



Call on ex-regulars

Sir, Elisabeth Braw is correct in her ambition to expand the registration of former service personnel for a national strategic reserve but curiously selective in her target group and age limits through exclusion of former volunteer reservists and those over 65 (“MoD must track down ex-regulars — we need them”, Thunderer, Feb 23). There is no need at this point to “track anyone down”. A national self registration portal and volunteer information system would be a valuable and efficient first step to re-engagement with a coalition of the willing in a wider age range. At 69, I remain professionally active and effective, and engaged with a dynamic collection of similar individuals whose collective service muscle memory is invaluable and deep. The first step to reconstituting the resource is to track down the missing imagination.
David Rew, KVRM, TD, FRCS Consultant general surgeon, Southampton Hospitals; colonel (ret’d), Army Reserve

Andrew and the official line of succession

Sir, I read with interest Ronald Thwaites KC’s letter (Feb 21), and express some surprise at his questioning the need for an arrest in respect of the investigation of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor. While the use of voluntary attendance is growing ever more popular, the case in point was one, so we are led to believe, where the police needed to carry out searches and potential seizures, and as Mr Thwaites will be aware, the right to do this, under section 18 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, can be triggered only by an arrest taking place.
As for other reasons for an arrest as opposed to arranging a voluntary interview, one may have regard to Mr Mountbatten-Windsor’s response to past invitations to co-operate voluntarily.
Stuart Field
Sugars & Co Solicitors, Leeds

Sir, Most of the 56 members of the Commonwealth are longstanding republics (or in five cases, constitutional monarchies). The Commonwealth was founded in 1949 very much around India’s decision to be a republic but stay within the system. Chris Hammond (letter, Feb

23) thinks that for the remaining 14 to acquire republican status (if they want it) would somehow “remove their association” with “the whole sordid affair”. In fact, if anything, it would be more likely to strengthen the position of these small nations in the network, as well as strengthening the whole Commonwealth and the opportunities of all kinds, especially security, and the influence of Britain, which could do with a bit of a boost, within it.
Lord Howell of Guildford
Former minister for the Commonwealth; former president, Royal Commonwealth Society

Sir, Considering he has not been convicted of any offence, or even been charged, talk of removing Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor from the line of succession is premature if not foolish, and would set a dangerous precedent. I hope at least some Commonwealth realms would have the backbone to veto such a move.
Dr Noel Cox
Former professor of law, Auckland, New Zealand

Sir, Calls for parliament to remove Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor from the line of succession would consume

parliamentary time at public expense for negligible practical effect. The probability of his inheriting the throne, at 66 with seven members of the royal family ahead of him, is infinitesimal. Given that scarce Treasury resources must fund Ukraine, strengthen defence, safeguard democratic values and protect the vulnerable, pursuing this course would be an ineffective and costly use of time in both Houses.
Trevor Lyttleton
London NW11

Sir, It is sad that the Succession to the Crown Act 2013, which replaced male-preference primogeniture with absolute primogeniture, applied only to those born after October 28, 2011 (“Andrew set to be taken off line of succession”, Feb 21), and therefore did not elevate the Princess Royal, one of the most hard-working members of the royal family, ahead of Andrew in the succession. If it had and there was a disaster of biblical proportions, we would have been much closer to a Queen Zara and King Mike, who both have some experience in representing their country with honour.
Peter Ramsden
Bolton

Special needs role

Sir, As always, the success of the government’s intention to overhaul the education, health and care plan (EHCP) system will depend on the government and local authorities to organise and administer the necessary changes (reports, Feb 23). I hope that further discussions will also ensure that the history of special education, our changing attitudes, our new understanding and the inevitable costs will be fully taken into account.
Sixty-two years ago, when I qualified as a teacher, children were strictly categorised by age and ability and sent to what was thought to be an appropriate school — unless the child happened to have severe educational needs, in which case they were not entitled to a place in any school. In the intervening years there have been significant changes in what should be provided for all children and what is actually available; recognition of previously unknown conditions and appropriate teaching strategies has been constant, along with a battle to finance new staff training, buildings, equipment and smaller class sizes. Some special schools have now taken very successful initiatives to work with mainstream schools. Thankfully we have not reached an end-point and this pattern of development — and cost — must be expected to continue.
Peter Hare
Former special school head teacher, adviser and inspector; Deal, Kent

Religious literacy

services respond accordingly, is useful. “Happy Lent” is not. Beiford’s diverse nomenclature is

Sir, Dr Milann Sachania (letter, Feb 21) writes that sustained play during long school summer holidays helps

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Background

I returned in this letter to my theme of the importance and urgency in creating an efficient system for the strengthening of the Volunteer Reserve (see letter in The Times of 9th April 2025).

Elizabeth Braw of the Atlantic Council had offered one perspective in her “Thunderer” Op-Ed of 23rd February. My observation is self-explanatory. The creation of a dynamic database with voluntary on line registration and regular updating of skills, experience and availability would be of immense value and a substantial step forwards in reconstituting an active Volunteer Reserve for the British Army.

The framework for this already exists in the form of the recently issued UK Veterans card, and some 2 million veterans are eligible for this facility.

Of course, many of those individuals will be elderly and inform, but many ex-forces members remain active in public life in many roles, and the events in Ukraine have brought together many ex-military groups with specialist skills in charitable support of the Ukrainian cause. Her is Elizabeth’s article which prompted my letter

MoD must track down ex-regulars — we need them

Elisabeth Braw The Times p22 Monday 23rd February 2026



The Ministry of Defence wants members of the strategic reserve — that is, ex-regulars — to serve for ten more years, until the age of 65. The reform makes sense.

Former soldiers know the ropes, and Europe faces military threats all around. There’s just one problem: there’s no database of all the strategic reservists and their whereabouts. Find them!

The changes will also lower the threshold so reservists can be recalled for “warlike preparations”, not just the present requirement for “national danger, great emergency or

attack on the UK". Considering Russia's inventiveness when it comes to harming countries such as ours, it's little wonder that the MoD wants to prolong the availability of strategic reservists beyond the age of 55.

It is a positive step to give the UK's massive pool of talented ex-regulars serious attention.

But how massive the pool is, and who is in it, is anyone's guess. The government appears to estimate the strategic reserve at about 95,000 members. But with 13,000 to 15,000 service personnel leaving active duty each year, the force ought to be much bigger.

It's no mystery why the government doesn't have reliable figures: the armed forces don't keep track of regulars when they leave.

There is, extraordinarily, no database of all the ex-regulars and their up to date details. Perhaps that's because the military has had no need to keep in touch with them.

The details that do exist include ex-soldiers' enrolment in the military pension scheme.

These days, veterans can also apply for a railcard, while if they've left the military since 2018 they also receive a veterans ID. But this does not amount to a record of the country's strategic reservists and their whereabouts, let alone their skills, which they will have further enhanced on civvy street.

That's a shame because strategic reservists are a formidable resource.

Find them. Set up a comprehensive database and issue a public call for them to submit their details. Train them. Sure, the MoD's lack of engagement has made some disinclined to help. They may even have forgotten that they're legally obliged to.

All, though, live in communities that could be subjected to warlike violence or even war itself. If invited, most would, I bet, do the right thing.

Such an initiative would also be an opportunity for the MoD to keep itself up to date about ex-regulars' current expertise, as I suggest in an upcoming report for the National Preparedness Commission. It's bound to uncover a wealth of skills.