

Service Standard assessment report

Apply for a medal

From: Defence Digital
Assessment date: 01/03/2023
Stage: Alpha
Result: Not Met
Service provider: Digital Foundry

Assessment panel

Personal information will not be published. It is only included here for internal purposes.

Lead assessor: Stacey Crump
User research assessor: Silvia Grant
Design assessor: Dave Mercer
Tech assessor: Dan Bowen
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Previous assessment reports

- Not applicable

Service description

The service enables veterans or their power of attorney or next of kin to apply for medals that they are eligible for following service in the UK Armed Forces (The Army, the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Royal Air Force, the Home Guard or the reserve forces.) Eligibility criteria varies by medal.

The MOD Medals Office (MODMO) processes c.50,000 cases for medals and veterans badges each year. Approximately 30,000 hardcopy application forms downloaded from www.gov.uk each year.

The new service will also serve non-military users where applicable. Through this service, civilians will be eligible for the Nuclear Test medal, due to launch in 2023, and for which an overall increase in applications is expected.

The problem to be solved:

- The MOD Medals Office (MODMO) processes c.50,000 cases for medals each year. Current service personnel have a separate process and are out of scope
- Approximately 30,000 hardcopy application forms downloaded from www.gov.uk each year
- It can be a difficult and lengthy process to get medals from the Ministry of Defence
- The paper application forms are perceived as complex, and many users are confused by terminology used and which fields are mandatory
- Anniversaries of significant events (end of First World War, D-Day), TV series such as *Who Do You Think You are*, together with the growth of online services such as *Find My Past* and *Ancestry.com*, have all led to increased interest in family history with particular interest around medals awarded
- MOD has an obligation to provide medals to veterans and their families. There's an opportunity to help people by making it easier for them to request and pay for the service and ensuring they are kept up to date while their enquiry is being dealt with

Service users

The end-users identified for this service are:

- Veterans
- Users assisting veterans to complete their own applications
- Users holding the veterans' Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)
- Surviving relatives claiming posthumous veteran medals
- Back-office users processing the applications

1. Understand users and their needs

Decision

The service did not meet [point 1 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- in-person usability research has taken place with veterans
- the team invested time and resource to recruit and research with veterans with accessibility needs, including visual impairments and neurodivergence.
- the research involved carers and relatives who might have been completing an application on behalf of the veteran claimant
- there has been collaborative research with Royal British Legion and the Defence Disability Network
- the team identified an additional user type (LPA for Next of Kin) in research and have designed a journey to support their need

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- further segment the veteran population to understand:
 - veterans from different age groups; Veterans can be in their 20s, up to over 100 years old
 - veterans with different digital literacy skills, which might differ substantially between groups
 - veterans with different socio-economic contexts. Some veterans groups exist in deprived contexts, which implicates digital poverty
 - veterans from different Commands, ranks and deployment type
- further explore the correlations between the recent [Office of National Statistics Census](#) insights on the veteran population, and the usability findings of the team
- refine the current set of personas and user stories to reflect the above
- further explore and understand the needs of users wanting to claim medals and badges
- research further with veterans with low digital skills, but without a Lasting Power of Attorney
- research further with potential applicants with no knowledge of MOD terminology, for example serviceperson
- map and document the end-to-end journey of the applicant users. From how they find out about the service, to receiving the medal (or not), visualising the user journey at the alpha stage is useful to draw out relevant touchpoints

2. Solve a whole problem for users

Decision

The service did not meet [point 2 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team has explored access challenges for veterans
- they have considered the range of auxiliary users such as carers, relatives and charity workers who might support the online application process
- the team streamlined and simplified the current journey, which involved returning a paper form
- they made the link with the veterans badge and reduced the burden on users by including the badge in the medal application
- the team mapped a to-be process which identified improvements by looking at the whole service, including the back office, and removing unnecessary steps from the online journey
- the team have a longer-term aim for providing a more joined up experience once some contractual barriers have been removed

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- check insights/feedback of other content on other GOV.UK pages in the user journey to see if there are any issues, for example [Apply for a medal or veterans badge](#)
- challenge policy/process to give the best outcome for the user, for example removing “wet signatures”
- explore further content solutions to guide users who might have already applied for a badge (or might want to in the future)
- follow up the user journey until completion, and mapping the end-to-end user journey from the awareness stages until receiving the medal
- make clear why the question about the veterans badge is being asked, and clarify to users when a badge has been included in the application

3. Provide a joined-up experience across all channels

Decision

The service did not meet [point 3 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team had arranged for checks to avoid duplication if users sent the same request in-paper and online
- the team plans to have a period of dual running with the back office for in-paper and online requests
- they utilised MODMO to provide support to users who experience problems using the online service

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- have greater clarity over the linkages and difference in support for the paper and digital services to create a single service with multiple channels
- explore user needs around applicants being kept up to date with the status of their application. While the team have plans to incorporate Gov.UK Notify in private beta, it's not clear what the user needs are

4. Make the service simple to use

Decision

The service met [point 4 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- standard GOV.UK [components and patterns](#) have been used to create the prototype
- the team talked to the MODMO team to remove unnecessary questions from the online service

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- with reference to point 1 of the service standard - ensure the designs work just as well for the additional user types identified

