Summary of objectives and outcomes of the GIRFT Further Faster Armed Forces (FF-AF) programme

September 2026

What we did

Anecdotal evidence highlights that some armed forces personnel encounter extended waits for NHS care, with frequent relocations due to postings leading to their treatment being interrupted, a re-assessment elsewhere and the patient being placed on the end of a new waiting list, compounding delays.

GIRFT has worked in partnership with the Ministry of Defence and the NHSE Armed Forces Commissioning team to improve access to NHS care for serving armed forces personnel who are unfit or downgraded for deployment while waiting for treatment.

From January 2026, the GIRFT Further Faster Armed Forces (FF-AF) programme focused on supporting 20 providers* to meet the 18-week waiting time standard for serving armed forces personnel in the specialties with longest waits: ear nose and throat (ENT) and trauma and orthopaedics (T&O). These 20 providers held a disproportionate volume of the national >18 week backlog due to their proximity to large military communities – 69% of the national T&O backlog and 75% of the ENT backlog.

The work adopted approaches from the Further Faster methodology, including running super clinics and high-flow theatre lists, particularly focusing on utilising elective surgical hubs.

Providers received funding to deliver additional activity outside of their baseline planned care delivery, and no patients on NHS waiting lists were negatively impacted by this project.

GIRFT teams worked with the selected providers to deliver standardised pathway design and implementation support. The work targeted active service personnel with existing long waits at any stage of the care pathway, while also looking for opportunities for sustained improvement of cohort and pathway management.

Data (see table below)

		Dec 25	March 26
Trauma & orthopaedics	Total number of incomplete pathways	1,079	1,043
	Total <18wks	694	739
	% <18wks	64.30%	70.90%
	Median waiting time (wks)	13.9	9.7
	% >52wks	1.10%	1.00%
	>18wks	385	304
	Difference Jan-March		**81**
Ear, nose and throat	Total number of incomplete pathways	973	829
	Total <18wks	515	537
	% <18wks	52.90%	64.80%
	Median waiting time (wks)	16.9	11.8
	% >52wks	2.60%	1.70%
	>18wks	458	292
	Difference Jan-March		**166**
Total waiting list (all specialties)	Total number of incomplete pathways	6,655	6,169
	Total <18wks	4,089	4,084
	% <18wks	61.40%	66.20%
	Median waiting time (wks)	13.6	11.1
	% >52wks	1.30%	1.00%
	>18wks	2,566	2,085
	Difference Jan-March		**486**

Table 1: National published RTT data for armed forces personnel (unavailable for public search) https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/rtt-data-2025-26/, data extracts for Dec 25 & Mar 26

	1st Jan 26	31st Mar 26	Difference
Trauma & orthopaedics	267	159	-40.45%
ENT	342	181	-47%

Table 2: Local management information provided by the 20 participating providers. Patients waiting longer than 18 weeks for treatment.

Outcomes

1st January 2026:

- 6,655 = total waiting list size for armed forces serving personnel (all waits/all specs) of which 2,566 waiting over 18 weeks.
- Of those waiting over 18 weeks, 385 were in T&O and 458 were in ENT (the two largest specialty waiting lists for this cohort).
- The initiative targeted 20 trusts* with >10 serving armed forces personnel waiting over 18 weeks.
- In the targeted 20 trusts, armed forces personnel waiting over 18 weeks included 267 T&O patients and 342 ENT patients.

End of March 2026

- 6,169 (- 486) = total waiting list size for armed forces serving personnel (all waits/all specs) of which 2,085 (- 481) waiting over 18 weeks.
- Of those waiting over 18 weeks, 304 with in T&O (-81) and 292 (-166) were in ENT
- In the targeted 20 trusts, armed forces personnel waiting over 18 weeks included 159 T&O patients (- 40.45%) and 181 ENT patients (- 47%).
- The national median wait time for this cohort reduced from 13.9 weeks to 9.7 weeks in T&O, and from 16.9 to 11.8 weeks in ENT.

Quote from Surgeon Captain Nick Imm, assistant head of the strategic commissioning team for Defence Healthcare and the senior military lead for the Further Faster Armed Forces partnership:

“Further Faster Armed Forces is supporting the deployability of the UK armed forces by improving targeted access to NHS care, particularly in trusts supporting military communities.

“Some armed forces personnel face long waits for NHS care and frequent postings can interrupt treatment pathways and often require reassessment in a new location.

“The partnership between the Ministry of Defence and the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) programme has been invaluable in enabling the care of service personnel to be proactively managed.

“It is encouraging to see waits of more than 18 weeks already reducing in trauma and orthopaedic, and ear, nose and throat services."

Quote from Professor Tim Briggs, chair of the GIRFT programme, NHS England clinical lead for the Further Faster Armed Forces partnership and Honorary Colonel of 202 (Midlands) Field Hospital RAMC, said:

“For many years I have been committed to improving healthcare for serving personnel and veterans. Building on the recommendations of the Chavasse Report and our enduring partnership with Defence Medical Services, the GIRFT programme has long worked to ensure those who serve our country receive timely, high-quality care that recognises the unique demands of military life.

“Access to healthcare should not be determined by where someone is serving or the circumstances of their role, and this programme is helping to reduce unwarranted variation and inequalities in access to treatment.

“The success of the first phase of the Further Faster Armed Forces programme demonstrates what can be achieved when the NHS, Defence Medical Services and local clinical teams work together with a

shared purpose; an excellent example of how clinical leadership, partnership and innovation can deliver lasting improvements for patients while supporting those who dedicate their lives to serving our country.

“By reducing waiting times for treatment for serving armed forces personnel, we have improved patient outcomes, supported operational readiness and delivered meaningful change at pace.”

Next steps

Work has continued into Quarter 1 of the new financial year to drive down long waiters in the participating trusts. This has resulted in a number reaching zero armed forces personnel waiting over 18 weeks in one or both services. The aim is to maintain this position whilst conversations between partners are progressed to agree the next steps for this joint initiative.

***Providers taking part in FF-AF**

- Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust
- Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust
- Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust
- Somerset NHS Foundation Trust
- South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
- University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust
- University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
- York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust