current medal return process is not fit for purpose because its system suggests the medals were lost, not removed. The Armed Forces should also invest in communicating this scheme to all veterans who were stripped of their medals.

The wearing of uniform (such as berets) by LGBTQ+ veterans and the use of military ranks should be formally reinstated, whether such prohibitions were backed by service or not.

Veterans should be valued as members of the military family through invites to military events or other events that would help make them feel proud of their service and respected as veterans. In particular, this should include opportunities for veterans to take part in regional and national events for veteran communities by individual invitation. Examples include attendance at Royal Garden Parties, tattoos, national ceremonial events, open days and other occasions to which veterans are invited.

### Are you aware of any other research or surveys the government should be aware of which can help the review make recommendations?

Stonewall would like to highlight the work done by Caroline Paige, Christina Dodds, and Craig Jones through the Veterans and Military Families Research Hub at Northumbria University. Their study Mental health and well-being of LGBT+ Veterans dismissed from the British Armed Forces before January 2000 is particularly helpful in understanding the ongoing health impacts of the historic ban on LGBTQ+ veterans.

### Is there any other research the government should undertake to further understand the impact of the ban?

There is a notable lack of academic research into UK LGBTQ+ veterans’ health and wellbeing. This Review is a positive first step, however much more work needs to be done by research and academic institutions to understand the history of the ban and its ongoing impacts. There is not a study which examines the extent of LGBTQ+ veterans suffering homelessness, mental health issues, or poverty. Getting a better understanding of the extent of these issues will help the Government and charity service providers alike better target support to LGBTQ+ veteran communities, and we believe the UK Government should fund this research.

Stonewall believes support should be given to initiatives that record the history of the ban, and that celebrate the service of LGBTQ+ veterans. They should be given their rightful place in the history of the Armed Forces – one that was earned, but taken away and hidden.

We would also strongly recommend the Government undertake or commission research to understand the experiences of trans military personnel affected by the historic ban. Trans military personnel’s experience of the ban has not been properly accounted for or recorded.

## Forward Assist

[Exit Wounds Interview Report](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5829ccde2e69cf19589499ac/t/62b0be09d519264246126e9d/1655750158570/Exit%2BWounds%2BLGBT%2BTW%2B6.pdf)

[Invisible Man Report](https://www.forward-assist.com/military-sexual-trauma-research)

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17. https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/employment-tribunals/employment-tribunals/before-you-go-to-the tribunal/check-what-compensation-you-can-get-for-unfair-dismissal/ [↑](#footnote-ref-17)