5. Make sure everyone can use the service

Decision

The service did not meet [point 5 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- some users with different disabilities were involved in usability testing
- content was mostly streamlined and simplified to plain English standards
- the service will be including eligible civilian users for medal applications
- the team identified and included an additional journey for someone who has LPA over a next of kin

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- engage with veterans who are not active members of veteran charities and networks
- work to understand the needs of vulnerable users who do not have a LPA in place
- do more research with users unfamiliar with Defence terminology to improve content, for example 'a living serviceperson' may not be clear to some users

6. Have a multidisciplinary team

Decision

The service did not meet [point 6 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team is recruiting more multidisciplinary roles
- they are building on prior experience

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- recruit a content designer to review all content and user journeys
- be able to scale to build their service and engage with a broader community
- work with an accessibility expert

7. Use agile ways of working

Decision

The service met [point 7 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team used agile ways of working within a traditional PRINCE2/MSP organisation.
- they used agile ceremonies to effectively manage and address the service development

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- be more open and encourage a wider community to hear about and engage in your work through blogging, encouraging other teams to attend your show and tells
- identify opportunities to work with senior leaders in their governance structure to effectively challenge policy and process which may hinder providing a quality service

8. Iterate and improve frequently

Decision

The service met [point 8 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team worked with subject matter experts (SMEs) to remove unnecessary questions from the online application
- they used data from user research to make improvements to the prototype such as the redesign of the 'Additional service' question to provide a list to replace free text

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- ensure that the future waves of User Research and usability testing cover a broader range of users with different backgrounds, as indicated in Point 1

9. Create a secure service which protects users' privacy

Decision

The service met [point 9 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team used appropriate tools and practices to protect the users' privacy from malicious parties
- the team aims to carry out a penetration test prior to their private beta and are taking advice from appropriate specialists in security and in privacy
- they used an overall architecture that reduces the damage from any security breaches

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- consider how privacy can be improved in the back office. Their use of Notify is simple and appropriate for private beta; other technologies can improve privacy by reducing unnecessary access to information as the service scales
- gather quantitative data on whether strong ciphers cause access problems for their users during private beta. They should follow good practice (by supporting TLS 1.2 and higher only) unless they have strong evidence it affects their users
- use their DevSecOps pipeline to check that their service is secure and protects privacy. They should use their next penetration test to identify any issues the pipeline doesn't pick up, and then improve it
- gather data to test whether keeping information for 2 hours is necessary and sufficient

10. Define what success looks like and publish performance data

Decision

The service met [point 10 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team wants to use performance data to address pinch points and opportunities to build better services
- they built on learning from a service with similar user communities

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- provide greater detail on the data and analytics they will gather and how they will use it rather than implying they will do something
- gather comparable data related to the paper service to determine improvement/impact of the new digital service
- gather data for back-office processing of medal applications to understand the whole service impact of change and be informed on pinch points or future development opportunities
- take opportunities to share learning points with the Request a Service Records Service Owner where it might add value to strengthening that service
- use data to improve the development of user journeys

11. Choose the right tools and technology

Decision

The service met [point 11 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team used mainly appropriate tools and technologies
- they applied relevant tips and guidance from the cross-government community of practice (for example, their use of Pingdom)
- the team reused work from within the Department and across Government

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- iterate their toolset alongside the service, based on the results of penetration testing and other lessons
- move from their intended platform ([GOV.UK PaaS](#)) and know [why we've decided to decommission GOV.UK PaaS](#). They should consider whether this time and effort will stop them iterating from user research
- make sure they can replace all the roles provided by [GOV.UK PaaS](#) in their current design when considering their new platform. This may be challenging when considering services like security monitoring
- consider that a new platform, such as the [Defence DevSecOps Service](#) (D2S), may mean changes to the service. For example, they may need to change the cloud services they use
- consider the risks of staying on gov.uk PaaS before launching the service

12. Make new source code open

Decision

The service met [point 12 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team showed an awareness of and commitment to following [the secure development and deployment guidance](#)
- they have made their code open

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- consider moving their code to GitHub Enterprise as it is the largest repository used by the Ministry of Defence and will help other teams to find it

13. Use and contribute to open standards, common components and patterns

Decision

The service met [point 13 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team is using a range of appropriate standards
- they reused appropriate common components such as [GOV.UK Notify](#), and patterns from other services in their wider business area (such as [apply for a Veterans' badge](#))

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- consider whether their features and data should be API enabled so they can be reused by others
- look out for new ways to reuse patterns, standards or conventions, for example working with [Apply for a Veteran's ID Card alpha assessment](#)

14. Operate a reliable service

Decision

The service met [point 14 of the Standard](#).

What the team has done well

The panel was impressed that:

- the team used appropriate technology and architecture to deliver a reliable service, with multiple availability zones used for failover
- they used an application architecture that supports zero downtime updates
- they provided basic error handling if the service fails

What the team needs to explore

Before the next assessment, the team needs to:

- start the private beta service with a small number of users to prove its resilience
 - ensure the service's reliability is not affected by the move away from [GOV.UK](#) PaaS, especially the zero-downtime deployment capability
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Next Steps

Reassessment

In order for the service to continue to the next phase of development, it must meet the Standard and get CDDO spend approvals. The service must be reassessed against the points of the Standard that are not met at this assessment.

This report will be published in the Defence Service Manual

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