



LGBT Veterans Call for Evidence

2. Organisations and third parties (charities, policy institute etc.)

This is for organisations to send in their organisational response to the Call for Evidence.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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-judgmental 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.

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?

N/A

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

N/A

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

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.

Is there anything else relevant to the Review, and within its terms of reference, which you wish to add?

N/A